



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

Newsletter 23-01, dated 10 March 2023

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 a report following a meeting of the NGS Steering Committee on 1 March 2023.

CURRENT STATUS

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

The NGS Digital Platform subcommittee chaired by Mark Williams met again on 22nd February and a proposed design was demonstrated and feedback received. The design will be circulated to the subcommittee members for discussion within various WGs 3 and 4 (the latter under the direction of Chair Jason Bradbury), and more feedback will be given which will contribute to the final design. Some general feedback given during this meeting and reported to the NGS Steering Committee include the following considerations.

- Simple, clean design that captured the data required.
- Thought needs to be given to accessibility to vision impaired users.
- Data acquisition processes need to be discussed at the WG/state or territory level.
- The team will continue to design the platform and will use further feedback from the WGs.
- There is now a work demonstration of the system that can be accessed through password protection and will be demonstrated at the steering committee meeting
- An updated project timeline and milestone diagram of completed tasks has been prepared.

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

At the NGS Steering Committee, the Chair Dr Jon Hronsky OAM reported that he had been in contact with GWG representatives to reinforce the need for an early decision on the recommended GeoRegion approval process.

Discussions have continued over the past three months with the Australian Regional Tourism Network, ACT Tourism, Destination NSW, Ecotourism Australia, Wildlife Tourism Australia, RDA Goldfields Esperance, Minerals Council of Australia – Victorian Exploration members - Central Victorian Goldfields WHA sites project, the Sydney Mineral Exploration Discussion Group, the organisers of the NSW LGA 2023 Conference. Whilst good progress was being made in each instance, gaining the substantive support of the Australian Regional Tourism group (which was currently focused on developing a national agritourism strategy framework) was proving difficult given their parochial focus but arrangements to submit a proposal for a geotourism focused presentation at their 2023 Annual Summit have been finalised. With regular meetings in place with the CEO of Destination NSW, the AGC was gaining support in this quarter.

Successful presentations have been undertaken to both the Mineral Council of Australia exploration working group in Victoria for the Central Victorians Goldfields project and to the SMEDG organisation based in Sydney <https://bit.ly/41Zo8a6>

To provide support for this awareness building work, and with the support/input of a number of WG chairs, a document 'Understanding Geotourism in Australia' had been prepared and an initial draft is now attached to this report.

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion project

The project Steering Committee has determined that a key issue that had emerged was finding a mechanism to initiate effective communication with Aboriginal community groups. A recent meeting with Planning Minister Rob Stokes, and a follow-up meeting with representatives of the Greater Cities Commission have been undertaken to address this issue. Geotrail development has continued with funding applications for signage development lodged through a number of sources including the Science Week program.

Committee members, under the banner of the FOKE (Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment) are also leading GeoRegion walks in April as National Trust Australian Heritage Festival.

Murchison GeoRegion project

- The MGR website <https://murchisongeoregion.com/> has been completed earlier this year and has been well received.
- Site management planning is currently being undertaken with consultants to provide guidance for Shires when considering signage and infrastructure at geosites.
- Former Project Manager of MGR, Karin Grima commenced with the Mid West Development Commission (MWDC) in November 2022.
- The MWDC have committed to continued support of the MGR until the new Project Officer (now appointed) commences in March 2023.
- The MGR Project Working Group have committed to forming an incorporated association over the course of 2023, expected this will happen when the new Project Officer has settled in.

Glen Innes GeoRegion Project

Working Group member Margot Davis has reported that geotourism has been recognised again as a key tourism opportunity in the updated 2023 Northern New England Regional Economic Development Strategy (NNEHC-REDS).

"Geotourism, including cultural tourism, represents another growth opportunity for the region, with significant sites in the Washpool, Boonoo Boonoo, Bald Rock and Girraween National Parks (among others), and potential to link visitor experiences through trails connected to surrounding regions."

Now for the New England High Country region, there is in place a collection of strategies that link to geotourism including:

- THRIVE 2030 strategy - The Re-imagined Visitor Economy - where Glen Innes Highlands is a featured case study;
- NNEHC-EDS - per above;
- DCNO Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 - acknowledges 'capitalising on emerging tourism trends such as geotourism.'
- Glen Innes Highlands Destination Management Plan - the first DMP to include Geotourism in Australia!

This outcome opens up opportunities to leverage these strategies for grant funding the development of geotrails and geotales and to continue advocating for NEHC to become an official GeoRegion.

