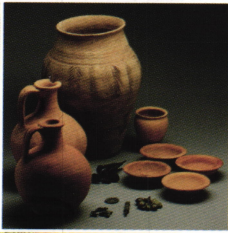




Zala

The Municipality of



iz
relo



Legend:



viewpoint



natural heritage



hop-growing



forest fruits



archaeological heritage



castle



religious heritage



ethnological heritage



hiking



cycling



riding



sports centre



hunting



fishing



Risto Savin

The

M

*unicipality of
Žalec*



consists of three distinct geographical areas: the central, flat section of the Lower Savinja Valley; to the north, the Ložnica hills with the karstified Ponikva plateau; and to the south, the northern edge of the Posavje hills between Mrzlica (1122 m) and Gozdnik (1090 m) with the Zabukovica-Liboje Tertiary coal depression. The area is drained by the Savinja in the south and the Ložnica in the north, together with their numerous tributaries. Despite regulation, these rivers still flood. Between the Savinja and the Ložnica is an extensive, mainly gravelly plain, with Quaternary terraces that towards the east sink below later alluvial deposits. The Municipality of Žalec covers an area of 116 km². In 2002, its population was 20,535, divided among 39 settlements. The territory has a markedly transitional character, with an interweaving of many of the characteristics of the pre-Alpine and sub-Pannonian worlds, and land use shows a varied and diverse economic orientation that has contributed to the thorough social re-stratification of the population and the transformation of settlements, and the cultural landscape in general.



The region's developed, mechanised and market-oriented agriculture is dominated by hop-growing and livestock breeding, while numerous small businesses and larger industrial plants, whose production is increasingly export oriented, provide the livelihood for a large proportion of the non-agricultural population. The dense transport network (the Celje-Velenje railway, completed in 1891, the main Celje-Ljubljana road, and, since 1997, the Celje-Trojane section of the motorway), largely based on old routes (some dating from Antiquity), has contributed significantly to the social and physical mobility of the population. This is reflected in its growth: between 1900 and 2002 the population increased by 104%; between 1948 and 2002 by 63%; between 1980 and 2002 by 9.4%; and between 1991 and 2002 by 2.1%. The largest expansion and growth has occurred in settlements with developed non-agricultural activities on the plain, while towns on the margins and in the hills have regressed. The most important settlement is the town of Žalec, with 4,919 inhabitants. Other major settlements with developed, centralised non-agricultural commercial, service-related and other infrastructure activities are to be found on the plain or in the former mining/industrial areas (Šempeter, Ložnica, Petrovče, Arja Vas, Liboje, Griže).

The Municipality of Žalec has several important cultural and historical sights of interest: the Roman necropolis in Šempeter, the old town centre in Žalec with its numerous characteristic buildings and the tower built to defend the settlement from the Turks (now renovated). The town also contains several museums and galleries. Other sights of interest are the baroque mansion in Novo Celje and the baroquified basilica dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Petrovče. Natural curiosities include Pekel Cave, a show cave in Ponikva Karst nature park, which also boasts a forest nature trail, the nature park on the banks of the Ložnica and Vrbje Pond, which is a protected natural monument, and one of the last areas of wetland in the Savinja Valley.









Few entirely natural areas survive in the Lower Savinja Valley today. To be more accurate, there are none at all, since even the remnants that survive today have been subjected to human influence in one way or another. Nevertheless, the valley can boast a number of natural sights of interest that are worth visiting and have a broader significance, too. In the end, in a very small area we can admire meadows, forests, standing water and a karst landscape that few other regions can boast.



P ekel Cave



Several cave systems have formed on the northern edge of the Savinja Valley in the predominantly Triassic dolomite and limestone of the isolated karst surrounded by impermeable Oligocene rock. Among the most famous sights is Pekel Cave (Jama Pekel), situated on the edge of the Ponikva Karst, which extends between the River Savinja, Gora Oljka ('Mount of Olives') and the valley of the Pirešica and Polzela. Several streams flow along the plateau in a north-south direction, and one of them, the Ponikvica, is responsible for creating Pekel Cave. At the point where the stream flows out of the cave, it acquires another name - Peklenščica. Pekel Cave has two levels: the lower level is flooded and has several tributaries. The main entrance passage ends after a hundred metres or so in a siphon that has the form of a narrow high passage and contains numerous pools and waterfalls. The four-metre-high waterfall is accessible to visitors and is the highest waterfall in any show cave in Slovenia. Here, there is also a passage to the dry upper level. The cave, in particular its entrance section, was known to our distant ancestors. By the 19th century it was already receiving visitors and was even used to hold parties. Bones of a Neanderthal man have been found in the cave. It is home to a rich variety of cave fauna.

