

MONTE NEGRO



TOP BIKING TRAIL 5

THE STORIES BY THE WATER

IMPRESSUM

The data given in this guide are the result of a careful research. Considering that the conditions regarding the trail markings, trails and signalisation are constantly changing, we cannot guarantee the accuracy of the data and this guide is to be used on one's own responsibility. In case you are not confident in your orientation abilities in the mountains, please contact an experienced guide for assistance.

With gratitude we accept all comments, remarks and suggestions which you can send to the publisher to the e-mail address office@bjelasica-komovi.co.me. To the same address you can also e-mail your stories and experiences from your travel along the TT5 Route – we will be glad to post them at the website www.tt5.bjelasica-komovi.me.

Publisher:

Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica, Komovi and Prokletije

Donors:

Austrian Development Agency and Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro

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Maps:

Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism of Montenegro

ELEVATION PROFILE



SIGNPOSTING



ROUTE CHARACTERISTICS

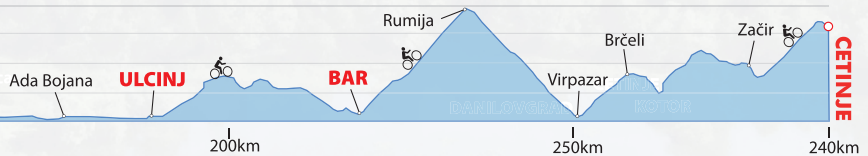
Duration: 2 - 3 days

Length : 236 km

Total climb: 3900 m

Highest point: 790 m

Lowest point: 2 m



Top Biking Trail 5

The Stories By the Water

From the pancakes of King Nikola, via the southernmost fiord of Europe, to the swamps of Louisiana. Sleeping on the tower which rules the sunny distances. Along the largest lake in the Balkans, through a magical forest of chestnut and the capital of the pirates, to the nudist beach and the oldest tree in Europe. Can happiness be wet and salty, tingle in the eyes?

Completing the TT5 Route (like the other Top Trail Routes) is not easy. However, in order to tackle it one needs a good,

but not top level fitness – far more important will be a positive approach, determination and good planning, so that we always have sufficient time for harder sections. The areas through which we will pass won't cease thrilling and inspiring us, and the ultimate reward – the poetry of travelling along the exotic areas and the joy to see some of the most beautiful places in Montenegro - will be incomparably greater than the amount of sweat involved. Every genuine nature lover knows that this is a great bargain.



Before setting off it's good to know:

Basic information regarding the route:

- the length: 236km
- the duration: 2-3 days
- the highest point: 790masl (the Sutorman Pass on Mt Rumija, above Bar)
- the lowest point : 2m (Ada Bojana)

The route can also be made with the weight on the bike (camping equipment and so on), but because of certain harder sections we recommend you to keep the weight as light as possible - with good planning one can always spend the night under the roof and also the supplies of food and water do not have to be larger than the half-day. Water available on all springs along the route is good for drinking. A

minimum of equipment: a map and a compass (or much better, a GPS device), a mobile telephone, a torch, basic tools for bike and a spare tyre.

The Top Trail 5 Route is fully marked with signposts, and from the website tt5.bjelasica-komovi.me one can download the GPS data (track logs and waypoints), which will make navigation on the route easier and safer.

Safety: apart from heavier traffic in certain rather short sections, there are no many other reasons for worry – this route enters the real wilderness in no place, and people whom we will meet will be more than kind and willing to help.

Let's go then...



1 CETINJE – RIJEKA CRNOJEVIĆA - VIRPAZAR (39km)

We set off from the Eco petrol station at the exit from Cetinje (660 metres above sea level), on the main road towards Budva. At the nearby roundabout we will turn left, onto a road toward Podgorica. The traffic of course will be rather heavy here, but a kilometre further we will turn right, onto the old road towards Podgorica. After construction of the new road this route, which stretches parallel to the new one but lower than it, has been underused and it is left to the ravages of time – however, it will suit us since it is totally quiet.

For learning more in detail about the history and tourist values of Cetinje as well as information regarding the interesting events in the town, please visit the website of the local tourism organisation: <http://cetinje.travel/en/>

A few hundred metres after the turn-off we will find ourselves

onto the spot on which a gentle ascent from Cetnje (705masl) ends and a steep, 15.5km long descent to Rijeka Crnojevića (25 masl) starts.

At 1.8km from the start we go past the Belvedere Restaurant. The name has not been given by chance, which we can be assured of on the terrace in the shade of the pines, with a marvellous view over Skadar Lake and Rijeka Crnojevića. (On a clear day from there one can even see how in the distance, on the opposite side of the lake, the roofs of Skadar flicker.) The first inn in this favourite excursion area of the Montenegrin King Nikola and his family was opened in 1888. Besides the view one should not miss no less spectacular Montenegrin pancakes (or King Nikola's pancakes) made of maize flour, with plums cooked in wine, honey and walnuts – an exhibition for the palate and a suitable energetic dope for the journey ahead of us.

The asphalt on the old road is identical – old, patched and damaged. But it is still acceptable for



a cyclist, particularly since one goes downhill. Tickling the wall of a natural amphitheatre above Dobrsko Selo and enjoying the panorama of a fantastic valley which below us goes towards the peaks on the horizon, on a hairpin bend we will soon reach a road to Rijeka Crnojevića (7.3km from the start, 390masl). A winding asphalt road becomes good from here and one still should not expect a heavy traffic, except maybe over the weekend during high season: since the time this is no longer a main road from Cetinje to Podgorica, Rijeka (Crnojevića) has been napping, rather than living.

A downhill section, nevertheless, should be expected - we

are only somewhere around halfway and the descent is just becoming great. From the low Mediterranean vegetation a complex riddle of aromas evaporates, but it is not necessary to solve it in order to be delighted by its muffled tones and secret alchemy. In an inland, the one who does not live by the sea or near the sea, those scents will pluck some sleeping strings and a disturbing longing for something elusive will tremble. And for a traveller there is no a more practical present than that vague unease which pushes him over the hills and valleys, to discover and learn, all that by chasing something that, luckily, he cannot reach.



