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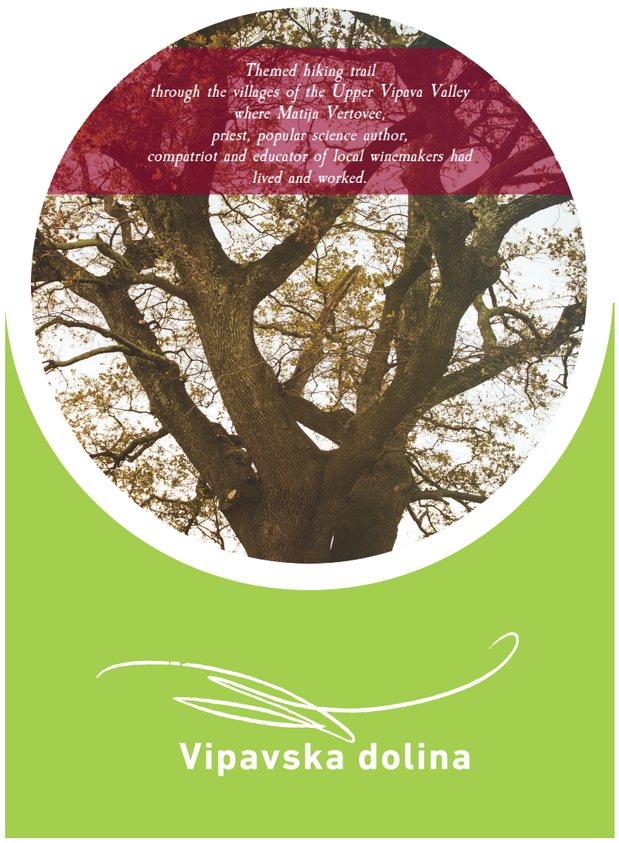
ENGLISH

po Vertovčevih poteh



1 Oak just outside the village of Ustje – start and end of trail

We set out to retrace the steps of Matija Vertovec at the majestic oak growing next to Jevšček Creek just before the village of Ustje.

First, leave the expressway Razdrto–Vrtojba at the exit Ajdovščina and turn left for Planina. At the next junction, turn right toward Ustje to get straight to the ancient oak. The starting point features an information board with a detailed trail description.

This 200-year-old oak is a signature landmark, standing out with a circumference of almost 450 cm, and a protected heritage tree with a large canopy that offers cool respite for hikers.

In the immediate vicinity of the assembly point of the hike, scientist Rajko Pavlovec discovered two never before seen nummulite fossils. He named the first one after Vipava River, *Nummulites vipavensis*, and the second one after the village of Ustje, the settlement closest to the discovery site, *Nummulites ustjensis*.

2 Dolenje

Head from the assembly point down the field path to the east and then turn right on the asphalt road to Dolenje.

The village of Dolenje actually consists of two hamlets, namely Dolenje (formerly Novaki) and Bačarji. The hill overlooking Bačarji features the Okno Cave with the spring of Honice Creek. In the past, there were three flour mills in the area: the small Poljšak Mill uphill of Dolenje which stopped before 1900, the somewhat bigger Koš Mill ahead of Bačarji with a small water reservoir which ground until 1925, and the largest of the trio – the late 15th century Novak Mill whose remains can still be seen today. The latter is located about a kilometre east of the village on Vipava River. Close by is Napoleon's Stone Bridge at a strategically important position that used to be critically important for local traffic.

3 Saint Margaret's Church

A short uphill hike from Dolenje will get you to Saint Margaret's Church.

Built in 1646, the church is renowned for its gothic presbytery around the altar area. Matija Vertovec held mass in Saint Margaret's Church when he was a priest in Planina. In the course of its renovation in 2011, the church saw the return of one of its bells. The old bells were melted down into cannons by the Italians during WW2. A service is held once a year in the church on the name day of its patron Saint Margaret.

4 Nabojs

From St Margaret's Church climb the path to the vantage point of Nabojs (275 m) before Planina from where you can make out the outskirts of the Vipava Valley.

Extending to the north are the peaks of the Trnovo Plateau, to the west lies Sončni Školj Hill, and to the east Mt Kucelj, Mt Čaven, Mt Mali Golak and Mt Veliki Golak, Mt Kozja Stena, Mt Sinji Vrh, and finally Mt Kovk on the easternmost edge with the take-off site for paragliders and hang gliders. Through the lush canopy of the oak trees you can glimpse Mt Streliški Vrh and Mt Nanos to the east. On the south side and to the far left, over the houses of Britih, the gaze stops at one of the oldest churches in the Vipava Valley. St Paul's Church was built in the 13th century, and restored in 1389. In the distance to the west, you can make out the villages of the Lower Vipava Valley, and in fine weather even a part of the Friulian Plain.

