THE KRKONOŠE MTS. NATIONAL PARK

The Magic of the Krkonoše Mts.

KRKONOŠSKÝ NÁRODNÍ PARK
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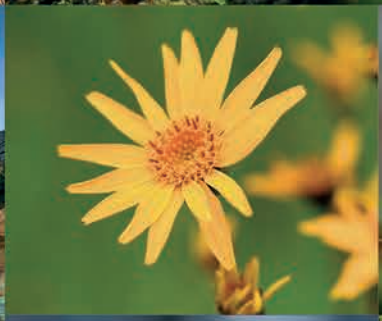







Krkonoše in numbers

Area: 639 km² (the Czech side of the Krkonoše Mts. – 454 km², the Polish side of the Krkonoše Mts. – 185 km²)

Elevation: 400 – 1 603 m a. s. l.

Highest mountain: Sněžka (1 603 m a. s. l.)

Climate: wet, cold, highly variable, average annual temperature between +6 and 0 °C, 800–1 600 mm of precipitation, 150–300 cm of snowpack, the mountain ridges have snow cover 180 days a year

Main rivers: Labe, Bílé Labe, Úpa, Jizerka, Jizera, Mumlava, Kamienna, Wrzosówka, Podgórna, Łomnica and Jedlica

The best known waterfalls: Labský, Pančavský, Mumlavský, Úpský, waterfalls of the Pudlava, Szklarka, Wrzosówka, Podgórna river, waterfall of the Kamieńczyk

Geological composition: granite, gneiss, schists, phyllite, quartzites

Vegetation zones: sub-mountain (480–800 m a. s. l. – deciduous and mixed mountain forests) • mountain (800–1 200 m a. s. l. – spruce forests, mountain meadows) • lower alpine (1 200–1 450 m a. s. l. – dwarf pine shrubs, peat bogs, grassy tundra and glacial cirques) • upper alpine (1 450–1 603 m a. s. l. – stony and lichen tundra)

Main trees and shrubs: Mountain Pine, Silver Birch and Carpathian Birch, European Beech, European Ash, Sycamore Maple, Silver Fir, Rowan, Grey Alder, Norway Spruce

Number of flowering (vascular) plants: over 1 200 species

Most famous of them: Willow Gentian, Sudetic Rowan, Alpine Hawkweed, Alpine Pasquefl ower, Golden Cuinquefoil, Cloudberry, Dwarf Primrose, Narcissus Thimbleweed, Mattgrass, Tussock Cottongrass, Mountain Pansy, Bohemian Bellfl ower, Alpine Lousewort

Number of vertebrates: over 320 species, 60 species of which are mammals common to the area, 278 species are breeding or migrating birds

Most famous of them: Roe Der, Red Deer, Badger, Fox, Pine Marten, Beech Marten, Wild Boar, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Crossbill, Black Grouse, Buzzard, White Wagtail, Grey Wagtail

Most prominent phenomena of inanimate nature: glacial cirques, trogs and moraines, tors, frost-sorted soils, cryoplanation terraces, periglacial talus, avalanches and landslides, waterfalls, evorsion bowls, peatbogs

National parks: established in 1963 on the Czech side, on the Polish side in 1959

Krkonoše Mts. National Park (KRNAP) Administration: Dobrovského 3, 543 11 Vrchlabí, Czech Republic

Karkonosze Mts. National Park (KPN) Administration: ul. Chalubińskiego 23, 58–570 Jelenia Góra-Sobieszów, Poland KRNAP Adm.

Information Centers: Vrchlabí, Pec pod Sněžkou, Špindlerův Mlýn, Harrachov

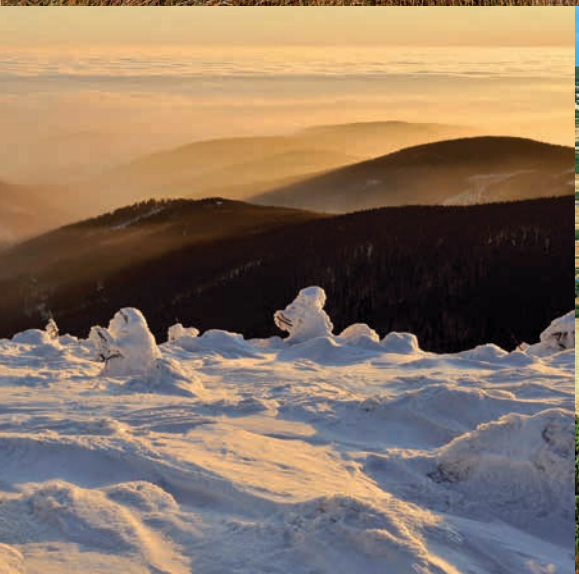
KPN Adm. Information Centers: Sobieszów, Szklarska Poręba, Karpacz, Domek Myśliwski

Annual number of visitors to Krkonoše: 3,8 million on Czech side, 2,5 million on Polish side

Network of tourist trails: Czech side – 800 km of summer and winter marked trails on Czech side, 230 km on Polish side.

