

The King of the Mountains



There are many beautiful mountains in Macedonia. Maybe it is for their rich vegetation, beautiful nature, and accessibility that they are usually referred to by female names like Sara, Plackovica, Baba, Galicica, Bistra, or Belasica. Yet there is a mountain which can be regarded as the king, even god, of the mountains. It is Korab, the highest mountain in Macedonia, a real inaccessible savage with Alpine hostility that is not treaded by many. Its name comes from the name of the Slavic god of sea. *Korab* is also an archaic word meaning "vessel". It might metaphorically call for a ride in the sky. Or it may refer to the Adriatic Sea, which, mountaineers say, can be seen from the summit when the horizon is clear.

The Korab mountain range is an extension of the Sara mountain range. Traditionally it is divided in two separate mountains: the higher Korab to the north and the lower Desat to the south. The main crest has a north-south direction from the source of the Radika River to the southernmost peak Crvena Ploca. It has the length of over 45 km and does not drop below 2000 meters. The Albanian-Macedonian border follows the main ridge. At 2764 meters Korab peak is one of only two summits in Europe which are the highest point for more than one country. It is also the 12th highest peak in Europe. From the Albanian side the mountain is part of the national park. In Macedonia it is represented on the national coat of arms.

Korab is a very rugged mountain massif that consists mainly of shale and limestone of the Palaeozoic era with bloc structures. Severely damaged gypsum rocks add to its horrid appearance. On the west side, the mountain falls steeply over rock walls. The north side consists of craggy rocks. The highest point is a kind of double peak with almost equal summits, one in the Macedonian territory and the other just about 150 meters away in the Albanian territory. On the same ridge there are two other peaks rising above 2700m. The southeast, stretching from a few meadows broken up by rock bands to the summit, is occasionally accessed by shepherds with their flocks of sheep. Some peaks are ruptured by radial blocks that end in the valley of Radika. These blocks occasionally have steep slopes up to 500 meters long. The mountain is home to the spectacular





Korab Falls in the upper valley of the Dlaboka River. In the spring, the waterfall reaches the height of over 130 meters, which makes it the highest in Macedonia. Apart from the Korab waterfall, there are several lakes on the mountain.

There are traces of ancient glaciation on the mountain peaks. The range is covered with beech, oak, and pine forest. In its highest part, above 2000 meters, the climate is alpine and includes some alpine flora elements. Particularly remarkable is the alpine area of Kabas with several sheer and hardly approachable peaks.

According to many explorers, Korab is the most beautiful mountain landscape in Macedonia. Yet, trekking, mountaineering, hiking and climbing are not regular on the mountain. There are no mountain huts, routes or other infrastructure. Ascent from the Macedonian side involves entering the international border area, for which a special permit is required from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Because of the border crossing policy between the two countries and logistical issues, ascending from one side and descending down the

other side of the mountain is not feasible at present. Macedonian government only opens Mount Korab for climbing once a year, on 8th September, to celebrate Macedonian Independence Day. So, the best chance to climb Mount Korab is to join the International climb that is organized by the mountain club "Korab", Skopje.

However, many enthusiasts do climb the mountain regardless of the constraints. The recommended way is to reach Mavrovi Anovi, the municipality beyond the town of Debar. From Mavrovi Anovi it is 8 kilometers to Trnovo, partly on a non-asphalted road, and then via the village of Nicpur, another 19 kilometers of solid macadam road to the sharp left bound curve beneath the abandoned military watchtower of Stezimir. From there it takes 4 to 5 hours of nontechnical hike up to reach the main summit. Those who plan to stay overnight must bring their own sleeping bags or tents, but have to watch out for wild animals (bears and wolves) and shepherd dogs. Because of the hard conditions it is recommended to climb only in dry weather.