Through a wonderful forest of pine and cypress sprinkled with crags, passing above a little freckle of the village of Očevići, we land straight into the centre of Rijeka Crnojevića. „The centre“ should not be taken too formally since Rijeka is way too little for that – but already for centuries it has been grand in the eyes of artists, today also in the eyes of the photography lovers, romantic souls, wanderers seeking for the unusual landscapes... For it along with its river flows through the areas which cannot be fully explained by an ordinary geography. There are places on the coasts of the oceans which the finger of destiny and human hand did not let look like the places on the coast of the ocean. And there are also places which are seemingly captured amidst the hoses, pockets, scanty windings, silent ravines and stubborn dead ends – yet everyone who finds himself in them feels that

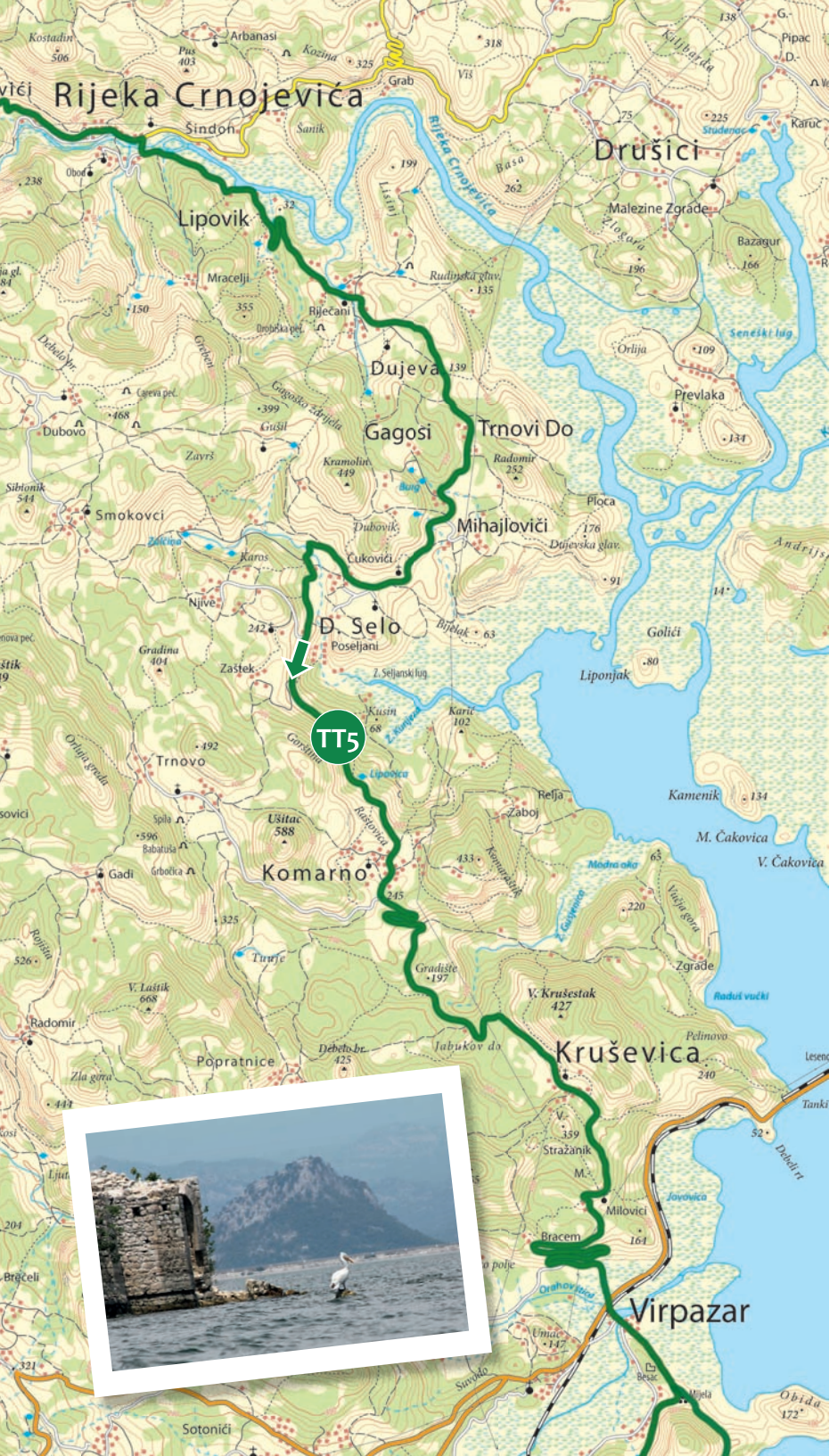
he has stepped on the threshold of some magnificent expanse to which only the imagination takes the measure of. So, as once from this remote nest it managed to be the largest port and main trade centre of Montenegro, that way even today Rijeka, with its narrow wooden boats roofed by colourful canopies, does not leave us alone – even while we just watch those boats, it draws us into its distant areas. And then it will not be strange if on the arch of the old Danilo’s bridge we have an impression that for some reason we are watching for example some channel of Venice, only with much more water lilies and considerably less tourists.

In this little place we can take a stroll along a 8km long, circular, marked ecological&recreational hiking trail called Obod. It starts by the stone bridge at the exit towards Virpazar, and it first



takes us past the old power station which was built by the Italians at the beginning of the Second World War (one of the first in Montenegro) and the remains of the old stone water mills. After hiking about an hour and a half from the start we will arrive in front of the huge entrance of Obodska pećina (the Obod Cave) in which one of the sources of Rijeka Crnojevića (the Crnojevići River) is located. One can enter the cave quite deep, all the way to the source, but also go astray in it, so one should not venture into exploration without a guide, a torch with full batteries, and without informing someone who stays outside the cave. Further on we climb to the vantage point called Babino and descend towards Obodski grad (thirty years after the Gutenberg invention on Obod the Cyrillic lead letters were cast and the work of the first printing house at the South Slavs began, and then we

descend back to the bridge. From the centre of Rijeka (Crnojevića) we will turn right, onto the stone bridge towards Virpazar. Two kilometres farther a moderate ascent starts. A few hundred metres before the beginning of the climb we go past the tavern called Splav (the Raft), a Gulliver-like floating construction which in the event of the new flood could accommodate the entire population of Rijeka (perhaps for that very reason it has been built, unless it is actually a camouflaged wooden aircraft carrier). On the left side we have a view over an outstanding panorama of the hill above the lake, in particular over the „volcano“ cone of Gradina which as a bow plunges into the water lilies and the marsh vegetation of the river, while in the distance behind it, in the top of the head of the southernmost ford in Europe, a craggy wall of Pavlove strane rises.



