

Update No 11: Spring (April) 2021



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

Our SGG meeting, planned for Mon 5 Oct 2020 at Ham Hill Country Park in South Somerset, sadly had to be cancelled due to the Coronavirus situation, but see below for preliminary plans for a get-together in some way this coming autumn.

Below that you'll find the report for Year 4 of our joint project with SERC to review Somerset's LGS; information on how we've been engaging as SGG in other ways; and news of a potential International Geo-Diversity Day in 2022, which may be of particular interest to those of you involved in organising events.

Our next SGG get-together is provisionally planned for **Mon 11 Oct 2021, 10 am to 2 pm**, when we will be able to report on progress with the review of South Somerset LGS, including for that at Ham Hill Country Park. This may need to be via Zoom – as in view of the current situation we will need to wait until nearer the time to see what might be possible in terms of anything on site.

We will confirm with details in the next Update which should get to you in early September.

Review of Somerset's Local Geological Sites (LGS) - report for Year 4 (2020/21) of our joint project with SERC

We continued to make good progress in 2020/21 - despite the Coronavirus pandemic. We were fortunate that our *modus operandi* was well established, although we were unable to recruit SERC-based graduate volunteers to assist over the summer season.

SERC arranged for Wesley (Wes) Harris, our temporary 2-day per week LGS Project Officer at SERC, to work from home, while the shared *Google Drive* established at the start of our

project by Garry Dawson (my SGG Co-coordinator) - for work-in-progress on the review - also proved invaluable. Garry also organised on-line meetings, so that Wes, he and myself could meet regularly to coordinate our activity and we were able to continue with LGS Panel meetings remotely.

Those of us from SGG who are signed up with SERC as volunteers on the project were able to continue with desk work and gathering reconnaissance information. So, although our ability to make formal site visits was limited, we were able to progress a good number of reviews.

Throughout the year we also kept in regular touch with Bryony Slaymaker, SWT's Volunteer Coordinator, to make sure that we knew when volunteer activity was possible and that we were all up-to-date with SWT's Covid-secure procedures.

LGS Panel

We processed a further c 65 LGS through Panel meetings in the year: 22 in April 20 (as an email consultation); 43 in Nov (at an on-line Zoom meeting); and a further 29 were ready at the year-end for consideration this April.

At the end of January, SERC's records indicated that there were then 223 LGS in Somerset (lower than the original 234, due to a few having been de-designated or amalgamated in our review), with 148 (two thirds) now reconfirmed by the LGS Panel. A further 14 LGS (originally 23) have also been reconfirmed within the Devon part of Exmoor National Park (ENP).

The number of LGS considered by the Panel to date and ready to be processed this April - is therefore over 200 of the original full total (including ENP Devon) of 257.

Post-Panel processing

Wes was able to focus a good proportion of his time over the year on post-Panel processing, but

his post was only established from Year 3. So understandably we have a back-log. SERC records indicated at the end of January that this was complete for 97 of the 148 sites reconfirmed by the Panel (plus the 14 in the Devon part of the ENP).

This stage can involve the need for further input from our volunteers, as well as final amendments, proofing and record updating at SERC. We are doing well therefore, but with more to do to catch up.

Information sent to landowners/managers

SERC's records also indicate that of these 97 LGS complete, c 70 have now been (or are about to be) sent to landowners/managers who gave permission for a site visit (with some others simply awaiting completion of other LGS in the same ownership).

This is an important last step, as ensuring more landowners /managers are aware of the interest on their land is an important aim of our project. Interestingly there are a few cases where the landowner has not been interested in receiving the completed form when offered it.

Some LGS also need to be processed as desk-study-only reviews, with reconnaissance information when available, where the owner has not been identified or where permission has not been granted for a site visit.

South Somerset

In June SERC received a grant offer from South Somerset District Council's (SSDC) Community Fund to assist with our LGS review in South Somerset – with the understanding that due to the pandemic progress will be slower than originally intended for this batch of c 50 LGS.

Our team of SGG-sourced SERC volunteers made an excellent start with desk and reconnaissance work (which has proved sufficient in some cases without formal site visits) and by the year-end 17 of the 50 were ready to be considered by the Panel this April. The remainder will form our main focus for this current year.

Wes has been approaching landowners for permission for formal site visits - most of which will be in the coming year. Garry coordinated the allocation of sites to the team, which comprises: John Kirby, Doug Robinson, Dee Edwards and

Dave Williams, with Sheila Alderman joining us in the autumn and myself helping with contextual information, for example, on the nationally important Geological Conservation Review (GCR) sites (Earth Science SSSIs) in South Somerset, and the more detailed desk input for Ham Hill LGS.

SSDC had been awarded funding to develop a Lottery bid for its Ham Hill Country Park and during the year appointed consultants to help develop this second-stage proposal. Our LGS Review is timed to help with this (see further below).

