



ROMANIA 2002



The Borders Exploration Group is a non-profit organisation run by adults for young people in the Scottish Borders. Its aims are:

To assist in the physical, mental and spiritual development of young people through participation in and preparation for expeditions - both international and at home.

To raise awareness of environmental issues in young people through recreational activities of an enterprising and explorative nature

To help young people develop a sense of identity and self worth, while offering the chance to encounter and begin to understand other cultures and peoples

To develop communication skills and learn the value and enjoyment of working as a team.

BEG was founded in 1991 and aims to run a major international expedition every two years.

1993: Lesotho

1995: Ecuador

1997: Kenya

1999: Mongolia

2001: India (original plans were for Nepal)

2003: departure of Peru expedition.

In addition, BEG runs a challenge for local organisations and groups called the Tower trophy Challenge, as well as organising a challenge for school teams called the Kirsty MacAskill challenge.

Other local expeditions have included a trip to the isle of Skye and trips around the West Coast on a converted fishing trawler.

Romania 2002 was BEG's first European trip.

For further information on the Borders Exploration group, please see the website:

www.borders-exploration-group.org.uk

Background to Expedition

Romania 2002 began in a rush of enthusiasm last December, when BEG was seeking a solution to the 'missing summer' between the major expeditions. Having recently returned from India 2001 I was eager to get involved in something similar, yet on a smaller scale - and Romania, where I'd worked 9 years previously, seemed ideal - a cheaper, shorter, closer to home version of the 'real thing.' Romania seemed to offer a culture and society that was different from our own, was steeped in a fascinating and turbulent past, yet which was more accessible than countries visited on major expeditions.

The aim was to provide a challenging and valuable opportunity for members of the Borders community who might not be able to commit to the fundraising, preparation and timescale of a larger expedition. It would also offer former BEG participants, particularly venturers, the opportunity to take on a leadership role in a potentially less daunting situation.

Major BEG expeditions are composed of 4 distinct phases:

Community: this has involved manual labour in a variety of projects including the construction of a school in Kenya, renovation of a children's home in Mongolia and a village hall in India.

Adventure: such as white water rafting, trekking, horse riding etc.

Environmental: engaging in activities to support or undertaking research of local flora, fauna and wildlife.

Social / Cultural: learning about different communities and societies through research and travel.

Originally my idea was to take a small group of venturers and leaders to Romania to participate in an Outward Bound course, based in Transylvania. At a BEG meeting where I put forward this proposal, Jim McPherson suggested that, for not very much more expense, the trip could be extended for a few days to give us the chance to maybe visit an orphanage - I think Romania is always going to be associated with the pictures of shaven headed orphans after the revolution.

This general itinerary thus allowed us to maintain BEG's focus on different phases: predominantly adventure and community. We would also have an opportunity to travel and environmental awareness was highlighted during training.

Organising our adventure phase through Outward Bound enabled us to produce a challenging series of adventures within a relatively short timescale. This also settled the group size at 14: Outward Bound's maximum capacity for a group.

Due to time restrictions and size of group, we would be unable to contribute significantly to a meaningful community project as such, yet I was wary of just visiting an orphanage voyeuristically. I felt that some kind of entertainment - organising a ceilidh or presenting some music and songs might enable us to actually provide some kind of service as well as allowing us to meet and talk to local members of the community.

All of these considerations helped to shape the organisation of the expedition.

However, despite the 'official' programme, an expedition such as this is made up of individual memories that could never have been prepared for: everyone who participated in Romania 2002 will have their own memories of what was important or frustrating or moving for them: sitting on a cold train station at 5am; waking up in a hayloft; being offered very strong Romanian plum brandy at a weather station in the middle of nowhere; practising our funky chicken moves in a youth hostel in Sighisoara; paddling 20km down a river on a home made raft surrounded by swimming gypsies; being tightly gripped by a 2 year old from a hospice.

It's amazing what you can do in two weeks.

Clare Kitchener

Chief Leader

Expedition Timescale

5th December 2001 Proposal to BEG meeting

January 2002 Advertising Venturer Letters,
application forms and selection

10th February 2002 Training Day : Selkirk
Initiative exercises, Safety Talks
Expedition Outline, tents, map and compass training.

17th March indoor climbing day at Alien Rock, Edinburgh

31st March 2002 Duck Race

3rd / 4th / 5th May 2002 Training Weekend 1 : St Mary's Loch
Language, Canoeing, Bivvi, Gorge Walk, presentations.

22nd / 23rd June 2002 Training Weekend 2 : Outdoor Climbing & Abseiling, Walk,
entertainment preparation, final details, parents' meeting
Paul Tierney withdraws, replaced by Jim McPherson

8th - 21st July 2002: The Expedition

Selection Procedure and Participants

Posters and press releases were issued shortly before Christmas. Due to time restraints on the expedition and so as not to clash with selection procedures for Peru 2003, applications were asked to be returned by the end of January 2001. Standard BEG application forms were issued to prospective venturers and leaders. Jim McPherson, Ron Sutherland and Trish Stevenson then volunteered to help assess candidates' suitability. All applicants were then informed of the decision by post.

Venturer Selection.

14 application forms were received from prospective venturers. From these 10 successful applicants were selected. In addition, Paul Tierney was invited to act as a venturer / leader, with no legal responsibility for venturers, but with sufficient experience to take on a more active role in the expedition and preparation.

Leader Selection.

It was decided that, as there would not be as much time for training about the ethos and expectations of a BEG expedition as on a larger expedition, applicants for the position of a leader must have participated on a previous major expedition, either a leader or Venturer. Laura Shackleton, a venturer on India 2001 and Jim Shepherd, a leader on Kenya 97, offered their services as leaders for Romania 2001.

The participants were as follows:

Leaders

Chief Leader / Travel / Community phase: Clare Kitchener
28, Teacher at Earlston High School, Leader on India 2001
Deputy leader / Outward Bound coordinator: Jim Shepherd
41, Health & Safety Consultant, Leader on Kenya, 1997.
Leader / Treasurer: Laura Shackleton
21, Travel Consultant, Galashiels, venturer on India 2001
Venturer-leader /Fundraiser: Paul Tierney
18, Hawick High School, venturer on India 2001

Venturers

Lynsey Anderson, 17, Earlston High School
Liam Cunningham, 17, Kelso High School
Laura Darling, 17, Hawick High School
Ruth Longmuir, 17, Hawick High School
Vikki McCall, 17, Hawick High School
Lisa Norman, 17, Hawick High School
Paul Norman, 17, Hawick High School
Lisa Ramage, 17, Selkirk High School
Clare Richardson, 17, Hawick High School
Catriona Ritchie, 17, Hawick High School

Unfortunately, shortly before we were to leave, Paul Tierney had to drop out due to a leg injury. Jim McPherson, who had been involved with many stages of the expedition training and preparation, agreed to take Paul's place. Jim was an expert stand-in - aged 48, he is head of computing at Selkirk High School and was Deputy leader on the Kenya 1997 Expedition and Leader on the Mongolia 1999 expedition.

Although we were deeply sorry that Paul wasn't able to come on the expedition, we would like to thank him for all his hard work and enthusiasm prior to the trip and say thank you to Jim, who was a superb asset to the expedition.

The small size of this group, as compared with major expeditions had many advantages, not least the way in which the group gelled quickly and confidently within a relatively short space of training and during the trip itself. Logistically, 14 seemed to be the ideal size for a trip of this scale.

Training Reports

ROMANIA 2002

First meeting of Romania Group

On Sunday 10th of February the group of venturers and leaders of the Romania Group met in the Argus Centre. Our first activity was to do ice breakers to get to know everyone. The icebreakers were a variety of different things, one involving making something musical from the words "Boom", "Blah" and "Hey", (whatever we came up with could be called many things but maybe not musical). Another icebreaker involved all of us threading string through our clothes and passing it to the next person, needless to say some of us were better at this than others.



Seeing how many people we could fit on a t-shirt was another icebreaker, this was fun to begin with until some of us were launched up on top of people's shoulders, which was very scary and left us hanging on at the top. The final icebreaker involved us trying to pour water from spoons into bottles, which were lying on Laura's and Clare's foreheads. Obviously they got very wet, as most of our aims were way off target.

What can we say about the next activity, except that it showed some of us how unfit we are!! We went on a run!! The run was meant to be a straightforward, easy activity, but after it some of us were very tired. It showed some of us (especially me and Catriona) that we need to do some more exercise!!!

We next had lunch which turned out to be very interesting. Everyone had to lay their lunch on the table. We were then all given a number and whoever was number one went first and could pick whatever they wanted off the table! This was great, especially if you'd brought a rubbish lunch. It was, however,

not as good for the person who got the last number!

