

ENDUROMANIA 2001

With the foot and mouth epidemic this year we looked forward to riding in Romania 22-28 July, seven whole days of riding! The July calendar in our house was like an advent calendar counting down the days. Bikes prepared, tires and spares sorted out and the all-important Bike sport jerseys with Scottish flag to rear-courtesy of Gavin Lindscott.

The getting up at 4 a.m. to leave was suddenly no problem, one last check; count bikes on trailer and off we go. With Tommy, Stewart and myself sharing the driving journey was easy with fresh driver every 4 hours along with eager anticipation! 32 hours later we arrived at our destination, deep in Romanian mountains 1000 m high and forests all around.

Since I saw Romania first in 1991, I have dreamt of bringing my bike here along with a few friends so kicking the bikes up – within 30 min of arrival was a moment to remember. As arranged, Sergio our Romanian organizer, arrived to greet us along with the Enduromania team to look after us for the week, we were shown our accommodation with a choice of: camping, dormitories or houses in village.

By the next morning the Enduromania team had transferred the old school house and dining room in a comfortable, clean, eating/ drinking/ meeting hall. The food layed on was excellent, plentiful and available at all times with a couple of Romanian chefs doing all the cooking. Drinks were available by a very trusting method of sign a book as you take refreshments, everything you could want including beer!

With Saturday being a day early, we set off early morning with a map supplied by Enduromania, we were pointed towards a forest/mountain to the east with compass in pocket just in case! The trail headed toward the forest 2 or 3 miles away from rolling hills, ruts, sunken trucks, ditches and steep hills. Trails criss crossing all over the terrain and seemingly endless, so we spent two hours here before even starting our intended journey.

Into the forest we headed upward and upward and dozens of trails/ tracks again criss/ crossing, and not a sign of a bike before us. We rode still upward till we leveled out 5 hours later. It seemed we had ridden so far out we should think of heading back, it wasn't possible to retrace our tracks so we headed approx in the homeward direction, some of the downhill trails were so good we stayed on them knowing we were headed in the wrong direction! eventually a distant TV mast told us we were nearing home so at 6 p.m. we arrived at camp a little tired but thrilled with the best days riding each of us had ever encountered.

Sergio and one of his Romanian bike guides were interested to know where we had been, so a map over table and discussion (all the Enduromania team speak English) told us we had only covered a fraction of the intended journey and even more exciting trails were up the next mountain and valley!

We knew at this point the week ahead was going to be fantastic!

By this time most of other Enduromania riders had arrived, around 50 from Germany, we were in fact the first off-roaders from GB. Sergio and his team made us feel very welcome and comfortable introduced all the teams to each other, many of the German riders spoke English so we were up most nights to the wee hours, beer, wine and song, it was just as well the old village was mostly empty of inhabitants with the noise we all made at nights, these German riders were like us on a off road biking holiday and for some it was there sixth year in a row, and plan to continue.

Day one of the event, we were invited to ride with six of the German riders to help us get to know area. 9 a.m. sharp off we went with a route of approx 200 km planned with fuel stops on route, we also planned to get to five or six checkpoints to gain points from 1000 to 4000 dependent on how difficult the terrain is to get to them! This first real day had everything from pleasant rolling riding to very difficult with plenty of drink stops and a small coffee for lunch, we arrived back at 7 p.m. again a little tired but another memory of a day's riding in paradise.

Day 2, much the same as day one, over 200 km and each day in a different direction, no fences, barriers or limitations to ride in. The area at Enduromania is around 100 miles square with a mountain 2200 m and a spectacular view, this mountain is a whole day's riding there and back.

Enduromania has the backing of the Romanian government. The local police, if you see any wave as you pass. The Romanian countryside is an off road paradise with no limits and most of the country covered in forest, a country many years behind most of Europe but beautiful in its timeless setting, the people are very friendly and mostly poor, a daily occurrence on our bikes was to slap the outstretched hands of kids who line the villages as you pass all in a line, a truly wonderful experience and pockets of our jackets filled with sweets never lasted very long as you throw them to the kids as you pass.

Each days riding was better than the last and we got to know the area a little better, but as the German riders explained, even after six years they still have only covered a small part of this region. We have already planed next years visit and I hope for a longer stay, it is without a doubt an off road paradise in Europe, it is the unknown for most people and an adventure will always unfold. The distance to travel is a little bit long but very worthwhile, a two week holiday makes the visit easier with time to rest, we each paid approx £ 200 – for complete riding package, food/ accommodation and all the beer we could drink! The whole trip including the ferry crossing, fuel and spending was around £ 500 each, with 3 sharing a vehicle.

