

MERCIAN NEWS

Bakewell for Bargains!

John Aram writes: The 9th and 10th October 1999 found the largest gathering in the region of geological dealers, suppliers, collectors, academics and amateur enthusiasts for 'The Rock Exchange'.

Under the control of the Peak Lapidary and Mineral Society and the guidance of Les Fox, this annual event takes place in the Lady Manners School near Bakewell. For two days the school Sports Hall, Drama Hall, canteen area and even the corridors are taken over by dozens of displays and stands, selling and demonstrating everything and anything related to geology. Free parking is provided in staff and coach parking areas, with the overflow onto mown grass and an adjacent sports field.

This year my eye was caught by machines to crack open geodes, hands-on demonstrations of gold panning, and guidance in polishing rock slices. Magnetite crystals from Shetland vied for my attention with haematite from Cumbria and fluorite from the Pennines. Increasingly rare trilobites in mudstones from North Wales contrasted with large numbers of finely detailed and prepared trilobites from North Africa. Bargain bins, oddments and special show prices contrasted with a gem-quality sapphire in its matrix with a four figure price tag. No doubt the many specialist dealers and part-time collector/dealers who are attracted to this show from all parts of Britain help to create a wide range of prices and quality of specimens.

The bargains? One member of EMGS went home the proud owner of a 'nearly new' lap for polishing his rock specimens (bought at a fraction of its 'new' cost). A Rockwatch member came from Coventry to spend his pocket-money on trilobites; when he left he not only had five new specimens to add to his collection, but had also been given a large bag of 'interesting pieces' of trilobites by one of the stallholders. Myself? In addition to the new millenium supply of white card trays to store specimens, and the 'write-on' plastic self-seal bags (I have promised to maintain much better records of my specimens), a small, battery-powered ultra-violet lamp has been added to my equipment, and a splendid new specimen of green fluorite from Wearsdale can now be seen in my cabinet. They were all bargains!

Put next year's show dates (7th and 8th October, 2000) into your diary. But take a warning; allow yourself plenty of time (and money) for your visit. Selecting a bargain can take time, and there are so many choices to make.

The Flying Finns . . .

Roger Peart (BGS) writes: Late June 1999 saw the completion of data acquisition for a collaborative airborne geophysical and environmental trial survey of four sites in the East Midlands. This was part of

the first project under a recently agreed Memorandum of Understanding between the British Geological Survey (BGS) and the Geological Survey of Finland (GTK). The work was co-sponsored by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Environment Agency.

The survey was flown using the elegant and powerful de Havilland Twin Otter based at Tollerton Airport near Nottingham. The main objective of this trial was to test the effectiveness of the GTK electromagnetic (EM) system in the rapid mapping of polluted groundwaters that may occur in the vicinity of certain landfill sites and colliery spoil heaps. GTK have proved the value of their system in such applications in Finland and BGS decided to test the method in the generally less favourable UK environment. In addition to EM, gamma spectrometer and magnetic total field and horizontal gradient data were also collected. These additional data will also be of both geological and environmental significance.

The four areas targeted are Shirebrook, the Trent Valley immediately north east of Nottingham, Langar-cum-Barnstone (all in Nottinghamshire) and Wolvey near Rugby. The preliminary results are very encouraging and several of the features detected will be investigated by ground survey in the near future. The fully processed data will be available for licencing in due course.

Rockwatch 1999 — Rockhound Challenge winners

John Aram writes: The 1999 Rockwatch competition results have just been announced, and once again entries from local children featured strongly in the final stages of the judging.

Katy Flinn from Nottingham received a special prize in the 12-16 Rock Artist competition for her beautiful hand-made book of illustrations of geological specimens; the first prize going to Stef Gladders of York for an original 3-D cave model.

Emily Ratcliffe of Sleaford created a rotund papier-maché woolly mammoth that earned her a Highly Commended in the very competitive under 12 years class of the same section of the competition. The winner was an impressive collage made by Thomas Baird from Northern Ireland.

The Rock Reporter under 12 class was won by Laurie Whitaker from Shropshire, with an illustrated account of a trip to Clee Hill with the Shropshire Geological Society, while the 12-16 prize went to "The Palaeontology Post", a newspaper written and produced by Kathy Marshall of Leeds.

