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WordPress Debug Constants Explained

WP_DEBUG_LOG writes errors to a publicly accessible file that Google has indexed on thousands of sites. Here's the fix, plus what every debug constant does.

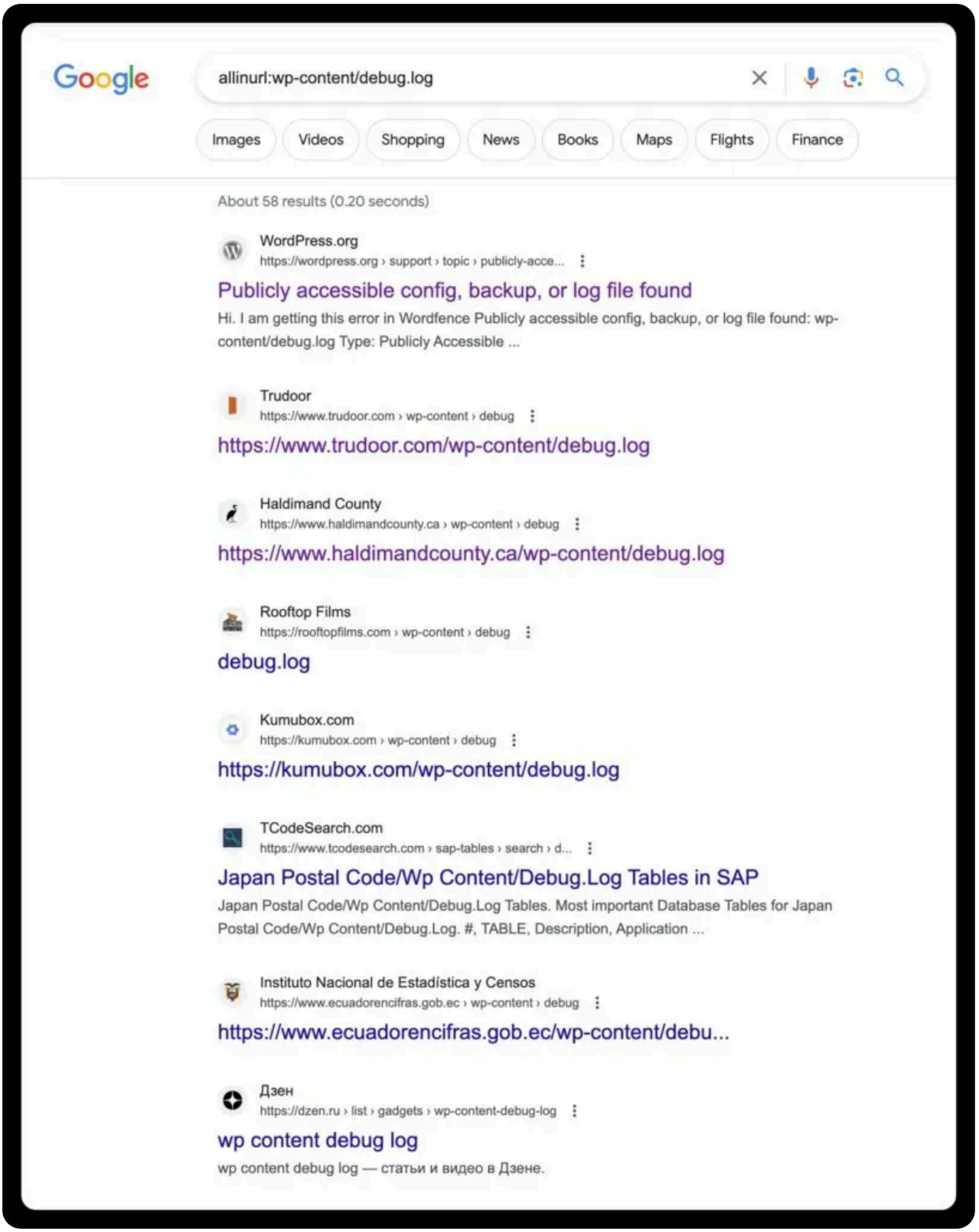
Phil E. Taylor | 28 August 2026

WordPress has a handful of PHP constants that control how errors are reported. They all live in your `/wp-config.php` file, alongside the hardening constants we check for such as DISALLOW_FILE_EDIT, and most WordPress developers never touch them. That's usually fine until something breaks and you have no idea why.

But one of these constants has a security problem that most people miss entirely.

Why is WP_DEBUG_LOG a security risk on live sites?

This is the one that catches people out. Setting `WP_DEBUG_LOG` to `true` writes PHP errors to `/wp-content/debug.log`, and that file is publicly accessible by default. Anyone who knows the path can read it. Worse, Google has already indexed thousands of them.



