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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Please note that the 32nd AGM of the Geological Curators' Group will be held at 1600 on Monday 5 December 2005 at the Worcester Room, Conference Centre, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ. Nominations for the posts of Officers, and two Committee Members must be made by two members of the Group and submitted in writing to Giles Miller, GCG Secretary, Department of Palaeontology, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD **by Monday 14 November 2005**.

Subscriptions 2006: look out for your invoice

As last year, instead of completing a subscription form in *Coprolite*, Personal Members will receive individual invoices for their annual subscriptions. We hope that this will encourage more prompt payment than in the past. When you receive your invoice, please deal with it immediately: don't let it be subducted beneath the developing orogen of paperwork on your desk. If you have already arranged to pay by standing order, you will not receive an invoice.

Subscriptions are due on 1 January 2006. Subscriptions remain the same as last year: £12.00 for UK Personal Members and £15.00/US\$27.00/€22.00 for Overseas Personal Members. Institutional subscriptions are £16.00 for UK institutions and £18.00/US\$32.00/€26.00 for Overseas institutional subscribers. Institutional Subscribers will receive invoices as usual.

Standing Orders. If you are a UK Personal Member and you did not complete a standing order form last year, then you are strongly encouraged to do so this year. This method of payment greatly simplifies the administration of subscriptions and helps keep costs (and, therefore, subscriptions) down. If you completed a standing order form last year, there is no need to complete another this year.

Gift Aid. As a charity, GCG can recover tax from the Inland Revenue at a rate of 28p for each £1 of your subscription if you are a UK taxpayer. It costs you nothing and GCG benefits, helping to keep costs and subscriptions down. Please sign the Gift Aid declaration on your subscription renewal invoice when you receive it.

Subscriptions unpaid by 30 April 2006 will be deemed to have lapsed.

Sara Chambers, GCG Treasurer, Royal Cornwall Museum, River Street, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2SJ tel 01872 272205, fax 01872 240514, email sara.chambers@royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk

New members

GCG is pleased to welcome the following new members: **Martha Richter**, Natural History Museum; **Huw Bolton**, National Museum of Wales; **Jan Freedman**, Bristol; and **June Wright**, Core Store Manager, British Geological Survey.

Musical curators

At the Royal Cornwall Museum in Truro, **Jodie Fisher**, a graduate of Leicester and University College, London and currently completing a PhD at Plymouth, has been appointed to the post of Geological Conservator to work specifically on conserving the mineral collection, while **Gerardo Mazzetta** who has a biology degree and palaeontology doctorate from the Universidad de la Republica, Montevideo, Uruguay has been taken on as curatorial assistant working mainly on the biological and geological collections; **Stephen Howe**, Curator (Palaeontology) in the National Museum of Wales has been appointed to the new post of Head of Programmes and Presentation in the museum and took up his post on 1 November; **Hannah Chalk**, formerly at Clitheroe Castle Museum has moved to Manchester University as Curatorial Assistant in the Department of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences to work on the Harwood Mineral Collection.

Dave Kemp

GCG members will be saddened to hear of the death of Dave Kemp, the fossil shark expert and Keeper of Geology at Gosport Museums. He developed a spinal tumour earlier this year, and died in hospital on 20 August.

Exhibitions 2005-2006

Diamonds Natural History Museum until 26 February 2006

Richard Owen: dinosaur man, The man who invented dinosaurs The Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester until 26 February 2006

Newish publications

Sedimentary rocks in the field. A colour guide by Dorrik A.V. Stow, 2005. London: Manson Publishing, 320pp. Hardback ISBN 1 874545 68 1, £39.95, paperback ISBN 1 874545 69 3, £19.95.

The evolution of clastic sedimentology by Hakuyu Okada with Alec Kenyon-Smith, 2005. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, xix + 251pp. ISBN 1 903765 49 8, £45.00.

Dinosaurs. A very short introduction by David Norman, 2005. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 176pp. ISBN 0 19 280419 7, £6.99.

