

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

Newsletter 24-01, dated 13 March 2024

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 5th March.

CURRENT STATUS

Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal

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

WG Chair Mark Williams reported that the draft data ingestion guidelines for the *Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal* described at <https://lnkd.in/ga4deQar> have been circulated among a workflow subcommittee comprising members from the NGS representing Tasmania, New South Wales, and Western Australia. This committee has been actively involved in testing the data ingestion process using datasets sourced from various domains. Valuable feedback has been gathered to enhance the process, focusing particularly on refining procedures and reducing any ambiguities present.

A review of the database schema has been undertaken, aiming to ensure its efficacy. A finalised version of the schema will be distributed in March. Additionally, a dataset featuring geotourism sites for Tasmania complete with all requisite attributes, is in the final stages of compilation, with completion anticipated shortly thereafter.

Plans are underway to conduct a training workshop once the refinements to the ingestion guidelines have been finalised, tentatively scheduled for later in March or April 2024. The workshop aims to equip reviewers and editors with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively utilise the guidelines. Furthermore, chairs have been tasked with nominating editors and reviewers to undertake this procedure.

It has been decided that planning and allocation of resources for the bulk upload of data (and ongoing data population) into the NGS digital platform should focus on Tasmanian and NSW geosites and geotrails in the first instance to enable presentation of the platform to the interested geoscience agencies.

Approval Pathways for Georegion and Geopark Development

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

1. The Working Group last met on 11th March. The Working Group, which now comprises Michele Spencer and Andrew McNeil representing the Geoscience Working Group (GWG), has noted the approval of the GWG for the establishment of GeoRegions https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/GUIDELINES-FOR-THE-DEVELOPMENT-OF-GEOREGIONS_finalrelease.pdf and has finalised a one page summary of this document. (**refer Attachment**). The Working Group is also working on a document aimed at detailing administrative procedures for potential geopark development within the two states (WA and NSW) in which GeoRegions have been approved.
2. The Chair of the NGS, Dr Jon Hronsky OAM has reaffirmed the significance of the GWG decision in GeoRegion establishment across Australia. It is also recognised that GeoRegions acted like 'exploration licences' in providing a means of assessing and obtaining government support for geopark development. This meant that proponents wishing to nominate a geopark proposal need to seek support for a GeoRegion as a first step.
3. Discussions with Mt Isa Council - a recent submission to Mt Isa Council had responded to interest in the development of geotourism as a viable post mining closure initiative.
4. Discussions with Warrumbungle Shire Council - a submission in support of geotourism development (in the light of Council's previous interest in UNESCO geoparks) has been lodge given contact having been received from a community interest group in developing cycle trails as geotrails.
5. Discussions with the CEO of Australia's Golden Outback, WA – discussions have been undertaken with both the Golden Outback RDA and the Kalgoorlie Boulder City Council in regard to some interest being expressed in GeoRegion development in support of mining heritage interests.
6. Progress of Murchison GeoRegion Project, Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion, Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion.

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion (KGR)

Highlights including the following:

- Outcome of meetings with NSW Government ministerial officials has resulted in a strong level of support from the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment, the Hon Trish Doyle MP. Meetings with relevant State Government ministers are likely to take place shortly.
- Progress in geotrail development has continued to have been impacted by funding constraints. However, the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW) has reaffirmed its interest in funding projects within the Ku-ring-gai National Park with the National Parks and Wildlife Service now collaborating with the Geological Survey of NSW to construct digitally based interpretation outcomes, utilising contractors approved by the GSNSW. Funding availability from Northern Beaches and Hornsby Councils for the 2024 programs has also been confirmed.
- Recently the local Bendigo/Adelaide Branch has provided the Friends of Ku-ring-gai

Environment (FOKE) with a \$1000 grant to enable the development of a GeoRegion web site.

