

# **The Mountains of Dragash/Dragaš,** Kosovo: Hiking and Nature Tourism Guide



**Mountain gorge five-minute walk south of Brod- Photo by Todd Wassel**



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Dragash/Dragaš Plain- by Todd Wassel

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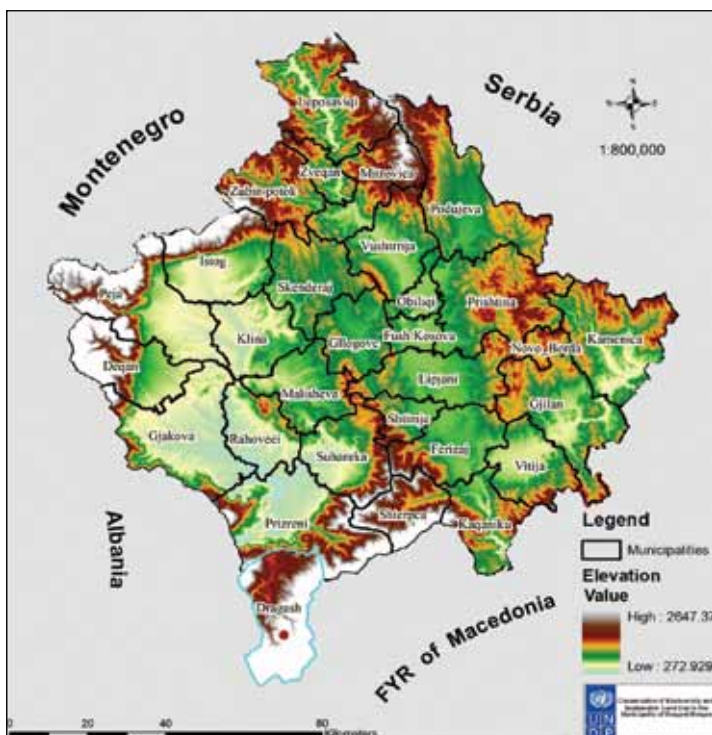
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# PREFACE



## Dear Nature Lovers,

The first time I discovered Dragash/Dragaš it was almost as a challenge to prove it could be done. I had arrived in Kosovo<sup>1</sup> a few months before, and heard amazing tales of beauty and hiking all over the country. However, when it came to Dragash/Dragaš, people became more reserved, “It’s dangerous there” one friend told me. “Their dogs bite,” another warned. Even a popular guidebook cautioned about the horrible roads and lack of infrastructure. Everyone agreed that it had wonderful hiking, but there were no maps and no one could tell me where to hike.



**Map 1: Map of Kosovo**

<sup>1</sup> All references to Kosovo in this guide refer to the UN administered territory under United Nations Security Council resolution 1244.

As I stepped out of my car with friends in the middle of January in the small village of Brod, vast stretches of snow covered the surrounding mountains, and I immediately fell in love with the area, its people, the old stone houses, and the potential for adventure. Everywhere I looked steep mountains thrust into the sky, pristine rivers flowed down their sides, and unmarked paths well known to the local shepherds but undiscovered by the outside world branched out in every possible direction. The drive had only taken 3 hours from Kosovo's capital Prishtinë/ Priština, even with the snow.

This guidebook came from a very simple idea as I made frequent visits back to Dragash/Dragaš, "more people would visit if they knew how." Isolated and forgotten, Dragash/Dragaš is one of the most remote areas in Kosovo, preserving old traditions and a way of life carved out from the surrounding nature. Dragash/Dragaš has amazing potential as a hiking and nature tourism destination if only people knew how to get there and where to go. Its mountains are part of the southern, yet excluded, limb of Kosovo's only national park, the Sharr/Šar National Park. While just across the border the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's (FYR of Macedonia) Mavrovo National Park attracts tens of thousands of tourists each year.

Thus, the idea of this guidebook was born to introduce the world to one of Kosovo's hidden gems and encourage sustainable tourism. We picked our 14 favorite hikes and 4 mountain biking routes, mapped them and provide detailed descriptions on how and where to go, added some local knowledge, places to camp, and out popped this guide. The guide was written with the generous support of the Finnish Government and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in close cooperation and support from the local municipality and the people of Dragash/Dragaš. This is the first guide to Dragash/Dragaš, and the first English guide to Hiking in Kosovo. It is this author's sincere hope that it helps to introduce the would-be tourist or hiker to a place of amazing natural and cultural beauty and through sustainable tourism help to promote but also protect the region for its inhabitants and future generations.

Todd Wassel

United Nations worker, avid hiker and nature lover,  
and founder and writer of the popular travel and adventure blog  
Toddswanderings.com.

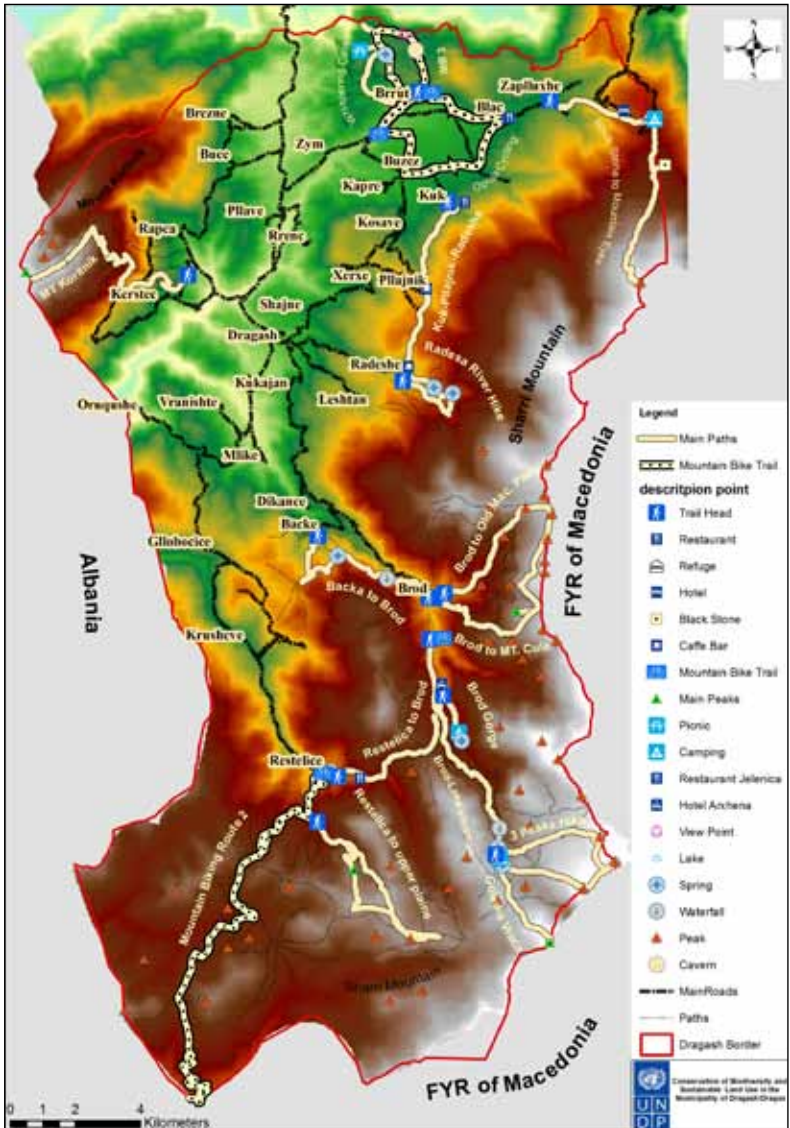
# ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to extend a special thanks to everyone who made this guide possible. First, I would like to thank the generous support of the Finnish Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Dragash/Dragaš Project. Heartfelt thanks also goes to the Municipality of Dragash/Dragaš and its citizens who have opened up their culture and lands to a stranger.

This guide would never have been created if it wasn't for a wide group of hikers who accompanied me on my excursions and who kept their good humor when I got them lost. Thank you to Michal Drozd who first brought me hiking in Dragash/Dragaš, taught me to use my GPS correctly and helped discover new paths. Thanks to Adrian Ouvry, Frank D'Hondt, Kaoru Yamagiwa, Kazuki Matsuura, and Laura Fragiaco for their company on the trails. A big thank you to the UNDP Dragash/Dragaš team, Bashkim Susuri, Ajhan Hadžija, Kaltrina Salihu, Bardh Xërxa, Florian Bemmerlein-Lux and Peter Bank who helped pull information together and complete the maps. Thank you also to Michael Neiman who contributed many of the cultural boxes found in the guide.



**A UNDP organized hike south of Brod- Photo by Todd Wassel**





# WELCOME TO DRAGASH/DRAGAŠ







**Shepherding is one of the main economic pillars of the region-**  
**Photo by Todd Wassel**

The southernmost municipality of Kosovo, Dragash/Dragaš is an oasis of untouched natural beauty and traditional villages sandwiched between the borders of FYR of Macedonia and Albania. Largely ignored by the Yugoslavian Government, the area never received development money for tourism despite its wealth of flora, fauna and cultural traditions. Luckily, this also spared the region the communist era concrete hotels and restaurants that mar similar regions in Kosovo. Unbelievably, over a decade after the NATO bombs ceased, the region is still relatively unknown as persistent rumors of crumbling roads and violent Sharr/Šar dogs have conspired to keep the area isolated mentally if not physically.

The undeveloped mountain range of the Sharr/Šar Mountains is an ideal location for countless outdoor adventures, family excursions and a taste of traditional Kosovo where life marches to the traditional rhythms of nature. Old trade routes to FYR of Macedonia and Albania, still used by local farmers for sheepherding and transporting crops, are easily accessible. The area boasts a wide range of hiking skill levels between basic day hiking and advanced trekking for the more experienced adventurer. You can spend an afternoon hiking, collecting edible mushrooms, horseback riding, mountain biking, backcountry skiing, and or just relaxing in idyllic picnic areas by crystal clear cool mountain rivers.



#### Lost Traditions: Pelivan

Perhaps it is only temporarily extinct, but ever since the end of the conflict the long time tradition of Kosovo wrestling, known as Pelivan, is rarely seen. Matches would normally take place the 1st of May on Labor Day; yet due to a lack of funds to carry forward the festival competition, the Dragash/Dragaš home of the event has been lost. But before such time, people from Albania, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and even Turkey, as well as other parts of Kosovo, would all come to the region to watch and participate in the tournament where the wrestlers would coat themselves in oil and duke it out as drums beat along as background music.



**Wild rose hip is collected for tea- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

The area is blessed with seasonal varieties of natural foods, cultural festivals, and is one of Kosovo's most diverse wildlife areas. Visitors can pick blueberries along mountainsides, enjoy bird watching for species such as the Eurasian Woodcock, the Green Woodpecker, and the Tree Sparrow, or hike through wild patches of Juniper and Rosa canina (rose hip). Local cheeses are a delicacy in the region as is the fresh mouth-watering slow cooked lamb and small-scale natural honey production.

Dragash/Dragaš is mainly mountainous but with distinct natural features in three areas. The Opoja valley in the northern area has a heart of flat agricultural land surrounded by mountains and forest ideal for mushroom picking. The central area around Dragash/Dragaš town is more mountainous with deep river valleys and abundant forests. The southern part of Dragash/Dragaš is striking in its almost complete lack of trees, towering mountains, and rolling alpine fields.

The municipality has 36 villages, including Dragash/Dragaš, which share a mixed cultural diversity of Albanian, Gorani, Bosnian, and even remnants of the Turkish era. The small villages, lined with traditional Ottoman era stone houses, are a breath of fresh air away from the large cities that dominate modern life.





**The high plains in the south along the border with FYR of Macedonia- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## NATIONAL PARK

The Sharr/Šar Mountains is the range of peaks that runs along southern Kosovo, northwestern FYR of Macedonia, and northeastern Albania. The mountain range first appears in a map produced by Ptolemy in the 1st century AD as Scardus, Scodrus, or Scordus. The current name is believed to have evolved from this older usage. However, a more poetic, explanation for the mountain range being named "Sharr" is the meaning of 'saw' or saw-like in Albanian which refers to the mountains visual image cutting up and down along the border of the two countries.

The highest peak is Mount Korab at 2,764m in both FYR of Macedonia and Albania, followed by Mount Tito 2,747m, Mal Turčin 2,702m, Borislavec 2,662m, and Rudoka 2,610m. The entire Dragash/Dragaš Municipality is within the Sharr/Šar Mountain Range. However, the current Kosovo Sharr/Šar National Park (established in 1986) does not yet extend into the Dragash/Dragaš area. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), through the support of the Finnish Government, is supporting the Government of Kosovo and the Municipality of Dragash/Dragaš in the process of including part of the Dragash/Dragaš territory in the Sharr/Šar National Park. At the time of printing of this guide the government of Kosovo had not yet made a final decision on the expansion of the park.

# GENERAL INFORMATION





**Winter in Brod,  
Dragash/Dragaš- Photo  
by Todd Wassel**

## ARRIVAL

While there are a few small dirt roads that enter Dragash/Dragaš there is only one main paved road into this isolated part of Kosovo. The main road is accessed along the road from Prizren to Kukës, Albania. This is the road that can be used whether you are coming from Albania in the South, from Prishtinë/Priština in the North, from Prizren, which is the closest tourist destination to Dragash/Dragaš, from Brezovicë/Brezovica in the West through the gorgeous Zhupa/Župa valley, or even from Peja/Peć to the East.

No matter where you come from, your main access will be at the turn off through the town of Zhur/Žur.

There are no trains in this part of Kosovo and the closest bus station is in Prizren. From here you can take the once daily bus to the town of Dragash/Dragaš (see the schedule in the Annex at end of the guide), or the more costly but flexible option of hiring a taxi or a minivan. The drive from Prizren to the town of Dragash/Dragaš takes about 40 minutes.

## ACCOMODATION

Simple accommodation is available in the main towns listed in this guide. Dragash/Dragaš has not yet developed a variety of accommodation options and most accommodation is in the form of basic hotels or more basic private home stays. For those looking for more elabo-



rate accommodation, Prizren offers a number of choices. The hotels listed here are done for information purposes only and no recommendation is ascribed to them other than as a resource to visitors.

## SEASONS & CLIMATE

From the end of April when the snow begins to melt until well into October, Dragash/Dragaš is an ideal area for hiking. Each season offers a unique quality. In the spring the alpine fields burst into color as they are blanketed with blossoms and the grass is a deep vibrant green. In the summer the upper mountains finally lose their snow and you can spend longer periods out enjoying the long clear views. The autumn is cool and crisp but you are rewarded as the forested areas light up in spectacular hues of red and orange. The winter offers its own excitement with snowshoeing and backcountry skiing opportunities.

If you are hiking in early spring or late autumn be careful of camping in the higher altitudes as the temperature often drops to at least 0° Celsius (32° Fahrenheit) and the snow lingers on the ground longer than in the lower altitudes. Most hikes above 1,900 meters will still have snow on the trails and hiking areas into May and the trails can be easily lost.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Tourism depends equally on the quality of natural environments, human environments, resources and culture heritage. It goes without saying that all visitors to Dragash/Dragaš should create as little impact on the natural environment as possible. This means packing out all trash that you bring in, including human waste; not using natural resources for fires, and exercising extreme caution when using burners for cooking. Dragash/Dragaš is just starting to develop the necessary rules and regulations required to protect from an increase in tourism. Visitors should respect this and leave Dragash/Dragaš cleaner than when they arrived.

Sustainable tourism, however, is more than just protecting the natural environment while hiking and camping. It means proper consideration of host communities, cultures, customs, lifestyles, and

social and economic systems. It is tourism that truly benefits those who are on the receiving end, and that does not exploit and degrade the environment in which they live and from which they must earn a living after the last tourist has flown back home. Please practice tourism that enhances the material life of local communities, without causing a loss of traditional employment systems, acculturation or social disruption.



**Dragash/Dragaš is still trying to develop a sustainable waste management system. Please do your part to protect the environment- Photo by UN-HABITAT 2010**

## CAMPING

There are no official camping areas in Dragash/Dragaš. Two areas have been marked on the map as suitable for camping near Brod where there are springs for drinking. However, there are many suitable areas in the backcountry. The mountain huts belong to the shepherds and should not be used. Firewood is not available and any camping should be done with the maximum care not to spoil the surrounding nature.

