

Quartzite palaeoliths found during 2020 by the northern footslope of Bredon Hill, Worcestershire

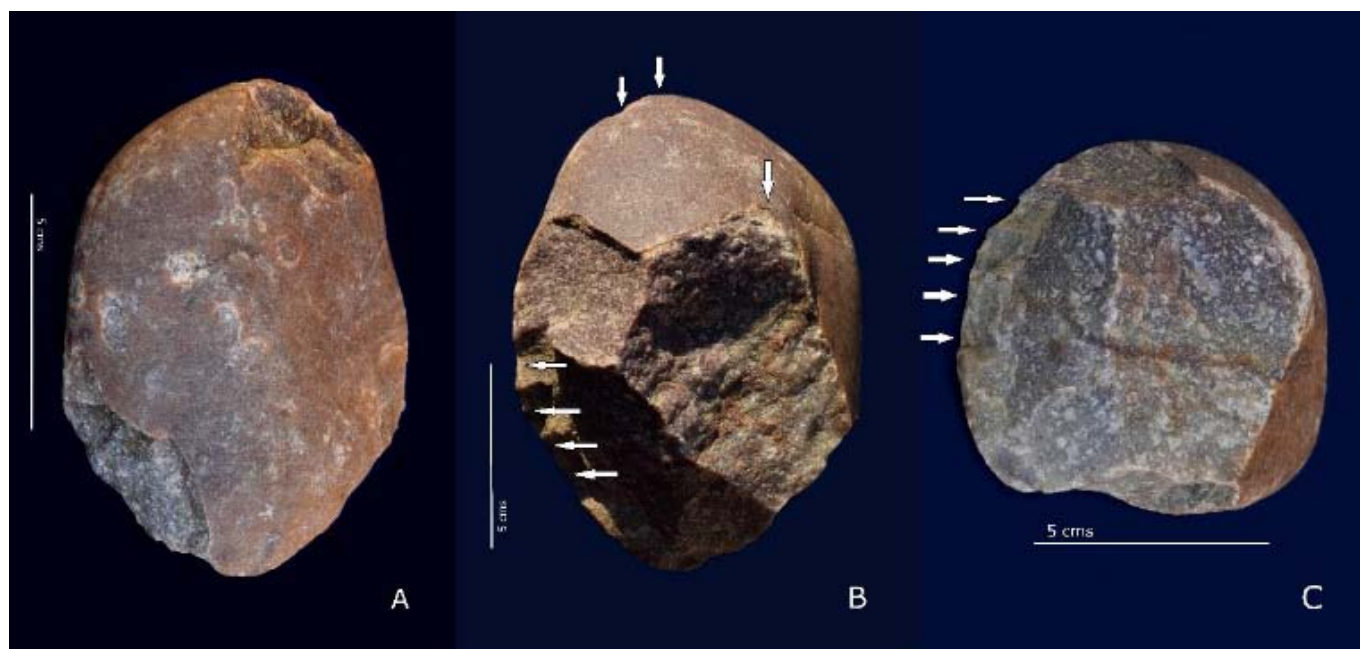
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Introduction

Two quartzite palaeoliths or stone tools are described from or close to modern land surfaces at Little Comberton and Haselor civil parishes, Worcestershire. Of Lower Palaeolithic age, >250000 years BP, such items are rarely found on modern land surfaces. Whitehead (2017) described examples from Pershore but these may have been derived from river terrace sediments higher than alluvium (Whitehead, 1988).

The Little Comberton palaeolith

This highly significant item (01, A,B,C) was found in the bed of a canalised Bredon Hill scarp stream in Little Comberton, Worcestershire (SO9643 30 m a.s.l.) on 18 June 2020 in what might generally be termed alluvium. This description is however too simplistic since the sediments are complex reworked gelifluction and solifluction deposits originating from the northern escarpment face of Bredon Hill. A veneer of high level gravel rich in quartzite pebbles occurs at about 250 m a.s.l. on the more stable dip slope of Bredon Hill (Dr M.J. Simms, *in litt.*, 26 June 2020) almost certainly as a relic of the Anglian Glaciation *ca* 450000 years BP, apparently overlooked by the review of Shotton, Goudie, Briggs & Osmaston (1980) and therefore an important addition to knowledge of the geochronology of Bredon Hill.



01. Quartzite palaeolith, Little Comberton, 18 June 2020. A, side of pebble with points of percussion visible at top. B, opposed side of pebble, vertical arrows marking points of percussion, horizontal arrows marking utilised edge. C, as B, distal end-on aspect. P.F. Whitehead.

A notable feature of this artefact is its pristine appearance and edge sharpness, apart from one smoother evidently utilised or reworked edge (01 B & C horizontal arrows). Solifluction does not significantly abrade its lithic content. The technique of manufacture is consistent with recognised Lower Palaeolithic technology; an attempt to split the pebble (01 A, 01 B vertical arrows) failed but the fabricator persisted and removed smaller flakes more or less unifacially. A better-resolved close parallel was found amongst the Quartzite palaeoliths recovered from the Carrant gravels at Aston Mill, Kemerton, during September 1977 (Whitehead, 1988, Fig. 3). Quartzite artefacts were also occasionally manufactured much later during the early phases of the Middle Palaeolithic but all known regional Quartzite artefacts are ascribed to the earlier time period. The great significance of this artefact is that it is not, unlike many river terrace gravel palaeoliths far derived. **It confirms for the first time the local presence of hominids in the Bredon Hill area perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand years ago greatly underpinning the global importance of the site and moving its hominid presence back more than 150 millennia at least.** It is mildly satisfying that this item was also found on land owned by me, although any hominid connection would be marginal at best! This is not the first palaeolith recognised from Little Comberton parish. Whitehead (1988) described a small rather crude distantly derived ovoid biface worked on weathered cherty flint from the modern land surface on 8 February 1975 at SO9643, which can now be illustrated in colour (02). This is likely to have been introduced to the site with gravel that was quarried from the parish gravel pit at Old Fallow Farm (SO9744) for track and road metalling during the 19th and early 20th centuries and almost certainly for long before then.

