

## Slovakia

Slovakia is a central European country, mostly mountainous, surrounded by five countries with a larger area: 49,000km<sup>2</sup> for Slovakia, 79,000 for the Czech Republic (north-west), 323,000 for Poland (north), 600,000 for Ukraine (east), 93,000 for Hungary (south) and 84,000 for Austria (west).



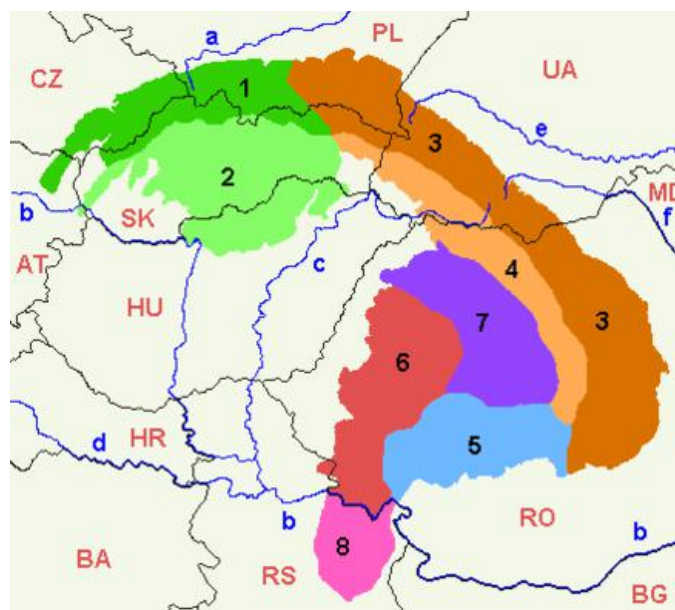
### Two important dates

From 1918 to 1992 Slovakia was merged with the Czech Republic into Czechoslovakia, after World War I and the dismantling of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the two states decided to divorce by mutual consent ('Velvet Divorce').

Slovakia acceded to the EU in 2004.

### Topography

The map below shows us two things. Slovakia is, after Romania (53%), the second country with the largest area in the Carpathian Mountains (17%), then Ukraine (10%) and Poland (9%). Carpathians are residual in four other countries: Serbia and Hungary (4%), the Czech Republic (2%) and Austria (less than 1%).



And secondly, Carpathians occupy the major part of Slovakia. A more precise map is required.



We see:

-The Inner Western Carpathians ('2' in light green on the simplified map above) start in the west with the Little Carpathians ('Malé Karpaty' in Slovak) and occupy the whole central part: Little and Great Fatra (Malá et Veľká Fatra), the Tatras Mountains (Tatry) along the border with Poland, the Low Tatras (Nízke Tatry), the Slovak Ore Mountains (Slovenské rudohorie) in the centre and the Lučenec-Košice Depression (Juhoslovenská kotlina) in the south, at the border with Hungary.

The highest point lies in the Tatras Mts.: Gerlachovský štít (2654m). Kriváň is lower (2494m), but is more symbolic for the Slovaks, to the extent of appearing on 1, 2 and 5c Euro coins.



Gerlachovský štít, the highest point



Stolica: Slovak Ore Mts. highest point



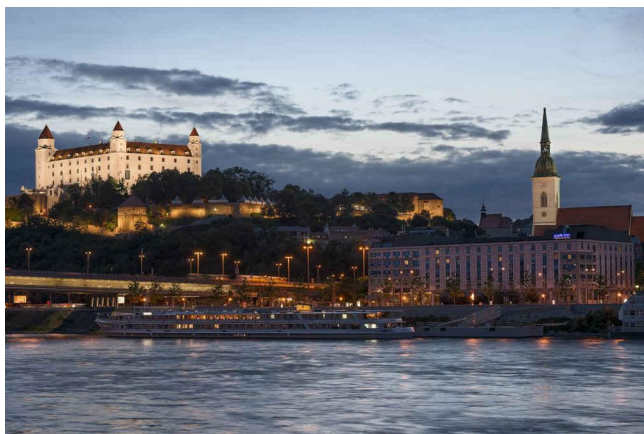
-The Outer Western Carpathians ('1' in dark green on the simplified map above) follow the border with the Czech Republic and Poland. They are a part of the Beskids and their highest point lies at Babia Góra (1723m).



