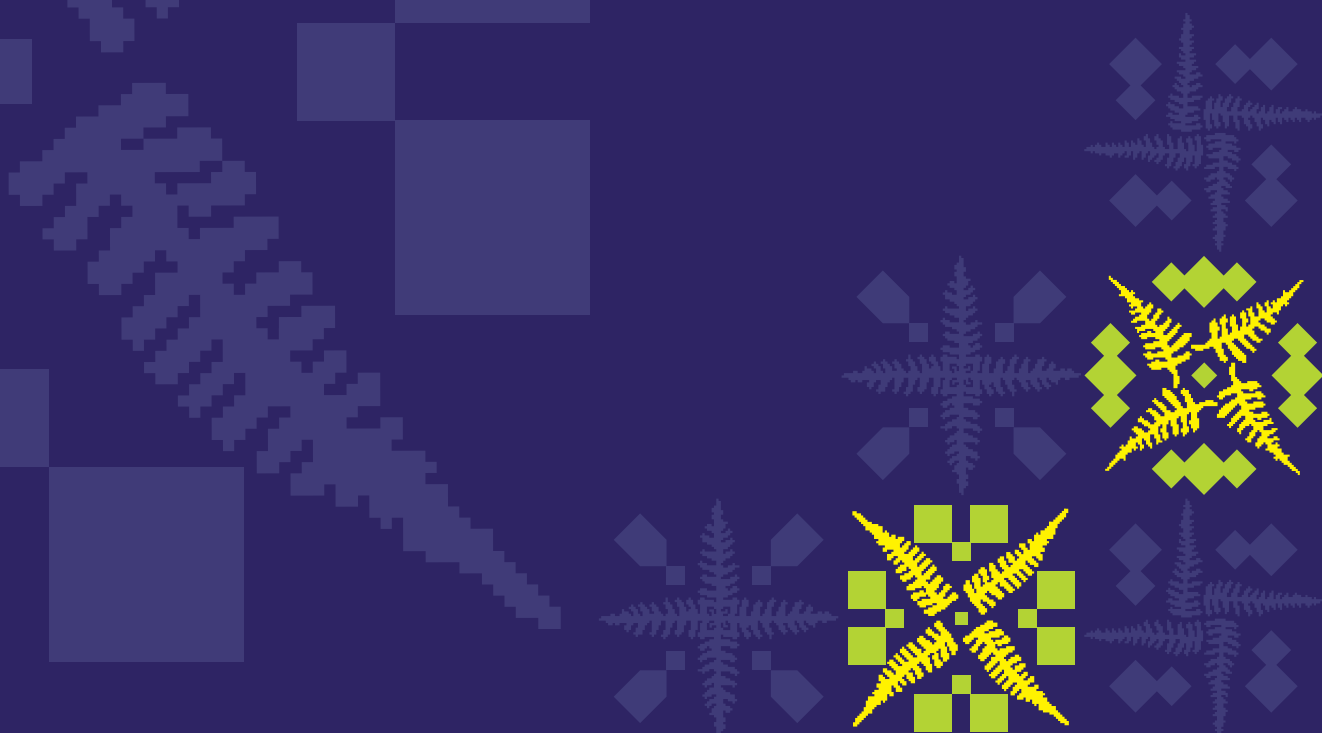


ZGODBE STORIES OF *STELJNIKI* STELJNIKOV

Preplet THE INTERWEAVING
OF COMMON BRACKEN,
ANIMALS AND HUMANS
orlove praproti,
živali in ljudi



Radenski steljnič Police, osemdeseta leta 20. stoletja. Foto: Peter Panjan
Steljnič Police near Radenci, 1980s. Photo: Peter Panjan



KAZALO CONTENTS

Predgovor Foreword	6
Uvod Introduction	9
Steljniki skozi čas <i>Steljniki</i> through time	10
Vloga steljnikov in živine v kmečkem gospodarstvu The role of <i>steljniki</i> and livestock in agricultural households	16
Paša Grazing	18
Steljarija Bracken harvest	22
Biodiverziteta v steljnikih Biodiversity in <i>steljniki</i>	24
Steljniki v štirih letnih časih <i>Steljniki</i> in four seasons	28
Mlade etnologinje Young ethnologists	44

PREDGOVOR

Gostujoča razstava *Zgodbe steljnikov: Preplet orlove praproti, živali in ljudi* je bila med 21. februarjem in 19. oktobrom 2025 na ogled v Slovenskem etnografskem muzeju kot del spremljevalnega programa stalne razstave SEM *Človek in čas: Od ponedeljka do večnosti*. Del razstave je bil med 9. aprilom in 12. majem 2026 na ogled v Kulturnem centru Semič.

Razstava je nastala v okviru podoktorske štipendije Marie Skłodowska-Curie, s katero je dr. Barbara Turk Niskač preučevala spomine na vključevanje otrok v delo v kmečkem gospodarstvu v Beli krajini ter ugotavljala, kako so se med delom oblikovali odnosi med ljudmi, med ljudmi in naravo, živalmi in krajino.

V raziskavi je sodelovalo 34 sogovornikov, rojenih med letoma 1940 in 2006, ki so delili svoje izkušnje in spomine ob srečanjih v manjših skupinah, v polstrukturiranih intervjujih, ob pregledovanju fotografij iz družinskih albumov in muzejskih zbirk ter ob hoji po kmečkih krajinah, vezanih na spomine iz otroštva. Prav sprehodi s sogovorniki, ki so bili zvočno, foto in video dokumentirani, predstavljajo pomemben del raziskave. Zgodbe s sprehodov, ki prikazujejo preplet spominov in krajine, so bile predstavljene na spletni strani projekta: <https://blogs.tuni.fi/patchwork/>. Avtorica razstave je izvedla tudi štiri strokovne intervjue z vidika kmetijstva, gozdarstva in naravovarstva. V okviru ljubiteljske znanosti so spomine svojih sorodnikov prispevale tudi tri učenke Osnovne šole Vinica.

Razstava se je osredotočila na steljnike, ki so tesno povezani z živinorejo in so v sestavi brez in orlove praproti značilnost Bele krajine. Gre za površine, ki so se predvsem tam, kjer je primanjkovalo drugih pašnih površin, spomladi uporabljale za pašo, jeseni pa se je kosila orlova praprot za nastilj živini. Namen razstave je bil prikazati belokranjske steljnike kot primer večvrstne krajine, kjer so ljudje le eden izmed njenih soustvarjalcev. Gre bolj za rezultat prepleta dejavnosti človeka, pašnih živali, orlove praproti in breze, ki iščeta primerne habitate za svoj obstoj, ter same topografije in sestave prsti. Skozi primer steljnikov se razstava navezuje tudi

FOREWORD

The temporary exhibition *Stories of steljniki: The interweaving of common bracken, animals and humans* was on display at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum as part of the programme accompanying SEM's permanent exhibition *Man and Time: From Monday to Eternity* between 21 February and 19 October 2025. A part of the exhibition was on show at the Cultural Centre Semič between 9 April and 12 May 2026.

The exhibition was produced in the framework of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions postdoctoral fellowship programme, during which Dr. Barbara Turk Niskač collected and studied memories of children's participation in domestic agricultural economy in Bela krajina. Through them, she investigated how this work shaped the relations among humans, nature, animals and the landscape.

Thirty-four research participants born between 1940 and 2006 shared their memories and experiences at workshops, semi-structured interviews, while going through family albums and photos from museum archives, or walking through landscapes associated with their childhood memories. Documented with photographs, audio and sometimes video recordings, these walks represent an important segment of the study. Intertwining memories and landscapes, some stories shared during these walks were published on the project blog: <https://blogs.tuni.fi/patchwork/>.

The author also conducted four semi-structured interviews with regional agriculture, forestry and nature conservation experts, and delved into the museum's photo archives to further contextualize participants' recollections. As part of the Citizen Science, three students of the Vinica primary school shared their relatives' memories.

