



**Newsletter of the Australian Geoscience Council Inc**  
**Update on activities within working groups**  
**of the National Geotourism Strategy**

**Newsletter 22-02, dated 23 November 2022**

**PURPOSE**

To provide intermittent periodic updates of activities and achievements of the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) Working Groups and links to useful items. Please note that working group issues and people commonly overlap between groups. The following categorisations may relate to more than one group.

**CURRENT STATUS**

**Working Group 1 relates to the development of new digital technologies to highlight and interpret natural and cultural heritage for geotourism.**

A position paper was prepared, in collaboration with WG3<sup>1</sup>, outlining the design requirements for a digital platform for the purposes of the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS). Dubbed as a “discovery portal” serving as an index of what geotrails, geosites, mining, and cultural sites are available, the NGS digital platform will be a searchable portal based on the needs of different working groups and other users. The paper recommended that the NGS Steering Committee consider a GIS solution for an initial proof-of-concept that will require upfront funding. The Steering Committee subsequently approved setting up an initial program utilising the University of Tasmania’s (UTas) ArcGIS Hub Solution platform, noting several NGS members with appropriate expertise are on the staff of UTas. The ultimate, long-term goal is to develop an interactive and searchable digital map of geotrails across Australia. For further information <http://bit.ly/3EsoSK9>

The AGC has subsequently agreed to fund a pilot project using the UTas ArcGIS Hub solution.

**Working Group 3 has the goal of establishing a framework for creating high quality, sustainable geotrails**

In New South Wales, the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion geotrails in the northern suburbs of Sydney are being developed in a working partnership with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and three local government agencies of Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai and Northern Beaches. The project’s Geotrail Working Group is at an advanced stage in preparing geotrail guide notes (text and pictures) for the localities of Barrenjoey Headland, Browns Field, and Long Reef with others in the pipeline. Further information is contained below under the ‘Ramblings’ heading.

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<sup>1</sup> Working Groups are all abbreviated to WG following by the actual working group number.

In Tasmania's northwest, a geotrail, the [Created From Chaos Coastal Trail](#), initially established in 2004, highlights 13 geological features along 60 km of scenic shoreline. The sites, between Devonport's Mersey Bluff and Wynyard's Table Cape, include some of Tasmania's Neoproterozoic deformed rocks along a coast sculpted by Quaternary ice-age effects and volcanic activity. Work is underway to expand the concepts with 100's of new geosites.

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In southeast Queensland, existing rail trails are now being upgraded to form geotrails. Cuttings along a rail trail can provide exposures of sedimentary and other rocks. Queensland Division of the Geological Society of Australia has a large range of [publications on geotrails](#).

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In the Australian Capital Territory, the geotourism feature of the National Rock Garden in Canberra is being moved into the National Arboretum commencing late in 2022.

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In Western Australia, the Murchison GeoRegion identifies a self-drive trail of 21 sites of national and international geosites of natural and cultural significance over an area of some 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This GeoRegion now has the potential to be 'game changing' tourism initiative, with capacity to help the region realise its potential as a major tourism destination, with the potential of being nominated as an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark. The Murchison GeoRegion trail guide has been reprinted following the successful circulation of the first printing. Website development is underway, will be finished by end of calendar year, a marketing and communications plan is being developed, consultants are to be appointed to develop site management plans for relevant local governments on site infrastructure and 'ownership' and stakeholder engagement. Finally, a research report for the governance model is being compiled for the Project Working Group.

The Midwest Development Commission has a new CEO who was keen to support geotourism when he was the CEO of the Shire of Mingenew. In addition, a new project manager has been appointed who, as well as the existing tourism promotion officer, will ensure the State agency will continue supporting geotourism in the region.

In other news:

- Trails WA has 893 trails of which a few are geotrails. Trails WA, sponsored by the WA Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, provides an integrated reference for [all forms of trails](#);
- The Star Swamp geotrail interpretive information is with the City of Stirling to incorporate on-site;
- A "Geodrive trail" proposal, extending from Fremantle to Kalbarri, is currently being developed; and
- Other geotrails in WA under potential development include the Darling Scarp to the Sea in the Mandurah or Peel region, Nannup, Wheatbelt Granite, and others in the Yilgarn Craton.