-The Eastern Carpathians go through the north-east of the country, outer ('3' on the map) and inner ('4'). The first line the eastern part of the border with Poland (Nízke Beskydy). Busov is their highest point.

The rest of the territory is occupied by low lands ('nížina' in Slovak). On the detailed map above, there are three:

- Záhorská nížina, north from Bratislava, along the border with Austria and the Czech Republic,
- Podunajská nížina, the Slovak part of the Danubian Plain,
- Východoslovenská nížina, in the south-east.



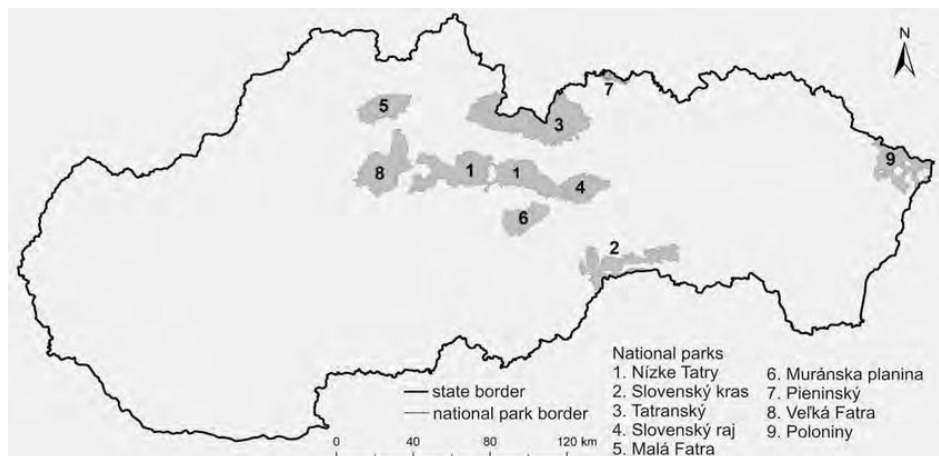
The Danube at the foot of the Bratislava Castle



Východoslovenská nížina

## Tourism in Slovakia

The country has 9 national parks (Národný park), 8 of them are located in the centre:



The Challenge visits all of them, 25% of our summits are involved:

1-Nízke Tatry: Prievalec (44), Jasná (45), Trangoška & Srdiečko (46), Sedlo Čertovica (47), Čierny Váh (48), Sedlo Priehyba (49), Kráľova Hoľa (50), Donovaly (51), Šachtička (53)

2-Slovenský kras: Silica (89)

3-Tatranský: Žiarska chata (41), Popradské pleso (74), Sliezsky Dom (75), Štart (76)

4-Slovenský raj: Vernár (84), Dobšinský kopec (85), Sedlo Grajnár (86)

5-Malá Fatra: Rovná hoľa (37)

6-Muránska planina: Veľká Lúka (63)

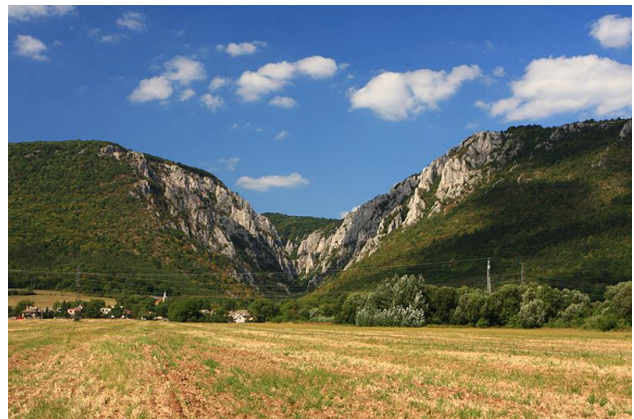
7-Pieninský: Lesnické sedlo (71)

