

From: [Monica Yeung](#)
To: [Salvaneschi, Sam](#)
Subject: Submission to Inquiry into Current and Potential Ecotourism of the ACT and Region
Date: Saturday, 28 April 2012 1:09:10 PM

Sam (Samantha) Salvaneschi
Secretary,
Standing Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Water

Dear Sam

We are an Ecotourism Operator – but specialise in a subset of Ecotourism: **Geotourism**.

My Geotour company was established in 1991 and since then we have organised and run Geotours both in the ACT and Region, Australia wide and Overseas.

Definitions of Geotours and Geotourism:

National Geographic and also in Wikipedia:

*“**Geotourism** is Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents”.*

And from: global-geotourism.blogspot.com/2011/01/geotourism-definitions.html

“The provision of interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation”(Hose,1995)

“Tourism relating specifically to geology and geomorphology and the natural resources of landscape, landforms , fossil beds, rocks and minerals ,with an emphasis on appreciating the processes that are creating and created such features”(Dowling and Newsome,2006).

“Geotourism is a knowledge -based tourism, an interdisciplinary integration of the tourism industry with conservation and interpretation of abiotic nature attributes, besides considering related cultural issues, within the geosites for the general public”(Sadry,2009) ”.

“A form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on landscape and geology. It promotes tourism to geosites and the conservation of geo-diversity and an understanding of Earth sciences through appreciation and learning. This is achieved through independent visits to geological features, use of geo-trails and view points, guided tours, geo-activities and patronage of geosite visitor centres” (Newsome and Dowling,2010).

“The provision of interpretative and service facilities for geosites and geomorphosites and their encompassing topography, together with their associated in-situ and ex-situ artefacts, to constituency-build for their conservation by generating appreciation, learning and research by and for current and future generations.” (Hose, 2011).

As you can see, there are numerous definitions, but, as a geologist, I subscribe to the definitions that focus on interpreting geology and geomorphology. I started my business partly out of frustration when I found that the general public had very little understanding of geology and geomorphology despite the fact that it is the rocks, soil and landscape that underpin what is at any particular location today. This includes the location of towns and infrastructure – something we should as a Nation consider more carefully in view of likely Climate change. Climate change, as a result of geological events has influenced evolution, innovation and civilizations in the past and we can only learn from this!

My decision to become a Geotour Operator in 1991 was not driven by frustration alone, it was also to a great part driven by the satisfaction and the joy I feel when I see the reaction of people when they learn to “read rocks” and when they have “light bulb moments” as they suddenly understand the “bigger picture”.

As Geotour Operators we impact little or not at all on the Ecosystems we visit and observe – we focus on the rocks and they are quite resilient to people walking on, and looking at them – provided they are not damaged or smashed with tools or acid or collected.

Within our company we have a strict policy of “non-collection and/or breaking rock” unless in a designated quarry or when working with and assisting geoscientists in the field for research purposes (e.g. fossil digs). This is to ensure that future generations can also enjoy the geological sites and fossils from which we can learn about the Earth’s past.

I am a member of the *Geoheritage Subcommittee of the ACT Branch of the Geological Society*, a member of the GSA (Geological Society of Australia) Standing Committee on Geological Heritage as well as the *Australian Geoparks National Committee*. In these roles I am actively involved in the promotion and protection of Geological Heritage Sites as well as geological sites that have an educational, tourism and / or aesthetic value. Visit the Woolshed Creek site to see an example of our work.

The ACT and the surrounding region are rich in such heritage, educational and scenic sites and they form the basis of my tours when I run them in the ACT and the surrounding region. Some of the tours we offer are:

- **Geology and Wine Tour** (“Wine comes from grapes, grapes grow on vines, vines grow in soil and soil comes from rock” – these tours take us out to Murrumbateman as well as to Lake George and Canberra itself).
- **Canberra Geology Tour** (takes in some of the more interesting geological sites in and around town (Tidbinbilla), including Aboriginal heritage sites in rock – paintings, grinding grooves – as well as places like the Woolshed Creek Fossil locality and road cutting, the State Circle Road Cutting and Mt Ainslie – an old volcanic pile of rock – from which visitors can see and understand some of the reasons why this location was chosen for Australia’s Capital).
- **A Geology Tour of the New Parliament House** (“See some old fossils in Parliament House and discover what happens when boring old rocks blunder into orogenic zones” – a light hearted look at the building stones used in the construction as well as – when possible – an underground tour to see a significant geological site in the bowels of Parliament House).
- **Wee Jasper Geology Tour** (magnificent caves and glorious fossils and even an old volcano and meteorite impact craters)
- **South Coast Geology Tour** (spectacular coastal scenery – lots of exposed rock formations complemented by the sea, volcanoes, fossils and marine biology in rock pools)
- **Alpine Geology Tours** (magnificent scenery, caves and fossils, spectacular road cuttings that tell stories of old rivers, basalt flows in old river beds, gold mining and all the interesting associated history, flora and fauna)

So, in short, if you learn how to “read a rock” – and it is not difficult as it involves just a few basic principles, there is a story in every rock and I love to share these stories. I have been involved in guide training at Birrigai and Tidbinbilla as well as in teacher training at local schools and workshops with local school kids (all voluntary undertakings) as well as in Strategic Planning sessions for Tidbinbilla, the Canberra Museum and ACT Tourism. The one thing these occasions used to have in common (but clearly no longer, most recently when it came to Tidbinbilla, there was a strong focus on the rocks) was a lack of appreciation and importance of the geological features in the ACT and the surrounding region. I used to find this so frustrating!

