

Launch of the James Hutton Trail in the Scottish Borders

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On the morning of 23 rd May, The Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability, launched their Scottish Borders James Hutton Trail and the permanent James Hutton Exhibition at the Reiver Farm Shop at Auchencrow near Reston in Berwickshire. With local television and national press coverage, the exhibition and trail were opened by the inimitable Professor Aubrey Manning.

This substantial interpretive project has been long awaited by many keen to see the life and work of the 'father of modern geology' being celebrated and interpreted in his local area, and at the locations in the Borders made famous by his brilliant geological insights.

The project has produced a series of interpretive panels with an accompanying trail leaflet and a developing web site (www.james-hutton.org.uk). One of the panels is at Hutton's farm at Slighhouses Farm south of Grantshouse, with another at its old marl pit, where Hutton extracted marl in effort at agricultural improvements on the farm. A board has also been placed at his hill farm at Nether Monynut in the Lammermuir Hills. Another panel is located above the classic unconformity section at Siccar Point, a site long overdue for interpretation.

For those of us who have long thought access was difficult even to the top of the 60 m high steep and grassy bank above the internationally famous Siccar Point, there is now a way-marked trail to the site from the lane leading to Drysdale's Turnip Factory, the former access route to Siccar. A new signpost by a farm gate (NT 8012 7051), now leads the visitor past the ruins of St Helen's Chapel and through kissing gates to the site. Improved access down the grassy bank to the famous view of the unconformity is still being considered in the light of its biodiversity and slope stability. The information board is by the last kissing gate that gives access to the top of Siccar Point (NT 8112 7085).

In the afternoon following the launch of the Scottish Borders James Hutton Trail, John Dent of Scottish Borders Council launched the Max Nowell sculpture of the Hutton unconformity site at Jedburgh. Crafted using greywacke sandstone and blonde Carboniferous sandstone from Swinton Quarry (Berwickshire), the sculpture is situated in Lothian Park in front of Jedburgh Abbey. The sculpture and an interpretation panel nearby bring the unconformity to the tourist, as the real unconformity site, used by Hutton to help develop his 'Theory of the Earth', is rather overgrown. Also known as Inchbonny RIGS, the actual unconformity can be viewed from the opposite bank of the Jed Water at Allar's Mill.

For Hutton fans the world over, the good news does not stop there. The Lothian and Borders Rigs Group (LaBRIGS) have just published a new leaflet

'James Hutton: A man ahead of his time'. It was prepared by LaBRIGS volunteers, supported financially by Scottish Natural Heritage and Borders Foundation for Rural Sustainability (BFRS) with the British Geological Survey (BGS) also providing in kind staff time. The leaflet is a treasure trove of places, people and art associated with Hutton including an image of a painting of Hutton meeting with Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott and others of the Enlightenment in Sciennes House, Edinburgh in 1787. The leaflet saw its first public airing at the Exhibition launch.

The funding for this substantial project was from Making Tracks (Leader Plus and the Scottish Executive) and Scottish Natural Heritage. BGS and LaBRIGS provided in kind professional and volunteer support as the main providers of geological information. Local Borders businesses (e.g. Simprimstudio) provided the design team. Denise Walton, Chair of BFRS who introduced Professor Manning, is entitled to sincere congratulations on having the foresight to set up this project, on obtaining sufficient match funding and on managing the project to this point.