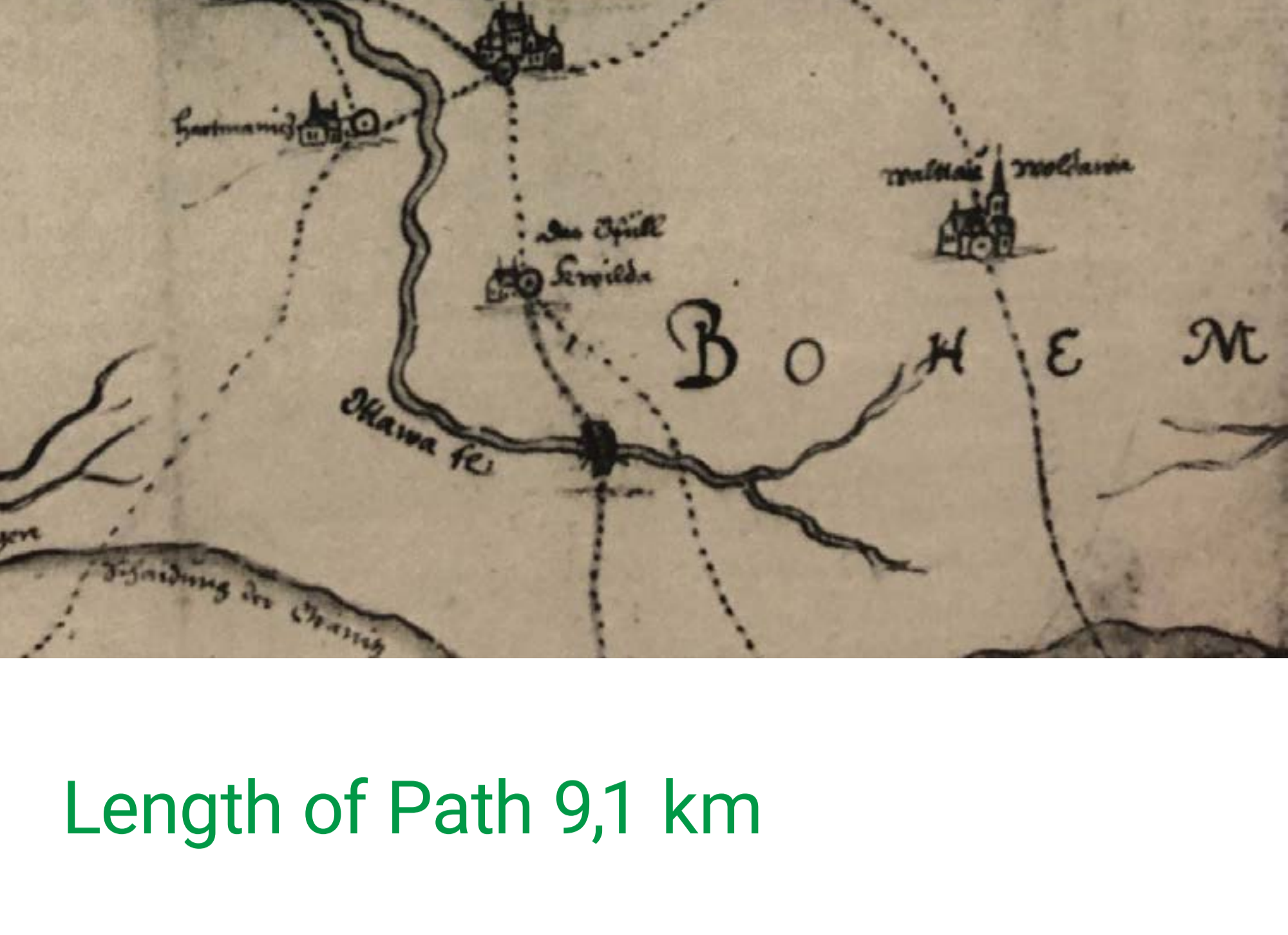




Following the Golden Trail

1 The most famous historical route



Length of Path 9,1 km

The most famous historical route

The most famous historical route is the Golden Trail. Its oldest route is its Prachatice branch, sometimes called the Lower branch. It has existed since the early 10th century, even though its name “Golden” comes from the 16th. It led from Passau through Salzweg, Waldkirchen, Grainet, Bischofsreut, it crossed the border by Marchhäuser and continued across České Žleby, Volary, Cudrovice, around the Hus castle, through Albrechtovice and to Prachatice.

