



TB - FUN & FRIENDS

The illustrated travel notes of an XVA guy

26-28 ottobre 2018



**A man of action seldom keeps a diary;
much later, he remembers, he writes
and most often he wonders.**

Marguerite Yourcenar,
Notes to *The Memoirs of Hadrian*



Prologue

If Alex had been an astronaut, this is how mankind's first mission to the Moon would've started:

- *Houston, we have a problem.*

- *Apollo, this is Houston - what's wrong?*

- *I'm sick.*

- *Apollo, Houst... Wait, what?!*

- *I'm sick.*

- *But... but... We haven't even started the final countdown yet. I mean... you're not moving!*

Dude, you're still on Earth!

- *I know. But I'm sick anyway.*



Friday, 26.10

16:01

We're calling it a day. The office comes to life as people start preparing to leave. I have the feeling of a large family getting ready to embark in the adventure of a lifetime.

And why not a family?... We spend more time together than we do with our *actual* families - we might as well act the part. Moreover, Giacomo is driving like a grandpa (his words), I am taking the kids of the GCC to the mountains like any caring father - and Oana is asking us for money like a true mother in charge of the parents' committee... Not to mention that the real mother of the Indians is Cristina B., while Petro has befriended half of that nation on Lync.

17:43 Somewhere in between Iasi & Podu Iloaiei
Speed: 5 km/h for a few seconds, every minute

They say the journey is more important than the destination. But what about getting stuck in traffic, unable to predict how long it will take to get from Iasi to Podu Iloaiei - which is usually a 15-minute drive?

And if Alex plans on getting serious with his car sickness, it's going to be one hell of a journey...

20:55

We somehow managed to clear the traffic jam and, after an uneventful trip, we arrived at our destination just minutes behind the others.

Giacomo greets me with a genuine sigh of relief that everyone got here safe, with no incidents along the way... Well, Gabi attempted to break away to Targu Neamt at some point and Catalin F. made some bold maneuvers (maybe too bold), but it all turned out OK in the end. Now we're all here - and we're hungry.

Saturday, 27.10

01:38

After dinner, the evening appeared to continue very peacefully: ping-pong, a round of poker, a demonstrative session of backgammon (during which I showed Alex all possible and ever more humiliating ways to lose at the hand of Catalin F.) and an excruciating, nerve-numbing game of Catan... But then

- Oh, dear, boss is taking it all!...



- Someone has obviously hacked something here...



One has won it all. One has nothing to lose, but an empty bag of pretzels. Happiness in its purest form.



it all went down the usual path for this kind of get-togethers: (loud) music and fine drinking.

So here we are: freezing our asses off in front of the hotel, mixing up alcohol in search of that killer combination. The sky is clear and stars are flickering all over this dark ink canvas. The moon has surrounded itself in a ghostly halo... It's the perfect moment to be poetic, but I can only think of the bacchanal to follow.

Some time after going to bed (03:30)

Downstairs things are happening. Things difficult to put into words. It would seem like a horde of buffaloes is trying to dance sirtaki while listening to Eminem - and also howling to the music.

I'm positive that down there, all these unarticulated sounds make all the sense in the world for the would be singers - but somehow, on the way to the upper floors, it all changes into a monstrous noise.

Later

The ruckus has still not settled. But, eventually, they will have to return to their rooms... Who knows what

they'll want to do to the poor mortals trying to get some rest here...

I feel a strange vibration in the air. I look over my shoulder just in time to see Vlad's sleepy arm coming down on me - apparently for some late night cuddling. I manage to get out of the way in the nick of time. Now I'm stranded at the edge of the bed, with my sistern shutting down... The bufalloes are still there... Or were they dromedaries?... So hard to tell right now...

09:30

Silence feels so good!... The raging horde is gone. It's time for a quick breakfast, a not so quick - but sacred - coffee and we're ready to take on the mountain. Or... Are we?

