

# **THE MOUNTAINS OF MONTENEGRO**



#### About the Author

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*The Islands of Croatia*

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*The Peaks of the Balkans Trail*

## THE MOUNTAINS OF MONTENEGRO

by Rudolf Abraham

**CICERONE**

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*za Ivanu*

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*Front cover:* Zupci ('teeth') and Bandijerna, seen from the pass below Bobotov kuk in Durmitor national park (Route 6)

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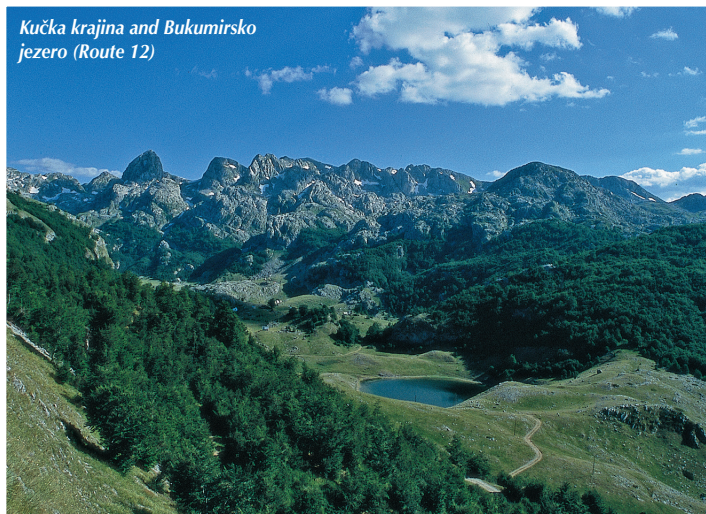
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*Kučka krajina and Bukumirsko jezero (Route 12)*



### Warning

Mountain walking in remote areas can be dangerous and carry a risk of personal injury or death. It should be undertaken only by those with a full understanding of the risks and with the training and/or experience to evaluate them. Whilst every care and effort has been taken in the preparation of this guide, the user should be aware that conditions can be highly variable and can change quickly, thus materially affecting the seriousness of a mountain walk.

Therefore, except for any liability which cannot be excluded by law, neither Cicerone nor the author accept liability for damage of any nature (including damage to property, personal injury or death) arising directly or indirectly from the information in this book.

For the Mountain Rescue Service (GSS) in Montenegro, contact [www.gss-cg.me](http://www.gss-cg.me), in English, or tel: 064 333 88 68 or 063 466 466.

Although travel within Montenegro is perfectly safe, visitors are strongly advised against straying over the border into neighbouring countries (with the exception of those itineraries detailed within this guide). In particular, there is a danger of landmines in Bosnia-Herzegovina, certain areas of Croatia, the border areas between Kosovo and Montenegro, and possibly over the Albanian border.

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/731/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/731/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

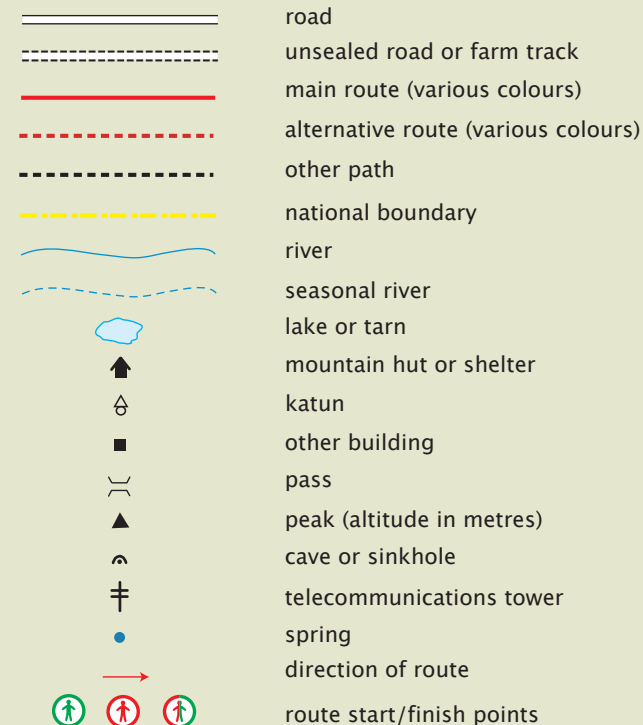
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## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLE

