



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

**Newsletter 24-03, dated 5 December 2024**

**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 3<sup>rd</sup> December following a meeting also held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

**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.**

Working Group Chair, Mark Willams, has reported that the Phase 2 strategy proposal prepared by Dr Stephen White of EarthLight Editing has now been completed. This excellent document, which details a costing for Stage 2, has been thoroughly reviewed to ensure it is comprehensive and aligned with the objectives of Geotourism Australia.

Mark has reported that Phase 2 involves recruiting key roles, including project leader(s), subject matter experts (SMEs), and GIS analysts, to build a 'seed dataset' and move towards public release. This includes securing a sustainable long-term hosting partner. The target 'seed dataset' for Phase 2 prior to public release is 100 geosites, 10 geotrails, and a lesser amount of cultural and mining sites per jurisdiction, though specifics may vary depending on available data and resources. **Members of WG 3 (Geotrails) and WG 4 (Geoheritage)** continue to play a key role in supporting this initiative.

Discussions are now in progress with third parties interested in funding the completion of Stage 2.

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

# Approval Pathways for GeoRegion and Geopark Development

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

1. The Working Group last met on 26th October and is still 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 continuing discussions with other representatives of the WA and NSW State Governments with a focus on defining government agencies agreeable to assume the role of 'the designated government agency'. Of significance, the CEO of the Mid West Development Commission has now agreed to assume this role for the Murchison GeoRegion, a move which he is recommending to other WA Regional Development agencies for their consideration. Discussions are progressing with the assistance of the office of the NSW Minister for Environment to determine whether this role in NSW could be assumed by NSW Regional Development/Planning agencies.
2. The Working Group now comprises Dr Phil Blevin (Chair) and Michele Spencer representing the Geoscience Working Group (GWG) from NSW and WA respectively, Mike Vicary representing GSTas, representatives of the three GeoRegions, and Dr Melinda McHenry.
3. Geotourism Australia Steering Committee members Angus M Robinson and Dr Melinda McHenry are scheduled as speakers at the Goldfields Environmental Management Conference scheduled for 6-9 May 2025, which will provide a platform for regional collaboration with the Murchison GeoRegion, and the potential for involvement of AusIMM members from the Kalgoorlie and other WA branches.
4. Progress of Murchison GeoRegion Project, Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion, and Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion.

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

Highlights including the following:

- In recent months, the KGR Geotrail Development Group has focused on designing signage for the Bicentennial Park geotrail. In addition, with the sponsorship support to the value of \$30k from the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife, the NPWS has been able to commit to the development of a geotrail at West Head. Arrangements have been finalised with the Australian Institute of Geoscientists and the Sydney Minerals Exploration Discussion Group for a major sponsorship to the combined value of \$30k for the further development of the Long Reef Geotrail which will see the creation of two additional interpretive signs and eight QR code mounted totems as well as 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.
- Steering Committee member Dr Peter Mitchell OAM in collaboration with John Illingsworth have published an outstanding 25 minute, Youtube video presentation of the geotourism highlights of a high-profile nature reserve – the Muogamarra Nature Reserve: <https://bit.ly/4emdK1e>

## Murchison GeoRegion

- Shire Councillors from the seven Murchison GeoRegion Shires have unanimously endorsed the Murchison GeoRegion & Geoparks Incorporated Constitution. With the unanimous support of the Shire Councils, the Constitution has been submitted to the Western Australian Department of Energy Mines Industry, Regulation and Safety (DEMIRS) for approval.
- Murchison GeoRegion is currently revisiting land tenure of geosites as some have changed and pending change since first listed.

## Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegion

- New Monument Sign with cultural messaging: The Glen Innes Skywalk now features a striking new monument sign incorporating Ngarabul messaging to welcome and educate visitors.
- Soundtrail Enhancements: A new landing platform has been developed for audio Sound Stories through Soundtrails, featuring additional narration and music to deepen the immersive experience.
- The Glen Innes Highlands Skywalk has undertaken some weed management, planting, and removal to enhance the Lookout experience.
- Photography and Videography Project: A recently completed photography and videography shoot showcases local people and the beauty of the region, which will complement future geotourism messaging when suitable. This material will contribute to future Glen Innes Highlands tourism marketing and geotourism experience, subject to funding availability.

5. 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 has recently been Published <https://bit.ly/40uYYlk> having regard to a submission (December 2022) by the Australian Geoscience Council Inc. The following recommendations (abbreviated in part) relevant to geotourism in cultural landscapes were noted but not discussed and include the following.

- The Australian Government to establish a national First Nations tourism body to represent the interests of First Nations businesses and communities in visitor economy policy and program development, with the terms of reference of the new body to be informed by the strategies and successful activities of the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC).
- Once the above-mentioned First Nations tourism body is established, it should consider:
  - A review into the current state of the First Nations tourism sector with the aim to make recommendations to government and industry on the short-medium- and long-term actions to build a stronger and sustainable First Nations tourism sector and enable First Nations peoples to derive real financial benefit from appropriately sharing their cultural knowledge in the tourism sector;
  - preparation of a National First Nations Visitor Economy Strategy; and
  - development and implementation of programs that educate non-First Nations tourism operators on how to engage and ethically partner with First Nations people in their local communities and how to appropriately collaborate with First Nations people and showcase cultural product in their business and services.

- The Australian Government to continue to implement grant programs that support First Nations tourism businesses to design and deliver authentic, culturally appropriate experiences including in ethical partnerships with established operators. In implementing these programs, the Government should engage with the proposed new national First Nations tourism body.
- Membership of Tourism Australia's board should include at least one or more First Nations people and to establish a First Nations advisory panel under the Tourism Australia Act 2004 with the purpose of advising Tourism Australia on appropriate representation of First Nations in marketing strategies and campaigns.
- \* Relevant Australian Government agencies to work with the tourism industry and First Nations representatives to develop partnerships and implement a robust accreditation scheme that supports and promotes the integrity and authenticity of First Nations tourism products, experiences, and partnerships.

In addition, Austrade to develop in consultation with Tourism Australia, State Tourism Organisations and Regional Tourism Organisations, a Regional Dispersal Strategy to drive greater domestic and international visitation into more of Australia's regions.

- \* It is recommended that Australian Government seeks opportunities to promote nature-based tourism and agritourism in combination with developing policies directed at enhancing international tourism to regional areas, including through streamlining approval processes with state and national parks and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth).

Geotourism Australia has recently made a further submission about the inquiry directly to the Minister for Trade and Tourism of Australia, the Hon Don Farrell MP, refer <https://bit.ly/4ioPQ8H>

It is also worth noting that Geotourism Australia has received formal advice from the Heritage Policy Branch, Heritage Division of the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for inclusion of the following requirement to be adopted in the proposed Geopark Assessment Process, inter alia, *'Continuation of consultation with community groups including relevant First Nations groups for the area, environmental and heritage interest groups, having regard to the recommended requirements for compliance with any state, territory or commonwealth regulations and/or best practice guidelines'* in anticipation of a proposed 'First Nations Engagement Standard' being developed and regulated by the Australian Government.

In the light of the report of the JSCFADT report, Geotourism Australia is now of the view that the recommendations provide Geotourism Australia with a major opportunity to participate in the development of tourism for First Nations peoples, particularly in the areas of interpretation and communication.

## Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes

**Working Group 5, chaired by Dr Melinda McHenry, has been developing geotourism in regional mining communities with potential geoheritage and cultural heritage sites.**

### Major Projects and Activities

1. Mining and Cultural Landscapes Criteria Application to Geotourism Ventures – integration with the AGDP.

A Sub-Working Group led by Will Plumb, is applying geotourism criteria to Australian mining and cultural landscapes, for the purposes of adding more sites to the Australian Geotourism Data Portal (AGDP). Initial data collection for Tasmania and Western Australia is complete. Will Plumb is currently addressing data gaps for national cultural landscapes and Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander geotourism ventures.

