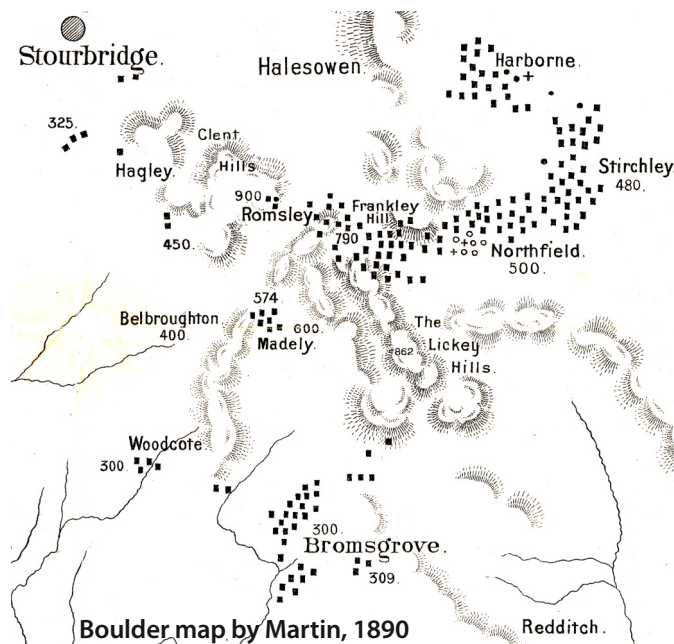


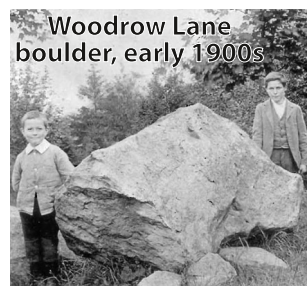
## The Story of Bromsgrove's Boulders

The Bromsgrove area is famous in the world of Arenig ash boulders as the most southerly outpost of their deposition during the Ice Age around 450,000 years ago. The 1890 map by Fred Martin (*below*) shows their distribution (as solid squares) in a roughly NE to SW direction with a strong concentration around Bromsgrove at the south-western extremity. Researchers in the late nineteenth century



reported numerous boulders from this area. The Rev. H.W. Crosskey, as secretary of the 'Erratic Blocks Committee' reported in 1875 that "Ninety-three boulders have been examined in this district, many of them of considerable size", and added: "Evidences abound of a very great destruction of boulders in this district from time immemorial". Crosskey's colleague, Dr. Deane gave a talk on the Bromsgrove boulders in 1879, which was reported in a local newspaper. The locations of several boulders are mentioned, notably: "several boulders of much size and weight and much worn are placed around the weighing machine". This was at the north end of The Strand in Bromsgrove, where an old horse trough now lies, but no boulders. A group of Arenig boulders was recorded at the time as lying close to the Ladybird Inn (formerly the Dagoon Inn) on the corner of Finstall Road and New Road. The trail passes this spot, but the fate of the boulders is unknown.

John Humphreys (1850 - 1937) was a Bromsgrove dentist who was also a Fellow of the Geological Society and a champion of the local erratic boulders. In 1902 he delivered a presidential address: 'The Great Ice Age and its Action on the Lickey' to The Institute in Bromsgrove. We learn from the transcript that two of the 'weighing machine' boulders mentioned by Dr. Deane had been moved to the Bromsgrove cemetery entrance (*see photo, right*) a few years before Humphreys' address. They have been there ever since, and feature in this trail. Humphreys tells us that several large Arenig boulders were buried in the High Street. This may account for the fate of the other boulders formerly near the weighing machine. He had photos taken of some of the finest boulders before they were "destroyed, buried or removed to adorn rockeries or to form bouldereries in private grounds". One such 'bouldery' was noted to be in private grounds near Lydiate Ash, including a boulder from



Woodrow Lane, a photo of which still survives (*see left*). Interest in erratics gradually waned, but Humphreys has left this tantalising account of their former glory, and he is fittingly buried in Bromsgrove Cemetery guarded by the two boulders at the end of this trail.

Visit our website: [erraticsproject.org](http://erraticsproject.org)

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Glacial Boulder Trail 6, June 2023



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**Heritage Fund**

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



## Birmingham's Erratic Boulders Heritage of the Ice Age

### Glacial Boulder Trail 6 Around Bromsgrove and Tardebigge Boulders by Bike or Boots



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.







Arenig Fawr

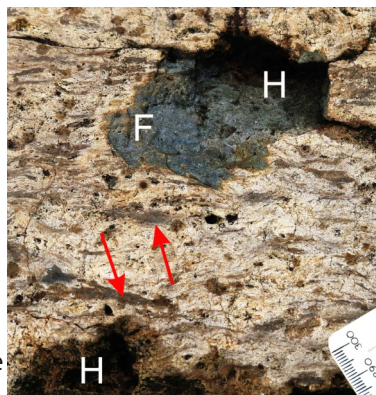
### What are glacial erratic boulders?

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 shows the eroded east face of Arenig Fawr, the source of most 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 those which buried the Roman city of Pompeii. The photo (right) 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), 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 (top right) 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



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

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.

