

Gate

magazine for visitors
to the Ústí Region

Issue No. 8

Nature

An Adventure
in the Church of Nature

History

Miracles of Memory
and Creative Imagination

Interview

The Gate to Bohemia and I
– Josef Formánek

Active rest

Cycling Through
Recultivated Landscape

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Gate to Bohemia

Discover the Beauty of the Ústí region

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The Author’s Invitation

I stepped into the same river for the eighth time, and again, it was different, unexpected, unpredictable and surprising. It’s no news to me that the Gate to Bohemia is a magical area. Time and again, I come across something that I hadn’t noticed before, something humbly calling for my attention. As I wander through the Gate to Bohemia, I like knowing that my experiences will be shared with others, I like knowing that everything I have seen and done may give you ideas for trips of your own. Last year, I was overwhelmed to see how nature, with a bit of appropriate and qualified help from humans, is able to take back what people and time had taken from her – such as how incredibly quickly mines can be recultivated. I discovered a breathtaking valley that hosts the abandoned village Königsmühle, I wandered among natural theatres and plateaus of outstanding beauty near the village Verneřice, I climbed up lookout towers, I paddled among the gleaming kaolinite in lakes overgrown with reeds, I rejuvenated my body in the new thermal pool Thermalium, I peddled my way along cycle paths and I tasted various beers, wines and wonderful food. I enjoyed the divine silence of the Stations of the Cross, and roamed among the peaks of the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří), the forests of Bohemian Switzerland (České Švýčarsko), the old mines in the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory), and the viewing points along the river Ohře – the cleanest river in the Czech Republic. I even dared to venture on high-rope courses far above the ground, and to ride a motorbike so as to experience the Ore Mountains in way I hadn’t before. All as your test pilot. I tell you all about it on the following pages, so have a good read, and off you go to see the Gate to Bohemia with your own eyes. It’s full of surprises and breathtaking experiences.



Rostislav Křivánek

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Dear Readers!

This is the eighth time you are reading the magazine the Gate to Bohemia, a magazine aspiring to be – and we hope it is – an invitation to visit our wonderful region, a display case with ideas for trips, interesting historical facts, and regional news. It also gives you a glimpse into the future of four of the local destinations, which all offer much more than you would expect. This issue has several different themes – we take you to see a couple of untraditional lookout towers and a few abandoned villages. Together we will also follow in footsteps of miners past and present, and we will show you a landscape that is being rejuvenated and transformed... Our main goal for the near future is to prove that the gastronomic boom that is taking over the country came to the Gate to Bohemia, and took root here, long ago. We have picked out some craft breweries to take you to, as has been our habit for the past eight years. We also take you to wome remarkable restaurants that are in many ways unique, and we recommend some lesser known gastronomic experiences from the southernmost parts of the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří). We also introduce you to some regional fruit growers, and – most importantly – we tell you how to best go about a wine trail around Litoměřice, including which winemakers offer not just great wine, but also an interesting experience. All of this is a pre-taste of our attempts to create a gastronomical guide to the region, a directory with all the best restaurants, cafés, roasters, bakeries, and breweries, as well as food producers and original delicacies. All of this will soon be available, not only in our magazine, but also in a completely new format. We’ll let you know more about that in the near future. Finally, I’d like to return to what I mentioned at the beginning, namely the invitation. Come and see the Ústí Region, the real Gate to Bohemia. We will do our very best to make you feel welcome.



Zdeněk Matouš
Councillor of the Ústí Region
for Regional Development, International Relations and Tourism



Published by the Regional Authority of the Ústí Region
Velká Hradební 3118/48, 400 02 Ústí nad Labem
Telephone: +420 475 657 111
Fax: +420 475 200 245
E-mail: urad@kr-ustecky.cz

www.kr-ustecky.cz
www.gatetobohemia.com

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The Baroque Soul of the Czech Central Highlands

During the Baroque period, the landscape was considered to be a celebration of God. Which is why people started reshaping it, redesigning it, creating impressive features, and planting alleys. This was the age when mills, mill races, man-made lakes, and the first agricultural fields appeared. Despite all the changes that have happened since then, we still live in a Baroque landscape today – the Garden of Bohemia, that is to say, the heart of the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří) is no exception to this. I have prepared a wonderful road trip for us: As we drive through this wonderful region, we'll see the most beautiful vestiges from the Baroque period. And those of you up for a challenge can take your bike instead.



DAY ONE: THE LEFT BANK FROM DELLA PORTA TO DIENTZENHOFER

In total, the trip is about 62 kilometres long, but it can be divided into two parts. The first part starts at the château in Libochovice, a Baroque gem on the river Ohře. When the previous Renaissance château burned down, the Italian Antonio della Porta rebuilt it in an early Baroque style. It houses an interesting exhibition that showcases both the houses and the lives of the nobility from the Renaissance to the end of the 19th century. The park is no less beautiful; originally a French garden it's slowly becoming an English landscape. From Libochovice, we head towards Vrbířany, a beautiful Baroque château with a park. The château used to be in poor condition, but has been renovated and now looks charming. The château hosts the beginnings of what will be a large exposition, as well as an exhibition of prams. There are just under 200 prams on show, and some of them are quite unique. Next, we move on down towards the Ohře, and, just behind it, we are taken by the beauty of the convent of the Premonstratensian sisters in the village Doksany. We wander through the beautifully adorned Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary (kostel Narození Panny Marie) with its High Baroque interior, and then continue down to the famous Romanesque crypts from the 12th century with its stunning 250 m² hall. From one river to another – in just a moment we will see the Elbe. As we pass through the village Libotenice, we see the Elbe licking the riverbanks as it flows past a lonely church. This is the Baroque

Church of St Catherine of Alexandria (kostel svaté Kateřiny Alexandrijské) with a freestanding bell tower. The gates are wide open and the church is – empty. But, believe it or not, Baroque churches are just as beautiful even without all the gold and statues. The architect of the church, Octavio Broggio from Litoměřice, proves this beyond doubt. The magnificence of the space, the murmur of the river, the buzzing of the wasps, the quiet, the endless rotundity, a window in the shape of a bell, the fine cracks in the railings... All drops of humble beauty. We end our tour along the left riverbank



in a village called Počaply. Here, the delightful view of the sacred area surrounding the Church of St Adalbert (kostel sv. Vojtěcha) makes us slow down. In addition to the church, the area comprises a freestanding chapel, a rectory, and a graveyard. The architect, Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer, was a master of Baroque style, and one can instantly tell that this is the work of a genius, no doubt about that.

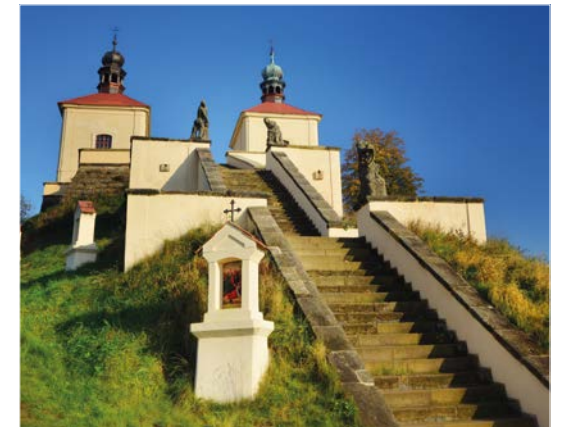
DAY TWO: THE RIGHT BANK FROM THE OLDEST CHURCH TO THE ŠPORK RESIDENCE

If you decide to cycle along this route, you can cross the river using the ferry in the village Nučičky, but we'll be driving across the bridge in the town Litoměřice. We start off not far from the village Křešice. From here we can admire the Church of the Holy Trinity (kostel Nejsvětější Trojice), one of the dominant features of the Garden of Bohemia, from afar. The church and its freestanding bell tower crown the hillock in an almost bewitching manner. The church is quite possibly the oldest Baroque church in Northern Bohemia, and I'm glad that a group of volunteers are working on preserving this architectural jewel of Spinetta's. Next, the road leads us through the village Liběšice. If you haven't been here before, you're in for a treat. During the Baroque period, the Jesuits created a unique area here by building a beautiful residence and a cemetery chapel dedicated to St Francis Xavier – both of these are witness to the boundless creativity of Kilián Ignác Dientzenhofer. The Jesuits also built a wayside shrine and rebuilt the church according to Baroque style. Their biggest achievement, however, is the open-air gallery of statues that they founded. Fifteen statues are visible from the road, but apparently there are almost as many statues in the gallery as there are on the Charles Bridge in Prague. The ground beneath our tyres starts sloping upwards as we make our way up to the village Levín. The late Baroque church in the cen-

tre of Levín, the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (kostel Povýšení svatého Kříže), is completely round. Inside the church, quite a mystery awaits us: the famous 'cat of Levín'. It's a small stone plate covered in a relief of a mysterious animal surrounded by a jumble of letters even more mysterious than the cat. Is it even really a cat? Or perhaps a lamb, or even the devil himself? In a church? Some historians claim it's a lion – the name of the village certainly supports this theory, as the Czech word for lion is lev. Outside the church, the landscape is dominated by the unusually austere belfry that rises above the village in the place where a castle once stood.

We continue our journey to the village Konojedy. Most tourists come here to see its remarkable geological feature – Dubí hill, or for the typical Konojedy bread, but we are focused on the Baroque period and hence head to the large Baroque château, which used to be the residence of the count František Antonín von Špork. The château has been amply restored and nicely complements the wonderfully renovated Church of St Wenceslas (kostel sv. Václava). This is bound to become a popular tourist attraction, but for now it's still relatively unknown. To finish up, we drive down to the village Úštěk and then upwards again

to the Station of the Cross, Kalvárie, which lies just above the village Ostré. How could we end our Baroque pilgrimage without visiting a Station of the Cross? This Station consists of a rock promontory crowned by three chapels. Locals call them the 'little churches' and they are visible far and wide. The view from here is just as unique as the three chapels are.



HIDDEN GEMS

The town Litoměřice is the Baroque highlight of the Garden of Bohemia and it's worth taking you time to have a good wander around it. There's a set tour of churches and other sacred monuments in the area, and a special booklet for children to go with it. If you join in the game and collect stamps along the way, your efforts will be rewarded at the end with a beer at the brewery Biskupský pivovar. Talk about ending the Baroque pilgrimage in style!



The Return of the Natural Outdoor Theatres

There's a long and hearty tradition of amateur theatre in Bohemian Switzerland, so it's no surprise that the old natural theatres in the forests and among the rocks are being revived. These theatres are exceptionally charming, and if you come here when the theatres are empty, void of the actors' voices and gestures, they have an intense atmosphere of mystery, romance and magic to them. Natural outdoor theatres started popping up near villages already a hundred years ago. Slabs of stone, preferably surrounded by interesting and mysterious rocks, were chosen and turned into amphitheatres. Today we'll see three such places that come to life summer after summer among the rocks of Bohemian Switzerland.

THE NATURAL OUTDOOR THEATRE IN MLÝNY

The villages Mlýny and Kytlice lie above a beautiful valley with the river Kamenice running through it. Between these two villages, there's an inconspicuous path



that takes the curious through the forest and up to the rocks. The clearing in front of the splendidly rugged rocks was turned into a theatre in 1931 by Franz Marschner, who otherwise spent his professional life creating glass beads. The enterprising glass worker also set up a restaurant just a stone's throw from the theatre. The first piece to be performed was an operetta – musical theatre was a popular genre in the natural theatres. Renowned ensembles used to come here with stunning performances – at times up to a thousand spectators would gather to see a play. And no costs were not spared on creating the scenery – some of the backdrops were quite elaborate and fanciful. A lot of the plays were also followed by

a concert, but the war put a stop to things here as it did elsewhere. After the war, the founder of the theatre and most of the local amateurs were expelled and the place was deserted. It was not brought back to life until 2003, again thanks to the work



THE NATURAL OUTDOOR THEATRE IN SRBSKÁ KAMENICE

Among the wild and jagged rocks above the village Srbská Kamenice, there's a glade that is guarded by watchful pine trees. Here, the theatrical tradition goes back even further, as local amateurs (plays were performed here as early as 1867!) created the natural theatre in 1924. The saying that every cloud has a silver lining was proven to be true as the pub U Růžáku, where the ensemble was housed, burned down, yet all the scenery and costumes remained intact. This wooden house among the rocks was part of the theatre's base – in other words there was no fancy kind of stage. Yet performances were held here up until the war. And then? Towards the end of the 1940s, the theatre was demolished and all traces were removed. The government wanted to distance itself from the theatre, to cover it up completely. But they did not succeed. The amateur theatre in Kamenice started performing in the pub Zelená hospoda (yes, formerly the pub U Růžáku so it's a full circle) back in 2002 and in 2013 they cooperated with the local municipality to restore the natural theatre. This year marks the resuscitated theatre's 7th season. The municipality has been quite generous and built a brand new bridge across the river as well as put up a wonderful painted information board... The area is actually so beautiful that it deserves a visit even when the theatre is not in action.



of a single zealot, Karel Krejčí, the head of the Kamenice theatre group. The opening performance was reminiscent of old times as it drew an audience of 500. Since then, a secure access has been installed, and plays are performed here on a regular basis. In addition to this, it's also a popular location for theatre and folklore festivals. In other words – this natural theatre is alive and kicking.

THE NATURAL OUTDOOR THEATRE IN PRYSK

Strictly speaking, this theatre is in the Liberec Region, situated among the first few hills of the Lusatian Mountains (Lužické hory), but the boundaries in the area are anything but



straight so there's no point in being too rigid about them. What's more, this theatre is so young that it's practically just a baby. However, this one-year-old is a prime example of that fact that traditions are not dying out; they are still alive even among the internet generation. There are a number of abandoned quarries around Prysk. One of them resembles some kind of postmodern cathedral – an eerie place that will take your breath away. The quarry had been half-filled with sand, rocks, leaves, and overgrown trees. Every now and then someone would come here camping, but that was it. And then someone popped the idea: There's natural theatre in Mlýny, and one in Srbská Kamenice – how about a natural theatre here? Hours and hours went into tidying up the quarry and building a wooden stage. Then, in July 2018, Vlasta Chramostová, a local patriot and keen cottager, inaugurated the stage with all the zeal and energy of a 91-year-old, and, for the first time, Prysk's amateur theatre group could let their voices rumble among the echoes of the stone walls.

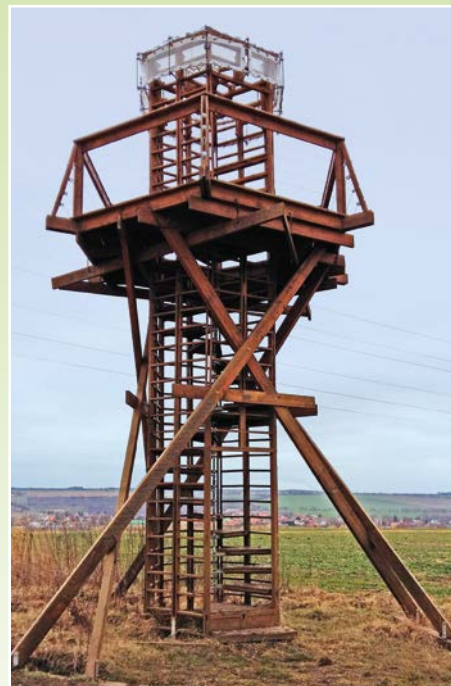


HIDDEN GEMS

If you take a look around the neighbouring regions, you'll discover two more beautiful natural outdoor theatres. Across the border in Germany, there's the wonderful natural theatre Felsenbühne Rathen hidden among the rocks. It's situated in the valley Wehlgrund, below the imposing rock formations of the famous Bastei. The first performances were held here in 1936, and just two years later, the first Karel May festival was held here. The festival was revived in 1984 and is now an annual event. In the Lusatian Mountains, there's a natural theatre in the forest near the village Sloup v Čechách. In 1921, prince Kinský donated a patch of land in the hills to the local amateur theatre – and today the beautifully restored theatre puts on classic plays such as *The Three Musketeers* and *The Wizard of Oz*.

Not Your Run-of-the-Mill Lookout Towers

Why did people ever start building lookout towers? No doubt, our age-old yearning to have wings and, just like a bird, to see the world from above had something to do with it. The first lookout towers were built during the early 19th century and were more for show than anything else; the nobility used them to adorn the parks of their manors. Then it became fashionable to combine beauty with practicality and viewing platforms were added to the trigonometric towers. And then it took off. Somewhere around the 1880, hiking clubs and local associations started popping up everywhere, and their goal was often to install a lookout tower in the area. The Czech Republic has lookout towers galore, and the Gate to Bohemia is no exception. Today we are off to see three of them that are... unlike any others.



THE TEN-DAY LIGHTHOUSE

The village Strupčice is situated between the towns Chomutov and Most, not far from Vršany, the youngest surface mine in Northern Bohemia. The locals here had been dreaming of a lookout tower for a long time. Not that the village was located on a hill or so, but the location still offered a great panoramic view. And what a view! The only problem was – building a lookout tower requires a lot of material and a lot of money... Then along came 20 volunteers, who had attended a local building course, saying that they were wanting to build a lookout tower. Their problem was that they hadn't been able to reach an agreement with the local mining company. But the mayor quickly managed to find a suitable piece of land, right on the border between the village and the mine. The volunteers lead of a group of planners from ARCHWERK – an architectural association that not only had a finished project to present, but also the finances and workforce needed to build it. Could such miracles really happen in Chomutov? Indeed, they could. At the time, the director Martin Ryšavý was working on a documentary, “Na Vodě” (On Water), and decided he wanted to incorporate the construction process into his film. The director and the architect agreed that such borderlands are where the best and most surprising things tend to occur. The lookout tower was built using the film budget, and it was completed in just ten days! The tower is beautiful. It's about 7,5 metres tall and the viewing platform is at a height of about 4,8 metres, at the top of 24 spiralling steps. The structure is remarkable – the foundations are not made of concrete but of oak, because, in this environment, oak practically turns into stone (Santini knew this already back when he built the monastery in Plasy). Three interlaced triangles made of spruce wood rise from the foundations and a cylinder symbolising a lighthouse gives it the finishing touch. And at the very top, there's a weather vane. So what can you see if you follow the clear wooden arrows guiding you from the village to the top of the tower? A lot. The panorama includes the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory) from Klínovec

to Bourňák, the château Jezeří, the towns Chomutov, Most, and Litvínov, the electrical power stations Komořany and Počeradý, the surface mines Vršany and Jan Šverma, as well as the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří) and the Doupov Mountains (Doupovské hory). And one day... one day you'll be able to see the glimmering surface of the lakes that are to be created where the quarries are today.

A TOWER FULL OF NAMESAKES

From Strupčice it's not far to the town Jirkov. The main sight in this town is the Church of St Giles (kostel sv. Jiljí). The mighty tower with a lookout point on its northern wall was not built at the same time as the church, but was added in 1545. Now, you're probably expecting me to tell you that the tower is 29 metres high, that it has a viewing platform and what you can see from there – and call it a day. But then you would miss the best bit! Because to step out onto the glassed-in viewing platform without taking a single break on the way up is not easy, a fact they inform you about at the nearby information centre when you buy your ticket. The reason being that, in reference



to the name of the town, the Museum of People Named Jiří (Muzeum Jirků) has set up an exhibition on each floor of the tower. So as you climb your way up, you're surrounded by personal items and memorabilia connected to various famous Czechs named Jiří, such as the musician Jiří Šlitr, the actors Jiří Suchý and Jiří Mádl, the skier Jiří Raška, and the musician Jiří Korn. This is the only museum that has chosen its exhibits based on their first name. And the view from the top? You can see the whole town and the surrounding countryside, the Ore Mountains, and the nearby castle Červený Hrádek. By the way – if you want to visit the tower, the castle, and the town's famous cellars, a combined ticket is available at a reduced price.

THE HIGHEST LOOKOUT TOWER IN THE COUNTRY

If I were to take you up a tower with an open viewing platform 140 metres above the ground, you would most likely wonder why anyone would want to build such a high lookout tower. It's actually the highest lookout tower in the Czech Republic. But it wasn't built just like that. Rather, the lookout tower was built on top of another building, which happens to be the tallest industrial building in the country – the power station in the village Ledvice. The power station is the most modern classic (in this case coal) power station in Central Europe. It's an experience out of the ordinary. You are provided with basic safety instructions at the local information centre, and then you are given a reflective vest to wear before setting off with your group of up to ten people. You're given the fairly simple choice of climbing the 773 steps, i.e. 28 floors, or taking the lift up. Even if you take the lift, another 44 steps will be waiting for you at the top, but I'm sure that won't be a problem for you. The viewing



platform at the top of one of Ledvice's 'twin towers' is glassed in, but you can go outside onto the open viewing platform if you want. The view from here is impressive. You can see the Czech Central Highlands, including its highest peak Milešovka, the Ore Mountains, Jezeří castle, the towns Bílina, Krupka and Kostomlaty... What more could you ask for? And did you know, that from here, the country's highest lookout tower, you can see the lowest situated area in the Czech Republic – the bottom of the Bílina mine? And you can even see Central Europe's largest phonolite structure – a hill named Bořen.



HIDDEN GEMS

If you're already at the Ledvice power plant information centre, you simply must go up the lookout tower. The information centre has three floors and it's the first of its kind: it has interactive exhibitions with 3D images, virtual reality, you can measure a tree's photosynthesis online – and well, to make a long story short, you're not likely to get bored here.



Šumburk Castle and the Unknown King

The town Klášterec nad Ohří is known for its wonderful red castle that rises above the river, for its well-kept and charming gardens with the sala terrena, and its porcelain exhibition. Not to forget the Clock Museum (Muzeum hodin) or the spa complex Evženie, of course. But the countryside around Klášterec is equally beautiful, and it isn't full of tourists – at least not yet. So all the more reason to set off on a trip to the castle Šumburk.

It's about ten kilometres there and back, so just enough for a half-day trip. We set off from the spa area and follow the red trail markings upstream along the river Ohře until we reach the street Ohřecká louka. Here we leave the red trail markings and continue onwards through the houses. We walk up a slight incline until we reach the surprisingly spectacular viewing point above the river. From this natural stone wall, we really do have a stunning view of the valley and the tranquil river Ohře. Following the slope up through the woods, we arrive at a signpost, and here we turn right along the yellow trail markings. After a while the yellow markings almost make a U-turn. Remember this spot; on

the way back we'll go on a quick detour at this point. But for now we'll make our way up to the colossal ruins of the Hussite castle Šumburk from 1431.

COLOSSAL RUINS AND AN EERIE STEWARD'S HOUSE

In contrast to most Hussite castles in the Czech Central Highlands, the Šumburk ruins are enormous. Not only does this location give you a wonderful view, it's also a very strategic spot. The castle's distinctive silhouette is one of the most picturesque symbols of the Lower Poohří, and it has a visible aesthetic connection to the other nearby castles, such as Egerberk, Klinštejn and Pernštejn. Having wandered around the remains of the castle walls, we return to the signpost we mentioned earlier. From here, follow the trail markings for about 100 metres and you'll find the picturesque ruins of the old fortresses steward's house. You may think that the remnants of the buildings and arches have been fully abandoned, but the King of it all still stands gracefully ruling his land. The



King is, in fact, an ancient oak tree. It's a real focal point of the area, with an unusual energy that spreads an eerie atmosphere here, especially towards the end of autumn or during early winter. It may seem dull to take the same route back, but it's anything but boring – the views of the town and the river are quite spectacular. As of yet, only a few devoted visitors are aware of the ruins of Šumburk. So enjoy the luxury of a walk in solitude – such experiences are becoming rarer by the year.



Getting Lost among the Treetops

High-rope parks are becoming more and more popular. And I'm not surprised – using your agility, strength and balance to roam around above the ground knowing you are fully safe, yet with a considerable dose of adrenaline is great fun. Two new parks have recently popped up near the town Teplice, and the two of them are completely different. So – leave your vertigo at home and up we go.

BALANCING ABOVE THE ROOFS OF TEPLICE

More specifically, above the roof of the new shopping centre for sports equipment, where the old winter stadium used to be in the centre. All ages are welcome and everyone is guaranteed to have fun. There are three courses according to levels of difficulty. The children's course, where children aged seven and up gamely roam the 3D labyrinth, but it's open to children as young as three in the company of an adult. Then there's the family course, where children aged seven to ten need to be accompanied by an adult. Finally there's the zip line, where adults can enjoy themselves alone, and children up to the age of twelve need an adult with them. Clambering about on the courses, we reach some rather respectable heights – eight to twelve metres. Considering that we're on a rooftop, one could almost call it a heavenly experience. The poles are connected by a web of ropes and cables that have wooden parts connected to them. These parts are generally incredibly unstable – but that's what a high-rope park is all about, isn't it? Frankly, you need

to be at least reasonably agile and rather brave to enjoy it. You're secured by a special fastening and carabiner, so again – you'll feel the adrenaline but still be completely safe.



