

## REVIEW

*Geological Sites of the Bristol Region*. Edited by Stagg, K., Stonebridge, E., Hutchinson, D., Corner, T. and Barnett, R. 2018. Published by the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre, Bristol 296 pp. Price £19.50. ISBN 978-0-9545235-3-4

The Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) maintains records of sites of biological and geological interest in a region extending from the Mendip Hills (excluded) in the south to Thornbury and Wickwar in the north, as far as Bath to the east and the Severn Esuary to the west. This book is a multi-author effort: as well as the listed authors many sections are credited to other experts.

The first chapter includes a brief account of local geology and an introduction to geological concepts and terminology. There is no mention of the faults and overthrusts which are such an important feature of Bristol geology, and indeed these are not shown on the geological maps in the volume. The priorities of the compilers are shown by sections on geology and soils and geology and ecology, i.e. plant life. Geology in the context of this book means only the distribution of outcrops of the various formations.

An important chapter gives the history of geological collections in the region, and includes accounts of the nineteenth century pioneers, complete with pictures of Victorian dignified gentlemen.

Discussion of geological conservation in the region begins with an account of SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), which have legal protection, followed by a discussion of Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS), far more numerous than SSSIs. The Bristol region has more than 236 RIGS and BRERC also holds information on more than 948 other geological sites that have no special designation, i.e. are neither SSSIs nor RIGS. The importance of RIGS in planning procedure is explained. Recently there has been a move to replace the term RIGS with Local Geological Sites (LGS) which does not seem helpful, as the term is less explicit than RIGS.

The *raison d'être* of the book is the section Key Geological Sites in the Bristol Region which comprises two-thirds of the book. Thirty-nine sites are described in detail. This is not, however, a field guide for geologists. The list certainly includes important localities such as Aust Cliff, the Avon Gorge, Brown's Folly, Burrington Combe, Lower Writhlington coal tip, the Portishead coast. But it also includes useful descriptions of sites which are not normally accessible – Banwell Bone Cave, Pen Park Hole, Redcliffe caves, and some which no longer exist such as Yate celestine workings, Wick Golden Valley ochre works and Durdham Down bone cave. The entry on Bath thermal springs includes historical information and a hypothetical geological section to explain the origin of the hot springs. Cotham Park Pillars, partly built of Cotham Marble, are included because there is no local exposure of the rocks which include the landscape 'marble'.

There are numerous geological maps, they are included with most of the descriptions of sites. They are based on the British Geological Survey 1 : 50,000 map which is available online. To identify the colours used on the maps the reader has to refer to the back flap of the paper wrapper. Leaving aside the ephemeral nature of paper wrappers (libraries often discard them), the said flap includes thirty-four very small blocks of colour, some of which are labelled with names that are not indexed in the book and may not occur in the text. The maps themselves have no topographic base, which makes it difficult to locate the geology, although the outlines of the sites themselves are shown on the maps.

The topographic maps which accompany many of the site descriptions are of limited usefulness. Something has gone wrong in their production. Urban areas are indicated by a shade of very pale grey but there is no detail of roads, buildings or other features. There are occasional road numbers but the roads themselves are not seen. The map for Burrington Combe (p.126) is completely wrong for the small amount of detail that it shows.

In the case of Clevedon beach (Pier Beach is the name used, p.197) a geological sketch map of the beach would have been much more useful than the two maps provided. The case is the same for several other sites, for example the Portishead coast.

The book is available in the Bristol City Museum bookshops, either in person or online at <https://shop.bristolmuseums.org.uk/>

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