



The Golden Trail

1 Kašperské Hory from the Golden Trail and the Golden Road



Length of Path 25 km

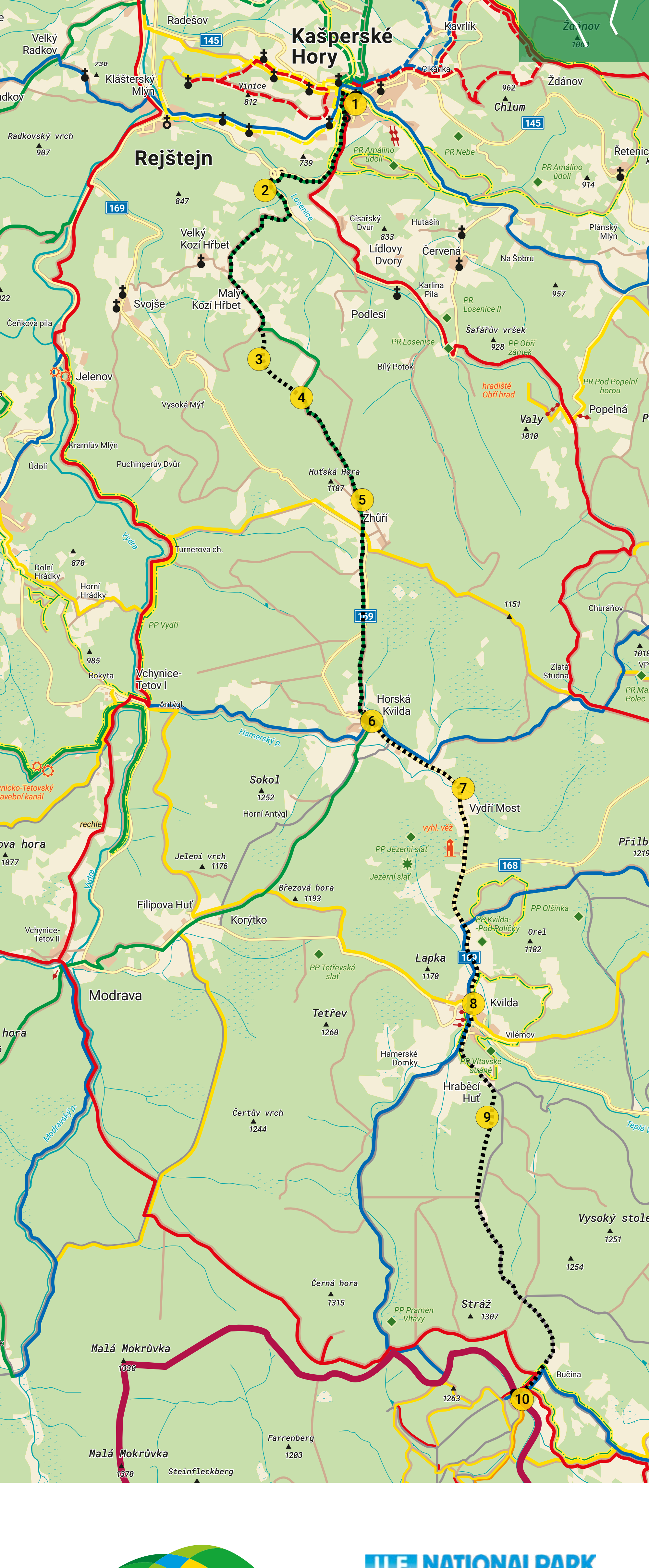
Kašperské Hory from the Golden Trail and the Golden Road

The town of Kašperské Hory used to belong among the most important Bohemian mining towns in the Middle Ages. In the first half of the 14th century, there was a shift from panning to mining gold. The salt trade coming from the transshipment point in Passau was growing at the time, as was the demand for more luxurious goods from the Danube region and southern Europe. Bohemian king and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV thus decided in 1356 to expand the connections between Bohemia and those regions and initiated the founding of two new trade routes from upper Otava region towards Passau and the new town of Grafenau in the Bavarian duchy.

They both began in Passau. The Golden Trail, or rather its third branch, led towards Freyung, Mauth, Bučina, Kvilda, H. Kvilda do K. Hory. Its competitor, the Golden Road, also began in Passau, but led towards the border across the Bavarian duchy, that is Tittling, Grafenau, border crossing Modrý sloup, Březník, Filipova Huť and Horská Kvilda, where it joined the Golden Trail.

Charles IV had the castle Kašperk built 3 km north of the town. It was supposed to protect southwest Bohemia, the gold mines, and ensure safe passage on both mentioned trade routes. The castle also became a residence for the highest court officials in the region.

