

Gate

magazine for visitors
to the Ústí Region

Issue No. 3

Interview

The Gateway to Bohemia and to my
inner self - Lukáš Konečný
Ústí, which is above all beautiful nature

Active rest

Ride your bicycle through the Gateway to Bohemia

History

Castles and chateaux
of the Ore Mountains

Nature

Jetřichovice vistas



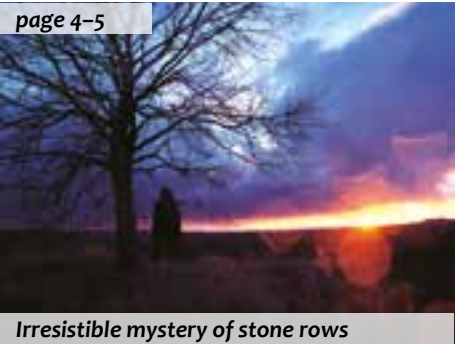
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Gate to Bohemia

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Author's invitation

Year by year I cannot believe my eyes and feel like in a dream. Imagine coming home after some time and finding there things you did not know about before! For twenty years I lived outside the Ústecký region and only visited it sporadically and for a purpose. And then I was given the chance to write this magazine for you. And suddenly I found that the region of my childhood had changed. That it had taken a deep breath and grown into a beauty, that there were many nice places here which I had not known before and which had not deserved my youthful unconcern. Please forgive me for taking you into my private world but you know, this is the nicest work in the world. Really. For six months you wander, observe, admire, talk, meet people, find unknown treasures, simply put, enjoy the delights of an eager traveller and a curious tourist, and then you take all you have absorbed back home to your computer and begin to look for the nicest words to deliver at least partly all those unique and unforgettable experiences to your readers. The power of the word is immense if you select the right one. But what a word can do is only unveil a mystery, outline the beauty, sketch a silhouette. And so I beg you - when you have read these words, go further and do not satisfy yourselves merely reading them. Words cannot equal what you will meet in the Gateway to Bohemia and be astonished by there. Pack your things and go there. Only then will you give my writing some sense.

Rostislav Křivánek

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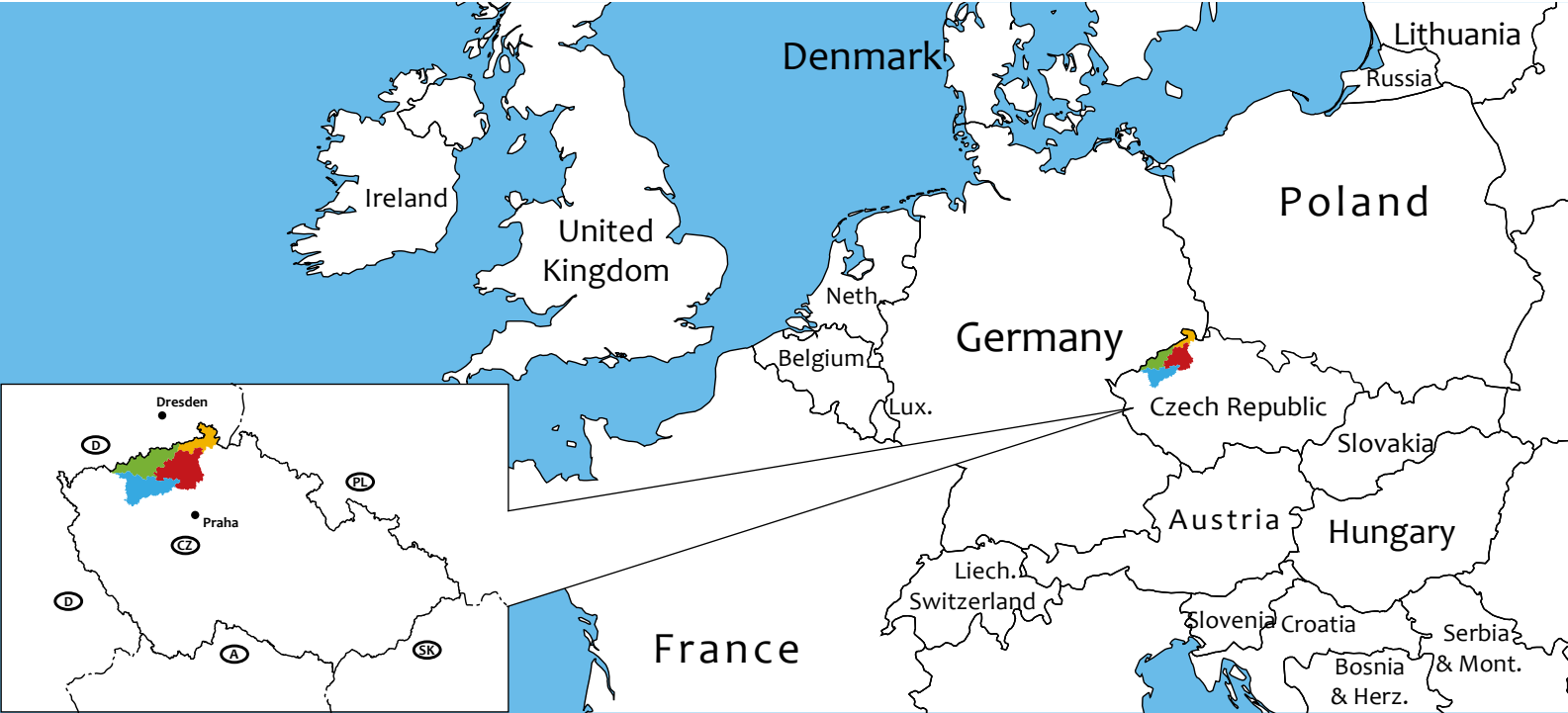
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Dear Readers!

The third is the best, I feel like writing. The third number of the Gateway magazine offers ever more new views of the wealth and variety of the Gateway to Bohemia, proving beyond all doubt that the Ústecký region really has a lot to offer even to the most demanding tourists, being at the same time a remarkable place to live. If you read the interview with the best Czech professional boxer, Lukáš Konečný, who has lived in Ústí nad Labem since eight years of age, you will understand that there is no point in succumbing to any prejudices, that you need to go there in order to understand why Ústí nad Labem equals beautiful nature and more. The Gateway will take you to all four regional destinations and very likely uncover for you unknown things, such as the minor sacral gemstones of Czech Switzerland, the newly set up Lužice connection path, forming a continuation of the legendary Blue mountain ridge path, the castles and chateaux of the Ore Mountains region, as well as the local magic and unique marshlands, the oldest English chateau park in the country, the youngest village museum in the open air in the Czech lands, mini breweries and interesting restaurants, observation towers, horse rides, the phenomenon of wind and water mills - indeed an opulent offer for this year. The dominant theme of this Gateway is represented by the four backbone cycle paths of the Ústecký region. The surroundings of three rivers – the Elbe, the Ploučnice and the Ohře – as well as the extremely long ridge of the Ore Mountains - represent unique terrains for cycling and are for the most part easily navigable thanks to the careful maintenance provided by the regional council of the Ústecký region. In addition, they are connected to the star-shaped structure of cycle paths across the Gateway to Bohemia and also to similar paths abroad. And so I wish you a good ride, my dear readers!

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Irresistible mystery of stone rows

We have somehow got used to understanding everything. If anything is unclear we simply put it in an internet search engine and become wise in a moment. But there are still a couple of questions without answers. These enigmas are mysterious, adventurous and non-transparently magical. On the one hand we are annoyed that we cannot understand them and on the other they irresistibly attract us for this very reason. The Kounov stone rows are certainly one of these enigmas.



IN THE NAME OF THE SUN

The centuries have obviously thoroughly affected the stone rows. Not only that the Plain is covered with forest today. The most important influence was caused by the fact that the unusual stones found in the locality attracted man to acquire them and use them to build whatever - from the Middle Ages to recent times. Therefore, only two and a half thousand stones have been left in the forest, arranged in rows up to 350 metres long, too dense to represent boundaries of 19th century agricultural fields, as one of the theories has it. All around and mainly underneath, exclusively marlite and sandstone. None of these stones comes from the locality, they had to be transported here, which was hard toil then. They are quartzite typical of the Bohemian Uplands, often weathered and rubbed down like the local "Sun Stones". The Sun looks like the central theme and the main reason for this megalithic structure. We only see sunshine rather as an attribute of nice weather today. We do not think about whether the burning life-giving star will appear in the sky tomorrow or not. The Earth rotates around the Sun so what is there to worry about! But two and a half thousand years ago this was not a thing that could just be assumed. The Sun died from the summer Solstice on. It needed to be adored, parted with, fires had to be set and navigation had to be built for the Sun to find its way back to the people again. As the winter Solstice approached, people were afraid that this time the Sun would not come back to them any more. So they felt they had to do all they could to give the Sun a reason to continue to give them life. From rituals to accurate instruments corresponding to the period to make sure the God of the Sun would really return.

TRACING THE CELTS

For nearly eighty years, scholars, archaeologists, historians as well as ufologists and psychotronics, have tried to clarify the purpose and origin of these two and a half thousand stones arranged into fourteen rows. In vain. There are obviously many theories trying to explain this but none of them is absolutely certain. And tell me - is there anything more attractive than that? Is there anything else that will so forcefully make you get up from your armchair and travel to the plateau called Plain since time immemorial, slowly rising at 526 m above sea level near the municipality of Kounov in the north-western corner of the Džbán nature reserve? When you arrive here and begin to slowly climb along the marlite quarry to the tree covered hilltop, not looking like a venue of mysterious events when seen from a distance, try to imagine that there is no forest here and the calendar has returned some two and a half millennia into the past. A remarkable geometric field of nearly eight thousand stones laid in the ground in rows oriented in the north-south direction, many hardly protruding from the ground, and others mightily pointing upwards, and even a tall and dignified menhir in the golden section of the field, will suddenly appear in front of you as you walk. From the place where the menhir is located (or from its top) you will see the largest stones - for example, those today called Gibbon and Pegas. They are exactly 365 megalithic yards apart. And we all know what that number means. The line of both stones is related to the orbit of the Sun at the time of the summer and the winter solstices. In addition, the Plain hillock lies in the line of other megalithic bodies (from the Hředla rings to the stone groups by Kluček), again related to the solstices. You may see a druid here, standing by the menhir and taking in solar as well as telluric, i.e. earthly energy, thus becoming a deliberate part of the universe. Just about a thousand metres from here you will see a Celtic fortified settlement. But this will all be just a vision, for even if we could really travel back in time and get to the period some six centuries before Christ, we would still understand nothing like a Celt appearing unexpectedly in our times.

A QUITE INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCE

To walk through the forest, to observe the rows of stones, to think about the theories of ufologists that this was the landing area for a group of UFOs, to consider the option of a Celtic race track, all that will occupy our minds for a little while only. The locality is strongly charged with energy even today. Even very positive healing effects have been reported here. Likewise there are reports of unpleasant feelings woken by the stones in some people. People say that strange noises can be heard here in the night. In short, if you walk around the stones for a while you may be sure something will happen inside you as well. Something unique, for every man is unique. And to find out what this will be may be a good reason for a trip to the forest outside Kounov. To wander around here is exciting - but you may as well trust in the kind care of the way marks and information panels of the educational path. In the Kounov "Three Linden Trees" house, where you can get to for example from the pilgrimage chapel of St. Vojtěch on the southern slope of the Plain, there is an exhibition on the stone rows where you can compare your own findings with all existing theories on the origins of the megaliths. And you need not stay in Kounov all the time - nearby Mutěnice offers the ruins of a mediaeval castle called Džbán, a remarkable pottery workshop which you can see if you book the visit in advance, and also a local brewery called "Below the Džbán" with a pleasant restaurant serving local beer brewed according to an original recipe, which will wash away the dust of the journey across centuries.



By Porcelain Gondola to the Ore Mountains Forest

TERESA SPA

In fact, this was a crazy idea. Within sight of Little Paris, the ParLOUR of Europe, that is, the spa town of Teplice, in the middle of the forests, which the spa guests of Teplice only visited for trips to the game parks, to build another spa right here. No wonder the owners of the Teplice spa, the Clary-Aldringen family, laughed at the idea. A flea wants to fight against an elephant... But a famous Czech balneologist, extremely enthusiastic about the local air, recognised already in the mid 19th century the spa potential of this corner of the Ore Mountains. He was the owner of the idea and - luckily for us - also the owner of the means to realise it. In short, Dr. Löschner met the businessman and factory owner Anton Tschinkel, who originally was only looking for a good piece of land here to build a sawmill to produce wooden barrels and containers for chicory, made in Lovosice by him. He then built the first spa operation in Dubí - Diana's spa. Soon after that, another spa operation was built here a little upstream of the Bystřice river - the Hydrotherapy Institute of Dr. A. Recher, a doctor working at Diana's spa who somewhat - in today's words, stole the know how. And even that was not enough. Where the local railway approaches Dubí, one of its builders, the engineer Thomas Nowak, began to build the third spa operation next to the Brecher Institute. The operation was called the Teresa Spa after the builder's wife and became a beautiful building in the fashionable Alpine style. And the Clary-Aldringens were not laughing any longer. On the contrary - they began to take steps to acquire the Dubí spa operations one by one. Their empire was preserved, even expanded. But this was all the same for the visitors from all over Europe. Especially when Teplice and Dubí were connected by a tramway line. Today the spa continues to serve its purpose, sharing its opulent houses with a Retirement Home. The air is crystal clear here again and the birds perform their concerts here better than orchestras once did at the proms.



“When you come to Dubí for the first time, you might be a little confused. At first sight you may think that the local artery is the road connecting Teplice and Cínovec. But when your own feet begin to tread the streets and the lanes of the town you will find out that the blue thread connecting the people living in this pleasant valley of the Ore Mountains and their lives is the Bystřice river rather than the road. You would look for a classical square here in vain. Once, far back, there were only woodcutters' settlements here, but as time passed a triple miracle of human resilience happened here.

CHURCH OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The biggest local sight is also connected with the name of the Clary-Aldringen family. When you see the front of the marble church and cannot drive away the intense audible hallucination, the splashing water of the Grand Canal and the songs of the gondoliers, do not be afraid you have lost your senses. You have not. You will be facing the most northerly Venetian building in the world. Literally Venetian. And that's the way it was. The black sheep of the family, the likeable and art loving but completely impractical Carlos Clary-Aldringen, who was not aware of the worth of money at all, collected building and sculptural elements. And as the family owned a palace in Venice, he focused on collecting items from that town. After his father's death he gained access to the family assets and before he was prevented from doing so, he spent a lot of them. In his defence it needs to be said that he did not spend the money on games and follies but completely invested them in church buildings. The most important of them was the church in Dubí. He had each brick, each marble block, the whole portals and reliefs transported by horse cart from Venice. He even invited a Venetian architect and Italian bricklayers to North Bohemia to build the miraculous church in front of the amazed eyes of the local population, with its front consisting of fifty-five red and white marble blocks, a beautiful portal, a rosette, a gallery of white marble statues and five decorative turrets. The front is nearly identical to the Venetian church Santa Maria dell'Orto. The church itself is built of aesthetic bricks, as is the grand bell tower by the northern wall of the church. The interior is fragile, filigreed and marble. In short, a Venetian illusion in the middle of the relentless conifers of the Ore Mountains slopes.

CHINA WITH BLUE BLOOD

The name Anton Tschinkel has already been mentioned. He settled in Dubí and in addition to his spa began to do business in the industrial sphere as well. He in particular built a teralite and siderolite factory. In the course of time this factory developed into the famous china factory of Dubí, a factory with a hundred and fifty year tradition, whose china has borne the same trademark for the whole hundred and fifty years - a three-point royal crown. Since the 1880s, the world famous “blue onion” china, the pattern exclusively connected with Meissen, and the only china pattern to have withstood all the caprices of time, began to be produced here under the only legal licence in the world. The pattern consists of Chinese and Japanese plant elements, dominated by the pomegranate, reminding 19th century Europeans of the onion, painted in cobalt under enamel. The history of siderolite, the “blue onion” china and other fragile porcelain beauties is presented today at the exhibition in the House of China with Blue Blood. Visiting the factory itself is also very interesting as you will be astonished by how powder and water are transformed into dreamily refined china ornaments. However, Dubí is not only the town, but also beautiful forests with many tourist paths, a pleasant educational path around the spa town, the highest golf course in the country on top of the nearby Cínovec mountain, and the Ore Mountains tourist artery nearby... simply put, the town of Dubí has a lot to be proud of.



Wonderful and Inconspicuous Monuments of Human Faith and Hope

“Bohemian Switzerland stretches to the Šluknov Promontory, the fairy-tale land of sandstone fantasies, continuing into gloomy landscape of legends. In the past this was an island of Catholic faith surrounded on all sides by protestant towns and villages. No wonder then that there are so many Stations of the Cross here, the most northerly Loretan chapel in the country, and so much minor evidence of faith and respect for God scattered around in the fields, meadows, forests and rocks.”

SMALL PEARLS SCATTERED AROUND THE LANDSCAPE

To find all the twenty-seven minor sacral monuments is not difficult thanks to the map available, but it needs time. They are scattered around the landscape and therefore a plan of the journey may help. Above Krásná Lípa in the settlement of Kamenná Horka you will be amazed by the unique Kögler Cross, looking to the north, the south, the east and the west. In the forests above Česká Kamenice you will

be surprised and silenced by the inconspicuous forest path taking you to the altar of the Bohemian Brethren, a place of enchanting beauty that will win your heart. In the middle of the forest you will find panels with images of the Stations of the Cross, statues and a stone altar. This is where those whose faith was not at the time tolerated hid. In Dolní Chříbská you will be amazed by the beautiful alcove chapel with its painting of the Visitation, in the deep valley by Studený you will find several sacral gemstones in one place, headed by the Marian chapel, painted crosses with numerous suspended accessories for decoration, simple but artistically made crosses with paintings on sheet metal, stone steles, and crucifixion columns. And you may be warmed by the knowledge that they are mainly the works of our contemporaries - stone masons, sculptors and painters, who have made excellent copies, often on the basis of nearly destroyed or completely missing originals. The landscape has been revived. And continues to boast of its gemstones. Just ask in any of the villages - they will send you to a relief, cross or chapel dotted everywhere - even in excess of the twenty-seven selected. Action has provoked reaction and the municipalities are now trying to restore hundreds of other sacral monuments.



WHAT SURVIVES IN US

The Ústecký region is said to be a completely non-religious region. But when the Bohemian Switzerland society for public benefit managed to repair the twenty-seven selected small sacral monuments, these crosses, chapels, alcove and rock chapels were decorated with flowers overnight and the flowers have been renewed since. Some respect and humbleness has survived in us and that is good. Every landscape has its own cultural memory, bearing the impressions of human destinies, human hope, faith and longing. Sacral monuments, in addition to folk architecture, are the brightest gemstones of this picturesque and highly visited tourist region. Whenever you return here you will find something to surprise you. If for example you visit the Rumburk lorette, which we have already mentioned in the Gateway, you will be surprised, in addition to the carefully reconstructed cloister, the unique Holy Steps and Holy Hut, by the new upstairs exhibition in the entrance wing introducing the church art of the Šluknov region. You will learn a lot about the destroyed local churches and Stations of the Cross, you will see the treasury, paintings and sculptures and hear music by local Baroque composers. From there you can set off on trips to the countryside with your brain packed with information and your heart beating with expectation.



FOURTEEN CONTEMPLATIONS ABOUT THE HUMAN RACE

You can spice up your trip by visiting churches - for example, in Růžová, Chříbská, Krásná Lípa, Děčín, Staré Křečany, Mikulášovice or the beautiful pilgrimage chapel of the Birth of the Virgin Mary in Česká Kamenice. Your meaningful journey can be completed with a quiet walk along the fourteen(!) Stations of the Cross. To build a Station of the Cross was a prestigious and humble act for our ancestors. We should feel the duty to prevent these symbolic structures, reminding us of the last journey of Jesus Christ in this world, from being buried in piles of debris or, even worse, in underpinnings of garden fences, whatever we ourselves believe in. This is being managed with alternating success. One of the Stations of the Cross, in Fukov, was destroyed together with the village in the course of the merry building of the new order in 1960, and only negligible traces of it have been left. The Station of the cross on Jáchym was devastated at the same time, only the traces of it are more visible. The same fate was met by the Station of the Cross in Krásná Lípa, now waiting in agony for an act of human mercy. Other Stations of the Cross are preserved in a very representative and often even conserved form - for example, the oldest one - in Šluknov - or the most frequently visited one - in Jiřetín. Where to go then? Well, let us take it from south to north: Jiřetín below Jedlová, Krásná Lípa, Varnsdorf, Rumburk, Brtníky, Staré Křečany, Jiřikov, Vilémov, Velký Šenov, Království, Šluknov, Annaberg, Jáchym, Fukov. It is good to know that Stations of the Cross usually consist of fourteen stops with standard themes telling the story of Jesus from his conviction to crucifixion, with Jesus' tomb being the theme of the last stop. It is also good to know that Stations of the Cross may sometimes be completed with other structures, mainly the Gethsemane Garden with statues of resting apostles, but also fountains and artificial caves - these are the so called passion ways. And it is then up to every pilgrim what he or she takes from the journey, how strongly he or she is impressed by the stops and what the trees will tell, planted together with the structures, for trees are witnesses of our deeds.



Restored Beauty of Royal Litoměřice

“Visiting this city is always enchanting. Its very first touch will delight you – whether you arrive from the hills, for example Máchův Radobýl, or from the plain stretching from Hazmburk, or by boat along the Elbe or the Ohře, you will always be overwhelmed by the white beauties overlooking the river, fragile and powerful, subtle and astonishing... in short, Litoměřice is a shining pearl of the Bohemian Upland.”

AN ENCHANTING TRIP ALONG THE SURFACE

This wonderful place on the banks of the Big River simply could not have been left unsettled from time immemorial. Once in the past the first settlers were probably represented by people around a certain Lutomír – the Lutomirics. Hence the name of the settlement, which became a royal town in the early 13th century. Historic Litoměřice offers a lot of remarkable sights. This, one of the oldest and most beautiful Czech towns, is situated at the confluence of the Elbe and Ohře rivers. The memorandum of the local chapterhouse is the oldest written document of its kind in the Czech lands – it dates back to 1057! In the past twenty years the town has very loudly announced its history: memorial buildings, churches, town walls, all as if they had emerged from the depths and acquired their past beauty. You can walk here along the remarkably well preserved fortifications of the town walls, wander along narrow mediaeval lanes, discover the fragile beauty of churches, experience the peaceful and dignified atmosphere of Cathedral hill with the bishops' palace, climb up the tower of St. Stephen's cathedral or the monumental chalice-shaped observation tower to see the town, set in the landscape of the strange and picturesque hills of the Bohemian Upland, as if lying in the palm of your hand, then go back down and walk along the sunlit main square lined with burgher houses, including Gothic houses, some of the earliest residential houses in the country, admire the fountains, statues, decorative architectural elements, the Baroque plague column, visit the museum or one of the galleries, or bravely descend deep underground to the labyrinth of corridors connecting historic cellars...

MYSTERIOUS TRIP TO THE UNDERGROUND

You cannot see everything at the same time. Let us then start from the foundations and descend to the underground. The historic catacombs under Litoměřice are some of the largest in Bohemia – they snaked for several dozen kilometres in the Middle Ages. Today only some four hundred metres are accessible to the public but the visit is certainly worth it, for the lapidarium of the regional museum is located here. A completely novel experience is offered by the underground exhibition “The Richard Mine in Transformations in Time”. The exhibition was opened under the building of the town hall and is operated by the local well-equipped information centre. You will be offered a unique experience in the form of a guided visit to the Richard mine, inaccessible to the public. The actual Richard mine is situated under Bídnice hill some four kilometres away. The varied and dramatic history of the mine certainly deserves to be exhibited – eighty metres of underground corridors will tell you about lime mining, about the underground Nazi factory where around 4500 prisoners died in inhumane conditions at the end of the war, as well as about the present radioactive waste repository located there.