After a 3km long ascent we are again on the flat section (150masl). Skadar Lake still hides successfully from our looks, but a narrow road do its own job, burrowing and thinning out its frail shelter, therefore 8km from Rijeka Crnojevića it will drip in our palm as well.

At 8.5km an asphalt road forks left to a few hundred metres away (but invisible from the road) village of Čukovići. We should find sufficient time and go there, leave our bike at someone's in the village and then along a narrow stony path down a little canyon and the area called Mlinovi (the Mills) descend to a nearly deserted little fishing village of Poseljani, down on the lakeside. For Mlinovi and Poseljani are the secret treasure of this area... A series of small natural terraces with little pools which clear Seljanski potok (The Seljani Brook) fills and has fun in them (having been left without its miller job), are as made for splashing around, and they are decorated with the remnants of old stone watermills (once there were 14 of those) which have been approached from the houses over the narrow little bridges. In the old days the watermills used to work at full steam (that is to say water) and the milling was awaited for days, so according to a story down in Poseljani there were pubs, and even the gambling houses. Not much remained from the former structures (the oldest ones are around 300 years old), but that what is still there fascinates totally and definitively.

And when we reach the bottom

of the backwater of the lake and Poseljani, we will find ourselves in some sort of the Montenegrin Louisiana, amongst the marsh vegetation and under the shadows of mighty trees... Only instead of the large, ornate wooden villas again the adorable little stone houses blink at us. One of them still lives, and the others will just sigh for us ...

It takes around 40 minutes to descend from Čukovići (the trail is stony, so one should kit oneself out with appropriate footwear), but it's unlikely that we will manage to resist and return for less than half day. Some will maybe decide to stay here as long as they have food and water – that strong and attractive is the shared silence of life and nature in Poseljani.

One can reach Poseljani slightly sooner if one does not go to Čukovići but proceeds along the road to Virpazar. About 1.3km from the turn-off for Čukovići we will notice a yellow hiking signpost which on the left by the road marks the beginning of the trail towards Poseljani (it will somewhere in the middle of Mlinovi join the trail from Čukovići). Nevertheless, we recommend the start from the village – enjoyment will last longer, and we will miss less beauty.

After Čukovići we have a stretch of short downhill section and then from the tenth kilometre (125masl) we start a 4km long ascent to the village of Komarno (235m).

In dales rock and vegetation boil like in the boiling pot, and the aroma of that broth intoxicates on a hot summer day on which



the sky lowers itself at, now constantly present, bright blue lake. In spring and autumn, they enchant the eyes: the shapes sway and transform one to another – nothing is forever here, and nothing respects oneself much, teaching us the transience as on a rapid film. The houses are moved away from the road and hidden by vegetation – only the roofs peek here and there, those also similar to the rock in which they have grown.

The traffic is very light, but the roadway winds and it is narrow, so one should never relax fully. (The weight limit is 7 tons, therefore we should not eat too much before going this way.) All in all, we advance rapidly, and in no time we will be on the serpentine above Virpazar, from where that tiny town is nicely visible.

A little bit more of up-and-down

riding through a stunning scenery and there we are, 19km from Rijeka Crnojevića, on the final descent towards still invisible Virpazar. From 225masl we will descend to 20m above sea level in that tiny town. On the descent one should definitely stop by after 1.4km (20.3km from RC) in the place at which through the stunted vegetation a small footpath forks left. It leads towards some hundred metres away pile of crags and broken rocks, on the top of which we will notice a man-made low structure. When we climb up, we will find ourselves on the place with probably the loveliest view on the leg from Rijeka to Virpazar. And not just that: round, spacious, meticulously paved „tower“ (gumno) encompassed by a low stone wall with a bench, radiates a fantastic atmosphere. There are Virpazar, the lake and a mountain called Rumija above it clearly visible,



as on a silver platter an opportunity is given to sit, have lunch (although with an effort, the beauty is too distracting here), to stare to your heart's content at a stunning space from which the perspectives, blueness and sunny distances tingle, and all that from the height which must have been adjusted by some precision instrument to be this inexorably and thrillingly – perfect as it is.

We recommend an overnight stay in this spot: if the weather is fine the inner layer of a tent or just a sleeping bag (or none of those) will be enough, and awakening in a true, well-deserved palace, will be an unforgettable event.

A little further down the road there are three serpentines along which we descend rapidly, cut (carefully) the Podgorica – Bar main road, and there we

are in Virpazar (20masl), 24km away from Rijeka Crnojevića. The small town is very small (some three hundred inhabitants) yet lovely, and it has everything a traveller needs: a couple of shops, decent accommodation (a few small hotels, private rooms and apartments), a drinking fountain, a bakery and shade in the little park.

CRMNICA, WINE AND FISH

Virpazar lies in the fertile Crmničko polje (The Crmnica Field), and the Crmnica Region is best-known for wine called Vranac (The Black Horse) which is one of the highly prized wines on all world's menus, and at the international exhibitions it has also been repeatedly proclaimed the best in the world). It is made of small black grapes which for some mysterious reasons no one has yet succeeded