If firewood is necessary please arrange for its delivery by local guides who can arrange the wood to be packed in by horse and ensure it has not been illegally harvested from protected areas.

## WATER

Due to the natural structure of Dragash/Dragaš springs are plentiful and often taps have been created to supply consistent water to the locals working and living in the area. An effort has been made to indicate springs on hiking trails. Bottled water can also be bought at the main towns listed in the guide. At higher elevations (above 1,700 meters) springs become more difficult to find. You should always carry a sufficient supply of drinking water (about 2 liters) and make sure to fill up your supply whenever possible. Plastic water bottles should never be left behind and care should be taken to make sure they are disposed of in proper trash bins.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING & HORSEBACK RIDING



**Dragash/Dragaš Horses- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

Dragash/Dragaš offers a large possibility of wonderful mountain biking trails. However, as with hiking trails, the marking of routes is still in the planning stages. We have included 4 mountain biking routes that offer easy access and

in some cases are also along hiking paths. Enterprising mountain bikers can find many more possibilities by following the local road system, the southern plain areas with the old dirt roads, or by following the larger animal paths.

There is also great potential for horseback riding in the area and some farmers offer rides on well trodden tracks, however, no formal businesses have yet captured this market. The shepherds, local residents, and traders packing their goods across the borders still rely heavily on small, sturdy horses to navigate the surrounding paths and deliver supplies to those living in remote areas with flocks of sheep.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

You should always be properly equipped and prepared before setting out even on the easiest of trails. The weather in Dragash/Dragaš can change very quickly and at altitude severe and sudden storms and a rapid drop in temperature pose a very real danger. The higher altitudes and the southern hiking areas of Dragash/Dragaš are marked by their alpine pastures where there is little to no shelter. Fog is another real danger and can descend upon the region quickly. It is recommended that you use a GPS device so that you can track your way out in case of fog.

Danger from wild animals (insect or snake bites) is rare, although there are snakes in the area and you will see them often on the trails. Caution should be used in all dealings with snakes. Domestic dogs pose one of the greatest risks in the area (see below). You should avoid dense vegetation, as some plants can be poisonous.



**Nettle**

**Nettle** is a common plant in the mountains and if rubbed up against causes an allergic reaction where the skin turns red, swells and becomes itchy almost immediately upon contact.

As there are currently no hiking route markers or officially established paths beyond the commonly used shepherd paths, caution should be taken to stay on routes marked on the map.

The mountains of Dragash/Dragaš can turn steep and slippery very quickly, and can end in large cliffs. When in doubt it is best to back-track the way you came.

**Mines and unexploded ordinances** from past conflicts pose a minimal, but present risk. As of 2010 NATO has cleared the region of mines and current maps do not show any high-risk zones. The routes in this guide have been chosen to coincide with areas in use by locals. However, there is always a chance of encountering an undiscovered mine. Sticking to the routes marked in this guide will minimize this danger.

## A word of Caution about Sharr/Šar Dogs (Illyrian Shepherd)



**Sharr/Šar dog protecting a shepherd's hut- Photo by Todd Wassel**

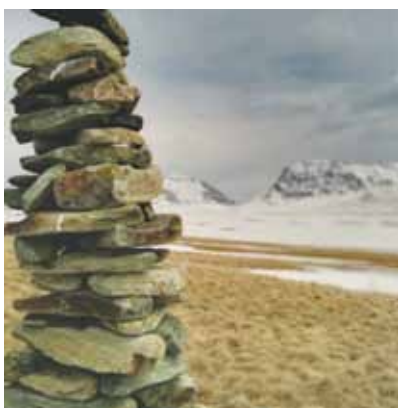
These beautiful dogs are only found in this area of the world. They are large and are VERY protective of the sheep and territory they guard. It is their job after all. If you come across a flock of sheep or a shepherd's hut, most likely there will also be Sharr/Šar dogs around. A local shepherd gave me this advice:

"Don't worry too much about the dogs. They hardly ever bite humans, but you should keep your distance, as they are protective of the sheep and their territory. When you are passing by just give them enough distance. They will bark, but don't be afraid. Sharr/Šar dogs are the best!"

I've followed this advice and have not had any problems to date. Although I have had plenty of the dogs bark at me to their hearts content. But there are plenty of reports of hikers being bitten although the circumstances surrounding each bite are unknown. When hiking in the wilderness it is best to be safe as help is a long way off. Keep a fair distance from the dogs just to be on the safe side, even if it means hiking a bit out of your way.

## EMERGENCIES

There is no federal or municipal mountain rescue service available in the event of an emergency. Dragash/Dragaš is a remote area and it is best to try to get the help of locals. Before setting out mark the nearest settlement or dirt road and try to reach it in case of an emergency. Use a cell phone to report your GPS location (if you have it) to the Dragash/Dragaš Police at: (192 or 029) 281 017



**Stone marker along Restelicë/Restelica Upper Plains Hike- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## ORIENTATION AND ROUTES

The mapping and posting of hiking trails in Dragash/Dragaš is still at its beginning stage. It is planned to use this guidebook as a first step in marking and maintaining trails. However, to date there are no clear signposts or markings for any hikes in Dragash/Dragaš. For most hikes the maps

provided here should have enough detail to guide you. However, it is suggested for safety that you bring a GPS with you and download the trail routes. GPS tracks are available for download on the Internet and downloadable links are provided on each of the route descriptions below. The GPS tracks are in KML format that can be viewed easily on Google Earth and also converted to formats used by most GPS devices. At the very least a compass is always a good idea.

There is much still to discover in Dragash/Dragaš and the experienced hiker and mountain biker can venture off the described routes. However, care should always be taken and maps and local knowledge are always recommended. Please also be aware of the impact of hiking on the natural surrounds and stick to well worn routes to minimize damage to the environment.

## EQUIPMENT

Sturdy hiking boots with good soles, clothing to protect from wind and rain, and the sun in the summer (including a wide brimmed hat), are all essential for long hikes in Dragash/Dragaš, especially when going to the more remote and high elevations. Your backpack should contain sufficient food, drinking water (1.5 to 2 liters per person), a change of clothing, and extra warm clothes for layering when it gets cold, including gloves. Hiking poles help to take the strain off your knees when hiking down the steep Dragash/Dragaš slopes and help conserve energy when climbing up. A compass and/or GPS device is essential not only for hikers going off the trails and into the backcountry, but also in the event of a sudden change in weather that reduces visibility.

## TELEPHONE

Cell phone reception is generally good in most villages in Dragash/Dragaš. The further you hike to the south and the higher you hike the weaker the signal becomes.

## REFRESHMENTS

Small restaurants and shops are available in all the major towns listed in the guide. Dragash/Dragaš Town has the largest number of shops and places to eat but you can find simple provisions, including water and coffee in most to the smaller villages. It is not unusual to be invited for coffee, or a snack by friendly locals. It is considered very rude to reject such invitations.

## LANGUAGE

The primary languages spoken in Dragash/Dragaš are Albanian and Bosnian Serbian, with some locals speaking limited English. Due to the high rates of migrant workers very often you can find people who can also speak German or Italian.



## LOCAL FOODS and DRINK

Nothing helps you get to know the local area like eating traditional dishes and drinking like the locals. Some flavors that you can easily find in restaurants are:

**Sharr/Šar Cheese** – considered by many to be the most delicious in Kosovo, this peculiar cheese is highly salted to aid with preservation and is only found in the Dragash/Dragaš and Sharr/Šar regions.

**Byrek/Burek** – meat, cheese, or vegetables inside fried dough.

**Božë/Boza** – fermented traditional wheat drink.

**Qebapa/Ćevapi** – small sausages usually cooked on an open grill, served with roasted pepper, pita like bread, and a side of cabbage salad

**Gjyveçë/ Ćuveč** – roasted vegetable stew

**Kos/Kiselo mleko** – thick yogurt

**Ajvar** – mashed red peppers made into a sauce

**Flija** – usually prepared outside on top of hot coals, in a large round pan, this multi-layered pancake like batter is cooked one layer at a time. When one layer has been heated long enough another layer of flour, water, and oil is poured on. It is usually eaten with a side of yogurt, jam and sometimes peppers.

Traditional food from Gora region:

**Sarma/Sarme** – Minced meat with rice rolled in cabbage leaves

**Traditional wedding soup-** prepared with meat and cow brains (yes, it is delicious!)

Special pies filled with cheese, meat, cabbage etc: Vitkanica, Zelmanik



**Bee Keeper at work- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

## LOCAL PRODUCTS

**Natural Honey** – bee keeping and honey production is a large source of income in Dragash/Dragaš due to the abundant natural pollination through flowers and pine.

**Sharr/Šar Cheese**

**Medicinal Herbs**

**Traditional Clothing**

No touristic center is available in Dragash/Dragaš territory, but if you are interested in any of these items, you can directly ask villagers and if it is the correct season you may be able to find and buy them.

One NGO, with available English speaking staff, that has been promoting Tourism development in Dragash/Dragaš is NGO “Renesansa” from Rapçë/Rapča village, Contact: Suad Tosuni, Mobile: 044 561 081, E-mail: [renesansa2004@yahoo.com](mailto:renesansa2004@yahoo.com)



**Traditional Clothing- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

## INFORMATION

There is currently no information center in Dragash/Dragaš. The Municipality is working on producing its Municipal Development Plan and within this a tourism strategy. It is expected that some tourist information center may soon be made available for visitors but the timing and type of information is still not known.

### Important Festivals in Dragash/Dragaš

**February 17**, Kosovo Independence Day

**March 8**, International Women's Day

**March 14**, Verza (Spring Festival) Harvest Festival for preparing the fields for the next season.

**May 6**, St. George's Day; villages such as Brrut/Brut (April 23), have community celebrations in the forest, rejoicing their belief in god, multi-religious commonality, and life.

**May 6**, Gorani Day: In the Gora region the Day of Gorani is celebrated with traditional music 'tupan' and costumes. The main place of gathering for people from Gora region is at the place called Vlaska <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERzjdRgAU-A> near Vranishtë/Vranište village

Wedding ceremonies in Gora villages are also held mainly on May 6th, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x\\_DS4u0K5U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x_DS4u0K5U) [this is a recording from a weddings in Brod village]. On the 7th they gather in Rapçë/Rapča village. On The 10th gatherings take place in Restelicë/Restelica village, this gathering is called Youth Day, and if financial situation is not bad, traditional horse races would take place

**May (date to be determined)**: Aulona International Folk Festival: celebrated with music and dance, in various villages each year as a tribute to Drenas/Glogovac and Rapsha; observed in 2009 in village Bresanë/Brodosavce near Blaç/Bljač. [www.aulonafolk-festival.com](http://www.aulonafolk-festival.com)



Spring Festival- Photo by Bashkim Susuri

# HIKING ROUTES

## HIKING NEAR DRAGASH/DRAGAŠ

Hiking near the main town of Dragash/Dragaš can accommodate both the beginner and the advanced hiker. The main towns for exploring the area are the capital Dragash/Dragaš, the Gorani village of Rapçë/Rapča with the towering Mt. Koritnik behind it, and the sleepy village of Radeshë/Radeša located at the opening of a gorgeous river canyon.

### Dragash/Dragaš

Population: Approximately 37,000

The main town in Dragash/Dragaš Municipality and the main staging point for nearby hikes is the aptly named Town of Dragash/Dragaš. The town lies at the fork leading to both the Brod Valley and the Restelicë/Restilica Valley and deserves a quick stop if you are looking to load up on more than basic provisions. The town boasts a small supermarket, numerous byrek/burek and bread shops, and 3-4 restaurants in the full sense of the word. If you are looking for pizza, pasta or other European fare this is the only place you will find it in Dragash/Dragaš. Fridays are market days when villages from surrounding areas collect and sell a variety of daily goods and essential items.

#### **Where to eat and stay:**

##### Restaurants in Dragash/Dragaš Area

**Restaurant “PALMA”**, first restaurant when entering Dragash/Dragaš town on the right.

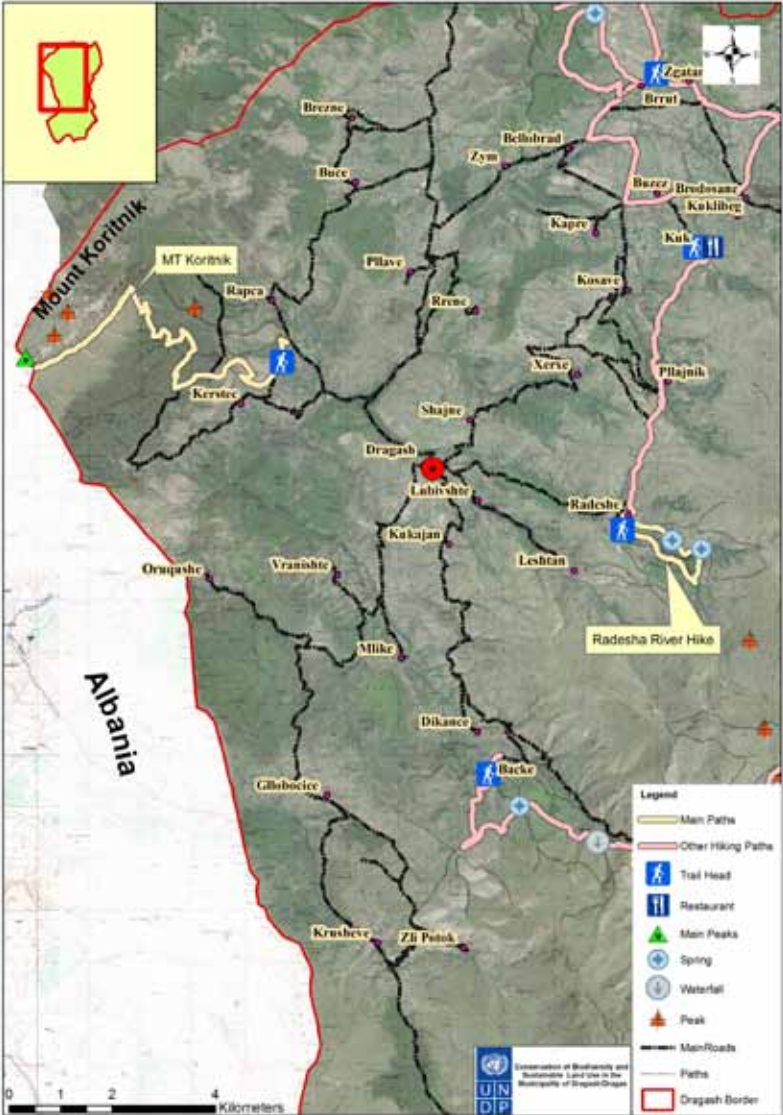
Contact Person:

Besim Zyberi 045/659660

049/244988

Working hours 08:00-23:00

Location: Entrance of Dragash/Dragaš coming from Zhur/Žur.



### **Restaurant “Venezia”**

Contact Person:

Hajri Tershnjaku 044/265843

Lirian Tershnjaku (English) 044/313883

Working hours: 07:00-22:00

Location: Sheshi i Dëshmorëve-Center of Dragash/Dragaš across from the Municipal Building

### **Restaurant “Kasablanka”**

Contact Person:

Sead Ibrahim (English, Russian) 044/107635

044/511279

Working hours: 10:00-24:00

Location: On the way to Restelicë/Restilica

### **Restaurant “Vidikovac”**

Contact Person:

Sala Elezi (English not fluently) 044/327153

Working hours: 07:00-22:00

Location: On the way to Restelicë/Restilica 1km from Dragash/Dragaš

### **Restaurant “Dasma”**

Contact person: Selvet Qollopeku Mobile: 044 218 727 (Speaks basic English, French, German, Italian and Spanish)

Working hours: 08:00-24:00

Location: Village Zym/Zjum, 1 km from the junction to Opoja region known as so called “Tyrbe”, on the road Prizren –Zhur/Žur – Dragash/Dragaš

Currently there are no places to stay in the Town of Dragash/Dragaš. Renovation is ongoing at an old Yugoslavia era hotel, but as of the time of going to print it was not completed yet.





