

Geotourism

Australian geotourism — spreading the word

Geotourism is an emerging global phenomenon that fosters tourism based upon landscapes. Its definition has recently been defined as a form of tourism that specifically focuses on the geology and landscapes that shape the character of a region. This advances an earlier concept of geotourism as strictly 'geological tourism'. Geotourism promotes tourism to 'geosites', the conservation of geodiversity, and an understanding of Earth Sciences through appreciation and learning.

In February 2014, geotourism was formally defined by the Governing Council of GSA as '*tourism which focuses on an area's geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning and enjoyment*'. Ross Dowling (a longstanding member of the Geotourism Standing Committee), has introduced the concept that geotourism adds considerable content value to traditional nature-based tourism as well as cultural tourism, inclusive of Indigenous tourism, thus completing the holistic embrace of 'A' (abiotic) plus 'B' (biotic) plus 'C' (culture).

Since its inception, the Geotourism Standing Committee has worked to engage with its members, as well as with the Australian Institute of Geoscientists and the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy (AusIMM), to explain that geotourism also:

- provides the means of increasing public access to geological information through a range of new ICT technology applications
- contributes to regional development imperatives through increased tourist visitation, particularly from overseas
- creates professional and career development for geoscientists
- provides a means of highlighting and promoting public interest in mining heritage
- celebrates geoheritage and promotes awareness of and better understanding of the geosciences.

With the establishment of GSA Geotourism subcommittees in SA, Tas, and now very recently in NSW, it is hoped that within a few years, all Divisions will be actively promoting geotourism activities and providing advice and guidance to government land-management agencies and local government authorities. The appointment of Boyd B Dent, a hydrologist by profession, to head up the NSW group will provide considerable impetus to a number of geotourism projects in that state. The Standing Committee also welcomes Mark Asendorf, who has strong links with the NT Government, as its newly appointed NT representative to replace Kasia Gabrys, who has resigned to accept a new job appointment in Vic. We thank Kasia for her input and contribution to the work of the committee.

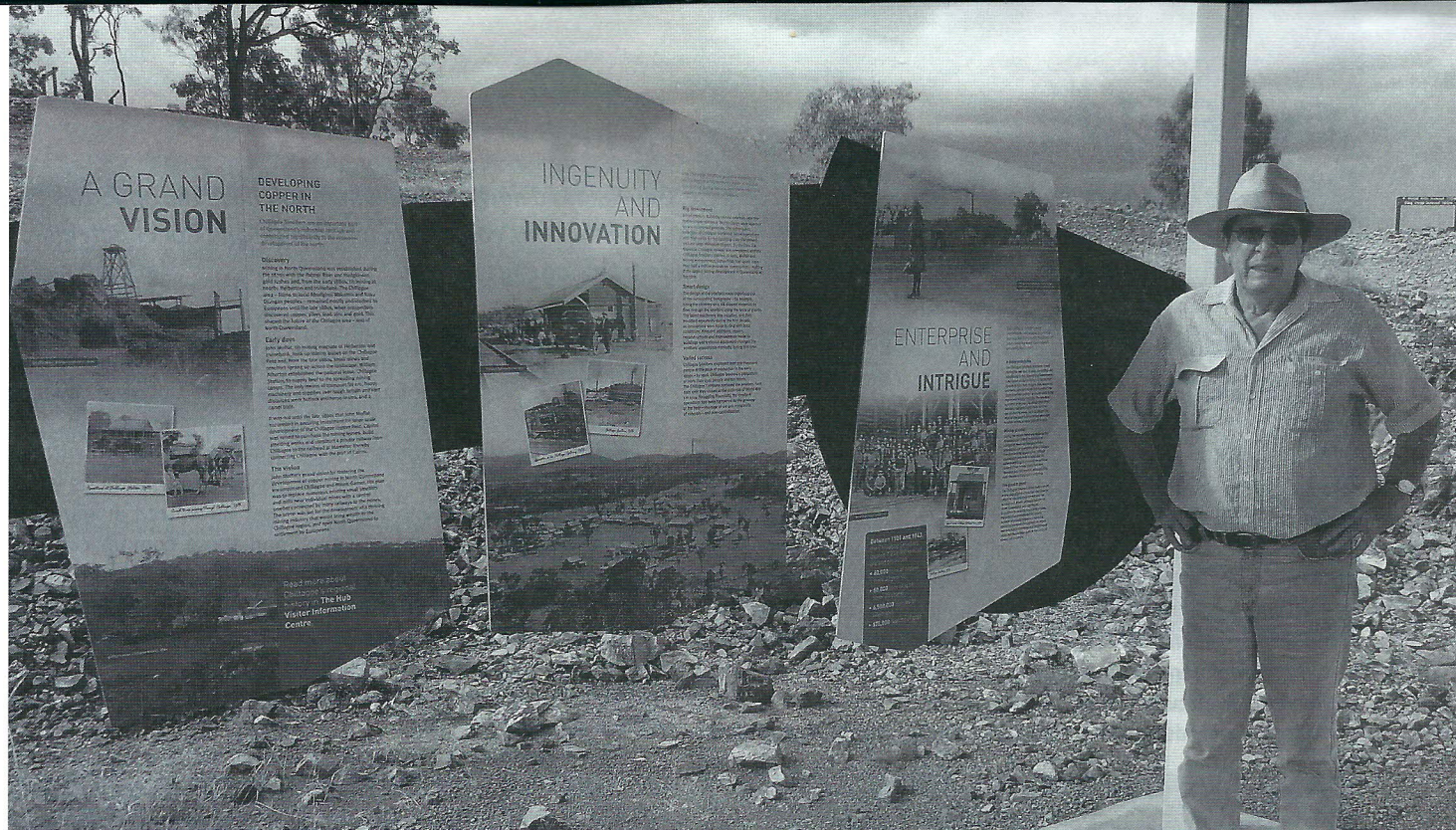
The Australian Geoscience Council Convention (AGCC), which will be held in Adelaide, 14–18 October 2018, provides the perfect opportunity to spread the word about the benefits of geotourism by reaching out to geoscientists across the broad societal

