

Thematic path in municipality Žiri and Gorenja vas - Poljane



# RAPALLO BORDER

— 1920 - 1947 —

THEMATIC PATH

The theme path along the Rapallo Border is intended to acquaint visitors with the time between the 1st and 2nd World War, which due to the establishment of the Rapallo Border, also left its mark in our towns and villages. You will discover what life was like for the residents who lived with, and along, the border in the areas of Žiri and Sovodenj,

## THE BORDER

The Treaty of Rapallo was signed on the 12th November 1920 in the Italian town of Rapallo. The treaty required the handover of a third of the territory of Slovenia, which formerly belonged to Yugoslavia, to Italy, dramatically changing life in Sovodenj and its surroundings. Neighbours, relatives and friends immediately became citizens of two kingdoms – the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later



Yugoslavian border guards at the main boundary stone No.41 in Ravne pri Žireh, behind them a frontier guardhouse.

You can choose how much of the path you wish to walk, depending upon your ability and how much time you have available. The entire path from Žiri to 'Vrhovec' in Podlanišče is 46km in length (9-10 hours). There are also several shorter routes, some of which are circular. The circular path from Žiri to Mrzli vrh and back is 13km in length (4 hours). Those wishing to set off from Sovodenj can walk to Mrzli vrh, to boundary stone No.38 (14km, 4 hours round trip) or, in the opposite direction, to boundary stone No. 36 in Nova Oselica (6km, 2 hours round trip). This route can also be extended to boundary stone No.35 which stands at 'Pr'Vrhovec' in Podlanišče (14km, 4.5hours, returning to the main road for Cerkno-Sovodenj in Podlanišče).

the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and the Kingdom of Italy. The entire Rapallo Border, which ran from Peča, above the village of Rateče, over Triglav to Rijeka, was 244km in length and was divided into 70 sections. At the start of each section a main boundary stone stood – cippo principale - whilst smaller boundary stones were placed between the main ones. In the area of this theme path there are five main boundary stones numbered from 35 - 39.

The border was guarded by the military and police from both sides. The villages along the border were inhabited by outsiders – Italian border officials (customers officers, 'gafovci',

fascists) and on the Yugoslav side by border guards and customs officers. Along the border there were a number of fortifications which protected the border and hinterlands – after the year 1932 on the Italian side the so-called 'Alpine Wall', after 1939 on the Yugoslav side the so-called Rupnik Line.

The minds of those guarding the border were not only filled with their duties of protecting their homeland. Attractions developed between them and local girls. One local man who, during the time of the border lived on the Italian side, learnt Italian. An Italian soldier asked him to translate a love letter which one of the local girls had written to him. However, the 'translator' also rather liked the girl so he translated it somewhat differently to how it had been written. Therefore the soldier never found out what she had really written and the girl never did get her sweetheart.

The border also influenced religious life and the schooling of children. The residents of some of the villages along the border were forcibly separated from their parishes and graveyards, and had to attend mass and bury their dead on the Italian side. Children had to attend Italian schools, where they were prohibited from using the Slovene language. Residents required a permit to allow them to cross the border.



The restored main boundary stone No.35.



A border permit allowing movement along and over the border.

Life along the border also offered a number of opportunities for additional earnings, for which it was necessary to have plenty of courage and cunning. The smuggling of contraband came into effect.

Contraband smugglers secretly smuggled goods, most often at night, from Yugoslavia to those parts of the border that were unsupervised, where locals from the Primorska side received them. The border was guarded by border guards and customs officers who resourceful locals were sometimes able to outwit. Coffee, flour, tobacco, saccharin, and sugar were smuggled onto the Italian side; some of the more daring even smuggled horses and other livestock. There were less goods coming into Yugoslavia; textiles, wine, rice, tropical fruit, umbrellas, mercury and more.

The harshest period which residents experienced was during the 2nd World War. During attacks and bombardments, people used to seek shelter in abandoned mining tunnels or in other hidden places.

You can find out more about these stories about smuggling if you walk the path accompanied by a guide.



Many of the homes in a 100-250 metre band along the Yugoslav side were demolished and people moved away. A wide barbed wire fence, several metres high, was placed along the length of the border and landmines were laid beneath it. The Germans were sure that this meant the border was completely closed but they were soon to be disappointed. The landmines didn't cause problems for ex-Austrian soldiers and other daring contraband smugglers. Within a few weeks it was already possible to step over the barbed wire fence in places. Sadly the border and mines also sowed the seeds of death. With the abolition of the Rapallo Border, on the 15th September 1947, Primorska was returned to its homeland.

## THE PATH ALONG THE RAPALLO BORDER – From Žiri

During the time of the Rapallo Border, Žiri was a town along the border. Following the establishment of the border, the Municipality of Žiri and its parish lost 12 settlements to the Kingdom of Italy.