Ridges and valleys

The Krkonoše Mts. stretch for a length of almost 30 km from in a northwestsouth-east direction and form a natural border between the Czech Republic and Poland. In higher elevation, there are two ridges clearly visible – the Slezský hřbet Ridge, or border ridge, which runs along the state with Poland, and the Český hřbet Ridge, or inner ridge. Between these ridges, close to the Luční bouda and Labská bouda chalets, there are two large plateaus (called etchplains) with sub-arctic peat-bogs, dwarf pine shrubs and Nardus grasslands. In the southern direction, both ridges fork into smaller ones; mountain rivers formed deep and narrow valleys covered by forests. The northern, Polish side of the mountains, built mostly from granite, falls down by steep and short slopes from the Slezský hřbet ridge into the extensive Jelenia Góra basin.



Krkonoše climate

The Krkonoše Mts. are high mountains, our highest in fact, and also very cold, wet and windy. They have the harshest climate of all the Central European mountain ranges. Every visitor has probably experienced the difference between the comfort under the mountains and the harsh climate high up on the ridges. The combination of elevation, fog, low temperature and strong wind is fairly dangerous in the summer winter.

The mountain nature has adapted to the cold climate, which is resembles that of Northern Europe.

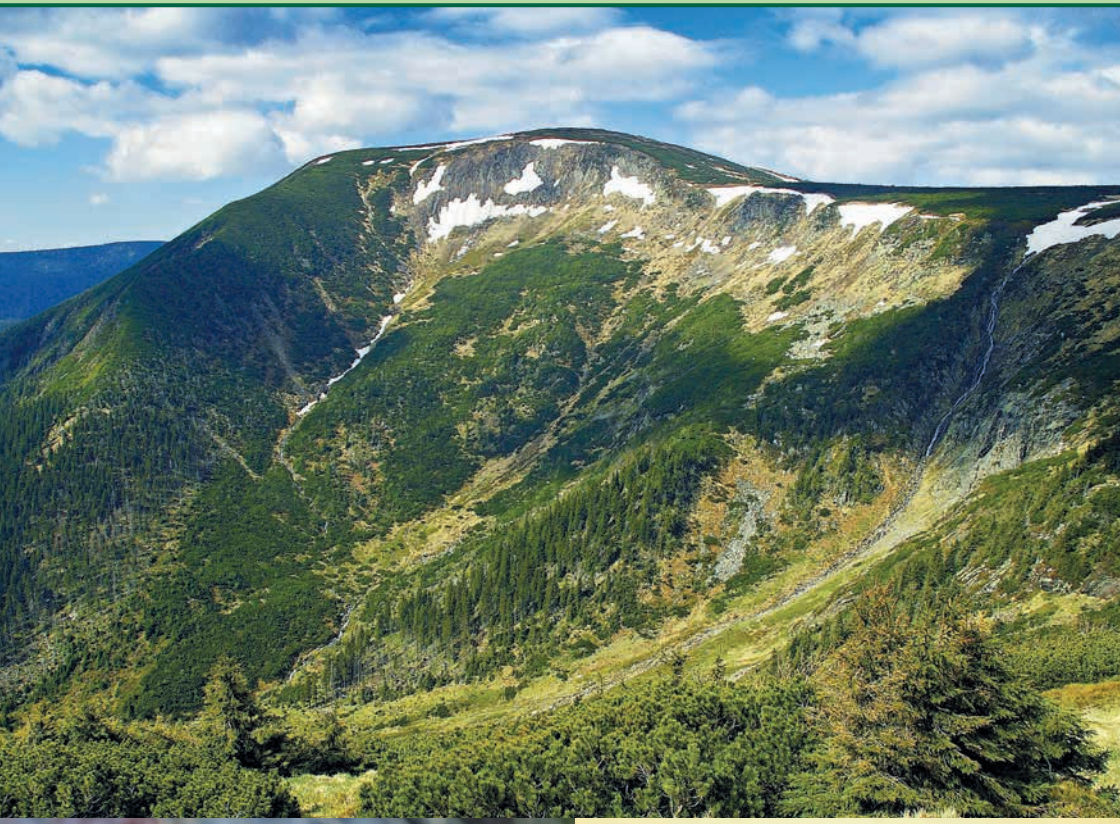
The respect of people for the local mountain nature is therefore justified. Underestimating the Krkonoše climate does not pay off. Even in the summer, we may be surprised in the Krkonoše Mts., for example, by the dense fog. It covers the ridges over 150 days a year. The pole markers along the trails are the best possible solutions in such conditions. The mountaineers have used and maintained these poles for at least 300 years.

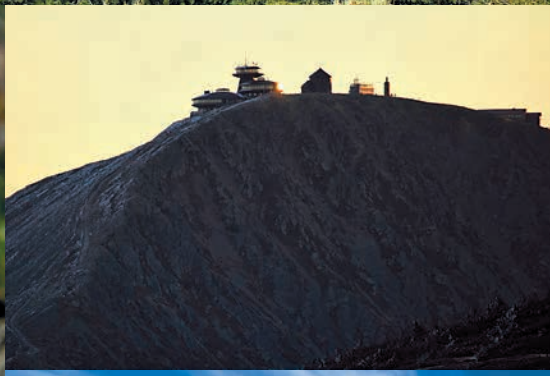
Mountains in winter

The excellent snow conditions in the Krkonoše Mts. attract lovers of various winter sports and tourism. Since the end of November till the end of April, the Krkonoše Mts. are covered by snowpack which can sometimes get up to 3 meters. The snow covered plains with the bizarre shapes of frost coated trees, snow ripples formed by violent winds on the slopes and mountain ridges, but also massive snow overhangs on the edges of glacial cirques, that fall into the valleys in spring in forms of avalanches – this is the image of the six months when winter reigns over the the Krkonoše nature. Even in June we can encounter striking firn beds, including the Map of the (Czechoslovak) republic. This is regularly formed on the south slope of Mt. Studniční hora and the height of snowpack over there can in some years exceed 15 meters. In good visibility, the Map of the republic can be seen from Hradec Králové up to 70 km away.