TOWN SURROUNDINGS AND EDUCATIONAL AND WINE PATHS

Litoměřice offers a pleasant interface with the past but its background is completely contemporary. There are several restaurants and wine cellars, much frequented by visitors and locals, a remarkable mini brewery called the Swan (see below), comfortable hotels, and an interesting and varied range of cultural events. Litoměřice is also a place with a thousand years of viticulture tradition: in the Middle Ages its four hundred hectares of vineyards made it the second largest wine town in Bohemia, after Mother Prague. That is why it would be unwise not to taste the local nectar and not to learn about its history and present. The best place to do this is the Gothic castle, with its architecturally interesting completely contemporary interior. On the top floor you will find a unique exhibition on Czech viticulture. The exhibition is unique with its content as well as its form - it is interactive and entertaining, you will not only look and listen but also try out a lot of things, touch and play. The exhibition will show you the history and present of Czech viticulture and - of course - will invite you to taste the famous Litoměřice wine varieties.



You can do the same by visiting the individual wine makers in the surroundings of the town, accessible via an educational wine path. And if that is not enough, you can spend many days making trips to the surroundings of the town, especially to the peaks of the nearby hills, which offer breathtaking views far over the Bohemian landscape. Apart from all that, being in Litoměřice and not seeing the nearby chateau of Ploskovice, which looks like a fairy-tale chateau and which crowns a lovely park, would be an unforgivable sin. A brand new experience is represented by the educational path Hlinná – Kamýk, easily accessible on foot as well as by bike, and less than twelve kilometres long. Its information panels will introduce to you Bare Hill, the Fortified Settlement, Plešivec Hill and the Kamýk castle ruins, the geological, historic and natural science wealth of this part of the Bohemian Uplands. And all that before you even climb Radobýl Mountain, visit the Garden of Bohemia and the Litoměřice Wine Harvest, or take a ride on the tourist steamer Porta Bohemica along the Elbe river... Litoměřice simply demands your attention, and offers a lot in return.

Cover the Ore Mountains artery by bicycle or on foot

A RATHER LAZY BEGINNING

The Ore Mountains Artery is one of the longest tourist routes in the country. It crosses two regions, beginning in Cheb and ending in Děčín, where it connects to another artery, this time the Elbe cycle path. If you decide to cover the whole of it, you will have to pedal or walk nearly 250 km. This time we will cover the part of the artery situated in the territory of the Gateway to Bohemia, as people have nicely called the Ústecký Region for some years now. And we will be a bit lazy. Real cycling tourists will probably curl their lips and look disapprovingly at how we will give up climbing the Ore Mountains hills, but we want this route to be enjoyed by everybody, not only those with thousands of covered kilometres on bike whose calves look as if woven of steel ropes. The key to our laziness is represented by two funicular railways. The first, situated on the very boundary of the region, connects the town of Loučná below Klínovec and the top of the highest mountain in the Ore Mountains range. The funicular will take you up to a height of 1244 metres, and not only you but also your bicycle or pram with your baby. From there you can spend long hours descending to the Skalka water reservoir in Cheb, but we will choose to walk along the range towards the north-east. The vertical climb is minimal, the good mountain range path allows you to swallow kilometres without great effort and to be able to look around, sometimes taking a little detour along an educational path, to a vista or another attractive target. And there are a lot of them...before we briefly look at them one by one, let us take a look at the second funicular railway. You can also start your travels across the Ore Mountains from the Krupka plains on the famous Gnat Tower. You and your bicycle can get up there via an absolutely extraordinary funicular - the longest funicular without an interim stop in the whole of Bohemia, nearly two and a half kilometres long with a vertical climb of nearly five hundred metres.



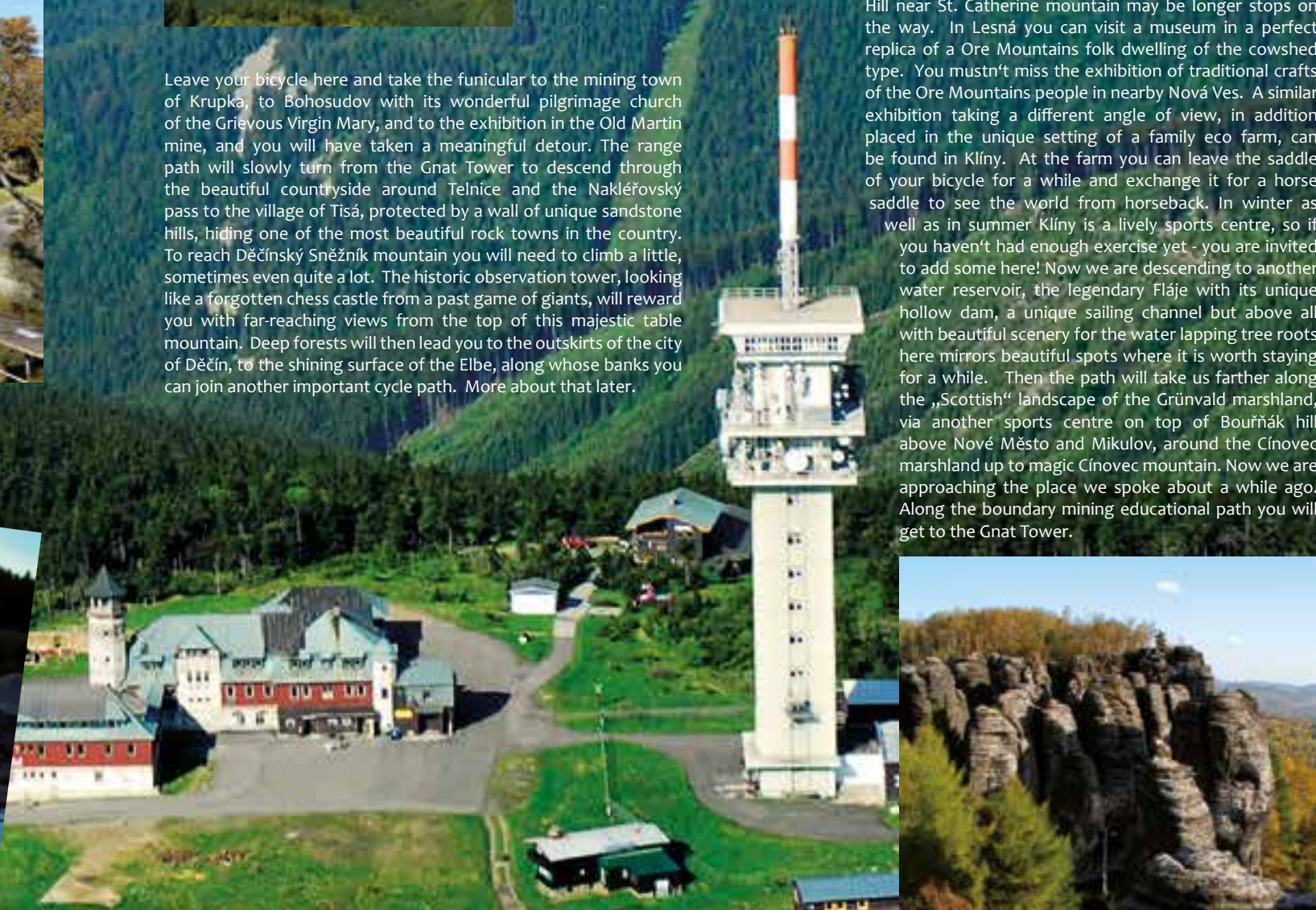
Leave your bicycle here and take the funicular to the mining town of Krupka, to Bohosudov with its wonderful pilgrimage church of the Grievous Virgin Mary, and to the exhibition in the Old Martin mine, and you will have taken a meaningful detour. The range path will slowly turn from the Gnat Tower to descend through the beautiful countryside around Telnice and the Nakléřovský pass to the village of Tisá, protected by a wall of unique sandstone hills, hiding one of the most beautiful rock towns in the country. To reach Děčínský Sněžník mountain you will need to climb a little, sometimes even quite a lot. The historic observation tower, looking like a forgotten chess castle from a past game of giants, will reward you with far-reaching views from the top of this majestic table mountain. Deep forests will then lead you to the outskirts of the city of Děčín, to the shining surface of the Elbe, along whose banks you can join another important cycle path. More about that later.

The continuous chain of forest covered hills, long slopes, undulating meadows, mysterious marshes, charming mountain villages, breathtaking views, all these are the characteristics of the Ore Mountains, a peculiar, raw as well as endlessly picturesque mountain range on the north-western boundary of Bohemia. And as this number of the Gateway focuses on the backbone cycle paths of the Ústecký region, let us blow up the tyres, tighten the chain and set off for the Ore Mountains before the hilltops are covered with snow.

ALONG THE MOUNTAIN RANGE TO ROUGH AND BENIGN BEAUTY

Let us start our bicycle ride at the top of Klínovec hill this time! Whichever place we will emphasize, it will be unjust to those we will not mention, for this is a top flight cycling treat. The nature is rough but so beautiful that you will forget the effort of pedalling. See for example Měděnec hill shining with all the shades of green and brown, wander past the stone sphinxes or descend underground to the historic mine of the Helping Virgin Mary. Then there is the Přísečnice water reservoir with its cobalt surface sometimes calm, sometimes whipped up by the wind, squeezed between the plateau meadows and deep forests resisting the caprices of the weather. The wonderful, picturesque and depressing Novodomské marshland, to which you can detour on

St. Sebastian mountain, or the observation tower on Rose Hill near St. Catherine mountain may be longer stops on the way. In Lesná you can visit a museum in a perfect replica of a Ore Mountains folk dwelling of the cowshed type. You mustn't miss the exhibition of traditional crafts of the Ore Mountains people in nearby Nová Ves. A similar exhibition taking a different angle of view, in addition placed in the unique setting of a family eco farm, can be found in Klíny. At the farm you can leave the saddle of your bicycle for a while and exchange it for a horse saddle to see the world from horseback. In winter as well as in summer Klíny is a lively sports centre, so if you haven't had enough exercise yet - you are invited to add some here! Now we are descending to another water reservoir, the legendary Fláje with its unique hollow dam, a unique sailing channel but above all with beautiful scenery for the water lapping tree roots here mirrors beautiful spots where it is worth staying for a while. Then the path will take us farther along the „Scottish“ landscape of the Grünvald marshland, via another sports centre on top of Bouřňák hill above Nové Město and Mikulov, around the Cínovec marshland up to magic Cínovec mountain. Now we are approaching the place we spoke about a while ago. Along the boundary mining educational path you will get to the Gnat Tower.



On a dragon's back to the past of the Earth

It has been many hundred years since man began to burrow inside the Earth to take incredible treasures out. In ancient times man also took coal from there but real progress in the mining of this carbon treasure with usable heating capacity only came in the 18th century, eventually launching the industrial revolution, which continues to the present. Man decided to sink his teeth into the landscape, first with bare hands and later with more and more refined tools, and the landscape succumbed to his will. And the landscape changed. And man paid for his increasing needs. Fields, meadows, forests and villages changed into vast wastelands. Then man realized what he had done and began to return these wastelands to life. This is an exciting story and you can live it personally, be there, return in time and peep into the future as well.

SAFARI AMONG DINOSAURS

An ordinary truck with windows and twenty seats turned into a vehicle for travelling in time. You will get aboard together with your co-wanderers in time and soon enter a landscape looking like another planet or a strange type of desert in a large rift valley. Most Coal Safari In other words, you will be taken to the realm of surface mines, down holes up to two hundred metres deep. You will be surrounded by chiselled walls which serve as textbooks of geology, showing the history of the Earth's formation layer by layer. The hundreds of holes in them were made not by human technology but by riparia, a bird that immediately adapted to the new face of the landscape and began to build thousands of nests in the giant bank. And before the first dinosaurs appear you will be surprised by a herd of moufflons on a waste rock pile who quickly got used to the conditions, understanding that the local dinosaurs were coal eaters and running carelessly between them.

And when you hold your breath upon seeing in the distance a little Baroque box, the Jezeří chateau, hidden on the edge of a mountain slope forest, you will suddenly see the first giant reptiles, the solitaires of the mining technology, the giant excavators for moving earth and caterpillar excavators. Some of them are quite unique and can graze the area of a football pitch down to a depth of five metres in a single shift. Others are able to swallow sixty tonnes of coal per hour. And now please imagine your time machine moving between these giants in full operation. Of course you will leave your parent ship from time to time to take a couple of uncertain steps on the surface of the unknown planet, to take samples (really, a piece of coal taken with your own hand is the most precious souvenir), to stop for a while by the feet of these sophisticated eaters and experience the feeling Gulliver had in the kingdom of giants. When you watch a sauropod, eating the earth of the slope with its bucket teeth, you will be amazed by the power of human intellect. How can such a small being invent something so big and make it move? You will not experience anything like this elsewhere. And then the whirl of time will begin to turn around you and you will fly to the recent past, to the present and even into the future, to see with your mouth open in surprise the triumphs of the local revitalizers for as is well known, Czech recultivation has led attempts around world to restore the surface of mines to the original appearance of the landscape. And the results are overwhelming – a pleasant race course with horses galloping around, a golf course where nothing that grows is older than twenty years with swishing balls and booming drivers, an artificial lake 75 metres deep on the site of the former Ležáky mine hole attracting you to go swimming and sailing. The slopes around Most are covered in vineyards with ripening grapes ready to be turned into the delicious and heady beverage. No wonder you have to book this view well in advance! You know, everybody wants to travel in time today.



A FAIRY-TALE TRIP TO A DRAGON'S CAVE

Do not forget to take children on the second trip, they will be amazed. Hardly anybody knows that in Březno, between Chomutov and Kadaň and within sight of the Nechranice water reservoir, there is a whole herd of fairy-tale figures living here in harmony with the locals. Severus Dragon is the biggest and the most powerful of them all. As the tale goes (get used to the fairy-tale rules that apply here), his father once tyrannized the surroundings until the brave knight Betula overcame him, making him the protector of Březno. The son took after his father a little, and once grown up he began to swallow the land mercilessly, looking like he was ready to swallow the whole Březno like a berry. Betula the knight had to return again to restore the dragon to its senses. Today Severus is a nice little dragon, loved by children, for whom it is all the same that he is a veteran giant KU 800 excavator parked on the premises of North Bohemian Mines, for the miners kindly let the children and their parents see him. Severus is as high as the Petřín observation tower and his weight equals seventeen loaded freight planes, so indeed he is a bit of a dragon. Here in the dragon's cave children will find a lot of fairy-tale scenes and props, try out a lot of that stuff and begin to fulfil fairy-tale tasks. They will soon take them to the Dragon Path around the village. And the trip will be really extraordinary, for there you will meet the already

known Betula the knight, who even has a life-sized wooden statue here, the mine dwarf, the fireman able to open the rocks and paint the twilight sky red, the blue nightingale, the greatest friend of Severus the dragon, the church angels Peter and Paul, taking care that the tourists do not lose their way, and singing lullabies to the children of Březno in the evening, the terribly nice highwayman Bu-bu-bic living in the crown of an ancient oak, and by the pond the goodhearted waterman with his dancing fairy. And when you successfully finish this trip you will receive a toy Severus dragon at the Březno information centre. It is therefore clear that to deprive children of something like this would be really cruel. Bring them here in spring at the time of the Dragon Wakening from Winter Sleep ceremony, with competitions, games and a lot of food to give them a real experience! Fairly speaking, the Dragon Path is also trodden by lots of adults who do not have any children with them. You know, Březno is really charming and full of interesting sights, from the gallery of wooden statues and the remarkable Baroque church of St. Peter and Paul, one of the most precious monuments of the Chomutovsko region, probably designed by the congenial mind of Kilian Ignace Dientzenhofer, to the nearby Nechranice water reservoir, a paradise for water sports and lazy relaxation.



The most beautiful vistas and the haunted mill

Bohemian Switzerland is like an octopus, with its three hearts. One is Pravčice Gate, the second the Kamenice gorges and the last is Jetřichovice village. And until you have seen these three places you cannot say you have been to Bohemian Switzerland and that you know it. The first two hearts have already been mentioned earlier in the Gateway. Now we will visit Jetřichovice together.

WITH DWARFS TO DEVIL'S MILL

A whole book could easily be written about the surroundings of Jetřichovice. These two pages do not allow for anything more than simplification and make me deprive you of what is better to see with your own eyes and tread with your own feet anyway. And so just a couple of suggestions and passing impressions. Falkenstein will reward you for the hard climb with the stony remains of this once proud castle, still occupied at the beginning of the 17th century. When the wind drives a team of heavy clouds over the landscape, this place is lent a beautifully gloomy and rather romantic atmosphere. Dwarf Rock is a triumph of human creativeness. Ernst Vater once cut reliefs of dwarfs in the rock in a narrow rock fissure. You can see even today that they used to be beautifully coloured. If you have children, a visit here is a must but even you deserve this lovely sight. Cross Hill is near here, overlooking the village of Rynartice. If you climb up to the mighty cross which gave the hill its name, you will discover beautiful vistas loved by photographers. You will certainly meet a couple of them here at sunrise. I do not want to be rude to them but anybody can manage to take a nice picture from here. You can either return via a stony path cut into the massif or a few dozen metres below it along either riverbank of the Chřibská Kamenice, forming one of the most attractive and beautiful valleys of Bohemian Switzerland - Pavlino valley.

What you should not miss at all is a trip to Dolský mill in the valley of probably the most beautiful stream of the wide surroundings, Jetřichovická Bělá. The crystal clear water washes the waves of the green hair of fairies, called Water crowfoots by botanists. Close to the place where the majestic Royal Spruce overlooks the Kamenice confluence are the romantic ruins of Dolský mill. Film makers love it, and classics like The Haughty Princess, Lost Prince, Hell with Princess, etc. were shot here. But what is far more important is that this place is also loved by people who do not make films but whose visits support the mill considerably. Volunteers led by the good soul of the place, the writer Natalie Belisová, patiently, carefully and diligently repair everything that can be repaired, returning after every flood and rebuilding what they had completed before. Nobody will build a monument to commemorate them but they certainly deserve one. So please remember them when you arrive here and enjoy the unique nature of the place, with such a strong genius loci that it is hard to leave.

LET YOUR EYES FLOAT

Although the village itself is picturesque, full of remarkable achievements of folk architecture, its real fame and what attracts tourists comes from its unique surroundings. The range of attractive destinations here is really opulent. See for yourselves: Jetřichovice vistas, Dolský mill, Pavlino valley, Dwarf rock, the Falkenstein castle ruins, a stone path, Cross hill..., all this within four kilometres' walking distance of Jetřichovice! You will certainly not be making a mistake if you decide to see everything from a bird's eye perspective first. You will have to take an impressively intense but pleasantly short climb around the scorched scene of Raven Hill, which was nearly completely burnt eight years ago. Today you can see how nature restores its power over places transformed by the elements into a burnt cemetery full of tree stumps. Life is slowly returning here, as mother nature is a calm, powerful and patient healer. Along meandering paths and steps cut into stone you will reach the first vista, climb a rock crowned with an arbour, lean against the railing and let your eyes travel over the countryside. From Mary's rock (named after princess Mary Kinska) you will see the whole of Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland and much more. The Saxon table mountains, the perfect cone of Růžovský hill, Jedlová, Studenec, the Ore Mountains, and the Bohemian Uplands in the background. If you want advice, come here and enjoy the sunset at Mary's vista – that is a five-star treat. You will not forget the view as long as you live. The route to the remaining two vistas goes along the ridge around the Tetřevna stratum cave called the Balzer military camp.

Vilemína wall is named after another princess of the Kinský family. This is a rock face accessible from a sandstone massif along a small bridge. Exquisite views obviously continue to be offered here. You will climb to the third vista, Rudolf's Stone (named after a Kinský prince), along an idyllic path through foxglove fields and silver beech forests if you come in summer. But know that the real connoisseur comes when Master Autumn paints its loveliest pictures here. Rudolf's Stone itself will not yield to you so easily – it is a real ascent made easier by steps, galleries and railings. The vista successfully competes with Mary's Rock and if you believe the experienced, get up early in the morning and watch the rising sun from here, burning through the celluloid horizon and flooding the landscape with its golden light in one broad sweep of a brush. Inexpressible. You will then descend to Jetřichovice along a pleasant path to complete the eight-kilometre circuit, which can obviously also be walked in the opposite direction. Always bringing an impression as deep as the sea.



Pedal along the Elbe



The third number of the Gateway has a central theme-cycle paths. There are many in the Ústecký region, but four of them are backbone paths. We will go down all of them in our minds without even touching the pedals of our bicycles. But be reassured that a real ride is much more enchanting. A moment ago we started with the Ore Mountains artery and now we will continue with the Ohře and the Ploučnice. But the principal and probably most beautiful one is the Elbe cycle path. As the Elbe river is a donor of the life-giving liquid, beautifully meandering through the landscape like a silver thread, its banks form a natural cyclist-friendly terrain for wandering. You can wander on foot, with a pram, a considerable part also being suitable for inline skaters and hand bikers, but this route is simply the most beautiful from the bike saddle.

THROUGH THE DEEPEST CANYON AS FAR AS BELOW VĚTRUŠE

Let us start upstream of the Elbe this time. The terrain is very friendly for recreational tourists and families with children. Let us therefore virtually mount a bicycle, ideally a trekking bike, in Saxon Schmilca or even farther away in Bad Schandau, a beautiful and idyllic resort with lots to do and see, including an interactive exhibition of the Saxon Switzerland National Park Centre with the local "Eiffel Tower" with a lift to the rock tops, a centre of water entertainment, Toscana Terme, and the option of a unique trip by tram among the rocks. Why in Saxony? For the frontiers are only imaginary here and nature offers an unrivalled whole that is most beautiful between Bad Schandau and Děčín. At the frontier you will pass the lowest elevation above sea level in Bohemia - the sea only 128 metres below. The whole ride offers a view of the deepest sandstone canyon in Europe, lined with up to 250 m high rock walls, needles and other strangely shaped rocks. In Hřensko you will come across the first delusive arrows luring you on detours. If you have time, it would be foolish to miss taking a walk into the depths of Bohemian Switzerland, an astonishing landscape of rocks, forests, meadows, valleys and rural architecture. This time we will resist the temptation and continue through the picturesque rocks, passing numerous remarkable sights. For example, in Dolní Žleb you may stop at the Hilleho cross with its beautiful painting of Christ (and again it would be beautiful to take the steep path paved with huge sandstone stones to the forests around Maxičky) and you must certainly bow in front of the patron saint of boatmen, St. Vojtěch, and not be surprised when you see the crews of passing freight ships throwing small change into the river - to drive away bad luck from their ships.



Then you will see the reloading port at Loubí, the stone arbour above the river and a high pointing Kvádrberk with Děčín waiting behind the river meander. Here you will certainly forget time completely when you walk down the Baroque Long Ride to the chateau, take the tour around it, walk around the Rose Garden and the newly opened South Gardens, and perhaps to the opposite bank, where behind the white „Heaven“, a chateau in the Shepherds' Wall, there is a very interesting zoological garden (continuing farther to the west you can connect in Tisá to the Ore Mountains artery). By a stone bridge you will notice a detour to the Ploučnice cycle path (read about it elsewhere in this document) and continue pedalling along the right Elbe riverbank around the Nebočadský luh peninsula, a natural monument and habitat of birds and beavers, via Těchlovice to Malé Březno, where you will not be able to resist a detour to nearby Zubrnice (although a little uphill), to see the wonderful open air museum and historic railway. Another stop is in Velké Březno with its cosy historic Tivoli, a brewery (which you may enjoy visiting) and the Chotkovský chateau surrounded by an English park. Around the late Gothic church of St. Jacob the Great in Svádov you will already be approaching Ústí nad Labem. And like on the whole ride from Děčín when you enjoyed views of the dignified Beech Mountain, now you will be astonished by the shining recreational chateau of Větruše on the opposite bank (you can reach it by a funicular railway) viewed through the cables of the architecturally unique Marian Bridge. It would be a mistake to miss the Gothic Assumption church with the fourth most leaning tower in Europe, the zoological garden situated on a steep slope, and the excellent mini brewery Na Rychtě.