**Working Group 5 relates to developing geotourism in regional mining communities with potential goheritage and cultural heritage sites.**

A useful reference paper on geotourism from the legacy Hercules Mine in Tasmania can be accessed [here](#). The paper refers to the cultural background and the interpretive value of the former mining sites and of the geology revealed in the mining exposures.

**Working Group 6 is working to strengthen Australia's international geoscience standing through geotourism excellence.**

- Australia has won the bid to host of 2026's International GeoScience Education Conference and Perth is the selected venue for the Conference. Geotourism has been included as a key topic.
- WG6 members have met to shared their global geotourism best practices and examples with papers and videos from different countries.
- Geodiversity Workshop 6 (Africa) was held on 5<sup>th</sup> October and the Geodiversity Workshop (Oceania) will be held on 26<sup>th</sup> November with Jason Bradbury and Melinda McHenry representing Australia to speak on the geodiversity of Australia.
- WG6 members met with colleagues of New Zealand's Waitaki Whitestone Geopark on 7<sup>th</sup> October. It was agreed to hold regular meetings to share knowledge and experiences.

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Mark Williams, chairman of WG1 (and representing the NGS Steering Committee), recently presented at the August 2022 [Asia Pacific Geoparks Network Symposium](#), (APGN) in Satun, Thailand and the September 2022 [European Geoparks Network](#) conference in Sesia Val Grande, Italy, and Dr Young Ng (also representing the NGS Steering Committee) presented at the AGPN Symposium. The presentations were well received, and representatives of the Global Geopark Network has advised that it is interested in what is happening in Australia with the implementation of the National Geotourism Strategy and is keen to see geoparks developed in Australia soon.

**Working Group 7 is seeking to develop and enhance the geoscience interpretation and communication skills of everyone actively involved in the presentation of geosites, enabling the provision of accurate and thematic information in an accessible manner.**

A booklet of geocommunication guidelines is in the planning stage and aims to support the range of various players in the geotourism field. The proposed online publication will seek to demonstrate excellent geocommunication cases with both oral and static examples for organisations such as councils and State conservation and geological agencies.

Members of the WG are currently working on a contents list for the guidelines, which is likely to cover the following points:

- What is important in 'geocommunication';
- Geo-interpretation methods;
- The ABC of geotourism;
- Form, processes and time;
- The rule of thirds; and
- Resources with links to websites

The WG is seeking examples of excellent 'geocommunication'. Please send any examples to the WG 7 Chair, Simone Meakin [simone.meakin@gmail.com](mailto:simone.meakin@gmail.com)

## Geotourism ramblings! - Other news items

A major review [paper on the 'Natural and Cultural History of the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion](#) (KGR)' has been published by the Linnean Society of NSW, compiled by nine co-authors led by Bob Conroy (formerly Executive Director of the NPWS), and including the NGS Coordinator and Dave Robson of our working groups, as well as Dr. Peter Mitchell of the NGS Steering Committee. This significant document should be recognised as setting a high standard for the consideration of progressing the acceptance and nomination of an area for a GeoRegion and potentially as a geopark nomination. Its chapters include:

- Initiating the KGR project (Ursula Bonzol);
- Regional geology and geomorphology of the KGR; the flora of the KGR (Dr John Martyn);
- The Hornsby diatrema (Dr Ian Percival);
- Stability of the coastal cliffs of the KGR and climate change implications (Dr Peter Mitchell);
- Soil materials in the Hawkesbury Sandstone landscapes of the KGR (Dr Peter Mitchell);
- Vertebrate fauna of the KGR (Jayden Wash);
- Connection to Country - Aboriginal site types of the KGR (Bob Conroy);
- Geotrail development within the KGR (Dave Robson); and
- Conclusion – future potential of the KGR as an Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark (Angus M Robinson).

The paper was launched at a field symposium in Sydney last week and included presentations of all these chapters; the presentations of Dave Robson <http://bit.ly/3U0MhrC> and the NGS Coordinator <http://bit.ly/3XpDQci> are particularly relevant to the development of this NGS pilot project.

