

## Cultural aspects of geological sites in the Golden Geopark of Lapland

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The proposed “Golden Geopark of Lapland” in northern Finland and inside the Arctic Circle is one of the most unique wilderness areas in northern Europe. It comprises dozens of rounded and rocky fells crossed by the deep river valleys of Ivalojoki and Lemmenjoki. It consists of 23 geological sites and 22 cultural historical sites of various types. The distinction between them is often blurred, since many geological sites have cultural aspects, too. Most of them are related to the 140-year history of gold mining. Finnish Lapland’s gold history begins with the Ivalojoki River in 1868, when the first discoveries of gold nuggets in the soil were made there. The discovery led to a great gold rush amid the uninhabited wilderness. Close to 500 men could be counted in the area, digging and panning for gold. Rocky gullies, glacial melt water channels and sandy river terraces were transformed into colourful gold-panning communities. Gold-bearing quartz veins in Precambrian bedrock were also prospected. Mine shafts tens of metres deep were dug in solid rock with rudimentary tools.

For centuries, people have been fascinated by the peculiar landforms, and many popular beliefs and myths are linked to them. Boulders and cliffs situated in peculiar places have been thought to be sacred places. The rugged Ukko Island and the fells of Nattaset, with rocky formations on their summits, are visible from a distance of tens of kilometres. They are known to have been the ceremonial sites of the old Sámi, who are now the only indigenous people of the EU. Fish and reindeer were sacrificed in order to ensure success in fishing and hunting, and to appease the unseen spirits. Geological formations related to the history of gold prospecting and sacred places are at present famous tourist destinations, too.

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