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2 The Losenice system



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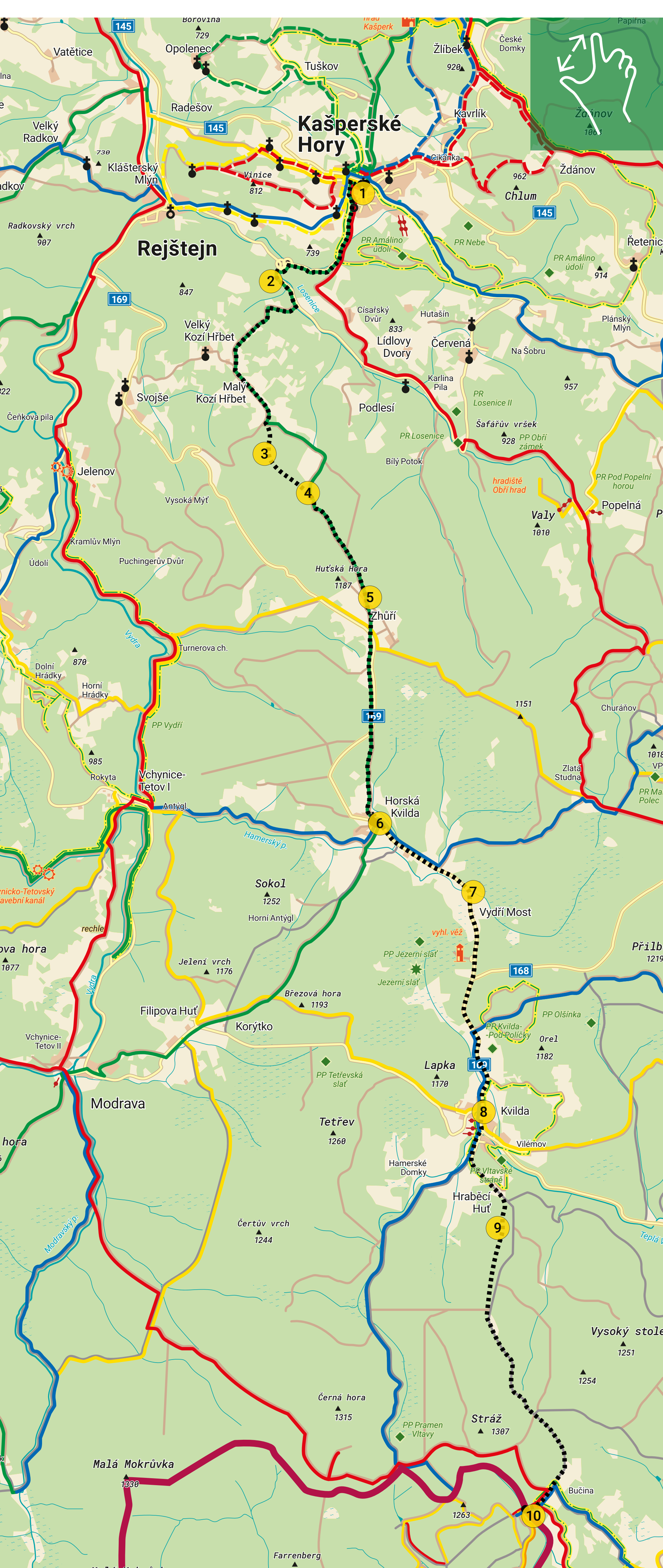
The Losenice system

Continuous unbroken remains of the Golden Trail are called systems. The trails of the Losenice system began to appear in the first half of the 15th century. The original course turned towards the village Červená between Zhůří and Kozí Hřbety and never reached this place.

Parts of the Losenice system, with their switching left and right turns of two parallel trails, belong to the most impressive remains of the Golden Trail on Bohemian lands. In this area, the Trail climbed from the Losenice valley to 700 meters and in a long southward curve it began to line up its direction with the massive mountain ridge rising from Rejštejn to Zhůří. The width of the path is 5 meters on the ground and almost 8 between the tops of embankments, which are 5 meters high.

The paths of the system used to pass through land with high concentration of expensive metal mines. As such they were no doubt used not only to transport salt but also for connecting mines and exporting their yield.

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3 The Zhůří system



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The Zhůří system

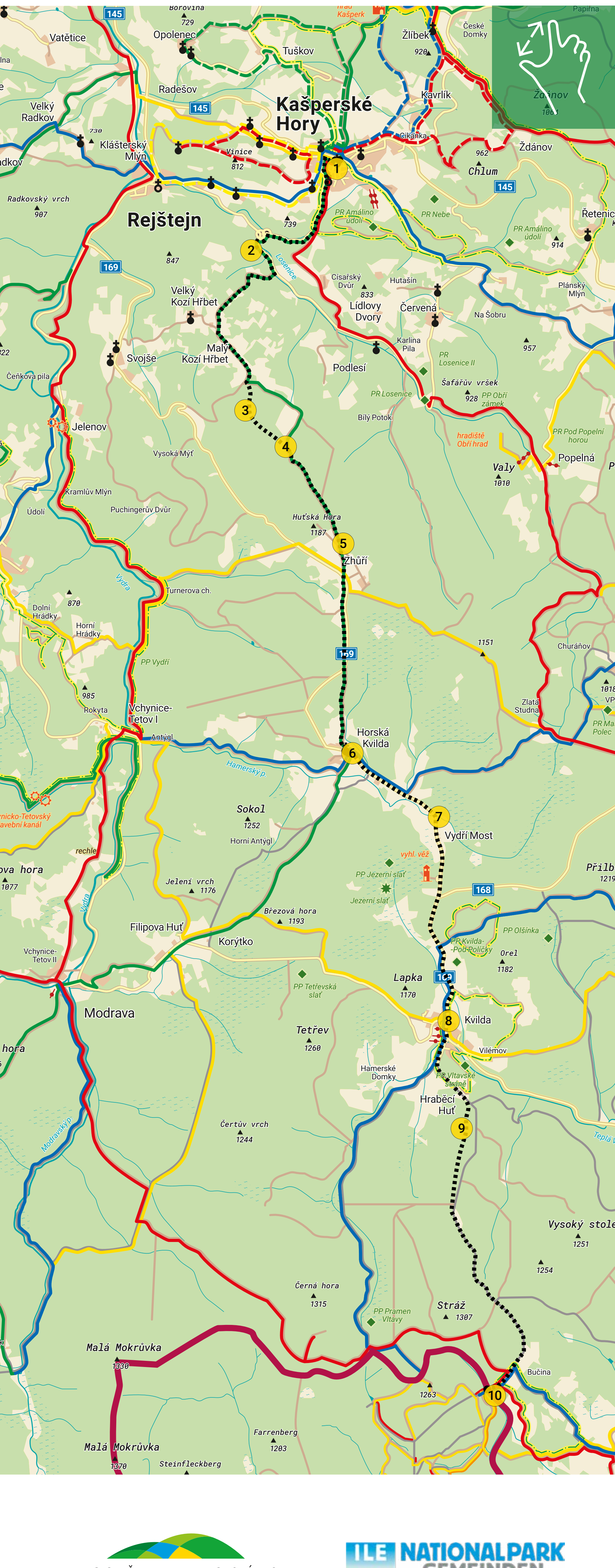
In the deep forests of the mountain ridge rising south of the village Kozí Hřebet all the way to a plateau with the former village of Zhůří, hides the Zhůří system of the Golden Trail remains. It is one of the highest located systems in the country; its numerous sunken lanes rise almost incessantly from 900 meters above sea level to Huťská mountain in the height over 1100 meters.

