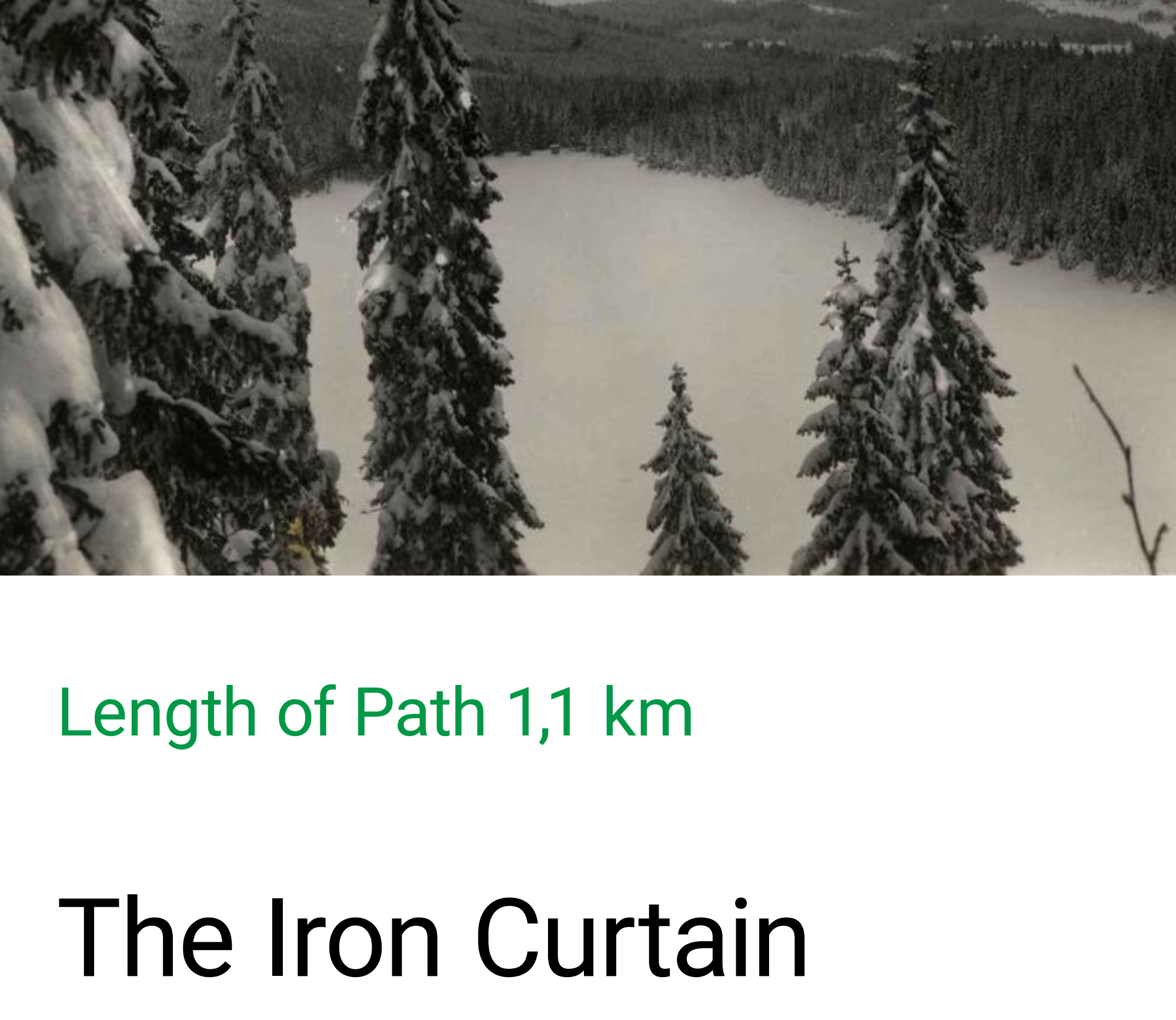




The Iron Curtain

1 The Iron Curtain



Length of Path 1,1 km

The Iron Curtain

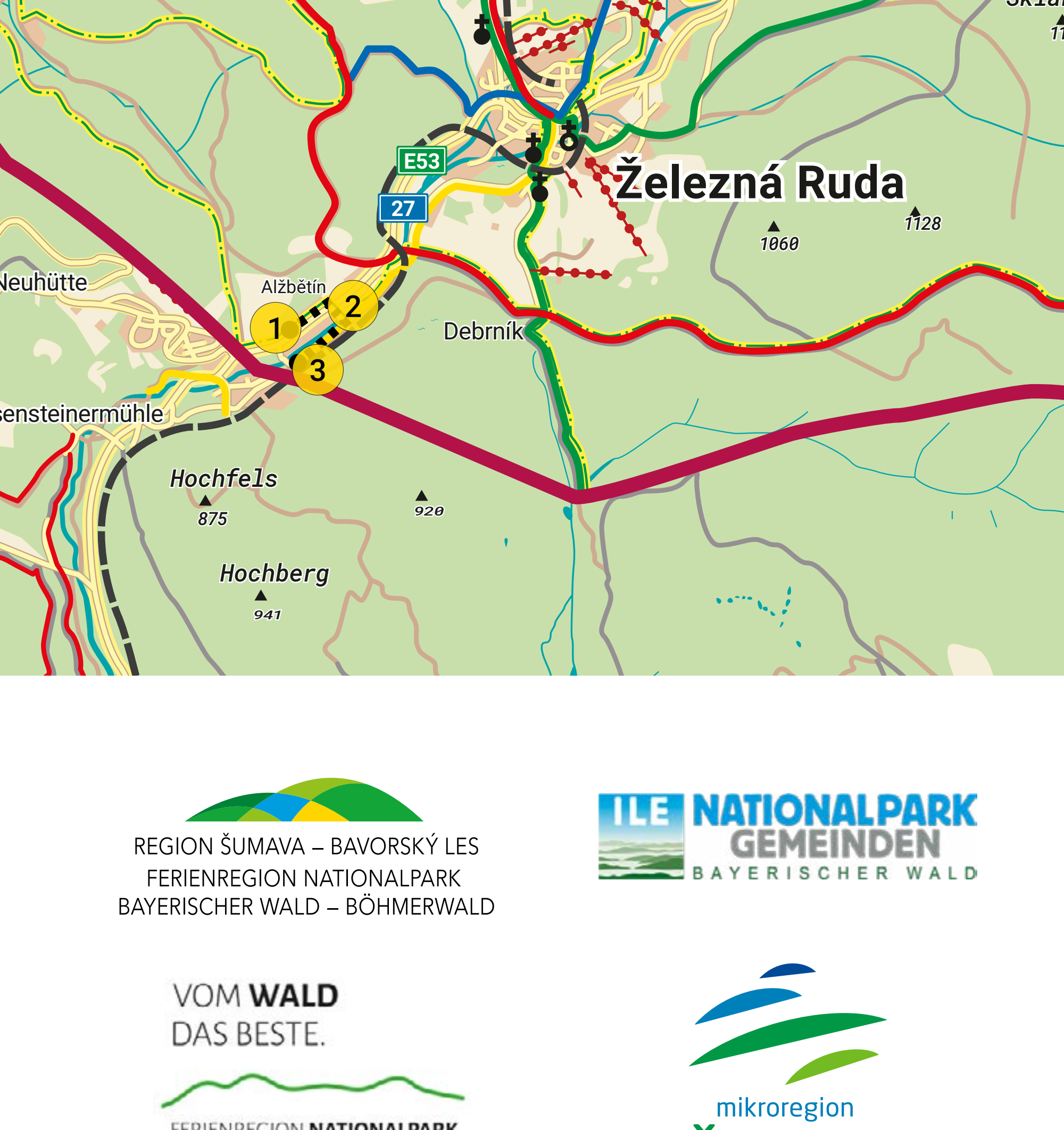
The events of the last February decade in Prague forced many opponents of the new order to think about their future existence. The First Republic-era political representatives were deciding between resisting from home or emigrating. In the case of the latter, Železná Ruda served as an ideal gate to Western Europe. The town was a popular tourist and skiing destination and there was a rail connection from Pilsen, the final stop of which was Železná Ruda – Alžbětín, lying exactly on the national border.

