

"There's Gold at Foz!" and other geotourism products for raising awareness of the Naturtejo Geopark geomining heritage

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Geopark Naturtejo da Meseta Meridional shows an important geological and mining heritage, whose marks are still deep in the landscape and memory, made of open-pit and sub-surface mines or tailing piles, of over at least a 3000 year period. The "Moor Lady Mines" at the quartzite crests are legendary reminiscences of iron ore exploitation coming from the Iron Age to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The "conheiras", "conhais" or "gorroais", being the most important ones Arneiro, Chameca, Foz do Cobrao, Termas de Monfortinho and Ponsul, are kilometric-size testimonies of placer mining during the Roman period described by Pliny the Elder in the Tejo basin. In the last two centuries 112 mining districts existed in the Geopark territory and only in the Idanha-a-Nova County, for 116 years, 1960 mine discovers were registered. In a mining land, the "black gold fever" has its own specificities associated to migrations of land workers, illusions related with the Industrial Revolution, experiences of "going for ore" and the smuggling of wolfram and tin. In this wide region there was also exploited lead, barium, phosphorous, copper, silver, mercury(?), zinc, antimony, titanium ores and "semiprecious stones". But it is gold that shapes the cultural landscape of the region. Associated to the shepherd's way of life, gold was made nomad, moving families exclusively dedicated to gold gandaia (panning), or whole communities when the land work or food was scarce. The "Gandaia" axis was and always has been the Tejo River, as well as its tributaries and sub-tributaries, namely Erges, Ocreza, Ponsul, Aravil and Serta. It is this cognitive mapping that is being searched nowadays for fostering development through innovative logics based on geotourism.

In Segura, next to Tejo Internacional Natural Park, the Mines Trail was built in 2005. This walking trail is the starting point for the development of a Centre of Geomining Interpretation for the region of Idanha-a-Nova. For now, the local Tourism Office shows a small exhibition called "I'm going to Ore" pretending to put in context the initial research on the history and memory of the impact and aspiring of Segura Mining Company, during the decades of the 40's and 50's. This trail has been the reason for many thematic walking and 4WD fieldtrips. Closeby, at the village of Salvaterra do Extremo, a local NGO and the tourism company "Casa do Forno", are betting in the legacy of lead and gold mining to develop thematic visits in the areas of Vale de Idanha and Batao, "across hills, mines and valleys". The impressive Conhal do Arneiro Roman Gold Mine is one of the 16 geomonuments from the

Geopark and was protected under Portas de Ródão Natural Monument. Still in a preliminary stage, Nisa County developed a walking trail named "Conhal Trails", which is used as an interpretation path of the ancient Roman arruigae, in the Naturtejo's tourism programmes as much as the educational programmes (www.naturtejo.com), for hundreds of visitors. Some overview features of the mining exploitation are provided during boat trips by the outdoor company Incentivos Outdoor. This company also developed the tourist product "There's Gold at Foz!", at the Schist Village of Foz do Cobrao, based on the knowhow of gandraia people still living there. The differentiating tourist activity is nowadays a reference of Naturtejo Geopark, the concept of panning for gold being used by a growing number of outdoor companies operating in the region. The integration of this heritage in the newly-born national web platform "Mines Guide" (www.roteirodeminas.pt/) aims to contribute for the development of national routes of mining heritage.



9th European Geoparks Conference 2010

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