

## IDRIJA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

**Surface area:** 513.1 km<sup>2</sup>

**Highest point:** 892 m (Marutnik)

**Lowest point:** 310 m (Marof)

**Towns:** Idrija, Gore

**Rivers and streams:** Idrijca, Nikova, Ljubevščica

**Main rocks:** clastite rocks (claystone, siltstone, sandstone, conglomerate), carbonate rocks (limestone, dolomite, marlstone), diabase, and tuff

**Main forest community:** Dinaric beech-fir forest (*Abieti-Fagetum dinaricum*)

**Botanical particularities:** Carniolan primrose (*Primula carniolica*), auricula (*Primula auricula*), Idrija primrose (*Primula x venusta*), henbane bell (*Scopolia carniolica*), Hacquetia (*Hacquetia epipactis*), *Daphne blagayana*, lady's-slipper orchid (*Cypripedium calceolus*)

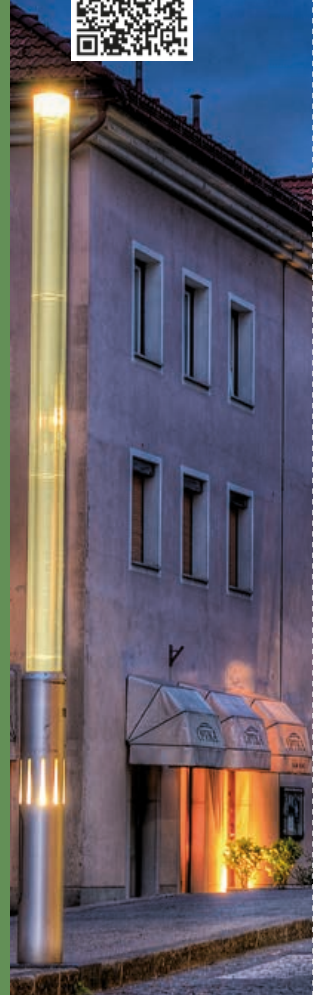
**Panoramic peaks:** Marutnik (892 m), Kobalove planine (816 m), Zagodov vrh (730 m)



A town with almost 6,000 inhabitants, Idrija lies in a basin in the heart of Idrija Hills. Flowing through the town is the Idrijca River, which rises in the nearby Vojsko Plateau. The pre-Alpine and karst worlds meet here and, as a result of the tectonic fault here and, as a result of the varied geological activity, the Idrija mine has developed in the area. The region is rich in timber and water resources, which played an important role in the operation of the mine. Just below the town of Idrija runs the Idrija Fault, one of the most powerful faults in the Southern Alpine region.

Roads lead to Idrija from Ljubljana (54 km), Nova Gorica (65 km), Tolmin (45 km), and Škofja Loka (41 km).

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I FEEL  
SLOVENIA

Idrija.

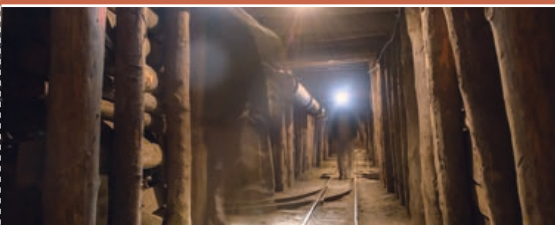


IDRIJA

THE HERITAGE OF MERCURY

1 2 15

Supplying the whole world with precious liquid metal for centuries, Slovenia's oldest mining town is bursting with rich heritage of mercury at every turn.



**Idrija** is the town with the **longest mining tradition in Slovenia**.

Its history is inextricably linked with five hundred years of mining of precious metal – **mercury**. Known for its properties since the pre-industrial era, Idrija's mercury played a special role in medicine and alchemy while, centuries later, it was a key factor in the development of world science, economy, and medicine, and was indispensable in the amalgamation process for the extraction of gold and silver.

**The mine** attracted the most esteemed European naturalists and technical minds of their time. Together with home experts, they designed **technological and technical innovations** of European significance, while the income from selling mercury filled the treasuries of the monarchies and countries that used to own the mine in various periods. With miners transforming Idrija's underground into a **700-km-long labyrinth of galleries**, mercury was the cause of the development and growth of the town above it.





