

MONTE NEGRO

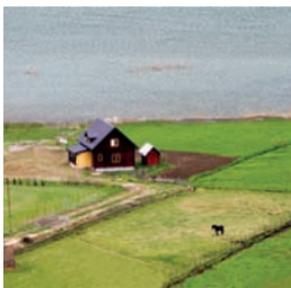
TOP BIKING TRAIL 3 EASTERN ENCHANTMENT



**MONTE
NEGRO**

Wild Beauty





ELEVATION PROFILE



IMPRESSUM

All the data in this guide are product of careful research. Given that the conditions related to marking, trails and signalization can be changed, we do not guarantee the correctness of the information in this guide. Use this guide on your own responsibility. In case you are not sure, please approach experienced guides for assistance. We appreciate all comments and suggestions you might have, and you can address them to e-mail office@bjelasica-komovi.co.me.

Publisher: Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi and Proletije

Donors: Austrian Development Agency, Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro

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Design: Studio 24, Berane

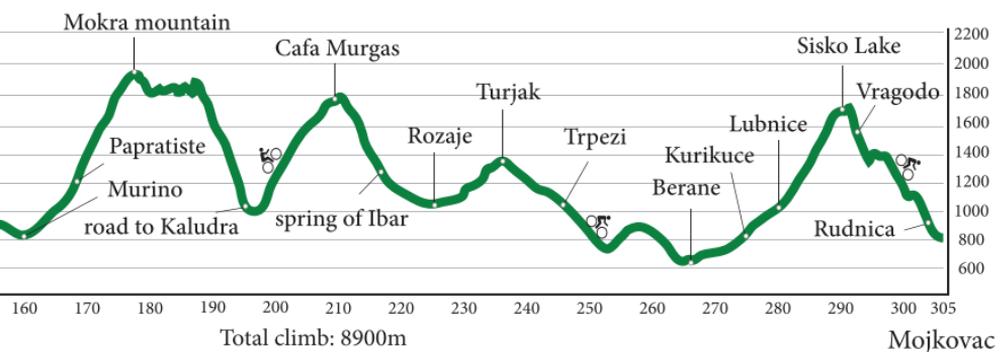
Maps: Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro

SIGNPOSTING

- **Biogradsko jezero** 10,6km 003
- **Žel. stanica Mojkovac** 0,9km 003



Duration: 6 - 7 days
Length : 305 km
Total Climb: 8900 m
Gradient: 35% max
Highest Point: 2162 m
Lowest Point: 665 m





The three-hundred-kilometre long “Top Trail 3” biking route will introduce the inquisitive, discovery-thirsty two-wheel traveller to the landscapes of eastern Montenegro, bordered to the northwest by Mojkovac and Mt. Bjelasica, to the southwest by Mt. Komovi, to the south by the valley of Plav, Plavsko Lake, Krs Bogicevice, Hridsko Lake and the Albanian border, to the east and northeast by Mt. Hajla, the border with Kosovo and the small town of Rozaje, and to the north by Berane.

It is a place where the heights and distant views are intertwined with mysterious forests and valleys, and the landscapes change, different as though hundreds of kilometres apart. From the solitude of the mountains to the tamed, inhabited areas, from vast green spaces to the deep blue of rivers and lakes,

from rocks and cliffs to meadows – this is all on the menu for this great feast, which will leave no one indifferent or in want of long-lasting memories.

Travelling the TT3 is not easy. But in order to conquer it one needs to be in good, but not top, shape – what is far more important is a positive approach, a strong will and good planning (in order to always leave enough time for the more difficult parts of the trail). Besides this, the landscapes we will be riding through never cease to excite and inspire us, and the final reward – the poetry of riding through exotic landscapes and the good fortune to see some of the most beautiful places in Montenegro – will be incomparably greater than the effort we put in. Every true nature lover knows that this is a good bargain.



Before you start it is good to know...

The route can be travelled carrying weight on the bike (camping gear, etc.) but because of some more difficult parts we recommend that you keep the weight as small as possible: with good planning one can always spend the night under a roof, and food and water supplies do not have to be larger than half a day's. Water from all the wells along the route is good for drinking.

Due to the remoteness of many sections it is recommended that you travel in a group, and have a map and a compass (or even better, a GPS device), mobile phone, flashlight, basic bike tools and a spare tyre as the minimum level of equipment. The Top Trail 3 route is marked with signposts

along its whole length, and on the web site goo.gl/wYUQu one can find GPS data (track logs and waypoints) that will make navigation along the route even easier and safer.

Safety: provided that the weather is fair, we are feeling well and we know where we are, we are safe on this route. There are no wild animals to worry about, and the people we meet will be kind and more than helpful. At the cattle herders' summer cottages ("katuns") we can count on generous hospitality.

MONTENEGRO

Wild Beauty





Mojkovac



Let's start then...

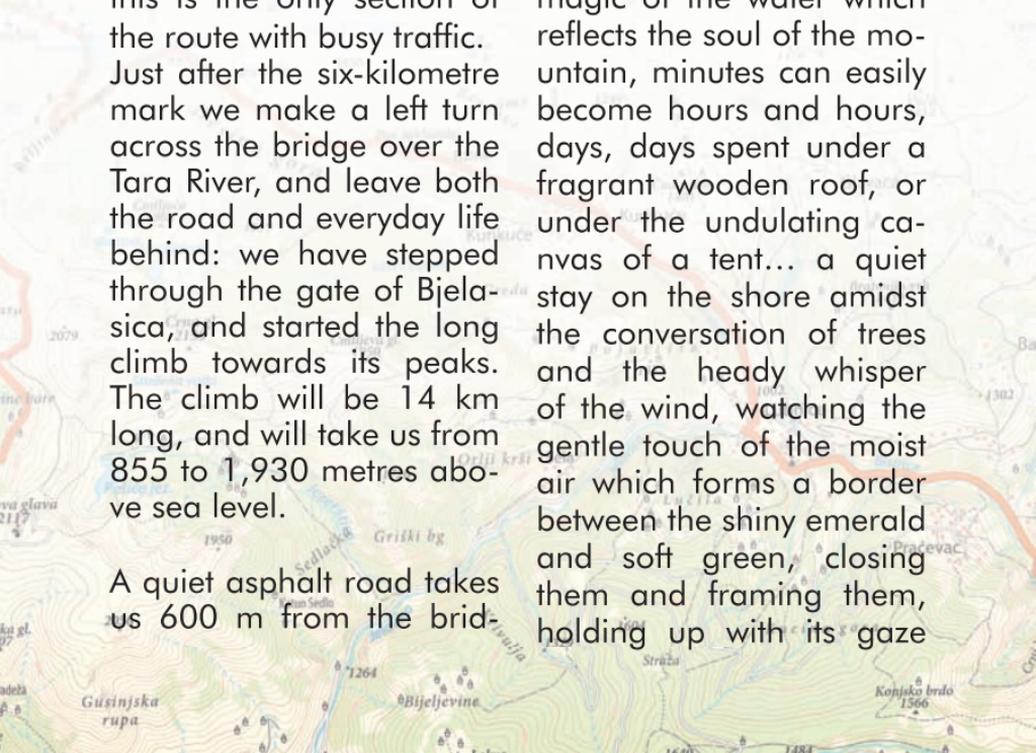
We begin the journey in Mojkovac, from the information board for the Top Trail 3 route, at the exit from the railway station on 805 metres above sea level (this is also the spot where our journey will end). We start going north, 1.2 km to the Bijelo Polje–Podgorica road. There we make a left turn, towards Podgorica.

For the next 6 km, until the turning for Biogradska Gora National Park, we will be riding along a busy road, therefore one has to concentrate and be careful – there will be plenty of time for talking and looking around later, since this is the only section of the route with busy traffic. Just after the six-kilometre mark we make a left turn across the bridge over the Tara River, and leave both the road and everyday life behind: we have stepped through the gate of Bjelasica, and started the long climb towards its peaks. The climb will be 14 km long, and will take us from 855 to 1,930 metres above sea level.

A quiet asphalt road takes us 600 m from the brid-

ge through the entrance barrier of Biogradska Gora National Park and then upwards, curving through several serpentine. We enter a lovely forest – a luxurious coat of beech, maple, fir and spruce trees – which will follow us for quite a long way. After the serpentine we slowly climb towards Biogradsko Lake, which we reach 10.7 km after the start in Mojkovac, at an altitude of 1,110 m.

