



*UNESCO Global Geoparks Council in session in Morocco*

## JCWL Geopark a step closer to UNESCO Global Geopark status

### Positive news from the assessment

The UNESCO Geopark evaluators conducted an in-depth tour of Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark during July 2023. Their evaluation mission report was discussed at the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council meeting in Morocco in September, with three possible outcomes: rejection, deferral, or acceptance as a UNESCO Global Geopark. JCWL Geopark received a deferral, which is quite common with applicants at first attempt. Following the review there is a clear pathway for gaining UNESCO status, and this brings the Geopark one step closer to that goal.

The evaluators' report had many positives. They also listed a number of recommendations. The main ones to address are: improve visibility / signage; develop a more strategic education programme for locals and visitors; secure a stronger funding base; further development of networks of communities, business, education, and increased links with the Global Geoparks Network (now around 200 world-wide). The Geopark is confident about reporting on those points to UNESCO in summer 2024, and being accepted in September as a UNESCO Global Geopark. The assessors do not need to visit again.

Stay up to date through the geopark website

[www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie](http://www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie) and social media / facebook Twitter and Instagram @JCWLGeopark



*Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau with DCU student group*

## A Geopark education programme targets range of users

Especially since 2020, JCWL Geopark has been active providing information and education supports to a range of geopark stakeholders – local communities, businesses, schools and institutions. Work has already begun on framing the approach around a more strategic ‘education programme’, drawing on ideas and feedback from stakeholders. Your contributions to this framework will be much appreciated. More info during the early part of 2024.

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## Securing a funding base for JCWL Geopark development and operations

A secure funding base is essential for well-functioning UNESCO Global Geoparks. Core funding is included in the Geopark agreement with Geological Survey Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Mayo and Galway County Councils. Other state agencies, including Fáilte Ireland, contribute to specific initiatives. Solid funding is also coming from the cross-community representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise via philanthropic contributions. Local, national and EU projects are also available, mostly for specific actions. The Geopark also aims to help the communities and enterprises to identify and access suitable funding sources.

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*Mournes storyteller Sinéad McAleavey in full flow*

## Shared Island visits bring geoparks north and south closer

### Our new partners from Mourne Gullion Strangford Geopark

JCWL Geopark and its communities in north County Galway and south-west County Mayo recently hosted representatives from Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark. The 21-22 November visit included stops in seven of the 20 JCWL communities. This initiative has financial support from the Shared Island Civic Society Fund (Department of Foreign Affairs). It brings communities north and south of the border closer together, to exchange ideas and strengthen collaboration on community, business and learning development in the respective geoparks. The reciprocal visit by 13 people from JCWL Geopark communities took place in October. Standout examples of community and business potential on both visits included local heritage initiatives, storytelling, men's shed/Chalet na mBan, amenity parks, conservation actions and much more. The project concludes in spring 2024 with business exchanges between the two geoparks.

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*Full project team in Geopark Sunnhordland*

## **New EU project will shed light on outdoor education for all**

### **Working together throughout Europe**

An EU-funded Erasmus+ project, which JCWL Geopark is a partner, kicked off in Norway's [Geopark Sunnhordland](#) in October 2023. The education-focussed project aims to improve the teaching and learning capacity within the partner organisations and the users of geoparks. The five partners include two teacher training universities in Norway (one in lead), and four geoparks – one each from Norway, Italy, Romania and JCWL Geopark. Continuing for 36 months, the project will develop digital resources at a number of geosites in the 4 geoparks and general guidelines for excursions. In a nutshell, it aims to stimulate innovative learning by combining the expertise of the geoparks with experienced teaching.

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*One of the many JCWL Geopark images now available on Discover Ireland*

## **JCWL Geopark is now on the Discover Ireland listing**

**The importance of being seen**

Fáilte Ireland is our national tourism agency and one of the JCWL Geopark partners. Through their guidance, and in particular close collaboration with the Wild Atlantic Way team in Galway and Mayo, the Geopark will increasingly develop as an emerging tourism destination for the region. A key resource is the registration of the Geopark on the Discover Ireland listing. This is the platform used to showcase to the world and is available in multiple languages. Additionally, all of the professional photography commissioned for the Geopark's website has been added to the Tourism Ireland content pool for anyone to use on travelogues or promotional articles. This improves the visibility of all the businesses in our current listing and is a focal point for all our partners to refer to.

