



Transylvania: Mouflon



Paul Childerley thought mouflon hunting was easy. To prove him wrong, we sent him to Transylvania for a mountain hunt in temperatures 16 below zero...

I was on a driven hunt in Germany with the main man himself, Peter Carr. After a great day's sport, we discussed a winter trip to a country we hadn't been to before. This led to an extended conversation with another good friend – Jost Arnold, the head forester – who worked with a colleague Romania who looked after some great hunting grounds. We discussed some dates but, being busy men, completely forgot to arrange the trip.

Before we knew the date was almost upon us and the invitation was still open. With just a couple of days to go we booked flights for three of us (Geoff Garrod joined us) to fly to Bucharest, Romania. As I like to plan for all my trips away, I spoke to Peter about where we would be hunting and the weather conditions. It would make a big difference – if we were one hour north of Bucharest it would be -4°C , and if we were three hours

north it would be -16°C . I received a brief that we would meet a guide called Christian at Bucharest airport at 7.15pm. That was the extent of the brief.

Wizzair treated us to a tortuous check-in, a cramped flight and a bumpy landing – but eventually we arrived in Romania and headed off to find Christian. But there was no one waiting for us. This was going to be a trip like no other. We waited around for a while; eventually a taxi man arrived, saying, "Hello English?" He'd been sent by Christian to collect us.

On the way, we asked the taxi driver how far to the hunting ground. He explained it would be around three hours. Of course we were heading north. I could see the temperature dropping outside, and the further north we got, the more snow there was. By the time we arrived at our small hotel, the car thermometer read -16°C .

We were greeted by Christian, the head forester Sandor, and Attila the translator. After being shown our rooms we sat down for dinner: a traditional Romanian feast with plum schnapps. During dinner we planned the next morning's hunting. Peter and Geoff were assigned to the head forester to foot-stalk a big keiler, which would surely be very testing as there was a lot of snow on the ground. Christian was going to take me to check the wolf and boar feeding areas. Owing to our choice of airline, we had been unable to take our own rifles, but Christian had a selection to choose from. Happily, the choices were two new Blasers or a Merkel Helix, all with good quality scopes on top. I chose the smallest calibre available, which was a .300 Win Mag.

We rose early the next day, declined the winter-warmer schnapps and set off. It was



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a bright, sunny start, with the temperature at -9°C – positively balmy for this part of the world. Through his broken English and German, Christian advised it was not good weather for hunting because all the boar and deer were tucked up in warm areas hiding from the wolves. After a short drive we met the area's gamekeeper, Lisuma, who was driving an old L200 with some serious off-road tyres. This meant we were heading to the mountains in the Cosvana district of Transylvania.

We drove along the main road through the arable flat plains, which reminded me of the Norfolk broads but even flatter, and headed out on to a forestry track and into the mountains. After about an hour of extreme off-roading, we got to the first feeding area where the gamekeeper had been feeding whole maize for the deer and the boar. To my surprise, at the back of the feeding area was a horse, half eaten, chained to a post.

I asked Christian why they used horse for bait; he explained they use horses to extract the timber from the forest and there are several casualties from this hard labour. The horse bait is used for the wolves, bears and wild boars to entice them into the area where they have a trail camera – it's the most effective way to assess the population of animals in a remote area.

After visiting five different sites, taking over four hours of driving, we stopped the vehicle and tracked several wolf prints in the snow. Christian explained that deep snow on the ground with a frozen crust is deadly for hooved game. Their legs push through the crust when being chased by the wolves – it's a one-way ticket. Following several tracks of wolf prints, we saw the results of their efforts: two predated red deer, one of which was a trophy stag. Hunting wolves



At -16°C, the conditions proved challenging for the British hunters

is difficult in these weather conditions as they can catch their own fresh food with minimal effort.

