



## **Newsletter of the Australian Geoscience Council**

### **Update on activities within working groups of Geotourism Australia**

**Newsletter      25-04, dated 16 December 2025**

#### **PURPOSE**

To provide intermittent periodic updates of activities and achievements of the Geotourism Australia 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 Geotourism Australia Steering Committee was held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

#### **CURRENT STATUS**

##### **Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal (AGDP)**

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

In reporting to the recent Steering Committee meeting, Working Group Chair Mark Williams advised that four UTAS students undertook professional placements to curate datasets for inclusion in the AGDP. Two students delivered datasets suitable for integration but requiring further refinement to reach the desired level of completeness and accuracy, while the other two produced partial datasets that can be incorporated with additional work. Dr Stephen White managed the students and noted that engagement and communication varied across the group, with some students completing or nearing completion of their required 80 placement hours, while others have unclear progress and hours recorded. Overall, the placements generated useful data, but additional work is needed to finalise these contributions and address remaining gaps. This will need to be taken up through WG3 and WG4 volunteer work, or additional funding will need to be secured.

Mark intends to seek support of Working Group members to enlist relevant subject-matter experts within their respective states or territories to assist with reviewing existing datasets, resolving inaccuracies, and guiding the further curation of priority datasets in preparation for public release, noting that this collaborative input is critical to ensuring data quality, consistency, and the long-term value of the AGDP. Members of WG 3 (Geotrails) and WG 4 (Geoheritage) are expected to continue to play a key role in supporting this initiative.

Mark is keen to convene a meeting of the Working Group early in the new year as he believes that there needs to be some more strategic thinking about the future direction of WG1. This could include exploring emerging technologies such as VR, AR, and AI in geotourism, as well as engaging with providers to First Nations communities.

## **Approval Pathways for GeoRegion and Geopark Development**

**Working Group 2, chaired by Angus M Robinson (Coordinator), has the goal of defining an approval pathway for major geotourism projects.**

### **Geopark Assessment Process**

The Working Group met on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 to consider a document (**the Geopark Assessment Process**) aimed at detailing administrative procedures for potential geopark development within Australian States and Territories with particular immediate relevance to two states (WA and NSW) in which three GeoRegions have already been approved, and work is proceeding towards potential nominations of UNESCO Global Geoparks.

The Chair of the Governments' Geoscience Working Group (GWG) has advised that the document has now been approved by the GWG, and the Working Group has updated the document further to take account some amendments by the Heritage Branch of the DCCEEW of the Australian Government which has also approved the process. This document has now been approved by the Executive of the Australian Geoscience Council and is now available on the AGC website at [https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Geopark-Assessment-Process\\_final.pdf](https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Geopark-Assessment-Process_final.pdf) noting that it does include a Caveat issued by DCCEEW that states, inter alia

**The Australian Government is the State Party to UNESCO and is responsible for any interactions with UNESCO on its treaties, conventions or programs. At this stage there is no intent by the Government, nor formal ministerial approval, for Australia to engage with the Geoparks program. The inclusion of potential stage five activities should not be considered an endorsement by the Government that any geopark assessment would be commenced.**

In advising the AGC Executive, it is worth noting that the Steering Committee Chair, Dr Jon Hronsky OAM, did point out that after a very long (multi-year) process, Geotourism Australia had finally succeeded in getting to the end-point of our one of our key strategic objectives, which is to develop an agreed, government-endorsed, pathway toward potential UNESCO Global Geopark development.

The AGC has also decided that this copies of the document need to be forwarded for

information to the Australian Minister for the Environment and Water, to State Government Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers, GWG members, to the proponents of the three approved GeoRegions (i.e. Murchison in WA, and Glen Innes Highlands and Ku-ring-gai (both in NSW), Minister Jackie Jarvis, Minister for Mid West (WA), the heads of the WA Regional Development Commissions, and both the WA and NSW Local Government Associations.