A 3D LABYRINTH IN OSEK

The high-rope park in Osek is near the village's swimming pool. It's said to be a unique 3D labyrinth among the treetops. The adventure is mainly aimed at children, and there are two courses for them to choose from – the lower course, about four metres above the ground, is open even to very young children. The higher course, at a height of 7,5 metres, requires more motor skills and is open to children from about six years of age. However, there are also plenty of adults who love bobbing around among the trees. There are 14 rope obstacles, and in two places you can move up and down between the higher and the lower course. You are secured by the nets along the sides, and there are also a couple of lookout points among the treetops as well as tree houses to play in. The locals proudly proclaim that this is the first 3D labyrinth in the world. Let's take their word for it and go visit this popular park, which is suitable for the whole family. It's open from April to the end of September and the entrance fee for the whole day is a mere 50 Czech crowns.

Miracles of Memory and Creative Imagination

Three thousand valleys. Seventeen thousand houses. That's how many human homes disappeared during the 1950s, when the army started using heavy machinery to systematically eradicate villages that the government had not been able to populate following the expulsion of the original German-speaking inhabitants. Unfortunately, they also wiped out villages that could have been used by those looking for an alternative place to live once the Communist government started tightening the barbed-wire noose of oppression. Many people ended up emigrating instead. When you come to an area where there used to be houses, schools, churches, and mills, it's usually nature itself that will tell you that this is a place that was once inhabited by people. It could be a cluster of fruit trees, a currant bush that's grown wild, an alley of trees that no longer has a road to protect, a pile of stones and bricks... And then there are villages that have left clear traces behind. But there's only one such village that has come back to life, in a way nobody would have expected. Königsmühle.

As I stood by the chapel in the village Háj with the panorama of Klínovec and Fichtelberg before me, not far from one of the busiest places in the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory), I could barely believe that an abandoned valley lay just a kilometre or two away. But every step you take towards the grassy horizon is magical. The overgrown path keeps you on your toes right from the start. This is the path that once led to Königsmühle. As we walk on, the horizon suddenly changes and we find ourselves looking out over an immense plain, and in front of it, we see a quiet valley lined by a forest of fir trees and a gently shimmering stream. The large cross is as solitary as a tree on a plain.

The former track leads us further and further down a slope until it turns into a five-metre-deep gorge. The lovely dry tree trunks that once lined the alley are resistant to the wind. Suddenly an odd character appears on the horizon. The statue 'Windcatcher' (Větroplach). That's not a bad description of this carved ornament. It really looks as though caraway seeds, branches and stumps of wood have somehow come together on their own to create this magical statue guarding the path. At the mouth to the gorge, a straw man is trimming a knoll covered in blueberry bushes. That's when

the magic of the place really hits you. First you'll notice the remains of seven houses, all of them at various stages of returning nature. And then you'll realise that it is not the ruins of the mill Königsmühle itself that creates the genius loci here. It's the creative touch given to the place by the people who still love the area today.



THE FREE LAND OF LAND ART

Never before have I come across such a literal expression of the phrase 'cultural landscape', i.e. a landscape that has been touched by human hands. The ruins of the houses haven't exactly been restored. Rather, people have just helped nature along the way – organising the stones into mounds, crowning the stone protrusions with branches... I can't help but lean against the wall and let my eyes sweep across the landscape. This is a place where people once lived. There were two mills, which led to a track being carved into the slope by wagon wheels. This place has been abandoned for almost seven decades – and yet here I am. The creative touch of humans is reviving this it. Land art is such a well-known and misused expression that I find it as embarrassing as the current fine arts, that can barely tell the difference between the true invention of a creative soul and art created just for art's sake. But there's a place where land art redeems itself – Königsmühle. A unique and unpretentious open-air gallery has emerged, and you won't find any kind of polished mainstream kitsch here. Instead, you'll be amazed by a bundle of overgrown grass that has been skillfully



HIDDEN GEMS

The main focus of this story was the feeling and the beauty of the landscape. For more information about Königsmühle or how to get involved, please visit their website at www.konigsmuhle.cz or their Facebook page 'Königsmühle - zaniklá obec a dějiště art festivalu'. Anyone not yet in the claws of consumer society and still able to appreciate beauty should visit this place – whether as an artist, a volunteer or an onlooker.

plaited; horseshoes in the grass leading you to the bench on the other side of the stream; the pink heron guarding that same stream; and, hanging from a tree, a beating heart pierced by a nail. The most well-preserved house can be entered through a golden gate, and a huge chair awaits its kind-hearted giant. A pair of wooden hands reach for the sky from the half dried-up riverbed of the small tributary stream. The face of a girl lies by the roadside. A wicker version of the mill wheel clatters in the river. A trans-



parent heart in the stone wall. Cain and Abel lie on a tinder of dry grass – the horror of people hearing the story of their fate for centuries has turned them to wood. A twisting totem pole turns to the heavens in lamentation. Soon enough, you find yourself looking for art in every red drop of paint on every stone – is it intentional or coincidence? And then you realise that it doesn't really matter, because this entire place is pure art. Nature, caressed by human art.

COME, HELP, CREATE

Twice a year, there's a festival here with concerts and films, but the main focus lies on being create. Renowned artists attend the festival, as well as regular people able to appreciate beauty. During these festivals, the bustle of life returns to Königsmühle. Throughout

the rest of the year, people come here for a walk or a hike..., and nobody wants to leave. It's the kind heart of the harsh Ore Mountains; beauty in every shape and form. Is there anything that this wonderland still needs? Of course there is. Firstly, it needs its visitors to continue showing respect and leaving the local art in peace. Secondly, it needs practical support from the public, such as volunteers who can help organise the festivals. The project 'The Free Land Art Republic of Königsmühle' isn't exactly rolling in money. They don't need much to get by, but investors and sponsors would be a big help. Finally – there can never be too much creative energy. So motivated artists, excited to create a piece that will instantly become a part of the landscape, are welcome. And then, Königsmühle will be just as it should be, unique, meaningful, its own.



Mysterious Verneřice and the Coal Trail

Verneřice is a village situated in the north-eastern part of the Czech Central Highlands. The surroundings differs a fair bit from the neighbouring region near the hill Milešovka on the other side of the river. Instead of high solitary peaks, there's a sweeping terrain from which colossal land masses and plateaus emerge, such as the one between Verneřice and the hill Buková hora. The area is stunningly beautiful and there is a unique atmosphere to it. You could spend days roaming unmarked paths, wandering across hardy mountain meadows, and strolling among the sheds and tall scythes in the groves. And you would probably assume that the altitude is much higher than it really is. The landscape gives you the impression that you are much higher above sea level than you actually are. In short – the plateau near Verneřice is not well-known and almost untouched. The few marked trails almost seem to be the work of pioneers. And it's along one of those trails we'll be going today.

FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF SPINNERS, MINERS AND ENGINE DRIVERS

I doubt it would actually occur to anyone that mining coal would be possible in a landscape like this, a landscape that looks more like a rolling mountain pasture than anything else. Originally, most people round here worked in the textile industry. There were a lot of spinners, and in 1707, the first Bohemian cotton spinning mill was actually founded right here. A couple of decades later, a textile printing factory was also founded here – that, too, was the first of its kind in Bohemia. So imagine what it was like at the beginning of the 19th century, when the first steam engine was brought to Verneřice – this place really was at the forefront of technological development. Even back then, people would sometimes stumble across coal when digging a well or laying the foundations of a house. It wasn't long before a couple of entrepreneurs got going, and small mines started emerging in the area. Well, they were individual pits more than mines – twenty or so of them operated

all the way up until the 1850s. But the brown coal was not of high quality; it had low thermal conductivity and so the industry dwindled, and step by step farming took over instead. As is often the case – it was just towards the end of Verneřice's industrial age that it was decided that the industry should be supported by providing easier access between the hills and riverbank. And so in 1890, while celebrating the 60th birthday of Franz Joseph I, the tracks of the private railway line from Verneřice to Velké Březno via Lovečkovice and Ústěh was finally finished, inaugurated, and ready to start running.

FROM THE TRACKS TO THE VIEWING POINT

Now that we know a bit about the history of the area, let's set off along the local educational trail. The trail was built in 2018 and is about 4.5 kilometres long. There are eight information boards that tell us about what life used to be like in the nearby villages, the local coal mining, and the flora and fauna of the meadows and the stream. Where does the trail start and finish? It starts in the village Lovečkovice, at the local mini-museum and ends at the popular viewing point called Viťova vyhlídka.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. The mini-museum in Lovečkovice is actually a tribute to the previously mentioned railway track.

The mini-museum opened 1 June 2018 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of this incredibly picturesque railway route closing down. Inside the museum, we are welcomed by the seasonal information centre and can enjoy a small exhibition about the history of the village, the local volunteer fire department, and of course the legendary railway. For now, the trains belonging to the Railway Museum only run between the villages Velké Březno and Zubrnice, but there



are plans to extend the line to Lovečkovice. This will make the mini-museum one of its stations. So what is it that makes this railway route so unique and gives it its charm? Not many railway tracks are so perfectly interconnected with the profile and the character of the surrounding landscape. The track runs some 150 metres



above sea level, along the bank of the stream Luční all the way up to a plateau approximately 570 metres above the sea. The track is only 15 kilometres long, but the incline is exceptionally steep for a railway track. It's often above 40 per mille – and that without the help of any bridges or tunnels. It's almost as if the tracks had sprouted right out of the ground. The educational coal trail, however, takes us almost directly northwards through a landscape typical of the Verneřice plateau – rolling meadows and slopes, and drawn-out islands of trees – all the way to the village Náckovice. The 11-metre-tall lookout tower is clearly visible above



the surrounding meadows. Since it's both a telecom tower and a lookout tower, it is anything but ordinary. The architect, Martin Gabriel, created an original metal tower clad in wood with stone foundations. Once you've climbed the 8,5 metres to the viewing platform, you'll have an amazing panoramic view of not only the Czech Central Highlands, but also the Lusatian Mountains and the Ore Mountains. The lookout tower is only open during summer weekends, but if you come at another time the view from the bottom will surely satisfy you anyway.

HIDDEN GEMS

Were you wondering why the lookout tower is called Viťova vyhlídka (Viťa's lookout tower)? Funnily enough, the hill on which the tower stands hasn't got a name. There were various attempts at naming it, but the one that caught on was the name of the builder, Viťa.



Lookout Towers of the Third Millennium

We pay a fair amount of attention to lookout towers in this issue. As you may have guessed, we want to go beyond the traditional image of a stone tower with a viewing platform that has looked down on the land for over a century. Lookout towers started to pop up here and there during the early hiking boom, but just as many are being built today, and they developing more rapidly than ever. Sometimes they're built to be useful. Other times they're built to fulfil an old dream or a longing to give the landscape an unexpected feature. We shall start our tour with the latter.



NAKED RŮŽENKA ŘOPÍKOVÁ

If you're hoping for something indecent, I'm afraid I'm going to have to disappoint you. Although Růženka is graceful, six metres tall, and has large round eyes, she's not a woman but a concrete lookout tower. She stands on a stunning spot just above the village Růžová, at the top of the hill Hutberg as the locals call it. Though according to the map it's called Pastevní Peak (Pastevní vrch); it's quite a modest peak though, only 402 metres above sea level. And why do people say she's naked? We'll get to that. But let's start by saying that Pastevní Peak has always been a popular lookout point with a view of the surrounding hills and rocks. The wayside shrine on a sturdy plinth dates all the way back to 1809, when a procession of the faithful used to visit it on the Feast of Corpus Christi. Today the procession is much smaller than it used to be, and its destination is now the tower Růženka. Her appearance stirred quite a controversy, but for no reason. The group of architects known as Mjolk took inspiration from the so called 'řopíks', which are small concrete fortifications that were used by the Czechoslovak military, almost like a kind of bunker. The region is dotted with such constructions, and Růženka is a new addition to the family. The tower was originally supposed to be over twelve metres tall, but following long-lasting negotiations with the local nature conservation association, the height was cut in half. And back to her being naked. People are impatient. We are no longer able to appreciate that certain things take time. The grumblers claiming that Pastevní Peak was no place for a concrete toadstool didn't take the time to listen to the plan of letting climbing plants grow over the tower. Only then will Růženka be fully dressed. But the great panoramic view from the three-metre-high viewing platform is available right away. From here there's a view of the Elbe sandstone rocks and the tablelands Děčinský Sněžník, Grosser Zschirnstein, Pfaffenstein, Lilienstein and Kaiserkrone, the natural stone bridge Pravčická brána, and also Růženka's sister towers Janov, Falcon Hill (Sokolí vrch) (we'll visit this one in just a moment), Tanečnice, Vlčí hora, Jedlová, and Studenec. In the distance we can also make out the hill Vlohošť and the Czech Central Highlands with its queen peak, Milešovka.

A GIANT AMONG GOBLINS

Falcon Hill (Sokolí vrch), above the village Dobruška, is an age-old haunt for goblins – there are even two caves here. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to get hold of any of the goblins to ask for a comment on the concrete giant that sprouted up here in 2004. The giant is 51 metres tall and wrapped in a steel staircase consisting of 162 transparent steel bar grating treads. Originally, this was only meant to be a telecom transmitter, but in the end a viewing platform was placed on the 34-metre-tall giant's finger. So now you can see the entire town Děčín and the surrounding hills, including Děčinský Sněžník. You can also see further afar to the transmitter on the hill Buková hora, or the hill Ještěd near the town Liberec, as well as the castle Bezděz near Česká Lípa. You can even see as far as to Dresden, the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory), the Lusatian Mountains (Lužické hory), sometimes even the Jizera Mountains (Jizerské hory), and if the weather's really good you might see the Czech Republic's highest peak, Sněžka. Unlike at Růženka, you have to pay a small fee to climb this tower and it's only open during the weekends April through October.



THE TALL PERCH OF JANOV

Okay, so the title isn't quite perfect, because a perch should be made of wood but the Janov lookout tower (rozhledna Janov) is a hundred percent metal. It's a slim 40-metre-tall beauty with a viewing platform at a height of thirty metres. If going up the lookout tower on Falcon Hill was for the daring, this one is definitely not for those who are scared of heights – the combination of the tower's slight wobble and the transparent steps will not be to their liking. But for anyone else, this is an experience you won't find elsewhere. Don't climb the tower if the temperature is below -10° C, and I wouldn't go up there in a gale either, but a slight wind is enough to add the bonus of the tower's playful sway. This tower was also originally intended to be a telecom tower. However, once she saw how many other lookout towers there were around, she didn't want to be any worse. And this wonderful place had been wanting a lookout tower for a long time. As any local cyclist will tell you, it's at the top of quite a hill, whichever direction you approach it from. Here, from the edge of the golf course where the old theatre used to be, there had been a tradition of gazing into the distance. And now, with the tower, you can see the entire Czech part of Saxon Switzerland (Saské Švýcarsko), numerous tablelands, the natural stone bridge Pravčická brána and the nearby sandstones called the Silver Walls (Stříbrné stěny), the hill Růžák and the Lusatian Mountains. Just like at Růženka, there's no fee and you can climb the 140 steps whenever you wish – except during the inclement weather conditions already mentioned.

HIDDEN GEMS

If you are already in the area around Růžová and Janov, it's not far to the village Jetřichovice. Even if you have been here before, it's worth revisiting because the restaurant Praha in the centre has been rebuilt, and it now hosts a permanent exhibition called 'Leporelo of the Back Country'. The exhibition has been illustrated by the local artist Ivo Švejnoha from Kytlice. It depicts the history of the village and the surrounding countryside in a way that is funny and makes sense to children. Kids are bound to love it, as are parents.

The Ore Mountains

Quiet and deeply introspect, ores that have been mined from time immemorial, chillingly sharp views that are invariably dignified and majestic, even when covered by a hazy mist. That is the Ore Mountains for you. It's a wonderful area of oddly captivating and raw beauty. Wooded hillsides and stony slopes descend from the long wooded ridge. There are stunning mountain meadows, plains and wetlands. And below it all, the energy of the ores that have been mined for rare metals for generations, the mining galleries – passages towards the centre of the earth – and the springs of healing waters. There are numerous ways of getting to know these hills, and they are yet to be fully uncovered. One of the most interesting ways is to follow the in the footsteps of those who discovered its hidden riches – those who mined the ores for metal in the Middle Ages, and later the coalminers. The newly printed brochure **The Mining Trail of the Ore Mountains** (Hornická stezka Krušných hor) is the perfect guide on this trip.



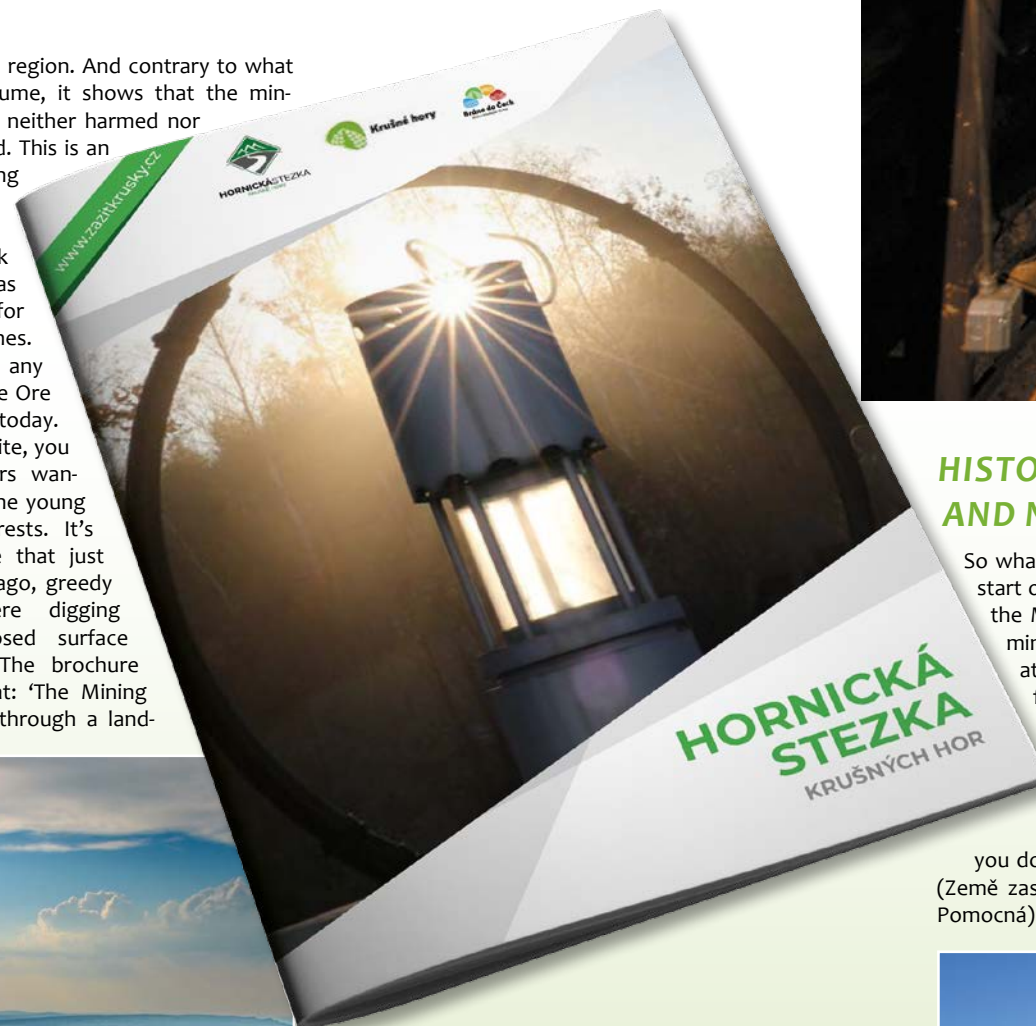
ONE REMARKABLE SPOT AFTER ANOTHER

The destination management company called Krušné hory published a fantastic brochure last year. The past and present of the mining industry is omnipresent in the Ore Mountains, and this is the perfect guide to the areas that are open to the public. The brochure takes you all

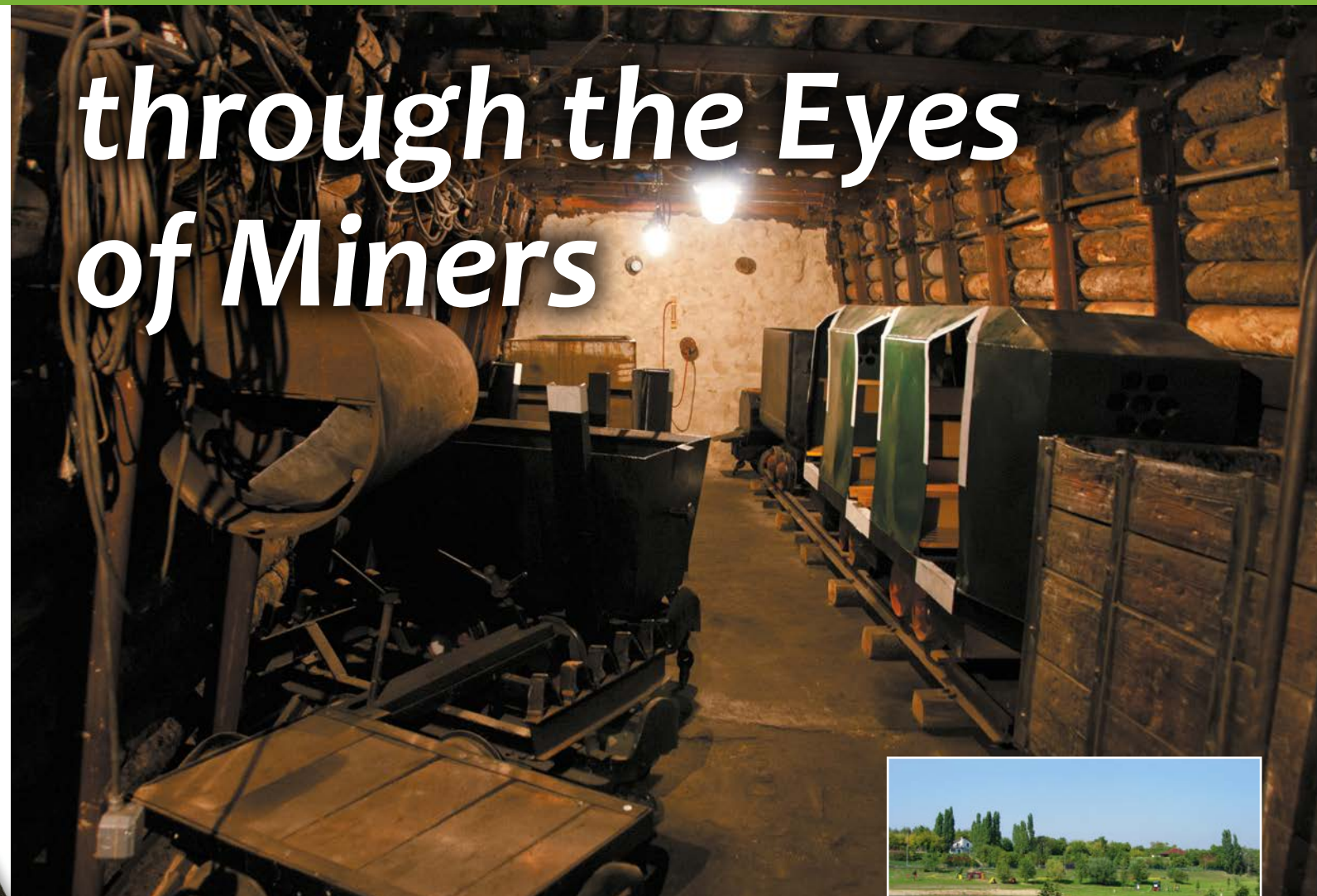
around the local region. And contrary to what many may presume, it shows that the mining industry has neither harmed nor crippled the land. This is an area that is being revived, where nature is greedily taking back the land that was once seized for its mineral riches. You won't find any dead trees in the Ore Mountains today. Quite the opposite, you can spend hours wandering around the young and diverse forests. It's hard to believe that just a few decades ago, greedy excavators were digging into the exposed surface of the Earth. The brochure assures you that: 'The Mining Trail takes you through a land-



scape that offers a whole range unique experiences for both hikers and casual tourists. It is up to you if you wish to go by car, on foot or by bike. The bike trail was made especially for this purpose and is outlined in the brochure. There is also a specially created map of the Ore Mountains that complements the brochure. Along the way, you can add a number of souvenir stickers from the newly produced edition The Ore Mountains Mining Trail to your collection, all of them marked with the project logo.' Every word of it is true, and I strongly encourage you to experience it for yourself.



through the Eyes of Miners



HISTORICAL GALLERIES AND NEW LAKES

So what can you expect from this trail? We start off by travelling back through time to the Middle Ages. We enter the historical mining galleries and get to experience, at least vicariously, how the miners felt as they toiled away in indescribable conditions extract rare metals such as tin, silver, and copper. These enticing tours into the centre of the Earth start in the village Měděnec. Then they take you down the galleries The Promised Land (Země zaslíbená) and The Virgin Mary (Marie Pomocná). On the Golden Hill (Zlatý kopec)

near the village Boží dar, you can again head underground down into the gallery Johannes and its huge chambers, which are quite unique. From the village Mikulov, you can access the gallery Lehnšafter, which has a couple of different routes inside. Old Martin (Starý Martin) in the village Krupka is one of the most visited galleries. In the village Hora Svaté Kateřiny, there are two mines not far from each other – the Mikuláš shaft (Milulášská šachta) and the restored mine Fortuna, the latter on the German side of the border. We will also pass some of the man-made lakes, which were created by filling former surface mines with water, such as the lakes Benedikt, Matylda, Most, and Barbora. Or the most popular of them all: Lake Alma (Kamencové jezero) with its unique water in Chomutov.



