



4th May 2020

Covid 19 Lockdown – Issue 2



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Geology – Whats Under Our Feet

By Iain Porter, Quantock Hills Development Officer

Geology is often overlooked when we consider landscape, but it is, literally, the foundations on which landscapes are formed.

By knowing more about the geology below our AONB's it allows us to understand how our landscapes have formed, the types of soils we will have, the landform in terms of slopes and gradients and therefore the plants and animals we are likely to find here.

Both the Blackdown Hills and the Quantock Hills have interesting geological histories which have shaped them. The Blackdown Hills are capped by an extensive outcrop of sandstone formed in Upper Greensand times (100 – 113 million years ago) from shallow marine sediments where there was a high level of organic matter in the water / on the seabed. They can have a high mineral content but are weak and friable. The soils on the Blackdowns, often described as “clay with flints”, contain abundant pieces of chert which are probably the remains of a thick chalk layer which once covered the area.

The geology of Quantock Hills can be neatly divided into three, in the north there is a strip of Triassic and Jurassic limestones and shales which formed about 200 million years ago. The main body of the hills is formed of Devonian rocks (370 – 393 million years ago), with the very hard Hangman Sandstone in the north and softer Ilfracombe and Morte Slates in the south.

The slates and the limestone on the coastal strip are less resistant than the sandstone giving rise to the varied landforms across the Quantock Hills.



We can often find clues about the geology of an area without having to dig huge holes. Looking at the stone used in local old buildings or walls can give an indication of the type of rock found in an area. Also there are a few locations where the rock formations are exposed and can be viewed from a safe distance.

The Somerset Geology Group (SGG) have also been very active in both the Quantock and Blackdown Hills as part of an ongoing review of all of Somerset's ~230 local geological sites. Local Geological Sites are identified to safeguard some of the county's best sites for geology. This work has been jointly co-ordinated by volunteer Garry Dawson with lots of support from other volunteers.

Another area of work Garry has recently completed with Peter Wright is a study of the stone used in buildings in West Somerset and South Somerset. This research was conducted on behalf of South West Heritage Trust and more information on the project can be found at the following website – <https://swheritage.org.uk/historic-environment-service/built-heritage/traditional-building-stone-research/> We are very fortunate to have volunteers like Garry and others at SGG who have undertaken this work as it has increased our knowledge of what is below our feet and allows us to better manage these special sites into the future.

The Rush of Spring Migrants

By Verity Jones
Quantock & Blackdowns Volunteer Coordinator



April and May feel like a glorious welcome relief after an extremely wet winter. Nothing heralds the start of spring more than the cyclical arrivals of our summer visitors who are travelling to the UK to breed. For me, this starts with House Martins; arriving at the beginning of April. Wheeling low over buildings, they have a characteristic sleek flight, triangular tail and white patch on their rump. These will have travelled thousands of miles from their wintering grounds in southern and western Africa, although little else is known about the actual location of these – leading to the speculation that they spend long periods feeding at high altitude, perhaps above rainforests.

The first sighting of a Swallow a little later is always exhilarating. If you're lucky you can spot the early arrivals at the coast wheeling their way inland or following the coastline northwards, maybe to Scotland or even as far as Scandinavia. After that you might see the odd one or two flying over until the swallows local to your area return. They are fast, elegant fliers with long perfectly balanced streamers on their tails; pale underparts and a red chin. UK swallows will have overwintered in South Africa, travelling northwards across the Sahara, Morocco, eastern Spain, the Pyrenees and then over western France – quite something!

These are some of the more distinctive migrants birds which are easier to see from home but there are plenty of other species which arrive on our shores annually to herald spring and summer such as: Chiffchaffs, Painted Lady butterflies, Emperor dragonflies and Nightjars to name just a few. What seasonal arrivals will you see?



Our Hills – Different & The Same

(Answers on the back page)



1) The Quantock Hills AONB is small in size for an AONB, the Blackdown Hills is large, but by no means the largest which is Cotswolds AONB at 2,040km² / 787 square miles, what is the total area of the Blackdown Hills and Quantock Hills AONBs when added together?

- a. 370km² / 143 square miles
- b. 99km² / 38 square miles
- c. 469km² / 181 square miles

2) Both the Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills are important areas for their wealth of historic heritage but according to Historic England how many Scheduled Monuments can you find within their boundaries?