The museum exhibition focused on *steljniki*, patches of land covered with common bracken and sparse birch trees, sometimes also spruce trees and juniper, which are used

na spremembe skozi čas in težnje, ki so značilne za celotno Slovenijo, ko gre za spremembe v strukturi kmetijstva ter posledično opuščanje in zaraščanje mozaične ekstenzivne kmetijske krajine. Ta je danes vse bolj prepoznana ne le zaradi pomena prehranske suverenosti, temveč tudi zaradi biotske pestrosti.

Številni spomini, zbrani med raziskavo, so bili posredovani v obliki zaključenih zgodbic in anekdot. Med sprehodi s sogovorniki se je izkazalo, da so se številne površine, kjer so v njihovem otroštvu še pasli, kosili ter celo gojili poljščine in zelenjavo, do danes povsem zarasle ali se drugače spremenile, denimo zaradi komasacije. Porodila se je ideja, da bi s pomočjo animacij oživili prigode iz otroštva ter spreminjajočo se krajino, na katero se navezujejo spomini. V režiji ilustratorke in animatorke Zarje Menart je tako v produkciji studia Finta Film, v koprodukciji z RTV Slovenija in s podporo Slovenskega filmskega centra, nastalo šest kratkih animiranih del. Ta na podlagi naracije sogovornikov iz raziskave prikazujejo prigode otrok, vezane na kal, njivo, pašnik, košenico, gmajno in steljnik.

for animal husbandry and are characteristic of the Bela krajina region.

In the past, these patches of land were used for spring grazing (especially where pastures were scarce), and in autumn bracken was harvested to be used as bedding for stable animals. The aim of the exhibition was to present *steljniki* as a multi-species landscape shaped not only by human activity, but also by grazing animals, common bracken and birches seeking suitable habitats, as well as topography and soil composition. At the same time, *steljniki* also served as an example of the changes and trends that have evolved over time and are now characteristic for entire Slovenia as regards the shifts in the structure of agriculture and the consequent abandonment and overgrowth of the extensively managed mosaic agricultural landscape. Today, this landscape is increasingly recognized not only for its importance for food sovereignty, but also for its biodiversity.

Many memories gathered during the research were shared as complete short stories and anecdotes. During walks with the interlocutors, however, it became evident that many areas where they used to take animals for pasture, where they mowed, and even cultivated crops and vegetables in their childhood and youth have become completely overgrown or otherwise changed, for example due to land consolidation. To bring personal memories and the changing landscape of the past to life, illustrator and animation director Zarja Menart, in a production by Finta Film studio, co-production by RTV Slovenia and with the support of the Slovenian Film Centre, turned six narrated memories related to a pond, a pasture, a meadow, a field, *gmajna* (land belonging to village commons) and *steljnik* into short animations.



UVOD

Steljarjenje je bilo nekoč, tako kot drugod po srednji Evropi, razširjeno tudi po vsej Sloveniji. Jeseni so kmetje v gozdovih grabili suho listje, nabirali mah, smrekove veje, kosili in želi praprot in drugo podrast za nastilj v hlevih. Čeprav izraz stelja označuje ves gozdni material za nastilj, se v Beli krajini izrecno uporablja za orlovo praprot. Steljniki, prepoznavni po redkih brezah in prevladujoči orlovi praproti, so značilni za Belo krajino, ki naj bi po eni izmed razlag po belih brezah dobila ime. Belokranjski steljniki so rezultat prepleta dejavnosti človeka, pašnih živali, rastlin, ki iščejo primerne habitate za svoj obstoj, ter zemlje, ki je v Beli krajini zaradi svoje sestave večinoma sprana ter dodatno zakisana zaradi steljarjenja. Orlova praprot je bila v Beli krajini domnevno prisotna že pred neolitikom, ob krčenju gozdov prvih poljedelcev pa se je še bolj razširila. V Evropi so jo za nastilj in gnojenje uporabljali že v železni dobi. Potreba po nastilju se je povečala v 18. stoletju s spodbujanjem hlevske živinoreje. Z intenzivnim steljarjenjem je zemlja postajala še bolj kislá. Orlova praprot in breza pa sta pionirski vrsti, ki uspevata prav na takšnih tleh.

INTRODUCTION

Collecting bedding materials was once widespread throughout Central Europe, including Slovenia. In autumn, farmers would gather dry leaves in the forests, collect moss and spruce branches, and cut bracken and other undergrowth to use as bedding in stables. Although the term *stelja* refers to all forest materials used for bedding, in the Bela krajina region, it specifically refers to bracken. *Steljniki*, patches of land characterized by sparsely growing birches and dominated by bracken undergrowth, are a distinctive feature of Bela krajina, which, according to one explanation, got its name from the white birch trees. The *steljniki* of Bela krajina result from the interplay between human activities, grazing animals, plants seeking suitable habitats, and the soil composition. Here, the soil is mostly leached due to its composition and further acidified by human activity. Bracken was presumably present in Bela krajina even earlier, but during the Neolithic period, it spread further as early farmers cleared forests. In Europe, the use of bracken for bedding and fertilizing arable land dates back to the Iron Age. From the late 18th century, with stable livestock farming encouraged, the demand for bedding materials increased. With intensified bedding collection, the land became even more acidic. Bracken and birch, both pioneer species, thrive in such conditions.

Steljniki skozi čas

STELJNIKI THROUGH TIME

Steljniki so se oblikovali na površinah, ki so bile prvotno namenjene paši. V Dolenjskih novicah iz leta 1912 lahko preberemo, da so se steljniki v tem času ob pomanjkanju paše in stelje plačevali enako ali pa še dražje kot najboljše njive. Vendar so bili v 20. stoletju vse bolj razumljeni kot degradirana območja. V šestdesetih letih je tedanja država v želji po večji produktivnosti podprla spremembo steljnikov v iglaste gozdove s pogozdovanjem ter v kmetijske površine z apnenjem. Od sedemdesetih let dalje pa so se zaradi opuščanja živinoreje ter spremenjenih načinov reje živali začeli intenzivneje opuščati ter posledično zaraščati. Če so v šestdesetih letih pokrivali 10.000 ha površine Bele krajine, je dandanes ohranjenih še približno 100 ha steljnikov. Nekateri izmed danes najbolj znanih steljnikov so bili leta 2010 očiščeni v okviru projekta *Revitalizacija belokranjskih steljnikov* pod okriljem Občine Metlika. Dandanes kmetje, ki steljnike še kosijo in orlovo praprot uporabljajo za nastilj, steljo v glavnem pokosijo s kosilnico in jo zbalirajo.

