

WALKS AND TREKS IN CROATIA



About the Author

Rudolf Abraham (www.rudolfabraham.co.uk) is an award-winning travel writer and photographer specialising in Croatia, Central and Eastern Europe. He is the author of more than 10 books, and his work is published widely in magazines. He first visited Croatia in the late 1990s, returned to live in Zagreb for two years, and continues to make several trips a year to his favourite country in Europe.

Other Cicerone guides by the author

St Oswald's Way and St Cuthbert's Way

The Islands of Croatia

The Mountains of Montenegro

The Peaks of the Balkans Trail

Torres del Paine

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WALKS AND TREKS IN CROATIA

MOUNTAIN TRAILS AND NATIONAL PARKS,
INCLUDING VELEBIT, DINARA AND PLITVICE

by Rudolf Abraham

CICERONE

JUNIPER HOUSE, MURLEY MOSS,
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for Ivana

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The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

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Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:
raise both arms
above head to
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:
raise one arm
above head, extend
other arm downward



Emergency telephone numbers

Police: 92;

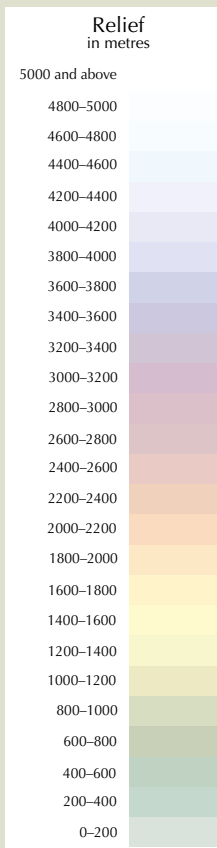
Fire: 93;

Ambulance: 94;

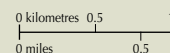
Emergency services can also be contacted on: 112;

Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.

Symbols used on route maps



SCALE: 1:50,000



Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals
and highlighted at 100m intervals.





INTRODUCTION



Viewpoint overlooking the Velika Paklenica gorge from just below Manita peč, Paklenica National Park (Route 18)

My love affair with Croatia began some 20 years ago, when I first visited Velebit, in the middle of winter. It turned out to be a rather wonderful place, snow-bound, unfamiliar, and yet unspeakably beautiful. Within a year I had moved to Zagreb where I lived and worked for two years, making frequent trips into the mountains, which formed the basis of the first edition of this guide, published in 2004. I have been returning to Croatia ever since.

The past decade or so has seen a huge increase in the number of people visiting Croatia – mainly the coast and islands, more recently with a *Game of Thrones*-induced twist to things – and Zagreb appears to have

suddenly been ‘discovered’ thanks in part to its enormous Christmas market, voted one of the best in Europe.

This is not to say that the Croatian coastline is busier than any other attractive and sunny part of Europe during the summer months – indeed, it remains less crowded in many places, and comparatively unspoilt. And while most visitors head straight for the coast – the lovely Dalmatian towns and villages and the glittering isles of the Croatian archipelago – the mountains remain largely untouched.

Croatia’s rugged mountains rise up suddenly, often spectacularly, beyond the narrow ribbon of coastal cities and rocky beaches. It is these mountains – the limestone massifs of Velebit, Gorski

kotar, Mosor and Biokovo, extending in furrowed ranges from Slovenia in the north to Montenegro in the south – which so dramatically divide the Adriatic from the continental interior, contributing as much to the particular character of the country as the more celebrated coastline. More significantly, from the point of view of this guide, they provide a superb, and as yet remarkably unspoilt arena for the mountain walker, whether you're after an easy day walk or an extended mountain trek.

Often only a few hours from the coast by way of steep and rocky trails, these mountains have much to commend them as a walking destination. Ranging from gently sloping, forested hills to rugged tops and limestone crags, they form a landscape of outstanding beauty; at their most

spectacular they are a karst labyrinth of domed peaks and cavernous sink-holes, sun-bleached ridges and rocky dells. They are not a wilderness experience in the traditional sense (then again, little in Europe is). Trails are for the most part well-established and clearly marked, mountain huts are plentiful and local walkers abound. But the scenery is as lovely as it is varied, the terrain rewarding, and the views often breathtaking. And despite their modest elevation – Velebit rises to less than 1800m – there is still plenty to be found that is challenging. Furthermore, in contrast to many of the mountain areas in neighbouring Slovenia, Velebit and Gorski kotar remain well within the capabilities of the well-equipped walker during the winter months, despite heavy snowfall.

Diocletian's Palace, Split – a UNESCO World Heritage Site



KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Country name:	Republika Hrvatska
Capital:	Zagreb
Population:	4.29 million (2011 census)
Language:	Croatian
Main religion:	Roman Catholic (86.3%)
Currency:	kuna (Kn or HNK)
Land surface area:	56,594km ²
Length of coastline (including islands):	5,835km
Number of islands, islets and reefs:	1185
Time zone:	GMT +1 (CET)
International telephone code:	+385
Electricity:	220V/50Hz

Finally, the very proximity of these areas to the coastal scenery and islands, and to historic cities such as Dubrovnik, Split and Zadar, is a considerable attraction in itself. These cities boast some stunning Roman and medieval architecture – Dubrovnik often being touted, with considerable justification, as the best-preserved medieval city on the Mediterranean.

To complement these better-known features of the country, the walks in this guide provide a more intimate view of Croatia and its people, and a counterbalance to the bustle of its coastline during the summer months (after which the coast largely reverts to its sleepy Dalmatian self). And while the walls of Dubrovnik heave with sightseers, the hiker can still follow a sinuous ridge without seeing another soul, or sit comfortably on a high pass below Zavižan, and take in a dazzling sunset across the Croatian archipelago.

GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Croatia, my Croatian friends told me long before I first visited their beautiful country, is like a bird in flight. Look at a map and you'll see this quite clearly: the great wings spread back across Slavonia, poised between beats; the head hanging low in Istria, and protruding out into the Adriatic; the body and tail stretching down through Lika and Dalmatia; the belly splintering into the myriad isles of the Croatian archipelago. It is an attractive image, and one which has stayed with me ever since (certainly it is more poetic than the comparison between Croatia's rather peculiar shape and a boomerang).

