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Ordovician and Silurian geological heritage in protected natural areas of Iberia

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The Iberian Peninsula is home to the most extensive outcrops of Ordovician and Silurian rocks in Europe, being mainly located in the Variscan Iberian Massif of Spain and Portugal. Many of these outcrops are outstanding in terms of their geomorphological value and impressive landscape, but also because of the palaeontological record they hold or their exceptional stratigraphic record of certain Ordovician and Silurian successions.

The present work proposes 23 sites that typify the rich Iberian geological and palaeontological heritage of these periods, all of them located in natural areas protected by national or regional laws (National and Natural Parks, European Geoparks, Natural Monuments, National Hunting Reserves, or municipal reservations). Selected geosites add value for these natural areas and are chosen in order to disseminate knowledge of the existence of rocks and fossils with examples that are key to interpreting Gondwanan palaeogeography and the regional palaeoenvironmental conditions (cold peri-polar seas with marine platforms bathing a gigantic deserted continent), physical events of local and global nature (eustatism, tectonic events, volcanism), paleobiodiversity, and evolution.

The potential of the Iberian Ordovician and Silurian rocks and fossils as a geotouristic and educational resource require the preparation of fixed information panels, on-site museums, geological viewpoints, georoutes, guided visits, and tourist information guides and pamphlets, which are currently being arranged or already established. The effective use of these 23 Ordovician and Silurian geosites can benefit from the protection afforded to the natural areas in which they are located.

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