

Geopark Vis Archipelago

One of the
Last Paradise
Oases of the
Mediterranean



Geographical definition of the area

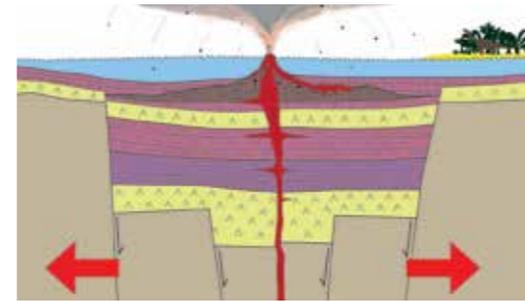
The Vis Archipelago is the central maritime zone in the Adriatic. This triangle-shaped area comprises the island of Vis, its nearby uninhabited islands (Ravnik, Budihovac, Veli Paržanj, Mali Paržanj, Greben, Host, Veli Barjak and Mali Barjak), the further removed, open-sea island of Palagruža (40 sea miles south of Vis), inhabited only by a lighthouse keeper, and the islet of Jabuka rising like a black pyramid above the sea (some 30 sea miles west of Vis). Within this triangle-shaped zone spreading across approximately 6,000 square kilometers, there are also the islands of Sveti Andrija, Brusnik and Biševo, the latter being the only inhabited island among the three.





GAĆE CAVE, SOUTHERN COAST OF VIS

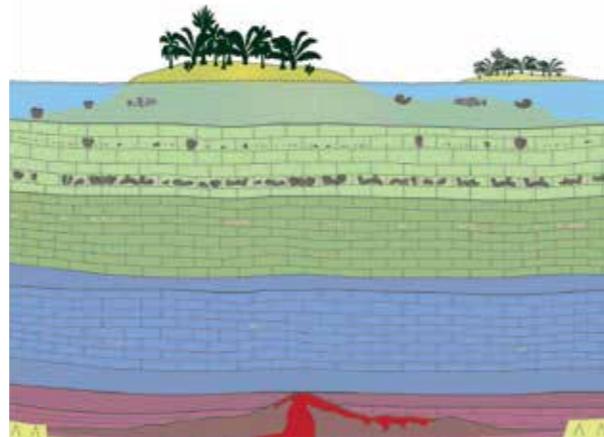
Geology



Among as many as 1,200 islands scattered across the Adriatic coast, the islands comprising the Vis Archipelago have the most heterogeneous rock formations. In addition, these islands are also the youngest and the oldest Adriatic islands. The youngest in the sense that they are still rising, and the oldest in the sense that they are composed of volcanic, salt and sedimentary rocks formed along

deep rooted faults in the Earth's crust during the first period of the Age of Dinosaurs, the Triassic, some 220 million years ago, during the breakup of the supercontinent Pangaea and the opening of the Tethys Ocean.

Triassic rocks were deeply buried in the Earth's crust beneath a few thousand-meter thick cov-



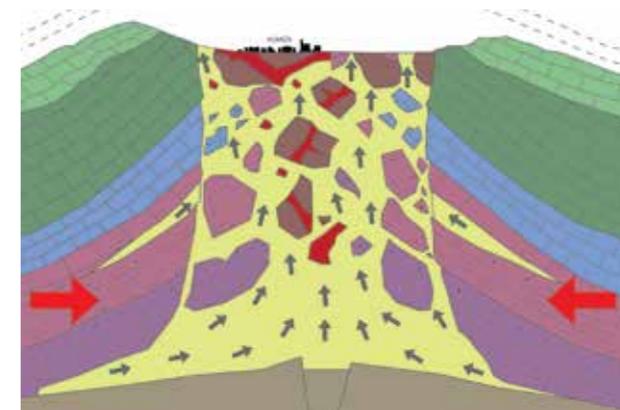
er of layered sedimentary rocks of the Adriatic Carbonate Platform (ACP), deposited in the area during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. The wider Adriatic area was then situated along a tropical belt within the western Tethys Sea, on a small drifting continent called the Adriatic plate or Adria. During the last few million years, the lighter Triassic salt and associated volcanic and sedimentary rocks began to uplift and pierce through the cover of carbonate rocks forming a salt diapir – a few kilometer tall subsurface “mushroom.” The upper

part of the Earth’s crust was deformed and partly eroded during the slow rise of the islands, which feature spectacular cliffs built of layered carbonate rocks resembling “stone books” in which each layer contains the geological record from the time of its deposition. In the Quaternary period, the two-kilometer wide “head” of the “mushroom” protruded through more resistant uplifted carbonates, and was eroded by the rain and sea, forming the present-day Komiža Bay.