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The latest issue of the AGC Information Bulletin, which sets out all the background to the development of geotourism, GeoRegions, geotrails and geoparks, has been updated to include all recent developments (particularly relating to access to a range of external listings such as geotrails and rail trails etc.). The bulletin can be accessed at [https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AGCInformationBulletin\\_23September2022.pdf](https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AGCInformationBulletin_23September2022.pdf)

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The **Australian Earth Sciences Convention (AESC 2023)**, June 2023 in Perth has a most important theme on the "[Critical role of geoscience in Australia's future](#)", led jointly by Geoff Sharrock (a Past President of The AusiMM) and the NGS Coordinator, and will include several subthemes relating to geotourism, including:

- Cultural Landscapes and Geotourism (Convenor: Dr. Melinda McHenry)
- Digital Technologies (Convenor: Mark Williams);
- Geotourism, GeoRegions and Geoparks (Convenor: Dr. Young Ng);
- Establishing a framework for creating high quality, sustainable geotrails (Convenor: Dave Robson);
- Towards national geoheritage listing criteria for geotourism (Convenor: Jason Bradbury); and
- 'Geocommunication': sharing the geo-love! (Convenor: Simone Meakin).

The [call is now out for abstracts](#) and all members of the NGS working groups are encouraged to present relevant papers (discussing if necessary with the session convenors), and to suggest to other colleagues to present papers for consideration.

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Nature-based tourism commonly overlooks the geological attributes of relevant sites. Wildlife Tourism Australia (WTA) recently organised a conference convened by its Chair Dr. Ronda Green (a member of WG7), and which included a panel session (which also included the NGS Coordinator and an Ecotourism Australia representative) with the theme exploring 'the meaning of Ecotourism and a vision for the future of ecotourism (including wildlife ecotourism) in Australia'. Specifically, *"Ecotourism is environmentally responsible tourism and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy, appreciate and/or study the natural attractions of such areas, as well as any cultural manifestations (present and past) that may be found there, through a process that promotes conservation, has low negative environmental and cultural impact, and fosters an active and socio- economically beneficial involvement of local populations"*.

Conference presenter Hector Ceballos-Lascurain (the 'father of ecotourism'), acknowledged the links between ecotourism, wildlife tourism, and geotourism to provide an impetus to develop a closer relationship across these groups in Australia without getting too 'hung up' on definitions. Whilst Ecotourism Australia has managed Geotourism Forums since 2013, it has been agreed recently between EA and the NGS that both groups should explore together a higher level of engagement and interaction. Moreover, WTA is already represented on the Interpretation and Communication WG7 with the opportunity to be further engaged in working groups relating to the use of digital technologies and to the development of 'cultural landscapes'.

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The AGC has commenced discussions with the Australian Regional Tourism network, that has very recently launched the National Agricultural Strategy Framework, with a view to suggest a higher level of national collaboration for 'nature-based' tourism within the context of a [recent communique of a meeting of Tourism Ministers & Tourism Senior Officials](#) in Adelaide, in support for the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy.

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### GeoRegions Explained – Kanawinka Revisited

In Australia, creating a GeoRegion as a local initiative represents the first step in evaluating its potential development for major geotourism projects including its future potential elevation to a UNESCO-identified Global Geopark. A GeoRegion is therefore an area defined by a potential geopark proponent having ideally completed an approved tourism destination management plan. Embracing the GeoRegion designation means that the proponent now wishes to seek agreement from the State/Territory Geological Survey and other State-based entities or agencies to designate a defined area of natural and cultural heritage which highlights outstanding geological and geoheritage features.

Tzigane Scholz-Talbot, who is completing geotourism studies from the University of Tasmania, has explained how a GeoRegion can be identified and evaluated. Tzigane selected the former Kanawinka Global Geopark (2008 and 2012) for re-evaluation based on the GeoRegion concept, recognising that in recent years, the Kanawinka experience has been continued through a network of geotrails under the honorary direction of Ian D Lewis (a member of WG2 and WG3).

The Kanawinka Geopark, initially covering some 25,000 km<sup>2</sup> in western Victoria and southeastern South Australia, incorporated the volcanic and karst landscapes of the Newer Volcanics region, the Mount Gambier Sinkholes and Caves region and the Naracoorte World Heritage site. Tzigane's proposed GeoRegion, explained in the following video clip <https://bit.ly/3TW3LWz> builds upon the Kanawinka approach and expands it to include coastal features and the Devonian sandstone areas of the Grampians Ranges. Tzigane has applied [Kubaliková's 2013 definitions of geomorphosites](#) to assess the value of the features for geotourism purposes.