

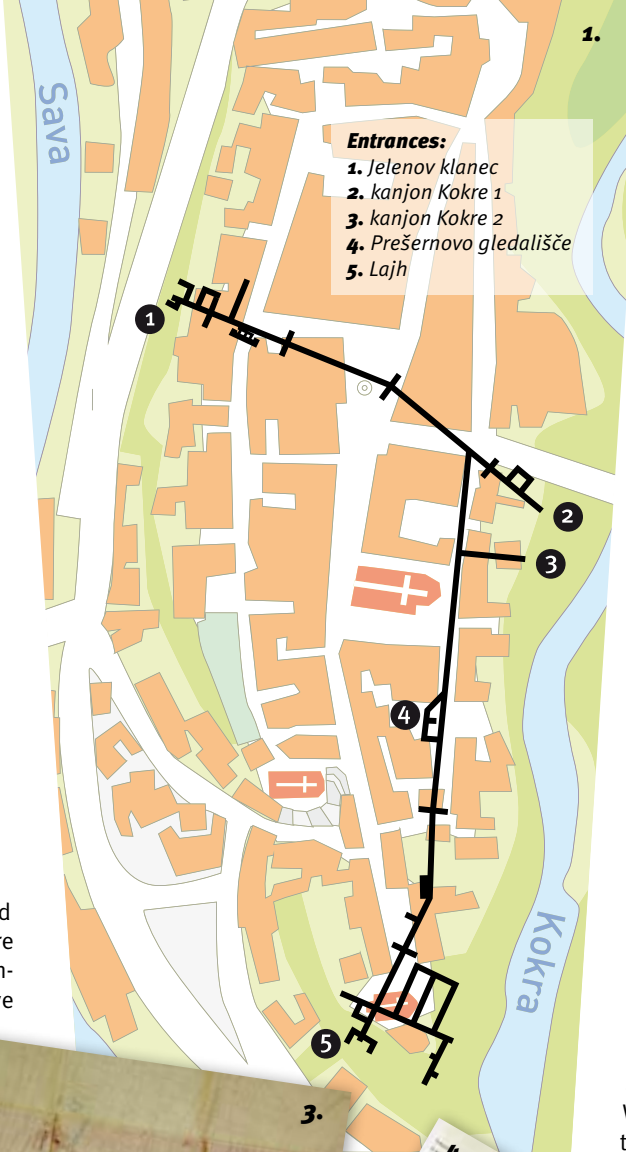


Words of Mr. **Damijan Perne**, the mayor of Kranj, on the occasion of the opening:

»The Kranj tunnels – after losing their protective function – have sunk in oblivion, although they represent a unique curiosity of Kranj. They are of an unquestionable interest to local inhabitants as well as to tourists. Let me therefore express my satisfaction with the fact that common effort has resulted in cleaning the tunnels of all dirt, which had accumulated there for years, so that the present state of the tunnels allows us to be proud and we will gladly use them for cultural purposes as well.«

Tunnels under the Kranj old town centre

During World War II, numerous underground constructions were built in Kranj. They were used as air-raid shelters or dugouts. The tunnels under Kranj and its surroundings have been carved into Pleistocene conglomerates. Municipality of Kranj started



Entrances:

1. Jelenov klanec
2. kanjon Kokre 1
3. kanjon Kokre 2
4. Prešernovo gledališče
5. Lajh

building tunnels already on the eve of World War II, the works being started anew during the occupation in 1944, when the danger of allied forces bombing from Italy increased.



Unfinished section of tunnels.

The works on tunnels were carried out by two construction companies from Kranj – Josip Slavec and Josip Dedek. Approximately 130 hired workers finished the major part of construction works by the end of 1944, but there was not enough material and time to finish the protective concrete coating and other installations. The tunnel was nevertheless frequently used by citizens during frequent air-raid warnings because of the allied ferry flights.

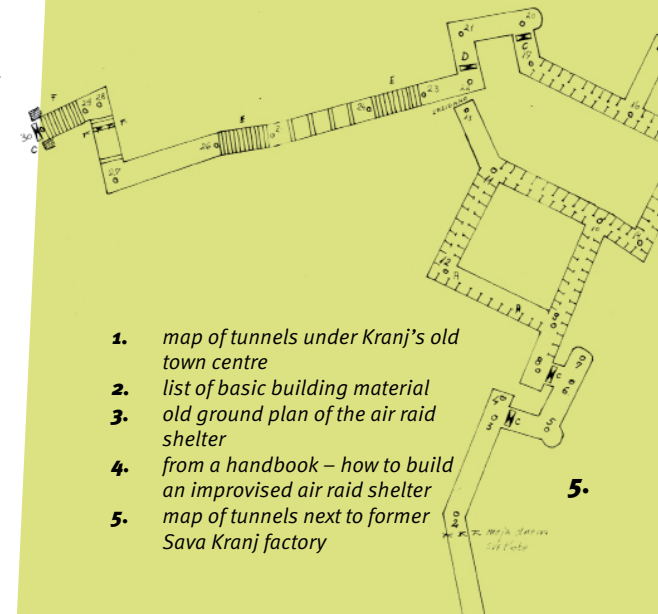
The old city tunnel, nearly 1300 m long, is an important monument of construction building and technical culture of Kranj during World War II. The tunnel has four entrances – from the slope Jelenov klanec, from the Kokra canyon, from Lajh, and along the staircase from the back of the Prešeren's Theatre. All tunnels are of approximately equal dimensions, 2 metres wide, only the section under Pungert is slightly branched out. They are fortified by a layer of concrete,

the unfinished section showing the original conglomerate dugout. Apart from one smaller chamber there are no larger rooms.

