



Cover page for progress report and business plaque installed at BÁCÚS

Optimism about Geopark ‘green light’

Report decision in UNESCO hands

We're delighted to say that the Progress Report on addressing all recommendations to achieve Global Geopark status was submitted to the UNESCO Geoparks secretariat at end of July. Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark application and Progress Report will be adjudicated on at the Global Geoparks Council meeting in Chile in early September. JCWL Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau, along with Clare Glanville, senior geologist at Geological Survey Ireland, will be present. All going well, we will receive a “green light” endorsement in Chile, which then goes forward to the full UNESCO Executive Board in spring 2026 for ratification.

In the meantime, we have all signage produced, delivered and available to complete installation in the next few weeks. They include business partner plaques for the 13 businesses that have been assessed and signed a 2-year partnership for the Geopark. These square limestone plaques are engraved with the Geopark logo and include a bilingual note “Geopark partner”. Brown entry-point and community signs are being erected in County Galway (previously installed in County Mayo). New corten-steel lecterns with attractive information panels are being installed at nine of our main geosites (sites of interest). The graphic design of these panels, commissioned by Fáilte Ireland, has included consultation on content with local communities. The brown signs and lecterns are being installed by Galway and Mayo County Councils as in-kind contributions to the Geopark, for which we are very grateful.

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



Information panel at the Deircs geosite

A stunning view of the Deircs

Owenbrin Valley from Lough Mask Distillery

The UNESCO evaluators highlighted the temporary info panel in the car park area of Lough Mask Distillery about the Deircs/Owenbrin Valley as an example of signs that should have improved design and better access for the public. As the photo above shows, that recommendation has now been acted on. A small custom-made, self-closing gate allows full access to an attractive garden and a fabulous view of the Owenbrin Valley – shaped over the last 2.5 million years by melting and shifting glaciers. The redesigned info panel provides other detail, including about the Deircs corries. There's even a small bench for visitors to sit, gaze and contemplate life now, and as it was long ago. Mile buíchas to those from local work schemes who helped “curate” the geosite and garden, and to Údarás na Gaeltachta and Drioglann Loch Measc for enthusiastically supporting the idea.



Geopark business network event

Business training in communities

Targeting start-ups and further develop existing enterprises

As flagged in our spring newsletter, we are hopeful of securing LEADER funding by the end of 2025 to roll out new business training/mentoring for people from the 20 Geopark communities from early 2026. The training programme would be a 'cooperation project' supported by both FORUM Connemara and South West Mayo Development (the latter as lead). And of course, we will know by this autumn if the Geopark will be ratified next spring for UNESCO Global Geopark status. The timing would be ideal to help those with a good idea for new business in the Geopark communities to receive customised training to help turn the ideas into reality. To gauge needs for the training, we circulated a short online survey (link [here](#)) to the community liaison reps and the Community Councils to spread the word (social media, parish newsletters, word of mouth etc) and encourage survey responses. The survey has just 10 questions (7 are tick answers, 2 are short-answer text), remains open until 29th August. You can complete the survey if you have an idea for new business and either live in one of the Geopark communities or want to set up a business in the Geopark – in hospitality, experiences / attractions / youth, culture/heritage, environment services, local retail, etc. We are also exploring possibilities for Fáilte Ireland funding for a training programme to help existing businesses in the Geopark to grow and strengthen sustainably. More info on this before Christmas.