2. Heritage Grant Applications.

Land managers of two mining heritage sites were approached for collaborative project proposals, but there was insufficient capacity to engage due to funding constraints prioritising operational needs.

3. West Coast Tasmania Mining Heritage and Closure Project.

Team members visited the West Coast of Tasmania to explore post-closure options, community development, and georegional identity. A project proposal is being developed to support the creation of a Destination Management Plan for geotourism and a prospective GeoRegion.

4. EnviroMETS Support <https://enviromets.net.au/>

- Development of performance criteria for mine-closure scenarios in Queensland, aligning with broader WG initiatives and activities, noting that the Geotourism Australia coordinator is an appointed adviser of EnviroMETS. Dr McHenry and Will Plumb are providing specialist support for this activity

### Collaborative Projects with Other Working Groups

1. GeoRegional Projects (WG2 Linkage).

- Discussions with stakeholders in the Flinders Ranges on geotourism opportunities outside the Flinders Ranges World Heritage Area (WHA) bid boundaries.
- Systematic GeoRegional Assessment: Manav Sharma (UTas) is interviewing industry and community experts to define criteria for GeoRegional establishment and decision-support tools.

2. International Projects (WG6 Linkage).

- Australia-China Grant: Submitted in October to support sustainable geotourism development and digital tools. Awaiting outcome (early 2025). Should the bid be unsuccessful, a more focused application will be prepared for next year.

- **GEOFEST 2025** (WG6 Linkage).

Date: 1st–4th November 2025

Theme: Nature, People and Place

Location: Hobart

Host and Organiser: University of Tasmania (UTas), endorsed by Geotourism Australia

Program Highlights:

- A three-day event including a field trip to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.
- Participatory workshops on geoparks, GeoRegions, and Tasmanian geotourism management.
- Opportunities for sponsors to host meetings on 4th November.
- A prototype website [www.geofest.com.au](http://www.geofest.com.au) will be launched shortly.
- The full organising committee will be formed in December 2024.
- Sponsorship packages have been devised to include branding opportunities and reserved meeting times.
- Discussions underway with the Indonesian Geoparks Network to gauge interest in Australian delegates attending their annual program while supporting GEOFEST 2025.

Should any Geotourism Australia member have an interest in participating in any of these activities, please advise by emailing [angus@leisuresolutions.com.au](mailto:angus@leisuresolutions.com.au)

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

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

### **1. Australia-China Grant**

As reported above, WG-6 has been supporting WG-2 and UTas in the application by the University for the Australia China Grant 2024-2025 Round offered by the DFAT’s National Foundation for Australia-China Relations. The application was submitted in October to support sustainable geotourism development and digital tools. The outcome of the application is expected to be known by early 2025.

### **2. Xian Delegation**

A delegation comprising five key officials of Xian City of China visited the Blue Mountains World Heritage Site on 25 October 2024. The delegation was headed by the Deputy Mayor Yang Jianqiang with four of his colleagues responsible for natural resources, national park, rural development, infrastructure, and investment. A meeting with the management staff of Scenic World was arranged by Phil Hammon (a member of WG 5) and the Director of Hammons Holdings P/L, which owns Scenic World. The delegation was particularly interested in the tourism management and operation of the three moving systems namely Scenic Skyway, Railway, and the Cableway within the setting of a World Heritage Site. The general manager, Jason Cronshaw, had guided the delegates to inspect the operation of each of these systems. The visit was insightful and provided some great ideas for the delegates to bring back home. Both parties agreed to maintain dialogue for cooperation, exchange of information and mutual publicity.