8-Veľká Fatra: Vlkolinec (42), Smrekovica (43), Donovaly (51) et Malý Šturec (52)

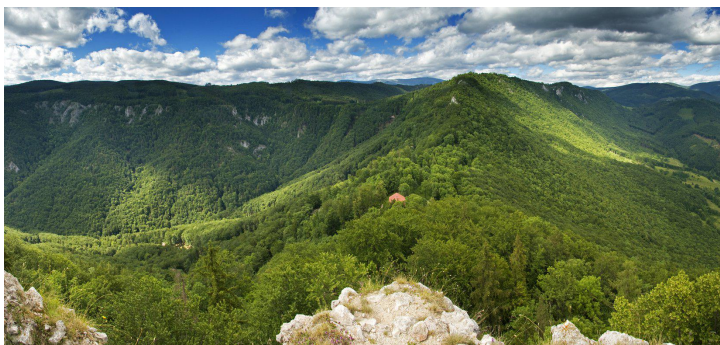
9-Poloniny: Karcaba (97)



Nízke Tatry



Slovenský kras



Muránska planina



Pieninský

Other areas are 'Protected Landscapes' (Chráněná krajinná oblast, CHKO).



11 of the 14 'green areas' are in the Challenge:

Malé Karpaty: Hrad Dobrá Voda (14), Buková (15), Červený Kameň (16), Pezinská Baba (17), Biely Kríž (18), Kamzík (19) and Devínska Kobyla (20)

Biele Karpaty: Vršatec (3), Veľká Javořina (10) and Poľana (11)

Kysuce: Kohútka ski center (1)

Strážovské vrchy: Kresáň (2)

Horná Orava: Mrvova Kykula (36)

Ponitrie: Partizánska chata (58)

Poľana: Poľana (Horský hotel) (60), Tistý javor (61)

Štiavnické vrchy: Červená studňa (65) and Sitno (67)

Cerová vrchovina: La Perla (70)

Východné Karpaty: Laborecký priesmyk (81)

Vihorlat: Morské oko (98)



Vršatec in the Biele Karpaty



Štiavnické vrchy



Cerová vrchovina



Laborecký priesmyk

Other green areas:

- Malý Milič Nature Reserve (96)
- Havešová Primeval Beech Forest (97 Karcaba)
- Manínska tiesňava (Gorge) (2 Kresáň)
- Strekov Vineyards (29)
- Vyhliadka Šianec (24) and Vyhliadková veža Hradová Viewpoints (92)



Malý Milič



Strekov

### Blue tourism

The flow length of Danube in Slovakia is 172 km (left bank) and 22km (right bank). The Challenge is close to it at the top of Devínska Kobyla (20) and close to the junction of the Danube and the River Hron (Rázcestie na Bajtavu, 30).

Upstream the **Váh** splits in two: the Biely Váh (White Váh), that rises near Štrbské Pleso Resort (74), and the Čierny Váh (Black Váh), that rises north from Kráľova hoľa, flows through the Lower Reservoir (that bears its name) at the foot of the Sedlo Priehyba (49) and under the Upper Reservoir (048). The junction is located near Kráľova Lehota.

Climbs of the list that start in the Váh Valley:

Between Liptovský Mikuláš and Žilina: Jasná (45), Prievalec (44), Polom (33)

Between Žilina and Trenčín: Kresáň (2), Križ Butkov (4), Vršatec (3), Homôlka (7)

Before the junction with the Danube: Havran (22), Vyhliadka Šianec (24)



Devínska Kobyla



The Čierny Váh Upper Reservoir

The **Hron River** rises upstream from Brezno and flows into the Danube after 300km. We can find it :

Around Brezno: Priehyba (49) and Čertovica (47)

Near Banská Bystrica: Trangoška & Srdiečko (46), Pleše (54), Ponický vrch (57), Šachtička (53), Laskomer (56)

Between Zvolen and Nová Baňa: Železná Breznica (59), Červená studňa (65), Bôrina (66)

At the junction with the Danube: Rázcestie na Bajtavu (30).



