

The Triassic of Monte San Giorgio in the World Heritage List of UNESCO: An opportunity for science, the local people and tourism

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In 2003 the Middle Triassic geological units of Monte San Giorgio (MSG) have been recorded in the World Heritage List of UNESCO thanks to their exceptional palaeontological value (80 fish, 30 reptile and a good amount of invertebrate species, distributed in 5 major distinct fossiliferous levels). The area of MSG has been a very important focus of palaeontological studies since the middle of the 19th century. It is one of the so-called classic fossil sites. The UNESCO recognition concerns, for the moment, the Swiss side of MSG; though, the Italian side is now being proposed as a candidate as well. Triassic rocks of MSG outcrop over a 11 km² area; a 20 km² buffer area allows a more complete knowledge of this mountain's geolo-

gical history from the Carboniferous to the Cretaceous. We must remember also other interesting natural (especially botanical) aspects of this mountain, that need to be preserved. In May, 2001, an official agreement for the MSG has been subscribed by 14 public bodies together with other 24 public and private boards, both Italian and Swiss. The aim is to promote either cooperation between the two countries or socio-economic development of the area; also, it is necessary to protect its scientific heritage and, at the same time, to coordinate scientific excavations of fossils. About ten projects INTERREGIIIa (an European Union founded programme) have already been forwarded. Planning and management should be



Excavation site Acqua del Ghiffo near Crocifisso: Since 1997 a team from the Palaeontological Institute and Museum of the University of Zurich studies a fossiliferous section in the lower Meride Formation (Ladinian, Middle Triassic). The detailed study of taxonomy, frequency, spreading and preservation of the fossils and the composition of the sediment allows the reconstruction of the palaeoenvironment in the Middle Triassic marine basin (Foto by Markus Felber).

A short comment by the Chief Editor

Long before 1997, these strata were systematically explored by teams of the Zürich institute, and magnificent collections of Vertebrates were assembled: from 1924 onwards under B. Peyer and from 1950 to 1968 under the direction of E. Kuhn-Schwyder. The latter integrated also invertebrate paleontologists as H. Rieber in his team, and was very successful in publicizing the results of the Zürich group's work. This has largely contributed to the recognition of the Mte. S. Giorgio as being worth to figure in the UNESCO List.

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carried out on the basis of international agreements. Regarding the scientific aspects, the “*MSG Scientific Forum*” (made of representatives of Meride, Induno Olona, Milano and Besano Museums, Universities of Zurich, Milano and Varese) together with government authorities will identify the scientific targets (i.e. excavation campaigns, focused investigations) and then coordinate and check the research as well as the relative publications both scientific and popular. Other tasks will be organizing courses for teachers, didactic excursions on the

field, scientific congresses, always encouraging divulgation and popularization of palaeontological contents (scientific excavations, fossil preparation and exhibits) as well as quarries of ornamental stones, mines, old industrial structures, that are strictly related to the local communities since many centuries. Today, it is a focus for scientific research, the protection and management of the mountain, and the promotion and divulgation for educational purposes of its exceptional heritage.