

MENDIP ROCKS! FRAMEWORK

Last year The Mendip Hills AONB put out a consultation paper "Mendip Rocks! - A Framework for Delivery", and followed it up with a one day event held at the Somerset Earth Science Centre at Moon's Hill quarry, Stoke St. Michael, near Radstock. This event was to consider ideas for improving the understanding and management of the Mendip Hills geology and the wildlife and historic landscape that it has shaped.

A significant amount of research, activities and management has already been undertaken by a wide range of individuals and organisations. The programme for the day posed such questions as "How can we better share this information? It was hoped it would inspire and suggest new ideas and partnership projects through the proposed coordinated - 'Mendip Rocks! Framework'.

Your Chairman and I attended this day to represent the Society and I for one was impressed by the calibre of all those from the other organisations and by the presentations given by those who have already undertaken related research and activities and have started working together in new partnership projects. We were welcomed by the Centre Manager Dr, Gill Odolphie; anyone who came to the Open event in Slader's Leigh last September will have seen her showing children ancient rocks and helping them to make their own fossils.

First off - the Mendip Rocks Festival coordinator, Ruth Worsley, said that the Mendips has a complicated history which just needs communicating to the public (how many people know that we are sitting on a Jurassic volcano site here for example?). The Festival, now in its fourth year planning aims to involve all age groups with a good spread of geographic events. The Society held two of those events in 2013 and plans to do so again this year. To see the exciting areas covered last year go to: http://dgagdigs.homestead.com/Mendip_Rocks_Festival_2013_-_Guide.pdf

Following on nicely was Robin Thornes talking about the 'Quarry Faces' community project, this was the subject of our well attended Wells talk in February. Concern for the rapid disappearance of the physical history and the memories of mining on Mendip has led to the collection of stories,



Pillow lava flows on Middle Hope beach, Weston-s-Mare

artefacts and photos, all to be stored digitally and made available for everyone as on-line databases, books and teaching resources. A travelling exhibition about the project is moving from Wells to Frome Museum, opening 11th March until 31st May. The Wells and Mendip Museum, under the leadership of Society member Barry Lane has been developing its traditional role - that of a 'place which collects things', into one which tells stories about things, a lot of the time through people and their daily lives. The Museum also has a lot of 'geology' stored away which is now seeing the light of day and can be loaned out to groups; enthusiasm and involvement there is in plenty, lacking is the resources to make use of it properly, this is where the partnerships will come in.

After a coffee break- much needed with all the talking going on - the next topic was 'Geodiversity' with Bob Corns from 'Natural England'. Bob has long been a friend of the Mendip Society, it was he who facilitated the grant from English Nature (as it was then) which helped us to buy Slader's Leigh. His forte in those days was 'Biodiversity', now it is more understood that the rocks and minerals beneath us are a record of the past history of the Earth, including all the natural processes, such as erosion. Rocks control soils and agriculture and watercourses depend on them; the UK probably has one of the most diverse areas in the world which of course influences the distribution of biodiversity. But everything is connected and interlinked. This is such a huge subject that it merits an article of its own next time (if the Editor allows of course!).

Following on, another topic with Biodiversity at its heart with the Somerset Wildlife Trust; was 'site management in the Mendip Hills', with, in particular, a habitat found only in a few places in the UK. Nearly everyone learnt a new word at this point viz: 'Calaminarian'- defining a very rare type of grassland with generally short, open vegetation of fine leaved grasses, flowers,, mosses and lichens. This type is found only

on soils with a high metallic content, so usually forming on mining spoil heaps. The SWT is surveying to find 'unknown' patches of this habitat, which is also good for certain invertebrates and amphibians, Yoxter, Blackmoor, Velvet Bottom, and lead rakes being words which cropped up often.

Mendip Cave Exploration and Records, an organisation led by another of the Society's speakers, Alan Gray, and the work done and the results achieved by many dedicated cavers over the years, impressed everyone - again the subject is just too big to cover here but can be found at www.mcra.org.uk, a huge website stuffed full of amazing things - all downloadable freely. And finally, Bob Croft, Somerset County Archaeologist, of Somerset Historic Environment Research pointed out 'Priorities and Directions' with a ramble round Mendip with the aid of Saxton's 1580 map - the most well used and loved map of the time. The Geographical area proposed is the Mendip Hills National Character Area (NCA No. 141) together with the Mendip Hills AONB. (See the map). This is one of 159 distinct natural areas, each defined by a unique combination of landscape, biodiversity, geodiversity and cultural and economic activity. Their boundaries follow natural lines in the landscape rather than administrative boundaries, making them a good decision making framework for the natural environment.

After a delicious, locally produced lunch the afternoon was spent in groups discussing the myriad of ideas generated by the morning's presentations and how they should be organised and implemented. So many suggestions and so much enthusiasm - I don't envy those who now have to collate everything and hopefully produce the 'Mendip Rocks! Framework'. Watch this space for the next stage in the process. For those who are interested in this big local project see the Consultation paper done in October 2013 at <http://www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Mendip-Rocks-Framework-for-consultation.pdf>

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The boundaries of the Mendip Hills AONB and National Character Area (NCA)