

Gate

magazine for visitors
to the Ústí Region

Issue No. 4

Interview

The Gate to Bohemia and us – Czech Olympic Competitors
The four musketeers of Račice

Active rest

Most – a town filled to the brim with sport

History

In search of the greatest treasures
of the Lower Ohře river area

Nature

See the sandstone arch of Pravčická Gate and...



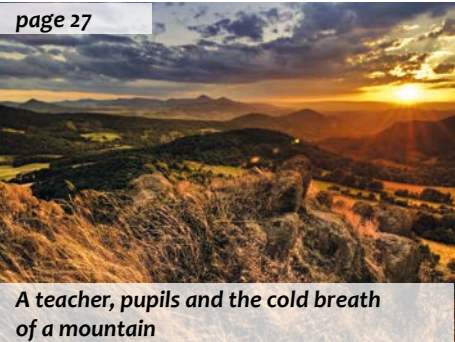
Comic Strip: The Chalice and the Virgin
or Jan Žižka in the Litoměřice area

p. 43

Gate to Bohemia

www.gatetobohemia.com

Contents



An Invitation from the Author

Have you ever noticed that despite the fact that you were born in a place and have spent your entire life there, there comes a moment when you realise that in fact you do not know your region so well, and that there are many blank areas on your personal map? I always have this feeling when I am writing for the Gate. It's as if I have the eyes of an eager child again and I am amazed; I become an explorer and try hard to capture it all in words that can convey at least a notion of the beauty that is to be found in this region. This year I discovered the Štětí area, an enchanting landscape at the very edge of the Central Bohemian Uplands, the fascinating town of Kadaň, ferries on the Elbe river, lookout towers that I have never looked out from before, a splendid botanical garden, an unbelievable watch and clock museum created by a life-long enthusiast, I have caught a whiff of a charcoal and met wonderful people. Believe me, such experiences have been countless. However for many of you all the information presented in the Gate to Bohemia is new. Therefore, I try to see the things that I have seen umpteen times, such as Pravčická Brána - a natural sandstone arch, as though it were the first time. You know I envy you – it must be intoxicating to see the arch for the first time. So please accept this invitation of mine, wrapped in words and sentences, and crisscross the region that will never disappoint you. And if I may ask something of you – do not keep it to yourselves. Tell your friends about your experiences, share them through social networking sites, become ambassadors of beauty and memorable moments. These four diamonds – Bohemian Switzerland, the Central Bohemian Uplands, the Ore Mountains and the Lower Ohře river territory – deserve it.

Rostislav Křivánek



4–5	The Pravčická Gate See the sandstone arch of Pravčická Gate and...	40–41	Benešov nad Ploučnicí A town rich in chateaus
6–7	Kadaň, Louny, Krásný Dvůr In search of the greatest treasures of the Lower Ohře river area	42	The Castles and Chateaus of Central Bohemian Uplands History throughout the land of castles
8–9	Ferries on the Elbe river Charon's secret on the Elbe river	43	Comic strip The Chalice and the Virgin or Jan Žižka in the Litoměřice area
10–11	Most – a town of sport A town filled to the brim with sport	44–45	Račice – the Elbe arena The Elbe arena and working out
12–13	The Šluknov Hook The monuments of faith and earth power in the Bohemian Netherlands	46–47	The gate to Bohemia and us The four musketeers of Račice
14–15	Chinaware and balneology The stories of white and liquid gold	48–49	Forest Crafts Close your eyes and follow your nose
16–17	The Central Bohemian Uplands for children The place for children to be!	50–51	The Štětí area The undiscovered charms of the landscape around Štětí
18–19	The traditional wooden toys of the Ore Mountain region In the magical world of the nutcracker	52–53	The Guardians of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park The magnificent five and work for real men
20–21	Culture in the Gate to Bohemia The gate is open for muses	54	Bezruč's Valley, Jirkov, Chomutov Running water, heading for the Ore Mountains
22–23	Děčín – the chateau The chateau of miracles	55	Teplice – the botanical garden An oasis of ever-changing beauty
24–25	Lubenec A hidden lookout tower and a church full of surprises	56–57	Natálie Belisová – interview I am like a tree, my roots are here
26	Verneřice Middle Uplands A lanscape of shadows of the past	58	Studenec Wandering through the remarkable landscape under Studenec
27	Hlinná–Kamýk – an educational path A teacher, pupils and the cold breath of a mountain	59	By train across Bohemian Switzerland A railway line that is dear to us
28–29	Litvínov – the chateau and the gloriette A really welcoming chateau	60–61	The Ore Mountains main cross-country route Wonderful treks without borders
30–31	Mikulášovice – the Easter Riders All about Easter flags and top hats	62	Milešov Middle Uplands A tour around Velemin
32–33	The technical sights of the Lower Ohře River area The technical story of the Ohře river	63	Regional products The enticing magic of traditional products
34–35	Lookout towers in the Ore Mountains Let your eyes wander through the landscape	64	Gastronomy An unexpectedly varied vegetarian menu
36–37	Roudnice Airfield The skies above Roudnice and seventy years of peace	65	Gastronomy A garden on the borderline
38–39	The Watch and Clock Museum – Klášterec nad Ohří The king of time from Klášterec	66–67	Czech history in the Lower Ohře river area An expedition against the flow of time
		68–69	The Rescuers of the Gate to Bohemia People who can deal with misfortune

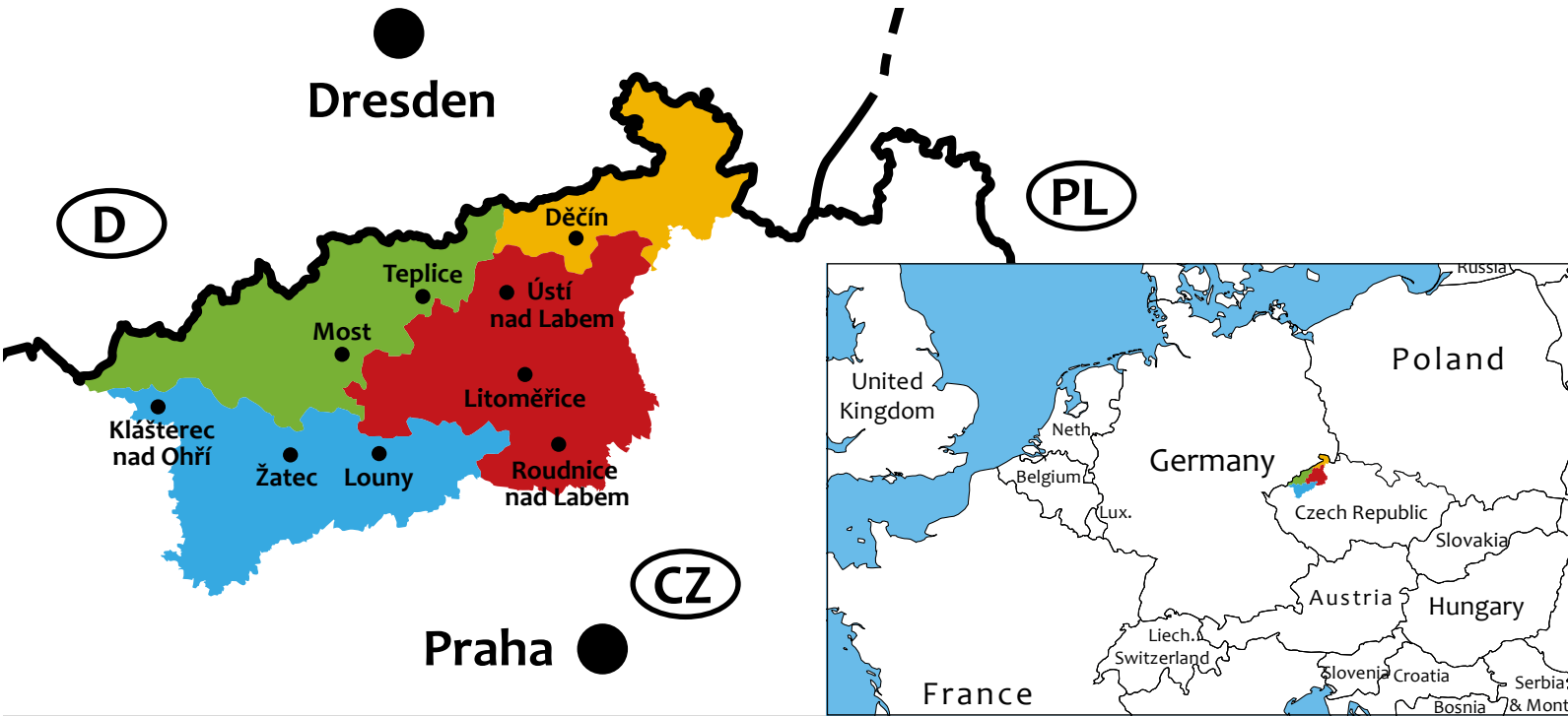


Dear Readers,

You have just opened the fourth issue of Gate Magazine. During the four years we have been making the magazine for you, the interest in tourism in the Ústí Region has increased dramatically. We are delighted that you're coming to explore the Gateway to Bohemia, as we call it here, so enthusiastically. In fact, you keep giving us new tasks every year and we are thrilled to tackle them. It is necessary to prepare new experiences for you, build tourists paths, cycle routes and nature trails, enable you to get to the most interesting places in the region other than by car yet with comfort and convenience, repair monuments and make them accessible and much more. You reward us with your visits, which have become longer and more frequent. Please take this magazine as a kind of gallery of attractive places in the Ústí Region, get a taste of them, be inspired and come and visit them. Maybe to Velké Žernoseky for the great and characterful wine or other vineyards in the Litoměřice wine region, or to take your skis or a bike to explore the rough beauty of the slopes and table lands of the Ore Mountains, to wander through the Central Bohemian Uplands – the fruitful Bohemian Garden with a unique landscape, to pause in amazement in front of one of the most beautiful mountain gates – the Pravčická Mountain Gate... Let us invite you to discover the living culture of our region, cultural footprints swept over by time and renewed traditions – such as the unique Eastern Riders Ride at Mikulášovice. You can visit makers of wooden toys, stained glass, soaps, natural cosmetics, or organic farms, and Gate Magazine will advise you on trips with children, will proudly present the rowing and canoeing project – the Elbe Arenas in Račice, and recommend excellent restaurants and much more. If you don't know where to begin after you've read the following pages, then Gate Magazine has fulfilled its purpose. I am personally looking forward to meeting you somewhere within some castle walls, on a cycle route or ski slope or in a theatre auditorium.

Jan Szántó
Councillor of the Ústí Region

for Regional Development, International Relations and Tourism

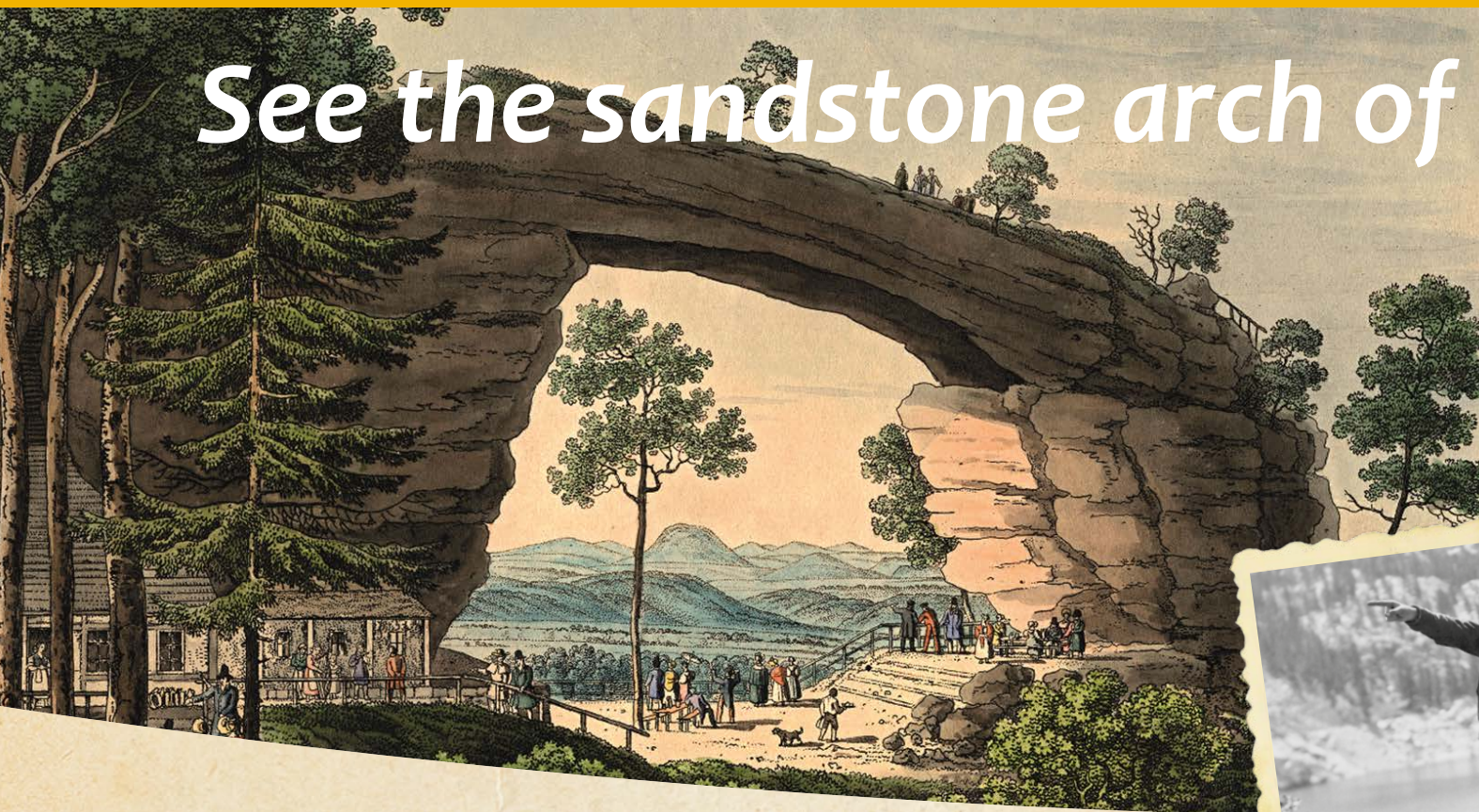


Published by the Regional Authority of the Ústí Region
Velká Hradební 3118/48, 400 02 Ústí nad Labem
Telephone: +420 475 657 111
Fax: +420 475 200 245
E-mail: urad@kr-ustecky.cz

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

Creative and graphic design: NOESIS s.r.o.
DTP processing, production and printing: NOESIS s.r.o.
Author of texts: Rostislav Křivánek
Fotografie: Archives of the Ústí Region, archives of Czech Switzerland, archives of DA Krušné hory, o. p. s., archive of DA Dolní Poohří, o. p. s., Archive of DA České středohoří, o. p. s., ČOV, Tomáš John, Petr Mikšíček, Dan Fiker, Václav Sojka and others
© NOESIS s.r.o. www.noesis.cz

See the sandstone arch of **Pravčická Gate** and...



Seeing the Pravčická Gate for the first time is an amazing experience.

I've seen it at least a hundred times and written about it more times than I can remember.

As I'm now about to write about it again, I'm wildly jealous of those who have the privilege of seeing it for the first time. Nothing compares to it. So I've decided to forget all about my existing experiences and come to the Gate, not using one of the less well known routes from Janov or Růžová, but the one from Hřensko, which is a classic. And I'll try to lead myself into believing that this is the first time. Do you think it'll work out?

MEETING ANDERSEN

Well, it did work out. But a peculiar thing, which I can't explain, happened. As soon as I set off, I met a small group of men in archaic costumes. The one with a big head and wild curls seemed familiar, but where had I seen him before? A magnificent rock arch indeed, made by the mighty spirit of nature in rocks so rough that it can't be expressed in words... I heard him saying in German a little while before they all ceremoniously removed their hats, bowed slightly and continued towards Hřensko. But that was... nonsense. A theatre play. Hans Christian Andersen has been dead for 140 years! Yes, he came here six times and wrote a book on his travels but... from then on, only unusual things crossed my path. Just around the corner a vendor with a cartwheel was standing and offering trinkets and souvenirs, calling out that ladies and gentlemen could buy 'a brand-new invention, pictures of the Převýšovská Gate painted by light!' Indeed, apart from copies of engravings he was also offering early photos. When I entered the woods in Dlouhý Důl (Long Mine), an elderly accordionist approached me, brazenly played some vaudeville and moved his hat with some coins in it meaningfully towards me with his foot. A zitherist a bit further on, then an organ-grinder... there was no doubt. It wasn't an event held by the History Club – it was a journey through time!

TRAVELLING BACK IN TIME

'Excuse me, my lord, if you'd please step slightly aside!' I could hear behind me. A man wearing a black hat with a crimson brim and a cockade was leading a small group of tourists. The ladies were wearing crinolines – honestly! Men were walking in tailcoats and top hats. Well, their panting was quite unbecoming. Next, another guide went past, leading a horse, on the back of which a slightly ruffled lady with a massive hat and a needlessly opened umbrella sat swaying side to side as the horse moved. Then two well-built men carrying a litter overtook me and, suddenly, I was standing in a clearing, looking at the 'magnificent and triumphant gateway, a gargantuan vault on a massive bastion, the Převýšovská Gate, or Presbichtor.' Yes, the name Pravčická was established in 1924. An unobtrusive man sitting by the path introduced himself as Josef Vítězslav Šmák, a contributor to Otto's edition of Bohemia, and let me see his notes: 'From the foot to the top a monolithic wall, cuboidal layer upon layer. On the top, at a giddy height, a huge plate stretches from pillar to pillar, big and unmovable, a wonder of Middle Europe. The rock is bare and bald, only under the vault are there some pines towering, bent by the wind. You can reach the top by a safe path



and steps. And when you get there? For the eyes of the spectator, a magnificent horizon is formed by deep valleys and a hundred horsts and hills from the Elbe to the North.' That's right; it was possible to climb to the Gate itself at that time! Climbing to the top has been forbidden since 1980. And what about the Falcon's Nest, the famous restaurant? It is already here, but its predecessor is right next to it, a barn covered in bark clinging to the rock wall... There is obviously no chronology to my time travel. I'm climbing up to the viewpoint at Malý Pravčický kužel (Small Pravčický Cone), 'an amazing solitary obelisk in the middle of a gorge, its wider end up,' as Mr. Šmák wrote. And there, at Edmund's Obelisk, I meet the person most responsible for making Pravčická Gate accessible, Prince Edmund Clary-Aldringen with his family and friends. This time they didn't come from Hřensko, but used the then popular route from Saxony, from Great Wintergerg, known as 'Fremdenweg' - the Strangers' Way. It used to lead from Bad Schandau, past Kushtall rock gate and on into Bohemia. Well, that's not possible today as it's in the first zone of a National Park, or rather two National Parks, the Czech and Saxony ones. Prince Edmund nods wisely for he is an enlightened man and so my news from the future doesn't shake him at all. However, he willingly starts talking about how it all happened.

PRINCE EDMUND TELLS THE STORY

He tells the story of the Great Gate, which was discovered by Saxon and Swiss painters at the end of the 18th century, that occasional tours were made in the first two decades of the new century, and that tourism became fashionable thus making it necessary to adjust tracks, break rocks, pave paths, grant permits to provide refreshments, control vendors with souvenirs and minstrels and other artists... 'As soon as the year of our Lord of 1836, crowds began flowing in – nearly 1,200 people in the first year and 2,000 a year later!' I remarked that nowadays more than 100,000 people a year visit the Pravčická Gate. The Prince raised his eyebrows, nodded, and said: 'I expected it to have great tourist potential.' He then told me that it took years to build Gabriela's trail to Mezní louka, where he had a spa hotel built, he mentioned an observation tower at Růžovský hill, which he gladly financed, that after his beloved Elisalex died he threw himself into building tourist trails, and that he opened the magnificent passes at the River Kamenice, 'the first of which he took the liberty to name after himself.' And while I was watching the Prince's son, Karlos, leisurely climbing the obelisk, the wind started to blow and I was suddenly surrounded by a group of people with Nordic Walking poles, who were taking pictures of one of the world's wonders with their mobile phones and couldn't get enough of it. I was no longer jealous. I realised that the Pravčická Gate had been there since the dawn of time, much earlier than when it started to captivate tourists and that whenever I see it, it would be different, new, amazing and unique.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Pravčická Gate rock formation, a national natural monument, is located about 3 km north-east of Hřensko village in the District of Děčín

TIP

120 years ago, tourists paid 1 Gulden (the currency of the Austro-Hungarian Empire - calculated using egg prices as approximately 120 CZK today) for a guide to Hřensko, 1.30 Guildens for a litter and 2.50 Guildens for a guide and a horse. Today, entry to the Gate area costs 75 CZK.



In search of the greatest treasures of the Lower Ohře river area



There are less than three hundred of them within the territory of the Czech Republic. National Cultural Monuments – the most important and most valuable elements of the national cultural heritage of the Czech nation. There are three of them in Dolním Poohří. If you haven't seen them for yourself, you can't claim that you truly know about them. Let me invite you for just a short visit, a glimpse which you will remember as a great experience for your eyes and legs!

FRANCISCAN CLOISTER IN KADAŇ

There is a ghost boat going down the River Rhine sowing the Black Death all over the region like a wind. It is the 14th century, and nobody believes in medicine but everybody believes in God's mercy. A strong intercessor is needed... no, a whole group of intercessors is needed as the plague is too strong. So, people pray to the Fourteen Holy Helpers, a group of Saints, to help the people plagued by the disease. Chapels and churches devoted to the Fourteen Holy Helpers are built all over the continent. In the 1460s there was already such a chapel standing on the hill above the River Ohře, at the foot of the woody hill of the Holy Mountain at the edge of the city of Kadaň. In the spring of 1473, Franciscans are invited and together with the citizens of Kadaň and the Hasištejn family from Lobkovice, they build a stately church in a gothic style. The cloister gets larger and larger by the addition of further buildings until there is a magnificent complex with a walled garden. The view from the River Ohře is still among the most beautiful in the country as the cloister, protected by the massive hill, is extraordinarily picturesque. However, it's not necessary to stick to just one incredible sight. The City Museum of Kadaň is located in the area of the cloister, which has three tours, one more attractive than the others. Take the one called Life in the Cloister. You'll enter the humble and modest world of the Franciscan monks; you'll

be astonished by the beauty of the perfectly restored cellar vaults, Lucas Cranacha's pupil's paintings will amaze you, and you'll pass through the gothic church with its magnificent baroque furnishings. The Hindsight Tour into the past of Kadaň will show you an execution sword and the old city seal; you'll see the Elizabethan sister's pharmacy and catch a glimpse of the mystique of how a medieval town and a typical citizen's house functioned. The third tour – Mineralogy, Geology and Archaeology is also impressive in many ways, particularly because of its gemstones from the Ore Mountains which you will certainly find enchanting. You will also enjoy the medieval glass-house exhibit.

ST NICOLAS CHURCH IN LOUNY

It was March of 1517. It was said that the River Ohře itself was burning on that day. The hellish glow could be seen miles away and the Franciscan monks in Kadaň must have seen it as well. The city of Louny was on fire and was burning terribly. Half of the city fell to the fire and – what's worse – the church, pride of the city, burned down as well. The road to building a new one was long and strenuous, a trustworthy stonemason was impossible to find until the councillors came up with the idea to appoint the greatest master of all, Benedikt Rejt, a royal architect. Although he was building an extraordinary church in Kutná

hora to celebrate God and St. Barbara at the time and was planning to build a castle in Blatno, he finally agreed and started his work in 1520. The St. Nicolas Church in Louny was fatal for Master Rejt as he met his end there in 1534; he was also buried there. However, his vision was completed and today we can stand in amazement and look at the unique sharp cones of the church roof, which appear to form the first line of mountain tops of the Central Bohemian Uplands.

The church is a rare jewel. The magnificent elevated dome hangs over the aisle like St. Peter's net over the whole of mankind; the limestone pulpit is also fascinating. The gothic style graciously meets the baroque; limestone meets wood and tall windows let in light, which completes this uniquely beautiful piece of architecture of the human soul. Indeed, there are few churches more beautiful in Bohemia.

KRÁSNÝ DVŮR CHATEAU

At the same time that the hammers of the building site of the St. Nicolas Church could be heard, a Mr. Václav Pětipeský decided to build a fortress in Krásný Dvůr, some 5 Viennese miles (today, it would be less than 40 kilometres) south-west of here. However, he couldn't finish his vision as he was beheaded as a member of the estates revolt in 1547. A new owner completed the building in the renaissance style. It continued to change owners and ended up as a granary and a warehouse. Then a visionary came by who looked at the beautiful place and decided that he would build a chateau and a park garden there. His name was František Josef Černín, and Krásný Dvůr had belonged to his family for no less than 70 years. The enchanting landscape had initiated it, the building became a part of it and the castle crowned the countryside and blended with it harmoniously. Another Černín, Jan Rudolf, extended the garden to a large extent. He built something similar to what he had admired on his travels around Western Europe, a hundred-acre English park filled with extraordinary buildings, which were cleverly placed. The upper baroque chateau served mainly as a recreational and hunting lodge. Here we can see an exhibition of period interiors and historical collections



across 18 rooms. And it's a magnificent sight. Even the entrance, known as the Honorary Yard, surrounded by the chateau wings from three sides, is amazing in its own right and intensifies the experience of slowly approaching the building, which seems to say – I'm not only a house but also a home, a refuge and I have my own pride and honour. And if you'd allow a little advice – don't rush. The chateau and the park are remarkable as a whole and if you haven't seen one, you can't fully appreciate the other.

HOW TO GET THERE

You can find the Royal towns of Kadaň and Louny on the banks of the River Ohře, Krásný Dvůr Chateau is in the village of the same name 18km south-west of Žatec.

TIP

In the chateau garden at Krásný Dvůr there is a church in the gothic revival style, currently under renovation, which it is the oldest building in the gothic revival style in the country and also the oldest romantic observation tower in the Czech Republic.



Charon's secret on the Elbe river

CHAPERONED BY THE WISE ŘÍP

The Elbe ferries are not just romantic boats on which a person can stand for a while and watch in amazement at how the strong current of the river is sliced by the keel of a ship that looks so tiny compared to the mighty power of the water... They are also very practical because they enable an explorer to closely survey the natural beauty of the landscape and the history of human lives on both banks of the great river. Imagine: you are cycling along the Elbe cycle route from Roudnice, past Černěves and Lounky and arrive at Nučnice, and look - there is a ferry connecting Nučnice and Nučničky, names that sound like they are from a nursery rhyme. You



board the ferry with your bike, and on the way you'll see the mythical Říp, and suddenly you'll discover that not only the fortress town of Terezín with the Small Fortress and all its museum exhibits, but also the remarkable Easter Egg Gallery in Libotenice, are within your reach. When you've seen all that, you can get back to the cycle route via the ferry. And there are 8 more ferries! But please, don't be disappointed that no demon with wings will ferry you across, but just ordinary smiling men. Well, the River Elbe isn't the River Styx after all and you are not travelling to the Underworld, but allowing yourselves to be enchanted by the beauty of the Central Bohemian Uplands.

