

# The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark Newsletter

Welcome to the first edition of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark newsletter, your guide to what the Geopark is all about, with updates on the GeoparkLIFE project, events, education initiatives and much more....

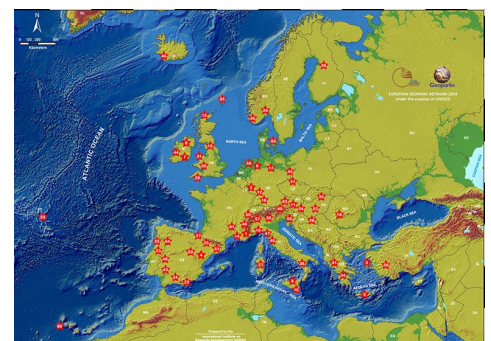
## Global Geoparks: Celebrating Earth Heritage, Sustaining Local Communities

We are all aware of how important and special the Burren landscape is and in 2011 it was recognized on a global level with the awarding of Global Geopark status. The status was awarded to the Burren together with the Cliffs of Moher for their outstanding geological heritage and local culture. The designation also recognised the work that was already in progress in the region to balance tourism and conservation.

Conserving and promoting natural and cultural heritage is a major focus of Geoparks. As a Geopark we are part of a global community of over 100 Geoparks worldwide who come together to share knowledge on heritage management and sustainable development. It is this knowledge along with that of our partners that is helping us to create a structure for the region, a struc-

ture that will lead to a well-managed, protected landscape with preserved heritage and a thriving local economy.

As a Geopark we are bringing together all the groups who have an interest and a stake in protecting, conserving and promoting the Burren region. We are partnering with state agencies, Clare County Council, universities, local businesses and community groups to ensure a prosperous local economy built on sustainable tourism. We are introducing quality, well managed tourism products that will benefit the local community while providing an exceptional experience to the visitor. Our focus is on quality over quantity; quality experiences, quality interpretation and well managed sites that will encourage visitors to stay longer in the region and contribute more to the local economy.



**As a Geopark we are part of a global community of over 100 Geoparks worldwide with 65 based in Europe**



**The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark was twinned with the Stone Forest Geopark (Shilin Geopark) in Yunnan Province, China earlier this year.**

## Status Revalidation

Global Geopark Status is revalidated every four years and this year saw our first re-assessment. The process is done by peer review and in June this year we hosted Dr. Klaus George from Geopark Harz in Germany and Dr. Margaret Wood from GeoMon Geopark in Wales. As part of the assessment process the revalidators met with the Geopark team and reviewed the work being undertaken in the areas of conservation, heritage management and sustainable development. They also toured the region looking at our on-the-ground initiatives, they met members of the Burren Ecotourism Network and the community groups we are partnering with. We were officially revalidated on September 2nd for another 4 years.



**Geopark revalidators at Aillwee (L-R) Jennifer Woods, Zena Hctor, Dr. Klaus George, Nuala Mulqueeney, Lorna Cronin, Dr. Margaret Wood, Dr. Eamon Doyle**





## Education Updates

### The Geopark; Raising Awareness of Our Landscape

**The Burren Rocks!** And Geopark geologist Dr. Eamon Doyle should know. Eamon received his PhD from NUIG for work on 400 million year old fossils and sediments of north County Galway. He subsequently lectured in the Geology department of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. His current geology interests include the development of surface karst features, drowned forests along the Clare Coast, the ice age, deltaic sedimentation in the rocks of county Clare, groundwater flow in the Burren, ancient carbonate shelf and sea level fluctuations, and any fossils. Eamon is happy to look at any loose rocks or fossils you may have found on a beach or in your garden but asks that you do not remove fossils from rock outcrops, a photograph will do.

Eamon has been the Geopark Geologist for 4 years, and works very much in an educational capacity. Eamon is working to promote awareness and understanding of the Burren landscape and its unique geology.