The medieval traveling traders had to move through these locations in often extreme climates. High levels of snow, fog, rain and freezing cold are not exceptional weather conditions, and the travellers and their beasts of burden who had to transport heavy cargo from autumn to spring deserve our admiration.

The location of the system ensured that it was preserved, as human activity could never be as intensive here as it was in lower areas.

The westernmost sunken lane travels from the meadow Flusárna towards Horská Kvilda and it is almost 4 meters deep and several meters wide, paved in parts and with beautifully curved turns. It was likely used even after the end of the Golden Trail. The green tourist trail leads through here

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4 Kašperk Castle



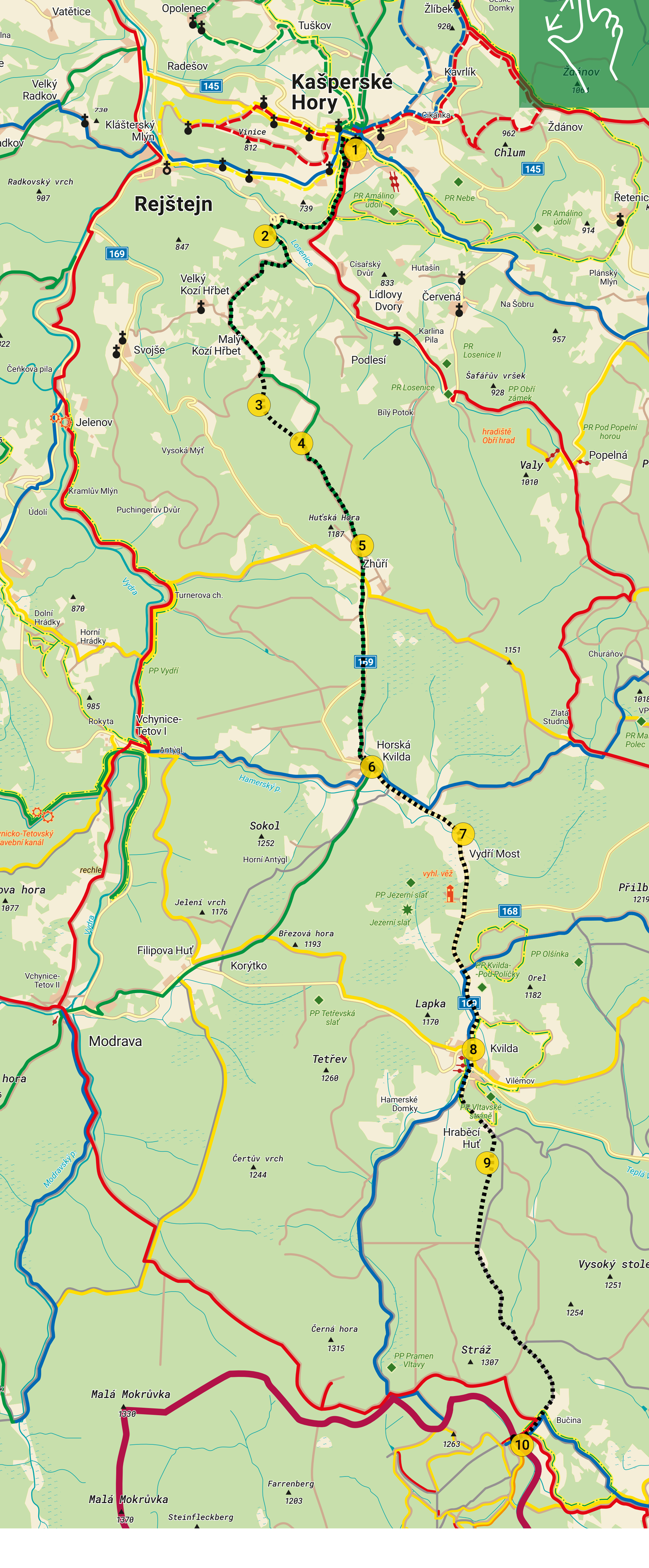
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Kašperk Castle

The founding of the Kašperk Castle is directly related to these important medieval routes. The order to build it was given by the Bohemian King and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV in 1356. It was meant to be a border guarding castle, which would protect Šumava and its surrounding areas, as well as the gold-mining region of Kašperské Hory, including upper Šumava. The castle guards were also to guard the two then-new trade route, the Golden Road and the Golden Trail. They both led from Kašperské Hory to Passau, one through the land of the Passau bishopric and the other through a Bavarian duchy.

Another reason for its construction was the need to uphold and support the royal administration in Southwest Bohemia. As such, Kašperk was home to the most prominent royal court officials. This is probably why representative halls and chambers were built, so that the officials may reside here with their families. Up until 1409 the holder of the castle had the role of the arbiter of the law. The Kašperk Castle and its holders had an existential stake in the prosperity of the commerce on the Golden Road and the Golden Trail, as the customs and tolls brought them no small profits.

