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DANNY BEER

Danny Beer. Tourist on Wheels

A EUROPEAN ADVENTURE



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Wheels. A European Adventure

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Аннотация

Cycling around the world? Has anyone done it? Tour diaries from Danny Beer, an Australian guy, who found his passion in exploring the cities by bike and made his dreams come true. His daily adventures are shared on the pages of four different books. This book is about a European adventure. 11,317 km (7,032 miles) over 168 days from February 15, 2007 to August 1, 2007

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Introduction: The beginning

Wednesday February 14, 2007

Well this is it. The big one. Maybe. Six or seven months in Eastern Europe and who knows what after that. You just get your life sorted out in Taiwan with a nice job, apartment and girlfriend so you throw it all away to ride a bike.

As a goodbye present of sorts two friends decide to steal from you. Thanks Americans.

So this is it. You leave your girl on Valentine's day and fly to Vienna. This is the beginning.



Day one.: Vienna to Bratislava
Thursday February 15, 2007,
64 km (40 miles) – Total
so far: 64 km (40 miles)

Well. You made it. The anxiety never really set in until two days ago. Say goodbye to your life in Taiwan and hello to adventure in Europe.

You have weight issues at the airport. Including the bike everything weighs at least 35 kg. You feel and look ridiculous with all the hand luggage. Two heavy books are the first to go at Bangkok airport. More will soon follow. And yet not soon enough. Some ski gear, pants and extra socks, will go in three weeks. You are tempted to say goodbye to the camping gear but that is being saved for Italy and the like.

The flight to Vienna is dogged by a screaming baby a few seats in front. It refuses to stop for perhaps the entire night, relenting only after dawn when you really can't sleep anyway.

Your bike survives the flight unscathed. The tires are completely flat though. The heavy load does not help at all. Your efforts with the hand pump are fruitless. You ask at airport information and are directed to a service station nearby. You walk over and pump the tires up, no probs. On the way you stop

at a pedestrian crossing and are actually surprised to see the cars stop for you to cross.

It really is winter. It's cold and wet. But you are happy to be riding. Today's destination is Bratislava. You follow the road signs out and find yourself on the freeway. Five kilometers later, and only 100 meters from the exit you are pulled over by the police. They tell you to get off the freeway. You can only agree. Hoping this being the end of the matter you continue on your way and up the exit ramp with just the occasional glance over your shoulder.



Bratislava Castle.

It feels great to see so many beautiful buildings and attractive countryside. There is quite an extensive network of bike paths on the way to Bratislava. But not finding a map until much later you designate staying close to the busy highway for much of the day.

You almost miss the border control. But they were so uncommitted you doubt anyone would have cared. Nevertheless, you make sure you get your little stamp in the passport. Your tailwind turns into a nasty headwind for your final few km into town.

Bratislava looks even more impressive than you remembered.



Bratislava.

**Bratislava.: and the
Iron Curtain bike trail
Friday February 16, 2007,
67 km (42 miles) – Total
so far: 131 km (81 miles)**

You go to see Devin castle. Then see the Iron Curtain bike trail and decide you just have to go. For a little while at least. You go with promise of fine castles. You see a lot of nice countryside you wouldn't otherwise see but nothing to write home about. It is a very pleasant ride. Until it gets late and you have to ride back in the dark.



**Bratislava and the
Danube.: Just taking it easy
Saturday February 17, 2007,
37 km (23 miles) – Total
so far: 168 km (104 miles)**

Just a relaxing ride along the Danube today. The only thing of note is that you kis the Moldovan girl staying in the hostel. And, um, other stuff. Tomorrow you leave for Trencin.



Bratislava.

Bratislava to Trnava.: On the way
Sunday February 18, 2007,
85 km (53 miles) – Total
so far: 253 km (157 miles)

Today marks your first full day of cycling. The target destination was Trencin but it turns out to be too far to go today. You decide instead to make it to Trnava but the lack of any affordable accommodation force you on to Hlohovec. You almost had to further today's journey but eventually find a room after asking some people.

You got your first flat today. It is a great pain with all of the heavy luggage. You manage to find the puncture and fix it okay but the useless pump refused to help in any way. You stop a passing cyclist, who by chance spoke excellent English. He helps you inflate the tire but it must have another puncture somewhere. Or maybe you just didn't fix the first one properly. He rips the tube off and puts his spare tube on. Then he inflates the tire and helps you load everything on again. So helpful. And all so effortlessly too.

A combination of an overloaded bike and a headwind prevents any real progress today. You see a couple nice castles. In Trnava a local cyclist points out a 15th century tower and gothic

cathedral. You take a picture.



