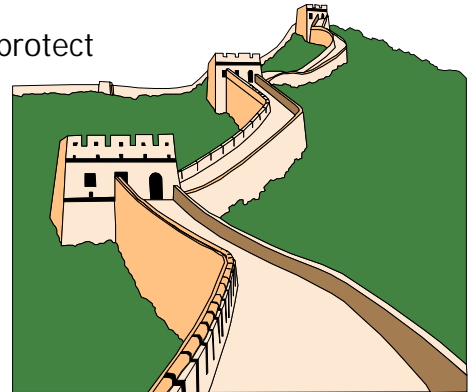


The Great Wall of China

The Great Wall was originally built in 3rd century BC to protect China's northern border. At this time, China was not unified, and states were fighting for control of land. Walls were put up to help prevent this warring. The most famous early wall construction was ordered by Shihuangdi of the Qin dynasty in order to stop the nomads of the North and fortify the frontier. There are very few traces of this original wall today. What we see is a network of walls and towers built by different people during different dynasties. The wall is not a single, continuous structure built thousands of years ago, as many people believe.



Most of the wall that exists today was built by China's Ming Dynasty in 15th century AD. The Ming refused to trade with the Mongols, who were north of them, due to a military defeat. The Mongols were dependent on the Ming for certain foods, thus causing greater conflict between the two peoples. In order to keep the Mongols out, the Ming built walls. Most of the walls forming the Great Wall were built using the *hang-tu* method. This consisted of a wooden frame filled alternatively with pounded layers of earth, stones, and twigs. However, the Mongols were eventually able to break through these walls anyway. By the 16th century the walls were made sturdier, built out of stone by professional builders.

Wall building continued until the Ming Dynasty fell in 1644. At this time the wall was an incomplete, uneven network extending about 1500 mi. There were inner and outer walls and space along the top for soldiers to march. Some areas had watchtowers as well. Some of the walls measured 25 ft in height and 30 ft in width, tapering from base to top. The dimensions varied throughout the wall.

The name "Great Wall of China" was given to the wall by Westerners who assumed incorrectly that the wall was one long continuous structure built all at the same time. They also thought that all of the walls were built with impressive stonework, but it was mainly only the ones near Beijing. The myth is that it had kept peace in civilized China for thousands of years by keeping out the nomads. It is now a huge tourist attraction visited by people from all over the world. Due to the tourist industry, the wall has been extensively renovated.

Information from Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 1999