

Gömör-Torna Karst

A Karst Region embraced by the Carpathians



Gömör-Torna Karst

Eine Karstregion umarmt von den Karpaten



Ausgezeichnet von der Österreichischen UNESCO-Kommission



Onosma tornensis

„I’ve loved you, tiny flower, ever since I’ve known your name!“
Far Eastern
Saying (TEIJ)

Natura Trails: Tracking Europe’s Natural Treasures

Europe is known for its diverse areas of outstanding natural beauty. The span extends from untouched mountain peaks to cultural landscapes shaped by people through the centuries – all of them home to an impressive variety of fauna and flora.

Many of these landscapes are protected by law to preserve them for future generations.

National parks, protected landscape areas or biosphere reserves, the goal invariably is to ensure the long-term protection of important habitats while respecting the needs of the local population.

By creating Natura 2000, an EU-wide network of protected areas, the European Union has taken an important step forward in conserving endangered animals, plants and habitats across borders. Natura 2000 areas do not exclude people, but rather invite them to consciously experience nature.

Natura Trails are designed to give visitors a living experience of biological diversity and to make them aware of the nature around them – something which we also hope to achieve with the present brochure!

Andrea Lichtenecker
Naturefriends International

Natura Trail Gömör-Torna Karst A border-crossing walking tour from Szögliget to Hrušov

Dear hikers, dear bikers!

Gömör-Torna is the historical designation of a karst region that has almost fallen into oblivion. It covers approximately 600 km² and forms part of the foothills of the Limestone Carpathians in the border area of northern Hungary and southern Slovakia, and strikes the eye with its varied landscape of wooded hills, valleys, meadows and fields, which are home to a highly diverse flora and fauna. Divided by the national border, the Hungarian part bears the name of Aggtelek Karst, the Slovak part that of Slovak Karst. Together they form a geological, ecological and historico-cultural unit.

What you currently find there, is a unique, craggy surface and sub-surface landscape marked by deep gorges, karst sinkholes and caves. So far, approximately 1,300 caves have been discovered, which are remarkable for their fascinating rock formations and are home to more than 500 animal and plant species, such as red-listed bat species or endemic arthropods like insects or spiders. The caves of the Slovak Karst and the Aggtelek Karst, with their impressive stalagmite and stalactite formations, were inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1995.

With a view to protecting this varied natural and cultural landscape as well as its flora and fauna, represented inter alia by the Imperial Eagle, national parks were set up both on the Hungarian and on the Slovak sides of the border. When Hungary and Slovakia became members of the EU in 2004, the Aggtelek National Park and the Slovenský kras National Park became part of the EU-wide network of protected the Natura 2000 sites.



Tracking Europe's Natural Treasures



This very special border region was designated 'Landscape of the Year 2010/11' by Naturefriends International. The designation is an accolade granted every two years to an ecologically valuable cross-border region and intended to make it the focus of Europe-wide attention. The idea is to promote

regional development and sustainable tourism by way of hands-on initiatives, such as the border-crossing Gömör-Torna Natura Trail.

Information on the two National Parks at:
www.anp.hu,
www.sopshr.sk/slovkras

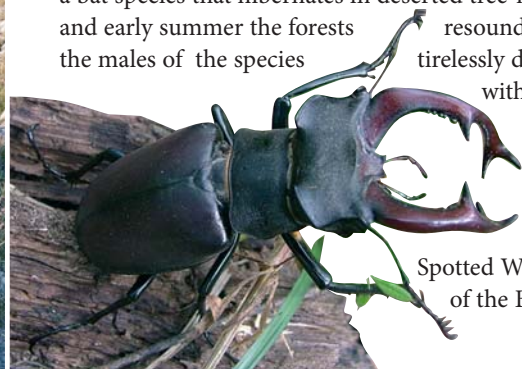
In the forests of the Gömör-Torna Karst Species-rich habitats

Large stretches of the Gömör-Torna Karst region are dominated by **oak-hornbeam forests**, which – owing to localised cooler micro-climatic conditions – are occasionally interspersed with Common Beech. Their canopies permit of little undergrowth. In early spring, however, the forest floor is for a short period covered by a sea of blossoms sprouted by spring-flowering plants, such as the Grape Hyacinth, Snowdrop or Hollow Root. A few rare orchid species



attract the eye with their shapes and colours, among them the **White Helleborine** (cover) or the **Lady Orchid** – which are protected like orchids in general. The forest management of past decades accounts for many old pinewood stands, which, thanks to ecosystem-based natural management, are nowadays increasingly converted into native-species forests.

