



Down to Earth^{Extra}

Issue 148 April 2025

NEWS FLASH...

Field trips...

- Summer & Autumn trips
- book now!

2026 Trips...

- NW Scotland, April 14-22
- Cornwall, May 1-8
- North Pennines, May 16-23
- Shetland, June
- Iceland September 13-22

All available to book now!

What are you waiting for?



This near life-sized model of a steppe mammoth (*Mammuthus trogontherii*) can be seen above the beach at West Runton on the North Norfolk coast. The skeleton was found in the nearby cliffs in 1990. The find is the largest nearly complete mammoth skeleton known, and is the oldest found in the United Kingdom.

(Image: Chris Darmon)



From the Editorial team...

Obituary - Richard Fortey - a very British palaeontologist:

It's always sad when we lose someone of the calibre of Richard Fortey, who died on March 7th, aged just 79. I'm proud to say that I got to know Richard more than 20 years ago when he was on the judging panel of what started out as the LASMO Geological Challenge - an annual award made to an individual or group from the geological grassroots who had communicated or presented geology in an outstanding way.

Communication was what Richard Fortey did supremely well. He did it through his many books and also his lectures. I once remarked to some people that I needed a dictionary when reading one of Richard's books not for his geological pronouncements but for his use of rare and unusual words that exist elsewhere in the English language. Richard was, in the truest sense, a wordsmith who went out of his way to incorporate one or more of these words but this was always alongside the amazing and compelling geological story.

But Richard was far more than just a prolific author, even if that was where so many people came to know him. Books like *Trilobite!* where he turned a humble fossil group into a bestseller or *The Earth: an intimate history*. Richard was a true academic, someone who immersed himself in whatever he was studying at the time. He was a graduate of Kings College Cambridge and the same institute awarded him a PhD and DSc. His professional career was spent at *The Natural History Museum* in London. He was also an accomplished lecturer and presenter, readily adapting his style to an audience of fellow academics or the TV viewing general public.

Above all, Richard was a gentleman and a true friend to many in the geological community. He always found time to encourage a beginner or a young person to reach their full potential. Richard was more than just a palaeontologist, he was a British palaeontologist and proud to be so.

Chris Darmon & Colin Schofield
The Down to Earth Editorial Team

Get a first look at our plans for 2026 and the chance to book your place(s) now! See pages 8-10 for details.



news update

That Ukraine-US mineral deal, what is it really all about?

On Monday March 17th, we ran two live Zoom sessions where we presented the geology and mineral resources of Ukraine to an audience of some 40 people. This was in the light of considerable global interest in the subject, generated as a result of some of the pronouncements of US President Donald J Trump, proposing a deal to acquire a stake in Ukraine's mineral resources.

In order to present the Zoom Chris & Colin carried out significant online research. We watched a number of Youtube videos, listened to a number of experts and read many documents about the subject. To start with Ukraine has a very long geological history, stretching back to the Archaean some 3.8 billion years ago.

Called the Ukrainian Shield, these basement rocks are overlain by lots of sedimentary rocks that span all the periods of the Phanerozoic. Tectonically, the most interesting area is the Dneiper-Donetsk basin zone which lies across the northern part of the country and particularly in the northeast, the very area where the fiercest battles between the Russians and Ukrainians have been taking place.

Within the Ukrainian Shield there are large deposits of banded iron formation deposits, which were used, along with some of the coal deposits to make steel in the now destroyed plant at Mariupol. It's hard to see how Ukraine will once again ever become a big steel manufacturer. As for the coal deposits, they are considered to be dangerous and are virtually non-operational.



A Ukrainian quarry deploying Soviet era plant, which is common across the country.

