

# THE MOUNTAINS OF ROMANIA



#### About the Author

Janneke Klop is a self-declared 'roamaniac' and has been exploring Romania since 2005. After studying English Language and Culture in the Netherlands and the UK she started working as a teacher, but the world on the other side of the window was so attractive that she decided to head outdoors. It was love at first sight between her and Romania and she has revisited almost every year. She writes about her Romanian adventures at [www.roamaniac.com](http://www.roamaniac.com) and also co-organises (self-) guided tours of the mountains of Romania. Born and bred in the Netherlands, Janneke now lives in Ghent, Belgium, where she works in Flanders' best-supplied travel bookshop, Atlas & Zanzibar. She is an active member of the Klimen Bergsportfederatie (Climbing and Mountaineering Belgium) and Grote Routepaden (Grandes Randonnées) associations.

## THE MOUNTAINS OF ROMANIA

TREKKING AND WALKING  
IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS

by Janneke Klop

**CICERONE**

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All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/948/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/948/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: *The craggy limestone southern ridge of the Piatra Craiului in late May (Route 19)*

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## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### International distress signal *(emergency only)*

Six blasts on a whistle (and flashes with a torch after dark) spaced evenly for one minute, followed by a minute's pause. Repeat until an answer is received. The response is three signals per minute followed by a minute's pause.

### Helicopter rescue

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### Emergency telephone numbers

Emergency services: tel 112

Romanian mountain rescue (Salvamont): 0725 826 668

### Weather reports

[www.meteoblue.com](http://www.meteoblue.com)

**Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.**

## Symbols used on route maps

	route		woodland
	alternative route		urban areas
	start point		route start on overview map
	finish point		trek route on overview map (main stages, excluding excursions)
	start/finish point		
	route direction		
	regional border		
	international border		
	station/railway		
	peak		
	manned/unmanned refuge		
	official campsite/permitted camping spot		
	building		
	church/monastery/cross		
	castle		
	pass		
	water feature/waterfall		
	viewpoint/cave		
	bridge		
	other feature		
	crag/outcrop/precipice		
	sheepfold		
	satellite tower		
	car park		
	national road (DN)		
	county road (DJ)		
	communal road (DC – paved/unpaved/paths/tracks)		

### Relief in metres

2600–2800	
2400–2600	
2200–2400	
2000–2200	
1800–2000	
1600–1800	
1400–1600	
1200–1400	
1000–1200	
800–1000	
600–800	
400–600	
200–400	
0–200	

SCALE: 1:100,000

0 kilometres 1 2  
0 miles 1

except where indicated

Contour lines are drawn at 50m intervals and highlighted at 200m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/948/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/948/GPX).



### Publisher's acknowledgement and thanks

James Roberts was the pioneer of visiting Romania for walking and trekking and wrote Cicerone's first guide, published in 2005, to Romania's beautiful mountains and trails. After the revolution of 1989/90 he spent more than half of each year there and travelled throughout the country. James was an experienced backpacker, often travelling solo on trips in the Atlas and Himalaya as well as Romania. He married Elena, a Romanian, and developed an unrivalled knowledge of the country, its people and natural history, becoming an expert interpreter of the Romanian scene.

Sadly, James died very young, shortly before his guidebook was published, and Elena has shepherded the guidebook since then.

On behalf of Cicerone and all who have appreciated Romania and its mountains through his work, we give our heartfelt thanks to James and Elena.

The world doesn't stand still and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Janneke Klop who has also come to love Romania and was brave enough to take on the project of illuminating Romania's trails and mountains for a new generation of hikers and trekkers.

*Jonathan Williams*

## AUTHOR PREFACE

Here is a little tribute to Romania itself – the country that makes me feel sound and whole and happy like no other place I've been.

### Home

The birds are big.  
The sky is high.  
The grass grows tall.  
The apples fall.

The air is warm.  
The wind sends wisps  
of hay across  
my bare tanned arms.

I lie face up  
and I breathe in  
until I burst.  
Except I don't

because I'm whole:  
There is no crack  
this joy can't heal:  
I am at home.

