



NATURE PARK VELEBIT



VELEBIT
Park prirode • Nature park





GENERAL INFORMATION ON VELEBIT NATURE PARK

Velebit is the largest Croatian mountain massif, covering an area of 2,274 km². It extends in a gently curved arch from north-west to south-east, between the Vratnik Pass and the Zrmanja Valley, at a length of 145 km. Its trunk is perpendicularly incised by passes, which is the basis for the customary division of this mountain chain into: the northern (between Vratnik and Veliki Alan), central (between Veliki Alan and Baške Oštarije), southern (between Oštarije and Mali Alan) and south-eastern (between Mali Alan and the Upper Zrmanja Valley) sections.

To the west it is clearly bordered by the Velebit Channel on the Adriatic Sea, while on the east by the Lika-Gacka plain. Its width varies from approximately 30 kilometres in the north, to only about 10 kilometres in the south. Despite its enormous appearance, it does not boast of any major elevations. Its highest peak, Vaganski vrh, has an elevation of only 1,757 m.



PROTECTION OF VELEBIT

Because of its specific relief, vegetation and landscape, individual narrower sections of Velebit have been set aside and placed under various forms of protection. In 1949, Paklenica National Park (102 km²) was established in the southern part of the mountain zone, while the most valuable portions of Northern and Central Velebit were protected as strict and special reserves.

After it was inducted into the international biosphere reserve network in 1978 (UNESCO's "Man and Biosphere" Program), in 1981 the Croatian Parliament decided to proclaim all of Velebit a nature park. In 1999 the Northern Velebit National Park (109 km²) was proclaimed in the northern section of the mountain chain. This park encompasses the Hajdučki and Rožanski Crests Strict Reserve, the Zavižan-Balinovac-Velika kosa Special Botanical Reserve, and the Velebit Botanical Gardens in the north, and the Štirovača special forest vegetation reserve in the central Velebit zone.

Because of this, Velebit can today rightfully be called the PARK OF NATIONAL PARKS.

The natural monuments of Velebit also include the most valuable speleological site in Croatia for both researchers and tourists: the Cerovac Caverns (Southern Velebit), and many caves and shafts, and a series of major geomorphological (Kiza, Tulove grede, Stapina crest, etc.) and hydrological sites (the spring and source of the Zrmanja, Krupa and Krnjeza Rivers).

CLIMATE

Velebit is located at the meeting point between two climatic zones: the Mediterranean and Alpine/Dinaric. This is an area in which air currents from the inland continental zone clash with those from the Adriatic Sea. This is why the climate in this region varies drastically over short distances, beginning with the sub-Mediterranean climate in the Velebit Channel to the mountain climate on Velebit's peak belt and the continental climate on the Lika plateau. The climate is harsher in the north-west than it is in the south-east.

The most specific characteristic of the entire region is the well-known north-eastern wind, the bora, which blows down from Velebit onto the Adriatic Sea.



REGIONS – ZONES

Owing to its diversity, Velebit extends over the three major landscape zones of the Republic of Croatia.

The western edge of Velebit is in the Kvarner-Velebit region, extending along the Adriatic coast. Here rocky terrain is the norm. From this point, the mountain offers a unique view of the Adriatic Sea.

Its eastern edge extends into Lika like a rampart covered with age-old stands of beech and fir forests.

The peak zone of Velebit is characterized by a high mountain relief and transitional vegetation. The exceptional wealth of its karst “sculpture” and rocky formations (barren limestone peaks) that constantly alternate with small forested dales (called *dulibe*) and mountain meadows (*padeži*), including bare rocky terrain in the southern section of Velebit, are the principal features of Velebit’s peak zone.

KARST PHENOMENA

Velebit is an integral part of the high karst of the Dinaric carbonate platform which, all along the coastline, borders with the Adriatic carbonate platform, and which together form the common Dinaride zone. Velebit has the characteristic morphology of an underground terrain. The crests, canyons, fields, rifts, caverns, caves and other karst formations that developed under the influence of tectonic forces and the action of water give this mountain its specific charm. Diverse habitats can be found in the territory of Velebit. According to the CORINE classification, there are 89 different habitats in Velebit’s territory, which is 75% of all habitats in Croatia.

The principal habitat types are:

- Various forest habitats
- Stone and karst gradients covered with underbrush and low vegetation
- Mountain meadows and pastures
- Dry meadows and stone ground meadows
- Crests
- Cliffs
- Rivers
- Peat bogs
- Caverns
- Subterranean habitats.



BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

A combination of natural circumstances have created diverse habitats that are home to a large number of Croatian and Velebit endemic species and surviving ancient plant and animal life. The core of Velebit's endemic species emerged under the aegis of rocks and gullies, in southern Europe's remaining peat bogs, in thousands of karst formations (caverns, swallow-holes, sink-holes, limestone fissures, pits, cliffs and ravines) and waterways with unique living communities in the travertine waterfalls of the Zrmanja, Krupa and Krnježa Rivers.

When speaking of endemic species, the as-yet unexplored karst subterranean zones are significant, as new species are continually discovered during ongoing research.

FLORA

The plant life is exceptionally abundant: approximately 1854 plant species are present, and 79 of them are endemic. There is a notable number of endemic plant species, such as the Velebit degenia (*Degenia velebitica*), the Croatian sibiraea (*Sibiraea croatica*), the Velebit bellflower (*Campanula velebitica*) and others. The Park's territory is distinguished by a large number of plant communities with remarkable high-elevation zone variations. The vegetation of this territory can be classified as forest, meadow and rocky and stone terrain plants.

Going from the sea toward the Lika side, there is an alternating procession of thorn-bushes, oak and oriental hornbeam forests and underbrush, oak and hop hornbeam forests, black pine forests, coastal beech forests, juniper and mountain pine forests, sub-alpine spruce forests, mountain spruce forests, Dinaric fir forests, Dinaric beech and fir forests, beech forests and sessile oak and common hornbeam forests.



CEROVAC CAVERNS

The **Cerovac Caverns** are certainly the most important speleological site not only of Velebit but all of Croatia. The complex consists of 3 caverns (Lower, Central and Upper) with a total of 4 km of explored passages. The first 700 m of the Lower and Upper Caverns can be visited by tourists.

These caverns are exceptionally rich in artefacts from the distant past. Besides the large quantities of archaeological artefacts, the caverns are also one of the largest sites of cave bear remains in Croatia. Thus, even today the traces of the “polishing” of the cavern walls by the bears as they passed through them can still be seen.

The constant dripping of water indicates the continuation of the millennial process of stalagmite/stalactite formation. This is why it is vital that when we enter the caverns we respect these natural processes and refrain from touching any of these decorative features. Only one ill-conceived move of the hand can interrupt a process that otherwise lasted for decades.

The caverns can be visited from April to November with prior notification, and also during the winter months provided that it is a group of 10 or more persons.

How to get there: The *Cerovac Caverns* are located 4 km from Gračac on the road leading to Knin. If you come by motorway, take the Sveti Rok exit. The distance from Sveti Rok to Gračac is 25 km.

FAUNA

The wildlife is also diverse. The centuries-old Velebit forests of beech and fir trees are home to significant populations of large game (wolves, bears, lynxes and wildcats). Among the bird species on Velebit, particularly notable are the capercaillie, hazel grouse, golden eagle, various species of owl and woodpecker, and numerous characteristic mountain species. The Park is also home to many species of reptile, particularly on the coastal side, home to Croatia’s best-known protected venomous snakes, the horned viper and the common adder.

Numerous types of butterflies also live in the Park, generally from the Nymphalidae family. Many of these species are threatened, and thus registered in the Croatian Red List of Butterflies and the European Red List of Butterflies.



ZAVRATNICA

If you are planning an outing in which you expect to discover a new and fascinating destination, then you must visit Zavratica – a “significant landscape” and one of the loveliest coves on the Croatian coast. Zavratica was formed when a valley with high canyon cliffs (ca 100 m) was flooded. The cove is approximately 900 m long, and its width varies from 50 to 150 m. It emerged in Cretaceous layers which, due to their fragmentary nature, form numerous rockslides that had to be stopped with support walls, and planting of trees and bushes. A total of 129 plant species have been registered in Zavratica, of them 100 autochthonous and 29 allochthonous species.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a trail at the top with a viewpoint was built, as well as a path to the sea. It was at this time that Zavratica became the hideaway summer resort of the elite from Vienna and Prague. The azure shades of the sea in the cove contrast with the grey tones of Velebit’s stones, the greenery of the meagre vegetation and the dark clouds and shadows of trees which move along only parts of the path during the summertime. It is no wonder that not even renowned Croatian writer Vjenceslav Novak could resist the beauty of Zavratica, which provided the inspiration for his works.

