

SGG Update No 16: April 2024

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

Following consultation with you last year, two overarching themes emerged to focus our activity over the next few years:

- **Building relationships with owners of Local Geology Sites (LGS) to help 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.**

This *Update* is aimed at reporting our progress over the last year under both headings – starting with the second - as it is a new strand to our activity in recent years.

Town Building Stone Trails

will form the focus for our autumn SGG meeting, which will be on **Monday 7 October 2024**, hosted by South West Heritage Trust (SWHT) at its Somerset Heritage Centre in Norton Fitzwarren, Taunton. Full details, including booking information, to come in early September – but please put the date in your diaries now.

Encouraging good quality interpretation

Your feedback last year emphasised the scope to tell the story of Somerset's geology in an accessible way through the local building stones used in towns and villages, such as might be achieved, for example, in town trail leaflets.

Encouraging town trails and other geo-walks

Over the last year, Garry Dawson, my SGG co-coordinator, has led two walks for SANHS around

the Taunton geological trail (both fully booked), while the *Mendip Rocks* festival programme in 2023, included walks led by Doug Robinson, around Wells, and Simon Carpenter, around Frome. Geoff Rowland has drawn our attention to some 'missing material' from Hugh Prudden's *Somerset Good Rock Guide*, which provides a potential trail that could be developed for Bridgwater and Sheila Alderman has been working (as part of Dorset Building Stones Group) on a trail for Sherborne, just across the Somerset border.

Dee Edwards also last year, drew our attention to some 'good practice' leaflets, produced in Cornwall in the past, written by John Macadam.

Meanwhile, Garry has also been continuing his separate project, as a volunteer for SWHT, to document the building stones used in Somerset's towns and villages - with help over the last year from both Sheila and Doug. (See <https://swheritage.org.uk/historic-environment-service/built-heritage/traditional-building-stone-research/> . There is also a link from there to Mike Barr's Building Stone Inventory for Devon (which extends into parts of Somerset) and the data collected by Mike is now available, on request, from the Devon Heritage Centre <https://swheritage.org.uk/devon-archives/> .

Town building stone trails day

In the autumn therefore Garry met with Nic Wall from SWHT and we are delighted that it has agreed to host our next SGG meeting (see box). We hope it will be a chance to share thinking and plans on: existing trails that need an update; locations for potential new trails; and on formats and writing styles. Plus, there may be potential for material of this type to be added to SWHT's website in the future.

Garry is currently liaising with potential contributors and we hope to complete the day

with a short walk around Norton Fitzwarren village to examine its building stones.

We have also recently learnt from Andy King of Geckoella that there is a local initiative starting to update the Watchet building stone trail, produced by Eric Robinson several years ago, with several new stone types located since.

Bibliography on the Geology of Somerset

Andy Gordon, has continued updating Hugh Prudden's 1997 *Bibliography on the Geology of Somerset*. Work is still in progress, but Andy has now added 268 new references, bringing the total to 1,589, with more being added all the time. Plus, he has been able to clarify the detail of Hugh's references in several cases.

He has now added references: mentioned in the later years of Hugh's SGG newsletters (to c 2010); others that we have newly come across during the LGS review; relevant to Somerset from the Ussher Society journal (1958 to 2022); and from Bath Geological Society journal (1982 to 2023).

His additions to summer 2023 are available on our current SERC web-page and the latest version will be added to our new web site in preparation (see below).

A SGG website to provide a gateway to information on the geology of Somerset

The possibility of a full SGG web site was raised in our discussions last year, but we have been reluctant to have a completely separate web site, as SGG is simply a network with no formal constitution. However, in August, at an on-line meeting with SERC, we learnt from Tony Price, SERC's web manger, that SERC is able to host, and cover the annual fee, for a website for us, as one of its associated specialist groups.

