



Newsletter of the Australian Geoscience Council

Update on activities of Geotourism Australia

Newsletter 26-01, dated 19 March 2026

PURPOSE

To provide intermittent periodic updates of activities and achievements of the Geotourism Australia Working Groups and links to useful items. The most recent quarterly meeting of the Geotourism Australia Steering Committee was held on 12th March 2026.

CURRENT STATUS

Approved Change to Geotourism Australia Operations

Since the commencement of implementation of the National Geotourism Strategy in April 2021, the seven strategic goals have been implemented by designated working groups directed by a Steering Committee member who has access to a dedicated grouping of registered members. In total, the working group members total some 60+ interested members.

As time has moved on, it has become apparent that the effectiveness of this arrangement has diminished with fewer working group meetings being held. Moreover, members participating in any one group might now not be available for a range of reasons, and any meeting held appears to be attracting fewer participants.

In response to this situation, the Steering Committee has approved changes to be made, effective immediately as follows.

1. Move from Working Group Leadership to Theme Leadership with responsibility for service offering of domain expertise for **advising purposes** with the opportunity to engage in specific projects according to availability and interest levels. Each Theme Leader will be provided with the opportunity, subject to regular consultation with the Steering Committee, to fine-tune NGS goals as they see fit. Each Theme Leader can reach out to a

wider group of individual geotourism members for advice or engagement as deemed appropriate.

With this change the Theme Leaders are nominated as

- Digital Technologies – Dr Mark Williams
 - GeoRegions - Angus M Robinson
 - Geotrails – David Robson
 - Geoheritage – Ruby Hoyland
 - Cultural Landscapes – Dr Melinda McHenry
 - International Engagement – Dr Young Ng
 - Interpretation and Communications – Professor Pat James
2. Amalgamate the working group members into one central pool.

Digital Technologies Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal (AGDP)

Project status

Dr Stephen White, who has been project managing data curation work over recent months, has reported to the Steering Committee that the AGDP staging environment currently holds 27 geotrails and 430 geosites. Of the geotrails, the majority are in New South Wales, and the remainder are distributed between Tasmania, South Australia, and the Northern Territory. Of the geosites, 280 are in Tasmania and 134 are in South Australia. The remaining located sites (10 sites) are in Western Australia.

Stephen has pointed out that in early 2025, a report prepared for the Geotourism Australia (steering committee evaluated the requirements to take the nascent AGDP from its test stage (staging environment) to production (public release). Four essential conditions for achieving this were: 1) securing a permanent host for the portal; 2) identifying and recruiting feature curators (subject matter experts [SME]) in all of Australia's states and territories; 3) populating the database with a respectable, reliable seed dataset of geotourism features; 4) funding to support ongoing data curation and compilation, hosting and maintenance.

From July to November 2025, he advised that the AGDP project sought curators and enlisted four graduate students from University of Tasmania (UTas; in Environmental Science) to compile or create geotrail and geosite data from extant sources using established templates and standards. Spatial work by the students was in partial fulfilment of their course requirements and was seen as an opportunity to assess student employment as a mutually beneficial method of raw data compilation.

By December 2025, no permanent host for the portal had been secured, the services of several SMEs from most states or territories had contributed limited data curation, the UTas students had submitted spatial datasets of mixed quality for evaluation and possible addition to the AGDP staging environment, and no potential sources of funding had yet been realised. Work by the UTas students, supported by the project lead, yielded seven new datasets. Additional information comprises imagery for a Darwin City geotrail and data provided by one of the feature curators. The new data and information are confined to South Australia, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia.

Stephen has reported that the updated compilation of geotourism features across Australia cannot be ready for release in the AGDP public portal until they have been edited and, where necessary, corrected. The timeframe to undertake this task is currently uncertain; it depends on how soon qualified data editor(s) can be engaged and how much work is involved to bring the datasets up to standard. The latter point may depend, in part, on the availability of geotourism feature curators in several jurisdictions.

The Steering Committee has yet to decide whether the addition of these newly captured datasets, once cleaned and added to the AGDP staging environment, to the existing staging datasets will justify public release of the portal. In any event, the identification of a suitable host organisation remains a key factor in moving forward.

