



Via GeoAlpina - an international project of IYPE

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Mountainous areas show earth science features in a very conspicuous, frequently even in a spectacular way. Because of the general perception of the beauty of mountains many mountainous regions are well developed in terms of trails and touristic infrastructure. Therefore, mountains are a key area to bring earth sciences closer to people.

In many mountain chains all over the world (e.g., Alps, Pyrenees, Andes, Rocky Mountains) far-ranging walking and hiking trails are developed to serve a broad audience. To provide this audience with basic information in geological phenomena along such trails the project “Via Geo...” was born as an international activity within the International Year of Planet Earth.

The Alps have been selected to act as a pilot project with six Alpine nations participating: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland. Many well maintained trails exist bridging the Alps from the Adriatic Sea in Trieste (Italy) to Monte Carlo (Monaco) in the Western Mediterranean. Some of these trails are included in the project “Via Alpina”. The idea of Via GeoAlpina is to point at geological attractions along the trails of Via Alpina or in their vicinity and offer simple but striking information. Various earth science fields will be covered, such as geology, geophysics, paleontology, mineralogy, hydrogeology, pedology, climatology, and geomorphology. The trail descriptions can be accessed and downloaded from the Via GeoAlpina website. In 2009 every country inaugurated Via GeoAlpina on a national base with a particular opening event in the presence of local authorities and local and national media. These events were accompanied with the distribution of flyers, by offering guided tours and by installation of panels in the field. These activities, however, should be followed by even more actions in the following years. These follow-ups should attract local and regional authorities at state, county or village level and will ideally be financed by private entrepreneurs and local administrations.