MENDIP ROCKS! 2026 EVALUATION REPORT

General Overview

The Mendip Rocks! Festival of Geology is provided in partnership with the Mendip Hills National Landscape (MHNL), the Somerset Earth Science Centre (SESC) and the Mendip Society. This year's festival ran from the 2nd to the 24th of October and was our busiest to date, involving 30 activities during 20 events distributed across the Mendip Hills.

The festival launched with *The Mendip Wolves*, a community arts, science and heritage project created by artist Sean Harris and Professor Danielle Schreve. Delivered in partnership with the MHNL Team, SESC, Natural England and Somerset Art Works, it used Ice Age light projections to bring the story of wolves in the Mendip landscape to life. The project involved local schoolchildren, who created wolf print lanterns which formed part of the immersive experience at Ebbor Gorge.

Several events were held to celebrate Earth Science Week (11th to the 17th of October), including guided walks exploring the geology of the Mendip Hills, Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet; quarry tours of Torr Works Quarry; and a lecture day featuring expert talks from award winning author Anjana Khatwa, geologist Owen Dukes, and geoarchaeologist Vince Simmonds. The festival ended with a well-attended museum open day at the SESC.

Attendance was excellent throughout the festival, with many events and activities being oversubscribed and requiring waiting lists on Eventbrite. The Building Stones of Wells Cathedral had such an extensive waitlist, that it was decided to organise a second tour in the afternoon. As seen in previous years, there are still a few members of the community that find it challenging to make bookings using Eventbrite. On the rare occasion this happened, the SESC team were able to facilitate bookings via telephone.





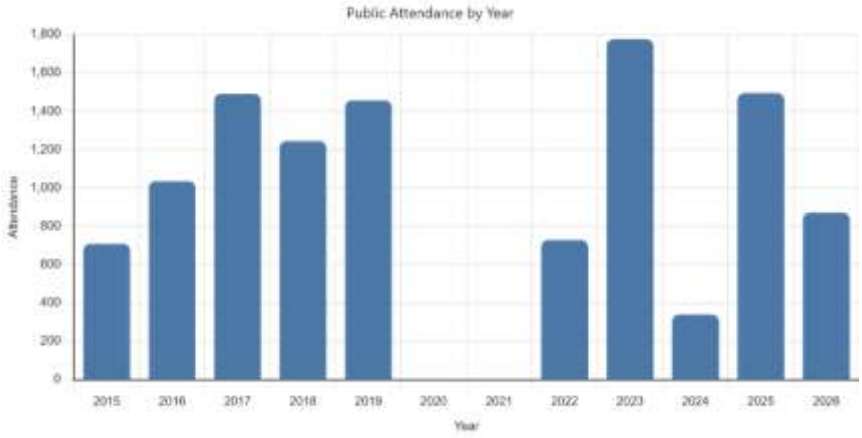
Some highlights from this year's festival.



Some highlights from this year's festival.

Figure 1: Comparison of public attendance with previous years.

2026 - 873
2025 - 1497
2024 - 341
2023 - 1778
2022 – 730
2020/2021 - Covid
2019 - 1459
2018 - 1246
2017 - 1493
2016 - 1037
2015 - 710



Festival Contributors

A total of 71 staff, volunteers, speakers and artists contributed to the successful delivery of the festival. A huge thank you to all who gave up their valuable time.

Organisations:

- Bristol University
- Heidelberg Materials
- Holcim
- Mendip Hills National Landscape
- National Trust
- Natural England
- Somerset Art Works
- Somerset Earth Science Centre
- Tarmac
- The Mendip Society
- Trigger
- Wells Cathedral

Event Statistics

The table below details the attendance of each event during the festival.

Table 1: Statistics for each Mendip Rocks! event.