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

In conjunction with NGS Goal 1, over the past few months the WG Chair, David Robson, has been in consultation with Mark Williams, Chair of Goal 1, to discuss how the Australian Inventory of Geotrails can be imported into a Digital Platform. At a Digital Platform Meeting Chaired by Mark on the 22nd of February 2023, the Platform Schema and Roadmap / Wireframe has now been developed. The Schema involves 'Tabs' of Geosites, Geotrails, Mining – Cultural Sites, GeoRegions and Domains. On the 'Roadmap' a Splash Page (info, logo, disclaimer etc.), Main Home Page (Navigation), State / Territory etc. has been formatted. Members of Goal 3 will now need to search or develop a 'Shape File' for each of the 90 or so existing Geotrails so that each Geotrail can be imported into Arc GIS HUB.

He advised that geotrails continue to be listed and Geotrails Around Capital Cities are in the process of being compiled. In the latest GSA March 2023 TAG magazine is an article titled "Follow in the Footsteps of Giants - Outback Queensland Dinosaur Geotrails" – it offers a range of unique experiences not available anywhere else in the world, let alone Australia. The world-renowned outback triangle links the towns of Winton, Hughenden, and Richmond is the home to some of the world's best preserved dinosaur fossils.

As a result of submissions made by both the GSA and the AGC, the Minister for Parks and Rangers, the Hon Nicole Manison MLA has released the NT Parks Masterplan 2023-53 where geology and geotourism appears, with a commitment for three geotrails over the next seven years.

Following considerable lobbying by the AGC, the recently released Country and Outback NSW Destination Management Plan now provides for implementation of an expanded Wonder of Gondwana geotrail concept that incorporates night skies' experiences and geotourism.

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

Chair, Dr Melinda McHenry has arranged a meeting of WG5 for Friday 17th March which will seek to finalise the terms of reference - and opportunities for members of our team to work on upcoming projects including the priority project for the year - Vic Goldfields WHA, and the promotion of new projects (such as RDA Goldfields Esperance, WA and potentially West Coast Tasmania). In regard to the West Australian project, the Coordinator has accepted an invitation to present to the Goldfields Environmental Management Group conference in June.

In regard to the Central Victorian Goldfields WHA bid project, the organisers have been advised recently about the capabilities and contact details of those working group members and other professionals who are either directly or indirectly associated with the work of the NGS, and who have expressed an interest in participating in the collaboration we have been discussing over recent months.

Melinda is ably assisted by Dr Sandra Close, Chair of The AusIMM Heritage Committee and Principal of Surbiton Associates, a group that is best known for its up-to-date specialist knowledge of the Australian Gold Sector. Sandra has arranged for valued input from AusIMM Past President and Heritage Committee member Peter McCarthy who has specialist knowledge of the Central Victorian Goldfields and a Board Member of Sovereign Hill Museums Association.

Within WG 5, other members of the group who have specialist knowledge applicable to the project are David Turvey; member of the Management Committee of the AusIMM Geoscience Society, and other Heritage Committee members Dr Christopher Davey, Executive Director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, and Dennis O'Neill who is conferring with LGAs in NE Victoria in the development of a geotrail focusing on the heritage gold mining industry. Also a resource available as a member of the AusIMM Heritage Committee is Tony Weston and who manages the Mining Site register https://www.ausimm.com/globalassets/mining_heritage_sites_check_list_rev_9.pdf

With the excellent support of Jon Crosbie who has recently been appointed as Deputy Chair of the AusIMM Social and Environment Society Management Committee, it is planned to increase the level of engagement by The AusIMM in these projects, given that The AusIMM has recently identified a resource within their Secretariat Narelle Wolfe <https://www.linkedin.com/in/narelle-wolfe-69815746/> to coordinate AusIMM community engagement, particularly through their extensive Branch network.

Working Group 6 is focusing on strengthen Australia's international geoscience standing through geotourism excellence.

Convened by Dr Young Ng (WG6 Chair), a zoom meeting was held on 27 January with the participation of four representatives from Rijani Lombok UNESCO Global Geopark of Indonesia, and eight representatives from Australia, including five NGS working group members. Both sides reported their latest geotourism and geopark developments in their countries and agreed to enhance co-operation through the proposed signing of a MOU Memorandum of Cooperation between the Indonesian Geoparks Network of Indonesia (comprising six UNESCO Global Geoparks) and the AGC.

A finalised draft document was endorsed at the recent NGS Steering Committee. Should the AGC approve the creation of the MOU, it is proposed that it could possibly be signed by both parties at the forthcoming AESC 2023 in Perth.

