



The Ridge: Rocks and Springs, 2014-2017

Evaluation

Executive Summary

Over the period of three years from July 2014 to June 2017 the Sandstone Ridge Trust conducted a Heritage Lottery Funded project working with local volunteers to understand how the distinctive physical features of the Ridge have shaped the cultural heritage of the area, and specifically, how sandstone and water supplies have enabled settlers, farmers and industrialists through the ages to develop and exploit their environment. The project focussed on sandstone quarries and methods of extraction, historic communal and commercial water supplies and rock art and carvings. The Trust was very pleased to report that the project was completed successfully within the planned time-scale and budget and its objectives were met.

What we wanted to happen

The objectives of the project were:

- 1.To recruit approximately 50 volunteers and deliver training to them in the Ridge's geology and hydrogeology and in recording techniques - surveying, photography, use of aerial photographs and maps, and documentary research.
- 2.For the volunteers to carry out desk-based archaeological research at Cheshire Archives, Historic Environment Record (HER) and local libraries to document all potential rock and spring sites on a spreadsheet.
- 3.To select quarrying and spring sites for more detailed archival study as well as fieldwork comprising visual surveying, photography, measurements, field-walking and interviewing local people to gather historical accounts.

4.To deliver a road-show consisting of a presentation and photographic display to share the findings presenting to 10 local communities and 10 schools.

5.To produce interpretation materials about the sites of particular interest, aimed at both residents and visitors, comprising: - three leaflets including QR codes (1,000 copies of each); a booklet distributed to visitor centres, libraries and village halls on the Sandstone Trail; and a programme of walks and tours.

6.To add the findings of the project to the Sandstone Ridge Trust's website, to lodge them with Cheshire's Historic Environment Record and place in village archives.

Underlying these objectives was a desire to provide meaningful activities on the Ridge for many volunteers who had previously been inspired by the HLF-funded Landscape Partnership Scheme, *Habitats and Hillforts*. It is part of the Trust's remit to maintain and build on the legacy of this scheme and pursue their stated goals of celebrating and improving understanding of the area's archaeological, historical and cultural inheritance, increasing public enjoyment through interpretation and improved access, and providing training, volunteering and educational opportunities in the natural and historic environment.

What actually happened

1. Recruitment of a self-employed consultant co-ordinator

The post was advertised in free media outlets including *Environmentjob.co.uk* on May 9th 2014 with a closing date of May 30th. There were 20 applications from which a short-list of 6 was selected for interview. Interviews were conducted by a panel of 3 on June 25th & 26th and Gary Ball was appointed to start on July 1st.

Supporting documents: Co-ordinator's contract, guidance notes and CV

The period of nearly two months between May 9th and July 1st was needed to synchronise the diaries of the interview panel members and gave applicants ample time to understand the project. The Trust was delighted with the quality of the applicants and the eventual appointment and, whilst it was lengthy, were very satisfied with the process and its outcome.

2. The Project Plan

The plan submitted to HLF covered the three-year period April 2014 to March 2017. However, the slippage of three months entailed in seeking permission to proceed and recruitment of the co-ordinator resulted in the project actually running from July 2014 to June 2017. It was intended that the co-ordinator would be employed

for two years only and the members of the Trust would manage the final year. Accordingly, the co-ordinator's contract ended in June 2016. Some elements of the project which required the co-ordinator's expertise were not completed by this time: namely supervising a survey and excavation at *Bloody Bones Cave* in August, writing survey reports of this and two earlier field excavations and a chapter on quarries for the book. The Trust, therefore, extended the co-ordinator's contract by one day-per week for a further 6 months.