In the afternoon we split into three groups and went round different activities. One activity involved putting up tents, which most people were good at, another was using a compass and reading maps - we had to go outside and put black bags over our heads and try and find our way around! Some of us were good at this too and some of us weren't (Ruth almost walked over a grassy bank!). But at least we know now who we shouldn't let use a compass in Romania!! The third activity was to light a stove so we could boil water and make a cup of tea. Only one out of the three groups did this so it looks like we'll either starve when we are away or be eating cold food for the two weeks! Hopefully though we'll all be able to use a stove by the time we go.

For the rest of the time, Clare and Jim gave us information on the trip, the history of Romania and what the country is like now and what we can expect to be doing when we get there.

The trip sounds amazing and everyone in the group seems really friendly and enthusiastic about it. We can't wait to go and look forward to meeting everyone again soon!



Romania 2002

Cappercleuch Training Weekend

We all met at Selkirk High School on Friday 3rd May, raring to go, with packs so big and heavy that anyone would have suspected we were leaving home, rather than going to St. Mary's Loch for a training weekend! After having arrived at the little green hut by the side of the loch, which was to be our lodgings for the night, we unpacked and got stuck, straight away, into some games, (not literally) one of which involved running over people's legs, and trying very hard not to stand on them, which proved to be incredibly difficult as the majority of us were wearing clumpy boots. Next we were given a crash course in Romanian by Clare Kitchener, where we learnt to say such things as, "hello", "yes", "no", "my name is . . ." and many other useful phrases. However, sensing the fact that our Romanian would probably leave much to be desired, she had also included the phrase, "I do not speak Romanian!"

It was Jim McPherson's turn next, to educate us in the realms of map reading - one of the tasks involved looking for all the sites of interest along a particular stretch of the River Tweed from a map, and then presenting our finds in an interesting way. In our group, with Paul and Liam being the only blokes in it, we naturally had them crawling around the floor, pretending to be cute little frolicking lambs by the side of the river, then fish in the water, and finally, twittering birds in the trees as they flapped their arms around wildly, much to the amusement of Jim who, I don't think had seen anything quite like it before!! In the other group however, we had Catriona conducting a tour of the River Tweed in a gondola! Before we knew it, it was bedtime, and everyone was snuggled up in their sleeping bags, trying to sleep. Trying being the operative word - no-one had mentioned the fact that ear plugs were an essential part of the kit list in order to combat the snores of a certain person who shall remain nameless!!

Porridge was on the menu for breakfast, which was just as well because we were to need the energy for the morning's activities - canoeing, in which many of us spent most of our time going round in circles, (there is a great amount

of energy and skill involved in this, I tell you) and also a quiz with clues spread around the loch.

After lunch we had a visit from the Sutherlands, and Ron had us sketching a landscape across the loch and then labelling it, looking at the land, not merely from an artist's point of view, but geographically too. After that, we split up into two groups - one group went with Pat to do some fitness training, the general aim seemed to be, for the majority of us, to show how unfit we all were, rather than fit. I think some private training will be needed!! The other group went with Ron and were shown the ins and outs of the Trangia Stove, then we had to boil a kettle of water, with slightly more success than at the previous training day. Our next activity saw us scrambling up a burn, in and out of tree branches, trying desperately not to get our feet wet. (Otherwise known as gorge walking) Anyone looking down on our little escapade from above would have wondered at the sanity of our group as there seemed to be perfectly adequate grassy banks on either side of the stream to walk on. It comes as no surprise then that it was PJ (aka Jim Shepherd) who was conducting this activity!! When we all got back to the hut in one piece with a few scratches and splinters to show for our little exploit, we were then informed that we were to go canoeing for one and a half miles across the loch, to some remote bit of forest where we would be setting up camp for the night, without tents and with only the trees and wildlife to keep us company!! At this point, I began to wonder whether or not I really was crazy, as we were paying to do this! Once across the loch, we split up into two groups to build our bivvys, while some people set about making the dinner. Alan Young who had dropped by, seemed quite intrigued at the amount of crashing and banging coming from one part of the woods, where one particular tree seemed to be swaying rather violently back and forth with someone attached, half way up it! Bivvys having been made and the dinner cooked, we all sat around the fire to enjoy the wonders of sludgy pasta with a "vegetarian-mince-and-every-other-vegetable-imaginable" sauce to go with it. (much to the annoyance of carnivorous PJ)

We rounded off the evening, sitting in front of the roaring camp fire, looking out across the loch, under a starry sky, enjoying the sound

of fiddles played by Ruth Longmuir and Lisa Ramage, with occasional hoots of an owl in the background. (Aaaw, how idyllic) Then we all bundled off into our bivvys, where most folk slept like a log after such a tiring day. (with the exception maybe of Vicky who had the misfortune of having to sleep with my elbow stuck in her neck for most of the night!)

We woke in the morning to the sound of birds singing and to bright sunshine. It was to be a stunning day. Having come across the loch by canoe, we now had to get back over to the hut - before breakfast - and so, once again, we all got into our canoes and paddled off across the loch. This time however, the journey over was spectacular, and will be remembered for a long time to come ; the loch was flat calm and there was not a cloud in the sky. The sun shone brightly, highlighting the beauty of the surrounding landscape. It was magnificent.

After an egg roll which greatly helped replenish our energy levels, we then sat outside, basking in the sunlight, while listening to Sam who gave us some handy hints on how to and what to pack in our rucsacs. And finally, our last task was to produce an interesting presentation on a certain aspect of Scotland, such as education, history, culture, entertainment or sports. The leaders found our presentations highly amusing (once again) and I have a sneaky suspicion that the sole purpose of these presentations was merely to entertain the leaders. After a quick rounding off session, where we all discussed how the weekend had gone, it was obvious that everyone had had a great time. Thanks to all the leaders and anyone else who helped make this weekend really enjoyable and a great success.

Thanks for the weekend, it was great,

Lisa Norman

Romania 2002

Heiton Training Weekend

Report for Romanian Training Weekend 2

On Saturday 21st June the leaders and venturer's met at Heiton Hall at 9:15 in the morning. First on the Agenda was some rock climbing. All of us, except for PJ (Jim Shepherd) who was waiting for a very tired Ruth, took the mini bus to the natural rock formation at

Berryhill where we were going to climb.

Ian and Sarah Stark were there to greet us and indeed they were our instructors. Firstly Ian gave us a little talk and warmed us up with some jogging and some stretches. While instructing us he emphasized that safety always came first, he also explained the climbs and gave us details on how difficult they were. To some people's horror, rock climbing difficulty ratings start at the 'very difficult' and these ones to the inexperienced (mainly me) looked very tricky! Starting with three climbs, everyone was arranged into groups, given harnesses, helmets and instructions on how to use them. To those who had been to Alien Rock to do indoor climbing they found this a very different experience - agreeing outdoor climbing has a lot more advantages, including some magnificent views when you reached the top. After mostly everyone had had a try at the three different climbs - and I have to say everyone did really, really well - we split into 2 groups. One half went to do bouldering with Ian. This was walking along the cliffs horizontally not very far from the ground and trying not to fall off. This also entailed half-wriggling, half-climbing up a crack in the cliff - this produced some very strange techniques. I for one got stuck in the crack and had a fit of giggles and Jim McPherson did a kind of dance under Claire Kitchener trying not to let her use his head as a leverage (and unfortunately getting hit twice)! The other half of the group went with Sarah to try the most elegant, and most evil looking, of all the climbs called Flutings.

After being drenched twice with rain and Jim McPherson doing an amazingly complicated fall/roll down one of the climbs we headed back to the hall to receive a talk on rucksack packing from PJ. We were privileged to have an intimate glimpse inside his rucksack - finding out that PJ really, really loves his sleeping bag - finding out which items are best put in specific places e.g. heavy items to the top. After that we talked about the golden rules

Alan Young came to visit us after dinner where we discussed issues like entertainment that we are putting on for the Romanians. It was decided that we would do a musical number with country and highland dancing. Also a sketchbook of pictures, e.g. Scottish landscapes and such was to be produced for the Romanians

to see what Scotland actually looks like. Also, Lisa Norman had a booklet of songs where the singers do actions - songs we can teach the Romanians which we will take with us.

PJ then talked to us about river crossing and it's dangers. We then pretended the hall was a river and then tried to cross this amazingly dangerous piece of water with techniques taught to us by PJ, which included the use of a brush. The first was where 3 people lined up holding each others hips in a chain behind the strongest person who then felt there way across the water using the stick (brush) to judge the depth of the water. The second was where 3 people hold the stick together and shuffle along the water and the third was when 3 people huddled in a triangle to shuffle along the water. PJ then proceeded to terrorize us with some horror stories about botched up river crossings, which made us really look forward to trying it.