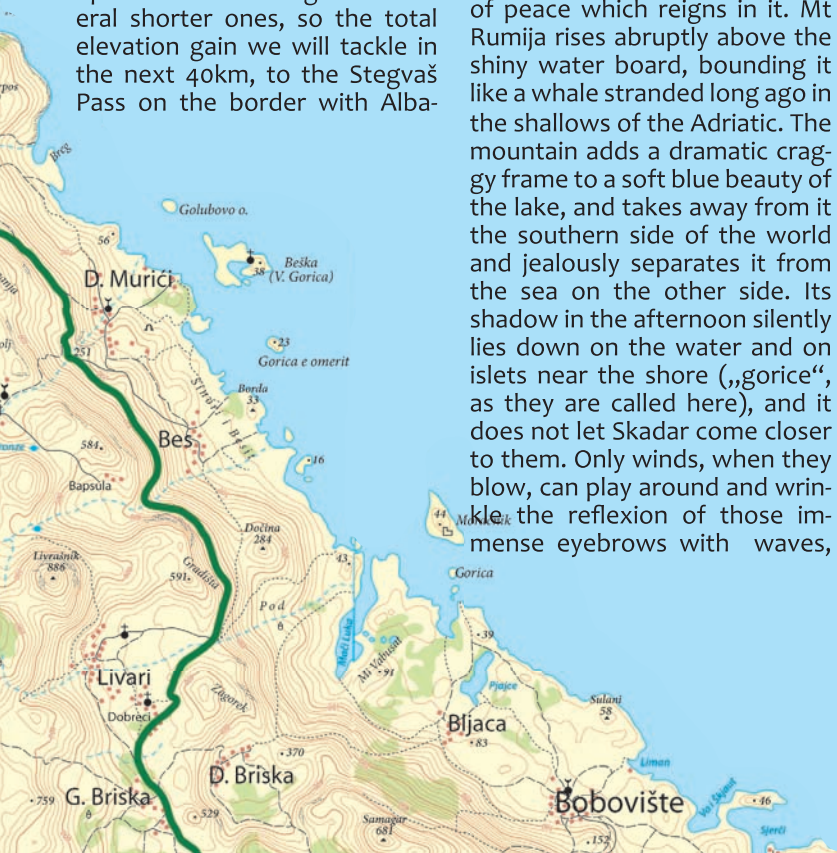
to convince to give colour and flavour in some other place or region as it has when growing here. In order to additionally tantalise poor gourmands from all over the world the locals claim that the best meze with vranac is a fish called ukljeva (a type of bleak), which lives only in Skadar Lake and nowhere else in the world.

2 VIRPAZAR - OSTROS - ULCINJ - ADA BOJANA - ULCINJ (100KM)

We follow the shoreline of Skadar Lake, towards the south-east. An exceptionally beautiful yet strenuous lap is ahead of us: three rather long steep uphill sections along with several shorter ones, so the total elevation gain we will tackle in the next 40km, to the Stegvaš Pass on the border with Alba-

nia, is about 1200m. The traffic is mainly light so it will not impede our enjoyment while travelling along this pristine space on which, fortunately, there are still no hotels, motels and other companions of mass tourism. However one should keep in mind that the roadway is very narrow and winding, and in many places there is no guard rail on the edges behind which the chasms gape. From some of the sharp bends a van or a camper can always emerge, so one should not relax too much, particularly on the downhill sections.

For any pedalling lover the road along the lake is a near perfect experience, in terms of everything it offers, in terms of beauty, attractiveness and in terms of peace which reigns in it. Mt Rumija rises abruptly above the shiny water board, bounding it like a whale stranded long ago in the shallows of the Adriatic. The mountain adds a dramatic craggy frame to a soft blue beauty of the lake, and takes away from it the southern side of the world and jealously separates it from the sea on the other side. Its shadow in the afternoon silently lies down on the water and on islets near the shore („gorice“, as they are called here), and it does not let Skadar come closer to them. Only winds, when they blow, can play around and wrinkle the reflexion of those immense eyebrows with waves,



and then, over it fly away towards Ulcinj and Bar.

SKADAR LAKE

It lies at a vertiginous elevation of 6 metres above sea level and in terms of its surface area it is the largest lake in the Balkans – it is more than 43km long and on average 10km wide (the maximum width being 14km). It is the youngest, and at the same time also the biggest natural fresh-water reserve in Europe. An average depth is about 6m but certain places (so-called oka or vrulje) are much deeper – even over 60m. The lake is namely a crypto-depression: its surface is above and the stretches of the bottom below the sea level. The two-thirds of the lake belong to Montenegro and one third to Albania. In 1983 Montenegro declared its part, along with its lakeside, with a total surface area of around 40 thousand hectare, a national park.

The shores are predominantly wetland and the wealth of birds, fishes and plants is exceptional (48 fish species and 264 bird species), along with a large number of relict and endemic species. Various types of ducks and geese, cormorants, grebes, herons, ibises, eagles, vultures, bustards and seagulls, the birds of the western Siberia, a very rare African black heron (it nests only at one island, near the coast of Mauritania), are some of the residents or regular visitors to one of the largest bird habitats in Europe. The mascot and the symbol of the Skadar Lake National Park is the Dalmatian pelican, a European rarity. The fishes called krap (a type of a pure-bred carp which weighs up to 30kg) and bleak (a

small fish, the speciality of the Crmnica Region and an ultimate meze with wine from Crmnica), live only here and nowhere else in the world. Since 1996 the lake has been on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.

Once on Skadar Lake there was a rather developed boat traffic, therefore it is mentioned that “besides boats over this lake rather small steamers also sail, and steamship ports are: Plavnica, Vir and Skadar”. The main danger then was a wind called upor or smuta, which “strikes out of the blue and creates large whirlwinds, therefore it is very dangerous for boats and boatmen, when it finds them on the water “. Today, unfortunately, there is no regular passenger line.

Eight hundred metres from a little square in the centre of Virpazar, below the hill called Besac on which the remnants of an old fortification are located, we pass a place at which the road via Mt Rumija to Stari Bar (from there we will come in the second part of the tour) forks right. At 1.8km from the centre we cross a low pass called Mijela (115masl) at which there is also a vantage point.

The first big ascent (and the hardest one) we start at 4.6km and at an elevation of 20m above sea level. In the next 7km we will climb to the village of Gornja (the Upper, of course) Seoca, at an elevation of 460m above sea level. In the centre of the village there is a lovely shady park, as custom-made for a rest after sweating.

OUTINGS TO THE SECRET NOOKS

During the ride along the lake, we will repeatedly find ourselves on the spots from which bypaths fall towards a blue magic of its water, inviting to a nice little adventures of seeking and finding. And that what we find will sometimes be a quiet little fishing village with seemingly forgotten boats which sunbathe their hulls, left nearly without their paint. Another time it is a strange, secluded bay waiting just for us. And sometimes we will find out that at the end of the footpath, at the edge of the water, our own peace and achieved harmony wait for us. The lake gives us an opportunity which is much more valuable than one can imagine when starting the ride: its tranquil existence and a thick layer of silence (on a calm day without wind there is more of it than the water) will give us a chance to hear ourselves – something that maybe we did not managed for a long time in our everyday hurried life.

The detour to Raduš is one of such experiences. Having turned left off the main road in Gornje Seoce, we will descend to Donje Seoce along a nice asphalt road (1.5km, at 140 masl). Then one should leave bike at the locals and proceed on foot to Raduš, a miniature fishing settlement on the shore of the lake (about 40min). We return by the same route.