THROUGH PORTA BOHEMICA TO THE REGION OF WINE

The regional capital will part with you with the spectacular Střekov castle which you can visit and from which you may take a look around. Around the only timber framed bell tower in Bohemia by Církvice church you will quickly approach the Porta Bohemica, the pearl of the Bohemian Uplands, where the meandering Elbe has created a valley pleasing to the eye, best seen from Kalvaria hill, from the three crosses visible from a distance. A large vertical climb to overcome, but worth it. Whoever does not want to take on the ascent may continue pedalling by the river to Velké Žernosky, where they will see the chateau wine cellars cut into the rock and vineyards ascending the slopes along both banks of the Big River. And now we get to Litoměřice. A beautiful town to be explored in all points, to the Church Hill, to the square, to the town hall tower, to the gallery, to the exhibition of viticulture in the Gothic castle, to the Swan brewery where you will taste local beer hot like horse radish, maybe detouring to nearby Ploskovic to the fairy-tale chateau and then continuing on again. Now we will betray the Elbe for a while and head towards Terezín by the Ohře river mouth (see the chapter on the Ohře cycle path), to humbly return to the Elbe river with a thorn in the heart left by this fortified place and its tragic history. Around the Dientzenhofer Baroque church of St. Vojtěch in Počaply, with a visit to the Painted Egg Gallery in Libotenice, you will slowly pass the wide Elbe canyon with constant views of the picturesque hills of the Bohemian Uplands with the beautifully unconquerable silhouette of Hazmburk castle as far as Roudnice nad Labem. Here you must visit the Lobkowitz chateau wine cellars, the chateau itself with its Romanesque castle, the church of the Birth of the Virgin Mary, the Gallery of Modern Art and certainly legendary Říp mountain. After passing Račice, where you can take a pleasant swim in the rowers' channel, the cycle path leaves the Ústecký region. We have pedalled for a beautiful hundred kilometres - and our legs do not hurt at all.



www.ceskestredohori.info, www.labska-stezka.cz

Landscape of mills

There used to be long periods when people were completely dependent on flour as the staple of their diet. They grew grain and to make it digestible they had it milled at specific plants built exclusively for that purpose. Visits to a mill were an inseparable part of life in the Middle Ages and in many places still at the beginning of the last century. Mills were important and generally respected structures, and millers were honoured and respected too. Small, once peasant mills are now romantic adornments of the landscape, serving as hotels and pensions, recreational cottages or exhibition places of the milling trade. But they are beautiful nevertheless. There are many mills in the Gate to Bohemia.



THE MILL WHEEL IS TURNING IN THE MILL

Water mill. This term usually evokes a picture of an idyllic, often very romantic, but always picturesque corner of land, a little fairy-tale, a little mysterious. The same is true of one of the nicest valleys of the Bohemian Uplands - the Oparenské valley. Here, within sight of the majestic Lovoš, on the Milešovský stream bank, there used to stand several mills. Some are ruined today, others transformed into camps for children or recreational summer houses. You will certainly stop at the Černodolský mill with its welcoming guesthouse and restaurant, and at the Oparenský mill, a sensitively reconstructed group of mill buildings used as a centre for environmental education and as a tourist base of the Association of Tourist Youth Clubs in the Czech Republic, where you can find accommodation in a very authentic environment. The best preserved water mill can be seen in Zubrnice. Týniště Mill, building number 27, is part of the local open air museum, rescued in 1976 and reconstructed three years later. Today you can get acquainted here with the history of a small peasant mill, milling grain with the help of the customer himself. But this is not the only local mill. The Luční potok stream valley included over twenty mills, with a distance of three hundred metres between each - the densest water mill collection in Central Europe. Most mills have not survived, but local enthusiasts are preserving four more and soon a mill educational path will be built in Zubrnice interconnecting all five mills. After passing the last water mill you will have to enter the deep gorge of the Kamenice river near Jetřichovice. The tourist loved romantic ruins you read about a couple of moments ago used to be a mill way back in the 16th century, later extended with other buildings - a distillery and a residential house, occasionally used as a bakery. Today only the wind tells its story here but the place is very beautiful nevertheless.



WIND IN THE SAILS

Windmill. This term will reliably evoke the image of the Dutch lowlands or a strangely clad old man on a slim horse with a spear militantly pointed at the windmill sails. But you are not likely to connect this term with the Bohemian landscape or admit that this structure used to be common in the Czech lands. But this is still true in Bohemian Switzerland and in the Šluknov region. These regions have the largest number of windmills in the country. They number ten. All are of the Dutch type, most of them built around 1850. Only the foundations have been preserved of the Mikulášovice mill but the rest are very remarkable. The mills of Arnoltice in the middle of the village, in Huntřfov and on František Hill, in Janov by the village pond and in Varnsdorf in a peaceful residential quarter, are used for recreational purposes today. In Růžová village, on Petřín hill, there is a windmill with a five-armed wind wheel which does not work any longer, but forming an attractive decoration for the pension the mill was turned into in the nineteen-sixties. By the way, the present owner bought it then as a ruin for 730 crowns. There are two most remarkable mills, with completely different histories, evoking completely different feelings if you stand in front of them. One of them, in Rumburk on Watchtower hill, does not look like a windmill at all. The building was erected in 1722 as a chapel consecrated to St. John the Baptist. In the context of the Josephine reforms it was deconsecrated and sold and the new owner, a linen trader called Fidelis Salomon, had it rebuilt as a windmill. After his death the mill was turned into an inn before being sold in 1842 to the weaver Artl and rebuilt as a chapel again. In 1902 a Station of the Cross was built in front of the chapel. After the war the chapel faced



decay but in 1959 it was purchased by the East Christian church, which has been taking care of it since. Inside there is a remarkable iconostasis and a typical wall decoration. An interesting history, don't you think? The windmill by Horní Podluží is the completely opposite case. This is the best preserved windmill in the country. It used to stand in the middle of Lichtenberg village. After the war the whole village was demolished. In the early fifties the mill was reconstructed, but lacking subsequent care the building decayed. For a while it served as a cottage and then a refuge for tourists. In the nineties the mill was passed from hand to hand, but for the last couple of years it luckily found an enlightened owner who decided to rescue and restore the operation of the building. Thus the mill not only has a functional five-sail wheel but works as a mill again, for all the technology inside it was successfully reconstructed. In addition most of the preserved original components are used, which makes the Lichtenberg mill a rarity. There are other windmills outside the Děčín region as well. if you drive along the motorway from Prague to Lovosice you cannot overlook the attractive ruins of the former windmill called Windsor, rebuilt in the neo-Gothic „castle“ style, and in Donín u Loun you will be surprised by a nearly fifteen-metre tall five-storey family house rebuilt from another windmill.

Take your Children on a Horse Ride

Some people say that the world is most beautiful when seen from horseback.

Although children probably do not know this saying, they are unconsciously attracted by horses anyway. Especially girls at a certain age (from four to a hundred) are obsessed by these sophisticated, beautiful and very social animals. Ranches and farms where horses not only live, graze and run around but where they can also be ridden, are increasing in numbers and the Gate to Bohemia is no exception. We have selected three focusing on children. Once we will visit the heart of Bohemian Switzerland and twice the Bohemian Uplands for a horse farm and a ride.



ZABABEČ FARM

This cosy guesthouse surrounded by stables can be found in the hills above Litoměřice, by the pleasant little town of Třebušín, full of beautiful examples of rural architecture. When you feel the path cannot continue any further you will have arrived at your destination. Spending some time here is really cleansing - you will find yourselves in really virgin and savage nature and yet surrounded by the comfort you are used to. Zababeč is a family farm run by the Voštova family and you will really feel at home here. Whether you send your children here for a spring or summer camp (in addition to camp games they will ride horses every day) or come here with your family any time of the year, you will always take away unusual experiences with you. Your children will be surrounded by animals - in addition to the twenty-four horses and ponies they have cats, dogs, goats, sheep, geese, ducks, rabbits and even small boars. And you can also use the playground and pool. But above all, you and your family can ride horses as much as you want here, even if you have never done it before. Even those who say on the first day that they would never do that, will eventually be unable to resist.



You can learn to ride in a riding school or in the open air - the surroundings are really charming, and although hilly the horses do not mind at all. The local mountain meadows with broad views across the Bohemian Uplands were made to be enjoyed from horseback. And the meals are also home-cooked. You can also take trips from here - to Chalice, to the Úštěk pond, to the Beaver waterfalls, to Varhošť hill, Ploskovice village, Velké Březno or Zubrnice. The most important thing is that they will prepare a programme tailor-made for you - from a mere stay on the farm via horse rides to week-long star trips to the Šluknov promontory... Whether you are a child, an adult or a senior, whether you single, a family or a group of friends. To put it simply - whatever occurs to you.



JÁNSKÁ WOLF RANCH

Between Bohemian and Serbian Kamenice, not far from Rose Hill, the Dolský mill and Jetřichovice, there is a village called Jánská. When you pass through the village you will see horses. You cannot overlook them. Their pens and part of the pastures are easily visible from the road and the Wolf Ranch where these beautiful animals live is adjacent to them. Once there used to be a state farm here but for the past decade Simon Müller and Bára Voslařová have fulfilled their dream here. They have thirteen horses, most of the year freely grazing in the open air, and if even in winter they use a cosy refuge protected against the wind and bad weather, they continue to run around on the slopes behind the ranch, weather permitting. Bára runs a children's riding club, gaining prestige in dressage and show jumping competitions as time passes. The children are from near and more distant surroundings and love this way of spending their afterschool time. However, the ranch and the horses are not reserved for them alone. You can send your children here

for a week-long riding camp where they will learn not only the basics of horse riding but also to understand horses and their needs. Or book a ride yourselves with the owners of the ranch. You can have your children learn basic horse riding style in a ring riding school or on a ride in the country. Skilful guides will accompany them and if you possess any horse riding experience you can join in and ride with them. The terrain is marvelous, whether you ride along the Rabštejn valley or to the pond at Stará Oleška, to the Filipínky vistas or between the meadows and ranches as far as for example Všemily. You will see Bohemian Switzerland, the Lužice mountains and part of the Bohemian Uplands. In addition, the children will find here a remarkable extreme trial route imitating the obstacles usually found in wild nature, all within a small enclosed space. And if you have time you can talk with Simon about his great hobby - natural communication with horses. You will soon learn what fantastic animals horses are and what we humans can learn from them.

BABINY ECOFARM

Just over a hill, near the charming village of Homole u Panny, in a municipality called Babiny II our travels to horse farms will end. Here they have eighteen horses on the local grasslands, and you and your children (ideally on the basis of a prior booking) can mount them to ride along forest paths and meadows, again to see the whole of the Bohemian Uplands. What your children will see here in addition is environmental farming. Your children will learn how to look after a three hundred head herd of cattle, make friends with two goodhearted St. Bernard dogs, see sheep, goats (and try to milk a cow or a goat), rabbits, cats, pigs and even a donkey. You will find a children's playground here as well but what is not certain is whether you will even have time for it because there are so many experiences in store here for you and your family. The best idea is to devote a whole day for the visit here, to see everything, to ride a horse and to take home a stock of impressions that will last for a long time. And on top of all that there is a large log cabin with a roofed open fireplace and a mighty grill where a party for up to fifty people can be held, including accommodation in a couple of cottages around the cabin. To make a trip here with children is a really good idea, for in addition to all sorts of entertainment they will learn that animals can be raised in a most human and natural way, and even if they are bred for slaughter they can spend their lives in satisfaction in the middle of the big Radič family. And now one final note for those who are afraid to put their child on horseback even in the presence of an experienced guide. Like on the Wolf Ranch here you will sit in so-called western saddles with a practical "pommel" at the front which you can use to hold on any time and which thus makes the experience of horse riding very safe, even for complete beginners.



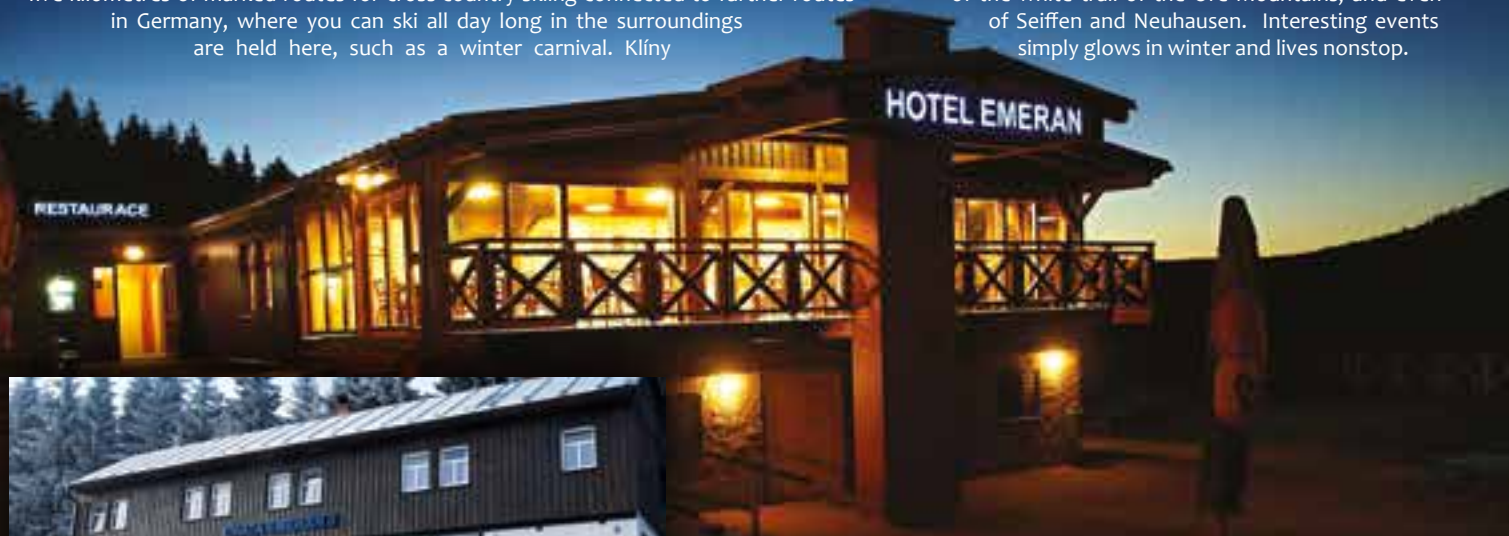
Enjoy Klíny

If you want to get acquainted with all sides of the Ore Mountains, then visit Klíny. About six kilometres above Litvínov, more than 800 metres above sea level, lies this typical mountain village with a written history going back to 1355. Like many others, this was also a mining settlement which used to be called St. Venceslas Mountain. It is a beautiful place to be in, otherwise I would not invite you to visit it. In addition, Klíny is an ideal place for a longer stay, for many reasons. One reason is that it is an ideal starting point for many trips to typical Ore Mountains sections and another is the excellent sports centre with very good facilities for summer as well as winter sports.



IDEAL MODEL OF SKIING

In winter you can enjoy the local excellent skiing conditions, which go without saying. You can choose from four downhill ski tracks with natural or artificial snow, depending on the weather conditions, accessible by a modern four-seat ski lift, with day and night skiing (thanks to the fact that the slopes are illuminated, of course). A whole day ticket for the ski lift costs less than four hundred Crowns, and there are many cross-country ski tracks all around here - what more could you want! Well, people are very inventive in their desires, but Klíny is prepared for all these. For example, families with children are most welcome here. The terrain is varied - from wide to narrow, groomed by a new top-standard snow plough (which you can also take a ride on and try for yourselves how difficult it is, for example, to level a steep slope). There is a beautiful snow park here offering endless opportunities for adherents of free skiing and snowboarding, with two lines of obstacles - again for day and night use thanks to the very good lighting. You can entrust your children to experienced ski instructors who emphasize an entertaining approach to skiing. In addition you can come here without any skiing equipment as they will loan you all you need, provide ski servicing and in addition a broad smile as a bonus - and this is one of the really important things today. Cross-country skiers will find a real paradise here. The premises maintain fifty-five kilometres of marked routes for cross-country skiing connected to further routes of the white trail of the Ore Mountains, and even in Germany, where you can ski all day long in the surroundings of Seiffen and Neuhausen. Interesting events are held here, such as a winter carnival. Klíny simply glows in winter and lives nonstop.



like no-one else!

BY MOUNTAIN SCOOTER INTO THE SURROUNDINGS

Good meals and good accommodation go without saying. Hotels, tourist dormitories, a guesthouse - the latter even in the building of an old local school from 1898. Much entertainment and comfort is offered in winter as well as in the summer. For example, the restaurant or the fitness club, the sauna, the whirlpool and massages in the Emeran hotel, an indoor sports hall with a climbing wall, where you can safely let your children learn bouldering. Before you realize how time flies it is summer again, no rain, and plenty of sunshine inviting you to the outdoor sports ground with artificial surface, the outdoor climbing wall and a tennis training wall for male and female athletes or groups of playing children. The biggest attraction is represented by the mountain scooters for hire and for making trips - on wheel and on foot, you probably know the famous fairy-tale, into the charming surroundings. If you ride a bicycle or are a hiker you can visit the surrounding forests and plains even without the scooter, and you will be equally surprised by the opulent offerings of the local nature. Would you like a picturesque, but also typically brooding local marshland? Just take a walk to the Black Pond (see a couple of pages later) and enjoy the spectral beauty that might as well make up the coat of arms of the Ore Mountains. Or descend to the Fláje dam and the most beautiful water reservoir in the Ore Mountains range, see the unique "hollow" pillar supported dam and walk along the Fláje sailing channel. Or climb up to visit the Jeřábina observation tower overlooking Klíny. The tower is brand new, built in 2009. The place it is situated in is extremely windy and in the case of gales the observation tower can suffer damage, so the harbour needs to be rebuilt again and again - and has been since 1884. You will see two mountain ranges - the nearby Ore Mountains and the Bohemian Uplands in all their picturesque beauty. And there is one more view to enjoy - the whole Most basin - another untypical vista.



DO YOU KNOW FELTING? LEARN IT!

It would be unwise to forget all about the Ore Mountains artery (you have already read about it if you have read the Gateway booklet from beginning to end) and the nearly two hundred and fifty kilometres of cycle paths - whether leading you to the north-east above Děčín or to the south-west as far as Cheb, for example. In Klíny you may also stop by the wooden belfry with its statue of the Virgin Mary of Lourdes and close your eyes. Then you may see with your inner sight the church of St. Anthony of Padua, standing nearby since the mid 19th century. The church was pulled down in 1985 and the Marian belfry is the only remnant of it. To eliminate any doubt about the exceptionality of this locality I will add the option to visit the local environmental farm of the Klouček family. Your children will see animals here they may not have seen before, and try how to milk a goat or make home-made cheese. The farmers have also revived old regional crafts and so you can learn spinning here, work with a spinning wheel or try to process sheep wool by wet felting. You will certainly not be bored here - whether in summer or in winter. Klíny is a nice, friendly and comfortable place set in beautiful nature.

Realm of frozen waterfalls

Winter, whether you like it or not, is simply magical. Literally. It is able to transform the landscape so that you cannot recognise it, give it a new dimension, turn it upside down. When autumn is fed up with its colour extravagances, winter waves its magic wand and lets the colours freeze away. The world changes into a black and white kingdom of darkness and twilight. The landscape is naked. You can walk down avenues of frosty trees and look under the skirts of forests, meadows and fields. And you will see everything, even what the chaste earth otherwise hides under clothes of foliage and grass. All is transformed, including water. Water is frozen in its movement, petrified in its beauty. And this is the time ice falls are created.

BRTNÍKY GALLERY

There is one place that is a real gallery of frozen beauty. Not far from Krásná Lípa or Rumburk, near the village of Brtníky, in sloping forests, slowly descending to the Křínice river valley, those who know where to find them can every winter enjoy four spectacular ice falls. Not to speak of the other frozen waterfalls, formed nearly everywhere here, in any gorge or fissure, although these four ice sculptures are a real treasure. The water here, enhanced by earth and the frosty breath of air, transforms everything into unusual and hardly imaginable shapes with a colourfulness that is so impressive you will get the feeling that inside these icy stalactites, stalagmites and stalagnates there is an orange column of fire. As the local gorges are very cold due to their unique climate, the ice falls stay here until Easter most years. Their best form comes when the reign of winter is not threatened by any warm breezes of early spring yet. If you know this path from your summer walks then you know that this is the way to the Big Prussian Camp and Brtníky castle, but now in winter this is like another planet. For years the detours to the ice falls have been marked with visible arrows so that you cannot miss them. The first crystal exhibit is the mighty and colourful Curtain. White changing to dark brown, the rich ice draperies reach down to the ground in places. Astonishing. It is a real spectacle, a masterpiece of winter. To enter the stage and watch the trees in their white fur coats walking to their seats in the auditorium through a peephole in the crystal curtain is a really unique experience.

The path will take you down to the river, but before you see the frosted banks of the Křínice the path will turn to the left to join the cycle path. Another ice fall seems to be growing from the surface of the Wolf Stream. A white tablecloth and small ice figures on it - a nativity scene. A little farther on you will see an overhanging rock with ice organ pipes falling from it. When the ice layer is the thickest the Organ covers the whole overhang, which then looks like a vast wolf's mouth with bared teeth. And rightly so, for we are in the Wolf Stream valley. After a while you will cross the Wolf Stream over a wooden bridge and head towards the Big Column. This is obviously the largest of the local ice falls, over eight metres tall, a massive and majestic ice column decorated at the top with a beautiful ice crown which in its richest form reminds you of a luxuriant palm tree or a huge sparkler on a Christmas tree. The secret of this ice fall may be unveiled in the summer - a mighty tree trunk leans against the rock, in winter completely covered with ice. If you have quenched your thirst for views you can return to Brtníky. But if the treat provokes a thirst for more, you can go and look for other ice falls. You can find the Quail Wall, the Horse Stable, the Wolf Den, the Small and Big Cascade, the Wolf Wall, the Linen, or unnamed ice falls still waiting to be christened.

VAŇOV WIZARD

Ice falls are formed anywhere, for example, also in the surroundings of Ústí nad Labem. He who knows that Ústí is sometimes called a city of waterfalls (there are more than twenty of them in the surroundings!) will not be that surprised. Three of the local ice falls are situated by the road from Trmice to Vaňov. The first ice fall is located a few steps past Trmice, where the Hostovice waterfall gurgles in summer. Now the summer waterfall has changed into hundreds of glass buns sitting one on top of another. Just after Hostovice, a red path will take you to the forest, where you will turn towards Podlešín at a crossing and walk along the Podlešínský stream, following the yellow tourist path. Detour from the marked path to see the Devil Mill ice fall and then, continuing along the yellow path, you will arrive at the largest local ice fall, so big that local ice climbers sometimes try to conquer it, the Vaňov ice fall. The wall is twelve metres high and supports a giant leaning against it, a frost wizard in a white, richly pleated cloak. It is really hard to break free from his might, for the view is really magnificent. A little farther on there is one more magnificent view, although not of ice statues any more. Near the bridge below the Vaňov waterfall there is a detour to an observation platform on top of a basalt hill - Vrkoč. You can observe from there a landscape without colours, Ústí nad Labem locked by frost, stretching as far as a sea despite the cold, the ascetic Střekov castle, and the round as well as pointed hills of the Bohemian Uplands, dominated in this part by Vysoký Ostrý mountain. And long after, already sitting in a cosy pub sipping hot grog, you will see in front of your eyes the catalogue of artefacts made by the frost chisel of Lady Winter.

