

Rockband links fossils, fabrics and folklore

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Most museums have geology collections, but many lie unused through lack of geological knowledge and expertise. With this in mind, a partnership of five museums in South East England was set up to enable museum staff and volunteers who had little or no experience in working with geology collections to deliver geology sessions. As one partner commented: "I got involved simply because it sounded like a really good idea to share ideas and experience on how to get more out of our geology collections."

The partnership, known as Rockband, comprises Hampshire County Council Arts and Museums Service (HCCAMS); English Heritage Education Centre, Dover; Canterbury City Museums and Galleries Service; Painshill Park, Surrey; Vale and Downland Museum, Oxfordshire.

Using funding provided by the Heritage Lottery Fund (Your Heritage Programme), the Rockband partnership was able to bring in expert advice to provide new ideas to help interpret and communicate about the geology collections in innovative and exciting ways, as well as promoting partnership working. The funding also enabled the partnership to learn from best practice elsewhere and to reach out to new audiences including blind and partially sighted people.

A Cambridge-based consultant, Annette Shelford, was appointed to deliver these aspirations and she and her team have produced a very high-quality suite of activities and resources for each partner. Through working with the consultant, all of the partners have broadened their local geological knowledge, with one making the comment: "I also found that it was a good excuse to delve deeper into the collections and the stories behind them and find out more about our local geology."

A key feature was linking the geological resources identified by the partners to local heritage to bring alive the geology of the region and the local areas around the museums and their collections.

Geological curiosities

A beautifully crafted bespoke 'collector's box of geological curiosities' was produced for each of the partners, for use in facilitated sessions with schools as well as self-led family and group activities, .

Think you've found a Fossil?

A series of cards entitled *Think you've found a Fossil?* have been produced. These show some of the most commonly found fossil invertebrates in South East England, along with original illustrations, clues on how to tell one fossil from another and fascinating facts and stories associated with fossils.

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The project has inspired the partners to rediscover and embrace a previously underused area of their collections.

The Hampshire collector's box of geological curiosities arouses people's interest and imaginations.

Photo: Christine Taylor



STRENGTHENING TIES TO GEOLOGY

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Bespoke textile geological mats

A bespoke textile geological mat was produced for each partner, designed to communicate the geological formation of the area, in particular to people who are blind or partially sighted but for other users too. The mats, produced by textile artist Jenny Langley, contain lots of pockets for hiding fossils in, flaps to explore and an interpretation of the geological features for the local area of each partner.

Story-telling resources

Each partner has been provided with their own bespoke story based on local sites, myths and tall stories based on fossils. These stories are linked with the textile geological mats and feature fossils, props and models of fossils when they were alive.

The story-telling elements of some of the 'Fossils and Fables' sessions have proved popular with children and adults alike, especially as all the fossils and rocks used in the story can be found locally. The usually overlooked 'hagstones' (stones with holes in them) prompted much discussion and amusement; as did the revelation that belemnites ('thunderbolts') were carried to help ward off rheumatism!

Geochemical kits

A geology/chemistry kit includes resources and links to show how the stone samples relate to the real world of building and industries.

The geochemical kit sessions on building materials have really reinforced the connections between the natural landscape and building material. The racket created by shaking rocks to check for abrasion caused great excitement and hilarity as well as the revelation that some rocks really are not suitable for building walls!

Building on the success

The provision of fantastic bespoke geology-based learning resources with excellent links to key stages in the curriculum hasn't been the only outcome of the Rockband project. Before the completion of their mat, Vale and Downland Museum worked with under-5s to produce an interactive story with knitted ammonites (provided by a local knitting group) and a blue cloth to represent the sea. Hampshire has joined up with a geodiversity network and a 'Rock Detectives' programme linking Hampshire's geology to other counties rather than just the local area.

Since January 2013 the kits have been used at two science fairs, seven family workshops and with three partially sighted groups. What has become apparent at all of the geology sessions to date is how much enjoyment people get from handling fossils. As one partially sighted participant remarked: "I really can't believe that we are allowed to touch these!"

In short the project has enabled the Rockband partners to develop their confidence in delivering geology sessions, provided the means to make cross-curricular links with geology and, more importantly, inspired the partners to rediscover and embrace a previously underused area of their collections.



A partially sighted group explores the Hampshire textile geological mat, designed to communicate the geological formation of the local area.

Photos by Christine Taylor

