



# The Gold miners' Trail

1



## Length of Path 8,4 km

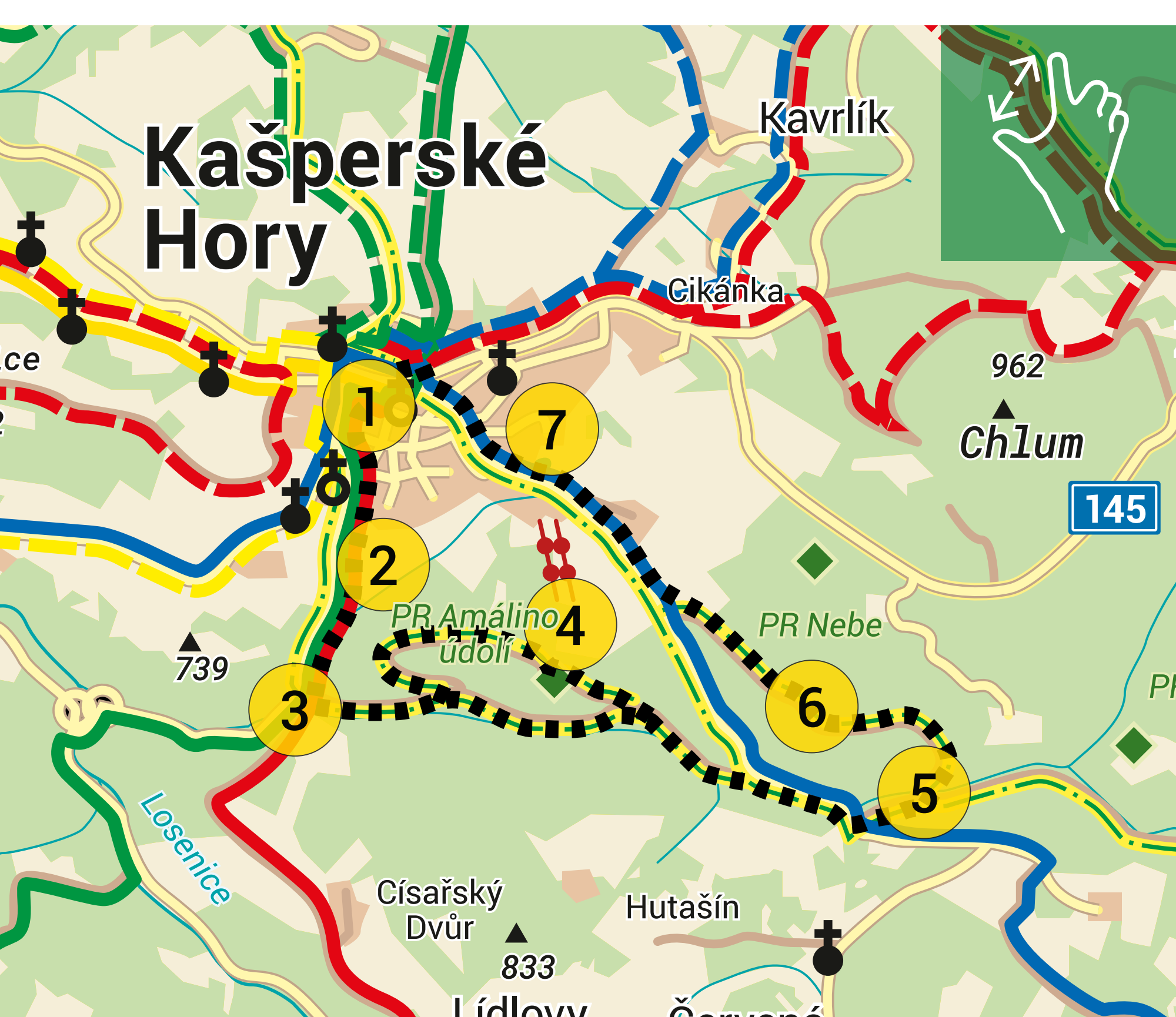
The Celtic name of the Otava river – Atava (=rich river = meaning rich in gold) only confirms the presence of gold in its basin. However, we can only suspect who first started extracting it.