*Janneke Klop*

*Pastoral scenery after the Bicăjel Gorge  
(Route 9, Stage 3)*





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a guidebook is a solitary business, and while I love solitude I am beyond grateful to everyone who supported me during the three years it took to complete this gargantuan project. First of all, I would like to thank Anamaria Cremers, who relentlessly searched until she had found someone to update the precursor to this guide – written by the late James Roberts, to whom I am hugely indebted. Anamaria, you truly are my guardian angel. I am so glad our paths crossed. Thanks also for going over the language appendix.

A heartfelt thanks to everyone in Romania who hosted me, fed me, hugged me, hiked with me, listened to me, gave me advice, became my friends: you have made my experience so much richer. Special thanks to the owners of the Babou Maramureş, De Oude Wilg, Țară Nomadă and Zamolxe campsites: thank you for hosting me for extended periods of time and for your generosity and flexibility. You made me feel at home. Sorin Rusu – thank you for letting me stay at your beautiful apartment for next to nothing when I needed it the most, for driving me places (including the hospital) and for thinking along with me. Prof Dr Alexandru Diaconescu, archaeology professor at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, shared invaluable insights about Romania's history, without which it would have been considerably more difficult to write a sensible introduction to Romania's complex past.

I am very grateful for all the hard work the editorial team at Cicerone have put into making this book look the way it does: I am so glad I 'only' had to do the writing! Boatloads of gratitude go to Georgia Laval, my amazing copy editor. Thank you for making the book more readable.

Many thanks to my family and friends, old and new, for supporting me, and for reading my stories. Creating stories is so much more rewarding if you get to write them down – and people actually read them and respond to them.

I don't know why partners always come last in acknowledgements but they do – perhaps only so that one can say 'last but not least'. Thank you, Wilbert, for encouraging me and keeping me grounded – for being there for me, wherever I was. You are my anchor.

*Janneke Klop*

## INTRODUCTION

'Romania is my refuge. The mix of people, the rugged, unkempt beauty of Romania's nature that leaves me breathless. A country where nothing is taken for granted, and everything is cherished for its true value.'

*Lee Rammelt*

'I breathe and sleep and do everything better here.'

*Giulio da Sacco*



*A glorious path to the Bucegi ridge in the Bucegi on Route 16*

Romania is nothing short of breathtaking. It offers an almost bewildering array of options to the adventurous traveller. From the last inhabited medieval citadel in Europe, Sighișoara, to the robust fortified Saxon churches around Sibiu and Braşov; from the second largest underground glacier in Europe in the Apuseni Mountains

to the best road in the world (according to *Top Gear*) – the Transfăgăraşan, which cuts through one of the wildest and highest mountain ranges of Romania; from the last primeval forests of Europe in which brown bears, wolves, chamois and lynxes still roam to the Danube Delta teeming with life – Romania has it all.

## THE RODNA MOUNTAINS

### ROUTE 1

#### *Șetref Pass to Rotunda Pass*

<b>Start</b>	Șetref Pass or Borșa
<b>Finish</b>	Rotunda Pass
<b>Distance</b>	60km or 49.6km from Borșa
<b>Total ascent</b>	4220m or 4240m from Borșa
<b>Total descent</b>	3770m or 3660m from Borșa
<b>Grade</b>	Moderate-difficult
<b>Time</b>	4 days
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	2279m (Ineu Peak, Stage 3) or 2303m (Pietrosu Peak, Stage 2)
<b>Maps</b>	Preferably Munții Rodnei, 1:55,000, Munții Noștri; or Rodnei Mountains, 1:50,000, Dimap

This trek enables a traverse of the 57km main ridge of the pristine Rodna Mountains in four days. The landscape is pastoral; most of the ridge is grassy and doesn't pose any major challenges, and you will see lots of sheep, cows and horses grazing (and therefore quite possibly livestock guardian dogs too; see 'A note on dogs' in the book's main introduction). However, there is a lot of ascending and descending to be done and there is a challenging serrated section on Stage 3 that involves some scrambling. You might encounter wildlife too – the Rodna is home to a sizeable bear population. Bears being shy of humans, you are more likely to see chamois and marmots though. If you want to climb the massif's highest peak, Pietrosu (2303m), which is off the main ridge, consider adding an extra day – although it can be included at the beginning of Stage 2. Every stage except the last one ends at a lake or tarn. The lack of cabanas in the Rodna demands a high level of self-sufficiency, and the range's national park status means camping is only allowed in designated areas (see 'Accommodation and food', below). If strapped for time it is possible to start from the town of Borșa, which offers a worthy alternative to the lengthy Stage 1 from Șetref Pass. See below.

