

2014/2015 Annual Report of the Geotourism Standing Committee of the Geological Society of Australia (GSA)

THE GEOTOURISM STANDING COMMITTEE

- * Chair - Angus M Robinson, Managing Partner, Leisure Solutions®, Sydney
- * Michael Comfort, Section Leader, Geoconservation Section, Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment, Hobart
- * Bob Conroy, Administrator, Jenolan Caves Trust, Sydney
- * Professor Ross Dowling OAM, Foundation Professor of Tourism and Associate Head, School of Business, Edith Cowan University, Perth
- * Vicki Pow, Canberra
- * Associate Professor E B Joyce, Earth Sciences School, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne
- * Bruce Leaver, Chairman, Sapphire Coast Tourism, Cobargo, NSW
- * Ian D Lewis, Director, Kanawinka Geopark, Adelaide
- * Professor Suzanne Miller, Director and CEO, Queensland Museum, Brisbane
- * Young Ng, Founder and Chair of the Hong Kong Association for Geoconservation, Sydney
- * David Robson, Associate, Leisure Solutions®, Sydney
- * David Tucker, Principal, Western River Pty Ltd, Perth
- * Neil Williams, University of Wollongong, Canberra

Observer:

- * Ian Neuss, Councillor, Australian Institute of Geoscientists, Sydney

Correspondents:

- * Veronica Blazely, Director, Natural Heritage Section, Department Environment, Canberra
- * Patrick McKeever, Chief of the Earth Science Section, UNESCO

Working groups have recently been established in the areas of

- policy and advocacy
- communication and education
- symposia and seminars, geoheritage
- karst areas, geoparks and geotrails
- national landscapes

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GEOTOURISM STANDING COMMITTEE

Following a decision of the GSA Governing Council, on the 18th of November 2014, the Geotourism Sub Committee was replaced with a Geotourism Standing Committee. Members of the former Sub Committee have automatically become members of the new Standing Committee, with its Terms of Reference, to be reviewed and approved by the Governing Council.

The effect of this decision is that the pursuit of geotourism in Australia is now being formally supported nationally by both the Geological Society of Australia and the peak national nature-based tourism industry association - Ecotourism Australia Ltd (EA).

It is recognised that the decision by the Governing Council represents a strong vote in support of geotourism and augers very well for the future development in Australia of this rapidly growing, global industry sector.

It is also worth noting that The AusIMM, in its June 2014 submission to the draft Australian Heritage Strategy of the Australian Government has also provided strong support for the concept of geotourism.

Given the interest that is now being generated in the geoscience professions about the potential of geotourism, discussions have been initiated with The AusIMM Geoscience Society and the Australian Institute of Geoscientists (AIG) about their representation on the Geotourism Standing Committee by societal representatives who are also members of the GSA. Already Geoff Sharrock, Immediate Past President of The AusIMM, has indicated that he would join the GSA to represent The AusIMM on the Standing Committee if invited, and it is hoped that the AIG will be in the position to emulate this move.

Discussions have also been held with GSA President Graham Carr to determine whether the Australian Geoscience Council would be prepared to include geotourism as an area of future project funding and support.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE GEOTOURISM SUB COMMITTEE AND STANDING COMMITTEE DURING 2014/2015

1. Engagement with the Australian National Landscapes Programme, National Parks and Chinese Global Geoparks

Engagement with the Australian National Landscape Programme has continued. In his capacity as a member of the Australia's Green Cauldron Landscape's Reference Committee, the then Geotourism Sub Committee Chair attended the Annual Forum of the Programme held in the Flinders Ranges in August.

Subsequently, as part of the 'Seeing the Results' phase of the Programme, Parks Australia (and Tourism Australia) have announced that they have stepped back from a central coordination role, and instead have offered limited funding to EA to enable it to administer the programme and co-ordinate the development of a transition plan for the programme to become financially

sustainable. EA has currently sought commitments from most of the national landscapes so as to secure the Tourism Australia matching funding.

With EA now assuming a coordinating role, it is envisaged that as geotourism continues to develop both globally and within Australia, it is believed that more opportunities for geoscientist employment within government land management agencies, areas embraced by the national landscapes, and within the tourism industry will be created.

Other Standing Committee members are directly involved in the National Landscapes Program. Professor Ross Dowling is the Chair of the Steering Committee for the *Great South West Edge* National Landscape in WA and Bruce Leaver plays a key role in the tourism management of *Australia's Coastal Wilderness* Landscape in NSW/Victoria.

In association with the newly established Geotourism Forum of EA, the Standing Committee has also continued to facilitate preliminary overtures from interested Global Geopark managers in China aimed at developing bi-lateral collaboration arrangements between China and Australia's National Landscapes regions.