The Plan was sub-divided into five overlapping sets of tasks:

- Preparation, recruitment and publicity (4 months)
- Training (2 months)
- Investigation, research and field studies. This was divided into two stages: initial survey to capture as many sites as possible, and visits to selected sites for more detailed study (16 months)
- Preparation of promotional materials and evaluation (5 months)
- Promotional activities, evaluation and preparation of legacy projects (10 months)

This framework was a useful way to check on progress but it was always understood that some tasks would be running in parallel and that timing was only approximate. Some trainers waived their fees for workshops and this enabled us to offer more training than had been anticipated, but the programme had to be adapted to fit in with trainers' availability. Arranging dates for field excavations also had to take into account access and the weather. The co-ordinator's practical engagement with the project was completed by December 2016 and the remaining promotional activities were completed by members and volunteers by June 2017.

3. Meeting of objectives

All objectives were met, with some minor amendments and some substantial additions:

Objective 1: To recruit approximately 50 volunteers and deliver training to them in the Ridge's geology and hydrogeology and in recording techniques - surveying, photography, use of aerial photographs and maps, and documentary research.

Trainee and volunteer recruitment took the form of notices on parish boards and in local shops and libraries, talks and displays. The Trust also took part in 'The Age of Metals' event at Beeston Castle in July 2015 where, in addition to a display promoting the project, we contributed a stone-carving experience, a walk and talk about the pre-history of Beeston, and a children's archaeology experience.



**Ridge
Rocks
Springs**



SUMMER EVENTS 2014

An exciting new project, The Ridge Rocks and Springs – a sandstone legacy throughout the length of the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge.

The Trust is now looking for volunteers from the local communities to join in the project, researching quarries and wells, and recording them for posterity. There will also be stories to be read from the many carvings on the rocks.

Volunteers will receive free training workshops to learn more about how to research these features and they will be able to take part in practical research and recording. Regular progress meetings and get-togethers to share and exchange information will be held throughout the area.

Come along and meet new and existing volunteers. To learn more about how you can become involved in your local heritage contact us below or visit one of our free events.



www.thesandstoneridgetrust.co.uk
Email: srtcoordinator@gmail.com

Illustrated talks and displays with refreshments from 7.30pm

Frodsham Community Centre, WA6 7QN August 12th
Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall, CW8 2LB August 13th
Church of All Saints, Harthill, CH3 9LH August 14th







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Registered office: Suite 7, Ground Floor, Northwich Business Centre, Meadow Street, Northwich, CW9 5BF




Volunteer recruitment poster

For ease of management, the Ridge was divided into three regions: North, Central and South, and volunteers were grouped according to their geographical preference (usually dependent on where they lived). Each region had a volunteer group leader: David Joyce in the North and Peter Winn in the Central region. Whilst the overall number of volunteers was satisfactory, we noted that there were proportionately fewer volunteers in the South. This was simply because the population on that part of the Ridge is much thinner. Being unable to recruit a volunteer group leader in the South, Gary Ball, the consultant co-ordinator for the Project as a whole, took on the role of leader for that region. This was not an ideal solution and in retrospect we should have made greater efforts to recruit volunteers for that region from slightly further afield. Nevertheless, the arrangement did have the benefit of giving Gary direct contact with the volunteers in the field and direct experience of the research materials and terrain.

A total of 44 trainees were recruited for workshops and, of these, 15 or more went on to participate actively as volunteers in research and fieldwork throughout the three years of the project.

A *Volunteers Handbook* was produced and made available on-line to assist the volunteers in their work. Communication with volunteers was achieved through Facebook, newsletters and e-mails.

Plenary social meetings, regional group meetings, field visits and meetings between the three group leaders were held according to the plan but some trainees were lost from the process when there were delays in organising meetings, training or field visits. When the mass of data had been accumulated and the work became more focussed on writing, the volunteers were engaged in designing and writing the directions for walks, proof-reading the book and editing the large collection of photographs amassed by the project.

