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FIELD GUIDE TO
FOSSIL COLLECTING
AT WREN'S NEST
IN THE WEST MIDLANDS







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The Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve is one of the most notable geological locations in the British Isles. It is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

Over 400 million years ago the area was covered by Silurian coral reefs and tropical seas. This was the environment resulting in the famous fossils which can be found today. Over 700 types are known to have come from Wren's Nest. 186 of these were first discovered and described here. 86 are found in no other rock strata.

This Wenlock Limestone outcrop on the west side of the former quarry on Wren's Nest Hill, near Dudley, is particularly fossiliferous. Although age exposure appears limited, fossils are plentiful Foraging and collection of loose stones is allowed, but the use of geological hammers and the prising of material from the rock face is not. You will not require any tools at this site.



THE GEOLOGY



The Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve is renowned for its fossils from the Silurian age and collecting here in the Much Wenlock Limestone can be very rewarding. Although reliant on erosion to expose the fossils, visitors are free to explore the scree slopes of this former quarry, to collect from.

There is no need to bring any tools, as this SSSI site forbids the use of tools, especially hammers, in order to protect this rare outcrop. The limestone outcrops provide a definitive section through the Coalbrookdale and Much Wenlock Limestone Formations, which are exceptionally rich in marine invertebrate fossils. They were deposited in the Homerian stage (420 to 423 Mya) of the Silurian,

At Wren's Nest it is easy to find fossils in the loose material on the floor of the quarries and in the fossil trench. The types of fossil that can be found include compound corals such as chain coral, solitary 'rugose' corals, sea lilies or crinoids, and abundant brachiopods. Trilobites are probably the most famous of our fossils, especially the 'Dudley Bug' as nicknamed by quarrymen in the 19th century. These look a bit like modern woodlice but are actually more closely related to crabs. Several types of brachiopod or seashell can be found. These were more prevalent in Silurian times than modern-day bivalves like oysters and mussels. Occasionally you can find a gastropod or early sea snail. Wren's Nest also had sea scorpions and hard shelled relatives of the squid and cuttlefish inhabiting the reef, however these are much harder to find.



At Wren's Nest the lowest strata of the Wenlock Series are represented by the Coalbrookdale Formation, which occurs as light brown and grey shales in a few limited outcrops. The major exposures are of the Much Wenlock Limestone Formation, which comprises three major lithological divisions - the Lower Quarried Limestone Member, Nodular Member and Upper Quarried Limestone Member. On top of these are poorly exposed light brown shales of the Lower Elton Formation at the base of the Ludlow Series. T





Acervularia ananas
Coral



Calymene bumenbachii
'Dudley Bug'
Silurian trilobite



Crinoids





A fragment of the British
Silurian sea-floor.



Acervularia ananas
Blue
Coral



Bryozoan fossil





Partial trilobite



Eospirifer radiatus
Brachiopod



Rhynchotreta cuneata
Brachiopod



Bryozoan fossil



Dalmanites myops
Trilobite



Fossil cystoid



Favocites gothlandicus
Coral



Dalmanites myops
Trilobite fragment





CLEANING & STORING YOUR FINDS

Cleaning & preservation

The vast majority of amateur collectors and tourists visiting Wren's Nest will find that their fossils collected from the site will require no tools with which to prepare them. Just ensure you only collect ex-situ (i.e. loose material) This is an SSSI site, so no digging into the bedrock.

It is inadvisable to use varnish on fossils, as it leaves a nasty stain over time.

Storage

Storage is a matter of preference but small boxes of card or plastic are probably a good place to start (See <https://earthlines.com>). Most importantly, your specimens need a label. A fossil collection will be worthless if you do not, at least, record where you found the fossil, even if you don't know the fossil names - you can always name them at a later time. A simple label like this example will be useful.

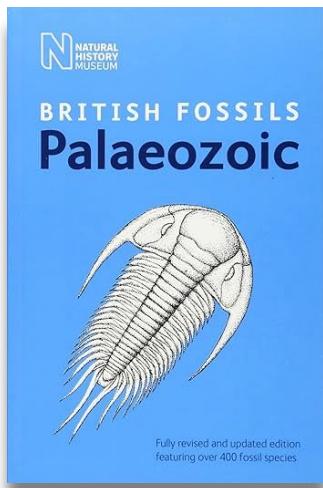
Name: *Rhynchotreta cuneata*

Location: Wren's Nest, Dudley, West Midlands

Geology: Wenlock Limestone Formation

Age: Silurian. Homerian Stage

Date found: February 2024



British Palaeozoic Fossils, published by the Natural History Museum, is a great resource for helping to identify your finds, especially brachiopods and trilobites.

DISCLAIMER

This downloadable PDF is one of a series of general guides to fossil collecting localities and not an extensive manual for health and safety when visiting such sites.

Furthermore, because potential hazards may change over time, prior to undertaking any fossil collecting activities, you need to make yourself aware of any RISKS, DANGERS, HAZARDS and LEGAL IMPLICATIONS associated with visiting and collecting fossils at any particular site.

UK Fossils, authors or any associated parties cannot be held responsible for your failure to do so, nor any consequences thereof.

Enjoy your fossil collecting safely and responsibly.