The undisturbed forests are home to a variety of insects living in decaying timber, among them **Capricorn Beetles** or **Stag Beetles** with their imposing antlers. Woodpeckers, too, are probing for insects living under the barks. The holes they gouge into rotten timber are also of use to other animals, such as the Noctule Bat, a bat species that hibernates in deserted tree-holes. In the spring and early summer the forests resound with birdsong, as the males of the species tirelessly defend their territories with their calls.



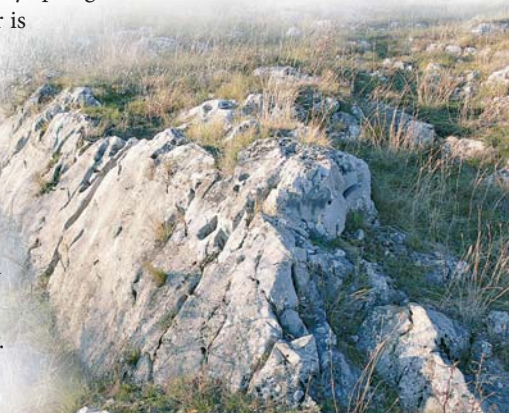
The lovely song of the Chaffinch can be heard just as the calls of the Middle Spotted Woodpecker and those of the Black Woodpecker.

From the bottom of the sea floor to the karst landscape

More than 200 million years ago, deposits of occasionally up to 1,000 m thickness were formed by the calcareous shells of marine creatures living in the Thetys Ocean. Over time, the earth's crust rose and subsided; the sediments folded, were covered and compressed. This was how today's limestone and dolomite rocks of the Gömör-Torna Karst were formed. The distinctive surface features of the karst topography, such as runnels (karren), sinkholes and dolines result from water-soluble rock, such as limestone or dolomite, being leached out by carbonic-acid-containing rain or melt-water. This process is called karstification.

Through countless joints, crevices and cracks on the surface, the water enters the bedrock, frequently forming caves through which it flows below the ground, only to surface again as one of many springs.

Even though water is often scarce on the surface, karst areas are important water reservoirs – also of drinking water. The cavity systems frequently contain large quantities of water.



Natura Trails

Natura Trails are theme paths through particularly well suited protected areas. No new trails are laid out. Folder and sparingly used info-boards point the way, inform about the fauna and flora that is characteristic of the region, introduce readers to its biological diversity and invite them to discover the area. In addition, GPS data and supplementary information on Natura Trails can be downloaded with the help of a trail-based geocoaching tool from www.naturatrails.net/geocoaching

International Nature Reserves in the Slovak Karst – Aggtelek Karst

UNESCO World Natural Heritage



... In 1972, UNESCO adopted the International Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage with a view to preserving cultural and natural assets of outstanding universal value.

Natura 2000 Areas



... Protected sites of Community interest designated in compliance with two EU Directives (Fauna-Flora-Habitat and Bird Protection Directives) and forming part of a Europe-wide network of protected areas. There is no ban on traditional agricultural and forestry operations.

Ramsar



... The so-called 'Ramsar Convention' is an international agreement designed to protect wetlands of outstanding importance. To date, it has been ratified by 160 states parties and covers 1,953 wetlands of international importance (as at August 2011).

Biosphere Reserves

... Form part of the worldwide network of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, which comprises large ecosystems of outstanding importance to the preservation of biodiversity. Nature conservation is combined with the preservation of cultural diversity and the promotion of research and education in the interests of the aims pursued.

National Parks

... Areas protected pursuant to the criteria of the World Conservation Union (IUCN), laid down with a view to preserving their ecological integrity. The core zone is dedicated to the preservation and development of natural landscapes and ought to be exempt from utilisation. In the outer zone utilisation is permitted as long as it is geared to the conservation objectives.

Further information on Natura Trails:

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www.naturatrails.net



Traces of the past

The ruin of Szádvár and the deserted village of Derenk

The Natura Trail leads past a lot of remnants from the area's modern-time settlement history.

Prior to its destruction in 1685, Szádvár used to be one of Hungary's biggest fortresses. Today,

Szádvár is a ruin which still gives you an inkling of its former dimensions. With a bit of luck, you can watch gorgeously coloured

Green Lizards (cover) or Common Wall

Lizards sunbathing or

chasing after insects. On the way up to the top of the hill you should let the eyes roam and take in the vegetation along the path that changes practically with every step. Arrived at the top you will be rewarded with a breath-taking **panorama view** (cover).



It is hard to imagine that **Derenk** was once home to a Polish minority. Today, all that testifies to the existence of this village,

which was evacuated in the early 1940s, are the remains of an old school building which houses an exhibition that traces the settlement history, a newly built chapel, meadows with fruit trees, and a few brasses.