It is definitely worth spending some time at the lake: one of the reasons is the 3.3 km-long trail around it. And if we fall completely under the spell of the magic of the water which reflects the soul of the mountain, minutes can easily become hours and hours, days, days spent under a fragrant wooden roof, or under the undulating canvas of a tent... a quiet stay on the shore amidst the conversation of trees and the heady whisper of the wind, watching the gentle touch of the moist air which forms a border between the shiny emerald and soft green, closing them and framing them, holding up with its gaze





Biogradsko Lake

clouds sprinkled with birds and waiting for the afternoon shadow to eat away the day until dusk falls – these are all duties and vices of the bicycle traveller, and therefore should not be missed...

The asphalt road ends at the lake, so we continue (after replenishing our water supplies!) along a gravel path, good quality for the most part, but with a few bad sections. The climb becomes more serious, and the track twists with serpentine once again, as it emerges out of one of only three remaining primeval forests in Europe, whose depths hide trees more than 400 years old and more than 45 metres high. Climbing Bjelasica is a serious task, but not an extreme

one, and the forest becomes ever more beautiful, the lonely narrow track in front of us more and more often covered with a rich carpet of dead leaves – just the grazing ground for the wheels of any hungry bike. After a little less than 2 km (12.6 km from the start, and almost 300 m above the lake) we have a good excuse for a pause: a narrow footpath branches off to the right, towards the nearby watchtower at Lazovi. At the cost of just a little time, the high construction offers us a great view, with which we finally part company with the magical waters below us.

13.6 km from the start, the main part of the climb begins: a series of 12 serpentine at shorter and shorter intervals, that will,



with their ever more frantic oscillation, like corks hungry for breath, shoot us out of the champagne bottle of the forest straight onto the bare ridge of Mt. Bjelasica. Before that, we will pass through two crossroads, where any dilemmas will be solved with our signposts. After the second of the two crossroads (15.9 km, 1,650 m high) the descent to the area of Dolovi begins.

16.9 km from the start (1,680 m high), some 100 m to the left of the road there is a spring with a wooden shelter. At 17.3 km, when the road starts crawling uphill again running away from Dolovi, at a sharp curve we come across a lonely jumble of wooden beams, which

look as if they were swept there by the wind, and through an even greater accident piled into something one could call a Robinson Crusoe café. If we are lucky, it will be open. If not, in line with Murphy's Law, at least the road will become worse and more difficult. We face the final effort on the climb, to finally reach the area under the rounded peak of Crna lokva (Black Pond) called Svatovsko groblje (Wedding Party Cemetery) (19.5 km), from where the ride becomes much easier.

The road we ride along now is talking to the clouds and low skies: the views are unforgettable, and one's gaze, as if sliding on oil, glides from the carpet of grass into the distance



– the crown of Mt. Komovi and the wreath of the Prokletije range waving behind it on one side, and the peaks of Sinjajevina slowly rising on the other. Inching across the forehead of Bjelasica we finally feel all its nerves and all its essence, overwhelmed with height and breadth, wherever we turn we face airy, shiny, spacious, gently curving beauty, silence to the ears but a sensory overload for the eyes.

The symphony continues and becomes stronger as we cross the end of our long climb which began at the road (1,930 m high, 21.1 km from the start) and reach the saddle at Jusin brijeg (22.9 km, 1,900 m altitude). The saddle is an important point on our route. From there we could easily descend to Sisko Lake, from where one can ride back to Mojkovac, which would shorten our journey to just one day (but we would miss all the beauty waiting for us on the rest of the route). From Jusin brijeg one can also walk the 2 km trip to Ursulovacko Lake (also at 1,900 m, but the path first climbs to an altitude of 1,955 m, and then

descends to the cirque (the head of a glacial valley) of Ledeni izvori, at an elevation of 1,840 m).

After the saddle, arching along the slopes of Bjelasica's highest peak, Crna glava (2,139 m), we come closer to the slightly lower peak of Zekova glava (2,117 m) and a large stone building on its top, reminiscent to some of mountain huts in the Alps. Unfortunately, this once-military building is still off-limits for excited wanderers like us: its TV, telecommunications and other antennae looking like the spines of an angry hedgehog. Angry or not, it is a lovely decoration, a filigree

button fixing together the sky and the blue of Pesica Lake (hidden under the other slope of Zekova glava) with Bjelasica.

One simply must have a look (one of amazement) at Pesica Lake. We will be able to do this if we turn right and go uphill for a couple of hundred metres at the crossroads before Zekova glava (24.6 km, 1,900 m high) and from the saddle the huge, magnificent stone amphitheatre will open in front of us, and from the lake bed, some two hundred metres below, the precious, eternal secret of this mountain mirror will rise into our eyes and memories.

Coming back to the crossroads, we continue our

Pesica Lake





journey, descending along the edge of the cirques that are the home to the springs of the Biogradska River and the beginning of the primeval forest of Biogradska Gora. There we find ourselves at the top of that whisper which we heard from a distance by the lake, perhaps less understood then than now.

A good gravel road takes us under Zekova glava peak into Jaganjčarske rupe (1,800 m high), where one has to ascend to the saddle at Velika ckala (1,940 m high, 28,3km – the highest point that the route takes us on Bjelasica). Immediately after the saddle we enter a wider gravel road (that leads to the previously mentioned building on Zekova glava) that will have some bad sections, and along which we descend to Bjelasica Mountain Hut (31.1 km, 1,760 m high).

At some 900 metres from the hut there is a place called Raskrsnica (crossroads), and it is appropriately named. A road branches off to the right leading to Kolasin 16 km away, and one kilometre along this road is the eco-village of Avranjak (www.vilajelka.com/en/katun.html) where one can spend the night in a traditional hut, ride a horse or

witness the everyday life of cattle herders. The left-hand road leads to village of Lubnice, a little less than 15 km away, and in fact constitutes a shortcut to the second part of our route, leading from Berane back to Mojkovac across the northern parts of Bjelasica.

But the return is a distant thought – there are too many things yet to discover and admire, therefore we continue straight across this crossroads and, on the billowing dress of the eastern slope of Mt. Ključ, we reach the next important crossroads, the one on Tresnjevik Pass. The descent is not constant and before reaching Tresnjevik we will climb a few shorter sections. Along the road we will enjoy the view of the peaks of Mt. Komovi, and the changing perspective from which we see them, and we will pass by the mountain hut at Krivi do (36.1 km, altitude 1,700 m). Some one hundred metres after the hut a very good, relaid gravel road begins, and lasts all the way to Tresnjevik.

At Tresnjevik (46.6 km, 1,570 m high), in a building which was once a mountain hut, is now Savo's café. 1.5 km further ahead we leave the asphalt road and continue riding straight, along the

dirt road. (The asphalt road that continues up to the right leads to the eco-village of Stavna, a bungalow-type tourist resort with ten 5-bed huts and a restaurant.)

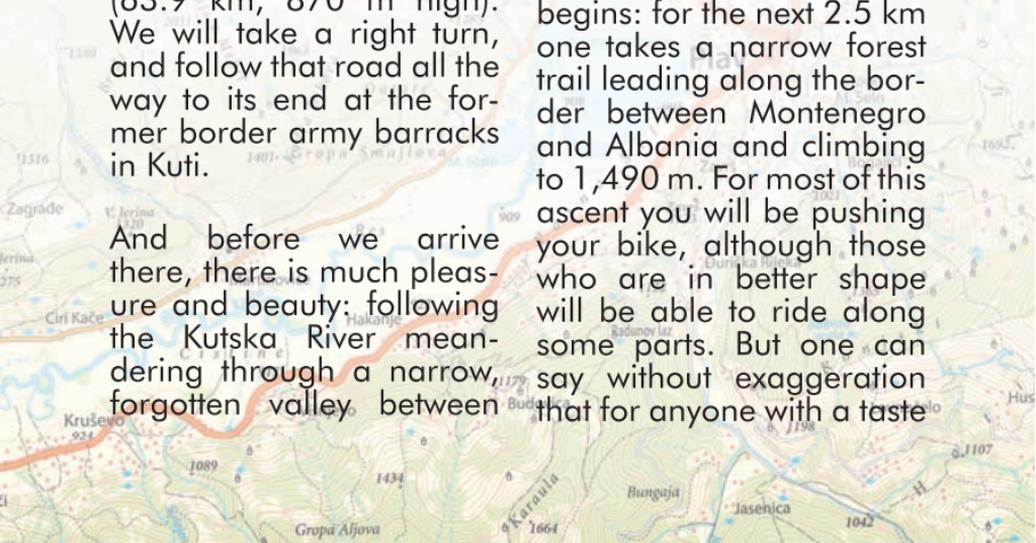
For the first 1.6 km from Tresnjevik we climb to an altitude of 1,650 m, and from there a long descent begins, to the valley of the Perucica River and the village of Konjuhe (60.6 km, altitude 870 m). At the descent we pass very near Mt. Komovi, and the view opens towards the mighty peaks of Prokletije: Zijeva glava; Mojan; Suvi vrh; even the distant Maje e Rosit.

