

**INVENTORY OF KEY GEO-SITES IN THE BUTAJIRA VOLCANIC FIELD:
PERSPECTIVE FOR THE FIRST GEO-PARK IN ETHIOPIA**

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Tourism represents an important sector of the growing economy in Ethiopia. The country is endowed with numerous tourist attractions in addition to wild life which is among most threatened faunal diversity in the current state. The spectra of natural-attractions in Ethiopia should be widened to reach such untapped eye-catching geological features among many. In this contribution, we highlight the potential of few sites we viewed that can be considered worthy of being considered as Geo-park sites which are located in the Butajira Volcanic Field (BVF) in Southern Ethiopia. The BVF has not yet earned the worldwide fame it deserves in a manner similar to the active volcano of Ert'ale in the Afar Rift further north. The BVF offers a distinct perspective to the Afar Rift in being much better accessible and most safe. This monogenetic volcanic field is located on the edge of an active continental rift and provides insight to the relationship between extensional tectonics and basaltic volcanism in a continental setting. Rows of scoria cones can be viewed from rift scarps while the rift floor is observed from peaks of these numerous aligned scoria cones respectively. The location also has a little more than the fascinating geological setting with the added benefit it offers for visitors through the experience of the very traditional endemic Guraghe ethnic cuisine and culture.

First in the list of potential attractive sites in the prospective Geo-park site is Shetan Lake – a perfectly round maar-crater hosting a Lake, that changes its colour throughout the year. This is the only lake-filled maar in the BVF and is rimmed by a tuff ring consisting of phreatomagmatic pyroclasts containing large (1m dimension) ejecta of the underlying ignimbrites. Not very far from the Shetan Lake is then an entrance to the Butajira Cave which is of tectonic origin within a walking distance. This Cave did not form through the usual chemical dissolution but rather as a result of tectonic process involving tension cracks developed in basaltic lavas. This Cave therefore registers the ongoing extension in the Main Ethiopian Rift. Debes Qoto scoria cone is another interesting site which is most likely the youngest volcano in the BVF. This volcano produced a lava flow which filled one small canyon on its way down to the rift floor. The steep scarps on the rift margin, in the area of Ajora, host enormous water-

falls with exposures of Late Miocene to Pleistocene rhyolitic ignimbrites.

Apart from these main features, numerous other sites that have educational value on important geomorphological and geological features and processes associated with continental rifting are present in the BVF. We hope, there will be a will to establish the first Ethiopian Geo-park in the BVF, and that this will take place sooner.