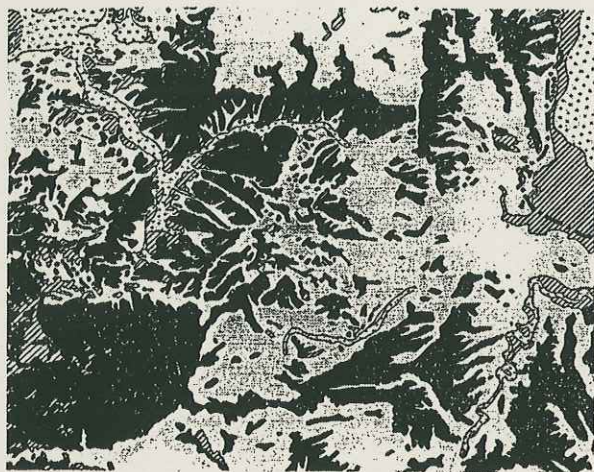


CHARNIA



LEICESTER
LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL
SOCIETY

THE NEWSLETTER OF
SECTION C (GEOLOGY)

SPRING 2002 EDITION

Editorial

Not wishing to give the impression that I have my head continually buried in a book these days, though I have been reading more for pleasure in recent months than at any other time in my life, this editorial will once again have a bibliophile flavour. Before mentioning what lies between the covers of Simon Winchester's 'The Map That Changed The World' (published by Viking, 2001, ISBN 0-670-88407-3 - blurb as promised in the Autumn edition of 'Charnia') a tale that may amuse: an article in the 'Los Angeles Times' under the header 'Man Almost Killed by Love of Books',

"Friends and neighbours said Anthony P.Cima, the 87-year-old San Diego man who was buried under thousands of books in Sunday's earthquake, had recently counted the volumes in his room and by his tally, there were 9,900 hardcover copies in his 12-foot-square hotel-apartment room ... Fire Department spokesman Larry Stewart said it took firefighters about 20 minutes just to locate Cima's foot and another 20 minutes to get him out ..."

Apart from holding the roof up and keeping the weather out surely walls are purely for hanging beautiful and interesting pictures and accommodating bookshelves. The problem surely isn't too many books - it's too little wall-space. My wife doesn't agree with me on this touchy subject and asks me if I'll be taking books to booksales, rather than bringing more new titles back. Hmm..., on with 'The Map That Changed The World' ...

The curtains open to reveal the Prologue. This heading is illustrated by an illustration of *Psiloceras planorbis*, the earliest Jurassic ammonite. Each chapter is illustrated by successively younger ammonites, ending with *Pavlovia pallasoides*, not that this book is particularly about the evolution of these creatures. The Prologue describes something hidden behind a pair of very large light-blue velvet curtains at Burlington House in London's Piccadilly. The object behind these curtains is William Smith's huge hand-coloured geological map of England and Wales, produced in this form in 1815. Smith began work on this project in 1801. William Smith was another great nineteenth century auto-didact. He endured penury, eviction, awful marital problems and, if these weren't enough, his work was plagiarised. Winchester's book is a superb biography which I found hard, once started, to put down.

Another geological biography is 'The Ice Finders' (by E. B. Bolles, Counterpoint, 1999, ISBN 1-58243-030-6). This book features Louis Agassiz and Charles Lyell, describing the trials of individuals who employ scientific method, only to be howled down by the Establishment when their revolutionary findings are announced. The perseverance of individuals facing

dogma and prejudice is only to be greatly admired. Which neatly brings me once again to the Creationist-Determinist school of 'thought'. Niall Shanks is a lecturer at the East Tennessee State University who understandably has quite a bit of trouble with biology majors when it comes to Darwin and evolution. The problem is that high school and church indoctrination have queered his scientific pitch. Shanks said, in the American Magazine 'Free Inquiry':

"... creationists do not just have complaints about evolutionary biology. They have complaints about most branches of science ... In a real sense, then, those of us who care about science education are not just facing the challenge of teaching interesting and exciting scientific ideas, we are also fighting the battles of the Enlightenment all over again. Medieval ideas that were killed stone dead by the rise of science three to four hundred years ago are not merely twitching; they are alive and well in our schools, colleges and universities."

