

## **A Report on The Torbay GeoQuest 2010**

The English Riviera Global Geopark GeoQuest was performed and enacted between the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2010.

A seven day journey (as part of the 2010 Geopark Festival) by Tony Lidington, Hugh Nankivell and Phil Smith from the Valley of Rocks (Watcombe) to Brixham, returning to Torquay by boat. The journey was supported and facilitated by the English Riviera Global Geopark, funded and supported by Torbay Council and managed by The Arts at Dartington. The theme of the journey: the geology of Torbay. Each day the 'Geotrio' ran workshops in the morning, prepared a walk during the afternoon and then between 6pm and 10pm led an audience on a mis-guided tour, which was then followed by a performance (prepared in the week or so before the journey) and a meal (at a covered venue).

Workshops were held at Homelands School Nursery (Torquay), Ilsham Primary School (Torquay), Torquay Young Volunteers (THE STEPS, Torquay), Stay and Play Parent and Toddler Group (Paignton), Oldway Primary School (Paignton), Seashore Centre Mammoth Day Drop In (Goodrington), Three Corners Care Home (Churston Ferrers), Brixham Young Volunteers (Brixham), Frensham Care Home (Brixham), Young Explorers (Torquay Museum).

Starting points for the mis-guided walks were Anstey's Cove Car Park, Daddyhole Plain (Toquay), Occombe Farm, Oldway Mansion (Paignton),

Paignton Pier, Breakwater Beach (Brixham), Torquay Tourist Information Centre.

The performance/meal venues (and end points of the walks) were Kent's Cavern & Restaurant (Torquay), Spanish Barn (Torquay), Occombe Farm Restaurant (near Cockington), Palace Theatre (Paignton), Goodrington YMCA, Berry Head Café (near Brixham), Torquay Museum.

Total performance tickets sold: 211

Total audience for the walks: 179

10 Workshops, participants: 195 (approx)

There were also random interactions each day, so there was a direct engagement with, approximately, another 150 people (some very brief, others more significant), plus those who observed the Geotrio (from passing cars, in the crowds at Brixham).

### **What happened – an account of the English Riviera Global Geopark**

([www.englishrivierageopark.org.uk](http://www.englishrivierageopark.org.uk)), **Geoquest 2010**

The origins of the GeoQuest 2010 lie in a series of informal walks taken together by Tony Lidington, Hugh Nankivell and Phil Smith in 2007/8, during which they explored through conversation ways in which they might work together while simultaneously exploring the environment they passed through.

These origins became and remain significant because they were the grounds for interest in the invitation to create a 'Quest', made by the regional organisers of the Cultural Olympiad in 2008, introducing the concept of 'Quest' and 'Questors' as a metaphor that could link the physicality of Olympic sports with work created in response to Greek myth:

At the same time as a response to this was being developed by Tony, Hugh and Phil, Mischa Eligoloff (Torbay Council) expressed support from Torbay Council & The Geopark. The proposal concentrated on a single (roughly) circular ambulatory journey around Torbay taking in key geological sites around the coastal areas of the bay. The proposed project involved two key phases – firstly, a series of workshops, facilitated by Tony, Hugh and Phil (hereafter, The Geotrio) and other artists, encouraging local community groups to create a piece of performance, visual art, music, installation, *etcetera* in response to local geology, and, secondly, the journey – along which we would integrate the community group artworks into our performances, an element of 'barter'; our performances would be exchanged for local ones.

The Arts at Dartington joined the project and became the project managers.

The ACE application was unsuccessful, but Mischa had secured sufficient local funding (and there was sufficient practical support from the different partners) for a viable Quest journey (minus the preparatory workshops) and

with the workshops now conducted *en route* (two per day) and led by the Geotrio.

Paid preparation time was now strictly limited – The Geotrio supplemented this with their own personal reading and research and preparation (Hugh for example, walked all the guided walk routes).

The performance venues were secured by the partners, Hugh and The Arts at Dartington organised the workshop groups.

The Arts at Dartington organised stewarding and publicity.

The Geotrio's limited formal preparation time together at the beginning of May was spent walking some of the routes of the guided tours, minimal exploring (our visit to the Crystal Cave) and devising a structure for the workshop and performance. Then, separately, the Geotrio wrote and composed. They then reconvened for two days (three, if the day prior to the Quest is counted) of rehearsal (revising and devising).