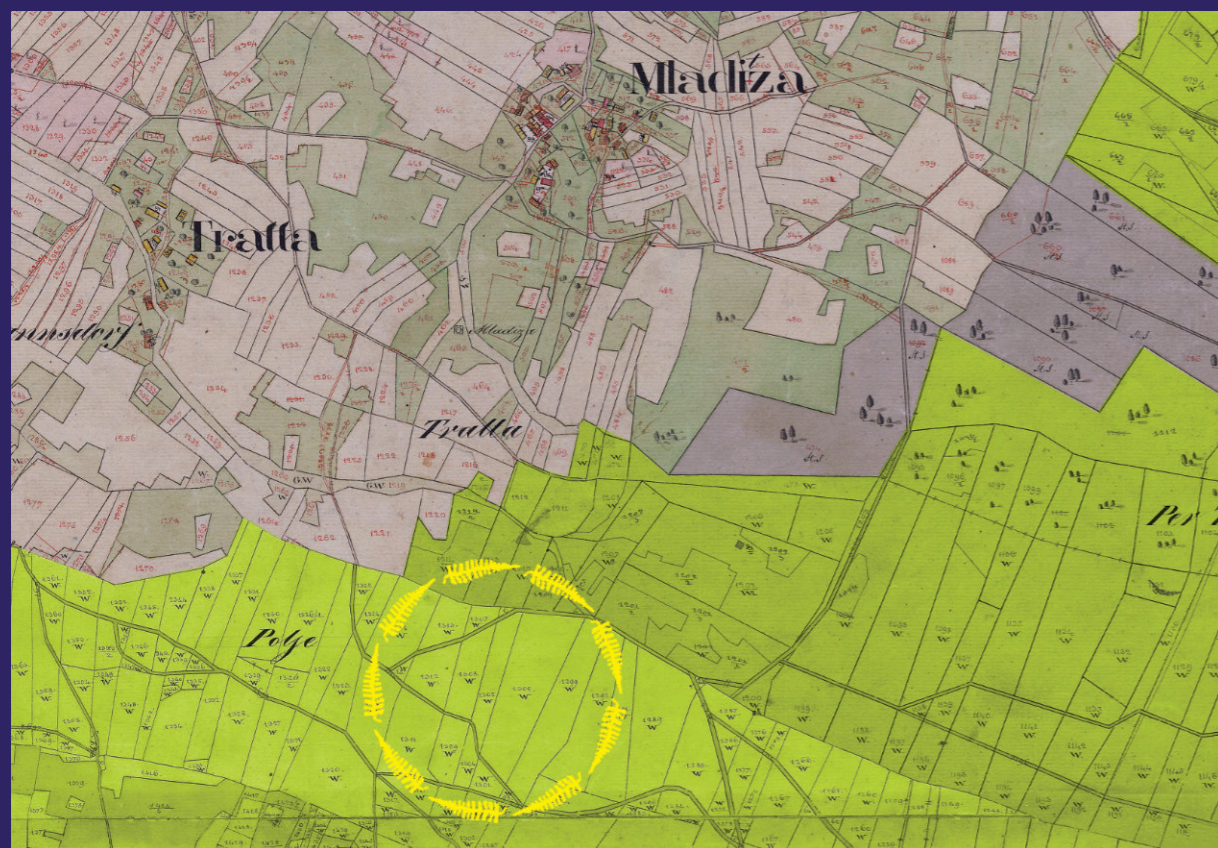
Steljniki typically emerged on patches of land that were originally used for grazing. In the *Dolenjske novice* from 1912, it is noted that at the time, *steljniki* were valued as highly—or even more highly—than the best arable land due to a lack of grazing areas and bedding materials. However, in the 20th century, they increasingly came to be seen as degraded areas. During the 1960s, the government of the time, aiming for greater productivity, supported converting *steljniki* into coniferous forests through afforestation or agricultural land through liming. From the 1970s onward, as livestock farming declined and agricultural practices changed, *steljniki* began to be abandoned more rapidly and subsequently became overgrown. While *steljniki* covered 10,000 hectares of Bela krajina in the 1960s, only about 100 hectares remain today. Some of the most well-known *steljniki* were restored in 2010 as part of the revitalization project run by the Municipality of Metlika. Today, farmers who still mow *steljniki* and use bracken for bedding mostly mow the bracken with a mower and bale it.

Od sedemdesetih let dalje pa so se zaradi opuščanja živinoreje ter spremenjenih načinov reje živali začeli intenzivneje opuščati ter posledično zaraščati.

From the 1970s onward, as livestock farming declined and agricultural practices changed, *steljniki* began to be abandoned more rapidly and subsequently became overgrown.

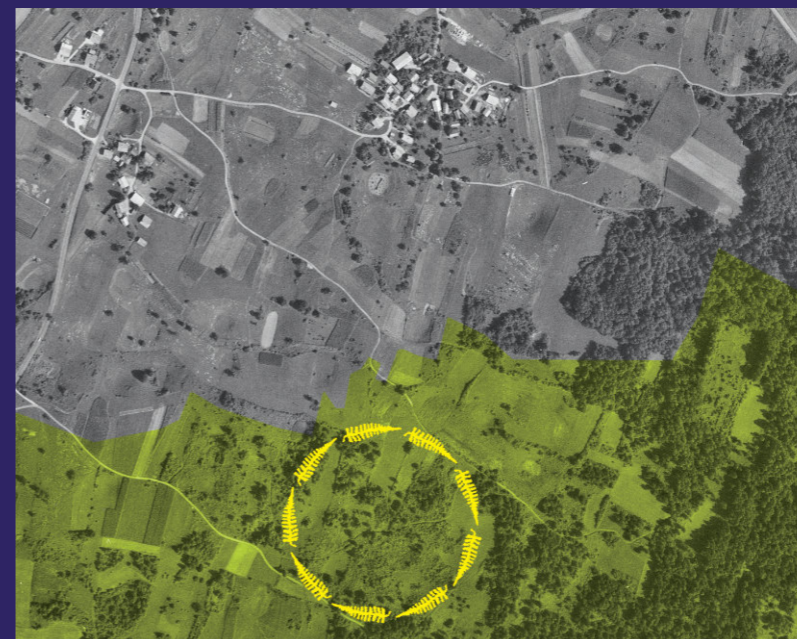


Lokalna skupnost v Drašičih organizira košnjo Vinomerskih steljnikov, ki si jo lahko ogledate na spodnji povezavi. The local community in Drašiči organizes the harvesting of bracken, which was documented in a short film available on the link. <https://youtu.be/2daDDqtEfOE>



▲ Franciscejski kataster iz leta 1824 prikazuje pašnike (območje, obarvano s svetlo zeleno). Gozda je bilo v Mladici pri Semiču zelo malo (sivo območje). Njive so svetlo rjave barve. Vir: Čitalnica Arhiva RS

The Franciscan cadastre from 1824 shows the areas used for grazing (shaded in light green). There was very little forest in Mladica near Semič (shaded in gray). Cultivated fields are light brown. Source: Reading Room of the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia



◀ Območje, obarvano s svetlo zeleno prikazuje zaraščajoče travnike in steljnike leta 1995. Vir: Geodetska uprava Republike Slovenije

The light green area shows overgrowing meadows and stajniki in 1995. Source: Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia



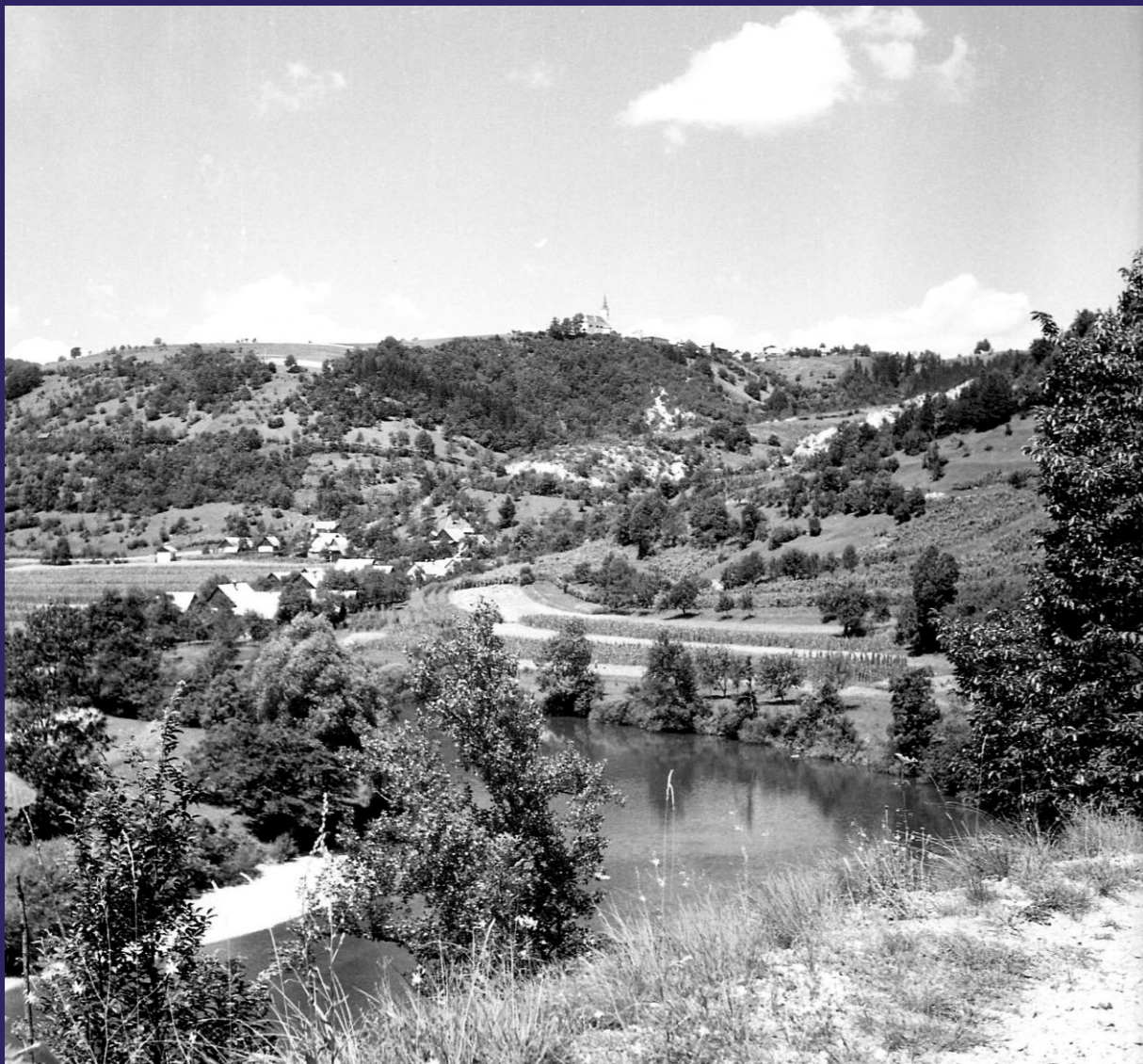
◀ Območje, obarvano s svetlo zeleno prikazuje zaraščajoče travnike in steljnike leta 2006. Vir: Geodetska uprava Republike Slovenije

The light green area shows overgrowing meadows and stajniki in 2006. Source: Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia



◀ V okviru projekta pod okriljem Občine Metlika *Revitalizacija belokranjskih steljnikov* je bil leta 2010 revitaliziran tudi steljnik pri Malikovcu (obkroženo z rumeno). Zračni posnetek prikazuje stanje leta 2024. Vir: Geode

As part of the project under the auspices of the Municipality of Metlika, *Revitalization of stajniki of Bela krajina*, the stajnik near Malikovec was revitalized in 2010 (circled in yellow). The aerial footage shows the situation in 2024. Source: Surveying and Mapping Authority of the Republic of Slovenia



▲ Pogled na Stari trg ob Kolpi, 1953. Pobočje med Starim trgom in Sodevci so nekoč pokrivali vaška gmajna, košenice in vinogradi. Foto: Jernej Šuštaršič. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika

A view of Stari Trg ob Kolpi, 1953. The slopes between Stari trg and Sodevci were once covered by communal pastures, meadows, and vineyards. Photo: Jernej Šuštaršič, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



◀ Pogled na Stari trg danes. Foto: Peter Panjan

A view of Stari trg nowadays. Photo: Peter Panjan



▲ Med Preloko in Adlešiči, na Marindolskih steljnikih, 1961. Foto: Jože Dular. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika
Between Preloka and Adlešiči, Marindol steljniki, 1961. Photo: Jože Dular, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



◀ Marindolski steljniki 2023. Foto: Bar

Marindol steljniki 2023. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač

Vloga steljnikov in živine v kmečkem gospodarstvu

Steljniki so neločljivo povezani z živinorejo. V drugi polovici 20. stoletja so kmečke in polkmečke družine imele nekaj glav živine, nekateri so imeli tudi ovce. Pred mehanizacijo kmetijstva, ki se je odvijala med šestdesetimi in osemdesetimi leti, sta bila pri hiši za delo tudi dva vola ali konj. Kmetije so bile pretežno samooskrbne, vendar so združevale tudi tržno usmerjene dejavnosti. V času nekdanje Jugoslavije so zadruga denimo med drugim odkupovale tudi mleko in teličke, kar je za kmečka gospodinjstva pomenilo pomemben vir dohodka. Otroci so pogosto nabirali tudi gobe in lubje krhlike, ki so ju prav tako odkupovale zadruga. Vloga živine je bila v kmečkem gospodarstvu večplastna. Poleg uporabne in menjalne vrednosti, na kar nakazuje tudi izraz *blago* za govejo živino, ki označuje tudi premoženje ali lastnino, so bile živali tudi človekovi družabniki in pogosto »tako rekoč družinski člani«.

THE ROLE OF STELJNIKI AND LIVESTOCK IN AGRICULTURAL HOUSEHOLDS

Steljniki are closely linked with animal husbandry. In the second half of the 20th century, farming and semi-farming families typically kept a few head of cattle, and some also raised sheep. Before the mechanization of agriculture, which took place between the 1960s and 1980s, the households also had two oxen or a horse for work. Farms were primarily self-sufficient but also engaged in market-oriented activities. During the former Yugoslavia, cooperatives, for example, bought milk and calves, which provided a significant source of income. Children often collected mushrooms and buckthorn bark, which were also bought by cooperatives. Livestock played a multifaceted role. Beyond their use and exchange value—illustrated by the term for cattle, *blago*, which also means wealth or property— animals were also companions to humans and often "so to speak, family members."

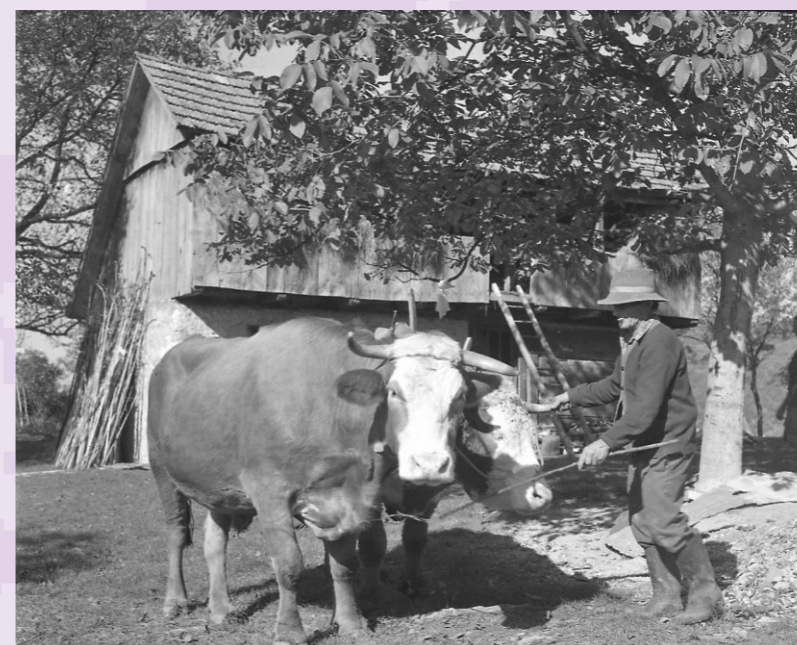


Na paši, 1937. Osebni arhiv Ivanke Jakovac
Tending to grazing animals, 1937. Personal archive of Ivanka Jakovac.



