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THE WESTERN PART OF THE TRANSBESKIDIAN HORSE TRAIL (TRANSBESKIDZKI SZLAK KONNY): A VALUE OR A TRAP?

Abstract: horse-riding tourism has been attracting more and more interest among tourists. There have been numerous horseback riding centres established and horse trails marked out within the areas attractive for their natural qualities. One of such trail is the Transbeskidian Horse Trail which has been waymarked through the particular mountain ranges, starting from Brenna and ending up as far as Wołosate.

The article aims at analysing attractiveness, accessibility and tourist facility development of the western part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail as a tourist attraction significant from the perspective of horse-riding tourism in the regions of Silesian Beskids and Żywiec Bieskids.

The research material was collected during a field study carried out on the Transbeskidian Horse Trail (Zawoja-Brenna sector). The main research method was a participant observation.

The research showed numerous irregularities on the trail. First of all, its designing stage has included neither camping and grazing areas and facilities, nor routes as an alternative to the trail marked out through exposed top parts of the upland, which would significantly improve safety and comfort of tourists and horses. Due to the improper trail development, horseback riding on the Transbeskidian Horse Trail within Zawoja-Brenna sector is now a dangerous trap.

Key words: horse-riding tourism, Beskids, tourist attractions, Transbeskidian Horse Trail

INTRODUCTION

Horse-riding as a form of outdoor physical activity enjoys increasing popularity. This results from a kind of trend towards engaging in exclusive sports and a need of close relations with animals in the great outdoors; and this especially concerns big city dwellers. Both wants can be satisfied by using the offer of horse-riding tourism.

It is said that the horse-riding trip to Hoverla in 1873 gave rise to the modern horse-riding tourism in Poland. However, this form of qualified tourism was first formalized only in 1990. The Horse-riding Tourism Committee [*Komisja Turystyki Konnej* (currently: *Jeździeckiej*)] of the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society [*Polskie Towarzystwo Turystyczno-Krajoznawcze* (PTTK)] was established in 1996 [Krzemień 2002]. PTTK has been trying to promote horse-riding tourism for years. There have been staff education regulations (for leaders of horse-riding tourism) as well as ranked horse-riding tourism badges created; the status and database of horse-riding centres affiliated by PTTK (specializing in organisation of horse-riding tourism and; especially, horseback tours) have been established as well as horse trails have been designed and marked out.

One of the main PTTK horse trails is the Transbeskidian Horse Trail [Józefczyk 2010]. It is the longest trail of the Mountain Horse-riding Tourism in Poland with over 400 km to cover. According to the initial assumption, its route was to refer to the PTTK Main Beskidian Hiking Trail (red one). The Transbeskidian Horse Trail leads from Brenna (Silesian Voivodeship, Cieszyn District, Silesian Beskids) to Wołosate (Podkarpackie Voivodeship, Sanok District, Bieszczady Mountains). It is assumed that it takes 14 days to ride the entire trail [www.gtj.pttk.pl].

This article focuses on the western part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail. Three one-day sectors were selected: Zawoja – Korbielów, Korbielów – Żabnica (Cisiec) and Żabnica – Brenna. During the field research, its route and accessibility for horse-riding tourists were verified. What is

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more, the question whether the trail in its current form constitutes a tourist value or a kind of trap to horse-riding tourists was discussed.

The literature on the subject of tourist attractiveness offers the notion of a "tourist trap" understood as a facility established near a tourist attraction, which only purpose is a commercial gain [Kruczek 2009]. Another type of tourist traps are facilities which are to be an attraction "in itself", usually offering only "idle entertainment" [Doroz-Tomasik 2015]. This article however describes the notion of a trap in its literal sense - as an unexpected threat in potentially dangerous spots.

RESEARCH METHOD AND OBJECTIVE

The field research was conducted in August 2016. The participant observation method was used. This enabled one to verify accessibility and attractiveness of the particular sectors of the western part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail. With regard to the fact that the trail is designed for horse-riding, the research involved horse-riding on this very trail.