In the four years Eamon has been with the Geopark he has introduced a geology evening course; 'Stone, water and Ice' which is an introductory course on the geology of the Burren. It is designed for anyone with an interest in the Burren and a curious mind! He has also developed an illustrated booklet on the geology of the Burren also titled 'Stone, Water and Ice'. Eamon has facilitated the development of the Geopark heritage trails, and works closely with Mary Immaculate



secondary school in Lisdoonvarna on the young scientist competition. Eamon has also developed the interpretation panels for the Geopark Geosites, which are sites of geological importance in the Burren region. He has also contributed to information panels at a number Burren businesses. For heritage week each year Eamon turns his hand to tour guiding as he takes to a bus for a day to give a tour of the Geopark Geosites.

**Knowledge at the click of a mouse.** The Geopark website is home to an archive of information on geology, archaeology and ecology. Recognising that the Burren is the ultimate outdoor class room the Geopark has compiled an archive of reference materials and reports on the Burren landscape. Dr. Eamon Doyle has also designed geology information sheets and teaching resources that are free to access and download. <http://www.burrengeopark.ie/learn-engage/>



Learning in the landscape

**A new geology field school opened in the Geopark** in June, attracting international students. The field school was developed by Dr. Eamon Doyle, in collaboration with Caherconnell Archaeological Field School and NUI Galway. The Burren Geology Field School will teach students about the world-class geology of the Burren and how the region has been changed over millions of years by floods, tsunamis, earthquakes and ice ages.







## Our Partnership with the Burren Ecotourism Network

**Better together; As the saying goes, 'two heads are better than one', but a partnership of many can achieve so much more.** The Geopark have been working with the Burren Ecotourism Network on decreasing the impact of tourism on the Burren landscape as well as improving opportunities for the local economy through sustainable tourism.

Working together, pooling our resources, knowledge and manpower we have seen many successes, of which a highlight was winning the European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) award. As partners we have lobbied for better public transport links to the region, rolled out green businesses practices to a large number of businesses and

undertaken much conservation work, including launching the 'adopt a hedgerow' initiative (see page six).

A big part of our work together is in promoting the area as a sustainable tourism destination, which will supply an alternative type of tourism to the region. We are looking to build an alternative to the "drive-thru" tourism that the region already experiences. We are encouraging visitors to 'stay a little longer' recognising that visitors who stay in the area have a greater impact on the local economy, they visit the pubs and restaurants, they spend time at the local attractions and spend in local shops which all positively impacts local employment opportunities

and allows local businesses to interact with visitors and communicate the importance of leaving no trace on the landscape.



**The Burren Ecotourism Network is a network of tourism businesses in the Burren, many of who are small family owned businesses. Members of the network take as much pride in looking after their environment as they do in the visitor experiences and products they produce and offer. The businesses are looking to improve the tourism in the Burren for the benefit of all who live here.**

For further information on the Burren Ecotourism Network you can follow them on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/burrenecotourism> and Twitter <https://twitter.com/BurrenEco>



**BEN Sustainable Transport Committee launching Free cup of Tea initiative**

**The 'Free cup of tea if you cycle to me' initiative** was launched at Poul nabrone in June. This sees members of the Burren Ecotourism Network promoting the Geopark region as a destination for cyclists. The initiative was developed as a result of a sustainable transport training module provided by the Geopark as part of the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism programme. The workshop was lead by An Taisce Green-Schools Travel Officer Roisin Garvey. The 'Free cup of tea if you cycle to me' scheme will see cyclists offered a free cup of tea when cycling to participating Burren Ecotourism businesses.

**The Burren Outdoor Adventure and Activity Trail** with the tagline 'Discover more with a guide' was launched in 2014 as a way of promoting the benefits of navigating the landscape in the company of a guide. Guides offer excellent insights into an area, they interpret the landscape and enhance the visitors experience and understanding of a region.

