



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

Newsletter 22-03, dated 19 December 2022

PURPOSE

To provide intermittent periodic updates of activities and achievements of the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) Working Groups and links to useful items, and on this occasion an end of year message from the Chair of the NGS Steering Committee, Dr Jon Hronsky OAM.

CURRENT STATUS

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

The AGC has now approved funding for this pilot and the project task force, comprising the engaging Chairs of WGs 1, 3, 4, 5 and 7 (and led by Mark Williams) has already met to discuss the project plan which in the first instance will involve over the next six weeks gathering and preparing data from various inventory sources (available to WGs 3,4, and 5) to be processed for input into the Hub.

Working Group 2 relates to defining an approval pathway for major geotourism projects.

At the NGS Steering Committee held on 29th November, Dr Hronsky reported that it was quite evident from the advice received from the GWG that geopark development in Australia, commencing from a GeoRegion starting point, will require full government approval and support. It is understood that the GWG is yet to complete its assessment of the GeoRegion assessment process, noting however that that the initial response from the GWG did seem to support (in principle at least) a national approach to GeoRegion assessment.

In addition, it was reassuring to be advised separately by Dr Kristof Vandenberghe (Chief of Earth Sciences and Geoparks Section of the Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences for the UNESCO Global Geoparks Secretariat) that UNESCO was fully supportive of the approach by the AGC and the GWG in furthering geopark development in Australia.

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion project

The Steering Committee reviewed the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion launch of the Natural and Cultural History of the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion at the Linnean Society of NSW Symposium held on 17th November with offprints of this high-quality publications now available for sale online from STEP Inc (one of the community groups supporting this project) at <https://step.org.au/index.php/books/krgeoregion>

The project Steering Committee has also met with senior UNESCO representative Professor Patrick McKeever during his recent visit to Australia and had gained some valuable insights about how to move forward with gaining support as a potential Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark. A strategic planning meeting has been scheduled for 24th January to finalise the next steps.

Murchison GeoRegion project

A comprehensive article about the Murchison GeoRegion (prepared by WG3 Chair and Chair of the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee, Dave Robson) was published in the latest issue of The Australian Geologist <https://bit.ly/3W8QyLc>

Glen Innes GeoRegion Project

It is understood that the GSNSW is currently evaluating the proposal that the Glen Innes project be formally approved as a GeoRegion. In addition, Marissa Betts (a lecturer in Earth Sciences at UNE, a member of WG5, and a contributor to the Glen Innes project) has been spreading the word about a film that has recently been announced as a finalist in the Earth Futures film festival currently happening. The film is called ROLA[STONE] and is about the connection between geology, landscape, and culture. A trailer is embedded below, but it can be viewed in full on the festival website <https://lnkd.in/gzNEG4dq> A UNE article about the film can be sighted at <https://lnkd.in/g9QFmzav>

Marissa has explained that Rola is the Anaiwan word for “stone.” The film explores the inseparable connection between geology, landscapes, and culture on Anaiwan Country (Northern Tablelands area of New South Wales, Australia). All places have parallel narratives—the scientific and spiritual, that govern our relationship with them. Woven together, these perspectives invite us to rethink the ways we understand the deep and recent past, present, and future of the world around us.

Australian Government Lobbying

The AGC has recently made a submission to Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), through its Trade Subcommittee *Inquiry into Australia’s tourism and international education sectors*. The AGC Submission addressed the terms of the Inquiry, i.e., the challenges and opportunities for growth in tourism and how Australia can reassert itself as a leader in the international tourism sector; the effectiveness of recent tourism campaigns overseas; the promotion of regional Australia as a world class international travel destination; and the role of Australia as a hub in support of tourism in the Asia Pacific region through specific reference to the National Geotourism Strategy. Also citing the support of the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy, the submission promoted the opportunities for developing geotrails through regional Australia as well as making the Committee aware of the need to facilitate the development of UNESCO Global Geoparks through the ‘GeoRegional’ assessment process.

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

Mike Vicary (member of Working Group 3 and Chair of the Tasmanian Geotourism Committee) has just advised of the establishment of a new Council supported geotrail on the Northern Tasmanian coastline near Wynyard <https://bit.ly/3uLErlm>

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

Working Group members will be reassured and pleased to learn that their Chair, Dr Melinda McHenry is now making a slow but steady recovery from her recent illness and plans to be back in the Chair by the end of January. In the interim, after lodging a formal proposal, the AGC has received verbal advice (to be confirmed in writing) that the Australian Regional Tourism (ART) grouping has agreed in principle to engage in collaborative activities with the NGS but not as part of a formal agreement.

