

# SGG Update No 15: May 2023

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

Firstly, to encourage you to have at least a quick look at all the items in this *Update* - there are several interesting developments.

Then, thank you to those who responded with feed-back, following our consultation on future priorities and opportunities for SGG in last September's *Update*. Our emerging strategy is set out below, but more thinking will be needed on how best to achieve things. We are simply a network and much depends at present on our capacity as volunteer co-coordinators, while SERC currently has no in-house capacity dedicated to LGS activity. So please bear with us.

## Our future plans

We had further discussion on our future at our SGG get-together in October, with partners at the LGS Steering Group meeting in February and more recently, in April, at a SGG Coordinating group meeting. We have also agreed to continue our working arrangements with SERC for LGS, so that we can still have a small team of SGG-sourced SERC volunteers for any ongoing LGS-related activity, including any survey and monitoring required, and to continue the LGS Steering Group and Panel.

Two main overarching themes have emerged from our discussions to focus activity over the next few years:

- **Building relationships with owners of LGS to help with them understand the interest of their LGS and to advise on any conservation management desirable;** and
- **Working with partners, owners and others to encourage good quality interpretation on the geology of Somerset, in a wide range of different ways, including town trails and where appropriate for LGS.**

See further below for both. Plus, of course, we will also want to encourage a wide range of

related activity via our network, including geo-education and field visits.

## Completing some outstanding tasks

Meanwhile we are still completing some outstanding tasks from our review of Somerset and Exmoor Local Geology Sites (LGS).

In February the LGS Steering Group approved the working version of the LGS review area report for the Taunton area. The final report will be added to our webpage on SERC's website over the summer. The Steering Group also advised on a simple list of LGS, indicating conservation category and this is also in final preparation.

These, together with the other LGS review area reports already available on our web-page (for the Exmoor, Quantock, Mendip and South Somerset areas), will give complete coverage for the new Somerset Council and the Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA). The LGS steering group also agreed a new proforma, so that any updating information for individual LGS can be added to SERC's files. Several notes we hold from the last year still need to be transferred into this format.

We were able to hold the February LGS Steering Group meeting at SERC's office for the first time since 2020. Keith Moore agreed to chair the LGS Panel in future and we were joined by Andrew Gunn, from the Planning Department of the then Somerset County Council, Julie Layzell, Future Landscapes Officer for ENPA and Dave Evans, recently retired from Natural England.

In the autumn Garry also produced a report of our activity for GeoConservationUK's newsletter; and a paper on our LGS review for Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.

## Building relationships with owners

We anticipate that this will become a main theme of our LGS partnership working in the coming years and we have clarified with SERC that follow-

up visits to meet with owners (to help with an understanding of the interest) can be carried out under the SERC volunteer role. In practice this is likely to be progressed only very gradually, as owners will need to be contacted in advance of any site visits – and, as indicated above, at present SERC has no in-house capacity dedicated to LGS activity.

At our recent SGG co-ordinating meeting, Dee Edwards also showed us a leaflet, produced by our equivalent group in Cornwall a few years ago, specifically to assist owners in understanding the value of LGS in Cornwall in an accessible way. We will explore if we can produce something similar for Somerset.

In September Wendy met Julie Layzell from ENPA to discuss on-going opportunities within the ENP (with the ENPA itself owning some LGS) and in April she met National Trust's (NT) Nature Conservation Adviser, Hannah Gibbons, to discuss NT-owned LGS in Somerset and the Devon part of Exmoor (also covered in our LGS review).

We are currently making sure that the NT has all the relevant LGS review information and hope this may pave the way in the future, for members of our volunteer team to meet with NT rangers, to help explain the interest of individual LGS and discuss any practical conservation needed or interpretation potential.

Similarly, Sheila Alderman has offered a training session for rangers and volunteers at Ham Hill (see further re Ham Hill below). There may be other opportunities too, where our SGG-sourced SERC volunteers developed a good relationship with an individual owner during the initial review.

### **Practical conservation work**

There is, of course, no requirement under LGS designation for an owner to carry out practical conservation work and it is not always needed. However, where any management is agreed with an owner and a practical conservation group is involved, Garry will lead on liaison, maintaining an e-group to let those of you from our SGG network know, if any opportunities to join in such practical working parties emerge.