In Konjuhe we meet an asphalt road that follows the Perucica River to its confluence with the Kutska River (from where they flow together to Andrijevića under the name of Zlorečica). We will cross a small bridge and immediately climb on the Andrijevića–Kuti road (63.9 km, 870 m high). We will take a right turn, and follow that road all the way to its end at the former border army barracks in Kuti.

And before we arrive there, there is much pleasure and beauty: following the Kutska River meandering through a narrow, forgotten valley between

Mt. Zeletin and the wall of Prokletije, we dive through forests, emerging in clearings near the water with restless glimpses of the surrounding peaks. A narrow asphalt road curves through all of this, jumping across small bridges, curiously peaking into every corner of this magical kingdom. The area where the valley widens, where the small scattered village of Kuti is situated, is exceptionally beautiful: a mountain idyll flourishes under the mighty peak of Greben (2,196 m high) in a perfect symbiosis of meadows, smoke from huts, a thick layer of peace and philosophically pensive cows. Before the village, at 67.7 km, is the spring of Miloševa voda, and at 69.3 km we come across some picturesque waterfalls.

The asphalt road ends at the former army barracks (74.9 km, 1,050 m high), and one of the most challenging parts of the route begins: for the next 2.5 km one takes a narrow forest trail leading along the border between Montenegro and Albania and climbing to 1,490 m. For most of this ascent you will be pushing your bike, although those who are in better shape will be able to ride along some parts. But one can say without exaggeration that for anyone with a taste



for challenge and the patience for difficult sections, this will be a lovely, exotic adventure – physical fitness is the most important factor if one plans enough time for this section (see below) – and the sense of achievement in crossing a high mountain pass and the descent to a new world beginning on the other side, in the valley of Gusinje and Plav, is unique and cannot be achieved any other way.

(Those that give up on this section of the route can go back and continue riding to Andrijevica, from where they should take the main road to Plav. From Plav they can go to Gusinje, and then back to Plav again.)

So let's go then: a biking signpost will lead us to the beginning of a slightly overgrown, but still clearly visible path which immediately climbs with a series of close serpentines. After a couple of hundred metres the path widens into a hard, in places stony, track that ascends gently for a while, and twists into a new series of serpentines. The forest is very beautiful, and the breaks for rest during the climb will not be boring. Right at the top we reach a meadow (1,490 m high) where, on its right-hand side, some 50 metres away we will notice the

white pyramid of a border stone B-11 – a good photo opportunity. In the distance in front of us one can see the peaks of Prokletije above the valleys of Grebaje, Karanfili and Trojan.

On the other side of the meadow we start the descent to the valley of the Grncar River and Gusinje. We have to cover a little more than 3km before we reach the asphalt road by the former army border barracks at Grncar. In a fantastic atmosphere of beech forest we will roll along a lovely carpet of leaves, but one has to always bear in mind that this carpet – in places as thick as if it were a snowdrift – hides dry branches and rocks that can bring you off your bike in no time at all. So for those who want to be safe, it is best to ride with caution, slowly, or occasionally get off one's bike.

After the spacious Lipovicka meadow we face a short ascent from the creek of the same name (78.9 km), and at 80.7 km and an altitude of 960 m we reach the asphalt road at the former army border barracks at Grncar and a nearby border crossing of Bojovici (from where, along a picturesque gravel road through Albanian territory one can reach Shkodra or Podgorica). The difference in altitude from



Grebaje Valley

the point where we started the descent (at border stone B-11) is 530 m.

The time needed to get from the former army border barracks at Kuti to the border barracks at Grncar is: 1½-2½ hours for the ascent and approximately 1 hour for the (cautious) descent, in total: 2½-3½ hours.

The road to Gusinje (86.8km, 920m high) slightly descends. It is worth taking a break in this small town to taste local burek (a kind of meat or cheese pie), but the best option would be to halt the journey for a little while and visit Ali Pasa's Springs, a kilometre away, as well as the very attractive Grebaje

Valley (it would certainly be a shame to miss it).

We will reach Plav riding along a quiet, narrow road that leads along the southern side of the Ljuca River and Plavsko Lake. The huge, steep boulder of Mt. Visitor rises on the other side of the lake, and patches of marshland – the green kingdom of birds – lie between us and the lake. The Ljuca meanders through a spacious, wide and flat valley, conquering and weaving there a special world, belonging neither to the mountains nor the valley, but only to itself and where it is the sovereign ruler. Occasionally we climb smaller hills, offering us pretty views over

the surroundings.

At the smiling town of Plav (98.8 km, 950 m high) one should taste cevapi (a local minced meat dish) and local yoghurt, before heading off for the circuit to Hridsko Lake and to the highest points on our journey. If it is summer time and the weather is warm, one should include a swim in Plavsko Lake.

Plav: 0 km

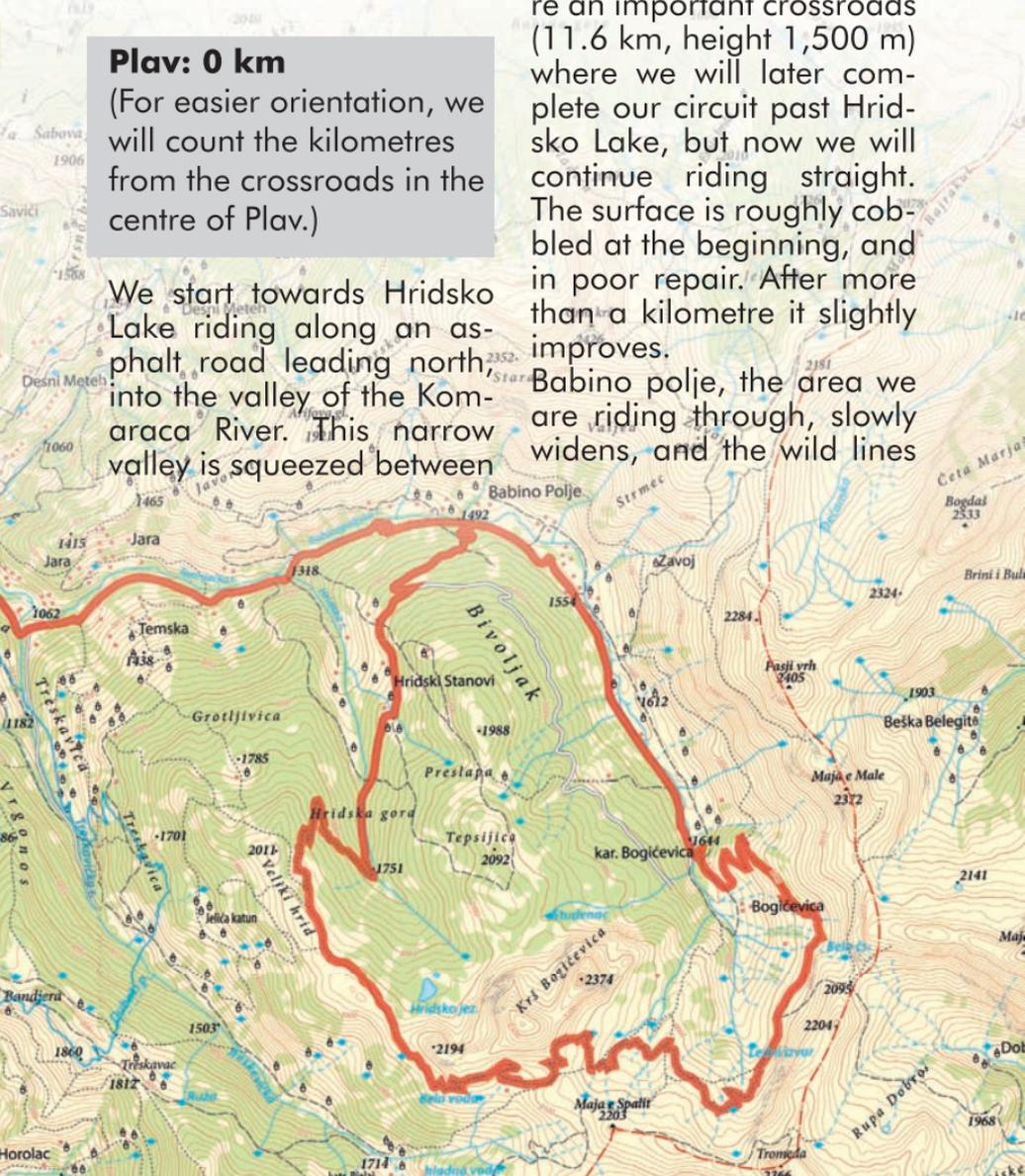
(For easier orientation, we will count the kilometres from the crossroads in the centre of Plav.)

