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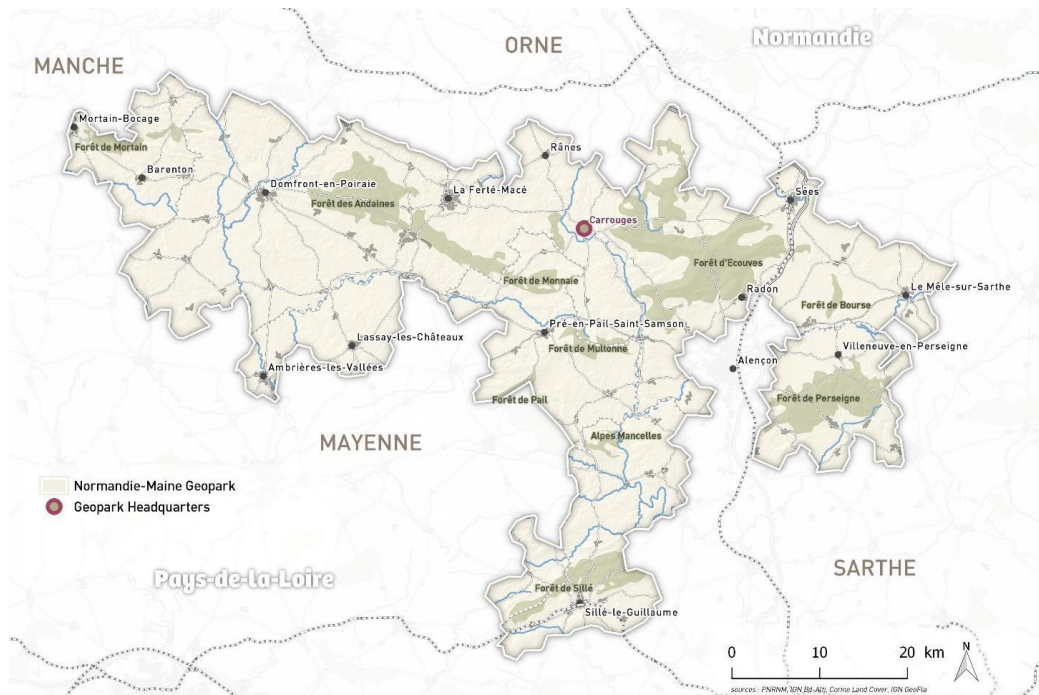
Applicant UNESCO Global Geopark

Normandie-Maine, France

Geographical and geological summary



● Aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark



1. Physical and human geography

The candidate Geopark territory covers 2,650km² and is located in north western France, straddling Normandy and Pays-de-la-Loire. It presents a rather weak demography with 98,000 inhabitants and a density of 38hab/km². This predominantly rural territory has many aspects. With more than 60% occupied by farmland, agriculture is a significant part of the local economy. In the west, it is dominated by cattle breeding - dairy or suckling. Whilst in the east, cereal farming is more prevalent. The forest also provides for significant activity with more than 46,000 hectares of forest. In addition to agriculture and forestry, industry and crafts have a significant presence.

The candidate Geopark thus brings together large forest areas that crown the Armorican sandstone ridgeline, a veritable spine shaping the territory from east to west. It is home to the highest peak in the west of France at 416 metres. These ancient hilly areas bear witness to the Hercynian chain; they present soft shapes known locally as "mountains" and "valleys" but also outcrops such as rocky cliffs and precipices.

In terms of tourism and history, the Geopark is a territory of trails, routes and paths, with Grande Randonnée hiking trails (GR) (Le Chemin Montois) and also the rise in cycle routes now reaching as far as Mont Saint-Michel and the Atlantic coast. These trails routes combined with landscapes and historical interests, encourage a green and family-oriented tourism such as at Bagnoles-de-l'OrneNormandie, a spa town since the 19th century.

The management of the Geopark is assured by the Normandy-Maine Regional Nature Park, classified for the quality of its landscapes and its heritages since 1975. Its administrative head office is located in Carrouges (48.563284 / -0.15038159) where a Visitor's Centre is open to the public from 1 April to 31 October.

2. Geological Features and Geology of International Importance

The candidate Geopark's landscapes are a result of global geodynamics and tell a turbulent story of the formation of two mountain ranges at the heart of the Armorican Massif and the creation of a subsident sedimentary basin, the Paris Basin.

During its history, four major events have left their mark on this territory. The cadomian orogeny that generated significant Cambrian volcanism is still visible in several outcrops on the territory. Then the Hercynian orogeny, which following its long process of erosion, led to the formation of a crest line that today shapes the territory from east to west and is home to the highest point in western France (416 m). In the Mesozoic, the formation of the Paris Basin covered the foothills of the Armorican Massif, thus creating a clear break in the agrarian landscapes in this part of the territory. Then a continental alteration occurred resulting in the upheavals that formed the Pyrenees and the Alps. Finally, the plains scree from the cold periods of the quaternary, which are an exceptional element of the geological heritage of the candidate territory. The great diversity of rocks, phenomena and ages observable on the candidate territory makes Normandy-Maine an area of exceptional geology that testifies to 600 million years of history of our planet and presents the evolution of the palaeoclimates represented through the different ages.

The awareness of the geological heritage is mainly due to the numerous studies carried out since the 19th century. The national inventory conducted in 2007 identified 52 sites, 37 of them were selected in the bid process, 2 of which had international value, 5 national, 21 regional and 9 local.

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