- Arrangements have been made for the GeoRegion to again host activities as part of NSW Heritage week scheduled for May.
- Steering Committee member Dr Peter Mitchell OAM in collaboration with Bob Conroy (who addressed an Aboriginal Community just last week) is proceeding on gaining engagement from the Aboriginal communities within the GeoRegion.
- The LinnSoc publication, the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the KGR has been reprinted with 50% of the sales being directed through the NPWS information centre (RRP of \$29.50). However, NGS working group members can obtain copies at a special rate of \$20 on application to angus@leisuresolutions.com.au

Murchison GeoRegion

Karen Morrissey, the Project Working Group Project Officer of the Murchison GeoRegion has reported that the Project Working Group Members are made up of representatives of the seven participating Shires i.e., Cue (CEO), Meekatharra (Councillor), Mount Magnet (CEO), Murchison (Councillor and Chair), Sandstone (Councillor), Wiluna (CEO) and, Yalgoo (CEO).

The Murchison GeoRegion Project Working Group is now meeting monthly with the key points of progress (December - March) as follows.

- Murchison GeoRegion and Geoparks Incorporated Constitution adopted and forwarded to the seven Shire CEOs for Shire Councils' endorsement.
- Marketing and Communications Plan endorsed.
- Social Media manager appointed.
- Marketing underway through Australia's Golden Outback.
- Four MGR towns on 'Our Towns' National TV and now on 'Our Towns' Facebook,
- Geosite signage design and materials upgrade adopted.
- Site Management Plan nearing completion.
- Geological Survey of WA continues to assist research for MGR.
- A new events calendar is being established for www.murchisongeoregion.com

Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

- The Glen Innes Severn Council has officially opened an 80 m long Skywalk style 'geotrail' which was launched on 19 January and features the latest digital technology enhancements <https://bit.ly/3VdvDtk>

Sustainable Geotrail Development

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

Working Group Chair Dave Robson has reported that geosites desirably need to be interwoven with a nominated geotrail. This process of populating the fields with information is now underway with the following example is from Flinders Island Geotrail that was previously documented in

In other news, AusIMM Darwin Branch Chair, Peter Waggitt and AusIMM member Mark Asendorf has been instrumental in establishing the Pine Creek Miners Park and Geotrail in the Northern Territory. Websites for both projects were launched at an event hosted by the AusIMM Darwin Branch on 25 January 2024. Refer: <https://bit.ly/3Phy5uR> and <https://bit.ly/3PfNg7V>

Dave is keen to share with NGS working group members some details about access to exemplar geotrail projects as follows.

- In 2021, based on a conference presentation at AESC 2021, the Geological Survey of NSW produced a 'YouTube' video clip with the title "Geotales and geotrails – a collaborative geotourism initiatives and implications for new visitor experiences in regional NSW <https://bit.ly/3xNrqA3>
- Warrumbungle National Park Geotrails, an outcome of the deliberations of the work undertaken in proposing a UNESCO Global Geopark some years ago. <https://bit.ly/3fc6lZs>
- The newly established Mutawintji National Park Geotrail, located some 130 km north-east of Broken Hill in far west NSW, follows existing walking tracks to explore the park's ancient geology and Aboriginal cultural significance. Exploring the park with the NSW GeoTours app <https://bit.ly/3Zc1lBu> tourists will be led back through time. This project was delivered in partnership with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and with guidance from the Mutawintji Board of Management, Mutawintji Local Aboriginal Land Council, local Aboriginal elders, and members of the wider community <https://bit.ly/3V6lEop>
- There is another similar 'YouTube' video clip on the Derwent Valley Rail Trail located approximately 30 km north-west of Hobart <https://bit.ly/48Lqpld>

Managing Geoheritage

Working Group 4 has the task of establishing national criteria for geoheritage listings suitable for geotourism.

Working Group Chair Jason Bradbury has reported that two articles highlighting the outcomes of the NGS Geoheritage report have been posted on LinkedIn since the last meeting.

