



The Connemara fjord is in Lonely Planet's world top 50

Killary Fjord in Lonely Planet's best for 2027

Global spotlight for stunning beauty and adventure spot

In a terrific publicity boost, Killary Fjord has been named in **Lonely Planet's Best in Travel 2027**, a selection of 50 places and experiences from around the world. The news featured in the *Irish Independent* and was shared [here](#) and [here](#) on social media by travel journalist Pól Ó Conghaile. Pól also highlighted Killary's setting within **Joyce Country and Western Lakes UNESCO Global Geopark**. Framed by mountains on the Galway–Mayo border, the fjord is a striking example of the landscapes that make this region special. This international recognition is welcome news for local communities and tourism businesses. It offers another opportunity to introduce new and returning visitors to the Geopark's geology, scenery and warm west of Ireland welcome.

Stay up to date through the geopark website

www.joycecountrygeoparkproject.ie and social media / facebook and Instagram @JCWLGeopark



Participants at one of the trainings for new business development

Training underway for new business

A great range of ideas proposed

With LEADER funding secured, the Geopark's training in new business development was rolled out in September. Sixteen participants gathered for the first session hosted in the attractive and repurposed former Ulster Bank building by local Ballinrobe business Slí Nua. As anticipated following the Geopark's UNESCO designation in April this year, there's a great variety of new enterprise ideas among the trainees. They include farm tourism and product diversification, guided foraging tours, forest therapy, pilgrimage and history tours, digital marketing, home food experience, crafts and courses, language training, accommodation, art services, and career coaching. It's a vivid example of the fantastic potential for sustainable new business and job creation in the Geopark's 20 communities. The training is through a LEADER cooperation project (national and EU funding), supported by South West Mayo Development, FORUM Connemara and Galway Rural Development. Training is by an experienced team from RUNDA Hospitality and Tourism Solutions, who secured the contract following a competitive public tender process. Delivery is a mixture of in-person and online, and continues through the autumn, concluding with one-to-one mentoring and a full day visit to an Irish geopark.



Participants at an outreach event at the lakeshore outside Tigh Phaidi, Tourmakeady

Lough Mask Arctic Char project launched

Initiative to support ancient species under threat

In July's newsletter, we noted RBMS funding had been awarded to the Geopark voluntary group GeoEnterprise for the Arctic Char project. It began in August, focussed on raising awareness of the conservation of this wild native species and the importance of restoring water quality in Lough Mask to high status. The presence of Arctic char in the lake is confirmed in monitoring by [Inland Fisheries Ireland](#), but the species is [under threat](#) in Ireland as it is now one of the rarest species found here. The Arctic char in Lough Mask are likely surviving because of the lake's depth of more than 70m in places due to a geological fault that runs north-south close to the western side of the lake. Arctic char in Lough Mask contend with many pressures including the impacts of climate change which disrupt hydrological cycles, predation from other species and nutrient pollution from agricultural practices and domestic waste-water. Lough Mask is a Blue Dot (High Status Objective) waterbody, with high ecological status objective under the EU Water Framework Directive. This designation was applied in 2018 to waterbodies that were consistently achieving high ecological status in the past (irrespective of their current high status), or where they were within one of eight particularly important freshwater pearl mussel catchments. The project commenced in August. It consists of two main strands of work: education and outreach and research.

Education & outreach

The first outreach event was held during [Heritage Week](#) at the lakeshore beside Paddy's Pub in Tourmakeady. Information about the Arctic char, water quality and the geology of the Geopark was shared and the attendees participated in a pond dipping workshop to see what organisms are living there and learn how the various life forms indicate the water quality status. The education activities have also started with the primary schools around Lough Mask. In September, S.N. An Fháirche hosted the first school visit. This included classroom activities and active learning, drawing on the Citizen Science Stream Index with a kick-

sampling demonstration for children at An Choill Bheag lochta stream near the Clonbur playground. Lots of flora & fauna spotting and fossil hunting was included! Plans are underway for more school visits in the coming weeks.