Somerset West and Taunton

Our local volunteer team continued to make good progress with desk work and/or reconnaissance still needed for some of the c 23 LGS on the Permo-Triassic strata in the Vale of Taunton Deane. John Kirby, Saranne Cessford, Phil Parker, Martin Doherty and Garry have all contributed, with Garry acting as mentor.

These LGS are situated on several different formations, including the Chester Conglomerate (formerly known as the Budleigh Salterton Pebble Bed Formation), with several sites in small old quarries with local history interest and scope for research into their use for building stone and lime production – several sites still have limekilns. The use of the stone is also a major factor in the attractive and distinctive appearance of the local villages and towns and there is plenty of scope emerging for geo-interpretation.

Only c 2 LGS remain to be completed in this area, together with the 5 LGS within the Blackdown Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) not yet started. The LGS on the older geological strata in the district have already been reviewed, in conjunction with those for Exmoor National Park (ENP) and the Quantocks AONB - although as explained above, post-Panel processing for some may not yet be complete.

Mendips District and AONB

We continued to make steady progress with the remaining desk work needed, with Doug Robinson continuing as mentor and myself helping, including starting work on the final Mendips area report. This batch (originally of 58 LGS in Mendip District including the Sedgemoor part of the Mendip Hills AONB) was the focus of

our work in Year 3. At the year end the last 2 LGS within the AONB and a further 7 were ready for the April Panel meeting - leaving only c 8 needing further input before being ready for the Panel.

Exmoor NP

All the remaining LGS were progressed through both the Panel and final post-Panel stages of the review during the year, with SERC providing the ENP Authority with a complete set of all the site forms in February. A complete set for those owned by the National Trust was also supplied to the NT, which holds several of the LGS.

The work during the year covered those LGS in the Devon part of the ENP (as part of the SERC funding agreement with the ENP Authority), with careful consideration needed in several cases on overlap with nationally important GCR sites.

Peter Chamberlain from Devon County Council (DCC) joined our November Panel meeting, on behalf of the Devon RIGS group and DCC's Register of Geological Educational Sites, to aid our discussion. SERC liaised with and provided the final site forms to DERG, its equivalent record centre in Devon. This has ensured consistency across the ENP and reflects similar arrangements to those when the Exmoor LGS were first selected in the 1990s.

We submitted the *Final report for the Exmoor area* to the ENP Authority in February – a slightly shorter version will be available on our website in due course.

The review for Exmoor is therefore complete and, at our February Steering Group meeting, we expressed our thanks to Pamela Morris for her input to the project, as she was about to leave as ENPA's Senior Landscape Officer. She had been on our Steering Group since 2017, with the ENPA being supportive from initial planning in 2016.

The Quantocks AONB

The *Final report for the Quantocks area* was completed in Year 3 and added to our SGG web page last May, while the last 3 of the original 32 LGS in this wider Quantocks area were considered by the Panel during the year.

Plans for the current year (Year 5)

Our Steering Group meeting in February was chaired by Peter Wright (who also chairs the LGS

Panel meetings) and we were delighted to learn from Leon DeBell, SERC's Manager, that SERC will be able to extend the contract for Wes' role for the first 6 months of this financial year (21/22).

This is a more positive situation than had looked might be the case in September when Peter, Garry and myself met with Leon on-line. However, SERC will still need to consider if it will be able to extend the contract for the full year - and that in turn will depend on our continued progress and ability to drawdown grants offered.

We also anticipate that we may need a few months at the start of 2022/23 to wind up the last strands of the project and consider future needs, but otherwise we look to be on track to complete the bulk of the work this year.

Meanwhile there are some potential new LGS already waiting in the wings – and the review is highlighting lots of potential SGG activity for the future!

Thanks - our thanks to everyone from SGG and SERC who is helping with the LGS Review project; to all those who have assisted with funding, including contributions from: the Curry Fund of the Geologists' Association; the Pat Hill-Cottingham Memorial Fund of Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society; Exmoor National Park Authority; the Quantocks and Mendips Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; South Somerset District Council; Wessex Water; and Geckoella geological consultancy; and to all those who have assisted in other ways with help in kind, including the Mendip-based Somerset Earth Sciences Centre and advice from Natural England.

Other SGG news

Ham Hill

Dee, Dave and myself met in September with Rachael Whaites, the Manager of Ham Hill Country Park, and the consultants working for it on the second stage of its Lottery bid. We provided ideas, information and contacts to assist the consultants in thinking about how best to integrate the geological interest into the bid, including looking at how it might be included in innovative ways into an engagement programme for those who are currently less well represented as users of the Park.