## Town centre

A short stroll through the old town centre brings to life many stories. The discovery of a rich cinnabar ore on 22 June 1508 in **Achatius' Shaft** set the foundation to 500 years of uninterrupted mining in the Idrija Basin. To commemorate this important event, this is when the Idrija miners celebrate their day. Among the buildings that surround Idrija's oldest square, the **Magazin** – the mine's grain storehouse – and the first **Slovenian brick-built theatre** stand out. Going through the underpass of the Magazin, you will reach the **Town Square** with its imposing **town hall** and **popular school**. Climb up the steep street to the **Church of the Holy Trinity**, where legend has it that a tub maker found droplets of mercury. Pass the imposing building of the **first Slovenian secondary school of natural sciences** and reach the **Gewerkenegg castle**.



Church of the Holy Trinity



Jurij Vega Secondary School

## Mine and Mercury

The ore deposit was created more than **230 million years ago**, in a period of tectonic and volcanic activity in the region. Along the faults, mercury-rich solutions flowed from the depths and cooled down into crystallised mineral called **cinnabar**. Idrija mine is famous for **native mercury**. Next to Francis' Shaft, in the administrative building of the Idrija Mercury Heritage Management Centre, you can see the **mine collection of cinnabar ores, minerals, and rocks**. In 500 years of mining, Idrija miners dug out more than **700 km of galleries**. The deepest parts of the mine reached **382 m deep**. **145,700 tons** of mercury was smelted out of the cinnabar ore, filling more than **3 million steel bottles** sold all over the world.



Cinnabar crystals

Elementary mercury



Legend has it that mercury was discovered by a tub maker soaking wooden tubs in a stream.



## Anthony's Main Road

For an unforgettable experience, visit the **oldest part of the mercury mine**. Dressed in green and black vests and wearing a helmet, enter **Anthony's Main Road** through the magnificent **Selštev building** to discover the history of mining. Follow well-lit passages to the **mine chapel of Holy Trinity**, descend wooden stairs to reach the depths of the mine and see droplets of mercury permeate black rock, and listen to the guide explaining the incredibly difficult work of the miners. Perhaps you will even encounter the naughty **mine elf Perkmandlc**.



## From the Depths to the Surface

Several shafts were designated for the transport of the ore and the import and export of miners. The deepest of them was **Joseph's Shaft** (1786), which connected all 15 levels of the mine and reached 382 m deep. Its hoisting engine has been preserved, and so has the hoisting tower that still stands out from the surrounding buildings.

A few years after the Joseph's Shaft was built, large production led to the installation of the **Francis' Shaft** (1792), which is one of the oldest mine buildings in the town today. It hosts an exhibition of **mine machinery**, including the famous **Kley pump** dating to 1893.

The **Inzaghi Shaft** is another important remnant of the rich industrial heritage of Idrija.

Kley pump





## Hg Smelting Plant

Through five centuries, ore smelting developed from the simplest piles of the 16th century to the most modern rotary furnaces, which operated until 1995. The Hg Smelting Plant houses the permanent exhibition **From Ore to Mercury Drops**, presenting the **history of smelting, the process of extracting mercury as well as the characteristics and the use of this remarkable liquid metal**. You will follow the path of the ore from the crushing to sieving machines and see the unique Čermak-Špirek furnace.

## Compressor Station

Since 1914, the mine compressor station housed various compressors, which, for almost 100 years, produced compressed air for a faster and safer work in the mine.



Ore sorting







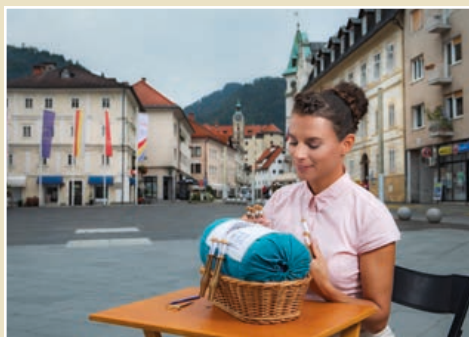
## Gewerkenegg Castle

Rising above the town centre is the Gewerkenegg Castle. It was built in the early 16th century for **defence purposes, to store mercury and grain, and to house the mine's administration**. Today, it is the seat of the **Idrija Municipal Museum**. Its permanent exhibitions tell the story of 500 years of **mercury mine** and the development of the town, all while revealing the hardships of the miners' daily life that were softened by social and cultural life. The beauty of white **Idrija lace**, created by miners' wives in the safety of their homes, charms every art lover. You will also be fascinated by the historically verified story of the clever **Melhorca**, an 18th century smuggler, who greets you in the castle courtyard.



