

Impetus at AESC 2016 for development of Australian geotourism

From a geotourism perspective, the Australian Earth Sciences Convention (AESC) will be surely remembered as pivotal for geotourism development in Australia. Keynote speaker, Earth Sciences Chief Professor Patrick McKeever from UNESCO, explained to conference delegates the opportunities, including economic benefits, offered by UNESCO Global Geopark development. Patrick also engaged in highly effective conversations with interested parties from South Australia and New South Wales.

A visit to the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary facilitated by owners Marg and Doug Sprigg and Sanctuary Foundation member Ian Plimer, and a tour of the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park hosted by the South Australian Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, provided Patrick the opportunity to discuss the requirements to meet potential geopark listing. The visits also provided him a keen appreciation of the geological heritage of this key national landscape iconic region. Following the conference, Patrick also met with the South Australian Minister for the Environment, the Hon Ian Hunter MP, and participated in roundtable

discussions with senior departmental officials. An immediate outcome is an invitation extended to the Geotourism Standing Committee to be represented at a two-day workshop focusing on future strategies for development of the Flinders Ranges region including Arkaroola.

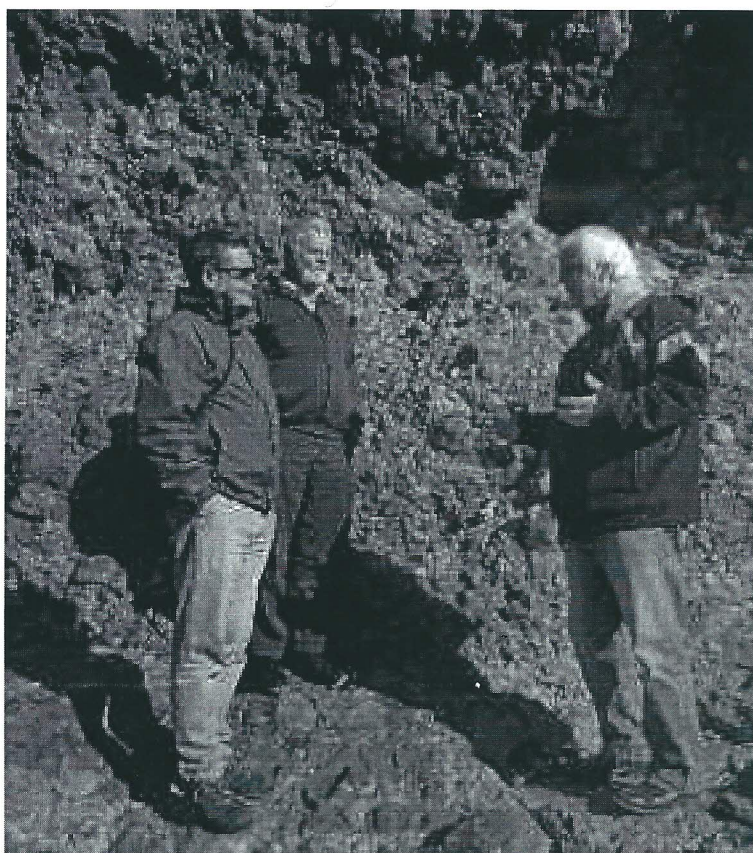
Another highlight of the conference was the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the Geological Society of Australia and the Geological Society of China by then-GSA President Graham Carr and Professor Anze Chen. This Memorandum of Cooperation seeks to promote better understanding and closer cooperation between the two societies for the promotion and advancement of geotourism. Anze Chen, who was visiting Australia for the first time, is highly regarded as the father of geopark development in Australia.

Geotourism Standing Committee member Young Ng presented Anze Chen's joint presentation on tourism Earth Science (an emerging discipline generating new opportunities for Earth Scientists). His other co-presenter, Tao Xu, discussed 24 models of geotourism (based on a matrix of considerations), a study that underscored the depth and breadth of interest in developing geotourism based on the academic discipline of tourism Earth Science.

The focus on current pathways for development in Australia relating to geotourism, geotrails and geoparks was introduced by the geotourism session co-convenor, who in a separate presentation, explained how a traditional tourism product (Blue Mountains and Jenolan Caves) can be enhanced by applying geotourism principles. Our other session co-convenor, Bernie Joyce, referenced local geotrails to connect small volcanic geosites and demonstrated how new opportunities for geotourism could be based on examples from the Kanawinka Geopark in the Newer Volcanic Province of South Eastern Australia. Alan Briggs (co-authoring with Ross Dowling) provided an update on geotourism developments in Western Australia. Alan, who is undertaking a doctorate on geoparks, provided an overview of stakeholder perceptions, in a West Australian regional area, towards geotourism, geotrails and geoparks. Ian Clark, co-authoring with Patrick James and Jane James, discussed the geotourism potential of a range of sites within South Australia, including the remote Witchelina area in the Northern Flinders Ranges.

