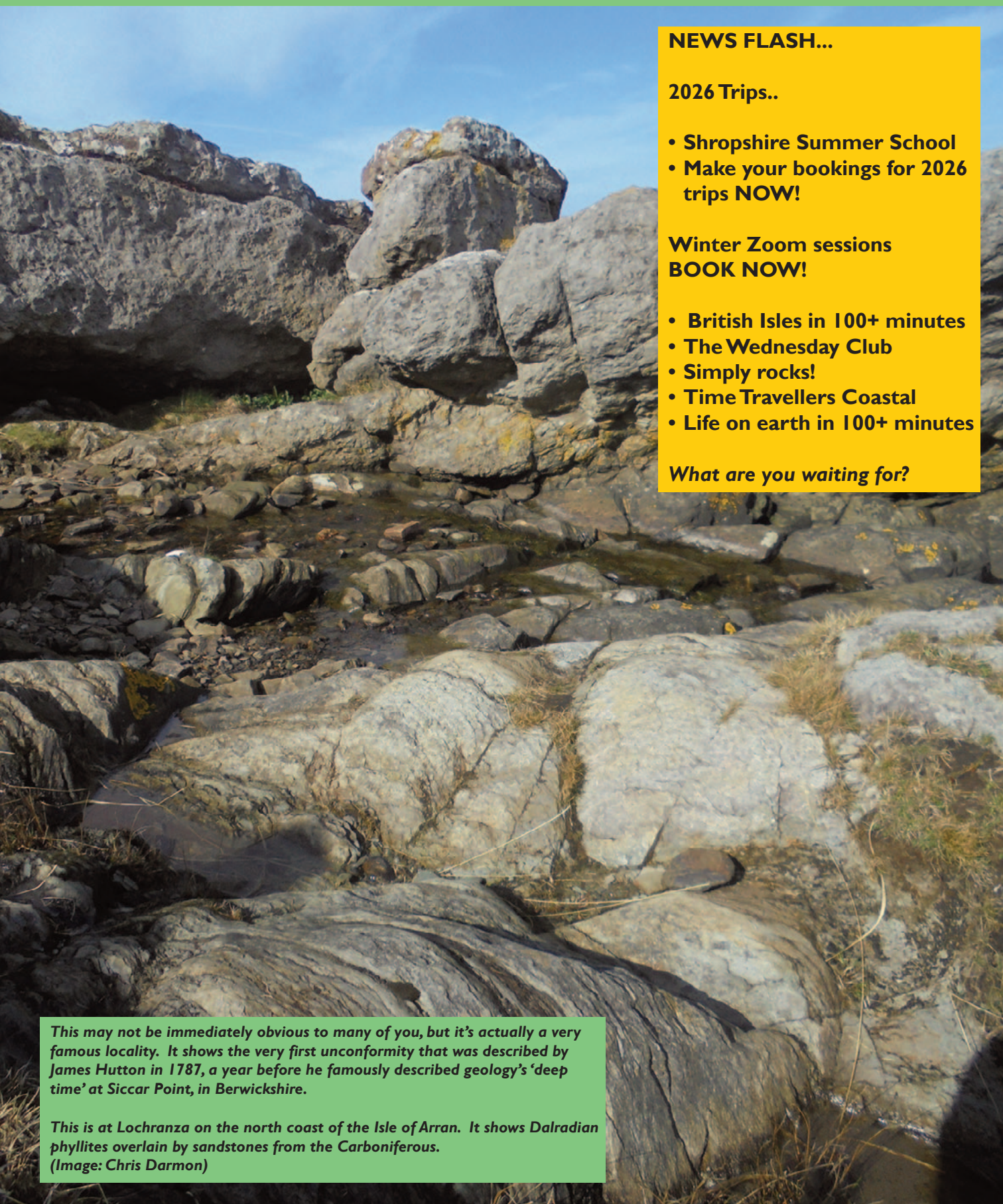
Down to Earth extra

Issue 157 January 2026



NEWS FLASH...

2026 Trips..

- **Shropshire Summer School**
- **Make your bookings for 2026 trips NOW!**

Winter Zoom sessions BOOK NOW!

- **British Isles in 100+ minutes**
- **The Wednesday Club**
- **Simply rocks!**
- **Time Travellers Coastal**
- **Life on earth in 100+ minutes**

What are you waiting for?

This may not be immediately obvious to many of you, but it's actually a very famous locality. It shows the very first unconformity that was described by James Hutton in 1787, a year before he famously described geology's 'deep time' at Siccar Point, in Berwickshire.

This is at Lochranza on the north coast of the Isle of Arran. It shows Dalradian phyllites overlain by sandstones from the Carboniferous.
(Image: Chris Darmon)

From the Editorial team...

There's a phrase used more and more these days and that is to thank people by giving them a 'shout out'. As little as ten years ago, such a phrase would have been meaningless too most people, but it's now an established way of appreciating what people say or do for others, usually acting in an entirely voluntary capacity.

Both of us have either worked for or been involved in the work of charities and other volunteer led organisations over many years. We know what it's like to see people, often of advanced years, still soldiering on keeping the wheels turning to keep an organisations going. The world of Earth science education simply would not exist as we know it, without the sterling work of volunteers.