From where to Bohemian Switzerland? Certainly from Krásná Lípa

“Whichever direction you approach Krásná Lípa from, your heart will skip a beat when you see the beautiful nature

surrounding the town. The Křinice river, passing through the town centre, hidden under the square, and sparkling and gurgling elsewhere, will take all who want to the Bohemian Switzerland, to the national park, to the landscape where sandstone marvels harmonise with lovely meadows, forest covered hilltops, deep cold valleys releasing mighty clots of fog in the morning, where the local fairies wash their long green hair in the crystal clear heavenly streams. Krásná Lípa (Beautiful Linden Tree) is simply beautiful, and not only in name. And welcoming too. Well, see for yourselves.”



A TOWN FULL OF IMPRESSIONS

An incredible leap forward characterises the progress of this town in recent years. Still in the late nineties it was a sleepy inconspicuous nest - and now? A pulsating tourist centre with very good facilities. Last year the square was completed with a new hotel - the Lípa - built according to a remarkable architectural project. However, the central building of the square is still the Bohemian Switzerland House, a charming place. The house hides a well equipped information centre and above all a marvelous interactive exhibition. Two floors of the exhibition offer you and your children - who will be really astonished - the possibility to see, to tread on, to touch and to try with their own senses where the rock town phenomenon came from and what the reason for its exceptionality is. Here you will become geologists, archaeologists, composers, natural scientists, porters, pilgrims, mountaineers, painters and more - and above all, you will really enjoy yourselves. A couple of steps away, below the St. Marie Madeleine church, there is the shining

new facade of a historic house, since last summer the seat of the Křinice brewery with a cosy inn and - above all - excellent Falkenstein beer. But for more details, see other sections of the Gateway. A wonderful fragrance will attract you across the whole town to the Mana chocolate factory, where you can get handmade chocolate bonbons and hot chocolate. But do not overeat - a little further on there is the Factory, a relaxation and sports centre with a fitness club, massage and a sauna as well as a gallery and a restaurant. On the opposite side of the street there is the historic and sensitively reconstructed Bohemian Switzerland guesthouse, where they will pleasantly feed you and tuck you up. But you do not feel like sleeping yet and so you set off for the nearby (everything in Krásná Lípa is nearby) Bohemian Switzerland Sports Centre, a grand and well equipped place with several sports grounds (also for beach volleyball) indoor tennis courts, a climbing wall, a children's castle and playground, a funicular for children, an arbour with a large seating capacity and a barbeque...

TO THE PARK AND AMONG COTTAGES

You see, we have not left the town yet and still you do not know where to go first. And you have not yet walked through the town park with its streams, ponds, harbours and benches around an absolutely unique sight. Right behind the cemetery wall there is the wonderful tomb of the Dittrich family, designed in 1886 by the famous Berlin architect Julius Carl Raschdorff (who, among other things, also designed the sepulchre of the German emperor Friedrich III in Potsdam). The beautiful building is completed with a real technical rarity - only a couple of steps farther on there is a tall brick smokestack and a small boiler room that heats the sepulchre. Unfortunately, there is no money to preserve this rare monument so hurry up to see it before the teeth of time completely devour it. You will certainly enjoy carelessly wandering around the Címrák pond or a trip to the Kamenná Horka part of Krásná Lípa, where you will see another rarity in front of the former Josef Kögler inn - the Kögler Cross. The cross is newly reconstructed and shines towards the north, the south, the east and the west - you cannot see the reverse of this crucifixion column - there is no rear, only the face on all sides. While you are here, enjoy a walk past the charming underpinned houses, modern gemstones of rural architecture.

SURROUNDINGS LIKE NOWHERE ELSE

You will not believe that such a small town can offer so much. If you add the surroundings you will get a place where it is easy to create a programme for a two-week holiday packed with experiences. Krásná Lípa is the starting point for trips to the justly popular Kyjov valley, along which you can walk for example to the German side of the frontier, to the gorges of Obere Schleuse, which you can ride through by boat, and further to charming Doubice, the famous unofficial open air museum of rural architecture and a place loved by children for the huge interactive playground between hundreds of wooden statues, or to Sněžná, with one of the most picturesque chapels in the region, to Wolf Mountain, where you can climb an observation tower, have a good meal in the Wolf Restaurant or visit the exhibition and shop of Nobilis Tilia, producer of Czech aromatherapy cosmetics, and see their permaculture bio garden... Not far from here is Brtníky village, where you need to visit the newly opened information centre called Amethyst with its exhibition of precious stones from Czech and around the world and photographs of Bohemian Switzerland, and take a walk to Brtníky castle and the Big Prussian Camp overhang, and via the Kyjov valley of the Křinice river to picturesque Kyjov, where you will get an excellent meal at the famous Kyjov terrace. From there you can return to Krásná Lípa. And the very best idea is to walk along the 23-kilometre long Kögler educational path, which will best show you the whole surroundings including sections in the national park. And I must abandon descriptions of the trips to Rybníště, Jedlová, Světlík and Jiřetín due to the lack of space here. There is nothing to do but to go and see Krásná Lípa in person.



The Ohře cycle path is pleasant to ride

The third backbone cycle path across the region is defined by the course of the Ohře river. It is only a little shorter than the Ore Mountains artery passing through two regions – Karlovarský and Ústecký – in its 230 kilometres. Well - for the time being. Soon the German section will join up and allow you to follow the Ohře river from its spring to the mouth of the river. Two-thirds of this route is situated in the region covered by this issue of the magazine. Experienced cyclists will probably remember this path as two hundred and fourteen, but since this year it has all been clearly marked as number 6.



TOWARDS ROYAL TOWNS

You can set off in both directions along the life-giving Ohře river, rich in fish and water birds. The clearly downstream path will run a little downhill - although take it any way it is a plain in both directions after all. This time we will begin at Perštejn, where not only the Ohře river but also the bitumen cycle path enter

our region from the neighbouring one. As far as Kadaň our wandering will continue along a cycle path (meaning bitumen), and further to Litoměřice, where the Ohře flows into the Elbe along a (still) dirt cycle path. The first seven kilometres will take us to the charming valley and to the first town. The towns are gemstones on the Ohře river necklace. Any of them is worth a detailed study. We are now entering Klášterec nad Ohří. The charming chateau full of fragile china beauties, a pleasant chateau garden with a sala terrena and Brokof statues, a Thun sepulchre in the Holy Trinity church. But the Ohře will not wait. Although we are not going to chase the river there is a lot to see, so let us continue downstream of the Ohře, as this river used to be called. And it is definitely worth it! You will enjoy romantic, moving and spectacular views of the landscape modelled by the river basin. For a while you will ride along a technically unique structure, a suspended steel structure grown into the rock massif. You will enter Kadaň accompanied by the friendly barks of Maxidog Fig, who gave its name to the riverbank. And again - an hour will not be enough. Barbakan, the square, the white town hall with its unique tower, Headsman's lane, the narrowest of the narrow, fortifications around the town walls, Kadaň castle... Now the Želín meander, beautiful landscape where the river cuts a majestic omega into the meadows, lined with steep rocky slopes with steppe vegetation. Climbing up to the Želín church is a bit of an effort but now we are riding again, this time towards the shiny surface of the Nechanice reservoir with the longest poured dam wall in Europe (over three kilometres!). You swim, camp, fish... You will need a mountain bike to reach Žatec, for the path is suddenly stony and loose. But then, God knows how you got there, you find yourselves in Southern France, a sunlit landscape of vineyards. But that means that Žatec is in sight.

THE HOPS CAPITAL

And again, forget about passing through it quickly without stopping. The attractions not only include the remarkable historic centre with its really beautiful main square and the vistas from the town hall tower. You should remember you are in the capital of hop picking and that the hops here are the best in the world - and I will argue this with anybody! So it is an obligation to visit the grand exposition of the Cathedral of hops and beer with its beer beacon and 3D projection in the elevator, with the beer astronomical clock, the labyrinth between balls and search for the biggest hop cone, a museum of Homolupules, the only recently discovered beer nation, the large hops museum (the largest in the world)... I cannot resist mentioning that on the way along the Ohře you will pass seven mini breweries and of course also a big brewery in Žatec. Please note that I am not seducing you to stop and taste, I know that cyclists do not drink but watch the road with vigilant eyes... (but if you decide to stay overnight do not dare to avoid tasting the treat!). Before you reach the next royal town, have a round at Postoloprty and above all Březno with its mining and archaeological specials, which you have already been informed about in detail in this number, and then you will approach the moon city, the Hussite city, fortified with town walls - Louny. Here you must visit the square, the Hussite museum and the exhibition of petrified trees, the Benedict Rejt Gallery - and of course the unique church built by him, St. Nicolas' church, and the Kotěra labour colony... Again a nice delay packed with exciting and remarkable sights.



LANDSCAPE WITH A KIND AND CRUEL HISTORY

And I have not mentioned yet any trip up the surrounding hills from which we are watched by castles, chateaux and mediaeval ruins. You will pass one of them on your way from Louny - Šebín. And you will come across a Baroque chateau, one of the most beautiful in the country. Libochovice, the birthplace of Jan Evangelista Purkyně (he was born right in the chateau), with an exhibition of noble lifestyles over the course of the centuries, the famous crocodile, the chateau garden with its peacocks... And then majestic Hazmburk, the Budyně water fortress with its strong alchemic past, the Doksany monastery... There the Ohře is already a mature river rushing to be hugged by the Elbe. But before it arrives there we will quietly and with piety enter Terezín. A small fortress, a museum of the ghetto and other memories of the Nazi tyranny and inhumaneness, but also stories of the resilience and courage of the human spirit. It is also worth being reminded of the earlier history of the fortified settlement, for example, in the artillery museum, or of its present, for example, in the Crystal Touch museum with its exhibition of crystal copies of hands of famous personalities. You can also play golf here at the golf course with the lowest elevation above sea level in the country. The route passes some of the holes and joins the Elbe cycle path here. So, what do you say? Are you already tightening the bolts and lubricating the chain?



Searching for a key to the mysterious plateau

A rather raw plateau of resilient and captivating beauty, that is the Veneřicko region. A shallow and undulating basin surrounded by big and small hills. No fields, only meadows and pastures. Forests cluster into small, exactly framed shapes, breaking up the meadows like islands or long scythes, suddenly ending strips or incomplete circles. A landscape not tamed by man - and where he did, he immediately destroyed his footprints. There used to be dignified and proud sacral monuments here that were swept away by an ideological pressure wave. This UFO levitating in the middle of several rivers, in the middle of the central Bohemian Uplands, as if an enclosed habitat ending on all sides in rocks and abysses after just a couple of kilometres. Obstinate charm, resilient fragility.

WITH HUMBOLDT TO BEECH MOUNTAIN

In the west there is a dominant feature of the new age, the tallest concrete structure in the country, the 223 metre tall transmitter on Beech Mountain. In the sixties there stood its predecessor, which caught fire a couple of years later and had to be pulled down. Only a couple dozen metres west of the foot of the new transmitter from 1967 there is a rock platform named after the famous traveller, natural scientist and geographer Alexander von Humboldt. In 1837 he could not quench his thirst for the incredible views of the Elbe valley and the major part of the Bohemian Uplands. Here the Veneřice basin ends and the terrain slopes steeply down through the rock town of Bird Stones, Ice Pit, a deep fissure in the basalt massif where snow firm and ice plates stay over the whole summer. As if the cold and harsh world of this strange mountainous climate was cut off with scissors, around the Vrabince castle ruins over Těchlovice, not far from here there is an island of thermophilic plants. Let us return and cross the Veneřice plain to its eastern edge. In the south-west the platform breaks to the Luční stream valley but you cannot see this when wandering around Veneřice with the only significant church of St. Anne preserved and now getting a brand new coat. You cannot resist climbing the nearby Divine Hill, once Gottesberg, with its hatless head and humble feelings, where there used to stand the Holy Trinity church with a Station of the Cross, a white Baroque church at the top of the hill. The church fell into decay after the war, like the other sacral monuments in the region. In 1975 they pulled it down, disregarding the fact that the demolition was more expensive than its reconstruction would have been. The aim was to sweep with a red fist the darkness out of the region. Oh, you human silliness...

DOWN HEAD FIRST THROUGH BEAVER GORGE

Soon you will find yourselves at the other end of the Veneřice world. Here too the terrain will suddenly break at the waist and begin to fall steeply together with the wild waters of the Beaver stream between fissured rocks. The Beaver Gorge is full of romantic scenes, with water overflows, fountains, cascades, weirs, for millennia patiently polishing the rocks in the basin. Rocks tower all around, sometimes up to thirty metres high, and a waterfall on top of all that - an about six-meter overflow looking as if it were much bigger and leaving a grandiose impression. Salamanders live here, water ouzels sing and wagtails hop around. The bottom of this mysterious gorge is home to cryophilic mountain plants, while on the top of the rocks warmth loving ones blossom happily again. A torn apart world. The gorge can be passed via a comfortable green path taking us down to Kravaře, unless we let ourselves be enchanted by the world in the valley and return to the plain. And still there is the northern direction. The two hills we are heading to are crowned with observation towers - the Cock and the Watch Tower Hill. But their stories will be part of another section of the Gateway.

SPELL OF FIELD VILLAGES

The landscape of pastures will stretch to two villages here - Valkeřice and Merboltice, long mediaeval field villages built along restless streams. These villages too had their own churches - St Catherine at Merboltice, St. Barbara at Valkeřice - in 1975 both were ordered to be pulled down as part of the sacral plundering in the Veneřicko region so that faith to have nothing to lean against in these self-contained areas. The Merboltice belfry was rescued as if by a miracle. Whichever village you walk through, the streams will take you to the Ploučnice river down in the valley. Our route will be lined with beautiful samples of rural architecture in a strange conglomerate of styles - from timber-framed to underpinned houses, small cottages and dignified two-storey houses with black or brown and white stripes, pleasing the heart with their beauty. The forest near Valkeřice hides a flooded phonolite quarry and the forest above Merboltice Stone Hill, a nature reserve on the slopes of Kamenec hill. Here you will find the largest continuous areas of free and open basalt landslides in the Bohemian Uplands. You will no longer be surprised to see warm and cold landslides side by side, providing completely opposing living conditions for completely different organisms. On the one hand you will come across ice pits with snow in the middle of July, and on the other you will see sources of warm and wet air where snow melts even in January. And again a mysterious and seducing force will pull you back to the plain. You know, the best thing is to wander around the stretches of meadows, hide in enclosed groves, find clusters of stones and perceive the rough beauty of this corner of land. And then, when the whole countryside is lit by the sun, you will suddenly understand. Verneřicko is like a mountain dweller who hardly ever descends to the valley from his perch. It is a man who has got used to harsh conditions, rough and gloomy on the outside, but good-hearted and welcoming on the inside. And the sun is the key to his heart.

Dignified quartet of the Ore Mountains

The perfect line of the Ore Mountains foothills between Chomutov and Osek hides four remarkable historic sights. Two ruins of the once majestic castles of Hasištejn and Rýzmburk, the romantic Red Castle and Jezeří chateau, a unique structure with a shifted destiny. You may manage to visit all four of them in one day if you try a little. And it will certainly be worth it. So let us start above Chomutov...

POETIC HASIŠTEJN

On a narrow promontory over the deep valley of the Pruněrovský stream stands the cylindrical tower of a ruined castle called Hasištejn. Like nearby Jezeří, the castle was built in the mid 14th century as one of the bastions for the defence of the Czech lands in the foothills of the Ore Mountains. The strategic significance of Hasištejn was great and for nearly all of its "career" it served the original purpose for which it had been built, and was never reconstructed into a more comfortable noble residence.

The owners rather invested in reconstructions to make Hasištejn an even more invincible fortress. The most important reconstructions were implemented when in the early 16th century the humanist and poet Bohuslav Hasištejnský of Lobkovice made the castle his seat. This was after he had travelled across Italy, Greece, Palestine and Egypt and abandoned his plans to become Bishop of Olomouc. This vigorous man was actively involved in the administration of his assets and also in the reconstruction of his castle. It was he who initiated the construction of the cylindrical tower with loopholes, had the castle walls fortified, and the bastions extended with two two-storey towers. What a pity he was not so active as a husband and did not leave any offspring. Thus after his death Hasištejn was deserted and became a mighty source of construction materials for settlers in the castle's surroundings. At the end of the 19th century the castle was acquired by Emanuel Karsch, who had the debris removed, the walls reinforced, the former palace rebuilt as a restaurant and the tallest tower changed into an observation tower. In the 1970s the restaurant was all burnt down. Today it has been reconstructed and is happy to offer you a good meal. Hasištejn is taken care of by a group of enthusiasts from the civic association called Friends of Hasištejn Castle. Also thanks to them the castle is still alive and readily accepts visitors from early April to late October.



GIANT RÝZMBURK

Just like at the beginning, so at the end of the imaginary line there is a civic association determined to rescue the ruins. This time it is the former castle of Rýzmburk near Osek. In the past three years the dilapidated castle has been secured, cleared of self-seeding trees, access roads have been restored and professional works on renewal of the mediaeval masonry have been started. In addition, a number of cultural events have been held here to restore general awareness of the monument. And yet in its time it was one of the largest Gothic castles in Bohemia – indeed, Rýzmburk may be translated as Giant Castle. Its origins date back to 1230 and its construction was the prestigious task of Boreš of Hrabšic, court marshal to Václav I. From 1250, when a substantial part of the large castle had been completed, he began to call himself Boreš of Riesenburg. He had reason to be proud as his castle was apparently the second largest in the country after Prague Castle. Despite its size, in the 16th century Rýzmburk lost its attractiveness, lost the status of a noble estate and began to be deserted. Its fame was revived a little as late as in the 19th century when it became an appreciated tourist destination. The tourists of that time did not know that they were visiting the site of an ancient settlement from the 9th century B.C. Today Rýzmburk is one of the stops on the educational path called the Nature and history of Osek, offering, in addition to the castle ruins, also the first manufacture in Bohemia, mine complexes around Osek and a hibernation site for bats.



SPECTRAL JEZEŘÍ

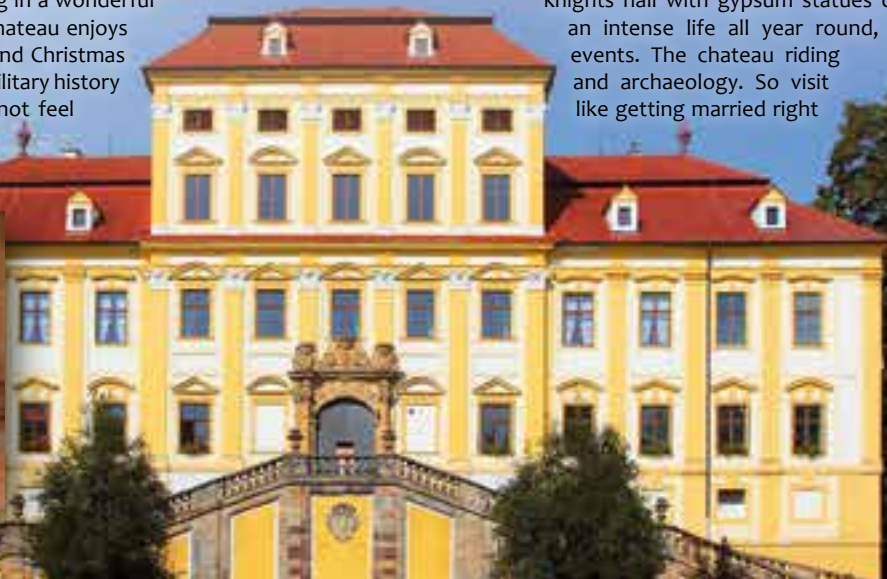
it would be hard to find in this country a chateau with more bizarre surroundings: Jezeří gives the impression of a romantic UFO in a moon landscape. Once surrounded by a remarkable large park, now the chateau is surrounded by former coal mines which devoured not only a substantial part of the chateau park but also several surrounding villages – Ervěnice, Nové Sedlo, Komořany, Třebušice, Dřínov, Albrechtice and Dolní Jiřetín. The chateau itself had a narrow escape, the mining machinery already biting into the Jezeří foothill. The vistas are inexpressible, apocalyptic and fascinating. And yet the chateau would be magic even without these sad circumstances. The originally Gothic castle was reconstructed as a Renaissance chateau and even later to its current Baroque appearance. The chateau is situated in a unique place whose energy was already known to the Early Slavs and the Celts before them. The first written records about this estate date from the latter half of the 14th century when the Lords of Rvenice settled here to be near to and control ore quarrying in the Ore Mountains region. The owners changed here regularly, but all actively defended the interests of the Czech lands. The longest ownership belonged to the Lobkowitz family, owning the chateau for 250 years and making it a representative family estate. The last landlord was named JUDr. Maxmilián Lobkovic. The pre-war ambassador to Great Britain chose to stay in exile after 1948 and his estate ended up like many other historic monuments in socialist Czechoslovakia: Continuous devastation planned to culminate in the mid 1980s with liquidation. But the chateau was rescued – mainly thanks to the active approach of the locals. Today you can see the remarkable interiors of Jezeří, visit the cellars inhabited by ghosts, walk in the romantic park and enjoy a vista indeed not seen elsewhere.



ROMANTIC RED CASTLE

This charming and romantic chateau, today a much sought-after location for wedding ceremonies, was named after the Hussite interventions. The Hussites conquered it three times and completely burned it down. When in the 1420s the castle was reconstructed it was provided with a bright red facade. Although the colour of its facade has long been different, the name has been preserved. In the late 17th century Count Hrzán invited an interesting artist here, the sculptor and wood carver Jan Brokoff, whom was born a son during his works on the sculpture decorations of the chateau and the park, who was named Ferdinand Maxmilian, born to overshadow his father's fame once grown up. Mainly thanks to the Rottenhans and the Buquoy, a beautiful English park was built around the chateau. At the end of the 1930s the chateau became the venue for two meetings between Konrad Henlein and Walter Runciman, the gloomy overtures to the more extensive and much more fateful meetings in Munich. Today the chateau prospers nicely as an asset of the town of Jirkov, once subordinated to the chateau owners' rule. There is a comfortable hotel here with an extensive wellness area, but above all a very interesting sightseeing route culminating in a wonderful knights hall with gypsum statues of ancient gods in super-life size unique in Europe. The chateau enjoys event, from a chorus song festival to advent and Christmas school houses a very interesting exhibition of military history this place, it will make sense even if you do not feel now.

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Places where the art and skills of our ancestor have survived

You can read from time to time how folk crafts cease to exist, how people are no longer manually skilled and if they are they cannot combine manual and mental skills and so old crafts die and disappear... But this may not be true always and everywhere. There are still places where people cherish craft traditions as something precious. They stubbornly and systematically investigate, search, learn and try to eventually enjoy deserved success and be able to offer their applied pedigree art to others. And they mostly do not confine themselves to selling you their products, they are often happy to present you their realm, to show you how things are done and to let you try it out with your own hands.

REALM OF FOLK TRADITION AT BECHLÍN

The best thing will be to begin on top of Říp mountain. Or about six kilometres away at Bechlín. The reason is simple - this is the cradle for masters of the folk craft tradition. In the local retail workshop of Czech folk tradition connected with a museum of non-raised pastry you will be shown the production of custom objects made to the present days from various easily obtainable natural materials such as eggs, dough, earth, straw or dry corn leaves. The products are made by real masters of the crafts and you can not only buy their products but also watch them work and try to make something yourselves under their guidance all year long - which is a real rarity in the Czech lands. An Easter whip made with your own hands, a blueprint scarf, a painted egg, an animal or a candlestick made of non-raised pastry, a doll of dry corn leaves, a wrath of rye straw - in addition to Bechlín you may choose to visit the affiliate in Rovní right at the foot of Říp hill.



PAPER TOWER IN LITOMĚŘICE

As readers of the Gateway, you already know that Litoměřice can boast of well preserved town walls. But you may not know that one of the towers houses a workshop where traditional manual paper production takes place. The space is astonishing. Not only that it smells nice, not only that you always come across an interesting exhibition here, mostly connected with paper, but you can also endlessly watch the paper makers transform with their masterly hands ugly pulp on wooden sieves into beautiful paper, wonderfully uneven, with a strong texture - simply speaking, handmade paper. And that is not all, as you can also try to make a sheet of paper here yourselves. If paper has accompanied mankind for the last two thousand years, it is nice to know how to make it, even at home.