#### Access

To get to the Șetref Pass (at the border between the counties of Maramureș and Bistrița-Năsăud), take a bus or train to Săcel or Dealu Ștefăniței from Sighetu Marmăției. The bus to Săcel takes around 1hr 15min; ask the driver to drop you off at the Șetref Pass. There's also a direct train from Cluj-Napoca to Săcel or Dealu Ștefăniței but this takes a long time and departs at inconvenient hours (4hr 30min, 12.45am or 5.15pm). From the railway station in Săcel or Dealu Ștefăniței, walk or hitchhike your way up to the Șetref Pass (7.5km or 3km, respectively).

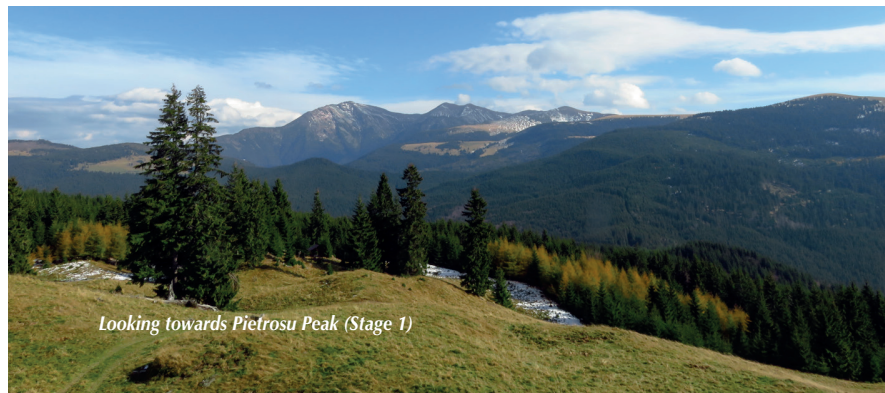
If starting from Borșa: several buses a day reach Borșa from Sighetu Marmăției (2hr 15min) and Baia Mare (4hr). Most of these are run by Dracard; in Sighet they leave from the bus station opposite the train station; in Baia Mare the bus station is right next to the train station.

From the Rotunda Pass you can walk or hitchhike the 4.5km down to the DN18 road. This brings you to the hamlet of Fluturica, from where you can hitchhike or take a bus west towards Borșa (less than 1hr). It's also possible to continue into the Suhard Mountains; see Route 5.

#### Accommodation and food

There is a good pension at the Șetref Pass called Hanul Tentea. Other than this and the cabanas at Rotunda Pass, at the eastern end of the main ridge, there are no cabanas. You can camp at the Șetref Pass though (ask for water at the pension). Camping is also allowed at La Igheaburi (the cowboy who lives there will happily offer you shelter from the rain), Pietrii Pass and the meteo station, as well as at the stage ends. In Borșa, your best option is the Borșa Turism campsite and pension; otherwise, try Camping Laura Borșa, Str. Independenței, nr. 139. In 2017 a refuge was built just south of Între Izvoare Saddle (Stage 2).

Hanul Tentea serves decent meals; the cabanas at the eastern end are self-catering. There are plenty of restaurants and bars in Borșa, as well as several supermarkets such as Profi and Penny that sell supplies for a hike.



*Looking towards Pietrosu Peak (Stage 1)*

## STAGE 1

## Şetref Pass–Rebra Lake

Start	Şetref Pass
Finish	Rebra Lake
Distance	23km
Total ascent	1740m
Total descent	630m
Grade	Moderate
Time	7hr
Maximum altitude	1985m (Tarnița La Cruce Saddle)
Water	At the pension at Şetref Pass; at La Jgheaburi meadow, as well as 1km further along the route from La Jgheaburi. Plenty of springs around Tarnița Bătrânei; spring at Rebra Lake.