So, at the beginning of 2026, spare a thought for the people on the committee of your local geological society or club. The person who arranges the programme and ensures that month by month there's someone to give you an inspiring talk, or even the treasurer who makes sure that the club pays it's way. Not forgetting, of course, the members who put out and then pack away the chairs, welcome members at the door or even make the tea and coffee. Every one of these individuals is important - without them life would not be the same.

But hang on a minute, if only life was that simple. These days volunteers are being asked to step into the breach to ensure that tasks that used to be undertaken by paid people carry on. Many geological societies take on hard manual labour, especially during the winter period to safeguard and enhance their local geosites. Local authorities can no longer afford the cost of hiring in contractors except in the most difficult cases. As for many of our Geoparks, where would they be without volunteers?

Let's hear it for our volunteers, give them a 'shout out' for 2026. We appreciate what you do and say a big 'thank you' for all that you do!
A Happy New Year to you all and may 2026 bring you peace.

Chris Darmon & Colin Schofield
The Down to Earth Editorial Team

Get a complete look at our trips for 2026 and the chance to book your place(s) now! See pages 7-10 for details.

news update

New evidence for early fire-making in Suffolk...

Just when did mankind light the first fire? We have long thought that this was sometehing carred out exclusively by our own species *Homo sapiens* but now a new site in Suffolk pushes that event back a long way, possibly to the *Neandarthals*.

Now a team led by Nick Ashton, Curator: Palaeolithic Collections, at ***the British Museum*** and Rob Davis, Project Curator, ***Pathways to Ancient Britain***, and Simon Parfitt from ***UCL*** in London, have uncovered evidence from an archaeological dig site at Barnham, in Suffolk. Thsi, indicates that the ability to make fire is much older than previously thought. The evidence of this early use of fire has now been published in the journal ***Nature***.

This comes from the UCL website:
"Described in ***Nature***, the artefacts date to about 400,000 years ago and include scorched earth, fire-cracked flint handaxes, and two fragments of iron pyrite, a mineral that can produce sparks when struck with flint.

The presence of pyrite is significant as it is a mineral not commonly found in the area, suggesting that early humans carried it to the site deliberately. In later prehistoric periods, pyrite was used to ignite fires by striking it with flint to create sparks. Its presence at Barnham suggests that this technology may have emerged much earlier than previously thought, possibly from neanderthals that lived in the region at that time or another species of early humans.

Previous discoveries at sites in Africa indicate that humans had used natural fire over a million years ago, but the artefacts at Barnham suggest the creation and control of fire, which carries huge implications for human development and evolution. Until now, the oldest known evidence of fire making was from 50,000 years ago and was found in northern France.

Some of the team excavating the fire-pit at Barnham (Image: Jordan Mansfield, Pathways to Ancient Britain)

Down to Earth extra is designed & published by Geo Supplies Ltd., 49 Station Road, Chapeltown, Sheffield S35 2XE

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Co-author, Simon Parfitt ***(UCL Institute of Archaeology)*** said: "This discovery gives us a rare window into a moment when early humans were not just using fire, but had begun to understand and control it. This discovery highlights the ingenuity and skill involved in mastering fire, a game-changing moment in human evolution."

Controlled fire use offered evolutionary advantages including warmth, protection from predators, the ability to cook food, and a social hub where early humans likely gathered. Distinguishing natural wildfires from deliberate burning has long frustrated archaeologists.

However, at the Barnham site, the team discovered sediments with geochemical signals that indicated fires were repeatedly lit in the same spot, as well as imported pieces of pyrite and clusters of flint that also showed evidence of being exposed to heat. Together, the artefacts point to their combined use in creating and controlling fire.

The sylvan glen setting of the Barnham excavation site (Image: Jordan Mansfield, PAB)

This access to fire on demand would have allowed early humans to cook meat more reliably, thereby improving its digestibility and energy intake. This, researchers say, may have supported the expansion of the human brain.

Lead author Professor Nick Ashton ***(UCL Institute of Archaeology & the British Museum)*** said: "This is the most remarkable discovery of my career, and I'm very proud of the teamwork that it has taken to reach this groundbreaking conclusion. It's incredible that some of the oldest groups of Neanderthals had the knowledge of the properties of flint, pyrite and tinder at such an early date."

Iron pyrites and flint were both required to make fire (Image: Jordan Mansfield, PAB)

Co-author Dr Rob Davis, of the British Museum, said: "The implications are enormous. The ability to create and control fire is one of the most important turning points in human history with practical and social benefits that changed human evolution. This extraordinary discovery pushes this turning point back by some 350,000 years."

The Barnham site was situated near a watering hole where these humans encamped. "We think humans brought pyrite to the site with the intention of making fire. And this has huge implications pushing back the earliest fire-making," said archaeologist Nick Ashton. The other essential ingredient for making fire, flint, would have been locally sourced from flint nodules.

BGS scientists get a unique insight into the inner workings of the Great Glen Fault...

The Great Glen Fault (GGF) slices through Scotland like a knife blade on a NE-SW line from Inverness, through Fort William and across to Northern Ireland. As a major strike-slip fault, it's been described a our very own 'San Andreas' (without, of course, Los Angeles)!