▲ Izkop krompirja, Štrekljevec, 1981.
Foto: Andrej Dular. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika

Potato harvesting, Štrekljevec, 1981.
Photo: Andrej Dular, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



◀ Jože Veselič z voli, Adlešiči, 1973.
Foto: Jože Dular. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika

Jože Veselič with his oxen, Adlešiči, 1973.
Photo: Jože Dular, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



Prisluhnite, kako so kmečke in polkmečke družine združevale samooskrbo s tržnimi dejavnostmi. Listen to how peasant and semi-peasant families combined subsistence and market-oriented activities.

Vloga živine in ekonomija Livestock and the economy
<https://youtu.be/RzeKHLohnxE>



Prisluhnite kaj lahko iz pričevanj izvemo o odnosu do živali? What can we learn from the testimonies about people's relationships with animals?
O odnosu do živali About the relationship with animals
https://youtu.be/ocbAjfmvQ_Q

Do konca 19. stoletja, ponekod pa vse do sredine 20. stoletja, so bile pašne površine last vaške skupnosti, za pašo goveje živine pa je bil zadolžen črednik. Po ukinitvi vaških skupnosti so skrb za sezonsko pašo od jurjevega (24. april) oziroma od križevega (40. dan po veliki noči) do novembra navadno prevzeli otroci. Paša je bila namreč razumljena kot manj zahtevno delo in je tako za nekaj ur dnevno postala običajna izkušnja generacij, rojenih do zgodnjih sedemdesetih let. Med pašo so morali otroci poskrbeti, da so se živali najedle, hkrati pa paziti, da živina ni zašla na obdelovalne površine in povzročila škodo, ker zemljišča niso bila ograjena. Po prvem novembru, ko se jim ni bilo več treba ozirati na meje, je tudi čas na paši postal bolj brezskrben.

GRAZING

Until the end of the 19th century, and in some places up until the mid-20th century, grazing lands belonged to village commons, and a herdsman was responsible for the cattle grazing. After the dissolution of the village communities, the responsibility for seasonal grazing, from *Jurjevo* (April 24) or *Križevo* (40 days after Easter) to November, was usually taken over by children. Grazing was considered less demanding work, so for a few hours a day, it became a common experience for generations born until early 1970s. While grazing, the children had to ensure the animals were well-fed while also keeping watch to prevent the cows from wandering onto cultivated land and causing damage, as the fields were not fenced. After the first of November, when they no longer had to watch the land borders, the time spent on the pasture became more carefree.



◀ Pastirčka Jože Stariha in Ivan Tajčman, Drašiči, 1965. Foto: Marija Makarovič. Hrani: Oddelek za dokumentacijo SEM
Shepherd boys Jože Stariha and Ivan Tajčman, Drašiči, 1965. Photo: Marija Makarovič, SEM Documentation Department



◀ Ovce pred štaljo v Ziljah, 1960. Foto: Jože Dular. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika
The sheep in front of the stable in Zilje, 1960. Photo: Jože Dular, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



◀ Vaški pastir trobi na volovski pastirski rog, Stari trg ob Kolpi, 1953. Foto: Boris Orel. Hrani: Oddelek za dokumentacijo SEM
The village herder blows on an ox-herder's horn, Stari trg ob Kolpi, 1953. Photo: Boris Orel, SEM Documentation Department



Spomini na pašo so pogosto vezani na različne otroške prigode. Prislunite zgodbam s paše. Memories of grazing are often linked to various childhood adventures. Listen to the stories from the pastures.



Zgodbe s paše I Stories from the pastures I
<https://vimeo.com/1185063894?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>
Zgodbe s paše II Stories from the pastures II
<https://vimeo.com/1185065936?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

Med pašo so morali otroci poskrbeti, da so se živali najedle, hkrati pa paziti, da živina ni zašla na obdelovalne površine in povzročila škodo, ker zemljišča niso bila ograjena.

While grazing, the children had to ensure the animals were well-fed while also keeping watch to prevent the cows from wandering onto cultivated land and causing damage, as the fields were not fenced.

Napajanje krav v kalu, Cerkvišče, 1953. Foto: Jernej Šušteršič. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika
Cows drinking water in a pond, Cerkvišče, 1953. Photo: Jernej Šušteršič, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



Steljarija

BRACKEN HARVEST

Steljniki so se kosili, ko je orlova praprot oziroma stelja porjavela. Ponekod je bilo to že »med mašami«, med 15. avgustom in 8. septembrom, drugod pa okoli vseh svetih. Košnja stelje se je odvijala v krogu družine, ponekod tudi na podlagi medsebojne pomoči ali s pomočjo najetih delavcev. Moški so steljo kosili s kosami, ženske in otroci pa želi s srpi na delih, kjer košnja s koso ni bila mogoča. Nato so steljo naložili v stog – več kot dva metra visoko kopico stelje z brezo ali stožino v sredini –, kjer je varna pred dežjem počakala, da so jo z vozom ali s sanmi čez zimo po potrebi prepeljali do hleva. Ponekod so steljo spravili tudi na kmetiji, v t.i. *steljarnici*. Steljarija je bilo težaško delo, lepi spomini na delo v steljnikih pa so vezani predvsem na druženje in prehrano.

Steljniki were cut when the bracken turned brown. In some places, this happened already “during the masses,” between August 15 and September 8, while in other areas it occurred around All Saints’ Day. Bracken harvesting took place within the family circle, sometimes with mutual help or with the assistance of day labourers. The men cut the bracken with scythes, while women and children used sickles. Afterward, the bracken was stacked into a pile more than two meters high with a birch or pole in the centre. In this way, it was protected from rain, waiting to be transported to the barn with a cart or sleds during the winter as needed. In some places, the bracken was also stored on the farm in a bracken shed. Bracken harvest was hard work, but the fond memories of working in *steljniki* are mainly associated with socializing and meals.



▲ Košnja steljnika v okolici Črešnjevca, šestdeseta leta 20. stoletja. Osebni arhiv družin Plut in Pavlišič. Vir: Blaž Kočevar, FB-stran *Semič v starih cajtih*

Bracken harvest in *steljnik* near Črešnjevca, 1960s. Personal archive of family Plut and Pavlišič. Source: Blaž Kočevar, FB page *Semič v starih cajtih*

◀ Postavljanje stoga, Preloka, 1966. Foto: Jože Dular. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika
Setting up a pile of bracken, Preloka, 1966. Photo: Jože Dular, Bela krajina Museum Metlika Archive



◀ Košnja radenskega steljnika z mehanizacijo. November 2023. Foto: Tine Lindič

The mowing of Radenci *steljnik* with machinery. November 2023. Photo: Tine Lindič



Ob poslušanju zvočnih posnetkov lahko izveste, katere jedi so spremljale košnjo stelje ter kako se je skozi čas spreminjalo delo v steljnikih. By listening to the audio recordings, you can learn which dishes accompanied the bracken harvest and how the work in *steljniki* has changed over time.



Spomini na delo v steljnikih Memories of work in *steljniki* <https://vimeo.com/1185069835?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>
Steljniki nekoč in danes *Steljniki* in the past and today <https://vimeo.com/1185067148?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci>

Biodiverziteteta v steljnikih

Steljniki, v katerih se preneha kositi stelja, se v 40–50 letih v sukcesijskih fazah spremenijo v gozd hrasta in navadnega gabra, ki je v nižinskem delu Bele krajine naravna gozdna združba. Z zaraščanjem steljnikov iz krajine izginjajo tudi breze in brinje. Vendar pa raziskave nakazujejo, da so najbolj biotsko pestri prav steljniki, kjer se praprot kosi in odnaša s površin – tu najdemo 45 vrst na 100 m². V steljnikih, ki so v fazi zaraščanja, najdemo 38 vrst na 100 m², v gabrovem gozdu pa 24 vrst na 100 m². Ohranjeni steljniki so pomembna rastišča številnim gobam, ki jim odgovarja specifična sestava tal in rastejo v simbiozi z brezami. Steljniki so pomemben habitat tudi mnogim pticam, metuljem, zelencu, zajcem ter skoraj 300 rastlinskim vrstam. Zato imajo denimo Marindolski in Vinomerski steljniki status naravne vrednote, oboji pa so tudi del evropskega omrežja Natura 2000. Ker pa je njihov obstoj odvisen od košnje stelje, belokranjski steljniki predstavljajo preplet naravne in kulturne dediščine.