Ferrying is an ancient profession. It's not surprising that the oldest monument in Paris is the Ferrymen's Column dating back to the 1st century AD. So it would be strange if there were no ferryboat routes crossing the biggest Czech river. Once, there were as many as 35 of them. Only 10 are left today, 9 of which in the area of the Gateway to Bohemia, which is what the Ústí Region has been called for some time. Let's travel along the river, preferably using the Elbe cycle route, and find out what we can get for our coins prepared for the ferryman.



HOW TO GET THERE

The Elbe route is 1,270km long and goes from Prague to the North Sea. It enters the Gateway to Bohemia at the town of Štětí and leaves it in Hřensko

TIP

Be careful when travelling on the ferry in Dolní Žleb, because a glass fairy castle is said to be hiding a hundred fathoms under the water. Anyone falling in the water here will be imprisoned in it until the mermaids decide to set them free.



TO THE LAKE SURROUNDED BY VINEYARDS

When the Elbe cycle route brings you to the beautiful Píšťanské Lake close to Velké Žernoseky, you will be able to spice up your journey by swimming in the former sand quarry. There is clear water and a sandy beach, three romantic islands and the Elbe Marina area where you can hire a boat, speed boat or yacht. There is also a ferry. Aboard a ship called Tramín, watched over by Radobýl, Mácha hill, you'll arrive in the town of Lovosice. From there you can continue to the Bohemian Garnet Museum in Třebenice, to Košťálov, Hazmburk or to Libochovice or Budyně nad Ohří for example. Not far from there, Velké Žernoseky is connected to Malé Žernoseky. Never mind that Malé (small) is bigger than Velké (Big) – all in all, it is one of the most famous wine regions in the country and the times when the inhabitants mainly earned their living by chiselling quern-stones are long gone. When crossing the river, you can enjoy the fact that aboard the ship Ludmila you are sailing through the magnificent Porta Bohemica. On both banks of the River Elbe, you can find vineyards with harvests, wine tasting, hillsides covered with grapes; the entire Oparno Valley will open up for you, including the Černodolský flour mill and the mysterious Lovoš and magical Boreč hills.

FROM HERE TO THE END OF BOHEMIA

Another ferry awaits its passengers in Církvice. A powered catamaran ship will take you across to Dolní Zálezly where you will be able to climb to the breathtakingly beautiful viewpoints at the picturesque Church of St. Barbara in Dubice or to the Doerell Observatory or to Radejčín Observatory, which will enable you to see the whole of the Central Bohemian Uplands as if you were standing in the palm of an imaginary giant. When you get to Svádov and see the gothic-renaissance Church of St. James the Great, you'll be able to use a brand new ferry. A Canadian powered catamaran ship will take you across to Neštětice and from there it's only a short way to Krásné Březno Chateau or to Ústí Zoo. In Velké Březno, after being amazed by your visit to the remarkable local chateau, you'll pass the famous brewery on your way to the River Elbe, where a ferryman will be waiting to take you to Neštětice. Even if you can only climb Kozí Hill to its fantastic

viewpoint over the river, it will be worth it, but you can also go up to the ruins of Blansko Castle, which crown the less well known and unexpectedly beautiful surroundings of Ústí nad Labem with literally breath-taking views. After you pass through Děčín, where the cycle route crosses the river to its left bank via a bridge, you will enter the Elbe Valley, which is so beautiful that a thousand words wouldn't be enough to describe it. Also, two ferries wait there, with Czech Switzerland in sight. It is not so long ago that the one in Dolní Žleb was the only connection for the inhabitants of Dolní Žleb with the outer world (if we don't count the railway) as there was no road. There is one today but because it is connected to the Elbe route, the ferry, which takes cars as well, is busy at all times. The last ferry is across the border. From Schöna in Saxony, you can get to Hřensko and you will know where to take it from there because the Kamenice Passes and Pravčická Gateway are in sight. But let's get back to the Central Bohemian Uplands because those of you who are good at maths will have already realised that there is one ferry left.

FROM FERRY TO SHIP

The missing ferry is the one connecting the Ústí quarters of Vaňov and Brná. Here, a ship called Marie serves as a ferry, but it doesn't just cross the river back and forth, it offers longer-distance trips as well. You can use it to wander among Církvice, Velké Žernoseky, Dolní Zálezly and Píšťany, which allows for a thorough exploration of Porta Bohemica. But please be aware – these are no holiday cruises! Marie is a transport ship offering an alternative to land transport but that doesn't mean that you can't buy something to eat, for example. And you can arrange a trip or another event using it as well. And talking of ship transport on the Elbe, ships belonging to the Labská Plavební shipping company can take you from Ústí to Litoměřice or from Děčín to Hřensko and beyond, such as to Dresden or Miessen.



A town filled to the brim with sport

In June 2014 two unobtrusive men appeared in Most and started going round local sporting facilities. Their strictly neutral expressions started to change from visit to visit and both men began to smile. They were surprised at what they saw – and they only managed to see some of the sport and relaxation facilities which have been increasing in numbers recently. As the two men were inspectors from ACES Europe, Most is now the proud owner of the honorary title of European City of Sport 2015. So, what's so special here?



SPORTING FACILITIES GALORE

Most is a wonderful place where you can experience sports from every angle – taking a totally passive role, an active one or an adrenalin filled one. As spectators, you can't miss a match of the Black Angels, one of the best women's handball teams regularly playing in the European Cup competitions – DHK Baník Most. And it would be really foolish not to visit Most Autodrome to see the Czech Truck Prix for example, where powerful trucks from all around Europe race on the four-kilometre-long circuit. But that's not all – just this year, everything you can think of is going to take place here – the European Junior Softball Championships, horse racing, bicycle and in-line skate races (even amateurs can join in), golf tournaments... And if you feel like trying it yourself, you can visit the Benedikt Sport and Relaxation Centre for example, which has a swimming pool and grounds for many ball games. There are also two lakes, Matylda and Most which not only offer great swimming and water sports, but also a golf course, a football pitch, a hippodrome, the magnificent aquadrome, a great in-line skating track... this article is too short for all this. Look at the city website for the map of sporting facilities and you will be amazed.



WHERE TO TAKE YOUR FAMILY? TO THE AUTODROME, OF COURSE

The famous autodrome is one of the most popular and most visited sporting facilities in Most. You are probably imagining men watching motorbikes or cars, and bored women and children falling asleep. But you would be completely wrong! There are few better ways to spend an unforgettable day with your family, packed with fun. Men and boys will be the easiest to satisfy. They can either watch races from the stands or go to the paddock where they can see the racing machines in their service area. And what about the ladies and girls? Let's start with the children's

traffic playground where your child can borrow a bicycle, scooter or in-line skates, and let's continue with the special programmes at the unique local Polygon, e.g. taking the safe-driving course for ladies, which involves intensive tuition on the Polygon practice grounds in the care of a professional make-up artist and hairdresser. But enough of gender division, because it's not necessarily true that men are from Mars and women from Venus. Polygon's great practice grounds enable you to let trained instructors, often with significant racing experience, train you in dynamic driving. You will encounter water obstacles, face skids and aquaplaning, learn avoidance manoeuvres, drive through bends, estimate braking distances... in short, you will use the handling circuit to learn to drive so well that your instructor will slap you on the



back in admiration. You can try drifting. The back wheels of your car will be equipped with special covers, and then you will discover the unknown, with your instructor by your side – drifting or driving by skidding. You cannot easily experience what the latest technology at the Polygon allows you to experience anywhere else. Certainly in the Czech Republic.

ROARING ENGINES IN A BEAUTIFUL SETTING

Read on carefully: there is also an area for practising parking in different conditions, great hilly terrain for quad bike riding, an outside go-kart racing circuit with the possibility to race round it in Birel N35 go-karts fitted with Subaru 200 cc engines and a really perfect off-road track with hills and bumps which is nothing short of extreme. Still not enough? Very well – enjoy a drift ride in a BMW M3 Special as a passenger with an experienced instructor. The engine roars, the tyres squeal and smoke pours out as you hurtle towards hazardous surfaces and sharp bends in an adrenaline filled ride. Well... was that enough? What about going to one of the two restaurants or just walking around for a while? Wait, walk round an autodrome? You might think it's crazy but from here you can see the entire ridge of the Ore Mountains, the round hill of Hněvín with the silhouette of the romantic castle at the top, the surface of Lake Matylda glitters below and birds sing in the silent moments. And we haven't yet mentioned the special events and large number of races and championships that are held here – from the

very popular Autoshow, Drift Festivals, Carbonia Cup, O zlatý motokárový volant, Formula Student, 6hod Le Most, The Most MotoCamp, Alpe Adria to the hit we have already mentioned – the Czech Truck Prix (this year it will take place on the last weekend in August)... And one final tip – insurance companies bomb us with offers for life and motor insurance, because we know how the roads are these days... so why not take a course in safe driving at Most autodrome during

an Autoshow? You can try a turn over simulator and alcohol and cannabis glasses. I can assure you that you'll behave differently on the road after that – so it's worth it! Well, I don't think I need to persuade you any further. It is a great idea to come to Most for sport and fun. So try it and then perhaps write to Gate Magazine about what you enjoyed the most.

HOW TO GET THERE

You will find Most Autodrome when you take the E442 road west from Most. There are signs for the Autodrome and the Polygon that will take you from the roundabout past the turning for Litvínov.

TIP

One „-drome“ has not been mentioned yet. Most also has an aerodrome. It's a great place to book a sightseeing flight and see Most with all its sporting facilities and other sights from high above.



The monuments of faith and earth power in the Bohemian Netherlands

THE POWER AND ENERGY OF THE HILLS

This energy flows from many places in the Šluknov District and if you walk round them, you'll find that religious constructions are part of most of them – from simple crosses to majestic churches and calvaries. There are 14 of them. Of course, the Šluknov district, part of the Czech 'Netherlands' used to be a Catholic land wedged between the Protestant mass of Saxony and Horní Lužice, so it's only logical that more religious buildings have been built here than anywhere else. But it's not only that. It doesn't matter whether you believe in the power of God, the earth's magnetism or the power of the universe. The important thing is that you can feel it even if you aren't gifted with a special spiritual sense. Try it. It's worth it going round all the local calvaries, mainly those situated on hilltops. When you are standing on Annaberg, which towers above Lobendava and Lipová, you'll get goose bumps when

you learn that according to legend, a statue of St. Anne, which people originally placed on the nearby hill of St. Jacob, chose this hill. Every night the statue wandered over to the then nameless hill until the people realised that they had to build a chapel there and later, a calvary. The place is fascinating, powerful, and intense. It's the same for Křížový vrch (Cross Hill), Šluknov, and you can experience the same intensity in the meadow which has a calvary, on top of Strážný vrch (Guardian Hill) in Rumburk, or at the calvary on the slope of Guardian Hill close to Velký Šenov. Notice the names – Cross or Guardian Hills. Why? Why was it here that a cross was erected? Why did people guard their



settlements from here and not from the other, often nearby hills? It's the mysterious power concentrated here that even drove our pagan ancestors to erect menhirs (standing stones) and build sacrificial places here.

ENERGY THAT STILL FLOWS

The strongest energy is on Cross Hill above Jiřetín pod Jedlovou where we started our journey. As legend has it (although who knows), the first cross was erected shortly after the tragic Battle of White Mountain by one of the seven Donát brothers. They had to solve a difficult dilemma – deny their ancestors' Protestant religion or flee and leave their property to the mercy of strangers. In the end, they left, with heavy hearts, for nearby Horní Lužice. However, on their first night in the new country of their religion they all had the same dream. The Messiah talked to them from His cross and wanted them to return. They decided

It was a very hot July, really boiling. Jiřetín pod Jedlovou lay somewhere below me. I was wearily climbing the slope of Křížová hora past the magnificent rococo Stations of the Cross, Getseman's garden behind me and the stone Chapel of the Holy Cross high in front of me. Clouds were racing from the Lužické Mountains. One moment the wind was teasing the leaves on the trees only to howl the next moment, lifting the dust and chasing it in a conical whirlwind over the sun-burnt grass. It's an experience only for the tough to go through a storm on a mountain known for its magnetism. Deep down, in the St. Jean Evangeliste mine, the rock walls are vibrating and cracking sounds just like those from a fire can be heard. The seams in the rock are great conductors and the electrical current flows in and out through the mountain. Lightning is gathering somewhere over Jedlová, and is here because Křížová hora has always been its target. Hiding in the chapel, I'm watching the havoc. Then suddenly everything goes quiet, the air is full of ozone and there is a strange light. My steps take me to one place, about half-way between the chapel and the 14th stop – the Holy Grave. Here. I'm standing here and intensive energy is pulsating through my body, the telluric power flowing from the mountain. According to measurements, the biggest outburst of positive energy in the whole area is right here. The energy from the earth meets the energy from the universe and I'm glowing with energy like a lamp.

that one of them would go back and they drew lots. The youngest one, sick and with bad legs, was chosen. So he trudged back to Jiřetín and when he recovered from the hardship of the journey, he limped to Kahle Heide – a bare plain above the town – to thank God and to erect a cross. Later, when he was praying beneath it, he heard a voice from the cross: 'Drop your crutches and go home. You are healed.' And since then the hill has borne the name of Cross Hill and witnessed several miraculous recoveries. That's why there is a calvary, one of the most beautiful in Bohemia. When you are standing there, you'll understand. Power is power regardless of the name we give it.



ECHOING LIVES OF OUR ANCESTORS

The massive neo-romantic minor basilica in Filipov u Jiříkova at the very border has a miracle to thank for its existence. This miracle is well-documented because the person involved, Magdalena Kade, who was deathly ill but fully recovered after the Virgin Mary's epiphany, really lived there and people still remember her. The huge church seems inappropriate today – as if it has overgrown the village. However, it also has its own power as the title Basilica Minor is only given to churches under the Pope's direct patronage (unless it is located in Rome – these are Major Basilicas). And again – whether you believe in the said miracle or not, you will feel a certain chill, maybe when looking at the image of the Virgin Mary, made from a description, a bit like a police portrait today, from the eye witness account of the epiphany by Magdalena Kade herself. The Šluknov District is a magical enclave criss-crossed with energy currents,

with its strangely wistful and secretive, unusual and tenacious beauty. When you are wandering here and suddenly a giant rusty cross springs up in front of you, it will be a sign from the spirit of the land and you'll hear the quiet sigh of those who were here before you. Stand still for a while and listen quietly to the land. You may hear the echo of your own soul.

HOW TO GET THERE

Ask for a brochure called Calvaries of the Šluknov District at any information centre in Czech Switzerland and the Šluknov District where you'll find all the relevant geographical and historical information

TIP

When Magdalena Kade was shown the figure made from her description, she said: 'Yes, it's the Virgin Mary, but she was a bit prettier.'



The stories of white and liquid gold

Porcelain is wonderful because most of the things made from it are used in everyday life, which means that they become part of people's stories. Who doesn't own some porcelain that belonged to their Grandmother, which is only used for serving on special occasions, like Christmas and family celebrations? There is also a nice story behind a dark pink porcelain cup and saucer on which you can see the faint logo of 'Vivat Böhmen'. By the time you look at it as a part of the wonderful porcelain exhibition in the chateau in Klášterec nad Ohří, you'll already know its story.

LONG LIVE THE DELICATE PINK OBJECTS OF BOHEMIA

Prince František Josef Thun, the squire of Klášterec, had a favourite estate director and chief forester called Jan Mikoláš Weber. When he was sixty, the Prince awarded him a pension and retained his loyalty. You know how it is – an active person retires and starts thinking 'what should I do?' As chance would have it, in Černýš, over the River Ohře close to Klášterec, a china clay deposit was discovered. 'That means porcelain could be made!' Jan Mikoláš said to himself. Mikoláš was ecstatic and obtained the Prince's permission for the test firing of a kiln. To be honest, the results were disappointing at first. The first and second attempts didn't result in anything worthwhile.

It wasn't until 1794 when a firing in the third kiln was successful. Well... the porcelain was nothing special, it was yellowish and looked dirty, but it was porcelain! And it was during these first attempts that our pink cup and saucer were taken out of the kiln. The 'Vivat Böhmen' logo was probably a symbol of gratitude from J. N. Weber from Alsace to the Czech Prince but as we can see today, it was prophetic. It is not only the oldest product but also the oldest preserved piece of Czech porcelain in existence. The story of Klášterec porcelain has continued and new pages are still being written today. However, although today the porcelain factory still uses the Thun 1794 trademark, it now uses the latest technology and produces a wide range of shapes and designs. And we are very lucky that the exhibition which

was opened for the 220th anniversary of porcelain making at the chateau in Klášterec nad Ohří has been so successful and well visited that we can enjoy it until September of this year. If you are in the region, allow yourself the pleasure of seeing the beauty of the exquisitely arranged dinner sets. You are likely to get hungry in the process. At least hungry for another porcelain walk. This kind of hunger can be satisfied easily at Klášterec Chateau. The chateau chambers host a permanent exhibition from the collections

of the Museum of Decorative Arts in Prague. You can see Japanese, Chinese, Meissen and also Viennese porcelain and admire the fragile perfection of flute vases, big porcelain aquariums, figural sculptures and celadon porcelain. The walk through the Czech porcelain exhibition is also very long. In no less than 21 halls you can follow the time line from empire through second new biedermeier, rococo, renaissance, secession... in short, you'll discover all the changes in style of this most delicate white gold.



A WELL WITH A SWEET NAME

When you are in Klášterec, wandering from the chateau to the peaceful River Ohře, you'll be interested to hear another story - because nothing beats a good story. In 1881, several decades after Weber, an active pensioner tried to fire his first porcelain. On a lovely day in May, a Wednesday morning, Mr. Fickert, a farmer from Klášterec threw the chain from his well to the ground and swore. There was no normal water in the bucket like there usually was, but something sour... wait... yes; it is sour but not bad at all! Great, even, come here, Marie and taste it! What's happened to our well? The water was not only sour and



bubbly, but an analysis proved it to be mineral water of a high quality - Kyselka in Czech as it was then called, a bicarbonate mineral water. Fickert didn't waste any time and started to offer his water to his neighbours as well as those who came from far away for it. First for free, later for a small charge. It is unknown whether the charge got bigger or not. But what's for sure is that he sold the spring to Mr. Fieber, a sugar maker 5 years later, who named it after his wife. Since then the spring has been called Evženie and since 1898 it has been the proud owner of the title of 'Healing water, beneficial for the digestive tract and supporting lipid and sugar metabolism' - when taken orally and when used externally, it is particularly beneficial for degenerative musculoskeletal diseases and can prevent cardio-vascular diseases. So the history of the Klášterec spa industry began. On your walk along the river, you will arrive at it suddenly. Nowadays, the spa has three springs: as well as Evženie there is the City Spring and the Klášterec Spring. They offer peace and relaxation, really beautiful countryside and countless spa services and procedures. The mineral springs, so plentiful to the west of Klášterec can also be found when you follow the Ohře in the direction

of Louny. Does Praga mineral water ring any bells? It should, it used to be one of the most popular ones. Unfortunately, it's no longer on the market as bottling ended in 2011. But you can still drink it today, in its pure natural state. Just drop into the village with a very Czech name – Břvany. Břvanská Pearl, as it used to be called, still flows here, in a small pavilion that has seen better days in front of the former Praga premises. A far more sophisticated style of drink awaits you in Louny, available in three different places. Here, you can taste mineral water from the Luna (Moon) spring, which is the deepest in Bohemia.

HOW TO GET THERE

Klášterec nad Ohří is located 6km west of the river in a lovely valley between the Ore and Doupovské Mountains.

TIP

You will appreciate the mineral water in Louny if you have a bad stomach or liver. People with heart conditions, pregnant women and children particularly should avoid drinking it.





The place

You know it – there are never enough ideas for family trips. Children are excited to see what their parents come up with and you end up surfing the internet fruitlessly. The great thing about the Central Bohemian Uplands is that you can take your children there all year round and there will always be something to do. Don't believe me? You think it's just marketing talk? Take a look:

TO THE ANIMAL WORLD

There is no child that won't be excited to see some animals. The gates of Ústí nad Labem Zoo are open for animal fans all year round. It stretches across a large hill, so you start at the bottom gate close to the Elbe and finish with a splendid view down into the valley. Of course, you don't have to make the trip with an elevation of nearly 100 metres on foot; there is a lovely zoo train that will take you anywhere. There are a lot of attractions at Ústí Zoo. You can witness animal feeding, sweet collecting from a honey tree (starring Malaysian bears) and you may be asked to give way to a small group of elephants on their regular walk around the zoo. The zoo specialises in exotic and

tropical animals so you can meet giraffes and orangutans as well as... it would be a long list! There is the Children's Zoo with a brand new village yard and if you book in advance, your child can try working as an animal minder in the zoo or at least take part in the feeding of elephants, seals, giraffes or exotic animals. Or, in Ústě, there is Water World, which is a remarkable aquarium exhibition, where you can meet freshwater fish face to face, from giant catfish to pike, carp, eel and sturgeon. And what about horses? There are several farms to choose from, offering a lot of unusual fun. On Zabadeč farm, for example, children will be surrounded by animals. Apart from 24 horses and ponies there are cats, dogs, goats, geese, ducks, rabbits and even baby boar! There is also a swimming pool and a playground. However, the main attraction is horse and pony riding suitable for both adults and children; even if it's the first time you've done it. Or go round the hill to Babiny Ecological Farm, where you can ride horses in beautiful meadows with views over the whole of the Central Bohemian Uplands. What's more, your children can learn about ecological farming and maybe try to milk cows or goats.



IN FAIRYLAND

You find yourself right in the middle of a fairy tale, and a very scary one, at the Museum of Devils in Ústě. In the massive tower and in gothic cellars, you'll see demons made from all the materials you can think of, mainly of wood, then variety of infernal machines and mechanical figures, scales for sinners, a wheel of devils' claws – and you may even be scared by a 'real life devil' or possibly a whole horde of them! What would children's stories be without the baddies? You can join one of them for an adventure trip round the city of Štětí. There is a nature trail with a bandit called



Štětka (Teasel) which you'll learn more about a couple of pages later and which will take you through beautiful countryside, fields and rocks to Štětka's cave called Mordloch. You'll learn a lot about the life of our ancestors and play an interactive game as well. You may even meet Štětka himself with his band of thieves. If a tour from a bandit cannot be missed, then what about a princess?! You can find her in the delicate and exquisite chateau in Ploskovice. An interactive game called the Devil's Treasure is played here every June, but I'm sure your children will be thrilled to visit at any time of the year, either by the chateau chambers, the park, or under the lights in the artificial caves. In Litoměřice, in the majestic gothic tower in a splendid area of the former planetarium, you can find a puppet gallery containing over 250 puppets from the theatre of Svátovo Divadlo, some of which your children can borrow. The real fairytale world is the outdoor museum of rustic structures in Zubrnice. You can walk through timbered and semi-timbered houses,

which you can enter and for a while and become a farmer, a craftsman, a miller or a storyteller, a singer or a dancer if you get there in time for one of the many events there – such as carnivals, Easter, May day, funfairs or Christmas. The current exhibition is great for children – from April to October you can see the historic school in Zubrnice! And the ride on a historical train with a stop at the Railway Museum is also magical.

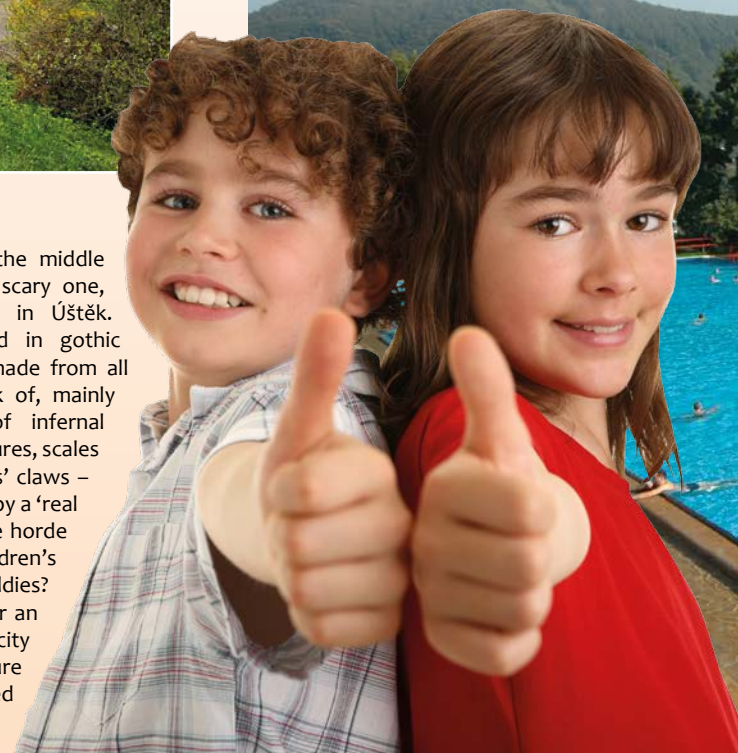
IN PURSUIT OF MYSTERIES

There are many very mysterious and remarkable experiences to be had, such as climbing the Říp mountain, over which dragons flew in mythical times and looking out from the St. George Rotunda at the countryside through the Czech forefather's eyes, descending to the underground labyrinth of cellars and passages, being arrested in the dungeon in Ústě, going through a torture chamber or finding out about an executioner's job. But if you want something



really mysterious, go to an alchemist's workshop. One is waiting for you in the gothic water castle at Budyně nad Ohří. You will enter a mystical world of kilns, stoves, burners, melting pots, cauldrons and hot coal and look over the shoulder of those who wanted to give the world the philosopher's stone. And when you've had enough of mysteries, have a ride along the Elbe Cycle Route. Or would you prefer to have fun in the water? As far as swimming is concerned, we have two wonderful tips for you. Pišťanské Lake close to Žernoseky is the first one. You won't be disappointed (weather permitting) by the magnificent water area with a view of the Central Bohemian Uplands, with a wide sandy beach, clear water and water sports. The thermal swimming pool in Ústí nad Labem – Brná is the second tip. Here, even the weather cannot prevent you from having fun in the swimming pools, on the toboggans or on the mini golf course. So, do you now believe that 'any child, who really wants to, can have fun in the Central Bohemian Uplands'?

for children to be!



HOW TO GET THERE

Attractive places for families with children are strewn all over the Central Bohemian Uplands – from Ústě to Budyně, from Ústí to Štětí. There are leaflets with detailed maps available from tourist information centres.

TIP

Children should be able to have fun and enjoy life. However, it's good to give them something to think about from time to time. There is a Museum about the Second World War ghetto in a former school in Terezín. There were many children in Terezín during the war. You can catch a glimpse of their lives and their pictures and toys there.

HOW TO GET THERE

Nova Ves v Horách is located 18km west of Litvínov. The shop and museum are open on weekdays between 10:00 and 14:30 and also on Sundays in the summer season.