NUTCRACKERS OF NOVÁ VES

These nutcrackers are not mere tools, they have a soul. And they are not alone. We have moved to the mountain tops of the Ore Mountains, to Nová Ves v Horách, that is, to a village with a strong and famous tradition of wood processing expanded in 1880s by toy making. The NBW company decided to keep the old craft alive despite the caprices of time. It exists today as the only company here in the mountains with more than a hundred and twenty five years of tradition. Its portfolio is fantastic - from the above-mentioned nutcrackers to "smokers", i.e. hollow figures of, for example, cooks, watermen, chimney sweeps, or gardeners, filled with a piece of burning frankincense and that let the fragrant smoke out of their mouths, or very popular stoves with smoking pots, all made of pine and beech wood. And on top of all that, a popular party game - tivolí - spread across Europe, but, as hardly anyone knows, it originated from here, from the Ore Mountains. Players make a ball move with a spring, trying to get it into the highest scoring hole. Local people also invented pulled toys, like the popular "duck" that has become part of a famous popular saying.



PLAY OF GLASS AND LIGHT AT LUBENEC

When you are passing through Lubenec and see a house with a sign revealing it to be the seat of a company called Skloart, stop for a while, however much of a hurry you are in. Jitka and Richard Kants make works of art out of glass here, including stained glass windows. They are real masters of stained glass windows, acknowledged across Europe. There is another world behind the door of their shop. A world of enchanting light, magic colours, fragile magic. First of all it was necessary to find out how, learn the craft, complete education, travel a lot and above all introduce stained glass windows to the general awareness and practice of this country, which was nil even twenty years ago. They did not have what they did not find out and try for themselves. When you have seen their works in the shop, they will take you to the workshops, let you try soldering and cutting, show you a film on stained glass windows, in short, let you into their wonderful world. And when you have digested all that, let them talk about what they do in their free time, and then go and see it. You will be astonished. Just by the way, they rescued and restored an observation tower and a church to make it a museum of stained glass windows, obviously.



REALM OF SOAP BUBBLES IN RŮŽOVÁ

At the very edge of Růžová village in Bohemian Switzerland there is the Rubens soap factory. You will not believe the way it came into existence. The owners of the adjacent guesthouse found a recipe book in the loft describing how to make soap at home. They tried the recipe in a pot in their kitchen - and succeeded! Then they built a house and began to show people how to make soap - and the interest was so big that they had to build an extension for presentations. Their opening hours... daytime. Most of their products are original products using herbs grown in their garden. In addition to soaps and products using the salt of the Dead Sea, they also produce microwave oven heated herb belts with salt and solid shampoos or ointments... While your children run around the garden trying to guess the names of the herbs or engrave pictures in the soap, you can talk with the local soap fairies. The talk will be curative like some of their baths. And you will leave here not only with a scented sachet but also with a smile, which cannot be bought with money.



A beautiful park in the Krásný Dvůr

“Once upon a time there was a hunting lodge rebuilt in the period of the high Baroque. The counts of Černín arrived here in the 18th century from their home of St. Petersburg (the one near here, not the one on Lake Ladoga) to make trips and to hunt. In compliance with the period habit the chateau was surrounded by a perfectly arranged Baroque garden with sadly singing peacocks and slowly strolling nobility. But then in 1779 Jan Rudolf Černín began to travel to Western Europe - and was astonished. He saw for the first time in his life the phenomenon of the English park.”

WHY NOT HAVE AN ENGLISH PARK IN THE MIDDLE OF BOHEMIA?

The nobility did not know what to do with their money and in addition were attracted by the seductive ideas of Rousseau about a return to the nature, as well as being enchanted by the remote countries of the Orient. Count Černín walked around the chateau parks, conceived as places of frequent surprises and constant entertainment. Whoever walked here was often surprised by unexpected scenes and remarkable structures. The count decided to build something similar in Krásný Dvůr as well. And so in the 1780s the forests adjacent to the chateau began to be cultivated together with the pheasantry and meadows around the Lesko stream and the more or less forested slopes and undulating terrain around. This gave birth to the first English park in the Czech lands, measuring nearly a hundred hectares in area. And for the period required him to add a spiritual dimension and memento mori aspects to the entertainment, the park was extended by a romantic gorge featuring a hermitage and an artificial sepulchre. A trip to such a park was an adventure lasting many hours for the Černíns and their visitors, often very famous - such as Franz I, Mexican emperor Maximilian, Franz Joseph I, Swedish king Gustav IV, Goethe and Dobrovský.



Time has closed the curtain and the world has changed, often insensitively and crudely, but the English park in Krásný Dvůr is still here for you to walk around. Although the tooth of time has been diligent, especially between the end of the war and the late 1980s, recent years have brought continuous recultivation of the terrain and the buildings, and so your walk in the park, with a certain stretch of the imagination, is very much the same as it was a hundred years ago. Of course you will first want to see the chateau itself, which was used as a storage place in the periods when the word „nobility“ could not be but whispered, where furnishings from more than thirty other chateaux were stored as they were changed into mental hospitals, dormitories, conference rooms or barracks (which is still true in many cases today). Even now the chateau is packed with remarkable objects up to the attic - and not all of them can be squeezed into the exhibition halls and shown publicly. But this is the park's story and so I will only note the unique collection of forty-two dog portraits in life size, which you can see in a representative sample of twenty in the „dog corridor“. But let us return to the park again. You can choose one of three walking circuits - the red one is five kilometres long, the blue one covers less than three and the yellow one something over two.



EVERY STEP BRINGS A SURPRISE

If you let me give some advice, do not hurry. Allow yourselves a calm and slow walk and plan enough time for it. Only then will you be able to fully enjoy the sophistication of the builders of the park, who sensitively utilised the nature of the terrain to compose in it numerous exotic trees, for collections of trees from all over the world were very popular at that time. This realistic landscape is crowned with sudden revelations of symbolic and decorative structures. Imagine slowly walking below the crowns of tall trees and suddenly seeing a giant lantern by the riverbank - however, it is not a lantern but an aviary. But even more grandiose is for example the Pan temple, the oldest structure designed for the park in Krásný Dvůr. This variation on the antique temple of Janus, the god of two faces, was used as a music hall. Just opposite there is an artificial water cascade and an ancient Gloriette, a circular building perhaps inspired by the famous Temple of Love in the Small Trianon at Versailles. While you continue along the undulating terrain surrounded by trees and meadows you wonder what else is in store for you...? Do not guess - just look - at the end of an over kilometre-long avenue you will see a twenty-six metre tall stone obelisk reminding us of one of the Napoleonic battles. About in the middle of the “mile”, as an avenue straight as a ruler is often called, there is a hidden pink Chinese pavilion over a large pool used as a water reservoir for the waterfall cascades. And now a cut and you will find yourselves in a Dutch lowland and on an idyllic Dutch farm. And what about the Gothic temple, harmonically and very effectively complementing the view across a large meadow. The temple was used as an observation tower and represents one of the earliest neo-Gothic structures in the country. This view will take long to disappear from the horizon of your soul. And speaking of the soul - there is still the gorge of the Hermit, originally of Rachel. The gorge was to be used for contemplation and the evocation of humble ideas. In the middle of the gorge there used to be a romantic Hermitage and a little timber-framed church above it. Although the Hermitage is demolished now and the only remains of the church are represented by moss overgrown steps up the slope, nothing has reduced the power of this place. Especially when at the end of the gorge you face a mysterious sepulchre hiding in the dark inside a symbolic sarcophagus. The list of structures and other remarkable objects is not exhaustive, though, for two mere pages are not enough to describe something so large and beautiful. So put the magazine aside and visit Krásný Dvůr in person, for something like this should be seen by everybody at least once in their life.



A bike ride along the Ploučnice valley or A Handful of Memories

If the kind reader permits, the author will now enter the pages of the magazine in person to represent himself. I cannot avoid this for this theme touches my soul. While Prague citizens say they are baptised by the Vltava, I have a lot of Ploučnice water in my blood. I grew up by it and in it. Although the truth is that there was a rumour at school about the „black river“ and our parents were warned with a finger over the mouth to ban their children swimming in the river, the warning voices might as well have prohibited breathing in Děčín and ordered walking between drops of acid rain. We bathed in a cove featuring a tall alder tree with a rope hanging from it - our catapult to the waves. We walked with our parents along the river to the Birch Forest and to the hill above Bechlejšovice, where fantastic fossils could be found. And of course we pedalled to Benešov, to see father, who commuted to the instrument factory in Mikov all his life. These memories are taking me directly head first (and feet on pedals) to the middle of the theme of this article.

LANDSCAPE OF GORGES AND WEIRS

Today the Ploučnice is again a clean river rich in fish, and you can dance in the rain in Děčín and breathe as intensely as you wish. You can even walk to the chateau without being afraid that a Russian soldier will hit you with the buckle of his undone belt. The path along the river basin is as beautiful, adventurous and articulate as I remember it from childhood, with the only difference being that instead of toiling through the mud you can comfortably ride along it today. The beneficial project of the Green Cycle Artery along the Ploučnice (number 15) has finished. You can reach it from the Elbe cycle path in Děčín by detouring near a beautiful renaissance stone bridge from the 16th century with Baroque statues of the Czech patron saints St. Vitus, St. Venceslas, and St. John of Nepomuk by Michal Jan Josef Brokof. Around the local aquapark, where you will want to park your bicycle for a while for you will find a lot of water attractions there, both indoor and outdoor, you will continue to the Děčín winter stadium. Behind the stadium the path will again join the river and will continue along it for long kilometres. In the past this place was inaccessible. Today you ride along a proper pavement, on bitumen and pebbles in turn for the whole way to Starý Šachov, at the very end of the Ústecký region, where the path does not end of course, but continues along the younger and younger river up to its sources. The mighty weir called “By Daimonka” is now provided with a salmon run (what would have been ridiculous once is now a necessity for the salmon really return here). And several dozen metres further on there will be our childhood cove... No, it is not there. Bank regulation in the context of building the cycle path changed it into a stone bed. Never mind. When I close my eyes I can see it. I will happily exchange this banality for the perfect surface of the cycling path, where the bicycle rides almost by itself and lets me concentrate on the landscape. The landscape becomes more and more beautiful. You will pass the secondary gardening and agricultural school in Libverda with its botanical garden accessible to the public together with a horse farm. And then you will continue across Březiny, through the spectacular Gorges via Malá Veleň and Jedlka, through meadows, small and large forests as far as Benešov upon Ploučnice. Leaving Bohemian Switzerland, you will find yourselves at the border of the Bohemian Uplands, a landscape not that showy or panoramic but impressively Czech and moving. The river shines in the afternoon sun, surprising you once in a while with a weir or a small power plant. You will certainly meet fishermen in their surroundings and you need not be persuaded that to watch a skilful fly tier is like watching a film about nature. If you are lucky you will see a swiftly moving otter, a shining kingfisher flying over the surface or a venerable stork, and when the landscape begins to change into its negative you may even notice a bat.



FROM THE PEARL OF THE SAXON RENAISSANCE FOR EXAMPLE TO THE SPRINGS

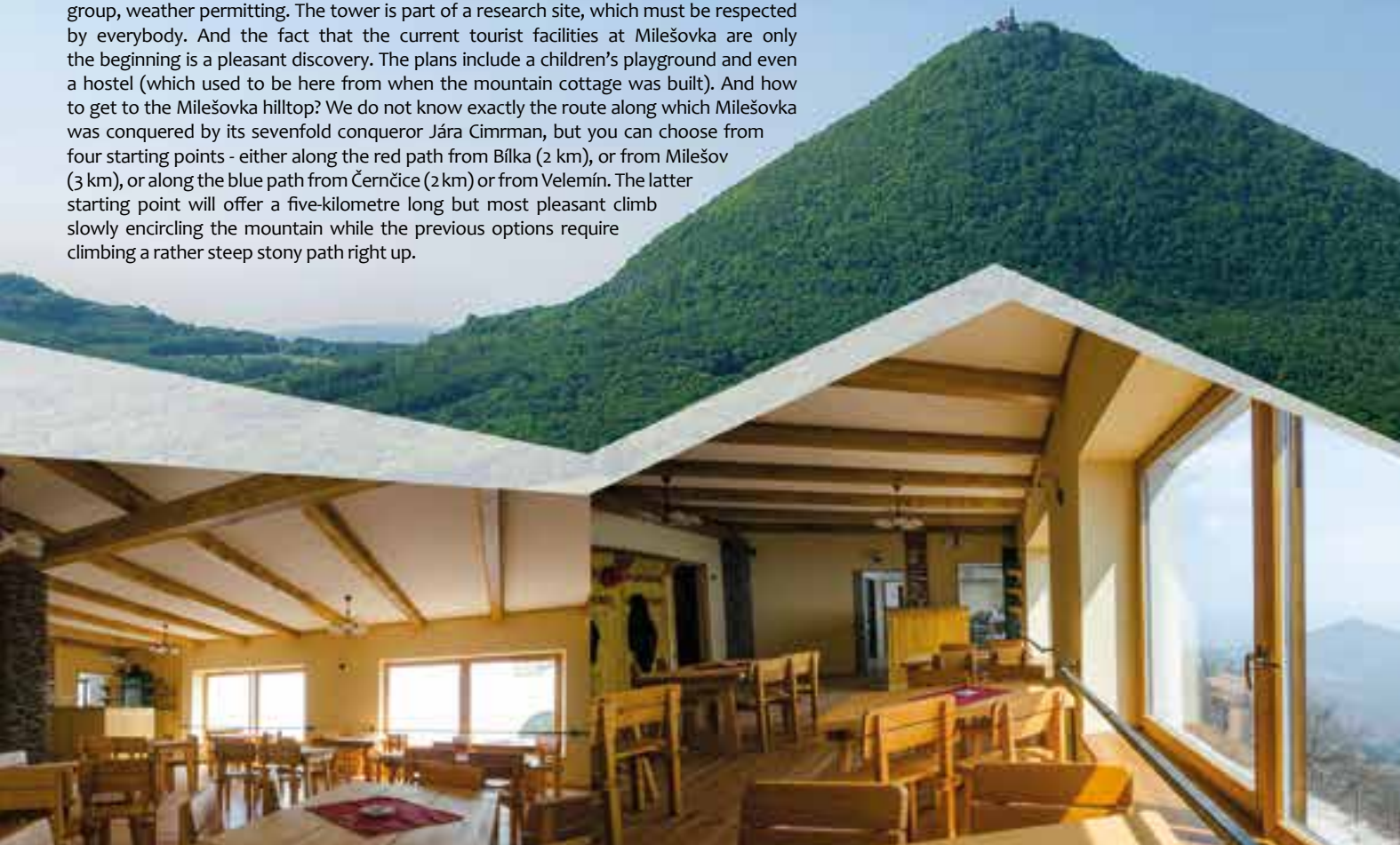
Benešov upon Ploučnice is not a place to be quickly passed. Right in the middle of the town you will find two chateaux in the style of the Saxon Renaissance crowning the town conservation zone. This was the furthest destination of our family trips, some ten kilometres from Děčín. And if you have only detoured here from the Elbe cycle path, take the same path in the opposite direction and you will see lots of new things you did not notice before. If you feel like taking a trip to Bohemian Switzerland from here, accept one of my secret and personally tested tips. Ride upstream of the Bystrá river. You will ascend only a little, like on a plain, through beautiful scenery with various examples of rural architecture, from timber framed to underpinned houses, via Dolní and Horní Habartice up to Markvartice, at the very edge of the wonderful rocks and gorges. However, we have set off to explore the Ploučnice cycle path, so let us go on. Right past Benešov there is the only really demanding ascent, for the path leaves the river valley and takes you (or you take your bicycle) to the top of Ostrý hill (some 180 metres of vertical climb) with rewarding views of the countryside around before you return to the river basin, to Františkov upon Ploučnice. But before you descend again take a detour by the sports ground and visit the torso of a Gothic castle called Šarfenstein from the 13th century. You will praise me for the vista. In Františkov you will certainly welcome a glass of fresh beer in the local pub before you continue along only mildly articulated terrain to Starý Šachov... and further to Osečná, along the meandering Ploučnice across the Liberec region. Now I will return to anonymity, thanking all those involved in building this nice cycling path. They pleased my heart and gave you the chance to get to know the area the beauty of which had so far only been appreciated by the locals.

Milešovka in a New Coat

If you really want to understand the Bohemian Uplands, first you will have to climb Milešovka. The queen of the region will let you see the endless charms of the articulated landscape full of picturesque and strange cones, piles, bare and forest covered hilltops, rocky and forest covered slopes reduced by stone quarrying and crowned with castles, pleasant meadows and thorny forests, decorated with ponds like gems and rivers and streams like laces. The Bohemian Uplands are most beautiful from the Milešovka hilltop, for they are seen through the eyes of an enchanted aviator, the moved Karel Hynek Mácha, the surprised Alexander von Humboldt, through the eyes of Goethe, Neruda, Vrchlický... They understood for they were here. Join them and follow the long lines of tourists that have been coming here for hundreds of years.

PANORAMIC VIEW RIGHT FROM THE TABLE

Now you have the best opportunity – for Milešovka, the windiest mountain in the country, has shown its hospitality since this March. Well, not the mountain, for the Thunder Mountain will never show regard for human fornication. But the people who love it. If you climb to the top you will come across many very pleasant surprises. The municipality of Velešín in cooperation with the Ústecký region has done a lot of work – repaired the supporting walls and vistas and changed the tourist facilities. On the first floor of the tourist cottage built in the early 20th century there is a panoramic observation deck with seating and refreshments. You will also find here an information service for tourists, new restrooms and seventeen places to sit, all with absolutely unrivalled views. There is no road to Milešovka, everything is transported here by a goods funicular, including water. Despite that, you can choose from several hot meals, draught beer and lemonade - simply all a tourist will appreciate after a demanding climb. Then you can watch programmes about Milešovka, the Bohemian Uplands and the meteorological station active here for 108 years (!) on a large screen. The vistas seen on the screen in the cottage may then be enhanced by the real vistas from the tower gallery. You can only climb here in an organised group, weather permitting. The tower is part of a research site, which must be respected by everybody. And the fact that the current tourist facilities at Milešovka are only the beginning is a pleasant discovery. The plans include a children's playground and even a hostel (which used to be here from when the mountain cottage was built). And how to get to the Milešovka hilltop? We do not know exactly the route along which Milešovka was conquered by its sevenfold conqueror Jára Cimrman, but you can choose from four starting points - either along the red path from Bílka (2 km), or from Milešov (3 km), or along the blue path from Černčice (2 km) or from Velešín. The latter starting point will offer a five-kilometre long but most pleasant climb slowly encircling the mountain while the previous options require climbing a rather steep stony path right up.



Poet's Observation Tower over Kryry

It was in the sixth year of the twentieth century when the construction of an observation tower was completed on Church Hill above Kryry village, following a design by the Viennese architect Alois

Kaiser. The local aesthetic society, who came up with the idea of the observation tower, decided to name it after the genius whose death a hundred years before was being celebrated - the poet and playwright Friedrich Schiller. In the middle of June a strange tower started shining with novelty on the site of the former proud Kozihřady castle. Its body was partly built using stones from the original castle and over the foundations of the former castle tower. In addition, the tower was built of nearly a hundred thousand bricks shining virgin red, and the first ladies and gentlemen, locals and non-residents, including a delegation of Kryry natives from Vienna, climbed the hundred and twenty-two steps to view the countryside from the top of the tower for the first time.

A PRESENT FOR A HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY

The enthusiasm for observation towers at the turn of the century slowly faded and the structure began to dilapidate. The rotten wooden gallery became the site of a tragedy in 1924, and the town decided to pull it down. At the end of the war the observation tower was closed completely. Its rebirth was connected with another hundredth anniversary, this time of the observation tower itself. In 2000 the town of Kryry commenced extensive but sensitive repairs. Following photos from the early twentieth century, the gallery was built again from beech wood, the bricks were regouted, the observation platform at a height of 22 metres above the ground was repaired, the wooden spiral staircase was renovated - and in 2006, a hundred years after the tower was first built, the first tourists could climb it again to enjoy the beautiful vistas. The topmost platform remained closed to the public as the metal spiral staircase could not be repaired and a new one would be needed. But the five-metre difference is negligible, for the vistas from the Schillewarte, today the Schiller Observation Tower, are excellent, despite the fact that viewers looking into the distance from here are only 402 metres above sea level. The panorama includes the Doupovské hory mountains with the mighty Fortified Settlement, the Ore Mountains with the dominant feature of Klínovec, the Bohemian Uplands governed by Queen Milešovka, as well as the Křivoklátsko region. The ticket to go up this architecturally unique observation tower costs a couple of crowns but you will certainly keep it as it is a small picture postcard. When you descend from the tower to Kryry and pass the Baroque church of the Birth of the Virgin Mary, stop on the bridge across the Blšanka by the rare Flood Memorial reminding of the flood of 1872.



“If you say „marshland“ an experienced tourist will add „Of course, Šumava!“ But hardly anybody knows that the Ore Mountains are interlaced with marshlands and that thanks to careful and meaningful interventions by activists, their area keeps increasing, currently reaching over 100 hectares. The truth is that in the past this area was a hundred times larger. Maybe you say - a marshland, in addition without the wooden log walkways and the omnipresent information panels, well what about it? You are mistaken. Greatly mistaken. The Ore Mountains are like a mustang. An unsaddled and untamed horse that you can get on but the ride will be wild, often uncomfortable, but beautiful and absolutely natural. And the local marshlands - that is one big ride.”

With a swinging step to the soul of the Ore Mountains

IN THE REALM OF BEARDED DWARFS

A man who has trodden the Czech lands from one end to the other has seen nearly all types of the varied and very articulate Bohemian landscape. But the marshlands of the Ore Mountains are simply different. There is a still silence here, sometimes a bird dares to twitter, a bee to buzz or a grasshopper to chirr. A strange silence. Huge cakes, mostly lined with forests, as if kneeling down around the marshlands and slowly stretching again. And what are the cakes garnished with? A continuous line of bumpy hills covered with resilient grass, perhaps all types of moss of many different colours, from light green to dark brown via red or even bluish, here and there rusty water coloured by the peat like caramelised malt colours stout, wind playing with white feathery cotton grass as if as far as you can see there were aged bearded dwarfs all around. Here and there a short solitary spruce and mainly the beautiful torsos of dry trees, a spectacular gallery of avant-garde sculptures, gossiping old birches grouped in small forests to gossip together, the twinkling blue eyes of periwinkles, the pre-storm shine of veronica, ripening cranberries, seductive bog bilberries or sundews. Here and there a viper or a lizard, or even a black stork circling over this strange pervious piece of staggering land. Marshlands are the soul of the Ore Mountains - resilient, raw, sometimes treacherous, but always beautiful under any circumstances.

SEVEN BEAUTIES

Let us stop at seven of them, affected by the more or less visible efforts to slow down their drainage, to allow groundwater to accumulate and nourish what belongs to this habitat, and to displace what has been introduced here from the outside. If you climb from Chomutov via the beautiful Bezruč valley to the New House, you will be just a couple of steps away from the New House marshland. This marshland has been a nature reserve for nearly half a century. Along the forest path marked in blue from the New Pond to the west or north-west, you can cross the whole marshland and reach Načetín, from where you will comfortably get back to Chomutov by bus. You will see here nice growths of dwarf pine, rhododendrons, andromeda, and of course the bearded marshland dwarfs - cotton grass. A little further to the north, not far from Klíny (above Litvínov), by the state frontier, there is the Black Pond marshland. As the name suggests, the habitat includes a mountain pond surrounded by grass, heath, marshland flowers and - as mentioned above - mystical silence. When the countryside darkens and people are not able to recognize more than the outlines of objects, the hour of the owls begins. Little owls and Eurasian pygmy owls dot the dark skies over the marsh in their encumbered flight. The most famous marshland however is the one reached after passing Fláje lake and continuing towards Moldava. There you will find the Grünwald marshland. It is huge, spectral and modestly beautiful. The sunlit sky over it is crossed by birds of prey and snipes cry from the bushes. As if you were standing on the shore of a lake only partly covered with grass. Like in the previously mentioned habitats and most marshlands of the Ore Mountains, this one is also an ideal nesting place for the rare heatcock and it is marshlands that contribute to the chances of it surviving.