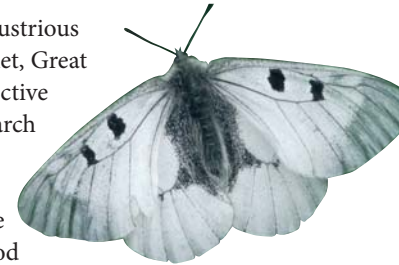


Another token of human presence is the Hungarian-Slovak national border – a dividing line drawn through the Gömör-Torna Karst after the First World War, irrespective of natural boundaries. In marked contrast to its impact on nature, which has been negligible, its impact on the daily life of the local population has been tremendous. The former connecting road between Szögliget (HU) and Körtvélyes/Hrušov (SK) was turned into a dead-end road; instead of 7 km now one has to cover 43 km to get from one place to the other. Nowadays, pedestrians and bikers are again free to cross the border.

Meadows, pastures and their denizens

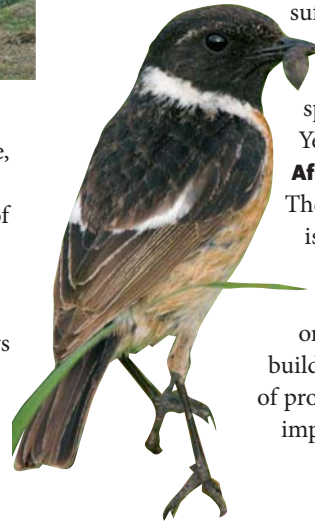
Cave finds testify to the presence of people in the karst as long as more than 30,000 years ago. Since then, the aspect of the region, that used to be covered by forests, was radically changed by logging and clear-cutting. The nutrient-poor soils failed to produce high yields and tended to be used as pastures. To this day, a varied, highly structured cultivated landscape, with meadows abounding in species and blossoms, with pastures and calcareous as well as dry grassland has remained characteristic of the region and provides important habitats for its plant and animal denizens, such as insects, amphibians and birds.

This is where butterflies with illustrious names, such as Woodland Ringlet, Great Banded Grayling, and the distinctive **Lesser Apollo butterfly** are in search of nourishment. The diversified structures composed of grass-land, hedges and bushes provide sufficient food



and nesting places for a number of bird species, such as the Yellow-hammer or the **African Stonechat**.

The **Red-backed Shrike** is breeding in the thornbushes of the dog rose or the blackthorn, building up a stock of provisions by impaling small insects on the thorns.



Changes in land use and land ownership have caused formerly highly structured areas to become overgrown with bushes, a fact that is causing a loss in biodiversity. In the two National Parks, pastures of special ecological value are mown once a year to prevent shrub invasion.

Wolf and Imperial Eagle

Two notable species encountered in the karst

Wolves are found single or in pairs, but most often in packs. They can live to be 16 years old, dwelling in burrows, preferably in open landscapes and sparse forests. They are shy animals with an excellent sense of hearing and of smell that comes in useful when hunting medium-sized mammals, insects, or frogs. Larger animals, such as Roe Deer, Wild Boars or Red Deer are hunted in a pack. Being classed as pests and suppliers of furs, excessive hunting caused wolves to become almost extinct in Europe. But a small population sustain in the karst. Wolves are strictly protected under the Fauna-Flora-Habitat Directive of the EU.



A singular denizen of the Gömör-Torna Karst is the imposing **Imperial Eagle** that belongs to the order of falconiforms.

A large part of the European population breeds along the Hungarian-Slovak border. The wingspan of this bird of prey, which grows to a size of 70 to 83 cm – the males being somewhat smaller than the females – can reach a width up to 2 m. The adults have a dark brown almost blackish plumage with white patches on the shoulders; head and neck are yellowish-brown. The Imperial Eagle preferably constructs its nest in a free-standing tree, where usually two chicks hatch at the end of March. The Imperial Eagle mainly feeds on gophers and hamsters. As an endangered species it is strictly protected under the EU Bird Protection Directive.

Natura Trail Gömör-Torna Karst

Arrival:

Hungary: Budapest-Miskolc: motorway M3;
Miskolc-Sajószentpéter: road 26-
Sajószentpéter-Szögliget crossroad: road 27
Slovakia: Košice-Rožňava: road 50;
Jablonov nad Turňou: turn-off to Silická Jablonica



Starting point: Szögliget/Szalamandra Ház

End point: Hrušov/bride on the stream Torna

It is a one-way hiking trail, with information boards at each end.

Distance: ca. 5 hours (about 8 km)

Directions: Szalamandra Ház - Szádvár - Derenk - Vidomáj-pusztá - border - Torna-stream

Starting at the Salamander-House a logging road takes us through the oak-hornbeam forest to the ruin of Szádvár (following the signs to Szádvár) from where we can enjoy a beautiful view. After returning back to the logging road (green sign – bicycle route) we walk further towards the border. At the information board, which displays the history of Derenk, we turn left into a meadow, following the path which will take us to the deserted village of Derenk. We pass small memorial plaques, reminiscent of the inhabitants of a Polish minority.