In the magical world of the nutcracker

Nová Ves v Horách lies in high the Ore Mountains near the border with Germany. If you go there, and I honestly think it's worth it, you'll experience the last remnants of mountain living. Winters are still really harsh, the natural landscape is untouched and, what's more – some traces of long-lost lives, traditions and crafts haven't died out yet. You can start at the local tourist information centre where there is a small exhibition on the way of life of our ancestors. Right after that you should continue to a small factory by the road. It has a cosmopolitan name - NBW (North Bohemian Wood), but don't be deceived - it has been operating since 1889 without interruption! It is the last of more than a hundred toy factories and workshops, a reminder of the production of unique and original wooden toys. There are 13 people who continue the tradition which bridges both wars, the expulsion of the German inhabitants, totalitarianism and the Czech version of capitalism. However, all of this alone wouldn't be a reason for a visit. The important thing is that there are rows of many different nutcrackers and smokers, wood stoves with steaming pots, ageless Tivoli games and much more in the shop windows. The NBW shop is only an entrance because right behind it there is a wonderful airy room smelling of wood: a small museum, built by the employees themselves. It's a completely different world. You'll discover the entire history of the place, why so many toys have been built here and why it is that as early as 1910 they invented and sold Tivoli board games, just like the Walter family who came up with pull-along wooden toys, right here in this house. If it hadn't been for them, we couldn't say today: 'It was so long ago that you were pulling that wooden duck around!' A nice lady, who knows a lot about toys, leads the tour and also researches their history. She will show you a film and tell you a wonderful story about the past and present. This lady's name is Sonja Vydrová, the owner of the company, who came up with most of the present range of products. To give you a chance to do your homework and know what's what in the museum in advance, let's ask her a few things now.

**How long have you been here, Mrs. Vydrová?**

I was born here. In the toy factory, by the way, where my parents were renting a flat. But it was nothing special as toys were made all around this area. I didn't know the reason for this for a long time but since I've been interested in the history of toy-making, I've learnt that it's because of several reasons. For one thing, everything has always been made of wood, since the first settlers came in the 11th century – from whole houses, to wash-tubs, twirling sticks, spoons, writing-cases and toys. There were markets where goods were at first exchanged for foreign products, then later sold. The second reason is lovely – wooden toy-making was a local fashion. One neighbour started and another thought 'if he can do it, so can I' and finally, anyone not making toys was 'weird.' It started in households and the Walters began in the same way. Their toys were a success so the Walters opened this factory in 1889 – right in the room where the museum is today. Their success meant building up the business and the factory grew. And when electricity was brought to the mountains in 1912, the toy-making industry flourished. There were over a hundred factories here between the two world wars and all worked at full capacity.

So what about you?

After the war, it was a catastrophe. Most of the people were evicted. Only a few of those important for the economy in the mountains could stay. My Grandmother and Grandfather were two of those people. They didn't speak a single word of Czech so I learnt to speak both languages naturally. There was nobody to carry on with the tradition and the few factories that were left were closed one by one by the Communists and in 1964, only one

factory was left – ours. It's usually kept quiet but German female workers working under the supervision of a national trustee got the worst and worst-paid jobs. When the factories were closed down, these women went to work in the forests. In 1960, they came to work in this toy factory and worked here for many years, some of them until they retired. The main lines of products were Tivoli games and peg boards. My mother started as a worker here and gradually earned the forewoman's job. The company was making products that brought foreign currency to the state and when things started to go wrong, a delegation was formed and came to my mother to ask her to return and manage the factory. My Mum didn't want to hear of it but I was visiting her at the time - I was working at a post office then – and blurted out: 'Mum, let's do it together.' so we started in 1987. My Mum was the manager and I worked on the machines because I wanted to learn about production first in order to be able to manage it later.

And what next?

But this was just the beginning. Then the revolution came and things didn't look good for the company, so I got myself into huge debt and bought it in 1992. Two years later it became clear that it wouldn't work without a partner who would bring in money and work. I found

such a partner in Germany and our partnership still continues today. 100 % of our production used to be exported to Germany as there was no demand here for a long time.

But are things changing?

Slowly, they are. We sell about 10 % of our production on the Czech market, for which we also think up a different range of goods. We are able to make custom-made nutcrackers and smokers on demand – we have made firemen, ice-hockey players and postwomen but also traffic lights and locks. We've also started making smoking stoves, which are growing in popularity – our range simply follows demand. What's more, people seem to be losing interest in plastic and children no longer live only in the computer world. When they come here they are amazed by a simple pull-along duck or a Tivoli ball flying around some nails. And they also like Krušberk (The Ghost of the Ore Mountains). I thought of him when I was listening to my Grandma and Grandpa's stories about the good ghost of the Ore Mountains. But make no mistake – I can think things up but I could never have done it without Toník Klíma, our amazing toy-making master.



The gate is open for muses

We live in local times. Have you noticed that regionalism has been the biggest trend in the last few years? Exploring everything local, regional, nearby and typical... When looking at it like that we suddenly realise that the countryside is really rich and varied, that the lifestyle is less pompous and intense than in the town centre. Let's surrender to this trend and find out about the Gateway to Bohemia, a region which is full of culture and offers extraordinary experiences.



IN THE KINGDOM OF THALIA AND TERPSICHORE

Take the theatre, for example. You can take your pick from an opulent feast of one opera, two ballet and three drama companies performing in wonderful premises. We should start in Ústí nad Labem, not because it's the Region's Capital, but because it has maintained a high-quality opera and ballet, which is rather unusual in the Czech regions. The theatre building is a pretty faux-baroque construction built in 1909, used to showing the best of world opera and ballet – as early as the 1930s Wagner and Janáček operas were played there. We can still enjoy these writers there today, the arias of Wagner, Puccini, Verdi, and Smetana Leoncavallo soar high, the ballet virtuosos from Ústí dance to the music of Janáček, Mendelssohn or Tchaikovsky. Add operetta and dance theatre performances. You won't miss out on drama in Ústí even when you have travel to the other side of the River Elbe, to the Střekov quarter, where the legendary Činoherní Studio, which is invaluable for theatre development, operates. Many stars of Czech acting have performed on its stage – Bartoška, Heřmánek, Zedníček, Schmitzer,

Töpfer, Vetchý, Spurná, Rímský, Suchařípa to name but a few. Despite the recent turbulences Činohérák (as it's called today) continues and the city is trying to help with its long term prospects. This is good news as it would be a great loss for Czech theatre if it disappeared. You can also travel to Most City Theatre for great drama. There's a great professional company performing in one of the most modern theatre buildings (built in 1985). The performances are not limited to the main stage as there are also three chamber scenes to ensure diversity. You can add diversity in Divadlo rozmanitostí – a puppet and alternative scene at Most Theatre which has been performing on its own stage for 25 years. Puppet theatres are interesting phenomenon in North Bohemia – you can take your children to them not only in big cities like Louny (you can read about that later), Litoměřice (Svátovo Divadlo performs in a former Jesuit star observatory, a gothic tower in the middle of a beautiful park), but

also in small towns like Dolní Poustevna on the border with Germany or in the small village of Tisá, where the puppets from the Skaláček Theatre celebrate the most famous part of the surroundings of the village – Tisá Rocks (Tiské stěny). I've left an interesting theatre, in Litvínov, till the end. Docela velké divadlo ('Theatre that is Quite Big') offers a very interesting repertoire and a totally independent approach and is housed in a huge building built in 1911 as a culture house with a gym. A unique and complex dramaturgy has crowned the company for 9 years.



THROUGH A FOREST OF FIDDLESTICKS TO THE MUSE EUTERPÉ

The brilliant Severočeská Filharmonie Teplice (North Bohemian Philharmonic) is the only, but very famous and successful, orchestra in the Gateway to Bohemia. Its history goes back as far as 1838 and at present it's mainly connected with the following three names – chief conductors Tomáš Koutník, Charles Olivieri-Munroe from Canada and Italian Alfonso Scarano, who is new. The orchestra gives concerts all over the world and is literally the pride of Czech music. Severočeská Filharmonie Teplice is associated with the most significant festival in the Ústí Region: the annual

Ludwig van Beethoven Music Festival. Strangely, there is a lot of beauty and emotion hidden behind those words, regardless of how dry they may seem. Just go to one of their concerts to see for yourself. A magazine spread is not enough to venture into the large amount of local amateur music. Take the many local choirs for example – for both adults and children. If you want to get to know them, go to Jirkov to the Jirkovský Píšiňovaf singing festival. There are also many more options.

A MUSE WITH NO NAME BEHIND A BRUSH

Fine art was once deprived of a muse but painters have always put their vision of the world onto canvass. There are 4 places (actually, only 3 at the moment, unfortunately) to see for yourself. You should start in Severočeská galerie výtvarných umění (North Bohemia Gallery of Fine Arts) in Litoměřice. You will walk among works of art dating from the 13th century up to the present day, mainly of Czech origin. Then you'll continue to the originally gothic house in the square, where the second exhibition is located. Here, you'll find real treasures from the collections of Litoměřice Episcopate including 'Madonna in a Closed Garden' by Master of Tiburtine Sibylle from 1494. In nearby Roudnice, there

is a Modern Art Gallery in the former riding hall of Lobkowitz Chateau, which is full of amazing works by Slavíček, Filla, Zrzavý, Špála, Muzika, Lhoták, Boštík or Medek. It would also be a good idea to visit the Fine Art Gallery in Most, which concentrates on the 20th and 21st centuries. Benedikt Rejt's Gallery has even more contemporary trends as it explores the constructivist tendencies in both Czech and international fine arts. However, the gallery is closed indefinitely due to damp in the former brewery where the gallery resides. We promise to follow its progress and when it's no longer wet but dry, we'll meet here again.

TIP

If you want to experience something unique, go to Mlýny u Kytlice, close to Česká Kamenice for the local Forest Theatre. The performances in the open air have a special atmosphere which cannot be matched.





The chateau of miracles

Long gone are the days when the Thun Chateau on the cliff above the junction of the mighty River Elbe and rapid River Ploučnice was deteriorating, dogged by bad luck and nearly destroyed by three armies, the last of which – the Soviet army, built its central military hospital there and significantly sped up the devastation. Today, it's not worth discussing the condition of the chateau after the destructive army left; I don't think anyone would believe it apart from those who witnessed it. 25 years is only a moment in history. Yet the people who love the chateau have worked miracles on it. Do you think I'm exaggerating? Go and see for yourself. If this is not a miracle, I honestly don't know what is.

THE LONG RIDE TO INHABITED ROOMS T

Anyone who's ever renovated an old house or even a ruin knows the hardship of running from office to office, raising money, and trouble with workers... And now, multiply it several times as here it was a critically ill giant needing to be revived. The people of Děčín have been there and done it. The chateau proudly shines as in the times of its greatest glory, tourists are pouring in – and all for a good reason – there are three tours, two gardens, a lot of special events and festivities, a restaurant, views over the whole city... but first things first. Just arriving at Děčín Chateau is a unique experience; nowhere in the Czech Republic or even Europe can you experience it. In 1672, when the chateau was renovated to meet



baroque ideas of beauty a new entrance route was built – the 292-metre-long and 10-metre-wide Long Ride. And that's only the beginning. The first court offers a beautiful view of Děčín, the amazing second court is enclosed by the chateau wings on all sides and a large and majestic beech tree dominates it. And

what about the three aforementioned tours? If you choose any one of them, you can't go wrong, I assure you. The first two tours will take you through the chateau interiors. Many people will probably frown at the expectation of yet more endless rows of beds and tables... but it's different here. As you walk around the chateau, you can't help feeling that the Thuns are there somewhere, they've just gone out. The exhibitions look natural and lived-in without any unnatural arrangements – you could live here today. The first tour is called The Golden Years of Děčín Chateau. You'll peacefully wander through the chambers where the Thuns lived, worked, entertained and had plans and dreams during the 19th century; you'll step into the places where the princes

were taught how to play the piano by Fryderyk Chopin himself and where Emperor Franz Josef I walked with a glass of wine in his hand. Dining rooms, salons and the very interesting picture gallery will be waiting for you and you'll finish at St. George's Chapel. The second tour is even more intimate – A visit to the rooms of Prince

Franz Thun. The feeling of the presence of the great politician is even greater here. Every time I enter his study, I cannot help feeling that the Prime Minister of the Austrian government and Vice-Regent of the Czech Kingdom will be sitting there looking over his documents and will look up in surprise at the intruder to his room. You'll see children's bedrooms with scattered toys, which look like Countess Anne hadn't managed to clear up. There is also the Corner Hall, summer dining room and, most importantly, the Tower Cabinet with windows on three walls offering magnificent views of Děčín, the Elbe, the old bridge and the Shepherd's Wall opposite.

THROUGH A MYSTERY PASSAGE TO THE GARDENS

The third tour is worthy of the baroque pearl that the chateau is. You use a beautiful stone bridge to descend to the chateau stables, where there are two rows of stone pillars crossed by vaults over the original troughs made of red marble. A rose garden with a Sala terrena and an exquisite baroque gloriolite decorated with statues awaits you. The gloriolite offers a different view of the city but the slightly mysterious passage that leads from it is the most interesting thing. Well, it was mysterious, mainly in the times when the castle was occupied by the army; in the times of the Thuns it was just a connecting passage from the chateau to the nearby Church of Exaltation of the Holy Cross, used by the nobility to attend mass. When you've gone through the passage built on tall pillar arcades and enter the chapel and the oratory, you'll have a really extraordinary



view of the church interior. However, that's not the end of the extraordinary experiences at Děčín Chateau. The renovation of the once famous Southern Garden was finished only a few years ago. In the 19th century, there were 18 famous heated glasshouses which were renowned for their collections of orchids and camellias, even the legendary Victoria Amazonica first bloomed here during the time of the Habsburg Monarchy. It is a giant water lily which was discovered by Tadeáš Heanke from nearby Chřibská. The 20th century turned it into a dump, then a pig sty, then tanks for fuel were placed there... it was not until the next century that the garden woke up again and began to regain its former beauty. Do you still have time?

What about the house where Dr. Miroslav Tyrš, the father of Czech physical training was born? Do you have children with you? Don't worry that they might find the chateau boring and fall asleep on your back in the middle of a tour. There are special children's tours – the really fun one is intended for younger children (there is a 'real' Countess as a guide, pieces of a parchment are to be found, and a riddle to be solved...), then there is the Scary tour with the Black Knight for older children (the children will see places that are normally out of bounds

for visitors). Whichever way you walk around Děčín Chateau remember those who turned the decaying ruin into beauty, their detective work searching for lost paintings and furniture, their belief, enthusiasm and love. Maybe a bit of their determination will rub off on you to take home along with all the remarkable experiences.



HOW TO GET THERE

Děčín Chateau is the dominant feature of the city, you can't miss it. You'll find the Long Ride at the Chateau Square (Zámecké náměstí) close to the Chateau Lake.

TIP

Děčín Chateau also arranges unique guided tours focused on a variety of topics – for example eating, cooking and dining at the Chateau or Chateau gardening...

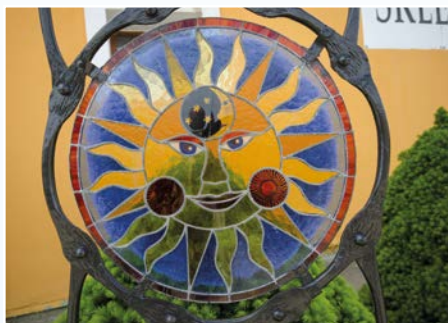
A hidden lookout tower and a church full of surprises

THE DELICATE BEAUTY OF STAINED GLASS

In the centre of the village, you can't miss the house with the workshops and shop of the Skloart Company. Jitka and Richard Kant design and make stained glass and artwork using glass. They are real masters in their work and their stained glass is recognised throughout Europe. There is a completely different world behind the door of their shop. It's a world of magical light, magical colours, delicate magic. But it's only the beginning of a fascinating story. These two people, who have known each other since elementary school, started making stained glass just like anyone else – it was an interesting hobby for them. When the employment situation became complicated in the 1990s, they didn't drown their sorrows in pubs but threw themselves onto something completely different. They gradually became masters in the field of stained glass, improved their skills and education, they started teaching and, more importantly, started to share their knowledge of stained glass as it was lacking in Czech society 20 years ago. They didn't know anything they didn't find out and test themselves. It may sound like a dream but it's very demanding in reality. Let me give you a bit of advice – call them and book your tour in advance. They'll take you on a tour of the workshops, let you try brazing and cutting and show you a film about



the art of stained glass - in short, they'll let you enter their marvellous world. When you've digested everything, let them tell you what they do in their spare time and then go and see it. You'll be amazed.



MYSTERY TOWER

It all started very innocently. A group of conservationists were cutting bushes around the very dilapidated St. Giles Church near Libyně. Because they knew that the Kants were artistic and deeply interested in history, they came to them with their suspicion, that the church 'might actually be gothic.' It was gothic. The Kants definitely knew after an art historian's visit, who recommended that they do everything they could to save the church and offered her help with the paperwork. When the Kants took her to a nearby hill called Vochlice and showed her a small, mysterious and very dilapidated tower which wasn't on any maps, she recognised it as one of the oldest Czech stone observatories and was keen to save this monument as well. There are a lot of such observatories, houses and churches in our country. But there are only a few such determined people who won't give up in their efforts to save them. The observatory was about to collapse so that was where they started. The new civil society for saving St. Giles Church (i.e. the Kants and a couple of their volunteer friends) started to repair the observatory at their own cost, with their own hands, on somebody else's land somewhere in the woods. And the repairs were really thorough. They started in 2007 and by the autumn of 2010, with the help of sponsors who they were able to find, they welcomed the first visitors. There was a new pillar inside



It always surprises us when we meet somebody who doesn't just care about themselves, doesn't regret spending their time and money and tries to save something our ancestors left us. When you are driving along the road to Karlovy Vary, you'll see the silhouette of the Doupovské Mountains rising in the north, the massive camel hump called Vladaře, and then you'll be in Lubenec, where several such people live. If you want to become part of their fascinating story and experience something that's not possible anywhere else, stop there.

supporting the staircase, a battlement was built with outside knowledge and intuition (as there were no plans or photos), cracks in the walls were filled, and a roof was even built, which the observatory had probably never had. They found some pieces of the memorial stone and when they pieced it together, they learnt that the observatory was built in 1881 by a local tourist club to honour their village – the tower looks exactly like the one in the village crest.

THE CHURCH WITH WINDOWS FROM ALL AROUND EUROPE

The church was deteriorating rapidly. However, the Kants and their friends didn't want to lose it. Almost simultaneously, they started rescue works at the church. So a thrilling detective story started. It soon became clear that the church is far more interesting, rare, important and older than it seemed at first. Let them tell you all about their discoveries: a Slavonic double grave containing rare S-shaped behind the ear earrings, the crypt under the aisle, the treasure chest where only one coin was left, about the hidden documents that somebody managed to collect from their hiding place behind the altar and disappear with them God knows where, about ceramics and prehistoric artefacts, about the reborn St. George's – it would be hours and hours of talking and breathless listening. The Kants knew that the church must have a purpose, a reason for people to come here and help a good cause. So they came up with something unique in the whole world. A museum of stained glass. Bit by bit, in the same way they are raising money to repair the roof, walls and floors, they are trying to acquire patrons who will donate



unique copies of stained glass from all around the world. Each window will represent an era at its most typical. Don't worry, these are no empty plans, seven windows in the church shine already and another eight are waiting. You can already see a marvellous copy of stained glass from the cathedral in Augsburg, as well as gothic, renaissance and historicist stained glass. The church is far from completed – and that's what's great about it. Anyone who comes can help with money, work or just sympathy. Book your tour in advance and try to come before two o'clock so that you can see the masters at work. They'll lend you the key to the church and observatory because they'll trust you (otherwise the observatory is open during the tourist season on Saturdays and Sundays between 1 and 4 pm). Information panels will guide you. And a secret tip: what you can't see for the trees, you'll be able to enjoy from the viewpoint at the edge of the woods – e.g. the entire Blšanka valley and Džbánsko and Výrov if the weather is nice.

HOW TO GET THERE

You'll arrive at Lubenec along the I/6 road from Prague to Karlovy Vary. It is situated 30km south-west of Žatec, at the border of the Ústí Region. Libyně lies 2km North of Lubenec.

TIP

If you can, visit St. Giles Church in Libyně on 18th July. A poetic and romantic concert, called the Night of Lights will take place there on that date.



A landscape of shadows of the past

The Verneřice Uplands are wonderful and unusual lands, a plateau lost in thoughts, which in some places seem higher in the mountains than the actual 500 or 600 metres above sea level. A land of memory, a land of sad monuments to human apathy and anger. But fear not, for no sad journey awaits you as the nature there is hauntingly beautiful and it's good for us to be reminded from time to time that anything we build so proudly can be destroyed. And stories such as these, about things that used to be there but no longer exist, remain in the memory of the land.

CHURCHES SENTENCED TO DEATH

In the beautiful landscape, you sometimes find remains, shadows even, of human-built constructions. You can often only guess that a village, hamlet, church or a chapel once stood right there. You cannot feel

any pride about the fact that your contemporaries could destroy historic monuments and boast that they do good for the people.

Do you think I'm exaggerating – the demolition of monuments? Just think about the following scary list. When St. John the Baptist's Chapel in Touchořiny was demolished in 1970, no-one could anticipate that the red rulers were planning a 'genocide' of ecclesiastic monuments around Verneřice. Behind all that was the desire to match the Soviet model and create a totally atheist region, free of all idolatrous and reactionary places: chapels and churches. Then

the terrible year of 1975 came and the demolition started – in June, the beautiful baroque Church of the Holy Trinity at the Holy Hill close to Verneřice is demolished. In July, dynamite destroyed St. Barbara's Church in Valkeřice, in August St. Bartholomew's Church in Valkeřice is blown up and the year of the 'cleanup of religious remains' is finished off by blowing up St. Catherine's Church in Merboltice. St. Francis of Assisi's Church in Mukařov is demolished as well and St. Procopius' Church in Touchořiny is knocked down three years later. We can't do anything today apart from remembering and going to these places to think about the things humans are capable of doing. In some places, you'll find only scattered remains, elsewhere, such as in Mukařov, you'll see clear contours of walls and a wrecked bell-tower nearby, in Merboltice there is even a preserved bell tower. The sun is shining, birds are singing and bees are buzzing everywhere. Banish the thoughts that were it not for November 1989, the same fate was awaiting churches in Markvartice, Kerhartice, Růžová, Javory and Doubice... – let's stay in the Gateway to Bohemia and enjoy all that is beautiful about this journey.

ON TO THE EXTINCT VILLAGES

If you walk round the area of Verneřice, try the green tourist route around the extinct villages under Buková Mountain that takes you round different monuments of human life. It goes from Zubnice through an extinct hamlet called Mauerschinn and the extinct villages of Velké Stínky, Stará Homole and Vitín, the lost hamlet of Tschlerlaken on to Malé Březno. You'll walk 11 kilometres round beautiful hilly landscape with marvellous views and you'll see the remains of places where a relatively short time ago people lived, worked and brought



up their children. Nature claims back anything humans have left. It's good to see it. Just to make sure we don't become unnecessarily proud.



HOW TO GET THERE

You'll find the village of Verneřice, the heart of the Central Bohemian Uplands with the only preserved church, St. Ann's, 23 km north-east of Litoměřice. When cycling, take the cycle bus to the Central Bohemian Uplands from Litoměřice, Roudnice nad Labem or Štětí and get off in Mukařov.

TIP

Make sure you stop at Žampach Farm in Verneřice. There, you can buy milk, cheese, cream, eggs or meat and spend a while in the company of sheep, goats, cows and ducks and many other animals. You can stay here for a night or arrange to spend a weekend there with your children.

A teacher, pupils and the cold breath of a mountain

The Central Bohemian Uplands is a beautiful, picturesque and unique area with an amazing topography and diverse, often surprising fauna and flora... You will read something like that in any guide book about this piece of land that will quickly steal your heart. Then a long list of fantastic places you can't miss will be included. I understand – it can be really annoying. You are glad to have a couple of free weekends or holidays a year and there's no way to do it all. Well, I could give you a piece of advice. There is a quite new nature trail, only 10 km long, which will show you the Central Bohemian Uplands in a nutshell. You'll walk along it, experience the important things and begin to understand. It runs in two loops from Hlinná to Kamýk.

THE CENTRAL BOHEMIAN UPLANDS IN A NUTSHELL

The content of the seven information boards that you'll pass is mainly geology. It makes perfect sense as Mother Nature really put in a lot of effort here. Imagine limestone and sandstone settling here over millions of years forming the ocean bed and then buckling and volcanic activity caused rocks to scrape through the cracks and solidify at different speeds. The result is an accumulation of hills of many wonderful shapes – and many more things that can be read about on the aforementioned information boards, as my explanation is very simplified.

When you leave Hlinná, a village huddled among the hills, you'll feel as if you are high up in the mountains – that's nature deceiving you. The landscape surrounding you will be wildly

beautiful, rugged and downy, as you'll be climbing the Lysá Mountain to the area of the Holý Vrch Nature Reserve. You'll learn something because the friendly signs will explain the geological development and you will be amazed at the beauty of the fantastic rocks made up of eroded nephelinite towering high above the terrain with strange names like The Teacher and Pupils. Depending on the season, you'll be surrounded by colourful flora, being eaten in places by lovely flocks of sheep. The views are unique. You'll continue almost back to the starting point and see a national natural monument called Bílé Stráně favoured by thermophilic plants. And back up

the hills again – there's no other way in the Central Bohemian Uplands – up to Plešivce, one of the strangest mountains in the region and in



the Czech Republic. The extensive stony debris hides an unexpected surprise. At its foot, you'll find snow and ice in summer, here, some 500 metres above sea level. How come? It's because of ventarols – ice holes, cracks surrounded by basalt boulders, from which a freezing breath from inside the mountain wafts. You have to see it to believe it. This whole trip is unbelievable; I don't know anyone who'd forget it easily. And the last bit of advice – bring good shoes, you'll be high in mountains!

HOW TO GET THERE

You'll find the Hlinná–Kamýk nature trail easily – Hlinná is 6km north-west of Litoměřice.

TIP

If you take a leaflet about the nature trail from one of the tourist information centres, you can play a knowledge game on the way with the help of the information boards. Before you set off, visit CHKO České středohoří Geopark.



A really welcoming chateau

There is a turning point in the history of any city which changes everything. For Litvínov, it was probably one aristocratic wedding. In 1642, Polyxena of the Lobkowitzs married Maxmilian of the Wallensteins. The small and insignificant village at the foot of the Ore Mountains couldn't have known at that time that there was a future awaiting it as a city surrounding an imposing manor.

REBIRTH ON ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

The Wallensteins started building and rebuilding. In the place of a former gothic and later renaissance fortress they built a chateau and founded one of the earliest factories in Bohemia – it was the year of 1715. 15 years later it was decided that the Litvínov Chateau was not ostentatious enough and Maxmilián Kaňka, an imperial architect was invited to plan a somewhat grandiose and aureate reconstruction in the high baroque style. To be honest, the importance of the chateau decreased a hundred years later – it became a seasonal summer house. Nevertheless, it's still an impressive and beautiful building. Time flies and the chateau has been 'modernised' many times, always in a style popular in the given period so the original ostentatiousness became more austere. What's more, the manor was turned into an office building, then a museum after the war – but there wasn't enough money for repairs, so the chateau faded and gloomily watched

over the industrial development of the city getting closer and closer with its expanding coal mines. If you expect that an obituary on the Litvínov Chateau will follow, you're in for a surprise – the next significant turning point was the beginning of the third millennium when the purposeful rescue of this remarkable building started. The gates of the generously restored chateau complex opened to the public on St. Valentine's Day in 2014. Why on Valentine's Day? Well, there's some logic to it.