Jane Robb won the under 12 Rockhound prize with a folder describing and illustrating her geological collection and the mini-museum in her home in East Lothian. Winner of the 12-16 competition and 'Rockhound of the Year 1999' was 12 year old Alex Ayling of Sandhurst, for an

outstanding report of his collecting work, laboratory preparation and study of micro-fossils.

If you know of any keen young geologists, do tell them to watch out for details of the 2000 Rockhound Challenge. The prizes in each class are worth up to £100 worth of geological materials, specimens, equipment and books!

Sculptured Stones at Rufford Country Park

Alan Filmer writes: Fashion in gardening has currently moved to hard landscaping, with plants sometimes playing merely a supporting role. In this garden, created by Gerry Price, this idea has been taken to its ultimate conclusion with scarcely a plant in view. However, for a geologist with an interest in garden design and sculpture, it is full of interest. The garden was created in June 1999 and will be removed in June 2000. It is laid out like a conventional garden with curved island beds but planted with rocks and stones and having mulches of different coloured, textured and sized pebbles or chippings. Among these there are a number of sculptures carved from various types of stone and in differing stages of completion.

The garden provides an interesting geological trail in a compact area, with plenty of scope for trying to identify the rock types and processes that are in evidence. Rufford Country Park is on the A614 between Nottingham and Ollerton. Entrance is free with a parking charge only at weekends and Bank Holidays. To find the garden, park in the main car park and walk through the old stable block and courtyard. Enter the sculpture gardens and turn left.

Trent Trends, Nottingham University, 16th October 1999

Phillip and Judy Small write: This conference was held in the Djanogly Arts Centre, Nottingham University, and was organised by the Trend and Peak Archaeological Unit and C.B.A. East Midlands. A series of excellent speakers reviewed the discoveries and developments in archaeology in the Trent valley over the last 45 years and discussed the new techniques that were being applied.

Several members of the EMGS were present and were pleased to find how the geology of the Trent valley had played such a major part in the development of early civilisation. Identification of sites may involve both aerial and geophysical techniques. Scientific backup for archaeology now involves the talents of many other experts.

The Trent, the third longest river in England, is fed by the Dove and Derwent, which both rise in the Peak District. In early post-Devensian times, enormous quantities of gravel were brought down by meltwaters into the braided river systems of the wide Trent valley. As the river meandered across the valley floor, palaeochannels were left behind which

are now frequently exposed as the gravel is extracted. This has led to the discovery of many important artefacts such as bridges, fish weirs and the Bronze Age Aston log boat. The gravel excavations need continuous pumping. Artefacts and wooden structures have often been well preserved by the high water table but need urgent attention when exposed to air and sunlight. Sands and well-preserved organic-rich mud deposits are often related to the palaeochannels and these may contain plant and animal parts which can be identified by experts. Beetle wing cases are often well preserved and give good information about the environment in which they lived. Plant material is also of value. Oak tree trunks are of particular importance as dendrochronology can often give a reliable date for worked wood and associated artefacts.

There are only a few professional archaeologists working in the Trent valley and much valuable help is provided by enthusiastic amateurs. Dr Chris Salisbury, who is also a keen EMGS member, has spent much of this spare time studying the Trent valley. For many years he has been regularly visiting many of the gravel pits and has a good rapport with the quarry staff. He is often contacted when something interesting has turned up. His major contributions to local archaeology were freely acknowledged by many of the speakers.

News items for the Mercian

To mark progress into the new millennium, the EMGS editorial board aims to expand the news sections of the *Mercian Geologist* in order to reflect the many aspects of local geology with which Society members are involved. Future issues will feature more short items, on, for example, significant temporary exposures, geological events, important sites within the East Midlands and small items of local research, beside devoting pages to the publication of longer papers. We will therefore welcome any text (with or without illustrations) that is sent in by members.

Please send any material to the new editor, Tony Waltham (see notes for contributors at the end of this issue). A single copy is all that is needed, and the style can be very informal; just call the editor if you have concerns about any drawings or photographs. Don't hold back or delay with your contributions, especially in the spring months when issues are prepared for printing. We hope that this way forward will make the *Mercian* an active record and forum of its members, in a style that befits an active local society.