

## PAPARA'S HOLE (HUDA LUI PAPARĂ<sup>1</sup>)

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**ABSTRACT:** *Papara's Hole - Huda lui Papară - is one of the most famous and important caves in Romania and Europe, being situated in the northern Carpathians. It has long been known since prehistory, but its exploration began in the 80's of the last century by members of the Speleology Circle in the town of Blaj (Alba County, Romania), who made the first touristic arrangement cave. This paper presents a cave history that blends with a set of legends that have been created around it and have had a strong impact on the local community. It is then presented the entire evolution of the cave exploration and arrangement, which no longer exists, due to floods that destroyed the settlement in time.*

**Keywords:** *hole; Ancient History; exploration; the layout of the cave;*

Somewhere, where the unreal can be touched, where legend meets history and the day has two dawns, there ends the outside world and Huda lui Papar begins.

Huda lui Papar's creation day was a few million years ago, when Bedeleu's limestone armour was lifted above the sea waters and its western corner was cracked, moving away from foundation. The newly formed emptiness became an escape way for water, and a refuge for life. From mosquito to bear, fish to bats and bacteria to fungi. All raised hopes in the walls and the floor of the newly created world. The last tenant arrived much later less than one hundred million years ago ... the Human.

The brutal *Neanderthals* arrived first, being always ready to attack with his spear, but later he was the underhand of the feeble conqueror, *homo-sapiens*. Since man found this place, he never fled it. He had found here water and wood, berries and game, salt, honey, gold, iron, shelter and warmth... In sunny, quiet times, he dwelled in huts or in wood and stone houses built on the flat piece of ground. On cold, wet and harsh days, he

cringed in the shelter of the darkness through hidden paths. If strangers ever came here, rarely they could get to the shelter and he that reached it, would remain here forever, dead or alive.

The high content of shiny gold grains, from the river's water, helped man to become strong. From that metal, with an endless life, man created barter items with others near or far. He exchanged gold for seeds and arrowheads, for materials and bronze axes... The Man was powerful and afraid only of the Gods... The Gods that came riding dragons and squeezed out water from the clouds, drowning the path through the underground shelter.

The tribal men attacked the dragon clouds, with bows and arrows, to chase away the rain.

Zamolxis the old religious leader from Apoulon's temple, lived over the mountain, and was the only one who could talk with the Gods. He came and entered the dark shelter and came out four years later.

The Ancient History tells us that Zamolxis entered into the cave and remained

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<sup>1</sup>hudă = hole in the ground, narrow path, shelter; Papar = religious leader, in a primary language

there for four years. From that moment, he became the only God to whom people prayed and the cave became the place of teaching and preparing new priests, new “papari”.

The children born with a contrite heart were stolen and taken to the other realm, to the dark shelter from Babar’s Fortress, where they were educated and travelled the world to bring the Zamolxis code. These shamans claimed to know how to summon or stop the rain, the hail storms, or to start the tornadoes – real dragons which could shatter everything by striking the ground with their tails.

People rarely stepped into the cave and started to avoid speaking about this place.

Roman legions came through the Aureus Valley, looking for the gold of Alburnus and the salt from Potaissa. But they left as they came.

Then rushing hoards of invaders came from the East. But they left as they came. On the glade in front the cave, people were born, lived and died.

The religious leaders rarely meet each other and their place was taken over by other clergies who talked about love and Christ. They built a monastery over the mountains, at Râme . They taught people about the Heaven in the sky and about the Hell under the earth, avoided talking about “huda”.

The water built dams in lakes and waterfalls, whose roar could be heard from far away. The peace of this little hamlet was affected by some curious phenomena. In the clear sunny days of summer, rushing streams of muddy waters could be seen pouncing from the cave, lowlands and the gardens, drowning the animals and destroying the grass. Those were the spirits, the dragons bathing in the shelter and pouring out the muddy waters through the cave.

The Shamans were becoming fewer and rarely were seen creeping into the underground shelter. People called them “solomonars” now, after the biblical king Solomon, who controlled the rain.

