



ASOCIAȚIA SPEOLOGICĂ
F O C U L
V I U



Grind Explo 2025

Expedition Report

*Prepared for the European Speleological Federation/
Fédération Spéléologique Européenne*

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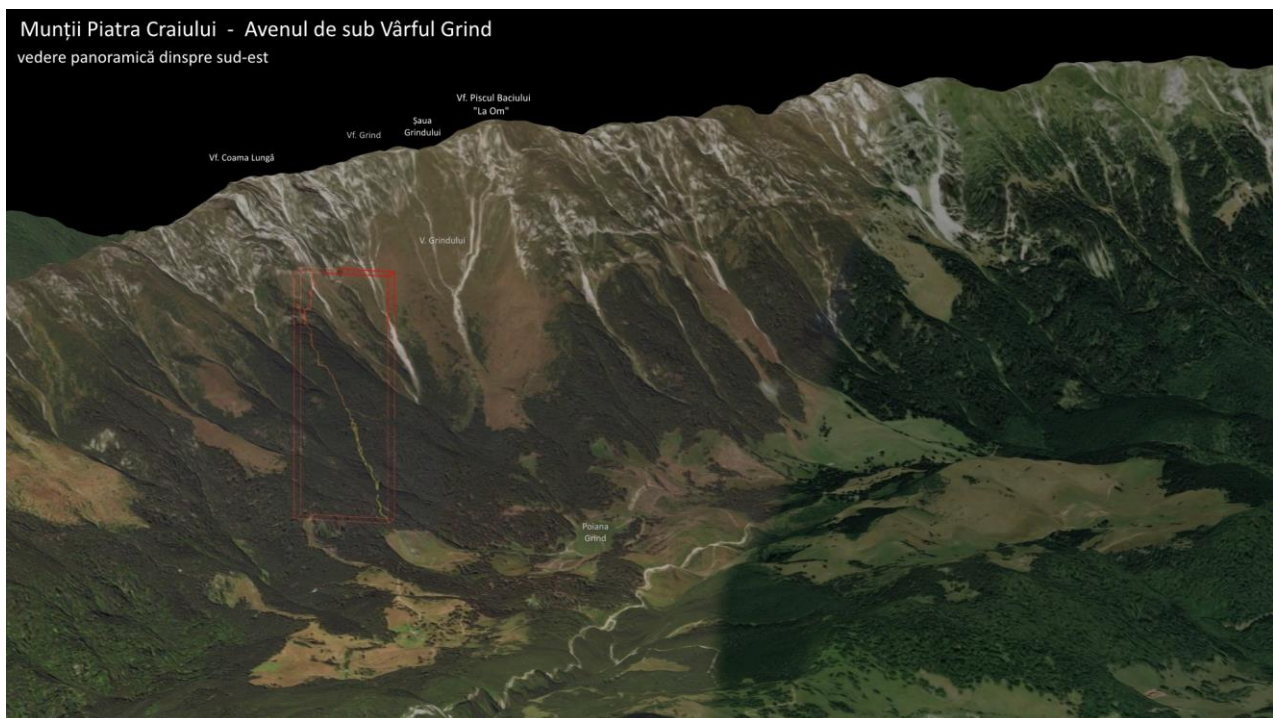
1. Summary

The international speleological exploration expedition **Grind 2025** took place in the **Piatra Craiului Massif** over multiple stages, including a preparatory trip in September, a main 19-day expedition (**26 September – 14 October**), and a follow-up trip (**12–17 November**). During the expedition, exploration continued in **Avenul de sub Vârful Grind**, resulting in new discoveries beyond the 2024 terminus and further extending the Romanian national cave depth record, previously increased during previous expeditions in the same cave.

The cave was discovered in 1985 in an area characterized by one of the greatest vertical relief potentials in Romania. The system consists predominantly of vertical shafts. The entrance lies at an altitude of 1922 m on the eastern flank of the Piatra Craiului Mountains, on the steep slopes below the main ridge within one of the Grind couloirs.