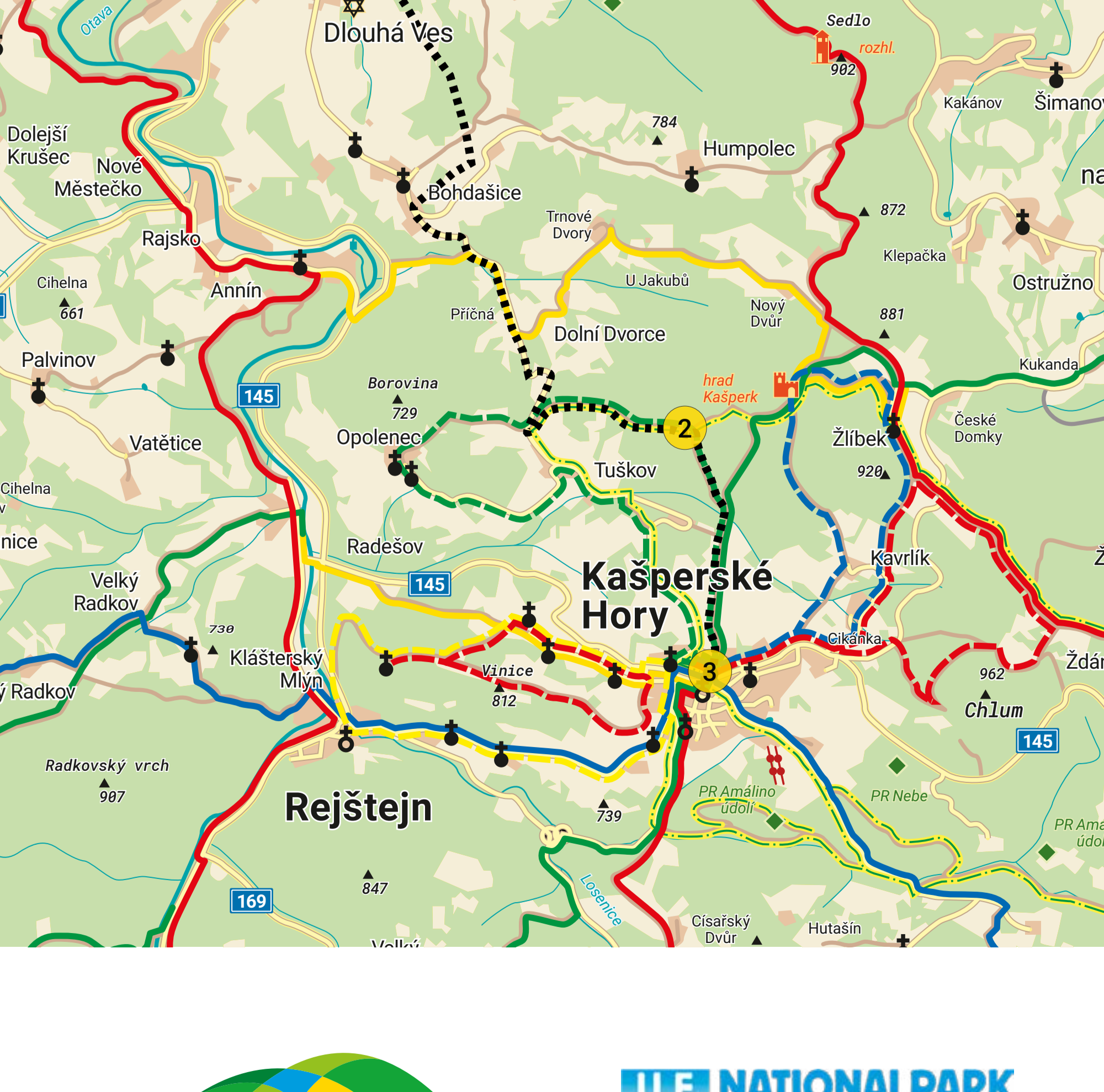
The Vimperk (Middle) branch of the Golden Trail is younger. It is only first mentioned in 1312. The trail separated from the Prachatice branch by Ernsting and led through Hinterschmiding and Herzogsreut, below Kunžvart to Horní Vlatavice and through Solná Lhota to Vimperk.