From Gornja Seoca in the next 6.5km we descend (with one rather short uphill stretch) to 255masl. On that section we pass the fork (11km, 360masl) of the path for the village of Krnjice – again a chance for a lovely de-

tour (3.5km from Donje Krnjice, on the lakeside).

The end of the descent is at 15.5km and at an elevation of 400masl, and there is also a junction at which again we can head downhill, to maybe the most interesting visit on the shore – to the Albanian-populated village of Donji Murići. (All other villages further down the shore are also populated by the Albanians.)

A three kilometre long asphalt road descent to Murići is exceptionally steep but it's worth the effort on the way back from there: down we will find a very beautiful pebble stone beach bounded by low conifers, a large restaurant with a view, a nice little camp in the shade of olive groves next to it, and one can also stay overnight in the wooden bungalows with bathrooms. One should not miss a boat trip to at least one of the nearby islets - Beška, Starčevo and Moračnik. We can ask the fishermen in the village about transport options.

From the junction on the main road above Murići we start the second serious ascent: 6km in length, to 470masl in the village of Gornja (the Upper, of course) Briska. We end the ascent at 24.5km from Virpazar, in a magical forest of tall relict chestnuts – a joy to the eye, but also to overheated head on a warm summer day. Sailing lightly up-and-down and winding through the forest we will have an impression that we have lost our way in the fabric of a fairy tale, and we will constantly expect an appropriate plot resolution...

We start a 6km long downhill



section and pass above the vil-
lages of Tejani and Koštanjica.
Koštanji, that is to say chest-
nuts, are a traditional product
of this area – if we come here in
the right season, we will see the
roofs completely covered with
dark balls which are dried there
– hence the name of this latter
village. The end of the descent
is at 210masl, near Ostros, the
largest village on this shore of
Skadar Lake.

OSTROS

(34km from Virpazar, 215masl)
at the end of the 10th and the
beginning of 11th century was
an important centre of the area,
and the legend attributes a sta-
tus of the centre of the Princi-
pality of Duklja to it. Today there
are only a dilapidated motel, a
couple of cafes and privately-
owned (excellently supplied)
mini-markets, and little pubs.

ANOTHER THREE DETOURS...

The first one: after Koštanjica
from the main road (32km
from Virpazar, 230masl) we can
turn towards about 4km away
Bobovište. We reach it via the vil-
lage of Runji, through the pome-
granates and Mediterranean
aromatic vegetation, through
the rolling charming landscape
in which we will meet laden don-
keys and locals working in their
fields. Bobovište looks like as if
it does not care about space and
time, but it floats in its own spe-
cial dimension, filled with tran-
quillity and silence.

A little after that village at the
junction we will turn right, in or-
der to reach a lovely bay on the
shore of the lake in which there
is serenity and an amazing view
which opens amongst the hulls
of the fishing boats – walrus
on the shore.

Back to the said junction where
now we go right, towards Blja-
ce. All that we have said about



Bobovište applies even more to this last settlement on the narrow and empty lane. There we can leave our bike and venture into a lovely wandering along the lagoons and capes on one of the most interesting stretches of the lakeside. We take the same way back to the main road – if we actually ever want to go back. The total mileage: about 14km.

The second one: in Ostros we can turn towards a less than a kilometre away village of Ćurjan (Alb. Qurjani) with a mosque on its entrance. At 2km from Ostros there is a junction at which we will turn right, to visit a nice little bay of Smokvica as well, in the vicinity of which there is a islet called Gradac. After about 300m the asphalt road ends, and to the bay one should proceed on foot for about 800m more. Having returned to the above mentioned junction we will now

turn right, towards the village of Sjerči (4.5km from the start in Ostros). About 300m from the junction the asphalt road ends and the macadam road starts. Here one should not expect much in terms of a settlement (it is almost absent, and it is almost deserted), but there is a bay full of reed and birds, a shrieking metropolis in the watching of which we could spend days. We return to the main road along the same route we have come here. The total mileage: about 9km.

The third one: about 2km after Ostros (36km from Virpazar, 260masl) a road towards a 5.5km away village of an unusual name – Ckla branches off. The very name would be a sufficient reason to go there, but it offers us even more than that... Through surroundings which resemble the French Provence we slowly descend towards the





water mirror. At 500m from the main road one should turn left, at 3.1km proceed straight on, and at 3.9km turn left again. We soon reach the remnants of stone buildings and also large, exquisitely preserved stone pier – a witness that this place once has seen much better days and that the ship on the regular line over the lake used to stop off there. The impression which Ckla makes is one of the strongest on the shore. The atmosphere is totally „sea-like“, and while we watch the outlines of high mountains on the Albanian side we can easily imagine that we are really on the ship which cuts through the azure mirror and takes us towards new, exciting shores.

On our way back, about 200m after the pier we will notice a path which forks right and leads us to a nearby restaurant. The combination is lovely: a feeling that we are beyond the world is complete, and then again enriched with a chance to indulge in the earthly pleasures. The total mileage: 11km.

From Ostros our last big ascent on the road along the lake starts: it is 7km long and from 210masl it takes us to 490masl on the Stegvaš Pass (40km from Virpazar). Up there the furnishing is like this: rock, some stunted vegetation and a big, lush view. About a kilometre ahead of us, on the bare rib of the mountain, we see a small white Albanian border watchtower. In the depth on the left side the red roofs of Skadar diligently glow red. On the right a bright green, soft mosslike valley, which opens towards the

sea and in which a silver snake – the Bojana River sunbathes, diligently glows green. So, the pass is one of those places at which the view has a hair part.

Along with one rather short climb, the downhill section from the pass lasts until before the very tiny place of Vladimir (52km from Vripazar, 50masl). The asphalt road is not great (a lot of patches), but don't look a gift horse in the mouth. At 1km before Vladimir (10.5km from the pass) the road towards the Sukobin border crossing forks left (6.5km).

SVAČ AND THE CHURCHES OF ŠAS

North from Šasko jezero (Šas Lake), on the hill from which one sees a whole area around the delta of the Bojana River, the remains of the prehistoric town of Svač (today called Šas) founded in the 4th century BC are located. In the Middle Ages the town was the centre of episcopate, it minted its own coins and it was larger than Kotor in that time. Many have repeatedly attacked and destroyed it, but its mortal blow was struck by... the Mongols in 1242. The legend says that in the town in that time there were 365 churches, which were all destroyed. At the beginning of the 17th century about 700 inhabitants however still lived here, but today it is abandoned and it is one of the best-known „dead towns“ on this side of the Adriatic Sea. Of all its buildings only the ruins of the ramparts and the remnants of several churches can be seen. Šas Lake is home of many bird species.

