



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

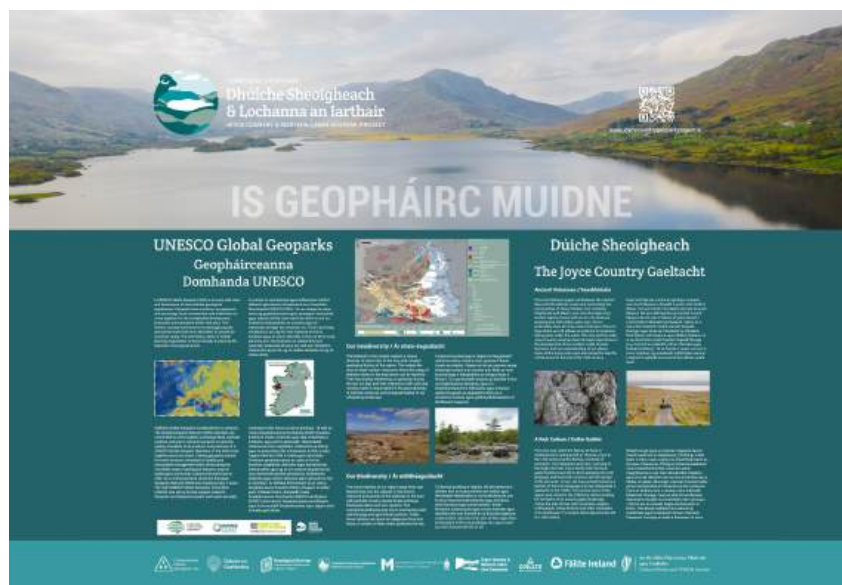
## **Edging closer to UNESCO decision**

### **Visibility a key priority**

We're pleased to report very good progress as we edge closer to a decision on UNESCO Global Geopark status for JCWL Geopark (expected early September 2025). Signage procurement is almost completed (Geological Survey Ireland lead), the physical production and installation will be in the coming few weeks – road signs and community signs in Co Galway, along with plaques for business network partners and instalment of attractive panels for nine specific geosites. A new exhibition/info corner is now being set up at the Geopark host organisation Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach (CDS) in Corr na Móna (story below). The three Geopark networks – business, community, education – are functional and active. And the governance and financial aspects are well established. Written feedback from the Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee (IUGGC) on our draft progress report indicates we are well on track to address all seven UNESCO Global Geopark recommendations to achieve UGG status. A further progress report is being prepared for the IUGGC by end April. The final report goes to UNESCO in July. Your continued stakeholder strong support and engagement is greatly appreciated.

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

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*JCWL Geopark display at CDS*

## Geopark exhibition space at CDS

### Includes creative learning resources

Visitors to the CDS centre can now enjoy viewing and reading – in Irish and English – about Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark and UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGs) at an attractive display and info space. The exhibition includes a large ‘serpentine’ panel. It has info on the features of UGGs, their global reach and networks, and the important role of the Irish UNESCO Global Geoparks Committee. There’s a section on the significant geodiversity of the five local CDS communities, and the geopark overall. And a brief cultural history of the origins of the name Joyce Country and it’s numerous place names. Other exhibition material includes ‘creative learning activity sheets’ for children visiting the Geopark (developed on work placement in 2024 by two Sancta Maria/Louisburgh students), plus our popular tear-out A3 size Geopark maps with lots of information about trails, attractions, activities, geological and landscape features and links to much more info on the Geopark website.



## Engaging Council Municipal Districts

### Councillors show strong support

State agencies play a key role in Geopark governance, funding and support for achieving and retaining UNESCO Global Geopark status. Their representatives on the Funders Group, Coiste Treorach Group (advisory) and Operations Management Group are kept up to date regularly. We also engage with County Councillors in Galway and Mayo through presentations at Municipal District (MD) levels, notably those with communities in the Geopark. Already this year we have presented at MD meetings in Connemara, Tuam and Claremorris-Swinford, receiving strong endorsement from each. Plans for further presentations soon include Castlebar MD and Westport-Belmullet MD, and to the overall council meetings.



*Business network event at the Crossroads community centre*

## Geopark business network event

### Strong engagement on show

The 2025 annual Geopark Business Network Event, held 17th February, attracted a wide range of representatives from 40 local enterprises. They included accommodation/food/other hospitality, attractions, angling/other outdoor activities, heritage, culture/art and training. The format was simple yet very effective. First, progress updates from the Geopark, then outlines of business supports by Fáilte Ireland, Mayo and Galway County Council tourism officers and Local Enterprise Offices, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), Inland Fisheries Ireland and local development companies Forum Connemara and SW Mayo. Interspersed were very brief elevator pitches from all the businesses present to provide a hook for follow up introductions and chats during the numerous networking breaks to explore possible collaborations. Thirteen of the more than one hundred businesses listed on the Geopark website ([joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie/en/map/](http://joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie/en/map/)) have so far signed up to individual partnership agreements to be members of the JCWL



Geopark Business Network for two years, renewable. We expect these numbers to grow steadily. Contact us for further information.