After Alan Young took his leave we all done some country dancing with Ruth, Lisa and Paul giving us some spectacular music. It was really great fun, with very enthusiastic participants. The whole group then went to bed, only to be wakened up again at 1 o clock in the morning with an emergency evacuation. This was our first one but we were told we all did really well - everyone with they're personal possessions getting out of the hall in about 4 1/2 minutes, with only a pair of boots and a jumper left in the hall.

In the morning Rodger Hemming dropped in and gave us a talk about good practice when in Romania. Before starting Rodger took us outside and let us listen to what was around us and discuss what we may hear in Romania that would be similar - this also had the aim of waking us up. When inside the talk commenced starting with 'Effects of Fieldwork', in which Rodger explained the effects of trampling the environment around the campsite and the damage it could do. 'Access and Movement' was another issue which included points like are all the expedition members conversant with minimizing movement impact? Another was 'Effect of the Camp' teaching us to find the best area for the least environmental damage. Lastly was 'Community Relationships' - is the expedition welcomed by the community? This was a very informative talk and really helped a lot in understanding more of our responsibilities and what we may be expected

to do and achieve in Romania regarding the environment.

We then took the mini-bus to the outskirts of Kelso with our full rucksacks. We then took turns of map reading to take us back to the hall. The walk took us down the Tweed - the walk was idyllic and the scenery beautiful the whole way. PJ stopped us half way through the walk and showed us parts of the river that may have been dangerous to cross. After crossing the old Railway Bridge (which was supposed to be sealed off) Laura and I decided on a quicker route to the hall that did not include the road - unfortunately this took us through a very muddy bog.... but we did reach a beautiful poppy field at the end, in my opinion it was worth it!

After reaching the hall we had our lunch and Claire showed us the T-Shirt design for the Romanian Expedition T-shirts that she was ordering and we all picked what size of T-shirt we wanted. After which Claire gave us more details of the Expedition. The main talk including the Golden Rules, which the venturer's had discussed amongst themselves already, and then they were finalized with everyone's agreement and input. We then discussed the highs and lows of the weekend with everyone mostly agreed that the mountain climbing was the highlight of the weekend and the emergency evacuation the lowest.

The weekend was then rounded up with parents coming to hear the finalized details of the expedition that included the flight times, itineraries and more explanations of the golden rules. Everyone was very amused to find we were leaving at 4 o clock in the morning.... All in all it was a great weekend and was great fun with lots of input from the leaders and venturer's with an undercurrent of excitement for the expedition ahead.

Vikki McCall

Organisation / Contacts

Organising the Outward Bound section of the trip was fairly straightforward. Our main contact address was: obr@fx.ro

However, finding contacts for an orphanage or similar community element was more difficult. Eventually we made contact with a venturer's uncle, Andrew Cunningham, who lived and worked in Romania and he was to be a vital link and help with organisation:

Andrew Cunningham
International Water. Romania.
Tel (UK): +44 7767 405 117
Tel (Rom): +40 721 43 70 28
Fax (Rom): +40 21 231 4349

He made contact with various placement centres and organisations and assured us that we would be able to visit one. It was not until we arrived in Brasov however that we actually made contact with anyone directly and met representatives of the placement centre.

On our return I received the following email:

Clare, glad to hear that everything went well. You probably now understand my earlier messages when things appeared not to be progressing but eventually did come together. Regarding the orphanage it is a big relief to Alex and I that you achieved the objective. Both of us put in more effort than was apparent and although we kept getting the "it'll be fine" response we wanted something more substantial than the normal responses. Eventually we were worried that our promises would not be realised. What you got was a real plan B, we had a plan C if all had failed (also a plan D, but that costs more).

This reveals some of the difficulties inherent in organisation within Romania.

One of Andrew's main helpers was Alexandra Tulai:

alexandratulai@hotmail.com

The contacts made on our behalf by Andrew and Alexandra were as follows:

Miss Luminita Olteanu (General Director) and Mrs. Pascu (Deputy General Director).

Directia Generala pentru Protectia Drepturilor Copilului
Strada Iuliu Maniu Nr. 6
Brasov
Cod Postal 2200
Romania

Directia Generala pentru Protectia Drepturilor Copilului means The General Division for Protection of Child's Rights. This is the place where we went and met a representative who took us to the placement centre / orphanage.

Our contact at the Romanian embassy was:

Susan Gheorghiu
Consular Section

Susan.Gheorghiu@fco.gov.uk

Romania 2002 Treasurer's Report

The Romanian expedition cost £550.00 per person

This price included flights, outward bound course for 8 days, fully comprehensive insurance, travel in Romania, accommodation, meals and all miscellaneous expenses such as entries to tourist attractions etc.

The breakdown is as follows: Flights + tax: £263.90
Insurance: £39.90 (adult) / £19.95 (over 17)
Outward Bound: £135.30
TOTAL = £440 approx

To help raise extra funds for the expedition we held a duck race in Hawick, which raised approximately £480 after £50 paid as prize money.

We also received a grant of £500 from the James McLean Trust.

Total money available to the expedition: 14 x £550 individual payments
£480 duck race
£500 grant
TOTAL: £8680

Money available per person after expenses outlined above: £180

In trip expenses:

4 nights' accommodation: 16 million lei (approx £296 / £21 per person)
Minibus: 8 million lei (approx £137 / £10 per person)

We had an emergency fund of £500 while we were away.

We took £2650 worth of dollars with us, carried as American Express travellers' cheques and split between the leaders. Once we arrived in Bucharest we cashed a large amount of money as we had the Hostel and the minibus to pay for and we were uncertain as to how easy it would be to cash money in Sighisoara.

The only problems we came across in Romania were that the banks closed early and in Brasov there was nowhere to change money on a Sunday. There were also only a few places that accepted travellers' cheques - personal money at least might be better carried in dollars.

When we returned from the trip we were left with £454.48.

The current balance stands at £723.03, before production of the report.

Fundraising / Sponsors

Due to the short timescale of this expedition, we made no demands that all contributions should be fundraised.

Many contributions came from individual savings, or were raised through taking on part-time jobs.

We had one major fundraising events: a duck race in Hawick. Many thanks to all who contributed their support to this, particularly Paul Tierney for his organisation.

We applied to several trusts. We are very grateful to the James McLean Trust for their financial support with a donation of £500.

A longer timescale would allow for more fundraising opportunities for the group and for individuals within it.

Romania 2002 - Itinerary

Monday 8th July
Depart Edinburgh
Arrive Bucharest
Minibus to Sighisoara
Overnight in Elvis Villa Hostel, Sighisoara

Tuesday 9th July
Rest Day in Sighisoara
Evening pick up by Outward Bound

Wednesday 10th July
to
Tuesday 16th July
Outward Bound Activities
Overnight with Outward Bound

Wednesday 17th July
Leave Outward Bound am
Rest Day in Sighisoara
Evening travel to orphanage

Thursday 18th July
to
Friday 19th July
Visit to orphanage,
Cultural investigation
Evening travel to Brasov

Saturday 20th July
Visit Bran castle
Overnight in Brasov

Sunday 21st July
Depart early for Bucharest
Minibus pick up at station
Depart Bucharest
Arrive Edinburgh

OUTWARD BOUND ROMANIA (OBR)

This phase of the expedition was unique for 2 reasons:

1. We were actually contracting the whole of the adventure phase to Outward Bound and their program
2. It was the longest phase of the expedition, accounting for 7 days

Our first impressions of OBR was good - they arrived at Sighisoara on time, with a nice new Mini Bus, complete with a small covered trailer for the rucksacks to transport the team to Sovata. The driver was first rate and took the journey at a sensible pace that was both relaxing and comfortable. Cheryl (a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to work with OBR) was bright and cheerful and could talk for America! Plenty of information was passed to Jim McPherson on route and on arrival at Sovata we meet the team who would be working with us for the next few days.

Attila was the outdoor expert - a qualified mountain rescue team member, highly competent in the field of rock climbing & mountaineering. Like all the staff we encountered, he worked only part time for OBR and was employed locally as an engineer. Gabi was a school teacher, who although exceptionally fit was not as technically competent as Attila in many of the activities offered. Jasminya was a close friend of Attila who was not actually part of the OBR team but was to join us for the experience. Her area of expertise lay in the sport of Caving but her general level of fitness was below the other instructors but she proved to be an endless source of entertainment as the various phases went on.

OBR adopts a fascinating approach to the way they run their operation. They have very limited experience of working with groups like ours and to-date they had only run two types of training course. The most common one, for school instructors, to prepare them for taking small school groups into the mountains and the second type for ordinary school groups. Gabi explained later that the groups of school kids were normally poorly motivated, had little interest in the content of the course, and had to be coerced through the program. Their approach was, for our team, a trifle frustrating. There was no typed programme, just a series of very short briefs where we were provided with the most basic of information. Irrespective of how often you asked or probed, the answers were rarely forthcoming.