We start towards Hridsko Lake riding along an asphalt road leading north, into the valley of the Komaraca River. This narrow valley is squeezed between

the peaks which are especially high on its northern side. Riding through here, we will enjoy the forest-green, picturesque meadows. After the village of Komaraca (3.6 km) a mild ascent begins. There is plenty of water along the road, there are springs at 0.7 km, 6.7 km, 7.9 km, 9.1 km (Becova voda), 9.3 km and 12.8 km.

The asphalt ends just before an important crossroads (11.6 km, height 1,500 m) where we will later complete our circuit past Hridsko Lake, but now we will continue riding straight. The surface is roughly cobbled at the beginning, and in poor repair. After more than a kilometre it slightly improves.

Babino polje, the area we are riding through, slowly widens, and the wild lines



of ridges and the peaks of Bogicevica become a decoration and a crown for each glance. A kilometre and a half after the katun of Bajramdurovi pijeskovi (some 100 m from the road to the left) we will reach the spot where an access road branches off, leading to the nearby small, but nice new mountain hut of the Hrid Mountaineering Association (15.9 km, 1,650 m high). One can spend the night in the hut, but it is not always open, therefore it is necessary to contact Hrid M.A. to announce one's

Back to our route: near the road to the hut is another memorial drinking fountain with benches and a table – a good spot for a break and a rest, since “more serious business” is ahead: 9 more kilometres of climbing, with a height difference of around 530m. The road deteriorates (it is mainly a dirt track) and for the first couple of kilometres through four serpentines it climbs into the katun of Jesavica (1,820 m). To make the ascent more interesting there is a small chalet half-way up: the yard is decorated



Hridsko Lake

arrival (see the section with contact data). In front of the hut there is a drinking fountain and a nice camping area.

with attractive benches and tables for people to sit and enjoy the view; there is water from a spring, and above the chalet door a rug proudly hangs, with a

portrait of Josip Broz Tito on it (with a pitch-black, afro-style hair-do). This is the last opportunity to take on supplies of water for the next 18 km of the route that will, partly because of the ascent and partly because of the many things to see, take us quite a long time.

After the serpentines the route is easier for one kilometre, but then one must conquer a difficult stretch, just a couple of hundred metres long, where the road is in an exceptionally

and left. But from there an amazing landscape comes into view, towards the enormous, rough, stony amphitheatre ahead of us dominated by Krs Bogicevice (2,374 m high). Behind us, the valley of the Babinopoljska River that we went through on our way up, ruled over sovereignly by the peaks of Pasji vrh (2,405 m), Crni krs (2,426 m) and Starac (2,352 m) opens up.

Our goal, Hridsko Lake, lies on the other side of the rock, but we still need



bad condition. There is a crossroads near-by (19.4 km, 1,960 m high) where the road to Decani in Kosovo branches off upwards

to break into a sweat to reach it. For the next kilometre we descend along a better stony road carved into the side of Ravno brdo to an altitude of 1,970 m,

from where we start the last section to the lake. The rough and deserted mountain road goes mainly upwards, and only very occasionally downwards for the next four kilometres, and finally takes us to an altitude of 2,130 m (24.6 km from Plav town centre) – this is the highest point on the whole of route TT3. It offers an excellent view of the surrounding peaks: to the northeast, behind Pasji vrh, the sharp point of Mt. Bogdas (2,533 m) peeks out; to the southeast the guards of Mt. Tromedja (2,368 m high, a point where the borders of Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania meet), the recognizable sharp peak straight ahead of us is Ujkov krs (2,269 m high), and behind it, towards the horizon, the line of the highest peaks of the Albanian Prokletije mountains; behind us, Krs Bogicevice towers over us, as if getting ready to swallow us: we are riding along its southern side.

A short and steep descent will take us pass the former military border building (25.8 km, 2,091 m alt.). Now deserted, there are plans to transform it into a mountain hut – anyhow it offers good cover from the rain or lightning. After the

building we enter a lovely area covered with pine forest and, completely surrounding Krs Bogicevice we come to a spot from which we can see the emerald waters of Hridsko Lake for the first time.

At 28.2 km and a height of 2,045 m (there is a biking signpost here) is a place where we need to take some time out for some local magic again: we can quickly go down a narrow path that starts here to the lake. The path is very steep, so we should best leave our bikes in the bushes next to it. A walk around the lake (along a tiny path that sometimes disappears among the stones and green undergrowth, but then reappears) along with the return to the road is 1.7 km long.

The lake is considered by many to be the most beautiful one in Montenegro, and truly, the whole effort of coming here will be worth it if only for the smile it gives us through the branches of the pines. It is hidden in a small forest shaped like an upturned palm, looking on one side as if cowed, lying beneath rocks reaching towards the sky, and bold on the other side, where it lies on a sort

of terrace above the surrounding area. Hence the lake allows itself to be bordered only on three sides – on the fourth it flows over the horizon and into the distant blue, where, blending into the sky, it has no limit. For this reason, it seems to be the largest lake in Montenegro, Europe, or even the world...

If we have enough time it is worthwhile following a path that goes from the eastern side of the lake to the spacious meadow of Tepsijica nearby – a soft quilt of luscious grass, under the mighty elevations of peak of Hridski krs. We will want to stay here a long time, sleep over, stay another day, sleep over again...

After the lake the quality

of the track deteriorates again, but on the other hand it is descending all the time through the forest covering Mt. Hrid. 35 km from the start we come across a small spring with a hose, on the right side of the road. Soon after that the road again turns into bumpy cobbles, and at 38.8 km we will come down again to the crossroads we crossed earlier on the way from Plav. We will now make a left turn there (the asphalt road starts nearby) and go back to Plav with a lovely downhill ride, using the same road that we came by.

It is now time to finally leave Plav (maybe after another taste of cevapi and yoghurt) and ride towards Andrijevica, along the main road that follows the slopes of Mt. Visitor.

