

ALBANIA 2018

WORLD RANGER DAY & EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES WITH THE ALBANIAN RANGER ASSOCIATION

NIKLAS GÖTH 31.7.2018

Day 1

DURRES-TIRANA

After arriving by train and ferry , we were met by ranger Edison Kashari in the port city of Durres and drove to Tirana airport to pick up Branko Stivic, President of the Croatian Ranger Association . Arriving in the lively metropolis of Tirana we were welcomed by Artenisa Peculaji, secretary and Genci Kacori , president of the Albanian Ranger Association. Together, we explored this ever-changing and up-and-coming interesting city. In the early afternoon there was a great typical lunch with various grilled meats as well as fantastic salads , sheep's cheese and yoghurt.

In the evening we met Ranger Erind Zalli from the north-facing Valbona Valley NP . Together , we strolled through the city and talked about the current state of the Rangers scene. The evening ended with a couple of drinks together while still hot at midnight.



DAY 2

TIRANA-BERAT-OSUM CANYON -TOMORRI NATIONALPARK

Early in the morning we drove with Ranger Edison to the beautiful city of Berat where we visited the castle above the town and the place on the river Osum and there we met the first young people who work for the tourism project Smile Albania, in which also the newly created Junior Ranger Program is involved. The basic idea for the Smile Albania project comes from Ranger Edison and it will be carried out this summer by around 1000 teenagers and young adults. Some of these teenagers are part of the Junior Ranger program



In Berat we also met the junior ranger and Rafting Guide Dany who accompanied us to the incredibly deep ravines of the upper part of the Osum River and told us many fascinating details of this interesting and wild area





After a fantastic meal with organic lamb from the area in the late afternoon we changed the Fiat car for a 4x4 vehicle and went into the untouched Tomorri Mountain National Park





The night we spent together with the local ranger Eglisson in the local ranger station and the evening ended at the barbecue. At a late hour we heard a bang and saw a SUV with headlights turned off along the gravel road. The two Rangers were immediately on alert, especially when more shots were fired. In Albania there is no hunting and in the national park there are always poachers. The two Ranger appeared after some time out of the bushes, and after a phone call the situation was clarified. It turned out to be local residents who were using pistols to deter badgers in their corn field.

DAY 3

TOMORRI NATIONALPARK-BERAT-DIVJAKA/KARAVASTA NATIONALPARK-TIRANA



The next morning after a hearty Albanian breakfast we walked a bit through a remote village and then on a wonderful circular walk through a small part of the national park. The landscape and biodiversity was breathtaking.





The agriculture in this part below the high mountains takes place on small terraces and is characterized by thoroughly mixed and varied cultivation. Due to the small structures and the fact that no artificial fertilizers or pesticides are used, the biodiversity is very high in the agricultural area. Large-scale crop monocultures are a foreign word here.



After this beautiful trip in the best weather we had an appointment at the National Park Administration in the Ranger Office in Berat. After the local welcome raki we discussed the tasks and problems of the local rangers to protect the incredible natural beauty in this national park. In this park there are many endemic plant species and around 40 species which only occur here. In some cases stones are mined in illegal quarries. Furthermore, the rangers are unsure whether they can keep their jobs in case of a change of government or whether the positions are filled arbitrarily.

Another big problem for this national park are the ailing or non-existent access roads. These are also used by the inhabitants of the remote villages in the national park and their very poor state is major problem for residents, rangers and future small tourism projects. The National Park Administration hopes that at least the main access routes to the villages in the National Park will be repaired in a timely manner.

The rangers work very closely with the local villagers in the park, receiving news about incidents such as poaching, etc. This is very important for the effective management of this large area.

After another Raki stop at the parents of one of the rangers, it was now off to the Divjaka Karavasta NP



alongside the Adriatic sea. We drove for about an hour through a hilly lake landscape until we reached the Karavasta lagoon with very old pine forests. Ranger Ardian, who is responsible for the area, received us at the brand new Visitor Center of Koci. Of course, there was once again another welcome drink and watermelons demonstrating Albanian hospitality. Together we went to a restaurant located on the edge of the forest where there was another fantastic lunch for us. I once again tried unsuccessfully to host the meal - hospitality in Albania is incredibly high.

