

THE SLOVENE MOUNTAIN TRAIL



About the Authors

Justi Carey and Roy Clark started visiting the British mountains in their teens, a discovery which has shaped their whole lives. Their passion and love for the outdoors has led to travels across the world – taking in Iceland, North America, Jordan and New Zealand – and a deep commitment to the environment, while their continuing interest in being ‘out there’ has resulted in an enthusiasm for downhill and cross-country skiing, canoeing, cycle touring, and horse riding, among other things. After 16 wonderful years in Slovenia, they have recently moved to north-west Ireland for some new adventures.

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Walking in Slovenia: The Karavanke

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THE SLOVENE MOUNTAIN TRAIL

SLOVENSKA PLANINSKA POT

by Justi Carey and Roy Clark

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www.cicerone.co.uk

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Second edition 2019
ISBN 978 1 78631 020 0
First edition 2009

Printed by KHL Printing, Singapore
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
All photographs are by the authors unless otherwise stated.

DEDICATION

*for all those who nurture the land
and seek to protect the wild places of the earth*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our good friends Tatjana and Brane Sitar, Mirjam Martinuč-Bernard and Rok Bernard, and all the many others who have helped us along the way. Keith Gaines, Carol Piercy and Colin Burge, Sue and Ivan Godfrey, and Diane Badham sent us invaluable updates for the second edition, and we thank them.

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1020/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: Walking along the Karavanke from Stol to Vajnež (Stage 5)

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Warning

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

To call out the Mountain Rescue, ring the international emergency number 112 for rescue, fire and medical or 113 for police only: this will connect you via any available network.

Walkers nearing the summit of Porezen (Stage 9)



Map key

	motorway
	main road
	minor road/forest track
	route with direction arrow
	tunnel
	ski lift
	national boundary
	railway
	river
	ridge
	town/village
	peak
	col
	hut
	campsite
	habitation
	waterfall
	marshy ground
	direction arrow
	viewing tower
	cave(s)



*Crossing the top of the screes below Kranjska
Rinka on route to Skuta*



INTRODUCTION

*Making hay in the Zadnjica valley
near Trenta (Stage 8, Day 1)*



Slovenia is only a tiny country, but within its small area lies some of the most varied and beautiful mountain scenery in the whole of Europe. From the stark heights of the Alps, through forested plateaus and rolling hill country scattered with small farmsteads, to the fascinating limestone karst areas, Slovenia has it all. And to explore it, there are thousands of kilometres of waymarked tracks and paths, from wine routes to high mountains and via ferratas. The series of treks described in this book together form the Slovene Mountain Trail and constitute around 550km of walking that is by turn beautiful, impressive, magnificent and spectacular, and will richly reward all who undertake the journey.

Flying in to Ljubljana International Airport at Brnik, the lofty mountains, the hills with their red-roofed churches, and the villages surrounded by neatly tended fields look as if you could hold them in

the palm of your hand. This is a jewel of a land, perfectly poised between the Alps and the sea, invaded from all directions throughout the ages but never overcome, and still retaining a vision of the important things in life that many of us, in today's busy world, are struggling to find. Once out on the trail, the body relaxes and the mind settles, until the vital things are not lists of urgent tasks to be done, but the beauty of a butterfly on an alpine flower, the sudden startling view as you turn a corner, or the shaft of sunlight shifting through the transparent green of the leaves.

The original concept of the Slovene Mountain Trail was to encourage mountaineers to appreciate the beauty of the Slovene environment, and it certainly offers plenty of opportunity for that. Because of the small size of the country, one of the charms of the route is that from most of the high points along

the way, you can see where you have come from and where you are going next. Triglav, the highest mountain in Slovenia, at 2864m, can be seen from almost every viewpoint, and by the time you come to climb it, you have the feeling of meeting an old friend.

Slovenia is about the size of Wales, or half the size of Switzerland, and although only about 11 per cent of the land area is covered by high mountains, 90 per cent is higher than 300m above sea level, and the Slovenes proudly count themselves an Alpine nation. Mountains have shaped the country and its culture; its northern and western borders are formed by the Karavanke and the Julian Alps, while agriculture and land use have been dictated by the terrain. With a present-day population of about two million centred on Ljubljana, the capital city, there are only a handful of other large towns, the most important being Maribor, Celje and Kranj. Much of the population still lives in villages, which are connected to the main centres by an excellent public transport system.