How refreshing then to see this little snippet in a newspaper at the beginning of this January:

"The US Supreme Court has declined to enter the debate over the teaching of evolution in state schools by refusing to hear a case by a teacher who was reassigned for not teaching the theory in class. The ruling is a victory for schools that require teachers to teach evolution even if they disagree with it."

At least, it's a step in the right direction.

Our most recent local earthquake, which occurred at teatime on October 28th caused a bit of a stir, not least in local newspapers, with headlines such as "Quake 'felt like a bomb blast'" (Loughborough Echo, 02/11/01) and "SHOCK: PEOPLE RUSH INTO THE STREETS IN PANIC AS THEIR HOMES ARE ROCKED"; "EARTHQUAKE - DID YOU FEEL THE TREMOR?" (Leicester Mercury, 29/10/01). More informed information on this can be found on the British Geological Survey's website, if you have computer access. I had not experienced anything like it since I was a lad of ten in Mr. Evans' classroom at Quorn Primary School in February, 1957. I recall everyone in my class freezing as the huge sash windows rattled furiously in their casements.

The BGS publishes a free magazine twice a year which readers of 'Charnia' might like to receive. It is called 'Earthwise' and describes the work BGS undertakes. To be placed on the mailing list, contact Tracey Heard at the BGS on 0115-9363411. Another twice-yearly free magazine, 'Earth Heritage', is published by English Nature and features work in geological and landscape conservation. This can be ordered from English Nature at Peterborough on

01733 455000, and we also receive copies for distribution at meetings.

Elaine Smith's article on *Suchomimus* in the summer edition of 'Charnia' drew attention to the work of the University of Chicago's Paul Sereno. Also from fieldwork in Niger's Ténéré Desert, Sereno has spent a year preparing what has been popularly dubbed 'Supercroc' or, more scientifically, *Sarcosuchus imperator*. This was a huge, 8-ton, 40-foot, 110-million year old crocodylian. Deliberately setting out to make palaeontological discoveries isn't perhaps as newsworthy as accidental discoveries of the same. Recently, a farmer in Queensland was rounding-up sheep when he discovered a 95-million year old sauropod. The animal was many metres long and is a sauropod type unique to Australia. It may turn out that Australia was the home of the largest dinosaurs on Earth.

Biggest, oldest, heaviest, longest, etc. are epithets often attached (usually by discoverers anxious for publicity and hence further funding) to the latest discoveries. No exception to this was the interest aroused by Channels 4's 'Secrets of the Dead' programme on 'Millennium Man' (*Orrorin tugenensis*). In spite of all the hype about this hominid being the oldest human ancestor, the probability is that it was an ape, not part of our direct lineage. This revelation was made at the ever-popular Section C Annual Hominid Talk in November by Professor Peter Andrews. Interestingly, from the viewpoint of systematics, how do you demarcate the divergence between ape and man? Is it some specific dental feature, or the precise angle the head of the femur makes with the pelvis, or the existence of a chin protruding from the lower mandible, or the comparative arrangement of bones in hands in feet, or a combination of all or some of these? The jury seems to be still out on this one ...

Remember the item about the prospect of oil and gas prospecting at Quorn? The method of determining the presence of hydrocarbons deep underground is a first in the West and I thought that it would be a coup for Section C to book one of the people behind the technology to talk in the forthcoming winter programme. There is a slight problem, however. The only people who know anything about the 'micro-lepton' satellite and airborne surveying speak Russian and no English!

Finally, just before Christmas, it was announced that 94 miles of coastline from Orcombe Point in Devon to Harry Rocks in Dorset now have World Heritage status, awarded by UNESCO in Helsinki. This status affords no legal protection, though there is an obligation toward preservation. Quite how this affects the collecting of fossils along this Jurassic coastline isn't yet clear ...