On a related matter, the Executive Director of the GSWA has recently advised that a notice has been placed on their website which recommends the establishment of GeoRegions as a first step in advancing any geopark proposals. <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-mines-petroleum-and-exploration/geological-survey-of-western-australia/geotourism-and-geoheritage>

The notice states that as ‘an Australian initiative, GeoRegions define areas where sites of geological significance are connected by a unifying theme. They can also serve as a pathway towards UNESCO Global Geopark recognition. GeoRegions can provide a sustainable framework for geotourism that recognises and celebrates local communities, geology, culture, and nature. Establishing a GeoRegion involves collaboration between local governments, community and business groups, and Traditional Owners. Geological Surveys across Australia, along with other government agencies, are consulted throughout this process.’

The notice also states that ‘GeoRegions are grassroots projects that rely on local knowledge, engagement, and governance. The Australian Geoscience Council has published guidelines for the development of GeoRegions, and UNESCO provides helpful resources on its Geoparks website.’

## **Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion (KGR)**

Recent highlights have included the following:

The Sydney Minerals Exploration Discussion Group (SMEDG) has approved a major sponsorship for the creation of a virtual geotrail a concept as developed by Dr Peter Mitchell OAM, using video footage posted on the new KGR website, which interprets the stratigraphy of the geology of the Sydney Basin extending from Palm Beach to North Head.

The Australian Institute of Geoscientists (AIG) has also resulted in approving a proposal to commit substantial funding to the upgrade of the Kalkari Discovery Centre to include the ‘Kalkari Rock Display for the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion’. The Centre is the main interpretation centre within the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, forming a large portion of the GeoRegion.

The NPWS has commenced work on building the new West Head geotrail with funding of \$30k obtained through the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, a charitable organisation dedicated to national park establishment and a wide range of natural and cultural heritage activities throughout Australia.

Discussions have continued with the NSW Department of Education's field school at Bobbin Head. The Gibberagong outdoor school operates focusing upon providing outdoor learning for students at schools in Sydney's northern suburbs.

Presentations to two environmentally focused community groups have been arranged in recent weeks and further signage work is proceeding in conjunction with the three LGAs.

## **Murchison GeoRegion**

Geotourism Australia has recently provided detailed commentary to the Mid West Development Commission of WA as it relates to a Digital Economy Strategy and its relevance to the Murchison GeoRegion. This advice has also been shared with other regional development agencies, refer <https://bit.ly/48GgUxp>

## **Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion**

Geotourism Australia has provided extensive input into the updated Draft Destination Management and Economic Development Plans, which are based on a strong geotourism approach and practices for the GeoRegion <https://haveyoursay.gisc.nsw.gov.au/glen-innes-highlands-economic-development-strategy-and-destination-management-plan>

## **Engagement with the Australian Government's Tourism Agency dealing with Industry Policy**

Further to the report of Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), through its Trade Subcommittee Inquiry into Australia's tourism and international education sectors being published, Geotourism Australia has made a further submission about this inquiry directly to the Tourism Minister Submission <https://bit.ly/42gunYX> .

The **Office of Tourism and the Visitor Economy** Austrade's Canberra office has been launched on 3 November by Senator the Hon Nita Green, Assistant Minister for Northern Australia, Tourism and Pacific Island Affairs. It is reported that the establishment of the office is an opportunity to elevate the profile of Austrade's tourism and visitor economy functions and unlock further impact through deeper integration of Austrade's trade, investment and tourism priorities.

At the launch, Assistant Minister Green outlined the Australian Government's priorities in delivering the **THRIVE 2030 strategy**, including increasing tourism spend in regional communities and tackling longstanding workforce challenges to ensure the industry has the skills needed to drive sustained growth and visits from international and domestic tourists.

A meeting has already been held with the advisor to the Assistant Minister to discuss Geotourism Australia's commitment to the THRIVE 2030 plan and the way it interfaces with the NGS.

## **Celebrating Geoheritage**

Newly appointed Chair of the Geoheritage Working Group, **Ruby Hoyland**, is keen to develop a new strategic goal and has been developing ideas to present to WG4 members in the next quarter for their input.

