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The use of geological sites by schools

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Introduction

Successful management of geological SSSIs (as well as RIGS [Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites] and other non-statutory designations) requires that the sites are used in a responsible manner; and an awareness of this requirement therefore needs to be raised. This report was commissioned as part of a contribution towards the achievement of positive management on geological SSSIs, as well as the promotion of geological conservation through encouraging the use of these sites as an educational resource. Part of this contribution might be achieved through promoting the responsible use of geological SSSIs by schools. The use of these sites by schools may only increase if on-site interpretation, events linked to sites, teaching packs and other appropriate tools are designed in a way that gives them relevance to the National Curriculum. In this way, geological conservation messages can also be communicated, contributing in the long term to a better understanding and greater public support for geological conservation.

What was done

English Nature commissioned a review of information relating to the use of geological sites by schools for the purpose of assessing how English Nature might promote the educational use of some of these sites. The review covers:

- An analysis of the Earth Science element within the Science and Geography sections of the National Curriculum, identifying those areas where potential links may be made with sites.
- A brief survey of primary and secondary schools, identifying the practical factors that discourage field work.
- A brief survey of sites where some form of Earth science educational or interpretation takes place.

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Results and conclusions

Although potential links between geological sites and the National Curriculum exist, the total Earth Science content of the curriculum has been significantly reduced over the past decade, whilst its elements have become dispersed over the Science and Geography curricula.

Legal, financial and logistical issues have become increasingly burdensome over the past decade; acting to discourage field visits.

The foot and mouth disease epidemic may have acted to change patterns of usage.

There appears to be a 'non-field work' culture developing in schools and the amount of field work carried out in schools has declined significantly in the past decade.

English Nature's viewpoint

This review represents a step in addressing the management of geological sites through encouraging their use for educational purposes, in that it identifies a trend of decreasing field-work caused by a several factors. English Nature should be lending its support to efforts made by other organisations seeking to reverse this trend. English Nature may also be able to achieve some success through the identification of sites where clear links to elements of the National Curriculum can be demonstrated, and where many of the financial, legal, and logistical obstacles reported on below may be overcome. Such sites are likely to be on National Nature Reserves or within or close to urban areas. English Nature should also consider the promotion of such sites through the development of partnerships with other organisations that are promoting field-work.

Selected references

KING, C. 2001. Earth Science Teaching in England and Wales today: progress and challenges, 59-67. *Teaching Earth Science*, 26, pt 2.

NUNDY, S. 1999. *Raising Achievement through the Environment - the case for fieldwork and field Centres*. National Association of Field Studies Officers.

Further information

For the full report or other publications on this subject, please contact the Enquiry Service on 01733 455100/101/102 or email enquiries@english-nature.org.uk

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