



## Large Hole in England's Silbury Hill

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Silbury Hill near Avebury, Wiltshire, England, circa 3700 B. C., the largest artificial mound in Europe, 130 feet high and covers five acres. On May 31, 2000, a resident found a hole on top. By June 11, 2000, the hole is 50 feet deep and about 6 feet wide. Aerial photograph © 1993 by Linda Moulton Howe.

**June 11, 2000 Silbury Hill, Wiltshire, England** - On May 31, 2000, a Wiltshire resident reported to police that at the top of Silbury Hill was a caved in hole. The local *Gazette* reported, "National Trust staff discovered a hole about six feet by four feet had opened up revealing a drop of almost 50 feet into a well-like shaft."

Some witnesses have described the hole as "sharply cut," but earthfiles.com is waiting for clear photographs. Chris Gingell, Manager of Britain's National Trust, told reporters that he believed "the recent heavy rain had caused the material used to fill the shaft over two centuries ago to destabilize which resulted in the collapse."

Britain's National Trust is responsible for preserving the great hill which is the largest artificial mound in Europe, rising 130 feet high and covering five acres at its base. Age estimates vary, but the nearby Windmill Hill sacred site was in use by 3700 B. C.

This morning I talked by phone with the Manager of The Henge Shop in Avebury, not far from Silbury Hill, who has been following the U. K.'s efforts to deal with the sudden crisis of their unique Neolithic mound.

### Interview:

**Eric Dougherty, Manager, The Henge Shop, Avebury, England:** "On May 31st, we received a phone call from one of the local papers. One of the journalists had gotten a call from a local resident who had been up on top Silbury Hill that day and noticed there was a cave in. He was immediately contacted as well as the police. The hole is about fifty feet deep and about 8 feet wide. But what they are concerned with is a funneling effect where the dirt from the surrounding area will cave in with it. So, it could be anywhere from, just looking at the photograph, from the aerial photograph, they have a cordoned off

area of what looks like maybe 20 feet across.

**THIS IS A MAJOR HOLE THEN PENETRATING RIGHT DOWN THROUGH THE TOP OF SILBURY HILL.**

It's a pretty good sized hole, yeah. The original hole in Silbury was created by the Duke of Northumberland. He had hired some Welsh miners to excavate right down through the core of Silbury Hill trying to find out what was buried in it.

**THAT WAS WHAT YEAR?**

Back in 1776. And they found nothing. They were looking for a legendary king on his golden horse and they came up with nothing.

**THEY HAD MADE THIS BIG HOLE, FILLED IT IN, AND THEN IN THE YEAR 2000, SUDDENLY IT OPENS UP?**

Yes, it opens up. According to anyone who works in mining or landfill, you usually can put about two-thirds of the dirt back in that came out due to settling. So, after a certain amount of time you're going to have settling. We had an especially wet April and May and that probably is what triggered the soil to sink. As a result we have a 50 foot shaft that opened up on the top and which is about right. Silbury is 130 feet tall, so that's just about a third of what would have been there (originally) before the Duke excavated.

**HOW ARE THEY GOING TO REPAIR THIS AND WHO IS GOING TO DO THE REPAIRS?**

No one is really sure. They are looking into the possibility of using helicopters to lift large amounts of soil at a time. It says a lot for the original builders who actually created this. They have to get hold of structural engineers and see what they can do about it.

**IN THE YEAR 2000 WE ARE CONFRONTED WITH A PROBLEM AT SILBURY HILL THAT MODERN DAY PEOPLE ARE NOT CERTAIN HOW TO REPAIR AND IT IS DIFFICULT ENOUGH TO GET UP THERE THAT WE ARE CONTEMPLATING LIFTING UP SOIL BY HELICOPTERS?**

Exactly. As a 'modern society,' we are looking for the easiest way to repair something like this when people who built it carried it up with probably nothing more than a wicker basket and scooped it out of the ground with a shoulder blade or deer antler.

**OR THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE INVOLVED WITH THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONOLITHS OF THE BRITISH ISLES THAT NONE OF US YET UNDERSTAND.**

Could be.

**RIGHT NOW, THE TOP OF SILBURY HILL IS CORDONED OFF FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE?**

Yes, there is a posted 24 hour guard just to make sure. It is owned by the National Trust and it is a cordoned off area. They are taking it very seriously right now with the ground being unstable and making sure no one goes up there.

**FALLS IN.**

Falls in, right."

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## More Information:

The National Trust says it will take hundreds of tons of soil to fill the open shaft and before that helicopter operation is carried out, archaeologists hope to examine the shaft to see what more can be learned about the mysterious mound of Silbury Hill which is the largest artificial mound in Europe. The original purpose for its construction is still not known.

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## Websites:

<http://www.thisiswiltshire.co.uk/>

## Credits

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