



View from Proščka lookout

The trail leads between the rocks and is edged by dense blueberry bushes. On the right is a small rock outcrop and around the bend another; now the trail veers toward the third outcrop. It goes up, and iron chains help you with the climb. And from up there... a view of the surroundings: crowns of century-old trees in the forest below the clifftop. Meadows and fields, roads and trails; streams and rivulets meandering through the landscape; shining pond surfaces and green hilltops with hidden rocks. And in this landscape, scattered villages and some separate buildings. Welcome to Žďárské vrchy (Žďár Hills)!



Primeval forest in Žákova hora-National Nature Reserve

## How people have changed the landscape

How many years have passed since the time when this landscape was a deep primeval forest with swamps, cliffs, large carnivores and grazing animals? Seven hundred, perhaps eight hundred. People travelled this way from the north to the south and back again on well-trodden paths beneath fir and beech trees. Often they struggled through thickets, got bogged in mossy marshes and had to climb over fallen logs of old trees.

How the landscape has changed over those hundreds of years! The primeval forest's trees have turned to ashes or succumbed to axes, the sea of green being eaten into more and more.

The inhabitants transformed the land into fields, meadows and pastures; they built ponds and mills on the rivers. They mined iron ore from the earth and burnt wood from the trees in kilns to make charcoal. They manufactured glass and a host of other objects, for work as well as for pleasure. The landscape has been changed many times by human influence; several animal and plant species have disappeared while others have appeared. These days, we admire the harmonious coexistence of people and nature, developed over centuries and still manifest despite all the influences of modern civilisation. We come here to relax and recharge our inspiration in the natural order of things.

## The white-throated dipper, guide to the Žďárské vrchy House of Nature



It is inconspicuous, extraordinary, and yet ever-present in our landscape. Shallow, pebbled streams with clean, flowing water are its home. It stands on stones, dipping below the surface for food; it also walks along the streambed, turning over pebbles and collecting small animals. You can hear the short mix of flute-like tones and chirping of dippers all year round, though it might vanish in the gurgle of the water. The females sing too, which is unusual. Dippers build a round nest from leaves, rootlets and moss on outcrops above the water, amongst roots or stones, often even under bridges. There are up to 2 000 pairs of dippers in the Czech Republic, and 15–20 pairs nest regularly in the Žďárské vrchy Protected Landscape Area.



Silver fir



Roundleaf sundew



Great crested grebe



Orchid meadows



Fire-bellied toad

## The Žďárské vrchy House of Nature

In the Krátká Village Heritage Reserve, right in the heart of the Vysočina region, you will find picturesque buildings that reveal the mystery of the Žďár Hills. This former farmhouse is the protected landscape area's visitor centre. Its permanent indoor and outdoor exhibition links the landscape's history since the deep primeval forests, via settlement, to the present. It presents the beauty and sights of the local countryside and the heritage of our ancestors. Thematic programs are available in and around the House of Nature for school groups and others who are interested. The barn near house no. 12, only a few minutes' walk from the farmhouse, is also part of the visitor centre.

### Dům přírody Žďárských vrchů

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The Žďárské vrchy House of Nature visitor centre is run by: Český svaz ochránců přírody Kněžice in collaboration with Chaloupky o.p.s., Kněžice 109, 675 29 Kněžice, [www.chaloupky.cz](http://www.chaloupky.cz)

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House no. 2 in 1972



House no. 2 after restoration, 2020

### Did you know that...

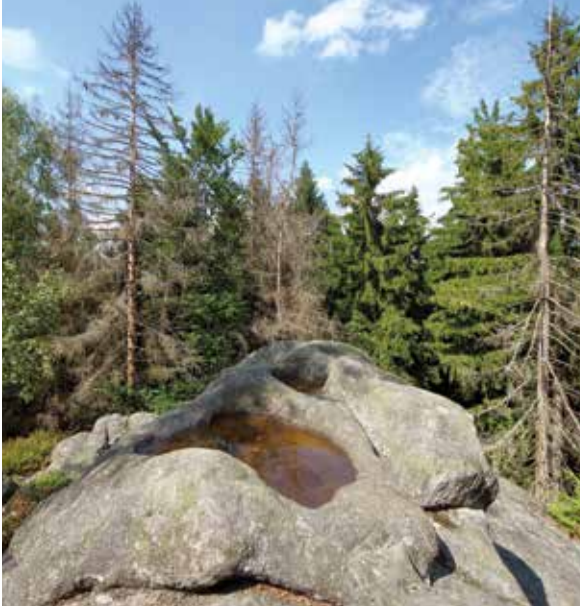
- ✿ the name of the protected landscape area has its origins in the Czech word žďaření (slash and burn)? It comes from the times when people burnt forests here to create arable land.
- ✿ there are over 17 peaks higher than 800 m above sea level in Žďárské vrchy? The highest is Devět skal.
- ✿ the Dářko peat bog has a peat layer 8 metres thick?
- ✿ the forests in Žákova hora National Nature Reserve have been untouched by human impact for about 100 years?
- ✿ the sources of some major rivers in the Czech Republic are in the Žďárské vrchy, of which the Sázava, Chrudimka and Doubrava flow into the North Sea, and the Svratka and Oslava flow into the Black Sea?
- ✿ on 2 January 1830 the last wolf in the Vysočina was shot, and that a memorial marks the site of its demise? Wolves are slowly returning to the Vysočina.

