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Delegates from the tourism industry and geology-related projects across Ireland attended the recent annual Geoh heritage Ireland Forum which was hosted by the Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism Project at the Carrickdale Hotel on 14/15 October.

The event was jointly organised with the Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) and it focused on the potential for Geotourism while showcasing successful projects and initiatives on the island of Ireland.

Speakers at the conference included Dr Patrick McKeever from UNESCO and representatives of Tourism Ireland, Northern Ireland Tourism Board and Fáilte Ireland. The event also showcased the activities and plans of the Geoparks at Marble Arch (Co Fermanagh), Burren and Cliffs of Moher (Co Clare) and the Copper Coast (Co Waterford) and developing geotourism projects at Causeway Coast and Glens, Joyce Country (Co Galway) and Mourne-Cooley-Gullion.

John Devaney (Geotourism Manager for Mourne Cooley Gullion) stated that "the conference demonstrated the importance of geotourism as a relatively new and important element of sustainable tourism".

He added that the "success of geo-related projects across Ireland demonstrated how geotourism can work very well in promoting the unique landscape of an area as part of the tourism product and it can be community led, where everyone can feel a pride in promoting, enhancing and preserving the area around them".

The event concluded with a field trip of the region led by project geologist Dr. Siobhán Power and archaeologist Dr. Vanessa Ryan.



Presenters at the Irish Geoh heritage 2013 forum.

GEOTOURISM PROJECT HOSTS KOSOVAR GOVERNMENT DELEGATION

The Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism project hosted officials from the Kosovar Ministry of Local Government Administration and Ministry of European Integration during their visit to Newry on Thursday 10 October.



Kosovar government officials visit Flagstaff viewing point in Co. Armagh

The delegation availed of the opportunity to learn about the new regional tourism initiative for the region as part of a week-long visit to Northern Ireland and Scotland. The visit was facilitated by East Scotland European Partnership and the Special European Union Programmes Body.

ESEP is implementing an EU funded project in Kosovo to promote cross-border cooperation in this small country which declared its independence in 2008. The intended learning objectives of the study visit were to gain exposure to actual practices of EU cross-border projects on the ground in the areas and to aid officials in managing three cross-border programmes; Kosovo-Albania; Kosovo-Macedonia; and Kosovo-Montenegro.

Geotourism Manager John Devaney highlighted the importance of public engagement and awareness of the project and in welcoming the delegation from Kosovo stated that "this was another opportunity to introduce and present this initiative to a new audience". The successful cross-border nature of this and other projects in the region and Mr Devaney added that "they may serve as examples to aid cross-border cooperation elsewhere in Europe".

Cllr David Taylor, Deputy Mayor of Newry and Mourne District Council formally welcomed the visitors from Kosovo and highlighted the fact that "this is an area that offers so much to the visitor, and I would hope that projects like Geotourism will demonstrate to the Kosovar delegation good governance, strong cross

border cooperation and a desire to enhance the overall tourism product for this region".

The delegation was later treated to a fieldtrip by project geologist Dr Siobhán Power and archaeologist Dr Vanessa Ryan around the Mourne Cooley Gullion region.



Kosovar delegates pictured with representatives from EBR and Geotourism

DUNDALK 'MEET AND GREET' A VERY POPULAR EVENT

Dundalk Tourist Office was the venue for the first Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism 'Meet & Greet' Roadshow event on 27 September, and it drew in visitors from all three of the project areas.

Project geologist Dr. Siobhán E. Power, archaeologist, Dr. Vanessa Ryan and local volunteer Rachel Curran met visitors and talked about the project in an informal setting over a cup of coffee.

There was a steady flow of visitors to the event throughout the afternoon, giving Siobhán and Vanessa the opportunity to speak with members of local tourism businesses, accommodation providers, walking groups, local media and local political representatives, as well as numerous members of the public.

Interest in the project from local political representatives was strong - the Chair of the Louth County Council Cllr Declan Breathnach, Chairman of the Dundalk Town Council Cllr Eamon O'Boyle and members of various political parties joined the gathering.

Speaking after the event, Sinéad Roche from Dundalk Tourist Office thanked all who had attended and said that she was looking forward to working in partnership with the project as it developed.



L-R: Dr. Vanessa Ryan and Dr. Siobhán E. Power organisers of 'Meet and Greet' event

Dr. Siobhán E. Power from Geotourism said "We are grateful to the people of Cooley and Dundalk for coming to meet us and share their thoughts with us on the potential for geotourism in the area."



The Lady Bagenal greeting visitors to Greencastle for the Medieval Experience day

MEDIEVAL THEMED HALLOWE'EN LECTURE

Hallowe'en night for the Geotourism project involved a treat of a different kind! The project hosted a special medieval themed Hallowe'en lecture in the Banqueting Hall of Bagenal's Castle, Castle Street, Newry.

The lecture, entitled '*The Black Death: Devastation in the Middle Ages*', was delivered by Rostrevor native Mr. Turlough Trainor of Queen's University, Belfast.

Referring back to the 14th century, Turlough addressed the cataclysmic impact of the Black Death in Europe during this period. He then went onto examine both the physical and psychological damages of the plague and how it plunged the world into chaos. Through examination of the causes of the plague and the affect it had on culture, religion and medicine; a better understanding of the time period was gained by all present. The lecture followed up with an open discussion on this time period and the impact of the Black Death. There was a great turnout for the lecture and the fancy dress on the night caused great excitement amongst the audience.

The Geotourism project team were on hand on the night to meet and greet friends and followers of the project who attended.

THE GREENCASTLE MEDIEVAL EXPERIENCE!

In keeping with the theme of medieval experiences, the Geotourism project hosted a medieval day in Greencastle Castle, Co. Down.

