

A woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a purple jacket and black pants, stands in a forest. The ground is covered in brown pine needles. A large, smooth, round stone is integrated into the letter 'O' in the title 'A Passion for Rocks'.

# A Passion for Rocks

WRITTEN BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT | PHOTOGRAPHED BY MIKE DAVIS

**B**renda McEnery is a rock hound. For the last 40 years, since owning a house in the village of Erin, she has been collecting beautiful and puzzling stones of all shapes and sizes. During construction of the house, a large, perfectly round stone was excavated and became her first find. The rear yard of the house backs onto a ravine containing the Credit River, and here she has found countless more pieces.





Brenda McEnery at the Credit River which flows close to her house in the village of Erin.





▲ Brenda's finds are organized and displayed on tables and benches in the garage. PHOTO BY GLORIA HILDEBRANDT.



**T**wo folding tables and some sturdy benches have been set up in the garage to display her finds, including a significant collection of many perfectly round or oval stones in sizes from a cannonball down to a musket ball. Many of the other pieces look like natural rocks, although when she points out some features, they become more intriguing and less like they're completely natural. Some have grooves as if from wear. Edges look like

they might once have been sharp. Lines in stone may have been made deliberately. Some items look like scrapers or grinders or axes or hammers. Some have suggestions of grooves where they might have been tied to handles.

Brenda believes that her finds may be very old artifacts from Indigenous people who used to live and hunt in the area. She has examined and studied each piece and done research on possible uses. Having found

similarities among the finds, she categorizes them as round and egg-shaped rocks, tools, exotics, and having the shapes of kites, spears and almonds.

"I have a lot of round, ovoid, smooth rocks that seem to be prevalent in this area," she says. "All have been found within a two-km radius, mostly along the banks of the Credit River."

She has gathered so many of these rocks that she uses them as decorations in her garden, and has lined them up on a retaining

wall. She demonstrates one possible use for them as a grinder on a stone that has a remarkable curve on one side. Together, the stones make a good fit. If not used for grinding, the round stones might have been used for pounding or as a weapon.

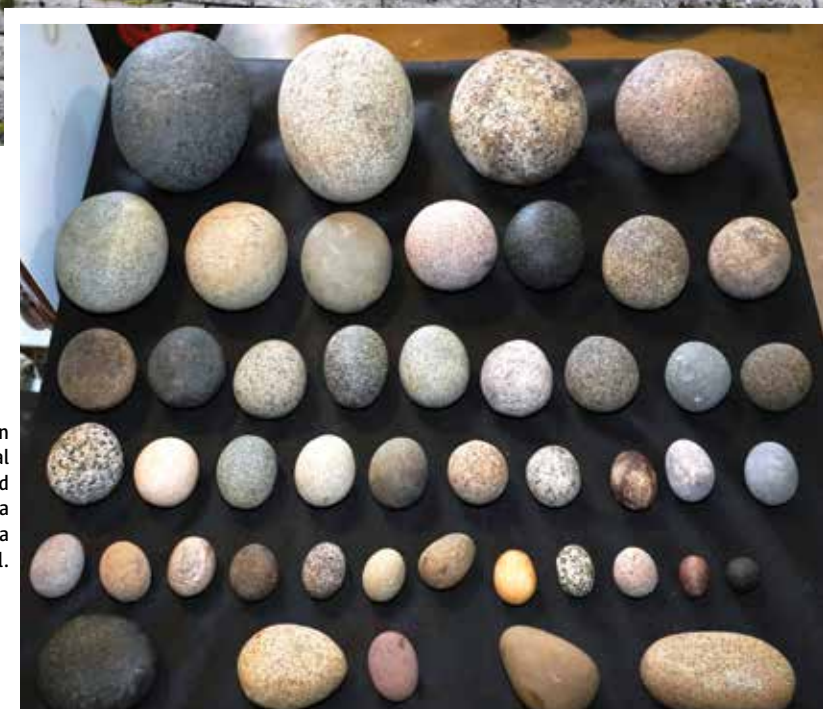
Brenda shows that some of the round stones are highly magnetic. She shares that she learned that some of the smaller stones could have been heated by fire and used in women's birthing





▲ Brenda's garden in Erin is decorated by many perfectly round, large stones that she found locally. These are only some of them.