The Kašperské Hory (Upper) branch was built around 1356. It led across today's Röhrnbach, Freyung, Mauth, Finsterau, Bučina, Kvilda, Horská Kvilda, Červená (after the Hussite Wars through Kozí Hřbety – there was a custom house too) to Kašperské Hory and then to Sušice.

At the same time, king Charles IV rules to build the Golden Road. A document has survived from that year which has Charles IV granting Heinczlin Bader hereditary use of land between Malá Losenice and Červená in return for his help during the construction of a road from Passau to Bohemia. Ten years later, Charles IV ordered all merchants traveling on the road to stay overnight in Kašperské Hory. Failure to oblige meant a fine of 100 talents. Merchants also paid the town a fee of one haler per horse. The collected fine was then equally split between the Royal Chamber and the town of Kašperské Hory. At the same time, the Kašperk castle was forbidden from collecting any customs duty from merchants on the trail, apart from gold and silver. The Golden Road (Gulden Straß) diverted from the Golden Trail in Horská Kvilda and led through Filipova Huť, Blaue Säule, Grafenau to Passau. A legend says that there used to be gallows right by Blaue Säule which served to warn thieves who would take bread from the local stores without paying. Later on, many human bones were allegedly dug out here.

The Golden Road then exited Vilshofen, which lied a bit more against the current of the Donau. The traffic on this road was preferred by the governor in Straubing, leaseholder of Kašperk and the favourite of the king, Jan of Leuchtenberk, who expected large personal profits from administrating the road. By founding the St Oswald Monastery and elevating the villages of Hals and Grafenau into town statuses, he also managed to elevate the importance of the road. However, after king Charles' death, trade mostly returned to the Upper trail. When Václav IV granted Sušice the right to annual markets in 1404, he ruled that all merchants must travel with their goods through Kvilda and Hartmanice. During the Hussite Wars, it was dangerous to travel on these routes. Several villages on and around it were burned down both on the Bohemian side and on the Passau side. The Golden Trail was likely used by Hussite troops, which stormed into Bavaria in 1429. The duty of merchants to spend the night in Kašperské Hory introduced by Charles IV was renewed by the next leaseholder of the castle Zdeněk of Štemberk. The Golden Trail continued from Kašperské Hory, through Bohdašice and Dlouhá Ves to Sušice.