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5 The village of Zhůří



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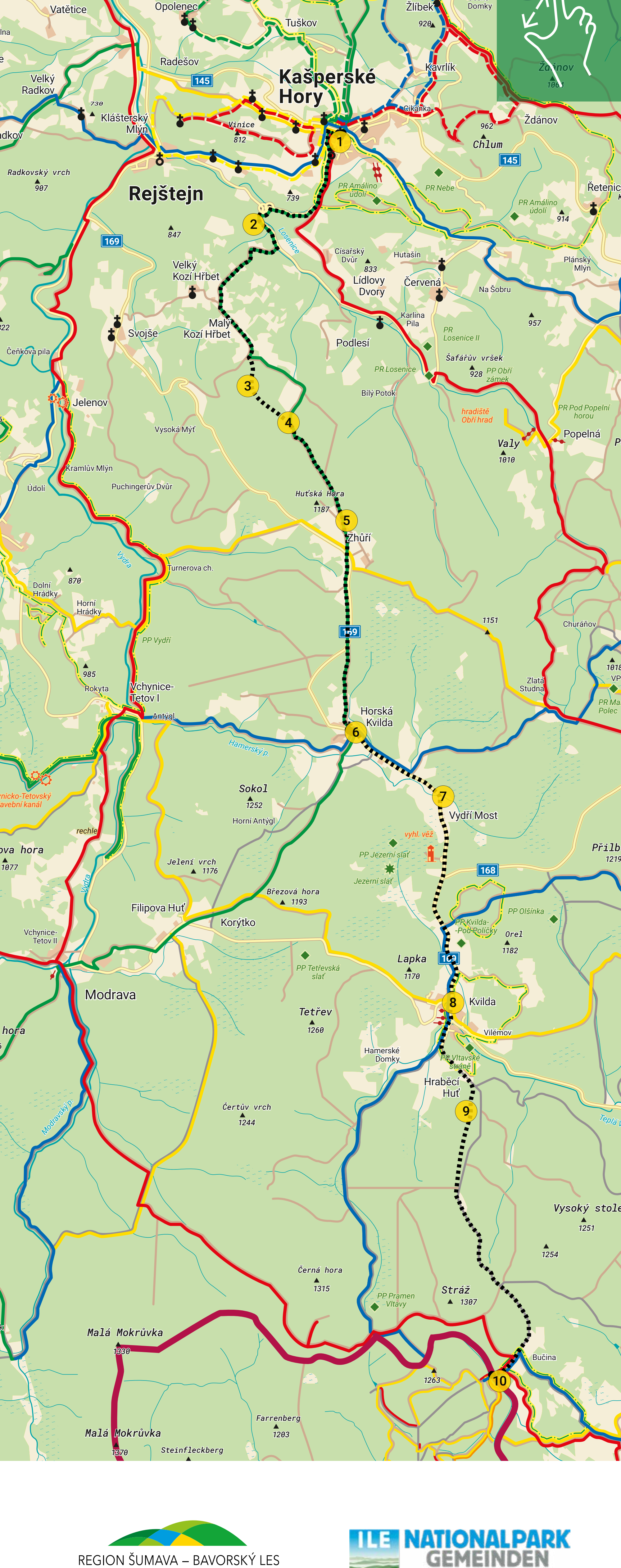
The village of Zhůří

Today, the former village can be identified in the terrain only by the remains of the Golden Trail, which led through it, and by small overgrown piles of rubble, signaling the former presence of houses. From the plains around the former village, one can, during favourable weather, admire one of the most beautiful views in Šumava.

The Golden Trail descended towards Zhůří from Huťská mountain (1187 m) across meadows and around old crosses in a noticeable “meadow” sunken lane of the impressive measurements of 4-6 meters of width and up to 3,5 meters in depth. In parts there are noticeable remains of paving and solidifying the sides with stone.

West of the former village Zhůří lies the place “U věže” (By the Tower), registered in some older and even newer maps. Some explorers think that from this strategically situated place, it was possible to control a large part of the Kašperské Hory branch of the Golden Trail. As such we cannot rule out the existence of a fortified protective building. However, it is not possible to test this theory via archeological research, because the whole area served as an impenetrable military compound during the socialist regime, and it has undergone widespread terrain modification, which irreparably ruined all possible archeological situations. A similar guard tower to the one on Stožecká rock on the Prachatice branch or by Strážný (Kynžvart) on the Vimperk branch of the Golden Trail can thus not be proven.