No	Route title	Duration	Rating	Total ascent/ descent	Maximum altitude	Nearest centre	Page
<b>ORJEN</b>							
1	Subra	2-3 days	Moderate	1425m/1425m	1675m (Subra)	Kamenno (from Herceg Novi)	59
2	Zubački Kabao	1-2 days	easy-moderate	885m/885m	1894m (Zubački kabao)	Vrbanj (from Herceg Novi)	66
<b>LOVČEN</b>							
3	Jezerški vrh	3hrs 30mins	easy	560m/400m	1675m (Jezerški vrh)	Bukovica (from Kotor or Cetinje)	72
4	Kotor fortress	1h 45mins	very easy	280m/280m	280m (Sv Ivan Fortress)	Kotor	76
<b>LAKE SKADAR</b>							
5	Rumija	1 day	moderate	590m/590m	1594m	Virpazar/Stari Bar	79
<b>DURMITOR</b>							
6	Central Durmitor	4-7 days	moderate-difficult	4253m/4253m	2523m (Bobotov kuk)	Žabljak	88
7	Durmitor Circuit (via Skръčko jezero)	3-4 days	moderate	1745m/2065m	2409m (Bandlijezna)	Žabljak	113
8	Durmitor Circuit (via Velika Struga)	2 days	moderate	780m/1130m	2274m (Velika Struga)	Žabljak	123

