



Down to Earth *extra*

Issue 145 January 2025

NEWS FLASH...

2025 trips...

- Get your booking in **NOW!**
- Summer School - book now!

NEW Winter Zoom courses...

- Hot rocks!
- Geology of the British Isles
- The Wednesday Club - all new lively topics!

What are you waiting for?

A reminder, if one were needed, that whilst there were a lot of grey and dreary days in 2024, there were also some sunny ones! This is one of the magnificent exposures of Lewisian Gneiss on the north coast of Scotland around Sango Bay and Sango Sands to the east of Durness.

It's one of those places where you just catch your breath and go 'wow' - and then try and explain what's going on!
(Image: Chris Darmon)

From the Editorial team...

The one thing that you can be certain about in the Earth sciences is that sooner or later something will be discovered that will shake up what has hitherto been seen as the accepted norm. If you read the news items in the last issue of **Down to Earth extra** you could have been forgiven for thinking that it was the April issue! What could we be referring to?

Nothing less than a complete re-imaging of what has been happening in the North Atlantic these past 50+ million years! For some time now, firstly beneath Iceland and then beneath the Greenland, Iceland, Faroes Ridge (GIFR) scientists have been reporting that geophysics is indicating the presence of significant amounts of buried continental crust below a thick covering of basalts. In Iceland, this was thought to be a part of Jan Mayan Island.

Now, work that has been undertaken in the David Strait between Canada and Greenland has revealed a new and isolated block of continental crust which has added to the mystery. The team which includes Dr Jordan Phethean from the University of Derby here in the UK, is now going so far as to suggest that the North Atlantic may now be only in the process of being stretched and broken apart.

If this is the case, then we probably need to re-think the North American and Eurasian plate hypothesis. Perhaps the 'special relationship' between the UK and the USA goes as far as sharing the same tectonic plate! As Donald Trump prepares to re-enter the White House that's something to think about!

If further research confirms these initial findings, it will radically reshape how we think about plate tectonics in general, including the proportions of oceanic v continental crust around the world. If nothing else, it keeps us on our toes - Happy New Year!

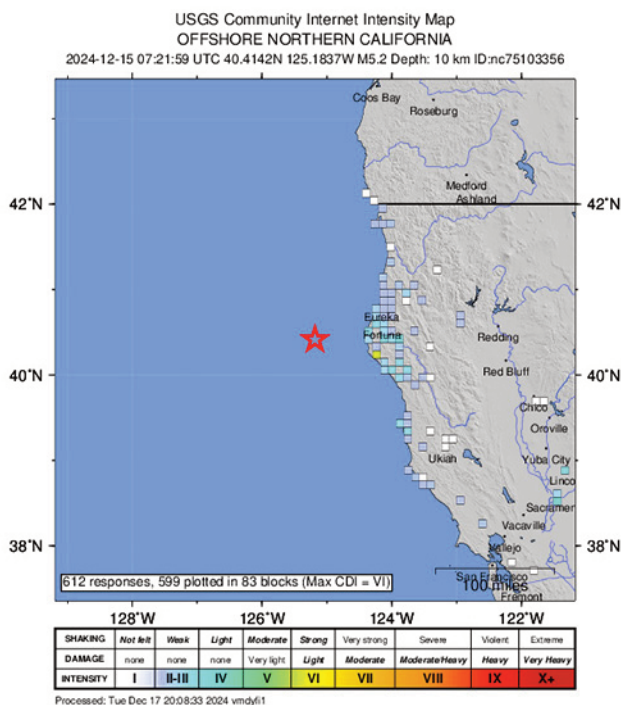
Chris Darmon & Colin Schofield
The Down to Earth Editorial Team

Sign up for a Zoom course this Winter - see page 11!



news update

Increased seismic activity detected around the San Andreas fault line in California...



Magnitude 5.3 earthquake 77km WNW of Petrolia, California on December 15th. (Image: Courtesy of USGS)

Scientists are seeing an increase in the number of daily earthquakes being recorded, particularly offshore affecting parts of California. Whilst nobody is yet talking about a 'big one' affecting heavily populated areas onshore, it is nevertheless beginning to be seen as concerning.

What is being seen is an increase in the number of daily seismic events at much lower levels, with 175 in one week alone in December. These appear to be minor movements on a number of faults in the area, which can be interpreted as a healthy sign that all is well with the more major faults.