### 3. GEOFEST 2025

WG6 will be supporting The University of Tasmania in the organisation and hosting of GEOFEST 2025 in Hobart. This event provides an important opportunity of inviting Chinese geoscience involvement in this event.

## 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.**

Whilst the publication of a booklet is currently being scheduled for completion with the generous support of the Geological Survey of WA (GSWA), the work has been put on hold for the present pending the appointment of a new Working Group Chair. Our appreciation is extended to retiring Chair Heidi Allen for her efforts in advancing this work.

## Other News Items

### NGS Steering Committee Members

Geotourism Australia welcomes the appointment of Robert Taylor MBA, CEO of the Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council (WAITOC) <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robert-taylor-21013335/> as a new member of the Steering Committee who is replacing Haydyn Bromley, a prominent member of SAATOC, a professional tourism association for Aboriginal-owned tourism businesses in South Australia. Geotourism Australia extends sincere appreciation to Haydyn for his efforts and valued advisings as an inaugural member of the Steering Committee.

Robert Taylor also serves as a newly elected member of the Board of Ecotourism Australia (EA), a circumstance that can serve to strengthen the links between Geotourism Australia and the Geotourism Forum of EA <https://ecotourism.org.au/community-resources/geotourism-forum/>

### Report on NGS awareness building.

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (874 members to date, an increase of seven members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members have continued with resultant high levels of impressions received.
- A further series of LinkedIn articles have continued to be published since the last meeting which explain various aspects of geotourism.
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7254988605893287936/>
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7254992835865632769/>
  - <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:ugcPost:7264783475541454850/>

- GEOFEST reports – AGC societal newsletters
  - AusIMM <https://bit.ly/4fXn6Sx>
  - AIG <https://bit.ly/4ggsJLu> pps 36-40
  - GSA [https://issuu.com/gsaustralia/docs/tag\\_nov](https://issuu.com/gsaustralia/docs/tag_nov)
- The Coordinator delivered a technical talk on geotourism to the Sydney Branch of The AusIMM on 17th July <https://bit.ly/3xXzDV5> and to the Sydney Basin Symposium held in Newcastle on 21 August on the topic of 'Implementing Mining Cultural Landscapes post Mine Closure through the National Geotourism Strategy - a Hunter Valley Coalfields Opportunity' <https://bit.ly/3BgVOaS>
- The Coordinator was invited as a speaker to the annual Wildlife Tourism Association workshop in Tweed Heads on 5th November. <https://bit.ly/3BYQclt>
- The coordinator presented a webinar for The AusIMM on 8th October - Implementing Mining Cultural Landscapes through the National Geotourism Strategy <https://bit.ly/3BCPREV>
- An excellent overview of geotourism in the Red Centre of the NT has recently been published by the CSIRO in its COSMOS magazine, with many thanks extended to Alice Springs based journalist, Glenn Morrison for the quality of his coverage, and of course to Dr Anett Weisheit for all her continuing efforts at geotourism development in the Red Centre. <https://bit.ly/3BYnAZO> The work undertaken by our geotourism team in creating a geotrail brochure at Angkerle Atwater Standley Chasm is also discussed.

**Angus M Robinson Coordinator, Geotourism Australia**

**MESSAGE FROM GEOTOURISM AUSTRALIA CHAIR, DR JON HRONSKY OAM**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all team members for your commitment and dedication to the implementation of the National Geotourism Strategy through the auspices of Geotourism Australia, an entity established this year by the Australian Geoscience Council.

So much has been achieved this year with the convening of GEOFEST 2024 achieved with the fantastic funding support of AGC member societies and SMEDG, the extent of project development activity directed in the area of cultural landscapes (both Aboriginal and mining), the further development of the AGDP project, and continuing progress being made in gaining government support for our strategic GeoRegion-focused approach designed to underpin major geotourism projects.

As 2024 draws to a close, may I also wish you all a very enjoyable Christmas with time to be spent with families and combined with well-earned relaxation in readiness for a further year of achievement ahead.