

PART I ANCESTRAL TANGLE

" The seed of the cedar will become cedar.  
The seed of the bramble can only become  
bramble "

Saint - Exupéry "Flight to Arras" 1942,22

ONE

MY TRIANGLE

I call the area where my ancestors and I lived MY TRIANGLE, (shown in exhibit 1.) As far back as I can go my paternal ancestors lived in the area of Beckov (pronounced Betzkoff), Kovarce and Nitra. My maternal grandfather also lived in my triangle, in Hlohovec but my maternal grandmother came from Hungary outside the triangle. I was born in Vienna but lived first in Madunice. We also lived in Piešťany, Bratislava and Veľký Lapaš, all inside my triangle. Piešťany is 50 m from Bratislava; Veľký Lapaš is about 33 m.

The river Vah flows right through the middle of my triangle from north to south. About 40 m north-east from Trenčín - outside my triangle - it makes a sharp bend to the east near Žilina. Its sources are on the northern slopes of the Low Tatra mountains. By the time the Vah reaches Piešťany it is a wide river, about the width of the Thames in Kingston. It flows into the Danube near Komárno.

The Nitra river is shorter and smaller. Kovarce, where my paternal grandfather was born, is on the upper reaches of this river. Just below the town of Nitra, the river splits and forms an "island". Our farm in Veľké Janíkovce was close to the eastern arm of the Nitra river.

The area south of a line Bratislava - Sered - Nitra is flat and is part of the Danubian alluvial plain. Further south the Danube splits into innumerable arms and rivulets, forming many "islands" which are marshy in part. North of this great plain, the Vah and Nitra valleys are separated by chains of hills, rising northwards to about 900 meters (ca 2700 ft). These hills get higher further north until they finally reach 2655 meters.

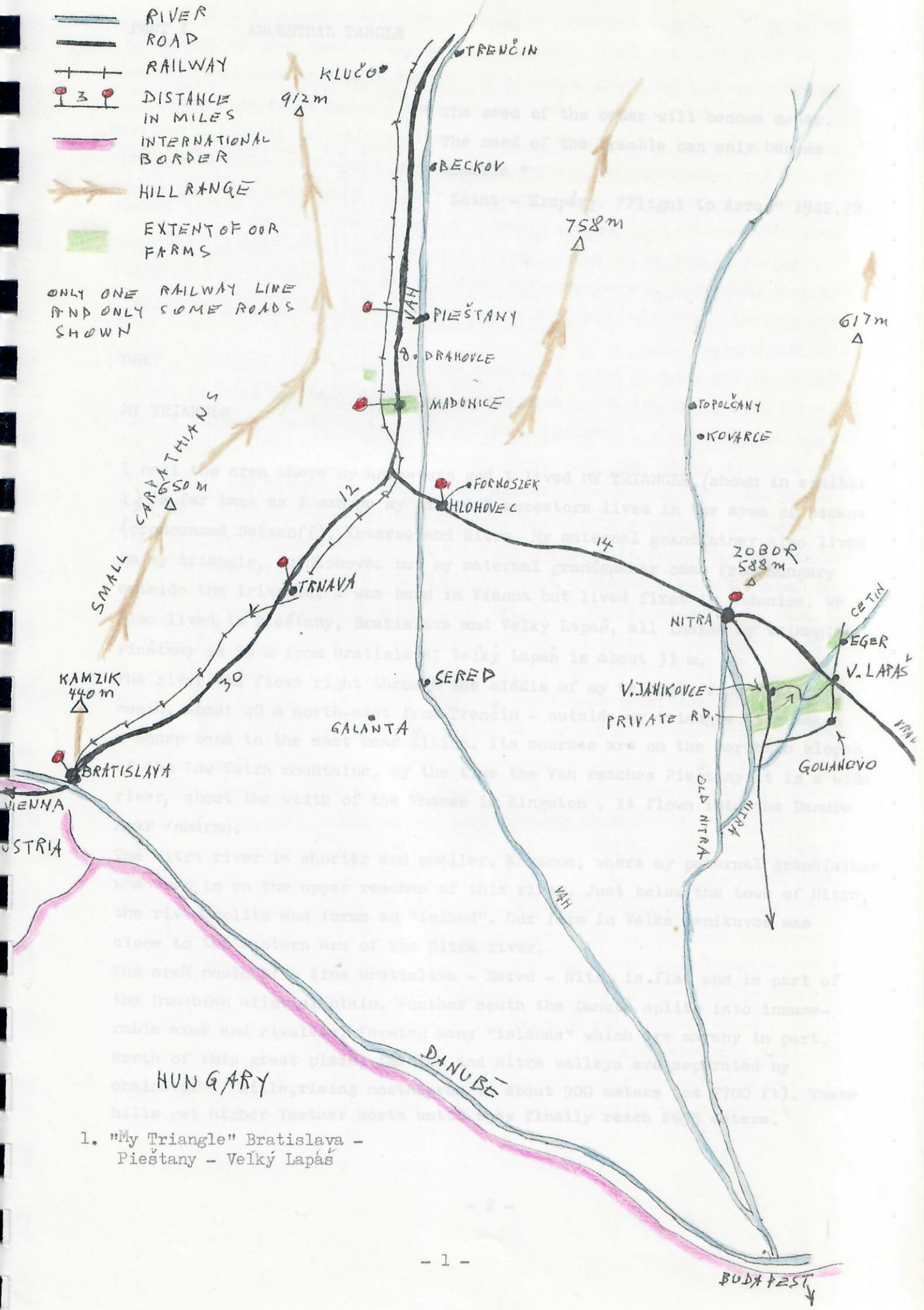
(c. 8000 ft) in the Gerlachský Štít which is quite a distance away from my triangle in the High Tatra mountains. It is the highest peak in Czechoslovakia. The hills inside my triangle are wooded with deciduous trees. From time to time the traveller comes across high scraggy rocks on which castles have been built in the middle ages by noble - or ignoble - families. From these, commanding splendid vistas on clear days, they ruled their subjects and many a battle was fought around their walls. Today they are mostly ruins providing romantic cachets to Slovakia's complex past history.

The climate is fairly extreme with low temperatures in the winter and plenty of snow and hot in the summer. The southern slopes of the hills near Bratislava and Nitra have vineyards producing an acceptable quality of white and red wines.

Vienna is the nearest large town from the triangle. It is about 30 m from Bratislava. In my childhood days there was a good road and also an electric tram which travelled parallel with the road and on some stretches virtually on the road. There were good train connections and at an extra cost one could take the famed Orient Express which travelled once a day in each direction. In the summer one could reach Vienna by paddle steamer. The paddle wheels were on each side of the boat and not at the stern as on Mississippi steamers. Vienna provided a powerful magnet for us in Bratislava as a cultural and shopping centre.

- RIVER
- ROAD
- RAILWAY
- DISTANCE IN MILES
- INTERNATIONAL BORDER
- HILL RANGE
- EXTENT OF OUR FARMS

ONLY ONE RAILWAY LINE AND ONLY SOME ROADS SHOWN



1. "My Triangle" Bratislava - Pieštany - Veľký Lapáš