

ALBANIA

LAND OF EAGLES

FILIP WEBER



OFF-ROAD GUIDE
FOR ADVENTURE DRIVERS
AND RIDERS





Albania – Land of Eagles

Filip Weber

Off-road guide
for adventure drivers
and riders

Sample

Sample

Written by Filip Weber, www.advrider.cz

Photo by Filip Weber and Roman Hrabě

Published by CompuNet s.r.o., www.compunet.cz

Printed and bound in the Czech Republic by Jan Mareš, www.potisk.com

All map rights reserved by Reise Know How, Germany.

Reise Know How maps can be purchased at www.reise-know-how.de.

For digital map versions see Touratech QuoVadis,

Fugawi, OziExplorer and other map programmes.

First published in February 2010

ISBN: 978-80-254-8643-6

Foreword

If you are looking for a travel guide, you may as well lay this booklet aside. It does not contain a dry description of the country or a list of interesting places and sightseeing attractions.

I would like to introduce Albania from a perspective few people gain. As a friendly and wonderful country with nice and hospitable people.

It always depends on the area you choose. Visit cities and the coast and you will loath it. Visit villages and inland highlands and you will love it. All you need is an off-road car, motorbike, a bicycle or just a backpack and good walking boots.

But hurry up, if you do not want to find standard Europe. Albania is changing as well, and stone roads for donkeys are being replaced by tarmac – a blessing for the locals, to be frank.

The first part of the booklet tells about my wandering throughout Albania during the past ten years to show how easy going the land and its people are. The second part suggests some engrossing routes to take. All of them are passable by off-road 4WD cars or motorbikes only.

Some extracts of this text are on-line on my website, but a book is a book. I will appreciate any tips and comments.

Filip Weber
filip@weber.cz
www.advrider.cz

Obsah

Foreword	5
Where do the best people live?	7
For the first time	9
Albania – Land of Eagles	11
Albania from a motorcycle	17
The Expedition	27
This time by car	49
Travel routes	59
Vocabulary	91

Sample

Where do the best people live?

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

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

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

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

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

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



*The monastery custodian in Frashër.
Blocks of highland flats on the route Këlcyrë – Osum*



For the first time

I had started considering Albania as a destination a long time ago. But there was the armed uprising in the 1990s, followed by total anarchy of 1997 when most of the people went bankrupt in pyramid investment funds and began rioting army stores. Moreover, my neighbours kept claiming that Albania was a dangerous country.

I visited it for the first time in 1999. I went riding the uplands of northern Greece with a friend of mine and his girlfriend. But the routes I chose put the couple off soon (no wonder), and we parted company. So I decided for a one-day trip to Albania.

My courage was promoted at the very border. The Greek customs officer looked at my BMW, nodded and asked if it wasn't a waste of such a nice motorbike to take it to Albania. Damn! The Albanians allowed me into the country without problems, and I may have been the last visitor to have all his data scribbled into the thick border books by the customs officers.

There was a perfect new tarmac road behind the border. But it ended a few kilometres on, and I turned to a horribly winding road leading to Sarandë. There is a new road from the ridge today and it takes another way. I wavered through Sarandë till some local policemen with tommy guns assured me that the road leading across the town rubbish heap really was the highway to Vlorë and the coast. It was not a road; it was a rock-strewn narrow track barely passable by car, unbelievably hollowed, without a trace of tarmac.

I rode past a submarine base, watched dolphins playing in the bay and reached Himarë. I was sure that it could not be such a wilderness so as not to have a place to eat. And I really found a splendid restaurant with beer

on tap, run by a Greek who could speak good English. He started telling me about the country. He had not been born here, but liked the country and, despite all problems, talked nicely about it. I did not get any further that time, turned and rode back to make it across the border to Greece before nightfall.