This is a long stage; if you want you can split it up and camp at La Jgheaburi or Pietrii Pass. There is no water at the latter though, unless you are willing to descend north towards Moisei for 30–45min: there is a spring called 'Izbucul Izei' to the right of the watermill.



Two paths depart east from **Şetref Pass**; take the upper one that departs from behind the Hanul Tentea pension. (Deceptively, the lower cart track is marked with a signpost that suggests you go down this path. However, this will only lead you down into the valley.) After 500 metres or so you will see the first red stripe waymark on a tree. After 1km the path forks at a sheepfold; keep right – the trail goes through a ditch. Waymarks are far apart. You can see the Țibleș to the southwest and the Munții Maramureșului to the north.

When the track bends to the right after 2km, continue straight ahead (east) on a narrow trail; there is a waymark on a tree. At **Capu Muntelui Peak** (1194m) the trail sharply bends to the right (southeast). When it forks after 1km keep right, then turn left (northeast), off the track and onto a grassy trail after 200 metres. Climb for 500 metres to reach a picnic table (with roof). You will encounter several of these today. Continuing, there is a spring 200 metres further up, just before the signpost at **La Jgheaburi meadow** (1532m) where you may well find a herd of cows and horses.

Continue climbing eastwards for 1.5km until you reach a fork; keep right here. If you need shelter, there is a small abandoned **shepherd's hut** up to the left, and a spring in between the two paths. Fill your water bottles at the springs after a further 1km if you plan to camp at Pietrii Pass; there is no water there. After 400 metres a track comes in from the right – keep going straight ahead and up. When the path forks after a further 600 metres keep left, even though the waymarks point to the right – they indicate an unnecessary detour. Gently descend through the forest to **Pietrii Pass** (1196m) – you might well see bear prints on this section.







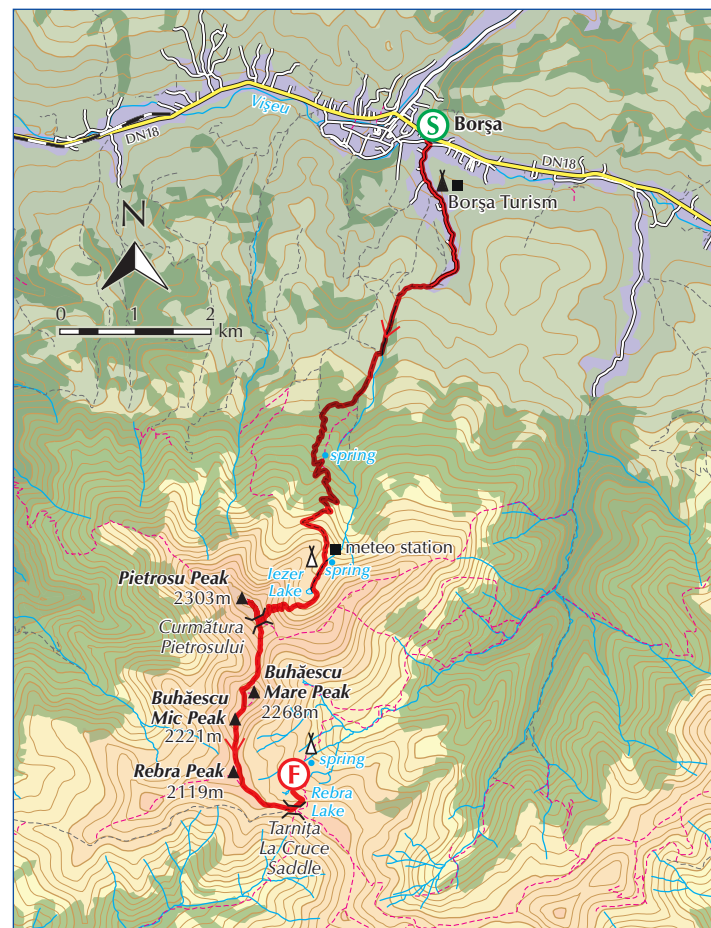
From the pass, steadily climb for 4km to **Bătrâna Peak** (1710m), then continue climbing for 2.7km to **Tarnița Bătrânei**. There are several springs here. About 700 metres later the path forks; if you go left the trail will take you over Rebra Peak (2119m). The easier option is to keep right and head straight for Rebra Lake. Continue for 3km until you arrive at **Tarnița La Cruce Saddle** (1985m). From here, descend north to **Rebra Lake**.