EVENT	TICKETS AVAILABLE	TICKETS SOLD	PUBLIC ATTENDED	STAFF, VOLUNTEERS & CONTRIBUTORS
Mendip Wolves – Coxley & Wookey Schools	85	70	51	18
Mendip Wolves – Friday Performance I	39	39	20	18
Mendip Wolves – Friday Performance II	35	26	18	18
Ebbor Gorge – Where Ancient Rock Meets Living Landscape Walk with Les Cloutman	25	20	18	2
Explore Ebbor Meadow Activities & Car Park	-	-	230	27
Secrets of the Mendip Ice Age: Walk & Talk with Professor Danielle Schreve I	20	21	25	4
Secrets of the Mendip Ice Age: Walk & Talk with Professor Danielle Schreve II	20	19	27	4
Mendip Wolves – Priddy Primary	85	62	48	20
Mendip Wolves – Saturday Performance I	35	33	30	20
Mendip Wolves – Saturday Performance II	35	35	30	18
Digging Deep: Discovering the Somerset Coalfields	20	18	16	4
Discovering the Geology of Great Elm and Vallis Vale	15	15	12	2
Earthforms & Artforms: A Creative Workshop at Fairy Cave Quarry	15	8	7	2
Where Lava Met the Sea: Exploring Sand Point's Carboniferous Volcanic Past	25	22	20	2
Deep Time & Human History: A Geo-Archaeology Adventure in the Mendip Hills	18	14	10	2
Layers of the Land: The Geology of Glastonbury	14	14	14	2
Torr Works Morning Quarry Tour	13	11	12	4
Torr Works Afternoon Quarry Tour	14	12	8	2
Building Stones & Geological History of Shepton Mallet Geo Walk	15	13	12	3
Somerset Earth Science Centre Geo Lectures	80	40	40	6
Halecombe Quarry Morning Tour	14	9	8	4
Halecombe Quarry Afternoon Tour	14	14	13	4
Building Stones of Wells Cathedral I	16	16	12	3
Building Stones of Wells Cathedral II	20	16	14	3
Whatley Quarry Morning Tour	14	13	14	5
Whatley Quarry Afternoon Tour	14	14	14	4
SESC Museum Open Day	-	-	140	16
TOTAL	**700**	**588**	**863**	**169**

Evaluation of Individual Events

Some of the events were geo walks or quarry tours and numbers had to be restricted to ensure the highest level of safety. Three events that had a larger potential capacity were *Explore Ebbor*, the SESC geo lecture day and the SESC museum open day. The events held at Ebbor Gorge saw the highest interaction with the public.

Table 2: Evaluation of each Mendip Rocks! event.

EVENT	SUCCESSES	EVEN BETTER IF
Mendip Wolves	• Free to attend. • Collaboration with 3 local primary schools.	• Free tickets reduced commitment to attend.
Explore Ebbor	• Free to attend. • Opportunity for organisations to collaborate and interact with the public. • Walks very popular with excellent feedback. • Good attendance throughout. • Provided fundraising opportunities for Gully Cave research.	• Although walks proved very popular, public engagement with the meadow activities was less than previous years. • Keep separate from other events so not to overstretch resources.
Digging Deep: Discovering the Somerset Coalfields	• Talk and walk (theory and practical) combination was well received, with repeats requested by the public.	• More opportunities for fossil hunting.
Discovering Geology of Great Elm and Vallis Vale	• Attendees appreciated the clarity of the leader's delivery and their explanations. • Networking with potential future collaborators.	• Option to continue to another site after lunch needed to be clearer for the public. • If repeated, start with De La Beche unconformity.
Earthforms & Artforms: A Creative Workshop at Fairy Cave Quarry	• A lot of positive feedback from attendees. • Very well publicised amongst local art groups.	• Attendees requested more art-related activities. • One of the few events that didn't sell out.
Where Lava Met the Sea: Exploring Sand Point's Carboniferous Volcanic Past	• Very well attended. • Public particularly appreciated the clarity of the leader's explanations.	• Option to shorten walk to reduce exposure to uneven ground. • Send out field notes prior to walk in case of windy, wet weather.
Deep Time & Human History: A Geo-Archaeology Adventure in the Mendip Hills	• Public continue to enjoy hybrid events, such as learning about how geology has influenced archaeology. • Longer, more challenging walk well received.	• Send out field notes prior to walk in case of windy, wet weather. • Potential to have opportunity for public to engage just with archaeological part of walk, geological part of walk, or both.