Heroic science. Swansea and the Royal Institution of South Wales 1835-1865 by Ronald Rees, 2005. St Athan: Wales Books (Glyndwr Publishing), 247pp. ISBN 1 903529 16 6, £9.99.

Unearthing the dragon. The great feathered dinosaur discovery by Mark Norell, 2005. New York: Pi Press, 254pp. ISBN 0 13 186266 9, £21.99.

The pterosaurs from deep time by David Unwin, 2006. New York: Pi Press, 347pp. ISBN 0 13 146308 X, £28.99

Discovering Dorothea. The life of the pioneering fossil-hunter Dorothea Bate by Karolyn Shindler, 2005. London: HarperCollins, ISBN 0 00 257138 2, ix + 390pp.

Fossils and the future. Paleontology in the 21st century edited by Richard H Laine, Fritz F Steininger, Roger L Kaesler, Willi Ziegler and Jere Lipps, 2005. Frankfurt: Senckenberg-Buch Nr 74, 290pp.

Fossil, mineral and gem shows

19-20 November Cheltenham Racecourse, Prestbury Park, Cheltenham, Glos

3-4 December Brighton Racecourse, Freshfield Road, Brighton.

For further information contact HD Fairs Ltd, PO Box 72, Maidenhead SL6 7GB tel 01628 621697 email info@rockngem.co.uk www.Rockngem.co.uk

Canterbury Fossil Roadshow

Now in its eighth year, Canterbury Museum's next Fossil Roadshow will celebrate Kent's amazing fossil riches in a **Festival of Fossils**. As always, our team of experts will be on hand to identify all manner of rocks, fossils and minerals brought in by the public, and they expect to be busy throughout the event.

Enthusiasts from local fossil groups, including the Oyster Coast Fossil Society, Medway Fossil and Mineral Society, the Sheppey Fossil Study Group, Kent Geologists' Group, Kent Regionally Important Geological Sites Group and the Ravensbourne Geological Society, will be exhibiting their latest and most spectacular finds.

Activities for children (and adults!) will include a fossil-workshop to excavate your own fossil and discover 'hollow' fossils, as well as trying your hand at finding real fossil sharks' teeth. Free gifts too!the first 50 children attending the Roadshow will be invited to try a lucky-dip for a fossil, rock or mineral specimen.

The Roadshow will take place on Saturday 28 January 2006 at the Royal Museum, High Street, Canterbury, Kent from 1000-1300, 1400-1600, admission free. We regret that the Museum is not yet accessible to wheelchair users.

Contact Ralph Anderson or Martin Crowther on 01227 452747.

Everything Dinosaur

Mike Walley has set up a company specialising in the supply of dinosaur and prehistoric-related toy, hobby, games and merchandise. He has brought together a huge range of models, games, puzzles, and gifts for at young people, aimed at encouraging an interest in Earth sciences. Everything Dinosaur can be contacted at 1 Goodwood Rise, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9FJ tel 01606 841068 fax 01606 837964 email sales@everythingdinosaur.com web www.everythingdinosaur.com

Dudley's Rock and Fossil Festival 2006 and Wrens Nest 50th Anniversary celebrations 16-17 September 2006

As you will all be aware, this one will be very special as it coincides with the 50th Anniversary of the Wrens Nest becoming the first geological and mining heritage packed National Nature Reserve. The events surrounding this celebration will be

bigger and higher profile than ever before. Already, we have had considerable interest in, and requests for, stands at the fair from national institutions, European organisations, local and specialist groups. As such we will be issuing the details to anyone who expresses an interest very shortly.

The weekend after the festival we'll be holding a host of field trips to local sites and in the run up starting in September of this year we began photographic competitions, exhibitions about Wrens Nest through the ages and the preparations for new leaflets, trail guides and conferences. It will be an amazing year so if you would like more details please let us know as soon as you can as things are gathering pace now.

