

Victoria Common

Victoria Common was established as a municipal park to celebrate Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. As you follow the route round to St Laurence Road, you will pass a children's playground. You may note that there are some boulders in the enclosure - glacial erratics? No! These have been brought in for ornamental effect. In our project we want to distinguish the genuine Ice Age Heritage from human activity. (See our website: erraticsproject.org)

Lodge Hill Cemetery and Selly Oak Park

Lodge Hill Cemetery and Crematorium dates from 1895 and houses Birmingham's oldest crematorium. Selly Oak Park grew from land gifted by Mrs E.J. Gibbins and her sons, owners of the Birmingham Battery and Metal Company. The park formally opened in 1899 complete with gardens, toilets and a park keeper's lodge which still survives. The occasion was marked by renaming 'Old Lane' running alongside the park, as 'Gibbins Road', in honour of the park's benefactors.

The Lapal Canal

The remnants of the Lapal Canal, a continuation of Dudley No. 2 Canal, can be seen running alongside the path. For over 100 years it connected the Dudley canal network with the Worcester and Birmingham Canal at Selly Oak, and was much used by the Cadbury chocolate company. A collapse in the 3,470m Lapal tunnel caused its permanent closure in 1917. Plans are now ongoing for the canal's restoration.

The Worcester and Birmingham Canal

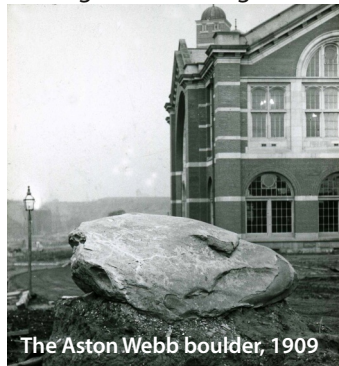
The Worcester and Birmingham Canal runs from Gas Street basin in Birmingham to join the River Sever in Worcester. It was under construction from 1792, and finally opened in 1815. As recently as 2011, a new section was built to take canal traffic over the new section of the A38, and this provides a delightful walk to take us to the University of Birmingham, our final destination.

University of Birmingham

The original building was opened in 1909. It was designed by Aston Webb and Ingress Bell who had previously designed the Birmingham Law Courts. The curved front of the Byzantine-influenced Aston Webb building is dwarfed by the imposing Chamberlain Clock Tower built between 1900 and 1909. At 325 feet high it is the tallest free standing clock tower in the world, and is named after Joseph Chamberlain, the first Chancellor of the University.

The Lapworth Museum of Geology

The Lapworth Museum of Geology was established in 1880 at Mason College in the City Centre, and later became a part of the University of Birmingham. Charles Lapworth became the first Professor of Geology, a position he held until his retirement in 1913. The Museum is one of the oldest geological museums in the UK and houses significant collections of rocks, fossils and minerals, plus early geological maps and archives of written material, including the Lapworth Archive. After major refurbishment it reopened in 2016 in its original location in the Aston Webb building, still retaining some of its Edwardian features. Lapworth's time in Birmingham coincided with an explosion of interest in the Ice Age, and it is partly thanks to his interest that so many erratic boulders and documents relating to this heritage have been preserved. Amongst



The Aston Webb boulder, 1909
Courtesy of the Lapworth Museum of Geology

these is a collection of around 700 small fragments of glacial boulders collected and catalogued by the Reverend H.W. Crosskey in the late 1900s. He was the secretary of the 'Erratic Blocks Committee' of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, testimony to the importance of this subject at the time.

More information at: erraticsproject.org

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Glacial Boulder Trail 1, 2nd Edition, December 2022



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UNIVERSITY OF
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Birmingham's Erratic Boulders Heritage of the Ice Age

Glacial Boulder Trail 1 The Roland Kedge Trail The Great Stone Northfield to the University of Birmingham



Take a trip back into deep time to discover relics from the Great Ice Age half a million years ago. Thread your way past glacial erratic boulders, mostly from the mountains of Wales and brought here by the power of ice. This trail links these little-known bastions of our prehistoric heritage.