Provisional Summer Programme 2002

Dennis Gamble is still at a fairly early stage with his plans for the 2002 summer field season, so please consider the following dates and localities as provisional only. The final programme, with leaders and further details, will be published in the May edition of Charnia. Please note that the first trip is the weekend excursion, which we have moved forward to May, and you will need to **book with Dennis as soon as you can** for that one. Now is not too soon! We want to have final numbers by the middle of March so that hotel accommodation can be reserved.

Friday May 17th - Sunday May 19th

Dorset coast (weekend excursion, probably based in Lyme Regis)
Leader: TBA

Sunday June 23rd

Blockley Quarry
Leaders: Dr Mike Howe (BGS) and Pete Blake

Sunday July 13th

North Lincolnshire
Leader: Steve Thompson (Scunthorpe Museum)

Sunday August 4th

Venue and leader to be decided

Sunday in late August/mid September

Derbyshire, mainly minerals
Leader: Kip Jeffrey (Geology Dept, Leicester University)

Saturday September 28th

Warwick Museum (morning) + local geology or Edge Hill quarries (afternoon)
Host/Leader: Jon Radley (Curator, Warwick Museum)

Indoor meetings January-March 2002

All meetings begin at 7.30 in room LT10 in the Geology Department, Leicester University, **except where stated**

Wednesday January 30th

Professor Alan Dyer (Department of Chemistry, Salford University) - 'Zeolites - or how an inorganic chemist discovered the Highlands and Islands'

Wednesday February 13th

Members evening, to be held at the **New Walk Museum**

Wednesday February 27th

Professor Bob A. Spicer (Open University) - 'Fossil leaves: nature's ancient meteorologists'

Saturday March 2nd (whole day)

Saturday School, **Vaughan College. CANCELLED.**

Wednesday March 13th

Dr Mike Searle (Department of Earth Sciences, Oxford University) - 'Crustal evolution of the Himalaya, Karakoram and Tibet during and after the India-Asia collision'

Wednesday March 27th

AGM and Chairman's address - Andrew Swift (Department of Geology, Leicester University) - 'Small but beautifully formed - the world of microfossils'

Saturday School 2002

It is with great regret that I have to notify the membership of the cancellation of the Saturday School on March 2nd, on planetary geology. Try as we might, the Secretary and myself were unable to find sufficient speakers despite many approaches over several months. However, next year is already looking more promising, and I'm very hopeful that we can renew our fruitful partnership with Vaughan College.

Andrew Swift

Annual General Meeting

Just a reminder about the AGM on March 27th. It's your opportunity to air your views on Section policy and also to exercise your democratic rights. Enclosed with this Charnia is a nomination form for officers/committee. If you would like to nominate anybody for any position, or would like to stand yourself, please complete it and return to the Secretary at least two weeks before the AGM.

Abstract of talk scheduled for February 27th 2002

Fossil leaves - nature's ancient meteorologists

Professor Bob A. Spicer
The Open University

It is a well known fact that vegetation and climate are linked. So much so that Mediterranean vegetation looks similar whether one is on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea itself or in California or Chile. All these areas experience a similar climate and in all cases the vegetation looks the same, even though the component species may be different. Vegetation appearance or "physiognomy" reflects that adaptation of the plants to the prevailing climate. The organ of the plant that is most responsive to climate is the leaf. This is because it is the leaf that is directly exposed to the atmosphere and has to intercept light and process gases in the most efficient way given the circumstances in which the plant grows. These constraints are governed by the laws of physics and therefore are independent of place or time. By quantifying leaf physiognomy and discovering numerical correlations between leaf physiognomy and climate we have developed a powerful tool for looking at climates of the past using fossil leaves. This technique allows us to determine, for example, ancient mean annual temperatures to within 1.8°C for given places and times up to 100 million years before Present.

We have recently been using this tool to expose weaknesses in global climate models when they are used to simulate the extreme "greenhouse" conditions of the past. The largest "errors" are in the continental interiors and the talk will focus on a recent expedition to central Siberia. The technique can also be used to determine the altitude at which the fossil plants once grew and the talk will also include an example of this approach as applied to the elevation history of Tibet.