The Slovenes are immensely proud of their land, and this is evident on even a short visit. Once you have sampled the mountains, the countryside, the old town centres and the easy-going way of life, you will want to return again and again.

LANDSCAPE AND GEOLOGY

Slovenia is one of the most mountainous countries in Europe. The Slovene Mountain Trail can wander across the length and breadth of Slovenia, linking several mountain ranges and hill regions, and stay up high for many days at a time.

In spite of its small size, there are several distinct geographical regions in Slovenia: the Alpine area, including the Julian Alps, the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, Pohorje and the Karavanke; the foothills (pre-Alps) to the south of the Alps; the karst area, south of Ljubljana towards the Italian border; the short coastline; and a small area of flat Pannonian plain to the northeast, near the border with Hungary.

Geologically, most of Slovenia is composed of limestone. The term karst, derived from the Slovene word *kras*, is used all over the world to describe limestone formations, and includes such features as deep, steep-sided gorges and dry valleys, sinkholes, springs, water-dissolved caves and tunnels underground, and water-eroded surface rocks resulting in the formation of limestone pavement, all of which are encountered in abundance along the route.

The main characteristic of limestone, seen to dramatic effect in the landscape, is its porous nature, which allows water to sink directly into the rock. This means that there is relatively little surface water in the form of streams or lakes. There are several intermittent or periodic lakes, which come and go throughout the year, the largest of these being Cerknica, south of Ljubljana, which can reach up to 40km² in area. Rivers and lakes are linked below ground level by incredibly complex systems of caves and channels, many of which are still not fully explored. There are over 7000 caves in Slovenia, with more still being discovered each year, and several cave systems are known to be well over 1000m deep.

Throughout the Alps, glaciation has played a major part in forming the



In the cavern of the Zadnje Okno – the smaller of Prisojnik's two natural windows (Stage 6, Day 5)

landscape. There are many textbook examples of U-shaped valleys, glacial moraines, erratic boulders and other features of glaciation. Fast-flowing rivers like the Soča, with their great erosive power, have carved steep-sided valleys in the surrounding mountains. Another typical feature of the area is high mountain karst, typified by the Kriški podi below Razor (Stage 6). High mountain karst is formed when a karst (limestone) plateau is above the treeline, with little vegetation cover, in an area of high precipitation, so that snow and water remain at the surface for more than half the year. This means that water erosion is greatly increased, resulting in diverse rock formations that are of great interest to geologists and cavers, such as deep sinkholes, potholes and vertical shafts, limestone pavements, and immensely complex systems of caves and tunnels.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Although Slovenia is a tiny country, its topography is such that it has three distinct climatic zones: a Mediterranean climate by the coast, with warm, sunny weather throughout much of the year, along with mild winters; a continental climate in eastern Slovenia, with hot summers and cold winters; and an Alpine climate in the northwest, with warm summers, cold winters and abundant precipitation. Most of the Slovene Mountain Trail falls into the Alpine area, but the later sections are increasingly influenced by the Mediterranean.

Global warming is affecting Slovenia. Climate patterns are changing and it is not possible to predict fully the results of

that change. Trends over the past 20 years or so suggest that temperatures are rising – there is less snow in winter, and summers are hotter, evidenced by the melting of the Triglav glacier, which is now reduced to a large ice patch.

In any mountain area, weather is notoriously difficult to forecast. Snow can occur at any time of year, and can render a summer walking trip a disaster if you are not adequately prepared. In summer the snow does not tend to lie for long, but the peaks and high-altitude paths of the Alps can be snowbound from October to June in some years. April and November are times of maximum rainfall. Thunderstorms are common in July and August, and can be particularly dangerous on ridges and high-altitude routes – they can spring up out of clear air within half an hour, perhaps not leaving enough time to get to safer ground. Thunderstorms are most common in the afternoon and evening, so it is often advisable to make an early start so you have a chance of getting to the next hut before a storm occurs.