Until the 60’s there still were solomonars

in the mountains of Apuseni. They may be there nowadays too. They were mysterious characters, no one knew them. Tall, with a wild sight, often russet-haired, poorly dressed, they showed themselves in the villages, begging for food. If they were well nourished, the following year would be a peaceful one, with regular rain, without hail or storms. If they were refused by the villagers, the hail and storm would swoop upon the village in that year.

Because they were afraid of solomonars, people built a little wooden church on the mound in sight of the cave. Whenever crashed, burned or dynamited, the church was rebuilt and even today reconciles the two worlds of darkness and light, of reality and legend... The little church is still standing tall nowadays and next to it can be found the Monastery “Sub Piatra” (The Monastery Under the Stone).

The first written mention about the dark shelter “huda” was made by cartographer Lenk v. Treuenfels in 1939, *Siebenbürgisches Geographisches Lexikon* (The Seven Castles Geographical Encyclopedia). He describes the area, but can’t get inside the cave because of the encountered difficulties.

It falls back into oblivion until 1954 when the geologist Erno Balogh together with a youth group from Cluj succeed an exceptional performance for that time. They explore the whole active gallery of 1,200 meters and another 800 meters of fossil galleries. They used new climbing technologies but also improvisations like wooden stairs and deck beams. The extraordinary thing was the mapping of a theodolite with unrivalled precision.

In 1977 and the following years, the Speleology Club Polaris Blaj represented by brothers Ludușan (Nicolae, Roru, Dorel, Teo, Nelu and Mircea), Sorin Sârbu, Ilie Sabău, Ovidiu and Gabi Băcioiu, Ioan Dordea, Gino Sălăjan, Iosif Pop, Victor and Nunu Ciufudean) began the systematic exploration of the cave.

The first attempt was made in the middle

of winter, by Roru and Teo Ludușan, when they discovered the active area. They chose January, on the basis of the low level of water. The only information they had was a one-page summary of the exploration made by team Balogh, from the Cave Book of Romania (M. Bleahu, 1976). They managed to get to the Wonders Hall, which was crowded with bats.

Next summer, Roru Ludușan organized two more explorations in order to identify the potential of the area.

A year on, accompanied by Sorin Sârbu and Victor Ciufudean, he organized an underground camp in the central area, through the gallery which leads to the Hall of Silence, detecting a possible continuity. The gallery ends 20 meters above the active gallery. On the opposite wall, six meters below, the gallery's entry can be seen. They threw a rope, and Roru goes down. With a swing he landed on the gallery's ledge. The sloped and slippery floor made him nervous, but after a few steps everything was safe. He explored only a few dozen meters and when it was certain that the gallery continued, he returned.

The others climbed down too. It looked like a tangled maze, with interspersed galleries, shafts and chimneys. They junction with the Hall of Silence and with the second gallery which leads from the same room. On their return journey they found a narrow gallery which faults the dangerous entry through where they started the explorations.

After a second period of sleep, they were awoken by a curious phenomenon. A few meters from them could be seen a trickle of water that flowed near by the roof, dripping on the gallery's wall, into an aperture. From here they filled up on drinkable water. But now, instead of a gentle rippling, a serious waterfall could be heard. And so it was.

*- Flood!*

In a few minutes, they packed the camp. After the ladder way, they found the water rose one meter on active. And it seemed to be just the beginning. They climbed the walls

and managed to pass the deep areas and after dozens of hours they've got to the Wonders Hall. No time to rest. The water was rising. An afterglow was seen at the entrance. It was noon time. But here began the lakes and waterfalls area. They prepared a small rubber dinghy with equipment and approached the last part. It took them twelve hours to make the last four hundred meters till to the glades entrance. But they got out safe, and ironically dry.

Roru made the mapping in two outings and came simultaneously with new explorations. Dorel, Dana, Nelu and Mircea Ludușan, Gino Selejan, Ovidiu and Gabi Băcioiu, Ilie Sabău, Iosif Pop all took part in it...The new discovered area was called the Ludușan Labyrinth.

Another expedition is organized and Teo Ludușan together with Victor Ciufudean climbed the chimneys from Balogh Gallery. They used a technique absolutely inconsistent, but in those times there were no rules. A tied collision clamp (an anchor) on the end of a chord was thrown to the balconies between the walls and the gallery's ceiling. Victor and Teo, without any other safety measures, using only some locks, lifted the chord when it was caught into something solid. They answered many questions, but they couldn't find a relevant continuity.

