



Taking earth science to the community

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Keyworth

Since its earliest years, the British Geological Survey has had a major role to play in the academic development of the earth sciences. In addition, from its foundation in 1841 until its transfer to the Natural History Museum in 1985, the Geological Museum was a major interface between the Survey and the general public. Guide Lecturers, Education Officers and other museum staff provided public lectures, guided tours and geological excursions.

Following the publication in 1993 of the White Paper on Science, Engineering and Technology, *Realising Our Potential*, the importance of promoting the public understanding of science has been officially recognised by central government and actively adopted within the BGS. However, up to a decade earlier the then Director, Sir Malcolm Brown, instigated a series of open days at the BGS to welcome local residents to the new Nottinghamshire headquarters and celebrate 150 years since the foundation of the Survey in 1835. No part of the BGS was off limits to the public and every aspect of the science was explained. These open days were a tremendous success. During the 1988 event over 16 000 people passed through

the gates at Keyworth in a single day. Highly successful open days were also held at the BGS Regional Offices.

Budgetary constraints mean that the BGS can no longer afford to open its doors on quite the same scale. However, the BGS still welcomes visits by professional and community groups by prior arrangement and BGS staff regularly give talks to evening classes, university groups and local community organisations.

"...our more spectacular fossil and mineral specimens are popular attractions..."

The BGS is an active participant in the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) Schools Liaison Network. With their support and guidance, the BGS has launched the *Rocky* series. These booklets, aimed at Key Stage 3, take a light-hearted look at how geology affects all our lives. The BGS has long been active in local schools. Our more spectacular fossil and mineral specimens are popular attractions along with interactive talks on such diverse subjects as "Geology and Meals" and "The Life of Mr Earth". In 1994 and 1995 the BGS was host to the Barclay's Life Jason project when thousands of visitors were able to participate in exploration in Belize

Education

(1994) and the Hawaiian volcanoes (1995) via live satellite link-ups.

Much of the BGS's effort towards the public understanding of science is now focused into national initiatives such as Science, Engineering and Technology Week (SET). For the last four years in mid-March, school parties have been invited to experience a programme of demonstrations and interactive talks on earth science topics ranging from moonrock and mineral exploration to mammoth thigh bones and geology in the bedroom. A wider public was reached in 1997 with a programme of evening lectures given by Survey staff and a chance for family groups to participate. Scottish based staff at Murchison House, Edinburgh concentrate their efforts on the Edinburgh International Festival of Science which takes place during the Easter break. In addition, the BGS in Edinburgh makes a major contribution to Scottish Geology Week. Open days, public lectures and evening geological excursions are planned for this year's event in August.

Although the public understanding of science is now regarded as a high priority to the nation as a whole, funding is still very scarce and the success of such activities at the BGS is partly due to the commitment of staff giving generously of their free time.



Photo courtesy of O. Hillier



Left Out and about: the BGS's biggest and best fossils on show at a local school.

Top Youngsters learn to pan for gold during SET week at BGS.

Right Science or a sticky mess? Make your own volcano at BGS during SET week.

