

Australian pre-aspiring UNESCO global geoparks announced

The Geotourism Standing Committee was well represented by three members at the biennial Global Geoparks Network conference (GGN 2016) held at Torquay in the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark in September. This event provided the opportunity to announce two Australian 'Pre-aspiring' UNESCO Global Geoparks. One project embraces the Warrumbungles in the Orana Region of New South Wales, and the other the Etheridge area of Far North Queensland – known as 'The Golden Heart of the Gulf'.

The presentations to GGN 2016 from the Australian delegates can be accessed at <http://www.leisuresolutions.com.au/index.php/geotourism-industry-groups/>.

These major geotourism projects are being driven by local government with the support of Regional Development Australia. Steering committees have been established to coordinate the work to formally lodge nominations through the auspices of the Australian Government, at which stage these projects will formally graduate to 'Aspiring' UNESCO Global Geopark status. It is expected that the entire preparation, nomination and decision-making process may take up to three years to complete. The Standing Committee is in the process of establishing technical reference groups to provide expertise in geoscience, geoheritage and mineral heritage. Representatives of the North Queensland and Far North Queensland branches of The AusIMM and the Queensland Museum have expressed strong interest in mineral heritage, with an eye to mining heritage for the Etheridge project. For both projects, it is anticipated that representatives of the two state geological surveys and the National Park Services will also be closely engaged in the nomination process.

Etheridge project

The Pre-aspiring Etheridge Global Geopark embraces the Etheridge Province of the North Australian Craton as described by Ian Withnall and Leonard Cranfield in their 2013 paper. They explained that rocks of the Forsyth Subprovince outcrop in the Georgetown area and constitute a metasedimentary sequence deposited in an intracratonic rift setting with two major Proterozoic folding events affecting the rocks of the Forsyth Subprovince. At least four additional episodes of folding have also been recognised. Withnall and Cranfield also recorded that the rocks of the Forsyth Subprovince host important gold mineralisation that includes the Etheridge Goldfield, the most significant of which is located at the former Kidston mine. This mineralisation is probably genetically related to Siluro-Devonian and Permo-Carboniferous intrusives of

the Pama and Kennedy Provinces. Small, massive stratabound concentrations of iron and base metal sulfides are known from the base of the Etheridge Group within the Forsyth Subprovince. The Etheridge Province also contains significant gemstones, notably agate and topaz, as well as hot spring attractions.

Two geological events in the Cainozoic now feature as iconic geotourism attractions in the region. The more significant is the Undara lava tube system, truly unique in the world based on consideration of age, preservation and lineal extent, as well as the geomorphological expressions within flat-lying sediments at Cobbold Gorge. Both of these landforms, as well as the other Proterozoic and Paleozoic landforms in the area proposed for the Global Geopark, have resulted in diverse landforms with unique biodiversity characteristics including a rich assemblage of birdlife. Committed input from the Ewamian Aboriginal community is sure to identify sites exhibiting rich Indigenous culture.

The Etheridge geotourism project (strongly championed by the Shire Mayor Warren Devlin and Chief Executive Michael Kitzelmann) is coordinated from the Shire Council office in Georgetown, located on the Savannah Way west of Mt Garnet and Mt Surprise. In October, Etheridge Council unveiled the world's first Peace Monument represented by a substantive rock sculpture garden adorned with plaques recognising seven global peace leaders including three Australians, Eddie Mabo, Helen Caldicott and Julian Burnside. This cultural project is also strongly supported by the mayor, who includes gold mining as one of his various business interests.

Members with an interest in contributing to any of the projects mentioned in this article are invited to contact the Geotourism Standing Committee at email: angus@leisuresolutions.com.au.

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Congratulations Greg McNamara

GSA Member Greg McNamara has been appointed to the International Geoscience Education Organisation (IGEO) Council.



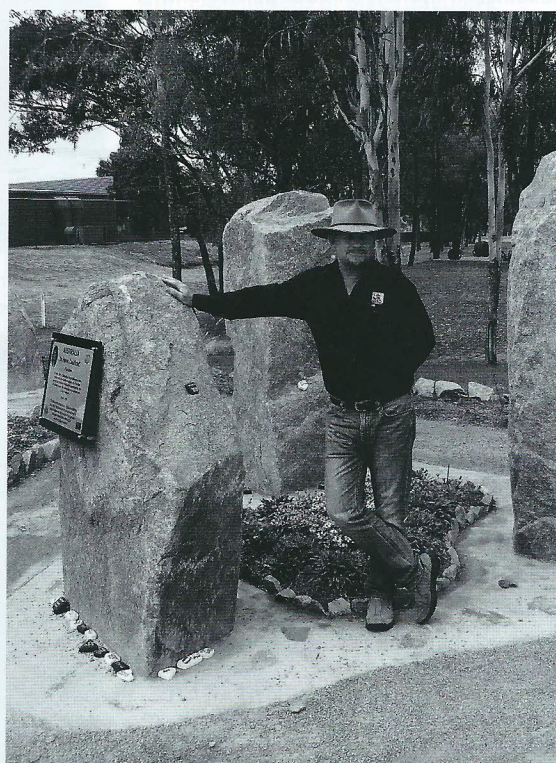
Geotourism Standing Committee at GGN 2016.
[L-R] Ross Dowling, Patrick McKeever (Earth
Sciences Chief, UNESCO), Angus M Robinson and
Young Ng. Image courtesy Young Ng



Cobbold Gorge, near Forsayth in Etheridge Shire, Far North Queensland. Image courtesy
Angus M Robinson



The Archway, Undara lava tubes system, near Mt Surprise in Etheridge Shire, Far North
Queensland. Image courtesy Angus M Robinson



Warren Devlin, Mayor of Etheridge Shire, at the Peace
Monument rock sculpture garden, Georgetown, Far North
Queensland. Image courtesy Angus M Robinson