Since last year too, it has become increasingly clear, that there are several books, guides, leaflets and other sources of information (such as local museums with interpretive material) that could help to provide an introduction to the geology of Somerset. As Andy said then: *'There is a lot of information out there on Somerset's geology already, but no easy way for anyone interested to find it.'*

We now therefore also have a clear aim for a full SGG web site, ie to provide a gateway to help signpost people to information on the geology of

Somerset. There is currently nothing of this type available - and we hope that it will be useful to all our partners.

Andy has since liaised on our behalf with SERC and a web site is now in preparation. It will replace our web page - but please bear with us: our current web page may be slightly out of date until we make the change and we still have a long way to go to fully develop the new site! We will let you know our latest progress in the autumn.

Opportunities for geological education

Last year, our discussions revealed that there are now few opportunities to study geology in Somerset. Over the last year we have therefore tried to ensure that we have more of the relevant contacts for our SGG network.

We understand there are currently active University of the Third Age (U3A) geology groups in Taunton, Wells, and Barnstaple (the latter in Devon, but relevant to Exmoor) and it is still possible to study geology at Wells Music School and at Richard Huish College, Taunton.

We welcomed new contacts to our SGG network for the Taunton and Barnstaple U3A geology groups; and Adele Bolt as the new geology lead at Richard Huish College. Garry has now given Adele some help, in advance of a student field visit to Hestercombe, and with sorting the College's field collection, while Phil Parker will help Adele further with the latter in the summer.

LGS and building relationships with owners

We agreed last year 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. We also clarified then that follow-up visits to meet with owners (to help with an understanding of the interest) can potentially be carried out under the SERC volunteer role (although that requires an update).

However, SERC has been short staffed over the last year, with Leon DeBell, its manager, leaving in September 2023, and a new manager yet to be appointed, whilst there has also been a break in administrative support.

Completing some outstanding tasks

In the interim, we have been completing some outstanding tasks from our joint partnership project with SERC on the 2016-2022 Review of Somerset and Exmoor's LGS. The final Taunton area report was added to our webpage on SERC's website in summer 2023.

Garry and I spent some further time last spring developing the project spreadsheet for future use by SERC, including a version for Exmoor National Park Authority (ENPA) - with LGS in the Devon part of the NP included - to assist its ongoing monitoring of LGS within ENP.

A second paper written by Garry about the review for the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS) was published in SANHS Proceedings: Dawson, G, 2023: *Review of Somerset's Local Geological Sites*, Vol 166, p229-252. This also gives the reference to his earlier paper on the project.

Getting information to owners/managers

We have been able to ensure that more information from the LGS review has been sent to owners/managers. For example, in August 2023 Garry held an on-line meeting with Somerset Council highways department to ensure it had received the information for the 25 LGS it manages and to pave the way to discussing any future conservation management. This revealed that SERC had been awaiting a contact to send the information to for the 9 LGS in its south Somerset area. This has now been remedied and the review information sent by SERC.

We also drew its attention to the LGS status of East Chinnock Hollow (where landslip has closed the road over the last two plus years). Dee Edwards and Dave Williams had alerted us to a consultant's report on the situation, which appeared unaware of the LGS status.

In April 2023 Wendy had met Hannah Gibbons, the National Trust's (NT) Nature Conservation Adviser covering Somerset and the Devon part of Exmoor, from which it emerged that it had not yet received the LGS review forms for the 7 LGS it owns for the Devon part of Exmoor (formerly 10 but involving some amalgamations), done as a desk exercise during the Covid pandemic.

We have subsequently remedied that too. Plus, we have ensured that the NT is aware that it owns land adjacent to a road-side LGS managed

by Somerset Council highways at Montacute - and of the scope for interpretation on building stone at NT-owned Montacute House.

We also hope to progress a leaflet, suggested by Dee Edwards, on the lines of one produced by our equivalent group in Cornwall a few years ago, to assist owners in understanding the value of LGS in an accessible way. We have produced a preliminary draft, which we agreed with SERC's manager, Leon DeBell, before he left, would be useful for the LGS partnership. This is currently on hold, due to SERC's limited capacity - but we hope to progress it in the coming year.