The first evening, after a meal in the restaurant, was spent on little icebreakers designed to provide some personal background information on our individuals. Numerous comments from them about their dislike of hikes, heights and water sports did nothing to convince OBR that we were serious about partaking in this adventure. At this stage I was convinced that OBR had already written us off. When Attila looked at our merry band of warriors, all he could see was a rather pathetic looking group of young girls accompanied by a couple of rather old, grey fogies. He later admitted this but also was honest enough to admit his first impressions were wrong. (At least as far as the girls were concerned!)

OBR Day 1

A reasonably early start became frustrating, as the pace in Romania is somewhat relaxed. After breakfast we meander through a beautiful forest to start the first of a series of small tasks. It's at this stage that OBR begin to experience and understand that we are already a team and can operate effectively as one. A simple ropes task where teams of seven are blindfolded and then must create shapes with a length of rope using limited communication (no talking) is completed with ease and we move on to a more challenging task - the acid pool. This task involved us retrieving objects from within a ring identified by a large circle of rope used to simulate an acid pool. With the equipment provided (harness, rope, krabs) we had to collect as many of the articles scattered in the pool, the additional handicap was that any team member crossing over the pool had to be blindfolded. Our performance was superb but not what OBR had expected. We completed the task in around 40 mins - OBR can normally run this for 2-3 hours and even then are not surprised if the task remains uncompleted. The debrief that followed was interesting - the 4 leaders were put firmly in their place and told to back off and basically keep quiet. Where in BEG we put tremendous effort into breaking the leader / venturer divide and form one cohesive team, OBR were immediately differentiating us.

A further two short tasks were completed before lunch (a blindfold trail and a human knot) before heading off to the OBR Centre. The instructions were vague as usual and we are split into two groups and set off on a simple trail through a steep wooded climb then over into the next valley where the centre lay. It was a really tough walk in the heat and for one of the groups it involved a very long, steep climb to the top of the ridge. An excellent navigation exercise was included where each team had to scribe notes on the route and then swap them over for the return journey.

The OBR camp was still under construction and lay at the foot of a long, flat valley. It was a truly beautiful location and the site will be very impressive once the buildings have been completed. At the time of our visit the rooms were made, but had no fittings (doors etc), utilities or power supply were in place. The whole building was covered in a thick layer of cement dust and this made the trying on of wet suits a truly memorable experience. Sweating bodies, grubby tight wet suits and clouds of dust make an exceedingly bad combination and it seemed to take forever to get the right fitting suits.

We were also issued with climbing harnesses and helmets at this stage. The climbing kit was in good condition but the wetsuits had evidently seen a great deal of use.

The afternoon was spent on the climbing wall and for many of the team members this would be a depressing session. The vertical, wooden wall must have been constructed for serious climbers. There were very few hand / foot holds and most were quite small and exceptionally difficult to climb using walking boots. No rock boots were provided and many of the team struggled to gain any height on the contraption. Gabi was evidently no climber and she fared little better than many of the team members. Discussions / comments passed to OBR were met with little sympathy - they set serious challenges - full stop! They don't see a problem in setting challenges that cannot be met, again we find a very different approach to how we in BEG and organisations in the UK tend to operate.

After a long, frustrating session we set off on the trek back to the hostel. This was a taste of just how physical the next few days were going to be - it was a very weary group that sat down that evening for a meal.

OBR Day 2

At 10am we took a trip by minibus back to the OBR centre to gather the equipment we tried on the previous day, and then it's off to Gheorghina to buy food. There was plenty time left

to explore the pretty village and walk round the highly decorated churches. Some of the team visit a local school whilst others enjoy soaking up the sun in the small park situated in the town centre.

A further journey into the mountains takes us to a spectacular location and our home for the next couple of days. The Villa Andrei stood on the side of a steep mountain with a large decked platform offering a fantastic view both up and down the valley. With no set meal times we finally



enjoy lunch at 4pm, just prior to heading off rock climbing.

Jasminya leads us a merry dance up and down very steep slopes until we eventually find where Attila has set up a couple of belays. The chosen climbs are claimed to be the easiest in the area but in reality they are very, very difficult climbs, especially for newcomers to the sport. One route (the snake) had to be abandoned due to the sheer nature of the climb. It was an 'S' shaped route with a long overhang that could only be negotiated by wedging fists and arms into deep fissures. Even if we had tried this first thing in the morning when we were all relatively fresh, I doubt whether any of the team had the upper body strength to complete the route. The team does exceptionally well on the other routes and after some modifications and the addition of a

small rope part way up the face, many are successful in completing their first ascent of a rock face. The belays are well located and Attila is very diligent in his management of the belay teams and all participants gain a high level of competence over the session. Everyone is given ample opportunity to climb, lots of support and encouragement and OBR make sure that every group member contributes. The competition is fierce between the team members and we climb for as long as the light will allow us and as long as we still have enough energy to move in an upward direction. We eventually sit down to our evening meal at 10pm after a long tiring day that provided the team with a multitude of bruises, scrapes and small cuts.

OBR Day 3

Another BEG first today when the team tries canyoning. Donned in wetsuits, this involves a trek down a river, negotiating any obstacles such as waterfalls, pools etc that are encountered.

After an early start and leisurely breakfast we are encouraged to bring some suitable footwear, day sacs for our clothes (when we change into the wetsuits) and nothing else. The assumption that we would be back for lunch was a little naïve to say the least.

A brisk walk through hay meadows in brilliant morning sunshine, complete with local farmers cutting fodder creates a warm carefree atmosphere. The contrast of the cool water as it quickly saturates the wet suit certainly brings all the senses alive.

We start the walk in a lethargic manner, fooling around in a few inches water, lapping up the sunshine but it's only when we turn round a corner in the river and a stunningly beautiful deep gorge opens up in front of us that our breath is really taken from us all. The sight was magnificent, steep rock face on both sides with the higher, tree covered slopes in various shades of green, capped by rugged mountain peaks contrasting against the bright blue sky. The river varied between 4 to 6 metres wide with small, wild waterfalls, deep pools and narrow rock passages. The descent was certainly challenging with ropes used to drop rucksacks down steep drops in order to try and keep the clothes dry. The ropes were also employed as handholds to aid the scramble down a tree trunk lodged in a steep waterfall. Our teamwork became apparent to OBR as they watched us in action on every obstacle that nature had put in our way; with minimum assistance from them we made short work of the drops, wading through deep pools and a venture through a narrow, slippery cavern to avoid a fast flowing waterfall. For some of the team members dropping 3 metres down into a small dark hole was pushing them to the limit but teamwork, a reassuring hand and lots of encouragement paid dividends. There were a

few slips, a couple of falls and the odd tear but the drop was negotiated.

The gorge continued to be completely awe-inspiring, a truly magical experience but it had a trick up its sleeve that none of us expected, including OBR. We had been walking for hours and when asked about lunch and how much further there was to travel, the standard OBR feedback provided the political correct, non specific response. Apart from a few chocolate biscuits and some water we were a little on the peckish side. A change in the weather adds to the experience. Dark clouds, heavy rain then huge hailstones bombard us as we try to find shelter in the gorge but with its steep sides and very few overhangs we are easy targets for what the heavens throw at us. It's now been 5 or 6 hours in wetsuits and the hailstones herald a detectable change in temperature. Attila leads us as fast as we can move further down river to an 'S' bend that provides a sheltered rocky bank, that's both dry and protected by a rocky overhang. The rest bite from the hailstone battering is welcome and we are able to start a good fire with the drift wood trapped in the bend of the riverbank. Slightly further downstream a long, wispy waterfall drops around 50 metres, within 20 minutes it becomes a raging torrent of dirty brown water cutting off our exit route. The volume of water added by the waterfall has made it too dangerous to proceed any further and Attila maps a route back up stream and out of the gorge. A very steep, slippery climb and miles of trekking back up the main road in wetsuits makes sure that you don't feel the cold for long. The walk is of course uphill, after 6 hours of descending a river and the resultant loss of height we have to return via a long, twisted road. All around us are sheer rock faces, with many bolts / eyes visible - this is a spectacular Mecca for the serious rock climbers.



Back at the Villa the group shower and wait patiently for their turn on the outdoor BBQ to prepare the evening meal. OBR debrief the team and we all compare notes on the day's adventure. The next three days will be trekking and in true OBR style we get the scantest of instruction.



OBR Day 4

Rucksacks prepared for the next 3 days its back to Gheorghina for more provisions.