As always, we will continue to observe and report on what we see.

Meanwhile in Vanuatu...

On 17th December a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck the remote island nation of Vanuatu in the South Pacific. Vanuatu is made up of some 80 separate islands and initial reports indicated a high level of destruction.

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The earthquake struck some 30km from the capital Port Vila. There are reports of very significant damage to buildings and at least 16 people have lost their lives, with over 200 injured. Additionally, damage to infrastructure has been caused by landslides that have been triggered by the earthquake.

Vanuatu, a low-lying archipelago of some 80 islands in the South Pacific, is located west of Fiji and thousands of kilometres east of northern Australia. The nation sits in a seismically active area, and is susceptible to frequent large earthquakes and other natural disasters.

On December 21st. there was a further earthquake of magnitude 6.1 which has caused further misery to the inhabitants, as around 1,700 people are reported to be homeless following the previous earthquake.

Meanwhile in Iceland, the latest eruption is officially declared as 'over', but there's movement at an old volcano...

These days it seems that no sooner is one Icelandic eruption is over, there's another one about to begin. With the latest Svartsengi eruption now over, visitors are once again able to flock to the Blue Lagoon, just in time for Christmas.



*A reminder of the Bardarbunga eruption, back in 2014
(Image: Wikipedia)*

Meanwhile seismologists are recording ever more activity over in the east, where an old name - Bardarbunga - is once again on people's lips, even though it last erupted some ten years ago. Apparently there's been reports of swelling in the volcanic system with the suggestion that magma is moving upwards. This seems to be one to watch for 2025.

"I just dug up a complete mastodon jaw in my backyard" New York homeowner...

A homeowner in Orange County in New York unearthed a complete mastodon jaw in his backyard, the first such find in more than 11 years.

NBC News reported:

The mastodon jaw, which was believed to be from an adult, was unearthed by researchers after the homeowner spotted it coming out from his lawn. The homeowner initially found two teeth hidden by a plant on the property, and after digging just a few inches underneath that, two more teeth were found.



The mastodon jaw being unearthed in the backyard of New York home owner. (Image: New York State Museum)

"When I found the teeth and examined them in my hands, I knew they were something special and decided to call in the experts," the homeowner said.

Staff from the museum and university led excavation efforts after that, and uncovered the well-preserved jaw of the mastodon — an ancient relative of modern elephants. A piece of a toe bone and a rib fragment were found as well, officials said.

"While the jaw is the star of the show, the additional toe and rib fragments offer valuable context and the potential for additional research," said Dr. Cory Harris, Chair of SUNY Orange's Behavioural Sciences Department. "We are also hoping to further explore the immediate area to see if there are any additional bones that were preserved."

Volcanic Experiences 2025

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*How's this for a fine set of teeth?
(Image: New York State Museum)*

The fossils will undergo carbon dating and analysis in order to determine just how long ago the mammal was roaming the area, what the diet consisted of, and details of its habitat, according to officials, who noted that the discovery will be featured in public programming starting in 2025.

“This discovery is a testament to the rich paleontological history of New York and the ongoing efforts to understand its past,” said Dr. Robert Feranec, director of Research & Collections and curator of Ice Age Animals at the New York State Museum. “This mastodon jaw provides a unique opportunity to study the ecology of this magnificent species, which will enhance our understanding of the Ice Age ecosystems from this region.”

Oil giant Shell to join forces with Equinor in the North Sea...

With all that's going on in the field of UK energy supplies right now it's easy to lose track of the fact that the North Sea is still quite a major producer of oil and gas. The name of Royal Dutch Shell has been synonymous with the North Sea for some 50 years.

Now Shell has decided to join up with Equinor in a new joint venture that will combine their respective North Sea assets. This is normal when a field is coming towards the end of its natural life as the North Sea is. The new company will be based in Aberdeen.

GEOLOGY - ISLE OF ARRAN

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An unusual present idea - limited edition...

‘The Cream of the Crop 2024’

As part of their work for Geo Supplies, your editorial team, Chris Darmon and Colin Schofield go to some very interesting places around the British Isles. Whilst they are in these places they often pick up rock specimens, most of which go to students and institutions both here and even around the world.

However there are also some rare or unusual rocks that don't form part of our regular stock and it is these that we've gathered together into a limited edition collection that we are offering as our 'Cream of the Crop 2024'.