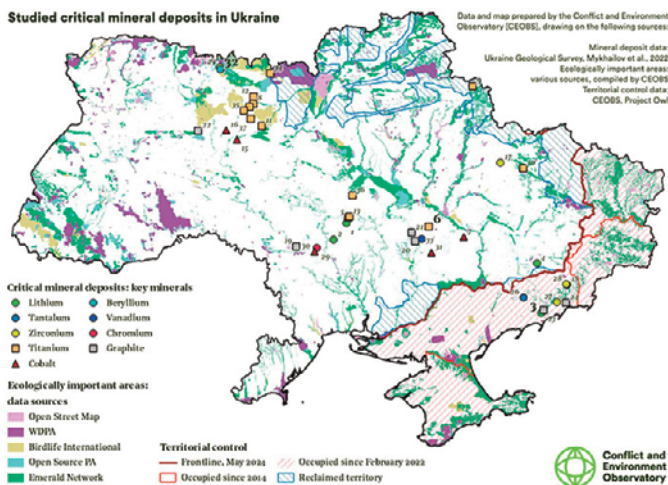
In any assessment of Ukraine's mineral resources, you have to take into account some basic facts. Firstly, what constitutes a 'mineral resource'? The answer is that it's a material that can be worked at a profit, which isn't happening in many places in Ukraine right now. So we are dealing with materials which we might describe as 'potential resources'.

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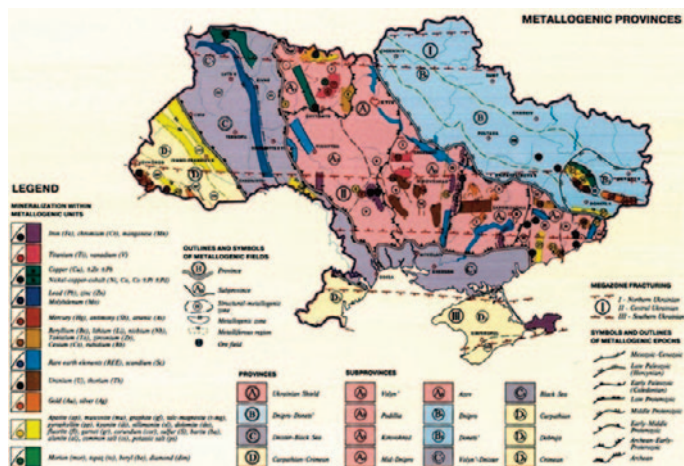


A map of the critical minerals of Ukraine. Remember however that this is largely based on old exploration data and these are largely unproven.

In order to realistically assess the potential mineral resources we need up to date survey data and for much of Ukraine this is not available. Before the war, Shell were carrying out some work on a gas deposit in the Dneiper area, but for much of the rest we are dependent upon Soviet era data from many years ago. The same goes for many of the existing mining operations.

There's a graphite mine, at Zavalievsky, operated by Volt Resources that's been operational since 1934. It's desperate for US (or anybody else) to invest in it. A glance at the plant shows that it's hardly moved forward over the past many years.

The same goes for the lithium mine near Zaporizhzhya which was recently seized by Russian forces. It falls within a larger area around Donetsk where there is thought to be significant amounts of the metal. Before any modern extraction could take place on the site it would take a considerable amount of time and a huge financial investment.



A metallogenic map for Ukraine. What REEs exist are likely to be found in the tailings of some of the old mines, none of which is working today.

But what about the rare earth elements (REEs)? To listen to President Trump you would be forgiven for thinking that Ukraine had lots of them, but this isn't true. According to Jack Lifton, the Co-Chairman of the US based Critical Minerals Institute, the only REE's in Ukraine are, like ours, to be found in the tailings of former metal mines. He

says there are no primary REE deposits in Ukraine. In a 9-minute Youtube presentation, Jack Lifton examines the case for commercial REE mining operation un Ukraine and finds there to be no case whatsoever. He also examines the geo-political case and even that he finds to be completely removed from reality. He actually accuses his own government as being clueless when it comes to the subject. In a telling remark he says that there's been no contact between his organisation and the US Government on the subject, which I found extraordinary.

As to where the US might get its REEs from he points to their own mine in California and the almost limitless supplies that can be won from primary REE deposits across the northern border in Canada. Not only are these proven to exist, in some cases they are already in operation. Jack Lifton puts the prospect of mining REEs in Ukraine alongside similar fantasy projects in Greenland, Mars and mining the asteroids.

