

Spring happenings, geotourism icons and geotrails

SEGRA 2015 workshop

In October, the Geotourism Standing Committee co-hosted a workshop at the Sustainable Economic Growth for Regional Australia (SEGRA 2015) conference in Bathurst, NSW, in a year that marked the city's 200-year anniversary of establishment following the successful crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813. Significantly, the Mayoral welcome reception for SEGRA 2015 was held in the Australian Fossil and Mineral Museum, now the home of the internationally renowned Somerville Collection. SEGRA was well attended by representatives of state, regional development and local government, all keen to discuss and identify opportunities to enhance regional development in Australia.

The geotourism workshop focus this year was 'Geotrails – creating new journeys for geotourism'. This concept seeks to develop an extended journey that follows a logical sequence and connects otherwise unrelated towns, districts and attractions through thematic interpretation based on geological and landscape features. The opening presentation addressed the development of a formative Red Centre Geotrail, of which Uluru is now a global iconic attraction. Dan Cove, formerly Operations Manager of Jenolan Caves and now the Chair of the Geotourism Forum of the workshop co-host (Ecotourism Australia), explained how geotrails offer genuine potential for both adding new dimensions to a regional visitor experience and as a tool for encouraging extended travel time within a region.

It is worth noting that Jenolan Caves, now part of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, has a special place in Australia's history. In the early part of the 20th century, this destination enjoyed the same iconic status as Uluru for overseas visitors travelling to Australia.

In his presentation, Ian D Lewis, Director of the Kanawinka Geopark/Geotrail, illustrated how the geopark promotes rural tourism and landscape care for the many volcanoes, famous caves and coastline features across western Victoria and south-eastern South Australia, encouraging visitors to select from a number of highway trails through the region via accommodation hubs. Ken Moule, Chief Technical Officer, Global GBM, showed how the contribution of technology to the tourism experience opened the way for new regional imitative 'around map enabled' mobile apps to economically promote attractions and improve the visitor experience.

Neil Williams, now an honorary professorial fellow at The University of Wollongong, put the case that the successful development of geotourism across Australia depends on quality information about the nation's geology. He discussed how best to bring together geoscience and tourism expertise to support further geotourism development across regional Australia. The final speaker, Phil Smart, President and Founder, Gondwana Coast Fossil Walk Inc., illustrated how, in recent years, the geotourism potential of the Ulladulla rock platforms had been developed by his team of volunteers into a successful tourist attraction.

In summing up, the workshop convenor said that the concept of geotrails has provided an alternative and attractive approach to nurturing regional development by celebrating geotourism, and geological and mining heritage. Geotrails can offer genuine potential by both adding a new dimension to the regional visitor experience and encouraging extended travel time within the region.

SEGRA 2015 conference speakers. [L-R] Neil Williams, Angus M Robinson and Ken Moule. Image courtesy Ken Moule



AAPG conference

In September, both the Red Centre and the Blue Mountains–Jenolan Caves featured as tour destinations for delegates attending the international convention of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) in Melbourne. These tours were co-led by the Geotourism Standing Committee Chair. Tours were also led by GSA Governing Councillor, Christine Edgoose, in the Red Centre, and by Ian Percival, Chair of the GSA NSW Division Geoheritage Sub-committee, in the Blue Mountains. The petroleum geologists visiting the Red Centre could inspect the source and reservoir rocks of the Mereenie Sandstone of the Amadeus Basin. Visitors to the Blue Mountains could see some heritage sites associated with Australia's early oil shale and coal mining industry.



David Hay (impersonating Charles Darwin) delivering a distinguished address to the AAPG tour dinner at Jenolan Caves House. All images courtesy Angus M Robinson

The tour to Jenolan Caves included a distinguished dinner address by the compelling and charismatic David Hay, recently the cultural initiatives officer and tour guide at Jenolan. In his address, David brought to life the visit of Charles Darwin to the Blue Mountains in 1836, citing Darwin's observations about the geological history of the Blue Mountains and the role of the platypus in forming evolutionary theory, noting that platypus can be sighted in the Blue Lake at Jenolan Caves. David's fascinating address, which was inspired by an Earth Sciences History Group cohort (comprising Branagan, Percival, Pickett and Robinson) can be viewed at <http://preview.tinyurl.com/outgu8w>.

Further conferences

In November the 'geotourism workshop' will move to Rottnest Island in Western Australia as part of *Global Eco*, the Conference of Ecotourism Australia. The workshop will include presentations from Standing Committee members Ross Dowling, Young Ng, as well as Ivor Roberts and Michael Freeman of the WA Department of Mines and Petroleum.

Western Australia will also be the location for SEGRA 2016 to be convened in Albany and hosted by the Great Southern Development Commission. The location is within the Great South West Edge National Landscape, of which Ross Dowling is the steering committee Chair.

GSA members interested in finding out more about developments in geotourism are invited to join the LinkedIn discussion group – Australian Geotourism Development.

ANGUS M ROBINSON

Chair

Geotourism Standing Committee

angus@leisuresolutions.com.au

AAPG tour delegates visiting the new Three Sisters lookout at Echo Point, Blue Mountains.



Tour participants being briefed by traditional owners, Ellery Creek Hole, Red Centre.