TOP TIP

You can pick up the brochure about the Mining Trail at any of the information centres in the Ore Mountains. Why not even in the centre where this meaningful brochure originated – the destination management company Krušné hory at the Waldstein castle in Litvínov?



Žatec, Hops, and UNESCO

In the last issue of the Gate, we tried to cover all the efforts and steps that had been made to add various local points of interest to the UNESCO World Heritage List. But a year is a long time. Things keep moving forward and it's time for an update. The most significant steps have been taken regarding the hops town, Žatec. How come? Well, the reason this application raised so much interest is because it is so unique. The objects that Žatec is wanting to add to the 'List of Responsibility' can only be seen here.

Are you wondering why we called it the 'List of Responsibility'? The answer is simple: Whoever manages to complete the, usually rather lengthy, task of being added to the UNESCO list, on the one hand receives a great benefit as the place will be known all over the world and by all travel agencies that bring tourists into the country. It's automatically added to the list of must-sees. On the other hand, however, the listed objects and their home country take on a great responsibility; they promise to take proper care of the objects, to perfect the customer service, and to ensure the comfort of all visitors. And whether or not the objects still deserve their place on the UNESCO list is revised at regular intervals.

But let's not get too theoretical. Instead, we'll take look at the specific progress that has been made on Žatec's account. First of all, the application attracted a fair amount of interest. The UNESCO World Heritage

Committee discussed the application from Žatec – the Hops Town at the meeting in Bahrain, which ended 1 July 2018. The town council of Žatec, the Ministry of Culture, the National Heritage Institute, and a team of external enthusiasts submitted the application together. Now, if I tell you that the response was – 'Please revise the nomination and expand the concept with examples of the hops growing tradition' – you may think it sounds more like a deferral than a breakthrough. But considering that this is UNESCO we're talking about, it's a big step forward. It means that they were impressed with the application and are in fact asking Žatec to make it even more extensive. It's quite clear that UNESCO is interested. So far, there is nothing like Žatec on the list.

Quite frankly – nothing like it could be on the list. This metropolis of hops is, indeed, truly unique. The mere number of buildings constructed for a single purpose – i.e. to dry and store hops – is a rarity. The buildings, by the way, look like regular town houses thanks to an old decree once issued by the town council. It's a curious experience; there you are wandering around the town and you think to yourself 'there's something odd about this square'. There are no curtains in the widows of the brick buildings



surrounding the square, no lights on anywhere, and if you walk up to one of the entrances you won't see any bells with nameplates. Is it a ghost town? Not at all. It's due to the fact that anyone wanting to build a hops kiln or a warehouse was given a clear ultimatum from the town council: The façade of the house had to look just like all the other regular brick houses in the area. That way the town could retain its homogeneous appearance and not look too industrial or foreign. They sure had their thinking caps on. But this curiosity also turned out to be one of the challenges regarding the UNESCO application; the committee made it clear that the application would stand a much better chance if it also included a concrete vision for the future of these buildings. And that is a rather



tall order. Žatec is not Prague – and even in Prague this would be no easy feat. But we, and all the other tourists, can of course only benefit from it. Museums? Interactive exhibitions? Galleries? Cafés? Theatres? Art studios? Can a provincial town like Žatec manage it all? It sure wants to try, anyway. But there are two sides to it – if the application goes through, tourists from all over the world will come rolling in and the newly built cultural and gastronomic businesses will be happy to satisfy their needs. But if it doesn't go through... No, let's not think about that, because if you start to doubt...

Of course it will go through. Let's quickly sum up what Žatec has to offer already: the biggest hops museum in the world, a completely unique Hops and Beer Temple with an extensive interactive exhibition, the only astronomical clock in the world with a beer-theme, an equally

unique hops lighthouse with an original 3D lift that travels up and down. Then there's the two craft breweries that stand next to each other as the heart of the hops town. And we've already mentioned the numerous kilns, warehouses, and centres for packing and classifying the hops. Not to forget the humorous museum of the mysterious people Homo Lupulus in one of the bastion fortresses in Žatec, the smallest hop-garden in the world on the square Náměstí Svobody, the historical trellised hop-garden in the Kapucínská Garden (Kapucínská zahrada), the Renaissance malt-house with an exhibition

about films made in Žatec (a fair few of them), and most importantly – whichever way you turn, Žatec is surrounded by immense hop-gardens that, to this day, produce the best hops in the world. We look forward to seeing Žatec on the UNESCO list.



TOP TIP

If you're looking for an experience out of the ordinary, take a trip across the sea of hops and stop off at the wonderful late Baroque château Stekník. The terraced gardens here are literally built on top of the ruins. The château is situated just seven kilometres away from Žatec.



Along the Elbe and Back

The Elbe is the artery of the Gate to Bohemia, and there's a cycle path that runs right along it. The track is sometimes poetically called the 'backbone' of the region, and it sure lives up to its name. The Elbe Cycle Route (Labská stezka) connects to the Ohře Cycle Route, the Ploučnice Cycle Route and the Express Trail in the Ore Mountains (Krušnohorská magistrála), as well as hundreds of kilometres of local cycle paths. It's no exaggeration to say that you can cover the entire Ústí Region on your bike. The Elbe Cycle Route measures 96 kilometres within the Ústí Region. But what does this cycle path look like, you wonder? Is this not just favouritism, when in actual fact the cycle path is just some muddy and stony footpath? 'Trust but verify' as they say. There's just no other way to find out than to hop on your bike and see it for yourself. But I don't want to keep you in suspense – I was quite satisfied, delighted even. And I'm sure you will be too.



The Elbe Cycle Route is like a living organism. It's in constant flux. Right now, for example, two new sections are being added. One stretch runs between the villages Dobřín and Hněvice via Račice; the other stretch runs between two other villages, Třeboutice and Nučnice. The surface of the Elbe Cycle Route is constantly being improved upon, and I have to say, it's as good as the cycle paths abroad. But it's not just about the surface. Cyclists want to know where they are and what there is to see. A number of new signposts have recently been added to the Elbe Cycle Route, including 30 signs telling you where you can turn off as well as 18 new information boards. So, if you turn off in a certain direction, you'll not only know where you are, but also what there

is to see around there. You'll know if it's worthwhile making a detour, and where you can find accommodation or refreshments... You might think that this should be a given. But it takes time to make and install the signs, and somebody has to do it. Luckily, the Elbe Cycle Route has a good warden: the destination management company called České středohoří puts a lot of love into its work. For example, at one point I cycled passed three playgrounds placed just far enough apart – completely irresistible to children. I can imagine that these playgrounds have been a life-saver for a number of families out on their bikes for the day. The only problem may be convincing your children to leave the playgrounds, and I'm afraid I can't help you with that one.



FANTASTIC FERRIES

Regular readers will know that the Elbe Cycle Route takes you from the plains near the town Roudnice right to the heart of the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří). It stretches along Porta Bohemica itself, and along the way you'll catch a whiff of wine and see towns that are true hidden gems. The cycle path is lined with hills and hillocks, as well as long ridges. As it draws to an end on the Czech side of the border, it's embraced by the most beautiful valley in the world, the Elbe canyon (Labský kaňon), which is guarded by the wondrous rocks of Bohemian Switzerland (České Švýcarsko). Cycling the along the whole route is on the to-do list of any long-distance cyclist. And the wise warden is aware of this and has, therefore, added alternative detours, and, most importantly, enticing circuit tracks. These circuits have only been made possible thanks to the region's numerous well-functioning ferry crossings along the river. Not many regions are so lucky. There are a total of ten ferries that cross the Elbe, and nine of these can be found within the Gate to Bohemia. This, of course, opens up to a number of possibilities. We can travel from bank to bank and see so many wondrous places that we can't even cover them all. One of the new alternative routes is marked 2A and starts from Pišťany, just under the hill Radobýl. There's an old sand quarry here that has been

filled with water and is now a lake called Pišťanské jezero. This is a wonderful place, a perfect spot to go for a swim or indulge in water sports. Once you've followed the sign to turn off of the main cycle path, the Lovosice ferry awaits you on right-hand side of the Elbe. There are plenty of reasons to visit the town Lovosice while you're here. Examples include great places to eat (for example Hotel Lev or Hotel Cukrovar), the Baroque Church of St Wenceslas (kostel sv. Václava), an interesting and eclectic town hall, the wonderful Pfannschmidt villa from 1887, the Art Nouveau church Mírový, and the unique memorial from the battle of Lovosice in 1756, which was built to look like the back wing of a chapel. Then there's the park Lesopark Osmička with a number of spots where you can make a fire, and the remains of the Jewish cemetery... And all of this is either right by the cycle path, or very close to it. Then you can continue cycling on along the asphalt to the next ferry. This time we go between the villages Malé Březno and Velké Žernoseky. Before you get on the ferry, I recommend taking another detour to the beautiful Oparenské valley (Oparenské údolí) and the ruins of the castle Oparno. Once you've taken the ferry across to Velké Žernoseky, you're back on the main track and can follow it back to our starting point below Radobýl. You see, there's plenty to see even along these alternative tracks.

of the cycle track 3066 that cuts right across the Elbe Cycle Route. Following track 3066 from the right-hand bank up the hill is quite an effort. At the top, however, we reach an area that is not often visited by tourists, but is none the less beautiful: the stunning landscape around the village Homole u Panny. In fact, this wonderful landscape continues all the way to



the village Třebušín and the area below the castle Kalich. But if we instead take the ferry across the river, there's a great ride through the valley, along the Lužický stream (Lužický potok), and then up the hill all the way to Nakléřovský pass (Nakléřovský průsmyk) from which you can see the Ore Mountains. All in all – this is a cyclist's paradise!

HIDDEN GEMS

Ferries along the Elbe Cycle Route
(some are only in service during the summer months):

Nučnice – Nučnický
Pišťany – Lovosice
Velké Žernoseky – Malé Žernoseky
Církvice – Dolní Zálezly
Brná – Vaňov
Svádov – Povrly
Velké Březno – Neštědce
Dolní Žleb – the road near Hřensko
Schöna – Hřensko (on the German side of the border)



UP AND ACROSS THE ORE MOUNTAINS

While we're at it, let's take a look at the other ferries, too. One of the first ones is the ferry from Nučnice to Nučnický. We'll be taking track 2A again, but this time it takes us from Počaply (I have written about Počaply's Baroque treasure elsewhere) to the fortress town Terezín, on to Litoměřice, and back into the arms of the Elbe Cycle Route. Or how about the ferry from Velké Březno to Povrly? That ferry is part

Fourteen Paths to Calvary

There are 14 stations along the Stations of the Cross. And there are 14 Stations of the Cross in the Bohemian Lowlands, as Šluknov Hook (Šluknovský výběžek) has been called for centuries. Coincidence? Perhaps, but I wouldn't be surprised if it were intentional. This region used to be a Catholic island in a sea of Protestants; each religious symbol was a great proclamation of faith. The Stations of the Cross started appearing during the Baroque period, and they have continued doing so, in their own way, up until today. Fortunately. Because he who forgets his past has no future. So let's, at least briefly, go through the 14 Stations of the Cross that end at the top of the hill called Kalvárie. Perhaps, once you see them with your own eyes, you'll be as taken by them as I was.

ŠLUKNOV

This is the oldest one. The foundations were laid by a Russian, whose motivation was the gratitude he felt due to having found employment and being able to start a family here. The stations weren't finished, however, until after his death in 1756. It has an atmosphere of Passion to it; as well as the 14 stations and a Garden of Gethsemane, it also includes several chapels and artificial caves. To this day, Cross Peak (Křížový vrch) above the square in Šluknov is no ordinary place. The energy of it will affect anyone, religious or not.

JIŘETÍN POD JEDLOVOU

This is the most famous of the Stations of the Cross in the region. Perhaps even in the country, as it was awarded the title Monument of the Year in 2017. This, too, is a Passion kind of route with a Garden of Gethsemane, and the village Jiřetín was also built in a somewhat Baroque style. The stations were completed in 1764. The Hill of the Cross (Křížová



hora) is a marvellous spot in itself. It emanates an earthly energy, and you'll find a wonderful roofed gloriette in close proximity to the Stations of the Cross.

VILÉMOV

This is the last Baroque Stations of the Cross (1766). It leads to the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (kostel Nanebevzetí Panny Marie) and a chapel with healing water. The typical Baroque symmetry had to be sacrificed due to the nature of the terrain and the stations have been placed wherever nature made a space. It's an incredible area, yet not many people have heard of it.

BRTNÍKY

This Stations of the Cross was built at the very beginning of the 19th century. One of the remarkable things about it, is the way one walks between the stations: On the way to the chapel, pilgrims zigzag between two rows of stations. The stations have been renovated throughout the last 20 years, restoring their original colour and adding new replicas of the original images by Joseph von Führich.

JIŘÍKOV

The Jiříkov Stations of the Cross makes a circuit around the Church of St George (kostel sv. Jiří), and thus traces the circumference of the old cemetery. It was finished in 1826, but is still evolving today. Current and thematic artwork by the artist Siegfried Köder were added at the beginning of the 20th century.

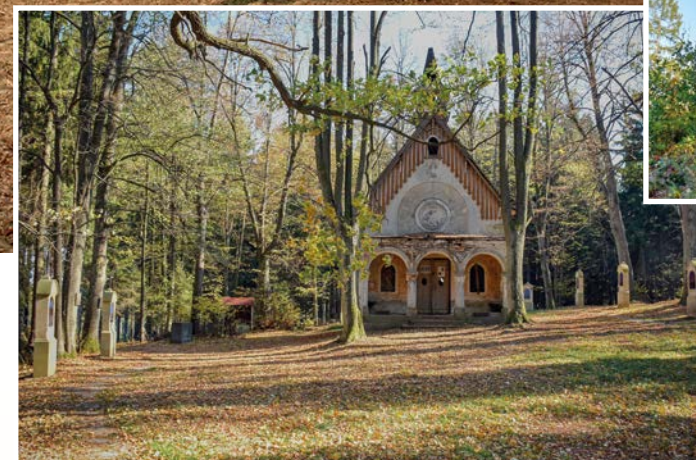
STARÉ KŘEČANY

The Staré Křečany Stations of the Cross was built around the same time as Jiříkov and it, too, circles a church: the remarkable Baroque Church of St John of Nepomuk (chrám sv. Jana Nepomuckého). And it is also well looked after, even today.



ANNABERG NAD LOBENDAVOU

Personally, I find Annaberg nad Lobendavou to be the most charming of all the Stations. It is the northernmost Stations of the Cross in the Czech Republic, the tip of the Catholic island. It was finished in 1834, has a Passion quality to it, and surrounds a Garden of Gethsemane with statues depicting Christ and the apostles. This Station was renovated less than two years ago. This place is bound to touch even the most hardened of people.



JÁCHYM U LOBENDAVY

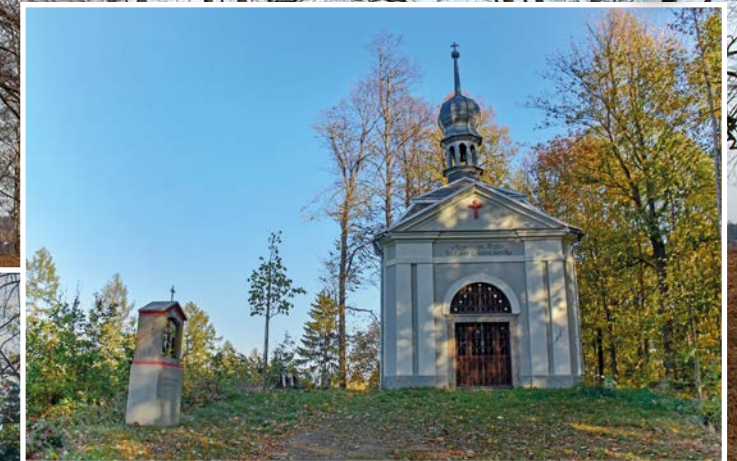
In close proximity to Annaberg we find yet another Stations of the Cross. It was restored for the first time in 1916 and, after years of decay, again in 2017. In fact, it was completely rebuilt. The chapel is still dilapidated, but an initiative has been started to preserve it. This place, too, has an irresistible charm to it. It's simply...well, you have to see it. I strongly recommend it.

VELKÝ ŠENOV

This Stations of the Cross, from 1856, was also restored following the turn of the millenium. The remarkable thing about this one is its 12th station, i.e. the image of Christ's crucifixion. It's depicted, not once, but three times – at the 12th station, in the form of a large cross with Christ crucified, and again as the chapel Kalvárie.

HIDDEN GEMS

If you are planning a pilgrimage along the Stations of the Cross in and around Šluknov, don't forget to stop off at the Rumburk Loreto Chapel. As well as the Baroque jewel itself, there's also an exhibition of ecclesiastical art in Šluknov, a multimedia presentation of the pilgrimage sites and the Crosses of the Stations, and a new map with all the stations clearly marked.



KRÁSNÁ LÍPA

Nowadays, it's not easy to spot the Stations of the Cross in the glade behind the Church of St Mary

Magdalene (kostel sv. Máří Magdalény) in Krásná Lípa. This one actually only exists because of the Stations of the Cross in Velký Šenov. It was a case of – well, the neighbours have got one, so why haven't we? Today it ends at the pergola but back then... It was built in 1859 and restored... Well, not yet, but hopefully it will be.

KRÁLOVSTVÍ

The Stations of the Cross in Krásná Lípa and Království were both finished in the same year. And the one in Království was also recently restored – the Chapel of the Flagellation (kaple Bičování Krista) has been repaired, and the stone stations have been adorned by new castings that are copies of the original reliefs.

FUKOV

Built in 1881, the Fukov Stations of the Cross is the only one that has not

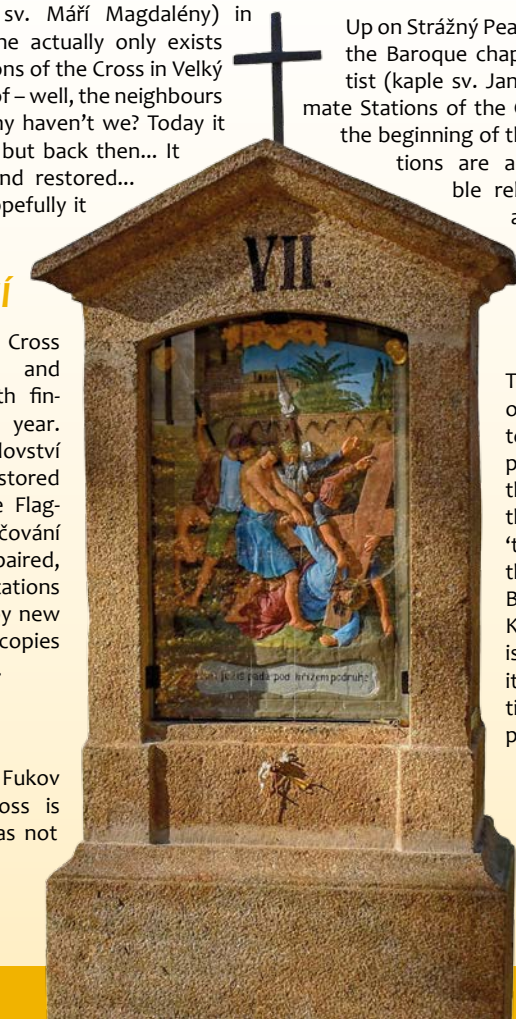
been preserved, just like the village itself. Five years ago, a sacred place, which symbolically marks the stations, was created. May we keep in mind, that obliterating villages and removing churches comes at a cost – a part of our history is lost.

RUMBURK

Up on Strážný Peak (Strážný vrch), behind the Baroque chapel of St John the Baptist (kaple sv. Jana Křtitele), the penultimate Stations of the Cross was built right at the beginning of the last century. The stations are adorned with remarkable reliefs, but anyone with a good ear will be able to hear them crying out to be repaired.

VARNSDORF

The youngest Stations of the Cross dates back to 1912. Not many people are aware of the fact that the town hosts the famous neo-Gothic 'towerless church', i.e. the Church of St Charles Borromeo (chrám sv. Karla Boromejského). It is simply fascinating. And it its shadow, the Stations of the Cross waits patiently to be restored.



The Ore Mountains on Two Wheels

Bikers – they're like a nation within a nation. Or perhaps a global ethnicity. Some people consider them to be lunatics, others think they're awesome. They themselves think they are a completely normal group of people connected by a common love, longing and lifestyle. Without their bikes they just wouldn't be themselves. To be honest, the region hasn't had much to offer bikers in the past. Which is why it is so great that the destination management company Krušné hory had started cooperating with MOTOWANDER, a company that creates travel brochures for bikers. They have just finished their second project, and bikers are going to love it. So what have they created? A fun way to get to know the wonderful, obstinate Ore Mountains by bike in a way that is respectful to both nature and other people.

TRIPPER RALLYE IN THE ORE MOUNTAINS

The Ore Mountains has hundreds of kilometres of well-marked trails for hikers (nobody marks hiking trails as well as the Czechs), and many of these trails continue across the border into Germany. There are trails suitable for Nordic walking, for dog tracking, for long-distance hiking, and any other kind of hiking you can think of – it's paradise for hikers. And cyclists are no worse off. The cycle paths are so numerous that, seen from above, they create a thick web, and the web of cross-country skiing tracks are even thicker. The Ore Mountains have something for everybody. But what about bikers? Two years ago, a specific motorbike road that runs across the Czech-German border was created in the Ore Mountains. The Ore Mountain Tripper Rallye in 2017 was a harbinger of this road. Though Tripper Rallye was in fact a game, a kind of real-life quest. The original idea came from an annual orienteering competition run by a Suzuki V-Strom motorcycle club. 'The tradition of creating it-



neraries for private orienteering competitions goes back a few years now, and our main aim is always to get to know new places while having a good time and enjoying rides full of twists and turns, and fantastic views' says the mastermind behind the project. The fun thing about Tripper Rallye was that everybody knew that it would be a great ride along some interesting places, but nobody knew the route. The only known point was the starting point. We had to figure

out the route by solving the riddles, quizzes and rebuses provided in the specially printed leaflet. Each answer gave you a clue and the clues helped you figure out the route. If you got lost, there was a number to call to help you with the next clue. We rode around the Ore Mountains and made fools of ourselves on both sides of the border. If you reached the goal, you were given a secret code and could log on to the website to print a certificate. But nobody was too worried about the certificate – the ride itself was enough of a reward. Beautiful views along the route, obstacles to overcome, tasks to fulfil, a secret destination... What more could you ask for?

MOTORBIKING THE MINING TRAIL

We've already written about the Mining Trail in the Ore Mountains just a few pages back. But those routes were for more your typical tourist, so to speak. This time, we want to give bikers some inspiration for great rides with thematically chosen activities and sights

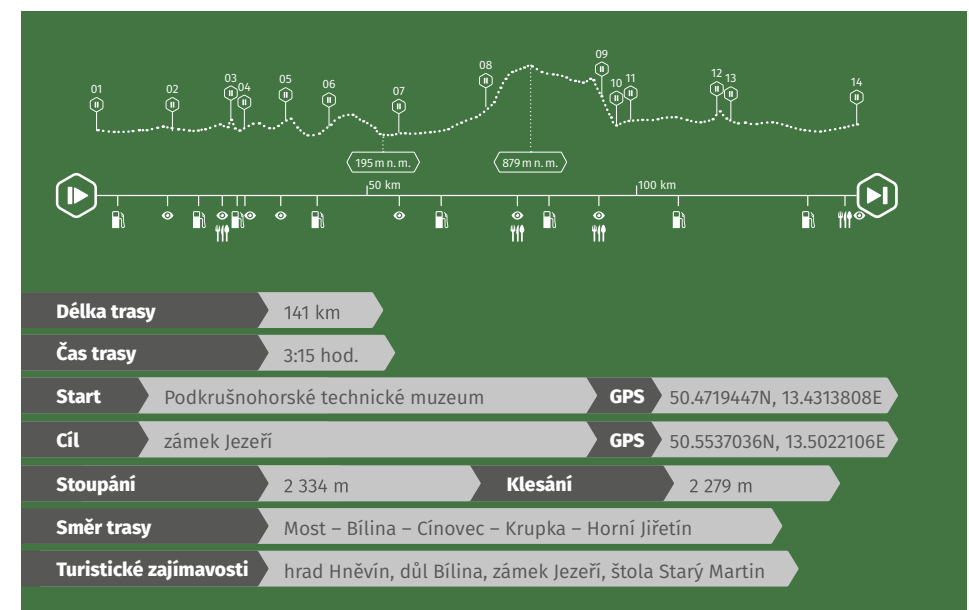
along the way. The Mining Trail is jam-packed with interesting things to do or see, and you can find all the details in the leaflet that was published just last year. The leaflet is available either at the information centre at the Waldstein castle (Zámek Valdštejnů) in Litvínov, or at any other information centre in the region. Unlike the leaflet we mentioned above, this one is no game, but a knowledgeable guide. The route starts at the Podkrušnohorské Technical Museum just outside the town Litvínov. Set off at your own pace – because ask any real biker and they'll tell you that, although it's fun in your hair, the branches that slice through the wind, the open landscape, the company and the freedom of exploring the region. So, pick your own pace. And where does the track go? First it goes past the viewing point Vršanská (Vršanská vyhlídka) down to the pit of a surface mine, then on to Hněvín Castle (hrad Hněvín) that rises above the town Most, and past the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (kostel Nanebevzetí Panny Marie), which had to be moved from its original position due to the mines. Next, it's up to look at the view of the Bílina mine, past the quondam dump Radosevická, which is now being recultivated, and up to the lookout tower Levice. From here it goes down under the railway bridge in the village Hrob and all the way up to the ridge of the mountains and the hill Komáří vížka. From there, it's on to the mineshaft Old Martin (Starý



Martin), then the Krupka Castle (hrad Krupka), the memorial for the victims of the explosion in the mine Nelson III, and finally past Rýzmburk Castle all the way to the Jezeří Castle. And there you have it, 141 kilometres full of amazing experiences. If you take a look at the map, or if you're a regular reader, you'll soon realise that there are plenty of extra detours, stops, views and adventures along this loop. The Ore Mountains are magnificent and getting to know them is a never-ending adventure. On the Czech side of the border, they're steep and soaring; on the German side gentle, rolling into plains. In the summer blooming, warm and yet mysteriously melancholic; in the winter colourless, vast and sparkling... Irrespective of whether you explore the mountains by car, by foot, by bike, if you're skiing – or if you're on your motorbike, may Marcebila (the guardian of the Ore Mountains) watch over you and help you find your way to whichever wonderful destination you are headed.