This was an all day event and was free to attend. The castle was opened from 10am to 4pm and welcomed people of all ages in large numbers.

Tours of the castle were given by a medieval Knight throughout the day and all those who attended were able to experience medieval life through re-enactments and sample food of the rich and poor. This was a fun and unique experience for many children and families who attended throughout the day.

At 1pm all those present at the Castle were able to participate in a geology and ecology walk, led by biologist Grace Trainor and Geotourism geologist Dr. Siobhán E. Power, to Greencastle shore. People were able to see the close relationship between the rocks, plants and animals, food sources and human development.

A great day was had by all who attended.



Volunteers at Ravensdale Forest Park who assisted with the clearing of invasive species of plants

GEO-CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS

Building on the success of a cross-border volunteer work day in February we are now recruiting for Geo-Conservation Volunteers for work days across the Mourne Cooley Gullion region.

The volunteers will be working in close association with Action for Biodiversity, Louth County Council, Mourne Heritage Trust and Ring of Gullion AONB.

We would like volunteers to help us with the conservation and protection of the local geological, archaeological and natural heritage of the area. Through their work volunteers will assist with maintaining access ways to important geological and archaeological sites, including viewpoints, as well as improving local biodiversity to enhance the experience of locals and visitors alike.

GEO-AMBASSADOR TRAINING OPPORTUNITY A BIG HIT!

An enthusiastic group of Geotourism Training students from across the region came together in SRC, Newry, on Tuesday, September 17th, to begin the first eight week programme of our new Geo-Ambassador initiative.



Geo-Ambassadors about to embark on a fieldtrip of the Mourne Cooley Gullion region.

This popular training course is being delivered by Tourism and Transport Consult International in association with Southern Regional College.

The objective of the training is to allow people to avail of a learning opportunity that focuses on the regional geology, geomorphology, archaeology, tourism, myth and legend. This programme will develop an academy of Geo-ambassadors who are empowered to promote the unique features of the region, develop an enhanced pride in where they live and assist various aspects of the Mourne Cooley Gullion project.

The region-wide field trip on Saturday 12 October was a day of discovery and learning for participants who looked at the various rock types in the region from the metasediments on the coast at Annalong, Co. Down, to the fossil bearing limestone on Whitestown Beach in Co Louth.

As the initial programme moves towards a conclusion, the plans for the 2014 programme are well underway.

FUTURE EVENTS

NOVEMBER LECTURE SERIES

Examining the relationship between archaeology and geology.

WEDNESDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER 2013 – DR. ALISON LENNON, 'THE MEDIEVAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF SOUTH DOWN.'

Dr. Alison Lennon will speak about the medieval archaeology of South Down focusing on the fantastic site at Greencastle.

WEDNESDAY, 20TH NOVEMBER 2013 – DR. VANESSA RYAN, 'THE BUILT HERITAGE OF SOUTH DOWN.'

Dr. Vanessa Ryan will discuss the built heritage of the South Down region.

WEDNESDAY, 27TH NOVEMBER 2013 – DR. SIOBHÁN E. POWER, 'HUMAN RESPONSE TO THE NATURAL LANDSCAPE.'

Dr. Siobhán E. Power will speak about human response to the natural landscape in the Mourne Cooley Gullion region.

'All of the above Lectures are due to start at 2.30pm on the dates listed in the Nautilus Centre, Kilkeel.

Admission is free and everyone is welcome.

Call 028 3025 6650 or email: vanessa.ryan@newryandmourne.gov.uk for further information.

ARCHAEOLOGY LECTURE: THURSDAY, 14TH NOVEMBER, 2013 IN CARLINGFORD

'Carlingford and its castle in the Middle Ages' by Prof. Terry Barry from Trinity College, Dublin

This lecture will begin at 7pm and will be hosted in the Holy Trinity Heritage Centre in Carlingford. It is preceded by a guided moonlit geology and archaeology walk of Carlingford by Dr. Vanessa Ryan (archaeologist) and Dr. Siobhán E. Power (geologist) from the Geotourism project. The walk begins at 5.00pm from the Tourist Office in Carlingford and will finish up at the Holy Trinity Heritage Centre in Carlingford in time for the lecture. Light refreshments will be served and everyone is welcome to attend.

WINTER SOLSTICE EVENT

The Neolithic Passage Grave on the summit of Slieve Gullion is aligned to the setting sun at the winter solstice. It is breath taking when the sun finally hits the back of the chamber and it is amazing just how bright it gets. Ring of Gullion AONB officers have led walks to the summit in time for sunset in the past few years and will again this year on the 19th, 20th and 21st of December. In addition to the walk the Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism project will be hosting lectures and activities in the Hawthorn suite Slieve Gullion courtyard.

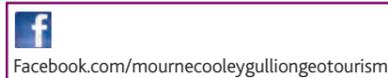
VOLUNTEERING

When	What	Where
23rd November 2013	Tree planting	Flagstaff Viewpoint, J 105 201
14th December 2013	Clearing invasive species	Ravensdale Forest, Co. Louth, J 081 157
25th January 2014	Clearing invasive species	Ravensdale Forest, Co. Louth, J 081 157
22nd February 2014	Vegetation clearance from geology features	King John's Castle, Carlingford, Co. Louth
29th March 2014	Tree planting	Flagstaff Viewpoint, J 105 201
26th April 2014	Path maintenance to St. Blinne's well, Killevey	Meeting at Killevey old churches. J 040 221

The above events can be subject to change depending on weather conditions.

Mourne area events will follow shortly. Please follow us on Facebook for up to date event information.

Mourne Cooley Gullion Geotourism,
McGrath Centre, Margaret Street,
Newry, Co. Down BT34 1BP
Tel: 028 30 256650
www.mournecooleygullion.com



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