

SGG Update No 14: Sept 2022

Working in partnership with Somerset Environmental Records Centre (SERC) and Somerset Wildlife Trust (SWT) to encourage appreciation, conservation and promotion of the geology of Somerset <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>



Dear all

There are two main things to draw your attention to in this *Update*. The first is to ask you for feedback on our Somerset Geology Group (SGG) priorities for the coming years, including any areas where you may be able to offer help. This will also be part of the focus of our next get-together on Tues 11 Oct (see adjacent box).

The second is the opportunity of the new annual International Geo-diversity Day which will be celebrated for the first time on Tues 6 Oct 2022 (see box on p3).

Recent activity and future priorities for SGG

Now that we have completed our five-year project with SERC to review Somerset's existing Local Geology Sites (LGS), we need to look at the priorities and opportunities for SGG over the next c five years to best encourage geological conservation and associated interpretation and educational activities in Somerset.

Garry has produced some additional columns for the LGS Review project spreadsheet, that will help, for example, with identifying LGS that are priorities for conservation work. Priorities and opportunities are also flagged up in the LGS Review area reports and we will continue to liaise with LGS review partners.

Several potential themes are already emerging: identified during the review, from feed-back from those actively involved and discussion in our SGG Co-ordinating group.

- *See adjacent box on how to let us know your views and whether you can offer any help. Much will depend on our volunteer capacity.*

Our current organisation

Back in May 2016 we started to revive SGG and map the expertise and interests of members. Then at our SGG meeting in May 2017 we agreed that we would operate as a network - to ensure a light-touch and avoid duplication with organisations, such as Somerset Earth Science Education Centre (SESC) and SERC, and

Our next SGG get-together will be on **Tues 11 October 2022, 10.30 am - 3 pm (coffee from 10 am) in the meeting room, Alfred Gillett (AG) Trust, The Grange, Farm Road, Street, Somerset.**

The **AG Trust** will be telling us about its plans for a **new museum** and we will be contributing to its consultation on that, including a chance to look at its geological collection.

We also plan to share information on what everyone is doing and discuss what SGG might best focus on in the coming years.

- *Let us know your views on the various themes for SGG activity in this Update and of any offers of help. You can do this by email to Garry Dawson via Somersetgeology@gmail.com by Fri 7 Oct and/or by coming to our meeting on 11 October.*
- *Please let Garry know if you plan to come to the meeting. See separate agenda for full details.*

competition with membership subscriptions organisations. We therefore need to work in partnership with others for individual projects and activities, to provide, for example, appropriate insurance cover for volunteers.

Garry and myself act as co-coordinators (having taken on the baton passed to Andy King by the late Hugh Prudden, SGG's former secretary). Our 'core' tasks include: co-ordinating joint work with SERC and other partners on LGS; dealing with planning and other external queries; maintaining our SGG mailing list, producing this *Update*, and organising our yearly meetings. We have a page on SERC's website, with contact information and where earlier issues of our *Update* can be found.

Garry currently sits for us on Geo-Conservation UK (our national umbrella body) and we are

supported by a small SGG Co-ordinating group which includes Peter Wright (who chairs both SERC's LGS Panel and our LGS Steering group), Phil Parker (who, along with Garry, is an original long-term member of SGG), and David Hill (also with early involvement in SGG and with experience in the museums sector).

In the last two years, we have invited Sheila Alderman (with experience of organising the Wessex group of the Open University Geology Society (OUGS)) as an alternate for David, as he has needed to focus on other commitments (including as a trustee of the AG Trust).

The LGS Review Steering Group and SERC's LGS Panel have broadly similar membership to each other, with those invited ensuring involvement and expertise from across the county and criteria for LGS designation.

This has included for example: Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA), Adel Avery from SESC, for its Mendips and education expertise and contacts with quarry owners, Natural England and Somerset County Council (SCC) planning department, plus those from SGG acting as area mentors and volunteers for the LGS review project signed up with SERC as volunteers.

- *We propose to continue this approach, but would welcome any ideas and support to help us be more effective.*
- *Please also keep an eye out over the next few years for anyone who may be coming up to retirement, looking for a new voluntary commitment and/or who may be interested helping with SGG co-ordination.*

The themes we have identified for potential future activity include the following:

1. Continued partnership work on LGS

We anticipate continued partnership working with SERC, but at a lower level than for the LGS Review. The LGS Steering Group will meet in February 2023 to advise, for example, on making the best use of the Review information. SERC's LGS Panel will then meet as and when necessary to consider any LGS where further review becomes possible and any potential new LGS.