**To Trencin.: Castle denied
Monday February 19, 2007,
70 km (43 miles) – Total
so far: 323 km (201 miles)**

You make it to Trencin without much trouble, although for some reason you do get lost trying to leave towns. You find a semi-quiet road parallel to the freeway. Accomodation now seems plentiful now that you are not looking for it.

You make it to Trencin quite early due to not stopping for lunch. But a late lunch and getting lost trying to reach the castle makes you arrive five minutes after closing time at 3:35. “Tourist. Tourist. Niet.” Repeats the caretaker/guard as you try to take a couple quick pictures. Well if only they gave more accurate directions you would have gotten there on time. Guess you will have to wait until tomorrow morning for a quick tour.

You just spent waiting thirty minutes unsuccessfully to use the internet. It looks like everybody is busy chatting. Maybe if you wait a little longer someone will leave. But, like the bus that never comes, you can't wait forever. Maybe when you return after dinner a computer will be free. But you doubt it.

You see a lot of vicious looking dogs but lucky for you they are all fenced in, another welcome change to Taiwan. You seem

to have lost your whip sometime today too. Unused 'cept for some playful joking back in Bratislava.

You find a bike shop and invest in a spare tube in hope you will never need to use it. You also decide to redistribute your luggage and throw away your cycling rain jacket. It is made redundant as it is certainly cold enough to use your heavy coat.



A Castle.

Trencin to Piestivany.: Castles abound

Tuesday February 20, 2007,

80 km (50 miles) – Total

so far: 403 km (250 miles)

So today you go to see Trencin castle. You could have made it in time for the tour yesterday but the caretaker was just being a prick. You are glad you stayed for the tour though. It is quite interesting and you get to see a lot of neat things about the castle's history with the Habsburgs, etc. The road to Piestivany is busy with a lot of frequent trucks and no shoulders to ride on.

You take a short cut which turns out to be longer and up a hill. This time you make it to the castle about two hours too late. But if you saw Trencin castle yesterday instead of today then maybe you could have made it. Anyway, it opens at ten tomorrow so you will see it then before you leave for Martin.

Your pension room is really nice. You feel that it is going to waste on your own. You just found out. It is three degrees Celsius outside. That sounds about right. It was perhaps eight degrees in the day but conditions aren't icy just yet. Looks like some hills tomorrow and then after that you'll hang up your bike for a few days to go skiing.



A Castle.

Bojnice to Martin.:
In search of a place to stay
Wednesday February 21,
2007, 80 km (50 miles) – Total
so far: 483 km (300 miles)

The castle at Bojnice is a real delight. Of course as a 'student' you get your usual discount. You don't know whether you are supposed to or not but you join a big group of tourists for the tour. Well it was difficult to get past them all. And the tour is in English anyway despite that you are probably the only native English speaker in the crowd.

It isn't until 11:30 that you hit the road. You finally get to see snow. And as you keep riding you see more and more of it. You also see some locals riding Giants too. Must be a popular bike.

You get to Martin but the lack of accommodation forces you to keep going. It gets dark and the traffic gets heavy. You are aware of some beautiful scenery you are missing out on. Eventually you make it to Kralovany. If you can't find a room here you'll just have to pitch your tent somewhere. The previous two towns promised pensions. The first was closed for winter and the second was too obscure to find in the dark. But third time lucky you're in luck. And only about twelve Euros. They even

serve breakfast too.

What is it about Slovakia and breakfast? You can never find a restaurant open. You usually skip it in hope of an early lunch and some chocolate. As a consequence you have also been skipping coffee. Today you have your first cup since leaving Bratislava.

So you just discovered Martin pivo, a nice little beer with the added bonus of sharing your middle and last names. Well, it makes you happy anyway.



**Martin to Liptovsky
Mikulas: Beautiful Slovakia
Thursday February 22, 2007,
60 km (37 miles) – Total
so far: 543 km (337 miles)**

You wake up today to a Swedish table. This is a direct translation from the polish and means 'buffet'. The fifty km to Liptovsky Mikulas is easy enough. You see more and more snow but really never feel it with your warm clothes, including ski pants. But then it starts to rain not far from your destination so you are only interested in going there or finding a restaurant for lunch. You even elect to skip a detour to a wooden church! It probably wasn't worth it though.

You get into town but the first thing you find is a bus to Jasna for the skiing. You look for the hotel but they are all booked out. This morning you try to call but their number had changed. It isn't listed on the internet.



So from there you slowly descend down the mountain, stopping to ask for a free room wherever feasible. Twice your bike skids on the loose gravel throwing you off. The second time you come off one of the pannier clips break off. But the bag stays on okay. You do find one pension but you can only stay for one night. You need five.

