

English Nature Research Report 505

Mineral collecting and conservation - hammering out a future?

Proceedings of a one-day conference in Salford, 16 April 2003

Report Authors : Hannah Townley, 2003

Keywords: Mineral collecting; collecting code of conduct; site management; conference

Introduction

Mineral collecting is scientifically and educationally important and a hobby enjoyed by many. However, many mineral sites are finite and the issue of sustainable collecting is becoming increasingly important. Collecting is fundamental to mineralogical research and important for educational, commercial and aesthetic purposes, but indiscriminate activity can easily deplete or destroy a mineralogical site.

'Mineral collecting and conservation - hammering out a future?' was co-convened by English Nature, The Russell Society and the Geological Society of London's Geoconservation Commission. The idea for this conference arose due to the issues surrounding over-collecting, collecting bans, collecting permit policies and increased powers for English Nature through the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). This conference builds on English Nature's previous experience of working towards sustainable fossil collecting (Bassett and others 2001).

What was done

The aim of the conference was to encourage discussion about the different issues surrounding mineral collecting and the best way of conserving the available mineral resource for future use by all interest groups. The conference provided an opportunity to share views and identify and discuss the issues among different user groups.

The speakers and delegates reflected a wide range of views on the issues surrounding mineral collecting and included representatives of: the statutory conservation bodies; professional, amateur and academic collectors; museums; and landowners. The conference concluded with an open debate, which discussed some of the issues raised by the speakers and delegates.

Results and conclusions

The debate agreed areas of common ground and discussed areas of disagreement. Discussions covered five main themes: the mineralogical resource, collecting methods, threats to sites, threats to collecting, and ways of dealing with threats. The results of the debate are listed below:

- The mineralogical resource includes mineralogical sites, the minerals themselves, the knowledge of those who collect from, study or manage mineralogical sites and the different repositories for minerals.

continued >>>

Research information note - English Nature Research Report xxx - continued

- Collecting methods depend upon the type of site being collected from and why the material is being collected. The reasons for rescue collecting, where specimens should be stored and how they should be curated were also discussed. Different management approaches are needed for different types of site. For example, a more prudent approach to collecting is required for a limited vein outcrop or mine dump than for mineral vein being extracted by active quarrying. Two of the questions left unresolved were, 'should material be collected or left in situ?' and 'what defines responsible collecting?'
- Threats relating to mineral sites include mineral collecting (small-scale), mineral extraction (large-scale), site development or restoration, and ignorance of a site's value.
- Threats relating to collecting mineral specimens include collecting bans, and inexpert, thoughtless or over-collecting. Access to sites is a particularly relevant issue, especially in active quarries, where access has been limited by health and safety legislation.
- Methods of dealing with perceived threats were discussed. This discussion highlighted the need for joined-up thinking and increased dialogue between the different site users and managers. Improved dialogue between site users will raise awareness of other important features (for example botanical or archaeological interests) and generally benefit the conservation of these sites.

One of the main outcomes of the conference was to highlight the need for further discussion between all of the parties involved with the different aspects of mineral collecting. These discussions need to develop the idea of 'responsible' mineral collecting and attempt to produce a mineral collecting code of conduct, which could be endorsed by all the stakeholders.

English Nature's viewpoint

English Nature considers this conference and research report to be a starting point for further discussions about the idea of 'responsible' mineral collecting and for the development of a mineral collecting code of conduct.

English Nature intends to produce a leaflet outlining its approach to mineral collecting issues and, in particular, its definition of responsible mineral collecting. English Nature would like to encourage other organisations with an interest in mineral collecting issues to consider their views on responsible collecting as an aid to future discussions.

Selected references

BASSETT, M.G., and others, eds. 2001. *A Future for Fossils*. National Museum of Wales Geological Series No 19. Cardiff.

BEVINS, R., ed. 1993. Conserving Britain's Mineralogical Heritage. *Journal of the Russell Society*, 5(1), 34-63.

YOUNG, B. 1994. Mineral collectors as conservationists. In: D. O'HALLORAN, and others, eds. 1994. *Geological and Landscape Conservation*, 439-442. London: Geological Society.

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

For further information about the work of English Nature, please visit our website at: www.english-nature.org.uk