

## Dinara – the Mountain of Extraordinary Beauty

The magnificent Dinara Mountain is a morpho-tectonic component of the Dinaric Alps, a mountain chain running through the territories of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Monte Negro, from the northwest to the southeast, separating the Adriatic sea from the Pannonian Plains.

Dinara is the highest mountain in Croatia, with its peak reaching 1,831 m above sea level. It extends from the saddle Derala (965 m) in the northwest up to the saddle Privija (1,230 m) above Unište in the southeast of the country. It is 20 km long and nearly 10 km wide. The origin of the name "Dinara" has not been established yet; it is thought that it could stem from the name of the Illiric tribe Dinara that once lived on the east side of the mountain. In the ancient times the mountain was called *Adrian oros*. It is not uncommon that the same area bears different names in Croatia and in Bosnia, which points to the fact that for a long time Dinara has been, and still is, a natural boundary between the countries and acts as such in the full sense of the word. In fact, Dinara spreads as a natural border between Dalmatia, a southern part of Croatia, and Bosnia, functioning as a high wall that separates two different worlds: one Mediterranean, at its southern bottom, and the other continental, to the north. In the history of Croatian people, this barrier played a very important role. The first Croatian state was born in the shelter of its slopes, and through several centuries, the "wall" provided a natural protection from the Turks, thwarting their invasions to the south. The Dinaric mountain range has been named after it. Together with other two orogenetic parts, the Šar-Pindus mountains in the southeast and Southern Limestone Alps in the northwest, this mountain range represents a tectonic unit called the Dinarides.

The earliest history of this area has been written in stone and saved in the material relicts of cultures of that time, such as stone axes, grindstones, knives, darts, and pottery, all gathered and exhibited in the Sinj museum. From the Roman legacy (this territory had been governed by the Roman Empire for more than 600 years) we have learnt that a large Illiric tribe Dalmatae lived here; the Romans named their province Dalmatia (formerly called Illyricum) after them. With the irruption of Avaric and Slavic tribes, the Croats became and stayed to the present day the main ethnical subject in these parts.

The inhabitants of the region at the foot of the mountain are famous for their valuable, almost exotic, national costumes and other interesting folklore elements, e.g., the Vrlika reel dance. There are few permanent settlements on Dinara. Mainly, there are modest summer huts of cattle-breeders from the region under the mountain and from the Sinj plain, and a few villages in several bigger valleys. The area is characterized by lack of water, especially during dry summer time, when people have to carry water from distant springs, several hours of walk away (1). Through this karstic region runs the Cetina River, giving the area its unique beauty. From its source in the village at the foot of the Dinara mountain, after which it was named, this wonderful river flows over 100 km through many picturesque places, penetrating the magnificent cliffs to reach its mouth in the city of Omiš, once a well-known pirates' place. The territory through which the Cetina River runs was once a historic Republic of Poljica, which spread over an area of around 250 square kilometers east from Split. The Republic realized its autonomy in the 14th century or even earlier. The Statute of Poljica, which is considered one of the most valuable legal-historical documents in Croatia, was issued in 1440. The Republic of Poljica ceased to exist after Napoleon's military action in 1807 (2). The source of the Cetina River is a typical karst spring, which forms a little dark lake in the rocky sinkhole from which the river immediately rises. Not far from the spring there is Vrlika Cave, still not completely explored, but considered the biggest cave complex in Croatia. Among the archeological monuments from the old Croatian state, the most precious is the church of Sv. Spas Vrhici (St. Savior) (Vrhici meaning "at the top of the river"), in today's Cetina village (3,4).

The Dinara Mountain is a natural border between the Mediterranean climate of the Adriatic and continental climate in the hinterland. At the mountain bottom (300-700 m above sea level) prevails mild, warm climate with dry summers, and the average temperature in the coldest month never falls below -3°C. Below the altitude of 1,000 m, the climate is characterized by humid and warm summers, whereas at the altitudes above 1,500 m, the climate is humid and boreal, with fresh summers and snow covering

the mountain tops from November until April, and remaining in firm basins even during the summer (5).

There are no rivers or streams on the mountain because of its porous limestone structure. Water can be found only in puddles, firm basins, and ice-pits. The basic appearance of the area is characterized by the karstic formations in limestone and lack of rich soil, precipitation, and vegetation (6).

The southern, sea-facing slopes of Dinara are covered with scarce vegetation, turning with altitude into low bushes. Rocky meadows and grasslands predominate at around 800-900 m above sea level. Mountain pine forests can be found at higher altitudes, toward the border with Bosnia. On the Bosnian side, up to the height of about 850 m, a mixed forest of pubescent oak and European hophornbeam can be found, and forests of beech and silver fir above that altitude. Above the forest zone, which spreads up to around 1,380 m, there are grasslands. Furthermore, juniper-wood can be found on Troglav and other mountain peaks. Mixed beech and silver fir forest, with abundant fauna, is characterized by the smallest temperature changes between day and night (7,8).

Various wild beasts inhabit the mountain, such as wildcat, wolf, fox, jackal, weasel, pine marten, stone marten, brown bear, and lynx (the last being rather rare). As to cloven-hoofed animals, wild boar, doe, and chamois are common. Dinara bird life is also rich, and the most common are capercaillie, hazel-hen, Greek partridge, hawk, and golden eagle (9). There is also an endemic rodent species, *Dolomys bogdanovi longipedis* (Dinaric mouse), a protected species in this area, just like the squirrel (10).

Dinara mountain is strategically very important for Croatia, since all movements and traffic between inland and sea coast can be controlled from the mountain peaks. During the recent war, the mountain offered protection to the soldiers of Croatian Army, and the military-police action "Storm" in 1995 began on its slopes. The lines of Serbian rebels on the Dinara and Livno fields were broken on the Christmas Eve 1994, whereupon the mountaintops fell under the control of the Croatian Army and formations of Bosnian Croats (HVO). This allowed further progression of Croatian soldiers towards the town of Knin and other occupied Croatian regions. In the summer of 1995, after the liberation of Bosansko Grahovo, the Croatian Army units continued toward Knin and liberated the complete territory, which had been under occupation of the Serbian rebels assisted by the former Yugoslav Army (11).

While staying on Dinara during the war, 66 Croatian soldiers were infected by hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome. The existence of a natural focus of hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome was con-

firmed (12). Information on the location of this natural focus of the zoonosis will prove very useful for climbers, hikers, as well as soldiers on military training in that area (13).

Dinara has thus become a very interesting mountain for scientists from various fields (botanists, zoologists, physicians, archeologists, speleologists, and other), prompting them to perform further research. It is obvious that the mountain has not been sufficiently explored so far. In its rude karst beauty, it still hides many natural phenomena of unique and special forms, irresistible to all nature lovers searching for challenging adventures.

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