Managing geological specimen collecting: responsible collecting

This note sets out the principles for responsible geological specimen collecting. It has been written for collectors and is also relevant to managers of geological sites. It accompanies the guidance on managing geological specimen collecting in TIN111 and the case studies in TINs113 to 119 and TIN127. These provide information on how to manage geological specimen collecting in different situations, reflecting the available resource, its importance and different collecting pressures.

Background

Rocks, fossils and minerals are part of our natural heritage and form an important scientific and educational resource. The ability to record field observations and collect specimens is essential to geology, which is a field-based science that allows us to understand the processes that influence our natural environment. Today collecting rocks, fossils and minerals is enjoyed by many and can provide an inspiring experience of the natural world.

The available collecting resource is, however, finite and only through adopting a responsible approach to collecting will it remain available for future generations to experience, study and enjoy. The need for collecting should be carefully considered on a site by site basis. In some situations collecting can threaten a site, but in most cases, if undertaken responsibly, it is a tool for positive management.

Responsible collecting

Access and collecting

Permission to enter private land and collect geological specimens must always be gained. Elsewhere permission to collect may be required.

A child shows off their recently collected Gryphea and belemnites. © Colin Prosser

If in doubt seek further advice over whether permission is required to collect. In all cases any legal requirements and local by-laws or management guidance should be followed.

Ownership and collecting

A clear agreement should be made with the landowner over the future of any specimens collected. In some cases both the landowner and the owner of the mineral rights (often, but not always, the same person) may need to be approached. If in doubt seek further advice over who to talk to and ownership.

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How to collect

In general collect only a few representative specimens from fallen or loose material.

Scientific study may require collection of *in situ* specimens; any such collecting should be carefully planned and focus on scientific needs. Wherever possible avoid sampling the most visible exposures or those critical to interpreting the site.

Always make a precise record of the locality at which specimens are found and, if collected *in situ*, record relevant horizon and associated details, including linking specimens to information such as site name, grid reference and, if possible, photographs.

In most cases, collecting by hand from loose material is sufficient. Hand tools, where allowed, should only be used when essential and power tools only used in exceptional circumstances.

Any form of excavation is likely to require permission before it is undertaken.

Site management and collecting

Always avoid disturbance to wildlife, be aware of other people and ensure that the site is left in a tidy and safe condition for those who follow.

Looking after your collection

Ensure that all records can be directly linked to any specimens collected. Where necessary seek further advice on specimen identification and care.

Scientifically important specimens should be eventually placed in a suitably managed collection, such as a museum, where there are adequate curatorial and storage facilities to ensure they remain available for further study.

Further information

Geological Curators' Group. *Rocks, fossils and minerals - how to make the most of your collection*. URL: **www.geocurator.org/pubs/A4Thumbs_upleaflet.pdf** [Accessed June 2012].

Geologists' Association. *A Code for Geological Fieldwork*. (A leaflet available from the Geologists' Association, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1V 9AG).

Prosser, C.D., Murphy, M. & Larwood, J.G. 2006. *Geological conservation: a guide to good practice*. Peterborough: English Nature. URL: **http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/83048?category=30050** [Accessed April 2012].

Scottish Natural Heritage. 2008. *The Scottish Fossil Code*. URL: **www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/fossil_code/fossilcode_08.pdf** [Accessed March 2012].

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: **www.naturalengland.org.uk**. In particular see:

- TIN111: *Managing geological specimen collecting*
- TIN113: *Managing geological specimen collecting: caves*
- TIN114: *Managing geological specimen collecting: Charmouth case study*
- TIN115: *Managing geological specimen collecting: Fowlmead Country Park case study*
- TIN116: *Managing geological specimen collecting: rock coring*
- TIN117: *Managing geological specimen collecting: Whittlesey Brick Pits and King's Dyke Nature Reserve case study*
- TIN118: *Managing geological specimen collecting: Wren's Nest case study*
- TIN119: *Managing geological specimen collecting: Writhlington case study*
- TIN127: *Managing geological specimen collecting:Caldbeck Fells case study*

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail **enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk**

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