Geotourism

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Giants Causeway, Grand Canyon, Giant Geode of Pulpi, Moreno Glacier, Finger of God, Devil's Marbles, Stone Forest, Wave Rock. These are all rocks and they are all tourism attractions. That is the theme of this book: geological tourism. Of its 27 contributors, all but three are principally geologists, and their chapters focus on geological features rather than on tourists, tour companies, or tourism infrastructure. Several also emphasize the role of tours in educating the public, particularly school children, about geology.

The editors' introductory chapter acknowledges that the term geotourism has recently been appropriated by *National Geographic* and others in the United States (Stueve, Cook and Drew 2002) to mean geographical rather than geological tourism. In the *National Geographic* report, the term was used almost as a synonym for ecotourism. This caused some annoyance for the United Nations Environment Program and the World Tourism Organization, which had devoted considerable effort to promote the World Ecotourism Summit. A slightly narrower interpretation, to focus on types of

tourism where the attraction has a fixed geographical location, could be a very useful term (Buckley 2003) but does not seem to have been adopted generally.

This volume defiantly repudiates any such use of the term. Indeed, one wonders if that was perhaps why the editors took up this topic. Figure 1.1 in the book shows three concentric circles: with “geotourism” as the bullseye, surrounded by “geoparks”, and “geographical tourism” relegated to the outer limits. It is worth quoting at length from the Preface, because this defines the book’s intent very clearly:

We are passionate about the subject. Both of the editors have trained as geologists and now work in tourism education. We hold geology dear to our hearts and wish to share that with like-minded people. We believe that through geotourism a better understanding of the Earth can be achieved.... The Earth’s geological wonders have always fascinated people, and many form the basis for...protected areas and World Heritage Sites (p. xxv).

So, rocks as heritage. It is by no means a new theme (Buckley 1986), but it is put forward very persuasively in the current volume. Readers expecting a development of the American geotourism concept will be disappointed: for them, this approach will be retrograde. Geologists, especially those involved in education, will be delighted. To them, this compilation will represent long-overdue recognition of the role of rocks in global tourism. Despite the many authors who have linked tourism to biodiversity (Buckley 2002; Newsome, Dowling and Moore 2005), more people probably travel to see scenic splendours,

which are essentially geological features, than to see particular plants and animals.

What matters here is that thousands of geological features worldwide have become attractions: sandstone beehives, limestone caves, crags and cliffs, peaks and ranges, salt pans and desert dunes, gorges, and glaciers. In tourism terms, the oldest is perhaps the karst hills of Guilin in China, famous destination for the painters and poets of the Middle Kingdom long before New Zealand became Middle Earth.

Moving from poets to statistics, there are 27 contributors, including the editors. Six are from Australia, four each from Germany and the United Kingdom, three each from China and South Africa, two each from Spain and Iran, and one each from France, Malaysia, and the United States. Some of the case studies presented could equally well be considered as ecotourism. Environmental issues such as carbon dioxide levels from tourists in caves, and noise from overflights, receive a brief mention. There is also a nod to adventure tourism with particular mention of the slickrock mountain-bike trail in Moab, Utah.

Several chapters simply present the relevant country's potential geological attractions, but many emphasize educational aspects and several examine management issues. One-third of the book is devoted to geoparks, "a direct result of geological public relations work" (p. 95). The most detailed example presented is the Vulkaneifel Geopark in Germany, which comprises 15 geocentres and 257 field locations. The park features a self-drive route to various geological points of interest. It is intended principally for education, using a cartoon figure, "Willi Basalt" as an interpretive tool.

The American chapter, in contrast, points out that many existing National Parks in the United States have long been famous for their geological features. Twenty or so are mentioned specifically, including Yellowstone and Yosemite. Again, the educational aspect of the emphasis on the geology of the national parks is at the forefront: trying to get university geology students to go look at some geology.

The editor's concluding chapter mentions further examples not covered in the text, from Iceland to Trinidad, India to Canada. It reiterates that to these authors, "geo" in the tourism context refers to geology, not geography. It mentions impacts and interpretation, and draws parallels with ecotourism. The authors do not say so in as many words, but effectively their message is "geotourism: the new ecotourism". Stueve et al (2002) would no doubt agree.

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