At the end of all this what can we conclude? There's lots of expert analysis that points to the nonsense of Ukrainian critical minerals and REEs being at the heart of this conflict, whatever Donald J Trump may tell us. You have to conclude that he's pursuing this deal for reasons other than we are being told right now.

You can view the full 9-minute video here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ya9WKaveRXU>

Meanwhile, tell us what you think about the subject. Perhaps you've got an insight into what the conflict might hold for the US President. Something that he's not tell us about.

Volcanic Experiences 2025

Small group tours to areas of superb geological interest

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www.volcanicexperiences.co.uk
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email volcanicexperiences@aol.com

Wales sees big, and expensive, problems with former coal tips...

Those of us who were around in 1966 remember the disaster that was Aberfan. On October 21st of that year, after heavy rain, a former coal tip above the village became unstable and slid down onto the local school, claiming the lives of 116 children and 28 adults.

Ever since that time, Wales has naturally been highly suspicious of such tips and has kept a close eye on the. With recent extreme weather events becoming ever more common there are some in the country who are becoming more worried.

In 2020, again after a bout of heavy rain, some 60 000 tonnes of soil and colliery waste slide down a hillside near the Rhondda village of Tylorstown. Luckily there were no casualties of this even but it could have been a very different story. Another incident occurred last year as a result of Storm Bert, when homes in Cwmtillery, Blaenau Gwent, were damaged and people had to be evacuated.



The Tylorstown slip of 2020 involved an estimated 60 000 tonnes of material. (Image: WalesOnline)

Now the Welsh Government has announced a fund of £34 million which will be used for safety inspections and remedial works across 10 local authorities and a total of 130 sites. The area with the most sites is Rhondda Cynon Taf where £11.5 million has been earmarked.

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Understanding The Earth



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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 the British Isles and Norway: with: carbonatite, Larvikite, phonolite, borolanite, picrite, 'oyster rock', teschenite, Ledmore marble, Aberfoyle slate, orthoquartzite, breccia and micro-granodiorite. Each set comes boxed with notes and costs £49.95 including postage. The set is available and ready to be shipped NOW!

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

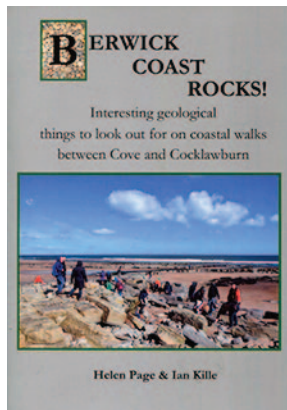
Down to Earth *extra* 147 March 2025

It's a problem that will always be an ever present danger across the South Wales coalfield area and it's something local residents live with every day. No one can, hand on heart, say that another disaster could not happen in the future. This allocation of funding should see some of the worst examples being addressed, but it will not cure the problem, far from it.

A best selling book gets an expanded second edition - thanks to its readers...

A few years ago the members of Alnwick U3A group set out to tell the story of their local rocks. As a result two books were produced, one covering a stretch of the Northumberland Coast, the other the coast of Berwickshire, mostly in Scotland.

Both books were superb and amongst the very best for people self guiding themselves along the coast and examining the rocks at the sites themselves. They used excellent photographic illustrations that actually showed you what to look for. Both books were reprinted thanks to demand by the readers.



Now the Berwickshire volume has gone to a second and greatly expanded edition that runs to 140 A5 pages. There are sites from Cove in the north to Cocklawburn in the south. This is one book that crosses the border between Scotland and England effortlessly.

Much of the expansion of the second edition has been the addition of more high quality photographs that tell the story better than a thousand words could ever do. More to the point they help everyone understand what's going on and that, after all, is what they want the readers to do!

"Berwick Coast Rocks!" is available from Geo Supplies Ltd for £17.00 including postage either via www.geosupplies.co.uk or by ringing us on 0114 245 5746.

