



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

### **Update on activities within working groups**

### **of Geotourism Australia**

**Newsletter 25-01, dated 14 March 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 6<sup>th</sup> March 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.

The Geotourism Australia Steering Committee at its meeting of 6 March has determined that the completion of the AGDP project has emerged as a top priority. The Committee has approved a further tabled implementation report which details how Phase 2 could involve 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 now 130 geosites, 20 geotrails although 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.

##### **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.

1. The Working Group has completed a draft 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 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. 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 WG 5 Chair, Dr Melinda McHenry. At its most recent meeting, it was agreed that the draft document could be now submitted for consideration by the GWG later this month.

2. 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 recently made a further submission about this inquiry directly to the tourism minister.
3. Geotourism Australia has also made a submission to the Qld Government's Destination 2045 Tourism Strategy. Ecotourism Australia (EA), which hosts a Geotourism Forum supported by Geotourism Australia, did reference geotourism in their submission to this Strategy. EA has also made a recommendation around investing in the creation, protection and expansion of national parks and protected areas and how establishment of geoparks and support for geotourism provides a basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment in a recent submission to the Australian Government's 2025-2026 Pre-Budget Submission process.
4. The AGC has recently received a letter of appreciation from the Director of the Eromanga Natural History Museum in Western Qld, thanking the AGC for its written support of a government funding application which resulted in the award of a grant totaling \$14 million.
5. Geotourism Australia continues to support geotourism development initiatives in the Mt Isa/Mary Kathleen/Cloncurry area of Qld.
6. Progress of the three GeoRegions, noting that whilst work has continued with the development of the Murchison and Glen Innes Highlands GeoRegions over the summer holidays, there have been several key developments occurring within the Ku-ring-gai 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 National Parks and Wildlife Service will be shortly commencing 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.

- A grant application by the Friends of Ku-ring-gai Environment (FOKE) to the Community Enterprise Foundation has been approved to enable the development of a printed brochure to promote a comprehensive GeoRegion web site which will be launched shortly.
- Ku-ring-gai Council has applied for a \$20,000 State Government grant to construct general GeoRegional signage within a highly visited precinct within the LGA.
- Under the direction of Rob Corkery, the Steering Committee has completed a comprehensive audit of all the activities underway as they relate to meeting the requirements of the GeoRegion and the resultant documentation has provided a 'road map' to be followed should a UNESCO Global Geopark nomination be prepared at some time in the future.

## **Building Geotourism within Cultural Landscapes**

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

### **Major Projects and Activities**

- EnviroMETS Support, noting that the Coordinator has been appointed the Geotourism Adviser to EnviroMETS Qld and is working through membership of the management committee of the Social & Environment Society of The AusIMM to encourage a higher degree of AusIMM member interest. For details about the EnviroMETS program as it relates to the National Geotourism Strategy, please refer to the AusIMM Webinar <https://bit.ly/4iyY9Oc>
- Focus: Development of performance criteria for mine-closure scenarios in Queensland, aligning with broader WG initiatives and activities.
- Next Steps: WG members Dr Melinda McHenry, Dr Sandra Close, Will Plumb, and the Coordinator have met with EnviroMETS Qld staff/advisers in early January to advance this work.
- Kalgoorlie Region/WA. - Goldfields Environmental Management Conference (GEMG 2025 in May 2025. The Coordinator and Dr Melinda McHenry respectively are speaking on the following topics.
  - Geotourism - Contributing to the Creation of Higher Value Productive Post Mining Land Use, in support of work being undertaken by EnviroMETS Qld.
  - Community Participation in Post-Mining Landform Design and Cultural Representation.

It is hoped that the Murchison GeoRegion might be able to sponsor an exhibition stand, which will

provide a base to meet delegates and with local representatives of both The AusIMM Kalgoorlie Branch and the Geological Survey of WA. This scheduling also provides an opportunity to arrange a meeting with local regional development authority representatives about regional collaboration between geotourism and mining interests, with a particular focus on celebrating mining heritage in the Golden Outback region.