BIODIVERSITY IN STELJNIKI

When bracken harvesting stops, *steljniki* undergo successional phases and transform into forests of oak and hornbeam within 40–50 years, as these are the natural forest communities of the lowlands in Bela krajina. With the overgrowth of *steljniki*, birches and junipers are also disappearing from the landscape. Studies suggest that well-maintained *steljniki* are richer in biodiversity than the succession stages. *Steljniki* where bracken is regularly mowed and removed can host up to 45 species per 100 m². In *steljniki* in the process of overgrowth, 38 species per 100 m² can be found, whereas hornbeam forests harbor only 24 species per 100 m². *Steljniki* are a valuable habitat for various birds, butterflies, spiders, lizards, the European hare, nearly 300 plant species and numerous fungi, which thrive in the specific soil composition and grow in symbiosis with birches. Because of this ecological importance, the Marindol and Vinomer *steljniki* have been designated as natural heritage sites and are part of the European Natura 2000 network. Since their existence depends on the mowing of bracken, *steljniki* embody a blend of natural and cultural heritage.



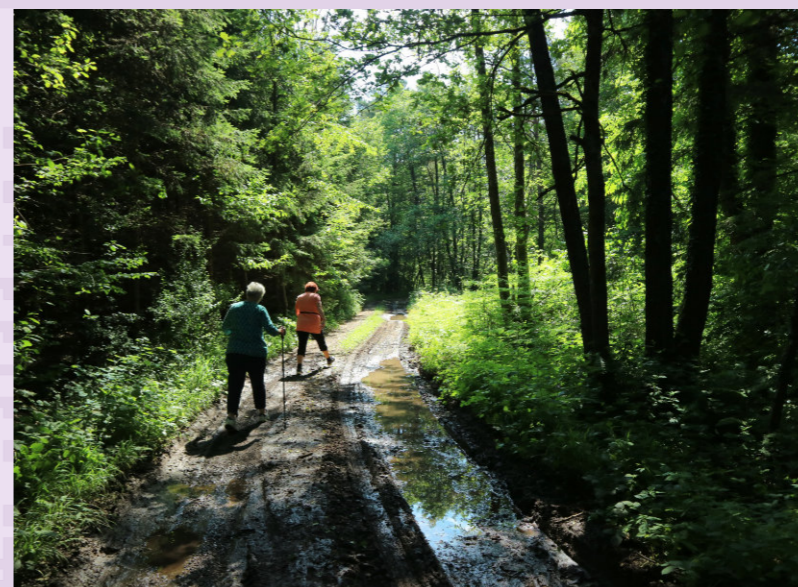
Steljniki, ki ga kosi družina Pečarič, Čurile.
Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač

Steljniki that is being mowed by the family Pečarič, Čurile. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač

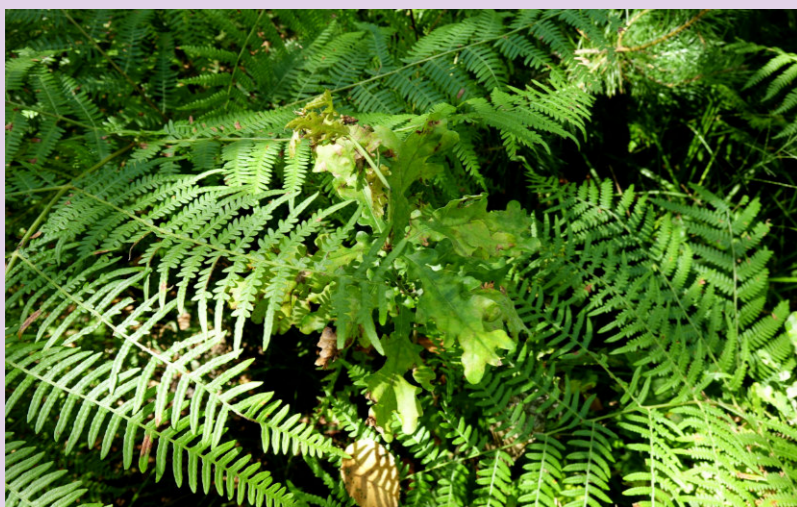


▲ Vzdrževan steljniki med Krvavčjim Vrhom in Gornjo Lokvico. Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač
Maintained steljniki between Krvavčji Vrh and Gornja Lokvica.
Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač

◀ Vzdrževan steljniki nad Tančo Goro. Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač
Maintained steljniki above Tanča gora.
Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač



◀ Zaraščen steljniki med Kvasico in Kanižarico. Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač
Overgrown steljniki between Kvasica and Kanižarica. Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač



▲ V vzdrževanih steljniki najdemo številne gobe in glive, na odmirajočih brezah pa raste ena izmed najbolj zdravnih gob, brezova odpadljivka.
Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač

In maintained steljniki, we find numerous fungi, while on the decaying birch trees grows one of the most medicinal mushrooms, the birch polypore.
Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač

◀ Čeprav se ob prenehanju košnje steljnik spontano začne zaraščati v gozd, Jože Stariha iz Drašičev v svojem zaraščajočem steljniku skrbi za samonikla drevesa: kadar se zasadijo preveč na gosto, jih presaja, ščiti jih pred divjadjo ter skrbi, da orlova paprot ne zaduši podmladka.
Foto: Barbara Turk Niskač

Although once mowing stops, steljnik gradually begins to transform into a secondary forest through various succession phases, Jože Stariha from Drašiči takes care of the self-seeding trees in his steljnik: he transplants them so that they have enough space, protects them from wild game, and ensures that bracken does not smother the young saplings.
Photo: Barbara Turk Niskač

»Moraš na naravo gledat. Ne na dnar. Pozabi. Ampak moraš bit s tem zadovoljen. Meni je lepo, ko vidim, da je prišlo drevo ven. Če bi gledal ekonomsko, ja tega ne bi delal, ampak mene to veseli.«

»You have to look after nature, not after the money. Forget about it. But you have to be content with it. I'm glad to see that the tree has grown. If I looked at it economically, I wouldn't do it, but it makes me happy.«

Jože Stariha iz Drašičev o svojem zaraščajočem steljniku.
Jože Stariha from Drašiči about his steljnik.

Steljničnik v štirih letnih časih

Praprotni uspeva v kislih tleh; raste na vseh kontinentih, razen na Antarktiki. Preživela je izumrtje dinosavrov, fosilizirane ostanke praprotni pa najdemo tudi v premogu. V Beli krajini raste v steljničnikih, zato jo tu imenujejo kar stelja. Številni sogovorniki so izpostavili, da je spomladi, ko iz rizomov, razvejanega podzemnega sistema, poženejo njeni polžasto zviti poganjki, praprotni zanimiva in lepa rastlina. Mlada praprotni je občutljiva na spomladansko pozebo, izpostavljena pa je tudi živalim, ki med pašo teptajo njene poganjke. Vendar pa je praprotni znana tudi po svoji odpornosti. Tako močno je zakoreninjena, da ji ne prideta do živega ne mraz, ne strup, samo apnenje. Kot je dejal eden izmed sogovornikov: »Če jo uničiš na enem mestu, bo na drugi strani pognala deset poganjkov.«

STELJNIČNIK IN THE FOUR SEASONS

Bracken thrives in acidic soils and spans across all continents except Antarctica. It survived the extinction of the dinosaurs and its fossilized remains can be found in coal. In Bela krajina, it grows in steljničniki and is called stelja (animal bedding). Several interlocutors emphasized that in spring, when its curly fiddleheads sprout from the rhizomes – a vast underground network – it is an interesting and beautiful plant. Young bracken is sensitive to spring frost. Another threat are grazing animals that trample its fiddleheads to the ground in search of scarce grass. Yet bracken is well known for its resilience. It is so deeply rooted that neither cold nor poison can destroy it, only liming. As one of interlocutors said: "If you destroy it in one place, ten fiddleheads will sprout in another".





