The prospects for the promotion and growth of tourism within this region have been enhanced with the recent development of significant projects. Geotourism is the latest initiative and the plans for the project will hopefully evolve with others to result in a significant coordinated tourism product for the Mourne Mountains, Cooley Peninsula and Ring of Gullion.

Geotourism is a unique product. It celebrates and promotes certain aspects of our region that make it special – its geology and the related fields of archaeology, mythology and heritage. The landscape around us has shaped the way we live and work and in some ways, we have shaped it.

The outstanding geological features and the beautiful landscape of the region have attracted so much interest and attention over time and it is natural that we should want to develop tourism in a way that can have a social and economic benefit for the region. However, tourism should work for everyone – visitors, residents, farmers, businesses.

Our project has a focus on three areas. Tourism marketing will complement the work that is already ongoing through the tourism authorities, councils, local initiatives and regional and national government. We intend to have a presence within the industry and to enhance the profile of the region through roadshows, suites of marketing materials and the development of our brand.

In order to ensure that young people can have access to a greater understanding and appreciation of the landscape, geology, archaeology and heritage around them, our schools and summer programmes will work closely with teachers to design, develop and deliver opportunities for learning and field trips. We also aim to implement geotourism training opportunities for teachers, tour guides, conservation volunteers, those who work within the tourism sector and local authorities and the general public as a way to enhance understanding of geo and tourism issues and to perhaps develop our own Geo-Ambassadors.

Our third area of focus is the actual geology. We want to identify the most significant sites of geological interest and develop interpretation and access to them. We will do this through significant collaboration, consultation and agreement and those sites of greatest significance can become part of the overall tourism product.

People in this region of Mourne Cooley Gullion have a real sense of heritage and place. They are proud of the landscape they have inherited and our project will be keen to respect that and to give them a sense of belonging to the Geotourism initiative.

We are fortunate to have availed of INTERREG funding and we shall endeavour to put it good use in developing one of the most significant cogs of tourism for this region.

John Devaney
Geotourism Manager

‘The landscape around us has shaped the way we live and work, and in some ways, we have helped to shape it.’
Tourism in the Region

Of the many areas of outstanding natural beauty across Ireland and these islands, the region that covers the Mourne Mountains, Ring of Gullion and Cooley Peninsula is exceptional. And yet, few know of its true treasure within. This is an area rich in geology, archaeology, mythology, history and heritage and now this new project aims to promote this wonderful landscape.

The Ring of Gullion is a unique geological landform, unparalleled elsewhere in Ireland or the UK. It is one of the first ring dykes in the world to be geologically mapped. The ring of low, rugged hills forms a natural boundary between the semi-wild habitats of heath, bog and woodland contrast with the neatly patterned fields and ladder farms. Slieve Gullion’s mysterious reputation as the “rampart” around the heather-clad Slieve Gullion mountain. It promotes tourism in geotourism and the conservation of geo-diversity and an understanding of Earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This can be achieved through the promotion of geological features, use of geo-trails and interpretive, guided walks. A whole new industry has opened up new potential to promote this wonderful landscape.

Geotourism aims to sustain or enhance the geo-spectacular and geographical character of the place being visited including its environments, cultural heritage, heritage and well-being of its residents. Of central importance is the sense of place, with an appreciation of its locality and benefit quality and residents alike. Geotourism aims to reconnect the environment and incline us seek unique and unique experiences when we travel.

Irland and the UK can boast a very rich diversity of geology. It is our landscapes that have drawn visitors from across the world. Three very existing examples of Geotourism on the island of Ireland – the Giant’s Causeway on the north coast, Burren and the Cliffs of Moher in Co Clare and the Marble Arch Global Geopark in Co Fermanagh are three such examples.

The future of tourism in Ireland is inextricably linked to the quality of the environment, its geology, scenic landscapes, coastlines, rivers and lakes and cultural heritage are the bedrock upon which tourism has been built. This is a commercial landscape industry that can only be grown if the quality of these resources is maintained and enhanced.