For example, a golden hair piece from the Bronze Age was found by Vrcovice near Písek. It was made 3 700 years ago. Millstones were also found near Otava, below Vrcovice. Remains of gold panning in Otava's meanders by Modlešovice also date back to the Bronze Age. The Celts were known for gold panning. They extracted gold here in the 5<sup>th</sup> and especially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries Bc. A Celtic gold panning device was also found in the already mentioned village of Modlešovice.

The Celts used Otava's gold to make jewellery, both for women and men. They made bracelets, necklaces, or rings. They also used a portion of the gold to make their coins, the so-called rainbow cups.

Some sources state, that Bohemian deposits could have yielded up to 17 tons of gold. The total area of deposits in Bohemian lands is estimated to be 75 km<sup>2</sup>. Piles of gangue, which were accumulated during gold panning, remain to this day. Their length is estimated to be 12 metres, their height 4. These piles were mentioned as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the humanist Vít Trajan Žatecký. Bohemian deposits are estimated to have yielded up to 7 tons of expensive metal, 60% of that coming from the gold panning areas.

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The path to Amálinio Valley, which used to be a part of the Golden Trail to Passau (founded by Charles IV in 1356) leads around important mining localities with many remains of past mining activities. East of it lies Liščí (Fox) Hill and west lies Friedlholz.

Along the path, about 40 metres deep, miners dug up the main, so called hereditary drift of St John. It was also known as The Drift by the Treasure. And no wonder. As late as 1701 “very beautiful and God-blessed pieces of gold. It belonged amongst the oldest (founded 1334) and largest of the local drifts. It was around 800 metres long. It began in the centre and ended by the confluence of Řetízkový and Zlatý streams. It was in a downslope as it led water from this and other mines in the town. The mine Michael, which had the machinery to pump water from the hereditary drift used to be in the place of today's wastewater treatment plant. Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the miners' gild house (Zechhaus) used to stand by the road above the mine.

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## Length of Path 8,4 km

On the north-western hillside of the Spanreifel hill, we can find systems of shafts, pits, and ditches, which the old miners used to observe the auriferous veins close to the surface.