Kolasinski katun

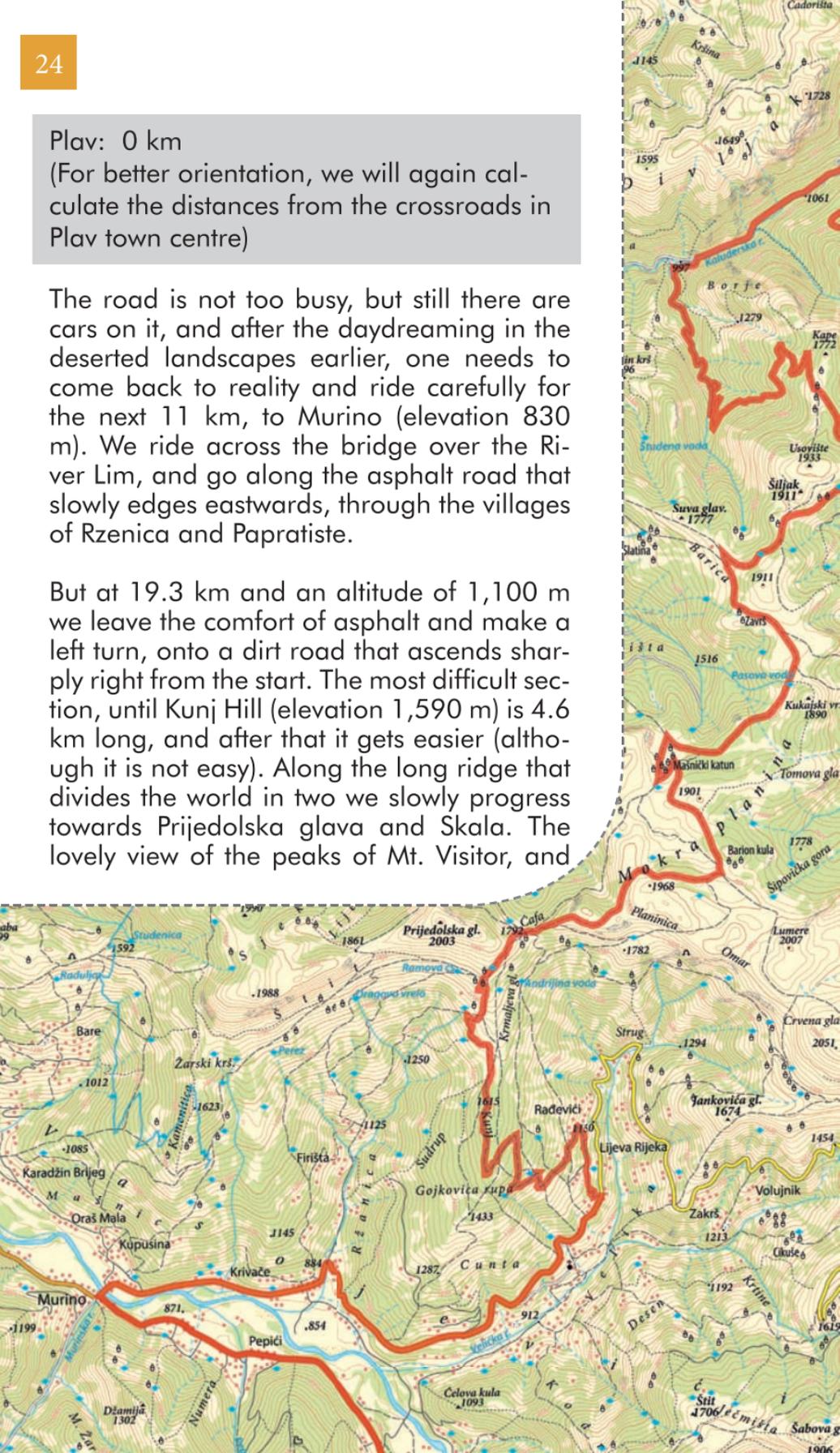


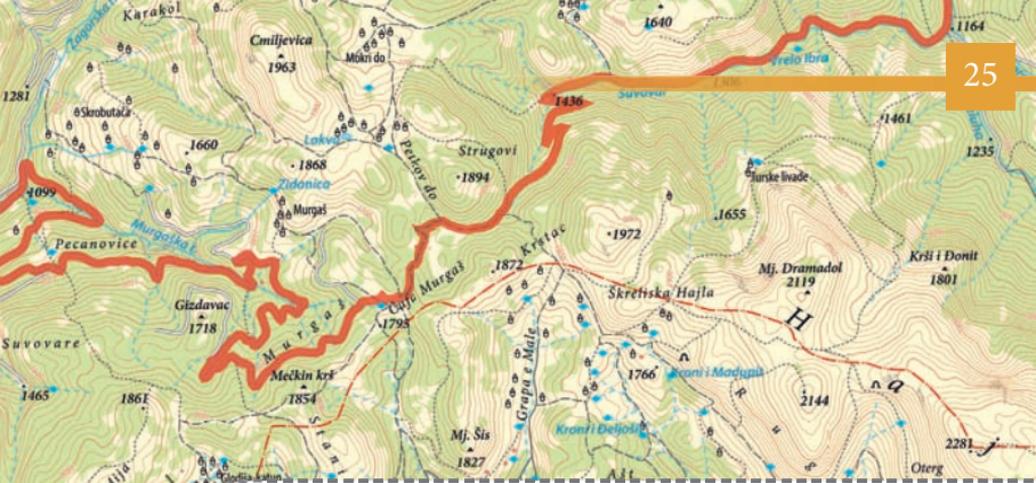
Plav: 0 km

(For better orientation, we will again calculate the distances from the crossroads in Plav town centre)

The road is not too busy, but still there are cars on it, and after the daydreaming in the deserted landscapes earlier, one needs to come back to reality and ride carefully for the next 11 km, to Murino (elevation 830 m). We ride across the bridge over the River Lim, and go along the asphalt road that slowly edges eastwards, through the villages of Rzenica and Papratiste.

But at 19.3 km and an altitude of 1,100 m we leave the comfort of asphalt and make a left turn, onto a dirt road that ascends sharply right from the start. The most difficult section, until Kunj Hill (elevation 1,590 m) is 4.6 km long, and after that it gets easier (although it is not easy). Along the long ridge that divides the world in two we slowly progress towards Prijedolska glava and Skala. The lovely view of the peaks of Mt. Visitor, and





the wreath of the Prokletije Mountains behind them, will be our reward.

At 26.9 km, under Prijedolska glava, at the spot called Cafa, near a small rebuilt chapel, stands a sentry of some twenty graves of soldiers who were killed in an onslaught in 1912. From this point, another great view opens up -- on one side to the upturned palm of Plav valley with Plavsko Lake, and on the other to the valley of the Sekularska River, and further on towards Berane.

The ascent, more than 9 km long, finally ends on the flat plateau of Mt. Mokra, at a crossroads 28.6 km from Plav and at an altitude of 1,915 m. We find ourselves in a lovely, interesting and moderately hilly area where we will be going up and down all the time, passing through the cattle herders' summer settlement of Masnicki katun (31.6 km, 1,800m

high) and enjoying a view of Mt. Hajla, which we are slowly approaching.

At the 38-kilometre point it is time to collect a reward for all the effort: under the peak of Usoviste we reach a saddle (elevation 1,875 m) where an 8.5 km-long descent starts, through a forest and the valley of the Kaludarska River (elevation 1,010 m). In the valley we meet a macadam road, leading us north-eastwards, to the final stage which takes us to Rozaje.

The ascent is moderate until we have just passed the 50-kilometre point, and then, from the vale of the small river Murgas (altitude 1,210 m) we are off towards the 10.5 km distant Cafa Murgas (1,780 m high) where we brush against the border with Kosovo. This long climb goes through predominantly beech forest at the beginning, and later coniferous forest, and





Hajla Mountain

in the last section through an interesting area on Mt. Murgas covered in rare coniferous trees and glades. The landscape is similar after the saddle too: we go down over mildly curving terrain, at the 62-kilometre point passing by a large pond (or a small lake, depending on one's perspective) with a luxurious name – Hind's Pond (Kosutina lokva). This beautiful, pale green and sleepy eye is shallow, but never dries out, perhaps because it sheds a tear for each traveller that leaves it.

Further down the descent, at a certain point, we will catch a glimpse of the peaks of the Serbian mountain Kopaonik, more than 80 km in front of us. In contrast, the huge mass of Hajla, along whose furthest slopes we are actually riding, escapes our gaze.

At the 64-kilometre point

we enter a dense forest, and down three serpentine we descend into the valley of Suvovar creek, a valley carved deep underneath the Hajla, and we meet a much better macadam road (66.2 km, 1,438 m high). At 69.7 km and 1,250 m high, we arrive at a very symbolic spot: the spring of the river Ibar, which starts its 276 km-long journey from here across and through Rozaje, Kosovska Mitrovica, Raska and Kraljevo, connecting people and history, legends and everyday life, until it reaches its confluence with Zapadna Morava. The springs are decorated with huge leaves and water flows plentifully, welling up and foaming from within them.

In the lower part of the valley finally a beautiful view opens up of the mighty rocky ridge of this mountain that, like a giant support, holds the sky up – the true "soa nebeska" (pillar supporting the heavens) as



the people living in Montenegrin katuns) like to say...