Abstract of talk scheduled for March 13th 2002

Crustal evolution of the Himalaya, Karakoram and Tibet during and after the India-Asia collision

Dr Michael P. Searle
Department of Earth Sciences, University of Oxford

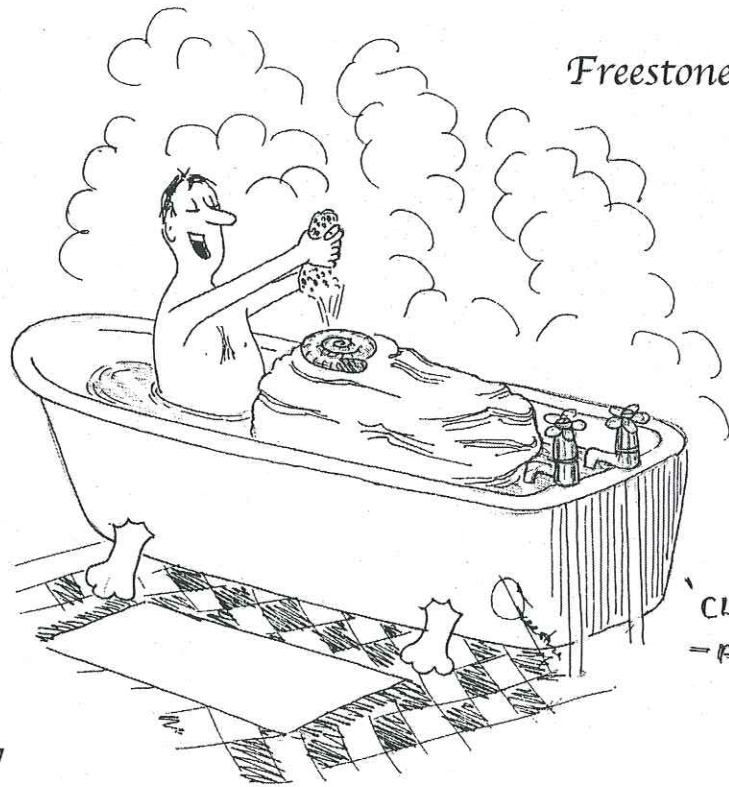
50 million years ago the Indian plate collided with Asia, producing the Himalaya and the Tibetan Plateau, which comprise the highest elevated landmass on the planet. Both the Himalaya and Tibet have been growing since the collision, producing spectacular mountains along the Himalayan chain as well as the Karakoram Mountains in the NW frontiers region of Pakistan. Mike Searle has been working in the Himalaya and Karakoram for 20 years and will describe the geology and mountains from K2 in the west to Everest in the east, as well as the scenery and geology of the southern Tibetan plateau.

Small but beautifully formed - the world of microfossils

Andrew Swift

Department of Geology, University of Leicester

The world of microfossils is vast, and completely beyond the scope of a one hour lecture, so in this talk I will concentrate on giving an introduction to the larger and better known of the mineral-walled microfossil groups. Three main groups dominate the literature relating to mineral-walled microfossils, the ostracods, foraminifera and conodonts, and this is a direct result of certain qualities inherent in these groups apart from their undoubted beauty, which cannot be questioned. Firstly they are ubiquitous except for short intervals in the geological record and are easily extracted from sediments, and secondly they tended to evolve rapidly and thus have great applicability in biostratigraphy. On another level they can tell us much about the environment which they inhabited. Such qualities also apply to the less well-known groups such as Diatoms, Radiolaria and Coccolithophores, but they are generally rarer and less easy to extract. However, the nature of all six named groups of microfossils will be examined and their usefulness discussed.



