

## Nature Protection in the Service of the Visitors who visit National Park Mljet

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**Summary:** National park «Mljet» is proclaimed in 1960., for sake of wooded areas and two picturesque sea lakes. Located on the one third of the western part of the island Mljet, it takes up the region of 3000 hectares. The region is wooded and systematic protection of nature has been realised there.

Every year visitors arrive at this area and we make efforts to give them pleasant and substantial stay. So boards with educational matter have been placed in the National park. The notices educate visitors about characteristics of lakes, the protected sea parts, archeological locality, possibility of sightseeing ... Signs, texts and maps with description of ecological paths are installed to give better information about the Park.

There are the ecological round path Fontana – Vrbovica, cca 4000 m long, the ecological path to belvedere V. Sladin Gradac and the ecological path Pomena – Soline.

Apart from improvement of educational subjects, we work permanently on preventive protection against forest fire, cleaning rubbish and protecting entire region from dirt.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1960, within the programme for the protection of both natural and cultural heritage, the western part of island Mljet (about 1/3) was proclaimed a national park, which included 3,000 ares of land as well as 100 ares of the Large and Small Lakes, and the Bay of Soline. The 1987 physical plan basically protected the sea water area, while in 1997 The Sabor (the Croatian Parliament) formally extended the borders of the National Park to a sea belt 500m off the coastal line of islands, capes and islets, altogether 2,275 ares of sea area. Systematic protection of nature has been conducted in that zone ever since; forests are allowed a natural development, and only a sanitary felling is permitted. Activities of The Public Institution National Park "Mljet" are the following: maintenance of forest straight clearings and paths, arrangement of lanes, waste management and cleansing of the shores.

Every year we have visitors here, and we try to make their stay as pleasant and as interesting as possible. To that purpose, boards with educational posters are placed in the National Park, enabling the visitors to get acquainted with the values of the natural and cultural heritage. The posters are stationed at the following points: Pristanište (Landing Place), Montokuc, Mali most (Small Bridge), Veliki Gradac, Otočić sv.Marije (St.Mary's Islet), Polače, Križ (Solinski zaljev) /Cross (Soline Bay)/ and the village of Govedari. (see Map 1: Island Mljet)

### PRISTANIŠTE - LANDING PLACE

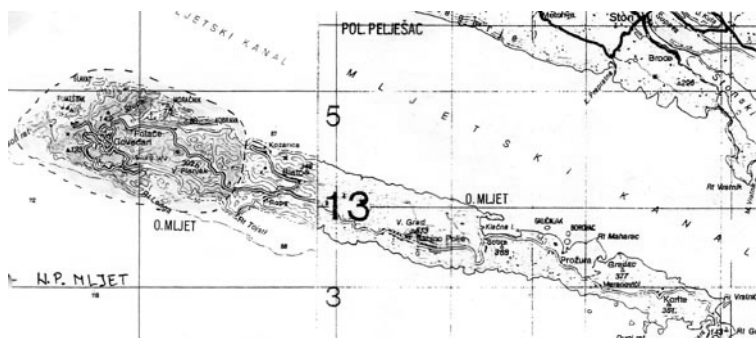


Foto 1: Pristanište

In 1960 the Sabor (parliament) of the Republic of Croatia proclaimed Mljet a national park for its natural beauty, densely forested areas, a two-sea-lakes phenomenon and historical monuments. The national park covers an area of 31 sq.km ie about one third of island Mljet (Official Gazette no's 49/60 and 54/76). For its forests it is called "green island". In 1997 the waters surrounding the island 500m off the coastal line were also included into the territory (O.G.no.13/97), adding another 27.35 sq.km to the area.

Mljet belongs to the Dubrovnik archipelago and it lies at the end of the Elaphite islands (Lokrum, Koločep, Lopud, Šipan, Jakljan and Olipa)<sup>1</sup>, although it is clearly an open-sea island. It is about 36 km long, 3-5 km wide, and has an area of 100.4 sq.km. Distance from the Pelješac peninsula is 8 km, from island Korčula 18 km, and from Dubrovnik 30 km. In the north, the Mljet Channel separates it from the Pelješac peninsula.<sup>2</sup>

Mljet belongs to the area of the Mediterranean climate characterised by warm and dry summers, and mild winters. Autumn and winter periods are cool and rainy, which enables flourishing of vegetation.<sup>3</sup> Temperature below 0°C and snow are very rare. Average annual temperature is 16.1°C,



Map 1: Island Mljet

while average annual precipitation is 765.00 mm. Typical winds are bura, jugo and maestral. Bura is a north, usually dry wind; jugo (sirocco) is a south wind bringing humidity and rain, and maestral is a typically summer wind bringing freshness to the coastal region.

