



UNESCO recognized Geopark

Location: Tumbler Ridge, Peace River Regional District

Recognize and celebrate the area's geological history

In 2014, Tumbler Ridge lost its major industry when the last coal mine shut down, and the district was faced with the possibility of being closed by the Province.

The idea to recognize the geological, cultural and environmental character of the Tumbler Ridge area landscape began in 2012 and presented an opportunity to refocus the community's main industry toward tourism. Highlighting geology and the way it impacts and shapes culture gave them recognition as a Global Geopark, strengthening the region's - and Canada's - work to preserve and celebrate the natural features of the area.



In this relatively small area there are many natural features that warrant this international recognition. On the eastern slopes of the Hart Ranges of the northern Rocky Mountains are glacier summits, the flowing Parsnip and Fraser Rivers, and peaks towering over 2,600 metres above sea level. The area includes six provincial parks and an abundance of palaeontological resources.

UNESCO Global Geoparks are unified areas of international geological significance that work to demonstrate the connection of geology with all other aspects of the area's natural and cultural heritage. The intention is to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of our natural spaces and how they interact with the fabric of our societies. The success of a Global Geopark is deeply tied to empowering local communities and developing productive partnerships towards a common goal.

The journey: Gaining recognition through partnerships

The process of gaining recognition as a UNESCO Global Geopark is a lengthy one. Though requiring lots of work and contribution, the process also paid dividends in strengthening community partnerships and a local sense of pride, as well as the collaboration toward this worthwhile goal. In 2014, the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark gained its Geopark status.

Every four years the Geopark must go through a revalidation process, an evolving exercise that ensures the park continues to meet rigorous standards and demonstrate continued progress in developing their contributions and significance in the community and their commitment to increasing awareness of their natural spaces.

Through these requirements, the organization engages in dynamic, community-focused work and partnerships. They've developed partnerships with the local museum and businesses and have collaborated with the city and local politicians to weave the Geopark into the fabric of the local economy and life.

Exploring economic impact

The Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark employs two regular full-time staff at its visitor centre, as well as summer students and three full-time employees in the roles of Executive Director, Program Director and Earth Scientist. It also attracts research funding in Earth Science.

The Geopark has developed partnerships with local businesses to deepen the sense of place experienced by visitors. The Geopark works with local hotels and chefs to educate about the natural bounty of the area and feature menu items that champion ingredients native to the area, like blueberries. This type of work highlights the rich connections between local geology and culture.

Most geoparks are supported by more than one town or community. Tumbler Ridge is unique, as it's the only town in the area and is the sole supporter. The Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark worked together with the municipality to produce a joint brand strategy. The focus was to show visitors that they are in a park community. The initiative included a signage strategy showcasing the park's presence and focused marketing. The result won a Municipal Innovation Award and helped to increase tourism to the region from 2,000 visitors in 2014 to 16,000 in 2017. The strategy focused on recognizing the district's resources and capabilities, and using those to work together in showcasing their unique features to the world. Working with local stakeholders and partners, the joint brand strategy employed a business-mindset, empowering them to market themselves in an engaging and successful way.

Some of the economic impacts of the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark are easier to measure than others. Visitors can be counted, local business sales that come out of partnerships can be given a dollar value. Other impacts are less tangible, but no less valuable: multigenerational interest in the local landscapes, a more nuanced understanding of place and culture, a deepening appreciation, and sense of value of the natural world.

Sharing insights



Scale Up:

- Scaling up to a level of international recognition required the organization to develop thoughtful programs and build strong partnerships in the community—it ended up being worth the time and effort for Tumbler Ridge.



Increase Diversity:

- Increasing the number of voices around the table was essential to Tumbler Ridge's success. Designation and continued success as a Global Geopark was only possible through partnerships, relationships and connections.



Focus:

- Clear, concise, and focused branding and communications became key to their organization's success, especially when coordinated with the community. By focusing on the community's strengths in their branding strategy they were able to substantially increase tourism numbers.



Train:

- The Park's foundation is the intersection of education, science and culture. An important way this manifests is through a formal curriculum made in collaboration with the local school district.