Freestone's Fables

CLEAN GENTLY
- AVOID SCRUBBING -

Excursion to Coates Quarry, Much Wenlock and Lincoln Hill, Coalbrookdale

August 18th 2001

The Shropshire town of Much Wenlock is famed for the beauty of Wenlock Edge, which gives spectacular views across to the Longmynd and the Welsh mountains beyond. This area is also famous for the excellent exposures of Silurian rocks. Indeed, it was one of the areas visited by Sir Roderick Impey Murchison, the founder of the Silurian System. Little do people realise, however, that Wenlock Edge has been extensively quarried. The largest of these, and still active, are Lea and Coates quarries.

Arriving early in the morning to the typical Welsh Borderland weather of cloud and thin rain, the members gathered in the main Lea Quarry before moving to Coates. A large area of this quarry has now been given over to the storage of a labyrinth of garden fences and rose arches – providing members with their first hurdles to cross (apologies). Coates Quarry has recently been reactivated (blown up!) and there was plenty of material for members to pick over. The quarry exposes the calcareous Much Wenlock Limestone Formation, which is famed for the quality of its corals and other shelly fossils. Large patch reefs could be seen in the cliff face and the quarry manager had recently built a very useful ramp straight up to one of these previously inaccessible features. Several large platform and solitary corals were recovered, along with the spiral gastropod *Poleumita* and even a very good crinoid (well done to our sharp-eyed junior member).

Lunch was had by all in Much Wenlock and then the programme took a sudden turn. The key that we had been promised to let us into Shadwell Quarry (also near Much Wenlock) failed to materialise and the quarry (recently closed) had been fortified with enough barbed wire to make a World War I trench look spartan. The nearby Lincoln Hill, in the picturesque Coalbrookdale Gorge, provided the back-up. Lincoln Hill has some of the best preserved Much Wenlock Limestone fossils I know, but on that day it had more in common with the dense Amazonian rain forest than a quarry. However, several impressive slabs covered in brachiopods, trilobites and bryozoa, a few hefty platform corals and a mighty stromatoporoid were found. And if that wasn't enough there was a couple of good pubs all within teetering distance. We then rounded off the day with a couple of pints of Shropshire Lad and a look at the impressive engineering of the Iron Bridge.

Gary Mullins



The main face at Coates Quarry



Hunstanton party, Sunday September 16th 2001



Fossil collecting, Cleeve Hill, Sunday September 30th 2001



Studying the recent biodiversity, Hunstanton beach, 16/9/01



The Cleeve Hill group, 30/9/01, still happy after the rain!

Hunstanton Cliffs
Sunday September 16th 2001

It may be that memories of wet seaside holidays, sand in bathing costumes and boarding house landladies have coloured many local geologists appreciation of Hunstanton as a quality geological locality, but the fact remains that it is. It is also a somewhat isolated island of 'real rock' exposure in a mainly flat landscape dominated by glacial features both inland and in neighbouring cliffs. However, its qualities have not been lost on the geologists in the Leicester University Department and Hunstanton remains a regular location for undergraduate field trips, usually led by Roy Clements, who we were fortunate to secure as our leader in September. A small but keen group assembled in the town near the western edge of the cliffs and then started on a west to east traverse along the foreshore, observing the geology as we went. The cliffs consist in the lower part of Carstone, followed by a thin development of Red Chalk and then finally up to 6m of white Chalk, all units of Cretaceous age. The strong coloration of each unit makes for a picturesque and easily followed sequence on the large scale, but in detail the rocks are anything but straightforward to interpret, and irregular bedding, non-sequences and condensed horizons run throughout the section. Several interesting debates ensued as we walked.

After lunch followed arguably the best part of the day when Roy took us through some 'actuo-palaeontology', when we did a study of recent shell accumulations in the sediments at a number of points from cliff foot to water line, and discussed the various controls on fossil formation. It was pointed out in our excavations just how near the surface of the sand anaerobic conditions prevailed and were already having an effect on the shells. We all went away with a greater insight on the processes of fossilisation. The day ended with a suitable finale - tea and cakes in a seafront cafe in the best day-tripper tradition!

