Black Country
Geopark

THE BLACK COUNTRY’S UNIQUE LANDSCAPES
AT A GLANCE

LIMESTONE CAVERNS
The Black Country is made up of four distinct areas, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and the City of Wolverhampton.

This is the place where many essential aspects of the Industrial Revolution began, which spread to change and modernise the entire world. It happened here, simply because the rocks below, held vast quantities of easily worked minerals during a time when people were free to experiment, explore and invent. In delving into the earth, discoveries of fossils and geology were made, creating special places and features, which are now globally unique and internationally important.

These unique places and features make this area different and very special. They are an expression of our past, our roots as communities and are at the heart of the Black Country’s character.

We will look after and protect these places and features, to ensure that visitors and future generations continue to enjoy them. We intend to do this by seeking international recognition for our heritage by becoming a member of the Global Geopark Network, (the organisation responsible for granting international Global Geopark status) for world class special landscapes such as ours. Our application will be submitted in the autumn of 2015.

The world’s first true geological map was made at Castle Hill, Dudley in 1665 and was an amazing advance in technological thinking.

The black, smoking fiery landscape of the industrial Black Country was the inspiration behind JRR Tolkien’s landscapes of Mordor in The Lord of the Rings.
THE FORGING OF THE BLACK COUNTRY

The landscape of the Black Country was created from a series of monumental events in the history of planet earth. These events are recorded in the rock layers that make up the Black Country landscape of today. Each rock layer is like a page in Mother Nature’s diary, in which the fossils, rocks and structures within them are like words on a page. Geologists read these clues from each layer in turn, building up a little bit more of the earth’s story each time they discovered something new.

The Black Country tells a story of vast changes. The deepest rocks (and the oldest) are the limestones of Dudley, Wolverhampton and Walsall. These are full of shelly fossils and coral reefs that once lived and died here. They tell us of a very different Black Country landscape that existed here 428 million years ago (geologists call this the Silurian Period). On top of the deep rocks are layers of ironstone, fireclay and coal with lots of fossils of plants and insects. These rocks tell us of a time some 310 million years ago when the Black Country was covered in huge steamy rain forests without which we would not have had the minerals being formed for the Industrial Revolution (geologists call this the Carboniferous Period – after the carbon in the coal). On top of these sit reddish sandy rocks which contain ancient sand-dunes showing how some time later the landscape dried out to become a scorching desolate desert (the Permian and Triassic Periods between 330 to 225 million years ago).

The final chapter in the making of the landscape is the Ice Age when vast ice sheets scraped across the surface of the area, leaving a landscape sculpted by ice and carved into the hills and valleys we see today.

Explore the geosites scattered across the Black Country to see these rock layers and the evidence that tells us what an incredible journey this landscape has been through over 428 million years to finally become the place of industry in our time.

The Newcomen ‘Atmospheric’ Engine, the world’s first commercial steam engine, was erected near Castle Hill in 1712.
Located in the heart of the West Midlands, England, the Black Country is an amazing place to explore with a great number of world-class hidden gems, many of which are nestled amongst buildings, roads and houses. The area’s key association with Britain’s Industrial Revolution makes these geological wonders truly unique.

Whether you’re a regular or first time visitor, the Black Country offers many different experiences for everyone. You can explore the ancient worlds by visiting geosites such as Wren’s Nest National Nature Reserve, where the cliffs are covered in ripple beds and find out more about its 700 fossil species, 86 of which cannot be found anywhere else in the world.

Come and discover how the Black Country shaped the Industrial Revolution and the world at places like the Black Country Living Museum or take in the breathtaking views and enjoy long walks at our nature reserves and open spaces.

The Black Country is built on proud traditions, industry and rich culture, with many a famous author and film maker taking inspiration from our special heritage and unique landscapes, which are important to the world’s heritage.

Scratch the surface of the Black Country and you’ll soon begin to see the vast amount it has to offer and just how special and important its features really are.

The world’s first true seismograph (earthquake measuring device) was made in a basement in West Bromwich by a Black Country chap called John Johnson Shaw. This went on to become the standard equipment for the new science of earthquake measuring.

For more information and to view other special Black Country geosites, visit: blackcountrygeopark.org.uk
THE BLACK COUNTRY’S INSPIRATIONAL LANDSCAPE

“Black by day and red by night”

The industrialisation that spread across this once green landscape turned the place into a ‘country black by day and red by night’ from the coal mine spoil heaps, soot and fiery furnaces that could be seen almost everywhere. The communities of the Black Country sprang up amidst this industry and formed close bonds through hard labours and common suffering, which made them tough men and strong women in a landscape of noise and smoke.

