



UNESCO field assessment team Stéphane Legal and Antonio Garcia Jiménez during their mission visit to Kylemore Abbey, flanked by two Geopark staff Dominic Ó Móráin (L) and Michael Hegarty

UNESCO field mission completed

Two-person team visited mid-July 2023

Two assessors representing UNESCO Global Geoparks visited Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark in mid-July. Stéphane Legal (geologist from Luberon UNESCO Global Geopark, France) and Antonio García Jiménez (sustainable development executive from Sierras Subbéticas UNESCO Global Geopark, Spain), spent three full days plus two half days here, getting to know the key features and services in our geopark region and assessing our application. They report back to UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGG) on how prepared Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark is to achieve UGG status. The criteria are demanding, as outlined in the [self-evaluation form](#). The assessors will then build a detailed report, including thorough analysis of the governance and management system, geological heritage, conservation, sustainable development including tourism development and promotion, and environment. The assessors report goes to UNESCO Global Geoparks Council for their September meeting. The Council in turn advises the overall UNESCO Board, and the final decision is due sometime in spring 2024. We prepared a broad mission itinerary covering a range of Geopark features. Below are brief details and photos, divided into each of the three full days of the mission. The support from Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark communities, businesses, funders, and other stakeholders was fantastic for the mission – míle buíochas go léi.

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

DAY 1: Wednesday 12 July

Walk the Mám Éan geotrail / Guided tour Kylemore Abbey, Gardens, Gothic Church / Lunch event for range of stakeholders Kylemore Abbey- Notre Dame campus / Killary Fjord Boat Tour, Wild Atlantic Way viewpoints / Killary Adventure Centre tour.



UNESCO Global Geopark assessors, farmer Colm Gavin (red) at Mám Éan with Geopark staff Dominic Ó Móráin and Benjamin Thébaudeau



Some of the guests at Lunch event Kylemore Abbey-Notre Dame campus (also below)



Trish Walsh (JCWL GeoEnterprise) and Michael Hegarty (Geopark manager) with assessors on Killary



Geopark staff, Leenane farmer Colm Gavin and UNESCO assessors at Mám Éan oratory



At Kylemore Abbey are Galway Coco Chief Executive Liam Conneelly, Director of Services Alan Farrell, Fáilte Ireland's Daithí Gallagher, Kylemore Abbey Marketing Manager Jessica Ridge, UGG's Stéphane Legal & Antonio Garcia, & Geopark Geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau



Dr Siobhán Power (Geological Survey Ireland) speaking to guests at the Kylemore-Notre Dame Lunch event

DAY 2: Thursday 13 July

Sheep & Wool Centre Leenane / Joyce Country Wool, Shanafaraghaun, Lough Nafooey / Finny geosite / lunch event with Chalet na mBan (Women's Shed), Headford Lace, Plean Teanga Dúiche Sheoigheach & Tuar Mhic Éadaigh, Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach / cruise to Inchoigill Island L. Corrib / Walk around Cong geosite village / Cong Crossroads Centre, light meal event with networks (communities-heritage, businesses, education), Údarás na Gaeltachta and local councillors with local food agus ceol.



Sheep & Wool Centre guide Séamus Kirwan with UNESCO assessors Stéphane and Antonio



Carina Coyne spinning at her Joyce Country Wool business, Shanafaraghaun, Co Galway



Ger Hassett (Headford Lace) and Peggy Philbin of Chalet na mBan at CDS-hosted lunch event



Cong guide Vincent Campbell at geosite sign with UNESCO assessors & Geopark geologist



Dominic Ó Móráin (Geopark) and participants at communities' event at Cong Crossroads Centre



UNESCO assessors having a go at the Siege of Ennis during the communities' event at Crossroads

DAY 3: Friday 14 July

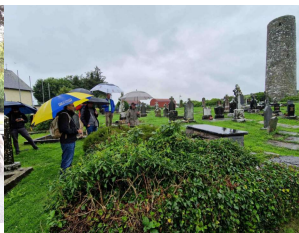
Visit Ballintubber Abbey incl guides & reception/ visit Moore Hall & Lough Carra, geosite / Visit Aughagower village / visit Geopark office-info centre, host Coiste Pobail & light lunch / visit L. Measc Distillery & Deircs geosite / Clonbur Woods limestone pavement geosite.



