



ŠTÁTNÁ  
OCHRANA PRÍRODY  
SLOVENSKEJ REPUBLIKY



## PLA POĽANA - Youth at the TOP 2025 - Our Footprints in the Mountains

Poľana welcomed us into its arms. From **July 17 to 19, 2025**, we set off with a handful of children and youth on an expedition that was not just about kilometers on a bike, but above all about getting to know, stopping and feeling that we belong to this country.

The Youth at the TOP event annually connects the theme of nature, movement and personal growth. This year, with the subtitle "Our Footprints in the Mountains", took place at the Záhorská chalet, in the embrace of mountains and meadows - as a symbol of freedom, curiosity and respect for nature.

Children aged 8 to 16 became part of a small expedition - both cycling and mental - that led them through the nooks and crannies of forests and meadows.

We cycled the route from Sihla through Kamenistá dolina to Osrbli. The more demanding route through Štomp tested our orientation skills in the terrain, endurance, empathy and team spirit.

At the stops of **Spády**, **Hrončok** and **Tri vody** we devoted ourselves to stories that connect people with nature. We discovered places where people left traces in the form of the Hrončok dam or the high stone oven at Tri vody. The wild landscape drew us into stories about wolves and lynxes, and we even wrote one story ourselves. A story of friendship. It was not just a cycle tour - it was a journey of self-discovery. The evening program opened up space for questions and silence. Legends from Poľana were told, songs were sung, we shared stories and feelings. All without pressure, with trust and respect for the uniqueness of each child. Fun games, laughter, discovery, debates by the fire and everyone's freedom evoked feelings of peace and openness in us. In addition, curious questions, horseback riding, air rifle shooting or observing nature with night vision... These are all small fragments from the camp, which left us with the conviction that it makes sense and that children belong in the mountains.

We "fell out" from the modern world into the world of wilderness.

This event was not created as a challenge to perform, but as an invitation - for young people to connect with nature, with themselves and with each other.

The atmosphere of the camp is described by the statement of one of the participants:

"For the first time I was without a mobile phone for so long... and I didn't miss it at all. Because there was always something happening here - and it was real."

And that's exactly what this camp was about. Not about performance, but about experience. Not about lectures, but about stories.

Youth at the TOP 2025 showed that when we offer young people a space in nature, they start to ask themselves questions - and find their own answers. Nature is more than a backdrop - it is a partner, a teacher and an inspiration.

We thank all the young people for their courage to discover, share and be present.

Poľana embraced us again - and we left our traces in it.

*Some traces are washed away by the rain, but others remain - in the heart, in memories, in attitude.*

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