*Fionnan Nestor, Fáilte Ireland, describing the upcoming Inland Mayo DEDP*

## Ideas for a business programme

### Geopark eyeing funds to boost growth

As you know, Geoparks are about business and jobs development in communities based on experiences and attractions available in the area. With this in mind we are exploring funding options from various sources for a training programme to stimulate growth of existing business and also new start-ups. There are great opportunities for such growth with the expected increased interest from visitors to stay in and explore the region. Fáilte Ireland recognises this potential, reflected in their decision to begin work on a new Destination and Experience Development Plan (DEDP) for 'Inland Mayo' during 2025. Community consultations took place during April. A DEDP provides a shared vision and clear direction towards strengthening an area's market share of tourism revenues, enhancing the overall visitor appeal through targeted investment support. Mayo is already benefiting significantly from the Clew Bay DEDP, now in its fourth year of implementation. Connemara and Aran Islands DEDP has been in place since 2018 and will be renewed in the next year. Keep a good eye out for these DEPD developments.



*Erasmus+ GeoSite project logo*

## **Erasmus+ ‘Geosite project’ update**

### **Developing digital learning tools**

The Erasmus+ project partners meet next at the Tuscan Mining UNESCO Global Geopark in Italy at the end of April. The project partners are developing early versions of digital resources and of the website that will host them including virtual fieldtrips. The 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 outcomes will add significantly to the engagement and learning tools for geoparks and will be tested in local schools from next September.



*Two of the chosen boulders for the geodiversity trail*

## **Progress on new Geotrail initiative**

### **Identifying boulders for Tourmakeady Woods**



January's Storm Éowyn was very severe on people, buildings, trees and forests, but it hasn't prevented work identifying boulders to fit in a geodiversity trail in Tourmakeady Woods. This walk, funded by Geological Survey Ireland, is a partnership with Coillte and the local Coiste Pobail Thuar Mhic Éadaigh. It is implemented by the Geopark in association with Comharchumann Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo. Quarries and some other landowners in the Geopark region are generously providing boulders of particular rock types for the trail. The walk will consist of 10 to 12 boulders of distinct rock types set at intervals along the 500m walk from the Woods carpark to Tourmakeady 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 Tourmakeady, and other communities, have with the wider Geopark and develop the woods further for education and enjoyment.



*University of Galway students at the Larches*

## Education update

### A full term of learning

This last school term has seen further visits to local primary and secondary schools as well as engagement with visiting universities. The Geopark is proud to promote the region for its wide range of geological and geographical features as well as historical and cultural aspects to be used in the classroom. This is one of the main objectives and actions of the Geopark's education programme launched last November and available on our website in both English and Irish. Additionally, the last term saw three new groups (37 people) of Geopark Ambassadors undertake this free course with 20 people completing the fieldtrip session. This puts the total number of graduated Geopark ambassadors at 134, a cohort now able to share what the geopark has to offer to visitors and locals alike. Don't hesitate to contact us if you want to participate in a future session of this course.



*Draft webpage of information on JCWL GeoEnterprise*

## GeoEnterprise sub-group updates

### Draft scope of work defined

We previously informed readers that the cross-community representative group JCWL GeoEnterprise has established three sub-groups to support development in Geopark communities. A draft scope of work for each of the groups has now been outlined (bullets below), and a dedicated GeoEnterprise page is being prepared on the Geopark website. If you want to get involved, get in contact at [agdsgeoenterprise@gmail.com](mailto:agdsgeoenterprise@gmail.com)

- **Biodiversity / sustainability / climate action:** i) Engage with communities to highlight environmental concerns and identify how they might be addressed; ii) Work with communities to minimise environmental harm and support sustainable practices; iii) Work with communities to showcase unique aspects of local flora and fauna and address potential impacts, propose mitigation strategies and work to implement actions; iv) Develop plans for efficient use of resources, waste reduction, and recycling.
- **Heritage and Culture:** i) Promotion of Irish language in every-day life; ii) Art/artists in the community; iii) Engage with communities to highlight heritage and cultural strengths and how these assets can be managed in a sustainable way and to act as a catalyst for economic activity; iv) Encourage gathering of heritage, recording, publishing and dissemination in/between communities.
- **Enterprise and development:** i) Encourage and support people to develop business ideas and create employment; ii) Develop an entrepreneurial culture through training and education; iii) Encourage organic growing and food production; iv) Promote products from the locality; v) Encourage country markets around the Geopark area.



Ballintubber Biodiversity Action Plan 2021-2026

## Biodiversity plans in our communities

### The time for action is now

All local authorities have to have a biodiversity action plan in place by 2026. Galway and Mayo County Councils both have biodiversity officers (Rosina Joyce in Galway and Sheila Murphy in Mayo). A small number of Geopark communities already have local plans (e.g. Ballintubber). Several have secured funds to develop their local plans (Tourmakeady, Clonbur). Others have plans currently out of date and are considering how to update them (Ballinrobe, Cong, Headford). Ireland faces significant biodiversity challenges. A recent Connaught Telegraph report quoting Mayo's biodiversity officer Sheila Murphy notes that over half of native Irish plant species have declined in range and/or abundance. 26% of 211 bird species are on the red list. Over half of our 100 bee species are in decline, 30% are threatened with extinction. A total of 85% of Ireland's habitats are in 'unfavourable' status. The Geopark intends to support communities to recognise the need to develop quality biodiversity plans, share experiences and models and possible other supports.



TIONSCADAL GEOPHÁIRC

**Dhúiche Sheoigheach  
& Lochanna an Iarthair**

JOYCE COUNTRY & WESTERN LAKES GEOPARK PROJECT





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