

The Ichnological Park of Penha Garcia: the most attended open air class at the Naturtejo Geopark (Portugal)

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Naturtejo Geopark, a member of the European and of the Unesco's Global Geoparks Networks is located in central Portugal near the eastern Portuguese-Spanish border.

The Ichnological Park of Penha Garcia is one of the 16 geosites of the Naturtejo Geopark and it is located in the gorge of the Ponsul River, near Penha Garcia village of the Idanha-a-Nova Municipality. The ichnofossils occur in the Lower Ordovician mud-quartzarenitic rocks of the Armorican Quartzite Formation. These fossils had been studied by the pioneer Nery Delgado back in 1885.

Penha Garcia is famous worldwide for its ichnofossils, the Cruziana mainly, which are feeding trails produced by trilobites and other morpho-similar life forms. This natural heritage needs to be preserved for the next generations and that is why the Idanha-a-Nova Municipality has classified the area of the gorge of the Ponsul River as a Property of Municipal Interest.

The "Fossils Trail" is a pedestrian trail (since 2003) 3 km long crossing the Ichnological Park. This trail aims at the promotion of nature conservation and the raising of the people's awareness of the geosciences. When on this trail, one gains a holistic perspective of all types of heritage: natural, historical, cultural and ethnographic. The valley of the Ponsul River in Penha Garcia can be considered a huge interdisciplinary classroom in the wild where field classes of several subjects from the pre-school to higher education levels can be organized.

The Naturtejo Geopark has been promoting field classes in the Ichnological Park as of 2007/2008, when the educational programs addressed to the school population were first created and implemented. The Ichnological Park is the setting for two field trips of the Educational Program named "The School meets the Geopark" and also of a fossils workshop in a program entitled "Geopark goes to School". Some of these activities take place in the scope of annual educational projects or during the celebration of theme days. In addition, several educational resources have been created, namely the Trilobite and Cruziana models and an educational book addressed to teachers - Fossils Trail: Questions and Answers - The Ichnological Park of Penha Garcia. New educational resources are being produced for the 2010/11 school year, as the Ichnological Park is the most requested geosite for field activities.

References

- Catana, M. & Rocha, D. 2009. The Role of the Educational Programs on Tourism development of Naturtejo and Arouca Geoparks. In: *New Challenges with Geotourism. Proceedings of the VIII European Geoparks Conference, Idanha-a-Nova, 14-16 September 2009 (Portugal) / Eds. C. Neto de Carvalho & Joana Rodrigues. Idanha-a-Nova Municipality / Geopark Naturtejo da Meseta Meridional, 2009, pp 61-65.*



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