Orlova praprot lahko zraste do dva metra visoko in rada zasenči rastline pod seboj. V ljudski medicini je znana po zdravilnih lastnostih – predvsem za zunanjo uporabo. Vseeno je potrebna previdnost, saj vsebuje tudi kancerogene snovi in lahko zastrupi živali. Sogovorniki so trdili, da se ji je živina med pašo izogibala ter je skrbno izbirala travo in zeli. Po ljudskem izročilu praprot povezuje vidni in nevidni svet. Tako naj bi človek, ki mu na kresno noč v čevelj nevede pade praprotno seme, lahko razumel živalsko govorico. Otroci so med pašo izumili tudi igro s praprotnimi stebli – *steljkanje*.

Bracken can grow up to two meters tall and shades out other plants below. In folk medicine it is known for many healing properties, mainly for external use. Still, it is a plant that should be handled carefully, because it is toxic and cancerogenic, and can cause poisoning in grazing animals. The interlocutors remembered grazing cattle, oxen and sheep in Bela Krajina carefully avoiding it, grazing only on grass and herbal plants. According to folk lore, bracken connects the visible world with the invisible. People believed that if its spores happened to fall into their shoe on the midsummer night, they would be able to understand the language of animals. Children looking after grazing animals also invented a game with bracken stems called *steljkanje*.



Video posnetek prikazuje pastirski igri *steljkanje* in *pikičanje*.
The video shows shepherd games *steljkanje* and *pikičanje*.
https://youtu.be/R04U5pWJn_w



Jeseni, ko se je praprot obarvala rjavo, se je kosila in žela za nastilj živini. Sogovorniki so se spominjali, da se olesenelo steblo praproti rado lomi in se je hitro zapičilo pod kožo ter povzročilo praske in poškodbe. V tem času so se je spominjali kot »zoprne, grobe rastline«. Pokošeno praprot so navadno spravili v več metrov visoke stoge, ki jim je za oporo pogosto služila breza.

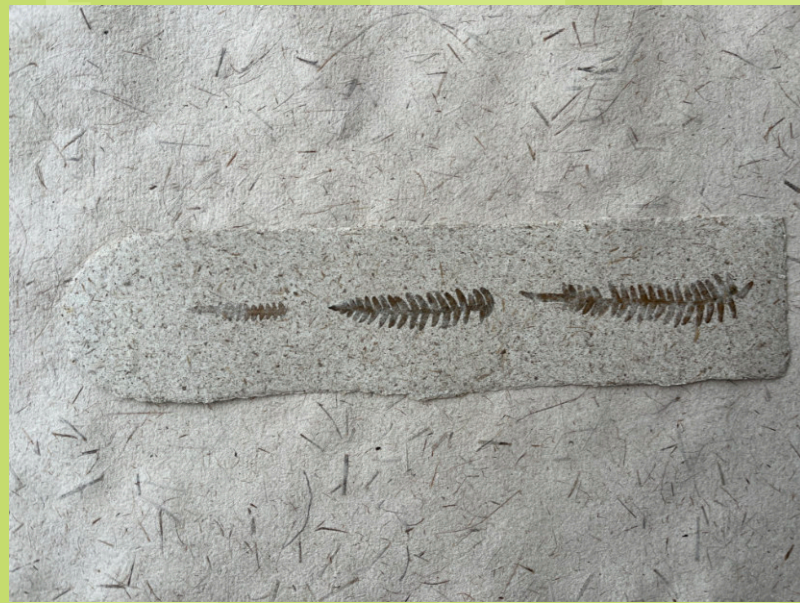
In autumn, when bracken turned brown, it was harvested for animal bedding. Interlocutors recalled its woody stems breaking, causing scratches and injuries as it went through the skin. In this season, it was remembered as "a nasty, rough plant". After harvesting, bracken was usually stacked into several-meter-high piles supported by a single pole or birch tree.





Sogovorniki so se spominjali, da so, ko so steljo čez zimo znosili v hlev, pod stogi pogosto našli jurčke. Tudi miši in kače so tu našle zavetje za svoja gnezda. V hlevih je stelja čez zimo grela živali. Skupaj z živalmi je sodelovala tudi pri recikliranju hranil – pomešana z živalskimi iztrebki se je namreč spremenila v dragoceno gnojilo. Sogovorniki so radi poudarili, da je bil to kakovosten gnoj, saj z njo na njive niso prinašali plevela. Živina, ki je ležala na praproti, je imela tudi manj parazitov.

Interlocutors recalled discovering mushrooms thriving under the piles once bracken was removed to be carried to the stables. Mice and snakes' also found shelter there for their nests. In stables, bracken kept the animals warm during winter. Together with animals it played a role in nutrient recycling. Mixed with animal dung, it turned into valuable fertilizer. Interlocutors liked to emphasize that manure with bracken was of high quality, because it was weed free and did not contaminate the fields. The cattle that lay on bracken also had fewer parasites.



◀
Ročno izdelan papir iz orlove praproti, PAPLAB, JP VOKA SNAGA. Foto: Maja Pučl
Handmade paper from common bracken, PAPLAB, JP VOKA SNAGA. Photo: Maja Pučl.



Na razstavi v Semiču smo predstavili ročno izdelan papir iz orlove praproti, za kar je poskrbela mojstrska delavnica PAPLAB. Proces izdelave si lahko ogledate [TUKAJ](#).
At the exhibition in Semič, we presented handmade paper crafted from common bracken, courtesy of the PAPLAB workshop. You can view the production process [HERE](#).



Mlade etnologinje

YOUNG ETHNOLOGISTS

V moji mladosti so delali vse na roke. Ljudje so si med seboj pomagali pri delu. Otroci smo vsak dan delali. Hodili smo na pašo in pomagali pri delu na njivah. Najlepše mi je bilo pozimi, ko smo imeli kolone. To je bil velik praznik. In takrat smo imeli za jesti veliko mesa, ki ga drugače ni bilo. Zjutraj so se zbrali moški. To so bili sorodniki in sosedge. Otroci smo bili v hiši na peči. Kar naenkrat se je od zunaj slišalo kričanje. Prašič, ki so ga hoteli zaklati, jim je pobegnil. Moški niso dobro pazili nanj, saj so pili žganje. Nato so poklicali iz hiše še nas otroke, da smo ga pomagali loviti. Lovili smo ga po visokem snegu. Na koncu smo ga ujeli in zaprli v svinjak. Popoldan smo deklice pomagale prati čreva. Pomagale smo delati krvavice. Zvečer smo rezali meso in špeh. Družili smo se z žlahto in sosedi. Jedli smo pečeno meso, svinjska jetra, domač kruh, kislo zelje.

In my youth, everything was done by hand. People helped each other with work. We children worked every day. We went herding and helped with work in the fields. My favourite time was in winter when we had pig slaughtering. It was a big celebration, and we had plenty of meat to eat, which was rare otherwise. In the morning, the men gathered - relatives and neighbours. We children stayed inside by the stove. Suddenly, loud shouting came from outside. The pig they were about to slaughter had escaped. The men hadn't watched it properly because they had been drinking brandy. They then called us children out of the house to help catch it. We chased it through the deep snow. In the end, we caught it and locked it back in the pig house. In the afternoon, we girls helped wash the intestines and prepare blood sausages. In the evening, we cut meat and lard. We spent time with relatives and neighbours, eating roasted meat, pork liver, homemade bread, and sauerkraut.

