



# Hungerford U3A GEOLOGY GROUP

Group Leader: Chris Carlon

**Hungerford U3A Geology Group 2016 - 2025  
8th December 2025**

## **Background**

Having advertised to see if there was any interest in starting a Geology Group within the newly formed Hungerford U3A, Mrs Pat Honeybone organised an inaugural meeting at The Bear Hotel on 13th December 2016. This attracted around 15 people, but it was apparent that as everyone present had little or no experience of the subject, that learning by “doing internet searches’ as planned, was unlikely to inspire an interest in the subject.

When Pat asked the individuals attending the meeting what experience they had I felt obliged to explain that I was a recently retired professional geologist. Pat asked me if I would suggest the best approach to learning the subject. I had a background of previous experience of adult education extramural geology teaching as a research student, and training geologists in the mining industry. I provided Pat with a structured approach to introducing the many new concepts that anyone starting the subject would need to study. Pat agreed with this approach and asked me if I would act as Group Leader, which I agreed to do.

We initially met at the Bear Hotel, but after several meetings it was agreed that it would be easier to meet at Froxfield Village Hall where there was free parking, the opportunity to use a large screen for image projection and a kitchen for tea and coffee facilities. It was also agreed to meet on the second Thursday in each calendar month, from 14.00 - 16.00pm.

A hire charge was agreed with the managers of the Froxfield Memorial Hall, and Mrs Lorraine Saville agreed to act as secretary. Lorraine also arranged refreshments for each meeting, collected a nominal amount from attendees and arranged payment to the Hall.

Attending Group members contribute as necessary, a situation which permits flexibility to pay the hire costs by those attending while not retaining too big a “kitty”. Tea, coffee and biscuits are provided by the group members at the meetings.

## **Group Meetings - Attendances**

The Group met for a total of 76 meetings (including field visits) between January 2017 and December 2025, and even managed meetings through the Covid pandemic years of 2020-2021.

The numbers attending have been fairly steady with a few members leaving the group and new members joining. Average attendances in the 9 years meetings have been held have ranged from 6-20 persons and averaged around 14 people. Attendance has been consistent through the 9 years; it was 12 in 2017 and 13 in 2025

The two years through the COVID pandemic obviously saw a decrease in meetings (7 only) but meeting attendances remained much the same (average 11).

## **Group Meetings - Content and Subject Matter**

Apart from the occasional field trips the meetings usually took the form of illustrated “Powerpoint-type’ presentations, with much questioning and discussion. In addition to images of all manner of geological phenomena from across the globe, geological maps and rocks, minerals and fossil specimens were used extensively. Much emphasis was placed in the earlier meetings of getting

'hands on' experience with hand specimens, to know what to look for and how to identify minerals, rocks, rock structures and fossils. Members were also encouraged to bring to the meetings images of things they had seen on holiday "in the field" for discussion and identification, the emphasis being on a practical approach to 'seeing' rather than just 'looking'.

Using examples from all over the world I am pleased to say that we have successfully done what we set out to do; that is, cover the main branches of the subject, look at examples of geological phenomena around the world and investigate various places that people knew or had holidayed in the UK and overseas.

We covered all the main rock types, minerals, fossils, structures and landscapes. We tried to get our heads around the enormity of geological 'deep time', looked at earth history, structural geology, scenery and geomorphology, soils, climate change, earthquakes, geological hazards, continental drift, continental structures, mineral exploration, metal mining; strategic, critical and rare minerals; hydrocarbons, orogens, plate tectonics, volcanoes, carbon capture and storage and radioactive waste disposal. We even discussed the incredible chance of life forming and evolving on earth and considered what we know of planetary geology.

We have also covered the geology and geological history of the UK generally, the Hungerford area, SW England, S Wales, Southern England, The Forest of Dean, the Cheshire Basin, the Pennines, the Church Stretton area of Shropshire, the Lake District, North Norfolk and the Highlands of Scotland. Further afield we have looked at the geology of Scandinavia, Turkey, South America, Chile, Iceland, the Canary Islands and Madeira, Canada, the USA, the Colorado Plateau, SE Asia, the ocean basins and the Pacific 'Ring of Fire'.

Geological features have been demonstrated from every continent from the deep sea to the highest mountains and we have even looked at the internal structure of mountains, how they form and what we can see within their structures. We have been down a coal-mine, toured the old iron mines in the Forest of Dean and investigated the local geology around Hungerford and W. Berkshire.

### **Comments and Summary**

With group members initially unfamiliar with the science of geology it was difficult to encourage people to lead a meeting. However as knowledge and confidence grew more people were encouraged to "have a go". This was particularly true for members with some experience of science generally, an interest in geography and/or experience standing up and presenting something to an audience, particularly an area or destination they knew or had visited. Seven group members have from time to time contributed by leading a meeting. These have invariably been very well received and have always been very informative and entertaining.

Judging by everyones involvement and enthusiasm I would suggest that the Geology Group has been a great success. Personally I have thoroughly enjoyed seeing people develop and increase their knowledge of what can be a difficult subject to comprehend, but they have done so with great enthusiasm.

I am sad to step-down as the Geology Group leader. Preparing the meeting subject matter was always a time consuming job, but was worth doing because of the group members enthusiasm and obvious enjoyment of the subject. However after 76 meetings the end of 2025 seems like a good place to stop as it marks the 9th Anniversary of the inaugural meeting in December 2016 (even though we haven't yet run out of subjects to discuss !)

It's been a real pleasure for me to have done this, and I have really enjoyed doing so within the structure of Hungerford U3A. I've met and got to know a super group of people.