How to get there: You can reach Zavratica from Jablanac, a ferry port for the island of Rab, in a half-hour hike on a seaside trail. If you have an adventurous mountaineering spirit, you can reach the cove on a trail from the village of Zavratica.

DABRI AND DABARSKI KUKOVI

Geomorphology and landscape-wise the most interesting part of Central Velebit, *Dabri* are a range of karst depressions – fields and dolenes of which three are called *Dabri* (Crni Dabar, Ravni Dabar, Došen Dabar), and three *Dulibe* (Došen Duliba, Bačić Duliba and Crna Duliba).

All *Dabri* and *Dulibe* were once inhabited and cultivated. Some of the few permanent settlements in Velebit, people lived here from the retreat of the Turks all the way into the 1970’s. Towering above them are Dabarski Kukovi, considered the most beautiful karst peaks of Central Velebit and one of its most recognizable landmarks. The area of Dabri and Dabarski Kukovi stretches along the central part of the Velebit range, from Bačić-Kuk, opposite the Budakovo Hill in the northwest, to do Ljubičko Hill and its associated peaks above Oštarije in the southeast, some 10 km as the crow flies.

The area near Ravni Dabar is a designated **alpinist zone** where sports climbing is allowed on following rocks (karst peaks): Visibaba/Agin Kuk, Čelina Kuk and Rujičin Kuk.

How to get there: On the Baške Oštarije-Karlobag road turn-off after 8 km toward the village of Ledenik and then continue for 5 km on a macadam road headed toward Štirovača.



VELEBIT'S HISTORIC ROADS

Velebit has always connected coastal parts with Lika inland into a unique economic, cultural and historical complex. Its roads were used for trade and circulation of various merchandise. For this purpose, traffic connecting was extremely important since antique until nowadays.

For the purposes of economy, trade and traffic development, the Habsburg Monarchy built a few very important roads over Velebit in 18th and 19th century. Road constructors were distinguished by exquisite skilfulness, so that most of these roads are, with some reconstruction being carried out, functional even nowadays.

The reconstructed Velebit roads were a great achievement in road construction technology at the time they were built, because their roadway had a stone bed, large rocks on the edges, massive supporting pillars, good drainage and complementary objects below the road's body, while their width varied between four and six metres. Road metal was essential in order to preserve the roadway from the devastating effects of rainfall and strong winds. Otherwise, the road would have been destroyed in no time.

Due to its preserved state and historical value, some of these roads are enlisted as part of the *Croatian cultural heritage*.

THE THERESIANA ROAD

The Theresiana was one of the major roads constructed over the passes of Velebit to facilitate commercial traffic between the coast and the interior.

The Theresiana Road was constructed in 1786 to better link the regimental headquarters of the time in Gospić with the free port of Karlobag, and to replace the existing Caroline Road, which was becoming increasingly more difficult to traverse due to its sharp curves and steep grades. The order to construct this new, more modern road was issued by the Austrian emperor of the time, Joseph II. The road was named after his mother Maria Theresa. Construction was entrusted to Military Frontier officer Filip Vukasović, later the renowned builder of the Louisianne Road from Karlovac to Rijeka.

The Theresiana Road was enlisted as part of the *Croatian cultural heritage* in 2007. In the interest of informing as many people as possible of the cultural importance of the Theresiana Road, the Velebit Nature Park Public Institution organized a part of the Theresiana as a **learning trail**. The trail is intended exclusively for pedestrians, and it is particularly interesting because the 3 km of the trail pass through both faces of Velebit in all of their beauty.

How to get there: The learning trail begins in Baške Oštarije (924 m above sea level), behind the old school, and ends at the village of Konjsko (650 m above sea level). Open to pedestrians only.



PREMUŽIĆ TRAIL

The peak zones of Northern and Central Velebit are connected by a 57 km long mountain trail. It is named after its designer, Ante Premužić, a renowned maker of paths and trails on Velebit. The trail made it possible to reach even the most inaccessible and beautiful parts of Northern Velebit, until then known to only a small number of local residents. The construction of the trail took only three years (1930-1933). Works were carried out by numerous residents of villages on and at the foot of Velebit.

Since it does not have many major inclines, it can be traversed by people with less hiking experience. They can find refuge and a place to rest in several mountain shelters located near the path. The trail is considered a masterpiece in terms of the quality of its construction and manner in which it fits into the local environment. These were the reasons why Premužić Trail was enlisted as part of the *Croatian cultural heritage* in 2009.