- Victorian Goldfields Mining WHA Bid – key Masterplan documents have been released.
  - [https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Victorian-Goldfields-Masterplan\\_Exec-Summary\\_LR.pdf](https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Victorian-Goldfields-Masterplan_Exec-Summary_LR.pdf)
  - [https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/about-the-bid/projects/masterplan/#:~:text=The%20Victorian%20Goldfields%20World%20Heritage%20Master%20Plan%20\(the%20'Master%20Plan,and%20the%20global%20goldrush%20story.](https://goldfieldsworldheritage.com.au/about-the-bid/projects/masterplan/#:~:text=The%20Victorian%20Goldfields%20World%20Heritage%20Master%20Plan%20(the%20'Master%20Plan,and%20the%20global%20goldrush%20story.)

Although not cited in the Executive Summary, the Masterplan contains a total of four (4) significant references to geotourism. to the extent that it can be assumed that there is recognition of its relevance to the delivery of the bid if approved. To this extent, Geotourism Australia has been successful in embedding some reasonable level of understanding of the benefits offered by the geotourism approach, and we have achieved productive and potentially ongoing access to the bid organising committee. This access will hopefully enable Geotourism Australia to provide further ongoing advisings, particularly as it relates to the conservation and promotion of the significance of mining heritage, as any approved project enters the implementation stage in years to come.

- A Sub-Working Group led by UTas undergraduate 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.
- 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.

- West Coast Tasmania Mining Heritage and Closure Project.

UTas working group members have 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.

- Collaborative Projects with Other Working Groups

International Projects (WG6 Linkage) - a National Australia-China Foundation Grant application by UTas supported by Geotourism Australia was submitted in October to support sustainable geotourism development and the application of digital tools in both the Greater China Region and

Tasmania. However, advice has now been received that despite the application being shortlisted from over 300 other applications, it missed out on being finally selected. However, it is understood that the Selection Committee were impressed by the theme of the application and has encouraged Utas to resubmit in 2025.

- 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 (a UTas postgrad) is interviewing industry and community experts to define criteria for GeoRegional establishment and decision-support tools.

**NOTE: Geotourism Australia Members, who would like to participate in any of the above-mentioned activities, are invited to contact the Coordinator at E: [angus@leisuresolutions.com.au](mailto:angus@leisuresolutions.com.au)**

## **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. This is achieved through the establishment of sister park, sister museum/rock garden, sister geological and mining heritage sites relationships, particularly with China and countries in the Asia-Pacific region (specifically China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, PNG and South Pacific nations etc.) . This strategy is also relevant for countries that enjoy 'Gondwana age' geological relationships with Australia, specifically Indonesia, New Zealand, and nations within South America, Africa, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Last year the GeoFestival and International Geotourism Conference initiated by the Indonesian Geoparks Network (IGN) included a one-day workshop in Australia - the GEOFEST 2024 Sydney Workshop represented a direct response to a recent MOU arranged between the Australian Geoscience Council Inc (AGC) and the IGN. Geotourism Australia plans to reconvene GEOFEST in Hobart in 2026.

In the meantime, Geotourism Australia is recommending that Australian geotourism enthusiasts consider participating in one or more of four key international events.

- Taiwan Geoparks Network's Annual Conference will be held at Taiwan National University in Taipei in June 2025. Additionally, a post-conference field trip to Penghu Islands is planned, offering an opportunity to explore the region's stunning volcanic and coastal landscapes. For more details, <https://bit.ly/4btvaJF>
- The 6th GEOFEST & International Conference 2025, Malaysia - July 25-29, 2025, is being organised by Langkawi UNESCO Global Geopark in Langkawi, Malaysia, in July 2025. For more details, <https://bit.ly/41q5ZmD>
- The 11th International Conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks, Araucania Region, Chile - September 8-12, 2025. This prestigious global conference offers a unique opportunity to delve into the reasons why thousands of people from around the world support the UNESCO Global

Geopark initiative. Geotourism Australia aims to assemble an Australian team to participate in this event, for an EOI, please contact Dr Young Ng E: [oz.geotourism@gmail.com](mailto:oz.geotourism@gmail.com) noting that the deadline for abstract submissions is April 30, 2025. For more details, <https://bit.ly/4bqIP50>

- International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks (IJGP) Conference, Zhuhai, China -November 6-7, 2025. This international conference will be held in Zhuhai City, a modern metropolis located near Guangzhou and Hong Kong. The event featuring distinguished speakers (comprising mainly members of the Editorial Board) will address pressing challenges in the planning, protection, and management of geoheritage, parks, and other natural environments.

## **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.

The Steering Committee is also evaluating whether the production of a communications media channel, which might be better accommodated as an online product or even linked to the AGDP.