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6 The Horská Kvilda System



Length of Path 26 km

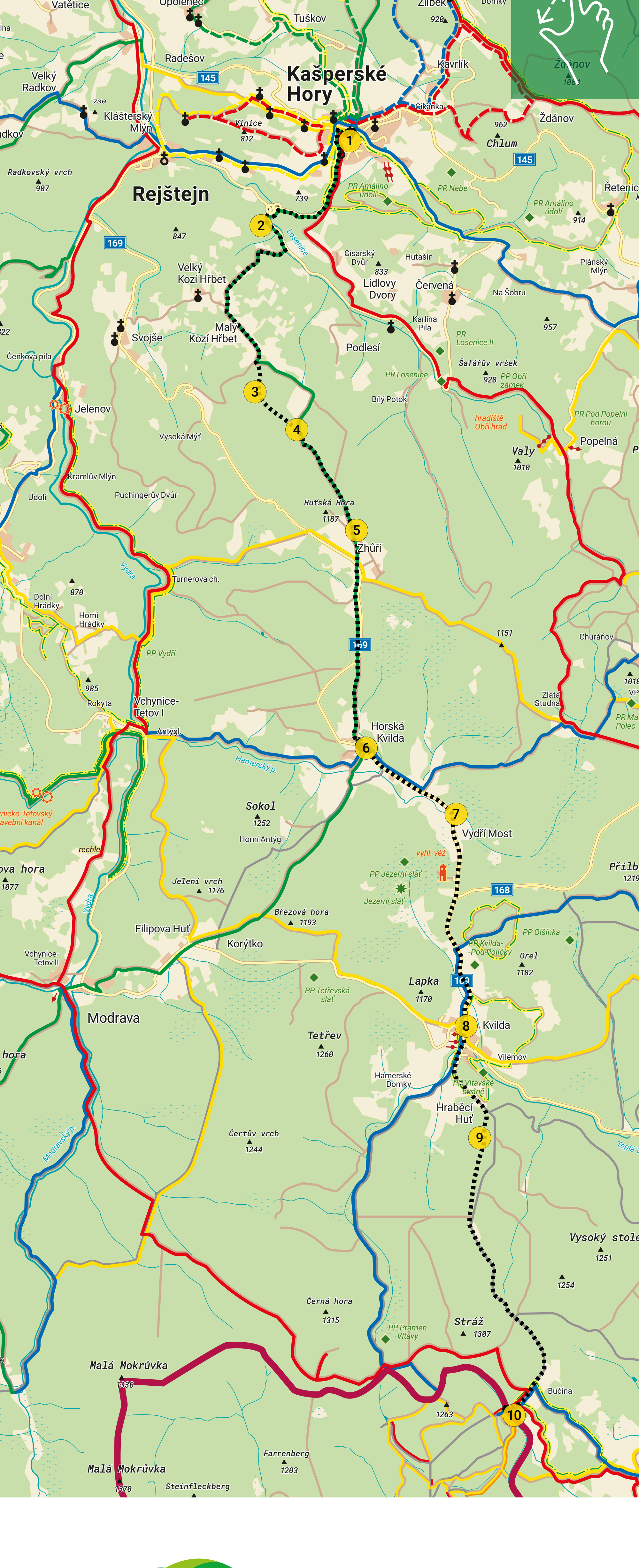
The Horská Kvilda System

With its size it belongs among the smaller systems with a simpler pattern of sunken lanes and, as most preserved systems on the Kašperské Hory branch, it exemplifies the course of a medieval route in a mountainous terrain over 1000 meters above sea level.

It hides in a forest north of the village of Horská Kvilda, on a gradual southern slope of the Břemeno mountain (1156 meters), where it is cut across by a road from Rejštejn and Zhůří to Horská Kvilda and Kvilda. The main route of the system spreads across its entire length from the road to the edge of the forest and is about 2 meters wide and up to 2 meters deep. About halfway, the Horská Kvilda system has up to five parallel routes (including the main one). Pieces of old paving, which probably come from its later usage, can still be found on the main route.

On the edge of the forest north of Horská Kvilda, all the routes connect into one large sunken lane, which ends on the edge of a large grassy plain and becomes a narrow ground lane. The Golden Trail then clearly continued further south alongside the route of today's unpaved road across the partly waterlogged meadow into a place, where the Golden Road separated from it to continue to Bavaria and where later the village of Horská Kvilda would be founded.

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7 The Otter Bridge



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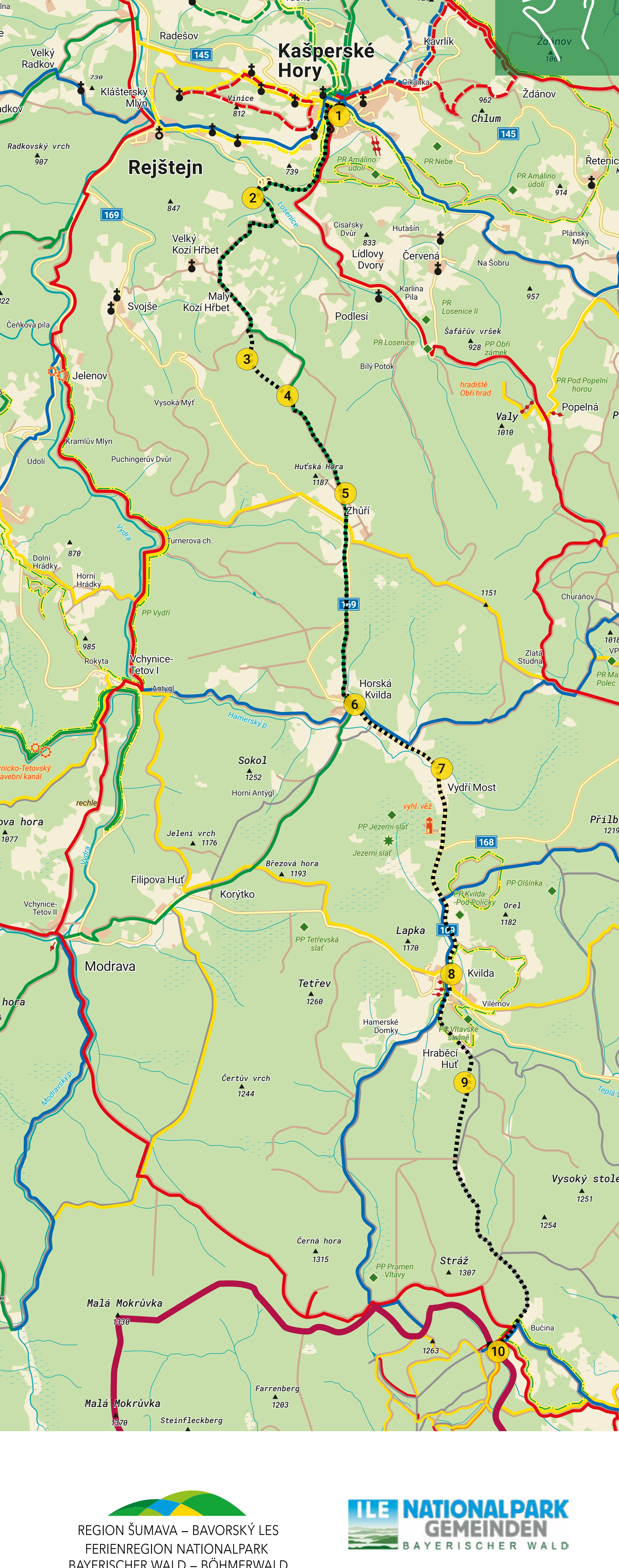
The Otter Bridge

Several kilometres southeast from here, in times of the Golden Trail's existence, the estate of the town of Kašperské Hory ended and the Zdíkov-Vimperk estate of Malovec of Chýnov began. Both sides had long-term disputes over the border.