Further review is a high priority for a few sites, such as the wider Doulling stone quarry area, where one LGS is now reclaimed land, and, as

well as the currently quarried areas, there are adjacent previously quarried and now wooded areas with public footpaths with reported exposure. Then there are several LGS where review was as a desk study, but if further enquiries enable us to identify ownership (see below), then we may be able to make site visits.

Monitoring - We also need to establish a simple procedure so that, when SGG members or others visit an LGS for other reasons (such as for field study) or have new reconnaissance information, we can provide SERC with a file note with any updating or new information.

Somerset's LGS - There are now 220 LGS in Somerset (plus 14 in the Devon part of the ENP) with the evidence base for each held by SERC. Area reports for the Exmoor, Quantock, Mendip and South Somerset areas are also now available as PDFs on our web page on SERC's website. Plus, we hope to be able to make a simple table of LGS sites available there in due course.

LGS (formerly RIGS) are of local to regional value and are covered by policies in local plans. Their boundaries can be found via public planning search web sites for some, but not all, districts and we hope this may become more consistent with the move to a unitary planning authority for Somerset in 2023.

LGS complement the c 60 nationally important earth science SSSIs in Somerset.

2. Practical conservation work

Clearing rock faces of vegetation and other debris is a high priority at a few LGS, with opportunities also arising at others from time to time.

We need to ensure that such work is organized with the agreement with the owner; with a partner organization which has the appropriate insurance, equipment and skills; and is ideally accompanied by making interpretative information available or with arrangements in place for occasional access for field study use.

Earlier this year, for example, Garry organized clearance of a rock face at Great Wood in the

Quantock Hills under the auspices of the South West Group of the OUGS with the permission of Forestry England.

Alan Holiday, chair of DIGS our equivalent group in Dorset, and SESC are currently liaising on the needs for Vallis Vale SSSI and Tedbury Camp LGS, where DIGS has previously carried out practical conservation work. There may also be opportunities in the future at Ham Hill. We also hope to explore with Natural England whether there are any needs for earth science SSSIs in Somerset.

- *Please let us know if you would like to be part of an e-group to be notified of opportunities to assist with practical conservation work.*

3. Potential for educational use, interpretative material and activities to raise the profile of Somerset's geo-diversity

At present the *Somerset Good Rock Guide*, produced by Hugh Prudden for SGG in 2004 (available on our web-page below the *Updates*) is the only guide we have to LGS and earth science SSSIs in Somerset suitable for field studies but some of the information may now be out of date.

We hope to be able to provide more clarity in future on which LGS are: on open access land; in public ownership; are clearly visible from adjacent public footpaths; and/or where owners may be willing for occasional field group visits.

Garry is, for example, organizing a South West Group OUGS field day in October which will visit three LGS, including one where Sheila's local knowledge has facilitated contact with the owner.

Our LGS Review area reports flag up opportunities where interpretative material might be developed for individual LGS and for interpretative material on the geo-diversity of Somerset and Exmoor more widely, while the new annual geo-diversity day (see adjacent box) and other event opportunities (see box at the end of this *Update*) provide opportunities to organize field activities and other geo-events.

Back at the beginning of the review we also identified a need to build more contacts with those teaching geology in Somerset.

- *Please let us know if you are involved in organizing geo-activities, have writing skills and would be interested in developing interpretative material for LGS and/or could help develop our contacts with those teaching geology in Somerset.*

The first International Geo-diversity Day - Tuesday 6 October 2022

The main programme of activities in Somerset that we are aware of is the ***Mendips Rocks! - Festival of Geology***, organised by SESC and the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It will include events throughout October, including a geo-walk to Hapsford Bridge and Vallis Vale on the day itself. *See attached programme for further details and how to book.*

This is the first year for this UNESCO supported day, so it is worth gathering ideas and planning ahead for the future. If you are organising an event you can, register it in advance, for example, with the Geologists' Association (GA). See also links at the end of this *Update*.

4. Liaison with conservation organizations and developing contacts with owners

This is a critical part of raising awareness of Somerset's rich geo-diversity. Wendy and Phil will follow up our LGS Review recommendations for the Exmoor area by arranging to meet the new ENPA Conservation Officer in the autumn and Wendy will then also arrange to meet the new conservation advisor for the National Trust (NT) covering Somerset.

Garry has good contacts with the Quantock Hills AONB, Forestry England and NT in that area and Wessex Water, while Adel at SESC also has good contacts with the Mendip Hills AONB. Wendy is a member of the Blackdown Hills AONB Heritage Forum. Other organizations where we could usefully develop closer contact on LGS include National Rail and Somerset Highways Authority.

