

130 Years of the Czech Tourist Club

From history

The Czech Tourist Club (KČT) is one of the oldest organizations in the Czech Republic. Founded in 1888, it celebrates its 130th anniversary on 11th June 2018. Its activity was based not only on the patriotic traditions of our enlightened ancestors, but also on receiving new impulses and challenges. Shortly after its establishment, the KČT started its public education, organizing tourist events and activities, marking all hiking trails and building tourist hostels. The KČT is a competent body with a long-term impact on tourism in the Czech Republic. Moreover, it also significantly influenced the development of some sports, such as skiing, canoeing, or orienteering.

Several years of effort of Dr Vilém Kurz, Sr. (President of the National Union of Pošumaví and the main organizer of the Sokol Trips) and Dr František Čížek (President of the Northern Bohemian National Union and later mayor of the Sokol movement) was completed on 11th June 1888 in the Měšťanská beseda (the historical building of the former Association of the Czech Bourgeoisie in Prague) by establishing the KČT. The first president became a famous traveller and known patriot Vojta Náprstek, who held this position only for half a year because of his busy work and many other interests. The next development was influenced by the team of Dr Kurz and architect Vratislav Pasovský, who became the third president in 1890 after previous president Jaroslav Zdeněk. Vratislav Pasovský held this position for unbelievable 25 years.

The founders of the KČT were aware of the need to inform members of the club and those interested in tourism, as well as the need to promote their activities from the very beginning. Therefore, the club began to publish the Tourists' Magazine in January 1889. Its first editor was Dr Vilém Kurz, who was later replaced by



Stanislav Guth-Jarkovský. In the very first issue in the article Our efforts, Dr Kurz described the main goals and tasks of the KČT: “We want to educate through travelling, we want to support travelling around Bohemia. We want not only to search for beautiful landscapes and places, but also to make them accessible. We will make travelling easier and as pleasant and comfortable as possible. We hope to achieve these goals by all the means that the statutes allow.” The intentions and plans of the KČT to protect nature, educate their youth tourists, and cooperate with foreign clubs were also the part of this essentially ‘program statement’.

Shortly after the club was founded, the surprisingly quick construction of the Petřín lookout tower – the diminutives of the Eiffel Tower in the 1:5 scale – and the construction of the cable car from Újezd to Petřín Hill was made. Both projects are still admired. For the implementation of this project, the KČT members were inspired in the spring of 1889 when they took part in the World Exhibition in Paris. A total of 363 tourists came to this exhibition, and the KČT gained 1,000 gold in Austrian currency.

The foundations of the lookout tower and groundwork for the cable car were completed in May 1891, the building of the steel tower was finished in July 1891, and the cable car started its operation on August 20th of the same year.

The content of the legendary essay of Dr Kurz 'Petřín lookout tower, a picture of the near future of Prague', which was questioned by most of the experts as well as the public, became a reality in August 1891. The cable car and the lookout tower are still in operation after several renovations.

The club used the money obtained in 1889 from the expedition to Paris for the creation of the exhibition pavilion to promote itself at the Jubilee Exhibition in 1891. A diorama picture from the painters of the Liebscher Brothers was, respectively still is, a part of the pavilion. At the end of the exhibition, the pavilion was moved to the peak of Petřín Hill and was completed with a mirror maze. Even after incredible 127 years, this maze pavilion is the centre of attention of domestic and foreign visitors to the capital city of Prague.

In 1889, the KČT also started marking routes. This has significantly contributed to the regulation of movement in the nature and its protection, as well as to the promotion of interesting tourist destinations, monuments, and sites. The first marked route was the Štěchovice – Svatý Jan section, led over the crossroad 'Kolna' between Štěchovice and Třebenice, near the present, non-existent Svatojánské proudy (St. John's Currents) on the Vltava river. In the spring of 2014, the Czech Tourist Club restored this first tourist route, using replicas of original markers and signposts. The event met with great interest of the tourists and the media. Marking the historical sections of the first marked routes in the individual regions of the Czech Republic could become a very interesting tourism product, potentially also in the context of the current European trend in the certification of hiking routes. In connection with this year's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic, it is a good opportunity to remember that in 1918 the Czech Tourist Club was successful for thirty years in tourism development and national awareness promoting. It is no wonder that it immediately became a part of the democratic climate of the just founded young state.

It responded to the new state organization by transforming and changing the name to the Czechoslovak Tourist Club (KČST), whose activities ended in 1939, when the club returned to the name of KČT due to the formation of the Protectorate. During the Second World War and also later up to the unification of physical education, the KČT helped other forbidden organizations such as Sokol or Skaut. In this period, the solid roots of mutual cooperation between those organizations were established.