TOP TIP

If you interested in the collaboration between MOTOWANDER and Krušné hory and would like to see more routes specifically designed for motorbikes, go to www.motowander.com.



Meandering through the Kaolinite Landscape

The area surrounding the village Podbořany in the foothills of the Doupov Mountains (Doupovské hory) is still rather unknown among hikers. The undulating landscape has a contemplative character, and as you wander through it, you can't help but feel that it's hiding some kind of secret. Hidden among the meadows and islands of trees, you'll find lakes that have a marvellous colour. Dive in, and you slowly start turning into a statue as thousands of shiny flakes cover your skin. With each step you take, the soft bottom moulds itself below your feet. The doughy sand is almost irresistible. If you grab a handful, you'll see beautiful flakes of kaolinite slipping through your fingers.

FROM THE DEPTHS OF PREHISTORY TO THE FORTRESS OF HLUBANY

Kaolinite plays a leading role round here. The region is home to the only Kaolinite Museum; an educational trail is under way; and to this day, kaolinite is the livelihood of many locals, as this rare resource is still mined and processed here. Where does the kaolinite come from? It was first detected some 200 years ago, but it had been hidden below the surface since prehistoric times. The local Permian sandstone had been intensively weathered and, bit by bit, it turned into the clay mineral otherwise known as kaolinite. Kaolinite has been excavated from the white quarries for the past 200 years. The first quarry was opened by a Mr Anton Sengl, who extracted the kaolinite by hand through waterwashing. In the 19th century, two factories for processing kaolinite sprung



up – a porcelain factory and a ceramics factory. They started producing tiles, tiled fireplaces and baths. Up until recently, this kind of information was just scattered in various archives or in the memories of the locals – because almost every family in Podbořany has some kind of connection to kaolinite. Considering the impact kaolinite has had on the region, it had been somewhat neglected. Until last year when the Kaolinite Museum was opened in the village Hlubany, not far from Podbořany. The museum is located in Hlubany's Gothic water fortress, a building of historical value which has finally been given a meaningful purpose after lying fallow for many years. The exhibition in Hlubany is part of the Podbořany Museum, which not only has an interesting permanent exhibition about the lives of the Volhynian Czechs (regular readers know all about them) but also displays various collections covering the flora, archaeology and geology of Podbořany. The Kaolinite Museum ties in naturally with these collections. In order to look around the fortress and see the exhibits, you'll need the warden, Mar-

tin Cyprian. You can either drop in at the Podbořany Museum, or ring ahead and agree on a time. Martin takes you to the fortress himself, which is quite handy as he is one of the creators of the Kaolinite Museum. Nobody is better suited to tell you about kaolinite. So what is there to see at the fortress in Hlubany? Well, right away you'll find yourself right in a kaolinite quarry watching a man skilfully excavating kaolinite clay from the open wall, just as they did in the olden days. Behind him there's a mine cart full of clay he has already mined. Of course – it's only a model, but if close your eyes and use your imagination, you'll soon travel back in time and will even hear the miner breathing! In addition to the information about the origins of kaolinite, its history, the excavation process and later manufacturing, there is also a dashing white display of various local porcelain and ceramic products, all made of the white clay mineral. There are beautiful tiles, cups, plates, poultry feeders, and also such items as an exact model of the natural drying chamber in the nearby village Nepomyšl. Having a guide with you really makes the exhibition come to life, and if you're lucky Martin will tell you an anecdote or two. Perhaps about that time when he travelled half-way across the country to an auction. A rare tiled fireplace, most likely built by his late grandfather who he'd never met, was being auctioned off. He managed to call it in and proudly lugged it all the way back to the fortress in Hlubany, where it is now on display.

FINGERS CROSSED FOR THE EDUCATIONAL TRAIL

To fully understand how kaolinite has affected the area, it's of course best to saunter through



kilometres and would go all the way to the village Nepomyšl, and a shorter circuit about 7 kilometres long. So, once you've had a look at the exhibition in the Kaolinite Museum, head west to the nearby village Buškovice. From there, go first southwards and then westwards past Šípkový peak (Šípkový vrch), Malý Oprám and Velký Oprám – the kaolinite lakes we mentioned earlier – and all the way back to Podbořany. And keep your fingers crossed for those who are working hard to install the educational trail. This kaolinite landscape really deserves it.

the countryside and see the landscape created by the industry. There are plans to create an educational trail that would show tourists all the interesting historical places, and prevent anyone from getting lost, but the bureaucracy is not easy – it requires numerous permits and authorizations as well as convincing a number of people and places to cooperate. It's a time-consuming process. So far, the trail is still unmarked and there no information boards to be seen. However, if you know where to go, it's still possible to see the landscape. Two routes are up for consideration – a longer one which would be about 17



TOP TIP

If you come in summer, why not go for a swim in the pool in Podbořany? And don't miss the chapel of St Anna (kaplička sv. Anny) on the hill Rubín – what now looks like a palisade and a wooden lookout tower was once a significant fortification (perhaps even the legendary Wogatisburg).



Caught on Camera



The Ústí Region Film Office (Filmová kancelář Ústeckého kraje, or Fkúk for short) was featured quite heavily in the last issue of the Gate. But this team of two works so hard, and so fast, that two pages is barely enough to cover their work since then. Location after location in the Ústí Region is being caught on camera. The locals have noticed the growing interest and are giving a helping hand suggesting unknown spots, scouting locations that fulfil the film makers' needs, and signing up as extras. It seems that almost everyone has realised that film crews not only bring a bit of prestige and free advertising to the region, but also a lot of money – just think how much the crews must spend on accommodation, food and other services, and how many jobs they create. During the past few months, one thing has been on tip of everyone's tongue, namely...

THE TV-SERIES MOST!

The eight-part TV-series *Most!* was created by the expert scriptwriter-director duo Kolečko–Prušinovský. And naturally, it was shot in the town Most, where the film crew spent half of 2017. And it wasn't just about the location, a number of locals even appear in the background. In fact, more than twice the number people needed showed up when the team was recruiting extras. It got to the point of people doing whatever they could to be cast as an extra; one excited candidate even slashed the crew's tyres in order to draw attention to himself and get hired. It was just like a scene from the TV-show. Fkúk did a tremendous job in Most – Bára and Helena helped scout locations and recruit extras, negotiated with the local council and were practically a kind of bulldozer clearing the crew's path from any obstacles. They also negotiated exclusive pre-viewings in

Ústí nad Labem and Most. Not only did these viewings give the film crew the chance to show the locals their appreciation, but they also got to see that even those who are supposedly portrayed in the show find it funny, if not downright hilarious. And thanks to Fkúk's initiative, all proceeds from the pre-viewings country-wide



will go to the local hospice in Most. And was the crew happy with Most? Absolutely! They found the locals and the regional beauracrats to be much more helpful than expected, and the setting was just perfect. 'My wife is from Most and I've been to the pub Severka with my father-in-law. The characters in the show are based on real people. Some of them, anyway. That's why it's situated in Most. It didn't even occur to me to relocate it', Petr Kolečko explained when asked why he chose to set the show in Most. Jan Prušinovský adds: 'Most is a working-class town through and through, so it has this immutable philosophy. Visually, it's completely unique, because it was built in just a few years, it sprung up out of nowhere to replace the old demolished town. There aren't many places like this, where the beauty of nature is intertwined with communist architecture.' The final product will be aired on Czech national television.



HIDDEN GEMS

Despite the number of action scenes in the second season of *Rapl*, the most serious injury incurred was a twisted ankle, and the biggest material damage was a broken window on one of the trailers due to a strong wind.

RAPL MOVES TO ÚSTÍ NAD LABEM

Fkúk's long-lasting cooperation with the crew making the second season of *Rapl*, a successful crime show, is another great accomplishment. The Elbe runs through the second season like a red thread, so it's no surprise that a third of the 13 episodes were shot in Ústí nad Labem. The crew spent 45 days here shooting all over the town – at the castle Větruše, on the Mariánský bridge, at the old castle Střekov, at the hospital, in the industrial area, the shopping centre, and out on the streets as well as at Lake Milada. They also chose less traditional locations, such as the cable car or a trolleybus. But they ended up spending most of their time either at the port in Ústí, or inside one of the town's regional buildings, which had been given such a makeover it was difficult to even recognise it. And what did the town gain from all of this? Not

only did the crew spend plenty of money here, they also cooperated with a number of local suppliers and employed 500 locals, 100 of which were extras. And was the crew satisfied? This is a very important matter, because, as in any field, word or mouth spreads quickly and a good review could bring more film crews to the Ústí Region. So let me tell you – they were delighted. They really were. The creative producer, Josef Viewegh, for example, said: 'We met the girls from Fkúk just as the project was taking root. They promised a lot, and not only did they keep their promises, they did even more. Without Fkúk we would never have chosen this location.' Now that's what I call positive feedback. Let's finish up with a comment from the show's main actor, Hynek Čermák: 'If I were to buy a cottage, I'd buy one somewhere round here, by the Elbe, so that I could see it every day. I'd maybe even get a boat, because it reminds me a bit of the canals in the Netherlands.'

OTHER STAR APPEARANCES BY THE GATE TO BOHEMIA

Last year, the German–American film *Jojo Rabbit*, starring Scarlett Johansson and Sam Rockwell, was shot in the Ústí Region. In addition to this, the BBC visited a number of places (such as Litoměřice, Bohušovice nad Ohří and Žatec) while shooting a new war serial – *World on Fire*. The region is also featured in scenes from the Czech drama *Jan Palach* and the sitcom *Světlu vstříc*. This year, the director Ondřej Trojan will be visiting Varnsdorf for a few scenes for the movie *Bourák*, and Dan Svátek's film based on a book by Josef Formánek will also be shot in the Ústí Region – *Dvě slova jako klíč*. And that is by no means an exhaustive list. So congratulations to Fkúk!



fkūk.

Filmová kancelář Ústeckého kraje



A Challenging Hike among the Castles of the Czech Central Highlands

The Czech Central Highlands are known for being a land of many castles, and we'll see both castles and peaks aplenty as we follow the Golden Trail through the region. This lengthy trek isn't among the most commonly hiked, yet it's a great choice for keen hikers up for a challenge! The distance from the start in Ústětk to the finish in Budyně nad Ohří is a good one hundred kilometres in total and takes at least five days to cover. But trust me, you won't find such a beautiful five-day trek anywhere else. So let's take on this unusual challenge and start crossing those castles off the list...

This is the hardcore version. We won't be spreading it out over a week with two rest days, or even dividing the trek into two three-day hikes. With enough determination and a reasonable physique, that won't be necessary. God knows what we'll look like by day three, but for now our motivation is keeping us going. I can tell you right away that there is plenty of accommodation along the way, so hardy as we are, we won't be setting up camp somewhere in the middle of the woods or behind a castle. No need to take things to the extreme (though the choice is there for those of a more Spartan nature).

DAY ONE, FULL OF MOTIVATION (19 KM)

Ústětk is a beautiful medieval village, but not many people know that, among its numerous other sights, it also hides a castle from the early 15th century. The castle was rebuilt in late



Baroque style, and then rebuilt again to become a brewery. This huge building still remains today, as do the town fortifications with the famous tower Pikartská, where a number of demons now run rampant in the Demon Museum. We set off from Ústětk along the red trail markings and singing a spirited song. We pass through the picturesque village Srdov and continue on to the ruins of the castle Litýš. The castle was erected by Zikmund von Wartenberg to serve as a base in the fight against the Hussites. The castle was never conquered, though it's also not clear if the Hussites ever actually attempted to do so. Next, the trail takes us past the mysterious castle ruins on the hill above the village Levín and then on to the village Třebušín. In Třebušín, we change to the yellow trail markings and walk up to the Hussite castle Kalich. The top of the hill has recently been cleared of trees and the castle ruins are kept in good condition. We spend the night in Třebušín.

DAY TWO, TWO ROUTES TO CHOOSE FROM (19 OR 20 KM)

Today we have two options. Option one follows the green trail markings (Žižkova stezka) past numerous castles while conquering the same land as the Hussite leader Žižka. First we go to the castle ruins Panna, and then we follow a variety of coloured markings past Tašov (the remains of a fortress) and the village Němčí to the stunning Průčelská ravine (Průčelská rokle) and its waterfalls. Then we continue along the green educational trail called Pod Vysokým Ostrým. This gives us some wonderful views



of the Elbe down in the valley and, above it, we see the castle Střekov, the best-preserved Gothic castle in the country. Finally we hop on the train to finish up in the village Velké Žernoseky. The second option is just as long and starts off taking the yellow trail markings from Třebušín across the unique peak Trojhora. Once we get to the sign post, we follow the blue markings past Křížová hill (Křížová hora) and then down to the village Skalice. From here, we follow red and then yellow all the way to

the castle Hradiště (the views along the way are breathtaking). From Hradiště we move on to Kamýk, castle ruins that are visible far and wide, and finally it's downhill to the village Velké Žernoseky.



DAY THREE, HUMP DAY (18 KM)

The ferry takes us across the Elbe from one village to another, from Velké Žernoseky to Malé Žernoseky. We wander through the charming Oparenské valley (Oparenské údolí), and as we reach the end of the valley we head upwards to the massive fourteenth-century castle ruins, Oparno. With all this behind us, we are a bit weary by the time we get to the village Milešov, but we're still impressed by the well-preserved Baroque castle (now a home for the elderly). If you still have energy to spare, you can hike up Milešovka, the highest peak in the area, but those of us with a bit more self-preservation will head to the quondam castle Ostrý. These underrated ruins are quite remarkable, a treasure of medieval fortifications. Finally, we roll down the hill to the lovely bed and breakfast Kocourov, where we are properly fed.

DAY FOUR, FOR THE HARDENED (18 KM)

From Kocourov, we set out on the Golden Trail again. This time we follow the red markings to the village Medvědice, where there used to be a fortress. We then walk around Lipská Hill (Lipská hora) before reaching the ruins of the small Hussite castle Oltářík and one of the most beautiful views in the Czech Central Highlands. We continue through a basin to the former castle Skalka, of which only the military watch-tower remains. Then it's up the hill to Košťálov and the remains of a fourteenth-century castle that has become the symbol of the Czech Central



Highlands. Further then to the village Třebenice, where the Museum of Bohemian Garnet hosts an exhibition of castles in the Czech Central Highlands. We end the day with a strengthening cup of hot chocolate at the charming local chocolate shop.

WHERE TO STAY

Ústětk – Kemp Ústětk u jezera Chmelař, Sporthotel Patriot, bed and breakfast U Rybníka, or Hotel Racek

Třebušín – at the castle, or bring a tent and camp at the local ranch 3V

Velké Žernoseky – Kemp Marina in Píšťany, or the hostel in Velké Žernoseky

Kocourov – bed and breakfast Kocourov

Třebenice – bed and breakfast U Havlů, or the manor U Chobotnice in Podsedice



DAY FIVE, FOR THE SURVIVORS (21 KM)

If you can stand, you can walk. Again, we follow the red markings of the Golden Trail through the land of castles. This time it zigzags its way to the foot of a hill called Klapý and the most iconic castle in the Czech Central Highlands. Two towers, one white one black, rise from the top of the hill where the castle Hazmburk awaits us. As we continue, we see the welcoming glimmer of the river Ohře, and next to the river, the Baroque Libochovice Château, which houses an interesting exhibition. Finally, we follow the tributary river named the Little Ohře (Malá Ohře), which keeps us company all the way to our final destination, the moated castle Budyně nad Ohří with its famous alchemist workshop. Did you arrive in one piece? Then you're quite the hiker!



An Adventure in the Church of Nature

Challenging hikes in difficult terrain that last for several days are becoming more and more popular. The most popular hikes are found in Scandinavia and New Zealand. For years, I have claimed that Bohemian Switzerland is actually a smaller Central European version of New Zealand. I doubt there is such a variety of beauty in such a small area anywhere else in the world. So I was quite excited to hear that a similarly challenging hike is being marked out on the left bank of the Elbe, among the forests and rivers between the hill Děčínský Sněžník and the German town Bad Schandau. Now that's a challenge!

A TRAIL FOR THE PREPARED

I'm not going to pretend that I covered those 100 kilometres of the Forest Track (Lesní stezka / Forststeig) all in one go, but I'm incredibly tempted to do so. For now, I've just had a look around, a little taster. And I was enchanted and amazed by what I saw. If you think it might be something for you, I'd say go for it. It's like experiencing a completely different world, a world without that quotidian stress, and the snare of electronics and constant communication that is the norm nowadays. But I should warn you – this hike is no walk in the park and it's definitely not for everyone. It requires good health, a certain level of fitness, the right equipment and a sensible approach. You need to have a clear plan and plenty of time. Never hike after dark, and plan where to spend



the night ahead of time. It's best to do it with a partner, and to keep a third party informed on your approximate location. The weather is not to be underestimated either. Finally, make sure you carry enough food, water and a change of clothes – good shoes are a given. The track is open from April through October and it's best divided into seven full-day hikes. There are five cottages and three wind shelters to stay in

along the way. The cottages have a communal area for up to about twelve people and the wind shelters can each host about five small tents. If you want to stay in any of the cottages or wind shelters, you need to buy a ticket before you set off. The tickets are valid for two years and are available at the Bohemian Switzerland Information Centre (Dům Českého Švýcarska) in Krásná Lípa or at Autocamp Pod Císařem in Ostrov, among other places. The cost for adults is €10 per night for a cottage and €5 per night for a wind shelter. The proceeds from the tickets go towards maintaining the trail. Once you arrive at your lodging for the night, you simply tear off a ticket and put it in the designated letterbox. Like I said, it's a different world. What else do you need to know...? Ah yes, the trail markings! Follow the vertical yellow markings. Within the Czech Republic and along the roads there are also some additional green arrows. Ready? Then let's go.

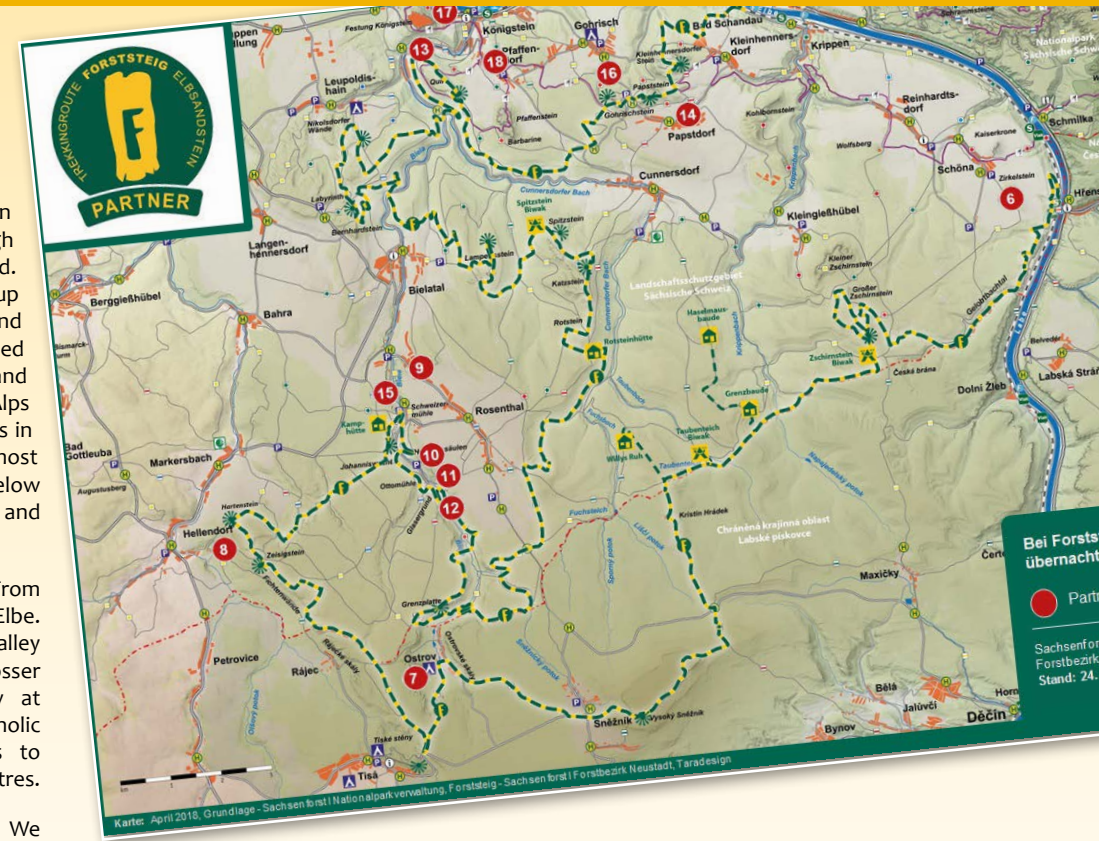
ROCKS, FORESTS AND TABLELANDS

The Forest Track starts at the railway station in Schöna, Germany and passes through the border forests of Bohemian Switzerland. It goes along forest paths and tracks, up gravel roads, over twelve tablelands, and ends in Bad Schandau, Germany. We'll need 7-8 days to cover the 100 kilometres, and the elevation is as though we were in the Alps – 2770 metres. Unlike the wild rocky tracks in Schrammstein, Affenstein and Bastei, most of the rocks along this track are hidden below the trees in the forest. And it's that solitude and melancholy that make this track so unique.

Day One – from Schöna to Grenzbaude. From the station, we set off following the Elbe. Then we go through the charming valley Gelobtbachstal and up to the tableland Grosser Zschirnstein. There's a wonderful view at the top. Next we walk through the melancholic forest to the signpost that points us to Grenzbaude. The total distance is 15 kilometres.

Day Two – from Grenzbaude to Ostrov. We set off through the forest, along the valley and past the lake Taubenteich. Then it's upwards to Kristin hrádek, an old hunting cabin that was built back in 1734 (today it's a lovely bed and breakfast, and the restaurant is even better). And then we continue even further upwards to the lookout tower at the top of the hill Děčínský Sněžník. Once we have made our way down to the bottom of the rocks and reached Ostrov (a small village with a campsite, a hotel and a great restaurant), we'll have walked 13 kilometres.

Day Three – from Ostrov to Beutwald. This is the most adventurous and the most extraordinary part of the trail. From Ostrov, we pass the Volské rocks (Volské kameny) on our way to Rajecké skály, Tisá and its sandstone rocks (Tiské stěny). We pass through wild canyons and walk across vast open hills all the way to the deep forest of Beutwald. 14 kilometres.



Day Four – from Beutwald to Rotsteinhütte. Today we dive into the wonderful rocky valley that accompanies the stream Biela. Next, we pass the stunning Hercules Columns (Herkulesssäulen – Herkulovy sloupy) up to the dizzying viewing point Grenzplatte. From here we follow the small, almost forgotten, footpaths along the border down to Rotsteinhütte. 20 kilometres.

Day Five – from Rotsteinhütte to Nikolsdorf. This section is full wonderful views from Katzstein, Spitzstein and Lampertstein. It ends in at the Nikolsdorf rock labyrinth. 18 kilometres.

Day Six – from Nikolsdorf to Gohrisch. This rugged leg of the journey takes us through the valley Bielatal, across the plateau Quirl, around the majestic Pfaffenstein tableland, and passed the elegant rock formation Barbarine at the foot of the table hill Gohrisch. 12 kilometres.

