

ROUTES
in cross-border region
Thassos – Garmen



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FEBRUARY 2013

From the “Green island Thassos” to the “Green Rhodopes adventure”

The Thassos – Garmen region is located in south-eastern part of Europe, at the crossroads between the East and the West, the North and the South.

The area is characterized by a diverse topography and is rich in natural landmarks. To the south, the region bathes in the waters of the Aegean Sea, while to the North it reaches the mountain massifs of the Rhodopes and Rila. The picturesque coastlines of Thassos look like lace, shaped by the crystal blue waters of the Aegean. In this region nature is exceptionally beautiful, with well-preserved rare plants and animal species. Pretty, thick, virgin forests and scenic forest paths, extremely rich in flora and fauna, draw the gentle slopes of the Rhodope Mountains. Snow-covered, sparkling-white mountain peaks and slopes, mountain gorges, plateaus and grasslands. Enchantingly beautiful caves with underground lakes and rivers, colourful plains and virgin nature bring the feeling of timelessness.

This place is marked by the millennial history of human development!

Prehistoric and traditional villages, ancient cities and temples, medieval castles, architectural monuments. Ancient Greece, Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great and the Thracians, Rome, Byzantium, and the Ottoman Empire later on, have left their mark on the history of the area. There are numerous religious temples and monasteries. Arts and culture, myths, manners and customs, countless festivals, folk traditions and activities have had their influence on this ancient land.

The modern picturesque towns and villages, still full of life, ensure tourist infrastructure capable of attracting the attention of visitors from around the world, and provide multiple options for alternative tourism.

The hospitable residents of this extraordinary beautiful place in the Balkans welcome you throughout the year, so that you discover the unique natural resources, history, customs and culture.

ROUTE 1

“The green adventure in the Rhodopes and the prehistoric treasures”



The sites envisioned for the route provide for a minimum two-day stay in the region of Garmen and accommodation in a hotel at one’s choice. The suggested attractions are located within a short distance from places with available accommodation – Garmen and Ognianovo.

The suggested sites can be visited all year round.

Age group: individual tourists, families or organized groups with no specific age limits or specific equipment.

Required transportation vehicle – van, car. Bike for people with good training.

Garmen – Starting Point of the Routes

The village of Garmen is the administrative centre of the Garmen municipality which occupies an area of 388,321 hectares in Southwest Bulgaria. The municipality encompasses parts of the valley of Mesta River and the western slopes of the Dabrava ridge of the Western Rhodopes. To the east, the north and the south, it borders with the municipalities Satovcha, Bansko and Hadzhidimovo; to the northeast and southwest – with Velingrad and Gotse Delchev. The municipality is an administrative and territorial unit in the Blagoevgrad district. The distance from Garmen to the district centre of Blagoevgrad is 118 km. The second-class road Gotse Delchev – Razlog – Predel – Blagoevgrad provides the main road connection to the district centre and the rest of the country.

The municipality includes 16 settlements – the municipality centre Garmen (population 1,800), 6 large villages – Debren, Dolno Dryanovo, Dabnitsa, Gorno Dryanovo, Ognianovo and Ribnovo (population over 1,000), 9 medium-sized villages (with population between 200 and 1,000): Baldevo, Krushevo, Oreshe, Osikovo, Skrebatno, Hvostyane. The small villages in the municipality (population under 200 people) are Kovachevitsa, Leshten, Marchevo. There are no depopulated villages in the municipality.

The road network of the Garmen municipality includes third-class roads (34 km) and municipal roads (55 km). The density of the road network is 23 km/100 sq. km, which is significantly lower than the national average (33 km/100 sq. km).

The main road in the municipality is road III-197, Gotse Delchev – Satovcha – Dospat and road Gospodintsi – Ognianovo – Garmen – Dabnitsa – Ablanitsa, which connect the municipality to neighbouring municipalities, the district centre and the national road network. Of particular importance for the socio-economic development of the municipality is the connection to road II-19 Simitli – Razlog – Gotse Delchev – Drama, which creates the prerequisites for active economic development and increases the attractiveness of the municipality to foreign businesses. The importance of this connection increased after the opening of border pass Ilinden and the overcoming of the topic development of road infrastructure along the Mesta Valley.

The nearest railway station, Dobrinishte, is situated 50 km northwest of the village.

The municipality is situated at the border of two climate zones – the prevailing humid continental climate and the transitory Mediterranean one, coming from the Mesta Valley. The seasons are clearly defined – the summer is warm and the winter is moderately cold. Climatic conditions are favourable to tourism through most of the calendar year, except for winter months November to March.

In the municipality, there are many cultural and historical resources from different historical eras – the basis for development of cultural tourism.

Valuable tourist resources are the archaeological sites in the region. Near the village of Garmen one finds the city from the late antiquity and early Byzantine period, **Nicopolis ad Nestum**. Two and a half kilometres southeast of Nicopolis ad Nestum, in the “Gramadeto” area is located the archaeological site “**Basilica**”. Excavations carried out in 1978 – 1979 revealed a three-nave Hellenic-type basilica with a total length of 24.71 m.

Near the village of **Dabnitsa** there are remains of a fortress from the late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Near the village of **Dolno Dryanovo**, in the Gradishte area, is located an archaeological cultural monument of national importance – the “**Prehistoric Thracian Sanctuary in Gradishte.**”

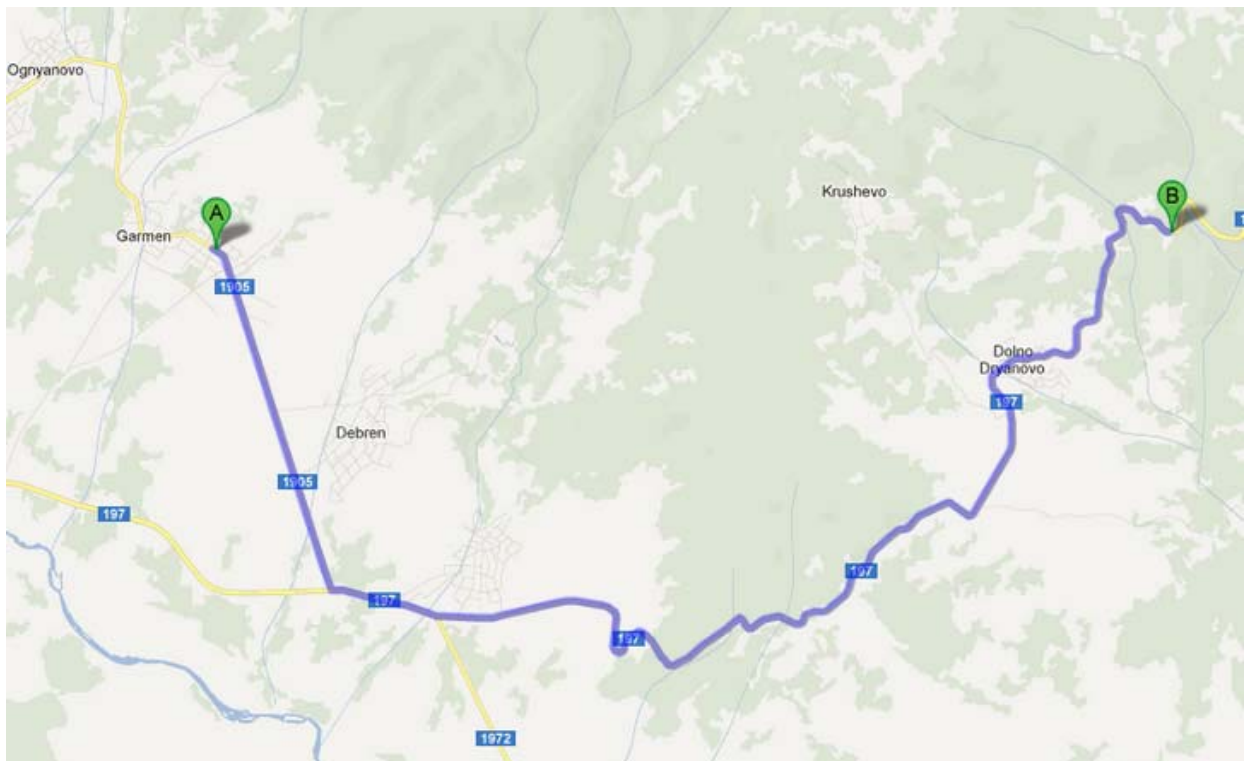
A **museum with a rich ethnographic collection** opened in the village of **Skrebatno** in 1978. It contains historical documents and photographs about the past of this region, everyday objects and cultural artefacts from the village.