It takes about an hour to walk through the part of the cave that is open to visitors - just over a kilometre. And where does its unusual name come from (Pekel = Hell)? The cave was given its name by local folk who saw a giant with horns in the rocks by the entrance and believed that he was standing at the entrance to Hell, the abode of devils.







Ponikva Plateau

An interesting feature of the area surrounding the cave is the 'geology trail' through the forest. Pekel Cave is not the only cave in this isolated karst area, which is protected as the 'Ponikva Karst' and measures approximately 40 km². Other sights worth mentioning include the Stone House (Kamnita hiša) in the valley of the Pirešica close to the quarry and the Secret Cave (Tajna jama), to the north in the direction of Polzela, believed to be the longest water cave in Slovenia.



The



iver Ložnica and meadows

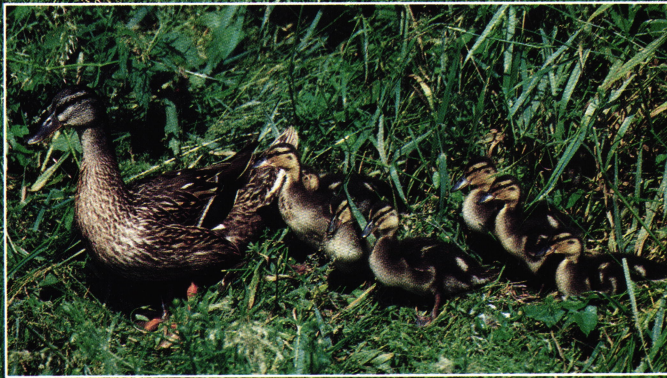
By the electricity substation on the road leading to Pekel Cave, the River Ložnica begins to meander its way through water meadows that extend all the way to Polzela. The meadows are a characteristic feature of this zone, which covers around 100 hectares. At one time there was grazing land here, too. Among the meadows, which are still waterlogged in places and are usually flooded in spring and autumn, belts of trees and bushes grow and afford shelter to many species of birds, amphibians and other tiny creatures. One interesting bird to be found here is the Red-backed shrike *Lanius collurio*, which is increasingly rare in Europe. Roe deer *Capreolus capreolus* are also found here, and from time to time a fox can be seen even in broad daylight. The area is given variety by individual groups of trees that are evidence of the forest that once covered the valley. In the large wood near Grušovlje, in a section where only oaks *Quercus robur* grow, the traditions of 'littering' (gathering hay as bedding for animals) and mowing still survive. This characteristic example of the use of lowland oak forests gives the woods a unique appearance - that of a city park. The forest groves are a sanctuary for many animals and birds.

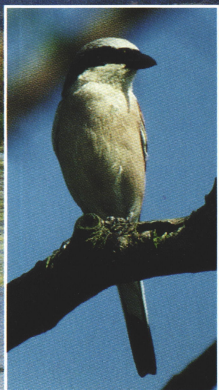
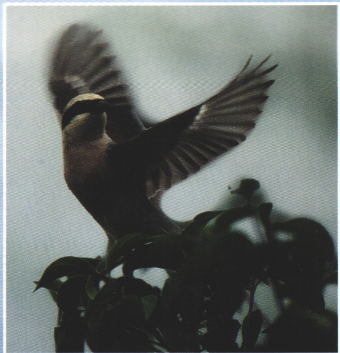
Across the road, next to the substation, is a spring and a washing place (for washing clothes) that is still in use today.

The Šenek mansion in Polzela, which today houses a home for the elderly, has an ornamental garden with clipped box hedges. On the other side of the house there is a pool, while the whole property is surrounded by a well-kept park, criss-crossed by numerous well-worn paths. A great variety of trees, some exotic, others domestic, grow in the park, and many of them have attained enormous dimensions. Particularly noteworthy are the giant linden, the tulip poplar and the Canadian hemlock. The park has protected status.

The visitor's gaze will also be attracted by Novi Klošter, at the foot of the Založje hills. Originally a monastery and later converted into a mansion, it is now abandoned and is falling into ruin.