The set comprises 12 carefully chosen specimens from around the British Isles including examples of sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks. We'll be putting the sets together during January and they will be available from February, when the exact list will be named. Each set comes boxed with notes and costs £49.95 including postage.

Purchase online at: geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on: 0114 245 5746.

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Cliffe Hill Quarry gets permission to expand...

Midland Quarry Products Ltd has obtained permission from Leicestershire County Council to greatly expand its operations at Cliffe Hill Quarry Stanton under Bardon.

The Company currently works a Precambrian igneous complex for roadstone aggregate, close to the M1 motorway and a freight railway line. The new permission will release around 30 million tonnes of new reserves and keep the quarry in operation until 2042.

With this latest announcement, the supply of hard rock aggregates, especially for London and the Southeast, looks secure in the short and medium term.



*Cliffe Hill Quarry, Leicestershire
(Image: Mindat)*

Permian 'lost world' found in the Italian Alps...

This comes from Live Science:

Stunningly preserved fossils of reptilian footprints and underbellies discovered last year in the Italian Alps have helped researchers unearth a tropical lakeside ecosystem that predates dinosaurs.

A woman hiking in the Italian Alps discovered a fragment of a 280 million-year-old ecosystem, complete with footprints, plant fossils and even the imprints of raindrops, researchers have confirmed.



Down to Earth - in print...

If you've enjoyed reading this Down to Earth extra, you'll love our quarterly Down to Earth! It's a 32-page quality magazine in full colour that's packed with up to the minute geological news and articles. You can get your hands on this either in print or electronic formats. Why not request a FREE sample electronic copy of the current issue?

For 2025 why not treat yourself or a loved one to a gift subscription? Go to: www.geosupplies.co.uk and enter the online shop or ring us on 0114 245 5746.

Down to Earth is published quarterly. Subscribe now for 2025 for just £17.00 in the UK. We'll send you the next 4 issues, to the end of 2025 and back issues from 2023/4. For an additional £30.00 (UK only) we'll send you a parcel of back issues - around 50! Alternatively, take a 2023/4 e-subscription for £10.00. Additionally, all subscribers will get **DtoE extra** FREE each month.

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Extra January 2025

Claudia Steffensen was walking behind her husband in the Valtellina Orobic Mountains Park in Lombardy in 2023 when she stepped on a rock that looked like a slab of cement, The Guardian reported. "I then noticed these strange circular designs with wavy lines," Steffensen told the newspaper. "I took a closer look and realized they were footprints."

Scientists analysed the rock and found that the footprints belong to a prehistoric reptile, raising questions about what other clues beyond Steffensen's "rock zero" were hiding in these Alpine heights.



A reconstruction of what the 280 million year old lake environment may have looked like.

(Image: Drawing by Fabio Manucci)

Experts subsequently visited the site multiple times and found evidence of an entire ecosystem dating back to the Permian period (299 million to 252 million years ago). The Permian was characterized by a fast-warming climate and culminated in an extinction event known as the "Great Dying," which wiped out 90% of Earth's species.

Traces of this ecosystem consist of fossilized footprints from reptiles, amphibians, insects and arthropods that often align to form "tracks," according to a translated statement. Alongside these tracks, researchers found ancient traces of seeds, leaves and stems, as well as imprints of raindrops and waves that lapped at the shores of a prehistoric lake. Evidence of this ancient ecosystem was found up to 3,000 meters high in the mountains and down in the bottom of valleys, where landslides have deposited fossil-bearing rocks over the eons.

The Editor notes: You never know what you're going to stumble across on a mountain walk!



Down to Earth

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Announcing our seventh Summer School...

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- A visit to the Peak District Mining Museum in Matlock Bath
- The Triassic rocks of Alderley Edge
- Visit to Wollaton Hall Museum, Nottingham
- The Torrs at New Mills - by train from Grindleford
- Geology of Matlock and Matlock Bath
- Geology of Monsal Head & Dale (see image above)
- Coach/minibus transport to field locations
- Full board accommodation in single ensuite rooms (can also be double rooms)
- Evening talks and activities from visiting speakers and our own team
- Social events and opportunities for down time

Everyone is invited to join us for our annual Summer School. The cost is £1395.00 per person whether you are in a single or shared room.

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Great geo-adventures in 2025 begin here...



The Claerwen Valley is part of the area flooded by the Elan Valley Reservoir in the Heart of Wales.
(Image: Cwm Elan Valley)

We still have a few vacancies on most of our 2025 trips. We can accommodate a few more on Cyprus now thanks to a couple of cancellations.