4-7 May exploring and devising

20-21, 24 May rehearsing

25 - 31 May walking/performing

By February 2010 the Geotrio had agreed on the basic geological narrative of Torbay that should be presented by the Quest (formation of limestone in the Devonian period, formation of the Permian deserts, the formation of caves in the limestone, human impact on the geology). Prior to the final devising period in mid-May the Geotrio had agreed on a structure for the evening performance, a dramatic 'shape' using the mythical figure of the Golem as a metaphor for geological forces.

Uncle: We have come to sense the forces of nature, the scale of what we are dealing with, and we have ended up conjuring the Torbay Golem, accidentally laying open secrets of landscape and murky shifts of time. The Golem is a monster, manufactured from the earth beneath us. It lies, slumbering beneath the surface... if you listen at the manhole where the Fleet still runs, or if you stand in the rain, you can hear him in the thump of the waves against Shoalstone Pool...

ALL: (sing) We went looking for geology  
But we found a monster's soul,  
We went looking for geology,  
We found a whole monsterology! (rehearsal draft, 13.5.10)

The reiterated 'promise' of the geology's monstrous return removed the need for a tight dramatic narrative and the performance consisted of episodes and songs (plus a character piece) recounting and re-enacting the Geotrio's

ambulatory searches for Torbay's geology. Eventually, the Torbay Golem does awake:

It ripped up the houses  
Along the fault lines  
Till all that was left  
Was its limestone spine

It tore out the sandstone  
behind Palm Court Hotel  
then rounded on Paignton  
To ruin that as well

And the map of Torbay geology is torn to shreds, the destruction wrought on the map representing a feasible account of the long term future for Torbay's geology, and the opportunity for the audience to draw their own maps, of the geology they hold dear.

The GeoQuest's daily guided tours began as plans for relatively informal collective walking from the daily workshop venues to the performance venues, and were connected to provisional ideas, eventually abandoned, for carrying a rock in a cart (or some equivalent); something more like a procession: "The geoquest team will then walk/cycle on to their evening venue (with others from the community group if they wish)." (notes for an ACE application, 1.7.09)

This was changed in early 2010 and the walks became more like 'misguided-tours': walks that use the guided tour format to challenge dominant ideas about an environment and challenge the formalities of the guided tour format (eg. passive audience) at the same time. Despite having to generate material for seven separate guided walks, although this was hard work, it was possible, and as the week progressed the walks became more playful, allusive, interwoven and participatory, and less like lectures on the move.

The workshops were not fixed, but consisted of a set of different options that were deployed in different ways dependent on the workshop participants: songs, a brief introduction to the basic geological narrative of Torbay, a quick 'field trip' outside, and a resource of participatory exercises draw upon from Hugh and Tony's extensive workshop experience. Part of the aim of these workshops was to skill up the participants so they were able to make their own contributions to the Geo-map.

Hugh had written a number of songs, upon which the Geotrio could draw, not just for the performances and workshops, but at any point on the journey.

The Geotrio had commissioned distinctive costumes (with a rock like appearance), and had decided to walk not 'in character', but 'in personae' (Phil as Crab Man, Tony in his pierrot persona as 'Uncke Tacko' and Hugh as 'Aeolian Hugh'.)

The seven day journey itself was a challenge for the Geotrio and at times gruelling, with periods of anxiety and questioning. The days were very long (7.30am till 10pm or later), but there were many moments of intensity for the Geotrio: the camaraderie of the road, the short but intense engagements at care homes and in workshops, humour, spontaneous poetry, moving and educative encounters with people

All the walks and performances were delivered (despite quite fierce rain during one of the walks). One workshop was cancelled.

The feedback (immediate and later by emails, conversations and letters to the press) from audiences and participants was very positive. People were clearly engaged by the 'different' and often unexpected way of encountering the (often familiar) landscape. Many who were not engaged in thinking about the Torbay geology were surprised by the interest they began to feel in the rocks around them. And the idea of a Quest journey seemed to capture many people's imaginations, and many expressed enjoyment in having a sense of having joined in and shared in the Quest journey (through eating together, through walking together with the Geotrio).

*Our aim is to continue developing The Geoquest over the next years in Torbay*