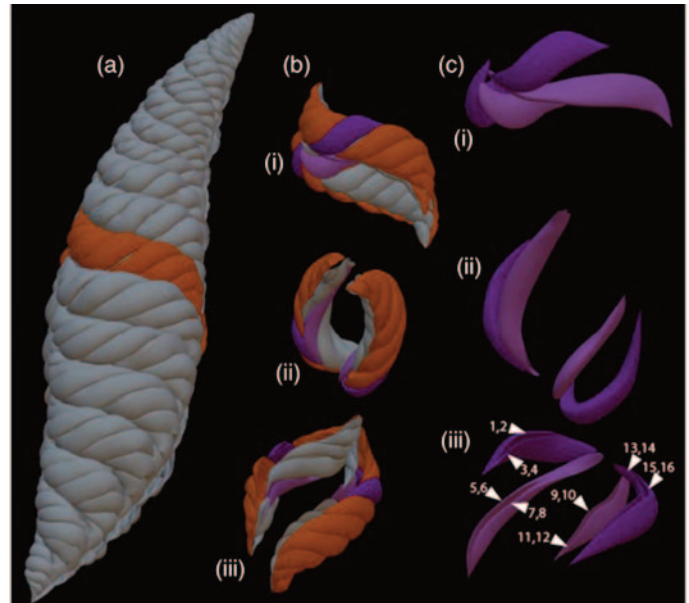
A new look at *Charnia masoni*...

Way back in 1958 a 15-year old school boy called Roger Mason found what was later confirmed as the first Precambrian fossil in a former

slate quarry in Woodhouse Eaves in the Leicestershire countryside. The iconic fossil was described by Dr. Trevor Ford of the University of Leicester and named *Charnia masoni* after its finder.

The actual specimen is proudly displayed the New Walks Museum with casts in museums across the globe. But what did the actual living creature look like? D McIlroy of the Department of Earth Sciences at the Memorial University of Newfoundland has recently undertaken some architectural modelling of *Charnia masoni*.

The work has been published in the *Journal of the Geological Society* and is the result of 3D sculpting to reconstruct the body plan. It is based on an analysis of many different specimens from around the world, including from Newfoundland in Canada.



Primary-order branch of Charnia masoni reconstructed with secondary- and tertiary-order branches. (a) Primary-order branch with a single secondary-order branch highlighted in orange. (Based on Brazier et al 2012)

The Editor comments: At last, something that looks like a real animal that could have lived. Thanks for bringing *Charnia* to life for another old Leicestershire fossil!

You can read the full paper here:

<https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/gsl/jgs/article/182/3/jgs2024-242/651575/Architectural-modelling-of-the-fractal-like>



Get Down to Earth - by e-mail...

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 and is available as a PDF e-subscription for just £10.00 for 1 year or £25.00 for 3 years. If you prefer a paper copy that is available for £17.00 for 1 year with back issues for 2024 included as well.

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Extra April 2025



Down to Earth

"Earth science learning for all"

Announcing our seventh Summer School...

Cliff College, Curbar
August 9-16 2025



Peak District geology at its very best!

- 6 full days of field work with a choice on some days
- A visit to a Castleton cavern
- 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.

See the brochure & book online at www.geosupplies.co.uk
Email downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on 0114 245 5746
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Great geo-adventures in 2025/6 begin here...



With the white buildings of Torquay in the background, this is the near vertical Devonian strata in the cliff. This location is known as London Bridge and will be seen on a boat cruise around the bay. (Image: Chris Darmon)

We still have vacancies on the following trips this Summer: the Western Lake District, the Yorkshire Coast and our Peak District Summer School. For the Autumn we have space available on our Torbay trip in October.

We've made significant progress on our programme for 2026 - see opposite and are ready to take your early bookings!

To view a brochure, go to our website at:
www.geosupplies.co.uk or Tel: 0114 245 5746

Remember that booking forms are only available direct from us:

Email: downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk

Residential Field trip programme 2025/6...

2025

- Scarborough, Yorkshire Coast June 1-6
- Western Lake District, June 25-30
- Peak District Summer School, August 9-16
- Torbay, South Devon, October 8-15

2026

- Northwest Scotland, April 14-22
- The best of Cornwall, May 1-8
- Teesdale & the North Pennines, May 16-23
- The Shetland Isles, June dates to be confirmed
- Iceland North & East Fjords, September 13-22

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 on one of our trips...

