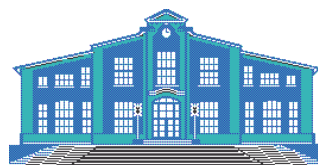




# BALKAN SPELEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE

## EXCURSION GUIDE BOOK

21 OCTOBER 2023



## EXCURSION : KARST IN THE GORGE OF THE RIVER ISKAR, BALKAN MOUNTAIN

The Iskar Gorge is a natural miracle carved out of the stone breasts of the Stara Planina Mt. The total length of the gorge is 156 km. The central - most beautiful and distinct part of the gorge is 67 kilometres long. In this central part of the gorge there are natural geological, geomorphologic phenomena. There are also known plenty of caves in this region.

The canyon is formed by Iskar River after the drainage of the Sofia Lake to the sea located on the territory of the Moesian Platform in the middle of the Dacian Stage about 4,5 million years ago.

Now Iskar River takes its source from Rila Mountain, the highest mountain on the Balkans, crosses the Balkan Mountain through the picturesque Iskar Canyon, then the Moesian Platform and flows into the Danube. Iskar Gorge offers a number of scenic landscapes and remarkable rock outcrops of various metamorphic, igneous, volcanic and sedimentary rocks, representing the whole Phanerozoic history of the Earth

### **First stage: Ritlite, Lyutibrod village, Vrachan region**

Geotop "Ritlite" is an object of aesthetic, scientific, ethnographic and historical value. It is located at 250 m above sea level on the right bank of the Iskar River in the southern part of the village Lutibrod. The rock walls are located in the uppermost levels



of the Lyutibrod geological Formation. They are vertical layers of strong sandy limestones and calcareous sandstones, rising as rock walls up to 200 m long and up to 50 m high, varying in thickness from 3 to 7.5 meters. The formation of Ritli is due to the different erosion resistance of the layers. The layers of limestone, sandy limestone or calcareous sandstone are the strongest, and

the marl interlayers are the most unstable. Thus, as a result of uneven erosion, the stronger sandstones and limestones have been preserved as high projecting vertical walls, and the more unstable marl and clay interbeds between them have been washed away by the waters and are now overgrown with vegetation. Ritli are one of the most famous geological phenomena in Bulgaria.

### Second stage: [Cherepish rocks](#) and Cherepish monastery.

The [Cherepish rocks](#) are formed among the limestones of the Cherepish formation near the Cherepish rail way station at an altitude of 200 to 600 m. The karst canyon of the Iskar river, deeply incised among the Cherepish limestones, is considered to be the "northern door" of the Iskar gorge. The Cherepish limestones has Tithonian - Baram age. They are light gray, gray to beige limestones. They are organogenic, hemogenic, clastic and cryptogenic . Here over an area of 3 km<sup>2</sup> are known more than 170 caves. The longest cave is "Studenata" with length of 602 m. After Cherepish, along the gorge the road pass through Zverino, Opletnya, Lakatnik, Bov and Tserovo.



In the narrowest part of the canyon, on the right bank of the Iskar River, is the Cherepish monastery "Assumption of the Virgin", founded in the 14th century. This is evidenced by a church statute written in the monastery in 1390-96, which is kept in the library of the Church Historical and Archaeological Museum in Sofia. Ravaged many times , it was rebuilt in the late 16th or early 17th century. Many ancient manuscripts

are preserved in the Cherepish Monastery, the most famous of which is the Cherepish Four Gospels from the 15th century with a gilded fitting, made here in 1612 by the Chiprov master-goldsmiths Nikola and Pala. The monastery itself consists of a church and several buildings located next to the river Iskar.



