

Le Déhus Dolmen

What is it?

It is an ancient monument where people, in the past, buried their dead. We call it a dolmen but a more correct name is a 'passage grave'.

How old is it?

We think people might have started using it from around 4000 BC (about 6,000 years ago). At approximately the same time in history, slaves were building pyramids in Ancient Egypt.

How do we know that?

We can't date stones, but we can date bones. So we can estimate the age of the dolmens from the bones found in them.

What does it look like?

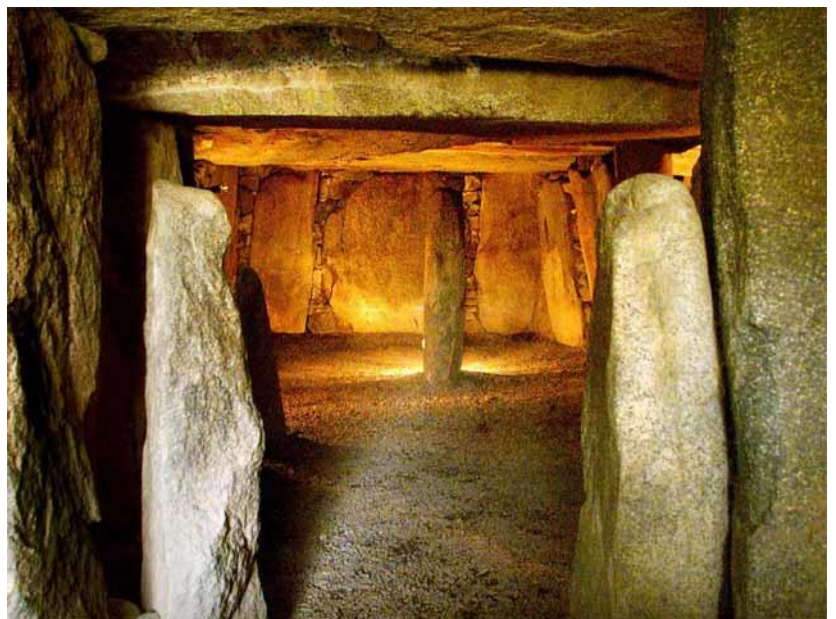
From the outside, it looks like a large mound of earth. Underground, there is a network of chambers, lined with very large stones.

Why is it so special?

Le Déhus is the most impressive dolmen in Guernsey to visit. Once inside, you can challenge yourself to find the carving known as 'le Gardien de Tombeau' (the guardian of the tomb). It was not discovered until 1918. The carving is the figure of a man's face. See if you can find his eyes, mouth and nose. He is also accompanied by a bow and arrow nearby. If you have trouble finding it, there is a light to illuminate the carving.

Tell me more about the carving....

It is the earliest face we have from Guernsey. We are not sure if it represents a real person or some god or spirit. It is possible that the stone with the carving on once stood upright as part of a standing stone or menhir. The carving looks similar to objects found in Brittany (France), which suggests that there were trade and cultural links between these areas and Guernsey during the 'new' stone age (Neolithic).

