

The evolution of a Global Geopark: challenges and achievements in the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark

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The Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark can trace its modern history back to 1985 when Fermanagh District Council opened the Marble Arch Caves as a tourist attraction in a rural part of Co. Fermanagh in Northern Ireland. Together with the adjacent Cuilcagh Mountain Park, the Marble Arch Caves became the first European Geopark in the UK in 2001 and then with the creation of the Global Geopark Network in 2004, it became known as the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark.

Since then, the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark has undergone substantial change and has evolved significantly from being one of the smallest Global Geoparks in the network, when it comprised of only two sites and contained no real communities within. Following a major programme of expansion that took place in both 2007 and 2008, the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark is now made up of over 40 individual sites, involves numerous local communities, and perhaps most notably, spans the international between Northern Ireland (UK) and the Republic of Ireland.

Such change is not without its challenges; using two currencies, two units of distance, two education systems, and being jointly managed by two local authorities operating in very different jurisdictions, are just some of the issues that present themselves on occasion. But the opportunities that have arisen from the creation of a cross-border Global Geopark have undoubtedly outweighed any negativity.

Increased geodiversity, wider educational target markets, attraction of EU funding, and a much stronger community network, are just some of the benefits of the expansion of the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. But perhaps most important of all, is the sense of peace and reconciliation that this rural area has managed to achieve in what was once a region in political turmoil.

Presented in Theme 5