From Derenk we return to the information board (Derenk) and walk again on the green marked trail (bicycle route) on the logging road along less dense karst areas. After the border, we follow the yellow marks (yellow sign-bicycle route) which will take us to the little village of Hrušov. The Natura Trail can be explored by bicycle as well. This does not include a visit to Szádvár and Derenk, because there are no bike paths.

Accommodation:

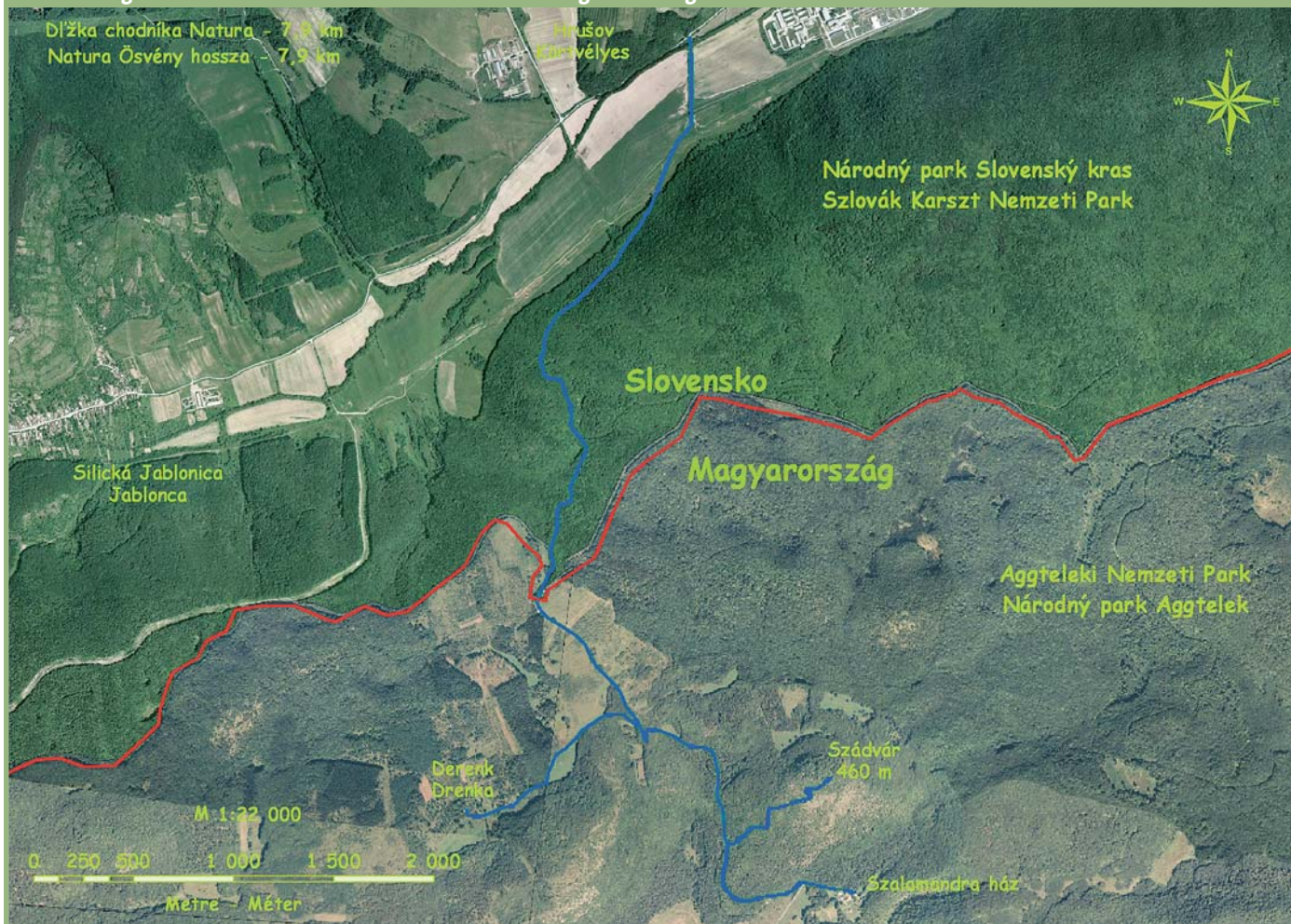
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Geocoaching – Naturerleben mit GPS www.naturatrails.net/geocoaching



SOURCE: GOOGLE (modified)

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www.anp.hu

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