Along With Dr Melinda McHenry, Ruby has attended the Workshop on Geoheritage Management in UNESCO Designated Sites (held in Madeira, Portugal October 2025). Hosted by UNESCO Chair on Geodiversity and Geoconservation, participants from 20 countries, all from designated or aspiring UNESCO protected areas – variety in areas that both explicitly recognise geoheritage, and those which have implicit recognition but are working towards better geoheritage communication

Ruby has also attended online the International Workshop on Geoheritage, Parks, and Nature Conservation to present on ‘Integrating Fire Risk into Geoheritage Conservation Planning’ and gained valuable insight into how geoparks in particular have been developed in China, as well as their continued management

## **Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes**

**Working Group 5, chaired by Dr Melinda McHenry (and supported by the Coordinator and Dr Sandra Close AM) has been developing geotourism in regional mining communities with potential geoheritage and cultural heritage sites.**

### **Kalgoorlie Eastern Goldfields**

Following the Goldfields Environmental Management Conference 2025 held in early May 2025, the Chair of the Kalgoorlie Branch of The AusIMM has kindly agreed to chair the proposed Working Group and steps have continued to have been taken to approach identified stakeholders, refer AusIMM bulletin at <https://www.ausimm.com/bulletin/bulletin-articles/kalgoorlie-branch-embraces-geotourism/>

### **Closing the Gap and Geotourism Investigations**

Geotourism Australia has made several inquiries through a range of channels aimed at stimulating interest in exploring geopark opportunities for First Nations peoples. The most fruitful response so far has been through the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation, owners of the recently listed Murujuga World Heritage site in the Pilbara region of WA. An initial meeting with their CEO has been undertaken with further meetings with key staff to follow shortly.

A brief meeting was also held at the ICOMOS conference with Damien Bell, the champion of the Budji Bim World Heritage Site in Western Victoria and the convenor of the Victorian Aboriginal Treaty movement. There have also been constructive discussions with Dr Alan Dale who helps build integrated societal governance systems across the tropical world and northern Australia. He has extensive research, community advocacy and policy experience in

these fields and is Chair of the annual Developing Northern Australia Conference. His past research career helped inform the policy and investment foundations for Australia's regional natural resource management system, and he was previously responsible for natural resource policy and social impact assessment within the Queensland Government. Allan has been the Chair of Regional Development Australia and CEO of the Wet Tropics Regional NRM Body.

### **Proposed Collaboration with Qld Parks and Wildlife Service and with Regional Development Agencies**

Meetings have been held recently with representatives of the Service to discuss the potential of a collaboration which might be constructed having regard to a successful model for geotrail development established in NSW.

It has been suggested that a selection of say six geotours using this technology platform within National Parks across Qld to be developed by a consortium which might include the Service park managements, the Qld Geological Survey, Geotourism Australia (involving also the Geological Society of Australia), and at the local level for each location, the appropriate First Nations People representatives. It has been suggested that the Chillagoe/Mungana Cave National Park/ Chillagoe Geology Hub might be the first project to be considered.

With the assistance of AusIMM member, Colin Randall based in Cloncurry, Geotourism Australia continues to support geotourism development initiatives in the Mt Isa/Mary Kathleen/Cloncurry area of NW Queensland through the auspices of the MITEZ (Mount Isa to Townsville Economic Development Zone Inc) organisation.

### **Red Centre Regional Development, Northern Territory**

Geotourism Australia has submitted through Tourism Central Australia two EOIs for funding grants; one to develop geotrail brochure supported projects at three sites along the West and East Macdonnell Ranges and another to undertake a feasibility study of the establishment of a new GeoRegion across the Red Centre to complement the existing Katja Juturna National Park WHA.

## **Building International Outreach for Australian Geotourism**

**Led by Dr Young Ng, this imperative is embraced by Goal 6 of the National Geotourism Strategy and employs geotourism to strengthen Australia's international geoscience standing and enhance its influence for the long- term benefits of Australian geoscientists.**

### **AGC–IGN Geohazard Workshop**

As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the partnership between Australia and Indonesia through the Indonesia Geoparks Network (IGN) in promoting and developing geotourism, Dr Young Ng has advised that an online webinar was held on 18 October 2025. Professor David Cohen, former AGC President, delivered the opening address, welcoming participants and emphasising the importance of bilateral collaboration through such exchanges. He also

highlighted current challenges in geoscience education, particularly the difficulty of attracting new students to the discipline in Australia.