At the 75-kilometre mark, we come to an asphalt road at Dimiskin Bridge (Dimiskin Most), at the entrance to Rozaje.

Dimiskin Bridge: 0 km
(For better orientation, we will calculate the distances from the crossroads at Dimiskin Bridge)

We will take a left turn here, on the road to Berane and, passing by the Grand Motel and Duga-Zeleni raj restaurant soon after, we begin a moderate ascent to a 5.1 km-distant crossroads in the village of Kalace. We leave the main road to Berane here and take a secondary asphalt road to the village of Trpezi.

The ascent from Kalace is steeper along its first section, but leads us to a lovely landscape speckled with

dreamy groups of houses, meadows and pastures with just a few trees here and there, enough to spice up the ride to perfection. Rays of sun awaken and light up the tame surroundings as far as the eye can see, cooled down by the white walls of small houses, pinheads that fit the luscious green cloth exactly to the measure of each traveller, as if pinned by a tailor's skilful hand. While we climb through the enchanting peace of this landscape there will be plenty of time for daydreaming and absentminded reverie; we do not have to worry about what comes after the next curve; this is one of those places where our mere existence should suffice.

We will ride across Slijepa glava Hill (9.7 km, 1,300 m high) and enter the coniferous forest behind it, on the final stage of the ascent to Turjak Pass (11.6 km, 1,350 m high). From



the pass we are able to see the peaks of the Bjelasic to the west, the ridge of the Hajla to the south, and to the southeast the stony crown of Rusulija and Zljob, peaks that hide the town of Pec, in Kosovo, behind them.

The descent from the pass is 16 km long – at first passing through forest and then through open areas, we will fly through the scattered houses of the

village of Trpezi and go down into the valley of the river Vrbicka (740 m high). From there we gently climb for slightly more than 3 km, passing by the place where the road to Petnjica branches off to the right and arriving at a spacious and, at this point, already quite densely populated plane above Berane. From there, we will easily reach the town (41.9 km, 670 m high).



Berane





We are slowly edging closer to the end of our great circuit across the East of Montenegro. But before we close this loop, there will still be plenty of things to remember: we will discover more of Bjelasica's secrets, this time on its north-western side.

Berane: 0 km
 (For better orientation, we will calculate the distances from the big crossroads locally known as "Auto-Moto", on the Andrijevića–Ribarevine road (which goes to Bijelo Polje, Mojkovac and Podgorica).

We will take the road to Andrijevića, but we will leave it after only 400 me-

tres and turn right onto an asphalted side road to the Monastery of Djurdjevi stupovi (www.eparhija.me/manastir-djurdjevi-stupovi) less than a kilometre away.

From the beautiful stone building of the monastery we ride on, just beneath the first waves of Mt. Bjelasica. Through orchards, gardens and the everyday life of the inhabitants of Berane that live in the most beautiful part of their town, one foot in the town and one in the country, with one hand on the flowers and other held above the eyes – to squeeze the body of this mighty mountain and fit it into fragile human view. As for us who





Jelovica - Glava

must keep our hands on the handlebars, this area is one of those we can like, and not think about why.

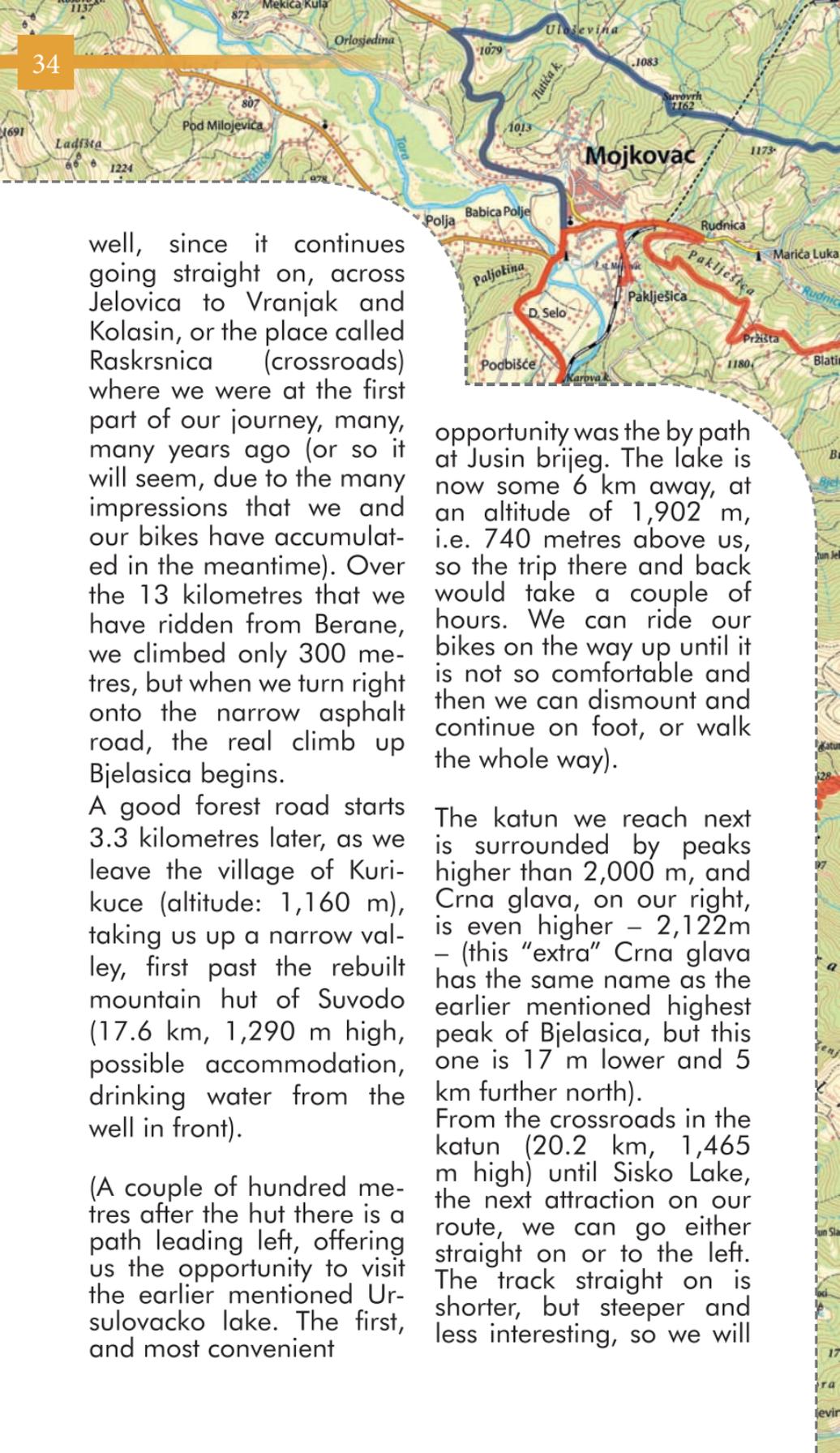
At 3.3 km and an altitude of 720 m we start along a narrow asphalt road leading to Lubnice, which we will take and slowly begin climbing up, along the narrow valley of the River Bistrica. The road is very quiet, and we will meet very few cars, but we will pass by many dancing shadows flowing from the surrounding peaks, watering and putting the trees to sleep even in the middle of a summer's day.

At the seven-kilometre point we ride through Zdravac – a short and ribbon-thin cut through the mountain's gaping jaws. Until this Cerberus lets us pass through, we can-

not enter the real world of Bjelasica. And although it does not ask questions like the sphynx, one has to prove to him to be deserving of the other side: a sigh of amazement, a glance that returns to the landscape a mirrored image of its beauty, or the first drops of sweat should be sufficient.

A small, lonely church made of limestone and planted near the road, some 600 metres before the entrance to the village will alert us that we are close to Lubnice (12.9 km, 995 m high). And for those who orient themselves by more worldly things, there is one, also lonely, wooden café called "Točilo", less than 200 metres further on.

In Lubnice we leave the road that has served us



well, since it continues going straight on, across Jelovica to Vranjak and Kolasin, or the place called Raskrsnica (crossroads) where we were at the first part of our journey, many, many years ago (or so it will seem, due to the many impressions that we and our bikes have accumulated in the meantime). Over the 13 kilometres that we have ridden from Berane, we climbed only 300 metres, but when we turn right onto the narrow asphalt road, the real climb up Bjelasica begins.