Day 3: Off on our own to find 1st of four checkpoints, approx 100 miles later in and out of forest into big grass clearings, fast tracks and huge ruts, tricky down hills over washed away tracks. Wherever there's grassland there's shepherds living permanently out in the middle of nowhere, waving to you as you ride past signaling for a cigarette! But as we all know off road bikers don't smoke!

We sometimes stopped to have a look at how these shepherds lived and some had never seen a bike before, their tire biting dogs however seemed to know a motorbike and would chase you for half a mile, if we played the game correctly we could get all the pack of dogs to chase one guy while the rest of us had cramps of laughing! Arrived home 8 hours later.

Day 4-6: We're spent riding with the German guys again 9 a.m.- 7 p.m. two fuel stops and a lots of riding to checkpoints miles from anywhere, the days were getting hotter so a full water back was essential, some of the tracks are made with horse and cart and two ruts with center are often found, small river crossing and lost in a forest for one hour or two, till we retraced our tracks. This was when the German guys used their G.P.S. a first for me to see the device, useful but not absolutely necessary if you can use map & compass, however I may still buy one!

Two of the German guys, George and Stefan were very good riders and a bit quicker than their friends so Stewart and I made plans with them to have a fast day on day 5! No checkpoints just ride till we drop! Sergio pointed us towards difficult terrain on the map so off we headed 9 a.m. George was exceptionally fast riding forest roads even although they were anything but smooth! It took a lot of effort to keep up with him, and it was a great relief when from time to time a little water had to be drained from the carburetor of his XR 400!

Dozens of tracks lead from all forest roads, so as we liked we would suddenly take off up or down one for miles and then try to head back another route, back to the forest road. We managed to plan a wee detour to fuel stop and a bite of lunch at one of many small café/shops. The afternoon was much the same to a mountaintop of 1700 m and a view that was breathtaking.

The lead would change often between us, and the leader paved the way he liked, we all had never experienced such free riding and at times had no idea where we are, but knowing Romania as well I do there are plenty of shepherds to point out the way home even for riders who speak no Romanian.

We eventually arrived home again very tired but with the biggest smile we had ever had riding off road. It would be fair to say there was a hint of Scotland v Germany in the best possible way and it had to be called a draw. Before Stewart and I managed to get our bikes parked up George and Stefan were over to shake our hands and express the delight of that day, and how crazy they thought we were! Feeling mutual guys!

I was pushed to the limit of stamina and ability and riding, I previously could only dream of. The whole Enduromania set up provides for all levels of riders as the terrain is varied and the guides there to help you will point you in routes suited to your ability & wishes. The time you want to ride is purely up to each team. It just so happened that we wanted long days and sometimes difficult. There were other teams with big heavy trail bikes that also had a terrific time.

I don't think it would be possible not to enjoy riding in Enduromania for any level of rider and the team set up by Sergio was so professional and yet so laid back, there are no rules except enjoyment and the team made sure of that (a point I feel some certain UK training school and ride out trail tour my friends and I have been to would be well advised to look at!)

The only real accident that occurred was one guy to break his leg and was dealt with very quickly with their own private ambulance and a trip to a private hospital, he returned later on in the day in plaster and stayed to watch the rest of the week. The Enduromania team has 6 or more mobile telephones to assist at any time.

The week finished with a sort of fun special test around the old school to bring all riders together and the closing prize giving in the evening. Prizes for different achievements were handed out, but the Prize of Dynamic Team was given with a standing ovation and much beer throwing – come home to Scotland for the first time!

It seems we left our mark on Enduromania and our new German friends and we plan to meet again next year. Some people bring partners or wives as a holiday together, if you enjoy stunning scenery and timeless beauty along with friendly people it has it all. Needless to say I will be off to at least one of these events each year with many friends.

2002 can't come soon enough.

I highly recommend this off road experience to anyone of any level and age; it's truly "Enduro Paradise"!

The Enduromania website can be looked on:

www.enduromania.net

No visas are now required for GB passport holders to holiday in Romania.

My wife Viorica and I will be happy to assist anyone further interested.

Our Tel.: 01620 895728

Steven Palmer