

# Update No 9: Spring (April) 2020



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

We are currently feeling our way to the best way forward for this coming year (Year 4) of our joint project with SERC to review Somerset's Local Geological Sites (LGS). However, we are hopeful of continuing to make at least some progress, as there is plenty of desk work that can be done in the current 'coronavirus' situation and Wesley (Wes) Harris, our LGS assistant at SERC, is now set up for working from home with remote access to the relevant systems and files at SERC's office.

Meanwhile you will find a report below on our progress in Year 3 of the project.

## Desmond Donovan

Firstly however, I would like to mention the sad news of the death of Prof Desmond Donovan in December 2019. Desmond was the first chairman of our Somerset Geology Group (SGG). He was invited by SWT in 1984, to chair a geology advisory group for it, which became SGG. The group then went on to identify Somerset's RIGS (now LGS) in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Desmond was in his 90s, still received our *Updates* and came to our meeting at Street in May 2017. I met with him in summer 2016, and was in touch with him until this last autumn. I have sent our commiserations to his family.

## Events

Secondly, there are obviously going to be some changes to geo-events in Somerset that would normally be in the pipeline for the coming year, **with most currently cancelled due to the coronavirus situation.**

The main web links are below: **please check them more than once**, because things may change over time, including possibly some creative thinking going on. You may be able to join in remotely in some way – or there may be time to read up about the history of geology in Somerset (see below under SANHS)!

## SGG meeting 2019

Our last meeting was held on Mon 30 Sept 2019 at Broomfield Village Hall in the Quantocks, with the National Trust (NT) hosting us for an afternoon visit to the LGS on its adjacent Fyne Court property. Twenty-one of us, including guests, met to hear and discuss latest progress with our LGS review.

Wes gave us an overview of progress to date, with Megan Trunks and John Hicks (our SERC-based graduate volunteers for the summer) describing their progress with the review in the Mendips - see below for more detail. We were also delighted that Tim Hasleden from the Mendips AONB was able to join us to learn about the project.

Leanne Butt (SERC's Manager) explained the overall context of SERC's work programme and systems. SERC is responsible for over 2 ½ million species records and data on 2,500 Local Wildlife Sites as well as the c 230 LGS. Leanne has now left SERC (see *Update* No 8) and we have since welcomed Leon DeBell as her successor.

Garry Dawson (my Co-coordinator and mentor for the Quantocks LGS) told us about the opportunities for geo-conservation and geo-interpretation that our review of the LGS in the Quantocks area has identified. See below and *Final report for the Quantocks area* on our web-page for fuller detail.

Kristina Luxton, NT Area Ranger for the Quantocks, gave a presentation on management from the NT's perspective and in the afternoon we brainstormed the geological story of the LGS at Fyne Court on site, facilitated by Prof Chris King. We discussed how this might best be conveyed to a wider audience, but kept scientifically accurate.

Kristina took away our thinking from the day to share with the wider local NT team and the AONB

- especially the potential for greater inclusion of geology within interpretive material. Garry has also had discussions with Forestry England to consider the opportunities for practical conservation work and interpretation on the LGS within their land holding in the Quantocks.

Our next SGG get-together is *provisionally* planned for **Mon 5 Oct 2020, 10 am to 2 pm**, at Ham Hill Country Park, near Yeovil. We have the venue booked – as help-in-kind from South Somerset District Council, but in view of the current situation we will need to wait until nearer the time to see if that is going to be possible. **We will confirm or otherwise in the next Update which should get to you in early September.**

**South West Open University Geological Society (SW OUGS)** - see <https://ougs.org/events/> for the latest situation for events for the South West branch. At the moment there is a potential opportunity to visit some Permo-Triassic exposures in the Vale of Taunton Deane on Sun 27 Sept, led by Saranne Cessford and Danny Clark-Lowe, depending, of course, on how the situation is nearer the time.

Garry Dawson organised a second successful practical conservation session for SW OUGS members at the LGS at Clatworthy Reservoir, near Wiveliscombe on Sat 28 Sept 2019.