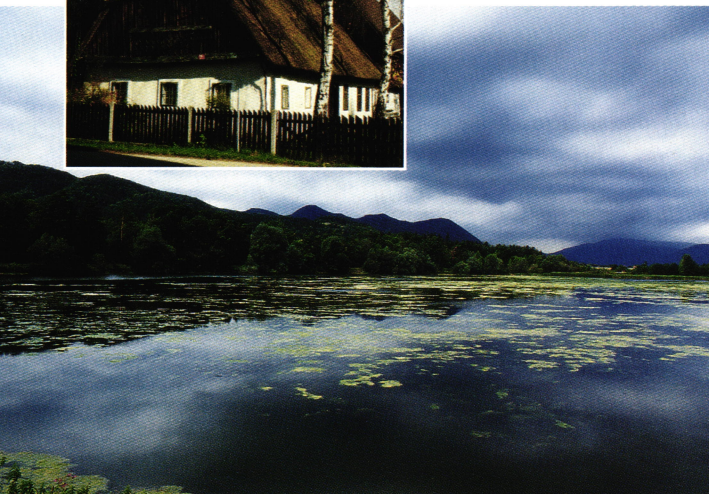


Vrbje Pond

South of Žalec, close to the Savinja River, lies an interesting protected area the centre of which is Vrbje Pond. Covering just over 13 hectares, it is the largest stretch of standing water in this part of the valley. Various species of carp are bred in the pond.

The pond also has abundant and interesting flora and fauna. Over 130 species of birds have been observed here. One of the noisiest of them is the great reed warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, which nests among the reeds. The pond is also home to the little bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, the common moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, among other interesting birds. In terms of colourful plumage, the kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, which nests on the banks of the Savinja, is unrivalled. In autumn and winter the mute swan *Cygnus olor* attracts most attention, while in spring and summer the great crested grebe *Podiceps cristatus* is interesting for visitors. There is even more variety at the time of the spring and autumn migrations, when great numbers of ducks, herons, shorebirds and birds of prey stop here. The birds share the pond with amphibians, the noisiest of which is the European tree frog *Hyla arborea*. Dragonflies compete with the birds in terms of flying ability and colourfulness. Despite their name they are perfectly harmless. Over 20 species have been observed around the pond.

The plants growing on the banks of the pond and river include numerous healing herb and edible plants. Plants are also found in the pond itself - for example, pondweeds, water milfoil and duckweed.



The R iver Savinja



Only a dyke separates Vrbje Pond from the River Savinja. This section of the river is well preserved, and the river has concealed the earlier regulation. The eroded walls and gravel beds typical of a naturally preserved river are still present here. The gravel beds, which change and shift from year to year, are home to many plants and animals. They also play an important role in purifying the water.

There are practically no surviving flood forests on the banks of the Savinja. The few remaining sections are detached from the main river, which means that the vitally necessary floods no longer reach them.



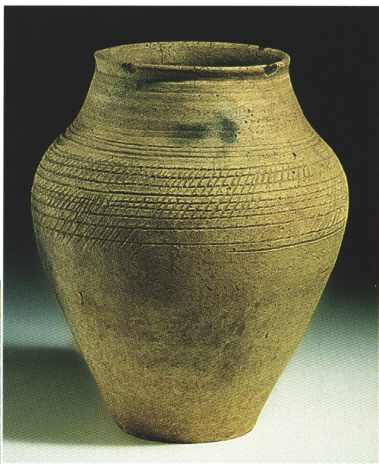
In the

and of the Taurisci

In the past, when travellers, Roman merchants or soldiers, driven around the world by the fates, crossed *Atrans* (Trojane), they entered the territory of the Taurisci. The Taurisci were one of the many Celtic tribes that from the 4th century BC settled the territory of present-day Slovenia, including the Savinja Valley. By the end of the 1st century BC, the Romans had annexed this territory, with which they had cultivated early trading and political contacts, to the Roman Empire. Some decades later they organised it as the province of Noricum. The capital of the region was *Celeia* (Celje), which acquired town rights during the reign of the emperor Claudius. The local Celtic population soon adapted to the new conditions, and some rich individuals occupied important political positions.