In recent months, efforts have been directed at identifying a suitable geoscience-focused professional grouping which could be encouraged to develop a broader co-operation arrangement with geotourism interests in Australia i.e. the Geotourism Standing Committee of the GSA and the Geotourism Forum of EA, on the basis that such an agreement might well be endorsed by the respective national governments.

At this stage, it is proposed that any co-operation agreement could embrace areas of activity which could include

- growing and enhancing the level of best practice 'nature-based' tourism in both China and Australia;
- progressing protection, conservation and presentation of the geoheritage of natural and mixed protected areas, Geoparks (in China), national parks and reserves (in Australia), Australian National Landscapes and areas on the World Heritage List (as defined in the World Heritage Convention 1972) areas (both countries);
- exploring opportunities to promote ecotourism and geotourism;
- raising the profile of China and Australia as world- leading 'nature-based' tourism destinations;
- exploring other co-operative projects such as participation in conferences; and
- fostering the development of 'sister park' relationships between China and Australia.

Dr Young Ng, a member of the Standing Committee and Founder and Chair of the Hong Kong Association for Geoconservation, has determined that the Geological Society of China (GSC) is the only 'NGO' in China that could fulfil the role as a China partner, and at its March meeting, the GSA Governing Council approved of Dr young making a formal approach to the GSC to initiate discussions about the feasibility of a co-operation agreement being formulated, with EA being incorporated as a collaborating partner.

Following an initial meeting between officials of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, and the NSW Geological Survey of NSW (GSNW) in August 2013 to discuss the mechanisms for

populating NSW National Parks web site listings with geological content supplied by the GSNSW, the Geotourism Standing Committee has decided to re-open these discussions in NSW, and with the assistance of Dr Neil Williams, to seek to have this proposal discussed by the Government Geologists Committee as a potential nation-wide initiative.

In September 2014, a meeting, also involving EA was held with the Minister for Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP, to discuss matters relating to the future of Australia's National Landscape Programme, the potential for an Australia-China collaboration, and geopark development, the latter issue being followed up by EA.

2. GeoTreat Smartphone Proof of Concept Project

Following the 34th IGC at which the Swedish Geological Survey (SGS) presented the GeoTreat application to delegates and called for other countries to be engaged in an 'open source' collaboration with the Scandinavian Geological Surveys, the then Geotourism Sub Committee contacted the SGS and indicated that Australia would be interested. Arrangements were then made for the NSW Sapphire Coast Tourism RTO Chairman, Bruce Leaver to contact the SGS directly and to organise at the cost of the RTO the loading of geological information forming part of their Geojourney program <http://www.sapphirecoast.com.au/blog/take-a-sapphire-coast-geo-tour-with-our-new-app/> as the first pilot for Australia. Subsequently, Bruce Leaver travelled to a workshop in Sweden and then addressed the Annual Forum of the Australian National Landscape Program in 2013 http://www.tourism.australia.com/documents/Campaigns/Case_Study_Geotreat_Tool.pdf at which time steering committee interests from Australia's Green Cauldron, Kangaroo Island and Flinders Ranges have subsequently expressed interest in trialling this application.

During the past 12 months, the then Geotourism Sub Committee has sought agreement from the SGS that heritage coalfield sites in the Illawarra region could also be trialled and indicated that should this pilot be offered, SGS could deal directly with the Illawarra Branch of The AusIMM. Being an open source project, there are no licensing arrangements required, and that so far the SGS has generously hosted the geological data on their servers. The costs of participation are minimal and relate to the collation of photos and text and GPS data that is formatted for use in the Application.

3. Definition of Geotourism

At its January 2015 meeting, the GSA Governing Council approved the definition

'Geotourism is tourism which focuses on geology and landscape as the basis for providing visitor engagement, learning, and enjoyment'.

4. IUCN World Parks Congress 2014, Sydney

A digital poster promoting geotourism was presented to the IUCN Congress <http://wpc2014.digitalposter.com.au/sessions/MOS3B>

5. AESC, July 2014

The then Geotourism Sub Committee collaborated with the Earth Sciences History Group to put together a one day symposium on geotourism at AESC 2014 which included two keynotes, 10

presentations and a panel session which focused on the theme 'Geotourism - The Potential for Employment Opportunities for Geoscientists'.

The two GSA groups had collaborated to put together a two day pre-conference tour to the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area (inclusive of Jenolan Caves) but unfortunately this project was cancelled because of insufficient bookings. Nevertheless, work undertaken for this project, and with the assistance of Dr Ian Percival, this tour is now part of the post conference tour offerings for the international conference of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists to be held in Melbourne in September 2015. A separate pre-conference tour to Australia's Red Centre National Landscape is also being organised with the assistance of Chris Edgoose, Manager- Basin Geoscience of the NT Geological Survey (also a GSA Governing Councillor).