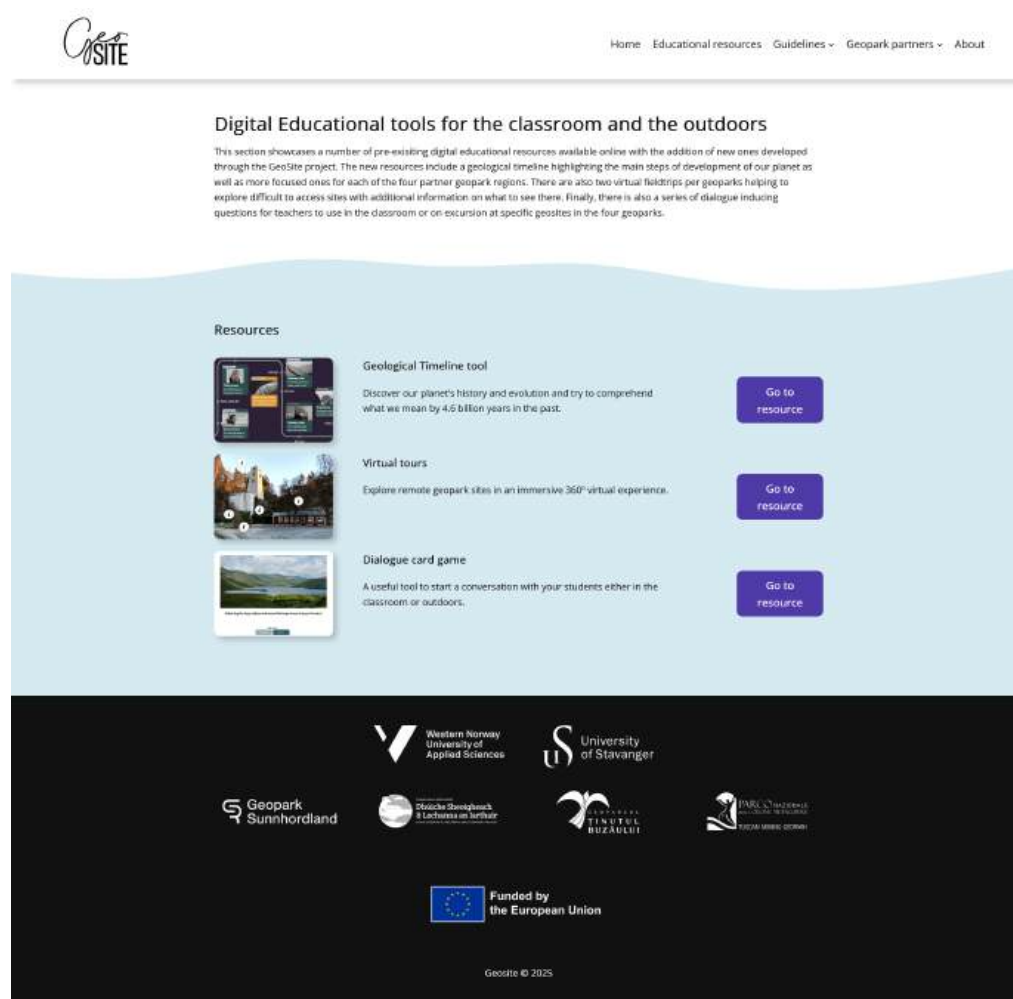
Looking at insect life from kick-sampling in the stream at Petersburg

Biodiversity in Action Day

A great range of activities delivered

There's lots of discussion these days about biodiversity threats and challenges and, thankfully, successes. With this in mind various Geopark groups organised an afternoon at the end of June at Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training

Centre (OETC) Clonbur to raise awareness of biodiversity and related outdoor actions, particularly for children and youth. Three afternoon sessions aimed at National School ages included a fossil hunt (led by Geopark geologist Benjamin), fresh-water kick sampling (Éanna Hyland & LAWPRO team) and wild-flower identification (Ciara Burke). Children from Cloghbrack and Clonbur NS schools and parents were among the busy numbers taking part. Stand-up paddle boarding (SUP) lessons also took place for older kids at the same time coached by Petersburg trainers. The early evening included launch of the Clonbur Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030. Following a welcome light dinner, the cross-community voluntary group GeoEnterprise hosted a Geopark Environmental Forum exploring ideas for new actions across the 20 Geopark communities. The Biodiversity in Action Day was hosted by JCWL GeoEnterprise in association with Comharchumannn Dhúiche Sheoigheach Teo (CDS Teo), with support from Community Foundation Ireland, Pride of Place Clonbur, generous input from LAWPRO, and with the superb amenities and staff of Petersburg OETC.



