

## **Marble Arch Caves European Geopark Progress Report: April 2008**

### **Geopark activities**

- Fermanagh District Council's application to EGN/UNESCO in March 2007 to substantially expand the Marble Arch Caves European Geopark to 18,000 hectares - more than ten times its previous size - was accepted at the September 2007 meeting of EGN/UNESCO.
- Richard Watson has been appointed to the Executive Committee of the UK Field Studies Council commencing in April 2008.
- The ongoing €4M INTERREG IIIB project in co-operation with three other European Geoparks in North West Europe is nearing completion and has been a model exercise in co-operation between geoparks in three different European countries.
- In February 2008 a number of European Geoparks within North West Europe met at the headquarters of the British Geological Survey in England to plan a collective INTERREG IVB project application.
- Visitor numbers to Marble Arch Caves in 2007 were 53,280, which is our highest yearly figure since 1996 and an increase of 3% on 2006, which was itself a record year. The 2007 figure is 17.5% more than 2004 when we became a Global Geopark and 30% more than 2001 when we became a European Geopark.
- Lisa McManus, our former Education Officer, left us in October 2007 and has been replaced by Chris Reid who will be our Geopark Development Officer. Chris is a Geographer with several years teaching experience and he is also an expert snowboarder and rock climber.
- Chris Reid spoke about the Geopark at a major peatland conservation conference held in England on 13 –14th March 2008.
- Patrick and Richard attended the EGN meeting held in the North West Highlands in September 2007.
- Kirstin Lemon, the Geopark Geologist ran a number of excellent events in 2007 and in 2008 – lectures, walks and junior geologists events before going on maternity leave in January 2008.
- Congratulations to Kirstin who gave birth to a baby boy – Adam – in February 2008. Mother and baby are both well.
- Richard Watson's friends from the Raven Potholing Club in Dublin followed up their week's mountain walking holiday in the Madonie

European Geopark in Sicily in March 2007 with a similar holiday in Sardinia in February 2008 when they visited the Sardinia Geominerario European Geopark. Unfortunately Richard was not able to accompany them this time but it seems that they had a very enjoyable trip.

- A proposal to expand our Geopark on an international basis into neighbouring areas of the Republic of Ireland has been submitted to EGN/UNESCO for consideration at the April 2008 meeting.

### **Activities on behalf of EGN**

- Patrick McKeever continues to be a roving ambassador for EGN and has travelled extensively in 2007-08 representing the Network – he was in Australia in March 2008 working on behalf of the EGN/UNESCO and will report on this and other working trips to the CC at the April meeting.
- Patrick and Nickolas Zouros have been in almost daily contact dealing with the ever-increasing workload generated by the success story of European Geoparks.
- Richard Watson gave a presentation about the work of EGN at a seminar in Northern Ireland on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2008 organised by the Special European Union Programmes Body and attended by 150 delegates.
- An inaugural meeting of the Irish Geoparks Forum was held at the headquarters of the Geological Survey of Ireland in Dublin on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2008. Patrick and Richard both gave separate presentations at the Forum, which is intended to discuss common geopark actions and to assist aspiring geoparks in Ireland.