The village of **Kovachevitsa** is the only architectural reserve in the municipality of Garmen.

The village of **Leshten** is one of the most attractive and authentic villages for rural tourism in Bulgaria; it has preserved the original Revival-period architecture and atmosphere, typical for this region. Currently the village is one of the most authentic rural tourism resorts in Bulgaria. Fifteen renovated old houses offer a Revival period atmosphere, characteristic of this region and combined with modern comfort.

Visit to the sanctuary in the “Gradishte” area

Starting point (A)	Village of Garmen	+41° 35' 49.56", +23° 48' 23.08" (41.597100, 23.806410)
End point (B)	Historic-landscape park “Gradishte”	+41° 35' 54.82", +23° 54' 47.02" (41.598560, 23.913060)
Recommended means of transportation	Car	
One-way distance from the starting point to the end point	15.2 km 20 min.	



This ancient temple dates back to around fifth millennium BC and according to archaeologists it is one of the largest ones in Bulgaria, and possibly in Europe.

The rock complex has enough features to be defined as an ancient Thracian sanctuary.

The sanctuary, called “Gradishteto” by the locals, is situated on three hills, about 2 km east of the village of Dolno Dryanovo in Garmen municipality, to the right of the road Gotse Delchev – Satovcha.

The sanctuary is situated on a ridge, approximately 700 m long, oriented as follows: north - northwest – south – southeast. On the ridge with an area of 20 hectares can be discerned three prominent rocky hills with a maximum elevation of 879.80 m. The height is naturally protected, accessible only from the northwest. From all other sides, it is surrounded by an impressive picturesque canyon. The slopes are very steep, and in some places the cliffs appear to be almost vertical; to the east – northeast they form an abyss 50 meters deep.

Here and there on the hill’s crest, mainly on the southern slope there are a number of small, naturally levelled spots surrounded by bare, picturesque rocks. Depending on the point of view, some of the rocks can be very interesting and resemble human profiles, figures of animals, fish, turtles and birds.

The majority of figures are represented by groups of elements and oriented in the direction east – west. The complexity of the compositions, their quality and type, as well as their strict spatial orientation allows suggestions that most of the figures result from handmade engraving and processing of rocks. As examples can be given the levelling of rocks, the construction of grooves, the so-called “sharapani” (round holes in the rocks, probably used to support a wooden structure on the rock), steps, etc.

The Discovery of the Sanctuary

The sanctuary was discovered in the early spring of 2000 by the the late Prof. Todor Boyadzhiev during one of his many trips to the Rhodopes. During a random stop on the road to Satovcha, he noticed a rock formation, which he called the “Purgatory”, while the locals call it “*promushvachka*” (a narrow passage).

During his first visit, the professor did not notice the human head, now iconic to the sanctuary, which he later named after the god “Tangra”.

In an interview he said:

“Once you pass the “Purgatory”, it is important where you decide to go – to the left or to the right. In general, most of the objects in the Sanctuary are “visible” only in the light intended by those who created them – primarily from a certain angle and place, not from anywhere. And in order to “see” them, it is not enough to look. It also takes time to get to the Spirit of the Sanctuary. Time to understand his messages. Messages which, although possessing meaning that seems obvious “afterwards”, have been blurred in our memory by the information waves that surround us.

The process is analogous to our perception of Him in our souls – it may be sudden, but never immediate. It is required that a person goes down a road – a road which can possibly be hard. It seems to me that I saw “Tangra-1” only in 2001. “Tangra-3” was my discovery for 2005...”

Saved from the treasure-hunters

In the period 2000-2005, the professor took many friends and colleagues to see his discovery. It cannot be claimed that during that period the sanctuary was not known to the locals from nearby villages. In 2005, on one of his visits, he noticed excavations left from treasure-hunting activities. These were concentrated in the central areas of the Sanctuary, where supposedly rituals were once performed. Near the excavation pits there were pottery fragments, including an entire pot, lying in the grass 5-6 m away from the “beard” of “Tangra-1.”

In May 2006 Professor Boyadzhiev sent a warning signal and the sanctuary was visited by a team of archaeologists from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski.” It was then that the treasure-hunters’ excavation pits of various sizes and depths were confirmed and described in detail.

It was established that a systematic treasure-hunters' intervention disrupted the cultural layer and the structures. In June 2006, a procedure was started and by an order of the Director of NIPK (National Institute for Monuments of Culture) was established a joint committee chaired by M. Ivanov – a NIPK expert and with representatives of NAIM-BAS, Sofia University, the museum in Gotse Delchev, the municipality of Garmen and others.

Since July 2008, the site in Gradishteto is categorized as a cultural monument, in accordance with the current law in Bulgaria. With its basic elements and characteristics, the sanctuary fits with the known features of the Thracian rock sanctuaries.

Archaeological surveys

From 10.04.2008 to 23.04.2008 were conducted rescue archaeological probing studies, supervised by Senior Associate 2nd degree, Dr. Anelia Bozhkova – NAIM-BAS, deputy supervisor - Assistant Prof. Nadezhda Todorova – Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and scientific advisor Dr. Krassimir Leshtakov – Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

The excavations were funded by the municipality of Garmen and conducted with the assistance of Garmen's Deputy Mayor Mr. Hassan Hadzhiiski. Besides the supervisors, the survey also included PhD candidates and students from the Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” – mas. Georgi Katsarov, Lubomir Alov and Yana Mutafchieva.

Many probes were performed, as the total studied area was 150 m², while the established thickness of the cultural layers ranged from 0.50 to 1.50 m.

Structures from the late Iron Age

The archaeological surveys found household pottery, made manually and using the potter's wheel, as well as fragments of roof tiles, well-preserved clay weights for vertical loom, a clay spindle element, fragments of an ancient crater, an amphora tare. Of interest is the fragmented piranos, construction ceramics – mainly roof tiles, and the broken and well-preserved animal bones.

Because of the limits of the study, at present the nature and the function of the stone facilities cannot be determined with certainty. One possible interpretation, based on formal similarity, is that they represent mounds with stone embankments. It should be noted however, that currently there is no conclusive evidence for the presence of cemeteries or signs of burials being performed within these facilities. We cannot exclude the possibility that the stone piles are only of cult and symbolic nature and that they functioned as depositories where pilgrims put gifts during visits to the sacred place.

Late Chalcolithic period

Stratifications from the late Chalcolithic period were registered within the boundaries of three naturally formed rock crevices.

The late chalcolithic ceramic complex is homogeneous in typological sense. One can find dishes, bowls, amphora-like containers, pots, cups, miniature forms.

The decoration of open containers should be paid special attention to. During the decoration a variety of techniques were used– incisions, poking, printing, and painting.