Who is Roland Kedge?

A self-styled 'rock-hound', Roland has been hunting for glacial erratic boulders in and around south Birmingham for many years. He provided the first version of this trail and has been the inspiration behind the Erratic Boulders project. Roland has long wanted to see these survivors of this bygone age protected and promoted for people to learn about the amazing stories they have to tell, from the Ice Age to the present day.



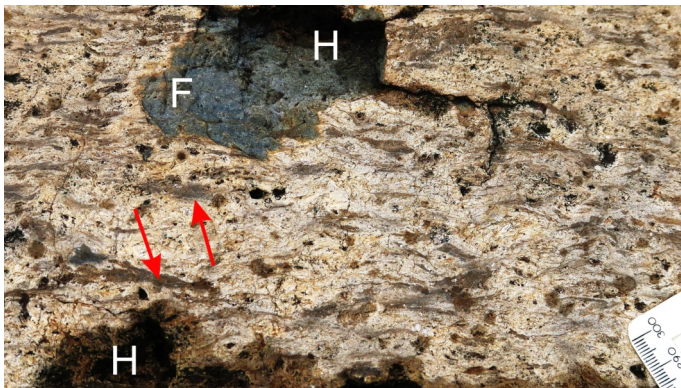
Roland Kedge

What are glacial erratic boulders?

These are boulders moved by a glacier to a different place and left there when the ice melts. The boulders can often be matched with their source, allowing the flow of the glacier to be reconstructed. The photo (right) shows the eroded east face of Arenig Fawr, the source of most of the local erratics.

What is distinctive about the Arenig rocks?

The volcanic rocks from Arenig in North Wales display features showing they formed as pyroclastic flows which are very hot, ground-hugging flows of rock debris and gas such as that which buried the Roman city of Pompeii. The photo below shows a clear example of a cleaned rock. The weathered surface of the rock is cream-coloured, but where the surface has chipped away (F) the dark green colour of the fresh rock is seen. Larger rock fragments in the deposit often weather out as holes (H). Elongated black fragments (indicated by the red arrows on the image below), were originally blocks of pumice (volcanic glass full of gas holes) which became flattened by the weight of overlying deposits whilst they were still hot. Geologists call this a welded tuff.



What is special about the Birmingham boulders?

The boulders on the trails originated not in the last ice age, but in a more severe, older one, probably 450,000 years ago. Most of these erratics are volcanic rocks from the Arenig area of North Wales - around 80 miles (130km) to the west of Birmingham, but a few are basalts and sandstones from the Midlands. The rocks are exceptionally tough, resulting in unusually large erratics up to three metres across. The photo below shows one of the largest in the area, which is on private land.



What have these boulders meant to local people?

In ancient times the size of the boulders was an obstacle to movement, so many were used to mark district or property boundaries just where they were left by the ice, or moved short distances. But where had they come from? They were unlike the local red sandstone, which was relatively easy to work for building stones. Theories abounded: were they brought with the Biblical Flood? by giants? or were they meteorites?

Through the 19th century scientists began to unravel the real story of their glacial origins. As more and more were unearthed during building works in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they became valued as curiosities to be preserved and celebrated.

The photo below shows a large boulder in Cannon Hill Park at the turn of the 20th century, preserved with metal railings and later accompanied by an explanatory notice. The original notice and metal railings are gone, but the boulder is still there and is included in Glacial Boulder Trail 7, 'Boulders by Bike'. The smaller boulder in the photo is now missing.



Photo by W.J. Harrison. British Geological Survey, P236744

This series of walking and cycling trails show some of the ways in which these boulders have captured the interest and imagination of scientists, historians and local people.

Trail 1 Route Details

This is a linear walking trail. Starting at the Great Stone Inn (Church Lane, Northfield, B31 2LU), passing through urban parks and alongside the Worcester and Birmingham canal, the trail finishes at the Lapworth Museum of Geology at the University of Birmingham. The Museum entry is free, but check opening times. (*See back page for more on the Lapworth Museum.*)

Length: 5 miles (8km) long. It may be conveniently divided into two halves at the junction of Hole Lane and Bristol Road South (A38).