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

### Trail 6 Route Details

This leaflet describes a route for **cyclists** starting from Bromsgrove station and is divided into two parts: a countryside circuit around Tardebigge, and an extension to Bromsgrove visiting boulders on display in an urban setting. A linear route for **walkers** is marked on the map. Much of the **cycle** route follows National Cycle Network Route 5 (NCN 5). The Tardebigge circuit follows quiet country lanes over the railway and the Worcester and Birmingham canal, then loops round to Tardebigge Church, continues SW on bridleways around the reservoir and crosses the canal again to join the outward route. The Bromsgrove section follows a quiet route through the town suburbs to the cemetery, returning the same way. For the suggested **walk**, take the Diamond Bus No. 52 or 52A from Bromsgrove station to Tardebigge (the bus stop is near the Tardebigge pub). Follow the trail guide and the **walker symbols** on the map to return to Bromsgrove station.



Tardebigge Church

**Trail Lengths and Navigation: Cycle trail:** 12.4 miles (20 km). Tardebigge circuit: 8.2 miles (13 km); Bromsgrove extension: 4.2 miles (7 km). **Walk** Tardebigge - Station: 4 miles (6.5 km).

The Tardebigge **cycle** circuit is mainly on country roads with a bridleway section which may be muddy in places. An on-road alternative is suggested at that point. The Bromsgrove extension follows the well-signed NCN 5. It is recommended that you use a cycle-mounted GPS device with the .gpx file of the route from: [erraticsproject.org/trail-6/](http://erraticsproject.org/trail-6/).

**Accessibility:** The Tardebigge **cycle** circuit is suitable only for experienced cyclists. The **walk** from Tardebigge to Bromsgrove station requires strong footwear and is mostly downhill. It is unsuitable for wheelchair users.

**Facilities:** Bromsgrove centre for cafes, toilets, bike stands; toilets at the train station; shops and eateries around the New Road/Finshall Road junction; the Tardebigge pub on Hewell Lane, B97 6QL (see map).



### Locality 7 - Bromsgrove Cemetery

Turn left at The Strand (still on NCN 5) where the main road bends to the right. Continue along the passageway to join Market Street and turn left onto the A448. This is where we leave NCN 5. Turn right at Church Road and left onto Church Lane. In 180m stop at the entrance to Bromsgrove Cemetery on the right, Locality 7.

On the left is St. John's Church with its magnificent spire, already seen on the trail from a distance. At 60m high it is the tallest in Worcestershire. To the right a few boulders leading to the cemetery entrance gate are not erratics! But the two large boulders (7a and 7b) flanking the gateway are Arenig survivors from the Victorian age when they were moved here from The Strand where an old horse trough stands today, (see front cover photo). Here they have escaped the fate of the numerous lost boulders which once graced the streets, gardens and verges of late Victorian Bromsgrove. The trail ends here, but you may like to complete your 'erratic' adventure with a visit to the grave of John Humphreys (see overleaf for more on this subject).

Push your bike through the cemetery and you will find his grave on the left of the central avenue not far from the exit (see map).

Continue to the gate ahead and turn right to rejoin the outward route back to the station.

The grave of John Humphreys

Bromsgrove Cemetery

7b

7a

St. John's Church

Bromsgrove

### Locality 6 - Berkeley Close

This boulder was dug up from the back garden of this property and preserved here for all to see from the pavement. It has a white coating of silica which is a feature of weathering. Freshly broken surfaces reveal the usual colour and texture of Arenig ash boulders. More erratics are surely waiting to be discovered in local gardens.

Return to Fulton Close, turn left and follow NCN 5 to the pedestrianised High Street in the centre of Bromsgrove. Directions continue in Locality 7.

Berkeley Close

6

Fulton Close

Finstall Road

St. Godwald's Road

Bromsgrove Station

Start here

Finstall Park Farm

Dusthouse Lane

Grimley Lane

Dusthouse Lane

St. Bartholemew's Church

Tardebigge

3

High House Lane

Bromsgrove Highway

Alcester Road

The Tardebigge

### Locality 4 - High House Lane

This small boulder displays typical Arenig Ash features including aligned linear black streaks (fiamme) as described at Locality 1. Fiamme are frequently visible in Arenig ash boulders. On the grass verge either side of the entrance you will see several small boulders including one made of off-white quartz, probably also from the Arenig area. It is hard to spot - can you find it? Quartz boulders are common locally, but are rarely seen in Birmingham. You will find many small boulders protecting the verges around properties as you explore these country lanes. Many are local sandstone, but amongst them are treasures from the Ice Age - look out for them on your travels.

Continue with fine views of the Malvern Hills ahead, to the junction with London Lane on the right. Now there are two options. For the road route (missing Locality 5) follow the dashed line on the map. The main route (described here) is off-road, first on a gravel track to Patchett's Farm then through fields which are likely to be muddy in wet weather. Go along the track to a farm gate on the right. Look over for a view towards Tardebigge reservoir and beyond, then carry on for 50m to a gap in the hedge, Locality 5a.

