

STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE FOR UNESCO GEOPARKS

Background (taken from Crofts and Gordon *Geoconservation in protected areas* in WCPA protected areas management handbook)

Geoparks are areas with outstanding geoheritage established primarily to promote geotourism and to support local economic development. They are not protected areas *per se*, but they may wholly, or in part, be covered by protected areas. They are not systematically identified and classified as a comprehensive global network; many are based on community-led voluntary initiatives and others by top-down designation. Nevertheless, the Global Network of National Geoparks or Global Geoparks Network (GGN), assisted by UNESCO, provides an international framework to conserve and enhance the value of the Earth's heritage, its landscapes and geological formations, and the creation of Geoparks will probably *de facto* provide a level of landscape scale coordination of conservation, sustainable use and complementary social and economic development, though not always in the strict definitions of IUCN categories. Currently the network comprises 100 national Geoparks worldwide (<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/earth-sciences/global-geoparks/>).

Geoparks combine conservation of geoheritage with encouragement of its enjoyment and understanding, education and support for sustainable socio-economic and cultural development through geotourism (McKeever et al, 2010). The GGN operates in close synergy with the World Heritage Convention, the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) World Network of Biosphere Reserves, and with national, international, non-governmental organizations and geoheritage conservation programmes. Sites within the GGN are required to meet criteria relating to size and setting; management and local involvement; economic development; education; and protection and conservation (http://www.globalgeopark.org/UploadFiles/2012_9_6/GGN2010.pdf). Geoparks are not necessarily specifically protected areas, and are subject to quadrennial reviews of their performance and management. Should a Geopark fail to meet the criteria and the issues raised are not addressed within 2 further years, it is removed from the GGN list.

Dingwall et al (2005) recommended that the Global Geoparks Network should be seen as a complementary approach to World Heritage listing. However, it should be recognised that the Geoparks Network is not primarily a listing of important sites; they are sites selected for tourism and promotion purposes. There still remains a need for an international listing of important geosites alongside World Heritage Sites and Geoparks since each has a different role to play in international geoconservation.

The following quotes from the UNESCO 'Guidelines and Criteria for National Geoparks seeking UNESCO's assistance to join the Global Geoparks Network' (2010) provide relevant information:

"A Geopark seeking to become a member of the GGN is an area with clearly defined boundaries and a large enough area for it to serve local economic and cultural development (particularly through tourism). Each Geopark should display though a range of sites of international, regional and/or national importance, a region's geological history, and the events and processes that formed it. The sites may be important from the point of view of science, rarity, education and/or aesthetics."

“Where appropriate, the geological and non-geological features inside the Geopark area must be accessible to visitors, linked to one another and safeguarded through a clear responsible management body or partnership that has demonstrable local support. The management body or partnership should have an effective management infrastructure, adequate qualified personnel, and sustainable financial support.”

“The Geopark should have effective and professional management structures, deliver policy and action for sustainable regional socio-economic and cultural development across the territory where it is located.”

“One of the main strategic objectives of a Geopark is to stimulate economic activity within the framework of sustainable development.”

“A Geopark is not specifically a new category of protected area or landscape and can be quite different from what is sometimes an entirely protected and regulated National Park or Nature Park, and the branding of an area as “Geopark” does not necessarily affect the legal status of the land. For legal protection for certain geosites within the Geopark, however, the authorities responsible for the Geopark must ensure its protection in accordance with local traditions and legislative obligations. It is the government of the country where the Geopark is situated which decides on the level and measures of protection of certain sites or geological outcrops.”

There are 7 Geoparks in the UK:

English Riviera, Torbay

Fforest Fawr, Brecon Beacons,

GeoMôn, Anglesey

North Pennines

North West Highlands, Scotland

Shetland

Main elements of IUCN definition	Discussion of element in relation to UNESCO Geoparks
Are the sites in clearly defined geographical areas?	Yes the sites have clearly defined boundaries and these are digitally stored.
Are they recognised, dedicated and managed to achieve the long-term conservation of nature? NB ‘nature’ includes all levels of biodiversity as well as geodiversity, landforms and broader natural values.	Yes as they are only of continuing relevance if their geoheritage characteristics and features are maintained. But they are usually part of areas with other conservation objectives such as national parks and Natura 2000 sites, whose conservation objectives and supporting instruments will override those of the Geopark

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Is the main management objective nature conservation? Other objectives of equal standing may be present but they do not cause conflict, i.e. nature conservation is the priority	No as their primary purpose is a combination of conservation, public education and tourism development, and if there is a problem there is no clear statement to favour conservation of the geoheritage unless this exists in statutory protection under for example SSSI for geoheritage conservation s part of the implementation of the GB Geological Conservation Review
Does the designation of the site prevent, or eliminate where necessary, any exploitation or management practice that will be harmful to the objectives of designation?	No as the designation of a Geopark does not bring any additional powers of protection than may or may not exist already. The UNESCO Guidelines make it clear that domestic protection measures are needed for this purpose. In practice, this will mean geoheritage sites as SSSIs as the only powers have any teeth.
Does the designation of the site aim to maintain, or ideally, increase the degree of naturalness of the ecosystem being protected?	No. Indeed in some circumstances removal of materials, through for examples quarrying and gravel extraction, may enhance the educational benefits of the site by revealing new exposures.
Is the long-term nature conservation ensured through legal or other effective means? E.g. national or international statutory law/ agreement/convention, traditional rules or NGO policy.	No in the strict legal sense as the Geopark designation does not bring with it any additional powers. Protection is solely reliant on domestic legislative and other powers. However, protection does rely on the application of other powers through the working of the formal managing partnership for the Geopark, such as local structure and other plans and policies.

Conclusion

Geoparks are not protected areas as defined by IUCN as

1. Designation does not bring any new powers of protecting the geoheritage features
2. Sole reliance is placed on existing domestic law to safeguard the geoheritage features identified
3. The partnership management arrangements confer only a moral obligation on the partners and the constituent bodies to act in the best interests of protecting the site
4. The process of identifying potential Geoparks is deliberately a bottom-up approach to ensure local commitment and engagement
5. There is no rigorous set of criteria to identify the sites to be included, unlike for example the GB Geological Conservation Review
6. The primary motivation of a Geopark is to stimulate geotourism to benefit visitors and the local economy.

However, they may be regarded as community conserved areas with an imprimatur, albeit informal, from an international organisation.

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