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THE GEOTOURISTIC POTENTIAL OF THE OESTE REGION OF PORTUGAL

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Presently, it is under discussion the relevance of the defining a new geopark in the West region of continental Portugal, on the usually called "Região Oeste" (West Region), situated in the central west coast of continental Portugal, and comprises twelve municipalities, Alcobaça, Alenquer, Arruda dos Vinhos, Bombarral, Cadaval, Caldas da Rainha, Lourinhã, Nazaré, Óbidos, Peniche, Sobral de Monte Agraço and Torres Vedras. This is primarily a rural area, but where tourism has been growing. The touristic potential of this region is enhanced with white sandy beaches and surf, attracting thousands of visitors and a growing History and Nature tourism. The area possesses two international relevant geologic features. In the Peniche Peninsula, the Pliensbachian-Toarcian stratotype (international geologic reference that better represents a particular time period of the Earth's History). This site attracts mainly national and international scientist, but there is a growing awareness of its importance by schools and the general public. The visitors search this site not only for its geological significance, but also to observe marine fossil and for its landscape beauty, within the Unesco Berlengas Biosphere Reserve. Other UNESCO site is Óbidos as Creative City in Literature.

Fossils, in particular the dinosaur findings in that area are also international relevant. From the Late Jurassic (~150 Ma), many fossilized dinosaur remains have been found in this area, not only for the quantity of bones found, but also for the significant number of species. Several unique species have been identified from those remains, like *Lourinhanosaurus antunesi*, due to the work many national and international researchers. These fossils area a great local attraction, as part of the collection of the "Museu da Lourinhã", that attracts about 24000 visitors/year, and an under construction thematic park about dinosaurs, "Parque dos Dinossauros da Lourinhã". More than 200 fossil species are unique to the Oeste and have been named after localities within. The "Região Oeste" has also other sites of geologic sites of regional and local importance, some already in the Portuguese national inventory of geosites: The "Afloramento da Brecha Vulcânica de Papôa" is a site near the village of Peniche where it is possible to observe a volcanic breccia surrounded by Lower Jurassic limestones. This breccia is a result of a collapsed volcanic conduit. Another area of interest is the "Corte Geológico da Península de Baleal", North of Peniche, where it is possible to observe a beautiful tilted limestone sequence. The section denominated as "Arribas da Praia do Salgado" is a good area for the public to observe several marine animal fossils, fossilized beaches and a XV century landslide.

We recognize that many more sites have great potential to be included in the geosites list and need to be characterized.