The objective of the project was the continued exploration of **Avenul de sub Vârful Grind**, a predominantly vertical alpine cave, with a focus on extending the cave in the terminal sector and improving logistical infrastructure for deep exploration.

From the 2024 terminus point at **–801 m**, teams extended exploration to an estimated depth of **–807 m** following rock removal and passage enlargement. Beyond this point, exploration encountered an impenetrable joint-controlled fissure, where further enlargement work has been initiated in order to prepare future progress.



Panoramic 3D model view containing Grind in relation with surface morphology of Piatra Craiului Mountains (SE point of view)

In parallel, exploration also continued from the level of the former sump at **–775 m**, where teams resumed the digging and passage enlargement of a horizontal passage, work originally begun during the 2023 expedition and continued in 2024. Beyond this section, a new parallel section was explored (100 m long), consisting of a sequence of shafts, short horizontal connecting passages and short pitches, leading to a **new sump** at **–815 m**, which is the new terminus.

To achieve these objectives, one team remained for nine consecutive days in the advanced underground bivouac located at –775 m. During the first stage of work, after setting up the bivouac, a new section of the water bypass (guided drainage) system was installed above to divert water flow and improve safety conditions around the bivouac, completing the drainage system work begun in 2024.

Severe meteorological conditions resulted in high water flow, forcing teams to temporarily withdraw from the lower sections of the cave at the end of the first week of the expedition. Continued rainfall and snowfall quickly melting meant that activities during the middle and second part of the expedition were concentrated in the upper sections of the cave, where teams carried out re-equipping of several rope sections and installed new rigging intended to improve both safety and travel times within the cave.

Additional objectives achieved during this period included maintenance work at the –540 m bivouac and a test 3D scan of a significant section of the shaft system, using the Mandeye LiDAR scanning technology, an emerging tool adapted for speleological environments.

In the second part of the expedition, access was possible only down to –650 m, as the continuous high discharge of the underground stream prevented further descent to the –775 m bivouac.

Beyond the discovery of new passages and the establishment of a new national depth record, the exploration of *Avenul de sub Vârful Grind* is also contributing valuable geological and hydrogeological information regarding the internal structure of the Piatra Craiului Massif. These data may provide useful insights for future scientific research and public-interest applications such as researching a part of the Piatra Craiului drainage network, which is a tap water source for the nearby localities.

Logistics for the expedition involved transporting a significant quantity of equipment along a mountain approach of approximately



–780 m, pitch discovered in oct. 2025 – photo: A. Pologea

2.5 hours to reach the vicinity of the cave entrance, located at an altitude of 1922 m, near the main ridge of the massif. During the latter part of the expedition, several of these transport trips were carried out in winter conditions.

During **12–17 November 2025**, a follow-up trip to Avenul de sub Vârful Grind resumed exploration in the terminal area after earlier high water flow had blocked access below –650 m in the second part of the main expedition. Survey of the newly discovered passages resulted in a depth of **815 m**, confirming a **new national depth record for Romania**, with 100 m of new passages between the former sump at –775 m (now partially drained) and the new sump at –815 m. In addition, a narrow but promising ascending passage with active flow was discovered near the first pitch of the new section. The team also carried out documentation, sump observations, installation of a communication line, removal of the –775 m bivouac and equipment, and complete de-rigging of the cave, concluding the 2025 exploration campaign.

The 19-day international expedition, together with a preparatory trip earlier in September and the follow-up 6-day trip in November, involved 34 participants, who contributed to the expedition's achievements both on the surface and underground.

The expedition was organized by **Silex Braşov Speleological Club** and **Focul Viu Speleological Association, Bucharest** (Romania). [Participating cavers](#) also came from **Prusik Timișoara Speleological Club** (Romania), **Cristal Oradea Speleological Club** (Romania), **Abis Chişinău Speleological Club** (Moldova), **P.S.K. D.V.I.G. Mountain Speleological Club** (Serbia), **S.A.I.S.–Speleological Sports Association Knjaževac** (Serbia), the **Ukrainian Speleological Association** (Ukraine), and **National Speleological Society** (Romania).

In addition to the 27 **Romanian** participants, seven cavers from **Serbia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Canada** took part in the expedition.

