

Landscapes of Meaning: Geotourism and the Sustainable Exploitation of the European Geoheritage

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ABSTRACT

Observations on, and interpretations of, European landforms and geophenomena have influentially informed the development of geology and geology from at least the sixteenth century onwards. However, both landforms and geophenomena often have older mythological, religious and more recent aesthetic significance. These scientific and cultural elements when combined create a major global geoheritage. European archives, libraries, museums and universities are a storehouse of global significance for that geoheritage – both specimens and documentation. However, this geoheritage and its value is frequently neglected and threatened. Geotourism, since it is both a geoconservation and sustainable exploitation strategy, offers a means to address these issues. Its success depends upon attracting and maintaining the support of politicians, planners and developers by demonstrating the geoheritage's potential for the tourism and outdoor recreation industries. Hence, academic geoscientists must recognise the need to promote the significance of their studies to other than committed audiences and constituencies. The successful promotion of European geoconservation, a significant and essential component of geotourism, requires the adoption of appropriate geosite designation and interpretative strategies. Case studies from Europe and North America underpin a discussion of these strategies. The presentation also provides an introductory toolbox for the evaluation of geosites and their associated interpretive media. Essentially, this presentation establishes for the conference a focus on geosite recognition and promotion and provides the means for an informed debate on the central issues.

KEY WORDS

Geosciences, Geosites, Geoconservation, Geoheritage, Geophenomena, Geotourism.

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Tom Hose initially trained as an earth scientist, gaining his BSc in geology and geography (University of London) and is a Fellow of the Geological Society of London. He gained his teaching qualification (University of Liverpool) in geography and science education. He completed his MA in museum and gallery administration (City University) with a thesis on the history of museum education. Finally, he undertook extensive fieldwork in the UK, Europe and the USA in developing the geotourism concept, the focus of his doctoral thesis (University of Birmingham) and the first such anywhere on the subject. Tom has authored chapters for three Geological Society of London books and a major European geoconservation text, together with numerous articles, reports, poster sessions and conference papers on geotourism and geological interpretation. He contributes, frequently by invitation, geotourism keynote conference addresses and practitioner workshops in the UK and Europe. He is also a guest lecturer on geology and geotourism at several universities in the UK and Europe.

Tom Hose is presently a university principal lecturer in heritage and tourism management. Previously he has worked in museums as a head of natural history, education officer at an inner city nature reserve and as head of a new county museum education service. He has also taught in secondary schools in the humanities and sciences, eventually as a head of geology. He has been much involved in UK-based geoconservation schemes, most recently the Regionally Important Geological and Geomorphological Sites (of which he is a Member of its Executive Committee) and for the British Institute of Geological Conservation (of which he is a Council Member). Consequently, he has extensive experience as a geologist and field naturalist. Likewise, he has considerable expertise in natural heritage conservation and environmental education. He is a consultant on geotourism and geology-focused interpretative provision and has recently completed a multi-media interpretative project for a local geological nature reserve. Setting aside his major geology interests, Tom is an accomplished and published photographer with a strong commitment to outdoor recreation and the development of young persons.