

INFORMATION CIRCULAR 9

MAY 1974

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Considerable growth in international activity and co-operation in geological and physiographic conservation has occurred since the appearance of Circular 8. For example, in the autumn of 1973 members of the Dutch equivalent of the Section and of the Netherlands Geological Survey visited Britain and examined the work of the Section in the field so that they could apply our experience as a basis for advancing geological and physiographic conservation in their own country. Also, the Section's case at the Barton Inquiry (see below) drew support from fourteen organisations in seven overseas countries.

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SYSTEMATIC REVISION OF GEOLOGICAL SSSI's

PHASE V - THE CARBONIFEROUS

As was recorded in Information Circular 8, the preparatory work for Phase V of the Section's systematic revision programme was completed in the spring of 1973. Seventy-two experts were consulted and from them details of 261 localities of interest were obtained. During the 1973 field season these were inspected and 44 of the most important were found to be acceptable for scheduling as SSSI's.

PHASE VI - THE DEVONIAN/OLD RED SANDSTONE

A partial revision of the coverage of Old Red Sandstone SSSI's was carried out during 1973, the main area of investigation being the Midland Valley of Scotland. Over 40 sites were proposed and after field inspection 4 were accepted and passed to the Regional staff for scheduling as SSSI's. In 1974 this revision is to be extended to cover all England, Scotland and Wales and experts have already been consulted. The fieldwork is to begin in June and it is hoped that the survey will be completed in the present year. Anyone wishing to submit further site proposals should send them to:- "Devonian Revision", The Geology and Physiography Section, Nature Conservancy Council, Foxhold House, Thornford Road, Crookham Common, Newbury, Berks., quoting the grid reference and supplying a draft statement of interest and references to more important relevant literature.

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PHASE VIII - THE ORDOVICIAN

The International Ordovician Symposium is to be held in Britain in mid September and work on the Phase VIII of the systematic revision programme has accordingly been brought forward to 1974 so that full advantage can be taken of the Symposium and its associated field meetings. The Section would be grateful if attention could be drawn to important localities, exposing Ordovician rocks, quoting grid reference, interest and important relevant literature. These should be sent to:- "Ordovician Revision", The Geology and Physiography Section, Nature Conservancy Council, Foxhold House, Thornford Road, Crookham Common, Newbury, Berks.,

IDENTIFICATION OF PHYSIOGRAPHIC SSSI's

The erection of a national network of physiographic SSSI's commenced in 1972 and already preparatory work has been completed for England to the south and east of the outcrop of the base of the Chalk, all Wales, the Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland, the Scottish coast from Cape Wrath to the Tay, the Southern Uplands, the Peak District and Cornwall. In many of these areas sites have been selected and passed to the Regions for scheduling as SSSI's. Although at present progress has been slowed by staff changes, it is expected that the primary selection of the most important physiographic sites will be completed and implemented within the next 3 or 4 years.

In allocating priorities within this primary survey, special attention has been paid to the possible threats posed by the development of North Sea oil and gas. The Section's work in Shetland has, in particular, been directed towards this end and forms part of a larger project which considers biological as well as geological and physiographic factors. Following the fieldwork carried out in 1972, three members of the Section re-visited Shetland in early 1974 to update the earlier results in the light of further oil discoveries and development proposals, and will report their findings by June 1974.

PUBLIC INQUIRIES

OGOF DYDD' BYRAF, CLWYD

A report on the major public inquiry concerning proposals to extend a quarry into the hillside above this cave was included in Information Circular 8. The Geology and Physiography Section and the North Wales Region of the Nature Conservancy joined with the Cave Research Group (now part of a new body, the British Cave Research Association) to present a combined case which constituted the leading objection.

The Secretary of State for Wales has now refused the planning application. Though this decision is most satisfactory and of great significance in the development of cave conservation, the refusal was coupled with recommendations that require considerably more scientific information to be gathered if the long-term future of the cave system is to be ensured.

The quarry company concerned have now submitted a new application which excludes the cave and the Conservancy is currently negotiating access arrangements.

CHESIL BEACH, DORSET

In February 1973 the Geology and Physiography Section assisted the South West Regional Office in presenting evidence at a public inquiry concerning the removal of shingle from Chesil Beach. The Conservancy contested the application in view of their grave doubts whether the continued removal of pebbles over a long period would distort the natural grading of the pebbles on the beach, and lower the value of Chesil Beach as a unique research site. The County Planning Authorities on their part were concerned that continued removal of shingle would reduce the efficacy of Chesil Beach as a natural sea defence.