EVENT	SUCCESSES	EVEN BETTER IF
Layers of the Land: The Geology of Glastonbury	• Potential to become rolled out as part of the Somerset building stone trails. • Attendees enjoyed specific focus.	• Printed walking leaflet for the public to use in their own time and engage more people.
Torr Works Quarry Tours	• Sold out very quickly. • Lots of positive feedback. • New emphasis on rail operations well received.	• Organise repeat visits to meet demand from public. • More tours with emphasis on rail.
Building Stones and History of Shepton Mallet	• Collaboration between the two leaders with different knowledge and interests worked well. • Attendees enjoyed seeing parts of the town they were unfamiliar with. • Also enjoyed seeing Shepton from a different perspective.	• Printed walking leaflet for the public to use in their own time to include town trail and engage more people.
Somerset Earth Science Centre Geo Lectures	• Well attended with fantastic feedback from the public. • Good range of geoscience celebrated. • Significant social media outreach.	• Make use of untapped social media networking opportunities. • Requests from those unable to make it to offer an online option.
Halecombe Quarry Tours	• Lots of positive feedback from public. • Attendees enjoyed being at the rock face with opportunities to collect rock and fossil samples.	• Organise repeat visits to meet demand from public. • More time to hunt for fossils.
Building Stones of Wells Cathedral	• Sold out with long waiting list which prompted second tour in the afternoon. • Attendees enjoyed the leader's explanations and anecdotes.	• Printed walking leaflet for the public to use in their own time to include town trail. • Request for return of Wells building stones tour
Whatley Quarry Tours	• Sold out very quickly. • Change to include rail loft well received.	• Include a visit to Mendip Rail. • Include visit to the viewing platform.
SESC Museum Open Day	• Well attended. • Lots of positive feedback from public.	• Start advertising earlier. • Consider press release promoting event in Mendip Times. • Send advertisement to more local schools.

Publicity and Social Media

Newspapers & Magazines

Mendip Times (see Appendix A)
Mark Adler kindly agreed to a short editorial about the festival in the September edition and this was free of charge. The October edition included a half-page editorial promoting the festival and a half-page advertisement of all the Mendip Rocks! events. Dates and information about the festival was detailed in the "What's On" pages.

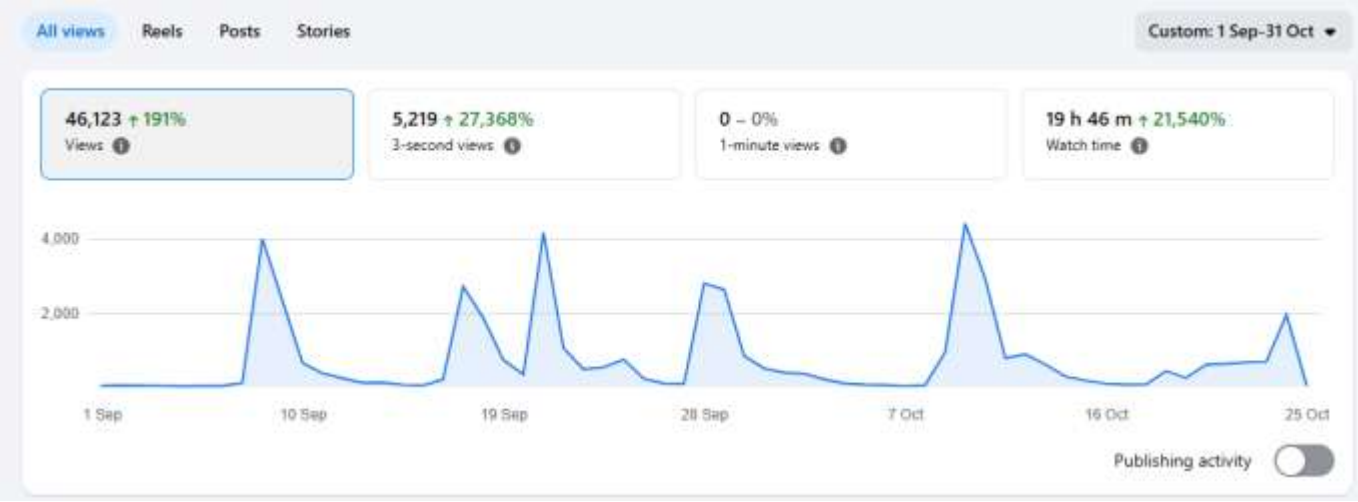
Leaflets
A much-needed revamp of the leaflet and poster artwork was funded by the MHNL. A grant from the Mendip Society covered the cost of the Mendip Times advert and most of the printing of 2000 leaflets, which were distributed across the Mendip Hills by the MHNL and SESC staff and volunteers. Leaflets and posters were accepted by libraries, museums, cafes and shops.