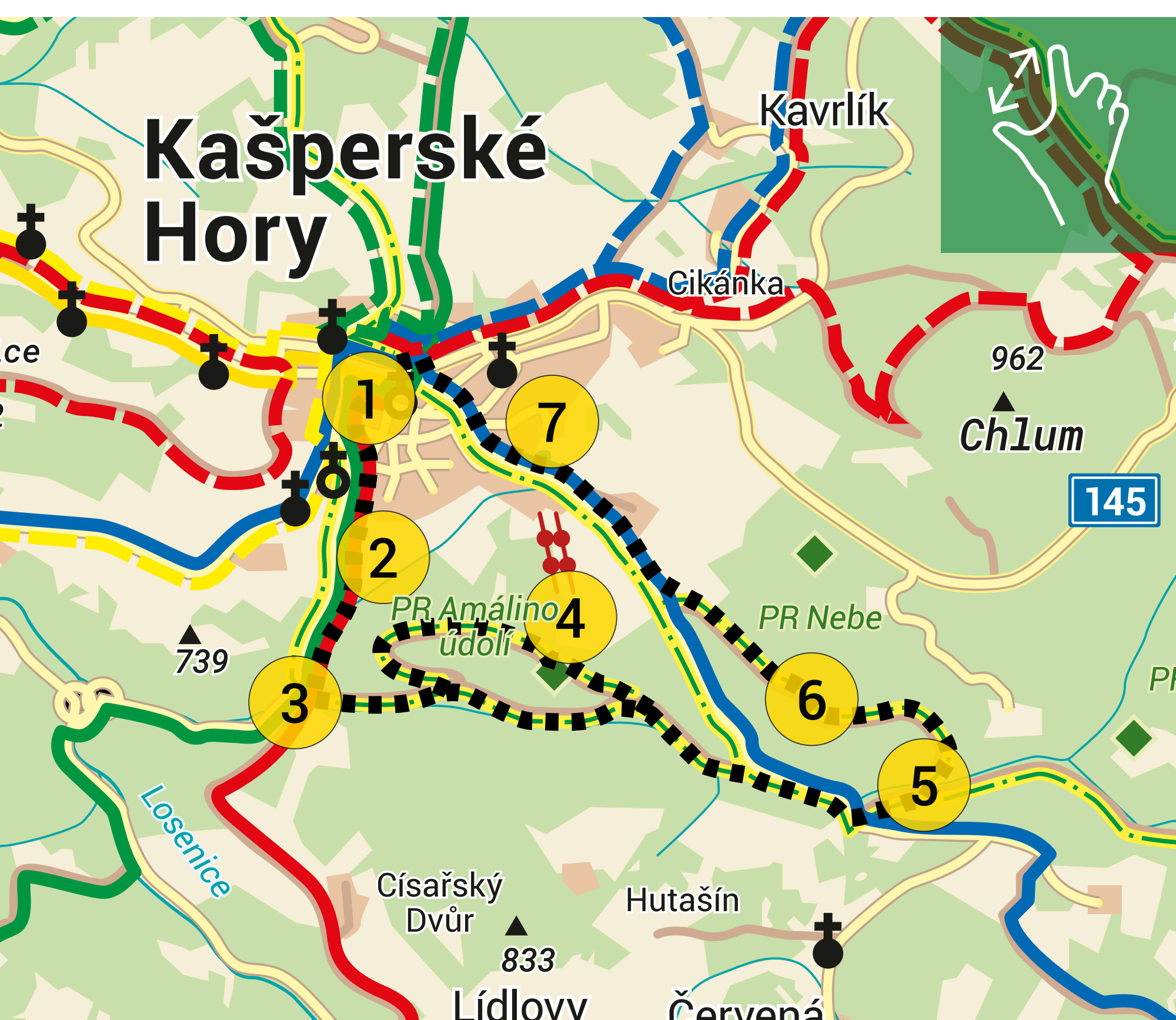
In the Zlatý Stream Valley (area around today's Hotel Šumava) used to stand a hammermill which made mining tools. Near the confluence of the Zlatý Stream and Losenice was a stamping mill for crushing the auriferous quartz and gold mills.

Gold was also extracted by sifting through the river sand, using the panning technique. In Šumava, gold can be found in primary and secondary deposits. Primary deposits are the gold veins in the earth. Secondary ones are silts – created by wind erosion of rocks and their entering the river system. People would use the gold panning technique to extract gold from secondary deposits, using the water current to separate the heavier materials from the lighter ones.

The oldest gold panning device was a wooden bowl, in which the auriferous sand was washed through with flowing water.

In the middle ages, it was common to use gold panning weirs – sloped wooden boards with either notches or transverse laths. Specs of gold would then settle in the hollows.

