

**WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST  
TRAVELLING FELLOWSHIP**

**FELLOWSHIP REPORT  
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**“Developing Sustainable  
Geo(scientific) Tourism :  
Researching Best Practice”**

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## 1. FOREWORD – SOME PERSONAL THOUGHTS

I had been aware of the Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship scheme for many years. In fact, some of my friends had successfully applied over the last 15 years or so and all had come back both enlightened and exhilarated, almost changed people in a sense, with a renewed sense of vigour and enthusiasm for life. In each case, when they recalled their experiences, they made it clear that the opportunity afforded by their Travelling Fellowship had not only resulted in a significant widening of knowledge and experience in their particular field of interest but had also been very influential on their own personal development and outlook on life. At various times, these friends had individually suggested that I, too, “give it a go” as they thought that I might benefit from such an opportunity.

It was therefore with renewed interest when I listened to a friend and colleague describe her recent Fellowship travels and I could see just how much her experiences had been of benefit to her, not only professionally but very much on a personal level. The deciding factor came when, a short time thereafter and purely coincidentally, another of my friends just asked me one day “Why have you still not applied to do a Travelling Fellowship? There’s no excuse, you’d really enjoy it! It’s a real adventure and an experience of a lifetime!”

So, I thought about it and realised that the time was just right for me to try, both professionally and personally. I plucked up the courage and - the rest is history! Once I had “taken the plunge”, and found to my great delight that I’d been selected, the staff in the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust (WCMT) office were just excellent, really supportive and so helpful as my plans started to take shape. Careful thought and meticulous planning are, of course, essential ingredients of a successful Fellowship in order to derive the maximum possible benefit. I’m glad that I paid attention to this at the appropriate time – and the WCMT staff do give excellent guidance on this.

The whole point is that I’d never had the chance to do anything like this before in my life. I decided to treat the whole exercise as an adventure and my experiences certainly lived up to my expectations, even better. A key point is that my travels were frequently fast, sometimes furious and always intense, visiting new places every day and meeting so many knowledgeable, helpful and interesting people, whilst seeing places and features that I’d only ever read about. And I was travelling on my own, so the overall experience certainly was a very personal one! I couldn’t have managed to do and see so much, however, if I’d been accompanied, because of the pace I had to follow and the requirement to be very adaptable at any moment, as circumstances dictated and permitted. Also, it’s amazing what you learn about yourself when you are left to your own devices – I certainly found that I had qualities which I never knew I had and that just has to be a big plus.

To anyone reading this who might be thinking about trying something both challenging and rewarding (dare I say “exciting”?), I therefore strongly urge you to consider applying for a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship, to travel and experience something completely different and special. Treat your Fellowship as a “once in a lifetime” opportunity to learn about yourself every bit as much as your chosen Study Topic and just enjoy the privilege of becoming a Churchill Fellow. It has certainly made me think about my life and the total experience is one which I’ll never, ever, forget – and all made possible by the generosity of the WCMT!

## **2. INTRODUCTION – AIMS AND BACKGROUND OF MY FELLOWSHIP**

My current position is Geoscientist and GeoRanger for the North West Highlands Geopark (NWHG) in Scotland. It is a European and Global Geopark. I have learned, through my professional contacts within both the European Geoparks Network and the Global Geoparks Network, that Geotourism, in all its forms, is a fundamentally important activity which is rapidly becoming both a world-wide phenomenon and a global industry. Geotourism is the main activity promoted by Global Geoparks and is the main driver for sustainable economic development within Geoparks, leading to increased public awareness and understanding of our natural world and the way it was formed.

