

## THE HUNGARIAN PLAN FOR THE USE OF BISERUJKA CAVE ON THE ISLAND KRK (CROATIA) FROM 1910

### Abstract

The cave Biserujka (Omišaljka cave, Slivanjska pit, Vitezić cave) was known from 1834. At first it was used by smugglers for hiding their smuggled goods and later by numerous tourists who destroyed it by breaking speleothems, thinking it was precious stone. In 1910 in Omišalj the society JAMA (means pit) was founded. In the same year JAMA issued a poster – the Hungarian project offering building plots near the entrance of the cave, but the project failed. It is known that in 1911 the Tourist office from Crikvenica organised the cave as show cave; a small stony house was built over the entrance, tourist path leading through the cave was fixed and it was electrically illuminated. However, soon, due to the wars the cave was neglected until 1969 when it was restored for the first time, and neglected again. In 1997 the cave was renovated and today it is still in permanent use for tourist purposes.

Key words: Cave Biserujka, island Krk, tourism, building plots, society JAMA

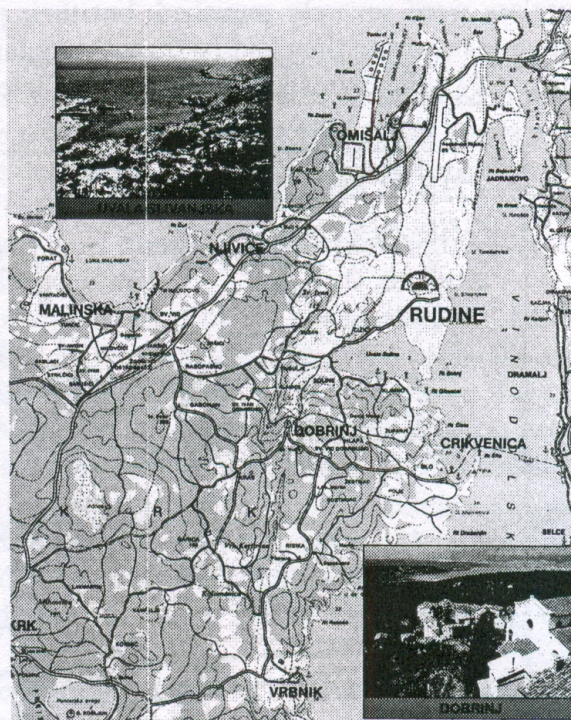
The cave Biserujka on the island Krk is relatively small cave, but nice and today very well organised show cave, counting numerous visitors per year.

It is known a long ago under several different names. Since it is situated near the Slivanjska bay on the north-east part of the island Krk, it was known as Slivanjska pit or Slivanjska cave. It was named pit (pit = jama) because the entrance of the cave is very steep and it seems like a pit. Because of Omišalj, a little town near the cave, it was called Omišaljka cave and as the entrance is situated on the former property of the bishop Vitezić it was also called Vitezić cave.

The name Biserujka originates from the time when visitors started admiring the cave's speleothems that were glittering like pearls (pearl = biser) and therefore it was named the Pearl cave.

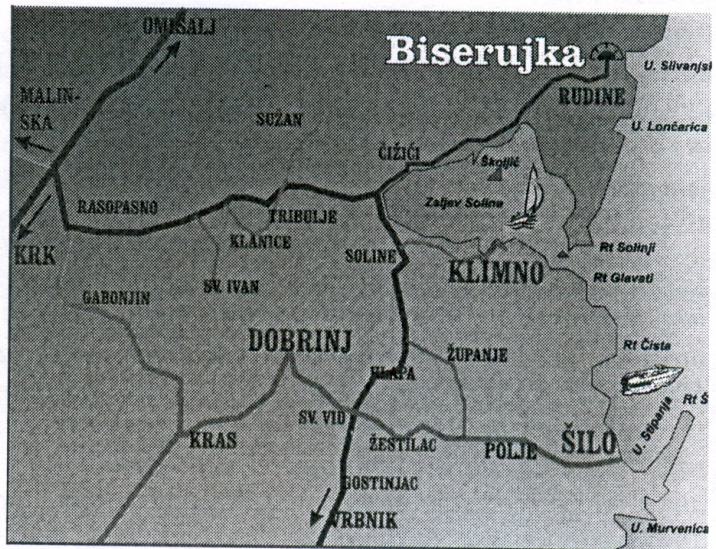
The reason for writing this article is recent discovery of the poster – the Hungarian project of tourist settlement near the cave Biserujka dated from 1909 or 1910. Several copies of this poster circulate on the island and the members of the Speleological Department of the Mountaineering Club «Željezničar» from Zagreb got hold of some of them. Since the content of the poster incorporates well into the history of the cave, a short tourist history of the cave is presented here; from its discovery to the present days.