LIBRI LOCATION ON THE ISLAND OF BIŠEVO WITH SEDIMENTARY ROCKS RISING FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

During the Ice Ages the sea level was 140 meters lower than today, and the hills were surrounded by the Adriatic steppe. The sand from the steppe was blown by strong winds up to the hills, forming sand plains and the present-day substrate for the highest quality vineyards, and some of the most beautiful sand beaches along the predominantly rocky coast. After the last Ice Age the sea flooded the steppe, turning the hills into islands, while submerged caves became the most beautiful natural phenomena in the Adriatic.



The Vis Archipelago in the ecological network EU Natura 2000



ELEONORA'S FALCON

The Vis Archipelago and its submarine area are included in the ecological network EU Natura 2000. The main goal of this program is to maintain or improve the condition of preservation of targeted biological species and their habitats. This is particularly important for the island of Vis which is, along with its open sea islands, a bird migration corridor between the Adriatic shores.

Birds of open-sea islands

The Vis Archipelago is habitat to 11 bird species observed within the ecological network Natura 2000. These are some of the characteristic open-sea species such as Eleonora's Falcon (*Falco eleonorae*), Cory's Shearwater (*Calonectris diomedea*) and the Levantine Shearwater (*Puffinus yelkouan*). Eleonora's Falcon in particular is an important species due to that fact that it is almost nowhere to be found in Croatia save on its open-sea islands.

The wondrous world of the corallogenic reefs

Along the steep underwater reefs of the Vis Archipelago, in spots with poor visibility and strong currents, a heterogenous coralligenous biocenosis has developed, filled with gorgonias, stone corals and spiny lobsters. A characteristic feature of the Vis Archipelago is the presence and preservation of the commercially highly exploited Red Coral (*Corallium rubrum*) at shallower than usual depths, and Black coral (*Antipathes sp.*), very rare in the Adriatic, found at greater depths. Coralligenous reefs are part of the ecological network Natura 2000.



Bottlenose Dolphin

The area of the ecological network "The Vis Marine Area" is a habitat of the Bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*). The size of its population is a minimum of 250 specimens. The Vis maritime zone is an area in which the Bottlenose dolphin raises its young.