Graham Worton, FGS, C.Geol, Keeper of Geology and Museum Manager, Dudley Museum and Art Gallery, 1 St James Road, Dudley, West Midlands DY1 1HU tel 01384 815574 fax 01384 815576 email graham.worton@dudley.gov.uk

Geological Museum of Lisbon under threat

GCG has received reports that the Geological Museum of Lisbon is under threat. The museum was established in the mid-19th century by the Geological Survey of Portugal, and it is one of the few examples of a 19th museum in Portugal, with its original content, lay-out and furniture. It was housed in the same building as the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon, but it belongs to the Institute of Geology and Mining, which inherited it together with the archive of the Geological Survey. In addition to its historical interest, the Museum is indispensable to present day scientific studies, because it possesses reference collections of fossils, minerals, archaeological and palaeoanthropological items collected in Portugal and purchased in Europe from well-known collectors and museums.

In August, the Minister of Science of the newly elected government, upon the request of the Academy of Sciences (which claims to need the space occupied by the museum), decided that the Museum is to be dismantled and moved into a building far from the city-centre where it is now. For many years the museum has been under-funded and under-staffed (with only one curator). There is great concern that the collections will be mixed up during the move and that there will be no staff to take care of them for many years to come, with the attendant risk that they will be discarded.

Simon Knell, Director of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester says, "Here is a national museum on the verge of destruction. It is the national survey museum of Portugal and is possibly the richest palaeontological collection in the country. It has a long history dating back to the early years of the establishment of the science in that country. It certainly has received under investment in recent decades but the collection fairly when I saw it a couple of years ago. It is a unique database for the future of Portuguese geology and we really must try to save it."

If you would like to express your concern, please write to Professor Miguel Ramalho, Instituto Geológico e Mineiro, Estrada da Portela, Apartado 7586, P-2720 Alfragide, Portugal.

University museums with free admission can now reclaim VAT

48 university museums and galleries across the country can now reclaim their VAT thanks to the extension of the Government's free access policy. The free

access policy is a cornerstone of this Government's cultural policy which will now also recognise the essential work of these university museums and galleries, who provide regular free admission to the public to view permanent collections or exhibits, by allowing them to reclaim the VAT they have paid on their running costs.

In 1998, the Government made a commitment to restore free public access to view the principal collections on display in the main national museums and galleries. One obstacle to the transition from levying admission charges to free access was the ability to recover VAT. While they charged for admission, many museums and galleries could – under the normal rules – recover the VAT paid on their purchases because they were engaged in a business activity. This right would cease when charges were abolished, because there would no longer be the same level of business activity to permit any appreciable recovery of VAT. To compensate for this, a special VAT refund scheme was introduced in 2001 for the museums and galleries for which the free access commitment was given.

Last year, following Sir Nicholas Goodison's review *Securing the Best for our Museums: Private Giving and Government Support*, the Government decided to extend its free access policy to the collections held in university museums and galleries. In last year's Spending review, the Chancellor then announced that the VAT refund scheme would apply to those university museums and galleries that agreed to provide or maintain free access, in line with the Government's newly-extended policy.

From 10 August 2005, the scheme for the refund of VAT incurred in relation to the provision of free admission was extended to museums, libraries (in respect of the historical collections in their galleries, temporary exhibitions and other related public programmes and events), and galleries in universities and other relevant institutions which: maintain a permanent collection in a space that is used solely for that purpose; provide admission without charge to these collections; and are open to the public without appointment at advertised times for at least 30 hours per week.

Minister for Culture, David Lammy, said, "With this latest extension of the free access policy, museums like the Fitzwilliam in Cambridge, the Ashmolean in Oxford, the Hancock in Newcastle and the Manchester Museum will now also be able to claim VAT refunds, helping them to do more to make our cultural heritage freely available to everyone."