[Whole text](#) ↗



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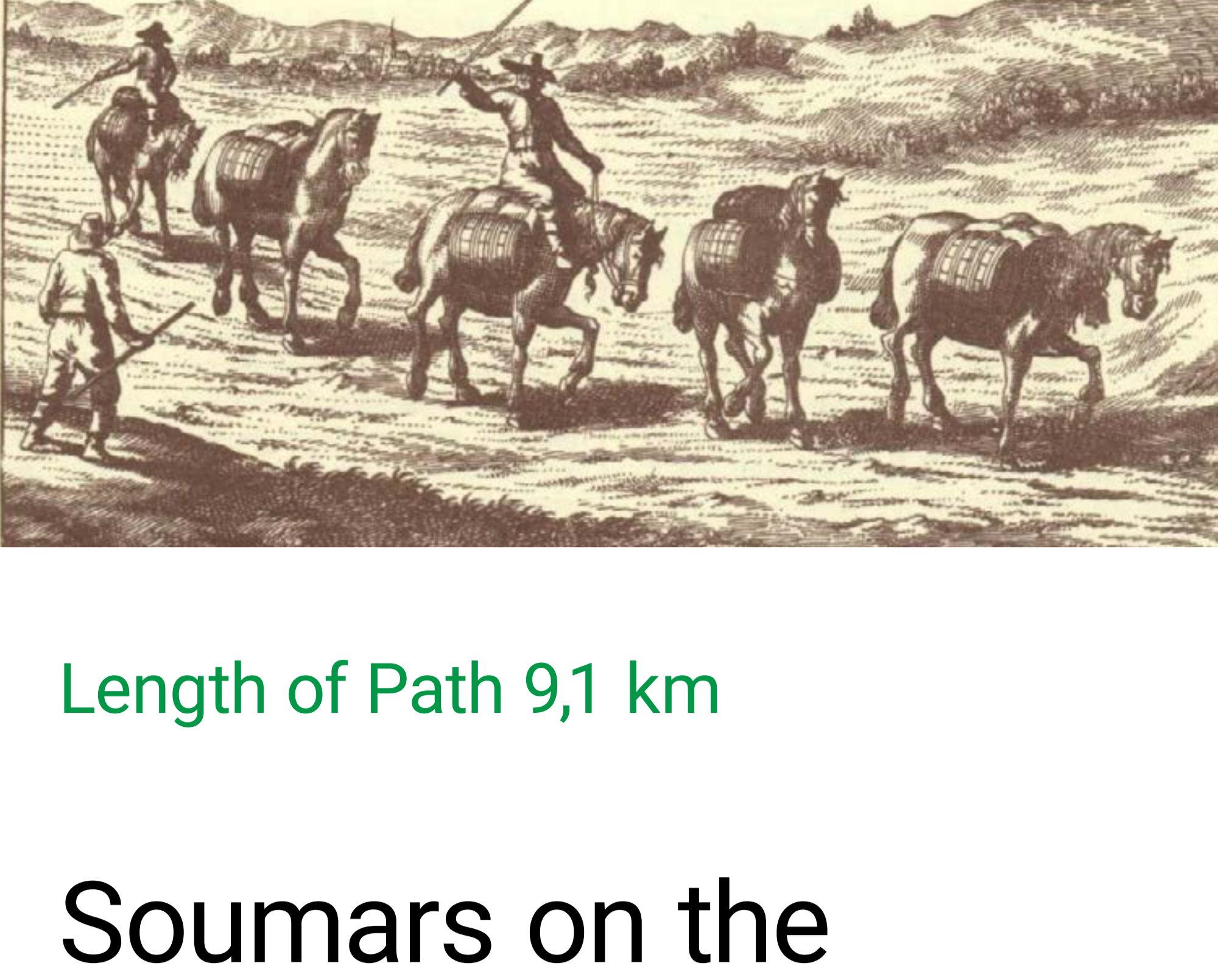