There is a small village near the base of the mountain with a ton of 'zimmer freis' You stop at one and instant success. 400 Kroners a night. But maybe you said yes too quickly because now the price is 500. So you say only three nights. He tries

to negotiate to four nights. You'll stay for three and see if you can find something better after the weekend. It is very basic and you still need to catch the bus up the mountain in the morning to ski.

Liptovky Mikulas: Snowboarding days

Sunday February 25, 2007

It is lonely up on them hills. You've been snowboarding these past three days. Then you hang out in a restaurant and bar in the evenings. There are a lot of people up on the slopes. You almost do your head in on the first day. It is a different kind of solitary to cycling. Your longest conversations are with the guys at the ski rental. The barman teaches you to say "One more pivo" but you have already forgotten it.

Tomorrow is your last day. You plan to head up early so you can leave by two. Maybe you can make it to Poprad if you don't encounter any problems.



**Liptovsky Mikulas to Motel
on highway: Riding in snow
Monday February 26, 2007,
48 km (30 miles) – Total
so far: 591 km (367 miles)**

Today is your last day of snowboarding but you want to get back on the bike again so you leave the pists by one. Your host tried to get you to stay another night last night and again this morning when it was snowing. It snows for most of the day on the board and on the bike. At times it is a nuisance but it also makes it a unique delight on the quiet roads.

You hand the board in to the ski shop. At first they give you a fifty per cent discount and then for free. You decide not to question why and continue on your way. Coming back down the mountain the bus skids on the road. But you were okay and everyone else on the bus seems non-plussed.

Today is also the day you test the new latch on your broken bag. It holds up okay and should last you as long as the bags.

Once you leave Liptovsky Mikulas and get onto the quiet roads you actually enjoy the snow. You are all wrapped up in four layers of clothes and the snow falling all around is beautiful. It hits your face. You try to catch some on your tongue but you

seem to have better success when you don't try at all.

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You want to make it to Tatranska Strba, a town with nothing

there but it is sign posted. You make it on dusk and find a nice motel to stay in. Your clothes, bags and bike are dirty from the road. The front bags are quite frosted. You try to wash your ski pants in the shower but they are so dirty they need a heavy duty wash, as does the rest of your clothes, your bags, your bike, not lest yourself.

**To Levoca.: Just walking the bike
Tuesday February 27, 2007,
44 km (27 miles) – Total
so far: 635 km (395 miles)**

The day starts out alright even if the highway is very busy. Traffic is generally courteous but often a truck would come by too close and too fast pulling me into its slipstream. Buses are the worst. They never give room and they never wait. At least they don't try to force you off the road like they do in Taiwan though.

By lunch time you get a flat. This time it's the front. But that's okay. You'll just put on the spare and fix the puncture in the evening. But wait. Why is the valve so fat? It doesn't even fit through the hole. Looks like you'll need to repair the flat now after all.

So you put on the patch but the tire doesn't seem to want to inflate. So you try again. And again. You manage to inflate the damn thing a little. Enough to walk the bike but you can't ride it.

So you walk. Five km to the next town, Levoca. There you'll be able to find a service station and perhaps even a bike shop. On the way you find a restaurant and stop for lunch. Your one embarrassment is that you leave the seat up in the women's bathroom.



You find a service station just out of town and inflate the tire easily. But just one km later it goes again, totally flat. Once again you start walking. This town is quite attractive. Why isn't it in the guide book? Oh, it is. Lots of pretty buildings and even a 16th century cage for putting impure women in. You ask for directions to a bike shop and sure enough, success! A pretty young girl even follows you to make sure you find it.

So you buy two new tubes and a bike pump. You even get the guy to inflate it for you, after yet another unsuccessful attempt.

Yet again the tire blows after riding it for a little while. You go back to the shop and the guy finds the reason why. There is a hole in the actual tire itself. So you buy a new tire. You think it is a little smaller than the old one but you're sure it will be fine. You hope.

But now it is almost five. It is starting to get cold and dark. So you'll stay here tonight. You don't want any frantic searching for accommodation on dusk like last night.



**To Kosice.: Cold cold riding
Wednesday February 28,
2007, 91 km (57 miles) – Total
so far: 726 km (451 miles)**

28—2 91 km

You awake again to blissful snow falling down from the heavens. Breakfast and a quick (ish) trip to the town hall museum and you're off. The first point of call is the neo-gothic cathedral just out of town. This turns into a ten km plus detour up a hill you really didn't need to make.

Spisske Podhradie is the next point of call, sight of Spissky Hrad, the largest castle in the country. There is also a magnificent cathedral there so you stop there first. But alas you have to wait half an hour so into town for lunch you go.

The cathedral is great, like its counterpart in Levoca. The castle is closed for winter. But by then it is already two and it's a long way to Kosice.

