

ALBANIA

OFF-ROAD PARADISE

FILIP WEBER

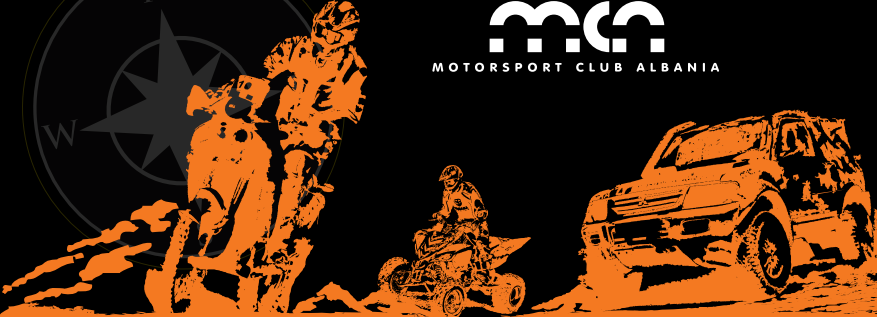
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OFF-ROAD GUIDE



MOTORSPORT CLUB ALBANIA



RALLY

ALBANIA

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www.rallyalbania.org



Foto: Marek Vincik



Foto: Filip Weber

Albania
off-road paradise
Filip Weber
Second, enlarged publication 2012
OFFROAD GUIDE



**NO BEER
NO POWER**



Written by Filip Weber, www.advrider.cz

Photo by Filip Weber, Albert Weber, Michal Benátský, Marek Vincik, Vojta Pihř, Jan Mareš, Edvin Kasimati, Rally Albania Org.

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For digital map versions see Touratech QuoVadis, Fugawi, OziExplorer and other map programmes.

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Introduction

Do you know how to say “shovel” in Albanian? “Lopata”! Even if you don’t know how to say it in Albanian, be sure to throw one in the car when you go, or better yet take two and make sure they’re really solid ones.

Albania has changed dramatically since my first visit in 1999. The towns have been renovated and new main roads, new bridges as well as a new highway to the north have been built. You can catch a mobile phone signal almost everywhere and the stores are full of goods. Only the mountains have remained the same – or maybe they have become even more desolate as time goes by. Young people are moving to the towns, mountain villages are depopulating and no one maintains the mountain roads. Illegal lumberjacks use IFA trucks to haul wood and the condition of the roads is getting worse and worse. Deep ruts, which are impassable with a regular off-road vehicle, are common. Roads are often washed away by water or covered by landslides. Each year after winter, more and more mountain roads are impassable. But there are still many beautiful, passable routes that lead to the most beautiful places in the mountains. The viewpoints of magnificent mountain lakes and majestic rock formations take your breath away. I would like this guide to lead you through the most beautiful places in Albania, places that I have fallen in love with and that I like to visit again and again. Don’t believe ugly stories that people in Central Europe tell to scare each other. Forget the legends about bloody vendettas and hold-ups. All the same, you can never be too careful and you’ll be wise to camp close to residential areas and greet and chat with the locals when you arrive. You might even bring them a small gift, like beer, a knife, an axe or cigarettes for adults and chocolate, coloured pencils, colouring books or English children’s books for kids. Albanians are very hospitable; I have always been polite and respectful to them and they have been very kind in return.

I’d like to thank all the friends who helped and supported me. I’d especially like to thank my wife Zdeňka for her patience and Edvin Kasimati, director of Rally Albania, who was a great inspiration to me.

Filip Weber - Beba, filip@weber.cz, www.advrider.cz

Routes

Despite the fact that new roads are being built all over Albania and that most of the main roads are new, mountain roads are in bad shape. Expect a very slow travel speed. Mountain roads are unmaintained and damaged by IFA trucks hauling illegally timbered wood.

The routes described here are passable only with an all-terrain vehicle or on an Enduro motorcycle. The roads are ancient, evidently built with rocks during the reign of the Turkish empire and originally intended for donkeys and people on foot.

The most interesting roads are inland, where detailed maps are lacking, there have never been any signposts and it is difficult to communicate with locals. The roads are unmaintained and it's not unusual to encounter collapsed bridges.

If you can, bring small gifts for children: coloured pencils, pencils, pads of paper. Adults will be pleased by gifts of local beer, an axe, or a pocket knife. Life is truly hard in the mountains.

GPS and military maps are useful for navigation, but they are not essential. I recommend the Reise Know How map (www.reise-know-how.de), which is evidently the only readily available usable map.

But it's best to ask the locals, who are always willing to advise you.

Road passability changes in relation to the weather and the most recent winter. A road that is passable in dry conditions can change into a muddy hellhole after rain. Likewise, some roads that I drove through one year became completely impassable after winter due to landslides.

Always travel with a good supply of emergency tools (a spade, pick axe and wench for the vehicle) and allow extra time.

Routes marked with the Albania Rally logo were part of this event, which is the most difficult European cross country rally.

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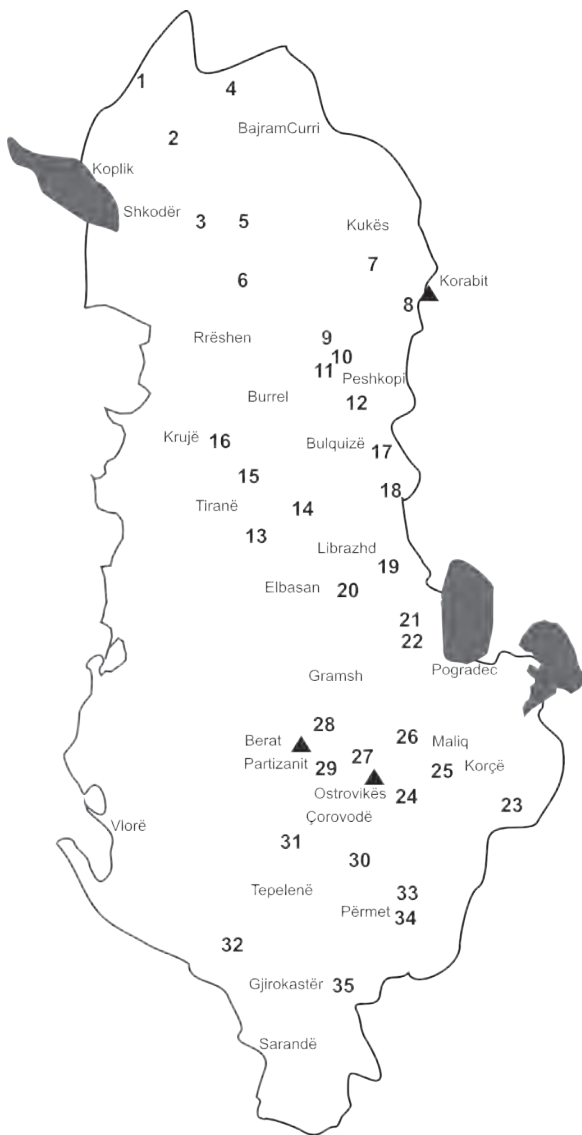
Foto: Albert Weber

Engine driver from Përrenjas.

Recommended Route

A two-week travelling route across Albania. The route starts at a crossing point from Montenegro and terminates by Lake Ohrid. I have chosen routes that are passable for loaded travel Enduros and travel off-road cars. None of the routes requires a winch or mud tyres. But be cautious, the situation can change after rain or after winter.

Name	Order
Cermit Canyon - Vermosh, north Albania	1
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North Albania

1. Cem Canyon – Vermosh

Route: Koplík – Hot – Rrapshë-Stare – Brojë – Tamarë – Lëpushë – the border at Vermosh – Gusinje

Length: 120 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux, KTM LC4 Adv

Description: A journey through a deserted corner of Albania, a splendid way of entering or leaving the country

The tarmac ends a few kilometres past the turn-off from the main road and is replaced by well-passable fine gravel up to the saddle. Wonderful and breathtaking serpentine curves will bring you down into the Cem River valley.

There is a small brewery in Tamarë. Note the trout hatcheries above Tamarë and an aqueduct cut through a rock on the right above the river.

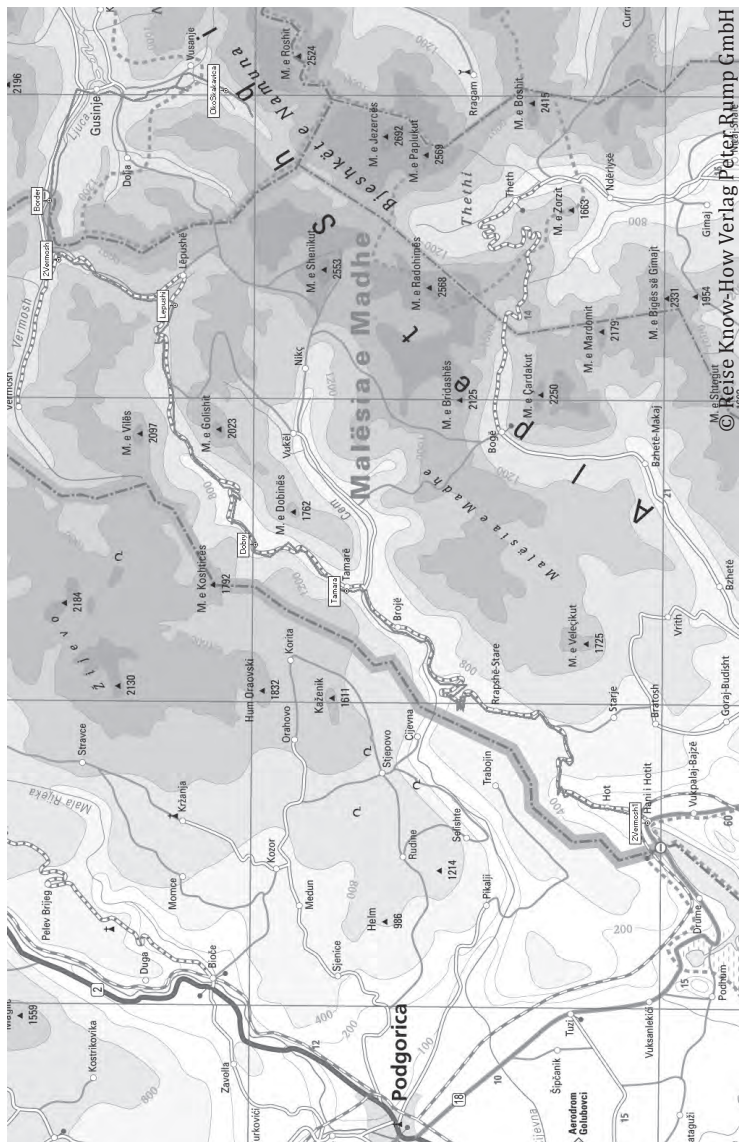
There used to be a reasonable shortcut to Bogë, but I got word that it has been blocked by a landslide.

The trail climbs through dramatic rocks above the village Selcë, which must have collapsed in some earthquake.

You can stop for a snack in Lëpushë before or after crossing the border to Montenegro. In Vermosh I can recommend the campground and basic accommodations. Albanian custom officers are usually friendly; the Montenegrins tend to be rather serious and thorough.

Do not miss the strong crystal clear river springs near Gusinje – “Oko Skakavice” and “Alipašini izvory”. Ask the locals how to get there.

2Vermosh1	N42 20.314 E19 26.120
Tamara	N42 27.698 E19 33.674
Dobry	N42 29.930 E19 35.190
Lepushi	N42 31.927 E19 43.071
2Vermosh	N42 34.768 E19 44.551
Border	N42 35.011 E19 46.488
OkoSkakavica	N42 30.711 E19 50.150



2. Bjeshkët e Namuna / Prokletije Mountains

Route: Koplík – Bogë – Theth – Nicaĵ-Shalë – Lotaj – Kir – Prekal – Shkodër

Length: 130 km, two days, but it would be a pity not to stay longer in the mountains

Description: The Albanian Alps – Bjeshkët e Namuna / Prokletije – is the most beautiful mountain range in Albania and at the same time the most deserted and wildest part of the country.

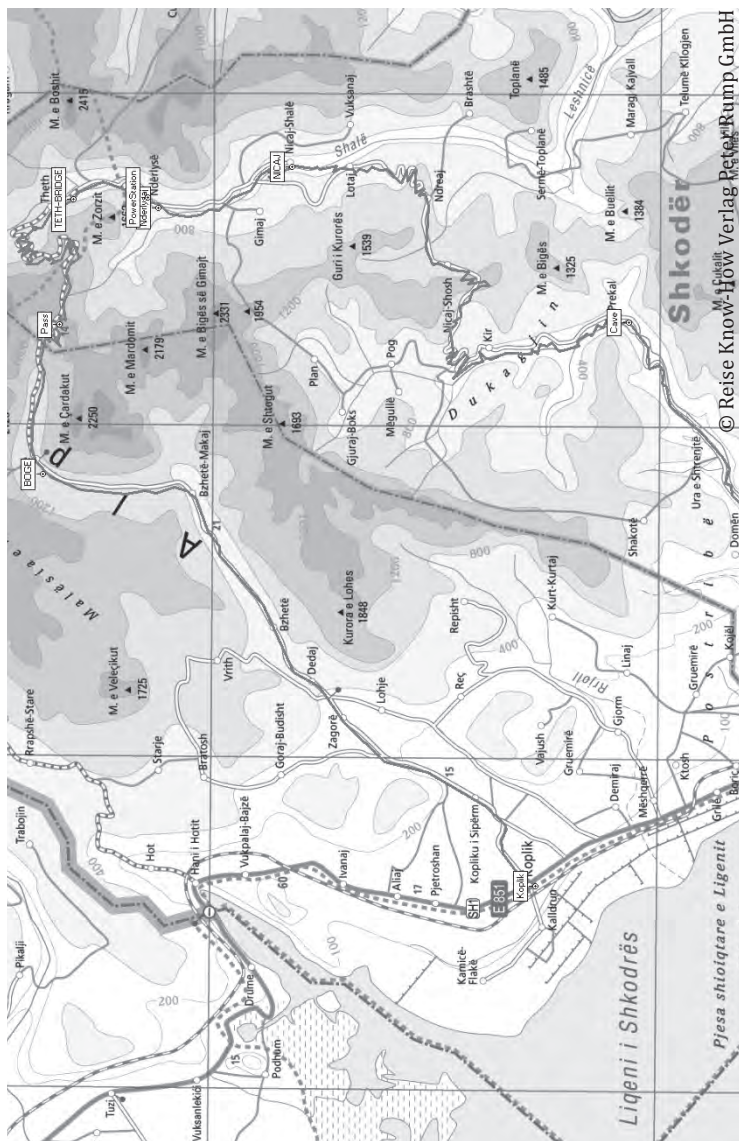
Set off on the new tarmac road from Koplík to Bogë. Off-road drivers and riders will enjoy the track from Bogë to Theth. The route goes up over the Tërthorë Pass 2000 m above sea level. You can take a wild canyon trail following the river downstream to Nderlyĵaj. There is a nice waterfall on its tributary and another one called Capri 5 km upstream. The Rrok and Dede families in the village are very kind and will gladly provide you with accommodations.

You can try the newly marked hiking paths through the surroundings of Theth and Nderlyĵaj.

The onward journey over Nicaĵ, Lotaj and Kir is quite demanding even for an off-road vehicle. Be prepared for slow progress and be especially careful in the canyon below Kir.

Points of interest: The Cave of Puci, Bogë. The cave is 1,087 meters above sea level. It is 5 by 5 and has several floors in a karstic ensemble which connects to another cave, that of Husi, located nearby. The central area of the cave consists of 5 floors which are linked to one another through vertical shafts and sloping galleries. The cave is composed of calcite concretions. Both tourists and speleologists will find it worth visiting. They can find accommodation in houses characteristic of the region in Theth and Bogë.

Pass	N42 23.448 E19 43.023
THETH-BRIDGE	N42 23.149 E19 46.809
PowerStation	N42 21.488 E19 46.865
Ndërlyĵaj	N42 21.242 E19 46.546
NICAĴ	N42 18.255 E19 47.814
Cave	N42 10.698 E19 43.185



3. Fierzë – Koman ferry

Although this is no off-road route, it is such a spectacle that you should not skip it.

The ferry crosses the dammed river Drinit të Zi. It used to be the only way to travel between Kukës, Bajram Curri, Kosovo and the coast. Two vessels used to cruise the dam up to four times a day. The new road and highway from Bajram Curri have reduced the dam traffic to a single trip a day. There might be another ferry crossing in the afternoon during the summer, but I am not sure. The ferry leaves Fierzë at six in the morning and sets off back from Koman at ten in the morning. Check this timetable with the locals.

The ferry captain always transports a tank full of petrol. The interesting thing about it is that he takes it from the mountains to the coast. The ferry owners then divide up the charged money on the captain's deck during the passage.

The connection Koman – Ura is allegedly passable, but I did not check it out.

Ferry	N42 15.823 E20 00.551
Ferry_dam	N42 06.399 E19 49.558
Hotel	N42 05.576 E19 48.791



† Foto: Filip Weber

4. Valbonë Valley

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Route: Bajram Curri – Valbonë – Rragam and back

Length: 40 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux

Description: One of the most beautiful valleys in Albania.

The Valbonë Valley no longer is what it used to be: a godforsaken, wild and hardly accessible valley. A new tarmac road to Valbonë is under construction and there is a large camp site above Valbonë. Yet the valley retains its beauty and is certainly worth visiting.

Consider starting off at Valbonë where the paved road ends, go through the river bed up to Rragam and spend the night around there. You can also venture a hike through the surrounding mountains to a little lake by Çerem, or walk to Theth. Do not underestimate this trip, however.



BarjamCuri	N42 21.286 E20 04.738
Miele-Valbonë	N42 27.320 E19 54.012
Rragam	N42 24.760 E19 50.784
Valbonë	N42 27.119 E19 53.415

Central Albania

5. Fierzë – Fushë Arrëz

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Route: Fierzë – Bugjon – Iballë – CikBallesh – Kryezi – Fushë Arrëz

Length: 30 km, two hours

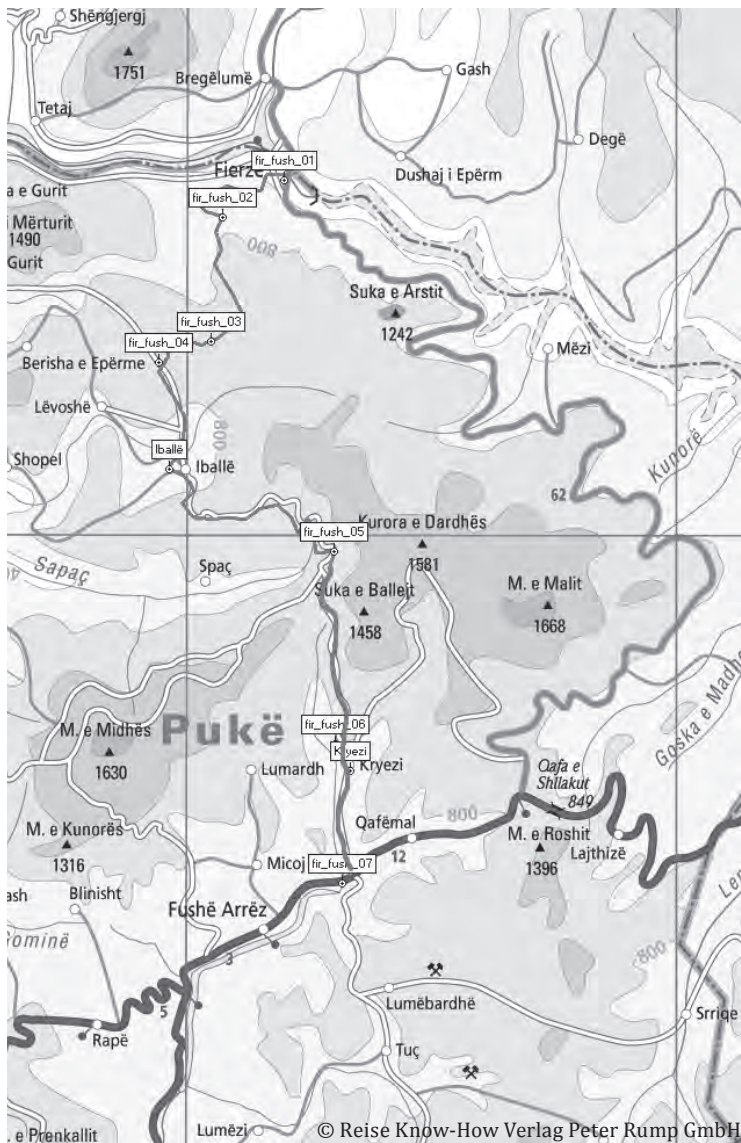
Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RallyRaid

Level of Difficulty: Easy fine-gravel trail

Description: Excellent shortcut between Fierzë and Fushë Arrëz, you will save yourself a lot of slow kilometres on tarmac roads through the mountains. It is also recommended for trips to Kukës (Bajram Curri – Kukës is a totally boring route), the valley of Drini i Zi and the Lurë Lakes.

Beyond the bridge in Fierzë just below the dam a muddy road turns off to a quarry (fir_fush_01). Having climbed a meandering road across the mountain ridge, you come to the village of Iballë. Going around a water reservoir you get over another ridge. What follows is a very nice path meandering through pine forests on the slope. Then, just a simple descent to Kryezi and a tarmac road leading to Fushë Arrëz (fir_fush_07).

fir_fush_01	N42 15.399 E20 01.987
fir_fush_02	N42 14.832 E20 00.713
fir_fush_03	N42 12.933 E20 00.487
fir_fush_04	N42 12.617 E19 59.430
Iballë	N42 10.996 E19 59.639
fir_fush_05	N42 09.750 E20 03.002
fir_fush_06	N42 06.828 E20 03.043
Kryezi	N42 06.414 E20 03.358
fir_fush_07	N42 04.703 E20 03.190



6. Forced Labour Camp, Central Albania

Route: Fushë Arrëz – Tuç – Gurth Spaç forced labour camp – Reps – Peshqesh

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Length: 35 km, three hours

Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID

Level of Difficulty: Partly a fine-gravel road, but the path across the saddle is more difficult, passable by car

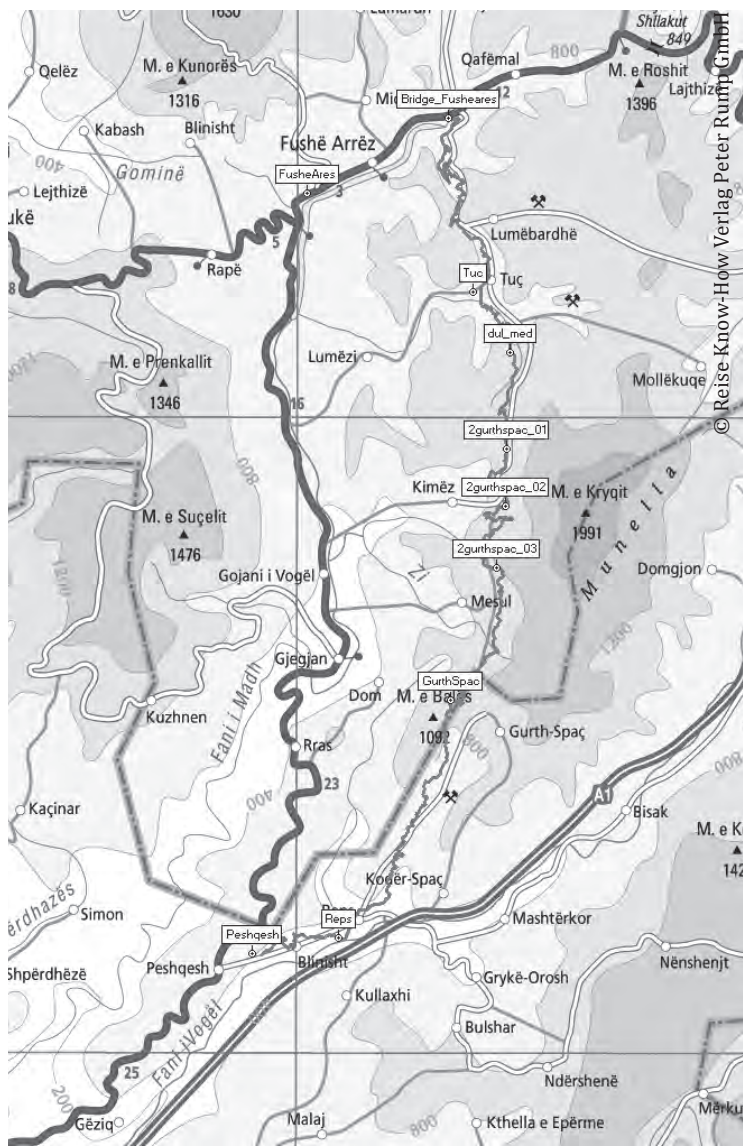
Description: A route through beautiful mountains passing by the most gruesome of all Albanian forced labour camps, Gurth Spaç.

Level of difficulty: Difficult over the pass, practicable for a vehicle, otherwise easy gravel

Description: This route leads through beautiful mountains around Gurth Spaç, the most horrible of all the Albanian gulags.

From Fushë Arrëz go about 4 km on the main road to Kukës. Turn right over the bridge (Bridge_Fusheares) onto gravel and follow the main road. It's a good dirt road that swings over the pass and then follows a stream down into the village of LumëBardhe. At the intersection take a right turn downstream to the village of Tuç (tuc). The road continues to follow the stream into the hills. After 12 km you come to a bridge and beyond the bridge there is a mine opening with red water flowing out – it's a copper mine (dul_med). Take a right over the bridge. This is the beginning of the most difficult part of the route, which gets little use or maintenance. You climb up to a ridge around a highly visible dump site on the left-hand side and dilapidated houses beyond the stream. This is the hardest part of the route. There is a small wooden cross on the ridge.

The road leads from the steep hill around a large mine opening and gradually gets better. Then there is a turn-off before a village. Take a left uphill and after about 600m you will see a blue gate on the left side where the road bends (blue_gate). Stick to the main road, once again passing mines across another ridge. After the mines there is a turn-off to the right and you ride out to a viewpoint (ViewpointG). Then you follow serpentine curves



down to the cemetery. From there, go down through the canyon to the Gurth Spaç mine (Gurth-Spac). The road you want may not be the most heavily used one as the surrounding mines are still active and tracks may lead to a different mine every year. Sharp serpentine curves lead you down into a dramatic canyon, where the Gurth Spaç mine is located. The next part of the route, to Reps, is easy and from Reps there is tarmac. In Reps there is also an on-ramp to the highway even though it is not shown on maps.

Points of Interest: Gurth Spaç used to be the worst forced labour camp in Albania. Many people uncomfortable for the communist regime, especially intellectuals, were worked to death in this copper mine. Severe frosts, unheated quarters in winter, scorching heat in summer and hard labour in the mine took their toll.