The OBR staff once again let us loose to buy our own supplies for the planned 3 day trek with little more than a point in the direction of the nearest supermarket. As we soon discover the range of products is limited and combined with a list of personal likes & dislikes, the diet during the next few days is certain to be somewhat bland and repetitive. Split into teams of 2 in order to speed the process up, it becomes apparent that the staple diet for all was to be bread. The shop was relieved of most of its fresh loaf supply in a matter of

minutes. On the return to the bus, a small fruit stall was then raided of vast quantities of apples, pears, oranges and bananas with scant regard given to the weight of this purchase or how well it may survive being carted around in rucksacks. We are rewarded with a fabulous meal in a

local restaurant before setting off again in the bus to our start point, the valley of the Zebras. A 60km hike is ahead of us, starting on a dirt track through the forest. Soon the track steepens and we get the first taste of what the next three days is really about. It's hot and the water bottles are put to full use. After trekking for 4 hours we have a choice, stay put and camp next to this water source or keep going for another 2 hours to reach the next watering hole. We move on and climb an exceptionally steep bank that really saps the energy but the view at the top is fantastic. The bivvi site is on the edge of the forest and the teams are quick to get themselves sorted out, fed (a relief to actually devour some of the heavier items in the sac) and settled for the night. Stories of bears and wild shepherd dogs circulate the camp and convince the group they need to be meticulous in the care and storage of their rations.

OBR Day 5

The early morning sunshine warms the face and tired limbs set off once again. The landscape is littered with burnt trees, the aftermath of lightning strikes, which tells us something of the thunderstorms they must appreciate this high in the mountains. Miles of steep climbing takes us to weather station that sits right on top of the mountain and we are greeted by a group of very friendly Romanians. They refill all our water bottles and after some lunch and a nip of Romanian Whisky, we are once again on our way. In the far distance, just visible on the horizon is a small triangular peak, the point where we were heading for. A steep rocky descent exposed a huge scar on the landscape which Gabi explained was due to mining by the government. They had removed the cap of a huge mountain in an attempt to find radioactive material for the military. At one stage the whole of the area was cordoned off and guarded but the mining provided no suitable resource and they withdrew, leaving huge patches of the mountain strewn with crushed rock. With no top soil, nothing grows and their blatant disregard for their beautiful environment is obvious.



The steep descent finds us on a grassy saddle where we can drop the rucksacks in preparation for the climb to the summit. Some of the team are suffering badly from blisters and make the agonising decision to sit this one out and wait at the saddle along with Jasminya.



The climb is so much easier without the heavy rucksacks and we scale a steep ridge that in 2 hours takes the team to the summit at 2380 metres. The views are spectacular and the saddle looks a long way off. We can see the weather changing below us and after a very short stop the team set off back down the rocky ridge. Spirits are high and the descent is made in record time. Rucksacks are collected and the whole team head off down the valley in search of a suitable camp site. An encounter with Romanian shepherd dogs demonstrates exactly how aggressive these animals

are. They also seem much larger than the sheepdogs we are used to and everyone desperately tries to give the snarling creatures a wide berth.

After hours of walking we stumble across a hay loft and Attila negotiates our resting place with some woodmen based in a nearby cabin. The hay loft is above a stable but the floor has a number of rather large holes, never the less, it is a far more attractive option than building bivvis and we strategically place the leader team in order to cover the main drops. During almost the whole of this phase, there has been no input from OBR, they say very little and let us set the pace. They

make no decisions on when to start or stop and I am sure that if we walked all night, they would follow. Tired bodies fill the hay loft and the day ends with another BEG first.

OBR Day 6



Breakfast is the same as lunch, same as evening meal, repetitive and bland. The bread does not travel well and soon disintegrates to become a bag of crumbs. This is the last day of the hike and 3 hours down the track we are stopped by OBR and introduced to an exercise they call Solo. We are each given paper and an envelope and told to find a suitable location in the forest on our own where we can sit and contemplate life. We were to think about our experience, our inner feelings and then write a letter to ourselves

putting down what we felt we had gained. We were allocated an hour and it was a fantastically relaxing experience. We came back together as a group almost refreshed and ready once again to hit the road. The letters were collected and later posted to us in time for Christmas. This was one of the most intriguing and powerful tasks I have encountered and worthy of inclusion in any expedition.

Another couple of hours trekking down the valley find us back closer to civilisation and we elect to set up bivvis on a flat grassy patch close to the river. This was obviously well used with remnants of camp fires and all the other tell tale signs of inconsiderate campers found littered around the banks and local woods. Bivvi construction was assisted by using some local coppice and a variety of designs seemed to entertain the OBR staff.

A roaring camp fire was used to lighten the refuse load and in true BEG tradition we were very mindful of our impact on this beautiful location. The fire also provided a focal point as darkness drew in and songs both Scottish and Hungarian added to the atmosphere. There was a tinge of relief that the walking was almost at an end. This had been one very long, hard slog and the team were looking forward to something a little more relaxing - this thought was also a little premature.

OBR Day 7

Early breakfast, a short trek (less than an hour) and we sit baking in the hot sun waiting for transport. The rest is short lived, we are carted off to the banks of a very wide, very dirty river and split into rafting teams. The equipment is simple, 4 inflated inner tubes, a few planks and a few pieces of rope. Helmets, buoyancy aids and paddles are provided along with a couple of bottles of water per team.

It is blistering hot and everyone is warned to keep well covered and watch out for sunburn. The teams are excited and fooling around, glad to be finished walking and expecting a much easier day but it's not long into





the rafting when it becomes apparent that we have been launched into yet another major physical challenge. The water is flat, virtually no white water, which means lots of serious paddling to make any sort of progress. We must cover 20km and hours into the exercise we find we are little more than 4km down stream.

A tiny stretch of rapids wreaks havoc with some of the rafts, toppling them, sending the poor souls upside down in the gruesome water. The smell from the river is completely disgusting and

little wonder as we encounter hoards of kids, horses, cows etc bathing, washing and drinking in the murky waters. The local fishermen are upset by our apparent inability to steer the rafts around them but everyone is exceptionally tired and the most direct route is always attempted to be maintained. The BEG spirit is maintained and each raft adopts a variety of motivational techniques to relieve the boredom and take the mind off the aching arms and shoulders.

OBR have a couple of canoes which makes their trip much more comfortable and less strenuous. The canoes also provide adequate safety cover and they escort the weary flotilla downriver ensuring we don't drift too far apart.

It's early evening before we eventually make it to the pick up point. After hours of gruelling, painful paddling we at last drag the rafts and ourselves away from the stench. The group is amazing, spirits are high as the feeling of dry clothes lifts us again. We are rewarded by a slap up meal in a restaurant, complete with Coke and a fantastic lightening display that brings a storm which seemed initially to be miles away, right on to our doorstep.

Back in Sovato we can shower and finally rid ourselves of the manky river.

OBR Day 8

We have survived 7 days of everything that OBR could throw at us and the team have every right to be proud.



This had been a phenomenal endurance challenge that was punishing beyond belief but throughout the whole phase, there were no complaints, moans, groans or gripes. OBR were impressed, the feedback session before we parted company was testament to how much they admired our performance. In fairness we also admired how they handled the 7 days. If we had been told how far we were to climb, hike and paddle at the start of the phase, perhaps we would not have risen quite so well to the challenge.



Their approach is very different to anything we had encountered before but there is little doubt that their formula is successful. We left OBR much richer for the experience and with a feeling of complete satisfaction that we had achieved something completely out of the ordinary.

Heartfelt thanks and a round of team photos were exchanged before climbing aboard the bus. On to the next phase.

Community Phase

This was made up of two sections: firstly a visit to a hospice in Sighisoara, organised by Nathan of the Elvis Villa hostel, and secondly a trip to a placement centre (orphanage) in Brasov to present our entertainment.

The Hospice

The hospice is for children aged 0 to 2 years who are either orphans or have been abandoned by their family because of illness or poverty. It is situated a 10 minute walk away from the hostel.

We walk into a building, which has a number of rooms with cots in them; some 8 rooms with 6 or 7 cots in each - 50 babies altogether.

We get shown around and get some details, 2 nurses only; all the other folk we meet are volunteers. The nurses feed and change the babies twice a day and do little more. Any human interaction these babies get comes almost completely from the volunteers who are allowed to visit twice a day for a total of 4 1/2 hours. Two Irish girls are there as well, changing one of the babies who is H.I.V. positive as the nurses won't go near her.

We go into another room and collect all the babies from there and take them outside into the sunshine to play with them. The venturers are in their element. We have a very pleasant



if thought provoking and emotional afternoon: hopefully the babies enjoy the time as well; they certainly seem to. While we are outside, with our roomful, the Irish girls, with a few Romanian Volunteers have another group of babies outside playing as well, but simple arithmetic tells us that there are at least another 30 babies inside getting no attention just now.

5:00pm arrives altogether far too soon and we have to leave, as do the other volunteers. The babies are aware of what's happening and are all crying. It has a tearing effect on us, having to walk away and leave them alone in their nursery. In material ways they seem not too badly off, but so much more could be done, we feel completely

helpless to do more. The 'placement centre' (the Romanians don't like the term 'orphanage') is much better than those featured on T.V. some years ago, but there's still much room for improvements in support, facilities and attitudes. What we learn from Nathan about Romanian 'placement centres', is useful, informative and quite depressing. There is so much needing to be done. Much good work is happening already, but how much more could be done with more aid and better facilities.