These log files can expose database credentials, file paths, plugin internals, and other details that make an attacker's job much easier. If your site has `WP_DEBUG_LOG` set to `true` in production, fix it now.

The fix is to pass a custom, hard-to-guess filename instead of `true`:

```
define( 'WP_DEBUG_LOG', 'myOwnRandomFileName_as8f6safsif.log' );
```

Now nobody can guess the URL. The log still works, but it's not sitting at a predictable path waiting to be found.

If you're worried that your debug log has already been exposed, run a suspect content scan to check for any signs of compromise.

The WordPress debug constants

Here's what each one does and when to use it. The official docs are at WordPress.org's Advanced Administration Handbook if you want the full reference.

WP_DEBUG

The main switch. Set it to `true` and WordPress will show PHP errors, notices, and warnings on screen.

```
define( 'WP_DEBUG', true );
```

Leave this on in development, turn it off in production. Simple.

WP_DEBUG_LOG

As covered above, this writes errors to a log file instead of printing them on screen. Useful for production sites where you don't want visitors seeing PHP warnings, but **never set it to** `true` on a live site. Always use a custom filename.

```
define( 'WP_DEBUG_LOG', 'myOwnRandomFileName_as8f6safsif.log' );
```

WP_DEBUG_DISPLAY

Controls whether errors show on screen. Set to `false` on live sites so errors get logged but visitors don't see them.

```
define( 'WP_DEBUG_DISPLAY', false );
```

SCRIPT_DEBUG

Forces WordPress to load the full, unminified versions of its CSS and JS files instead of the minified ones. Handy when you're debugging front-end issues and need to actually read the source.

```
define( 'SCRIPT_DEBUG', true );
```

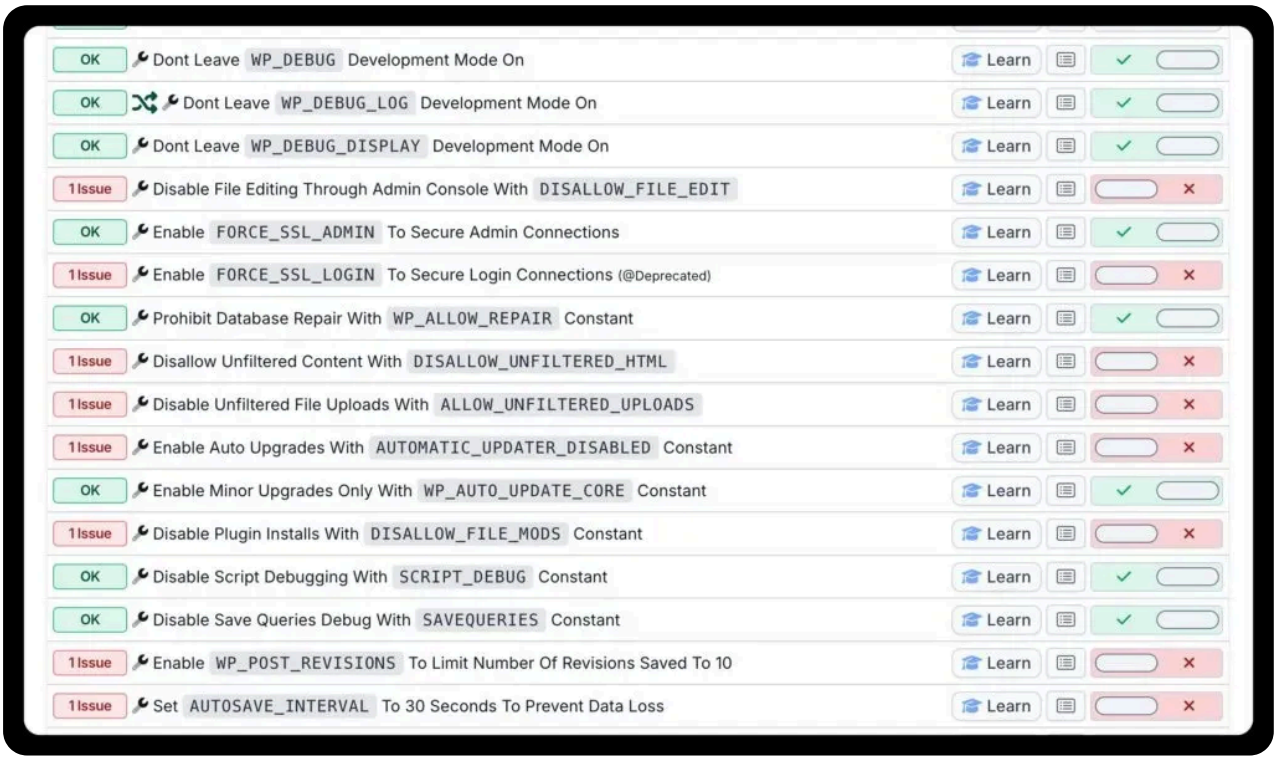
SAVEQUERIES

Stores every database query in `$wpdb->queries` so you can inspect them. Good for tracking down slow queries, but leave it off in production because it adds overhead.