FusheAres	N42 03.527 E20 00.205
Bridge_Fusheares	N42 04.699 E20 03.188
Tuc	N42 01.970 E20 03.698
Turning under Lumëbardhë, switch right	N42 02.983 E20 03.454
dul_med (copper mine), switch right	N42 01.014 E20 04.482
Waypoint	N41 59.500 E20 04.420
Waypoint	N41 58.608 E20 04.400
Waypoint	N41 57.629 E20 04.217
Blue gate	Modrá vrata
Turning in wood	N41 57.650 E20 04.032
Turning in wood	N41 57.553 E20 04.333
Turning in wood	N41 56.941 E20 04.268
Turning in wood	N41 56.332 E20 04.236
Turning in wood	N41 56.241 E20 04.048
Turning before viewpoint	N41 55.751 E20 03.794
Turning at cementary	N41 55.880 E20 03.386
GurthSpac	N41 55.554 E20 03.237
Peshqesh	N41 51.562 E19 59.069
Reps	N41 51.799 E20 00.883



Foto: Albert Weber

*Highlander
Cheese works in Radomir*



Foto: Filip Weber

7. Drinit të Zi River Valley

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Route: Peshkopi – Kuben – Rreth-Kolaj – Arras – Lugaj – Zall-Reç – Mustafaj – Kukës

Length: About 80 km, half a day

Driven: 2001 – 2011 – KTM LC4 Adv, Toyota Hilux

Level of Difficulty: Easy

Description: A route leading through a beautiful valley high above the Drinit të Zi River

Cross a narrow bridge past Kuben. Turn right towards Arras where you can stop at a restaurant by fish hatcheries. I strongly recommend you visit this restaurant. In Arras after the bridge turn left to the Lurë Lakes. Just follow your nose for about 20 km up to another bridge. The road goes over it and swings up into a saddle and once more down and up to Mustafaj where tarmac starts and will take you to Kukës.

If you go in the opposite direction, don't miss the turn-off to the valley past Mustafaj. A new tarmac road is being built across Ceren to Peshkopi. Before the new road was constructed, the minibuses cruising between Kukës and Peshkopi used the road in the Drin valley.

Arras	N41 44.199 E20 18.660
Bridge-Drinit	N41 55.584 E20 21.308
Bridge-peshkopi	N41 40.692 E20 20.171
Mustafaj	N41 58.385 E20 24.165
2Korabit	N41 57.371 E20 23.283
ViewPoint	N41 54.269 E20 20.678

8. Below Korabit

Route: Peshkopi – Kastriot – Trojak – Radomirë – Bushtricë – Domaj – Kukës

Length: 100 km, half a day

Driven: Toyota Hilux

Level of Difficulty: Easy

Description: An alternative course of the route through the Drinit të Zi River valley

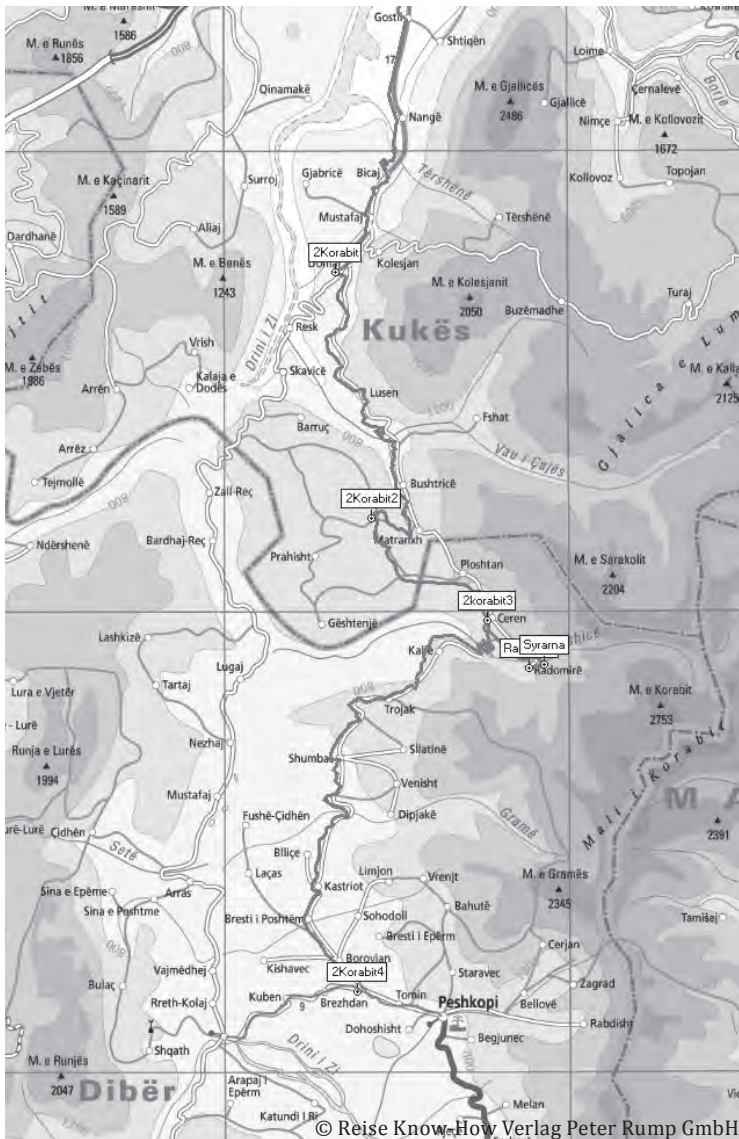
There is tarmac road from Peshkopi (the name of the town would be something like “Trouty” in English because “peshk” means trout) to Kastriot followed by a comfortable fine gravel path. The road gets worse past the bridge over Veleshicës, climbing uphill rather steeply. Radomirë lies directly under Korabit, a bit off the road, but the two marvellous village cheese plants are worth the detour.

The track winds through the mountains and is difficult to find. Try to ask the locals. Intense construction of new tarmac roads is underway here.

I recommend following the sightseeing tarmac road along the left bank of Drinit të Zi River from Kukës to Fierzë and taking a ferry to Komani. If you prefer terra firma, carry on to Valbonë. The ride to Bajram Curri along the right bank of the lake is boring.

Points of Interest: There are two cheese plants in the village of Radomirë. The local people bring milk-churns here on donkeys every morning. Right from the cheese plants you can start climbing Albania’s highest mountain peak, Korabit. The route is marked at places, the final climb is very difficult. On the top, snow lies long into summer and the path may not be passable.

2Korabit	N41 57.371 E20 23.283
2Korabit2	N41 52.038 E20 24.304
2korabit3	N41 49.824 E20 27.662
Radomire	N41 48.771 E20 28.875
Syrarna/Cheese works	N41 48.845 E20 29.320
2Korabit4	N41 41.749 E20 23.877



9. Lurë Lakes

Route: Arras – Lura e Vjetër – Lurë Lakes – Qaf-Murrë – Selisht

Length: 80 km, all day, but allow for two

Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID, Toyota Hilux

Level of Difficulty: Difficult, not recommended for motorcycles with a lot of baggage and vehicles with low ground clearance

Description: The Lurë Lakes are not easily accessible. I recommend taking the route in this direction as it is very difficult to climb the mountains in the opposite direction.

From the trout hatcheries in Arras (arras, Lure_01) climb between the fields almost up to the village of GrykëNokë, just before the village turn left (Lure_02) to Çidhën. Go steeply up to the ridge, where there is a beautiful plain, and then go down again to Lura e Vjetër. The road is poor and steep, but practicable.

There is a new hotel and a shop in Lura e Vjetër. The beginning of the next section is very difficult to find (Lure_03), ask the locals. The road climbs steeply around GSM transmitters to the first of the lakes, Liqeni i Madh.

You can't get lost further on, but the route may be challenging – landslides, fallen trees, mud and deep puddles. You will pass by several lakes, probably the most beautiful of them being Liqeni i Luleve. In 2011 I found fresh bear droppings on the road.

Starting from the last lake there is a very poor and steep shortcut straight down. It is better to turn left to the valley before the lake (Lure_06). Though the by-pass road is damaged by water with deep ruts in it, it is still better than the shortcut. There can be deep tracks between the intersections Lure_06 and Lure_07. Alternatively you can try to pass by on another side path. At the Lure_09 intersection turn sharply to the right, past Lure_10 enter the stream bed. At Lure_11 the shortcut from the last lake joins in from the right.

Further on you pass a new active mine and at the intersection (Lure_12) you connect onto the main road between Qaf-Murrë

and Lis.

There is a small shop (bier) in Qaf-Murrë. From here you can go back via Selisht to the bridge at Peshkopi or cross the ridge from Selisht to Belquize – described below. Or you can explore Lake Shtungës and Lake Miçekut.

Note: The road Qaf-Murrë – Vinjol – Lis marked in the KnowHow map no longer exists. Now you can take the white-marked road to the north directly from Qaf-Murrë to Lis, passing by the turn-off to Lurë Lakes.

One of the Lurë lakes.

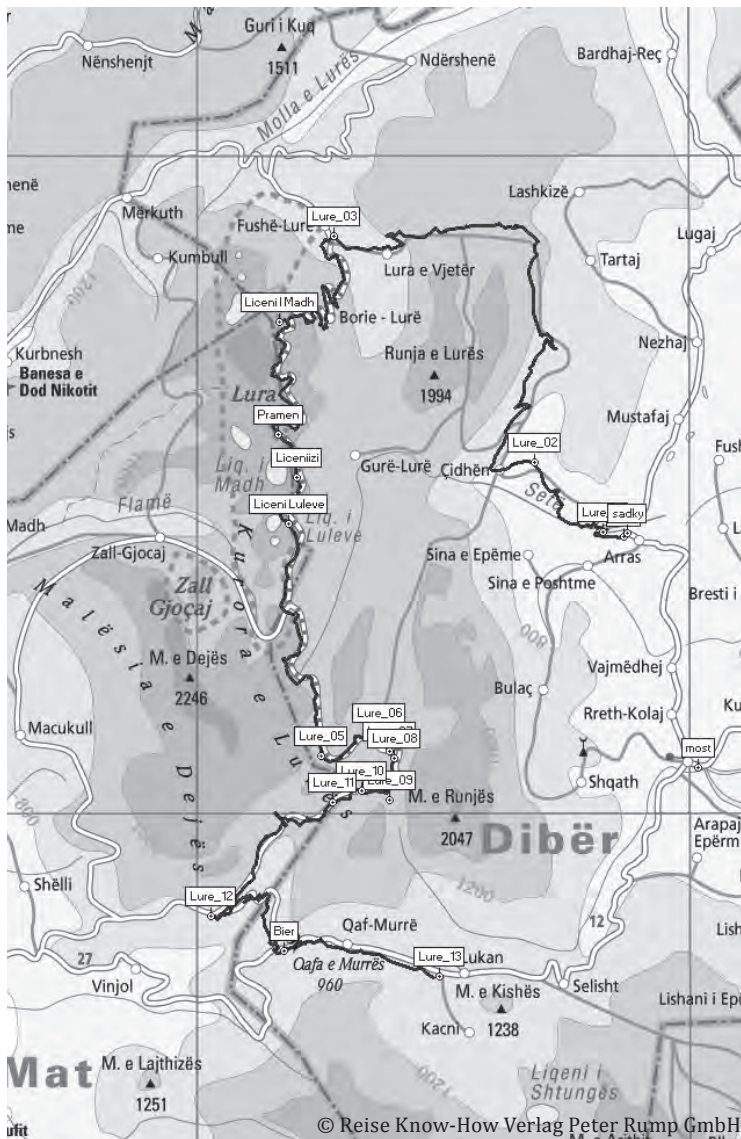


Foto: Filip Weber

arras	N41 44.199 E20 18.660
Lure_01	N41 44.273 E20 18.243
Lure_02	N41 45.332 E20 16.859
Lure_03	N41 48.775 E20 12.785
Liceni I Madh	N41 47.474 E20 11.672
Pramen	N41 45.760 E20 11.643
Liceniizi	N41 45.103 E20 12.035
Liceni Luleve	N41 44.401 E20 11.861
Lure_05	N41 40.868 E20 12.524
Lure_06	N41 41.232 E20 13.698
Lure_07	N41 40.949 E20 13.903
Lure_08	N41 40.832 E20 14.011
Lure_09	N41 40.202 E20 13.900
Lure_10	N41 40.345 E20 13.348
Lure_11	N41 40.163 E20 12.765
Lure_12	N41 38.447 E20 10.294
Bier	N41 37.911 E20 11.767



Foto: Filip Weber



10. Shtungës Lakes, Kreshtës Mountain Range

Route: Kacni – Shtungës Lakes

Length: 15 km, half-day

Driven: 2011 – KTM EXC 450

Level of Difficulty: Very difficult, steep climbs, boulders

Description: An extremely challenging trip to the beautiful valley of Shtungës and the mountain lakes in the Kreshtës mountain range. The difference in elevation from the village of Kacni is almost 1,100 m.

There is a turn-off to the valley across the bridge at the lumber mill (2kacni) on the road between Qaf-Murrë and Selisht. Before the village of Kacni, there is a coffee bar serving delicious trout (fish). There is a turn-off to the right to a stony path beyond the bridge in the bend past the coffee bar. The road climbs along serpentine curves and after a 4km ride there is a turn-off to the left (2Shtrunges). The road continues straight towards the Miçekut Lakes. The road is still stony with serpentine curves and beautiful viewpoints around an abandoned mine. Pass by a building (2Shtrunges2) providing accommodation to miners working at the newly opened mine to the left above you. This is where the really challenging climb begins. Sharp serpentine curves, a stony path; it may be dangerous, particularly in rainy conditions. The locals drive down this road in IFAs (IFA – an East German heavy truck with enormous passability) loaded with logs and extracted rock from the mine at the lakes. Don't underestimate the fact that the IFA can pass through and be careful. The road climbs up to the ridge and falls back down into the valley of Shtungës. There is a simple shepherd's shack (bouda) built there. The road to the left from the intersection (2Shtrunges3) beyond the shack leads around the ridge in the direction of the village of Selisht. This road passes by several other nice lakes but it is blocked by an impassable landslide at about the 7km point. The turn-off to the right brings you successively to several lakes. Try to drive or walk around the mine to the very end of the road to Liqeni i Zi – Black Lake. The road is not used frequently, it may be torn away by wa-

ter or blocked by fallen trees. But Liqeni i Zi is definitely worth the effort. I recommend spending the night at the lakes.

If you have climbed all the way up here, you will have to pluck up the courage to go back down along the serpentine road, so be careful!

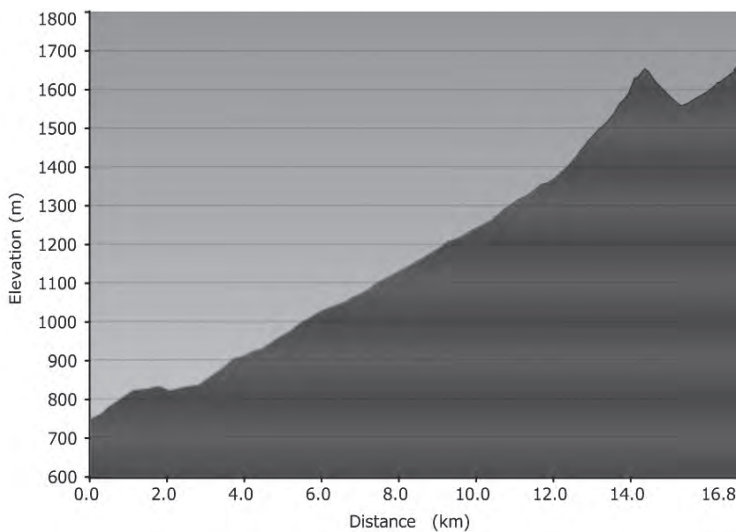
Points of interest: The lakes were originally natural – remains of glacial lakes. In 1985 dams were constructed; the lakes were probably intended to serve as water reservoirs. The surrounding mines were abandoned after 1990. Mining was resumed in some of them around 2008. Chromium oxide is extracted from the mines.

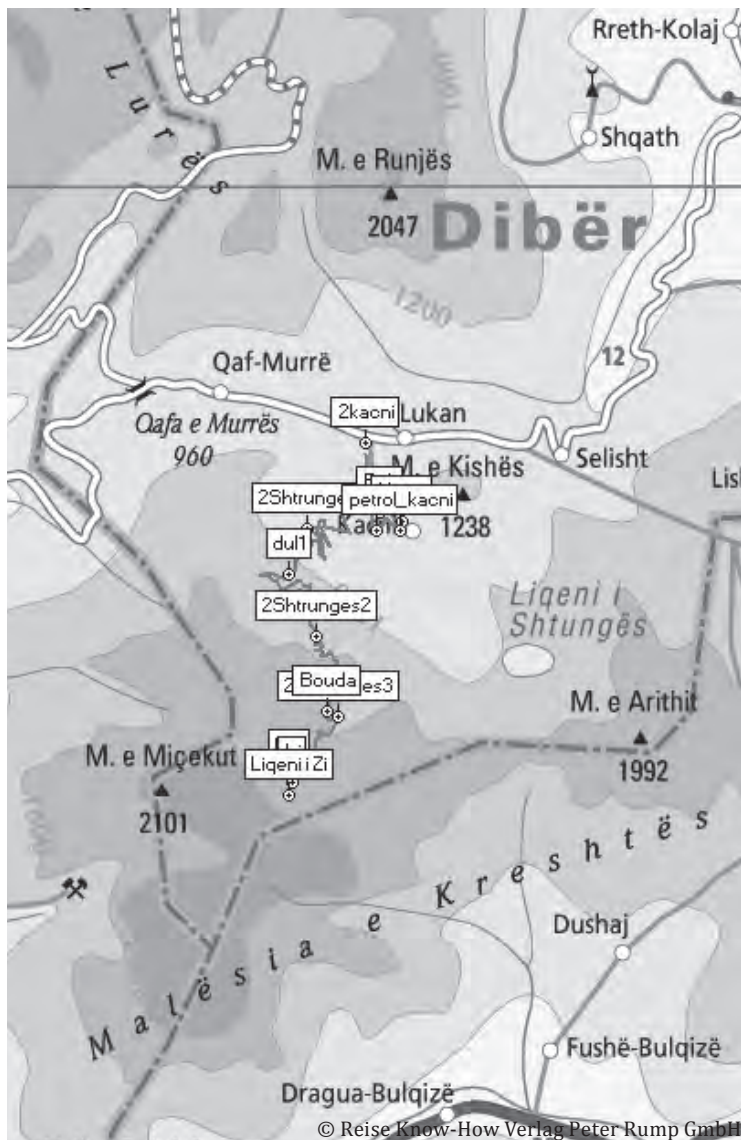


Foto: Filip Weber

Lake Zi

2kacni	N41 37.514 E20 14.909
Fish	N41 36.859 E20 15.106
2lake	N41 36.673 E20 15.050
2Shtrunges	N41 36.689 E20 14.174
2Shtrunges2	N41 35.646 E20 14.274
Bouda	N41 34.924 E20 14.420
2Shtrunges3	N41 34.870 E20 14.564
Liqeni i zi	N41 34.124 E20 13.922
Izi	N41 34.231 E20 13.979
Kacni	N41 36.769 E20 15.375
dul1 (mine)	N41 36.256 E20 13.926
petrol_kacni	N41 36.674 E20 15.364





11. Miçekut Lakes

Route: Kacni – Miçekut Lakes– Lake Balgjajt- Klos

Length: 50 km, all day, but I recommend spending the night at the lakes

Driven: 2011 – KTM EXC 450

Level of Difficulty: Difficult, steep climbs, boulders

Description: A difficult trip across the Kreshtës mountain range to the beautiful Miçekut Lakes. Depending on the level of difficulty, it is possible to continue across the mountain ridge as far as Klos. The trip is only recommended for really powerful off-road vehicles or light motorcycles without any load.

There is a turn-off to the valley across the bridge at the lumber mill (2kacni) on the road between Qaf-Murrë and Selisht. Before the village of Kacni, there is a coffee bar serving delicious trout (fish) and further on, in the village itself, a petrol station. There is a turn-off to the right to a stony path (2Micekut) beyond the bridge in the bend past the coffee bar. The road climbs along serpentine curves and after a 4km ride there is a turn-off to the left for the Shtungës Lakes. Go past the turn-off and continue straight on. The road climbs gradually along serpentine curves around building ruins and a house with an aerial (antena). There is a difficult connection to Qaf-Murrë to the right from here (described below). Keep driving uphill along the stony path.

Option 1. At a tiny quarry, there is a turn-off for one of the route options to the Miçekut Lakes (2Micekut1). This option is slightly easier but the path may be impassable due to mud in spring or after spells of rain. The road looks like it doesn't lead anywhere but don't worry. Keep riding via point 2Micekut2 through a pine forest. There may be very deep ruts from IFA vehicles on the road. The tracks may be so deep that it will be impossible for a car to go through or around them. The road keeps climbing, steeply over rocks in places, until you arrive at Waterlily Lake (2Micekut3).

Option 2. At the tiny quarry (2Micekut1) continue along the main road. Before an abandoned mine with a large waste dump turn sharply to the left and uphill again (2Micekut21). The road is

pretty muddy as it is used by lumberjacks. After some 600 m there is a perpendicular turn to the right with a sharp climb. The climb is approx. 900 m long, very steep, torn away by water, over big rocks. But it is lined with trees to which you can attach the winch rope... At the top you are rewarded by spectacular views and after crossing a mountain meadow you will have Waterlily Lake (2Micekut3) just below you.

At the next lake, Hysen Begu, there is a sharp turn-off to the right and down (2Micekut4). Downhill from the turn-off, there is a miners' camp and a gallery (mine_begu). Active mining takes place here, both in the gallery and on the surface using an excavator. Beyond another lake, there is a shepherd's hut (salas) where the shepherds make amazing sheep cheese.

The next part of the road to Miçekut Lake is infrequently used and stony. Miçekut Lake lies at an elevation of 1,830 m above sea level below the mountain of the same name, Maja e Miçekut, which is 2,101 m above sea level.

If the trip up here pushed your abilities to the limit, take the same way back. From Miçekut Lake there is a very steep and difficult climb to a saddle with an elevation of 1,984 m above sea level (pass). The road is never used, and it's full of loose rocks. Beyond the saddle there is another lake and a viewpoint overlooking the village of Fushë-Belquizë situated below the mountains. Below the lake there is a road which used to lead to Fushë-Belquizë but it is blocked by fallen rocks. It may be passable on foot or on a donkey. Not far below the lake you can turn to the right (2Balgit) and ride through the terrain across a low saddle (pass2) to Lake Balgjajt. However, the section across the saddle is full of low cliffs and stones and it will probably be impossible to find a way for a car to get through. On a motorcycle you can weave your way between the stones on the sheep track. You can go around Lake Balgjajt on the right-hand side. The road picks up again just next to it. The road was built to access the newly opened mine which is to the right of the 2Balgit2 intersection. Go left and the road descends very steeply along serpentine curves to the Shkallas mine (mine_shkallas).

It will probably be impossible to drive in the opposite direction in rainy conditions. From the Shkallas mine there is an easy road through a canyon to the town of Klos.

Option 3. If you are coming back from Lake Miçekut and do not want to take the same route to Kacni, turn off at the house with an aerial (antena). The road goes downhill through a pine forest. There are ruts from IFA trucks and can be difficult to drive, particularly after rain. Come out onto a plain next to the ruins of a house (HouseRuin). Here you can turn to the right and follow an unused but passable path to QuafaMura, where there is a store selling beer. Or you can try turning to the left. A fairly good road winds through pine forests on mountain slopes for some 15 km to the village of Kurdari, which is not far from the main road between Klos and Burrel. You can try finding the Kulla e Mehmet Sufit tower near the village of Kurdari and send me the coordinates.

Points of interest: The Kreshtës mountain range is one of the most outlying mountain ranges in Albania. After World War II English and Yugoslavian enemy agents sent to fight the emerging communist regime would allegedly parachute in here.

Note: The road Qaf-Murrë – Vinjol – Lis marked in the KnowHow map no longer exists. Now you can take the white-marked road to the north directly from Qaf-Murrë to Lis, passing by the turn-off to the Lurë Lakes.