Approval Pathways for GeoRegion and Geopark Development

Geopark Assessment Process

WG2 last met on the 10th December 2025 to consider advice from the Australian Government Department of Energy, the Environment, Climate Change and Water which indicated that they would have no objection to a finalised and approved Geopark Assessment Process document https://www.agc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Geopark-Assessment-Process_final.pdf being released on the basis that an appropriate CAVEAT was included which reflected the following statement, 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 of any assessment process.

Following approval by the AGC Executive, under the signature of the AGC President, have recently been 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.

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.

This new process was explained at the recent AESC 2026 Convention in Melbourne refer <https://bit.ly/4rz5QIn> and distributed through social media outlets <https://bit.ly/4u2DpVX>

Given the recent success achieved with the development of the Geopark Assessment Process, the Geotourism Australia Steering Committee has agreed to document for the historical record the work that was completed from 2011 through to the launch of the NGS in April 2021 and involving some 40+ individuals as contributors. This document is currently available at <https://bit.ly/3PyUvuB> and will be posted separately on the Geotourism Australia website.

Progress of Ku-ring-gai, Glen Innes Highlands, and Murchison GeoRegions

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion (KGR)

Following highlights have included the following.

- The Sydney Minerals Exploration Discussion Group (SMEDG) has now approved a major sponsorship to the value of \$15k for the creation of a virtual geotrail, 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 AIG has also approved a proposal to commit \$15K to the upgrade of the Kalkari Discovery Centre which

is the main interpretation centre within the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, forming a large portion of the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion.

- The NPWS is well advanced on building the new West Head Geotrail with funding of \$30k obtained through the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife.
- Signage work is proceeding in conjunction with the three LGAs with the latest sign being installed at the Bicentennial Park in Pymble.
- The Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment (FOKE) has finalised a MOU with the Australian Institute of Tours Guides to enable commercial tour guide services to be conducted within those established facilities (i.e., geotrails) of the GeoRegion
- In a very recent submission to Ku-ring-gai Council relating to their proposed Destination Plan (DMP), Geotourism Australia has advised that the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion provides Council with a practical, conservation-led framework to guide visitor activity while strengthening place identity and community values. By organising visitor experiences and partnership collaboration. Through its partnership with Geotourism Australia, it has been suggested that Council can leverage national expertise and established geotourism frameworks to deliver a distinctive, place-based visitor strategy that prioritises stewardship over volume.

Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

The Mayor of Glen Innes Severn Council and a member of Geotourism Australia, Cr Margot Davis, has recently issued an important media release about the future development of the GeoRegion accompanied by a video presentation on Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5fXmH0dxwY>

Murchison GeoRegion

No recent developments to report.

Sustainable Geotrails

At the recent AESC 2026 Conference, 2-6 February, held in Melbourne Melbourne, Geotourism Australia members delivered several presentations which included a focus on geotrail development, as follows.

- Turning Trails into Sustainable Geotrails, by David Robson. Refer LinkedIn article <https://bit.ly/40BfCin>
- Linking Recreational Trails with Dams, Reservoir and Lakes, by Bill D'Arcy, George Winter and David Robson. <https://bit.ly/4ICxC5j>
- A brochure for Angkerle / Standley Chasm A blueprint for a holistic geotourism experience in collaboration with the Aboriginal Traditional Owners, by Dr Anett Weisheit. Refer

LinkedIn article <https://bit.ly/4upwAhp>

- The SA Great Geotourism SAGA (South Australia Geotrails App), by Professor Pat James and Marg Beal (and Marcus Marshall). <https://bit.ly/41eKntu>
- Geotrail Development and the Potential for AI-Driven Interpretation, by Mark Williams and Angus M Robinson (poster).

Other presentations at the convention included the following.

- Realising the Potential of Glen Innes Highlands as a GeoRegion, by Margot Davis. Refer LinkedIn article <https://bit.ly/4bhS4oF>
- Government Approved Process for Geopark Assessment within Australian GeoRegions, by Angus M Robinson. Refer LinkedIn article <https://bit.ly/4u2DpVX>
- Redefining Geotourism: A Contemporary Framework for a Rapidly Evolving Discipline, by Dr Young Ng. Refer LinkedIn article <https://bit.ly/4098rO0>
- From Stone Age to Age of Geotourism (Murchison GeoRegion) by Karen Morrissey.
- A poster was also presented: Auditing the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion, by Robert Corkery and David Robson.

