



Viewpoint

## Ringing the blues



Time: 15 mins

Region: Wales

Landscape: rural



**Location:** Craig Rhos-y-felin, between Brynberian and Crosswell, Pembrokeshire SA41 3TA

**Grid reference:** SN 11677 36158

**Getting there:** Head west out of Crosswell. After 500m, take the right hand fork in the road. The road winds steeply down to a river crossing point. Park at the small parking spot just beyond the ford. Cross the road and enter the field, following the bridleway. The large, dramatic outcrop of rock is in front of you.

At first glance, this remote corner of rural Pembrokeshire has nothing to do with Stonehenge in Wiltshire.

But archaeologists have discovered that at least one of the stones incorporated into Britain's best-loved prehistoric monument comes from this exact spot.

Join anthropologist and author Mary-Ann Ochota to find out...

...what's so special about these rocks?



Take a look at the jagged, dramatic outcrop of pillar-shaped rocks in front of you (do they remind you of anything, a sleeping dragon or the scales of a mythical beast perhaps?)

It is made from a volcanic stone called rhyolite. The slabs of rock, stick up vertically between the gorse and other vegetation and have split naturally into these layered, fractured patterns. This distinctive structure may be why our Neolithic and early Bronze Age ancestors targeted this outcrop and quarried stones for their monuments like tombs, standing stones and stone circles.

Despite the natural way the rock splits, it wouldn't have been an easy task... At this time, people only had simple tools made from wood, bone and stone, and ropes made from plant fibres. They used natural fissures in the rock to hammer wooden wedges in and prise each stone away. See if you can spot places where it looks like rocks have been quarried away from the rock face. Sometimes it's only a 'stump' near the ground that reveals where a stone is missing.

### To Stonehenge...with love from Wales

The stones you can see today at Stonehenge come from two main sources. The largest are sarsen, and are found within 20 miles of the stone circle. The others, which make up a smaller circle within the henge, came from Wales. They aren't all the same kind of stone – there's spotted dolerite, rhyolite and sandstones amongst others. Together, they're referred to as bluestones, because of their colour. The bluestones are dwarfed by the sarsens, but they're actually up to 2.6m tall and weigh as much as two tonnes – as heavy as an elephant.

It's only in the last decade that geological tests have been able to pinpoint the origin of individual stones. By comparing the chemical fingerprint of different outcrops with stones at Stonehenge, it's been confirmed that at least one of the stones was quarried from this remote spot at Craig Rhos-y-felin.

### So what's so special about these rocks?

Research has shown that many of the bluestones transported from Preseli to Stonehenge have unusual acoustic properties – if you strike them with another stone, they 'ring' like a bell.

Perhaps the rocks were considered to be sacred, or to have healing powers, or some special connection with the otherworld, spirits or the ancestors.

We don't know if this is why these stones were selected in the first place, but it's worth remembering: these dramatic stones may not actually have been chosen for how they looked, but rather for a physical or supernatural property that we might no longer appreciate.



**Written by Mary-Ann Ochota,  
anthropologist and author of  
Hidden Histories: A Spotter's Guide to  
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