

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

Newsletter 23-04, dated 19 September 2023

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. The most recent quarterly meeting of the NGS Steering Committee was held on 2nd September.

CURRENT STATUS

Under the leadership of Mark Williams, Working Group 1 relates to the development of new digital technologies to highlight and interpret natural and cultural heritage for geotourism.

- At the AESC Perth (27th-30th June), Mark led a session on geoscience's role in Australia's digital future, featuring presentations on VR in Flinders Ranges, 3D fossils, virtual geotourism story maps in WA, and the Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal (NGS Digital Platform) which garnered significant interest, especially regarding its progression beyond the prototype stage; over 50 attendees participated. A post was prepared for LinkedIn to promote the platform and presentation can be found here <https://bit.ly/3JBUv78>
- WG1 held a meeting on 11th of August and has prepared a draft guideline for digital tech categorisation in geotourism, with 12 tech categories and criteria such as ease of use and affordability. Two matrices were proposed: one linking technology to its ease of use and another aligning technology with persona groups from WG3's geotrail personas. WG1 will prepare a final document to incorporate further ideas including sub-categories for particular digital technologies, considering distribution channels of digital technologies, how to measure criteria effectively, and ensuring advanced tech such as AR is user-friendly. WG1 will work to present this to the Steering Committee in early 2024.
- At this meeting, Mark demonstrated the prototype NGS digital platform showcasing various features and WG1 discussed next steps empathising clarity in data ingestion from data custodians. He outlined the platform's timeline, with a potential 2024 public release. The current hosting at the University of Tasmania was agreed for the prototype stage and discussions about alternative hosting arrangement should be sought.

- A further meeting later in August has discussed preliminary plans regarding the future hosting arrangement for the NGS digital platform. Currently, the University of Tasmania is hosting it during its prototype stage, which is now complete. The possibility of finding an alternative organisation for centralised hosting is being explored, with Geoscience Australia being one of the contenders.
- The discussions centred on determining the hosting requirements, specifically: 1) for the dataset alone, and 2) for the entire digital platform. Securing senior executive support was deemed essential, and the group concurred that promoting the platform during Earth Science Week (8-14 October 2023) as a community engagement project would be beneficial.

Working Group 2 has the goal of defining an approval pathway for major geotourism projects.

- Following the determination by the GWG (Chief Government Geologists of Government Geological Surveys) that GeoRegions establishment in Australia has been approved, the Working Group has prepared a document setting out guidelines for the establishment and administration of GeoRegions which has been further approved by the GWG in late August. The approved document is expected to be formally made available to the AGC within a few weeks, at which time it will be made available publicly.
- A meeting has recently been held with the Australian Government agencies DCCEW (Environment Department) and Geoscience Australia in Canberra with the objective of receiving some guidance about how any geopark nomination arising out of a GeoRegion assessment might be evaluated by the Australian Government. Formal advice is expected shortly.
- Progress of Murchison GeoRegion Project, Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion, Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion

- The briefing of all local members (Coalition and Independents) following the change of Government in NSW has been a key focus with enthusiastic commitments made to lobby by all of these members to lobby the new Labor Environment Minister to back the project.
- Progress in geotrail development has continued to have been impacted by funding constraints, although the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife has reaffirmed its interest in funding projects within the Ku-ring-gai National Park with the National Parks and Wildlife Service keen to collaborate with the Geological Survey of NSW to construct digitally based interpretation outcome based on what has been successfully undertaken within the Warrumbungle National Park, a site originally proposed as forming part of a now disbanded UNESCO Global Geopark development proposed five years ago. Ku-ring-gai Council has recently applied Environmental Levy funding to install two signs for one of the geotrails. <https://bit.ly/3EsAHjK>

Ku-ring-gai Council has featured this achievement on their website

<https://bit.ly/3Lixasb>

- Funding availability from the other two Councils is pending.

Murchison GeoRegion

- MGR participated in the Australia's Golden Outback 'DeTour to Spectacular' campaign with very good results in terms of website visits, app downloads and social media presence.
- The DeTour to Spectacular page on the AGO website includes road trip itineraries, towns and station stays providing an ideal platform for leveraging the MGR Trail <https://www.australiasgoldenoutback.com/detour-to-spectacular>
- Participation in the AGO Campaign over the past two years has seen an increase in interest in the MGR.
- The Site Management Plan for MGR is now in draft form and awaiting feedback from the project working group. The plan will provide a guide for local government considering infrastructure at geosites.

Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

- The Glen Innes Severn Council is currently constructing an 80m long Skywalk style 'geotrail' which is scheduled to be officially opened in September.
- An article about the Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion has been published in the September issue of *The Australian Geologist*, of the Geological Society of Australia (GSA) <https://bit.ly/3rmSSV9>

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

- Chair David Robson has continued to monitor the substantial input of State/Territory working group representatives into the development of the digital platform with information about up to 100 geotrails to be loaded.
- The Larapinta Trail Geology Field Guide authored by working group member Anett Weisheit (supported by major sponsorship from the AGC, GSA, and Leisure Solutions®) was launched in Alice Springs on 12th August with around 60-70 in attendance.
- The Geological Survey of NSW has recently launched the Mutawintji National Park Geotrail, located some 130 km north-east of Broken Hill in far west NSW, and which follows existing walking tracks to explore the park's ancient geology and Aboriginal cultural significance. <https://bit.ly/3rc9lvi>.

Working Group 4, chaired by Jason Bradbury, has the task of establishing national criteria for geoheritage listings suitable for geotourism.

- The report outlining WG4 deliberations and presenting a proposed framework for the listing of geosites suitable for promotion as geotourism sites was tabled at the most recent Steering Committee meeting. Some minor revisions have been, much of which related to cultural geoheritage, an area of overlap between WGs 4 and 5, the chairs of which will soon meet attempt to determine a consistent position, with the finalised document to be approved by the Steering Committee prior to circulation to all working group members.

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

- The latest meeting of the WG5 took place on 14 July with the next meeting of WG5 scheduled for later in September.
- Discussions have continued with EnviroMETS Qld about potential project engagement opportunities and has participated in various meetings through the auspices of the AusIMM Coordination Committee advancing the interests of Goal 5 through the three AusIMM Communities of Interest i.e., the Social & Environment and Geoscience Societies and the Heritage Committee.
- Presentations have been made at two conferences, at the Goldfields Environmental Management Conference in Kalgoorlie (15 June), and at the SEGRA Summit in Toowoomba (27 July) on the topic of *'Implementing Mining Cultural Landscapes Post Mine Closure through the National Geotourism Strategy'*.

https://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SEGRASUMMIT2023_angusmrobinson.pdf (Toowoomba)

https://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GEMGangusmrobinson_final.pptx (Kalgoorlie)

- Engagement of WG5 with the Victorian Goldfields WHA project has been ongoing with further opportunities for contributing to the Draft Masterplan when it is completed as expected at the end of this year.

Working Group 6, chaired by Dr Young Ng, is working on strengthening Australia's international geoscience standing through geotourism excellence.

- Australia-Indonesia MOU

Following the signature of the MOU between AGC and the Indonesian Geoparks Network (IGN) on 25 May 2023, it has been followed up by Professor Pat James of (WG-6) and Dr Ng both attending the IGN's GeoFestival and International Geotourism Conference in Lombok, Indonesia on 19-24 July. A report on the MOU signing has been published in the

September 2023 issue of *The Australian Geologist* <https://bit.ly/3PmPdPg>

Detailed discussions have been undertaken during the face-to-face meeting at the conference in Lombok. A work plan focusing on three major areas is currently being finalised.

- The Steering Committee has approved the convening of a Sydney based event (18-19 July 2024) which will be organised as an overseas workshop to form part of the major GeoFestival and International Geotourism Conference of Indonesia. The workshop will be hosted by AGC together with the School of Geosciences of The University of Sydney. It will be a two-day workshop with presentations and discussion on the first day, followed by a field trip on the second day.
https://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/geofest_5th-11.pdf
 - Geoproducts – the Steering Committee is aware that IGN is interested in helping its geopark members to export UNESCO Geopark branded local products and has requested assistance in referral through NGS members and networks. A list of products has been received. These products include bamboo straw, black garlic, organic soap, essential oils, pepper, ginger, spices, coffee, cocoa, banana chips, rice snacks, T-shirt, batik, and woodcrafts.
 - Research and exchange – the IGN has expressed interest in working with AGC on geotourism research and development, particularly in the field of digital technology applications, geotourism site identification, presentation, and interpretation. Four research institutes have been suggested by them for interesting parties in Australia. These include the Padjadjaran University in Bandung, Bakrie University in Jakarta, National Research, and Innovation Agency (Government Agency), and the Geodiversity Centre in Kebumen, Central Java.
- Proposed Australia-China Geotourism Accelerator Project

In June 2016, the GSA signed a MOC with the Geological Society of China, an agreement which focused on promoting better understanding and closer cooperation between the two associations for the promotion and advancement of geotourism; and to create a partnering arrangement between the two associations to develop mutually beneficial geotourism between China and Australia.