- <https://bit.ly/3v6QVhy> and <https://bit.ly/3IAJJ0o>

Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes

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

Chair Dr Melinda McHenry has reported on progress following meetings convened on 7th December and 10th January, making specific reference to

- Approval of a Major Projects protocol currently under preparation.
- Consideration of new projects - Mt Isa, Lithgow/Seven Valleys.
- Continuation of engagement with the Victorian Goldfields project; the AGC has recently been invited to comment on the updated Masterplan.
- Continuation of engagement through AusIMM COIs and CRCTiME in the work of EnviroMETS Qld.
- Preparation for lodgment of a major National Heritage government grant to embrace Tasmanian and South Australian mining heritage areas.
- Proposed engagement in the international ProGeo geoheritage conference scheduled for convening by UTAS in 2026,

Melinda has offered to assume responsibility as the proposed Convenor of the public outreach workshops for GeoSciEd-X in 2026 (an international conference being organised by the AGC and to be located in Adelaide) because it is believed that the work that has been undertaken at UTAS will be of significant interest to educators and researchers in Australia and Internationally. Accordingly, in consultation with Melinda, the following five themes have been submitted as part of the bid process.

Theme 1: Digital enhancement of geological features

Features: The assessment and promotion of new digital technologies (e.g. 3D, AR and VR) to highlight and interpret natural and cultural heritage, highlighting geology and landscape has already been demonstrated at Hallet Cove (Project Live) near Adelaide, in the Warrumbungle National Park and as a feature of the Glen Innes Highlands Skywalk (within an approved GeoRegion) both sites located in the State of NSW. With speed of change driven by digital transformation, it is anticipated that by the date of the GeoSciEd-X conference in 2026, digital technologies will be front and centre in the interpretation of geoscience features forming part of the geotourism experience. By that time, the *Australian Digital Geotourism Portal* will also have been established as a world first endeavour, and its purpose and operational details is sure to be of interest to geoscience educators.

Theme 2: GeoRegions, Geoparks, and Geotrails

Features: Australia's National Geotourism Strategy has already delivered the establishment of three GeoRegions (which can be single, unified geographical areas of appropriate size where sites and landscapes of geological significance, linked together around a central natural or cultural value; two in New South Wales and one in Western Australia) as an exploratory mechanism for the assessment of proposals which aim to be aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark nominations. The implementation of this particular strategy is being monitored by UNESCO and other countries which are experiencing difficulty in gaining support for global geoparks. By 2026 it is anticipated that other GeoRegions will be in place, with indications already that this approach may be also applied in South Australia. Moreover, geotrail development throughout Australia has expanded rapidly over the past three years with South Australia celebrating the well-established Brachina Gorge Geotrail in the Flinders Ranges with plans being approved for a network of geotrails across the State. This proposed workshop will provide an excellent opportunity for educators to gain a much better understanding of the relationship between GeoRegions and UNESCO Global Geoparks and the alternative strategy of focusing on geotrail development.

Theme 3: Geoheritage - Evolution of Life forms

Features: In April 2021, a significant milestone was achieved, with UNESCO accepting Australia's inclusion of the Flinders Ranges on its World Heritage Tentative List. This was an exciting and significant first step in pursuing World Heritage Listing, expressing Australia's commitment to nominate in the future. Since then, the major focus has been to engage respectfully with First Nations peoples, tourism planning for core visitor destinations, as well as landholder and community engagement. Particularly extraordinary are the fossils and geology of the Flinders Ranges, which display the history of our planet and the evolution

of life on Earth. Some of this critical evidence spans more than 300 million years and includes the world's finest example of the Ediacaran explosion of life, when the earliest forms of complex multicellular animal life evolved. It is these outstanding geological and palaeontological forms within the Flinders Ranges that make it an important site to pursue for World Heritage Listing. By 2026, it is quite possible that the nomination will have been considered and hopefully approved. Educators at the proposed workshop will benefit significantly from learning about this nomination process, and the importance of the Ediacaran fossil assemblage.

Theme 4: Cultural Landscapes

Features: One of the goals of the National Geotourism Strategy is developing geotourism in regional mining communities with potential geoheritage and cultural heritage sites. By 2026, the government backed case for Cornish mining sites in Burra and Moonta in South Australia to be considered for World Heritage status is likely to be well advanced. Moreover, a similar, and more advanced, World Heritage bid to embrace the Victorian Goldfields may well have been approved by this time. There is only one other World Heritage listing for mining sites elsewhere in the world and that is located across Cornwall and Devon in the UK. Educators at the proposed workshop will obtain a unique opportunity to understand the complexity and broad scope of cultural landscapes (having regard also to the interests of Aboriginal communities) with briefings obtained from specialists about the three World Heritage Areas (inclusive of the Flinders Ranges) under development in South Australia.