Working Group 7 is focused on developing and enhancing 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.

Simone Meakin is coordinating the finalisation of a booklet hopefully ready for release at AESC 2023 through the courtesy of the GSWA.

Other news items

The December 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 (extended **closing date 14 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.

A response to the earlier deadline date of 1 March has resulted in some 20 abstracts being received, notably double the number that was received for AESC 2021.

- 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@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au T: 0419 886 572
- 'Geocommunication': sharing the geo-love! (Convenor: Simone Meakin).
E: simone.meakin@gmail.com T: 0428 760 554

IN AUSTRALIA, WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GEOTOURISM?

National Geotourism Strategy Steering Committee, March 2023

Geotourism is an established concept in many places around the world, especially Europe, North America, and China. Geotourism is defined by the US National Geographic Society (and updated by the [Arouca declaration in 2011](#), as *‘tourism that sustains or enhances the distinctive **geographical character of a place**—its geology, environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents’*. Importantly, geotourism is heavily endorsed by UNESCO and supports a range of [UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals](#). The Geological Society of Australia has defined geotourism as *‘sustainable tourism which focuses on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment’*.

At the foundation of geotourism is the physical landscape, which shapes the geosystem services provided to the biota and human societies that live in the place. Geotourism is therefore integrated – it sees geology and landscape as the foundation bedrock around which society, culture, and ecosystems interact. As such, UNESCO recognises that geotourism can be practiced in wild and protected places such as World Heritage Areas (e.g., Blue Mountains, Great Barrier Reef, Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area), but also in areas with significant modification, and in UNESCO Geoparks.

Because ‘the Earth’ is the focal point for geotouristic sites and experiences, most are situated in areas of aesthetically pleasing, culturally significant or notable landscapes or landform elements. Mountains, caves, rivers, reefs, sand dunes, even novel soils that produce heritage grape varieties are often focal points around which geotourism sites and experiences are situated. Tourists who engage in these experiences often do not realise that they are taking part in a geotouristic experience or a place of high geotourism value, but when we are encouraged to think about all of the big Australian touristic experiences through the lens of geotourism – we can see just how many there are located here in Australia!

In Australia, we have embraced the inclusive nature of the geotourism concept and have understood the inter-relationship between natural and cultural heritage elements. By focusing on the **geology and geomorphology** (i.e., physical geography) as well as **the ecology and culture arising from these geological characteristics**, it is believed in Australia that geotourism **adds considerable content value to traditional nature-based tourism** as well as to cultural tourism, inclusive of Aboriginal tourism, thus completing the holistic embrace of ‘A’ (abiotic – climate, sky, landscape, and geology) plus ‘B’ (biotic – flora and fauna) plus ‘C’ (culture) aspects.

Geotourism has links with adventure tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, wildlife tourism, astrotourism, and agritourism, but is not synonymous with any of these forms of tourism, although in broad terms it embraces them all because it is essentially ‘place-based.’

Geotourism is undertaken in all areas, including places utilised by people (**cultural tourism**) and where primary industry activities (i.e., **agriculture/agritourism, mining, and forestry**) are prevalent, and in areas with **Aboriginal land tenure** or are subject of cultural interest. It is therefore about **the place**, regardless of its condition.

The recently released [THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy \(Action 7.5\)](#) of the Australian Government states *‘Grow and develop high-quality products and experiences around unique Australian locations and themes, including approaches which integrate sustainable nature tourism with economic opportunities for Traditional Owners, and capitalising on emerging tourism trends such as **geotourism**.’*