The full list of eligible university museums that will benefit from the VAT refund scheme can be found at www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2005/20051993.htm

SPNHC Abstracts available

The abstracts for the SPNHC conference last July had to be reprinted as the printers introduced an extra blank page at the start meaning that the page numbers got printed near the spine rather than on the edges of the pages as designed. Text is as finally printed. As a result I have a large number to distribute. If any GCG members would like a copy then please e-mail me or write to me, Dr Giles Miller, Department of Palaeontology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD tel 0207 942 5415 fax 0207 942 5546 email G.Miller@nhm.ac.uk

HLF grant for Dorset geology

Dorset County Museum has been granted £336,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the redisplay of geology in the museum as a Jurassic Coast Gallery in conjunction with the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

Geotourism and museums

It's not often that geology features much in the *Museums Journal*, so it was a pleasant surprise to find three pages on geotourism in the September 2005 issue. This is a subject which GCG has addressed on several occasions in the past and it is very much a hot topic at the moment, especially with the recent designation of several European geoparks in the UK. The article "Rock stars" by Deborah Mulhearn (*Museums Journal* Vol 105, No 9, pp.24-27) makes slightly uncomfortable reading for museum geologists, who might feel that for all our efforts over the last few decades, what impact have we really made on the public's perception of geology? Are we really making enough of a link between the collections we hold and world outside our museums? Tom Hose, a tourism lecturer in Buckinghamshire, who has spoken to GCG in the past, makes the point that geology is in a bit of a rough patch at the moment, it doesn't have "a good brand image", geology curators are becoming an endangered species, fewer schools and colleges are organising fieldtrips, and collections are being allowed to decline. It's a bit of a depressing picture.

However, Mulhearn does cite a number of initiatives which should give us some encouragement: the redevelopment of Ludlow Museum and the Manx Museum, and the plans for the Rotunda Museum in Scarborough and its role as a gateway to the Dinosaur Coast. And in Dorset, local museums are actively pursuing links with the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. These, Mulhearn says, could have visitors packing rock hammers along with their buckets and spades for their summer holiday. Maybe there's a still bit of work to do on geoconservation issues. But she does agree that museums have a key role to play in geotourism.

The issue of geoparks and the role museum geology collections can play is the theme of GCG's next meeting, at Worcester on 5-6 December 2005.

PRISM funds geology

Among the recent awards from the PRISM fund of the Museums Libraries and Archives Council are three of geological interest. Cambridge University Museum of Zoology has been awarded £17,918 for the acquisition of three specimens of *Westlothiana lizziae*; Tullie House Museum Carlisle has been given £1260 for minerals from Cumbria; and Somerset County Museum Service has received £5,000 for the conservation and preparation of a plesiosaur excavated last year from Bridgewater Bay (see *Coprolite* No 44, p3).

The virtual quarry

The Quarry Products Association has secured MIST funding for a project that seeks to produce a set of dedicated teaching resources concentrating on topics associated with quarries and aggregate extraction. The lynchpin of the project will be an Internet-based interactive teaching tool called the Virtual Quarry. Although still in development, the scope of the site and the level of information it will provide are considerable and it is hoped it will act as a hub to access materials from myriad resources already at other online locations.

From March 2006, visitors to www.virtualquarry.co.uk will be able to travel in a virtual 3D environment from a building site in a fictional city, tracing the

construction materials back to the quarry from which they were extracted. Modelled on a real working operation, the virtual quarry will accurately model the processes involved in the industry, from researching the geology of the site, to blasting (which will include an interactive element that the project team believes will be of particular interest to young visitors...), transporting, screening and distributing materials.

Throughout the experience, the user will be able to find out more about the common processes involved in quarrying while making the mental link between the built environment and the mineral extraction that underpins it all. However, to maximise the relevance and usefulness of the resource, the QPA has teamed up with a team of education consultants which is developing learning modules encouraging both visitors to the website and actual quarries across England. These modules are designed to feed directly into the National Curriculum ensuring that teaching materials are relevant and easy to apply in the classroom.

With a project team drawn up from industry, environmental charities, education and web design, the final resource is shaping up to be a cutting edge example of how e-communications are becoming an important and powerful tool in modern teaching. We are keen to promote the site as widely as possible and welcome interest and input from Forum members, please contact the QPA's Tim Parry or Elizabeth Clementson 020 7963 8000 to find out more about the project and to get involved. We are particularly keen to source some rock photographs for the facility, so if any member can help on this front, we would welcome your call.

