

Eleven new sites join UN-backed geo-parks list



High Force, England's biggest waterfall

5 October 2010 – Eleven new sites of outstanding panoramic beauty and scientific importance, from subterranean rivers in China to Ice-Age-shaped landscapes in Finland, have been **added** to the United Nations-backed Global Network of National Geoparks.

The sites from nine countries, admitted at the 9th European Geoparks Conference in Lesbos, Greece, which ended today, bring to 77 in 24 countries the number of geoparks in the Global Network, created under the aegis of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) in 2004. All have tourist potential, a condition for admission.

The new members include the Basque Coast in northern Spain with cliffs and spectacular abrasion platforms, where a long cultural history is represented by cave paintings, shamanistic artefacts and a magnificent Gothic church; the Dong Van Karst Plateau in northern Viet Nam with a limestone landscape and rich cultural heritage; and Jeju Island in the Republic of Korea, a volcanic island with a tourism-based economy and several major preserved geosites.

Other Asian sites include two from China: Leye-Fengshan in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in the southwest, with numerous karst features, large subterranean rivers, karst windows, natural bridges, and extensive cave systems; and Ningde in Fujian, showcasing rock and water interaction in gigantic erosion shapes; and one from Japan – San'in Kaigan National Park, a beautiful coastal area integrating geological heritage with local development.

Italy has two sites: Cilento and Vallo di Diano in the Apennine Mountains, with outstanding mountainous landscapes, cave formations and coastal features; and the Tuscan Mining Park, the most important mining district in central Italy, with mountainous landscapes and important seaside tourist centres.

The other European sites are: Vikos-Aoos in northern Greece, an area of unspoiled panoramic mountains, impressive gorges, and an exceptional variety of natural habitats, ranging from lowland to Alpine; and Rokua in northern Finland, the northernmost Geopark near the Arctic Circle, with a unique combination of geology, nature and culture shaped by the Ice Age, such as glacial ridges, pine and lichen-clad heaths, small ponds – and prehistoric human settlement.

In the Americas, Stonehammer on Canada's east coast, the birth place of geological research in the country, was admitted as a site where geology is fully integrated into the residents' daily life, with numerous leisure and tourism initiatives around the geological heritage and landscape.

To be selected, sites must contain geological heritage of exceptional scientific and educational importance, rarity or beauty. They must also possess an effective management structure, clearly defined boundaries and a sufficiently large area to permit significant sustainable economic development, primarily through tourism.

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