View of Žiri.

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The town has long been marked by various borders. On the ridge of the western edge of the Žiri basin, is the divide between the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. In Roman times, the border between the provinces of Italy and Pannonia ran from here with its defence system of fortifications 'Claustra Alpium Iuliarum'. In the middle ages, a border between the Bishops of Freising and the Lords of the Tolmin and Idrija Territories.

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The path begins at the Žiri Museum, which is situated in Old Žiri. As an introduction, visitors can take a look at the exhibition and multimedia presentation 'Welcome, Lovers of Fortifications', which is about the heritage of the Rapallo Border. The marked walking path leads through Tabor and upwards towards Breznica. To the right you will see a hill, Žirk, where, according to legend, the wicked dragon 'Lintvern' lives. Approximately 150 metres above the last house, there are views across the valley behind Žirk. Here, there is also a shrine, a cross, which the owner of the lower house 'Pr'Pavlač' erected in 1925 in gratitude that his home remained on the Yugoslav side of the border. The path along the Rapallo Border then veers left along a track, past intermediary boundary stones. Ascend through the forest to the meadow and continue towards the slope. On reaching a forested tractor path, turn right to the main bo-

undary stone No.39 which stands in the forest beneath the village of Breznica.

After a look at the boundary stone, backtrack a few metres and continue on the path towards the village of Breznica, which in the period between both world wars, was a part of the Kingdom of Italy. In the centre of the village is the Church of St. Kancijan. Beside the village are two caverns, which were built to serve the needs of the Italian border employees (gafovci). From here, the way to Mrzli vrh continues on the marked mountain trail. If however you wish to see more of the boundary stones, keep following the signs for the theme path. On leaving the forest at the foothills of Mrzli vrh and beginning to ascend, there are beautiful views of the surrounding hills and mountains. Continue the path along the meadows over 'Loncmanova Sivka' via the marked mountain trail (987m). Prior to the 2nd World War, in close proximity, stood a barracks of the MVSN (Milizia

Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale), which was demolished after the war. From Loncmanova Sivka a short-cut leads past the 'Pr' Vodičari' farm to the main boundary stone



The boundary stone beside the path from Mrzli vrh towards Breznica.



Breznica.

No.38. Alternatively, descend to the lower house 'Pr' Belin' (Mrzli Vrh 8), beneath which you can rejoin the path that leads past boundary stones to the neighbouring house 'Pr' Erjavc'. Above it, stands the main boundary stone No.38. Nearby the beginnings of a new mountain hut are being built on the site of the former Yugoslav border guardhouse. From here you can return to the start in Žiri through the Jarčja Valley and past Ledinica, where the Church of St Anne is located. Alternatively, the walk can be continued towards Sovodenj.

## SOVODENJ

The village of Sovodenj got its name from the confluence of three streams, the Javorščica, Podosojnščica and Podjelovščica, which all con-



Sovodenj.

verge here at the bottom of the basin. It is interesting to note that following heavy downpours each stream is a different colour as each flows into the valley through various stone surfaces.



The centre of Sovodenj as it once was.

In Sovodenj you can opt to walk to the main boundary stone No.38, which stands on the top of Javorjev Dol (or Mrzli vrh). From here you can continue towards Žiri; or to boundary stone No.36, which stands in Nova Oselica and then on towards boundary stone No.35.

## To Boundary Stone No.38

Set off past the Co-operative Home (Zadružni dom), left, beside the Javorščica stream. After approximately half a kilometre you will pass a house where, during the time of the Rapallo Border, the contraband shop 'Pr'Malk u Grap' flourished. In addition to food, it was possible

to buy materials, 'Bata' shoes and export tobacco. The shop operated until 1942.

Just a short distance ahead, on the left, is the Jurnec Cave (Jurncova jama). During the 2nd World War, or rather during bombardments from the Italian side, this was a convenient shelter for locals. After approximately 500 metres, look out for the remains of the intermediary boundary stone. From the 'U Kacjanovš' house, the border went downwards into the valley and for some way ahead it ran partly beside the path and partly through the Javorska ravine. The boundary stone was also an official border crossing point manned by customs officers. On the right side of the stream there was a Yugoslav barracks.

At the crossroads for Otalež, head left in the direction of Javorjev Dol. At the crossroads for 'Balantinovec' veer from the former Rapallo Border, and follow the main road in a straight line until reaching the 'U Dolu' house. During the 2nd World War the house served as a German barracks, therefore, despite its close proximity to the Italian border, it was not pulled down unlike the other 16 that on the Yugoslav side. On the bend behind the house, head right towards 'Likar', where in the forest, immediately before the meadow, you will once again cross the former Rapallo Border. Behind



The dance of the soldiers in Sovodenj.

the first house 'Pr' Zarobarju' ascend to the left on a track to the top of the hill. Continue on the path along the ridge behind 'Tešar' and follow the path crossing left through the forest, past the ruins of a former shack. Some 100 metres ahead you will reach the main boundary stone No.39. From here you can continue on the marked theme path towards Žiri or, if you decide to return to Sovodenj, you can do this by taking the same path, or the marked mountain path for Bevkov vrh from the 'Lanišar' Farm towards Sovodenj.