This unique landscape has become the inspiration behind some world famous stories. Two of the most famous are JRR Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings and James Whales’ classic portrayal of Frankenstein in Hollywood, whose inspiration came from the blackened smoke-shrouded environments of the industrial Black Country.

The Black Country and its neighbour Birmingham also gave rise to heavy metal music, whose dark powerful tones chime with the heavy metal industries of the area.

The Black Country today has a thriving music scene with many bars and concert venues offering a full range of live entertainment that cater for everyone.

The Stourbridge Lion (railway locomotive built in Stourbridge by Foster-Rastrick) was the first ever train to run on rails in the USA.

The South Staffordshire Thick Coal was mined in the Black Country and at 12m in thickness is the thickest coal seam in Europe. This was the power behind the Industrial Revolution.
MUST SEE PLACES

Just some of the places to see and visit in the Black Country

There is a very wide range of natural and cultural heritage, events and activities to enjoy here, but as a starting point why not try these and branch out from there. More information is available at www.blackcountrygeopark.org.uk

Dudley Museum and Art Gallery
The Black Country Geopark headquarters, geological displays and tourist information point

Dudley Castle Hill attractions
The Black Country Living Museum with mining experience, Black Country village and events, Dudley Zoo and Castle, Dudley Canal and Tunnel Trust, canal narrow boat ride into underground limestone mines, displays, activities and special events

Wolverhampton Art Gallery
Large art gallery with a geological collection (view on appointment). Nearby West Park hosts features and glacial boulders

Walsall Art Gallery and town centre
Large modern art gallery in the heart of Walsall, nearby Victorian arboretum and leather museum

Bumble Hole and Warrens Hall Park
Large nature reserve at the junction of two canals with canal tunnel, coal mine buildings and clay pit which is host to an annual canal festival in September

Wren’s Nest National Nature Reserve
The Black Country’s premier fossil site and limestone mining heritage area with many woodland footpaths to explore

Sandwell Valley Country Park
Living heritage farm and museum with local history displays, valley walks and an RSPB bird reserve

Galton Bridge and Galton Valley
Huge man made valley containing two canals and railway lines and the Galton Bridge – a historic structure that was once the largest single span bridge in the world

Barr Beacon Local Nature Reserve
Black Country highpoint with views to Birmingham, across the Black Country and the surrounding counties, very large sandstone quarry at Pinfold Lane which provided much of the material for constructing Birmingham, good network of footpaths

Saltwells Local Nature Reserve
The largest local nature reserve in the Black Country with woodlands, abandoned clay pit with coal seams exposed, old bell pits, canals and classic geological sites associated with them. Very good network of footpaths and warden led activities

Sedgley
The villages of Sedgley and Upper Gornal were once referred to as the Cotswold’s villages of the Black Country because of their honey-coloured sandstone buildings. The area contains some classic geological sites at Sedgley Beacon Hill and Turners Hill at Cotwall End Valley, consisting of old sandstone quarries, a ruined windmill and conservation area

Moorcroft Wood Local Nature Reserve
For a taste of bygone industry Moorcroft Wood is a great site to explore, huge boulders of foundry waste sit beside a flooded clay pit in an area which is now a wildlife haven between two canal arms

A warm Black Country welcome
Known for being down to earth, humorous and having generosity of spirit, Black Country folk embrace visitors and newcomers alike.

So why not settle into cosy seats in historic pubs to be served the best locally brewed ales and beers you’ll ever taste. You can also sample fine Asian cuisine as well as good old Black Country favourites.

Visitors will be bowled over with how much there is to see and do in the Black Country, so whether visiting for a day, weekend or longer, the Black Country offers a mix of accommodation to suit all needs and requirements.

The Black Country really does offer a unique experience, with no two visits ever needing to be the same.
To find out more about the Black Country Global Geopark:
Visit www.blackcountrygeopark.org.uk
Call 01384 815575 (10am – 4pm Monday to Saturday)
Email blackcountrygeopark@dudley.gov.uk

BLACK COUNTRY GEOPARK HEADQUARTERS

Dudley Museum and Art Gallery is the headquarters of the Black Country Geopark and is located in Dudley town centre. It is a medium sized museum with 10 galleries that host and display geological collections, fine art and local history. This is a great starting point to pick up information and begin to explore the Black Country Geopark.