Foto: Filip Weber

*Shepherd at Miçekut lakes.
Mine in Kreshtës mountains.*

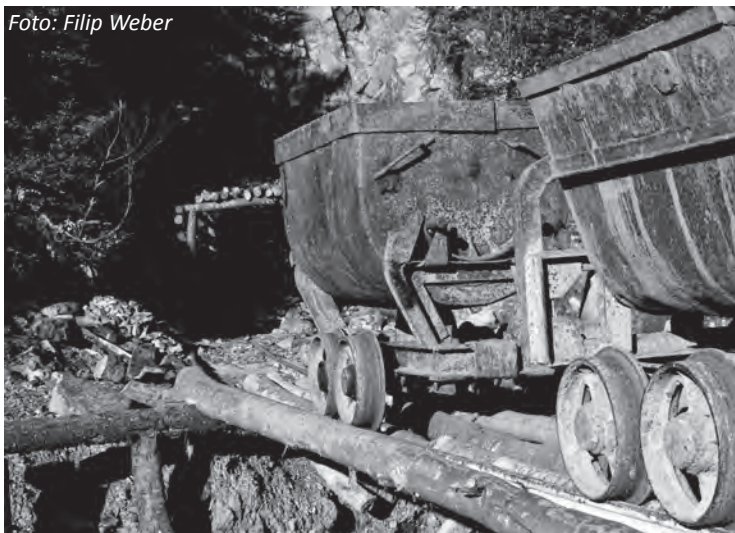
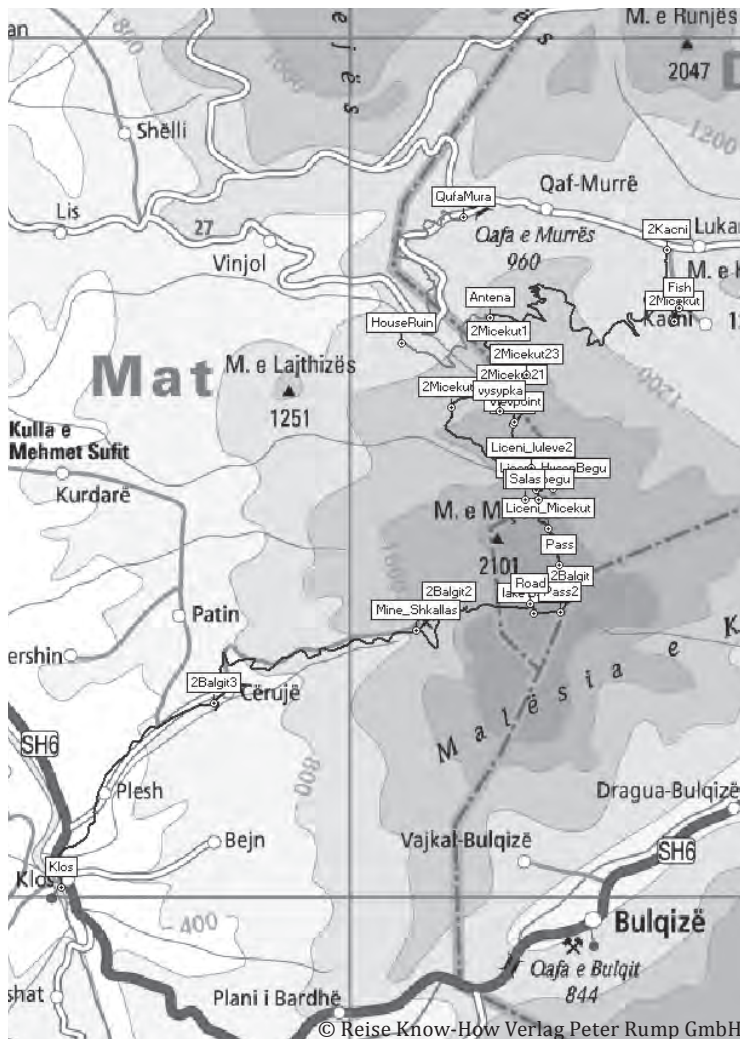


Foto: Filip Weber

2Kacni	N41 37.514 E20 14.909
Fish	N41 36.859 E20 15.106
2Micekut	N41 36.689 E20 15.043
Antena	N41 36.749 E20 12.186
2Micekut1	N41 36.344 E20 12.314
2Micekut2	N41 35.689 E20 11.581
2Micekut3	N41 34.933 E20 12.799
2Micekut4	N41 34.731 E20 12.887
Liceni_Micekut	N41 34.267 E20 13.091
Pass	N41 33.849 E20 13.239
2Balgit	N41 33.492 E20 13.418
2Balgit2	N41 33.304 E20 11.528
Pass2	N41 33.303 E20 13.260
Mine_Shkallas	N41 33.091 E20 11.036
2Balgit3	N41 32.250 E20 07.900
Klos	N41 30.103 E20 05.516
2Micekut21	N41 35.834 E20 12.529
2Micekut23	N41 36.073 E20 12.762
HouseRuin	N41 36.453 E20 10.797
lake Balgait	N41 33.283 E20 12.834
Liceni_HysenBegu	N41 34.755 E20 13.149
Liceni_luleve2	N41 34.980 E20 12.821
Mine_begu	N41 34.631 E20 12.938
Pivo/Bier	N41 37.911 E20 11.767
QufaMura	N41 37.911 E20 11.767
Road	N41 33.404 E20 12.792
Salas	N41 34.630 E20 12.722
stavba/building	N41 35.492 E20 12.547



Viewpoint	N41 35.520 E20 12.559
Dump	N41 35.653 E20 12.336

12. Shupenzë – Selisht, Central Albania

Route: Shupenzë – Selisht

RALLY ALBANIA

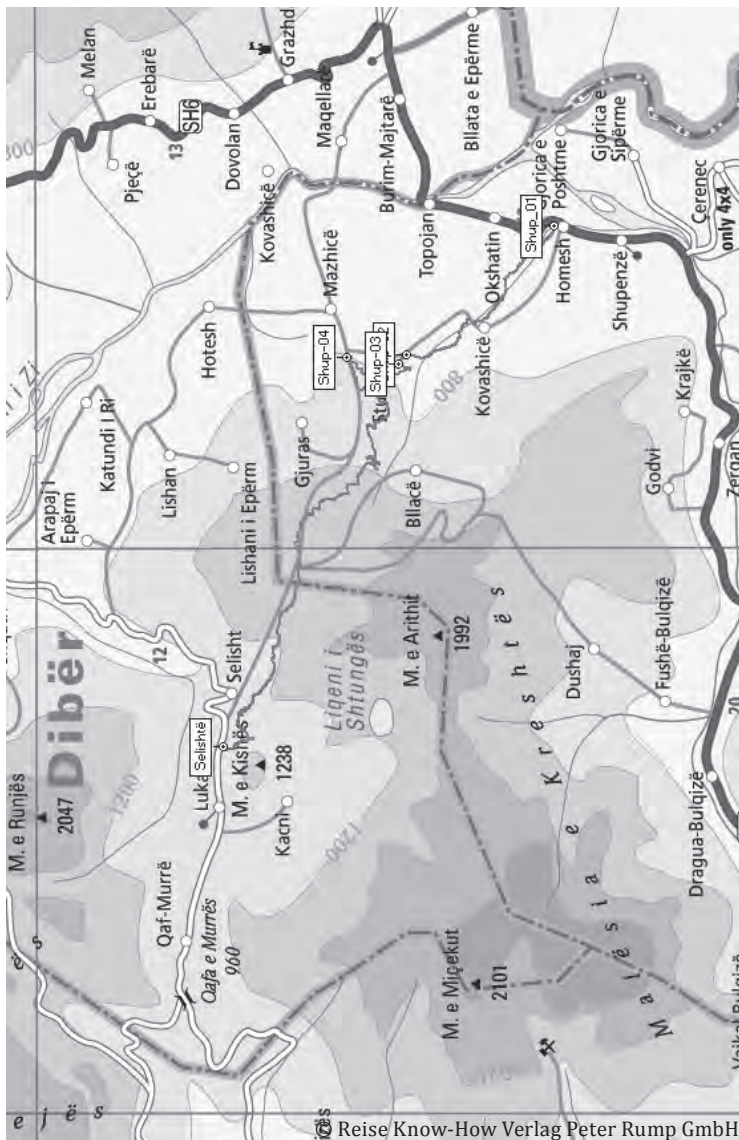
Length: About 25 km, one hour

Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID, Toyota Hilux

Level of Difficulty: Gravel mountain road

Description: A shortcut to avoid a boring trip on a tarmac road via Peshkopi. At Shupenzë leave the tarmac road (Shup-01). Keep going upstream, pass by a school building. At the intersection (Shup-02) turn left, then left again (Shup-03) and left once more (Shup-04). You pass GSM transmitters along the way and climb up to the ridge. Before reaching the ridge the road dives into bushes. There are deep puddles with mud on the road here. You can go around some sections by riding above the road on the left-hand side through a meadow. Sections that can't be passed around should be explored carefully. On the ridge pass a concrete monument and start descending along a stony road through a creek valley until arriving at the village of Selisht (Selistë).

Turning from Homesh to Selisht	N41 33.215 E20 25.459
Shup-02	N41 35.080 E20 23.423
Shup-03	N41 35.184 E20 23.252
Shup-04	N41 35.865 E20 23.377
Pass Selisht - Homes	N41 36.538 E20 20.113
Turning in Selisht	N41 37.116 E20 16.660
Selishtëë	N41 37.514 E20 16.488



13. Elbasan – Tiranë

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Labinot Fushë – Gricani – Lanabregas – Tiranë through the mountains

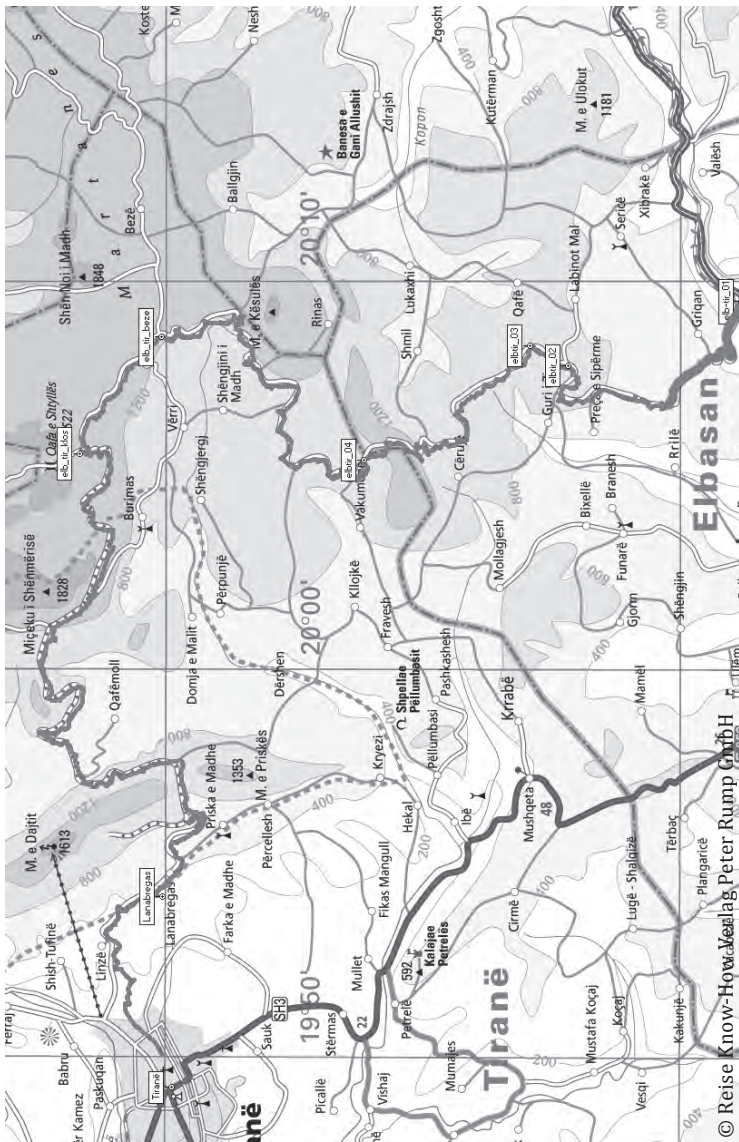
Length: 100 km, half-day

Level of Difficulty: Easy rocky mountain road

Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID, Toyota Hilux

Description: A pleasant trip through almost deserted mountains. On the road between Librazhd and Elbasan, approx. 9 km before Elbasan, there is a turn-off under a railway track to a narrow tarmac road (elbtir_01), which climbs steeply into the mountains. The tarmac ends after a while and a typical Albanian rocky mountain road follows. The navigation is easy as long as you maintain the right direction. At points elbtir_02 and elbtir_03 turn to the left. This section of the road runs for many kilometres through a beech forest where you feel like you're driving through a green tunnel. Pass an estate with a lake (elbtir-04). The green tunnel continues until you come out at the intersection of roads between Tiranë and Bezë (elb_tir_beze). Turn to the left here again. The road continues through a gorgeous limestone mountain range, around pitted plains and dolines. The next intersection is a turn-off to Klos (elb_tir_klos), to the left again. The road then gradually changes to tarmac and comes down around the highest hill, Dajtit, through the village of Lanabregas into Tiranë. Entering Tiranë after the serenity of the mountains, the traffic on the streets of Tiranë is murder.

elb-tir_01	N41 08.813 E20 09.497
elbtir_02	N41 12.186 E20 07.818
elbtir_03	N41 12.918 E20 08.333
elbtir_04	N41 16.147 E20 05.392
elb_tir_beze	N41 20.081 E20 08.580
elb_tir_klos	N41 21.678 E20 05.542
Lanabregas	N41 20.045 E19 54.135
Tiranë	N41 19.870 E19 49.222



14. Elbasan – Bulqizë

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Elbasan – Bezë – Krastë – Bulqizë.

Length: 70 km, half-day,

Level of difficulty: Easy rocky mountain road

Driven: 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID, Toyota Hilux

This route is the same as the previous route Elbasan – Tiranë except for the intersection (elb_tir_beze). At the intersection turn onto another rocky road to Bezë. There is a large army base in Bezë. Cross a bridge over a pretty creek and about 3 km past Bezë there is an intersection at a monument (2Bulqize1). You can continue straight on to Librazhd or to Bulqizë approaching from the east. I rode these routes during a time trial for the rally but I don't have any records and I do not remember anything about them so they are not described here. So turn left. The rocky road winds through pine forests along the foot of the mountains. Pass a turn-off for Lenë (2Bulqize4) and then there is a view of an enormous mine. Mine galleries have been dug through the entire mountain here and there is a waste dump under each one. The mine is active, with explosions thundering all day long, and the work continues even on weekends. You climb up serpentine curves through the mine and drive right through its centre (mine). There is a guard here but he has never objected to our driving through. The next part of the road leads through a valley to the turn-off for Krastë. From here a road of broken tarmac leads to the main road to Bulqizë (2Bulqize). I also recommend the turn-off at point (2Kochyses) to a side canyon. This area is also full of mines and you can go all the way up to the Kochyses Reservoir (Liqueni), which is the water source for the mines. There are large bunkers on the shore of the reservoir.

Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



*The donkey is the only means of transport in the mountains.
Highlander.*

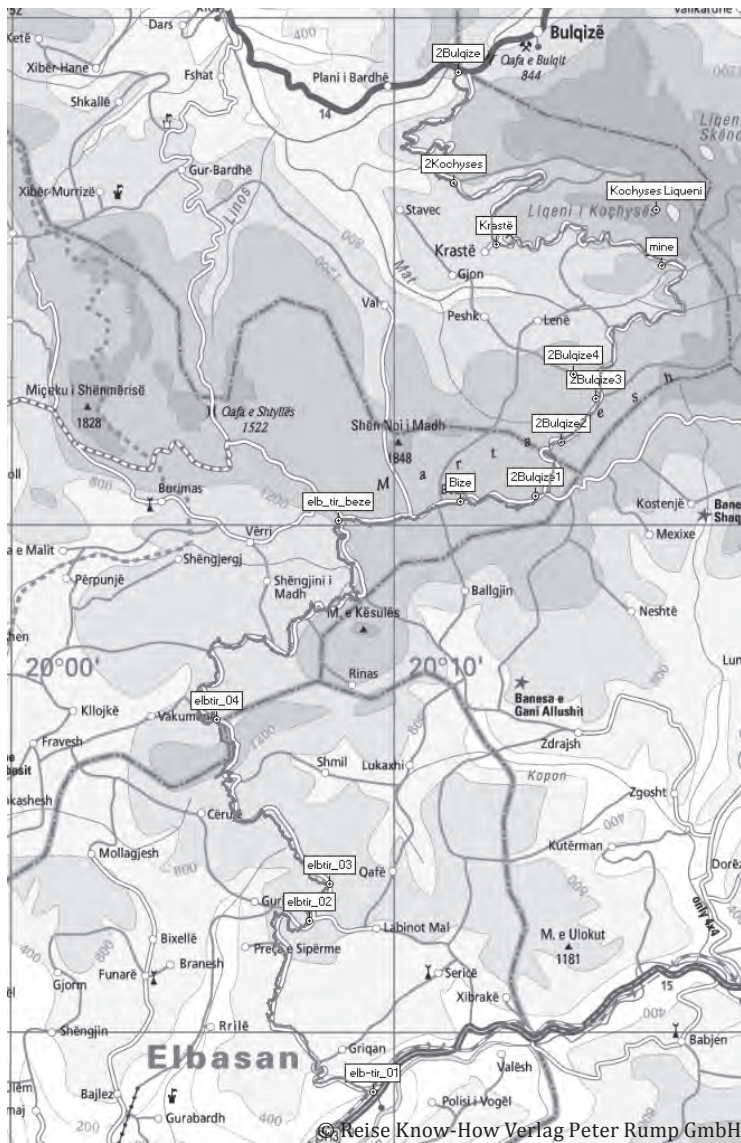


Foto: Albert Weber

elb-tir_01	N41 08.813 E20 09.497
elbtir_02	N41 12.186 E20 07.818
elbtir_03	N41 12.918 E20 08.333
elbtir_04	N41 16.147 E20 05.392
elb_tir_beze	N41 20.081 E20 08.580
Beze	N41 20.453 E20 11.790
2Bulqize1	N41 20.570 E20 13.725
2Bulqize2	N41 21.643 E20 14.398
2Bulqize3	N41 22.490 E20 15.326
2Bulqize4	N41 22.974 E20 14.736
Mine	N41 25.118 E20 17.059
Krastë	N41 25.542 E20 12.730
2Kochyses	N41 26.764 E20 11.594
Kochyses Liqueni	N41 26.223 E20 16.885
2Bulqize	N41 28.929 E20 11.727



Foto: Filip Weber



15. Tiranë – Klos

Route: Tiranë – Lanabregas – Gur i Bardh – Fshat
– Klos

Length: 50 km, approx. 2 hours

Driven: 2011 Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Easy rocky mountain road

Description: From Tiranë you take the tarmac road around the highest hill, Dajti, going higher and higher into the mountains. You pass a quarry and the road, which follows the contour line, leads to an army garrison and restaurants. The tarmac ends here and the road gradually changes to a rocky road through limestone mountains. You pass karst dolines (dish-shaped depressions in limestone). At the intersection (elb_tir_klos) continue straight. The turn-off to the right points to Elbasan or Bulqizë. You drive up to the Qafa e Shtyllës saddle. Driving through a thick beech forest, you come to a goat farm where the road continues along the base of the mountain for a long way. You gradually come down into the village of Gur-Bardhë. The road is very poor here, with tractor ruts. Continue to Fshat on a rocky road across a bridge to the main road and to Klos.

Points of interest: In the mountains there are notable karst dolines (dish-shaped depressions in limestone where water flows underground).

Tiranë	N41 19.870 E19 49.222
Lanabregas	N41 20.045 E19 54.135
elb_tir_klos	N41 21.678 E20 05.542
Guri i Bardhe	N41 26.858 E20 04.393
Fshat	N41 28.717 E20 05.351
Klos	N41 30.100 E20 05.515

16. Burrel – Krujë

Route: Burrel – Komës – Qafa e Kamzës – Cudhi – Nojë – Krujë

Length: 50 km, about two hours

Driven: 2011 Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Easy rocky mountain road

Description: This route crosses the Skanderbeg Mountain Range, which is covered with beautiful pine forests. The road is tarmac to Komës, where there is a large abandoned ironworks. From there a rocky road rises steeply into the mountains. It swings over the saddle of Qafa e Kamzës, where an area of pine forests begins. At the intersection a road joins from the left. This way leads to Tiranë but it is very difficult to drive through and complicated in terms of navigation. A leg of the Rally Albania went this way. Rather than pushing your luck, it's better to turn right. The road leaves the pine forest and traces serpentine curves down to the village of Cudhi. There are large bunkers above the road. The road changes to tarmac and, passing a very dramatic gorge and an equally dramatic, continually burning dumpsite, leads you into Nojë and then to Krujë.

Burrel	N41 36.355 E20 00.634
Komesi	N41 34.910 E19 58.064
Qafa e Kamzes	N41 31.505 E19 54.109
Noje	N41 31.272 E19 48.980
Krujë	N41 30.504 E19 47.389

17. Along the Macedonian Border

Route: Librazhd – Stërblevë – Ostreni i Vogël – Tuçep – Çerenec – Shupenzë

Length: About 70 km, half-day

Driven: 2001 – 2011 – Toyota Hilux, KTM LC4 Adv

Level of difficulty: Easy

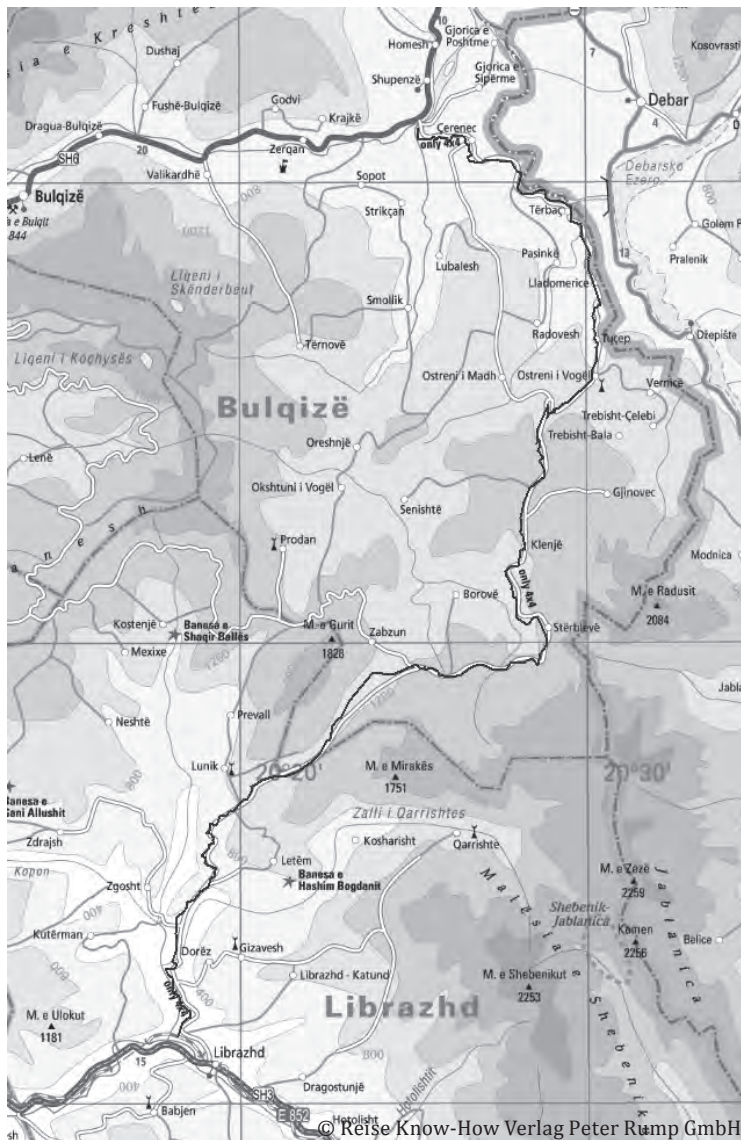
Description: Beautiful mountain road along the Macedonian border

Start at the main square in Librazhd and ask for the road to Peshkopi. The road is very rocky and climbs into the mountains. There are beautiful spots to camp out on the ridges. The navigation is easy as long as you maintain the right direction.

In the village of Tërbaç notice the crystal clear river, which flows from the Debar dam reservoir on the Macedonian border.

In 2009 construction began on a new road from Librazhd.

2Cerenec1	N41 11.502 E20 18.200
2Cerenec2	N41 12.609 E20 18.061
2Cerenec3	N41 13.859 E20 18.159
2Cerenec4	N41 19.443 E20 24.802
2Cerenec5	N41 25.185 E20 28.948
2Cerenec6	N41 31.215 E20 25.199



18. Skanderbeg Table

Route: Main road from Elbasan to Përrenjas – Pishkash

Length: 120 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux, KTM LC4 Adv

Description: Skanderbeg Table is an impressive rock formation above the village of Pishkash. It is visible from the main road between Elbasan and Përrenjas under the railway bridge and you can drive all the way to the top. Legend has it that Skanderbeg's army camped here.

Points of interest: There are 27 Czechoslovak train engines from CKD at the train station in Përrenjas.

One of the largest old Turkish bridges stands at the western edge of Elbasan. It is still used, even for cars.





2Skanderbeg1	N41 04.471 E20 29.994
2Skanderbeg2	N41 04.900 E20 30.465
2Skanderbeg3	N41 05.224 E20 30.114
2Skanderbeg4	N41 05.657 E20 30.743
Skanderbeg-table	N41 05.750 E20 31.226

South Albania

19. Around Skanderbeg Castle (Kala and Skanderbëut)

Route: Librazhd – Dardhë – Mountain Peaks – Lepush – Stravan – Stranik – Dritaj – Përrenjas

RALLY ALBANIA

Length: 70 km, half- to full-day.

Driven: 2010 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID, 2011 – Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Very difficult road, deep ruts with mud and rocks, vehicle with high ground clearance needed, not suitable for touring motorcycles.

Description: Difficult route leading to magnificent mountain peaks above Skanderbeg Castle (Kala and Skanderbëut). From the main road between Përrenjas – Librazhd (2Skander1) turn off on to the gravel road to Dardhë (2Skander2). The road climbs into the mountains along sharp serpentine curves. The road from the village of Dardhë is not marked in any map, not even military maps. The road climbs up to the mountain peaks to a shepherd's hut (2Skander3). If this section seems difficult, just go to the point before the descent from the mountain peaks (2Skander4) and go back. Continue through the valleys between the peaks at about 1500 m above sea level. In the spring the meadows are full of blooming flowers and the road can be very muddy. At the intersection before the descent from the peaks (2Skander4) turn right onto the main road. The road to the left connects to the main road a few kilometres farther on (2Shpatit5), but it is a new shortcut for hauling lumber.

The next 27 km section of the route to Lepush is very difficult. It is a narrow road that winds along the base of the mountains. There are deep ruts from IFA vehicles on the road. Illegal lumberjacks use them to haul wood out of the mountains. You can't get around them and if you meet a passing vehicle, it will be you that has to back up, sometimes as much as several kilometres. There is a high rock-covered mound between the tracks in the road that is very dangerous as you can easily snag the bottom of your vehicle here. If you are travelling by motorcycle with suitcases, you will have trouble fitting into the tracks without catching your boxes.

At the intersection (2Skander5) a shortcut joins the road from the left; a ford follows. It wouldn't be worth mentioning except that the bottom of your vehicle can get stuck on the deep ruts leading into it. At the next intersection you hook up to the main road (2Skander6) from Gramsh or Elbasan, turn left – the worst is behind you. The road winds down to Lepush along serpentine curves. Then continue along a better gravel road to Stravan, Stranik and to the restaurant by the bridge. From the bridge the road is good all the way to the main road between Librazhd and Përrenjas.

For drivers of vehicles with low ground clearance and motorcycles with a lot of baggage, I recommend driving to the peaks via Dardhë and going as far as the intersection at 3 Skander4 and turning back. Even this route is worth the effort as the peaks are magnificent.

I recommend the small restaurant with a trout tank on the main road (Fish_bar).

