BULGARIA

Kaleto Fortress, Belogradchik

Rila Monastery

We have particularly enjoyed three places in Bulgaria - Sozopol, Plovdiv and Rila Monastery. The gates to the monastery are opened at 6 am. We made our way in shortly after that. How beautiful to be there in total peace and solitude. The monks must love winter when they are snowed in and the likes of us cannot impede their tranquility. Siggy, as is usual, was photographing everywhere and everything. He loves it. It is his passion. I stood quietly for a while in the centre of the deserted quadrangle. I then sat on a step and just listened to the sounds of the day - water flowing (from drinking water fountains and the distant fast flowing river in the valley below) small birds chirping as they pitched and dived and the rustling of the mountain of trees that seemed to be growing out of the side of the monastery. A monk then appeared carrying a large wooden cross which he rhythmically struck. I assume it was the wake up call for his fellows monks.

Mountains & Gorges

After rising early to view the monastery in total solitude, we headed out of the Rila mountains. They are the tallest in Bulgaria. Bulgaria is in fact very mountainous - particularly the central and south-western part. As we turned north to skirt Sofia, the mountains formed a lovely picture on our right side. North of the capital we started to cross the Stara Planina Mountains (also known as the Balkans). We went the long way and the road followed the River Tirsta as it raced around corners and nudged the cliffs. The drive was pleasant and easy. After exiting the mountains we headed north-west to our intended location near the border with Romania. The mountains were now on our left and once again provided a great stage for our viewing pleasure.

We reached Belogradchik late in the day. This place is well known for its very unusual rock formations and a very old fort, started in 1 or 2 AD, that has made astounding use of these strange weathered natural features. Kaleto

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POLICE We have seen more police in our short time in Bulgaria than in the whole three weeks in Romania. There we only saw one police car. Here they are everywhere.

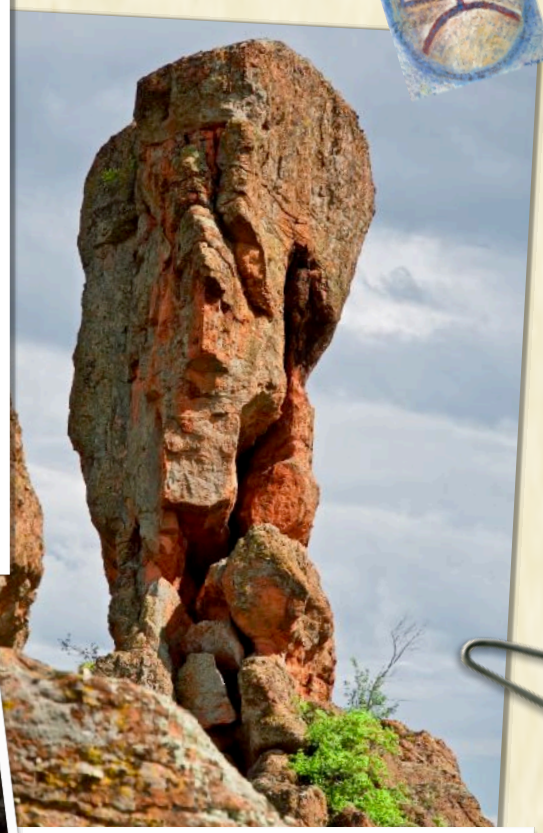
WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY Noticed a few suspect safety barriers. One Bulgarian's response - "our WH&S is based on natural selection."

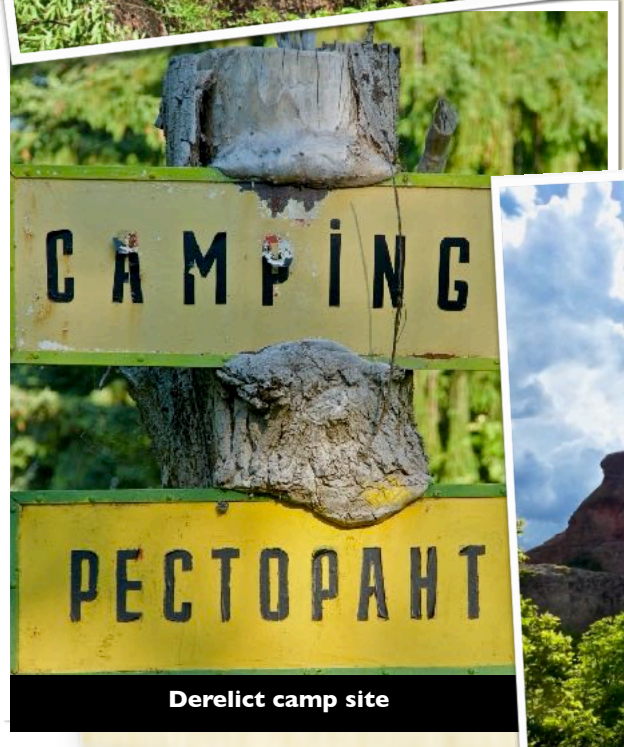
SNAKES After narrowly avoiding 4 snakes crossing the roads I can tell you that Bulgaria does indeed have snakes - lots of them.

A mountain church and a mountain fortification …….

fortress consists of three enclosures that get smaller the higher up the slope you go. Each enclosure is surrounded by high walls and uses the rocks as natural protection from enemy invaders. We wandered all over the fort and then parked our van for the night a little way up the hill beside one of these monoliths. After a brief thunderstorm we once again have music in the background. It just started up from the fort area below us so Heather has gone down to have a look. Surprisingly it is just one person with a big microphone and loud speakers playing Bulgarian music. Strange indeed.

PHOTOS





Derelict camp site

PHOTOS