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 with the way that our 2025 programme has been received, with a number of trips now fully booked.

We still have vacancies on the 2025 trips listed below, but they are limited and subject to availability at the time of booking.

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.

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 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.



The Cumberland Hotel, our base for the week!

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

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.

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 about four more people in double rooms.

Welcome to our exciting world!



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 on site 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.

Although technically, this trip is fully booked, we may be able to accommodate two more people in a double or twin room.

What is our Summer School?

Our Summer School is modelled on those that used to be run by the Open University a number of years ago. All are based on a campus of one sort or another where we can sleep in largely single, en-suite study bedrooms and enjoy on site meals. They are also more than just field trips with dedicated transport each day. There's an evening programme of talks from local experts and also social events. In short - something for everybody, including those with limited mobility!

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 a few more people at this stage, including people looking for a single room. We strongly advise you to book NOW to secure the last remaining places!

NEW! Cornwall & North Somerset, September 20-28

£1995

A small number of vacancies have arisen on this trip because our US guests, from Washington State, have not taken all of the places. This trip is split between Central Cornwall and North Somerset with Hotels in Redruth and Minehead.

Coach transport is provided each day and this includes our transfer between Redruth and Minehead. A memorable week is in prospect with great company and excellent geology. Geological highlights include The Lizard, granite scenery, china clay, Valley of the Rocks, Watchet and Blue Anchor.

The brochure for this trip is only available direct from us - request one today!

The South Devon Riviera, Torbay, October 8-15

£1295



The Hotel Balmoral, our base in Torquay.

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 to Totnes.

Don't miss out on an Autumn break - come and join us in sunny Torquay!

The 2026 programme...

We know that we aren't very far into 2025 and now we are talking about 2026, but believe us when we tell you that the best hotels are already taking bookings for next year!

The Northwest Highlands of Scotland, April 14-22

£1695

Come with us to the Britain's most spectacular 'geological corner' that is Northwest Scotland. Assynt contains our oldest rocks and is also the backdrop to some of most amazing discoveries in our science. It was here that thrusts were shown to have moved huge rock slices through many kilometres and also where rocks that are more than 3 billion years old can be studied.



The Peaks of Assynt (Image: Rewilding Europe)

Our base for the entire 8-nights is the unique Inchandamph Hotel that sits in the stunning landscape that is Assynt. Your hosts Richard and Jaimie are excellent at providing superb food and ensuring that everything runs smoothly in this remote place. If you have never been to this area before, make the effort you won't regret it!

The brochure is already out and we are taking bookings!

The best of Cornwall, May 1-8

£1595

We discovered Tricky's at the Tolgus Inn in Redruth in time to take two groups of Americans during 2025. Now we are offering the location to our regular clients! Redruth is centrally located on the main railway line from London. Paddington and allows us to reach most of the main parts of Cornwall without long journeys.



Tricky's Inn is partly housed in former mine buildings from an old tin mine that was once on the site.

During this week we'll be taking in the granites of Lands End, the ophiolites of the Lizard, the china clays of St Austell and the amazing folded rocks of North Cornwall around Tintagel and Boscastle. We'll also go down a tin mine and visit Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum. We'll have the use of a locally hired minibus or coach to get around on this trip, making it possible for everyone.

We are taking deposits ahead of the main brochure coming out shortly.

Teesdale and the North Pennines, May 16-23

£1395

We've been looking to visit this area for some time and have never quite got around to it until now! Finding the wonderful family run Teesdale Hotel was the final piece in the jigsaw and hey presto - here we have a new location!

We'll be taking in the wonderful Upper Teesdale with its Lower Palaeozoic inlier along with High Force, Lowe Force and Cauldron Snout. There's great limestone scenery as well as the Great Whin Sill.