I chose to study Geo(scientific)tourism because it is the life-blood of a successful Geopark and I wanted to see and learn just how it all worked at other well-known locations (not necessarily Geoparks) and hopefully bring back some sound knowledge and experiences for the benefit of NWHG and the wider community. This would be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to visit other internationally renowned sites where Geotourism is a principal activity and I therefore selected places, many of which are household names in the field of Geotourism, to observe Best Practice and learn any lessons which might be relevant to the future development of NWHG. Although I was able to make many good contacts in advance of my travels, and fantastic resources and facilities were often made available to me when I arrived at a particular location, I still tried to sample the Geotourism experience being offered by participating (as much as possible) as a “normal member of the public”, ie. as a typical “geotourist” (whatever that means!). My aim was to experience, at first hand, what was being offered and presented to the general public whilst noting the reaction of the other geotourists to the particular facility being visited. The main aspects which I paid particular attention to were:- the natural feature(s) itself (or Geosite); the way in which the background story is communicated to visitors; interpretation of the more technical/scientific aspects and ease of comprehension by non-specialists; accessibility, infrastructure and safety issues; signage; visitor centres and related facilities; visitor guides/tours/personnel and training; and branding/marketing in general.

I also had a secondary, more personal aim, which was to embark upon an adventure of discovery to places I'd only ever read about, and satisfy an innate longing to do something like this, but had never previously had the opportunity to do so. I viewed it as a fantastic opportunity for personal development and enlightenment. I think that this aspect of my Fellowship helped me to derive the maximum possible benefit from the overall experience.

It is important to note that my Fellowship project should not be regarded as a piece of “robust and rigorous” academic research. Clearly, the available time and practical considerations could never have allowed this. The findings of my study topic are based primarily upon my own personal observations and experiences, enhanced by speaking with the appropriate people, and should be regarded solely as a “snapshot” in time. My research was therefore primarily qualitative, observational and experiential in nature and not based upon the acquisition of quantitative data and analysis as part of a piece of more “in-depth” research – it was never intended to be such. Nonetheless, I adopted a discipline of photographing every relevant aspect of all the places I visited and their associated features, including visitor/interpretation facilities and also the many people (site officials and general public) whom I came in contact with. At the end of my Fellowship I had accrued a photographic record comprising more than 12,000 high quality images and this has become my “Fellowship photographic diary” which I now refer to regularly. If I ever need to explain to someone in the future just how a particular part of the Geotourism process is managed at one of the facilities I visited, the chances are that I will have excellent and detailed photographic coverage of that aspect, if the subject matter had rendered it possible.

Notwithstanding the constraints of time and limited resources, and the degree of subjectivity unavoidably inherent in my technique, I am convinced that my relatively brief assessment of Geotourism in the countries and places I visited has allowed me to get a fair and accurate overview of the present state of the Geotourism industry and a valuable insight into current Best Practice internationally, which was the main aim of my Fellowship.

### **3. OUTLINE OF PHASED TRAVELS AND ITINERARIES FOLLOWED**

For practical reasons, I decided to undertake my travels in two separate Phases, with the approval of my Fellowship Manager.

Phase 1 was undertaken to Australia and New Zealand (North Island) during November and early December of 2010, a few weeks before mid-Summer when the weather was expected to be good and all visitor facilities open. Phase 2 to USA and Canada followed during April and early May in 2011. It was delayed as late as could be permitted within the 2010 Fellowship year, in order to coincide with the Spring opening of some of the more important USA National Park facilities I was going to visit, although weather could still be wintry.

#### **OUTLINE ITINERARIES**

##### **Phase 1 (2010)**

8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> November – travel UK to Dubai to Perth, Western Australia.

10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> November – visiting sites in Western Australia.

15<sup>th</sup> November – travel Perth to Melbourne, Victoria.

16<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> November – visiting Kanawinka Global Geopark and other sites in Victoria and South Australia.

22<sup>nd</sup> November – travel Melbourne to Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> November – visiting Uluru, Kata Tjuta and West MacDonnell Range, Northern Territory.

27<sup>th</sup> November – travel Alice Springs to Sydney.

28<sup>th</sup> November – travel Sydney to Auckland to Hamilton, North Island, New Zealand.

