ROMANIA

Chaos on the mountain

Well, it was just one of those days! Firstly we slept in. We had arranged to meet at 9am and when Vlodek knocked on our door we were still in bed. A very quick dress and breakfast and we were on our way in their car to get some RON (Romanian money) at the closest point, some 14kms away. They had been at the "cave" yesterday and said it was after the auto teller point. We got the money we needed but it only allowed us to take out either the equivalent of $20 or $300. I got the $300 - much more than I really wanted. We then headed off and I felt we were going in the wrong direction. By the time we were able to get Vlodek and Beata to understand that, we were already right down the very windy road to the bottom of the mountain!! Apparently they had been to a totally different cave the day before and thought that was the one we wanted to go to. No. The "Ice Cave" our intended destination was only about 10km from

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NO TEA? Yep, much to Heather's horror, Romania does not seem to have ANY tea on the menu (let alone English tea). The look of sheer distain on her face was telling.

YUK Evidently tripe soup is a delicacy in Poland but the example provided here in Romania was not only cold but also extremely unpalatable.

EXHAUSTION Hundreds of steps back up from the cave are enough to give you the shits - Heather hates walking up slopes almost as much as walking up steps.

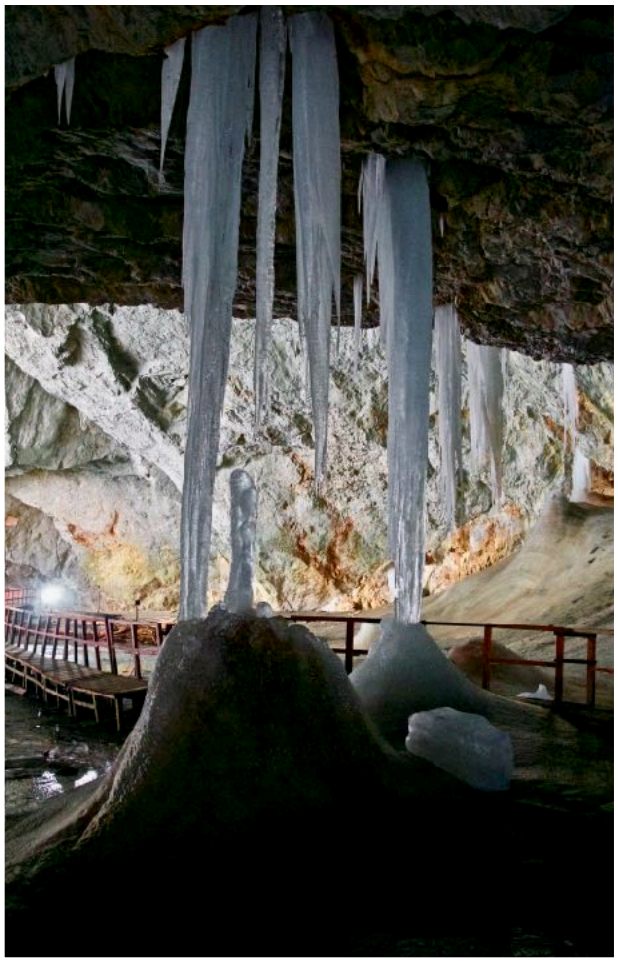
where we had parked!! So we turned around and went back up the mountain. The problems of not understanding one another!! We had a giggle and finally found our way to the Ice Cave where we had a pleasant 10 minute walk up to the cave entrance. Local people offered jam, wine and wooden carved objects for sale along the route. It was very low key and, I suggest, may be typical of what we find in other Romanian locations. The alpine scenery with its old and new houses was interesting to experience. Snow could be seen in the distance.

We had a long wait for our turn to descend the very long and very steep staircase to the opening of the cave. Snow covered the entrance and stalactites hung from the roof. It was definitely worth the effort. This is only one of two caves in Europe that has been carved out by an underground glacier. The cave is about 700m long and reaches a depth of 105m. Further into the cave we could see the wall of the glacier itself. Apparently the Apuseni Mountains are quite unique hydrologically in that they have been carved by numerous above and below ground rivers.

The walk up was taxing for some. By the time we reached our vehicle it was well past lunch time so we made our way back to Garda de Sus and found one of the few places offering food. Interestingly the place is not overrun with tourist facilities. It is rather low key.

We really enjoyed our time together conversing once again via our computer translator friend. Finally we got some hot food although the "tripe" soup was not to Vlodek's liking. We played safe and enjoyed a house special - "Mama Uta Pizza". The hot chocolate we ordered was literally melted chocolate - a little strong for some tastes.

The days that go a bit astray are often those that live on in your memory. We will remember the frustration of not being able to talk, of our laughing and the enjoyment of a fabulous natural feature very few people would have seen.



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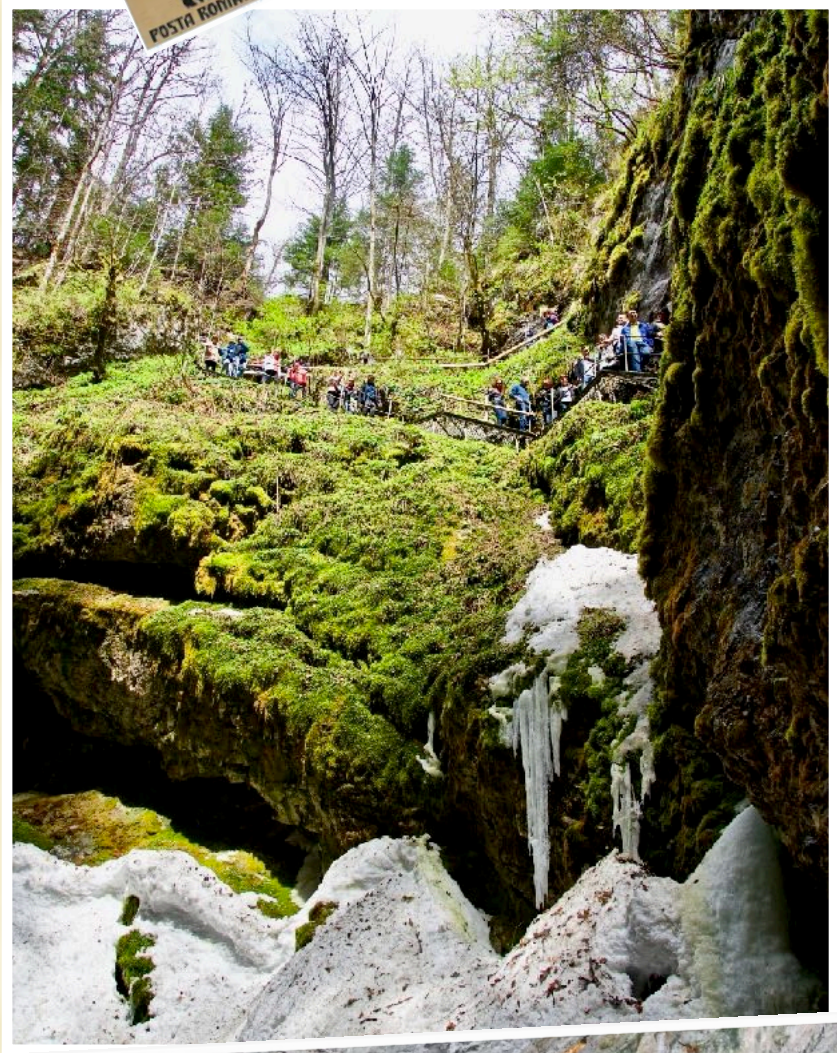

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