



THE HIGHLAND GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Scottish Charity No. SC004427

JANUARY 2016

Dear Members,

Welcome to the start of another year! You will have received a separate reminder from our treasurer that membership fees are now due. Our winter programme of talks continues with a lecture by Hamish Johnston about his great-great-grandfather, Matthew Forster Heddle on 13 January. Hamish will have copies of his recently published book for sale (see below) and will be happy to sign them on the night.

Plans for our summer excursions are continuing: dates already agreed are given at the end of the newsletter.

WINTER PROGRAMME 2016

13 January *The Work of Matthew Forster Heddle*, Hamish Johnston

Hamish, author of the new - and first - biography of Matthew Forster Heddle will talk about hitherto unknown aspects of Heddle's life, describing his exploration of the Highlands and Islands and his related published work. This includes his *County Geognosy* series of papers (from Shetland to Sutherland), his role in uncovering the geological puzzle of the North-West Highlands, and his maritime expeditions.

Matthew Forster Heddle: Mineralogist and Mountaineer has now been published by National Museums Scotland Enterprises (ISBN 978 1 905267 98 9) at £14.99. The book is a nicely produced paperback of 270 pages, with 50 colour illustrations, plus black-and-white illustrations in the text. All profits from the book go to the museum, which holds Heddle's great mineral collection.

17 February

2.00 pm The Inverness Museum Geological Collections

Cait McCullagh, Curator (Collections Engagement), Inverness Museum & Art Gallery

Inverness Museum holds several collections of rocks and fossils, of which only a small part is on display at any time. During the visit Cait will explain how the museum looks after and displays these collections and some of the challenges it faces. She will also have available a sample of interesting rocks and fossils for us to examine hands-on and discuss. Bring your hand lens!

If you are staying in Inverness between these events and would like to eat with the group prior to the AGM, please let Alison know and we will arrange a suitable venue.

7.30 pm AGM followed by:

The Lost Zircons of Upper Badcall: A New Discovery in Old Rocks, Andy Moffat, HGS.

Andy's talk will explain what zircon is and describe a former uniquely accessible zircon occurrence near Upper Badcall, Scourie in NW Sutherland. The zircon was present as well formed distinctive pink crystals and, unlike most UK zircon, was easily visible to the naked eye. The crystals were hosted in Lewisian ultrabasic rocks occurring within the gneiss. There were attempts to have the site protected as a SSI through SNH but the wheels of bureaucracy ground very slowly and after several months no progress was made and by then it was too late. As news of this discovery spread and, despite the remote location, professional mineral collectors rapidly stripped the site with specimens subsequently appearing on eBay and other online

mineral selling websites. A number of specimens will be on display at the talk and a short-wave ultraviolet fluoroscope will reveal the striking yellow fluorescence of the zircon.

2 March *Minerals and Gems of the Cairngorms*, Roy Starkey

The Cairngorms are the most extensive area of high mountain terrain in Britain. The area has given its name to gem quality smoky quartz, but has also produced spectacular specimens of beryl and topaz. In Victorian times, hunting for crystals was both a popular pastime and a “cottage industry”, but nowadays the area is a National Park and few fine specimens have come to light in recent years. In 1811 it was reported that these “Cairngorm Stones” were so much sought after, that a number of the inhabitants, not only of Aberdeenshire, but of the counties of Perth and Inverness, flocked to these mountains, in whole families, during the summer season, in quest of gems; and purchasers from London, who were well acquainted with their value, came frequently to buy the precious stones from these poor people. The profits of the finders or miners were extremely variable because the success rate was relatively low. Huge amounts of effort were expended in the search and records suggest that by the early 1800s, the Cairngorm diggers had already trenched more than twenty acres to a depth of from five to six feet. It is a recorded fact that Queen Victoria ascended Beinn a’ Bhuid on 6 September 1850 and collected specimens of Cairngorm quartz. This talk will review the fascinating history of “Cairngorm stones”, illustrated by images of notable specimens and explorations over the past 25 years or so.

13 April To be confirmed.

Meetings take place at 7.30 pm at Millburn Academy (Diriebught Road, Inverness, IV2 3QR) and are charged at £2 for members and £3 for non-members. If you would like to join the committee for dinner before any of the meetings, please let Alison know – all welcome.

SUMMER PROGRAMME 2016

Saturday 9 April to Monday 11 April – Skye, Dr Iain Allison (University of Glasgow)

Unfortunately Jim Ritchie from Speedwell Energy is unable to run this excursion as originally planned but Iain Allison from the University of Glasgow has very kindly agreed to lead this weekend. More information will follow but we will be based at Sligachan –please book direct with either the hotel (01478 650204) or with the bunkhouse (0781 085 7683) or arrange your own accommodation elsewhere if you prefer. There is also a campsite at Sligachan; more information available at: <http://www.sligachan.co.uk/sligachan-hotel.php>

Saturday 11 June – Sunday 12 June – Banffshire coast, Dr John Mendum (BGS)

Programme details again are still to be finalised but this weekend will be based in Cullen and will allow us to explore some of the Dalradian rocks along the Banffshire coast.

Sunday 7 August – Duntelchaig, south of Inverness, Ann Reynolds (HGS)

Saturday 3 September – Sunday 4 September – Tayvallich volcanics, Dr Roger Anderton

This excursion will be based in Lochgilphead to allow us to look at the upper part of the Argyll Group (Craignish Phyllites, Crinan Grits, Tayvallich Limestone and Volcanics) which provides varied stratigraphy and sedimentology, volcanics, and interesting tectonic structures. There is also some fascinating Quaternary geology to see, including moraines, outwash, sea level, and periglacial features, as well as noteworthy geoarchaeology.

Contact information:

Chairman: Alan Thompson 01463 238992 alanrossthompson@hotmail.com

Secretary: Dr Alison Wright 01309 671949 a.j.wright00@aberdeen.ac.uk

Treasurer: Dr Rhona Fraser rhonabifraser@tiscali.co.uk