### 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
- ✿ walking only on marked trails while in national nature reserves
- ✿ riding your bicycle on cycle paths and being respectful to nature and other visitors
- ✿ leaving alone the animals and plants in their natural habitats
- ✿ taking your rubbish home with you.

**Tip for a trip: Rybenské perníčky Natural Monument**

Under this mysterious name you can set out to the natural monument with two rock outcrops called Hrad (Castle) and Netopýří skála (Bat Rock), situated on a hiking trail in the forest, about 1.5 km above Pustá Rybná. On the top of the smaller of these, which is accessible, you will find rock basins that people call perníčky. Several explanations exist for the origin of this term, the most frequent of which relates to the word pernice – a bowl for grinding boiled poppy seeds, but also, a ginger-bread mould. One legend alleges that the large stone on the top of Netopýří skála was once an altar and the hollows in it were used for sacrifices during pagan times. And if one set of perníčky won't do you, you can walk a longer circuit and look at similar rock basins in the Velké Perníčky rock formation in the forest above Křižánky.



Rybenské perníčky Natural Monument

**Tip for a trip: Samotín**

The picturesqueness of this out-of-the-way spot has inspired many poets and painters. The settlement was established at the beginning of the 18th century, when iron ore was mined and processed here. Because of the high demand for wood, large areas of forest were cleared and the iron workers were allowed to build dwellings in the clearings and cultivate the land. Today these pastures and fields are still divided by bounds and stone barriers. Samotín is one of the most common starting points for several vertical outcrops. The closest are Dráteničky, a natural monument reserve much utilised by rock climbers. Something of a legend is Samotínský vánek, a liqueur that the publican of a now historic local inn made to his own special recipe.



Samotín stone barriers

**Tip for a trip: Zelená hora (Green Hill)**

If you want to enrich yourself with cultural and spiritual beauty as well as natural beauty, then don't miss Zelená hora. The pilgrimage church is a work of art and the most distinctive project by the ingenious Czech architect of Italian ancestry Jan Blažej Santini-Aichel. It was built at the beginning of the 18th century in Baroque Gothic style and consecrated by St John of Nepomuk. In the architecture of this work you will find symbolism of numbers and also mystical aspects connected with its layout. Because of its uniqueness the site of the pilgrimage church was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List.



The Church of St John of Nepomuk at Zelená hora

**Tip for a trip: Velké Dářko**

Velké Dářko pond, with an area of 206 ha, is the largest pond in the Bohemian–Moravian Highlands. It is well known especially amongst tourists as a spot for swimming and water sports. The area surrounding Velké Dářko, however, is special because of its peat bogs and marshes, which are reminiscent of the distant northern taiga. Some of the organisms that grow and live here are threatened and protected. The Dářko and Radostín Peat Bog National Nature Reserves are connected by the Dářská rašeliníště interpretive trail. Along the trail you will see peat bog pine, which grows only in peat bog forests of central Europe. You'll also learn how peat was cut, and perhaps you will come across the carnivorous sundew.



Radostín Peat Bog National Nature Reserve

**How did Velké Dářko come about?**



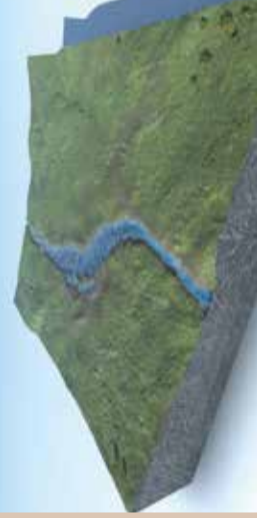
At the end of the 15th century the Velké Dářko fishpond was constructed, which once again inundated large parts of the marsh. The overall raising of the water level allowed an expansion of the peat bog in the western part of the area, to its appearance today.



Later, the reed communities were replaced by sedges, cotton-grass and woody species (7 000–5 000 BC). A cover of peat-mosses with stands of pine and spruce appeared in the cooler period (5 000–2 500 BC). This formed a large peat bog.



Due to an impermeable substrate, this depression gradually filled with water, forming a shallow lake that started to grow over with marsh vegetation in 8 000–7 000 BC.



At the beginning of the late Quaternary period (probably 11 000 years ago) in the region of today's Dářko, there was a stream – let's call it the "proto"-Sázava river – that flowed through shallow depressions in some places.

From an animation of the Velkého Dářko's origins by the Czech Geological Service ([www.geology.cz/svet-geologie](http://www.geology.cz/svet-geologie))