One of the first people who went into exile after February 25th, 1948 was the general secretary of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, Member of the Constitutional National Assembly, professor at the Charles University and most importantly a legend of the non-communist resistance during the Second World War Vladimír Krajina. As early as February 26th, 1948 he was expelled from the university leadership and arrested. After a personal intervention by president Edvard Beneš and Vladimír's wife Marie Krajinová (nee Závodská), he was freed on the very same day. But he knew well that the upcoming regime will take repressive steps towards him. As such, he immediately decided to emigrate west. He used the party apparatus of the National Socialists and with the help of his connections and sisters Bohunka and Vlasta he set out for Železná Ruda on the last day of February 1948 – officially to enjoy skiing. On February 29, with the help of smugglers, he escaped on skis into the Bavarian Železná Ruda. In August, his wife Marie, children Milena and Vladimír (born December 18, 1947) and his mother-in-law Marie Závodská also used the help of the National Socialist Party members to join him in Bavaria and together they emigrated to Canada. In September 1948, the new regime tried Vladimír Krajina in his absence and sentenced him to 25 years of imprisonment for alleged collaboration with and providing intelligence to the enemies of the state.

After the February coup, crowds of supporters of the new regime called out slogans like: "Peroutka to the corner". So, Ferdinand Peroutka, one of the top representatives of pre-war journalism, correctly assumed that getting expelled from all organisations (The Union of Czech Journalist, The Syndicate of Czech Writers and others) and from the leadership of the Free Newspaper was only the beginning and that his arrest would follow. He quickly decided to emigrate.

The journey from Hamry to the nearby border was undertaken at night around the former village of Zadní Chalupy. The smooth goings of the smuggling of Ferdinand Peroutka's group were interrupted by his wife Marie, who had learned about a love affair between her husband and Jaroslava Fenclová, a friend of his daughter from his first marriage (she was supposed to get to Bavaria via the same route a couple days later). Right after crossing the border, Marie repeatedly fell to the ground and began to loudly accuse her husband of infidelity. That naturally disturbed the peace at night and were the smugglers not recruited from among NSC officers, they would surely have gotten into big trouble. Eventually it became clear that the "We shall come" group's smuggling activities were already known to state security authorities and Peroutka's group thus became the last to cross to exile through this channel. The trap has sprung during the next attempt at smuggling a group of regime opponents.

