

Perceptions of a Geo-tourist

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Thank you for the opportunity to show you some of the great geological features we have experienced during our travels around Australia. We started travelling around Australia over three years ago. Our plan was to travel slowly and spend considerable time in the iconic regions of Australia.

I had previously been heavily involved in Tourism Australia's National Landscapes program, as Executive Officer of the Australian Alps National Landscape, so our goal was to slowly visit all 16 of the National Landscapes.

Many people who travel around Australia carry a 'business card' to pass on to interesting people they meet. The back of our 'business card' spells out the 16 regions we plan to spend time in -all of them National Landscapes. While I understand Tourism Australia no longer uses the National Landscapes program as a basis for its promotion, I still think the concept helps to encourage travelers to better appreciate a region, rather than merely ticking off bucket list highlights.

It is no surprise that each national landscape is primarily based on the scenic qualities of the nature conservation areas that dominate that landscape. Scenic quality in turn, is linked to the geology of the area and the variation in that geology.

So far we have spent quite a few weeks in six or seven of these landscapes. The geology of the Flinders Ranges, Red Centre, Tasmania and Ningaloo-Shark Bay are literally in your face and difficult to avoid. In other landscapes such as the Australia Alps, Wilderness Coast and your own Great South west Edge, the geology is more cryptic and shrouded in the ridges and valleys of these landscapes.

But there's re other geological features and themes that have made our travels more interesting and helped us to better understand our environment.

For example the volcanic outcrops and evidence of vulcanism in south-west Victoria and south-east South Australia make up the Kanawinka GeoPark - a good example of how co-operation between organisations can result in a regional tourism promotion that links the geological heritage of adjacent communities. It is unfortunate that the future of the Kanawinka GeoPark concept is at risk, with the co-ordinating committee disbanding earlier this year, as a result of the Commonwealth Government's lack of support for the Kanawinka GeoPark to remain as Australia's only Global GeoPark recognised by UNESCO. Local Government Councils, regional tourism organisations and Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations will need to quickly start co-operating and pick up the tourism promotions association with the GeoPark.

As visitors from the eastern States to Western Australia, we had heard about Wave Rock and thought we would visit this site as a key feature of W.A.'s geotourism. However, before we got anywhere near Hyden, we had discovered the wonderful array of granite outcrops that pepper the Wheatbelt, including

many outcrops with 'Wave-Rock' type formations. The pleasure of these low granite outcrops lay in their unusualness for 'easterners' and in how they have played such a pivotal role in the communities that surround each outcrop. From the significance to Indigenous peoples to the architectural marvels of the water-collecting designs, these granite outcrops are so much part of the heritage of the region. So visiting these granite outcrops and discovering their individuality and unique role in the local community has been a major focus of part of our Western Australian visit. It is unfortunate that there does not seem to be any co-ordination to collectively highlight and promote these 'geotourism gems'.

We have visited other geological features better-known to Easterners including the gorges of Kalbarri and Karajini and noted the Aboriginal links of these landscapes to the Rainbow Serpent, Warlu or Thurru.

We have discovered Western Australia also has other geological standouts that are generally unknown to Easterners and possibly not even visited by many Sandgroppers. These include the spectacular Mt Augustus, and the Indigenous petroglyphs hammered, pounded and scraped into the iron rich rocks of the Burrup Peninsula.

To wrap up, I think there are plenty of geo-tourists looking to better understand the geological heritage of Australia, and the forces that operate to give the landscape we appreciate. The challenge is to co-operate and co-ordinate geological themes, develop web and hard-copy maps and information, and balancing scientific geology with Aboriginal story-lines of landscape creation.

Thank you for listening.