

# English Riviera



## GLOBAL GEOPARK

English Riviera Geopark Organisation Ltd

Web: [www.englishrivierageopark.org.uk](http://www.englishrivierageopark.org.uk)

Community and Customer Services, Lower Ground Floor, Town Hall, Torquay, TQ1 3DR

### **PRESS STATEMENT**

**Embargoed until UNESCO make the announcement – latest Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> Nov**

## **Torbay gets UNESCO status as new “UNESCO Global Geoparks” programme announced**



In its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary year and 40 years after the creation of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the Science Commission of UNESCO (*United Nations Organisation for Education, Science and Culture*) at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris today has approved the statutes of the new “International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme” which will allow for the creation of the new site designation of “UNESCO Global Geoparks” and the re-designation of all 120 existing Global Geoparks, including Torbay, as new UNESCO Global Geoparks.

Previously operating with the informal support of UNESCO, the status of UNESCO Global Geoparks has been recognised under the new programme. The English Riviera, which includes the three towns of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham, and covers the entire Torbay area, became a Global Geopark in 2007 and, against competition from China and Europe, won the bid to host the 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Global Geoparks in September 2016 when delegates from around the world will attend what will now be the first UNESCO Global Geoparks conference.



The English Riviera Global Geopark was an initiative that came from the Torbay Heritage Forum 11 years ago and led to the development of a grass-roots initiative, championed by the Torbay Coast & Countryside Trust, supported by Torbay Council under the direction of Nick Powe, director of Kents Cavern. It is now a partner-led organisation coordinating Geopark activities and assuring adherence to a pragmatic code of conduct mandated by the Global Geoparks Network and UNESCO.

**Rory Stewart MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs** said: *"This is the most fantastic news. It gives us a great international profile. Connecting our geological heritage and literally our bedrock with our community and economy is a very exciting opportunity. The work Geoparks do locally, and their new UNESCO status, could inspire people for years to come."*

**Gordon Oliver, Mayor of Torbay** said: *"I am delighted with this outstanding achievement for Torbay. The English Riviera Geopark team is small with limited resources and has worked tirelessly to achieve this prestigious status for the English Riviera. We must now continue to work through the English Riviera Global Geopark organisation to maximise and maintain the advantages for Torbay of having this highly sought after status as a UNESCO Global Geopark."*

**Kevin Foster MP for Torbay** said: *"This is great news not just for those who already have a love of our unique geology, but those who will discover it thanks to this UNESCO designation. Our beautiful bay has for decades attracted visitors with its beautiful beaches and breath taking views. Now the unique geological story of our area will help inspire new visitors to head for our bay for study and relaxation. My congratulations go to all involved with securing this excellent result which was literally millions of years in the making."*

**Professor Iain Stewart, Geologist and broadcaster, patron of the English Riviera Global Geopark and Director, Sustainable Earth Institute at Plymouth University** said: *"I'm a huge fan of the Geoparks. They are a wonderful natural showcase for how the rocks underfoot continue to shape our economies and our cultures. We have them scattered across the UK and Ireland, a testament to the breadth of fantastic geology we have beneath our backyards and the important role they play as local gateways to connect with ordinary people about how our planet works and how they should care about what is happening to it"*.

**Melanie Border, English Riviera Geopark coordinator and Chair of UK Global Geoparks Forum,** said: *"This incredible recognition reflects the dedication and commitment of all of the UNESCO Global Geopark communities and partners in the UK and around the world. Of course it is about geology, but it's not just about the rocks. It is about how we use that geology to make a difference to life locally, economically and socially. The UK Global Geoparks Forum is very proud of this formal UNESCO recognition and we are looking forward to making the most of the opportunities it presents. Meanwhile, locally, with the strong support of all of the Geopark partners, we can now build on this wider recognition."*

**Nick Powe, chair of the English Riviera Global Geopark** said: *"We began working towards gaining the status in 2004 and were successful in 2007. We always hoped the designation would eventually get full UNESCO programme status and now it has."*