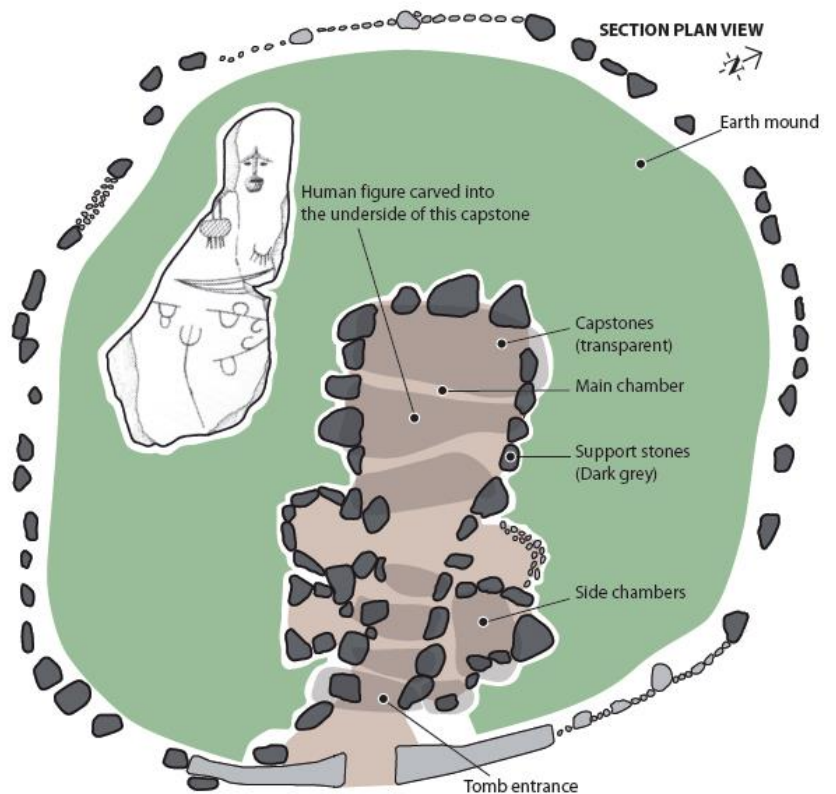


Why did people build dolmens?

To bury dead bodies inside. It is possible that dolmens would have been used for other purposes too, such as marking special life events – for example, similar to how churches today are used for christenings, weddings and funerals. There is still a lot about dolmens that we don't know.

How did people build dolmens without diggers?

With a lot of effort! People in those days had no metal tools. Wheels or oxen would have been used to pull the great stones uphill and into position. These monuments were clearly very important to the people that built them. Most of the tombs have their entrance pointing towards the sunrise. Herm has so many tombs in the north of the island that archaeologists have called it an 'Island of the Dead'.



Le Déhus is very old and it is still here. How?

It was very nearly destroyed by quarrymen who wanted to use the stone for building. Le Déhus was 'saved' in 1775, by a man called Mr John de Havilland. He bought the site for £4 and 10 shillings to prevent the stones being broken up for export (thank you, Mr de Havilland!)

What has been found inside?

A famous Guernsey archaeologist called Mr Lukis started exploring the site in 1837. Luckily for us, he kept useful records and diaries. He says that he found:

- Human bone
- Pottery
- Two skeletons kneeling back to back
- Lots of limpet shells

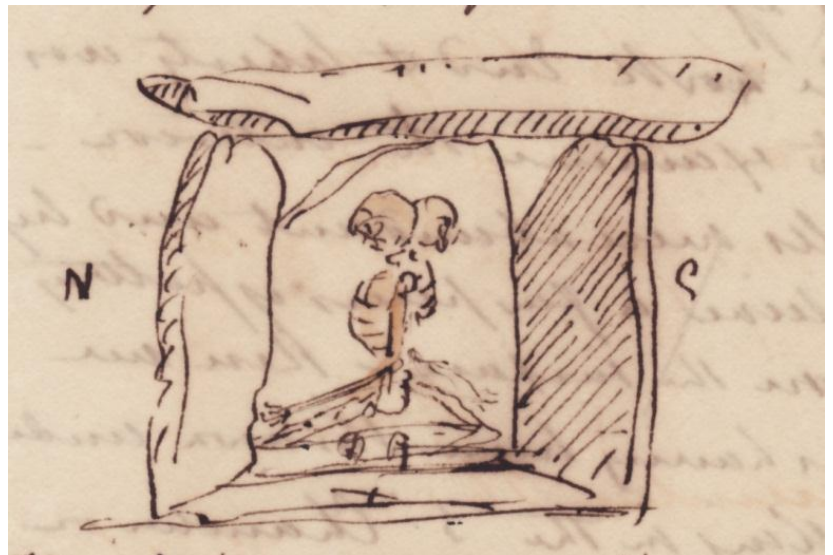


Archaeologists think it's difficult to believe that the skeletons could have stayed in an upright position for thousands of years. Perhaps the limpet shells were helping support the bones.

Why were there so many limpet shells?

We don't know – but they did have an interesting effect. Did you know that it's quite unusual to find human bone in Guernsey soil? This is because the earth here is so acidic that the bones usually dissolve quite quickly. However, limpet shells make the soil less acidic and helped to preserve the bones. Did our ancestors know that? We're not sure.

It is interesting that Ancient Egyptians buried their dead with food needed for the afterlife. People ate limpets in the past, so it's possible that they had similar beliefs.



Can I see any artefacts from Le Déhus?

Yes. At Guernsey Museum you can see many of the finds including some of the human bone and limpet shells, Lukis' notebooks and a little model of the dolmen. Behind the scenes, the Museum still holds a large number of skeletal remains, probably representing at least 26 adults and 7 young people.

When is the dolmen open?

It is open every day during daylight hours and entry is free.

Déhus Dolmen

Dehus Lane

Vale

Perrys Guide: 7 H4

Accessible via a few steps from the lane.

Parking is very limited close to the site however there is a public car park just a short walk away through quiet lanes at the end of La Miellette Lane.

