

Geotourism: The Tourism of Geology and Landscape



Edited by

David Newsome, Murdoch University, Australia

and Ross K. Dowling, Edith Cowan University, Australia

Contents

Introduction	2
Importance of mountains	2
The Australian Alps	3
Human history	4
Tourism to Mt Kosciuszko	5
Environmental impacts of tourism	8
Future of this geotourism destination	8
Conclusion	10

 Published by Goodfellow Publishers Limited, Woodeaton, Oxford, OX3 9TJ
<http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com>

Copyright © Goodfellow Publishers Limited 2010

All rights reserved by Goodfellow Publishers Limited. The text of this publication, or any part thereof, may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, storage in an information retrieval system, or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.



Design and setting by P.K. McBride

6 The Australian Alps: opportunities and challenges for geotourism

Pascal Scherrer, Edith Cowan University, Australia and
Catherine Marina Pickering, Griffith University, Australia

Introduction

Geotourism, as the concept of tourism based on geological features, has gained growing traction in recent years as evidenced not only from contributions in this book, but also from the geopark movement and the number of recent conferences on the subject. Geotourism and particularly the geopark concept build on the notion that fundamentally, geology is the underlying, defining and connecting factor for many natural and even social features of a region, including aspects such as biodiversity, landscape, patterns of human occupancy and use and even architecture. However, today these links are seldom explored or made explicit in the general tourism product even though they have the potential to provide an avenue for a holistic view of a region and its activities, landscapes and people.

This chapter focuses on mountain areas as geotourism destinations, with specific focus on the Australian Alps. The first part of the chapter highlights the importance of mountain areas and in particular the Australian Alps for their ecological, economic and cultural values. The latter part of the chapter explores the case of Mount Kosciuszko, Australia's highest peak, as a geotourism destination. The region has a diversity of tourism attractions based on geological features which lend themselves to providing a holistic approach to the interpretation of the region's features. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the opportunities and challenges for geotourism and tourism in general to the region.

Importance of mountains

Geological formations such as entire mountain ranges, individual peaks and associated land formations underpin tourist attractions in many parts of the world. Mountain areas cover about 27 per cent¹ of the earth's land surface (UNEP WCMC 2002). The greatest component (12.2 per cent; 17.9 million square kilometres) is in Eurasia, while only one per cent (1.4 million square kilometres) covers the Australasian and Southeast Asia region. Mountain areas have important economic, cultural and ecological values. About 10 per cent of the world's population live in mountain regions and more than 40 per cent depend in some way on mountain resources such as water from mountain catchments for drinking and irrigation (Hamilton 2002; Messerli and Ives 1984). Some mountain areas, such as the European Alps, have been utilized sustainably for agri-

1 Using the UNEP WCMC definition based on elevation and slope (cf. UNEP WCMC 2002).

cultural purposes for millennia, while other areas, such as the Australian Alps, have experienced little anthropogenic alteration until relatively recently (since the arrival of Europeans) (Bock *et al.* 1995; Patzelt 1996).

Mountains are prominent geotourism destinations worldwide. The highest mountains in a range, in a country, on a continent and in the world, tend to attract far more interest than smaller peaks. At a continental scale this is seen in the focus on climbing the ‘Seven Summits’: the highest mountain on the seven continents. Continental Australia’s highest mountain, Mt Kosciuszko at 2228 metres in the Australian Alps, is by far the lowest of the traditional ‘Seven Summits’. It is much lower than the highest peaks that are at similar latitudes in New Zealand and in South America and is only a quarter of the height of Mt Everest (8848 metres) (Körner 2003).

The Australian Alps

Mt Kosciuszko is part of the Australian Alps which form the southern end of the Great Dividing Range that runs parallel to Australia’s east coast for over 2000 kilometres, about 50 to 150 kilometres inland. The Australian Alps extend from the high country of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), through the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales (NSW) to the highlands of Victoria, with some alpine areas in Tasmania (Figure 6.1).

The Australian Alps are distinctive in many ways in relation to mountain areas worldwide (Kirkpatrick 2003). Important characteristics include aspects of geology, flora, fauna, climate, and particularly their comparatively low-set topography. Many of the values of the Australian Alps are found in the differences from, rather than conformity to, the stereotypic images of steep slopes, high rocky outcrops and towering mountain peaks, which are often associated with alpine areas elsewhere (Kirkpatrick 2003). Australia’s mountains are much older and, unlike the mountains of New Zealand or New Guinea which are still being uplifted, have experienced considerable weathering since their major periods of uplift (Ollier and Wyborn 1989). With milder Pleistocene conditions than in many other mountain regions, the Australian Alps experienced only weak glaciation (Good 1992). These factors all contributed to the area’s rounded, soil-mantled character that stands in contrast to the icy, rugged and sawtooth-like features of alpine areas in Europe, Asia, America or New Zealand (Kirkpatrick 2003). In late 2008, the Australian Alps National Parks and Reserves were placed on the Australian Government’s National Heritage List on the basis of the significance of the landscapes including its glacial features, its distinctive snow adapted flora and fauna and its human history including indigenous, pastoral, recreation and scientific use (DEWHA 2008).

The highest and largest alpine area in Australia, centred around Mt Kosciuszko, consists of an undulating plateau that gradually rises from the east to a series of north–south aligned peaks along the Main Range, and rapidly drops off towards steep valleys along the western side. The tree line is around 1850 metres which, like in many other mountain environments, coincides with a mean temperature during the warmest month of about 10°C (Costin *et al.* 2000; Körner 1999). Some of the outstanding natural features include 21 endemic flowering plant species (i.e. 10 per cent of the native flowering plants); periglacial and glacial features (which show the only clear evidence of mainland glaciation during the last glacial period and are an example of glaciation under marginal conditions); and great scenic values (Good 1992; Kirkpatrick 2003).

Chapter extract

**To buy the full file, and for copyright
information, click here**

[http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&st](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=231)

[oryID=231](http://www.goodfellowpublishers.com/academic-publishing.php?promoCode=&partnerID=&content=story&storyID=231)



All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recorded or otherwise, without the written permission of Goodfellow Publishers Ltd

All requests should be sent in the first instance to

rights@goodfellowpublishers.com

www.goodfellowpublishers.com