
EASTERN MENDIP and WESTERN MENDIP GUIDES

G.W. Green - May 2008

These colourful and attractive guides continue the BGS series aimed at the intelligent layman who is interested in getting out into the field to see the rocks and landscape for themselves. Each folder comes with a large folded sheet mainly taken up with a geological map, scale 1:25k, but with much marginal information in the form of inserts of some key areas, scale 1:20k, geological cross sections and a key to the geological units depicted and their colours, together with brief lithological notes and generalized thicknesses. In addition, there are geological and topographical overviews of each sheet area, scale 1:100k. Each folder includes an explanatory booklet, lavishly illustrated, of about 70 pages in length. Special points of interest are flagged up on the maps and annotated with numbers that cross-reference to descriptions in the booklets. The texts are well written with plenty of informative diagrams and photographs and with much historical detail particularly referring to mineral exploitation past and present. In addition to the geology, descriptions of the local vegetation and its relation to the underlying geology are welcome and will appeal to many walkers. The sites of springs, caves, stream sinks and the main collapsed areas are marked on the maps as befits an area dominated by the Carboniferous Limestone whose drainage is dealt with in some detail and is well explained. With all of these riches it seems almost churlish to be critical.

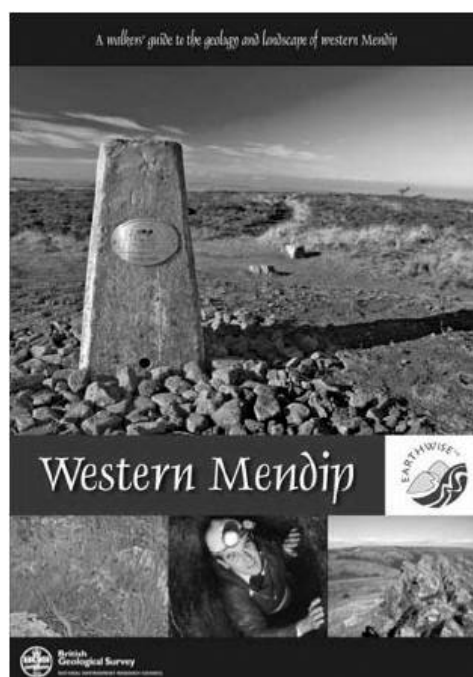
The map sheets are very large and printed on not very robust paper so one wonders how they will stand up to wear in the field. However, the scale of 1:25k is well chosen for the intended purpose. Some reduction of the sheet size could be achieved by omitting the inserts and overview maps which give little extra information. A perennial problem with the printing of geological maps is that the colours and ornament tend to obscure the topography. Although these maps in this respect are of a high standard, it is still difficult to follow roads etc. in places, most notably under the Dolomitic Conglomerate. If I were walking in the area I would want the back up of a good OS map. I must admit I am not enamoured of the shaded relief maps (1:100k)

which appear both in the booklets and on the map face – a well-layered topographical map would surely give as much, probably more, information more elegantly and clearly.

As a life-long geological mapper I must be allowed to protest about the description of geological mapping as just ‘the extrapolation of the boundaries between outcrops of different rock types across the map’. The differential resistance to erosion of the different rock units results in changes of slope on the ground and forms the basis of the important technique of feature mapping. On Mendip this applies to all the formations except for some in the Carboniferous Limestone in which differential weathering is less important.

A valiant attempt is made to explain the stratigraphical subdivision of the Carboniferous Limestone but apart from the Lower Limestone Shale (Avon Group), I suspect this will remain a mystery to most of the readers – maybe this is not too important in the present context. Convincing photographs of rock types are unusual, and those in these booklets are of limited use and are often misleading as for example, galena (p.12, Western), Inferior Oolite (p.9, Eastern) and many others. The answer to the problem is a hammer and a good hand lens – also, a wet surface is helpful

and up to the ingenuity of the observer! The photographs of typical fossils are, on the whole, unhelpful – line drawings are much preferable for clarity of definition.



Various minor points; with regard to the development of Mendip structure, surely the development of anticlines etc. precedes the thrusting and the subsequent folding (not mentioned) of the thrusts themselves to form nappes. The Purbeck Marble is crowded with gastropods (snails) not bivalves (p.63, Western). It is incorrect to describe the sandstones in the Coal Measures as red (Key to geological units). They are red only when in contact with Triassic strata; the normal colour is grey. The term Pleistocene is introduced without definition (p.19, Western). It seems a pity to have eliminated the Fuller's Earth Rock from the maps as the field brash is full of fossils. Although the Writhlington Colliery fossil collecting tip is only just off the top of the Eastern map, not to have even mentioned it might be regarded as a missed opportunity for geology popularisation.

The references for further reading are understandably biased in favour of caves and related phenomena but the more geologically-minded might feel a bit left out. Some guidance as to where to tap into the great body of geological literature including maps would have covered this.

In conclusion I hope the various criticisms will not be regarded as carping and will not detract from what constitutes interesting and worthwhile publications which will do much to heighten the profile of a very interesting area.

ANOTHER MENDIP GUIDE REVIEW

Hugh Prudden – April 2008

I am most impressed with the new guides: attractive, clear prose, informative, good coverage, 1:25 000 scale is a joy, handy size. In other words, they are a splendid addition to the Somerset canon. We now have a Mendip Geopark in all but name.

The text gives some hints as to where one might stroll but we need to provide more help for visitors/groups planning their visits. We need local worthies to suggest hour/half-day circuits. Each locality would need information on parking, duration, map outline with key features (numbers shown on the 1:25 000 maps?), toilets, pubs if nearby and graded for accessibility. This information could be shown on cheap A5 size

sheets. The information could be similar to Somerset Geology-A Good Rock Guide. The sheets could be available as a pack and/or on the Internet. We are minded to produce just such a map for Tedbury Camp Quarry.

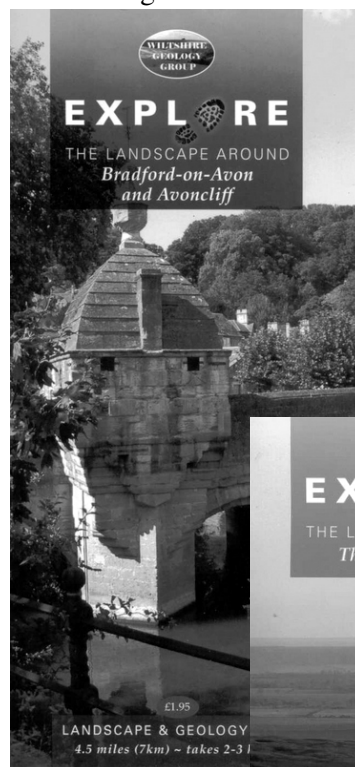
I get a lot of calls for help with visits and, to be honest, there is not time enough to do all that one would wish. There is now enough information about Ham Hill, the Mendips, Hestercombe Gardens, Taunton and Yeovil town centres for self-guided walks. As a former teacher, I would claim that it is a good thing for individuals and groups to follow their nose, with a little help, and explore without being talked at by a leader. The joy of personal geology is the challenge. Explore! Discover! Make mistakes!

MORE NEW GUIDES

Two new guides in the Landscape and Geology

series are now available price £1.95 each.

Produced by WGG (Wiltshire Geology Group) they explain the geology of the landscape and its influence on local history.



The clarity of the text is amply supported by maps and photos as well as simple diagrams. Printed on glossy card in full colour, these guides are a must for those who like a walk with a purpose.