Wendy and Sheila are now on South Somerset's consultative group for Ham Hill Country Park and we have assisted recently with an enquiry from local artist Carolyn Lefley who is creating an artwork for Somerset Art Week inspired by the geology of Ham Hill. Sheila, Dee Edwards and Dave Williams met her on site in July to provide background on the geology and Geoff Rowland assisted with a fossil identification day in August.

There is also potential to identify ownership of some privately owned LGS by more detailed local enquiries than were possible during the LGS Review. Where an owner is willing, there may be opportunities too for an LGS to be 'adopted' by a local individual volunteer contact, to assist with advice, conservation work, etc.

There may also be opportunities to raise the profile of the value of LGS through SWT's new 'Team Wilder' initiative to encourage local action for wildlife. And you may have contacts with other groups, that could help to raise the profile of Somerset's geo-diversity.

- *Please let us know if you think you can assist with facilitating contact with a particular organization or LGS owner.*

5. Planning

In April 2023 a new Somerset unitary authority planning authority will replace the current district and county planning authorities (with ENPA remaining a planning authority in its own right).

We hope to find a way to make the LGS review information held by SERC more readily available to the new planning authority. Only a brief summary statement is included in the updated data set on LGS currently sent by SERC to planning authorities every 6 months.

Plus, we would like to find a simple way to ensure that as SGG we can contribute any additional information/advice needed where a planning application for any development is being proposed affecting LGS. In recent years we have become aware of only a very few planning applications affecting LGS. We may therefore be missing opportunities for enhancement and face cleaning etc. Somerset Heritage Trust has, for example, a system to vet planning applications for archaeological interest.

In August, Keith Moore from the LGS Panel, Peter and Wendy, met Andrew Gunn from the planning department of SCC as a first step to exploring this.

6. Active quarries and restoration plans

In June we celebrated completion of the LGS Review with a small gathering of those who have been actively involved from SGG as signed up volunteers with SERC. We were hosted by SESC, were pleased to be joined by four students from Oxford University, about to embark on a field mapping exercise in the Mendips, and had an update from Adel on SESC's work programme, which is supported by a consortium of quarry companies in the Mendip area.

In the afternoon we visited Doulling Quarry, again hosted by SESC, and led by Doug Robinson. The quarry has been regularly used by SESC and others for field studies in recent years and our visit was a useful reminder (after visits to many bramble and scrub-covered LGS) of the value for education of fresh rock exposure.

We were able to observe a thin basal conglomeritic layer on the base of some of the freshly roughly cut stone blocks, which included small rounded quartzitic and mafic pebbles as well as fossils. And we could also see faces illustrating how a new coarser layer of shell sand had infilled hollows and cracks in the surface of an earlier layer of finer material.

We will want to coordinate closely with SESC in the future to support its work and avoid duplication of effort. It would also be useful to develop relationships with quarry owners, including in some instances where we were unable to carry out site visits for the LGS Review.

When we met with Andrew at SCC we also started to explore how best to engage when quarries reach their end-of-life. In some instances, there may, for example, be a commitment to retain a quarry face in the reclamation plan.

Andrew helpfully drew our attention to the *Somerset Minerals Plan* (adopted in 2015). It's *Table 7 checklist for reclamation plans* is divided into two: aspects that must be addressed by

quarry operators; and those that should be considered only where relevant. The latter includes contributing ... *to the conservation of Somerset's geological heritage and geodiversity, including maintaining geological exposures for educational purposes.*

7. Temporary exposures and new research

Documenting temporary exposures, produced by new road works or pipelines, was a former SGG activity, that we agreed to leave as a low priority in the last 5/6 years.

However, one very positive outcome of our LGS Review is that it has made us more aware of formations, such as the Beacon Limestone Formation in South Somerset, and other aspects of Somerset's geology of interest to those involved in contemporary research.

Last year, for example, Garry spotted a new exposure of the North Curry Sandstone in Triassic strata exposed at road works at the M5 junction with the A358. He alerted Alastair Ruffell, who in turn involved others with a research interest, including Mike Benton and Chris Duffin – and a paper is shortly to be published in the Proceedings of the GA.

To pursue this more actively we will need to build contacts with, for example, Somerset Highways Authority and Wessex Water.

- *Please keep your eye out for major new pipe lines and other potential new/temporary exposures that may be of interest; and keep us up to date with your research interests.*

8. Encouraging geological research

The existing LGS also provide opportunities for research in the future. As per our last *Update*, we now have good contact with Robert Chandler for those LGS of interest for the Inferior Oolite and hope he will be able to visit a few more of the sites in the coming years.

- *Several LGS in the Carboniferous Limestone in the Mendips area ideally require further review from someone with specialist expertise of its formations there – let us know if you are aware of anyone who may be able to help.*

9. Bibliography on the geology of Somerset

Hugh Prudden produced a comprehensive bibliography of publications on Somerset's geology up to the year 1997 (available as a PDF on our web page below the *Updates*).