The Children's Hospital at Sighisoara.

Our visit to the Children's Hospice in Sighisoara came about purely by chance. On our arrival at the Elvis Villa, we had been telling the owner (Nathan Gendreau) about our plans for our fortnight in Romania, including a planned visit to an Orphanage in Brasov.

Nathan told us that he was a regular volunteer visitor to the Children's Hospice in Sighisoara and that if we wanted to we could go along there as well for a visit. We did this on our return to Sighisoara after our time with Outward Bound Romania.

It was a very moving experience seeing at first hand the circumstances in which so many of Romania's young live and left us with many more questions than answers. I asked Nathan for some of his time later on, to collect more first

hand information from him. Here it is:

Numbers

Our visit was to the Children's Hospital, which is intended for babies from newly born infants, up to 4 years old. After that age they move to different 'placement centres' of which there are another four in Sighisoara. The Hospital caters for approximately 50 to 60 babies at any one time. Along with the other centres, there are some 970 children below the age of 18 in care in Sighisoara, a town of 30 000, some 2 1/2 percent of the population.

Many of the children in the centres are abandoned or placed in care by parents unable to cope with another mouth to feed. In many cases, the child would be the 5th, 6th or even 7th in a family, unable to afford to feed and clothe another, or perhaps the expense of long-term medical care. In other cases, the child could have been born to a very young mother, he cited the case of a 7 month old, whose mother is still only 14.

Basic funding for all the centres comes from the Romanian Government, but many still depend on overseas aid to enhance what they are able to offer. The Sighisoara Hospital depends on two major donors - the 'Veritas Foundation' in America and Northern Ireland. The Veritas Foundation arranges volunteers to spend time in Romania, while co-ordinators Linda and Norman organise lorry loads of supplies overland to Romania. They supply such essentials as nappies; the hospital has just exhausted its current stock and was waiting for another delivery.



Support

The government is sensitive to the term 'Orphanages' widely used in foreign press reports and prefers the term 'placement centres'. The reason is that in many cases, the parents are known, having transferred responsibility to the centres when the children are left there. Very few children are actually orphans in the traditional meaning of the word. Obstacles in the bureaucratic process actively discourage international adoption; such adoptions are seen as an admission of failure by the authorities.

The hospital we visited was part of a larger medical complex. We saw one man, who we assumed to be a doctor; we were told that there were also two nurses on duty, though we never saw them. All the other adults we met during our visit were volunteers. Volunteers are allowed to visit and entertain the babies twice daily, from 9:30am to 12:noon and again from 3:00pm to



5:00pm. Generally volunteers are not encouraged by the authorities as this is felt to be would be a tacit admission of inadequacy in childcare. Nathan attempts to visit every day when possible, though in summer with the hostel busy this often proves difficult. The most heartening thing from my point of view was the number (small admittedly - but you've got to start somewhere) of Romanian volunteers who were there as well.

The employed nurses will do basic feeding and changing of the babies twice per day, but other than that, they are left in their cots. Any other adult contact and stimulation

will be entirely dependant on volunteers. One child in this hospital (Persida by name) is H.I.V. positive having been born to an H.I.V. positive mother. The nurses refuse to change her and again it is only due to the efforts of Volunteers that this child gets any care at all.

What can we do?

When asked what was needed, Nathan identified two areas. Volunteers to go to Romania and help in whatever way possible. The day we visited, some 14 babies were outside their cots for over an hour. There would still be some 35 to 40 left inside getting no contact. Essentially, the babies are played with on a rota basis. With a limited number of volunteers and 50 babies in the Hospital, it may take more than a week for a child to have any contact with an adult other than for basic needs.

Education is the other main area of need. Nathan sees requirements for parenting skills and sex education as crucial requirements in the School system. Attitudes as well, nursing skills are poor as this is seen as a job with 'low esteem'.

Education is universal, from the age of 8 up to 14, but with no truancy officers and little encouragement for youngsters to complete higher education there are many drop outs from the school system. Many youngster, obviously of school age can be seen in the streets during the day when they should be at school. Smoking and drinking are very common amongst this group. All the primary schools (how many) in Sighisoara are state funded. There are 3 high schools, 2 of these are state funded, the 3rd receives funding (how much) from Germany. There also seems to be an impression of little to be gained from a University education.



Overseas aid is noticeable in areas, aid convoys and funding of schools and placement centres make an impact where they are in place - but there are many which receive no aid and corrupt officialdom also has some effects. As with aid in other countries, the best is 'low tech' and therefore useable, rather than the well intended 'high tech' which may work for a while but is then unable to be maintained or repaired. Also the main need is for a long term commitment, rather than the grandiose 'one off' high publicity campaign.

Other problems

The official unemployment rate is given as being 8%; unofficial estimates place it as high as 30%. With labour intensive farming being very noticeable wherever we went, any modification of farming could increase this figure even more.

Inflation is currently running at 20 - 23%.

Developments are in progress, moves are afoot to develop a 'Dracula theme park' near to Sighisoara, though as with many such developments, the capital needed to build it would come from abroad and that is where the profits would go as well. Jobs would certainly be created, but what level would Romanians be employed at? Other developments are taking place: Brasov railway station is being improved with the help of EEC funding, as is the railway line between Brasov and Bucharest. Bucharest airport has obviously had much done to it in the recent past and would provide a welcome introduction to any visitor.

The big question is how much will these improvements improve the day to day life of the average Romanian and in particular the youngsters in the Placement Centres?



Placement Centre in Brasov

We learned on the day we visit the centre that it is for kids from 4 to 18. We thought we must be on the 3rd or 4th alternative for a visit as the description of where we're going had changed with each phone call. However we were finally on our way.

The centre was in the Rhimpeg area of Barsov and was home to about 60 children. Some were orphans, while others were there because of family problems - one girl for example said that the centre was better than home where people were always fighting. We arrived to see a large Romanian flag and also a Union jack hanging outside the door. We were shown round in 2 groups; it was all quite factual and brief. Facilities in the centre were actually very good - there was a computer in the manager's office, as well as well-decorated rooms and classrooms. However, the reality of the situation hit home a little harder when we realised that there were only two dormitories for the entire centre: approximately 25 children, aged between 4 and 18, in a room. The translator was the centre's psychologist, the fact they had one was both encouraging and disconcerting at the same time. The centre was in contact with a charity in Ireland, through whom they received some financial aid and who they had just visited.

For the dancing we cleared the dining room and set chairs down each side. It went well, with the exception of Jim managing a spectacular fall, but the audience loved it. We demonstrated, and then got the kids to join in: maybe with a few more practice sessions they'll get the hang of these steps, but they looked like they were having a good time.

The basic plan worked well, but the youngest and oldest kids were getting a bit fractious, so we finished with some action songs such as hokey cokey and the funky chicken and then went outside to play with balls, bubbles etc. that we brought. What the kids seemed to want most was personal contact at times we felt like climbing frames. After an hour or so outside, we collected ourselves, bade farewell to the kids and left after yet another enjoyable and thought provoking time in Romania.

Day 13 Saturday 20th - Dracula Castle

We had a bus booked at 9:00am to take us to Bran castle (Dracula's place!). There was also another bus with 19 in it going the same way as well and we were going to get a guided tour. The journey there was scenic, the castle picturesque. There were tourist stalls by the dozen in the 'Dracula Bazaar'. There was also a sign above the road advertising the 'Dracula erotic night show': the imagination can go into overdrive wondering what may be on offer there. We paid our way in (to the castle!), getting an information booklet thrown in for good measure though Laura S and Clare ended up going in with Child's tickets as a result - not really quite sure how that happened. We got our conducted tour of the place, complete with loads of historical facts and information - the guide was actually quite informative - until we lost touch with the rest of the group. The castle was quite a complex place with plenty of narrow staircases - we saw quite a few of them by the time we caught up with the others.

We had to be at the busses to move on at 11:10am, but we wanted more time for shopping. The driver and guide appeared a wee bit hesitant, but \$10 did the trick - we got an extension to noon. Serious souvenir shopping began: Dracula mugs, lace cloths, woolly jumpers and hats. Many presents heavier and many, many million Lei lighter, back to the villa - a 15-minute respite, then we were off again to the Restaurant Panorama.

This involved a journey by cable car where Clare demonstrated a really dedicated vertigo. At the restaurant, the food was good, but the view of a nearby lightning storm was even better, but we all moved just a bit further away from the umbrella's metal frame. We then took a short walk to a viewpoint with views of Brasov from a platform, which wobbled more than we felt quite comfy with.

