

# GGN - Geopark Annual Report 2021

## 1. GEOPARK IDENTITY

**Geopark name, country, regional Network:** Aso UNESCO Global Geopark, Japan, Asia Pacific Geoparks Network

**Year of inscription / Year of the last revalidation:** 2014 / 2018

The Nakadake crater, a major geosite, experienced an explosive phreatic eruption on October 20, 2021. This is the first occurrence of an explosive eruption since October 8, 2016. The alert level was raised on October 13, 2021, and fortunately, human casualties were avoided. In response to this eruption, a new regulation area map was created. In 2016, we had a significant impact on the number of tourists due to reputation damage. Based on this experience, the local community took the initiative to create the map. As a result, we were able to stop the decrease in the number of tourists. Aso city and Kumamoto prefecture is now working on safe volcano tourism.



Phreatic eruption of Mt. Naka-dake (October 20, 2021), photo by local resident in Aso city

## 2. GEOPARK FIGURES

**Number of Geopark staffs:** 9 staffs including 2 geoscientist(s)

**Number of visitors:** 7,382,824 (2020) \*Statistics for 2021 are under investigation.

The following is the number of visitors to the major geosites, museums and visitor centers.

- Aso Volcano Museum: 42,600
- Mt. Aso Visitor Center: 210,000
- Minamiaso Visitor Center: 15,270
- Nabega-taki Falls: 84,846
- Ositoishi: 25,500

**Number of Geopark events:** 21

**Number of school classes realize Geopark educational programmes:** 23

**Number of Geopark press release:** 8

### **3. GEOPARK ACTIVITIES**

After the reconstruction phase of the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake, we are now at the stage of reevaluating our understanding of the disaster experiences and communicating it to the world.

#### **Major achievements in 2021**

In order to make the Aso UGGp a sustainable organization, the director general has replaced. After that, we contacted with related organizations (Kumamoto Prefecture, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Kyushu Regional Development Bureau (Aso Sabo Office), Ministry of Environment, Kumamoto University, University of Vienna (Austria), Impact Crater Lake aUGGp (Finland) to collaborate in 2022. In addition, activities are diversifying among the municipalities.

#### **Contribution towards GGN - Networking and participation**

- We shared our “build back better” story of 2016 Kumamoto earthquake at the 9<sup>th</sup> international conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks in Jeju island. By presenting Minamiaso village's earthquake disaster program, we contributed to improve the disaster resilience in the world.
- We joined the Desital Course on UNESCO Global Geoparks, general assembly at international conference, APGN online meetings.

#### **Management and Financial Status**

Labor costs and office expenses have continuously covered by both the budget from local government and the investment profit by Aso Local Development Design Center Foundation. Project expenses have covered by national and prefectural governments.

#### **Geoconservation**

At Nabega-taki Falls, overtourism has become a serious problem. We have taken various measures such as limiting the number of visitors on holidays, and are experimentally introducing an advance reservation system using the Internet to limit the number of visitors and create a space where visitors can interact with nature in a relaxed manner.

#### **Sustainable tourism (Geotourism)**

- We were able to implement geotourism during the pandemic, which traces the route of a novel by one of Japan's most famous literary figures.
- We are planning to develop unique tourism such as geothermal tourism in Oguni, Minami-Oguni town, and tourism utilizing the deep canyons of the pyroclastic flow plateau in Yamato town.

#### **New education programmes on geoconservation, sustainable development and disaster risk reduction**

- “Geopark-gaku (Geopark study class)” have held at all prefectural high schools in the region since 2021.
- Minami-Oguni town has subsidized the purchase of pellet stoves that biomass energy without additional carbon dioxide emissions and to raise awareness of action for global warming and build a low-carbon society.

- Minamiaso Tourism Organization and geopark guides developed a new educational program that provides an opportunity to think about coexistence with nature from the earthquake experience at Tateno Geological Site. Currently, they provide the program for about 5,000 students annually. They challenge to demonstrate that how can we convey both benefits such as hot spring, beautiful landscape and disaster risk through generations.

### **Strategic partnership**

“Junior Geo-Guide Training Program” has been held since 2012 in collaboration with the National Aso Youth Friendship Center. The relationship has strengthened so that they suggested new educational programs and offered us to use their facility with Kumamoto University.

### **Promotional activities**

- Collaboration with commercial facilities of JR Kyushu (former Japanese National Railways)
- Our official account on Facebook has approximately 5,000 likes, and its posts have some 100 to 400 likes. Its account on Instagram already has over 500 followers.

## **4. CONTACTS**

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