What is Geotourism?

Geotourism is probably best defined as a form of natural eco-tourism that specifically focuses on landscape and geology. It promotes tourism in geotourism and the conservation of geo-diversity and an understanding of Earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This can be achieved through the promotion of geological features, use of geo-trails and interpretive, guided walks.

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It involves the community. Local businesses and civic groups join to provide a distinctive, authentic visitor experience.

It informs both visitors and hosts. Residents discover their own heritage by learning that things they take for granted may be interesting to outsiders. As local people, they develop pride and skill in showing off their locale, tourists get more out of their visit.

It benefits residents economically. Travel businesses hire local workers and use local services, products and supplies. When community members understand the benefits of geotourism they take responsibility for heritage stewardship.

It supports integrity of place. Destination-savvy travellers seek out businesses that emphasize the character of the locale. In return, local stakeholders who receive economic benefits appreciate and protect the value of those assets.

It means great trips. Enthusiastic visitors bring home new knowledge. Their stories encourage friends and relatives to experience the same thing, which brings continuing business for the destination.

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It means great trips. Enthusiastic visitors bring home new knowledge. Their stories encourage friends and relatives to experience the same thing, which brings continuing business for the destination.
The Mourne Cooley Gullion region represents over 400 million years of geological history and tracks Ireland’s journey from south of the equator to its present location through a diversity of tectonic regimes.

Silurian

The oldest rocks exposed in this region belong to a sedimentary sequence known as the Longford-Down Terrane. These rocks are found in the lowlands of Co. Down and on the north coast of the Cooley peninsula, Co. Louth. At the time of their deposition, one tectonic plate was being subducted beneath another at the closure of the Iapetus Ocean. The Iapetus Ocean divided the continents of Laurentia to the north and Avalonia to the south. These sediments were deposited in a marine environment above the subduction zone, very like sediments currently deposited along the west coast of South America. Sediments form layers as they accumulate but these were also folded as soft sediments before they became rocks and are now exposed as vertical beds throughout the region.

With continued subduction and collision, the continental crust above the subducting plate melts and intrudes into higher levels of the crust. The igneous body known as the Newry Granite (granodiorite), found from Forkhill, Co. Armagh to Slieve Croob, Co. Down, formed in this way. Its outcrop pattern is linear and follows the trend of the Longford-Down Terrane. The Longford-Down terrane has this name as the same rocks are found from Co. Longford to Co. Down and continue into Scotland where they are known as the Southern Uplands Terrane.

Carboniferous

During the Carboniferous period, Ireland was in the tropics and covered by warm, clear waters, typical of current tropical waters of the Caribbean. This lead to the development of coral reef systems which are now preserved as the fossil-rich limestones of the south and east Cooley peninsula and at Cranfield in south Co. Down.

Palaeogene

This geological period is probably the one most associated with the Mourne Cooley Gullion region as it is the age of the Mourne Mountain Complex, the Slieve Gullion Complex and the Carlingford Complex. They are all igneous bodies associated with the opening of the Atlantic Ocean. When geological systems are given the name ‘Complex’, it is because they are difficult to decipher and usually are the cause of much research and debate. The presence of three complexes in the Mourne Cooley Gullion region adds its extra-geological value but it makes it difficult to explain in a few words. The oldest of the three is Cooley and forms its mountainous centre. It is a series of magma extrusives (volcanic) and intrusives with rock types varying from lavas and gabbros to granites. Intrusive means the liquid rock cooled below the surface of the earth and never extruded or flowed onto the surface. The final phase in the Carlingford complex was the intrusion of a cone sheet now exposed as a dykes in the Slievenamon and Carboniferous sediments dipping towards the main igneous body. The Slieve Gullion Complex followed the main events of the Carlingford Complex. The whole Gullion Complex was emplaced into the Slievenamon granodiorite and the chemistry of these Slievenamon rocks probably added to the complex of the Carlingford Complex. The Ring Dyke which is exposed as a ring of hills surrounding Slieve Gullion is older than Slieve Gullion. The Ring Dyke shows evidence of extrusive (volcanic) and intrusive rocks while Slieve Gullion is a layered intrusive body. The final stage of the Gullion Complex was the intrusion of a granite now exposed in Ravensdale and Cremorne. Finally, the younger rocks in the region are the Mourne granites, intruded as five granites, four of which can be subdivided according to chemistry variations. The granites are classified as G1 to G5 with G1-G3 exposed in the eastern Mournes and G4-G5 in the western Mournes. The Mourne granites intruded into the Slievenamon Longford-Down Terrane sediments and the contact between the two is well exposed in many places. The main intrusions are surrounded by a cone sheet which is well exposed at Glassdrumman beach.