The Hron in Banská Bystrica



The junction Hron-Danube

Mountain lakes ('pleso'): Ťatliakovo pleso (40), Štrbské pleso and Popradské pleso (74), Velické pleso close to Sliezsky Dom (75) and Morské oko (98).



Ťatliakovo pleso



Velické pleso

The Herľany Geyser (94) belongs to the World Heritage.



## UNESCO sites

- The historic centre of Banská Štiavnica (65), the oldest mining town in Slovakia
- Levoča at the foot of Marianska hora (82)
- The Spiš Castle (Spišský hrad, 83)
- Vlkolínec, village with a folk architecture (42)
- Silica (89) and Ochtiná Caves (87)
- Bardejov Town Conservation Reserve at the foot of Mihaľov (78)
- Havešová (Karcaba, 97) and Vihorlat (Morské oko, 98) Primeval Beech Forests



Spiš Castle



Vlkolínec

## The 7 castles in the Challenge

Five of them are medieval (around the 13<sup>th</sup> century) and today in ruins. Spiš is the most impressive (UNESCO). The others: Vršatec (3), Branč (12), Dobrá Voda (14) and Topoľčiansky hrad (21).



Branč



Topoľčiansky hrad

Bojnice (9) dates back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but today the romantic style is dominant. Kunerad (34) is the most recent. It was built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century according to the Loire Valley Castles.





## Various places of interest

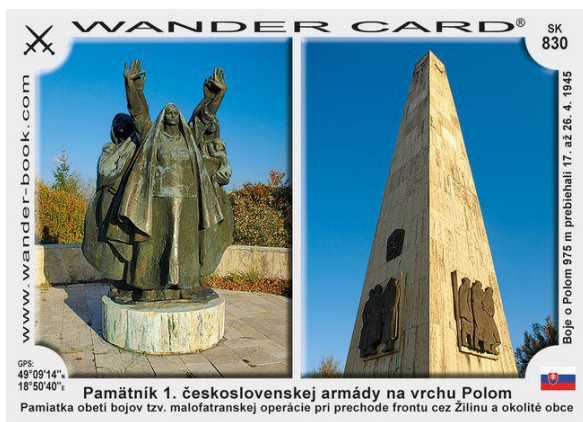
-The Cairn of Milan Rastislav Stefanik (13), cofounder of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

-The World War II Memorial in Polom (33) pays tribute to the victims of the battle that took place in April 1945 in the liberation movement of Czechoslovakia.

-The Basilica of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Mariánska Hora (82).

-The site devoted to the worship of Divine Mercy at Mount Butkov (4) was built in a stone quarry in balcony above the Váh Valley. It's made, among others, of a monumental cross, a stele in memory of John Paul II and another to Cyril and Methodius, missionaries who converted the Slavs of Central Europe to the Orthodox Faith in the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

-A museum dedicated to Andy Warhol in Medzilaborce at the foot Laborecký priesmyk (81).



Polom



Musée Andy Warhol

## The ski resorts

12 summits are located in a ski area: Kohútka (1), Fačkovské sedlo (6), Kubínska hoľa (38), Žiarska chata (Žiar Dolinky, 41), Jasná (45), Donovaly (51), Šachtičky (53), Skalka (55), Rázcestie pri Tablici (Ždiar, 72), Strbské pleso (74), Stanica lanovky Štart (Tatranská Lomnica, 76) and Drienica-Lysá (79).