The preliminary results of the processing of ceramics, the formal characteristics of the vessels and the main features of the ornamentation gives us reasons to date the complex back to the very end of the late Chalcolithic period – the beginning of the fourth millennium BC and the first half of the so-called Transitional Chalcolithic period to the Bronze Age.

Historic-landscape Park “Gradishte”

In March 2011, the Garmen Municipality began working on Project “Strengthening the Attractiveness of the Cross-Border Area Thasos-Garmen through Upgrading of Local Environmental

Assets”, funded under Contract B1.11.16 from 14.03.2011 by the European Territorial Cooperation Programme Greece - Bulgaria 2007-2013.

Using the mechanisms of cross-border cooperation, the project aims to promote Garmen municipality through the development and promotion of attractive tourist products.

One of the project activities is the construction of Historic-landscape Park (LIP) “Gradishte”. In a narrow sense, the term historic-landscape means a combination of nature (landscape) and historical evidence, presented on a clearly dominant natural background (forest, rock, meadow and pasture landscapes).

In LIP “Gradishteto” were differentiated three park zones: Roadside (Western), Central (zone of the sanctuaries) and Eastern. The construction of the three zones necessitates careful arrangements when “handling” nature. This is due to the requirement for minimal visual pollution of the environment.

First park zone – Roadside/Western

In this zone are located:

- Tourist Information Center;
- A shelter with a fireplace;
- 2 gazebos;
- 4 restrooms;
- A module for wastewater treatment;
- To construct water supply with a tank and network (1,700 m)
- A rock exhibition complex (SEK) under the name “Chech rocks”, which is unmatched outside the country as well. This idea emerged after examining the rock variety in the Bulgarian part of the historical and geographical area Chech (the so-called Nevrokop or Upper Chech). A great diversity on a small area was discovered – the earth’s crust is made-up of different rocks, representing the three major genetic groups: igneous (effusive and intrusive), metamorphic and sedimentary. The rock complex will essentially be an outdoor museum exhibition (collection).
- A parking lot (on the road Dolno Dryanovo – Satovcha/at the entrance of the Historic-landscape Park “Gradishte”)
- Bridges, platforms, railings, solidified steps and ladders
- Attraction lighting at sites, as well as electrical supply of the building, the parking lot and the attraction centre for children with an Alpine route

Second park zone – sanctuaries/Central

In this zone are located:

- A gazebo for observation and recreation;
- Alpine route
- Bridges, platforms, railings, solidified steps and ladders
- To explore, conserve and exhibit in the proper manner at least one archaeological structure near the constructed facilities.

Third park zone – Bistritsa canyon/Eastern

- A shelter with a fireplace;
- A gazebo;

- Bridges, platforms, railings, solidified steps and ladders

Eco-trails

The constructed eco-trail aims to provide pedestrian access to Historic-landscape Park “Gradishte”. The path will be 900 – 1,000 m long and 1.50 m wide.

The eco-trail starts from the “Ravnishtata” area in the village of Dolno Dryanovo, passes along the Bistritsa River and reaches the Historic-landscape Park “Gradishte”, as it sticks to existing roads.

The path will consist of three sections:

Eco-trail No 1 – from “Ravnishtata” area to the foot of “Gradishte”, as in vicinity to the River Bistritsa is envisioned the construction of a relaxation spot. It will be close to the tourist site (from the south) and there will be constructed:

- A covered wooden shelter;
- A restroom – made of wood, with a septic tank;
- Tables and benches – one table and four benches made of wood;
- A fireplace in the open;
- Garbage bins – 3;

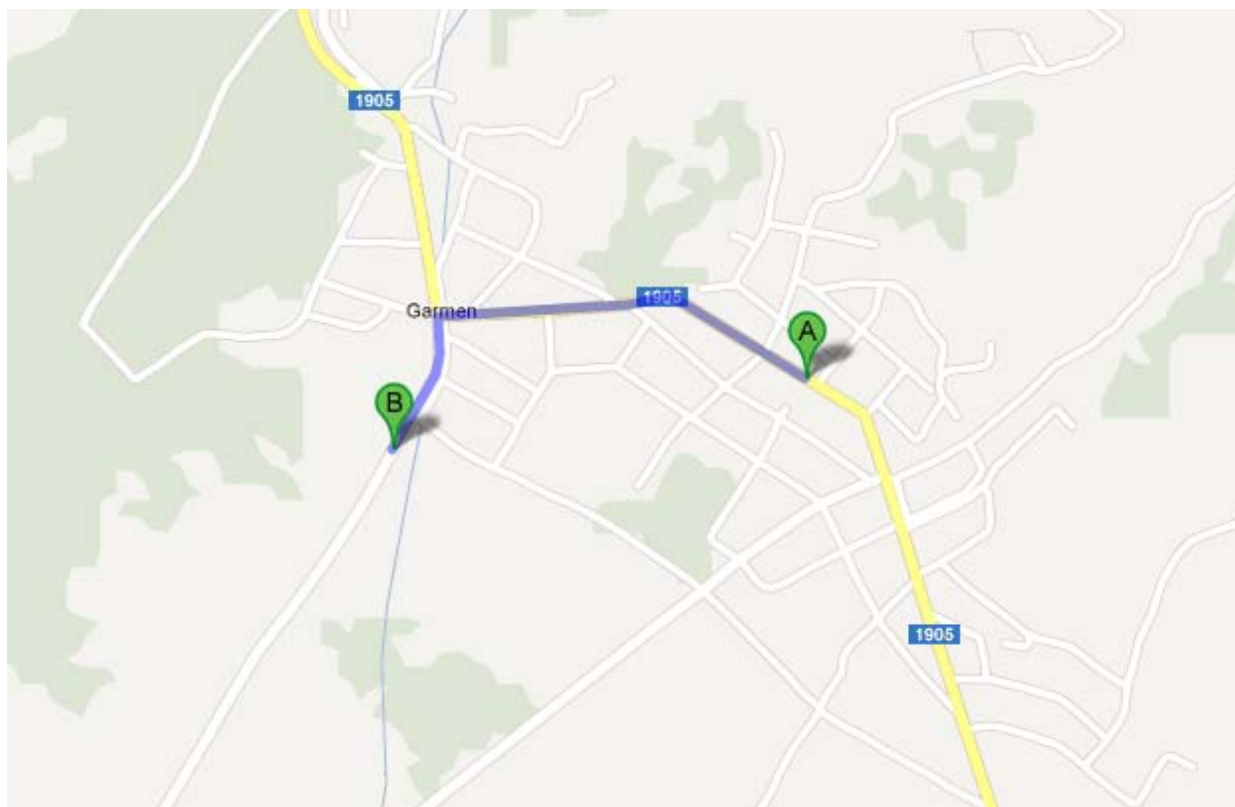
From the Relaxation spot starts the first beam (**Eco-trail No 2**) leading to an existing Roman bridge and “Momin Vir”. A second beam parts from Eco-trail No 2 (about 30 m) and runs northwest, as it joins with an existing trail from “Gradishte” (**Eco-trail No 3**).

Three pedestrian bridges over the Bistritsa River are built along the path.

All these facilities, except for the bridges’ foundations, will be built with natural materials – wood and stone. An Instruction board and arrows, information and educational boards are put along the route of the eco-trail.

