

Skara Brae



What is Skara Brae?



Skara Brae is a Neolithic settlement in the Orkney Islands, Scotland. It is now on the coast, but in Neolithic times it was further inland.



Where is Skara Brae?



Skara Brae is on the shore of the Bay of Skail, which is on the west coast of the Orkney Islands. The Orkney Islands are 50 miles north of the Scottish mainland.



What is the weather like on the Orkney Islands?



The weather on the Orkney Islands is wet and windy. In winter, it is dark for much of the day. Neolithic people would have needed to keep warm and sheltered from the gales and rain.



How was Skara Brae discovered?



The settlement at Skara Brae had become buried in sand and soil over the years. A storm in 1850 blew some of the sand and soil away, so some parts were visible. Local landowner, William Watt, started to excavate the site. It was later fully excavated by archaeologists between 1928 and 1930.

Excavation of Skara Brae in 1929



Why is Skara Brae important?



The settlement at Skara Brae was extremely well protected by the sand and soil. When it was completely excavated, it was found to be the best preserved Neolithic village in western Europe. It contained many clues about how Neolithic people lived.



How do archaeologists know it was a Neolithic settlement?



Archaeologists first thought that Skara Brae might be an Iron Age settlement, so they used a scientific technique called radiocarbon dating to find out when it was built. They found out that the settlement was Neolithic and people lived there from c3200–c2200 BC.



What can the work of archaeologists tell us about life at Skara Brae?



Settlements like Skara Brae provide clues about how the houses were built, what food was grown and eaten and the tools that were used. Archaeologists put these clues together to understand more about the ways that people lived over 4000 years ago.

