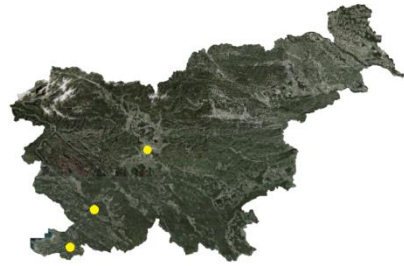


EXCURSION

To southwestern part of Slovenia

Monday, April 8, 2013



The Škocjan Caves UNESCO Natural Heritage

The Škocjan Caves Regional Park is situated in the Škocjan Karst, a vast flat landscape that lies at an altitude between 420 and 450 metres in the south-east of the Karst. The Caves are unique natural phenomenon, the creation of the Reka River. The Reka River springs from below the Snežnik plateau and flows some fifty-five kilometres on the surface. After reaching the Karst, that is the limestone surface, the river not only deepens its riverbed through erosion, but also by means of corrosion – it dissolves the limestone.

The first written sources on the Škocjan Caves date back to the 2nd century B.C. In 1689, the Slovenian scholar J. V. Valvasor described the sink of the Reka River and its underground flow. The systematic exploration of the Škocjan Caves began in the 19th century, with explorers reaching the banks of Mrtvo jezero (Dead Lake) in 1890. The last major achievement was the discovery of Tiha jama (Silent Cave) in 1904, when some local men climbed the sixty-metre wall of Müllerjeva dvorana (Müller Hall). The next important event took place in 1990, nearly 100 years after the discovery of Dead Lake. Slovenian divers managed to swim through the siphon Ledeni dihnik and discovered over 200 metres of new cave passages.



What distinguishes the Škocjan Caves from other caves and places them among the most famous underground features in the world is the exceptional volume of the underground canyon. The river flowing through the underground canyon turns north-west before the Cerkevnik Bridge and continues its course along the Hankejev kanal (Hanke's Channel). This underground channel, first explored at the end of the 19th century, is approximately 3.5 kilometres long, 10 to 60 metres wide and over 140 metres high. At some points, it expands into

huge underground chambers. The largest of these is the Martelova dvorana (Martel's Chamber); with a volume of 2.2 million cubic metres, it is considered the largest discovered underground chamber in Slovenia and one of the largest in the world. It is interesting to note that an underground canyon of such dimensions ends with a relatively small siphon: one that cannot deal with the enormous volume of water that pours into the cave after heavy rainfall, causing major flooding, during which water levels can rise by more than one hundred metres.

Another characteristic of the Škocjan Caves is the range of different stalactite formations, the best-known of which are the Rimstone Pools and some larger stalactites in the Great Hall, the most impressive being a giant stalagmite called the Giant. The Reka River flows underground for almost 40 kilometres and resurfaces at the springs of the Timava River in the Gulf of Trieste (Italy).

The Škocjan Caves and their surroundings were entered on UNESCO's list of natural and cultural world heritage sites in 1986.

Hrastovlje – The Church of the Holy Trinity



The Church of the Holy Trinity is a historical building in a small village Hrastovlje, which is surrounded with wine yards and situated in coastal region of Slovenia. There are two hypotheses about its origin. According to the first it is a Romanesque church from the 12th century and according to the second it is an example of the Istrian variant of Early Venetian Renaissance architecture from the 15th century. The church stands behind a wall that the local population built to protect itself from Turkish attacks in the 16th century. It was built mostly out of stone, as its typical for the entire Slovenian coastal region. It stands on bare rock and for this reason does

not have deep foundations. As a result of the local weather conditions it does not have many windows. In summer, a room with small window was protected from the sun, while in winter it was protected from the strong local wind bora (burja).

The church has been painted with Gothic frescoes by Janez iz Kastva (Johannes de Castua), who finished his work on 13 July 1490. Some of them include letters in Glagolitic script. They cover almost whole interior. The most famous of these frescoes is a **Dance of Death** ("Danse Macabre"). The fresco is 7 m long and it consists of personified Death summoning representatives from all walks of life to dance along the grave. There is a pope, king, queen, monk, child, rich man and a beggar being led by the skeleton towards Death. Dance of Death frescoes were usually produced to remind people of the fragility of their lives and how vain were the glories of earthly life

The frescoes were discovered in 1949 under thick layer of plaster by the academic sculptor Jože Pohleven.