The Large and the Small Lake are virtually submerged karst depressions filled with sea water, that resemble two bays running deeply into the land.<sup>4</sup> They are linked by a passage 2.6m wide and 0.6m deep, while the Large Lake is connected with the Soline Bay by a passage 13.6m wide and 2.6m deep. At the entrance to the Large Lake once stood an old stone bridge with the remnants of an old grain mill driven by the tides, so that this place is still called The Big Bridge. Ebb and flow in the lakes cause a strong stream in the passages, which pushes the seawater in and out of the Lakes.

National park Mljet has two outstanding historical sites that must not be missed: a Roman settlement at Polače that was continually inhabited from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. to the 12<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>5</sup>, and a Benedictine monastery from the 12<sup>th</sup> c. on the islet of St. Mary in the Large Lake. The Roman complex at Polače comprises a palace, two basilicas, thermae, and two structures of undefined title.<sup>6</sup> The islet of St. Mary with the Benedictine monastery is a unique example of architecture merging with landscape.<sup>7</sup> The location of the monastery is also unique, the monastery being situated on the islet in the Large Lake.

Tour of the NP Mljet can be started from Pomena - a walk through a pinewood to the Small Lake, and then by boat to the islet of St. Mary in the Large Lake. If you start from Polače, then the path takes you to the Large Lake and Small Lake. The path round the Small Lake is 2,600m long, and round the Large Lake 9,240m. Those who like walking can go to Montokuc peak (258m) taking the educational/ecological path Vrbovica-Fontana. From this path there is a superb view of the Small and Large Lakes, Pomjenta field, Soline place and the channel of Mljet, and when the weather permits, of island Korčula and peninsula Pelješac. The path leading to the peak of Veliki Sladin Gradac (157m) is near the Large and Small Lakes; it is not too tiring, and offers a chance of enjoying the scenery below. Nature lovers ought to see the cliffs on the

shore facing the open sea, either from a boat or walking all the way to them.<sup>8</sup>

## MONTOKUC



Foto 2: Montokuc



Foto 3: M. panorama

On clear summer days after rain, when the summer bura blows over the sea, a view breaks on the open-sea islands of Lastovo and Vis in the distance, while Korčula is seen quite clearly. During summer season, when there is a greater danger of fire, the experienced fire watchman is on a round-the-clock duty in order to prevent the least chance of flames catching the vast stone pine forests and maquis.

There are two basic types of sylvan communities occupying large areas: climazonal communities of holm oak and black ash (*Orno-Quercetum ilicis* H-ić, 58) and the community of Aleppo pine) with an underbrush floor of maquis (*Pinetum halepensis* Anić 58). On a very small area there is hop hornbeam (*Ostrya carpinifolia*) that is typical for the Mediterranean-mountain belt on neighbouring Pelješac, and a stone pine wood (*Pinetum pineae*, Anić 59) at the southernmost end of the island (*Pinjevca*, Saplunara).<sup>9</sup>

Holm oak wood on Mljet is mostly a degraded phase of maquis, born by cutting of seedling and regenerating from tree stump. We find it mostly on the northern, shady locations. The more frequent the cutting, the smaller height of trees and the smaller wooden mass. The low wood (*panjača*) on the Velika Dolina and Valakija localities looks nice and can seem to be a medium wood (some trees grown from the seeds, and some from the stumps), but this

appearance is mostly due to the stand conditions and the position the locality has on the terrain.<sup>10</sup>

Maquis is an underbrush wood comprised of evergreen (rarely deciduous) sorts caught by thorny climbers, so that it is very often impassable. Typical maquis sorts are holm oak (*Quercus ilex* L.) and black ash (*Fraxinus ornus* L.), and the accompanying sorts are mostly: lurustinus (*Viburnum tinus* L.), strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo* L.), briar (*Erica arborea* L.), myrtle (*Myrtus communis* L.), phillyrea latifolia (*Phillyrea latifolia* L.), mastic tree (*Pistacia lentiscus* L.), and laurel (*Laurus nobilis* L.). The following climbers can be found in maquis: sarsaparilla (*Smilax aspera* L.), madder (*Rubia peregrina* L.), honeysuckle (*Lonicera implexa* Ait.), black bryony (*Tamus communis* L.), and evergreen rose (*Rosa sempervirens* L.).<sup>11,12,13</sup>

Aleppo pine wood comes usually with the underbrush of maquis, and we find it on northern, shady sides. Aleppo pine is a sort that is prone to occupying new grounds, and in the past it was often used for afforestation. Its seeds are light and it accepts new soil very well, especially after fire. In the NP Mljet special attention is paid to the preventive measures for fire protection.

