

Why we need to embrace the concept of geoheritage

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The concept of geoheritage may seem redundant or unnecessary to practicing geoscientists who do not engage either with the public or with politicians who are steered by public opinion, but at the peril of the sustained funding of geoscience. Gone are the days where geoscience is handed a blank cheque by funding agencies, or is given license by an unquestioning public. The concept of geoheritage was given form in Digne, France, in 1991, in the eloquent *Déclaration Internationale des Droits de la Mémoire de la Terre* (Declaration of the Rights of the Memory of the Earth). Early on, the concept was embraced primarily in Europe, where it fueled the explosion of European Geoparks. In recent years, the movement has been formally recognized by a dedicated journal *Geoheritage*, and specialist working groups of the IUCN and IUGS. Across Canada, the systematic documentation of each Province and Territory's geoheritage sites is gaining momentum. The purpose of a geoheritage list is to build public awareness of their geologic heritage and its influence on a region's cultural history. Geoheritage provides the best vehicle for public engagement, to help people better value geology and the role of geoscience in our lives. Specifically, a systematic geoheritage strategy has potential: (i) to be the best vehicle to make something tangible that is to most people intangible - the principles of geology; (ii) to open the doors of our scholastic towers to our fellow citizens, for their use in community-based economic development initiatives, including an essential role in identifying candidate Global Geoparks; and (iii) to reconnect a largely disconnected society with the Earth on which we depend. The realization of these goals is not just a 'feel good' exercise, but is vital to two great issues facing humanity: (i) access and limits of mineral and energy resources, by increasing public awareness of the connections between our cultural heritage and geology; and (ii) better understanding of current and future global change by consulting the geologic record. A systematic, site-based approach to Geoheritage recognition, now in place for Nova Scotia, lays the foundation for realizing these goals that lie at the heart of geoscience practice.