FACTORIES ARE THE FUTURE

The people of Litvínov's love for the most dominant building of their city is behind it all. But it is mainly just one exhibition that the chateau chambers hold today. Litvínov Chateau is very welcoming as well as heart-warming. If you can't do without an endless parade of bedrooms, trophies and inlaid chests, this

chateau is not for you. But if your heart is open and you long for new aesthetic perceptions and different experiences, rush to Litvínov! In the first two years of the new era of the revived chateau, three exhibitions were installed, one better than the others. While the excited visitors walk in amazement round the beautiful sculptures, thousands of hearts and jewels of historical technology, intensive works are being carried out on historic exhibitions that will be the future of the building. First, there will be a modern interactive exhibition focused on the previously mentioned Wallenstein factory, of which nothing remains, yet its glory is significantly inscribed in the history of the early textile industry. Cloth made in Litvínov travelled to Prague, Vienna Ljublan, and Terst or as far as Levante in its day, even before the year 1800 when the factory was rebuilt.



DON'T EXPECT BEDROOMS!

Let's get back to the present from the future. The present exhibitions are really great; fun, entertaining and contemporary. Before we start playing, let's begin with the chateau gallery filled with sculptures by Mr. Stanislav Hanzlík, one of the most important and valuable Czech sculptors. Who doesn't know the busts of Rudolf Hrušínský, Stanislav Neumann or Josef Kemr, which decorate the foyer of the National Theatre in Prague? Who wouldn't be amazed at the creativity and personality of the works by Bedřich Mára, a sculptor trampled by the Communist regime in the film Pupendo by Jan Hřebejk? Their real creator, however, is not Bolek Polívka, the actor, but Master Hanzlík. And don't be fooled, it's not the production of just any artist - Stanislav Hanzlík is an honorary citizen of Litvínov and lives and works in his studio in Křížatky above Litvínov. Apart from the sculptures in the gallery you'll see photos by none other than Josef Sudek,

the sculptor's friend. You'll learn a lot from seeing a documentary by Petr Skala. Let's move on to the second exhibition dedicated to the history of cinematographic technology. Miloš Štěpán, a collector from Krupka has put together historical cameras, projectors, machines and tools, and a classic editing desk – in short, enabled us to have a glimpse into the past of one of the newest art forms. From time to time he even shows films on the ancient technology and guides visitors around the remarkable exhibition himself, which is an experience I can highly recommend.

THE LEAD ROLE OF THE HEART

The most extensive and utterly charming exhibition was created by Veronika Richterová (Queen of Czech 'pet-art') and Michal Cihlár (King of Czech linocut, connected to Prague Zoo for many years). It's called SRDCERÁJ (Paradise of the Heart) and is irresistible. It

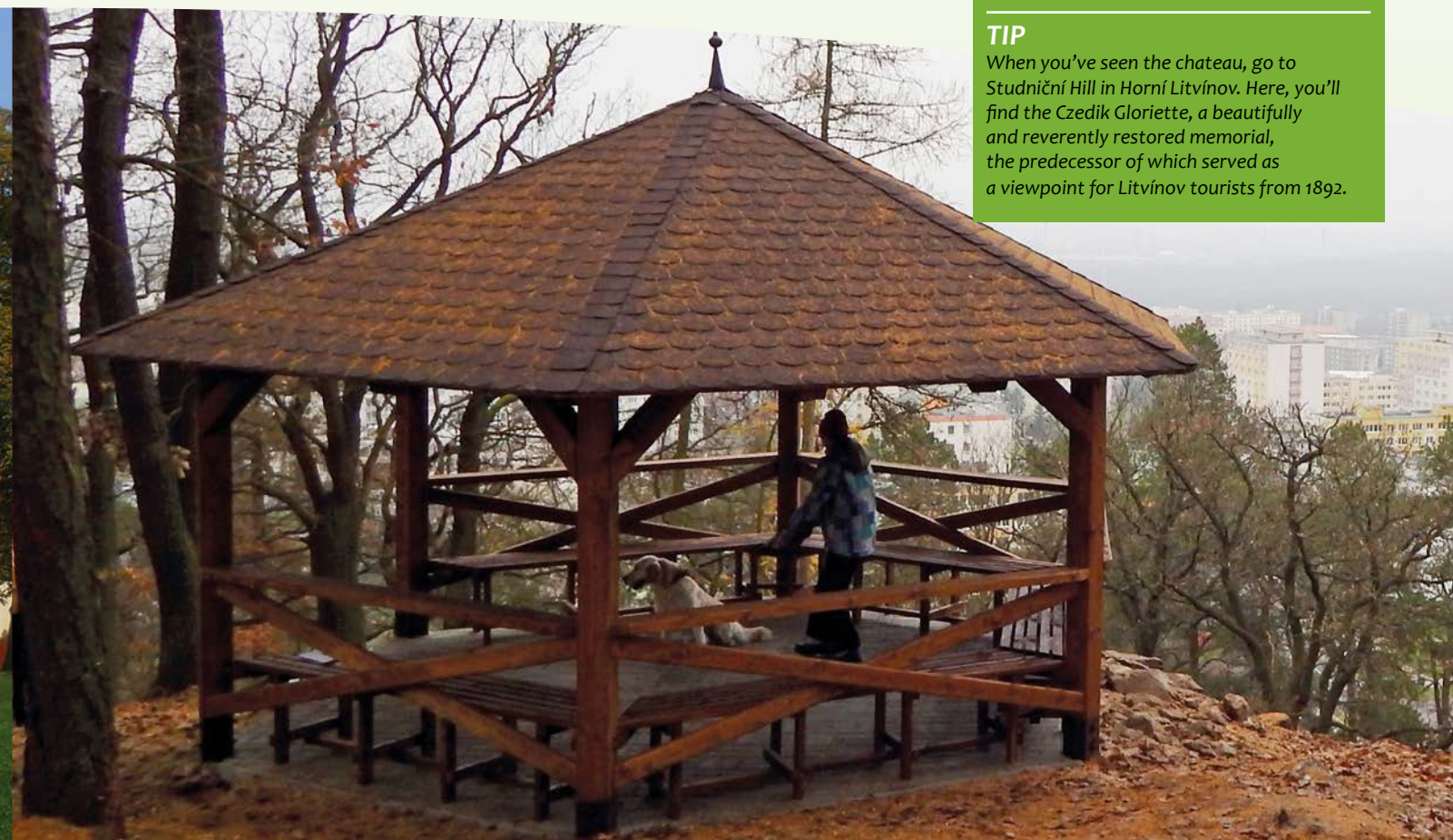
opulently honours the symbol that all people of the world can understand, regardless of their language, culture or standard of living – the simple heart shape. You won't believe all the places the symbol got to and you'll feel dizzy from the sophisticated collection of 'hearty' works, both big and small, from religious art to performance art and kitsch and even a bit of graffiti. You'll sit on a bench under birch trees engraved using knives proclaiming love, you'll get a picture of yourself standing in a plush heart gate, you'll make your own images at the heart table (using Michal Cihlár's linocuts), you'll be surrounded by pastry, tattoos, street graffiti, jewellery, pottery – anything you can think of and even things you didn't know existed. A wonderful and very intense experience.

HOW TO GET THERE

Litvínov Chateau is in the heart of the city, just a few steps away from Náměstí Míru (Peace Square). The chateau park is nearby.

TIP

When you've seen the chateau, go to Studniční Hill in Horní Litvínov. Here, you'll find the Czédik Gloriette, a beautifully and reverently restored memorial, the predecessor of which served as a viewpoint for Litvínov tourists from 1892.



All about Easter flags and top hats

HOW TO GET THERE

Mikulášovice is 16km west of Rumburk and 40km north-east of Děčín. Thanks to the National Park Railway, which is described elsewhere, you'll get there easily.

TIP

In Mikulášovice, remarkable destinations are plentiful. Apart from the church, and several chapels and small religious monuments there's also a marvellous swimming pool, Cutlery Museum and a functioning historical star observatory!

Sudety, oh Sudety..., uprooted land. The eviction of most of the inhabitants and a wave of new settlers from the inner lands that were practically unconnected to the place deprived the area of its traditions and didn't establish new ones. Hardly anybody remembers food, songs, holidays and ways of celebrating. Lost, gone with the wind, futile... Wait. It's not all that bad. Many traditions survived just a few kilometres across the border. And for the last few decades, when people no longer frown at each other across the border, new branches of traditions have sprung up on what seemed like wasteland. Let's follow them to Mikulášovice on the border of Czech Switzerland and the Šluknov Region, at Easter in particular, to see the revived Ride of the Easter Riders.

THE CELEBRATION OF SPRING AND REVIVAL

Where does this strange tradition come from? It's very old, probably dating back to pre-Christian times. Its origins are ritual rides around fields that should have protected young crops from evil powers. Sometime in the 11th century, a Christian element was added – the rides continued to go round the fields but their main purpose became spreading the message of the resurrection of Christ. The tradition became strongest in Lužice and, of course, in the adjoining part of Sudety (the Sudetenland), mainly in the Šluknov Region. These processions used to be diverse, made up of horse riders and walking processions that followed them. Then the era swung around and bared its teeth. The Nazis didn't like the tradition one bit and prohibited it indiscriminately. So there were no rides from the 1940s. What about after the war?

There wasn't anyone to revive the tradition and the local settlers were bombarded by propaganda that anything German must be bad, the worst even, and nobody distinguished between a Saxony German and Serbian from Lužice. And in the revolutionary happy GDR (German Democratic Republic – East Germany)?

The former inhabitants of the Šluknov Region tried to revive the tradition in Sebnitz and Hinterhermsdorf in 1970s but the ruling party and the government decided that the rides may take place but any earnings were to go to the party, which the restorers of the Easter Rides refused. So the arrival of freedom was the turning point. Serbians from Lužice started to revive what had been far from dead. Today, nine processions take place every Easter Sunday, when more than 1600 'křižerjo' or crusaders on horses take part in total! It's not easy to get such a great number of horses of course, so the riders borrow them

wherever they can and also bring them from Bohemia. And what does a ride look like? It starts in a church with a rosary prayer. The mounted procession then sets off from the church. They are all in black, with top hats, sashes across their chests, holding procession flags. They ride through the whole village and the surrounding fields singing songs about the Easter miracle. What's great is that although it is a Catholic tradition, Protestants also take part in preparations and sometimes ride as well. Before the war, such a thing would have been unimaginable. Ecumenism in everyday life, tolerance in practice. Bigger and bigger crowds arrive every year, tourists from half of Europe visit. And make no mistake – there are no stalls selling sausages, candy floss and funfair knick-knacks! These are dignified celebrations of traditions and religion.

RIDERS IN MIKULÁŠOVICE SING AGAIN

But of course, you want to know about Mikulášovice, don't you...? Well, it was like that. The beautiful St. Nicholas Church in Miulášovice is luckier than many others – it has Roman Klinger. Not only does he teach at the local school but he also takes care of the other local religious monuments, together with his uncle. His Great-Grandfather was the leader of the local Easter Society – founded in 1844 – until it was prohibited in 1939 and he left two horse harnesses, two saddles and saddle cloths and about 12 of the Society's sashes in the attic. Riders from Mikulášovice had red and gold sashes over black tailcoats or suits. In the church, all the Society's banners dating back to the 1920s were preserved. There were also photographs, so all that was left was to try and

convince people. None of the parishioners in Mikulášovice had a horse nor could anybody ride, so friends were invited. In 2011, after 72 years, the Mikulášovice riders rode again. There were 8 horse riders in the procession, followed by musicians, and songs from preserved hymn-books were sung both in German and Czech. The original route was given, of course, but nobody could remember it. But it was clear that it went through all parts of Mikulášovice so the new riders went to Salmov, Tomášov and to Horní and Dolní Mikulášovice. The rule stating that only men were allowed to ride was overruled and women riders appeared in the procession as well, wearing black, complete with top hats and sashes. A moneybox also circulated among the people. In the past, the Easter Society invested the proceedings into important events; for example, they bought an organ for the church, a tower clock, bells, had a big stone cross erected in the cemetery, which the lapidary assignation of 1879 proves, and contributed to the orphanage and poorhouse and so on. The tradition has been revived. Last Easter the singing riders went through

Mikulášovice for the fifth time. People's interest has grown largely – nowadays, horses, growing in number every year, are met by large crowds of people arriving from near and far, even from Saxony or Lužice. The ground didn't shake, the price of bread didn't change, but Sudety lived up. Something that resonated there for hundreds of years, something on which numerous generations of people who were in this beautiful land before us, lived by, is now coming back to life. And it brings a new dimension to our lives. If there's anything we're missing really badly today, it's the sense of incorruptible continuity.



The technical story of the Ohře river



There is only one life-giving artery in Dolní Poohří. The River Ohře has determined a lot of things over the centuries; it even significantly influenced technological development. Therefore we must look for technical monuments that tell the story of construction and the mechanical craftsmanship of our ancestors who lived around it. Historically, the most common technical constructions on water are of course mills and bridges. And there's no doubt that paper mills and breweries have a great need for water. Let's go up the river and see what the craftsmanship of those who were there before us have left behind.

FROM THE MILL TO THE BRIDGE AND BACK

We should start in Louny as local city mills were functional here from the beginning of the 17th century. They stood opposite each other across the river in the spot where Most Veslařů (Rowers' Bridge) crosses it today. Two of them, Režná and Šejdovna, adjoining the Louny city walls, were destroyed together with the city granary in a destructive fire in May 1895. In their place, a magnificent neo-renaissance building stands, Režná, a new mill, which still continues to amaze us today and which was named after its owner – Jirásek Mill. You'll walk under this beautiful construction on your walk round the lovely promenade called Pod Šancemi, which copies the preserved city walls. You won't be able to

get inside the mill though, but it only makes the experience better. Jirásek Mill still works today and its technology is continuously being modernised - they are able to grind up to 180 tons of grain a day. The next remarkable construction – a flowage bridge, is also in working condition. Let's make this technical expression less mysterious by revealing that flowage can mean flood. This amazing stone bridge built in an imperial style in 1816, 272 metres long with 40 pillars joined by a barrel vault, placed in a bend, stretches across the water only if the Ohře decides that its banks are too small for it. Thanks to the bridge, the important transport route from Louny to Lipsko has never been closed. To see another remarkable mill we must leave the Ohře in Louny and go up the Smolnická stream. After 6 kilometres, it will lead us

to Verner Mill in the village of Brloh. This mill, that existed as early as 1630, is a historical landmark which was later complemented by a late-baroque building, which later received a reasonable imperial facade during further modernisation. However, the building part is not the most interesting thing about the mill; the technology is. Although it's hard to believe, all operational segments are preserved almost completely, as are the original details and metering and other devices on all floors of the mill, including the transport connection both vertically and horizontally. And what's more – it's all made of wood! You should really see this. The local 'Museum vivum' Český mlýn (Czech Mill) and forgotten crafts are a unique experience accompanied by knowledgeable and impressive commentary. You'll go through all the technical rooms, see



the exhibition on flour-milling and other tools, get inside the grinding room and get to see the 'devil's' machine, which propelled the mill in dry periods and which has just turned one hundred years old. Walking along the Ohře again, we arrive in Postoloprty, where an old chain bridge was replaced with a new, concrete construction in the middle of the 19th

century. What's so special about a concrete bridge? You may wonder, but this is one of the oldest concrete bridges in this country and it is decorated with temperate secession décor. A must see for all bridge lovers.

UNESCO AND HOP GROWING?

Up the river, we arrive in Žatec. This city has two faces – a historical and an industrial one. They are both beautiful. When you walk here in the evening, you'll be surprised to see the number of imposing bourgeois houses that seem empty. There are no curtains in the windows, lights out everywhere... but that's exactly as it was a hundred years ago or even earlier! These houses are huge warehouses and drying houses for hops that had to be built so that they wouldn't disrupt the built-up area, not even visually. It was the decision of the illuminated city planners of Žatec. This is unique in the world in numbers like this. That's why the people of Žatec are striving to add it to the UNESCO list. Tourists will be amazed by some of the hop houses – for example, the biggest Museum of Hops in the world, a unique Hops and Beer Temple with a hop lighthouse, astronomical clock and a detailed interactive exhibition. Add attempts to save and restore the beautiful building of a former paper mill and the grandiose neo-renaissance complex of the Dreher Brewery, which used to be one of the biggest and most modern breweries in Austria-Hungary – and you get a taste of the technical spirit of the city.

PUNCH'S HOUSE

Let's get back to where we began our trip – to Louny, to a picturesque building that is worthy of our attention. A puppet theatre. When you are standing in front of it, you'll feel as if you've turned into a puppet on the stage with threads tied to your hands. The little house is just like the one from the story about Punch and Škrhola. The keen puppeteers from Louny, who formed an association as early as 1909, scavenged the material for it from a demolished slaughterhouse and Hugo Katz, a builder, built it in 1920 based on a project designed by Otakar Polák. Josef Skupa, the legendary father of Spejbl and Hurvínek, supported the construction when he willingly performed without being paid. It would all be just a nice story, if this building weren't the oldest puppet theatre in the country and maybe the whole of Europe! We not only have the continuous enthusiasm of the Louny puppeteers to thank for the fact that our children are still able to laugh at the stories of Mr. Punch and Kalupinka today, but also a very paradoxical fact: the theatre building escaped its fate of demolition because the left-wing parties in Louny joined the Third Communist International there.

Tip

Did you know that the most famous Czech puppet Mr. Punch is called Kašpárek in Czech and got its name in the nationalistic effort to make the popular figure of Middle European baroque, Hanswurst, sound Czech? So Pimprle became mash + sausage - kaše + párek = Kašpárek in Czech.



Let your eyes wander through the landscape

Downy landscapes, bristly carpeted forest floors interwoven with the surface of water, dark and mysterious moorlands, places of ghostlike and dark beauty, meadows full of matted grass hair and lance-like plumes, through which streams and brooks meander like sapphire threads, tall and clear beech trees, silver giants cross-hatched with golden rays of afternoon sun, stones and tree trunks cushioned with shiny moss with shocks of fern, avenues of hairy trees, through which you can pass quietly and humbly as if under a church vault, the deep blue eye of the Fláje dam in the middle of brown-green meadows bathes the feet of pine groves eagerly entering the cool water, the edges of hills dressed in woods and hills strewn with the symmetric crowns of observation towers and castles, the thick-set jewels of dignified historical cities grown into the landscape, the rust coloured brushes of the moors, the still wisdom of the stone sphinx at Měděnec or beads for the ancient veneration of God – delectable village chapels, bulky churches and modest columns of the crucifixion, places of the age long mining of ore and rare metals, the fragile scars of caves. All this and even more can be seen from observation towers in the Ore Mountains.

LET'S LOOK AT THE LAND FROM THE ORE MOUNTAINS

KOMÁŘÍ VÍŽKA

If we start from the east and continue west of the Ore Mountains, we must start at a really beautiful place, which is, however, an observation tower that no longer serves its purpose. Komář vížka towers above the medieval town of Krupka and for the excitement of tourists, there is a chair lift going to it, which is the longest in the Czech Republic, a whole 2,348 metres. Prince Edmund Clary-Aldringen had a mountain restaurant with an observation tower built on the site of a former mining bell tower in 1857. However, the windows are walled up today but the view from the hotel terrace is almost as good, i.e. fascinating. From an altitude of 809 metres above sea level you'll be able to see the tops of the Ore Mountains, the Central Bohemian Uplands, Děčínský Sněžník with an observation tower and when the visibility is good, even the Doupovské Mountains, the Lužické Mountains, Ještěd, the Jizerské Mountains and the Giant Mountains.



VLČÍ HORA

20 kilometres west of Teplice, near Osek on Wolf Mountain above the village of Dlouhá Louka, at an altitude of 890 metres above sea level, a new concrete multifunctional pole climbs high up into the sky, wrapped by a staircase and finished with an observation platform 15 metres above the ground. From there, you'll be able to see the Central Bohemian Uplands, Litvínov and the Džbán mountain range and, of course, the surrounding hills.

JEŘABINA

Under the hill called Jeřabina, some 6.5km from Litvínov, at an altitude of 767 metres above sea level, there is a wooden gazebo sitting on a stone pedestal. People have been coming here to look over the foothills of the Ore Mountains and the Central Bohemian Uplands for 130 years. The German army had an observation point there during the war. There were also years when the observatory was closed to the public, but since 2009 it has been shining again, lovingly repaired and offering views right across the foothills of the Ore Mountains, the city of Most and the Central Bohemian Uplands.

RŮŽOVÝ VRCH

Another stone tower with a wooden extension, this time glassed-in for a change and with a pyramid-shaped roof, awaits the eyes of those eager to enjoy the views on the southern edge of the town called Hora Svaté Kateřiny, about 25km from Most, at an altitude of 729 metres above sea level. It was built in 1902 and from then it bore the name of Emperor Franz Josef I. Then it was named after the founder of the German physical training movement, F. L.



Jahn and today it's named after the hill on which it stands. There's a circular view of the Ore Mountains which you'll really enjoy.

SKŘIVÁNČÍ VRCH

Before you get from Růžový vrch to Skřivánčí vrch, you'll notice an observation tower which isn't open yet – its Strážíště u Chomutova, a stone tower, which is a part of a newly reconstructed hotel, and even though tourists enjoyed views from it as early as 1931, it's not possible today. Fortunately, there's a brand new metal observation tower, called Skřivánčí vrch, only 7 kilometres away from Chomutov near the village of Málkov. From an altitude of 460 metres above sea level, you'll see the Nechranice reservoir, the Doupovské Mountains and the Džbán mountain Range.

HASIŠTEJN

Orthodox 'observers' will probably object as castle walls don't really count as observation towers, but the round stone tower of the massive ruins of the gothic Castle



of Hasištejn, which was abandoned around the year 1600, served as a viewpoint in the times when tourism was just beginning, i.e. at the end of the 19th century. From the 627 metre high hill plus the 25 metre high tower, you'll see the Ore Mountains, the Doupovské Mountains as well as the Central Bohemian Uplands and the city of Kadaň.

KLÍNOVEC

The most famous observation tower? Well, it's the one on the top of the highest mountain of the Ore Mountain range. At an altitude of 1244 metres a wooden tower stood here since the year 1817 and the contemporary stone tower, just like one from a Victorian novel, has been standing here since 1884. A chair lift goes up there and the panoramic view is really unique. Apart from the aforementioned places, you'll also see Šumava, Lužické and Jizerské Mountains, and even the Giant Mountains.



LOOK AT THE BEAUTY OF THE MOUNTAINS FROM THE FOOTHILLS

DOUBRAVKA CASTLE

Yet another castle tower, I know, but this one was specially built as a viewpoint! It stands on Doubravská Mountain in Teplice and Edmund Clary-Aldringen whom we've already met, took the ruins of a tower, had it completed and glassed-in and made it a dedicated viewing tower in the 1880s. You'll see the edge of the Ore Mountains, the Central Bohemian Uplands including Milešovka and, of course, the entire city of Teplice can be seen clearly.

LETNÁ

There are two observation towers in Teplice; the other one is a kilometre from the centre, in the dreamy tower of a chateau that looks like it's straight out of a Hollywood cartoon (it used to be called Kozí hrádek – Goat's Castle). Apart from views similar to those from Doubravka, there's a very good restaurant called Franz Josef.

HNĚVÍN

The city of Most also has its own mountain with a romantic, medieval style castle with a tower, which is of course is an observation tower, all built in the high-romantic style. The stone castle observation tower with a wooden top, octagonal viewing area and conical roof will offer you wonderful views of the entire city of Most, the Ore Mountains and the Central Bohemian Uplands.

MAJÁK

The village of Strupčice lies 10 kilometres east of Chomutov and a low artificial uphill slope, a former dump, rises above it. There's a wooden tower just waiting for you to enter to see the panorama of the Ore Mountains as well as Chomutov and Jirkov.



The skies above Roudnice and seventy years of peace

You might have heard of the Memorial Air Show, it is an event known all over Europe. It's quite possibly the only Air Show in the world that has been visited repeatedly by a head of state and it can boast many achievements in the 24 years of its existence. Perhaps the most remarkable of them is the first post war landing of the famous B-17 Flying Fortress. Year after year people are amazed, and year after year the organisers prepare a wonderful show for them. This year the event will commemorate, with great reverence, the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. And so we invite you to the event: come to the airport in Roudnice nad Labem either on the 27th or 28th of June 2015. You will not regret it – after all this is the greatest social aviation event of the year in the Czech Republic.

A PROMISE TO GENERAL FAJTL FULFILLED

It all started shortly after the revolution in 1989. At that time, Vlasta Dvořák, today the President of the Aviation Club of the Czech Republic, met General František Fajtl, one of the greatest heroes this country has ever produced, and promised him that he would organise a respectable event that would, at last, rehabilitate Czech pilots, the veterans of the Second World War. The journey from the promise to the event itself was to be a long one though. Vlasta Dvořák managed to win over President Václav Havel, Prime Minister Petr Pithart and Minister of Foreign Affairs Luboš Dobrovský and so the promise was fulfilled in 1991 when the first Memorial Air Show took place at Roudnice airfield. However nobody expected that this one-off event would transform into a regular homage to the war-time pilots. The Memorial Air Show received such a reception that it was clear that war-time pilots deserve not only rehabilitation but also regular commemoration and homage – and luckily there are enough people in our country who feel this way. So, the event began to be

repeated year after year, although its motto had been changed. The organisers had come up with an idea to create a platform for the meeting and symbolic reconciliation of former adversaries, the pilots of both fighting sides. This took some time, however in 2005, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War the idea was finally put to practice. In the presence of President Václav Klaus, not only did the Memorial Air Show take place, but there was also a commemorative ceremony in the hall of the municipal authority. The emotions on the part of the veterans present from the USA, Russia, Germany, Slovakia, France, Great Britain



and the Czech Republic cannot be described by anybody who was at the ceremony. The legends of aviation had tears in their eyes and at that moment it was clear that Roudnice was leaving an indelible mark on the history of tolerance and the memories of mankind.

A UNIQUE AVIATION SHOW

The Memorial Air Show can claim to be the first in relation to many of its achievements and outstanding events. This was the first location within the former Eastern Bloc where NATO aeroplanes landed. Visitors had even the chance to watch the pride of the North Atlantic Alliance's air force – the Apache helicopter and the Harrier jump jet, capable of vertical take-off – for the first time in the Czech Republic. There was no need to point out the Spitfire, B-52 Mitchell and Hurricane, i.e. the planes flown by the Czech members of the RAF that could be seen during the very first year of the event on 18th June 1991, because all the war-time flying machines which were available in Europe took part in the event in the years to come. For the first time, planes of the current US air force flew to the Czech Republic being navigated from an AVACS aeroplane. These were F-16 jet

planes and A-10 fighter bombers from the Italian air field of Aviano. The Memorial Air Show in Roudnice even hosted the handover of the EU presidency to Sweden, which was accompanied by the message of the free Schengen area sky, of which the Czech Republic was the first country to take up the initiative, supported by the significant efforts of Vlasta Dvořák. "It has been my long-term dream and idea and I was the only one in the EU to fulfil and push through this plan. This project is associated with many experiences and ideas in my mind. The most powerful of them is, without any doubt, my letter to the Prime Minister of Sweden. At



that time the government let us down and there was nobody on our part who could lead this communication. And so I addressed the Swedish Prime Minister in writing and asked him to take over this vision of mine, and it was agreed that Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer would discuss this issue with him during an official visit to the kingdom of Sweden. And that is what happened. Since then I have known that nothing is impossible."