**River that runs through the Radeshtë/Radeša canyon-  
Photo by Todd Wassel**

## RADESHË/RADEŠA RIVER HIKE

This is one of the easiest hikes in this guidebook. Besides a short steep area with a barely visible trail, the hike is quite flat and well trodden. The path follows a beautiful river through a stunning beech forest into one end of a canyon and then out along a separate river coming out of a nearby canyon that marks this Y shaped river system. The route follows a loop and provides the opportunity to end the hike walking through the main section of Radeshtë/Radeša which boasts a number of Ottoman era stone buildings.

**STARTING/ENDING POINT:** Entrance to Radeshtë/Radeša village

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1350 meters;

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1550 meters

**DISTANCE:** 4.95 km

**DURATION:** 2 hour loop hike

**DIFFICULTY:** Moderate. There is some climbing involved in the middle of the hike. Specifically there is one area where a short steep climb through the grass is necessary, followed by a steep, but well marked switch back trail. The paths can get confusing and easily lost here but luckily you are not far from town.



**Map 4: RADESHE/RADESA RIVER HIKE MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Radesha.kmz>

## Route Description



**Can you make out the face?**  
- Photo by Todd Wassel

The beginning of this hike is accessed before you reach the town of Radeshtë/Radeša. Just before the bridge leading to the steep climb to the main town there is a dirt road that forks off to the right. Follow this road along the right side of the river as it gradually climbs in elevation until the river is left far below.

After about 10 minutes the path will fork with a dirt road to the right, a dirt road going down to

the river on the left, and the path continuing straight but slightly left. Stay straight/left and follow the path into the beech forest.

The path winds its way back down to the river and into the canyon. Along the way don't forget to pause to marvel at the Old Illyrian in the Rock, a large bolder on the right hand side of the path that when viewed from the correct angle looks like an old man with droopy moss covered eyes and a classic Kosovar Albanian white hat.

The path comes to an end at a handmade wooden bridge. It is not long, nor is the water deep, but be careful, it is narrow and can be slippery. Across the river follow the path about 20 meters up the hill until you come to a barely noticeable fork. Turn to the left along a very small, but manageable animal path that cuts across the grassy hill. Follow the grassy hill up (there is no path so consult the map) until you reach the top and the path reveals itself once again. This is the trickiest part of the trail. If you get lost just keep heading up into clear land until you can see the other river and head down towards it.

The path begins its sharp decent, switching back and forth until you reach a concrete bridge and a wonderful river. Take a break and drink the cold running water from the established spring. Take a left after the bridge and follow the large path back towards Radeshtë/Radeša along the river. The path will deliver you along the top of the hill near the town's graveyard. Wind your way back through the town's stone

streets staying left at each fork, until you pass the mosque to your left and you descend along the main road back to where you started.



**Wedding ceremony - Photo by Leonor Lopez**



**Gorani Wedding Costumes-  
Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

### Weddings

No matter if you are Albanian or Gorani, during the summer months just before the start of Ramadan, Kosovo is home to a wedding surplus. On average, most villages seem to have at least two weddings a day. Every day throughout July, day-long parties of community festivities spill out onto the streets. They begin with dancing, drumming, and blowing of the Zurla, a trumpet like instrument. Often the traffic comes to a standstill trying to pass the crowds in the roads. Since the advent of cars, weddings have incorporated long caravans of dressed up vehicles passing throughout the cities or villages, and honking car horns tirelessly and waving white handkerchiefs and flags out the window.







**Mt Koritnik dominates Dragash/Dragaš and the Sharr/Šar Mountains with its distinct fingers of snow near the top- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## MOUNT KORITNIK

Mount Koritnik is one of the main mountains in Dragash/Dragaš municipality with the richest biodiversity and affords amazing views over the Sharr/Šar Mountains to the east and the Accursed Mountains in Albania to the west. The heavily forested mountain transitions to a definitive tree line where high altitude fields prevail filled with flowers in the spring and mushrooms in the fall. At most times of the year you will find snow at the top, so come prepared for colder weather.

STARTING/ENDING POINT: Old Quarry Past Town of Rapçë/Rapča

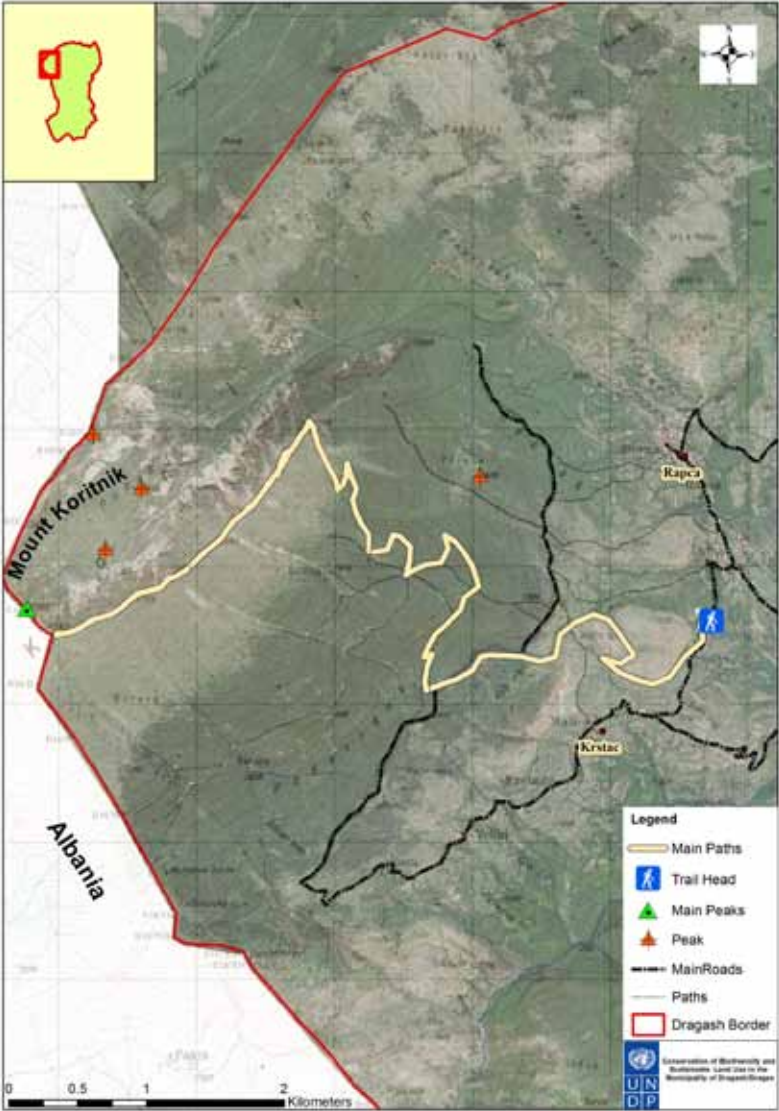
STARTING ELEVATION: 950 meters

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 2395 meters

DISTANCE: 13.07 km

DURATION: 7-8 hours round trip

DIFFICULTY: Medium. This is a very long hike, but the length helps to ease the elevation that needs to be climbed to reach the top. Except for the last 1 hour the whole hike is along an old forestry road.





## Route Description

The starting point for this hike is a small quarry past the town of Rapçë/Rapča. After entering Rapçë/Rapča by car take the left fork in the center of town and follow the road up and to the left (ignore the first right hand turn after the centre split). The road will eventually open up views to the valley below. After about 1 km there will be a dirt road that breaks off to the right. Follow this and you will see the small quarry just after the turn on your right. Park your car here. If you are being dropped off then you can have your driver bring you further up the road.

This is the main dirt road you will follow all the way to the top of the mountain. About fifteen minutes after leaving the quarry you will come to Fork #1 in the road. Turn to the right (the left goes to a small village) and continue on. After some time you will enter



**Orchid- Photo by Todd Wassel**

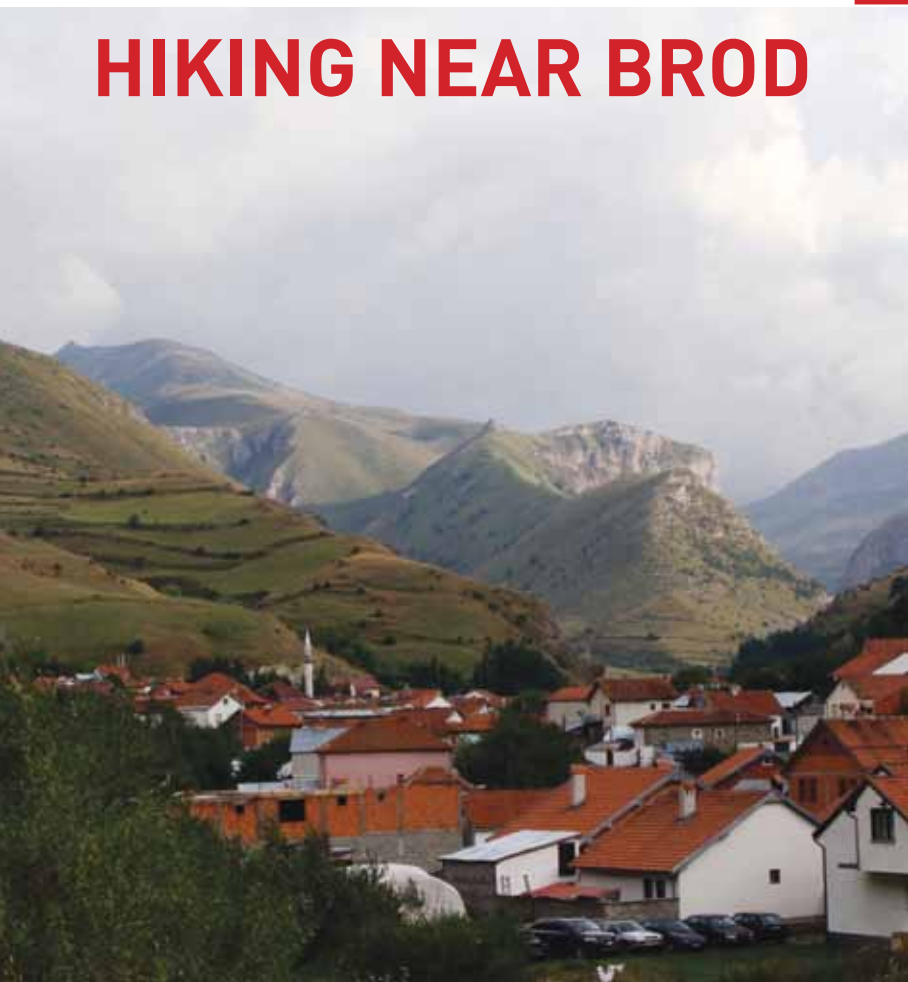
the wooded area and will come to Fork #2, follow this to the right as well. Are you starting to see a pattern?

Continue up the logging road until you come to Fork #3. There will be a green dumpster to reassure you that you're on the right path. Turn right at this fork as well. Keep hiking until you come to Fork #4 and, you guessed

it, you turn to the right. This right hand turn ensures that you will make it to the top and not over the border into Albania!

This was the last turn and you follow this road all the way out of the trees until the road ends. From here you follow the path along the ridgeline for about 1 ½ hours until you reach the top of the mountain. There are actually two tops, each holding a pile of rocks. Sit, relax, enjoy the amazing views and gather your strength before you head back home following the exact path you climbed up.

# HIKING NEAR BROD



## **Brod**

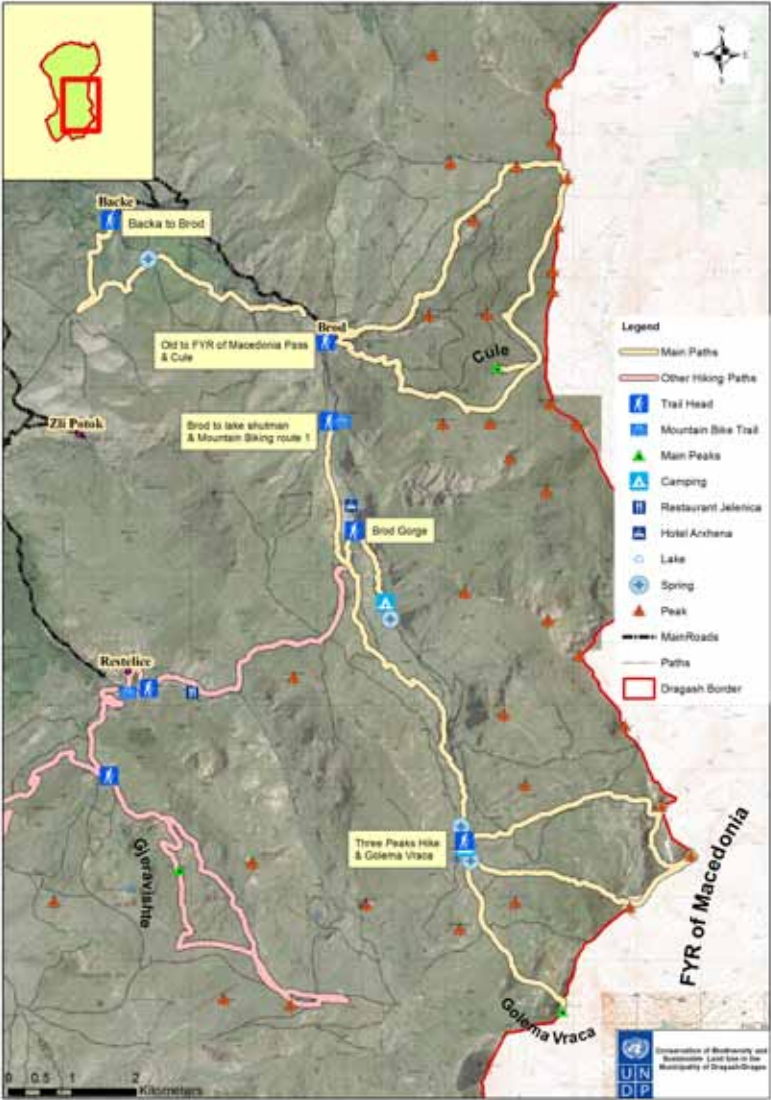
Population: 1000



**The village of Brod-**  
**Photo by Todd Wassel**

Southern Dragash/Dragaš is filled with enormous mountains, sweeping alpine fields and a variety of options for outdoor sports from hiking in the spring, summer and fall, to skiing in the winter. Brod, one of the main Gorani villages, is located on the eastern side of Dragash/Dragaš separated by striking mountains from its more southwesterly neighbor Restelicë/Restelica. Just being in Brod makes you feel like you are deep in the heart of the Sharr/Šar Mountains surrounded by gigantic monuments of nature from mountains, to cliffs, to rushing rivers.

This small village is one of two key entranceways into Dragash/Dragaš's most undiscovered southern territory, and is an ideal base to explore the hikes in this area. This small traditional Gorani village still has many traditional Ottoman buildings and stone houses along the river. There is one school, two mosques, one small medical facility, a pharmacy, two Internet cafes, and four markets. For families looking for easy hikes, and peaceful picnicking areas Brod is the ideal choice.



Map 6: Hiking Near Brod Region Overview Map

You are more likely to encounter horses or cows on the narrow stone streets than another car. Among the locals there are still around one hundred cows where the long tradition of making yogurt, cheese and milk is still followed and the cheese is considered some of the best in Kosovo. Brod used to be the most developed town in the municipality, by serving as an important trading and handicraft center. However, in 1912 a large number of inhabitants migrated to Turkey with the retreat of the Ottoman Empire.

On the outskirts of the village are mountain fields of juniper and other herbal plants. During July and August half the village scours the fields for wild blueberries collecting close to a hundred tons each year.

Beyond Brod the wilderness opens up and the mountains pierce the sky along the FYR of Macedonian border. Breathtaking gorges, mountain lakes, clear rivers, and open fields filled with wildflowers in spring await the adventurous hiker. One can bird watch, roam alongside wandering sheep and cows, and possibly catch a glimpse of lynx or isolated wolves while wild goats skip amongst the crags along the highest peaks.

The Brod area has the most developed tourist facilities in the area and it is easy to spend a day picnicking along the river near the Arxhena hotel, or eating in the hotel's restaurant.