Again, this is a former SGG activity that we have left as a low priority over the last 5/6 years. Doug established for us back in 2018 that academic search facilities can help collate papers mentioning Somerset and geology in their title for some scientific journals.

However, this does not cover articles published in more local journals of the Ussher Society or Somerset Archaeological and Natural History (SANHS). Since 1997 several new books and guides have also been published covering aspects of Somerset's geology, such as Dave Green's recent book covering the landscape and geology of the western part of Somerset.

- *Let us know if you could help with updating this comprehensive bibliography and/or with compiling a list of books and guides in current publication covering the geology of Somerset.*

10. Museum collections and encouraging projects on the history of geology in Somerset

We realized in the early stages of the LGS Review that there may be specimens held in museums from individual LGS, but initial enquiries revealed that this was beyond our capacity to explore further then. For example, collections are often held under the name of the original collector and the information may not include full locational details such as a grid reference.

We have SGG members who are part of the GA's Geological Curators group, but we are not aware of any listing of museum and other collections which hold geological material from Somerset.

- *It would be welcome if there is someone who could help with this.*

There are also several LGS in Somerset where the exposure was documented originally by nationally well, or lesser-known, geologists from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For example, several LGS were documented originally by the early Somerset geologist Charles Moore, while recently Sheila Rabson has let us have some copies of papers collated by her late husband, David, relevant to the history of geology in Somerset. David was a member of SGG and we were very sad to hear of his death last year.

- *Let us know if you have an interest in research on the history of geology in Somerset and have writing skills. It could contribute to interpretative material for LGS or on Somerset's geo-diversity more widely.*

11. Nature Recovery Areas and consultations

As mentioned in the last *Update*, we are trying to encourage the inclusion of geological SSSIs and LGS, as well as biological SSSIs and LWS, within the forthcoming Nature Recovery Areas in Somerset. Plus, we sometimes need to contribute our views to national or other consultations, such as on DEFRA's *Nature Recovery Green Paper*, to which we contributed earlier in the year.

12. Encouraging projects on local building stone

Garry and Peter will be continuing their voluntary project (under the auspices of Somerset Heritage Centre) to map the building stones used in Somerset's towns and villages. See <https://swheritage.org.uk/historic-environment-service/built-heritage/traditional-building-stone-research/> for their latest progress. There is a link there to Mike Barr's, 2017: *Building Stone Inventories for Devon* (which include parts of the western side of Somerset).

- *Let us know if you are interested in contributing to similar work for the Mendips area. Doug Robinson and the late Chris King had started to consider this.*

Finally, we can do our best to coordinate and encourage activity, but it seems likely that what

we can achieve in the coming years will depend on opportunities that arise, individual interests and volunteer commitment.

We may also need to think more widely: to make the link with issues affecting Somerset and that would engage young people, such as climate change and sustainable use of water resources. The new geo-diversity day may help with that.

Wendy Lutley and Garry Dawson, Co-coordinators

Events

- **Mendip Rocks! Festival 2022 – 1- 29 Oct 2022** – see <https://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/news/mendiprocks/> and/or <https://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks>
- **International Geodiversity Day – 6 Oct 2022** - <https://www.geodiversityday.org/>
- **Earth Science Week - 9 - 15 Oct 2022** - <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/Policy-and-Media/Earth-Science-Week-2022> -
- **GeoWeek** - <https://earth-science.org.uk/geoweek/> - a week of activities in May
- **South West Open University Geological Society (SW OUGS)** - see <https://ougs.org/events/>
- **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS)** - see <http://www.sanhs.org/>
- **The Geologists' Association (GA)** – for local groups, guides, inspiration and ideas <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/>

See also Graeme Churchard's events calendar <http://westcountrygeology.com/> and his blog at <https://geologywestcountry.blogspot.com/> . You can contact Graeme from there to submit an event or request publicity.

NB Not intended to be comprehensive.

Thanks - to all who have helped with the LGS Review and continue to support our work. Our particular thanks to SESC for hosting our celebration in June to mark completion of the LGS review and to the Alfred Gillett Trust for hosting our forthcoming meeting in October.

SGG is a member of **GeoConservationUK** (<https://geoconservationuk.org/>) which *encourages the appreciation, conservation & promotion of local/regional geological and geomorphological sites for education & public benefit*. We also aim to encourage delivery in Somerset of the UK Geodiversity Action Plan www.ukgap.org.uk and England Geodiversity Charter www.englishgeodiversityforum.org . Our Web page with previous *Updates* and reports is at <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/> .