Quaternary

The landscape as we know it was formed in response to geological processes occurring in the last 17,000 years. At the last glacial maximum, the region was covered by a blanket of ice and its retreat revealed the current shape of the earth or geomorphology. The hard igneous rocks of the Carlingford, Gullion and Mourne Mountain Complexes were more resistant to ice erosion than the surrounding sediments and so have remained as highlands. The ice also deposited its sediment load in the lowlands in the form of basins filled with the sediments of the Mournes and till on the Mourne Plain and along the Cooley south and east coasts. The most obvious result of glacial erosion is the valley cut from Lough Neagh to Carlingford Lough.
**Origins of the Project**

The idea for a Geotourism Project in Mourne-Cooley-Gullion was first developed by the Mourne Geology and Archaeology Group (MGAG) - an informal group of geologists and archaeologists with an interest particularly in the Mourne. This group presented a paper titled ‘The Geotourism potential of granite in North-East Ireland’ at the Second UNESCO Geoparks Conference held on Belfast in September 2006.

Mourne Heritage Trust subsequently raised the concept with partner organisations and local authorities. The early stages were driven by Martin Casey and Brendan McSherry who still maintain a strong participation in the project.

The Mourne Geology Gullion Geotourism Project was identified as a strategic cross border project in the 2009 ICLRDR Report “The Newry-Dundalk Twin City Region supports the involvement of cross border collaborative frameworks”.

A project team was established informally, with staff from MHT, RoSA and Louth County Council meeting jointly for the first time on 1 August 2006 and obtained expert advice and input from Geological Survey of Ireland and Geological Survey of Northern Ireland. Newry and Mourne District Council became part of this group from March 2007 and became active participants to work up the project. The group were then extended to include Banbridge and Down District Councils.

In October 2006 the Louth County Council Heritage Officer presented the concept to the Newry-Dundalk Joint Councils Committee, which endorsed it as potentially a significant vehicle for sustainable economic development and enhanced branding of the wider Newry and Dundalk Twin City Region.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is a strategic alliance between Newry and Mourne District Council, the Mourne Heritage Trust and the Louth Local Authorities which seeks to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region. The cooperation themes are Emergency Planning, Renewable Energy and Green Technology, Tourism and Recreation and Sustainable Economic Growth and Job Creation.

From 2008, consideration was given to an application for INTERREG IVA funding for a Geotourism project which was finally secured for commencement of the project in 2012.

The development of the project has benefited from specific local research, including an audit of important earth science sites which culminated in the publication of ‘A Geological Field Guide to Cooley, Gullion, Mourne and Slieve Gullion’ by Sabh Baxter in 2008.
Meet the Team

The staff of the Geotourism project are employed through Newry and Mourne District Council and are based at the McGrath Centre in Newry.