**Brod children with their dog - Photo by Todd Wassel**

### Where to eat and stay:

-**Hotel Arxhena** and restaurant: €30 a night with breakfast; Address: 22000 Dragash/Dragaš, Brod village; phone: +381 (0) 29 285 170; Email: info@arxhena.com; Website: www.arxhena.com

Location: Past Brod about 1-2 kilometers along the dirt road that leaves the village to the south.

-**Home Stays** with Biljgaip Zilje tel 044/967004 (only speaks local languages)

Available: two rooms with two beds in each room and toilet, no meal provided at the moment.

**English speaking person in Brod organizing camping services for groups:** Ajhan Hadžija: ajhanhadzija@yahoo.com local phone number (044 561 303)

-**Restaurant Ramće** phone: 0292 85 119; this restaurant is ideal after a day of hiking. Eat fresh lamb, local cheese and roasted vegetables. Arrive before noon and you'll have a chance to spot wild mountain goats in the cliffs above.

Location: just before Arxhena Hotel on the right.



Guided hiking and camping trip south of Brod- Photo by Todd Wassel





**Mt Çule/Ćule, it looks closer than it really is! - Photo by Todd Wassel**

## **BROD TO MT. ÇULE/ĆULE**

This is one of the quickest hikes from Brod that allows you to climb high enough to view the surrounding mountain range. The hike starts to climb immediately and there are few flat areas. There are many small paths branching off of the main shepherd's path, which can make things confusing at times, but Mt. Çule/Ćule is always in site so it's easy enough to navigate towards.

**STARTING/ENDING POINT:** The Town of Brod

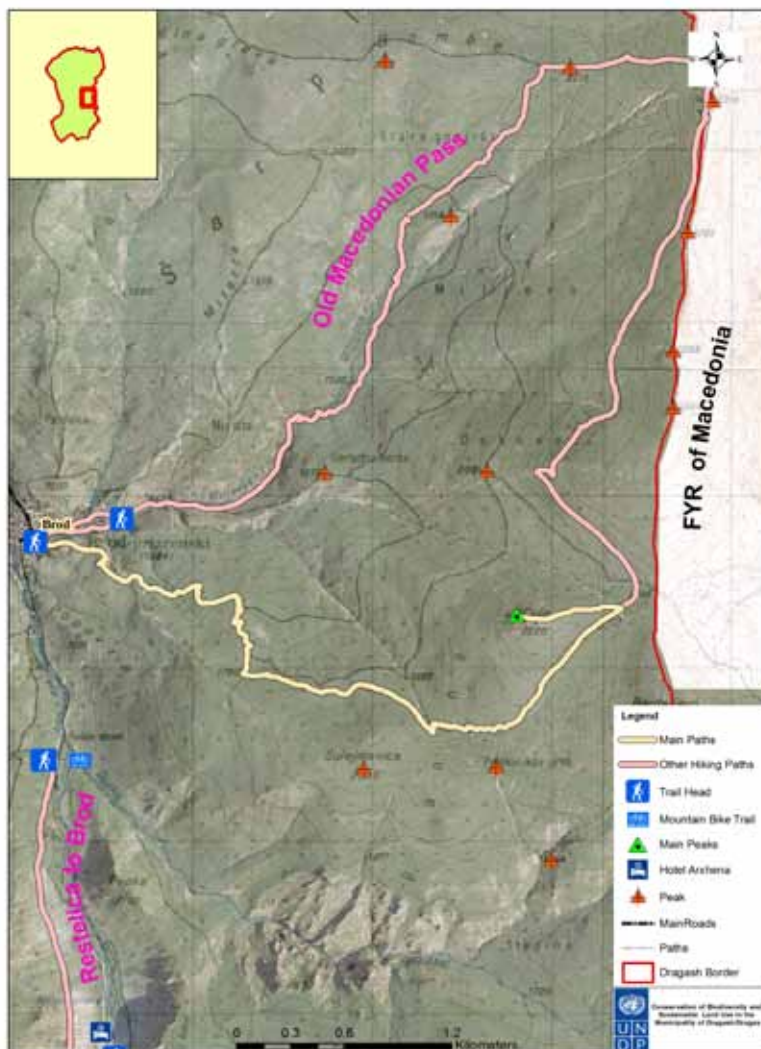
**STARTING ELEVATION:** Brod-1384 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** Mt. Çule/Ćule- 2220 meters

**DISTANCE:** 5.76 km

**DURATION:** 4 hours round trip

**DIFFICULTY:** Hard, due to steepness of the climb. There is nothing technically difficult about this hike other than the steepness.



**Map 7: BROD TO MT. ÇULE/ĆULE HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Cule.kmz>

## Route Description

As you approach Brod from the North, Mt. Çule/Ćule and its rocky pyramid shaped peak becomes immediately recognizable as it looms majestically over the small village.



The path starts from the southern edge of the town, across the river and up the hill from the community center. The town is not very big so just ask anyone in town for Çule/Ćule (pronounced “Chule”) and they should be able to point you in the right direction. You will find a lot of shepherd’s trails but follow the main ones up the mountain and towards the rock peak to the southeast (that’s Çule/Ćule!). There are no markers here so follow the map as best you can. The good news is that there are no trees and it is easy to navigate by sight alone.

After about an hour of steep hiking you will come to a stream. Cross it and follow it up the mountain. You will see Mt. Çule/Ćule up on your left. Continue up along the stream until you are just past the peak and then turn to your left and climb the peak from behind where the grass leads up to the top.



**These mushrooms belong to the highly poisonous Amanitaceae family. Mushroom picking is possible in Dragash/Dragaš but should always be done with a trained guide or expert.- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

#### Responsible Mushroom and Blueberry Picking

For many locals, picking blueberries and other produce from the mountainside is a significant portion of their livelihood. If you are like me, and love the excitement of finding, picking, and eating blueberries, wild strawberries, and edible mushrooms from the mountainside please remember to not over-pick. Take just enough for an enjoyable meal, but do not take more than you need. Responsible preservation of the edible nature helps to sustain not only the local population, but also visitors who are interested in getting closer to nature.

**WARNING: There are a number of poisonous mushrooms in Dragash/Dragaš. Please only pick mushrooms with a trained guide or expert.**



Hiking along the border with FYR of Macedonia- Photo by Todd Wassel

## BROD to the OLD FYR OF MACEDONIAN PASS

This can be a challenging hike but also has the possibility of ending early on the shorter version. If you take the longer hike to the border with FYR of Macedonia you will be rewarded with stunning views into both FYR of Macedonia's dramatic mountains as well as across the whole of Dragash/Dragaš and back into Albania.

STARTING POINT: The Town of Brod near the cemetery

ENDING POINT: Mt. Çule/Ćule hike starting point (long hike); Re-trace back to cemetery (short hike)

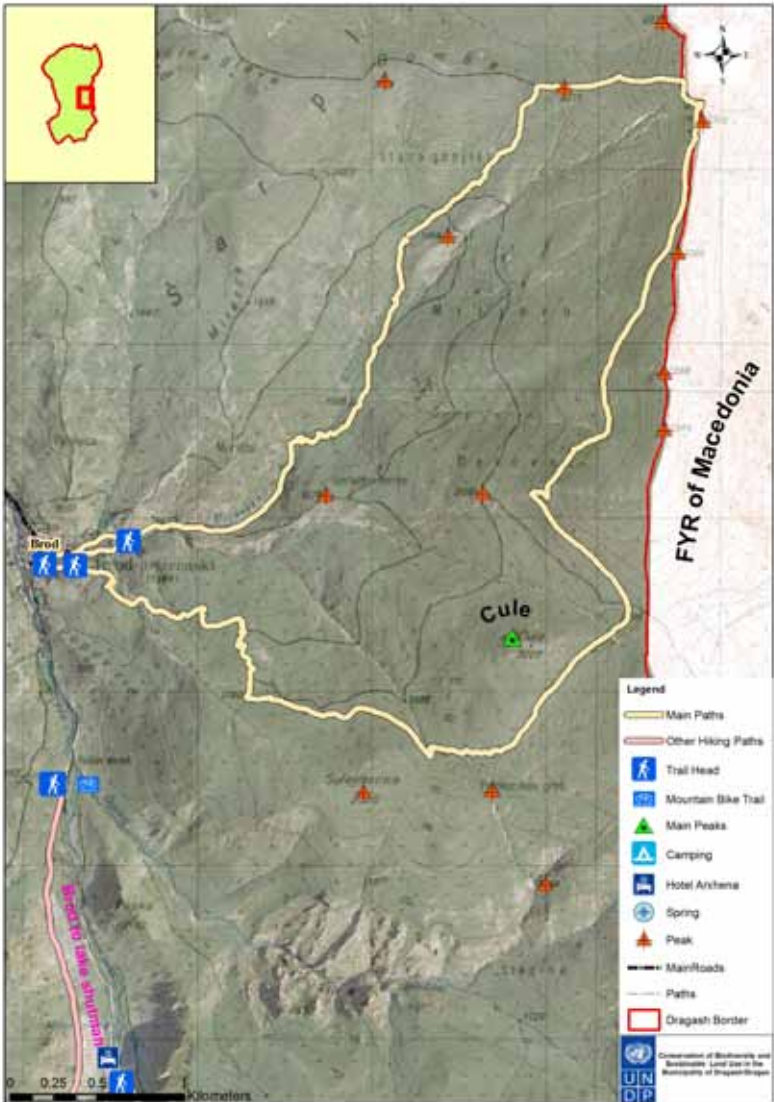
STARTING ELEVATION: Brod-1384 meters

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 2265 meters

DISTANCE: 15.76 km

DURATION: 7 hours (long hike); 1 1/2 hours (short hike)

DIFFICULTY: Hard for the long hike due to steepness and lack of easily recognizable trails. Easy for the short hike as the trail is clear and there is very few steep parts.



**Map 8: BROD to the OLD FYR OF MACEDONIAN PASS HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Brod-OldMac-Pass.kmz>

## Route Description

The path starts on the eastern edge of Brod. Enter the town from the Dragash/Dragaš road and turn left when the road ends. Follow the river up past the mosque until you reach the edge of town with the cemetery above to the left. Climb up the steep hill until you see the source of the river flowing out of the narrow gorge.

Follow the river and the gorge for about 40 minutes until you reach a large boulder towering over the river. From here climb up the hill to the right until you are above the boulder and you see a path that takes you to a flat area (perfect for camping) and a spring to fill water bottles further on. This is where the easy hike ends and the longer hike continues.

Follow the path through the valley until it ends at a river. Cross the river and climb the mountain following a small goat path up to the left of a sharp peak and around it to the right and then up, up, up. Your goal is the top of the mountain, so feel free to get there any way that makes sense. Once you reach the top, after a long and steep climb, you will see the top on your right. This is where you will see the old wagon tracks and the remnants of a stone rest house. Keep going up to the right until you reach a drop off and magnificent views of FYR of Macedonia where Mt. Tito pokes its sharp head into the sky. From here you start your return to Brod by keeping FYR of Macedonia on your left and the valley you hiked through on your right far, far below.

Make your way until you see the point of Mt Çule/Ćule to your left with the town of Brod below on your right. Turn to the south until Çule/Ćule is on your right and follow the contours of the path and mountain until you reach Çule/Ćule. Be careful not to go down the steep mountain as it drops suddenly and is dangerous. Keep on the goat path with Çule/Ćule on your right across a deep valley and it will bring you around the backside of Çule/Ćule and eventually down to the normal shepherd path that leads back to Brod. From Çule/Ćule head down and cross a small river and you will see a clear path. Just head towards Brod at this point and you can't go wrong. Remember part of the joy of hiking in Dragash/Dragaš is finding your own way, which is very easy as no trees obstruct your view.



Local Gorani men at wedding ceremony – Photo by Jasim Lika.

### Who are the Gorani?

There are many opinions about the origin of the people that live in the Gora region. However, due to the lack of the original writings, today it is difficult to determine the origin of these people. Some think that Gorani originated from South Slavic groups, some think they have Vlah origin, while others believe they are tribes that came from the Near East or from Caucasus, and still others think they are tribes from Albania. The fact is that there is no definitive answer to their origins.

According to the last census (April 2011) the situation is still not settled. One part of the Gorani population declared themselves as Bosniacs while the other part as a Gorani ethnic group, even though both identify themselves according to the Islamic religion. Much of this discrepancy has much to do with current politics as historical identification, but that is another story.

The Gorani people live in the triboundary region of Kosovo, FYR of Macedonia and Albania on the hillsides of the Sharr/Šar Mountains and Mount Koritnik. In Dragash/Dragaš Municipality they inhabit 18 villages mostly in the southern area. They have a rich folklore and cultural traditions, with specific folk costumes and dancing. Their weddings are culturally unique to the area, and they also celebrate different festivals on certain days such as Saint Georges Day, which belong to pagan traditions that are specific at every people in this area.

Traditional Gorani folk music typically includes a two-beat dance called "Kolo" ('circle'), which is a circle dance focused on the foot movements and always starts on the right foot and moves in an anti-clockwise direction. Kolo is usually accompanied by instrumental music (drums and zurla) and is rarely followed by singing.



Village of Bačkë/Bačka- Photo by Todd Wassel

## BAČKË/BAČKA to BROD

This is an easy but beautiful hike that begins in the picturesque village of Bačkë/Bačka which clings lovingly to the mountainside and leads the hiker through forests before opening up along a stunning mountainside path that leads you the all the way back to Brod through the river valley. While the beauty of Bačkë/Bačka is undeniable looking across from the opposite valley, this small town only has a few families living in it during the winter as everyone else works abroad.

STARTING POINT: The Town of Bačkë/Bačka

ENDING POINT: The Town of Brod

STARTING ELEVATION: 1250 meters

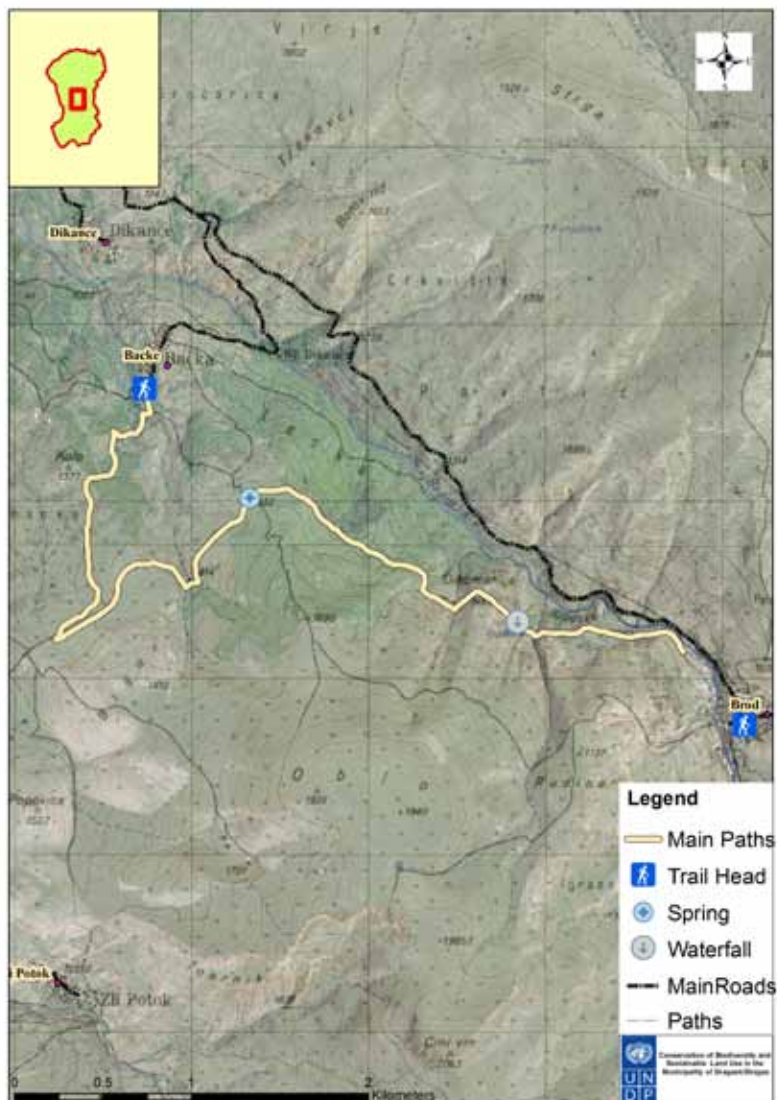
HIGHEST ELEVATION: 1470 meters

DISTANCE: 7.34 km

DURATION: 3 hours one-way



**DIFFICULTY:** Easy. There are very few steep parts to this hike. However, signposts are not yet available as well.



**Map 9: BAČKĚ/BAČKA to BROD HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Backa-Brod.kmz>

## Route Description

This is a one-way hike, so you can either plan to retrace your steps to return to a parked car, or arrange to be dropped off at the starting point or picked up at the end. The hike can be done starting from either Baçkë/Baçka or Brod, but for the purposes of simplicity only the directions starting from Baçkë/Baçka are listed.

