

UNESCO assessment coming soon

Expected around summer 2023

The application for UNESCO Global Geopark status, submitted November 2022, is due for assessment around the middle of this year. We'll get about six weeks' notice before the assessors arrive. Normally the two-person team includes one from Europe and one from another region (possibly Asia), chosen from the official "Roster of Evaluators". A draft agenda for the visit has been prepared, we'll be tweaking it in the coming weeks. Assessments involve thorough analysis of the governance and management system, geological heritage, conservation, sustainable development, tourism development and promotion, and environmental aspects. They provide constructive commentary and recommendations where appropriate. We're optimistic about achieving UNESCO status.

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



Liaison Persons nominated ...

... for Geopark Communities Network

Geoparks need to have strong connections with/support from their communities. There are 20 communities in the geopark region – 17 villages and three towns. The best way to build and keep that support

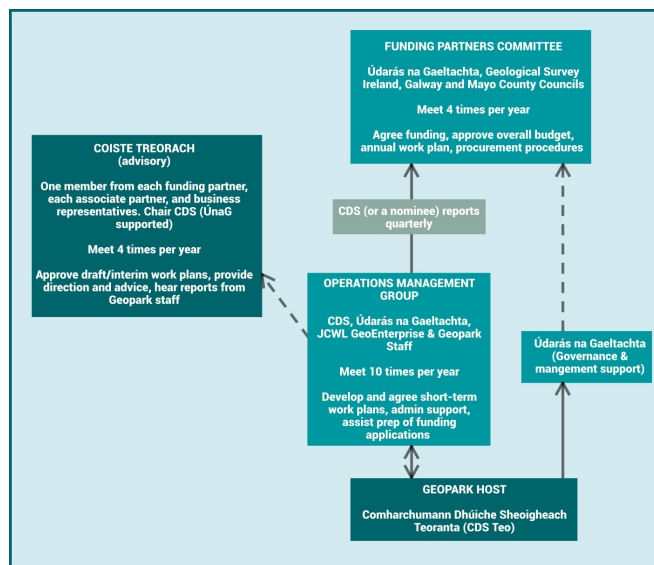
is through a Geopark Communities Network. The aim is to share information and ideas about how our communities have developed and can develop, to deal with issues, help them thrive. And so, each of the communities has nominated a **Geopark Liaison Person**. They help connect your community with the geopark staff and office, and also with the voluntary cross-community group called GeoEnterprise. That's the group that helped develop the geopark idea, and sourced kick-start funds. The 'Liaisons' help three-way communication – i.e community to geopark staff and GeoEnterprise and vice versa, and between communities. It's about sharing. It's about 'meitheal'.



FAM visits for communities, businesses and funders

Familiarisation tours help us realise the great geopark resources & opportunities

FAM visits help people to understand the features of our geopark and its communities. It's a way to showcase not only some of the fascinating geological story, but also the natural and built and cultural heritage, way of life, festivals and events, attractions, activities and ideas for future development. In April we're taking the Geopark Liaison Persons on FAM visits – those from Mayo communities visiting the Galway communities, and vice versa. And a separate FAM tour for businesses, to get to know what's on offer in the region. In May we're showing officials from Galway and Mayo County Councils around (Údarás na Gaeltachta and Fáilte Ireland took part at end of February, and Geological Survey Ireland is already very familiar with the geopark region). They are voyages of discovery and sharing.



The Geopark Governance and Management System

Geopark Host, Coiste Treorach, OMG and Funders

The JCWL Geopark's governance and management system is firmly in place. It's part of the overall Management Master Plan 2022-2028 launched recently. CDS Teo is the **Geopark Host** organisation. An **Operational Management Group** (with participation from CDS, geopark staff, the community representative group GeoEnterprise, and Údarás na Gaeltachta) meets monthly to track and plan developments. A **Coiste Treorach** (advisory and support group, with participation from CDS, communities, farming, business, education, Údarás, county councils, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland) meets quarterly. A **Funding Partners Committee** (Údarás na Gaeltachta, Geological Survey Ireland, Galway and Mayo County Councils, CDS, and staff) also meets quarterly.



Ciorcal Comhrá in Oughterard

The first of the pop-up Gaeltachts promoted by the Geopark

Oughterard Courthouse and the JCWL Geopark team organised a very

successful ciorcal comhrá event in February. One key aim of the Geopark is to promote use of the Irish language throughout the region, whether inside or outside the Gaeltacht. This well-attended event attracted over 30 people. It kicked off with an introduction by Cepta Stevens of the Oughterard Courthouse organisation. Dominic Ó Móráin, Geopark tourism officer and fear an tí for the night, interviewed Bernie Ní Flatharta a freelance journalist and broadcaster from Moycullen with a long experience of reporting the news in both Irish and English. Stiofán Seoighe, the language plan officer for Gaeilge Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Thuar Mhic Éadaigh, presented the ongoing language plan process and the type of events being organised. Then an introduction of the work of Glór na nGael by Seán Ó Cuirrín, including development of Irish in a community outside of the Gaeltacht. There seems great enthusiasm for promotion of regular ciorcal comhrá meetings in Oughterard. The Geopark will organise similar events in the other two towns of the region, Headford and Ballinrobe, and further events to link the various initiatives promoting Irish in the region.