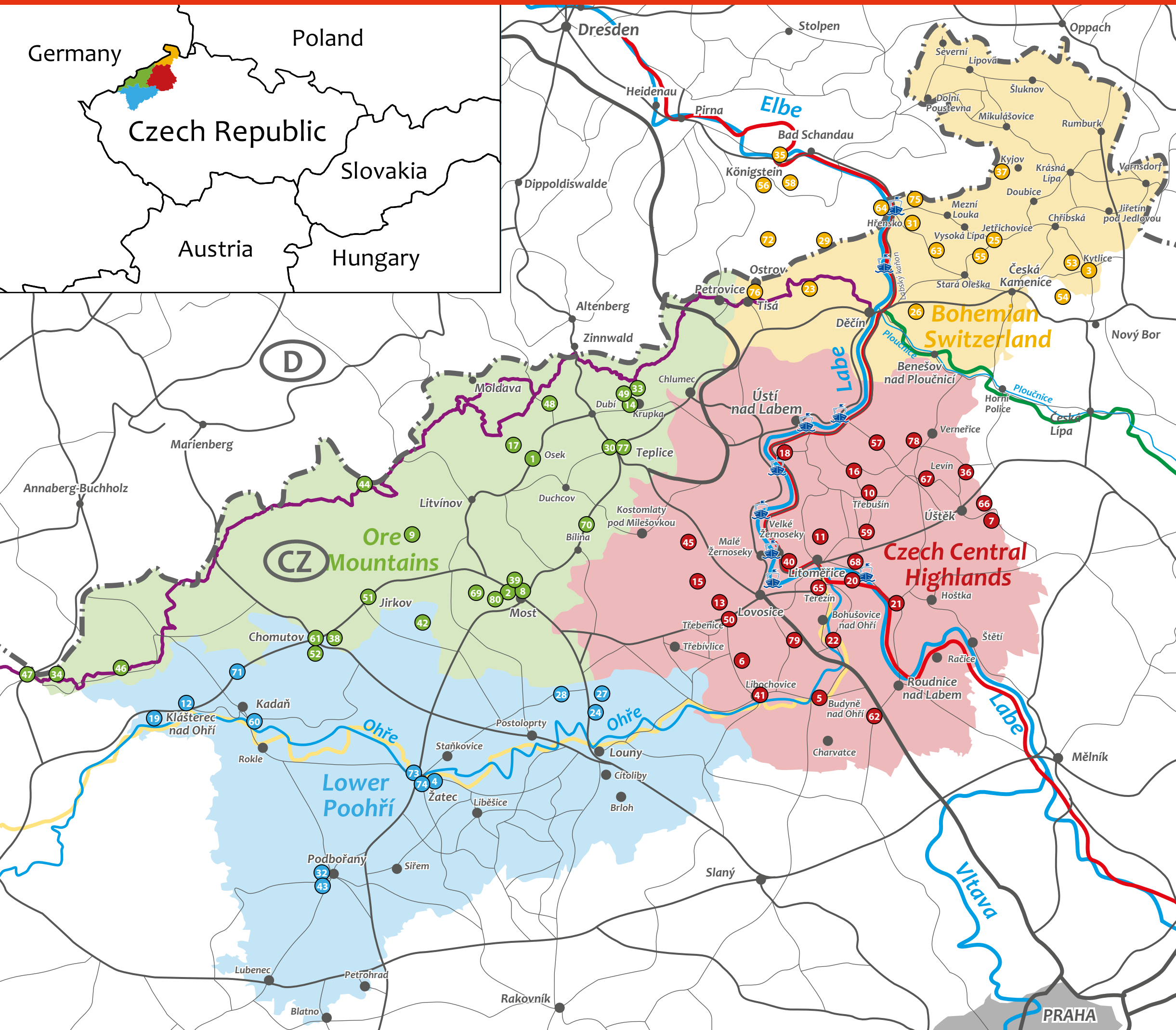
Day Seven – from Gohrisch to Bad Schandau. On our last day, we cross Gohrisch, and Papststein and the wistful tableland Kleinhennersdorfer Stein back down to the railway station in Bad Schandau. 9 kilometres.



TOP TIPS

Don't underestimate the value of being prepared. Go to www.forststeig.sachsen.de for further information in English, such as how to get to and from the start and finish.





Clues:

- 1 3D labyrinth among the treetops in Osek
 - 2 Autodrom Most
 - 3 Brewery Helene
 - 4 Brewery Pioneer Beer
 - 5 Castle Budyně nad Ohří
 - 6 Castle Hazmburk
 - 7 Castle Helfenburk
 - 8 Castle Hněvín
 - 9 Castle Jezeří
 - 10 Castle Kalich
 - 11 Castle Kamýk
 - 12 Castle Klášterec nad Ohří
 - 13 Castle Košťálov
 - 14 Castle Krupka
 - 15 Castle Ostrý
 - 16 Castle Panna
 - 17 Castle Ryzmburk
 - 18 Castle Střekov
 - 19 Castle Šumburk
 - 20 Church of Saint Adalbert in Počaply
 - 21 Church of Saint Catherine of Alexandria
 - 22 Convent of the Premonstratensian sisters in Doksany
 - 23 Děčinský Sněžník
 - 24 Ejemova Cabin
 - 25 Exhibition Leporelo
 - 26 Falcon Hill Lookout Tower
 - 27 Farm Oblík
 - 28 Farm The Flying Goat
 - 29 Grenzbaude
 - 30 High-rope park in Teplice
 - 31 Janov (lookout tower)
 - 32 Kaolinite Museum
 - 33 Komářův vížka (peak)
 - 34 Königsmühle
 - 35 Königstein
 - 36 Konojedy Chateau
 - 37 Kyjov Valley
 - 38 Lake Alma
 - 39 Lake Most
 - 40 Lake Píšťany
 - 41 Libochovice Chateau
 - 42 Maják (lookout tower)
 - 43 Malý Oprám and Velký Oprám (lakes)
 - 44 Mikuláš shaft and the mine Fortuna
 - 45 Milešovka
 - 46 Mining galleries The Promised Land and The Virgin Mary
 - 47 Mining gallery Johannes
 - 48 Mining gallery Lehnšchafter
 - 49 Mining gallery Old Martin
 - 50 Museum of Bohemian Garnet
 - 51 Museum of People Named Jiří
 - 52 Nástup Tušimice (quarry)
 - 53 Natural outdoor theatre in Mlýny
 - 54 Natural outdoor theatre in Prysk
 - 55 Natural outdoor theatre in Srbská Kamenice
 - 56 Nikolsdorf rock labyrinth
 - 57 Open-air Museum Zubrnice
 - 58 Pfaffenstein
 - 59 Ploskovice Chateau
 - 60 Reservoir Nechanice
 - 61 Restaurant Republika
 - 62 Restaurant Steakgrill
 - 63 Růženka (lookout tower)
 - 64 Schöna railway station
 - 65 Small Fortress in Terezín
 - 66 Stations of the Cross
 - 67 The Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
 - 68 The Church of the Holy Trinity in Zahořany
 - 69 The Czechoslovak Army Mine
 - 70 The electrical power station Ledvice
 - 71 The electrical power station Prunéřov
 - 72 The Hercules Columns
 - 73 The Hops and Beer Temple
 - 74 The Hops Museum
 - 75 The natural stone bridge Pravčická brána
 - 76 The Tisá Rocks
 - 77 Thermalium Teplice
 - 78 Vítova viewing point
 - 79 Vrbičany Chateau
 - 80 Vršanská viewing point
-  Ferries
 The Elbe Cycle Route
 The Ohře Cycle Route
 The Ploučnice Cycle Route
 Express Trail in the Ore Mountains

THERMALIUM

Worthy of Beethoven

If you were to set out looking for a European spa that once was famous for its traditions, that was once practically a must for anyone who was anyone to visit at least once a year, a spa where emperors would meet with military leaders, writers, poets, musicians, clerks, nobles, and rich industrialists, well, then your search would most likely bring you to the town Teplice. According to the legend, the spring Pravřídlo was discovered some time around the 8th century. There is evidence, though, that tells us that both the Celts and the Romans were aware of this miraculous spring over 2,000 years ago already. The water didn't start being used intentionally, however, until the 12th century, thanks to the Czech queen Judith, mother of Ottokar II of Bohemia. Who would've thought, that after all these centuries, something would happen to revolutionise the spa concept? And yet it did.

A NEW NAME FOR A NEW CONCEPT

The Beethoven Spa is the heart of the hot springs in Teplice. It consists of twelve historical buildings, and it is in fact the oldest spa in Central Europe. As the spa's pool reached the ripe old age of twenty, it was no longer able to fulfil the visitors demanding requirements. This was



a chance for a change. Though at first, nobody expected the change would be quite so big. But then someone had the idea to really shake things up and create something unlike anything else. Something so new, that a new term had to be coined: Thermalium. The architect behind it, Petr Sedláček started from a simple premise – an unimaginably powerful spring flows forth from the earth beneath our feet – what if we were to welcome it and try to use its beneficial factors to a much greater extent than previously? The spring Pravřídlo has a temperature of 45,7 °C when it originates many kilometres beneath

sea level. By the time it reaches the surface, its temperature is 38 °C, i.e. still warmer than a human body. 'The healing spring works its way up through rhyolite rock to the spa, where it passes its strength on to weak bones and muscles. The spring water heals the body, the spa heals the soul. Thermalium isn't just a pool with warm water... Thermalium is a healing spa... The interior of the spa, every object within it, the materials, the colours and the details – together they have to create an atmosphere of harmony, earnestness, calm and safety. The interior should also align with the history and traditions of the spa, creating a sense of sincerity and trust. Trust in the water's healing powers.' This is what the architect set out to create. The result is stunning.



PURE WATER

The building is remarkable, even from the outside. Large tempered glass panels in the walls of the black building create the sense of an enormous grand piano that has been propped up ready for a concert. The glass is embossed with the face of a lion. The lion is the oldest symbol of the spa and dates back to 1583, when the spring water flowed forth through metal lion heads. The interior is even more impressive. The notion of an antique spa manages to shine through the otherwise modern design. The columns dip their feet into the salubrious water, the statues silently observe the modest daylight seeping in through the round openings in the ceiling. The water itself looks like a source of light – it sparkles enticingly as if emanating calmness, harmony and some undefinable goodness. The water surface covers a full 420 m², which gives the impression that the water is



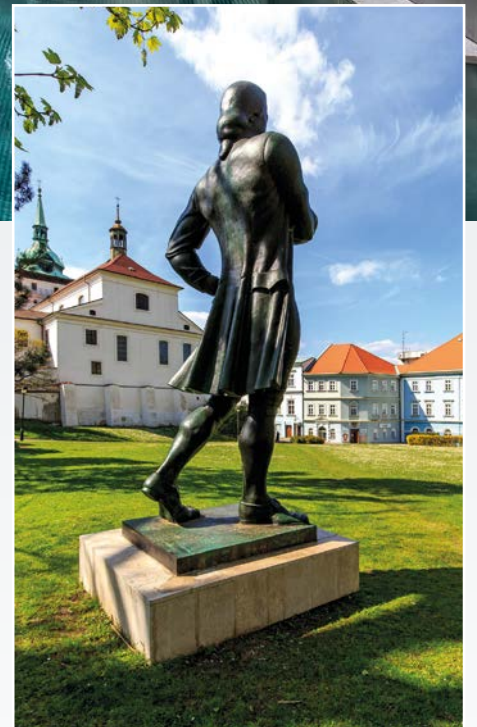
simply everywhere. But there are actually two separate spas here. The water in the main spa is 35 °C and supports muscle performance and blood circulation, increases the bodies range of motion, strengthens the joints, relieves swelling, stimulates cells that support bone structure... The number of beneficial effects are legion. The smaller spa (Malé lázně) is 32 °C and hence more suitable for exercising or swimming. It helps lower the weight placed on joints, bones and muscles, increases the metabolism and initiates weight-loss. Hydrotherapy is an integral part of Thermalium. For those of you not familiar with it, it entails walking through two tanks with pebbles on the bottom (Kneipův chodník). One is filled with hot water, the other with cold. As you alternate between the two, the legs' blood circulation is increased, and the pebbles massage the soles of the feet. As a result, circulation improves throughout the body. In addition to the pools, there's also a variety of saunas to choose from. Not to mention the tranquil garden on the roof...

THE SALUBRIOUS SPRING PRAVŘÍDLO

The spring Pravřídlo is, of course, Thermalium's greatest asset. This unique, modern spa

TOP TIPS

A bust of the founder of the spa, queen Judith, was uncovered in the arcade of the Imperial Spa (Císařské lázně) at the end of last year, before Thermalium officially opened. The bust is the result of scientific analyses of the almost 900-year-old remains, which were buried in Teplice's Roman basilisk. Why not go pay her a tribute?



Cycling Through Recultivated Landscapes

The Czech Republic is among the best in the world at recultivating industrial areas, and has been for decades. To say that the rest of the world comes here to learn from us is no exaggeration. So it's no surprise that this is already the second time we are mentioning recultivation in this issue. It really is something that the Czech Republic can be proud of, yet not many people know much about it. Since the very first issue of the Gate, we have been fighting the common myth among media, politicians and the public that half of the Ústí Region is a mere moonscape. And the cycle path from the town Kadaň to the village Černovice is one of the best ways to witness the symbiosis between the return of nature and ongoing mining with your own eyes.

only popular among tourists cycling through; a lot of the locals are also excited to have a safe alternative to the busy road between Kadaň and Chomutov. Many use it to get to work or just to go for a walk. The high-quality of the surface makes it perfect for in-lining too. And the surroundings really are magical. Every now and then, the alleys open up to views of the largest brown coal quarry in the country – Nástup Tušimice. For every metre, it becomes clear that nature, with a little help from humans, is taking back the land that has been returned to it. And that nature can, indeed, live side by side with the mines and the industry. What's really great about this path, though, is that it talks to you. You just have to look at the asphalt to find out where you are and what fun things there are to do around. And along the track you'll find picnic table with maps in the middle of them; maps of the villages that fell victim to the expansive mining. It's an odd feeling to look around knowing that a village once stood on this very spot – Pruněřov, Kralupy u Chomutova, Ahníkov, Zásady u Krbic. Once you reach Černovice, you can either head back the same way (so far we've cycled 15 km) or you can continue round the quarry and return that way past the Nechranice reservoir. The terrain slopes



slightly upwards round the quarry and the total distance is 40 km. It's easy enough to navigate: In Černovice, simply switch to track 3080 and stay on the same track until it ends in Vikletice.

From Vikletice follow track 6, i.e. the Ohře Cycle Route, all the way back to Kadaň. For the 2019 season, the wonderful information centre in Kadaň is preparing a tear off map of this route.

A TOWN TO SETTLE DOWN IN

Before we hop on our bikes, let's take a look around the town that is our starting point: Kadaň. We leave our bikes on the main square and wander around the beautifully restored town houses in amazement. We take in the tower of the town hall with its unique white colour and decorative crabs. Then we walk along Katova ulička, the narrowest street in the country, before taking a look around the atelier of the original sculptor Herbert Kísza. When we see the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (kostel Povýšení svatého Kříže), we are again amazed by the perfect Baroque symmetry. Then there's Kadaň Castle, the stunning Franciscan monastery, the parks, the Witch Museum, and the cycle path along the river Ohře

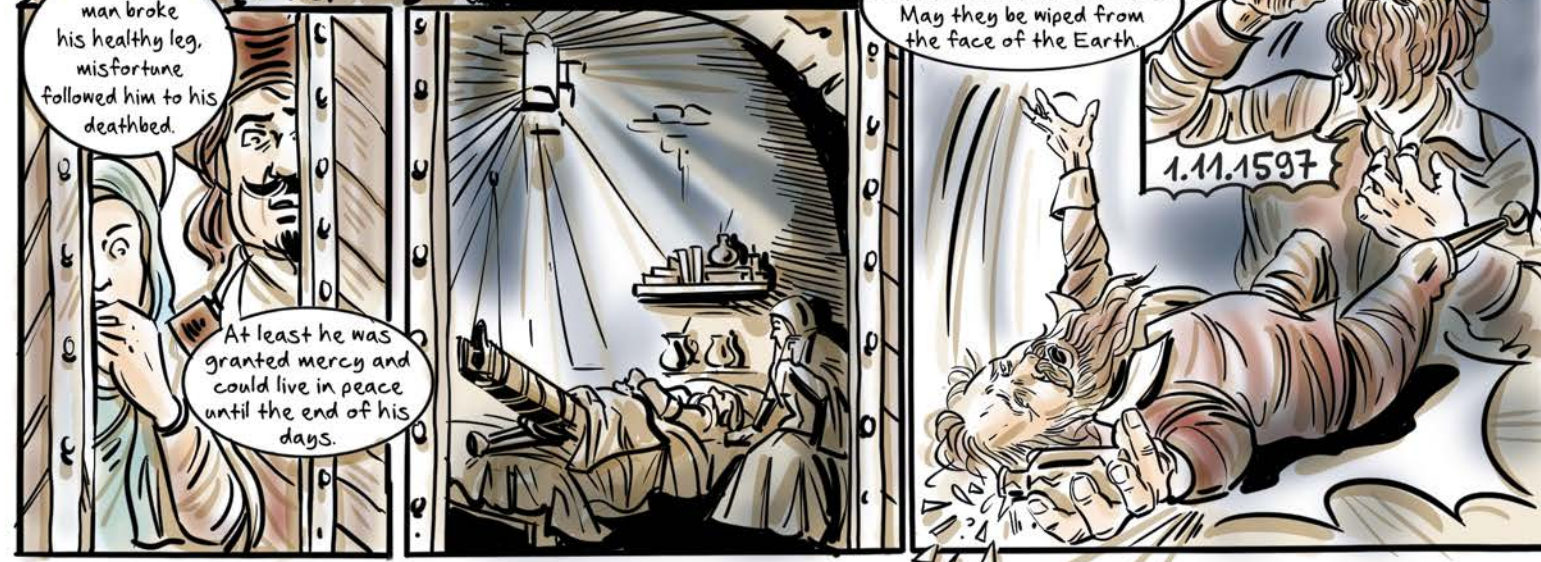
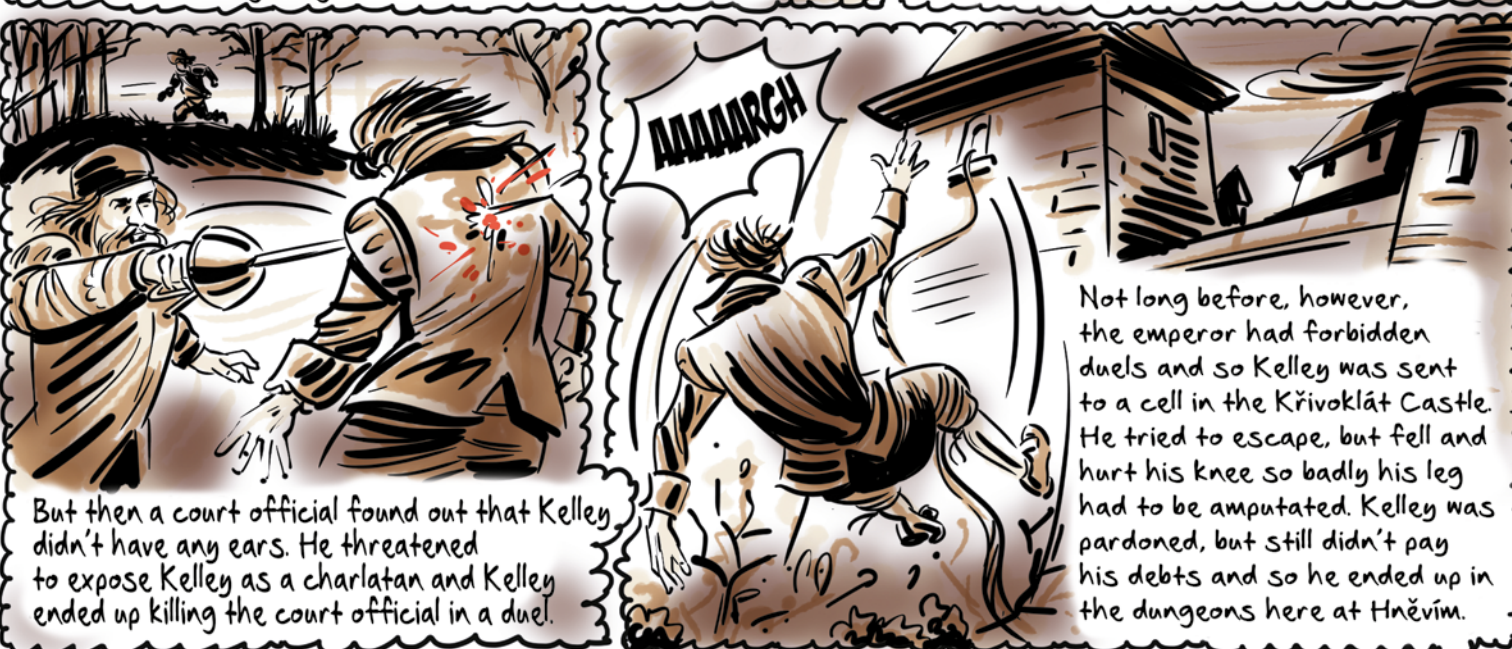
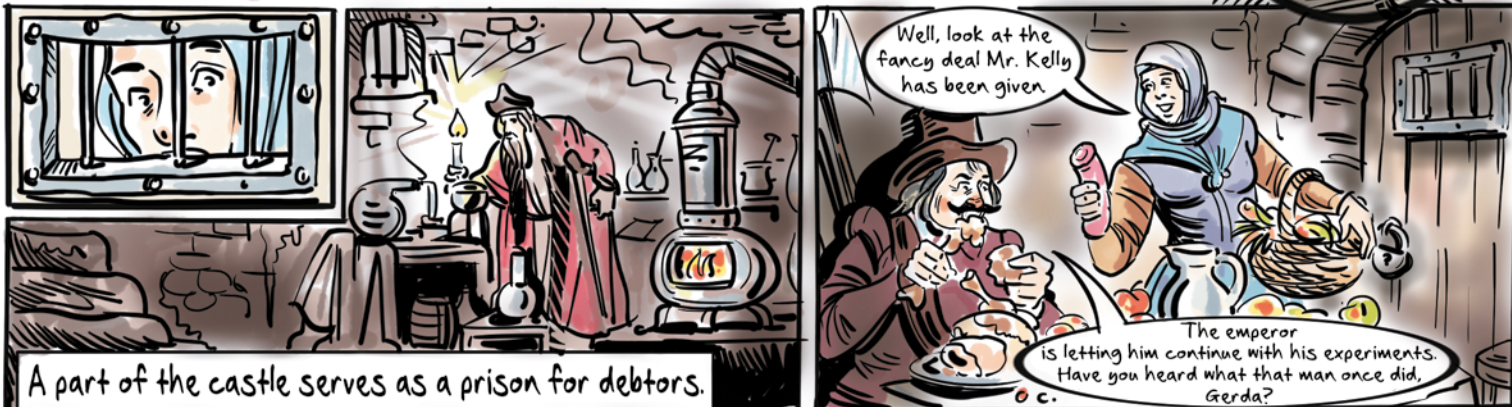


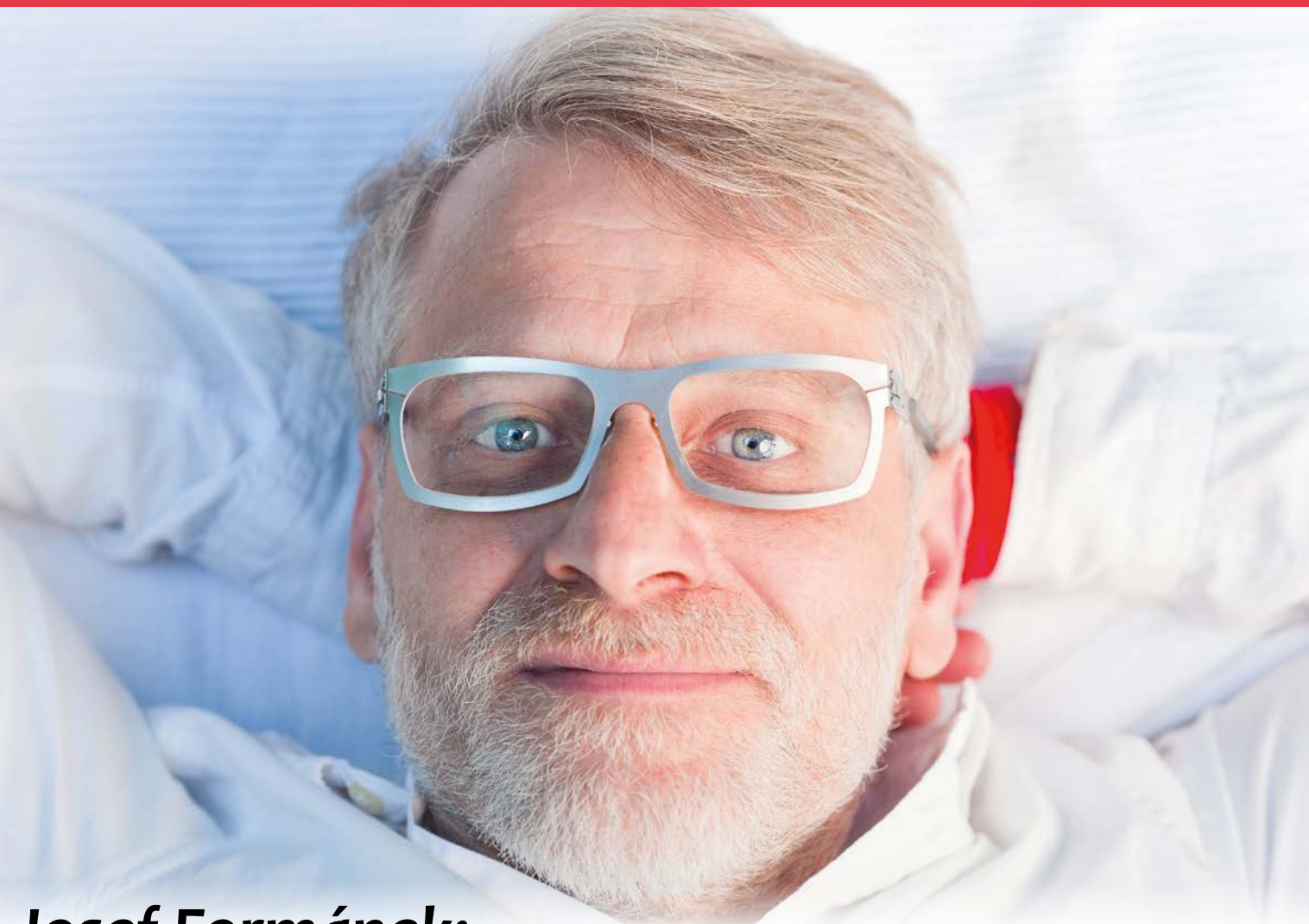
with a number of interactive activities... But we'll leave those for another time. Right now, we'll head off past the barbican to the well-marked cycle path 3115 that takes us through the town. As we peddle our way through Kadaň, we become more and more convinced that this would be a great place to settle down in. For example, we ride through the Roosevelt Gardens (Roosevelty sady), that has an 18-target disc golf course, a crazy golf course, an outdoor gym and an in-line track. We can't help but wonder if there is any other town that has such a great park. We soon reach the cycle path 3115A, and at first we follow the old section from Kadaň to Pruněřov. The asphalt alternates with gravel and the terrain is bumpy as we ride through a low grove. It's hard to believe that this grove was once a dump, that this little wood stands on recultivated land. Then, between the trees on either side of the cycle path, the cooling tower of the Pruněřov electrical power station appears on the horizon. It slowly grows larger and larger. As we cross the bridge we look down at the conveyor belt below us as it transports coal straight from the quarry to the hungry electric furnaces. It's hard to fathom that this gigantic industrial plant is completely surrounded by greenery.