David Robson has recently arranged for an article explaining developments along the Murchison Geotrail at Mt Magnet to be published in the December issue of The Australian Geologist https://issuu.com/gsaustralia/docs/tag_december_2025_issue_216

Celebrating Geoheritage

Theme Leader, Ruby Hoyland has reported that the QLD government is seeking feedback on a new heritage strategy and on changes to the Queensland Heritage Act 1992. Drafting of the submission has commenced and which would advocate for the inclusion of geoheritage under the new strategy and in the Act, which has been circulated to geoheritage interest members for their input in the coming weeks. The submission is due on 31st March. It should be noted that arrangements have been made with the Heritage Committee of the AusIMM to cover mining heritage issues.

Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes

Closing the Gap and Geotourism Investigations

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

Supportive conversations in the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance have been initiated. Geotourism Australia has been encouraged to present at the Developing Northern Australia Conference (DCNA26 <https://northaust.org.au/> conference in early August at Alice Springs. An abstract for a presentation with the title of ‘Country at The Centre: How GeoRegions Can Support Indigenous Leadership, Story, and Sustainable Futures’ has been accepted.

Other project opportunities in Qld and the Red Centre of the NT are currently under investigation.

Building International Outreach for Australian Geotourism

- *International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG) – 11th International Conference on Geomorphology, Christchurch – 2–6 February 2026.* Owing to the scheduling overlap with AESC2026, Geotourism Australia representation was provided by Steering Committee members Melinda McHenry, Mark Williams, and Ruby Hoyland, all of whom presented at the conference.

Upcoming International Events of Strategic Importance

- *GeoSciEd X, Adelaide – 14–16 August 2026.* Organised by the Australian Geoscience Council and supported by Geotourism Australia, this international geoscience education conference will feature strong geotourism and geo education components. Geotourism Australia is assisting with international publicity and outreach. More information: <https://eventstudio.eventsair.com/geosciedx-conference-2026>
- *Asia Pacific Geoparks Network (APGN) Symposium, Langkawi – 4–12 September 2026.* The 2026 APGN Symposium theme is ‘Celebrating Networking in Geotourism – Innovate, Connect, Transform.’ This event will be a major platform for strengthening regional collaboration, promoting geotourism innovation, and advancing geopark partnerships. More information: <https://apgn2026.lada.gov.my>

Forthcoming Geotourism Australia Initiatives and Collaborative Activities

- *Promotion of Geoethics in the Asia–Pacific Region.* Dr Silvia Peppoloni, President of the International Association for Promoting Geoethics (IAPG), has encouraged WG 6 to support geoethics outreach across the region. Dr Ng plans to organise a regional webinar on 25 May, inviting Dr Peppoloni as keynote speaker.
- *ProGEO Asia–Pacific Working Group.* Dr Margaret Brocx, Vice President of ProGEO, has shared the ProGEO Strategic Plan 2026–2027 and invited Dr Ng to participate in the newly established Asia–Pacific Working Group focusing on geoconservation and geotourism. WG 6 awaits further details to identify potential joint activities.
- *GEOFEST 2026 (Online).* Geotourism Australia will continue its annual GEOFEST series with a Zoom meeting in October/November 2026, this year will focus on tsunami as a geohazard, building on last year’s theme. Colleagues from Indonesia and New Zealand

will be invited to contribute. The proposed GEOFEST 2026 conference (to be held in Hobart and hosted by Utas) is not proceeding this year.