Theme 5: Communication and Interpretation

Features: Another of the goals of the National Geotourism is to develop and enhance the geoscience interpretation and communication skills of everyone actively involved in the presentation of geoscience, enabling the provision of accurate and thematic information in an accessible manner. A field guide, currently under preparation, will be freely available by 2026, and educators at the workshop will be able to obtain insights from a number of co-authors about how this publication was put together and how it can be used by educators in better communicating geoscience to their students.

Each of the themes have been tailored to the South Australian locale where appropriate, and it is anticipated that if these themes are acceptable for a successful AGC bid, Melinda will be seeking engagement from South Australian geotourism specialists, including of course the resources available through the various university earth science schools in Adelaide. Any working group members (including those not located in Adelaide) who would like to specifically participate in the planned workshop, are invited to contact Melinda E: Melinda McHenry melinda.mchenry@utas.edu.au

We hope that with the offer of leadership being offered by Melinda and the University of Tasmania, the proposed technical session/workshop component of the AGC bid is well placed to provide educators with the latest opportunities to promote geology, landscape and geotourism using cutting edge techniques for students in person and online. It is also hoped that the NGS engagement as currently offered will add value to the participant experience.

Building International Outreach for Australian Geotourism

Working Group 6 is working on strengthening Australia's international geoscience standing through geotourism excellence.

- **GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop**

This project is an international geotourism workshop organised by Working Group 6 under the direction of an Executive Organising Committee and assisted by a broader Advisory Committee. The workshop is a result of the signing of an MOU between AGC and the Indonesia Geoparks Network (IGN) in May 2023. The workshop is hosted by **AGC, IGN and The University of Sydney (USYD)**. It will be held on the campus of USYD on 18 July 2024, followed by three different fieldtrips on the following day and a **special Wildlife Tourism Session on Saturday 20 July 2024**. The main theme of the workshop is volcanic geotourism destinations. A total of 10 speakers (five of which are international) have been invited to present on topics associated with volcanic geotourism destinations and promotion, geoparks, and sustainable development. An official website development <https://geofest.com.au> **with early registration of \$100 now available**. All members of NGS and AGC members are encouraged to register and help to promote the event, noting that the Chair of the NGS has been invited as one of the keynote speakers and panelists and Melinda McHenry has kindly agreed to take on the role of Workshop convenor.

Program details are available at <https://geofest.com.au/program-speakers/> with the field trip details at <https://geofest.com.au/field-trips/>

Whilst the AGC was unsuccessful in receiving DFAT funding, the coordinator reported that so far, a target total of \$28,500 from has been committed from Co-hosts and Sponsors, **SMEDG, The AusIMM (including the Sydney Branch), and the Australian Institute of Geoscientists** and an approved budget submitted to the AGC.

Steering Committee Chairs have asked to encourage their working group members also to engage through registration and/or promotion amongst their colleagues.

This project has attracted a high level of enthusiastic support from the Sydney based geoscience groups. The AGC is also grateful for the outstanding work being committed to this project by the project Executive Committee members, especially Steering Committee Chairs Dr Young Ng and Mark Williams.

- **IGC 2028 Bid**

The AGC intends to bid to host IGC 2028 in Melbourne. Working Group 6 has provided the bid organisers with a schedule of recommended geotourism-focused tours for both delegates touring Australia and en route to Australia through partner countries in the Asia Pacific which are managing Global Geoparks.

Enhancing Geoscience and Communication Skills

Working Group 7 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.

The publication of a booklet is currently being scheduled for completion with the generous support of the Geological Survey of WA (GSWA). The recent appointment by the NGS Steering Committee of Heidi Allen of the GSWA to the role of Chair will provide extra impetus to these plans. Much appreciation has been

expressed by the Steering Committee for former chair, Simone Meakin, for her sterling efforts in advancing the work of her team over the last three years.

Other news items

Report on NGS awareness building.