*"What sets UNESCO Global Geoparks apart from other designations is that they are locally-led partnerships working to support sustainable economic development of the area, primarily through geological and nature tourism, a concept known as GeoTourism, but connected to educational programs, scientific activity and the area's cultural offer. No other English seaside resort has this status and this creates unique opportunities right across the Bay, and across all sectors, to bring both economic and social benefits to the Bay, stimulating inward investment and economic regeneration."*

*"This news will create a worldwide surge in interest in becoming a UNESCO Global Geopark and as hosts of the next UNESCO Global Geoparks conference at Torquay's Riviera International Centre the promotional and economic benefits for Torbay and the conference have just been elevated to a whole new level."*



The UK government – through the UK Permanent Delegation to UNESCO, UK National Commission for UNESCO and the UK Global Geoparks Forum in partnership with other member states – helped to lead the process for Global Geoparks to become a formal UNESCO designation.

**Dr. Beth Taylor, UK National Commission for UNESCO's Natural Sciences Director**, said:  
*"The UK's seven UNESCO Global Geoparks are a national treasure, not just in terms of their geological interest but the enthusiasm and dedication of their local champions who work so hard to maintain them and to make the most of the educational and economic opportunities they offer. They are a great illustration of local communities working very effectively in some of the most remote and beautiful areas of the UK. But I appreciate that they are also a bit of a national secret, not widely recognised by visitors or even by many of those who live within their boundaries. I hope that the UNESCO brand will give our Global Geoparks the same recognition factor as World Heritage Sites – a visible guarantee of their international significance and an assurance that they are great places to visit and explore."*

The new designation was approved at the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris on 17th November. The UK's UNESCO Global Geoparks and the UK National Commission for UNESCO plan to mark the announcement with a series of community-focused events during European Geoparks Week in May 2016 and at the International Global Geopark Conference in the English Riviera Global Geopark in September 2016.

**Sally Balcombe, VisitBritain Chief Executive** said: *"This is exciting news and a real accolade for the seven Global Geoparks, as well as the communities who sustain them. The United Kingdom is rich in natural beauty and VisitBritain works hard to showcase the diversity and accessibility of our countryside and coast to inspire international visitors to explore further than well-trodden paths. This year we launched our Countryside is GREAT campaign to increase international visits across all our nations and regions, and the breadth and beauty of the Geoparks will provide significant opportunities for visitors to explore the UK's incredible geological heritage and contribute to local economies."*

#### **ENDS** –

#### **NOTES TO EDITOR**

- 1) For further information on filming or for any other interview or photography requests in the English Riviera Global Geopark contact:
  - o Melanie Border, Geopark Coordinator on +44 1803 207358 or email: [m.border@englishrivierageopark.org.uk](mailto:m.border@englishrivierageopark.org.uk)
  - o Nick Powe, Chair of the English Riviera Global Geopark Organisation on +44 7973 746383 or email [nickpowe@kents-cavern.co.uk](mailto:nickpowe@kents-cavern.co.uk)
- 2) For more information about the Global Geoparks Network [www.globalgeopark.org](http://www.globalgeopark.org)
- 3) The 7th International Conference on Global Geoparks takes place 27-30 September 2016 in Torquay. More information at [www.ggn2016.com](http://www.ggn2016.com) or from [david@ggn2016.com](mailto:david@ggn2016.com)

#### **FACTS AND FIGURES**

- 1) Torbay was awarded Global Geopark status by UNESCO in 2007 when it became the first urban Global Geopark. The designation, awarded to just 120 places in the World, recognises areas that not only have outstanding geology but who use that heritage to bring about benefits to the local community, both economically and socially.
- 2) Since 2007 the English Riviera Global Geopark status has indirectly resulted in major inward investment projects in Torbay including the geological themed children's GeoPlay park in Paignton, the Geopark Cycle Trail and the new facilities at Berry Head.
- 3) The area's geology began 400 million years ago at the bottom of a warm tropical seas, south of the equator and is characterised by the Devonian (headlands at Berry Head and Hopes Nose), Permian (Paignton and Maidencombe) and the Quaternary (Ancient human occupation at Kents Cavern).



