



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

Newsletter 24-03, dated 7 August 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 11th June.

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.

It was agreed at the last Steering Committee that this project had to be regarded as the top priority for 2024 and that the engagement of Trisha Moriarty as a coordinator of the Phase two work was a decided plus.

- It was also decided that WG1 members Amy and Melinda will lead a project "Development of User-Friendly Guidelines for Digital Tool Use in Geotourism Enterprises". This project aims to develop user-friendly guidelines and decision support tools for geotourism operators to assess the suitability of digital tools for their enterprises, based on customer profiles and incorporating socioeconomic and sociodemographic analyses, ultimately enhancing visitor experiences and operational efficiency. This builds upon the digital technology repository that was created in 2022 to capture examples of how digital technology is being used to promote geotourism.
- AGDP update

WG 1 Chair Mark Williams reported that his team has completed the first two stages of development of the AGDP: Investigation and Design, and Development and Testing, completing Phase 1. Phase 2 will involve the next two stages, Evaluation and Maintenance, and Transition to Public Release. This will first involve data ingestion of a seed dataset and editor/reviewer training to facilitate this. This will be

led by Trisha Moriarty from Geoscience Australia. Once the seed dataset has been established, we will consider a transition of the AGDP to Geoscience Australia and a strategy for public release.

A manuscript (with Mark Williams as the lead author) for the AGDP platform has been submitted, approved and now published by a prominent Sustainability journal and can be viewed at <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/13/5482>

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 has met on 8th May and 18th June with several sub-Committee meetings 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. This process has involved discussions with other representatives of the WA and NSW State Governments.
 2. The Working Group now comprises Michele Spencer (Chair), Andrew McNeil and Dr Phil Blevin representing the Geoscience Working Group (GWG).
 3. **Based on** a submission to Mt Isa Council, **recent discussions** with Mt Isa Council **and senior officials of the Qld Department of State Development and Infrastructure are pursuing interest** in the development of geotourism as a viable post mining closure initiative **and as a mechanism for regional development in NW Queensland generally.** <https://bit.ly/3yxzqsr>
 4. Discussions with the CEO of Australia's Golden Outback, WA – further encouraging discussions have been undertaken with 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. Currently, it is proposed to participate in the Goldfields Environmental Management Conference scheduled for May 2025, which could provide a platform for regional collaboration with the Murchison GeoRegion.
5. Progress of Murchison GeoRegion Project, Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion, Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion.

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion (KGR)

Highlights including the following:

- 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. Should the FNPW funding not be issued in the short term, other funding sources have been identified from Sydney-based geoscience groups. Funding availability from Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai, and Northern Beaches Councils for the 2024-2025 financial year has also been reconfirmed.
- 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 which is now under development.

- 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 have organised a successful public tour of the West Head Geotrail and have published a 50 minute, Youtube video presentation of the geotourism highlights <https://bit.ly/4db5t0t>

Murchison GeoRegion

Karen Morrissey, the Project Working Group Project Officer of the Murchison GeoRegion has reported the following recent developments.

- Murchison GeoRegion Project Working Group held a Partners Meeting, inclusive of representatives of government agencies and organisations.
- It was resolved to engage with mining companies for funding opportunities, particularly for signage. This also enables opportunity to develop relationships with miners across the Murchison GeoRegion.
- “Great Aussie Road Trips” filming to commence on 27th August, featuring the Murchison GeoRegion. Will go to air internationally in 2025.
- The Murchison Campoven Muster held this last weekend, included sunset at Errabiddy Bluff Geosite and 45 camp oven meals – had very positive reviews and is set to become an annual event. This new event in the Murchison GeoRegion also had perfect clear weather and fields of everlasting flowers the Murchison is renowned for – also in bloom.
- Other areas continue a work in progress including preparations for the three Murchison GeoRegion Shires Space Trail event 5 – 7 September.

Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

- The Glen Innes Severn Council has been fine-tuning the interpretive information (particularly the Aboriginal cultural stories) for the 80 m long Skywalk style ‘geotrail’ which was launched earlier this year and which features the latest digital technology enhancements.
- Council is organising a mining heritage focused event scheduled for next year and is likely to involve a keynote presentation from a specialist recommended by our NGS mining heritage interest groups.

Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes

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

Chair Dr Melinda McHenry has reported on progress following several meetings in May and June. Melinda has addressed a recommended schema for project execution and a scheduling of proposed projects having regard to the likelihood that some of these projects may in fact generate some income for Geotourism Australia or alternatively attract external project funding.

These proposed projects are listed at <https://bit.ly/3WUqWow> The NGS Steering Committee has

agreed that priority will need to be assigned to two or three of these proposals once their feasibility has been assessed by the Working Group.

Should any Geotourism Australia member have an interest in participating in any of these proposals, please advise by emailing angus@leisuresolutions.com.au

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, 18-20 JULY 2024

www.geofest.com.au

The 5th Geotourism Festival and International Conference 2024 was initiated by the Indonesian Geoparks Network (IGN) which is a geopark network in Indonesia comprising 10 UNESCO Global Geoparks and more than 10 national geoparks.

The Conference included a one-day workshop in a partner country, this year in Australia. The GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop event, comprising the Workshop and further days devoted to tours and a special Wildlife Tourism workshop, was convened over the period 18-20 July. It was an international event attracting 100 delegates including geoscientists, environmental professionals, educators, students, and tourism planners/managers/operators. The focus of the workshop event was on building a strategy framework for geotourism development in destinations where the volcano was reviewed as a key attraction.

The Main Workshop

The GEOFEST event was co-hosted by The University of Sydney. In his welcoming address, Dr Jon Hronsky OAM, Chair of the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) said that the event is the first international joint co-hosted geotourism project organised in Australia with our closest neighbour Indonesia, and with New Zealand as a warmly invited participant. In responding by way of an official welcome, H.E. Ambassador Dr Siswo Pramono of the Republic of Indonesia advised that he was very pleased to see this significant event taking place. In a separate address, Dr Pramono explained how the development of the Natuna Geopark related to the socio-economic development of the Riau Archipelago Province of Indonesia.

Ipuk Fiestiandani Azwar Anas, Regent of Banyuwangi, Banyuwangi Regency of East Java, Indonesia then spoke about the impacts of volcano geotourism and the UNESCO Ijen Global Geopark on enhancing economic development in the East Java Province, precisely in Banyuwangi where per capita income continues to rise and the poverty level decreases. Mohamad Farid Zaini, Chairman of the IGN discussed managing volcano geotourism destinations to sustain local communities. He explained that by demonstrating the efficacy of collaborative approaches, community empowerment, and holistic management strategies, Indonesian geoparks serve as a beacon for other volcanic destinations aspiring to balance conservation efforts with socio-economic benefits. This study underscores the global imperative for sustainable geotourism practices, emphasising the critical role of scientific research and stakeholder engagement in nurturing resilient and inclusive tourism ecosystems. Dedy Asriady, Head of Gunung Rinjani National Park Office in Lombok, discussed the social and economic impacts of geotourism of Gunung Rinjani National Park in West Nusa Tenggara.

For the Australian side, in a follow-up presentation, Dr Hronsky affirmed that the AGC is fully supportive of working with global partners, particularly in the Asia Pacific Region. He advised that engagement with the Australian mining industry in developing geotourism strategies for maximising the value of cultural landscapes, particularly in regions where mining operations are facing closure was a top priority. With a further commitment to digital transformation strategies through the design and development of the Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal, Dr Hronsky further suggested that the AGC is becoming a leader in nature-based tourism in Australia.