From a hiking perspective, the most interesting areas are the successive ranges of mountains running parallel to the Adriatic coast – the belly and tail of the bird, to take the analogy further. Collectively known as the Dinaric Alps, these mountains

rise steeply from the narrow band of settlements along the coast, frequently to 1500m and in some cases to over 1700m, forming a dramatic natural barrier between the rocky coastline and the continental interior.

The Dinaric Alps are simultaneously the longest mountain chain in Croatia and its most spectacular area for hiking. Stretching southeast some 700km from the Slovenian border, these mountains run the length of Croatia, through Montenegro and into Albania, from where they continue as the Pindos Mountains in Greece. Their steep western slopes present an almost impenetrable barrier towards the Adriatic, and with only a few exceptions (such as the Krka and the Cetina rivers, which break through the mountains as impressive canyons on their way to the Adriatic) their drainage is almost entirely eastwards into the Danube.

The Dinaric Alps are composed of a series of distinct massifs or ranges, some higher or more extensive than others. From north to south in Croatia these are Gorski kotar, Velebit, Mosor and Biokovo, with various smaller areas in between, and behind them the Dalmatian hinterland and the Lika basin; Dinara (which includes the highest peak in Croatia) lies slightly further inland, along the border with Bosnia. To their west is the rocky, highly indented coastline for which Croatia is best known. Croatia's islands, which like the mountains run in a general northwest-southeast

direction, effectively constitute low-lying outer ranges of the Dinaric Alps, their valleys long ago submerged beneath the waters of the Adriatic.

Croatia's mountains are formed primarily of Cretaceous limestone – laid down on the seabed in the form of shells and other marine life when the Adriatic, along with the rest of this part of central and eastern Europe, was submerged beneath a shallow tropical sea some 66–145 million years ago. The Croatian Adriatic had become a coastal plain by the Pleistocene Era (2.5 million–11,700 years ago), with the gradual flooding of this coastal plain during the Holocene leading around 7000 years ago to the creation of the islands and the Adriatic Sea as we now know it.

Croatia is karst country. Karst is formed by the gradual dissolving of the limestone rock by rainwater – or, more specifically, by the combination of rainwater and carbon dioxide from the earth's atmosphere and the soil, which results in a weak solution of carbonic acid. Over millennia this process gradually enlarges surface drainage holes, as well as horizontal and vertical cracks and fissures in the rock, as the water percolates downwards, creating distinctive surface features such as vertical fluting (karren), solution pans, limestone pavement and sinkholes (dolines), while beneath the surface it leads to the formation of an extensive network of caves and underground drainage channels, with all rainwater rapidly disappearing

Karst features on Bojinac (Route 19, Stage 1), Paklenica National Park, Southern Velebit



underground, re-emerging later as karst springs, either in the foothills of the mountains or as submarine springs (*vrulja*). Collapses in the roof of these subterranean voids leads to the formation of larger sinkholes and cenotes. *Polje* – large, level-floored depressions up to several kilometres in size, where a thin layer of alluvial soil has gradually accumulated – often form the only suitable areas for growing vegetables and the cultivation of crops.

Many of Croatia's caves and sinkholes (*špilja* or *peć*, and *jama*, respectively) reach astonishing depths – Lukina jama on Velebit is among the 15 deepest sinkholes in the world, and contains a single, stomach-churning vertical drop of over 500m.

Although in many places now denuded and bare, and typified

by poor vegetation, the Dinaric Alps were once heavily forested. Progressive deforestation (both by foreign powers and the local population) and overgrazing since well before the Middle Ages led to extensive soil erosion, exposing the underlying rock to chemical and mechanical weathering. (The Republic of Venice, in particular, is frequently singled out for its role in the process, drawing much of the timber for its fleet from Dalmatian forests.) Local restrictions on the sale of timber to foreign powers (in the case of the Republic of Dubrovnik, as early as the 13th century) failed to check the process, and archives from the town of Zadar, dating from 1803, state that the forests of the surrounding mountains were by then so devastated that not even a piece of firewood could be found.

Kozjak (Route 24)



The Croatian archipelago encompasses a mind-boggling number of islands of various shapes and sizes – some 1185 of them, bringing the total length of the already very indented coastline to well over 5500km. Generally elongated, they follow the northwest–southeast orientation of the coastal ranges, and represent all that remains above sea level of a low, outlying range of hills once part of the Dinaric Alps. Beaches are typically rocky or of fine shingle, although there are a few sandy beaches too.

Slavonia, by contrast, is an extensive plain, and is extremely fertile. (It was the fertility of the land which, in the aftermath of World War 2, encouraged many people from Dalmatia to move to Slavonia.) Its eastern border meets Serbia on the Danube, and its northern and southern borders are

defined by the Drava and the Sava, respectively. Low, wooded hills dot various areas such as that north of Požega, while the landscape becomes progressively flatter towards the eastern border with the Danube and to the northeast, where it stretches off into the Hungarian plains.

Croatia's geographical position places it on the fringe of that rather ill-defined territory known in the West as the Balkans, though most Croatians prefer not to attach that label to their country – and may politely inform you that the Balkans begin somewhere southeast of the River Sava.

HISTORY

The earliest evidence of human habitation in Croatia dates back to the Palaeolithic era, most famously in the

form of humanoid bones and stone tools unearthed in a cave at Krapina, north of Zagreb, and dated to around 65,000bc. Evidence of the presence of Neolithic man is widespread: these early fishing and farming communities were characterised by the cultivation of cereals and the domestication of livestock, the development of 'tell' settlements and the introduction of copper working. Finds from the later Vučedol culture, which flourished around 2800–2500bc, include some remarkably beautiful pottery objects – the most famous of which figures on the reverse of the modern 20Kn note. Finds from the Bronze Age include axe-heads discovered in Slavonia and on Hvar, datable to around 2000bc. From the middle of the second millennium bc the Dalmatian coast was joined by sea routes to Italy and the Aegean, leading to an increase in trade and an expansion of external contacts; and from the end of the Iron Age we gradually enter the realm of recorded history.

