

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Charles Darwin the Geologist: An Exhibition

The **Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences** at the **University of Cambridge** has been awarded a £519,000 grant by the **Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)**. The money will fund a new permanent exhibition celebrating Charles Darwin's work as a geologist and displaying the Museum's unique collection of rock and mineral specimens collected by Darwin during his voyage as ship's naturalist aboard the HMS *Beagle*.

The exhibition, associated publications and activities will place the Sedgwick Museum firmly at the heart of the celebrations planned for 2009 to mark Darwin's 200th birthday and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*.

Although chiefly famous as a biologist, Darwin was passionate about geology and the 3000 rock and mineral specimens he collected, combined with his notes and observations represent some of Darwin's first serious work as a scientist. The exhibition will highlight this often overlooked material and make this very important collection of specimens and papers accessible to visitors for the first time - showing how Darwin learned to translate his raw curiosity about the world into inspiring science.

The Director of the Sedgwick Museum, Dr David Norman said: "We are extremely pleased by this news from the HLF. Very few people realise that Darwin considered himself primarily as a geologist for the first 20 years of his remarkable scientific career. Bringing this period in his life to public attention for the first time and emphasizing how this energetic and inquisitive young man worked and developed as a scientist will generate a great deal of excitement."

The HLF funded project will not only involve the display of the specimens for the first time. An exciting programme of educational, and fun, activities are planned to further people's insight into the world that Darwin inhabited.

Annette Shelford, the Museum Education Officer involved in planning this programme said: “Darwin’s work as a geologist clearly demonstrates his great enthusiasm for learning and the excitement that his discoveries brought him. This project is a fantastic opportunity for us to show people what Darwin did, why he did it, and above all to give everybody an opportunity to share in his enthusiasm and excitement and hopefully take some away for themselves.”

The Sedgwick Museum is gradually redeveloping its galleries, exhibitions and collections, and the funding from the HLF represents an essential contribution to this process. The grant provides for the complete cleaning, conservation and cataloguing of the collection. The storage conditions of the material will be greatly improved and the Museum’s historic display cases will be refurbished. Digitised images of the specimens and their associated documentation will be developed into a valuable web-based resource. Two new posts will also be created to help manage the project through to its completion.

The Sedgwick’s Collections Manager, Dan Pemberton, said: “Not only will this help us make this historic collection more accessible to both public and scholars alike, it will also assist the Museum in its continuing mission to set new standards for collections care and documentation.”

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Note to Editors

1. The Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences is the oldest established Museum at the University of Cambridge (having been founded in 1728). Its collections of over 1.5 million specimens have received the accolades of Designation and Accreditation because of their national and international importance. Since the mid 1990s it has been undergoing a period of renovation and refurbishment.

2. The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is a 'non-departmental government body' set up by Parliament in 1994 to give grants to a wide range of projects involving the local, regional and national heritage of the United Kingdom. They distribute a share of the money raised by the National Lottery for Good Causes. Their web-address is: www.hlf.org.uk, and their press release announcing this award is available from: www.hlf.org.uk/English/MediaCentre/PressReleaseDatabase/Eastern.htm

3. Images of Darwin, the specimens and associated letters and documents to accompany this story are available on request.

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