Weather forecasts are difficult to obtain once you are out on the trail, although hut wardens should be able to help. Make full use of the available facilities before you set out. There are forecasts on television (Slovenia 1) daily at 6.55 and 7.55pm, which cover the whole country and give a long-range forecast for about four days ahead (the broadcast is of course in Slovene, but the map symbols are universal). Tourist information offices will also have a forecast. The website www.arso.gov.si is only in Slovene, but click on the word *vreme* (weather) in the top bar and then

napovedi in podatki, and look down the list to find *vremenska napoved v sliki* (weather forecast in pictures) – this gives a two-day forecast. Other general weather websites will give you an idea of the outlook, but are unlikely to offer any detail for mountain areas.

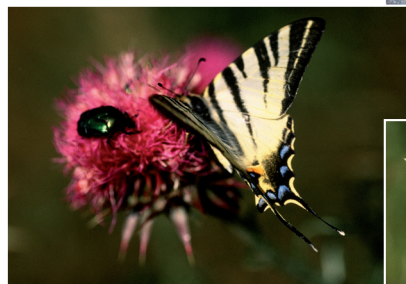
A somewhat unusual hazard is the limestone rock – as it is very pale, the sun shines on it with an effect like snow. Sunglasses are therefore recommended even on days that appear cloudy.

WILDLIFE AND FLOWERS

This brief section can come nowhere near doing justice to the wealth of wildlife to be found in Slovenia – we mention here only some of the key species that can be observed.

Limestone areas tend to be a botanist's delight. The thin soil does not allow any one species to gain

Swallowtail butterfly with 'tiger stripe' markings ▼



Sea holly is encountered frequently, particularly in the southern sections of the route ►

dominance, so an astonishing variety of plant life flourishes, even among the rocks of the highest peaks. Flowers are a highlight of all the stages of the route, from the alpsines of the high mountains to the aromatic herbs of the coastal areas. In the Alps the white stars of edelweiss are common, along with the deep blue of various species of gentian and the pink cushions of moss campion. Two alpine flowers in particular are beloved to the Slovenes: the Triglav rose (*Potentilla nitida*), a bright-pink flower supposed to have sprung from drops of the blood of Zlatorog, the golden-horned chamois of local legend, and Zois' bellflower (*Campanula zoysii*), related to the harebell.



▲ Alpine pasqueflower



description of the route before setting out, as even some of the easier graded stages require stamina, while some days may be shortened by spreading a stage over an extra night or two.

Each stage begins with an information box giving details of the start and finish points, distance, time, grade (explained below), height gained and lost, maps needed and access. Then a short introduction describes the highlights and 'feel' of the route, along with any points of interest or difficulty. Each day begins similarly with a short introduction and information box followed by the route description.

The stages are not intended to be completed in any particular order, and indeed you may enjoy any number of them with no intention of ever completing the whole route. However, it will enhance your enjoyment of the walks if you read at least the introduction to all the stages, in order to have an idea of where the route has been and where it is going next.

Walk information

Distance is given in kilometres and is taken from the map, taking no account of the extra distance covered on steep terrain. Distance becomes less useful in mountain country – on difficult ground it could take many hours to cover a small number of kilometres. Consider the distances in conjunction with the time given in the box.

The **time** given for each day is offered as a guide only, and takes no account of rest stops, taking photographs and so on. Usually our timings coincided with those suggested by signposts; in the few instances where this is not the case we have said so in the text.

Each day has been given a **grade** from 1 to 3, to give an indication of length and difficulty, as described below. This is necessarily subjective, and, again, is intended as a guide only – it does not correspond directly to international grading systems. Some days are easier or more difficult than others, even within the same grade. Any particularly significant points are mentioned in individual route descriptions. Remember you are likely to be walking with a full pack, and may not be able to cover the same distances as you would with a small daysack.

- 1 Mostly on tracks or lanes, with some height gain and loss, but no technical difficulty or very steep ground – although it may be long and tiring.
- 2 A day with significant height gain or loss, rough ground, and probably some steep sections with easy scrambling.
- 3 A serious, high route, long and strenuous, often exposed, and usually with sections of fixed protection such as steel pegs and cables. Previous experience is required, and self-belaying equipment and a helmet are strongly recommended.

The **heights gained** and **lost** are also taken from the map and the route profiles provided for each stage – as such they are an approximation only.

The **○** symbol in a route description indicates a place where you can collect a stamp for your record book.

