

WORDS & PICS: NIK

TRANSYLVANIAN TRAVELS

PART SEVEN So day seven, the last one ... poo.

5 am, I'm sound asleep when, suddenly, my feekin' 'phone, which obviously hasn't moved for several hours, decides that now is the time to get a decent signal and accept several days worth of text messages ... bastard thing.

Today has three objectives. Number one is an amazing cemetery where all the inscriptions on all the gravestones are written in a kind of Romanian limerick form, and are highly decorated to boot. Called 'The Merry Cemetery', it's in a little place called Sapinta and is definitely worth a visit if you're into the macabre. What really impressed me, though, was the fact that the church there was undergoing a dramatic restoration and all the scaffolding being used was made out of planks of wood. No, I'm really not kidding - planks of wood, nailed together. 'Kin 'ell! Having worked on roofs in the past, the thought of standing up there all day on a few bits of two inch thick board that's nailed to other bits of two inch thick board brings me out in a cold sweat just thinking about it. I also liked the way three blokes in the street were dealing with the blocked underground drains, caused by the heavy rain the night before - they were pumping the water out onto the street. Riiight ...



Amazing wooden peg tile roof, how intricate is that!?!?

The next stop was to be the border with the Ukraine. We set off and some time later, as we were making our way through one of the usual unbelievably picturesque villages, I swear I saw a wolf walking down the main street. No, really, I'm sure it was a wolf - it didn't look like any bloody dog I'd ever seen. Way thinner and rangier than, say, a Husky or a Malamute, it looked just like ... well, a wolf really. I was gobsmacked - that can't possibly be an actual wolf, can it? Sadly, the only pic I could get of it was from quite a distance away, and with its back to me,



Another terrifying bridge... they do terrifying bridges really well in Romania.



On the right, normal-sized door - on the left, door for midgets? Wot?



This decorated tree means there's a marriageable woman in this house... <smooths down hair, polishes boots on the back of trousers> wonder if she's fit?

Back on the bikes, it wasn't long before my fuel light started to blink and so, like we'd be instructed, I made sure the guide knew about it. He nodded and I kind of assumed we'd stop at the next city and re-fuel, but we came to the next city and passed it, got to another town and passed it too (no petrol stations in sight anywhere in

and no-one else, including the little old lady walking past it not ten feet away, seemed to take any notice of its presence so ... dunno, looked like a wolf to me though.

At the Ukrainian border we stopped and milled about a bit as there were men with very small and menacing-looking machine guns watching us edgily. Why the size of their machine guns should make a difference to their menace factor I'm not entirely sure - I mean, big ones'd do just as much damage as little ones, wouldn't they? Maybe I've watched too many shoot-'em-up films? Paddy from MAG though, fearless world traveller that he is, went up with the guide to the border and, he reckons, got one foot just over the line and so can now justifiably (well ...) say he's been there. I did something similar in Luxembourg years ago - I took me foot off the 'peg of the Hayabusa that I was piloting across it at 120mph and scraped it along the tarmac of the motorway. Voila, I've set foot in Luxembourg.

Where was I? Oh yeah, right, last objective of the day - taking the bikes back to Cluj and the end of the trip. There was one more stop planned - at a distillery where they made one of the near-as-dammit lethal concoctions that the Romanians are fond of - but as the temperature inside the place was even hotter than it was outside, and I was melting in me bike gear already, I gave it a miss and instead found a bit of a breeze by a river and just watched the world go by while the others sweated.

either of them) and, an hour or so later, we still hadn't stopped anywhere. I was beginning to get mildly panicky now as the fuel light was flashing faster than the lights on the spaceship in 'Close Encounters ...' and, although the GS Twelve hadn't coughed or spluttered yet, I was convinced that it wouldn't be o

ISWEAR I SAW A WOLF WALKING DOWN THE MAIN STREET



That is not a feekin' dog!

I'm not a religious man, but I do wish our churches were as barking-looking as these...



That's right, that is wooden scaffolding...



Wonderful graves with poetic epitaphs... people are dying to get in here, y'know?



MY BIKE WAS NOW DECIDEDLY DEFICIENT IN THE BRAKING DEPARTMENT TO THE TUNE OF TWO

long until it would be doing an impersonation of my beloved Changeling and becoming an inert lump on the side of the road. Add to this the fact that my bike was now decidedly deficient in the braking department to the tune of two (the front(s) had been pulsing like mad for a couple of days due to oddly worn pads, and the rear, which I use a lot and had been using even more 'cos o' the poor fronts, was rapidly running out of material too), and you can see why coming down some of the steeper hills, with their myriad of hairpins, was becoming a little hair-raising. In fact, I really should (and did) apologise to the two riders in front of me who I had to pass on one remarkably intricate stretch 'cos it was either that or run into the back of them ...

We were following the support truck, who had the sat-nav, at this point and, just as we got into a town

that looked like it might have a petrol station, it turned off left along a much narrower road than we were on. Slightly mystified, we followed it and very soon were back on tiny little mountain back roads where there was obviously about as much chance of finding a filling station as there is riding across the surface of the Moon. We, the riders, finally pulled over and questioned the route and were slightly taken aback to hear that the sat-nav was playing up and both guides were lost. Great. There then ensued a somewhat farcical attempt to buy black market fuel from a local who was, apparently, a smuggler but, as we were responsible for the bikes if anything went drastically wrong with them as a result of something we did, we politely (mostly ...) declined and headed back to the main road, back the way we'd come. And, what do you know, within a mile (at most) of the junction there was a petrol station and, across the road, a sign saying that Cluj wasn't that far away. Hmmm ... and people wonder why I'm not that big a fan of sat-navs. The rest of the journey back was uneventful and, slightly later than had been planned, we were back in Cluj, the



Just popped home for lunch...



The Ukrainian border - there were a lot of big blokes with very scary-looking guns standing around looking edgy ... so we left sharpish.



Drains full? Just pump the water out onto the street ...

AND PEOPLE WONDER WHY I'M NOT THAT BIG A FAN OF SAT-NAVS

bikes given back and us lot were shown to our hotels, showered and ready for the end of trip meal.

So, the big questions - how much was the trip? And was it worth it? Well, the week-long tour, the hotels, breakfast and some evening meals (but not all), with guides and back-up truck costs a smidge under £900 with bike hire and, on top of that, you'll need flights there and back (mine were £130ish), money for fuel (I spent less than £70 to do the full 800+ miles), money for food and beer (very cheap as long as you're not extravagant), and money for ... umm ... stuff, you know, souvenirs an' that. So that's about £1300 or so, I s'pose. It may sound a lot for a week, I know, but when you consider that it costs that much to do Faro by bike these days and this trip, while not having a rally as the point of going, is so unlike anything most folk reading this will ever do that it seems to me to be well worth the money. The roads and the riding are just amazing, the Transfaragasas quadrupely so, and the scenery and the fact that it's so far removed from what we're used to is something that would cost you far more to do in, say, India or Mexico or anywhere else equally rural. Is it worth it? Yeah, I think so, definitely. Would I do it again? No ... but only because Alin, the boss of Transylvania Live, is talking about organising a tour to China next and I'd really, really like to do that next time please! ☺



Call that a pothole? That's nothing compared to some of the roads we rode on ...

Either that's a really big Chinese Muppet on an exchange visit or that haystack needs a haircut ...



Interesting post outside the church of where - the crucified Jesus being stabbed by Communist soldiers while a demon smiles and ... umm ... tries to get a lift?

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