For much of it's course the GGF is marked by a major valley up to 5 km wide in which there's a major loch, such as Loch Ness. Rock sections in the fault zone are unheard of, so when one does appear it's major news.

Over to BGS for the full story:
"At over 1000 km long and 40 km deep, the Great Glen Fault is the largest geological fault structure in the UK. As part of ground investigations for SSE Renewables' proposed pumped hydro storage scheme at the Coire Glas site on the shores of Loch Lochy in the Highlands, deep drill core was extracted from beneath the Great Glen.

BGS scientists were granted a unique opportunity to study the newly drilled fault rocks that are part of the Great Glen Fault Zone. These 'first of their kind' core samples have lived up to their billing, with experts claiming that they give unprecedented insight into the inner workings and behaviour of crustal-scale faults worldwide.

BGS scientists studying some of the core samples from the Coire Glas site (Image: BGS/UKRI)

The Great Glen Fault formed around 400 million years ago in a massive mountain-building event, as the ancient continental plates of Laurentia (North America and Scotland) and Baltica (Scandinavia, England, Wales and Europe) collided. This tectonic event is known as the Caledonian Orogeny. The fault stretches from Ireland, all the way through Scotland, to Norway. Today, the fault underlies the major valley of the Great Glen, which crosses the whole of Scotland and was scoured out by glaciers during the last ice age. Generally, rocks associated with the Great Glen Fault Zone remain mostly hidden to the human eye by the waters of Loch Ness, Loch Oich and Loch Lochy, along with ice age deposits along the valley floor.

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investigations for SSE Renewables' proposed pumped hydro storage scheme at the Coire Glas site on the shores of Loch Lochy in the Highlands, deep drill core was extracted from beneath the Great Glen. BGS scientists were granted a unique opportunity to study the newly drilled fault rocks that are part of the Great Glen Fault Zone. These 'first of their kind' core samples have lived up to their billing, with experts claiming that they give unprecedented insight into the inner workings and behaviour of crustal-scale faults worldwide.

A sample of the core with pale green fault gouge (a fault rock where the parent rock is ground to a very fine paste, then hardened) with remnant clasts of granite (red) and cross-cut by later veins of calcium-magnesium carbonate (white). (Image: BGS/UKRI)

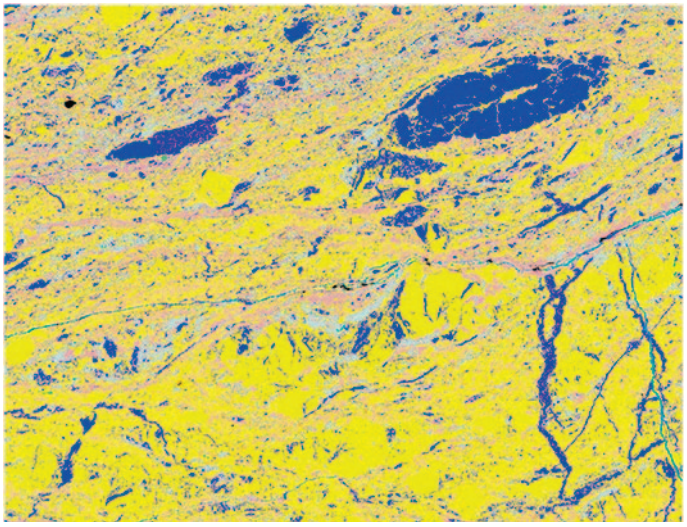
The new drill core from the Coire Glas Project offers the tantalising prospect of furthering our understanding of how these fault systems work and how fluids emerging from deep within the Earth's crust change the properties of the rock. Over 1500 m of core were recovered, reaching depths of 650 m below ground level. Core was drilled on the shore of Loch Lochy and from within an underground tunnel at the base of the mountain. Drilling geological core is expensive and is normally only justifiable to such extensive depths as part of major energy or infrastructure projects. The added difficulty in relation to the Great Glen Fault is that, in addition to being located in remote parts of the Highlands, fault rock can be very weak and presents a technical challenge to drill successfully.

The new geological samples provide an opportunity to understand the geological processes happening deep in the Earth's crust. This is also relevant for understanding other major crustal faults, such as the San Andreas and Anatolian faults.

Several key questions remain:

- does this fault connect all the way to the Earth's mantle, thought to be at more than 30 km depth?
- what is the source of fluids in crustal fault zones?
- how do hot fluids interact and change the mechanical properties of the rocks in a fault zone?
- how many times has the fault moved in its long history?
- how have the hundreds of earthquakes that likely made the fault zone changed the properties of the rock?

The Coire Glas core will be stored and made available for future research purposes at the BGS National Geological Repository, a bespoke facility that is publicly funded through UKRI and houses the UK's foremost collection of geological samples. This will enable long-term preservation of the core, allowing scientists to study and attempt to unlock its secrets long into the future.