The Secretary of State refused the planning application in view of the doubts about the long-term repercussions of such pebble picking. The result of this inquiry is of particular importance in view of a number of existing permissions which are due to come up for renewal within the next few years.

BARTON, HAMPSHIRE

On 30th April 1974 the Geology and Physiography Section were the sole major objectors at an Inquiry into a proposal to extend the sea defence works to the east of Barton.

Highcliffe to Milford Site of Special Scientific Interest is of international importance as the type section of the Bartonian Stage (Upper Eocene). Further loss of exposure due to an extension of defence works on this coast would severely reduce its scientific value and was consequently unacceptable. The Conservancy called Messrs. P. Nuttall and J. Hooker of the British Museum (Natural History) and Dr. S. J. Craig-Smith of the University of East Anglia as expert witnesses.

In support of its case the Nature Conservancy Council was able to submit over 30 letters to illustrate the site's international importance and its economic value as a type section, with particular reference to continental shelf exploration for oil. These letters were provided by the Geological Surveys of Denmark and the Netherlands, universities, museums and individuals in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland and the United States, as well as from British scientific societies and the oil industry.

The result of this inquiry will not be known for some months.

WARDEN POINT, SHEPPEY, KENT

The Conservancy attended a public inquiry on the 7th June 1973 into an appeal against refusal of planning permission for a chalet development on the cliff top. Should such development near to the cliff edge be permitted, it would inevitably increase the demand for coastal protection works which, in turn, would threaten the scientific interest of this classic London Clay site. The Minister rejected the appeal.

Another public inquiry concerning the extension of a caravan park within this site is to be held on 12th August 1974 and the Conservancy is currently preparing the scientific case.

SITES CURRENTLY UNDER THREAT

OGOF FFYNNON DDU, POWYS

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu is a cave system whose passages exceed 20 miles in total length and ranks as the longest in Britain and one of the ten longest in the world. It is by far the most important British cave system with regard to its physical and biological scientific interest. Part of the cave is overlain by a quarry which, if deepened, could break into some of the passages. Currently the quarry company is endeavouring to obtain planning permission to increase the extent of its workings in a direction which would not affect the cave. The planning authorities have agreed to this extension on condition that the company reach a permanent agreement with the Nature Conservancy Council whereby their workings will avoid the known passages. As the extension of the quarry departs from the existing development plan, the Welsh Office have called in the application: should a public inquiry result the Conservancy will contest this in the scientific interest.

DUNGENESS, KENT

This shingle foreland of international scientific importance is under increasing pressure from gravel companies and water abstractors who wish to construct bunded reservoirs. The Conservancy is currently negotiating with these interests and the planning authorities in an attempt to save the most important parts of the foreland.

COPT POINT, FOLKESTONE, KENT

An outline planning application has been submitted for a major hotel and marina development on the outcrop of the Gault Clay at Folkestone which would affect the world standard stratotype section of the Albian Stage for which there is no suitable alternative in North West Europe.

The Conservancy has made strong representation against this development.

NEW LOCAL AND TRUST NATURE RESERVES

WORM'S HEATH, SURREY

This classic pit exposes Chalk pinnacles with Thanet Sand and Blackheath Beds occupying intervening solution pockets. It has had a rather checkered history whilst partial infilling of the quarry has been underway for the last 15 years. One pinnacle was selected for permanent preservation but there was a problem as to who should be responsible for maintenance work on the site including fencing.

Surrey County Council have accepted management responsibility for this site and it has now been designated a Local Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The powers to create LNR's have seldom been used, and this is the first geological Local Nature Reserve in Britain. Its declaration therefore is a landmark in the history of geological conservation.

STENDER'S QUARRY, MITCHELDEAN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation have purchased this quarry, better known to geologists as Cement Works Quarry, which exposes the top of the Devonian and the lower part of the Carboniferous Limestone. The site has suffered chronic difficulties over access and it is therefore particularly welcome to learn that the Trust has secured this quarry specifically for the benefit of the geological community, and hope that the full burden of the purchase price (£1,500) will not fall on the local naturalists of Gloucestershire.

The Geologists' Association has donated £50 in recognition of the value of the quarry to its members and Gloucestershire County Council have contributed £250 in view of the value of the quarry to educational bodies within the county. Further response to the Trust's appeal will provide encouragement for Trusts to acquire further geological reserves of this sort.