Another marshland, hidden among the springs of the Flájský stream by Nové Město, has the heatcock in the name - the Big Heatcock Mating Place. A little further to the north there is the steep Pramenáč mountain, which since time immemorial has washed its tired feet in countless pools of water and streams and cured its rheumatism with the peat from the marshland. As far as you can see there are pines, birches, lakes nearly swallowed up by the ground, a real savage land of the Ore Mountains, virgin land. But now you can already see Cínovec. On the top of the Cínovec range, next to the local golf course, there is the Cínovec marshland. And as water does not know human frontiers, it runs from here to the Czech as well as the German side of the mountains. Therefore, the Cínovec marshland joins the Georgenfelder Hochmoor. It pays to visit the German side, for there you will eventually come across wooden log walkways allowing you to reach the very heart of the marshland. The endless wandering along the swinging unstable terrain of the “unsaddled” wetland makes you feel sick for these firm log paths. A tourist is not a creature lacking imagination or an inclination towards overcoming obstacles. Or at least they should not be. And so return to the Cínovec marshland and dream over the rusty surface blossoming with pink foxgloves, those beautiful Czech orchids. These moments may not be counted as life.

Žatec, loved by film makers from all over the world

Just walk along the narrow lanes of the historic centre of Žatec and you will feel like a film star. For example, Barbara Streisand filmed Yentl here and Roman Polanski took many shots for his Oliver Twist in these lanes. Photogenic Žatec is able to become revolutionary Paris, historic London or the Warsaw ghetto of World War II.

FROM THE FILM MALT HOUSE TO GORGEOUS BARBARA

Start your film trip to Žatec in the Malt House Gallery. The local permanent exhibition called Žatec in film will show you photographs and previews of the forty films made here over the years. This is however just a fragment of the film glory of Žatec, where film crews have found over two hundred and fifty ideal locations for movies, series or advertisements. You will find the answer to the question of why Žatec has been so attractive for film makers when you leave the Gallery and begin walking through the city centre. After a while you will realize that you are passing one square after another and that the local streets resemble an exhibition of architectural styles.

A dozen squares each with a different atmosphere and over five hundred buildings in different architectural styles make Žatec a rich catalogue of film scenes. And the catalogue will include not only churches majestic at first sight, but also apparently modest burgher houses. Žatec offers corners resembling - with some good will - the Paris of the Great French Revolution, which can be transformed without extensive interference into the London of 1830, or the Polish Jewish ghettos of the early 20th century. The film potential of Žatec became known in Hollywood long before the fall of the Iron Curtain and the inflow of foreign film crews to the Czech Republic in the nineties. In 1982 Žatec became an excellent venue for Barbara Streisand's debut as a film director, called Yentl. The period story of a Jewish girl prevented from acquiring an education by the religious and social conventions of the time, required a number of different locations resembling Jewish quarters in Polish towns at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Historic Žatec was then able to offer authentic lanes and buildings that had not been subjected to modernisation - in the good and bad sense of the word. The historic buildings were valuable by the fact that nobody tried to repair them, which meant they were run down but had preserved their period spirit. Many places really looked like a hundred years before. And so the Oscar-winning actress settled in Žatec and made many shots here, especially in the surroundings of Dlouhá street with the synagogue, Chelčický square, náměstí 5. května square, the railway station staircase and Hošťálkovo square dominated by the front of the Assumption Church. These places are some of the most photogenic locations in Žatec where film makers often return, and one can say with only a little exaggeration that Streisand discovered them for her colleagues. The Žatec citizens could then be proud that their town had significantly contributed to the success of this excellent musical drama when Yentl was nominated for four Oscars.

OLIVER TWIST AND JEAN VALJEAN IN ŽATEC LANES

Not only Žatec citizens but also film makers still talk about the welcoming approach of Barbara Streisand. She was overwhelmed by her project and was willing to do the maximum for its success, so she for example had bitumen pulled up and replaced with period pavements. This was appreciated by many film makers who came to Žatec after her, for example, the crew of the series Young Indiana Jones. Its producer, Rick McCallum, who had for example cooperated with George Lucas on the legendary Star Wars, came to the Czech Republic in search of film locations, finding them in Žatec. He liked our country so much that he settled in Prague and married there too. Scenes for two instalments of the Young Indiana Jones series, holder of ten Emmy awards, were again filmed in náměstí 5. května square. A couple of blocks further along in Dlouhá Street and Chelčický square, film makers worked in 1997 when they made shots for the film Les Misérables. This version of the famous novel by Victor Hugo was directed by Bille August and Jean Valjean was embodied this time by the Irish actor Liam Neeson. Žatec was the venue of demanding sequences with exploding barricades and breaking windows in the whole street after one of the explosions. Nobody warned the citizens of Žatec that in the course of such scenes their windows should remain open. Although film is an illusion and all happenings in it are just "as if", the consequences of filming are often very tangible. Like in the case of filming the Radecký March film in three parts, not very well known in our country. Then in 1993 the film makers had thirty centimetres of mud brought into the streets but a sudden change in the weather caused the mud to freeze, the filming had to be discontinued and the mud took long to clear from the streets. The consequences are not always so dramatic, for example, Žatec citizens like to remember the filming of an historic series called Red Bloodwort, where some of them also acted. Like in the other titles filmed here, such as the Oliver Twist series and later the more famous film of the same name directed by Roman Polanski, in the new adaptation of the novel Doctor Zhivago of 2002 or a couple of years ago in the excellent biographical film on Edith Piaf. But Žatec is not only favoured by Hollywood and European producers, Czech film makers like it too. Already in 1962 Ladislav Rychman filmed here the famous musical Starci na chmelu and Juraj Herz in 1973 all exterior scenes of the comedy Holky z porcelánu. The local railway station was used as the scene for virtually the whole film on a railway theme called Ještě žijí s věšákem, plácačkou a čepicí, while the town centre provided an appreciated backdrop for the Náměstíčko series and the continuation of the series Nemocnice na kraji města. A couple of shots were taken here also by the film director Agnieszka Holland for the remarkable three-part film from HBO, Hořící keř, about the message of Jan Palach.



Ahoy ship! or Sail Across Bohemian Switzerland

THE ELBE

The mightiest river, taking in its arms all three others, is the Elbe, called the Big River from time immemorial. Sailing the Elbe is venerable and majestic. If you embark on the Poseidon steamer below Děčín castle you will be up for an unforgettable experience. I recommend you stand on the upper deck. The strange movement and non-movement, the non-shaking and non-bumping drifting along the calm surface is an experience framed by incredibly beautiful scenery. The Elbe canyon is certainly the most beautiful river valley in the country. The banks rise steeply to the sky on both sides, here covered with bristly trees in dense crowds, there shining with bare rock walls, fragile sandstone needles alternating with giant rock statues, the horizon closed with a stone bastion, with watch towers from where tiny little figures observe from up there what we see from the bottom, charming villages, columns of cyclists and roller skaters, as well as families with children in prams on the Elbe cycle path, the straightest of the straight, here and there the head of a curious beaver in the reeds, checking the surroundings before continuing with its endless tooth work. Another nice experience is passing by the ships, goods ships, mighty bodies merged in liquid and slowly cutting the Elbe waters, with the skies checkered with heron, stork and cormorant routes... All that you can also enjoy in a more active way if you borrow a raft in Děčín and paddle along the river body or let the legendary water dragon float you to Saxony... Three wet nurses of the Elbe are to be met in Děčín, Hřensko and Bad Schandau, for there are the confluences of the ever thirsty Elbe with its three sources, the Ploučnice, the Kamenice and the Křinice.



KŘINICE

Křinice is a nice example of how nature ignores human frontiers. Three springs join up to make the river between Studánka and Krásná Lípa, where it used to run in an open basin under a bridge in the 19th century and now hides under the pavement of the main square in Krásná Lípa, to emerge again later to head for Krásný Buk and the Kyjov valley. You will enjoy visiting this valley and walking or riding along the river basin for here the Křinice is still young and extremely beautiful. Your feet will tread the wet trail, a black stork will majestically fly over your heads, you will find remains of human life in deserted villages to eventually reach the Saxon side, where the Křinice squeezes between the severe rocks and forest covered slopes of the Obere Schleuse gorge. Here you can also sail on a barge and enjoy a much more intimate but no less beautiful experience than in the Hřensko gorges of the Kamenice. The Křinice will then gurgle further along the beautiful valley as far as Bad Schandau, hurrying to lend new strength to the Elbe. So put on a striped t-shirt and a white cap with a peak, shout out Ahoy! and sail across Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland for joy, for pleasure and for knowledge.

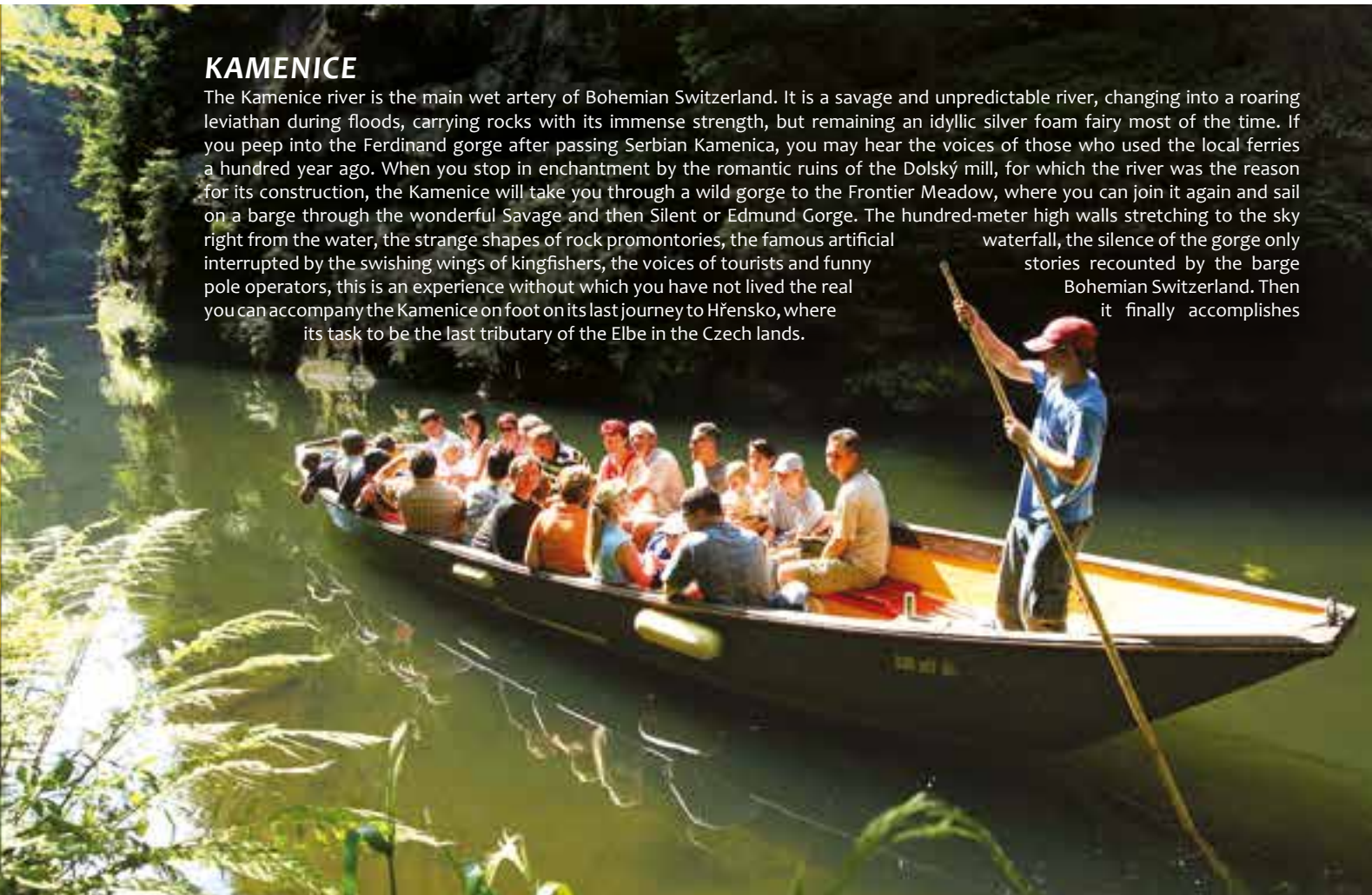
Bohemian Switzerland may be perceived in a thousand different ways, which is why it is so irresistible. Tourist guides speak a lot about sandstone rocks, shapes, walls and towns, about vistas, houses, gorges, observation towers, all sorts of things, but little about rivers. And yet rivers and streams represent one of the biggest assets of this beautiful corner of land. Let us visit Bohemian Switzerland by boat this time, let us merge with the transparent blood of the landscape and sail with it through its arteries, veins and capillaries. Whoever takes a decision like this should know that Bohemian Switzerland is a region of four rivers.

PLOUČNICE

You can accompany the Ploučnice on its way by bike (see above), or join the few water sportsmen gourmets who have only recently discovered this river is a unique sailing terrain. And although primeval in its upstream section in the neighbouring region, richly meandering and constantly surprising, after entering our region at Starý Šachov, it changes to a kind and pleasant river hurrying through the pleasant valley with occasional playful swings across a couple of weirs. The Ploučnice only lightly touches the southern edge of Bohemian Switzerland from Benešov upon Ploučnice, to invade it again by Děčín and conciliatorily join the waters the Elbe has collected along its journey through the whole of Bohemia.

KAMENICE

The Kamenice river is the main wet artery of Bohemian Switzerland. It is a savage and unpredictable river, changing into a roaring leviathan during floods, carrying rocks with its immense strength, but remaining an idyllic silver foam fairy most of the time. If you peep into the Ferdinand gorge after passing Serbian Kamenica, you may hear the voices of those who used the local ferries a hundred year ago. When you stop in enchantment by the romantic ruins of the Dolský mill, for which the river was the reason for its construction, the Kamenice will take you through a wild gorge to the Frontier Meadow, where you can join it again and sail on a barge through the wonderful Savage and then Silent or Edmund Gorge. The hundred-meter high walls stretching to the sky right from the water, the strange shapes of rock promontories, the famous artificial waterfall, the silence of the gorge only interrupted by the swishing wings of kingfishers, the voices of tourists and funny pole operators, this is an experience without which you have not lived the real Bohemian Switzerland. Then you can accompany the Kamenice on foot on its last journey to Hřensko, where it finally accomplishes its task to be the last tributary of the Elbe in the Czech lands.

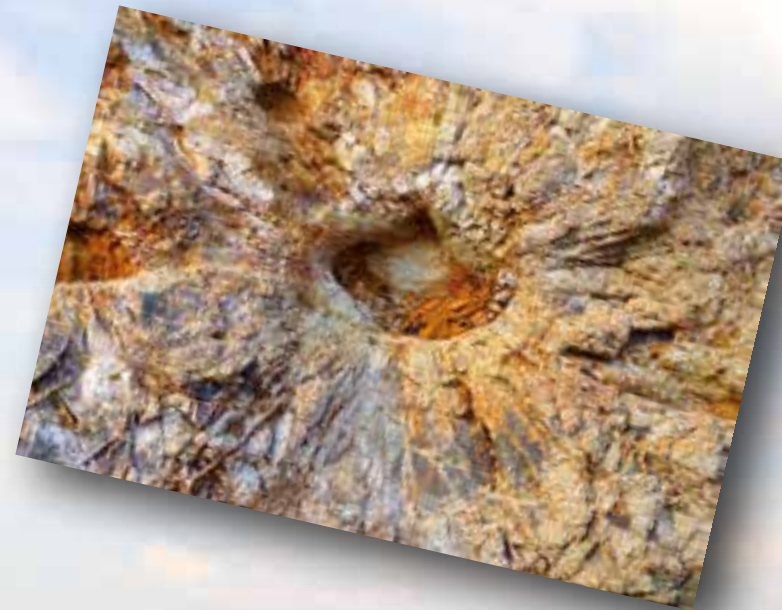


Landscape like after Volcano War

“Standing on the hilltop of Milešovka or Hazmburk, having climbed one of the observation towers or vistas, or in a valley between hills, viewing the Bohemian Uplands you will enjoy a sight hardly offered by any other place on this planet. The marvels of this landscape require a painter or a poet - or a geologist - to be described properly. A geologist would be best for he knows the reasons why something as unique as this once came into existence. But let us be frank, a geologist's account would not be very easy to read. So what to do? Let us abandon the exactness of science and just remain astonished and curious laymen left breathless by this landscape.”

COLD SUNS

Near a village called Hnojnice u Třebívlic is the last of the three selected geomorphological rarities – stone suns. It is in fact a small quarry with an uncovered rock wall. At the beginning you may think that somebody has been having a practical joke and small children simply painted the wall with naive pictures of suns. But when you come closer you will understand that this is really a consequence of volcanic activity. Magma is to be blamed, exploding and mixing with whatever was in its way. When the magma encountered cold clay stones it as it were rebounded from them (this is again a feeling or a vision rather than a scientific description, so those who are raising their eyebrows quickly close the book and run to the library of the Academy of Science) and the heat created star-shaped fissures in the whole rock surroundings. And as the clay cores are large and small (from three millimetres to thirty centimetres) the stone sun sizes are different too. Frankly speaking, although it is good to know how this beauty came into existence, it is even better not to know and simply view it, even with an open mouth, for this is forbidden here. You see, there are still other things to visit, such as the pseudo-stalactites in the Highwaymen Cave by Velké Březno, the Bohemian garnet deposits by Třebenice and Podsedice, the basalt pillars on Vrkoč near Ústí and the Estate Rock or Gold Hill by Česká Kamenice... The Bohemian Uplands is a landscape astonishing not only for its relief. It is magic on the outside as well as the inside. And it is worth investigating, believe me.



BETWEEN ICE AND FIRE

Let me mention, for example, the ice pits and vents. The former are fissures in the rock or depressions in landslide fields from where the cold air cannot escape and thus keeps crystals of frozen snow and ice mirrors in them. The air emanating from these holes is icy and freezing. The vents as if connected directly to the earth's core - they are stony holes connected to the fissures inside the hill and breathing out hot air even in the middle of a cold winter, making snow give way to incredibly fresh grass. You can come across these phenomena in several places in the Bohemian Uplands, the most famous examples being Plešivec and Boreč. Plešivec is a hill near Litoměřice, nicknamed Iceberg (Eisberg), which can be reached by the blue path between Velké Žernoseky and Sebužín. The hill is covered with forest but the southern slope is one big landslide. And the cavities in the landslide accumulate heavy air that the bed of the sea of stones will not let escape. So despite the mere five hundred meters above sea level, you will come across snow and ice here even when summer begins. And where does the air eventually disappear to, you would like to know? That is the magic.

In many places the air does not disappear at all, being replaced with even colder air when frost ushers in the next winter. If you are interested in the devil's breath, visit Boreč. This hill is situated outside Lovosice as a counterpart to the dominant Lovoš. The educational path taking you there will give you more serious geological and geomorphologic data than this article about feelings and astonishment. The truth is that Boreč has scared people from time immemorial. In 1881 researchers measured minus eleven at the foothill and plus fourteen degrees Centigrade at the top by the vent. No wonder that people were scared and believed devils lived in the hill. The explanation is again sophisticated, but I will try a naive one. - At the foothill the mountain takes in cold air through the holes, the air rises through capillary attraction to the hill top, heats up and at the top the mountain breathes it out like a man exhales warm air from his lungs on an icy day. So what is to be seen on the hilltop? Several little caves or hollows surrounded by green moss and grass in the middle of a frosty winter. And if it goes down to minus thirty, you may even see from the foothill how smoke rises from the hilltop.

TERTIARY INVASION

I imagine here a peaceful plain, once the bottom of a sea, full of deposits, marlite, sandstone, simply settled aborigines. But then the noisy and bombastic Tertiary troops arrived and attacked from the bottom, through the settled idlers, and began to struggle for their way to the sun, jumping up, bulging, pointing and moving up by capillary attraction, emerging and growing - an army of basalt and phonolite warriors who broke up and pierced all around them. And when the volcanic anger passed and their hot lava blood set, they became petrified. The landscape around the Elbe and the Ohře was no longer flat like a table, being instead filled with crowds of cones and "buns and peaks, as if colossal stalactite madness created giant stalagmites, tall, short, wide... - not a continuous range but individual egoistic tops. This was so different and so strange that all sorts of strange things manifested themselves here - as if by a spell the basalt formed geometrical shapes, creating stone prisms, organs and curls, fans and walls, volcanic chimneys remaining naked like earthy fingers, drops of the blood of the Bohemian land precipitated to form shining and seductive Czech garnets, the sea returned here, but this time made of stone, oceans of landslides, strangely soft loess overhangs, fissures exhaling the icy breath of the planet, and vents endlessly emitting an earth glow, or orange clay cores radiating twisting rays and forming mysterious suns that do not heat. That is just a little wild vision but all this really is in the Bohemian Uplands and you can still see it with your own eyes even today. And be reassured that these adventures are unrivalled.



Dresden International Airport – your gateway to Northern Bohemia



Flughafen Dresden GmbH is a subsidiary of Mitteldeutsche Airport Holding, transporting about 1.9 million passengers a year (2012). The regions covered by the short lines of Dresden International Airport include the German regions of Saxony and Southern Brandenburg and also North Bohemia in the Czech Republic and Lower Silesia in Poland.

The timetable includes daily flights to German and European capitals. These include Barcelona (Vueling), Basel (Easyjet), Düsseldorf (Air Berlin, Germanwings), Frankfurt upon Main (Lufthansa), Köln / Bonn (Germanwings), Krasnodar (Hamburg Airways), London-City Airport (Air France / Cityjet), Moscow-Sheremetevo (Aeroflot), Moscow-Vnukovo (UTair), Munich (Lufthansa), Palma de Mallorca (Air Berlin) and Stuttgart (Germanwings). In addition, the daily offer includes direct flights to tourist destinations on the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic, the Red and the Black Sea.

If you take off from Dresden and have only one stop-off on the way you can reach any destination in Europe and the world: The airlines Aeroflot, Air Berlin, Air France / City Jet, Germanwings, Lufthansa, UTair and Vueling provide this. They offer lots of practical connections to capitals and tourist destinations. The waiting times at the given hubs are usually short and the large number of connections allows for flexible route planning.

Its direct connection to the A4 motorway, the nearly 3,000 parking places near the terminal and the compact terminal with its speedway station and conference centre represent a coherent concept allowing for comfortable arrivals and departures or the organisation of conferences and meetings right at the airport. North Bohemia can be reached in about 45 minutes by the A4 and A17/D8 motorways. At the main station in Dresden you can change from the S2 speedway from the airport to connections to the Czech Republic. The journey from the airport to the main station takes about 20 minutes. In addition, a Student Agency bus line connects Dresden Airport with the capital

city of Prague several times a day. As passenger satisfaction surveys show, the airport also scores thanks to its aesthetic appearance and the welcoming approach of its staff.