29<sup>th</sup> November to 5<sup>th</sup> December – visiting Rotorua, Taupo, Waitomo and other sites in North Island, New Zealand.

6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> December – travel Hamilton to Auckland to Dubai to UK.

##### **Phase 2 (2011)**

18<sup>th</sup> April – travel UK to Phoenix, USA.

19<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> April – visiting Grand Canyon National Park and Meteor Crater.

25<sup>th</sup> April – travel Phoenix to Salt Lake City.

26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> April – visiting Yellowstone National Park.

1<sup>st</sup> May – travel Yellowstone National Park to Salt Lake City.

2<sup>nd</sup> May – travel Salt Lake City to Chicago to Montreal to Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada.

3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> May – visiting Stonehammer Global Geopark, New Brunswick.

9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> May – travel Saint John to Halifax to UK.

## 4. SUMMARY OF PLACES VISITED AND EXPERIENCES GAINED

### PHASE 1 - WESTERN AUSTRALIA (WA)

#### The Pinnacles Desert, Nambung National Park (North of Perth)

I was guided round by David Newsome, Associate Professor, Environmental Science and Ecotourism, Murdoch University. Imaginatively laid out site with excellent access to very dramatic mineralised remnants of trees. Very clear signage and branding and excellent interpretation facilities within a purpose-built visitor centre. A very important Geosite for supporting Geotourism in WA and clearly an example of Best Practice in accessibility, clarity and interpretation. A really stunning site! According to David, The Pinnacles Desert is a candidate for becoming an icon of WA.

#### Lake Thetis (North of Perth)

Again, guided round by David Newsome. An unmanned site, no visitor centre, but a location showing excellent examples of living stromatolites which rival those found further north at (better known) Shark Bay. Very dramatic and very easy to see and understand. Interpretation panels are of the highest possible quality and clarity and are examples of Best Practice. Access over wet/boggy sandy ground via well designed metallic foot grids to a timber viewing platform. A simply laid-out but stunning site!

#### Wave Rock (East of Perth)

Privately operated site, outwith WA Government control. A very dramatic, visually stunning, high “wave-shaped” feature formed by weathering/erosion into a granitic outcrop. The site has been developed within a water catchment area adjacent to a reservoir and an “unsympathetic and unsightly” concrete catchment wall has been constructed along the top of the wave feature. Nonetheless, visitor facilities generally good with fairly good interpretation of the main feature but quality and clarity of some of the trail signage could be improved upon. Unfortunately, the Visitor Guide was away on the day of my visit and the inadequacy of some of the signs became apparent whilst I and other visitors followed a self-guided tour.

A good example of a fantastic natural feature let down by lack of clearer signage and an unsympathetic man-made structure, requiring a re-think.

#### The Stirlings, Stirling Range National Park (SSE from Perth)

I met with John Watson, Dept. Environment and Conservation, WA Government, who led me on a walk up Bluff Knoll, one of the Stirling Range mountains. A very fragile biodiversity with many rare and protected plant species plus dramatic and important mountain geology. In all respects an example of Best Practice – excellent visitor displays and interpretation panels at car park, thoughtfully constructed mountain trail path. No manned visitor

interpretation centre or visitor guides but these are not necessary as everything has been very clearly laid out and communicated to the public. An excellent example of Geotourism combined with an explanation of a sensitive and important biodiversity and the relationship between the two.

The Gap and Natural Bridge, Torindirrup National Park (West from Albany)

Again, guided round by John Watson. Extremely dramatic huge ravine and natural bridge structures in massive granitic gneiss, with viewing platform looking out towards the Southern Ocean. A very straightforward site – the dramatic geology and structures speak for themselves and a magnet for geotourists. Careful thought given to sympathetic choice of materials in constructing an access path – blends in well with the geology (Best Practice).

