ROMANIA

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Romania is a little more than twice the size of Tasmania. It has double the population of Hungary - about 20 million. Car ownership - like Hungary is quite low - about 4.5m vehicles. This is only interesting in terms of the comparison to Australia where I would say every adult owns a car. The Carpathian Mountains carve a boomerang through the heart of the country and the southern border with Bulgaria is the Danube. The history of the country in terms of who held the reins of power is so complicated and sordid that a reading made me decide I could not summarise it. Sufficient to say that the current incantation of Romania happened in 1859 when a number of areas combined. But it was not until after WW1 that Transylvania joined the country of Romania. Yes "Transylvania". The home of Count Dracula. Now that will be fun to investigate when we get closer.

FIRST DAY

Today started out poorly but ended up as a blast. We left our snug camp site and our relatives to drive into Romania. Beata, Vlodek and Machev were going to follow at their own pace. As we drove we got some very confusing info from our GPS. It indicated that our destination would take us 6 hours - Google Maps had previously estimated about 3.5 hours!! We discovered that it was diverting us around a section of road and we could not work out why. Our destination was high in the Apuseni Mountains, so we assumed it probably meant that the road was not suitable for large motorhomes. However we could not figure that out until we got within 50km of the destination to see if any signage on the road would give us the necessary information. Very frustrating. In the end the road was fine (many sharp bends and a poor surface - but we have seen a lot worse). We followed two large trucks up the road! The journey did actually take about 6 hours because we had to buy

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RUTHLESS Had to double take - park your car inappropriately at your own risk - it will be CRUSHED. Biker Parking Only indeed.

SWITCHBACKS The GPS tried to tell us that this was an impossible road to travel on. It obviously forgot the horrific roads we had been on in the past.

DRESSING GOWNS? Saw lots of people walking around in the thermal spa town we visited the night before. Dressing gowns in public!!!!

food, get through the border where we had to wait a while whilst they checked and stamped everything and also loaded up with petrol and some Romanian currency.

Our destination, Garda de Sus, was listed in Lonely Planet as a beautiful alpine village. Their idea of "beautiful" and our's are obviously not the same. Maybe when the ground is covered in snow (there was some still around) and the disturbance of human activity was covered up, it may look beautiful. However that being said our journey here today did give us a taste of what we might expect to see in this country. From our reading we discerned that the Romanian countryside apparently has maintained a quieter, more traditional way of life. Today, in our short time observing the scenery, we saw a horse and cart bobbing along with the traffic, another being used on a road side to gather items, an old man using a sickle to cut the grass at the front of his house AND numerous old women dressed in very thick black stockings and with heads covered in scarfs. Just a taste. What more is to come?

When we got to the accommodation that Heather had chosen (a place that had tent and hotel accommodation), we both quickly decided that it was really crap and drove up the road a bit to a more salubrious looking place. It was a hotel and restaurant. We asked if we could park our van on the grounds (and sleep in it) and our relatives would take a room. They were extremely accommodating and allowed us to do just that. They would not even take any money for us staying in the van - we had all our own services on board!! Better was yet to come. When the family arrived, we went inside and started to converse using our computer to translate. It was a riot trying to communicate with the staff and ask about rooms and costs. We had this hilarious round table discussion in English, Polish, Serbian and Romanian AND the "computer translator". The receptionist understood a tiny bit of English. To complicate matters we discovered that they did not take a card — only RON (Romanian Leu). None of us had enough to pay for a night. In the end they accepted Euro from Vlodek and we had enough RON to pay for 5 plates of goulash. After we had finished that they came out with a plate of beautiful traditional cakes free of charge. What lovely people. We then all had a great time "talking" via our little "Apple" translator.

Family breakfast in our van