REPORTED ABUSE OF GEOLOGICAL SITES

It is disturbing that since the appearance of Information Circular No. 8 the Section has received a markedly increased number of complaints about the behaviour of geological parties and the abuse of exposures.

The chief agent of the National Trust has complained of widespread hammering and collecting of rock samples on the Trust's properties. This activity is increasing and causing considerable concern, especially in North Wales and Cornwall. Such activities are a breach of National Trust by-laws and while the National Trust is happy for geologists to make educational use of its properties where there is unrestricted access, they have no right to indulge in activities which would not be tolerated from other members of the general public. If you wish to hammer and collect on National Trust properties, the Trust's permission should first be sought.

Bute County Council have expressed concern at the extent to which rock outcrops are being eroded on the Island of Arran through the activities of geologists. Arran has long been one of the most popular areas for geological fieldwork in Britain but recently there has been disquiet at the extent of the damage caused. All university departments, schools and other educational institutions who visit the island should seek to avoid incidents and to ensure that opposition to field parties does not become further aroused, nor the geological interest further damaged. Clearly, if geologists are to continue to be regarded as welcome visitors on Arran, the standard of behaviour of at least some visiting parties has got to be improved.

Lady Jean Fforde, a large landowner in Arran, has also contacted the Conservancy commenting on the excessive collecting done by field parties on her estates and on the disturbance caused to shooting tenants by individual geologists. She particularly requests that persons wishing to visit her estates in the Stalking Season (September to November) contact the Head Keeper, "Strabane", Brodick, Isle of Arran, so that disturbance of this sort can be avoided. At all seasons of the year permission to take field parties on to her land should also be sought.

The Cat Ghyll section in the Lake District has not only suffered excessive hammering, but the Conservancy's Regional office reports that the excessive number of visits is severely damaging the vegetation. This locality is of international importance for its mosses and lichens and it is requested that this interest be respected by visiting geologists.

Swindale Beck and the nearby Moorhouse National Nature Reserve in the North Pennines have already been mentioned in an earlier Information Circular in connection

with serious misbehaviour by visiting parties. Despite this, further complaints continue to be received. It is recommended that Swindale Beck should not be visited by student parties in the immediate future and attention is drawn to the need to obtain a permit to collect on the Moorhouse NNR. Such permits can be obtained from the Warden, Moorhouse Field Station, Garrigill, Alston, Cumberland.

The exposures of Woolhope Limestone 100 yards north of Birches Farm in West Malvern have been so extensively hammered that the section is becoming unstable and debris scattered over the road. The owner is extremely concerned at the misuse of this exposure and has threatened to wall it up. To avoid this threat, party leaders are requested to prevent hammering at this exposure.

Within Mortimer Forest on the Shropshire-Herefordshire border there occur a number of reference sections in Wenlock and Ludlow strata. These are small and not suitable for general collecting and it has been reported that several have been badly damaged through overuse. Party leaders are requested to restrict collecting to samples required for serious research and are reminded that the access arrangements imposed by the Forestry Commission should be strictly followed. In particular, vehicles are not allowed on the forest tracks without permission.

It is believed that a party of geologists were responsible for uprooting and trampling a number of rare plants in Rudge End Quarry, Herefordshire. The quarry lies in Forestry Commission land and is managed by the Herefordshire Naturalists Trust as a biological reserve. Care should be taken at this site to ensure that damage to the vegetation does not occur.

#### ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACCESS

Permission to visit Oakley Railway Junction Pit, Bedfordshire may be obtained during the week from the tip depot offices close to the quarry. For visits during the weekend prior permission is required from Bedford District Council Offices, 41/43 Goldington Road, Bedford.

Information and permission for access to Docks Clay Pit, Wiltshire may be obtained from Mr. S. Miles, Devizes Section Inspector, Canal Lock, Devizes, Wiltshire.

Since the last Circular appeared a procedure for permitting access to Woodham Brick Pit, Buckinghamshire, has been devised with S. Grundon Services (Western) Ltd. Those wishing to visit the pit should obtain clearance from the Geology and Physiography Section of the Nature Conservancy before applying to Grundon Services at Woodham. Visitors are advised not to arrive at the pit without arranging permission since they are likely to be turned away by the pit manager. The telephone number of S. Grundon Services (Western) Ltd. is now Waddesdon 651 and not Waddesdon 219 as mentioned in the last circular.

#### ROAD SCHEMES & PIPELINES

Owing to the paper shortage details of current schemes have been omitted from this Circular. Information on particular projects can be obtained from the Section on request.