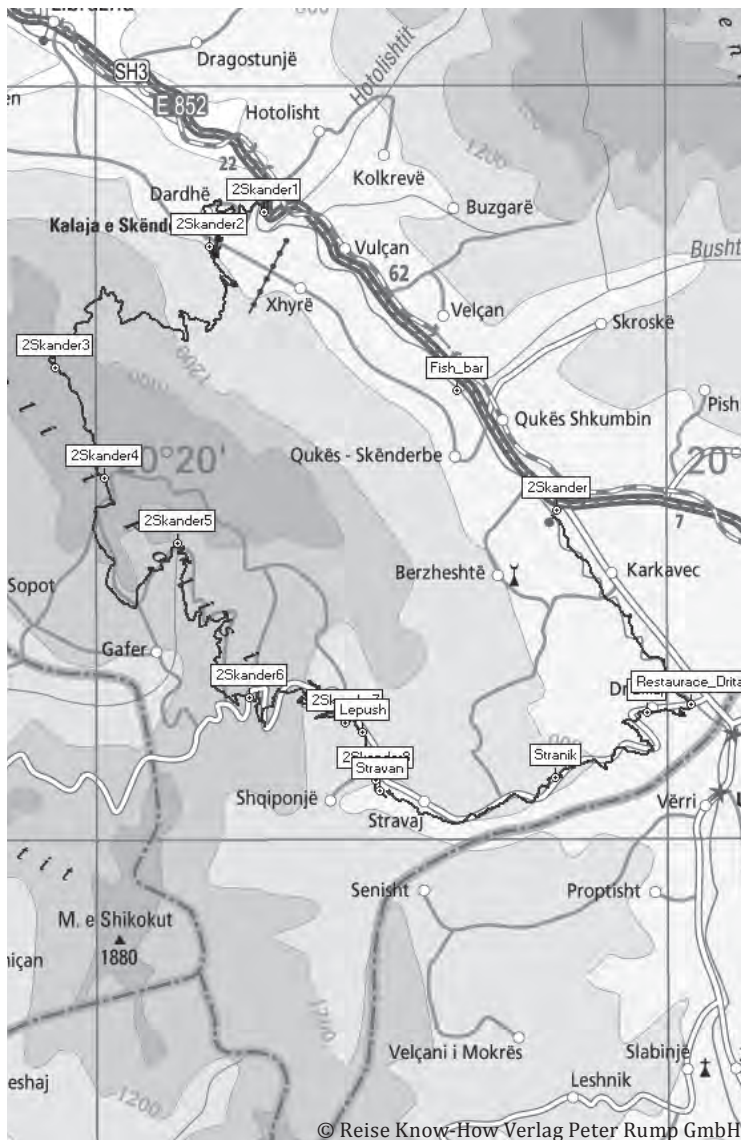
Note: The route marked in the map across the Mali i Shpatit mountain range from Stravaj to Gjinar and on to Elbasan, around Zavalines Lake, is impassable according to information from 2011 due to landslides in the mountains.

Points of interest: Purportedly there are remnants of Skanderbeg Castle in the village of Dardhë but it is difficult to tell which pile of rocks it is and the locals don't know anything about it.

2Skander1	N41 08.318 E20 22.948
2Skander2	N41 07.863 E20 21.992
2Skander3	N41 06.261 E20 19.278
2Skander4	N41 04.806 E20 20.155
2Skander5	N41 03.925 E20 21.417
2Skander6	N41 01.888 E20 22.687
2Skander7	N41 01.539 E20 24.362
Lepush	N41 01.415 E20 24.649
2Skander8	N41 00.783 E20 24.886
Stravaj	N41 00.636 E20 24.954
Stranik	N41 00.809 E20 28.036
Dritaj	N41 01.672 E20 29.643
Restaurace_Dritaj	N41 01.770 E20 30.417
2Skander	N41 04.365 E20 28.063
Fish_bar	N41 05.951 E20 26.334



Foto: Albert Weber



20. Lukova Lakes

Route: Turn-off from main road between Librazhd and Përrenjas – Dritaj Restaurant – Slabinjë – Leshnik – Bishnica – Lukova Lakes

Length: 44 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Easy

Description: The road to the lakes is not difficult except for the very end and it leads through fairly populated mountains. From the main road between Librazhd and Përrenjas turn off onto a good gravel road. There was supposed to be a main road to Pogradec built along this route, but it was taken out by a landslide just as construction was getting underway. Turn left again at the restaurant below the village of Dritaj along a narrower road and you come to a new tarmac road between Përrenjas and Slabinjë. Past the intersection you can see the historical Turkish bridge Ura e Terziut. The tarmac ends suddenly and the road swings up to the ridge through the village of Leshnik. Keep left after the ridge and drive down into the remote village of Bishnica, which has a small store and bar. The village is a timber community and there is logging everywhere in the surrounding mountains.

The road continues along the base of the mountains, following the contour line. Landslides can make this section impassable after rains or following winter. At the intersection (2Lukova6) the main road continues straight to the village of Jola. Turn right and uphill here. The road is more difficult, you pass an abandoned army building and at the next turn-off turn right again (2Lukova7). The road is much worse and you may have to leave your vehicle here. But it is only about another 3 km to the lakes and it is easy to find the way.

From the point 2Lukova7 the main road continues uphill. It may go over the ridge towards Gramsh and there may be another turn-off for the lakes on the ridge. Unfortunately I surveyed this area in October 2011 after three days of rain, in the fog, with occasional snowfall and I was unable to drive up to the ridge.



Foto: Albert Weber

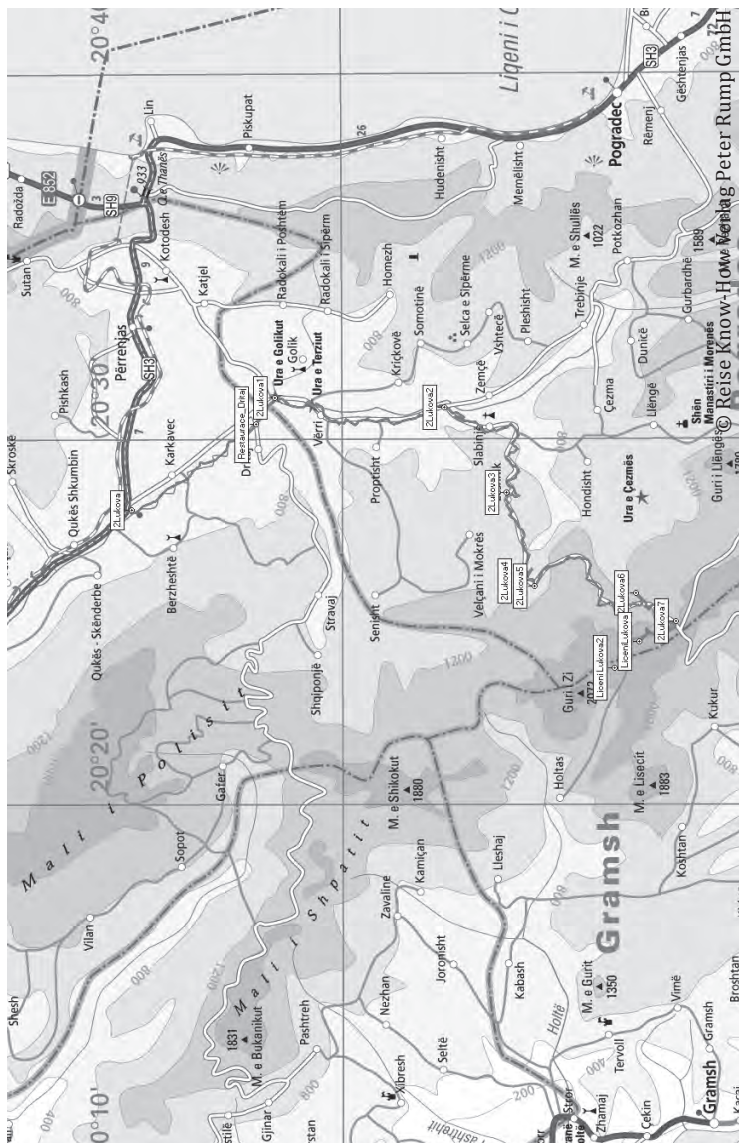
*By Lukova Lakes.
Engine driver from Përrenjas.*



Foto: Albert Weber

Points of interest: The Lukova Lakes are at an elevation of 1700 m above sea level. They are surrounded by rare pines that are 22 m tall and 170 years old. There is a well-preserved stone wall at the edge of the upper lake that is called the “Bulgarian Wall”. It dates to the First World War.

2Lukova	N41 04.365 E20 28.063
Restaurace_Dritaj	N41 01.770 E20 30.417
2Lukova1	N41 01.391 E20 31.140
2Lukova2	N40 57.871 E20 30.859
2Lukova3	N40 56.588 E20 28.531
2Lukova4	N40 56.343 E20 26.116
2Lukova5	N40 56.020 E20 25.954
2Lukova6	N40 53.922 E20 25.771
2Lukova7	N40 53.093 E20 24.998
LiceniLukova	N40 53.845 E20 24.449
Liceni Lukova2	N40 54.372 E20 23.714



21. Përrenjas – Pogradec

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Turn-off from main road between Librazhd and Përrenjas – Dritaj Restaurant – Bridge below Slabinjë – Zemçë – Trebinje – Potkozhan – Rëmenj

Length: 44 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux, KTM 690 RallyRaid

Level of difficulty: Easy

Description: This is definitely a more interesting route than the road around Lake Ohrid. Like the route to the Lukova Lakes this route begins with a turn-off from the main road between Librazhd and Përrenjas (2Pogradec1). Turn left in front of the bridge at the restaurant (Restaurace_Dritaj). There will be a tarmac road from the left, turn right onto the small bridge (2Perrenjas). At the intersection below the village of Slabinjë (2Pogradec2) go through a concrete plant across the bridge. Then keep going up through the villages of Zemçë, Trebinje and Potkozhan to the ridge. On the ridge there is an intersection at a monument (2Pogradec). To the left there is a very good road with steep serpentine curves down into the valley to Rëmenj and Pogradec (2Trebinje). If you go in the opposite direction, then the turn-off for Rëmenj is right at the petrol station in Pogradec.

If you haven't run out of beer, then you don't need to go into Pogradec and you can continue from the intersection with the monument straight to Guri i Kamjes. The road is worse here, with ruts from IFA vehicles, but it was passable even after rain. The road winds along the base of the mountains high above Pogradec and affords beautiful views of Lake Ohrid and various rock formations.

At the next intersection, a road from Nicaj connects from the right uphill side (2GuriIKamjes2). It is worth taking a trip up to the rock formations and viewpoints. But I don't recommend the next road, to Nicë. In October 2011 I had to pull my vehicle out with a winch 17 times on this road. Maybe the road will be passable after a long period of dry weather.

It is better to turn left, go around the hill and join up with the main road (2GuriIKamjes2), which leads to the Guri i Kamjes rock

monument.

Points of interest: Don't miss the local speciality at Lake Ohrid: Koran trout. In Macedonia this endemic fish, distinguished by the pink colour of its flesh, is strictly protected while in Albania it is a sought-after delicacy.



Road passing around Guri i Kamjes.



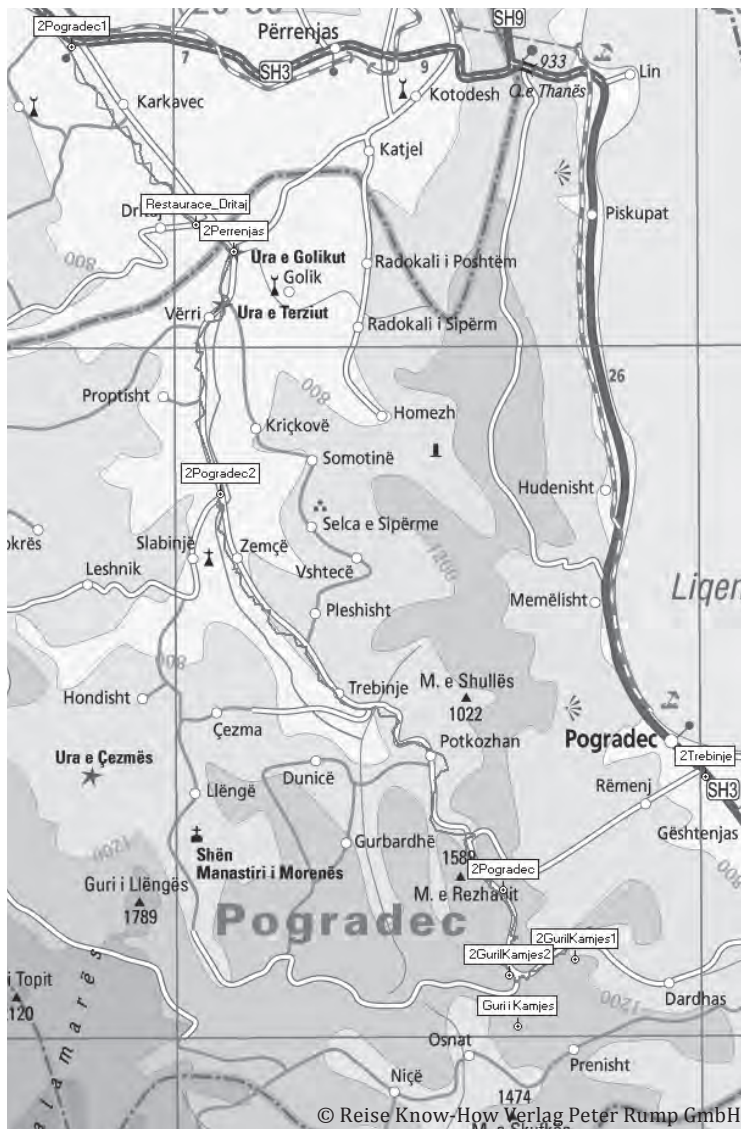
Foto: Albert Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

Guri i Kamjes.

2Pogradec1	N41 04.356 E20 28.047
Restaurace_Dritaj	N41 01.770 E20 30.417
2Perrenjas	N41 01.391 E20 31.140
2Pogradec2	N40 57.871 E20 30.859
2Pogradec	N40 52.120 E20 36.213
2GurilKamjes2	N40 50.888 E20 36.334
2GurilKamjes1	N40 51.119 E20 37.598
2GurilKamjes	N40 51.570 E20 41.684
2Trebinje	N40 53.750 E20 40.099



22. Guri i Kamjes

Route: Pogradec – Guri i Kamjes – Osnat – Nicë – Devolli Canyon

Length: 55 km

Driven: 2010 Yamaha TT600RE , 2011 Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Easy in dry weather, impassable after heavy rain

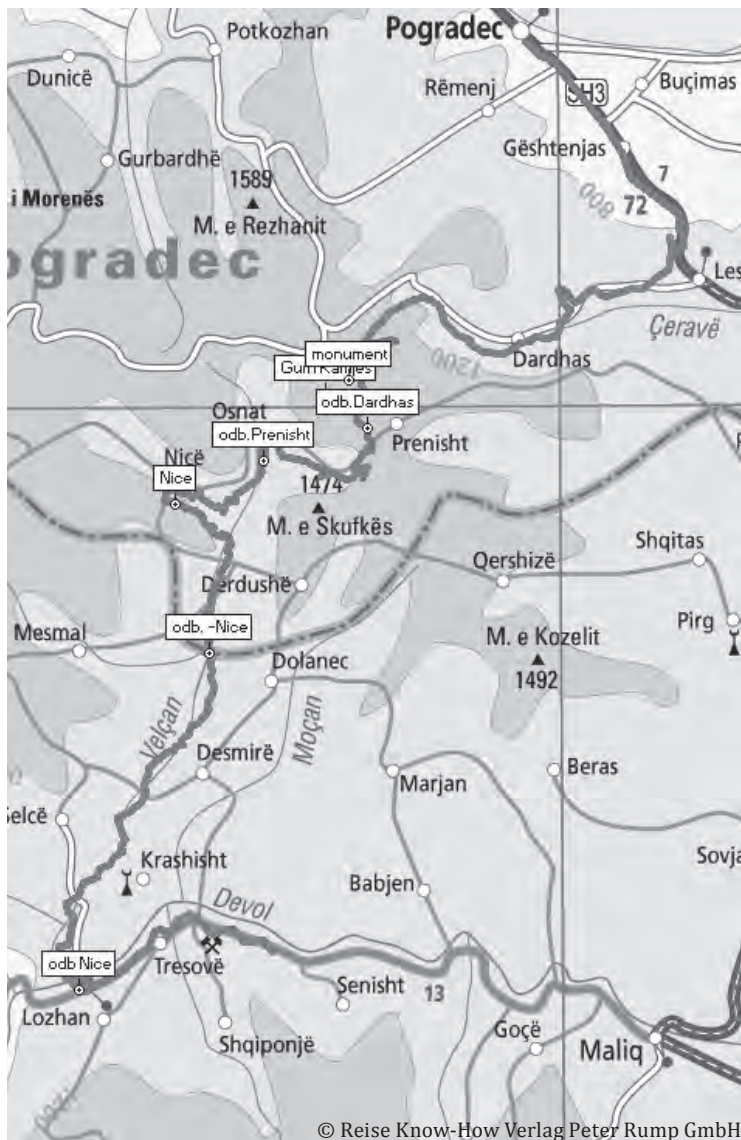
Description: Guri i Kamjes is an impressive rock formation. From the main road between Pogradec and Korçë, turn off just above the serpentine curves to the village of Stropckë (2GuriIKamjes). The tarmac ends after a while and you drive all the way to the Guri i Kamjes rock formation on a good gravel road.

The next part of the route is very difficult and may be totally impracticable after rain. In summer 2011 the road was passable but in October there was a landslide between the villages of Osnat and Nicë. I had to pull out the Toyota Hilux 17 times with a winch on the detour route that leads to the north on the ridge, the double cardan joint snapped off and it couldn't get through.

The road from Nicë to the Devolli Canyon runs alongside a river. The road crosses the river often and is very muddy.

Points of interest: Guri i Kamjes rock formation

2GurilKamjes	N40 51.570 E20 41.684
GurilKamjes	N40 50.297 E20 36.837
Osnat	N40 49.362 E20 35.566
Nice	N40 48.895 E20 34.229
odb Nice	N40 47.201 E20 34.731
odb Nice	N40 44.058 E20 34.025



23. Guri i Cjapit

Route: Korçë – Drenovë – abandoned mine – Guri i Cjapit and back

Length: Round trip 20 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux 2011

Level of difficulty: Medium difficulty

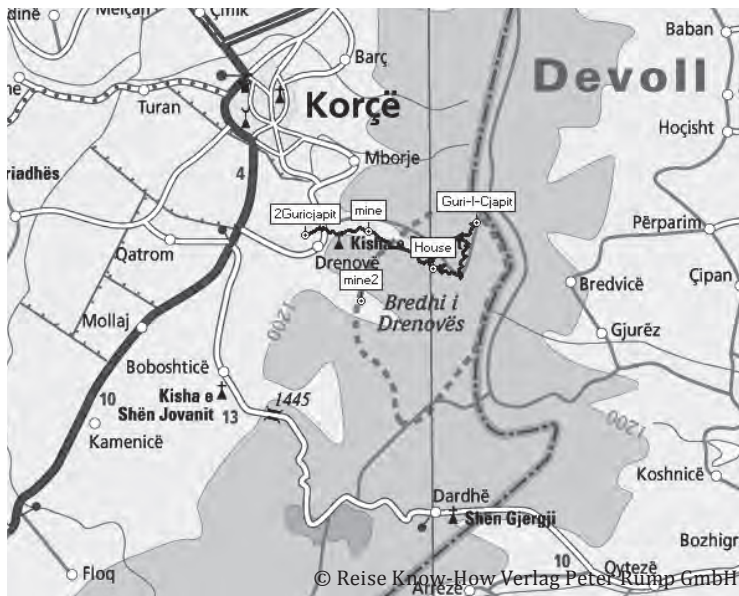
Description: Guri i Cjapit is an agglomerate rock formation in the Mali Moravës mountain range and Bredhi i Drenovës National Park. Guri i Cjapit means Goat Rocks.

From the village of Drenovë (2Guricjapit) drive through the northern, very dramatic canyon to an abandoned mine (mine). There is an army building above the mine. The area was closed off until 1995 but today the soldiers occupy just this one building and the radar station at the top. The road up leads through pine forests and is easily practicable. You pass about two buildings and then you get a view of the rock formation. Sharp serpentine curves take you all the way up to the rock formation.

The rock formation used to be an army base and has tunnels driven through it. It is no longer used by soldiers. The road continues up to the top of the mountain where there is a military radar station.

It is worth driving over to the southern canyon above Drenovë. There is another abandoned mine there and along the way above the mine you can go all the way up to the peaks of the mountain range, which offer fantastic views. There are more rock formations in the Bredhi i Drenovës National Park.

2GuriCjapit	N40 35.263 E20 47.666
Mine	N40 35.321 E20 48.833
House	N40 34.775 E20 50.054
Guri-I-Cjapit	N40 35.429 E20 50.852
mine2	N40 34.326 E20 48.697



Guri i Cjapit.



Foto: Filip Weber

24. Ostrovicës Mountains

Route: Voskopojë – Gjegjevicë – Marjan – Lekas – Gjergjevicë – Voskopojë

Length: Loop of 45 km

Driven: Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Easy

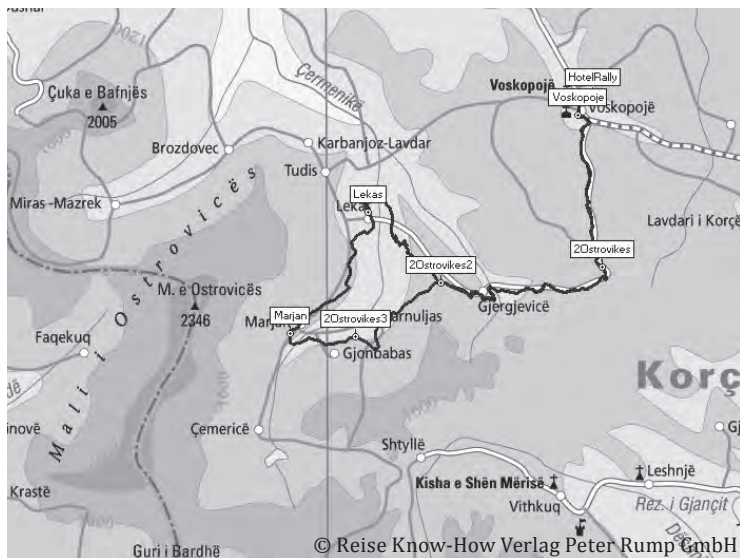
Description: The Ostrovicës mountain range is one of the prettiest in Albania. From Voskopojë there is a comfortable gravel road up to the ridge, where there is an intersection (2Ostrovikes), from which you drive down into a pretty valley with pines. The road climbs up past the village of Gjergjevicë to the saddle. Before you reach the saddle there is an intersection (2Ostrovikes2), to which you return as you loop around the mountain.

There are magnificent views of the entire mountain range from the saddle. A fairly good road leads you to Marjan and, along the other side of the valley, to Lekas. From here you return to the intersection across the valley and along serpentine curves (2Ostrovikes2). This route is a loop because the road continuing on from Marjan to Çemicë is impassable.

Point of interest: In the 18th century, Voskopojë used to be the largest town in the area with the population of the unbelievable 35,000 – more than the population of Athens or Sofia at that time. You can find old churches with wall paintings there.

Recommendation: I recommend the highest situated of the hotels in Voskopojë (HotelRally). The son of the owner, Elzi, regularly takes part in the RallyAlbania with a car.

Voskopojë	N40 37.976 E20 35.524
2Ostrovikes	N40 35.424 E20 36.052
2Ostrovikes2	N40 35.171 E20 32.501
2Ostrovikes3	N40 34.275 E20 30.631
Marjan	N40 34.346 E20 29.193
Lekas	N40 36.365 E20 30.909
HotelRally	N40 38.313 E20 35.857



Ostrovicës mountains.



Foto: Filip Weber

25. Voskopojë – Tresovë

Route: Voskopojë – Tresovë

Length: 22 km

Driven: 2011 Toyota Hilux

Level of difficulty: Medium difficulty in dry weather, impassable after rain. I do not recommend taking this route in the opposite direction.

Description: A beautiful creek meanders from Voskopojë and there is a road alongside it. It is dusty but maintained on the whole – at least for the first 5 kilometres to an army garrison and the arched bridge to Shpëskë. At this point, before the bridge (Bridge), there is a turn-off for a forest road that is apparently rarely used. It crosses the creek and swings up to a point above the canyon, passing through beautiful pine forests all the way. The road is easy, with sandy soils. It would probably be slippery after rain but you could drive it. The road goes by the village of Krushovë and goes around the right side of a hill. Military maps show the road passing the hill on the left side; there is a road there but it is apparently unused. You pass by a fish pond and a turn-off to Shpëskë on the right side of the road and then join up with the old road (2Tresh).

Climb up above the pine forest to the peak of the Maja Plerinati hill with a beautiful view at an elevation of 1555 m above sea level. To the right past Korçë you can see Guri i Spaci, a rock formation with bunkers, and the Guri i Kamjes rock formation in front of you on the horizon along with the Vallamarës, Gramsh, Tommorit and Ostrovicës mountain ranges. There is a beautiful spot to camp out here.

The next part of the route is difficult to navigate as there are several turn-offs in the forests where all the tracks look similarly rut-filled. Try to follow the one with the deepest ruts. At the very end, at the top of the hill above Lozhan, the tracks make a sharp right turn and drop steeply down apart from the original road. Then there is a steep decline through ferns back to the original road.

This is where the one truly difficult part of the route begins. In this area there are beech trees, which retain water, and which means that the steep decline goes through ruts filled with water (vyjezd). Then you cross a landslide area, which is fine in dry weather, but in wet conditions there is serious danger of sliding off to the side – the Devolli Canyon is about 300 m straight down. Because of this spot this route cannot be recommended in the Tresovë – Voskopojë direction and in rainy weather it is not recommended in either direction.

In Lozhan you come out on the village square next to a lookout point with a big tree. A tarmac road then leads to Tresovë, where there is a restaurant, store and an abandoned brown coal mine.

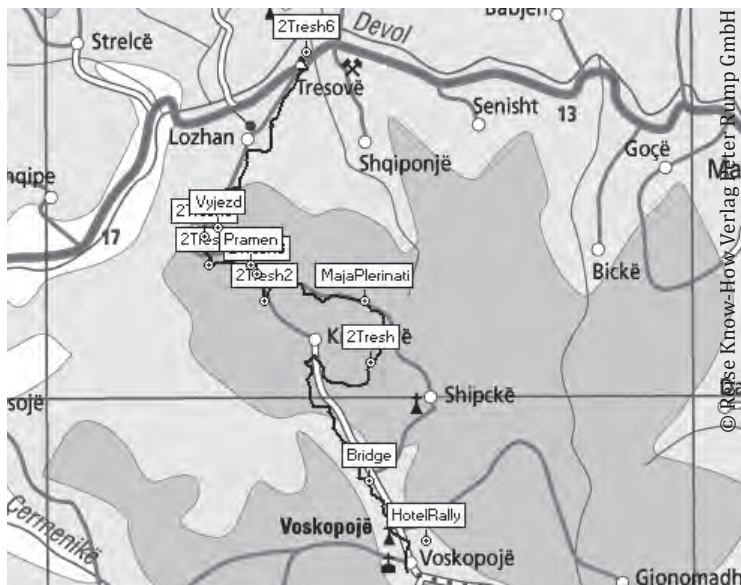


Foto: Marek Vincík

HotelRally	N40 38.313 E20 35.857
Bridge	N40 39.014 E20 34.983
2Tresh	N40 40.413 E20 35.002
MajaPlerinati	N40 41.125 E20 34.922
2Tresh2	N40 41.146 E20 33.369
2Tresh3	N40 41.453 E20 33.253
Pramen	N40 41.560 E20 33.168
2Tresh4	N40 41.561 E20 32.522
2Tresh5	N40 41.905 E20 32.456
Descent/Vyjezd	N40 42.008 E20 32.657
2Tresh6	N40 44.058 E20 34.025

Blocks of highland flats on the route Këlcyrë – Osum





26. Devolli Canyon

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Shtëpajë – Gramsh – Maliqi i Oparit – Maliq

Length: About 200 km, one day

Driven: BMW GS1150, 1999

Level of difficulty: Easy

Description: Rocky road through a beautiful canyon, muddy in places

This is one of the most impressive routes in Albania. The Devolli River canyon between Shtëpajë and Maliqi is beautiful, rocky and wild. The road traces an ancient Roman route for almost the entire way.

