

Geotourism

said in my last TAG article that *"like the rollercoasters on Sentosa Island in Singapore, I suspect the (geotourism) ride will be a little bumpy, sometimes a little scary, but one hell of a rush!"*

Well, it certainly has been just that since I last wrote. There is a lot to cover in this update and some very exciting opportunities ahead.

The Geotourism Standing Committee (GTSC) of the GSA met again on 24 September for its first meeting since November 2018 and the resignation from the committee of former Chair, Angus Robinson. For my part, it was wonderful to hear again of the great work being undertaken around Australia and across Asia. Highlights from the time between meetings include:

- The NEW Furneaux Geotrail on Flinders Island has been established, supported by the Tasmanian Government. Congratulations to those involved in its creation and its addition to the state's existing geotrails. Further information about the Furneaux Geotrail is available at furneauxgeotrail.flinders.tas.gov.au.
- Two NEW geotourism resources from members of the GTSC. *The Handbook of Geotourism* edited by Ross Dowling and David Newsome was released in December 2018 and the *Geotourism Dictionary* by Young Ng, A Chen, E Zhang and M Tian is expected in October 2019. Congratulations to both Ross and Young.

In his new capacity within the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC), Angus also provided the GTSC with an update on the National Geotourism Strategy (NGS) and advised he is awaiting comment from critical stakeholders. On behalf of the GTSC, I would like to thank Angus for his enthusiastic contribution and efforts in guiding the committee during his tenure and in promoting geotourism across Australia. I know the NGS — when released — will be an important part of the geotourism paradigm to shape, guide and align future initiatives.

In my first 'official' capacity since taking on the role of Chair of the GTSC, I presented at the Sustainable Economic Development of Regional Australia (SEGRA) conference in Cobram-Barooga in regional NSW. I was very impressed with SEGRA and the quality, breadth and diversity of the presentations, the implications of those subjects on regional and remote Australia. Tourism — particularly geotourism — is specifically mentioned as one of the five key drivers of economic growth in regional and rural Australia in its recent post-conference Communique. More information about SEGRA and its objectives can be found at segra.com.au.

The concurrent Tourism and Geotourism sessions in SEGRA were facilitated by Angus Robinson and included presentations by him on behalf of the Australia Geoscience Council (AGC), the Geological Survey of NSW and the Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia. My talk covered geoheritage and geotourism in the NT and outlined concerns, opportunities and options in developing a viable geotourism industry in the territory.



Hidden facets of history — Archean aged outcrops on the way to Litchfield National Park. Image courtesy Mark Asendorf

Unlike other states in Australia, the NT is very much at the beginning of its geotourism journey and can learn from the lessons of others. It also has unique opportunities and multiple challenges to overcome due to its location, proximity to Asian capitals, small population base, vast tracts of relatively untouched land, limited (but developing) transportation and logistics infrastructure, and of course, its spectacular scenery.

The conference presentations are available on the SEGRA website, and my presentation can also be obtained from www.gsa.org.au/Public/Geotourism/Presentations.aspx.

An interactive 'story-map' version is available at arcg.is/11DTja.

I have a couple of thank yous to make. Firstly, to the NT Geological Survey for releasing me for the week during a busy period; to Angus Robinson for his hospitality, company and for driving to the SEGRA Conference and back; and to the SEGRA working committee for putting on such a well-planned, thought-provoking and organised conference.

At a local level, a lot has been happening in the NT since I returned from SEGRA.

I have met with several key stakeholders in Darwin to progress both geotourism and geoheritage discussions. While these overlap, they have very different drivers, stakeholders and factors for consideration. As detailed in my SEGRA presentation, there has not been much in the way of geoheritage documentation in the NT since 1988, and most of that information has been compiled and sourced from much older sources.

It was then perhaps fortunate that the August edition of *AJES* was dedicated to geoheritage and geoconservation efforts in Australia and informed some of the discussions mentioned above. I must congratulate M Brocx, V Semeniuk and K Meney for their

editorial efforts in compiling the volume. I read it with great interest and encourage other GSA members with similar interests to get their hands on a copy.

I also managed to check out one of the sites in Palmerston that I had assessed as 'at risk' in late September. A geologist friend confirmed the site had degraded to the point at which any original value it may have had, had been lost. It was a timely reminder that if we don't protect important geological sites they will likely be lost, unless prevailing planning and development paradigms change.

It is great to hear and learn of the many activities and projects being undertaken by organisations and individuals around the NT. I have learnt of two activities in Central Australia relating to the iconic Desert Park and the Larapinta Trail; my discussions with one of the local councils could potentially lead to a new local geotrail; and three geotourism-related suggestions were submitted on behalf of GSA in a recent 'Transforming Public Spaces' challenge. Refer to the website for details: tinyurl.com/TransformingPublicSpaces.

Overall it has been a very busy September, and October is shaping up to be similar. Geotourism is an emerging, dynamic and exciting space, and I encourage GSA members around the country with interests in geotourism to get in touch with their state rep or myself. Contact details are on the Geotourism page of the GSA website. I also advise of the following:

"The geotourism movement may be a multitude of quiet voices, or it may track faster, as more individuals and organisations see the potential".

MARK ASENDORF

Chair, Geotourism Standing Committee

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