



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

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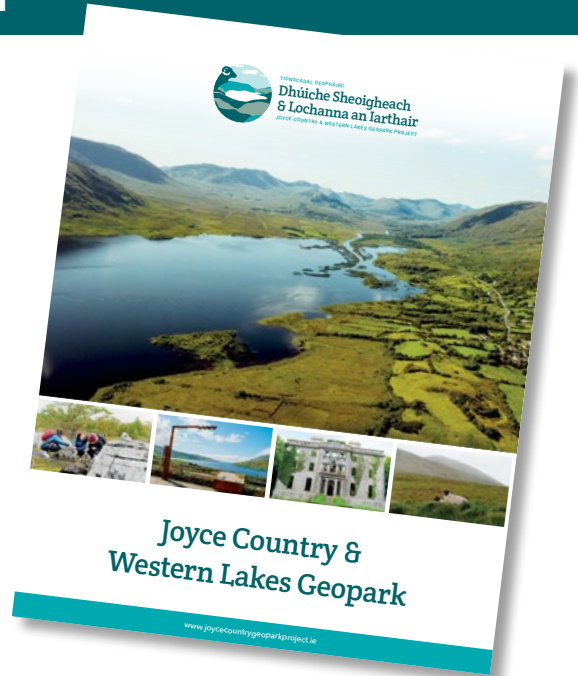
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Application submitted to UNESCO for Global Geopark status

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES
GEOPARK EDGING CLOSER TO THE DREAM

Our BIG news is we have submitted our application to the UNESCO Global Geoparks Secretariat for Global Geopark status. The 50-page document, lodged on 30 November, is the outcome of two years of intensive work on the ground among the communities and businesses of our geopark region. Even more ... it is the culmination of 10 years of tremendous voluntary effort, plus other more recent funding and support resources from Project Ireland 2040 and collaborating partners Geological Survey Ireland, Údarás na

Gaeltachta, Galway and Mayo County Councils, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, and the cross-community voluntary group JCWL GeoEnterprise. The application will be assessed around mid 2022, and the outcome will be known around spring/summer 2023. In the meantime, we function as an aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark, supporting further development of sustainable tourism, business, jobs and education. Keep up to date through www.joycecountrygeopark.ie and @JCWLGeopark.



Connecting to the International Appalachian Trail

NEW GEOTRAIL INFO COMING TO MÁM ÉAN
ON THE WESTERN WAY

Joyce Country and Western Lakes GeoEnterprise has been awarded a Geoheritage Grant Scheme for 2021-2022. This Geological Survey Ireland funding will go to develop a new geotrail on the Mám Éan section of the Western Way which links the Maam and Inagh valleys. Beyond the traditional pilgrimage site and the spectacular views, this section allows close viewing of Dalradian metamorphic rock outcrops (quartzite, schist and marble). Here, there's evidence of the complex folding and overturning of strata with an excellent example of a folding structure at the natural amphitheatre at the col.

The geotrail will be developed in partnership with Forum Connemara and the local Rural



Recreational Officer, and will consist of two to three panels and info posts, greatly adding to the walking experience. This new geotrail will then be a focal point to integrate the whole of the Western Way to the International Appalachian Trail (IAT). The IAT spans both sides of the Atlantic and highlights commonalities of the ancient Caledonian mountain range along walking routes. This new geotrail, to be delivered next summer, will broaden the awareness and appeal of geology, complement the geopark signage mentioned above, and strengthen the geological connections to North America, Greenland, Scotland and Norway for the local communities. A new Ulster phase of the IAT has just been launched, indicating the great potential such a partnership can have.



Communities and consultations including at farmers' marts

WE'VE BEEN OUT AND ABOUT MEETING YOU

Since late August we've been on the go meeting and presenting to nearly all the communities in our geopark region (less than a handful still to meet in Q1 2022). It was all going well ... until infections rose and the Covid Omicron variant came along so we reverted to zoom meetings. We were able to give each community council / coiste pobail an update on geopark progress on all actions and especially towards submitting the application for UNESCO Global Geopark status. Even more importantly, we got good feedback about what your communities have been doing, your plans and how you might all benefit from Global Geopark status. You may have also seen us at Maam Cross and Ballinrobe marts where there was good engagement with farmers and livestock traders. The meetings were a great opportunity to distribute more of our A5 flyers on 'what is/isn't does/doesn't will/won't ever be' a geopark, which can also be seen on our website here .



Tour guide training success

A NEW COHORT OF TRAINED GUIDES NOW AVAILABLE

As the geopark region grows in confidence about the future, a new group of 17 regional tour guides have just completed training as guides for the whole of Connacht. The guides will soon receive Fáilte Ireland badges, having successfully completed the course funded by the Geopark Project, delivered by Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre and certified to QFI level 6 standard.

Participants came from all parts of the Geopark region with backgrounds in farming, hospitality

and visitor attractions. Some signed on to the training programme with an idea of a career change, buoyed with the possibilities of what UNESCO Global Geopark status might bring. All trainees who presented for assessment in December were successful. Many of these guides will be looking for new opportunities in the geopark region from 2022 onwards. Those available will have the opportunity to be listed on the geopark website. This new guiding resource adds greatly to the human resources available to boost the visitor footfall, jobs and revenues in our fascinating geopark landscape.

Training for our business and community networks

EFFECTIVE NETWORKING AND USE OF ONLINE AND SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to training of new regional tour guides, other important skills training was provided by this geopark project during 2021. This included: i) effective social media for existing users; ii) market differentiation, cross selling and referrals in a business network and to improve collaboration; iii) social and digital

media optimisation for more effective marketing; iv) the geopark ambassador course, providing locals with a basic understanding of the significance of the region's geological heritage and be able to convey it to visitors using skills and tools to utilise the geopark for marketing; and v) video production and promotion.



Networking and sharing ideas key to successful geoparks

IRISH GEOPARKS FORUM 2021 & 9TH INTERNATIONAL UGG CONFERENCE JEJU ISLAND

Our geopark team's networking efforts continued recently with dual presentations. The Irish Geoparks Forum, held this year on 7th December, is an annual gathering of established and potential UNESCO Global Geoparks in Ireland north and south. It's open to public registration, with each region presenting activities of the past year or specific thematic actions. This year's theme was Climate Change: past, present and future. It highlighted how the various geoparks present evidence for climate change in their rock records and compare it to the current anthropogenic climate change. Detail was also provided on regional actions and plans on mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

The other large online event this year was the 9th International conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGG) organised by Jeju Island UGG in South Korea. Presentations were made from many of the established and aspiring UGGs in the world covering nine scientific sessions. Our presentation was on the development of the Joyce Country and Western Lakes aspiring Global Geopark and outlook for the future. There are now about 160 established UGGs in 44 countries worldwide.

And finally... Christmas and New Year wishes



This time last year we hoped (or thought), that with the vaccine roll-out getting under way we might be out of the woods and maybe even clear of Covid-19 danger. It hasn't turned out that way. We all still need to be careful to follow the public health guidance and make good use of available support schemes. While Christmas for most won't be like it used to be, people are very resilient, science and technology are amazing and we will get through this pandemic and other challenges including climate

change. We're optimistic that the considerable efforts of this Geopark Project during 2020-2021 and the plans and actions of our partners going forward will help the families, communities and businesses in this geopark region to work together and look ahead optimistically for a bright future. Keep up to date by following us on facebook, Instagram and Twitter @JCWLGeopark and through our website www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie
Most of all, Merry Christmas and happy New Year to all.



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