Social Media
Interest in our social media channels continued to grow this year, generating more than 46k views across Facebook and Instagram between the 1st September and 31st of October. Building on the success of previous years, the focus was on creating short-form video content (Reels) to promote upcoming events and, where possible, showcase and celebrate events soon after they had taken place. The Mendip Rocks! Facebook and Instagram accounts are managed and regularly updated by the SESC. We are grateful to the MHNL team and the Mendip Society for their ongoing support in sharing content and promoting the festival through their websites and social media channels.

Social Media Statistics

Facebook and Instagram

Figure 2: Comparison of views and follower numbers (between the 1st September and 31st October 2026).



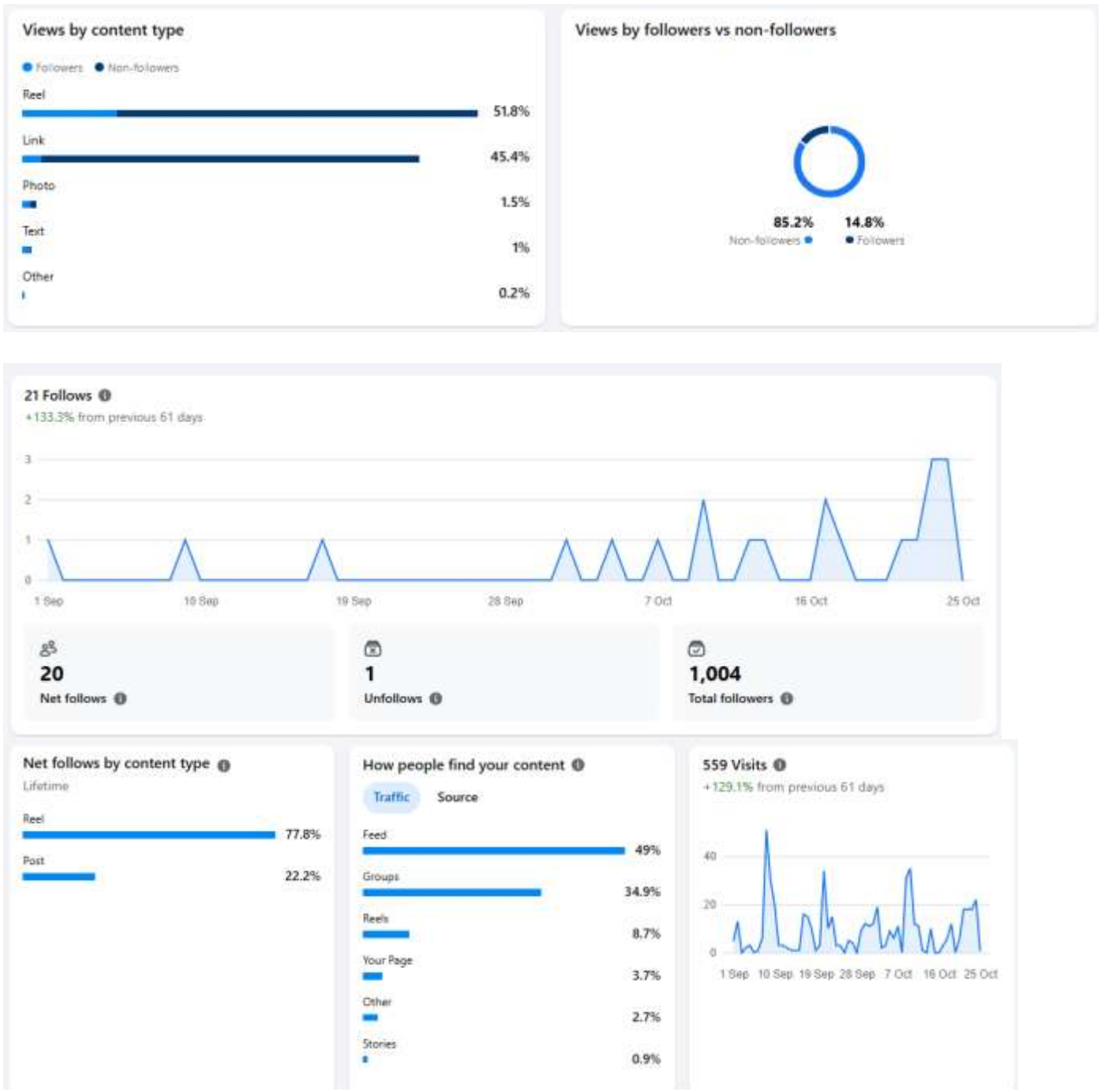
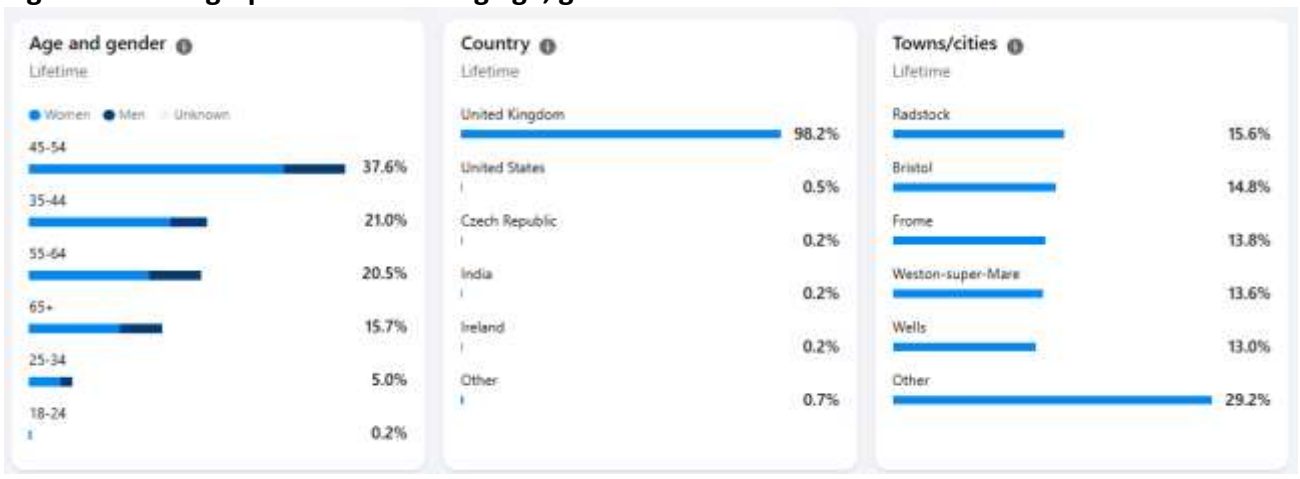


Figure 3: Demographic data showing age, gender and location numbers



Events were shared with the following local community Facebook pages/groups:

- Bath Area Network for Artists
- Bath – What's On?
- Binegar/Gurney Slade/Chilcompton and Oakhill Anything Goes
- Bruton, Somerset
- Cheddar and Axbridge Discussion
- Chew Valley Community Connect
- Chew Valley Events
- Chilcompton Past & Present
- Coleford Parish Council
- Coleford Somerset – The Peoples Page
- Cranmore Parish e-Chat
- Doulting Community Group
- Events Within a 70 Mile Radius of Bristol
- Frome community Social
- Get Outside in Somerset
- Holcombe Village
- Keynsham Community Group
- Leigh on Mendip Community Page
- Mendip Mummies
- Midsomer Norton & Radstock Community Group
- Midsomer Norton Community Hub
- Oakhill Village Life, Somerset
- Shepton Mallet Community Group
- Somerset Events. Events Only Related to the Arts
- Somerset Walks
- SSMCEG Stoke St Michael Community Events Group
- Stoke St Michael – No Rules
- Street/Glastonbury + Connecting Communities
- The Original Cheddar Mums
- Wells Art Community Network
- Wells Community Information & Chat
- Weston-Super-Mare in the Spotlight
- What's on Bristol
- What's on: Bristol
- What's on – Chilcompton, MSN, Paulton, PSJ, Radstock and Outlying Villages
- What's on in and Around Bath
- What's on in Weston-Super-Mare
- What's on Cheddar
- What's on Somerset Events

Websites/Information Boards

- Bath Geological Society
- Bristol Museum
- Bristol Naturalists
- Bristol University
- Barnstaple U3A
- Bradford-on-Avon U3A
- Cheddar U3A
- Discover Cheddar
- Dorset Geologists' Association
- Eventbrite
- Geological Society
- Geology in the West of England Blogspot
- LinkedIn
- Mendip Hill National Landscape
- Mendip Times
- Shepton Mallet U3A
- Shepton Mallet Nub News
- Sherborne U3A
- Somerset County Gazette
- Somerset Earth Science Centre
- Somerset Geology Group
- The Mendip Society
- The Russell Society
- Wells Nub News
- Wells U3A
- Wessex OUGS
- What's on Somerset

Social Value

Over the course of the festival, the total event attendee contact time with the public was **2755** hours. This is an increase of 239% on last year. **356** hours of time was kindly contributed by volunteers during the festival, which is a 132% increase on last year. This does not include time spent preparing for events, which was significant, but very difficult to capture.

Finances

2026 ticket sales (Eventbrite and on the door) income: **£2810.52**

Funding: **£2250** includes £500 from the Mendip Society; £1500 from the Mendip Hills National Landscape; and £250 grant from The Geological Society for Earth Science Week expenses (awaiting confirmation).

Total income: £6032.52 (£250 of which is tbc)

Expenses: £1758.54

Total net income for festival: £4273.98
An increase of 0.7% from last year.

Actions for 2027

1. Continue to identify new potential locations/contributors for walks and talks.
2. Continue to research additional income streams.
3. Marketing:
    a. Start earlier, particularly with events with larger capacity.
    b. Make better use of email addresses provided by public.
    c. Continue to schedule social media posts/events on social media platforms to help manage limited staff time.
    d. Produce a video to promote Mendip Rocks! 2027 using bank of photographs and videos from previous years.
    e. Continue to build bank of photographs for marketing.
4. Identify opportunities to promote the festival prior to launch, e.g. Frome Festival.
5. Record and share events, e.g. geo lectures, to broaden our audience.
6. Research development of YouTube channel to extend our reach further.
7. Research other ways to further broaden our audience.
8. Consider more weekend or half term events to further increase involvement from older children/teenagers.
9. Continue to use the voice amplifier for outside events to overcome background noise.