Tim Parry, Project Management Team, Quarry Products Association, 38-44 Gillingham Street, London SW1V 9HU tel 0207 963 8014 mobile 07841 958400 fax 0207 963 8001 email parry@qpa.org

MDA wins contract to develop collections description manual

MDA has been awarded a contract by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) to develop a Collections Description Manual for MICHAEL, a project which will create the first multilingual inventory of collections in museums, libraries and archives across Europe. MLA is the UK partner in the European MICHAEL consortium, which also includes representatives from France and Italy. In the UK, MLA has been working to develop the Collections Description Service, a unique set of tools which will draw together descriptions of physical and digital collections.

MDA has been commissioned by MLA to support MICHAEL and the Collections Description Service by creating a manual for culture-sector professionals who will be creating descriptions of their collections. The manual will be launched in October 2005 as an online browsable resource providing guidance and case studies illustrating best practice in describing collections. Kate Fernie, ICT Adviser EU Projects at MLA commented, "MICHAEL is a ground-breaking project which will open up worldwide access to our shared European cultural heritage". Nick Poole, MDA Director, said, " In recent years, digitisation initiatives have supported the creation of millions of digital versions of objects, documents and artefacts across Europe. MICHAEL and the Collections Description Service have a vital role to play in ensuring these resources are available to all".

For further information about MICHAEL, go to www.michael-culture.org/project.html

MDA publishes revised edition of SPECTRUM standard

A revised edition of SPECTRUM, the documentation standard for museums has been published by MDA. SPECTRUM has been developed in partnership with over 100 museum professionals and is recognised nationally and internationally as the authoritative source of best practice in documentation. It includes 21 procedures, eight of which are defined as requirements of the Museum, Library and Archive Council's (MLA) Museum Accreditation Scheme, the national minimum standard for museums. The procedures cover all aspects of the management of an object within a museum's collections, from acquisition to loan or disposal. The revised edition has been completely updated, and features three entirely new procedures including information on Rights Management. Other updates to the standard include a new more accessible format, and updates to the sources of help and advice that are referenced throughout.

SPECTRUM is available free of charge for non-commercial use by museums. It can be downloaded from the redesigned MDA website at www.mda.org.uk/spectrum.htm. Hard copies can be purchased from MDA Publications for £30.00 including postage and packing (£25.00 for MDA members). Telephone MDA Publications on 01223 415760 or email lorraine@mda.org.uk

MDA launches online forum

MDA has launched a free online forum to help museum professionals find information and share expertise. Accessible through the MDA website at www.mda.org.uk/forum.htm, the forum enables museum staff to ask questions, discuss current issues and find out more about the work of MDA. The forum is free to use, although new users are required to register. Discussions are reviewed regularly by MDA's network of information management specialists who are able to answer queries and make constructive suggestions. Topics covered by the forum include general documentation, the SPECTRUM standard, Museum Accreditation and copyright. There is a members-only section which provides direct access to MDA experts through the AdvicePoint advisory service. The forum will also host discussions relating to MDA's Collections for all campaign (www.collectionsforall.org.uk) Forum users are also able to access information about the latest documentation-related jobs and tenders through the relevant section.

MDA signs landmark agreement with Scottish Museums Council

MDA has signed a landmark Service Level Agreement with the Scottish Museums Council (SMC) to provide support and advice for museums throughout Scotland. Under the Agreement, members of SMC are to be offered a free Standard membership of MDA (normal price £40). This membership will enable the museums to use MDA's telephone and email advisory services, members-only online services, and to benefit from discounts on publications, training and membership of affiliated organisations. In addition to the free membership, the SMC has agreed to grant MDA a further subsidy to build capacity and services which directly address the needs of Scottish museums.