Professor Phil McManus from USYD Geosciences explained that many parts of regional and remote Australia are looking for opportunities to rejuvenate their local economy. Volcanic landscapes, which exist from Far North Queensland to Tasmania and west to Mount Gambier in South Australia, offer sustainable geotourism potential. His presentation explored what it might mean to build sustainable tourism around volcanic landscapes in parts of eastern Australia, what are the opportunities and challenges and how this may enhance the protection and awareness of crucial geological features and processes. Both volcano geotourism specialist Dr Patrica Erfurt and Savannah Guides General Manager, Russell Boswell were able to provide the audience with a comprehensive overview of past volcanic activity across Australia and Far North Queensland, respectively. Sasha Morriss, Geoeducator and Geoscientist of the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark, discussed the evolution and rationale for New Zealand's first geopark.

With a focus on the role of geoscientists in geotourism development, Professor Mega Fatimah Rosana, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering Geology, Padjadjaran University in West Java, advised in considerable detail how geoscientists play a multifaceted role in bridging scientific knowledge with practical applications to promote sustainable geoparks and geotourism and to protect geological heritage in the areas of geodiversity, geoheritage, geoconservation, and protection; education, research, and monitoring; interpretation, geotourism promotion and planning; and collaboration and advocacy.

With a further commitment to digital transformation strategies through the design and development of the Australian Geotourism Discovery Portal, this theme was explained by PhD candidate and NGS Working Group Chair, Mark Williams, who outlined a range of opportunities for geoscientists (including other 'geoprosessionals') through volcano geotourism. Furthermore, Mark suggested that the geoscientists and geopark practitioners could be engaged in activities related to data collection and analysis, content creation and curation, visitor education and engagement, and sustainable practices advocacy.

To bring together all of these themes, the Workshop included two panel sessions entitled 'Geotourism and sustainable development' as well as 'Geotourism opportunities for geoscientists'.

Wildlife Workshop

Led by Dr Ronda Green, President of Wildlife Tourism Australia, with specialised knowledge of wildlife in the Asia Pacific region, Ronda is chair of the Biodiversity Working Group within IUCN's Tourism and Protected Areas Group. Indonesia and Australia are both amongst the world's highest-ranking countries in terms of biodiversity and endemism.

The session discussed these shared groups and some of the endemic creatures of both countries, in the context of understanding the formation of the Gondwana landmass. Some of the species were considered in relation to their dependence on kinds of soils or landscapes, and in some cases their own influence on soils. The session discussed some ideas on incorporating wildlife interpretation into geotourism displays and activities. Other speakers included Professor Jatna Supriatna of the Universitas Indonesia who

discussed the primates of Indonesia as well as paleontologist, Professor Julien Louys of the Australian Research Centre for Human Evolution at Griffith University who presented on the topic of 'Australasian Exchanges and Extinctions: why is Australia, New Guinea and Wallacea so alike and yet so different?'. Finally, Dr Simin Maleknia of Tetratherix Medical reported on forensic investigations into illegal wildlife trafficking in Australia and Indonesia.

The Welcoming Dinner at The University of Sydney

The dinner attended by 60 guests featured speeches firstly by Dr Elizabeth Thurbon, Professor of International Political Economy, School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales. Elizabeth spoke about the opportunity for applying economic and cultural statecraft based on successful models developed in East Asia, so important for Australia's future relationship with its closest neighbour. Ipuk Fiestiandani Azwar Anas, Regent of Banyuwangi then spoke about the significance of the development of a close and warm relationship through the auspices of geotourism and UNESCO Global Geopark development.

The Tours

Blue Mountains World Heritage Area

Led by Dr Peter Hatherly, a specialist of landforms of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, the large tour group visited the World Heritage Exhibition Centre in the Blue Mountains Botanic Gardens located on the volcanics outcrops of Mt Tomah, the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, and various geosites and a short walking trail including the Triassic sedimentary landscapes of the Upper Blue Mountains at Echo Point.