STAGE 1 MARIBOR TO SLOVENJ GRADEC



Distance	59km
Time	4 days
Grade	1
Height gained	2260m
Height lost	2130m
Map	Pohorje 1:50,000 PZS
Access	To get to the start of the route, take the number 6 bus to Spodnje Radvanje, and get off at the end of Radvanska cesta. Turn left at the T-junction and walk along the road to number 70 Streliška cesta, then turn right up the side road Pot na Okope; the sign that marks the start of the route is just a few metres up here. The number 2 bus also goes close to Pot na Okope; www.marprom.si/webmap/website/webmap.php has a good map of Maribor bus routes and timetables.

The route starts in Maribor, the second city of Slovenia in importance as well as size, and crosses the high, forested plateau of Pohorje. This upland area, although it doesn't rise much above 1500m, provides beautiful woodland walking and is popular throughout the year. In winter it has some of the best skiing in Slovenia – the cross-country trails are particularly good.

After the first steep ascent up from Maribor, the plateau undulates gently through the all-pervading forest. There are no technical difficulties in this stage – the walking is on woodland tracks and paths. The route is mostly well marked, but be aware that the plateau is crisscrossed with forest roads and the map is not always accurate – follow the waymarks and signs carefully.

The closure of Koča na Klopnem vrhu means that the recommended days from the first edition have had to be changed, giving a long Day 2 and a short Day 3. Consider using Ruška koča at the end of Day 1 to shorten Day 2 by about 4.5km.

DAY 1

Maribor to Mariborska koča

The first day is short, to allow time to get to Maribor. The route leaves the city behind and climbs up through the quiet forest onto the Pohorje plateau.

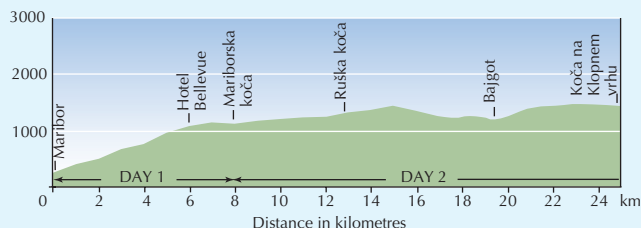
Start	Spodnje Radvanje in Maribor
Finish	Mariborska koča
Distance	8km
Time	3hr
Grade	1
Height gained	830m
Height lost	40m
Stamp	Mariborska koča

Maribor (www.maribor-pohorje.si) is a compact city situated on both banks of the River Drava. It is a university town, which gives it a young and vibrant feel, and it also has an interesting old quarter and pleasant walks along the banks of the river. Maribor is known for several theatre and music festivals, and the surrounding hills are noted wine-growing areas. There is plenty of accommodation at all standards, and Maribor is easy to reach by bus or train from Ljubljana. You can also fly to Graz in Austria (served by Ryanair from Stansted) and take a train to Maribor.



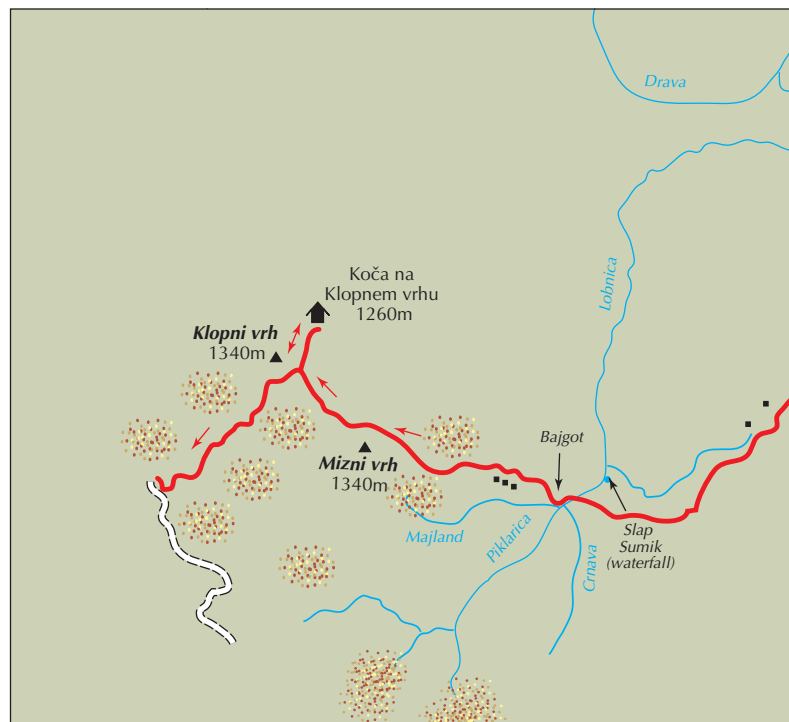
Looking back down the ski slopes towards the city of Maribor