From the very beginning of the Czech Tourist Club, its representatives were aware of taking care of youth education. For that reason, the KČT set various themes for student trips and holiday trips under the guidance of experienced tourists and made offers of cheap or free lodging. Already in 1897, the representatives tried to organize a holiday travel course for high school students in the Brdy mountains. However, the Imperial-Royal Provincial School Council did not allow the running of this course.

A special part of the organizational structure of the former KČST was the Academic Section of the Czechoslovak Tourist Club. This section started its activity on 28th February 1919 in Prague. Similar Academic Sections were also formed later in Brno (1922) and Bratislava. The mission of these sections was to bring together the undergraduates and upper secondary school pupils to develop and promote tourist activities among teenagers. The members of academic sections also paid a lower membership fee. According to the statutes from the year of 1931, these members could be admitted as members of local unions of the KČST. During this time, young members played a positive role in promoting modern insights into human habitation in nature, nature conservation, the use of sports activities in tourism, and a healthy lifestyle. Similarly, the potential tourism opportunities in the field of military education, respectively, its opportunities for education and training, were promoted.

The Prague Academic Section started publishing its own magazine for young people Student

Tourism. This magazine designed for students was also edited by students. The logical consequence of the involvement of the students in these structures was their gradual taking of important positions in the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Tourist Club. However, the continuity and intensity of the activities of academic sections were affected by fluctuations of student representatives. This fluctuation was related to the relatively short period of their studies and a limited period of carrying out their club functions. Nevertheless, the activity of academic sections until the ban on the operation of the Czechoslovak Tourist Club after the Second World War is considered to be very beneficial and academic sections are compared to the tourism high schools with a slight degree of exaggeration.

The forced vacuum in the free activity of the Czech Tourist Club (and the later establishment of the Czechoslovak Union of Physical Education ČSTV) after 1948 due to the lack of political freedom could be left aside. On the other hand, it is necessary to mention at least the specific resurrection of the activities of tourist academic clubs in the second half of the 20th century. In the autumn of 1962, students of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering travelled to Poland for the jubilee X. Ogólnopolski rajd studenski. This event was so inspirational for them that they soon formed several tourist groups; and under the head of the politically profiled Czechoslovak Union of Youth (ČSM), they started to go to the mountains together. This student activity with a liberal dimension met with a favourable response from the leadership of the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering. After a while, this group of students received the name Tourist Academic Club – TAK. The name was inspired by the similar Polish club Akademicki klub turystyczny.

These students' enthusiasms from the 1960s and the resumption of the concept and functional structure of the Tourist Academic Club can be perceived as a successful attempt to offer psycho-hygienic, social, sport-tourism, and educational programs to the students. It can be

considered unfavourable that the Czech Tourist Club after the restoration of its activities in March 1990 did not initiate negotiations for cooperation with the Tourist Academic Club, which, like the Czech Tourist Club, was registered in the new democratic conditions in May 1990 as a separate entity, basically without a historical connection to the Czech Tourist Club.

The youth is a guarantee of continuation of the activities, traditions, and further development of the organization. In this context, it is a pleasure to mention that in 2017, 50 years elapsed since the establishment of specific organizational sections of the former Tourist Association – the Youth Tourist Groups (TOM), which shortly after the restoration of the KČT for organizational and program reasons associated with the Association of TOM CR, which KČT supports and closely cooperates with.

From the present

Membership

In 2017, the membership of the KČT is formed by 34 thousand members, of which 4,000 members are in the Youth Tourist Groups (TOM). The club is organizationally divided into 14 areas which, identically with regions, cover the territory of the Czech Republic. The KČT is run by the Central Committee headed by the president, and the management of the KČT. The regions are run by Regional Committees. Sections (about 450 in the Czech Republic), which are the fundamental elements of the KČT.

A member of the KČT may become anyone who agrees with the Statutes and signs up in and enters into one of the KČT sections, or electronically at www.kct.cz into one of the Internet sections. The member pays an annual membership fee, its amount is determined by the KČT Maternity Section. Starting in 2016, candidates for membership may choose the type (basic, extended, or TOP membership) of the year's membership and the related amount of membership fee contributions and the range of benefits.

Similarly, the new membership card of the KČT, with the discount card function (EUROBEDS) and the loyalty program (SPHERE), entered into force in 2016. The list of EUROBEDS partners is available at www.kct.cz, discounts on the SPHERE card program at www.sphere.cz. From January 2015, the KČT members are insured within the membership of the Czech Olympic Committee. From 2016, there is a possibility of joint membership in the KČT and the Austrian Alpine Association – Österreichischer Alpenverein (ÖAV). A part of the ÖAV membership is also insurance for staying in the mountains around the world and discounts of up to 50% for a stay in the Alpine cottages.

