



*Cover page for progress report to Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee*

## JCWL Geopark on track to address UNESCO points

### Positive feedback on draft progress report

We've received positive feedback from the Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee (IUGGC) on our draft progress report responding to UNESCO's seven recommendations in their application deferral letter of 22 May 2024. The draft report went to the IUGGC at end of September 2024. The feedback noted each of the recommendations was dealt with in appropriate detail including relevant supporting evidence. They note that some of the required actions are still ongoing, with good progress evident on these. Key things still to focus on 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. Geopark info points in place at the office/visitor centre in Tourmakeady, at the Cong information centre, and in Kylemore Abbey's visitor centre will be made more permanent. Plans are taking shape to populate other information corners for promoting the Geopark, including at the Geopark host organisation Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach (CDS). A suitable funding base has been secured for 2025 (see next article), and wider commitments on governance for the foreseeable future. The continued strong support and engagement of stakeholders is essential and acknowledged.

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

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## Partners agree base funds for 2025

### Clarity on Geopark budget level

A successful UNESCO Global Geopark (UGG) application must have geological heritage of international value and is managed by a body with legal recognition

under national legislation. Its management body should include representation of all relevant stakeholders, partners and scientific, local and indigenous (if any) communities. And it requires a comprehensive management plan, covering governance, development, communication, protection, infrastructure, finance, and partnership issues. Joyce Country and Western Lakes has functioned as a de facto UGG since 2021, following significant support from the Government's Rural Regeneration Development Fund. Since 2022, funding support for normal operations (costs include three staff, other overheads, marketing, etc) has reverted to contributions from four state bodies Geological Survey Ireland, Údarás na Gaeltachta, and Mayo and Galway County Councils. This is stated in the Funders Collaborative Agreement, reviewed annually and effective for a three-year period, with an option to extend a further three years. Philanthropic funds sourced by JCWL GeoEnterprise (the Geopark cross-community representative group) have also provided essential support for Geopark operations since 2022. Modest other funds from project applications have helped bolster development resources. We are pleased to note that core budget commitments have recently been agreed for 2025 for Geopark operations, with the full-year budget c. €175,000 from all the above-mentioned sources.

**Baile an Róba Ballinrobe**

Tá tú i nGeopáirc, áit le geolaíocht speisialta. You are in a Geopark, an area with special geology.

Cumadh an téarma 'boycott' sna 1880idí nuair a dhíhailtaigh tionóntaí agus seirbhísí áitiúla déileáil leis an ngníomhaire talún Charles Boycott. When local tenants and services refused to deal with land agent Charles Boycott in the 1880s, the term 'boycott' was established.

**Tréimhí ama**  
Time periods

750 500 250 0

Pre-Cambrian Cambrian Devonian Carboniferous Permian Triassic Jurassic Cretaceous Tertiary Quaternary

PHILIP ROONEY'S  
**CAPTAIN BOYCOTT**  
THE MAN WHOSE NAME GAVE A DREADED WORD TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN THE STORMY DAYS OF THE LAND LEAGUE

Is é an tainmíocht a bhaineann le mairbh na hAille é 'Captain Boycott' de Rooney (1943).  
Rooney's Captain Boycott (1943) is a novel about boycott and his clashes with locals.  
© Image Union

Deán scanadh le haghaidh tuilleadh eolais agus chun ár gcód iompair a fheiceáil  
Scan for more and to see our code of conduct

[www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie](http://www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie)

**Approved information panel for Ballinrobe**



Approved information panel for Fionnaithe/Finny

## Geopark signage procurement is closer Signage is key part of Geopark visibility

As noted in previous newsletters, one of the main recommendations by UNESCO Global Geoparks Council JCWL Geopark should address is visibility, including installation of appropriate signage. Procurement of signage production is in the hands of Geological Survey Ireland, utilising money set aside from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund which kick-started the Geopark from 2020. Geopark staff have been assisting GSI with technical detail for public procurement of the signage, and we are anticipating progress on concluding the procurement shortly, ready for installation. Three forms of signage will be procured: welcome signs on main roadways; village signs in Co. Galway communities (Mayo ones are already in place); and geosite panels in nine Geopark signature places. The images above include one of a set of three panels for Ballinrobe at the Bowers (Co. Mayo) and the proposed panel for Finny/Lough Nafooey (straddling Co. Mayo & Co. Galway). 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 generating interest from locals and visitors. Panel design funded by Fáilte Ireland.



