



Coquet Head

Northumberland's oldest rocks



What will I see?

Tucked away, right next to the border with Scotland, are the oldest rocks in Northumberland. And perhaps the best place to see them is at the head of the river Coquet, near Makendon. In a little river cliff, beside a bridge, are shattered and broken grey rocks at a steep angle – close up they look a bit like a hard muddy sandstone.

How old is it?

The rocks are Silurian in age, that's 430 million years ago. Northumberland doesn't have any rocks older than this and they only occur around here in the extreme north west of the county, stretching across the A68 to our biggest reserve at Whitelee Moor. In places they may contain very primitive marine fossils called graptolites.

Did you know?

That just a short distance up the road there is some amazing archaeology - the Roman camps and fort at Chew Green; Dere Street - the Roman Road; and a medieval village called Kemylpethe, that was probably used as a stop-over by Scottish cattle drovers.

Why it is here?

These rocks were once sand and mud on the steep slope of a continental shelf. They became unstable and slid down the slope so quickly they didn't have time to settle out and are all mixed up – geologists call the rocks “turbidites” or “wacke or greywacke”. They are very old and so have been affected by many pressures within the Earth – that's why they are at such strange angles and are broken and fractured.

And wildlife?

You may see the herd of wild goats (escapees from domestication), and in spring and early summer the sound of curlews and skylarks.

Where is it?

Near the head of the River Coquet, past Blindburn [NT806096] and beside a bridge over the stream.



Want to know more?

- NNP Geodiversity Audit
- Onshore GeoIndex
- iGeology
- Geological history of Northumbria
- Carboniferous rocks

