



Newsletter Issue 4: June 1998

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First UK RIGS Conference 1998, University College Worcester.

The Group has organised the major Geoconservation Conference, details of which are given below. Places at the conference may be available to members of the RIGS Group for Herefordshire & Worcestershire at the subsidised rate of £25. Please get in touch if you would like to reserve a place. If you would like to have a display in the exhibition please contact Pauline Couper. The exhibition will be open, free of charge, to any interested person or organisation from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm on Wednesday 2nd September.

The Conference Organising Committee is of the opinion that the RIGS movement needs clear leadership and direction and much improved funding and support systems. These matter will form the theme of the conference which has been arranged for 1st to 3rd September 1998 at University College, Worcester. Considerable support for this has been received and the indications are that there will be maximum attendance with up to 150 delegates.

The conference will also look at matters such as recording of sites, education, conservation, information technology, national guidelines, links with industry, planning departments and wildlife trusts, site management, safety, and geological trails. Delegates are expected to include geologists, geographers, conservationists, planners, consultants, academics, and representatives from the scientific and conservation agencies and from quarrying and landfill companies. Groups such as County and District councils, schools, colleges, universities, wildlife trusts, consultancies and Earth Science bodies are likely to be represented. The majority of the delegates will be from the 55 RIGS Groups.

Support and financial backing has been promised by University College Worcester, English Nature, The Wildlife Trusts, The Environment Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage. Other organisations actively considering support are Worcestershire and Herefordshire County Councils, The Geologists' Association and The Geological Society.

The first day will involve a look at Earth Heritage conservation from the viewpoint of the premier organisations; English Nature, The Wildlife Trusts and The Geological Society, as they seek to give an overall strategy and background. This information may well differ from the experiences of those 'on the ground' and in order to make an assessment of what has been happening since 1990 (or even

before) a response will follow from Cornwall RIGS Group, The Black Country Geological Society, The Geologists' Association, Shropshire County Planners and Gloucestershire RIGS. They will look at RIGS designation criteria, the number of RIGS so far recorded and the best ways of getting the work underway and of notifying sites.

Advice on achieving best practice and dealing with operational problems will follow on the second day with educational aspects being addressed together with safety. The problems associated with the recording of geomorphological sites will also be addressed. Experiences in Scotland and Wales will form an important part of these sessions as will those of Worcestershire Wildlife Trust and the Environment Agency.

An exhibition, running through the conference, will feature displays from the Ordnance Survey, the British Geological Survey, English Nature and RIGS Groups. There will be book and field equipment sales as well as practical examples from consultants, landfill and quarry operators of their work in site conservation. A strong programme of workshops will cover such aspects as recording and conservation software, field assessments, geographical information systems, applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund and information retrieval using the Internet.

A final forum will deal with improving the system, especially covering the use of computers, support for RIGS groups and funding. Subsequently the 'Proceedings' will be published and these will act as a significant reference for the RIGS movement and all those associated with or interested in RIGS work.

RIGS and SSSIs.

Pauline Couper writes:

Of the sites currently held on the Groups' database, approximately 50 are either designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), or lie within the boundaries of SSSIs.

The geological / geomorphological features within these sites cover a range of geological periods - Quaternary, Triassic, Carboniferous and Pre-Cambrian are among those represented - but two are decidedly dominant; 17 of the sites have aspects of Quaternary interest, and 16 Silurian (note, however, that some sites may fall into 2 or more categories). Of these, Worcestershire contains the majority of the Quaternary sites, while Herefordshire can lay claim to almost 70% of those with Silurian interest.

Twenty-five to thirty of these sites received designation as a result of their geological / geomorphological significance, although only three of these are geomorphological. These 'physical feature' (as opposed to biological) SSSIs include Woodbury Quarry, in the parish of Great Witley (Worcestershire) and Wilton Bluff, in South Herefordshire.

Woodbury Quarry is described in records held by English Nature as containing "one of the finest Silurian sections in the Welsh Borderlands," revealing a complete succession through the Ludfordian to Downtonian rocks of the Malvern and Abberley Hills. These rocks are also highly fossiliferous, with brachiopods, bivalves, cephalopods, gastropods, ostracods, trilobites, corals and some fish recorded. When extraction and subsequent restoration of the quarry is complete, the northern face will be retained as this provides an exposure throughout the entire succession (English Nature).

Wilton Bluff, a road cutting through an old river cliff in the Ross Rural area, provides a good exposure of Devonian Brownstones. Cross-bedding indicates deposition by south-flowing water, and the sediments suggest channel deposits of "braided / meandering, but essentially flashy and sloping" streams. This exposure thus yields important information regarding the environmental

conditions prevailing at the time of deposition, as well as the position and character of the source area (English Nature).

As is particularly demonstrated by the example of Woodbury Quarry, the geological features of such sites are already protected by the SSSI designation, and these do not, therefore, require any further designation as RIGS. However, the remaining 20 sites recorded which coincide with SSSIs are designated as such for their biological value. (Again, the majority of these sites are of geological interest rather than geomorphological). The physical features within these are documented, but not protected in the same way.

An example of such a site is Bredon Hill, in the Wychavon District of Worcestershire. This is also one of the few geomorphological sites within the SSSI group. The focus of interest for RIGS at Bredon Hill lies in the mass movement - a combination of mudflows, rotational slips and translational slides ranging in age from the late Devensian to the present day (Morris, 1974). It has been suggested that a site near Woolashill provides the opportunity to assess some of the factors involved in these movements (Rendell Geotechnics).

The mass movement of Bredon Hill, and other such geomorphological or geological features within biological SSSIs, may not be of national or international significance required to necessitate protection under the SSSI scheme. However, their significance within the local area has yet to be established, and these sites may well, therefore, become RIGS.

References:

Morris, L. 1974 The Geomorphology of Bredon Hill, in Adlam, B.H. (ed). Worcester and it's Region. Geographical Association, Worcester Branch.

English Nature. Geological Conservation Management reports for SSSIs. (Eastnor office).

Rendell Geotechnics. (Date unknown). Internal report on landslides in the Midlands. (Supplied by M. Lee).

Website

The Groups web site address is now: <http://www.worc.ac.uk/eht.html>

Data manager: Pauline Couper. Pauline can be contacted at the Geological Records Centre.