On the Summit of the Krkonoše Mts.

From an elevation of 1 603 metres a. s. l., visitors to the highest Krkonoše, but also Czech Mount, will enjoy incomparable views into the depths of the Obří důl Valley and distant views of the Czech and Polish foothills of Krkonoše. Long ago, the mountain glaciers and torrents modelled the tree-sided pyramid of Mt. Sněžka; this mountain, with its white snowy cap, has attracted the attention of the inhabitants from the surrounding lowlands since time immemorial. Mountaineers first climbed to its summit in the 13th century and later built the St. Lawrence chapel, tourist chalets and a meteorological station. The summit of the highest mount in the Krkonoše Mts., with its average annual temperature of only +0.2°C is one of the coldest and harshest places in Central Europe. Strong wind, fog and rainy weather, often also snow in the middle of summer, these are usual guides for tourists hiking several different routes that lead to the summit. On the opposite slopes of Mt. Studniční hora lie the mysterious Krakonošova zahrádka and Čertova zahrádka (Krakonoš garden and Devil's garden), with huge variety of mountain flora. If we direct our steps through the extensive mountain plateau towards the distant Luční bouda Chalet, we are surrounded for a while by the unique world of the Úpské rašeliniště peatbog which will closely remind us of the landscape in the far north of Europe.





Island of the Arctic in the middle of Europe

Anybody who has ever experienced a real blizzard by the chapel in the Modré sedlo Saddle, whether in winter or in summer, will understand why the Krkonoše Mts. have taken so many victims, even though they are a relatively small and low mountain range. However, that which ruins a nice trip for the visitors and maybe even endangers their lives, is quite common for the cryophilous inhabitants of the mountains from the realms of plants and animals. The nature of the Krkonoše Mts. so much resembles the tundra in the far north, that the highest Czech mountains have rightfully been described as an *island of the Arctic in the Middle of Europe*.

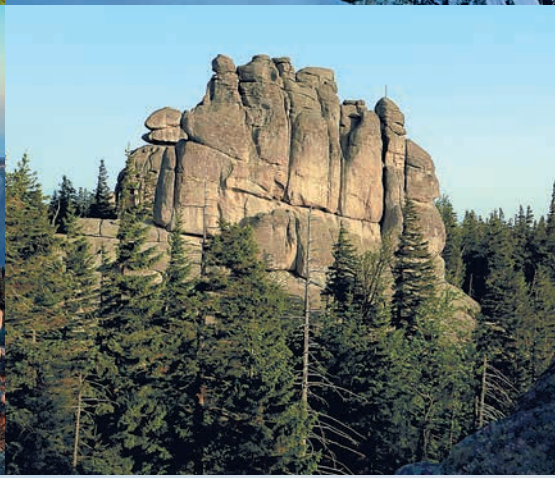
The mountain ridges, where cold and windy northern climate reigns, are covered with snow for more than 180 days per year and the average annual temperature does not climb higher than +6°C. This is the home of tenacious shrubs, grasses, mosses and frost-resistant lichens; it is a world of quaking peat bogs, rocky talus and deeply frozen soils, reformed into curious shapes by the frost and ice.

On the trail of ancient glaciers

The deep waters of two lakes on the Polish side of the mountains reveal the ancient history of Krkonoše. During the dramatic cooling of the northern hemisphere at the beginning of the Quaternary, the huge continental ice sheet spread from Scandinavia almost to the northern foot of Krkonoše. It was such cold (periglacial climate) in the surroundings of the ice sheet that local glaciers started to form on the slopes of the Krkonoše Mts. and they modelled the shape of the mountains as they were descending into the valleys. The upper parts of the ice filled valleys took form of deep, rock amphitheatres – glacier cirques – while the lower parts of the ice filled valleys took the form of trogs – rounded U-shaped valleys (e.g. Obří důl and Labský důl). On their journeys the glaciers deposited piles of rocks, sand and clay – glacial moraines – at many places in the valleys. In some places these blocked the valley so well that the water from melting ice and snow formed deep lakes. The Wielki Staw and Mały Staw glacial lakes on the northern slopes of the Krkonoše Mts., with depths of 7 and 24 metres, are such witnesses to the Ice Ages.

Rock castles on the mountain ridges

Frost, ice, water and wind modelled the non-glaciated mountain ridges and in many places these natural forces have left evidence of their vigour in the form of isolated and bizarrely fractured, loafshaped granite rocks – tors. They were formed in two geologically different periods – in tropical and dump climate of the Mesozoic and then in the frozen climate between Tertiary and Quaternary; they “emerged” from the terrain after the water and wind erosion had transported away the less resistant and more intensively weathered minerals down the valleys. A strange phenomenon of the tors served as an abundant source of inspiration for our ancestors in terms of naming them. The best known of them are the Pielgrzymy, Słonecznik (Polední kámen) near the Wielki Staw Lake, the Dívčí and Mužské kameny tors, Violík, Tvarožník, Harrachovy kameny, Kukaččí skály and many other dominant features on both of the main ridges of the Krkonoše Mts.