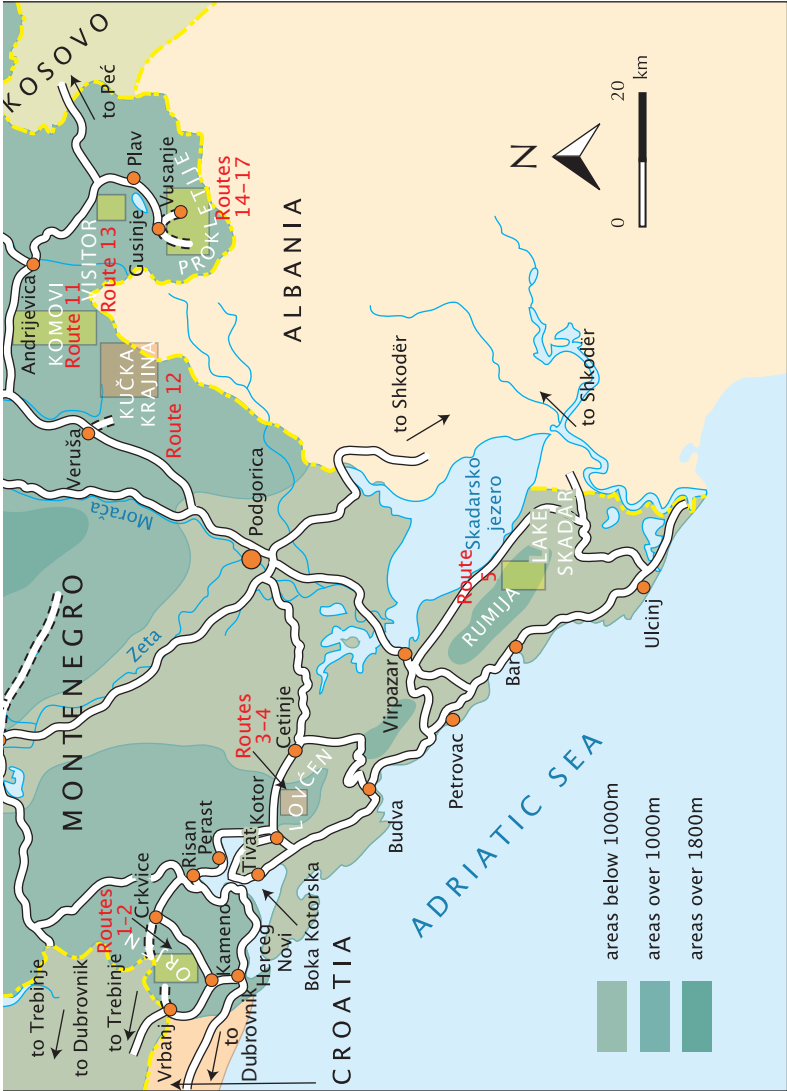
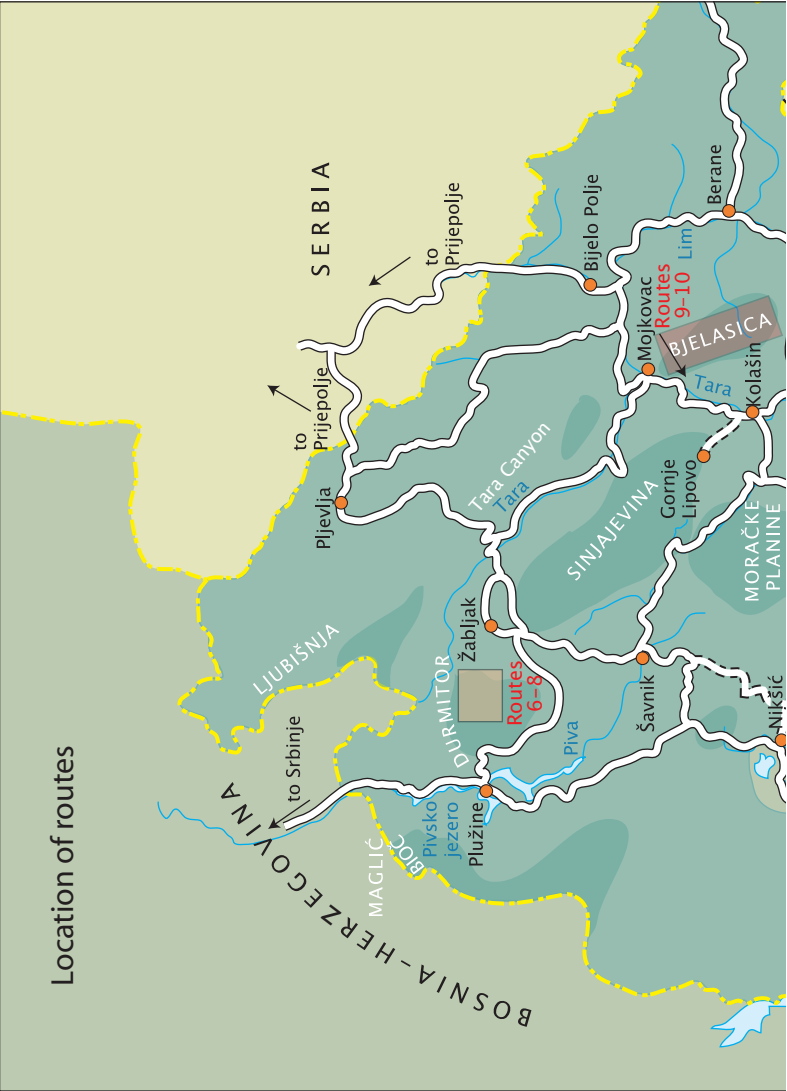
No	Route title	Duration	Rating	Total ascent/ descent	Maximum altitude	Nearest centre	Page
<b>BIJELASICA</b>							
9	Biogradsko jezero	1hr	very easy	0m/0m	1099m (Biogradsko jezero)	Mojkovac	129
10	Biogradsko gora	2 days	easy	1405m/920m	2139m (Crna glava)	Mojkovac/Kolašin	134
<b>KOMOMI</b>							
11	Komovi	4 days	moderate-difficult	1635m/1635m	2469m (Kom Ljevoriječki)	Kolašin/ Andrijevica	145
<b>KUČKA KRAJINA (ŽIJEVO)</b>							
12	Kučka Krajina	4-5 days	moderate	2310m/2310m	2165m (Štitan)	Verusa (from Kolašin)	156
<b>VISTOR</b>							
13	Visitor from Plav	1 day	moderate	1390m/1390m	2211m	Plav	172
<b>PROKLETJE</b>							
14	Volušnica	4hrs	easy-moderate	721m/721m	1879m (Volušnica)	Gusinja	184
15	Krošnja and Karanfil	4hrs 30mins	moderate	800m/800m	1960m (Krošnja)	Gusinja	187
16	Kotao	2hrs 45mins	difficult	470m/470m	1670m (Kotao)	Gusinja	191
17	Ropojana valley and jezero	4hrs	easy	310m/310m	1300m (saddle above lake)	Vusanje (from Gusinja)	193