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*One of the panels on the Mám Éan trail*

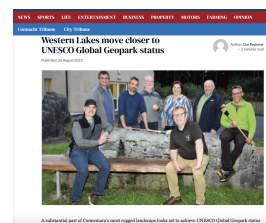
## **The Mám Éan geotrail is now in place**

### **Celebrate our links across the ocean...**

You may remember in a previous newsletter about installation of three info panels forming a geotrail on the Mám Éan section of the Western Way. This roughly 3km long section links the Maam Valley and Joyce Country to the Inagh Vvalley and Connemara over the Maumturks. It also allows a close-up look at the oldest rocks in the Geopark region (Precambrian metamorphic rocks >700 million years) with strong connections to rocks on the other side of the Atlantic. The geotrail is now in situ and acts as a focal point for incorporating the whole of the Western Way within the International Appalachian Trail [www.iaatsia.org](http://www.iaatsia.org). The Geopark communities' representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise is responsible for this project and wish to thank Geological Survey Ireland for the funding as well as Forum Connemara (the Rural Recreation Officer), National Parks and Wildlife Service and local communities of Recess and Maam for their help and collaboration. An official launch of the Mám Éan geotrail will take place in early 2024 (date and venue to be confirmed) and will feature a walk through the ancient pass and a celebration of our links to North America and the whole North Atlantic region.

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*News items in Connaught Telegraph, Tuam Herald and Connacht Tribune*

## Publicity / local media

### Making some noise

Geoparks need to get the word out about their existence. There's no point being a best kept secret. Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark is no exception. Keen media watchers/listeners among you will have noticed an increase in media coverage of the Geopark in recent months. Local newspapers publishing JCWL Geopark stories include Connacht Tribune, Tuam Herald, Connaught Telegraph, Mayo News, Western People, Mayo and Galway Advertisers. Broadcasters include Midwest Radio, Galway Bay FM, Connemara FM, Radio na Gaeltachta and TG4. We appreciate all the coverage. For those of you in the digital world, keep an ear and eye out on facebook, twitter/X and Instagram, including various influencers out there @JCWLGeopark.



*Mayo Tourism Networking event*

## Mayo tourism networking event early December

### A well-attended event at Breaffy House Hotel

Close to 100 tourism organisations and other service providers attended the Mayo Tourism industry Networking event on 7th December. This now annual event is a unique opportunity for accommodation providers, attractions and visitor experiences to meet one another, learn more about Mayo's rich experiential offering and inspire greater collaboration right across the county. The pre-event registration system works well, allowing participants to schedule in advance up to 12 one-to-one meetings with industry colleagues on the day. Fáilte Ireland, Udáras na Gealtachta, Mayo County Council, Bord Íascaigh Mhara, South West Mayo Development Company and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Public bodies also there on the day included: Fáilte Ireland, Udáras na Gealtachta, Mayo County Council, Bord Íascaigh Mhara, South West Mayo Development

Company and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. JCWL Geopark secured a number of meetings there, spreading the word about what there is to see, do and experience in this fabulous region. Guest speaker was travel expert, writer and Irish Independent tourism editor Pól Ó'Conghaile, providing fresh insights from the world of travel and hospitality.

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## An eye on ...

### ... funding opportunities for communities

These funding calls may be of interest to your communities.

- [Community Climate Action Fund: Strand 1](#): Building Low Carbon Communities, the communities partner with the County Council on projects that have a direct climate action impact. Strand 1A: Shared Island Community Climate Action, enables communities to carry out a cross-border project in partnership with a community in Northern Ireland. Applications for [the County Mayo fund](#) close Friday, 23rd February 2024. Applications for the [County Galway fund](#) close Thursday 29th February 2024.
- Heritage Organisation Support fund. The Heritage Council's "Heritage Organisation Support fund" provides funding support for the core costs of non-profit organisations working in the heritage sector, up to a max €60,000. [Closing date for applications 15 January 2024](#).
- Western Development Commission & [Community Loans](#). WDC provide Bridging Loans for LEADER Projects only, and Term Loans for a variety of different types of Community Led Projects such as Community Childcare, Sport, Family Resource Centres, Arts & Heritage, Tidy Towns, Community Education, and Community Environment Projects. The aim is to motivate and support communities to take on Green Themed Projects, can include Community Gardens, Tidy Towns, Green Infrastructure, Waste Reduction & Recycling Programmes, Energy Efficiency Projects, Green Energy Initiatives, Community based Conservation, and Green Building Projects. email - [annegraham@wdc.ie](mailto:annegraham@wdc.ie)
- Men's Shed funding - [application form](#). Grants of up to €3,000 will be provided to 435 Men's Sheds across the country. The funding is designed to assist with their running costs such as their heating, electricity utility and insurance bills.



## Christmas and New Year wishes

The years do roll around. Just where did that one go? It was a big year for progress towards UNESCO Global Geopark status. Hopefully it was a big, bright year for you our followers and readers too. Míle buíochas to all the numerous Geopark contributors and supporters, especially in the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark region. To you, your families, friends, communities and businesses we wish a safe and very enjoyable Christmas and happy and prosperous 2024.



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

## Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT



### Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark

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