High Force, Teesdale with the Great Whin Sill (Image: The Geological Society)

Over in Weardale we'll take in the lead mines around St John's Chapel and Killhope as well as the Frosterley Marble and the fossil tree at Stanhope. ***We are already taking bookings for this trip!***

Shetland - the North Isles, June exact dates to be confirmed

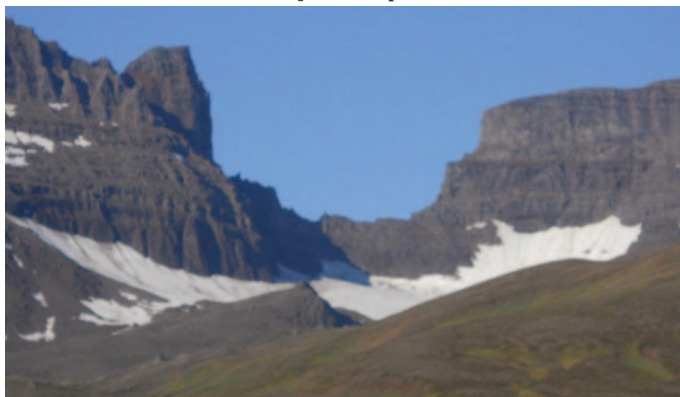
We are in the planning stages for this trip that will begin in Lerwick and then transfer to North Mainland's St Magnus Bay Hotel at Hillswick and Baltasound Hotel on Unst the most Northerly Island in the entire UK.

Our Shetland adventure, will take in the deep mantle serpentines and talcs of Unst and Fetlar, the amazing metamorphics of north mainland and the dramatic volcanics of Eshaness. Shetland is a unique place that everyone should see at least once in a lifetime.

We are taking deposits now with the brochure to follow shortly.

Iceland - the North & East Fjords, September 13-22

£2595



The Eastern Fjords are beautiful in any season! (Image: Chris Darmon)

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 Eystri 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 already have 20 people booked for 2026!

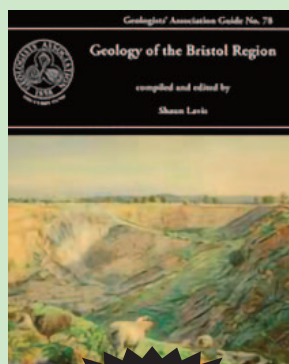
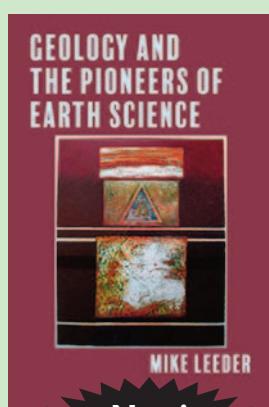
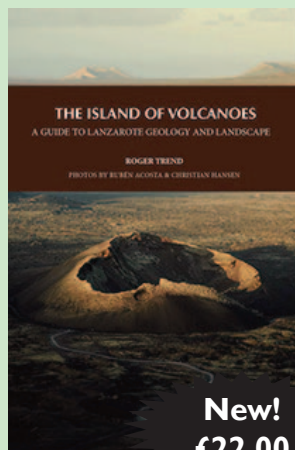
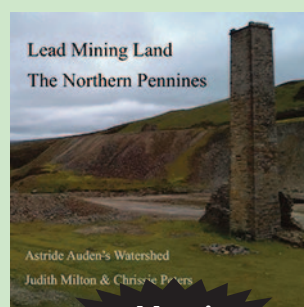
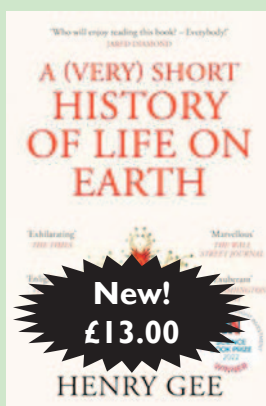
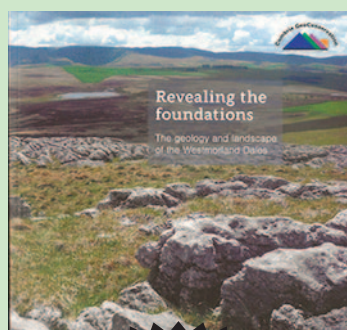
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