Just out of town you see your first evidence of slums. "Gypsies" you think. The sun bids you hello but snow abounds. You are slower than time allows for. A mountain hinders the final few km to Kosice. It gets cold and dark. The final descent is no fun at all. It is however eerily beautiful.

Eventually you make it into town and eventually you find a place to stay, the same place you stayed five years ago with your then girlfriend. Riding for just a few minutes without your gloves chills your fingers. You put the gloves back on.

No cycling tomorrow. It's a rest day. Besides, you have a lot of tourist stuff to do.



A tourist in Kosice.: Rest day

Thursday March 1, 2007

Ah, the first day of spring and the first day in a week it hasn't snowed. Today, the last full day in Slovakia, is a rest day, to be spent doing tourist stuff. There are a couple nice museums in town and many chances to take photos of pretty buildings.

This year marks the 800th anniversary of the town's cathedral. A climb up the narrow tower stairwell affords great views of the city.

You buy a bike pump but it doesn't work so you exchange it for one which does. Another bike shop has the same bike, a Giant OCR 3, for sale. It's the newer model so has a few better features. It also has a price tag almost double what you paid.

Slovakia is a great country. Kosice is a nice city. But it is time to move on. Hungary beckons. Hopefully the cold Slovakian winter is left behind and a warmer climate is found.

You see a bum peeing in the middle of the street. Oh. How lovely. You don't think before crossing hurriedly.



To Hungary.: Fairwell Slovakia
Friday March 2, 2007,
85 km (53 miles) – Total
so far: 811 km (504 miles)

Fairwell Kosice. On the outskirts of town you spot another of the numerous dogs, ready to attack and yet fenced off from doing so. It runs along yapping until it runs out of yard. Then it pops through a gap under the fence and keeps going. “Oh shit!” That wasn’t supposed to happen. Eventually it tires and you slow down to a more relaxing pace.

It is too difficult to find a restaurant open for breakfast so you elect, instead, to find something on the way out of town. Fifty km and near the Hungarian border later you find somewhere. By now it is lunch time.

A look at the menu doesn’t help at all so you choose something at random. It must have been a lucky guess. Yummed up and ready to go the border check point proves slow yet eventually painless. It is certainly easier than five years ago when you had officials from both countries follow you through five train carriages to retrieve your passport from your bag.

And welcome to Hungary! And wow, a bike lane just for you. How convenient. Haven’t seen one of those for a while.



Hungry in Hungary

Saturday March 3, 2007,

107 km (66 miles) – Total

so far: 918 km (570 miles)

Blue skies and a quiet country road makes for a happy cyclist. But this cyclist is hungry and doesn't get to eat until lunch, 45 km later. You see a couple horses pulling a cart. You get out your camera but they pull into a yard. Never mind though as this will certainly become a familiar site over the course of the day.

After lunch you spot a couple wooden bell towers. Apparently there are three dozen such towers throughout the region. You try to take some photos but the towers are silhouetted against the sky.

Fehergyarmat is today's destination. The last twenty km or so finds a nice riverside bike path. It also finds rain which is less than welcome.

You spot some venison running along. Thoughts return to your empty stomach. You also see one bloke, pushing his bike laden with firewood. "And I thought my load was overbearing." You think.

You make it into town but accommodation is difficult to find. Making enquiries two km out sends you back into town but never mind as success is at hand.

This is the second and last night in Hungary. Tomorrow Romania beckons. Perhaps it is the quiet roads or maybe the lack of hills but Hungary has been a great improvement cycling-wise over Slovakia. The beer, however, is much more expensive for much less quality.

Hello Romania

Sunday March 4, 2007,

97 km (60 miles) – Total so far: 1,015 km (631 miles)

It is a nice ride to the border. You decide against a detour to a 14th century Gothic church. It may have been nice but there are other nice things to find.

The Romanian border guard is quite interested in your story. Or maybe she is just doing her job. Either way she lets you through without trouble.

A dog is the first to greet you as you head into Satu Mare. It is of no great bother and soon gives up chase. A bank and restaurant are the first and second orders of business. After that you have difficulty trying to leave town. After a while of traversing the town's pot-hole riven roads you head in the general direction out on what may or may not be the road. But you find your way.

A strong side wind makes life difficult along the busy highway. Drivers here are not as friendly as in Hungary and the previously two mentioned conditions make for some dangerous cycling. Of particular danger is when a large truck would pass or overtake sending a strong gust of wind your way.

Off the highway the road deteriorates badly. After

a particularly scary moment when a car and a truck try to pass you at the same time you decide enough is enough and ride in the middle of your lane. This creates a myriad of angry toots from over anxious drivers forced to slow down and wait a second or two to overtake.