## ALTERNATIVE STAGE 1

### Borșa–Rebra Lake

Start	Bridge over Vișeu River, Borșa
Finish	Rebra Lake
Distance	12.6km
Total ascent	1760m
Total descent	520m
Grade	Moderate
Time	5hr 45min
Maximum altitude	2303m (Pietrosu Peak)
Water	Spring after about 6km; spring in between the meteo station and Iezer Lake; spring at Rebra Lake

Starting in Borșa comes with several advantages: it's easier to access than the Șetref Pass; the trail goes over the Pietrosu Peak, the massif's highest point; and if you're strapped for time this is the shorter route.



Cross the bridge over the Vișeu River in the centre of **Borșa**, just east of the hospital, to the south. You should start seeing blue stripe marks from here. Walk up Strada Avram Iancu, then keep left to stay on Strada Pietroasa. When the path splits, keep left for the Munții Rodnei National Park; the path to the right will take you to Pietroasa Monastery.

After about 7km and a 1000m climb you'll arrive at the **meteo station**; there is a camping spot here. The path takes you on to **Iezer Lake**, which happens to have exactly the same shape as Romania. From the lake, ascend another 500m to **Curmătura Pietrosului**. Turn right and head northwest for the very short climb to **Pietrosu Peak** (2303m); you can leave your pack at the saddle as you'll have to return here to continue to Rebra Lake.

Back at the saddle, the path takes you down towards **Buhăescu Mare Peak** (2268m). The path swings round the summit, then take the left path that hugs the southeastern side of **Buhăescu Mic Peak**. You will see Rebra Lake (very tiny and swampy) on your left. Either take a shortcut from the side of Buhăescu Mic Peak or continue to **Târnița La Cruce Saddle** and walk down to **Rebra Lake** from there.

