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Australian Geoparks Network and Geoparks WA Reflections December 2023

Well, as we enter the seasons of Christmas and New Year, it is timely to reflect a little on what has taken place during 2023.

Western Australia

Travel has excluded me from many direct-action projects however, here in Western Australia, we have committed communities working away on geopark projects and more communities seeking information about establishing them in their patches.

I have previously recognised the great work being done by Nannup WA Geopark Inc. and have just recently been informed the group has received Nannup Council approval for the design of their interpretative centre. It will be amazing as an attraction and education centre for visitors including school children. 2024 is going to be an exciting year for Nannup as they implement their grant received from the South West Development Commission. But wait, there is more. The Nannup team have identified a further outcrop of Bunbury Basalt near Nannup. Further exploration is under way to see how this finding can be added to the geo-attractions already available in Nannup.

Binjareb-Peel Geopark Inc also has been working away on a geodrive trail that will include ten geosites complete with interpretative signage that is currently being prepared with funding through the Peel Development Commission. Next year will also be exciting as they commence a community engagement strategy that has been drafted, including establishing a formal management committee for the geopark. And the booklet prepared by local enthusiasts for the geopark is in demand and just maybe a coffee table style publication can be released.

Wanneroo/Joondalup continue to work through the Local Government Authority processes to determine their pathway and approval processes. The planning stages have been completed and in 2024 will see a community process initiated. We at Geoparks WA are working closely with the team.

The Murchison Georegion and aspiring Geopark is finalising its constitution for incorporation and will likely to be completed next year. Consideration by the working group is being given to the boundary of the geopark. Will it be the entire georegion or a selected part? If it is all the georegion it will be the biggest geopark in the World ... just saying!

During this year, as mentioned above, Geoparks WA has received several requests for information and assistance on establishing geoparks in their respective areas. For reasons of confidentiality and previous experiences, I won't mention names but 2024 is going to be made even more exciting in Western Australia.

On the National Stage

The National Geotourism Strategy, into which both the Australian Geoparks Network (AGN) and Geoparks WA have contributed, was launched by the Australian Geoscience Council (AGC) on the 7th April 2021. The strategy sets out seven principles to encourage geotourism and is developing an AGC process for geopark approval.

A further aspect of the strategy is to engender international partnerships and Dr Young Ng has arranged a conference across Indonesia and Australia. The title is 5TH GEOTOURISM FESTIVAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (GEOFEST) 2024 is an Australia-Indonesia Geotourism Collaboration Project. The conference is to be held commencing in Java and Lombok (1-6 July 2024) with a final conference in Sydney (18 July 2024) with the theme of “The Volcano as a World Class Sustainable Geotourism Destination”. For information check LinkedIn.

Also on the East Coast, two georegions are being developed. While Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park and Northern Beaches coastline of New South Wales and Glen Innes Highlands region have been presented as georegions both are being nominated as future UNESCO Global Geoparks. These, along with the Murchison Georegion were cited as examples of tourism growth in the Austrade “Thrive 2023” publication. This document is available online.

Internationally

The 10th International Conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks was planned to be held from 7th to 11th September 2023 and was being organized by M’Goun UNESCO Global Geopark, Morocco. Unfortunately, the conference was rudely interrupted by a nighttime earthquake following the first day of the conference. AGN board member, Professor Patrick James was in attendance. His presentation didn’t make it to the podium, but we have uploaded it to the AGN website.

The Earth is on the move. First Morocco, then my own experience in Sanur (Bali, Indonesia) and now Iceland.

Iceland’s Reykjanes Geopark secured the next international conference of European Geoparks Network (EGN), which will be held at the beginning of October 2024 in Hljómahöll. It is estimated that up to 600 people will attend the conference. Well, that was before the volcano erupted! I visited the geopark earlier this year and can attest to the volcanic activity taking place. If the volcano settles down which is unlikely, a visit to Iceland would be amazing with beautiful landscapes created by volcanic activity over the past centuries.

All this activity makes our championships for geoparks even more essential for both public safety and for education. Stay safe.

Have a great festive season, Merry Christmas and we will see you in the New Year.

Cheers

Dr Alan Briggs

President – Geoparks WA

Acting Chair – Australian Geoparks Network