Suggestions for Mendip Rocks! 2027 Events

1. Repeat quarry tours which are always over-subscribed, e.g. Whatley and Torr Works.
2. Vary quarry sites to be visited, e.g. Doulting, Callow Rock, Moons Hill/Stoke.
3. Organise more quarry tours with emphasis on rail operations.
4. Organise more of the popular hybrid walks to include geology, biodiversity and archaeology.
5. Organise more events with opportunities to fossil hunt or fieldwork.
6. Collaborate with Frome Town Council to organise a town geo walk.
7. Develop a self-led Building Stones Building Stones and market trails for Frome, Glastonbury and Shepton Mallet, in collaboration with the Somerset Geology Group.
8. Investigate opportunities for more geo-art themed workshops.
9. Continue with popular SESC lecture day and develop other opportunities for talks during evenings and weekends.
10. Continue to research and contact potential high profile speakers.
11. Continue with popular SESC family museum open day.
12. Collaborate with Trigger and MHNL Team in the organisation of an art project to launch the 2027 festival and celebrate Mendip geodiversity.

A Sample of Feedback from the Public

“So informative and well organised. Great staff.” Halecombe Quarry tour.
“Love the Mendip Rocks! events, so please keep this stuff going!” Whatley Quarry tour.
“(Our guide’s) stories, information, knowledge and gentle humour”. Building Stones of Wells Cathedral.
“A beautiful, interesting location, and helpful, friendly guides.” – Earthforms and Artforms at Fairy Cave Quarry.
“Being able to visit the quarry floor and talk to staff knowledgeable in operations” Torr Works Quarry tour.
“The quality of the speakers and their knowledge of the subject.” Geo lectures.

Appendix A – Magazine Publicity

Mendip Times September Edition

Geology festival returns

MENDIP Rocks! Festival of Geology will return this October, bringing an exciting programme of guided walks, talks, quarry tours and creative activities celebrating the unique landscapes of the Mendip Hills.

Organised by the Somerset Earth Science Centre in partnership with the Mendip Hills National Landscape team and The Mendip Society, the festival offers something for all ages, from exploring ancient volcanic landscapes and fossil-rich sites, to unique quarry tours and hands-on workshops.

To launch the festival on Saturday, October 2nd, a series of immersive events at Ebbor Gorge will bring the Mendip Hills' Ice Age past to life, including The Mendip Wolves after-dark lantern performance followed by a family open day on Sunday, October 3rd with guided walks exploring the gorge's cliffs, caves, and remarkable archaeological heritage.

During Earth Science Week, there will be opportunities to celebrate the links between geology, landscape and human history, culminating in a special Geo Lecture Day at the Somerset Earth Science Centre on October 17th.

The festival will close with a lively Museum Open Day at the centre on October 24th, where visitors can explore fossils, rocks and minerals, enjoy family activities, and bring along their own finds for identification.

For details, visit: https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/mendiprocks

Mendip Times October Edition

Mendip Rocks! is on a roll

THE much-loved Mendip Rocks! Festival of Geology returns in October offering an inspiring programme of events that uncover the dramatic stories behind the Mendip Hills.

Organised by the Somerset Earth Science Centre, in partnership with the Mendip Hills National Landscape Team and The Mendip Society, this year's festival – running from October 2nd to October 24th – invites visitors of all ages to explore the deep connections between geology, wildlife and human history through a diverse range of walks, talks, creative workshops and exclusive behind-the-scenes experiences.

A special highlight for 2026 is a series of immersive events at Ebbor Gorge, bringing the Mendip's Ice Age past vividly to life. Visitors can experience The Mendip Wolves, a magical after-dark lantern performance inspired by the ancient presence of wolves in the landscape, created by artist Sean Harris and conservation palaeoecologist Professor Danielle Schreve.

Other events include a fossil-hunting exploration in the Somerset Coalfields, a creative workshop set within the atmospheric Fairy Cave Quarry and a range of guided walks exploring landscapes such as Sand Point near Weston-super-Mare, Glastonbury and Vallis Vale near Frome. Visitors will also have rare opportunities to go behind the scenes at some of the UK's largest working quarries, including Torr Works, Halecombe and Whatley.

