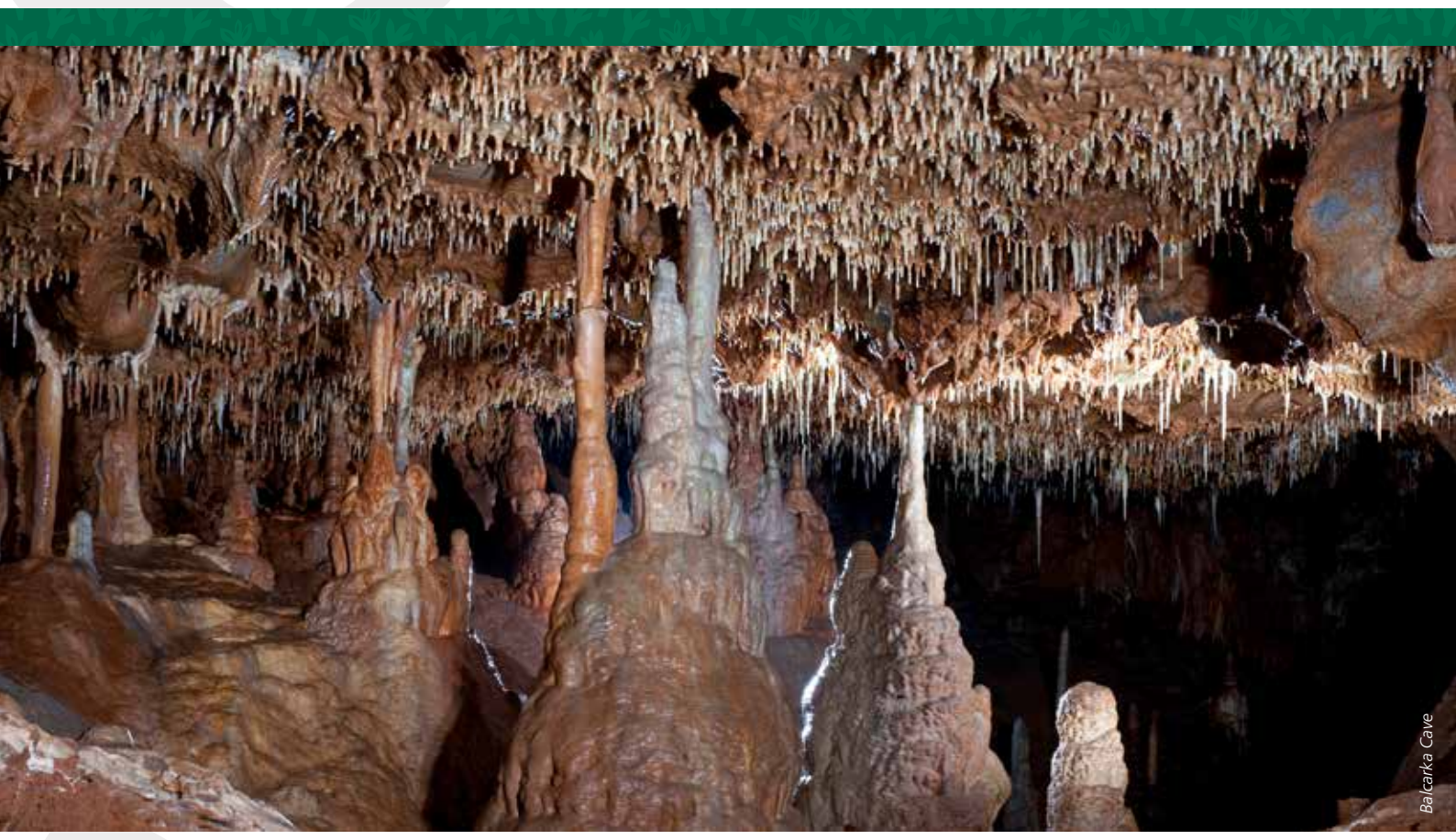
The Moravský kras House of Nature

Dům přírody MORAVSKÉHO KRASU



Balcarka Cave

Welcome to a landscape of white cliffs and shaded gorges, to a world of roaring waters disappearing into jagged swallow holes that take water from the daylight to the eternal darkness of extensive cave systems, chasms and domes. The silence of the karst underworld is interrupted only by the regular rhythm of dripping water that is slowly transformed into uniquely shaped stalagtites, stalagmites, sinter pools and cave pearls.