Roru Ludușan explored the final area together with another team. He mapped and got up the final chimney, which brings up the cave's elevation by 123 meters. He also explored a crack in the left wall and after he climbed four meters, he found a narrow high gallery which runs into a circular hall. At the same height, two entrances of galleries could be seen. He managed to get into the one and explores it to the base of a cataract. He gives up, but returns in few weeks together with Victor and Nunu Ciufudean. Here, they explored and mapped a maze which crosses several times the chimney from the Cross Hall, on-coming to Ludușan Labyrinth to whom it belongs. The cave has more than a 5 km length.



The explorers



Climbing



Flood



Pass

Roru Ludușan and Ovidiu Băcioiu organized the next expedition to video record inside the cave (huda). But lighting was a real headache. Those days the only options were electricity and floodlighting. They borrowed a 5 KW generator and an IMR van. Ioan Dordea brought the generator near the entrance of the cave. Bad luck! Although they tried the generator before they left, now it didn't work anymore. Although the generator was new, but it was improperly stored and it became useless. So, they reorganized, and Ovidiu and Gabi Băcioiu borrowed a 2 Km long power cable from CPL (The Integrated Wood Processing Department). Ioan Dordea transported the cable with the same IMR van (The Institute of Rare Metals) from Alba County. Nicolae Ludușan used to "borrow" that van illegally to Polaris, in extreme cases. The cable was connected to the closest electrified point – the school from hamlet. They stretched that 2 Km of cable to the cave (huda) but it was still short by a few hundred meters. They asked for help from the mine at Baia de Arieș. When they finally completed the equipment, they realized that because of a power failure,

they can't use the floodlights. They failed to film into the darkness of the cave but they built a strong team ready to do the impossible: *the layout of the cave*.

Roru came with the idea and with the layout plan of cave. The members of Polaris had no experience in construction. Gino Sălejan just graduated the Military School and was a fresh lieutenant in the Roads and Bridges Department. His opinion was assertive: *"It's not possible!"* But the chairman of Albamont, Mărioara Pușcaș, believed in Roru's project and introduced him to Ion Ranga, the chief engineer of Enterprise Construction District. He wanted to see the cave. Roru and Gino took him through lakes and waterfalls, up to the Hall of Wonder. He's shocked by the uniqueness of the cave, but has a disarming conclusion:

- *"Me, and my best constructors, I wouldn't engage to build it in a period of two years. You, with ten children, you think you can do it in a month? If you say <yes>, you'll have all my support and a demijohn of brandy (țuică).*

The action begins on 1st August. Roru, Nelu, Mircea and Dana Ludușan, Eugen and



Dodo Cindrea, Vasile Kucinski, Naghy Martin, Ovidiu and Gabriel Băcioiu, Florin Oprea all take part. Meanwhile, Bogdan Broșteanu, Tibi and Lucian Spătacean, Lute Ciufudean join the team.

A whole day they ferret among the enterprise's odds and ends, and they load the lorry with metals, reinforced concrete and metal grids. From Geberta, Sălciua's mayor endorsed by Ranga, obtained cement, timber and a buffalo cart for transport. They borrowed welders from the mine at Baia de Arieș, and paid for a daily hot meal. From the train station, the lineman Seuleanu offered them some thrown-away iron rails.

They camped at the end of the grid from Valea Moților, 3 km distance from the cave.

What followed was an odyssey. They built directly on to the lake's water, 50 meters of gabion to support the gateway. They also made up and installed 12 metal footbridges, two staircases and a few hundred meters of landscaped paths.

During the day, divided into teams, they carried boulders and concrete, they brought decks and stairs from camp to the cave, drilled holes into the rails with a chisel and hammer... During the night they worked in the camp. They chopped and seamed profiles for stairs, bridges and handrails...