The following training workshops were held:

- Archives and Records Office, led by Chester Records Office staff, Sept 3rd, 18th 2014: 16 registrations;
- Quarries and Mining, led by Simon Timberlake, Early Mines Research Group, Oct 13th, 14th 2014: 13 registrations;
- Hydrogeology, led by Gordon Coombs, Nov 3rd, 10th 2014: 20 registrations;
- Water and Wells, led by David Joyce, SRT, 27th Nov 2014: 20 registrations;
- The Geology of Quarries, led by Cynthia Burek, Cheshire RIGS, Jan 30th 2015: 16 registrations;
- Digital Archives, led by Gary Ball, co-ordinator, Feb 4th 2015: 10 registrations
- Digital Photography in Archaeology, led by Viviana Culshaw, Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, Feb 4th 2015: 10 registrations;
- Graffiti and Rock Carving, led by Peter Winn, SRT, Feb 26th 2015: 8 registrations;
- Grosvenor Museum Collections, led by museum staff, Oct 22nd, Nov 7th 2015: 14 registrations;
- Historic Quarries, led by Ian Thomas, National Stone Centre, Nov 23rd 2015: 16 registrations.

The Trust had planned for 4.5 days of workshops at a total cost of £2700 but, in the event, some trainers waived their fees and so we were able to offer 8.5 days at a considerably lower cost.

Supporting documents: Recruitment poster; Newsletter

Document accessible on-line: Volunteers handbook

Objective 2: For the volunteers to carry out desk-based archaeological research at Cheshire Archives, Historic Environment Record (HER) and local libraries to document all potential rock and spring sites on a spreadsheet.

The first stage of the volunteers' research was to survey the entire Ridge in order to identify as many sites of old quarries, wells and rock art/graffiti as possible. In order to record these sites thoroughly and in a style and detail consistent with the

county Historic Environment Record's needs, the co-ordinator designed an electronic form that enabled the volunteers to download data directly onto a spreadsheet on-line.

The three regional group leaders allocated the research parish by parish so that there was no overlap, although volunteers were also encouraged to work in teams when they went on field visits. Photographs were downloaded onto a Dropbox.

Through a combination of desk research at the County Archives and at home with on-line maps, followed up by site visits along the entire length of the Ridge the volunteers identified and recorded more than 700 sites. Of these approximately 115 related to quarries, 547 to wells and water supplies and 50 were examples of graffiti or rock carvings.



Helsby graffiti hunt



Dipping well at Alvanley

Document accessible on-line: Data-base and interactive map

Objective 3: To select quarrying and spring sites for more detailed archival study as well as fieldwork comprising visual surveying, photography, measurements, field-walking and interviewing local people to gather historical accounts.

When the greater part of the first stage was completed the three regional groups met with their leaders to review the sites that they had found and select those that they considered to be the most in need of further investigation. Each group put together a short-list of sites. An example can be seen in the Newsletter (supplied

as a supporting document) which demonstrates the number and range of different sites that excited the interest of the volunteers. Further research into these sites was conducted so that their entries in the data-base could be expanded, additional visits made and photographs taken.

At this point the three group leaders met to identify three sites that could be accessed for a much more detailed two- or three-day survey and excavation – one in each of the three regions of the Ridge. These sites were:

- Northern region: Simmonds Hill Quarry, Manley, courtesy of the Timpson family;
- Central region: Urchin's Kitchen, Delamere, courtesy of the Forestry Commission;
- Southern region: Bloody Bones Cave, Harthill, courtesy of the Bolesworth Estate.

Excavations were conducted by volunteers over three weekends in 2016. 6 or more volunteers contributed to the excavations on each occasion. Archaeological reports were written by the co-ordinator, Gary Ball.



Urchin's Kitchen



Simmonds Hill Quarry



Bloody Bones Cave



Bloody Bones Cave



Simmonds Hill well or shaft?

Other sites were ear-marked as potential projects for the future.

Supporting document: Newsletter

Document accessible on-line: Report on the fieldwork at Urchin's Kitchen

Objective 4: To deliver a road-show consisting of a presentation and photographic display to share the findings presenting to 10 local communities and 10 schools.

