

Kütralkura: the first aspiring Geopark of Chile established in a very active volcanic area

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The first initiative to establish a Geopark in Chile following the guidelines of the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) supported by UNESCO is developed around the active Andean volcanic chain at the Araucanía Region (38° - 39° S; 71° - 72° W). The Geopark project is called Kütralkura (kütral=fire; kura=stone in Mapudungun, the indigenous Mapuche language) and covers an area of approximately 8.100 km² coincident with the districts of Vilcún, Melipeuco, Curacautín and Lonquimay. At its center is the Conguillío National Park and the Llaima volcano, one of the most active volcanoes in Chile, and also includes the Lonquimay, Tolhuaca, and Sollipulli volcanoes, which are continuously monitored by the Volcanology Observatory of the South Andes (OVDAS). The most attractive volcanic landscapes are located within the six natural protected areas of the territory, and the area partially overlaps with the Araucarias Biosphere Reserve of the Man and the Biosphere UNESCO's Program. In addition, important archeological vestiges indicate the presence of the first inhabitants of the zone at least since 2000 years ago. The current population of this large territory is estimated at more than 50,000 inhabitants, of which 30% correspond to Mapuche indigenous communities. The establishment of the Kütralkura Geopark aims to improve life quality of the population through the development of geotourism, geoconservation and education in geoscience, with particularly emphasis on volcanic hazards. The project started on 2009 lead by the National Geology and Mining Service (SERNAGEOMIN) and presently is supported by local authorities and communities, regional universities, and other relevant public and private entities. The creation of a management committee capable to administrate the aspiring Geopark is required to apply for the membership of the GGN of UNESCO.