

# Building momentum in Australia

**S**outh Australia provided two opportunities in 2017 to promote the benefits of geotourism to regional development. With the Australian Geoscience Convention being held in Adelaide in October 2018, a real opportunity has now been created to build momentum for geotourism development.

At the opening of the Global Eco conference held on 27 November 2017 in Adelaide, the SA Minister for Sustainability, Environment & Conservation, the Hon Ian Hunter MLC, commented on the potential of geotourism development for the state.

"Geotourism is (also) an emerging market that South Australia is especially well placed to cater for, with megafauna fossils at the World Heritage Naracoorte Caves, evidence of the world's earliest animals in the Flinders Ranges, and stunning geological formations in parks like the Gawler Ranges, Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges, and the ice-age gem of Hallett Cove right on Adelaide's doorstep," he said.

Geotourism workshops featured at both the Global Eco conference and the SEGRA 2017 conference held at Port Augusta in late October, with the latter event attended by the Hon Geoff

Brock MP, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Local Government. Following a representation to the Minister at this conference, he subsequently advised that the information documentation made available at the conference, and describing the major industrial corridor through the Upper Spencer Gulf Region, was developed as a tool to highlight infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, mining and other industries in an area of economic growth, and to provide a focus for investment opportunity. He agreed that the focus on nature, landscape, heritage and culture as key focal points for tourism development implies a geotourism approach.

Geotourism has also been reviewed as part of the preparation of the World Heritage nomination for the Flinders Ranges, initiated at the first 'Experts Workshop' held in August 2016. The subsequent Preliminary Statement of Values Report that was prepared is now being subject to geoscience peer review in a follow-up workshop scheduled for February 2018. Information about this project was also presented at SEGRA 2017 by Justin Holmes of the SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources.



Entrance to the massive Zhijindong Cave system, Zhijindong Cave UNESCO Global Geopark. Image courtesy Angus M Robinson





Castle Rock, Shire of Etheridge, Far North Queensland. Image courtesy Savannah Guides Network

At both SEGRA 2017 and Global Eco 2017, Geotourism Standing Committee member and now Chair of the SA Division Geotourism Sub Committee, Ian Lewis, presented his concept about the development of a major geotrail extending from Kangaroo Island, through the Fleurieu Peninsula, Hallett Cove, Burra, the Ikara Flinders Ranges National Park, incorporating the Brachina George Geotrail, and ending in Arkaroola (<http://bit.ly/2DtjQ2h>). A presentation at Global Eco 2017 on developing opportunities for regional fossil tourism and education by Liz Reed, Research Fellow of The University of Adelaide, completed the SA coverage.

WA was well covered by a presentation from Standing Committee member, Alan Briggs, who spoke about driving rural recovery with geotourism in the state's wheatbelt region. Alan, who is also the inaugural Chair of Geoparks WA, is organising a 'Geotourism and Geoparks' workshop in Perth on 14 May 2018. David Williamson presented on the challenges and opportunities facing the Bungle Bungles in the Purnululu National Park of the Kimberley National Landscape.

Charles Davidson, the CEO and Founder of Peninsula Hot Springs in Victoria, informed Global Eco delegates about the geotourism potential of the numerous hot springs sites throughout Australia.

Standing Committee member, Dr Young Ng, delivered two comprehensive presentations about Chinese geotourism and geoparks, particularly relating to economic benefit considerations.

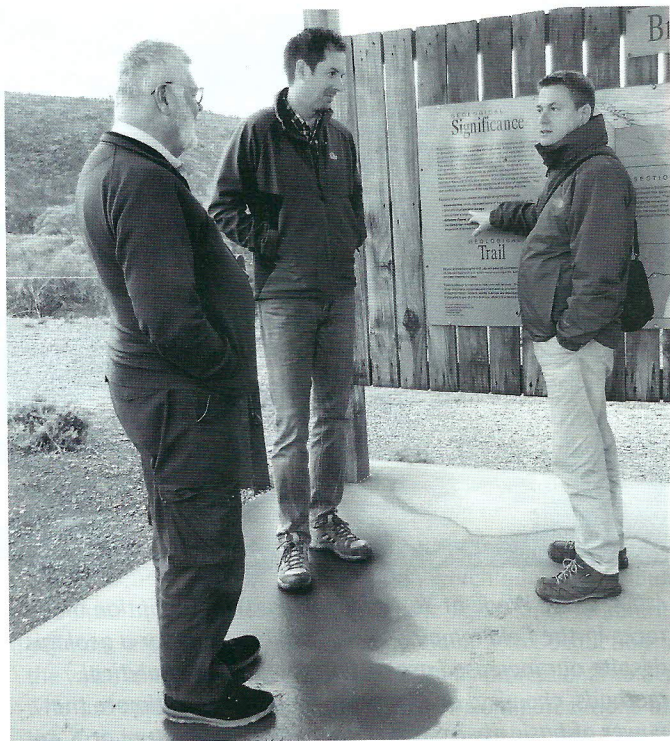
All presentations from the geotourism workshops of these two events can be seen at <http://bit.ly/2D00xwV>.

