



Cover page for progress report to Irish UNESCO Global Geopark Committee

Draft report submitted to IUGGC

A key step towards UNESCO status

By now many of you will recall that JCWL Geopark's prime target is to get the green light for UNESCO Global Geopark status in 2025. This involves providing evidence in a report that we have addressed satisfactorily the seven recommendations made by the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council in their application deferral letter of 22 May 2024. We are very happy to report we are still well on track with this process. A draft progress report was submitted to the Irish UNESCO Global Geopark Committee at the end of September. The IUGGC will provide feedback on the draft by December. Key things to continue with in the coming months include production and instalment of attractive signage for nine specific geosites, road signs and community signs in Co Galway, along with plaques for business partners. We are actively considering other information points for promoting the Geopark. And securing a stronger funding base requires ongoing attention. The continued strong support and engagement of stakeholders is essential.

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



Michael Hegarty (JCWL Geopark) and Suellen McKenna (Ballintubber Abbey) signing the business partnership agreement

Network businesses sign up to the Geopark

First group agree partnerships

We are happy to report the first dozen local businesses have signed individual partnership agreements to be members of the JCWL Geopark business network. This is just an initial number towards what we expect in the coming few years will be a much larger grouping of businesses who see the benefit of 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. Just to remind you, the [Geopark website](#) includes a listing of over 100 local businesses. 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 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 partners as the network grows.



Approved information panel for An Fhairche/Clonbur



Approved information panel for Lough Carra

Quality geosite signage on the way Attractive designs supported by Fáilte Ireland

Following engagement with the relevant Geopark communities, design is now complete of new information panels to be located at the Geopark's nine main geosites. We are grateful for Fáilte Ireland's support commissioning Tandem Design for the content work. Production of the panels will commence as part of a public procurement process, with installation either later this year or early 2025. The images above of panels for An Fhairche/Clonbur (Co. Galway) and Lough Carra (Co. Mayo) are two examples of the layout. Each panel includes Gaelige 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 locals and visitors alike.



Kylemore Abbey staff with Benjamin Thébaudeau (JCWL Geopark) in front of new display in ticket office

Geopark ‘Serpentine’ displays at Kylemore and Cong

Plans also for exhibits at CDS and other places

Striking new exhibition displays about JCWL Geopark now feature at two busy visitor centres in the region. One is at Cong info centre, in the heart of that busy village, just opposite the Quiet Man statue of John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara. The other is in the visitor centre/ticket office at historic Kylemore Abbey in Co Galway. Both large-scale ‘serpentine displays’ (2.3m x 3.4m) include bi-lingual (EN & Irish) descriptions of what are UNESCO Global Geoparks and how they contribute to sustainable economic and social development. Also, information on the geopark region’s geodiversity and biodiversity as well specific information on the landscape and heritage of the local area. Both info centres are delighted with the new displays and quality of information.

At Kylemore Abbey, a Geopark partner with c. 600,000 visitors/year, the local area information mentions the bog-blanketed mountains, reference to the life cycle of the ancient Iapetus Ocean, and notes on the archaeology and history of the area. At Cong visitor centre managed by the local community (c. 35,000 visitors/year), the display describes the karst features that explain the absence of a connecting river between Loughs Mask and Corrib, and the Cong springs which are among the largest in the world. There’s also archaeological reference to Neolithic and early Christian times, the time of the Gaelic High Kings, Anglo-Norman invasion and the Ashford Castle demesne story. Both centres are also

distributing new versions of the popular double-sided tear-out maps to hospitality and experience providers in the Geopark.

We also have a plan for installing a similar display at the Geopark host organisation Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach (CDS) at Corr na Móna. Additionally, two Geopark partners – historic Ballintubber Abbey and Killary Fjord Boat Tours – received planning permission in 2024 to construct visitor facilities (building to commence early 2025) at which the Geopark has agreements to install similar displays.



Marianne Shine & Joe Greaney (behind right); the new CT representatives

Coiste Treorach's 2 new community reps

Nominated through GeoEnterprise

Two additional community representatives joined the Geopark's **Coiste Treorach** (Steering Group) in summer 2024, one female and one male. Both were nominated at the Geopark Communities Forum 23 June 2024, hosted by the cross-community representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise. Marianne Shine (Glencorrib village, Co Mayo) is active in local community development, and has completed tour guide training for the province of Connacht, funded through JCWL Geopark. Joe Greaney (The Neale, Co Mayo) is experienced in community and regional development, is also a farmer, local heritage officer and guide, and has fluent Gaeilge. Their representation on the Steering Group continues till the end of 2025, when a new nomination process will take place.