## Richness of Idrija Lace

The budget of a mining family in Idrija was largely complemented by women's **lacemaking**. Their entire profit was put into food and clothing, and the growing-up girls used the money for their trousseau. The centuries-old lacemaking tradition is still alive today. **Idrija Lace School**, active in the former popular school building, preserves the know-how of numerous lacemaking techniques and elements. Today, around 400 girls and boys attend classes there. You can see their creations in the school's exhibition space – many of their works are true masterpieces. You can also see a demonstration of lacemaking and buy literature from the field and bobbin lace pieces.





## Rake Channel and Kamšt

In late 16th century, the Idrijca River was dammed at Kobilja and the first **water channel** known as rake going all the way to the town centre was built. At first, water flowed through a **3.6-km-long** wooden trough; later, the channel was reinforced with support walls, covered in stone, and mortared with clay.

For centuries, water from the channel drove mining machinery known as **kamšt** that pumped water from the mine and lifted ore to the surface. The last and the most impressive **kamšt** that stands at Joseph's Shaft and is still preserved was built in 1790 – it operated for 160 years without interruption, pumping 300 l of water per minute from the depth of 283 m. With its massive **wooden water wheel** with a diameter of 13.6 m, it is believed to be the largest pumping device of its kind in Europe.

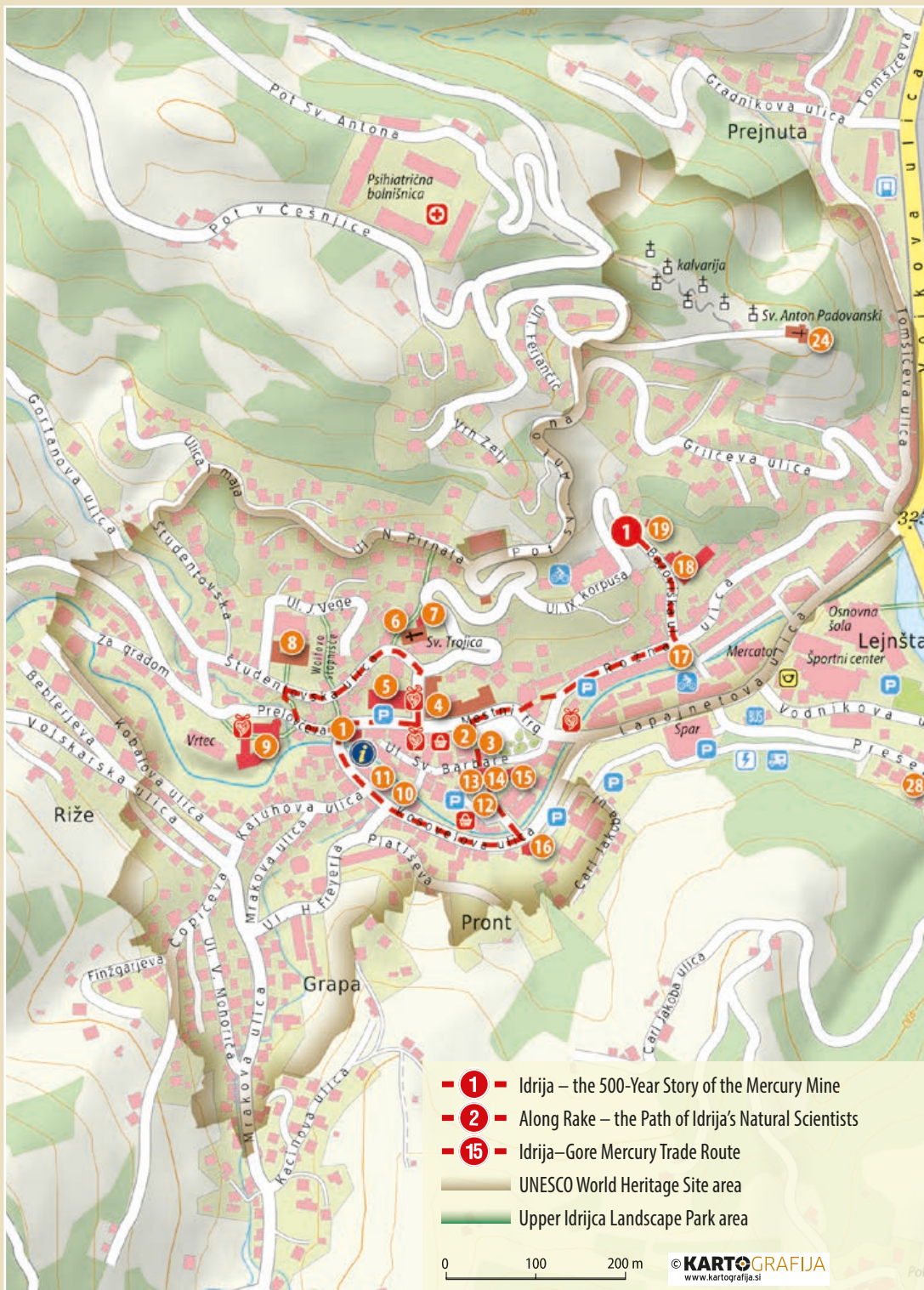


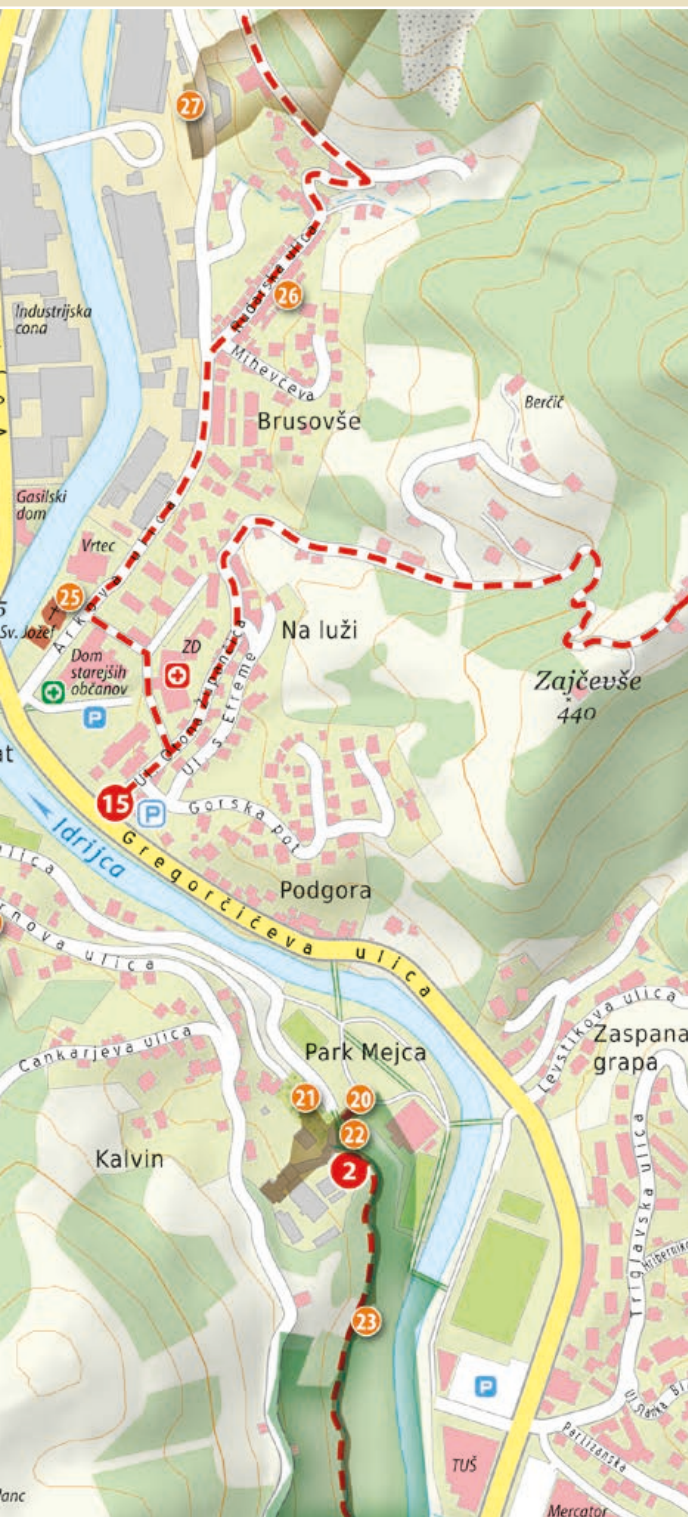
KAMŠT

# Klavže

Ever since its early days, the mine required large quantities of timber used to support the pits and burn ore. As no forest roads existed in the past, people from mid-16th century onwards used to float timber on the Idrijca River and its tributaries. On the Idrijca and Belca rivers and in the valley of Kanomlja, they built **majestic water barriers – klavže**. At first, they were made of wood, but in the period of Maria Theresa, they were built in stone. *Klavže* functioned as a dam: once enough wood was set up, the dam opened, and water took the logs to Idrija. There, they were stopped by a **wooden rake** that traversed the Idrijca River and functioned until a large flood in 1926.