Cape Leeuwin, Leeuwin Naturaliste National Park (Further West from Albany)

At the most southwesterly point of Australia, where the Indian Ocean meets the Southern Ocean. Visitor centre at Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse gives information on coastal marine location and historical heritage. Excellent visitor viewing platform looking out over the two oceans and built above very dramatic low coastal rock surfaces formed in gneiss. The Geotourism aspect here is very subtle and the few information displays are simple and excellent.

Lake Cave (West Coast, North of Cape Leeuwin)

Very dramatic underground limestone caves and visitor centre at the surface giving excellent detailed explanations of limestone geology, calcite cave formations and cave explorations. Participated in a guided tour of the caves. Standard of guided tour and information given really excellent. Great opportunity for young people to learn about karst erosion and subterranean water flow. An example of Best Practice in communicating geological processes to the public, combined with a very enjoyable experience for all ages.

## **PHASE 1 – KANAWINKA GLOBAL GEOPARK, VICTORIA AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

The Twelve Apostles, Port Campbell National Park, Victoria (West from Melbourne)

I was met by Joane McKnight, Director of Kanawinka Global Geopark (the World's largest Global Geopark) and taken to visit The Twelve Apostles on Australia's southern coast, an iconic location. An excellent and dramatic example of active coastal erosion processes with (formerly) twelve isolated sea stacks cut off from the cliff of the mainland by aggressive sea erosion. Also large viewing area and visitor centre. Very dramatic signs indicating hazardous and unstable cliffs and no confusion/uncertainty about the real dangers for visitors who stray beyond the signs. Lessons to be learned here!

### Kanawinka Global Geopark, Victoria

I was introduced by Joane McKnight to the Board of the Geopark at its meeting in Hamilton and to their Geoscientist, Dr. Ian Lewis. Kanawinka Global Geopark is characterised by a) “young” or “recent” (geologically speaking) volcanic features and b) limestone geology. Ian spent the next few days showing me around the most important places within the Geopark, including the Limestone Coast and Mount Gambier. Here, the Umpherston Sinkhole (a limestone dissolution feature) and the Blue Lake (a huge water-infilled volcanic crater) are very dramatic features and the quality of signage and interpretation is very high (Best Practice).

### Naracoorte Caves National Park, South Australia

Ian Lewis had been involved during the earlier exploration of these unique limestone caves and subsequent development of the features as a Geosite. We participated in a guided tour of parts of the extensive underground cave system and viewed the excellent displays in the visitor centre. The standard of interpretation and communication of scientific information to the public here is exceptional (Best Practice). The standard of visitor guide employed here is also exceptional (Best Practice).

## **PHASE 1 – ULURU - KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK AND MACDONNELL RANGE, NORTHERN TERRITORY**

### Uluru (Ayers Rock), Northern Territory

Just as I had expected, Uluru certainly didn't disappoint. I met with the Chief Ranger, Mick Wilmott, who talked me through some of the Uluru Management Strategy. Mick recommended that I accompany one of his Rangers on one of their many guided walks as well as spend as much time as I could just photographing and observing. Everything that I saw and experienced at Uluru was, without any doubt, an example of Best Practice and truly inspirational. There is just so much to learn from my Uluru experience, in particular the standard of “customer care” shown by the fantastically well-trained Rangers was exemplary. Their explanation of the geological origins of Uluru, in addition to their introduction to Aboriginal Culture and the significance of Uluru, was fantastic. Many lessons to take home from here!

### Kata Tjuta (The Olgas), Northern Territory

Perhaps even more dramatic than Uluru (if that were possible!), this series of high red sandstone peaks, transected by deep gullies, attracts high numbers of visitors, many of whom go trekking into the area. There are no visitor facilities except a basic sheltered area and car park plus occasional display signs in the wider area highlighting the various types of vegetational cover and lower-lying landforms. Not a lot to draw from this site except that what

infrastructure there is, is of high quality and the car park area is well maintained without any signs of vandalism in such a remote place.