The Moravian Karst (Moravský kras in Czech) Protected Landscape Area was declared in 1956 and covers a narrow strip of limestone 3–5 km wide and 25 km long between Brno and Sloup. The area consists of a Devonian limestone bed (390–370 million years old) up to 1 km deep. The karst plain is intersected by canyons up to 150 m deep. The geomorphology of the area is characterised by sinkholes and dolines that channel surface waters into huge cave systems. At times these waters resurface from the underground as springs. More than 1100 caves are known to exist in the Moravian Karst, many others yet to be discovered. With a length of over 50 km, the Amatérská Cave system is the longest; the second longest, with a length of almost 13 km, is the Rudické propadání (Rudice Sinkhole) – Býčí skála (Bull Rock) system. The Moravian Karst is famous for its archaeological and paleontological finds which are today prime exhibits of museums both here and abroad.

Winter colony of greater mouse-eared bats

Bechstein's bat, a rare resident of the Moravian Karst

Bats are probably the group of mammals most shrouded in superstition and myths, but such prejudice is mostly due to lack of knowledge, because our senses are incapable of revealing the secrets of their night life without modern instruments.

Of the total 27 bat species known to occur in the Czech Republic, 23 have been confirmed in the Moravian Karst. Microbats and horseshoe bats live here not only during winter, when some species hibernate in the caves (November to April), but are abundant all year round. They find shelter for their summer colonies, mating sites in the autumn and also temporary shelters during their spring and autumn migrations.

The greater mouse-eared bat, your guide to the Moravian Karst House of Nature

Cave bear bones

Cave archaeology

Unique evidence of habitation by Neanderthal people from some 120 000 years ago has been preserved in the sediments of Kůlna and Švédův stůl caves. In Pekárna Cave, world-famous engravings of animals are preserved, created by people of the Magdalenian culture 15 000 years ago. Also remarkable is a find in Býčí skála Cave from the 5th century BC which has been interpreted by contemporary archaeologists as a cave burial shrine for eminent people at that time. The skeletal remains of cave bears, lions and hyenas have been found in the Sloupsko-šošůvské cave system and in Výpustek Cave.

Tip for a trip: Sloupsko-šošůvské Caves and Výpustek Cave

Hart's tongue fern

Plant life

Almost two-thirds of the area is covered in forest, with the natural species composition largely preserved in the central and southern parts and on the hard-to-access slopes of the karst canyons in the north. The diverse thermophilic plant communities in the south alternate with large beech woods in the central karst area and montane forests in the karst canyons. The Hart's-tongue fern (*Asplenium scolopendrium*) is a relic of the Ice Age. Other local rarities include Russian bugloss (*Echium maculatum*), and yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium calceolus*), red helleborine (*Cephalanthera rubra*) and dark-red helleborine (*Epipactis atrorubens*) orchids.

Tip for a trip: Macocha Nature Trail

Clouded Apollo butterfly

Underground and on the surface

The karst underground is home to some interesting invertebrate species that are perfectly adapted to living in the dark, cold and dampness. The oribatid mite *Belba clavigera* lives near the cave entrances and the oligochaete worm *Bythonomus absoloni*, found nowhere else in the world, lives on the bottom of Macocha Abyss. Peregrine falcons, Eurasian eagle-owls, common ravens and common kestrels nest in niches in the cliffs, while black storks, stock doves and black woodpeckers inhabit the forest. The occurrence of more than 2000 moth and butterfly species is further evidence of great faunal biodiversity.