The Illyrians

The precise origin of the Illyrians remains a matter of conjecture, but from about 800bc they come to dominate the history of the eastern Adriatic. An Indo-European people, the Illyrians were in effect composed of numerous tribes scattered throughout the region from the Veneto to Albania, some perhaps more deserving of the title 'Illyrian' than others. Among the most important of these

were the Liburni (famed pirates, who originally controlled the coast from Istria to the River Krka); the Delmatae (inhabiting the coast and hinterland, including the Dinaric mountains, and noted for their near unassailable hill forts); and the Japodes (inhabiting the area behind the Liburni, north to the Sava and west to Velebit, whom Strabo describes as living on Mount Albion – perhaps Velebit). A number of them (Histri, Delmatae, Ardiaei) were to leave their names in the region (Istria, Dalmatia, Adriatic), and by the early 3rd century bc the Ardiaei had formed a powerful kingdom in the south, centred around Lake Shkodër in modern Albania.

From the sixth century bc, Greek settlements and trading posts began to be established on the Adriatic coast and on the islands, notably at Korkyra meliana ('black Korčula'), Issa (Vis), Pharos (Hvar) and Tragurion (Trogir), which assured the spread of Greek culture on the islands and along the coast. The fourth century bc also saw the arrival of the Celts, who subjugated the Illyrians in Pannonia (an area roughly corresponding to modern Slavonia) and settled around the middle Danube and in the Sava and Drava valleys.

The Illyrian kingdom reached the height of its power during the third century bc under King Agron and, following his death, Queen Teuta, with the defeat of the Aetolian Greeks. Teuta then despatched enormous plundering expeditions against Epirus,

and particularly the city of Phoenixe, which was then emerging as a centre of commerce and trade with Rome. It was perhaps Illyrian interference with this trade, combined with the murder of a Roman envoy sent to complain against Illyrian piracy, which prompted the Romans to launch their attack on Illyria in 229BC, with 200 ships and a massive contingency of infantry and cavalry. Thereafter a Roman protectorate was established over the Greek coastal cities and islands.

The Roman period

The Romans conducted a succession of campaigns against the Illyrians. The Roman province of Illyricum was placed under senatorial control in 27BC, and passed to imperial

control upon the full conquest of the Pannonian tribes during 13–11BC, which extended Roman territory to the Danube. Following the great Illyrian revolt of AD6–9, Pannonia became a separate province and Upper Illyria was renamed Dalmatia.

Establishing their capital at the old Illyrian stronghold of Salona (Solin, near Split), the Romans built roads and cities and developed trade, exploiting the wealth of minerals and timber offered by the territory as well as the agriculturally rich farmland of Pannonia. Among the most important Roman settlements were Jadera (Zadar), Parentium (Poreč) and Polensium (Pula), while a defensive boundary (the Roman limes) was established across the interior. The late third century emperor Diocletian's Palace still graces the city of Split.

Byzantine influence on the coast was to become increasingly prominent following the dedication of Constantinople in 330 as the new capital of the Roman, and later the Byzantine, empire.

Invasions

The fourth and fifth centuries were marked by a succession of Hunnish and Gothic invasions. The Visigoths swept into the region during the period 379–401, while in 450 the Huns appeared in northern Pannonia,

Roman forum, Church of St Donatus and bell tower of Cathedral of St Anastasia, Zadar



Ivan Meštrović's sculpture 'History of the Croats' (Povijest Hrvata), in front of the Faculty of Law in Zagreb

followed by the Ostrogoths. The Slavs, originally from Ukraine and the steppes north of the Black Sea, began migrating into the valleys of the Danube and the Sava some time after the year 500, and from there later expanded into the Dinaric mountains and along the Adriatic. In the second half of the sixth century the Avars, a nomadic people of Turkic and Mongol stock, swept south into the region, sacking Salona and laying siege to Constantinople.

In the chaotic wake of the Slavic and Avar invasions, a people known as the 'White Croats' were invited by the Emperor Heraclius to move into the region and fight against the Avars

in 626. A Slavic (or at least Slavicised) people, these White Croats were at that time living in an area north of the Carpathians. Moving southwest as requested, they successfully defeated the Avars, after which they settled in the region to which they would eventually give their name: Croatia. They were followed by the Serbs, who migrated from their home (known as 'White Serbia', also north of the Carpathians), and settled east of the Croats. Although the historical accuracy of this account has been questioned, the existence of a 'White Croatia' north of the Carpathians is confirmed by medieval sources.

The arrival of Charlemagne at the close of the eighth century brought first Pannonian and then Dalmatian Croatia under Frankish sovereignty, with all of Dalmatia save some key cities

and islands being formally ceded by Byzantium to the Franks in 812. These campaigns were followed by a gradual and more widespread conversion of the local population to Christianity. Byzantium regained its control of Dalmatia in 868–878, when it became one of a number of Byzantine themes, with its capital at Zadar.

Croatia's golden age

The second half of the ninth century saw a gradual increase in power and autonomy, which would lead to Croatia's brief but much vaunted golden age. This was reflected in a move towards religious autonomy and the appearance of local Croatian dukes in a position of rule.

After successfully repelling the first of many Hungarian attacks, Tomislav became the first king of Croatia in 925. However, power struggles within the ruling class followed his death, and it was not until the reign of Petar Krešimir IV (1058–1074) that Dalmatia was regained from Byzantine control, and Dalmatian and Pannonian Croatia unified for the first time into a single state. Petar was succeeded by Zvonimir (1075–1089), who had the title King of Croatia and Dalmatia conferred upon him by the Pope. However, the country once more fell into disunity after his death, which effectively marked the end of the Croatian royal house. Popular legend tells that Zvonimir was actually murdered by his own people, and that his dying curse upon them was that they should be forever ruled

by foreign powers. Indeed, Croatia would see some 900 years of foreign rule before regaining its independence in the 1990s.

Hungarian and Austrian rule

In 1091 Hungary, under King Ladislav, invaded northern Croatia, finally defeating the last pretender to the throne on Mount Gvozd (the modern Petrova gora). In 1102, a treaty was signed between the 12 Croat tribes and the Hungarian King Koloman, with the Hungarian Arpad dynasty inheriting the rights of the Croatian kings, and a Hungarian *ban* (governor) being installed. The Dalmatian nobility accepted Koloman's rule, but this was to be limited by Venice's increasing power in the Adriatic.