Posidonia – the lungs of the Mediterranean

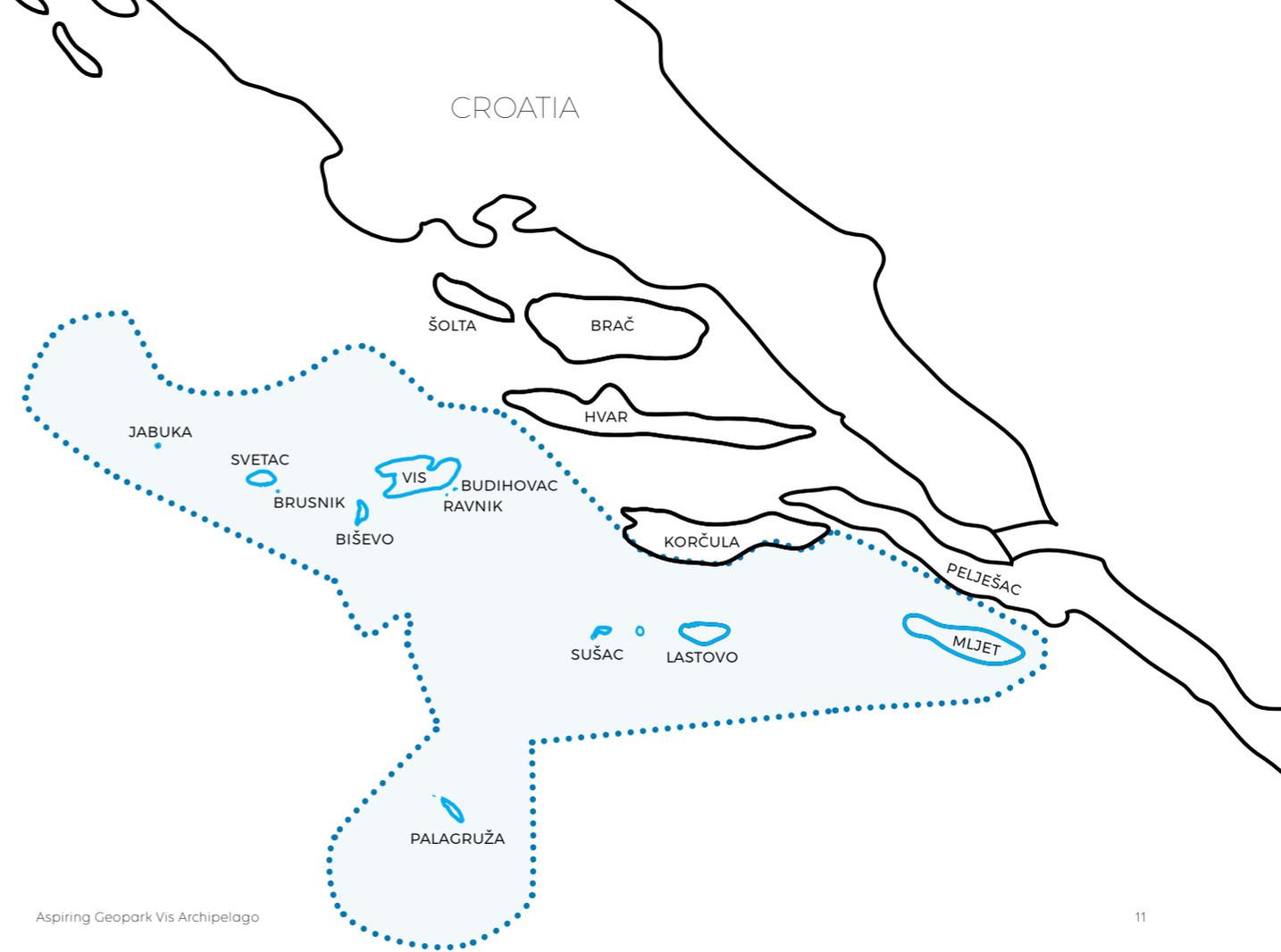
The Posidonia seagrass species (*Posidonia oce-*

anica) is endemic to the Mediterranean Sea, it is the lungs of the Mediterranean and a home to many commercially exploited and protected zoological species. Its role in the maritime eco system is indispensable. Due to widespread underwater Posidonia meadows, some of which are a couple of hundred and even thousands of years old, the area of the Vis Archipelago is part of the ecological network Natura 2000.

The Vis Archipelago — the Adriatic Blue Corridor

The World Wildlife Fund, an ecological organization based in Rome, has included the Vis Archipelago in the *Adriatic Blue Corridor* (2003) due to the biodiversity of its terrestrial and marine flora and fauna.

The WWF provided the following explanation for their decision: “The geographical and historical isolation are a reason for the exceptionally heterogeneous and preserved flora and fauna both on the shore and beneath the surface.”



