



Rocca di Cerere Geopark

The European Geopark "Rocca di Cerere", which is situated in the middle of Sicily, was established in 2001. It is characterized by a rich, geologically diverse environment in which the "chalk-sulphur" plateau, and the sandstone peaks of the Numidic Flysch are outstanding features. Since Palaeolithic times, the inhabitants toiled in and shaped the landscape. The traces of these farmers, shepherds, miners, warriors, paupers and kings, women and men are still watched over under the maternal gaze of the goddess Demeter. The significant mineral deposits of the gypsum-sulphur plateau were laid down during the Messinian Salinity Crisis, between 5.96 and 5.33 million years ago. The crisis was created by the dessication of the Mediterranean Sea, resulting in the precipitation of salts, the most important of which was gypsum. The Erei hills are characterized by high sandstone peaks and a fantastic stepped landscape with plateaus and cuestas created by the differential ero-

sion of hard limestones and soft clay marls. Since pre-historic times miners opened galleries in search of sulphur and the region became important for the extraction of minerals. Here man began to differentiate between halite and the potassium salts. Recent archaeological research in Monte Grande and Milena show that from Minoan to Mycenaean times, the inhabitants of this part of Sicily, exported slabs of sulphur to the rest of the Mediterranean region. The Romans condemned Christians, "ad metalla", to a life of slavery and convict labour in the central part of Sicily. Several hundred slaves died there between the 1st and 5th centuries A. D. In more recent times, geological and mineralogical research resulted in the construction of deep mines within the sulphur plateau and Sicily became the first producer of sulphur minerals in the world. With the collapse of the Sicilian sulphur market and the gradual dismantling of the Sicilian Mining Company (EMS), the mining complex-

es were abandoned and nowadays the area looks as if the workers, the "carusi" of the past, had walked away just a few hours ago, leaving heaps of raw minerals, tools, pay books, cars and underground equipment lying on the ground. Only the potassium salt mines at Pasquasia and Corvillo survived into the 1980s, but closed due to the influx of salts derived from the Ukraine into the western market. The Geopark, which manages these important sites, is formed by nine towns containing four natural reserves and is the only mineralogical park in Sicily.



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