

# The Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark Newsletter

Welcome to the second edition of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark newsletter. 2015 saw many successes in the Geopark including a UNESCO designation and the winning of national and international awards. 2016 has begun where we left off with an awards short listing, this time for the GeoparkLIFE Universal Access project with the Brother of Charity in Ennis.

## UNESCO Status for the Burren and Cliffs of Moher

The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark was designated as a UNESCO site following a vote at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) General Conference in Paris on 17th November 2015. This is the first time since the signing of the World Heritage Convention in 1972, that UNESCO has created a new site designation, the UNESCO Global Geopark.

We are delighted that UNESCO has recognised the Global Geopark

programme and that it endorses the work and agenda of Global Geoparks, who are committed to the long-term sustainable management of their regions through the development of sustainable tourism.

A UNESCO designation increases the appeal of a destination to visitors looking for high quality tourism experiences where access to landscape and cultural experiences are authentic, personal and local.

**Right: Professor Patrick McKeever, UNESCO, visited the Geopark in November**



## Finalist for the National Geographic World Legacy Awards

The National Geographic has recognised GeoparkLIFE by short listing us in the Destination Leadership category of their World Legacy Awards alongside Destination Røros (Norway) and Travel Oregon (United States).

The awards programme honours tourism companies, organisations and destinations regarded as leaders in sustainable tourism best practices who are demonstrating successes in environmental protection for cultural and natural heritage, benefits to local people and educating travellers on the principles of sustainable tourism.

We are delighted with the award nomination as it recognises the work of our partners, the local communities, local businesses and the state agencies who have invested time and energy working in partnership with us.



**Costas Christ (second left) of the National Geographic met with members of the Burren Ecotourism network during his visit the Geopark in November as part of the awards assessment programme.**

**The awards ceremony takes place at ITB in Berlin on 9th March.**





## Education

### Promoting environmental awareness among school students



Education forms a large part of the work of UNESCO Global Geoparks and here in the Burren Geopark it is a core element of the role of the Geopark Geologist.

Dr. Eamon Doyle has been working with Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Lisdoonvarna on a project to promote environmental awareness among school children in the Geopark region.

The project saw a number of the transition year students attend

classes on the hydrology of the Burren and the impact of littering on the groundwater by Hydrologist Dr. Tiernan Henry of The Earth and Ocean Sciences Department, NUI Galway and local author Sonja O'Brien respectively. The students then prepared a class plan for presenting this information to 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> class local National Schools at Kilshanny and New Quay.

The transition year students gained valuable learning and teaching ex-

perience while the primary school students received information about environmental awareness in a novel way.

The National School children were also presented with copies of the book '*What to do and what not to do in the Burren*' to read to the younger age groups in the school or at home.

The project will be submitted to the 2016 ECO-UNESCO Young Environmentalist awards.

### Playing host to the Irish Global Geoparks Committee

The Irish Global Geoparks Committee held their annual seminar in the Burren in November. The committee was established by the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) to contribute to the future development of Geoparks as a major tourism resource.

The focus of the recent seminar was on working with local tourism businesses and how Global Geoparks can effectively contribute to the local tourism economy.

The group of Irish Geoparks and aspiring Geoparks presented on and discussed each of their programmes of engaging with tourism businesses before taking a fieldtrip into the Burren to meet with some of the local businesses we are partnering with here in the Burren.



**Above: Mike Sweeney, Waterford's Copper Coast Global Geopark.**



**Above right: Pat O'Connor, formerly GSI and Margaret O'Connor with Dr. Kirstin Lemon, GSNI at the seminar.**

**Right: Martina O'Neill and Grainne O'Connor from Marble Arch Global Geopark.**







# Sustainable Tourism

## Looking at coach tourism in the Geopark

There has been a great increase in visitors to the island of Ireland in recent years. With many of our visitors wanting to see our famous landscapes and heritage sites we have seen a rise in coaches on our roads. As a Geopark we have a role in protecting our landscape as well as developing well-managed tourism. In 2014 the Geopark commissioned a comprehensive yearlong study to establish the extent and impacts of coach tourism in the area. We collected data from over 40 organisations and businesses, undertook 21 site assessments and did 35 location counts of people and traffic. Below are some of the key findings:

- Excluding retail sales, the estimated revenue for 2014 is €6.9 million and supports 235 full time equivalent jobs
- Approx 550,000 passengers alighted at free sites in the Geopark

- The environmental impact is rated localised, slight and capable of rapid recovery
- Current practices give rise to concerns on health and safety, access and overall quality of experience
- Existing parking facilities are close to capacity

We have presented the findings of our study to the agencies responsible for tourism and conservation in the region. We have initiated discussions with Clare County Council, The Cliffs of Moher and Doolin Tourism on capacity management and on improving the quality of the overall visitor experience in these popular locations. We have also developed an online communications system of communicating with drivers and guides to promote the practice of the Leave No Trace and to provide accurate interpretation of the natural and heritage features of the Geopark.



