



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

A new Geopark management structure And a management master plan for the road ahead

As we are now in a new development phase in Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark, there's also a new management structure taking shape, though with similar partners. Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo (CDS) is now the Geopark Host, supported by Údarás na Gaeltachta. This reflects the fact that a sizeable portion of the geopark is Gaeltacht. Údarás is part of what's called the Funders Group, also including Galway and Mayo County Councils, and Geological Survey Ireland. The latter was lead agency during the 2020-2021 geopark period when development of the geopark idea gathered pace. (Main financial contributors in the 2020-2021 geopark project were Ireland 2040 (RRDF fund), Geological Survey Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta.)

Going forward, a Coiste Treorach (steering group) now oversees the work plan implementation and finance. CDS, Joyce Country and Western Lakes GeoEnterprise (the cross-community voluntary group) and the three geopark staff form the more hands-on Operational Management Group. Staff include geologist Dr Benjamin Thébaudeau, tourism officer Dominic Ó Moráin (both engaged since Jan 2022), and recently re-appointed manager Michael Hegarty (from Sept 2022). A new management master plan through to 2028 is being shared with stakeholders for feedback, including key performance indicators to assist monitoring progress towards goals. Two offices are servicing the Geopark – Tourmakeady (same as for 2020-21, next to playground) and CDS at Corr na Móna.

Stay up to date through the geopark website www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie and social media / facebook Twitter and Instagram @JCWLGeopark



Comharchumann
Dhúiche
Sheoigheach Teo.

Application for UNESCO Global Geopark status

Working to an adjusted timeline

In November 2021, Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark

submitted an application to be assessed as a UNESCO Global Geopark. This quality document included expectations that the new management body would be in place and appropriately equipped, in time for assessment by UNESCO during 2022. It was also anticipated appropriate signage would be procured and installed in the first half of this year. While we were confident these two issues would be addressed in time, this has not been the case.

Therefore, in consultation with the Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee the application was withdrawn in early September – but with the full intention to re-apply this year by the annual 30th November deadline. It's likely the assessment by UNESCO will now take place sometime during 2023 (instead of 2022). We are confident the two issues mentioned above will be resolved by the end of 2022, particularly as the partners remain very supportive of the geopark development and its great potential to create jobs, grow business, sustain and enhance communities and expand income opportunities.



Communities event, Sat 12th Nov 10am-1pm, Ballinrobe

SAVE the DATE!

The geopark wants to help you in your 20 communities to develop, and to be even more attractive places to live and work, or visit. To kick off this support, we're hosting a Geopark Communities Network event in Ballinrobe for 3 hours on Saturday 12 November from 10 until 1pm.

We'll open by giving a brief update about the geopark plans, and we'll ask for feedback on the draft Management Plan. That's followed by a short presentation on energy saving and renewable options – ideas to deal with the higher energy costs hitting us these days. Dr Orla Nic Suibhne, a Sustainable Energy Community Mentor for Mayo and Galway (a Sustainable Energy Authority Ireland initiative) has great info on available supports, including setting up Sustainable Energy Community groups, retrofitting, how to identify service providers, and options for renewable energy production, etc.

The final session will be for your community council representatives to share info on recent and planned developments, and to tell us what your council needs are which the geopark might be able to help with. Side tables will have people from the likes of the Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs), the LEADER companies, county councils and Údarás na Gaeltachta on what they can offer communities. Two from each community is best. More detail to follow soon.

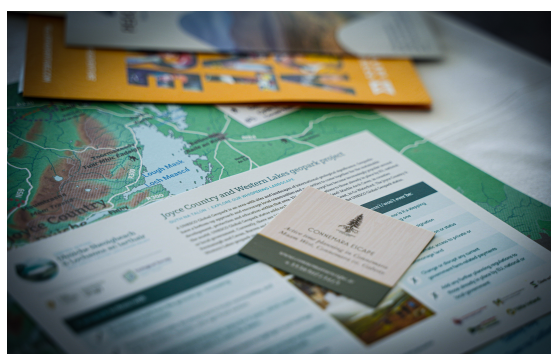


Frozen ...

... but February's business network event a warm success

Despite an overnight cold snap, over 40 tourism businesses turned out at The Lodge at Ashford on 24 February 2022 for our geopark networking event. It took the form of "speed-dating" - connecting hospitality providers with visitor attractions and activity businesses, and promoting cross-referencing with other businesses in the entire geopark region of 1560 km².

This was our first in-person event of the year run by the Geopark. Participants were welcomed by Patricia Walsh, who is chair of the Geopark's voluntary representative group Joyce Country and Western lakes GeoEnterprise. The event was a great success, with enthusiastic interaction between businesses across the Geopark region working together to develop saleable packages and the development of a referral system between business interests. The business network charter was aired, and a follow-up media pack was made available for the network members, containing logos, pictures, links and descriptive text.



