1. INTRODUCTION

Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre is an interpretation Centre concentrating on non-residential enjoyment of the local coastal environment. Our role is in the education of a wide variety of visitors with the aim to –

> *'Enhance peoples enjoyment and understanding of the local coast and countryside, in a manner that encourages its future well-being.'*

Our activities include –

- Visits to the Centre by members of the general public and educational groups.
- Guided walks and fieldwork for members of the public and educational groups.

Our activities take place at a number of locations. These can be grouped into three categories:

1. Inside the Centre building
2. On the beach
3. Within schools for outreach sessions and occasional events at festivals

Since opening in 1985 the Centre has maintained a high standard of safety practice and our record is unblemished by serious injury to either staff or visitor. This review of our safety procedures is to ensure that we maintain the highest standards in the future.

This document has been compiled with reference to –

- '*Five Steps to Risk Assessment*'; Health & Safety Executive.
- '*A Code of Practice*'; Field Studies Council.
- '*Safety in Earth Science Fieldwork*'; Earth Science Teachers' Association

2. SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

Within the Centre visitors are free to visit and interact with a number of displays. These include;

- Visual displays
- Interactive tables of rocks/marine specimens
- Computers
- Audio-visual theatre.

Outside the Centre our guided walks include –

- Fossil hunting between Charmouth and Lyme Regis.
- Rockpooling/Plankton Trawling at Charmouth Beach.
- Rockpooling at Broad Ledge, Lyme Regis.
- Beach cleans and surveys of local wildlife.
- Investigating Coasts session for school groups

4. IDENTIFYING PEOPLE AT RISK

- **Paid staff and volunteer workers**
  The Centre employs four full-time managers, a seasonal warden, a part-time administrator and a part-time cleaner. The Centre also has a team around 75 volunteer workers who help to man the Centre and further to this, a party of 10 volunteers who carry out maintenance work during the winter months when the Centre is closed to the public (e.g. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday -TBC).
  Risk: Full-time and paid employees will have detailed knowledge of the Centre's fire procedures and are familiar with the Centre layout and potential hazards. The Centre is checked daily by the managers during the opening and closing procedures. Some of our volunteers may only work at the Centre once a month and might not be as familiar with procedures as the managers or other volunteers. The majority of volunteers are from the retired population so some may have slight mobility problems.

- **Visitors to the Centre (general public)**
  The Centre can welcome up to 150,000 people a year through its doors. Some of these people will often be making return visits, but

some will be completely new to the Centre. This population includes all ages and abilities. Some will visit in family groups but we often have unaccompanied children in the Centre, especially during the summer months, despite having signs and lone children policies in places.
Risk: Visitors may have no previous knowledge of the layout of the Centre if they have not visited before. Any unaccompanied children at the Centre and during a possible fire, may become frightened. During events such as a fossil walk, there may be large numbers of up to 60 people in the Centre at one time. Having such large numbers may hinder evacuation, especially if people start to panic.

- **Visitors to the Centre (schools and groups)**
  The Centre welcomes around 4,000 school children and visiting groups in a year. All school visits are with accompanying staff or an identified leader within the group. The majority of our sessions take place on the beach and if requested by the school they can visit the Centre in small groups of 20 pupils (maximum) with accompanying teachers and adults.
  Risk: There can be large numbers of up to 30 children in the Centre at any one time during a visit.

- **Visitors to the Centre (special educational needs and disabilities - SEND)**
  The Centre welcomes members of the public and school groups with special educational needs and disabilities. The Centre has ramp access to the rear of the building. This is the only ramp access to the building.
  Risk: Evacuation issues if the ramp access to the building is blocked due to fire for wheelchairs and also those with mobility problems.
  SEND people may have an adverse behavior reaction to sounds, lights and "panic" situation.

5. GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES

Ultimate responsibility for the safety of visiting groups lies with the group leader. **MANAGERS ACT AS GUIDES ONLY.**

This equally applies to parents or guardians who bring children on our public activities. No child under the age of 18 may attend without the supervision of an adult.

4. GENERAL SAFETY PROCEDURES FOR ALL ACTIVITIES

The following is a summary of the main safety measures undertaken within the scope of the Centre's activities –

- The building has been checked for compliance with Health & Safety requirements. The building is inspected periodically by Charmouth Parish Council and Dorset Council.
- Our Managers have certificates in First Aid at Work and have training in dealing with likely emergencies at the Centre.
- Managers carry first aid kits and mobile phones while leading activities away from the Centre.
- The Centre has risk assessments for all activities, and safety information is given at the start and during all sessions.
- This information is communicated to all guided walk participants and visitors in one or more of the following ways –
    - Visually in our leaflets, posters, displays and school booking forms,
    - through our theatre presentations,
    - verbally within the information given to a guided activity.
- Visiting groups, schools and parties making advance bookings are given a booking form which includes advice on safety and group responsibilities. Group Leaders and Head Teachers/Heads of Organisation are required to sign this form as read.
- Beach walks are scheduled to take place on a falling tide, thus maximising the width of beach available for the group activity.
- If conditions on the day are adverse the Manager will advise the Group Leader as to their options. The Managers reserves the right to cancel the activity. Please see separate safety considerations in this folder 'When to cancel an event'
- A standard rule is applied to beach study areas with regard to a safe zone of operation. See environmental risk zoning/ratings.