## To Boundary Stones No.36 and 35



Boundary stone No.36 overgrown by a fir tree.

From Sovodenj set off right past the Co-operative Home (Zadružni dom) and the Hunter's Home (Lovski dom) and along beside the Podosojnščica stream. The Rapallo Border, from 'Kacjanovš' (boundary stone No.37 no longer exists) ran past 'Lisjak'. From under Bevkov vrh, or rather 'Laniše' it descended to the Podosojnščica stream and once again ascended along the ridge to Nova Oselica.

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Limonite minerals in the form of brown iron-ore were hidden within the Podosojnščica ravine. More than a hundred years ago copper-ore was excavated in this part of Laniš. During the time of the Rapallo Border, a lively trade in contraband horses also took place in the ravine.

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At the end of the valley, the forest path leads right, towards a hill, where you will cross the former border. Immediately before leaving the forest, and where meadows open out in front of you, look for the intermediary boundary stone, overgrown by the fir tree on the right.

Here the border breaks and turns towards the valley meadows, the land registry border of two owners. The old landlord 'Pagon' succeeded with his request that the Rapallo Border did not cut-off his source of water for livestock. Otherwise the border would have run between the house and stable. The meadow path leads us past the 'Pagon' house to the main road. Behind the road, in the direction of Nova Oselica, the restored intermediary boundary stone No.36/I can be seen. Lower in the valley there are also others whilst higher in the forest the partly preserved main boundary stone No.36 still remains.

You can return to Sovodenj along the same path. Alternatively, to make a circular route by road, at the Linden Tree in front of the Church of St. John Nepomuk (Sv. Janeza Nepomuka),



Hikers.



head left along the grassy track right by the forest and downwards past 'Traha' to the road to Cerkno. This path leads towards boundary stone No.35. (If you wish only to walk to boundary stone No.35 we advise that you drive a further two kilometres along the main road for Cerkno and park at the information board at the border between the municipalities of Gorenja vas – Poljane and Cerkno).

The boundary stone beside the road is No.35/LX. On the left (in the direction of Cerkno) there once stood a Yugoslav sentry box. The Rapallo Border ran between it and along the edge of hayfield upwards towards Nova Oselica then on the other side of the road upwards along the ridge. A little further ahead, around the first bend, there was also an Italian post and a barracks.

Begin the walk by crossing the stream, to the right across the clearing (in the direction of Cerkno), where the path is already visible beneath the forest. This leads to a wide path which you should follow to the left to 'Pr' Karant'. From here continue upwards along the gravel road 'Na Lokev', where the stone ruins of a former blacksmith can be seen. The Rapallo Border ran to the right of the house along the ridge of the meadow and up the slope through the grove to 'Brdar'. Here, during renovation of the house some smaller 60cm high intermediary boundary stones were built in, where the letters J (Yugoslavia) and I (Italy) can be clearly seen.

Some 10 metres from 'Brdar's House (Brdarjeva hiša) veer at a right-angle into the forest on a track. With careful observation of the surroundings somewhat higher between the trees, craters of a large diameter can be seen. According to tales of older folk, these were caused by cannon grenades when the Italians shot from the distant Jelenek during the 2nd World War.

The path leads downwards along the asphalt road to the meadow on the right. Where there is no grass, continue along the right edge upwards to the forest and follow the track. Where the grass and the aforementioned path are unsuitable, you can extend the walk along the main road towards the farm 'Na Lanišah'. Beneath the forest turn onto the track, then a little ahead along the ridge, follow the marked mountain track to the cavern which was built in the years 1937/38. Italian soldiers lived in it until the capitulation of Italy in 1943. Older locals recall that they departed in such a hurry that they left behind bedding, stoves and other things which locals then took home. Approximately 100 metres behind, left behind the hill, stands another, partly ruined Italian cavern, which is visible from the top of the hill named 'Šance'. The restored boundary stone no.35 stands beneath 'Šance', 'Pr'Vrhovc, in Podlanišče.



Beside the border in Breznica.

