

Group 8: Geoheritage as an Economic Driver, Geotourism, Community Engagement

Matt Brueseke (Presenter), Kansas State University

Brennan Jordan (Facilitator), University of South Dakota

Carol Frost (Recorder), University of Wyoming

Dominique Brough, U.S. Forest Service

Yann Gavillot, Montana Bureau of Mines, Montana Tech, Oregon Paleo Lands Inst.

Michael Kelly, Northern Arizona University

Steve Martin, Kentucky Geological Survey

Douglas Munski, University of North Dakota

Bill Rose, Michigan Technological University

Susan Schnur, Washington Geological Survey

Yolonda Youngs, Idaho State University

What is geotourism?

Varying definitions: brief to expansive, narrow to inclusive

- Geotourism is the term used internationally for the practice of hosting visitors at natural areas specifically to enjoy geologic features and processes. (America's Geologic Heritage: An Invitation to Leadership, 2015)
- Geotourism is tourism of geology and landscape usually undertaken at geosites. It fosters conservation of geological attributes (geoconservation) as well as understanding of geoheritage and geodiversity (through appropriate interpretation). At a higher level the geological knowledge imparted to a geosite may be used to inform its biotic and cultural features so that a more holistic view of the environment can be gained. This should then lead to a more enhanced understanding and appreciate of the world build from its geological foundations. (Dowling and Newsome, 2018)

Scales of geotourism projects

Scale can vary widely*:

- 1) Regional-encompassing: equivalent to geoparks of the GGN (potentially overlain on a spectrum of private and public lands of different jurisdictions)
- 2) Regional-routes: driving routes, byways, and trail networks
- 3) Local: rural/urban spaces, parks, and trails, even individual features

**all can include outdoor spaces and associated visitor centers/museums etc.*

Aspects of the Global Geopark Network model can inform projects across these scales with regard to integrating geotourism, outdoor recreation, cultural tourism, economic development, and community engagement

Geotourism engagement - part 1

1. Best practices & getting buy-in and sense of community ownership is critical
 - a. Stress positive local-regional sustainable economic impact (seek supporting data from others' experiences); don't overemphasize challenges
 - b. Engagement with:
 - i. Tourism/visitor organizations at appropriate level (local, state, etc.)
 - ii. Local/regional conservation organizations
 - iii. Museums, cultural heritage sites & organizations (historical societies)
 - iv. Outdoor recreation organizations/businesses (broad!)
 - v. If scope of project is appropriate, create committees/boards that offer influential community members and donors an opportunity to participate
 - vi. Include local/regional/state geological societies, gem & mineral clubs
 - vii. State geological surveys may be partners in projects at a wide range of scales

Geotourism engagement - part 2

1. Best practices & getting buy-in and sense of community ownership is critical
 - a. Assemble or broadcast (2 -way) to stakeholders including formal and informal educators, land managers, tourism offices, bookstores, outdoor recreational shops, bikes/hike groups, birdwatchers, hunters, state geo surveys and others. Snowball recruitment.
 - b. Polish the description of the project and benefits/challenges, be open to other ideas
 - c. Find a champion(s) to help moderate community conversations (\$)
 - d. Promote ongoing community-based conversations
 - e. Iterate $a \Rightarrow d$

1. Funding Challenges Are Real
 - b. Let your scope define your budget, fear not, but revise
 - c. Understand the range of funding: gofundme, donors, municipal budgets, federal, foundation
 - d. Land managers often cash strapped, investigate alternative funding through partner existing env or conservation orgs and their donor base. Certain communities may have more \$ connections than others.

Interpretation tools for geotourism projects

1) Many options:

- a) StoryMaps, videos, maps (including geological), websites, mobile apps, audio and virtual guides, podcasts, downloadable travel guides, kiosks, historical photos, audio-interviews of people, other geological info (e.g., annotated photos, strat columns, cross-sections, etc.).
- b) Geoheritage self-guided tours (why, where, how) - a “geojourney” that combines some of the above! Theme focused (e.g., Keweenaw peninsula mining heritage)
- c) Conventional interpretive panels and pamphlets still have a significant role, especially where internet connectivity is an issue

2) Educational training needs

- a) Formal training where content experts teach recreation/education group leaders/guides, who then teach others
- b) Informal education (e.g., kiosks, Roadside Geology books, etc.) - you or I could read/listen/etc.

3) Need to consider accessibility when possible

- a) ADA laws and WCAG 2.2+ guidelines

Developing promotional campaigns for geotourism projects

- Websites
- Social media
- Email “blasts” to large mailing lists (state parks, outdoor groups, etc.)
- Brochures & rack cards
- Radio advertisements
- Print media in newspapers
- Stickers
- Presentations/booths at society meetings and local organization events
- Digital apps & tours
 - Analytics from apps can be used to understand user demographics and allow for better tweaking of tour
 - Ads from local businesses can be placed in this medium, allowing for community buy-in and promotion
- Posters to hang at local businesses & government offices/buildings
- All promotion will require thoughtful design, marketing effort, and UPKEEP

Need for a national geoheritage network

USA is missing a national association or organization that we can rely for both information and to label our activities that people can relate to

- Could be an organization-framework or a something like a resource repository (website?)

- Partner up with GSA, AAG, etc. (Geopark alliance network? Geoheritage and Geopark network?)

Everything links to the Earth, we need to remind everyone this simple truth by highlighting places where this is clear.

Perhaps: “U.S. Geoheritage and Geopark Association (USGGA)”, which would be supported by AGI, GSA, AGU. This is how the EGN (European Geopark Network) originally got started.

Or: “Geo-Park and Recreation Areas (GRRA)”. If down the line, there is a national system of Geopark in the US, these recreation areas could easily be transitioned to something else reflecting a National context.