Apart from the above mentioned old city tunnels, there are numerous other tunnels that were dug in the same period – tunnels along Savska Road, tunnel next to the railway station, tunnel next to the old factory Sava Kranj in the Kokra River Canyon, and tunnel next to the natural cave Tular at the slope Gaštejski klanec. In 1960 the abandoned shelter was turned into a cave laboratory and inhabited with the European blind cave salamander (*Proteus anguinus*). It is the only cave laboratory in Slovenia and – apart from the cave laboratory in Moulis in France – the only place to breed this endangered cave amphibian in captivity.



Proteus (Proteus anguinus) in laboratory pools.



1. map of tunnels under Kranj's old town centre
2. list of basic building material
3. old ground plan of the air raid shelter
4. from a handbook – how to build an improvised air raid shelter
5. map of tunnels next to former Sava Kranj factory

Fire-fighting reservoir on Main Square

During World War II Germans built several open fire-fighting reservoirs in Kranj, which have later mostly been filled up. On the location of the city fountain (restored in 1995) on Main Square a large underground reservoir was built in 1943 by the Josip Dedek construction company. It was first filled up with water on 16th January, 1944.



Cave diver exploring the reservoir.

The reservoir, which is completely underground, has two narrow open shafts next to the fountain. It is 3,5 metres deep, 4 metres wide and 30 metres long. It contains 310 cubic metres of clean water and could therefore still serve its purposes.

Cave animals and karst phenomena

The abandoned tunnels, where darkness, moisture and constant temperature create an environment similar to a natural cave, have been inhabited by species that are not typical cave animals, but enjoy the conditions there. The most frequent, especially in the entrance sections, are the cave cricket (*Troglophilus cavicola*) and the cave spider (*Meta menardi*).



Cave spider (Meta menardi).

Rare but very interesting inhabitants are the bats. The most common is the lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*), while the greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*) is much rarer. While resting they both hang with their heads down and their wings enfolding the body.

On spots where water drips, stalactites are formed, which are the same as in natural caves. They are made of calcite crystals, which is precipitated from mineralised water that slowly trickles through the 15 metre thick conglomerate ceiling above the tunnels. Straw stalactites are narrow hollow tubes, which are very fragile and should therefore not be touched. The thicker solid stalagmites slowly rise from the floor. In winter the dripping rainwater near the entrances occasionally freezes and forms seasonal ice stalagmites.



Straw stalactites.

The Kranj tunnels today

In the 1980s and 1990s the abandoned tunnels under the slope Jelenov klanec and Pungert were used as cultivation ground for champignons – mushrooms that need darkness and moisture to grow. Unfortunately all the dirtiness was left in the tunnels after the growing of mushrooms had been given up. During the Slovenian Independence War in 1991 the tunnels again acquired significance for a short period of time and the Kranj Civil Protection Units arranged the entrances and renovated electric lighting.

In 2003 the Speleological Society of Kranj started removing the rubbish. In 2005 they have cleaned most of it in the tunnels under the slope Jelenov klanec, and in 2007 also at the entrances to the Kokra River canyon. The work was resumed by the Kranj Civil Protection Units for Rescuing within the sphere of activities for the yearly action “Let’s Clean Kranj”, organized by the Scout Association of Kranj. With their work they have paved the way to revival of the abandoned underground constructions.

The Municipality of Kranj, together with the Tourist Board Kranj, the Institute for Protection of Cultural Heritage, and the Nature Protection Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, has decided to tidy and put in order the tunnels and the entrance platforms.

Text: Gregor Aljančič, *the Cave Exploration Society Carnium*; Miloš Ekar, *the Institute for Protection of Cultural Heritage, OE Kranj*; Natalija Polenec, *the Tourist Board Kranj*; Davorin Preisinger, *the Speleological Society of Kranj*

Photography: Gregor Aljančič, Davorin Preisinger, Bojan Okorn

Design: Aljaž Primožič – iLab d.o.o.

Translation: Jana Ambrožič, Hugh Penney

Print: CC – Consulting Kranj

Year of production: 2009

Number of copies: 1500



Tunnels under the Kranj old town centre

Information and visiting:
Tourist Board Kranj, Glavni trg 2, 4000 Kranj, Slovenia
Tel.: 00386 4 2380 450, info@tourism-kranj.si

www.tourism-kranj.si