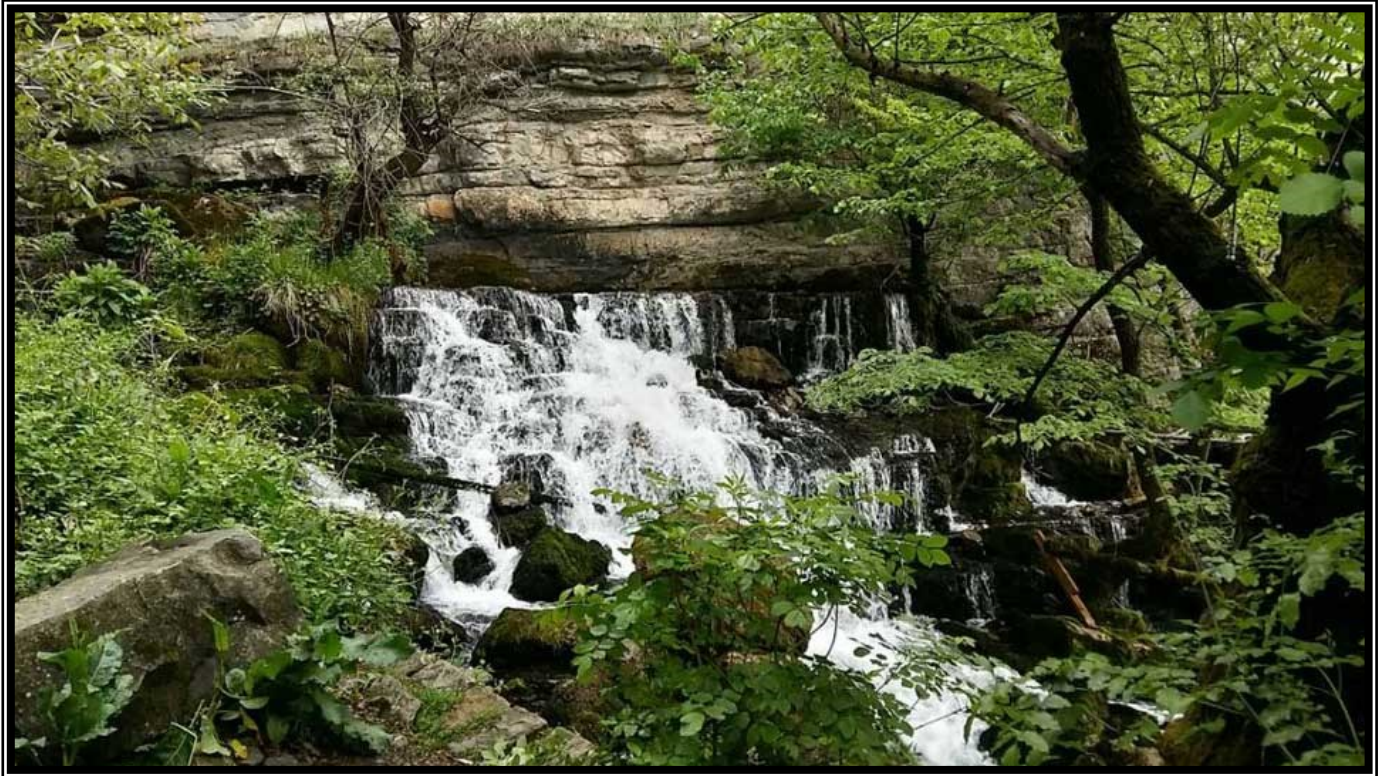


**Third stage: Lakatnishki rocks, Milanovo village, Svoge municipality, Sofia region**

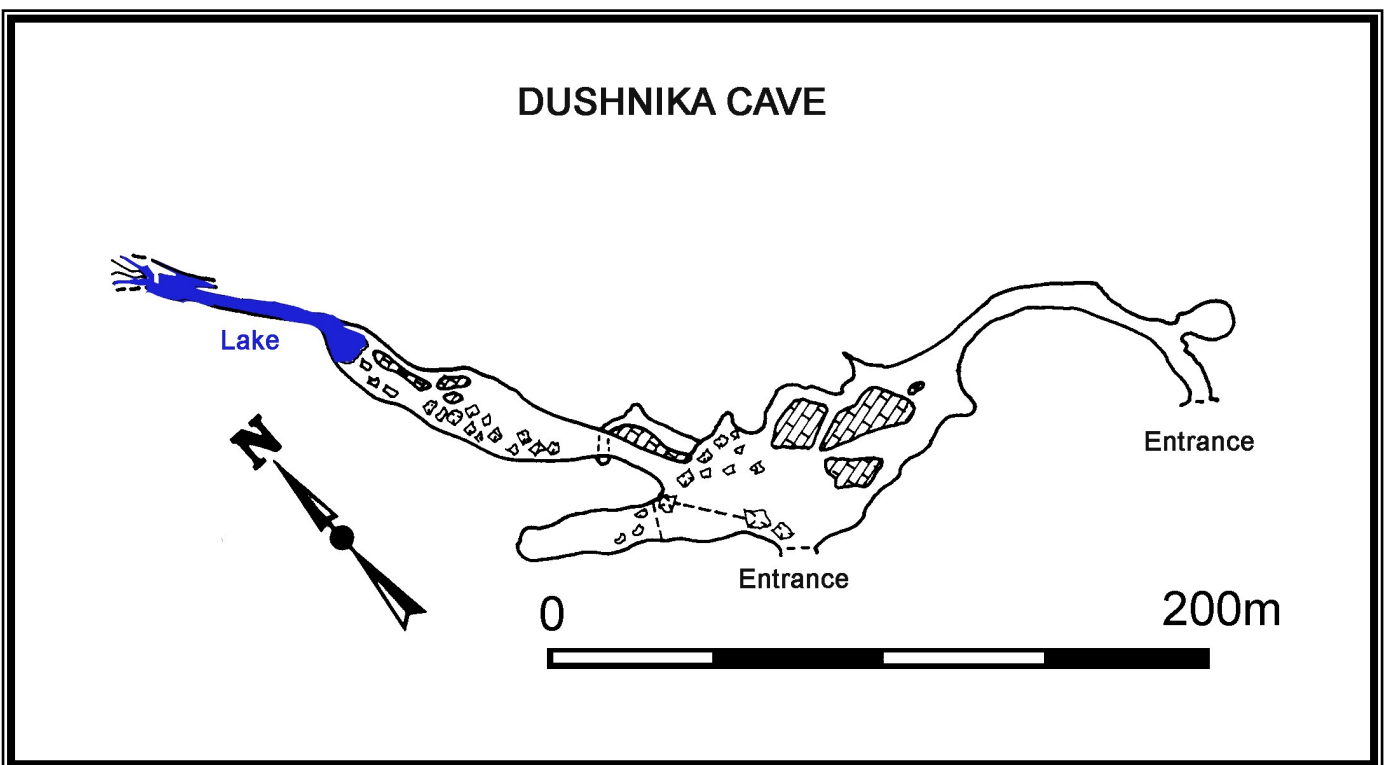


The Lakatnish rocks are a complex of rock ridges, escarpments, pyramids and pillars, caves and karst springs, developed among the rocks of the Triassic system on the western slope of the valley of the Iskar river. They represent the most attractive part of the remarkable canyon of the Iskar river. The base of the rock ranges is between 400 and 500 m above sea level, and the maximum height reaches up to 700 m. The Lakatnish rocks were declared a natural landmark in 1989. The protected territory falls within the boundaries of the later designated "Vrachanski Balkan" Nature Park. The area is built of Triassic rocks and includes one of the most complete sections of the Triassic system in our country and in Europe. The rocks were formed in the stratigraphic interval between 250 and 200 million years. The high aesthetic value of Lakatnishki rocks is due to the impressive rock crown composed of sheer walls, slopes, rock pyramids and pillars, caves and karst springs, a product of the multi-stage deep erosion of the river.

There are 86 caves in the area among the famous Temnata Dupka Cave with length more than 8 km m and the [Zhitolub Karst Spring](#) (average discharge 98-3577 l/sec ) . Other long caves near Lakatnik are Kozarskata Peshtera (709 m), Razhishkata Cave (316 m) and Svinskata Dupka (300 m).



#### Fourth Stage: Dushnika (Iskretskata peshtera, Peshtta, Vodnata)Cave



## Dushnika Cave , Iskrets Village, Sofia Distr., Length - 876 m. Depth - 12 m

A water cave on the left bank of Brezenska river, ca. two kilometers NW of Iskrets. The road to Breze was built over the entrance chamber of the cave.