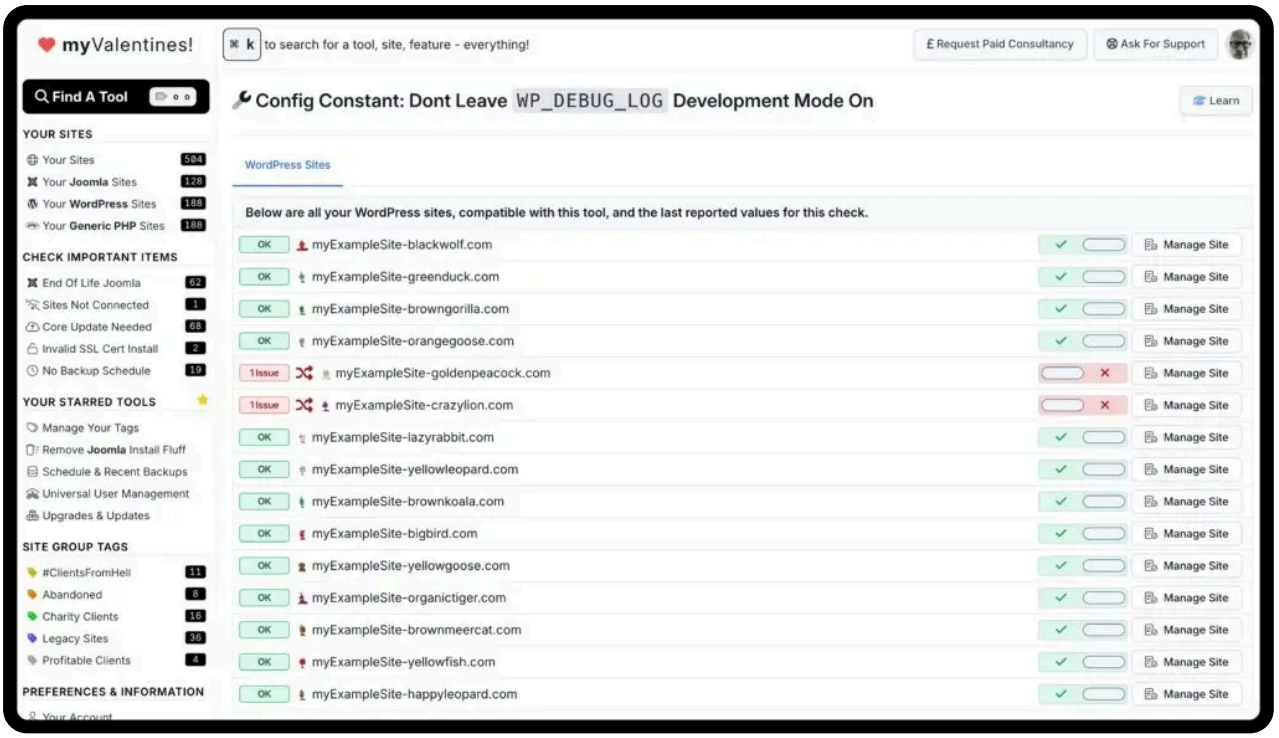
```
define( 'SAVEQUERIES', true );
```

Checking WordPress debug constants across all your sites

Manually checking `wp-config.php` on every site gets old fast. The mySites.guru snapshot reads your WordPress config and flags anything that doesn't match best practice. Most settings have one-click toggles so you can fix them without editing files. The same one-click approach works for other WordPress configuration checks, like removing the WordPress logo from the admin bar, disabling automatic updates, and cleaning up leftover default content.



You can also view any single constant across all your connected sites at once using the Ultimate Toolset. Click through any snapshot tool to see that value on every site in one view.



For a broader look at hardening your WordPress and Joomla installations, see the WordPress and Joomla security guide.

Need someone to fix it for you?

If debugging isn't your thing, or you'd rather not deal with it, we offer set-fee site fixes at fix.mysites.guru. No hourly billing, no surprises.

