

Sueno's Stone in Forres is the tallest carved stone in Scotland and shows a dramatic battle scene.

INVESTIGATING SUENO'S STONE

Information for Teachers





Sueno's Stone

Pictish symbol stones are among Scotland's most distinctive monuments. Their elegant and vivid symbols and images can be found carved into boulders and slabs of rock, and on specially cut and shaped freestanding stones. Most of the stones which survive today were carved between around AD 500 and 800. Many stones have now been taken into museums to preserve them, but there are still a number standing in the landscape where they were positioned nearly 1500 years ago.

One of these is the dramatic stone known as Sueno's Stone in Forres. On one side of the stone is a boldly shaped cross, hewn from the stone slab and adorned with intricate knot work. But on the other side is a completely different story, the story of a battle. We can see armies of people, horses, armour, weapons and gruesome defeat. It seems that this stone may be an unusual commemoration of an actual event, possibly a battle which took place at Forres in AD 966.

Practical information

- Location: Off the A96, on the east edge of Forres
- Parking: Small car park beside stone
- Nearest toilets: Grant Park public toilets, Forres
- Note: Sueno's Stone is enclosed within a glass case for conservation reasons. In wet weather it may be difficult to see the stone clearly.
- Recommended adult:child ratio: 1:10

How to use this resource

This resource is designed to enable teachers or parent helpers carry out a simple investigation of Sueno's Stone. Simple discussion points focus pupils' attention on what they can see and encourage pupils to interpret this evidence.

This activity guide should be used in collaboration with the much larger full-colour booklet *Investigating Carved Stones*, Historic Scotland 2009. This is available free of charge to teachers from Historic Scotland and can also be downloaded from the Historic Scotland website. This booklet sets Sueno's Stone in the context of other Pictish stones and provides a wealth of additional suggestions for pre-visit, on-site and post-visit activities.

Call **0131 668 8793/8736** or visit www.historic-scotland.gov.uk for more details.

Suggested activities

- Guess or measure the dimensions of the stone, so that back at school you can recreate a life sized or scale model of it.
- Draw one element from the stone. Back at school pupils can use these drawings as a basis for scale drawings of the stone or modelling work. Or they could be used to inspire imaginative writing or expressive art work.
- 'Carve' a pattern or emblem from the stone into a tile of clay. These could then be fired and placed in the school playground.
- Design a pattern made up of intertwined animals, either real or mythical. This could be 'carved' into a tile of clay which could be fired and placed in the school playground. Designs could also be used for press printing using polystyrene tiles.
- Imagine you were reporting on the battle for the local newspaper. Write a short report of the battle, using the scenes on the stone as 'photographs'.
- Take photographs of the different sections of the stone. Back at school, add speech bubbles to the figures to tell the story and imagine their thoughts.

Further reading

Historic Scotland Education, *Investigating Carved Stones*, Historic Scotland 2009.

Anna Ritchie, *Picts*, Historic Scotland/HMSO 1995.

Iain Fraser and John Borland, *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland*, RCAHMS, 2008.



Did you know...

The Picts may have coloured their stones with red clay or charcoal.



Sueno's Stone before the protective box was constructed

Background information

This may be read aloud to pupils either before the visit or on site.

- This is the tallest carved stone in Scotland! How tall do you think it is? (more than 6.5 metres).
- This stone was probably carved more than 1200 years ago by a group of people called the Picts. They were the people living in the north and east of Scotland between AD 300 and 900 but we don't know for sure that they carved it.
- We're not sure exactly what this stone was for. It might have been a grave marker for someone important, but it could have been a territory marker, or a place for religious ceremonies. Or it might have been put here to remember an important battle. Maybe you'll have your own idea once we've looked at it.
- The stone might have been decorated or painted when it was new.
- The name Sueno's Stone was made up in the 1800s, when the stone was rediscovered. It had been buried for years. We don't know what the people who carved it actually called it.

Discussion points

<i>Teacher prompt</i>	<i>Pupils responses</i>
Why do you think the stone is so big? It is the biggest of all the Pictish stones in Scotland.	To show how powerful the winners were.
Which side of the stone do you think is the front or main side? Which side do you like best? Find your favourite part of it, and tell a partner why you like it best.	Probably the cross – important religious symbol.
Why do you think that the cross is inside a glass box? Do you think it's better to have it in a box outside, or on open display in a museum?	To stop the stone being damaged and worn away by the wind and rain. Pupils' own ideas.