## Map Key



## Contour Key





The ridge on Meded, Durmitor (Route 6)



## INTRODUCTION

The small town of Virpazar, gateway to Lake Skadar National Park (Route 5)



Few parts of Europe are so little known as the countries lying between the Danube and the northern frontier of Greece.

*Sir J Gardner Wilkinson, Dalmatia and Montenegro (London, 1848)*

‘Ljepši od Alpa’ – ‘more beautiful than the Alps’. This description of Montenegro’s mountains was given to me by a Croatian climber, in the most congenial setting of a wedding, just over the Slovenian border. And it was these words, together with a post-card of improbably sheer-sided peaks in Durmitor, the country’s best-known mountain area, which first drew me to Montenegro, while living in Zagreb between 1999 and 2001.

Montenegro (or more correctly Crna gora, ‘black mountain’) lies on the southern Adriatic coast, sandwiched between Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Albania; and within its borders are some of the wildest, most spectacular, and least visited mountains in Europe.

So I wrote in the introduction to the first edition of this guide, back in 2006. And remarkably, with the exception of Durmitor National Park which in recent years has seen a healthy surge in visitor numbers, the last part of that sentence remains just as true now, as I write material for a new edition in 2015, as it did then. It’s true that Montenegro’s popularity as a travel destination has grown



## ORJEN



The Dobraštica ridge (Route 1)

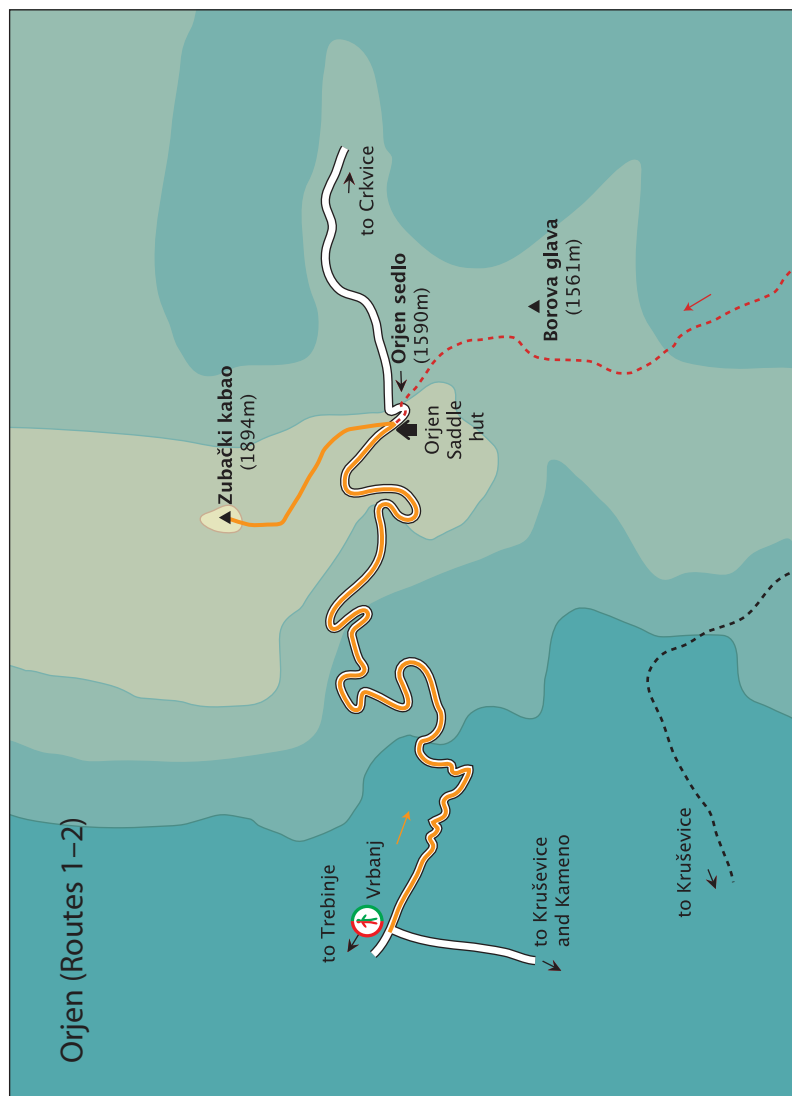
Orjen is a limestone massif wedged against Montenegro's border with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. It is a harsh, desiccated area, and its appearance shares more in common with the mountains running along the Croatian coast than with the mountains of inland Montenegro. Despite its waterless appearance, however, this area receives the highest rainfall in Europe (an average of