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The Gate to Bohemia and to my inner self - Lukáš Konečný

Ústí, that is above all beautiful nature

Lukáš Konečný is the best Czech professional boxer. He has provided countless interviews in his life but this time he had to face a brand new experience. To talk for an hour with an interviewer without uttering a word about boxing was completely new to him. Lukáš is known by everybody as a boxer. But he is not known by so many people as a native of the Ústecký region. We met in the Eden pub in Ústí, which Lukáš is a co-owner of, and which offers beautiful vistas of the city and the surrounding hills. Before I invite you to listen to our talk, I should explain some facts to you: Lukáš was born in Brno, where he spent the first eight years of his life, his father being the first Czech professional boxer, Milan Konečný. Lukáš and his wife Jarka have three daughters – ten-year-old Ann and seven-year-old twins Bára and Jaromíra.

Lukáš, what are you then, a native of Brno or of Ústí?

Half and half. I travel to Brno a lot, mainly to visit my family. Brno and Ústí are two completely different cities, with different mentalities of the locals and different ways of life. But I live in Ústí and spend most of my time there - of course I travel across the country and across Europe, but I am a settled citizen of Ústí and I like it here.

As an eight-year-old boy you moved out of the city after finishing third grade at elementary school. What was it like then?

Those who have not experienced this will never understand the feelings of a boy living for the whole life at the other end of the country and having all his friends there and then being forced to leave them and move God knows where. But my parents made up their minds and so we moved. Well, that was not easy. I had passed the first three grades at elementary school in Brno and in Ústí I began fourth grade... On the other hand, despite being a small boy I realized quite clearly that the countryside around Ústí was completely different – while Brno was on a plain Ústí was surrounded by hills. And I came to like this immediately.

What did you do as a boy?

Mainly sport. My father in fact moved because of boxing and so I immediately started attending boxing training sessions, but at the same time I played football and tried other sports as well - nobody knowing then what I would actually do in the future. And me the least. So sports grounds, sports halls, training sessions. Those are my strongest memories from childhood. First we lived on the Northern Terrace and then we moved to Dobětice, Poláčekova.

So a child from a housing estate?

In Brno we lived in a normal three-storey block of flats, but since then I have always lived in a concrete prefabricated building. That means that when I was not training I and my friends ran around the estate, the playgrounds, parks... Still on the Northern Terrace I and my friends played a lot in the valley of the Chudrovský stream, where the Erben vista was built later. At that time the observation tower was much lower than it is today and mainly there was a bunker which we banged the iron door of, longing to get inside. That was a great adventure. Especially when we managed at last to get in. Today the door is welded shut, to the detriment of today's boys.

Did you go on family trips?

All the time. Every free weekend. I have seen everything here and across the country. My parents took me to all sorts of castles and chateaux, observation towers and vistas - I had forgotten a lot of that and only began

to be reminded recently. We often visited Hazmburk, when it was still completely dilapidated. Today it is an idyll, you can even go up the tower. The slopes below the castle offered excellent pears and apples, I remember picking them. And today we visit the same place with our children, it is one of our favourite spots. We often visited all the vistas in the surroundings of Ústí, Ostrý, Marian Rock, Bořeň, Milešovka, Děčínský Sněžník... And now we do the same with our daughters.

So you continue the family tradition?

Of course, we make trips whenever we can.

Where to most often?

That would be a very long list indeed, we have seen everything here, really.

Well, ok, so what is your favourite destination?

There are also many... Well, in the summer, when it is hot, and the children can run around and nobody is lacking anything, this pub is a wonderful escape. The vistas from here are incredible. Or from our apartment balcony, we live on the fifth floor and have a priceless view... No, really, for example Blansko, Blankenstein ruins, we like it there. When we had a dog, a beagle, we went around Erbenka all the time, we know every stone there. It is a short trip to the Dobětice waterfalls from here. Of course Zubrnice with the children, where my mother paints eggs in the marketplace, and of course the zoological gardens, close to here, where we used to have a season ticket so we could drop in there for a short while - our children know exactly where which animal is. Around Bukovka is a nice walk. And when the water rises the Masaryk sluice is an excellent place to visit, we've even been inside it.

Three girls at this age, you need to think of a programme for them all the time, don't you?

That is absolutely no problem here, we usually come up with an idea in a couple of minutes. Recently we visited the Pravčice Gate, we prepared the girls for that for a long time so that they could really enjoy the trip. We also visited the gorges and sailed on the boats... I don't think you would find a place around Ústí that we have not visited. In short, as my parents travelled with me now we travel with our children, as when they get used to this in their childhood they will find it good for the rest of their lives. Like me.

Do your daughters play any sports?

Of course they do! They do all sorts of sports - floorball, mountaineering, athletics, basketball - nothing professionally, they look for what they will like most. In the context of my training I run half-marathons around the Elbe and the girls accompany me on their bikes.



Lukáš, tell me, if you were asked by somebody who does not know Ústí to explain why you settled here, what would you say to him?

I simply like it here. Well, I do not go downtown so much, that is not attractive for me, but the countryside reaching the city from all sides is beautiful and is the reason we are here. Who knows, I may end up in Brno again in the future, but this (pointing to the panorama of mountains and hills) I would miss a lot. Here you just take a few steps and you're surrounded by places which are worth visiting and returning to. In fact, I would say all the corners of this region are nice to visit.

To say Ústí and nature in a single breath may surprise some people...

I know, those who don't know it here usually connects this city with industry and pollution... and yet we can see a herd of boars from the window and a panorama that cannot be seen everywhere.

And a personal tip for a trip? For those who do not know it here?

The funicular to Komáří vížka. The longest in Bohemia. We take our bicycles with us, have them transported to the top by the funicular and then we ride down the hill with the children. That cannot disappoint anybody.



Lužice connection path returns the ridge path to where it started from

“Today, tourism is something quite normal. Everybody thinks of themselves as tourists even without being organised anywhere, for a tourist in the widest sense of the word is anybody taking a trip to the countryside for the purpose of getting to know it. But the tourist fashion is not that old. The first boom only came in the late 19th century. And yet around 1830 innkeeper Thekla of Kamenická Stráň u Růžové in Bohemian Switzerland loudly demanded the reconstruction of the path from the Pravčice Gate to Rose Hill for tourists. Then everyone laughed at her but some seventy years later her words came true.”



HOW LADY THEKLA DEMANDED A PATH

In April 1902 delegates of unions active in North Bohemia and Upper Lužice met in Varnsdorf to launch an even more ambitious project. The most active unions included the „Mountain Union“ of Krásná Lípa, the „Bohemian Switzerland“ of Děčín and the „Union for Northernmost Bohemia“ of Rumburk, whose president became the coordinator and as such submitted a plan for the route from Ještěd to Rose Hill. The plan was mainly inspired by the system of Alpine and Thuringia paths. The route, about sixty kilometres long, was to be marked by a blue four-tooth comb (most tourist marks were red then) and that is why the route began to be called the Blue Ridge Artery (Blauer Kammerweg). The creator of the blue comb symbol was the Varnsdorf factory owner Otto August. The section in the territory of the present Ústecký region was covered by the route from Tolštejn via Jedlová, Krásné Pole, Studenec, Líška, Kamenice, Všemily and Dolský mill to Rose Hill. In the course of the same year the path was marked and thus a year later a researcher from Česká Lípa, Anton Paudler, and a native of Krásná Lípa, painter August Frind, could not only walk the whole route but also write and illustrate the first tourist guides for the Blue Ridge Artery. Later, other unions joined and eventually the Blue Ridge Artery connected the Ore Mountains and Praděd mountain, and in the early thirties measured an impressive 800 kilometres in length. Paradoxically enough, the marked path eventually bypassed both Rumburk and Krásná Lípa, Děčín and Kamenická Stráň, where innkeeper Thekla expressed this idea for the first time in her request towards the Count of Teplice.



WHICH WAY...

The blue ridge path later became a logical basis for many other tourist paths but no longer as a whole and never ever perceived as a single route. Until last year. The initiative was taken by the Liberecký region together with the Görlitz region, and with support from the European Union they renewed and marked (the blue ridge got into the red field) part of the original Kammerweg – from Orle in Poland via the Jizerské and the Lužické hory mountains to the Žitava mountains. At the Pod Ptačincem crossing the path enters the Ústecký region – where the task was taken over by enthusiastic individuals of a society for the public benefit called Bohemian Switzerland. Although they did not continue marking the ridge artery, a much more demanding project awaiting a sponsor, they invented the wonderful Lužice connection, a detour from the main route. Its concept expects a future connection either to the original ridge artery between Hřensko and Schmilka or, which is more likely, for it to pass to the Upper Lužice via Šluknov and connect to the German long-distance route Oberlausitzer Bergweg, to deserve its name the Lužice connection. The idea is excellent. In addition to taking tourists to a beautiful piece of land between Bohemian Switzerland and the Šluknov region, the arrows with the name Lužice connection pay tribute to the men and women who originally conceived the whole ridge path and eventually takes tourists to its area as well. The Lužice connection will cross Tolštejn, Jedlová and Rybníště and continue beyond the nicely renewed Karl vista (do not miss the vista, it will leave you breathless) to Frind's town of Krásná Lípa and further via the Snow and Wolf mountains to Brtníky. And from there, God and the economic situation permitting, it will take you in future to the Křinice valley and through the gorges called Obere Schleuse in Saxony to the above-mentioned Schmilka. A beautiful and very meritorious project indeed.



TRIP TO ALLURING COUNTRYSIDE

But enough of geography now. You are probably already asking with impatience why take the Lužice path at all. The reasons and the ways are many. Probably the most comfortable one is to hire a guide. The society for public benefit Bohemian Switzerland offers two- or three-day trips along the Lužice connection beginning in the Žitava mountains, including a climb to the top of the highest mountain in the Lužice mountains, which continues across Czech territory along the above-mentioned route. But whether you take the route with a guide or rely on your own sense of orientation, you should by no means miss the legendary ruins of the once very wealthy castle of Tolštejn, a climb to the top of Jedlová mountain, where you can look over much of the ridge artery from the shoulders of the dignified Stone Lady - the Jedlová observation tower (and use the rope centre or ride down on a mountain scooter), the already recommended Karl uplands, also called Countess Leap, with

its colossal vista, the settlement of Kamenná Horka with its beautiful vistas and the unique Kögler Cross, Krásná Lípa with the Bohemian Switzerland House (we have already talked a lot about the town itself), the picturesque highlands with the mountain settlement called Sněžná and its highly photographed Baroque chapel in the broad surroundings, the underpinned houses and cottages in Dlouhý Důl village, and Wolf Mountain with its popular observation tower and the Carmelite Virgin Mary chapel. The Lužice connection temporarily ends in Brtníky, where you will find the Amethyst information centre with its remarkable mineralogical exhibition and a retail exhibition of landscape photographs. From there the Kyjov valley (oh yes, the one with the wonderful ice falls), the entrance to the national park, is within reach. Fantastic wandering in a landscape abounding with experiences. Well then - we are keeping our fingers crossed for you, builders of the Lužice connection.

Caramel with a pleasant Italian flavour

When you have walked around the ancient town of Louny, taken the town wall promenade above the Ohře river basin, viewed with astonishment the daring curves of the roof of the Gothic jewel, St. Nicolas' church, when you have passed through the unique Benedikt Rejt gallery and the unusual araukarite museum of petrified trees and the Hussite museum, when in short you have unhurriedly digested all this beautiful town has to offer, you will certainly feel hungry. We all know well that it is sometimes difficult to find a decent restaurant in a small town, where you can not only eat but also satisfy your longing for sophisticated gastronomy, not an end in itself but rather meant to be for people, without one compromise after another. But you need not resolve this problem in Louny's main square. There is a very decent restaurant there with a healthy philosophy and an experienced and creative chef. The Caramel Hotel & Café



FROM BOHEMIAN CABBAGE SOUP TO RATATOUILLE AND BACK

Right next to Daliborka, the beautiful mediaeval house with a preserved log cabin room on the first floor, there is the shiny green facade of a building which used to be a block of flats, with a knife sharpener on the ground floor visited by the whole town when they needed to have a knife or a skate blade sharpened. For three years the building has housed a nice and cosy hotel that will welcome you with its friendly, light and very pleasant restaurant. Before you take a seat, walk to the beautiful terrace at the rear, from where you will see the river. In summer you must eat here and in winter at least stand and look. You will be pleasantly surprised by what the restaurant offers. The chef, Jaroslav Louda, prepares modern European cuisine here. He possesses extensive experience from Prague and foreign restaurants, and specialises in Italian cuisine. Nobody will overwhelm you here with gastronomical experiments, this is a really pleasant and affordable restaurant both at lunch time, when the menu offers several different meals including at least one vegetarian, and at dinner time, when the creativeness of the chef peaks. If you want to try the local hit, order pork stuffed with ricotta and Parma ham. The starters will surprise you, with grilled Cypriot halloumi cheese, grilled duck liver in cognac and above all beef carpaccio, and chef Louda will bet that you will not find better anywhere else in Louny. If you like soups, do not miss the Bohemian cabbage soup. Vegetarians and children will appreciate the attention paid to them here. Where else can you order ratatouille as the main dish? And children? Nobody will palm them off here with chips and ketchup - they can have a crispy chicken burger or chicken schnitzel as a cake. As I have already mentioned, the chef is mainly proud of his Italian dishes - as soon as you taste the very first mouthful of his risotto you will seem to hear the splashes of the Grand Canal and the vaportetto song, the homemade gnocchi with chicken and leaf spinach and cream is really excellent and the fresh tagliatelle will not disappoint you. But you will not be making a mistake either if you choose the Czech beef fillets, the excellent duck or the salmon in a light marinade. Their range of salads is really grand. Nevertheless, leave some space for dessert and let yourselves be surprised by the strawberry bruschetta, a sweet doughnut, an apple pie or one of the pancakes. If you take my advice, try the remarkable combination of caramelised pineapple and pistachio ice cream - the result of a long and successful search for an ideal harmony of flavours. And finish your meal with a cup of coffee, which is fine.

Game paradise at Krista castle

In the middle of the deep forests near Děčínský Sněžník mountain, in perfect isolation, there used to stand a small hunting lodge from 1735. The lodge was built by Jan Josef Thun-Hohenstein for himself and he named it after his wife - Krista. If I say „used to stand“ I want to emphasize that it nearly missed being pulled down. At the beginning of World War II the hunting lodge was expropriated by the German army and after the war the border sections were only accessible to the select. Just three of all the buildings making up the hunting lodge have survived and have recently been thoroughly reconstructed. For three years there has been a pleasant hotel here, recently enriched with the last of the three reconstructed buildings. The local restaurant is famous and specific in many respects, even in the nationwide context.



MEAT FROM THE SURROUNDING FORESTS

The hotel is simply elegant and comfortable. The two buildings include thirteen suites with very stylish furnishings. Each suite is different in nature and all are unified by the sensitively selected style. You can choose from the Spruce, Birch, Oak, Astrological, Geographical or Botanical suite. Outside there is a spacious roofed veranda with summer kitchen, a children's playground and cycle paths in summer and cross-country ski tracks in winter. The restaurant is headed by chef Ladislav Kotyza - who surprises with his clearly defined style and strictly adhered to philosophy. First of all they have opted for domestic cuisine here, no ready made products or emulsifiers, everything is prepared on the spot from scratch, including the broth. The menu reflects the season of the year and the daily theme - for example, asparagus, pumpkin, advent... and now the main point: Krista castle is one of the few restaurants in the Czech lands with its own venison preparation room. The point is that the hotel has its own hunters and the animals are taken from the forest right to Krista castle. There the quality is inspected and the best pieces are selected to be served. Then the meat is steamed, skinned and portioned - and supplied to the hotel kitchen. Simply ideal. The menu just says „venison“ and only the waiter will inform you which animal the meal will be prepared from, for this depends on what has been actually hunted and made available to the chef. I tried in vain to get the hits of the local menu from the operations manager, Jiří Rippl. People simply do not travel here for a particular meal but for Kotyza's cuisine. In addition to venison you will also be offered fish, poultry and beef - always of Czech origin, with a preference for local breeders and private farmers. The menu is based on venison, though, which is also suggested by the hotel and restaurant's

decorations - a not obtrusive number of hunting trophies including a really giant European elk, combined with historic photographs of the lodge. There are as many tastes as there are people - there are some who prefer the local dumplings with mushrooms, or grilled vegetables (and they need not be vegetarians) - but most people come here to have venison - and their decision is a good one. I tried the grilled venison back on a mushroom ragout (I was lucky with the stag meat), grilled pâté of venison rump in hunter's sauce and incredible slowly cooked venison rump steak with pine and juniper, butter dumplings and redcurrant sauce, immediately following a sample of excellent venison pâté and delicious fillets of venison back in marinade and wild spices, all crowned with blueberry dumplings made from cottage cheese with cream and fruit topping and very good coffee. As I could see the other items on the menu were equally popular with the other diners, I cannot recommend anything special, you will have to find out for yourselves.



Devil's tower over the Bílina

BOŘEŇ, A MYSTERIOUS MOUNTAIN

Climbed by Goethe, Humboldt, Balbín and hundreds of other curious people and lovers of fantastic rock shapes and far vistas every year since. Many experts consider Bořeň the very biggest phonolite body in Europe and the rockiest solitary mountain in the country. The mountain is really mysterious. Bare, with forest confined to its foot, hundred-meter high vertical slopes, mysterious fissures, black rock and towers. Well, Bořeň is also the tallest non-sandstone climbing wall in the country. There is a fantastic view from the top for the mountain itself is easily visible from far away. The Ore Mountains in their beauty, the Bohemian Uplands not seen like this from anywhere else, the Doupovské hory mountains, but also the Ore Mountains basin and the cities of Most and above all Bílina with the Radovesic hopper. Being a quiet and attentive visitor does pay off. You will see nesting owls (back after many centuries), toads, lizards, ring snakes, many butterflies and strange spiders. The local flora is even more fascinating. The most precious jewel is the Aster Alpina, only growing where there has been no forest since the Ice Age. There are only five such places in this country, Bořeň being the habitat with greatest occurrence. Hedge parsley, pasqueflower, iris, carnation, golden rod - an incredible and very big rockery. All that protected as a nature reserve since 1977. Twenty-two years later, students from the local grammar school in Bílina built an educational path here that will take you to the top like the best guide.

Who could forget the chilling thrill of the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind...* when the select earthlings, driven by an urge hard to understand, drew, painted and modelled a strangely shaped mountain. Devils Tower in Wyoming. Its brother dominates the town of Bílina. The two are geological twins – mighty and steep phonolite piles reaching about 350 metres above the river as a result of volcanic activity. The Czech phonolite tower is called Bořeň.



BÍLINA, CITY IN THE SHADOW OF A MOUNTAIN

The starting point is the city of Bílina, which itself offers remarkable sights. For example, the St. Peter and Paul church with its Gothic and Renaissance architectural elements and valuable Renaissance tomb stones, the hundred-year old Art Nouveau town hall, the Kyselka spa with its legendary forest café, transferred from the jubilee exhibition in 1891, a Baroque chateau with a significant influence from Antonio della Porta, the remains of a multi-lateral "Hussite" bastion of the latter half of the 15th century... But wherever you go in the city you will always be fascinated by the incredible silhouette of Bořeň. And so, willingly or unwillingly, as if drawn by a magnetic force similar to the one in the American film, you will let yourselves be led to the mountain at the end of the Ore Mountains range and the beginning of the Bohemian Uplands - Devil Tower over Bílina.

Three historic stops in the new Most

You could read in the first number of the Gateway that it was a city of "dromes": you will find there an aerodrome, an aquadrome, a hippodrome and an autodrome. Due to the fact that the old Most with its major architectural sights disappeared without any trace left, you may feel that the town is good to practice sport in but nothing much else. But that is a great mistake. In addition to the wonderful surroundings, especially if you take a trip to the mountains, Most offers at least three interesting historic sights.

MONUMENTS MOVED TO VTELNO

Vtelno used to be a separate municipality with a long history, the first written records dating from 1278. Today it is part of Most with the adjacent sporting and recreational quarter called Benedikt, and the recultivated Velebudice hopper with (so far) a nine-hole golf course. Vtelno is the only part of the city preserving to a great extent its original appearance. On the other hand, Vtelno is now paradoxically richer in sights than before. How is that possible? From a distance you can see the nice dominant feature of the municipality, the Baroque church of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, designed by the congenial North Bohemian architect Octavian Broggio. And this is where I will take you first, for the church is surrounded by small sacral buildings having nothing in common with Vtelno. One of them is a lapidarium, both in the church itself and in the open air around it. Around the cemetery there are three conciliation crosses, i.e. stone memorials of tragic events, mostly decorated with a relief of the weapon which killed the person in this place. In this particular story not here, but for example in Libkovic or in Kopisty, i.e. villages that had to give way to coal mining and now where you hardly even know they used to be. Libkovic is also the origin of the four alcove chapels from the originally seven-member set. They originally lined the pilgrimage road from Libkovic to Mariánské Radčice, reminding pilgrims of the seven sorrows of the Virgin Mary. You can also stop by the chapels of the Circumcision of Jesus, the Flight to Egypt, Twelve-Year-Old Jesus in Church between the Scholars, and Carrying the Cross, and you will know which three chapels are missing. At least part of what once disappeared under the bulldozers and excavator buckets can be seen here now.



TRAVELLING CHURCH

Another sight is a building entered in the Guinness Book of Records, well, not the building itself but its relocation. The Assumption Church was moved 841 metres when the old Most was pulled down. Along four rails, pushed from the rear and braked from the front by hydraulic cylinders, at a speed of 2.16 centimetres per minute, over the course of twenty-seven days. This was a grand gesture concealing the fact that the other valuable historic buildings had to disappear from the earth's surface. Nevertheless, thanks to this you can now walk on the floor, if not the place, where the citizens of Most attended holy mass as early as in 1570. Today the church houses a gallery with an interesting exhibition of Gothic and Renaissance art.

THE CASTLE FROM WHICH MASTER KELLEY RAN AWAY

The third sight is situated high above the city in Most castle on top of Hněvín hill. If nothing else, then the alchemic past of the place and the fact that the legendary Master Kelley was jailed here are worth the climb. You will be welcomed by a nice restaurant and above all by the experience exhibition in the Workshop of Master Edward Kelley, where you can try to make the philosophers' stone in a historic crucible. And when you then climb the more than a hundred-year old observation tower of Hněvín and look far into the countryside, you will certainly thank me for this tip.



Falkenstein of Bohemian Switzerland

There are many mini breweries across the country. But not all of them were driven by an idea as strong as in the case of the Křínice brewery in Krásná Lípa. When you listen to the three friends who said to themselves in 2010 that they liked Bohemian Switzerland and Bohemian beer, so why not establish a mini brewery, and when you follow their story of the principle of purity based on nature, of their desire to contribute to tourism in the town, of their plan to break state frontiers in the minds of people, you feel like saying: There have been many fools like these... But they were not fools, for three years later, last summer, the Křínice brewery, located in a historic building in the main square of Krásná Lípa, opened its doors to its first guests. And if you pardon my personal judgement, the beer brewed here is simply excellent.



BEER THAT UNIFIES NATIONS

A brewery existed in the city from 1878 but a year after the war the brewing houses were deserted and the building itself was pulled down in the sixties. Radim Burkoň, Jiří Rak and Jan Srb followed up on this tradition and even their basic portfolio very much resembles the original brewery. The beer is called Falkenstein, for it is the only foamy beverage brewed in Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland, where there are two Falkensteins – the highwaymen’s castle near Jetřichovice and the sandstone rock on the Saxon side. This suggests the philosophy of the cross-border reach - when the brewery has been established in the minds of the locals Falkenstein will be on tap across the Křínice valley, from Krásná Lípa, where the source of the river is, to Bad Schandau, where the river flows into the Elbe. Linguists will find falcon in the name, and the falcon has been successfully returned to the wilderness here. Well, you say, a nice idea, but what about the beer? The philosophy is simple - a rather conservative portfolio of lagers, no crazy experiments, rather four or five specials a year - and that is it. The portfolio is based on a well hopped eleven-degree beer, deliciously bitter and very moreish, or the very tasty fourteen-degree stout, not as sweet as most stouts, and the twelve-degree black and tan, which takes the best of both. In summer you can have the wheat beer with mint and the “runners” nine-degree beer, and in autumn the “All Souls” (mildly fermented “ale”) and the very strong advent “bock”.