The expedition is primarily self-funded through contributions from participants and the organizing clubs. In 2025, the expedition also benefited from a **grant** provided by the **European Speleological Federation** through the **Romanian Speleological Federation**.



The new passages: photos: Emi Stoica

2. Results and achievements

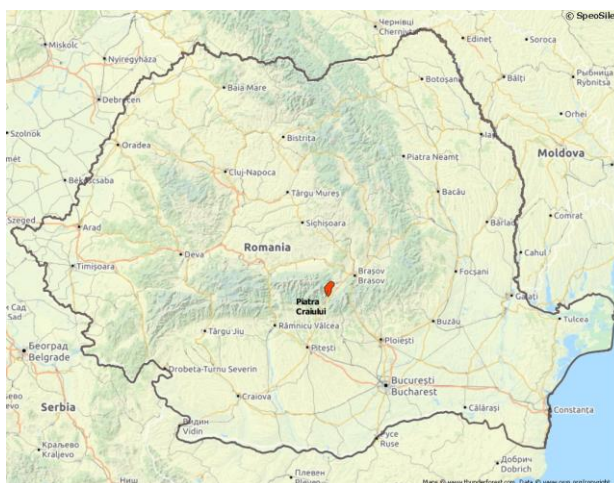
- **Depth record and new sector exploration:** A new parallel sector at the cave bottom was explored and it became the new terminus. The digging and enlargement of a horizontal gallery at –775 m (the former sump level) revealed a new gallery (approximately 100 m long) descending through several shafts and short pitches to a sump. The new cave depth is –815 m.
- **Depth advancement:** Progressed an additional 6 meters on the previous deepest branch (*La cuțite - Razors Pitch*) beyond the previous terminus through passage enlargement, leading to the discovery of an impenetrable horizontal continuation where the enlargement work has to be continued (estimated depth on this branch is –807 m).
- **Drainage system:** A new section of the guided drainage system was installed on the shaft above the –775 m bivouac to divert water flow and improve safety conditions around the bivouac, completing the drainage system work begun in 2024.
- **Bivouac Maintenance:** Maintenance and improvement works at the –540 m bivouac to enhance safety and comfort.
- **3D LiDAR Survey Testing:** Performed a [3D LiDAR survey test](#) between the cave entrance and –450 m depth using the Mandeye LiDAR scanning system.
- **Passage Enlargement:** Continued enlargement actions at depth of –295 m to improve accessibility.
- **Rigging and Rope Maintenance:** Replaced several rope sections in the upper third of the cave using Korda's rope and optimized rigging for improved safety and efficiency.
- **Discovery and partial exploration** of a narrow continuation at –785 m in the new explored section.
- **Four new/updated leads** for next expedition: –807 m, sump at –815 m, –785 m, and chimney at –772 m.
- **Improved communication system** by extension to the terminus and improved / fixed connections.