Each of the business featured in the trail has undergone visitor interpretation and 'Leave No Trace' training and actively practice the principles on their tours.



The region is now home to a **European Destination of Excellence (EDEN) designation for Tourism and Local Gastronomy**. The designation was awarded to the Burren Food Trail for demonstrating that local gastronomy has taken a central role in the tourism offering in their destination while also sustaining the local environment. Key to securing the win was the adoption of the Geopark Code of Practice for Sustainable Tourism by the businesses involved in the Burren Food Trail and their commitment to taking care of their environment.



**The Burren Food Trail**



## GeoparkLIFE: Tourism for Conservation

In 2012 the Geopark led a partnership of state agencies to apply for EULIFE funding to support a project that would balance the needs of tourism and conservation in the Burren and in other destinations looking to do the same. The funding application of 1.1 million euro was successful and requires each of the partner agencies to match the grant and to work collaboratively on the project.

Named GeoparkLIFE, the 5 year project began in December 2012. The purpose of the project is to create a model for sustainable tourism destination developments that not only balances the needs of tourism and conservation but brings together all stakeholders who have an interest in maintaining and restoring

the regions natural, cultural and economic integrity. The stakeholders involved in GeoparkLIFE include Clare County Council, the state agencies responsible for both tourism and conservation as well as local businesses and community groups.

The project's work will tackle three elements of sustainable destination development:

- 1. How to develop sustainable ethos and practices amongst tourism businesses operating in the destination**
- 2. How to develop integrated management practices at popular heritage sites and**
- 3. How to enable communities to lead and participate in active conservation programmes in their locality.**



The Geopark team are recording and documenting the process and the outcomes achieved throughout the project. We want to produce a model of sustainable destination development that will provide local environmental, social and economic benefits. The final model will be transferrable to other Irish and European destinations.

### GeoparkLIFE Funding

#### Partners



Clare County Council  
Comhairle Contae an Chláir



**Fáilte Ireland**  
National Tourism Development Authority



*An Roinn Ealaíon, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta*  
Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht



**NUI Galway**  
OÉ Gaillimh



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



The GeoparkLIFE Team with Dr Lynne Barrett of the EU LIFE programme at the recent EDEN award ceremony in Hotel Doolin. (L-R) Siobain O'Brien, Zena Hctor, Lynn Barrett, Dr. Eamon Doyle, Carol Gleeson, Tina O'Dwyer, Laura Cotter



GeoparkLIFE partners on a site visit to An Cahermor.





## 1

### Developing sustainable ethos and practices amongst tourism businesses:

Working with our partners the Burren Ecotourism Network, we are looking to raise the standard of sustainable practices among tourism businesses across the entire destination of the Geopark and across all types of businesses. To achieve this we have developed a Geopark Code of practice for Sustainable Tourism.

The Code of Practice provides each of the businesses who adopt it with an understanding of how to manage their business sustainably and what the benefits of doing so are, to both the environment and the Burren landscape.

Featuring 10 key areas of good practice the Code addresses both operational and visitor management practices of tourism businesses. Energy, water, waste-water and waste management are all ad-



**Members of the Burren Ecotourism Network during sustainability Training**

dressed along with landscape interpretation, visitor communication, sustainable transport, conservation and Leave No Trace.

The Code of Practice is supported by a highly practical training and mentoring programme which provides the businesses who take part with information to make real changes in their business and to also measure the impact of those changes. The businesses are also provided with the resources to draft an environmental policy and action plan for their business.

Businesses have seen real savings in their use of energy and water



along with financial savings to their operating costs. Also undertaking the journey of training together as a group has had a significant impact on relationship development with friendships forming and business partnerships developing.