THE SPEAKING CYCLE PATH AND MORE

A new cycle path is being built where the village Pruněřov used to stand. This asphalt path will go all the way to Černovice. Perhaps you're wondering where all the money for such a project has come from. Well, the town council of Kadaň and a couple of the nearby villages took a gamble – no, no, not at the racetrack. They applied for a grant from the Integrated Regional Grant Programme, a programme that only grants money to about 1 in 300 applicants. But good fortune comes to those who draw up meaningful projects, and so, in 2017 the work could begin. It took exactly a year to finish it, and at just half the originally calculated cost. But looking at the picture-perfect path you would never guess how cost efficient it was. It's not

The Death of Mr. Kelley





Josef Formánek:

“I live in a divine garden“

Josef Formánek is a popular Czech author, traveller, and co-founder of the geographical magazine Koktejl. He has written such books as The Breasted Man and the Thief of Stories, To Tell the Truth, and many more. The recent film The Smiles of Sad Men, based on Formánek's book with the same name, was directed by Dan Svátek and shot in the Ústí Region.

Josef Formánek, you were born near Ústí and you still live here today. Some people might ask themselves what keeps you here...

Ústí has a sentimental value to me. Just recently I was thinking about how me and my parents used to walk from our block of flats down to the swimming pool in the summer. After all these years, just thinking about it makes me want to walk the same route again. Of course, a lot will have changed since then, but that careless feeling I had as a child walking along amazed by those blocks of castles, or looking at the storks in the neat gardens, that air of a homework-free summer free and just being completely at ease – that feeling must still be hidden there somewhere... (laughter) Ústí is also where I experienced my first love, and I have a lot of friends here... I don't know, I guess it's the seemingly little things – like running into someone you know in town and giving

each other a nod and a smile, that's what I like. You're a part of the town and the town is a part of you. It's all so familiar and you feel that this is where you belong. And, of course, even better than Ústí itself are the wonderful Czech Central Highlands just round the corner, and then the oddly gloomy, yet attractive Ore Mountains in the distance...

Were you aware of any of this as a child?

I can't say I ever really thought about where I lived in those days. Ústí was my home and that was just the way it was. Back then, me and the other kids in the area had a War of the Buttons going on. We were divided into Catholics and Hussites – I was a Hussite and I dreamed of one day becoming the military commander. We had battles that went on for months, and we had bunkers and wooden shields and helmets... We took prisoners of war and forced them to

pick nettles which we would then sell and buy sherbet with the money. Once, I got caught by the Catholics. But they didn't take prisoners of war, so they just beat me with stinging nettles. I was so humiliated and I went to let it all out behind the garage. So there I was, angry at the whole world, and suddenly this girl Maruška appeared. She looked at me and suggested that we have a competition to see who could pee the furthest. The winner would get to take a good look at the other. I won, of course, she only managed to pee on her shoes. And then she got undressed, lay down and said quite authoritatively: “Now have a good look.” And from then on, I was no longer interested in the battles between the Hussites and the Catholics, but only in the Maruškas around me. And they dictated my life for quite some time... (laughter)

Some years ago, you moved out of town to the heart of the Czech Central Highlands, not far from Milešovka. Was that a decision that had been brewing for some time?

The older I get, the more I appreciate nature. We used to spend the weekends at the cottage, and then it hit me – why do we keep travelling back and forth? Now that we have cars, nothing is ever far away. And so we moved to the cottage for good. And we're happy here. I go for a jog every morning; I just open the gate and I'm in the forest... Just this morning I saw a deer through the mist – we stood looking at each other for some time, and then each ran off in our own direction. Living in the country gives me a certain sense of calm. People seem to think that the countryside in the Ústí Region is dying, but they're wrong. In fact, most of my friends that come visit me here are usually prejudiced towards the region at first. They're always surprised by reality, delighted even. I used to know a guy that took people on tours in Africa. We were driving through the forests and the fields here, and we saw several deer, moufflons, foxes, hares, and a sparrowhawk. And when we got out of the car, we heard an owl. My friend laughed: “So I take people on safaris in Kenya and you've got one right outside your door.”

Whenever you write about the Czech Central Highlands, you use the word 'beautiful'. What is it that attracts you to the Highlands?

It's such a magical place. The landscape is so romantic, dotted with windbreaks and villages, odd abandoned houses, and dilapidated buildings. We can only guess who used to live there. And the castles, the bare peaks and extinct volcanoes... That quiet beauty that softly touches your heart. I call it a divine garden. Whether you've lived here for years or just happen upon the region by chance as a tourist, this garden will give you a sense of calm and inner peace.

It's not as common as it used to be, but did you and your parents go on trips at the weekends when you were a boy?

Yes, quite often. We used to go to places like Komářův vížka. We'd take the train to Bohosudov, then the cable car to the top of the hill and from there we'd walk to, say, Telnice and then catch the bus back home. Or we'd go to Hřensko, Jetřichovice, Dolský mlýn... We did a lot of hiking. My mum loved hiking. Every year she'd get excited about her traditional 50 kilometre march from Ústí to Milešovka...

And now? Do you still find the time to go on trips?

I do. If I have friends visiting, I often take them up Milešovka. I'm really quite proud of it. I let them take in the view that the famous traveller and scientist Alexander von Humboldt claimed to be the third most beautiful view in the world. I can only agree with him. I've seen a number of beautiful places all around the world, but this is definitely one of the most beautiful. I like walking up the hills Kletečná and



pros and cons – the exotic beauty comes with tsunamis, earthquakes and tornadoes. We don't have any of those here. And even if my family and I were to move, I can't imagine leaving my parents, my friends, the country, the language – I'd miss it all too much... But travelling is important, because you can't fully appreciate the beauty of your own home unless you have something to compare it to. Whenever I return from a trip somewhere, I always say to myself – there's nowhere quite so picturesque, romantic, wistfully melancholic and at the same time so safe as here. We don't have to worry about a snake biting us in the forest or that we'll get eaten or catch dengue fever. That fear that pursues people elsewhere just doesn't exist here. That's why I say it's a divine garden.

Lovoš as well... In spring, Lovoš really is a beautiful place to be... The autumn is lovely here too, if a bit too melancholic for my liking...

You have seen a fair bit of the world. Have you ever found a place where you thought – yes, this is paradise, this is where I want to settle down?

No. I guess only if fate and the circumstances forced me to leave. Otherwise, I'd never want to live anywhere else but here. Honestly. There are magical places, of course. Like the Indonesian island Siberut with its majestic tropical rainforest. I love visiting that place. And the Amazon really captivated me, and Sri Lanka, or India with all the incredible contrasts. Or Mexico with its amazing atmosphere... But there are always



Photo: Miroslav Nebeský

Route 15 through the Czech Central Highlands

Classic routes and roads can be found all over the world. The most famous must be 'The Mother Road' or Route 66 in the US. To become legendary, a route has to have a history, and most importantly – the surroundings have to be beautiful enough to make driving along it a sacred and unforgettable experience. Just like the road 1/15, the 'Artery of the Czech Central Highlands'. It connects Most with the village Zahrádky near Česká Lípa, and this is a route that will amaze you time and again; it's not often you get to see such a varied landscape. Let's go for a road trip together and enjoy the view. If you don't fancy driving the entire way, just a small part is enough to enchant you.

FROM ČESKÁ LÍPA TO THE FOOT OF MILEŠOVKA

Route 15 could just as well have been called 'The Plum Route'. It runs almost parallel to the railway track with the same name – the Plum track (Švestková dráha), which, by the way, now runs all year round. The track got its name from the endless plum orchards it once ran through. However, a combination of plum pox and a sudden socialist rage for massive fields of corn and wheat led to most of the trees being uprooted. But the poetic name stuck. So, let's fasten our seatbelts and get going! First up, we leave Zahrádky and the canals carved into the sandstone rocks (Novozámecké průrvy). We pass the charming Dutch reservoirs (Holandské rybníky) with the mysterious peak Vlhůš and Ronov, the last bump of the Ralské uplands (Ralská pahorkatina) in the background. We open the Gate to Bohemia just before we reach the medieval village Ústě, famous for its markets, the Demon Museum (Muzeum čertů), 'birdhouses', the synagogue, the pilgrimage site Kalvárie near Ostrý, and the nearby castle Helfenburk. Next, we drive through the Baroque village Liběšice, and soon we turn off to take a good look around the Baroque Ploskovice Château. As we continue, we soon see the Verneřice Central Highlands rising above the town Litoměřice, which is also known as the 'White Pearl of the Czech Central Highlands'. It's worth taking break and having a good look around Litoměřice. We could go on the tour of religious monuments in the town, wander through the grounds of the Catholic

church (Dómský pahorek), take look around the poet Máchas quarters (Máchovy světničky) and walk up the hill Radobýl, where Máchas edited his last poem. Route 15 then takes us across the Elbe all the way to the outskirts of the fortress town Terežín. We stop here to take in all the exhibitions about the military history of this unique town, from Retranchement V via the labyrinth of underground passage ways to the exhibition about Kavalír 2 and the soldiers' lives in the barracks. Finally, we visit the Ghetto Museum (Muzeum ghetta) and the Small Fortress (Malá pevnost). These both tell us about the short, but horrific, his-



tory of when Terežín was a Jewish ghetto. Just beyond Terežín, we reach the town Lovosice, which has a wonderful park called Lesopark Osmička, a lookout tower called U Přivozu, and the welcoming Café Zámeček. And from here there are some great hikes up the hill Lovoš or through the Oparenské valley (Oparenské údolí). But for now we'll follow Route 15 to the heart of the Czech Central Highlands.

FROM THE HEART OF THE CZECH CENTRAL HIGHLANDS TO MOST

The holy trinity of the Czech Central Highlands – Milešovka, Kletečná, and Lovoš – are on our right. We also pass the magical hill Boreč, whose peak is green in summer and winter alike thanks to a remarkable quirk of nature. As we move on, the Košťálov castle ruins rise above us. Košťálov has one of the most beautiful views around. Below the ruins lies the village Třebenice, which hosts the Museum of Bohemian Garnet (Muzeum

českého granátu), an exhibition on the castles of the Czech Central Highlands, and a charming little chocolate shop that tempts our noses. Just a few kilometres further on, we reach the village Třebívlice. The local winery in Třebívlice, Johann W, is one of the most modern in the country. They organise excursions where they show you how their delicious wine is made, and they also have a fantastic restaurant and a shop with wine and other local delicacies. The Třebívlice Château hosts a small exhibition about the life of Ulrike von Levetzow, who lived here for most of her life. She is mostly famous for her short, bordering on romantic, relationship with Goethe. She was buried at the local cemetery and her grave is still there to be seen. If you are drawn to the mountains, it is possible to turn off at almost any point along Route 15 and hike up to the castle ruins on, say, Skalka, Ostrý or Blešno. Another option would be to head to the friendly restaurant at the bed and breakfast Kocourov, the village Řisuty with



the ruins of the Church of St Bernard of Clairvaux, or perhaps to hike up Oltářník. Back on Route 15, we are led through the beautiful Czech Central Highlands to the village Libčev. It would almost be a sin not to take a break here and look around one of the top Roman relics in the Czech Republic, i.e. the Church of St John the Baptist. And it would be equally sinful not to hike up the nearby hill Čičov. At the top, you not only get a lavish view, you can also enjoy the unique steppe vegetation, or (if you have the right equipment) try kiting. We are drawing close to the end of our lovely road trip, but that doesn't mean that there is nothing left to see

HIDDEN GEMS

Before we head down to Most, the classical Korozluky Château catches our eye. It's not very well known, but it is remarkable. It was set to be demolished in 1988, but the château escaped its fate and was instead thoroughly renovated. Today it's home to an interesting exhibition of sacred art from Most's demolished churches. You can also take a look at the château's interior or as walk around its beautiful park.



– in fact, we're just entering the village Chrástec, which has managed to revive its wine culture. The local winery offers tours, and they sell wonderful wine that originates from the hills around Most. Chrástec is in fact the leading Czech producer of kosher wine, so make sure you have a taste. As we move on, Hněvín Castle appears ahead of us, and we end our pilgrimage in Most, the town of 'droms' (Aerodrom, Aquadrom, Hipodrom and Autodrom).

The National Park Line – There and Back

It all started in July 2014, when the railway stations in Dolní Poustevna, Czech Republic and Sebnitz, Germany organised touching celebrations that welcomed the train as it entered the stations, not unlike when railways were first invented. Since most families nowadays have two cars, it may seem a bit odd that people were getting so excited about a train. But it had been 60 years since a train last travelled from Dolní Poustevna to Sebnitz. In 1948, the tracks were officially pulled up, and for a long time it seemed as though that was the end of it. But it wasn't. The track from Děčín to Rumburk via Bad Schandau and Sebnitz has come to life again. The line was given the number U28, and soon enough it was named the National Park Line (Dráha národního parku).

THE TRAIN RIDE ALONE IS AN EXPERIENCE

This was not the end of the railway revolution in the region. The staff at the destination management company České Švýcarsko know a thing or two about tourism, and they were convinced that a railway is an ideal form of transport that takes both people and nature into consideration. They worked hard for a number of years and their efforts paid off. The National Park Line consists of two loops, which cover so many beautiful spots that I think it's safe to say it's a unique experience. First of all – 90% of the way you're either in one of the national parks Bohemian Switzerland (České Švýcarsko) and Saxon Switzerland (Saské Švýcarsko), or you're passing through the nature reserves of the Elbe sandstone rocks (Labské pískovce), the Lusatian Mountains (Lužické hory) or the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří). That alone promises beauty galore. Just imagine – you get on the train in Děčín and ride through the incredible Elbe Canyon (Labský kaňon) to the tablelands in Saxony. Then you go past the spa town Bad Schandau into a land-

scape filled with various rock formations. In Sebnitz you cross the border back into the Czech Republic and pass Dolní Poustevna, Mikulášovice and Šluknov on your way back to Rumburk. During the summer it's also possible to change trains in Mikulášovice and take line U27 to Rumburk via Brtníky and Krásná Lípa. The National Park Line then continues on another lovely loop numbered U8. You can start this loop in either Rumburk or Krásná Lípa, and it passes the border of the Lusatian Mountains, through Chřibská, Jedlová, Kytlice and Mlýny to Česká Kamenice and then on to Benešov nad Ploučnicí and back to Děčín. If you pack up a good snack to take with you, it'll be quite enough to just sit on the train looking out as the enchanting landscape passes by. Taking in so much beauty can be tiring.

SOMETHING TO SEE AT EVERY STATION

There is, of course, more to see than just the view from the train. Wherever you hop off, there is something to see or do before getting back on the train. No car needed! The best thing about the National Park Line is that it takes you to the biggest tourist attractions in the region, and saves the trouble of having to fight harder and harder each year to find a parking spot. For example, if you get off at Schmilka, you can take the ferry across to Hřensko. From there it's not far to either the natural stone



the Kamenice gorge. Even Jetřichovice is just a short bus ride away. The station at Bad Schandau is a good starting point if you want to take the tram through the Kitzsch Valley (Křínické údolí) or visit the jagged Schrammstein rocks. If you get off the train in Rathmannsdorf, a stunning view of Saxon Switzerland awaits you. In Dolní Poustevna, two new hiking trails are being made as a result of the National Park Line. From the station in Mikulášovice, you can head to the lookout tower Tanečnice; in Lipová there's the Annaberg Stations of the Cross or the chateau that is being reconstructed from ruins. There's another Stations of the Cross to see in Velký Šenov, and in Šluknov there's a remark-

able chateau in the unique Saxon Renaissance style. If you get off in Rumburk, don't miss the unique Loreto Chapel and its cloister. If you decide to take the U27 from Mikulášovice, you'll pass through Brtníky, which is a great starting point to go see the charming Kyjov Valley (Kyjovské údolí) and the river Kitzsch (Křinice). In winter it'll take you to the frozen waterfalls at the stream Vlčí potok. Get off at Panský, and it's not far to the lookout tower Vlčí hora. The station in the town Krásná Lípa is the eastern

gate to Bohemian Switzerland. Krásná Lípa also has a brewery, cafés, the Bohemian Switzerland Information Centre (Dům Českého Švýcarska) with a popular interactive exhibition... The track passes the Lusatian Mountains, so it's possible to get off at the quaint little station in Jedlová and head up to the beautiful stone lookout tower. Kytlice and Mlýny are two idyllic villages that will warm your heart. Then there's the historical town Česká Kamenice with its Chapel of the Virgin Mary and a cloister, the viewing point up on Jehla, and the spiritual altar, Bratrský oltář, in the middle of the forest. And if you get off at Benešov nad Ploučnicí, just where the Czech Central Highlands start, there are a number of interesting chateaus to be seen. Some of the stations already proudly call themselves National Park Line Stations. The locals have got used to how much easier it is to travel to work, and things have also become easier for tourists on either side of the border.



TOP TIP

The National Park Line has its own website at www.drahanarodnihoparku.cz. And since you're already online, it's worth visiting www.ceskesvycarsko.cz, where you'll find a number of ideas for trips and excursions.



If You Don't Ask, You'll Never Know

Gone are the days when information centres were deserted and tourists wondered why they should even go there. Some might have expected those days to become a permanent status, considering we can now find literally everything online. But how wrong they were. Information centres have increasingly become the obvious starting point for anyone visiting a new town or setting out to see some natural or historical highlights. They are better equipped than previously, and more importantly, the staff really know what they are talking about and what to recommend. So it's no surprise that centres are springing up like mushrooms. In the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory) alone, a new brand new centre has recently opened and another is due any day now. Before we take a look at these centres, let me just say that the best and most comprehensive material about the eastern Ore Mountains can be found at the information centre at the Waldstein castle (zámek Valdštejnů) in Litvínov, where the destination management company Krušné hory is seated.

THE INFORMATION CENTRE AND THE CULTURAL MINING LANDSCAPE IN KRUPKA

Right in the heart of Krupka, there's a historical building that up until recently looked about ready to be written off. However, it has been transformed and is now a multi-storey information centre. Only the front wall and the Gothic cellars remain from the original building. The rest was rebuilt under strict conservationist supervision. The building now blends in with the Medieval surroundings while serving the spirit of the 21st century. This is not just a place to pick up a few maps or brochures of places to visit – this is a multifunctional building that serves tourists, locals and profession-



als alike. Part of the building is devoted to an exhibition of the mining tradition and the ore mining which took place throughout the Ore Mountains. It also has rooms that can be used for conferences or professional educational activities – It really is multifunctional. In the last issue of the Gate, I wrote extensively about how

Krupka has been cooperating with other Czech and German mining landscapes in the Ore Mountains in an attempt to be added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. We'll find out whether or not they have succeeded later this year. Krupka has taken a rather pragmatic approach to it – if it's added to the list, it will already have an exclusive starting point for tourists coming to see the mining landscape. If not, its fancy info centre will still be the envy of many surrounding regions. If you're in Krupka, it's worth visiting the info centre. You'll find maps for all the new educational trails in and around the town where the ores of rare metals, tin in particular, were mined from the early days of the Middle Ages. And I'll bet you anything you'll be sent off to see the mining gallery Old Martin (Starý Martin) to experience what a miner's life was like back in the day. The centre is open all year round from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day except Mondays.



TOP TIP

Information can be soaked up at all kinds of places. Like museums. There's an incredible museum worth visiting in the village Lesná not far from the hill St Catherine (Hora Sv. Kateřiny) in the Ore Mountains. It has an exhibition about the life and work of those who lived in the mountains a hundred years ago. The exhibition is housed in a perfect replica of a typical house, or shed from those days. You'll also find the newly installed replica of the belfry with a real bell. If you're lucky enough to come when there's an event going on, you can also have a go at some forgotten crafts or take part in the traditional cabbage treading.



THE INFORMATION CENTRE AT THE FLÁJE RESERVOIR

If you're reading this in spring, you'll have to wait a little longer, because the info centre in Fláje doesn't open its doors until 1 July. I doubt I'll have any difficulties convincing anyone that Fláje is one of the most beautiful and romantic reservoirs in the country. If you've braved the ferocity of the forests in the Ore Mountain, dipped your toes into the dark water of the reservoir and wandered in the shadow of the dam at night, you'll know what I'm talking about. You see, the dam at Fláje isn't just some scary building – it's unique: a dam consisting of a hollow concrete pillar. It's so unusual, in fact, that it ranks among the cultural monuments of the Czech Republic. And on the eastern side of the dam, an architecturally interesting building has sprung up and will become the new information centre. The building is mainly wooden, but the foundations are made of the crane that was used to build the dam back in the 1950s. A wooden pier with benches has also part

of the new centre. Why build an information centre in the middle of the woods? Because it's the perfect place to remind people about and explain the history of the region; to tell the stories of the villages that were destroyed as the dam was built; to explain how water energy was used and how exactly this expansive lake helps provide drinking water for the locals. Information boards have been put up between Fláje and its neighbouring dam Rauschenbach in Germany, and soon the educational trail will be ready. As in Krupka, this info centre will also be open all year round. And before I forget, mark the first Saturday in September in your diary – that's the date for Fláje's traditional open house this year. Both Czech and German professionals will be present, and you'll have the chance to see the inner workings of the dam.

THE INFORMATION CENTRE IN DUCHCOV

No, this info centre is in no way new. But it is great, and it was even ranked as the best in the Gate to Bohemia. I'm not surprised. On Masarykova street (Masarykova ulice), just a stone's throw from the Duchcov Château, lies this inconspicuous hall filled with insightful and useful information. I find something new every time I come here. And that's all thanks to the staff. The staff here takes their work seriously. When they get home at the end of the day, they sit down at their computers to learn, inquire, and write. They create their own materials, and the quality is impressive. Trust me, I have them all!



A Taste of the Louny Highlands

So there's actually no such thing as the Louny Highlands. Officially this stunning southernmost part of the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří) is called the Ranská Highlands (Ranské středohoří), but what can you do – everyone says the Louny Highlands (Lounské středohoří) and it's best to use this name if you're asking for directions. It has recently become fashionable to travel between towns and villages on a food pilgrimage, and we're off on a 40-kilometre-long pilgrimage to see what gastronomical goodies we can find. An excursion for gourmands.



This trip is suitable for driving if you include a few walks along the way. You can also do it by bike – in fact, the versatile information centre in Louny is planning on marking this circuit as a cycle path. But we can also wander among the bare and bulging rocks on foot, although you may want to divide the route into smaller sections. Bottom line, we'll be roaming a region

unlike any other. The southern part of the Czech Central Highlands is a bit different to the rest. The hills are further apart, and the landscape is almost like a steppe, covered only in grass and grazing sheep and goats. But more than anything, the hills are graceful. Since they aren't covered in dense forests, they look lower and easier to ascend. But that's just an illusion.