Slopes full of stones

The tallest slopes of the both main ridges in the Krkonoše Mts. are covered by prominent rock seas consisting of boulders of all shapes and sizes. Even from far away, they attract attention with their yellow and green colour, this is due to the dense growths of tiny lichen on the stones' surfaces. The dominant species is the Yellow Map Lichen, with its cracked surface really resembling a geographical map.

The boulder fields, called periglacial talus by experts, were formed under the rule of frost and ice, primarily in the ice ages many thousands of years ago. Rain water flowed deep into the cracks of the rocks in

the frosty foreground of the glaciers, where it repeatedly froze, during which its volume increased by one tenth and the ice wedges had no problems dealing with the rock. The surface of the granite or mica schists gradually disintegrated and broke up, and is still breaking up, into boulders of many shapes. This is how the distinctive stone seas and boulder fields were gradually formed. While granite, which is the main component of the Slezský (Hraniční) hřbet Ridge, disintegrates into more rounded boulders and the ridge therefore has a rounded appearance, the mica schists and quartzites which are the main components of Sněžka and the Český hřbet Ridge, weather away into small fragments with sharp edges. This can be well observed on the shape of Kozí hřbety Ridges or the Obří hřeben Ridge, which stands to the east of Mt. Sněžka.

Krkonoše glacial cirques

Even though Krkonoše have mostly round-shaped mountains, if we get into any of the fifteen Krkonoše glacial cirques – the cradles of ancient glaciers – we are surrounded by a true high mountain scenery of the rocky cliffs of Úpská jáma, Studniční jámy, jámy Rybníků, Kotelní jámy or Labské jámy. However, the most dramatic are the Śnieżne Kotły (Sněžné jámy), a pair of glacial cirques in the western part of Polish Krkonoše Mts. Wildly jagged granite cliffs tower over 200 meters off the ground and because the cirques are located on the shaded northern side of the mountains, the massive snow beds often lying at the foot of these steep rock walls until late summer are what gave the cirques their names. From the vantage points on the upper rim of the cirques we can recognise the pine scrub covered glacial moraines on the l oor of the Wielki Śnieżny Kocioł (Velká Sněžná jáma) and several small glacial lakes. A perceptive observer will surely realize the obvious difference in steepness and topography of the Polish and the Czech sides of the Krkonoše Mts. When we walk along the trails on the floors of both cirques we will feel like we are in the Tatra Mountains or in the Alps.

High on the slopes of the Mały Śnieżny Kocioł cirque, between the granite cliffs, we can find a dark coloured basalt vein which enriches the soil with minerals. No

guidebook will omit this natural wonder of the Krkonoše Mts. As opposed to other cirques, the Śnieżne Kotły (Sněžné jámy), do not contain any waterfalls; the nearest is the 27-metre-high Kamieńczyk waterfall near Szklarska Poręba, which, together with the Szklarka waterfall (with high more than 13 m), are among the most attractive waterfalls on the northern slopes of the mountains.

Kozí hřbety Ridges

The striking line of the mountain ridges above Svatý Petr will stay in the memories of visitors to this wellknown mountain resort. The strong winds in winter lay down such thick layers of snow on the leeward side of the sharp edges of the Kozí hřbety Ridges, that it is only a matter of time before the snow cornices start to move and fall towards the Důl Bílého Labe or Dlouhý důl valleys in the form of avalanches. The same happens on the slopes of Mt. Luční hora massif, the second highest peak of the Krkonoše Mts. (1 555 m a. s. l.) For your own safety, you should never underestimate this winter danger in the Krkonoše Mts. On the Czech and Polish side of the mountains, there are more than 100 places where avalanches are a common occurrence. Both access routes to the Luční bouda chalet are closed in winter due to danger of avalanches. Snow and avalanches are, apparently, of little concern to the shrubs of the Mountain or Dwarf Pine shrubs, the dense, dark-green growths of which fringe the boulder talus and precipitous rocky cliffs of the Kozí hřbety Ridges. The twisted, creeping trunks tell us a lot about the tenacity of these pines shrubs as they cope with the harsh conditions in the Krkonoše tundra. Hidden away in their branches, we can find many species of birds, small mammals and

active insects. One of them – the ground beetle Nebria rufescens is even a survivor from ancient Ice Ages. At that time the slopes of Kozí hřbety Ridges were covered by a permanent snow and ice fields and Dlouhý důl valley was formed by rapid streams as well as avalanches and landslides. It was as late as the 16th century before mountaineers reached these places, founded a settlement, and mined copper, silver and iron ores, and the appearance valley bellow Kozí hřbety Ridges slowly changed.

Mount Kotel

When arriving at Krkonoše, your attention will surely be focused on the view of the mountains, which can first be seen in all its glory at the village Horka u Staré Paky. The most beautiful view from here is in the springtime, when the background for the awakening spring nature is the towering and still snow-covered ridges of the highest Czech mountains. The dominant of Western Krkonoše is Mt. Kotel (1 435 m a.s. l.), into the south-eastern slopes of which ancient glaciers carved out the Velká Kotelní jáma and Malá Kotelní jáma, a pair of glacial cirques with diverse high-mountain nature.