THIS YEAR WILL BE A VARIED SPECTACLE

So what can you expect to see this June in Roudnice? Besides the aeroplanes of our air force, the JAS 39 Gripen, CASA transport aeroplane and Mi-24 and Mi-17 helicopters, there will also be historic aeroplanes: a B-25 Mitchell, P-51 Mustang, OV-10 Bronco, Lisunov Li-2, Avenger, PB-Y Catalina, T-6 Texan, Spitfire, JAK-3, de Havilland DH.100 Vampire and a group of Bücker planes. Naturally other attractions cannot be missed: the Flying Bulls acrobatic group, Martin Šonka with his Extra 300 and other special acrobatic planes and paratroopers. The Army of the Czech Republic has a surprise prepared – a combat scene demonstrating the cooperation of land forces with support from the skies, all this will be accompanied by pyrotechnic effects. Is that not enough for you? Well, there will also be presentations of the combat technology used by our air

force and of historical combat clubs and most of all - the specific layout and size of Roudnice airfield allows for unique and direct contact with aviation technology and combat shows. The programme will be the same on both days; it starts at 1pm and finishes at 5pm. Finally I asked Mr Dvořák if there was anything we were not going to see in Roudnice. "Unfortunately there is. As for social significance, this year will surpass the previous ones – the Ústí nad Labem region is



the general partner of the event, the event will take place under the auspices of Miloš Zeman, the President of the Republic, ministers Martin Stropnický and Dan Ťok, Governor of the Ústí region Oldřich Bubeníček and Vladimír Urban, the Mayor of the town of Roudnice nad Labem – but there is one thing we have not managed to secure. Most likely we are not going to see any aircraft from the current equipment of foreign air forces. In other words some of our leading politicians have forgotten what happened seventy years ago. And so it was impossible in the end to invite representatives of the Russian Federation to the event celebrating the end of the most terrible war in the history of mankind. Commemorating the victors without the presence of one of the victors - this is beyond my understanding. "

HOW TO GET THERE

Roudnice Airfield is located in the vicinity of the D8 motorway, a kilometre from the exit leading to Roudnice.

TIP

May we offer one good piece of advice? Do not leave your car in unauthorised car parks, come all the way to the airfield and park your car directly by the airfield.

The king of time from Klášterec

This museum really is a unique experience and Mr Šimonovský's presentation pushes it to another level dramatically. It is open daily and the owner will show you around, mainly on Tuesdays ("I have some work to do too and trips to take to get the clocks"). But you can try to make an arrangement by phone; my experience tells me that he will try to help you if he is able to.

Opposite the baroque Church of the Holy Trinity, a few steps from the square in Klášterec nad Ohří, there stands an inconspicuous building with a large inscription - 'Clock and Watch Museum' (Muzeum hodin) – on it. Entering the building is like entering another world, a kingdom ruled by Cronus, the lord of time. However only a few know that Cronus goes by the name of Václav Šimonovský and the museum you have just entered is his collection, which he began to put together fifty five years ago, presented to the public. Across five rooms you will find watches and clocks from renaissance to the imperial style, all of them genuine originals ("A replica of a clock is like putting salt in your coffee" says the local Cronus), and all of them in a functioning state. The display includes mysterious, martial and pictorial clocks, a clock of sheet silver with a pendulum in front of its dial, a necktie watch, a temple clock, aquatic and nocturnal clocks, a baroque clock with a swing, even a clock driven by a saw that would be wound once a year, travel alarm clocks, rotating clocks, a musical clock with pipes, a clock with a pendulum shaped like the sun, the eyes of which keep watching you, and finally there is also the legendary clock with a fountain. No everyday clocks or watches, as Mr Šimonovský says: "I have a soft spot for everything that is somehow special in one way or another."

It must have been a lot of work to put this museum together, wasn't it?

That's for certain. We bought this house for the purpose. Nobody lived in it; it was a ruin in fact. We were toiling on it for a year and a half with my son, just the two of us. When, at the beginning of last year, I told the mayor of Klášterec that the place will be ready to open by the summer he thought I had gone mad. But we managed it. My son is a trained bricklayer, I am a milling machine operator, and so the work went smoothly.

Wait a minute, you're not a clockmaker?

No way. For a large part of my life I was a professional driver and did some odd jobs to earn something extra to support this expensive hobby of mine without cheating my family. In the beginning I was led by my intuition. I took lessons from one old man in Klášterec, this lasted about half a year and I learnt the very basics but



from there I essentially had to discover the rest on my own. There was no internet and no suitable books were published. I had one book from 1948 and I have been using its knowledge to this day. Today I can repair anything. Anyway, there is no other way to go about it; in fact everything that you can see here was not functioning when we bought it, often almost ruined. In the beginning I thought that my son would start clockmaker training but it was not his cup of tea. And you know something, about twenty years ago he got hooked and today he can even repair marquetry. You know broken clocks are always cheaper and we didn't have substantial savings or rich relatives. I didn't get a single penny in subsidies for this museum; I paid for it all from my own pocket.

Maybe it's none of my business, but how can a driver get extra money?

You have to take every opportunity. For instance, I exchanged the complete yield of cherries from

our cherry orchard for a beautiful china clock. At the time of the Communist regime it would have cost thirty five thousand crowns, can you imagine how much that was then? Add another ten thousand and you could buy a new car. Naturally I also sold the pieces that didn't give me so much pleasure from time to time – I repaired and resold them.

You must have been just a boy when you started – what was it like then?

I went to unload coal for neighbours of ours, I was about fifteen, and saw a pendulum clock in their house. When the neighbour asked me what I would like for the work, I asked for the clock. And this was the start. At that time I could buy a clock cheaply but for me even a hundred was too much. I did not earn any money; I was receiving vocational training in Teplice. An old Jewish woman had an antique shop on the square in Teplice. She had a lot of beautiful clocks in her shop and I admired them but my father did not want to give me



money for them. He would say: stop worrying about old junk, it is good for nothing. I wanted to train as a clockmaker but my parents told me clearly – we all work in the ZKL factory, and that's the place for you too, repairing clocks is a job for women or invalids. In the beginning one did not know what the value of individual pieces was or where to look for them. At that time I worked as a driver for a scrap metal firm, I frequented scrap yards and got tips about people who had said at the yard that they had some old clock at home.

And later? Did you frequent antique shops?

Not much. Markets rather than antique shops. These markets were in almost every larger town in the mid-seventies. When I had a tip off, there were no e-mails and mobiles and even a phone was something that not everybody had, it meant a random trip and waiting, sometimes, for several hours for the person concerned to come home. It was difficult but adventurous. Nowadays



we travel all over Europe, just now we are going to Amsterdam for a Japanese clock; there are very few of them in Europe.

The result is wonderful, your museum is really great... What piece are you most proud of?

I am proud of everything that I have brought back to life. Naturally there are some exceptions – for instance this is our oldest clock, a one-handed clock, from 1580. I got it in Liberec. A family found it in their loft, it was rusty and in very poor condition, they had no idea what they had and so I got the clock very cheap. And these two showcases are filled with curiosities – a pocket sundial, a water clock, a crucifix clock, a bird clock or the greatest curiosity of them all – a magician's watch with a secret mechanism. But as I said I like them all, every piece has its own story.

Do you remember any of those stories?

All of them. For instance this saw clock was found by carpenters at a vicarage near Litoměřice. This clock is the only piece of its kind in the world; it is from the renowned Prague clock-maker Balke who would make every clock only once. He left about seventy clocks behind him and they are numbered – this clock is number 14. When I saw it at a market in Buštěhrad my breath stopped. I expected to pay a fortune, but it was cheap – nobody knew what a treasure it was. Or this baroque French clock. We found it at an auction in London, but it was too expensive for us. I wanted to reserve it and return to get it later, but the owner said 'give me a deposit and I'll bring it to Prague'. I paid the deposit and thought I would never see the guy again. And three weeks later I'm standing at Ruzyně airport and he's walking up to me with a large box on casters. I paid the sum and he was very eager to get to know Prague. I began considering various sights but he wanted to go to a brothel. I got a tip from a cabdriver and sent him in the right direction. I got a message from him a few days later saying that the brothel was wonderful, he never the place and spent all the money there.

A Town rich in chateaus

Below the Děčín Chateau the River Ploučnice flows into the Elbe. I invite you on a trip upstream on the Ploučnice which after some ten kilometres will take us to a town that began to fill up with entirely unique chateau building structures five hundred years ago. And so here today we can admire an entire complex of chateaus. This town is also called the pearl of the Saxon Renaissance; however, you will find it under the name of Benešov nad Ploučnicí on maps.



BY BIKE TOWARDS THE SEAT OF THE SAALHAUSENS

We will not take the trip on foot, we will go by bike since Děčín and Benešov are linked by a beautiful cycle route that was described in the previous issue of Gate. This time let us be content by simply stating that this is a ride through a wonderful landscape, a river valley surrounded with wooded hills, picturesque gorges – from one information board to the next the ride is gentle and the elevation is subtle. When we get off our bikes at Benešov Square we will stand in awe in front of the quite remarkable group of chateaus. We have arrived at a lucky moment because a majestic exhibition commemorating the arrival of the Saalhausens to the town is taking place and we have a chance to get to know in detail what this old German family of knights, originally from the German town of Saalhausen, means to Benešov nad Ploučnicí. In order to understand it we will have to return to hot July days in 1515, when Nicolas Trčka of Lípa sold his extensive domain, that is the areas around the towns of Děčín, Kamenice and Benešov, to the Saalhausen family, which had decided to relocate from Saxon Meissen to northern Bohemia and build their family seat in Benešov. At that time Jagellonian gothic era was slowly changing over to renaissance and the Saalhausen's builders combined these two architectural styles into a new quite original one, which is called Saxon Renaissance or Saalhausen Gothic. Apart from Saxony and north-western Bohemia this style cannot be found anywhere else in the world. And such an extensive complex of secular buildings crammed into a small area can only be found in Benešov.

THE FULFILLED VISION OF FRIEDRICH OF SAALHAUSEN

In those days a fortress stood above the sloping square. And the conversion of this fortress was just the start – the Saalhausen building boom broke out and lasted from 1522 to 1578. This short period of fifty six years gave rise to many separate chateau buildings linked together by narrow corridors at the height of the battlements of the castle walls. The parish church, to which all those corridors led, had undergone a significant change too. The complex is an entirely unique example of town planning in the life of the renaissance nobility in a vassal town, as has been written by PhDr. Zdeněk Henig, the warden of the chateau today. And the place really feels very unique. Harmonious and exceptional architecture, a chateau building at every turn – this is by no means an everyday experience, especially in such a small town. But let us go back far in time and follow the actions of Friedrich of Saalhausen, who, having converted the aforementioned fortress into a chateau, which would be known as the Upper Chateau, bought a hospital and four houses on the square from local townsmen, had them all torn down and set out to build the so-called Lower Chateau. God knows how the builders at the end of the Middle Ages did it but the Upper Chateau was completed just in two years and the Lower Chateau, a far more extensive structure, in only four years. But this was not the end of the building activity – besides others the buildings at the Starschedel palace and the Konojedy palace were also erected at that time. The Konojedy chateau presents a chance to examine the thinking of the nobility of the time, which is so difficult for us nowadays – it was designed for the moneyless members of the family and Saalhausen widows. The nearby Church of the Nativity of Mary was also undergoing significant renovation: a new chapel, joined to the temple's presbytery on the northern side, was built. However this happened as late as 1562, the year when Friedrich of Saalhausen died, and in fact the structure was meant to commemorate the memory of this great visionary and investor in construction. Nowadays the chapel houses a very interesting set of renaissance tombstones and epitaphs that do not cover any graves, but remind us of the life and death of the deceased. As I have mentioned before, Friedrich's death did not spell the end of the construction of chateaus. His son John as well

as his grandsons Anthony and Volf continued his efforts. In 1578 they added another building to the Lower Chateau, which is now called Volf's Chateau. The remarkable activity of a single family was not over yet. It is true that not all of their achievements have been preserved – this applies to the roofed above-ground corridors mentioned earlier, a greenhouse and a horse stable. But that which has been preserved makes for a wonderful and unique complex. The fact is that the noble families that succeeded the Saalhausens never made the Benešov chateaus their main seat and so no significant additions or renovations took place, meaning the pearl of the Saxon Renaissance can shine and glitter in the third millennium too.



OTHER SIGHTS IN BENEŠOV

However, a tourist will come across many other interesting sights in Benešov nad Ploučnicí. The baroque period has left a few gems there too – at random we can point out the beautiful pillar of the Blessed Virgin Mary, decorated with the statues of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus and of a foursome of saints, namely Saint Florian, Saint Joseph, Francis Xavier and John of Nepomuk, the chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows in the neighbourhood of the church or the calvary sculpture, a piece of art of very high value, which has been relocated to in front of the premises of the Upper Chateau. The neo-renaissance tomb of the Mattausch family at the Benešov cemetery and the ruin of Ostrý castle on a rock jutting out over the River Ploučnice are also worth mentioning... And there are other sites that could be mentioned. Benešov nad Ploučnicí is simply a town full of the great footprints of the lives of our ancestors. And now we can get on our bikes again and set out along the cycle path further up the Ploučnice towards the river's source in the neighbouring Liberec region or back to Děčín so that we can, for example, visit the reconstructed gothic Church of Saint Ann in Jedlka that we passed on our way to Benešov.

HOW TO GET THERE

Benešov nad Ploučnicí is roughly 10km southeast of the town of Děčín. All the events organised to commemorate the anniversary can be found at www.benesovnl.cz.

TIP

The writer Karl May was imprisoned in Benešov town hall in January of 1869, having being arrested for vagrancy. He passed himself off as a merchant from Martinique; however he was given away by the new invention of photography and an arrest warrant from Saxony. Writing a story about life on a Caribbean island, 'Man from Martinique', did not help him outwit the jailers.



History throughout the land of castles

In Gate Magazine I have repeatedly confessed my love of the unique landscape of the Central Bohemian Uplands, the place like no other in the world, and I hope I will manage to get across my fascination and cause you to wander about the hills and hilltops that pop up around you, which rise and point towards the skies in unexpected and often unbelievable shapes. This time I will add another argument, another feature of this landscape – ancient cultural footsteps, the remains of the lives of our ancestors, namely the aspects of defence and attack. Castles and chateaus.

PILGRIMAGE FROM CASTLE TO CASTLE AS A CURE FOR STRESS

You cannot imagine how many castles there are in the area. Naturally everybody native to the place knows Hazmburk, Libochovice or Ploskovic, however today I am inviting you for a trip stretching more than hundred and twenty kilometres that will be dotted, and I really mean it, with twenty five nobility mansions and former fortresses. We can take this trip thanks to the concentrated long-standing efforts of many people who came up with the idea of the Golden path through the landscape of castles and provided it with markers and information boards.

The path starts in Budyně nad Ohří at what was originally a gothic castle and ends in Ústě at a gothic castle, converted to a brewery in modern times, nowadays an essential part of the town, towering high over the bed of the Ústěcký stream. I can imagine you asking why on earth anybody would trudge such a distance... Well, you would be surprised by the number of such enthusiasts. This is a trip full of adventure through a wonderful landscape during which you constantly have one foot deep in history, and after some time you'll start getting ideas out of nowhere that a gang of thieves is

waiting for you behind one of those rocks. Along the route there are many places to stay or to have a meal so why not take the trip and escape the troubles of the present day, taking a different perspective from a distance of several centuries? It goes without saying that you can only make use of part of this well-marked route, which is dotted with information boards to add to your journey. It is always going to be a rich and intense experience. And where will the Golden path take you? Just listen to the names, the sound of which brings back the long-forgotten past – Budyně, Libochovice, Hazmburk, Třebenice (you should visit the local Museum of Czech garnets with its exhibition on the castles of the Bohemian Central Uplands, in other words: this place is a basic information source for the entire length of the route), Košťálov, Skalka, Oltářík (there you may want to branch off down the Hussite path past the castle on Blešenský Hill to the village of Třebívlice), then back over Medvědice, Ostrý,



Milešov, Bílý Újezd, Velešín, Oparno, taking a diversion to Lovosice, then across the Elbe on a ferry from Malé Žernoseky to Velké Žernoseky, up to the Kamýk Castle ruins, through to Žitenice and Litoměřice and all the way to Kalich Castle – from there the Žižka path will take you to Panna Castle or to Ploskovic and finally across Litýš all the way to Ústě.



THE FORTIFICATION INGENUITY OF THE HUSSITES IN A NUTSHELL

Lovers of history will certainly know that this year marks the 600th anniversary of the infamous burning of John Hus (Jan Hus) at the stake. His followers are judged from various points of view, however nobody can deny they had a totally creative and innovative attitude towards the art of war, including the cunning development of the art of fortification, in other words the building skills focused on the fortification of castles. And it is in the town of Ústě, where we finished our trip a few lines above, where another trip will start on the 20th June 2015, that is, the journey of “the Exhibition of Hussite fortification arts” across the Czech Republic and the countries beyond the borders. The travelling exhibition, including a lot of new and revolutionary information (among other things there will be very revealing 3D models), is a long-term project that is unparalleled in our country. Therefore, Gate will follow it closely and publish any related reports. You may encounter our reporters in places where the exhibition will be on display. So, please accept my cordial invitation – come and witnesses this homage to the ingenious brains of the Czech builders of the middle ages.

Written by: Rostislav Křivánek

Drawn by: Petr Herold

The Chalice and the Virgin or Jan Žižka in the Litoměřice area



May 1421. Jan Žižka together with Křišťan of Žernoseky and his brother Jaroslav Žižka besiege Litoměřice



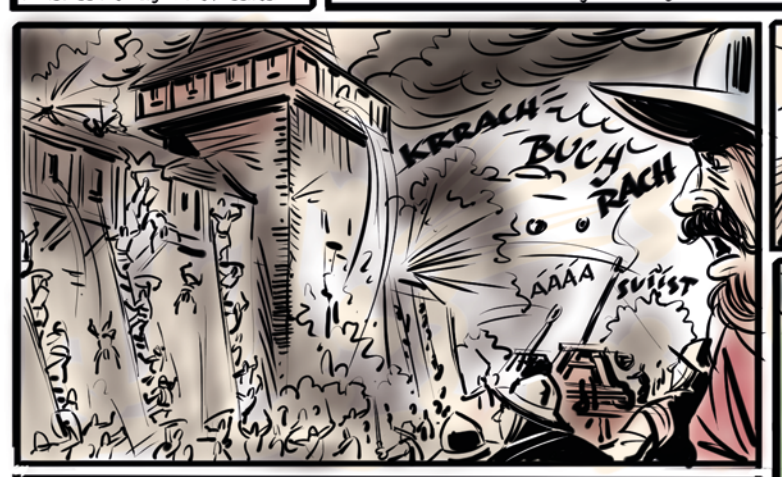
In a mere two years the Chalice castle is almost finished. From then on, Jan Žižka starts to put “of Trocnov and Chalice” next to his name.



Jan Žižka leaves for Čáslav for an assembly to discuss the unity of the Hussites.



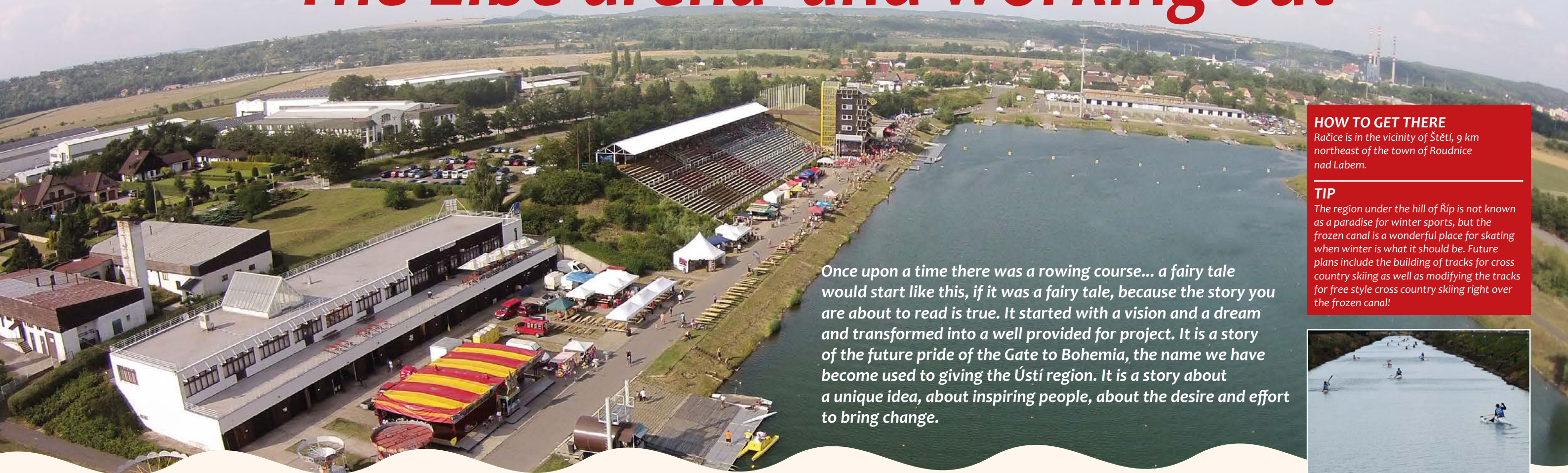
Zikmund of Vartenberk has brought his army to the Chalice.



The year 1423. On the second attempt the Hussites conquer the 'Virgin' and settle in it. The Virgin and the Chalice become solid Hussite strongholds until the end of the Hussite wars.



The Elbe arena and working out



Once upon a time there was a rowing course... a fairy tale would start like this, if it was a fairy tale, because the story you are about to read is true. It started with a vision and a dream and transformed into a well provided for project. It is a story of the future pride of the Gate to Bohemia, the name we have become used to giving the Ústí region. It is a story about a unique idea, about inspiring people, about the desire and effort to bring change.

HOW TO GET THERE

Račice is in the vicinity of Štětí, 9 km northeast of the town of Roudnice nad Labem.

TIP

The region under the hill of Říp is not known as a paradise for winter sports, but the frozen canal is a wonderful place for skating when winter is what it should be. Future plans include the building of tracks for cross country skiing as well as modifying the tracks for free style cross country skiing right over the frozen canal!



PART ONE – THE TRANSFORMATION OF A SAND QUARRY

The rowing and canoeing canal in Račice was established on the site of a former sand quarry in 1986 and from the very beginning it was dedicated to the junior world championships. It was immediately clear to everybody that this sports site had parameters that were unique, that there are not many canals in the world that could match it. Abracadabra – a few years have passed and Václav Chalupa, a world-class rower, is toiling hard in his skiff in the canal. His coach Zdeněk Pecka is accompanying him on a bike

along the bank. They are quite alone there. Abracadabra – the year of 1997 and Zdeněk Pecka becomes the director of the indebted and insufficiently utilised site. Abracadabra – eighteen years later the rowing and canoeing canal in Račice has turned into the National Olympic Centre for water sports and sportspeople from all over the world come here to train and compete, the facility is bursting at the seams and the rumour is that it's one of the best in the world, perhaps with the fairest conditions for rowing. Rowers and canoeists are not alone – whenever the waters are free of boats, fishermen spring up (in winter when the canal freezes over this is one of the few areas in our country where fishing “through holes” is permitted), cyclists pass by (the Elbe cycle route cuts across the area) and tens of people on inline skates can be seen. The local five-kilometre circuit is six metres wide; there are no cars, no leaves, a pine tree wood on one side, water on the other – the dream of any inline skater. In the building above the water, a few people sit contemplating future plans for the arena.



PART TWO – THE ELBE ARENA IS BORN

The idea is a daring one. The two-kilometre canal in Račice is to be supplemented by a ten-kilometre training course on the River Elbe in nearby Štětí – from Liběchovice weir to the weir in Štětí. A new boathouse will replace the old one, which was wiped out by flooding. New supporting facilities for sport and relaxation will be built together with accommodation facilities, and a pool for rowers and canoeists will be constructed. New sports facilities will be also built in Račice with new underground distribution lines

and the accommodation capacities will also be increased. Moreover multipurpose sports grounds, tennis and beach volleyball courts, a fitness centre with body-building equipment for rowers and a playground for children will be created. Both complexes will be linked together and the Elbe Arena will be created: a top-



notch sporting area for the training of Olympic competitors suitable to hold any world event and, at the same time, a place where you can come for sports, relaxation and entertainment. Later rowers and canoe sprinters will be joined by white-water slalom racers who have a great white-water course in nearby Roudnice nad Labem. It takes about half an hour to get here

from Prague along the motorway. In a few years the Elbe Arena will be a major attraction and the showpiece of the region. And there is no reason why the stands and slopes around the waters will not be covered with spectators as is the case now with the Vysočina Arena, thanks to the Czech biathlon miracle. There are many talented and accomplished rowers in this country. Well,

you may think that there have been many plans like this before... However, this idea is clearly taking shape because the project is financially secure thanks to the Ústí region, the Ministry of education, youth and sports and the Czech Olympic Committee.

PART THREE – LET'S GET CHILDREN MOVING!

What else could rowers and canoeists wish for? It could hardly get any better! Well, this is true now. But honestly who will sink the oars and paddles in the water of this beautiful channel in five or ten years? Today's schoolchildren? Are thinking of those beings who are becoming glued to the screens of their computers, phones and tablets, and hardly move throughout the year? Have you recently visited a lesson of physical education? Children lack basic movement routines, their physical fitness is getting closer and closer to zero, health problems caused by body posture and zero fitness and obesity among children is becoming normal. Are these to be our future competitors for Olympic medals? You know something, perhaps they will be? The Elbe Arena has come up with a wonderful idea of how to link professional sport with the everyday activity of children. It started with the plan for youth sport centres, an idea born in the head of the Olympic competitor Květa Pecková-Jeriová. Having completed her professional sporting career she became a teacher of physical training and could not bear to watch the physical devastation of our offspring, just shrugging her shoulders without accepting any personal responsibility. It is very simple – the time children spend in the youth sport centre is passed by running, jumping and

throwing. The basis of the system is in athletics, which in turn is the basis of movement versatility. The first group is already operating in Štětí and the idea is spreading through schools along the banks of the Elbe and Ohře rivers. In order to increase motivation on the children's part, top-notch sportspeople will regularly visit them. In times when there are almost no heroes to emulate this is a great idea: going for a run with Olympic medal winners Mirka Knapková or Ondřej Synek is not something that everybody has a chance to do. And imagine, having completed the first four years of primary school, the children will swap the youth centre for a sports club in which they can choose a sport to their liking and either stay with athletics or try their luck on the water – at the age of twelve or thirteen this makes sense. And what comes next? Sports high schools and universities, naturally, or in other words: the Academy of Water Sports of the Ústí region. This is a beautiful idea and it is wonderful that it was born in the Gate to Bohemia. Who knows, maybe in a few years' time the following conversation will be typical – ‘Where are you from? Ústí region? Then you must be a rower!’