To visit these places one heads along a road which in the centre of Vladimir (300m before the Lukoil petrol station) forks south-eastern. To the lake there is around 5km, the fork-off for Šas is at 2km.

From Vladimir to Ulcinj, the southernmost town on the Montenegrin coast, 17km is left. In that section the traffic will be more intense, and of course increasingly heavier as we are approaching the town. Until after the village of Krute we have a rather small ascent (4km, from 50 to 120masl) and on the other side the identical descent. Approaching the sea will not be particularly spectacular on a low, gently rolled terrain sprinkled with forest. We reach the entrance of Ulcinj (10masl) 69km after the departure from Virpazar.

We will turn left, onto the road which near the coast via the Ulcinj Saltern leads to the south-east, towards the Albanian border. In high season the traffic on it will be heavy. After 13km there we are in Ada Bojana, a place where the Bojana River flows into the sea. On the wide sandy mouth there is a beach – the nudist one as well. (Practically the entire leg which we have covered from Ulcinj to here, leads along the famous Long Beach of Ulcinj).

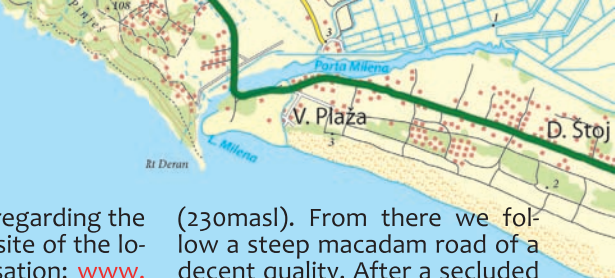
Ada Bojana will not be the favourite to those who love craggy coves of an interesting configuration and the depth – here we will walk quite a lot through the shallows until we reach sufficiently deep sea to swim in it, and the sand on the beach stretches as far as the eye can

see both left and right. But one comes to Ada for an informal Robinson Crusoe-like and hippie atmosphere (which often entails a lack of care for litter), lazy living in and around the cabins scattered in the vegetation along the beach, for parties and wind surfing.

If on the road there are too many vehicles for our taste, we can ride along the dirt paths which lead parallelly through about 1.5km wide green belt between the asphalt road and the sea. The turns-off are quite frequent – we can follow one, and then improvise. That way after all we will also have a better insight into the appearance and events on the Long Beach, and we will also go past a couple of camps of windsurfing schools.

ULCINJ

One should devote to it at least a part of a day: the narrow old streets, the mixture of cultures and the spirit of Orient and Mediterranean, a large fortress, rich history, multi-ethnicity... call on for it. It is one of the oldest settlements on the Adriatic: it is thought to have been founded by the Illyrians in the 5th century BC, so it has already existed for 2500 years. In the „biography“ it also has a fact that it was a main stronghold of the pirates in this part of the Mediterranean. Today it is populated by a mixture of the Albanian, Slavic and Romanic population. Tourist from the far-off countries have early discovered this town - in the 13th century it was one of the rare ones which succeeded to reject a “visit “ of a rather big group from Mongolia. More details on



the town and info regarding the events on the website of the local tourism organisation: www.ulcinj.travel

A big Ulcinj Saltern is an eco-system surrounded by the forests of tamarisk, a home to numerous birds – during the winter there are more than 20,000 of them here. From the bridge over the channel of the saltern, a kilometre before the town, we can best see kalimeras – interesting mechanised fishing nets of local fishermen which are fixed to one place and work on the principle of well sweep. Their mushrooms, like some kind of extravagant sculptures or the baldachins raised above small wooden cabins and jetties, adorn the banks of the channel.

3

ULCINJ - OLD BAR - RUMIJA - VIRPAZAR (61KM)

Distances will be calculated from the square with a monument dedicated to Mother Teresa (the intersection of Mother Teresa St and Djerdj Katrioti Skenderbeg Boulevard, 20masl). We leave along the main road in the direction of Bar, along a moderate uphill section which gradually becomes steeper. The traffic is heavy and one should ride carefully. Along a narrow valley after 5.5km we reach the village of Kruče (Kruta) and the turn-off (on the right) onto a quiet side road to Stari Bar.

An excellent narrow asphalt road climbs through a series of gentle bends but it ends at 900m from the main road

(230masl). From there we follow a steep macadam road of a decent quality. After a secluded house on the right side the road becomes narrower and somewhat poorer. We travel on the scantily „dressed“ terrain, over the slope of the hill called Belveder above Kruče, of course always with a lovely view over the settlements in the coves and the main road deep below us. The ascent ends at 3km from the main road, at an elevation of 310masl – further on we will ride downhill, passing first a large tailings pond on the left side.

The surrounding low vegetation becomes increasingly denser so even the very road is here and there somewhat overgrown with tall grass. We also pass one poor leg, luckily only some hundred metres long – later on the macadam road is solid again. Through frequent green „channels“ we reach a narrow, somewhat poorer asphalt road (7km from the main road, 210masl), then we head uphill again. This ascent will last for about 2km, and it will take us to an elevation of almost 300m. On the other side there is a nearly identical descent to the little village of Pečurica (12km from the main road.)

A little bit of gentle ascent through an already urban environment (along the road we go past the olive groves, a place with a lovely view over the coves of Mali and Veliki pijesak (the Little and Big Sand), one boarding house and one restaurant), then finally at 15km from the main road we start a 5km long descent to Stari Bar. A wide, ex-



cellent road takes us straight to the old olive (50masl, 21km from leaving the main road in Kruče).

The Old olive is... old. Over 2000 thousand years and it is considered to be the oldest tree trunk in Europe, and there are only two trees older than it in the world: the famous olives in Israel and Tunisia. The area in which it is located is called Mirovica – according to a story, that is so because under its treetop the quarrelling parties used to reconcile, and „the word“ used to be given that people will not do harm to each other. The circumference of the olive tree trunk is 10m, or more precisely 24 girl’s steps, and its shadow at noon is 74 girl’s steps long. It still bear fruit.

