

Progress on Establishing a Global Geopark on the Parrsboro Shore

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Background

Global Geoparks are a unique undertaking. Not actually ‘parks’ at all, the movement is in effect a marketing brand for a region defined by its geology. Global Geoparks are not restrictive, but rather strive to foster economic development in a bottom-up, community-driven model, all centered on the area’s geoheritage and cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2016). Formed in 2000 as the European Geoparks Network, the movement grew to become the Global Geoparks Network after its enthusiastic embrace by China. As of 2016, there were 120 Global Geoparks in 33 countries. In 2016, the program was adopted as an official UNESCO program. Canada has North America’s first two Global Geoparks, with two poised to join this year in Mexico. Twelve regions across Canada are now seeking to establish geoparks.

The dramatic seacliffs and waterfalls of the Parrsboro shore offer an unrivalled record of one of the great episodes of Earth history: the assembly and breakup of Pangea. The rifting of the supercontinent was accompanied by the largest outpouring of lava in Earth history, represented by the basalt headlands and islands from Five Islands (Fig. 1) to Cape D’Or and Isle Haute. Exploration for native copper in these basalt cliffs represents the earliest mining by Europeans in North America. The trademark orange-hued sedimentary rocks hold the story of life within a great rift valley, including the oldest dinosaurs known in Canada. To the Mi’kmaq, these islands and sea stacks hold stories of the legendary Kluscap, and are deeply significant (Fig. 2).

Progress through 2016

In October 2015, the author apprised the board of the Cumberland Geological Society (administrators of the Fundy Geological Museum) of the potential

for a geopark along the Parrsboro shore. This area is especially rich in geoheritage sites (Calder and Poole, 2017), and has the added benefit of established park and museum infrastructure, including Five Islands Provincial Park, Cape Chignecto Provincial Park and the Fundy Geological Museum. The Cumberland Geological Society took on the challenge, and in December of 2016 notified the Canadian National Committee for Geoparks of their intention to pursue a Global Geopark designation, pending support from local communities. From the outset, the partnership of the Mi’kmaq community has been paramount. The Elders Advisory Council was first to be consulted, and its blessing was sought and received before proceeding further. In September 2016, a paper was presented on this partnership and was seen as a model for conventional geological and indigenous cultural ways of seeing (Calder and Gloade, 2016). ‘Town Hall’ meetings (Fig. 3) were held subsequently in May and June in Economy, Port Greville, Advocate Harbour and Parrsboro, with unanimous support from those in attendance to move forward. Presently, the area under consideration as an aspiring geopark comprises 150 km of coastline from Cape Chignecto to Economy, extending inland to the Cobequid Highlands. The ultimate boundaries may change as community consultation continues.

Coincidentally, a Strategic Tourism Expansion Program (STEP) for the Parrsboro shore in 2016 considered how best to marshal resources to focus attention on the great tourism potential of the region. Dialogue between the STEP and geopark initiatives resulted in identification of the aspiring geopark as a key path forward for tourism growth. Importantly, global geoparks are especially attractive to the outdoor enthusiast sector of tourism, which is the most highly sought due to their tendency to both stay and spend more than other tourist categories.



Figure 1. The basalt islands at Five Islands Provincial Park.



Figure 2. Kluscap presenting his Grandmother with an amethyst necklace at Wa'soq (Partridge Island), as depicted by Mi'kmaw artist Gerald Gloade. Image is used with permission of the artist.

An ad hoc Steering Committee of the Cumberland Geological Society (Fig. 4) was formed in mid 2016, with broad community representation and participation of private sector tourism operators.

Following community consultation, a branding exercise was undertaken and the name “Cliffs of Fundy” chosen to reflect the importance of the Bay of Fundy, and the sense of adventure imparted by the cliffs (Fig. 5).

An inventory of geosites has identified 49 individual geological points of interest, most along the coast, but also including waterfalls on the flank of the Cobequid Highlands. The author was aided greatly in this assessment by Eric Leighton, retired forest technician with the Department of Natural Resources. These sites have been grouped into 12 areas, each with its own unique experience for the visitor.

Support for the project has been demonstrated at all levels of government from municipal to federal. The Steering Committee has a target date of submitting a draft application to the Canadian National Committee in 2017, which could see a UNESCO Global Geopark declared for Nova Scotia in 2020.



Figure 3. Town Hall meeting at Economy, May 2016.



Figure 4. Ad hoc Steering Committee for the Cliffs of Fundy Aspiring Geopark. Left to right, Anne Garbinsky (NovaShores Adventures), Tim Fedak (Fundy Geological Museum), Karen Dickinson (Cumberland Geological Society), John Calder (Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources), Chris MacIntyre (Five Islands Provincial Park), Willem van den Hoek (That Dutchman's Cheese), and Anita McLellan (Cobequid Interpretive Centre). Missing from photo: Michelle Byers (Municipality of Cumberland) and Oralee O'Byrne (Age of Sail Heritage Centre).

References

Calder, J. H. and Gloade, G. 2016: Seeing a Geopark through Indigenous and Geological Eyes: The Fundy Rift, Home of Kluscap; 7th

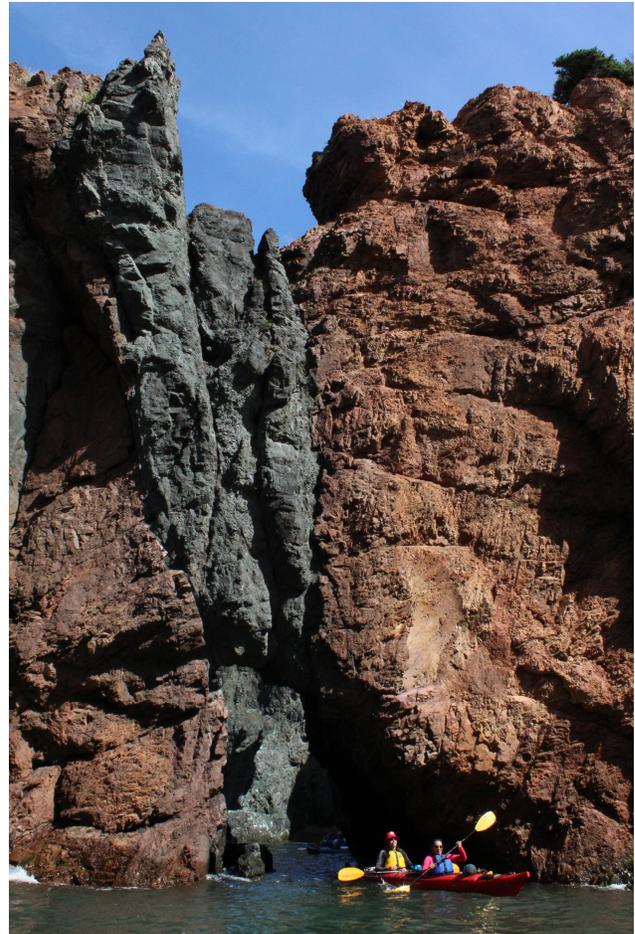


Figure 5. Kayaking the Three Sisters near Cape Chignecto. The adventure of visiting geosites is seen as one of the strong suits of the aspiring geopark.

International UNESCO Conference on Global Geoparks, Torquay, England, September 2016.

Calder, J. H. and Poole, J. C. 2017: Geoheritage sites of Nova Scotia; Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Open File Map 2017-032, scale 1:500 000.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2016: UNESCO Global Geoparks: celebrating Earth heritage, sustaining local communities; UNESCO, France, 19 p.