It was during this period that the city of Dubrovnik (or Ragusa) rose to prominence. Founded in the first half of the seventh century by refugees from Epidaurus (Cavtat), a city recently devastated by the Avars and the Slavs, Dubrovnik soon grew rich on maritime trade, and in the 12th century developed into an independent republic. In 1190, Dubrovnik signed treaties against external enemies, in particular Venice, as well as trading agreements with the pirates at Omiš. In the 14th century its territory stretched from the Bay of Kotor in the south to the northern tip of the Pelješac peninsula, and included the islands of Lastovo and Mljet.

In the 12th century, Venice launched a series of attacks on the

Ružica grad is the most impressive of several ruined castles that can be found in Papuk nature park



coastal cities of Dalmatia, as well as on a number of its islands. In 1202 the Venetian Doge Dandolo enlisted the support of the armies of the Fourth Crusade to capture Zadar – following which an infuriated Pope excommunicated the entire expedition. In 1205 Dubrovnik also fell to Venice. The Mongol invasions of the 13th century saw them pursue King Bela of Hungary to the Adriatic coast, which they ravaged before being recalled to their homeland on the death of Genghis Khan. The power struggles that followed the death of Bela in 1270 were used by Venice as an opportunity to take Šibenik and Trogir. Between 1342 and 1382 King Ludovik I of Hungary reestablished control over Croatia, but the country slid into anarchy on his death. Following this, the Croatian nobility misguidedly turned to Ladislav of Naples, who was crowned king

of Zadar in 1403. Ladislav soon sold Zadar to Venice for a miserable 100,000 ducats, and by 1420 Venice controlled the whole of Dalmatia, a grip it would not relinquish until the arrival of Napoleon.

The Ottomans

The overwhelming defeat of Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian forces by the Ottomans at the battle of Kosovo in 1389, together with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, saw the Balkan peninsula opened up to Turkish invasion. Bosnia was conquered in 1463 and Herzegovina in 1482, and thousands of refugees trekked north. In 1493 the Croatian nobility were decimated at the battle of Krbavsko polje in Lika, and city after city fell to the Ottoman advance. In 1526 the Hungarian forces under Ludovik II were defeated at the battle of Mohács, and 1529 saw the

Ottomans lay siege to Vienna. The Austrian Archduke Ferdinand was elected king of Croatia by its parliament under the proviso that he would help defend the country against the Ottomans; but by the end of the century only a small area around Zagreb, Karlovac and Varaždin remained under Austrian control. Austria established the military frontier across the war-ravaged and largely depopulated Croatian hinterland, and settled the area with large numbers of Vlachs (mountain inhabitants of both Orthodox and Catholic faiths), who were granted a degree of independence in return for their services as frontier soldiers. The Croatian parliament objected furiously to their settlement on Croatian soil and to their exemption from the system of feudal taxes imposed on the rest of the population. Yet the Vlachs were to remain in the *Krajina* for more than 450 years, until their descendants were expelled at the close of the war in the 1990s.

During the 16th century the Uskoks, fugitives from the Ottoman advance based in Senj, turned to a phenomenally successful career of piracy and conducted a long reign of terror against the Turks, with refugees joining them as partisans. The rout of the Ottoman forces at the second siege of Vienna in 1683 marked a reversal of Ottoman fortunes in the Balkans, and in 1699 the Treaty of Sremski Karlovci saw all Turkish claims to Croatia and Hungary renounced.

The 19th century

The arrival of Napoleon at the end of the 18th century brought new changes to the region, as well as renewed hopes of Croatian unity. However, although Dalmatia was transferred to Austria upon the disintegration of the Venetian republic in 1797, the administrative division of Dalmatia and Slavonia was maintained, much to Croatian disgust. In 1805 Napoleon's victory over the Austrian forces at Austerlitz resulted in Dalmatia being ceded to France, and in the creation of the Illyrian Provinces. Dubrovnik was occupied by Napoleon's troops the following year, following which the Republic of Dubrovnik was dissolved and became part of the new Illyrian Provinces.



Zagreb old town

Napoleon instigated a number of positive reforms in Dalmatia to counteract the years of neglect suffered by the region. These included a tree plantation programme, in an attempt to restore the denuded forests; the establishment of schools and the University of Zadar to combat illiteracy; the draining of the marshes to combat rampant malaria; the construction of new roads and hospitals; and the introduction of new crops. Yet these reforms remained largely unpopular, due in part to French opposition to the clergy, and to the fact that new taxes were introduced to pay for the reforms.

The 1815 Congress of Vienna returned Dalmatia to Austria, while placing the rest of Croatia under Austria's Hungarian province. This saw a restoration of power to the former-Italian elite in Dalmatia, and the imposition of Hungarian language and culture upon Croatia as a whole. The reaction to all of this was the Illyrian Movement, which surfaced in the 1830s and marked the beginning of a national awakening, or national revival, in Croatia. Typically at this time, upper-class Dalmatians spoke Italian, while German and Hungarian were spoken in northern Croatia. Perhaps not surprisingly then, the Illyrian Movement centred on a revival of the Croatian language.

During the revolutions of 1848, Croatia agreed to intervene against a Hungarian revolutionary movement on the side of the Hapsburgs in return

for greater autonomy, and 40,000 troops were despatched under the command of governor Josip Jelačić. This celebrated figure (whose statue stands in Zagreb's main square, the eponymous Trg bana Jelačić) was both a loyal officer in the Austrian army and a firm supporter of the Illyrian Movement. However, the battles were indecisive, and ultimately Jelačić was not the only component of the force which finally broke Hungarian resistance. Opposition to any form of revolutionary regime grew in Austria: the emperor revoked all revolutionary and constitutional changes, and the Croatian parliament was closed.

Against this background two schools of political thought developed within 19th-century Croatia, both directed towards the emancipation of the country from foreign rule. The old Illyrian Movement became the National Party, led by the charismatic Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer. Strossmayer, who also supported the cause of Serbian independence, believed (with considerable justification) that the differences between Croats and Serbs were being magnified by foreign manipulation, and that this could be combated only by south Slavic unity, although he felt that this should be within the framework of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rather than complete independence. The opposing movement was the Party of Rights, led by Ante Starčević. Militantly anti-Serbian, he promulgated the idea of an independent Croatia consisting

of Slavonia, Dalmatia, the Krajina, Slovenia, Istria and part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

During this period, the Orthodox church encouraged Serbs to form a national identity based upon their religion, which together with the attacks of Starčević, led to a gradual polarisation of the two populations and an increasing sense of a separate, Orthodox identity within largely Catholic Croatia. The Hungarians exploited the situation by supporting the Serbian cause, dividing the country still further.