A horizontal, labyrinthine cave with four entrances. Water t° = 11°C. Developed in Trias limestone. In spring most of the cave is inundated, except for the entrance part. The hydrological system of the cave gives rise to the biggest dynamic karstic spring in Bulgaria (ca. 54 900 l/sec).

The distance between Ponor Planina Mt. and the spring is ca. 7,5 km as the crow flies, the denivelation being over 650 m. The huge water basin indicates that if one day the end siphon is penetrated, the cavers may find themselves in a complex and very long cave system.

Known to local people since time unrecorded. First written information is given by Zlatarski in 1904. Zheko Radev surveyed 225 m in 1915. During the period 1923-25 the cave was visited many times by Dr. Buresch and his team for the study of the cave fauna. The club Akademik, Sofia, added in 1967-69 some more information and brought the known length to 567 m. The latest map of the cave (1988, Z. Iliev, A. Zhalov and others) indicated a total length of 876 m.

Fauna: Stygobites are *Cavernisa zaschevi* (Gastropoda), *Diacyclops pelagonicus saetosus*, *D. stygius*, *D. clandestinus*, *Speocyclops lindbergi*, *Maraenobiotus parainsignipes*, *Stygoelaphoidella elegans* (Copepoda), *Sphaeromides bureschi* (Isopoda). Troglobites: *Paranemastoma* (Buresiolla) *bureschi* (Opiliones), *Pheggomisetes globiceps* (Coleoptera). Also known are many other troglaphiles (incl. *Balkanopetalum armatum*) and troglonexenes.



**Requirements for tour:** The participants need to have headlamp and torch, helmet, caving clothes (no need impermeable overall) , shoes (rubber boots). **Easy cave. No narrowing's, pitches or difficulties. Temperature 12 °C**  
Please don't forget to Register here: <https://form.jotform.com/230695107769365> Deadline: **25 September 2023**