- Each activity has an individual risk assessment sheet.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL RISK ZONING/RATINGS

Risk assessment for outdoor activities includes:

i) Description of sites.
ii) Advice given by Wardens at start of activity.
iii) Maps of localities with zone of activity.
iv) Risk Ratings.
v) Individual risk assessment sheets for each site.

i) DESCRIPTION OF SITES

CHARMOUTH BEACH

The River Char splits Charmouth Beach into east and west sections.

The East Beach After the landslides of 2023 and 2024 the profile of East Beach has changed and has formed a natural barrier below the steep cliffs and formed a safe collecting area. We do not take groups further than 1km along East Beach as the steep cliffs of the 'Belemnite Marls' reach the beach level and are more likely to collapse with little warning. The collecting area on East beach can be narrower than west beach and on Neap tides access may not be possible because of the large landslides protruding onto the beach. From our meeting area we have to walk across the Charmouth Parish Council carpark to access this side of the beach and warning statements are given.

The West Beach has a wider approach and a wider beach area at low tide where groups can safely operate away from the cliffs. West Beach also benefits from past landslips which form a natural barrier below the cliffs, keeping people away from potential rockfall hazards. The Centre feels this extra width of beach provides a safe route to and from the fossil collecting site and that the site is

protected by the above factors from the cliffs. The approach to the collecting site has steep cliffs formed of 'Shales-with Beef' and we walk groups along the sand and pebbles at a distance of at least 10m from the exposed cliff line.

Mouth of the River Char, CHARMOUTH

As the tide retreats an expanse of pebbles are exposed which are composed of material washed down the river and/or carried along the beach by longshore drift. In the summer months many of these pebbles can be covered in algae which can be slippery underfoot. and participants in activities are recommended to wear sensible footwear. This site is not flanked by an exposed cliff line and the exposed flanks of the river are not steep banks. The incoming tide will not cut off access back to the beach as it does at Broad Ledge in Lyme Regis. Everyone is warned of the pollution levels in the river and advised to wash hands after handling rocks and wildlife. Pollution levels are dependent on the rainfall and outflows from Wessex Water.

BROAD LEDGE, Lyme Regis

Rockpools are visible and accessible at low tide and the area is well away from any cliffs. For rockpooling activities the tide must be low and consideration to the incoming tide is an important factor.

Rocks may be slippery and participants in activities are recommended to wear sensible footwear.

The Charmouth Heritage Coast Centre has permission from The Charmouth Parish Council, National Trust and Lyme Regis Council to carry out the activities detailed below on their land. Copies of these permissions are detailed in the 'Licenses and Insurance' section below.

ii) ADVICE GIVEN BY WARDENS AT THE START OF ACTIVITY

The Managers advise the following to participants of activities –

- Do not go under cliffs, work at least 10m away from the foot of all cliffs.
- To keep within the safe fossil collecting area designated by the Managers.
- Always go fossil collecting on a falling tide and keep away from the sea.
- Beware of mudflows, never try to walk on them.
- Beware of slippery rocks and seaweed.
- Do not approach pollutants or pick up any man-made objects while on the beach.
- Do not throw stones to break fossils open.
- Do not hammer in the cliffs.
- Wash or sanitise hands after handling beach material.

iii) MAPS OF LOCALITIES WITH ZONE OF ACTIVITY

See following pages.

iv) RISK RATINGS

The following simple risk rating system has been applied to the hazards on the basis that **recommended safety measures have been implemented**.

Likelihood of occurrence based on previous records –

1 Rare: Probably never happen
2 Unlikely: Not expected to occur but may infrequently
3 Possible: Expected to occur occasionally
4 Likely: Expected to occur/ re-occur
5 Certain: Expected to occur/ re-occur possibly frequently

Severity of injury or incident if occurring –

1 Negligible: Full recovery expected after a short time.
2 Minor: Requiring First Aid but with no lasting health consequences

3 Moderate: Professional medical treatment required with possible long-term consequences.

4 Major: Long term disability following medical treatment

5 Fatal/catastrophic: Death or major irreversible disability resulting.

Risk Rating = Likelihood x Severity

A score of greater than 8 requires control measures to be adopted.