Geopark signage is coming

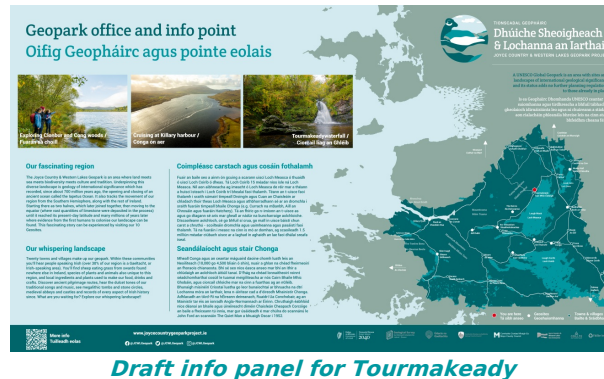
Bringing much-needed visibility

Signage was planned during the 2020-2021 geopark project but there have been delays. The good news is the signage funds are ring-fenced and things are starting to move. Geoparks need to display a physical presence in their communities and at geosites (sites of geological and/or cultural significance). The signage plan includes the production of 11 information panels at our geosites, each one gives summary information and local heritage detail, with links for more on the

geopark website <http://www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie/>

There will also be simple bilingual road signs at entry points to the geopark region and in all our 20 geopark communities. Indoor signs for selected business network members and at community halls are also in the plan. These signs will showcase the regional geological map and a more local geological map with further information on other aspects of local heritage to inform visitors and community residents alike.

The signage plan has already been agreed by the 2020-2021 steering committee and is being procured by Geological Survey Ireland in consultation with Galway and Mayo County Councils.



Mám Éan Geotrail signage and International Appalachian Trail linkage

Our geological links to North America

Joyce Country and Western Lakes GeoEnterprise has been awarded funds from Geological Survey Ireland to develop a geotrail with information panels on the Mám Éan section of the Western Way, between the Maam Valley and the Inagh Valley. Work started earlier in 2022 and is now well advanced, in partnership with the County Galway Rural Recreation Officer, National Parks and Wildlife Services and the local communities of Maam and Recess. Information panels have been drafted and production procurement is underway. Launch of the geotrail is planned later on in 2022.

The Geotrail showcases the wonderful example of metamorphic rocks that hikers walk over on this trail and highlights the geological connections of these rocks with North America. In fact, these strong links are being researched further so as to incorporate the Western Way into the [International Appalachian Trail \(IAT\)](#). This idea was presented at our geopark conference in June 2021 by Don Hudson from Maine, USA (the video recording of his presentation and all others from our conference are available on our website and our [YouTube channel](#)).



Aerial view of Mám Éan looking to the South East

Schools' visits programme

There's great education interest in this region

One of the main activities of the geopark geologist hampered by the pandemic restrictions was school visits. The good news is these have been taking place again. In total 18 primary schools and 3 secondary schools were visited from February to May, mostly located in the geopark region but with some in the larger surrounding towns like Westport, Claremorris, Clifden or Galway city. These visits focus on the diversity of rocks in the region and the stories they hold – offered free for 3rd to 6th classes with some younger classes visited as well as field visits organised. These visits are free and offered every year and can be focused on specific parts of the curriculum as required by the teachers.

A 2-day field visit of 2nd year Earth and Ocean Sciences students from NUI Galway took place in early April facilitated by the geopark, linking with local landowners, businesses and communities. Despite the weather, this was a great success, proving that so much of the field teaching aspect of university geology courses in Ireland can be undertaken in our Geopark region. Further field visits have taken place in the summer with other 3rd level institutions, some from as far afield as Notre Dame University in Indiana and William and Mary University in Virginia, both in the USA. A document for university lecturers in Ireland showcasing the wider geopark region and the Finny/Kilbride peninsula in particular for such field activities has been drafted and will be circulated very soon.



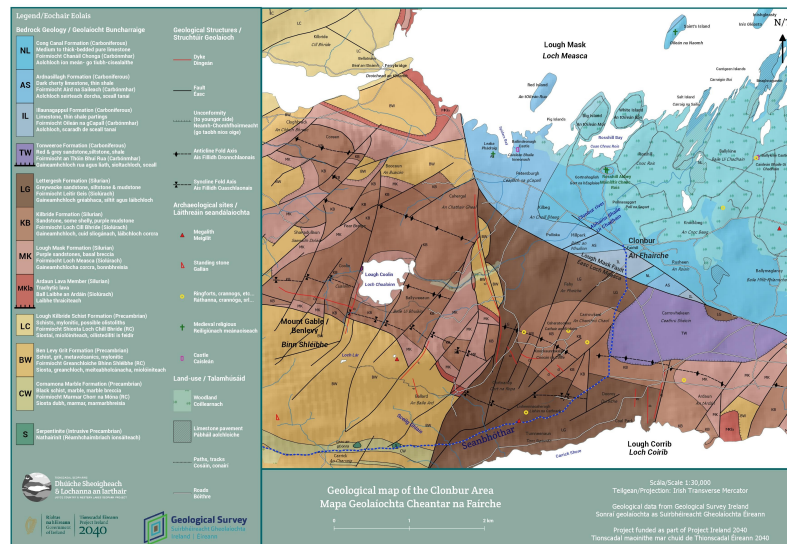
Our Geopark Geologist with the 2nd year Geography option of Ms Flannery at Ballinrobe Community School 2021-2022

Launch of 17 local geological maps for the region

These are a boost to local area knowledge

The 6th of October marked the first ever International Geodiversity Day as proclaimed by the UNESCO at its 41st General Conference in 2021. Geodiversity represents the variety of our mineral environment, i.e. all the parts of nature that aren't alive. Geodiversity is the driver of biodiversity and also impacts many areas of society. These links are celebrated by UNESCO Global Geoparks throughout the world.