John Devaney
Geotourism Manager
A native of Co Longford, John now lives in Downpatrick. He has a BA and a law degree from Queen’s University Belfast and has worked in management roles with the North South Confederation of Councils, Washington DC and Queen’s University. He also worked with the Office of Legislation at the Department of Energy in Washington DC. John had previously worked with Newry and Mourne District Council as a Project Officer with Challenge of Change and with the Policing and Community Safety Partnership before joining the Geotourism initiative last September.

Anne Kelly
Marketing and Publicity Officer
The tourism and project marketing is a key element of the Geotourism project. Anne is a graduate of the University of Ulster and has a BA (Hons) Leisure, Events and Cultural Management degree and an MSc in Marketing and Entrepreneurship. She also attained a Level 6 Certificate in Further Education Teaching. Anne has professional experience in marketing through the McAvoy Group, Cookstown Panel Centre, Southern Area Hospice Services and South West College. She has completed three marathons and a self-guided world tour in 2008.

Dr Siobhán Power
Geologist
Siobhán graduated from NUI Galway with BSc and PhD in Geology and spent two years as a post-doctoral researcher and visiting lecturer at the University of Iowa. Her time in Iowa included seven weeks at 78° North in NE Greenland. Since returning to Europe in 2003, she has worked as a lecturer in Geology and as the Science Faculty Research Information Teaching co-ordinator at Liverpool John Moores University, and as a science leader (Greenland 2009) and Chief Scientist (Norway 2012) with the British Schools Exploration Society. Siobhán is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Alison Henderson
Education Officer
Alison is from Caledon and she will lead the schools programmes and training opportunities. She graduated from Queen’s University Belfast and has a PGCE. Alison has a wide and varied work experience in Earth Science with the National Trust at the Causeway Coast and Carrickfergus Heritage Coast Centre on the Jurassic Coast in Dorset. She spent the majority of her teaching career at Bishopsport College in Wiltshire, teaching science to international students of all ages.

Our Project Partners

Geotourism is a fine example of regional collaboration. There are six organisations, including four local authorities, involved in the overall management of the project.

Newry and Mourne District Council
- The tourism and project marketing is a key element of the Geotourism project. Anne is a graduate of the University of Ulster and has a BA (Hons) Leisure, Events and Cultural Management degree and an MSc in Marketing and Entrepreneurship. She also attained a Level 6 Certificate in Further Education Teaching. Anne has professional experience in marketing through the McAvoy Group, Cookstown Panel Centre, Southern Area Hospice Services and South West College. She has completed three marathons and a self-guided world tour in 2008.

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The Project Plan

This project will create a high quality visitor experience and identity based primarily on the internationally important geology at the heart of the region. Firstly the exceptional landscape of the Mourne, Cooley and Gullion uplands will be matched with high quality visitor infrastructure, services and marketing, allowing it to take advantage of its strategic location straddling the Belfast/Dublin road and rail routes as a hub for ‘Geotourism’.

The project is part financed by the European Union’s European Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG IVA Cross-Border Programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body. Our budget of STG£1.4m will finance the project to June 2015.

The project staff are employed through Newry and Mourne District Council who act as the Management Agency.

We will aim to promote the area’s natural landscape, geology and related heritage (which will link to a range of heritage, culture and recreational based activities) with a view to increasing visitor numbers, enhancing the tourism potential and contributing towards people’s appreciation of the beautiful landscape around them.

Our work will include public education/consultation, access infrastructure, interpretation materials, events & tours, and targeted marketing initiatives and it will closely integrate tourism development with conservation and education.