The first acknowledgement of the cave dates from the beginning of the 19th century. The oldest recorded event related to the cave occurred in 1834. That year, in the town Senj, a smuggler was arrested. It was found out that the

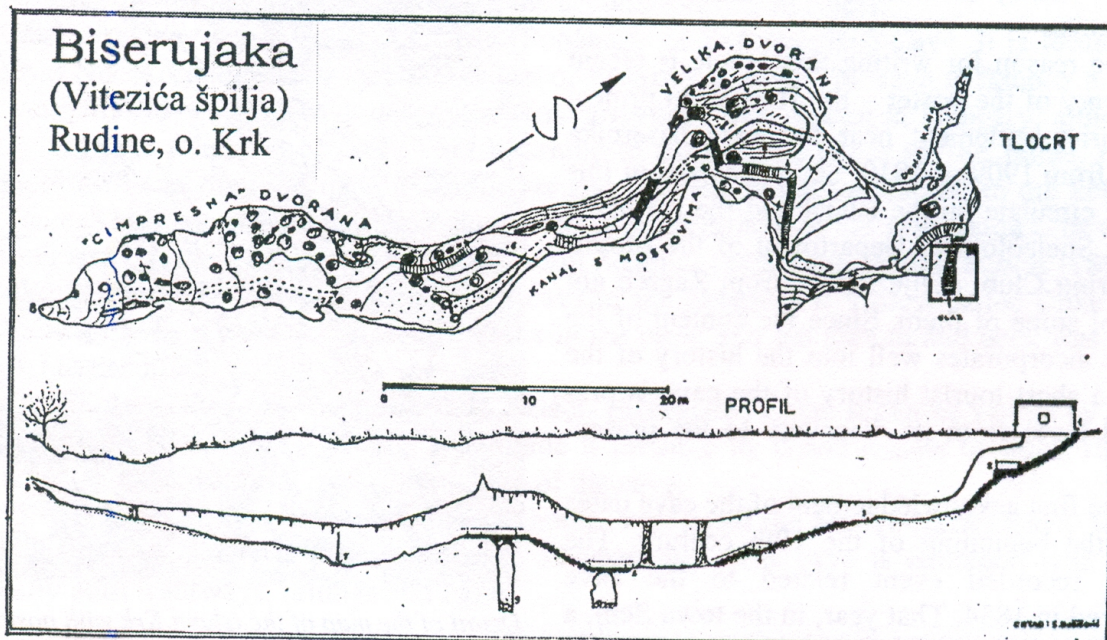


Detail of the map of the island Krk with position of the cave Biserujka

smuggler's goods were hidden in a cave on the island Krk. In order to save his goods he had told his friend where the cave was situated. He had found the cave and the smuggled goods. He had also found a narrow passage leading into the deeper part of the cave. He had passed crawling through this narrow and had come into the chamber full of magnificent speleothems. Due to the poor lighting in the cave he had imagined all sorts of things, become frightened and had gone out of the cave. Soon, people started talking about fairy's palaces, hidden treasure, ghosts etc. in the cave and for that reason a mass visiting of the cave had begun. People had then begun breaking the speleothems and bringing them out thinking that those were precious stones that could be easily sold for a lot of money, particularly in Venice. The rumours about it had reached the political government of the island Krk, so the local authority of the village Dobrinj had the door built in on the entrance and employed the guards. This was the first physical protection of a cave in Croatia.



But the stories of precious stones encouraged several peasants of Dobrinj to go into the cave. First they overcame the guards, broke the door and, using axes, broke many speleothems, and took them home in bags. Luckily, they were recognised and arrested. It was written: "Those burglars were severely punished, but their punishment was not adequate to compensate for barbarous damage they had inflicted". As far as we know, this is the first, and the only case of somebody being punished for damage inflicted to a cave in Croatia.