You shouldn't miss the chance for a trek along the Masaryk Mountain Highway from Horní Mísečky, which is the best way to really experience wild character of the surrounding landscape. In nice weather, you can see far into the Česká kotlina Basin, where you might spot the ruins of the Trosky castle and then the massive of Mt. Ještěd in the west, a scenery of deep rocky cliffs of both Velká and Malá Kotelní jáma cirques, dark green dwar pine shrubs on the surrounding slopes, as well as ancient primeval beech forest in the Jizerka river valley. The Mechové jezírko – the only glacial lake on the Czech side of the mountains – is hidden

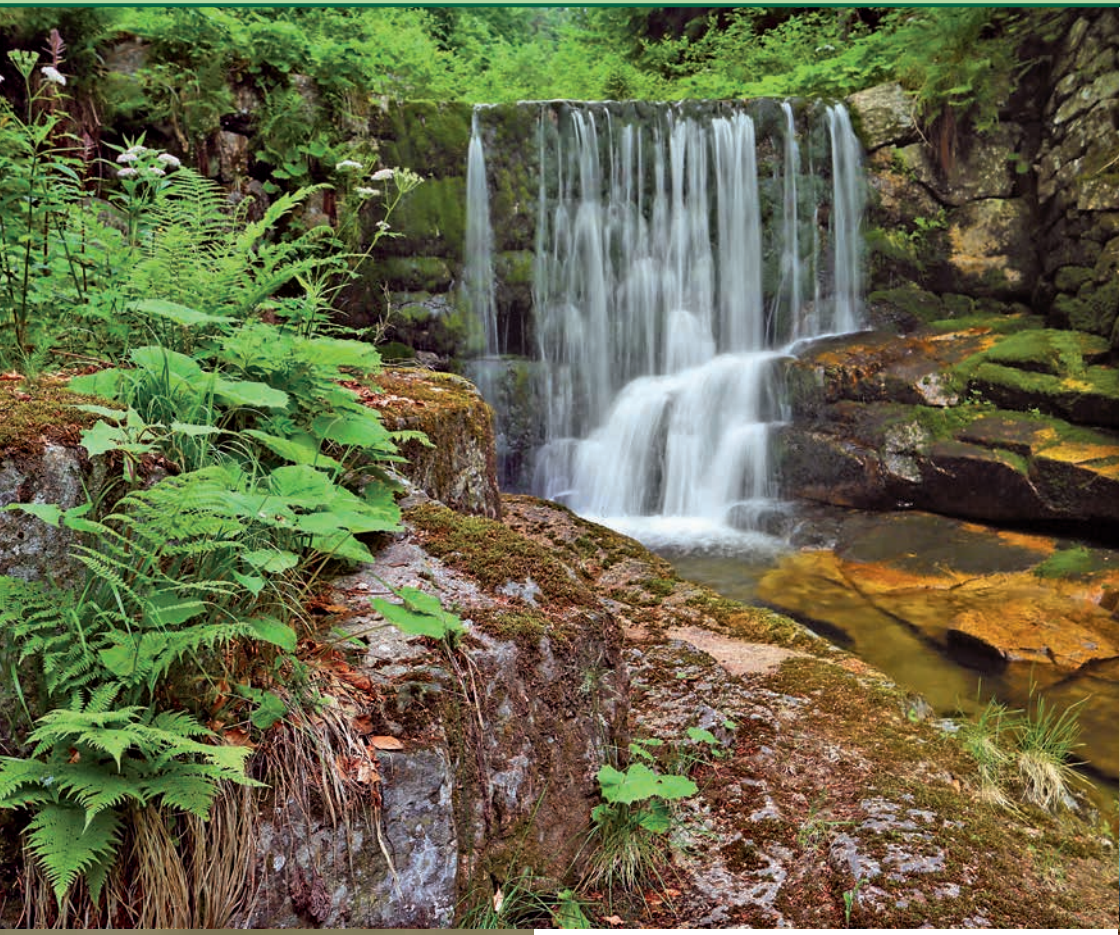
in the dense spruce forest. The two black silhouettes on the northern edge of the Velká Kotelní jáma cirque are witnesses to a much younger history. Close to the Vrbatova bouda Chalet stands the stone Hanč and Vrbata Monument, reminding us of the sporting tragedy during the international skiing races in 1913. The farther silhouette belongs to the Harrachovy kameny tors – a set of bizarre granite stones commemorating a busy geological history when frost, wind and ice modelled the highest ridges of the Krkonoše Mts.

By the spring of a great European river

In the middle of the plateau on the ridges of the Western Krkonoše Mts., at 1 386, 6 meters a.s. l., exists one of the pilgrimage place of these mountains – the spring of the greatest Czech river, the Labe. Each year, tens of thousands of tourists make the trip here, wanting to see the first few meters of the most famous of Czech rivers as well as the coats of arms of 28 largest towns which Labe passes through on its 1 062 km kilometre-long pilgrimage to the North Sea, of which 368 km are on the Czech territory.

Tourist trails lead from the Spring of the Labe to the Labská bouda Chalet or to the nearby rocky outcrop Violík (1 472 m a.s. l.), which rises above the Czech-Polish border.