Leaving the town of Stephaj, go around the non-existent dam, which has only a causeway structure. The dam is marked in every map and roads leading around it are also signposted, but there is no water in the dam reservoir and the roads go across the bottom of it. In 2009 it looked as if a survey was going on at the reservoir so maybe there are plans to complete the construction.

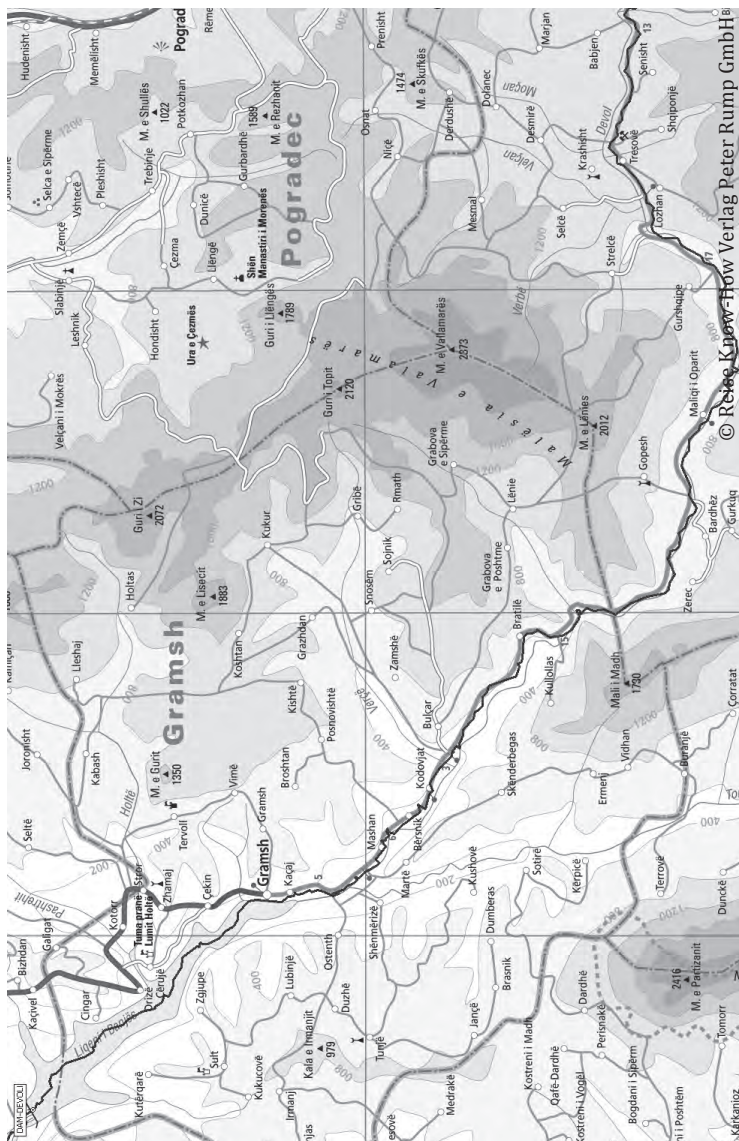
The route continues through the small town of Gramsh and plunges into the canyon alongside the river. After that there are just many kilometres through a wild canyon along a gravel road.

The valley opens up a bit in the upper part. There are old coal mines on the left side. The route ends in Maliqi.

From the valley you can turn off onto the Devolli—Gjerbës road.

I do not recommend the connection to Voskopojë in the direction from Devolli Canyon to Voskopojë as there is a difficult climb a short distance above the village of Lozhan.

Points of interest: There is rafting and kayaking in the Devolli River canyon.



27. Gjerbës – Devolli

RALLY ALBANIA

Trace: Gjerbës – Posten – Vrepckë – Devolli Canyon

Lenght: About 25 km

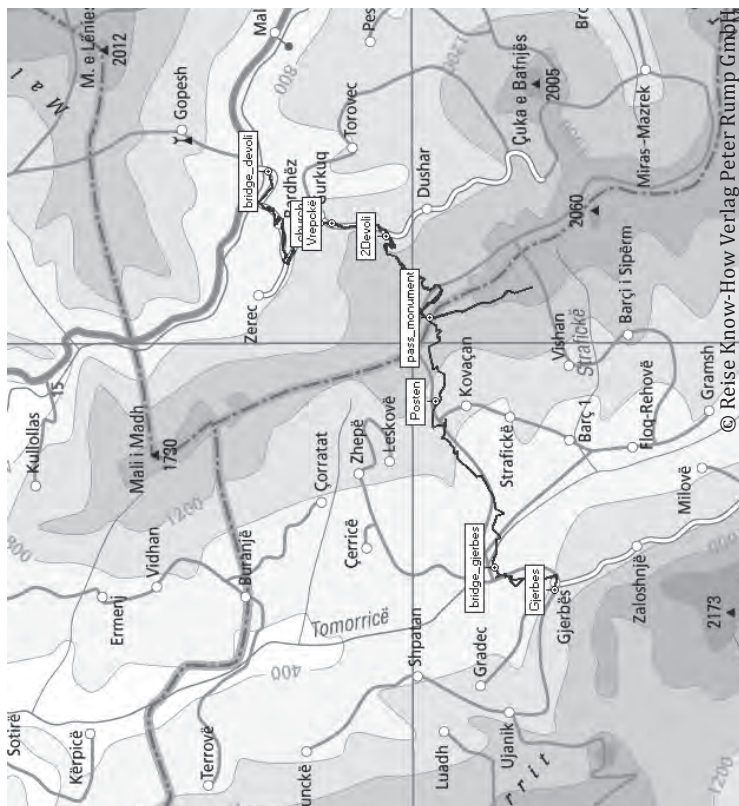
Ridden: 2009, 2012 – Toyota Hilux

Difficulty: The road has been damaged by water; there may be deep mud ruts

Description: In Gjerbës you take a little road turning right directly from the village square. The road has been heavily damaged by water and it will take you to the bridge below Gjerbës (bridge_gjerbës). Cross the bridge and take the road uphill towards Posten. The road goes around Posten, passing the village on the uphill side. You'll need to cross a bridge over a gully. Drive carefully; when driving a car it is sometimes difficult to turn onto and from the bridge and particularly when it rains, the manoeuvre can be quite dangerous.

In 2010 there were big landslides which blocked the road. There was an alternative route that followed the river upstream for a ways before the bridge with a right uphill turn after the building, right up to Zhepë and Leskovë. In 2012, the main road was passable. From Posten you climb through a pine forest to the ridge where there is a communist monument (pass_monument). The pass is considered by many to be the most beautiful place in Albania. It is definitely worth turning off in both directions and riding along the ridge to the nearby peak which offers stunning views.

The road leading down from the ridge can be difficult after rain. There are deep ruts. Turn left at the intersection (2Devolli), pass the village of Vrepckë and serpentine down past a mill to an iron bridge in the Devolli Canyon (bridge_devoli).



Gjerbës	N40 37.878 E20 15.138
bridge_Gjerbës	N40 38.772 E20 15.595
Posten	N40 39.655 E20 18.854
pass_monument	N40 39.733 E20 20.488
2Devolli	N40 40.389 E20 22.104
Vrepcë	N40 41.195 E20 22.366
Church	N40 41.377 E20 22.354
bridge_Devolli	N40 42.156 E20 23.382

28. Gjerbes and Tomorricës Rivers

Route: Çorovodë – Gjerbës – Tomorricës River – Kërpicë – Gramsh

RALLY ALBANIA

Length: About 60 km

Ridden: 2010 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID

Difficulty: Çorovodë – Gjerbës good gravel road. The Gjerbës – Gramsh route goes through a river bed.

Description: Tomorri Mountain Range National Park; the highest peak in the park is Mt. Partizanit reaching 2,416 m.

The road climbs from Çorovodë past the Turkish bridge, later changing to a gravel road going steeply up into the mountains, across a saddle, past a quarry and a monument with views of the Ostrovica Mountain Range. The route ends in the village of Gjerbës where you will find some pubs and two small hotels.

The second part of the route actually runs directly in a river bed. It is practicable only in dry summer. It is totally impracticable after rain or in early spring. The route leads through rocky river deposits and it often crosses the stream. I do not recommend this route for motorcycles with a lot of baggage. Cars with sufficient clearance can drive here without difficulties. Consult the practicability of the route with the locals in Gjerbës.

In Gjerbës you will find a small narrow road leading from the village square to the right and down. The part of the road between the square and the bridge was under construction in 2011. Cross the bridge, ford the river to the other bank below the bridge and continue downhill along the right bank of the river. The road soon ends and you will have to drive in the river bed. Continue in the river bed. The water meanders a lot so you will need to cross it many times. Sometimes, you will find stretches resembling a road on the banks, but don't be fooled; the only right way is to stay in the river bed. Leave the river before arriving at Kërpicë just above the confluence with the creek (approximately the leave_river point). After arriving at the village, you will cross the creek, which may have more water in the summer than the river. From there, you will find a comfortable gravel road, cross two more fords and get to the



Foto: Filip Weber

*Tomorrit mountain.
Gjerbës.*

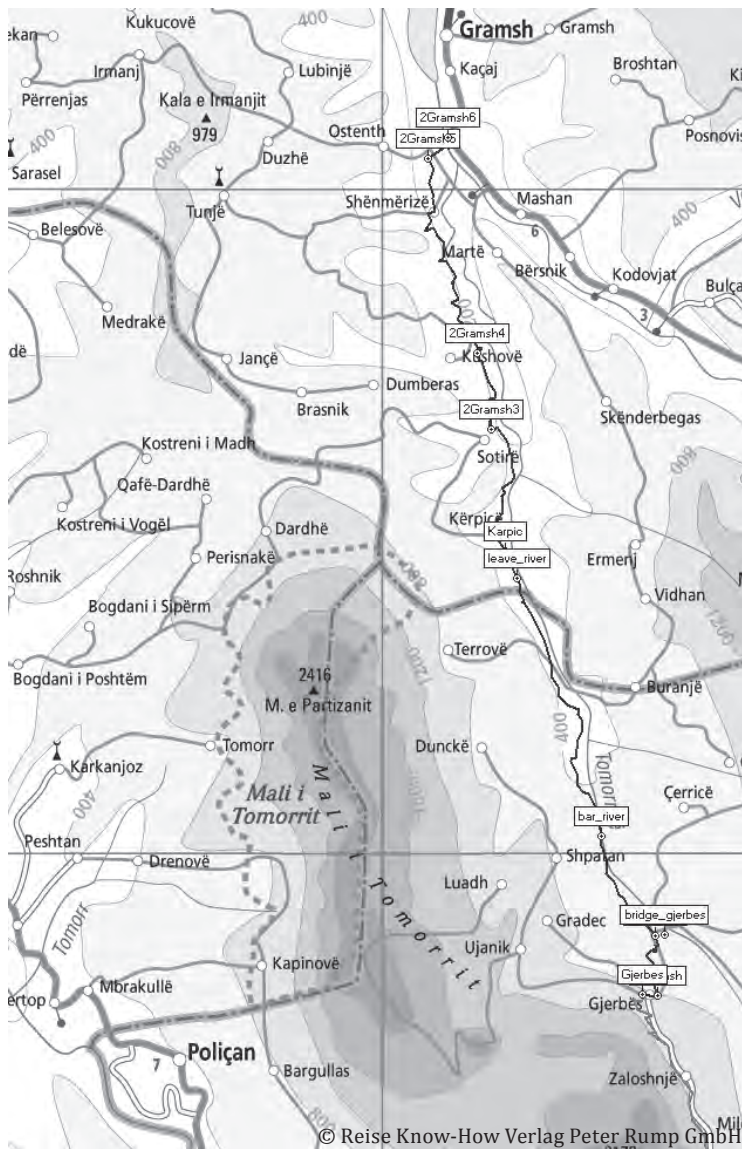


Foto: Filip Weber

bridge nearby Gramsh.

If crossing the river is impracticable, try the Gjerbës – Devolli route or crossing the Mali i Tomorrit mountain range across the Kulmakës saddle to Poliçan. An alternative would be to ford the river below the bridge, then finding the road uphill behind the building and going through the villages of Zhepë, Corratat, Vidhan, Skënderbegas and Martë. The ford below Martë is relatively deep, try to stay on its edge and avoid the path taken by trucks. It is a question whether the ford below Martë will be practicable, if the river is not practicable from the uphill side.

Çorovodë	N40 30.806 E20 13.745
Gjerbës	N40 37.878 E20 15.138
2Gramsh	N40 37.862 E20 15.440
2Gramsh2	N40 38.758 E20 15.405
bridge_Gjerbës	N40 38.772 E20 15.595
bar_river	N40 40.252 E20 14.338
leave_river	N40 44.139 E20 12.670
Kërpicë	N40 44.549 E20 12.429
2Gramsh3	N40 46.389 E20 12.150
2Gramsh4	N40 47.523 E20 11.890
2Gramsh5	N40 50.454 E20 10.910
2Gramsh6	N40 50.774 E20 11.314



29. Mali i Tomorrit Mountain Range

Route: Gjerbes – Kulmakës Saddle– Mount Tomorrit – Poliçan

Length: 40 km

RALLY ALBANIA

Driven: Toyota Hilux, KTM 690 RallyRaid

Level of Difficulty: Easy, only the climb up to Mount Tomorrit is very steep

Description: Have you ever driven up a mountain 2,388 m high in a car? This is your one and only chance. Take the road to the west from the Gjerbes village square and climb up past the quarry. You will go past a new drinking water bottling plant and drive up to the Kulmakës saddle. You will find a brand new Bektashi Order monastery (teqe) there. You will go straight through the monastery, reaching a newly constructed road which will take you up a very steep climb with an elevation change of 904 m to the peak of Mount Tomorrit. There, you will find a chapel dedicated to the first imam of the Bektashi faith – Abaz Aliu.

The route from the saddle to the town of Poliçan is easy and passes through huge rock quarries. Poliçan used to be the centre of armament production and the entire area was a no-entry zone.

Points of interest: The Bektashi Order was most probably established in Turkey by Haji Bektash Veli around the 13th century. The order was banned in Turkey many times but it spread to Albania through the Janissaries, an elite force of the Ottoman Empire infantry. The Bektashi order is one of the strains of Islam, but it is very tolerant.

Note the horizontal bars at the saddle and on the top. They are used for sheep sacrifices during festivals. The main festival is in August and lasts 5 days. However, this is a very bloody event.

A Bektashi monk enters a mosque and starts calling loudly: “Oh God, could you give me a bottle of raki?”

There is a pious Sunni praying next to him and upon hearing the Bektashi’s prayer he exclaims: “Shouldn’t you ask God for something else? You know very well that raki is banned under sharia!”

“What should I ask for then?” replies the Bektashi earnestly.



Foto: Filip Weber

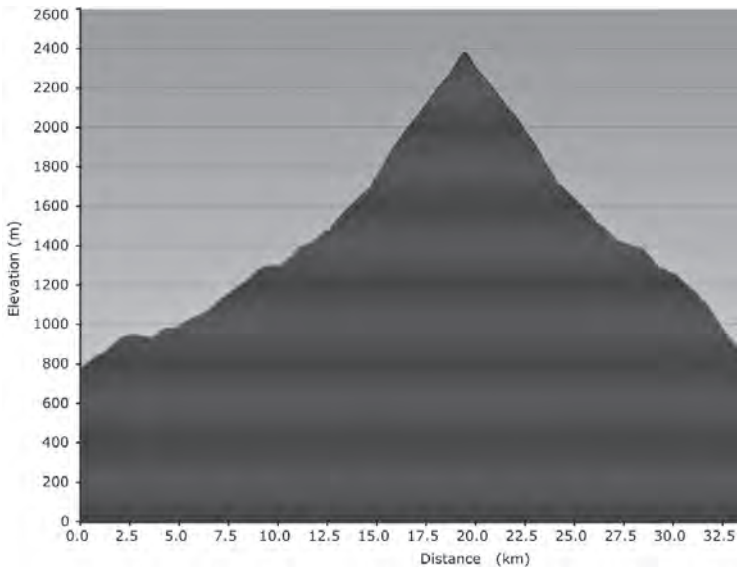
*Çuka Partizan 2416 above sea.
Rally Albania.*



Foto: Marek Vincik

“You should start praying for God’s mercy,” says the man.

The monk stands up and says: “Don’t people usually pray for something they don’t have? As far as I am concerned, I have plenty of God’s mercy. What I really don’t have is a bottle or raki!”



Gjerbës	N40 37.878 E20 15.138
2Poliçan	N40 38.539 E20 12.141
Kulmakës	N40 37.104 E20 11.683
Abas	N40 38.181 E20 09.755
2Poliçan2	N40 35.849 E20 08.956
2Poliçan3	N40 35.949 E20 08.282
2Poliçan4	N40 35.101 E20 06.489



30. Përmet – Çorovodë

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Përmet – Pagri (Rabon) – Odričan – Sevrani – Dhorës – Çorovodë

Length: About 70 km, half a day

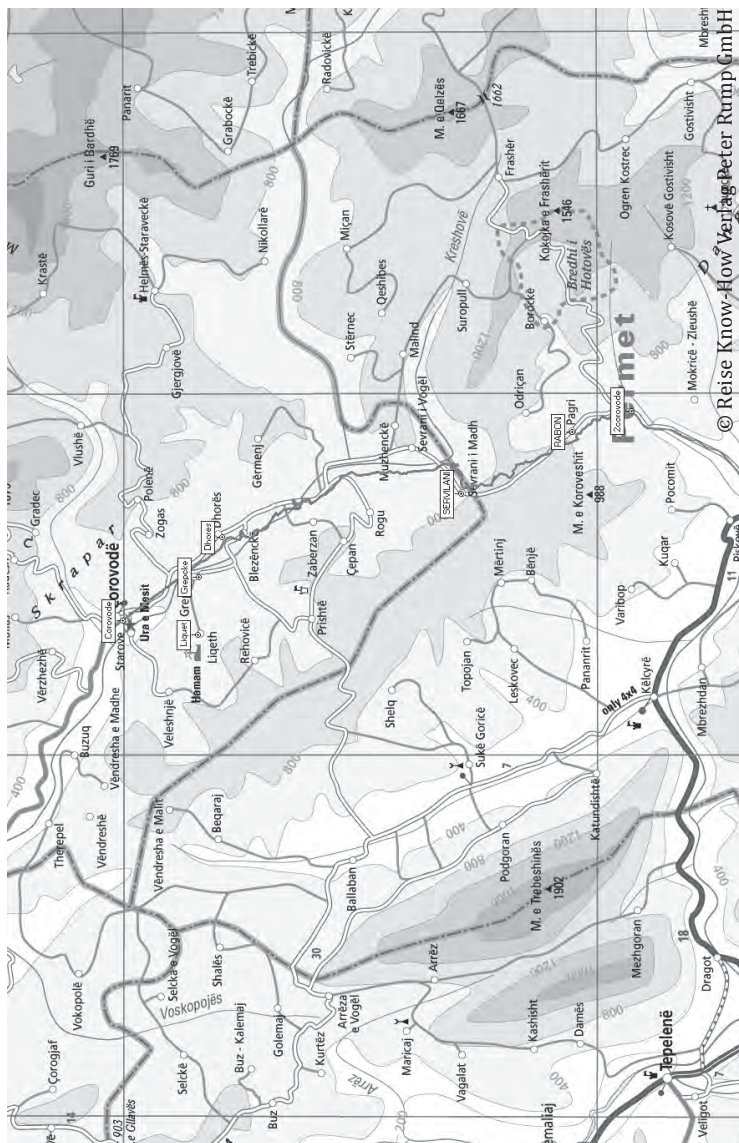
Ridden: 2009 KTM LC4 Adv, 2011 KTM 690 RallyRaid

Difficulty: Easy gravel road

Description: Take the same route from Përmet (2Frasheri3) as if going to Frashëri and look for an easy to overlook turn-off to Rabon-Pagri (2Frasheri4). The road is made of fine gravel, nothing demanding, and it will take you over a saddle to a bridge across the gorge cut by the Osumi River. The route continues up to Çorovodë without any difficulties. You can flavour it by a detour to a small waterfall in Liqeth (Liquet) providing it has not rained a lot. It is marked in the Know-How map as a turn-off from Grepckë. To reach Grepckë, you can either ascend from Çorovodë on a nice fine-gravel track above the gorge, or come down the hill from the bridge to Rehovicë. The turn-off, easily missed, starts a while after the road leaves the river. Be prepared for a lot of jolting. The road from Grepckë to Liqeth is impracticable after rain.

Points of interest: Close to Radesh, not far from Çorovodë, there is the Pirrogosh Cave. It is the longest cave in Albania, 1,500 m deep and home to large colonies of bats. The 4km-long Gradec Canyon on the Osumi River close to Radesh is only 1.5 m wide at some points. Higher upstream, above Çorovodë, there is the Osumi Canyon. It is 15 km long, its width is sometimes only 5 m and the walls are up to 50 m high.

2Çorovodë	N40 19.261 E20 19.508
RABON	N40 20.523 E20 18.933
SERVILANI	N40 22.869 E20 17.226
Dhorës	N40 27.919 E20 16.041
Çorovodë	N40 30.014 E20 13.732
Grepcke	N40 28.419 E20 14.927
Liquet	N40 28.437 E20 13.337



31. Këlcyrë – Poliçan

Route: Këlcyrë – Ballaban – Buz – Terpani – Osum River Valley – Poliçan

Length: 50 km, half a day

Ridden: 2007 – BMW 650 Dakar, 2011 – Toyota Hilux

Difficulty: Easy stony road

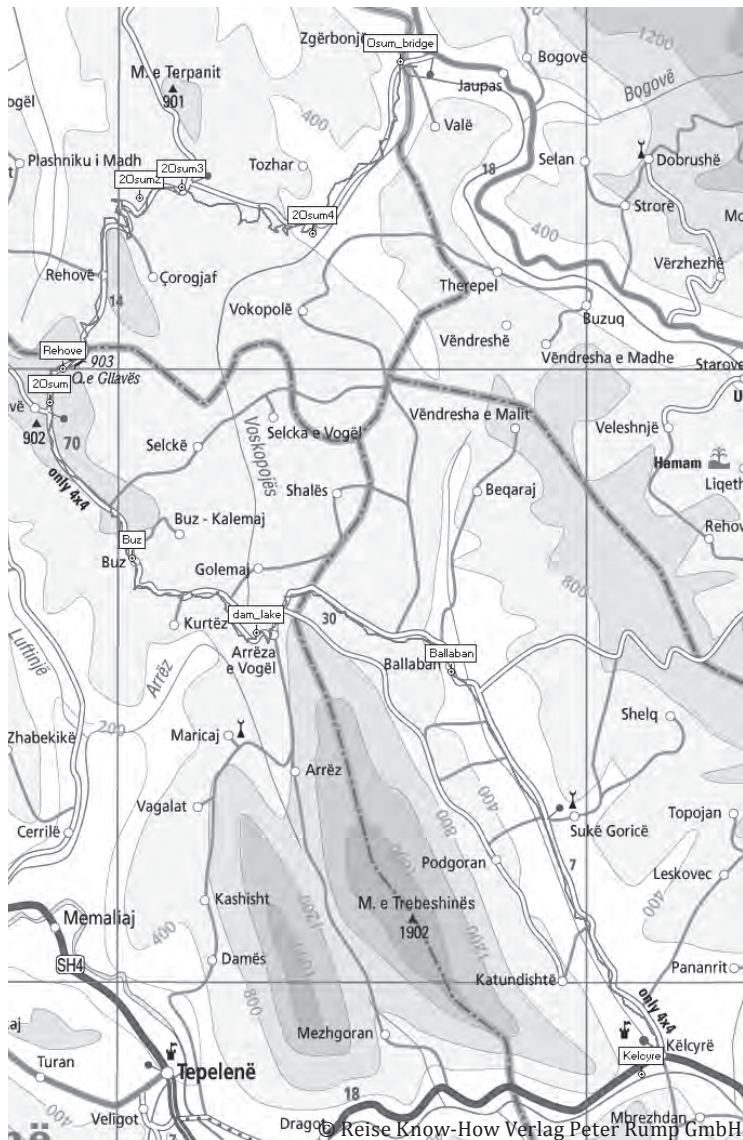
Description: The road is marked on the map as the main connection between Këlcyrë and Berat. But forget about tarmac!

From Këlcyrë the road starts going up into the hills, passing through little villages. Let yourself be guided by your intuition over the saddles; the places are not signposted, but if you are lucky enough to meet somebody, you can be sure they will be happy to show you the way. You need to pass a dam (dam_lake) and a village called Rehovë.

You can marvel at an example of communist architecture in the village Buz (or maybe it is in Gillavë) – highrise blocks of flats along a hilly road evoking the Middle Ages.

Before Terpani turn (2Osum3) onto a little used track. The road, built of round stones that will test your bike dampers, looks like the original Turkish road. What era the bridges are from, I do not know. Carry on through the valley to the river confluence and cross a cable bridge to the other bank. You will find an excellent restaurant there and a tarmac road.

Kelcyre	N40 18.492 E20 11.176
Ballaban	N40 25.059 E20 07.125
dam_lake	N40 25.691 E20 02.954
Buz	N40 26.904 E20 00.298
2Osum	N40 29.455 E19 58.541
Rehove	N40 29.986 E19 58.806
2Osum2	N40 32.783 E20 00.440
2Osum3	N40 32.957 E20 01.339
2Osum4	N40 32.207 E20 04.140
Osum_bridge	N40 35.007 E20 06.029



32. Borsh – Tepelenë

RALLY ALBANIA

Route: Borsh – Ftterrë – Kuç – Gjormë – Vajzë – Sevaster – Dorez – Tepelenë

Length: About 150 km

Ridden: 2004, 2008 – KTM LC4 Adv; 2010, 2011 – KTM 690 RALLYRAID

Difficulty: Easy

Description: A connecting route between the submarine base and hot springs.

Have a look at the submarine base and the Turkish fort (fort_submarine) close to Borsh. Going uphill, make sure you do not miss the turn-off with its dilapidated signpost to Ftterrë (2Tepelene). Wonderful windings of the stony road will bring you from the sea right up to the mountains, all the way to the village of Ftterrë. There is a road of broken tarmac leaving the village that takes you past a trout farm and a restaurant.