membership of the AGC. Subtheme 5.1 (Geology in Society: geotourism and geoheritage) recognises that '*geology has shaped our external environment and our history. Cavers, mountain bike riders, walkers or naturalists — geology is important to us all. Unique and sensitive ecosystems arise around geological features, and geological resources have determined where societies grow and the occupations they have had over time. This subtheme will explore the interplay between geology and contemporary societal activity such as tourism, nature conservation and stewardship of our natural and industrial heritage. It will consider the impact that digital transformation is having on the ability to understand and visualise our planet. In this way, the subtheme will explore the past, present and future relationships between people and the rocks beneath their feet.*'

In attracting the call for papers (to be submitted by 14 June) for this subtheme, the convenors would like to embrace the following areas of geotourism activity:

- cave, hot springs and volcanic geotourism
- walking and biking trails development
- time walks and rock gardens
- international collaboration, particularly the Australia/China Memorandum of Cooperation
- skills development and training for geotourism guides
- monitoring the impacts of geotourism on sensitive environmental areas/geoheritage protection
- management of safety issues pertaining to geosites
- digital transformation, including development of smartphone applications, websites and visitor centres
- case studies of geotourism, geotrails and geopark projects based on outstanding landscapes and geology, incorporating both biodiversity and cultural characteristics, both post-European settlement and Indigenous
- fossil tourism (including World Heritage sites in Flinders Ranges compared with Naracoorte Fossil Caves).

On Sunday 14 October, the Geotourism Standing Committee is organising a pre-conference workshop that will explain the philosophy of geotourism, economic outcomes, issues of regions, and economic benefits versus environment protection. The workshop will also show participants how to develop a 'geotourism story' around interpretation of the holistic nature of geotourism, geotrails and geoparks based on outstanding landscapes and geology, incorporating both biodiversity and cultural characteristics (both post-European settlement and Indigenous), as well as maximising the value of incorporating mining heritage (both past and present). Issues relating to seeking government approval and community engagement will be covered, and insights about the impact of digital transformation will be shared.



John Nethery at the historical interpretation displays at Chillagoe Hub. All images courtesy Angus M Robinson

Another important role of the Geotourism Standing Committee is to assemble reference groups comprising geological and mining heritage specialists who can provide valued advice to organisations developing major geotourism projects. For example, the Etheridge Reference Group, chaired by Ian Withnall, has been able to assist Etheridge Shire Council in Far North Qld with several geotourism project concepts. John Nethery, who is based nearby in Chillagoe, is one member of this team who has recently provided the Savannahlander Train drivers/tour guides with user-friendly geological content for the length of the rail line through the shire. John also designed high-quality display boards found at the Chillagoe Hub Visitor Information Centre and Chillagoe Smelter Trail.

Spreading the word about geotourism through making contact with local or regional tourism organisations can also extend to retired geologists who are connected with or know of mining interpretation centres located across regional Australia, many of which are referenced in the AusIMM listing of Mining Heritage Centres (Museums and Heritage Areas) at <https://bit.ly/2q9xn7w>. All of these centres (eg, at Herberton, Far North Qld) offer the potential of being connected into regional 'geotrails', a concept that is gaining momentum as state tourism agencies are becoming increasingly interested in the development of self-drive itineraries tailored for couples and small groups.

GSA members are invited to contact me if they are interested in contributing to regional geotrail development, or would like to consider responding to the AGCC 2018 call for papers.

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Herberton Mining Museum and the Great Northern Trailhead