

An Introduction to the



WAITAKI
WHITESTONE
ASPIRING GLOBAL
GEOPARK
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

**CULTURE & HERITAGE | ENVIRONMENT | SCIENCE
EDUCATION | SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

WHAT IS A GEOPARK?

A Geopark is the new UNESCO designation (like World Heritage status) that gives world-wide status to a defined area of international geological significance which **tells the story of how the geology and landscape has shaped the lives of its inhabitants**, be they people, animals or plants.

A Geopark is managed within an holistic framework of protection, education and sustainable development. **But it is about much more than just geology.** It also creates a unifying platform which explores, links and celebrates the identity, history, culture and diversity of the area.



Connecting people to the 38 million year long story of this land, which has shaped every aspect of our lives, **is a platform for addressing the societal challenges we all face** – such as climate change, environmental protection, biodiversity loss, sustainable use of resources, geohazards, and sustainable economic development.

Geoparks are driven from the ‘bottom up’, relying heavily on community support and participation, and returning benefits to the community through increased profile, social capital and sustainable economic development. The Waitaki Whitestone Geopark aims to be the first Geopark in Oceania.

THE WAITAKI WHITESTONE GEOPARK

Located in the South Island (Te Waipounamu) of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark is a 7,200 km² part of Zealandia - the world's ‘8th continent’, which broke away from Gondwanaland and then became submerged under the ocean for millions of years before tectonic forces thrust New Zealand above the waves. **It exhibits huge geo-diversity** – snapshots of the Earth's mantle, karst landforms, braided rivers, features of submarine volcanic and tectonic plate forces, and fossils of an ancient marine world.

The karst landscape and its ‘whitestone’ are integral to the identity of the Waitaki district. The first people to the area found shelter in limestone caves, leaving now-treasured rock art. Waitaki's largest town, Ōamaru, is renowned for fine limestone architecture. Today, the Vanished World Centre celebrates the wondrous fossils that emerge from the Geopark's whitestone.





The Geopark contains outstanding natural heritage and is well known for its wildlife, with local plant, insect and animal species adding to the distinct character of this area.

Some of the first sites of human occupation in Aotearoa New Zealand are here, the last major landmass on Earth to be populated by humans. These sites, and the Mātauranga Māori (knowledge) surrounding them, reveal the story of the local iwi (tribe), Ngāi Tahu and in the 19th century, Europeans who arrived to engage in farming, mining and supporting industry and activities required by new settler communities.

OUR GOALS

The Geopark is governed by a charitable Trust. The goals for the Geopark are to:

-  Increase the protection of and access to the geological, cultural and heritage sites within Waitaki.
-  Enhance the identity and increase the social capital of the Waitaki district by providing a unifying platform for the stories of our land, culture and heritage.
-  Share the story of the WWG through education and by providing experiences and activities within the Geopark, with a focus on youth engagement.
-  Increase the wellbeing of local people through sustainable economic activity.

This area continues to be a hub of primary production with recent emphasis on dryland beef and sheep farming and dairy production. Increasingly tourism also contributes to the area's livelihood as visitors come to admire the historic buildings, appreciate local food and wine, our rich biodiversity and the culture and heritage of the area.



The first steps to becoming a Geopark were accomplished by the Vanished World Incorporated Society, a community organisation which aims to promote and understand the geological riches of the Waitaki region through education, conservation and appropriate use. Since the year 2000, with support from the local community, the Society has developed a Discovery Centre at Duntroon and trails to nearby geological sites to view fossils, minerals, rocks and landforms.

UNESCO ACCREDITATION

With the active support of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO, the Trust is seeking designation of the area as a UNESCO Global Geopark. **This will provide a framework of values and goals to guide our actions, worldwide profile for Waitaki and Aotearoa New Zealand,** an increase in visitors to the area, and access to a network of UNESCO Geoparks to learn from and share with.

The Trust will submit an application to UNESCO in November 2019, requesting an inspection of the Geopark in mid-2020, and designation the year after.



For more information visit:

WWW.WHITESTONEGEOPARK.NZ

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