#### THE SMALL BRIDGE



Foto 4: The Small Lake

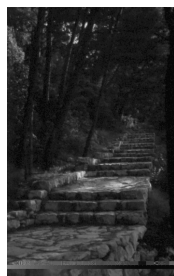


Foto 5: S. L.: The path

The Small Lake (the total volume 3,349,000m<sup>3</sup>) is a karst depression filled with seawater. It is connected with the Large Lake by a passage about 20m long and 0.5m deep. Its surface area is 24 hectares, the biggest depth is 29m, and the shoreline length is 2,600m.<sup>14</sup>

The Large Lake is also a karst depression filled with seawater that enters it through the Soline Bay and the Big Bridge. The total volume of the Large Lake is 36,730,000m<sup>3</sup>, the surface area 145 hectares, and the shoreline length 9,420m.

The temperature in summer months is higher than the one on open sea; for instance, in the Small Lake the temperature of 27°C was recorded, in the Large Lake 29°C, and in the Gonoturska Cove

17°C. The salinity is also higher - 27‰ in the Small Lake, 28‰ in the Large Lake, and in the Gonoturska Cove 17‰ (T.Vučetić, The 1985 Mljet Symposium). In the rainy season (winter) the salinity in the Small and Large Lakes is somewhat lower due to fresh water springs and inflow of rainwater. The average annual temperature of the sea surface in the Small Lake is 26°C, which is higher than on the open sea. The average winter temperature is about 4.5°C, which is lower than on the open sea. The salinity of the Small Lake increases towards the depth, which leads us to a conclusion that there is a direct underground connection with the open sea. The explorations of the Lake in 1953 confirmed for the first time the presence of H<sub>2</sub>S in the waters of the Adriatic.<sup>15</sup>

Prof.Schulze, who made explorations in the Small Lake in 1984, found the pollen of Aleppo pine dating back 2,000 years. In his study he explained the connection with the open sea ie located the chasm.<sup>16</sup>

#### VELIKI SLADIN GRADAC (ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE)

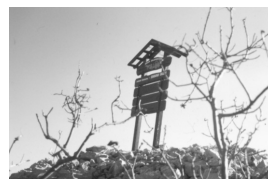


Foto 6: The educational poster



Foto 7: V.S.G. Panorama

The Illyrian period in the history of Mljet left its trace in form of many ruins of ancient cities located on hilltops, which usually bear the name of Gradac.<sup>17</sup> Illyrian graves were found at Ivanje Polje, on Glavica near the village of Govedari. The Illyrian period had lasted till 35 B.C. when the island of Mljet got occupied by the Romans. We learn from Appian's work *De rebus Illyricis* how the Illyrian tribes were conquered, their city Melitusa destroyed (its location still unknown), and the population taken for slaves.<sup>18</sup> Name *Melitusa* has its origin in the Latin name for honey (*mel*, *melis*), which tells that in the past the island was known by the production of honey.

"Before the arrival of Antiquity civilisations, our coast was populated by native Illyrian tribes. We could not talk of a particular type of arrangement that would be significant for the history of landscape gardening of that period, but some historical structures do exist, and in a way, their characteristics might fall within the scope of interest of landscape architecture in general. Here we refer

to the prehistoric stone mounds, which appear individually or in the form of necropolises on many locations on our coast and islands. Very often they stand on elevations, plateaux, and smaller and bigger hills that is, on prominent spots in the landscape.

If, on one hand, we consider cemeteries parts of landscape architecture (and these mounds are primitive tombs), and if, on the other hand, using an attractive area of the landscape for the surroundings of a structure or for the emphasis of an object's significance represents one of the specific issues of landscape architecture that varies in certain periods of its development, then we have reasons to consider these primitive prehistoric monuments the oldest objects in our coastal region which are in certain way interesting for the history of both landscape architecture and landscape gardening."

