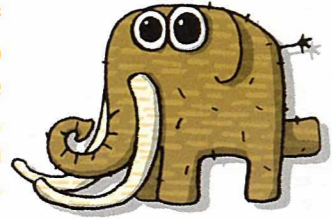
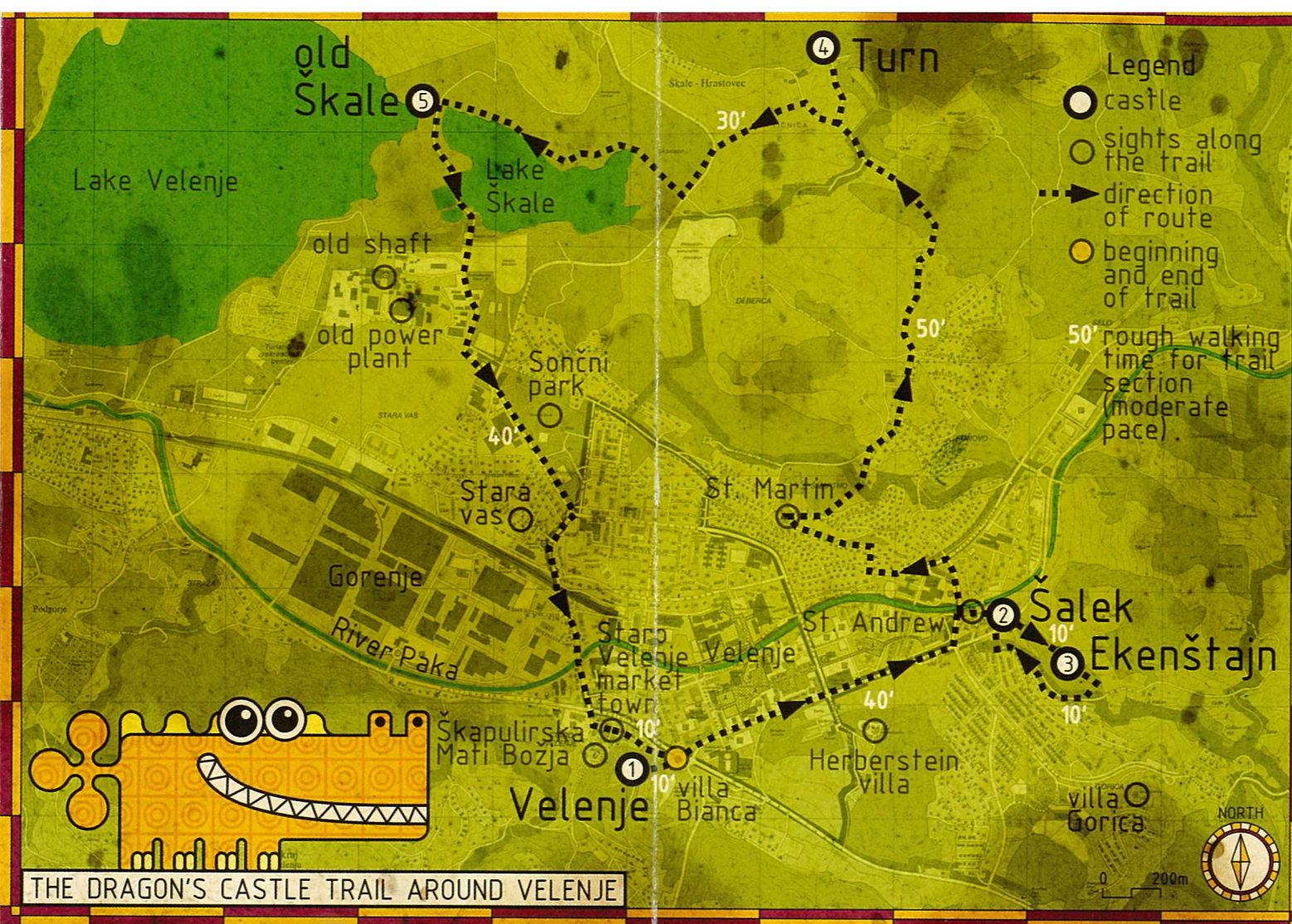


Old Škale stamp

For over 135 years, lignite coal was dug underground in the Šalek Valley. As a result, in places, the surface subsided more than seventy metres, creating lakes. These are the deepest man-made lakes in Slovenia. At the site of today's lakes, there were once fertile fields and, for more than eight centuries, the centre of the Šalek Valley at the deanery church on Škale hill. The church was called St George on the Lake. In the area of Škale, the remains of two types of mastodon, the ancestor of the elephant, were found; they lived in the Šalek Valley. Tapirs once roamed here, too.