- a. 77
- b. 51
- c. 26

3) Both AONB teams are keen on wildlife surveys and survey many of the same species to compare information, but which species are not surveyed in both AONBs?

- a. Bats and butterflies
- b. Adders and amphibians
- c. Pied Flycatchers and crayfish

4) The Quantock Hills was England's first AONB designated in 1958. The Blackdown Hills is much younger, and will be celebrating its Pearl Anniversary in 2021, but when was it designated as an AONB?

- a. 1981
- b. 1991
- c. 2001

5) Both the Blackdown Hills and Quantock Hills AONBs appear more imposing on the landscape due to their scarp slopes – a steep slope which separates 2 relatively level areas – but which direction do their scarp slopes face?

- a. South and East
- b. North and West
- c. South and North

6) Which statement is true of both the Blackdown Hills and Quantock Hills AONB?

- a. The fictional character, Blue Burches the hobgoblin, played pranks on local people in these areas
- b. Dairy farming is the most common type of farming.
- c. They do not contain any towns.

7) Which AONB has the remnants of the only Second World War US Navy base in Europe

- a. Quantock Hills
- b. Blackdown Hills

8) Melanism is the increased development of the dark coloured pigment melanin in the skin or hair. Both Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills have found examples of these animals but what animals were they?

- a. Badger and mole
- b. Dormouse and adder
- c. Squirrel and fox

9) Both Quantock Hills and Blackdown Hills have ample networks of Public Rights of Way which during normal times can be used to explore these wonderful areas but how what length of Public Rights of Way can be found together in both AONBs?

- a. 429km / 267 miles
- b. 786km / 488 miles
- c. 676km / 420 miles

10) Which AONB is best?

- a. Quantock Hills
- b. Blackdown Hills
- c. Trick questions – they are both great!



'Back Garden' Bathing

By Kristen Lambert, Nature & Wellbeing Officer

Following on from the last edition's 'Forest Bathing' article, this time we will focus on taking notice of what we can see in nature. Don't worry if you don't have an outdoor space at home – just make a conscious decision while taking your daily exercise to really focus your attention on the activity.