STONE MAD STORYTELLING FESTIVAL 24TH - 27TH OF OCTOBER 2024

JOYCE COUNTRY AND WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PRESENTS
ITS INAUGURAL STORYTELLING FESTIVAL

CHECK OUT THE COMPLETE PROGRAMME BELOW

WWW.JOYCECOUNTRYGEOPARKPROJECT.IE



Storytelling festival poster

Stone Mad Storytelling Festival in Geopark

Just the thing to rouse at Hallowe'en

So you like a good yarn, do you? Well you're in for a treat. The 'Stone Mad' Storytelling Festival is set to kick off in the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark area on the Hallowe'en / Oíche Shamhna weekend of October 24-27th, 2024. Venues in Finny, The Neale, Clonbur, Cong, Ballinrobe and elsewhere will host a programme of events made up of varied genres of the art of storytelling. Including professional storytellers, 'walk and talk' history strolls, music, film and drama ... all with the odd cup of tea, or stronger, in hand! Significantly, local groups will host and participate in the activities, and these include Women's/Men's Sheds, Ciorcail Comhrá, writers groups, primary schools and

community groups in the Geopark area. This inaugural running of the festival has emerged from the partnership of Mourne, Gullion and Strangford UGG and the Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark. With support from the Shared Island fund at the Dept. of Foreign Affairs, the two Geoparks have engaged with each other over the last couple of years to set up useful channels of transfer of know-how and methods and models by which a Geopark can evolve a positive economic dividend for its participating communities. Look out for the festival programme on social media [@JCWLGeopark](#)



Erasmus+ work meeting in Romania

Erasmus+ project visits Buzău Land Geopark, Romania

Digital tools for outdoor teaching and learning

During the first week of September, Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau and manager Michael Hegarty visited Buzău Land UNESCO Global Geopark in Romania along with the other Erasmus+ 'Geosite Project' partners. Buzău Land is a hilly and mountainous territory covering 1036 km² in the Carpathian Bend Area. It is a rural territory, where c. 45,000 people live in 18 municipalities (169 villages and hamlets), most of them grouped in depressions or strung along valleys, while others are scattered along slopes or on high plateaux. The largest mud volcanoes in Europe are found in Buzău Land, alongside eternal flames (natural gas springs), petroleum springs, sandstone concretions and other geological features. Salt domes pierce the surface of complex karst morphology. Some of the longest and deepest salt caves in the world are found here. Sustainable tourism is an important part of the Buzău Land economy.

The Geosite Project is developing a digital resource for outdoor teaching and learning in the four partner geoparks and general guidelines for outdoor education. Steady progress is being made on this with the current development of a website with draft resources to be analysed at the next work meeting in Italy in April 2025 and then tested with local teachers in the four partner geoparks after that.



Benjamin Thébaudeau (JCWL Geopark) presenting at the EGN conference in Iceland

JCWL represented at EGN conference Iceland

Over 300 attend from European geoparks

This year the biennial European Geoparks Network conference was held in the town of Keflavik in the Rekjaenes peninsula UNESCO Global Geopark (UGG) in Iceland. This is an important event for meeting and sharing ideas and information with over 300 visitors from European UGGs and aspiring UGGs. JCWL geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau and Údarás na Gaeltachta's bainisteor turasóireacht Meadbh Seoighe represented our Geopark, with Benjamin making two presentations: one on the ongoing Erasmus+ project on behalf of all the partners, and one on the now completed Shared Island Civic funded project in partnership with Mourne Gullion Strangford UGG. Both presentations were very well attended raising significant interest. The conference included an optional field trip around the local Geopark on the final day. There were stops to local hot springs and to recent lava flows, including the evacuated town of Grindavik which was made accessible specifically for the conference attendants.



Geopark roadshow in Oughterard Courthouse and at Ballinrobe post office

Heritage Week roadshows a success

Visits to Oughterard, Headford and Ballinrobe

It wasn't quite shouting from the roof tops, but JCWL Geopark took to the road in August during Heritage Week to promote the idea of our Geopark in the area's three towns. This was a great opportunity for the Geopark to inform and even brag about the fascinating geological and cultural heritage in this beautiful part of north-west County Galway and south-west County Mayo. Also to update locals and visitors alike on progress towards UNESCO Global Geopark status.

First stop was the fabulous Courthouse community facility in Oughterard. The event attracted a steady stream of visitors of all ages, mostly locals, but also some dropped in from outside the area and beyond. Second stop was on the eastern side of Lough Corrib for a warm welcome at the well-known staging post The Anglers Rest in Headford. Third and final destination was in the busy Ballinrobe SuperValu and Post Office carpark.

