



UNESCO Global Geoparks Council meeting in Morocco, September 2023

UNESCO's recommendations to achieve Global Geopark status

List of actions clarified for JCWL Geopark

In May 2024 we received official notification from UNESCO Global Geoparks Council about the deferred application by Joyce Country and Western Lakes. The letter notes seven recommendations to be addressed in a report back to the council to achieve UNESCO status (the UGG Council has merged several of the evaluators original 15 recommendations). The main ones to address are: i) Develop a UGG specific Geopark partner program with criteria and branding for partners including hospitality providers, promoting use of the Geopark logo on partner sites; ii) Create an exhibition space to show and explain the values of the aspiring geopark in a holistic way; iii) Improve the understanding of the geological map for a wide audience, Establish a multidisciplinary Scientific Committee, Design an educational program for the geopark, Increase outreach and educational activities on the importance of climate change; iv) secure a stronger funding base, Strengthen the participation of local communities in the Advisory Group, Develop the Management Plan into concrete actions with an Action Program for the next three years including budget lines; v) Strengthen collaboration and joint actions with National Parks and Wildlife Service; vi) Strengthen cooperation within the regional (EGN) and Global Geoparks Network (GGN) and set up partnerships with other UNESCO Global Geoparks (now 213 world-wide). We are on track to report back to UNESCO by mid next year and to achieve the status in autumn 2025.

Stay up to date through the geopark website www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie and social media / facebook Twitter and Instagram [@JCWLGeopark](https://www.instagram.com/JCWLGeopark)

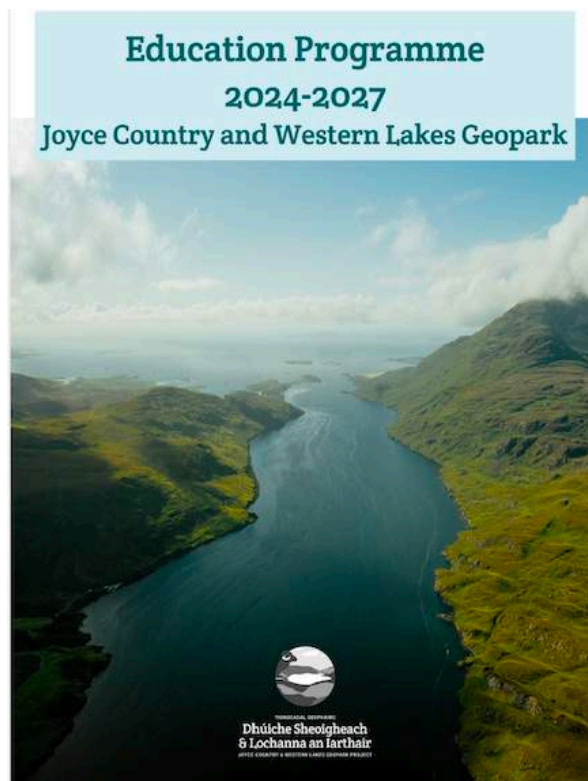


Draft images of information panels for two Geopark geosites at Corr na Móna and Tourmakeady

Geosite panels and other publicity

Expanding the Geopark's visibility

Excellent progress has been made on design of new information panels to be located at the Geopark's nine main geosites. Fáilte Ireland commissioned Tandem Design for the content work. The draft panels are being presented to the relevant geopark communities from July before approval and installation later in the year. The images above of panels for Corr na Móna (Co. Galway) and The Deirce (Co. Mayo) are two early samples of the layout, with some tweaks still to come. Each panel includes Gaeilge and English text, location map, geological time scale, QR code and website link to further information, and stunning images. The content is aimed at sparking interest from a wide audience. We hope you agree! Other signage will be appearing in the coming few months. Exhibition spaces are being developed in the Cong Tourist Office and Kylemore Abbey. We are also distributing new versions of the popular double-sided tear-out maps to hospitality and experience providers in the Geopark. Contact us if you need more.



The Education Programme 2024-2027 ready for finalisation and launch autumn 2024

Education Programme being finalised

An approach to education and informing about the Geopark

Following months of consultations with a range of partners and stakeholders, a draft Education Programme 2024-2027 was completed in June and feedback was collected until 19th July. The body of the draft runs to 21 pages, including sections on local context for education, resources and actions to date, main themes for the programme, vision and objectives and main actions. Four main themes are Geoscience, Environment, Cultural heritage, and Sustainable development. The Main Actions section links these five specific objectives – awareness, living and visiting experience, outdoor classroom, understanding our landscape, and Irish language – with sets of actions and key performance indicators. The appendices include an analysis of target groups, details of the stakeholder engagement, summary of local context for education, and suggestions on how to use the Joyce Country & Western Lakes Geopark region as a case study for the primary school geography curriculum. After feedback from stakeholder groups, it is planned to have a formal launch of the Education Programme in autumn 2024.



Trish Walsh (Petersburg OETC) signing the 2-year partnership agreement with Michael Hegarty (JCWL Geopark)

Geopark business network development

Formalising partnerships with local enterprise

JCWL Geopark has been developing its business network to help promote the region. This includes making the Geopark better known as a destination, encouraging local businesses to work together (referrals), promoting local heritage and the Irish language and adopting/improving sustainable practices. The [Geopark website](#) includes a listing of over 100 local businesses. A five-year Tourism strategy was developed in 2020, including a Charter for the business and community networks of the Geopark. UNESCO Global Geopark status for the JCWL region will result in the first and only of its kind in Connacht. It will be a great boost for attracting more visitors to come and stay and experience the fantastic things the region has to offer. UGGs in the world (currently 213 of them) attract 60m visitors annually. The UNESCO Geoparks Council have recommended strengthening the JCWL business network. So, we are engaging progressively with the listed local businesses, as a step towards formalising the business network. It's quite a straightforward process. We ask each individual business to sign up to a 2-year partnership agreement with the Geopark committing to follow the principles of the JCWL Geopark Charter. It's basically a commitment from both parties to share information and promote activities for mutual benefit. To become a 'network member' we do a simple assessment of the business and its practices along 20 criteria: 3 are necessary and the other 17 are supplementary of which 12 must be met for inclusion (minimum total score of 15 out of 20). So, we are now working through the business listing to organise brief in-person meetings to go through the criteria and fill in the assessment sheet. Assuming achievement of a pass, both parties then sign the partnership agreement for two years. The meeting marks the official entry into the JCWL Geopark Business network. A small, attractive stone plaque for display will be provided to members as the network grows.