Several people, that only a few hours ago were known as The Buffaloes, are hung over. Sobering up is not easy and it takes a while to round up four drivers and head to Pietrele Doamnei. But once we get moving, we find our enthusiasm again.



12:00

As we make our way up the Transrarau, the weather worsens - but is still patient enough to allow us to enjoy the scenery and take some snapshots. Snow patches show up here and there, reminding us that winter wastes no time in this part of the country. Climbing the rocks might be problematic later.

13:15

By the time we get to the base of the rock, it's dripping. We waste no time with preparations and farewells. A party of 9 will make the climb (namely Iulia, Giacomo, Vlad, Razvan, the two Catalins, the two Bogdans and me) while the others will wait at the chalet.

As we head in the forest, the rain stops - but everything is wet. It's not going to be easy.

13:45

Now this is a true team building experience! The ascent is very challenging and we need to help each other to get over some rough patches. We're all in - feet, hands and elbows. There is no room for mistakes on the slippery rock, as even one moment of negligence may





lead to a twisted ankle... or worse. No time for day-dreaming here.

However, there is sheer beauty in this struggle of man against the elements. With every obstacle we overcome, one becomes more aware of how insignificant humans really are against the raw force of nature... The more so as some of us are still recovering from a rough night. But I believe there is no better exercise than hiking in the crisp mountain air.



Getting to the top (after taking on a steep incline with chains) feels very rewarding. Giacomo is trying to yell his satisfaction towards the ones waiting in the valley below, but the powerful wind is pushing the sounds back in his throat.

The view is magnificent!

14:10

Getting off this wind-blown rock poses a new set of challenges. Striding uphill took a toll on some people and now muscles are failing, making the descent on the wet surface quite difficult. Nothing serious, though, and before long we join the others in the valley... There was something heroic in our little adventure and we each bear the marks to prove it - but Razvan had by far the most thrilling experience.

No time to brag about it, as the rain sets in. We clean ourselves up a bit and then head to the cars. We are all thinking of a nice hot meal to recover our strength.

18:18

Late afternoon by the pool - what a life! The cool water



We deserved it.
We earned it.
It's worth it!





has a marvelous rejuvenating effect, no matter if we struggled with the mountain earlier - or with a hangover. Or both. It soon becomes obvious that Catalin D.'s ancestry has something to do with dolphins; there's nothing human in the way he pops out here and there from under the water.

The sauna is a letdown, but at least the guys hacked the jacuzzi and got all its nozzles working. We're discussing the most important moments of the day - engulfed in bubbles.

After a slow start, we got off to a pretty busy day: a bit of mountaineering, some tinkering at Vlad's car (that made us worry over what turned out to be a tiny pebble stuck in the wrong place), some delicate vomiting for the connoisseurs and then lunch - and ow this... We want massage bathtubs and waterproof tablets at work!

21.42

This is supposed to be bonfire night, but the titular character (aka the fire itself) is not very convincing. It may look nice in this snapshot, but it's really not that

impressive, because of the wet firewood. Moreover, the image of the failed campfire is complete when the stack collapses - giving us the world's first *horizontal* bonfire ever. But where there are problems, there's opportunity. This is the perfect occasion for the arsonist in me to stir up the flames - and before long, a bunch of people are gathering by the fire.

There is something magical about fire that has captured the imagination of man ever since Prometheus stole it from the gods. No wonder they were so pissed off by it!... Feeling the warmth of the ghostly flames as they devour matter and hearing the crackling of the



charred wood is what got humanity through the ages. There's no better way to clear your mind of any troubling thoughts and to regain inner peace than stretching your legs by the fire and surround yourself in the heat of the glowing embers. The night is right and this is the perfect setting to dream of anything, from haunting vampires to burning love affairs.



23:30

The revery is over! Somebody spotted a football on the nearby court and very quickly the game is on.

I haven't played in more than 10 years, but the adrenalin rush feels great and reflexes are starting to wake up.