Geopark Geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau led informal discussions at the three venues, armed with an intriguing collection of rocks, maps and flyers and, most importantly, fascinating info and stories about how our amazing landscapes have been formed over 700 million years. Plus, how geological processes and, much more recently, how human interaction have shaped this magical geopark region of roughly 1500 km². The basic idea of the roadshow is to inform and interact directly with local people and visitors about what a Geopark is and how this particular Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark can help the 20 communities in the Geopark region to explore and develop their own local heritage, grow local business and jobs, and sustain and expand local services.



Biodiversity Summer School on the shores of Pollacappul Lough at Kylemore Abbey

Green Sod Biodiversity Summer School at Kylemore

Partnering with Notre Dame University's Global Centre

Promoting good care of the natural environment is an important aspect of our Geopark. Where relevant and appropriate, we partner with organisations in events and initiatives that have similar aims. In this sense we have a growing partnership with University of Notre Dame's Global Centre at Kylemore Abbey on community development, including the environment. During the last weekend of August, NDU hosted a Biodiversity Summer School organised by [Green Sod Ireland](#). This organisation works with local communities, raising awareness of the health, educational, social, economic and environmental benefits of caring for the land and its biodiversity. The networking event brought together various organisations, projects, businesses and the public who focus on biodiversity protection and enhancement in Connemara, south Mayo and Joyce Country. Contributors included Dr Terry Morely (Uni of Galway), Mary McAndrew (ACRES West Connacht), ecologist Marie Louise Heffernan (Letterfrack Tidy Towns), Eamon McLoughlan (NPWS conservation officer), John Lusby (Birdwatch Ireland), David Rafter (LAWPro), Margaret Flaherty (Dark Sky Ireland), Jess Williams (Hometree), and Forum Connemara ceo Karen Mannion. The event included a workshop on enabling action on biodiversity led by Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau, a walk and talk with the Kylemore Abbey biodiversity officer Inez Streefkerk, and a chainsaw demonstration on good practice for control of *Rhododendron Ponticum*. A nature photography exhibition by Tina Claffey along with a poetry reading by Jane Robinson brought in a delightful contribution from the arts to the protection of biodiversity.



Clare Glanville (GSI) at the Geoheritage grant project showcase

Geoheritage Grant Projects Showcase @ GSI/DECC

‘Conserving the Past – Sustaining the Future’

In part to mark International Geodiversity Day (6th October) and in part to celebrate geoh heritage in the community, Geological Survey Ireland's Geoh heritage Programme hosted an event at the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications offices at Beggars Bush, Dublin, on 7 October to celebrate Irish geoh heritage. The day showcased projects from around the country that were funded by GSI's annual geoh heritage grants in recent years. Project representatives gave short, informal updates on products, interpretative boards, and other work they've done to make geology and geoh heritage accessible to the public. JCWL Geopark, the three existing UNESCO Global Geoparks in Ireland, and other groups and organisations who have received funding gave short updates on products, interpretative boards, and other work they've done to make geology and geoh heritage accessible to the public. Each project also had a stand area to display their work. There was lively networking, sharing of ideas, enthusiasm, and many examples of geoh heritage in the community supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs).