After the Thirty Years' War this border moved 2 kilometres north, here just in front of Horská Kvilda, to the Otter Bridge (Vydří most) across the Hamry stream. At that point, there were not many reasons for a dispute left, as the commerce on the Golden Trail began to diminish and gradually disappear and so the profits it brought were no longer significant enough to quarrel over. A very detailed 1736 map of the Kašperské Hory branch of the Golden Trail depicts the border between the estates on the Otter Bridge. The tradition of administrative divide remains to this day, with the Pilsen and South-Bohemian districts having their border here.

We have detailed information above the Golden Trail around the Otter Bridge from the early 18th century. In 1729, the Prague Gubernium ordered both Pilsen district representatives to personally investigate the state of the Kašperské Hory and Vimperk branches of the Golden Trail. The goal was to evaluate the possibility of transforming them into modern communications connecting Bohemia with the Donau region. The Vimperk branch eventually underwent this modernisation and today the main road from Vimperk to the border crossing Strážný leads through here.

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8 Kvilda

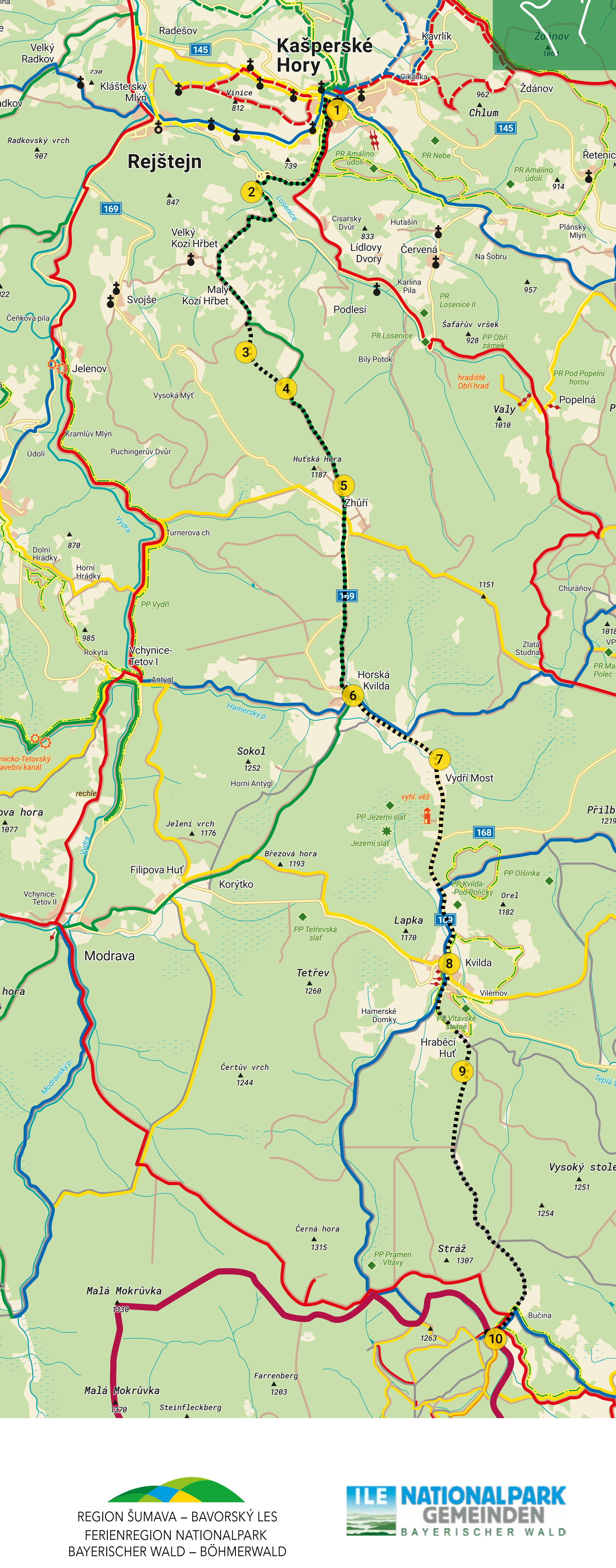


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Kvilda

The royal grounds around Kvilda were given to Ondřej, king John the Blind's deputy on the royal castle in Písek, in the first third of the 14th century. After Ondřej's death, his sons Tomáš and Jan were, in a document dated May 23, 1345, granted ownership of "the forest, which is called Gevilde, and which lies behind Reychensteyn", with all its waters, artificial lakes, meadows and pastures, as well as the rights to use the metal mines (gold, silver, and others). Soon after the establishment of the Kašperské Hory branch of the Golden Trail, the farm Philde was founded on an uninhabited plain around today's Kvilda. The founding of the village of Kvilda most likely dates back to the 15th or 16th century, this is supported by the local findings of ceramics. On both shores of the Hamry and Kvilda streams, which flow into Warm Vltava, there are visible remains of the area's gold mining past, in the form of piles of gangue. The first settlement was more of a customs station, as the high altitude did not allow for agricultural activity. The village together with its surroundings belonged to the estate owned by the House of Malovec. In 1593 it was referred to as "the Bohemian village in the woods" where travelling tradesmen could find two inns to refresh themselves in. With the end of the Golden Trail, Kvilda's inhabitants lost their main source of income. A post-Thirty Years War tax document from 1654 still names keeping of livestock and trading on the Golden Trail as the people's main source of income.

