What is it?

The Great Wall of China is a wall that covers much of the northern border of China. If you take the length of the entire wall, plus various branches, it is around 5,500 miles long! No wonder they call it the Great Wall.

Why did they build the wall?

The wall was built to help keep out northern invaders like the Mongols. Smaller walls had been built over the years, but the first Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, decided that he wanted a single giant wall to protect his northern borders. He ordered that a single strong wall be built with thousands of lookout towers where soldiers could guard and protect his empire.

Who built it?

The original Great Wall was started by the Qin Dynasty and following dynasties continued to work on it. Later the Ming Dynasty rebuilt the wall. Much of the Great Wall that we know today was built by the Ming Dynasty.

The wall was built by peasants, slaves, criminals, and other people that the emperor decided to punish. Soldiers were involved in building the wall and in managing the workers as well.

It is estimated that millions of people worked on the wall over the course of over 1000 years. Some scientists think that up to 1 million people died while building the wall. People building the wall were not treated very well. Many people were just buried under the wall when they died.

What did they build it with?

Generally the wall was built with whatever resources were available nearby. The earlier walls were built with compacted dirt surrounded by stone. Much of the later Ming wall was built with bricks.
Was it just a wall?

The wall was really a fortification to protect the northern border. It was a wall, but also had watchtowers, beacon towers to send signals, and blockhouses to house soldiers. There were soldiers guarding the walls and towers. There were also towns built along the wall to garrison soldiers so they could quickly get to the wall in case of a large attack. It is estimated that over 1 million soldiers guarded the great wall during the height of the Ming Dynasty.

A wide road on top of the wall where soldiers could defend

Fun Facts about the Great Wall of China

- There are over 7,000 lookout towers that are part of the Great Wall.
- Today the walls continue to erode, however historians are trying to protect what sections they can.
- The height and width of the wall varies over its length. The current wall built by the Ming Dynasty averages around 33 feet tall and 15 feet wide.
- It is the longest man made structure in the world.
- Wide moats were often dug outside the wall in flat areas to make an enemies approach more difficult.
- Smoke signals were used to indicate an attack. The more enemies that were attacking, the more smoke signals they would make.
- It was named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.
- Many people say that the Great Wall can be seen from the Moon without aid. However, this is just a myth.
- The wheelbarrow, which the Chinese invented, no doubt was a great help in building much of the wall.
- The wall extends through all sorts of terrain, even into the mountains. Its highest point is over