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The Iron Curtain

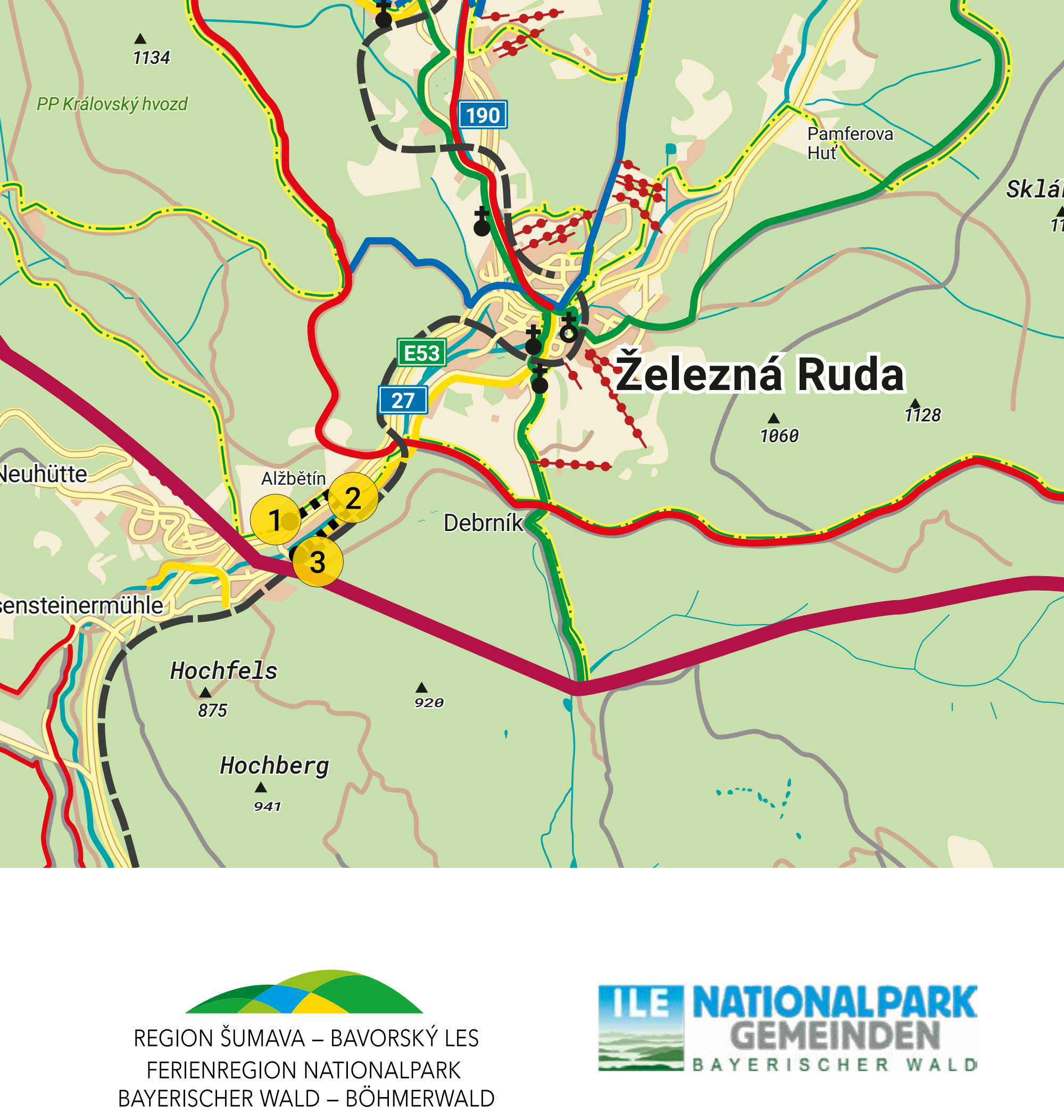
2 The Iron Curtain

Length of Path 1,1 km

The Iron Curtain

In the second half of August of 1948, there was a clash in Ferdinand's Valley nearby Železná Ruda between smugglers and a new border guard. It all started when Zdeněk Kratina from Alžbětín made an accusation on August 19th at the Železná Ruda NSC station, claiming that he suspects three people of anti-state action – Josef Michalík, who moved to Ruda from Slovakia, and two local Germans Karel Bruckendorfer and Maximilian Aschenbrenner. The two last mentioned men were already known smugglers before the war and Josef Michalík had been helping them since he moved there. Main smuggled items were cigarettes and horses, horses going from Bohemia to Bavaria and cigarettes in the opposite direction. That same night, another contraband was supposed to be passed on in a place called America, nearby Železná Ruda, of which the accuser Zdeněk Kratina was to be the receiver. In this regard, it remains unclear why Kratina, who must have bought smuggled goods in the past, willingly reported all to the NSC. The officers then decided to monitor the reported meeting and make their move against the smugglers at the right time. But for unknown reasons the three smugglers did not show up that night and another meeting was scheduled two days later. So that none of the smugglers could have a chance of getting away, reinforcements from among the Klatovy National Security officers were sent for. Chief officer Převrátíl was leading the operation. Collaborator Kratina was supposed to give a signal by tripping over a planted can on the edge of the road. All officers participating in the operation were warned that the smugglers would surely be armed and would not hesitate to use their weapons. But the carefully laid out plan went wrong from the very beginning. Only Karl Bruckendorfer and Maximilian Aschenbrenner came to the meeting and from an unexpected direction, so they both stood very close to officer Klíma, one of the officers preparing to surround them. This young, inexperienced officer who was on top of that stressed out by the information about how dangerous these “enemies” were decided to stand up and shine his torchlight in the direction from which he heard footsteps and a quiet conversation. He saw two people and called out to them to put their hands in the air. His answer was a gunshot, which hit him in his left hip. The injured officer fell to the ground. During the fall he accidentally pulled the trigger on his gun and fired a shot which landed right next to his instep. Then the scene was lit up by the prepared floodlight and all members of the surrounding unit began to shoot. But by then the smugglers were relatively far away, in the dark and disappeared to Bavaria. The shooting thus endangered only the officers themselves. The two German smugglers never returned to Czechoslovakia and even Josef Michalík escaped abroad. Officer Klíma was criticised for his unprofessional approach, as he betrayed his position by shining his torchlight, thus making it impossible to successfully finish the operation.