Fr Fahy, Alan Dillon TD, and Mayo County councillors among guests at Ballintubber Abbey reception



Representatives of Lough Carra LIFE project and the Catchment Association at Moore Hall



Local Aughagower guide Olcan Masterson on the history of the graveyard and round tower



Tomás Ó Éanacháin, John Gibbons, Nora McHugh hosting visit to Tourmakeady by the assessors



Sampling the goods to complete a tour of Lough Mask Distillery, Tourmakeady, Co Mayo



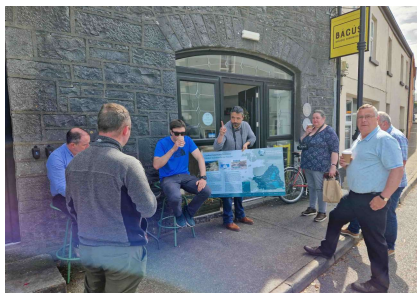
Discussing the geological heritage of the limestone pavement, Clonbur Woods



Geopark Liaison Reps, mostly from SW Mayo, on the FAM tour of north Connemara communities



Liaison Reps from communities in north Connemara visiting Moore Hall and Lough Carra



Coffee time for some of the Geopark Business Network members outside BÁCÚS bakery, Clonbur



Representatives from Mayo County Council, Geological Survey Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, & University of Notre Dame meeting local businesses in Clonbur

Familiarisation visits for communities, businesses, and funders

FAM tours help us realise the fantastic resources and opportunities in our Geopark

Further familiarisation (FAM) visits took place in the Geopark during Quarter 2 this year. They help people to understand the features of our geopark and its communities. It's a way to showcase some fascinating geological stories, the natural and built and cultural heritage, way of life, festivals and events, attractions, activities and ideas for future development. So, on Saturday 1st April, a dozen Liaison Reps from the south-west Mayo part of the Geopark were hosted by communities on the north Connemara side. Stops and exchanges took place in Leenane, Kylemore, Recess, Maam, Corr na Móna and Clonbur. Then on Saturday 15th April, the reverse exchange took place – Liaison Reps mainly from north Connemara visited S-W Mayo including Cong, Ballinrobe, Carnacon, Ballintubber, Killawalla, Tourmakeady and across the county border at Clonbur. All participants and hosts seemed to get good value from the visits. Many noted how little they knew about the features, developments and challenges in other geopark communities, even those close by. On 2nd May, the business network tour included stops at Corr na Móna (Lough Corrib Adventures), the Seanbhóthar walkway Clonbur and BÁCÚS bakery, Ashford outdoors activity, lunch at Carney's Ballinrobe, visit Ballintubber Abbey, and the geopark info centre and office Tourmakeady. In mid-May, we showed officials from the funders group around – Mayo County Council, Geological Survey Ireland and Údarás na Gaeltachta (Galway had a clash of dates, and Fáilte Ireland took part at end of February).



TIONSCADAL GEOPHAIRE
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JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

Holes in the ground: The karst landscape of JCWL Geopark



**Series of talks on Saturday 19 August
7 to 9pm at the Crossroads, Cong, F31PY97
for National Heritage Week**

- David Drew on Development of the local karst landscape
- Mike Simms on the Limestone plateau and its special features
- Fintan Gorman on the History of Cong Canal
- Launch of the Geopark's new animated video

Free event open to all



A free walk to the limestone pavement geosite in Clonbur will take place on **Sunday 20 August** from 10am departing from Rosshill cemetery





**National
Heritage Week**
A Heritage Council programme



www.joycecountrypeoparkproject.ie

Holes in the Ground

An exploration of our karst landscape

Our Heritage Week events this year focus on the karst landscape of our geopark to the east of the region. The main event, 7 to 9pm on **Saturday 19 August** at the Cong Crossroads Community Centre, is a series of talks by national and local experts on what makes the

limestone of Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark region so special. A new animated video on the development of our local springs and holy wells, caves, limestone pavement, marl Lake at Lough Carra as well as our local turloughs has been produced by the geopark team with Geological Survey Ireland funding. The video will be launched following talks from:

- **David Drew**, author of the book "Karst of Ireland", on development of the local landscape through our recent geological past
- **Mike Simms**, senior curator of Natural Sciences at the Ulster Museum, on features found on the limestone pavement on the shores of our great lakes
- **Fintan Gorman**, local historian, on the history of development of the Cong Canal

The next day, **from 10am on Sunday 20 August**, there will be a walk to the limestone pavement on the shores of Lough Mask in Clonbur Woods, departing from Rosshill Cemetery. It will take a minimum of 2 hours, and will be led by the Geopark Geologist, Benjamin Thébaudeau, accompanied by Mike Simms and David Drew. See [National Heritage Week listing](#).