“Why should I wait when I can just easily run you off the road” and “This is a road. It’s built for cars. Cyclists are of secondary importance to cars.” You can almost hear them say, in Romanian of course. You just wave ‘hello’. This usually works better than any rude hand gestures as it helps settle your anger and, if they bother to look, intensifies the driver’s anger.

“What is he doing? Waving? What does that mean? I want to make him angry so I can stop my car and maim him.” Well it is better than the old road-rage one-up-man-ship salute anyway.

Ninety-seven km later you roll into town and find a hotel. But alas, no hot water so you decide to remain smelly. You go for a walk down the street. Someone taps you on the shoulder. It’s a policeman. He wants to see your passport but it’s at the hotel. He just wants to know what you are up to. As a foreigner you must stand out a mile away. Or maybe he could smell your sweaty stink.

Romania certainly has a different feel to it than Hungary. You see evidence of great poverty and hovels of buildings. People also get around in traditional garb, women in flowery dresses and men in wide brimmed hats. It is definitely car country though and drivers have no intention of giving up this fact. A shame really

as it distracts from the otherwise beauty of this country.



**The good, the bad, and the ugly of Romania: Beware of blue vans in Marmarus
Monday March 5, 2007,
69 km (43 miles) – Total so far: 1,084 km (674 miles)**

A dry and calm day awaits the day's cycling. A long incline followed by mediocre-to-bad road conditions hampers speed. At the top of the summit the frontier police wave you down. You have a friendly chat as they flip through your passport. They do inform you however that you are legally required to wear a fluorescent vest, of which you buy when next convenient.

You find a small restaurant in Sapanta and try to order something from the menu. You sit down and soon bread then soup arrives. You await the main course but it never comes. A visit to the Merry Cemetery and then to a near complete monastery sees a lot of your camera film.

The Ukraine is ever present a mere swim across the Tisa on your left. The next stop is Sighetu Marmatei. At first glance this is a dusty chaotic town. After a couple brief queries about accommodation it appears to be an expensive dusty chaotic town.

A guy drives up beside you and starts a conversation. You both stop and he recommends heading out of town for a place to stay. He's a cyclist too and wants to help out a fellow cyclist. He shows you his calves.

So you head out of town. A car vents its frustration at not being able to overtake for a precious few seconds. As opportunity presents itself it goes around only to slowly and deliberately cut you off and force you off the road. You veer off the tarmac but stay on the bike as you brake to a halt. He really wanted to cause some harm. You decide to wait for a few moments as it leaves your sight. You don't want any more vengeance from the psycho driver. Your knees are still shaking as you find a pension nearby. That last incident was enough for today. Hopefully tomorrow no blue vans will cross your pass. Cyclists beware of blue vans in northern Romania.

The pension is nice. You are fed soup and some kind of rice-meat things which are apparently traditionally Romanian. You chat to two pretty Romanian women who are friends of the host. Perhaps. You wonder. But nah, it could never work. A hot shower and a cold beer or three and it is just about time for some sweet dreams.

The best of Romania
Tuesday March 6, 2007,
66 km (41 miles) – Total so
far: 1,150 km (715 miles)

A sunny and clear, albeit cold sky greets your day. You are treated to breakfast and soon make your way back towards town to wander about the open air peasant village museum. You invite your host's friend Lilly to join you but she makes her excuses. She would like to come but she has to tend to her pigs.

Upon seeing your bike you notice someone had gone through your bags during the night. Due mainly to laziness you are in habit of leaving some front bags on your bike. Nothing much of value is left in there anyway. Never-the-less some cheap but useful camping bowls are taken. It is more of an annoyance than inconvenience but something to be weary about.

You spot a blue van heading into town and thoughts return to the previous evening. You get to the peasant village museum but nobody is at the ticket office. So you wander about. It is alright but there isn't that much to see. In comparison the 1850's Sovereign Hill in Ballarat, Australia, is much larger and indepth. The baaing of sheep adds to the atmosphere. You meet some people there. The museum is closed. But you've had enough

anyway. You offer to pay for your ticket none-the-less but the guy shrugs it off.

Back on the bike you head eastwards. A blue van passes sending your heart pounding. Then another and another. But all without incident and you soon relax to the traffic. It soon heats up and you shed some layers, replacing the beanie for the baseball cap.

The villages here are quite beautiful. Elaborate wooden arches adorn each yard entrance. There are quite a few old wooden churches. The oldest, a 14th century church is to be found at Leud, down a very bumpy, very muddy road. But worth seeing though.

At one church are some reporter-photographers. They are quite nice and quite interested in who you are and why you are here.

Eventually you make it to Lecel. A boy greets you so you stop to chat. He shares your namesake and is interesting to talk to. Apparently, though, things are 'bad' in Romania. You have been heading towards some snow-lined mountains. But tomorrow should see you head south over the Carpathenians and into Transilvania.

