

By Motorcycle to Bucharest (First Instalment)



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We have read Mark Powell in *A Night In the Appennini*; now here is the first part of a short tale about a travel in Romania

Mark Powell

By Motorcycle to Bucharest

(An ACE Reconnaissance Trip)



Mark Powell has never had a car. He moved from bicycles to motorcycles in 1982, since when he has owned 30, nearly all BMWs, and ridden about 2 million km across Europe.

First Instalment

In late April 1995 two British motorcyclists met at a prearranged spot on the Hungarian-Romanian border, having set out separately, as chance would have it,

from Cambridge and Oxford respectively. My friend John was riding a BMW R100RS to Istanbul where he would visit an expat sister. I was on a two month exploration of Eastern Europe on a rugged BMW R80GS, a sort of “Two-Wheeled Landrover”.

Biking in Romania was an unpredictable adventure then, so we had stuffed our panniers with useful things. I was carrying old guide books and inaccurate maps (there *were* no accurate maps) and John, fearing famine, had packed a huge stock of pot noodles and our only contact address: of a journalist in Bucharest neither of us had met. He was head of the Reuters office there and, we feared, would probably be too grand to receive us.

A sardonic border guard warned us of bandits and appalling road surfaces. The bandits we were to meet later, but the disintegrating roads hit us from the start. Gingerly circumnavigating potholes, we entered Oradea, our first Transylvanian city, along a road whose verges were rigged with huge lagged hot water pipes from which insulation fell off in lumps.

Beyond this city of the plain we came to the foothills of Transylvania’s downland where our plodding straight highway looped into whiplash curves over sheep-grazed slopes. The villages, Romanian, Hungarian or German, were gabled fronts enclosing farmyards full of animals and carts, one house deep either side of the road, with barns beyond.

In the centre was the house of the village policeman and often a tiny post office, which I later learned had the *only* telephone in the village.

The campsite in Cluj was closed and we tried to pitch our tents a few miles to the south, on a meadow in Copaceni, a village in the mouth of a gorge. Aurel, a local man who spoke German, warned us not to, for fear of



the bears living in caves nearby. A local family took us in and we had our first experience of Romanian hospitality at the simple brick and mud home of Gheorge, mechanic, shepherd and smith.



All the houses in the village had a little menagerie of free range animals. At dusk the housewives simultaneously came to their gates and whistled to the mass of ducks and geese on the common. The gabbling fowl answered the calls, separating into their several platoons, each of which waddled to its allocated pen through the opened gate.

The high point of one day's exploration was riding up to the citadel of Sigisoara. We rode up a steep lane and under an arch only to stall at the sight of the most beautiful tower in Transylvania. At the far end of the cobbled street a vast glittering

baroque pavillion of muticoloured tiles sat on top of a Hansel and Gretel medieval gate tower. To the right was the modest house where Vlad the impaler was born.