FRAGRANT HONEY AND TRADITIONAL CHEESES

We'll start in a Medieval town named after the moon – Louny. We drive over the incredible so-called 'flood bridge' (built to ensure transport even during floods) that is a full 272 metres long. Next, we pass the southern gate of the Czech Central Highlands, the wide basin between the three-pointed hill Raná and the curvaceous pyramid Oblík. Ahead of us lies our first peak, Red Peak (Červený vrch), originally called Silversmith Peak (Stříbrník). At the top of the hill we find Ejemova Cottage (Ejemova chata), crowned by the Frotzelová lookout tower (Frotzelová věž). From here, there's a wonderful panoramic view of the Czech Central Highlands and the flood plain of the river Ohře lined by the hills of the natural park Džbán. The cottage is very hospitable and it's here we enjoy our first taste of the authentic Czech Central Highland cuisine: Some proper Highland honey from the bees up on the hill. The bread from the local baker is just as sensational, and the goat and cow cheeses from the farm on Oblík (we'll head there later) are excellent. The cottage offers proper, traditional Czech pub food, and they are renowned for their pickled white cheese (nakládaný



hermelín), pickled sausages (utopenci), and regular sausages. Next, we're off round Lake Dobroměřický (Dobroměřický rybník) to the hill Oblík and the farm with the same name. We get a close-up of how the farm works and the little shop provides tasters the products that weren't on offer at Ejemova Cottage. Such as their fabulous yoghurts. Cyclists may want to cycle around Oblík, but if you're here on foot it would be a pity not to hike up to the top. The view? Well, you really have to see it for yourself! We continue through the villages Mnichov, Charvatce and Jablonec along paths that take us through the sprawling Highland fields until we reach the village Kozly. The Baroque Church of St Martin (kostel svatého Martina) on the main square of the village takes us by surprise. It's dated 1717, and its Gothic core hides the grave of noble Chotek family. Just a short walk away, there's a beautiful nature reserve called Tobiášův vrch. It has a rare steppe ecosystem and a large number of endangered plants, such as pheasant's eye, small pasque flower, Eastern pasque flower, and European feather grass. By now, it's about time for something to quench our thirst. But if you've still got a last drop of energy, we'll just pop up the nearby hill Čičov first. In spring, this hill is covered with pasque flowers and you can rest your eyes on the lavish view of the Highlands around Milešovka.

TOP TIP

If, despite all our gastronomical sensations, you're still hungry once you get to Louny, the town's wonderful Baroque hospital also houses a very good restaurant named Vegetariana. The restaurant is true to its name, but don't worry. Even the keenest meat eater will find something they like – or even love – here!



WONDERFUL WINE AMONG FLYING GOATS

Luckily, we are getting close to Chrámce, which you can read more about a bit later. The wine from the Chrámce winery is one of the most valuable gifts of the Czech Central Highlands, so we were delighted to have a taste. A little less steady on our feet and with our rucksacks weighted with bottles, we slowly leave northernmost point of our trip and head southwards. The road takes us through the villages Skršín and Bečov to the crossroad, where we can turn off on a detour to the village Milá and hike up the wonderful hill with the same name. The view from up here is definitely worth the detour. And

then it's on to the village Hrádek. And here I definitely recommend going another couple of hundred metres to the already renowned farm the Flying Goat (Létající koza). There's an enormous rock wall here that creates the perfect environment for the large, curious flock of irresistibly cute goats. This is no zoo, the goats eat plenty in order to provide the necessary ingredients for the amazing goat cheeses. The cow cheeses are no worse, so we take some of those off the farmers' hands, too. By now, our rucksacks are overflowing, so it must be time to head back to Louny. We leave the magnificent hill Raná, pass through the village Lenešice and soon enough we find ourselves back on the flood bridge with the dignified town walls of Louny rising above us.



Scooters

– Perfect for Taking in the View

Kick scooters first became popular in Finland and then spread across Europe. God knows why it caught on in the Czech Republic. But it did. So much that, today, it's even more popular here than in Finland. There are a number of prominent Czech companies that produce scooters, and we're, undoubtedly, among the world's top scooter manufacturers. You could even say we're a super power among scooters. By now, everyone has heard of about off road scooters – practically any hill has a rental service offering you a scooter to ride down the slopes or across the fields. But 'on road' scooters? From personal experience, I learned that, in Germany, everyone will stare at you on one of these. Some will even take a photo of you. Just like in every other country. Jarda Novotný runs a company called Event Time that organises (among other things) scooter excursions, and he invited me to come try it out. And now I'm inviting you!

BREAK A LEG

Where are we going? Well, technically, it would be possible to scooter you way around the Giro d'Italia track, but most regular mortals find it easier to walk rather than scooter uphill. A flat or slightly sloped terrain is the best option for an amateur scooter. Which is why we'll start up on the plateau Děčinský Sněžník. And we'll be taking advantage of the fact that the border between Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland (Českosaské Švýcarsko) is practically just a formality nowadays. We start off going downhill to the Elbe Valley (Labské údolí). We've got 35 kilometres ahead of us. To be honest, when I found out how far we were going, I wasn't exactly

excited. I haven't been on a scooter since I was...five? And now this – was I going to make a fool of myself? The scooter itself is a wonderfully simple apparatus. You stand just four centimetres off the ground and the only thing you need is the handlebars with the breaks. That's it! No need to switch gears, just switch your leg. It takes about two minutes to go through the technique. Yep, got it – push off from the ground with your leg, and you're propelled forward. Then bring your leg forward again and repeat. And that's how a scooter works. We're ready to go. Let me tell you – it's amazing! Just imagine slowly gliding through the countryside – standing up! – both feet on the deck. A scooter requires asphalt, though. The better

the asphalt, the smoother the ride. It had never occurred to me how perfect a scooter is for taking in the view. 'A scooter's perfect for gaping at the scenery', says Jarda nodding towards the rock formations lining the autumnal forest track. You have to nod, because a scooter isn't a bike; you can't steer it with one hand. But to stop and get off is so simple... "Do you want to hear a fun fact about how Czech scooter riders greet each other?" Jarda asks. Don't they just say 'hello'? No, it turns out, they use the phrase 'trhni si nohou'. It kind of sounds like 'twist a leg' in Czech, but in actual fact it tells you where to put it, so to speak. Well, now we know that, let's set off on a perfectly painless trip though this wonderful region.



HIDDEN GEMS

Two tips: Firstly – make sure you buy an Elbe-Labe day ticket. It covers all the ferries except the one in Rathen and will save you a fair bit of money. Secondly – don't go alone. Nothing beats a well-informed guide, and meeting a great bunch of people is an added bonus. At www.eventtime.cz you'll see that they have more than ten similar routes zigzagging back and forth across the Czech-German border.

VIEWS THAT TOUCH YOUR SOUL

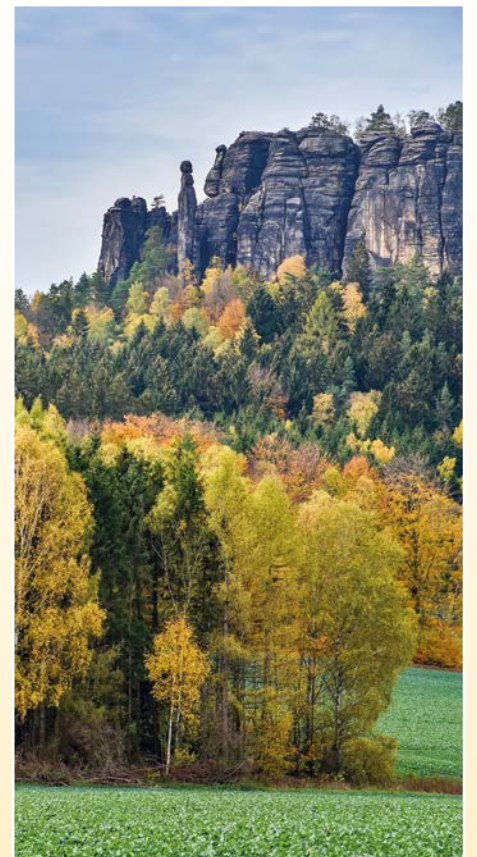
The fierce, sturdy trees and the windswept grass of the plateau Děčinský Sněžník slowly transform. We cross the border into Germany and once we reach the stream Liščí potok, which is now called Fuchsbach, we slowly ride down through a wonderful forest, past charming

is evangelical – we're in Saxony, after all. And we have a dilemma: 'What do you say? Either we just continue downhill or we can go one kilometre uphill to the most incredible viewing point.' It's an easy choice for me. I'd give my right arm for a good viewing point. We push our scooters uphill, chatting away. You don't have this kind of freedom on a bike. To get off and push is a disgrace for a cyclist.



ponds. Suddenly, great rock walls and beautiful sandstone formations appear and keep us company all the way to the stone lapidarium right by the village Cunnersdorf. We have a snack here while looking at the useful items made of stone – everything from millstones to long blocks with holes drilled down the middle, parts of an old water main (just thinking about the fact that it was 67 kilometres long makes me dizzy – I sure wouldn't want to be drilling all those holes). Then we reach Cunnersdorf, a charming, perhaps pedantically tidy, village with a wonderful cemetery surrounding the church. The church

And then there it is – we see the majestic plateau Pfaffenstein at the rock formations: a stone ship and at the bow, a beautiful virgin – the slender and irresistible Barbarina. My eyes are like a camera, slowly taking it all in. A scooter sure is the best gaping-gadget. As we move on, two more plateaus rise up on the horizon – first the rigid Königstein topped by a fortress, and then the elegant Lilienstein. Stone pistons that rose from the landscape stopping just as they reached their highest point. My eyes start watering from the sheer number of impressions. And then we're down by the Elbe. From Königstein we follow the left bank to Kurort Rathen below the famous Bastei. We take the ferry across to the right bank and enjoy the splendid ride to the town Stadt Wehlen, straight out of a fairy tale. The ride is no longer downhill, so we have to keep kicking, but bit by bit we get there. There's just enough time to catch the show in the shop selling hand-made sweets before taking the ferry across the river again. Finally, we catch the train back to Děčín, where our car is. I used to be a narrow-minded cyclist, but now I happily cheer 'Long live the scooter!' Thirty-five kilometres? I barely even noticed it...



Reviving the Fruit Industry



THE CZECH CENTRAL HIGHLANDS

Even the railway track that weaves between the hills and hillocks is named after a fruit – the Plum Track. So it's hardly surprising that modern fruit growers are popping up here. In the village Trávčice not far from Terezín, for example, we find SEVEROFUKT that grows and processes both fruit and vegetables. Some of the fruit is dried, in keeping with tradition, and their dried apples and pears are renowned. However, they also produce fruit concentrates, and these are quite the hit at the farmers' markets. And in the village Klapý below Hazmburk Castle, there's another farming association called Zemědělské družstvo Klapý. The large premises are filled with apple trees, sour cherry trees and plum trees as well as their treasured sweet cherry trees and the popular Pinkcot apricot trees. Stanislav ŠTRYMPL in Svádov, on the other hand, has a smaller-scale production, well-known for its sought-after strawberries. Then there's Jan Heřmánek, who got fed up with not being able to find any decent marmalade and started making his own in Radešín just north of Ústí nad Labem. His aim was to make a marmalade as good as his mother's. And it seems he succeeded. His line of marmalades, called Mazaný Filip, have already been awarded eleven gold stars at the Great Taste Awards, the world's most prestigious competition for food and drink. Fancy some plum and vanilla jam? Or a strawberry and vanilla marmalade? Or perhaps apricot and amaretto, currant and star anise, or the gooseberry and cardamom jam that was awarded with two gold stars? MAZANÝ FILIP has all you could ask for and more. And if you're curious about how one went about drying fruit in the olden days, a group of volunteers have an annual show at the open-air museum in Zubnice.



BOHEMIAN SWITZERLAND

Even in the northernmost parts of the region, fruit growers are returning, and rowan berries and other fruits are being rediscovered. Let's start the BBCidre cider press in Rumburk. These entrepreneurs fell in love with the old Breton beverage and use classic Sudeten apples to make great ciders. They are well fermented and carefully bottled, and they have a uniquely rugged flavour to them. And if you

like these, then... A little further on, in Jiřetín pod Jedlovou, there's a fragrant company named ČOKODŽEMY. Their idea of combining high-quality marmalade with chocolate has been surprisingly successful. So successful in fact, that they added pancakes to their chocojams and jamolades and opened a pancake shop right on the main square in Jiřetín. Drop by and try some! In the village Kytlice, PETR PSOTA produces a completely different kind of jam, alongside his pestos, chutneys and syrups. How about a carrot chutney with almonds and coriander? Or a peach jam with vanilla and brandy? Interesting... The name Valdemar Grešík is known all over the country and is synonymous with great fruit teas, jams, chutneys, dried fruit, and juices. Grešík's company NATURA is seated in Děčín. This same man is the man behind the comeback



We have been documenting regional food producers since the first issue of the Gate. We taste, enjoy, and recommend. This time, our focus is on fruit and products made of fruit. The local fruit industry goes back thousands of years – up until the late Middle Ages, making cider and growing, distilling, and drying fruit were the mainstays of the two regions the Garden of Bohemia (Zahrada Čech) and Bohemian Paradise (Český ráj). The four treasures of the past were plums, pears, apples and rowan berries and huge amounts of dried and fresh fruit were sold across the border. Even towards the end of the empire, most villages were still drying fruit. The Czech Central Highlands had more plum orchards than you could count and there were all sorts of ancient plum types throughout the region. Can all of this really be revived? Well, so far it seems to be working!

of rowan berries, which he turns into a great liquor. In the same town, we find the small family business MANOK that makes some wonderful jams, fruit teas and syrups. Their strawberry syrup is especially popular. Our third producer from Děčín is Štěpánka Holcmanová and her MARMEĽÁDY CIDONIO marmalades that have some unusual flavours. There's something for everyone – sweet classics, variations with bitter, sour or spicy flavours, and also some interesting versions with alcohol.



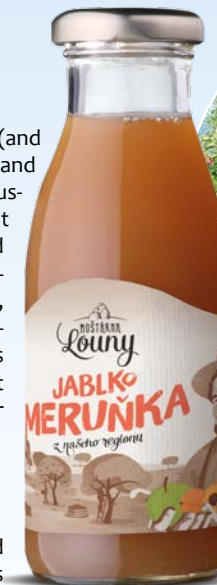
THE ORE MOUNTAINS

The previously-mentioned Plum Track runs through the Czech Central Highlands and ends in the foothills of the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory). It's here, in the village Bělouše u Mostu, that Karla Ščepková's family farm keeps the fruit-growing tradition alive with the farm KARLÁTKA OD ŠVESTKOVÉ DRÁHY (KARLÁTKA OF THE PLUM TRACK). The have two hectares filled with trees that provide the fruit for their fabulous dried plums and plum jam. A little further on, in the village Chrástce u Mostu, there's another family business called Zámecké sady Chrástce. This business has a slightly larger production – a full 95 hectares of orchards. There's plenty to recommend here, such as their dried organic pears from their pure Hardy and Madame Verte pear trees, or their juices, jams and fresh fruit. We head to the village Jirkov in search of more jam makers. SADY A ŠKOLKY

JIRKOV grow fantastic apples (and also strawberries, cherries, pears and plums) that help revive the fruit industry in the area. Another resident of Jirkov, David Netolický, dreamed of a small old-fashioned delicatessen. He's getting there step by step, and his brand PERFECTLY DELICIOUS makes extraordinary jams such as onion marmalade with port wine, or spicy ketchup with garlic, or the award-winning jam spread.

LOWER POOHŘÍ

Next up is the town Louny and its surroundings. The cider press MOŠTÁRNA LOUNY has been around for seven years already, and only uses local ingredients. The fruit is pressed cold, and the juices are neither sweetened nor diluted. It's simply bottled fruit. The village Košnice lies to the north of Louny, and Brloh to the south. Why am I telling you this? Because the family distillery KARFÍKŮV DVŮR is in Košnice. It specialises in producing and distilling pure, high-quality spirits, and also produces mead, liquors and juices. I have left quite a remarkable episode for last. Avid readers of the Gate are already familiar with the Vernerov Mill (Vernerův mlýn) in Brloh. In addition to its exhibition about mills, the traditional Kdoulování (quincing) takes place every year. This is a day when fans of the quince, an almost forgotten fruit, get together and make quince marmalade. Of course, you're still welcome even if you've never heard of the fruit before. The chateau in the village KRÁSNÝ DVŮR is no worse, as it organises and annual



Day of the Apple: A whole day full of cultural and gastronomic events, markets, concerts, theatre plays as well as a prestigious strudel competition. Are you still worried about the future of the fruit industry in the Gate to Bohemia? I'm not.

More information about regional producers can be found in the catalogue Regional Produce from the Ústí Region, available on the Gate to Bohemia website.



PIONEER BEER

– a Love Story

Nowadays, it's all about telling the story behind things. And this brewery definitely has a story to tell! It all started with Michal, a malt and brewery engineer who had been working at the brewery in Krušovice for almost twelve years. He had been dating the charming Slovak marketing specialist, Miriam, for some time. One thing lead to another, and soon enough they just knew – their future lay with each other. And a brewery of their own. And so last year, the brewery Pioneer Beer was born.

It didn't take many seconds to put that on paper, but unless you've done something similar, you can't imagine how much work went into starting the brewery. It took them a year just to find a location. Michal is from Podbořany, so they looked for something either in his home town, or in the Mecca of hops – Žatec. Finally they found a building in a perfect location – in the hops heart of Žatec, just a stone's throw from the Hops Museum and the Hops and Beer Temple. It was quite an effort making sure the necessary equipment didn't break

The storeroom is where they get their work-out, because for every 1,000 litres of beer they make, they need 200 kilos of malt. Within their first month, the pair managed to brew – and sell – 3,000 litres of frothy beer. Their beer is now sold all over the country. If you're looking for it in Žatec, you'll find it at the Rock Café and at the restaurant Cihelna. The latter actually started serving the beer due to popular demand among their customers.

A PIONEER WITH A CLASSIC UP ITS SLEEVE

Their philosophy? Pioneer is pioneering. But not everything needs to be groundbreaking. So they make a wonderful classic light lager, but you can also try one of their interesting, high-quality, top-fermented specialties. However, you won't find any pumpkin or green colouring in these beers – they have a strong ethic that beer should be beer. That doesn't mean it can't be adventurous, though. The brewery cooperates with the Hops Research Institute and tries new varieties of aromatic hops that aren't even available commercially yet. Their ales are fabulous – you could easily drink their pale 12° Double Trap or semi-dark 13° Cara-

mel Shake all evening. How often can you say that about an ale? For the 2019 summer season the brewery is planning on opening a beer garden out front with beer on tap, and in the future they'd like to have a restaurant serving simple dishes. There's a great interest in Pioneer Beer and Michal and Miriam now know that their dream is not just a castle in the sky. Stop by for a beer (it'll likely end up being more than just one) and you'll be a part of making their dream come true. More information can be found on their website or on their Facebook page.



any of the preservation regulations. But they managed. Anyone who enters the brewery is amazed – the building is beautiful, the technology is modern, and everything is done by hand. Well, by four hands. I couldn't quite believe that Michal and Miriam do everything themselves.

HELENE

The World's Smallest Brewery

The title is a bit of an exaggeration. It is, of course, possible to brew beer in an even smaller space than at the bed and breakfast Helene in the charming village Kytlice. However, this brewery produces about 100 hl annually, and is run by a single person in a room that measures 3x3 metres. That must be some kind of record. And the beer is really great! In 2016 these local nectars were placed first and third in a comparison with other breweries from the Lusatian Mountains. And that's no easy feat!

There's an interesting story behind this brewery as well. Petra and Vladimír Štich bought a house in Kytlice wanting to turn it into a bed and breakfast. To do so, they had to learn a number of skills along the way.

Luckily, Vladimír is the kind of guy who will keep trying new things until the day he dies. And so he learnt brick-laying and bee keeping, and then decided to try his hand at brewing beer. Simply because it was something he'd never done before. So for his birthday, he was given a home brewing kit. Today, he calls that kit 'plastic junk'. But it did enable him to brew beer on the stove in a 50-litre pot. A single afternoon in the company of their neighbours, however, and the beer was all gone. So, they bought a freezer that Vladimír turned into a beer cooler. He made more beer, and the neighbours were happy. But the logistics were complicated. While Vladimír was brewing, the kitchen turned into... Hell, apparently. And so they decided to buy some basic equipment and start an authorised brewery. That way they could also sell

the beer in the restaurant at the bed and breakfast. You see, Kytlice is full of bed and breakfasts so it's important to have an edge. And theirs would be the first with a brewery. The brewery



officially started operating in March 2015. The success was instant. Word got around surprisingly quickly, and people started rushing to the taps to try this wonderful beer they'd heard of. And so the brewery updated its equipment again. However, the 340-litre kettle had to be welded together from smaller kettles. The ready-made kettle simply didn't fit through the doorway! And then there's the sensors, thermostats, new fermenting vessels – all in this in a 3x3 closet. As the bed and breakfast's guests never showed much interest in the sauna, it is now used as a luxurious (alder and

aspen panelling on the walls) washroom and kiln. It now houses tanks that are connected to the taps in the restaurant. The tanks were also equipped with a special tap so that they can fill five bottles at once...



KYTLICE'S THREE TREASURES

Through a process of trial and error the Štichs ended up with a prestigious brewery that produces three fantastic beers. And it's about time we introduce them. The recipe for the semi-dark bottom fermented 12° Adonis hasn't changed since that first legendary brew on the stovetop. His sister Grácie is not much younger; another light 12° lager that was also first brewed on the stove. Vladimír simply had a knack for it right from the start. The last member of the trio is the top fermented 11° APA. No need for a lager when this ale slips down so smoothly. Cheers!



TOP TIP

If you come to Kytlice for a beer, make sure you sit on the terrace. The view from here is just as scrumptious as the three local treasures.

Welcome, Wine Connoisseurs!

The town Litoměřice and its surroundings is home to wonderful grapes that make fantastic wine. Anyone who passes through is taken by the scenery; the slopes covered in grapevines give the Gate to Bohemia a poetic feeling. But there are also vineyards at the heart of the Czech Central Highlands, on the hills around Hazmburk Castle or the town Most..., plenty of them. Local vintners have long understood that the more fun they can offer their guests, the more often these connoisseurs will return. So let's go visit the local vintners that only offer not only wine, but also an experience.

THE WINERY ČESKÉ VINAŘSTVÍ CHRÁMCE

We start on the border to the Czech Central Highlands, not far from Most. This winery is all set for tourists. The owners are happy to take you on a tour of the place. And a wine tasting with nibbles is a given. They also regularly organise an Open House and every year at harvest time, there's an event to celebrate the Burčák – a traditional fermented grape juice produced in autumn. Finally, there's the mulled wine on sale every Saturday in December.

THE WINERY JOHANN W TŘEBÍVLICE

A little further east, we find the youngest and largest winery in the neighbourhood. And it has a special liking for tourists. Everyone who comes here is welcomed in the friendly wine shop that not only sells Třebívlice wine, but also various regional specialities. The best part

is that they take us on a Wine Trail, which follows the grapes all the way from the vine to the glass. The excursion utilizes top-notch technology and ends with a wine tasting. And as if that wasn't enough, they also run a restaurant that serves great food, have a yard with an amphitheatre, and organise various kinds of regular events...

THE WINERY VINAŘSTVÍ SV. TOMÁŠE MALÉ ŽERNOSEKY

We're down by the Elbe, in Malé Žernoseky to be exact. Sv. Tomáš (St Thomas) is another welcoming winery. You can either buy a bottle of wine to take home or a glass to enjoy right here. If you let them know in advance, they'll even prepare a wine tasting for you. During the tasting, they tell you a thing or two about the technology and history of the wine industry in the area. They also organise other wine-related events here, or even weddings!



THE WINERY ŽERNOSECKÉ VINAŘSTVÍ, s.r.o.

On the other side of the river, in Velké Žernoseky, we're in for a treat. We are led down to the château's historical wine cellar that is a full 1500 m². Premonstratensian monks carved the oak barrels in the 12th century. The barrels are still in use today and are used alongside the stainless steel tanks. You can either buy bottled wine here or ring in advance to organise a wine tasting for a group. You can also spend the night here in one of the château's stylish suites.

THE FAMILY WINERY MIKULENKOVÍ

Take a few steps from the château towards the river and you'll stumble across the family winery run by Petra and Dalibor Mikulenkovi. They are literally overflowing with ideas on how to entertain wine connoisseurs. Wine tastings are offered all year round. Anyone can stop by, taste some wine, and have some snacks or a meal to go with it. The food is wonderful. Quite likely, you'll find some kind of event going on, because they organise plenty of them. Such as celebrating the end of the burčák season, a traditional St Martin's Day goose, welcoming spring, the First of May... And if you buy a bottle of wine it comes with a special gift label made of hand-made paper.



THE WINERY VINAŘSTVÍ POD RADOBYLEM

The youngest winery in the region is situated at the foot of the hill Radobýl in the village Žalhostice. Here, as elsewhere, the staff is very friendly. They have clear opening hours and anyone who stops by during these hours can also go on a short tour of the winery and have a wine tasting. You can also ring ahead to book an organised tasting including refreshments, or to organise a company event or a private celebration.