See how the code of practice has benefited those who took part by checking out the case studies on the Geopark website at:

<http://www.burrengeopark.ie/community-business/the-geopark-code-of-practice/>



**Roisin Garvey of An Taisce Green-Schools giving a workshop on sustainable transport as part of the Geopark Code of Practice training.**



**Left: Burren Ecotourism Network members out in the landscape learning about 'Leave No Trace' principles.**

**Below: Network members participating in a litter clean up**







## 2

**Developing integrated management practices at heritage sites:** Our natural, built and cultural heritage is one of the regions most important draws for tourism. Safeguarding our heritage not only ensures it survives into the future but it also ensures that it is available for the enjoyment of local people and visitors today. Our heritage tells the story of where we have come from and why we live the way we do, it tells the story of our customs, and culture past and present. It's cultural value is significant.

The Geopark team are working with the GeoparkLIFE partners with responsibility for heritage and conservation; the National Parks & Wildlife Service, Office of Public Works and National Monuments Service to determine the best future management options for the heritage sites in the region. We have selected seven demonstration sites on which to assess the current management structure and usage patterns, these sites are pilot sites that will enable us to develop a model for assessing all sites. The seven sites are: Blackhead / Fanore, An Rath/Cahermore, Aillwee Cave, Slieve Carran Nature Reserve, Poul nabrone, Carran Church and The Burren National Park.



**Zena Hctor leading a field trip at Slieve Carran where the condition of the archaeological monuments is being assessed**



**The assessment of Slieve Carran also includes the monitoring of the impact of visitor footfall on the ecology and geology of the site.**



**A visitor survey was undertaken at the seven demonstration sites to gauge feedback on the ease of access and facilities available**

Each site is being assessed for its infrastructure, access, visitor numbers, usage patterns and heritage presentation. We are also reviewing how the site are managed, as well as monitoring the impact of visitor footfall and behaviour. Through the accumulation of all this information, we have identified sensitive pressure and impact points at each of the sites and are creating work programmes to address these.

The focus of this work is to enable the continuation of public access, while maintaining the integrity of these heritage sites and monuments. Access to heritage sites is incredibly important not just in the Burren but in destination across Ireland and in Europe and the model and toolkits we develop for the management of these sites will be transferable to other regions. As we progress through the project we will update you on our findings and the solutions for each of the sites in future newsletters.



**GeoparkLIFE partners attending a training session on pilgrimages to gain an insight into visitor behaviour**





## 3

**Developing a model for local community groups to undertake conservation work through partnership with state agencies:** Through the GeoparkLIFE project we are developing the skills of local communities to enable them to participate in conservation work in their area. Through building a partnership between community groups in the Burren and the state agencies who are responsible for heritage and conservation management we are creating the opportunity for these groups to participate in the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of their home in a sustainable way.

We are coordinating the delivery of practical training in conservation management to a number of community groups through a series of case study projects. As we coordinate each of the projects, we are documenting the process and steps involved with the focus of developing toolkits which will guide any community group through the maze of administration when seeking to undertake a conservation project in their community. The community projects we are facilitating include: the conservation of a historical building with Killinaboy Heritage group; 'Adopt a Hedgerow' with the Burren Ecotourism Network; 'Meitheal' with the Burren Ecotourism Network; 'Enhancing and highlighting local biodiversity' with Ballyvaughan Tidy Towns, 'Reviving a historical asset' with Lisdoonvarna Fáilte and an environmental education programme on hydrology with Lisdoonvarna Secondary school. As each of the projects progresses we will keep you updated on their journey.

### **The conservation of 'An Cabhail Mhór' a 17th Century fortified building in Killinaboy is being supported through GeoparkLIFE.**

Working in partnership with the National Monuments Service, Clare County Council, the Office of Public works and the Killinaboy Historical and Heritage Group, the aim of this project is to undertake conservation work on the building on a phased basis through a supervised training programme in lime mortar repointing and masonry repair.

To date a number of assessments have been carried out at the site, including an architectural and archaeological assessment, a measured survey, a conservation Inspection, a risk assessment and a wildlife survey.

