



Examining the concepts of "Geoparks" and "Geoheritage" in the Americas as a potential legacy for IYPE

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Globally, the concept of geological heritage as exemplified by terms such as Geoparks and Geoheritage have an intimate relationship to broader principles that recognize the importance of earth history to our cultural heritage. For centuries, individuals and societies around the world have long treasured the significance of unique rocks, landscapes, fossils, and other geological features as worthy elements of study, preservation and enjoyment by all. From these shared ideas were derived the earliest practices of establishing “parks” to capture and conserve unique geological (and biological) phenomena. This practice is especially well developed and successful in the Americas where national, state/provincial and regional parks abound. Regrettably, a number of different but related terms now plague the literature including geosites, geotopes, Geoparks, and others. Confusion arising from either a vague or strict definition for these terms has hampered the progress for promoting the concept of geological heritage; much to the detriment of the earth sciences. The earliest use of the term ‘Geoparks’, for instance, dates back to at least the early 1990s in Japan and elsewhere where it was used in the most general sense to denote geographic areas of geological interest. This historic use and many current uses of the term, contrast with the current UNESCO definition of Geoparks. Fortunately such diversity is unavoidable. As part of the celebration denoting the International Year of Planet Earth, the international geoscience community embraced the broader concept of “Geoparks” to help promote the importance of earth sciences to society at large. The legacy of IYPE will continue through the efforts of many who plan to engage in furthering such topics as Geoparks and Geoheritage. Herein we examine the historic, current and potential future of Geoparks and Geoheritage as they apply to the Americas.