The objective of this article was to analyse attractiveness, accessibility and tourist facility development of the western part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail as a tourist attraction significant from the perspective of horse-riding tourism in the regions of Silesian Beskids and Żywiec Beskids.

RESULTS

The field research was composed of three stages. Each stage was a one-day sector of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail. Stage I started in Zawoja and ended in Kobielów; stage II started in Kobielów and ended in Cięcina; stage III started in Cięcina and ended in Szczyrk (despite the planned ending in Brenna).

Stage I: the journey started in GTJ PTTK "Dyzma" centre located on the Transbeskidian Horse Trail. The first sector in the westerly direction was difficult and required a good condition from a horse. On the way to Hala Barankowa, there was a necessity to modify the route due to the presence of an unwatched cow herd grazed on the horse trail. From Hala Barankowa the trail leads through a picturesque forest path and mountain streams. At the crosspaths, the waymarking was insufficient and required great sense of direction and map reading skills. After reaching the main path leading to Przełęcz Klekociny, the waymarking disappeared and appeared again in the pass itself. Near Zygmontówka shelter in Przełęcz Klekociny, there is a possibility of having a short break and grazing break. However, there was no safe hitching post - in order to hitch up the horse one should use the existing infrastructure (e.g. fencing).

Past Przełęcz Klekociny, there was another very difficult sector requiring a good horse condition. One had to use a narrow, stony and steep path to get to Hala Kamińskiego. This was a demanding path for the horse, but simultaneously very attractive with regard to its landscape qualities. In Hala Kamińskiego, there was a short sector where the horse could have a break and tourist could admire the panorama of Beskids Mountains. Past Hala Kamińskiego, the horse trail led through the forest. Initially, it traversed the hill; however, the very climb to Mędralowa (Wielki Jałowiec) was short but extremely steep. Down the descent to Przełęcz Głuchaczki, the trail led through top parts of the upland which is simultaneously Polish-Slovakian border. Going down to Przełęcz Głuchaczki was stony, steep and difficult – it required a great focus both from the horse rider and horse as well as skills and experience in mountain horse-riding. There is a camping site functioning in Przełęcz Głuchaczki in the summer season. Despite a lack of professional facilities, there is a possibility of organising a grazing break for horses (Photo 1a and 1b), as well as preparing a meal for horse riders.



a.



b.

Photo 1. The horse during a grazing break in "Głuchaczki" camping site (a) and its provisional hitching (b) (Photo: H. Doroz-Tomasik)

From Przełęcz Głuchaczki through Jaworzyna, the trail leads to Korbielów. Initially, one must climb to three mountain peaks (the third one is Jaworzyna). The climbs were steep, the bed was not stony and the descent from Jaworzyna was moderate. However, there were problems with the waymarking of the trail. The waymarks appeared less often than before which caused a feeling of anxiety. What is more, past Jaworzyna, the Transbeskidian Horse Trail separated from the red hiking trail and started to line up with the yellow hiking trail (according to the original version of the trail, the Transbeskidian Horse Trail lined up with the red trail as far as to Przełęcz Glinne).

Going down the horse trail lining up with the yellow hiking trail is a relatively long and difficult sector, requiring great watchfulness and experience from the horse rider and horse. On the trail and in its immediate surroundings there were numerous fens; the path was narrow (and sometimes even disappearing in forest glades), and some parts were maladjusted to horse-riding (too narrow paths in a young stand, tree branches cut off too low). After leaving the forest, the horse trail links with the bike paths. Routes were wider and covered with breakstone. In Korbielów itself, the waymarking became troublesome. One should go to the main road offering next marking enabling one to arrive at GTJ PTTK "Połonina" centre in Korbielów.