Notification has also been made to the National Monuments Service to carry out the conservation work and permission has been granted. The next step in the process is to commission a conservation engineers report and develop a training plan based on this. It is hoped that training will commence in Spring 2016.



**A site visit at An Cabhail Mhór**

### **The 'Adopt a Hedgerow' case study facilitates members of the Burren Ecotourism Network to take care of their environment through combating litter and invasive species.**

The initiative was conceived by members of the Burren Ecotourism Network and through GeoparkLIFE, it is supported by Clare County Council. Through the initiative members of the network take responsibility for a section of hedgerow near their business premises, ranging from 500m to 3km. Each business is responsible for clearing the hedgerow of litter and reporting on invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Dogwood, which negatively impact on native species that are part of the Burren ecosystem. The first clean up took place over a weekend in May 2015 and further dates are in planning.



**Burren Free Range Pork, Kilfenora Hostel and e-Whizz in Kilfenora with their collected waste**







# Organisation

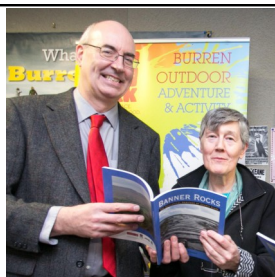
## Who's Behind The Geopark

**CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL:** The Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geopark is managed and co-funded by Clare County Council who recognise the need to balance tourism and conservation in the Burren region.

Since 2008, Clare County Council has been working in the Burren to address the balance of tourism and conservation. Initially through the Burren Connect project and now through the Geopark they are supporting the development of a sustainable tourism destination that gives direct benefits to the local community, promotes and celebrates local culture and preserves the environment.



**Cllr. Tony O'Brien, then Leas Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council; Carol Gleeson, Dr. Klaus George of Harz, Braunschweiger Geopark; Cllr. John Crowe, then Cathaoirleach of Clare County Council; Dr. Margaret Wood of GeoMon Geopark; Gerard Dollard, Clare County Council**



**Sarah Gately of the GSI with Matthew Park author of the Banner Rocks at the launch in Lisdoonvarna**

**The GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF IRELAND (GSI):** Geopark status could not have happened without the support and funding of the GSI. The GSI sees Geoparks as a vital public interface for education and outreach through the promotion of geology—and its integral relationship with habitat and human history—to locals and visitors alike, and as an important catalyst for local economic development.

Founded in 1845, the GSI is the National Earth Science Agency with responsibility for providing geological advice and information, as well as for the acquisition of data for this purpose. The GSI produces a range of products including maps, reports and databases and acts as a knowledge centre and project partner in all aspects of Irish geology. It is a division of the Department of Communications, Energy & Natural Resources (DCENR).

**FAILTE IRELAND:** Fáilte Ireland is the National Tourism Development Authority, whose role is to support the tourism industry and work to sustain Ireland as a high-quality and competitive tourism destination. They provide a range of practical business supports to help tourism businesses better manage and market their products and services.

Faillte Ireland have been a very active partner of the Geopark since its establishment in 2011 and a big supporter of its predecessor Burren Connect since 2006. They have provided much support from funding and training to advice and mentoring. Their positive engagement has provided huge encouragement to the Geopark team.



**Michael Fitzsimons, Fiona Monaghan and Flan Quilligan of Failte Ireland launching the Geopark Heritage Trails**

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- November 19th—The GeoparkLIFE Mid-term Conference  
Updating you on all the progress of the project to date
- November 20th— Irish Geoparks Forum  
The Annual meeting of the Irish Geoparks and prospective Geoparks on the island of Ireland

## THE NEXT EDITION

The next edition of the Burren and Cliffs of Moher Geoparks newsletter will see us wrapping up the year and sharing more details on the conservation work of the GeoparkLIFE project. If you would like to be added to the mailing list contact [lcotter@burren.ie](mailto:lcotter@burren.ie). Until next time.....



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