Organised resistance to Austro-Hungarian rule first erupted in Dalmatia, and in 1905 Croat representatives in Rijeka and Serbian representatives in Zadar joined forces to call for a unification of Dalmatia and Slavonia, with a guarantee of Serbian equality.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes

With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War 1, Croatia feared that it might be further dissected by foreign powers (certainly the Treaty of London, signed in 1915, seemed to suggest that an Allied victory would be followed by Croatia effectively being carved up between Italy and Serbia). Pula, Rijeka and Zadar were quickly gobbled up by Italy, and to prevent further territory being lost, a Croatian delegation persuaded the Serbian government to agree to the establishment of

a parliamentary monarchy ruling over the two countries. On 1 December 1918 the first communal Yugoslav state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was founded. It was to last until 1941, although it was never recognised by the Treaty of Versailles.

However, problems with the new regime soon became apparent: currency reforms benefited Serbia at the expense of Croatia; a treaty with Italy gave Istria, Zadar and a number of islands to Italy; and a new constitution abolished the Croatian parliament and centralised power in Belgrade. Opposition was spearheaded by Stjepan Radić, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party – until he was murdered in parliament, in 1928. Following this the constitution was suspended, and what amounted to a military dictatorship ensued under King Alexander.

Almost immediately the Croatian Liberation Movement, better known as the Ustaša, was set up under Ante Pavelić, with the stated aim of establishing an independent Croatian state, by force if necessary. Having fled to Italy, where he established training camps under the auspices of Mussolini, Pavelić masterminded the assassination of Alexander on a state visit in Marseilles, following which he was imprisoned and the training camps closed. Alexander's successor, his cousin Prince Paul, attempted to advance the cause for Croatian autonomy, but progress was cut short by the events of World War 2.

The SW face of Dinara (Route 20), viewed from Knin



World War 2

Germany invaded Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, installing the Ustaša as rulers of the Nezavisna Država Hrvatska or NDH (Independent State of Croatia), headed by Pavelić, and ushering in what is arguably the darkest chapter of Croatian history. Between 1941 and 1945 a range of decrees issued by Pavelić were implemented against the 'enemies' of the regime: primarily Jews, Gypsies and Serbs. These took the form of horrific local pogroms, with almost 80 per cent of the Jewish population sent to extermination camps in Nazi Germany, and Serb extermination camps set up to carry out the unwritten Ustaša demand that one-third of the Serbian population should be killed, one-third expelled and one-third converted to Catholicism. The estimated number of

Serb deaths varies enormously, but is possibly as high as 80,000.

However, the Ustaša drew their support from only a minority of the population, centred around Lika and western Herzegovina, and owed their authority to the support of Hitler and Mussolini. That their support would remain minimal in Dalmatia was guaranteed by an agreement to cede large chunks of the coast and islands to Italy. Armed Četnik (Serbian nationalist) resistance to the Ustaša began under General Dražo Mihailović, but soon degenerated into massacres of Croats and Bosniaks in eastern Croatia and Bosnia. The National Liberation Partisans under Josip Broz Tito, with their notions of 'Brotherhood and Unity' and a unified Yugoslav state, attracted both Croats and Serbs appalled by the cycle of reciprocal

massacres, as well as anti-fascists in general. The initial Allied support for the Četniks was re-channelled to the Partisans, who by 1943 controlled much of Croatia.

The Federal Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia

Following the end of World War 2, the Federal Peoples' Republic of Yugoslavia was established on 29 November 1945, consisting of six republics and two autonomous provinces. Tito initiated a number of constitutional reforms, but the channelling of money from the wealthier Croatia and Slovenia to Belgrade and to the less prosperous republics, combined with the suppression of organised religion (due to the perception that it had played its part in polarising the population, leading to the bloody inter-ethnic fighting of World War 2) and the over-representation of Serbs in government positions and the security forces, led to increasing dissatisfaction in Croatia, which culminated in the 'Croatian Spring' of 1971. Croatia's increasingly vocal criticism of Belgrade's policies and calls for greater autonomy and constitutional reform were swiftly answered with purges, jail sentences and repression. Following Tito's death in 1980, the Serb and Croat nationalist aspirations, which he had largely driven underground in 1971, slowly rose to the surface again.

Against a background of sweeping change and the collapse of communism in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, free elections

were held in April 1990, which saw Franjo Tuđman and the Croatian Democratic Union elected to power with 40 per cent of the vote. Mass dismissals of Serbs from the public service sector, combined with a Serbian media campaign heralding the rebirth of the Ustaša, prompted Croatia's 600,000-strong Serb community in the Krajina and in eastern Slavonia to demand autonomy, while Serb extremists within Croatia staged provocations intended to draw federal military intervention. In March 1991, a Serb unit took over the headquarters of Plitvička jezera National Park, and the resultant fighting between them and the Croatian police claimed the first victims (on both sides) of the war in Croatia.

Independence

In May 1991, following the deaths of 12 Croatian policemen near Osijek, a referendum was held, with more than 90 per cent voting in favour of Croatian independence. Independence was formally declared on 25 June 1991. In response, the Krajina Serbs held their own referendum and voted to remain part of Yugoslavia. In June 1991 heavy fighting broke out in the Krajina and eastern Slavonia, after which the Serb-dominated Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) increasingly intervened on its own authority in support of Serbian irregulars.

European Community mediation persuaded Croatia to freeze its declaration of independence to prevent

the country spiralling into further bloodshed, but in the three months following 25 June, one-quarter of Croatian territory fell to Serb militias and the JNA. The United Nations (UN) declared an arms embargo on all republics of the former Yugoslavia. In October, the JNA and Montenegrin militia positioned themselves on the hills above Dubrovnik, beginning a siege that would last until June the following year and draw widespread international media attention. In November Vukovar finally fell, having been almost razed to the ground by relentless air and artillery bombardment, and many of the surviving inhabitants were massacred. By December, thousands of people had died in the fighting in Croatia, and more than half a million fled their homes.