Copies of all these presentations can be downloaded from <http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>.

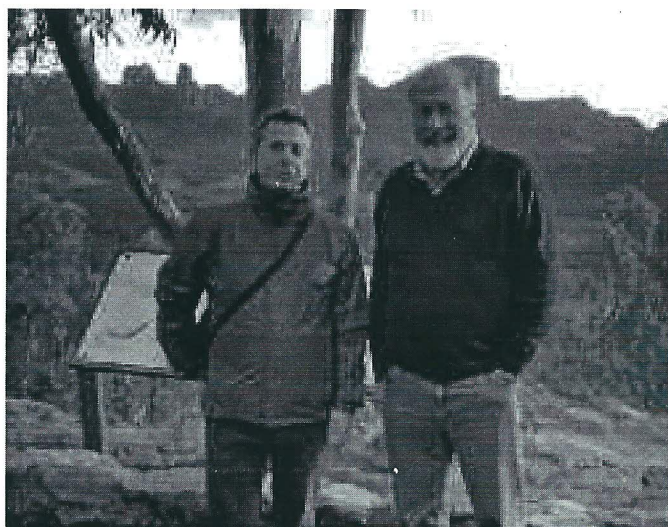
While in Australia, Patrick McKeever had the opportunity to attend a roundtable in Coonabarabran in the Orana Region of New South Wales. Organised by Regional Development Australia (RDA), the meeting was attended by the mayors and general managers of Warrumbungle, Gilgandra and Coonamble Shire Councils, and by representatives of Indigenous communities, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Sidings Springs Observatory. In a media release issued by RDA, Steve Loane, General Manager of Warrumbungle Shire Council said, "Warrumbungles National Park exists in



[L-R] Patrick McKeever, Ian Lewis of the Geotourism Standing Committee and Ian Plimer inspecting the very thick exposures of Sturtian glacial tillites at Stubbs Waterhole in the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. All images courtesy Angus M Robinson



Australia-China Memorandum of Cooperation signing ceremony: Graham Carr and Anze Chen (both seated), witnessed by [L-R] Patrick McKeever and Young Ng of the Geotourism Standing Committee



large part because of its geological significance — this could form the core of a geopark in the Warrumbungle and Castlereagh area. We already have a host of other tourist attractions, research and educational facilities, and areas of significance for Indigenous cultural heritage that could contribute to the establishment of a UNESCO Global Geopark. The recent announcement of the Warrumbungles National Park as a Dark Sky Place will also be a positive contribution should we decide to make an application.

Other news

In North Queensland, Etheridge Shire Council has reported that work has commenced in delineating and assessing potential geotrail routes throughout Etheridge Shire.

Western Australia will be the location for Sustainable Economic Growth Regional Australia (SEGRA) 2016, featuring a 'spotlight' geotourism theme, to be convened in Albany, Western Australia, on 26–28 October 2016 and hosted by the Great Southern Development Commission. This event is located within the Great South West Edge National Landscape. Register at <http://2016.segra.com.au/registration/>.

Hobart will be the location for the 2016 Global Eco conference of Ecotourism Australia on 21–23 November 2016. It will feature another geotourism workshop supported by the Geotourism Standing Committee. Register at <http://www.globaleco.com.au/>.

Members with an interest in contributing to any of the projects mentioned in this article are invited to email Angus Robinson of the Geotourism Standing Committee.

ANGUS M ROBINSON

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Convenor of the *Global Eco 2015* Geotourism Workshop
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[L-R] Patrick McKeever and Peter Shinton, geologist and Mayor of Warrumbungle Shire, at White Gum Lookout, Warrumbungle National Park

Memorandum of Understanding

The Geological Society of New Zealand (GSNZ) and the Geological Society of Australia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) effective 1 December 2013.

The intent of the MOU is to mutually benefit members of both societies by encouraging trans-Tasman conference, symposium and workshop attendance.

Effective 1 December 2013, GSA members are eligible for GSNZ member rates at the annual New Zealand Geosciences conferences and any solo or multi-society conferences, symposia or workshops in New Zealand for which GSNZ or its Branches, Subcommittees or Special Interest Groups are direct and formal sponsors.

Effective 1 December 2013, GSNZ members are eligible for GSA member rates at the biennial Australian Earth Sciences Convention and any solo or multi-society conferences, symposia or workshops in Australia for which GSA or its Divisions or Specialist Groups are direct and formal sponsors.

We hope GSA members and GSNZ members take advantage of this MOU.