Matija Vertovec

Matija Vertovec, who later became one of the most influential Slovenian 19th century technical writers, was born on 28 January 1784 in a hamlet called Jakulini, not far from the village Šmarje na Vipavskem. He was ordained as a priest in 1807 in Gorizia, later ministering in Vipava, Planina and Šent Vid (today Podnanos), where he died on 2 September 1851.

Vertovec made it his life mission to educate and provide moral and religious instruction to simple rural folk. This is what inspired his versatile opus. He was the first to use Slovenian to write about viticulture, winemaking and cellaring (*Vinoreja*, 1844), applied chemistry (*Kmetijska kemija*, 1847), astronomy (*Zvezdoslovje*, 1847) and general world history (*Obča povestnica*, 1863). In 1850, he published his sermon collection (*Shodni ogovori*) and a tiny but important booklet for winegrowers (*Sporočilo slovenskim vinorednikam*).

Literary historians have reason to believe that Vertovec gave Prešeren the idea to write *Zdravljica (Slovenian national anthem)*, and encouraged Peter Kozler to make the seminal Map of Slovenian Provinces published in 1853. Matija Vertovec was revered and respected in his lifetime for his professional efforts and concern for the common man, his plight and expectations.

5 Planina

From the Nabojs vantage point it only takes you a few minutes to get to the road for Dolenja Vas. First, you pass St Anthony's Chapel and continue through Kravija Dolina to the hamlet of Marci.

From June 1809 to April 1813, Matija Vertovec ministered in Planina. He taught locals about viticulture, winemaking and cellaring. He was the first person to systematically approach child education, and combat illiteracy among adults in this area.

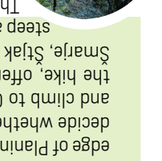
In Britih make a stop at St Cantianus's Church from 1631 with the altarpiece by famous painter Janez Wolf. Another interesting landmark is the old school building, now hosting the local community. Around 1750 it provided accommodation for the Carthusian Order.

Planina is home to the grape vine. According to legend, Romans first planted it on the site called Vine near St Paul's Church, from where it spread across the valley. It is the ideal place for the native Pinela variety described by Vertovec in his book Vinoreja (Winemaking). Planina is touted for its scrumptious fruit (apricots and cherries), chestnuts and turnip fermented in grape marc. The local homemakers are great at making tasty traditional dishes from these ingredients.

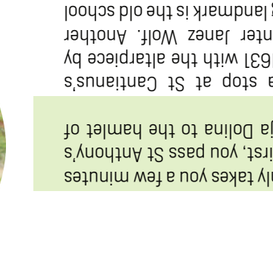
A special highlight of Planina are the underground depressions and caves that produce a peculiar sound as the wind passes through.

6 Ostri vrh

In the middle of the hamlet of Marci leave the asphalt road and turn left to the well-kept field path that runs along the south edge of Planina plain. Make a stop in Mali Dol near Jezerce, and decide whether you want to go right at Trešnik Pass (390 m) and climb to Ostri Vrh (422 m), which is the highest point of the hike, offering a scenic view over the villages of Gaberje, Šmarje, Šijak and the outskirts of Karst. If you're not a fan of steep ascents, skip the peak and continue downhill.



The trail takes you past Jezerce in Mali Dol, which used to be a watering hole – first for military horses and later livestock. This water catchment originates in the little forest surrounding the tiny lake ("jezerce"). Trešnik Pass is especially intriguing for fans of the distant geologic past as the area abounds with Eocene fossils such as nummulites, echinites, and fragments of ammonites and gastropods.



7 Potok

Return from Ostri Vrh to Trešnik Pass and descend the steep south slope. Turn right, i.e. to the west, next to the chapel shrine where the field paths intersect between the vineyards. Continue down the field path to the hamlet of Potok.

Due to their remoteness, these places played an important role during the National Liberation Struggle in WWZ. Historically, the area is famous for large rallies in which people loudly demanded the restoration of the region to the motherland. The most famous and high-profile rallies took place in June 1944. On 30 July 1944, this is where the largest rally of the National Liberation Struggle in the Primorska region took place, with around 6000 people voicing their support for returning the region to the motherland.