- 4) The English Riviera Global Geopark, covering the entire administrative area of Torbay, is one of the smallest Geoparks in the world (102km<sup>2</sup>) but one of the most densely populated with 137,000 people and receives over 3 million visitors each year.
- 5) The local partners represented on the English Riviera Geopark Management group are: Torbay Council, Kents Cavern, Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust, English Riviera Tourism Company, Torbay Development Agency, Torbay Community Development Trust, Torquay Museum, Brixham Heritage Museum, Torre Abbey, Cockington Court, Herald Express, Torquay Grammar School for Girls and Plymouth University
- 6) The UK is home to seven UNESCO Global Geoparks, stretching from the English Riviera in the South to Geopark Shetland in the North, and including two in Wales and a cross-border UNESCO Global Geopark shared by Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The UK sites are part of a growing international network of Global Geoparks – areas of outstanding geological interest which use their unique geology to drive community development.
- 7) Across the UK 357,000 people live in a Geopark and the Geoparks receive over 17.5 million visitors each year. Becoming a formal UNESCO programme is expected to raise the profile of the Geoparks among visitors and residents alike, encouraging them to play a more active role in looking after their shared, geological heritage and gain a greater understanding of the key issues and challenges facing society in the context of our dynamic planet.
- 8) There are seven Global Geoparks in the UK. These are:
  - **English Riviera:** Home to the Kents Cavern jawbone, the oldest modern human fossil in North West Europe and situated within the stunning, rolling hills of South Devon, Torbay's geology has created a beautiful coastline, linking the rich diversity of the landscape with its wildlife, people and culture.
  - **Fforest Fawr:** Fforest Fawr – (Welsh for the 'Great Forest') – is a swathe of upland country which forms the western half of the Brecon Beacons National Park. It is a cracked and crumpled layer-cake of rocks, 480 million years in the making, a landscape sculpted by ice then transformed by man and a witness to the birth of the Industrial Revolution
  - **Geopark Shetland:** From the highest sheer cliffs in Britain to the best 'hands on' exposure of the Great Glen Fault, Shetland is packed with an incredibly varied geology spanning almost 3 billion years. Where else can you walk on an ancient ocean floor, explore an extinct volcano and stroll across shifting sands in the space of a day?
  - **GeoMon:** The tectonic island of Anglesey includes more than a hundred different rock types and the oldest fossils in England or Wales within 1,800 million years of Earth's history., GeoMon is the UK's most geologically diverse Global Geopark. Such is the variety of shapes and types of rock, that visitors and locals alike cannot but marvel at the magnificent colours and structures visible around the coast of the Welsh Global Geopark.
  - **Marble Arch Caves:** Ranging from rugged uplands, lakes and forests through to gently rolling drumlins, the landscapes of the Global Geopark represent a complex Earth history dating back as far as 895 million years. With evidence of mountain building and destruction; searing hot deserts and warm tropical oceans; and of icy wastelands and water-worn caverns, the rocks and landscapes of the Global Geopark are nothing short of amazing.
  - **North Pennines:** The North Pennines landscape has been 500 million years in the making and reveals a story of tropical seas, vast deltas and deserts, huge ice sheets and continents on the move, alongside a world class mineral and mining heritage. In recognition of its special qualities, the North Pennines has been designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as well as a European and Global Geopark - highlighting its globally important Earth heritage.
  - **North West Highlands:** Located in the far north of the Scottish Highlands, the Global Geopark is home to the oldest rocks in the UK. Their Lewisian gneiss is over 3 billion years old! The eastern boundary of the Global Geopark extends beyond the settlement of Durness and Loch Eriboll to follow the Moine Thrust Zone, an internationally significant geological structure that helped 19th century geologists determine how the world's great mountain ranges were formed.

-ENDs