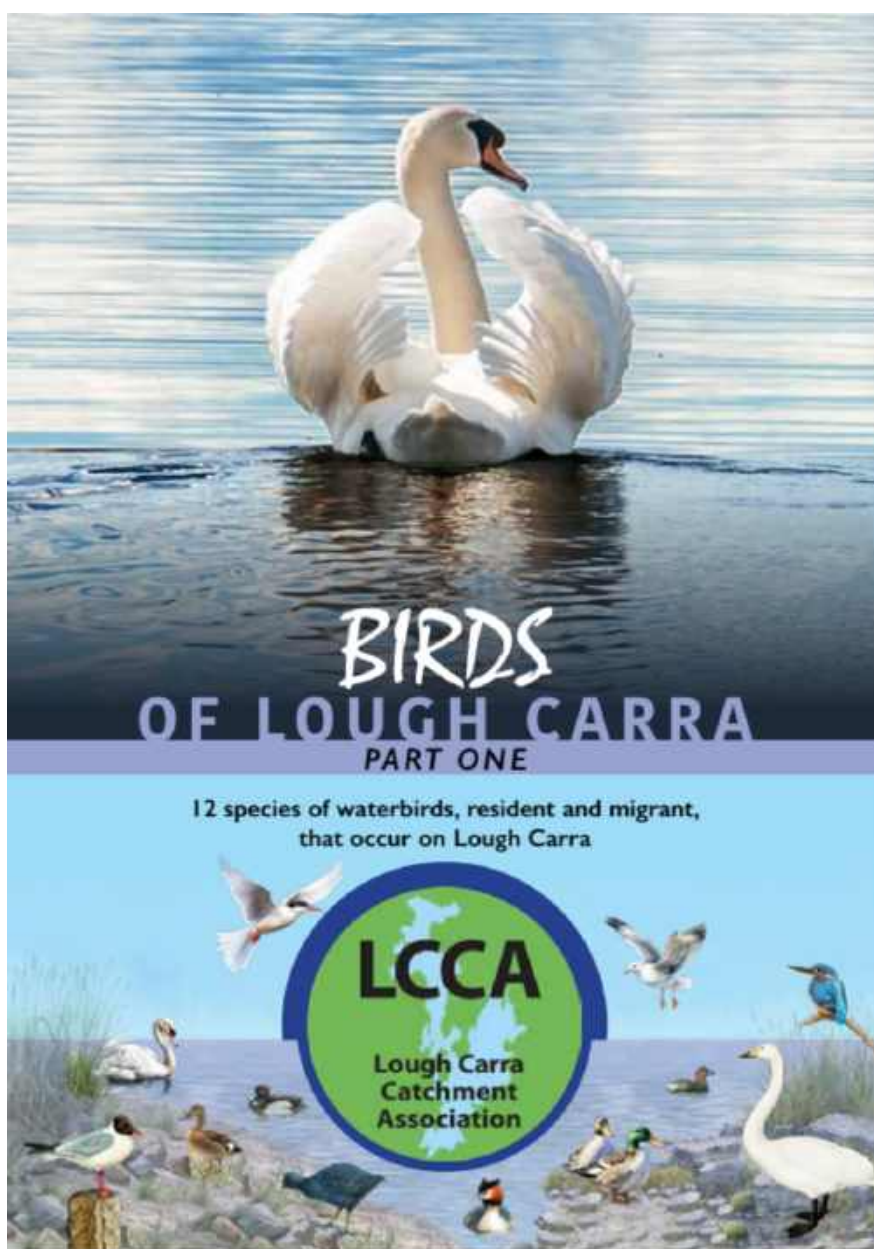


Cover of Terre Sauvage magazine October 2024 issue

Terre Sauvage – our Wild Lands ... in bold colour

Striking cover feature in this widely-read French magazine

Connemara and its geology featured as the cover story of a widely read adventure tourism French magazine entitled *Terre Sauvage* (Wild Lands in English), published October 2024. The article showcases parts of JCWL Geopark and includes a whole section on its rocks and landscape history that was co-written by our Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau. The visit of the main author, a freelance journalist and photographer, led to his discovery of the Geopark and the wealth of information on the website – including several webpages in French. A direct contact with the Geopark team then led to this beautiful magazine collaboration, which will provide more context to the many French tourists visiting our Geopark region every year.



Cover of new Birds of Lough Carra booklet

News from around Lough Carra

Tafann na dTonn: Barking Waves ... and more!

Lough Carra Catchment Association is a long-standing supporter of JCWL Geopark. They are a very active and committed group towards the preservation and enhancement of the unique marl lake Lough Carra, and its teeming bird, animal and plant life. As initiator of the Lough Carra LIFE project, they also seek to ensure the quality of drinking water from the lake. The LCCA received funding from the National Parks and Wildlife Service to produce four information booklets on these topics: Waterbirds, Butterflies, Insects, Woodland Flowers. The first of these booklets 'Waterbirds of Lough Carra' has now been printed featuring 12 species of Waterbirds that can be seen on the lake and in the catchment and is available on pdf [here](#). Hard copies are available by emailing info@loughcarra.org.

Still with books, the renowned American photographer, Ron Rostenock, and Irish poet Gabriel Rosenstock have come together to produce a beautiful book Tafann na dTonn : Barking Waves. Ron has been visiting Co. Mayo for over fifty years and the photographs featured in the book are all taken in Co. Mayo, including Lough Carra. Each photograph is responded to by a Haiku (a Japanese lyric verse form) written by Gabriel in Irish and English. They were kind enough to share one of the pages featuring Lough Carra with a photo of the cover (above). If you'd like to purchase a copy of the book it's available on-line from [Wordery](#).



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Lochanna an Iarthair

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT



Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark

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