Špela and Rok Poles, translated by Helena Byrne, print SVB d.o.o., Velenje, 1st edition, August 2011. This project is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme co-financed by the ERDF.



THE DRAGON'S CASTLE TRAIL AROUND VELENJE

We will see and learn about five sights on the circular trail. These are five castles: Velenje Castle, the castles of Šalek, Ekenštajn and Turn, and the site of sunken Škale which used to be the heart of The Šalek Valley. The trail can be covered on foot and, for the most part, by bicycle. The trail starts and finishes at Villa Bianca. There is a tourist information centre (TIC) where you can pick up a card for collecting stamps. You will find these on the information board at each sight. The stamps need to be rubbed, so bring along a pencil. If you manage to see all five sights you can collect five stamps. Bring the card with all the stamps to TIC and you'll get a gift – a dragon sticker.



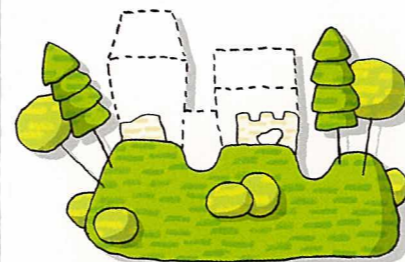
Velenje castle stamp

Velenje Castle is one of the best preserved castles in Slovenia. It stands on a hill at the south edge of the valley. Being heavily fortified, it could be conquered neither by the Turks nor rebellious peasants. Velenje Castle developed its present-day appearance over more than seven centuries by gradual extensions. Before leaving the castle, have a look at the Roman stone, some items from Šalek and the sculpture and remains of a mastodon. Long ago, the story goes, a girl lived in Velenje Castle, called Kunigunda. Some have it she was a countess, others a lady's maid. She was beautiful and kind-hearted, unmarried and had long black hair. She was skilled in the arts of magic and healing. People believed she was a witch because she could do magic. In times of drought, she could call the rain and, during floods, the sun; she could also ease the frost. Kunigunda was thrown into the well in the castle courtyard.



Šalek castle stamp

The heart of Šalek Castle emerged by the mid 12th century. At the time, it probably consisted of two towers: defensive and residential, connected by external wooden galleries. The two most exposed walls of the triangular tower were 2.5 metres thick. The walls taper in the last storey: from this walk, the defenders could control the access ways to the castle. The castle was remodelled and extended: Vischer's engraving also shows a chapel with a roof turret. A gallery led from the castle across the ditch to the outbuildings, the site of economic activities. The lady of Šalek Castle tortured her serfs without mercy. A farmer cursed her and she was swallowed by the ground. Every 100 years, on New Year's Eve, she drives in a glowing coach from Šalek to Ekenštajn.



Ekenštajn castle stamp

Ekenštajn was built by the Krka diocese in Carinthia in the mid 13th century. It developed step by step: first it was called a tower, then a fortress and finally a castle. It was an imposing castle with two residential towers and smaller buildings between them and an inner and outer defensive ditch. It was abandoned in the 16th century. In the 19th century, some of the gaps in the ruins were filled in with wooden backdrops in the spirit of Romanticism. Today, the stone remains are overgrown with woods. Under the path along the rocky crest from Šalek to Ekenštajn, some say there is a tunnel connecting the castles. In some places, apparently, the ground booms like a struck barrel. This passage, which also hides a treasure, was sought in vain many times. The entrance should be at the side of the castle facing Šafar or in the rock on the west side in a crevice which narrows with every year. Inside, the locals found stone balls, supposedly fired by the Turks at Šalek Castle.



Turn castle stamp

The castle stands on bedrock at the foot of Lubela hill. A deep gully around the castle served as a moat. The moat is spanned by a bridge on three stone semicircular arcades. The footbridge was once wooden and the ditch deeper. The stone gateway gives way to a yard with an irregular shape and partly skirted by arcades. An outer staircase leads to the first floor with a stone doorway to the former chapel. The castle probably dates back to the 13th century and was owned in the 15th century by the Counts of Celje (Lat. Cilli) who demolished it themselves in the wars with the Habsburgs but repaired it soon after. Later, the castle was taken and looted by rebellious peasants. After the Second World War it was converted into flats. In a room to the left of the main entrance, a nun was walled up alive in a dark corner, standing up. They say that her bones and pleats from her dress could be seen once and that there is still a child's gravestone in the cellar today.

