

*John Mortimer, Technical and External Affairs Director at ARC and Chairman of the CBI Minerals Committee, outlines the background and purpose of Minerals '98*

**John Mortimer**

ARC, Chipping Sodbury

In 1993 palaeontologists working in a disused gravel pit in Sussex discovered the shin bone of 'Boxgrove man'. At the time they were the oldest human remains ever discovered in Europe. They also found his perfectly formed flint hand tools dating from a period half a million years ago.

The discovery served as a reminder that since man's very beginning, we have taken minerals from the Earth and used them to make more of life.

Five hundred millennia have come and gone and as we stand ready to enter yet another it is an appropriate moment to remind the nation that minerals continue to be essential ingredients of our civilisation.

The new millennium brings with it tremendous challenges. In an increasingly crowded world, the health of the planet's environment concerns us all. It is more vital than ever that the minerals industry demonstrates that it is and will remain, part of the solution and not a source of the problems which we face as we look forward to the future.

Reaching the goal of sustainable resource utilisation will involve everyone in the



*Institute of Quarrying West Midlands branch sponsored dump truck drive from John o' Groats to Land's End for charity.*

industry, not only as professionals but also as advocates of the case that the objective is both vital and achievable.

Minerals '98 addresses that task by bringing together industry, professionals, academics, politicians, teachers, children and the wider community in a celebration of our mineral wealth and its contribution to society. More importantly, Minerals '98 seeks to advance the future interests of British industry both at home and abroad in order to ensure that we maintain its significant economic and social contribution to the nation.

***"... minerals are the essential ingredients that enable us to make more of life ..."***

The minerals industry is one of the cornerstones of wealth creation within the United Kingdom. The minerals produced from indigenous sources are vital to many of our manufacturing, processing and construction industries. Almost every aspect of our daily lives is dependent in some way on the minerals we produce.

The UK is fortunate in having an abundant and varied supply of mineral resources. In 1996 the value of mineral production was £21.8 billion excluding distribution costs. The UK maintains a positive balance of payments in minerals. It is self sufficient in construction materials and is a major exporter of a number of industrial minerals such as china clay and ball clay.

In reality, the output value of minerals does not reflect their ultimate value to

the national economy. Minerals are the basic raw materials for the manufacturing, power supply and construction industries. When the value of these sectors, which are almost entirely minerals based, are also taken into account, the figures show that minerals provide the essential raw materials to industrial sectors that contributed about £100 billion, or 16 per cent to the total United Kingdom GDP in 1996.

Equally importantly, more than 70 000 people work directly in the British minerals industry with many thousands more relying indirectly on the industry for their livelihoods.

British expertise in the minerals sector is renowned around the world. The BGS



*John Mortimer.*

itself, the London Metal Exchange, UK mining journalism, the number and strength of UK minerals companies operating overseas and the leading environmental consultancies, all bear testimony to our global reputation.

However, the extraction, processing, delivery and use of minerals have an impact on the environment. Rightly, society is placing increasing emphasis on the environmental sustainability of all human activity. The extraction of minerals can be highly visible and is increasingly the focus of attention for many environmental pressure groups. The danger is that the minerals industry may come to be regarded as 'unacceptable' resulting in significantly reduced activity, declining economic contribution and worsening balance of payments as imports rise.

Of course, some environmental impacts are positive — there is nothing environmentally friendly about inadequate housing, schools, hospitals and congested roads, and minerals are used to solve all these problems.

The industry also plays a major role in conservation. Over one hundred old quarries are now designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Working hand in hand with conservation groups and local authorities, the restoration of mineral workings provides the opportunity to increase local biodiversity and in some cases to contribute to national biodiversity targets. In particular sand and gravel extraction is the major provider of inland wetlands in Britain, replacing



*A former quarry at Blue Circle's Hope Works which has been restored as a nine-hole golf course.*

habitats that have been lost to agriculture and urban development.

A sustainable future for the industry requires that we harness technological innovation, so achieving improved efficiency, competitiveness and reduced environmental impact. We will need to recruit the best talents if we are to succeed.

Ours is an exciting, valuable and responsible industry. But it needs urgently to address fundamental questions about its future role in society.

Minerals '98 is an ambitious initiative — there has been nothing of its kind before in the sector. It has evolved from a close

working partnership between a diverse range of organisations, including minerals companies, professional institutions and academia, all of which have an interest in the future of the minerals sector.

There are three central aims:

- to maintain and enhance the contribution of the UK mineral sector to a sustainable and growing national economy and an improving quality of life;
- to ensure that the twin objectives of meeting society's need for minerals and the achievement of a sustainable environment are complementary and not mutually exclusive;
- to enhance understanding in the community of the minerals industry, its role, expertise and relationship with a sustainable environment.

Communication is a two way process. It means listening to others as well as explaining our own point of view. It also means learning, and just as we hope that Minerals '98 will be educational for our public audience we should learn ourselves from what they say to us.

As the industry opens doors during Minerals '98, let us hope that it opens minds too. Our message is important.

Minerals are the essential ingredient that enable us to make more of life.

*Children visiting a Grondon quarry at Chieveley in Berkshire. They are pictured with quarry manager Colin Scarlett.*