3. Expedition context

3.1. Location, surroundings and geologic context

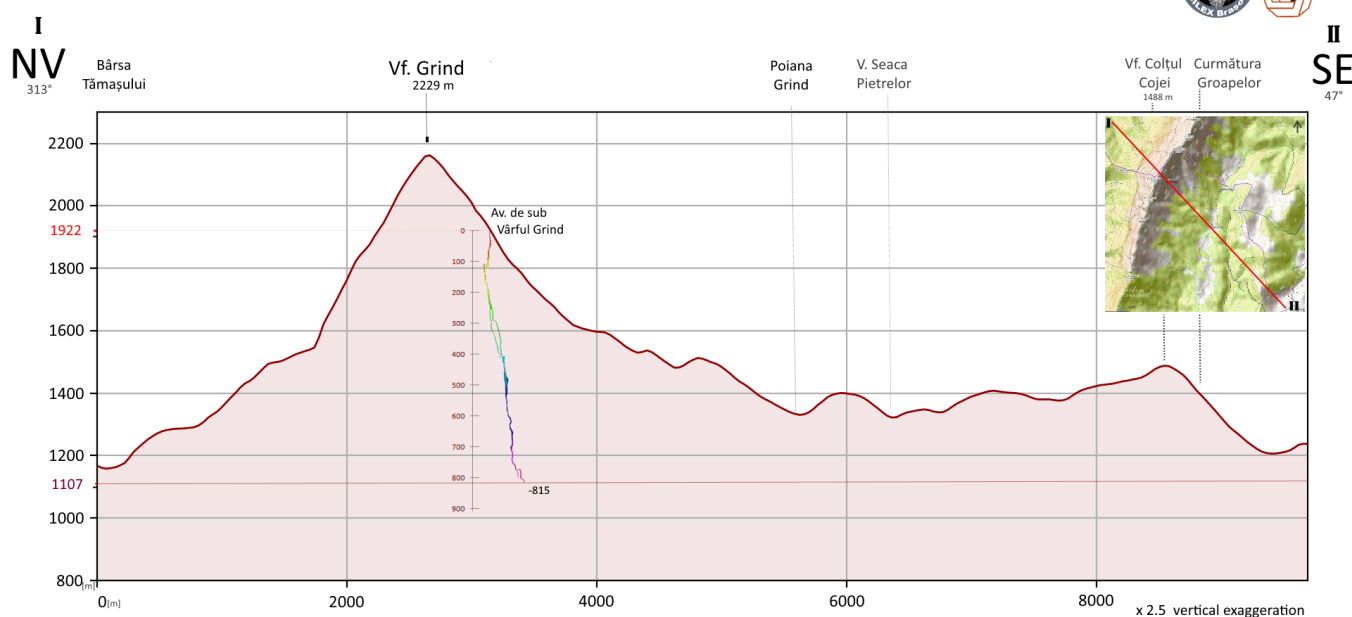
The karst setting is located in Piatra Craiului Mountains (Southern Carpathians), a [25 km long, saw-toothed, linear limestone ridge](#), of Jurassic age (Kimmeridgian-Tithonic). The limestone sequence reaches a maximum thickness of approximately 1500 m.

The highest point is Vârful La Om (*Piscul Baciului Peak*), at 2238 m a.s.l. The massif is regarded as one of the most beautiful sites in the Carpathians. Its morphology is directly controlled by a large, asymmetric perched syncline.



The syncline axis runs parallel to the main ridge, with the ridge itself corresponding to the hinge zone of the fold. The pronounced asymmetry—expressed by a steep to locally overturned western limb and a more gently dipping eastern limb—results in a differentiated geomorphology. The western flank, corresponding to the steep limb, displays a high-relief alpine karst morphology characterized by abrupt escarpments, vertical walls, sharp limestone ridges, and towers. In contrast, the eastern flank forms a structural dip slope with more moderate gradients and more extensive surface karst development.

Piatra Craiului - Avenul de sub Vârful Grind · altimetric profile



Based on the possible water drainages and spring elevations, the maximum cave depth potential is estimated at 1000–1100 m. The mountain range is located near the city of Braşov (35 km away) and it is part of the Piatra Craiului National Park.