Andrew Swift

Ralph Tajpowski

It is with regret that we announce the recent death of Ralph Tajpowski, who may be remembered by older members. Ralph was a very keen amateur geologist and was a long time member of the Section until the 1990's. He had two spells on the committee from 1970-1972, and 1979-81.

Cleeve Hill, Gloucestershire
Sunday September 30th 2001

With a heavy sky threatening rain 15 members gathered at the car park of the golf club on Cleeve Hill, the highest point in the Cotswolds, to study the Middle Jurassic sequences exposed around the Hill. Our leader for the day was Mark Barron of the British Geological Survey. We were fortunate that Mr. Barron had asked his friend Joe Angseesing from Cheltenham College to come along to co-lead the trip. Mr Angseesing is an expert on the area and takes a special interest in the palaeontology. Thus, he was able to identify most of the fossils found during the day.

The area of Cleeve Hill is dotted with small quarries and most of the faces have been restored by local enthusiasts, thereby revealing good snapshots of the geology. Mr. Barron took the group from one exposure to another with everyone keeping an eye open for errant golf balls, as our route wound its way through the fairways.

The first exposures seen were the Scottsquar Member and the Upper Freestone at the top of the Lower Inferior Oolite. Some nice specimens of *Pleuromya uniformis* were collected at this site. From here the party walked to a small quarry which exposed the Gryphite Grit Member. The Formation name is derived from the fact that the fauna is dominated by large specimens of *Gryphaea*. In Rolling Bank Quarry the rocks are younger, the sequence comprising the Witchellia Grit and Bourguetia Beds of the Middle Inferior Oolite and the Clypeus Grit Member of the Upper Inferior Oolite. At Grass Crown Quarry the members sorted through a heap of rubble and found some good specimens of *Plectothyris fimbria*. Unfortunately the heap had been dumped in here from one of the other sites; the leaders suggested that the material probably originated from the Scottsquar Member. The group then walked quite a way round to the other side of the Hill to look at the Lower Limestone and the Pea Grit. These are the lowest beds exposed on the Hill. At this point we were afforded wonderful views over Cheltenham. Whilst at this site (the furthest from the car park, naturally) our luck with the weather ran out, the heavens opened and everyone was soaked on the walk back to the cars. After thanking Mark Barron and Joe Angseesing for a very interesting and informative trip some of the party were so wet they were obliged to retire to the lounge bar of the golf club house to dry out.

Dennis Gamble

'Mac'- John Harry MacDonald Whitaker

Mac Whitaker, as he was known to his friends, died on September 11th., 2001, after a long illness. He was one of the Museum and University geologists who brought about the rebirth of the Geology Section of the Literary and Philosophical Society. After being suspended during World War II the section was revived by Bob King, George Snowball and Mac in 1951. Mac became its Chairman soon afterwards, and remained a member until his death.

Mac was born in 1921 in Cambridge and was educated at the Perse School there. He then joined the Cambridge Instrument Company and spent the war years investigating nerve gases at laboratories near Runcorn. There he met colleagues interested in mountaineering and this started his interest in geology as he looked at the rocks he climbed. After the War he read Natural Sciences at Cambridge University, initially intending to specialize in Chemistry but he found his supplementary subject of Geology much more attractive and changed course. He graduated in Geology and Mineralogy and won the Shell and Wilshere Prizes in consecutive years. In addition to his Cambridge B.A. degree he also obtained a London External B.Sc.

In 1948 Mac was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Geology at Manchester University, one of a trio known as the Three Musketeers. The others were Don Griffiths, later Professor of Geophysics at Birmingham University, and Jim Lawson, later Senior Lecturer at Glasgow. Jim and Mac, together with Charles Holland, founded the Ludlow Research Group.