- 1 Idrija Geopark Visitor Centre
- 2 Town Square
- 3 Gallery and Crypt under the Town Square
- 4 Town Hall
- 5 Idrija Lace School
- 6 Church of the Holy Trinity
- 7 Idrija Townspeople Apiary
- 8 Jurij Vega Secondary School
- 9 Gewerkenegg Castle (Idrija Municipal Museum)
- 10 Scopoli Square
- 11 Scopoli's House – »Švica«
- 12 St Achatius Square
- 13 Magazin - Mine's storage house
- 14 Idrija War Museum
- 15 Miners' Theatre
- 16 Anthony's Main Road (Idrija Mercury Mine)
- 17 Aumetz Square
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-  Tourist Information
-  Lace shop
-  Shop with local products
-  Hospital
-  Pharmacy
-  Post Office
-  Bus Station
-  E-bicycle rental
-  Parking
-  Camperstop
-  Gas Station
-  Charging station for electric cars
-  Police Station

## The Life of an Idrija Miner

The life of an Idrija miner was all but rich. Their income was often not even enough for the most basic everyday things. Despite this, they loved to gather to chat and play games.

Idrija saw develop a special type of house. In the hill, not far from the town centre and surrounded by vegetable gardens, stands the **miners' house**, where you can see a miner's apartment with typical rooms and furniture: a bedroom, a living room, and an open-fire kitchen. This is where diligent wives prepared **Idrija žlikrofi**, a typical Idrija dish. In 1910, the house was home to 3 families with 18 members.



Associations with the longest tradition in Slovenia include the **Idrija Miners' Brass Band**. Since the very beginning, music was entertaining to miners, it eased their daily troubles, lifted their national pride, and accompanied them on important events.





## Our Rocks Speak

The Idrija region has a **remarkably rich geological history**. Through millions of years, its turbulent processes shaped the area, creating a varied terrain with numerous phenomena, to which the living world and the human had to adapt.

In the Idrija Geopark Visitor Centre, the **exhibition Written in Rocks** will lead you to an informative journey into the geological past. Through rocks and various cultural and natural monuments worth visiting, models, exhibits, animations, and video presentations will tell stories of how the **Idrija region was created**. The exhibition is an excellent starting point for a further exploration of the Idrija Geopark heritage.







1

## Idrija – the 500-Year Story of the Mercury Mine

**Starting point:** TIC Idrija

**Length:** 1.5 km

**Duration:** 1 h

**Elevation gain:** 36 m

**Difficulty:** easy

Walking around Idrija, you will see unique cultural monuments and buildings that tell a story of an underground treasure. For 500 years, mercury led the development of the town, gave bread to generations of Idrija families, designed the educational, cultural, and social life of the town, and attracted the mightiest minds of European natural sciences.

Idrija began developing when mercury was discovered in 1490 – a few years before Christopher Columbus discovered America. Underneath the town lie hundreds of kilometres of the mine's labyrinth, which is no longer operational. The world acknowledged the heritage of mercury in Idrija and Almadén, the two largest mercury mines on the planet. In 2012, its universal value for humanity was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

 Anthony's Main Road • Achatius Square • Magazin • Miners' Theatre • Town Hall • Idrija Lace School • Church of the Holy Trinity • Jurij Vega Secondary School • Gewerkenegg Castle (Idrija Municipal Museum) • Idrija War Museum • Francis' Shaft (a collection of mine machinery) • geology collection of the mine • Miners' House • Idrija Townspeople Apiary





2

## Along Rake – the Path of Idrija’s Natural Scientists

**Starting point:** Main bus station

**Length:** 2.5 km (in one direction)

**Duration:** 45 min (in one direction)

**Elevation gain:** 13 m

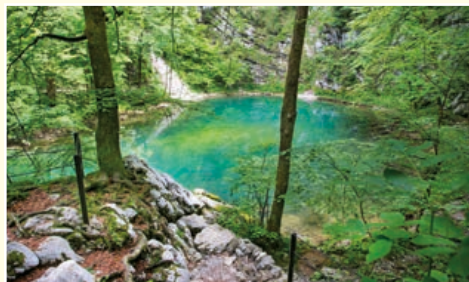
**Difficulty:** easy

The path along the Rake water channel is the only trail in Idrija that offers a leisurely walk that doesn’t go uphill. It leads you along the left bank of the Idrijca River, past suspension bridges, from which you can admire the beautiful Idrijca River, to the dam at Kobila. It is no secret that the water channel was built to serve the needs of the mercury mine.