»Ko sem bila stara sedem let, sem v Učakovcih ob Kolpi pasla ovce. Sama sem jih vodila na pašo. Ves čas so mi bežale.«

»When I was seven years old, I herded sheep in Učakovci by the Kolpa River. I took them to graze, but they kept running away.«

▲ Po pripovedovanju svoje babice zapisala učenka 5. razreda OŠ Vinica

According to the story told by her grandmother, written down by a 5th-grade student at Vinica Primary School.



▲
Paša v steljniki. Vir: DKŽ Dragatuš
Grazing in *steljniki*. Source: DKŽ Dragatuš

Ko sem bila stara sedem let, sem v Učakovcih ob Kolpi pasla ovce. Sama sem jih vodila na pašo. Ves čas so mi bežale. Zato sem en dan vzela dolgo vrv (štrik) in jih vse privezala nanjo. Nekaj časa so bile pri miru, potem pa so začele bežati. Vrv se je začela prepletati. Vse se je zapletlo. Nisem jih mogla razvozlati, saj so vlekle vsaka na svojo stran. Močno so blejale. To je čula moja mama in pritekla do mene. Na rokah je držala še dojenčka – mojega malega bratca. S škarjami je razrezala vrv, da se ovce niso zadušile in so lahko odšle domov.

When I was seven years old, I herded sheep in Učakovci by the Kolpa River. I took them to graze, but they kept running away. One day, I took a long rope and tied them all together. They stayed calm for a while, but then they started running, tangling the rope. Everything got knotted, and I couldn't untangle it as the sheep pulled in different directions, bleating loudly. My mother heard the noise and ran to help, holding my baby brother in her arms. She cut the rope with scissors to prevent the sheep from suffocating, letting them go home.

▲
Po pripovedovanju Branke Moravec, rojene 1962, zapisala Daša Stegne, učenka 5. razreda OŠ Vinica

According to the story told by Branka Moravec, born in 1962, written down by Daša Stegne, a 5th-grade student at Vinica Primary School.

»Pri dedku so imeli doma živino, in sicer dva vola, štiri prašiče, nekaj krav in preko sto kokoši.«

»At grandfather's home, they kept livestock, including two oxen, four pigs, a few cows, and over a hundred chickens.«

Po pripovedovanju Bogomirja Hudaka, rojenega 1949, zapisala Ana Pipan, učenka 4. razreda OŠ Vinica

According to the story told by Bogomir Hudak, born in 1949, written down by Ana Pipan, a 4th-grade student at Vinica Primary School.

Dedek Bogomir je šel prvič na pašo, ko je imel šest let. Na paši so se igrali različne igre, imenovane prašičanje, kobılanje, pikičati, med dvema ognjema. Igra pikičati se je dogajala med fanti in predstavlja igro s pipci (nož). Igra pikičati se je izvajala tako, da so konico pipca položili na različne dele telesa (koleno, dlan, prsti, nos, komolec, glava ...). Pipec se je moral v zraku vrteti in se je moral ob pristanku na tla zapičiti v zemljo. Pri igri med dvema ognjema niso imeli takšne žoge, kot jo poznamo danes. Narejena je bila iz žakljevine, napolnjene z žagovino. Določene igre so se lahko igrali na cesti, saj skoraj ni bilo prometa. Enkrat tedensko se je z avtom mimo pripeljal sinjevrhovski učitelj Jože Zabukovšek. Drugi so se vozili s kolesi in vozovi.

Pri dedku so imeli doma živino, in sicer dva vola, štiri prašiče, nekaj krav in preko sto kokoši. Vsako leto so imeli od enega do dva telička, ki so ju prodali, da so poplačali davščino. Dedku je ostalo v spominu opravilo vršilo. Vršilo je opravilo z voli, ki so hodili v krogu in teptali po žitu, da se je izločilo zrnje. Ko je bil dedek mojih let, se spominja, da je reka Kolpa vsako leto zamrznila, zapadlo pa je več metrov snega.

Dedek in prijatelji so ponoči sosedu ukradli vprežne sani, na katere se je lahko usedlo dvanajst ljudi. Dogodivščina se ni končala dobro, saj so se zaleteli v Jakovovo štaló (sosedov hlev). V Vinici je poučevala tovarišica Majda Matko, ki je kupovala mleko pri dedku, čeprav ga ni marala.

Grandfather Bogomir went herding for the first time when he was six years old. While herding, they played various games called *prašičanje*, *kobılanje*, *pikičati*, and dodgeball. The game *pikičati* was played among boys and involved a small knife. The game was played by placing the tip of the knife on different parts of the body (knee, palm, fingers, nose, elbow, head, etc.). The knife had to spin in the air and stick into the ground upon landing. For dodgeball, they didn't have a ball like the ones we know today. It was made from sackcloth stuffed with sawdust. Some games could even be played on the road because there was almost no traffic. Once a week, a car would pass by, driven by the teacher from Sinji Vrh, Jože Zabukovšek. Others traveled by bicycle or in carts. At grandfather's home, they kept livestock, including two oxen, four pigs, a few cows, and over a hundred chickens. Each year, they raised one or two calves, which they sold to pay taxes. One of the tasks grandfather remembered vividly was threshing. Threshing was done using oxen that walked in a circle, trampling the grain to separate the kernels. When grandfather was my age, he recalls that the Kolpa river froze over every year, and several meters of snow would fall. One night, he and his friends stole a neighbour's sled, which could seat twelve people. The adventure didn't end well, as they crashed into neighbour's barn. In Vinica, their teacher was Majda Matko, who bought milk from grandfather, even though she didn't like him.



▲
Družinsko delo na njivi, brananje.
Sedemdeseta leta 20. stoletja.
Vir: osebni arhiv Marije Gerzetič
Family work in the field, harrowing, 1970s.
Personal archive of Marija Gerzetič



▲
Voz sena pod Knežino, 1954. Foto: Jernej
Šušteršič. Hrani: Belokranjski muzej Metlika
Hay cart under Knežina, 1954.
Photo: Jernej Šuštaršič, Bela krajina
Museum Metlika Archive



Na razstavi so bili prikazani predmeti, kot so orodja in pripomočki za košnjo in pašo, za vpreganje živine, delo v steljnikih ter predmeti, povezani s pastirskimi igrami. Izbrala in pripravila jih je Barbara Sosič. Poleg predmetov iz zbirke Slovenskega etnografskega muzeja so dobršen del predmetov posodili udeleženci raziskave, in sicer Andreja in Silvo Veselič, Slavko Plut, Jože Konda in Boris Grabrijan.

The exhibition featured museum objects such as tools and implements for mowing and grazing, harnessing livestock, working in steljniki, and items related to shepherds' games. They were selected and prepared by Barbara Sosič. In addition to items from the collections of the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum, a significant portion of the objects were loaned by the research participants Andreja and Silvo Veselič, Slavko Plut, Jože Konda and Boris Grabrijan



▲ Muzejski prikaz steljnika skozi štiri letne čase in predmetov, povezanih s košnjo stelje in živinorejo. Foto: Tina Dernovšek
Museum presentation of steljnik across the four seasons, along with objects related to bracken harvesting and animal husbandry. Photo: Tina Dernovšek

Zgodbe steljnikov: Preplet orlove praproti, živali in ljudi

Stories of *steljniki*: The interweaving of common bracken, animals and humans

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Vizualna podoba in oblikovanje Visual identity and design Tina Dernovšek

Ilustracije in infografika Illustration and infographics Tina Dernovšek

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Jože Stariha, Peter Simonič, Zvonko Prus, Veronika Plut, Izidor Grabrijan, Manca Kos,
Andrej Žalec, Martin Plut, Peter Panjan. Strokovni intervjuji Interviews with professionals
Andrej Držaj, Matej Simčič, Boris Grabrijan in and dr. Borut Vrščaj

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