Early in 1992, UN negotiations were followed by the deployment of a 12,000 member UN Protection Force. The ceasefire declared in January 1992 largely held, and was accompanied by the withdrawal of the JNA, although significantly it did not mark a return to pre-war borders or provide for their future settlement. Moreover, for the Krajina it only temporarily froze the existing situation, without offering a permanent solution. In January the European Community caved to pressure from Germany and recognised Croatian independence. A few months later, the storm that had been brewing over Bosnia finally broke, plunging the

country into a war of almost unimaginable barbarity.

In January 1993 the Croatian army launched an offensive in the south Krajina, recapturing large tracts of territory. In May 1995 Croatian forces entered occupied western Slavonia, quickly regaining control of the area; the Krajina Serbs responded by shelling Zagreb. Some 15,000 Serbs fled Slavonia, despite assurances of their safety from the Croatian government. In August Croatia launched a massive military offensive on the Serb stronghold of Knin. The Serb army fled northward, together with over 100,000 civilians whose roots in the area stretched back some four-and-a-half centuries. Attacks followed on the few who stayed.

In December 1995 the Dayton Accord was signed in Paris, and Croatia's international borders were recognised (although a small UN mission remained to oversee the demilitarisation of the Prevlaka peninsula – the southernmost tip of Croatia, which was disputed by Croatia and Montenegro – until 2002). The years following the war saw a gradual trickle of refugees returning to Slavonia, and a massive increase in tourism in Dalmatia. In recent years, tourism has skyrocketed. Croatia was accepted into the Council of Europe in 1996, achieved candidate status in its bid for European Union (EU) membership by 2004, and finally became a member of the EU in July 2013.

There was a time not so long ago when Zagreb, the Croatian capital, saw relatively few foreign visitors in comparison with the coast and islands. Not any more. While this may still hold true in comparative terms, Zagreb is now most definitely *in*, and attracts far more visitors than it did when the first edition of this guide was published, back in 2004.

In any case, it remains a truly delightful city, with a completely different feel to cities on the coast such as Split or Dubrovnik – very much Central European, as opposed to Mediterranean. With its well-preserved old town centre awash with Secessionist architecture, café-lined streets and squares strewn with flower stalls, elegant parks and gardens, a wonderful Christmas market (voted the best in Europe three years in a row) – not to mention numerous excellent museums and galleries – Zagreb is a beautiful, vibrant and endlessly fascinating place to while away a few days before setting off for the karst wilderness of the Dinaric Alps. It's a city I fell in love with when I first moved there in the late 1990s, an affection which remains undiminished to this day.

Aside from its impeccable cultural credentials, there are some good, easily accessible areas for walking near Zagreb. Medvednica (Routes 1 and 2) is the large, forested massif rising directly from the northern suburbs of Zagreb, crowned by a large TV tower at its highest point, Sljeme

(1033m). Medvednica is a nature park (Park prirode Medvednica, www.pp-medvednica.hr) – although any of the bears implied by its name (from *medvjed*, meaning 'bear') were either hunted down or disappeared long ago. Locals flock to Sljeme at the weekends, and during the winter an area just below the summit functions as a small ski slope. Various *gostionica* (small restaurants) serve hearty meals, which you can work up an appetite for on the way up. There are numerous hiking trails on Medvednica, together with a road and a cable car (the latter closed for upgrading since 2009) to the top.

Samoborsko gorje (Route 4) is an area of rolling hills (and vineyards) southwest of Zagreb, beside the bijou Baroque town of Samobor (www.tz-samobor.hr), and forms part of the larger Žumberak area on the border with Slovenia. Like Medvednica, Samoborsko gorje is a nature park (Park prirode Žumberak Samoborsko gorje to give it its full name, www.park-zumberak.hr), and is criss-crossed by well over 300km of marked hiking trails, and dotted with small wooden churches. When in Samobor you should try the obligatory *kremšnite*, a particularly fine custard cream dessert for which the town is famous.

For practical information about Zagreb, including accommodation recommendations, see Appendix B and Zagreb City Tourist Office: www.infozagreb.hr.