## **REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL GEOTOURISM STRATEGY**

At its recent meeting, the Steering Committee of Geotourism Australia strategic settings of the NGS goals that were launched in April 2021 by the AGC and rolled into the establishment of the rebranded entity **Geotourism Australia** in April 2024.

### **SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

Since that time, the landscape in which these goals have been implemented has changed as follows.

- Whilst much work has been undertaken by the AGC in raising awareness of the relevance of adopting geotourism concepts amongst its constituent members and within some other communities, it cannot be claimed that geotourism has been able to have established a strong presence in the nature-tourism industry in Australia – ecotourism and agritourism still dominate the thinking of tour operators, State-based Tourism Organisations (STOs), Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) and the broader tourism promotion community.
- However, on the other hand, the development of indigenous cultural tourism within regional and outback areas of Australia has recently emerged as being of higher priority for governments of all persuasions <https://bit.ly/40uYYIk> and <https://bit.ly/3YsiZGR> and is being picked up by Aboriginal people even in urban areas.
- In 2022, the THRIVE 2030 Visitor Economy Strategy (Action 7.5) of the Australian Government stated that the ‘Growth and development of high-quality products and experiences around unique Australian locations and themes, including approaches which integrate sustainable nature tourism

with economic opportunities for Traditional Owners, and capitalising on emerging tourism trends such as geotourism should be supported.

- Whilst geopark development is encouraged by government agencies in most other countries, the same cannot be said for Australia. However, there is strong support for the NGS in the development of the exploratory GeoRegion concept because the concept provides the opportunity for government agencies and impacted communities to be adequately consulted about any geopark nominations with a clear pathway to enable government assessment and approval.
- A realisation gained from the engagement with the Indonesia Geopark Network, through the recent GEOFEST 24 workshop, is that geopark development is more likely to be implemented if geoparks are broadly supported by key stakeholders located in areas of areas of special, opportunity where exceptional 'geo' values can be used to establish new income streams to the advantage of locals. In an Australian context, this realisation applies to both First Nations people (e.g., the 'Closing the Gap' imperative) and within other non-Indigenous communities throughout regional Australia. In this regard, a growing need has been recognised to engage with communities and government agencies in Tasmania (particularly West Coast) to explore opportunities for the establishment of GeoRegions.
- In the process, the working group assessment of projects which celebrate cultural landscapes to develop geotourism in regional mining communities with potential geoh heritage and cultural heritage sites has been well received and can be considered as 'breaking new ground.'
- Moreover, the idea that geotourism can contribute to the creation of higher value productive post mining land use (including the conservation of mining heritage) has been accepted by industry-led groups such as enviroMETS Qld <https://enviromets.net.au/> and is leading to a higher level of acceptance of geotourism as a key driver in dedicated enviroMETS projects. It should be noted that enviroMETS Qld is an independent, industry-led, not-for-profit, company established with a mission to find innovative and sustainable new ways to make mining impacted land more valuable to its current, and future custodians. It is an industry cluster, or innovation ecosystem that has the capacity and capability to solve industry-wide problems, such as increasing value of Post Mining Land Use, as demonstrated through the design and implementation of dedicated projects.
- The contribution of geotourism has also been recognised in the current bid by the Victorian State Government and 15 Local Government Councils to seek UNESCO approval for the establishment of a World Heritage Area embracing the Victorian Goldfields.
- As a result of the success of the GEOFEST project, Geotourism Australia has been successful in attracting the interest of the Australian Institute of Geoscientists (AIG) and the Sydney Mineral Exploration Discussion Group (SMEDG) as active participants and potential funders of geotourism projects.

## **NGS STRATEGIC GOALS**

With these trends in mind and having regard to a detailed analysis of what changes might be necessary for the further implementation of the National Geotourism Strategy, the Steering Committee has approved the following recommendations.