Accessibility: The trail is mostly on hard surfaces, and is well connected by train, or buses along the A38. Where rough sections can be avoided, an alternative route is marked on the map with dashed lines. Near the end of the trail there are steps up from the canal to University station. (*See alternative route from Locality 7.*)

Facilities: Northfield Shopping Centre, The Great Stone Inn, Selly Oak Shopping Park, University Campus.

Locality 7 - Selly Oak Park

This massive Arenig ash specimen (7), and the previous boulder (6), were documented by W.H. Laurie in the Proceedings of the Birmingham Philosophical Society in 1926. Boulder 7 was found in excavations for a tram depot on Harborne Lane just over 100m to the south (now a storage facility). It was described by Laurie as being on its 'keel', indicating slow release from the gradually melting glacier, thus allowing sediment to build up and hold it in position until its modern disturbance. Weighing in at around 14 tons, it now lies on its side with the 'keel' to the left of the visible face. Behind the boulder lies the cutting for the disused Lapal Canal.

From the boulder, a diversion to the left (150m) takes you to an information board about the Lapal Canal (*more information overleaf*). (The dashed line from here shows an alternative route avoiding stairs at the University campus.) Otherwise retrace your steps to boulder 7, and continue to Gibbins Road. Cross, and head for the crossing over Harborne Lane. Turn left and walk around the garage to a pedestrian crossing. Cross and turn left aiming for M&S in Selly Oak Shopping Park. Turn right, follow the path past the shops, then head left for the Worcester and Birmingham Canal towpath (*more information overleaf*). Follow the canal towpath to exit at University Station. Climb the steps, turn left over the canal bridge and head for the modern Faraday statue. Continue straight on, crossing Ring Road South, and onwards under Staff House to the centre of University Square. Turn right and head into Chancellor's Court, the heart of the University complex (*more information overleaf*). Walk towards the Aston Webb building, turn left then right down steps beside the Bramall Concert Hall. Look out for a mounted boulder on a raised grassy area ahead and to the left. (See front cover photo.)

Locality 5 - Shenley Fields Park

In the early 2000s Roland Kedge found this boulder (5) just showing above ground beside the pond. At the time, desilting work was in progress, putting it at risk of being totally buried. Roland ensured that its heritage status was known, and it was duly dug out and preserved. It is one of the Arenig ash boulders, showing pebble-sized rock fragments ejected from a volcano.

Continue round the pond to Shenley Fields Road. Turn left and go uphill to the entrance to Lodge Hill Cemetery. A diversion here will take you to a small (unmarked) Arenig ash erratic. Follow the drive, then turn left into an open area. The boulder is close to the boundary with Weoley Park Road. Can you find it? To continue, head along Gibbins Road to the first entrance into Selly Oak Park (*more information overleaf*). Follow the route to the Old Park Keeper's Lodge, and boulder 6.

Locality 6 - Selly Oak Park

This split Arenig boulder (6) was found in a sewerage trench in nearby Frederick Road, and was moved to the park in 1901. It shows the usual characteristics of Arenig ash erratics, and was apparently split in two at the time of its excavation.

Continue along the path network to a boulder which you will see prominently displayed in the hedgerow ahead.

Locality 8 - University of Birmingham

This boulder (8) was discovered during excavation of the University site in 1909. We refer to this iconic glacial relic as the Aston Webb boulder, as it still remains in its place of discovery close to the Aston Webb building. A contemporary photo shows Charles Lapworth (the University's first Professor of Geology) sitting beside it, and the photo overleaf shows it as found with the Aston Webb building behind (*see also the front cover photo*). This boulder is unlike any seen so far and had a much shorter glacial journey. New research shows that although it contains some basalt from an igneous intrusion at Rowley Regis in the Black Country, it consists mostly of baked Carboniferous sediments.