A PUB WHERE IT IS NICE TO SIT

And what is it like in the Křínice brewery? Very cosy. Large windows overlook the picturesque square, the brewing rooms shine with copper behind glass, where fermentation cellars are also located. If you drive you can taste the excellent home-made lemonade and if you come on foot you can have a Falkenstein served by a simply fantastic staff. The Křínice brewery is a social establishment and so the waiters are mostly handicapped. Their enthusiasm, welcoming approach and reliability contrast with what is unfortunately common in other parts of Bohemia. You can also taste traditional food specials with the beer - mostly coming from the region - including a couple of hot meals headed by the brewery goulash, of course made at the Falkenstein. The locals have already found their way to the brewery and tourists are enthusiastic when they find it here. And the ambition of the three musketeers of Křínice? “We would like to brew the best beer in Bohemia, to get to the TOP 5 in three years, for Krásná Lípa to be visited not only for its national park but also for its beer.” I personally believe that this will happen much sooner. The beer is...well...simply excellent.

Swan of Litoměřice

Another historic building, this time in a beautiful historic town, and another excellent beer. In Litoměřice, near Mírové náměstí square, in Zítkova Street, there is a hundred-and-fifty year old building, once a hotel. It used to be called the Swan House and it still is. Three years ago, Sabina and Ondřej Žák opened a beautiful beer cellar restaurant here dominated by shining brewing tanks, for the beer is brewed right in the restaurant. And is called Swan, of course. In the three years of its existence the beer has become so well established in the local minds that many a citizen of Litoměřice won’t hear a word against it.



BEER MADE USING ONLY INGREDIENTS BEER SHOULD BE MADE OF

The intention of the Žák couple was to build a brewery making a good beer, and a beer restaurant pleasant to sit in, talk and drink. So no sophisticated restaurant with multi-page menus, beer with the meal and waiters standing and waiting until you finally decide on which meal. No - simply a beer restaurant. If you are hungry, have a pickled sausage with onion, local camembert in marinade, spicy mature cheese, salted herrings or bread with lard spread, for these are meals that will help you enjoy the main hero of the restaurant - the Swan beer. The vaulted room with its bare brick walls is elegant and attractive, quite large but intimate at the same time, where you can easily forget about the merciless world outside. The brewery’s philosophy is clearly defined here and the Žáks do not intend to betray it: They brew “natural” beer without preservatives, modifiers or artificial flavouring, without artificial saturation, simply nothing but malt, hops, yeast and water. The portfolio is based on traditional lagers, dominated by the twelve-degree ale - aromatic, well hopped and pleasantly bitter. Then the semi-dark excellently balanced bitter-sweet twelve-degree beer. In summer you can also have the local Swan eleven-degree with a light bitterness in the aftertaste, or the finer ten-degree lager. Well, finer - with four percent alcohol but a pleasantly balanced taste and a nice aroma again. They emphasize the beer aroma here - they recommend you let the beer stand for a while for the aroma to develop, then smell it and only then drink it. Just get used to it - Swan is a shrine to beer, here anybody can become a connoisseur.

EVEN BETTER AFTER A VISIT TO THE BREWERY

Especially when you accept an invitation for a small tour round the brewery, where the chief brewer will explain to you how it is that the basic ingredients change into the tasty red or dark beverage you have enjoyed drinking for a while. By the way, book the visit in advance, for there are crowds of people here and the staff are busy serving them all and keeping a nice smile on their faces all the time. When you walk from the brewing tanks to the open fermentation tanks and storage tanks you will learn about the local specials. The Žáks do not favour coloured and flavoured beers with fruit or herb flavours - this is against their philosophy. So you cannot expect blueberry or green frenzies here. A light fruity aroma is included in the excellent wheat Swan, while more popular is the lightly fermented pale ale, and if the beer is to be flavoured at all, then with honey. Not an artificial flavour, but real honey from the local bee keepers. If you have the summer ale, you can be sure it is not mixed but has its own recipe like any other local beer. Swan can be found in many restaurants outside Litoměřice, in some restaurants it’s in fact the only beer served, but not in Litoměřice. The only place you can get Swan in Litoměřice is at this shrine. And so do not miss it while you are here.



The most important thing is



Aleš Černohous was born in Děčín in 1975 and has lived here since, with just one small break. He has worked as a computer graphic artist and webmaster (for example, administering the portal www.decin.cz), has been a passionate and excellent photographer, an enthusiastic tourist, the father of two nice daughters - the older Ela and the younger Lola, the builder of his own house (he is a builder by profession, even though a railway one), and a publisher... This list is admirable but most admirable is its point - he has been confined to a wheelchair for fourteen years.

What happened in 2000?

I was a fresh graduate and had been working as a railway designer for seven months. But I somehow felt unfulfilled and so I informed my employer that I would be going to Israel to pick cucumbers. I always wanted to travel and this was my chance. Although the picking job did not materialise, there was other work to do and so me and my friends washed dishes in a hotel and operated an inflatable boat ferry across the Jordan river. Then we travelled to Greece by sea but the situation there was already very bad so I called my sister, who had lived in London since her secondary school-leaving examination, and we set off for there. In London we also took any jobs available there, for example, cleaning a Jewish school. On that October morning we were hurrying to a new job. A terrible wind had been blowing all night. It was raining. I tried to hold my umbrella against the wind while hurrying across one of the London parks. And suddenly a tree fell on me. A punctured lung, open leg fracture, and mainly an injured spine. I did not lose consciousness and already lying there under the tree I knew I would never walk again. I could not feel my legs. I have been in a wheelchair since.

The first months must have been horrible...

They were. But I immediately rejected the idea that I would abandon my plans, my dreams. I decided to cope. Of course I could return to what I had studied, this was a rather sedentary job, but I did not want to do that even in my new life situation. I was attracted by computers, graphic art and photography. And so after the first round of rehabilitation I went to the labour office, where they paid for a re-qualification course for webmasters, I obtained a trade certificate, received a subsidy for job creation, bought equipment and started a relatively new trade, for in 2000 the internet was just beginning. I always liked photography, had had a camera since I was a small child, and I did not think of photography being more of a walking job, and that some photographs must be walked to and waited for.

You simply refused to view your wheelchair as an obstacle...

Exactly. The beginnings were obviously very slow, I always defined an objective, and stubbornly toiled until I achieved it. First to learn to get into the wheelchair and get dressed by myself, to goals like „I must climb this hill“. My friends helped me a lot with the job, the first orders came from them. Another important thing was the Paraple Centre, with which I began to cooperate, there I attended further courses, mainly on computer graphics, and obtained further jobs via them. They offered to let me teach there what I had learned from them. I accepted that job, worked there full time for three years - that was the only time I did not live in Děčín. There I met my present wife, Hedvika, who was working in the rehabilitation centre. Our Ela was born and suddenly we realized that we did not want to be in Prague with the child, and so I took my girls back to Děčín. By the way, one of the impulses for the move was that we did not obtain a parking permit for Holešovice.

not to give up, to have a purpose and to try to achieve it

Tourism was also one of your goals?

No, that was rather a natural part of my life. Since childhood. I grew up in Želenice in Děčín, in a panel building, in one room with my sister. A room with a beautiful view of Děčín. I have loved vistas since and look for them. We took trips to Hřensko across the hills around Děčín, but also for example to the Giant Mountains. Also to Tokání, the company recreation centre of the employer of my parents, and from there to the mouse holes in the mountains - that I loved. But the surroundings of Děčín and Bohemian Switzerland I only began to get to know from my wheelchair. And I enthusiastically enjoy that.

I think that those who have not tried this cannot understand what it is like, don't you think?

Well, probably not. It is hard to explain but it is a kind of ecstasy. Handicap or no, suddenly you are relatively free, liberated, you wheel across the countryside and grasp it with your eyes and the lens of your camera. From the beginning I've wheeled alone, and that has made it the more wonderful. Of course only where I could get to by my own ... I began to have favourite places - for example, the Budersdorf path to Tokání, which I knew from my childhood. Of course you develop triumphal spots in the course of time - for example, something you have managed - in my case mainly hills. For a walking man these may not be very attractive targets but you see things differently from a wheelchair. Let us take for example the path from Malšovice via Stará Bohyně to Javory. There you will find a long but quite steep ascent where you must use all your strength, but at the top you are really rewarded.

Simple tourism soon changed in your case into active protectionism.

Well, I could not do any differently. I might drive past many a no entry sign but I do not do that on principle. I respect bans. It's only because I ride a wheelchair that I will not destroy nature. On the contrary, I tend to reprimand people for bypassing bans even though they might as well easily get there on their own feet. That is my way. Many people in wheelchairs for example ride quad bikes. They give freedom a new dimension by adding strength. But I see it as an assault on nature. I'm thinking of a quad bike myself, but only as a work tool - to be able to bring wood home from the forest or for example for clearing the snow.

You are building a house in Dobrná nad Děčínem – or more exactly you are having it built, is that so?

No, so far we have demolished things, the building will only start now. It is a nice piece of land, of course with a beautiful vista, in particular of Bukovka and the surrounding hills. But if you think that I only look, the opposite is true. I normally work - with a shovel, a pickaxe, a hammer, you can do all that from a wheelchair too. And it is a very good feeling, excellent relaxation after hours at the computer.

You are the author of a much needed brochure called Bohemian and Saxon Switzerland and Wheelchair Access. How did it come that you wrote the book?

This was another product of my cooperation with the Paraple Centre. When I taught there I was offered to the opportunity take over the project Travels by Wheelchair, mapping wheelchair access to accommodation facilities across the country. I created a website and a brochure...but there was little time for that, it was not a priority, rather a bonus. But I found mapping wheelchair access interesting and important, and so I got stuck into it. I offered to prepare a brochure mapping wheelchair access in the region for a society for public benefit called Bohemian Switzerland, and they accepted. Now I'm thinking of writing a similar book for the whole Ústecký region. People in wheelchairs need to know what they “are up against”. Then they can find tourism quite normal for them.



Climb and Observe!

The Bohemian Uplands are a feast for the eye in any season of the year. Their picturesqueness, shape variety, mysteriousness and romantic atmosphere are unrivalled. It is therefore good to know where exactly to offer your eyes such beauty for them to fill with it and bring tears of emotion. There are many vistas on all sides and in the very heart of the uplands. Let us concentrate on the observation towers, though.



HOŘIDLA

Let us start in the east, by the village with the poetic name Jištěrpy near Chotíněves, where the Uplands just begin to undulate. Here, at the top of Hořidla hill, there is an observation tower of the same name with a modern spiral structure. Once there was an inn with an observation platform here, but since 2008 you can climb a spiral staircase up to a height of thirteen metres and offer your eyes the panorama of the volcanic landscape. The impressive Saddle is the closest but you can also see all the other major hilltops of the Bohemian Uplands. So having seen the basic proportions let us get closer to the heart of the Bohemian Uplands.

VARHOŠŤ

Not far from Litoměřice, above the Kunderatice municipality, there is a forest covered basalt hill called Varhošť reaching up to 639 metres above sea level. Its location is so unique that it would be a sin not to build an observation tower here. The first one, from 1891, was a temporary structure in the crowns of five mighty oaks that lasted till 1902. The second once was already an actual tower, although the Union for the Bohemian Uplands had to compromise due to a lack of funds and build a reduced version of the original plan, a four-metre stone foundation with a wooden extension. The wooden observation tower served its purpose till the seventies, when it was replaced by a fifteen-metre tall steel structure using the original stone foundation. Eleven years ago, the tower and its three observation platforms were reconstructed and today you can safely view the countryside from it. And the countryside is really worth seeing, being maybe more wonderful than the vista from Milešovka itself. Milešovka dominates the panorama of the uplands as seen from here, guarding Hazmburk, Košťálov, Lovoš, Ostrý as well as Kletečná hills. The horizon is dominated by the Ore Mountains, with the city of Ústí nad Labem and Střekov, Děčínský Sněžník mountain, Buková mountain, Lužické, and even the Jizerské mountains... But above all the Elbe valley in the eight incredible observation windows.



or Observation towers of Bohemian Uplands

KOHOUT A STRÁŽNÝ VRCH

The Verneřicko region is dominated by two observation towers, not far from each other, and connected by a blue tourist path. The one on Kohout hill near Valkeřice (589 m above sea level) is equipped with an observation platform at a height of twelve metres. It is a metal extension of a beautiful cylindrical stone foundation. The foundation is the remnant of brave plans in the early 20th century when today's thick forest covered hill was still bare. The plans included a sixteen-metre tall stone tower but as we know very well even today, when construction was in the middle, the builders ran out of money. If you climb up the cock standard you will see Beech Mountain, Varhošť, Milešovka, Radobýl, Ronov, as well as the valleys of the Ploučnice river, Česká Lípa, Ralsko and the Lužice mountains. Six kilometres away, on top of Strážný vrch hill near Merboltice (601 m above sea level), there is a very new observation tower, only built in 2006. The stone foundation holds an eight-sided conical wooden tower, which also has its predecessors, for the vistas from here are really unique. In addition to the "cock" panorama there are views of the Jizerské hory mountains and Bezděz mountain.



STŘEKOV AND ERBEN OBSERVATION TOWERS

Two observation towers, on the opposite sides of Ústí nad Labem. You can see one from the other, and yet their histories are completely different. The older one, the Erben tower, celebrated its eightieth birthday last year. The newer one, the Střekov tower, will only have four candles on its birthday cake this year. The Erben tower offers vistas from Brand hill over Dobětice and is by no means connected in any way with the master of Czech poetry and fairy-tales, for it was named after Alexander Erben, president of the tourist club of Ústí, who had an eight-metre stone tower built in 1933. After the war the tower became a boys' playground, a victim of vandalism and visible decay. In the summer of 2006 the tower was reconstructed and extended by another seven metres in height, so you can now use one of its two platforms to see the whole of Ústí nad Labem and above all its beautiful hilly surroundings, including Milešovka, Buková hora mountain and the Ore Mountains. You can also see from here its newer sister in the Small Saddle on the other riverbank of the Elbe, called Střekov vista by the local people. This one is situated in the middle of the forest park of the Střekov city quarter, and is the follow-up to an air watchtower from the Second World War. This is a stone tower with a wooden staircase spiralling around it. The Elbe valley is beautiful from here.



! SECRET TIPS

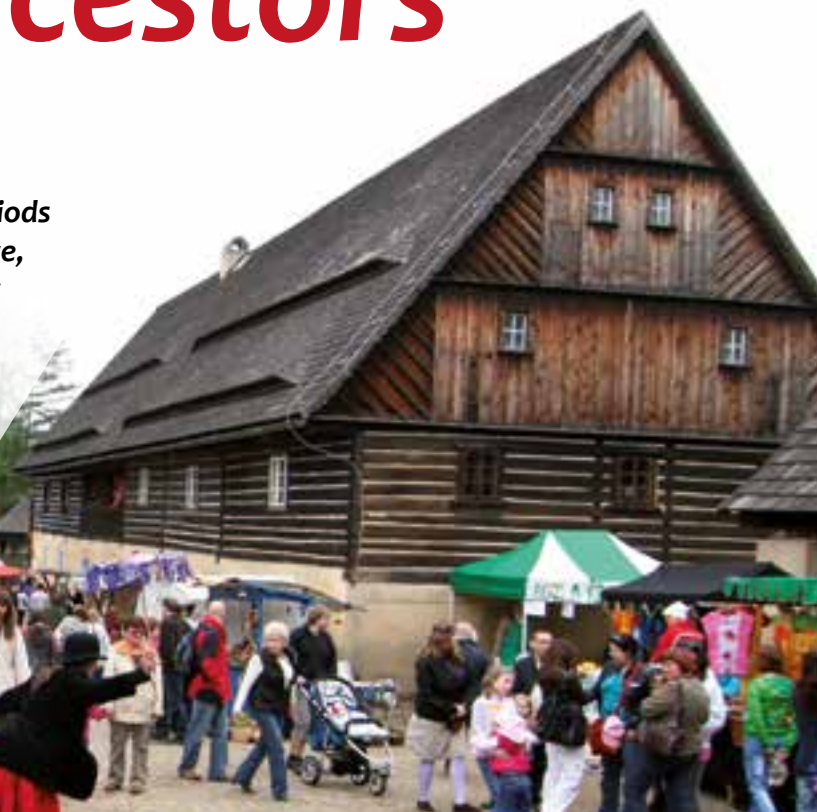
As has already been said, there are countless vistas of the Bohemian Uplands and even many observations towers have not been mentioned yet. But if you want to see the local landscape from another perspective, visit for example Malečov in the hills above Ústí nad Labem. Not far from the newly built ski lift there is a little known vista offering a luxurious panorama of the Bohemian Uplands as well as of a considerable part of Bohemian Switzerland. And there is also Raven Rock above Sebužín. If you detour from the green path and follow the contours you will get to the edge of a forest, to steep rocks with several vistas, the last of which, equipped with a small bench, may be the most beautiful vista of all of the Bohemian Uplands. And believe me or not, you can spend endless hours here viewing the Uplands.

A trip to a marketplace of our ancestors

Get on a train from another time and travel to periods when people cooked on a wood-burning stove, threshed wheat in the barn, churned butter in the sitting room, dried caraway seeds in the doorway, plucked feathers in the kitchen and dried hops in the loft, to the time of markets, carnivals, when people told stories to each other and listened to them, that must have been beautiful... Well, it is beautiful and not too hard to do, either. Just visit Zubrnice.

VILLAGE LIFE IN ZUBRNIC

The open air museum is nice and inspiring for the whole tourist season, but the real experience is represented though by special events when the houses and the village green wake up and time tumbles back a hundred or more years into the past. The village life begins at the end of winter and the beginning of spring with a traditional carnival. Do not be surprised by the parade of historic masks, let yourself be spirited away by the rhythm of rhymes and songs, thanksgivings for the last and prayers for this harvest. If you arrive at Easter you will find yourself in the middle of local customs, egg painting, Easter whip braiding, pot making, ginger bread decorating, baking of Easter cakes, making bobbin laces, spinning on spinning wheels... Later you can join in the May ceremonies and erect the famous Zubrnice maypole in the traditional way without cranes or grippers but with mere ladders and ropes. The climax of all this is of course represented by the May markets, a colourful and pulsing mess with lots of historic crafts, theatre performances, wandering conjurers, blacksmiths making magic, skilful basket makers, street singers, bee keepers, etc., with typical treats such as salted pretzels, sweet bowknots, and assorted goods that cannot be found in „shopping factories“. When summer is over, Zubrnice offers Autumn in the Village with an exhibition of historic agricultural machines and activities including fruit drying, flax and hemp processing, bobbin lace making, rope braiding and even corn threshing with a mediaeval flail. And Christmas? Exceptionally idyllic in the open air museum in Zubrnice – with folk customs, crèches, theatre, a craft market, Christmas cake making... Come any time and do not forget to bring your children with you, they would never forgive you for not taking them here - and justly so. If only for the opportunity to ride a historic train along a historic track, transferred to the property of the union after years of endless efforts, and now being taken proper care of, as far as Zubrnice railway station, where you can visit the railway history museum, with an exhibition on the history of the local railway line Velké Březno – Verneřice – Úštěk, or visit the nearby barn where only recently an Electrotechnical museum has been opened with an exhibition of old radio receivers, projectors, tape recorders, TV sets and mainly a large model railway with an exact copy of the line Lovečkovice – Verneřice – Levín. And when you are fed up with the mess, walk around Zubrnice, along the local educational path to get to know the local nature, birds, animals, plants and the Meadow Stream, once perhaps called Zubrný or Zubří, thus lending the name to the village built around it.



OPEN AIR MUSEUM IN THE MEADOW STREAM VALLEY

Zubrnice is pleasantly located in the valley of the Meadow Stream in the hills above Malé Březno. The ancient village from the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, where in the period when churches and even cemeteries died under the shovels of bulldozers in the surrounding villages, by miracle the Gothic church of Mary Magdeleine, rebuilt in the Baroque style, was rescued together with a beautiful Baroque statue of St. John of Nepomuk, still preserving a lot of its historic nature. This is also thanks to the rare efforts of the enlightened people of the District Natural History Museum in Ústí nad Labem, who decided to revolt against the destructive times and to start rescuing structures. In the mid-seventies they began to buy buildings and small structures which would not exist today if it had not been for their intervention. In 1988 their dream came true and a Rural Architecture Museum was opened in Zubrnice, the predecessor of the present newest open air museum in Bohemia - the Collection of Folk Architecture in Zubrnice. The basis of the open air museum is the ancient upland village, including sophisticatedly transferred buildings rescued from the buckets of excavators. And the result is marvelous. If you walk among the timber-framed or underpinned houses and enter them you become for a while a small farmer, craftsman, or maybe a storyteller, a singer or a dancer. The kind guide speaks and you listen and become astonished by how little was enough for the local people to live on and how skilfully they made their living with it.



IN THE MILL AND IN THE PROVISO

There used to be times when twenty-seven mill wheels turned here. Today only one has been rescued and reconstructed. Another is being transferred from nearby Homole u Panny, to be seated on the foundations of another original mill and equipped with technology imported from Hamry u Hlinska. Of course, the buildings from the original settlement that could be rescued are used as foundations. Mainly the impressive timber-framed settlement, in the early 20th century still inhabited by three generations of a family with a pair of horses, eight cows, five calves, two goats and three pigs. The cowshed was an integral part of the home, hops were dried on the roof, and air got inside through the easily visible holes in the roof. If you enter you will see a period household as if the master of the house and his family had just left it to toil in the fields. In the neighbourhood you will find a typical proviso, a fruit dryer, a timber-framed granary and barn, a carriage shed, a roofed Baroque well as well as a school with period desks and a shop, more or less equipped like this until the 1950s. A brand new acquisition is represented by the Multi-purpose Educational Centre built in an accurately reconstructed underpinned house imported from Loubí in the Česká Lípa region. The mighty two-storey house with its historic core is one of the most valuable buildings of rural architecture in North Bohemia. The house was built in the late 17th century and provided with two galleries, which is quite unique.

A Trip Fit for a King

A FAIRYTALE CASTLE AND ITS TREASURES

Moritzburg Castle



Picturesque and majestic it thrones on an island: the former hunting and pleasure castle of Augustus the Strong. Discover its precious interior, monumental painted leather tapestries, one of the most significant collections of hunting trophies and the legendary »Moritzburg Feather Room«! This castle also became famous for the fairytale movie »Three Hazelnuts for Cinderella« During the winter months the castle's exhibition is dedicated to this special fairytale.

Directions: A4 – Exit Dresden-Wilder Mann (follow the signage to Moritzburg)
www.schloss-moritzburg.de

A PEARL FROM SAXONY'S CROWN

Weesenstein Castle



High over the Mueglitz Valley rises on a rocky promontory the unique architectural ensemble of Weesenstein Castle. The museum awaits you with valuable furnishings and precious wallpapers in the royal apartments from the 18th /19th century – a reminiscence of King Johann von Sachsen. The castle offers insight into contemporary and building history since Gothic and the turbulent history of the Buenau Family, who, from here, constituted many lines in Saxony as well as Bohemia.

Directions: A17 – Dresden-Prague | Exit Pirna (follow the signage to Glashütte)
www.schloss-weesenstein.de

REACH FOR THE TOP!

Albrechtsburg Castle Meissen



Albrechtsburg Castle is considered the first palace in German building history and an architectural masterpiece. The castle was built from 1471 onwards by Duke Albrecht von Wettin. The murals from the 19th century impressively show a piece of Saxon history. Experience this unique site of culture.

Directions: A4 – Exit Wilsdruff | A13 – Exit Radeburg | A14 – Exit Nossen-Ost | from Dresden along B6 | direct train route from Dresden
www.albrechtsburg-meissen.de



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the largest chateau
in the Region of Ústí



Hřensko a Pravčická brána
the largest sandstone gate
in Europe



Velké Březno
the youngest chateau
and Březňák brewery



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