And now dinner awaits. Cooked by your new host.

And into Transilvania: To Bistrita
Wednesday March 7, 2007,
83 km (52 miles) – Total so
far: 1,233 km (766 miles)

Today's breakfast is Romanian cheese. No, it's quite delicious. Really. And filling. You pay your tab, pack your bags and hit the road. A long slow ascent greets your morning. Followed by a much longer, yet not quite so slow descent.

Snow becomes increasingly common as you climb higher, then slowly disappears 'cept for distant peaks as you descend into Transilvania. Road conditions remain variable.

As you move south traffic increases in volume. There are more larger trucks now and they have places to go. Horse drawn carts, as is this previous week, are as common as ever. Their drivers have a look of simple contentedness about them.

You are treated to pizza for lunch, not far from your final destination of Bistrita. You watch a scene across the road which seems to sum up life in Romania. A businessman in a nice car, parked, toots angrily at an old man behind him, busy chatting to a friend while sitting on his bike. The old man doesn't seem to be in a hurry to get out of the way so the businessman nudges him with his car. Then he seems to move. The businessman

reverses back a bit more and then does nothing. He is ready to go but wait. Now he's looking at his map. All the while chatting on his mobile phone.

So Romania seems divided. A new business class is out and about. They have things to do and places to be and no time to be waiting for those who don't. Then there are those stuck in the past. They are little influenced by the technological advances they see about them. They lead their lives as they always have done and don't show any signs of doing otherwise. They are happy the way they are. It is the new business class which lead the life of less-contentedness.

You make it to Bistrita. Now this is a city. There is what appears to be a nice cathedral, partially hidden behind a façade of renovation. It is still early. So aided with a belly full of pizza you press on. But by the outskirts of town you spot a motel and decide to call it a day. Sometimes it is hit and miss with restaurants and accommodation. Besides, this truck up your ass is getting to be more scary than annoying.

Today is the first day you are not stopped by the police. In Maramures they spot you and ask to see your papers once a day. They are friendly though and ask questions resembling conversations more so than interrogations.

Bistrita to Sighisoara.: Not dead yet
Thursday March 8, 2007,
144 km (89 miles) – Total
so far: 1,377 km (856 miles)

If you must admit, last night you were somewhat worried about the increasingly cyclist unfriendly traffic. These worries are not groundless. The only non-pedestrian traffic which actually seems pleased to see you are the horse drawn carts. Of which though still plentiful in number become increasingly rarer as you head south.

To be fair though a large majority of vehicles do give a fair birth when passing. As long as it doesn't inconvenience them that is. Others are simply careless, or even spiteful. Yet for some reason you cease worrying about the traffic, 'cept for the occasional van or truck which insists on passing at the near impossible. These send curses out at all angles.

One of the most annoying aspects is when vehicles insist on overtaking other slower vehicles by forcing you off the road. The road is clear. A lone cyclist is future road kill. Nothing more.

“Bread!?! I never ordered any bread.” You think. Why must restaurants always insist on giving you bread, charged to your bill of course. But this ducky aint for fucky. “Take it away.” You

insist.

Today's cycling is merely a means to an end. The end being Sighisoara. Armed only with the crappy Lonely Planet guidebook map you have no idea that today will involve over 140 km of riding. Not until the last thirty km do you decide to press on to the end. You can rest tomorrow, maybe. Maybe not, the hotel is pretty crap so it would be nice to move on in the afternoon.

Road conditions improve for most of the day. There are a few nice downhill stretches, preceded by the not-so-nice uphill stretches, but predictably cyclist unfriendly traffic hinders any substantial speeds.

**Almost to Brasnov.: Longer than half
Friday March 9, 2007,
94 km (58 miles) – Total so
far: 1,471 km (914 miles)**

What a delightful morning spent wandering about the citadel visiting museums and taking photos. Right, now that all that tourist crap is done you're outta here. Just fifty km. After yesterday's effort you don't want to overdo it today.

A nice looking motel/restaurant/disco is spotted a few km short of your goal. You press on. Then another motel is seen. It is a little too expensive so you keep going. The next place will be better. The next place is closed. Three vicious dogs greet you at the next place. Perhaps it is a sign as there isn't anything there anyway.

You turn off the highway onto a minor road eventually to Bran. But it takes you back onto the highway. Forty km later and on dusk you find the next motel. But a "Reservat" sign bars your entry. A private function is being held so as a once off the hotel and restaurant are closed. But no need to fret as the next motel is only four km further on. You may only be 23 km from Brasnov but enough is enough.

Traffic today doesn't seem as unfriendly as it was yesterday.

The shoulder is now two feet wider to, well, two feet wide. But nothing is perfect though and a few moments have you raising your hair.