*Hungarian poster from 1910*

People continued to visit the cave leaving many traces of their presence in the cave; broken speleothems, speleothems covered with soot and many signatures. Those signatures are mostly situated at the end of the cave and mostly originate from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

From 1867 to 1918 the island Krk was under the government of Austro-Hungarian monarchy which had influenced the records of the cave, meaning that the first descriptions of the cave were written out of Croatia, and on the foreign languages. The first descriptions were by G. Kubić (1874) in Trieste, J. Frischauf (1891) in Graz, F. Hasper (1894) in Budapest, A. Böhm and L. Waagen (1905) in Wien, and the first descriptions in Croatia by M. Solić (1903) and D. Hirc (1905) in Zagreb.

All writers praised the beauty of the cave and invited readers to visit it, the more that the cave was in the vicinity of the known tourist and health resorts Opatija and Crikvenica. Therefore, no wonder that people realised the value of the cave and wanted to incorporate it into the bath and health tourism of that time.

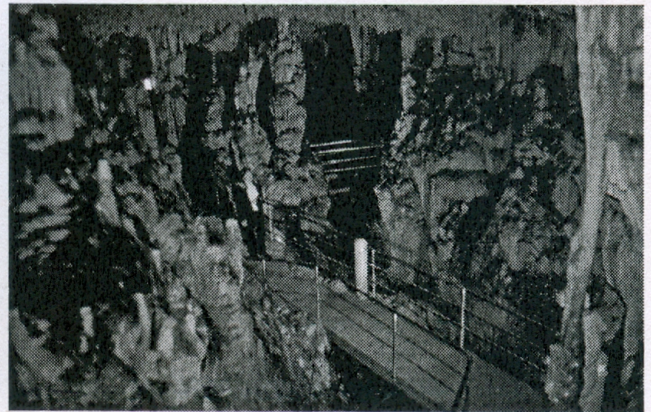
At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Omišalj on the island Krk, the Society of sea bath JAMA was established. Unfortunately for now, it is not known neither who established it nor the exact time of its establishment. According to the poster, printed in the Hungarian language, it is assumed that it was at the end of 1909 or at the beginning of 1910. The publisher Fried és Krakauet printed the poster in Budapest, under No 8136

Those data indicate that the members of the Society were Hungarian citizens working on the island Krk and in the area, i.e. that this Society was Hungarian.

The poster mentioned contains a part of the topographic map of the north-east part of the island Krk and a detail of the map of the surroundings of the cave's entrance. The map shows building plots offered for sale under various privileges, conditioned to register before the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1910. The poster was obviously aimed for broader public, since the number of plots was enormous. All plots were numbered, and it is possible to enumerate as much as 574 of them.

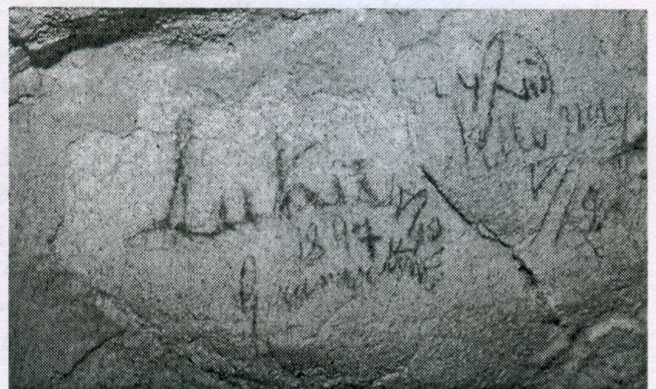
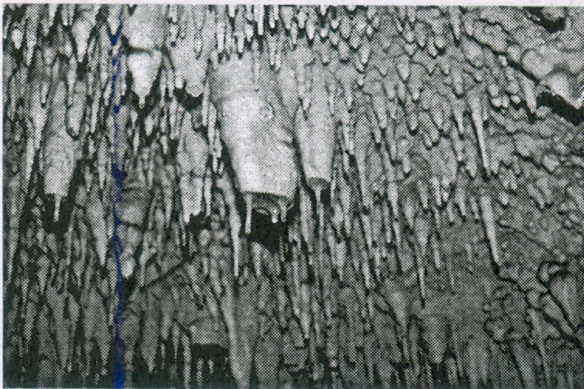
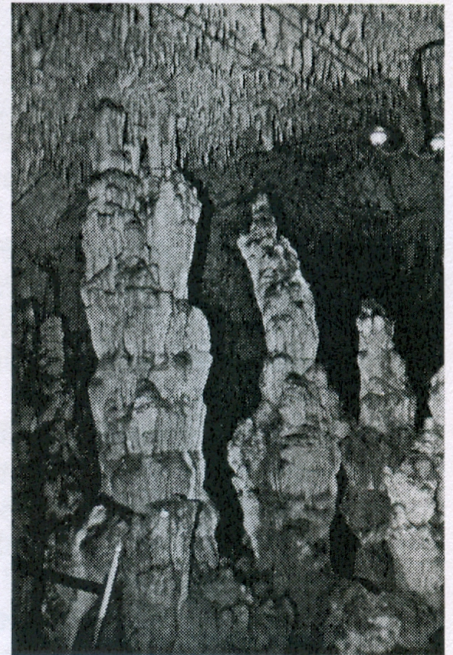
The plots were arranged in a way that creates a big settlement with health buildings, places of amusements (casino), streets, parks, quays in the Slivanjska bay, promenade along the sea side and others. The Society offered "stones, soil and plants free of charge". This settlement had about 230 000 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 480 x 480 m) and each plot about 200 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 20 x 10 m).