LGS Panel and two new LGS

In February 2024 we held a LGS Panel meeting under SERC's auspices (It is the lead organization in Somerset for Local Sites partnership working). It was chaired for the first time by Keith Moore, who has been a member of the LGS Panel throughout the LGS review and who has experience from the earlier process of selecting LGS (then termed RIGS) in Devon.

It had already been agreed that new LGS would be a low priority in the future, but the Panel was able to consider and recommend two new LGS for designation - both identified as priorities during the review of existing LGS. This will now be actioned by SERC.

Taunton Gateway Park and Ride LGS

In 2021 Garry had spotted a new exposure of the North Curry Sandstone Member of the Triassic at works associated with the Taunton Gateway Park and Ride and alerted those with a research interest (see *Update* No 14). This exposes a sequence covering the Carnian Pluvial Episode (see Dawson G, *et al*, 2022: *A new exposure of the North Curry Sandstone Member*, Proc Geol Assoc, Vol 133, p 457-618).

In June 2023 therefore, with the permission of owner Somerset Council, Garry organized a training session in completing the LGS review form, as part of the induction for Geoff Rowland and Andy Gordon from SGG, as new members of the SERC LGS volunteer team - and this provided the information for the Panel to consider and recommend LGS designation.

A new LGS at Deer Leap

A proposed new LGS at Deer Leap had been on hold since 2019, when it was suggested by Doug Robinson, our Mendip area LGS mentor, as it accessibly demonstrates the unique geological interest on this southern side of the Mendip Hills.

The land is leased by Somerset Council to SWHT and managed by the Mendip National Landscape (formerly AONB) as an open space. Then in autumn 2023 it became part of a new extended Mendip National Nature Reserve (NNR). This new LGS therefore has potential to contribute to Natural England's aim of using its NNRs to help tell England's geological story.

Additional information on LGS

Over the autumn of 2023, we completed 21 'additional information' proforma, for existing LGS, so that any updating information gathered by our LGS volunteer team since the review, could be reported to the LGS Panel and then added to SERC's files, when its capacity allows.

Amongst these, we were, for example, able to report on research that might help SERC to identify, or establish contact with owners for a further two LGS, where this had not been possible during the review.

Planning

SGG also responded during the year to two planning applications affecting LGS, both in the Mendips. One was a revised planning application for development at Barnclose Quarry, where the developer's agent had still not apparently sought the information available from SERC or taken the LGS interest there into account.

The second was a planning application relating to Doultong Quarry, a quarry producing a unique local Jurassic building stone, where Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC) has regularly organized field trips to the active quarry in conjunction with the owner over recent years. We clarified that the review had identified that further work was required in the future to revise the current LGS boundary to ideally ensure the retention of faces for conservation within any future restoration plans (whether formally required through the planning process or achieved voluntarily). The review had revealed that the current LGS boundary largely covers ground now reclaimed as a field.

Practical conservation work and interpretation

Amongst the 'additional information', there was some progress to report to the LGS Panel on practical conservation work and for interpretation – although of course, LGS designation does not require this.

Tedbury Camp and SESC

Adel Avery at SESC kept us in the loop re Tedbury Camp in the Mendips. Adel met with the landscape architect and geologist for the quarry-operator site owner in autumn 2023 and by February we learnt that vegetation on the unconformity surface had been removed and repair of the steps on the access path was nearly complete. Updated interpretation is planned as a next step (some of the earlier educational material being no longer available on-line). *NB Please contact SESC re arrangements for any proposed site visits.*

In October 2023 Garry and myself also attended the lecture day within the *Mendip Rocks* festival held at SESC – enabling us to give a brief update on SGG and meet fellow geology enthusiasts. Our thanks to Adel and the SESC team for a great day and their wider educational work.

Ham Hill

There was good progress too to report from Ham Hill Country Park. Geoff Rowland (appointed last year as a Ranger, as part its current Lottery-funded project) was able to organize clearing various quarry faces (as part of removing trees suffering from ash dieback). This also included clearing an exposure of the basal conglomerate, located previously by Sheila, Dee and Dave and which is in process of being considered as a small separate extension to the Ham Hill LGS.

