

***The Transversal***  
***A Travelogue***

**Introduction**

**Michael Biggins**

Jakob J. Kenda (b. 1973) is an educator, outdoorsman, and literary translator who became perhaps best known in Slovenia as the translator of J.K. Rowling's complete series of *Harry Potter* novels into Slovene, which were first published there from 1999 to 2008. He holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Ljubljana.

In 2018, Kenda made his debut as a travel writer with his book *Apalaška pot: 3.500 kilometrov hribov in Amerike* (Appalachian Trail: 2,200 miles of mountains and America), the published result of his first-ever trip to the U.S., the main purpose of which was to discover the country by hiking the full length of its most famous trail. Far more than a mere account of places and scenery, Kenda's Appalachian Trail is an exploration of the historical experience and present-day attitudes that both divide and unite Americans, gained from visits to historic sites, encounters with fellow hikers and sojourns in trail-side towns along the way. In 2019, the book was awarded the Winged Tortoise Prize (Krilata želva) for the best Slovene travel writing of the previous year.

As readers will soon discover in the following translated excerpt from Kenda's second book-length travelogue, *Transverzala* (*The Transversal*, 2020), this one about the past and present of Slovenia's most famous trail, the role of the long-distance trail as a medium for deepening the traveler's (and hence the reader's) understanding of the land the trail passes through and the often conflicted communities that live along the way remains as persistent a theme as it was in his previous book. Curiously, American readers may indirectly stand to gain as much insight into their own society as into Slovenia's by reading the very Slovenian *Transversal*, in ways quite comparable to the rich interpretations relevant to Slovenia that Slovene readers are likely to derive from Kenda's Appalachian Trail. We gratefully acknowledge the author's permission to publish this excerpt from the book in English translation here.