Follow the “main” road through the village of Baçkë/Baçka until you reach the beginning of the forest where a small path heads into the trees along a small stream. The path turns right and begins to wind its way left up the mountain and further into the forest. There are some small paths that intersect with the main trail. When in doubt keep following the path up and eventually you’ll reach a large tree with a dry fountain after about 20 minutes.

From here continue following the path first west and then slightly to the south until after 30 minutes you reach a wide dirt road. Turn left and follow the path back to the east. This is the main path that will bring you back to Brod along the river. As the path heads back into the river valley it first rises and then begins to fall sharply. Keep the mountain on your right and eventually you’ll come to a beautiful waterfall where you can take a break. This path will take you directly back to Brod where you cross a small bridge and enter the town by the main road.





**The gorge south of Brod Village- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## **BROD GORGE**

This is an easy short hike that brings you right through the main river gorge leading south past the Arxhena Hotel. If you have limited time in Brod this is a nice light hike that will help you get a feeling for the area. The path is easy to follow and if you are interested in camping there is a nice flat area with running water nearby that can easily accommodate 4-5 tents.

**STARTING POINT/ ENDING POINT:** Arxhena Hotel

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1384 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1622 m

**DISTANCE:** 1.97 km

**DURATION:** 1 hour roundtrip along the same path

**DIFFICULTY:** Easy. There are very few steep parts to this hike.



**Map 10: BROD GORGE HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Brod-Gorge.kmz>

## Route Description

This is a one-way hike so plan to come back along the same path. Start along the river path that runs next to the Arxhena Hotel. Be careful NOT to take the ski slope up the hill and instead stay on the

path that follows the river into the gorge. The path follows the river and after about 15 minutes begins to climb up but stays in the gorge and along the river far below.

After about 30-40 minutes of hiking from the beginning you'll come to an area where you can camp on the left. It is flat and just 20 meters farther on you'll find a spring. If you continue hiking from here be aware you will hit a shepherd's house where there are likely to be Sharr/Šar dogs who are not too happy that you are in their territory. It is advised that you return back along the path you came from at this point.



**Lake Shutman/Šutman -Photo by Todd Wassel**

## **BROD-LAKE SHUTMAN/ŠUTMAN**

This is one of the best-known hikes in the Brod region with a well worn path, and stunning views through the Brod Gorge and into the southern rolling alpine fields where Lake Shutman/Šutman lies. The lake is more of a pond and is shallow with a muddy bottom but beautiful nonetheless. These small lakes are called mountain eyes due to the resemblance of human eyes when viewed from the mountains above. This hike can also be combined with 2 other hikes in the region, Mt. Vracë/Vraca or the 3 Peaks hike, which begin and end at Lake Shutman/Šutman. The lake also provides a nice place to camp for those wanting to explore more of the southern area of Dragash/Dragaš.

STARTING POINT/ ENDING POINT: Arxhena Hotel or Old Road near Brod

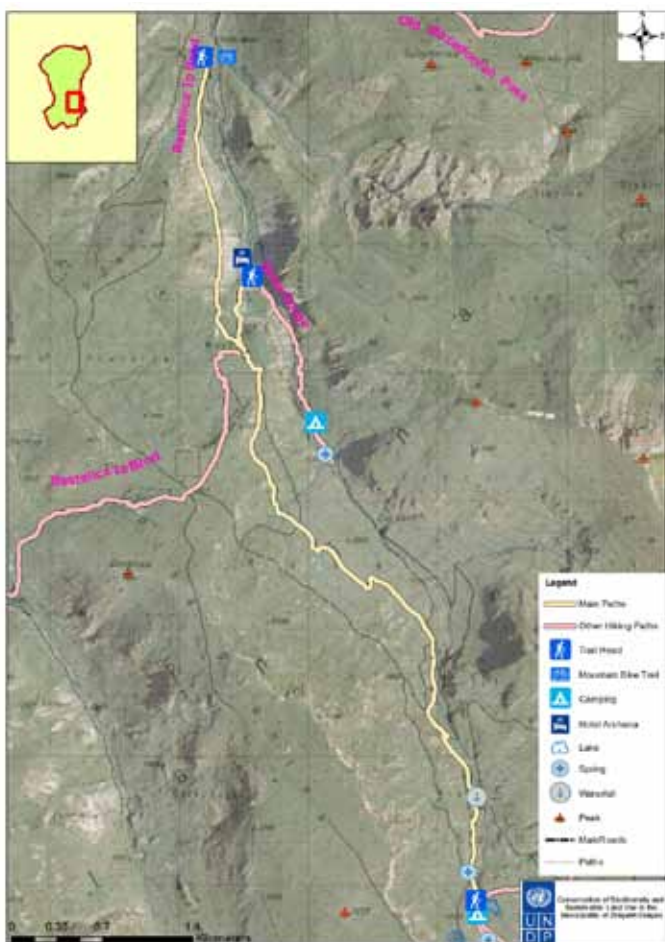
STARTING ELEVATION: 1384 meters

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 2120 meters

DISTANCE: 8.82 km

DURATION: 6 1/2 hours roundtrip along the same path

DIFFICULTY: Medium. There are very few steep parts to this hike but it can take time depending on your fitness level.



**Map 11: BROD-LAKE SHUTMAN/ŠUTMAN and MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 1**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Brod-Shutman.kmz>

## Route Description



**Waterfall on the way to Lake Shutman/Šutman-**  
**Photo by Todd Wassel**

This path can be combined with the following two hikes to Mt. Vracë/Vraca or the 3 Peaks. However, due to the distances covered, and the steep climbs of the later two hikes, it is advisable to combine the three with at least one night of camping. If you walk quickly and are in good shape it is possible to do this hike and one of the next hikes in 1 day and make it back to your starting point Arxhena Hotel.

You have two options where to start. You can either start directly from Arxhena Hotel and climb up the steep ski slope behind the hotel which meets the path further

on; or you can start from the beginning of the main path along the Old Road closer to Brod which is longer but has a more gentle climb up into the mountains. If starting from the Old Road, follow the main dirt road out of Brod towards Arxhena Hotel with the river on your right hand side.

After the last house between the hotel and the village, the river passes under the road. As the river moves to the left side of the road you will see a small concrete water-tap structure on the right and the power lines begin to diverge from the road. Turn right here and follow the grass road uphill following the wooden electrical poles. This is the start of the Old Road to FYR of Macedonia that was never completed. Eventually the grass route will turn to a dirt and rock path. Follow this further into the valley until you are directly above Arxhena Hotel. It is here that the ski slope intersects with the main path.

Continue following the well-travelled path south into the river gorge. Make sure you stay high up on the path and do not descend to the river and cross it. There is a path on the other side of the river but it is more difficult and does not lead directly to the lake. More than two

thirds of the way to the lake you will see a beautiful waterfall where the river rushes out of a narrow rocky gap. The top of the waterfall has a nice area to rest and have a picnic. You can access this area by leaving the path behind after the waterfall turning left to reach the river and several nice resting areas.

After passing the waterfall you will come to a point where the path becomes narrow and less clear. This is also where you will see a shepherd's building. Stay away from the building, as Sharr/Šar dogs are very protective, even if they are cute when they are young. Stay closer to the mountain on your right and you will eventually make out the path that leads out of this valley and up into the valley with small but beautiful Lake Shutman/Šutman.

#### **MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 1: Brod –Lake Shutman/Šutman**

Brod presents a number of interesting opportunities for mountain biking, especially for more experienced off the beaten path bikers. However, no matter if you are a beginner or an expert the first trail you will need to hit to get out of the mountains is the Brod-Lake Shutman/Šutman path. This old road is wide enough to satisfy beginners but leads into the heart of the backcountry for those who want to keep going. It can get steep at times, so be prepared.

You can start right from the town of Brod and follow the Old Road access described above. Be careful of the steep sides to the path once you get past Arxhena Hotel. There are a few areas (like heading into the Lake Shutman/Šutman Valley) where you may need to walk the bike.



**View from the top of Mt Vraca on a stormy day. Weather changes very quickly up in the mountains- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## GOLEMA VRACA

This is a steep but beautiful hike that leads you the southern border with FYR of Macedonia and reveals sweeping views of the south Dragash/Dragaš mountain plains. Two peaks await you from which you can peer over into FYR of Macedonia and touch a border pillar made of stones. Be prepared to find your own way to the top as there are few paths marking the way. But with no trees the way forward is clear enough.

STARTING POINT/ ENDING POINT: Lake Shutman/Šutman

STARTING ELEVATION: 2120 meters

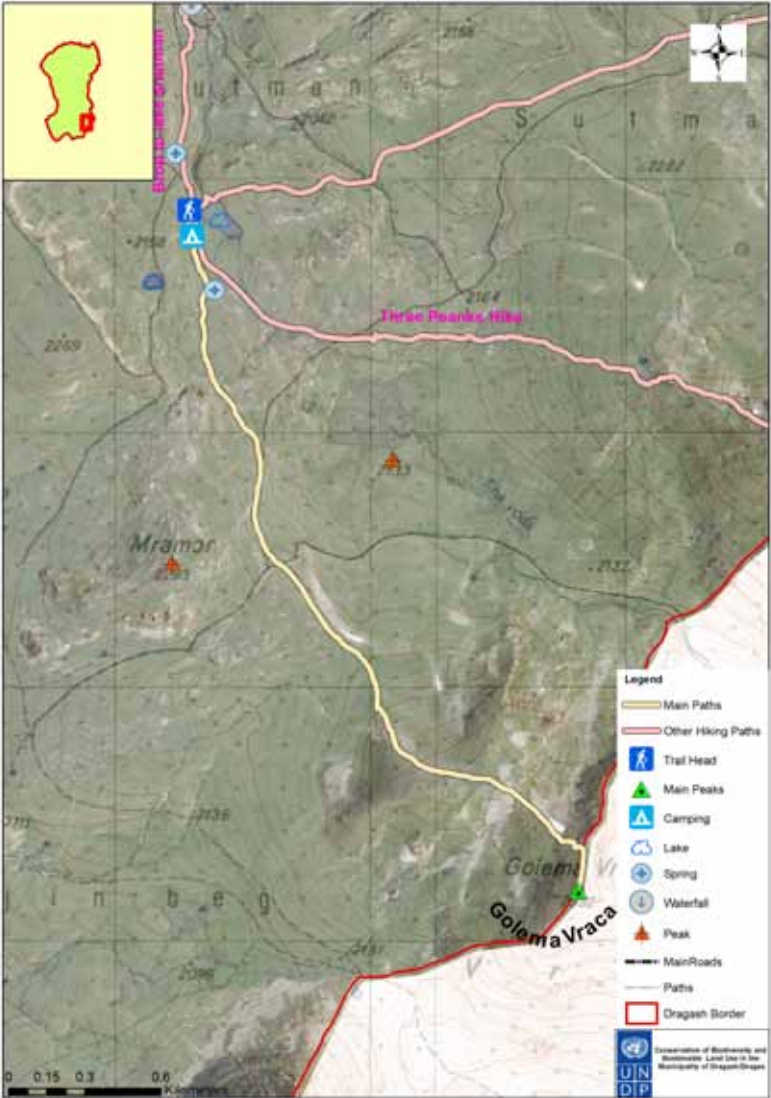
HIGHEST ELEVATION: 2582 meters

DISTANCE: 3.53 km

DURATION: 4 hours roundtrip along the same path

DIFFICULTY: Difficult. It is a steep climb to the top of the mountain and there are no paths to follow.







## Route Description

This hike can be challenging in that there is no clear path or markers at the moment leading to the top. However, if you follow the map and pay attention to the contour lines you should not have any problems, especially since the top of the mountain is clear almost all the way there.

Start your hike by climbing out of the Shutman/Šutman Lake Valley to the south. From here you will see in the distance a large gap between two distant peaks. You want to head for the peaks on the right hand side of the gap. Leading to the gap is a valley with 5 small ponds. You want to stay to the right of this valley and NOT go down into it. Stick to the right side of the valley and keep climbing up until you reach a point where the landscape opens up to the west into the rest of Dragash/Dragaš's southern plains. If you look up to the southeast you will see the steep climb up to Big Vracë/Vraca. There is no path leading to the top but it is manageable. Be sure to make switchbacks every few meters to help reduce the strain on your muscles with such a steep incline.

There are two peaks here. The first offers nice views and is recommended for less experienced hikers. For those in better shape and comfortable with heights you can climb to the second peak where you can see and the border with FYR of Macedonia. There is a stone border marker here that marks the end of your path.

Your return hike is along the same route.



High in the mountain fields on the 3 Peak hike- Photo by Todd Wassel

## THREE PEAKS HIKE

This is a steep, difficult hike with no clear paths. However, the difficulty is matched by the rewards of beautiful ridgeline hikes and breathtaking views of some of the wildest areas of the Sharr/Šar mountain range. This is the quintessential adventures hike as you have only your directional skills to guide you along the circular route.

STARTING POINT: Lake Shutman/Šutman South Side

ENDING POINT: Lake Shutman/Šutman East Side

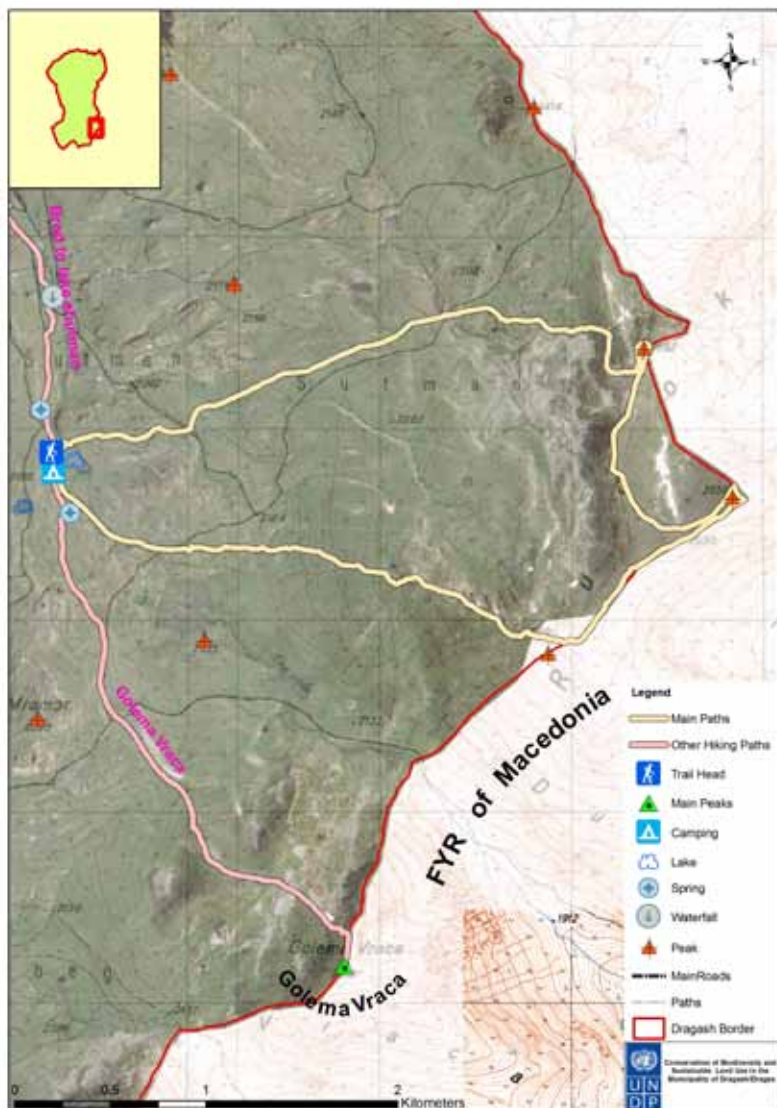
STARTING ELEVATION: 2120 meters

HIGHEST ELEVATION: 2658 meters

DISTANCE: 10.04 km

DURATION: 5 1/2 hours roundtrip on a circular route

DIFFICULTY: Difficult. It is a steep climb to the top of the first peak, there are no paths to follow, and getting down is steep and complicated.



