
22 Coquet Head

Theme: Earthquakes and folded rocks

Location

A long drive up a single track road to the head of the River Coquet, past Blindburn [NT 806 096] and beside a bridge over the stream.

Description

Right next to our border with Scotland are the oldest rocks in Northumberland. Perhaps the best place to see them is at the head of the river Coquet, near a farm called Makendon. In a little river cliff, beside a bridge, are shattered and broken grey-green rocks at a steep angle.

These shales were once mud on a deep ocean floor. With them are rocks called greywacke or turbidites. They were mud and sand that slid down the continental slope so quickly they didn't have time to settle out and are all mixed up. 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 so broken and fractured.

The rocks are Silurian in age, that's 425 million years ago. Northumberland doesn't have any rocks older than this and they only occur around here in the extreme northwest of the county, stretching across the A68 to Northumberland Wildlife Trust's biggest reserve at Whitelee Moor. In places the rocks contain very primitive marine fossils called graptolites and acritarchs.

Just a short distance up the road there is some great 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.

You may see the herd of wild goats (escapees from domestication, perhaps centuries or millennia ago), and in spring and early summer hear the sound of curlews and skylarks.

Photographs

(Photo 22-1) Silurian rocks at Coquet Head

(Photo 22-2) Broken ancient rocks near Makendon, once deep ocean sediments. Coquet Head.



(Photo 22-1) Silurian rocks at Coquet Head



(Photo 22-2) Broken ancient rocks near Makendon, once deep ocean sediments. Coquet Head.