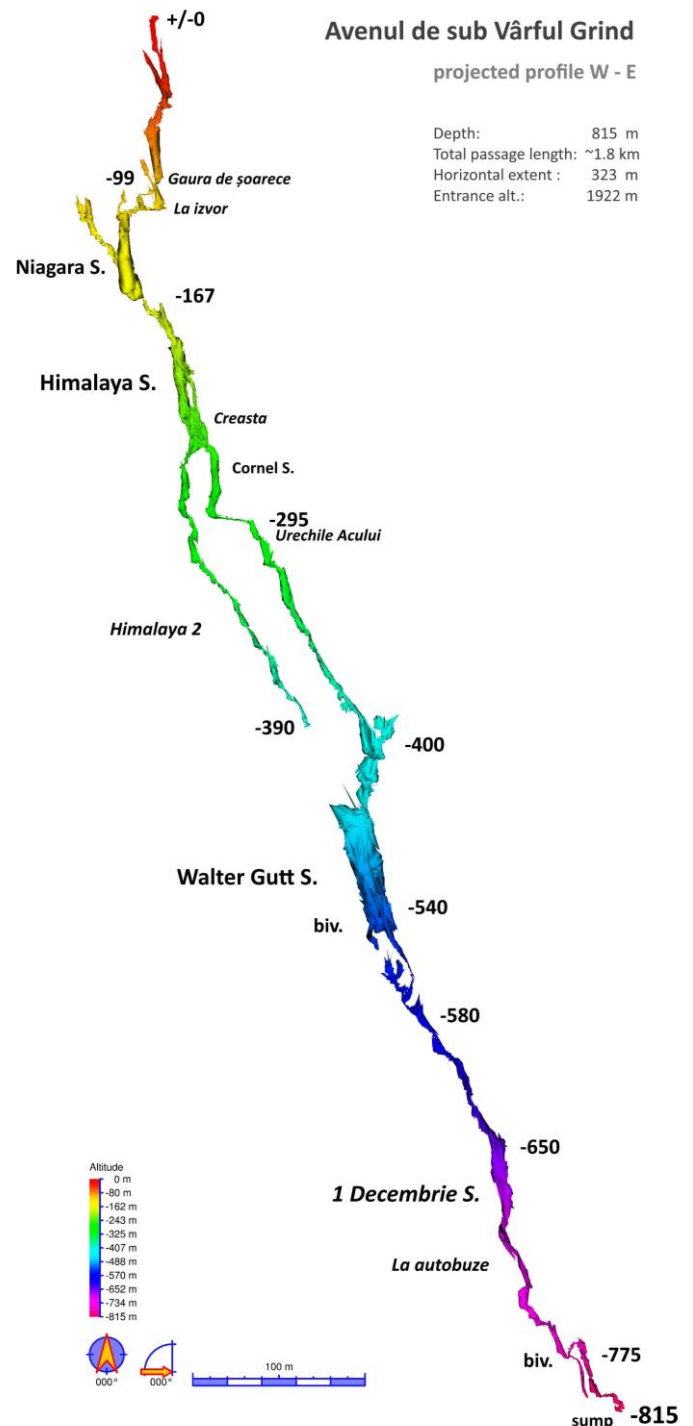
3.2. Cave description

Avenul de sub Vârful Grind (en: ~*Grind Pit*) is the deepest cave in Romania, currently reaching a depth of –815 m. Discovered in 1985, it is located in one of the areas with the greatest depth potential in the country. The entrance is situated at 1922 m a.s.l., on the eastern slope immediately below the main ridge, within one of the steep valleys known as Hornurile Grindului, in a high-energy relief area.

The cave is a typical alpine vertical one consisting of a sequence of 26 shafts (along the main conduit), with few and short horizontal passages. It has no major tributaries comparable in scale to the main route in terms of size / development, the longest tributary passage being the one that is intercepted at –167 m. The longest parallel sectors represent younger drainage bypass routes that reconnect lower in the cave. Additional important lateral / parallel shaft sequences are the Himalaya 2 and below sector (–210 m to –411 m) and the shaft system below the Walter Gutt Shaft (which merges with the main course at –567 m). The cave morphology is dominated by large bell-shaped shafts linked by narrower vertical segments. Passages are generally clean and largely devoid of any sediment.

Previous links and documentation:

- [Cave description with 3D maps \(in Romanian\)](#)
- [3D model of Piatra Craiului Mountains](#)
- [Dynamic surface map of Piatra Craiului](#)
- [Hidrology context map](#)
- [Altimetric profile](#)
- [2024 profile and plan maps](#)



Munții Piatra Craiului - Avenul de sub Vârful Grind

Piatra Craiului Mountains

Av. de sub Vf. Grind

Șirnea

Legendă

- ▼ Avenul de sub Vârful Grind
- ▲ Refugiu
- Proiecție drumuire aven
- Vâlcele seci
- Resurgente
(debit mediu anual [l/s])
- <1
- 1-5
- 5-10
- 10-50
- 50-100
- 100-400

0 1 2 3 4 km



Piatra Craiului ridge and the cave entrance seen from the access trail (view dir. SE > NW) – photo: Alex Pologea