The anticipated impact and lasting legacy of the Geotourism project will relate primarily to the following:

1. A long term agreed sustainable strategy for the development and management of Geotourism and Geo-heritage within the region.
2. Enhanced access to the special geological and related qualities (landscape, cultural heritage, activities) through new and improved visitor infrastructure – trails, car parks etc.
3. Enhanced interpretation of the special geological and related qualities for visitors.
4. Enhanced services for visitors and education groups including visitor information, guided tours, educational materials etc.
5. Enhanced awareness among local communities of the geological and related heritage and how it has shaped local culture as well as of the potential for nature tourism based on the special qualities.
6. Better opportunities for local entrepreneurs to promote their tourism, craft and food/drink products by relating them to a strong brand.
7. Increased local employment and environmentally friendly economic development.
8. Specific marketing collateral and activity for the Mourne Cooley Gullion landscape area and network of natural resource based tourism sites across the East Border Region.
9. Integration of the marketing of the Mourne Cooley Gullion area with that of a range of other attractions equipped to cater for and take advantage of the type of visitors received.
10. A strong recognition and raised profile for the Mourne-Cooley-Gullion area as a significant and coherent tourism destination and further dispersal of visitors attracted by this throughout the wider region.

The specific targets for the project are broken into three areas – Tourism Marketing, Education & Outreach and Geology.

### Marketing:

1. Develop an inclusive and coherent project specific logo and brand.
2. Design and develop a promotional website at www.mournecooleygullion.com with a target of hits per annum. The project will avail of online marketing opportunities and will have a strong presence on Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets.
3. Develop partnerships with existing tourism, activity or heritage related events within the Mourne Cooley Gullion region and develop Geotourism specific events.
4. Establish Mourne Cooley Gullion as a destination brand through a roadshow marketing presence at a range of events, shows and exhibitions across Ireland.
5. Develop a project advertising campaign.
6. Produce and circulate quarterly newsletters from Summer 2013.
7. Design and develop a promotional DVD/Film.
8. Establish a database and a photographic archive of sites and locations of interest in Mourne, Cooley and Gullion.

### Education and Outreach:

1. Audit the region’s educational resources and identify issues to be addressed in the educational and outreach plan.
2. Develop a series of ‘Rock Camp Summer Schemes’ in all three areas.
3. Develop a series of ‘Red Camp Summer Schemes’ in all three areas.
4. Provide Geology training opportunities for teachers across the region.
5. Develop a network of relationships with regional, national and international colleges and universities.
6. Provide a series of Geotourism training programme for tour guides, conservation volunteers and members of the public.
8. Conduct a programme of public awareness raising and consultation meetings and events.
9. Liaise with the local communities, including farmers, landowners and tourism industry sponsors.
10. Facilitate guided tours, field trips, visits by tour groups and educational and interest groups.

### The Project Plan

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**Geology:**

1. Complete a comprehensive audit of sites of geological, cultural and natural interest in the Mourne Cooley Gullion areas and an assessment of their condition (including safety, parking, interpretation etc).
2. Establish an agreed shortlist of sites for development and implement a prioritised work plan for improvement of access infrastructure including new and enhanced paths, parking, information and signage.
3. Implement an interpretation strategy.
4. Integrate developed Geo-sites within the tourism marketing strategy.
5. Develop strategic partnerships with academic staff and students of Geology and related fields within regional, national and international colleges and universities.

**The Steering Committee**

The management of the project rests with the staff and the members of the Steering Committee.

Gerard McGivern (Chairman), Director of District Development with Newry and Mourne District Council.
Michael Curran, Director of Cross Border and Economic Development with Louth County Council.
Mark Mohan, Senior Tourism Initiatives Officer with Down District Council.
John Douglas, Tourism Manager with Banbridge District Council.
Pamela Arbuth, Chief Executive of the East Border Region Ltd.
Dette Hughes, Programme Manager with East Border Region Ltd.
Martin Casey, Chief Executive of Mourne Heritage Trust.
Brendan McSherry, Heritage Officer with Louth County Council.
Darren Brier, Landscape Partnership Manager with Ring of Gullion AONB.
Jonathan McGilly, Assistant Director of District Development with Newry and Mourne District Council.
Dr Kirstin Lemon, Geological Survey of Northern Ireland.
Dr Patrick O’Connor, Consultant Geologist and former Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland.
This project is part-financed by European Union’s INTERREG IVA Cross-Border Programme, which is managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.