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (835) members to date, an increase of 21 members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members have continued with resultant high levels of impressions received.
- A series of **LinkedIn articles** have been published since the last meeting which serve to explain various aspects of geotourism, as follows.
 - **Understanding Mining Cultural Landscapes** <https://bit.ly/3uqrU0o>
 - **Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Landscapes** <https://bit.ly/43b6mBZ>
 - **Abiotic Features of Geotourism** <https://bit.ly/49EGS2d>
 - **Biotic Features of Geotourism** <https://bit.ly/3wNJIn0>

Conference Calendar for 2024

- **4-6 JUNE Brisbane. Global Sustainable Tourism Summit** being held by Ecotourism Australia <https://bit.ly/4a0YtC1>
- Registration: <https://www.ecotourism.org.au/conference>
- **18-19 July, SYDNEY. GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop** www.geofest.com.au
- **7-15 September, Leonora WA.** 28th AMHA conference at Leonora <https://www.mininghistory.asn.au/next-conference/>
- **29-31 October, Busselton WA.** National Regional and Economic Development Summit (SEGRA) <https://segra.com.au/busselton-2024-summit-host/>
- **5-7 November, Hastings Point, NSW Conference.**, Wildlife Tourism Australia <https://www.wildlifetourism.org.au/blog/coming-events/conference-2024/>

NGS Steering Committee Members in the News

Congratulations are extended to both **Dr Sanda Close AM** for her Order of Australia Award, announced on Australia Day recently, and to **Haydyn Bromley** who has recently been appointed Interim Chair of the South Australian Aboriginal Tourism Operators Council (SAATOC), a professional tourism association specifically for Aboriginal-owned tourism businesses. Bookabee Tours Australia, a cultural tourism business, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary of operations.



GEOREGIONS FOR GEOTOURISM PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The ‘highest order’ of sustainable geotourism can be accommodated through the establishment of geoparks, 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 where appropriate, and sustainability in a way that is true to the core values of all nature-based tourism in Australia.

UNESCO appreciates that each Nation State can develop its own procedures for assessing geopark proposals. In the case of Australia, the concept of establishing a GeoRegion as a strategy is only a first step for geopark proponents (e.g., regional development authorities, local government agencies, community groups, natural or cultural heritage interest groups, and, as appropriate, primary industry interest groups) to use, and is of local Australian domestic relevance only, and would fall away if a GeoRegion project supported by the relevant State/Territory Government evolves into a geopark nomination. Australian government geoscience agencies now accept the concept of GeoRegions as an essential exploratory step for proposed geopark development with approved guidelines for their establishment <https://bit.ly/47Nappn>

In Australia, GeoRegions can be single, unified geographical areas of appropriate size where sites and landscapes of geological significance are linked together around a central natural or cultural value. Their intended ‘bottom-up’ approach of combining conservation with sustainable development aims to involve local communities.

The GeoRegion mechanism provides a framework to undertake comprehensive consultation with the full range of interested or impacted community groups (including Aboriginal communities) and to resolve any identified land-tenure conflict issues that may arise. As a first step, a full audit of natural and cultural heritage attributes in the region is strongly recommended, as well as preliminary discussions with state-or territory-based Geological Surveys, Planning and Environment agencies, and any other designated state/territory government agencies. This early planning will help focus the work to a defined broad area (without any defined and formalised boundaries) and reduce effort by identifying localities unlikely to be suitable for geotourism purposes, having regard to land and resource management considerations.

It is recommended that intending proponents review at this early stage the following checklist and explanatory notes which are intended as a quick and easy dashboard to measure the preparedness of an aspiring geopark nominations on a regular basis <https://bit.ly/3uedflb> . In addition, a regular review of the UNESCO ‘Self-Assessment’ Form <https://bit.ly/3qW3t6d> will enable intending proponents to gain an appreciation of the scope of works required to be undertaken during the GeoRegion assessment process to meet any intended UNESCO nomination process.

Once a GeoRegion designation has been approved in principle by appropriate land managers and LGAs based on the endorsement received from the relevant State/Territory Geological Surveys, it is assumed that work within the GeoRegion can proceed under the direction of an existing or approved governance structure.

NOTE: Guidelines approved by a meeting of NGS Working Group 2 held on 11 March 2024