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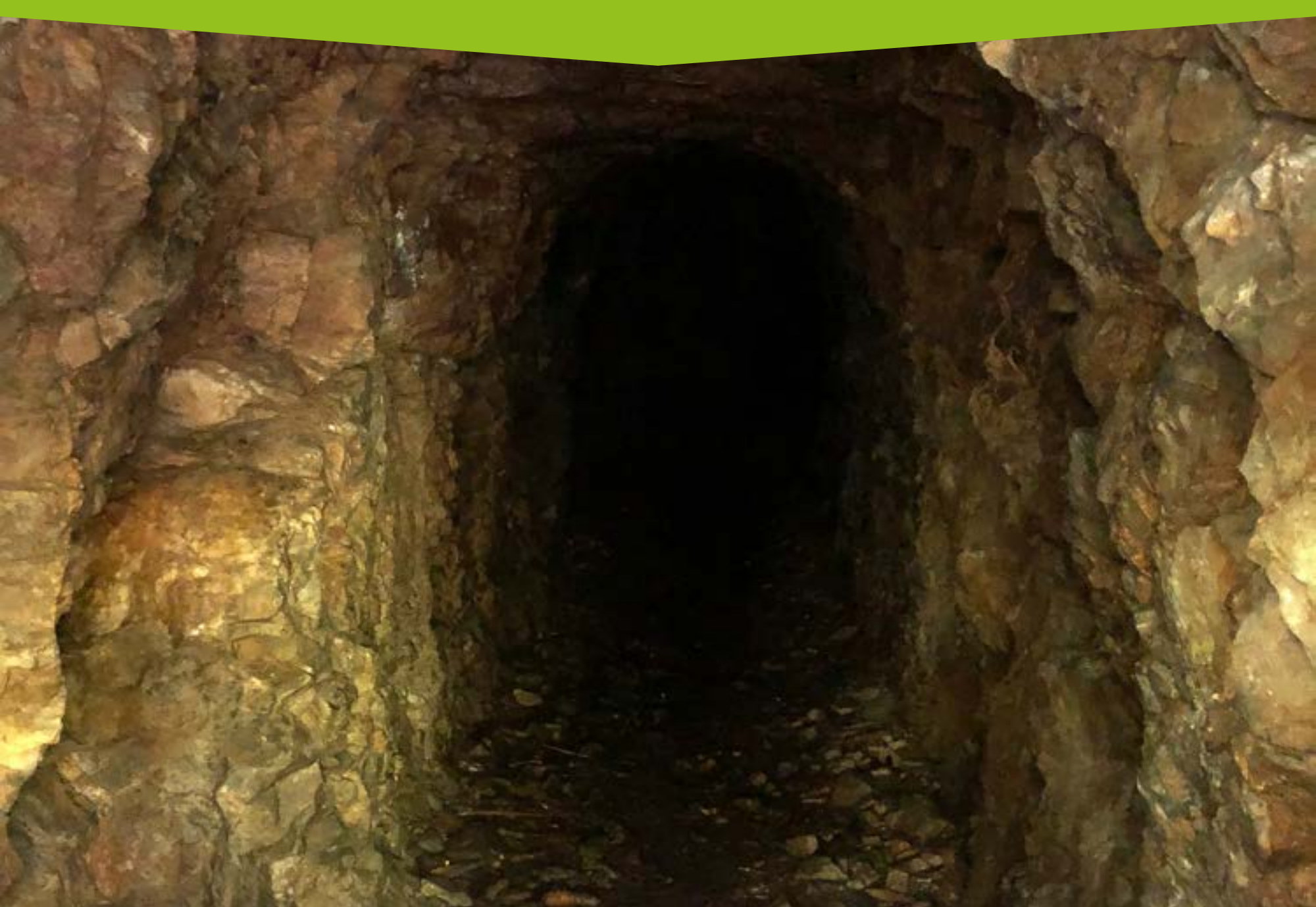
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The southern hillside of Liščí Hill has preserved the most distinct signs of mining. Shafts and drifts. Shafts are either vertical or slightly sloped, while drifts are horizontal. Most of the local shaft and drifts date back to the Middle Ages. Miners here worked with iron pieces, draffs, pick axes, shovels and crowbars. They softened the rock with fire and used miner's lamps for light. In the drifts, extracted ore would be carried in wooden washtubs carved out of a single piece of wood, later it would be transported in minecarts. In shafts, miners would use barrels with metalwork, irons and buckets, or ox skin bellows.

Winches and whims were used to pull the loads up. The mined auriferous quartz was then further processed and altered. It was crushed in stamping mills and ground in gold ore mills.

Pure gold would then be extracted through distillation with the help of mercury, during a process known as amalgamation.

We even know the name of one Kašperské Hory measurer and assayer Jan Jiří Printz. We learn about him from documents from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though at that point he was already a mine master in Jílové. He was chosen as the most capable candidate, but only eight years later he apparently "told the carpenters that Jílové gold is never going to be profitable, that he is unable to direct the mines in both Jílové and Kašperské Hory, that he spends more time in pubs than in mines and that he had a fight with the mine scribe on Easter. For those reasons the accounts officers have suggested he be withdrawn from the position." The administrator of the head mine master Jan Lauer says about him that "Printz possesses neither the necessary knowledge nor the abilities to fulfil his duties." He also states that "poor ore was being processed and he dare not even say where the gold went."