Inside the grand marquee at the Cong Food Village Festival in July



Ready for the night at Headfest 2023 as the sun goes down



A glimpse of the atmosphere at Ballinrobe Festival 2023

Festival season in the Geopark region

Cong Food Village, Ballinrobe and Headfest festivals

With the summer festival season well underway including in the Geopark region, the organisers note very good attendances by locals and visitors alike. Cong Food Village Festival attracted bumper crowds each of their two days 8th and 9th July. And there was no shortage of interest, atmosphere and craic in both the Ballinrobe Festival and at Headfest (Headford). Tag us on social media [@JCWLGeopark](#) to highlight and promote your community and festival event. See also some dates in next item below.



**National
Heritage Week**

A Heritage Council programme

**Some events coming up in the
Geopark area**

August & September 2023

[World cup trout fly fishing competition](#), Lough Mask, [Ballinrobe](#), Mayo.

2-6 August

[Ceol na Locha](#), traditional music classes and festival, [Tuar Mhic](#)

[Éadaigh](#), Maigh Eo. 14-18 August

[National Heritage Week](#), Events in various places in the country, 12-20

August

[Oughterard Agricultural and Horticultural show](#), [Oughterard](#), Galway.

Sunday 27 August

[Féile na Sléibhte](#), Corr na Móna, Clonbur, Maam, Finny, Co Galway & Co Mayo. 25-27 August

[Ballinrobe Agricultural Show](#), [Ballinrobe](#), Mayo. Sunday 3rd September



Two examples of signage in Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark: on left is an 'entry point' sign on the N84 approaching Ballintubber from the north; on right is the community sign in Killawalla, Co Mayo

Geopark signage

Four types of signage for Geopark visibility

The keen eyes out there will have noticed more signage going up recently in various Geopark villages and towns. They include geosites signs, with outlines of geological significance and info on cultural and other heritage aspects, where relevant. There are also signs indicating entry points to the Geopark, signs in villages and towns indicating Geopark communities. The communities and those in the geopark business network are also receiving signs showing the local geological map for putting up indoors in their community centres and business premises. We are working closely on this with the 20 communities/settlements of the Geopark, along with Mayo and Galway County Councils. As readers will be aware, signage and information are important elements of the overall visibility of a Geopark. We are mindful, too, of having a good balance between good geopark information and visibility for locals and visitors, and avoiding excessive amounts.



And keep an eye on ...

Funding opportunities for communities and business

In our quarterly Geopark newsletters we point out new and relevant information about funds and schemes available for development of your communities and local businesses. We don't claim to know about them all, but over time we are building up a database of schemes which we'll use to alert readers through the newsletter and more frequently through your Geopark Liaison Reps. The Department of Rural and Community Development has just announced the launch of the [2023 Town and Village Renewal Scheme](#). It has a focus on tackling vacancy and dereliction and bringing additional footfall into the centre of towns. Also development of outdoor projects such as plazas, parks, playgrounds and green spaces. Farmer and artisan markets are being supported under the scheme. Closing date for TVR Scheme is 10th November 2023. See Funding and Grants information managed by [Mayo County Council](#) and [Galway County Council](#) and [Údarás na Gaeltachta](#). Remember also the trainings and supports offered by the [Local Enterprise Office Mayo](#) and [Local Enterprise Office Galway](#) - many of them free of charge. Your community groups would benefit from information updates by joining the Public Participation Networks (PPN) in [Galway](#) and [Mayo](#). [South West Mayo Development](#) and [Forum Connemara](#) also administer numerous support schemes. Finally ... there's good possibilities to create small museums about local heritage in the Geopark communities. Maybe based in a refurbished former derelict farm building or village structure. Take a listen to this 8-minute clip for ideas from [The Business](#) show, RTE Radio 1 Saturday 22 July. Quirky ... but there's great potential.



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**Dhúiche Sheoigheach
& Lochanna an Iarthair**

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT



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