There is no information about how many people were interested in buying those plots, and who had registered for this. However, in 1911, in Crikvenica, the big demonstrations were held against the influence of the foreigners - Hungarians. Then it came out that this Project of the big



Nowadays entrance  
and interiors of the  
cave Biserujka

A Biserujka-barlang  
jelenlegi bejárata és  
néhány belső részlete



settlement on the island Krk was either a misunderstanding or a planned fraud. The organisers of the Project either thought that the land around the cave belonged to nobody and that the Society could sell it or they knew that the land belonged to somebody but didn't expect them to react. In any case, the owners rose against the Society and the Project failed. There are no more data about this Society.

It is known that, in a short period before the World War I (1914), a small stony house was built over the entrance of the cave, tourist path leading through the cave was fixed and the cave was electrically illuminated. The works were done by the Tourist office from Crikvenica. Due to the wars that followed the cave was neglected till 1969 when it was restored for the first time, but soon after that it was neglected again. In 1997 the cave was renovated again and from that time onwards is in use for tourist purposes. ŠILO TOURIST, from Šilo on the island Krk, takes care of the cave.

In the passed period many people wrote about the cave. Between the two World Wars foreign biospeleologists explored animals in the cave, while later all researches of the cave were conducted by domestic scientists (biologists, geologists, speleologists, protectors of the nature) - see list of references.

The cave is now marked by the topographic sign for caves on all topographic and tourist maps of the island Krk. The cave can be reached from the sea side, by a boat, e.g. from Crikvenica to the Slivanjska bay, and from there it is about 400 m to the west, or it can be reached by a car from Omišalj and hamlet Rudine, from where the cave is some 400 m to the north-west. The cave is 110 m long. It is a simple channel rich with speleothems, situated about 10 m under the cave's entrance. Only 65 m of the cave is adjusted for visitors. The tourist path, with little bridges and fences, leads through the cave and it is illuminated by electric light from a diesel motor. The temperature in the cave ranks from 10°C to 13°C depending on the temperature outside the cave. Folders (prospects) and post-cards can be obtained in the kiosk near the entrance, as well as in every tourist office on the island Krk.

The area foreseen by the Society JAMA for the tourist settlement is still now building free, that means that the surrounding of the cave's entrance is karst terrain overgrown in macchia and low bush.

## A KRK-SZIGETEN LEVŐ BISERUJUKA-BARLANG MAGYAR HASZNOSÍTÁSI TERVE 1910-BŐL

### Összefoglalás

A Biserujka-barlang (Omišaslsjska-barlang, Slivanjska-üreg, Vitezič-barlang) már 1834-től ismert volt. Először csempészek használták a csempészett javak elrejtésére, majd később a nagyszámú turista rongálta a barlangot, és tördelte a képződményeit, mert azokat értékes köveknek tartották. 1910-ben Omišalj-ban megalakult a Jama Társaság. Még ugyanabban az évben a Jama megjelentetett egy posztert – a magyar terv felajánlott egy házhelyet a barlangbejárat közelében, ám a terv meghíúsult. Ismereteink szerint a barlang a Crikveniai Idegenforgalmi Hivatal 1911-ben idegenforgalmi barlangként működtette; egy kis kőházat építettek a bejárat fölött, járdákat építettek a barlangban, s bevezették az elektromos világítást. A háborúk következtében a barlang látogatása 1969-ig szünetelt, ekkor rendbe hozták, majd ismét feledésbe merült. 1997-ben felújították és mai napig folyamatosan látogatható a turisták számára.

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