OLD BAR

The place was inhabited in the Illyrian times, 2800 years ago. A distance of four kilometres from the sea and modern Bar makes a difference: the locals are still

predominantly craftsmen or they grow olives, they are also small traders. A visit to the fortress and „the small Montparnasse“ below it, in which on the cobblestone street the paintings, woven rugs and souvenirs are sold and where it can be nice to sit in a pub or a little garden of a cafe, is a must-do. More details concerning Stari Bar at the website of the local tourism organization: www.visitbar.org

The biggest ascent on the TT5 Route is ahead of us: in order to reach Virpazar again, we will cross over the Mt Rumija. From the junction at the Archdiocese of Bar and the barracks (near the roundabout and the Kaća supermarket), in the next 16km we will ascend from 23 to 790m above sea level on the Sutorman Pass.

The traffic on this road is light since the roadway in the upper sections, near the pass, is in places in poor condition (minor landslides, nothing problematic





for a cyclist). We slowly gain the height, and since on the southern side of Mt Rumija there is less forest and the terrain is mainly open, a beautiful view over Bar and high sea towards Italy is entailed. An especially convenient vantage point is located 9km from the Archdiocese: a terrace near the road, at which a large obelisk stands – a monument dedicated to Montenegrin heroes.

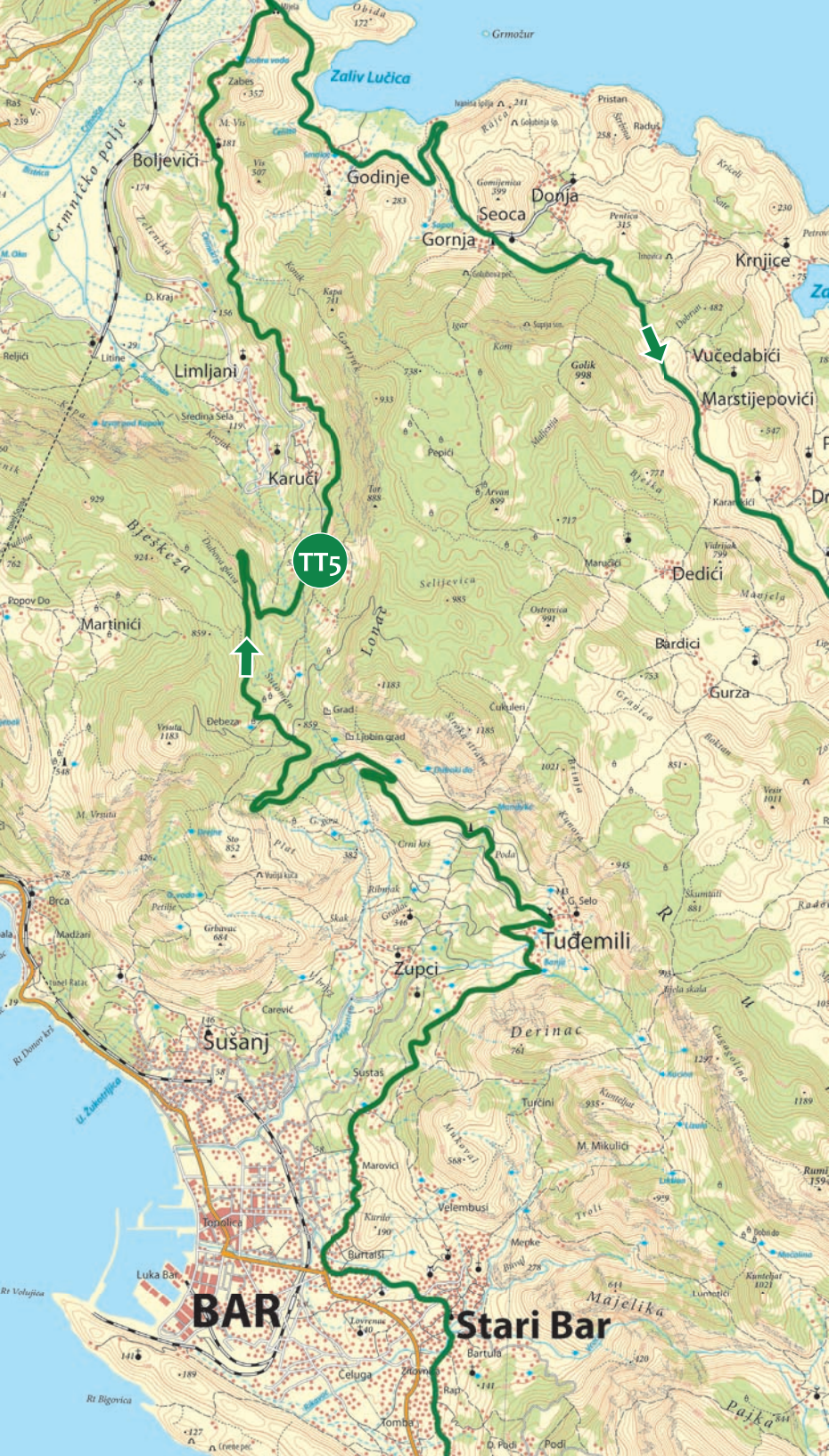
We go past the springs at 5.7km and at 12km from the Archdiocese. The latter is especially good for a rest - shade, concrete tables and benches, a good view.

ALONG THE ČIRA ROUTE...

From Stari Bar to Sutorman one can take the other, very interesting road: along the old route of Čira - now totally quiet, predominantly macadam lane which winds and gently climbs

(as it should be, since it has been intended for trains) to the left of us. In a lot of places we will be able to spot it nicely, and in many places it flows into our road, then a little further it forks again and leaves following its own route. More in detail regarding the ride along the Čira Route on some other occasion...

...Nevertheless, let's say only this: 13km from the Archdiocese in Stari Bar and about 3km before the pass (640masl), a path which takes us into a little adventure forks right. That way we will namely soon enter a 1300m long abandoned tunnel along which Čira once passed over the top (more precisely through the top) of the mountain. At the entrance there may be water dripping down the walls and the bottom (in cold weather from the ceiling big icicles will hang too, like the stalactites in a cave), but later the surface is concrete



and dry, again all the way to near the exit. Of course, one should bring along a torch. During the summer heats the livestock can seek shade in the entrance or exit section of the tunnel. After it we will just proceed along the road, and after 700m we will join the TT Route on the downhill section towards Virpazar.

We reach the Sutorman Pass (790masl) below the Tvrdoč hill, 16km after the junction at Archdiocese. From there we will ride 16km downhill (the same distance we have climbed) to Virpazar (20masl).