The China connection continues to play a significant role in the work of the Geotourism Standing Committee. On 9 December 2017, a historic Memorandum of Cooperation embracing a 'sister park' arrangement was signed between the Zhijindong Cave UNESCO Global Geopark and the Jenolan Karst Conservation Reserve. The Reserve's Administrator, Bob Conroy, also a member of the GSA Geotourism Standing Committee, executed this agreement during his visit to the spectacular karst landscape in Guizhou Province in southwest China. Bob has advised that his organisation looks forward to sharing information and management practices, receiving delegations and greater numbers of visitors from China and negotiating possible staff exchanges. Representing the Standing Committee, Bob Conroy and Dr Young Ng also attended the National Meeting of Tourism Earth Science and Geopark Research Sub Committee of the Geological Society of China.

Meanwhile, back in Far North Queensland, efforts over the past 12 months had focused on developing an application for an UNESCO Global Geopark with an official boundary that embraced the whole of the Shire of Etheridge. However, community opposition — particularly from graziers — was essentially predicated on a number of aspects of this proposal.

Having regard to Council's resulting decision in July not to proceed with an UNESCO application, Council was provided with three alternative strategies that took into account these stated community concerns, but at the same recognising that Council was intent on establishing a major internationally recognised, geotourism destination that could stand alongside the other two major destinations of Far North Queensland — the Great Barrier





June 2016 inspection of Brachina Gorge Geotrail by (L to R): Ian Lewis (Geotourism Standing Committee), Jason Irving (Manager, Protected Areas, SA Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources) and Patrick McKeever (Chief of Earth Sciences and Geohazard Risk Reduction Section, UNESCO). Image courtesy Angus M Robinson

Reef World Heritage Area and the Daintree World Heritage Area within the designated Wet Tropics National Landscape area. The boundaries of the national landscape also embrace much of the eastern part of the Shire including Einasleigh and the Undara Volcanic National Park, which is located to the east of Mt Surprise.

All of these options recognised that a 'geotourism' area could be selected that took account of 'georegional' characteristics based on geological and mining heritage and embraced principles that could serve to pre-qualify the area for a UNESCO application at some future time – in other words, meeting the designated requirements of a 'defacto' geopark.

Etheridge Shire Council is now supporting development of a major geotourism initiative within the Shire of Etheridge, which captures the aspirations of the pre-existing 'Unearth Etheridge' tourism strategy, providing additional natural and cultural heritage content. Through collaboration with other local government areas (LGAs), they are also supporting the establishment of strong geotrail linkages with geotourism attractions outside the Shire, eg, Chillagoe, Croydon, 40 Mile Scrub National Park, Mt Garnet/Herberton/Irvinebank townships, and the Dinosaur Trail and Flinders Discovery Centre of Western Queensland. Further details about this strategy can be obtained at <http://bit.ly/2BfAnC2>.

In the meantime, several geotrail projects are being developed and/or proposed in other areas of Western and Far North Queensland, which includes principally a reactivated and pre-existing 'Dig the Tropics' project. The developers intend to create a practical, industry-ready tour program that should be of

interest to the international gem and mineral audience, as well as amateur geologists and the travelling public at large. The transect basically follows the Tropic of Capricorn from Rockhampton to Winton.

Over a period of 14 days, the tour covers the following attractions:

- the Capricorn Caves and coastal formations
- Mount Hay and its unique 'thunder eggs' and their formation
- Carnarvon Gorge and its important location as a significant geological boundary, as well as indigenous links
- Central Queensland Gemfields – sapphires, rubies and mining operations
- Longreach and its museum attractions, outback history and stories
- Winton and the Age of Dinosaurs Museum and the Lark Quarry Dinosaur Trackways
- the landscape west of Winton and outback stations
- boulder opals at Opalton, as well as showcasing the true Australian outback.

The developers believe that this transect delivers an impressive cross-section of Australian geology, landscape, fauna/flora and culture.

In NSW, the Warrumbungle Pre-Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark project embraces three LGAs, at the core of which is the Warrumbungle National Park. The future direction of this project is currently subject to further discussions with the NSW State Government relating to the scope and size of the project, as well as the outcome of the deliberations currently being undertaken under the direction of Geoscience Australia. At its last meeting on 13 November, the project steering committee decided to extend the time for seeking government and community support over a further two years before a UNESCO Global Geopark nomination could be lodged.

Around the rest of Australia, various geotrail projects are progressing in places such as the West Coast of Tasmania, Kanawinka (Western Victoria), Port Macquarie (New South Wales), the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, and the John Forrest National Park Geotrail in Western Australia, with the latter project being ably championed by Standing Committee member, Mike Freeman. Recently, Eurobodalla Shire Council on the NSW South Coast announced its intention to assess the potential of a Global Geopark nomination over parts of the LGA under its administration.

All in all, 2018 is shaping up to be another big year for geotourism, particularly highlighted as a key session of the Australian Geoscience Council Convention, and featuring strongly in SEGRA 2018 and Global Eco 2018, both events being convened in Far North Queensland.

GSA members are invited to contact me if they are interested in participating in or contributing to any of these reported activities.

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