A subsequent MOU was signed between Zhijingdong Cave UGGp and the Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve Collaboration, facilitated by members of the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee which included Dr Ng who also serves as the Principal Geoscientist at Danxiashan UNESCO Global Geopark (UGGp). Earlier this year, Young had visited China and has received a high level of interest from both officials in Shaoguan City (the authority controlling the Danxiashan UGGp) and the Office of Foreign Affairs of Guangdong Province in the opportunity to engage with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) in respect of the Blue Mountains. Several years ago, Danxiashan UGGp signed a MOU with the Purululu NP in Kimberley, an action executed by the WA Minister for the Environment.

To progress a proposed Australia-China Geotourism Accelerator Project, it has been recognised that a few implementation steps would be necessary. With this in mind, discussions have taken place with executives of the Hammon Group (the owners of the major Scenic World tourism attraction at Katoomba) and the marketing director of the Blue Mountains Tourism Association who have expressed preliminary interest in this project, as well as approaching the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Destination NSW at a senior management level to ascertain the extent of NSW State Government interest.

A Sydney-based NFP group (Australia China Friendship Exchange Association – ACFEA) has confirmed interest in supporting this Accelerator proposal.

The Steering Committee has supported in principle for the concept of an Australia-China Geotourism Accelerator, but conditional on gaining both State Government (inc. NPWS) endorsement, given the political sensitivity, and subject to any funding arrangements through sponsorship of the ACFEA meeting AGC approval.

- Global Geoparks Conference

This major global conference was held in Marrakech, Morocco on 7-12 September 2023. Two AGC's steering committee members (Mark Williams and Young Ng) attended, and their presentations were scheduled:

- Mark's presentation: *Exploring the role of digital tools in UNESCO global geoparks: perceptions, utilisation, and challenges.*
- Young's presentation: *Australia's National Geotourism Strategy: Driving regional development in Australia.*

It is understood that WG6 member, Professor Pat James also presented at this event.

Working Group 7, chaired by Simone Meakin, is 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.

- A draft of the Geotourism Interpretation/Communication booklet has been compiled and circulated within WG7 for feedback on structure and contents, with Heidi Allen of the GSWA taking a more prominent role in driving this. Provisions have been made for visual examples or case studies, rather than text, to highlight the points. It is aimed to have plenty of graphics, photographs, and examples of good (and bad) geo-communication in relation to Australian geotourism sites.
- Heidi Allen co-chaired a successful session of AESC 2023 in Perth with Jo Whelan of AusEarthEd: Geo-communication: inspiring the next generation of geoscientists.

OTHER NEWS ITEMS

Report on NGS awareness building

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (807) members to date, an increase of 19 members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members have continued with resultant high levels of impressions received.
- The AGC Information Bulletin has recently been updated https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AGCInformationBulletin_22June2023.pdf
- The AGC published on 7th June an explanatory article on understanding geotourism, GeoRegions and Geoparks <https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Understanding-Geotourism-GeoRegions-and-Geoparks-in-Australia-NGS-June-2023.pdf>
- The work of the Darwin Branch of The AusIMM in supporting a geotourism project and an explanation of the role of the National Geotourism Strategy has just been published by The AusIMM <https://www.ausimm.com/bulletin/bulletin-articles/ausimm-darwin-pine-creek-heritage-park-and-geotourism-initiative/>
- On 16 November, Angus M Robinson (a Special Member of Savannah Guides) is scheduled to deliver a webinar to the Savannah Guide network, on the topic of “Understanding Geotourism” – Discover how holistic natural and cultural tourism adds value to the visitor experience.
- **AESC 2023, Perth, June 27-30:** A selection of some of the excellent geotourism-related presentations delivered at this recent conference include the following.

[Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal, Mark Williams](#)

[A geological guide to the Larapinta Trail and the potential of Central Australia for geotourism and geo-education, Dr Anett Weisheit, and Amber Jarrett](#)

[“Back to the Future” – 30 years of geotourism time travel, Professor Pat James](#)

[The Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion – its setting in the Sydney Basin, Dr John Martyn](#)

[Murchison GeoRegion – journey of a natural geopark, Cr Karen Morrissey OAM, Chair – Murchison GeoRegion](#)

[Tasmanian Geotrails – My Way! Peter S Manchester](#)

[Geotales and Geotrails, Guy Fleming](#)

[Telling Stories: Virtual Geotourism Using StoryMaps, Stephen White](#)