Five centuries ago, one of the oldest regional salt trading routes, the Česká stezka Route, connecting Bohemia with Silesia, passed by the Spring of the Labe. In 1684, the Bishop of Hradec Králové, Jan of Talmberk travelled here, in order to consecrate the Spring of the Labe. The surrounding monotonous yellow-grey Matgrass meadows hide another notable feature of the Krkonoše Mts. – the Nordic peatbog on the Pančavská louka Meadow. In the ancient past, the Nordic tundra and its ambassadors, such as the tiny Cloudberry, Lindberg's bog-moss, Sudetic Lousewort or the dragonfly (*Aeschna caerulea*), spread here along the edges of the massive Scandinavian ice sheet. These species survive here to this day as witnesses to the ancient Ice Ages.

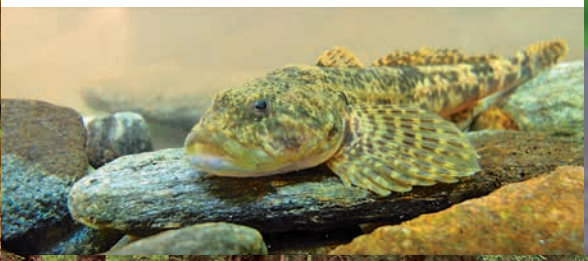


On the border between two seas

The deep forested valleys with boulderfilled river and stream beds – such is the rugged appearance of the Czech Krkonoše Mts. in places where Labe springs, but also at the springs of its main tributary Bílé Labe as well as Úpa, Jizerka or Mumlava rivers. Jizera is the only one which starts its winded journey on the peat bogs of the neighbouring Jizerské hory Mts. After just a few kilometers, near the town Harrachov, it joins with the Mumlava and passes through one of the most romantic river valleys of the Krkonoše Mts. – the Jizerský důl Valley.

Short, steep slopes of the Polish Krkonoše Mts. are drained by rivers Kamienna, Wrzosówka, Podgórna, Łomniczka, Łomnica and Jedlica. Their waters flow into the Baltic sea, whereas the rivers on the Czech side flow into the Northern sea. Thus, the Slezský (Hraniční) hřbet Ridge is the watershed between the Labe (Elbe) and Odra (Oder) river catchments.

Rivers and streams are home to many mountain animals and with a little luck and patience you can spot two treasures from the bird kingdom – the Dipper, which is a capable diver when looking for food, and the Kingfi sher. This bird patiently watches the activity of the small fish below them from a suitable spot and at the right moment turns into a swift fisher.



Krkonoše waterfalls

The waterfalls are like silver ribbons on the mountains slopes and are among the favourite tourist destinations. The Krkonoše Mts. have our richest collection of waterfalls of any of our mountain ranges. Both sides have several dozens of them – from the most well-known, such as the Labský, Pančavský and Mumlavský vodopád Waterfalls, the Kamieńczyk and Szklarka Waterfalls, to the less well known waterfalls, cascades and rapids on many mountain streams and creeks, which are often hidden in the forests.

The Malý Labský vodopád Waterfall, rapids and waterfalls on the Bílé Labe, Klínový potok Stream, in the Sedmidolí Valley, in the Modrý důl Valley, in the Těsný (Klauzový) důl Valley above the Spa Janské Lázně – these are just hints of where you can find natural scenery which is formed by the turbulent flowing waters of mountain streams in

places with variously resistant or stratified geological basements. Each of the waterfalls is an original creation giving evidence of the dramatic history of the Krkonoše Mts. Their names also explain a lot of their history in terms of discovering and describing these natural creations of our highest mountains – Luční, Kotlový, Balvanový, Tetřeví, Lavinový, Morénový, Štolový, Jelení kaskáda or Honzův vodopád. Unique surroundings of the waterfalls, rapids and rocky gorges are complemented in numerous places in Krkonoše by evorsion bowls, which are created by the swirling of small stones and grains of sand on the rocky riverbed. The largest numbers are on the Jizera River, while visitors to the Mumlavský vodopád Waterfall can also admire the evorsion bowls.

In the Krkonoše gardens

At the end of the longest glacier valley of the Krkonoše Mts. – the Labský důl, tourists will find unique scenery of the ock amphitheaters called the Harrachova jáma, Pančavská jáma and Navorská jáma Cirques. Long ago, they were the source of a massive glacier, which filled the Labské jámy Cirques to a depth of dozens of metres. Today their mountain-forming works are continued by the avalanches which regularly fall down the slopes of the cirques. These permanently forest-free avalanche runs were colonised by such diverse communities of shrubs, plants and animals that our ancestors came here to collect medicinal herbs, started to refer to these places in the Krkonoše cirques as gardens (e. g. Krakonošova zahrádka and

Čertova zahrádka in the Obří důl Valley). The richest natural locality of all on the Czech side of the mountains is situated here, in the Pančavská jáma Cirque, and its name Schustlerova zahrádka will always be remembered for one of the greatest Krkonoše researchers – the geobotanist František Schustler. He was the first one (in as early as 1923) to propose founding of the Krkonoše National Park. The most popular destinations include the Pančavský vodopád Waterfall, the silver waters of which fall over granite cascades from a height of 148 metres and join with the meandering Labe on the floor of the cirque. One kilometre downstream, the Labe is joined from the left by Pudlava – its 122 meters high system of waterfalls and cascades is often missed by the tourists, because it is partly hidden in the forest. However, you should defi nitely not miss an autumn visit to the Ambrožova vyhlídka near the Pančavský vodopád Waterfall. The views of the flood of coloured leaves on the twisted trees and shrubs on the steep avalanche slopes of the Labské jámy Cirques is one of the most beautiful images of the Krkonoše Mts.