Stage 1: Days 1–2



A noticeboard and waymark declare the start of the Slovenska Planinska Pot. Walk along the narrow road heading towards the broad, forested ridge of the Pohorje plateau, with the Maribor ski slopes further to the right. After 300m reach a junction of paths, and follow signs for Mariborska koča, almost immediately entering the trees on the wooded shoulder. In less than 100m reach another junction and bear left, following waymarks.

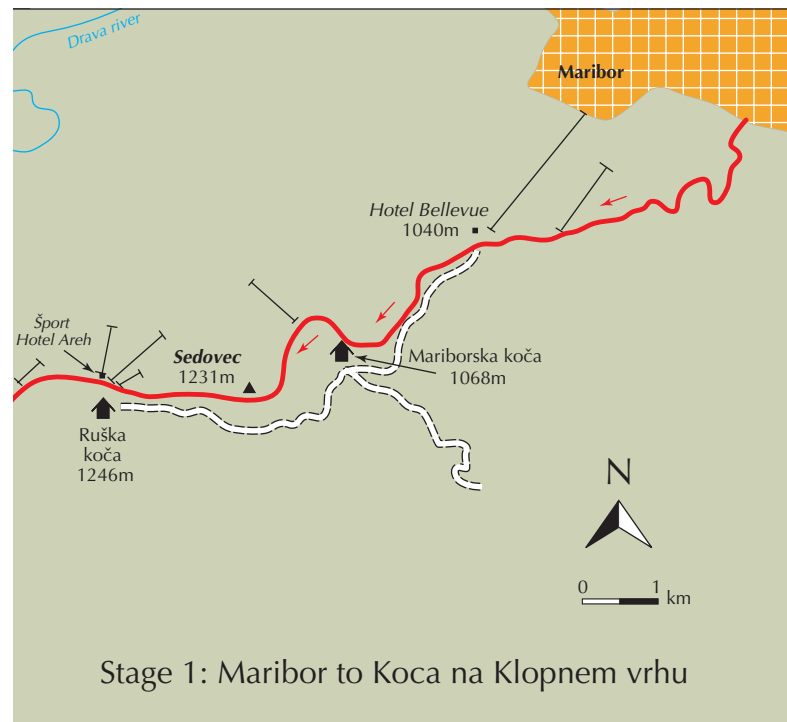
After about 500m skirt a small orchard, and within a few metres join a narrow road and continue up it a short distance to a junction. Mariborska koča is signed straight on, via the Južna pot, but turn right onto a rough track, also signed for the koča and Route 1, named the Šumljakova pot. The way follows a series of deep, rutted troughs, so you may find it preferable to continue on top of the banks, particularly in wet weather when the troughs act as drainage channels.



Continue to ascend through tall beech trees, following waymarks carefully where the route meets other tracks; the correct route is not always the obvious one! After about 1hr 50min, pass through an opening in the ski fence and continue up the left side of the piste on a gravel track to reach a group of wooden holiday chalets. Bear right, following the line of a small ski tow to reach the **Hotel Bellevue** complex and ski station, where there are good views of Maribor, now far below.

Walk past the hotel to the end of the tarmac road, and follow a sign for Mariborska koča 45min. The path initially runs alongside the road, on its right side, for a short distance, and then enters the woods. After about 10min or so the track divides, but continue to follow signs bearing left for the *koča*. ◀

The forest is a mixture of spruce and beech, while startlingly blue gentians line the path.



Stage 1: Maribor to Koca na Klopnem vrhu

In another 300m continue straight on at a fork, and pass behind a big apartment building with the main road below it. Soon the path reaches the road, and for a short while runs parallel to it, passing some small, pretty weekend cottages, before veering off once more into the wood. Eventually the path joins a minor road that you follow between houses for a short distance to a junction. Turn right, and in less than 5min reach **Mariborska koča** (1068m) ○.

Mariborska koča is open all year round, every day except Mondays. It has toilets and a washroom and shower with hot and cold running water.