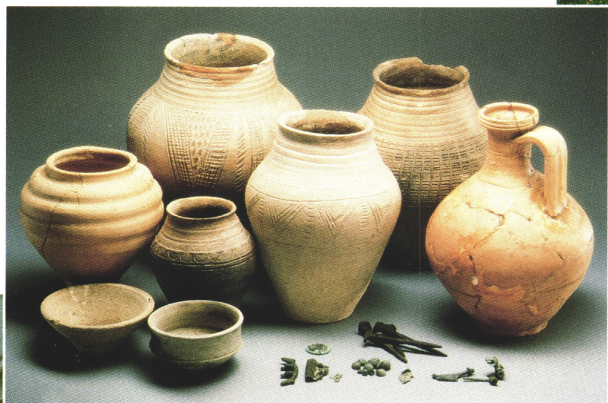
The Savinja Valley was at that time connected by an important traffic artery, the main *Aquileia-Emona-Celeia-Poetovio* road (Aquileia-Ljubljana-Celje-Ptuj) running along an earlier prehistoric trading route, the so-called 'Amber Road'. The remains of the Roman road can still be seen today at Presedlo. Road and post stations (*mansio*, *mutatio*) soon appeared alongside the main Roman road. Here, travellers could change horses, eat a meal or spend the night if their journey was a long one.

Not far from Trojane was the first settlement (*vicus*) in Vransko. This was also the site of a Roman



tile factory, which in the 2nd century supplied the needs of the Roman army at Ložica. At the end of the 2nd century, Ložica pri Polzeli briefly served as a camp of the Roman *legio II Italica*. This was the time of the first major invasions by German tribes from beyond the Danube and a period of serious threats to the Empire. The legion stationed at Ložica had the task of







defending the area and the crossing from Trojane into the central territory of the Roman Empire.

Halfway between Celje and Trojane was a road station called *Ad Medias*. The exact location is not known. We do know, however, that the road led travellers on to **Šempeter**, where they could admire magnificent marble tombs. Important families from nearby Celeia owned *villae rusticae* in the fertile valley and erected their tombs on their estates. The political positions they held in Celeia, were recorded on their tombs. These positions were honorary and unpaid. The surviving tombs include those of the mayors (*Spectatii*), the supervisor of public building (Vindonius) and the Ennii, a rich Celtic family. The surviving section of Roman road in the eastern part of Šempeter shows us how well the Romans maintained their road system. We can learn something about their everyday life from the items found in graves at Šempeter and displayed in the archaeological collection of the Regional Museum of Celje. The Romans quarried sandstone for the bases of their tombs in nearby Založe, while the marble was transported from Pohorje. The interior of the Roman burial mound at **Gomilsko** was also lined with blocks of marble.

The rich archaeological heritage of the Savinja Valley can be seen today in the collections of the Regional Museum of Celje.