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Following the Golden Trail

2 Soumars on the Golden Trail



Length of Path 9,1 km

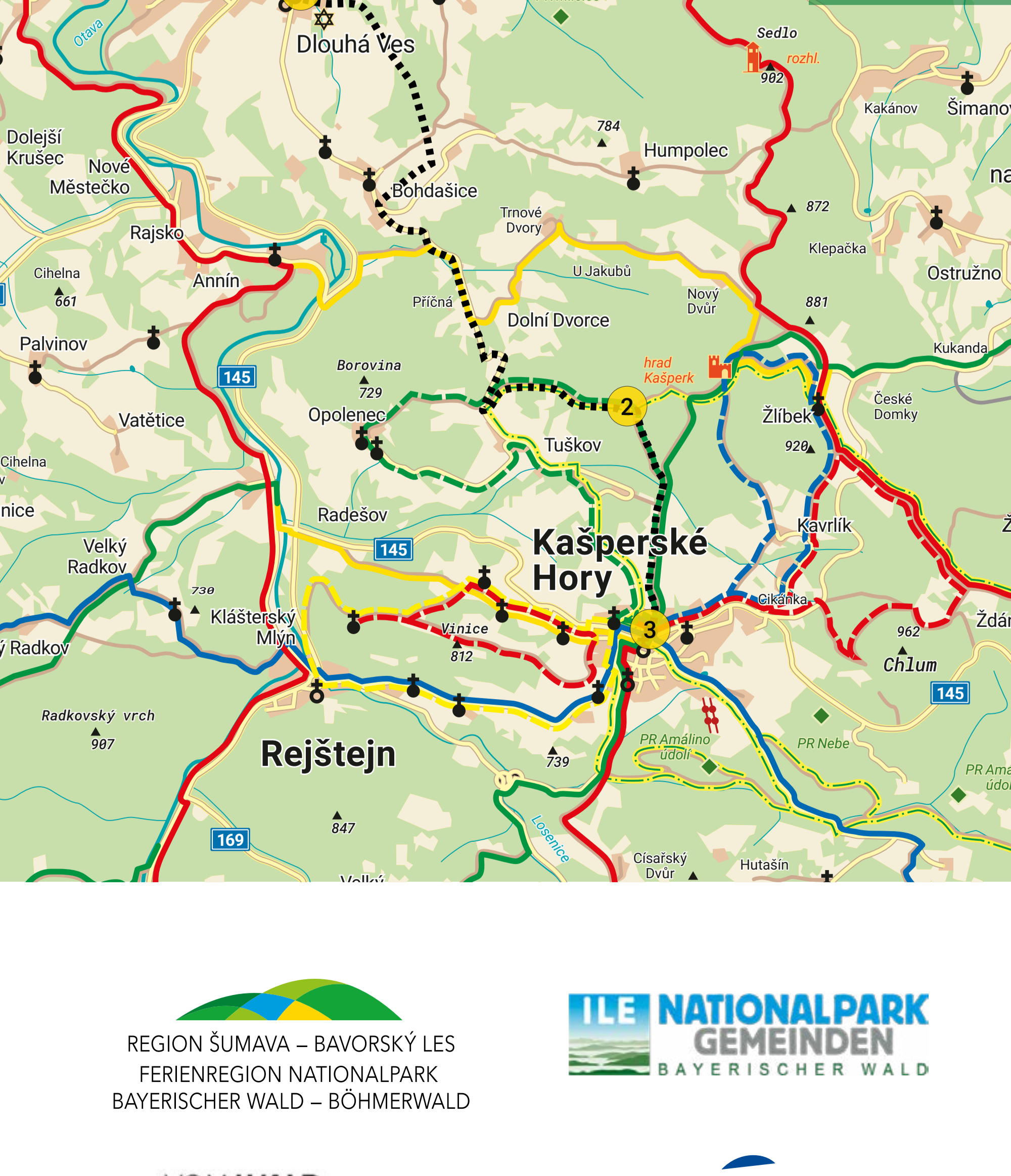
Soumars on the Golden Trail

The first mode of transportation, if indeed one can call it that, which moved across Šumava was a man. Goods used to be carried either by the merchants themselves or by carriers they hired for that purpose. Despite being very strenuous, it had a certain advantage. The path could be narrow, waterlogged places were easily crossed. As years went by and loads got heavier, the path got wider and the human carriers were replaced by beasts of burden, either carrying the loads on their back or on a sleigh they dragged behind them. After all, the most suitable season for transporting goods was winter, because the path was more walkable when frozen than when waterlogged. There was also generally less work as it was after harvest. The goods could also be carried on wooden litters, either by two men or hinnies. On the narrow paths, the beasts of burden would walk behind each other in a line.

