

Of Querns Setts and Silcretes



A silcrete boulder found at Bradenham including puddingstone on the left and finer sandy sarsen on the right.

Although some BAS members may not be familiar with the term 'silcrete', many will certainly know the terms 'puddingstone' and sarsen. Silcrete is defined by geologists as the 'near-surface accumulation of secondary silica'. On occasion secondary silica may incorporate pre-existing pebble beds to form a conglomerate (the more familiar 'puddingstone') but it can also be deposited in its finer (sandy) form 'sarsen' - utilised for example for the trilithons of Stonehenge. The two forms are not mutually exclusive. Locally, at Bradenham for instance, both can be seen in one boulder (see above). The pebble-free form known locally as 'Denner Hill Stone', occurs in some quantities around Hughenden and Bradenham; its durable quality once made it ideal for road surfacing, yards etc, for instance in Aylesbury.

Continued on the following page...



Puddingstone quern from Hambleden (photo courtesy Jill Eyers)

A recent issue of the *Proceedings of the Geologists Association* (Vol 127, Issue 3) contains eight articles on silcretes (with authors too numerous to acknowledge individually here), but of particular interest locally is a map of the distribution of Chiltern silcretes and a detailed discussion of the Romano-British rotary querns traditionally recorded as of 'Hertfordshire Puddingstone'. Chris Green has recorded over 700 examples of such querns in south-eastern England – including several from Buckinghamshire (see picture above). Two sites where they were made have now been identified in Hertfordshire, one just over the border at Great Gaddesden. So, we have the raw material, should we be looking for such sites in Buckinghamshire? Meanwhile this interesting volume is commended to readers. .

Mike Farley