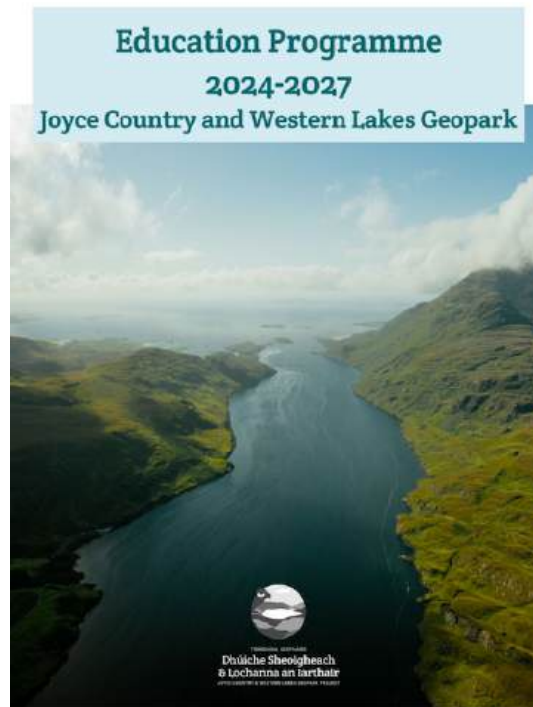
*JCWL GeoEnterprise AGM held in Partry community hall*

## **AGM of GeoEnterprise communities' group**

### **Meeting launches three sub-committees**

The Geopark communities' representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise held its annual general meeting on 19 November in Partry Community Hall, Co Mayo. The AGM included a review of 2023 activities, financial report and appointment of directors. The field visit in July 2023 by two UNESCO evaluators to assess the readiness for UNESCO Global Geopark status was the stand-out activity. GeoEnterprise hosted the Communities event at Cong Crossroads Community Centre for the evaluators. And GeoEnterprise contributed €25,000 to Geopark operational funds for 2023 calendar year, utilising philanthropic sources. Directors reappointed were Trish Walsh (Clonbur, also reappointed chair), Gearóidín Ní Ghrúinéil (Castlebar), Yvonne Finn (Tourmakeady), Bríd Burke (Clonbur). Michael Pippenger, representing Notre Dame Global Ireland/Kylemore/Dublin, was also nominated and accepted; this helps to strengthen the already positive engagement the Geopark has with Kylemore and Notre Dame Global, particularly in education and community development.

A regular meeting was held following the GeoEnterprise agm. Three sub-groups were launched, to provide a more strategic focus to GeoEnterprise and the communities it represents. The **Business/Enterprise Group**, chaired by Joe Greaney (The Neale) includes Frank Keane (Ballinrobe) and Marianne Shine (Glencorrib), will develop ideas and actions to promote new and existing business activity in the Geopark. The **Environment Group** includes Deirdre and Greg Forde (Oughterard) and Yvonne Finn (Tourmakeady) and will promote useful actions on climate, biodiversity and sustainability. The **Culture/Heritage Group**, chaired by Marian McHugh (Cong) includes Gearóidín Ní Ghrúinéil (Castlebar) and Charlotte and Brendan Daignan (Partry), will promote heritage and cultural actions. Terms of reference and priority areas are being developed in each of the groups.



JCWL Geopark Education Programme 2024-2027

## Geopark Education Programme launched

### Setting a vision, objectives and action plan

Following a year of consultation and preparation, the Geopark Education Programme 2024-2027 was officially launched on 19th November at the JCWL GeoEnterprise agm (see above). This document describes the education challenges and opportunities for the geopark, with local schools, universities and training boards, as well as the partner agencies involved in education. It highlights the four scientific themes linked with the Geopark's activities (Geoscience, Environment, Cultural Heritage and Sustainability). From these, a vision and objectives were defined along with an action plan for the next three years. The **overall objective** is: *Improve awareness and understanding of the geological, natural and cultural heritage of Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark among locals and visitors, and of the need to foster care for the environment by current and future generations while enjoying the wonderful educational experiences available in the region in both the English and Irish languages.* The English version with appendices is available as pdf on the Geopark website [here](#) with the Irish version to come in early 2025. The Geopark can now work on implementing the actions of the plan, including continuing visits to schools, geopark ambassador course and furthering partnerships with stakeholders including NPWS. Progress will be reviewed annually.



