

## Scotland Rocks Conference 2014

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Scotland Rocks 2014 was an amazing and unique experience which none of us will forget. For two days we were part of a group who shared a collective enthusiasm for geology. Nearly 40 Higher Geology pupils from seven Scottish secondary schools attended the conference, along with over 30 people with many levels of experience and expertise in Earth science, including professional geologists from industry, universities and the British Geological Survey (BGS), university postgraduate and undergraduate students.

The Scotland Rocks conference is aimed at school students studying geology. It began in 2013 when Perth High School pupils approached the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) with the idea of an event to raise the awareness of the value of studying Earth sciences at school. For us, however, it meant we could be immersed in geology led by people who took time to look at the geology with us. All the professionals and university students had the knack of teaching us by simply talking geology with us and encouraging us to think as geologists. Brilliant! The atmosphere and learning were just how our teacher (JJD) told us it would be, but to be honest we really didn't believe him!

The first day (Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> March) was mostly taken up by a fantastic field trip to St Monans in Fife which was organised by the University of St Andrews and the *GeoBus* team, along with geologists from the University of Edinburgh and the BGS. We observed and mapped the Lower Carboniferous rocks, learning about their sedimentology, stratigraphy, structures and volcanic activity. We worked in small groups, each led by at least two geologists.

After a great meal at our comfy hotel in Perth, we all headed to the Conference Reception at RSGS Headquarters, which marked the start of our contribution to the conference. The conference organiser, Joyce Gilbert (who is just a 'legend'!), had asked West Calder High School to run the reception desk and to be generally helpful to conference delegates. The main event of the reception was Professor Iain Stewart (our other 'legend'!) presenting the RSGS President's Medal to Dr Angus Miller of the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, for taking the lead on developing the Scottish Geodiversity Charter.

The second day (Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March) was a conference consisting of keynote lectures, hands-on workshops and other events. After a welcome by Mike Robinson (CEO, RSGS) and an inspirational keynote address by Professor Stewart, we watched a lecture by Professor Gupta of Imperial College, London. His lecture was about the *Curiosity* mission to Mars and it was conducted via a Skype link. His evidence of sedimentation processes similar to those on Earth was incredible. We really like his way of talking to us, as if he was showing us how he thought as a researcher. His lecture was reinforced by a *GeoBus* workshop where we had the opportunity to interpret photographs from Mars. Not many school pupils can include experience of Martian fieldwork in their CVs! Other workshops were optional and covered topics as diverse as minerals and crystal structure, fossils, tsunami sediments, and Geoparks. The workshops were fun, interactive and informative, helping to equip us with more skills for studying Earth science.

Geologists from different areas of industry and research gave us a clear perspective of the different career paths along which geology can take you, and the range of personalities who work in geology. This happened particularly during the Careers Speed Dating session when we had short periods of time with people working in or studying geology. We heard about what they do and how you could follow their career choice. The final session was a Question Time format where we posed questions to a panel about future energy challenges. This raised many interesting global and national issues.

In summary, a fantastic two days was had by all at Scotland Rocks. We learned a lot and we thank everyone who contributed. What is clear to us, and missed by other pupils who don't choose geology, is that once you have studied geology you look at the landscape in a new way. It is as if you are seeing more than other people see. More than anything, geology is about telling a good story!

Thanks to everyone who made this happen. Can we come back next year?