THE BEST VIEW?

For a view in which the picture of the entire coastal Montenegro will settle and „connect“, on the pass one should turn left onto a macadam path (later it is almost a little bit wider trail) which climbs to 3km away summit of Mt Vrsuta (1183masl). There is a 360-degree view from above: Podgorica, the valley of Crmnica, the ridge of Mt Rumija, Skadar Lake and Skadar, Bar, Sutomore and the rest of Montenegrin coast, Lovćen and the Adriatic... On the summit in addition to that there are one strange and one miracle. It is strange that there is a designated area for helicopter landing, and the miracle is that in such a place in the past a mausoleum, fortress or the second Žabljak Crnojevića... was not built.

The asphalt road on the downhill section is solid (apart from two or three damaged stretches, 10-30m in length, on which

we will come across a macadam road), so the kilometres down the wooded northern slope of Mt Rumija will fly by rapidly. At 3.8km from the pass we go past a place (590masl) at which from the right a road from the tunnel of Ćira comes. The one who has passed that way, besides a magical experience has saved up about 5km of the road and 150m of ascent.

At 12.5km from the pass we will have a lovely view over the Field of Crmnica. Some three hundred metres further on there is a spring called Maričina voda (the Marica's water), rather scarce in the summer. Virpazar is „around the corner“ so we will find ourselves there in no time – 32km from the junction at the Archdiocese in Stari Bar.

4

VIRPAZAR - BRČELI - GRAĐANI - CETINJE (37KM)

We reach the Podgorica – Bar main road and head left, towards the sea. The road goes uphill about a half a kilometre further on. At the large junction in front of the Sozina tunnel we go right, onto the road to Petrovac. After construction of the tunnel that road – once the main road leading from Podgorica to the sea – became a side road so the traffic on it is modest, and the roadway is wide and (still) very good.

The ascent will last for a little more than 7km (from the 6th kilometre the ascent already



slackens) and we will end it after the hairpin bend at which we turn towards the village of Gornji (the Upper, of course) Brčeli, at an elevation of 320m. Along the road, after the village of Sotonići we go past the Vuk Restaurant (5km from Virpazar).

We have entered an unusual, extremely interesting and lovely area of the spiky hills which stick out all around – on the north to the Rijeka Crnojevića - Virpazar road, on the east to Crmničko polje, and on the south to the high wall above the sea which is made of the hills of Paštrovići. The road actually takes us along over a large woody terrace which is steeply sloped towards the northeast and it goes into the hills.

Along a narrow good asphalt road 350m later we pass the turn-off for the nearby Brčeli Monastery (8km from Virpazar)

and less than a kilometre further there is also the turn-off for the Saint Nicholas Monastery, in Donji (the Lower) Brčeli. We will go straight on, downhill through the forest then through the old little stone villages of Tomići and Otočići. From the descent towards Otočići we will have a great view over the wrinkled duvet below us, all the way to Skadar Lake.

The downhill section ends after we pass a little hydroelectric power station and reach Velja reka and Podgorsko vrelo (the Spring of Podgora) (12km, 175masl). We will immediately proceed steeply uphill, towards the village of Građani. Below the very rock called Konj (the Horse), along a wonderfully built road high above Crmnica, we return to the heights.

Građani (15km, 350masl) have several houses, less than thirty



inhabitants, and the loveliest position in the whole area. There the enterprise of the ethnovillage construction has been started, so soon there should be places for the overnight stay. At the exit, at the places with beautiful view we will come across the comfortable chairs or even armchairs, set by the road - the locals seem to like to comfortably enjoy the surroundings along with a morning or afternoon cup of coffee.

After a short tunnel we gently climb through a more enclosed landscape with deep depressions - as if the tunnel is the boundary of those two worlds. At 18km we reach a pass (490masl), ride up-and-down a little bit, and then along a long flat stretch with a good asphalt road (here and there a few metres of potholes) we glide downwards to the village of Muževići (21km, 400masl). After the vil-

lage the road is still interesting, it leads through a deserted area in which we will rarely meet a vehicle. A lot of low forest or high bushes, provide a welcome shade.

From the pass we actually descend (with occasional short uphill sections) all the way to the Cetinje - Rijeka Crnojevića road which is already known to us. We join it after passing along the very edge of the crag above Obodska pećina (a striking view over Rijeka (Crnojevića)), 27km from Virpazar and at an elevation of 290masl.

We still have to ride back to Cetinje, slightly less than 10km away. And it means that we end our road cruising along the TT5 Route with a long ascent to an elevation of 705 metres above sea level.

The end of the travel we will



probably celebrate with a good lunch/dinner or at least refreshment, in order for impressions to settle down better. No kidding – there have been plenty of green moving away from and blue coming closer to (and vice versa), a lot of sailing over the hills with a view and through little valleys with scents, our days, owing to the persistent Montenegrin relief and even more persistent road builders, have abounded with those quality buzzing of the wheels which is worthwhile remembering.

There have been a lot of the open and plenty of that mysterious that we have not managed to figure out fully (and it should be that way – we will have more motives to come back one day and repeat at least a part of this experience). And all that should be placed somewhere, and at the moment it is just gushing from the forehead in the form of something which resembles sweat, but it is not sweat. Can happiness be wet and salty, can it tingle in the eyes? You bet :)



INFORMATION

In case you choose to take this trail, you will pass through several municipalities in Montenegro. You will have different opportunities for overnight stays, from hotels and motels, ethno villages and private accommodation, to camping sites and mountain huts. There are numerous options, so we recommend you get in touch with local tourism organizations in municipalities you find yourself in, and they will assist you in finding what suits your needs. Tourism organizations are service oriented, and they can help you with any other information, such as where you could repair your bike, what attractions you should visit in your vicinity, where you could taste dishes that represent national cuisine, etc.

National Tourism Organisation of Montenegro

www.montenegro.travel/en

Call center: 1300 (24h)

information@montenegro.travel

booking@montenegro.travel

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For more information on **BED&BIKE** services please visit:

<http://www.montenegro.travel/en/mjesta-kategorije/bed-bike>

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CRNA GORA

MINISTARSTVO ODRŽIVOG RAZVOJA
I TURIZMA



REGIONALNA RAZVOJNA AGENCIJA
Bjelasica, Komovi & Prokletije

with funding from

Austrian

 Development Cooperation