I tried to visit the submarine base on my way back, but the soldier guarding it with a tommy gun seemed to be rather tough. There was a brand new green Octavia with a bike on the top and a Prague licence number. So I asked: „Where are the Czechs from the car?“ „Which Czechs?“ wondered the soldier. „This car belongs to our commander!“

By the way, the submarine has been purchased by the Czech Republic and should be placed in the Military Museum in Prague.

1999

Albanian highland donkey





*Submarine base in Palermo Bay
Turkish bridge by the hot springs at Përmet*





*Dangëll mountain range
Young villagers from Greqçë admiring our motorbikes*





*One of the numberless communist monuments
Wading below the hot springs at Përmet*





*Rescue on the way to Frashër
Ilji, son of the monastery custodian*



Borsh – Tepelenë, southeast Albania

Route: Borsh – Ftterrë – Kuç – Gjiormë – Vajzë – Sevaster – Dorez - Tepelenë

Length: about 150 km

Description: a connecting route between the submarine base and hot springs

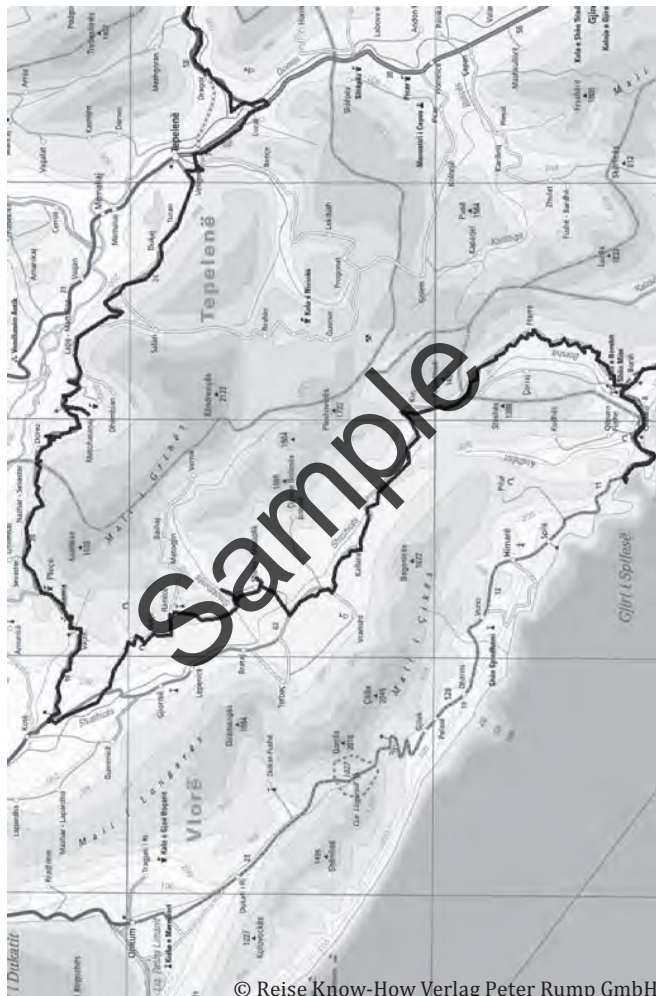
Have a look at the submarine base and the Turkish fort by Borsh. Going uphill, make sure you do not miss the turning with a ruined signpost to Ftterrë. Wonderful windings of the stony road will bring you from the sea right up to the mountains. There is a wrecked tarmac road leaving the village past a trout farm and a restaurant.

The tarmac road copies a river up to the turning to Vajzë. Should you get fed up with the tarmac, you can take a shortcut over the villages Shales-Mesaplik – Ramicë – Velçe, enjoy river wading and admire rock dwellings.

The tarmac ends behind the turning to Vajzë where you can stop at a beautiful restaurant in a rock with delicious cuisine. There are also several communist monuments by the road.

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

I recommend to carry on up behind Përmet to the hot sulphuric spring.