Šachtičky

## Cyclism in Slovakia

### Peter Sagan, 'Incredible Hulk'

Impossible not to mention Peter Sagan, prominent rider of the 2010s, with a very impressive record:

- 3x World Champion (2015 in Richmond, 2016 in Doha and 2017 in Bergen),
- 1x European Champion (2016 in Plumelec),
- 7x Green jersey in the Tour de France and 1x cyclamen in the Giro d'Italia,
- 18 stages in the big tours (12 in France, 4 in Spain and 2 in Italia),
- 2 'monuments' (Tour of Flanders in 2016 and Paris-Roubaix in 2018),
- 3x Gent-Wevelgem,
- 3 victories in Quebec (2x in Quebec itself and 1x in Montreal),
- 18 stages in the Tour de Suisse and 17 in the Tour of California !,
- 8x Road National Champion,
- Junior World and European Champion MTB in 2008,
- Number 1 in the UCI World Tour Ranking in 2016.



Three in a row



Freewheel burning

### Okolo Slovenska

The Tour de Slovaquie is a stage race (currently 5), that exists since 1954. Most of the winners are Slovaks (3x Škoda, for instance) and more generally it was an East European race (victories of Ivanov in 1987, Tonkov in 1989 or Honchar in 1993).

In recent years the race was upgraded and the level of the winners improved (Tratnik in 2017, Alaphilippe in 2018, Lampaert in 2019 and Sagan in 2020).

<https://www.okoloslovenska.com/?lang=en>



The profiles of the Tour are often hilly with a great number of KOM (more than 150 from 2012 to 2022), but the asphalted dead end summits in the Tatras are never used.

Štrbské pleso is the most visited place (6x KOM and 2x uphill finish). In the Challenge, this pleso is nothing but a step towards an upper pleso (74-Popradské pleso).

In 2012, the Čierny Váh Upper Reservoir (48) was another uphill finish (1157m).



Štrbské pleso



Stig Broeckx next to Čierny Váh

The most frequents KOM in the list:

4x: Fačkovské sedlo (6), Homôlka (7), Havran (22), Železná Breznica (59), Červená studňa (65) and Vernár (84) ;

3x: Sedlo Čertovica (47), Maľý Šturec (52) and Magurské sedlo (73) ;

2x: The Manínska Gorge (Manínska tiesňava) in Kresáň (2), Skýcov (23), Mrvova Kykula (called 'Oravská Lesná', 36), Rovná hoľa (37), Donovaly (51) and Sedlo Prašivá (62).

Červená studňa is located above Banská Štiavnica, cobbled town where an uphill finish took place in 2022 (2<sup>nd</sup> stage). The winner was Archie Ryan before Vansevenant and Fortunato.



Maybe the Manínska Gorge



The cobbles in Banská Štiavnica

Several races of the 2000s disappeared too quickly: the GP Bradlo (from 2000 to 2009), the GP Hydraulika Mikolasek or GP Jamp (from 2005 to 2010) and the GP Kooperativa (from 2005 to 2009).

## Visegrad 4 Bicycle Race - GP Slovakia

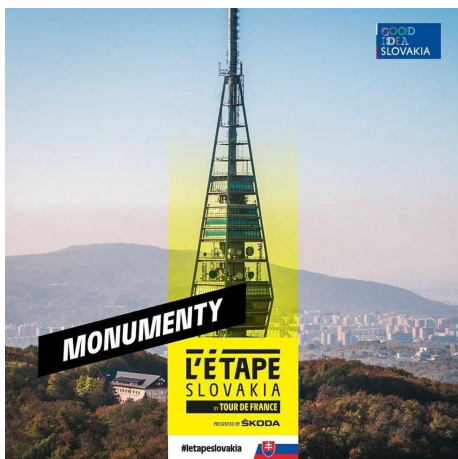
The Visegrad Group is an alliance of four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Since 2014 it results in a cycling race in four chapters, one per country.



In the Slovak chapter, that finishes in Nová Baňa, the riders have to climb Bôrina (66) and its fearsome 1,1km at 13% and 3hm at 15, 16 and 17%.

