

GOPARK IDRIJA – »The trail of natural scientist of Idrija«

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Until the middle of 18th century Idrija and its mercury mine was the centre of natural science development in Slovenia. Natural scientists were coming to Idrija because of the mine and they worked as doctors, pharmacists, botanists or in mine administration. Here they wrote numerous works from the area of geology, metallurgy, chemistry and botanic, which represent the basis of modern research and are still used today. Many botanic and animal species as well as cultural and natural attractions in Idrija were named after the beginners of Slovene and European natural science development.

The development of natural science in Idrija started already in 16th century, when a famous doctor and botanist **Pier Andrea Mattioli** worked in Idrija, who along with many others studied vegetation in Slovenia. The first doctor in Idrija and a well known naturalistic polymath in Europe **Joannes Antonius Scopoli** worked in Idrija between 1754 in 1769. This was a very successful period for his scientific and publicity work. He was doing research in the area of botanic, zoology, chemistry, mineralogy, geology and set the basis of European occupational medicine. During his stay in Idrija he corresponded with a famous Swedish naturalist Carl Linné and wrote some of his most important works. In 1766 a naturalist **Balthasar Hacquet** came to Idrija and worked as a surgeon and doctor until 1773, when he continued his work as a professor at the Ljubljana lyceum.

In 1774 **Johann Jacob Ferber** contributed the first coherent geological description of the Idrija region. His study surpasses the local Idrija borders, since he also studied the geological composition of broader Slovene territory. However, the author of the main work on Idrian geology is **Marko Vincenc Lipold**, the manager of Idrija mine. With his thorough field work he already determined the basic characteristics of Idrija ore deposit and made the first detailed geological map of Idrija region, which obtained a special award at the World exhibition in Vienna in 1873. The Idrija region was studied throughout the history by numerous Austrian geologists, although its final composition was analysed by Slovene geologists in the seventies. In this period the "Geologic school of Idrija" was founded in Idrija, well known in Slovenia as well as in other parts of the world.

Today, the town of Idrija and its habitants keep memory of the researchers of Idrija in the collections of Idrija Municipal Museum and Mercury Mine of Idrija. Six memorial plates with dedications were raised in the centre of the town in front of the warehouse in honour of the researchers in Idrija and a square in the neighbourhood is named after Scopoli.

Near the water channel »Rake«, which pumped water for 350 years with large wheels or »kamšt« a school trail named »the trail of natural scientists of Idrija« was arranged, going from the town Idrija to the Wild Lake. **Scopoli memorial garden** is situated at the beginning of Rake and at the same time represents the entrance to the **Zgornja Idrijca Landscape Park**. The trail reveals colourful mineral structure, vegetation and botanic particularities as well as the history of the town related to mining. One especially interesting topic for school groups is the relation between minerals and vegetation, in other words between living and non-living nature. After two and a half kilometres the trail passes a Wild Lake, the biggest Karst source in Slovenia. The water springs at the bottom of the lake from a steep cave passage. In spring time the area is covered with flowers, which were analysed already by the first naturalists and were named after them, such as "teveje" (*Hacquetia epipactis*) and "kranjska bunika or volčič" (*Scopolia carniolica*). However, the most important flower is autochthonic "kranjski jeglič" (*Primula carniolica*), analysed by Hacquet.

These trails have been preserved for centuries. In the past naturalists of Idrija have been

walking along them and today they invite us to stop and discover the things that amazed them and encouraged their research already centuries ago.