Realising Standards: the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections Annual Meeting, Natural History Museum, London June 2005

To mark their 20th anniversary, the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) ventured overseas in June to hold their Annual Meeting in Britain for the first time. The Natural History Museum in London was the chosen venue for this very well-attended and informative conference, run in

conjunction with NatSCA, the Natural History Collections Working Group (NHCWG) and, of course, GCG.

The GCG session kicked off on Thursday morning with a warm welcome from Patrick Wyse Jackson who also chaired the session. Jean DeMouthe of the California Academy of Sciences then spoke about standards of care for gemstone collections. She started by stating that they include all 'worked' materials with their gemstones, and that a museum's Collection Management Plan should identify what materials are included within this category. She emphasized the security issues involved with the care of such valuable, and usually small, specimens, including the need to keep very detailed records. Often the identification of gemstones is based on their description, for example: size, weight, colour, etc, and these details should be cross-referenced in as many ways as necessary, both electronic and hardcopy, with back-up copies of all files and registers kept off-site. The collections should be periodically checked and audited, and if necessary re-valued for insurance purposes. Storage is an important consideration, with environmental factors being of high priority. The best way to store gemstones, and worked materials, is usually by putting like objects with like objects, for example: cut slabs, spheres etc, although care should be taken to avoid crowding, and risk of abrasion. Also some materials, for example organic specimens, may have particular environmental requirements to be met. High value specimens should be kept in unmarked locked cabinets with keys issued only to specified staff. Procedures should be drawn up and adhered to in all circumstances, and loans should only be issued after all these have been followed. Loans for exhibition purposes must be particularly carefully considered, and curators should not hesitate to insist on appropriate standards and procedures being followed.

Helen Fothergill then filled us in on the findings of the 2001 State and Status survey. Intended to provide an up to date snap-shot of the nation's geological collections, twenty years on from Phil Doughty's 1981 report, it has proved to be a time consuming exercise. Of the 300 questionnaires sent out, only just over half were returned, and many of these had confusing or contradictory answers. Helen then quickly ran through the contents of the report (published in *Geological Curator*, vol.8, no.3). Worryingly, there seem to be some large parts of the country which do not seem to have any geology collections, and some major collections have been dispersed since the 1981 report. It was interesting that many museums without specialist curators reported that their collections were in good condition. Does this mean that we are becoming redundant - or is it just that only a geologist would be likely to spot if a collection was deteriorating. Also, many museums reported that they were not actively collecting, and had no acquisitions policy. The same themes, of lack of funding and of specialist staff, seem to be fairly common throughout all museums regardless of their size.

The third speaker, Owen Green from the University of Oxford, re-emphasised the advice about curation given to research students in the 1983 NERC-funded paper by Steve Tunnidcliff. This paper was intended to ensure that research collections were properly documented and cared for prior to their being offered to a museum. However, many students still seem unaware of basic curatorial techniques, and the importance of "donating a well-curated collection upon completion of their research". Students should be taught these principles, as well as advice on field safety, and obtaining permits, and permissions for export if required. They should consider carefully which institution they should donate to, as some museums may have reservations about taking certain foreign specimens, or may be unable to accept large collections or out-sized specimens, or those with particular conservation issues. They must also check with them as to

curatorial requirements, numbering, additional documentation etc. Digital images are now often an integral part of the documentation for a collection, and should be included, properly cross-referenced, with the donation. Owen proposed that collection policy documents should be made available to students and supervisors, through all major bodies, with more in-house advice and documents available through tutorials. Post-grad research students particularly should be given advice at the start of their projects. He suggested that "GCG, SPNHC, Pal Ass and the Geol Soc, could also be in a position to host or have links for this type of information on their web sites, or disseminate 'hard-copy' to students".

Mick Stanley next spoke about the revision of the 1993 *Standards in the museum care of geological collections*. The importance of such standards is of more importance now than ever before, with the decline in numbers of specialist curators and an increase in more generalised collections managers. Various other schemes, such as the revision of the *Guidelines*, and the 'Networking Activities' section of 'Synthesys', are also aiming to improve curatorial standards. Not all museums will achieve all the standards, but most will have to be met by museums with accredited status. Mick then went over various parts of the revised *Standards*, describing the four main areas: Procedural; Collection Care and Maintenance; Building and Management; and Access and Education.