In 1951 Mac became the Lecturer in Geology within the Geography Department of University College, Leicester. Starting with only five students, he built up the teaching of Geology into an independent department when it was severed from Geography two years later. Joined by Trevor Ford in 1952 and Tony Evans in 1956, the infant Department really got going when Professor Sylvester-Bradley arrived in 1958 and Mac was at last able to devote some of his energies to research, specialising in sedimentology. About this time the Ludlow Research Group embarked on the first detailed re-mapping of the Welsh Borders since Murchison. In sharing out mapping areas Mac drew the short straw and got the 'confused area' around Leintwardine, where outcrops were apparently poor and disjointed. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise as Mac found nearly five hundred localities and his analysis revealed a series of channels which were the first fossil submarine canyon heads to be found anywhere. In the early 1960s Mac extended his Silurian interests to Norway and mapped the Silurian and Lower Devonian of Ringerike, near Oslo, for his Ph.D.

Continuing his submarine canyon interests, Mac had a spell in Japan, working on channelled greywackes with Professor 'Happy' Okada in the Eocene Shimanto Belt of southern Japan, where an active volcano nearby was liable to spread ash over all his localities every few days.

Mac was quick to use the latest techniques in sedimentological teaching and research, including thin and polished sections, SEM (with EDA) cathodoluminescence and X-ray analysis of his many samples. Later, these researches led to consultative research on the Brent Sand in the North Sea oilfields.

Spending the rest of his professional life at Leicester University, Mac saw what he had founded grow into one of the leading Geology Departments of the country. He served on numerous University committees and was involved in many activities outside the University. On retiring in 1985, Mac set up the popular magazine Geology Today in conjunction with its recent editor Peter Smith and was delighted to see how it flourished over the years. Mac was an unflappable good friend to many students, some of whom are now leaders in their profession. He is survived by his wife Marian, his two sons Robert and Peter, and four grandchildren.

Trevor Ford



Christmas meeting, New Walk Museum, December 19th 2001

Other society's programmes

East Midlands Geological Society (details Alan Filmer, 0115 9663854)

Saturday February 9th, 6.30 pm, lecture theatre B3, Life Sciences (Biology) building, Nottingham University

Belemnites - the mystery thunderbolt

Professor Peter Doyle (University of Greenwich)

Saturday March 9th, 6 pm, lecture theatre B3, Life Sciences (Biology) building, Nottingham University

The AGM, followed by **Bringing dinosaurs to life, Is it science? Is it art?**

John Martin (Haley Sharpe Associates, previously New Walk Museum)

Followed by the Foundation Buffet meal in the Nottingham University Staff Club

Saturday April 27th, 6.30 pm, lecture theatre B3, Life Sciences (Biology) building, Nottingham University

Wagga Wagga. A model for Nottingham in the Permian?

Professor Ian Smalley

Stamford & District Geological Society (details Pauline Dawn 01780 764714)

Wednesday February 13th, 7.30 pm, Tinwell Village Hall

Further research on the Soom Shale of South Africa

Dr Sarah Gabbott (University of Leicester)

Wednesday 13th March, 7.30, Tinwell Village Hall

AGM, followed by **Member's Evening**

Saturday March 16th

Local Geology (Ice Ages) Day at Peterborough Museum, from 10 am

Includes field trip from 2 pm

Yorkshire Geological Society (details Paul Wignall, 0113 2335247)

Saturday February 9th, University of Leeds

Current Post Graduate research in Earth Sciences

Speakers: TBA

Saturday March 9th, University of Durham

The Sir Kingsley Dunham Meeting

Mineralisation in the north Pennines

Speakers: **Tony Johnson, Brian Young**

Hull Geological Society (details Mike Horne 01482 346784)

Thursday February 21st, 7.30 pm, Department of Geography, Hull University

What Pleistocene ostracods can tell us about modern bio-diversity

Dr Huw Griffiths (Hull University)

Thursday March 7th, 7.30 pm, Department of Geography, Hull University

AGM, followed by **Black shales - deep or shallow water?**

Dr Paul Wignall (Leeds University)

Saturday March 17th

Field trip. **North and South Ferriby**, led by **Terry Rockett** and **Mike Horne**

Saturday March 23rd

'Spring clean' at **Rifle Butts Quarry SSSI**, followed by RIGS meeting at **Kiplingcotes Nature Reserve** at 2 pm



Group on Yorkshire Coast, weekend excursion, June 2001

A Tramp in Leicestershire

A tramp in Leicestershire? What in heaven's name can this be about? My title tells you. A few weeks ago I set out on the Leicestershire Round, which claims to be a one-hundred mile circular walk around the County. When I walk I wear my oldest clothes and must therefore resemble a tramp. A walk of that length is more of a tramp than a walk anyway.