### West MacDonnell National Park, Northern Territory

I followed part of the Larapinta Trail to the west of Alice Springs towards Glen Helen Gorge, stopping off at the Ochre Pits. Interpretation panels are included at one of the unmanned Larapinta Trail Information stopping points. The detailed explanation of this special occurrence of multicoloured ochre in the sidewall of a stream valley is excellent and demonstrates what can be done to communicate geological/scientific concepts in a manner suitable for the public without “dumbing down” and without a specialist on hand to explain. An important lesson to be learned here!

## **PHASE 1 – NORTH ISLAND, NEW ZEALAND**

### Rotorua

I visited the Te Puia Maori visitor facility just south of Rotorua and was shown round by the Duty Manager, Faith Tuhakaraina. This well-known site comprises a combination of Maori culture/heritage and dramatic geothermal phenomena with excellent examples of active hot springs, geysers and mud pools. As was the case with Uluru, Rotorua certainly lived up to my expectations. The associated visitor centre and related infrastructure is “state-of-the-art”. The way in which the cultural and the geological heritages are described and interpreted is exceptional and the link between the two is well explained. The standard of visitor guide is also exceptional. Within the context of what can be experienced here, the Te Puia facility at Rotorua is certainly an example of Best Practice in all respects. There are important lessons to be taken from here in terms of managing the complete visitor experience and, again like Uluru, I found it all quite inspirational.

### Waitomo

I visited the Waitomo Caves Discovery Centre followed by the nearby Ruakuri Cave and Waitomo Glowworm Caves facility which has a “state-of-the-art” visitor centre recently constructed above ground. The quality and standard of infrastructure which has been designed and engineered to permit safe and easy access to these famous limestone caves is exceptional, very much enhancing the total visitor experience. Although one of the caves promotes the “glowworm” experience, the whole facility is based around stunning limestone geology and solution features which make this a much-visited Geosite. The guides who led the two guided walks I took were just excellent, demonstrating Best Practice from start to finish. Explanation of the geological circumstances was handled skilfully and questions were answered in easy-to-understand terms. Even a relatively simple thing like the display of entry charges (various combinations possible) was handled very clearly and “up-

front” without causing confusion for international visitors. As at Rotorua, I was inspired by what I experienced at Waitomo.

### Thames

The Thames School of Mines and Mineralogical Museum, located at the south-west corner of the Coromandel Peninsula, is a reminder of when the town of Thames experienced one of the World’s biggest “goldrushes” during the mid to late 1800s, rivalling the Klondyke event. Nowadays, this former School of Mines is set up as a comprehensive Mineralogical Museum and is literally packed full of geological exhibits. Although the facility has clearly retained its “traditional” ambience as a place of serious study, and is probably more interesting for amateur and serious geologists, appreciable numbers of the lay public do also visit. I suspect that this is, in part, due to the passion and knowledge of the Museum Manager who has the capacity to instil enthusiasm in the casual visitor. This demonstrates that passion and knowledge are key factors in the Geotourism process.

### Waihi

The trail constructed around the top of the former opencast gold mine at Waihi is an excellent example of Geotourism based upon rehabilitation of a 250 metre deep hole in the ground and the story of the gold which was extracted. Apart from being visually a very dramatic feature, there are excellent information and interpretation panels located along the rim walkway which also engage the visitor regarding the future rehabilitation and proposed use of this huge hole in the ground. Although at a fairly basic level, this Geosite will certainly be attractive to visiting families and specialists alike and is a good example of what can be done with what some people might regard as an industrial “eyesore”. Waihi Gold Mine is another example of Best Practice in this context.