As the condition of the roads improved, carriages, which could carry much bigger loads, began to be used. A horse harnessed in a collar could then also pull much heavier weights. The men who used to transport the goods were called 'soumars' (here, following the Bavarian model, this word is used to refer to both the beasts of burden and the men leading them, despite the Czech language only officially recognising it as referring to beasts of burden). At first, it was most likely only Bohemians who were soumars, but from the mid-13th century it was also people from the other side of the border: from Waldkirchen, Fürholz or Böhmzwiesel. The trails thus had a large role to play in the colonisation of the so far uninhabited landscape. The soumars brought a different culture, new ideas and news from the surrounding areas. Places for an overnight stay grew up alongside the trail, as well as various service places like smithies (Horská Kvilda) or even guard posts (Stožecká rock) or castles (Kašperk, Kunžvart, Hus, Wolfstein) ensuring the security of traveling caravans on the trail. In 1312, the Prachatice regional governor Verner of Vitějovice and Jindřich of Leubelfing, the warden of the Oberhaus stronghold, agreed upon a joint protection of the trail. New villages grew up around these places and the soumars themselves would settle there. During bad weather, mist or during dusk, bells would ring on the guard posts to make allow for better spatial orientation.

The trails were kept up by the nobility, for which they collected tax in certain places. There are no written records which would tell us who the very first merchants crossing Šumava were. We have some idea about the Celts. Their settlements probably lied on trading routes and were connected by them. One of those Celtic trails could be the predecessor of the Golden Trail. The safety of the traffic was overseen by strongholds on Větec or in Passau. Even Passau's original name Boidorum indicates a Boii stronghold. According to a Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy, the settlements Brodentia, Setua (perhaps Sušice) and Kremisa (perhaps Křemže) existed alongside the trading route in the Šumava foothills.

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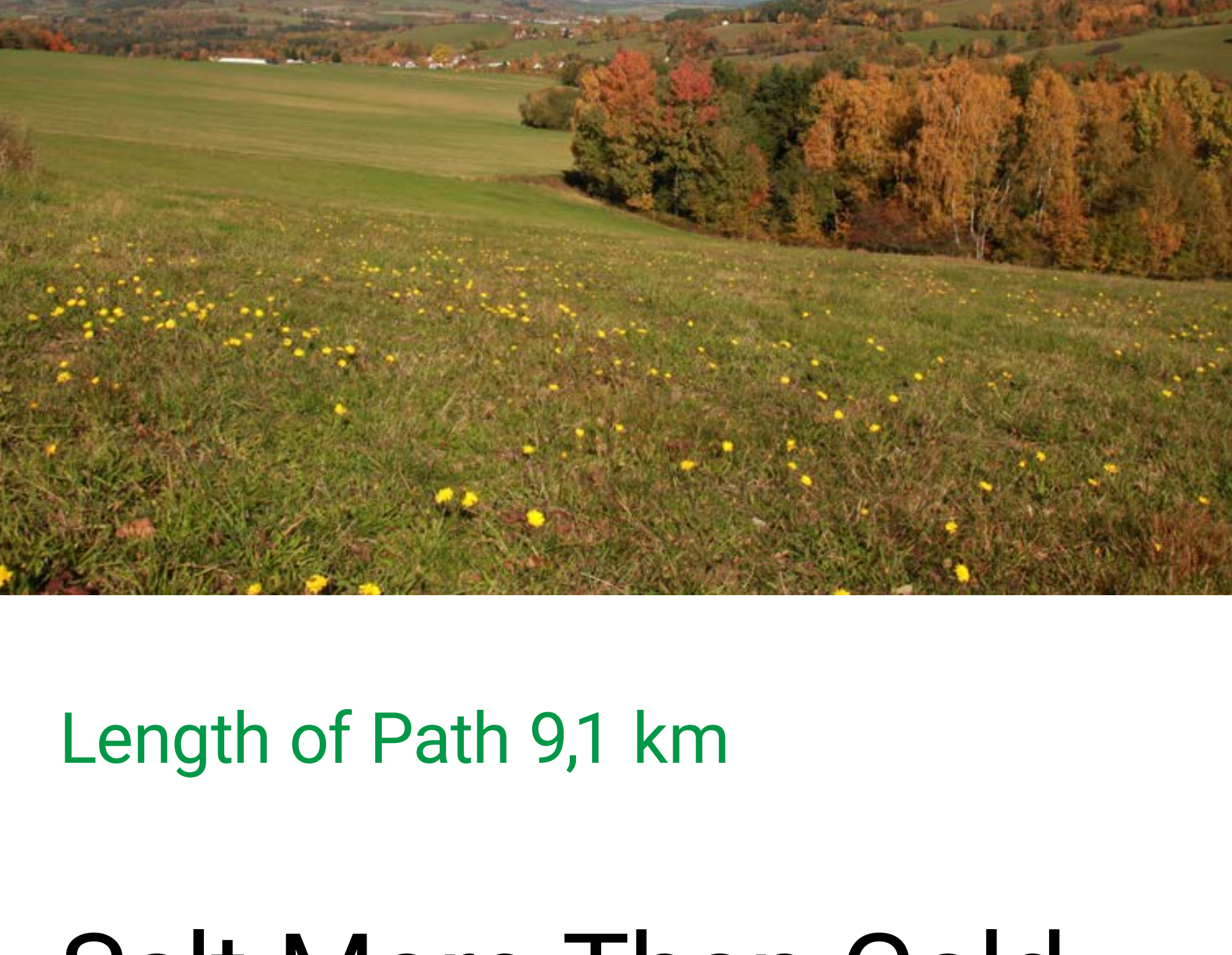