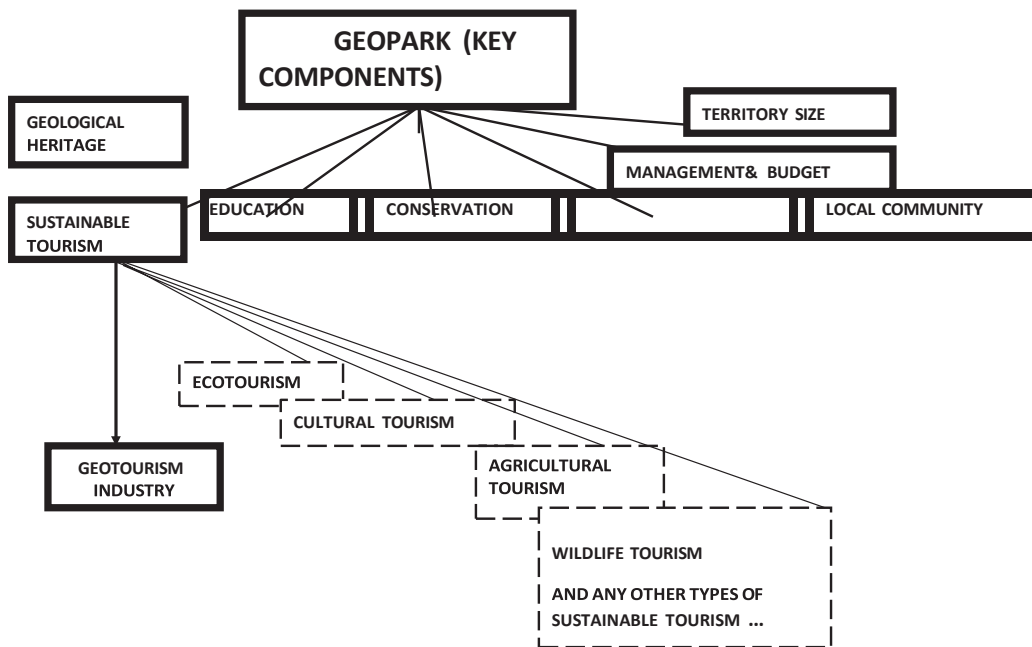
In Australia, geotourism development is now being guided by the [National Geotourism Strategy \(NGS\) of the Australian Geoscience Council](#). The Strategy has seven goals, which are being realised by multi-disciplinary work groups comprised of members of local, State/Territory and Australian government agencies, tourism and heritage professionals, NGOs, universities, industry groups, consultancy professionals, and resources industry organisations. These goals align with UNESCO's SDGs in many ways, and are promoting and are seeking government approval for geotourism ventures, sites, experiences, and concepts (Goal 2) via **digital platforms** (Goal 1), **geotrails** (Goal 3), **protected areas and national parks experiences** (Goal 4) and in areas with **mining and cultural heritage** (Goal 5). These areas can be better interpreted to enable interested operators and tour guides to communicate **geotourism concepts** (Goal 7), and **how quality Australian geotourism experiences can be showcased internationally** (Goal 6).

In Australia, for the geoscience community, geotourism promotes tourism through visits to geological features (geosites) in both protected and non-protected areas including those characterised by mining heritage, use of 'geotrails' and viewpoints, guided tours, geo-activities (such as geological time trails, fossil walks, rock gardens etc.), and patronage of visitor centres and museums. It therefore brings in a new type of visitor/tourist through those who are interested in geology and geography; also of interest to visitors not familiar with these geotourism concepts. Further highlighting the link between geotourism, ecotourism, and wildlife tourism in Australia, a [2008 study of geoscientists](#) (some of which were retirees) showed that many of them thoroughly enjoy natural environment tourism and leisure activities of all kinds, and appreciate learning about the relationships between earth's history, biota and culture!

'Geotourism Industry' and Geoparks

Supported by the UNESCO Global Geopark program, geotourism attractions are now being developed around the world primarily as a sustainable development tool for the development of local and regional communities, i.e., **at the core of the 'geotourism industry'**. Globally, geoparks are being established to enhance awareness, appreciation, and protection of **geoheritage** - protected geological and geomorphological features and phenomenon promoted in geoparks as the centerpiece of *'single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development'*. In Australia, as a first step, as a response to Goal 2 of the NGS, geopark proponents are being encouraged to identify a **'GeoRegion'** as a mechanism for exploring, assessing, and seeking both government approval and community support for geopark development.

Geoparks can be regarded as accommodating the 'highest order' of geotourism and geoconservation, in the same way that World Heritage Areas and national parks might be seen as the highest order of protection and enjoyment for biodiversity, culture, and geodiversity. Therefore, whilst the establishment of geoparks highlight one form of geotourism, they most definitely provide opportunities to celebrate and explore the Earth's natural features whilst also incorporating culture, protections, and sustainability in a way that is true to the core values of all nature-based tourism in Australia.



Note: Core elements and key components of a geopark. *Source:* Materials adapted from UNESCO, 1999, 2000 and GGN Guidelines, 2010.

Relationship Between Sustainable Tourism and Geoparks as defined internationally

Reference: Sadry B, 2020. The Geotourism Industry in the 21st Century. The Origin, Principles, and Futuristic Approach.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.1201/9780429292798/geotourism-industry-21st-century-bahram-nekouie-sadry>