

Centre News

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Centre Director's Report - January 2007

New Grants & Projects

Success in the the New Year has begun with the publication of a significant amount of new information on the Trust's website, together with a presentation about some of the Trust's work at the 4 day southwest geology conference, as well as the award of a grant from the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

This is all excellent news and continues the momentum which started in the autumn with the award of \$44,000 from the Alcoa Foundation.

The Alcoa grant will go to much needed improvements to the Centre's log cabin. The cabin will be extended and at long last there will be toilet facilities suitable for All Abilities.

Dr Philip Whateley from Howmet Castings, the Alcoa manufacturing facility in Exeter which facilitated the grant application, said: "We are delighted that Offwell have been successful in their application to Alcoa Foundation, and have received a grant in recognition of the excellent work they perform as both a local amenity and an internationally recognised resource for environmental science." The grant of \$44,000 is the largest Alcoa Foundation award made in the UK since 2003.

Alcoa Foundation is a global resource that actively invests in communities where Alcoa has a presence world wide. With nearly US\$411 million invested since its inception in 1952, Alcoa Foundation has enhanced quality of life around the globe, focusing on areas such as Conservation and Sustainability; Safe and Healthy Children and Families; Global Education and Workplace Skills; and Business and Community Partnership. As well as making grants of varying amounts, Alcoa Foundation actively supports voluntary work undertaken by employees of Alcoa.

The grant from the East Devon Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty will provide new areas for visitors in the immediate vicinity of the lake classroom. Rhododendron will be removed from the left and right of the classroom. The area will be landscaped and some extra seating will be provided.

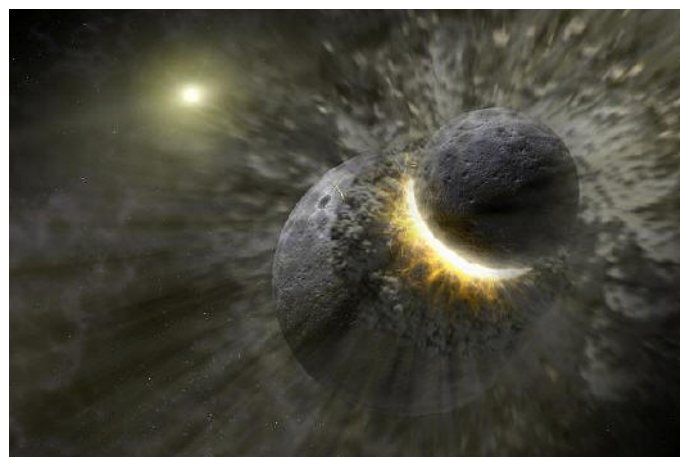


Roger Hambleton (right), Plant Manager of Howmet Exeter, presents the \$44,000 cheque on behalf of the Alcoa Foundation.

This work, which has also been supported by Offwell Environment Link goes hand-in-hand with the introduction of Q3 Rangers. These electronic GPS handheld guides provide directions and information about the Centre and its wildlife.

The Q3 Rangers are revolutionary and enable the casual visitor to have an expert with them at all times. Something which would not otherwise be possible. Providing the content for the Q3 Rangers will be an ongoing task as there is so much information which could be provided about the Centre, its wildlife and natural heritage.

The latest addition is a 5 minute multimedia section on the geology of the area entitled 'All you need to know about the Centre's 4.7 billion year history in 5 minutes!'. It contains a wealth of factual information and it would not have been possible without the help of the geologist, Dr Clive Nicholas. This information has also just been published on the Trust's website.



Planets collide - A screenshot from the 5 minute geology movie.

Also new for 2007, is a substantial upgrade and additions to the Heathland Restoration Project section of the Trust's website. For countryside management students, this information is one of the most useful sections about lowland heath which is available on the internet.

The heathland area was cleared of rhododendron in 1993. The 2 hectare site was then divided into strips and different management regimes were adopted. Ecological surveys were carried out and the results for the years 1996 - 98 were published on the web. Now in January 2007, the surveys for the years up to and including 2001 have been published together with expanded content and information. This represents several months of work and was possible thanks to a grant from 'Awards for All'.

The heathland is just one of the Centre's many habitats which are present because of the work program which goes on, often unseen, particularly in the winter months. Practical work for the management of the Centre is vital and the Trust has to rely on paid staff, contractors and increasingly on volunteers to carry out this vital work.

Current tasks include coppicing and removal of a quantity of Yellow Iris from the wetland. This work has to be done before the start of amphibian breeding which occurs in late February to early March. This depends very much on the weather conditions. A long cold spell at this time of year delays spawning.

The removal of Yellow Iris includes using long handled rakes to haul the plants out. One would have thought that the disturbance would keep the trout, which live in the wetland, well away. However whilst this work was going on, two trout could be seen within 10 yards of the bank circling each other before charging to attack, their fins breaking the surface of the water. After a short tussle they would resume their



Removing some of the Yellow Iris from the Wetland.

circular manoeuvring in an attempt to surprise the other. The clear water of the wetland allowed an excellent view of the spectacle which lasted for at least 15 minutes.

The Centre has its own weather station which uploads every half hour to the internet. Records for 2006 show that the annual rainfall at the Centre was **34.39** inches. The highest temperature was **84.3 °F / 29.1 °C**. Whilst the lowest temperature was **25.0 °F / -3.9 °C**. Interestingly the average wind direction was east.

At first sight this may seem impossible as the prevailing wind is of course from the South West.

However it reflects the swirling air movement in the steep sided valley. During the recent gales this phenomenon of downward swirling air was graphically demonstrated on a number of occasions by a sudden rush of air down the cabin's wood burning stove which would drive smoke and ashes into the room!

The current mild weather has resulted in a long season for fungi. In the second week of January, a couple of Stinkhorn fungi were seen complete with flies which are drawn to the pungent smell. Despite the torrents of rain over the last few months a solitary Brimstone butterfly is overwintering on a sprig of heather which is growing by the steps to the Heathland Restoration project.



A male Brimstone butterfly overwintering on the steps to the Heathland.

Following the resignation of Dr Rosalind Wilson as a trustee of the Offwell Woodland and Wildlife Trust, which is the charity which runs the Centre, David Tilbury has become a trustee.

David has had a keen interest and personal involvement in the Centre for some time. He has been the prime mover for both the Alcoa and East Devon AONB grants. He brings with him years of business experience and is a hive of activity.

The Trust owes a very great debt to Ros Wilson and it is difficult to imagine that the Centre would be moving forward so successfully without her input.