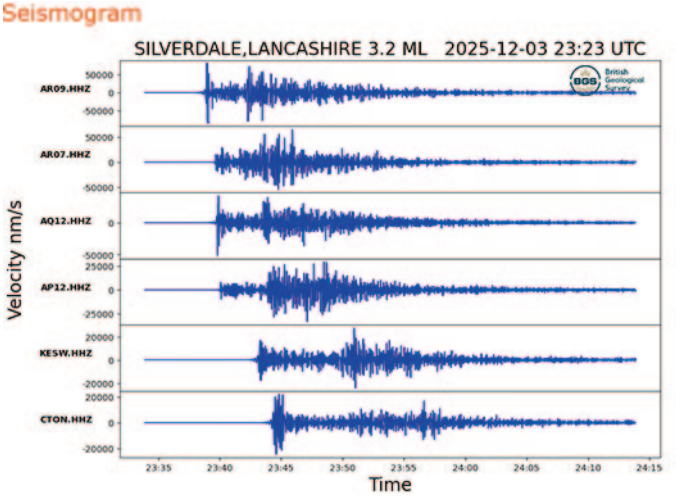
Mineral map image of Great Glen Fault rock generated using a scanning electron microscope. The pale purple-pink areas are formed by interconnected networks of weak clay minerals formed due to alteration of the host rock, which shearing has localised. Pale and dark blue areas are regions of later carbonate veins and cement. Image is 5mm wide. (Image: BGS/UKRI)

or December 3rdThe core has the potential to help us answer fundamental geological questions about the history of the Earth as well as better understand major crustal-scale faults in seismically active regions elsewhere. It will also enable us to understand rock properties that are important for major renewable infrastructure projects, energy storage and
geothermal targets. These cylinders of rock truly are one-of-a-kind windows back into our distant geological past."

Magnitude 3.2 earthquake strikes Silverdale, Lancs...

This comes from Down to Earth reader, Sylvia Woodhead who actually experienced the event first hand:

"I heard a loud explosion. I thought at first it was a low flying jet, and then that it might have been thunder, but I saw no lightning. The sound seemed 'round' to me. It seemed to have come from the Lindale Fault up the top of the village. If it ever stops raining, I might go to investigate if there is any damage to see. (there was none).



The Silverdale earthquake of December 3rd. (Image: BGS/UKRI)

The BGS earthquake site reported an earthquake, at 11.23pm on 3 December 2025, of 3.2 magnitude, with an epicentre about 100m from the shore at Silverdale, at a depth of 3km. The BGS have reported that thousands of people heard a 'loud explosion', but there have been no reports of damage. I reported my experience to the BGS earthquake page. They also recorded an aftershock of 0.8 magnitude at 00.54 the next morning, directly beneath the Arnside Tower.

The WGS report for the Witherslack area suggests that the movement is likely to have been along the NNW-SSE Yewbarrow Fault, (to the west of Witherslack), which extends to Silverdale. (The Lindale fault extends to Far Arnside). The earthquake was apparently felt within a 25 km radius. The earthquake was reported on the national news. People in Silverdale ran outside, as houses shook and some dogs were disturbed. Many thought it was a passing train, although my hairdresser knew it was an earthquake."

Thanks Sylvia - Ed.

Update: There have been several aftershocks, in the same general area, the most being on December 18th.

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 2026 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.

Extra January 2026

Ffos-y-Fran is back in the news...

A giant opencast pit that was the site of the very last coal mining operation in Wales is back in the news, more than two years after it closed. We've covered what can only be described as the 'ongoing saga' of the Ffos-y-Fran opencast coal site on the outskirts of Merthyr Tydfil in South Wales, on and off for the past two years.

The latest concerns relate to the stability of three overburden mounds that surround the site. The original intention was that these tips would be flattened with the material put back into the opencast mine site. The area would then be levelled and returned to use as a public amenity.

Ffos-y-Fran as it now appears - and it's close to a lot of houses. (Image: The Sennedd)

Now it seems that the developer Merthyr South Wales Ltd (MSW) is proposing a cheaper alternative warning that insufficient funds are available to deliver what was previously agreed. The new plans see one of the tips reduced in height while the other two remain as they are now.

Meanwhile the local council commissioned a geotechnical survey from respected engineering firm WSP. That concludes that the tips were constructed as "temporary earthworks" and the proposals "do not provide confidence that the tips and slopes will remain stable and will not pose an ongoing risk to the residents of Merthyr Tydfil and a potential financial burden [to the council]".

The effect of climate change "does not appear to have been considered" - while in some cases it is "dismissed with no supporting evidence", the consultants warn. They also note that one of the tips - known as OB1 - which rises approximately 170m above a main road running alongside Ffos-y-Fran - had already suffered a landslide in 2022. The report also notes "the recent history of a number of tip failures across south Wales as a result of high rainfall events".

Some information comes from a local BBC report, with thanks.

New geological maps of the Yorkshire Wolds help groundwater management and inform policy making...

In recent years you may have thought that BGS had moved away from mapping, but new work in the Yorkshire Wolds, paints a very different picture.

Geologists at BGS have completed a major update to the geological map of the Yorkshire Wolds, where the underlying rocks and sediments play a vital role as natural reservoirs for the region's underground water resources.

