

Transylvania On Wheels

For some the name Transylvania might evoke the famous vampire we are obviously not going to mention, but the place is a real treasure for those who want to experience some excellent rollerskiing in a beautiful setting.



In the Astra Ethnic Museum in 2017

This was the second year on the trot that we

headed to the region of Brasov and Sibiu to do some rollerskiing at the end of August. With winter not too far away, who could think of a better way to prepare for the white stuff?

Yes, it might sound like a long way to go to rollerski and why would one want to go further than Dorney Lake? Well, unlike on the island of Great Britain, cross country skiing in Romania benefits of some infrastructures specifically designed to actually rollerski, and you might have guessed: it even offers the opportunity to practice the most dreaded activity which is undoubtedly roller skiing downhill, but in a safe environment. Safe is obviously relative and most sensible grown up might differ on the concept of going down a hill on four wheels without the recourse to brake or other means to slow down.

Last year, under Soren Milas' instruction, we limited ourselves to practice only our rollerski. The benefits were actually impressive and very real when we came back not only a lot fitter but also technically more skilled and with no fear to tackle the worst bumps and railway and canal bridges England can throw at us. However, this year Soren had decided to exposed us to the real stuff: the biathlon. OK, this seemed to be an interesting idea, he previously

had us rollerski on the Cheile Gradiesti course where the IBU Summer Biathlon championship took place in 2015. The experience was an eye opener and we realised we had several level of rollerski practice to go before reaching glide Nirvana.

Our trip started with a flight to Sibiu, Soren's hometown and according to him the highlight of a visit to Romania.

This year we opted for flights with Lufthansa from Heathrow via Vienna and Munich, which offered a very efficient change and for us was much easier than driving to Luton to get the direct Wizz Air flight. or driving up from Bucharest, which we did last year. Driving up from Bucharest should not to be done at the start of the weekend because the whole city seems to want to race to the mountains Wacky Races style.



In company of Adina our triple Olympic cross-country and biathlon star

In Sibiu we met Soren full of enthusiasm, and ready to have us on wheels, despite not having attracted any others to experience Transylvania this year.

The programme straight away sounded exiting and the next day we were at it.

We were based in Sibiu for a few days. A couple of days we had an early start for laps of the Astra ethnic outdoor museum in Sibiu before too many tourists arrived. The place offers an impressive collection of relocated traditional farm buildings and wind and water mills, as well as a wide range of gradients. It is also serviced by cart and horse and this year Soren narrowly avoided an encounter with one of those placid animals, thankfully the poles scraping the tarmac gave us early warning!

Afterwards we did some agility work around the rose garden in the park, the rose thorns giving us encouragement to make the corners.



Reaching the top of 10km of solid climb

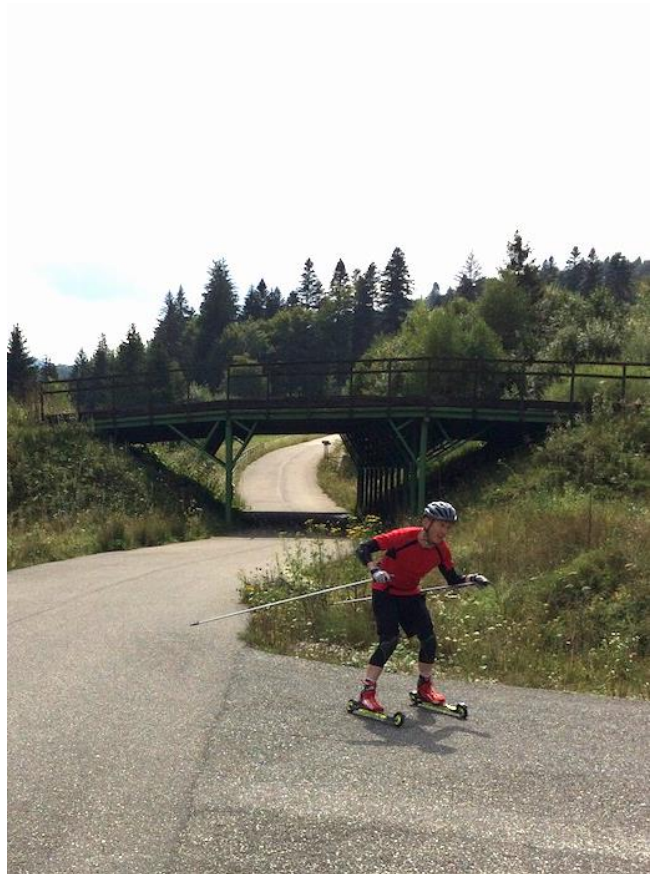
For a bit of a challenge, we started early the second morning on a 10km road climb up to a ski resort, that is about 10 km more climb than we get on our normal rollerski outings in Dorney or along the Dee, but it was surprisingly very manageable. Thankfully we had left a car at the top so did not have to go back down the switchbacks. The landscape and views at the top were stunning so we did some approachable downhill training at the top. We decamped before the start of the cheese and schnapps festival down the valley before the locals driving got any worse.

The early starts left plenty of time in the afternoon for sightseeing, after lunch and a snooze.

Then we relocated from Sibiu to Brasov, where a local version of the Eurovision Song Contest was taking place in the town square. Vincent christened it the Golden Moose.

Brasov is another lovely medieval Saxon town, but NOT as nice as Sibiu according to Soren. However, as well as a rather uninteresting communist era sprawl to the west towards Budapest, it is also surrounded by beautiful mountains and multiple purpose-built roller ski circuits. Last year Soren took us to Cheile Gradieste and Rasnov with his friend Adina, who represented Romania in cross country skiing and biathlon in three winter Olympics, and much to Soren's disappointment never gave her communist "escorts" the slip once. Both courses were of the distinctly challenging level, especially Rasnov which we never saw anyone doing the full round of.

However, this year we went to Predeal, which is a much more accessible rollerski course and biathlon centre. Obviously, Soren claims it was much harder when he were a lad but we don't care and loved the place. The tarmac is wide and very good quality, whilst the downhill were challenging but offering escape routes should it all go pear shaped with the bend approach at too high a speed.



Negotiating the bend down from the range in Predeal



Predeal biathlon range, nice setting!

only try our best. Needless to say, shooting tiny biathlon targets at a range of 50 m is not like watching Fourcade on TV and was a lot more difficult than it seems. Yes, they are minute and we left a lot of bullets in the surrounding forest trees.

After an intensive week with Soren and Gary, we not only improved massively our rollerskiing but we also gained the aspiration for another very expensive hobby.

Off the wheels there is a lot on offer in Transylvania, with its multiple Unesco world heritage sites

The lower section is also ideal for beginners and suitable for all to work on technique.

Things were getting too easy and it was time to add another challenge: shooting. Thanks to Soren and Adina we were introduced to biathlon shooting by the Romanian national biathlon team coach who was just back from international competition. Two beginners wanting to be taught by a national level coach could have been an embarrassing encounter, but Gary was great with good humour and a lot of patience. So, surrounded by athletes at national level we could



Under Gary's instruction

(although check the opening times!), wonderful forest and mountain walks, including in the Fagaras mountain range.

We are thankful for Soren for organising such an interesting and amazingly diverse trip. You missed this edition but lucky for you, Soren is planning to organise another trip in summer 2019. We hope to join him again. This time Vincent claims he will be on racing skis.



The impressive jute craft fortification in Brasov

Further Details

<http://sorenmilas.com/english/>