Patrick Wyse Jackson gave the next talk in which he asked if we are able to learn from the past. Many 'Standards' have been written, including a set in 1696 given to explorers and sea captains detailing what they should collect, and record, what instruments might be needed, and how to care for any specimens collected. He then talked about various other examples before leading on to the second edition of the *Guidelines* which is currently being written. Patrick finished by saying that although we should be aiming towards following standards as much as possible, they shouldn't rule us absolutely and we should not let them stop us doing the very best we can. Museums should be aiming towards "less management and more leadership". He also posed a final question: "How many of us, as curators actually curate specimens in any quantity - and why not?" Answers on a postcard....?

The final speaker of the GCG session was Linda Welzenbach of the Smithsonian Institution, who gave a very interesting talk about the curatorial regulations within the US Antarctic Meteorite Program. The Smithsonian holds the largest meteorite collection in the world and have rigorous procedures and regulations designed to minimise contamination to these scientifically important specimens. The meteorites are collected with stainless steel tongs, are placed in long plastic bags which are then rolled up and sealed with aluminium tags. They are stored at a constant -15°C and transported back to the US in polystyrene crates and refrigerated trailers. Once received, all new specimens are thawed and dried, photographed, sampled and then curated with a permanent number. Each is then published in the Antarctic Meteorite Newsletter. To avoid contamination and environmental changes, all meteorites are stored in stainless steel cabinets and flooded with nitrogen gas - even the very biggest at 110 kgs.

A geological Special Interest Discussion Group ended the morning, with 16 geologists, including six or seven GCG members present. Many interesting topics were discussed, including: the need for a national or international list of geological specialisms; undergraduates to be taught curatorial procedures and the need to curate only the best specimens in some cases; loans; on-line databases - how often are they actually used?; and also an unresolved debate about the pros and cons of retaining 'foreign' specimens - even if legal, should

they not be more appropriately returned to their home country where they might be of more use?

The overwhelming opinion of all was that this meeting had been an excellent opportunity for curators from many countries to meet and discuss common issues. It was perhaps not surprising to learn that everyone shared many similar problems such as lack of funding and over-management. All agreed that we should look to form more links between GCG and SPNHC and encourage further communication between the two groups.

Cindy Howells, Collections Manager (Palaeontology), National Museum of Wales

Forthcoming GCG seminars and workshops

5-6 December 2005 University of Worcester, Conference Centre (Worcester Room), Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ.

GCG seminar, field trip and 32nd AGM: Geoparks and Geodiversity Action Plans : A new look at GeoConservation

There is a major move in this country to roll out the twin, and not unrelated, concepts of Geoparks and Geodiversity Action Plans (GAPS). But what does it all mean? Where do museums and collections fit in to this strategy and what collaboration is taking place? What are the issues surrounding collecting and collecting controls and what are the implications with respect to Museums and collectors in general. This seminar will explore the strategic aims and objectives of these major geoconservation initiatives and how museums can play an active role, especially in terms of geo-tourism and education programmes. Particular emphasis will be placed on the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark, The North Pennines Geopark and the Northumberland and Durham Geodiversity Action Plans.

Monday 5 December 2005

1030 Arrival and Coffee

1100 Welcome.

1105 Dr Cheryl Jones (Director of the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark): Sustainable geotourism in the Abberley and Malvern Hills Geopark.

1145 Chris Woodley Stewart (Director of North Pennines Geopark): Geoparks and geotourism in the North Pennines.

1215 Jon Radley, (Warwickshire Museum): Local museums and geoconservation.

1245 Lunch

1415 Brian Young (British Geological Survey): Making sense of geodiversity in Northern England

1445 Andrew Haycock (National Museum of Wales): The Rhondda Cynon Taf Earth Science Audit: A geoconservation strategy and its application to museums.