Ruins of Illyrian cities are always situated on elevated grounds from which there is usually a superb view on the surroundings. They were built on elevations in order to have a good control over enemy's movements below and also to organise an efficient defence.<sup>19</sup>

#### THE ISLET OF ST.MARY



Foto 8: The islet of St. Mary



Foto 9: Panorama

In the 12<sup>th</sup> c. island Mljet falls into the power of Neretvan people. King Desa gives the island to the Benedictines from Mt.Cassino on the peninsula of Gargano in Apulia to be their exclusive property.<sup>18</sup> Three Benedictines of Ragusan descent come from Italy and choose the islet in the middle of the Large Lake for their permanent residence. There they build St.Mary's church and a monastery in Romanesque style.<sup>21</sup> Originally, the church and the monastery are not connected. The portal and two windows of the first monastery can be seen in the cloister of the present monastery.

In 1345 the abbot of the Marian monastery makes a contract under which the monastery remains the owner of one third of the island, while in its other part the *Universia* (municipality) is founded.<sup>20</sup> Every year the *Universia* of Mljet has to pay the monastery 300 hyperpers, donate one hen per household for the Festival of St.Blaise, and provide 2 shepherds at the discretion of the

monastery for the whole year. This contract is immediately followed by another document, the Statute of Mljet, and from then on three kinds of books are kept in the Mljet's office: *Documenti*, *Vendite* and *Testamenti*. Island Mljet definitely goes to the Dubrovnik Republic in 1410.<sup>18</sup>

In the 16<sup>th</sup> c. the church and the monastery merged into one, because the church got a Renaissance vestibule and porch, while the monastery became a spacious Renaissance building with cellars, ground floor and first floor.<sup>22</sup> The defence tower and wall were probably added in the 17<sup>th</sup> c. for the protection from Turkish pirates. Although the structure has the appearance of a Renaissance summerhouse, actually, it was also a fortification, completely closed, with the apse of the church built into the defence wall. During the conservation works it was opened so that the architectural structure of the Romanesque church of St.Mary could be revealed. In the very front of the building there was a Renaissance porch serving as shelter for boats. The building was once connected with the sea because one could gain access to the cellars from the Large Lake using a boat and passing under the porch. As poet Ignjat Đurđević describes, one could fish from the monastery windows.<sup>23</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> c. the church underwent some changes - the chapels were added, so that the floor plan of the church got the form of a cross. Besides, a Baroque balcony was reconstructed, which has been preserved till today.

This monastery was the seat of the Mljet Congregation (Congregatio Melitensem or Melitanam) from the day of its establishment at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The first chairman was abbot and poet Mavro Vetranović Čavčić, who was summoned from Rome to lead the Congregation and revive its monasteries.<sup>18</sup> The Congregation comprised four man's monasteries in the area of the Dubrovnik Republic (St.Michael's on Šipan, St.Andreas's on the open sea, St.Jacob's near Dubrovnik, and St.Mary's on Mljet). This step was aimed at subjecting the monasteries to the direct power of Rome in order to avoid the Venetian influence on the Dubrovnik Republic. Later, the seat of the Congregation was moved to St.Jacobs's monastery near Dubrovnik. One of the abbots was poet Ignjat Đurđević from a distinguished patrician family of Dubrovnik. He wrote a satirical epic "Tears of Marunko's" in which some geographical names from Mljet are mentioned, which shows that the characters from the epic had ties with the island.<sup>24</sup> The Congregation was definitely abolished in 1808, when Napoleon's army occupied Dubrovnik. Then the big library and archives were raided and burned down, so that some data are lost.<sup>25</sup> Only a small fragment has been saved in the Franciscan library in Dubrovnik.<sup>26</sup> The Benedictines were retired and moved to the Franciscan monastery in Dubrovnik, while the building had changed the owners. The Statute of Mljet was taken to Vienna, and the monastery on

Mljet served as the headquarters of the Austrian Forest Administration till WWI. The building was then given to the Dubrovnik Bishopric. After the WWII it was taken away from the Bishopric and stood empty till 1961, when it was converted to a hotel that operated till the beginning of the Patriotic War 1991.

At the end of the islet of St. Mary there are a few more structures, but their purpose and age are unknown. The whole islet is in fact an olive grove with paths for strolling and stone benches for resting.