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9 The Kvilda system of the Golden Trail



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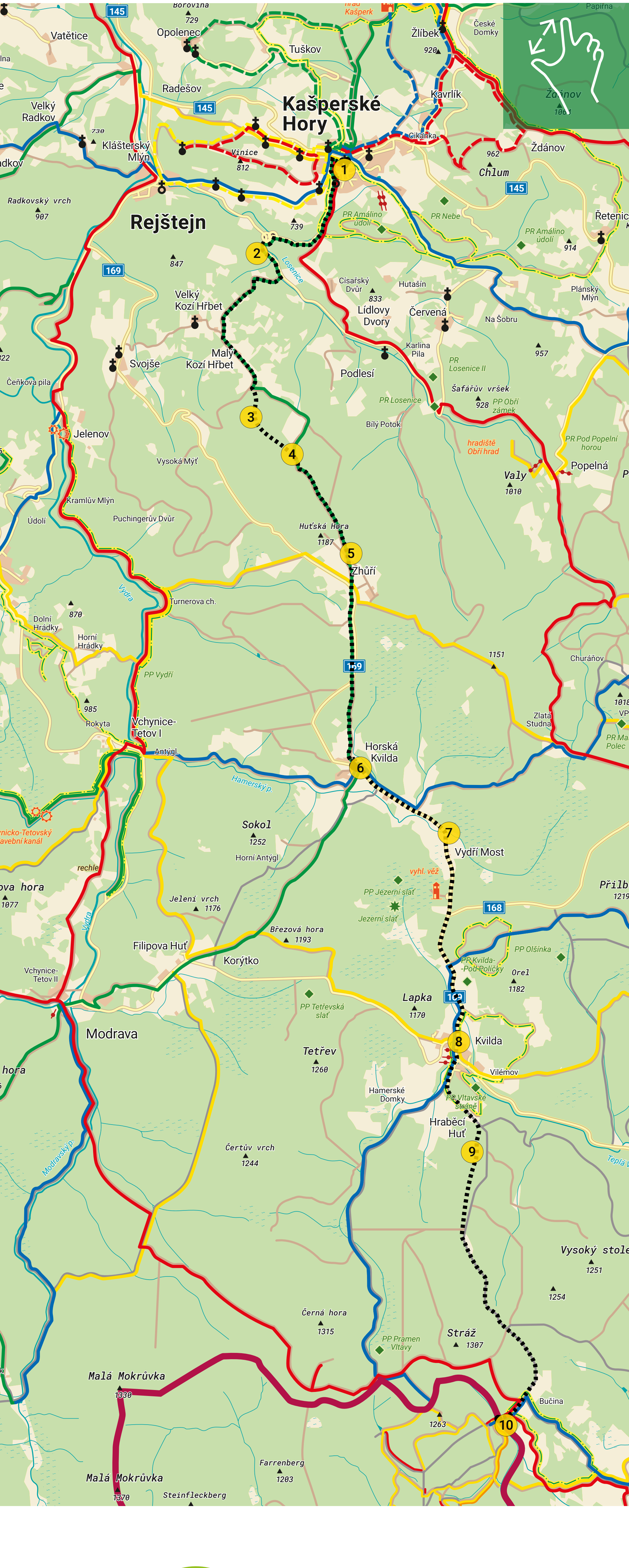
The Kvilda system of the Golden Trail

In the expansive border forests between Kvilda and the former village of Bučina by a border crossing of the same name, the Kvilda system of the Golden Trail can be found. Its course rose to considerable altitude around 1200 meters and the trade caravans had to deal with harsh climatic conditions.

Travel was further complicated by the fact that up until the 16th century that the border forests belonging to the Passau bishopric, spreading north of Freyung, all the way to Kozí Hřbety by Kašperské Hory, was completely uninhabited. The Kvilda system was just about in the middle of this large forest. In both directions, the travelling tradesmen were facing around 15 kilometres of uninhabited primeval forest.

From the entire distance of 8 km between Kvilda and the border in Bučina, the Kvilda system takes up about 2 km. We are speaking of one main sunken lane, which in some places splits into two to four trails.

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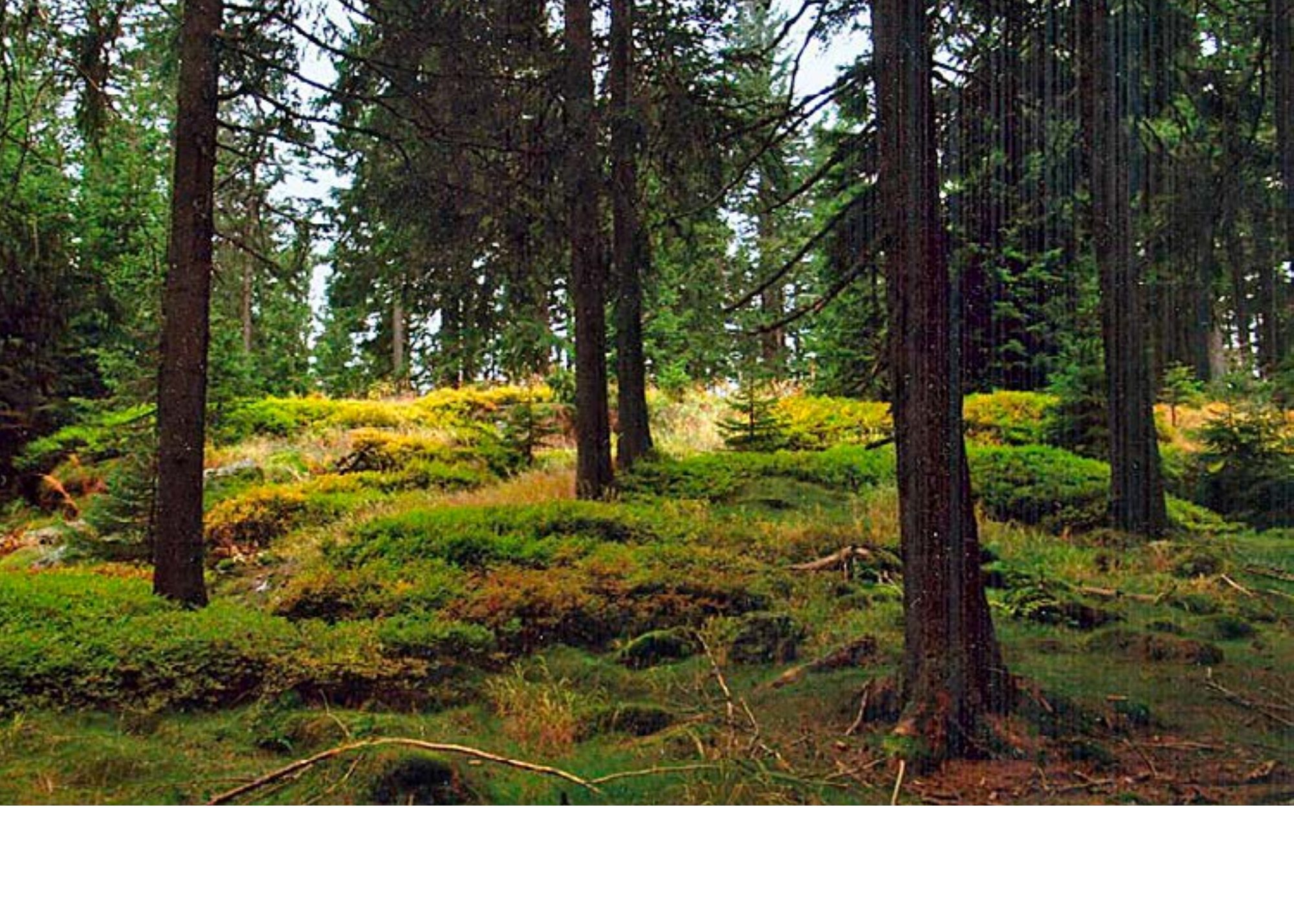