With the Victorian State Elections being decided, it is anticipated that engagement with the Central Victorian Goldfields WHA project will commence early next year – a situation which is likely to provide a reasonable level of engagement with the WG5 grouping.

The AGC has been advised that the Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils (GVROC) comprising membership of Goldfields-Esperance local governments such as the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Coolgardie, Menzies, Leonora, Laverton etc., have all embarked on a joint initiative with Australia's Golden Outback (AGO) - including RDA Goldfields Esperance – the joint initiative involves the employment of a Tourism Development Manager which will be based in Kalgoorlie, whose sole purpose will be to explore opportunities inclusive perhaps of those presented by the NGS, across the whole Goldfields region. We hope to have some more information on this development early in the new year.

Other news items

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/2022/12/AGCInformationBulletin_1December2022.pdf

The latest issue of The Australian Geologist magazine contains a comprehensive report about the Australian Earth Sciences Convention (27-30 June 2023, in Perth), and highlights the most important theme on the 'Critical role of geoscience in Australia's future' that will include several subthemes relating to geotourism <https://bit.ly/3P8M6tv>. The call is now out for abstracts (**close 1 March 2023**) and all members of the NGS working groups are AGAIN encouraged to **present relevant papers as appropriate** (discussing, if necessary, with the session convenors), and to **suggest to other colleagues** to present papers for consideration.

- Cultural Landscapes and Geotourism (Convenor: **Dr. Melinda McHenry**).

E: Melinda McHenry melinda.mchenry@utas.edu.au T: 0429 691 158

- Digital Technologies (Convenor: Mark Williams); E: **Mark Williams** mark.williams@utas.edu.au

T: 0434 197 146

- Geotourism, GeoRegions and Geoparks (Convenor: **Dr. Young Ng**).

E: Young NG oz.geotourism@gmail.com T: 0425 268 565

or **Angus M Robinson** E: angus@leisuresolutions.com.au T:0418 488 340

- Establishing a framework for creating high quality, sustainable geotrails (Convenor: **Dave Robson**); E: David Robson robodavidf@gmail.com T: 0419 236 293
- Towards national geoheritage listing criteria for geotourism (Convenor: **Jason Bradbury**). E: jason.bradbury@dpiwve.tas.gov.au T: 0419 886 572
- ‘Geocommunication’: sharing the geo-love! (Convenor: Simone Meakin). E: simone.meakin@gmail.com T: 0428 760 554

Dr Young Ng, Chair of WG6, has written a special editorial on geodiversity, published recently in The International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks. <https://lnkd.in/g/hwXKkZt> Geodiversity can be defined as ‘the natural range (diversity) of geological (rocks, minerals, fossils), geomorphological (landform, processes), and soil features, including their assemblages, relationship, properties, interpretations, and systems. Geodiversity formed the abiotic environment and foundation, based on which the biological, human, and cultural activities could be effectively put into practice.

The geodiversity concept originates from the earlier concept of biodiversity. It regards geological and geomorphological features as well as phenomena similar to the ways ecologists view biological species and ecosystem. Different names such as ‘landform diversity,’ ‘geomorphic diversity’ and ‘landform species’ have therefore been used to describe and express the concept and its characteristics.

Young has explained that the terms ‘geodiversity’ and its associated activities such as ‘geoconservation,’ ‘geotourism,’ ‘geopark’ and ‘geoeducation’ are new to most people. They are the products of the growing conservation awareness to the abiotic elements of the environment in recent decades and as supplement to a balanced view of the environmental conservation. ‘Geodiversity’ was first used in the early 1990's when studying geological sites for conservation in Australia and Europe. However, the published works had attracted little attention until there was obvious change of the attitude and need for a holistic conservation approach to the environment in the early 2000's to fill up the missing gap of the abiotic environment.

Young believes that the global awareness of geological heritage conservation, international geopark movement, promotion of geotourism and geoscience popularisation, all contribute to the gradual acceptance of this new conservation concept.

MESSAGE FROM NGS CHAIR, DR JON HRONSKY

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all team members for your commitment and dedication to the implementation of the National Geotourism Strategy. Much has been achieved this year with the endorsement of the recognition in the Australian Government’s THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy, the progress being made in gaining government support for our strategic approach for major project development through the three pilot study GeoRegions, the initiation of work towards development of a digital platform to showcase geotourism geosites and geotrails, and the international outreach achieved through engagement in global conferences by various team members, to name but a few of many other highlights.

As 2022 draws to a close, may I also wish you all a very enjoyable Christmas with time to be spent with families and combined with well-earned relaxation and recreation.