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Following the Golden Trail

3 Salt More Than Gold



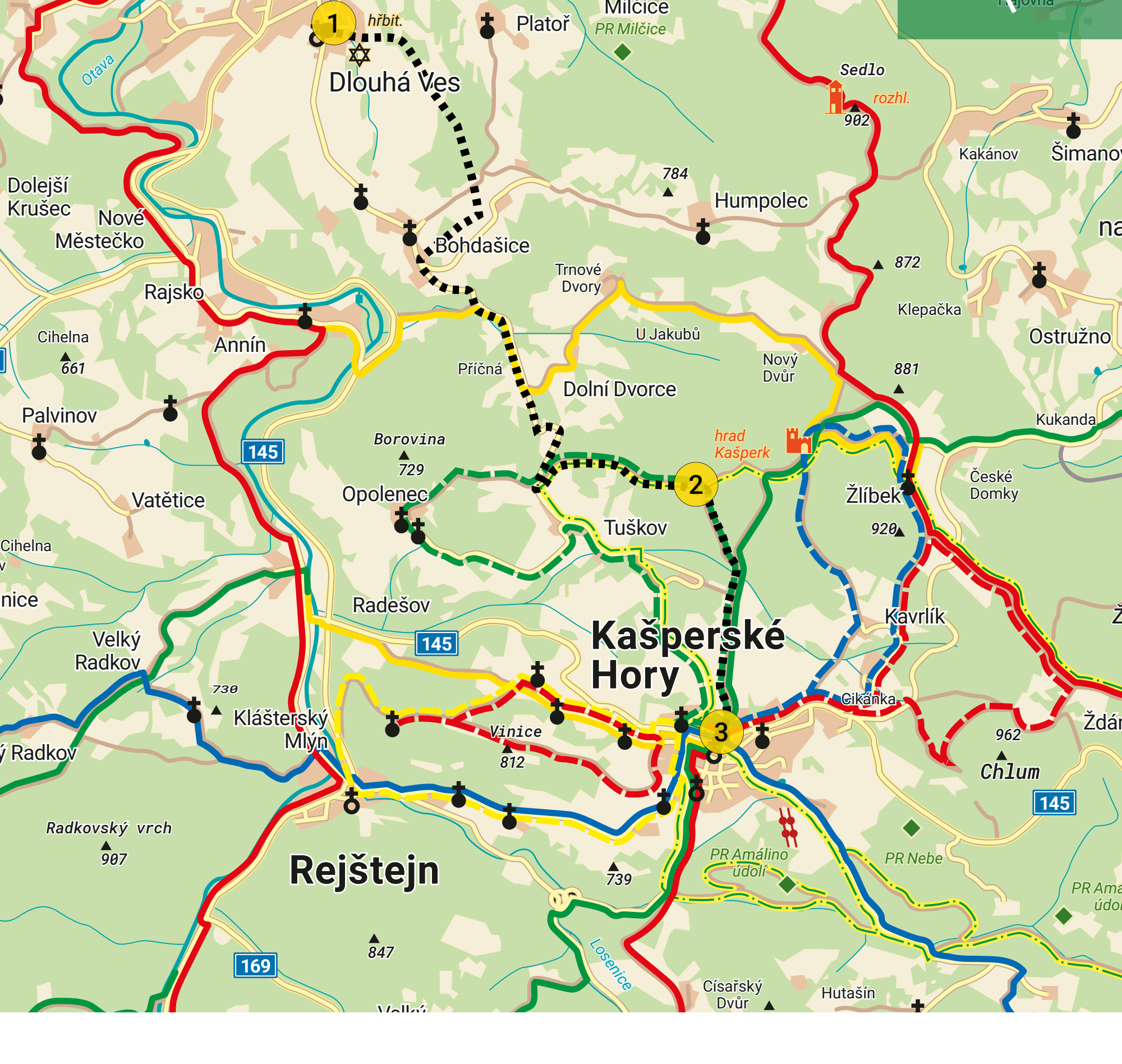
Length of Path 9,1 km

Salt More Than Gold

The trails were used to import salt into Bohemia. There were no local deposits, but it was widely used, not only to salt meals but also to conserve food. Salt was used to conserve cheese, butter, even fish and meat. Back then, farmers could not hope to feed their livestock during winter, so they slaughtered it before it came. The saying “Do not slaughter more than you can salt” comes from that time. Salt was used in tanning, glassmaking, even pottery. The yearly use of salt in the Middle Ages averaged at 16kg per person. Salt came from the Salt Chamber from around Reichenhall, Hallein and Schellenberg, from the deposits of the Salzburg Archbishop. From there it travelled on the Inn and Salzach rivers in wooden barrels on cargo ships connected into long convoys. It was then stored in Passau salt storehouses. In the mid 16th century, there were over 300 000 cents of salt transported annually through Passau. From there it travelled either with or against the current of the Donau, but mostly to Bohemia. The final storehouse of Bohemian salt was in Prachatice, the merchants could go no further. The main storehouse on the Bavarian side was in Waldkirchen. The import of salt into Bohemia was an exchange trade. In exchange for salt, the merchants would bring back mainly grain, but also hop, malt, beer, cheese, butter, fish, canvas, silver, Prachatice