### Map 13: THREE PEAKS HIKING MAP

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-3Peaks-Hike.kmz>

## Route Description

This is a difficult hike as there are no clear paths, the first peak is quite steep and getting back can be difficult due to the steepness. That being said, this is a beautiful hike that brings the hiker right along the ridge border with FYR of Macedonia and provides sweeping views of the most remote and wild areas in the Sharr/Šar Mountains.

Start your hike just like you would the Mt. Vraca hike by leaving the Lake Shutman/Šutman Valley to the south. Once you clear the first ridge you want to head down into the valley with the 5 ponds, crossing it to the east until you reach the base of the mountains. This is where the hiking gets steep as you climb to the top of the ridge, which marks the first of the three peaks on this hike.

Once you reach the first peak follow the ridgeline along to the second peak where there is a border marker made out of concrete. From here you want to double back on your original path until you see an easy way down into the valley below. Hike into the valley until you hit a steep cliff looking back to the west and Lake Shutman/Šutman where you started. Hike along the edge to the north and you will see the third peak. Just before you get to the steep climb that leads to the third peak take note of the gap to your left leading down between the mountains. After reaching the peak return to this slope and follow it down until you can turn right along a small animal path that clings to the mountainside. After turning follow the path for about 100 meters until the slope to your left reduces its steepness enough for you to walk down.

Once you are down, you follow the animal tracks back to the west. There are no clear paths here either so you need to make note of your surroundings, the peaks you climbed, and follow your best judgment back to the lake.

### A Sustainable Wall of Pooh

In a number of Gorani villages there is a tradition of sticking cow manure to walls of the houses and mountain rocks to dry and use for fuel. The bio-fuel is cheaper and cleaner for heating the house, and in an area where trees are scarce this has helped prevent the destruction of the surrounding forests. Though quite a few houses no longer use such methods due to modern heaters, many families still carry on the practice and it's not uncommon to walk past a literal wall of pooh! In an age of dwindling resources it is sustainable practices like this that will do the most to protect the environment.



Drying Pooh for the winter- Photo by Todd Wassel



# HIKING NEAR RESTELICË /RESTELICA

**Restelicë/Restelica**

Population: 4,000



**Restelicë/Restelica-**  
**Photo by Bajram Hodža**

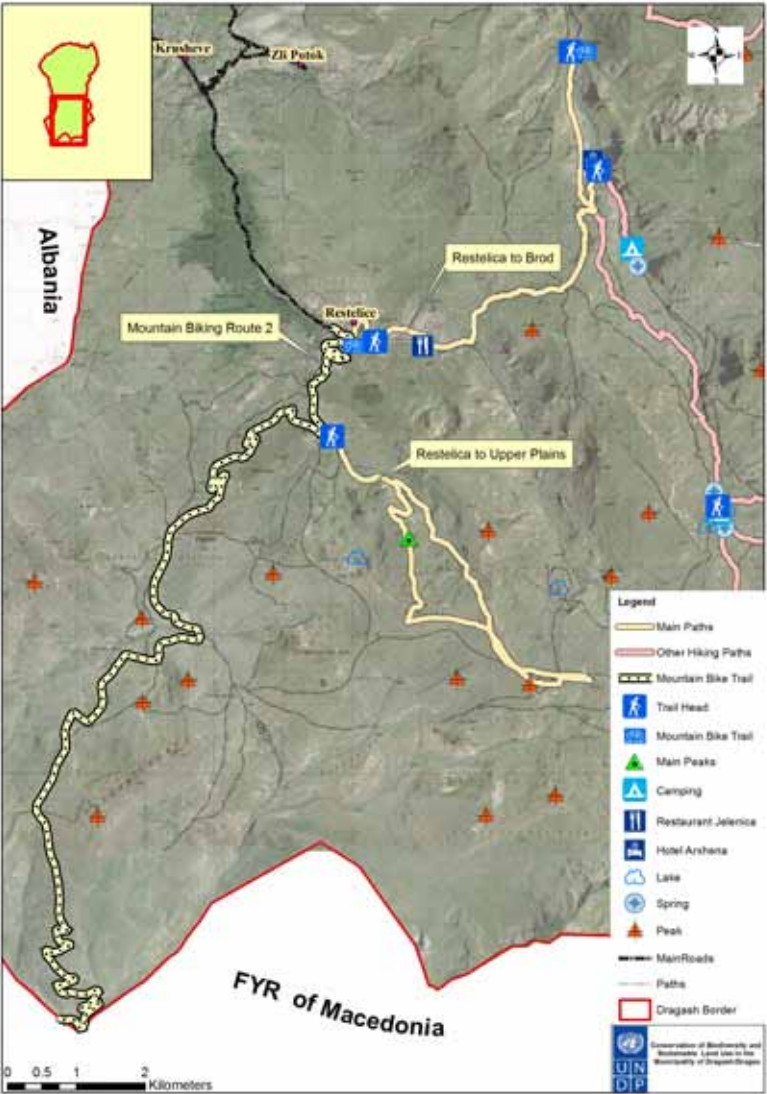
Restelicë/Restelica is the other southern gateway to the high alpine plains of Dragash/Dragaš and is one of the other main Gorani villages. It is located on the western side of Dragash/Dragaš separated by striking mountains from its more northeasterly neighbor Brod. Situated on the border with Albania and FYR of Macedonia, this wild border region is a joy to visit and is more accessible than most people assume. However, it is farther from Dragash/Dragaš than Brod taking about 45 minutes to 1 hour one way.



Restelicë/Restelica is the most southerly inhabited town in Dragash/Dragaš and thus all of Kosovo. The village sits high in the mountains on steep slopes with a river gorge running right through the town. Most places in the town have sweeping views of the surrounding mountains and the clear river below. The approach to Restelicë/Restelica is as spectacular as the hiking around it as you drive through more traditional villages and catch glimpses of life where cross border trade still takes place on horses along mountain paths. The road follows a winding river and cuts literally through the mountain revealing this hidden country one corner at a time until you arrive at the cliffs in the center of town.

Restelicë/Restelica's remoteness means most people either continue with local economic customs or go abroad to work in the larger cities of Europe sending home money to fuel the new, and somewhat chaotic, construction that can be seen around the town.

The village is in a state of change and development as new buildings and better facilities are appearing on the slopes and new options are opening up for tourism. There is a small local health center with a qualified doctor and nurse and small coffee shops around the village. If you are looking to explore the more southern reaches of Dragash/Dragaš's mountain fields this is the place to start.



Map 14: Hiking Near Restelice/Restelica Region Overview Map



**The road to Restelicë/Restelica- Photo by Bashkim Susuri**

#### **Growing Diaspora:**

Since the end of the conflict in 1999, there has been a sharp increase in local Kosovans migrating for work to other European nations. In some villages half of the population spends most of the year over the borders. When they return during the summer the growing diaspora population bring with them inevitable change to their home communities. Several key community values are still held together, but the current climate has positive and negative effects on the culture. Economically, the jobs are elsewhere, and so the workers leave. Sometimes the most innovative and most educated members leave and do not return to assist in local development (also known as brain-drain). But also for some villages when many return, they bring with them financial wealth, more cars, they build new houses, and even increase the modernization of facilities. The balance of the pros and cons to this current phenomenon is still unclear, but culture is clearly changing.

#### **Where to eat and stay:**

Jelice Hotel and Restaurant: contact Behadin Hodža, phone: 0 44 340 839 in Restelicë /Restelica

Location: in the valley just outside of Restelicë/Restelica along the path towards Brod.



**Valley beyond Restelicë/Restelica- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## RESTELICË/RESTELICA to BROD

If you go by car it takes almost 2 hours to reach Brod starting in Restelicë/Restelica due to the mountains in between that force you to backtrack to the town of Dragash/Dragaš. However, it is possible to follow the old hiking trails that connect the two towns and take in the amazing mountains at the same time. This is a moderate hike with a nice clear path and wonderful alpine fields where you can spot grazing horses and roaming sheep.

**STARTING POINT:** The Town of Restelicë/Restelica on the east side (starting from here allows you to climb less and enjoy the hike down to Brod). You can do this hike in the reverse but you have to climb more.

**ENDING POINT:** Brod, or Arxhena Hotel

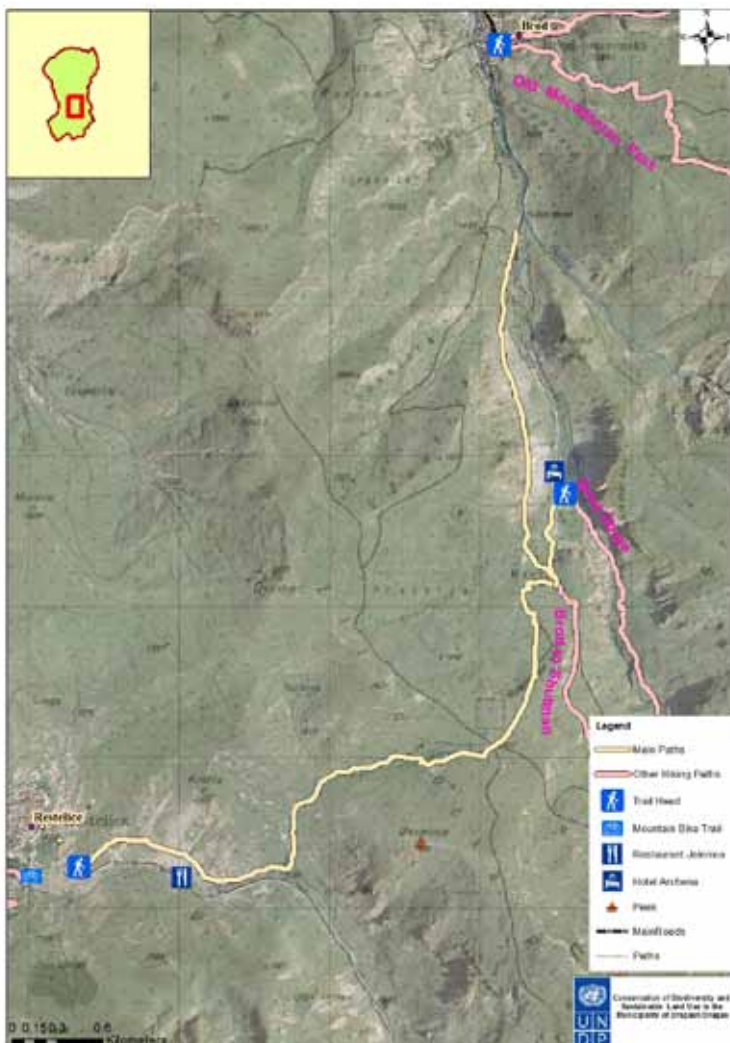
**STARTING ELEVATION:** Restelicë/Restelica- 1442 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1972 meters

DISTANCE: 9.2 km

DURATION: 2-3 ½ hours one-way

DIFFICULTY: Medium. There are a few steep parts and an area where the path disappears but no technically difficult areas.



**Map 15: RESTELICË/RESTELICA to BROD HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Restelica-to-Brod.kmz>

## Route Description

Enter the town along the main road until you reach a sharp left hand turn that switches back on itself. Follow this road left up into the main part of town. Keep following the road until it turns right and leads you out of town to the south and then into a river valley. From here the path follows the river into the valley. After about 20 minutes you will come to a fork in the valley with a smaller river flowing into the larger from the left. Leave the path here and follow the smaller river up into the valley on the left. After about 100 meters a path will start on the left side of this river. Follow this up along the river to the pass that leads down to Brod. On the way up you'll find a spring where you can refill your water bottles.

Just before the top of the pass there is a shepherd's hut where a lot of Sharr/Šar dogs live. Give it a wide berth just to stay safe, as Sharr/Šar dogs can be very territorial. Once over the pass follow the mountains down to the left. You'll be able to see a rocky cliff in the distance, head towards this. You will hit the old path towards FYR of Macedonia. At this point you can either walk down the steep, eroded ski slope towards Hotel Arxhena if you are staying there, or continue to follow the old path north and it will eventually bring you gently down into the town of Brod.

Don't forget to look out for the wild goats that live in the cliffs above Arxhena hotel. They come out in the morning and late afternoon. A small restaurant called Ramce by the river (before you reach the Hotel Arxhena coming from Brod) is a perfect place to relax and search for the goats. Ask the owner for his binoculars. They also serve great lamb so stop by on your way back from hiking. Just remember to call in advance as they need 1 hour to prepare the lamb properly (tel 029-285-119). They are only open in the summer but the scenery, cold beer, goat viewing and fresh meat can't be beat.

**STARTING FROM BROD (I see you didn't take my advice!)**

Just follow the directions above in reverse. If you are starting from Brod itself it is best to turn right across the river just outside of town to begin your climb along the old FYR of Macedonian road. If you start from the Hotel you are forced to hike up the ski hill, which is hot, dusty and very steep. Be careful not to follow the well-worn path towards the glacial lake in the south. Instead, once you are just

above the hotel turn west and head up over the mountains where the path is smaller and made by sheep. Don't worry too much about the path at this point, just get up and over the mountain pass and you will see where to go.



**The upper plains above Restelicë/Restelica are perfect for long hikes once you reach the top- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## RESTELICË/RESTELICA to UPPER PLAINS

This hike just south of the Restelicë/Restelica allows you to get into the heart of the alpine fields without wandering too far from the main town. The hike reaches the top of Mt. Karpa 2125 m where you have sweeping views over the Southern Dragash/Dragaš Plains and into Albania. The top of this area opens up into a high level plain where you can wander to your heart's content before descending back to town.

**STARTING POINT /ENDING POINT:** West Side of Restelicë/Restelica about 1 kilometer past the town along the dirt road to the FYR of Macedonia.

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1442 meters

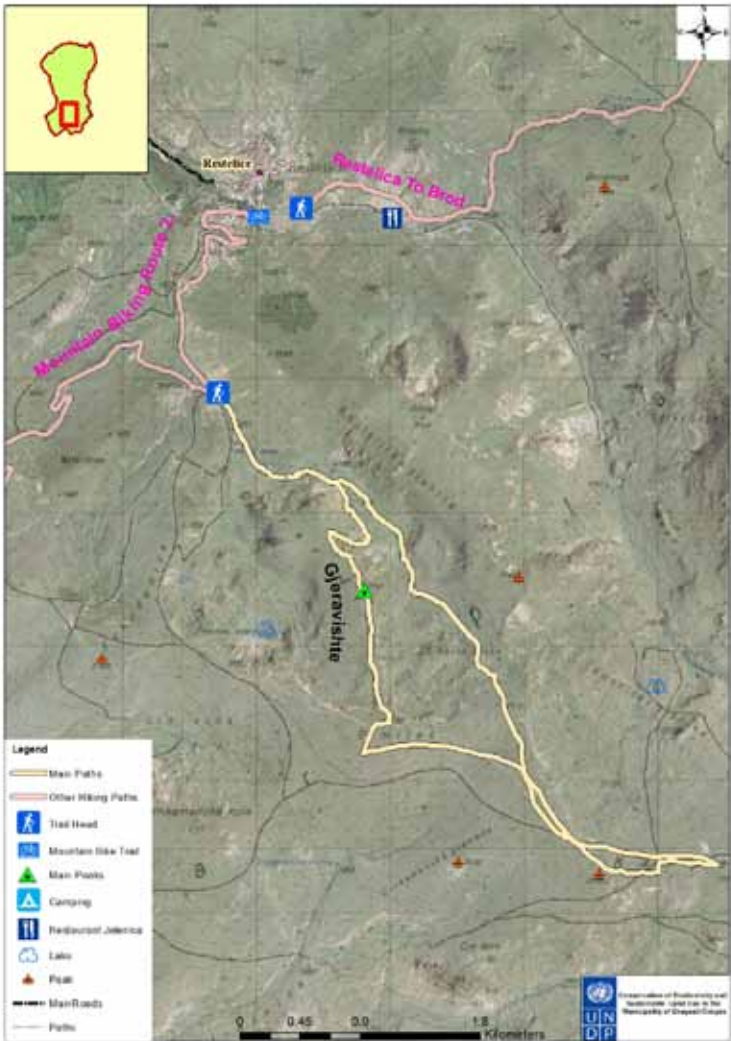
**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 2125 meters

**DISTANCE:** 15.23 km

**DURATION:** 4-6 hours round trip depending how long you want to hike at the top of the plain.



**DIFFICULTY:** Medium. The trail is mostly well trodden but there is a steep climb up to the mountain along very narrow trails. However, there is a gentler ascent you can use as well if you don't mind retracing your steps.