## L'Etape Slovakia

ASO organized an 'Etape du Tour' (117km and 1700m elevation gain) north from Bratislava. There are 4 KOM, among them Pezinská Baba (17) and Kamzík (19).



Kamzík TV Tower



And the road that leads up there

## Bratislava Gran Fondo

The Gran Fondo is longer than the Etape (130km), but less difficult: 1100m elevation gain and 3 KOM (17-Pezinská Baba 2x and 16-Červený Kameň Castle).



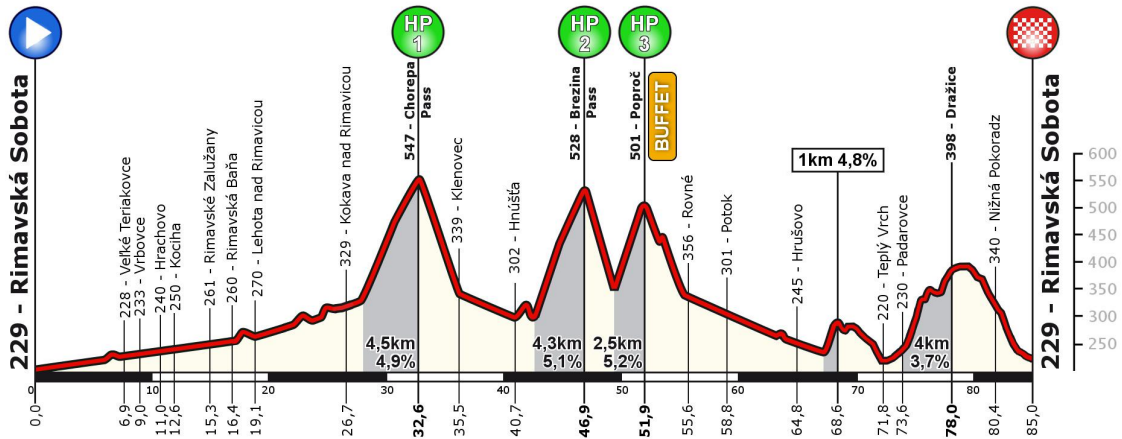
The route



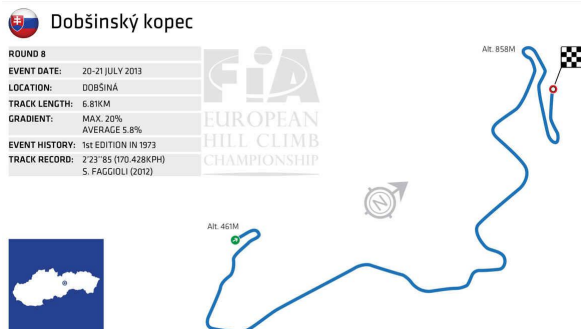
Pezinská Baba

## Teatro Okolo Malohontu

It's a 85km Gran Fondo with 1100m elevation gain and 4 KOM, among them Brezina (64).



Among the car hill climbs, Dobšinský kopec (85) is a classic.



## Difficulty in Slovakia

-12 summits are higher than 1200m d'altitude

Top 3: Kráľova hoľa (50) 1946m, Sliezsky Dom (75) 1670m and Popradské pleso (74) 1525m.

Martinské hole (35) 1460, Ťatliakovo jazero (40) 1375, Smrekovica (43) 1359, Žiarska chata (41) 1290, Poľana (60) 1252, Kojšovská hoľa (90) 1246, Sedlo Čertovica (47) 1238, Skalka (55) 1218, Trangoška & Srdiečko (46) 1206.