Back to the hotel, I met Peter and Geoff for a late lunch and heard the story about how difficult the hunting was in the mountains. With thick snow underfoot, the animals could hear them coming. Geoff had one window of opportunity through some thick woodland, but for a change, the top game shot missed. This was much to his annoyance but to our pleasure, giving us some great ammunition to pull his leg.

After lunch we headed back out to a couple of areas where boar and wolves had been caught on the trail cameras. I was told to wrap up warm as it was going to be especially cold. We sat out in high towers looking over a baited area – the plan was to stay there until midnight or we'd bagged something. However, it was so cold that by 8pm we were back at the hotel thawing out.

That evening the head forester took a call to say a flock of mouflon were seen at one of the feed stations at the top of one of the mountains. Peter thought these would make good footage for the Shooting Show,

and insisted he would guide me as he'd hunted these animals many times before.

After a morning of counting roe deer and hunting foxes on the lowland arable fields, we headed for the mountains to look for a big ram mouflon. I'd never seen one of these in the wild or hunted one before, so I was very excited. The pressure was on, though, as Peter was going to film me.

Sandor dropped us half a mile from the high tower and gave us plenty of advice on how to approach the mouflon without



Roe deer and foxes were easy to spot in the lowlands, but Paul was set on finding a mouflon in the mountains



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Good things come to those who wait: Paul with his hard-earned mouflon ram

spooking them – this particular group was very wary because they had been hunted by the wolves. We set off and realised this was going to be hard work as the snow was deep and frozen – it sounded like we were walking on cornflakes.

As we approached the tower, I saw some movement on my left-hand side – it was a small group of mouflon. They didn't realise we were there, so we thought we would get a few steps closer to see if there was a mature ram in the group. After a few minutes of glassing, a large ram came into view through a gap in the trees. Flustered with the excitement of seeing him I got ready, but my wingman Peter was still playing around with the camera trying to get it to focus. With that, the lead ewe put her head in the air, looked once, then bolted into the thick forest.

Despondent and thinking the group would not return, we headed to the high tower, which was only another 100 metres on. We climbed in and prepared ourselves for a long stay. After a couple of hours of whispering banter about who spooked the group of mouflon, we decided to call a truce. All of a sudden I heard some distant crunching in the snow to my right, getting louder. But we couldn't see them until a group of mouflon with one mature male emerged 70 metres in front of us.

This time we were both ready for action. The group was milling around and the ram wouldn't come clear of the ewes. We waited silently and patiently to get a clear shot. All of a sudden there was an opening of the pack, and the ram was in the clear. As he was only 50 metres away I was confident with the shot, and decided to take it freehand. I remembered Sandor's that if he ran back into the thick forest, there would be nothing left by the next morning, so shoot, shoot and shoot again to make sure the animal was on the ground.

When I took the shot I was confident it was a perfect placement, but the ram's reaction was different to what I expected. He ran so I cycled another round and fired. With this shot the ram still carried on running. As it was passing through the spindly birch trees, my vision of him was impaired, but I needed him to drop before the forest so I shot again. He dropped but out of sight. It sounds a bit cowboyish firing so many times on one ram when I knew the first shot was perfect, but I always listen to the guide's local knowledge, and I wanted the wolves to go hungry that night.

After waiting for 10 minutes, we got down and went to the first bullet strike area. There was a good blood trail and I could tell it was a good strike. I followed the blood trail, which was easy to track because of the snow, and



A well-conditioned ram with a good curl

found the mighty ram about 100 metres from the first shot. I was over the moon to find he was a dominant mature ram with thick base of horns and in very good condition, considering he lives at the top of a mountain.

Sandor turned up and was very happy that we didn't have to venture into the deep, dark Transylvanian forest. I was ecstatic too. I had assumed that mouflon would be a docile, tame animal and not very exciting to hunt – but I can honestly say it was one of the most exciting hunts I've ever done. This species is one I can recommend to anyone thinking about hunting in Europe, and a magnificent trophy. Mine will take pride of place at the Beckerings Park shoot lodge. ■