At the end of the 16th century, the Idrijca River was dammed at Kobila and the first water channel was constructed that fed water to the huge mining pumps called *kamšt*. Originally it led to the centre of the town, but today it only runs from the Kobila dam to the Kamšt. The first channel was made of wood, but in 1776 it was walled with stone.

The nature trail along Rake reveals the varied rock structure, forest communities and special botanical features of Idrija. A turn off the Rake trail over a suspension bridge to the other side of the Idrijca River leads you to the Wild Lake.

**Hint:** For more information on the trail, see the *Along the Rake brochure*.



Wild Lake

👁️ Scopoli’s Memorial Garden • Joseph’s Shaft • Idrija Kamšt • Rake water channel • oak avenue • remains of Italian forts • dam and cave at Kobila • Wild Lake



**15**

## Idrija-Gore Mercury Trade Route

**Starting point:** Idrija Police Station  
**Length:** 9 km  
**Duration:** 3.5 h  
**Elevation gain:** 510 m  
**Difficulty:** demanding

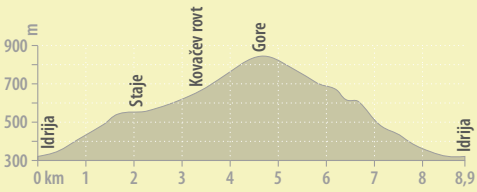
Until 1850, most of Idrija's mercury was transported across here from Idrija, via Rebro pod Gorami, Dole, Medvedje Brdo to Ceste, from there via Zaplana to Vrhnika and then along the Karst trade route via Logatec to Trieste and then into the world.

From Kovačev Rovt, you can enjoy a unique view of the Idrija basin and Idrija, which cannot be seen in its entirety from any other vantage point.

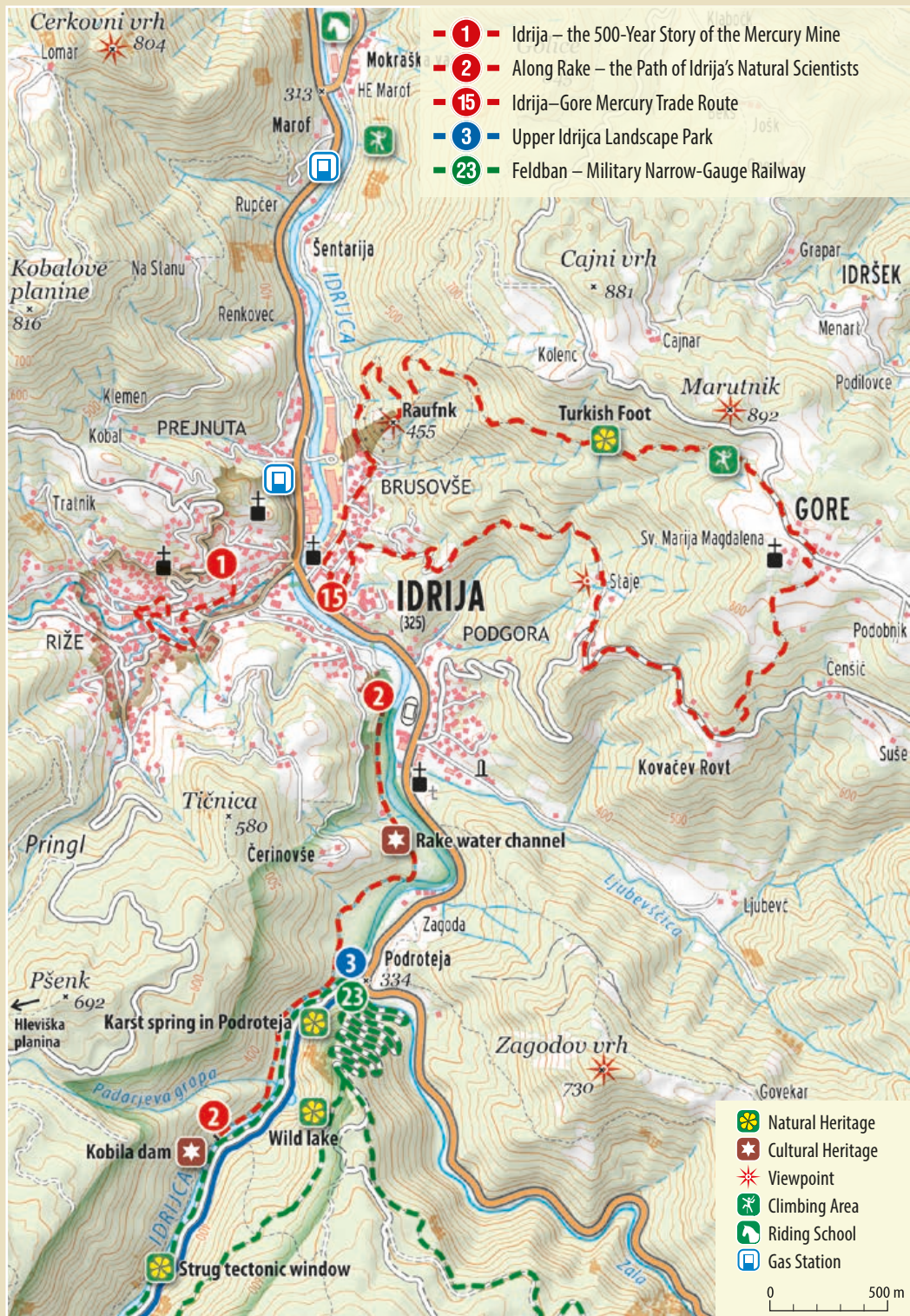
The peaceful and quiet village of Gore is located on the eastern edge of the Idrija basin and boasts a history spanning half a millennium. On a lookout on the edge of the village, it is adorned by the 15th-century Church of St Mary Magdalene.