Then we drove over the sprawling beaches to the lagoon, where the ranger passionately told us about this sanctuary. The beaches have grown by about 150 meters in the last 40 years as the sea recedes due to currents and lack of sand supply from the rivers. They saw hotels at the edge of the forest which were still right on the edge of the seashore 40 years ago and are now are facing a wide sandy beach and dunes.





The lagoon landscape was spectacular and far out on an island I saw the pelicans roosting. Next to the island was a small wooden frame with a tent on it, which is used by the Rangers at night to protect the pelicans from poachers. On the canals that connect the lagoon with the sea, there were interesting techniques of fishing to discover. The professional fishermen work there with the tides and an ingenious system of wooden piles that drive the fish into fenced areas.



A problem of the lagoon sedimentation because the canals are clogged to the sea resulting in the exchange of water and sediment from the lagoon being always lower. Maintenance of the canals and sediment removal in the lagoon are planned. Poaching is still one of the main problems for rangers in the area. The lagoon was once a popular destination for Italian "hunters" who simply shot at everything that moved. The current problems are more illegal fishermen and hunters who come from poor areas around the lagoon and go hunting and fishing to feed their families. After a "Sundowner" on the terrace of a hotel, it was about 1.5 hours drive back to Tirana.

DAY 4

TIRANA - WORLD RANGER DAY UND NATIONAL RANGER MEETING

After a morning coffee in a bar in Tirana and with outside temperatures of already hot 30 degrees, we went to a beautifully landscaped city park with a lake. Everything was already prepared for the 2nd WRD in Albania.



Rangers from all Albanian NP met there and took some pictures together for recognizing the sacrifice of world wide Rangers work for the environment while waiting for the beginning of the Ceremony.

The numerous junior rangers from different parts of Albania were rehearsing for the flag parade, which was planned for the arrival of the Minister of Environment and Tourism.



There were 4 television stations present and everyone was waiting in front of the stage for the late appearance of the Minister. After his arrival, the new Ranger anthem of the Albanian Association was played, the Junior Rangers carried the flags of the federations and also those of ERF and IRF onto the podium. After the minister's speech, I was also asked to give a few words on behalf of ERF and the twinning partner Swiss-Rangers, which I gladly did (at the now prevailing 38 degrees





After the obligatory group picture we had lunch in a luxury hotel thankfully air conditioned. There, the second national meeting of the Albanian Ranger Association took place in the afternoon. After two introductory lectures of secretary and P HAIRMAN the Board, I gave a speech about my work in the Greifensee Foundation, Swiss Rangers, Junior Ranger Programmes and the work of ERF and IRF. At the end of the talk, there was a minute's silence before the Roll of Honor to commemorate all rangers killed in the world for nature protection. Next our Croatian Ranger colleague Branko Stivic gave a talk about the Croatian Ranger Association as well as about various IRF Meetings. Each lecture was translated directly into Albanian by the secretary. I was very proud to have been invited by the Albanian rangers to this meeting and I am pleased that the Swiss Rangers have such an active twinning partner. Together we discussed further steps and projects of our two rangers organizations as well as other projects in cooperation with the ERF.

In the evening we explored the city center of Tirana and enjoyed (with still very hot temperatures) the lively nightlife in this exciting city.

DAY 5

TIRANA-DURRES

The next morning we went by taxi to the ferry port to Durres and then back across the sea to Italy and back to Zurich by train. Albania left a lasting impression on me. I am very impressed by the great kindness and hospitality of the residents as well as the incredible wealth of wild untouched landscapes. I'll be back for sure and highly recommend a trip to Albania. Many thanks to the Albanian Ranger Association for the exceptional care and organization.



WE ALWAYS STAND WITH OUR COLLEAUGES
AROUND THE WORLD