**Excursion to the Goring Gap, 11th June, 2016.**

Separating the Chilterns chalk from the Berkshire Downs chalk, the Goring Gap is arguably the most impressive fluvial landform in Britain. From the Jurassic lowlands around Oxford, the River Thames flows anomalously across the Chalk upland of the Chiltern Hills/Berkshire Downs via ‘The Gap’ and then enters the London Basin, initially onto the Lower Tertiary (Lambeth Group) in the Reading area. Sir Aubrey Strahan, who served as the Director of the Geological Survey from 1914 – 1920, originally proposed that the Thames was superimposed from a former Tertiary cover onto the underlying Chalk. Other interpretations such as glacial lake overflows have been postulated but our present day understanding of the geology gives no support to them. As William Whitaker appreciated, ‘The Gap’ is primarily the result of fluvial processes operating over a several million year time scale.

In 1895 the Geologists’ Association (GA) held an ‘Excursion to the Goring Gap’ under the leadership of Geological Survey geologists William Whitaker and J.F. Blake (*Proc. Geol. Ass*. 14, 175-6). The GA party of 50 arrived at Reading Station and walked to the river at the Thames Promenade where they embarked on the steam-launch *Fashion*. This took them up river to Goring through the incised stretch of the Thames. There they walked west into Berkshire and climbed Streatley Hill before returning to Goring in Oxfordshire. They boarded the launch again and sailed upstream a little before returning to Reading. It is proposed to repeat the 1895 excursion as precisely as possible.

The 2016 excursion will commence at Reading railway station which is 10-15 minutes’ walk, from the same landing stage as used in 1895. The ‘Caversham Princess’ has been chartered for the entire day and will be available for boarding from 09.30. The vessel has ample space and both decks are covered. There is a bar with real ale and other drinks. Scenically this reach is undoubtedly the finest on the entire Thames. Departure is scheduled for 10.00 and the initial journey will take between 2 - 2.5 hrs (two locks have to be passed). The former confluence with the River Kennet/Sulham Gap will be seen. Three historic buildings – Mapledurham Hall, Hardwick House and Basildon Park will be passed and a historian will explain their significance. Upon arrival in Goring, the party will undertake a c 6 km circular walk to Streatley Hill; this is capped by the Westland Green gravels, one of the oldest Thames river terraces. A climb of c 100 m (and descent) is involved. A range of geological features will be examined including evidence for the progressive incision of the River Thames in the form of a series of river terraces and landforms due to former cold climate processes. Sir Aubrey’s grave will be visited in Streatley churchyard. Non-hill walkers may enjoy the immediate environs of Goring at a more leisurely pace. A late lunch will be taken in Goring (there are several pubs and tea rooms) before re-boarding at Goring Lock for a 16.00 departure back to Reading, with an anticipated arrival at 18.30 at the latest. Given a viable number of participants, a live jazz band will play during the return leg.

Reading has numerous fast trains (average 25 mins) to London and a wide range of services to the south, west and north (it is Britain’s eighth busiest station).

**The excursion will welcome all geoscientists and partners. They do not have to be members of the GA. Tickets are £25 per person. Booking details are to follow.**

Peter Worsley. Version 22/01/14.