Mám Éan geotrail about to be realised

Our links with the International Appalachian Trail

Many of you will know the Western Way is a long-distance walking trail, beginning in Oughterard, Co Galway and ending in Bunnyconnellan, Co Mayo. It follows the shores of Lough Corrib, crosses the Maumturks mountain range at Mám Éan and continues northwards. The Mám Éan section allows a close-up look at the oldest rocks in the Geopark region (Precambrian metamorphic rocks). These rocks have strong connections to rocks on other side of the Atlantic. Mám Éan has acted as a focal point for recent discussions with the International Appalachian Trail www.iat-sia.org to incorporate the whole of the Western Way into the IAT. And so, the communities' representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise applied for and received a grant from Geological Survey Ireland to develop a geotrail on the Mám Éan section of the Western Way, in partnership with the Geopark, Forum Connemara (the Rural Recreation Officer), National Parks and Wildlife Service and local communities of Recess and Maam. The aim is to expand the geological interpretation in the region, which would be a catalyst for a renewed publicity campaign of the trail. Information for a small set of panels has now been finalised with content approved from all parties concerned, including the late Fr McGreal. Permission has been granted by NPWS to install the panels for the geotrail. Production of the panels is happening in April with installation sometime in May 2023. An official opening of the Mám Éan geotrail will take place during this summer, including the launch and integration of the Western Way into the IAT.



Our continuing focus on education

Schools, universities, geopark ambassadors and animated video

The geopark focus on education continues at a good pace. In Q1 2023, our geologist Ben visited eight primary schools and two secondary schools in the region. Interest in being a Geopark Ambassador continues from a wide spectrum – 22 people recently completed their field visits to graduate from the course. At higher level, we have been facilitating study visits to the geopark. The University of Galway is using the area for a geology field-skills visit. DCU Geography Department has a group looking at aspects of sustainability (includes students from Netherlands and Finland), while ATU has organised a field trip to explore the rich heritage in the area. Meanwhile, we are developing a new animated video on the karst landscape of the geopark. This is supported by a 2022 geoheritage grant from Geological Survey Ireland. The design concept has been drafted and a production company has just been procured. A launch of the video is planned for Heritage Week 2023.



Mayo Dark Skies event 22nd March

There's a lot to marvel at up there!

The stars, stargazers and planets were all well-aligned on 22nd March for the Mayo Dark Sky Tourism and Stargazing Talk. Organised by the Geopark to celebrate Ireland's first astronomy week, the event was a partnership with Mayo Dark Sky Park and was hosted at the Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre, Clonbur, Co Galway. Georgia McMillan of MDSP www.mayodarkskypark.ie outlined and discussed the importance of having dark skies for biodiversity, wellbeing and the rapidly growing interest from tourism. There were also tips on easy ways to manage and limit light pollution from human activity at home and around businesses and roads. We heard that many people are simply not aware of the negative effects light pollution has on the ecosystems we live in. Miraculously, the weather cleared for just long enough to provide an amazing experience of our dark skies from the Lough Mask shoreline. Georgia showed us a number of easily recognisable constellations and also a couple of planets in our skies at the time. A fascinating discussion followed on our cultural relationship with the night sky. It's evident, there are great opportunities for the geopark's communities and businesses and tourists as a night-time activity.

And finally ...

... funding opportunities for communities and business

There's a great range of funding schemes and other supports available each year, from various sources. They can help communities to achieve goals and remain optimistic for the future. We plan to provide information on schemes and supports for the Geopark communities through the Community Liaison Reps, social media and other channels. For now, here's links to several supports that may be interesting for Geopark communities. And don't forget the trainings and supports offered by the [Local Enterprise Office Mayo](#) and [Local Enterprise Office Galway](#) – many of them free of charge.

[Tidy Towns](#) – deadline 10th May.

[Adult Literacy for Life](#) – deadline 14th April.

[Community Services Programme](#) – Concept Note deadline 14th April

[Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme](#) – deadline 24th April

[Town and Village Renewal Scheme](#) – deadline 28 April

[CLÁR Programme](#) – see Mayo and Galway County Councils websites for application details

[Walks Scheme](#) for landowners to maintain trails through their holdings
– deadline 23rd June
[Community Centres Investment Fund – New Builds Measure](#) – deadline
3rd July
[Energy: Reduce your use](#) (SEAI short online course)
[Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme Funding 2023](#) – deadline
5th May



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT



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