- *Collaboration with the International Geographical Union (IGU)*. Professor Phil McManus, Geotourism Australia member and current Vice President of the IGU, has recommended closer engagement with the IGU Commission on Geoheritage and Parks. Geotourism Australia will explore opportunities for joint activities in 2026–2027, including seminars, workshops, and collaborative research. Commission details: <https://igu-online.org/organization/commissions/>

In summary, Theme Leader, Dr Young Ng has advised the Steering Committee that Geotourism continues to strengthen Geotourism Australia’s international presence through active participation in major global conferences, strategic partnerships with international organisations, and targeted initiatives in geoethics, geoconservation, and geotourism education. The upcoming program of events in 2026 provides significant opportunities to expand Australia’s leadership role in the Asia–Pacific region and to deepen collaboration with global networks in geotourism, geoparks, and geoheritage.

Geocommunication

Further Amendment to the Definition of Geotourism for use in Australia

Following discussion at the recent Steering Committee meeting, following representations from Geotourism members, the following **updated** definitions were approved.

Official Definition (Governance and Policy):

“Geotourism is a place-based form of sustainable tourism that safeguards Earth’s geodiversity and geoheritage while strengthening interconnected biodiversity, cultural values, and the wellbeing of host communities. It achieves this through inclusive stewardship, meaningful interpretation, positive-impact practices, and measurable outcomes that benefit people, place, and planet.”

Companion Definition (Public-Facing):

“Geotourism is sustainable, place-based tourism that connects people with Earth’s landscapes, heritage, and communities, while protecting their natural and cultural values for future generations.”

The rationale for this amendment is detailed at <https://bit.ly/4t1Auvj>

Report on Geotourism Awareness Building

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (923 members to date); weekly postings to all members through LinkedIn have continued with resultant variable levels of impressions received.
- The above-mentioned LinkedIn articles have continued to be published over the past three months which explain various aspects of geotourism.
 - <https://bit.ly/3NgGyka> GEOTOURISM AS POSITIVE IMPACT TOURISM
 - <https://bit.ly/4reKMqX> GEOHERITAGE, GEOTOURISM, AND THE GEOLOGICAL PROFESSION: A HISTORICAL REFLECTION
 - <https://bit.ly/4l9vYrJ> SMEDG FUNDS DEVELOPMENT OF THE KU-RING-GAI GEOREGION VIRTUAL GEOTRAIL
 - <https://bit.ly/4b2mWZ8> GEOTOURISM DEFINITION FOR AUSTRALIA NOW UPDATED
 - <https://bit.ly/4l2kTIU> SUSTAINABLE GEOTOURISM AT CHRISTMAS ISLAND
 - <https://bit.ly/4cqIOzz> GAMBA GRASS AND TRUTH-TELLING LANDSCAPES
 - <https://bit.ly/4cqsK0S> PROFESSIONAL TOUR GUIDING FOR KU-RING-GAI GEOREGION
 - <https://bit.ly/4d5uWLg> CLIMATE CHANGE AND GEOREGIONS: LEARNING FROM DEEP TIME
 - <https://bit.ly/4aOMkCN> GEOTOURISM FEATURED AT AESC 2026, 3-6 FEBRUARY, MELBOURNE
 - <https://bit.ly/> WHERE EARTH MEETS SKY: THE HIDDEN CULTURAL STORIES OF AUSTRALIA'S CAVES
 - <https://bit.ly/4u2DpVX> A QUIET BREAKTHROUGH FOR GEOTOURISM: AUSTRALIA'S NEW GEOPARK ASSESSMENT PROCESS
 - <https://bit.ly/4098rO0> WHERE TO NEXT FOR GEOTOURISM IN AUSTRALIA?
 - <https://bit.ly/4r9j52m> FROM DAMS TO DEEP TIME: UNLOCKING GEOTOURISM POTENTIAL ALONG AUSTRALIA'S RAIL TRAILS
 - <https://bit.ly/4upwAhp> FROM CHASM TO CONNECTION: A BLUEPRINT FOR COLLABORATIVE GEOTOURISM AT ANGKERLE / STANDLEY CHASM
 - <https://bit.ly/4r9jqCa> TOWARDS TRULY INCLUSIVE GEOHERITAGE: LESSONS FROM INDIGENOUS CULTURAL GEOMORPHOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA
 - <https://bit.ly/4bhS4oF> FROM ANCIENT ROCKS TO FUTURE PROSPERITY: GLEN INNES HIGHLANDS GEOREGION STEPS FORWARD AS A NATIONAL GEOREGION LEADER

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