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The geological drift Naděje (Hope) documents a newfound interest in valuable metal. It has been dug into the Suchý hill since 1989. The opening dig leads in a northern direction and is 800 metres long. Including side passages, the drift is made up of around three kilometres of passages. The prospector of the Czech-Canadian company TVX Bohemia důlní estimated the gold deposits in the area east of Kašperské Hory to be 100 tons. Modern exploration of auriferous deposits has been carried out since 1982 in response to the rising value of gold on the world market. TVX Bohemia důlní, a. s. gained the rights to exploration works at the turn of 1993-94, following the Geoindustria company. Revisions of mining works were carried out, as well as geophysical research and geological mapping. The technique of metalometric prospection, which identifies the amount of gold in ground samples, was used throughout. The success of the prospecting led to the founding of the drift Naděje.

In 1982 a new prospection, drilling into the ground in a 30° angle was commenced. The drift Naděje was opened in 1989. The project was worked out by the Uranium Industry Project Institute in Liberec, plant VIII Příbram. The drift was under construction until 1996. A compressor station and an office were also built there. The final dig is 689 metres long with a profile of 3,2 m x 3,7 m and the beginnings of future passageways. Reinforcements were only built by the entrance and by disparate rocks. The works were halted in 2002.

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Mining in the Kašperské Hory auriferous area reached its peak during the reign of the House of Luxemburg. Indirect proofs of this include numerous royal privileges for the mining town, the creation of the trading route called the Golden Trail and the building of the royal castle Kašperk.

When king John the Blind became the first Central European ruler to coin golden currency (the florins), he undoubtedly used gold from Jílové and Kašperské Hory. His son Charles IV then continued in using golden coins (the ducats). The usage of gold is so large that domestic deposits are not enough, and the Emperor has to buy it in Vienna (in exchange for silver). Mining for gold also required a more experienced workforce, as well as labour organisation and new technological knowledge. Mining experts as well as common miners came from abroad and brought hitherto unknown tools, plans of new machinery and apparatus. Most of them came from Bavaria, Austria and the Passau bishopric.

At first, a mining village was founded, with a mine master as its head and the king's deputy. Three areas are the first to be inhabited: around the church of St Nicolas, around today's square, the area Na Prádle.

In 1345, John the Blind's privilege already speaks of a town, townsmen, a Vogt, a village of miners or sworn men. The Vogt was the head of the town. The town council was made up of his 12 advisors, so called sworn men. Consuls then made up a smaller advisory circle. Over time, the Vogt's importance diminished as the importance of the Burgomaster, elected from among the consuls, grew. Members of the council were entitled to a part of the mining field. They either mined on it themselves or leased it out.