[Whole text](#) ➡



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The Iron Curtain

3 The Iron Curtain



Length of Path 1,1 km

The Iron Curtain

In summer 1948, the Klatovy boy scouts got involved in organising border crossings. Officially, in collaboration with the Prague main office, they set up several camps around Šumava in June, from which they were supposed to go to the woods to pick blueberries and other forest fruits to support the Republic's economy. Leadership was set up on Šerle's farmstead nearby Prášily and twenty camps then sprung up in its surrounding area. In the whole of Šumava, more than 1500 scouts built in total 68 camps that summer. NSC officers who were taking over border security at the time did not like the chain of camps located so close to the border. The Klatovy scouts built five camps on the way to Železná Ruda in the following locations: Lippl's Sawmill, Nový Brunst, Starý Brunst, Gerlova Huť, and Nová Hůrka. In this way they prepared a chain of navigation point for emigrants. Everyone heading abroad was advised beforehand that should they be stopped by an NSC guard, they should say that they are visiting "their" children in one of the mentioned camps or relatives and friends who are overseeing them. This route was used by professor Bohumil Černý, founder of a state-wide illegal organisation called "Black Lion" on August 22, 1948. The total number of people who are said to have used this route is guessed to be around 80. The NSC uncovered the route by the end of September 1948. Several of the Klatovy Scouts managed to escape to exile on September 20. The first arrests of the scouts first happened on November 25, 1948, when a car with Vladimír Bláha (nicknamed "Little Dragon"), the owner of a Klatovy plumbing business (as well as the car) Vladimír Pálka and a former official of the Presidium Pavla Pavlová set out towards Železná Ruda. After their interrogations, other raids followed in Prague and Klatovy. Trials with minors, which ended on June 8, 1949, were at first unusually lenient, spanning from three to ten months. However, those scouts who were not discovered continued in their activities. They focused on cooperation with the American information service CIC. Dispatches in the form of coded letters were smuggled across the border by rail employees Karel Baštář and Václav Ripla, who would regularly go to the border station Železná Ruda – Alžbětín. One of the Klatovy scouts, student Karel Dušek, betrayed and consented to collaborate with the NSC. Meanwhile, others have finished their sentence and were ready to return to the resistance. But the situation was more difficult now and so they decided to emigrate to Bavaria.

But it was not only the enemies of the new regime who escaped to Bavaria through Železná Ruda. On Friday November 12, 1948, the old smuggler path along the Řezná river was used by Oldřich Mihola. This trained NSC agent with the codename "Bastard" was tasked with integrating himself among Czechoslovak emigrants in order to extract information. He was successful and gained enough trust to go back across Železná Ruda as an agent for the exiled circles. None of the emigrants knew, that he did everything under the supervision of the military intelligence of the Czechoslovak army. His actions aided in arrests of several other agents-smugglers. However, reporters in Germany began to find it strange that a different courier should be detected or arrested each time Oldřich Mihola went back to Czechoslovakia. On June 18, 1950, Oldřich Mihola was arrested in Bavaria and sentenced by an American military court to seven years of imprisonment. In 1955 he was let out and banished to Czechoslovakia.

Title photo: <http://pohranicnik.blogspot.com/2013/07/>

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