Dr. Martin Jutzeler from the University of Tasmania represented Australia with a presentation titled “A Multidisciplinary Approach to Natural Hazards from Submarine Volcanism and Landslides.” His insightful research generated significant interest among attendees, sparking numerous questions about how Australia and Indonesia could collaborate further, potentially through a joint working group focused on managing geohazards within geotourism activities.

## **International Workshop on Geoheritage, Parks, and Nature Conservation**

The International Workshop on Geoheritage, Parks and Nature Conservation was held in Beijing on 7–8 November 2025. Australia was represented by four speakers: Dr Melinda McHenry (MM), Ruby Hoyland (RH), David Newsome (DN), and Young Ng (YN). Their presentations covered the following topics:

- Transitioning closing mines and other extractive industry legacy sites to geoconservation parks and reserves (MM).
- Integrating fire risk into geoheritage conservation planning (RH).
- Geopark visitation: The challenges that lie ahead (DN).
- Redefining geotourism for the 21st century: From geology-first to place-based stewardship (YN).

The workshop was attended by 150 academics and students. The Australian contributions were well received, attracting considerable interest from Chinese researchers in Australia’s approaches to geotourism and geoconservation.

## **International Geodiversity Day**

On 28 November 2025, Dr Young delivered a public lecture on Australia’s geodiversity and geotourism as part of the International Geodiversity Day celebrations organised by the Association for Geoconservation Hong Kong. The event took place at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre and drew 110 participants, including government officials from the Hong Kong Geopark Authority, geopark guides, tourism operators, researchers, teachers, and university students. The talk generated strong interest in Australia’s geology and conservation practices, with many questions raised about the planning and design of geotrails for tourism. The proposed new definition of geotourism was also discussed and received unanimous support from the audience.

# **Geotourism Communications and Interpretation**

## **Geoscience Schools Education Activities - Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion**

The KU-RING-GAI GEOREGION (KGR), just north of Sydney, is a 440 sq km area and is contained within three Local Government Areas embracing the Northern Beaches coastline and protected areas principally including the magnificent Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park [www.kuringgaigeoregion.au](http://www.kuringgaigeoregion.au)



A GeoRegion is an Australian designation that defines an area that showcases a geological heritage of local, national and international importance with a holistic concept of protection, education, and sustainable development, embodied in the vision of a potential UNESCO Global Geopark nomination.

The operations of the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park are governed by a Management Plan (updated in 2024) which, as a very high priority, specifically provides for improved visitor facilities and park interpretation, also including the **Kalkari Discovery precinct** (pictured) comprising a visitor centre used extensively by both day visitors and visiting school groups as well as a linked interpretation trail.



The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) has a commitment to investing resources in upgrading the interpretation elements, and as part of their commitment to the vision of the GeoRegion, there has been an agreement reached to incorporate geoscience elements (including rock specimens sourced from the GeoRegion) within both displays in the building and as part of the upgrading of the trail. This proposal has been warmly welcomed by the NSW Education Department managed **Gibberagong Environmental Education Centre** (Bobbin Head area) <https://bit.ly/43r80Rk> with which the KGR Steering Committee is establishing geoscience related programs linked to its KGR geotrails.

It is proposed that rock units in the KGR would be assembled on a structure/display outside the main building to explain the range of rock types outcropping throughout the KGR. In addition, interpretive signage highlighting abiotic content (geology etc.,) will complete this display. NPWS has agreed that acknowledgement of sponsorship by the NSW Branch of the AIG would be acknowledged by signage within the building. The sponsorship will be channelled through the Foundation of National Parks and Wildlife (FNPW) <https://fnpw.org.au/about-us/> also acknowledged by FNPW as a sponsorship. Worth noting that FNPW has recently committed a grant of \$30,000 to redevelop an additional geotrail at West Head in a collaboration with the GSNSW as part of their Geotour series <https://nswgeotours.stgry.app/>

In return for the proposed sponsorship, AIG would receive extensive publicity and geoscience awareness generated through social media outlets, local media and community group outlets on the Northern Beaches and Upper North Shore areas. Given that the KGR Steering Committee has recently introduced the AIG-supported Teacher Earth Science Education (TESEP) program to the Gibberagong Centre, it is believed that an upgraded Kalkari Discovery Centre will also benefit the TESEP participants.