The ancient city Nicopolis ad Nestum

Starting point (A)	Village of Garmen	+41° 35' 49.56", +23° 48' 23.08" (41.597100, 23.806410)
End point (B)	Ancient city Nicopolis ad Nestum	+41° 35' 45.47", +23° 47' 50.99" (41.595964, 23.797497)
Recommended means of transportation	Car, by foot A way station – <i>Vekovnite Chukari</i> (“The Eternal Peaks”)	
One-way distance from the starting point to the end point	The site is located at the northeast exit of the village of Garmen in the direction of Gotse Delchev. The distance from the centre of Garmen (municipality) to the ancient city – Nicopolis ad Nestum is 1 km (a 3-minute drive or an 11-minute walk).	



Nicopolis ad Nestum is one of the three cities founded on the Balkan Peninsula by the Roman emperor Trajan to commemorate his victory over the Dacians in 106 AD; it is called “City of the victory on Mesta” and is remembered as the City on Mesta (Latin Nikopolis ad Nestum).

The ancient city is located on an area of 13 hectares in the southern part of the village of Garmen. The city was founded by the Roman emperor Trajan I after the middle of the 2nd century. The city has been inhabited for more than 14 centuries, as it reached the peak of its population in late antiquity /4th -6th c./.

The village is situated on the road connecting the Aegean coast to the main road Via Egnatia that passes through the Rhodopes, the Thracian valley and Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv). Its strategic location on a key intersection contributes to its becoming a centre of economic, political and cultural significance during its peak period, 2nd – 6th c.

Excavations have cleared 280 meters of city walls, foundations of public and religious buildings and tombs. The found artefacts included fragments of a votive relief of the Thracian horseman, a statue of Hermes, an old-Christian gravestone, over 95 gold coins and 22 other coins, glass and bronze vessels and pottery, a golden ring and more. Two early Christian basilicas from the 4th c. were discovered near the fortified city.

Nicopolis ad Nestum is a priceless treasure since it is one of the few preserved ancient cities in Bulgaria and the only one in the Rhodope Mountains dating back to the Roman rule in the Balkans. Nowadays, it is declared an archaeological and architectural monument of antiquity and the Middle Ages.

At Nicopolis ad Nestum were minted coins from the time of Emperor Commodus (180-192) until the reign of Emperor Caracalla (211-217). The found coins and votive reliefs attest to the worship of the gods Zeus, Pluto, Hermes, the Thracian horseman, Asclepius and Hygeia, as well as the river god of Mesta and Ares and Dionysus, worshipped by the Thracians.

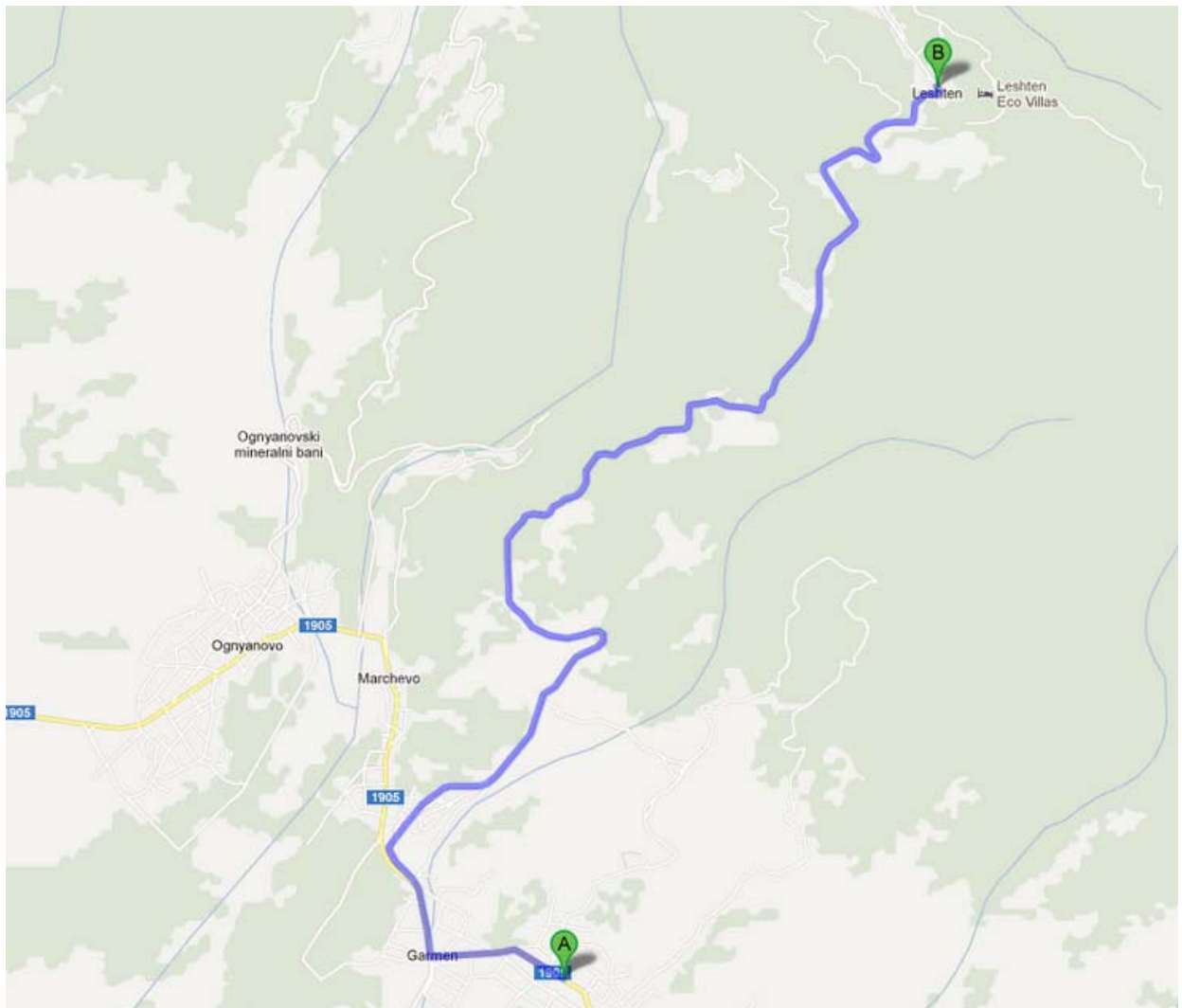
At the end of the 6th c. Nicopolis ad Nestum was attacked by Slavs and Avars and destroyed.

In the 9th – 10th c. the city was restored under the name Nikopol and existed until the 13th c., when it was destroyed again during the Crusades.

During the late Middle Ages at this location there was a Bulgarian village and in the south-eastern part of the fortified city – a Turkish chiflik. During the Ottoman rule, the urban settlement was moved a few kilometres to the west, as its name became Nevrokop (present-day Gotse Delchev).

Leshten – an authentic village, Western Rhodope Mountains

Starting point	Village of Garmen	+41° 35' 49.56", +23° 48' 23.08" (41.597100, 23.806410)
End point	Village of Leshten	+41° 38' 13.53", +23° 49' 44.06" (41.637092, 23.828906)
Recommended means of transportation	Car	
One-way distance	8 km. 13 min.	



The village of Leshten is one of the most attractive and authentic rural tourism resorts in Bulgaria. It is located on the southern slopes of the Western Rhodope Mountains, 200 km from Sofia and reveals an unforgettable view of the mountain Pirin.

The first thing you will see in the village of Leshten is the view to the little houses, perched on the steep slopes of the mountain and built in the architectural style of Kovachevitsa. They still preserve the spirit of the Bulgarian village.

Among the architectural monuments stands out the church “Saint Paraskeva”, which dates back to 1836, as well as the church school. The frescoes of the church, with their big strokes and bright colours, are outstanding.