Most trips have only a small number of vacancies, so act quickly to secure your places. This is particularly the case if you are looking for a single room.

To view a brochure, go to our website at:
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Remember that booking forms are only available direct from us:

Email: downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk

Residential Field trip programme 2025...

All trips are available to book NOW!

2025

- Isle of Arran, March 30-April 6
- Troodos Mountains, Cyprus, April 24-May 1
- Scarborough, Yorkshire Coast June 1-6
- Mull & Ardnamurchan, June 11-18
- Western Lake District, June 25-30
- Heart of Wales, July 9-16
- Peak District Summer School, August 9-16
- Iceland, North & East Fjords, September 1-10
- NEW! Torbay, South Devon, October 8-15

Early booking is advised, especially if you are looking for a single room.

Search online at www.geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on 0114 245 5746
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If you haven't joined one of our residential field trips before, what can you expect?

- *Our residential field trips are suitable for adults of all levels of interest and geological knowledge.*
- *Our trips are friendly and informal and usually comprise 15-20 people. Overseas trips are usually larger.*
- *We usually make use of comfortable small hotels and guest houses and all meals are included.*
- *You have the services of Chris Darmon and Colin Schofield as field leaders. Both are highly experienced and knowledgeable field geologists.*
- *For some trips we have a hired minibus but on other trips we will use shared cars, or even public transport.*
- *Dates shown in this listing are the start and finish dates.*
- *Where prices are quoted, they are per person in a shared twin/double room.*

If you still have any questions or queries, don't hesitate to email us at: downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk or tel: 0114 245 5746

Before you book for 2025...

We are always pleased to welcome new people along on our trips. So if you are thinking about it, what do you need to know before you 'take the plunge'?

Who are the trips aimed at?

The short answer is that they are not aimed at any particular group of people. Our participants are mainly older retired people who want to keep their minds and bodies active, but younger people are welcome.

Some people have lots of geological field experience whilst others are complete beginners. As one person put it to us "I've forgotten all I once knew and need to come along to hear it again." Our UK trips are all small groups of 15 to 20 people maximum so we can make lots of what we say personal to you.

Will I be able to manage the walking?

We always try to keep walking to a minimum, but, almost by definition, some walking will be involved. If you can't manage a particular walk, just tell us and it will never be a problem for you not to do it. We have one person who really enjoys sketching - she's done some amazing sketches while the rest of us visit a quarry!

How do we get about on trips?

It varies a lot from trip to trip. Sometimes we hire a minibus, on other occasions we use public transport and at other times we'll make use of shared cars. Look at the details for each trip to find out.

What about accommodation?

We always try to use hotels or guest houses that have ensuite rooms as standard. Most of our accommodation will provide breakfast and evening meals, but sometimes we eat in local restaurants. We include the cost of all food, including a packed lunch for each field day.

We prefer to use small family run hotels and guest houses but they are getting harder to find, so sometimes we use larger hotels such as Premier Inns and hotels in the Leisureplex group. Once again, see the individual trip brochures for details.

Are your bookings safe with us?

Yes indeed they are! We've been in the business of running trips a long time and ensure that all the money you pay us is safe in a client trust account until your trip is completed.

The 2025 programme...

We are delighted to inform you that we have now completed our programme of residential field trips for 2025. With a slightly reduced number of trips, demand was always going to be strong. Accordingly you are strongly advised to get your booking as soon as you can.

To make a booking email us at:

downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on: 0114 245 5746

Whilst the brochures are, or will be, available on our website, booking forms are only available from us. You can then arrange to pay the deposit and we'll send you the booking form.

Isle of Arran, March 30-April 6

£1395

Welcome to the Isle of Arran that is the original geologists' paradise. James Hutton was probably the first person to study the geology of Arran in 1786 when he described an unconformity at Lochranza.

Since then, thousands have trod the paths to examine the rocks! Arran is currently going down the path to become a full geopark.



Arran on a beautiful day showing the landscape and a magnificent raised beach. (Image: Scottish Geology Trust)

This trip is based at the very comfortable (and warm) Best Western Kinloch Hotel at Blackwaterfoot on the Island's quiet west coast. We spend a leisurely week examining most parts of Arran, making full use of unlimited travel on the local buses - the terminus of the main route is right outside our hotel.

