OLD MINING ROUTE

Viktor, Heinrich and Tona at Savske jame

Miners at Savske jame

An extract from the map of the mines in Savske jame from around 1880

The Ruard family home – manor house (left) in Stara Sava in Jesenice around 1900

A walk along the old mining route takes us into the past and shows us parts of the everyday lives of the people who excavated and transported iron ore in this area. While walking along this historic route, can you imagine meeting an ironworker who is trapped in time and looking for his manager to ask him about new ore deposits? Or a miner who was busy working in the mine and is now upset because he missed his lunch? Where are his fellow sufferers?

Viktor, Heinrich and Tona are real historical figures who are all connected to the mining past of Savske jame in one way or another. In their live enactment they are revived as part of the Old mining route, now a theme trail that follows the route once used by horse-drawn cart drivers for transporting ore from the Savske jame mines to blast furnaces by the Sava river. Visitors to the route can learn about the history of mining and its related activities. Information boards and exhibits are situated along the route.

You can embark the Old mining route independently or in the company of a guide, by yourself or in a group. If you book your visit early enough, you might even meet Viktor, Heinrich and Tona at Savske jame.

Reservations and additional information:
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JESENICE
the town of steel and flowers

OBČINA JESENICE

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Cast:

Klemen Klemenc
as Heinrich Fessl,
the mining manager

Bojan Dornik
as Tona Hribar,
a miner

Klemen Košir
as Viktor Ruard,
the mine owner

Viktor Ruard



Ironworks and mine owner

Viktor Ruard was born on 26th March 1814 in Sava. His family originated from Belgium, and his grandfather Valentin Ruard bought the ironworks in Sava and mines in Savske jame. From his father he inherited the estates in Sava, Plavž and Mojstrana, the forests around Kranjska Gora, mines and forests in Savske jame, a coal mine in Zagorje and an iron smelting plant in Litija. In 1861 his company employed 158 miners in the mines above Jesenice alone. He was considered a good, polite and humble person. He liked entertaining his guests with pocket magic tricks. He was also a keen bowler. Often he would ask the officials what they were doing: "Oh, that can wait until tomorrow, let's go bowling..." he would say to them and invite them to the bowling lawn in the garden of his manor house. His wife Ana, born Atzl, was highly arrogant and extravagant with money. The extravagant lifestyle led by his wife and eleven children is supposed to have contributed to the downfall of his company. In 1871 Viktor Ruard was forced to sell all his property to Kranjska industrijska družba, but he kept a part of the manor house in Sava where he spent his final years and passed away in 1886.

Interesting facts:

- At the back of their manor house in Sava, the Ruard family kept a zoo which was free to visit. The zoo's biggest attractions were bears, wolves and monkeys that the locals called "afne".
- In 1858 Viktor Ruard bought the Bled estate including its castle, but had to sell it in 1882 due to debt.
- There are numerous stories about Viktor's wife and children: After a horse threw one of their children from its saddle, Ana had it shot immediately; Ana and her adult children used to travel by carriage to balls in Graz and Vienna; Ana bought a house in Vienna without even seeing it.
- Only their youngest son, Friderik, remained in Jesenice. He was called Fric and was a hopeless drunk; in the pub he would drink other people's leftover beer. His sad life ended in a hay barn in Mojstrana.

Heinrich Fessl



Mining manager

Heinrich Fessl, a mining expert, was the chief mining manager of the mines owned by Viktor Ruard, and later Kranjska industrijska družba, up until his death in 1904. During his time the ore was starting to run out and mining costs were very high, leading him to search tirelessly for new iron and manganese ore deposits in the wider Gorenjska area.

Trained prospectors, who held permits for trial excavations in specific areas and for a specific period (e.g. 6 months or just a few weeks), were used for finding new deposits.

In Savske jame the iron ore occurs in the form of the mineral siderite, also called spathic iron ore by the miners. Its colour varies from dark brown to yellow or even grey-yellow. It can be found in the limestone layers and on average contains 32% iron. Between 1877 and 1878 the combined length of all the shafts and levels in the Savske jame was 7.5 km. The longest tunnel system was in the Nepomuk level (2.7 km). The lowest lying were the Valentin and Frančišek tunnels. The Korl tunnel, whose entrance is preserved, was lower lying still and the newest. In addition to these main tunnels there were also some shorter ones. Due to a lack of high-quality iron ore and excessive operating costs the mines at Savske jame were closed in 1904.

Interesting facts:

- To express their gratitude to the miners and prospectors for discovering new ore deposits, the mine owners, the Bucellini family, built the Church of the Holy Cross in Planina pod Golico in 1685.
- The German name for Savske jame is Reichenberg, which translates as the "rich mountain".
- At Savske jame Fessl's subordinates were foremen, with Mr. Kokošič from Plavški Rovt being the most famous of them all. Parents would ask him whether he could employ their children, and he decided whether they were old enough and capable of working in the mines.
- Heinrich Fessl was allocated an assistant called "purš" - he was a soldier who served him and helped him with his work.

Tona Hribar



A miner

Named after the last miner in Savske jame, Anton (Tona) Hribar, known locally as Peredl, was from Planina pod Golico.

At the end of the 19th Century around 200 miners worked in the mines at Savske jame. They came from Jesenice, Hrušica and the surrounding area up to Gorje. They worked 8 hours a day, with Sunday being their only day off when they went home, to church and to the pubs. During the week they slept and cooked in makeshift huts near the mines. They brought their own food - potatoes, porridge, corn flour, milk and lard - from home. On 4th December they celebrated a special holiday, the name day of the patron saint of miners, Saint Barbara. On that day they wore their festive black uniforms, raised their banners and flags and took part in a church procession. An iron bell in the wooden tower located in front of the mining manager's house was also dedicated to Saint Barbara and was used to mark the beginning and the end of shifts and an hour long break at noon. Work in the tunnels or so-called "štolni" was arranged hierarchically. Newcomers started out as "laufarji". They were menial workers who transported ore from the tunnels using carts called "hunti". Diggers excavated the ore and loaded it into the carts. They could be promoted to a "lerhajer" - assistant, "hajer" – deputy foreman or "forhajer" - foreman. For their work the miners used simple tools, such as hammers or "šlegl", mining picks or "pikl" or "pikon", various iron bars, so-called "štange", drills and gun powder. A simple lamp (lantern) was also part of the equipment. Due to the difficult working conditions in a damp, dark and poorly ventilated environment and the hard and protracted work, the miners did not generally reach old age. Despite this, Tona lived to the venerable age of 93, and died in 1965.

Interesting facts:

- In 1861 the miners excavated 7000 tonnes of ore.
- The worst recorded mining accident in Savske jame happened on 5th December 1882 when 6 miners were killed in a gas explosion. The mining manager, who barely survived, lost all of his teeth in the blast.
- The air quality in the mines was very low. If the right wind was blowing, you could smell that the miners were coming home fifteen minutes before they arrived.
- Rats were used, and even bred, by the miners as an early-warning signal for danger since they are able to detect increased concentrations of explosive gases much earlier than humans.