Is one of these figures King Kenneth MacAlpin?

Teacher prompt

Pupils responses

Look at the side with the cross on it.
 What is the cross usually a symbol of?
 What does this tell us about the Picts?

A Christian symbol.
 They were Christians.

The carving is quite worn now, but what else can you see beneath the cross?
 Some experts think that the person in the middle might show a king called Kenneth MacAlpin – who was the first king of all of Scotland.

It looks like two people bending forward, with perhaps another figure in the middle and two smaller figures either side – possibly angels?

Look at the patterns on the cross. How many different sets of patterns are there?

At least three different sets: on the cross shaft, the background behind the cross and below the cross.

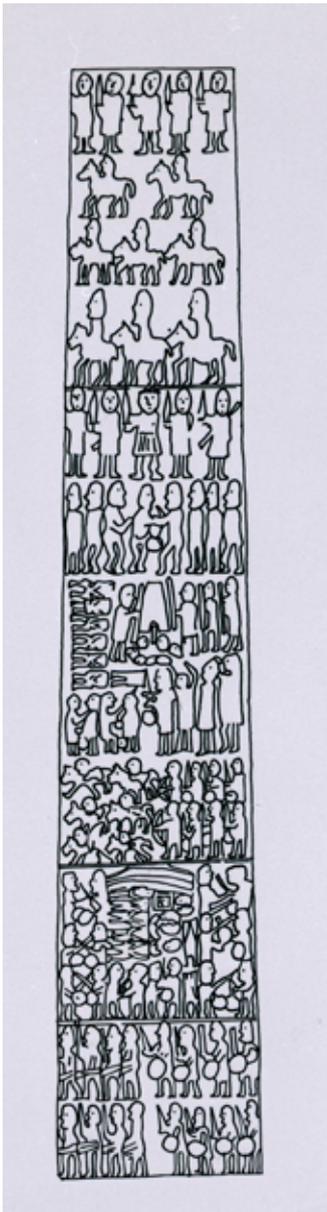
How are the patterns similar?

Circles and loops, very regular, lots of 'over and under' patterns.

Patterns like this are called 'interlacing' because they 'lace' over and under each other, a bit like shoelaces! Some experts believe that the carvers made these patterns so that you could 'lose yourself' inside them, and stop being distracted by pictures of things. They were meant to calm you down and make you ready to pray to god. But other people think that interlacing was a kind of trap for the devil!

Where else can you see patterns on the stone? Are they the same?

On the sides of the cross.
 No, very different. Much looser and bigger loops and swirls; can also see some little carved figures.



Drawing of Sueno's stone



Detail of the battle scene

Look at the other side of the stone. What makes this side different from the first side?

Very different – shows lots of small carved people.

Apparently the stone shows 98 separate people!

What do you think is happening on this side of the stone?

It shows a battle.

Some historians think you can 'read' the story of the battle like a comic strip from top to bottom. Look for these parts of the battle:

- Arrival of the two armies (top)
- Preparing to fight: facing each other (top middle)
- Fighting – headless bodies (bottom middle)
- Chasing and escaping (bottom)

Can you find:

- people on horseback
- a row of headless people
- people carrying spears and shields
- people blowing war trumpets
- a tower
- an arch which might be a bridge
- at the top.
- at the left in the middle, arranged one on top of the other.
- right at the bottom.
- middle right.
- middle.
- at the bottom.

Find something interesting yourself. Can your partner find it?

Can you see what the warriors are wearing?

Some of them are wearing short tunics – or possibly kilts?

Experts aren't sure what battle it shows. They have three ideas:

- it shows the tribe of the Scots beating the Picts
- it shows the Scots and the Picts together beating the Vikings
- it shows a battle which took place at Forres in AD 966 when the Scottish King Dubh was killed by men from the area

Do you think the stone would be carved by the winners or losers in the battle?

Most likely carved by the winners – wanted to remember and show off about their great victory. Also it could be a warning to others.