Jenel and Dodo trained themselves in masonry stone, Roru, Nelu and Mircea seamed, installed and consolidated the materials, Vasilică and Martin drilled the rock with the chisel and hammer, Dana run to and from the City Hall, organizing the materials and the carriage transport. Florin Oprea was responsible with the food, going daily to the canteen at Baia de Arieș and bringing back the food for the team.

After 31 days, the fantastic cave from Apuseni could be visited with street shoes. The first guests were the hamlet residents, some fearful grandmas who came out straight from Sunday Mass and, at the mayor urging, they entered the cave. Now they walked shyly in the place where a month ago, only trained and well equipped speleologists could go

venture in. They were convinced now, that inside weren't any wizards or dragons, but a peculiar beautiful place. The first ever guest who has bought an entrance ticket was Ion Ranga, and he did come with a demijohn of brandy.

The installation was maintained by the club members for several years and later was taken into Sălciua Council administration. In the end, a major flood destroyed it completely.

In 1988, Roru Ludușan discovers a siphon in a side of a loop, above the Great Barricade. They dive down to -4m but beyond that it became impervious because of a coggling.

Ioan Coroiu's team, a biologist and professor in Cluj-Napoca, took advantage of the installation and took some long-term research on bats, discovering that here are six species inhabiting, being the largest colony from Europe.

In 2004, Albamont began the construction of the cave visiting infrastructure on a new route, far above the water, on the left shoulder of the main gallery wall. The whole construction was made of wood, funded by European funds. The work was not completed and has gradually deteriorated. In those circumstances, it was found in a hollow wall, a bronze axe, five thousand years old.

Over the next period of time, some photos by Hans-Werner Ziegler, who won several competitions in this domain, brought the underground beauty to the surface, for the faint-hearted.

In 2008, the new Polaris generation of speleologists continued to organize s expeditions into the cave (Hudă).

Being assailed with a new technology, the cave begins to reveal its beauty through photos made by the teams directed by Cosmin Berghean and Sergiu Băcioiu.

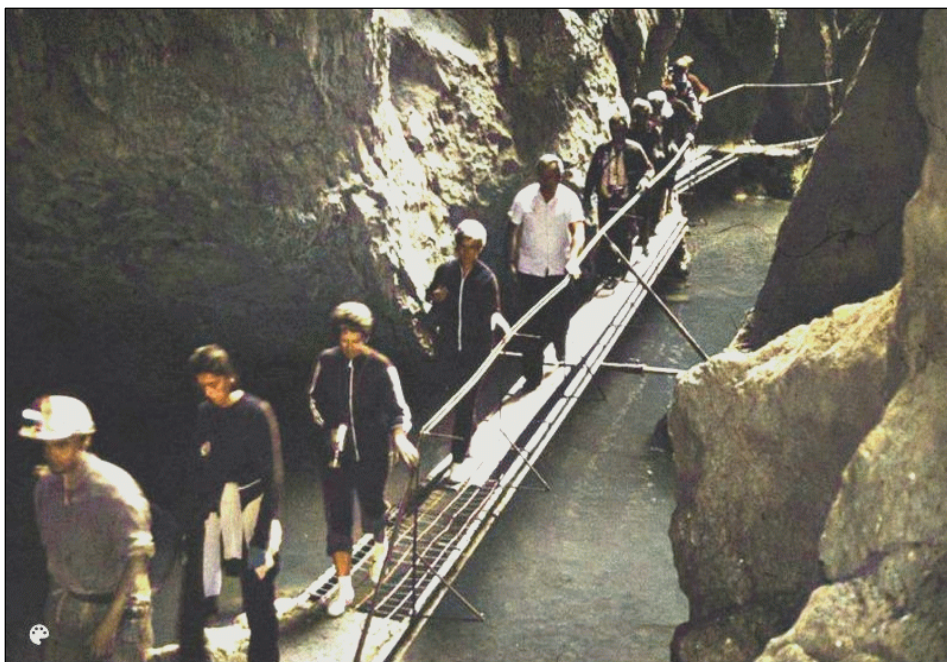
In 2008 – 2010, a team from Geoda - Târgu Mureș performed a hydro-tourism profile of the active gallery and a partial map of the stream.



Job



Edecars



First visitors



Amazing Hall

On one of the incursions into the cave, three people are caught by the flood and closed-off underground for dozens of hours.