The distinctive white chalk rock of the Chalk Group, which forms the magnificent coastal cliffs, is also present beneath the wolds. The chalk is an 'aquifer' and is important as the primary drinking-water source for the area. The new geological mapping will provide detailed and accurate information to inform decision making around the use of groundwater resources.

The geology of some of the area was last mapped in the 1800s, before modern understanding of the impact of tectonics (movement of the 'plates' that make up the Earth's crust) on the chalk and before information about differences in the properties of the chalk layers was recorded. At that time, there was no satellite data and underground data was limited, so maps were mostly based on ground observations, with much of it done from horseback! The new mapping provides updated geological data and information for the region and plays a central role in the current BGS national geological mapping programme.

The five-year project involved different remote techniques, including interpretation of 2-D seismics (information from small, controlled vibrations that create waves through the rock, which can then be used to map the subsurface), digital elevation models, aerial imagery and borehole records along with field surveys and palaeontological (fossil) analysis. Collectively, these methods and data have significantly improved geological understanding of the chalk aquifer.

The project was a collaboration between the Environment Agency (EA), Yorkshire Water Services Limited (YWS) and BGS. Recently, EA, YWS and WSP attended BGS's headquarters in Keyworth, Nottinghamshire, to discuss the conclusion of the project and its outcomes.

Down to Earth
'Earth science learning for all'

The learning zone

Great geo-adventures in 2026 begin here...

Portreath lies on Cornwall's north coast, just a couple of miles from Redruth. It's home to some fine cliffs and fabulous rocks and structures.
(Image: Chris Darmon)

We've added one final trip to our 2026 programme, so good have been the bookings! It's a 5-night trip to North Somerset's Jurassic Coast - get in NOW to secure your places.

Following a confirmation of the booking situation, we now have 2 vacancies on our September 2026 Iceland trip. There's a male and a female vacancy in two twin rooms. Several other 2026 trips are either full or nearly so. Remember that there are plenty of single rooms on our Summer School to Shropshire.

To view a brochure, go to our to 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 2026...

2026

- The Jurassic Coast of Dorset, March 27-April 1
- Northwest Highlands of Scotland, April 14-22 FULL
- Central Cornwall, May 1-8
- Teesdale & Northern Pennines, May 16-23
- Minehead & North Somerset, June 7-12
- Shetland, The Northern Isles, June 17-25 FULL
- Anglesey, July 5-10
- Summer School, Shropshire, August 8-15
- Iceland, September 13-22 - see panel opposite
- Melrose, the Scottish Borders, October 18-24

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
Geo Supplies Ltd 49 Station Road, Chapeltown, Sheffield S35 2XE

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.

In recent years we've run several special trips for American geologists and now some of them join us on our regular trips, adding greatly to the character of our field experiences.

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 2026 programme...

We are delighted with how well our programme of field trips for 2026 has been received. That said, we still have vacancies on most trips especially for couples or people willing to share a twin room.

If you haven't been with us before, you are particularly welcome, but please don't leave it too long before making your booking. Over the past year we've lost count of the number of people who have left it too late and we have had to decline their booking.

The Jurassic Coast of Dorset, March 27-April 1 £995
Believe it or not, we have not visited the famous Jurassic Coast of Dorset since 2017, so it's high time that we put that right! As on the last occasion, we're basing our trip at the seaside town of Weymouth which is well connected in terms of public transport and also has suitable accommodation for us to use. We're going early in the season so that we can offer you a good value trip, but with the recent pattern of mild winters, we hope that by the end of March it will be reasonably warm.

The magnificent Durdle Door (Image: Visit Dorset)

As for the magnificent geology what can we say? We hope to take in some of the area's 'gems' including Durdle Door, Lulworth Cove and Swanage. It would also be good to call in on Mary Anning's favourite stomping ground of Lyme Regis. We also hope to take in the amazing fossil collection on show at Dorchester Museum.
Get in soon to secure your places on this early 2026 trip!

Welcome to our exciting world!

The Northwest Highlands of Scotland, April 14-22 £1695
Ask Colin and Chris what their favourite trip is and they will answer "the Northwest Highlands". It combines their favourite hotel with their favourite geology and landscape! Accordingly we are once again offering this 8-night gem even though we were last there in 2024. On this trip we pay homage to Britain's oldest rocks in the form of the 3 billion year old Lewisian Gneisses, along with the overlying Torridonian Sandstones and the Cambro-Ordovician sediments. These all came together as a result of the Caledonian Orogeny some 420 million years ago.

In much more recent times, the Ice Ages of the last 2 million years have given us the most beautiful and unspoilt landscape that we can enjoy today.
This trip is now fully booked, ask us about cancellations.

Central 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.

Old mines and magnificent coasts.
(Image: Into Cornwall)

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 still have some double and twin rooms available!

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. 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.
This trip is now fully booked, ask us about cancellations.

NEW! Minehead & North Somerset, June 7-12 £995

The fabulous coastal cliffs at Watchet in North Somerset.
(Image: Chris Darmon)

Everyone knows about Dorset's 'Jurassic Coast', but similar fossiliferous rocks also outcrop to the east of the seaside resort of Minehead, around Watchet & Blue Anchor on Somerset's North Coast. During this 5-night trip we'll be taking in these rocks, as well as fabulous coastal scenery to the west around Ilfracombe and the Valley of Rocks at Lynton which are carved in Devonian strata. We will also take in some great Carboniferous limestone strata around Weston-super-Mare and Portishead that also includes rare basalt.