Zalec

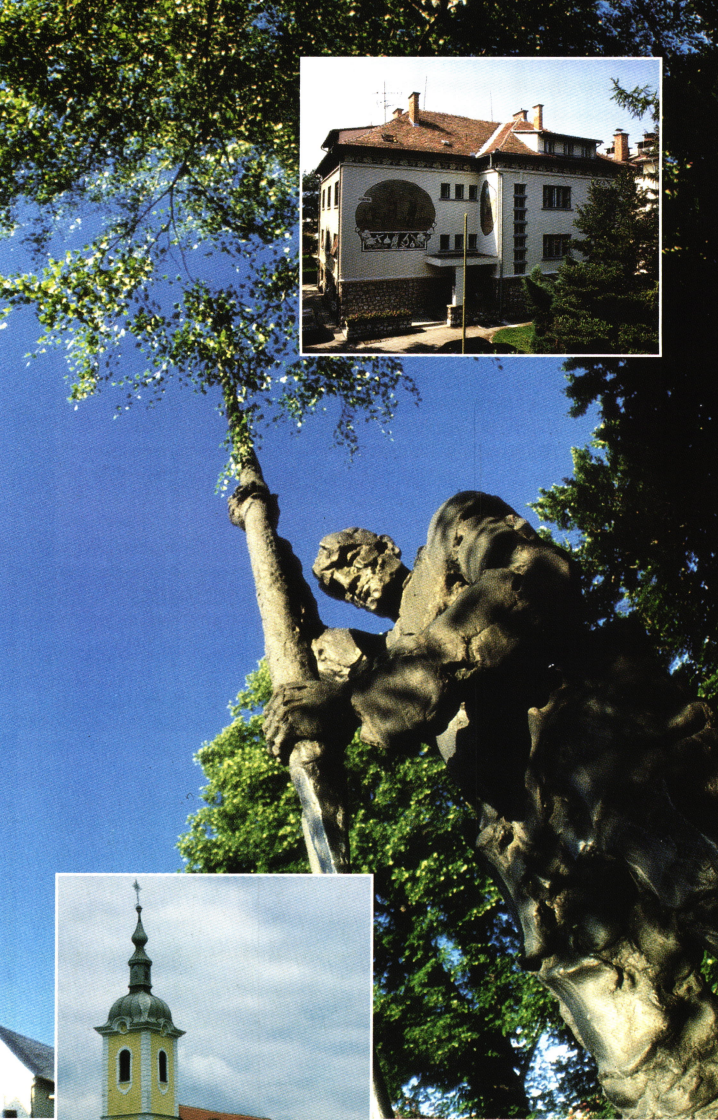
- a young town with an old centre



Žalec's origins as a market town are still visible in the eastern half of today's town, between the parish church of St Nicholas and the succursal church of St Canzian. The old market town consists of three separate sections: the western section, with its administrative and ecclesiastical buildings, dates from the 12th century; the eastern section has its origins in the 13th century; and the central section is from the 15th century. Žalec was granted market rights by King Otakar II between 1250 and 1254. The first owners of this territory in the 11th century were the Friesach-Zeltschach and Azhvin families. Between 1363 and 1456 it belonged to the lords of Celje, whose estates gradually expanded into the Lower Savinja Valley and effectively controlled traffic along it.

Notable buildings in the old market town include: the church complex, consisting of the church of St Nicholas, the defensive tower and the Gothic/Renaissance 'Zottel's Forge', which in around 1580 served as a Protestant chapel; the cemetery of the church of St Canzian, whose rectangular sanctuary indicates its Romanesque origin; and a few houses from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. With the development of Žalec, which was spurred in the mid-19th century by the development of the hop-growing industry, the market town continued to expand towards the west and south. The neoclassical buildings from the first half of the century were joined in the last quarter of the century by examples of historicist architecture. One of these is the parish church, where Fortunat Bergant's altar picture of St Nicholas can still be seen today.





Novo Celje Mansion

Novo Celje Mansion in Dobriša Vas, near Žalec, is one of the most important baroque mansions in Slovenia. Count Anton Gaisruck began building it in 1752 after acquiring a large Celje estate from the Empress Maria Theresa. The plans for the building were drawn up by the important baroque architect Matthias Persky, who had moved from Vienna to Ljubljana. The mansion was completed in 1767 for Count Karl Gaisruck by the architect Lorenz Prager. Notable features of the building are the perfectly preserved great hall with its portraits of the counts of Gaisruck and the renovated chapel with its frescoes by the painter Anton Lerchinger. The magnificent main staircase and many of the rooms have stuccowork decoration. Statues of Hercules and Samson - the work of the court sculptor Veit Königer from Graz - stand on tall pedestals in front of the main entrance. Some of the mansion's luxurious furnishings can today be seen at the National Gallery and National Museum in Ljubljana. The mansion is surrounded by a large park, originally laid out in the baroque style, with a long beech avenue leading up to the main entrance.

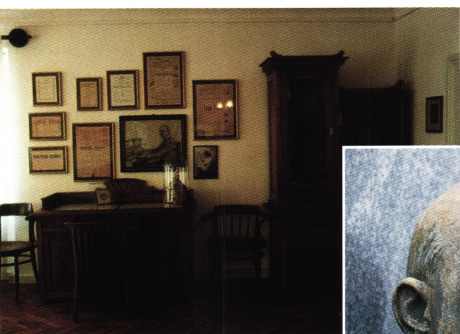


Risto Savin

- artillery officer and composer, whose lieder won him acclaim in Europe

Risto Savin belongs to the generation of Slovene composers who, though not professional musicians, made a significant contribution to the modernisation of composition in Slovenia in the early 20th century thanks to their technical expertise and modern aesthetic views. Following a period of study in Vienna, Savin's musical language, which originally displayed Early Romantic traits, gained Late Romantic and even Impressionist features in which the influences of models such as Brahms, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Wagner and even Debussy can be detected. The composer's technical gifts combined with this stylistic breadth and his Slavonic roots to create a distinctive musical language. His extensive *oeuvre* includes more than 50 orchestral works, chamber pieces and compositions for piano, operatic works such as *Lepa Vida* and *Matija Gubec*, and numerous lieder and choral works, and represents an important addition to the Slovenian musical repertoire.

Following the First World War he retired to Žalec and dedicated himself entirely to composition. The Savin house in Žalec, where Risto Savin was born, contains a memorial room dedicated to the composer.





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