The landscape is varied and evidence of our past activities is everywhere. Each generation has in turn taken what it wanted and earlier ravages cannot all be repaired. If we have held this land in stewardship and if we are ever called to account, I think we would all need to confess that 'we messed it up pretty good'. You might think that the countryside of Leicestershire is all beautiful, though looked at on foot is simply not the case. 'But look at Bradgate Park', some might cry. Looked after, yes in a fashion, but the bracken continues to encroach, the tracks are eroded and the ever-increasing parking charges are outrageous. The views from Old John are splendid though ...

Although my walk passed through Bradgate Park, my starting point was farther west, at Thorpe Satchville. Here, I found a stone to look at before I had even started! There is a Millennium Milestone in the village which gives the miles to Jerusalem, the North Pole and the South Pole. So for the first few miles I wondered what kind of stone it was and tried to mentally check the stated mileage figures. It would have helped if I could have remembered the circumference of our planet ... These thoughts were interrupted by the surprisingly extensive views from Burrough Hill. As that was messed up in the Iron Age, I am perhaps prepared to forgive the original extensive alterations made.

I passed by Foxton, where the staircase of locks is impressive and the inclined plane is of interest, though the latter can only have been a mistake originally in view of the short period that it was in use. The nearby Saddington Reservoir was originally constructed in order to feed the canal. To reach Foxton it is necessary to cross the A6 near the large roundabout near Market Harborough. I felt a bit like a rat in a maze here - the track is there and is waymarked, though the signs are tucked away and not easy to spot. While out walking you notice the noisy traffic, which is an intrusion on the peace and quiet. The noise both here and later on from the motorways and trunk roads was surprising. Housing is still being constructed adjacent to the M1 Motorway, which I suppose will keep some noise from other nearby houses!

As well as crossing busy roads, I crossed over and under several railway lines, some disused and others still in use, slicing through the countryside.

The impact of old gravel pits, quarrying and mining is also very evident. Old pit heaps have been landscaped at Bagworth and trees have been planted as part of the National Forest. Our National Forest does however need to be looked after. The weeds and grass are as high as the small trees in places and trees planted on subsoil are struggling. The large old quarry near Mountsorrel has recently been filled in and some trees have been planted there to improve matters.

I was surprised by the amount of new housing being constructed; the development by the M1 motorway did not seem ideal and a development at Thornton on a steep slope looked precarious! It was also a surprise to find just how many churches were locked - perhaps a rather sad sign of the times in which we live. Another sad thing was that not many pubs were open in the middle of the day when I was passing. The weather was kind throughout my walk, so luckily these sources of refuge from storms were not needed!

Most of the County is still agricultural, grass fields are the easiest to cross where sheep, cattle and horses are all curious. Crops mean that rights of way are tricky, though harvesting had largely been completed and this made life easier, although fields planted with Indian Corn (corn on the cob) growing above head height are difficult to navigate through and around. I even encountered a field of yellow sunflowers, which makes spotting a yellow-topped waymark post on the other side of the field something of a challenge. Newly ploughed fields are the hardest work to cross since the ploughing destroys the line of the path (usually at a diagonal angle). Some farmers plough right up to the hedges, making the route guesswork for a while.

Roger Newman

For sale

Dennis Gamble has a large, good quality, modern chest for sale, ideal for storing rocks, fossils, etc. Its made of decent plywood with a grey finish. Dimensions are: width 53, depth 38, height 33 (old fashioned inches). It has 8 drawers which are 2.25 inches deep. Most importantly, the proceeds will go to Section funds. Price is negotiable, but probably less than you think. Call Dennis on 0794 7725361.

Leicester Literary and Philosophical Society

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