Several legends speak of Gore, yet historical data is scarce. In Roman times, a pagan temple is said to have stood here, followed by a Christian chapel. According to a legend from Turkish times, the Turks rode from Krnice to Gore. Then, the church was obscured by fog and the Turkish horses began to sink into the ground and Gore were saved. However, the Turks probably only visited Gore.



- 👁️ Church of St Joseph • Miners' Street • Hg Smelting Plant • Raufnk (Chimney) • Turška noga (Turkish Foot) • Marutni vrh (892 m) • Church of St Mary Magdalene



# Geology of Idrija and the region

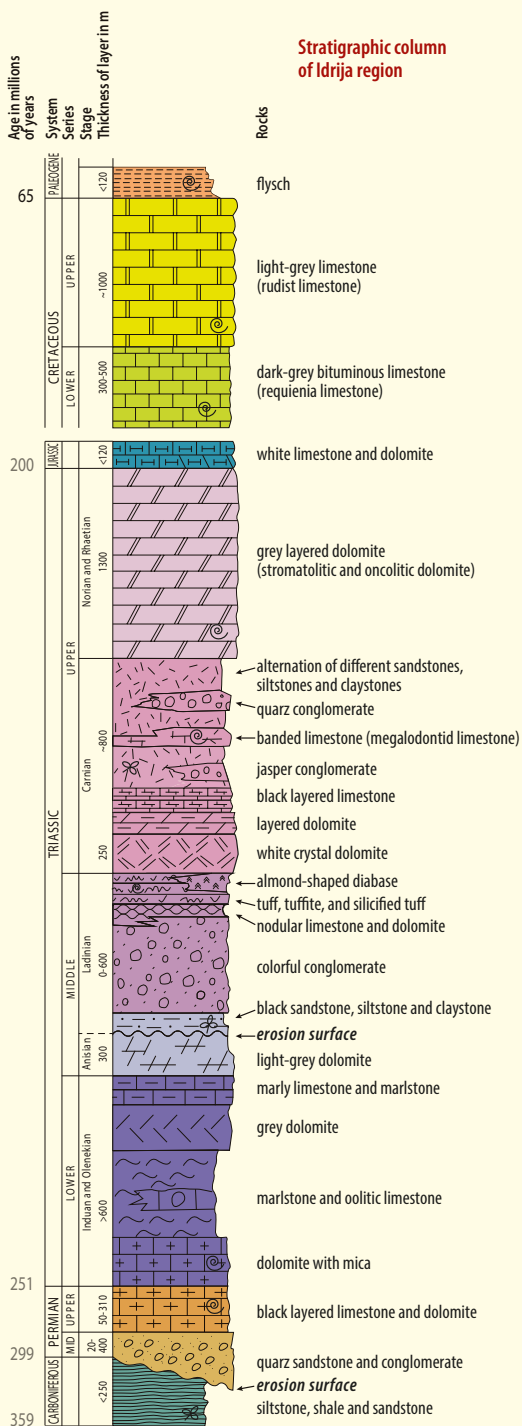
The geological structure of the Idrija region has been researched by numerous geologists.