Screenshot from new GeoSite website with the new digital education tools

Delivering new digital tools for education

New web-based teaching resources

Work on the Erasmus+ GeoSite project has continued apace since our last work meeting in Italy in the spring. Finalisation of content for the website and digital

tools is close to completion and is now being translated in all national languages of the project partners including Irish. The new tools are virtual fieldtrips for two hard-to-access geosites in each of the four participating geoparks, a set of simple questions to start conversations with students to use in the classroom or outdoors, and a geological timeline tool that helps visualise the age of the earth and the local geological history of the geoparks. Additionally, there is information for teachers on pedagogical approaches for active learning, examples of lesson plans, and guidelines for geopark staff involved in education. The project has entered its final year, and this new website will be tested with engaged teachers in the four participating geoparks to help refine it. It will also be shared wider to other geoparks in Europe to help pool together and improve the digital education resources available.



Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau presenting at Galway City Museum

Expanding our education horizon

A new partnership with Corrib Beo

This year in May, the geopark geologist was invited by Corrib Beo, the community organisation set up to advance and promote the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Corrib Region, to present at their spring talk series at the Galway City Museum. The presentation introduced the Geopark, its actions and the region's geological heritage. It also led to a meeting between Corrib Beo, JCWL GeoEnterprise (the Geopark's cross community organisation) and the Geopark staff to discuss a stronger partnership. Corrib Beo subsequently invited the geopark staff to feature on their Corrib catchment polyphonic video project to be launched on Culture night (Fri 19th September) at the Oughterard Courthouse.

This last quarter also saw the visit of students from two USA universities to the Geopark region: James Madison University from Virginia and Notre Dame University (Indiana) with their campus at Kylemore Abbey. These have engaged

with the Geopark to facilitate fieldtrips in the region and meet with local specialists, including the Geopark geologist. Additionally, the geopark ambassador course was run again for the current class of arborists studying at the GRETB centre at Petersburg. This free course helps build awareness of the region's riches but also of wider geological heritage in Ireland. The Geopark has now trained 143 ambassadors. More sessions of the course are offered annually. Contact the Geopark geologist to register your interest.



ACRES West Connacht staff presenting at the Corr na Móna open farm event

Farm walk event with Teagasc

Opportunities for diversifying farm income

Farmers and other landowners are important groups for the Geopark to engage with about the Geopark, and the opportunities UNESCO status can bring. With this in mind, Geopark staff participated in a Hill Sheep Farm Walk in June on the property of Paedar and Carol Joyce, Corr na Móna, Co Galway. The evening event included regular farming topics – a vet spoke on common animal health issues, an update from a new sheep breeding project, the ACRES climate-environment scheme, and the Teagasc organic team on low input production systems. The Geopark staff were also invited to speak about just what geoparks do and more specifically how landowners could benefit from being in a UNESCO Global Geopark. The beautiful landscape overlooking hill and lake on the Joyce farm holding was a perfect setting for this in front of around 25 participants. They heard of opportunities for small/micro businesses including farm accommodation, hospitality, guided walks, health-related benefits, water sports, heritage and cultural actions, etc. They heard just why the geological history of the region is so fascinating, and how it has influenced farming and the

way of life right through to the present. And how many visitors keen to explore the beautiful west of Ireland countryside love to hear stories and insights. Informal chats over cups of tea at the end of the walk were a great way of connecting with all those present. We are grateful to Teagasc and the Joyce family for hosting the event.



Heritage Week walk at the Seanbhóthar

Exploring our diverse landscape

Public events during the summer

The Geopark was invited to participate at the Ballinrobe Festival in July with a talk in partnership with the Lough Carra Catchment Association. Together we provided an overview of the landscape heritage of the region, and a particular focus on the Geopark region east of the lakes and on Lough Carra. The LCCA then presented the current threats Lough Carra is facing and how they are tackling them, in large part through the Lough Carra LIFE project. The presentation was well attended and raised great interest.

Heritage week just concluded on the 24th of August and saw a number of events in the communities of the Geopark, with notable efforts by Ballinrobe and Oughterard communities to host several events during the week. The Geopark held a well-attended presentation at Aughagower community centre about the local geological heritage. It also offered a special walk on the Seanbhóthar between Corr na Móna and Clonbur that helped explore the age of the earth with a scale of 1 million years for every meter walked (4.6km for the whole history of the planet). A good contingent from the Galway walking club attended

the walk along with others from local communities. This national trail is a perfect fit for this deep time exploration, as walkers benefit from the view of Mount Gable on one side and Lough Corrib on the other throughout the experience.



