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Notice

REGIONALLY IMPORTANT GEOLOGICAL AND GEOMORPHOLOGICAL SITES IN DEVON: PROGRESS WITH EARTH SCIENCE CONSERVATION

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INTRODUCTION TO RIGS

In 1990, the Nature Conservancy Council launched its Earth Science Conservation Strategy which included the concept of RIGS (Regionally important geological and geomorphological sites). The aim is to notify sites whose geological significance is not sufficient to attract statutory protection as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), but which are considered worthy of conservation on account of their local value for earth science education, for research, for historical or aesthetic reasons.

The setting up and running of local RIGS schemes (usually county by county) has been encouraged by NCC, and now English Nature, by forming groups of interested volunteers. The initial tasks of a RIGS group are to gather local site information, to select appropriate sites from those nominated, to involve landowners and to notify local authorities. In the longer term the RIGS group should monitor, manage and enhance sites, and add or remove sites from the list.

DEVON RIGS

The Devon Wildlife Trust organised an inaugural meeting for a Devon RIGS Group in April 1991, at Exeter Museum, to which all potentially interested parties were invited. These included local authorities, museums, local geological societies, higher education establishments, conservation bodies and other professional geologists. This meeting agreed the establishment of a Devon RIGS Group and a smaller Steering Group was self-selected, which has met at regular intervals since (this is comprised of the authors listed above). The Steering Group reports back to the main group at occasional meetings.

Having studied the guidelines for RIGS schemes, the Steering Group devised a site nomination card and accompanying explanatory notes for circulation to all interested parties. It has also investigated the possibilities of funding (so far without success), obtained publicity through the media, and

clarified the list of SSSIs in Devon.

One important policy decision was made, which was to exclude coastal sites from the scheme at the present time, but to review this policy later. On receipt of completed nomination forms or of information in any other form, for example lists of sites by name and grid reference only, a database has been established on PC at Exeter Museum. About one hundred sites were nominated during 1992, irregularly distributed around the county.

In order to make a start on the notification procedure, the county was divided into its ten local authority districts and the smallest one, Exeter City, chosen for this purpose. Five sites were selected as follows:

- Pinhoe Brickpit (Crackington Formation)
- Pocombe quarry (Exeter Permian Volcanics)
- Heavitree Quarry (Permian Breccia)
- Bishop's Court quarry (Permian Sandstone)
- Ferry Road, Topsham (Quaternary Fluvial Deposits)

These sites are currently in the process of being discussed with landowners and notified to the local authority.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

There must still be many potential RIGS sites which have not been brought to the attention of the Steering Group and the process of seeking nominations will continue as long as is necessary. The assistance of Ussher Society members in this important task is requested.

Selection and notification will proceed in other local authority districts, as sufficient coverage is achieved. Progress has been less rapid than anticipated, partly because the Steering Group is composed entirely of full-time professionals. Information on notified sites will be made available as the scheme develops.