The oldest rocks are Carboniferous shales and sandstones aged over 300 million years. They are followed by Middle Permian clastite rocks and Upper Permian dolomites and limestones with fossils. These can be found in great quantities in the ore deposit, while they come in smaller patches on the surface. Next come the Lower Triassic dolomites, limestones and shales, which are at least 500 m thick and found both in the mine and on the surface. From the Anisian (Middle Triassic), light dolomites and conglomerates have been preserved. From the Ladinian there are conglomerates, shales, sandstones, and pyroclastic rocks, found in the vicinity of Idrija, largely in the ore deposits. Due to high Middle Triassic tectonic activity, the **mercury was deposited in the form of cinnabar mineral and as native mercury**. The Carnian stage saw mainly the birth of shales and sandstones with limestone inclusions. Next came a long period when Upper Triassic dolomite, Cretaceous limestones, and flysch were deposited. There is only a sample of Jurassic rocks in the regions.

The complex structure of thrusts was later split by several faults. The strongest among them is the Idrija Fault with a horizontal shift of 2500 m.



Dolomite with fossilised corals *Waagenophyllum indicum* from Upper Permian (255 million years); Rejcov grič.





Church of St Anthony with Calvary



Feldban

## What to Explore

Idrija is an excellent starting point for an exploration of hidden gems – in the town itself and in its vicinity. In addition to all the attractions already mentioned, the **War Museum** is worth a visit, with exhibited equipment used by soldiers from World War I until the Slovenian War of Independence in 1991. Just a stone's throw from the town centre is the **Idrija Municipal Apiary**, an exceptional example of a 20th century beehive. If you don't mind walking uphill, a hike to the 1678 **Church of St Anthony with Calvary** will not disappoint: it opens wonderful views to the town of Idrija.

Do not miss the interesting thematic trails of the Idrija Geopark, which take you along numerous natural and cultural attractions. Among them, the **Upper Idrijca Landscape Park trail**, which runs through the heart of the Idrija forests. The rugged world carved out by the Idrijca and Belca rivers and tributaries reveals gorges, numerous waterfalls, picturesque pools and springs of excellent water, as well as a rich technical heritage.

Hike along the **Feldban**, the ancient route of a military narrow-gauge railway from World War I, which was built to supply units on the Isonzo Front. On the circular route, you will observe the remains of a former bridge, pass through a railway tunnel, and enjoy the unspoiled nature of the landscape park.

To discover magical views, hike to the former mine chimney – **Raufnk**, which rises 158 m above the smelting plant. The hut on **Hleviška planina**, which stands at 818 m, is also a popular excursion and hiking spot. Slightly higher still are the sunny **Kobalove planine** (816 m), which are worth a visit in all seasons.



Chimney above the Hg Smelting Plant



## Accommodation

Unique miners' houses rose upwards on the steep hills surrounding the town centre. For centuries, farms have been preserved on top of the mountains. Explore the varied accommodation offer from suites, inns, tourist farms, and youth hostel to prestigious accommodation in Idrija and the region.

## Cuisine

Idrija cuisine is a story of simple, high-quality, and locally accessible ingredients, which compose precious culinary pearls. The focus is on Idrija *žlikrofi*, which can be found in every restaurant, while the unique culinary story is rounded off by *smukavc*, *ocvirkovca*, *zeljševka*, and *prfarski štruklji*.



## Traditional Events

Idrija hosts many events throughout the year. The most well-known of them is the Idrija Lace Festival. In addition, the town offers a wide range of events to suit a variety of tastes – from cuisine, sports, hiking, culture, music, and much more.



PLAN



## Idrija Lace Boutiques

Boutique lace shops offer a wide variety of handmade bobbin lace products, which are the result of the long tradition and creativity of the lacemakers. Check out the range of products and get a unique piece to brighten up your home or give as a gift to your loved ones.



LACE  
BOUTIQUES

### Idrija Selected Collective Trademark

The Idrija Selected certificate of excellency guarantees the high quality of chosen delicacies, craft products, and authentic experience that are made by the nature and the people of the Idrija region. Tasty, decorative, and useful products designed with care and love tell stories about the traditions and heritage of Idrija.