**Quantock Countryside Volunteers** - Unfortunately a working party, planned by Garry for the Quantock Countryside Volunteers for LGS on Forestry England land in the Quantocks this March, had to be cancelled.

**GeoWeek 2020** - co-ordinated by the Earth Science Education Forum - see [www.geoweek.org.uk](http://www.geoweek.org.uk) for the latest situation. All events planned for this year (9 to 17 May 2020), have sadly had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak. However, event organisers have been asked to try to run alternatives, such as an online 'Ask a geologist' event - and some may be able to do so. They have also been asked to take forward their planning to next year - so 2021 may be a bumper year!

**Mendip Rocks Festival** - a draft programme for autumn 2020 is on hold, pending a decision later in the summer re whether it may be possible to proceed or best to cancel. For the latest information nearer the time see <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events/> and <https://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks>.

**Engineering Group of the Geological Society of London** - this year's annual field meeting was planned for 10-12 July focusing on the Bath and Somerset area, with a base at Wells, to look at the engineering geology of canals and the legacy of William Smith. This will evidently depend on the situation nearer the time. For the latest situation see <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/07-eg-field-meeting-2020>.

**Earth Science Week** ran last year from 12 to 20 October 2019 co-ordinated nationally by the Geological Society of London. No information at present re 2020. See: <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/earthscienceweek>.

**Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society (SANHS)** - events cancelled for the present. See <http://www.sanhs.org/> for the latest information. NB All 160 volumes of SANHS Proceedings are now gradually being added to its web site, starting with Vol 1 (1849 & 1850) – so there is a chance, while outdoor activities are constrained, to dip into some early papers on the geology of Somerset.

See also the events calendar organised by Graeme Churchard on <http://westcountrygeology.com/> (where you can also contact Graeme to submit an event or ask for publicity). See his blog too for other geo-news - which already includes a link to ideas for indoor geo-activities: <http://geologywestcountry.blogspot.co.uk/>

*NB This list is not intended to be comprehensive.*

## Review of Somerset's LGSs

*The following is the progress report for Year 3 of our joint project with SERC to review Somerset's c 230 LGS.*

### Mendips

Our main focus in 2019/20 was the 58 LGS in the Mendips area, with Doug Robinson acting as our

lead mentor for this batch. These include: 50 in Mendip District (10 of which are within the Mendip AONB); and 8 in Sedgemoor District (7 of which are in the AONB). Our two SERC-based volunteers for the summer, Megan Trunks, a BSc graduate from Cardiff, and John Hicks, an MSc graduate from Southampton, put in great work over the summer<sup>1</sup>, while Doug had already progressed work on 7 sites the previous winter.

Nearly 60% of these 58 LGS have now been processed by the LGS Panel or are ready to be considered at the April 2020 Panel meeting. Another c 30% have been started by Megan and John, but require further desk input, with only c 8 LGS not yet started. We will continue desk work to achieve what we can this year (Year 4) with completion envisaged in Year 5.

Those who attended our SGG meeting in September will have understood that the review in the Mendips has emerged as more complex than for other areas of Somerset. Over the winter I have therefore helped Doug with some of the issues emerging.

This has included, for example, 5 LGS which overlap with an earth science SSSI designation, where we have needed to consider whether to remove the LGS designation - or if there is additional local interest that still merits retention.

Two old railway cutting LGS were infilled with waste *prior* to original designation as RIGS in the late 1980s and the Panel is needing to consider whether designation should be removed now or not (still in process), while other LGS were apparently old or dormant quarry sites when originally designated, but are now part of active quarry complexes. Another 3 LGS have emerged where the boundary has inadvertently been in completely the wrong place!

A quite high proportion of the Mendip sites will also need to be desk-studies. Some are straightforward candidates for reconfirmation. In other cases, additional detailed work is ideally needed beyond the scope of the current project.

We have therefore agreed, after discussion at our Steering group meeting in February, that the

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<sup>1</sup> They also assisted with 2 sites in the Quantocks and 2 on Exmoor.

Panel will in general reconfirm these, particularly if we are assessing those without a site visit, but making sure that any additional work required is clearly indicated on the site form.