A long time ago the locals made their living by masonry, blacksmithing and gold sand mining. The authenticity of the past, the natural beauty mixed with the artificially added modern tourist image, also used as a stage-setting for movies and music videos, invites the visitors for unique experiences.

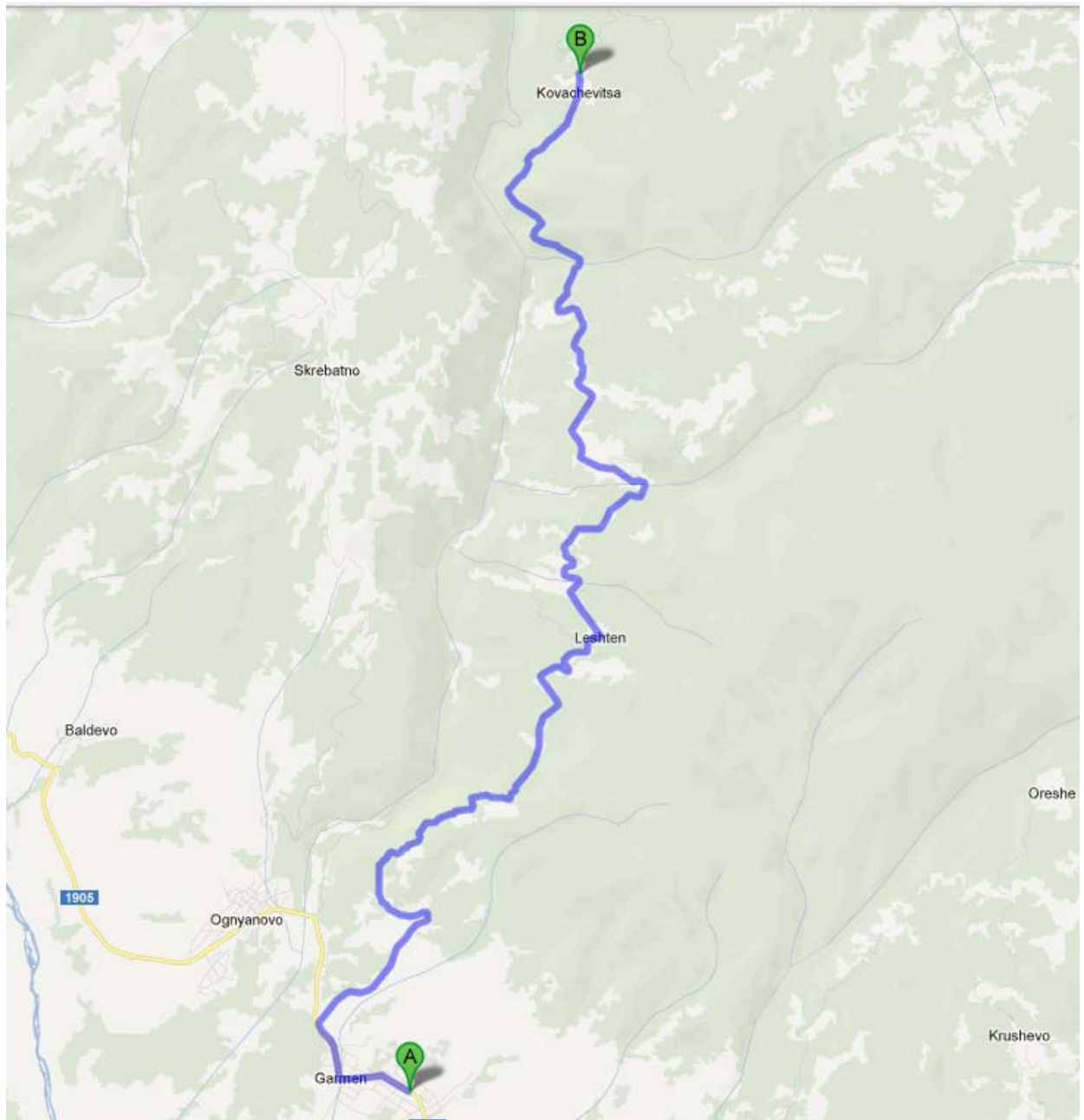
Depending on the season, visitors can benefit from favourable conditions for hunting and fishing, swimming and SPA in Ognianovo (5 km), for collecting mushrooms and herbs, for mountain excursions or trips to the neighbouring ethnographic complexes Kovachevitsa, Delchevo and Dolen. They can also plan a one-day trip to the nearby ski resort Bansko and the biggest monastery in the Pirin region – Rozhen.

The dining-room (21 seats), the restaurant (25 seats) and the garden (40 seats) are suitable for big tourist groups.

The village pub (once a church school) offers unique culinary masterpieces. Wooden boards contain the daily menu, while “chepcheto” (a wooden knot), hanging over each table is used to signal the waiter that the customer needs service.

Kovachevitsa – a historical and architectural reserve

Starting point (A)	Village of Garmen	+41° 35' 49.56", +23° 48' 23.08" (41.597100, 23.806410)
End point (B)	Village of Kovachevitsa	+41° 41' 9.10", +23° 49' 34.21" (41.685860, 23.826170)
Recommended means of transportation	Car, bike is an option	
One-way distance from the starting point to the end point	15,8 km 30 minutes by car The route passes through the village of Gorno Dryanovo and the village of Leshten.	



Kovachevitsa is located in Dabrava part of the Western Rhodopes, on the eastern slopes of the Kanina River's canyon. The village is located about 15 km from Garmen and can be reached through a well-kept asphalt road passing through the village of Gorno Dryanovo.

Kovachevitsa has preserved its authentic appearance and is one of the famous and beautiful Bulgarian villages in the Western Rhodopes.

The altitude is 1,000 meters. Nowadays the permanent residents of the village are approximately 50, but in the summer there are much more people.

The impressive granite houses covered with stone slabs (tiles) are perched on the southern slopes of the mountain. Northeast of the village lie old pine forests – the Reserve "Tamnata Gora" (the "Dark Forest") (Karaorman).

The mysterious places nearby, such as Kozia Kamak (the "Goat's Stone") and the archaeological finds from Thracian times give birth to legends about Thracian sanctuaries and secret sacrifices.

The legend

The legend about the origin of the name Kovachevitsa is an interesting one. A long time ago here lived the blacksmith Marko with his family. After his death, his wife took care of the family, and when people from neighbouring villages visited them, they said they were going to Kovachevitsa (in Bulgarian blacksmith is “kovach”, hence “Kovachevitsa” is the “wife of the blacksmith”).

Another legend connects the settlement with migration of people from the medieval capital of Veliko Tarnovo, even before the fall of the latter under Ottoman rule. That seeks to explain the impressive architecture of the houses of the Gorna Mahala (the “Upper Quarter”), as well as some particularities of the local language, which are less close to typical Rhodope vernaculars than to the East-Bulgarian specificities of the Tarnovo and Central Balkan vernaculars, which lie in the basis of the literary Bulgarian. Similar stories are heard in the neighbouring village of Gorno Dryanovo, whose name matches the name of a settlement in the Tarnovo region.

The history of Kovachevitsa

In 1791, ten families of craftsmen from Western Macedonia (Kastoria) settled in Kovachevitsa. They built their own neighbourhood at the end of the village – Arnaut Mahala (“Arnaut Quarter”). At the end of the 19th c. up to 450 masonry craftsmen were leaving Kovachevitsa every year. In terms of the number of craftsmen, the school there equalled the one in Tryavna. The craftsmen from Kovachevitsa become unsurpassed masters of building with stone and wood. They travelled in groups throughout the Ottoman Empire to build; they were known throughout the Balkans. The names of the great masters are still remembered – Stoyan Drelyov, Kiro Tsingov, Toma Markov, etc. The soon-to-be craftsman started studying masonry as early as in adolescence. He started as a labourer and had to go through all the stages to be recognized as an equal by the masters.