To Brasov.: Attacked by born agains
Saturday March 10, 2007,
27 km (17 miles) – Total so
far: 1,498 km (931 miles)

Today you can relax, wander about, visit museums, search the internet, take photos and just chill out. But first you have 27 km of cycling to do. It is always the last few km which are the hardest and today is no exception.

Brasov is nice. Really nice. But you'll move on tomorrow. It can get lonely out there. It's not so bad on the bike but sitting around bird watching gets boring after a while.

It gets hot. The sun blinds you. Too bad you left your sunnies in the hotel. You walk down the street. A guy approaches handing out leaflets to some live act in town. Which is fine. Then he starts preaching about God. Which is not so fine. "Think about heaven. Think about eternity." He says. You decide to make a conscientious effort NOT to attend the gig. Any amount of loneliness is preferable to being talked at about religion.

Brasov to Sinaia.:
Hello Count Duckula
Sunday March 11, 2007,
89 km (55 miles) – Total so
far: 1,587 km (986 miles)

You have a lot to do today so you had best get going. You take a 'short cut' out of Brasov which ends in a dead end. Back-tracking back to the highway first one then another then a whole pack of dogs come at you. Difficult as it is to cycle on a bad road, through curses you make your departure. So those warnings of packs of stray dogs prove true after all.

Traffic, void of trucks, is more pleasant today. Cars still honk 'outta the way' and buses never fail to pass as close as possible, even when given room to move over.

Rasnov is the first stop. It's quite a climb to the fortress but they have a nice exhibit up there. A few people are dressed up in medieval garments. On your exit you see a big group of tourists being driven up in those horse drawn carts, getting the royal tourist treatment.

Bran castle is alright but much over-rated. It is simply teeming with tourists there. It does have a pretty cool secret passage though.

From there it is up over the mountains and down to Sinaia. Here the main attraction is Peles castle. And it is magnificent. It closes at five so you had better hurry though. You make it by 4:30 but the ticket office has already shut. It closes at four. And it won't open again for three days. Fortunately security are nice and allow you to look around briefly and take some pics.

Tomorrow is a long day to Bucharesti so find a hotel, find some pizza, and rest up.

To Bucharesti.: The waitress from hell

Monday March 12, 2007,

130 km (81 miles) – Total so far: 1,717 km (1,067 miles)

Okay, traffic may be heavy but the road is wide with shoulders, oh so lovely shoulders. A constant downhill helps keep the speed up all morning. So why turn off?? Even if you did find that other road it won't be any better than this. Get back on the highway. That's right.

Just before lunch, and about half way is a detour around a large town so you take it. Well the sign says Bucuresti this way. Almost immediately the road turns crap. The surface is horrible and the shoulders have disappeared completely. You make a conscious decision to turn off onto a smaller road for the last sixty km but the sign indicates it is a truck route. You decide to give it a miss. Most interesting and especially scary is when you move over to the left lane to let a big semi-truck turn off to the right. As it passes you on the right another semi-truck passes on the left. It wants to turn off to the right as well. It just wants to overtake the other truck while doing so. You miss being sandwiched between the two.

Sure enough the road improves immediately after joining up

with all the town traffic. The next order of business is to get some lunch. You find a restaurant and order some kind of chicken dish and a coke. But the coke is warm so you try to ask for some ice. Another customer makes matters worse by saying you want 'diet' and she tries to give you a diet pepsi. Eventually ice is procured and you sit down, drink your coke and await your chicken. Half an hour later it still hasn't arrived. You try to ask. Is it coming? Is it being cooked? You know, there aren't any other customers here keeping you busy.

"Two minutes." She tells you. Five minutes later you ask again. Then she comes out with the frozen chips to ask if you want any. Why are they still frozen? You asked for them half an hour ago. You point to your watch to emphasise your point. You get your chicken and that is it. She gives you two gerkins as some kind of salad and later you see how expensive this salad is! Disappointed you pay for your overcharged meal and go. Coming into Bucuresti your nice wide shoulder is replaced by a nice looking sidewalk which is absolutely useless for cycling on.

Cars start to get a bit more aggressive. The white minibuses are the worst, insisting on driving as close as possible and more some irrelevant of how much room they have on the other side. Roadwork is being done which is no great hassle as it slows the traffic and in places allows you your own private road to ride on.

Through town and to the hostel you go. Let's see what this town has to offer.

**Welcome to Bulgaria:
Chased by truckstop whores
Wednesday March 14, 2007,
89 km (55 miles) – Total so
far: 1,806 km (1,122 miles)**

So what did you get up to yesterday in Bucharesti? A couple museums, a couple churches, a palace and a monument or two. Just the usual tourist stuff. It needs to be done and is all very interesting and all. Did you step on anyone's grave to try to take a photo? Probably. But they won't be complaining too much.