In 2013, a team of divers from SpeoSub and Bedeleu Adventure begin the de-clogging of the siphon. This action helped them discover and explore a 200 meters drowned gallery, which intercepts a dry area. The water could be draining to this gallery from the (saddle) Avenul from Tău Morii, on the plateau above the cave, where the Polaris teams directed by Ema Marcu and Cosmin Berghean reached -110 meters and may be surprised by a cave junction.

To better protect the cave, The Bat Protection Association from Romania installed in 2012 a metal gate that proves effective.

If you wish to see Huda lui Papară, you must get to Sălciua first, on the Turda-Câmpeni road. From the village's center, a narrow, paved road, takes you beneath the Bedeleu's ramparts to the unique entrance of shelter. A cliff, forty meters tall, white rock of Bulz, is the first sign that you are in the fantastic realm.

The first obstacle is a cold lake that you

have to pass, through chest-deep water. At its end, the Fan Waterfall forces you to climb over a four-meter high boulder, on the right side. After the next level, you get under the Stone Heart, a huge V-shaped rock stuck between the 80 meters high walls.

Don't waste time, and climb the frontal barricade on the attached rope from the left side.

The road is easier above the barricade. Three places, where the dams of boulders formed lakes, are coming. You can pass them smoothly and get to the Wonders Hall. It has 100 meters long and high and is full of wonders. The largest bat colonies in Europe are sheltered here for hibernation. The floor is made up by one hundred wagons of Chiroptera - a result of a guano bat phosphate. The hall ceiling is covered with hundreds of the largest and manifold helictites from Romania. At the top, another curiosity of this hall can be seen - a hot air bag.

Leave the Wonder Hall and continue through the Balogh gallery. You'll now climb another barricade, then, following the left and the right sides of the stream's bank



you can advance easier. Two hundred meters ahead, on the left side, there is a loop which drains the water from The Siphon of Roru, keeping it always clean and cool.

The gallery continues with a series of lakes that can be avoided through the banks, on gravel shoals.

Next to a gigantic pillar which divides the gallery in two, you can climb the wall (using the attached chain-rope), getting to the Silence Hall. Here thrive the parietal leaking, stalagmites and septum...

If you climb down 10 meters, with a rope, you can easily get to the active gallery. But don't rush! Above the waterfall, you can find The Ludușan Labyrinth, which leads you through dry galleries, narrow and high or broad and low, to the Silence Hall, above the active gallery.

Back to the active gallery... we have to go through the Cross Hall, with a chimney with unknown high and under the blade limestone of the semi-siphon, follow the active gallery. On the right side you can enter into the southern part of the labyrinth, which has the same configuration as seen before.

There are three more lateral rooms until you get to the Gemănata Waterfall which falls from the final area of cave, a tumultuous place that changes constantly. On the right, the final chimney takes you to the highest point of cave (+123 meters).

Only a few meters separates you from Vânătare and if you could move like the great Zalmoxis did a few million years ago, you could reach the lowest point of the unique subsidence from Romania.

The subsidence from Vânătare, a one hundred square kilometers hollow, relatively flat, with a few hidden villages in its three valleys, which drains through the cave's underground, is certainly the other realm from the shaman legends. The Waterfall from Vânătare, the Dâlbina Cave, the Small Cave, the Cave from Coacăzi Hill, the Pit from Tău Morii are places to see, don't believe that this is the other realm.

Our story stops here but the story of Huda continues. The cave became a workshop for several teams.

The speleologists are determined to push the boundaries, because the cave is practically boundless. A hundred meters can be a realistic target.

The divers will deliver the big surprises when they will get under Bedeleu.

The archaeologists must be assured to start the systematic excavations in the area and they will be surprised by the fact that legends are not just nice stories.

The photo film producers have here topics to satisfy their appetite for novelty. The biologists are awaited by a very special world.

The underground area, partially isolated, continuously refilled with nutrition elements, certainly created a unique living world which awaits discoverers.

These miracles should be seen by all. It's time for another development program. The cave (Huda) deserves a development on par with its miracles.

***Who's up for it?***

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