Of course, having Gabi around the ball is anything but safe, but I redescover the kamikaze instinct of throwing myself in front of the oncoming players... And among them - Iulia.

She's taking on the guys like she's been playing football since forever. She's not holding anything back and she

quickly becomes one of the most efficient strikers on the field.

We're all panting and trying to catch our breath, but I cannot think of a better way to end this day that was dedicated ad-hoc to outdoors activities. I guess that the spontaneous, voluntary yet unanimous commitment from this morning (no more getting wasted on alcohol) worked - as even Danut, the self-appointed martyr of last night, is giving it all on the court.

01:30

It's a new day, but it feels like the night is just beginning. A long, peaceful and sleepy night - no more buffaloes, no more threatening roll-overs from Vlad. Just the long-awaited chance of lying in bed and getting a well-deserved shut-eye.

Sunday, 28.10

10:30

It's a perfect autumn morning. No wind, the sun is shining, no disaster recovery needed after last night, the birds are singing somewhere in the southern



hemisphere... and a pseudo-democratic debate is ongoing with respect to our final destination.

- Pssst... Hey!

- What?

- **Final destination?...** Really?

- Oh, shit! Your're right... I gotta change that, or the kids will freak out imagining God knows what about death races and such.

So... we're discussing our NEXT destination. Catalin F., Gabi and me would like to make our way to Neamt, while a last minute change of Oana's plans sways the vote towards Suceava. As such, with a "majority" of 2 cars out of 5, the group decides on visiting the Fortress in Suceava and the outdoor museum near it.

I don't quite understand what just happened, but I'm not that surprised either. I mean, there are plenty of democratic initiatives being ignored in the recent history, that it's absolutely pointless to bother too much with this coup. Moreover, it would make no sense to split the gang just before the end of our adventure. Suceava it is then!

14:11

It's basically summer here in Suceava - and the unexpected heat wave is driving the flies and bugs crazy. But the weather is great for spending a couple of hours in the open air, admiring the vestiges of Moldavian history. The Fortress is still fresh to me since my last visit here in January, but the ethnographic exhibition on display at Bukovina Village Museum is something new. Villages are key to understanding Romanian history, folklore, traditions and gastronomy - but, tragically, as the aging process of the overall population accelerates, isolated settlements and villages are simply vanishing.

Somehow, we all have our roots in the countryside - and what better proof than finding out the origin of Catalin F.'s family name: as *fosalau* stands for a metal brush for combing wool after it's been carded (aka cleansed.) In translation: *fosalaul este o perie de metal pentru pieptanarea lanii dupa ce a fost daracita, respectiv scarmanata si curatata de impuritati.*

So, at some point, Catalin's ancestors were the ones processing the wool before passing it on to the furriers (*cojocari*) from my family. Starting with these bits of



information, one can put together a fascinating history of the people that have lived here... I don't know about him, but for me, thinking of all this stuff is quite emotional, as long forgotten time don't seem so distant anymore...

However, there's no time to meditate, as unrest builds up within the group. Bogdanel is missing and people are getting anxious - mostly because they're hungry, I guess (as Bogdan is in no real immediate danger... well, as long as there's no wind to blow him away, like we were afraid it might happen on the mountain, had he spread his arms and legs). Iulia is trying to call him, but it takes her a while to realise that, if Bogdanel drifted away to some distant moment in rural history, the only way to reach him would be sending a carrier pigeon - as there are no horses around for a mounted courier.

Finally, Bogdanel shows up. He was indeed side-tracked by all the history of this place - and something about Stephen the Great's father that he keeps babbling about.

19:01

Bogdanel's endeavor got him really hungry. Him devouring

a juicy steak later was the last notable event of our trip to Bucovina... The kids are now safely back at home and this is the last entry in this log.
Good night and good luck!



UGRM

28.10.2018



Actually, this is the last log entry, as I can't help to notice that the guy taking this photo is passionate about astronomy and seeing things from far away. Really faaaaar away...