### Taupo

The Craters of the Moon Geothermal Walk is located at the northern outskirts of Taupo and provides visitors with a first-class experience of steaming fumaroles, craters and bubbling mudpools within an active geothermal zone. There are no guided tours and only a relatively modest visitor/ticket facility, yet the quality of information provided via the very best of interpretative panels and the overall visitor experience make this unquestionably an example of Best Practice. This is a fantastic site suitable for visitors of all ages – any young person who does not understand about active geological processes cannot fail to realise, after they’ve visited here, that the Earth contains huge quantities of heat and energy which can be released at the surface. This site demonstrates that there is a strong educational component to Geotourism. The ticket office is manned by volunteers who are just so

passionate about their site. I found this particular facility inspirational as it demonstrates that a quality Geotourism facility does not always require huge investment, depending upon individual circumstances, providing that the quality of explanation/interpretation to the public is not compromised.

## **PHASE 2 – GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK, METEOR CRATER, USA**

### Grand Canyon National Park

I met with Jacob Fillion, Branch Chief, Environmental Education and International Programs Coordinator, at Park Headquarters, located at the South Rim of the Canyon. On my second day, at Jacob's prior request, I gave a presentation to the Park Headquarters staff on my own Geopark, the North West Highlands of Scotland and on my Fellowship travels. Jacob kindly made excellent facilities available to me during my time at Grand Canyon and I was permitted to "shadow" one of the Park Rangers when we took primary school children from a Navaho school on a fossil hunt. I also made geological walks into the Canyon with the senior Geologist and visited all the Grand Canyon facilities, including the Yavapai Geology Museum which is dramatically located right on the edge of the South Rim. The displays here are "state-of-the-art". The US National Park Service is underpinned by the National Park Ranger Service and the Rangers I met and worked with at Grand Canyon just have to be the very best. Their training, technical knowledge, passion and customer service skills are beyond reproach and, like everything else at Grand Canyon, they epitomise Best Practice. A particular feature which demonstrates just how good Grand Canyon is at communicating geological concepts, is the Trail of Time, a Geology Timeline, constructed along the South Rim path. I could not imagine a better way to communicate the (very difficult) concept of geological time and we can draw important lessons from this and many other features at Grand Canyon. In addition to the breathtaking grandeur of the Grand Canyon feature, I was totally inspired by everything else that I experienced and have returned with lots of ideas for my own Geopark. Grand Canyon is surely one of the World's top Geotourism sites which we can all learn from in relation to examples of Best Practice. I was particularly heartened to observe that the role of geology and natural processes in the formation of Grand Canyon and its constituent rocks is not underplayed to visitors and this is clearly one of the main points of interest for the visiting public.

### Meteor Crater, Arizona

I had always known about Meteor Crater in Arizona since I was very young and was keen to see how the visitor experience was handled at this important Geosite. An excellent visitor centre compliments the main attraction. Guided walks are available around the vertical perimeter rim of the 2km wide crater but it was too windy for this on the day of my visit. Nonetheless, visitors were

permitted to venture out onto a large viewing platform and the various features of the crater and the local geology were clearly demonstrated in a straightforward manner. The explanation of meteorites, their composition and origin, is beautifully done in the visitor centre where there are excellent displays and the story of Meteor Crater is told to visitors within a large cinema-type facility. The centre guide was excellent, both highly knowledgeable and passionate, and an example of Best Practice in the way in which he engaged with his audience.

## **PHASE 2 – YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK, USA**

Yellowstone National Park was the first National Park to be created in America in 1872. As is the case for Grand Canyon, I can say straightaway that Yellowstone is an example of Best Practice in all respects. I met with Hank Hessler, Chief Geologist and Bob Fuhrmann, Education Program Manager at Park Headquarters, Mammoth Hot Springs. Hank kindly spent a few days with me, showed me the main features to be visited and demonstrated how such difficult geological concepts were explained in easy-to-understand terms to the visiting public without “dumbing down” of the geological science. Apparently, it was the original attraction and fascination of the hot springs and geysers, and not the wildlife, which led to Yellowstone being declared a National Park. Again, like Grand Canyon, this is unquestionably one of the World’s top Geotourism sites. Although late Spring snows had caused some parts of Yellowstone to remain closed, I was able to visit the Old Faithful Visitor Education Center which is a model of Best Practice in relation to communication, interpretation and education in general. The quality of the displays here is exceptional. Elsewhere within the Park, there are so many active geysers, hot springs, mud pots and steam vents and safety is a real issue whilst permitting safe access to these features. The way in which Yellowstone have dealt with this important aspect is an example of Best Practice, primarily through the use of clear, unambiguous signs and well-constructed infrastructure and viewing areas, without creating unnecessary concerns and spoiling the enjoyment of this wonderful place. Like Grand Canyon, Yellowstone National Park is truly inspirational from a Geotourism process point of view and I have brought back many good ideas with me.