### *Inaugural Scientific Committee online*

## **Scientific Committee first meeting**

### **A multidisciplinary advisory group**

The Geopark Scientific Committee held its first meeting on the 11th of December online. This committee is composed of mostly scientific experts including from University of Galway and Atlantic Technological University and from statutory agencies Geological Survey Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Teagasc. It serves as a multidisciplinary advisory committee for the Geopark's Coiste Treorach (Steering group) reflecting the wide range of scientific themes beyond the expertise of the Geopark geologist, i.e. biodiversity and land management, archaeology and history, climate action and sustainable development. The committee will meet one to two times a year and is available to respond to scientific queries from the Coiste Treorach and to review Geopark publications and resources for scientific accuracy. The inaugural meeting saw the introduction of the members and their expertise as well as confirmation of the Chair Dr Brian McConnell, recently retired senior geologist Geological Survey Ireland.

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*Entrance to Tourmeakeady Woods*

## **A geotrail coming to Tourmeakeady Woods**

### **Funded by Geoheritage Grant Scheme**

Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo on behalf of JCWL Geopark is delighted to announce its success in securing a Geoheritage Grant Scheme award for 2024. The scheme is administered by Geological Survey Ireland. This award is for the development of a geodiversity walk for Tourmeakeady Woods in partnership with Coillte and the local Coiste Pobail Thuar Mhic Éadaigh. The walk will consist of 10 to 12 boulders of distinct rock types sourced from disused places in the Geopark set at intervals along the 500m walk to the Waterfall with a small information panel beside each. There will also be additional panels identifying various native species present in this People's Millenium Forest. The development will strengthen the link Tourmeakeady, and other communities, have with the wider Geopark and develop the woods further as a place for educational activities. Selection of the boulders will start in January, looking for locations with minimal impact on the environment and the landscape. For example, locations such as old quarries or land clearance, easily accessible from a track to allow for machinery access.

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*Cavan Burren Interpretive Centre in Cuilcagh Lakelands UGG*

## Lively Geoparks Forum in Cuilcagh Lakelands

### Much to admire in this cross-border geopark

The Irish Geoparks Forum is held each year, normally in the autumn. The Forum is open to anyone, not just those involved in geological heritage. This year's Forum 7-8 November was hosted by Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark – a Cavan-Fermanagh cross-border Geopark. Five representatives from JCWL Geopark attended – Meadhb Seoighe (Údarás na Gaeltachta), Micheál Éinniú (CDS), Trish Walsh (GeoEnterprise), and Michael Hegarty and Benjamin Thébaudeau (Geopark staff). The Forum includes update presentations by Ireland's four UNESCO Global Geoparks, and other aspiring Geoparks (this year including our JCWL Geopark, and Antrim/Causeway Coast). Three guest presenters' very interesting topics included placenames in the Irish landscape, philanthropy and the Irish Heritage Trust, and Ireland's holy wells. Forum field visits are always informative and inspiring, and Cuilcagh's itinerary was indeed that. We were treated to a tour of the enterprising, multi-purpose [Cavan Adventure Centre](#) and the [Cavan Burren Park](#) – the latter has a wonderful interpretative centre, and five fabulous walking trails linked to special stories that make it such a unique environment. See next year's newsletters for details of the Irish Geopark's Forum 2025!