At this time there are vacancies for single and twin/double rooms.

Troodos Mountains, Cyprus April 24-May 1

£1795

Come and join us as we visit the Troodos Geopark in Cyprus for the very first time. In the company of an experienced local guide and geologist we'll explore something of the magnificent geology of this great Mediterranean island.

Five nights will be spent based at the Rodin Mount Hotel in the heart of the Troodos Geopark from where we will explore the rocks of this world renowned ophiolite complex. The final part of the trip will examine some of the sedimentary rocks from a second base in the heart of old Larnaca. This is a great time of year to be visiting this upland part of Cyprus - do come and join us!

Welcome to our exciting world!



The fabulous Troodos Geopark, where geology is at the heart of the landscape

Thanks to a cancellation, we have a double or twin room available for 2 people. In addition, we can accommodate both a male and female if you are willing to share a twin room with another male or female.

Scarborough, on the Yorkshire Coast June 1-6 £895

Amazingly, we have never based a trip at Scarborough the 'queen' of the Yorkshire Coast, for the simple reason that we've never found suitable accommodation! Based at the comfortable Cumberland Hotel, we'll spend 5-nights in and around the town, taking in field



The Cumberland Hotel in Scarborough. (Image: Leisureplex)

visits to places like Filey, Forge Valley, Robin Hoods Bay and Whitby to mention just a few. This will allow us to examine rocks from the Jurassic and also the Cretaceous with lots of fossils and sedimentary structures that give us clues to ancient environments.

At the time of writing we have single and double rooms available.

Isle of Mull & Ardnamurchan June 11-18 £1695

We have managed to secure reasonably priced accommodation at the Park Lodge Hotel in Tobermory and this trip replaces the one previously advertised to Raasay.

The Isle of Mull and Ardnamurchan will put two Tertiary igneous centres at our disposal with that on Mull being one of the most imposing, whilst that on Ardnamurchan is the most accessible. We also hope to be able to take in a visit to the tiny Isle of Staffa with its famous basalt columns, depending on the weather. Another highlight

will be a visit to the Island of Iona with its Precambrian rocks.



Near the lighthouse at Ardnamurchan Point

With at least one full day on Ardnamurchan we'll be able to take in the fossiliferous Jurassic sediments as well as the basement metamorphics from the Moinian and the Tertiary igneous rocks.

At the time of writing we have only twin/double rooms available on this trip.

Western Lake District, June 25-30

£895

The Lake District is renowned for its superb landscape and scenery, but access to the central part is limited and accommodation is very expensive. We have previously stayed at Summergrove Halls in Whitehaven, but this is no longer available to us. Accordingly we've turned to Workington and the comfortable modern Premier Inn.



Amazing New Red Sandstone cliffs at St Bees. (Image: St Bees community)

From Workington we'll be able to access all of the Western Lakes, with trips to see places like Eskdale, Lake Windermere, the iron mines of West Cumbria and St Bees Head.

At the time of writing we can accommodate people in single rooms as well as twins and doubles.

Heart of Wales. July 9-16

£1295

This is one of the most unusual offerings in our 2025 programme, for the simple reason that's an area that very few people know about. Mid-Wales, or as we prefer to call it, the Heart of Wales is a sparsely populated area set in the county of Powys.

We'll be based in the quirky Neuadd Arms in the quiet village of Llanwrtyd Wells, which offers excellent food, including an afternoon tea and cake, and even an onsite brewery!

From here we'll explore the surrounding area, taking in Llandrindod Wells with its fossils, Builth Wells with its volcanic rocks, Llandeilo and its famous Ordovician rocks. We take in the local Elan Valley rocks and scenery, the minerals of Cwmystwyth and the fine cliffs of Aberystwyth.

At the time of writing we have vacancies for about five more people.

Summer School Peak District, August 9-16

£1395

For the first time in the 7-year history of our Summer School weeks we're actually returning to a place that we've visited before. Cliff College in the Peak District of Derbyshire is a well known Methodist theological college. It provides excellent ensuite bedrooms and lovely home cooked food, and makes for an ideal summer school base.