schnapps (Branntwein), later even glass. Apart from salt, other imported goods included southern fruits, oriental spices, fine cloth, or wine. The frequency of deliveries varied throughout centuries. In the mid 16th century, up to 1200 horses travelled on the Prachatice branch every week.

Trade was revived after 1560, when the Golden Road was partly renewed by the Bavarian duke Albrecht, as the road was administered by the Bavarian Duchy, unlike the Passau-administered Golden Trail. Both sides thus often got into conflict with one another. On top of that, some travelling merchants made their own detours in order to avoid paying the customs fee. For example, they went straight from Kozí Hřbety to Rejštejn, where they traded on a black market. At that time, the merchants would pass Kašperské Hory with almost 12 000 prostice of salt annually. There were also disputes at the border between the Zdíkov estate and Kašperské Hory. In the 17th century the salt trade begins to slowly disappear, despite the town of Grafenau building summer shelters for the travellers in 1611. The merchants then only trade with grain and a century later the trail is described as completely desolate. In Kašperské Hory, there is still the former 14th century salt warehouse on Bohdana Týbla street (no. 17). A significant part of the Golden Train, and not just the Kašperské Hory branch, has survived to this day. Animals’ hooves, wheels of carriages and heavy rainfalls left their unmistakable marks on the landscape.

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