



**DAVID FROST**  
**OPERATIONS DIRECTOR AT**  
**GEOACCESS**

A highly skilled, hands-on Engineering Geologist with an outstanding record of achievement in major construction, site investigation, inspections and remediation projects within transportation, landfill, gas and water environments. David has overseas experience in offshore oil & gas, as well as in the Gold Mining industry.



**GEOACCESS**

GeoAccess are a bespoke Asset Management company specialising in Inspections and Surveys. Established in 2014 to address the need for inspections on difficult access sites in the rail sector, we work nationwide covering a broad range of industries. Utilising our highly experienced Geotechnical and Structural Engineers coupled with UAVs, ROVs, Rope Access and Confined Space Techniques, we look at every job holistically.

Want to know more about GeoAccess?

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**When did you join the company?**

Although the business was set up in 2014, it wasn't until 2019 that I joined GeoAccess fulltime to support my business partner Mark Coleman with the onset of upcoming Network Rail framework contract opportunities.

**What is your role within GeoAccess?**

To keep an organisational structure and to lean on my strengths, it made sense to take the role of Operations Director, therefore not too far away from the coal face, as well as being accountable for all operational business relationships. Also supporting the Managing Director on all levels my role is to also encourage and inspire leadership.

**What was the inspiration behind starting GeoAccess?**

GeoAccess started as an idea back in 2014 where it was recognised there was a gap in the market for technical engineers utilising roped access capabilities to carry out earthwork examinations across the country. Some changes in Network Rail Standards meant that to complete a compliant inspection, it became a requirement to traverse much steeper slopes than previous.

To access these steep slopes on the network meant more people were needed to be IRATA (Industrial Rope Access Trained Association) trained and there was a lack of this resource nationwide. Today we carry out earthwork inspections directly to Network Rail following a series of successful bids a few years back, delivering upwards of 20,000 earthwork inspection reports per annum.

**What challenges have you faced in the industry?**

Working in the rail industry brings many challenges, but as an organisation we see these as opportunities. More recently Network Rail have quite rightly introduced some initiatives to ensure the safety of railway workers accessing, walking and working along the network.

In our sector we generally walk miles and miles along the railway corridor to access sections of railway cuttings and embankments but often encounter blockers to access such as 'pinch points' in the cess walkway, things like overhead line stanchions or overhead bridge abutments where the cess width has reduced to unsafe distances from the nearest running line. Where previously Line Blocks were relatively easy to obtain to allow engineers to pass the obstruction safely, the industry currently has to overcome a challenge for the amount of Line Blocks being asked for, causing Signaller overload. Recognising this early we as a company decided to look at alternative methods of accessing the areas we wanted to inspect.

Our work area is generally in the off-track environment away from the railway line, and so where we identify areas not possible to walk to along the railway cess we access via the boundary directly onto the earthwork, avoiding the need to book Line Blocks and keeping the trains running, but also keeping our operatives away from the open line.

**What is your Unique Selling Point?**

Our examination staff is mainly made up of qualified and experienced Geotechnical Engineers and Engineering Geologists, but what sets us aside is that on the difficult to access areas we have upskilled our workforce with the capability to use roped access techniques or even drones. This means we have the experienced technical person right at the 'coal face' to make assessments there and then on what data to collect or images to gather. This brings so many efficiencies for us and our clients, saving time and money. We are a company that thrives on a challenge and look at every obstacle holistically, so we find the most appropriate solution for our client that 'gets the job done' in the most efficient way.

