

SLMS field trip to Devon May 17th to May 19th 2018...

But first... Royal Wootton Bassett Mud Spring

This was added to the itinerary as it was on the route down to Devon.

5 of us meet-up for a walk along the public footpaths to cross the stream that comes from the SSSI Mud spring to see if we could look for fossils from the Ampthill formation that are brought to the surface by the mud spring, Kimmeridge fossils were also said to be found washed along from surface deposits. We located the stream and noted that it looked as if others regularly visited the site; loads of large footprints in the mud. We were lucky; the stream was shallow, any recent rain had passed through, although we could see a high-water mark which could have made the stream 2 foot deeper! Fossils were found: most common were broken pieces of oysters, then belemnites, ammonites, a button coral and a piece of lobster.

Picture of a selection of the fossils.



Day 2 was the main event... a visit to Combe Martin Silver Mine

The 7 of us were greeted by Gary, who kind enough to ferried us up a rutted track to the mine site. We had been warned to bring stout boots, boiler suits, hard hats and torches. Once we were all fully kitted out we were led up a small hill the mine entrance.



Gary was our guide, he explained the history of the mine from 1320 until it closed in 1880. The miners were following a quartz veins throughout the valley this lead to various mine shafts being sunk across the valley. The trip today was to go down 5 ladder levels and into the Victorian workings, any one not comfortable could go down just the first three and then back up. We descended, one at a time, into the cool gloom... At the 5-ladder level we examined what was left of the quartz vein and marvelled at the hard work that must have gone into mining, hand pick-marks to dynamite. It had rained fairly recently, so there were some puddles of water in the tunnels and drips from the ceiling.

There were also some low points... hard-hats were indeed necessary! We did a bit of scrambling to achieve the ladder-3 level then took the ladders back to the surface, all in all we spent 2 hours examining these interesting workings.



Once back at the top lunch was had sitting on a grass bank in the sunshine. Norman brought out a selection of local minerals e.g. axenite, wavelite & pyrite. Then it was on to look another part of the site and then finally look at the small, but comprehensive, museum showing; pottery, pipes, coins, buttons, shoes & tools which had been unearthed through excavating the mines and top site. At the end there was a chance to purchase some literature to commemorate our visit.

Thanks must go to all at the Mine for a great visit. What a day!

Ref: <http://combemartinminers.co.uk>

Map of the Mine workings



Day 3 was a visit to SSSI High Down Quarry, Castle Hill Estate

Nick had gained both the landowners and Natural England's permission to visit the site. The site was known to be over-grown with a Rookery in the above trees-tops. The Rooks were very noisy and there were areas of "Guano". However, we just had to look around and pick-up specimens of Wavelite, this was the type locality after-all, but everyone found some great specimens for their collections just by turning over stones.

We noted that there seem to have been recent "digging" and there were "ladders" attached to some of the slopes, so other visitors had been here recently.

We thank Castle Hill Estate for allowing us to visit.



Day 4 Valley of the Rocks

The last day dawned bright and sunny. There were only 3 takers for this part as 2 members had already visited this tourist attraction.

We took the footpath down to the small cove examining the cliffs on the way down sandstone cliff with quartz veining, honeycomb weathering, trace fossils. Upon climbing back to the top, the local Tearoom is to be recommended. We then collected some poor-quality fossils from the scree slopes on our way up to the top ridge: brachiopods and crinoid stems



also some quartz crystals. Some scrambling ensued to gain the ridge which we walked along to get back to the coastal path. There were some great views across the valley in the sunshine.

All-in-all a great extended weekend fieldtrip: thanks to Nick for organising it!

Nicola Claxton, Chair Sidcup Lapidary & Mineral Society