

First Activity Report from the English Riviera Geopark

1 Geopark Administration

1.1 How is our Geopark managed? The English Riviera Geopark Organisation (ERGO) is managed by representatives from 15 local organisations from the voluntary, private and public sectors. Each organisation nominates a representative person to attend the ERGO Steering group meetings. This person is allocated to one of four action task groups. The four action task groups are, Geopark Administration, Education and Community, Conservation, Marketing & Tourism. Each action task group has a leader/spokesman who sits on the ERGO Executive group. The ERGO Executive group manages the day to day operations of the Geopark activity.

1.2 How do local businesses and individuals participate? Local businesses, organisations and individuals are encouraged to become members of ERGO. A membership fee is payable and each member signs up to the ERGO code of conduct, modeled from the EGN charta. In return members receive various benefits, the most important being a license to use the English Riviera Global Geopark logo. This logo is trademarked and we are attempting to strictly control its use.

1.3 Patron of ERGO We have a new patron, BBC TV presenter Dr Iain Stewart. Iain is well known in the UK and the States for his popular and award winning television series “Journeys from the Centre of the Earth” and “Earth the Power of the Planet”.

1.4 Geopark Funding activity Our new Geopark status is providing many new and exciting opportunities for the school children and students of the Bay. We have submitted a funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), a UK national funding agency, to support 66% of the costs of a £74,000 (€97k) project to develop materials and coordinate a program of educational visits focused on promoting the geological heritage of our Geopark. Free coach transport is a key part of this project.

2 Cross-border European Coordination Activity We have supported a number of EGN activities and projects including; drawing up a 3 year project valued at €100,000 (£76k) as part of the EGN INTERREG ivC initiative; contributed funds towards the EGN's association with the International Year of Planet Earth; supported the Art festival in Psiloritis Geopark in Crete by proposing artwork by a local artist; contributed text for the EGN magazine; and facilitated a team to represent our Geopark at the Osnabruck Earth Camp in June 2008. Furthermore a freelance journalist commissioned by UNESCO, visited our Geopark in February and has written an article for the UNESCO Courier online magazine on Geoparks, featuring our Geopark.

3 Education and Community

3.1 Geopark national curriculum activity The ERGO Education and Community task group has been developing national curriculum materials relating to the Geopark. An educational newsletter has been sent to approximately 50 primary and secondary schools within the Geopark explaining what the Geopark is and how it can help children understand and value the geodiversity of the area.

3.2 Geopark Courses and Events in 2008 A programme of events is planned for the year including a packed week during Geopark Week in June 2008. These include; training 20 local Tourist Centre staff on a one-day training session on the Geopark concept; Geopark business development talks; Geopark coastal cruises; steam train Geopark rides; world sand sculpture festival; flint and fire demonstrations; dry stone walling courses; and a Conference at Torquay Museum in June will attract expert speakers on Geology and Palaeontology

3.3 Geopark Traveling exhibition for schools In collaboration with Torquay Museum, a traveling Geopark exhibition for schools is under development. This will be launched with a series of Geopark talks and activities at the schools hosting the exhibition.

4 Marketing & Tourism

4.1 Management of Tourism The area tourism authority is run by the Torbay Development Agency, an body responsible for delivering economic regeneration in the area of the Geopark. The Director of Tourism sits on the ERGO Steering Group and has been actively promoting the new Geopark status. The new Geopark has appeared in numerous national advertising campaigns including the Radio Times magazine and the Daily Mail newspaper and the principle tourism guide is dominated with references to the new Geopark status. Many international journalists are attracted to the area each year, many drawn by Torquay's association with Agatha Christie and all press packs now include a strong focus on the Geopark.

4.2 UK Parliamentary visit The UK Government's Culture, Media and Sport Committee, made up of 7 cross-party Members of Parliament (MPs), visited the English Riviera in March as part of its inquiry into tourism in the UK. The visit coincides with British Tourism Week. The Committee held formal oral evidence sessions in public with local representatives of the tourism industry and visited Kents Cavern Caves. The new Geopark and its role in promoting geological heritage was well publicised during this visit.

5 ERGO Partner activity in the Geopark

5.1 Berry Head National Nature Reserve An funding application has been made to the HLF for a £900k (€1.2m) grant as part of £1.8m (€2.4m) project to regenerate and protect this site. The project includes work on

the Napoleonic defenses and forts, a new education and visitor centre, conservation of grazing areas and promotion of the Geopark.

5.2 Limestone Grassland Project Limestone vegetation in the Geopark is unique. The Squill-Spurge fescue grasslands are found nowhere else on the planet and only 22 ha exist. These can be considered one of the UK's rarest and most threatened vegetation types. Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, Botanical Society of the British Isles, Plantlife and Natural England are working together to secure funding to restore and maintain Torbay's key Lowland

5.3 New Residential Centre opens A "linhay" barn and a "threshing" has been converted into a Camping Barn providing a residential experience for educational groups. The first group stayed in the Barn in October 2007 and bookings are strong for the coming season.

5.4 New sustainable education centre Constructed from straw bails, the new classroom/teaching kitchen will open at Occombe Demonstration Organic Farm, in the heart of the Geopark, in Summer 2008. Students from our local further education college are building this eco-friendly education centre from scratch, thanks to funding from the Learning Skills Council and a private charitable trust.

5.5 The Kents Cavern Jawbone The Kents Cavern human jawbone continues to attract international scientific interest and recently featured in a 30 minute primetime BBC Radio 4 programme entitled "The Jawbone". This small piece of ancient human bone, excavated from Kents Cavern, is 35 – 40,000 years old and is Britain's rarest human fossil. A team of international scientists, working on the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain (AHOB) project in London, are convinced the bone is Neandertal and tests continue to determine if they are right. In the meantime a research team is planning to re-open excavations in the cave in search of Neandertal leaf-point flint hand-axes, more commonly associated with modern humans.