



International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS), Initiative on Forensic Geology (IFG)

Monthly Update and Information for IUGS E-Bulletin, May 2026

MSc Forensic Geoscience Module, Institute of Earth Sciences, University of Heidelberg, Germany

From 11-15 May IUGS-IFG delivered an MSc forensic geology module at the Institute of Earth Sciences, University of Heidelberg, in Germany. The module comprised a series of lectures followed by field and laboratory practical sessions. The scope covered ground searches for burials, crime scene examination, the recovery of geological trace evidence from items found in the ground and from a vehicle. The course was attended by 25 students who were required to complete a formal written examination. The IUGS-IFG team in Germany was Dr Laurance Donnelly, Prof Duncan Pirrie, Dr Alastair Ruffell and Dr Benjamin Rocker. Prof Dame Lorna Dawson also provided a virtual presentation. Dr Laurance Donnelly and Prof Yamirka Rojas-Agramonte (IUGS Executive Committee) initiated the idea for a forensic geology university course in Germany in 2022, starting with a preliminary presentation on forensic geology at Kiel University in 2023. These events have firmly established forensic geology in Germany.



Previous page, IUGS-IFG MSc Forensic Geoscience Module, Institute of Earth Sciences, University of Heidelberg, Germany (Photographs, Laurance Donnelly and Heidelberg University).

UK Police Search Adviser (PoISA) Conference, Police National Search Centre (PNSC), College of Policing

On 27 May 2026, Dr Laurance Donnelly was invited by the UK College of Policing and Police National Search Centre (PNSC), to deliver a training presentation on the ‘*Geoforensic Search Strategy (GSS) and The Moors Murders*’. The event was attended by over 100 PoISA’s and police officers, which gave the opportunity to discuss innovative search strategies and techniques to locate burial related to homicide, serious and organised crime and counter terrorism.



Laurance Donnelly, UK Police National Search Centre, (PNSC) (Photograph, Laurance Donnelly).

Illegal Mining and Minerals Crime: INTERPOL, OECD, UNODC and WCO

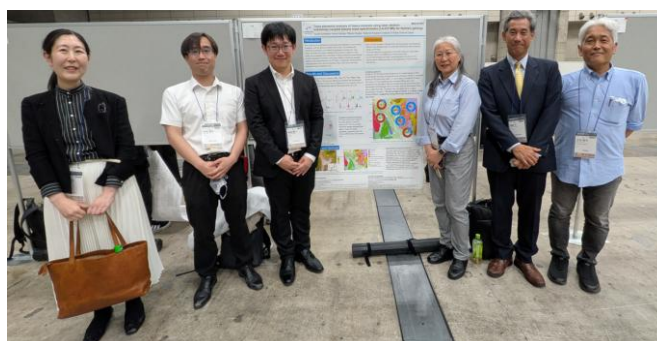
On 28-29 May 2026, Dr Laurance Donnelly was invited to present at the, ‘*11th Meeting of the Informal Law Enforcement Network on Minerals Crime: Disrupting Illegal Mineral Supply Chains.*’ The conference was held at INTERPOL’s headquarters in Lyon, France, in conjunction with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and World Customs Organisation (WCO). Dr Donnelly presented on, ‘*Forensic Geology Investigative Techniques to Detect, Deter and Disrupt Illegal Mining and the Illicit Trafficking of Conflict and Critical Minerals.*’



Dr Laurance Donnelly, Disrupting Illegal Mining, INTERPOL (Photographs, Laurance Donnelly).

Forensic Geology at the Japan Geoscience Union (JpGU), Chiba City, Japan

Forensic Geology was represented at the 2026 Annual Meeting of the Japan Geoscience Union (JpGU), held as a joint meeting with the American Geophysical Union (AGU) on 23 May, in Makuhari, Chiba City, Japan. IUGS-IFG was represented by Dr Ritsuko Sugita, Dr Noriko Kawamura, Dr Libby Stern, Prof Duncan Pirrie and Dr Laurance Donnelly, via in person and virtual presentations.
https://www.jpгу.org/meeting_e2026/about.php



Dr Ritsuko Sugita and colleagues at the Forensic Geology session, Japan Geoscience Union (JpGU), (Photograph, Ritsuko Sugita).

Netflix: Should I Marry and Murderer?

Prof Dame Lorna Dawson appears on the Netflix series, *'Should I Marry and Murderer?'*, which focuses on a case of a missing person in the Scottish Highlands. Prof Dame Dawson appears in episode two discussing in an interview the soil forensic evidence which she provided related to identifying where the burial site and the landscape context of the case and how trace evidence was recovered, which helped work out what happened to the victim.

[Watch Should I Marry a Murderer? | Netflix Official Site](#)

24th Triennial Meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences (IAFS), Sofia, Bulgaria

On 25-20 May, Prof Dame Lorna Dawson and Dr Benjamin Rocke, represented IUGS-IFG at the *'24th Triennial Meeting of the International Association of Forensic Sciences, Sofia, Bulgaria'*. The purpose of the conference was, *'In a world facing complex security, legal and humanitarian challenges, no country, discipline or institution can stand alone. Forensic sciences must advance through collaboration – across regions, specialties and generations.'* Prof Dame Dawson and Dr Rocke presented on a search undertaken in Syria with Reuters news agency. Where they worked to provide evidence of the movement of a mass grave from one location to another unknown location, through the use of multispectral imaging and drone technology. An IUGS-IFG poster was also presented.

<https://iafs2026.com/>



IUGS-IFG poster, displayed at IAFS, (left) (source, IUGS-IFG poster) and IUGS-IFG representatives and colleagues from the Brazilian Federal Police at IAFS (right), Bulgaria (Photograph Lorna Dawson).

Forensic Geology Field Visit, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE), Australia

On 17-20 September 2026, Prof Robert Fitzpatrick will run a field visit with the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) Science and Industry Regional Tour of the Flinders Ranges and Ediacara National Parks. This year's ATSE tour will allow you to step into deep time for a rare journey across Nilpena Ediacara National Park and Brachina Gorge in the Flinders Ranges National Park, where Earth's earliest complex life, ancient oceans, meteorite impacts and living landscapes come together in an unforgettable, world-class geological and biological experience. This includes a visit to the unparalleled Ediacaran fossils, which chronicle the "dawn of animal life" over 600 million years ago. These Ediacaran fossils, primarily found in the Flinders Ranges of South Australia, have a long history of theft and looting that dates back to the 1960s. These 550-million-year-old remains are highly susceptible to "raiders of the primordial ark" because they are often exposed on open ground in remote areas.

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How China's Demand Is Fuelling Illicit Sand Extraction in Latin America

Following on from the IUGS-IFG once day conference held in London in March 2026 the following web site below draws attention to illegal sand mining in Latin America and the influence of demand in China.

<https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/how-chinas-demand-is-fueling-illicit-sand-extraction-in-latin-america/>