Participants at the Geopark Communities Forum 23 June 2024, Cong Crossroads Centre

Strong engagement at Communities Forum

Positive signs for cross-community involvement

Communities do matter. That's the clear message from the Geopark Communities Forum, held Sunday June 23rd at Cong Crossroads Centre. Hosted by the Geopark voluntary communities' group JCWL GeoEnterprise, most of the 20 geopark communities were represented among the fantastic turnout of 26 representatives on the day. A Sunday.

The purpose was to: a) inspire and stimulate ideas from two other Irish Geoparks and others from the international network; and b) expand membership and voluntary engagement in GeoEnterprise and in the Geopark's Coiste Treorach (advisory group). Two excellent presentations by UNESCO Global Geoparks evaluators kicked off, first Richard Watson (now retired former manager Marble Arch Caves UGG), then John Galloway (board member Copper Coast UGG). Both provided really useful info and inspiring anecdotes. Chair of JCWL GeoEnterprise, Trish Walsh, led the second session. Nominations have been received to participate in the Coiste Treorach, and also to join an expanded GeoEnterprise to help boost community engagement in the Geopark. Further updates will follow on this. Micheál Éinniú, the new Bainisteoir of CDS (Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach, the Geopark Host organisation) was introduced at the meeting. Gearóid Ó Fátharta has now retired. We are very grateful for Gearóid's enthusiasm and support these past three years, and wish him well in retirement.



Erasmus+ partners at limestone pavement in Clonbur Woods, during their April visit to Ireland

Erasmus+ project visit to Ireland

Project partners impressed with JCWL Geopark

In April, JCWL Geopark hosted a visit by the other partners in **GeoSite**, the name given to the Erasmus+ project – two teacher training universities in Norway (one in lead), and three other geoparks – one each from Norway, Italy and Romania. The education-focused project aims to improve the teaching and learning capacity within the partner organisations and the wider users of geoparks. Over three-days, the April visit included four working meetings and a tour of sites, businesses and communities in our JCWL Geopark. The project is developing a digital resource for outdoor education in the four geoparks and general guidelines for education outings. The work so far, combined with expertise from the six partners, has developed a prototype online forum for education resources across the four geoparks. Partners meet next in Buzău Land Geopark in Romania in September.



Business network visiting Bluebell Lane's fireside yurt for night-time cultural experience, Co Down

Shared Island project wrap

Two geoparks and multiple learnings

The last of the four exchange visits between JCWL Geopark and Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark took place 9-10 April 2024.

Representatives from a range of JCWL Geopark businesses – garden centre, mart, pop-up café, historic places, boat tour, tourism network, distillery, accommodation/other hospitality, plus Fáilte Ireland – saw first-hand a great range of enterprises, from micro size to much larger. Especially impressive were the numerous examples of business innovation. Among others, [Bluebell Lane Glamping](#)'s yurt for all-year fireside song and story-telling; [Killeavy Castle Estate](#)'s own farm produce outlet; [Denvir's Hotel](#) converted 17th century coach house accommodation and meeting facilities across the political divide; and [Life Adventure Centre](#)'s youth ranger programme. The final report for this Shared Island Civic Society Fund project has been submitted to Department of Foreign Affairs. It's been a fantastic opportunity for deepening cross-border relations between the two Geoparks, promoting inclusive dialogue around the opportunities and challenges and contributing positively to all-island civic society ecosystem.



Mayo artist Annaliese Brown's Arctic Char mosaic at the Blue Dot waters launch, Tourmakeady

Joint actions with LAWPRO

Blue Dots, Arctic Char and biodiversity

Two recent actions related to positive environmental care are worth noting. Firstly, the Local Authority Waters Program (LAWPRO) and Mayo County Council celebrated the number of Blue Dots waters in the county by launching on 15 May an Arctic Char mosaic art piece by artist Annaliese Brown along with a new Mayo Blue Dots booklet and film. Blue Dots are the high-status objective waterbodies, there are 48 of them in County Mayo. They have the highest ecological quality of all Ireland's waters and often a greater diversity of species that are sensitive to pollution.

A wonderful [#biodiversityweek2024](#) event was held 17th May at Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre, Clonbur, Co. Galway in partnership with JCWL Geopark and LAWPRO. This event explored the biodiversity of the local woodlands and aquatic biodiversity of the local stream, plus the biodiversity of ancient time recorded in the local bedrock. Attendance included the school children of SN na Fairche.



National Heritage Week 2024 poster

Heritage week events in Geopark region

Finding your connections

A reminder ... National Heritage Week 2024 takes place from 17th - 25th August, with the theme Connections, Routes & Networks. The idea is for us all to explore the physical, cultural and natural connections in our communities and beyond. How do we connect to each other, through roads, rivers, rail or waterways? What are the cultural connections like sports or past times that bring us together? How does our environment and natural landscape create connections? The Heritage Week Portal is open for registrations to inform and publicise <https://www.heritageweek.ie>



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

**Dhúiche Sheoigheach
& Lochanna an Iarthair**

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT



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