Private minibus transport will be provided each day allowing everyone to enjoy the beautiful scenery of the Exmoor National Park. We stay at a 4-star guest house in Minehead and enjoy excellent food in local restaurants for our evening meals. All this with the added bonus of a ride on the Lynton cliff railway!
We expect this trip to fill up fast, so get your bookings in NOW!
At this time we have plenty of vacancies.

Shetland - the North Isles, June 17-25 £1895
Everyone should visit the Shetland Isles at least once in their lives, so says Chris, who's been there around a dozen times over the past 40 years. The best time to visit Shetland is around mid-Summer when it never really gets dark.

We invite you to join us as we take in the North of Mainland and the Northern Isles of Unst, Fetlar and Yell, home to some of the most amazing geology in the entire UK. Visit the Moho in a small quarry in Unst and get yourself a sample of serpentine to rival any from Cornwall.Why not begin our Shetland adventure with an overnight boat trip from Aberdeen?
This trip is now fully booked, ask us about cancellations.

Anglesey, July 5-10 £995
We love going to Ynys Mon, or as the English know it, Anglesey. As a long established geopark it's geology is superb and also unique as the main location to see rocks of the Mona Complex.Based at the former copper port of Amlwch in the north of the island we will explore some of the best sites on the island, many of which are close to our base.

The Dinorben Arms Hotel, our base on Anglesey

Come with us to see some very rare rocks and also experience some fine coastal scenery. On this trip you get to see sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic rocks of many types!
We have double and twin rooms available for this trip.

Come and join 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 at Harper Adams University in Shropshire
August 8-15 £1495
For our ever popular Summer School week, we are returning to the campus of Harper Adams Agricultural University which sits in lovely grounds in Shropshire. We last visited in 2018 and have a packed itinerary planned including some new localities.

Shropshire is home to a wealth of geology spanning many time periods and covering many types of rocks and landscape. We'll be taking in the Precambrian rocks of the Church Stretton area, the Lower Palaeozoic sediments of Wenlock Edge and the Lickey Hills as well as later rocks in Cheshire and the Black Country.

Highly fossiliferous Silurian limestones at the Wren's Nest National Nature Reserve in Dudley.
(Image: Visit Birmingham)

Yes, there's something for everyone and that's before we add in the evening talks and activities as well as the excellent company.
We have plenty of single rooms available on this trip!

Iceland - the North & East Fjords, September 13-22 £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 Akueyri 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! Iceland is an amazing place but these days much of it is over visited by tourists. This cannot be said for some of the places that we will be visiting on this trip. This is the real Iceland, where natural wonders and beauty are able to shine without the smell of hamburgers!To complete our trip we travel back from Hofn to Keflavik completing our circuit of Iceland. 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 - and still hot - lavas.
Two places in shared twin rooms available - one male & one female

Melrose in the Scottish Borders, October 18-24 £995
We end the year with a good value 6-night trip to a new area of the Scottish Borders. Melrose is in the heart of an excellent area of fine geology, with sediments from the Ordovician, Silurian and Devonian along with a fine array of igneous rocks, both extrusions and intrusions that mainly date from the Carboniferous.

During this trip we'll be taking in the famous localities of Dob's Linn near Moffat where Charles Lapworth established the Ordovician and Silurian boundary and also James Hutton's famous inconformity at Jedburgh. We'll also have a day in Edinburgh exploring some of the famous sites in Holyrood Park.

The Waverley Castle Hotel on the outskirts of Melrose is our base for this 5-night trip.

Our base for the trip is the comfortable Waverley Castle Hotel which sits in beautiful grounds on the outskirts of the small town. Unusually, we have been offered a number of single rooms, at a very modest supplement - but get in quickly to secure your place!
We can still accommodate people in dou be rooms.

To make a booking email us at:
downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on: 0114 245 5746
BOOKING FORMS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE BY CONTACTING US!

Welcome to our Zoom world!

This Winter why not join in one (or more) of our friendly online learning sessions?
There's bound to be something that suits you...

Yes, we've been hosting live online Zoom sessions since 2020 and since then hundreds of people, from the UK and abroad have joined our online community. All of our live sessions run at 2pm or 7pm and you choose when to attend. The prices quoted here are for one person, but two people on the same computer always make big savings.

It's easy to register, just go our website *www.geosupplies.co.uk* and enter our shop. Then choose 'educational courses' followed by 'virtual talks' and make your choices!

Alternatively ring us on 0114 245 5746 to pay by card - we're here to help you!

Winter events

One very wet, windy, dry and cold day... Sedimentary Rocks and Processes
A 10-week course (a continuing course), Mondays commencing November 10th - February 16th . Price from £80.00

Simply Rocks!
A 6-week course designed to introduce you to the world of rocks with an emphasis on the practical study of specimens. Tuesdays from February 3rd. Price from £65.00 includes a basic set of specimens.