Our review is of existing LGS only, but in the process several potential LGS sites of similar calibre are emerging. We are simply keeping a note of these at this stage.

The Mendips is, of course, of landscape-scale geodiversity value. In addition to the 58 LGS in the Somerset part, there are about 30 nationally important Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites (earth science SSSIs).

Two British Geological Survey (BGS) *Walker's Guides* for the Mendips, published in 2008<sup>2</sup> cover a wide range of other publicly accessible geology sites and geological features of interest.

Several active quarries in the area were covered by a voluntary geo-conservation assessment project in the early 2000s<sup>3</sup>. A good range of educational opportunities is also currently provided in the Mendips by the Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC) and these often involve visits to active quarries - while the AONB supports an annual *Mendips Rocks* festival.

Then there are also the LGS and GCR sites in the North Somerset and BANES parts of the Mendips.

We hope therefore that the evidence-base from our current LGS review will contribute to wider landscape-scale geodiversity action planning for the Mendips in the future.

### The Quantocks

The last 3 of the 32 LGS in the wider Quantocks (24 of which lie within the Quantocks AONB) are currently being considered by the Panel. Sixteen

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<sup>2</sup> Farrant, A, 2008: ***A walker's guide to the geology and landscape of western Mendip*** and ***A walker's guide to the geology and landscape of western Mendip***, book and map, published by the British Geological Survey.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas, C., 2004: ***Geodiversity Audit of Active Aggregate Quarries: Quarries in Somerset; Project Overview Report***. David Roche Consulting in association with Somerset County Council, British Geological Survey and Mendip Quarry Producers.

are within Somerset West & Taunton District and 16 within Sedgemoor District. We were able to make site visits to 21 of them and the remaining 11 have been reviewed as desk studies only.

Our *Final report for the Quantocks area* for the project will shortly be available on our SGG web page (see link above). However, not all LGS will yet have been through SERC's post-Panel processes or be reflected in the 6-monthly data set update sent by SERC to planning authorities.

### **Exmoor**

We now have progressed most of the c 60 LGS in the Somerset part of the ENP and similar older rock areas in Somerset West and Taunton District through the Panel, with the remaining 3 LGS being considered this April.

There remains a further 23 LGS to be completed in the Devon part of ENP (as part of the SERC funding agreement with ENP), with overlap with nationally important GCR sites in several cases. Eight are now ready for mentoring, 9 are awaiting permission for site visit; and a further 8 will be desk-study only. Work is also in hand on the *Final report for the Exmoor area*.

### **Permo-Triassic in the Vale of Taunton Deane**

Our local volunteer team has been making good progress on this batch of c 23 LGS, with John Kirby, Saranne Cessford and Phil Parker contributing (all from our SGG network and fully signed up as SERC volunteers) and Garry now acting as mentor. The first 8 LGS are being considered by the Panel this April.

### **South Somerset**

In the last part of the year we put the planning in place for work on the 50 LGS in South Somerset. A volunteer at SERC has assisted with identifying landowners over the winter. Dee Edwards and Dave Williams attended our November Panel and February Steering group meetings to get a flavour of the project and are now signed up as SERC volunteers in preparation for helping as mentors.

In February we applied for a grant from South Somerset District Council's community fund to assist with the work (currently awaiting a decision). Adverts for two potential graduate volunteers for the coming field season were also circulated before the current coronavirus situation had developed.

This was to be our priority for Year 4 of the project (2020/21), but we have had to cancel a mentor induction session planned for late April. Plus, although much of the LGS review work is desk-based, and can therefore potentially be done from home, there are some elements, such as induction and access to relevant SERC systems that may be more difficult to achieve.

We are hopeful that we may be able to achieve at least some desk preparation work for South Somerset and we hope to continue to progress and complete work elsewhere, that might otherwise have needed to wait until Year 5.

### **LGS Panel**

In total 74 LGS have been processed through two LGS Panel meetings in Year 3 (26 in April 19 and 48 in Nov 19). A further batch is currently being considered this April, including 22 new sites, as well as a number coming back for further consideration. We were also pleased to welcome Martin Doherty to the Panel.