4500mm–5000mm per year). The highest peak of the massif is Zubački kabao (1894m), however it is an area south of this, around Subra (1675m) which is the most interesting (and easily accessible) for walking. The two routes described here (Routes 1 and 2) take in some impressive limestone scenery and karst formations, which more than make up for the sections of road walking involved in each.

## ROUTE 1

### Subra

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Kameno
<b>Rating</b>	Moderate (some straightforward scrambling on Subra, and some deeply fissured limestone pavement, or lapiez, to cross).
<b>Duration</b>	2–3 days. With an early bus from Herceg Novi, you should have plenty of time to reach Vratlo hut and to climb either Subra (Stage 2) or Kabao (Stage 3) the same day.
<b>Maps</b>	<i>Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006), or <i>Mountain Orjen Trail Hiking Guide and Map (1:40,000)</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2012). The older edition is by far the clearer of the two.
<b>Water</b>	There is a well at Vratlo hut, but this is padlocked when the hut is closed. There are a couple of wells nearby, but these really belong to local cottages in the area; there is also a seasonal spring on the route up Subra (tricky to get to, see Stage 2). Therefore, unless you are certain that the hut will not be locked at the time of your visit, you should bring as much water as possible from the coast or Kameno.
<b>Transport</b>	Buses for Kruševica leave Herceg Novi's bus station at 8am and 2.15pm (Mon–Fri only, no service at weekends); the journey as far as Kameno takes about 20mins, fare 80c (buy ticket from driver). Buses returning to Herceg Novi pass through Kameno at 5.45pm.
<b>Huts and camping</b>	There are two functioning huts on Orjen: the newly-refurbished Vratlo hut (Planinarski dom za Vratlo) and Orjen Saddle hut (Planinarski dom Orjen sedlo). Contact Subra Mountaineering Association in Herceg Novi (see Herceg Novi', below) regarding opening times – usually weekends during summer – otherwise, particularly outside the summer months, you will find them locked. There is another hut at Vrbanj, but this has been closed since the war. There are plenty of flat areas for camping near (and just beyond) Vratlo hut.



A short, straightforward route to Subra (1675m) from the village of Kameno (which is easily reached by local public transport from Herceg Novi), plus a side trip to Kabao. While Subra is not the highest peak of the Orjen massif, it is perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the easiest to get to. Good trail markings. This area gets very hot in the summer, but there is the possibility of vast amounts of rainfall from late autumn to late spring, so come prepared.

### HERCEG NOVI

**Practicalities:** The bus station is on the main coast road, a few minutes' walk from the old town (stari grad). Banks and ATMs on the main square (Trg Nikole Đurkovića). An excellent local tour operator is Black Mountain ([www.montenegroholiday.com](http://www.montenegroholiday.com); [info@montenegroholiday.com](mailto:info@montenegroholiday.com)), run by a British couple who have been based in Herceg Novi for years and run outdoor adventure and cultural trips all over Montenegro.