Time Travellers Coastal British Isles
An 8-week course taking in some of the finest coastal geology of the British Isles with examples from all four home nations. Thursdays from January 22nd. Price from £65.00.

The geology of the British Isles in around 100-minutes! Wednesday January 7th.
Zoom into 2026 with a mammoth 100-minute session that will cover our entire geological journey! You can board our time machine at 2pm or 7pm Price £15.00 or £22.00 for 2 people on the same computer.

Life on Earth - the ups and downs of the Fossil Record in 100-minutes! Wednesday March 18th
Another mammoth live Zoom 'special' as we take a look at how life has faired over the past 600+ million years. We take in all the main mass extinctions and much more. Join us at 2pm or 7pm. Price £15.00 or £22.00 for 2 people on the same computer.

The Wednesday Club
Join us as we meet to enjoy an eclectic mix of very different subjects on a Wednesday. A new series commences January 21st. either in the afternoon or evening - it's your choice!

January 21	**The geology of the North Sea**
January 28	**The Ultramafic rocks**
February 4	**Rocks beneath the pavements of London**
February 11	**A new look at the geology of the Peak District**
February 18	**The North Wales slate industry**
February 25	**The geology of the Scottish Island of Raasay**
March 4	**The China Clay industry of Cornwall**
March 11	**Fabulous plants of the Rhynie Cherts of Aberdeenshire**

Take the eight talks for £65.00 (£95.00 for 2 people) or book them individually for £11.00 each.

We look forward to seeing you on one of our Zoom sessions - soon!

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.No one is required to carry out any sort of assessment and there's no entry requirements or formalities. Just sign up and go!

There's still time to join an Autumn class, but hurry! See below for details of these and the new courses commencing in early 2026.

IMPORTANT:
We are getting concerned at the number of people who leave it to the very last minute to book onto a Zoom session. We urge everyone to book at least 24 hours before a session and be aware that late bookers may not be accepted.

What's on offer this Winter?

The Geology of the British Isles in around 100 minutes!
A number of years ago Chris was invited to present a lecture with this title in the Darwin Centre at The Natural History in London. It was arranged by the late Dr Richard Fortey and was attended by quite a large audience that included Chris's late parents Eric and Norah as well as a number of ***Down to Earth*** readers.

With the recent passing of Richard Fortey it seems apt to recreate that lecture for the Zoom platform. Hang on to your hats, get yourselves a large glass of wine and get ready for the 'ride of a lifetime' as we take you on a journey from the oldest rocks in Northwest Scotland to the last glaciation that ended a mere 10,500 years ago!

This extended live Zoom session includes some video material as well as up to date information on the British Isles' geological journey. Wednesday, January 7th at 2pm or 7pm (you choose) £15.00 or £22.00 for 2 people studying on the same computer.

Simply Rocks! - a course aimed at people wanting to know about the basics of rocks, sedimentary, igneous and metamorphic. What are they and how are they formed?
This 6-week course is supported by a set of basic rocks, the cost of which is included in the course fee. You will be shown how to study rocks for yourself in a practical way. By the end you should be able to describe and identify many different rocks.

Course dates: Starts Tuesday February 3rd - March 10th
Cost: Six hour-long Zoom sessions with electronic background papers and a set of basic minerals £65.00 for one person or £85.00 for 2-people studying together. Printed background papers cost an additional £15.00. Zoom sessions on Tuesdays at 2.00 pm and 7.00 pm (you choose).

Don't worry, we don't bite!

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

Blue Anchor fault on the North Somerset coast (Image: Chris Darmon)

Time Travellers Coastal Britain
We first presented these topics back in 2021 so it's high time that we looked at them again. The UK's geology often presents itself at our rich coastline. We'll be taking in 8 great areas, including North Cornwall, Berwickshire & Northumberland, County Antrim, North Somerset, the Orkney Isles, Suffolk, Mull & Iona and Pembrokeshire.

Course dates: Starts Thursday January 22nd - March 12th
Cost: Eight hour-long Zoom sessions with electronic background papers £65.00 for one person or £85.00 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)

The Wednesday Club
We started this eclectic mix of subjects on Wednesday afternoons and evenings last year and they've proved to be highly successful. We hope that you like this new selection - they are all designed to bring you up to speed on some of the very latest ideas.

January 21	**The geology of the North Sea**
January 28	**The ultramafic rocks**
February 4	**Rocks deep beneath the pavements of London**
February 11	**A new look at the geology of the Peak District**
February 18	**The North Wales slate industry**
February 25	**The geology of the Scottish island of Raasay**
March 4	**The China Clay industry of Cornwall**
March 11	**Fabulous plants of the Rhynie cherts**

Cost: Individual talks £11.00 or £16.00 for 2 people.
Take all 8 sessions for £65.00, or £95.00 for 2 people.
Timings: Wednesdays at 2.00 or 7.00pm - your choice.