**Map 16: RESTELICË/RESTELICA TO UPPER PLAINS HIKING MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Restelica-to-upperplains.kmz>

## Route Description

This hike can be done in a circle or by retracing your path according to how comfortable you are with steep inclines and narrow paths. The path starts just outside of Restelicë/Restelica along the dirt road to the FYR of Macedonia. When you enter Restelicë/Restelica the road forks left and right, take the right along this bumpy and narrow dirt road until you leave the town behind. You will need a good 4-wheel drive car to make it to the trailhead.

The trail starts at a bend in the road, where the river passes under the road. There is a large boulder next to the river and a concrete fountain across the street. Take the small dirt path along the left side of the river and NOT the dirt road that leads to the small shepherd's hut. There are very protective Sharr/Šar dogs living here in the summer and should be avoided for safety.

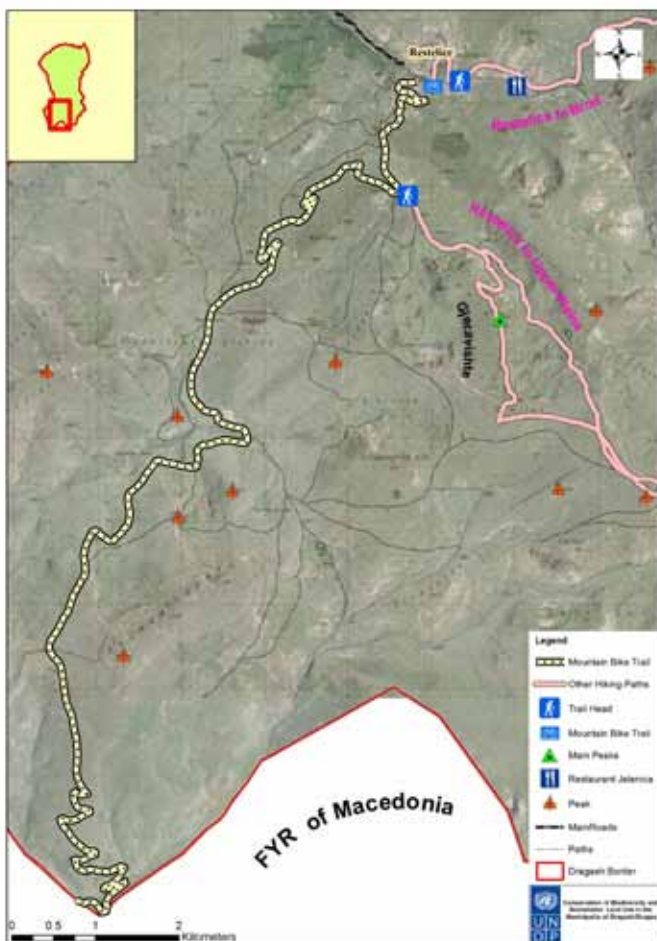
Follow the path along the river all the way into the gorge. The path will come to a dirt road that moves away from the mountainside. Ignore this and keep to the small path and the river as this is the quicker way up. You will come to a small cluster of huts. From here you have a choice. Follow the right path and you will climb a steep narrow path to the first peak. Or you can follow the larger road to the left behind the huts that will bring you to the upper plain in a gentler manner but without a set path to follow. I will describe the path along the steep hike as it is more difficult to find.

Continue to the right of the huts and stay along the side of the mountain on your right (which you will eventually climb). When you reach a large set of boulders start climbing up. This will be steep so make sure you zigzag back and forth. You will hit the beginning of a narrow dirt path that cuts along the mountain back in the direction you came from but up to the top of the mountain. Follow the path until you reach the ridgeline. Make a sharp 90-degree turn to the left and follow the ridge up to the top of the peak.

From here you can continue on to the upper plain to the south by following the ridge. This is a beautiful area to hike around in a large circle and see the southern area of Dragash/Dragaš and over into the mountains of Albania. When your loop is over, do not return to the first peak but instead find the sloping pass that descends into the valley where you started with the huts and where the path split. Follow the path back to where you started.

## MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 2: Restelicë/Restelica to FYR of Macedonia

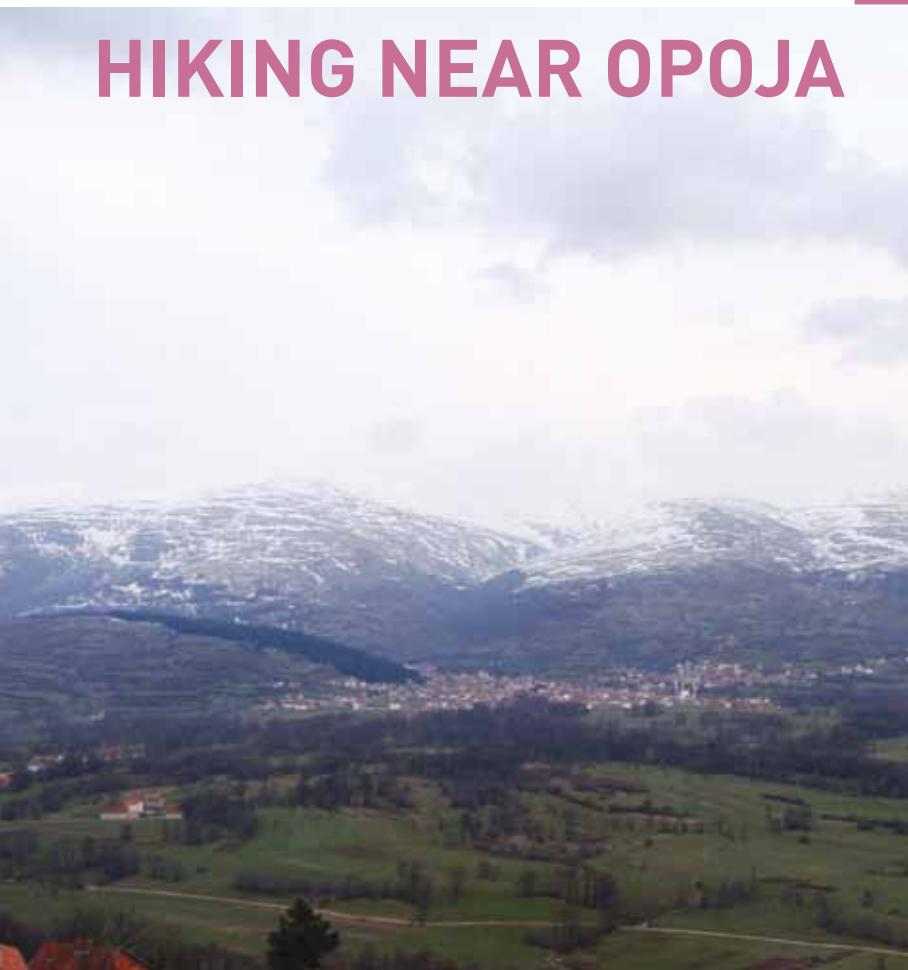
The dirt road leading south out of Restelicë/Restelica is an ideal mountain biking track and covers 19 km one way. The road reaches all the way to the border of FYR of Macedonia and the Mavrovo National Park, and goes through some of the most remote areas of Dragash/Dragaš. The unpaved road is mostly uphill leaving Restelicë/Restelica and leads to an abandoned official border crossing that amazingly still sees some traffic but not too much and the cycle is usually peaceful and quite. Shortly up the route, around 1780 m in altitude is a concrete gazebo where you can take a break and refuel with cold mountain water. You can cycle as far as the border or turn back to Restelicë/Restelica at any point.



**Map 17: MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 2: Restelicë/Restelica to FYR of Macedonia**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-MBRoute-2.kmz>

# HIKING NEAR OPOJA





**Opoja Valley- Photo by  
Todd Wassel**

## **Opoja Valley**

Opoja, in the northern region of Dragash/ Dragaš, bordering the municipality of Prizren is characterized by mostly farmland and rolling hills surrounded by the large mountains running along the border with FYR of Macedonia. The Opoja valley boasts a number of cute villages connected by an ideal road network for easy cycling. Each hiking and cycling trail starts from one of 4 towns but the visitor has the option to explore many more as they are all in easy walking or biking distance from each other.

The villages of Brrut/Brut, Blaç/Bljać, Bellobrad/Belobrod, Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje, Kuk and others both cling to the surrounding hillside and rest in the middle of the valley floor. There are a number of small rivers running through the area and the forests are ideal spots for picking fresh mushrooms during the late summer and early fall. High up in the mountains, above the town of Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje, sits the area's only mountain refuge, perfect for groups looking for a bit of comfort while staying out in the high mountains. Further up the mountain there is currently one ski slope but at the present no lifts up. If you are around on April 23rd don't forget to check out the celebration of St. George's Day in Brrut/Brut when the locals go to the forest and create a large bonfire to celebrate the relationship of believing in god and joy in life.

## **Where to eat and stay:**

**Opoja Restaurant and Motel**, this small hotel is still not finished after over a year

of construction. Hopefully, it will become operational by summer of 2012 but call first to make sure. Sweeping views over the valley and to the mountains beyond make it a nice place to stop by either way-  
Phone: 044 484 895 and 049 147 279

Location: past Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje approximately 4 kilometers from town along the dirt road near the hiking path Black Stone to Mountain Eyes.

**-Market Pizza Opoja Impex:** a food market on the ground floor and a pizza restaurant on the second floor with a nice balcony. Owner (Driton) speaks English and German. The market is open 7:00-20:00 and the restaurant is open 7:00-23:00.

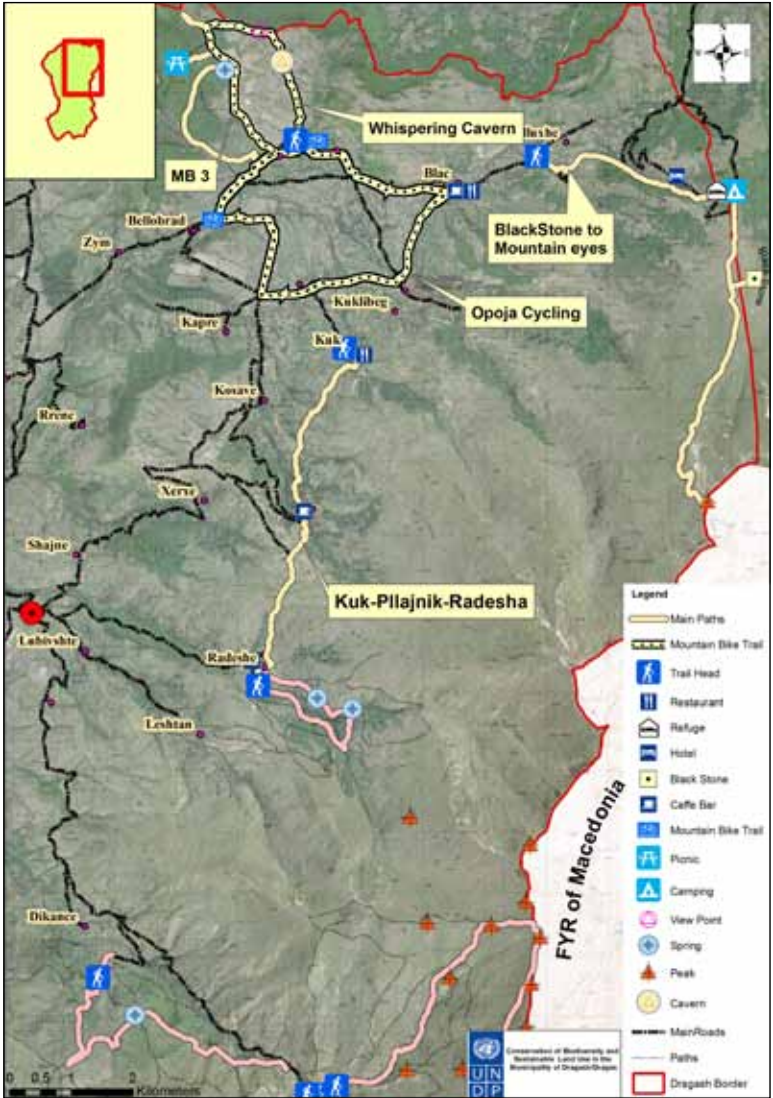
Location: in the center of Blaç/Bljać on the left on the way to Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje.

**-Amigo Pizza:** pizza and coffee shop open from 8:00-24:00. Phone: 044-699-777

Location: in the center of Kuk where the hiking path starts for the Kuk-Pllajnik- Radeshë/Radeša hike.

**-Cafe SGS:** small cafe selling drinks, including homemade blueberry juice. The hours of operation are not known. This is a small town place in an ottoman stone building along the main road in town.

Location: on the left side along the main road leading out of town. It is marked on the Kuk-Pllajnik- Radeshë/Radeša map.



Map 18: Hiking Near Opoja Region Overview Map





**Listening for the whispers- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## WHISPERING CAVERN

Hiking in Opoja near Brrut /Brut is one of the easiest hikes in Dragash/ Dragaš but still allows you to take in the views of the Sharr/Šar Mountains. This hike crosses plains, looks out over the edge of Dragash/ Dragaš to the city of Prizren below, and brings you back through beautiful forests to the small village where your adventure began.

**STARTING POINT /ENDING POINT:** Just past the Town of Brrut /Brut

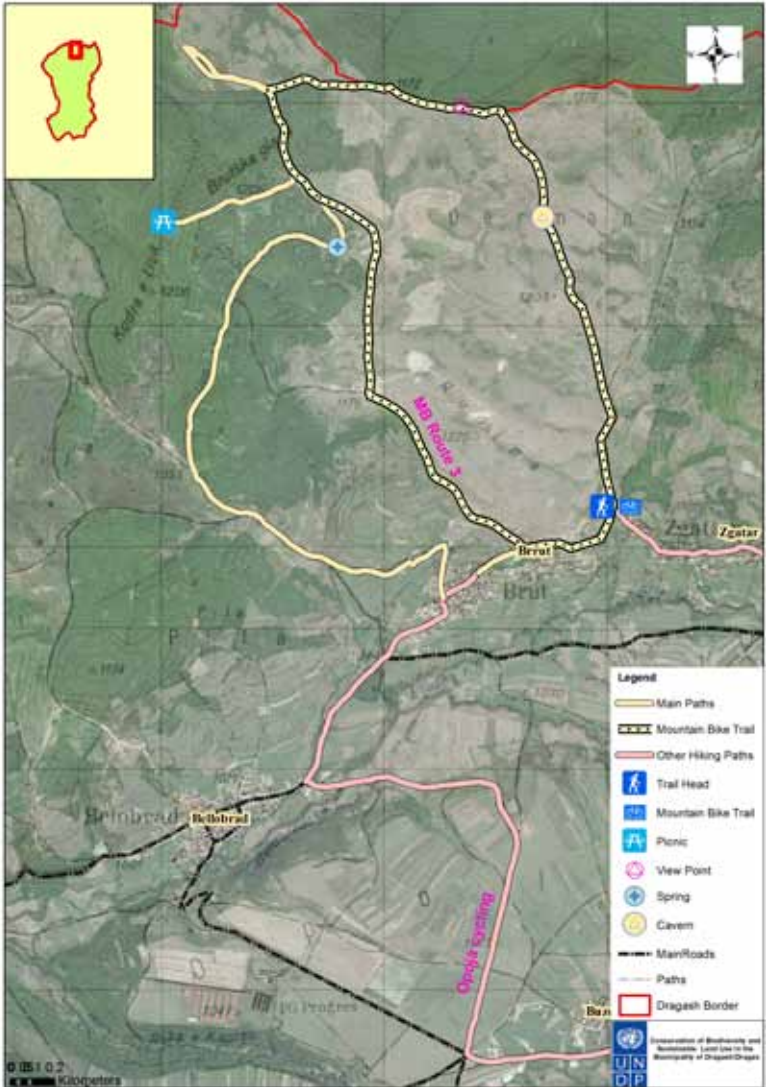
**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1044 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1115 meters

**DISTANCE:** 9.5 km

**DURATION:** 4 hours one-way

**DIFFICULTY:** Easy. There are no steep parts to this hike, however, the trail is not marked.



**Map 19: WHISPERING CAVERN HIKING MAP  
and MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 3**

GPS Tracks: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Whispering-Cavern.kmz>  
<http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-MBRoute-3.kmz>

## Route Description

This hike starts just past the town of Brrut/Brut. Follow the road until you leave the town past the second mosque. Continue past the Zgatar town sign and you will come to a sharp turn to the right with a small dirt road leading left. This is the road where the hike starts. Walk in along the dirt road and you will see a cell phone tower up on the hill. The dirt road will split to the left and the right but you stay in the center and climb the small hill in front of you. The path is well trodden and clear. As you pass along the left side of the hill you will pass a secluded farm field below to your left.