**Laura Cotter of the Geopark and Alan Fairweather of Leave No Trace participated in clinics with the Cliffs of Moher visitor centre to speak directly to coach drivers and guides**



**The GeoparkLIFE supported Burren Food Trail has helped put the Burren on the map as a top foodie destination having received the EDEN destination of excellence award for tourism and local gastronomy and the Irish restaurants association 2015 Foodie Town award.**

**Collecting the Food Town award on the streets of Dublin are L-R Martin Waldron PRO Burren Ecotourism Network, Tina O'Dwyer, GeoparkLIFE Sustainable Tourism Co-ordinator, Brid Fahy, Deborah Evers and Donal Monaghan, members of the Burren Ecotourism Network and the Burren Food Trail.**







# GeoparkLIFE

## GeoparkLIFE Seminar—Updating and Informing

The GeoparkLIFE project reached its mid-way point in 2015. To mark the occasion a seminar was held in November to update on the projects progress. Presentations were given on the three core activities of GeoparkLIFE.

1. Developing sustainable ethos and practices amongst tourism businesses.
2. Developing integrated management practices at popular heritage sites
3. Enabling communities to lead and participate in active conservation programmes in their locality.

Professor Gabriel Cooney, UCD presented an overview of the policies that govern these three areas and how the learning from GeoparkLIFE could influence these policies in the future. The aim of GeoparkLIFE is to influence policies so that it supports and enables our three core activities.

Videos of the presentations online at: [www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/geoparklife-seminar](http://www.burrengeopark.ie/geopark-life/geoparklife-seminar)



**Cathaoirleach Clare County Council Cllr James Breen (left) Ger Dollard, Director of Services, Clare County Council (centre) and Professor Gabriel Cooney, UCD (right) speaking during the seminar.**



**Janet Cavanagh of the Burren Ecotourism network spoke about the 'Adopt a Hedgerow' conservation programme which is being supported by GeoparkLIFE and sees tourism businesses cleaning up the hedgerows of the Burren.**



**Zena Hctor, GeoparkLIFE visitor management coordinator presenting on the progress being made to develop integrated management practices at heritage sites through working with the state agencies responsible for tourism and conservation.**



**Tina O'Dwyer, GeoparkLIFE sustainable tourism Coordinator spoke about developing sustainable practices among tourism businesses. Business owners Cari Ryan, Boghill Centre, Anthony Moloney, Doolin Hostel, and Brid Fahy, Café Linnalla spoke about their participation in the programme.**

## GeoparkLIFE Funding Partners

The GeoparkLIFE project is co-funded by the following agencies and universities who also sit on the projects steering committee







## Training Tourism Businesses

2015 saw the GeoparkLIFE programme continue in its goal of developing sustainable ethos and practices among tourism businesses in the region through providing training and development opportunities to tourism businesses.

Much of the training provided to date has had a large environmental and conservation focus with businesses being trained in environmental practices like waste, water and energy management. Businesses have been trained in measuring and monitoring and have developed environmental action plans.

Business sustainability also means the ability to continue and prosper. This year much of the training being offered through the GeoparkLIFE project is focused on developing capacity in the areas of management, leadership, planning, marketing and product development.

2016 will also see the GeoparkLIFE programme continue its support of the development of the Burren Ecotourism Networks' conservation programmes like the Burren Food Fayre, Meitheal and Adopt a Hedgerow.

For more information on the work we are doing with local businesses see:

<http://www.burrengeopark.ie/>



# WINNER

## RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL & TOURISM AWARDS 2015

**The members of the Burren Ecotourism Network have achieved great success in implementing environmental practices and a number of businesses have been recognised for their practices through responsible tourism awards.**



**The Burren Food Fayre is a conservation event organised by the Burren Ecotourism Network as part of the Winterage weekend. The Fayre promotes and celebrates local produce.**



**Members of the Burren Ecotourism Network attending a marketing workshop in January that focused on getting your website up to date for mobile and tablet users. The workshop was provided by Fáilte Ireland through GeoparkLIFE.**





## Managing Heritage Sites

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 15% of the world's population (1 billion people) is estimated to live with some form of disability. The UN World Tourism Organisation advocates that accessibility for all to tourist facilities, products, and services should be a central part of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy.

As part of the GeoparkLIFE project we are working in partnership with the various site management agencies—Office of Public Works (OPW), National Monument Service (NMS), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Clare County Council (CCC) - to explore the potential of integrated management practices at seven demonstration heritage sites in the Burren. We have assessed each of the sites in terms of visitor management and usage and one of the areas we are currently working on is that of 'Universal Design'. This is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

Our aim is to develop a template for the development of 'least restrictive access' to the heritage of the Burren.

To achieve this we have been working closely with the National Disability Authority and the Brothers of Charity, Ennis. During the summer of 2015, students from the Brothers of Charity 'Streetwise Programme' along with their tutor Moureen Kelly and the Burren Walking guide, Tony Kirby assessed each of our demonstration sites in terms of their physical and intellectual access abilities. Due to the high standard of this work, it was shortlisted for a 2016 AONTAS STAR award.

