

Stone Dolls



Kratovo and its surroundings are a real depository of cultural and natural treasures. Not only the town with its medieval towers, bridges and active mines, but also the surrounding mountains with hermits' caves, an ancient observatory and extraordinary stone dolls are full of historical artefacts. In sunny and dry weather an excursion to the stone dolls (*kuklici* in Macedonian) is a must. The incredible volcanic rocks with anthropomorphic shapes are just 13 km away from the town of Kratovo, in the village of Kuklica. Over 150 several-metres-high rocks are a real masterpiece dominating the ordinary landscape as if intentionally set up as their background. Scientific studies have shown that this natural wonder was probably created by vertical volcanic erosion, the power of the wind, and other weather influences. The town of Kratovo lies on the extinguished

volcano. Unusual rocks are more than 10 million years old. To be more precise, they were formed in the period between the Eocene and Pliocene from volcanic ash, melted and then formed by minerals and natural cements such as the iron ore and the silicon compounds. Scientists believe that this area was once under salty water because the scrapings of the rock taste of salt.

The impressive rocks have always affected the imagination of the local people. Many legends as well as folk beliefs and fears surround them. The locals believe the place is cursed. The shepherds avoid it, as they think the rocky pasture poisons their herds, causing many deaths among sheep and goats.

The most interesting local legend says that the stone figures are in fact wedding guests who were turned into rocks. Once in the village a young man was in love with two girls, the first rich but plain, the



second poor but beautiful. He proposed to marry both of them, but on the day of the wedding he decided to marry the rich girl. Upon hearing the procession, the poor girl came out to see if her betrothed was coming for her only to find out that he was marrying the other girl. Angered and devastated she cursed them to petrify the moment they kiss. So the whole procession turned into stones. The two big rocks in the middle of the area are the

bride and the groom and the two smaller ones at the sides are the brother-in-law and the maid of honour. The stone doll behind them is the best man.

Despite the curse the place is popular with tourists and is protected by the Ministry of Environment as a unique natural artefact. Only in Serbia a similar rock formation called the Devil's Town can be found.