The tarmac road copies a river up to the turn-off to Vajzë (2Tepelene2). Should you get fed up with the tarmac, you can take a shortcut over the villages of Shales – Mesaplik – Ramicë – Velçe. Along the way you can enjoy river wading and admire rock dwellings.

The tarmac ends behind the turn-off to Vajzë (2Tepelene2). Beyond Vajzë you can stop at a beautiful restaurant set in the cliff with delicious cuisine. There are also several communist monuments along the road.

It might be a bit difficult to find the right turning uphill to Tepelenë beyond Sevaster, but the locals will advise you. Be ready for about 7 km of an absolutely horrible rock-strewn way. The rest of the route to Tepelenë is all right.

I recommend you keep going beyond Përmet to the hot sulphur springs.

Points of interest: Ali Pasha of Tepelena – a powerful, separatist ruler in the north-western parts of the Ottoman Empire. He kept his own army and navy and maintained diplomatic relations with foreign powers. He was killed in Ioannina in 1882.



Foto: Filip Weber

**One of the numberless communist monuments.
Submarine base in Palermo Bay.**



Foto: Filip Weber



fort_submarine	N40 03.728 E19 47.462
Borsh	N40 03.892 E19 51.206
2Tepelene	N40 03.651 E19 51.479
Fttere	N40 06.736 E19 53.849
Kuc	N40 10.598 E19 50.608
2Tepelene2	N40 22.657 E19 37.203
Vajza	N40 21.654 E19 40.845
Sevaster	N40 23.435 E19 44.108
Tepelene	N40 18.368 E20 01.126
HotSpring	N40 14.605 E20 25.926

33. Frashëri

Route: Përmet – Frashëri and back

Length: 60 km

Ridden: 2007 – 2011 – KTM LC4 Adv, Toyota Hilux

Difficulty: Easy gravel road

Description: Easy route through mountains and forests

Leave Përmet in the direction of Tepelenë and continue for about 9 km till the turn-off to Çorovodë and Frashëri (2Frasheri3). There is another turn-off to the left towards Çorovodë after 6 km, but you need to keep going straight on the road to Frashëri (2Frasheri4), which will start winding soon to climb up to the forest belt. It is a nature preserve where Albanians like to go picnicking. Nevertheless, a 4WD is a must here.

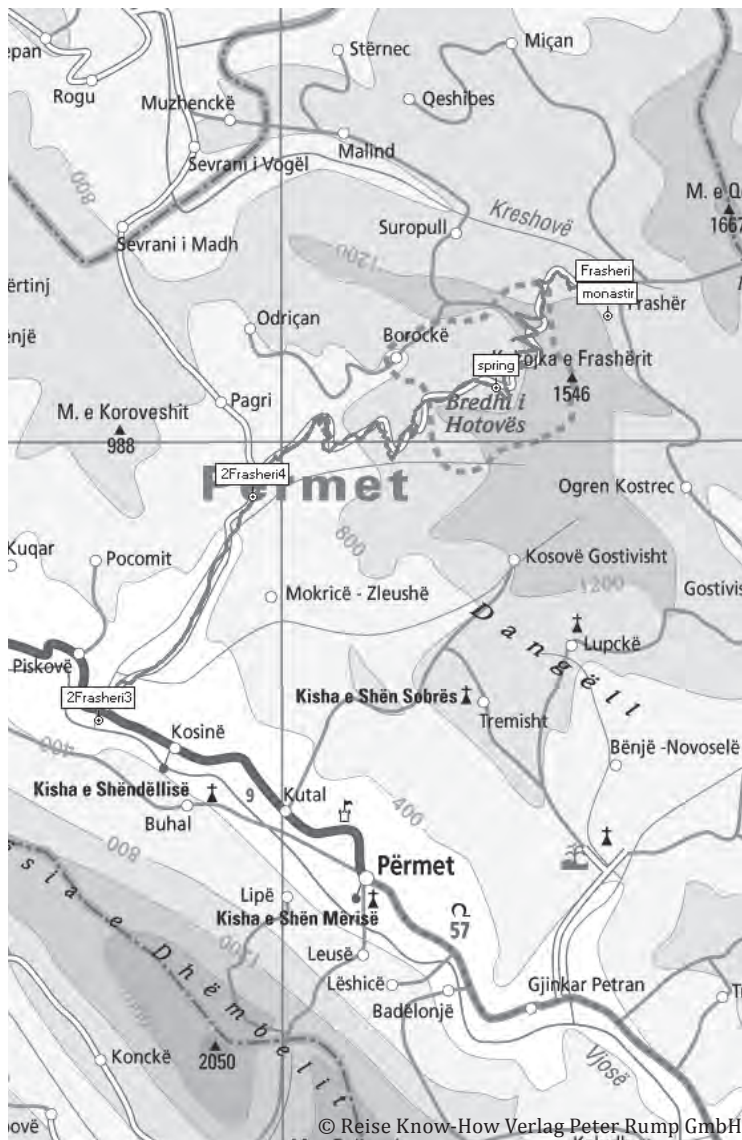
I do not recommend continuing from Frashëri to Luarasi – Qafzezi. Next to the underground military hospital above Frashëri there is a mass of fallen rock that can be passed through only on a motorbike and even that is extremely risky.

I recommend the hot sulphuric spring (hotspring) behind Përmet.

Points of interest: The village is named after the Frashëri brothers, prominent figures of the Albanian National Renaissance movement.

There is a museum and a Bektashi monastery in the village. The remains of an underground military hospital can be seen below a cliff on the opposite bank of the valley. The locals will gladly let you into the museum and the monastery if you ask them to. Ask for Pandy or his son Ilji, who have the keys.

2Frasheri3	N40 16.313 E20 16.813
2Frasheri4	N40 19.261 E20 19.508
Frasheri	N40 21.953 E20 25.613
monastir	N40 21.652 E20 25.658
spring	N40 20.709 E20 23.719
hotspring	N40 14.605 E20 25.926



34. Hot springs to Frashëri

Route: Përmet – Gostivishi – Frashëri

Length: 90 km

Ridden: 2007 – BMW 650 Dakar; 2008, 2010, 2011 – Yamaha TT600RE

Difficulty: Frequent landslides on the route, only for motorbikes. A lot of mud after rain.

Description: The route begins at the hot springs (Hotspring) about 10 km from Përmet towards Leskovik. Watch for a distinct rock marked by a cross (Hotspring) to find the turn-off.

Going upstream along the river on a good tarmac road, you will reach a Turkish bridge (bridge_otoman) where there are thermal springs. It is a real pleasure to have a bath there.

Look for a pillar from a torn-down bridge about 700 m below the Turkish bridge. Wade the river above the pillar (rivercross) and take the steep uphill track next to the pillar. It is rather muddy up to Gostivishi and very beaten by trucks.

You have to turn left before Gostivishi to the bridge over the gorge (bridge_fras)

The way beyond Gostivishi is often blocked by landslides (Landslip) which may be bulldozed through in some summers. It is about 10 km up to the next village, Ogren. There is a hard-surface road from the saddle to Frashëri.

From Frashëri you can take a comfortable hard-surface back to Përmet.

Continuing from Frashëri to Luarasi – Qafëzez cannot be recommended. Next to the underground military hospital above Frashëri there is a mass of fallen rock that can be passed through only on a motorbike and even that is extremely risky .

There is a tarmac road going to the hot springs and a new bridge is under construction, so there will most probably soon be a new road to Ersekë.

Points of interest: My friends have kayaked through the Lentricë river gorge, which ends by the hot springs.



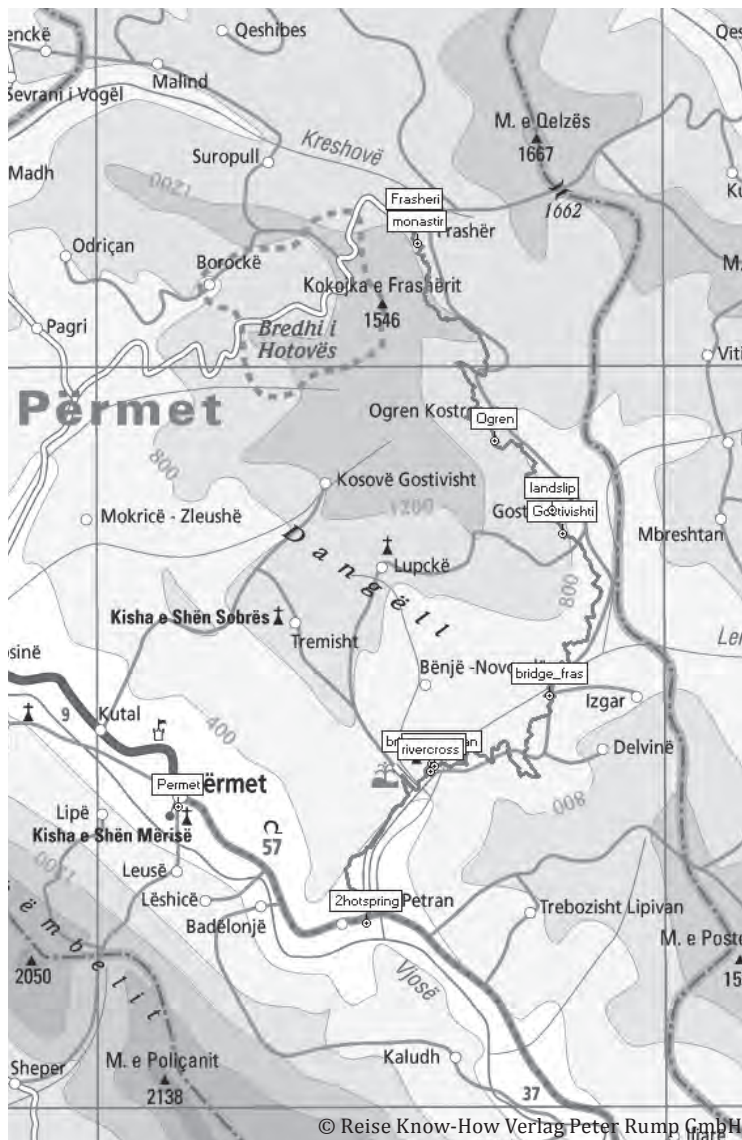
*The monastery custodian in Frashëri.
Coat-of-arms at the monastery door in Frashëri.*





Turkish bridge by the hot springs at Përmet

2hotspring	N40 12.491 E20 24.737
bridge_otoman	N40 14.629 E20 25.890
Hotspring	N40 14.605 E20 25.926
rivercross	N40 14.531 E20 25.870
bridge_fras	N40 15.545 E20 27.967
Gostivishti	N40 17.728 E20 28.208
Landslip	N40 18.053 E20 28.015
Ogren	N40 18.992 E20 27.004
Monastir	N40 21.652 E20 25.658
Frasheri	N40 21.953 E20 25.613



36. Nëmerçkë mountain range

Route: Dhuvjani – Suhë – Çatistë – Sopik – Poliçan – Topovë – Labova

Length: About 80 km, one day

Ridden: 2006 BMW GS650 Dakar, 2011 – Yamaha TT600RE
Anuch

Difficulty: A fine-gravel road, only from Zrej to Labova there is a more difficult stretch across the saddle.

Description: Take the main road between the Kakavia border-crossing and Tepelenë and turn right (2Nemerstika) into a river canyon in the direction of Poliçan. By the big trees at the end of the canyon you will see a road turning right in the direction towards the Greek border, which will take you over a bridge after a while. The track is covered with fine gravel. You will pass through several villages with churches and beautiful trees. Reaching the top of the valley, the way goes steeply downhill to a stream with a ford and goes uphill again on the opposite side of the valley. A very neat fine-gravel road will take you to Poliçan. There is a church and a pub on the square. You will pass a bunker when leaving Poliçan and a World War II memorial on a saddle going on to Topovë. The highland plateau past the following saddle resembles plateaux on Crete. The final descent will bring you down from an unbelievable height to the main valley. Keep to the left and you will come to Labova and then back to the main road over a bridge. There might be a new border crossing opened between Sopik in Albania and Pogoniani in Greece. However, it might be open only for local residents.

Points of interest: The area is populated by ethnic Greeks. Over the last few years, the majority of houses, which had been in ruins, have been repaired. The orchards and vineyards have also been renewed. Heavy battles took place in this area during WW II.

There is a large plain with old trees nearby the village of Li-bohovë. The trees are 32 m tall, up to 220 cm in diameter and are up to 220 years old.



Foto: Filip Weber

Villagers.

Monument commemorating WWII fights.



Foto: Filip Weber

2Nemerstika	N40 00.084 E20 12.870
SELECKE	N40 06.145 E20 18.104
HILOME	N40 04.050 E20 20.786
CATISTE	N40 01.867 E20 20.597
BROD (river cross)	N40 04.310 E20 24.319
SOPIK	N40 05.233 E20 24.686
SKORE	N40 06.430 E20 22.014
Poliçan	N40 08.045 E20 20.981
POMNIK (monument)	N40 09.937 E20 18.677
NDERAN	N40 10.136 E20 16.875
ZREJ	N40 11.525 E20 13.564
SEDLO (pass)	N40 11.280 E20 11.926
LABOVE	N40 12.435 E20 08.196
BENZIN (petrol)	N40 12.542 E20 05.340

RallyAlbania.



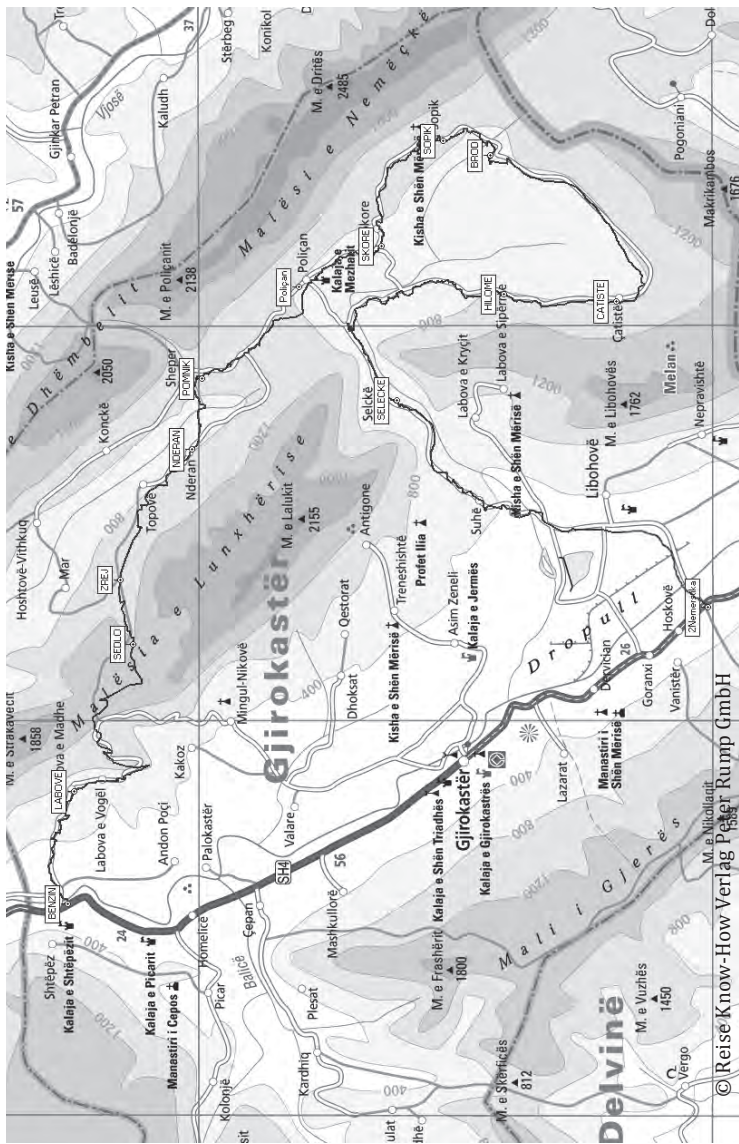




Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

*Still life with a piggy, mountains in North Albania.
School break, North Albania.*



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

After morning grass mowing, Theth.



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

*Village symbiosis, North Albania.
Horses know their way from the meadows, Radomire.*



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

*Wood for the winter, Theth.
Beggar, Shkodër.*



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

*Goat herdsman, Koman Lake.
Slaughterhouse, Peshkopi.*



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



Foto: Marek Vincik

*Valbonë valley.
On a way from Këlcyrë.*



Foto: Marek Vincik



Foto: Filip Weber

*In Dangëllia Mountains.
Ford under hot springs close to Përmet.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*Recovering on the way from the springs to Frashëri.
Ilji, Frashëri.*



Foto: Filip Weber



*Turkish bridge by the hot springs.
A mill in Bjeshkët e Namuna / Prokletije mountain range.*



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz



*On a ferry between Fierzë - Koman.
Ndërhyssaj village.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*Ploughing in Theth, "Kulla" in the background.
Korabit, the highest Albanian mountain, 2753 m.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*Lurës Lakes.
On a way from Ares to Fushë Lurë.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*Water Lily Lake.
Yellow water lily in the Water Lily Lake.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

Miçekut Lakes.

Saddle at 1984 m above sea level in the Kreshtës mountain range.



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*In the Ostrovicēs mountains.
View of Ostrovicēs from the saddle opposite from Gjerbēs.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Vojta Pihr

Copper mines near Gurth Spaç.



Foto: Vojta Pihr



Foto: Albert Weber

*Foot bridge across the Voskopojës River.
In the navigation stage of the Albania Rally.*



Foto: Jan Mareš



Foto: Filip Weber

*Dejës mountains.
Përrenjas.*



Foto: Albert Weber



Foto: Albert Weber

*Osnat.
Guri i Capit.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

Guri i Capit.



Foto: Albert Weber

*On the Voskopjë – Tresovë route.
Saddle between Devolli and Gjerbes.*



Foto: Albert Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

*A favourite dish – baked sheep brains.
Road to Fushë Lurë.*



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: www.expeditioncars.cz

*A village woman on her daily pilgrimage.
Sign on the former gate to the Frashëri monastery.*



Foto: Filip Weber

Where do the best people live?

I was sitting in a German pub in Hechlingen. I happened to get there thanks to filling in a magazine inquiry form and winning a weekend rider training for saddle-sure bikers at the BMW Enduro Park in Hechlingen.

Sitting there after arrival on Friday evening and drinking my beer, I saw some fellows in HP2 or BMW Fahrer Training sweat-shirts coming to the bar. The instructors, no doubt! I approached them and introduced myself politely. They nodded, uttered a few civilities and paid no more attention to me.

I returned to my beer and dinner. Then four chaps settled down at the next table and started talking – hard to believe – Russian. I, being an anti-Soviet Russophile, revived and addressed them. They were pleased to hear my Russian when I told them how I had ridden to Mongolia via Moscow earlier that year. But the conversation died off soon, and there I was sitting alone again.

Well, not alone, with my beer and my thoughts. I pondered about my travelling and the people I had met on my ways. Simple but nice in Mongolia. Arrogant in Moscow, great in Siberia. Proud and friendly in Libya, but too confined by Islam. In Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Rumania, Ukraine, England, Scotland, Norway, in the USA, on Réunion and Sumatra. Wherever I have been to.

How were the people? Communicative, hospitable, reserved, unpleasant.

And do you know what I came up with after the third beer? Where did the best people live? In Albania!

Albania – Mountain lakes

“Lakes in the Kreshtës Mountains? I have no idea how to get there!” says Edvin Kasimati, the director of Rally Albania and one of the best experts on the wild Albanian mountains. He spends months wandering around the mountains on his all-terrain motorcycle to prepare new routes for the most difficult European cross-country rally. “It’s the remotest part of Albania. In the 1950s English and Yugoslavian enemy agents sent to fight the communist regime were dropped by parachute there,” continues Edvin over a Tirana beer and delicious roasted trout, an Albanian speciality. We met about two weeks after the Arras rally at the fish-ponds. The lakes have been on my mind for a long time, so I packed satellite images, military maps, KTM EXC 450, a tent, a sleeping bag, and we set out to explore with my friend Roman sporting the same gear.

Kreshtës Mountains

The Kreshtës Mountains are divided into several valleys all of which share a ridgeline with Micekut, the highest mountain in the range at 2,101 m. In each of the mountain valleys there are one or more lakes just below the crest. The lakes are of glacial origin, but their water level was artificially raised by the construction of dams around 1985. Today, we may only guess why this was done. Most probably, the dams were intended as a natural reservoir of water for dry years. The water is crystal clear and the lakes are home to newts, swarms of tadpoles and tiny fish. The lakes are surrounded by spectacular mountain meadows full of yellow and blue flowers. Shepherds graze their sheep flocks there.

The purpose of our trip wasn’t only to visit the lakes, but also to find a route for off-road vehicles and to document it. I am not worried cars or motorcycles would cause much damage to this land. A car or a motorcycle won’t do much damage in places where all-terrain trucks carrying illegally logged wood have passed. Driving on difficult rocky trails with muddy ruts and climbing rocky patches and breakneck slopes requires a good amount of



skill whether you're driving a car or a motorcycle and this becomes a natural screening process that filters the number of vehicles that actually pass there. Four in a year? Maybe not even that many.

Shtungës Lakes

The Shtungës Lakes are located on the north-eastern slopes of the mountains. The locals described the way to the lakes, and it was not difficult to find. In the past, the lakes could be accessed by a relatively easy road going through the valley through which the brook running off from the lakes flows. However, the road had been swept away by floods and the locals used a bulldozer to grade a new road from the mines across the crest. It is steep, rocky and difficult to drive in a car or on a motorcycle.

"That's the hardest road I have ever driven!" exclaimed Roman after reaching the top of the serpentines with adrenaline pouring from his pores. The locals drive here with IFAs (IFA – an East German all-terrain truck) loaded with logs. I really rather wouldn't

like to sit in a loaded truck with the cabin poking above the slopes as the truck winds down the sharp serpentines. Shtungës is in fact a group of five lakes. The largest and the most beautiful of them is Liqueni i Zi. It lies at a height of 1800 m, directly below the crest. The lake is 600 m long and 400 m wide, has translucent water and is full of fish. There are traces of an old fire all around the lake – burnt trees that have fallen into the water. Albanian mountains are often afflicted by summer fires. Most of the trees have been cut down and nobody cares about planting new ones. There is a recently abandoned mine next to the lake located a little bit lower. By the lowest of the lakes we encountered wood-cutters on mules carrying power saws on their way to chop down another part of the beech forests.

Miçekut Lakes

These lakes are named for the highest mountain and are situated in the valley directly under the mountain. I counted five of them and there were nine on the map. Even though this valley is accessible from the same village as the previous valley, the locals were uncertain about this one. Some of them said there were not any lakes in the valley and others said there were lakes but there was no road to them. So we set forth on a rocky trail through the mountains in the direction of the lakes. However, the trail ended next to an abandoned mine and that was it. I found another promising trail connected to the one we were on on the satellite map. We found the start of this trail, or I should rather say of an abandoned tankodrome. It was more a gully than a path, full of loose boulders and rocks and very difficult to ride on a motorcycle. Roman railed against me: “This is the hardest road I have ever driven!”, but we finally managed to jump our way up to a small crest beyond which we could see a mountain valley with lakes. One of the lakes was even full of blossoming white and yellow water lilies. We were unlucky, because clouds scudded all night long and the day brought heavy showers, clouds and fog.

There was another mine by one of the lakes, a chrome mine



Foto: Filip Weber



Foto: Filip Weber

this time. Where there is a mine, there must be a road and trucks had not driven on the road we took on the way up for a long time. By the way – Albanian mountain mines are a textbook of anti-environmentalism. Originally there was a shaft with a small waste dump. Later, they discovered that the deposits reach all the way to the surface of the hill. So they decided to use an excavator, explosives, and the hill now looks like it was raided by air bombs. The miners are very excited to see us and they explain how they got here with their truck. We didn't get it.

We decide we should rather leave this brutal scar on the otherwise pristine mountain landscape and set out towards the next lake. First, we meet a flock of sheep, then a couple of grazing mules and finally we see a huge pot on a fire with steam rising from it. The pot is full of milk cans and the shepherds use it for making cheese. It is the famous Balkan cheese, salty, delicious and with a faint aroma of sheep. We are offered cheese for lunch, which is really a feast for us, because we have been living on sardines and chocolate for two days. The shepherds have built their sheep-pen in the ruins of an old building. They have a sheet stretched between the side walls sheltering a fireplace and a lair. There are no other words to describe this hotchpotch of plastic



Foto: Filip Weber

foam mattresses and blankets scattered on wooden boards cut to size right on the spot with a power saw.

The shepherds are very friendly, we chat, take pictures and try to explain the difference between the Albanian “jo” and the Czech “jo” (“no” in Albanian and „yes“ in Czech, the meaning being exactly the opposite, similar to the different meaning of nodding and shaking your head). They tell us that a few years ago a couple of Czech backpackers passed by here later followed by yet another group of four Czechs. Of course, I did not fancy we would be the first to discover this place. In fact, the first photo of the Miçekut Lake I discovered on the Internet was taken by the former Czech consul at Tirana. Miçekut Lake itself is beautiful – it lies straight beneath the mountain peaks in a huge rock amphitheatre. And again newts and swarms of tadpoles. And blooming meadows around the lake with hoopoes flying around.

In a few days after riding to the other side of the mountains, we return to the Miçekut Lakes. The lakes were the most beautiful spot and we also had to find a route for cars. We finally found it; it was the last of the trails we tried after a whole day of futile attempts. The ruts in the mud were so deep that the motorcycle almost disappeared in them. It will take a vehicle with high ground clearance and a brave driver.

Balgajt Lake

There is a nice boulder trail leading from Miçekut Lake across the saddle. The shepherds checked out our EXC and said we would be able to get through to Fuschë-Belquize. Although there was a road going to the saddle, the climb was unbelievably steep, full of boulders rolling down the slope. It was very difficult to climb on a motorcycle and it's very difficult to imagine driving a car there. I somehow managed to bounce my way to the top, but Roman got stuck in a steep stretch of the trail. For a while, the roar of his superb Akrap hovered above the mountains and echoed off the hills. Then, he became exhausted, so I drove his motorcycle a little ways down to give it another try. What should I

tell you – I tried two times, but I couldn't make it. I was not in tune with his Akrap at all, I couldn't gain fine control of the throttle, it was either off or full power. We dragged the machine on a rope for the last seven meters.

“That was the hardest trail I've ever driven!” said Roman catching his breath when we finally reached the top. “Well you didn't actually drive up here, you ingloriously crawled up on your arms and knees,” I can't help from nagging at him. The saddle is 1980 m above sea level, stunning views, sometimes clouds, sometimes sun, sometimes pouring rain. There is another beautiful lake below us. It is full of blooming water lilies and there is a beautiful reflection of the torso of a dead pine tree on the surface.

