

# Mayor Blair Experiences Moroccan Earthquake

By Mayor Christine Blair

*(In early September Mayor Christine Blair was part of a Nova Scotia delegation, representing Cliffs of Fundy Geopark and representative of the Municipality of Colchester, who travelled to Marrakesh, Morocco to attend the UNESCO Global Geoparks 10th International conference, September 5-12, 2023. On September 8th, a 6.9 earthquake struck the area. The hotel where they were staying shook and shaken and she dressed quickly and went to the street. The following is her account.)*

The UNESCO Global Geoparks 10th International conference was held in Marrakech, Morocco, September 5-12, 2023. It was my privilege to be asked to attend this conference as a representative of the Board of Directors, Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark, and the Municipality of the County of Colchester.

Cliffs of Fundy UNESCO Global Geopark had signed an agreement to twin with M-

Goun UNESCO Global Geopark in Morocco. This twinning proposal was negotiated for approx. 3 1/2 years between our two countries, with both the Canadian Ambassador to Morocco and the Moroccan Ambassador to Canada, being involved. Morocco and Nova Scotia share similar soils along their respective coastlines, something that happened when the continents split during Pangea, 300 million years ago.

The first two days of the conference were working days for the Global Geoparks Council and Board of Directors. Dr. John Calder, founder of the Cliffs of Fundy, is a member of the international Board and is a highly respected geologist amongst his international peers.

The next three days of the conference included all the international delegates, 1500 from 50 countries. The last two days had a field tour to M'Goun UNESCO Global Geopark scheduled, with overnight camping in local vil-



A photo op at convention centre entrance, M'Goun UNESCO Global Geopark which Cliffs of Fundy GeoPark was twinned with because of their closeness 300 million years ago. (Submitted)

lages in the geopark.

This was a very well organized conference with a full agenda discussing geological aspects of the geoparks, as well as economic development, education, tourism, all aspects Cliffs of Fundy is beginning to realize, but we also realize there is still a lot of work to be done for our communities regarding all of these things. This was a learning experience and a wonderful opportunity to network with representatives from other geoparks, most of which are facing the same issues and challenges as our geopark. For

example, I sat at a table with two men from two different geoparks in France; two women representing UNESCO headquarters in Paris; two men from Turkey; and a woman from New Zealand. One learns just by talking with people with geopark experience from around the world.

September 7 and 8 were two 12-hour days of meetings, very exciting information and learning about programs and projects offered in other geoparks. Friday evening, September 8th, on returning to my hotel, and settling in for the evening, at approx. 11:10 pm,



Delegates were welcomed in the reception with the traditional Moroccan greeting of tea. (Submitted)

I heard a loud smash, the room started to move, bed went back and forth, a crack appeared on the wall in front of me and I realized, in the split seconds one does, this was an earthquake! I have never dressed so fast in my life! (some day I will look back with a chuckle as I was hopping on one foot, floor moving, trying to get my foot in the leg of my pants!). I grabbed my purse, passport and phones and got out of that room as quickly as I could! People were coming out of their rooms, going down the stairs as quickly as possible, and getting outside the building. The hotel had 5 floors and I was on the third floor.

Once outside, I looked for the Canadian group, as there were representatives there from four of Canada's five geoparks - British Columbia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia.

I was standing in a group of people, and one man beside me said, "Madam, are you ok?" My hands were shaking and I said no, not really! He said to me, don't you worry, we're used to earthquakes here and everything will be alright. You be happy! (another thing to smile about) He was very

thoughtful to a stranger in his country, but I just wanted to find the group of Canadians to be sure everyone was ok.

Once spotted, I went over to them. The two other representatives from Nova Scotia, the Cliffs of Fundy Director and the Geoscientist, were not with the group but someone texted and they were on the way back from the Souk (marketplace), and arrived shortly after. Both were ok. We were all very fortunate as we were all ok. Dr. Calder, being part of the international Board of Directors, was staying at a hotel with that group but he texted they were all ok.



The Canadian booth at international pavilion featured a scene of Five Islands. (Submitted)

The hotel management had us remain outside for approx. 3 hours. Our group went to the median between streets in front of our hotel - it had benches, grass to sit on. Once the hotel was checked for damage, and deemed ok to go back in, we were allowed in the lobby and on the main level but not upstairs to our rooms. Many slept in blankets provided by the hotel, in the lobby on sofas and chairs, in the lounge, around the pool, in the median on the ground in front of the hotel - wherever they could lie down and get

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Streets at the convention centre were lined with international flags for the 10th international UNESCO Global Geopark Conference comprising 1500 delegates representing 50 countries. (Submitted)



A model of dinosaur greeted the 1,500 delegates in the reception area of the convention centre. (Submitted)

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