SMEDG (Sydney Minerals Exploration Discussion Group) has recently agreed to sponsor the creation of a **Virtual Geotrail** for the KGR on Sydney's Northern Beaches. <https://bit.ly/4iSVRLq> The project, delivered through the KGR content-rich website, aims to broaden public and schools' access to one of Australia's most significant geological, ecological, and cultural landscapes.

## **Amendment to the Definition of Geotourism for use in Australia**

At its recent meeting, the Steering Committee of Geotourism Australia approved the following updated definition as follows.

*“A place-based form of sustainable tourism that safeguards the integrity of Earth’s geodiversity and recognised geoheritage—its landforms, rocks, minerals, fossils, soils, and active geological and hydrological processes, while strengthening the region’s interconnected biodiversity, cultural narratives, aesthetic values, and the socio-economic vitality of host communities. Geotourism achieves this through immersive interpretation, inclusive governance, and demonstrable, positive-impact practices aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”*

The rationale for this amendment is detailed at <https://bit.ly/3XTZc3h>

## **Report on Geotourism Awareness Building**

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (922 members to date, a marked increase of 32 members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members through LinkedIn have continued with resultant variable levels of impressions received.
- The last NGS newsletter was published by the AGC on 12th September <https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-03-AGC-NGS-Newsletter.pdf>
- The above-mentioned LinkedIn articles have continued to be published since the last Steering Committee meeting which includes a number which explains various aspects of geotourism.
  - <https://bit.ly/4o8ptFG> WELLINGTON CAVES – A MEMORABLE GEOTOURISM EXPERIENCE
  - <https://bit.ly/3K894mr> CALL FOR PAPERS, AESC 2026
  - <https://bit.ly/4pn6isC> ATHERTON TABLELANDS QLD – A VOLCANIC GEOTOURISM EXPERIENCE
  - <https://bit.ly/49wbF41> WATER AS A CULTURAL AND GEOLOGICAL FORCE IN GEOTOURISM
  - <https://bit.ly/3LVIwW8> MANAGING SHOW CAVES TO PREVENT OVERTOURISM
  - <https://bit.ly/4r9IkCQ> CHALLENGES FOR GEOTOURISM IN INTEGRATING NATURAL HERITAGE FUNDAMENTALS WITH ABORIGINAL CULTURAL BELIEFS

- <https://bit.ly/3Mf3NtW> CELEBRATING KEY GEOHERITAGE AREAS
  - <https://bit.ly/43K5Mwp> RECOGNISING “CONSERVED AREAS”: EXPANDING AUSTRALIA’S CONSERVATION VISION BEYOND NATIONAL PARKS
  - <https://bit.ly/4rcYRG4> WHEN ART MEETS EROSION: A COASTAL REMINDER OF WHY GEOHAZARD AWARENESS MATTERS
  - <https://bit.ly/49wpO1e> DISCOVER WESTERN AUSTRALIA’S GEOHERITAGE RESERVES AND SITES
  - <https://bit.ly/3VzdpkE> CHALLENGING HERITAGE FUTURES: AUSTRALIA ICOMOS 2025 BALLARAT CONFERENCE
  - <https://bit.ly/4oj39cs> THE ABIOTIC COMPONENT OF NATURE – A FOUNDATION FOR GEOTOURISM
  - <https://bit.ly/4o4bZe5> WHY GEOREGIONS MATTER: A NEW PATH FOR CELEBRATING AUSTRALIA’S GEOHERITAGE
- Geotourism Australia was represented as a speaker to address the Australia ICOMOS 2025 National Conference, which was convened from 17 - 19 November in Ballarat. The presentation (which was well received) argued that while UNESCO Global Geoparks represent the highest international standard for integrated natural and cultural conservation, Australia has pioneered a more locally adaptable model as a first step in developing any nomination for a UNESCO Global Geopark i.e., the GeoRegion. <https://bit.ly/4ol3b3H>
  - Through the good work of David Robson, in his capacity as Chair of the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee, Geotourism Australia was able to field some nine proposals for presentations and posters submitted by members to be featured in the AESC 2026 Conference to be held in Melbourne in early February. Registration at <https://aescgsa.com.au/pages/registration/registration>

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**16 December 2025**