

The Victorious Mountain

Not very high and yet breathtaking, Mountain Kozjak is close enough to the capital for a day trip. Its name translates as the area of goats. It is dry, with scarce vegetation and vertical rocky slopes, where only the goats can find their pastures. Actually, throughout the Slavic world, its name has many variations. In Macedonia alone, there are several villages, a lake, and few hills bearing the same name. It is a common name of mountains, passes, pastures, villages and towns in other Slavic speaking countries. The Macedonian mountain Kozjak lies on the border with Serbia and Bulgaria. The bigger part of the mountain lies in Macedonia, northeast of Kumanovo and spans sixty kilometres from west, above the village Staro Nagoricane to east, near Kriva Palanka. It is nestled between

Pcinja and Kriva Reka. The mountain ridge is 15 kilometres long. Due to intensive woodcutting in the past and erosions, the mountain is almost barren. The biggest peak, Peren, is only 1300 meters high. The most impressive is the Virovi peak at 1283 m but with vertically falling rocky side towards the River Bistrica. The southern part has conic volcanic rocks and pool-shaped horizontal rock beds. After rainy periods the pools are full of water in which small crabs thrive. The landscape has many attractive forms, including small rivers with fast currents, small waterfalls, and cascades. There are two natural lakes with rich marshland flora near Karpino Monastery. The so-called Taticev Kamen on the west side of the mountain and the famous Kokino megalithic observatory are part of this mountain range. Karpino Monastery offers a splendid atmosphere





for spiritual relaxation. Once a year it hosts a dozen of visual artists from the region in the glorious art colony, which ends with an exhibition of the artworks after the days spent together and in communion with nature.

The climate is mild, and there is a range of wild animals: rabbits, wolves, foxes, boars etc. The mildness and accessibility mean that that the mountain has a huge potential for development as a terrain for mountaineering, hiking and mountain biking. There are already many ethno villages, restaurants and fish pools which offer good recreation opportunities. The distance of only one hour from Skopje is another advantage. The churches devoted to St. George and St. Petka, the cave of St. Prohor, the archaeological locality called Kostoperska Karpa make Kozjak an attractive destination for church tourism.

On the slopes of these mountains lies Pelince Memorial Centre devoted to Macedonian statehood. It celebrates the Assembly held in the Monastery of St. Prohor Pcinski in 1944 at which Macedonia

was declared a nation state within Yugoslavia. After the split of Yugoslavia the historic location remained in Serbia, and the new memorial was created within Macedonian territory. Thus, one more cultural location emerged, as the memorial is decorated with mosaics and artworks by the most prominent Macedonian artists.

Another nearby memorial is Zebrenjak that is devoted to the fallen soldiers in a key battle of the Balkan War of 1912 when Serbian troops defeated the Ottomans and made them leave Macedonia after almost five centuries of rule. The whole region around the mountain is called Kozjacija. It played an important role during the Second World War giving shelter to many partisan units that successfully fought against the Nazis and their local allies, the Cetniks. Actually it was the first partisan platoon that started the antifascist uprising in October 1941. One of the legendary commanders, Hristijan Todorovski-Karpos, used the mountain as his base for several years until he was killed in 1944 only a few months before the liberation.