
As reported in the December 2016 issue of *The Australian Geologist*, the Geotourism Standing Committee was well represented at the biennial Global Geoparks Network conference (GGN 2016) held at Torbay in the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark in September 2016. Nine years earlier, the English Riviera received international recognition for its rich geological, historical and cultural heritage, when it became one of just 57 areas around the world to be endorsed by UNESCO and welcomed into both the European and Global Geopark Networks. Since then, the network has grown and there are currently 120 UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Situated within the stunning, rolling hills of South Devon, Torbay's geology embracing late Palaeozoic sedimentary sequences has created the beautiful coastline of today, which fundamentally links the rich diversity of landscape with wildlife, people and culture. Torbay comprises the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

This 7th International Conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks attracted a large number of presentations, focusing on a variety of themes. These were health and wellbeing through creative and active engagement; engaging communities; education, interpretation and communication; mature geoparks — sharing success and challenges; conservation, science and research; geotourism, cultural tourism, sustainable development and local products; regional and international UNESCO Global Geopark collaborations; and aspiring geoparks. Aspiring geoparks was the theme underpinning a presentation on the topic 'Australian Geotourism — Pathways for Future Development Revealed', in which the following points were highlighted:

- Regional development imperatives (growth and jobs) are now driving geotourism initiatives in Australia.
- Creating geotrails is arguably the easiest way of providing early pathways and support from governments for geotourism activities in Australia.
- Successful roll-out of geotrails will instill confidence in geotourism, providing a future pathway to geopark establishment and development in Australia.
- State, local government and community-backed geopark and geotrail initiatives are now emerging, as evidenced by the announcement of two Australian 'Pre-Aspiring' UNESCO Global Geoparks — one project embracing the Warrumbungles in the Orana Region of New South Wales, and the other embracing the Etheridge area of far north Queensland.

Before attending this conference, these two Australian projects had been graded as 'Aspiring', but on arrival, it was soon learned from GGN colleagues that emerging geopark development interests in the US had adopted the 'Pre-Aspiring' grade to accommodate the stage during which work was needed to formally lodge nominations with UNESCO.

Following lodgement, these projects could be formally labelled as 'Aspiring' UNESCO Global Geoparks during the assessment process, which could take up to 18 months. A decision was made to adopt the same approach for Australia UNESCO Global Geopark development.

At the conference, some other developments in North America were realised. In Canada, the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks (CNCG) was formed in 2009 under the auspices of the Canadian Federation of Earth Sciences — which is similar in structure to the Australian Geoscience Council — to address the need for coordination of UNESCO Global Geopark applications from Canada.

Currently, there are two geoparks in Canada: Stonehammer UNESCO Global Geopark in New Brunswick, and Tumbler Ridge UNESCO Global Geopark in British Columbia. We learned that there are approximately 10 'pre-aspiring' geoparks at varying levels of readiness to submit a formal application to become a geopark, and that the CNCG has established guidelines governing the process by which Canadian communities can aspire to UNESCO Global Geopark status, thereby helping communities improve the applications that ultimately go to UNESCO Headquarters. It is also understood that the CNCG conducts site visits prior to applications being sent to UNESCO and advises on strengths and shortcomings of aspiring geoparks in Canada, as UNESCO rules only allow two nominations from any one country per year.

In the UK, learning about a current aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark — 'The Black Country' project — was of particular interest. This project, located in the heart of the West Midlands west of Birmingham, embraces the areas of Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and the city of Wolverhampton: all part of the rich industrial-revolution heritage based on the region's co-location of coal measures, iron-rich sediments, limestone, fire clays and brick clays. It is hoped that this project will provide inspiration to those communities in
Australia's Hunter Valley with an interest in developing a concept based on the region's rich coal mining heritage. At the conference, the Geologists' Association of the UK (a long-established group comprising both professional and amateur geologists) also introduced the concept of the 'geovillage'. This aims to establish a network of communities across the EU that offer high-quality, focused geotourism, with the ultimate objective of opening up a range of focused and accredited geology-based sites across Europe complementary to the vision and realisation of the geopark network.

The conference included an exhibition area (the 'Geofair') highlighting many geoparks from China, as well as from South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Germany, Finland, Norway, Denmark, the UK and Ireland. Indonesia's display was the most impressive. It featured displays from Batur UNESCO Global Geopark in Bali and Mount Sewu UNESCO Global Geopark in Central Java, as well as Mount Rinjani Geopark in West Nusa Tenggara, Toba Caldera Geopark in North Sumatra, Ciletuh-Pelabuhan Ratu Geopark in West Java, Merangin Geopark in Jambi, Maros-Pangkep Geopark in South Sulawesi and Raja Ampat Geopark in West Papua (currently in the process of being acknowledged as a national geopark). The scale of this marketing should be a salient reminder to Australian tourism interests that Indonesia is becoming a significant 'nature-based' tourist destination located much closer to southeast and north Asia markets than Australia.

Participation by the Australian delegates in this key event not only provided the opportunity to promote Australia's emergence as a potential UNESCO Global Geopark player, but also generated valuable networking opportunities, learnings and insights, all of which will add value to the development of geotourism in Australia. Attendance at this conference was assisted by the provision of a GSA New South Wales Division conference attendance bursary.

ANGUS M ROBINSON
Chair, Geotourism Standing Committee

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34th International Geological Congress travel grant scheme for early-career Australian and New Zealand geoscientists

Australasian rock researchers getting ready to go

Five passionate early-career geoscientists from Australia and New Zealand will share a total travel grant funding pool of more than $22,000 to support their world-class research overseas.

Almost 50 applications were received for the five substantial travel grants, with applicants requesting funds to conduct geoscientific research and attend conferences in places such as Greenland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Chile, Canada, Croatia and Japan. Applications were received from geoscientists within Australia and New Zealand who are members of the geoscience organisations that form the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC).

AGC President Bill Shaw said: "This is the second year of the 34th IGC Travel Grant Scheme and the Australian Geoscience Council and the Australian Academy of Science are pleased to be stimulating exciting research and offering opportunities for young people to extend networks, knowledge and experience as well as collecting good scientific data in the field and in international laboratories. We will be sending these researchers on trips to Canada, the UK, the USA and Italy, and bringing one from New Zealand to Australia".

Professor Sue O'Reilly, who represents the Academy of Science, said: "The applications for this round of the travel grant scheme were inspirational and included requests for support to do groundbreaking research. It is important to provide support for early-career researchers, allowing them to have the opportunity to study rocks in diverse environments and encourage them to make important contributions to the advancement of geoscientific knowledge".

The winners will be travelling the world this year collecting data and doing experiments in state-of-the-art laboratories. At various conferences, they will be informing international attendees about their progress and about the exciting new discoveries they have made in their current research, while developing opportunities for future collaboration.

The Travel Grants have been made possible through a trust fund, administered by AGC and the Academy, set up after the 34th International Geological Congress in Brisbane in August 2012.

For more information, contact AGC President Bill Shaw on 0438 010 851 or email president@agc.org.au.