

History of Geological Research in the Carnic Alps



Following the visit of the famous natural scientist Leopold von Buch in 1824 to the Carnic Alps the scientific world has become aware of it for the first time. Today this region represents one of the scientifically best studied areas in the world. This is documented by more than 1000 publications in national and international scientific journals.

Until this stage was reached, however, a long and cumbersome march had to be covered. Geological data are not just lying on the ground to be picked up but have to be discovered and evaluated very careful. Sometimes they even turn up as a meander. The heroic age of geological investigations in the Alps was like an expedition into a terra incognita: There were neither maps nor roads available and if you were lucky you would find some trails leading to a primitive shelter against bad weather. Any other of today's comfort for a longer trip into the mountains was unknown in the early 19th century.

At the beginning, the early geologists who were named "geognosts", had great difficulties to establish an order of rocks and fossils in the "mortuary of Earth's history" of the Carnic Alps. However, in the course of time they were able to increase the knowledge and to draw some unexpected secrets from the rocks.

In fact, there is no other region in the Alps where so many documents of the early Earth have been preserved. Among the many treasures of nature are not only uninterrupted sequences ranging from the Ordovician to the Cretaceous Periods containing the fossil remains of faunas and floras of that time, but also countless geological documents such as rocky cliffs, mystical caves, narrow gorges, high waterfalls, idyllic mountain lakes and witnesses from the ice age. There were two orogenies acting during the Carboniferous and during the Neogene, respectively, being responsible for a scenic landscape full of beauty and wonders. The geological difference resulting from repeated changes between carbonate and shaly rocks is reflected by the vegetation which connects the geologists and the botanists in their deep love for nature.