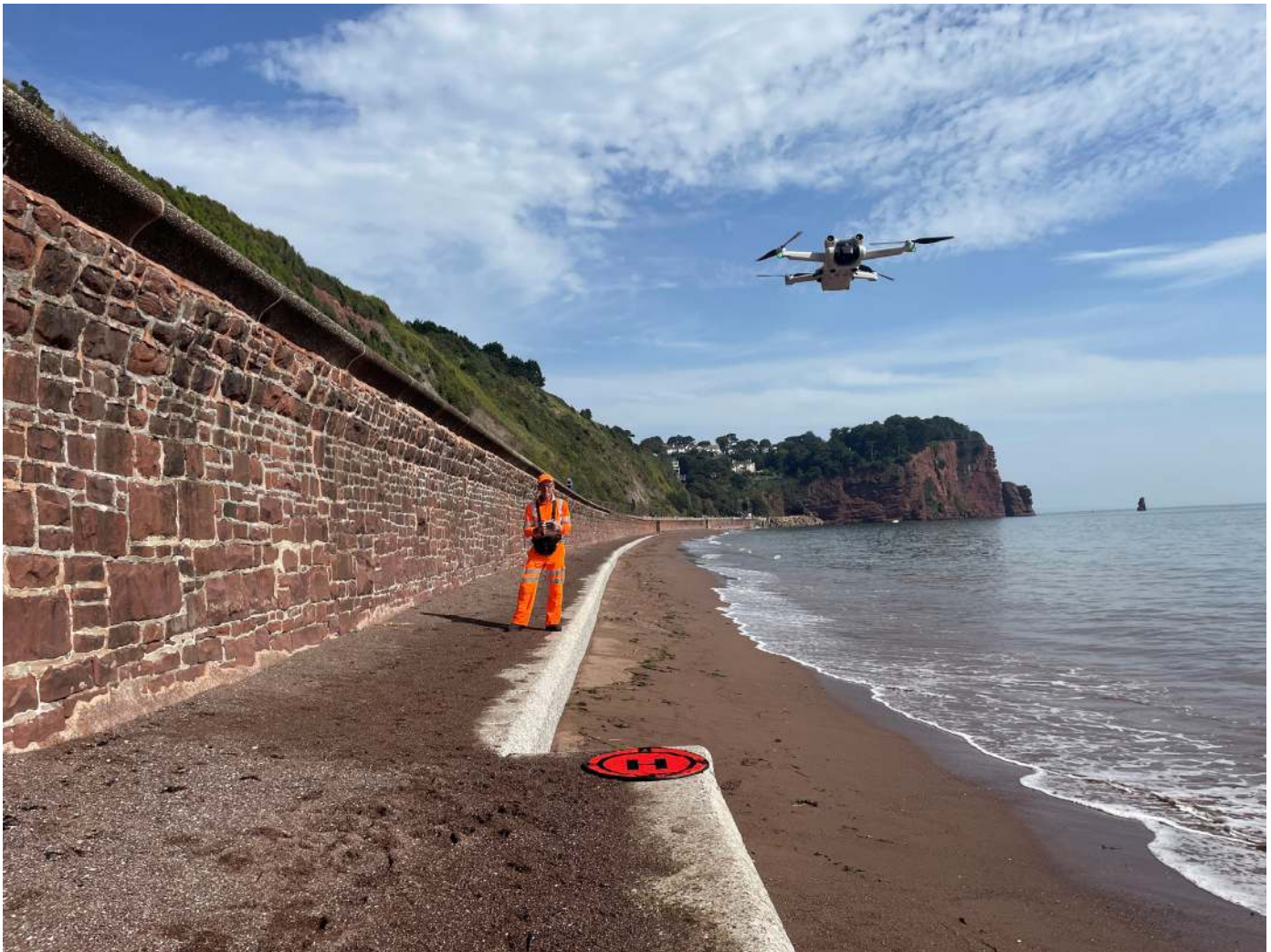
**What are some major projects you're currently working on?**

We are currently fully embedded into our Framework Contracts for Network Rail Wales, Western and Southern delivering earthworks examinations across all these three regions. On a typical earthwork season, we examine over 20,000 earthwork assets using our pool of experienced Earthwork Examiners out on site. We also carry out enabling works on these sites where vegetation levels are too high to carry out a compliant inspection, clearing strips on the earthworks to allow the examiner to safely traverse the slopes and collect the necessary data. On average we clear upwards of 1,000,000m<sup>2</sup> of vegetation across all these regions in a normal working season. In addition to our work on these Contracts, we also support other Teir 1 suppliers to Network Rail in other routes with earthworks examinations but also delivering bespoke geotechnical appraisals on high-risk earthwork assets.

Over the last twelve months we have also carried out over one thousand Mine Entry Inspections for the Coal Authority in Scotland, again utilising our Engineering Geologists to collect the data using handheld devices and uploading to a central database.

**When a client comes to you with a particular problem, what's your process for coming up with a solution, and how closely do you work with clients throughout the projects?**

When our client comes to us with a problem, we always listen so that we can fully understand what outcomes they are trying to achieve. We then work closely



and collaboratively to identify the most efficient and cost-effective solution, and at every stage make sure we have good and clear communications. In the challenging environment we work, things do change frequently from the original plan and we pride ourselves in managing these situations professionally at all times, discussing options and solutions with our client at all levels and phases.