## What to see and do:

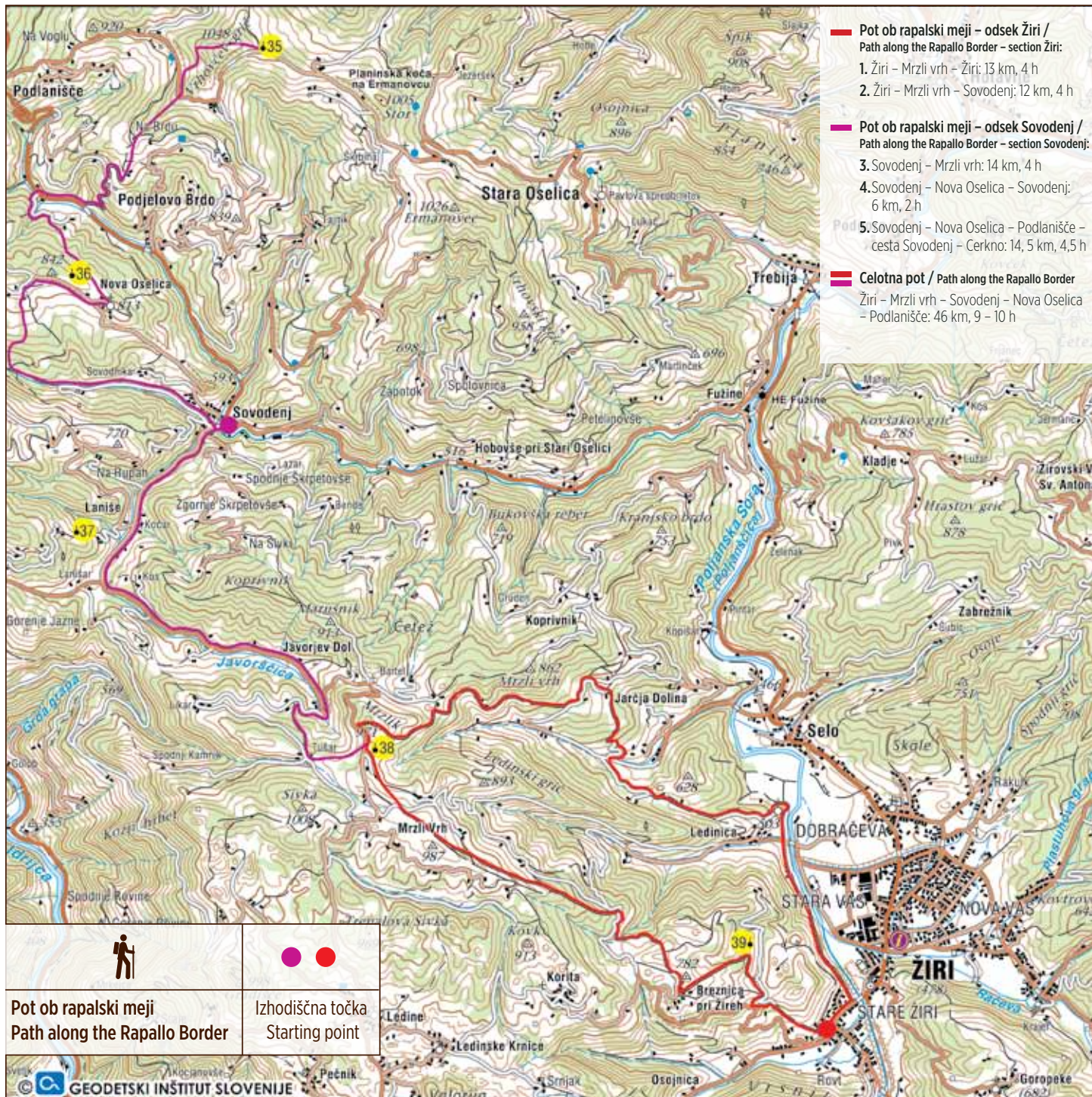
- Žiri Museum, Tabor 2, Žiri
- The Gallery of Lace-Bobbin, A. Primožič 1888, Žiri
- The Fortifications of the Rupnik Line, Žirovski vrh and Goli vrh
- The natural stone table in Ravne pri Žireh
- The Bunker on Mali Kovk above Ravne pri Žireh (Vallo Alpino)
- The top of Svetih Treh Kraljev (884 m)
- The Parish church of St. Martin, Žiri
- The church of St. John Nepomuk in Nova Oselica



## Where to eat and drink in the vicinity:

- Sovodenj Snack Bar (Bife Sovodenj)
- »Košanec« Restaurant, Sovodenj
- 'Žunar' Farm – home butchers, Stara Oselica
- 'Na Ravan' Farm – cheese and milk products, Cerkljanski Vrh
- Pr' Zet Restaurant, Žiri
- Pri Županu Restaurant, Žiri
- Catering Firm Sklednik, Žiri
- Caffè Geparđ, Žiri
- Ambasada, Žiri
- Pizzeria and Restaurant Lengar, Žiri
- Restaurant Katernik, Žiri
- The Hut on Goropeke, Goropeke
- Mountain Hut on Mrzli Vrh, Žiri Mountain Association (under construction)
- Mountain Hut on Ermanovec, Sovodenj Mountain Association





## Informacije / Info:

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