

Sidmouth Science Festival 2017 Review

The 2017 Sidmouth Science Festival, the sixth, attracted more visitors than previous years with over 4400 attendances during the week and more people coming from further afield.

The programme attracted different audiences to the different events. The talks series this year was of very high quality with highlights being Dame Julia Slingo FRS talking about weather forecasting and Prof Julian Dowdeswell from the Scott Polar Research Institute. Prof Adrian Moore was inspiring with his talk about Infinity. Other talks included the Science of Beauty, Why our Brains love Sugar, Technology Doping: when equipment outperforms the athlete, Imaging Concealed Wall Paintings using Terahertz Radiation, Thunderbolts and Lightening: are they very frightening? Shining a light on tropical disease, Beavers on the River Otter and a Science(ish) Road Show with authors Rick Edwards and Dr Michael Brooks.

Hands-on activities were well attended on Super Science Saturday. The day provides an opportunity for the public to engage with a whole range of schools, institutions, university outreach and other public bodies in a wide variety of STEM related activities. Families can visit various venues around the town and collect a dinosaur stamp to help them on their way. Contributors included the Met Office, University of Exeter, Jurassic Coast Trust, Institute of Physics, FabLab Devon, Double Elephant Print Workshop, Exeter Maths School and Colyton Grammar School. Especially popular this year was the Tesla coil demonstration which was very noisy!

The Fun Day at the Norman Lockyer Observatory (NLO) provided a packed day of activities, especially with the launch of 2 weather balloons. Sidmouth College designed experiments that were part of the Balloon payload. The instruments measured pressure, temperature and humidity and the College students also wrote the software that controlled the sampling and storage of the data. Sidmouth Primary school also designed experiments for the balloon that would show what would happen to a partially inflated balloon and a syringe of water as the balloon rose up in the atmosphere. These experiments were monitored by an onboard camera.

TV personalities Adam Hart-Davis and Dallas Campbell gave excellent talks which were full to overflowing and once again the jet car races were extremely popular.

Weather Art and Music put on an enjoyable evening of music complemented by narratives by Prof Paul Hardaker, Chief Executive of the Institute of Physics and seascapes by local and national artists.

Other local organisations ran events for the Science Festival: these included Sidmouth Library, Sidmouth Museum, Sidmouth Lifeboat and the Norman Lockyer Observatory.

New events this year included a visit to see how wine is made at Lyme Bay Winery, Observatory walks, bat identification and a drone race.

The Festival has a very strong Schools' programme too with EDDC countryside rangers leading workshops in kick sampling and bug hunts in the Byes in Sidmouth with Sidmouth CE and Newton Popleford Primary Schools. These schools had their own jet car races, too. Sidmouth Primary School also had a visit from Iggy the Iguanodon, a rather large dinosaur.

Over 700 students benefitted from workshops delivered by EDT and 2.Times Do supported by Devon Education Fund. The EDT workshops allowed students to learn from the construction of trebuchets and roller coasters and took place across East Devon Secondary and Primary Schools. The aim of this project was to support STEM career understanding in secondary schools and their primary partner schools. Technology workshops with 2.Times Do took place in Sidmouth College, Colyton Grammar and Honiton College. St John's International School ran their own Science Day.

Ada Lovelace Day, Earth Sciences Week and Biology Week were all celebrated during the Festival.

Link to photos on flickr

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/107235872@N02/>