REPORT

The National Stone Centre

The National Stone Centre stands on a dramatic site in old limestone quarries, overlooking Wirksworth, in the southern Peak District. Half of the 20 ha is a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of its unique assemblage of carbonate mud mounds and shark remains. The Centre aims to tell the story of stone in all its aspects, including geology, geomorphology and geodiversity, also its historical use and applications in art and the man-made landscape. It is an independent charity managed by representatives of industry, government and academia, but is self-sustaining and draws no regular revenue from government or industry, relying on grant aid only for larger capital work. Main activities are sustained by income from commissioned work, much of this based on support from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund.

Most of the geo-trails around the site have been recently improved, where a new series of interpretive panels cover earth science, history and ecology. New trail guides describe the site itself and nine, off-site, circular walks in areas between Stanton Moor and Whatstandwell. These recount the quarrying and mining history as well as their geology, and were supported by Countryside Agency, Heritage Lottery and Aggregates Levy funding. Work has also resumed on the "Geosteps", forming a small amphitheatre for use in outdoor presentations, with each step in stratigraphical sequence, upwards from Precambrian greywackes of Radnorshire at the base. The highest layers are still being sourced, but each step will be topped by local Hoptonwood limestone for seating. Longcliffe Quarries Ltd are supporting this work.

In the Centre's educational programme, volunteer leaders assist school visits with fossil casting and with demonstrations of rocks, minerals and soils, as well as walking the trails over the site or to overlook the nearby Dene Quarry which still produces aggregate. The Centre offers training courses related to stone; some are organised directly, while others are collaborations, including those in lime mortar and rendering, masonry, dry stone walling and stone carving.

The Centre generates income to sustain its other activities, by providing data on uses and sources of stone; it has created viewpoint panels for 20 quarries and geological sites across the country, and locally for Darlton, Dene, Crich and Ballidon quarries. It has also conducted a review of the Derbyshire and Peak District RIGS, and has worked on historical research of Mendip quarries. With the BGS, it has completed an investigation into the demand, supply and planning issues of aggregates to support major development in Milton Keynes and the South Midlands, and it is involved in the preparation of regional strategic policy documents for aggregate quarrying in the East Midlands and in Wales.

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