

Field Training

Magnesian Limestone is something really rather special, it's not any old limestone.

Well the field training programme is really about trying to instil people who already work with the public, to pass on the knowledge they are gaining from the days, so that people will understand and learn more about the limestone landscapes so that could be around the rock so the geodiversity and having a greater knowledge of the magnesian limestone strata, because it is a very complicated set up, the rocks that we've got here.

What has happened here is that you've got underlying topography so you've got sand dunes and dune ridges originally, and then as the sea encroached it covered up, it filled in the hollows, but if you had pronounced ridges it would have banked over it and that's what we've got there.

And, also looking at things around biodiversity such as butterflies and flowers that you see on the magnesian limestone grasslands. And, next to that we've got wild rock rose, it has little woody stems and opposite leaves and this is the plant that the rare northern brown argus butterfly depends on, and it actually lays its eggs on the top surface of these leaves. So we've been exploring the hill at Penshaw monument in the morning and we're here on this lovely afternoon at Tunstall Hills and we're now exploring the unique reef behind us at Tunstall Hills with geology experts and we're also looking at the fascinating wildflowers that are growing on the rocks. And then we've got a beautiful wild rose here and with its white flower and it has lots of little spines on the stems.

I think projects like this are really important because a lot of experts know that these sites are extra special sites. I think a lot of the public perhaps don't realise what they've got on their doorstep and I think if we can get people out, show them the unique geology and wildflowers in these areas, I think it raises awareness of these sites, how vulnerable they are, it gets people involved in helping to manage them, preserve them into the future.

Any idea what this might be ? Ladies Bedstraw.

Maybe more little known as the historic environment, that although we don't have a Stonehenge or a Hadrian's Wall we have a large number of quality historic environment places to go look at and see, and it's using these places and working with these people to develop a body of knowledge to help people to understand the wonders we have here.

Excitingly, the great thing about geology is you never know what you're going to find; you turn over rocks and all of a sudden something like this turns up. I don't know exactly what this is but it's got bony structure and what looks to be a sort of jaw bone along there.

Paul, our tutor, said that you often don't need to actually split the rocks open, if you just turn a rock over you might find something interesting. At that second I looked down, and there was this huge great conspicuous looking item in the middle of a large piece of rock. Fantastic to think it's been there for 200 million years or more and now we've found it – fascinating!