Research – volunteers wanted

The research strand involves a non-invasive approach. It aims to identify where and when the Arctic char are spawning by taking water samples at a number of sites on Lough Mask over a six-month period. We are seeking a number of volunteers to play an important role in this as Citizen Scientists. Volunteers will be trained on how to take the water samples which will be tested by a specialist laboratory. If you are interested in the topics of water quality or Arctic char conservation, and would like to volunteer for please get in touch with the Arctic Char Project Officer Jacinta Whelan at jacintawhelan@gmail.com



JCWL Geopark representatives receive official UNESCO Global Geopark certificate

18th Int'l European Geoparks Conference

JCWL represented at Saimaa UGG in Finland

The European Geoparks Network holds the European Geoparks Conference every two years. UNESCO Geoparks in Europe are obliged to take part in such networking events, and so Joyce Country and Western Lakes Geopark attended the 18th version of the International European Geoparks Conference, hosted by Saimaa Geopark in Finland 16-18th September. It is an excellent forum for Geopark teams from across Europe to share ideas and developments through presentations, workshops and a GEOfair. JCWL Geopark manager Michael Hegarty, presented the Erasmus+ GeoSite project and its work on digital resources for outdoor learning and education.

In a special moment at the closing ceremony, the Executive Board of the Global Geoparks Network presented us with the official certificate, formally welcoming Joyce Country and Western Lakes to the Global Geoparks Network. We also joined the field visit “**Nature and History in the Heart of Lappeenranta City.**” It showed how trails and facilities can be maintained for year-round access while protecting the environment. The trip also highlighted the importance of access to nature for everyday wellbeing in Finland – especially relevant as our communities have highlighted trail development as a priority.



Erasmus+ GeoSite participants at the final project meeting in Norway 27th August

GeoSite Erasmus+ project closing event

New digital resources produced for active learning

The GeoSite project, which ran from October 2023 to September 2026, has completed its objectives of production of digital education resources to promote outdoor education. The €400,000 EU-funded project was led by the University of Western Norway and included contributions from the University of Stavanger in Norway and four UNESCO Global Geoparks (UGGp); Sunnhordland in Norway, Tuscan Mining in Italy, Buzau Land in Romania and JCWL in Ireland. Each of the four UGGps hosted work meetings in their territory that included visits at specific geosites where education is offered. A review of scientific publications on existing digital resources used in education as well as a survey of requirements and needs from local teachers and students in the four UGGps steered the partners into the type of resources that could be produced.

The main result is a centralised website repository of existing and new digital resources with education guidelines on active learning approaches available in English and the four national languages of the partners (including Irish). The new digital resources include a tool to explore the geological timeline of our planet, virtual fieldtrips of key geosites in the four UGGps and dialogue card

game to facilitate discussion in class. Videos also introduce the project and website, to summarise the geological timeline and give examples of dialogic teaching practices in the field. The website (www.edu-geosite.eu) will be launched in the next few weeks. Presentation of the work done by the partners took place at the last three annual Geopark conferences and at a specifically organised Webinar with the European Geoparks Network Education Working Group in August.



New business network members Crave at the Cottage and The Quiet Man Museum

Geopark Business Network reaches 30

New members in Ballintubber and Cong

The Geopark Business Network has reached a new milestone of **30 member businesses**. We are delighted to welcome the three newest members: **Crave at the Cottage** coffee shop and eatery in Ballintubber, **Cong Holiday Group** (accommodation, tours, and experiences), and the **Quiet Man Museum** in Cong. From places to eat and stay to activities and attractions, the network members give visitors many ways to discover the Geopark. They also help visitors make connections between its landscapes, heritage, culture and communities. The strength of the network lies in businesses working together; sharing local knowledge, recommending one another and helping visitors explore the wider area. As members, they also commit to the values of Joyce Country and Western Lakes UNESCO Global Geopark in its charter. We look forward to building on those connections as the network continues to grow.



Geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau, with Mayo County Council's Tom Gilligan, Neil Sheridan, Padraic Flanagan, and Geopark Tourism Officer Sinéad Seoighe at Lough

Mayo County Council officials visit JCWL

FAM tours a great way to engage stakeholders

In recent months JCWL Geopark has welcomed Mayo County Council colleagues for familiarisation trips, an opportunity to explore the area and learn more about its landscapes, heritage and visitor experiences. On **8th July**, we welcomed Head of Tourism Michael McDermott, Tourism Officer Maura Murphy and David O'Malley from the Council's tourism department. A second visit on **22nd September** brought Director of Services Tom Gilligan, Padraic Flanagan, Head of the Claremorris–Swinford Municipal District, and Ballinrobe Area Manager Neil Sheridan, to the Geopark. The visits provide valuable opportunities to share the Geopark's work and discuss how we can collaborate to support local communities and sustainable tourism. We look forward to welcoming representatives from **Galway County Council** for a FAM visit this autumn.



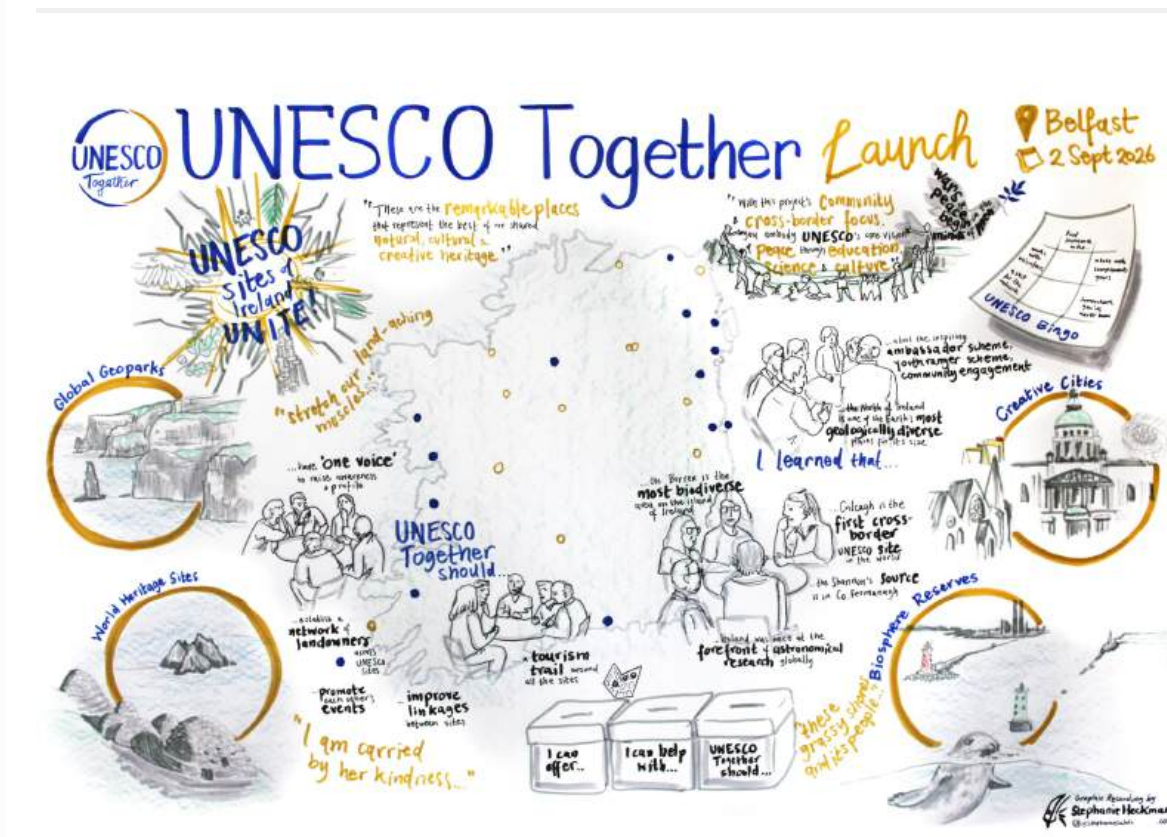
Tourmakeady Wood, Clonbur Woods, Oughterard - three Parkruns in Geopark

JCWL Tourism Strategy progressing

Plan for the sector through to 2030

The framework for development of sustainable tourism in the Joyce Country and Western Lakes UNESCO Global Geopark is on target for completion by the end of 2026. Covering the period 2026 to 2030, the document will be concise, very practical, and eminently readable by all. It will also be coherent with other relevant strategic documents including those charged with developing the

tourism sector in Ireland at national level, Galway and Mayo County Council, three Destination and Experience Development Plans in our area, and at local level, reflecting the broad consultation process undertaken. Consultation with stakeholder groups continues in the autumn including sharing strategy drafts before finalisation later in 2026.