In the gloom of the mountain forest

In clear weather the 1 033 m high Rýchory massif, which rises in the easternmost part of the Krkonoše Mts., offers wonderful views of the panorama of the whole of Eastern Krkonoše Mts. with the dominant pyramid of Mt. Sněžka. However, even if you get there under rainclouds or through fog, you will not come up short. Because that is the right time for a trip into the Dvorský les Forest – an old beech forest on the top of Rýchory massif. The twisted trunks of the old beech trees are witnesses of yearly battles between the primeval forest and strong winds and severe hoarfrosts. The existence of the beech trees at this elevation above sea level is a unique, in fact.

The torsos of these old trunks are covered by a carpet of mosses and polypores, numerous cavities also serve as hiding places for birds, including the Crossbill, Black Woodpecker, Spotted Woodpeckers and a variety of owls. Even before spring pulls its green canopy over the old beechwoods, hundreds of spring snowfl ake, anemone, fumewort and wild garlic flowers of light up their undergrowth.

Dvorský les Forest is sometimes called a primeval forest. The original forests of the Krkonoše Mts. may seem like this. However, Dvorský les itself, which was previously surrounded by mountain villages, some of which were abandoned, was formerly a grazing forest. It has gained its current „primeval" form since farming and forestry were terminated.

Spruce taiga

On our pilgrimage to the mountain ridges we will pass through the fresh green canopy of the montane beechwoods, then higher up the slopes we will be surrounded by the gloom of the primeval spruce forests, which will remind us of the Nordic taiga, thousands of kilometres away. It appears to be a poor world, because the kingdom of the spruce is only complemented by individual rowans or sycamores. The ground is only covered by a carpet of shadow-loving grasses, ferns and mosses. But the spruce taiga is full of surprises in the form of the various organisms; thus, the dimly lit silence is sometimes pierced by occasional sound of Crossbills, remarkable birds which mainly eat the seeds from spruce cones. The Black Woodpecker can find his food – the larvae of insects living under the bark of the tree – and inform us of their presence by the deep holes they leave in the trunks of old spruces. In the past, there were clumps of old man's beard lichens and hair lichens, which almost disappeared from the Krkonoše forests during the emission calamity. However, these sensitive indicators of clean air are slowly returning to the forests of the Krkonoše Mts. The montane spruce forests live their own

life, which also includes bark insects, especially the feared Eighttoothed Spruce Bark Beetle. However, even these beetles have their own place in the nature of the national park, so occasional dried out or dying spruce trees should not be seen as a sign of neglect. On the contrary, the nature, and not humans, should be the main manager and pick the best path for the forest.

Mysterious world of peatbogs

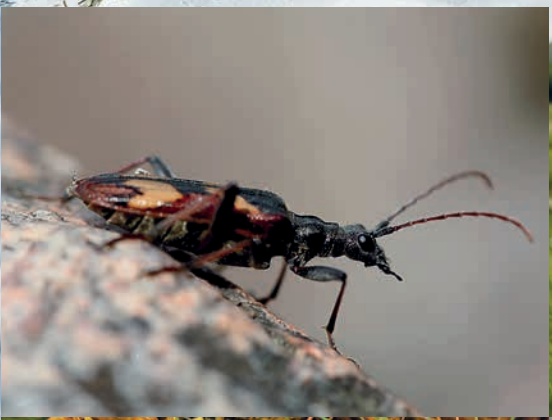
Mountains are not only steep slopes and rocky cliffs with wild torrents, but also flat depressions on the ridges, where rainwater accumulates and the quaking kingdom of bog-mosses spreads out. It is a world of darkly-coloured peatbog pools mirroring the white, downy fruits of Tussock Cottongrass. The deep peatbog which has formed over thousands of years amidst the spruce forest, on the flat saddle between Mt. Černá hora and Mt. Světlá hora at an elevation of 1 200 metres a. s. l., is a remarkable natural archive. This is because the old layers of brown-black, slimy peat can perfectly preserve pollen grains from various plant species, which provides experts with unique evidence of how our landscape

looked thousands of years ago. Even though the peatbog is strictly protected, there is an educational trail built around it which will show you a little part of the strange world of forest peatbogs. If you are lucky you may hear, or even see, the lekking Black Grouse. Visitors may also enjoy the view of a flood of white heads of Tussock Cottongrass or the miniature shrubs of the Bog Rosemary and Cranberry. Torsos of the old, dry spruces here are not evidence of the unfortunate effects of emission damage, but rather a real natural backdrop of a live peat bog, which does not give the trees much of a chance for a long-term survival. The wellknown Černohorský potok Stream also rises on the saddle, before flowing wildly down its dull, green rocky channel and forming the exceptionally romantic scenery of the Klauzový důl Valley. An autumn visit to this valley will provide us with extraordinary experiences while watching the kaleidoscopic galaxy of swirling leaves in the deep pools on the stream.

Kingdom of wind and frost on the mountain ridges

Humans are usually only short-term visitors to the mountain ridges and are able to cope with the hazards of the mountain climate. However, the permanent inhabitants of the lichen tundra had to be well prepared for the harsh life on the mountain ridges. The thalli of tiny mosses and lichens are able to survive even in strong wind and on the surface of the frozen soil. Yellow-fl owering hawkweeds protect themselves with dense growth of silver hairs on the surface of their leafs and stems and the roots and stems of the sparse clumps of grasses anchor themselves in the gaps between the rocks.