Stage II: The Transbeskidian Horse Trail goes through the area of "Połonina" centre and leads farther to a steep and long (over an hour) climb over the ski slope to Hala Miziowa. Due to the eroded surface of the ski slope, the bed is stony with sporadic rocky outcrops and tree roots. The trail waymarking is scarce but the ski slope makes it easier to get a sense of direction. The ski infrastructure degrades the natural landscape during the climb to Hala Miziowa; however, there is a fascinating view to Beskids behind one's back (or during going down Hala Miziowa). The bed gets much better after entering the forest; however, the trail becomes more difficult in a technical sense – the path is cut through by numerous tree roots, sometimes it gets narrow, and in the higher parts, over streams and fens, there are small bridges for hikers to pass through safely. Despite the fact that the route of the trail is quite evident in the forest (main path), there are numerous waymarks.

There is a necessity to organise a break in Hala Miziowa. There is no professional infrastructure which hinders safe hitching up for a grazing break (photo 2).



a.



b.

Photo 2. Grazing break in Hala Miziowa (a) and Hala Lipowska (b) with the use of the existing infrastructure (photo: H. Doroz-Tomasik)

The next part of the trail, past Hala Miziowa, is relatively easy and enables horse riders and horses to rest. There are picturesque views to be admired; the path is stony with small water seepages which can be passed by easily using the well-trodden path. After passing the peak of Trzy Kopce and continuing to Hala Rysianka, the area of fens is vast. There is no possibility of passing them with no risk and the only way to go are footbridges on the surface of the waterlogged area. These footbridges are designed for hiking - horse riding is very risky there (photo 3).



Photo. 3. Footbridge over the wetland on the trail (photo: H. Doroz-Tomasik)

In Hala Rysianka, the Transbeskidian Horse Trail separates from the red hiking trail and is marked out together with the yellow and green trails, and, before Hala Boracza, together with the black one. Up to Hala Lipowska, the trail is well-marked, but right past it there are some doubts concerning its routing so that good knowledge of land topography and map reading skills are

necessary. In Hala Redykalna, the view opens onto the mountains and the whole sector reaching as far as to Hala Boracza is very attractive with regard to the landscape. The trail's bed is quite stony but there are some flat areas enabling one to rest for a while. Past Hala Boracza, the horse trail separates from the black hiking trail and leads one with a soft, grass-covered path. Again, the trail's waymarking is unclear. Descending to Żabnica, during the research, was only possible thanks to the knowledge of land topography. In Żabnica, the horse trail can be found near GTJ "Piekiełko" centre. The next part offers great views as it leads through Abrahamów mountain ridge (together with the red hiking trail). The bed is stony and the sector from Żabnica to Cięcina should be planned as a separate day of horse trekking. As the result, stage II took approximately 12 hours.

Stage III: This sector should lead from Żabnica to Brenna. Since the distance from Żabnica to Cięcina was covered in stage II, one left Cięcina and GTJ PTTK "Nad Potokiem" centre towards Węgierska Górka to reach the Transbeskidian Horse Trail in its centre. At the border of Węgierska Górka and Cisiec, the trail turns right from the main road. The road is still asphalt and located near the Soła River leading to the forest. The path gets more steep in the forest. Riding further in the woods can be hindered there with regard to the presence of a barrier of the Polish State Forest administration. During the research, the barrier was closed and that made it difficult to cover this distance of one of the main horse trails in Poland... Past the barrier, there is still an asphalt road and it turns into a concrete-stony path higher up the mountain (photo: 4a). Only the final climb to Magurka Radziechowska offers a stony bed typical of this part of the Beskids. One of the most dangerous elements of this part of the trail is a deep and seep hollow (in a form of a widening gutter) where a horse might get stuck (photo 4b), or where it might fall trying to omit the hollow. Another hazard is a several dozen centimetre wide path with a layer of loose, quite big stones of volume of several dozen centimetres lying there (unstable, loose bed).



a.



b.

Photo 4. Unpleasant surprises on the trail: concrete and stony path (a) and a deep gap in the path (b) (photo: H. Doroz-Tomasik)



The trail from Magurka Radziechowska leads one through top parts of the upland towards Malinowa Skała. There is no tourist infrastructure within this sector apart from the waymarks. The ridges of this part of the Beskids are exposed and only covered with short bushes and young trees. There are numerous sandstone bed outcrops and much sandstone mantle. Sandstones are coarse-grained; the grains are between sand and gravel fractions.

