

## REVIEWS

**Derbyshire Blue John**, by Trevor Ford, 2000. Ashbourne Editions, Derbyshire. 112 pages A5, 70 colour photos, 29 figures, 1 873775 19 9, £5.95.

It is a rare privilege for a reviewer to be able to enthuse so completely over a book that is a complete success in so many ways. Trevor Ford's *Derbyshire Blue John* provides one of those privileges; it has all the key elements that every author and publisher yearns to achieve.

Blue John is the perfect subject. It is one of the very few British minerals that is important and famed on a worldwide scale. It can also claim to be unique to the Peak District. Fluorspar is common enough; blue (or purplish blue) fluorspar is also widespread; blue banded material is much less common; blue banded fluorspar that is of quality fit for ornamental carving is only worked at one other location (China); and large blocks of material for ornaments larger than trinkets have only ever been found in Treak Cliff. The mineral deposits of Castleton are truly unique.

To many, Trevor Ford is Mr Peak District (or more correctly Dr Peak District OBE). He has long been regarded (correctly) as the font of knowledge on anything geological in the Peak District; he has over 40 years of research experience in the area, notably on the mining and minerals and equally on the caves and karst. The second vital element for a good book is to have a knowledgeable author, and *Derbyshire Blue John* has the best possible.

The book covers every aspect of the mineral; there are excellent chapters on the geology, the mining and the cutting and preparing of ornaments and jewellery. One double page of colour photographs shows all the distinctive, named varieties of Blue John that come from the different parts of Treak Cliff's mineralised limestone. Not surprisingly, the book includes a chapter of fascinating detail on the mineralogy of Blue John, where there is still room for debate over the cause of the colouring. Trevor Ford ascribes the colour to lattice distortion, but retains doubts on the cause of this. He reviews the possible role of colloidal calcium, the less possible role of impurities, and the more likely potential for dislocation by uranium radiation, but he dismisses the old idea of colouring by hydrocarbons.

The history and use of Blue John occupies nearly half the pages in the book, as the author unfolds the story of the mineral starting from the discovery of its attributes around 1700, any notions of the Romans using Blue John having been debunked in a previous chapter. Early use in rather splendid fireplaces matured into the carving of the great vases that are now irreplaceable due to the declining availability of large blocks of the best-quality mineral. Today's modest jewellery production at Castleton is a mere shadow of the

Blue John industry of 200 years ago, but it does continue a fine tradition.

The third element of a good book is down to the qualities of presentation and printing. Yet again, this book is an unqualified success. The text is so refreshing, because it is so comprehensible; it is clearly authoritative without being a heavy, and barely readable, learned treatise. It is well written, and is a captivating read - surely the aim of any good book (and one that many others could do well to emulate). For those who want more detail, there is a useful, selected bibliography that is properly referenced.

*Derbyshire Blue John* warrants high-quality colour printing, and it has it. The wealth of colour pictures are there to be treasured; they include images of so many of the most splendid and most famed Blue John pieces. Readers can judge for themselves as to which is the most magnificent - Shore's vase on page 86, Vallance's vase on p 87, or Woodruff's table on page 99; they are all 19th century pieces now in different museums, but they are all to be seen in the pages of this book.

A reader could expect to pay dearly for such a wealth of information and excellent presentation; yet the book retails at just £5.95. This is rare value (will other publishers please note what can be achieved). *Derbyshire Blue John* will sell like hot cakes in the Peak District and should also achieve worldwide sales among mineral enthusiasts. And it's not just for the specialist; anyone could enjoy reading it. This is a great book.

Tony Waltham

**Holiday geology map: Peak District**, by Neil Aitkenhead & Anthony Dennis, 1999. British Geological Survey, A3, 0 85272 340 7, £1.95.

One of the series covering holiday locations in Britain, this provides a new view of the Peak District. It gives a quick snapshot of the principal rock types and the nature of their formation, along with other geological features, such as the faulting and mineralisation. The language used is kept simple, to enable it to be understood by the typical Park visitor, and although it does refer to time periods it does not attempt to complicate things for the interested.

The main feature is a satellite view of the whole Peak District from 700 km in space overprinted with a simplified geological map. This works extremely well except that the locations and towns are printed in very small type (maybe necessarily for the compact map scale) which makes them a little difficult to read! There is also an oblique 3-D section through the Peak District showing the arch of the Pennine anticline, to help illustrate a textual explanation of the overall geological structure, but this is a little too small to be of great use. The format of the map makes it easy to carry around and the thick laminated paper should make it resistant to a

fair amount of wear and tear. Altogether, this is an excellent publication, which should bring to the walker or holiday-maker in the Peak District, a basic understanding of the geology that underlies the beautiful landscape of the National Park.

*Tony Morris*

**The Dudley limestone mines**, by Steve Powell, 1999. Vol. 14, No. 1, Mining History (Bulletin Peak District Mines Historical Society), ISSN 1366 2511. 68 pages A4, 80 figures, £7.00.

Admittedly more West than East Midlands, the limestone mines of Dudley do provide a fascinating aspect of economic geology that is of more than parochial interest. Two Silurian limestone beds just 9 and 13 metres thick supported an amazing complex of mines, whose product was vital to the Black Country iron and steel industry. Quarrying evolved into underground mining around 1700, and a series of tunnels providing canal access direct to the mines became a success story that has made the hills of Dudley very special.

Sadly the 20th century at Dudley saw only the demise of the mines. Crown holes - those exciting surface collapses when bits of buildings and cricket pitches suddenly drop into oblivion - heralded the roof failures that were inevitable in the weak shales overlying the mined-out limestones. Just filling the surface holes was not enough; a fresh crown hole at Wrens Nest had to be filled in 1994 on the same site as a hole filled in 1962. The threat to roads, houses and people was such that entire mines have been filled in the last 30 years. The massive and expensive programme of ground remediation was a classic of its kind, and is described in this report.

Filling the mines was an undeniably terminal process, and this publication is therefore a valuable record of a lost heritage. It is a fascinating record of the miners' endeavour, the engineers' response to hazard, and the author's perseverance in gathering data. Some better maps to relate surface and underground features could have been welcome, but anyone drawn to the famous limestones of Wrens Nest Hill (to gain but a glimpse of the huge inclined pillars in the Seven Sisters mine gallery, now beyond massive railings) will find this volume both interesting and useful.

*Tony Waltham*