### Locality 5 - Above Tardebigge Reservoir

Boulder 5a is one of the largest Arenig ash boulders on this trail and lies to the right of a small pool below the path (see front cover photo, which shows this boulder in winter). It is hidden and out of the way, probably not far from its post-Ice Age resting place. Boulder 5b (85cm across) lies 35m beyond, 5m to the right of the path. It is a typical Arenig erratic, but is often hidden in deep grass. Can you find it? Beyond, and on many of the footpaths in the area you may find smaller erratics with the tell-tale features of Arenig ash or vein quartz. Keep your eyes open - but be careful not to trespass.

Continue through a gate and on to a junction at Patchett's farm. (NB: Cyclists cannot turn left here. It is a footpath only.) Turn right between buildings and go ahead onto the narrow bridleway through a field (which may be muddy), then through a gateway in a hedge. Bear left on a grass track across the reservoir embankment. Through this section you may need to push your bike. Go over the canal bridge, and along Grimley Lane with occasional views of Bromsgrove. Turn left at Dusthouse Lane and in 540m pause at a farm gate on the left opposite a property entrance.

Beside a tree on an old field boundary a very large Arenig boulder is visible across the field. This is on private property.

Continue along Dusthouse Lane and rejoin the outward route at the junction with Upper Gambolds Lane. At the junction with Finstall Road, a left turn will take you back to eating places and the station, but to follow Trail 6, turn right and follow NCN 5 signs. After the left turn at Fulton Close proceed 50m to a right bend. Turn left (off NCN 5) through a passageway to Berkeley Close. Stop at a large boulder outside No. 4 on the left, Locality 6.



### Locality 1 - Finch End Farm

From Bromsgrove Station take the 2nd exit at the roundabout onto New Road. Follow this to a roundabout and turn right onto Finstall Road, then right again onto St. Godwald's Road which is signed NCN 5. Follow Route 5 left onto Dusthouse Lane, then right at Upper Gambolds Lane and continue 135m to Finch End Farm entrance where a large boulder bears the farm's name plate, Locality 1.

This large boulder is a typical erratic from the Arenig mountains in Wales. It is composed of volcanic ash and small pebbles blown out of a volcano around 450 million years ago and brought here on a glacier during the Ice Age, around 450 thousand years ago. The deposits are aligned in layers formed as the ash settled and cooled. The prominent black streaks are made from hot pumice flattened into glass by the weight of overlying layers during the eruption (*see upper photo right*). These are known as fiamme (meaning they have flame-like ends). Many other Arenig boulders have been found in this neighbourhood, some still existing on private land, but many have been lost since they were recorded. (*For more on Bromsgrove's Boulders, see overleaf*).

Continue for 600m along Upper Gambolds Lane to the crossing over Worcester and Birmingham canal. This canal was first encountered in Glacial Boulder Trail 1 at Selly Oak in Birmingham. This bridge marks the mid-point in the famous Tardebigge flight of 30 narrow locks, the longest in the UK, with a fall of 67m over 3km. Over the bridge, continue uphill and stop 15m before the first tree in a row of oak trees on the left, Locality 2.

### Locality 2 - Upper Gambolds Lane

Lying in the road-side ditch there is an Arenig ash boulder which can be hard to find amongst the vegetation - but persevere! It is about 60cm across and has a hard white siliceous surface, (*see far right photo*). It has clearly been moved out of the way, but this one has at least avoided destruction. Ditches and stream banks provide fertile hunting grounds for hidden erratics!

Go on to a T junction, turn left onto Copyholt Lane and continue to follow NCN 5 to a fork. Keep left on Copyholt Lane leaving NCN 5 at this point. Continue 1.3 km to a junction with Holyoakes Lane. Turn left and continue, rising gently through the countryside for another 1.6 km to a junction with Alcester Road. For refreshments, turn right and go under the bridge to the Tardebigge pub on the right. Trail 6 continues to the left then left again at High House Lane. Almost immediately turn right, continue to Tardebigge Church car park and stop a while to explore Locality 3.

### Locality 3 - Around Tardebigge Church

There are no erratic boulders, but much of interest here. From a gate in the corner of the car park look across the valley to see an outcrop of the local red Helsby (formerly Bromsgrove) Sandstone, a river sandstone around 250 million years old. It is worth a visit on foot using the path down from here. The rock shows layering, and worn surfaces show that it erodes easily, unlike the volcanic Arenig rocks. Walk (or take your bike) alongside St. Bartholomew's Church with its imposing spire and commanding position. It dates from 1777 and marks the highest point of the trail at 163m. It is made of local red and green-grey sandstone with eroded blocks showing the structure of the rock. Beyond the church grounds a footpath to the right leads through a gate to a splendid viewpoint. A lock on the canal can be seen to the NW, and beyond, the spire of St. John's Church in Bromsgrove stands out. On a clear day the Abberley and Clee Hills are visible on the horizon.

Return to High House Lane, turn right and continue 670m to farm buildings on the left and stop at the entrance to Dove's Nest Barn (opposite High House Farm) where a boulder lies tucked under a small conifer bush, Locality 4.

