The Incredible Shrinking Pyramid

1. A structure located near the city of Giza, Egypt, has been called the horizon of Khufu, the last ancient wonder of the world, and the Great Pyramid. Whatever you choose to call it, this amazing pyramid has stood for more than 4,500 years, remaining in place while the world around it has changed in many ways.

2. As you might imagine, something that has been around for 45 centuries has quite a history. The Great Pyramid was built by the Egyptian king Khufu, also known as Cheops. Khufu wanted to construct a grand monument that would honor him after he died. What he had built was perhaps the largest structure on the planet. Originally the pyramid was 481 feet high at its peak. Its sides measured an average of 755 feet in length. More than two million yellow limestone blocks were used to build the pyramid, which contains Khufu’s burial chamber deep inside it. Though many other pyramids were built after this one, none could match its great size.

3. Many people have wondered how the ancient Egyptians could have built such a massive structure. Even experts aren’t sure. Thousands of workers would have been needed to move the structure’s huge blocks, each of which weighed more than two tons. Workers moved the blocks by pulling them with ropes across wooden rollers. As the height of the pyramid grew, the workers would have needed ramps or ladders to reach its top.
4 The work of building such a great structure must have been very difficult. Historians have learned that the pyramid’s builders were farmers. When the Nile River flooded, the farmers’ fields were underwater, so they worked as builders instead. Bakers and doctors also lived nearby the builders during the construction project to provide food and medical assistance.

5 Khufu built the Great Pyramid with the intention that everyone would notice it. In that, he was successful. Khufu’s pyramid was the grandest of its time, with the finest-quality stones. The pyramid’s fame has created problems, though. One such problem is that the pyramid, once the greatest structure on the planet, is shrinking. In fact, the structure has lost about 30 feet of its original height. It’s not that the pyramid is sinking into the sand. The structure has actually lost height over the years because people have removed its outer layers of limestone rock and used the rock to construct other buildings. Giza is not far from Egypt’s capital city, Cairo. As Cairo grew over centuries, the demand for new buildings increased. To meet that demand, people took stones from the pyramid’s outer shell and used them to build houses and other buildings. This practice only advanced the shrinking process that’s been occurring for thousands of years, as the wind, sun, and rain have worn down the same outer layers of the pyramid.

6 The Great Pyramid is also being worn away from within. Because the structure is an amazing sight and a historical landmark, thousands of tourists visit it yearly. As they walk through the tunnels and rooms inside the pyramid, the water vapor from their breath gets trapped inside the walls. Over time that water vapor collects into salts and forms a mold that causes the stones to deteriorate. So just as the pyramid is shrinking from the outside, it is rotting from the inside.

7 Fortunately one man, the archaeologist Zahi Hawass, made it his life’s goal to restore the Great Pyramid and the smaller pyramids that surround it. In

![Archaeologist Zahi Hawass](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/51VwEOiHhCL._SL500_.jpg)