European Geoparks Network

ABSTRACTS

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North West Highlands Geopark
Geopark Arouca: Geodiversity and biodiversity during the Palaeozoic

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In September 2006 the “Geopark Natural da Meseta Meridional” was formally accepted in the European and Global Geopark Networks as the first member in Portugal. The project for a new Portuguese Geopark is under development in Arouca (Aveiro, Central Portugal), which is expected to be submitted to these networks during the first quarter of 2008. The area of around 327 km\textsuperscript{2} is dominated by ante-Ordovician rocks of the Douro Group and by Palaeozoic rocks, mainly slates, schists, quartzites, granites, and granites that originates a mountainous relief. Two of the key features of the regional geodiversity are the occurrence of magnificite trilobite fossils with international scientific relevance due to their abundance and size (up to 70 cm in length) and a very rare magmatic phenomenon, locally known as “given birth stones”; that corresponds to biotitic nodules with a granite-muscovite nucleus, that “jump” from the granitic batholith by thermoclastic action. The geological heritage inventory is now concluded. In the Arouca region, 30 geosites were identified, characterized and sorted in relation to their relevance. Proposals for the conservation of the most sensitive geosites are being presented to the municipality in order to assure the best conditions for a future inclusion in geotourist products.

This natural heritage is complemented with a rich cultural heritage expressed by the traditional architecture, roman mining works, agriculture, a diversified gastronomy based on local products, a local cattle breed, etc. Supported on this extraordinary natural and cultural heritage, the Arouca municipality is leading the creation of a new association in order to manage the future Geopark. This association will join public and private institutions that operate in the region. The preparation of the application for this new Geopark is sponsored by the Portuguese Ministry of the Environment, Territory and Regional Development and supported by a team of geoscience specialists from different Portuguese and Spanish universities.