The NDA delivered two workshops in Universal Design in February 2016, one for Burren heritage site managers



**Moureen Kelly of the Brothers of Charity with Owen McDonagh and Aine Carey presenting on the GeoparkLIFE Universal Design project to the Burren**



**Above and Below: Brother of Charity students out in the landscape with local heritage guide Tony Kirby during the universal access pilot.**



and the second for the tourism businesses. From this collaboration we are aiming for the following outcomes:

Universal Design guidelines for

heritage sites within the Burren and an accredited heritage learning programme for people with disabilities, based around the Burren landscape.







## Conservation in the Community

Enabling communities to participate in active conservation develops a skills base within the community and enhances a communities capabilities for conservation management. As part of our GeoparkLIFE we have undertaken to work with a selection of community groups to develop a process for how groups can partner with state agencies to manage conservation in their locality.

In the last newsletter we focused our work with the Killnaboy Historical and Heritage group. This time we will look at the Ballyvaughan Community Development Group (BVCD). The Group were keen to develop conservation activities to nourish and highlight the biodiversity of the town. With the area surrounding the town being a Special Area of Conservation and home to a rare plant that has been identified by The Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland it was the perfect case study project for GeoparkLIFE.

GeoparkLIFE funded a wildlife Survey of the area which was commissioned by BVCD to determine what conservation activity the group needed to under-



**Local School children in Ballyvaughan sowing Burren Wild flowers with Bill Glynn of the Ballyvaughan Community Development Group**



take. The survey was carried out to identify habitats, physical features, and species in the area. the survey also listed and indicated notable species and those which are indicative of the health of the habitat.

The survey was commissioned in 2014 and results provided to the group in early 2015 in time for the group to develop a work programme and begin implementing actions for the 2015 Tidy Towns

competition. Actions implemented included the introduction of native shrubs and the sowing of Burren wild flowers. The tidy Towns adjudicators were very complimentary of the activities including the road-side verge project that allow the natural habitat to develop. The next stage of the project is to develop transferable tool kits for the ongoing management of biodiversity for the Community Group .

## Giving back with a Meitheal



**The tourism businesses of the Burren Ecotourism Network, who benefit from recreational walking routes in the region, came together through GeoparkLIFE to help with the maintenance of walking routes in Carron that are on farmland. Above right: Robert Cassidy speaking to the volunteers about the impacts of tourism on his land**

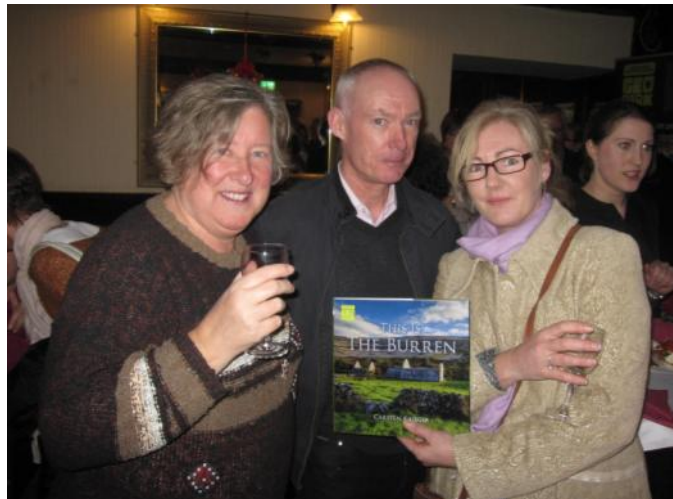






## Events

### Out and about in the Geopark



We recently co-hosted the launch of Carsten Krieger's book 'This is the Burren' with Collins Press and George Quinn of Hylands Burren Hotel. The book was officially launched by Rose Hynes Chairman of Shannon Groups Plc who is a native of the Burren. Rose is pictured above left with cllr James Breen, Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council, Tom Coughlan, Chief Executive of Clare County Council and George Quinn of Hylands Burren. Also pictured above at the book launch are Eva Hegarty with Christy and Jess Sinclair.



Left: An aspiring Geopark from Saimaa, Finland came to visit us to hear about our programmes, to meet our partners and to see the on the ground activity.

Below left the GeoparkLIFE Team with Professor Patrick McKeever of UNESCO. L-r Joanne Gaffrey, UCD, Carol Gleeson, Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, Eamon Doyle, Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, Tina O'Dwyer, Burren Ecotourism Network, Ger Dollard, Director of Service Clare County Council, Zena Hctor, Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, Professor McKeever, Laura Cotter, Burren & Cliffs of Moher Geopark, Professor Gabriel Cooney, UCD



### THE NEXT EDITION

The next edition of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geoparks newsletter will see us updating on our many and varied initiatives in education, site management and sustainable tourism development. If you would like to be added to the mailing list contact [lcotter@burren.ie](mailto:lcotter@burren.ie).



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