- *Let us know, if not already, if you would like to be on this e-group via [Somersetgeology@gmail.com](mailto:Somersetgeology@gmail.com).*

### **Further review, monitoring and new LGS**

Review is a high priority for a few remaining LGS where time pressure limited our ability to progress contacting the owner during the main review. Then there are several LGS where review needed to be carried out as a desk study, but if further enquiries enable us to identify ownership, then we hope we may in future be able to make site visits and monitor condition.

We envisage new LGS will be a relatively low priority in the coming years, with just a few coming forward to the LGS Panel.

#### ***Geoconservation: principles and practice***

is a new national resource, published by Natural England in February 2023 (NE802). It focuses on the nationally important earth-science SSSIs, with case studies covering different types of conservation interest and approaches to management – but has potential to help inspire and provide practical ideas for LGS as well. Available to download in three parts at

<https://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/6152405931261952>

### **Encouraging good quality interpretation**

Our discussions and LGS review indicate that there is considerable scope for interpretive material to tell the story of Somerset's rich and varied geology, more widely than simply in relation to LGS. Feedback has emphasised the particular scope to tell that story in an accessible way through the local building stones used in towns, villages and individual buildings open to the public, such as might be achieved, for example, in town trail leaflets.

Dee Edwards has drawn our attention to some 'good practice' example leaflets, produced in Cornwall in the past, written by John Macadam and often produced in partnership with owners and others. They, for example, explain the environment at the time the rocks were formed, relate this to contemporary issues (such as climate change) and provide a signpost to further information. Some of John's material is available via <http://earthwords.co.uk/> and <https://people.exeter.ac.uk/jdmacada/>.

Our discussions also suggest that recent advances in IT, such as QR codes, can provide new opportunities for the way in which such

information can be provided (not necessarily on site or printed).

### **Bibliography on the Geology of Somerset**

Andy Gordon, joined our volunteer team this winter, and we are delighted that he has taken on updating Hugh Prudden's *Bibliography on the Geology of Somerset* (completed to 1997, available as a PDF on our web page). This is a major project, which will take a while to complete, with numerous more recent articles in journals such as that of the Ussher Society.

Andy has already noticed that several new books, guides and leaflets have been published in recent years. As he says '*There is a lot of information out there on Somerset's geology already, but no easy way for anyone interested to find it.*'

Also, at our Steering Group meeting in February, we learnt from Leon DeBell, SERC's manager, that SERC will be updating its web site. We hope that this may provide an opportunity to improve our web-presence and that in coming years we can explore how information on Somerset's geology can be better signposted, both for the interested public (local resident or visitor) and those with more serious interest.

### **A new museum at Street**

Our autumn meeting was kindly hosted by the Alfred Gillett (AG) Trust at Street, when we contributed to consultation on its plans for a new museum aimed at opening in 2025, the bicentenary of Clarks shoe business being established. Sam Cullen of the AG explained that this first phase will cover the social and industrial history of shoemaking, with permanent display of the fossil collection in its current location.

Updated display of the latter, which includes ichthyosaurs and other fossils from quarries in the Street area gathered by Alfred Gillet (1814-1904), will come in Phase 2, but consultants have already been advising on conservation. Sam's presentation was followed by lively discussion on the best way forward for presenting the geological collection – see box. See <https://alfredgilletttrust.org/a-new-museum-in-street/> to keep in the loop as plans progress.

### **Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC)**

We were also pleased to have an update from Adel Avery on SESC's education work in our

exchange of information. SESC hosts schools and other education groups, arranges visits to local quarries and other geological sites and is co-organizer of the Mendips Rocks Festival (partnered with the Mendip AONB and The Mendip Society). Adel explained SESC's collection of local rock and fossil specimens is currently being cleaned and labelled by volunteers, with a