### POLAČE (ARCHAEOLOGICAL ZONE)



Foto 10: Polače – panorama



Foto 11: Polače - roman palace

Polače port is a natural harbour confined with four islets (Kobrava, Ovrata, Moračnik and Tajnik) and protected from direct wind blows. About 150 years ago in the archaeological zone rose the old settlement of Polače. Four stone houses, leaning against the walls of the very palace, had merged with it into an architectural structure. Later, a few more houses were erected in the immediate vicinity. In order to protect this archaeological site, a new settlement was put up along the coast east of the old one.

On a hill above the settlement, the Illyrians had their castle that probably served as a lookout, and from which foreign boats entering the port of Polače were controlled. The people from the Illyrian times left many traces of their life on the island<sup>17</sup>: ruins of their cities, their graves, remnants of castles. All elevations bearing the name of Gradac hide traces of living of the Illyrians; legend has it that they belonged to the extinct tribe of Roguđani (for instance, Sladin Gradac and Vilin Gradac).<sup>18</sup> Such traces of *Gradina* exist on Veliki Sladin Gradac peak, to which leads one of our educative ecological paths.

According to a book by Roman author Appian, *De rebus Illyricis*, Mljet fell into the Roman power in 35 B.C., in the time of Emperor Augustus. It also says that the Illyrians were conquered: their city Melitusa was burnt to the ground, and the population put into slavery. It is believed that the survived inhabitants in the island's interior melted with the Roman newcomers.

At Polače we have an important archaeological site from the Roman times with the ruins of a palace, thermae, two basilicas, and another structure of undefined title. The palace probably dates from the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century (according to Danish explorer Dyggve).<sup>27</sup> It had two towers in the façade, with the gate facing the sea, and two rooms for the guards. It also had a large central hall with the span of about 12m, and a round tower at the rear of the building. The remains of the walls in the rooms preserved are really impressive. Central walls were much larger than the side ones.<sup>28,29</sup> Not far from this were found the remnants of thermae with a mosaic depicting a crane bird, which is the symbol of the Ostrogoths. They ruled Mljet from 493 A.D, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Island Mljet, along with Dalmatia, fell under the Eastern Roman Empire in 535 A.D.

Record has it that during the reign of Emperor Septimius Severus, an Agesilaus from Anaserb in Kilikia (Asia Minor) was expelled to Mljet together with his son Opianus. Here he built a magnificent palace, the remnants of which still adorn this cove. According to legend, poet Opianus wrote an epic on fishing in Greek titled "Halieutica".<sup>18</sup>

The ruins of the two basilicas near the palace, which are of rather large dimensions, tell that quite a number of people stayed here. One of the basilicas was partitioned (the site of Nodilo's shed), which leads us to the conclusion that at a time the number of inhabitants was reduced so that the space for prayer was reduced accordingly. On another site are evident the expansions the structure underwent, so that we can conclude it existed from the 1<sup>st</sup> c. to the 12<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>30</sup> The remnants of a font for adults are preserved, and also a place where stood bishop's seat that was found there. As bishops always went with emperors, this is also a proof that in the Roman times Mljet was imperial property.

It is stated in a document dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> c. (consequently, from the Roman period) that the annual revenue from the property on Mljet is 200 solidi, which was a substantial sum. The income was earned from olive oil, wine, dried meat, cheese, goat- and sheepskin, dried and salted fish, honey, barley, wood for fuel and lumber. Thanks to honey, the island's name was Melita because in Latin *mel*, *melis* means *honey*.

Mljet remained under the Roman power till the 12<sup>th</sup> c., as part of the Eastern Roman Empire, although its eastern end was populated by newly arrived inhabitants - Croats from the Neretva Valley.<sup>17</sup> The old legend of the island tells about the battle of King Dešin and Duke Remin on Bijed hill, where probably was stationed a Roman patrol. The final combat happened on the St. John's Day, 24 June. The legend does not state the year, but it tells that the combat took place in Ivanje field, and that blood flowed over the Draginje threshing floor to the Velika Tatinica cove, some 1,000m away.<sup>18</sup>

Polače has a water spring, in which the water is rather low during summer months, but still

sufficient for living. The spring is right off the palace. On the locality of Vodice above Kneževo field is a more bountiful spring that was taken care of in the Roman times, the traces of its utilisation being still visible. The spring was protected from the pollution, perhaps even completely enclosed.

