

POTENTIAL FOR GEORGIA TO JOIN THE GLOBAL GEOPARKS NETWORK

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Georgia is located in the central part of the Caucasus along the Eastern coast of the Black Sea. The Caucasus represents a panerozoic collisional orogen that extends over 1200 km from Caspian to Black Sea. Currently it represents the Tethyan segment connecting the Mediterranean and Iran-Himalayan orogenic belts, between the Gondwana-derived Arabian plate and East European platform (Gamkrelidze, 1986). Georgia with its unique geological heritage and favorable climate is an excellent destination for the development of Geoparks and the Geotourism industry. Its territory covers all major structural units of the Caucasian Orogeny: the Greater and the Lesser Caucasus mobile belts and Intermountain depressions lying between them (Trans-Caucasus microplate). This area represents a real "Natural geological laboratory", exposing magmatic, sedimentary and metamorphic rocks, ranging wide on the geologic time scale (from the Neoproterozoic to the Quaternary inclusive). These rocks keep records of 700 million years of the history of geological processes that have built numerous geological sites of international importance observed in the present-day Georgia. The unique geological structure of Georgia's territory allows for the potential establishment of several geoparks and the preparation of several geotouristic routes (Gamkrelidze et al., 2011). As potential geoparks we could consider: 1. Kazbegi - Quaternary volcanics and Pre-Mesozoic crystalline basement (Daryali massif); 2. Vardzia - Mid Miocene Megacalder explosion products (thickness more than 800 m) and an ignimbrite flow (35 km length) in the river Mtkvari valley; 3. Dmanisi - Dmanisi ancient hominids site and the Quaternary continental basaltic flow of Mashavera valley; 4. Sataplia - Dinosaur Footprint, together Sataplia cave and Prometheus cave. Geotourism routes: 1- Along the Georgian military road: Tbilisi - Dariali massif (130 km); 2.- Tbilisi-Dzirula Masiff -Mestia-Ushguli (450 km). It should be noted that all these areas for geoparks and geotraverse contain important cultural heritage well. At the end, according to the modern multidisciplinary research, the Argonauts expedition to the Kingdom of Colchis (ancient Georgia) in the quest of —Golden Fleece" could have been a real event (Okrostsvaridze et al., 2014). If so, Georgia should be considered as the oldest country which was visited by - geotourists.

References

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