The Four Musketeers of Račice

They belong among the best sportspeople in Czech history. Three of them moved to the region, one is a native. They are all linked through the rowing canal in Račice. Altogether they have eight Olympic medals. I asked them a simple question: What is your relationship to the Ústí region?

VÁCLAV CHALUPA

A rower. Six Olympic appearances, a silver medal at the Olympics in Barcelona in the skiff event, four-time world vice champion.

"I am from Jindřichův Hradec. I must admit that I have always wanted to return to my native southern Bohemia where I belong and perhaps one day I will return. But I am connected to rowing, although not as an active sportsman now, but by fate. And the most logical place for a rower to be is Račice. I have spent most of my career here, I know every stone and every ripple, I've got many friends here, and I am glad to be here. Nowadays I am the technical director – don't be surprised to see me in overalls. Being a director here is hard work, the problems can't be solved



from behind a desk. And so we live here, together with my family, and when somebody asks me where I feel at home, the answer is here. I have got to know the Ústí region step by step and step by step I have come to like it. When I set out on my bike from Štětí for Stračí hill, suddenly there are rocks and forests in front of me, and I can cover, say, 50 kilometres and it will still be beautiful. Naturally I have to steal time to do that. Last year I was in Hřensko and saw the arch

of Pravčická Brána for the first time. I like Milešovka hill, we trek up Říp with the family and in winter we travel to the Ore Mountains and go cross country skiing in Dlouhá Louka and Cínovec."



MARTIN DOKTOR

A canoe sprint racer. Two-time Olympic champion from Atlanta in 1996, two-time world champion, holder of 14 medals from world championships.

"I come from Pardubice where I started to do sport but sometime around 1995 I was spending most of the summers in Račice. It was and still is one of the best courses in the world. I eventually moved here; we bought a house in Račice, I got married... Now my children go to school here, this is simply our home. Naturally I toured the Ústí region when I did sport professionally – for instance Ústí, Děčín, Chomutov, and Kadaň. When I used to go to Děčín or Ústí by train I liked to go back by bike, sometimes along the Elbe, but more often over the hills of the Bohemian Central Uplands – that is a wonderful route. Now I have more time and so we can enjoy the weekends too from time to time – naturally Říp, this hill simply cannot be ignored, Hazmburk castle, we have been to Sedlo, the fortified settlement, too, in winter we ski in Telnice,

sometimes we do cross country skiing in Klínov... However there are still many places we have not been to, for example we have seen almost nothing of Bohemian Switzerland – but we are planning to so we are bound to get there eventually, hopefully. The surroundings of Štětí are also nice. When I came here for the first time it felt like I was in the steel city from Begum's Fortune by Jules Verne, but since then there have been many improvements to the town – and on the other hand a few kilometres further on you'll find yourself in Mordlochu, among the rocks, on beautiful forest paths, with Kokorin around the corner..."

KVĚTA PECKOVÁ-JERIOVÁ

A cross-country skier. A holder of three Olympic medals – a bronze from Lake Placid in 1980 and a silver and a bronze from Sarajevo in 1984, and a bronze from the world championship in Oslo in 1982.

"I am from the Krkonoše Mountains and I ended up the Ústí region, namely the town of Litoměřice, because of marriage. The town has become unbelievably beautiful within the last twenty five years. There are marvellous historic sights, churches, galleries, and parks here and the surrounding landscape is also beautiful. Sport is still terribly important for me, especially cross-country skiing, and so I regularly set out for the Ore Mountains, the area around Klínovec or Nové Město, or the mountain

village of Cínovec... I have spent a lot of time in Bílina where my daughter was involved in athletics. But I divide free time between the Ústí region and my beloved Krkonoše – I can never be away from those mountains for long. We have a farm there so you can imagine how physically demanding it can be. However, when my husband has a free weekend, which is not that often given his work at the rowing canal, we often take a bike trip either along the Elbe route or into the Bohemian Central Uplands. A trip to Mostná hill with the lookout tower that provides a beautiful view of the Uplands is a nice walk too. There is a nice forest park and a statue of Karel Hynek Mácha there."

ZDENĚK PECKA

A rower. At the Olympics in Montreal in 1976 he won bronze in the coxless fours and another bronze in the double skull with Václav Vochoska in Moscow in 1980. A winner of several medals from the world championship, the coach of Václav Chalupa.

"I am from here, born in Litoměřice. I love this region, although because of a lack of time, I don't know it as well as I would like to. Where to start...? Let's start with the Gateway to Bohemia. As a young boy I often rowed through the valley of Porta Bohemica with oars

in my hands and it was always a wonderful experience. And I'd stop at Lake Pišťanské for a swim! I also did a lot of running in the Bohemian Central Uplands, mainly around Litoměřice in the direction of Lbín, Babiny, Čeraniště or Kundratice... When you get down to Hlinné and the view opens up in front of you – it's a very powerful moment. Both of us, Květa and I, love Střekov Castle, we even got married there, and we have thought up a great trekking route over the hills towards Litoměřice. There are loads of things I like about this region – for instance the sunset over Radobýl hill, nothing can match it. For many years the canal in Račice has been the centre of my life. I had a big window put in my director's office so that I could always see the canal and so I look at the water, the pine tree woods and the hill of Říp – this will calm your mind at any time. In fact Vašek Vochoska and I were the first to take a rowing trip along the canal – at that time it was far from complete, construction had hardly even started. We learnt that somewhere near Štětí they were digging a canal, so we went there and carried a boat for about two kilometres until we reached the construction site, put the boat on the water and took a few oar strokes – and we will forever be the first people to row in the canal."



Close your eyes and follow your nose

Bohemian Switzerland is a remarkable area, full of so many beautiful places that it is truly hard to pick one to go for first. Mostly people come here to see the wonders of the rocky towns and gates, the ragged gorges, the astonishing rocky lookouts, the romantic ruins of Dolský Mill, the sacred sites scattered all over the region, or the jewels of local architecture. But let's choose a different direction. Let's close our eyes and be led by our sense of smell. A kingdom of flowers, herbs, crops and endless forests filled with sweet-smelling wood awaits us. Leave your worries behind: this is not going to be a botanical trip into the realm of the local flora. We will be seeking out traditional crafts, which had – and still have – much in common with sweet smells and odours.

BENEFICIAL WEEDS

Herb women knew very well that what grows from the ground to the sky is a gift from God, and it would be a sin not to make use of this gift. You may think there is no place for an old herb woman in the world today... you couldn't be more wrong. Ok, he is not a woman, he is a man and his name is Valdemar Grešík. His beginnings were much the same as those of the old medicine women. He wandered the meadows and forests, gathered herbs and fruit and at home made them into a tea that could cure various ailments. And since Valdemar is a modern man, he started a business and now he is one of the most important growers in the region, his 'factory' producing hundreds of teas and condiment mixtures that are renowned all over the country. His work is wonderful, sweet-smelling and pleasing to God. Valdemar searches for old recipes and creates new ones: he seeks and finds. When he learnt that in the old days a spirit from rowan berries used to

be distilled in the region, he researched it and came up with a liquor by the name of Děčínská jeřábinka that has already become a much sought after regional attraction. He even inspired the establishment of new rowan tree orchards. When you find yourself in Děčín, go and see one of his shops. The places smell nice and, moreover, you will be advised on what to drink and why. However, herbs can be used for other benefits. A few years ago Miloslava Hrachovcová was clearing a loft in a house at the edge of the village of Růžová and found an exercise book filled with scrawled writing. These were formulas for the production of soap. She could not fight the temptation, took a battered pot



and tried to cook soap. In the beginning it did not lather much but then she found the trick – and abracadabra, let us skip forward a few years – today there is a lovely soap production factory called Rubens in Růžová. In a herb garden with a haptic path for relaxing barefoot walking you will find workshops, a presentation and sales room and some especially wonderful

and happy people who will tell you enticing stories about local soaps that not only wash but also cure, and you will also have a chance to try some of it yourself. The place is open... while there is daylight. If you follow the sweet smell of herbs further you will get as far as Vlčí Hory, a village humbly hidden under the hill bearing the same name, crowned with a famous lookout tower, just a short distance from Krásná Lípa. What is that sweet smell? It comes from a magic house with an amazing permaculture garden with a relaxation path and a picturesque pond. Nobilis Tilia, a place where purely natural cosmetics are made. You can go to a tea room and try one of the herbal infusions prepared from "what grows behind the house". You can take a rest and listen to the narration about permaculture and about how it is possible to live in harmony with nature for your and nature's mutual benefit, and last but not least you can get find wonderful and natural cosmetics for literally the entire family.

NOT EVERYBODY LIKES THE SMELL, BUT IT TASTES LIKE A DREAM

Between the lower and upper part of the town of Dolní Poustevna you will find a wonderfully renovated cross on a sandstone plinth, a part of a very interesting educational route alongside some small sacred monuments, and right next to it there is a turning off the road that heads uphill. If you follow this path you will soon hear sounds as if the Town Musicians of Bremen were approaching. However the truth is that you are approaching the goat farm of the Malina couple at the edge of the village of Víska. Besides a herd of goats and their naughty kids you will see pigs with a great sense of humour, kittens born in May will brush around your feet, there are hens, neighing horses and a braying donkey... But first and foremost the couple produces excellent, today well renowned cheeses, which are literally the essence of the local pastures and meadows.



MEMORIES OF THOSE WHO MADE THEIR LIVING FROM WOOD

Wood smells nice – this is clear to everybody. But it can also smell like hell, and not many people know that. The entire range of smells, from nice to terrible ones, may hit you when you get to Dolský Mill at Jetřichovice where Natálie Belisová, the fairy godmother of the place, organises activity days about forest crafts. Be sure that you are going to see something you have not seen before. Honestly – what do you know about forest charcoal burners, tar makers, resin processors and grease makers? Have these professions been extinct for a long time? Possibly – but not in this place. This is a place of playful experimentation with a scientific basis. The forest used to be full of people pursuing the aforementioned professions some two

hundred years ago. However creating a solid and dry pit for charcoal making in the vicinity of water but securely protected from it, building a heap of wood of many layers on top of it, covering it with branches, pieces of turf, leaves, hay and fern, then adding soil and sand with coal soot to it, sealing the heap with a cap, starting a fire and monitoring the colour of smoke, making holes in the heap for the smoke to get out and thus keeping even temperature throughout the whole pile... that is a hard and skilful job indeed. And the same applies to the production of tar and grease, which is in fact a mixture of tar and fat. They try and experiment with all of this at Dolský Mill and one has a chance to experience an adventure that is not available elsewhere. So go there and see for yourself that this experience has no comparison.

HOW TO GET THERE

The village of Růžová lies 12km northeast of Děčín, Vlčí Hora is 5km northwest of Krásná Lípa, the goat farm in Víska is 3km north of Dolní Poustevna and Dolský Mill is in the gorge of the River Kamenice, 5km west of Jetřichovice.

TIP

You can easily contribute to the repairs on Dolský mill. What is needed is enthusiasm, time and strong arms – there are regular working days organised for volunteers. You can find the necessary details on the Bohemian Switzerland national park website.



The last town in the Gate to Bohemia, i.e. in the Ústí region, on the River Elbe, is Štětí. This mainly industrial town is surrounded by a magic landscape that is still waiting for tourists to discover it. And believe me, it is worth wandering around the Štětí area. This interesting and ragged countryside with views over a great distance is dotted with pearls of special and sacred architecture, remarkable sandstone formations, pine tree forests and merchant routes. You can trek through any part of the locality but it seems like a good idea to be led by somebody who knows every corner of the area – highwayman Štětko.



THE EDUCATIONAL PILGRIMAGE OF ŠTĚTKA, THE HIGHWAYMAN

Well, it is not historically proven that he was real, rather he embodies the fact that during the Thirty Years' War this territory was plagued by a bunch of robbers who used to hide in a rocky cave known by the somewhat terrible name of Mordloch (the lair of murder). Given the current deeds of Štětko the highwayman, he must have been an outsider from the group because he is a thoroughly amiable and friendly character. His "educational pilgrimage" in the form of an extensive path provided with twenty one very well prepared information boards is entertaining and interactive, educative, investigative and fun and one learns to look for what one might not notice otherwise. The entire path is 30km long, with the option to take a shortcut

and shorten the trip to 24km, or you can simply walk only part of the route – it will always be worth it. The route starts at the village of Stračí (charming and genuinely Czech names for villages are common in the area), the nearest surroundings of which belong to the Kokořín landscape park,

which includes sandstone rocks in pine tree groves and the ingenious creations of water and wind – for instance the Seven loaves formation, a rock that leaves no doubt as to the origin of its name, or the lair of murder (Mordloch) itself, a rock-hewn cave with stone benches, which is linked to a very low karstic space. Passing by an abandoned quarry you will follow the ancient Brocno merchant route all the way to the village of Brocno, which has been a village monument area for more than twenty years.



As soon as you get there you will understand why. This is perhaps the most southern location with Upper Lusatian houses, i.e. timber-framed or log houses featuring one ingenious trick by unknown folk architects – a log or timber-framed floor built on pillars that carry the weight of the storey and so the floor below does not support any structure at all. There is still much awaiting you – a frog and newt kingdom in Nebeský pond at Veselí, a baroque chateau in Snědovice, monument trees at Krešov... From all directions you can see the slim silhouette of St Peter and St Paul's Church in the distance. When you get to its gate you are already in the middle of the village of Chcebuz. Perhaps you will find this village with its houses



in baroque and imperial styles and the remains of a renaissance chateau a bit familiar – and you would be right to do so. This is the very location

where the Petr Nikolajev film Lidice was shot. The reason for this was that there is a similarity between the layout of this village and the village of Lidice, which was completely destroyed by German forces in the spring of 1942 – the similarities include an old school from 1875, which you can find there, and the ruins of the chateau, which were also a fitting setting for the film. Having looked at the beautiful baroque pillar of the Blessed Virgin Mary, do not forget to visit the local cemetery. It is

evidence of the long co-existence of Czechs and Germans, the names on the tombstones are Czech as well as German; from a architectural viewpoint the mausoleum of the Laufke family from 1833 is remarkable. And the place provides a serene outlook across the landscape. Another lovely village is Radouň with the meticulously restored Chapel of Saint Florian, other jewels of vernacular architecture, a very interesting group of statues called The way of life by David Fiala, based on the ideas of local women, and an especially a beautiful Jewish cemetery in a pseudo-Romanesque style with an octagonal ceremonial chapel, which has recently been given a face-lift. If you travel there in May or June it is quite likely that you will come across the Czech orchids flowering in the local meadows – it is the rare military orchid that is in bloom at this time of the year. Wandering through this picturesque landscape, following the footsteps of Štětko the highwayman, is fun and interesting and brings a feeling of contentment to your heart. Do not miss it.

The undiscovered charms of the landscape around Štětí

HOW TO GET THERE

Štětí is a town on the River Elbe 13 km northeast of Roudnice nad Labem, the pilgrimage of Štětko the highwayman forms a loop in the area north of Štětí.

TIP

It is a short journey from Štětí to the village of Želíz in the Kokořín landscape park, barely 9 kilometres. Let us leave the region of the Gate to Bohemia for the time being and go to the aforementioned village in pursuit of a unique experience – the statues by Václav Levý from the mid-nineteenth century which are carved directly into the sandstone rocks. You are sure to find the Devil's heads, the Klácelka cave, the Snake or the Harp player enchanting.



FOLLOWING THE SWEET SMELL OF GRAPES BY BIKE

If you are not interested in walking there is another way to get to know the Štětí area. Get on your bike and set out on a trip along cycle route 0057, which links three regions – it starts in the Liberec region, in the Ústí region it follows the eastern part of Štětko's pilgrimage and leads you all the way to the Kokořín landscape park in the Central Bohemia region. You can follow the Elbe path along the bank of the largest river in the country and get as far as the Račice rowing canal, which is described in another part of this guide. Not enough for you? And what about getting to know Štětí and the adjacent areas, known as the region of grapes and great wine? This is the place where two Czech wine regions meet, the Mělník region and the Litoměřice region, with a conveniently well marked

route along the Elbe paths, which people follow in search of wine and knowledge. And it is not only wine making which you will come across following the trail, simply wandering through the wine making region is very relaxing, for instance around the mysterious 'cat-like' Sovice hill, the slopes of which are covered with vineyards. Why a cat-like hill? If you get to the top of it you will see a lonely basalt rock that resembles a cat lying down. That is why some people call the hill the Cat. As you are within sight of the river, at the beginning of the flat lands beneath the hill of Říp you can see the Sovice hill from a great distance. The horizon in the south rises just once in the place where the peak of the mythical hill of Říp rises from the ground. However, wherever you go in the area surrounding Štětí, you will always find out, to your surprise, that this territory is beautiful and worth getting to know better.

The Magnificent Five or work for real men

It is morning, the sun paints the rocks in golden colours, the wind drives away the remains of the night from the sky, fog from the gorges rises and rolls over the forests. A well-built man with a badge on his chest walks cautiously through a gorge. Then he stops. The pounding of hooves can be heard, clip-clop, drawing nearer and nearer. The man stands astride the narrow path and spreads his arms. "Stop!" he cries out, but the rider pays no attention. The horse gives out a startled neigh, leaps, and the sound of hooves begins to recede. The man, leaning against a tree, touches his belt and draws... a mobile phone. "Richard, we have a cowboy in the area. The brideway wasn't good enough for him, he is running around in the first zone. Call the police and try to catch him when he comes down, but be careful, he is crazy." There are five of them. The magnificent five. Pavel Svoboda, Václav Nič, Jan Lobotka, Petr Paulíček and Richard Šanda. The guardians of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park. One of the last vocations for true men – a forest ranger, the good spirit of the park. Václav Nič has been guarding the park, which will be celebrating its fifteenth anniversary this year, from its very beginning. Let us ask him what it is like to be a guardian of nature.



How does one get a job like this?

In my case I can say that it was a matter of passion. I have known the countryside since I was a child, for eighteen years I was a voluntary ranger for the Elbe sandstone landscape park, and as an active tourist I help with the marking of tourist paths. I had a very good job at the time I got the offer to become a professional guardian of the newly established national park. I decided to leave the job immediately. It is difficult to explain what the attraction is – you are just in nature

silent, while the falcon at least gives out a sound from time to time. People just don't realise that a climber "just" clicking his snap-hooks near a nest can scare the bird away and the eggs will go cold or will be eaten by a predator. When an area is protected, not only tourists and locals are forbidden to enter it – we can't go there either. Practically all activity stops for a precisely determined period of time, including forest works, naturally. After the birds have raised their offspring, people are allowed to enter these areas again.



And what about the high season? Many people think that tourists and the guardians are the greatest enemies...

That's total nonsense, the opposite is true. During the high season about seventy per cent of the guardian's work consists of giving information to tourists. My rucksack is full of timetables and maps, I have to know everything about the park, naturally not every technical detail, we have specialists for that, but in general. I have to know when a pub is open, when buses and steamboats leave, what that hill over there is called, what kind of moss is this, how to recognise a falcon during flight and many other things. For instance: Will I catch the last boat?

What are the most frequent questions that people ask you?

You really want to know? - 'Why is it not possible to get all the way to Pravčická brána (a sandstone formation) by car?' Sometimes you really have to have the patience of a Saint.

Now let us get back to the beginning – a disorderly horse rider, cyclist or biker on a footpath. What can you do? Draw a gun and start shooting?

What a romantic picture! Naturally you can't do that, we do not carry guns at all. However we have very good cooperation with our colleagues from the Saxon park and with the police – the state police, the town police and the river police. But there are some crazy people who are even able to escape them. On the other hand it is not such a problem, next time they will think twice. The worst possible scenario is when owners of quad bikes decide to organise a race in Pavlino Valley, which is outside the park's area. But it's hard luck for them, because we patrol the area outside the park borders too.

Which violations are met with the highest fines?

A fine is a last resort which we don't like to use. And when we really have to it usually concerns a car entering the forest in the territory of the park,

which is an extreme violation. And then we also fine those who enter the first zone of the park, that is, outside the marked routes, and those who set up camps and start fires in the woods. Sometimes a fine is imposed for riding a horse or a bike off the marked tracks and occasionally for climbing in those parts of the national park where it is forbidden.

And why is that one cannot enter the first zone?

There are still many people who cannot understand this. The reason for this is that we are not used to sharing things anymore. It simply does not dawn on them that the zone is a home for animals and plants. And that we, people, if we are sensible, should share nature between us and them. Neither we nor the animals can do whatever we would like to do. Animals need space to retreat to during the daytime where they are certain of peace and security. For example in winter the gorges are full of animals, you may see an otter sitting on a stone, tracks, droppings – not so in summer. That's why a section of gorges in the direction of Dolský mill is protected as the first zone. When I do a check there I can see tracks and quite often animals, even in summer. This approach just works. For example a lynx is passing through the area and we would like it to stay here. However for that it needs enough space where it can feel safe during daytime. That's why the first zone exists. Also rocks want to erode and fall off in peace without threatening anybody, dry and fallen trees want to rot without being in the way.



Running water, heading for the Ore Mountains

Many a family faces the same tricky problem from time to time – where to go for a trip? It has to be a proper trip, but on the other hand not too demanding in terms of kilometres, full of wonderful things within the smallest area possible, idyllic for parents and enchanting for children, beautiful in any season of the year. I have a reliable solution to such a question: Bezruč Valley.

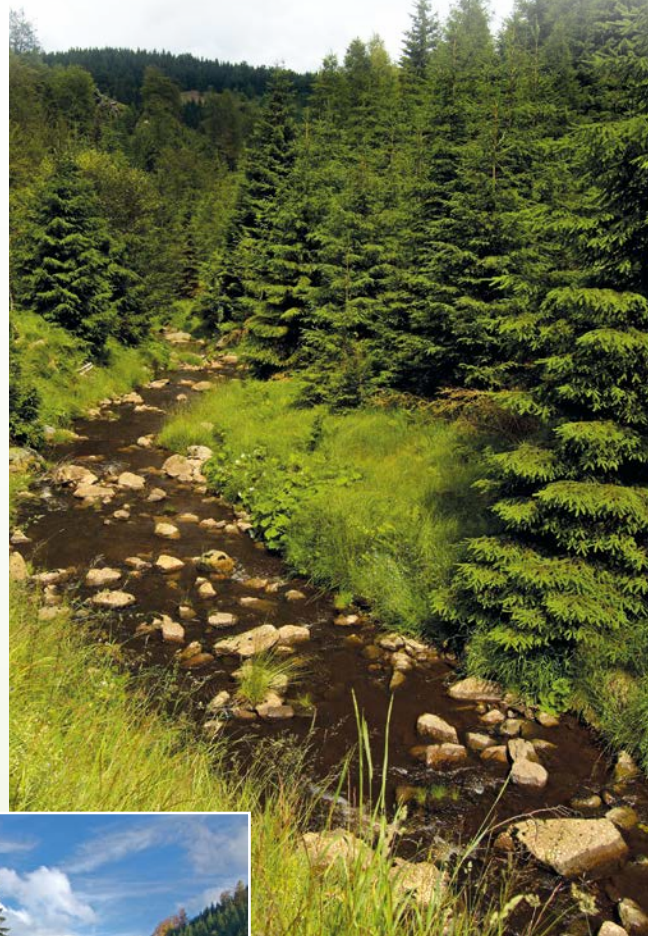
FROM COTTON GRASS TO BEECH WOODS

It is best to start on the ridges of the Ore Mountains, in the village of Načetín. After two kilometres of an idyllic journey along a forest path you pass by Červený pond and get to a guide-post and follow the track marked with blue markers. Believe me, the blue route is a good guide. First, it will take you to a remarkable landscape of low trees and enticingly undulating surfaces that change colour from green over rusty brown to exploding violet, a landscape dotted with the eager mouths of carnivorous sundews and flocks of downy plumes of cotton grass. To the right of you, as far as you can see, the peat bogs of the Novodomské rašeliníště National Nature Reserve spread. Only when you get to Nový rybník (New pond) the water sprite will tell you that you have arrived at the end of the peat bog, and then he will send you towards his colleague at Starý rybník (Old pond). The other water sprite will tell you, in his croaking voice, the way to the valley of the River Kamenička. The stream rushing from the hills towards the valley will take care of you and show you with pride the unspeakable beauties of a beech wood interlaced with maple treetops. At that moment you will see the Buky nad Kameničkou National Nature Reserve, towering above you on the other bank and ornamented with rocky spikes and lined with broken stones. Then the landscape opens wide with the eye of the Kamenička water reservoir in front of you, its surface skirted with woods and ending in a dignified stone dam with a collection tower watchfully guarding the area. All that time you have been in the arms of the Ore Mountains, and perhaps this is the very spot where the mountains show their picturesque, friendly and varied face at its best.



THE PROMENADE OF MILLS

The River Kamenička will take you to its end, to the place where it flows into the River Chomutovka. This river will be your guide from now on. It will show you the spot where the ruin of the Third mill used to stand thirteen years ago. Do not be confused by the name, the place was never used for milling; it was a hotel and a restaurant. Now only the name is left, with beautiful landscape all around. The artificial Křimovská Lake is a kilometre from here westwards if you follow the yellow markers. When you get back from the lake and continue along the track you will have a chance, besides walking through a lovely landscape, to learn something, as from this point on as far as the end of the Bezruč Valley, the route is lined with the information boards of an educational walking route. The first and second mills which you will come across were actually used for the purpose of milling grain in the past. Now they are both used as guest houses with restaurants and so the soul loaded with experiences may allow the tired body to relax. By then your steps will have slowed down as you have reached the last part of the valley that has been, for the natives of Chomutov, an area dedicated to short trips for time immemorial – there the custom is to walk slowly just to be able to take in the lavish beauties of nature. But this need not be the end of your trip, since at the end of the valley there are two towns awaiting you, touching one another through their streets like two lovers. Jirkov offers unique brewery cellars hewn from sandstone, a church tower full of gifts from people bearing the first name Jirka, a gallery or the lovely Chateau Červený Hrádek, while Chomutov offers bathing in the legendary



lake called Kamencové jezero or the largest zoo park in the Czech Republic with a beautiful outdoor museum of folk architecture. And those who do not like this trip can't be helped, and should be walled up in the Jirkov tower!



HOW TO GET THERE

The starting point is Načetín, which is about 30 km north of the town of Chomutov, 10 km from St Sebastian hill (Hora Sv. Šebestiána). The entire trip (without wandering through both the towns mentioned) roughly amounts to 20km

An oasis of ever-changing beauty

If I may give you a piece of advice, allow yourself the relief of spiritual purification and let yourself be spoiled by the Botanical garden in Teplice. It is a strange place. Whenever you go there, you'll find this gallery of nature in a somewhat different condition. There is always something in bloom, something wilting, something that attracts your attention and something that surprises you because you didn't notice it the last time. Comparison with a gallery seems fitting. This friendly multi-coloured world will leave you with a huge number of impressions and feelings, you will experience harmony and dominance, the beauty and inevitability of passing time, but what is most important is that you will feel different – relaxed, calm and cultivated.