You see a Korean couple and take them back to show the hostel. You find a couple guys and hang out with them in the evening. A chance meeting with a lovely local girl sees you head to a nice bar with cool live blues music. Then a club. It is all very fine.

You wake up late. But not that late. A slight headache dogs you for most of the afternoon. You pack and go, saying your goodbyes. Wow. It was great to finally have a crew to hang with.

You follow the signs out of town. The roads are crap and you get the suspicion that you are going 'round in circles. But no, you leave Bucuresti and only then does the road improve. It is a freeway in everything but name. And it is great for cycling on.

Like its equivalent two days previous to the north, wide shoulders give you plenty of room. But a sharp ditch gives an unpleasant feeling every time a truck passes.

You stop to buy chocolate and a gypsy tries to sell you a towel. The language barrier doesn't deter him. You don't need nor want a towel, even one this ugly. Seventy km later and you make it to the border town. Not seeing any other signs you head to the port. You are told to go back four km and turn right. Back in town some guy tries to sell you a camera. Interesting that you first think about not needing it before the moral consideration of buying this obviously stolen object.

You find the bridge and border over the Danube. Bulgarian border control on the other side are friendly. Out on the highway you spot a couple girls, one with her skirt hitched up high showing her ass. They also spot you. The other one waves and starts to run after you. Then reality dawns and you realize just what these girls are; truck stop whores. You keep going before thinking otherwise. Well you could always pitch your tent up somewhere. But nah.

You look back twice. Each time the girl waves frantically after you. A couple more girls are further up. All on the other side of the busy road.

A sign tempts with offers of accommodation sending you into town. You are about to head back to the highway when a hotel is spotted. But it's too expensive. Wait, you're getting confused. He is telling you in Levi, not euro. The price is cheap. And you

are given a discount for being so stingy.

**To Velico Turnov:
Bulgaria in all its beauty
Thursday March 15, 2007,
106 km (66 miles) – Total so
far: 1,912 km (1,188 miles)**

Back out on the heavy highway shoulders are non-existent but drivers aren't as unfriendly as the neighbors to the north. The second dog to chase you in Bulgaria appears. This one has four legs and is a little more vicious. But probably safer all the same.

You stop for a bike to eat. A girl sits nearby. "Sex?" She asks. You turn crimson. She comes over to make matters a little more awkward than they already are. For readers reference the price was fifty levi which is about twenty five euros. You decline her services. The price drops to twenty levi. You should go before you change your mind.

Later at another restaurant sop you see another girl. This one is obviously working. Is that her young daughter in a mini-skirt? No, it's just a midget. A working midget? No, you really shouldn't.

At around four you see three girls standing beside the road. The first makes a minor effort to flaunt her wares. The second chases after you, shouting to stop. And you have a hill to climb.

But those boots are made for walking, not running. The third girl, over the next rise, has very manly features. She doesn't make any attempt to seduce. You leave the girls to flag down some truckies.

Perhaps you are just wearisome but it appears that traffic is less friendly in late evenings. A car waits for a better time to pass but the truck behind it is less patient, honking to indicate its unacceptance.

You make it to Velico Tarnovo. You find the quite empty hostel and head into town for some food and a beer or three.

The town looks a little different from when you were last here five years ago.

**Velico Turnov.: Rest day
Saturday March 17, 2007,
10 km (6 miles) – Total so
far: 2,044 km (1,270 miles)**

A rest day today sees you visit the fortress and a museum. It is all very nice. Later you ride up to a nearby town. There is an old church with frescos. But it is a rest day so you don't want to exert yourself too much. After all, you do have a lot of climbing to do tomorrow as you make your way south towards Plovdiv. And you never know how many girls will be chasing after you.

**On the way to Stara Zagora.:
A nice night to pitch the tent
Saturday March 17, 2007,
122 km (76 miles) – Total so
far: 2,044 km (1,270 miles)**

The hostel breakfast is just too good. You just don't want to leave. Never-the-less, you do. The hostel was difficult to find. There are no signs. Apparently a hotel nearby kept taking them down. The hotel manager dissuades you from your chosen route. "Too dangerous" he says. "Too windy", 'too steep'.

Instead you are sent on a road though longer, has less traffic and is not so steep. Apparently. Either way there is still a mountain to cross. And sure it's a long way up but the ride down is great!

The Cyrillic signs are difficult to follow. Sometimes an Anglo equivalent is given but often not. You head to Stara Zagora. You spot another road, heading roughly in the same direction, still in good condition and minus the traffic. A nearby Sheppard confirms both roads head to the same town. So you take the traffic free one. But the Sheppard wants payment for his services. A candy bar perhaps but you don't have any so you just go.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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