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What Makes a Wall Great?

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We may call it the Great Wall of China, but the Chinese call it the Long Wall of Ten Thousand Li. (A li is a unit of length in China.) At more than 12,000 miles long, the Great Wall of China is one of the largest engineering projects ever built. Length is not the only reason the wall is great, though. Some parts of it are 30 feet high and 25 feet wide.

However, although it's called the Great Wall, it is made of many different walls. Sections were built over hundreds of years by different emperors, or rulers, in China. The oldest sections were built in the 7th to 4th centuries BCE. It is interrupted by natural features that also act as barriers, such as mountains and rivers.

The Great Wall was built both to protect the Chinese empire and to preserve Chinese culture. If enemies could be kept out, so could their culture. The wall was used this way for more than 2,000 years.

Unfortunately, thousands of people died building the wall. Peasants, soldiers, and criminals were the primary builders. It has been said that the wall has the skeletons of people who died building it. This may or may not be true.

The wall was built using many different materials, including dirt, brick, and stone. Workers used the materials that were available in each area.

Today, thousands of people visit the Great Wall every year. The Baldaling section, which was built during the Ming Dynasty, stands north of Beijing, China's capital. This section is the most popular. People can see holes in the wall that Chinese soldiers used to shoot arrows at their enemies. They can also see platforms that were used for signal fires.

After the Ming Dynasty ended in 1644, areas of the wall began to fall apart. However, much of it still stands. Today, it shows the dreams and the power of the Chinese empire.

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