### THE CROSS (THE BAY OF SOLINE)



Foto 12: The Cross



Foto 13: The Bay of Soline

In the 14<sup>th</sup> c. a stone cross was placed at the entrance to the Bay of Soline.<sup>18</sup> It bears an inscription in *Bosančica* (early Cyrillic letter in Bosnia), today partially illegible. The cross stands on a spot where the shore is shaped by the influence of the sea, strong waves and winds. The vegetation there is flattened and adapted to resist the strong gusts of waves and winds.

From this spot the view stretches over to Soline place and the Big Bridge where once stood a stone bridge and a tide-driven mill. It is set on a spot directly exposed to south winds. The vegetation is flattened to resist strong blows of waves and winds. On the rocks grow distinct halophytes, plants adapted to a life influenced by the sea.

The exact age of the mill and the bridge at the entrance to the Large Lake is not known, but it is supposed that the mill dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> c. that is, from the time the monastery and St.Mary's church were restored. We find a description of this unique tide-driven mill on the Adriatic in *Machinae novae* by F. Vrančić:

#### "A mill placed in the straits

Who could manage to force the sea to drive mills, and to be used as driving force for other purposes too? I think that it still can be accomplished, not everywhere though, but at places where it is narrow. One should see to it that the place is not open or exposed to the least force of waves. There is another way to make the sea useful. A hole should be dug out on the shore, with the sides as high as the level to which the sea usually rises, so that the flood tide would fill the lake (hole) with water, while during the ebb tide the water would be receding through a groove or a pipe and drive the mill. This will be, however, much better done in the ocean because of its rise and fall. I have recently heard of this from a good friend of mine."<sup>31</sup>

### GOVEDARI (ETHNOLOGICAL ZONE)



Foto 14: Govedari



Foto 15: National costume of Mljet

The village of Govedari was founded about 200 years ago, when the Benedictines from the monastery of St.Mary exchanged their houses and property above Veliko Polje for work on their estates. A contract has been preserved, signed by Milić brothers and Vincenzo Basto, who were first to settle at this place. The Benedictines promised to give them houses, a portion of the fields and estates in exchange for working in the field and guarding the monastery cattle. The village expanded to the present size, and today it is a precious rural entity containing ethnological values, ancient garments and national costumes, and also a mill for the production of olive oil.

The national costume of island Mljet is a union of red and white colour. Woollen skirt (*gunj*) in a vivid red colour is original part of Mljet costume, probably evolved from the Dinaric coarse cloth (*raša*) that was originally worn over the head as a dress. The skirt has a front and a back part, tied up by strips over the shoulders.

A white shirt, adorned with embroidery and lace is put over. A skirt with side slits is fixed round the waist with a belt. An embroidered headgear (*škufija*) is placed on the head, and atop of it a kerchief in white embroidery (*krpa*).<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION



Foto 16: The forest in the Bay of Soline



Foto 17: The forest trail

Putting up of educational posters with the descriptions of localities and their significance is a big step towards providing information to the visitors who come to this area during summer season. This way they are able to learn as much as possible about the values of the natural and cultural heritage of the National Park they came to visit. Apart from the value of the forests, the sea and the sea lakes, the historic localities, too, are important, because they lend a special stamp to this area. Founding of the National Park in the northwest part of island Mljet has opened a new chapter in the entire development of the region, and emphasis is placed on a continuous protection of nature. Building is restricted in the region of the basic phenomenon. This is especially evident around the Small Lake, which has remained unbuilt - a natural landscape preserved untouched for the posterity.

In addition to the educational posters and ecological paths, the National Park has many other possibilities of improving its activities on the protection of nature. One of them is marking the finds of rare or endemic plant divisions such as woody wolf's-milk (*Euphorbia dendroides* L.) blue *lasinje* (*Moltkaea petrea* Tratt. Gris.), Greek strawberry bush - hybrid (*Arbutus andrachnoides* Link.), fragile *kositernica* (*Ephedra campylopoda* C.A.Mey.), and a general awareness of the values of wood vegetation. So far, a lot has been done on fire protection, and this practice should be maintained at the same high level. A continuous monitoring in the season of fires and regular reports to persons on duty in the field are good safeguards against wood fires.

The values of the natural and cultural heritage should be brought closer to the visitors by way of strictly aimed excursions in the whole area of the National Park, because there is a heavy pressure on some of the points of interest.



Foto 18: *Moltkaea petraea*



Foto 19: *Arbutus x andrachnoides*

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