Kráľova hoľa

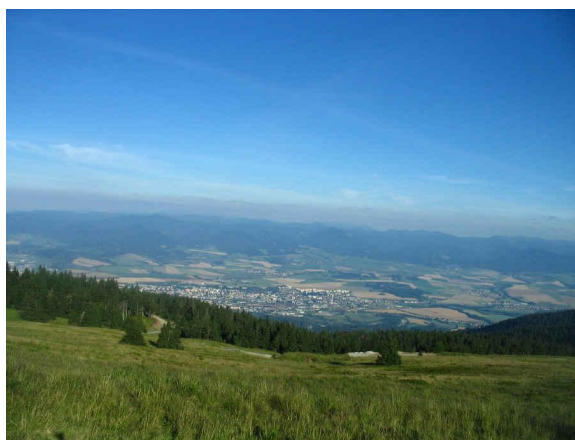


Popradské pleso

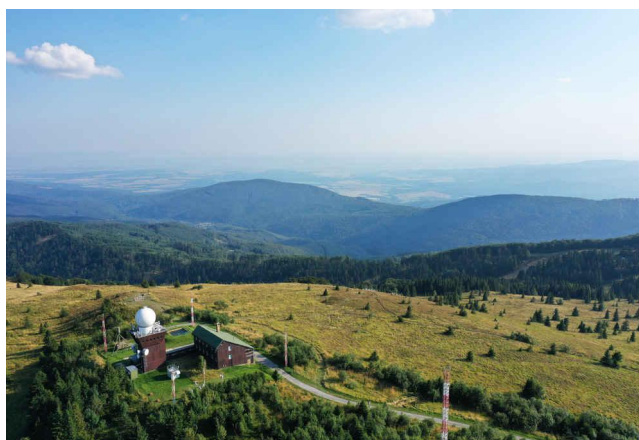
-9 sides exceed 700m elevation gain

More than 1000m: Martinské Hole (35) 1063, Kráľova Hoľa (50) 1051 and Kojšovská hoľa (90) 1038m ;

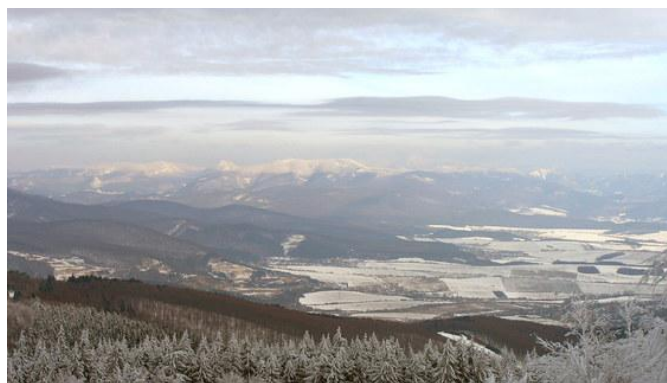
Sliezsky Dom (75) 875, Smrekovica (43) 793, Poľana (60) 783, Sedlo Čertovica (47) 769, Trangoška & Srdiečko (46) 758 and Inovec (8) 753.



Martinské Hole



Kojšovská hoľa



Inovec

-7 sides are longer than 20km

Grajnár (86) 31,2km, Kojšovská hoľa (90) 30,5, Rázcestie pri Tablici (72) 23,7, Sedlo Čertovica (47) 22,7, Morské oko (98) 21,6, Trangoška & Srdiečko (46) 21,5 and Tistý javor (61) 20,1.



Sedlo Grajnár



Rázcestie pri Tablici

-11 summits have more than 600 points

Kráľova Hoľa (50) 1006, Martinské Hole (35) 964, Smrekovica (43) 878, Kojšovská hoľa (90) 845, Slieszky Dom (75) 834, Poľana (60) 759, Trangoška & Srdiečko (46) 749, Inovec (8) 667, Sitno (67) 658, Polom (33) 656 and Drienica-Lysá (79) 638.



Hairpin towards Smrekovica



-11 summits have a bomb equal or greater than 28

Sitno (67) 34, Šachtička (53) and Smrekovica (43) 33, Drienica-Lysá (79) 32, Polom (33), Kráľova Hoľa (50) and Kríž Butkov (4) 31, Pleše (54) 30, Husárik (32) and Martinské Hole (35) 29, Vlkolinec (42) 28.



Sitno



Kríž Butkov and the Váh Valley