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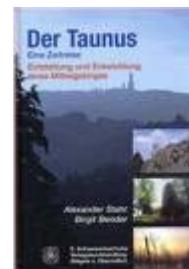
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Der Taunus—Eine Zeitreise —Entstehung und Entwicklung eines Mittelgebirges, by Alexander Stahr & Birgit Bender, 2007. E. Schweizerbart'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Johannesstrasse 3-A, 70176 Stuttgart, Germany. Hardcover, xiv + 254 pages, 253 illustrations. Price EUR 34.80. ISBN 978-3-510-65224-2.



One of the principal activities of geologists is the reconstruction of the origin and the development of mountain regions. Few geologists have the opportunity, however, to carry out such a huge task on their own. It is, consequently, even more exciting when one has the opportunity, for instance during an excursion or by putting the pieces of a mountain puzzle together with some colleagues, to feel that even a complex phenomenon like a mountain range can reasonably well understood. This book can, obviously, not compete with a field excursion, nor with a joint fieldwork, but it comes close, letting the reader make S as indicated in the book's subtitle S a journey in time, showing the origin and development of a middle-altitude mountain range (in Germany). One of the reasons for the authors to publish a book on this mountain range now, is the recent construction of a high-speed railway (Cologne–Rhine–Main) through the area, which led to great new exposures and, consequently, provided many new data.

The essence of the book is certainly not its high scientific value, but rather the way in which the reader is led through this mountain range, getting an ever better understanding of its history. But there is more: the authors make the reader feel that not only the rocks and the fossils have a story to tell. The landscape, the vegetation, and even the changes made by Man add to the insight that one obtains while reading. And even that is, in my opinion, not even the most valuable aspect of the book; most of all it is the 'feel good' attitude of the authors that cannot be neglected by the reader. Both authors studied at the university at Frankfurt am Main that has been named after the famous German poet, philosopher and (amateur) geologist Johann Wolfgang Goethe, and it seems, therefore, only logical that the authors start their preface with a quote from Goethe's autobiography "From my Life—Poetry and Truth": "Accidentally feeling that I liked to, as well as in accidental company I walked often to the mountains that, from my childhood on, I had had in front of me so remote and so earnest. We thus visited Homburg, Kronburg, climbed up the Fled Mountain from where the view made us want to go ever farther away."

Diving into this book is, indeed, diving in poetry and truth. The authors provide a wealth of data, but all the time not in the way of a textbook for professionals, but as a book that must convince the reader that a visit to the Taunus Mountains in Germany is more than worth while. Geology is dealt with properly, but understandably for non-professionals, and the numerous illustrations (largely in full color) help the reader if he does not know really about, for instance, plate tectonics or the Milankovitch-curve-induced climate changes.

Due to this approach, the book may be considered a great promotion for the earth sciences, seducing people to take walks (many of which are described) and look at the nature with eyes other than those of the tourist who comes only for rest, for culture, or for spending just a lazy time. So many suggestions for places to visit are made, that one could easily spend several holidays in the area learning more and more about the geological development of this old mountain range, and learning to see things that remained hidden before.

As the book is not aimed primarily at earth scientists, it seems overdone to detail the contents here. Let it suffice to say that the book starts with a 33-page preface, a second chapter about the continental drift that the area underwent, and a third chapter about the ever continuing changes that affect a mountain range, and that reshape it eventually from a real mountain range (with still unknown original altitude) to the more gentle mountains by which the Taunus is characterized nowadays. This is followed by a chapter about the rock types in the Taunus, a chapter about the Quaternary ice ages that changed its morphology considerably, a sixth chapter about the various soil types, and a chapter about the Holocene, including Man's influence, particularly regarding agriculture. Chapter 8 explains (in only 4 pages!) why the Taunus area is so beautiful; Chapter 9 deals with the natural resources (including healthy springs), and the final chapter (10) describes a huge number of walks and places to go. This all is followed by a (fortunately short) reference list and a helpful index. There is not much more that a reader might want.

Obviously, there are some mistakes and omissions. The stratigraphic table does not mention the eras before the Paleozoic, and it is a bit odd to see that the "Quaternary (old)" ranges from 1.8 million years ago to the present-day, whereas the "Quaternary (new)" is dated at 2.6–1.8 Ma. Another (small) shortcoming is that it is not mentioned in all captions whether the figure is taken from the Taunus or not: geologists (particularly from Europe) will be aware that there are no strong volcanic eruptions nowadays in the Taunus, but Figure 47 at least suggests so. Taken all together, however, the relatively few shortcomings and omissions are more than compensated by the very readable text, the well printed illustrations, and the interesting information. It is perhaps not a book that will find a place on the shelves of many professional geologists, but if someone asks you, as a geologist, what your work is about, then this book is the perfect gift (at relatively low cost). Books like this one should be published in many more countries!

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