In the winter of 2013 my wife and I took a trip to visit her family in Romania. I spoke to my brother-in-law Bogdan ahead of time as he was the only member of the family in Râmnicu Sărat with a car and I was in the middle of my 500 day caching streak at the time. My wife’s home town is rather small and had absolutely no geocaches but some of the larger cities, surrounding countryside and naturally the capital (Bucharest) had some. He was gracious and fascinated with my stories of caching in the US so he agreed to take me out and see if we could uncover some.

I am from Kansas City, MO and we have a lot of high quality geocaches but our understanding of terrain ratings various greatly from the fine folks in Romania. The first cache we attempted was on the outskirts of this town where you had to park near an old soviet era bridge that spanned the Buzău River and was closed to anything but pedestrian traffic. We walked to the edge of the bridge and my wife and her sister wished us luck as we slowly walked/slid down the side of the bridge about 50 feet to the frozen tundra like shore below. It was blistery and -15°C (4°F) so we had several layers of clothes but you could still feel the wind whip across the mixture of frozen ice and water. I pulled out my trusty GPS and cautiously we stomped through the snow which due to drifts was several feet deep in places. As I got closer to the GZ I noticed the coordinates were pointing us into a large collection of bramble bushes. We cautiously tip toed in and around but despite our best efforts the thorns kept catching our clothes and after one poorly placed step backwards I had one pierce through the bottom of my boot into my foot! After a good 20 minute search (and a pause to dislodge the thorn in my foot) we decided Mother Nature had won this round and retreated back to the warmth of the car. So much work for a DNF and that was a 2 star terrain cache!

Obviously skeptical my would be new cacher friends questioned our next destination. I wanted to keep them interested (and warm) so we ventured into town to search for what the cache page assured us was an “easy” cache. It turned out to be a nano on this massive statue in front of city hall. When we arrived thanks to the weather the muggle factor had dropped to zero. The design of this statue allowed for many hiding spots though and after 20 minutes our 4 sets of eyes still hadn’t found it. At this point a local policeman showed up and no surprise he had never heard of Geocaching but was very concerned about our loitering and intense interest in this statue in front of a government building. Luckily my native speaking partners were able to calm his concerns and not to push our luck we headed off once again.

I was really starting to worry that my streak would come to an end here 5,000 miles from home. As luck would have it this towns “city park” held one more hopeful find. Based on my previous observations I expected this to be a few block longs and situated between some towering concrete apartment buildings. What it actually turned out to be was a healthy sized nature preserve with long trails, a lake and next to a Federal “military zone”. Well Geocachers are persistent if nothing else so my somewhat reluctant family members in tow we parked and geared up for adventure. As we exited the car my sister-in-law walks to the edge of the woods and snaps a few branches off of the nearby trees then hands one to each of us. I thanked her for the walking stick and she explained it was far more important than that. Apparently Romania suffers from large packs of wild dogs and its best to be ready to defend oneself from them. A little concerned but bolstered by their apparent lake of fear we ventured deep into the snow covered woods.

Stopping every couple hundred feet to check our bearing and scout for dogs we trekked deeper and deeper until I felt a hand on my shoulder urging me down. I kneeled in place and looked back to see Bogdan pointing at a deer racing into the clearing ahead and followed by 20 dogs of various sizes. As the deer disappeared beyond the thick woods the faster dogs kept chase and the small, slower ones stopped and wandered around briefly. I was concerned they would come our way and saw that I was not a lone as everyone readied their sticks. The alpha dogs must have succeeded however because the rest of the pack ran off in their same direction a short time later.

Another quarter of a mile in and we arrived at the GZ. Thanks to experience I zeroed in on a likely spot but it was a hollow stump filled with several inches of ice. We chipped and scrapped until finally I laid eyes on one of the most beautiful geocaches I’ve ever visited! The container was just a flimsy piece of cracked plastic but goodness it was a hard fought win! After signing our names and leaving one of my trademark origami cranes we cautiously returned the conquering heroes.

…and that was just day one of the trip!