We search for a trail leading further into the valley, but we decide the only way to get through is on a donkey or a parachute. As we lie next to the lake and wonder which way to go next, a shepherd with a flock of sheep appears from behind the hill. “Miredita”, we greet him. Glad to hear us trying our Albanese, he replies “Mir”. We ask: “Ruga Belquiza motocykl – po?” The shepherd gestures strong Albanian disagreement – he shakes his raised forefinger. “Ruga – jo!” But after a short discussion, he advises us that we don't need to take the same trail back. He points to a low crest. Apparently, there is another Balgjajt Lake behind it. He gestures us to return back a bit and to turn off the trail and go straight across the terrain for about 2 km, to continue down to the lake and take the trail that we find beyond the lake on the right.

OK, up we go on the rocky trail, we take a turn onto a meadow strewn with large rocks and keep looking for a path among the boulders for about 2 km. The car would not be able to pass here, but the motorcycle somehow managed to thread its way through. There is really a road next to Balgjajt Lake. It has been freshly graded by a bulldozer – they opened new chrome-mining shafts here. The road curves steeply down to the canyon where the main mine is. The mine down in the canyon is old, it was opened back in the communist era. They are building their own power plant

here on the brook and are drilling one shaft after another in the surrounding hills.

Lurës Lakes

We must not forget the Lurës Lakes. These lakes are the most well-known Albanian lakes and there is a relatively good road around them. But good only for a four-wheel drive vehicle or a motorcycle. We used this road as a connection between Arres, where we had our meeting with Edvin, and the Kreshtës Mountains. The Lurës Lakes are situated in the neighbouring Kukorë Lurës Mountains. According to a printed guide translated from English, there are up to 25 lakes in this area, but when studying satellite images, I counted only eleven out of which six are accessible from the road. Maybe the other lakes have already dried out; or the author never visited the area, which is more likely.

The formerly natural glacier lakes were artificially modified by the construction of dams sometime around 1985. The lakes are very beautiful and attract visitors because they are relatively easily accessible. Attracting visitors on an Albanian scale means that there are some twenty cars coming here per year. One of the lakes is covered with white and yellow water lilies and we also found bear droppings on the road.

June 2011



In the mine

“They closed all the mines, so I had to go to Italy to find work,” recalls Etvalt Ndoj as he makes coffee for us in the “jezve” pot on a gas stove. We are sitting in a small cabin with two rooms. There is a stove and a table in one room and the other room with plank beds is shared by eight miners. “There was no work at all and my family really suffered from hunger at that time. I managed to put aside some extra money while working abroad, so when I came back four years ago I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to open my own mine. Where? That was also clear; I know the area quite well and my father had already known about the deposit earlier. I obtained the licence, bought the equipment, hired miners, mostly people I knew, and we started digging.”

I first noticed the new mine below the Lura Lakes three years ago. Where there was formerly just a bare slope there is now a freshly graded road, a hole in the ground and a hopper. The mine looks like something from the Middle Ages – a timbered shaft, rails, carts, carbide lamps. Most of the equipment comes from



Foto: Filip Weber

other, larger, now abandoned mines. Well, calling it equipment is maybe too much: they brought four carts, rails, a rail switch, a rail bender, mats and a hopper. The timbering is made of wood from the forests close to the nearby Lura Lakes. The only real pieces of equipment are thus an old compressor and a hammer drill.

They started driving the shaft three years ago. Now, there are two shafts, one on top of the other, connected by a vertical chimney at a depth of 450 m exploring the deposit.

When we arrived at the mine in the early evening, the shift was just closing. Using gestures and a few words in Albanian I indicated we would like to have a look inside. They understood immediately – no problem. Put high boots on, wear a helmet and take a jacket – it is cold down there. Water flows around our feet as we tread between the rails.

The shaft has been dug upwards into the hill to allow the water to drain, it's very damp. There is definitely no danger of explosion here. The timbering looks good, it is sturdily built and well maintained. I would never dare to enter an abandoned mine in Albania. The rock here is not as solid as for instance in the Amerika mine close to Karlštejn. The area is also seismically active, which means the timbering can be easily damaged and rock movement is also quite frequent. But an open mine is well maintained, so there is no need to be afraid. I waded through water in the light of a carbide lamp. We pass by a short side drift in which we can see a rail switch and carts.

There is a chimney at the end of the tunnel. They won't dig any further, the deposit shifts upwards here, so they dug an exploration chimney and then drove another shaft 100 meters higher. The chimney is now used to drop down pieces of rock containing chromium oxide. The upper shaft is used to cart away waste rock and the lower one is used for the chromium-bearing rock. Chromium-bearing rock is then taken on IFA trucks across the mountains to a large mine where there is a separating machine in operation. In another operating mine I visited there was no upper shaft, the deposit was surface mined using explosives and

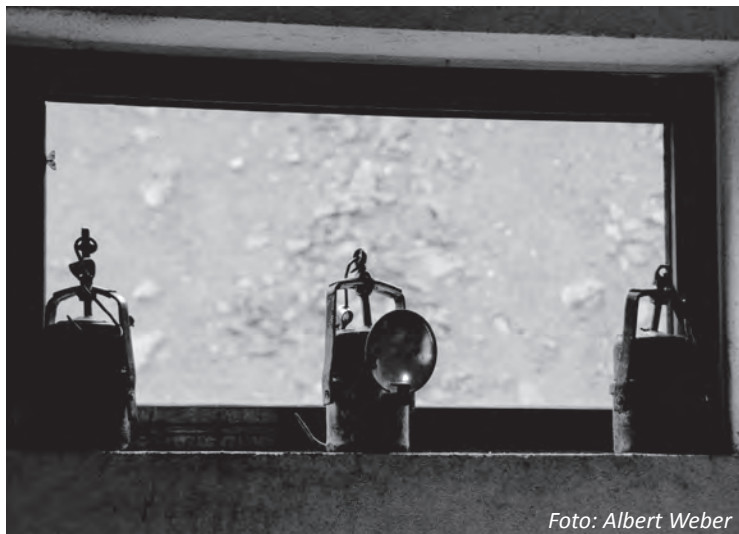


Foto: Albert Weber

excavators.

“How much money do you make?” I am trying to put together some phrases from a conversation book.

“It’s not bad, we make enough to pay for wages and we’ve already gotten our initial investment back. The deposit looks good and we will continue mining here for a few more years. However, I am already prospecting for a new deposit because it will take some time to obtain the licence,” concludes Etvall, aged 35.

The Albanian mountains have been drilled through and through. There are chromium and copper mines in the northern and central parts and there is black coal in the South. Almost no machinery is used in the mines, only air hammers and manually pushed carts. They use electric locomotives only in the largest mines. During the communist era, raw materials were the only exported article.

For instance, ore was bartered with Czechoslovakia for railway engines and cargo trucks. After the regime changed most of the mines were closed and the miners went looking for work

abroad. Now, they are gradually coming back, some of them work for multinationals which bought mining licences for the big mines. Others, just like Etvall, work for themselves in small shafts. A grim reminder of the communist regime is the now closed huge copper mine. Communists used it as a gulag and many people inconvenient to the regime were worked to death here.

June 2011



Albanian massacre

In the roadbook I see a note that I wrote last night, that it's another 20 km to the end of the time trial. I won't survive it! I've already had 65 km of wild riding in this time trial. And it's the second time trial of today's leg, which is 499 km long. We crossed three mountain ranges and on the connector we drove through a canyon around a copper mine with the most horrible Albanian forced labour camp. The second time trial began with a never-ending drive up into the mountains, which climaxed with a hard endurance ride over rocks. It was hell trying to keep my hands on the handle bars. Only another 10 km. The road winds across the base of the mountains, it's rocky, full of puddles, the rocks are slippery. I can't even control my motorcycle anymore, I'm just hanging on. It seems like this time trial will never end. Edvin, the director of the rally, really put the screws on this year and prepared the hardest rally I've ever been through.

Italian mixer

"If the rally is as boring as the prologue, I'm going home."

That's what most of the first-timers said at the Albanian rally. The prologue is a short round on a sandy beach. I tell everyone, "Stay calm and save your energy; you can't imagine what Edvin and Albania can do." And I was right – it even surpassed my own expectations.

The first leg starts at 5:30 in the morning and the first time trial comes after just 20 km, 85 km warm-up. We began in the Skanderbeg Mountains directly above Tirana and I called this leg the "Italian mixer". The edge of the track was littered with battered Italians, well not just Italians but they were in the majority. My friend Johanes from Austria stood to one side and the crank case of his Super Enduro was punctured. The sprocket hub on Filip's LC4 had torn off. Tomáš had jumped from a small bridge into a stony ravine. Fortunately his motorcycle stayed on the road. We passed an Albanian mountain army camp along the way. In front

of the gate there was a motorcycle laid on its side and soldiers were helping change a tire using a huge jack. In the second half, in the adjacent Martanesh mountain range, I caught up with Péca on a beautiful ridge between remnants of snow and together we lost our way near an enormous bunker. As we were returning to the route, we overlooked a deep ditch just after we came back to the main road. I jumped over it but my roadbook hit my glasses. Péca braked and hid his LC8 in the ditch. Fortunately the turn, which was identified as “Lucifero” in the roadbook (a jump down from a cliff 200 m high), did not result in any casualties. All-terrain ambulances drove in to get the Italians with their broken arms and concussions.

During the second time trial I made an interesting discovery. I had already looked for the road from Cerence across the Kreshetës mountain range to Selistë several times without any luck. This time, I know that it's here but I don't know if I will find it. The time trial goes by so fast that I don't even remember the route. The first car, Albanians, starts seven minutes after me and judging from the time they got in the first time trial, they must be

Josef Macháček, five-time Dakar winner on RallyAlbania



Foto: Marek Vincik

totally crazy. A few serpentine curves into the time trial I see a rally organizers' car pulling a four-wheeler out of a gorge with a winch. Poor Olin Bražina jumped into the gorge and injured his shoulder and that was the end of his race. Jirka with a BMW 800 is there too, fixing his kickstand sensor. Knowing that the first car is behind me, I ride as fast as I can. The car came in to the finish line, which was a short distance from a bridge below Pehskopi, about 5 minutes after me. They really drive like madmen. Along the way I had hoped for awhile that we would take the great route around the Lura Lakes, but we turned to the right; I guess Edvin was saving the lakes for next time.

The connector to the finish line seems endless – through the Drini i Zi Valley, where there is a gravel road, that is still ok, but from Kukës to Valbonë, part asphalt, part road construction, it's torture. The Valbonë Valley is one of the most beautiful areas in Albania and the Gjakovës mountain range is nicknamed the Albanian Alps. Snowy peaks, pine scrub, scree, bits of snow along with dilapidated houses and poverty. A crystal clear blue river flowing along the bottom of the valley. So Edvin dragged us up here to show us the beauty of the Albanian mountains. An afternoon storm spoils it a bit, but the weather clears up in the evening and so my brother at the barbeque grills some fresh chops for us, which we wash down with plenty of Tirana beer. Filip was the last to be picked up in the mountains, probably because he didn't have any broken bones. He was already building a lean-to shelter and begging for a light from some shepherds when they picked him up. They picked him up at 8 p.m. and they didn't get in until the morning, it was really far. In the morning we all check each other to make sure we have aluminium foil and a lighter packed. Not even Joe, the winner of the Dalmatia Rally, came in because he had injured his arm.

Ride on a jackhammer

There is a beautiful dry riverbed in the Valbonë Valley, with an imperceptible trail across the large rocks in the riverbed. And



of course the time trial goes through the ravine. We all ride out together below the village of Rragam and then we start on the same way back. Just the ride up over the rocks would be enough. Honza passes me about 3 km from the start, so I follow him and let him lead me through the entire ravine at a fast pace. We come out onto gravel next to a decrepit old hotel and fly down through the valley. You can't brake on the pebbly road, you can only accelerate. And then there is an unexpected turnoff – we ride up into the mountains to the left along a goat path into a completely abandoned village below the mountain lakes. The finish line for the time trial is at a concrete monument.

The riders who come in after us report that there is a motorcycle far down in the gorge alongside the rocky serpentine curves. Then when we ride back along the same route as a group, the rally organizers already have it pulled out with a winch. Today is a rest day and so we ride only 45 km. Filip borrows a rear EXC wheel from Adam, which fits the old LC4, so he can continue tomorrow.



Foto: Marek Vincik

Edvin Kasimati, director Albania Rally.

Over four mountain ranges

Valbonë – Vlore – just a glance at the map makes it clear that it will be hellishly far. I go to the start at 6:15 a.m. Fog sits in the Valbonë Valley, getting thicker in the direction of Fierze. The start of the time trial is in Fierze, just beyond the bridge below the dam. Rocks, rocks, rocks. As I accelerate, a loose rock shoots off my front wheel somewhere. So I ride along like a slowpoke. Just after the start my roadbook gets messed up so I have to put it back in place. Jindra starts right after me and leads me like a pal for part of the way. In one square of the roadbook there's just a huge stop sign. The edge of the road has torn off here, opening up a hole to hell. Edvin is standing there, kicking away a piece of earth that has slid down, so cars can pass by. We wind our way to the finish line across the beautiful pine-covered mountain range between Fierze and Fushë Arës. I ride very carefully; the results won't be anything great.

The next connector is the most beautiful route that Edvin

could have prepared for us. It climbs up through a canyon through pine forests. There are entries to abandoned mines in the canyon, with red streams flowing out of them – copper was mined here. It is hell up on the ridge, where there used to be an Albanian forced labour camp. A huge copper mine, with lots of galleries, concrete buildings, a red river running through the canyon, hellishly hot. Jirka gets a flat here and so he has an even more hellish time of it. Jindra and I ride together through this section and we both almost fall asleep in the heat as we ride. The next part of the route passes through foothills to Belquize; the landscape is pretty but it seems endless and is difficult. One part was even marked in the roadbook as the worst road on the planet. Holes, rocks, deep ruts.

A ways past Belquize, when we're so tired we feel like we can't ride another kilometre, we come to the start for the second time trial at the 270 km point. It makes me think of the excursions of most people who call themselves adventurers – after 200 km in the field they are totally exhausted and that's after just two days of riding. After the start there is a climb along serpentine curves into the mountains, higher and higher, so high that our ears plug up. Just when it seems like we can't go any higher, we come to a hardly noticeable road freshly run through by a tractor – Edvin is out to kill us. It's a logging road with a steep incline and deep ruts, clay and lots of rocks. A group of Italians passes me there. They hadn't been behind me at the start which means they've already managed to get lost. They're riding 450 two-stroke bikes and they just fly over the rocks on the way up. I have my standard gear shift so I ride in first gear over the clutch. My arms feel like they are going to fall off, I have to stop to rest. At the peak of the mountains, after about 6 km of that insane climb, is Lago Nero, at least that's what it's called in the roadbook. In reality it's the gorgeous lake Liqeni Skënderbeut. But the water level is low, leaving the shoreline muddy. Out of respect I circumvent it through shrubs. The entire group of Italians, whose brains are somewhere in their pants, drove straight into it. I almost die laughing, looking at them scattered about and wading through the mud. Honza saw



Foto: Rally Albania

an Italian here do a perfect somersault over his handlebars.

I keep chugging along at my leisurely pace and after a while they pass me again. But they take a wrong turn at a bunker. Unfortunately the last one in the group glances back and sees that I'm turning a different way. So they all turn around and obediently follow me. On the way down they lose patience and pass me again. When I get to the next intersection they're standing there. Then they follow me obediently. I've got the advantage! We join up to a road that I drove in a Toyota a few days ago. And it takes us to the top of a huge quarry.

A whole big hill is exposed here, with mines and dumpsites drilled through it and there is surface mining in some places. The road gets us all mixed up, then the navigation becomes easier so the Italians leave me in the dust again. But not for long. We continue back up into the Skanderbeg Mountains, and I know the road well. Past an army camp I see the group of Italians next to the road again. They rode like idiots and one of them looks like mincemeat so they're calling for help. I've only got 20 km left to the

finish line of the time trial. It doesn't make any difference that I know the road because it's easy to navigate here. Not so easy are the rocks, puddles and a tunnel of beech leaves. It's really slippery because puddle water has covered the rocks and I have to ride bending forward through the beech tunnel. A loud muffler passes me so I get out of the way and see that it's Jindra. He had started a few minutes before me. He must be really mad that he got lost and so he's gunning it. I don't even try to chase him on the wet rocks. Ten more kilometres to the finish line; it seems like it will never end. Five more kilometres to the finish line, all I'm doing is holding on to the handlebars, I'm not even changing gears as I can't press the clutch. At the finish line totally exhausted riders lie on the ground next to their motorcycles. I meet up with Jindra and Jirka, we have a beer at a petrol station below the mountains, and Norbert riding a 690 catches up with us. He hit his wrist and probably broke his thumb and in the evening he's done with the race. Only 160 kilometres to the finish line of this leg in Vlore. So Edvin takes us over some dirt roads, which we are really grateful for. In Vlore we are so tired that we would rather go straight to bed. But we find a car wash right on the beach and next to it there's a snack bar with Tirana on tap.

It's our salvation. The assistance team ran into big trouble. While getting off the Fierze – Komani ferry the Italians' support truck lost an electrical cable in the tunnel, the truck died and caught on fire. The driver of the German support truck didn't waste any time – he pushed the burning truck out of the tunnel in front of his. Everyone in the tunnel ran to the side to the levee and only after the smoke cleared did they start backing up back onto the ferry. They left Komani late and got to the Vlore campsite after midnight. I was already sleeping in the meadow but the poor Italians didn't have any of their stuff. The truck burned up completely.



Military zone

The entire peninsula across from Vlore is a military zone. Edvin had obtained a permit and we rode around the peninsula at a rest pace. At the farthest point there was a beach where we swam. No navigation, no hill climbs, just a winding road right above the sea along cliffs. And the rocks and cliffs made loud noises on my felly – it seemed like my shock absorbers weren't working at all.

After tuning up our motorcycles we met on the city beach, where they have Tirana on tap and I have to say that we'll have to make Olin Bražina and Martin Michna honorary members of the Czech Desert Beer Rally Team.

You still haven't had enough?

In the morning when I looked at the starting list of riders I got a shock – I wasn't on it! I got up like I would if I was starting normally, half an hour after the first start, but I didn't get to start until two hours after the first rider. The first one started at 5:30 a.m.

We move to the start of the first time trial along a well-known road from the sea to Tepelenë along the base of the mountains.

There are big storms and since I started last, the rain was really letting loose by the time I got going. I ride at a snail's pace along the wet rocks and keep thinking about how Pepa Macháček, who started about 20 minutes after me, will laugh at me. But he wasn't all that fast – he came in after I'd already been at the finish line for a while. First there was a rocky road, then a turn in a village across a pasture and then a mud bath. And after the mud bath there were sloping craggy rock plates covered in mud. Those poor guys on the LC8 and GS800. Robert took a fall somewhere along the way, he's all bruised and battered at the finish line.

Martin, who rode superbly and was just behind the first trio of riders, got lost on this sprint and lost about 20 minutes. The sprint was only 65 kilometres long. There's a short crossing to the start of the second sprint. A ways below Čorovode we turn off into the mountains and an 80-kilometre killer section begins. First there's a climb up to the saddle in the Kulmakës Mountains – boulders, cliffs, water. The ride down from the saddle is on gravel and Péca, riding in front of me, practices his flight show routine. I help him lift his motorcycle and we ride down really carefully into the well-known village of Gjerbës. To the left across the village commons, for those of us who know the way. And yes, once again we go to our favourite river, where Jindra taught his motorcycle to swim last year. Fortunately we only cross it and at an inexplicable place we turn onto a road that takes us up to the facing hill along steep serpentine curves. You can't really call it a hill – it's almost another mountain. A narrow road winds along its slope, about 1 kilometre above the river and it seems like it was built just for us.

Next is a toboggan ride through a pine forest – up, down, left, right. Once our heads stop spinning we ride down out of the mountains, through villages where there are speed limits, all the way down to the river and then a ford across. It's pretty deep. By the water I can tell where to cross, so the water's just above my wheels, but those who cross at the place where trucks cross have trout in their airbox.

We reach the end of the time trial and we have just a rest ride

over to Tirana. We have a beer at a petrol station, Pëtitáta first fills up his motorcycle's tank with diesel and then fills up his own tank and we assure each other that the rest of the way will be on asphalt. What a mistake! Edvin takes us over a dam, then over asphalt below Elbasan and right off the asphalt. The road across the mountains to Tirana is maybe even worse than the time trials. First gravel, then muddy ruts, up, down, the zigzags never end. Everyone is reeling from exhaustion. I'm not even conscious of arriving in Tirana, I have one Tirana beer (a 1.5l plastic bottle) and pass out. In the morning Igor withdraws from the rally, he hit some rocks on the leg in Vlora and he's bruised and battered and can barely walk.

Save the best for last

The last section is in the Skanderbeg Mountains just above Tirana. There's a trick in the roadbook - the first square was a traffic light at a hotel, not the exit from the hotel. Tirana was full of Italians riding in confusion in every direction. The time trial start was in the same place as last year, past the gorge, and in the end the entire time trial was the same and was 40 kilometres long. Since the results were a mess, Péca started right before me. But some Italian pushed his way in between us, I guess it was a new buddy of Péca's. I caught up with Péca a few kilometres before the finish line on a rocky path that traced the contour line. Along the way I also passed a block with an axe in it in the right tire track and some motorcycles left there. Once I saw Péca's shining helmet I gunned it so I would catch up with him and pass him. But the rocks were wet and I suddenly found myself lying in a turn with a broken clutch lever and injured arm.

As I was fixing it Martin, who had started way before me, rode up. He had shot out of a curve and fallen off a cliff and didn't even know how he'd climbed up out of the coomb. He gave me some painkiller at the finish line for my hurt arm and laughed that a cigarette and painkiller are a motorcycle racer's basic equipment. It was here that Adam believed an Italian for the first time and followed him into a wildly rocky incline. Honza told us how a slow

moving tourist blocked his way for a long time, so he passed him in a deep puddle and got him all wet. Edvin made the finish line of this section at a pub. It's apparently a deluxe local pub because they have Heineken Eurobeer instead of Tirana on tap. But even Eurobeer is better than no beer. Pëtitáta teaches the waiter to pour beer and I teach him to move fast and collect empty beer glasses. In the evening there's a ceremony with flags and national anthems on the main square in Tirana.

Adam

It's hard to believe but Adam Kubarski, a Polish member of the Czech Desert Beer Rally Team, came in second in the overall results. It's an unbelievable achievement; he beat much more experienced, famous riders.

Albania rally

The rally was much harder and more difficult than last year. The time trials were longer and the sections were harder. Last year there were fewer than 100 riders, this year it was up to 200. Including the best in Europe and Italy and riders who start at Dakar. Even though the route Edvin prepared for us was tough, it was a fantastic route through mountains across all of Albania. He must have worked with a forester to compose the route as it was full of tricks. The roadbook was perfect; the places and kilometre counts matched perfectly without a single mistake. So good that even the Italians didn't get lost much. It was just too bad that the computer timer broke down and the results had to be calculated by hand; they couldn't get them done in time and it was a mess and I'm not convinced the results were right. The rally was prepared very well; TV was everywhere and there were half-hour spots on TV every day. As a result we were welcomed everywhere we went and people waved and cheered in all the villages and towns we rode through. There were policemen at all the crossings with asphalt roads who stopped traffic whenever a rider went through; we had total priority.

Honza is proof of how difficult the rally was. He is usually one of the trophy winners but here he came in 25th. And me, the tourist, I came in 57th and I didn't have a single penalty or late start. Maybe Edvin will make a tourist category for me next year. But only 77 riders out of almost 200 finished all of the sections, which also proves how difficult it was.

“Pětitáta” - A five-time father

Every event has to have its own mascot. Ours was Tomáš a.k.a. “Pětitáta”. Judge for yourself: he drove to the rally straight on axis and made it back home too. He had his luggage sent only because Honza convinced him to. He finished late at night every day, but he always went on to the next leg. After the prologue his front tire came off on the highway at 130 km/hour. In the first section he jumped off a bridge into a stony ravine, and fortunately the motorcycle stayed on the road. In the third section, during the crossing to Valbonë, his mousse came off his front tire again before the start of the time trial, he borrowed a tire tube from the Italians, replaced the mousse, pumped it up and it popped. He put the mousse back, found out that the front tire was 21.5” instead of 21”, he borrowed another front tire and made it to the finish line of the second time trial at 9 p.m. He wrote us a text message to chill some beer for him, as he only had 160 kilometres left to go to Vlore. He came in to Vlore at 2 a.m. After the second time trial in the next to last section he drove to a petrol station and it seemed like the service was slow so he filled the tank himself. The petrol station employee jumped him and tried to grab the petrol nozzle from him. Pětitáta didn't give in, he kept pumping. As he was putting it into beer bottles he took a big swig. He crashed into the organizer's car. On the way back home he started falling asleep so he rode to a petrol station, bought a Redbull and fell asleep at a table with the can unopened. When he woke up the Redbull was gone. He reached in his pocket for change to buy another one and thought, you've finally shown what you're really like, you Albanian thieves...and just then the waiter comes up and hands him his

Redbull, which he had put in the fridge so it wouldn't get warm. Then in Bosnia, he asked a policeman who had stopped traffic if there's a way around through the forest or field. The policeman said no, it's a minefield and it's just being cleared!

But he went through the whole rally with a smile and unbelievably good mood! And he always said anyone who has survived a trip across Russia to Magadan and back can survive anything.

Czech Desert Beer Rally Team

Filip Beba Weber KTM LC4 690, Jan Mareš KTM LC4 690, Jindřich Moravec Yamaha WR450, Robert Víšek Yamaha WR450, Igor Gažo SK KTM EXC 525, Adam Kubarski PL KTM EXC 450, Petr Kalaš "Péca" KTM LC8, Vojtěch Pihrt KTM LC8, Tomáš Holman "Pětitáta" BMW XChallenge 650, Norbert Nývlt KTM LC4 690, Filip Holub KTM LC4 640, Jiří Kalát BMW GS 850.

Martin Michna KTM EXC 450 and Olin Bražina Yamaha Raptor were accepted as members of the Czech Desert Beer Rally Team for their performance and positive attitude during the rally.

Other Czech riders: Vlastimil Tošenovský KTM EXC 450, Martin Plechatý KTM 530 EXCR, Josef Macháček Buggy 1300.

June 2011



**NO BEER
NO POWER**

Exploring the South

It's a small world, especially in Albania.