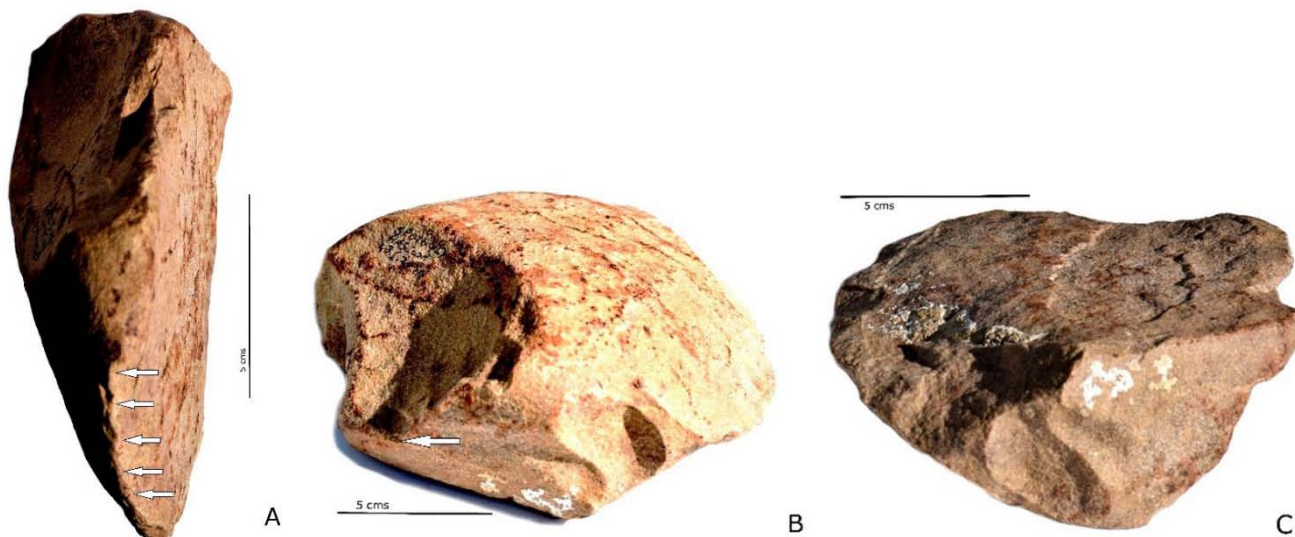


02. Battered and weathered ovoid Palaeolithic flint biface, Moor Leys Furlong, Little Comberton, 8 February 1975. Two aspects of vertical orientation. P.F. Whitehead.

The Haselor palaeolith

This large object (03), weighing 1100 gms, was found on the surface of an arable field at Haselor, Worcestershire (SP0142, 35 m a.s.l.) 398 m due west of the present course of Merry Brook on 28 May 2020. The piece does not conform to recognised palaeolithic typology and a small element of doubt may exist regarding its authenticity; it nevertheless requires to be described. Being part of a large quartzite boulder, it is not easy to ascribe its fragmentation or its provenance at Haselor, away from the gravel terraces of the River Avon, to entirely natural processes. The piece is essentially a flake

(03 A), apparently removed from the boulder with a single point of impact, leaving one face essentially cortical (03 A, B); a further removal from this face has been made, also from a single point of impact (Fig. 03 B arrowed). Better evidence of usage is provided by a contemporaneous uniformly reworked or heavily utilised distal edge 60 mm in length (03 B, C), suggesting the possibility of a bone splitting tool.



03. Palaeolithic Quartzite flake, Haselor, 28 May 2020. A, flake disposed +- vertically, the arrows marking a zone of edge wear. B, proximal end of flake the arrow marking a percussion point at a flake scar. C, as B, inverted. P.F. Whitehead.

This is an ancient weathered object which shows evidence of contact with iron cultivating tools and of ventefaction, or wind-blasting, over an extended period of time. It retains a patchy encrusted veneer of secondary carbonate precipitated out of solution under water (03 C), also over an extended time period. Situated in a very shallow valley, Merry Brook runs parallel and close to the River Isbourne with its large catchment. During the past 15000 years both watercourses must have discharged vast quantities of melt water and flood water into the River Avon; at times they would surely have been confluent. There was no evidence of any other derived quartzitic rocks in the immediate find area at Haselor where the bedrock is Charmouth Mudstone with abundant limestone fragments. Whilst the artefact may have arrived at its final resting place through recent human agency it may also have been transported by and embedded by the brook, rather like the Little Comberton artefact described above, when it had a much wider floodplain than its modern narrowly contained course.

References

Shotton, F.W., Goudie, A.S., Briggs, D.J. & Osmaston H.A., 1980. Cromerian Interglacial Deposits at Sugworth, near Oxford, England, and their relation to the Plateau Drift of the Cotswolds and the terrace sequence of the Upper and Middle Thames. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. Series B, Biological Sciences* **289** (1034):55-86.
 Whitehead, P.F., 1988. Lower Palaeolithic artefacts from the lower valley of the Warwickshire Avon *In: MacRae, R.J. & Moloney, N. Non-flint stone tools and the Palaeolithic occupation of Britain. Bulletin of Archaeological Research. British Series* **189**:103-122.
 Whitehead, P.F., 2017. A Lower Palaeolithic quartzite chopping tool from Pershore town, Worcestershire with observations on derivation. *Worcestershire Record* **43**:58-59.

Images

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