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We haven't raised our prices since 2012. But if you want to see the toolset for yourself first, you can use mySites.guru free for a whole month.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is leaving WP_DEBUG_LOG set to true a security risk on a live site?

It writes errors to /wp-content/debug.log, which is publicly accessible by default and has been indexed by Google on thousands of sites, potentially exposing sensitive server information.

How can I safely use WP_DEBUG_LOG without exposing the log file?

Pass a custom, hard-to-guess filename string instead of true, for example define('WP_DEBUG_LOG', 'myRandomFileName.log'), so the file cannot be found by guessing the default path.

How does mySites.guru help manage WordPress debug constants across many sites?

The mySites.guru snapshot reads each site's wp-config.php, flags constants that do not match best practice, and offers one-click toggles to fix them without manual file editing.

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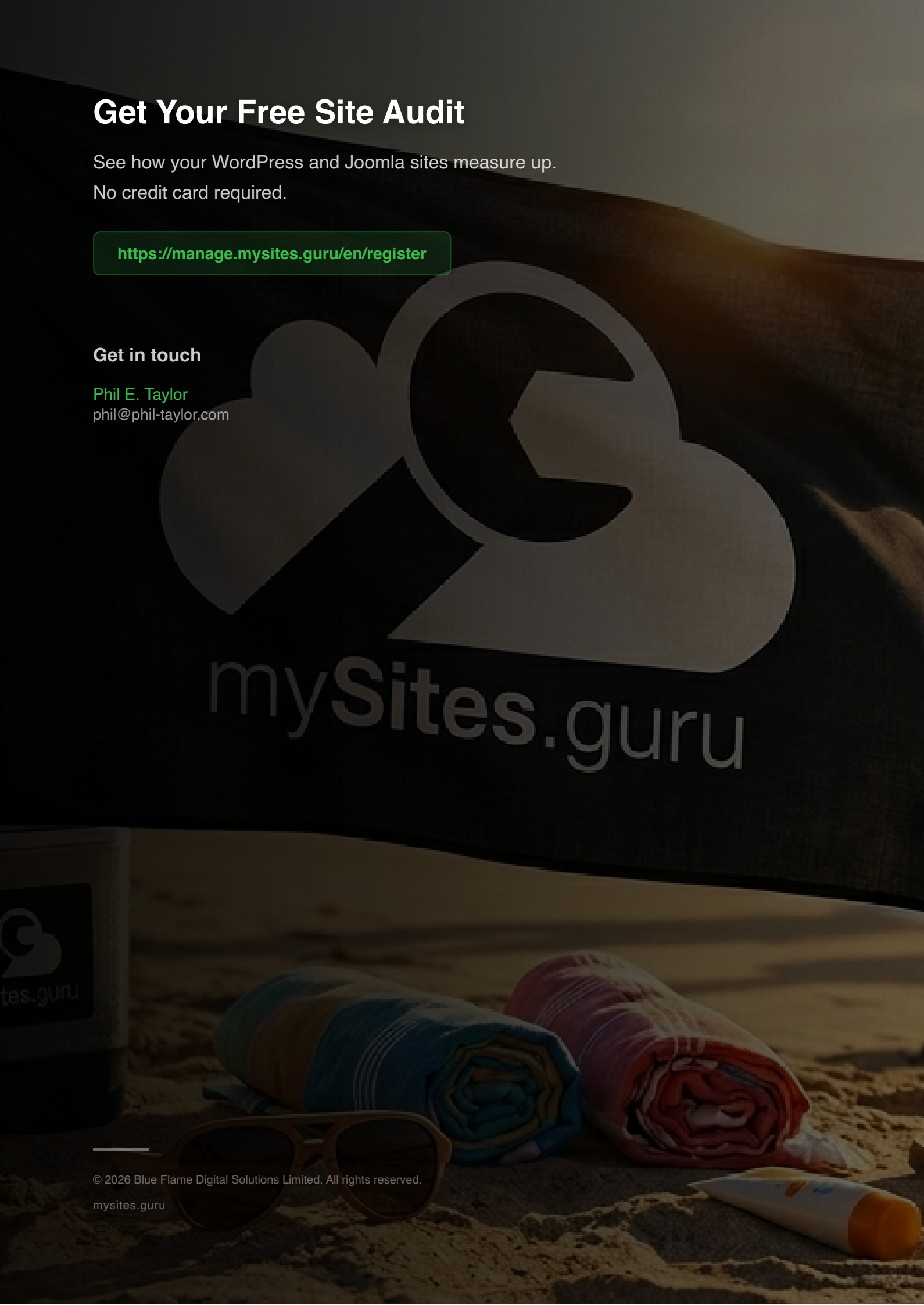

Get in touch

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