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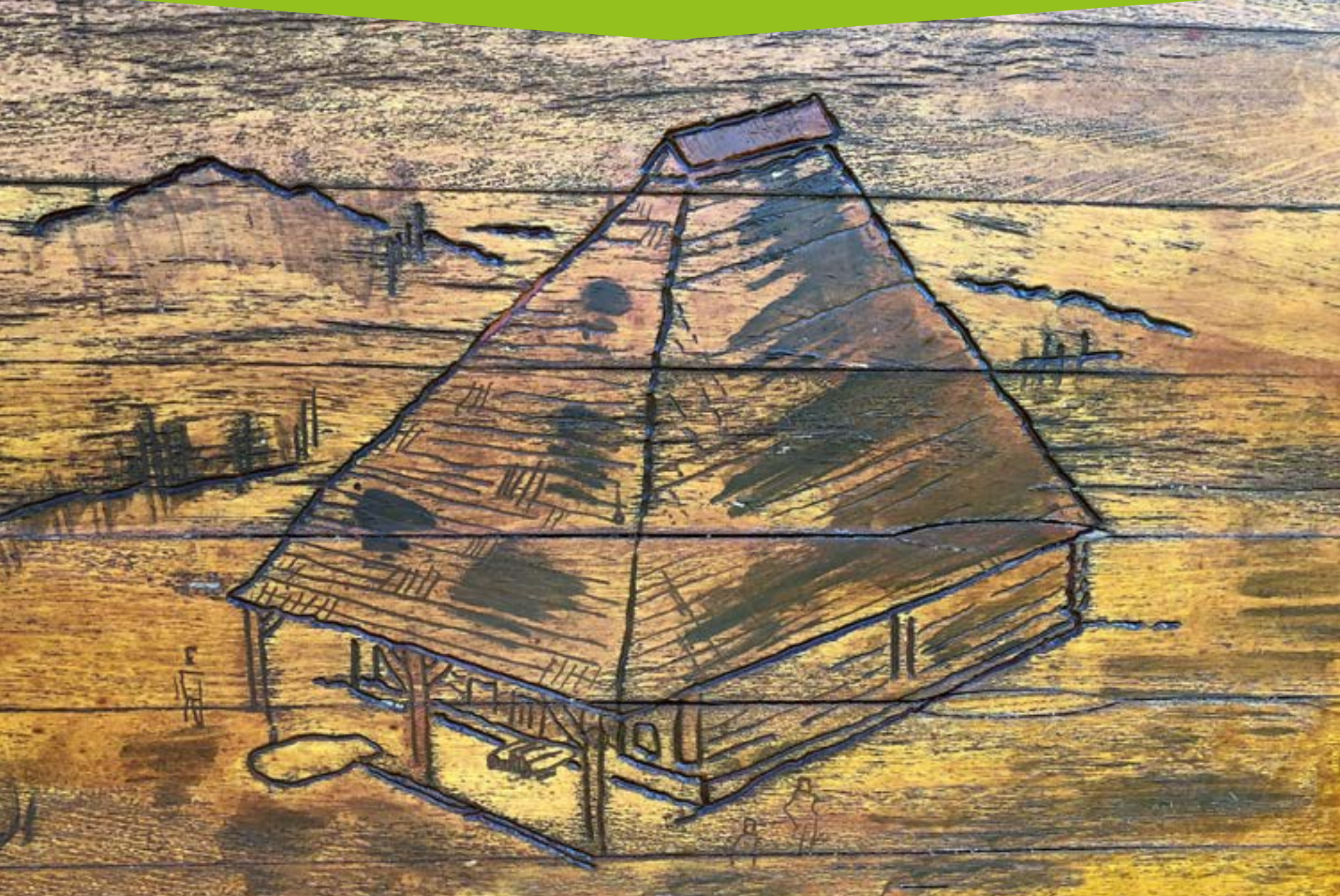
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The revelation of the modification site in the years 1989-1991 was carried out by the employees of the Šumava Museum in Sušice and the National Technical Museum under the leadership of Jiří Waldhauser. The site stands in the locality Na Prádle (Am Woesch, On the Wash in English), southwest of the town center. The name of the place itself suggests a possibility of gold panning or auriferous ore processing. The project was financed by Geoindustrie n.p., who at the time was in the process of opening the Naděje drift. The modification site was discovered while a system of canalization was being dug up. The underpinning made out of layered stone, on which the wooden building used to stand, had the dimensions of 11,3 × 12,3 meters, the width of the foundation being 1,2 meters. Inside, by the north facing wall, stood a furnace with an arch with the dimensions of 3,6 × 4,2 meters including the furnace pit. The opening had a matching estuary facing towards the southwest, the sunk bottom of the furnace was covered with flat stones, the perimeter was lined with bricks. The walls were burned red by the heat. Next to the furnace stood an ore manufacturing station. Originally, it was sunk into the ground, with wooden beams which were fastened to the ground by stakes around the perimeter. The bottom was covered by a ten-centimeter layer of yellow clay with grooves. Remains of shingles which were found there suggest that the building was roofed. Pieces of auriferous ore, containing one gram of gold per ton, were found during the exploration works. An almost 5 meters deep water cistern was also discovered, as were the remains of a fecal pit. The ore was heated in the furnace and water from the cistern was then poured over it. A similar technique was described as early as 1574 by Lazar Ercker in his Book of Ore Qualities.

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