The world of two-, four-, six- and eightlegged animals is well hidden in the deep boulder talus or the only appear for a few short weeks at the peak of the mountain summertime. The rocky surface of the lichen tundra bears a unique signature of long-term effects of frost and ice, the two natural forces which have created wonderful stony pictures on the highest peaks of the Krkonoše Mts. in form of various stony polygons, furrows, solifluction mounds and cryoplanation terraces. The tundra of the Krkonoše Mts. is therefore much more reminiscent to the distant landscape of Scandinavia than the landscape of the Central European mountain ranges. Krkonoše are a real and unique island of the Nordic tundra in the middle of Europe and we would be hard-pressed to find their equal in the surrounding mountain ranges in Central Europe.



Log cabins and their inhabitants

Metre by metre, generations of our ancestors conquered higher and higher places in our mountains. After several centuries this was also refl ected in the appearance of Krkonoše. Man created a peculiar atmosphere of the landscape which is unique and unmistakable. Different landscape types surround us in the Alps, in the Šumava Mts. or in the Jeseníky Mts. The scenery of the Krkonoše Mts. is a distinctive mosaic of mountain forests and forest-free meadow enclaves with a colourful mosaic of flowers and with the attractive architecture of mountain buildings – the Krkonoše logbuilt chalets. Their visage emits modesty and humility, since the mountainous environment has infl uenced the day-to-day life of the mountaineers. The style of the log cabins, the placing of their windows and doors to be well protected against wind and snow, or the dormers with doors on the roof to ease the storing of hay, we can only be amazed at what perfect experts on the mountain nature our ancestors must have been, and at the preciseness with which they sited their houses on the slopes of the mountains. Even though there were many insensitive interventions into the architecture of the

Krkonoše mountain chalets, in many parts of Krkonoše the original historic buildings have remained and are deserving of our attention, and our care. This is the case in Valteřice, Štěpanice, Křížlice, in Mrklov, Benecko, Buřany, Paseky or on the Polish side in Borowica, Bukowec, Jagniątków, Michałowice or Sosnówka. In all these places, the culture heritage of our ancestors lives on and should set an example to us of the harmonic coexistence of humans with the mountain nature.

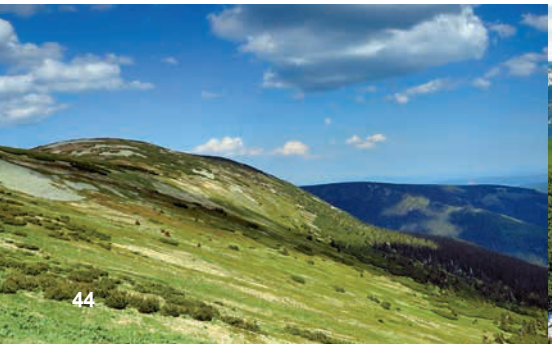
Inheritance from ancestors

Despite the rather small area and low elevation above sea level, the Krkonoše Mts. are among the most visited mountain ranges in Europe and its fame exceeds that of many higher mountain ranges with more illustrious names. It is a landscape with a natural diversity which is without parallel in the surrounding Central European mountain ranges. This is also a landscape with extremely rich history, culture and its own economic life, where tourism especially serves as the main source of income for the local inhabitants. But if tourism is to remain a truly perspective source of income, it must not change

the natural, historical or cultural values of Krkonoše. Therefore conserving of the attractive mountain environment does not only involve care for plants, animals or remarkable features created by wind, ice or water – the care for the natural treasures, which has been created without our infl uence for hundreds of thousands of years. It is necessary to care for the cultural heritage left for us by the generations of our ancestors. The mountain world is a rich treasure chest of stories, telling about a fragile and changeable relationship between humans and the mountain nature. It is always necessary to take from such a treasure chest in moderation and using our common sense.

National park on the border

The Krkonoše Mts. create a natural northern border between the Czech Republic and Poland. Since the year 1963 (since as early as 1959 on the Polish side), almost the entire mountain range – with an area of approximately 640 km² – (454 km² on the Czech side and 185 km² on the Polish side) has had the status of a national park. Thanks to its unique natural wealth, landscape beauty, easy access and wide offer of touristic and recreational options, this transboundary national park is one of the most visited in Europe. It is a mountain range full of testimony to ancient natural events, which formed this part of our continent. At the same time, the position of the Krkonoše Mts. in the middle of Europe predetermines, that step by step, humans conquered the mountain nature and changed its face, gradually turning the highest Czech mountains into a territory full of testimony to the mutual coexistence of humans and the mountain nature. In the true sense of the word, the Krkonoše Mts. represent the national cultural heritage of the Czech and Polish nations and the national park status and the bilateral UNESCO Biosphere Reserve are prerequisites for the preservation of such exceptional values.



THE KRKONOŠE MTS. NATIONAL PARK
The Magic of the Krkonoše Mts.

Issued by The Krkonoše Mts. National Park Administration in 2020
Text: © Jan Štursa
Photography: © Kamila Antošová, Petra Doležalová, Radek Drahný, Tomáš Koblížek, Pavel Musil, Zdeněk Patzelt, Ondřej Prosický, Richard Stehlík, Jan Vaněk

Printed on recycled paper.

ISBN 978-80-7535-096-1

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