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*Previous Business Networking event at the Lodge at Ashford*

## **Geopark business network event 17 Feb'25**

### **Getting ready for a big year ahead**

We all know the power of networking, engagement and referrals among enterprises for better business performance. With this in mind, we've set Monday 17th February 2025 for the JCWL Geopark Business Network event, 10am to 1pm at Cong Community Crossroads Centre (eircode F31PY97). A snappy event, it will include inspiring talks on maximising Geopark business opportunities and the do's/don'ts of AI at local level. Plus opportunities for networking. Agency service providers will also be there, showcasing the range of supports available for business growth and success. Just to remind you, the [Geopark website](#) includes a listing of over 100 local businesses. Already a dozen have signed up to individual partnership agreements to be members of the JCWL Geopark Business Network for two years, renewable. 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, promoting local heritage and the Irish language and adopting/improving sustainable practices. There are 20 criteria for formal network membership: 3 are necessary and the other 17 are supplementary of which 12 must be met for inclusion (minimum total score 15 out of 20). We expect UNESCO Global Geopark status to be achieved unofficially in September 2025 and officially in spring 2026, with exciting prospects for Geopark businesses and communities.

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*Éanna Ní Lamhna talking about Biodiversity at the Mayo Tourism Network event*

## **Mayo Tourism Networking event 5th Dec**

### **Éanna Ní Lamhna proves a big draw**

Fáilte Ireland hosted another excellent and well-attended Mayo Tourism Networking event at Breaffy House Hotel in early December. The format was familiar – ‘speed dating’ networking including hospitality businesses and service providers in the morning session, followed by guest presentations. The first of these was by Westport Estate (rebranded from Westport House) about the impressive development currently underway to expand its infrastructure (including almost ready ‘The Grace Hotel’) and bolster their visitor attractions at this signature destination. Then, well-known biologist, environmental consultant, author, broadcaster and academic **Éanna Ní Lamhna** provided a typically riveting and sharp-witted view of why Mayo is the place to live, visit, explore ... and adore. Our Geopark representatives Michael and Dominic got very good value from new contacts in the networking session. And went away feeling very good about the future of sustainable tourism in County Mayo and the wider Geopark. Congratulations to Fáilte Ireland on the event.

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**COMMUNITY SHOWCASE**



*Poster for "A Meitheal for Molly" event*

## ***Headford Lace Project's Meitheal for Molly***

### **Nominee for LA Community Festivals Awards**

Headford Lace Project has been celebrating the ancient harp tune and song Mailigh San Seoirse, also known as Molly St George, which has a historical and cultural significance for the town. Molly St George, the lady who inherited the Headford estate in 1749, was a patron of the lace industry. This multi-layered, inclusive intergenerational song, dance and music initiative culminated in a performance at 'Something in the Water Festival' in Headford in October. Supported by Creative Ireland Galway County Council it involved around 250 participants, and aimed to reclaim the song and tune for the town. Among the many contributors were Ability West Headford hub and Anam Music Therapy, local professional arts practitioners, four choirs (Presentation College Headford Choir, The Corrib Singers and Sing On Choir, and Campbell's Tavern Community Choir. Emerald Dance Studios created an intergenerational dance sequence Let's Dance Molly. Local world champion dancer Evan O'Brien choreographed 'A Slip Jig for Molly'. The tune was also played by students of Matt Cunningham's school of traditional music. Headford Music Works Orchestra played a new arrangement called 'Molly's March'. Harper Kathleen Loughnane and traditional singer, Breda Keville performed the song/tune in its original style. The entire event was filmed by John Conway's Búlabosca Films. The performance has been nominated for a Local Authority Community Festivals Awards as a standout event.

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*Benjamin Thébaudeau receiving the Gradam Gnó in Croke Park*

## Gradaim Gnó na hÉireann award

### Gold, silver, bronze success for Geopark

JCWL Geopark has been awarded a Gradaim Gnó (business award) by Glór na nGael recognising the efforts undertaken in the promotion of the Irish language. This national scheme allows businesses and organisations to be assessed and officially recognised for their use of the Irish language. For 2024, the Geopark was given a gold medal for its signage, a silver medal for marketing and branding and a bronze medal for service in Irish. These are good benchmarks on which the geopark will improve on in its future development. Beyond the full bilingual aspect of all its publications, JCWL Geopark also encourages increased use of the Irish language through its business network (one of the seven principles of the Geopark Charter for Communities and Tourism) and its education programme (see above). A plaque for the award was presented at a ceremony in Croke Park in Dublin on 12th November along with over 100 other businesses from around Ireland. The Geopark encourages any of its business partners to get in contact with Glór na nGael and register for the scheme to also be recognised for their promotion of the Irish language in future.