### **Post-panel processing**

Any last amendments are made to an LGS form after the Panel - and this can be considerable in some cases. The site form is then proofed and, where permission has been given for site visit, sent to the landowner. SERC's main *Recorder* database and the project spread sheet are also updated.

It may then be a further 6 months before any revised summary information for an individual LGS appears on the twice-yearly dataset update sent to local planning authorities by SERC.

### **Desk studies**

Although SERC upgraded its procedures on researching ownership and seeking permission last year, a line has to be drawn if ownership cannot be traced, while in other situations permission for a site visit may not be granted. Review is then carried out as a desk exercise only.

Each LGS goes through a number of stages for review and our overall progress reflects this. We are now, for example: roughly 85% through the initial stage of researching landownership for all the LGS; well over 50% through consideration by the LGS Panel; but only c. 25% through the post-Panel processing stage.

## LGS Project Officer

Funding for this 2-day per week post was approved by SERC at the start of the year (April 2019), with a budget earmarked for two years, but with a one-year contract issued initially.

Wes, our graduate volunteer from summer 2018 (who had continued to volunteer on the project over the winter) was successful in applying for the role and became a SERC staff member in May 2019 – and we are delighted that his contract has now been extended to cover the current year.

The role is proving critical in terms of: helping with the additional core SERC work the project is generating; providing a link to enable volunteer contributions; and helping to minimise SERC manager time on the project.

## Funding

We were delighted to be awarded a further grant from the Pat Hill-Cottingham Memorial Fund of SANHS this year and to receive a commitment of support from the Mendips AONB.

The project continued to be supported overall by contributions secured in earlier years from: the Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association; Exmoor NP Authority; the Quantocks AONB; the earlier grant from SANHS; Wessex Water; and Geckoella geological consultancy; with help in kind from many others, including the Mendip-based Somerset Earth Sciences Centre. That support is much appreciated.

## Volunteer contribution

The project is also generating considerable help-in-kind from our volunteers. We calculate that c 250 days of skilled input were contributed in calendar year 2019. This amounts to £35,000 (based on a SWT £20 per hour skilled rate).

It includes 60 days from our graduate volunteers last summer and 23 from Wes before he became the LGS Project Officer, with the remainder contributed by SGG-sourced volunteers (all signed up as SERC volunteers) and those assisting with the Panel or Steering group.

## Disseminating information on the project

We have updated our SGG web page on SERC's web site. An article on the project, written by Garry, my Co-coordinator, has been published in SANHS Proceedings (Dawson, G, 2019: **A Review of Local Geological Sites in Somerset**, Proc SANHS, Vol 162, p 126 – 129) and Garry continues to sit for us on Geo-Conservation UK's committee, but we were unfortunately unable to attend its annual meeting last autumn.

We were pleased to welcome Georgia Stokes, as SWT's new Chief Executive and I attended a special meeting of SERC's Specialist Recording Groups in the autumn, facilitated by Georgia, to contribute thinking for SWT's strategic plan.

Finally, this comes with our thanks to everyone who has helped during the last year and especially to our graduate volunteers for last summer, Megan and John: we wish them well for their futures.

Wendy Lutley, Coordinator

**Next Update** - please let me have any information on geo-conservation and related earth-science education activity in Somerset by **Mon 31 August 2020** for inclusion in the next *Update*.

**Data protection** – our SGG Co-ordinating group will try to ensure that SGG *Updates* are sent blind and that we only send 'non-blind' emails to you, where you have indicated that you are happy for us to do so, eg where a small number of people need to liaise on a particular topic. Our full list of SGG contacts will be held only by myself, with Garry Dawson holding a back-up list, as my co-coordinator. Let me know if you would no longer like to receive SGG *Updates*. **Please refer any potential new network members to our web page – see above - and the email address given there.**

SGG is a member of **GeoConservation UK**, which encourages the appreciation, conservation & promotion of local/regional geological sites for education & public benefit. See [http://wiki.geoconservationuk.org.uk/index.php5?title=Main\\_Page](http://wiki.geoconservationuk.org.uk/index.php5?title=Main_Page) .

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) .