SWIFTLY AROUND THE WORLD FROM CHILE

You can look at this garden in two ways. On one hand you can see a top-notch scientific facility fully comparable with gardens in Prague, Brno or Liberec, with remarkable collections and the unique results of research. Scientists from Teplice take an expedition to Chile each year and so it's no wonder the flora of Chile is one of the most prominent strengths of the garden. They even managed to find and describe an unknown species of poinsettia and gave it the name of Euphorbia dilloniana. Namely, it was Hana Šedivá and Jiří R. Haager (the garden's director) who were responsible for this discovery. The collection of drought-hardy plants from the driest desert of the world, the Chilean Atacama, is significant even in a global context. However it is quite likely that as lay persons and members of the general public you will be more interested in the impression that the garden makes on you – regardless of the names behind the project. The richest experience in terms of the number of colours and flowers awaits you from the end of May to September. But if you come at the beginning of April, for example, your soul, still feeling the cold of the winter months, will

be delighted by the first spring flowers, and if your craving for living nature becomes acute in the middle of winter the local greenhouses are there for you, even in December.

A WALK THROUGH THE GARDEN

The greenhouses are imposing structures with a significant magnetism to them and so you are likely to be sucked in as soon as you arrive at the garden. Therefore it seems fitting to warn you that you are entering a different world, where you are teleported to other parts of the planet without noticing it. The xeric greenhouse, that is, a dry or very dry greenhouse in layman's terms, is an expedition to countries and regions such as Mexico and Central America, South America, the Galápagos Islands, Arabia, Yemen, the Yemen peninsula of Socotra, southern Africa and Madagascar. The impression of otherness is intensified by the music coming from a corner and you will be surprised to see a Mexican pueblo inside the greenhouse; maybe you'll get the idea that perhaps, behind those walls, there are three laughing Mexicans sitting with a bottle of tequila hitting the strings of their guitars and singing with relish about happiness and beauty. You will also be accompanied by soundtrack

in the tropical and subtropical greenhouses. A lake, reaching the level of the footbridge is there, even a waterfall, huge aquariums with fish, a stone well with tortoises and thousands of plant species – this all is supplemented by the chanting, screaming and tweeting of birds. They seem to be everywhere and you get a feeling that they fall silent whenever you get near them so that you won't be able to discover them. You can hear many other birdsongs from every corner of the greenhouse. But no matter how hard you strain your eyes you cannot see them because in reality this is just a very cunning sound system. It makes sense because the birds would pose many risks for the rare plants – and this is not a zoological garden but a botanical one. Outdoors, surrounded by air which is more familiar you can walk through flowerbeds in bloom along paths covered with old Teplice paving stones, you can sit down on a bench under a really long pergola, you may visit the cafe for refreshments, letting your children play in the children's garden which is equipped with various climbing frames and other playground equipment (and if they are not happy with this there is a large playground just beyond the garden's fence where they can play with almost no limitations). Yes, a visit to the Botanical Garden in Teplice brings a powerful dose of relaxation and it is advisable to re-visit regularly.

HOW TO GET THERE

The garden is located in the Šanov villa quarter, by Janáčkovy Sady park under Písečný vrch hill, within sight of Doubravská hill.

Natálie Belisová

I am like a tree, my roots are here



Last year when the Prizes of the Governor of the Ústí region were handed out, the prize for contribution to regional development was awarded to Natálie Belisová. A historian, museologist, preservationist, enthusiastic researcher, writer of great books and articles. But first of all, and few know this, she is a forest sprite. She works in the Bohemian Switzerland National Park, where she looks after the cultural heritage, for years she has been organising troops of volunteers for the purpose of taking active action to preserve the legendary Dolský Mill (and invests the profits from the sale of her books into it), recently she has added the revitalization of cultural relics in Zadní Jetřichovice to her activities. For more than thirty years she has been mapping and repairing minor sacred monuments. She would not be surprised if she found a stone cornice for a wayward shrine tied up with a piece of ribbon as a present under the Christmas tree. During the Forest crafts day she brings forgotten activities such as charcoal making in piles or the production of tar and grease out of wood back to life. All this makes up just a fraction of her activities, which are all somehow related to Bohemian Switzerland, the Šluknov region or the Lusatian Mountains.



Your new book, *The Wanderers of the Jetřichovice territory*, is a bulky and revealing work. Is it true that it took you seventeen years to write?

I am often asked how long it took me to write *The Wanderers*. Truth be told, I am not able to count the years. The writing itself is a piece of cake, collecting the material takes much more time. And when you do start writing you often have to go back to places you have been hundred times, to archive materials you have seen umpteen times ..., and still you discover new things that escaped your attention the previous time. One can spend hours in the countryside just because of one word, which is however somehow significant and puts things in context. The *Wanderers* are simply a huge part of my life. I hope the book will find its readers – all the more so as they will not only obtain information but also help to preserve this beautiful piece of land. The entire profit from the book's publication will be used for the renovation of Dolský Mill. I mean the financial profit – my personal profit from my books is when they inspire people to look after the landscape and when people decide to start the fight for the preservation of the remains of history that are slowly dissipating in the landscape. Some readers have started to participate in the voluntary work. And some of them have become seedlings that have taken

root in their native territory and today repair crosses or chapels or clean cemeteries on their own. Good books live longer than their authors and I really wish that this is the case with my books, and I cherish the hope that they will motivate people to look after this landscape even at the time when I will no longer be able to do anything about it. Even if four such people read the books in a hundred years' time it would still be worth it. In fact I am trying to prove with my books that even somebody who is impractical, not a good organiser or is introverted can knuckle down and help to preserve these monuments.

You have been doing this for decades. Recently the repairs to many minor sacred monuments have started. Has the countryside changed during those decades?

Yes, it has. But I am still a bit scared. In the beginning when we repaired a wayside cross, the repair might even be improper or unprofessional but it always brought us enormous pleasure. We would go back to it, we were pleased by it. Nowadays there are many foundations, money from the European Union... Suddenly everything seems easier and renovations are done on a large scale. What has begun to disappear is the personal relationship which one might develop about a stone monument, a wayside cross or a tombstone, which the person cared for and worried about. I am not saying that it is bad that renovations are being done in such huge numbers – I am only aware of what the groups that are engaged in too many projects might



be deprived of. I have myself taken part in one such project in which crosses lost their names and obtained identification codes in order to streamline communication. For me it was a terrible experience. Every monument has its own significance, a reason for which it was created, a name which people gave it. It has a story which forms part of its value. Renovation without love does not bring new stories. And if we no longer feel the need to lead a procession to a cross or kneel by it, we have degraded and reduced it to a mere landmark. And then its preservation is just another on a long list of good intentions – the meaning is lost.

Have you got any unfulfilled dreams after all these years?

For me the moments of utter happiness are the moments when I simply walk in the woods, look around and let the landscape talk to me. I will never be bored by this, I will enjoy it until my last day, it is one of few certainties that I have. I know that there are many other nice places and sometimes somebody takes me somewhere different, and I might like it there, but as soon as I get back here, my heart clenches inside me because only this is the true, deep and rooted love that I will always find so touching. I was born here, grew up here, I belong here and I cannot live without this countryside. I know that there are still some gorges I have never climbed into and there may be some artefacts in them that will stimulate my interest and get me thinking – this is my greatest motivation and desire, to experience again and again the adventures related to discoveries and new knowledge, and if not knowledge then a secret because secrets are as beautiful as knowledge. If I could be born again I would not wish to be slim or beautiful or from a better family, I would wish to once again experience that feeling when I set out on a trip on Friday and wander through the countryside until Sunday evening, not worrying about being behind with some work, cheating on someone or considering consequences of my actions – the total freedom of time, that is what I would

like to experience once again. And there is one more thing – I miss the ignorance. I used to be surprised most by the landscape when I did not understand it. Nowadays I am pleased when I find an answer to a question such as what was this? what it was used for? why it is here...? Answers are nice but they deprive one of the charm of secrets that get under the skin.

You have simply never stopped being a romantic...

No way! I hope that one stops being a romantic when the first handful of soil is thrown on their coffin. Each period has its dreamers and romantics and I firmly believe that I am one of them.

Would you be able to leave, to another place?

No. One of my friends asked me recently if I had to choose between this countryside and a partner for life, what would I opt for? The question didn't please me, it a raw nerve. Luckily I have never had to answer this question. My husband knew that my bond to the landscape of my birth is a deep one...

In fact you are a native species...

I was born here, I have lived here all my life and I want to die here. This is not the way everybody feels it but I cannot stay elsewhere for long. I begin to wilt without roots and my roots are here.



NATÁLIE BELISOVÁ

... was born on Christmas Eve of 1960, studied at the Pedagogical Faculty in Ústí nad Labem, worked in the Office for the preservation of historical monuments in Ústí nad Labem (care of historic property), in the Regional museum in Děčín (a curator of the collections of the plastic arts) and since 2001 in the Administration of the Bohemian Switzerland National Park (the maintenance of cultural heritage, public relations). She has written thirteen books and co-written three others, she writes articles, organises the protection of monuments, often backing it up with her own finances. Let us at random give names of a few of her works: *The Story of Jánská Chapel or the Soul of Chrát*; *Wandering through the spiritual dominion of the Krásná Lipa region*; *The Dolský Mill*, the remote location of Grundmühle; *Rocky alcoves and chapels of Bohemian Switzerland*; *Fate's name is Dolský Mill*; *The Wanderers of Jetřichovice*.

Wandering through the remarkable landscape under Studenec

I must admit to you that I am not able to write anything objective about the places where I intend to invite you now. Suddenly I'm unable to put on the face of a serious, informed guide because my heart starts beating faster and my mind becomes relaxed whenever I am in the countryside under Studenec. Why is that? I do not know. When I set out from Kunratic and begin to descend towards Lipnice, Lipnický hill and th mysterious wooded Studenec with the metal tip of the lookout tower appear on the right hand side, but especially those lovely creeping meadows that go up towards the feet of the forest and seize the hillsides... and I am lost. I have entered this enclave that may be a part of Bohemian Switzerland – but still it is different, original, and wonderful. Come with me this time – maybe you will understand.

FROM THE VILLAGE OF STUDENÝ TO PAVLINO VALLEY

Perhaps you will discover the charm of the place if you start in the village of Studený. You know, this is a remarkable, picturesque village and its most remarkable feature is its people. The Pod Studencem voluntary association is a group of caring people led by a unique soul, Mrs Jitka Tůmová. The roots, the traces of the lives of our ancestors, the echoes of the past – is a nice obsession thanks to which you can set out from Studený along a beautiful educational path and enjoy its every metre with the knowledge that this path was marked out by people who live here, it is a product of their enthusiasm, time and efforts. That in itself is beautiful. But when you take the first steps on a route from the map, on which every route is clearly marked, or when you stop in the information centre, which is a converted fire station, where you meet some of the people mentioned above you will understand – there is more beauty to see. You can choose between a five kilometre circuit and an eleven kilometre circuit. Let's try the longer one. The narrow road in the direction of Lipnice winds between the aforementioned meadows from the very beginning and, if nothing else was awaiting us, this would still be a lovely piece of countryside. However there is more to come. At any moment. The memorial of the fallen of



the First World War, two carefully renovated painted crosses, and Lehmann's monuments... Let us stop at them. They are related to the Austro-Prussian battle under Studenec, which raged on those beautiful meadows in the summer of 1757 and painted the grass in red for three days. When the 150th anniversary of this great battle was commemorated Eduard Lehmann from Chřibská commissioned the erection of the first monument and, three years later, of the second monument. It is truly hard (fortunately) to imagine that instead of the peacefully grazing cows people were dying here in great numbers a long time ago. After the beautiful stop at the Archangel Michael we descend into a deep ravine. This is a place you will remember for a long time. The ravine itself is peaceful and quiet. Those who do not know what to expect are usually amazed – a forest Chapel of Virgin Mary hewn into a block of rock with a deep relief of the Helpful Virgin Mary with the baby Jesus in her arms. It was built as an expression of thanks for being spared from the plague infection in 1733. At several places around the chapel you will find alcoves hewn into the rock with pictures – and we should be grateful for that, because not long ago these were just expressionless sandstone surfaces. In Lipnice we will take a short trip to Schiffner's cross and then we will set out along the local brook towards a conciliatory cross. Here we can choose between two tracks – either we can go back to Studený or we can set out for the beautiful Pavlino Valley, which was formed

by the River Chřibská Kamenice, and we can cross the river, staying dry, on the newly constructed bridges (the old ones were destroyed by a flash flood) and go all the way to Rusalka's cave and a small pond and further towards the edge of Jetřichovice, where an unmarked road, at places cut into the rock, turns to the right and heads for the woods – just walking along this road is a wonderful experience. A road in a cutting takes us to Rynartice and from there we return to the edge of Pavlino Valley following the blue markers, and now we can finish the circuit going upstream following Studený brook. The last two stops are waiting for us there – St. John's Chapel from 1760, which has recently been renovated (and guess who we owe thanks to), with a newly found panel picture of the Virgin Mary by Ernst Vater (yes, he is also the author of the famous rock dwarves in Rynartice) and then you pass by the last cross and get back to the point of departure. And when you get back to the point where you started the trip, please be so kind as to whisper the words: "Thank you." The enthusiasts from Studenec deserve it.

HOW TO GET THERE

The village of Studený is located 7 kilometres to the north of Česká Kamenice, near Jetřichovice and Chřibská.

TIP

When you go back from Rynartice, downhill a bit along the road, you will get to Vater's dwarves. And when you go down off the bridge in Pavlino Valley, you can try to find the bear carved in the rock – most probably the work of Ernst Vater again.



A railway line that is dear to us

TIP

When you get on the National Park Line and set out from Vilémov in the direction of Rumburg, find your way to a window and watch the track you are going along. After a while the train travels onto a 190 metre long, more than a hundred year old viaduct, supported by four pillars, a technical monument towering high above the valley of Vilémovský brook.

The times when people enthusiastically welcomed the first sets of carriages arriving at brand new railway stations and when tourists in tailcoats and crinolines could not wait to enter saloon compartments to set out for a romantic trip are gone and forgotten. One would almost think that the railway was a thing of the past and that everybody now relies on cars. But quite recently an engine driver and conductors experienced similar cheering when arriving at the Czech town of Dolní Poustevna and the Saxon town of Sebnitz. What was the fuss all about? Well, the train rode on the track between these two towns for the first time after almost seventy years. This happened on the 5th July 2014.

GOING WHEREVER YOU PLEASE ON THE NATIONAL PARK RAILWAY

The first train tested the tracks in 1905, the last one some forty years later. In 1948 the rails were even pulled up due to an official resolution and it looked for a long time as though this was the end of the railway. But still today trains full of people ride along the track – the new route has made their lives much easier. The train windows are full of tourists who have found out that there's no better view. The railway connects the town of Děčín with Rumburg, passing through Schmilka, Bad Schandau, Sebnitz, Dolní Poustevna, Mikulášovice and Šluknov. Because a substantial part of the track touches on the territory of both national

parks, namely the Bohemian national park and Saxon Switzerland, the new line U28 was given the name the National Park Line. Let's leave aside the fact that some people save as much as an hour when commuting to work and focus on the advantages for tourists. They are unheard of. The train has become a fantastic method of transport for tourists without burdening nature with emissions. You just get on in Děčín and go to Schmilka. There you can get on a ferry to Hřensko and you are on the threshold of the gorges carved by the River Kamenice, near Pravčická brána and the observation points in Jetřichovice. You get back on the train and continue merrily on and on to another station where you can get off and make a loop visiting other attractive destinations – and then get back onto the train again, as long as you have enough time. From Bad Schandau you can go to the fascinating Schrammsteine, a unique observation tower on a plain awaits you in Rathmansdorf presenting an almost unbelievably breathtaking view of Saxon Switzerland. In Dolní Poustevna two new and very interesting trekking circuits are being built, the construction of which is due to the existence of the National Park Line, from Mikulášovice you can go to the Tanečnice lookout tower, from Lipové you can follow the Annaberg Way of the Cross or



you can get to a chateau that is once again rising from its ruins. There are also Ways of the Cross in Velký Šenov and Šluknov, this location also offers a remarkable chateau in the unique style of the Saxon Renaissance and once in Rumburg do not forget to visit the unique Loreta and its cloister. From there it is only a short distance to Krásná Lípa and the eastern part of Bohemian Switzerland.

Wonderful treks without borders

The Ore Mountains are a lovely mountain range of strange, enchanting and ragged beauty, a long mountain ridge dotted with wooded as well as stony slopes, fascinating mountain meadows, plains and wetlands. The mountains are full of surprises and hidden jewels, they have their secrets and it's beautiful to discover them. In spring, when the colourless landscape is awakened with green and yellow brush strokes, in summer, when the sun drives its vertical sickle into brown meadows, in autumn, when the countryside takes on all the colours of the rainbow, the Ore Mountains always present their irresistible charm. Cyclists know this very well - year after year the numbers of them in the mountains grow. However because they now have an extra reason to come here, the new Ore Mountain cycling region has been created – and it has no match in the Czech Republic.

CRISS-CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS

What's it all about? It is very simple as is the way with all good ideas: the Ore Mountains do not give a damn about the borders staked out by people – their beauty is inseparable. “Well, let's connect the Czech and the Saxon side of the mountains and create a true cycling paradise,” said the instigators of the project to themselves. And thus a number of brand new links have been created connecting the Ore Mountains main cross-country route and the long-distance route of the Saxon Central Uplands – Sächsische Mittelgebirge. Naturally for the new linking routes to make sense it was necessary to complete and solidify the older cycling routes. And the result? Almost 600 kilometres of circular tracks. Now the Ore Mountains offer an essentially inexhaustible range of trips and it is all the same whether you are an adrenaline



maniac, an experienced cyclist or an occasional recreational rider, it is also not important how much time you have: a day or a week – it does not matter. Moreover, as was suggested at the beginning the mountains always look different whenever you go there and so the same route is never the same. You can pick routes according to elevation, attractive locations, length or the level of difficulty – as you

please. I personally admit that although I am a cycling enthusiast, my sense of direction often fails me and I am simply not on friendly terms with all those GPS gadgets. And lo and behold – even someone like me cannot get lost in the new cycling region. First, there is a very well arranged cycling map available but, secondly, I can guarantee you that you will not need to take it out of its wrapper while cycling. The marking of the routes is perfect. You will be guided by the combined Czech and Saxon symbols, that is, the yellow number twenty three of the Ore Mountain main cross-country route and the orange silhouette of the cyclist of the Saxon Central Uplands. Moreover information boards, signposts and indicators are springing up like mushrooms – you cannot get lost here, that is for certain. A trip planner with many tips on interesting routes is also available – it is suitable for those for whom planning routes on their own deep into the night is not a passion.

FROM THE RIVER ELBE TO KLÍNOVEC MOUNTAIN

And so where can you go? You are spoilt for choice – simply everywhere. On the Czech side you can start with the Elbe route, climb over the table mountain Děčinský Sněžník with one of the most beautiful lookout towers in the Czech Republic to the hilltop of Komáří vížka and then head in a south-westerly direction all the way to Klínovec. Along the way you will be tempted by the aforementioned links to the Saxon side and you will discover the undreamed of charms of the landscape. In Germany there is a route parallel to the Elbe route going from Schöna all the way to Eibenstock on the bank of a lovely reservoir at the foot of Auersberg, which is crowned with a stone lookout tower. Normally we do not refer to websites in the Gate but I simply cannot withhold this link from you. Click on www.krusnehorynakole.cz and an opulent feast of trip ideas will open in front of you and you will be bewildered by the number of options: a trip through border forests and villages, through the valley of sandstone rocks, through the surrounding of Olbernhau, around the water reservoirs of the Ore Mountain region, over the hill of Saint Katherine (Hora Svaté Kateřiny), through the national park at Rübenau, you can choose the track of seven mountains (Sedmihůrská trasa) or you can



explore the nooks of the forgotten border landscape. And this is not the end of the menu by any means – you can combine individual stages and routes, link them, divert from them to visit the countryside of the foothills and then come back to the mountain ridges, conquer hills or drift with your bike along plateaus for hours. And in order to ensure convenience for cyclists, a mobile phone application is at your disposal for those phones that are called smart for some reason. I think it must be quite clear by now that the Ore Mountain cycling region is bound to become a great hit in no time. And therefore I advise you – do not wait, and come here as soon as possible in order to enjoy all those wonderful trips before the routes are packed with lines of cyclists.

GOING AFTER NUTCRACKERS AND AEROPLANES

Yes, at least a single item from the menu might be nice to whet your appetite. All right, so for

example... the Ore Mountain rarities. You can start this sixty kilometre circuit in Dlouhá Louka. You will pass by Fláje reservoir (with its unique buttress dam, the only one of its kind in the Czech Republic), over Klíny and Mníšek (stop here and try the wonderful meals in the Halfway restaurant, which is described a few pages on) to Kurort Seifen (an outdoor museum of specialist architecture and technology plus a toy museum documenting traditional toys from



the Ore Mountains from 1830 up to today), through Neuhausen (an irresistible museum of nutcrackers – more than five thousand exhibits from all over the world) around Rauschenbach water reservoir, to Cämmerswalde (a lovely mini zoo and a hands-on aviation museum) and over the settlements of Teichhaus and Žebrácký roh to Nové Město and back to the point of departure. This wonderful route will amaze you with the charms of mountain nature and, moreover, you will get in touch with traditional crafts, especially concerning the processing of wood. Or we can choose another route – for instance... No. You can choose for yourself.

TIP

The Ore Mountain cycling region is equipped with nine counters. The counters are not men with pencils in their hands, but inconspicuous wooden posts. Thanks to them we can learn how fast the local routes are becoming popular. What for? It is not merely an issue of statistics – the data can be a wonderful starting point for the completion of infrastructure to improve the experience for cyclists. So wave your hand at them while passing by.



A tour around Velemín

FROM TWO SISTER MOUNTAINS TO CASTLES, MILLS AND THE DEVIL'S HILL

Well, let's start with Milešovka, because the queen deserves our respect and admiration. We can even choose from two routes (you can reach the top either on foot or, if you want to raise your adrenaline levels, by bike) – one route is longer, marked with blue markers and starting directly from Velemín, the other is shorter, marked with red markers and starting in Milešov, a quarter located on the edge of Velemín. When you get to the top you can expect, besides the wind and fantastic views, a pleasant new restaurant with an observation deck. And what else is worth seeing in the surroundings of Velemín? Let's make a circle around Milešovka clockwise. Let's cross the mountain saddle of Paškapole, with its ancient merchant route, climb to the top of Kletečná, a cone-shaped mountain, the silhouette of which together with Milešovka creates perhaps the most typical image of the Bohemian Central Uplands (at the beginning of the 19th century it was immortalised in the painting of the Saxon painter Caspar David Friedrich). The view is naturally great. The first thing that catches your eye is a massive hill in front of you – Lovoš, the third one of the threesome of dominating hilltops. It also has a very nice view over the entire Bohemian Central Uplands but it also is the beginning (or the end) of the Lovoš

educational path that will take us to the beautiful Oparenské valley, to the romantic ruins of Oparno castle and down to Oparno mills and – if we leave the circle planned by us – all the way to the wine-growing village of Malé Žernoseky on the Elbe bank. But we cross the vineyards on the hillsides of Lovoš and get to the valley of Vchynický brook, to the village of Bílinka; from there it is a short journey to Režný Újezd, where another educational



path leading to Boreč Hill starts. This hill is one of the most remarkable hills in the entire Bohemian Central Uplands. Yes, it is the famous devil's hill where grass shines green and hot air rises from cracks in the middle of winter; this is due to vents in the earth, a unique natural phenomenon. Through the village of Březno with its baroque Calvary sculpture we will pass by rock formations formed by frost and stone all the way to the ruins of Ostrý castle located on a basalt hill with the same name. The ruins of a Gothic castle with a stone staircase and the remains of a massive stone gate offer a somewhat different outlook over the landscape,

When you say Milešov Middle Uplands most people would think of Milešovka hill automatically... and that is all. After all it is a dignified and lovely mountain that casts a shadow on its surroundings with a height of 837 metres above sea level and the title of one of the windiest hills in the Czech Republic. But still, this is one of the most attractive parts of the Bohemian Central Uplands and not only thanks to Milešovka. The centre of this territory is the village of Velemín, which gave the name to the entire basin under Milešovka – the Velemínská basin. If we put one leg of a pair of compasses in Velemína on the map and draw a five-kilometre circle, we would get an unbelievably varied menu of tourist destinations and walks, cycle routes and natural and cultural sites. This is really rare for such a small area.



through which we have been wandering in a circle around Velemín The village we are now returning to over the inconspicuous hill of Mannsteinův kámen (Mannstein's stone) is covered with grass and bushes. This hill is in a way the centre of the circle traced by us and from this point we can see the amazing procession of the hills we have just visited, lovely undulating meadows, the chunks of forests, the carpets of fields.

It was named after a Prussian commander who fought a battle here in 1757 and was caught and shot dead on this very hill. However no such general can stir great emotions in us because they are stirred by something else: the views from the hill are comforting and beautiful. We are back in Velemín, one of the oldest villages in the Bohemian Central Uplands. The walking routes to the places described above as well as to other, more distant destinations (Košťálov Hill, Skalka Chateau, the ruins of Hrádek Castle or Kostomlaty) are gradually being provided with more and more information boards, so the experience is not only lovely but also enlightening.

The enticing magic of traditional products

From first thing in the morning a stream of people from the entire town approaches, wagons are arriving, middlemen with pack baskets and rucksacks have climbed the hill and are heading for the place too, there are musicians at every corner, a fiddler, a man with a barrel organ, even jugglers with sawdust balls, the place smells of caramel and pastry, the cattle moo, horses neigh, hens in wooden cages make panicked noises. This is a trade fair! Craftsmen from the entire region have put their stands up and now – some in singing voices, some in croaking ones – they are shouting the praises of their goods. They are soap makers, pot makers, woodcarvers, bakers, gingerbread makers, wheel makers, barrel makers, basket makers, blacksmiths, knife makers, charcoal makers, brewers and liqueur makers, confectioners, weavers, comb makers, button makers, onion growers, gunsmiths, paper makers and candle makers...

PRODUCTS WITH A NAME AND A GUARANTEE

Strange modern shopping temples, tanks for people filled to the brim with goods without a pedigree, people wandering around and bumping one into another with their shapeless carts, pompous notices with prices, because it does not matter what we buy, what matters is the price... The transition over time is really not a pleasing one. Oh, if only I could once again just buy the things I really need from somebody who had made them with love and skill and bring home goods that have names, cherishing the good feeling of having had a nice conversation with the manufacturer...