**Accommodation and restaurants:** There are plenty of hotels and private rooms in Herceg Novi. Try the excellent value Apartments Mediterano ([www.facebook.com/ApartmentsMediterano](http://www.facebook.com/ApartmentsMediterano)), a hostel in all but name. Hotel Borići, on the road up to Subra (see Stage 1) is open during the summer months. The author's favourite place to eat in Herceg Novi is Pod Lozom, just off the main part of Trg Nikole Đurkovića.

**Supplies:** Plenty of shops; try the supermarket on the main square.

### STAGE 1

#### Kameno – Vratlo hut

<b>Start</b>	Kameno
<b>Distance</b>	14km
<b>Total Ascent</b>	600m
<b>Total Descent</b>	25m
<b>Rating</b>	easy
<b>Time</b>	2hrs
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1175m (Vratlo pass)
<b>Maps</b>	Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006)

A short, easy stage, initially following an asphalted road from the village of Kameno for about 10km, ascending to Vratlo hut along the old Austro-Hungarian packhorse route.

From the bus stop in **Kameno** turn right and follow the road up past the small shop and café. The wall of rock ahead of you is not Subra itself, but the Dobraštica ridge which forms the outer ramparts of the Orjen massif. The obvious cleft at the E end of this ridge is Vratlo pass. The road soon ascends through a series of hairpin bends (there are a few unmarked shortcuts, for the sharp-eyed). Ignore any side roads and continue for 1hr until you reach a road on your left to the Borići Hotel, at about 800m. Turn left, following the unsealed road round to the right from the hotel and continuing uphill. A marked shortcut takes you off the road where it swings round to the right; you soon begin following sections of the well-engineered packhorse track. This zigzags up to **Vratlo pass** (1175m), from where a trail to the left leads up onto the Dobraštica ridge (see Stage 3). Continue straight ahead, descending to reach **Vratlo hut** (1150m) in 5mins.

Water is available from the well behind the hut. However, if the hut is locked, the well will also be



Approaching Vratlo  
pass

padlocked, in which case the nearest water is from a well by one of the summer cottages, about 20mins along the onward route from the hut (see Stage 2). The best spots for camping are a little further along the trail towards Subra (Stage 2). Don't pitch a tent in any of the walled enclosures, where locals grow crops.

## STAGE 2

Vratlo hut – Subra (return)

Start/Finish	Vratlo hut
Distance	6km
Total Ascent	575m
Total Descent	575m
Rating	moderate
Time	3hrs 45mins (return)
Maximum altitude	1675m (Subra)
Maps	Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006)

An interesting route, passing through impressive limestone scenery. It involves some straightforward scrambling, and there is some deeply fissured limestone pavement (*lapiez*) to cross.

Follow the trail NE from **Vratlo hut**, descending and turning left (NW) on a trail marked 'Subra, Odljevo, Vrbanj', etc. The trail meanders through limestone *polja* (good camping 5–10mins from Vratlo hut), passing a few summer cottages, a track on the right to Zubački kabao (the highest peak on Orjen), and a route on the left (unmarked) to Odljevo, with Subra ahead of you. There is a well with water by one of the cottages in this area, if you are short of water. ▶

A little over 30mins from Vratlo hut, you ascend to an area of deeply fissured limestone pavement (*lapiez*). Cross this (care needed), passing some deep sinkholes (Dragova jama and Nikolina jama) and ascending again

See 'Further  
Possibilities'

The route to Subra





through scattered deciduous woodland and over rocky slopes, hugging the cliff on your right. The path veers right along a shelf, before rounding a bluff with spectacular views of Lovćen on the right. Pass a somewhat precarious trail to a seasonal spring on your right, then ascend the last 20mins to the summit of **Subra** (1675m). Views from the summit are expansive, with the twin peaks of Lovćen to the E and Zubački kabao to the N.

Descend to **Vratlo hut** following the same route (1hr 20mins).