This is where you will leave the path to explore the deep Whispering Cavern. The cavern is not much to see, as you can't descend into it, but local tradition says that if someone wants to know the gender of his or her baby; he or she throws a stone in the cavern. If immediately after that a crow comes out from the cavern the baby will be a girl; while if a pigeon comes out the baby will be a boy.

An enterprising young banker descended into the cavern with cables and a winch a number of years ago and discovered it is not as small as it seems and in fact is about the size of a small football stadium.

Return back up to the path and continue on and to the top of the next hill. From here you can walk left along the edge of Dragash/Dragaš and take in the sweeping views to Prizren below. Follow the edge until you come to a beautiful beech forest. Stay along the forest's edge until you come to a path entering into the forest and back towards Brrut/Brut. When you come out of the forest you can branch off to the right towards a picnicking area for a break. Or, continue on along what is now a farm road.

Follow the farm road for about 10 minutes until you see the forest on the right slope down to a small river. Break off from the dirt road and take the smaller path down to the beginning of the small river. Stay along the path just to the left of the river and follow this all the way back to Brrut/Brut through a nice forested river valley. Just continue following the river downstream until you see the village. The path will leave the river to the left before the village. Follow the path until you are brought back to the main road and follow that back to your car (if you parked at the trailhead).

### MOUNTAIN BIKING ROUTE 3- ALL AROUND BRUTT/BRUT

This whole area is perfect for mountain biking as the farm roads are clear, wide, and not too hilly. You can either follow the Whispering Cavern hike with your bike, or break off and explore the farm roads yourself.



**Mountain Eyes (Sytë e Malit )- Photo by Burim Qafleshi**

## BLACK STONE to MOUNTAIN EYES

This hike brings you to two of the most recognizable landmarks in the area, the Black Stone (Guri i zi) and the Mountain Eyes (Sytë e Malit), two postglacial lakes over the border in FYR of Macedonia. When viewed from the border above, the two lakes look like eyes peering out of the mountains towards the heavens. Starting in the village of Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje the path is well defined and easy to follow all the way up. However, it is also long and you have the possibility of driving a 4WD vehicle all the way as there is a dirt road that reaches the top.

**STARTING POINT /ENDING POINT:** Entrance to the village of Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1162 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 2455 meters

**DISTANCE:** 5.75 km to Black Stone; 9.9 km to Mountain Eyes View Point (double each for round trip)

**DURATION:** 2 ½-3 hours to Black Stone (one way, or 4 1/2 hours round trip); 4 ½ hours to Mountain Eyes View Point (one way, or 7-7 ½ hours round trip)

**DIFFICULTY:** Difficult. There is nothing technically difficult about this hike but it is long and the elevation gain is over 1300 meters.



**BLACK STONE to MOUNTAIN EYES MAP**

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-BlackStone-MountainEyes.kmz>

## Route Description

The beginning of this hike starts on the road leading into the village of Zaplluxhe/Zaplužje. After passing the town sign take your first right hand turn leading up through the outskirts of town. Follow the concrete road straight, follow as it turns sharp left and into a dirt road. Take your next right on a sharp right turn. Follow the dirt road up and out of town for approximately 1.25 km. At this point, right before the road makes a sharp curve to the left, turn off the road onto a path branching off to the right.

The path will continue up following electrical lines (on the left) for about 1 km, crossing a small stream to a path junction. At this point stay straight through the light forest until you emerge onto a small field that leads back to the dirt road. Turn right onto the dirt road until it takes a sharp right hand turn. Turn left here onto a small dirt track that leads to the mountain refuge. After the refuge turn right back onto the main dirt road once again. This dirt road brings you past the Black Stone and eventually up to the old military post at the border where you can view the Mountain Eyes and sweeping views of the Sharr/Šar Mountains, FYR of Macedonia and back into the Opoja Valley. Approximately 1.5 km after the refuge you will see the left hand turn to the path leading to the Black Stone. From here the road is almost straight all the way to the border viewing area.

This whole hike can also be accomplished in a 4WD vehicle and offers not only an easy way to reach a top area of the Sharr/Šar Mountains but also auto camping possibilities along the route. The return journey is along the same path as going up.





**Stone Ottoman era building in Pllajnik village- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## KUK-PLLAJNIK- RADESHË/RADEŠA

This is a beautiful village hike. The hike is relatively easy as it goes mostly through low-lying pastureland; however, it brings the hiker through 3 picturesque villages allowing you to catch a glimpse of rural Kosovo life. The hike is ideal for less advanced hikers and those looking to cross from the Opoja region to Dragash/Dragaš town by foot.

**STARTING POINT:** Center of Kuk village near Amigo Pizza

**ENDING POINT:** Entrance to Radeshë/Radeša village (the hike can also be done in reverse)

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1169 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1497 meters

**DISTANCE:** 7.2 km one way

**DURATION:** 4- 4 ½ hours one-way

**DIFFICULTY:** Medium. There is nothing technically difficult about this hike, however, there are a few steep areas and the hike is longer than other easy hikes in the guide.





## Route Description

This hike can start from either Kuk or Radeshë/Radeša; for simplicity only one way from Kuk is described here. The hike starts from the center of Kuk near Amigo Pizza. One of the nice aspects of this hike is getting a feeling for 3 rural Dragash villages. One of the best ways to get to know the local area is at the small coffee shops in each village, so don't be shy and go ahead and stop in for a macchiato along the way (1 cafe or restaurant is marked on the map for each village).

Facing Amigo Pizza, turn right and follow the road to a nearby fork and stay left. Follow this for about 5 minutes as it winds first left and then right at a stone building with the mosque in the background to the left. After following the bend in the road to the right here, you take the first road on your right. This is the road that will lead out of Kuk and towards Pllajnik. Leaving Kuk through a small forest you stay straight on a clear dirt farm road for .6 km until you come to a hard to see split in the path. Stay to the left and along the dirt road that stays up the hill. You DO NOT want to go downhill towards the village of Kosove. Stay on this dirt path as it enters a small forest and then hugs the edge of pastures. After approximately 1 km more the path merges with a larger dirt road that leads into the village of Pllajnik.

Take a right upon reaching the main road in Pllajnik and follow it downhill past the SGS cafe. At the bottom of the hill the path leaves the main dirt road to the left. Follow this path up the hill and be careful to stay right at the first fork. This path leads to flat pasture land and a more visible dirt road. Follow this dirt road straight through a crossroads where dirt roads lead in 4 directions. Ten to fifteen minutes down the dirt road the path branches straight or to the left. Stay straight (and down), as this path will lead you down to the village of Radeshë/Radeša. Once in the village, stay straight on the concrete road until it dips sharply down, crosses the river and then climbs up to the right. Follow this road back down and past the mosque on the left to reach the end of the path and the beginning of the Radeshë/Radeša River Hike.



**Country road in the Opoja Valley- Photo by Todd Wassel**

## OPOJA CYCLING

This is an easy cycling route along picturesque country roads that brings the visitor through a number of charming villages in the Opoja valley. This is a great way to experience the mountains of Dragash/Dragaš without having to actually hike up into them. Spend a relaxing day cycling, exploring the villages, picnicking or eating with the locals.

**STARTING POINT /ENDING POINT:** Entrance to the Town of Bellobrad/Belobrod

**STARTING ELEVATION:** 1003 meters

**HIGHEST ELEVATION:** 1134 meters

**DISTANCE:** 11.5 km

**DURATION:** Depends on how often you stop in each town. Plan for at least 2 hours.

**DIFFICULTY:** Easy. There is only one area between Blač/Bljać and Zgatar that is not paved.



## OPOJA CYCLING MAP

GPS Track: <http://www.kosovo.undp.org/repository/docs/WP-Opoja-Cycling.kmz>

## OPOJA CYCLING

There is nothing difficult about this cycling track and you do not even need a proper mountain bike, as much of the route is on paved roads. Start in Bellohrad/Belobrod or any of the other towns you might like to see a bit more of. You can follow the route in either direction and only have one steep area. If you are going counterclockwise, the steep section is as you enter Zgatar. If you are going clockwise, you will have to climb up into the town of Brut/Brut. There is one dirt track section between Blač/Blač and Zgatar but it is relatively easy to follow for most bikes.

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE SHARR/ ŠAR MOUNTAINS

The entire Sharr/Šar Massif is one of the largest and highest mountain ranges of the Balkan Peninsula, stretching between the Prizren valley and the Polog valley in the border areas of Kosovo and the FYR of Macedonia. The area is approximately 70 kilometers long and up to 30 kilometers wide, with the territory almost equally divided between Kosovo and the FYR of Macedonia. The whole Municipality of Dragash/Dragaš is located within the Massif and reaches all the way to northeastern Albania. As the mountain area is one large ecosystem, municipal and international borders have little meaning to the flora and fauna of the area. However, there are three main areas to the Sharr/Šar Mountains in Kosovo, which include:

- 1) The Northern Zone of Luboten/Ljuboten and Brezovicë/Brezovica
- 2) The Central Zone of Prizren
- 3) The Southern Zone of Opoja and Gora Regions

While currently, the Kosovo National Park Sharr/Šar Mountains (Mali Sharr/Šar Planina) reaches only the borders of Dragash/Dragaš Municipality (running through both Shtërpçë/Štrpce and Prizren Municipalities), it is hoped that the protection of the park will be extended into the Dragash/Dragaš area shortly. The Sharr/Šar massif is home to a number of high mountains with 22 peaks over 2,400 meters (7,874 feet) with the highest peak of Mt. Korab straddling the border between the FYR of Macedonia and Albania, reaching a height of 2,764 meters (9,068 feet).<sup>2</sup>

The Sharr/Šar Mountains are rich in biodiversity and beauty. Accord-

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<sup>2</sup> Feasibility Study on establishing a transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina -- Korab --Deshat/Dešat. UNEP Vienna - ISCC, 2010.

ing to existing data the area is among the richest biodiversity centers in the Balkans with many endemic, relict, important and rare plant and animal species. Based on data from previous investigations, there exists about 2000 vascular plant species<sup>3</sup> or more than 20% of overall Balkan flora<sup>4</sup>. The fauna of Sharr/Šar Mountain includes approximately 50 species of mammals, 17 species of lizards, and between 129 and 200 species of birds depending on the source. With over 147 butterfly species the area offers amazing opportunities for niche nature excursions and expeditions. The Sharr/Šar Mountains is also one of the richest in the Balkans in terms water and is filled with ravines, rivers, and lakes. Thirty-nine post-glacial lakes dot the area, peering up into the sky like alpine eyes.<sup>5</sup>

A few of the larger animals that you might see while hiking in the region are: Wild Goat (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), Lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*), Otter (*Lutra lutra*), Roe Deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), or even Grey Wolf (*Canis lupus*).

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3 "Report on the State of Nature" 2008-2009; KEPA, Pristina 2010, p16

4 IUCN SEE e-Bulletin Issue 25 · March 2011; [http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=4&sqi=2&ved=0CCoQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcmsdata.iucn.org%2Fdownloads%2Fiucn\\_see\\_e\\_bulletin\\_issue\\_25.pdf&rct=j&q=Sharr%20mountains%20plant%20species%20{30%25%20of%20the%20total%20in%20the%20Balkans}&ei=XJsGTryNF87mmAWI0uHKDQ&usg=AFQjCNFTDhAK3-WL-m\\_587ffX19jLFYK4w&cad=rja](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=4&sqi=2&ved=0CCoQFjAD&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcmsdata.iucn.org%2Fdownloads%2Fiucn_see_e_bulletin_issue_25.pdf&rct=j&q=Sharr%20mountains%20plant%20species%20{30%25%20of%20the%20total%20in%20the%20Balkans}&ei=XJsGTryNF87mmAWI0uHKDQ&usg=AFQjCNFTDhAK3-WL-m_587ffX19jLFYK4w&cad=rja)

5 "Feasibility Study on establishing a transboundary protected area Sharr/Šar Planina -- Korab -- Deshat/Dešat ." UNEP Vienna - ISCC, 2010.



**Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)- Photo by Nexhmedin Ramadani**



**Crested lark (*Galerida cristata*)- Photo by Nexhmedin Ramadani**





**Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*)- Photo by Nexhmedin Ramadani**



**Crocus scardicus- Photo by Bekim Bytyqi**

The Sharr/Šar Mountains are one of the most untouched and beautiful areas in Europe and offer a unique experience of stepping back in time to unspoiled nature. Please come and join us!

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## **Glacial Lakes:**

[http://balwois.com/balwois/administration/full\\_paper/ffp-579.pdf](http://balwois.com/balwois/administration/full_paper/ffp-579.pdf)

[http://www.bth.se/fou/cuppsats.nsf/all/3661a8471db7e401c12573ec003926a0/\\$file/Thesis%20Work-IM%20final\(2\).pdf](http://www.bth.se/fou/cuppsats.nsf/all/3661a8471db7e401c12573ec003926a0/$file/Thesis%20Work-IM%20final(2).pdf)

## **Flora Studies:**

[http://www.gowildconsulting.com/pdfs/harvesters\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.gowildconsulting.com/pdfs/harvesters_handbook.pdf)  
(USAID)

[http://www.cieer.org/geirs/regions/eu/kos/kosovo/by\\_family.html](http://www.cieer.org/geirs/regions/eu/kos/kosovo/by_family.html)  
(USAID)

## **Tourism in Sharr/Šar Mountains:**

Republic of Kosovo, official tourism website: <http://visitkosova.org/?page=2,153>

On-line guide: <http://www.kosovoguide.com/>

Private Mountaineering site: <http://sharrguide.com/>

Bird Protection –NGO-Finches: [haxhinexha@yahoo.com](mailto:haxhinexha@yahoo.com)

Municipal Representative From Local Action Group: Flamur Sylejmani, mobile 044 622 121 [flamursylejmani@hotmail.com](mailto:flamursylejmani@hotmail.com)

# DISCLAIMER

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## **ABOUT UNDP**

Conservation of biodiversity and protection of the environment as well as sustainable nature based tourism are essential for sustainable development. The poor are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. UNDP helps countries strengthen their capacity to address these challenges at global, national and community levels, seeking out and sharing best practices, providing innovative policy advice and linking partners through pilot projects that help poor people build sustainable livelihoods.

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges.

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## Annex Bus Schedule:

Dragash/Dragaš-Prizren 9:10 Bus station

Prizren-Dragash/Dragaš 11:00 Bus station

Dragash/Dragaš-Prizren 12:30 bus station

Bellobrad/Belobrad-Prizren-Prishtinë/Priština 08:25 near the primary school

Bellobrad/Belobrad -Prizren-Prishtinë/Priština 09:15 near the primary school

Bellobrad/Belobrad -Prizren-Prishtinë/Priština 10:25 near the primary school

Bellobrad/Belobrad -Prizren-Prishtinë/Priština 15:20 near the primary school

Prishtinë/Priština - Prizren-Bellobrad/Belobrad 12:45 bus station

Bellobrad/Belobrad -Prizren-Prishtinë/Priština 14:00 near the primary school

From Opoja villages to Dragash/Dragaš and vice versa there are mini vans only in the morning and late afternoon