A good forest road starts 3.3 kilometres later, as we leave the village of Kurikuće (altitude: 1,160 m), taking us up a narrow valley, first past the rebuilt mountain hut of Suvodo (17.6 km, 1,290 m high, possible accommodation, drinking water from the well in front).

(A couple of hundred metres after the hut there is a path leading left, offering us the opportunity to visit the earlier mentioned Ursulovacko lake. The first, and most convenient

opportunity was the by path at Jusin brijeg. The lake is now some 6 km away, at an altitude of 1,902 m, i.e. 740 metres above us, so the trip there and back would take a couple of hours. We can ride our bikes on the way up until it is not so comfortable and then we can dismount and continue on foot, or walk the whole way).

The katun we reach next is surrounded by peaks higher than 2,000 m, and Crna glava, on our right, is even higher – 2,122m – (this “extra” Crna glava has the same name as the earlier mentioned highest peak of Bjelasica, but this one is 17 m lower and 5 km further north).

From the crossroads in the katun (20.2 km, 1,465 m high) until Sisko Lake, the next attraction on our route, we can go either straight on or to the left. The track straight on is shorter, but steeper and less interesting, so we will



Suvodo

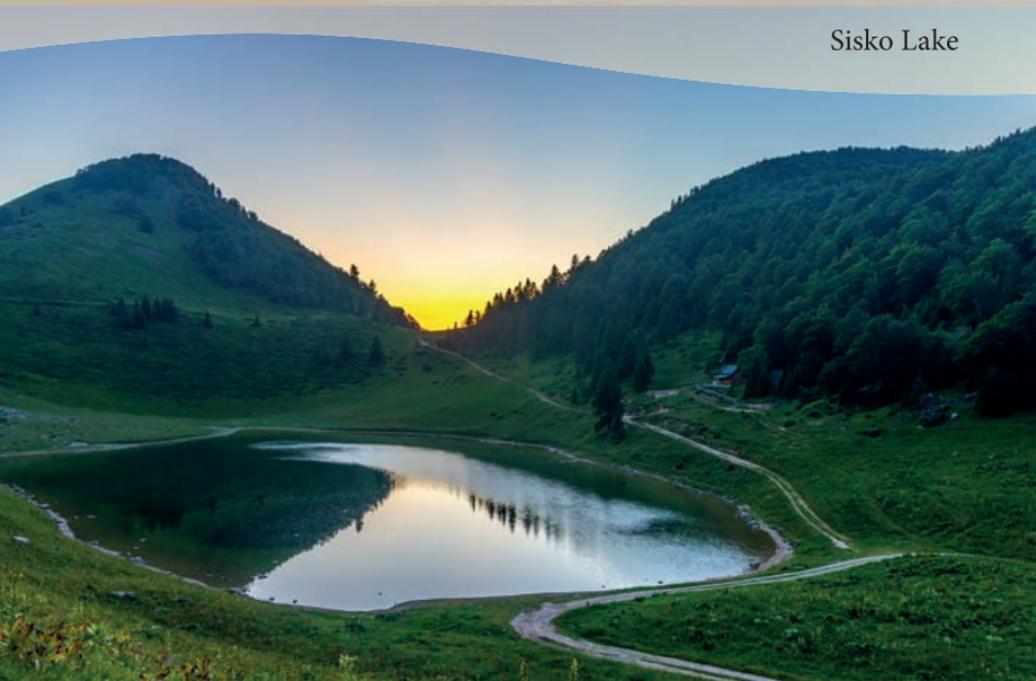
take the left one instead. This 2 km-long ascent is also not easy, but we will find our inspiration in the outstanding landscape we enter, as the green of the grass and charming bows of flowers on the floating curves of pasturelands slide under the murmur of the sharp edges of the glacial cirque of Reljina blunting them with their subtle strength. Amid this constant silent battle between David and Goliath we will soon reach the end of the climb and a crossroads where the shortcut from Jusin brijeg joins us, the one mentioned at the beginning of the story.

But we will turn right, onto the wonderful part which takes us across meadows and through an old forest, to a small lake called

Sevarina (22.7 km, 1,660 m high). It would be a shame not to slow down when passing through this microcosm, self-sufficient and complete in every aspect, so perfectly developed that it can continue its development only towards its gradual disappearance. That is why the lake is slowly dying, and its frogs are singing with their luggage ready to go. For us it would be best to walk this stretch pushing our bikes as if on a pilgrimage, else we might miss the pond's clear soul covered by the shadows of the forest, as one might miss a deer watching in a secluded spot.

Not far from Sevarina we enter the glitter of the pastures around the cattle herders' summer settle-

Sisko Lake



ment – katon Siska – and from there Sisko Lake (24 km, 1,660 m high) is also very close. It is 250 m in length and it only takes a few minutes to go around it – plenty of time, since it only takes a few seconds to fall completely in love with it. Like any true beauty, it is tranquil and takes no interest in those who admire it, lying on the big grassy upturned palm of the mountain like a pearl in a green velvet box. The urge to stay here for a long time is very strong, in the clear infinite expanse spreading across the sky from the mirror-like surface of the water, watching the clouds coming down to drink, and then lie down and float along the shore, ruminating. And if dark, angry bulls were to appear instead of these white, tame sheep – it seems that we would like that happen too – we would cower and shudder while the thunder breaks open the pale peaks, and heavy rain opens up holes in the water. The magic of the lake's mountain eye removes all worries and caution, it would be little wonder, due our already weakened sense of time, if we should doubt that we will make it to our destination by nightfall...

But once we snap out of the spell, we have to make

a choice between two options for the return to Mojkovac. One goes through Jelina katunina, Brskovo and Rudnica (16 km, the shorter option), and the other through Zarski katun, Dzambas mountain hut, Ulosevina and Krstac Pass (28km, longer and more difficult...but more beautiful). Dazzled by the just-finished journey through dreamland, and after careful and long deliberation, we will probably take the wrong option for us at that moment, but it does not matter: without wrong decisions the experience of the two-wheel voyager would never be complete, therefore we should enjoy whichever choice we make.

Sisko Lake: 0 km

(For better orientation, we will calculate the distances from the lake)

Option 1: Jelina katunina – Brskovo – Rudnica – Mojkovac (16 km)

We follow a narrower dirt path away from the lake. It will lead us uphill to a nearby pass which is even narrower (height 1,710 m) from where it will slowly descend down through a

meadow underneath the peak of Zuber. But some 300 metres further on, on the edge of a beech forest, it will turn downwards into a very narrow, almost invisible path, frantically grabbing onto the trees trying somehow to negotiate the very steep terrain among them. From the edge of the forest (where the signpost for route TT3 will not let us down) to the beautiful, narrow and wavy valley under it called Jelina katunina (1.1 km, 1,590 m high) is only 300 metres long, but the height

difference is as much as 60 metres. The descent is not dangerous, but one needs to be careful: for those with good technique and experience the downhill stretch will be a great challenge, but most will choose to reach the valley walking next to their iron horse.

Once we reach the light and wider area under us, passing through the labyrinth of trees and their melancholic sighs (or is it us sighing?), we will find ourselves in a place where

Vragodo



the silver lines of beech forest intertwine with a luscious carpet of meadows, softened by the sunlight. Their only purpose, it seems, is to create the cloth on which to hang the brooches of deserted cottages, there on the right side and a little above the lower end of Jelina katunina, whose wooden boards and beams long ago accepted their fate, and became pale and faded in a manner that is precious and the only possible way to end this image. All that is left for us to do is to turn after every shadow in the forest wall above and around us, frozen in its fall, like the biblical waters of the Red Sea – for one cannot expect anything in a place like this other than for an elf to silently run past in red boots, whose small bells have been removed because of curious wanderers like us.

On the other side of the meadow we enter the forest again, but the path is better and wider already. The forest ambience is most agreeable, and the path at the start is easy to ride on, but soon becomes steeper and more stony, and most travellers will prefer to get off their bikes

again. Those determined to ride should bear in mind that the small creek on the right side is about 10 metres deep, with very steep sides, and that the path often gets narrower or is inclined towards that side (or indeed both: at the spot where part of the slope has slid into the creek, taking the path with it, one needs to be very careful, even when walking).