*Erasmus + GeoSite project logo*

## Erasmus+ progress reports available

## GeoSite project is developing digital tools

The GeoSite Erasmus+ project is making significant progress towards the development of digital tools for the promotion of outdoor education in geoparks. As a reminder, this 3-year project led by the University of Western Norway is a partnership with the University of Stavanger (Norway) and four European geoparks: JCWL Geopark, Sunnhordland UNESCO Global Geopark (UGG) in Norway, Tuscan Mining UGG in Italy, and Buzău Land UGG in Romania. The project has now completed its first year and submitted progress reports to the EU. Two of the deliverables are already published and are accessible online (see below). The project partners are hard at work developing early versions of the digital resources and of the website that will host them. Early developments on the project were presented by the JCWL Geopark geologist at the last European Geoparks Network conference in Iceland in October where it stirred strong interest from other European geoparks. The next work meeting will take place in Italy in April 2025.

Report 1 on digital tools currently used by European geoparks:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11250/3166254>

Report 2 on results of teacher and student surveys in the four geoparks:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11250/3166255>



*Benjamin Thébaudeau working in the Geopark office with the two TY students*

## First TY work placement completed

### Creative learning activity sheet prepared

This early term of the school year saw the Geopark take on its first two TY students on work placement from Sancta Maria College in Louisburgh, Co. Mayo. They have been working with the Geopark Geologist on Fridays from

mid-September till the end of November. The work placement allowed them to explore all aspects of the Geopark territory, its ambassador programme and education activities and its involvement with local businesses. Their main task was to draft a 4-page activity sheet for children visiting the geopark, taking examples from similar sheets found in local national parks and museums. The two students, Maeve and Sophia Coyne from Leenane, were excellent in their engagement with the geopark activities and their comprehension of the task. The activity sheet produced will be circulated among our governance groups for approval, translated into Irish and printed for them to be taken and used at the Geopark information centres in the Tourmakeady Geopark office, Cong tourism office, Kylemore Abbey visitor centre and CDS Teo offices in Corr na Móna.

## COMMUNITY SHOWCASE



*Biodiversity in Schools workshop at Coláiste Muire, Tuar Mhic Éadaigh*

## ***Biodiversity and sustainable energy in Tourmakeady***

### **Look what's happening locally**

As many communities across Ireland plan actions around climate change and biodiversity, the Sustainable Energy Community Tourmakeady (SEC-T), Co. Mayo, used a small amount of philanthropic funding to complete two initiatives which could stimulate ideas for actions in other Geopark communities. The first was a **Biodiversity for Schools workshop**. It was organized with transition year (TY) teachers and other teachers in the local Coláiste Muire. The biodiversity workshop was delivered by an expert from [Biodiversity in Schools](#). The funding also covered hiring a videographer to film the TY class and teachers during the workshop, in the classroom and outside in the grounds of the school and adjacent Lough Mask shoreline. Photos from the shoot were used in a brochure created by the TY class. They are using the brochure and

video to promote biodiversity in the school and wider community. The second recent initiative was **Solar PV for Scoil Naisiunta, Tourmakeady**. Early in 2024, the SEC-T ran a Solar PV meitheal initiative with support from the SEAI mentor for Mayo and Galway, Dr Orla Nic Suibhne. A commercially competitive solar PV electrical company in Co Mayo was identified and contracted. During the October 2024 mid-term break, 6.96kW solar PV (16 panels) were installed on the roof of the school, along with a 10kW inverter. Additional panels are planned.

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## Christmas and New Year wishes

### Glancing back and looking ahead

Another year ending, another big year ahead. As noted in the items above, progress has been strong towards achieving UNESCO Global Geopark status. We're confident 2025 is the year. We also hope 2024 was a solid and encouraging year for you our followers and partners. 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 enjoyable Christmas and happy and prosperous 2025.



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

**Dhúiche Sheoigheach  
& Lochanna an Iarthair**

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT

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