But time cannot be changed. Or maybe it can. In the Gate to Bohemia, sometime ago, the certification of products started – it concerns those who try to continue traditions, who produce and grow in a fair manner, according to old tried and tested formulations and models and add their skills, enthusiasm and zeal. In all four parts of the Ústí region, i.e. in Bohemian Switzerland, the Ore Mountain territory, the Bohemian Central Uplands and in the Lower Ohře territory, you

will come across wonderful products and even services carrying the Regional product tag, which means they have been officially certified and marked as top quality products with something original in them. But let us get back to the various craftsmen at the beginning of this article... have you found the sentence? Well, all those professions mentioned in it have been brought back to life and you can find them among the certified products. You can go to a soap manufacturer, to a charcoal heap, buy special beer, liqueur, wines or spirits, cheese and milk or meat or onions from a farmer, stained glass, ceramics, a wooden comb, manually made buttons, even a coal tub, a vat or a wooden bucket, you can have a go at gingerbread prepared

according to traditional recipes, chocolate, honey or dumplings, homemade bacon or natural cosmetics, a proper knife from a knife maker whom you know by name, get a manually woven carpet or bag, knowing that they have been made in a traditional manner by people who are mentally or physically handicapped, you can be spoilt by cakes and delicacies made in accordance with traditional recipes, or learn to paint on glass, let a guide show

HOW TO GET THERE

Information about certified regional products can be found at www.regionalni-znacky.cz, or www.branadocech.cz



you around a chateau or take you to a rocky path in the mountains... So many things that it is difficult to remember them all. And year after year new manufacturers, growers and breeders are added to the catalogue. Visit one of the many information centres and ask for the catalogue to get direct information about the products and growers themselves – sometimes you can even buy some of their goods there. Or come to a feast or the trade fair mentioned at the beginning, because the town and village squares are again a place where farmers markets and trade fairs are organised.



HOW TO GET THERE

Velemín lies 7km northwest of Lovosice; it is easily accessible from the D8 motorway. A tip: if you travel by bike, you can use the bus for cyclists that will take you to the hill of Kletečná – the bus goes from Litoměřice, Lovosice, Roudnice and Štětí.

An unexpectedly varied vegetarian menu



It is really quite a mystery as to why a significant part of this nation still looks down on vegetarian restaurants and thinks of vegetarians as people with an eating disorder while, at the same time, fried cheese is one of the most common and typical Czech meals. However in the restaurant which I am inviting you to now they do not serve this calorie bomb prepared in a suspicious hot oil bath. In other words, La Karotka in Litoměřice is a restaurant that is wonderful from all points of view.

CREATIVITY CONNECTED WITH TALENT AND EMOTION

If you think that vegetarian canteens are places where a strange pulp will be thrown onto your plate you can believe it if you like. However, La Karotka is not a canteen by any means; it is a peculiar, original and very good restaurant. The chef František Václavěk is very talented and his vision is admirable – he knows all too well that people first eat with the eyes and the nose and then later with the mouth. And so the meals, served by smiling and obliging girls who are well versed in the menu and the philosophy of the restaurant and thus can help you and give advice, look really good and in no way



FRESH LUNCH, IMAGINATIVE SUPPER

You won't have much luck if you ask somebody in Litoměřice about the way to La Karotka – the restaurant is brand new and in the process of building up its reputation. It is a paradox that the restaurant is more often known to the visitors of the town than to the locals. But I am certain that this situation is going to change soon since La Karotka indisputably belongs among the very best within the gastronomic spectrum of the town. On the ground floor of a historical house, a few steps from the square, you will find yourself in a light space with a small art gallery on the walls, the dominating light wood will put you in a good mood, and the amiability of the staff and the meals served will intensify this feeling. This is a nice place to be, and the inventiveness of the place and its aims can be felt in the atmosphere. The owner Pavla Soukupová sums up the philosophy of the restaurant in a concise manner: "We want to give people an opportunity to eat differently without feeling on their part that something is missing. The fruits of our region plus zest plus creativity - these are our arguments. Vegetarian cuisine is our passion and we want to make it a passion for our guests too. We build on modern gastronomy based on fresh, first-class raw materials, mainly from local resources. We search for the best organic products on the market at reasonable prices because we think that the right to good food, health and fair treatment should be commonplace and not a rarity." And if you would like a guaranteed tip – try Tapas La Karotka. This starter will soon help you to understand what this restaurant is about.

come second to fashionable gastronomic creations from trendy restaurants that rank high in the charts. You can be certain that with a plate of grilled goat's cheese with potato gratin and rosemary, fresh spinach and beetroot, or steak tartare made of stewed aubergine, vegetable curry or pastry with vegetable ragout you will stop thinking about the fact that no meat is served here and your taste buds will shift to top gear. The food looks and tastes wonderful. Honestly, it has been a long time since I wrote about any restaurant that you could order anything without the risk of going wrong. However in the case of La Karotky this is the absolute truth. You will enjoy being surprised by Václavěk's cuisine.



HOW TO GET THERE

La Karotka is in the middle of Velká Dominikánská Street, which runs from the top right corner of Mírové Square in Litoměřice.



A garden on the borderline



On the ridge of the Ore Mountains, at the very border of the Czech Republic, in the vicinity of the Mníšek-Deutscheinsiedel border crossing, you will find, since November of last year, a new trendy restaurant with the fitting name of Halfway (V půli cesty). In winter you will be led there by the Ore Mountains main cross-country skiing route, in summer by the equivalent cycle route. Moreover – this is one of the places where a link between the cycle routes of the Czech - German borderland has been created (as is described in another article in the Gate) and so now you can get from Mníšek to Kurort Seiffen in a completely civilised way. If I add that the nature around here is enchantingly beautiful and the ski centre Klíny is a few kilometres from here, it must be quite clear that this place is very interesting.



IN THE ARMS OF LIGHT AND VEGETATION

But it is not the place, but the restaurant itself that I have in mind. Frankly speaking, I do not want to take the privilege of your first impression away from you. Anyway it is hardly possible to convey such an experience - you have to try it for yourself. But let me try: you enter a building that from outside does not seem to hide such generous and voluminous rooms filled to the brim with light. Halfway is partly a restaurant, and partly a lounge, that is, a place where you can sit comfortably, partly a cafe and partly a bar. But first of all it is a garden. This is the first impression that develops with every minute spent inside. The combination of wood and shining white decor with the vegetation is immensely relaxing and will put you in a good mood before you take a seat. There is really enough space there – no cramming people in for sure. The furniture is very comfortable; in fact it is fitting for a garden space. Even the waiters moving about look a bit like gardeners with green gardening aprons. Flowerpots with rich vegetation are distributed all over the place in a creative pattern; most of them you can buy and take home with you and you can add interesting wooden candle sticks or other decorations inspired by the garden to them. This all is due to the fact that the owner of the restaurant entrusted the indoor arrangement of the space to the hands of two garden architects who designed it and came up

with the concept. Their ideas are immortalised in photographs hung on the wall that show their work – beautiful gardens. Nikola Brunnerová and Katrin Holcová are garden designers. The place feels very pleasant, especially in summer when you can go to an extensive terrace, see the forests and eat your meal...



THE ORE MOUNTAINS' TRADITION IN A CONTEMPORARY SPIRIT

Why, thanks to the sophisticated and positive atmosphere of the place one would almost forget about the main things, which are the drinks and the food. However, attentive and obliging waiters will make sure that you remember – they will produce a menu the philosophy of which is based on the Ore Mountain traditions. Besides the meals that tourists always appreciate – such as very good beef sirloin in cream sauce, schnitzel, goulash or roast pork, there are meals that continue the tradition of local staple meals, however with completely contemporary and trendy modifications. For that matter the garden

atmosphere is also reflected in the menu – its basis is formed by fresh raw produce, local and seasonal if possible, in particular an abundance of herbs and lettuce, but also forest fruits and mushrooms from local forests. Have a potato mash with rucola, lettuce with duck meat, salmon or any of the pasta meals –

for instance tagliati with hazel nuts and cream or try the local version of couscous. And if you really want to try a local traditional meal, you should try smoked meat with horseradish sauce. The offer of desserts is also rich, from pancakes and crumpets with blueberries to fondant or ice-cream coated in crushed chocolate... Their coffee is also good and if you wish to sit for a while you can take a seat in the cafe area of the restaurant and savour the grace of a caffeine boost. Halfway / V půli cesty is simply an affable restaurant where the cooking is good and the atmosphere is fine. And this is not commonplace, especially in the mountains.

HOW TO GET THERE

Mníšek is a part of the village of Nová Ves v Horách and you will find it thirteen kilometres northwest of Litvínov.



An expedition against the flow of time

Perhaps Josef Nesvadba will forgive me for borrowing the title of his book for a pilgrimage against the flow of time, into antiquity, towards the very beginning of what is today the Czech Republic. If we plan to wander through prehistory and get to the beginning of the second millennium, and we do want to do that, we have to set out for an undulating landscape that is divided in two by the River Ohře, into the Lower Ohře territory.



SEARCHING FOR A MYSTERIOUS FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT

We are somewhere at the beginning of the second half of the first millennium, the River Ohře calmly flows and we are wandering along its banks, looking for traces of fights. It was the year of 631 and the Slavic forces of Samo engaged in a merciless battle with the Frank forces of King Dagobert... "Then the majority of Dagobert's army was slain by sword and the others were running away, leaving all tents and things behind them, on their way back to their settlements," says the Fredegar chronicle. Oh, Wogastisburg, you mysterious settlement, how much trouble have you caused to notable historians?! For three hundred years they have been proposing new and alternative theories as to where you might be located, and those places are almost a thousand kilometres apart, scattered all over Europe. But still there are two locations by the River Ohře which seem to be the most likely locations of the battle. The last findings most certainly rule out Úhošť Hill near Kadaň, but point with increasing certainty at a low hill called Rubín near the town of Podbořan, by the village of Dolánky. There used to be a fortified settlement with a long history here – people have lived there since the Neolithic period – and it is quite possible that at the time we are talking about the place was called Wogastisburg.

THE SHADOWS OF THE LUCKO TRIBE

And we continue our wandering, getting within sight of the town of Žatec, into the Lucko landscape. The first millennium is approaching its end and the powerful Lucko tribe in their fortified settlement resists the pressure of a hostile tribe of Bohemians. "The Lucko tribe, whom we today call the Žatec tribe after Žatec Castle really inhabited part of Bohemia in the old days. In the 9th century they controlled the northwest, particularly the Ohře territory, while Bohemians controlled the landscape around Říp and the upper stream of the River Vltava, in other words? The centre of the country," writes the chronicler Cosmas. So did they really exist or not? Is it a legend? Is the war with the Lucko tribe an echo of



some real battle? What does it matter...? Even if it was only a legend it is still a beautiful one which further affirms the beauty, fertility and the strategic position of the Lower Ohře territory since as we all know very well – there is no smoke without fire. You can learn a lot about the Lucko tribe as well as about provable history of the town of Žatec in the local Regional Museum of K. A. Polánek, and later when you are walking through the sea of hops you may catch a glimpse of the thoughtful face of Prince Neklan.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE MOST FAMOUS CZECH LOVE STORY

The ancient Cosmas will carry us on the pages of his chronicle along the River Ohře as far as Stradonice, in the vicinity of the town of Peruc. There we will disengage ourselves from myths, but only partly, because this is the place where the legendary fire of love between the real Prince Oldřich and the lovely Božena Křesinová was started. However, back then it was not Peruc, but Opučná. But since Oldřich saw Božena "ana peruc prádlo" ("as she was washing the laundry") the town has borne the name of Peruc ever since. Is this story true? Who would try to investigate? Perhaps zealous historians, who would engage in a bloody fight to decide whose version is "possibly" more likely. For us it is more important that love does exist and that we can experience it in the same way as was possible at the time of perhaps

the most famous couple in Czech history. Come to Peruc where love springs from Božena's spring and wind carries it into the spreading branches of Oldřich's oak, secured with iron hoops. And our pilgrimage would continue but there has to be an end to everything. We could wander for ages in the Lower Ohře territory and look for the traces of the second millennium of Czech history in historic towns, medieval castles, in chateaus and monasteries, and such a pilgrimage would be enlightening and engrossing. But space in this magazine is running out, so let us stop once again in 1004, when Oldřich kissed Božena for the first time and let's hope that if something remains with mankind for centuries, that something is good.

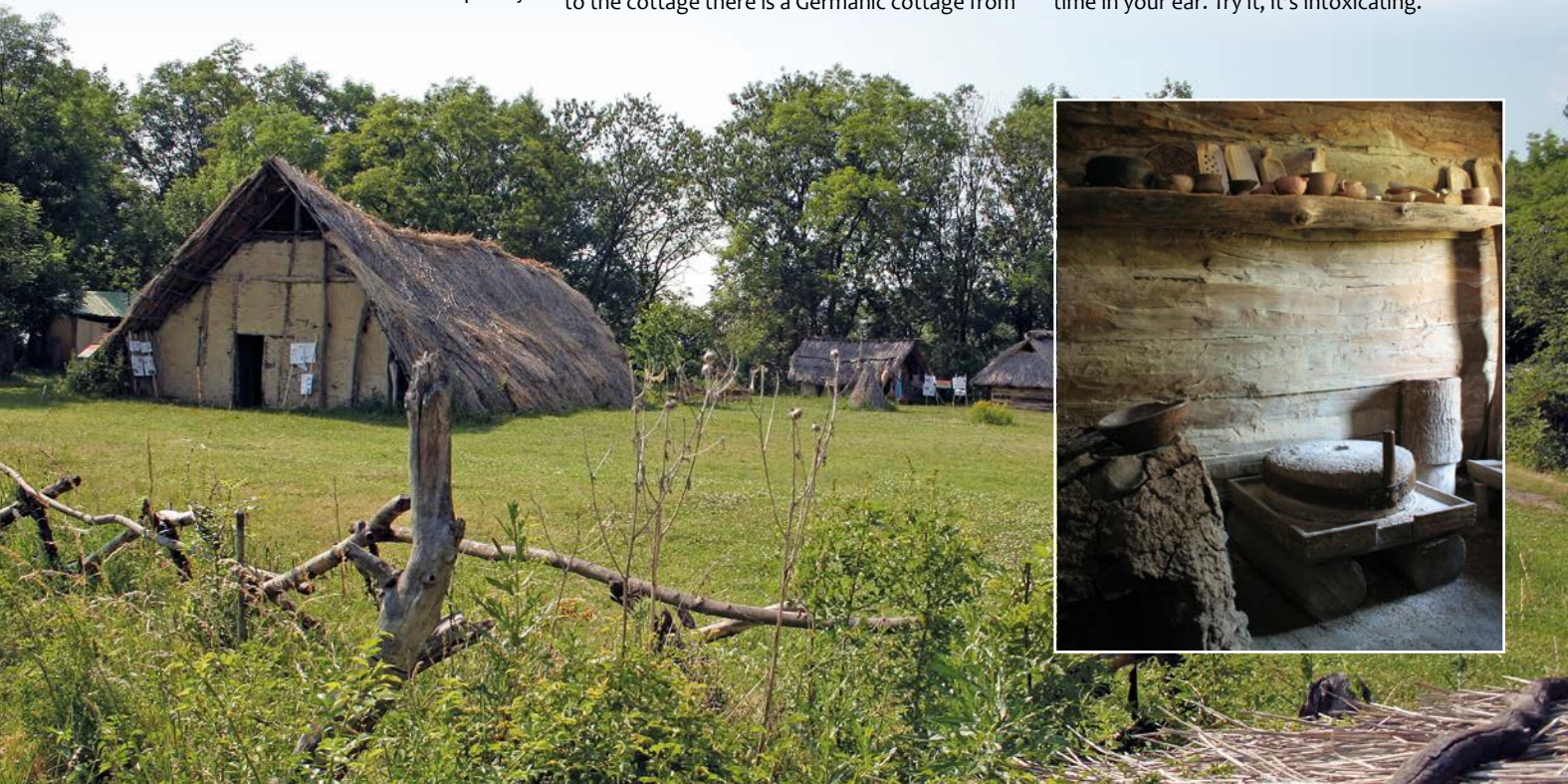


THE DEPTHS OF PREHISTORY

It is a strange thing. Mankind had indisputably developed significantly within the last six thousand years, judging by the options which we have today and which the first farmer did not have. However the question is what we have in common. It seems that it's much more than we would be willing to admit. In many ways we are basically the same. We are still attracted to certain places; we feel their power, peace, security or hope. For example, in the areas surrounding rivers. No matter how wildly floods strike we still cling to our settlements on the banks of streams. Near the contemporary

town of Louny there is the village of Březno. Some distance from it, on the river bank on the spot where a fortified Slavic settlement used to be in the 6th century, a very remarkable outdoor museum of architecture stands today – an outdoor archaeological museum. You go behind a simple fence made of wooden poles and you will find yourself in a timeless land. In front of you a so-called long house is towering from the stone ages as though it has emerged from a surreal hole in time – supporting posts, clay plaster, an open fireplace... However right next to it there is a Slavic cottage from the 6th century A.D., cut into the terrain, with wicker walls and a reed roof. Both structures are separated by almost five thousand years. Next to the cottage there is a Germanic cottage from

the same period, a grain pit, a potter's furnace, as well as a very 'recent' Slavic cottage from the 9th century A.D... And all these structures and useful devices are not just life-size models – many of them have been used for archaeological experiments for decades. Scientists and many volunteers seek out first-hand experience of the ancient lifestyle. And at night, when the starry sky arches above them, the same sky as the one our ancestors watched, human souls become connected across the centuries. You also have a chance to peep into the lives of prehistoric and ancient people, watch how they used to cook, heat, mill grain, bake bread – and it is possible that a Slavic ploughman will breathe on your neck and whisper the secret of time in your ear. Try it, it's intoxicating.



People who can deal with misfortune

The Gate to Bohemia attracts more and more tourists every year. It is no coincidence that the Ústí region has recently had the largest increase in the number of visitors of all the regions in this beautiful country. Why? Well, many people have had no idea how beautiful this region is. But there are drawbacks to this – the more people come the more likely it is that something undesirable happens. An accident, the spread of an epidemic disease, somebody getting lost, an injury... there are many possible catastrophic scenarios. Besides tourists, over eight hundred thousand people live in the region with its mountains, ravines, gorges, endless forests, ski slopes, water management constructions and lakes, settlements, huge mines, rocks, immense snow plains, busy centres – all these pose numerous safety hazards if we consider the issue from this point of view. And still one can say, with a clear conscience, that this region is becoming safer and safer.



ACTION HEROES BY PHONE

I do not know whether you have had any direct experience with the work of the emergency and rescue services. Maybe you have seen them in action but what about their operating centre? I was there, sitting still, eyes popping out of my head as though I was watching an action film. Hollywood films are full of plastic action heroes. In this room I suddenly encountered real action heroes. The operator, for example, many think that he or she just answers phone calls and dispatches ambulances; in fact this profession requires a wide scope of skills. You have to be able to concentrate, you have to be a skilful logistician and the extent of your responsibilities matches the control of air traffic at a gigantic airport; plus advanced medical qualifications verified by practice in locations quite different from the sterile environment of operating theatres; plus the diction of a theatre actor; plus the eloquence of a Police negotiator

combined with a first class psychologist; plus you really have to love this work and you cannot be disturbed by total idiots who want to shoot you or start a fight with you in the street. Can you guess how many of these people there are? I saw more of them in the Ústí operating centre than I had expected. These people are able to calm you down, transform you into a piece of powerful resuscitation equipment with their remote advice, instil basic principles of first aid in you and lead you through the mine field of possible errors to a happy ending. Really – it is quite common here to save somebody's life over the phone. And what follows is another list of action heroes, namely the extended limbs of the operating centre. And it makes no difference whether they get to you by helicopter, by ambulance or just by running up a staircase. These are people who can, at a given moment, concentrate only on you and your problem, and they would willingly put it above everything else and risk their lives for you.

MISFORTUNE WALKS THE MOUNTAINS AND ENJOYS WATER AND FIRE

A Czech proverb that says that misfortune can walk the mountains, especially the Ore Mountains. And it makes no difference what season it is. If we forget about injuries incurred while skiing, snowboarding or riding a bike, year after year for a while, there are people who just get lost. This can happen out of the blue. You may be cross-country skiing or picking mushrooms – Krušberk sweeps his wooden pole over your head and you do not know where you are. Who will help you? Naturally, the mountain rescue service of the Ore Mountains! It has 14 stations... But even though you may have a phone on you which is charged and you are lucky with the signal, the description of your position will roughly sound as follows: "There are trees around me, mostly low ones, but there are some high ones too, needles and every now and then a tree stump..." And these guys will find you anyway. But it takes longer than it would if you have the mountain rescue service application installed on your phone (you can download it for free). In such cases they would find you before you realise that you should worry. The misfortune we talked about has a soft spot for rivers, brooks, reservoirs and ponds. There are the River Police to protect you from the dangers related to these places. And again: this is not only the issue of people drowning. Boats may break down, a fire may start on them, you get tired while pedalling the wheel of the pedalo... And in winter? Who do you think monitors the thickness of the ice so that you can go fishing in the holes cut in it, or skating? Naturally: the River Police. Did you know that they are also in charge of the Elbe route and in summer patrol it on bikes? So now you know. And what other hobbies does misfortune have?



the language of the professionals. Naturally they are all properly trained and therefore know what to do. It works in the following way: the operator of the medical rescue service guides you while you provide first aid, the regular massage of the breastbone, and in the meantime one, let's say Firefighter, rushes to the spot. He or she opens the AED box and listens to it. Yes, the AED

It is in its element in fire. And this is the job of the fire rescue service. You naturally know that Firefighters fulfil functions other than just extinguishing fires: they also intervene in cases of natural disasters and many other similar situations that are defined as emergency situations. Well. Most of the services you have been reading about are connected by the Integrated rescue system, which ensures that information spreads as fast as possible and that the cooperation of the rescue services increases the effect of their interventions. But there is one extra thing that links them all.

A BOX THAT SAVES LIVES

Magic boxes with a mysterious name AED (and I decided to find out the meaning – it means Automated External Defibrillator) are distributed along the territory with the support of the Ústí region, meaning that this network has as many of these devices as possible. They are either mobile or stationary. What are they used for? For timely defibrillation, as doctors and rescuers say – to save a life when blood circulation stops because of heart failure, as we laymen would say. The rescuers, however splendid as they may be, simply cannot get into woods, remote settlements, centres of towns in peak hours, or into rocky hills or ravines in a few minutes. And minutes do count. The AED boxes make it possible for the member of the aforementioned services who is closest to the location where misfortune has struck to get there immediately – he or she is called the first responder in



speaks! It gives instructions on what to do, analyses the condition of the sick person, and after the electrodes are glued to the body it sends resuscitation impulses into it; put simply it guides the actions of an unqualified rescuer while the medical rescue services are on their way. Does it really help? – you may ask. Yes, it does. Statistically the use of the AED three times increases the chance of survival. Bear this in mind when setting out on a trip or on holiday. It will ease your worries. You can be certain that while you are enjoying yourself there is an invisible army completely ready to help whenever you need it.





Dresden International Airport Your gate to Northern Bohemia



Flughafen Dresden GmbH is a subsidiary of Mitteldeutsche Airport Holding with about 1.8 million passengers a year (2014). The catchment area of Dresden International Airport – an airport specialising in short flights – not only includes Saxony and southern parts of Brandenburg but also northern Bohemia in the Czech Republic and Lower Silesia in Poland.

The flight schedule includes everyday flights from German and European cities and back: **Barcelona** (Vueling), **Basel** (Easyjet), **Düsseldorf** (Air Berlin, Germanwings), **Frankfurt am Main** (Lufthansa), **Cologne/Bonn** (Germanwings), **London – London City Airport** (Cityjet), **Moscow-Sheremetyevo** (Aeroflot), **Munich** (Lufthansa), **Palma de Mallorca** (Air Berlin, Germania), **Stuttgart** (Germanwings) and **Zürich** (SWISS). The Leipzig/Halle Airport, which also belongs to Mitteldeutsche Airport Holding, also offers flights from/to **Istanbul** (Turkish Airlines), **London Stansted Airport** (Ryanair) and **Vienna** (Austrian Airlines). Besides this, the airports in Dresden and Leipzig/Halle offer everyday direct flights to holiday destinations on the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic, the Red Sea and the Black Sea.

Taking off from Dresden or Leipzig/Halle, changing planes just once and getting to almost every destination in Europe and the world: airlines Aeroflot, Austrian Airlines, Air Berlin, Cityjet, Germanwings, Lufthansa, Turkish Airlines, Vueling and SWISS offer this option. They provide their passengers with many practical flights to various cities and destinations. Waiting times at given airline hubs are, as a rule, short and numerous follow-up flights from/to Dresden or Leipzig/Halle allow for the flexible planning of a journey.

The direct connection of Dresden Airport to the A4 motorway, approximately 3000 parking places at the terminal, a compact terminal with a fast railway line and a conference centre form a self-contained place for arrivals and departures, negotiations and conferences. Going along the A4 and A17/D8 motorways you will get from Dresden to northern Bohemia in about 45 minutes. At the main railway station

in Dresden, persons travelling by the airport fast train (line S2) have the option to change to a train going to the Czech Republic. The travelling time between the airport and the main railway station is roughly about 20 minutes. Besides this, the modern yellow long-distance buses of the Czech company Student Agency connect Dresden Airport with Prague several times a day. Surveys show that the airport also gains points thanks to its orderly appearance and the friendly and competent behaviour of its workers. The passengers and visitors may buy refreshments, drinks, souvenirs, travelling accessories and many original presents in the new airport shop called “Gate 14”.

Dresden Airport offers popular tours of the airport, also in Czech. On every last Sunday of the month a ninety minute tour (the maxi tour) starts at 16:30, and is conducted by a Czech native speaker. The tour includes the following stages: a tour of the terminal, the security check, a bus ride along the airport site to dispatch a plane and a visit to the airport fire station. You must book your place on the tour at least five days in advance of the date of the tour.

On the weekend of 19th and 20th September 2015 Dresden Airport celebrates its 80th anniversary and will hold a great two-day airport festival. Activities include flights around Dresden and its surroundings, guided tours and tours of planes (e.g. a NATO reconnaissance plane called AWACS), a display of equipment and airport vehicles, entertainment for children and an entertaining programme with music, performance arts and many other surprises.

Flight schedules, on-line travel agency, booking parking spaces:

www.dresden-airport.de
www.letiste-drazdany.cz
www.mitteldeutsche-flughaefen.de

Information about the airport:

Telephone: +49 (0)351 881-33 60
 E-mail: information@dresden-airport.de



Schloesserland Sachsen - Discover your kingdom

Schloesserland Sachsen offers a wide-ranging choice of art and culture, numerous sights and exciting exhibitions in its 50 palaces, castles, gardens and monasteries.

You can truly save with your schloesserlandPASS. Ten days at €20 or all year round at €40.

Benefits at 50 properties

- Entitles to visit 50 properties as often as desired
- Free admission for (one or) two children up to age 15 when accompanied by the PASS holder
- Free admission to all permanent exhibitions and exterior premises, reduced admission to special exhibitions
- Exceptions: reduced admission to Dresden Residential Castle (except the Historical Green Vault) and to the Dresden Zwinger, discounts for guided tours of the Little Pheasant Castle and the Dresden Park Railway
- 10% discount on the regular room rate at our castle and monastery hotels
- Except events

Movie schloesserlandPASS



The schloesserlandPASS can be obtained from all participating properties or online. For further sales spots and detailed information, please go to www.schloesserland-sachsen.de