### STAGE 3

*Vratlo hut – Kabao (return)*

<b>Start</b>	Vratlo hut
<b>Distance</b>	2km
<b>Total Ascent</b>	225m
<b>Total Descent</b>	225m
<b>Rating</b>	easy-moderate
<b>Time</b>	1hr (return)
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1376m (Kabao)
<b>Maps</b>	<i>Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006)

You will almost certainly have enough time to undertake this very short climb after arriving from, or before descending to, Kameno. Carry full packs up the trail a little way rather than leaving them on the pass, if you are not staying in Vratlo hut. There is some easy scrambling. It can also be extended to form a longer, circular route (see 'Extension' below). The route is sometimes marked 'Kamenski kabao'.

Follow the path from **Vratlo hut** to Vratlo pass, then take the trail on the right marked 'K. kabao'. It's a steep 40mins to the top of **Kabao** (1376m), with a short, slightly exposed section at the beginning, then up through deciduous trees and around boulder fields.

Descend by the same route.



*View from Kabao*

### Extension

You could extend this stage by following the clear but unmarked route along the Dobraštica ridge as far as Odljevo (1571m); allow an extra 40mins each way. From Odljevo, it would also be possible to descend to the main Vratlo hut-Subra trail, and so turn this into a circular route (allow 1hr 20mins from Odljevo to Vratlo hut).

### STAGE 4

*Vratlo hut – Kameno*

<b>Start</b>	Vratlo hut
<b>Distance</b>	14km
<b>Total Ascent</b>	25m
<b>Total Descent</b>	600m
<b>Rating</b>	easy
<b>Time</b>	1hr 30mins
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1175m (Vratlo pass)
<b>Maps</b>	<i>Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006)



View from the summit of Subra

Descend from Vratlo hut to **Kameno** by the same route (1hr 30mins).

## ROUTE 2

### Zubački Kabao

Start/Finish	Vrbanj
Distance	23km
Total Ascent	885m
Total Descent	885m
Rating	easy-moderate
Duration	6hrs; 1–2 days
Maximum altitude	1894m (Zubački kabao)
Maps	<i>Guide and map (1:31,250) to the Orjen Massif</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2006), or <i>Mountain Orjen Trail Hiking Guide and Map (1:40,000)</i> (Mountaineering Club Subra, 2012). The older edition is by far the clearer of the two.
Water	There is a spring near the Orjen sedlo hut. However, bring enough water with you from Herceg Novi for the whole day – it gets very hot in the summer.

#### Transport

Buses for Kruševica, on the road from Herceg Novi to Trebinje, leave Herceg Novi's bus station at 8am and 2.15pm (Mon-Fri only, no service at weekends). From Kruševica you will need to walk or hitch (prospects unlikely) the final 7km or so to Vrbanj (allow 1hr 30mins). If walking from Kruševica to Vrbanj, you are unlikely to get back in time for the last bus back to Herceg Novi, which (at the time of writing) leaves Kruševica at about 5.15pm – check time with driver on your way up to be certain ('Kad ide zadni bus za Herceg Novi danas?').

#### Huts and camping

There is a small unstaffed shelter on the road below the summit of Orjen (Planinarski dom Orjen sedlo); contact Subra Mountaineering Association in Herceg Novi (see 'Herceg Novi', below). There is also a hut at Vrbanj; however, this has been closed since the war.

A short, straightforward excursion to the highest peak on Orjen, Zubački kabao (1894m). Effectively this is a road walk, followed by short climb to the rocky summit. It can be accomplished either in a long day from Herceg Novi, providing you can get transport the additional 23km from Kruševica (accessible by bus from Herceg Novi) to Vrbanj, or can be spread over two days, with a night at a shelter or a bivouac in between. This area gets very hot in the summer, but there is the possibility of very heavy of rainfall from late autumn to late spring, so come prepared.

#### HERCEG NOVI

**Practicalities:** The bus station is on the main coast road, a few minutes' walk from the old town (stari grad). Banks and ATMs on the main square (Trg Nikole Đurkovića). An excellent local tour operator is Black Mountain ([www.montenegroholiday.com](http://www.montenegroholiday.com); [info@montenegroholiday.com](mailto:info@montenegroholiday.com)), run by a British couple who have been based in Herceg Novi for years and run outdoor adventure and cultural trips all over Montenegro.