We emphasised the way that the geology underpins all the other interests of the Country Park: its geomorphology and resulting hilltop views; the location of the Iron Age hillfort; the calcareous soils that support a rich flora and fauna; and the local history interest of quarrying for centuries for a nationally important building stone used widely across southern England.

Somerset's Building Stones

Garry and Peter Wright continued their work on a separate voluntary project (under the auspices of the 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/>

where there is a map with graphics showing the percentage of buildings with different stone in each town and village. Further work is underway to complete coverage for the districts presently started.

There is a link from there to Mike Barr's, 2017: *Building Stone Inventories for Devon* (2 vols and including parts of Somerset and Dorset). This covers the western side of Somerset with distribution maps of use in buildings for each stone type and photos of example buildings.

A table is also included of building stones used in Somerset churches, compiled by the late Hugh Prudden and unpublished until now.

Planning

In May 20 we wrote to Somerset County and Mendip District Councils to flag up the need for information on the LGS at Barnclose Quarry to be considered in relation to proposed development there. We were also pleased to explain the need for an assessment of the potential impact on the geo-conservation value – at a level of detail which the LGS Review assessment cannot provide – when the developer's agent contacted us. It was therefore disappointing to see this March

that the full planning application still has no more detailed assessment of the impact on the LGS - and we have reiterated our concerns.

In February we also responded to SERC's consultation with its Specialist Recording Groups, as to how it might best develop its systems to support the newly emerging context of a Somerset Nature Partnership, the establishment of Nature Recovery Areas, the post-Brexit ELMS grants (replacing the former agri-environment schemes) and SWT's updated Strategy.

We replied encouraging the development of a shared online system for those with SERC Service Level Agreements, to enable planning authorities and AONBs etc to more readily access the full information held for each individual LGS. At present SERC's six-monthly GIS-based update only includes a very limited amount of data.

There is evidently still much to be done too to give landowners/managers a greater understanding of LGS designation. It needs to be considered as seriously as a Local Wildlife Site, and it is possible that a development could, for example, incorporate face cleaning and educational/interpretative opportunities, that would enhance its value.

We have been unable this year to encourage or engage in any particular initiatives for practical conservation work, but there are plenty of opportunities emerging from the LGS Review!

Meetings, talks, articles and research

Dee and Dave attended a Geological Society online geo-conservation seminar in autumn 20 on our behalf - where we learnt that Natural England is keen to encourage greater understanding of the geodiversity of its National Nature Reserves.

Doug gave an online talk to Mendips/Quantock AONB and Somerset Wildlife Trust volunteers on the geology of the Mendip Hills. Garry provided an article for SANHS on progress with our LGS review project. I facilitated contact with BRERC (SERC's equivalent in the Bristol area), for a geological interpretation project at Clevedon Pier in North Somerset.

And by this April Garry was alerting SGG member, Alastair Ruffell, to freshly exposed North Curry Sandstone at the road works near the Park &

Ride at the A358/motorway junction Taunton, which he had noticed over the previous months. Alastair has researched the origin of these beds over many years.

Events

International Geodiversity Day 2022

In March Garry attended the online AGM of Geo-ConservationUK for us - where he learnt of plans for an International Geodiversity Day - with a *provisional* date of 6 Oct 2022. The idea has arisen from discussions at a virtual Geo-heritage conference hosted in May 2020 by Oxford University Museum of Natural History. See <https://www.geodiversityday.org/> to keep in the loop as plans develop.

There is obviously still uncertainty as to what field geo-events in Somerset might take place this year, so we simply include below the main relevant links. There may be on-line alternatives in some cases.

Wendy Lutley, Coordinator

Next Update - Our next *Update* will be in early Sept 2021. Please let me have any information on geo-conservation and related earth-science education activity in Somerset for inclusion by **Mon 23 August**.

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** – <http://wp.somerc.co.uk/specialist-groups/somerset-geology-group/> - and the email address given there.

Field events in Somerset and on-line alternatives

For information see:

- **GeoWeek 2021** - 1 to 9 May - www.geoweek.org.uk - a week of activities co-ordinated by the Earth Science Education Forum.
- **Earth Science Week** - <https://www.geolsoc.org.uk/earthscienceweek> - a week in October co-ordinated by the Geological Society of London.
- **Mendip Rocks Festival** – see <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/events/> and/or <https://www.earthsciencecentre.org.uk/mendip-rocks> nearer the time - a programme usually running from the summer into the autumn
- **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/>
- See also Graeme Churchard’s events calendar <http://westcountrygeology.com/> and his blog for geo-news at <http://geologywestcountry.blogspot.co.uk/>. You can contact Graeme from there to submit an event or request publicity.

The Geologists’ Association’s website also has inspiration and ideas: from geo-walks, and guides to them, to *Geology from your sofa* - a fantastic compilation of online material - see <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/sofageology/> .

NB This list is not intended to be comprehensive.

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