Geoff has also delivered guided walks and other events on the geology of Ham Hill, while back in summer 2023 Sheila assisted nearby Stanchester School with information on Ham Hill's geology. The resulting performance, written and performed by its drama students about Ham Hill's history, was performed in the stone circle there for three evenings in late June 2023.

Sheila continues to attend meetings of the liaison group that covers the Country Park to keep us in the loop as plans for the new interpretation

centre progress. See box for link to the Country Park's web site for any more recent information.

Dorchester Road

Sheila was also able to liaise with the south Somerset Council highways contact following Garry's meeting (see p 3) and in the autumn organized two small conservation sessions, to clear vegetation from this LGS south of Yeovil, which exposes the Jurassic Bridport Sands Formation. This was organized via DIGS, our equivalent group in Dorset, which has the arrangements in place, including insurance, for practical conservation work. Our thanks to DIGS and everyone who helped.

Please email Garry via Somersetgeology@gmail.com, if you have practical conservation opportunities coming up; or if you would like to be on the e-group to be notified of such opportunities.

On-going LGS work for the future

The final part of LGS Panel meeting in February focused on what might be essential from SERC to support a modest on-going programme of LGS work to keep files up to date, service Panel meetings and support an on-going LGS volunteer team. We hope this can be achieved in the future, but we understand that resourcing it is a difficult issue for SERC – and we hope that those of you who are part of our SGG-sourced SERC LGS volunteer team will bear with us in the interim, whilst there is little opportunity for field visits.

We were pleased to welcome Simon Clark from SWT to the Panel meeting, so that he could get a better understanding of what is ideally needed. Ellen Phillpot, SERC's incoming Support Officer, had been able to update SERC's LGS web page with text, proposed by Wendy, to indicate that the LGS review had taken place and to include the five area reports from the joint partnership working. Rachel Hiscox, SERC's trainee, also helped with note taking for the minutes.

Later in February, Andy Gordon attended a day to keep us in the loop as plans evolve for the newly required Somerset Nature Recovery Strategy.

Wendy Lutley and Garry Dawson Co-coordinators

SGG is a member of **GeoConservationUK** (see <https://geoconservationuk.org/>) which *encourages the appreciation, conservation & promotion of local/regional geological and geomorphological sites for education & public benefit.*

Our SGG web page, with previous *Updates* and reports can be found on SERC's web site at <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/>.

Events and other contacts

- **GeoWeek** - a week of activities **25 May – 2 June 2024**, <https://earth-science.org.uk/geoweek/>
- **Earth Science Week** – usually in October <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/ESW23>
- **Mendip Rocks Festival** - usually in October with geo walks, quarry tours and a lecture day - 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/> 6 October each year.
- **The Geologists' Association** – this year its annual conference will be in **Bristol, 27-29 Sept** - <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/>
- **Open University Geological Society (OUGS)** – its 2024 symposium will be at **Bath Spa University 16-18 Aug** - see <https://ougs.org/events/>
- **U3A geology groups** – see eg <https://u3asites.org.uk/wells/page/73179>
- **Earth Science Teachers Association** - <https://earth-science-teachers.uk/>
- **Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS)** <http://www.sanhs.org/>
- **Ussher Society** - <http://ussher.org.uk/> focus on geological research in the south west
- **Ham Hill Country Park** – see <https://www.visitsouthsomerset.com/listings/countryside-nature-and-wildlife/ham-hill-country-park.htm> .
- **Alfred Gillett (AG) Trust** - see <https://alfredgilletttrust.org/a-new-museum-in-street/> to keep in the loop on its plans for a new museum at Street.
- **Earth Heritage Magazine** - twice-yearly produced by Natural England and partners <https://www.earthheritage.org.uk/>

See also Graeme Churchar'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 – our thanks to everyone who has helped through the year in all these different ways.