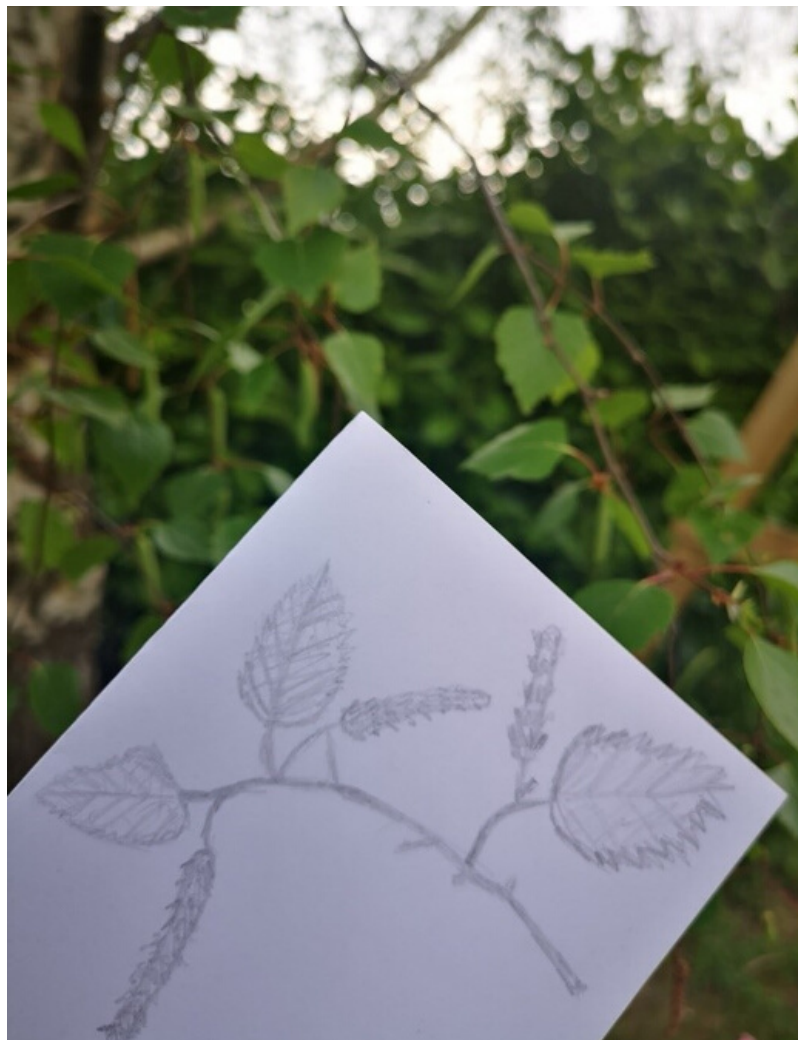
What you can see

- Carefully select something in nature that you can focus your attention on – it might be a leaf, a tree, a plant, flower or something else you notice.
- Really try and take it in, everything about it – noticing it's colour, shape, markings, texture, size. If you are doing this activity in your own outdoor space, touch the item too – to get a real sense of it.
- Why not try to capture the item's essence by drawing a sketch of it? You don't have to be good at drawing to do this – just sketch what you see in the natural item you noticed. If you do this when you get back from your daily exercise, it will help you to remember the item if you can't have it in front of you. You could even photograph the item on your phone to help you sketch it when you get home. Don't forget – the sketch should be how you see the item – it doesn't have to be an exact copy of it. What does it mean to you?

You can see my 'attempt' here – as you can see, I'm not artistically inclined but really enjoyed capturing what I noticed when sitting under the Silver Birch tree in my garden, particularly focusing on the leaves and catkins. As you can see, I have used pencil. You may choose coloured pencils or pens if you would like to capture colour too.

- Why not date your sketch and start a bit of a 'lockdown' collection of nature art?

Colour?
Shape?
Markings?
Texture?
Size?



Bronze Age Beakers on the OS Map

By Bill Jenman, Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager



By about 2300 BC bronze was starting to be used in the UK for the first time. Its introduction was gradual, with flint continuing in use for most everyday tools and valuable bronze often reserved for prestige and ritual objects. Gold ornaments start to appear at about the same time, and so did a particular form of pottery vessel known as a “beaker”, hence the shorthand term “Beaker People” still often used for these early Bronze Age inhabitants. This was the time when the great ritual landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury were at their peak, but there’s no evidence of any comparable sites on the Quantocks.

The landscape legacy of the Bronze Age lies not in great stone circles but in later barrows; funerary mounds of which over 120 have been identified. They could be made of earth or stones, often with a ring ditch (occasionally the ring ditch sits alone with no associated barrow). Typically, they contained one, or a few, cremation remains, normally in a pottery vessel of some kind, but some were never used in this way.

The Black Hill group of cairns and barrows is on the watershed saddle between Dead Woman’s Ditch and Hurley Beacon. The 21 monuments form a line 2km long, often hard to see, hidden in the heather and gorse, but the central Black Hill group of a ring cairn, a platform cairn, and a barrow are all well preserved.

Just as the Black Hill group is located on a geographically significant point between two hills and two catchments, Wills Neck is the highest point on the Quantock Hills (386m) and so also a unique site for a group of eight monuments including the barrow now surmounted by the OS trig point.

Understanding of the Bronze Age has not been helped by the activities of early antiquarians, who dug into most of them looking for “treasure” and destroying evidence (and presumably human remains) in the process. The depression in the centre of many such barrows is the result of their curiosity.

