

A THE TIME of its completion in 1889, the Eiffel Tower was the tallest structure in the world—nearly twice the height of the previous record-holder, the Washington Monument. Built for the Paris Exhibition, the Tower was made out of thousands of ribs of iron riveted together. It was originally intended to stand only for 20 years, but has since become a permanent feature of the Parisian skyline. Besides offering an incredible view from the top, it has also served as a weather station and a TV and radio transmitter.

Before the first skyscrapers were built towards the end of the 19th century, churches and cathedrals with tall spires were the world's tallest buildings. The highest spire belongs to the cathedral at Ulm, Germany. Building work on the cathedral began in 1377, but it was not completed for more than another 500 years. Modern skyscrapers, like the Bank of China Building, Hong Kong, now tower over the tallest spires.

Taller than many churches—and as high as a 30-storey skyscraper—is the Saturn V space rocket, the largest ever built. It was the launch vehicle for the Apollo moon missions in the 1960s and 70s. About the same height are the tallest coast redwood trees that grow on north California's Coast Ranges.

