



MONTS D'ARDÈCHE

GÉOPARK des Monts d'Ardèche

Candidate to the world Geopark label in 2014, extraordinary since 550 million years



The approval process for the aspiring Geopark of Monts d'Ardèche must also be seen in the broader context of the registration of Grotte Chauvet (the earliest known cave paintings) on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Through its international dimension, the Geopark project will contribute to strengthen the French application for the UNESCO label, as it deals with a theme very close to Grotte Chauvet. The opening the facsimile of Grotte Chauvet in 2014 is a chance for the aspiring Geopark, as it might modify the type of tourism in Ardèche, which is now mostly seen only as a nature destination allowing outdoor activities in beautiful and preserved landscapes. It will give the opportunity to develop and promote more in depth the interpretation of landscapes and of the geological history.

For more information:
Regional natural Park of Monts d'Ardèche
07380 Jaujac - France
+33 4 75 36 38 60
geoparc@parc-monts-ardeche.fr
www.geopark-monts-ardeche.fr

RhôneAlpes ^{Région} ardèche LE CONSEIL GÉNÉRAL



Maison du Parc
Domaine de Rochemure
07380 Jaujac
Tél. 04 75 36 38 60
www.pnrma.fr



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An extraordinary geoheritage

Education and sustainable geotourism

The Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park presents an extraordinary geological heritage that is meaningful in term of education and economic development. Ardèche is one of the few French regions where it is possible to find visible elements of **the earth history over a very long period.**

The tourism policy of the Park is based on sustainable tourism (the Park is awarded as Charter Area for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas since 2011), and its development project is systematically based on the promotion of cultural and natural heritage which is naturally linked to the geological settings, that shaped the landscapes of Ardèche and determined the conditions for human settlement on this territory.

The Geopark in Ardèche can firstly be seen as a **show-room for any geological ages dating back to 550 million years** (pre-Triassic peneplain, Triassic sandstone, rocks of Late Quaternary, etc.). In addition, the presence of different volcanic episodes has strongly marked the territory with visible traces in the landscape: strombolian craters, basalt columns, necks and dykes, maar, etc. This is due to its specific position on both the crystalline massif and the vast sedimentary basin of the southeastern sector.

The Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park has been working with local scientists on the development of **geotourism and geoeducation** in Ardèche for twelve years, especially trough interpretation projects. Today it gives legitimacy to the Park to become an aspiring Geopark.



The
regional
natural
park
of Monts
d'Ardèche

Located in the south east of France, on the western edge of Massif Central, the Monts d'Ardèche Regional Natural Park is an Aspiring Geopark, which offers a fantastic geological heritage, including various elements linked to volcanism: well conserved strombolian cones, tens of kilometers of basalt columns, and other interesting geological objects such as granitic chaos, dinosaur's footprints, etc.

The Park covers almost a third (ca 180,000 ha) of the administrative department of Ardèche, including 132 villages. At the interface between Massif Central and the Rhône valley, Monts d'Ardèche are crossed by numerous side valleys including the Ardèche and Eyrieux river r and tributaries. This results in marked relief, exceptional landscapes and major natural areas.

In the central part, "Serres Boutiérots" offer smooth and rolling hills and "Cévennes Ardéchoise" presents deep wooded valleys and the so-called "Ardèche Young volcanoes". The "Cevennes Piedmont" in the southern part is marked by terraced vineyards based on Triassic sandstones. Southern Cevennes lay further south and cover a wide area from a Pretriassic peneplain to an arid shale slope.

The Park includes six typical landscape units, each of them presenting remarkable features. In the northern part of the Park, "Region des succs" presents volcanic phenomena such as Mont Gerbier, famous for sheltering the sources of the Loire, whereas "Plateau de Vernoux" shows remarkable meadows.



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