

Recognising indigenous peoples values and knowledge systems in Geoheritage: Case studies from New Zealand and the South Pacific.

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Geological heritage or geoheritage focuses on the recognition and, to some extent, the protection of rocks, minerals, fossils, landforms, sediments, water and soils, and natural geomorphic processes that have some anthropomorphic value. These values are generally constrained by the geosite (sites of geological significance) having some scientific, educational, research and aesthetic significance. Criteria to determine the significance of a geosite are generally founded on conservation methodologies associated with ecology/biodiversity or the living components of the natural environment. These criteria presently focus on factors such as scale, scope and significance (from a scientific perspective). Very little value is attributed to the cultural connections of a geosite or the way a geosite has contributed to the development of a culture, its spirituality and understanding of the world. In the South Pacific, and in particular New Zealand, geosites and their related management (protection/conservation) mechanisms appear to be somewhat underutilized, possibly due to the fact that those mechanisms appear to the public as being initiatives related to the actions of the scientific community of which they may not consider themselves part. Indigenous communities of the South Pacific and New Zealand very rarely associate with the scientific community and view scientific methods as foreign to their own knowledge systems and worldviews. This generally results in conflict.

In the South Pacific, the connection to volcanoes, volcanic landforms and features, and volcanic activity has been an important component to shaping various cultures over time. We present three case studies: (1) from Samoa that explores how important geosites are recorded through local knowledge repositories, (2) from the Auckland Volcanic Field where sites are being classified and protected with little recognition of indigenous peoples' values, and (3) from a UNESCO World Heritage Area that, while well protected and recognised from an bio-diversity, conservation viewpoint, the local indigenous people do have the same importance attributed to their geological heritage. These all highlight the importance of recognising the connections between indigenous peoples' culture, history and knowledge systems as key factors in defining a geoheritage area. It is proposed that assessment schemes and criteria adopt a holistic and integrated approach to defining and quantifying geoheritage values, rather than using a reductionist taxonomic approach to quantifying and qualifying geoheritage sites.