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The Wootton Bassett Mud Spings (Wiltshire, U.K.): An unusual Largerstatten for Jurassic foraminifera

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On the January 6th, 1997, the mud springs at Templars Firs, Wootton Bassett (Wiltshire) were designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The springs are notified as an SSSI on the basis of their hydrogeological interest. Water seeping through the Lower Calcareous Grit and Coral Rag (of Oxfordian age) liquefies the Amphill Clay Formation (lowermost Kimmeridgian) which then migrates to the surface in a series of mud springs. Many of the fossils brought to the surface still display their aragonitic shells and are quite beautifully preserved. In autumn 2003 and again in spring 2005 we collected a series of samples with the permission of English Nature (Wiltshire Team) and these have been washed for foraminifera and ostracods. The microfauna have been described in a previous BGS report, although it is much more extensive and yields all the taxa associated with this stratigraphical interval. Many aragonitic taxa (epistominids) are present and beautifully preserved, including some of the stratigraphically significant taxa. Large agglutinated foraminifera appear to dominate one of the five active vents and are in an exceptional state of preservation. In the literature, many of these Jurassic taxa have been referred to modern, extant taxa, although this is almost certainly incorrect. The material from Wootton Bassett should allow for a more appropriate determination of these taxa. Also recorded are small planktic foraminifera which extend our knowledge of the early evolution of the poorly-known Jurassic plankton.