► Brenda's collection of round and oval rocks arranged from the sizes of a cannonball down to a musket ball.







▲ An arrangement of various finds, in the shapes of planers, scrapers, kites, some with distinct holes and others with possible notches.

canals to help soften and open the cervix for birth.

### Ancient Tools

Brenda believes that some of her finds could have been ancient tools, perhaps used once and dropped. Some flat rocks have a distinct hole at one end, and Brenda can show how two of them could work as coupling stones to hold a stick in place against a bow drill to start fire. Others look like planers. Some rocks have a rounded end with a notch and a point at the other end, suggesting that they could have been axes. There are similar shapes to many of the rocks, but in different sizes.

“I have this theory that, like us, the ancients made tools and used the same principles as you would in a small tool as you would in a large,” explains Brenda. “For instance, we have teaspoons and then we

have larger spoons for stirring and then it goes up to shovels for digging. I believe I found in my patterning that the Indigenous did the same.”

In her category of “exotics,” or pieces that don’t naturally occur in this area, Brenda puts a beautiful black granite cannonball-sized round stone, rose quartz pieces with extremely sharp edges, and what she thinks are fossilized pieces of bison and horse teeth.

“According to mainstream archaeology,” declares Brenda, “fossilization of vertebrates did not happen in this area, so either it did, or these obviously were transported here.” Other pieces are suggestive of spear heads or knives, while bow-shaped rocks could be used to sharpen other stones or smooth out fibres or strings made of animal hide.

“Mainstream archaeology will say these are not of the



▲ Resembling a “headstone,” this large rock contains grooves that can be seen as a stick figure crossed by a horizontal line.

most correct material,” Brenda admits, “and there’s no flaking or definitive pecking marks, but I believe the nature of the soil around here tends to be very alkaline so the artifacts are highly eroded and they are thousands of years old.”

Brenda has grouped similarly shaped rocks together, making impressive collections. “One of the phenomena of this area is what I call the kite shape,” she explains, “the one, two, three, with a point on the end,





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▲ Brenda holding a possible grinding stone on a rock with a curved surface that could serve as a mortar. The two make a pleasing fit.

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repeated so many times here. They're everywhere. Whether they're points or axes, I'm not sure. They're in sizes from very small to very large."

She claims that almond-shaped rocks she has found would have had a sharp edge and been used for cutting or scraping, although the edges are highly eroded. The lack of clearly worked edges in her finds prevents some people from instantly confirming them to be human artifacts. She is encouraged, however, by some interest that has been shown, saying that Tanya Hill-Montour, archaeology supervisor and consultant with Six Nations of the Grand River, as well as an archaeology representative from Mississaugas of the Credit, have concluded that some of the finds are Archaic in nature, which means they are as much as 7,000 to 10,000 years old.

Brenda has sought official responses from many organizations since early 2021. "All levels of government have been informed of the artifacts," she says, "and Ontario's Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has registered the coordinates I sent them as site leads."

### Sensitive Issues

There can be issues around archaeology. Many different reasons are given for leaving finds where they are. People wanting to develop a site can be delayed or even prevented if finds prove to be significant and the site becomes protected. Indigenous people today may want to have finds from their ancestors repatriated or left *in situ*, or untouched in their original locations, especially if the items have a spiritual aspect. Professional archaeologists need artifacts kept *in situ*, in order to have proper records and the best understanding of the items.

Yet some of Brenda's pieces were dug up when



▲ Brenda demonstrates how two rocks with a hole in an end might have been used as coupling stones to hold a stick for a bow drill to make fire.

construction was done in her housing subdivision. If she hadn't taken them home, they would have been pulverized or haphazardly buried by machinery.

Brenda has the best intentions with her finds. She stopped gathering pieces when she was told to by one organization, and all she wants is to add to the documentation

of Indigenous people having been in the area, as well as have Indigenous inclusion in any archaeological exploration of the prehistory of Erin Village. **NEV**





▲ Interesting finds that Brenda thinks may have been scrapers and points, with kite-shaped rocks in the lower right and at the bottom, exotics including rose quartz.



▲ The size of a basketball, this round white stone was revealed by excavation work done in Brenda's neighbourhood.



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