What is a Geopark?

When talking about natural values and their protection respectively, even nowadays most people think about rain forests covered by mist, colourful birds and herbaceous plants having beautiful flowers. How can one like a cliff or a road-cut or the brittle and silent rocks? The raising of the significance of lifeless natural values to the same rank as that of the above-mentioned ones (beyond the protection of caves) was not particularly well received at an international level; however, after a while, more and more voices spoke up for the importance of the protection and the demonstration of our geological heritage. The UNESCO’s Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences announced its Geopark Programme in 1997, and then in 2000 a committed group of French, German, Spanish and Greek experts established the European Geoparks Network, which today already has 32 members. A Geopark is a territory where numerous sites of geological and geomorphological values can be found. They are of outstanding significance from a scientific and educational point of view as well as having an aesthetic value, (if the word biodiversity was created for describing the variation of species and communities; can we not similarly use the word geodiversity?). Through sustainable geotourism, a Geopark — situated in an adequately large territory — would even be able to serve in the development of the local economy. One of the crucial tasks is to make the visitors and the local inhabitants realise the significance of the geological heritage. A Geopark would never lend a helping hand to those who make money selling geological values (for example selling fossils and minerals) nor to those who would damage these values. Emphasising the complexity, it is necessary to point out that in the area of the geoparks significant historical, cultural and ecological values can be found. The involvement of local communities and organisations is desirable (for example the local organisation for nature conservation can play an important role in the case of cleaning a poron or an abandoned quarry from the dumped waste products). The council who is responsible for managing the Geopark will work out how their organisation can join the environmental education and scientific research work together with the co-operating partners. Moreover, it consistently carries out an operational plan, which explains in detail how the economical interests of local inhabitants can harmonise with the protection of the various natural and regional values. And last, but not least geoparks, as members of the international networks, keep close contacts with the co-organisations, and they mutually call the visitors’ attention both to the values introduced by the partners and their activities. Thus, it is to be seen that a geopark is not a protected area with new restrictions, it is not only a geo-scientific park and not only a collection of geological key sections and nature trails.

The Balaton Uplands National Park Directorate decided to make preparations for the establishment of the Bakony–Balaton Geopark and to join the European Geoparks Network in 2004 (and through this the UNESCO Global Network of National Geoparks).

Our prospective partners (municipalities, civil organisations, organic-farmers, eco-schools, etc.) were informed about the concept of the Geopark and the possibilities of the co-operation in spring 2006, and a great interest was shown by them. The invited future partners seemed to understand that the essential goal is not only the acquisition of a “Marketing Diploma”, but also providing the concerned region with a basically new function, which may be useful for a few communities from several points of view. By virtue of the introduction of the name (logo, etc.) of Bakony–Balaton Geopark as a trade mark of high-quality, the inhabitants of the area will get the chance to develop products and high-level services conducted on the values of sustainable development. In order to promote this the organisation of training is planned (for example accredited geotour guides could be invited to the region and offer their programmes).

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The land of the calmed-down volcanoes and dinosaurs

It can be impartially stated that the Bakony–Balaton Geopark area internationally has an outstandingly rich geological past and geological build-up. It is located in the western part of Hungary with an area covering more than 3100 square kms. It can be found North of the Lake Balaton, which is the largest shallow-water lake in Central Europe, and it also encompasses a large part of the Bakony Mountains. This leaflet can give you no more than a taste of the many impressive natural sights and geological phenomena that are located in the area.

Part of the Bakony Mountains—emphasises the introduction of our geological heritage. It is worth visiting this exhibition, where, besides the minerals of the Carpathian Basin, mammal remains recently found in the vicinity of the Lake Balaton, can also be admired. The latter are displayed at an exhibition (having an expressive name): “Giants of the Ice Age”. Talking about the fossil finds from the past, the vertebrae finds (including dinosaur remains) of the Late Cretaceous period (85–90 million years ago) and found in the High Bakony area, may be considered as the greatest palaeontological sensation of the last few years (on the left, the photo shows the skull of a crocodylus named *Irrhakatosuchus*). Its significance is due not only to the fact that it is the only locality that yielded dinosaur remains, but also to the fact that the number of armoured dinosaur remains found here exceeds the number of such remains derived from other European localities.

Although the remains are kept by the Hungarian National History Museum (Budapest), plans are being outlined to establish a “dino park” in the vicinity of the locality, with the co-operation of several organisations. The Bakony Mountains—emphasises the introduction of our geological heritage. It is worth visiting this exhibition, where, besides the minerals of the Carpathian Basin, mammal remains recently found in the vicinity of the Lake Balaton, can also be admired. The latter are displayed at an exhibition (having an expressive name): “Giants of the Ice Age”. Talking about the fossil finds from the past, the vertebrae finds (including dinosaur remains) of the Late Cretaceous period (85–90 million years ago) and found in the High Bakony area, may be considered as the greatest palaeontological sensation of the last few years (on the left, the photo shows the skull of a crocodylus named *Irrhakatosuchus*). Its significance is due not only to the fact that it is the only locality that yielded dinosaur remains, but also to the fact that the number of armoured dinosaur remains found here exceeds the number of such remains derived from other European localities.

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