Down again, free time 'til 6:00pm so we roamed the town encountering other groups now and again, all savouring the atmosphere on our last day in this wonderful country. Down the street, we found the main square with folk roller blading, men playing chess and draughts on outdoor marble tables - this could be any European Capital city. We even encountered a wedding group getting photos taken in the park as well.

That evening we headed off down to the Chinese for our final meal in Romania. We hit the Chinese - all the outside tables were full so we were directed inside - smack into the middle of a Romanian Wedding Dance. Yet another BEG first as we gate crash a wedding.

There are a lot of similarities between a Romanian wedding and one back home. The meal was over; the bride in a typical white dress was leading the bridesmaids and some other women



dancing. The music included Rod Stewart and Tom Jones. The men were sitting around getting drunk with the occasional brave lad making a foray onto the dance floor. It was so much like a wedding back home we decided to leave before the fights started.

We had a good meal, and loads more photos are taken. The venturers suggested 'New York, New York' another restaurant they had found last night as a good place to go for the sweets.

In NY-NY, they reorganised tables for 14 of us and we ordered a variety of puddings and a wider variety of cocktails.



We were still surrounded by 'normal people' so rather than inflict a BEG presentation ceremony on them, and having already gate crashed one wedding tonight, we elected to return to the Villa for the presentations. For the first time in Brasov, we walk up the road in the dry.

We take over the top room for presentations. We go through the 'lows and highs' for the expedition. Quite a wide variety of options are offered, including some referring back to the training weekends. Clare and PJ present necklaces to the Venturers, giving reasons why: no one seems too offended.



Notable achievements for our group include:-

Lindsey	The person you least want to mess about with on a raft Also a 'converted trekker'
Clare R	Most 'Hip' person on the expedition Highest height reached with the shortest reach
Liam	The 'Trivia master' Participated in the funniest accident
Paul	The 'Morning Monster' Easily the 'easiest fed' group member
Lisa N	Owner of the 'wobblest legs' Also owns the most infectious laugh
Ruth	the 'Funkiest Chicken' Showed the greatest endurance (for blisters on the trek.)
Catriona	Loudest scream Faced up best to fear, during canyoning
Laura D	The most consistently cheerful The brightest sunburn
Vikki	The 'Question Monster' The most enthusiastic team member
Lisa R	the 'Scariest Sleeper' The most improved rock climber

Clare presents Laura S with a drinking set, PJ and Jim get Romanian whisky!. We present Clare with her present, a club to be used to keep the other leaders in order; the venturers need no such incentive.

We suggest an early night for our 4:00am start and folk disperse on this, our last night in Romania.



Travel



Through Andrew Cunningham we organised for 2 minibuses to pick us up from the airport in Bucharest and take us to Sighisoara.

The minibuses were the Bucharest British School and were available for our use because the kids were on vacation. The buses belonged to a private company that contracts with the school. Each bus took seven plus driver. Although Andrew had not seen the buses the school, he told us that "the school is very correct (and expensive) and I understand the buses to be safe/clean/new etc...."

The costs:

Otopeni Airport to Gara de Nord was 500,000 lei per bus (about £12). We needed two buses therefore it was about £2 per person.

If we had decided to take the train from Bucharest to Sighisoara, it would have cost, for first class, 200,000 lei/person each way, i.e. about £5 (2nd class was 150,000 but we were not recommended to use this as first class is equivalent to British 3rd class).

In total per person it was about £7.



One of the things, which influenced our decision to use the minibuses, was that it is not possible to buy train tickets from outside the country: they must either be bought on arrival, or through a contact in Romania prior to departure.

The minibuses were not of Western standard and broke down a couple of times on our journey north. These breakdowns were fixed by the drivers. Seat belts were provided only in the front - and Romanian standards of driving appear to be much more haphazard than in Britain!

During the Outward Bound course we used the Outward Bound minibus which was much more luxurious.

We travelled from Sighisoara to Brasov and Brasov to Bucharest by train in 1st class accommodation. Tickets were booked at a government ticket office in Sighisoara for both journeys and took 24 hours to organise. The trains themselves were fine - we were in several compartments along a corridor. All announcements on platforms and so on were in Romanian.

During the final journey from Brasov to Bucharest we were delayed by about 1 1/2 hours: if we had taken a later train we would have missed our flight, so it is worth leaving plenty of time.





Accommodation

When not on Outward Bound we stayed in the Elvis Villa chain of hostels.

Sighisoara:

Libertatii # 10 Telephone 0265-772546

nathangendreau@hotmail.com

INT code (0040) in Romania 0265-772546

The Sighisoara hostel was beautiful, with a covered yard in the back where we practised our entertainment for the orphanage. It was through Nathan the owner that we also organised the visit to the hospice in Sighisoara - Nathan worked part time there and gave a share of the hostel's profits to the hospice.

Brasov

Owner - Hojoon Choi

Elvis' Villa Brasov

Strada Democratiei, #2B (Piata Unirii)

0268-478-930; outside Romania (40)268-478-930

0721-844-940; outside Romania (40)721-844-940

The hostel in Brasov was much more modern and Western than the one in Sighisoara. We were placed in a variety of dormitories, sharing with other members of the public. It might be worth considering alternative means of accommodation if Brasov is visited again.

Prices were about \$11 per person per night.



BORDERS EXPLORATION GROUP

Statement of policy on safety

It is the policy of this organisation that those responsible for management of the Borders Exploration Group operations will take all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health and safety of all leaders, participants and other persons who may attend the groups activities.

It will adhere to the Code of Practice for Youth Expeditions, prepared by the Young Explorer's trust.

The matters to which that duty extends include:

1. Where applicable, the provision and maintenance of equipment or procedures that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.



2. Arrangements for ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, safety and absence of risks of health in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances.

3. The provision of such information, instruction, training and supervision as is necessary to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and

safety of leaders, and other persons attending the groups activities.

4. So far as is reasonably practicable as regards any venue under B.E.G.'s control, the maintenance of it in a condition that is safe and without risks to health and the provision and maintenance of means of access to and egress from it that are safe and without risk.

5. The provision and maintenance of a working environment for its members that is, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe, without risk to health and adequate as regards facilities and arrangements for their welfare.

6. Within the groups programmes of activities, members should operate to well defined and understood safety procedures that are designed to control and minimise any physical dangers and cope with unavoidable contingencies that may arise during activities.

7. Safety procedures within activities should be subject to frequent rigorous examination, discussion, revision, practice, training and supervision.

8. The Chief Leader and Emergency response group will retain copies of the Emergency Response File, containing information and details of all Expedition members. All Expedition leaders must be appraised of the relevant experience and general medical condition of all Group members. They must keep each other informed of the strengths and weaknesses and progress of Individual members. If problems arise with members which may affect safety, whether their own or that of others, a leader must not hesitate to suspend that person from further activities until the issue can be addressed.

Notwithstanding the former all leaders, members and other persons attending the groups activities have a clear duty to co-operate with B.E.G. in complying with all statutory regulations, codes of



practice and the Groups arrangements relating to health, safety and welfare. Medical Policy

Medical Policy

In the absence of an Expedition Doctor, the following guidelines should be followed.

All members of the Leader Team have a First Aid Certificate.

At any time, a designated member of the Leader Team will be responsible for the First Aid Kit. Venturers will be informed as to who that person is and they will be the first contact person for First Aid advice. This person may be any of the Leader team.

If items from the Group first aid kit, not normally found in a personal First Aid Kit, need to be used this should, except in extreme circumstances, be done after consultation with at least one other member of the Leader team, preferably the Chief Leader. Where only one member of the Leader team is present (or medically fit to make a decision), if possible another leaders advice should be sought.

On arrival in Romania, the leader team will assess the competence of Outward Bound Romania Staff to stand in as a "Leader" in such a situation.

During Rest days, a Leader will remain at a designated Safety (meeting) point with the Group first aid kit. Leaders accompanying Venturers will make every effort to return to this point should First Aid be required.

In general, it is our policy that at least two of the Romania 2002 expedition leader team will decide on the use of First Aid kit materials, but it must be recognised that circumstances may arise where a Leader must make an individual decision for the welfare of the Individuals within the group.

All expedition members should be aware that a high level of interdependence is vital to an expedition's success and therefore some information may need to be disclosed to others in the interest of fellow members safety or well being. Such disclosures would be carried out on a need to know basis and in line with this policy.

Injections

Hepatitis A Tetanus Polio

After consultation with a doctor, we decided that rabies would be at the participants' discretion. Wild dogs were mainly to be found in Bucharest and we were not going to be spending any time in Bucharest other than to travel through it in prearranged transport.

Medical Policy Review

It was not practical to always have a leader waiting at a designated contact point with the kit. The Outward Bound instructors incorporated elements of our medical kit within theirs during the trekking phase.

Romania 2002 Environmental Policy

Rubbish and Waste Disposal

When shopping consider means of disposal.