**What are your plans going forward to ensure GeoAccess services are still around for years to come?**

We have quite an audacious plan to be The Best in our area of expertise, working closely with our current clients so that together we can provide and deliver our best product. We have our sights firmly set on being successful on any future contract renewals and are working hard with our customers to ensure continual improvement on all aspects of our deliverables and client working relationships. We are extremely excited for other upcoming opportunities within other regions too and are preparing our team in readiness for this.

We believe that in this ever changing and challenging environment, being one

step ahead with innovative solutions is key. Technology will play a huge part in this and where we are faced with examining difficult to access areas, utilising our UAV capabilities to provide outputs that can be used by our examination team or our customer to still ensure a compliant end product, but probably just as important, be able to move this data around and import into the systems currently in use is so vital.

**What do you have planned for the year ahead?**

The next twelve-month plan for GeoAccess is quite important in our goal of being 'the best'. We have set ourselves challenging but achievable milestones. We will continue to deliver our current framework contracts with Network Rail to maximise efficiency and give our customer the best service we can. We pride ourselves in the quality of our end product, so working collaboratively and listening to feedback will be top of our agenda.

In being our best, we also want to be the number one company to work for in our sector. We have recently undergone a huge recruitment drive for additional site examination staff but also to build our

strong internal senior management team. Being adequately resourced with the best people in the market is key to our plan for the next twelve months to springboard our successes into the future.

We also know that technology and innovation will drive efficiencies, and so we plan to build on our current capabilities in order to offer many other solutions in the near future.

**What's next for GeoAccess?**

GeoAccess is going from strength to strength and has recently experienced a period of substantial growth. We plan to continue this upward trend with sights firmly set on other opportunities on the horizon, building on our successful model we intend to branch out to new clients in the industry. This is a very exciting time for me and our team.

**What are some of the biggest challenges this sector currently faces?**

For us, and I expect for many others in this industry, the changing climate brings along a multitude of challenges to this sector. With the aging rail infrastructure, much of it



built back in the mid 1800s it is now coming under stress from inclement weather. Rainfall events pose a particular challenge on earthwork assets where surface water runoff from adjacent ground overwhelms the slope drainage causing flooding and worse, even failures of the actual slope.

It has become evident over recent years that with mild autumns we are seeing less, and less vegetation die back into the winter months meaning the slopes are needing more clearance works head of an inspection to allow the examiner to traverse and collect the required data for a compliant examination. With an increase in the amount of vegetation removal required this does also mean additional ecological checks around the network which is starting to highlight real constraints. To date we have relied on external consultancy for ecological support, but recently we have made the decision to procure our own Ecologist, still supported by our consultancy, and will soon be getting stuck into desk studying our next season's task list.

**How can the industry tackle its skills shortage and how do you recruit/retain/train your staff?**

With our sector being quite niche, resourcing examination staff has always been a challenge. Earth science as a discipline in the universities has seen a decline in student enrolment over the last decade which means finding qualified engineering geologists and geotechnical engineers with the pre-requisites to fulfil the Network Rail standards is becoming much harder. We do pride ourselves in having a

very strong, professional, and experienced team and with our recent recruitment drive we have been really pleased to have brought into the industry some new and enthusiastic individuals.

We have a strong mentorship pool to support the new engineers on their journey of becoming an earthwork examiner. We are extremely proud to say that when people choose to work for GeoAccess they stay with us. I believe this is because of our solid core values as an organisation, so when people join us, they join a team of likeminded individuals who are professional, hardworking, and respectable. We see training and continual professional development of our staff as a major part of our recent growth and success.

**Have you changed your approach to work at all since covid?**

As with many organisations, working practices look very different now since the pandemic, and for SME's like us this has brought huge challenges. We work across the whole of the UK and our central hub is based in the Midlands, but our staff live and work from as far north as Scotland, to as far south as Devon and Brighton. Remote working is not entirely new to the workplace, but it is now more the norm than ever before. We as an organisation believe that maintaining the structure within the business is key to success when working so remotely, and this is reflected in our meeting regime of daily, weekly and monthly schedules, using video calling from our home locations. However, we do also believe that getting everyone together is hugely beneficial to a team's



success but also for mental health reasons, so we do encourage our staff to utilise office days from time to time.

We also encourage our staff to occasionally meet the client in a more face-to-face setting, particularly at monthly progress meetings. The collaborative discussions and problem solving sat around a desk far outweighs being sat in front of a laptop screen surrounded by thumbnail images of the attendees.

However, with the obvious challenges remote working brings there are also huge benefits. One being that our staff spend less time in the cars commuting, which is better for individual fatigue but also much kinder to the environment. RP