Devollit Canyon, south Albania

Route: Shtëpajë – Gramsh – Moglica – Maliqi

Length: about 200 km, a whole day

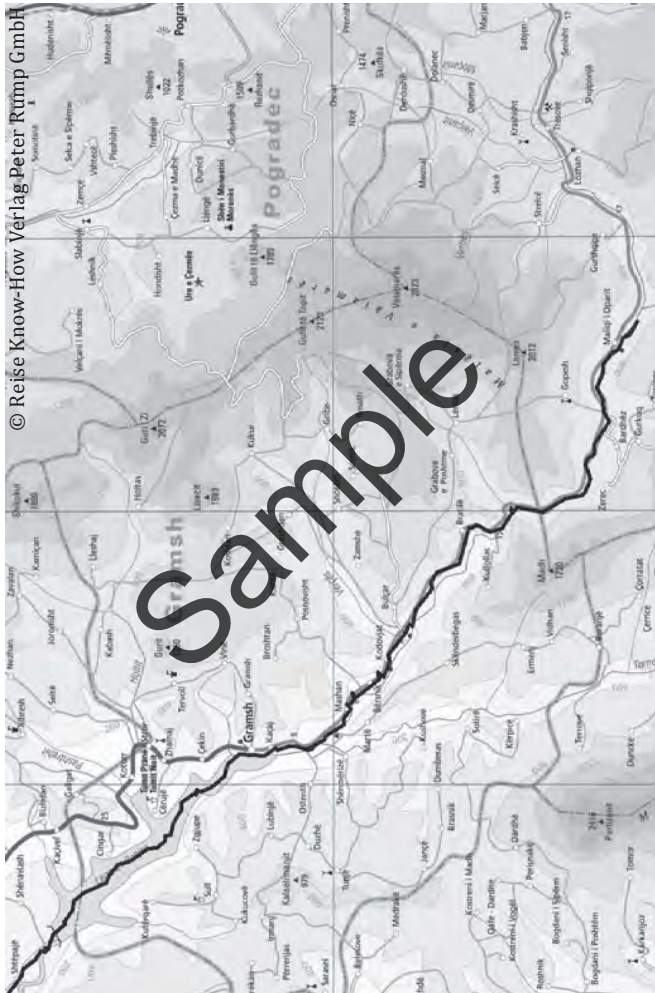
Description: a stony trail through a wonderful canyon

The canyon of Devollit between Shtëpajë and Maliqi is beautiful, rocky and wild. The route copies an original Roman lane all along.

There is a dam marked in all maps behind Shtëpajë with roads signposted around it, but the dam wall holds no water and you can still use the roads at the bottom. I noticed some prospecting work done on the dam in 2009 which may suggest that they would like to finish it.

The road continues through Gramsh and bites into the canyon together with the river. The only signs of civilisation are a wrecked bulldozer by the road and many kilometres of the gravel road leading through wild nature.





world mapping project maps by REISE KNOW-HOW

- > more than 150 titles
- > worldwide coverage
- > accurate high-quality cartography
- > printed on rip- and waterproof material
- > easy-to-read map layout
- > frequent updates
- > digital version, if available



www.reise-know-how.de

offroadtravel.eu



- ⚙️ **Offroad tours not only to Albania**
(Ukraine, Romania, Alpen, Tunis, Oman, Iceland, Israel...)
- ⚙️ **Service for travellers**
- ⚙️ **Satellite phone (sales, lending)**
- ⚙️ **We speak czech, english
and russian**

cestoffka
www.cestoffka.cz

ALBANIA

LAND OF EAGLES

FILIP WEBER

„Albania is a wild and mysterious country of high mountains, deep canyons, rock-strewn tracks, remote villages, rough highlanders, and blood feuds. Yet Albania is also a very friendly country with great and hospitable people. Get to know it driving or riding through this off-road heaven of stone or muddy roadways from the Ottoman Era.“



OFF-ROAD GUIDE



9 788025 486436