The highlights of this tour are captures in a short video clip produced by Raiza Sartori and Marcia Cunha <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtZXzp9gJlI>

Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion

Led by Dr Peter Mitchell OAM, a member of the GeoRegion Steering Committee. The tour group visited Long Reef on Sydney's Northern Beaches to gain an appreciation of how a geotriid along the coastline with 17 identified sites in a highly populated area is being constructed. The Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion is well known for its significant natural and cultural heritage values. The GeoRegion covers protected areas, principally the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park as well as the coastal cliffs and lagoons along a section of the Northern Beaches of Sydney.

Royal National Park & South Coast Volcanics

Led by Dr Sabin Zahirovic and sponsored by the NSW Division of the Geological Society of Australia, this field trip took participants to the NSW South Coast, more specifically to Kiama and Bombo. This area records the end-Permian mass extinction in the rock outcrops, driven by volcanism on the other side of the planet (via the Siberian flood basalts) 251 million years ago, as well as preserving the Late Cretaceous rift-related basalts formed during the opening of the Tasman Sea. Further inland, the region also hosts significant and geologically recent intraplate volcanics, highlighting the significant impact of volcanism and tectonics on shaping this region. In addition, the Kiama Blowhole is a significant geotourism destination on the NSW coast.

Sponsorship Acknowledgements



The GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop was co-hosted by generous sponsorship from various AGC member societies (The Geological Society of Australia inclusive of its NSW Division, The AusIMM and its Sydney Branch, the Australian Institute of Geoscientists), as well as by the Sydney Minerals Exploration Discussion Group. This financial support enabled the Workshop to be run successfully and within budget (refer attachment), with the surplus achieved to be applied by the AGC for activities devoted to the further development of geotourism in Australia.

The GEOFEST 2024 event has continued to forge new and friendly relationships amongst geotourism practitioners in the Asia Pacific Region. It has also provided fresh insights based on the Indonesian experience into the extent of input required by geopark proponents coupled with broad support from government agencies and communities that is necessary to secure UNESCO approval of sustainable projects. In addition, the event has demonstrated what members of professional geoscience groupings can achieve by collaboration and shared funding support, working within the framework of a cohesive national strategic framework.

Link to Full Digital Programme for both Workshops and the Three Tours

https://www.earthbyte.org/webdav/ftp/Training_Outreach/Workshops/2024/GeoFest_2024_FullDigitalProgram.pdf

Dr Young Ng, Convenor, GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop

GEOFEST
2024 SYDNEY WORKSHOP
VOLCANO AS A WORLD CLASS
SUSTAINABLE GEOTOURISM DESTINATION

EVENT OPENS TO GEOSCIENTISTS, ENVIRONMENTAL PROFESSIONALS, EDUCATORS, STUDENTS, TOURISM PLANNERS/MANAGERS/OPERATORS.

MAIN TOPICS

- SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- ECONOMIC BENEFITS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOPARKS
- CHALLENGES OF GEOTOURISM AND GEOPARK OPERATION
- DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY APPLICATION IN VOLCANIC GEOTOURISM

FEATURING SPEAKERS FROM AUSTRALIA, INDONESIA & NEW ZEALAND

FIELD TRIPS
BLUE MOUNTAINS
KŪ-RING-GAI GEOREGION
SOUTH COAST VOLCANICS
& A SPECIAL SESSION ON WILDLIFE TOURISM

LOCATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY
Camperdown
Darlington Campus

**18-19TH
JULY
2024**

REGISTER NOW
www.geofest.com.au

ENQUIRY: GEOFEST2024SYDNEY@GMAIL.COM

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 egoists, 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). Working Group Chair Heidi Allen has already convened the working group to finalize production of this booklet.

Other news items

Report on NGS awareness building.

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (861) members to date, an increase of 26 members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members have continued with resultant high levels of impressions received.

Conference Calendar for 2024

- **7-15 September, Leonora WA.** 28th AMHA conference at Leonora
<https://www.mininghistory.asn.au/next-conference/>
- **5-7 November, Hastings Point, NSW Conference.**, Wildlife Tourism Australia
<https://www.wildlifetourism.org.au/blog/coming-events/conference-2024/>

Angus M Robinson Coordinator, Geotourism Australia