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Geoparks WA Reflections – March 2023

As we move forward with establishing geoparks in Western Australia, there is also ongoing activity in the Eastern States. The recent Thrive 2030 Austrade publication (<https://www.austrade.gov.au/news/publications/thrive-2030-strategy>) outlined eastern two Georegions that were aspiring towards Global Geopark status with UNESCO as well as our own Murchison Georegion.

It is a shame then to recent informal advice that the Government Geological Surveys agencies are advocating *against* geoparks in Australia. The informal advice is that they are concerned the community might use the term “park” as a means of lobbying against mining. My PhD focussed on stakeholder perceptions about geoparks, and the research showed this concern raised by Geological Surveys agencies was just that, purely perceptions. Geoparks are about sustainable regional development driven by local communities. Geoparks by necessity must employ and engage with geologists and mining heritage. They are an integral part of a geopark. So, we will continue to advocate for geoparks with the Australian Geoparks Network (<https://australiangeoparksnetwork.org/>) and work with local communities to establish them. Currently Geoparks WA is engaging with four local communities.

Murchison Georegion (with a view towards UNESCO Global Geopark status) is currently working its way to incorporation. This is the only legal UNESCO implication about becoming a geopark. All other laws and regulation applicable by the host Nation/State apply. Murchison has already published geosite maps and launched an app. There are displays of varying nature across the seven local government authorities that continue to work together and fund the pathway to becoming a geopark. Mid West Development Commission continues to support the development of the geopark through geotourism and geo-drives. Check their website (<https://murchisongeoregion.com/>).

Nannup Geopark have already become an incorporated constituted body and are actively working towards establishing an interpretative facility. The geopark management team, who are an active and diverse group of talented and skilled people, have provided a well-received presentation to their local LGA council. As a result, they now have access to an area of land for the interpretative facility and are working towards obtaining funding for the project. The team have developed an App – Experience Nannup – and have several walking trails around Nannup.

Binjareb-Peel geopark is also progressing well with the development of a drive geotrail to take in the hero geosites around the region. Initially at least 10 geosites will be included complete with QR codes for further information about each site. Indicator signs will be installed at each geosite and a map detailing geosites and geodrive route will be available at the Mandurah Tourist office as well as online. The geopark is led by a dynamic couple and supported by the Peel Development Commission and Geoparks WA.

Geoparks WA has been working with Mid West Development Commission to establish a geo-drive from Fremantle (the mouth of the Swan River) to Kalbarri (the mouth of the Murchison River). While each river mouth has an exiting story to be told, the route north from Fremantle takes in a range of coastal geological changes and views enabling the story of the Coastal



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Plains to be explained to travellers. Three types of travellers were identified for the geo-drive; Destination travellers (drive in one day between the two destinations (Metro to Kalbarri) with one to two rest stops with conveniences), Leisure travellers (those taking time to travel and experience destinations such as Cervantes and Jurien) and Geotourists (those looking for more about geology). Overall, 40 potential geosites were observed with 30 being assessed using a Geosite Rapid Assessment Model for their suitability. Several were determined as unsuitable for safety reasons such as access off Oceanic Drive or having no facilities. Some excluded areas might become available as further road works are carried out in the future. Geotrails are mostly developed along existing tourist routes so little by way of infrastructure is required other than signage. Finally, 18 geosites have been identified as having potential to be developed in a way that will provide information to travellers about the surrounding geology and landscape. This will also create a safer drive for travellers as they take a break, relax, learn and then continue on their way.

Kellerberrin Cultural Arts project

The Kellerberrin cultural Arts project has wound up with exciting digital works having been created by Ben Beeton and Mali Moir. Ben and Mali were previously working on the Murchison Augmented Reality art works installed at Mount Magnet. Ben and Auntie Carol Pettersen presented a short talk and video at the Astro Rocks Festival in 2020. It is brilliant (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6jcS2Qhzss>). Ben and Mali drew together experts who identified endemic fauna and flora that both then used their creative talents to draw images for the Augmented Reality display. We worked with the Shire office and CRC to engage a local artist to provide samples of work relating to the geology, landscape, fauna and flora. Again, a brilliant outcome was achieved. The works were funded by Regional Arts WA.

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Ben's website is (<https://sciart.com.au/>)The project can be viewed here (<https://sciart.com.au/kellerberrin-genestreams-sculpture/>). Ben is arranging for another website to host the augmented reality display and I will bring that to you when it is available.

So, still lots happening in WA. Happy Easter.

Dr Alan Briggs
President – Geoparks WA