After less than a kilometre further on we will arrive at the katun of Vragodo (2.1 km, 1,480 m high). Unlike Jelina katunina, this is quite a lively place: loggers and their trucks make a noisy little island in this remote corner of Bjelasica.

A “proper” road leads from here, at first not very good (dirt at first, then stone) but it will improve slowly. We descend along it for 1.5 km (to an elevation of 1,295 m), and then, for the next 3 km, across the picturesque landscape of Sjenokosi and a couple of long, wide views, we slowly climb Pobrdje (6.5 km, 1,430 m high). The gravel road is by this time good quality, so along the ever-gentler slopes of Bjelasica we will rush down to Brskovo and the beginning

of an asphalt road above Rudnica (13.8 km, 850 m high). (Before that, at the 10.5-km mark we will pass a well on the left side of the road, where the water is funnelled out through a pipe).

The end of our journey is now very close – if we go to the railway station in Mojkovac again, the total distance travelled on this long adventure will be 306 kilometres.

Option 2: Zarski katun – Dzambas mountain hut – Ulosevine – Krstac – Mojkovac (28 km)

This option takes us from Sisko Lake along the road leading to north-eastwards which, after an initial descent to 1,590 m (0.7 km long), sharply ascends. The gravel road is relatively good but has bad sections, so the ascent is not easy, especially near the katun of Lainska (1.4 km, 1,660 m high). But once we reach

Bojna njiva (Battlefield)



the katun of Kojanovac (3 km, 1,830 m high) and from there across Cadorista Hill (1,900 m high) we complete the less difficult ascent to the high, grassy, spacious billowing expanse of Bjelasica, the struggle to get enough air in our lungs is over and until we get to Mojkovac we will mainly (with short exceptions) be living off the dividends we acquired with the sweat we worked up on the ascent.

From Cadoriste our Bjelasica fairytale blooms again: the landscapes here are quite different from the ones on the southern slopes of the mountain: it is somehow possible that the views are even more beautiful and distances even more airy. The glittering of the perspiring carpet of grass is topped only by the azure blue above, as intense as if we were on Himalayan heights, where the skies get their strength, depth and colour from the expanse, behind which lies only outer space. On the heights of Bjelasica, the earth colours the sky and the sky colours the earth; the mutual reflection fills the soul of the traveller with that noble joy he is always – sometimes unconsciously – searching

for, enduring pain and fighting the weather, often fighting even with himself. It is a quest that is rarely rewarded so fully as here, and everything else fades in the face of it.

At the beginning of an area called Suvo polje under Ogorelica Hill we come to a lonely, lovely little stone cottage with a well in front of it. From there we will go across the field directly northwards, until the scenery, close to two small ponds, opens out in front of us towards that side of the world. From there we turn left, towards the top of the hill, where our ascent finally ends, at an altitude of 1,965 m. and 5.4 km from Sisko Lake.

A path, barely visible at some points at the beginning takes us along the edge of Bardova kosa to a gravel road (7.8 km, 1,725 m high) leading eastwards to the katun of Omar. (From the top of Bjelasica and during the descend one can see a distant, lovely new chapel sitting on top of a beautiful elevated spot in that katun.) But instead, here we will go left, through a rocky, interesting and unique landscape, across

the katun of Dolovi, to Zarski katun (9.8 km, 1,665 m high). On a steep downhill stretch before this spot the road is quite bad. After the settlement, we slowly get used to the forest and landscapes of this particular world.

At 13.4 km and an elevation of 1,415 m is "Dzambas" mountain hut and that is a place where a stop, a break for refreshments or lunch and a conversation with the hosts is a must. We will hear all the news about Bjelasica there – whether the winter was harsh, how much snow there was, what the weather seems to be doing now, who has been here, passed through (and who is expected) – and we will get answers to all

our questions about it that might have popped into our heads on the way from Sisko lake.

Immediately after the hut is a crossroads where the road to Brskovo (option 1 on our route) goes left, and we go right along a pleasant forest road to a cemetery at Mjedeno guvno (15.6 km, 1,170 m high). A forest dirt road leading from there is rutted with tractor and truck wheels, which are filled with water and mud after heavy rain, so if we are descending from Bjelasica during such weather it is better to use option 1 and the road that leads to it from the hut.

At Bojna njiva we pass by

Bojna njiva (Battlefield)

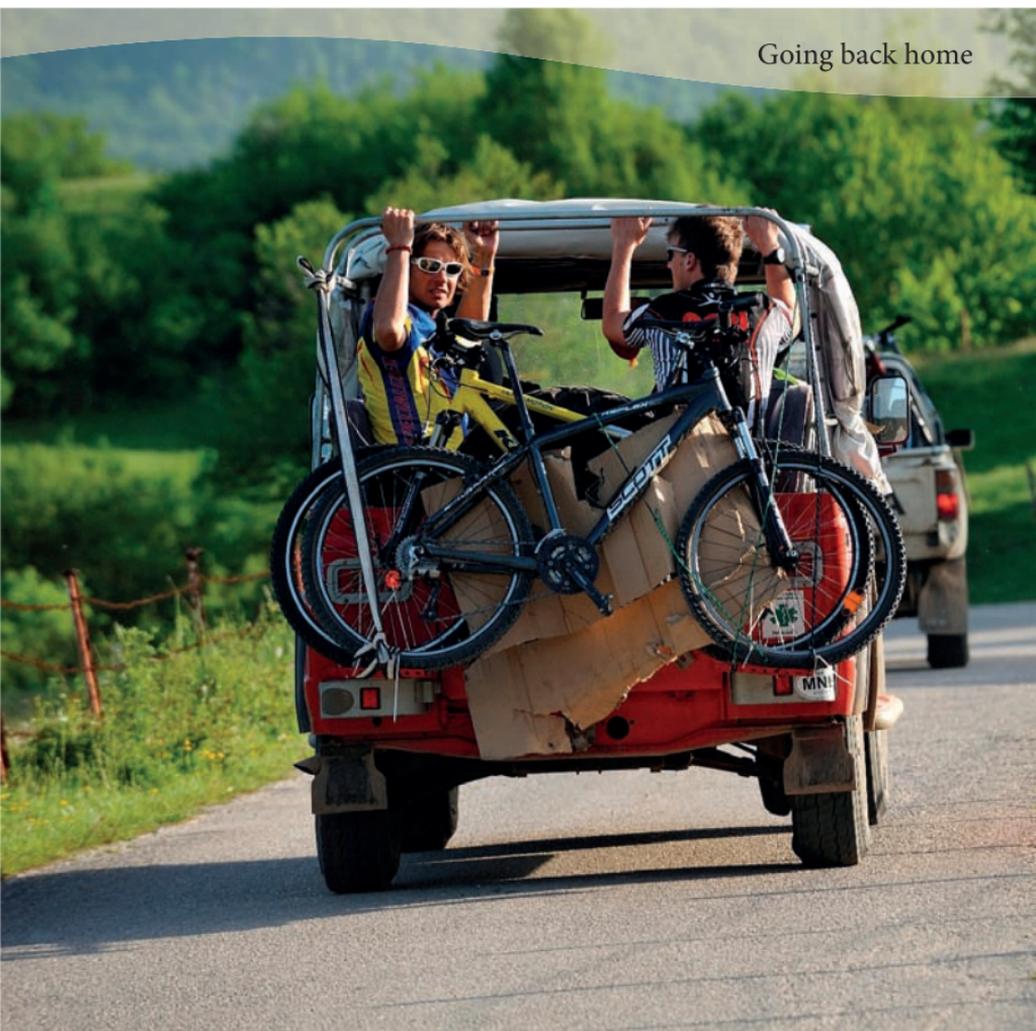


the monument in honour of the Battle of Mojkovac (19.5 km, 1,125 m high) and, some 600 m further on, a better gravel road begins. In the romantic landscape of Ulosevina there is the tourist eco-village of Filipovic (21.6 km, 1,060 m high) – another place worth visiting and spending some time (and sleeping over, of course). It is not far from there to Krstac Pass (23.7km, 1,016 m high) where we reach

the Mojkovac–Berane regional road, 4 km from the spot where we started our long journey.

And only there, at the railway station in Mojkovac, will the descent that we started on the heights of Bjelasica (1,965 m), end, a descent that was (with only short breaks) more than 18 km long. The total distance of route TT3 using this option is 317 km.

Going back home



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