Protected natural areas of the Vis Archipelago

The Blue Cave on the island Biševo
The Monk Seal Cave on the island Biševo
The island of Jabuka
The island of Brusnik
The Green Cave on the island of Ravnik
The island of Ravnik
The Stiniva Cove

The Blue Cave
A geomorphological
monument of nature



The Monk Seal Cave

A geomorphological monument of nature



The island of Jabuka

A geomorphological monument of nature



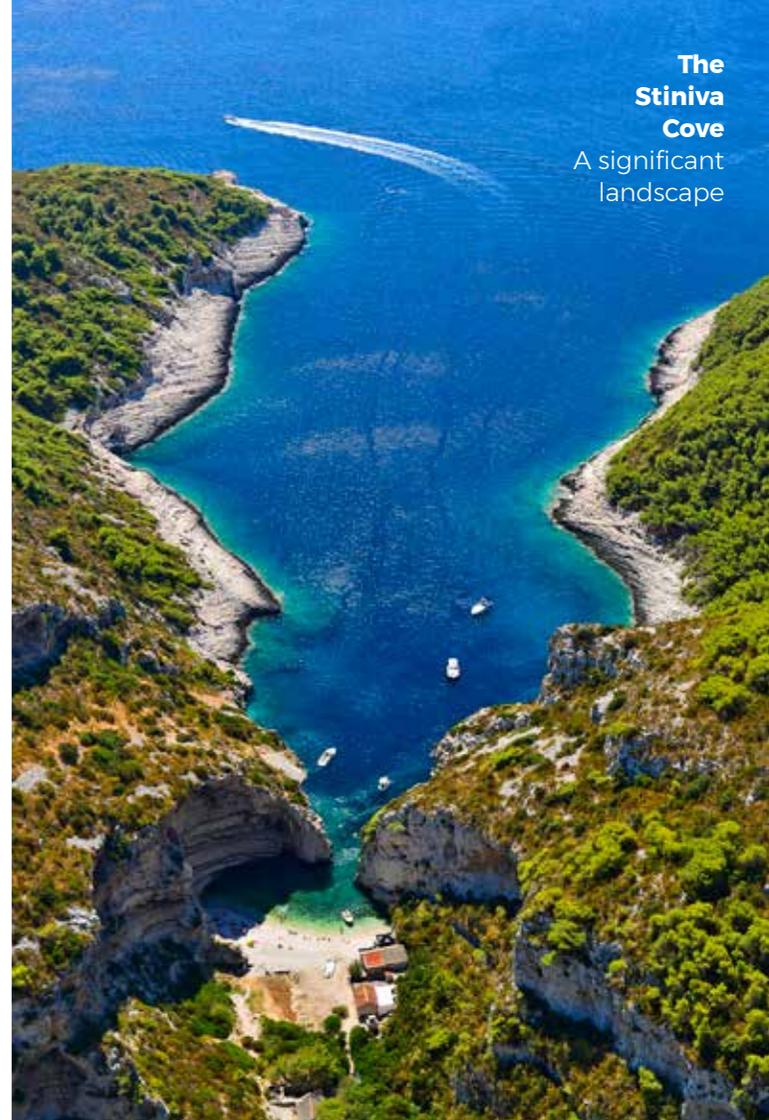
The eastern coast of the Brusnik island

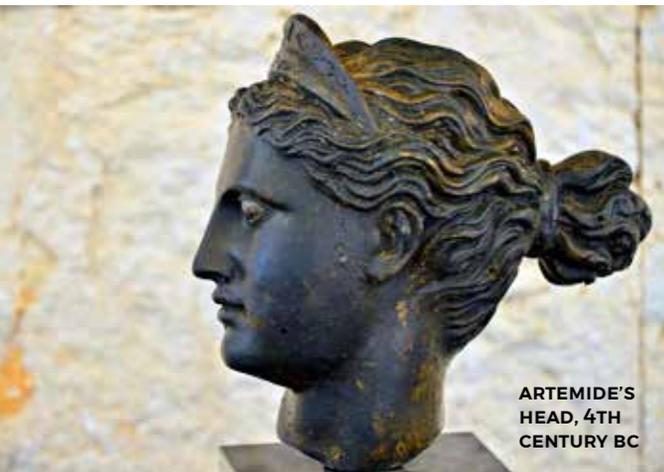


The Green Cave on the island of Ravnik
A geomorphological monument of nature



The Stiniva Cove
A significant landscape





ARTEMIDE'S
HEAD, 4TH
CENTURY BC

Cultural and historical identity of the Vis Archipelago

Issa

The precursor of the present-day town of Vis was the settlement Issa, founded by Greek colonists from Syracuse in Sicily in the early 4th century BC. Issa was the center of urban civilization along the eastern shores of the Adriatic – its settlers first started to use money as means of payment, developed literacy and art and created an orderly land registry. Their economic power was demonstrated through their expansion to the neighboring lands and the island of Korčula where they further founded their colonies. The remains of Hellenistic necropoli, residential architecture and streets, theatres and Roman baths as well as many other archeological sites, of which Artemide's bronze head is most notable, bear witness to the advanced civilizational and cultural development of this Adriatic polis.