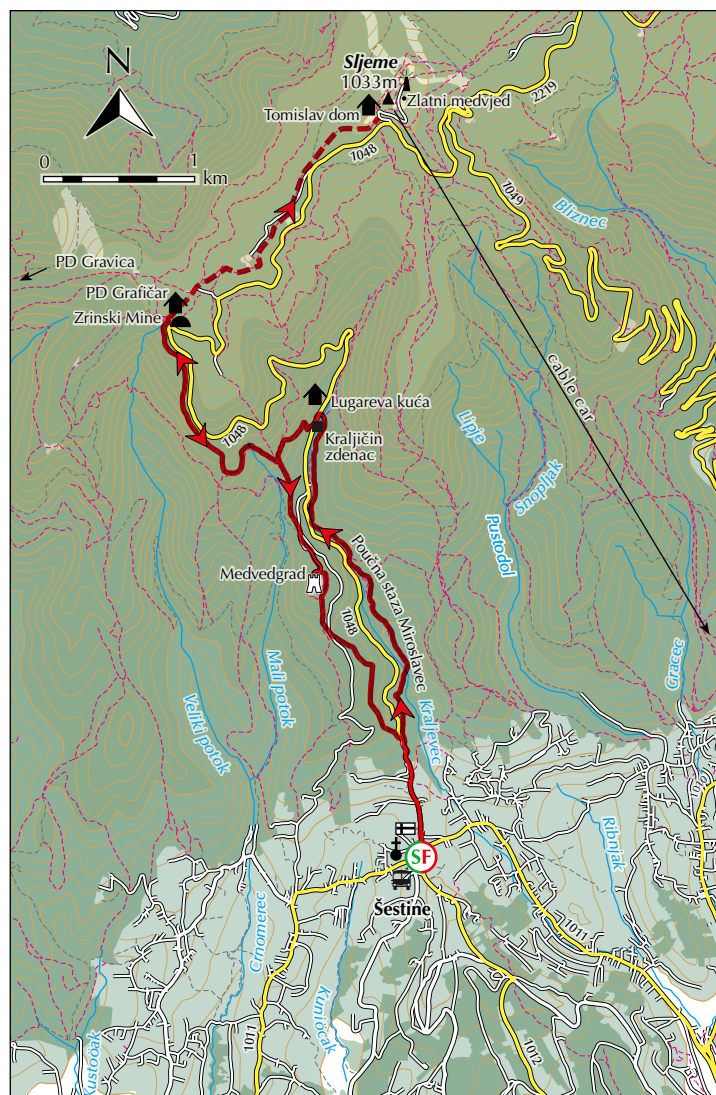
ROUTE 1

Grafičar, Sljeme

Start/finish	Šestine
Distance	13km (8.1 miles)
Total ascent/descent	760m (2493ft)
Time	4hr 30min
Terrain	An easy walk on good, clear forest trails; some steps on Poučna staza Miroslavec
Maximum altitude	871m (Grafičar hut)
Maps	SMAND (01) Medvednica (1:25,000); HGSS Medvednica (1:25,000); Park prirode Medvednica (1:30,000), published by the nature park office, is less detailed.
Refreshments	PD Grafičar (food and drinks, closed Mondays); Lugareva kuća (food and drinks, http://lugareva-kuca.com); Šestinski lagvić (food and drinks, www.sestinski-lagvic.hr)
Transport	Take a number 102 bus (either from Britanski trg or Kaptol) to the outlying suburb of Šestine (25min), and get off just before (if you're coming from Britanski trg) or after (if you're coming from Kaptol) the small church with its brightly coloured roof tiles.

The following route starts and finishes in the small village of Šestine, and follows a good, clear forest path to one of the nicest mountain huts on Sljeme, PD Grafičar, which makes a good place to stop for lunch. There's a medieval mine that can be visited near the hut, and a visit to Medvedgrad, a 13th-century fortress on the slopes overlooking Zagreb, is included on the return route. Of the many hiking trails on Sljeme, this is the most enjoyable.

Continue uphill from the **church** in Šestine, passing a cemetery on the left and following the trail markings. After five minutes, you will arrive at a car park and a sign reading 'Park prirode Medvednica' (Medvednica Nature Park), and pass a popular restaurant, Šestinski lagvić,



Hiker on the trail to Grafičar hut, Sljeme, above Kraljičin zdenac and Medvedgrad

on your right. When you reach a small wooden shelter on the right, turn right onto a broad gravel path that descends gradually from the road to wind through the shade of tall, ivy-clad oak and beech trees, while a small stream is audible trickling through the gully on the right – all in significant contrast to the harsh and waterless Dinaric peaks that await you along the coast. ► The path begins climbing slowly, with wooden footbridges crossing side-streams, to reach a junction 1 hour from Šestine, just above **Kraljičin zdenac**, a small café and picnic area by the road (closed until further notice in 2018).

The trail straight ahead leads to the summit of **Sljeme** (Route 2). Instead of taking this, turn left and descend to the road beside Kraljičin zdenac. ► Cross the road and follow the marked path up through fairly open forest, signposted to Grafičar. The path becomes a broad trail and climbs gradually to reach a junction, where you turn right (straight ahead would take you to Medvedgrad, a route which will be followed on the descent). The trail passes a small wooden shelter on the right, and there are some nice views on the left, out to the hills of Žumberak

The path, known as Poučna staza Miroslavec (*poučna staza* means 'educational trail'), is extensively labelled with details of the surrounding trees and rocks.

There's a nice little restaurant, Lugareva kuća, in an old hunting lodge a couple of minutes along the road on your right (uphill).

(on the border with Slovenia) and a distant Klek (Route 14) in Gorski kotar.

Where the trail meets the asphalt road, cross straight over and follow the path uphill to reach **PD Grafičar** in five minutes, 2hr 15min from Šestine.

PD Grafičar (food and drinks; closed Mondays) sits at the edge of a grassy clearing, with wooden tables outside, and serves a hearty *grah* (bean stew) and, during the summer, the best *čevapčići* (grilled meatballs) on Sljeme.

Just to the SW of PD Grafičar you'll find the **Zrinski Mine**, one of a number of medieval mines in the area, where gold, silver and other ores were once extracted. It was in operation from the 16th to the 17th century. The Zrinski Mine was opened to the public in 2004 and has interactive displays. It is open April–October, Sundays and public holidays, 11am–5pm. Tickets cost 23Kn for adults and 18Kn for children. See www.pp-medvednica.hr for more details.

Variations

If you want to connect this route with Route 2, follow a path uphill from PD Grafičar then turn right along an asphalt road, before branching off on a path to the left (but not the trail to Gornja Bistra) to reach vrh Sljeme in 30 minutes. It's also possible to walk to the Veternica Cave and PD Glavica (Route 3) from PD Grafičar, by following a trail W from the hut. Allow 3hr 30min one way.

Descend towards Šestine following the same route in reverse, but at the trail junction above Kraljičin zdenac, turn right. Descend a broad path to reach a cobbled road, then walk up to the entrance of **Medvedgrad**.

Medvedgrad was built in the mid 13th century, but was abandoned in the 16th century following a fire, then restored during the 1990s. There are good

views from the restored towers within the ruins, and a grassy terrace makes a good spot for a picnic. The controversial Oltar Domovine (Homeland Altar) is a monument and eternal flame to the memory of Croatian soldiers who died during the Croatian War of Independence, built (at considerable expense) at the order of President Franjo Tuđman. There's a medieval-themed fair held in the fortress during the last week in September. Medvedgrad is open April–September: Tuesday–Sunday 11am–7pm; September–January: Tuesday–Sunday 10am–6pm, January–March: weekends 10am–5pm. Entry costs 15kn (buy tickets at the gate). The ruins of another 13th century fort, Susjedgrad, lie on the western slopes of Medvednica.

Return to the main road and turn right, following it for 10 minutes before turning left onto a path marked Šestine. From here, it's another 15 minutes down to the road; continue past Šestinski lagvić and then down to the church in **Šestine**. The bus stop is just beyond the church, by the small newspaper kiosk (for buses towards Britanski trg), or opposite this (for buses towards Kaptol).