Here as well, the masons, being members of a guild, used an extensive “secret” language (the “meshtragansky” speech), rich with made-up words and borrowings from Albanian, Greek, Romanian – languages they knew due to their wanderings in the Balkans. They used the language to talk to each other freely, without revealing the intricacies of their craft to others. Kovachevitsa is an architectural reserve – most of the houses are preserved and well-restored – they are the most impressive proof of the genius of the masons from Kovachevitsa. They are the ones who build these houses, unique at that time, with bay windows hanging over the street.

The skills of local craftsmen became famous even in faraway Britain, where a journalist wrote that “the village’s sewer system is older than London’s.”

Every citizen of Kovachevitsa considered himself to be a master carpenter and used to make from wood everything he used in his home. The antique interior, the beautifully crafted carvings on the walls and ceilings of some houses in Kovachevitsa, demonstrates the good taste and the skill of local wood-carvers. Today in Kovachevitsa are preserved only two houses with interior carving – those of Boris Pachalov and Boris Daskalov. The two fulling-mills in the village and the textile shops downtown remind us of the past manufacturing of cloaks, full-bottomed breeches, tunics and sleeveless women's clothing. When processing wood tar, people from Kovachevitsa obtained pitch, which they traded.

In the 18th and 19th c. the village grew into a thriving centre of construction and cattle-breeding. In 1840-1847 a large new church was built, with a church school attached to it. The constantly traveling masons and cattlemen were hoping for protection from St. Nickolas Thaumaturgist, which is probably why the village named the church after the saint. In 1854, the teacher Nicola Banev-Kovachevski opened a secular school, which replaced the church school which most probably had existed since the end of the 18th century. The school in Kovachevitsa welcomed also children from neighbouring villages.

In 1865 a community centre opened in Kovachevitsa, where gradually and due to the constant interest of the local people, a rich library was established. In addition to the vast library, in the 1830s the community centre activities included a theatre group founded on the initiative of the teacher Angel Dzhigrev. With the financial help of J. Dimitrov in 1892 was built a large school building, and in 1873 in

the village was established a masonry association – the first professional association in the Pirin region. During the April Uprising of 1876 Kovachevitsa was saved from destruction, due to the ingenuity of the local people and the help of the neighbouring Muslim village Gorno Dryanovo.

After the Balkan wars the masons and the cattlemen were not able to travel freely to the Aegean anymore. The village turned to other ways of development – 1922 saw the establishment of the first cooperative that opened two industrial companies. “Our children should go and study” – declared the mayor to motivate people to build a shortcut to Ognianovo bathrooms. After World War II a large part of the population left Kovachevitsa. From about 1,500 people, now remain less than 50. The school is closed; the same goes also for the rich community centre library.

In 1932 the manufacturing cooperative built the first sawmill. In 1936 was built the second sawmill, property of the Bayatevi brothers. The vast forests around the village contributed to the fast development of timber industry.

A historical and architectural reserve

In 1977 Kovachevitsa was declared a historical and architectural reserve, being the only architectural reserve in the municipality of Garmen. It includes the “St. Nicholas” church, a church and a secular school, 112 houses and 5 outbuildings (stock-yards and barns), of which 56 were restored. Due to the small space and the steep terrain, the houses are built in a compact manner, as some of them are grouped together in duplex houses. Picturesque street ensembles were formed. Remarkable are the “Daskalov house”, the “Dishlyanov house”, the “Shumerov houses”, the “Pilarev house”, the “Shuntuev house”, the “Bangov house”, etc.

Most of the houses have kept their authentic outlook, as the street network and the environment are almost completely preserved. Kovachevitsa’s structure can be divided, functionally and spatially, into three concentric zones: a residential centre, a belt of farm buildings and stock-yards and a belt of farmland.

Kovachevitsa is the only village where architecture has a monumental effect. The market (“charshia”), typical for the Revival period villages, is absent here. There are Γ-shaped, T-shaped, straight or complex groups of houses. They illustrate the development of the basic principles of composition, applied when constructing ensembles of houses – in this way a specific architectural and artistic imagery is achieved. Most of the houses are pronouncedly rising from both sides of the narrow steep streets that follow the terrain. Typical are the small-sized courtyards surrounded by high stone walls, as well as the placing of farm buildings outside the yards. The houses can be placed in a separate subtype.

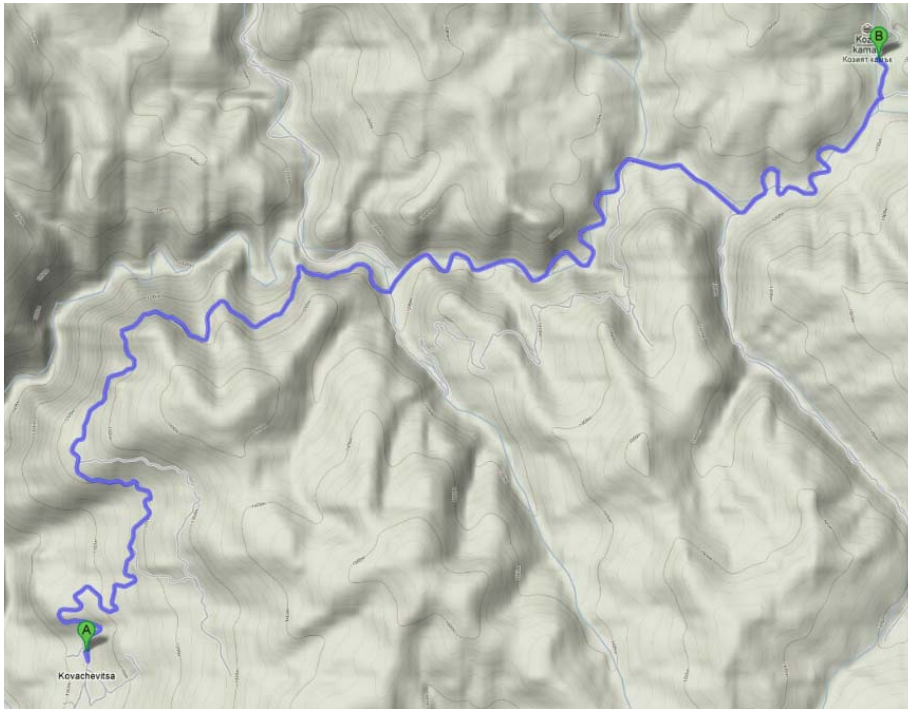
The Kovachevitsa house is a subtype of the Rhodope house. It has 2 to 4 floors, as the lower floors are used for business purposes, and the upper ones are residential. The ceiling is the centre of the composition. The main compositional elements of the residential floor are the rooms with fireplaces, the ceiling, the water-tank, the barn, the kiosk, the bathroom, the oven and the closet. The houses are built from stone and wood and covered with hewn stones.

Since mid-70s the unique architecture of Kovachevitsa has been attracting the interest of filmmakers and many movies were shot here: “Mazhki vremena” (Manly Times), “Za kude putuvate?” (Where are you Going?), “Mera spored Mera” and others.

Kozia Kamak (“Goat’s Stone”) – a natural landmark

Starting point	Village of Kovachevitsa	+41° 35' 49.56", +23° 48' 23.08" (41.597100, 23.806410)
End point	Kozia Kamak	+41° 43' 40.08", +23° 53' 50.64" (41.727800, 23.897400)

Recommended means of transportation	Car, by foot
One-way distance	14 km.