Tip for a trip: Údolí Říčky

The Moravian Karst House of Nature is a visitor centre with permanent indoor and outdoor exhibitions that familiarise people with the natural, cultural and historical sights of the most prominent karst area of the Czech Republic. Special programmes for schools and other interested groups are available both inside the House of Nature and in the field.

Dům přírody Moravského krasu
Punkevní žleb 80, 679 13 Vavřinec, GPS 49.3630058N, 16.7101422E, tel.: +420 516 414 826, e-mail: info@dpmk.cz, **www.dumprirody.cz/moravsky-kras**

The Moravian Karst House of Nature is operated by the public benefit corporation Dům přírody Moravského krasu o.p.s.

The Information Centre of the Moravian Karst Protected Landscape Area – Macocha serves visitors to the largest chasms in the Czech Republic and Punkevní Caves.

Informační středisko CHKO Moravský kras - Macocha, Vilémovice 6, GPS 49.3721325N, 16.7301697E
www.dumprirody.cz/informacni-stredisko-chko-moravsky-kras

It is operated by the Cave Administration of the Czech Republic (Správa jeskyní České republiky), Svitavská 11/13, 678 25 Blansko, tel.: +420 516 413 575, +420 602 205 584, e-mail: info@caves.cz, **www.caves.cz**

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The Moravian Karst Protected Landscape Area is administered and managed by AOPK ČR (Nature Conservation Agency of the Czech Republic), RP Jižní Morava, Správa chráněné krajinné oblasti Moravský kras, Svitavská 29, 678 01 Blansko, tel.: +420 951 425 025, e-mail: morkras@nature.cz, **www.nature.cz**

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NATURE CONSERVATION AGENCY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

CHRÁNĚNÁ KRAJINNÁ OBLAST MORAVSKÝ KRAS

Dům přírody MORAVSKÉHO KRASU o.p.s.

Did you know that ...

- the Punkevní Caves are the most visited accessible caves in the Czech Republic?
- Kateřinská Cave hides the oldest dated cave wall drawing in the Czech Republic?
- the Rudice Sinkhole is the largest swallet in the Czech Republic?
- Macocha Abyss is the only place in the Czech Republic where alpine bells grow?
- the Sloupsko-šošůvské, Císařská and Býčí skála caves are the most important bat wintering sites?
- Pekárna Cave hides a Magdalenian-culture settlement of reindeer and horse hunters?
- the Moravian Karst is home to the only cave in the Czech Republic used for the treatment of respiratory diseases? This treatment is called speleotherapy.

Thank you for your considerate conduct towards our shared natural heritage and for:

- camping and lighting fires only in places so designated
- driving and parking only where permitted
- in national nature reserves, only following marked trails
- riding your bicycle on cycle paths and being respectful to nature and other visitors
- protecting animals and plants in their natural habitat
- taking your rubbish home with you.

Tip for a trip: Křtiny

Křtiny is an important St Mary's pilgrimage site in Europe. You can visit the church, built in the 18th century according to the architectural design by Jan Blažej Santini-Aichel. The grounds contain one of the largest functioning carillons in Central Europe. There is also a large ossuary in the church crypt.

Tip for a trip: Holštejn

Lidomorna Cave is located near the village of Holštejn and you can reach it via the red walking trail. This cave was once used as a prison. Not far from the cave you can visit the ruins of Holštejn castle on top of a limestone cliff. The castle, built in the 13th century, is associated with a legend of a buried treasure.

Tip for a trip: Rudice Sinkhole

At the Rudice Sinkhole Natural Monument, the stream Jedovnický potok plunges 90 m deep into the more than 18 km long cave system. Not far from the sinkhole you can visit the Rudické Kolíbky archaeological site. It is also a favourite rock-climbing destination with climbing routes of varying grades.