Medvedgrad, Sljeme



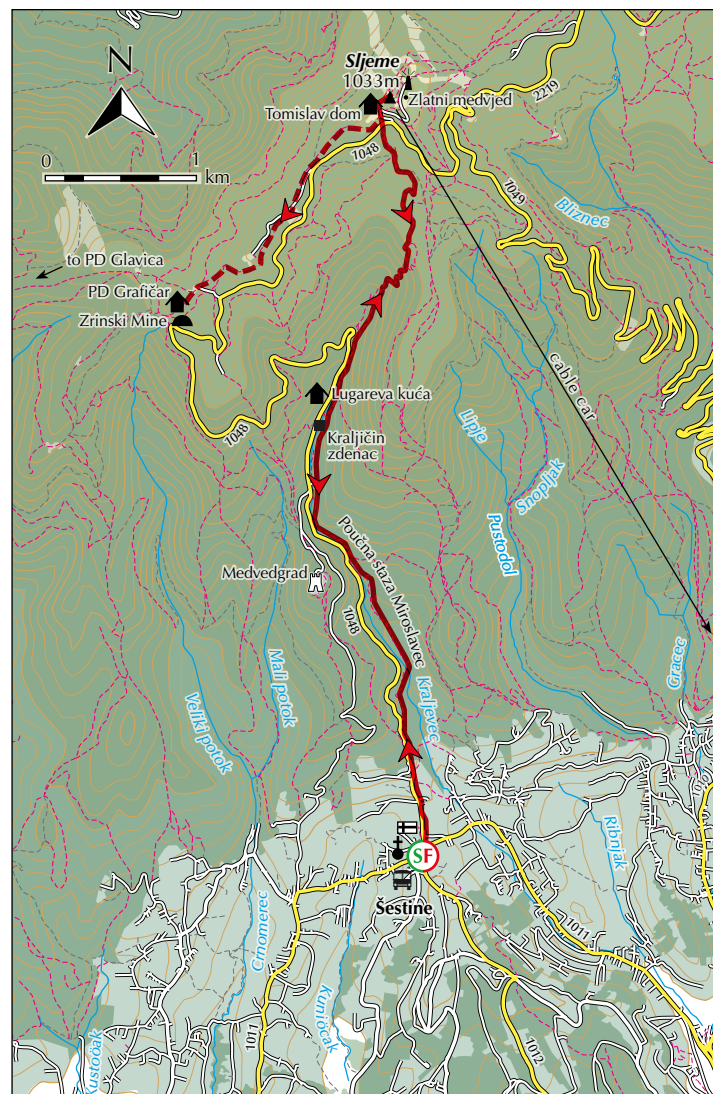
ROUTE 2

Vrh Sljeme

Start/finish	Šestine
Distance	13km (8.1 miles)
Total ascent/descent	845m (2772ft)
Time	4hr 30min
Terrain	An easy walk on good, clear forest trails; some steps on Poučna staza Miroslavec, and slightly steeper sections of trail between Kraljičin zdenac and vrh Sljeme
Maximum altitude	1033m (Sljeme)
Maps	SMAND (01) Medvednica (1:25,000); HGSS Medvednica (1:25,000); Park prirode Medvednica (1:30,000), published by the nature park office, is less detailed.
Refreshments	Zlatni Medvjed and other restaurants near the summit (many of them are closed on Mondays); Lugareva kuća (slightly off route; food and drinks, http://lugareva-kuca.com); Šestinski lagvić (food and drinks, www.sestinski-lagvic.hr)
Transport	Take a number 102 bus (either from Britanski trg or Kaptol) to the village of Šestine (25min), and get off just before (if you're coming from Britanski trg) or after (if you're coming from Kaptol) the small church with its brightly coloured roof tiles.

Like Route 1, this route starts and finishes in the small village of Šestine, but climbs to the highest point on Medvednica, vrh Sljeme. It's possible to follow a road from vrh Sljeme to just above PD Grafičar, and descend to Šestine following Route 1 in reverse.

Continue uphill from the **church** in Šestine, passing a cemetery on the left and following the trail markings. After five minutes, you will arrive at a car park and a sign reading 'Park prirode Medvednica' (Medvednica Nature Park), and pass a popular restaurant, Šestinski lagvić,



The path, known as Poučna staza Miroslavec (*poučna staza* means 'educational trail'), is extensively labelled with details of the surrounding trees and rocks.

Family hiking on Poučna staza, Sljeme



on your right. When you reach a small wooden shelter on the right, turn right onto a broad gravel path that descends gradually from the road to wind through the shade of tall, ivy-clad oak and beech trees, while a small stream is audible trickling through the gully on the right – all in significant contrast to the harsh and waterless Dinaric peaks that await you along the coast. ◀ The path begins climbing slowly, with wooden footbridges crossing side-streams, to reach a junction 1 hour from Šestine, just above **Kraljičin zdenac**, a small café and picnic area by the road (closed until further notice in 2018).

Continue straight ahead at the junction (without turning left as in Route 1, unless you want to stop at Lugareva kuća), following the signs to Tomislavov dom and ignoring tracks to the left, as the path narrows and enters conifers before becoming steeper. After opening out again into a tall stand of beech, the path crosses a side-stream and begins zigzagging up an eroded slope before entering tall conifers once more. The path divides and meets again, with occasional markings, crossing a forest road before veering left and zigzagging up to the main road below Tomislavov dom, 45 minutes beyond Kraljičin



Sculpture of a bear, Sljeme

zdenac. Turn right onto this before ascending past the cable car station to reach the **various cafés and gostionica** (many of them are closed on Mondays) and the large TV tower at the top of **Sljeme** (1033m) in a few minutes.

From the viewpoint on top of Sljeme, there's a view down over the scattered houses of Gornja Bistra and the forested spurs of northern Medvednica. **PD Grafičar** (see below) is a more pleasant spot to linger, however if you want to stop here on Sljeme and return by the same route, making a shorter excursion than continuing via PD Grafičar, one of the better places to eat is **Zlatni Medvjed**, near the TV tower.

Descend to Kraljičin zdenac and Šestine following the same route in reverse (allow 2hr). The **bus stop** is just beyond the church, by the small newspaper kiosk (for buses towards Britanski trg), or opposite this (for buses towards Kaptol).

To connect with Route 1

If you want to connect this route with Route 1, turn right just below vrh Sljeme onto a marked trail to PD Grafičar. This joins the asphalt road, passing a trail on the right to Gornja Bistra and a military base on the left. Then, turn left and follow a path down to **PD Grafičar**, around 30 minutes from vrh Sljeme.