Graphic representation at Belfast launch of UNESCO Together project

UNESCO Together project launched

Network to drive sustainable development

Joyce Country and Western Lakes UNESCO Global Geopark has joined an exciting new all-island partnership which has just been launched. UNESCO Together is a network of 14 UNESCO sites and six tentative sites across Ireland who will connect for the first time through culture, heritage, learning, sustainability and community collaboration, creating a shared network for future cooperation and exchange. The two-year project is led by Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Mourne Gullion Strangford UNESCO Global Geopark, with the project delivered in partnership with Cavan County Council and Cuilcagh Lakelands UNESCO Global Geopark. Supported by the UK National Commission to UNESCO and National Commission of Ireland to UNESCO, the cross-border network links UNESCO Global Geoparks, World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Creative Cities across Northern Ireland and Ireland.

The new partnership was officially launched on 2nd September, providing an opportunity for its representatives to meet and begin the journey of sharing ideas and opportunities for collaboration. It will involve over 650 people in cross-border activities including workshops, community exchanges, creative residencies, environmental action activities and cultural storytelling

programmes. The new network aims to develop an all-island strategic roadmap to guide long-term cooperation between UNESCO sites, including exploring the development of a UNESCO Tourism Trail, highlighting Heritage Sites and Global Geoparks as drivers of sustainable tourism, education, cultural identity and community development.



On the Srah loop walk trail in the Partry Mountains near Tourmakeady

Discovering Hidden Treasures of Lough Mask

Heritage Week events

Geopark geologist Benjamin Thébaudeau led a Heritage Week guided walk of the Srah loop trail in the Partry Mountains with a view of north Lough Mask. This little known 9.7km waymarked trail starts at the Naíonra in Srah to pass by the recently erected Tourmakeady ambush memorial and up the mountains to Derrassa to enjoy the glorious views of the lake there. The attendance was fantastic with 40 people on the day who heard about the rich geological heritage of the area and the wider historical and cultural heritage of the region.

Later on in the week, the Geopark joined GeoEnterprise and Corrib Beo at Finny Community Centre on 20th August for a talk on **Brigit and the Hidden Treasures of Lough Mask**. Mary Condren, author of many articles on gender, religion, violence, mythology and theology, explored the significance of Brigit's Well at Kilbride, Lough Mask, and its connections to local heritage and Celtic traditions. The well-attended talk reflected the renewed interest in St Brigit and the places associated with her. With St Brigit's Day now marked by a public holiday in Ireland, the event was a reminder that the stories and traditions

connected to St Brigit remain meaningful today and that we have places within the Geopark where those stories can be explored.



Joyce Country Challenge hikers, Kilbride peninsula; and a view of sheep pens at Oughterard Agricultural Show

A warm summer of festivals and events

Plan ahead for next year and beyond

Each year our Geopark region displays a rich heritage of festivals, shows and other cultural events. This golden summer of 2026 was exceptional not only for the weather but also for the number of events, along with a swell in attendances. The list is long (check it out on [our website](#)), but here's a brief mention of just a few to keep in mind for 2027 and beyond. **June:** Headfest music festival, Headford, Co. Galway, always popular and growing by the year. Cong to Galway Sailing Race. Corr na Móna 50 mile sponsored cycle, Ballinrobe races Ladies Day, Ballinrobe, Mayo. **July:** Oughterard Regatta Ladies' day. Maam Cross Pony & Livestock Show, Maam Cross, Féile na gCurrach, Corr na Móna, all in Co. Galway. Joyce Country Challenge (hillwalking), Finny, Mayo and Galway. Queen of the Lakes festival, Ballinrobe, Cong Village Food Festival, Co. Mayo. **August:** Ceol na Locha, traditional music classes and festival, Tuar Mhic Éadaigh, Maigh Eo. Oughterard Agricultural Show, Co. Galway.



Joyce Country and Western Lakes UNESCO Global Geopark

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