Diomedes' Route

The island of Vis has been the crossroads of maritime routes since Antiquity. The oldest trans-Adriatic route was named after the Trojan hero Diomedes, who sailed from the Gargano Peninsula in Italy, via Pala-



AMPHORAE FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF WINE,
LATE 2ND / EARLY 1ST CENTURY BC,
ARCHEOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN THE TOWN OF VIS

gruža and the Komižan Bay, to the eastern shore of the Adriatic.

Architectural Cultural Heritage

In the exceptionally heterogeneous urbanistic and architectural designs of the towns of Vis and Komiža, always cleverly adjusted to the local topography, we can find a number of prime examples of

architectural historical heritage. The port of Vis was a favorite rural getaway for nobility from the island of Hvar, who erected a number of their Renaissance and Baroque summer residences there. The picturesque residential and economic units from the early modern period in Komiža were built from blocks carved from breccia, layered sedimentary rocks with traces of sea life, which the uplift of the salt diapir

a few billion years ago in the Komižan Bay pushed up high above sea level. The facades of many stone houses in Komiža were created from life from the sea bottom, and are thus an exceptional geo-architectural attraction.

Vis – “The Gibraltar of the Adriatic”

The golden age of the island’s economic prosperity was between 1810 and 1815, while Vis was under English rule. During Napoleon’s continental blockade of England, the English turned Vis into *porto franko* for trade toward Europe, and they called the island “the Gibraltar of the Adriatic”.

The Battle of Vis

– the largest naval battle in the Adriatic

In 1866 Italians headed for Vis with the intention to conquer it, as well as the rest of Dalmatia, which they had lost with the fall of Venice in 1797. Italy lost this crucial battle and Vis remained under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Foundations of life on the island of Vis

By the end of the 19th century wine-growing on

the island of Vis developed, based on the tradition which had been in place since Antiquity. Wine-growing and trade have become the cornerstones of the economy, in addition to the fishing industry in Komiža. The oldest fish cannery in the Mediterranean was built in Komiža in 1870.

Vis – an unconquered territory in WWII

Due to its strategic position, the island of Vis was one of the key Mediterranean air bases for the Allied forces in WWII, as well as being a free territory in occupied Europe.

Anthropogenic landscape of the island of Vis

The island’s natural landscape is interspersed with thousands of kilometers of dry-stone walls built for the vineyard terraces on the steep slopes, as well as stone fences and stone heaps erected in the period between Antiquity and the middle of the 20th century. The stone formations are a result of the hard toil by Vis peasants who cleared land in preparation for its cultivation. This anthropogenic landscape of the island of Vis is a unique monument to its agrarian architecture.





The Boat

The Falkuša is probably one of the oldest types of fishing boats in the Mediterranean, preserved in the island's tradition until the mid-20th century. A replica was constructed in 1997 so it could participate in the EXPO 98 world exhibition in Lisbon, Portugal. In 2017 Croatia's Ministry of Culture declared the "Experience of Falkuša" an intangible cultural good of Croatia.

The Language

Croatia's Ministry of Culture has also protected the idiom of the island of Vis as intangible cultural heritage in 2017. Language is, according to the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage* (Paris 2003), the most important segment of intangible heritage. Today the idiom of the island of Vis is its most endangered heritage, which needs to be preserved for future generations.

Vis – One of the last paradise oases of the Mediterranean

The WWF (Rome 2003) declared the Vis Archipelago – *One of 10 last paradise oases in the Mediterranean*.



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