It took us a whole day to drive the 30 km from Guri i Kamjes. We used the winch only 17 times, we carried the spade alongside the car and we didn't even bother to reel up the rope of the winch – we just pulled the rope over the engine hood to the passenger's feet. I didn't bother to pour out the runny mud from my boots before getting into the car either; water from the puddles got into the car's body from the back and I couldn't believe how tightly little wild rose bushes could trap the winch rope. By the way, the Albanian word for winch is "arganelo". In the end, the only thing we ruined was the attachment of the drive shaft and of the front sleeve and we managed to get onto pavement before twilight. Luckily, the rain stopped and the temperature rose to 4 °C, so the fresh snowline stayed above us. We spent the night there. The next day, worn-out, we drove on decent roads to Voskopojë, which is a tourist destination. We visited the famous churches and wimped out, deciding we wanted to take a good shower. We could see luxurious hotels above the village. We drove to the first hotel – it was locked. We drove to the other hotel (above the first one) and we see an all-terrain Suzuki with the familiar red-and-black sticker on it and who doesn't run out of the hotel – Elsi! The guy who helped to organise the Albania Rally! What an encounter. The hotel is owned by his parents; he is alone here, the season has ended and he apologises he has nothing else to offer but Tirana beer.

Through the Pine Forests

"To Tresovë? You need to take the tarmac road through Korçe," I was advised by the old blokes playing domino in a pub in Voskopojë. "There is another road that goes through Krushove, but it is not used, take the tarmac road."

Luckily, I did not get discouraged and we set out on the road. It is true though that after one day spent on the IFA highway with the repeated exercise of recovering the car with a winch, I really did not have much taste for a mud bath.

Elsi helped us to dismount the towing bracket in the morning

– you need to take off the entire rear cross rail and then you can dismantle the towing bracket. It makes an excellent plough and I spent quite a lot of time hanging on it the day before yesterday.

A beautiful creek meanders from Voskopojë and there is a road alongside it. It is dusty, but quite well maintained. However, the road is good only for 5 km until you reach a military post and an arched bridge to Shipske. At this point, there is a turn-off for a forest road that is apparently rarely used. It crosses the creek and swings up to a point above the canyon, passing through beautiful pine forests all the way. The road is easy, with sandy soils, so there are no traces of the rain from the day before yesterday. It would probably be slippery after rain but you could drive it. The road goes by the village of Krushove and goes around the right side of a hill. Military maps show the road passing the hill on the left side; there is a road there but it is apparently unused. We drove past a small pond on the right side, later past the turn-off for Shipske and then we joined the road shown on the military map.

We met a shepherd with a flock of sheep. I could see from a distance that he was carrying a military rifle over his shoulder. When we stopped to say hello, he was no longer carrying the rifle. I smile at him and try to make a gesture to ask him where the rifle has gone. He smiles back, but doesn't show the rifle. I could try to explain here that he needs to carry a gun to protect his sheep against wolves, but the truth is that the locals have a passion for illegal hunting of hares and wild boars. I ask about the road and he confirms that "rruga Lozham makina sum mir". This means the road is perfect.

We drove up above the pine forest to the top of the hill. The smell of thyme and pines was intoxicating. And those views.

On the right side, past Korçe, we see Guri i Capit through a mountain valley, a rock formation with bunkers; in front of us, on the horizon, we see Guri i Kamjes, a rock formation with a scenic route where you can practice using a winch. You can also see the Valamarës mountain range and Lukova Lakes, where we spent the first day. The Gramsh and Tomorrit mountain ranges with the beautiful Ostrovicës mountains in the background, below which

we drove a beautiful loop in the morning. Unfortunately, we could not drive the entire loop and had to return to Voskopojë, because there was a mass of fallen rock between Marjan and Cemerice.

This would be a fantastic spot to spend the night, but it is still early, so we continue to wind through the pine forest. Navigation is difficult here, the military map is sometimes misleading and there are several turn-offs in the forest, which all look alike. At the very end, at the top of the hill above Lozhan, the tracks make a sharp right turn and drop steeply down apart from the original road. Then there is a steep decline through ferns back to the original road.

This is where the one truly difficult part of the route begins. In this area there are beech trees, which retain water, and which means that the steep decline goes through ruts filled with water. Then we cross a landslide area, which is fine in dry weather, but in wet conditions there would be serious danger of sliding off to the side – there is a lot of room for free fall, the Devoli Canyon is about 300 m straight down. Because of this spot this route cannot be recommended in the Tresovë - Voskopojë direction and in rainy weather it is not recommended in either direction.

We arrived in Tresovë directly next to the abandoned mine.

October 2011



Fot. Edvin Kasimati

ALBANIAN TRADITIONAL CUISINE

Edvin Kasimati

Introduction

Individual people have preserved their antique culinary traditions and, at the same time, have enriched them with the culinary experience of others. The geographical and historical proximity have made possible reciprocal influence in economy, culture and especially in the way of life.

Notwithstanding, it appears that the influences of the culinary art are more felt due to the fact that these peoples produce to a great extent the same food articles.

The traditional Albanian cuisine, costumes, culture and the hospitality that characterizes Albanians originate from ancient times.

Albania is one of the most ancient countries in Europe, lying on the border between East and West. As a result, one finds traces of two cultures and culinary arts: oriental and occidental.

The favorable climate allows for the cultivation of nearly all kinds of agricultural produce. Characteristic of all the dishes in our country is that the ingredients retain their natural features, color, and aroma. There is a rich variety of vegetables and fruits, which are consumed raw, in dishes, with meat, or conserved.

The most preferred vegetables are: tomato, pepper, eggplant, ladyfinger, potato, cabbage, onion, garlic, green beans, beans, cucumber, etc. They are most frequently fried, boiled on slow fire, or baked.

Among the leguminous plants, the most popular and traditional is the bean. Cooked in earthenware, beans are especially delicious. They are either used in dishes on their own or with other vegetables or meat. In some regions, beans also appear in pies. Peas and green beans also make delicious dishes.

A number of dishes are prepared in the same manner though using different ingredients. Such are categories of dishes found among all Balkan peoples, such as stew (fërgesë), casseroles

(tava), pickles, stuffed grape leaves (japrak), beefsteak, chops-teak, meatballs (qofte) etc. The mixed dishes, with or without meat (turli), mousaka and meatballs (qofte) are adopted from the oriental cuisine.

Especially delicious are olives prepared in different ways. They are preferred on their own, but also together with other food. Olives from the region of Berat are used as the table variety because they are big and have a low fat content. Olives growing in the region of Vlorë, Himarë coast, Borsh, and the vicinity of Tirana (Prezë, Ndroq) have a high fat content. For this reason, they are used for the production of natural olive oil, which these regions use for cooking and supply to the whole country.

Relish and seasoning play a very important role in the quality of dishes. The most particular in the Albanian cuisine are spices, herbs, sour taste of lemon, tomato, vinegar or yogurt. The spicy taste in traditional dishes, from mild to strong, comes from garlic or spicy pepper. Preferred seasonings are local plants such as: parsley, mint, laurel leaves, basil, celery, marjoram, rosemary, etc. It is not usual to mix seasonings. Each dish is seasoned by what harmonizes best with the natural aroma of the main ingredient. Quantity varies by regions and individual tastes, that is why their quantity is not specified in recipes. They only mention what kind is used.

Milk and its byproducts, as well as eggs, are daily dish for many plates, pasta, pastry, and desserts. Another byproduct of milk is buttermilk, pleasant to drink in every season, but especially during the hot days of summer. Cheese is classified according to the milk it comes from. The most famous, the white cheese from sheep milk, especially if originating from the southern regions of the country, is always present in Albanian kitchens.

Desserts are rich in variety too. They are often made of milk, cream and fruit juices, as well as poured over by syrup, such as baklava, sugar cookies (sheqerpare), baked noodles with ground nuts (kadayif), wheat pudding (hashure), rice pudding (sytliash), etc. The most notable among the desserts made of dough are

sweet or salty cakes from fermented dough, phyllo dough, fritter balls (petull), etc. Others are halva and butter jelly (hasude). A very popular drink is boza, produced mainly in the northern part of the country (Kukës). With maize as its main ingredient, it is used a lot as a refreshing drink during the summer.

With fruits being bountiful during the year, they are preferred as dessert, mainly in natural state, but also as compote, juice or preserve. The favorites are: apple, cherry, peach, pear, watermelon, melon, fig, grape, lemon, orange, apricot. Shell fruits, such as walnut, almond, nut, chestnut, are eaten with pleasure and used a lot in deserts.

Our country has a long tradition in the production of alcoholic drinks. The most traditional is raki, made from grapes. Especially known and appreciated is the artisan production from the vines of the region of Skrapar and Përmet, in the south of the country. Raki from plums is made in regions of cold climate, like Dibrë, Korçë and Pogradec. Viticulture and the production of wine have been practiced here since antiquity. It flourished in the southwestern shores of the Balkans 3,000 years ago. The ancient traditi-

Foto: Edvin Kasimati



on in the cultivation of grapevines and the making of wine dates back to the Illyrians, as is evident from archeological discoveries in Lin (Pogradec), Tepë (Elbasan) and Zgërdhesh (Krujë), where, among other objects, different receptacles for wine were found. The ancient geographer Strabo, describing Illyria, wrote: "This country is warm and prosperous because it is full of olive groves and good vineyards. Illyrians exported to Rome wine kept in wood barrels." The coins of Dyrrahium and Apolonia as well as the amphorae used in transporting wine found in the Illyrian cemeteries of Çimanak in Kukës, the Illyrian castle of Xibri (Mat), as well as the Illyrian town of Gajtan (Shkodër), testify to the developed cultivation of grapes. During the byzantine occupation (7th – 8th centuries), viticulture started to become the main economic activity with wine exports bringing in income.

Today the number of grape varieties has increased. This has created opportunities for the production of different wines, red and white. Among the red wines are: Shesh i zi (Tiranë, Durrës), Cabernet and Merlot, (Berat, Lushnjë, Përmet, Vlorë etc.), Kallmet (Shkodër Peshkopi), Black Pinot and Mavrud (Leskovik, Shkodër, Lushnjë). Among the white wines are: Shesh i Bardhë (Tiranë), Riesling (Durrës) etc.

An outstanding brand among the alcoholic drinks of color is cognac Skënderbeg, which has won several prizes in international competitions.

The geographical location of our country favors not only the cultivation of all kinds of fruits and vegetables, but also the breeding of a variety of animals and birds, whether wild or domestic. This is the reason why Albania increasingly offers its visitors something particular, traditional, parts of daily life, complemented perfectly for every region of the country by traditional cuisine. Let's have a close look at it according to the individual regions.

Northern Region

There is maize widely cultivated in this region, making maize flour not only the key ingredient in producing bread but also in

cooking an assortment of traditional dishes both salty and sweet. The cold climate of the region enables each family to create food supplies that last for a long time like pastërma (dried meat), stuffed tripe (zorrë e mbushur), mash (trahana) or pasta (jufka) and can be used during the winter season. These are homemade in every household in the north. The most characteristic and often used vegetables in the kitchen include bean, potato and cabbage, which serve as ingredients in different delicious dishes. Onion and garlic are ever present. They are tied in strings and dried, a tradition of the northern regions, so that they are available throughout the year.

Traditional dishes of this region include: baked rice (birjan) of Peshkopi, fritter balls (petulla) of Luma, pasta (jufka), casserole (tavë) of Gora, sheep's head soup (paçe) of Kosova, sausage (suxhuk) of Gjakova, maize mash (harapash/mëmëlikë), chicken wheat risotto (qeshqek me pulë), garlic mash (çervish), maize flour cookies (gurabie me miell misri), milk pie with maize flour (qumështor me miell misri) etc.

The cuisine of Shkodër occupies a special place, with popular dishes such as: çorba shkodrane, mish jahni (mutton together with some fat, onion, garlic, dried de-stoned plums, sauce, a little sugar, salt and pepper is cooked in low heat, pouring small quantities of water until the meat is boiled and the remaining juice is thickened).

With the region being rich in water resources, both salty and not, fishing is a tradition that dates back to the Illyrians. What makes the region stand out is not only its abundance in fish but also the traditional way they are cooked. The most well known are carp and fish juice (krapa me lëng), extremely delicious, mullet baked on tile (qefull i pjekur në tjegull), sole eel (njala jahni), dried sardines, etc.

Another traditional and often prepared dish is the eggplant stuffed with cheese, parsley and egg. It is delicious with parsley and tomato.

Talking about the region, one cannot help mentioning the re-



Foto: Edvin Kasimati

servation of Kunë-Vain in the district of Lezha and the surrounding lagoons rich in seafoal and wild animals, like: duck, goose, woodcock, pheasant, wild hare, etc. Hunted for their delicious meat, these birds and animals are in the menus of local restaurants. The climate, well suited for growing the characteristic plum of Dibrë, apple, cherry (vishnja), nut, walnut, etc., has spurred the tradition of making Raki from plums (shliva), and preserves. A special fruit of this region is the pomegranate of Shkodër, big, sweet and juicy.

Central Region

The diversity of animal species living in the region is augmented by the diversity of domestic birds (turkey) and seafoal (goose, duck).

The area of the forest of Divjaka, which lies on the Adriatic shore, is alive with wild birds and animals like: duck, wild goose and wild boar. Fishing is a significant activity given that a number of fish species migrate from the sea, such as: sole, bass, flat fish, eel, and mullet. Traps are set up in the canals linking the lagoon

with the sea to catch them. The Albanian or foreign visitors, who come to relax amidst the nature of the area, ought not to miss the variety of fresh fish dishes offered by the local restaurants. The suitable land and climate promote the growing of all kinds of fruits and vegetables used in the whole country. Among particular fruits of the region are berries like cornel, etc. The assorted raw ingredients are the basis for the very rich menu of the local cuisine. Traditional dishes include: dried de-stoned plum casserole (tavë me pistil), Elbasani yogurt dish (tavë kosi Elbasani), Tirana stew (fërgesë Tirane), pie of baked phyllo (byrek me petë të pjekura), turkey with (kaposh deti me përsesh), baked rice with milk (birjan me qumësht) and milky rice of Myzeqe (oriz qumështor Myzeqeje - yshmer), etc.

A special dessert is ballokume, characteristic crumpets of the town of Elbasan, masterfully prepared by local homemakers mainly for the celebration of the Spring Day (March 14), but also for family feasts. They are made of finely sieved white maize flour (4 - 5 kg of flour make 1 kg ballokume), butter, fine sugar, egg and finjë (sieved ash boiled in water).

Another tradition of the region is the use of livestock and cattle insides in dishes. The taste of a plate of fried liver, kidney and heart, or a roasted calf's head, accompanied by Raki, would leave the visitor with an unforgettably pleasurable memory.

The region is known for the making of Raki, wine (according to the variety of grapes used), fruit juices, nonalcoholic drinks, preserves and compotes.

The area of Berat has the largest plantations of figs in the Balkans. Here the locals have a tradition in the preparation of fig preserve and fig jam. The figs of Rroshnik (Berat) are well-known for their quality. That is why they are also used dried in strings or as buk fiket (ground fig made into the shape of bread and dried in a clean environment).

The area of Myzeqe is known for raising turkey and for a particular dish called turkey with mash (kaposh deti me përsesh). This dish is prepared in all the regions of the country, but it is



Foto: Edvin Kasimati

more delicious in this area. Local restaurants serve it, too.

The recipe is as follows:

Clean and wash the turkey. Daub with salt and butter. Bake pouring a little water so that it does not burn, and we have some juice for the mash. Crumble the dough (prepared beforehand using maize flour, water, salt and some oil) or the maize bread, and leave it in a pot. Lightly fry the leek or onion, pour the turkey juice and some water and let it come to a boil. Add the crumbled bread and stir until it thickens. Serve the turkey with the mash.

Southern Region

Albania is known for its animal-husbandry. Especially this area of the country is famous for the breeding of livestock, given the many natural pastures and the size of herds. The smaller local breeds of livestock are the source of milk to make the dairy products. The characteristic dairy-farms, especially in Gjirokastër and Delvinë, are known for the production of various kinds of

cheese, soft and hard, of high quality and great taste. Together with curd, cheese is a very important item in the menu for the inhabitants of this region, but also of Central Albania and beyond. The region makes the famed sheep yogurt (kos i deles), so thick it can be cut by knife.

Climate in the coastal area favors the cultivation of olives and citrus. In every home as well as the restaurants of the whole region, olives prepared manually are served as appetizers whether alone as a salad or accompanied by other vegetables.

Characteristic for this region is the making of Raki from the grape varieties growing in Nartë, Skrapar, Përmet, Himarë, Leskovik, Këlcyrë, Pogradec, Delvinë. In the village of Labovë in Gjirokastrë, excavations have accidentally brought to surface two stones shaped like washtubs used in earlier times for the crushing of grapes. The liquid would pass through a narrow canal in the stone and undergo further processing to become wine or Raki. These discovered objects are evidence of the tradition of viticulture in antiquity, when wine is said to have been drunk in place of water.

The area of Pogradec is known for the making of wine or Raki in individual households. Almost all of them make wine according to recipes handed down from one generation to another. Wine is kept in barrels in the coldest places of the house. It is mainly table wine, mild and aromatic (rose).

Skrapar is known for the making of rehani, a nonalcoholic drink from grape juice, as well as drinks of the alcoholic variety.

Përmeti natives make special fruit jams (gliko), like that from



walnuts. Characteristic for the area is the making of mulberry Raki (Ersekë, Leskovik).

The southwestern part of the country girdles the Albanian Riviera, where the clean mountain air blends with the warmth of the sea, making it the choicest among the tourist destinations in Albania. It is preferred not only for its wonderful climate, but also for its delicious food. The road to the Riviera is full of restaurants that prepare fresh fish or seafood dishes. The taste of shrimp, cuttlefish, squid, and mussel is memorable.

The Pass of Llogara, being the only land passage to the Riviera, is a resting area for the visitors, where they can also try typical dishes of the region, like roasted meat on a spit (mish i pjekur në hell), hot maize mash (harapash i ngrohtë - mëmëlikë misri), insides of suckling lambs (të brëndshme të qinq -jave pirës), jelly of honey and walnuts (pelte me mjaltë e arra), etc.

Meat in this region is the most tasteful in the country. The proximity to the sea and the quality of pastures give the meat an incomparable flavor, especially to the lamb of Karaburun and the surrounding highlands. The lamb is usually roasted on a spit (the whole lamb), on embers, or in an oven.

Pastërma, the dried conserved meat, is characteristic for the cold areas of this region. It is prepared with beans, and is served both at home as well as in restaurants.

Other favorite traditional dishes, intended not only for vegetarians, are meatless rice meatballs (qofte me oriz - qifqi), pie of Lunxh (lakror i Lunxhit - koftopite), rice made of fine crumbles of dough from flour, egg and milk (pilaf me rosnica), bean pie of Korçë (petanik me fasule), sham meatballs with garlic and yogurt popular in the area of Gjirokastër. The latter are prepared especially on wedding occasions and served at the end of the meal for digestion.

The basics of off-road adventure motorcycle riding

Milan Holý, www.enduroskola.cz

Adventure riding on large touring enduro motorcycles is not as easy as it might seem at first glance. Due to the equipment, spare tyres and load, the motorbike may well be 60 kg heavier than usual. You are usually far away from home in places where the availability of medical assistance, spare parts or adequate service is low or none.

Simply said, it isn't like riding around within a twenty-kilometre range of your home and when a friend with a van can pick you up within half an hour.

Therefore, ride and choose routes with your head, don't just open the throttle full blast, and don't overestimate your strength and abilities or your motorcycle's capabilities. Don't forget that adventure riding is not racing and that you want to enjoy your vacation till the last day.

Tip: Keep in mind that when inclined a loaded motorcycle tends to fall down much easier at low speeds.

Types of surfaces and methods of riding

Tarmac – this is typically the first type of surface that you come across and the one you usually spend the most kilometres on. You have to keep looking around and in the rearview mirrors all the time. It pays to trust no-one even when you are on the main road.

Tip: Keep in mind that the faster you go, the sooner your off-road tyres wear out. Sparing those few millimetres of tread profile may make your life much easier later on.

Gravel – All riders' favourite type of surface. In dry conditions gravel is easy to ride on even with road tyres. But beware. You are often inclined to go faster than you should, you may overlook a stone or a sharp bend and puncture a tyre or damage a wheel

rim, which means an hour's delay in better cases, or the end of the trip in worse cases.

Try standing on the foot rests with your knees slightly bent, firmly holding the motorbike with your knees for better control, and your buttocks back. This posture resembles that of a downhill skier. Hold the handlebars gently with two fingers on the brake lever and two fingers on the clutch lever. The elbows should be turned slightly outwards. Ride in a relaxed way with no cramping, take it easy, don't overdo it, half of your job is done by the throttle, brake and balance.

Tip: Try to look as far ahead as possible, choose the easiest track.

Big rocks – It is not such a problem on a light motorcycle but if you are riding something weighing almost 300 kg, then it can be difficult. Don't try to ride too fast or too slow, that is a sure way to hell. If you intend to stop, you usually won't be able to without assistance, the wheels and rims suffer terribly. Try to go smoothly, choose your way, don't be afraid of using the clutch. The advantage is that the mass under your body has its own kinetic energy. Ride with your feet on the rests and the weight of your body in the back. If you need to sit down, try to keep the motorcycle in motion. If you stop, don't be afraid of asking someone else to give you a push. Sometimes just a little help is enough and you save yourself a lot of trouble.

Tip: If your motorbike falls down, let others help you, save your energy, you will definitely need it later.

Mud – No two types of mud are the same, you surely know that yourself, from soggy, sticky clay to mud with a firm base. It is important to keep a constant speed, try to maintain the rear wheel in traction, not to let it spin. It is clear that the more knobby the tyre is, the better; touring tyres will not make your life much easier in mud. Try to stand on the foot rests, keeping your weight in the back. If you don't feel up to it, sit down and try to hop along but I wouldn't recommend that since the motorbike can easily fall down. There is no shame in dismounting the bike and exploring a problematic section in advance.

Tip: Firmer ground is sometimes where water flows rather than the surrounding deposits.

Ruts – Ruts are no bed of roses but if you happen to slide into a rut, don't try to get out of it, that usually results in a fall. Stay in it, release your grip on the handlebars, put your toe-caps as close to the bike as possible and just ride smoothly.

Sand – Another delicacy. The throttle is your friend here. You need to have sufficient speed and your weight in the back, give it a good gunning, preferably the second or third gear in high revs. You cannot ride slowly in sand, the motorbike would tend to get buried in it.

Tip: Underinflated tyres might help but beware; you can easily get a flat tyre on rocks.

Motorcycle equipment

It's no use: you just can't buy a completely prepared adventure motorcycle in a shop these days. On the other hand, that is a good thing because everyone can customize it to their own taste and needs. Let's mention at least the basic accessories which are good to have on a motorbike.

Protection guards are a must for off-road riding. Not only do they protect the motorcycle but you can also easily pull or lift the bike by gripping the guard.

Grip covers protect your hands against adverse weather and the levers against breakage.

When choosing foot rests, prefer metal jagged ones to rubber ones. The latter slip like hell in mud.

Realize that the engine also needs to be protected from the bottom. Instead of a plastic cover which is only good for road riding, it is a good idea to purchase a duralumin cover which withstands much more.

When travelling to countries where you can't always get good unleaded petrol, it is a good idea to consider installing an exhaust pipe without a catalytic converter.

As for luggage, for longer trips I prefer aluminium side bags

combined with a snap sack on the luggage grid. I recommend fastening it crosswise, not lengthwise, otherwise it will get in your way and you will tend to sit on it when transferring weight to the back. For shorter trips or trips focused primarily on riding in heavier terrain, I recommend a sea bag only. Suitcase holders serve as an excellent rear parachute and a lifting handle.

Tip: No matter how large your luggage capacity is, it will never be enough. Therefore, think about whether you really need a clean T-shirt for each day, two sweaters, four pairs of shoes, etc.

Pre-trip preparation of the motorcycle

There is nothing worse than getting to the Albanian border and finding out that your brake pads are completely worn out.

To prevent such mishaps, check everything before you leave home. Don't rely on someone in the service shop checking everything, rely on yourself.

The simplest way to perform a bike check is proceeding from front to back.

Remove the front wheel and grease the axis so that it can be easily removed when you need to change the tyre tube in the middle of nowhere.

Using a screwdriver, tap all the wheel wires, they should ring nicely. If not, have the wheel centred.

Check the bearings by sticking a finger inside the wheel and turning the bearing, it should run smoothly, without scratching.

Check the condition of the brake pads and discs on the front wheel. If they look like they are in the final stages of their useful life, you should have them replaced.

Make sure the front fork git seals don't leak.

Look at the mileage, add the number of kms that you plan to travel and check the service book to make sure the recommended oil change interval will not be exceeded.

If everything is OK, check the oil level; it is measured on a warmed-up engine. It is recommended that you note the type of oil used in your motorcycle so that you don't need to call your me-

chanic during the trip.

Check the level of clutch and brake fluids. Don't forget about the clutch and throttle-control cables.

Check the air filter.

Fully recharge the battery.

Remove the rear wheel, lubricate the axis, check the bearings, wires and rear brake pads.

Inspect the chain-set. If it doesn't seem OK, if the teeth are worn out to one side, have it checked or replaced.

If your motorcycle has a cardan shaft, make sure it doesn't leak and there is no backlash in the rear wheel.

Check the front and rear shock absorbers for anything unusual, grease, etc.

Fully inflate the tyres, check the tread profile; after 3,000 km it could well be worn down to the canvas.

Tip: Learn to notice any difference on the motorcycle: oil showing up on the engine, missing screws, unusual noises, etc., even during the trip. Early fault detection can save you a lot of worries.

Tyres

The choice of tyres very much depends on the planned mileage but also on the itinerary.

It pays not to experiment and use tested manufacturers and types of tyres. Only then will you be able to estimate how long the selected tyre will last.

I recommend being gentle on the tyres, as much as possible, which means not letting the tyres spin unnecessarily. Drifting through the curves is very impressive, indeed, but it makes the tyres literally disappear before your eyes.

Generally, off-road tyres show excellent performance in the field but their useful life is maximum 5,000 km. Touring tyres can easily go 15,000 km but they are of very little help in the mud.

A compromise solution would be enduro tread design but I personally don't like it. It usually combines the disadvantages of both previously mentioned types – has low mileage and gets plu-

gged in the mud.

Tip: Some travellers start the trip on old tyres which get worn out on the tarmac road and as soon as it ends they put on a new set of tyres.

Wishing you many happy kilometres

Milan Holý, www.enduroskola.cz

Slovníček

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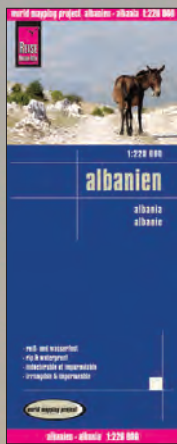
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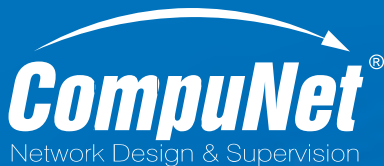
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