A three-panel display board presenting an account of the project with photographic examples of our activities and findings was created in order to provide visual accompaniment to any displays of the book and talks that might be given by the trustees or volunteers. This was offered by means of letters to parishes, local community groups and schools. At the time of completing this evaluation it has not been possible to enumerate responses, as the book was only available for distribution at the end of the project.



Road-show display board

Supporting document: photograph of Display Board

Objective 5: To produce interpretation materials about the sites of particular interest, aimed at both residents and visitors, comprising: - three leaflets including QR codes (1,000 copies of each); a booklet distributed to visitor centres, libraries and village halls on the Sandstone Trail; and a programme of walks and tours.

The principal vehicle for interpretation is a 132-page fully illustrated A5 book: *The Ridge: Rocks and Springs – a sandstone legacy*, ISBN 978-0-9957960-0-3. It was

launched at the Sandstone Ridge Festival on Sunday May 21st at the Barbour Institute, Tattenhall. It is offered free to the Trust members, volunteers, community groups, libraries, museums and schools in the area and, to date, has been very well received.

Compiling and editing the book was undertaken by the three group leaders, each taking responsibility for specific chapters and collating material and photographs provided by the volunteers. The chapters are:

- Introduction
- Quarrying the Ridge
- Shaping the Ridge – the influence of water on the development of communities
- Leaving a Mark - Rock Art and Graffiti on the Ridge
- Circular Walks

Volunteers were invited to create walks associated with the various sites that they had found on the Ridge. The group-leaders had aimed at two 4-5 mile walks in each region but in fact nine in total were offered. Individual volunteers reconnoitred and wrote up the directions for each and then passed them to another volunteer for checking on the ground. Yet another volunteer drew maps to accompany each walk and an editor and proof-reader checked the texts for consistency of style.

Volunteers have already led several of these walks with public groups in the Frodsham Festival of Walks, 2016 & 2017, and with the National Trust on Bickerton Hill in 2016 and 2017.

Announcement of Guided walk at Bickerton

At an early stage, it was decided that the three leaflets were an unnecessary addition to the interpretation materials. The original plan had conceived of them as supporting the walks but it was felt that the walks would be more usefully incorporated in the book where the sites mentioned could be more handily referenced. QR codes were also considered redundant although a QR code

directed to the Sandstone Ridge Trust's website, and thus to all the published materials, is in the book.

Supporting document: Advertisement for walk on Bickerton Hill

Document accessible on-line: book - The Ridge: Rocks and Springs

Objective 6: To add the findings of the project to the Sandstone Ridge Trust's website, to lodge them with the Cheshire Historic Environment Record and place in village archives.

The data that had been down-loaded onto the spreadsheet has been made available on The Sandstone Ridge Trust's website where it can be accessed as raw data or via an interactive map of the Ridge. This map, which was the inspiration of the co-ordinator, Gary Ball, was a major advance on the original intentions of the project and adds much value to the data-base and to the on-going work of the Trust.

The pro-forma can be seen in the Volunteer Handbook on-line. The resulting spreadsheet and interactive map can also be accessed on the website: www.sandstoneridge.org.uk (click on Projects)

The data was also made available to the Historic Environment Record and offered by letter to the parishes on the Ridge.

Supporting document: Letter from Cheshire HER

Review: Summary of lessons learnt

Comments on spending:

The project ran over-budget by a very small amount. In fact, some substantial savings were achieved under some cost headings:

- Recruitment cost nothing as we found that free media outlets attracted an excellent range of candidates and administration and office-space for the process was made available free of charge by the County Council.
- Digital outputs: under this heading only the co-ordinator's broadband and telephone were counted as costs. The downloading of the book as a pdf and other online materials on the Trust's website cost nothing.
- Staff training: the co-ordinator was highly qualified to run the project with limited training for himself.
- Training of the volunteers was remarkably economical as several of the professional trainers waived their fees. In fact, we were able to double the

number of days of training workshops delivered and yet halve the overall costs. Printing of learning materials, travel expenses and other incidental costs were born by the Trust.