The beautiful grounds of Cliff College (Image: Cliff College)

We'll be sampling lots of the excellent local geology and giving you those added summer school bonuses of evening talks and special visits to places of cultural and historic interest as well as geology. ***We can accommodate lots more people at this stage, including people looking for a single room.***

Iceland - the North & East Fjords, September 1-11

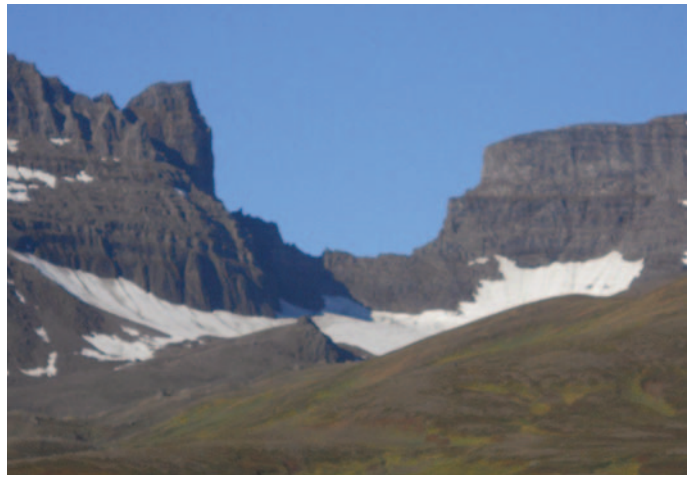
£2595

These days a lot of people go to Iceland, but they very rarely visit the north and east of country. In this trip with our usual guide and driver Ingi, we'll begin at Keflavik near the airport and then travel to Akureyri before working our way clockwise to Myvatn to the volcano Krafla before heading to the beautiful east Fjords.

We'll stop in the amazing geo-village of Borgarfjarðar Eystrí to see Iceland's most colourful rhyolitic rocks. The last time we were here we did see the Northern Lights in all their glory!

We fly back from Egilstaddir to Reykjavik and then transfer to Keflavik where we started. There's an option of an additional night at the end to have a day looking at the most recent volcanic activity on the Reykjanes peninsula and viewing the recent lavas, which will still be hot!

We can accommodate a few more on this trip.



The Eastern Fjords are beautiful in any season!

(Image: Chris Darmon)

NEW! The South Devon Riviera, Torbay, October 8-15 £1295



Distinctive Red Permian rocks of South Devon

The South Devon Riviera coast has been a holiday destination for more than 150 years and we will be staying in the family run Hotel Balmoral in Torquay. From here we will be exploring the local area that lies within the UNESCO world geopark. This is an area of great coastal scenery, with lots of Devonian sediments, plus some volcanics. As the geology is best seen from the sea, we'll ensure that we have at least one boat trip out into Torbay to get up close and personal with the cliffs and their fabulous structures. We also hope to take a trip on the Paignton and Kingswear steam railway and combine it with another boat trip on the River Dart of Totnes.

The brochure for this trip is now out and we have already taken some bookings

*For further information or to book,
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Don't worry, we don't bite!

All our educational classes and courses are friendly, informal and open to all.

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Learning with us is FUN...

We've been offering online and distance learning since before Covid and over that time hundreds of people have taken part in our learning programmes from the UK and around the world.

All our learning programmes are created and delivered by our in house team of Chris Darmon and Colin Schofield. Both are experienced teachers of distance learning over many years.

We deliver courses that are enjoyable and stimulating whilst at the same time being informative and educational. No one is required to carry out any sort of assessment and there's no entry requirements or formalities. Just sign up and go!

Announcing our new courses for winter!

The Geology of the British Isles

This course continues for a further 7-weeks in the new year. If you would like to join us this is still possible - contact us NOW to find out how you can catch up over the Christmas break.

Course dates: Starts Monday January 13 for a further 7 weeks.

Cost: Contact us for details

Zoom sessions on Mondays at 2.00 and 7.00 pm (you choose)

Hot Rocks!

In this 10-week course you'll learn all about igneous rocks and processes and how they link into plate tectonics. Igneous rocks define how our Earth works and have been around since the dawn of time.



Dykes and cone sheets at Kilchoan pier Ardnamurchan (Image: Chris Darmon)

This course will be pitched at both those who already have a body of knowledge as well as those just setting out upon their geological journey.

Course dates: Starts Thursday January 16 for 10-weeks.

Cost: Ten hour-long Zoom sessions with electronic background papers £80.00 for one person or £100.00 for 2-people studying together. Printed background papers cost an additional £20.00. Zoom sessions on Thursdays at 2.00 and 7.00 pm (you choose)



Perryfield Quarry, Isle of Portland (Image: Wikipedia)

The Wednesday club...