A part of the trail from Zavižan to Alan, at a length of 16 km, passes through Northern Velebit National Park, and it has been renovated and organized as a learning trail.

How to get there: Depending on where you want to begin your tour of the Premužić Trail (Baške Oštarije or Zavižan), you can contact the management of Velebit Nature Park (Kaniža gospićka 4b, Gospić) or Northern Velebit National Park (Krasno bb, Krasno) for more detailed information.

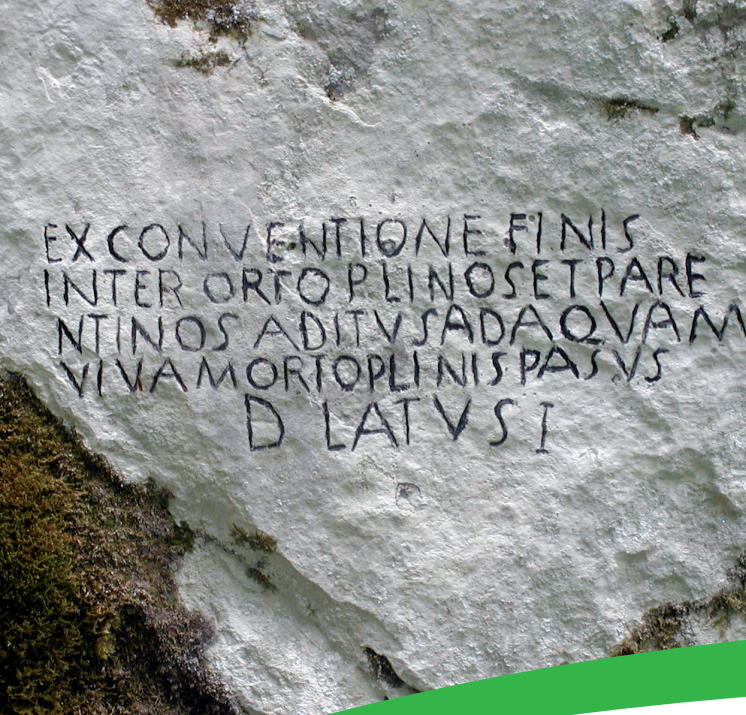
THE “MASTER’S ROAD”

Another historic Velebit road, included in Croatia’s **cultural heritage list** (2007), is the so-called **Master’s Road** (*Majstorska cesta*).

The construction of this trans-Velebit road on the route **Sveti Rok – Mali Alan – Obrovac** began in 1825 with the intention to shorten the passage to Dalmatia. This road marked the beginning of independent professional work of the renowned Croatian mountain road builder **Josip Kajetan Knežić**, a Frontier officer.

Spanning 41 kilometres, the construction of the road was completed in 1832 when it was officially opened as the Master’s Road (*Majstorska cesta*). This name marked the skill with which Knežić constructed its route along the steep Velebit slopes with numerous serpentine curves, between the gorges and the rugged rocky peaks, which all represented a breakthrough achievement in road construction of his time. The maximum road inclination of 5.5% is compliant even with modern-day standards of road construction. This new Velebit cross – mountain road was from the start an important trade and postal route between Vienna and Zadar.

It runs near the significant geo-morphological site of **Tulove Grede**, a prominent group of vertical limestone ridges, peaks and towers.



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VIVA MORTOPLINIS PASVS
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LIFE ON VELEBIT

For centuries, cattle-raising was the main source of subsistence of Velebit communities. Summer drought and shortage of water forced the herdsmen from Lika and the coastal regions to drive their herds to the mountain dwellings in Velebit. Here they tended to their cattle, cultivated the fields, mowed the grass and prepared hay and timber for the autumn descent from the mountain.

From ancient times, the Velebit herdsmen were well aware of the importance of sharing the mountain as testified by the pre-Illyrian pasture boundary stones. Despite this, conflicts were frequently provoked by violation of established boundaries. To resolve this issue, an agreement was reached whereby herdsmen from the coastal region were allowed summer pasture on Velebit (from July to September), while herdsmen from Lika were allowed winter pasture in the coastal regions (from October to April). Thus both groups were able to sustain their cattle in harsh conditions. Related to the life of Velebit herdsmen is also the ancient Roman epigraphic monument found in the vicinity of Kosinjski Bakovac – the so-called **Pisani Kamen** (Inscribed Stone). The Latin inscription carved in the rock deals with the resolution of a dispute over water rights between two Iapodic tribes, the Orthoplinae and the Parentines.