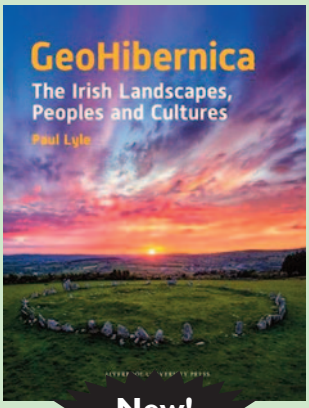
Life on Earth - the ups & downs of the Fossil Record in around 100 minutes!
Join us on this extended live Zoom session to take in all of the major extinction events that have taken place during Phanerozoic time. In around 100 minutes you'll get the feel of the fossil record and how it has been rocked by massive external events ranging from asteroid impacts to sudden changes in tectonics and environments.
Cost: £15.00 or £22.00 for 2 people on the same computer.
Wednesday, March 18th at 2pm or 7pm

To find out more or to enrol, email us at:
downtoearth@geosupplies.co.uk or ring us on: 0114 245 5746
You can enrol via our online shop at: www.geosupplies.co.uk
by entering our online shop and then choosing courses.

Featured books for January 2026

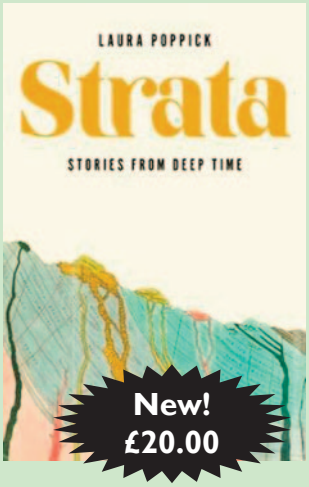
In each issue we are pleased to be able to introduce you to a range of featured books. Where they are being offered at reduced prices, these will be current to the end of January 2026 provided that stocks are available. This month we feature a variety of different books. Please note, all prices include UK postage.

New! £33.00

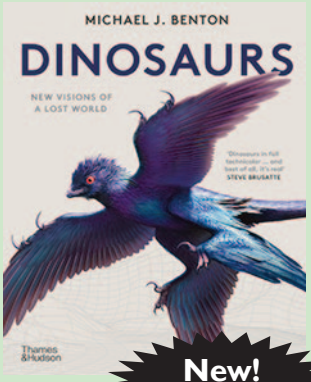


New! £50.00

New Ed! £17.00

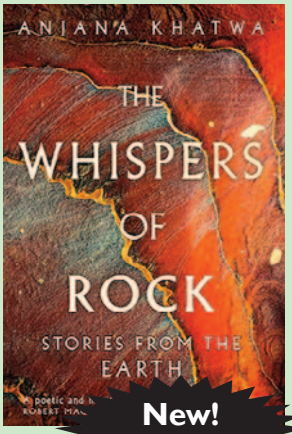


New! £20.00

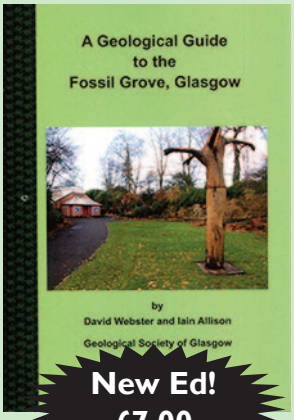


New! £22.00

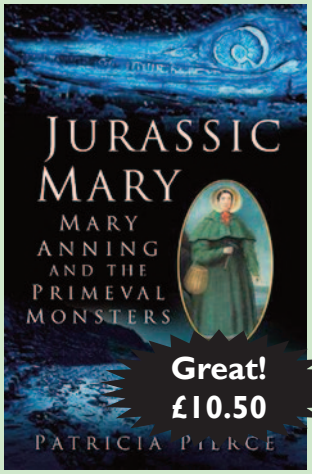
New! £15.00



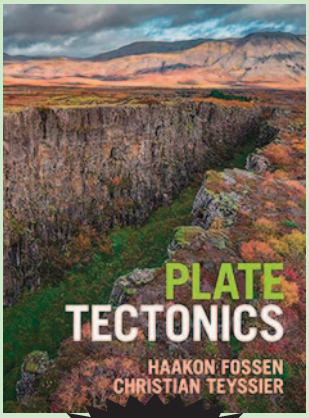
New! £25.00



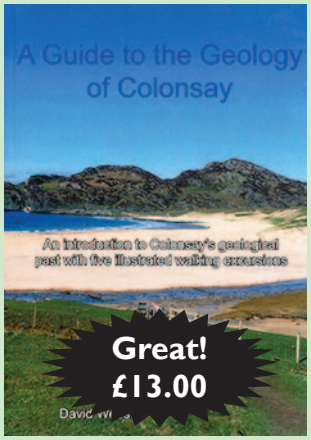
New Ed! £7.00



Great! £10.50

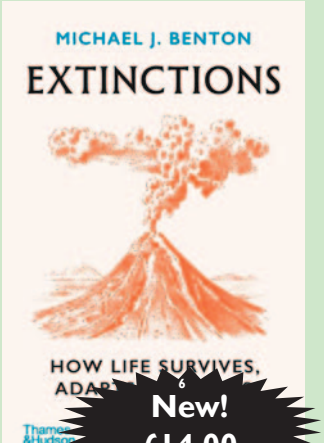


Terrific! £50.00



Great! £13.00

Ask about new guides to Islay & Jura!



New! £14.00

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