To mark Earth Science Week, the SESC – next door to Wainwright's Quarry at Stoke-St-Michael – will host an afternoon of geology themed lectures on October 17th. The festival will culminate in a museum open day on October 24th.

Lou Sumbler, Festival Co-ordinator at the SESC, said: "Mendip Rocks! offers a unique opportunity to step back through millions of years and uncover the stories



Hands-on activities were on offer during the recent Earth Science Centre day

hidden within our landscape. From Ice Age animals to volcanic eruptions and ancient seas, this year's programme brings the geology of the Mendips to life in exciting and creative ways. There really is something for everyone."

Jim Hardcastle, manager of the Mendip Hills National Landscape Team, said: "We're delighted to welcome the return of Mendip Rocks! The festival is a fantastic way to celebrate the special qualities of the Mendip Hills and to help people discover the remarkable geology that has shaped this landscape and its communities over time."


MENDIP ROCKS! FESTIVAL
OCTOBER 2026
An exciting programme of events to celebrate the awe-inspiring 450 million year geology of the Mendip Hills
The Mendip Wolves
Friday 2nd & Saturday 3rd October.
6.30pm – 8.30pm or 7.30pm – 9.30pm
Ebbor Gorge, BA5 1AY. Free. Booking essential.
Explore Ebbor
Saturday 3rd October. 12pm – 4pm.
Ebbor Gorge, BA5 1AY.
Free entry. Guided walks must be booked.
Digging Deep: Discovering the Somerset Coalfields
Tuesday 6th October. 11am – 2.30pm.
Somerset Earth Science Centre, Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Discovering the Geology of Great Elm and Vallis Vale Geo Walk
Wednesday 7th October. 10.30am – 2.30pm.
Fordbury Bottom, Great Elm, BA11 3NY. £8
Earthforms & Artforms:
Tuesday 8th October. 10.30am – 2pm.
Meet at Somerset Earth Science Centre.
Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Where Lava Met the Sea: Exploring Sand Point's Carboniferous Volcanic Past Geo Walk
Friday 9th October. 11am – 3pm.
Meet at National Trust car park.
Keystokes BS22 9UD. £8
Deep Time & Human History: A Geo Archaeology Adventure in the Mendip Hills
Monday 12th October. 10am – 3pm.
Meet at Blackmoor Reserve car park.
Charterhouse, BS40 7XR. £10
Layers of the Land: The Geology of Glastonbury Geo Walk
Tuesday 13th October. 10am – 12pm.
Meet outside Glastonbury Tourist Info Centre, BA6 9EL. £8
Torr Works Quarry Tours
Wednesday 14th October 9.30am – 12.30pm or 1.30pm–4.30pm
Meet at Somerset Earth Science Centre.
Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Building Stones of Shepton Mallet Guided Walk
Thursday 15th October. 10am – 12.30pm.
Shepton Mallet Market Square, BA4 5AZ. £8
Somerset Earth Science Centre Geo Lectures
Saturday 17th October. 12.30pm – 4.30pm.
Somerset Earth Science Centre, Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Halecombe Quarry Tours
Tuesday 20th October. 10am – 12pm or 2pm – 4pm.
Meet at Somerset Earth Science Centre,
Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Building Stones of Wells Cathedral Tour
Wednesday 21st October. 10am – 12.30pm
Wells Cathedral Entrance, Cathedral Green BA5 2UE. £8
Whatley Quarry Tours
Thursday 22nd October. 9.30am – 12.30pm or 1.30pm – 4.30pm.
Meet at the Somerset Earth Science Centre, Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU. £15
Somerset Earth Science Centre Museum Open Day
Saturday 24th October. 11am – 3.30pm.
Somerset Earth Science Centre, Stoke St Michael, BA3 5JU.
Free entry, no booking required, donations welcome.
Mendip Hills National Landscape
All events must be booked unless otherwise stated
Events part of Earth Science Week
More Event Information and Booking: https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/mendiprocks or call 01749 840156
For all outdoor events, please wear sensible footwear and weather appropriate clothing