Show restraint in use of toilet paper / sanitary products

Ensure that every environment is left litter free

Food

Be aware of availability of food and water from local communities

Support locals by buying local produce where possible

Accommodation

Minimise noise especially late at night and early in the morning

Be aware of security and storage of belongings

Social / Cultural

Be aware of and respect local people's traditions and culture, especially:

- ~ Greetings
- ~ Clothing
- ~ Language
- ~ Religion and superstitions! beliefs

Seek permission to take photos of people and special places

Mix appropriately with the locals, educating and learning from and with them

Do not pick wild flowers or disturb local wildlife habitats

Borders Exploration Group - Romania 2002

Emergency Response Plan

The Borders Exploration Group members of the Emergency Response group will act as home contacts and establish contact with the expedition as soon as they arrive in Romania. These members will then act as the contact point between the expedition and home for the entire trip. They will relay information to parents and other interested parties. The contact may be in the form of telephone, fax or e-mail.

Communication between the individual expedition members and home will be through postcards/letters except in very exceptional circumstances. This helps maintain the BEG ethos. In the event of an incident or serious accident requiring contact with the U.K. the following RESPONSE PLAN will be actioned by the Home Contacts.

For ease of communication, a colour-coded system will operate as follows;

Code GREEN: General information and organisational requirements.

Code AMBER: An incident or situation has developed which required attention by the leader team. This may involve passing on information to parents or involve the home contacts in an organisational task.

Code RED: The full emergency response group will convene immediately. They will fully evaluate the situation, gain as much information as possible and decide on the best course of action.

Emergency Response Group:

Vicki Moyes First Line of Contact

Sam Smith (Vice Chairperson of BEG)

Romania 2002

Golden Rules

Alcohol:

No Drunkenness

Drink only when socially appropriate

Everyone to be treated equally - if parents agree

No drinking: during Outward Bound

During travel

Buying as presents?

Drugs:

No illegal drugs

Money etc.

All participants to carry own money

Upper limit to be set : £80

Passport & tickets to be carried by individuals

Boundaries

Safe boundaries will be introduced at each location

Within safe boundaries travel in groups of not less than 2

Everyone outside safe area will be accompanied by a leader

"Buddy" system to be operated

"Quiet time" to be established

Freedom:

Everyone entitled to have freedom and personal space, within safe boundaries

Free time every day

Privacy:

Right to privacy

"Goldfish" time to be recognised

Relationships:

Be discrete

Right to privacy

No invitations to be issued without group approval

Should be discouraged

Personal possessions:

Ask permission before using/borrowing other folks items

Be considerate of space

Keep important documents safe at all times

Communication:

UK regular contact home (Jim McP & Vicki Moyes)
E-Mail and phone not allowed - except in exceptional circumstances

Responsibility:

Everyone must act responsibly in a way which would not bring BEG into disrepute
Make sure you know where your buddy is.
Awareness of necessary jobs & "pull your weight"
Openness and be prepared to voice opinions

Decision Making:

No selfish decisions
Democratic decision making
Good communication of decisions

Food:

Try it before complaining
Say if insufficient
Vegetarians will have appropriate food

Accommodation:

Room sharing/allocation will be a group responsibility

Dress:

Appropriate for occasion

After word

Romania 2002 began in India 2001. The experience of watching venturers and leaders alike return from a BEG expedition enriched in perspective, skills and memories helped focus for me a lot of what youth expeditions are about. They are about experiencing challenges to one's skills, self-knowledge and preconceptions and learning and growing as a result. Romania 2002 has been an opportunity to open this experience to a wider part of our Borders community and encourage leadership and participation amongst those who might not otherwise be able to join an expedition. It also opens up opportunities for BEG itself as a way of complementing major expeditions and fostering experience and understanding within a European context. Above all, I hope it encourages individuals within BEG to take the plunge and take on the challenge of chief leadership - if I can do it anyone can!

Being chief leader on such a trip has been the most challenging, exhausting and frightening thing I've ever done. But, overriding that, it has also been the most rewarding thing I have ever experienced. I have learned about myself and about others around me and I think I share that experience with everyone on the trip. And that, whether the expedition is European, international, or even closer to home, is surely the most important thing of all.

Clare Kitchener
Chief Leader

Recommendations for future European expeditions! **following discussion by Romania 2002 leaders.**

The leaders felt strongly that a European expedition every two years would give BEG an appropriate focus for the years between a major expedition. It might also attract those unable to commit to the timescale of a major expedition.

Destination

It was felt that, for the foreseeable future, it would be valuable for the European expedition to return to Romania.

- The country offers a variety of experiences not available elsewhere,
- It also offers a less daunting chief leader track.
- The groundwork has been done. This would allow us to plan in advance many elements that remained unplanned for Romania 2002 - e.g. Visits to placement centres.

Timing

Selection of chief leader should be done before the school summer holidays in the year preceding the trip.

Selection of venturers and leaders could then take place after the summer by the end of September. This would allow more time for planning and would mean that venturer selection was not so close to selection for the next major expedition.

Size of group

4 leaders and 10 venturers was an ideal size for accommodation, travel and task purposes. If the group were to expand much beyond this, it would lose much of the flexibility that is gained from being such a small group and the experience would be diluted.

Selection of venturers and leaders.

Selection of leaders: this was done by application form, available to people who had previously been on a BEG expedition, either as venturer or leader.

- This system should be retained: it is vital for an expedition such as this, where there is little time for extensive training, that leaders should be fully aware of the BEG ethos and aims. This can only be achieved if leaders have received this training through participation on a major BEG expedition, whether as a leader or venturer.
- This would enable venturers to move on to be leaders in a potentially less daunting situation.
- It would also allow BEG members to become involved who might not be able to take 5 or 6 weeks off work during the summer.

Selection of venturers: this was done by

* standard venturer application form

* meeting with the chief leader and 3 members of BEG who volunteered to act as informal training team during the first stages of selection and for the first training day.

This selection process worked well for the number of applications that were received (14). This would need to be reviewed according to numbers.

It should be ensured that the recruitment process should target young people not necessarily at school.

NB the group felt that participation in a European expedition should not automatically prevent someone from applying to take part in a major expedition.

Content

This would obviously be determined by participants. However, the following points were noted:

- Outward Bound was a very challenging and rewarding aspect of the trip and this should be retained.
- There would be the potential to expand BEG's involvement with the hospice in Sighisoara. We are aware however of the dangers of setting up a precedent which comes to be expected.
- With contacts already in place, the opportunity to arrange and organise talks, presentations and taking kids from the hospice on trips could be investigated.
- A games afternoon at the placement centre might be an alternative to a ceilidh.
- The balance between the hospice and the placement centre in terms of time spent at each needs to be considered.

NB Future leaders must consider the danger of trying to do too much within the timescale.

Travel I transport

A future expedition could investigate the possibility of hiring land rovers for transport within the country.

Fundraising.

Costs for Romania 2002 were £550 per person. We also raised approximately £1000 through group fundraising.

Currently, leaders and venturers were given no support for personal fundraising, nor was there any requirement that money should be fundraised.

We held one group fundraising day - a duck race, and received a grant of £500 from the James McLean trust.

Earlier selection dates might allow for some more structured system of fundraising to be put in place.

Training.

The Romania 2002 team undertook the following training:

1 training day, organised by informal training team and chief leader. This was very similar to the initial training day held for major expeditions and provided an introduction to BEG and Romania.

1 training day organised by leader team and assisted by volunteers. This was a day at Alien Rock indoor climbing centre in Edinburgh.

2 training weekends organised by the leader team with input from other BEG members. These focussed on camp skills, canoeing and outdoor climbing, golden rules, safety and preparation for the ceilidh.

This training was thought to have been successful in preparing the group for the expedition.

Thank you!

There are many people without whom this expedition would not have been possible. Many thanks therefore to the following people:

In the UK

Trish Stevenson for her support and encouragement and her vision for a European expedition.

Ron Sutherland for his help in the initial stages.

Alan Young, chairperson of BEG.

Vicki Moyes, Sam Smith, Ian Hogarth, Jim Gill, Kevin Murray - Emergency Response Team.

All other members of BEG for their help and support, particularly Paul Tierney for his help in the early stages of the trip.

The Selkirk High School design group "Zeitgeist" along with the Art and design department for their assistance in design and production of this report.

The James McLean Trust for their generous donation to the expedition.

In Romania.

Andrew Cunningham whose help was invaluable, as was that of Alexandra Tulai. Many thanks also to Miss Luminita Olteanu and Mrs Pascu for their help in organising our visit to the placement centre in Brasov.

Nathan Gendreau of Sighisoara Hostel for all his help and information in arranging the visit to the hospice.

Outward Bound Romania, particularly Gabriela, Attila and Jasmina, our instructors.

And above all:

All members of the team and their parents and friends who gave their support in many different ways.

Thank you from Romania 2002!!