Matija Vertovec is one of the most prominent agricultural authors of the 19th century. The Matija Vertovec Society installed a plaque on his birth house, and put up an information board in front of the house.

8 Jakulini – birth place of Matija Vertovec

Turn left in the centre of the village of Potok, and follow the instructions on the info board. Crossing the meadow and creek, ascend the steep hill next to the vineyard to arrive in Jakulini, which is the birth place of Matija Vertovec.

9 Šmarje

Head down the road to Hrasčje. Just before you reach the village, turn right to the field path, cross the meadow and, when you're at the chapel shrine, turn left to the asphalt road. A hop, skip and a jump, and you're in Šmarje.

The whole central part of Šmarje is a cultural monument on account of its distinct architectural features. Take a stroll down the narrow alleys ("gase") spiraling around the Holy Name of Mary Church with frescoes by Simon Ogrin from 1883. There are other religious monuments peppered throughout the village such as monuments, chapel shrines, and an ornamented column which is located in the 19th century cemetery.

Villagers commissioned a bust of Vertovec in the village piazza in front of the church from acclaimed sculptor Mirsad Begić to pay homage to their compatriot on the occasion of his 150th death anniversary.

The foot of the village has a lovely rest area with a water fountain and info board for hikers for a relaxing timeout under the grape trellis. The adjacent building, which until recently used to be a school, hosts the Vertovec memorial room, and is the seat of the Matija Vertovec Society.

10 Vrtovče

Take the road from Šmarje to the village of Vrtovče situated on the road connecting Vipava Valley and Branica Valley. Turn right and uphill in the village centre to the hamlet of Lisjaki, and from there take the old scenic path descending gradually to Tevče.

Located in the sharpest bend of the road Šmarje–Vrtovče is a water basin and reservoir that collects the water from Prelo Creek. The name goes back to the local washerwomen and their habit of doing laundry in the creek. Nearby is a fascinating fossil site with a fragment of the ancient sea bed.

In Vrtovče you can take in the unforgettable view of the peaks of the Trnovo Plateau, and the central part of Vipava Valley including Ajdovščina and Vipavski Križ. Amazing views will accompany you for a good stretch of the trail down to Tevče.

11 Tevče

From Lisjaki head down to the village of Tevče to cross the "invisible border" just before the village.

It is marked by an ancient provincial boundary stone. The "invisible border" between Goriška and Kranjska Province separated Vipava Valley for centuries, making life difficult for the population. Today, it marks the border between the cadastral municipalities of Planina and Šmarje. The village of Tevče comprises three hamlets – Gorjani, Vidmarji and the biggest of the three Tevče – and offers fine views of Vipava River. The village sits at 170 m above sea level, and has been an important traffic route between the valley and the west part of the hills around Vipava, i.e. between Vrtovče and Šmarje. Today, Tevče is touted for its chestnuts and wine.

12 Uhanje

Continue your hike down the field path descending to the hamlet of Uhanje (75 m) to arrive at the lowest point of the hike.

The Ključ junction is an amazing findspot of rare corals and other Tertiary fossils, even the world-first specimen of the *Bacorella vipavica*, a coral named after Vipava Valley and its discoverer Stanislav Bačar. Vipava River used to be full of clapping watermills; the longest operating one was Dolnji Mlin Mill in the downstream stretch of the river. Uhanje's local lore features a legend about the band of Greek heroes called the Argonauts. The story was also retold in the eponymous book by Radivoj Rehar (Argonavti, 1943). It was allegedly in Uhanje where the heroes and their ship fell into an ambush on Vipava River set up by the locals, barely escaping with their lives.

13 Ustje

In Uhanje cross the bridge to the right bank of Vipava River, and then turn right immediately and head east. The trail leads past the Hostage Memorial, through Ustje, and passes by the baroque-style St Just's Church consecrated in 1766. Enriched with new experiences, return to the starting point at the majestic oak tree.

The village of Ustje, surrounded with fertile fields and lush vineyards, has a cheqquered past. It was first mentioned in the 14th century volume called *Thesaurus ecclesiae Aquileiensis*. The remains of an ancient encampment next to St John's Church (1618) atop the hill, and folk narratives about a treasure hidden under the church threshold are just a part of the village's pulse. The village was heavily impacted by the tragic events of WW2. On 8 August 1942, Italian soldiers burnt it to the ground and killed eight hostages. And yet, the villagers soon returned to their charred homes to rebuild their lives and the village. The harrowing events were vividly described by local author Danilo Lokar in the short story *Sodni dan na vasi*.