

REPORT

The EMGS at Minerals 98: a tale of three very different events

Minerals 98 is a promotional event organised by the mining and quarrying industry to present their activities, and the associated benefits, in a positive light to the public. The environmental impact of quarrying remains the subject of much debate and planning dispute, but most sites nowadays are subsequently restored and may become wildlife refuges, nature reserves or recreational amenities. Even during quarrying, birds benefit from the cliffs created and the lack of public access. In the Trent Valley gravels, archaeological remains are often revealed which shed considerable light on both the history and pre-history of human settlement in the region.

The EMGS participated in three open days at local quarries, described in turn below.

Breedon on the Hill Quarry

This Carboniferous Limestone quarry is excavated in one of the six small Limestone inliers in the extreme south-east of Derbyshire. It was visited by the Society in 1997 as an evening trip led by Keith Ambrose and Albert Horton (reported in this issue). Albert Horton became aware of the open day when preparing for the Society's visit to the adjacent Cloud Hill Quarry, which is operated by the same company, Breedon Quarries.

Breedon Quarries is a family concern and pictures of successive generations of the owning family were displayed in the main marquee, along with the history of the quarry and many other historic photographs of quarrying activity at Breedon. The event was very much a family fun day, with many events for children. The Society's display was staged beside an interpretation of the geology of the quarry by Keith Ambrose of BGS and the quarry's own display of minerals and fossiliferous rocks. The latter must have been placed by machine, and rather dwarfed Les Hall's excellent collection which formed the centre piece of the Society's display.

There were several hundred visitors during the day, many of whom were quarry workers past and present who visited the EMGS display with their families. They were very keen to learn about the geology of the rocks that they had spent much of their working lives excavating. Children were able to clamber over the vast dumpers and other equipment on static display. There was also a continuous demonstration of the heavy equipment in operation and an excellent viewing platform had been set up, from which the large scale geological structures in the main quarry could be seen.

The Company's managers Terry and Roger worked unceasingly to ensure that everything was running smoothly and everyone had an enjoyable

day. We left with numerous helium-filled balloons, day-glow vests, key rings, mugs, hats, etc., most of which were consolation prizes from our failed attempts to win anything on the tombola.

Hoveringham Quarry

This is a large quarry for aggregate in the sand and gravel of the Trent Valley. Considerable archaeological information and artefacts have been discovered and most of the extracted areas have been reclaimed as excellent sites for birds and recreation. The operators (Tarmac) were keen to present these achievements to the public.

Tony Morris learnt of this open day a few days beforehand when he was asked to attend on behalf of the local MP. The presentations were to be entirely archaeological but the quarry management willingly agreed to the Society being represented. Tarmac have spent in excess of £1 million supporting archaeological investigations and conservation at its four local sites in Nottinghamshire. This work is carried out by the Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust.

The formal proceedings for the invited guests consisted of addresses by Tarmac's archivist, the Reverend Fenn and the Nottinghamshire County Archaeologist, Michael Bishop. This was followed by a most interesting presentation by Dr David Knight of the Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust, describing the results of the excavations at the Company's four local sites and demonstrating the archaeological value of the objects on display.

The EMGS volunteers joined in the consumption of the lavish buffet and wine provided. The invited guests then left and there was a chance to study the interpretative boards on the four sites and talk to the archaeologists about the finds on display while waiting for the public to arrive. The Society's display included fossils provided by Tony Morris and Jack Brown. Among the latter were various bones and teeth that were rapidly identified by the archaeologists. We were amazed at the quality of the pottery and weapons in the archaeologists' display and they were likewise amazed that most of our fossils were millions of years old. The publicity for this event was, unfortunately, not very effective. Only about a dozen members of the public attended, each of whom was outnumbered by geologists and archaeologists and received a lot of attention.

A second lavish buffet was provided and we left feeling rather full and having learnt a great deal about Trent Valley archaeology.

Besthorpe Quarry

This is also an aggregate extraction operation in the Trent gravels, operated by Lafrage Redland. The open day was designed solely for 200 local school children. The event was organised jointly by Vicky Mason of the Wildlife Trusts, who are based nationally at Lincoln, and the quarry manager, Alan

Perkins. Part of the site is now a large nature reserve run by Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (Warden: Jenny Kent).

A variety of participatory demonstrations were planned, including bird ringing and environmental activities run by the Wildlife Trusts, archaeological activities run by The Trent and Peak Archaeological Trust, trips to the quarry machinery run by the quarry management, and pebble identification exercises run by Rockwatch assisted by the EMGS volunteers. In the event there was heavy rain for the entire day and most activities had to be cancelled or re-planned. Fortunately, three marquees containing large numbers of chairs had been provided.

The ten EMGS members assisted Rockwatch's Duncan Friend and John Aram of The Wildlife Trusts on pebble and fossil exercises. I was surprised how much geology can be learnt from a small tray of randomly chosen pebbles using the well-designed exercises provided by Rockwatch. The children were very interested and seemed to enjoy their day in a tent in the rain! The exercises and favourite pebbles were taken away for more work at school. The fossil displays provided by Neil Turner (Wollaton Museum), Ben Bentley, Jack Brown, Tony Morris and Jean Morris created a lot of interest and provided an invaluable additional resource to mitigate the disappointments caused by the weather.

The Society's purpose is to further research, education and conservation in geology and, by attending and reporting on events like these, geology can be brought to a wider and interested public. It also brings the EMGS closer to other bodies having complementary activities in archaeology and wildlife conservation. Many thanks to all the EMGS helpers mentioned above plus Inga Filmer, Hella Tasker, Muriel Wright and Philip Small.

Alan Filmer