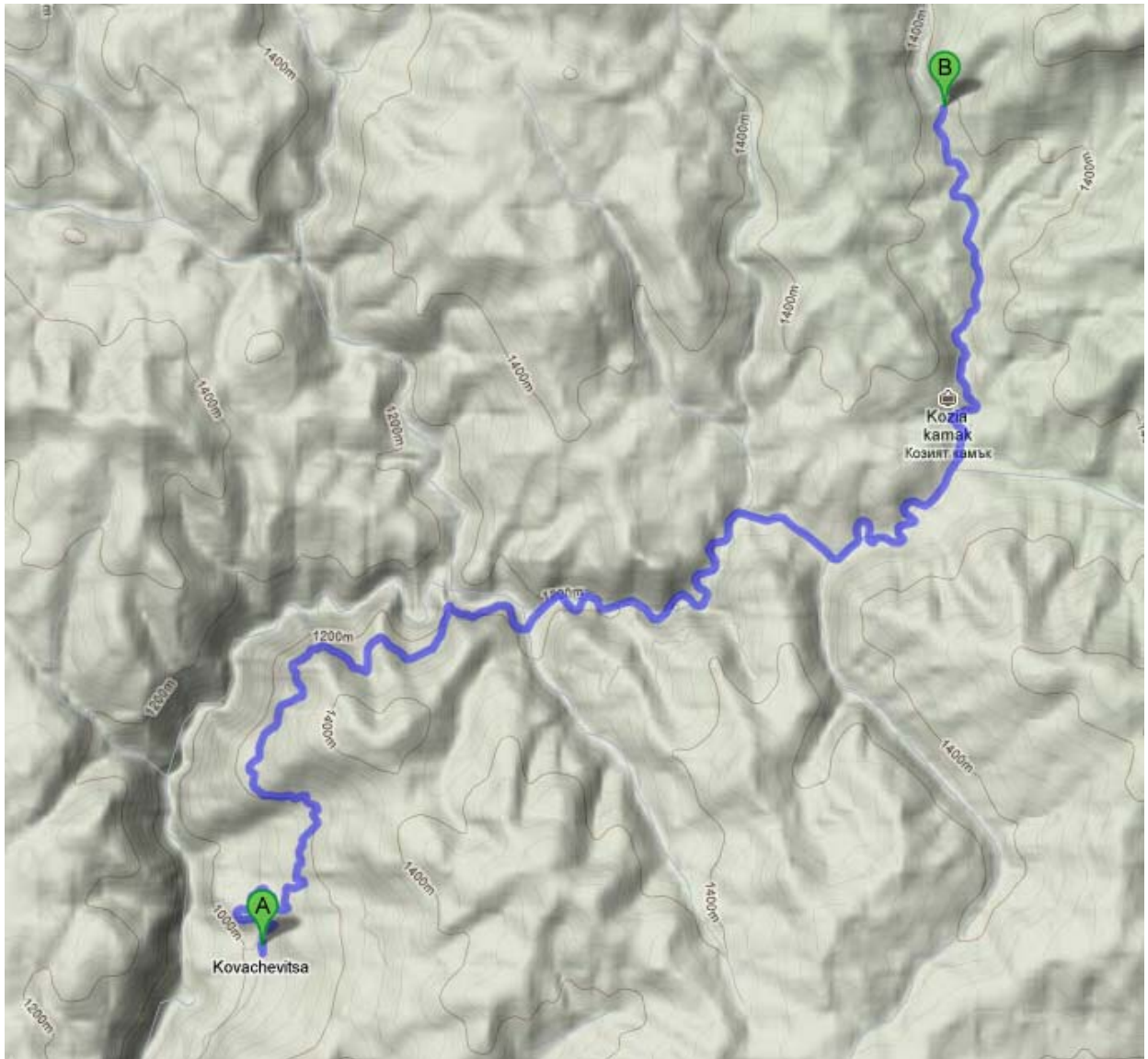


The natural landmark “Kozia Kamak” is a unique rock formation with an area of about 300 sq.m, located in a zone of the same name, 14 km north of the village of Kovachevitsa. In 1976, the site was listed in state records as “natural landmark” and as such is protected by law.

The 1983 archaeological expeditions investigated the 120 holes dug into the rock formation, dating back to antiquity and equal in diameter and depth. Located in defined geometric lines, they resemble the holes described in the archaeo-astronomical literature, which are dated to 3,000 BC and found in Europe and Russia. The ancient Greek philosopher and historian Herodotus points exactly to the Rhodope Mountains (perhaps this section of the mountains) as the probable location of the famous Dionysus temple, the sanctuary of the Thracian tribe Bessi. It is possible that their astronomical knowledge was so advanced that it could allow the creation of a “star map” on the rocks’ surface – work of the priests of the god Dionysus Sabazius. These scientific hypotheses attract many researchers and tourists to the interesting area Kozia Kamak, which opens an incredibly beautiful view to the famous “Kayaliiski Skali” the (“Kayaliiski Rocks”) and to the distant peaks of the Pirin Mountain in the west.

Kayaliiski Skali (The Kayaliiski Rocks) – impressive stone pyramids

Starting point	Village of Kovachevitsa	+41° 41' 9.10", +23° 49' 34.21" (41.685860, 23.826170)
End point	Kayaliiski Skali	+41° 45' 17.03", +23° 54' 54.36" (41.754730, 23.915100)
Recommended means of transportation	By car or by foot	
One-way distance	20 km.	



Kayaliiski Skali are located in the “Kayalietso” area, 16 km away northeast from the centre of Kovachevitsa on an asphalt road + 4 km north-northeast of the “Beslet” area on a dirt road that leads to the foot of Kayaliiski Skali.

Kayaliiski Skali are massive stone pyramids formed around 250-300 million years ago by erosion of late Paleozoic era granites in the regions of Rila and Western Rhodopes.

These rock formations have been a protected landmark since 1984.

Located at an altitude of 1,600 m in an ancient pine and spruce forest, they occupy an area of 8 hectares and form a unique set of huge protruding rocks and rock wreaths, up to 70 m high as a result from the spherical weathering of granite.



The route is relatively light, marked by the Beslet area, and allows for independent climbing, without a mountain guide.

The most appropriate period for a visit is from May to October. It is possible to organize a trip with a jeep, a safari or a walking tour with a picnic.

Walking Routes

Walking the Kaninska eco-trail

The Kaninska eco-trail offers a choice for passages between 2 and 10 hours, depending on the set goals – natural and cultural heritage.

The path includes:

- A big circle village of Kovachevitsa – village of Skrebatno – village of Gorno Dryanovo – village of Kovachevitsa, as the starting point/end point could be any of those.
- A small circle village of Gorno Dryanovo – gorge and cascade of Cherna River (“the Black River”) – village of Gorno Dryanovo.

There are 6 main sections connecting the settlements.

These sections can be covered separately, with a starting point and an end point as follows:

- Village of Skrebatno – near a steep rock hill and the second bridge above the Kanina River – village of Gorno Dryanovo;
- Village of Skrebatno – near a steep rock hill and the second bridge above the Kanina River – Village of Leshten;
- Village of Skrebatno – through the first bridge above the Kanina River – village of Kovachevitsa;
- Village of Kovachevitsa – through an underground corridor (Rizova hole) - village of Gorno Dryanovo;
- Village of Leshten – through an underground corridor (Rizova hole) – village of Kovachevitsa;
- Village of Leshten – through an underground corridor (Rizova hole) – village of Gorno Dryanovo.