The half-nomadic cattle breeding no longer exists and the Velebit pastures now lie empty. The only reminders of the nomadic way of life are the **summer abodes**, in places still very well preserved.

TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

The Velebit region has its unique and original folklore architecture which is very simple and adjusted to the region's main source of subsistence – cattle-raising (dry stone walls, shepherd's abodes). External influences have never played a big role here, because isolation forced the inhabitants of Velebit to rely on their own devices.

Dry stone walls were created by clearing tracks of harsh, rugged land and involved skilful stacking of stones atop each other without the use of any binding material. Dry stone walls are valuable not only for their cultural and historical importance, but also as habitats for diverse plant and animal species. Most of the **Velebit abodes** are rectangular in shape and were built in stone using the dry stone technique. The highland dwellings consist of a single room with no windows and have a fireplace and a roof supporting post in the middle. Built next to them were cattle-pens.

Traditional architecture of Velebit is also reflected in the construction of **sacred buildings**. Most churches and chapels in Velebit were built in much the same way as shepherd's abodes – as single-room structures. Construction of churches in Velebit was connected to important moments in the life of the shepherds' community. This tradition is still maintained in some places where vows are taken at ruined church altars.



MIRILA

Mirila are funeral stone monuments to be seen on Velebit passes and along mountain paths leading to the coast.

They are related to the seasonal life on the mountain and were part of the funeral procession in which the body of the person who died in the mountain was carried down the mountain to the cemetery of the respective coastal parish. The funeral procession was allowed to make a stop to rest and lay the body on the ground only in special designated places – the so-called *mirila*, the first resting place on the way from the deceased person's home to the cemetery. Once laid on the ground, the body's length would be measured and the measure taken marked with two stone slabs and subsequently a *mirilo* would be erected in this spot. For the inhabitants of Velebit *mirila* were memorials for the deceased and were considered more important than the cemetery, because they believed that the grave contains only the body without the soul, while the soul stayed behind at *mirilo*.

In December 2007, a decision by the Croatian Ministry of Culture declared the funeral customs connected to *mirila* as a **non-material cultural heritage**.

How to get there: In the vicinity of Starigrad-Paklenica there are two **learning trails** that include a total of 8 mirilo sites. The first trail lies 1 km from the centre of Starigrad-Paklenica, and the other is located near the village of Ljubotić (Adriatic highway exit at Tribanj-Krušćica).

VISIT US

The beauties of Mount Velebit will leave nobody indifferent and once you visit this mountain, you are sure to return. Diverse visit options – from rocky mountain summits to underground caves, from karst rivers to sea coves – guarantee an unforgettable experience.

The best way to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of Velebit is to visit our **learning trails**, either on your own (using the interpretation boards) or with a **professional guide**.

Those who prefer **active holidays** may choose among countless mountain trails and paths. Climbing and hiking can be combined with other activities such as cycling, alpinist activities or visits to speleological sites. You may also take a canoeing or rafting trip to explore the karst beauties, the river Zrmanja and the river Krupa. Also, a number of rivers and lakes within the Park are suitable for fishing and offer relaxation and rest from the stressful life.

To find out more about the complete **tourist offer** of the Velebit Nature Park, visit the web site: www.velebit.hr

For any further details, please do not hesitate to contact us directly!



RULES OF CONDUCT

Velebit Nature Park is a natural area protected by law. To preserve the biological, geological and cultural authenticity of the protected zone, visitors are kindly asked to cooperate with Park staff and to observe the following rules of conduct:

- Do not damage trees or branches, do not pick flowers or other plants;
- Do not frighten, disturb, catch, hunt or kill any animals;
- Do not carry any weapons;
- Do not damage nests or animal dens;
- Do not camp or light fires in places not set aside for camping;
- Maintain the order and cleanliness of the Nature Park and dispose of any litter at designated sites;
- Do not pollute water and springs;
- Do not damage protected cultural monuments;
- Filming or taking photographs for commercial purposes are allowed only with the approval of the Nature Park.



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Publisher: Velebit Nature Park Public Institution
Photos by: Velebit Nature Park Public Institution archive
Text authors: Ivana Svetić, Ivan Tomljenović
Design by: Bestias Dizajn d.o.o.