- ‘Other’ costs were minimal, although some (like room hire and refreshments) were sometimes included under the heading of Volunteer Training so the breakdown here is a little ambiguous.

The slight overspend is accountable under two principal cost headings:

- New Staff: the extension of co-ordinator Gary Ball’s contract for a period of six months at one day per week was necessary to supervise an excavation and complete survey reports and a chapter on quarries for the book.
- Publicity and promotions: that element that consisted of producing print materials (namely the book) ran under budget but there was an unexpected opportunity to take part in a promotional event, ‘The Age of Metals’ at Beeston Castle in July 2015. It was considered a valuable way of raising the public profile of the project and the additional costs of about £1500 were deemed affordable under the heading of Contingencies.

What the volunteers thought:

The volunteers were invited to complete a short questionnaire and attend focus groups to discuss the project with a Trustee.

The average age of volunteers was about 50. There was a fair balance of men and women but few young people. This was clearly a project best suited to the early-retired.

Two thirds of respondents had been involved in similar projects before – most in the Habitats and Hillforts project – and they saw it as a continuation of that project. Others were recently retired or encouraged by friends to engage in the area to learn more about it and/or contribute to its preservation. Their hopes were to gain more information about their local area, make new friends and to do something worthwhile and contribute to the protection of the Ridge. All found it very or relatively easy to get involved. This was probably more because of the pre-existing network of volunteers than due to additional publicity, although one or two respondents had seen notices on parish noticeboards or websites.

The majority of respondents felt that they were well aware of how the project had been organised and were well-informed about events, particularly through regular e-mails. Some respondents felt that more information needed to be provided about the overall progress of the data-collection. They were generally satisfied with the opportunities for social interaction, one new volunteer saying that

this was an unexpected bonus from the project. They were less sure about whether they could have been given the opportunity to contribute more towards the end when data-collection concluded and the focus was on writing the book. It may be that the organisers should have given more attention to the possibility of continuing desk research.

The respondents were extremely positive about the many and varied workshops that the project had organised. The key satisfaction for the respondents was their discovery of new things about their locality: the landscape and its history, exploring little known corners of the Ridge. They also appreciated the opportunity to meet other like-minded people but with different interests and skills to their own, and applying their own skills to unfamiliar situations: both in the library and on archaeological digs. Generally, they felt that the organisers had fulfilled their brief and respondents were very satisfied with the project. They felt that more regular meetings might have been desirable and more opportunities to continue desk-research and archaeology would have been welcome: a challenge for future projects.

Supporting document: Volunteers' questionnaire and letter from a volunteer.

The main lessons learnt:

This project was two years in gestation and took more than three years to complete. Trustees and Members need to understand the time-scale within which they need to work to gain funding, make appointments, recruit trainees and volunteers and plan such a series of workshops, site visits, digs and other events whilst keeping the end objectives in view. At no time did the organisers feel that we had “bitten off more than we could chew” and we were very satisfied with the final outcomes, but expectations of such a project need to be managed with a realistic time-scale in mind and the vital contribution of volunteers needs to be recognised.

Communication with volunteers can be problematic at times and momentum can be lost if this is not maintained. Virtually everyone on the project found that regular e-mails were the best means of communicating and that Newsletters and Facebook pages were a valuable back-up. More social events would have been welcome to secure the volunteer base and possibly to expand it.

At the very start, the organisers miscalculated the demographic of the Ridge and failed to recruit a sufficient number of volunteers from the Southern region because it is so lightly populated. As the Ridge covers such a large area (virtually the length of Cheshire) it was hardly surprising that volunteers tended to keep to their own individual parishes. More interest from the larger urban conurbations beyond the Ridge in Chester, Northwich, Winsford, Nantwich and Crewe should have been encouraged by a wider publicity campaign.

With those lessons learnt, the Sandstone Ridge Trust is eager to continue the success of *The Ridge: Rocks and Springs* with further projects, many of which have been suggested by the volunteers.

Dr Peter Winn, Trustee

The Sandstone Ridge Trust

June 2017