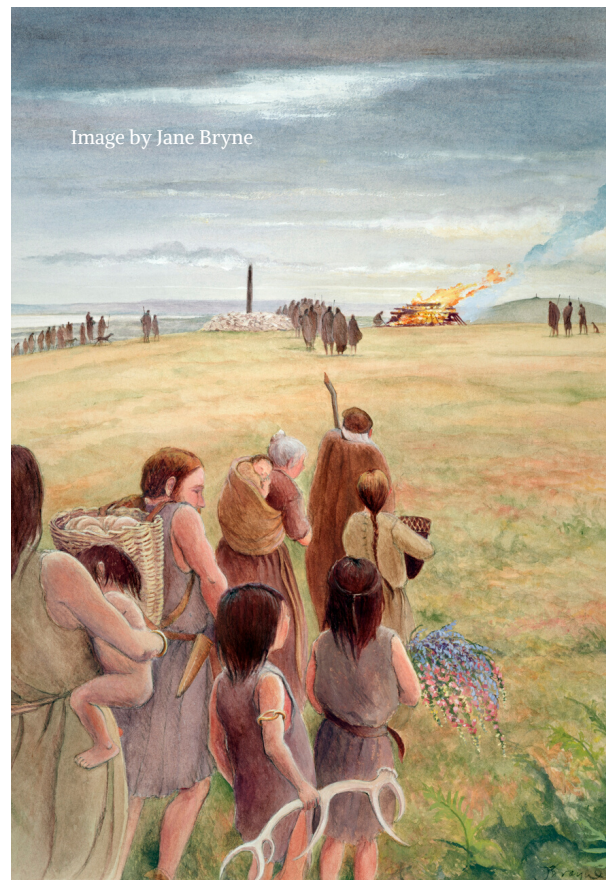


Image by Jane Bryne

Right now opportunities for exploring the Bronze Age landscape in person are limited, but the 1:25,000 OS Map 140 is a great way to get a feel for the extent of the monuments and how they sit in the landscape without leaving home. You can also access the OS Map layer on line at Bing maps for free – just select it from the drop down box that defaults to “Road” when it opens and zoom in.

Cuckoos are Calling

By Andy Stevenson, Quantock Hills Ranger

I'm sure everyone knows what a cuckoo call sounds like and many people have heard it in the countryside, but how many know what they look like?

The cuckoos have arrived back from their winter in Africa and are calling at various locations across the Quantock Hills – I heard two on 14th April. They only stay until the end of June and then head back to Africa.

Cuckoos are about the size of a woodpigeon and have a grey head and plumage with striped (barred) underparts. They have a distinctive yellow ring around their eye and yellow feet. They are found on woodland edges feeding on hairy caterpillars.



Image by Brian Gibbs - Aisholt Common



Image by Brian Gibbs - Lydeard Hill

They are known as brood parasites which means they do not raise their own young but lay their eggs in the nests of other birds which raise the chick thinking it is one of their own. The chick, once hatched, pushes out the eggs of the host bird so that it receives the sole attention of the adopted parents.

Sadly the national picture is not good with half the population lost in the last 20 years, making them a Red List species. However, on the Quantocks numbers appear to be steady with 33 recorded in 2018, 21 in 2012 and 23 in 2006. See the map below for their distribution in 2018:



If you follow the link below you can track some of the migration patterns and dates of cuckoos:
www.bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project



Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Quantock Hills & Blackdown Hills Word Search

B U O H N W F Y P L A R U T A N V C K E V P D
 P L R H D A U O O I C O N S E R V A T I O N B
 Q P A N E E T Z R N B O O K C U C X U A J G K
 E U A C A A E U U E S B L U E B E L L S P N Y
 W G A C K T T Q R K S W W Y M Y T U A E B I C
 J Y U N N D I H D A O T A W C O O M B E M H G
 Q R B I T W O O H O L U R I S I D W O Q V T I
 G Y R T D O T W N M O E S Y L H N S Y M J A S
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 B O E C N O X D A I N L R M C A D L G Y U E B
 L E A Q I R O B E L L J L U E E N I A R E R B
 L G G K E L M Z P R K L Z S S N V D N N U O E
 E K E G S C Z D E X Z S S N A T T Z B G D F U
 W Z S O K T W R T N D S E P A C S D N A L L F

Find the following words in the puzzle.
 Words are hidden ↑ ↓ → ← and ↘ .

- | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------|
| ADDER | CUCKOO | MONUMENT | SHEEP |
| BEAUTY | DOORMICE | NATIONALTRUST | SWAILING |
| BLACKDOWNHILLS | FORESTBATHING | NATURAL | WELLBEING |
| BLUEBELLS | FORESTRYENGLAND | NATURE | |
| BRONZEAGE | GEOLOGY | NATURE | |
| COAST | GUIDEDWALKS | OUSTANDING | |
| CONSERVATION | HEATH | PONIES | |
| COOMBE | LANDSCAPES | QUANTOCKHILLS | |



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Quantock Wildlife Quiz Answers

- 1c) They do not contain any towns
 7b) Blackdown Hills
 8b) Dormouse and Adder
 9c) 676km / 420 miles
 10c) Trick questions – they are both great!
- 1a) 469km² / 181 square miles
 2a) 77
 3c) Pied Flycatchers and Crayfish
 4b) 1991
 5b) North and West

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.org.uk

QUANTOCK HILLS
BLACKDOWN HILLS
Two of the
AONB Family