

Mining on Medvednica

The mineral resources of Medvednica have been exploited since ancient times. Until relatively recently, salt was harvested from the Slani Potok spring, while coal was mined near the settlement of Planina. In the Rudnica area, iron was extracted from limonite, while galena mines provided a source for silver. Among these are the Zrinski mine near the Grafičar mountain hut and the French mines on the steep Bistra slopes of Medvednica.

Slani Potok (Salty Stream)

On the northern slopes of Medvednica lies Slani Potok, a picturesque village of old wooden houses first mentioned in documents as early as the 14th century. The settlement takes its name from the stream springing from the forest above, in an area called Šokot (from the Hungarian sókút—“salty well”). If you taste the water at the source, you will notice its distinctly salty-bitter flavour—a lingering trace of a distant geological past when the Hrvatsko Zagorje region lay beneath a vast sea that once covered much of Europe.

Local inhabitants long relied on these saline wells for cooking, particularly during frequent salt shortages. This practice is formally documented in the mid-14th century, when Ban Nikola Banffy granted the citizens of Gradec the right to extract salt in the Šokot area. However, the water’s salt content proved too low for profitable production, leading to excavation of a mining shaft near the spring in an attempt to find richer deposits of rock salt.

Almost nothing is known about the mine’s size and appearance; today, the only visible evidence is its entrance, carved into fragile purple and dark brown clay schists. In the 18th century, Count Krsto Oršić attempted to restore the mines—though without much success. Further efforts were evidently made in later years, as traces of mining activity were still visible at the collapsed entrance some forty years ago.

Zrinski Mine

Near the Grafičar mountain hut lies an area known as Rudarski Vrt, where mining for precious metals has taken place since ancient times. The Zrinski family opened the mine in the 16th century to extract silver (galena). Due to unprofitability, the mine was abandoned in the mid-17th century.

Work in the mine was gruelling: roughly thirty miners worked daily in 10- to 12-hour shifts, manually extracting valuable ore using only hammers, wedges, pickaxes, and shovels. Inside the dark tunnels, the only light came from the flickering glow of oil lamps and wax candles.

Due to its historical significance, the Zrinski mine was declared a protected cultural property of the Republic of Croatia in 2006. A portion of the original tunnels is now open to the public, offering a glimpse into the realities of medieval mining. A visit to the site is highly recommended.



Zrinski Mine
JU PP Medvednica

French Mines

Count Henri Carion arrived from France to Gornja Bistra, where he purchased the Oršić castle in 1872 and took up residence. He was drawn to the region by the search for silver (galena) on the slopes of Medvednica.

He constructed a road from Gornja Bistra to the mines and established a smelter within the castle grounds to process the ore. Despite his immense dedication and the excavation of several shafts, the venture ultimately failed to achieve its primary goal—the galena proved too scarce for profitable production. After twenty years of persistence, he was finally forced to abandon the project.

In the 1950s, Vladimir Horvat and his associates explored four of the French mine shafts. Tomislav Jutrović later discovered a fifth shaft; however, its exact location remains a mystery today.

Since the French mines have not yet been opened to the public, entering these underground passages without proper equipment and speleological experience is strictly prohibited. Nevertheless, it is interesting to visit their entrances, hidden within the forest on the steep and hard-to-access northern slopes of Medvednica.



Vladimir Horvat and company in the shaft of the French mines
1950s / MGZ



In front of the shaft of the first French mine
Vladimir Horvat, 1961 / MGZ



Works in front of the shaft of the second French mine
1959 / MGZ