

MAKING THE MOST OF THE MENDIPS: UTILISING THE AREA FOR GEOTOURISM

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The Mendip Hills are one of the most geologically varied areas in the country with a wealth of important geological sites and a wide variety of rock types, landscapes and wildlife habitats condensed into a small area. This makes the Mendips one of the best areas in the country to appreciate the relationship between geology, landscape and biodiversity.

Large numbers of people visit the Mendip Hills each year to visit its famous caves and gorges, to participate in a range of outdoor activities, and to appreciate the landscape. The region is also an important source of aggregate, which causes a conflict of interest between conservation bodies, planners, and the quarrying industry, but which has created many superb geological exposures, some of these are now important nature reserves.

There is often a great deal of published information on the geology, geomorphology and natural history of areas of high scenic value or geological interest such as the Mendips, but there is often a significant gap between the basic geological information commonly accessible to tourists and locals, and the more specialist academic literature. The British Geological Survey is currently producing a new series of user-friendly maps and guidebooks to fill this gap and to promote geotourism in several regions across the country. For the Mendip Hills, this is being done through an Aggregates Levy funded project to create two 1:25,000 scale geological maps each accompanied by guidebook and an open access website. This more user-friendly approach to geological maps will hopefully make geology more accessible to local people and visitors alike and promote geotourism in the region.

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