

Home School with Charnwood Museum

Charnwood Rocks! Part I

Did you know that here in Charnwood we have some of the oldest rocks in Britain? Read the information below and have a look at the images from one of our Museum information sheets. Then test your knowledge with the questions

About 575 million years ago, this part of England was very different. The area would have been mostly under the sea, with volcanic islands sticking up above sea-level. The remains of one of these volcanoes are thought to be in the areas around Bardon Hill and Whitwick. The eruptions from the volcanoes threw dust and ash into the surrounding seas which settled into thick layers on the sea-bed. Over millions of years these layers formed into some of the rocks we can now see at various sites in Charnwood Forest.

Some of the best places to find these rocks are:

- Bardon Hill (around the summit, or top of the hill)
- Beacon Hill (again, around the summit)
- Bradgate Park (around the Old John and War Memorial hills)
- Warren Hills (between Copt Oak and Whitwick)



Beacon Hill By Mat Fascione, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12916841>

The volcanic dust and ash trapped living creatures as it fell into the seas. Over time these remains became fossils. In 1957 a schoolboy called Roger Mason while climbing with friends in a quarry near Woodhouse Eaves, spotted an outline in the rock surface. He went back with a Geology teacher from the University and it was later agreed that he had found a completely new type of fossil. It is the earliest-known large fossil species yet discovered and is very important because until then, scientists had no proof that there had been any forms of life so long ago. Charnwood is the only place in Western Europe where they have been found. It was given the name *Charnia Masoni* to show it was from Charnwood and had been found by Roger Mason. Since then many other fossils have been located in other areas of the Forest.



By around 540 million years ago, the volcanic activity had ended. Some of the rocks were being eroded or broken down by wind and water into pebbles, sand, silt and mud. These were then washed into the sea where they formed different layers, which over millions of years have been changed into a type of stone called slate. Since Roman times 2000 years ago, people had been mining and digging slate in the Swithland area, but now it is cheaper and easier to bring it from other places. With much skill and care, slate can be cut into smooth flat sheets of stone which can then be used for floor tiles, roofing and other purposes. Many of the older houses in Charnwood villages still have roof tiles made from Swithland slate.



In our next quiz we will continue telling you more fantastic facts about the rocks of Charnwood and the many ways they have been used.

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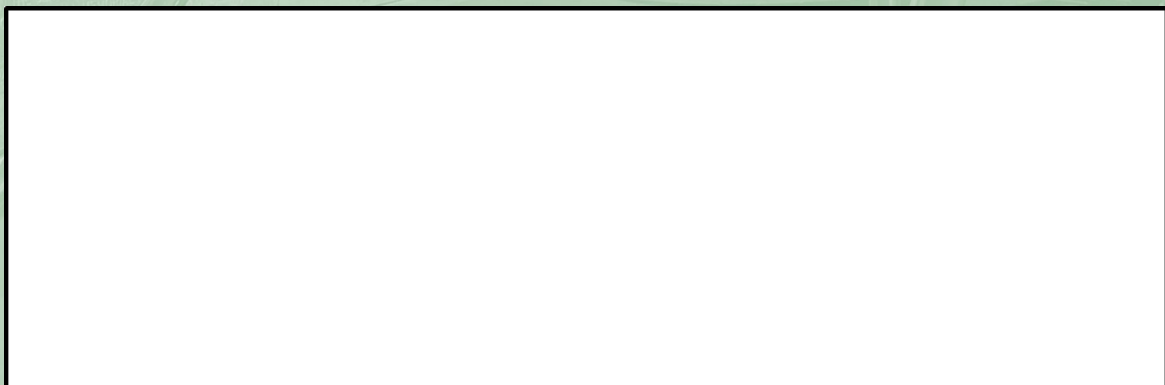
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Now see how you get on with the following questions

1. Why was Charnwood different around 575 million years ago?
2. Draw how you think it might have looked.



3. What materials did the volcanoes throw out into the seas?
4. What did those materials eventually become?
5. Have you been to any of the places where there are ancient rocks? Which ones?
6. Have you ever been fossil hunting? Did you find any?
7. Draw a picture of either a fossil that you've found or one that you've seen?



8. What is slate used for? Can you think of any other ways people use it?