We're building upon the success of our Autumn series of talks with a further offering of up to ten sessions this coming Winter. Join us for an hour on a Wednesday afternoon or in the evening - it's your choice!

As you'll see, we've got an eclectic mix of subjects for you to choose from. All are designed to educate and inform you in an informal and entertaining way.

New talks for 2025

January 15	Lagerstatte - exceptional fossil sites in the UK
January 22	Gold rush! - gold mining in the UK
January 29	Bowen's reaction series for igneous rocks
February 5	Portland limestone - the Cenotaph rock
February 12	Roderick Murchison - pioneer geologist
February 26	Radiometric dating as applied to rocks
March 5	The Permian/Triassic extinction event
March 12	Milliclose - a Derbyshire lead mine
March 19	Hard rock aggregates in the UK
March 26	UK marbles - the genuine and the look alike!

Cost: Individual talks £10.00 or £15.00 for 2 people.

New talks for 2025: Take the first five sessions for £40.00, the second five for £40.00 or all ten for £70.00 or £100 for 2 people. Timings: Wednesdays at 2.00 or 7.00pm - your choice.

To register interest, email us at:

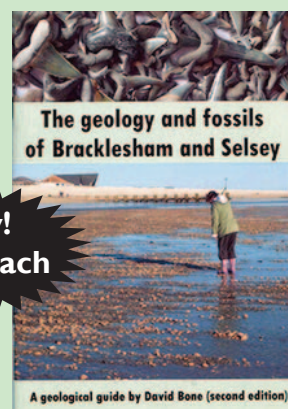
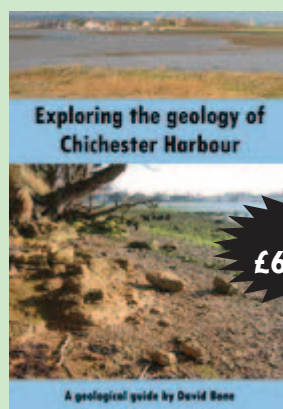
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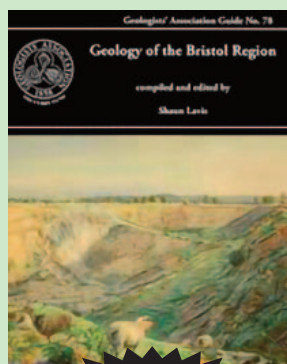
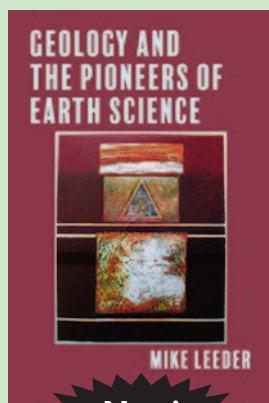
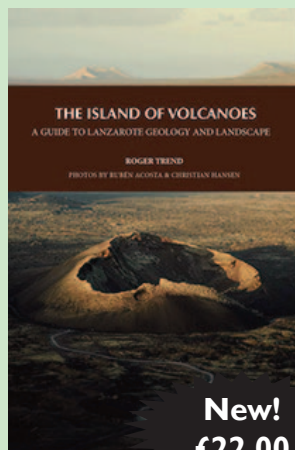
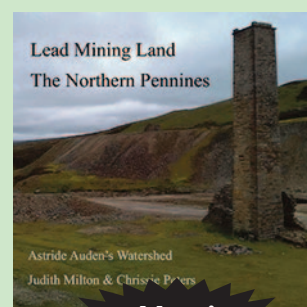
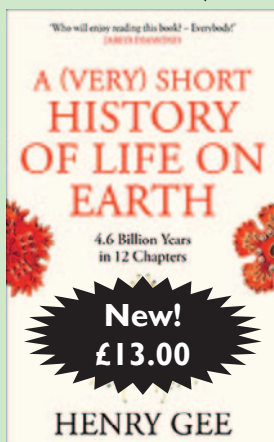
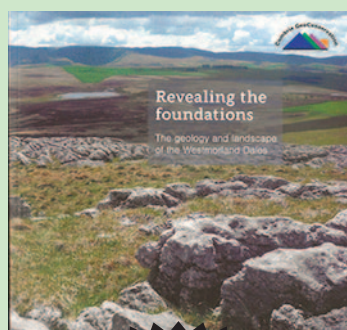
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