6. PROPOSED GEOTOURISM SYMPOSIA/SEMINARS

The Standing Committee is planning a one day seminar in Brisbane to be organised in collaboration with the Qld Museum, Inspiring Australia and Ecotourism Australia – to be held in 2015/2016.

Following the highly successful geotourism workshop organised by EA in association with Sustainable Economic Growth Regional Australia (SEGRA 2014) held in Alice Springs in October 2014, the Standing Committee has been invited to collaborate with the Geotourism Forum of EA in organising another workshop to be held at Bathurst in October 2015. The selected proposed theme of this workshop is to focus on geotrail development (including engagement with the Central West NSW modern mining trail coordinators).

The Standing Committee has offered assistance to the tour organisers of AESC 2016.

The Standing Committee has decided to focus its awareness building in WA by working with the Geotourism Forum of EA to support a major Geotourism workshop at the Global Eco conference to be held at Rottnest Island in November 2015. Discussions about this project have been undertaken recently with Ivor Roberts and Mike Freeman of the WA Department of Mines and Petroleum.

7. PROPOSED GEOTOURISM PROJECT

The Mid West Development Commission (MWDC) has recently contacted both the Geotourism Standing Committee and the Geotourism Forum of EA for advice relating to a project which seeks to establish WA's first major geotourism development to be built on a 'geotrail' model, focused on the Murchison subregion of WA. The MWDC believes that the ancient Murchison geology provides the ideal platform for unique, nature based tourism experiences of global significance, particularly to the 'experience seeker / dedicated discoverer' market. The Mid West Tourism Development Strategy (2014) concluded that the region's iconic nature based tourist attractions were not developed to their potential and that its visitor appeal was not fully realised. The Strategy identified geotourism in the Murchison subregion as a potential 'game changing' tourism initiative, with capacity to help the region realise its potential as a major tourism destination in its own right.

An expert panel comprising Dr Neil Williams (representing the GSA), Bruce Leaver (representing EA) and Alan Briggs (representing the Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco-Tourism (FACET) with additional input from Perth based GSA member, Mike Freeman, provided the MWDC with information and technical information. This enabled the finalisation of a draft EOI proposal to be

submitted by the MWDC on the basis of a proposed partnership with Murchison local governments, the Geological Society of Australia, Forum Advocating Cultural and Eco-Tourism (FACET) and EA. The EOI has proposed that funding totalling \$600,000 be sought for this project.

As of 31 March, 2015, the Governing Council is considering whether it will be appropriate to participate in this project if funding approval for this project is approved and received through the WA government's Royalties for Regions program.

8. GEOTOURISM PROMOTION AND PARTICIPATION

Following the publication of the first edition of the **Geotourism Map of NSW** produced by Cartoscope Pty Ltd in 2013 with the valued technical input of McElroy Bryan Geological Services (and supported by the GSA), the company has now decided to update the map's information. The first edition of this state map was an outstanding success and very few of the 100,000 printed copies remain. In particular, this double sided A0 size map has proved to be a very popular hand-out state-wide through regional visitor centres, educational institutions, geoscience organisations, and with the wider community.

The second edition will update the localities together with photos and text information. As with the previous map, the described near 100 localities are publically accessible and give overview details of geotourism interest. The new edition will also give more information on the type and amount of minerals from a mining site.

As with the previous edition, the map will be freely available and financial sponsorship for another print run of at least 50,000 copies is currently being sought.

Membership of the LinkedIn Discussion group '**Australian Geotourism Development**' now totals 203 members and continues to grow. A repository for the posting of geotourism industry information is now available at <http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>

Regular articles promoting Geotourism are now regularly appearing in the publications of the GSA, The AusIMM and recently in the newsletter of the AIG.

Angus M Robinson
Chair, Geotourism Standing Committee
27th April, 2015

Attendance at Geotourism Sub Committee¹ and Standing Committee² Meetings:

Member	6th May 2014¹	12th August 2014¹	10th December 2014²	10th February 2015²
Angus M Robinson	X	X	X	X
Michael Comfort	X	X		
Bob Conroy	X	X		X
Ross Dowling		X	X	
Bruce Goleby	X			
Bernie Joyce	X	X	X	X
Bruce Leaver		X	X	X
Ian D Lewis		X		
Suzanne Miller	X	X	X	X
Young Ng				X
Ian Neuss			X	X
Vicki Pow	X	X		X
David Robson				X
David Tucker			X	
Neil Williams				X
Margaret Brocx				