1515 Speaker to be confirmed

1545 Tea

1600 Geological Curators' Group 32nd Annual General Meeting (Worcester Room)

1700 Meeting ends.

Evening. There will be an opportunity to attend an evening meal. Details to be confirmed on the day.

Tuesday 6 December

Malvern Hills field Excursion.

Visit to Gullet Quarry where Lower Silurian marine sediments are exposed resting unconformably on the Malvern Complex, and a walk north along the Malvern Ridge to Herefordshire Beacon (British Camp) where there is a classic view of the northern Malvern Hills.

Meeting fee: £10 (included teas, coffees and buffet lunch on 5th). Lunch on 6th payable on the day. Please return the booking form on page 15 **by 18**

November 2005, to Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT tel 0191 222 6765, fax 0191 222 6753, email s.g.mclean@ncl.ac.uk

26 April 2006 National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff

GCG Workshop: The curation and conservation of rock collections.

This one day workshop will cover basic identification, terminology, storage and conservation of rock collections, including useful resources on the web and in literature.

Contact: Helen Kerbey, Department of Geology, National Museum of Wales, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NP tel 029 2057 3367 email helen.kerbey@nmgw.ac.uk

18 May 2006 Manchester University

GCG Seminar: Dangerous minerals

This meeting will review current best practice procedures for identifying and dealing with some of the classes of dangerous minerals commonly found in museum collections – these will include the asbestos group of minerals as well as radioactive species. Contributions from leading academics, curators and health and safety officers will allow participants to build up an up to date picture of how to manage the dangerous minerals in their collections.

Contact: Mandy Edwards, Curator and Learning Resource Manager, School of Earth, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL tel 0161 275 3825 fax 0161 275 3947

11 October 2006 (date to be confirmed) World Museum Liverpool.

GCG Workshop: Geological archives

Practical workshop looking at some of the techniques used to conserve and store a variety of archive materials including modern documents, books, maps and prints, and photographs and slide collections.

Contact: Tony Morgan, Natural History Centre, World Museum Liverpool, William Brown Street, Liverpool, L3 8EN tel 0151 478 4286 fax 0151 478 4390 email tony.morgan@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk

4-5 December 2006 City Museum & Art Gallery, Plymouth, Devon

GCG Seminar and 33rd AGM: Learning with geology collections

One of the current buzzwords: **Learning** underpins the purpose of geological collections whether we like it or not. It may encompass school children digging up fossils and making plasticine volcanoes, a researcher re-assessing type specimens for a new treatise, an exciting and informative gallery or a systematic collection representing early scientific thought. Education in all its forms can be indirect or formal; traditional or new; exciting and innovative or methodical and personal.

The theme of this meeting will allow us to re-explore some of the old favourites we've been doing for years (but re-branded to fit new and popular directives) plus truly new and innovative approaches that might inspire you to re-examine the potential of your rocks. The meeting will be aimed at geological curators, education officers and non-specialist curators with responsibility for geological material.

Contact: Helen Fothergill, Keeper of Natural History, Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon, PL4 8AJ tel 01752 304774 fax 01752 304775 email helen.fothergill@plymouth.gov.uk

Other meetings

4-8 September 2006 The Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde, Karlsruhe, Germany. The Sauropterygia: The first European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontology Themed Symposium.

Sauropterygian palaeontology, including preparation, conservation, display, etc.

Contact: Dr Leslie Noè, The Sedgwick Museum, Downing Street, Cambridge. e-mail lnoe01@esc.cam.ac.uk or see <http://eavp.alettra.de/>

Please return this booking form with a cheque for £10, made payable to "Geological Curators Group" **by 18 November** to: Steve McLean, The Hancock Museum, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PT.

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Secretary: Giles Miller, Department of Palaeontology, The Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 5BD tel 0207 942 5415, fax 0207 942 5546 email G.Miller@nhm.ac.uk

Treasurer: Sara Chambers, Curator of Natural Sciences, Royal Cornwall Museum, River Street, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2SJ tel 01872 272205, fax 01872 240514, email sara.chambers@royalcornwallmuseum.org.uk