



Newsletter Issue 10: December 2000

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Recent Changes

Employee changes: Adam Stinton, Trails Manager for Worcestershire, has left for the University of Buffalo, New York State, to study for a PhD. The Group would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all his hard work and wish him well for the future. Ruth Thornhill has now become Trails Manager for both Herefordshire and Worcestershire, and will continue the work Adam started alongside the Herefordshire Trails. Pauline Couper is now working full-time for the Group, as 'Fluvial Sites Project Manager'. Further information about this and the trails can be found in this newsletter.

New-look website: Until recently, Adam was responsible for maintaining the Groups web-site and he made a significant contribution to its development during his time here. This has now been taken over by Pauline Couper. The site has been given a completely new look, building on the ideas of Adam and of Lance Woodman before him. Recent changes include a general re-organisation to aid easy navigation, 'news' pages and additional information about local landscapes. Whilst some of this is in the early stages, it is hoped that the site will eventually become a useful resource for anyone interested in local geology and geomorphology. Your comments and suggestions regarding the website are always welcome.

AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Group will be at University College Worcester on Friday 2nd February 2001, at 11.00 am. Please call at Reception for room information on your arrival. Membership fees (£1) will be due at the meeting. Nominations for a maximum of 5 positions on the Executive Committee should reach the Geological Records Centre at least 14 days before the AGM. The current Executive Committee, consisting of Les Morris (Chairman), Moira Jenkins, Cheryl Jones, John Medley and Peter Thomson, are all willing to stand for re-election for another year.

Fluvial Sites Project

Pauline Couper writes:

Across the UK there tends to be a bias within RIGS designation towards sites demonstrating solid geology rather than those of geomorphological interest. This bias is, at present, reflected in the sites designated by Herefordshire and Worcestershire RIGS Group. In an attempt to rectify this, the aim of the Fluvial Sites Project is to research, survey and identify sites in Herefordshire and Worcestershire which relate to the fluvial geomorphology of the two counties. The project consists of three phases:

An area-wide study, including a desk-top assessment of solid and superficial geology and their influence on drainage, and a literature search to identify sites used for research and to collate published information on the rivers. Also, one of the criteria for RIGS designation is the educational value of a site, and with this in mind schools throughout Herefordshire and Worcestershire will be contacted over the coming months in an attempt to identify which sites are already used for National Curriculum work. If you are aware of any sites which you think may be of interest, I would be glad to hear of them.

From this information, selection of river reaches and landforms which require more detailed investigation.

Field survey of the selected rivers and fluvial landforms; geomorphological reconnaissance to characterise river reaches, landforms, and some of the processes in operation. This will enable the identification of potential RIGS for recommendation to the panel of assessors, although all sites surveyed will be added to the database archive held by the Group.

This approach ensures that the Group has enough information to consider sites within the context of the drainage basin - essential if the river system is to be understood. Such 'background information' may also be useful for other RIGS projects (for example, trails), and could be made available to schools if required, to assist with their fieldwork.

Trails Update: Herefordshire

Ruth Thornhill writes:

Funding has been secured for the production of five new trails in Worcestershire through the Landfill Tax Credit scheme. Firstly, a grant from the Hanson Environment Fund through the Royal Society for Nature Conservation's Small Payments Scheme. This will fund a new landscape and geology trail for Bredon Hill in Worcestershire. Secondly, funding for four trails in Worcestershire has been obtained from Mercia Environmental Fund managed by Welcome to Our Future (Local Agenda 21). Four Trails will be chosen from the following locations; North Malvern Hills, Worcestershire Beacon, Eastnor Castle and Estate, Bewdley and the River Severn, Severn Valley Railway (Arley to Kidderminster) and the Abberley Hills.

Our Volunteer Trail Testers are currently testing four Trails. We greatly appreciate their efforts and input. However we are still short of Testers. If anyone would like to volunteer please let us know. The four Trails currently ready for testing are Wigmore Glacial Lake, Worcester City Centre, Worcester Cathedral and The Lickey Hills.

A Date For Your Diary

Friday 6th April, 2001 is the date of the 'Five-year plan presentation (incorporating the Western Association Annual Field Meeting).' Representatives of the local councils, statutory, conservation and countryside agencies, industry members (e.g. quarry operators) and our sponsors will be invited to hear presentations during the morning explaining the Group's work and plans for the next five

years. The aim is to raise awareness of RIGS and the potential for collaborative work, and improve communication between ourselves and all those whose interests coincide (or perhaps even potentially conflict) with our own. Lunch will be provided, and in the afternoon members of the Western Association of RIGS Groups (ourselves, Avon, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Wiltshire) will visit sites in the Malvern Hills to discuss some of the practical issues facing RIGS work. Everyone attending the morning presentation is welcome to join us for this. Invitations will be sent out early next year. However, if you are keen to come along (there will be no cost), please contact Pauline Couper. (P. Couper@worc.ac.uk).