Tip for a trip: Josefovské údolí (Josefov Valley) Nature Trail

This trail is about 2 km long with many points of interest. Near the village of Josefov you can look at the Stará huť technical monument with its exhibits on ironworking. Further down the trail you will come to the walk-through Jáchymka Cave. This trail also leads to Býčí skála Cave, which is known mainly for its archaeological find of a bronze bull-calf. Not far from Býčí skála, you can visit another walk-through cave, Kostelík.

Tip for a trip: Macocha

Macocha Abyss, with its wide-open mouth, is one of the largest of this type of gorge in Central Europe. Its depth is 138 m to the surface and 190 m to the bottom of the pool Spodního jezírka. The Punkva River flows along the gorge floor from Amatérská Cave to the Punkevní Caves. Almost 50 cave entrances can be found in the walls of Macocha. Owing to the coolness and high humidity several alpine plant and invertebrate species live here. Views of the gorge can be taken in from two lookout platforms – Horní (upper) and Dolní (lower). The Macocha Nature Trail takes you from the House of Nature to Macocha.

The pilgrimage grounds of the Church of the Name of the Virgin Mary

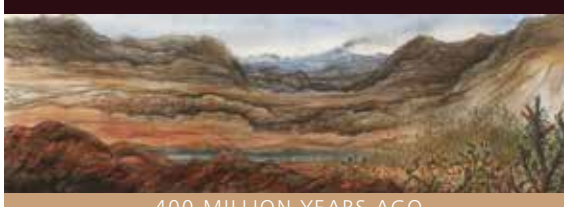
Holštejn castle ruins

Rudické Kolíbky

The stream Křtinský potok

Aerial view of the Upper lookout platform

Formation of the Moravian Karst landscape



400 MILLION YEARS AGO

In the Lower Devonian period, the land was arid and, because of a high iron content and weathering, coloured red. Intense torrential rains washed rock particles into lakes, where they were gradually cemented into conglomerate and sandstone.

390 TO 370 MILLION YEARS AGO

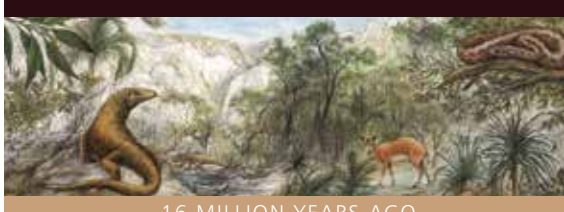
In the Middle and Upper Devonian, a warm and clear shallow sea provided suitable conditions for the growth of coral reefs and the gradual deposition of limestone layers almost 1000 m thick.

200 TO 140 MILLION YEARS AGO

In the Jurassic period, the time of the dinosaurs, the sea once again submerged the land. Limestone formed from the shells of dead marine animals.

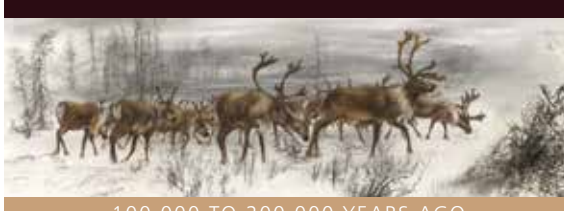
100 MILLION YEARS AGO

During the Cretaceous period, the climate was very warm. The limestones eroded to form high cones and deep sinkholes. From the west, the rivers brought brightly coloured sands and clays that settled on the bottom of the depressions. It was here that the iron ore deposits were formed.



16 MILLION YEARS AGO

At the end of the Tertiary period, the landscape was home to small deer, monitor lizards and boas. Later, this whole area was submerged by the Tertiary sea. Marine deposits containing fossils still remain in some of the caves today.



100 000 TO 200 000 YEARS AGO

In the glacial periods of the Quaternary, westerly winds carried mineral dust and deposited it as loess, mainly on the lee sides of ridges and valleys. By this stage, the landscape was inhabited by animals similar to those of today. Their bones have been found in the caves.

Illustration by Pavel Dvorský