## **PHASE 2 – STONEHAMMER GLOBAL GEOPARK, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA**

Stonehammer Global Geopark is North America’s first (and only) Global Geopark, created in 2010. In many respects, however, it has advanced considerably and is already much more developed as a Geotourism destination than my own Geopark (created in 2004). I met with Gail Bremner,

acting on behalf of the Stonehammer Board of Management, and was given a detailed presentation on the structure, organisation and management of the Geopark at a Board meeting. Gail is a marketing specialist and she demonstrated the importance of a well-conceived marketing strategy (Best Practice). A key person is Dr. Randy Miller, geologist, without whose in-depth knowledge and sheer passion Stonehammer might not have succeeded and the continued involvement of the New Brunswick Museum, under Director Jane Fullerton, has been crucial to the success of the Geopark. There are several aspects to Stonehammer Global Geopark that make it very successful as a Geotourism destination. The most important is that the Board of Management have been very successful in engaging with the numerous outdoor activity providers (or “direct operators”) and have ensured that these stakeholders understand the geological significance (and, to a certain level, the geology) of their Geopark. This was the main lesson I took back from Stonehammer - that developing a successful Geotourism strategy depends upon having the communities right behind you. Stonehammer Global Geopark is an example of Best Practice in this respect. I delivered a presentation on “Geotourism” at a 101 Geotourism Conference held in Saint John, on my final day, highlighting the Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship scheme.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

The following are my conclusions, based upon my Fellowship experiences:-

1. Sustainable Geo(scientific)tourism is a vibrant (global) industry bringing substantial economic, social and cultural benefits to an area.
2. Geotourism is rapidly becoming a world-wide phenomenon and will continue to expand as the number of newly developed Geosites and, in particular, Global Geoparks, continues to rise. Observations made during my Fellowship confirm that people, irrespective of nationality, have a “thirst” for learning more about the way our World has evolved and how it works.
3. Although most of the places I visited are (not yet) Global Geoparks, they demonstrated numerous examples of Best Practice in Geotourism. Lessons learned will be invaluable in the future development of the North West Highlands Geopark (NWHG) and the other Scottish Geoparks.
4. The development of sustainable Geotourism in Scotland, and in the NWHG in particular, is at a very early stage in contrast to the situation I experienced at the numerous locations visited during my Fellowship. Clearly, Scotland is currently lagging behind the rest of the World in this respect.
5. The development of a sustainable Geotourism industry requires the development of a national (or regional) Geotourism Strategy, tailored to suit the needs of individual Geosites or Geoparks.
6. Appropriately educated and trained personnel are an essential part of a successful Geotourism strategy. The National Park Service of USA can be considered to represent one example of Best Practice in this regard and there are lessons here for Scottish Geoparks.
7. Truthful, honest, scientifically accurate interpretation of geological and related phenomena is a “must” in order to retain the integrity of the Geotourism visitor experience. This requires, however, that scientific and technical explanations are communicated to the public in a language which they can understand without “dumbing down” the quality of the message/information. Equally, “style” must not be allowed to influence clarity and quality of communication in relation to the design of interpretative or display material intended for public consumption.

