

Geological heritage management: monitoring the Azores Geopark geosites

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The monitoring of geosites ensures better conservation of geological heritage and improves the management practiced in a given geosite. A monitoring plan aims to identify the threats that endanger the integrity of the geosite and quantify the loss of its relevance over time.

At the end of 2013 an experimental monitoring of the geological heritage of the Azores Geopark was implemented, with several field tests in the Terceira, Faial, and Santa Maria islands that allow preparation of a final checklist and monitoring table to be applied systematically to all terrestrial geosites in all Azorean islands. The monitoring record includes parameters such as the geosite status (cleanliness, condition of access, signaling), its geological conditions of interest (conservation, threats, natural evolution) and the characterization of the public (direct counting and behaviors observation). Given the high number of Azorean geosites and its dispersion through the archipelago, the monitoring of the geosites will be implemented in close cooperation with the Nature Guards Corporation of the 9 Island Natural Parks (key partners of the Azores Geopark).

The effective monitoring started in 2014 with a monthly frequency in all islands, and the first results are expected by the end of the year. Monitoring is scheduled throughout the calendar year, covering different seasons and natural conditions (e.g., weather conditions), and visiting conditions (e.g., high and low number of visitors).

In the near future, the Action Plan of the Azores Geopark includes the monitoring of the shallow submarine geosites, which should start in 2015 in partnership with regional dive companies and sea related institutes, such as the Azores University Department of Fish and Oceanography.

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