#### **Presenting geological materials – some key points emerging from our discussion**

- Display and visibility of specimens should be at the fore of consideration.
- Labels and accompanying information need to be readable (size, font, lighting) and updatable, as fossil names change or new information becomes available.
- It is worth thinking about hierarchies of information - aimed at different interests and levels - so that those that wish can find out more (including by links etc).
- Use of replicas & jigsaw type activities can provide tactile experiences for children.
- Too much technically-based interpretation can cause difficulties. It may not work well, can date quickly, may not be easy to change and/or can be experienced elsewhere.
- Looking at approaches elsewhere can help with inspiration and ideas, but not to necessarily simply copy.
- The focus should be on the uniqueness of the collection and its story – in this case thinking how to link the specimens to the local story of their discovery in local quarries as they were developed for building the growing town.
- Liaising with others nearby for eg exchange of material, touring and temporary exhibitions, marketing and merchandise, can be helpful.
- A range of different fossils etc can provide an idea of the ecosystem at the time. The illustrations in W. S. McKerrow (Ed.) 1978. *The Ecology of Fossils. An Illustrated Guide* are reported to still be useful.

view to having more open days at the centre.  
New volunteers welcome.

### Opportunities for geological education

Our discussions have also revealed that there are currently few opportunities to study geology in schools in Somerset, while extra-curricular classes have declined considerably in recent years, with most activity now happening through U3A geology groups. We have only a few of these contacts on our SGG network to date and are seeking to remedy this.

### Ham Hill – a new interpretation centre

In the winter we were delighted to hear that the then South Somerset District Council (SSDC) had been successful in its bid for a second stage Lottery grant to assist with improvements to accessibility at Ham Hill Country Park (which includes both an earth science SSSI and an LGS).

The plans include a new visitor centre (to open in 2024) and more recently SSDC won a grant from the Wolfson Foundation to assist with the permanent exhibition, which forms part of the overall project. The exhibition will cover all the conservation interests of the Country Park, including its geology.

Sheila Alderman is now attending meetings of Somerset Council's Countryside Liaison Group (former SSDC group for its County Parks) for us to keep in the loop as implementation starts. We assisted with ideas and advice at the earlier stages of the proposal, including a special in-depth LGS review (collating a wide range of information on Ham Hill's geology).

Lastly, we were deeply saddened in the autumn at the sudden illness and death of Peter Wright. Peter chaired our LGS Steering Group and Panel meetings, and was member of our SGG Co-ordinating group. His wise thinking is much missed.

*Wendy Lutley and Garry Dawson Co-coordinators*

**Thanks** – a special thanks to the AG Trust for hosting our autumn SGG meeting and Ham Hill Country Park for a venue for our SGG Coordinating Group meeting.

SGG is a member of **GeoConservationUK** 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](http://www.ukgap.org.uk) and England Geodiversity Charter [www.englishgeodiversityforum.org](http://www.englishgeodiversityforum.org). Our Web page with previous *Updates* and reports is at <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>.

### Events and other contacts

- **GeoWeek** - a week of activities **27 May – 4 June 2023**, <https://earth-science.org.uk/geoweek/>
- **Earth Science Week - 8-14 Oct 2023**, theme of how geoscience can help with sustainability and environmental problem solving <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/ESW23>
- **Mendip Rocks Festival - 8-22 Oct 2023** with geo walks, quarry tours, a lecture day on Sat 14 Oct and an open day on Sat 21 both at SESC, all in process of being planned. See SESC web site for full details nearer the time - <https://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/>
- **International Geodiversity Day** <https://www.geodiversityday.org/> was 6 Oct in 2022 (no details for 2023 yet)
- **The Geologists' Association** - <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/>
- **Open University Geological Society (OUGS)** <https://ougs.org/events/> but no branch in the south west at present
- **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS)** <http://www.sanhs.org/>
- **Ussher Society** - <http://ussher.org.uk/> focusing on geological research in the south west
- **Earth Heritage Magazine** - twice-yearly produced by Natural England and partners <https://www.earthheritage.org.uk/>
- **GeoConservationUK** - <https://geoconservationuk.org/>
- **Earth Science Teachers Association** - <https://earth-science-teachers.uk/>
- **Geosupplies** – organizes educational opportunities [https://www.geosupplies.co.uk/geology\\_earning\\_study\\_courses.php](https://www.geosupplies.co.uk/geology_earning_study_courses.php)

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.*