

# UNESCO Accreditation

With the active support of the NZ National Commission for UNESCO, and support from Waitaki District Council, the Trust is seeking designation of the area as a UNESCO Global Geopark. This will provide a framework of values and goals to guide our actions, worldwide profile for Waitaki and Aotearoa New Zealand, an increase in visitors to the area, and access to a network of UNESCO Geoparks to learn from and share with.

The Trust submitted an application to UNESCO in November 2019, requesting an inspection of the Geopark in mid-2020, and designation the year after. This timeline has been disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Trust anticipates the mission to be scheduled as soon as New Zealand borders are open to visitors again.

## What is UNESCO?

UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It seeks to build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences and Culture. There are currently 161 geoparks in 44 countries around the world, but none in Oceania.



Download our **Geopark App**  
to explore the park.

## Our goals

The Geopark is governed by a Charitable Trust. The goals for the Geopark are to:

**Enhance Waitaki's social identity and increase community pride** by providing a unifying platform to share the stories of our land, rich culture and heritage.

**Inspire locals and visitors to learn, discover and connect** with the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark through educational programmes and by providing engaging experiences and activities, with a focus on youth.

**Ensure key geological, cultural, heritage sites** and assets are visibly part of the Geopark, well **curated, accessible and protected**.

**Increase community well-being** through holistic sustainable development supporting economic growth.

For more information visit:  
**[www.whitestonegeopark.nz](http://www.whitestonegeopark.nz)**  
or email [info@whitestonegeopark.nz](mailto:info@whitestonegeopark.nz)

Visitors  
Guide

# Waitaki Whitestone Geopark

environment | science | culture  
education | sustainable development



**Waitaki  
Whitestone  
Geopark**

# What is a Geopark?

A Geopark is the new UNESCO designation (like World Heritage status) that gives **world-wide status to a defined area of international geological significance** which tells the story of how the geology and landscape has shaped the lives of its inhabitants, be they people, animals or plants.

**Connecting people to the 80 million year long story of this land, which has shaped every aspect of our lives, is a platform for addressing the societal challenges we all face – such as climate change, environmental protection, biodiversity loss, sustainable use of resources, geohazards, and sustainable economic development.**

A Geopark is managed within an holistic framework of protection, education and sustainable development. **But it is about much more than just geology.** It also creates a unifying platform which explores, links and celebrates the identity, history, culture and diversity of the area.

**Geoparks are driven from the 'bottom up', relying heavily on community support and participation, and returning benefits to the community** through increased profile, social capital and sustainable economic development. The Waitaki Whitestone Geopark aims to be the first Geopark in New Zealand.



## The Waitaki Whitestone Geopark

**Located in the South Island (Te Waipounamu) of Aotearoa New Zealand,** the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark is a 7,200 km<sup>2</sup> part of Zealandia – the world's '8th continent', which broke away from Gondwanaland and then became submerged under the ocean for millions of years before tectonic forces thrust New Zealand above the waves. **It exhibits huge geo-diversity** – snapshots of the Earth's mantle, karst landforms, braided rivers, features of submarine volcanic and tectonic plate forces, and fossils of an ancient marine world.

The karst landscape and its 'whitestone' are integral to the identity of the Waitaki district. The first people to the area found shelter in limestone caves, leaving now-treasured rock art. Waitaki's largest town, Ōamaru, is renowned for fine limestone architecture. Today, the Vanished World Centre celebrates the wondrous fossils that emerge from the Geopark's whitestone.

The Geopark contains **outstanding natural heritage** and is well known for its wildlife, with local plant, insect and animal species adding to the distinct character of this area.

**Some of the first sites of human occupation in Aotearoa New Zealand are here,** the last major landmass on Earth to be populated by humans. These sites, and the Mātauranga Māori (knowledge) surrounding them, reveal the story of the local iwi (tribe), Ngāi Tahu and in the 19th century, Europeans who arrived to engage in farming, mining and supporting industry and activities required by new settler communities.



This area continues to be a **hub of primary production** with recent emphasis on dryland beef and sheep farming and dairy production. Increasingly tourism also contributes to the area's livelihood as visitors come to admire the historic buildings, appreciate local food and wine, our rich biodiversity and the culture and heritage of the area.

The first steps to becoming a Geopark were accomplished by the Vanished World Incorporated Society, a community organization which aims to **promote and understand the geological riches of the Waitaki region through education, conservation and appropriate use.** Since the year 2000, with support from the local community, the Society has developed a Discovery Centre at Duntroon and trails to nearby geological sites to view fossils, minerals, rocks and landforms.