To celebrate this event, the geopark has officially launched a set of 17 local geological maps of the main geosites and all the communities of the geopark. These maps were prepared in the last 18 months using the highest resolution geological mapping of bedrock, karst and quaternary features available from [Geological Survey Ireland](https://www.geologicalsurveyireland.ie/). All available place names were added to the maps and further place names can be added in future when new records are finalised. The main archaeological sites and walking infrastructures are also indicated for clarity. The maps are all accessible on [our website](https://www.joycetrygeoparkproject.ie/) on each individual page for our geosites and our towns and villages.



Local Geological map for the Clonbur area

Expanding Geopark Ambassadors

It could be you!

The successful Geopark Ambassador program has been rolled out again this past summer with 16 participants. It consists of two lectures (these were delivered online in the past and can still be offered that way if requested) and a short field trip. The aim is to enable participants to become Geopark Ambassadors by learning about our Geopark, why the local geology is so internationally significant, what can be found at our geosites, how to read the geological map (and make links to the geology and geosites) and the landscape, and how you (the participants) can use and benefit from our Geopark brand. Contact can be made directly to geologist@jcwlgeopark.ie and further information is on our website www.joycetrygeoparkproject.ie and social media [@JCWLGeopark](https://www.facebook.com/JCWLGeopark).



Field trip of one group of Geopark Ambassador at Aill Dubh

Built vernacular tour - Heritage Week August 2022

Great insights revealed on The Neale, Ballinrobe and Partry

If you saunter past an old building or man-made structure, do you know what they could tell us about our heritage? If only they could talk. Well, the next best way is to get somebody who knows, to tell us those stories. This is what we did for our 'Built Vernacular Tour' during Heritage Week 2022. Three volunteering locals from three of the Geopark's communities filtered out the facts from the myths and tall tales to provide a riveting tour of our built vernacular heritage.

In **The Neale**, Joe Greaney wove the Boycott story into a visit to the ruins of the estate of Lord Kilmaine, and the 'big house'. We heard of the role of the Church and particularly of Fr. John O'Malley (and his numerous meetings with Michael Davitt) in bringing an end to 'Landlordism' in Ireland. We saw the nearby ruins of his abode in the 1860s/70s - a most interesting piece of history and legacy to the world occurred at this priest's humble dwelling.

In **Ballinrobe**, local historian Averil Staunton told how important the Robe River was to local transport and to social life in the bustling garrison town in the mid 19th century. And of the ambitious but ultimately failed plan in 1849 to link Ballinrobe to Lough Mask and the Corrib and onward to Galway and the sea, through a man-made canal to allow trading between Galway to the south and by road to Castlebar. The scheme was abandoned in 1856 for use as a port due to the lack of funding and emergence of railways.

And in **Furnace** near Partry, Paul Maguire showed us his 18th Century treasure in the form of a furnace used for production of pig iron. This well-preserved structure was an important contributor to the west of Ireland's industrial output, from local resources at nearby Srah (iron seams), Furnace (sandstone for the structure and oak for fuel), and the Cloon River and Lough Mask for transport towards Galway and to Britain.

See the videos from the tour on our [Geopark YouTube channel](#). The event and filming was supported by a Community Heritage Grant from Mayo County Council / via the Heritage Council.



*Paul Maguire describing the 18th Century
Furnace outside Partry*

Cong Moytura Heritage Society's Abbey Conference

Canons, Canonesses, Characters and Crosses

A major conference examining the history and heritage of Cong Abbey took place in Cong this summer. "Cong Abbey: Canons, Canonesses, Characters and Crosses" was hosted by the Cong Moytura Heritage Society from August 19 to 21 during National Heritage Week. It featured talks by leading archaeologists, art historians, archivists and historians, and guided visits to the abbeys of Cong and Inishmaine. Cong Abbey is one of the best-preserved medieval monastic foundations in Ireland. Founded early in the 12th century by the O'Connor kings of Connacht for the Regular Canons of St. Augustine as part of a wide-ranging reform of the Irish church, it remained the Order's Irish stronghold until the death of its last member, Abbot Patrick Prendergast, in 1829.

The geopark team assisted the organising committee and offered an additional guided walk focussing on the geology and karst landscape around Cong on the afternoon of Sunday 21 August in conjunction with Heritage Week. The Cong Moytura Heritage Society was very active in raising funds for the conference with contributions gratefully appreciated from Galway County Council Heritage fund, Mayo County Council Creative Ireland fund and local business' sponsorship.



*Robert Scott of Rare and Recent Books giving a
tour of Cong Abbey*

Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark

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