The eco-trail contains several extreme places that are difficult to access, where special equipment (wooden stairs, steps, ropes, high bridging, railings, etc.) ensures the safety of the passage and allows for a more extreme overcoming of several challenges, represented by natural obstacles:

- Underground corridor in the area “Eremieva Rock” (Rizova hole) with length 15 m, width 2 m and a height 10-12 m. There are two openings, for descent and ascent respectively; there are wooden steps, railings and safeguarding facilities.
- The gorge and the cascade of the Cherna River under the village of Gorno Dryanovo, included in the small circle of the eco-trail. The passage covers several long segments with bridging; there are wooden platforms and railings, a natural shelter and many steep steps.
- The steep rocky hill on the west beach of the Kanina River under the village of Skrebatno, equipped with high stairs, wood railings, ropes, stone and wooden steps, necessary for the safe and accessible overcoming of the challenge.

Different combinations for covering the eco-trail sections are possible, consistent with the available time and the weather conditions, the availability of water resources (fountains), the degree of difficulty of the route, the age, training, experience and interests of the visitors. Near the eco-trail, 500 m. above Kovachevitsa on the road to the Sinia Vir (“the Blue Pool”) was built a camp with a shelter, tables, benches, fireplaces, picnic areas and/or space for tents.

Walking passage to the Saint Nedelya Chapel

10.00-10.30 h.	Transfer to the old church in Garmen.
10.30-12.00 h.	Walking passage from the old village to the Saint Nedelya chapel
12.00- 12.20 h.	Visit to the chapel.
12.20-12.45 h.	Refreshments offered by a local bakery.
12.45-13.10 h.	Descent down the eco-trail to the Saint Anna church.
13.10-13.25 h.	Visit to the church.
13.25-14.30 h.	Visit to ART (an Atelier for development of traditions) in Garmen with an option to see the movie “The Miracles of Saint Nedelya” – an animator.
14.30 h.	Transfer back to the hotel.

An ancient Roman City and a Saint’s Miracles

10.00-10.30 h.	Transfer from a local hotel to Nicopolis ad Nestum.
10.30-11.15 h.	Visit to the remains of the ancient city. History and results of archaeological excavations. Visiting the age-old sycamore trees in close proximity to the ruins.
11.15-11.45 h.	Take the eco-trail to the Saint Nedelya chapel.
11.45-12.10 h.	Visit to the chapel, history of its restoration (an animator).
12.10-12.50 h.	Take the eco-trail back to the village and visit to the Saint Anna church.
12.50-13.50 h.	Visit to Atelier for development of traditions in the community centre, with an option to see the movie “The Miracles of Saint Nedelya”.
14.00 h.	Return to the hotel.

“Bukov dol”– “Vodopada”– the Saint George chapel – Kovachevitsa

This is a one-day route. The tourists are taken by bus or by cars to “Bukov dol” (the “Beech Ravine”), then by foot they visit the waterfall of the same name (“Vodopada”) and after a short break they head to the Saint George chapel. There they have a picnic and are told the story of the chapel; the tourists continue to Kovachevitsa where they learn about the architecture and history of the village. By transportation they return to the starting point. The route is entirely of knowledge-gathering character.

Cycling Routes

Cycling route: Garmen – Dabnitsa – Dolno Dryanovo – LIP “Gradishte” – Dolen

Departure from Garmen in southeast direction going to Dabnitsa. The section Garmen – Dabnitsa is 7 km long and with a 30 m descent. In the village you can find interesting houses, representative of the old architecture. You can also visit the recently established Workshop for Crafts Revival (RVZ), where you can see traditional techniques and methods for production of drums, belt buckles, etc.

Continue northeast to the second stop on the route – the village of Dolno Dryanovo where you can see LIP “Gradishte”. The section Dabnitsa – Dolno Dryanovo is 10 km long and with ascent 680 m.

North of the village of Dolno Dryanovo is situated the end point of the route – the cultural and historical reserve in the village of Dolen. The village preserves 70 houses, declared cultural monuments. The main attractions are the old “St. Nicola” church, built in 1834 and the attached church school.

The section Dolno Dryanovo – Dolen is 8 km long and with ascent 280 m.

Return to the village of Garmen using the same route.

Cycling route: Kovachevitsa – Suhoto – Beslet – Kozia Kamak – Ranča – Stoychivoto – Sarnitsa and back

Day 1: Starting point Kovachevitsa. From there the road climbs to the north of the mountain towards the area “Suhia Chark” (Suhoto – “The Dry Area”). Two thirds of the route is relatively difficult (170 m ascent), while the remaining one third to the Suhia Chark is a 40 m descent. The entire section Kovachevitsa – Suhia Chark is 7 km long, on an asphalt road. In the Suhia Chark, on the right side of the road, there is a gazebo and a fountain, a good place to relax and have a picnic. From Suhia Chark the route continues east to the “Beslet” area. You can choose to make a short detour (about 1 km north) to see the natural landmark Kozia Kamak. The section Suhia Chark – Beslet is an asphalt road, 8 km long and with ascent 110 m. Then the route continues east to the area “Ranča”. About 2 km from Beslet, the road passes near the well-kept reserve Tamnata Gora. Visits to the reserve must be agreed in advance with the Ministry of Environment and Water. Within a short distance from the reserve, the road begins to climb north to the Ranča area. The section Beslet – Ranča is 11 km long on a black truck road and an ascent of 330 m. From Ranča, continue north with a steep descent (400 m) to the area “Stoychivoto.” After Stoychivoto, the route continues on an asphalt road, and you should do a sharp turn southeast to the town of Sarnitsa, located on the northwest shore of the dam “Dospat.” there you can spend the night in one of the many hotels, holiday homes, cottages and guest houses. The last section Ranča – Sarnitsa is 22 km long.

Day two: Return to Kovachevitsa using the same route.

Cycling route: Kovachevitsa – Suhia Chark – Vishteritsa – Osenovo

From Kovachevitsa the road climbs north into the mountains towards the Suhia Chark area (Suhoto). Two thirds of the route is relatively difficult (170 m ascent) and the remaining one third to Suhia Chark is a 40 m descent.

The whole section Kovachevitsa – Suhia Chark is 7 km long, on an asphalt road. In the Suhia Chark area, on the right side of the road, there is a gazebo and a fountain, a good place to relax and have a picnic. The route continues northwest to the area “Vishteritsa.”

The section Suhia Chark – Vishteritsa represents a black truck road, 17 km long and with a 260 m ascent.

From Vishteritsa continue to Osenovo. In the village of Osenovo you can visit the preserved old houses and the rock formation “Svatbata” (the “Wedding”). The section Vishteritsa – Dolno Osenovo is an asphalt road, 15 km long and with a 270 m descent.

From there, the route continues southwest to the village of Mesta, passing through the village of Filipovo.

The section Osenovo – Mesta is an asphalt road, 10 km long and with a 370 m descent. The end point of the route (village of Mesta) is located almost next to the main road Gotse Delchev – Sofia.

Do you, bike fans, know that...?

The project “Balkan Velo Trail” has defined the southern route of the European cycle track No 13 the “Iron Curtain Trail” as passing through the border region of Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Macedonia.

The “Iron Curtain Trail” (ICT) includes a series of national and trans-border protected areas along the former “Iron Curtain”, passing through many countries, including 14 EU members. It connects monuments, museums and facilities that are historical symbols of divided Europe and the peaceful revolution of unification in Central and Eastern Europe. The “Iron Curtain Trail” initiative represents the longest track of world's cultural and historical heritage and can help promote the European identity through its rich historical, cultural and natural resources /for more information visit www.ironcurtaintrail.eu/. The cycling route “Iron Curtain Trail” runs through the municipality of Garmen.