From the boulder, follow the Ring Road South curving round the back of the Aston Webb building to the Lapworth Museum which is on the right. (See overleaf for further information and web links.)

The trail ends here.



Roland Kedge
at Locality 3

Locality 4 - Weoley Hill Park

This part of the park is occupied largely by sporting facilities, but on the left is a small boulder with a brick surround (4). It is an Arenig erratic, but unlike those formed from volcanic ash, it has a fine dark matrix containing prominent white feldspar crystals. It is known as a 'porphyry' and comes from a different part of the Arenig mountains, though may have formed from the same magma as the ash erratics. It is one of only three similar boulders found on these trails.

Continue to Weoley Hill. Turn left then right along Middle Park Road. Cross Shenley Fields Road, turn right then enter Shenley Fields Park. Walk alongside the pond to a large boulder. (Note the path is rough in places.)

Locality 3 - Bristol Road South

Here, close to Griffins Brook and often hidden from view by brambles and Himalayan balsam, there is an Arenig boulder (3), probably last moved by the nearby stream. Can you find it?

Continue along Bristol Road South to the footbridge, cross the bridge, then walk 150m to enter Weoley Hill Park on the left. Follow the paved path along the stream. Look out for a small erratic (unmarked) on the opposite bank at the base of a willow tree. Exit onto Fox Hill. Cross the road, turn left then right to re-enter Weoley Hill Park. (Note the path ahead is narrow and gravelly.)

Locality 2 - Garland Way and Hole Lane

This Arenig boulder (2a) is the tallest erratic on this trail. It once stood in prominent isolation, but is now partially hidden behind dense vegetation. Its smaller partner at the end of the pool (2b) is neatly displayed, and shows distinct rock fragments enclosed in the volcanic ash. For the adventurous, you can find at least 7 more erratics in the stream below the dam (2c). Look for the tell-tale signs of 'genuine' erratics: rounded, very hard, often with rock fragments, or holes where larger volcanic particles have eroded away. The stream banks show the typical pale blue boulder clay which is the source of most of the erratic boulders.

Follow the trail up Garland Way, turn left at Hole Farm Road, then left again into Hole Lane.

Look out for a small boulder in a front garden on the left (2d). This is another Arenig boulder, and begs the question - how many more erratic boulders might be found hidden in people's gardens?

Follow Hole Lane to the Bristol Road South. Continue north along the Bristol Road South, crossing Merritts (or Griffins) Brook, and look for a mud path into a field. Turn right and head diagonally to the left of a large oak tree. (This small 40m diversion is on rough ground.)

Locality 1 - Around the Great Stone Inn

Start at the old Village Pound beside the Inn. Through the gate you can see the Great Stone (1a), a fine specimen of a glacial erratic from the Arenig mountains, as described overleaf. The Great Stone used to stand on the corner of Church Hill and Church Road, protecting the Inn which bears its name. The boulder made it dangerous for pedestrians, and in 1954 it was moved to its current home. Since 2016 it has an explanatory plaque thanks to Roland Kedge. *(See overleaf and front cover photo.)*

In the walls of the 17th Century Pound you can see the contrast with local red sandstone which formed in desert conditions around 250 million years ago. This stone was quarried locally from Quarry Lane, which was also the source of stone for the nearby medieval St Laurence Church. The Great Stone also made its mark in the naming of Great Stone Road.

There are a few more Arenig boulders nearby: under the wall at the junction of Church Road and Rectory Road, and at the base of the church wall across Rectory Road (1b & c). There is a large one in the pub garden which at some point has been split in two (1d), and another (unmarked on this map) in the passageway to the east of the churchyard.

Walk up Church Road to Bunbury Road, turn left, cross at the lights then take the path uphill to enter Victoria Common past bungalows on the left. Follow the route marked on the map (more on Victoria Common overleaf). Follow the pedestrian route from St Laurence Road to Garland Way. Just before the left fork towards the pond, a large erratic boulder stands amongst the bushes.

Start here

0 0.25 0.5 km

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