- **Working Group 1** to continue to focus on the AGDP project as a number one priority, on the basis of considering how this project can be expanded to include other areas of digital transformation and the use of AI.
- **Working Group 2** to work to continue to achieve agreement by Australian Governments to the adoption of the proposed Geopark Assessment Process as well as communicating the suggestion that geopark development should be considered as a lever for government activity to address the needs of socio-economic disadvantage, particularly for First Nations peoples.
- **Working Group 3** to confer with the GSA interest groups to determine how best First Nations People can be assisted to develop geotrails that present their heritage stories, despite the difficulty to date that has been encountered in developing collaborations. Group members should make every effort to speak at tourism industry conferences/events about the benefits of geotrail development. Further collaboration with Geocache interest and other community-based interest groups could also be pursued.
- **Working Groups 3, 4 and 5** to actively engage in the fulfilment of the AGDP project.
- **Working Group 5** to decide how best the two streams implicit in the development of geotourism in cultural landscapes can best be accommodated, with the added goal of encouraging the establishment of new GeoRegions across Australia where the need arises. A deeper level of engagement with the enviroMETS Qld program is also recommended with the aim of seeing this concept introduced in other states. The planned engagement with the Goldfields Environmental Management Group conference in Kalgoorlie in May this year represents a key step in this direction. In addition, the identified opportunity for working with Ecotourism Australia should be prioritised, given also the findings of the recent Inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade as it relates to the development of indigenous cultural tourism within regional and outback areas of Australia.
- **Working Group 6** to focus on a proposed GEOFEST 2026 Hobart Workshop. In addition, a continuing focus on developing collaboration with geotourism interests in China and involvement in various Global Geopark network activities is of particular significance.
- **Working Group 7** to identify and appoint a new Chair with the next step of completing the production of a communications media channel, which might be better accommodated as an online product or even linked to the AGDP.

## **Report on Geotourism Awareness Building.**

- LinkedIn – Australian Geotourism Development (880 members to date, an increase of six members over the last three months); weekly postings to all members through LinkedIn have continued with resultant elevated levels of impressions received.
- The above-mentioned LinkedIn articles have continued to be published since the last meeting which includes a number which explains various aspects of geotourism.
  - <https://bit.ly/41cQApG> The Museum/Geotourism Interface
  - <https://bit.ly/3EQ6BtT> Indigenous Knowledge and Geotourism



- <https://bit.ly/3Xg2rSA> New Year Realisations and Geotourism
  - <https://bit.ly/4hQ6tsZ> Geocaching and Geotourism
  - <https://bit.ly/4hMgxDo> Geopark focus – Moving from Scenic Attraction to Community Engagement
  - <https://bit.ly/43cd2BU> Geotourism as Positive Impact Tourism
  - <https://bit.ly/4h4kNx6> Optimising Geotrail Development Adds Value to Mine Site Closures (source: Mark Williams)
  - <https://bit.ly/41gGFPS> Wine Terroir and Place-based Geotourism
  - <https://bit.ly/41sIHgW> Building a Geotrail
  - <https://bit.ly/3XkegY1> From Travel and Hospitality, the Tourism Industry Now Embraces Geotourism
  - <https://bit.ly/4ktffyP> Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Listing Progresses
- Geocache Collaboration, Sydney, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2025

The Event HQ was held at Sydney Olympic Park on Sunday 26th January with side events (including a geotour at North Head led by Dr Peter Mitchell representing the Ku-ring-gai GeoRegion) on the next day. The coordinator presented on geoheritage sites suitable for geotourism and explained the concept of geotrails. In addition, representatives of both the GSA (Dr Sabin Zahirovic) and the AIG (Jaime Livesey) staffed an exhibition booth with the goal of meeting and assisting geocachers with inquiries about geoscience.

All agreed that the collaboration had proved a success with the OZ Mega Committee expressing interest in their group participating in the AGC organised education event, Geoscied-X to be held in Adelaide in August 2026.

- AIG <https://www.aig.org.au/public/255/files/AIGNews/AIGNews156.pdf> pps 40-43

AIG is now freely promoting geotourism through articles submitted by Geotourism Australia whereas through the auspices of David Robson (Chair, GSA Geotourism Standing Committee), he endeavours to gain some interest from the GSA in publicising geotourism through the Australian Geologist (TAG) magazine .

- Geoheritage and Geotourism Advice from the Geological Survey of WA

For Geoheritage, the recommended action is to email the generic email address [geoheritage@demirs.wa.gov.au](mailto:geoheritage@demirs.wa.gov.au) – in that way Geotourism Australia has been advised that the first person available to answer any enquiry will do so. For future reference, there is also an equivalent email address for geotourism – [geotourism@demirs.wa.gov.au](mailto:geotourism@demirs.wa.gov.au)

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**14<sup>th</sup> March 2025**