The main areas of its activity

Marking of tourist routes

The marking of tourist routes far exceeds the club's activity framework. Since the end of the Second World War, the network of marked routes has covered the whole country. About 1,600 volunteer markers continue in the work of their predecessors and they are currently marking and maintaining more than 42,000 km of hiking trails throughout the Czech Republic. In the 1990s, the KČT became the initiator and at the same time the commissioner of the emerging network of cycling routes (the routes are mostly founded by regions, municipalities, and micro-regions). At present, 37,000 km of cycling routes, 3,800 km of trails for ski tourism and 2,800 km of hiking trails are marked. Since 2008, the KČT has also marked about 110 km of barrier-free routes.

Tourist programs

The KČT implements programs for youth, juniors, seniors, families with children, and disabled tourists, nature conservation programs, and national-history programs. It stimulates its members to discover nature in the form of the so-called gentle tourism (respectful to nature), exploring both domestic and foreign regions, their history and population. It offers to its

members and other interested a rich program in all types of tourism:

- Hiking – the most widespread activity for the KČT – is also newly enriched with events for bare walkers (bare hiking) and recreational running (cross-country skiing).
- Mountain hiking – the increased interest in mountain hiking relates to new opportunities for visiting foreign mountains. The KČT organizes both mountain hikes at home and abroad. The quality and safety of these activities have long been methodically guided by a section focusing on mountain tourism.
- Cycling – still very popular. However, in the long term, there is an obvious decline of interest in taking part in the mass events. Nevertheless, long distance trips and, to a lesser extent, cycling trips are still organized.
- Skiing – there is also a decline in interest in events with 'mass' participation. Ski trips and multi-day ski tours with a smaller number of participants predominate. The KČT still maintains the tradition of winter gatherings and events for winter campers.
- Water tourism and the rafting of domestic and foreign rivers are still included in the KČT program. Similarly, events with fewer participants, often individually organized with the use of a well-available network of boat rentals, predominate.
- Moto-tourism as a form of mobility coupled with active tourism, camping, and caravanning is a logical part of the KČT activities.
- Speleotourism – recognition of karst phenomena and amateur discovery of caves is a very specific part of the KČT activities. This activity retains its devotees and provides an interesting future potential.
- Hippotourism – is for the KČT a relatively new still developing form of tourism with specific health effects.
- Family tourism – including specific activities for families – usually in the context of tourism events for adults. Special events for parents with children are also organized within

the framework of the already established projects 'Wandering stroller' – short trips for parents or grandparents with children in the stroller, and a long-term competition 'Tourist family'.

- Hiking for disabled people – modified program offers of the KČT for tourists with various health disabilities. The project 'Tourism for all' is an important act of the KČT in the area of tourism for people with disabilities. Thanks to this project, 14 barrier-free routes for wheelchair users and several barrier-free access to the KČT tourist cottages were created.
- Performance hiking is still very popular with the KČT. It is a traditional performance evaluation based on the number of visited places, events, leading up to awarding the title of 'Master of Tourism'.
- Tourism for youth – young people interested in tourism have been associated in the Youth Tourist Group since 1967.

Publishing activities

Despite the stormy development of information and modern communication technologies such as smartphones, tablets, laptops with the possibility of connecting to wireless networks, the club magazine *TURISTA* – the oldest tourism national magazine in the Czech Republic, which has been also published continuously since 1889, remains the primary mean for sharing of information for the Czech Tourist Club. Through it, the KČT informs its members and the public about club life, the beauties and history and about the tourist activities and attractions in our country and abroad.

Another important source of information for members and the public is an annual publication of *Calendar of Tourist Events*. This national calendar contains over 800 events every year. Regional calendars offering other tourist events are also published by the regional divisions of the KČT operating in all regions of the Czech Republic. Since 2001, the *Picture Atlas of Czech Regions and Tourist Attractiveness* with differ-

ent themes (cycling trails, nature trails, technical monuments, religious monuments, or spas) is published every year.

After 42 years, the KČT started publishing tourist maps at a scale of 1:50,000 in 1991. Despite the massive expansion of GPS devices and the increasing availability of maps and various applications, these maps are still popular with tourists. The production and distribution of these maps is provided for the KČT by the company *Trasa, Ltd.* in cooperation with the KČT markers. This so-called 'green edition' consists of 98 map sheets and, for its completeness and regular updates, it is considered to be the best cartographic product in this segment.

Tourist cottages

The Czech Tourist Club owns and operates a total of 15 cottages owned by the KČT headquarters (including four cottages in co-ownership). Their list and contacts are at www.kct.cz.

International cooperation

The Czech Tourist Club is integrated into all European and world tourist 'structures'. It is a member of the European Association of Tourist Clubs (EWV – Europäische Wandervereinigung, ERA – European Ramblers' Association, FERP - Fédération Européenne de la Randonnée Pédestre) and world organization Internationalen Volkssportverband (IVV). It also cooperates with some foreign tourist clubs, which provide information for tourists in many countries and regions.

Vratislav Chvátal
the president of the Czech Tourist Club