Example of a risk rating:

Hazard: ***Using a rock hammer***

Risk: ***Hand injury***

Risk Rating: 6

(i.e. The risk is likely to happen but will result in a minor injury)

Each potential hazard and risk arising from itis has been identified for each individual activity and site visited.

v) INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS FOR EACH ACTIVITY

See following pages

vi) INDIVIDUAL RISK ASSESSMENTS SHEETS FOR INTERNAL ASPECTS OF THE CENTRE

see following pages

CHCC Fossil hunting walk procedures and scheduling

General protocol

- All events are scheduled with reference to the tide times and our sessions finish 1 hour either side of lowtide. This is to ensure there is enough time for emergency services to evacuate the beach before the access is restricted by the tide.

- The Centre has permission from Charmouth Parish Council and an annual licence from the National Trust to carryout activities on their land.

- The Centre is insured to carry out activities on the beach by our insurers and our public liability insurance limit is £5,000,000.

-All activities are fully risk assessed and these are reviewed quarterly or after any significant event. All Centre staff that lead or assist on walks and all volunteers that assist must sign the relevant risk assessments.

- Events are carried out in specific areas of the beach which have been agreed with the landowners and are assessed on a weekly basis and/or after any significant geomorphological events. In the event of a change in the exposed cliff line or beach the Centre's risk assessments are altered and landowners and insurers notified and supplied with the amended risk assessments.

-The Centre will amend session content and timings with adverse weather conditions.

-All sessions are led by trained Warden staff that hold a current First Aid at Work qualifications.

- All Wardens carry a field first aid kit and mobile phones.

- Volunteers assist on walks and are trained annually.

-All activities and guidance given are in conjunction with the West Dorset Fossil Collecting Code.

Public events.

-All public fossil hunting walks are timed with the above tidal guidelines and the general protocols outlined above.

-The Centre operates a ratio of 1:20 trained staff and volunteers to members of the public.

-During the introductory talk outside the Centre the participants are warned of the dangers of falling cliffs and incoming tides. We also advise that eye protection and caution should be taken when using hammers on loose rocks.

- At the end of the event the participants are told about the state of the tide and how long they can safely access this part of the beach regarding the tides.

-All children must be accompanied by a paying adult in line with the Centre's child protection policy.

Schools

-All school group sessions are timed with the above tidal guidelines and the general protocols outlined above..

-All school fossil hunting walks are booked in advance and the group leader and Headteacher are required to sign the booking form and health and safety information to show that they had read and understood this information.

- The Centre asks the visiting group to have a ratio of 1:10 staff or parent helpers to students.

- All risk assessments are available on the CHCC website and signed copies are supplied on request from the Centre.

- The Wardens are guides on these sessions and are not responsible for behaviour of the students, this is the responsibility of the schools staff.

- School groups are not allowed to bring or use hammers, only trained Centre staff and volunteers are to use this equipment.

The lead teacher and Headteacher are required to read and sign agreement to the below on their booking form:

- **Teachers/guardians remain responsible for the group throughout the visit. Wardens are responsible for tuition of the group and not their discipline. Control and safety of the group is the teachers/guardians responsibility. Our aim is for the wardens to give as much time to the children/students as possible, rather than having to organise the group.**

- **Each party should include a designated first aider and should carry a first aid kit.**

- **It is recommended/advised that there is a ratio of at least one adult per eight children. All teacher: pupil ratios should be in line with your own LEA requirements. For Investigating COASTS activities the ratio should be 1: 6 due to group session work.**

- **At least one adult/member of staff should act as a spotter to ensure children remain away from the cliffs and the sea.**

- **The teachers/guardians should ensure that the group arrives adequately dressed and equipped for the activity and on time. The full 1.5 hour session is entirely outdoors.**

- **The Centre does not allow children to use hammers on the fossil sessions.**

- **In extreme weather conditions the wardens may advise that the activity is modified for reasons of safety.**

- **A safety code will be stated which includes:**
  1. **Keep away from the cliffs, mudflows and the sea.**
  2. **Stones must not be thrown.**
  3. **Watch out for slippery or uneven surfaces.**
  4. **Children must not go ahead of the warden while on the beach.**
  5. **No fossil hunting equipment is required and any usage by pupils is not covered under our liability insurance.**

- **Wardens are first aid trained and carry first aid kits, mobile phones in case of an emergency and are enhanced DBS checked.**

- **All Centre activities are fully risk assessed and the Centre is insured to carry out fieldwork and events. Copies of the risk assessments for activities can be obtained from our website www.charmouth.org/chcc/schools.**

The following covid measures are still in place to keep everyone safe. We expect ALL participants, including teachers/guardians to follow these measures. All staff will also follow them.

- **The full 1.5hr session now takes place entirely outdoors.**

- **In the run up to your session, you will be sent an introductory talk video. It is essential that all participants watch this, as it will teach how to hunt for fossils and show examples of what will be found, in addition to crucial safety information. Watching this video will ensure everyone gets the most from their visit.**

- **The Centre can no longer provide indoor space to store bags whilst on the beach, or indoor space for lunches.**