Boulders ready to be deployed along the trail

Outdoor education resource in Tourmakeady

Inspiring future scientists ...

The Geopark is developing a new set of signage for Tourmakeady Woods to accompany a collection of boulders of the main types of rocks from the Geopark region. This new infrastructure is funded by Geological Survey Ireland through their Geoheritage grant scheme and is done in partnership with Coillte and the local coiste in Tuar Mhic Éadaigh. The nine boulders will be set at regular intervals along the main trail from the car park to the waterfall with an additional location just above the waterfall showcasing the local bedrock. All boulders will have a small bilingual panel describing their main features and influence on past geological processes. Additional education activity sheets will be offered to young visitors undertaking the walk. The trail is well underway with the panels drafted and most of the boulders brought on site. Once all boulders are delivered, Coillte will then set them along the trail. Panels will be sent for approval soon and their production will follow suit. The new geodiversity trail will be launched before the end of 2025.



Launch of Clonbur Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030

Biodiversity plans in our communities

Progress in Clonbur-Cloghbrack, Tourmakeady

At least two Geopark communities have made progress on biodiversity actions in recent months. A Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Clonbur-Cloghbrack 2025-2030 was launched at an action day at the local Petersburg Outdoor Education and Training Centre in June. This comprehensive plan, prepared on behalf of Clonbur Community Council and the local Pride of Place group, includes sections on the land and its history, surveys and inventories, site designations (EU and national), SWOT analysis and public consultation. The set of seven actions covers invasive species, pollinators, public awareness, development of a forest garden, light pollution, water quality, and woodlands and hedgerows. There are also sections on linkages (local, regional, national) and information on possible funding. A number of appendices and information sources are also there. Tourmakeady, meanwhile, is at an earlier stage in its BAP. Following initial ecology walk-over surveys, the ecologist met and walked with members of local committees through the village to look at potential projects and consider actions. Habitat mapping of the area has been completed by the ecologist. A desk top survey of biodiversity records of the area is also complete. A nature walk to the Tourmakeady Woods Waterfall was well attended, raising awareness about the project and the local biodiversity. The Tourmakeady Biodiversity Action Plan is due for completion in spring 2026. Please be in touch with Geopark staff about progress on biodiversity in other Geopark communities.



Poster for the Great Irish Fossil Hunt

Ancient animals on our kerbstones

A wealth of fossil heritage in Ireland

The Geopark is teaming up with Ireland's fossil heritage, an outreach programme from University College Cork, to help showcase the great numbers of fossils visible in Ireland. Fossils are remains of plants or animals that were conserved in part after their burial in sediments (sand, gravel or mud) to form part of a sedimentary rock. Because of the age and type of our rocks, Ireland features a number of very interesting fossils visible either while walking the land or in stones of buildings or kerbs on the pavement. Most cities and towns in Ireland are built with limestone from the Carboniferous period (360 to 300 million years ago) which contain many examples of corals, bivalves (like oysters) or gastropods (snails) as fossils. But other rocks can also contain fossils, such as the world-famous tetrapod (4-feet) trackway or fossil footprint found in Devonian sandstone (about 400 million years ago) on Valentia Island in County Kerry.

Ireland's Fossil Heritage project has put together a map of fossil sites in Ireland, indicating in particular the ones that can or cannot be visited. They have highlighted, for instance, the Clonbur limestone pavement geosite of the Geopark, and also built an urban trail for Ballinrobe so people can explore fossils on the building stones there. The project has also built a number of

interactive classroom activities to be used by the Geopark (and other partners) on future school visits. Additionally, the Great Irish Fossil Hunt, a citizen science project, is on until the end of August. It invites people to take pictures of fossils found at home, in their community or while walking on trails to share on their website and be added to their maps with prizes on offer for the best picture. Find out more at <https://www.ucc.ie/en/fossil-heritage/>



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