THE MONASTERY WINE CELLARS IN LITOMĚŘICE

The wine cellars in the heart of the town Litoměřice have regular opening hours, and if you ring in advance they are happy to organise a wine tasting. In addition to the wine tasting, you'll also be taken on a tour of the wine cellars connected to the monastery and some of the Baroque buildings along the Elbe.



shown you around the winery, and told all about the wine, you're given a taste, and quite likely a snack will be cooked up for you. And if the wine tasting ends up being more than just a little taste, you can even spend the night. This kind of hospitality could be sold at a high price. But here they just give it away.

THE WINERY AT THE HOUSE OF LOBKOWICZ IN ROUDNICE NAD LABEM

At this wonderful Renaissance house, we can buy wine either in the wine cellar or, in the summer, on the outdoor pavilion. If you order in advance, you can expect a wine tasting where you'll also hear about the rich history of the winery. You can even ask for a tasting right at the charming Roudnice winery. This winery also often participates in such events such as local wine and music festivals.

THE JEVINĚVSKÉ WINERY

This small winery is situated right at the edge of the Litoměřice region. It's a wonderful place. The owner Štěpán Sedlák welcomes you as an old friend, because he considers anyone who likes wine to be a friend. Then you get

WINE EVENTS IN THE GATE TO BOHEMIA

Springtime Open Cellars – 23. 3. 2019 (Třebívlice, Chrástce, Březno, Vičice) – wine tasting

Roudnice Wine Tasting – 8. 6. 2019 (Roudnice nad Labem) – wine tasting

Wine Pilgrimage in the Gate to Bohemia – 29. 6. 2019 (Lovosice – Malé Žernoseky) – Following the Elbe Cycle Route with stops for wine tasting

Open Cellars in the Czech Central Highlands – 31. 8. 2019 (Velké Žernoseky, Malé Žernoseky, Žalhostice, Lovosice, Třebívlice) – wine tastings and tours

Open Cellars around Říp – 16. 11. 2019 (Roudnice nad Labem 3x, Sovice, Libkovic pod Řípem, Jevíněves)



The Republic of Gastronomical Experiences

The restaurant Republika in the centre of Chomutov literally took my breath away. The restaurant had been recommended to me, but I was not expecting this. Anyone looking for a scathing review will be disappointed; the next few lines are full of well-deserved praise. The kitchen, run by the head chef, Vít Růžička, is among the top ten in the region. Perhaps even the top five. Add to that the unusually helpful, friendly and professional service and the ambient music – well, there aren't many places in the Gate to Bohemia that offer such a sophisticated experience.

The location itself was already nicely furnished, so Vít Růžička's team just had to add the content to the design. The interior is inspired by the era of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). This theme spread to the cuisine as well. They serve classic Czech cuisine with a modern touch, and there's also a little something extra. You see, alongside the well-composed traditional menu, there's also a more experimental menu that changes about once a month. This menu offers seasonally or thematically chosen meals. In the past they've had such themes as venison, Valentine's Day, lent, French, horse radish, St Martin's Day and advent. The five-course menu is quite the experience! The high-quality meals are presented in an inventive manner and paired with a wine or beer. I was lucky enough to try the autumn menu and I was more than satis-

fied. The regular menu boasts such items as an award-winning svíčková (traditional roast sirloin in a creamy sauce), smoked duck pâté, potato pancakes with garlic bryndza (Slovak sheep cheese) and sauerkraut, a classic veal schnitzel fried in butter, or a fantastic topside steak served with spinach and a garlic demi-glace. And the beer here is excellent. The restaurant is right next door to the brewery Karásek and



Stülpner, who provide them with most of their beer. One tap, however, is reserved for a guest beer from a craft brewery. Their wine comes from small Moravian vineyards, as well as from a few local ones in Březno or Třebívlice. The lunch menu is of just as high quality as the à la carte menu, and is on offer until 2 p.m. I was really taken by the young and ambitious staff. It's great to see people that are proud of their work and that enjoy doing what they do best. The restaurant is also an inconspicuous gallery. There's an absinthe fountain at the bar, the design is trendy, and it's simply a nice place to spend a bit of time. And allow me just a quick side-note about something beyond the food – the toilets are made of alabaster!

TOP TIP

Try their home-made lemonade. It's the real thing, no cheap squash with a bit of tap water. I hit the jackpot with a Galia melon lemonade.

An Addictive Steakgrill



If you're on the motorway D8 and you enter the Ústí Region, then just by the turnoff to Roudnice, you'll see a remarkable restaurant with an original concept. There's no sign for this restaurant, you just have to know it's there. And trust me, a lot of people know it's there. The restaurant is almost always full and a large majority of the customers are regulars. When the terrace is open during the summer weekends, the restaurant can seat 220 people. What is it that attracts so many customers? There's no big secret. They simply stick to the concept created by Michael Klíma, the head chef of a famous Chinese restaurant in Prague. The current owner and head chef, Jaroslav Honzajk, continues in his tradition.

So what is this special concept? It's difficult to explain to someone who hasn't tasted it. It's something between a high-end restaurant and fast food. If this sounds incompatible in your ears, you're wrong. The main component here is the content, the quality. The portions here are hardly minimalist reproductions of abstract art – quite the opposite, they are very generous. The menu is international but the recipes have been modified to suit the Czech palate. All the meals are made on demand; nothing is pre-cooked. The steaks are cooked on a grill, the liver on a griddle, the cordon bleu is fried. The base of each meal is the meat, which is mostly imported from South America. It usually has medium or high marbling and good maturity. Perhaps the most fundamental thing here, though, is that the menu developed over

a number of years, yet it hardly ever changes. I call it a concept rather than rigidity. What doesn't work is scrapped and replaced by something else. There's no seasonal menu, no unnecessary experimentation, just high quality food maintained over a long period of time. Whether you're here for the first time or the twentieth – the experience is the same. And that is the hardest thing when it comes to gastronomy. Are you still surprised that the restaurant is full of regulars? During the busiest season there's a dozen employees



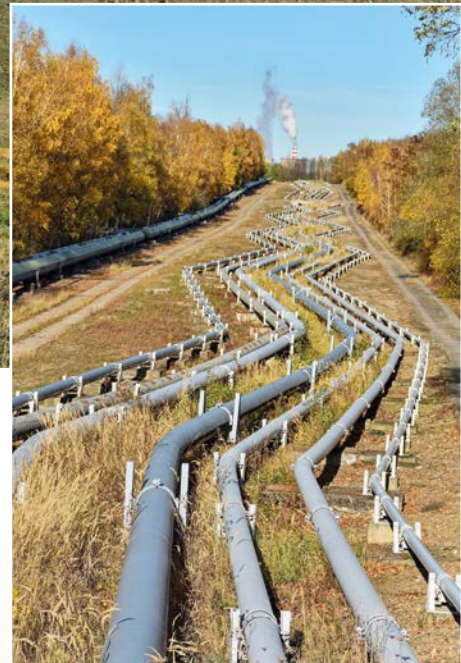
in the kitchen and another dozen on the floor. There's a great buzz to it. Oh, and by the way, if you ask, they'll let you take a look around the kitchen, too. And then there's the special events at weekends that include roasting a seriously large piece of meat on a spit, so that it has the captivating flavour of having been half baked, half smoked... What more could you ask for? Their Texas Chilli soup is legendary. Other highlights include the grilled Madagascar tenderloin with a pepper sauce and creamy spinach, and the cheeseburger made of minced beef neck. Not to forget the steaks, of course. The medium rare Rib Eye Steak made of prime marbled sirloin is another safe bet, as is the Grilled Fillet Mignon, again made of sirloin and wrapped in bacon.

TOP TIP

Fancy a dessert? I definitely recommend the Hot Chocolate Fondant served with cherries and a wonderful pistachio ice cream from Angelato, or the scrumptious crème brûlée.



The Irresistible Beauty of the Mining Landscape



Just to be clear – their seven off-road vehicles (and the capacity can be increased yet) are not the aim of the tours but the medium. They take you places a regular car could never take you. Or places you might never have visited at all. This group knows how to negotiate access to places that are otherwise out of bounds. Of course, they tell you what these vehicles are capable of out in the terrain, but the vehicles' main merit is that you can get to know and understand the beauty of the countryside in all its various forms. As soon as you hop in, your guide starts talking. Personally, I always end up in a kind of trance, because the guides really know what to say and how. Every now and then, when one of the other drivers has greater expertise on the subject, you'll hear them speaking to you through the speakers. Now, let's go see this moonscape that has been such a hot topic in the media and among politicians!

WHEN WILL WE SEE THE MOONSCAPE, ALREADY?

'Well, we're driving through it right now', says Martin with a sly smile. We are surrounded by a wondrous variegated young forest. A hare runs across the track, a little further on we see a deer... But we know what he means – we're at the Růžodolská dump. Debris from the mines was dumped here as recently as twenty years

ago. Today it's a place to relax, a forest with cycle paths criss-crossing through it. A lot of dumps in the area have developed similarly, and most of them are now protected habitats. And the views! We may only be 280 metres above sea level, but we can see the Czech Central Highlands (České středohoří), the Doupov Mountains (Doupovské hory), and the reservoir Džbán. Just below us lies the chemical factory in Záluží, and behind it the steep hills of the Ore Mountains (Krušné hory) – a 700-metre incline in just one kilometre, so no walk in the park. Just a little further on, something exceptional is in the working. We find ourselves quite literally in the wilderness. A small lake surrounded by thick reeds and grass – and then, a water spout. The spout is clearly not natural, but the way it has become a part of its surroundings is so charming I can't even describe it. 'You won't see this anywhere else. Water from the abandoned underground mine Kohinoor II is pumped out here. Water from 25 metres below sea level,



The Czechoslovak Army Mine (lom Československé armády) is one of the largest and most famous surface mines in the North Bohemian Basin. However, it is slowly closing down. Many, many years ago, this was a large lake – Komořanské jezero. The Lobkowicz family started draining it during the early 19th century as it was clogged with sediments and the wetland was a hotbed for disease. Coal was first mined here during the early 20th century and unless the time frame is prolonged, the last coal will be mined in 2024. I've been wanting to visit this gigantic pit for some time, but it's not so easy. I finally found a way thanks the company Offroadsafari, which has been featured in the Gate previously. Jump on in, and down we go!

or 300 metres below the surface. Since the water is hot, there is talk of using it to heat up large greenhouses for vegetables. Another option is to clean it and let it run into the Lake Most', Martin informs us. This place is fascinating! We keep driving, but the mine is still nowhere to be seen. We do see a lake, however. 'Lake Most is actually bigger than the famous Lake Mácha (Máchovo jezero), and in places it's a full 75 metres deep. The lake has been completely recultivated and the quality of the water is amazing. It should open to the public in 2019. Oh, and by the way, this was also a mine twenty years ago.' As I gape at the beauty, a flock of birds flies overhead. Apparently, 131 species (!) have been spotted here. I can't even fathom it. It doesn't even take half a human life for nature to return.

AMONG DINOSAURS

We drive past the Kopistská dump, which is now also a nature reserve. The pipelines drawn through it almost look like land art. And then –



'Put your helmets on at the gate and I'll go over the safety precautions with you. We're entering a functioning mine, so it's no joke. You really have to be on guard', Martin says in a serious voice. It's difficult to describe the view. Here, inside the pit, everything looks different. We can see how the mine is automatically filling itself

back up in the places where it's no longer being excavated. There are several little lakes that are already surrounded by greenery. The information board shows us the plan for the future – a huge lake, i.e. the lake will return. Except this time, it'll be sparkling clean. And we drive on! Right up to the excavators. I should perhaps mention some of the interesting technical features Martin tells us about, but it's probably best to just experience it for yourself. It was like being among dinosaurs – huge awe-inspiring metal beasts that are somehow beautiful. The Paddle Excavatorsaurus KU 800 eats two barrels of Vaseline a day and it takes seven men to control him! The Bucket Excavatorsaurus RK 5000 can – believe it or not – not only turn around, but also move forward... And finally, the sight that really took my breath away. Down at the bottom of the pit, where only employees are permitted, the mining is in full swing. Yet just a couple of tens of metres away, there's a flock of grazing moufflons. Nature always finds a way.



Autodrom

– Packed with Fun

Autodrom Most has been offering adrenaline-filled fun for 35 years. Even if you're not a car fanatic, you're likely to enjoy yourself here. You can, of course, watch the exciting battles between the cars, trucks or motorbikes on the race track, but there's also a wide range of other activities to enjoy. How about a safe driving course aimed at drivers of all ages? It includes terrain driving and also driving on the newly expanded off-road course. Or you can drive your own car or bike on the race track, or go for a taxi ride with an experienced racing pilot...During the Olympics in July or the local half-marathon in November, you can even run on the track! Add to that the go-cart track and the off-road track for four wheelers. And children will enjoy playing on the traffic playground where they can borrow bikes and scooters for free. There's no end to the possibilities!

TRUCKS, MOTORBIKES AND NASCAR

The 2019 season is jam-packed. Autodrom is preparing a number of weekend competitions, all accompanied by a rich programme of activities. There'll be something for everyone. If you're a fan of strong and fast vehicles, you can look forward to the Czech Truck Prix, part of the European Truck Racing Championship. This annual competition is the most popular event here. On 30 August and 1 September this year, it'll draw drivers and teams to North Bohemia for the 27th time. The Czech Truck Prix



is part of the regional project Rodinné stříbro, which aims to connect the most important cultural and sporting events in the region and beyond. Last year, the competition ADAC GT Masters visited Autodrom for the first time. It was such a success that it's returning 17–19 May this year. Germany tends to produce some beautiful and fierce vehicles at this international race series with modified super sports cars in the category GT3. Examples include the completely new Audi R8 LMS, BMW M6 GT3, Corvette C7 GT3-R, Lamborghini Huracán GT3, Mercedes AMG GT3, Ferrari 488 GT3, Honda NSX GT3, and Porsche 911 GT3-R. Team ISR and the drivers Filip Salaquarda and Frank Stippler will be representing the Czech Republic. The pair premiered last year with an Audi R8 LMS and managed to reach a respectable 9th place.

Autodrom continuously tries to draw more attractive race series to North Bohemia. Their deal with the company Team FJ is an incredible achievement. Team FJ owns the license for the company NASCAR, which covers one of the most popular series in the Stock Car category. In the US, this race dates all the way back to 1948. This upcoming year, Autodrom will be hosting the NASCAR Whelen Euro



Series, one of NASCAR's racing series outside of North America. It'll be the main event during the Most American Show weekend 28–30 June. For the third time running, there'll also be battles between historical cars, including open-wheel cars that were renowned worldwide during the last century. Motorbike fans won't be left out either. They can look forward to the premiere of the Internationale Deutsche Motorradmeisterschaft (IDM) 9–11 August. And just a week later, it's time for lovers of historical two-wheelers to come see the traditional races at The Most Historic Motorcycle.

TOP WEEKEND RACES 2019

The Most Show featuring ADAC GT MASTERS (17–19 May)

The Most American show NASCAR (28–30 June)

Internationale Deutsche Motorradmeisterschaft IDM (9–11 August)

The Most Historic Motorcycle (16–18 August)

Czech Truck Prix (30 August–1 September)



The Huntsman

from Krásné Březno

THE HUNTSMAN AND HIS INVIGORATING INVENTION

Once upon a time, there were two keen hunters, Ludwig Bramsch and Louiss Eckelmann. Their favourite thing to do was to go hunting near count Adolf Ledebour's hunting lodge above Telnice, not far from Ústí nad Labem. Once, during an especially successful hunt, the noble huntsman Ledebour offered the two men something to warm them up. 'Take a swig, my dear fellows. It's my own recipe. I make this sweet nectar from rye distillate', the huntsman said filling their glasses. It went down a treat, quite a success. 'Say, would you sell me this recipe, mister?' asked Eckelmann shrewdly. But the huntsman was no fool. He believed in his liquor. 'I'm afraid that won't be possible. You see, this is an heirloom that has been passed down from generation to generation', replied the huntsman standing his ground. 'And what if I promised you that you'd be the face of it, then? That way, you'd still be watching over it long after you've left us.' The huntsman thought for a moment. He imagined tens of bottles on the shop counter, all with his face smiling at the customer. 'Alright, it's a deal.'

CHEERS! TO RYE!

Who knows, maybe it's just a story...But we do know that 15 March 1848 the company 'Bramsch and Eckelmann – spirits, compressed yeasts and liquors' was founded in Krásné Březno, today a part of Ústí nad Labem. One

of their first products was Stará žitná myslivecká, which means The Old Rye Huntsman's. And the count is still known as the 'Good Old Huntsman' (Myslivec) today. This pure Czech speciality is made of carefully chosen rye distillates. Just like whisky, it matures in oak barrels along with natural extracts made of dried fruit – all according to the original recipe. Many years had passed since the Hunter was collecting trophies around the world, and it was time for something new. At first, this new version would only appear every now and then when there was a special celebration going on, and only within the walls of the distillery. The recipe was the same, but it was left in the oak barrels to mature a little longer. The result is a more noble, smoother, more harmonious whisky flavour with the warming echo of the orchard. In short, Stará myslivecká žitná Reserve was born. It hit the shelves a few years ago. Up until this day, the original recipe is as well-guarded as the crown jewels – only three people know it. When the company decided to move its production from Krásné Březno a few years ago, all the original technology, down to the last kettle and oak barrel, was moved as well. Nowadays, the Huntsman (Myslivec) is made at the oldest distillery in Europe – Green Tree, who produced the first rye spirit back in 1518. But the Hunter's face – and soul – always has and always will belong to Ústí nad Labem.



An Innovative Guide to the Gate of Bohemia



More and more people are getting to know the Svozils. But paradoxically, they don't actually exist. Here's a quick introduction for those of you who don't yet know them: The Svozils are a family that, years ago, decided that they'd get together and go on holiday at least twice a year. And funnily enough, the Svozils have already visited the Garden to Bohemia five times. They just love it here. The first time they were here, they roamed Bohemian Switzerland. Then they went to the Czech Central Highlands, and in winter they enjoyed the snow in the Ore Mountains. And each time they kept a travel diary. And now, two new travel diaries have appeared on the shelves at the information centres in the Ústí Region. Where did they go this time?

THE ORE MOUNTAINS AND LOWER POOHŘÍ

The Svozils decided to return to see the Ore Mountains in summer, because these gracious mountains have something to offer in every season. The Svozils named their diary The Return of the Brave Seven. They were also looking forward to getting to know the Lower Poohří (Dolní Poohří) properly, and this resulted in the travel diary Taking the Time Machine to the Lower Poohří (Dolním Poohřím ve stroji času) Reading

these diaries, you not only get to experience everything the Svozils have done and seen, but you almost become a part of the family. You get to see the inner workings of the family, but more importantly, of course, you get to know about all the interesting and remarkable things there are in the region. But it's not like reading a text book or a brochure, it's more like reading a story. And, as if in passing, you get know what places are worth visiting, where to go and what to see, and what to do... And I guess it's about time I told you: The Svozils are fictive family. We found a group of friends willing to 'act' as

the Svozils, and then we took photos of them in various locations throughout the region. Petr Herold, the same illustrator that creates the cartoons for the Gate, then redrew the photos one line at a time. Some pictures were given speech bubbles, others QR codes, so if you hover your smartphone over it, the characters will speak right at you. No other region in the world has anything similar to this, which makes everyone that contributed to the diaries that bit prouder. To give you an idea, we've included two short excerpts from the new diaries and added a number of photos from behind the scenes



i.e. from our photoshoots. So this is a unique chance for you to see the real Svozils before they're 'cartoonized'. Here they are: Zdeněk Ciboch (the dad, Jan), Dana Štefáčková (the mum, Barbora), Tomáš Pojer (the son, Lukáš), Laura Chalupníková (his girlfriend, Karolína), Kačenka and Mates Válekovi (the niece, Natálka and the nephew, Matěj).

THE SVOZILS IN KADAŇ

The main square in Kadaň is magnificent. The roof of the thin white Gothic tower looks like some kind of Christmas bun with aromatic cloves sticking out of it. 'Those are crabs', Barbora explained. 'Crabs?' Matěj asked excitedly. 'How did they get all the way up there?' Barbora had to explain that the terracotta ornaments were added to the tower when it was rebuilt during the Renaissance. They aren't real, live crabs, but a typical architectural adornment. But then she immediately jumbled things up for poor Matěj again: 'Some people call them frogs as well.' 'Frogs?' Matěj shrieked. 'And how did they get all the way up there?' Sometimes I really admire teachers, the things they have to deal with... Then Barbora got us all gathered round and told us that we were about to see something that doesn't exist anywhere else in the Czech Republic. She got just the reaction she was looking for – we were beyond curious. 'We're going to walk down the narrowest street in the country. At one point it's only 60 centimetres wide', said Barbora holding out her hands to show how narrow it is. 'No way!' gasped Natálka.



THE SVOZILS AT KOMÁŘÍ VÍŽKA

Finally, we were standing at the bottom of the chair lift from Bohosudov up to Komář vížka. Natálka and Matěj had brought a massive bottle of insect repellent and were busy smothering each other with it. 'Natálka?' Barbora



laughed. 'Oh, you won't be seeing any mosquitoes up there, kids.' 'Then why is it called...?' Natálka retaliated in an annoyed voice. 'That's just an old misunderstanding', Barbora explained patiently. 'A long time ago, when the Slavs first came to the Czech Republic, a tribe called Mogelin lived here. The leaders of the tribe where called 'Myk' and they made sacrifices to their god upon this hill. So people started calling the place Mykenberg. But then someone misspelled it as Mückenberg and so when the German name was translated, it became Mosquito Hill.' 'Hill?' Matěj wondered. 'Yes, it wasn't called Turret until the 16th century when the miners built the bell tower.' ...

asked carefully. 'What are you doing?' Natálka gave her a supercilious look. 'This is insect repellent. Mum gave it to us and told us to put it on at the chair lift.' Not that we were wanting to question Barbora's sister's parental authority, but the reasoning still wasn't quite clear to us. Natálka gave us an amused look and then spoke as though explaining herself to a pair of idiots: 'We're going to Komář vížka – that means Mosquito Turret in English. You don't think there's going to be mosquitoes on Mosquito Turret? We're putting on repellent so we won't get bitten.' I mean, she had a point. But Barbora just



Dresden International Airport – Your gateway to North Bohemia



Flughafen Dresden GmbH is a daughter company of Mitteldeutsche Flughafen AG, a joint-stock company with approximately 1.7 million passengers a year (2017). Apart from the German regions of Saxony and South Brandenburg, the catchment area of Dresden International Airport, the airport for short haul flights, also includes North Bohemia and Lower Silesia in Poland.

The flight schedule includes attractive connections to important air travel hubs both in Germany and the rest of Europe. These are: **Amsterdam** (KLM), **Barcelona** (Germania), **Basel** (Easyjet), **Düsseldorf** (Eurowings), **Frankfurt upon Mohan** (Lufthansa), **Köln/Bonn** (Eurowings), **Moscow-Sheremetyevo** (Aeroflot), **Munich** (Lufthansa), **Stuttgart** (Eurowings) and **Curych** (SWISS). Leipzig/Halle airport, which is also a part of Mitteldeutsche Flughafen AG, offers also flights to/from **Istanbul** (Turkish Airlines), **London-Stansted** (Ryanair), **Moscow-Domodyedovo** (Rusline) and **Vienna** (Austrian Airlines). Waiting times at the transfer airports are usually short and a large number of connecting flights to and from Dresden or Leipzig/Halle allows for flexible journey planning.

In addition, there are many direct flights from Dresden and Leipzig/Halle to popular tourist destinations in the Mediterranean, by the Atlantic, Red or Black Sea. These destinations include e.g. **Athens** (from Dresden only), **Bastia** (from Dresden only), **Dubai**, **Hurghada**, **Lamezia Terme**, **Malta**, **Monastir**, **Marsa Alam**, **Palma de Mallorca**, **Reykjavik** (from Dresden only), **Saint Petersburg** (from Dresden only), **Tivat** (from Leipzig/Halle only), **Tenerife**, **Varna** and many others.

The direct connection of Dresden Airport to the A4 Motorway, almost 3,000 parking spaces close to the terminal building and a compact terminal with a high-speed railway station and a conference centre provide an integrated concept that allows for comfortable arrivals and departures or holding meetings and conferences. It takes about 45 minutes on the A4 and A17/D8 motorways to get from Dresden to Northern Bohemia. Passengers can change from S2 high-speed railway to trains to the Czech Republic at Dresden Main Station. The journey from the airport to the main station only takes about 20 minutes. In addition, there are modern yellow Regiojet coaches travelling from Prague to Dresden Airport.

According to surveys, the airport is also popular because of its sophisticated design and friendly and capable employees. There is a shop, "Gate 14", where passengers and visitors can buy snacks, drinks, travel necessities, and many original gifts.

Dresden Airport also offers its popular tours in Czech (booking at petra.vetrakova@dresden-airport.de). The exciting tour includes a visit to the terminal building, a security check, a bus ride to the plane handling area and a visit to the airport fire brigade. Booking is definitely necessary.

Flight schedule, on-line travel agency, parking reservation:

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