

The Belogradchik Rocks is one of the most famous and most impressive nature phenomenon in Bulgaria. They are a group of bizarre sandstone and limestone rock formations with different and amazing shapes, reaching up to 200 m in height. They form a strip, which is 30 km long and up to 3 km wide, and are located north of the western slopes of Stara Planina, near the town of Belogradchik in Bulgaria. The formations are a product of erosion and were sculpted by natural forces over a period of more than 200 million years. Their iron ore content gives them their reddish coloration.

The rocks were declared a natural landmark in 1949. Every distinct rock is named after an object it is believed to resemble and the formations vary from red through yellow to grey in colour.

The natural phenomenon has amazing shapes - rock castles, palaces, fortresses, silhouettes of people, birds and animals, etc. In accordance of their interesting shapes, the rocks have similar names. Some of the most interesting and impressive groups of rocks are called: the Pine Stone, Adam and Eve, the Sphinx, the Schoolgirl, the Nun, the Bear, the rock mushrooms, the Madonna, the Horseman, The Monks etc.

In 2007, the Belogradchik Cliffs were nominated in a competition to select the New Seven Wonders of the World.

Legends

The Madonna – Once there were a monastery and nunnery amongst the Belogradchik Rocks. There lived a beautiful nun, who was secretly envied by all for her beauty. More than once, the old Mother Superior reminded the nun not to forget that even though she was young and pretty, that she had taken the veil and was vowed to God.

During the Petrovden celebration, a young patrician came to the festival on his white horse. Immediately, when she saw him, the nun recognized the man of her dreams. She could not resist her heartache and secretly met him, but the nun's illicit love was eventually discovered by the cries of her young child. The Mother Superior decided to severely punish the nun by all monastic canons, and even the monks from the monastery were summoned to pass judgment on her.

It took a long time for the white bearded monks to draw a punishment, but at last they decided to expel her and her child out of the priory. The poor nun was doomed to a life worse than death itself. Ordinary people would treat her like a leper, and no one would dare talk to her, let alone give her shelter or food. The nun was ready to have her life taken rather than be chased out of the nunnery. As heartbreaking as her sincere plea for mercy was, it did not move the monks.

As the nun was exiting the monastic gates, a miracle happened. The day became night and a frightening thunder was heard. The rocks opened up and the monastery and nunnery were both driven into the ground, and the Monks, on their retreat back to the cloister, the Madonna, bending over her child, and the Horseman, riding to his beloved on his white horse, were all turned to stone.

The Schoolgirl – Once there lived a schoolgirl in town, known for her raving beauty. The schoolgirl fell in love with a young hammersmith, and they used to meet each other near Subashin's spring, known for its delicious water.

But the dervish was extremely envious of this pure love. One day, he waited for the schoolgirl near the spring when she was going for some water, and attacked her. She somehow managed to wrestle out of his hands and started running to the rocks, hoping to escape the fiend. She was running for a long time between the rocks, but the dervish mercilessly pursued her. Suddenly a bear came in front of the schoolgirl. Shocked by fear and amazement, she fell to her knees. She would rather have been torn apart and eaten by the bear than to be ravished in the arms of the hateful dervish.

At this moment, a miracle occurred. A loud thunder was heard and the day became night, and into the darkness, a scared cry of a girl, the frightening roar of a bear, and the terrified cry of a man rang out. Then a sinister silence fell around. And when it became light again, they all stood in stone – the Schoolgirl, the Bear in front of her, and the despicable Dervish behind her. And the sun was shining bright and peaceful as if nothing had happened.