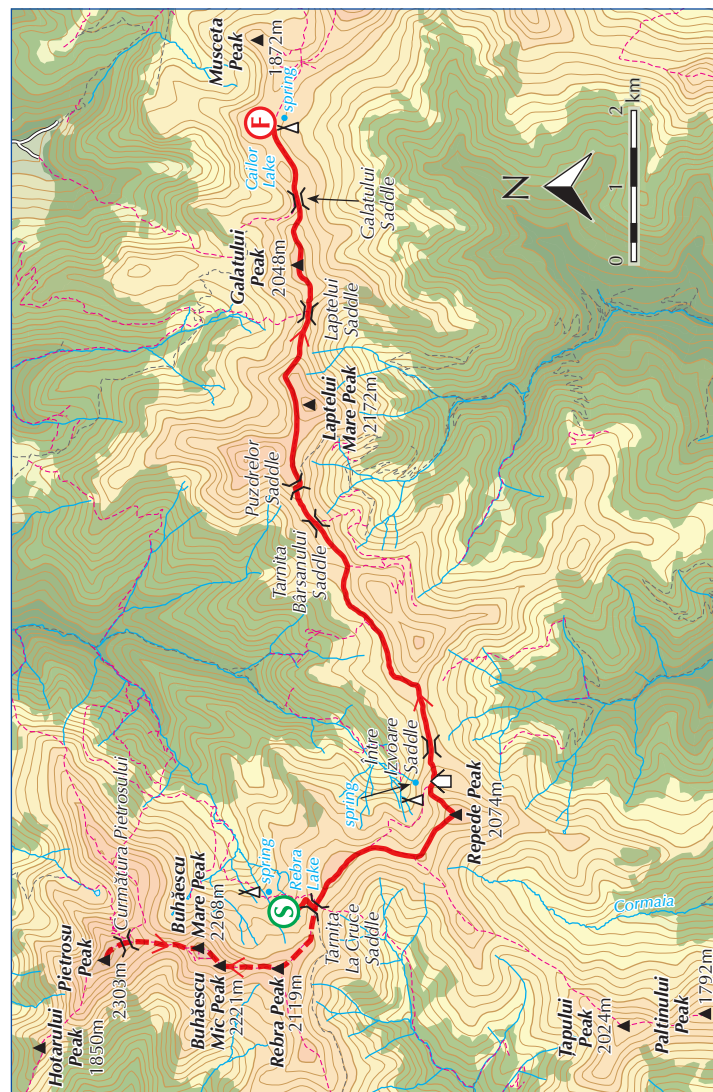
## STAGE 2

### Rebra Lake–Cailor Lake

<b>Start</b>	Rebra Lake
<b>Finish</b>	Camping spot 650 metres beyond Cailor Lake
<b>Distance</b>	13km, or 21km including Pietrosu Peak
<b>Total ascent</b>	690m, or 1450m including Pietrosu Peak
<b>Total descent</b>	740m, or 1500m including Pietrosu Peak
<b>Grade</b>	Moderate
<b>Time</b>	4hr, or 7hr including Pietrosu Peak
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	2074m (Repede Peak) or 2303m (Pietrosu Peak)
<b>Water</b>	At Rebra Lake, Între Izvoare Saddle, and at the camping spot beyond Cailor Lake

### To climb Pietrosu Peak

If you want to climb Pietrosu Peak (2303m), leave your gear at the lake and walk back up to **Târnița La Cruce Saddle**. From here, head north up the blue stripe trail (not the red stripe trail as the Dimap map suggests) to **Buhăescu Mic Peak** (2221m) and then **Buhăescu Mare Peak** (2268m). Descend slightly, then ascend to **Curmătura Pietrosului**; from there bear left (northwest) for the short







Horses near Cailor Lake

climb to **Pietrosu Peak**. From the summit, retrace your steps back to **Rebra Lake**. Alternatively, from *Curmătura Pietrosului* you can descend to *Borșa* in about 4hr, following ‘Alternative Stage 1’ (above) in reverse. Please note there is no cabana at *Pietrosu Peak*, which the Dimap map suggests; just a small derelict shelter.

From **Rebra Lake**, walk back up to **Tarnița La Cruce Saddle**. From the saddle, take the grassy trail that leads southeast up the ridge – not the cart track down south, even though the signpost suggests you should, as it will only take you down into the valley. After 3km of alternate ascending and descending you will reach **Repede Peak** (2074m). From here, take the (initially unmarked) path that swings sharply to the north. This takes you down to **Între Izvoare Saddle**, which is a camping spot as well. There is a refuge just south from here.

Continue down the red stripe trail. From **Tarnița Bârsanului Saddle** the path leads up towards *Laptelui Mare Peak* through juniper trees; at times the path is barely visible and you will have to climb over the trees. It is also quite poorly marked here, but just keep making your way up. At **Puzdreilor Saddle** just before **Laptelui Mare Peak** (2172m), take the path just to the right of the ridge. This leads to **Laptelui Saddle**. If you squint you’ll see a red stripe on a rock at the saddle; from here the path is well-marked again.

After going over **Galatului Peak** and **Galatului Saddle**, the path goes north-east. The camping spot is about 650 metres beyond **Cailor Lake** (‘Horse’s Lake’; presumably named after the wild horses that live here). Take a grassy trail to the right of the main path to reach it.

### Exit route: Cailor Lake–Prislop Pass

From the camping spot just beyond *Cailor Lake* there’s an easy exit route to the monastery at the *Prislop Pass*. Follow the red stripe trail to **Gărgălău Saddle**, 1km from the camping spot. From here the blue stripe trail takes you northeast to the **Prislop Pass** in about 3hr (8km). (After about 3km there’s an option to turn left to visit *Cascada Cailor* – ‘Horse’s Waterfall’.) From the monastery at the *Prislop Pass* you can take a bus or hitchhike back in the direction of *Borșa* and *Sighetu Marmăției*, or east towards *Vatra Dornei* and *Suceava*.

