



Down Hill



What will I see?

A small wooded hill which the usually straight B6318, Military Road, does a little chicane to go round. Even the Roman ditch, the Vallum, diverts round it on the south side. It's a very unusual small hill because it is a giant erratic – a glacial raft of limestone rock – a megablock - that has been plucked from its original position by an ice sheet and carried at least 2 kilometres to rest where it is now.

How old is it?

The limestone (called the Great Limestone) is Carboniferous and is over 320 million years old but as a slab of rock carried by an ice sheet it is possibly only around 20,000 years old and certainly less than 2.4 million.

Did you know?

That this is possibly one of the larger glacial rafts/erratics in England and because it is so large it puzzled geologists for a long time. It is so big (approximately 600x300x15 metres, that's over 7 million tonnes!) it has been quarried for limestone, including by the Romans. Usually erratic boulders are much smaller – a lot less than a cubic metre.

Why it is here?

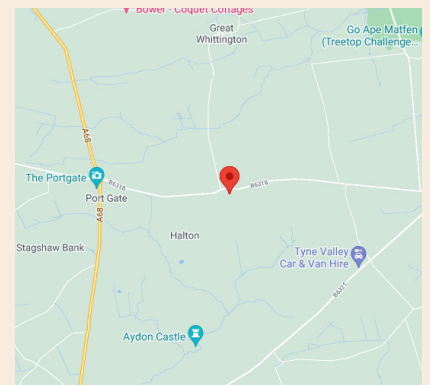
This ice sheet was moving quite quickly from Scotland and Cumbria across Northumberland and as it did so it not only carried lots of rock and debris, frozen to its base and in it but sometimes literally plucked large pieces of bedrock and moved them downstream.

And wildlife?

Growing on the old quarry spoil banks are lime-loving plants like salad burnet, mouse-ear hawkweed and quaking grass.

Where is it?

1.7 kilometres east of the Port Gate (Errington Arms) roundabout on the B6318. The safest way to see it is to park near the roundabout and walk back east along Hadrian's Wall Trail. [NZ006683].



Want to know more?

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