The following recommendations are made for appropriate dissemination of my findings and their potential future implementation:-

1. I shall endeavour to make presentations to the appropriate bodies, at local and national level, including The Sutherland Partnership, the Steering Group of the NWHG, the Scottish Government, Scottish

Natural Heritage, the Scottish Geodiversity Forum, Visit Scotland and local Communities. The purpose will be to illustrate the examples of Best Practice which I encountered during my Fellowship and demonstrate how these may be adapted and adopted for the benefit of developing sustainable Geotourism in Scotland.

2. I shall encourage colleagues within Scotland to press politicians and relevant agencies to consider developing a National Geotourism Strategy.
3. I shall give talks on my Fellowship travels at local schools (both primary and secondary) in order to show them what happens in other parts of the World in areas of outstanding geological or landscape interest and demonstrate how their own homeland/landscape is just as significant a place in which to live. It is important to engage with young people today who may become the decision-makers of tomorrow.
4. During my Fellowship travels, I made excellent contacts with key personnel at many of the sites I visited. These should be followed up and the possibility of youth exchanges between these international sites and my own Geopark explored.

## 6. SUMMARY OF MY FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE

My Travelling Fellowship has been a life-changing experience, allowing me to see and experience things and places which I might never have had the opportunity to visit otherwise. My Fellowship has been truly inspirational and, on the professional side, I have returned to my Geopark “brimming full” of ideas and with renewed confidence, vigour and enthusiasm. There is no doubt that there will be considerable spin-off and benefit, not just for the NWHG, but for myself in my position as Geoscientist and GeoRanger, and also for the wider communities within the Geopark and the North West Highlands area. On the personal side, I know that I have developed significantly as a person as a direct result of my Fellowship opportunity.

There is no doubt in my mind, therefore, that the purpose of my Fellowship was more than satisfied. I, personally, have benefitted, the NWHG has/will benefit, and the various communities within and around the NWHG will benefit.

On a practical note, the grant generously given by WCMT was mostly adequate for the purpose, bearing in mind that I travelled with a back-pack and stayed in cheaper accommodation in order to reduce costs. One aspect which I hadn't quite realised, however, was the absolute necessity to hire a car at each main location, brought about by the very nature of my Fellowship study topic. This was because I was travelling to see so many different features within any one day and becoming dependent upon public/local transport (not always available) would have made the whole thing unworkable. Car hire was not, however, required at Kanawinka Global Geopark, Victoria, Australia nor at Stonehammer Global Geopark in New Brunswick, Canada, as representatives from both Geoparks very kindly drove me around their areas to visit Geosites. I had not anticipated that car hire would be so crucially important to the success of my Fellowship and it is an aspect that future Fellows should consider when costing out their travels. It is too late when you arrive in an area to discover that the public transport system is not what you'd imagined it might be and your carefully planned itinerary therefore has to be reduced. Although I had pre-booked car hire for most places visited, I did get “caught out” in New Zealand and had to organise car hire as soon as I arrived. Car hire costs can be quite significant and should be added in to the overall travel costs when submitting details for the Fellowship Grant.

Another aspect of my Fellowship relates to the issue of a formal Letter of Introduction and the provision of printed personalised WCMT Fellowship business cards, prior to my departure. Both of these were “like gold” in the sense that they certainly allowed me to establish my “bona fides” and credibility with people/officials who had never heard of me. Their use (quite literally) opened doors and made entry to facilities and access to the key

people I needed to meet so much easier. Such was the obviously high regard in which Churchill is held internationally that I was always permitted free entry to visitor sites, whether they be National Parks in USA or smaller Geosites in New Zealand, for example. I therefore strongly recommend that the provision of a Letter of Introduction and personalised business cards is viewed by the WCMT as an extremely powerful and valuable aid in the undertaking of a successful Fellowship.

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I wish to acknowledge all the wonderful and enthusiastic help, hospitality and kindness which was shown to me by so many people at all the places I visited, from “key personnel” and “specialists” to members of the general public. You all know who you are!

Last, but certainly not least, I am grateful to my wife, Wendy, for her support and helping make my Fellowship more manageable and enjoyable.