Malvern Hills SSSI

Earlier in the year the Group carried out a survey of 18 sites within the overall Malvern Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest on behalf of English Nature. Proposals were made for improvement works under English Nature's 'Facelift' programme. English Nature subsequently contracted the Group to carry out this work, which is due to begin this month.

The original 'Site Management Brief' of English Nature was used as the basis for field investigations. A full photographic record of the latter is in our report (1). The sites investigated showed examples of Quaternary, Silurian, Cambrian and Malvern Complex (Precambrian) deposits (see the Geological Timescale to find out the age of these), and a number illustrated the structural complexity of the area. This was particularly evident at Gullet Quarry and Gullet Pass, where the excellent exposures of igneous and metamorphic rocks are juxtaposed with Cambrian quartzites and Silurian (Wyche Beds) siltstones, limestones and conglomerates. In this small area exists a wealth of geological features and it has recently been designated a RIGS by the Group.

Very different but no less interesting are the quarries further north in West Malvern, where diorites and granites are intruded by dolerite dykes. There are examples of foliation within the granites, xenoliths and thermal alteration zones around the dolerites. A little further south excellent examples of mica schist occur and in Upper Tolgate Quarry an excellent large, low-angle shear zone within the granites can be seen.

The purpose of the investigations was to propose site improvements, such that the important features can be seen and investigated by visiting individuals and groups. Most of our proposals include vegetation clearance and footpath creation, and in this context we are extremely grateful to Alex Morley and his team at the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers for their involvement in the remedial work due to take place over the next few months. In a few locations we are proposing to re-excavate the exposures and remove scree and soil. We even intend to investigate the possibility of sand blasting a small zone of igneous rock to illustrate a fresh, unweathered texture.

All of the work described above falls within the first phase of the Malvern Hills Facelift Programme. The second phase, surveying a further 15 sites, will start soon and it is anticipated that remedial work will be carried out on some of these early in 2001.

1. Malvern Hills (Geological Survey) Part 1. Herefordshire and Worcestershire RIGS Group, June 2000.

Discovering Worcestershire

The Group has built up strong and effective links with Worcestershire County Council and Herefordshire Council, particularly in the advice that has been given in writing the Landscape Assessment Appendix of the County Structure Plans. The Geological Records Centre is regularly consulted over relevant planning applications. In addition, the Group has just been awarded a grant by Worcestershire County Council to carry out an assessment of the geology and landscapes of the Malvern and Abberley Hills, as part of their 'Discovering Worcestershire' programme. This work

will be carried out by Dr. Cheryl Jones, and is intended to be the first in a series of eight 'distinctive landscapes' studies. The report will be used by council officers both in planning and countryside matters. The Group has asked Dr. Jones to publish these reports as teaching aids for A' Level and first year undergraduate work. It is intended to investigate a similar programme in Herefordshire.

Educational Centre for Geology and Landscape

The Group has secured major funding from the Countryside Agency under their Local Heritage Initiative to set up an Educational Centre and Museum. The Centre will house a reference collection which will be a major resource for teaching and research - rocks, fossils, minerals and landscapes. This 'type collection' idea is the first of its kind in the RIGS movement and may well be taken up by other groups using the Herefordshire and Worcestershire project as a model. At the moment we are working on the basis that the Herefordshire Collection will be held at Hereford Museum and the Worcestershire Collection at Worcester Museum. Both collections will be available for research and may well become part of the permanent collections of the two museums.

A second part of this project is the involvement of schools and Parish Councils in the identification and care of a number of 'user friendly' sites around the region that can be used for National Curriculum and other educational work. The award allows for the transport of school children to the sites that illustrate the rocks component of Key Stage 2. All first and primary schools will be invited to attend and participate in the three-year project. As part of the launch Rockwatch, the young persons national geology club run by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, will put on a roadshow on 30th April at University College Worcester, when a few hundred pupils will be transported (free of charge) to the campus. A similar event will happen in Hereford Museum on 1st May 2001. Schools interested in booking a place should contact us as soon as possible.

Thank You

The Group would like to thank all those organisations who have supported us over the past five years. These include:

- The National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- The European Union through the Herefordshire Hills and Teme Valley LEADER II Programme.
- The Countryside Agency through the Local Heritage Initiative.
- University College Worcester.
- Worcestershire County Council.
- County of Herefordshire District Council.
- English Nature.
- Royal Society for Nature Conservation.
- Mercia Environmental Fund.

In the next issue

- The Group's five-year plan
- Launch of the first trails
- Rockwatch Roadshow