The research concerning the trail to Malinowa Skała was discontinued due to deteriorating weather conditions. The storm was approaching from the west. No shelter on the several-hour sector of the horse trail and no path as an alternative to the one running on the top parts of the upland forced one to retreat easterly and go down using the hiking trail to Kotlina Żywiecka.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Each stage of the research involved unexpected inconveniences related to using a horse as a means of transport on the... horse trail. The field study verified information included on the official website of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail administrator, that is GTJ PTTK Committee. Irregularities concerned trek times (each time, it took several hours longer compared to original assumptions) and the route (no updates despite existing modifications in the field). The waymarking was questionable both with regard to the frequency of waymarks and their incompleteness (e.g. a white square alone or an orange point only instead of a complete mark – a white square with an orange point in its centre). What is more, information concerning the duties of centres affiliated by PTTK is misleading. The centres in Żabnica and Brenna refused to take one horse in for a night despite letting them know beforehand and despite the fact that the affiliated centres declare the possibility of taking up to three horses in (together with riders) for a night with no beforehand information necessary (in the case of the centre in Brenna, its affiliation status was unclear when the research was being carried out). Other inconveniences and dangers on the trail can be listed and divided into the specific research stages. (Table 1).

Table 1. Inconveniences and dangers in the west part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail

Stage I	Stage II	Stage III
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 sectors requiring the above average condition from a horse - necessity of modifying the route - 3 sectors with improper waymarking - 2 sectors requiring above average technical skills from riders and horses - fens - paths in a lifeless young stand unadjusted to a size of a horse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sector requiring the above average condition from a horse - degradation of landscape by introducing ski infrastructure - loose stones and bed rocky outcrops - at least three insufficiently waymarked sectors - numerous and vast fens - infrastructure facilitating hiking is maladjusted to horse riding (footbridges) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - improper bed (asphalt, thick layer of loose stones, deep gap in a path) - marking out the trail through the centre of Węgierska Górka - Polish State Forest Administration infrastructure making impossible to ride a horse on the horse trail - no tourist infrastructure (also designed for hiking) - no path alternative to the one running through the top parts of the upland

Source: own work

All the stages were lacking specialist facilities considering the specific character of horse-riding tourism. The most bothersome was a lack of horse pens or at least hitching posts. What is more, there was no shelter for riders which they can use to hide with the horse-riding equipment during a sudden weather change.



CONCLUSIONS

The presence of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail is a great advantage for the area of Silesian Beskids and Żywiec Bieskids. Horse-riding tourism enjoys a growing popularity, and a waymarked and well-maintained horse trail is of great value for tourists looking for a professional horse-riding tourism offer. One may use the trail's existence to promote a region and particular facilities (horse-riding centres).

Unfortunately, the research study showed numerous deficiencies concerning the design, implementation and maintenance of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail within the sector of Zawoja – Brenna. This trail is insufficiently waymarked in many spots. Additionally, the offered infrastructure is designed for hiking and this results in an increased risk of injury. Some sectors of the trail have been established with their use by local GTJ leaders and horses in mind (e.g. ponies from "Połonina" centre) which hinders (and in some extreme cases even makes it impossible) using the trail by big breed horses. Information concerning the trail included in public information sources has not been updated for a while. Furthermore, the horse-riding centres' managers are sometimes ill-informed and give misleading information, and this results from a lack of sufficient cooperation between the tourism branch entities in the region.

On the basis of the collected research results one may state that the west part of the Transbeskidian Horse Trail constitutes a trap for tourists who would like to cover this distance on their own horse and do not have great knowledge of and experience in navigation with the use of a map and land topography. This makes one think that the trail has been established only for local riding centres. Therefore, it should not be accessible for every horse-riding tourist.

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