In recent years I have been heavily involved in the Age of Fishes Museum Project at Canowindra (unfortunately just outside the Capital region which finishes just north of Boorowa) and my involvement in the ACT Region has been limited to running tours for visiting groups and conferences rather than actively promoting my tours in the ACT. I would, however, dearly love to go back to doing more tours in the ACT Region, but this would require a different marketing strategy on my part combined with more support and promotion from local government for the "Nature" part of the ACT Region.

Part of my "defection – or change of focus" to Canowindra has had to do with what I felt was very poor marketing by the ACT Government of the ACT as a "Nature" destination. Capital Attractions and Events have always been marketed as a priority and this meant that people who come to the ACT focus on these icons (Parliament House, National Library, High Court, National Gallery, National Museum, War Memorial, BM Tower) and if they feel adventurous, they may venture up to Mt Ainslie and the Botanical Garden (a big thank you to the Explorer bus to give these visitors a chance to see these). Self Drive people may even venture out to Tidbinbilla, but by the time they find out about local Tour Operators, it is either too late to book a tour or it turns out to be too expensive because there are only a couple of people interested.

And that is the crux of the matter – the people who do come to the ACT don't even think that there is more to this place than it being the capital of Australia with its National Attractions mentioned above, they do not associate Canberra with "Nature". The ACT does not even have a dedicated Natural History Museum – unlike every Australian State Capital. Canberra would be ideally situated for a National Natural History Museum, dedicated to telling the story of the Australian Continent through time, its geology, flora and fauna. Visitors to the ACT interested in Natural History thus miss out in this respect as well and this may well influence their travel plans. The ACT and the Capital Region have so much to offer in terms of Nature Tourism! It would benefit the ACT if visitors came here for this reason as well so let's promote it seriously! For now, people who want to experience "Nature" do not come to the ACT for this purpose, they have no concept of what they might be missing. Instead they go to the "Mountains" or to the "Coast".

People not coming to the ACT have possibly a lot in common with me: I have no interest in going to Washington DC to see the White House and the town's National (built) Attractions – and since I have no concept of there being anything else to see and do in Washington DC, I will not bother going there.....

Canberra has seen a procession of local small Tour Operators come and go over the last 20 years and if I am not mistaken, there are only two who have been here since then and for the duration (Gondwana Dreaming and Hire-a-Guide). We are both targeting the Conference Market as the VFR and the FIT markets seem to produce little return at present.

As for our contribution to conservation, restoration and the local economy:

When running tours, we make it a rule to collect rubbish along the way (one particular tour along Lake Burrinjuck when the water level was low, produced a trailer load of rubbish), and pull out weeds where we walk. We educate participants about the value of health ecosystems and point out and discuss with them dryland salinity issues and remedies based on the underlying geology and we certainly contribute to the local economy wherever we go by supporting local businesses (meals, accommodation, souvenirs) and employing local specialist guides (indigenous, flora and fauna, birds). We use email for communication as much as possible, we do not use print media when it can be avoided and if not, we use recycled paper. In this respect we are true Ecotourism Operators.

And finally:

Just in case you have not heard of Canowindra and the Age of Fishes – check it out sometime. How I wish this iconic Devonian fish fossil deposit was in the ACT Region! Then it might get the support it deserves but sadly lacks in Cabonne Shire from a Council that has no understanding of what this USP could do for their Tourism Industry. Canowindra is on a par with The National Dinosaur Monument in Utah, Pompeii, the La Brea Tar Pits, Miguasha World Fossil Heritage Site Quebec, Riversleigh and Naracoorte World Heritage Fossil Sites and – dare I say it – Uluru and Kata Tjuta (famous rocks after all!). Maybe we could stretch the boundaries a little....????!! ... it would do the world of good for the ACT Region – and, it will, once it takes off, because one of the

best ways to get there is from the ACT.

Sam, I think I have raved enough. I would be happy to come and give a talk about the wonders of the ACT Region's rocks to show even the die-hards how interesting a lump of rock or a road cutting can be. In fact, I am prepared to go a step further and take them on a short field excursion around town – I bet you, after that they will appreciate the role of rocks in the big picture of Tourism in this region!

Thank you for giving me an extension to submit this.

With best regards
Monica

Discovering the Natural World – Through Interpretation

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environment and even the wine we drink!

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