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10 Bučina and the Kašperské Hory branch of the Golden Trail beyond the border



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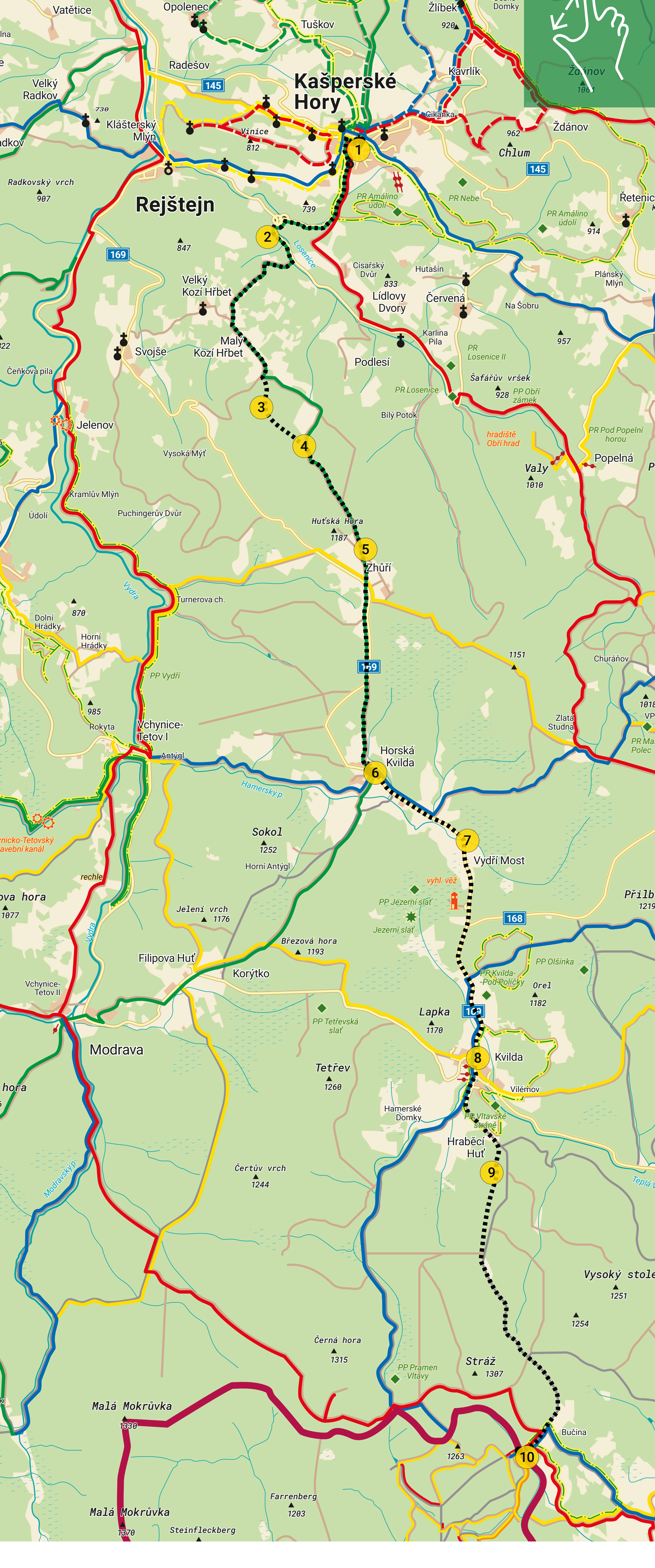
Bučina and the Kašperské Hory branch of the Golden Trail beyond the border

Here, the age-old Golden Trail left the Bohemian lands and crossed the bridge over the border stream towards today's village of Finsterau. Then the trail continued to Passau across the land of the Passau bishopric.

The Golden Trail used the be the very axis and arterial road of this region, the landscape of which gradually descended from the ridge of Šumava, through a charming hilly area, to the wide valley of the Donau. Since the early 13th century, the tiny state of the Passau bishops belonged into the varied patchwork of land units of the medieval Holy Roman Empire and bishops ruled it until 1803.

On the Passau land, the Kašperské Hory branch left Passau in the direction of Freyung and then led through Kreuzberg and expansive uninhabited border forests and wetlands all the way here, on the border of the Bohemian kingdom. During the Middle Ages, the land around the trail was gradually settled all the way to Kreuzberg with a noticeable church on a hill. The land closer to the border was only settled after the Thirty Years War. By 1704, it reached Finsterau, the last Passau village before the border.

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