3.3. Brief history of explorations

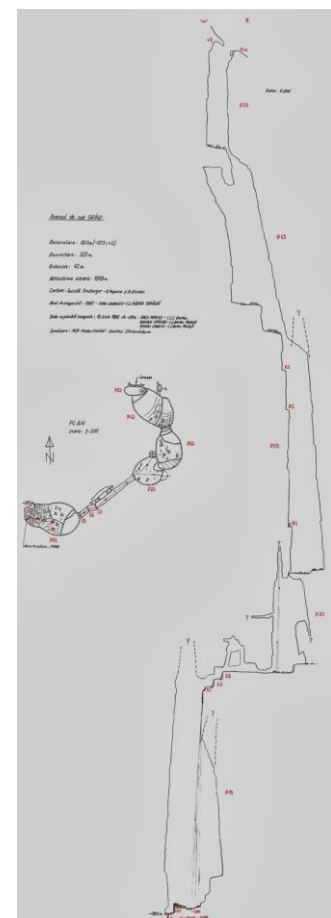
The cave entrance was found in 1985 by Ioan Bostan and Ioan Dobrescu from *Piatra Craiului* C. M. Speleology Club. In 1986, a depth of 167 m was reached, where there was massive tectonic breccia plug/collapse blocking the progress. In the following years numerous digging trips were undertaken – a cooperation of several speleological clubs. Subsequent multi-year excavation efforts involving several clubs led to a breakthrough in 1992, enabling exploration to continue to –540 m by 1995. At this depth, a second major breccia blockage was encountered, halting further descent. Later attempts to bypass this obstruction were unsuccessful, without major progress.

3.4. Recent explorations

After a 15-year period of limited activity, exploration was resumed in **2010** by Focul Viu (Bucharest). In the following years, Avenul Braşov and Silex Braşov joined as co-organizers. Additional participation was provided by several Romanian clubs, as well as occasional international teams.

Initial efforts focused on re-equipping (re-rigging) the cave, reassessing previously explored sectors, and investigating parallel shafts and side developments (8 expeditions between **2010** and **2018**). Excavation work was also resumed at the –540 m breccia choke. During the autumn expedition of **2019**, this obstruction was finally bypassed, and in November a breakthrough was achieved through a major boulder collapse at –581 m. This opened access to a new series of shafts, allowing rapid progression to –775 m by December **2019**, where progress was halted by a small sump. Subsequent expeditions targeted both this terminal sump and other sectors of the cave. During the **2022** campaign, the sump (approximately 6 m long and 1 m deep) was initially passed.

In **2023** the sump was dived and passed again. A drainage system was progressively installed and optimized, allowing control of the water level and maintaining it at a minimum. Following



1986 map (–167 m)
G. Popescu and A. Nicolau

enlargement of the sump low passage, the obstacle was bypassed, leading to the exploration of [a new 22 m shaft down to -800 m](#). The endpoint was characterized by a narrow continuation, suggesting further potential.

The **2024** expedition (6–24 September) focused primarily on improving safety and accessibility in the sump sector and in making some other points safer to pass. A preparatory trip was conducted one week prior to the main camp to rig the cave down to -600 m.

At -775 m, the now partially flooded passage (old sump) was drained using the previously installed pipe system. A compact underground camp (2–3 persons) was established in a confined and technically challenging location at the sump edge, in the shaft narrow bottom, with protective covering measures against water inflow from the shaft above.

Significant engineering work was undertaken to stabilize and improve passage through the partially flooded passage. A drainage channel was excavated along the rock margin to allow continuous outflow from the sump basin, enabling traversal of the 6 m long low passage without the use of a neoprene suit. Additional channeling was carried out in the sump floor through sediment and clay with embedded clasts; the channel was subsequently reinforced with larger boulders to prevent infilling and sediment reworking.

Downstream, a very narrow passage at the top of the 22 m shaft was enlarged in order to allow easier passage. At the top of the pitch above the previous sump (-775 m), a small concrete dam and a wide pipe system were installed to divert water flow (~18 m above), reducing the risk of flooding in the nearby bivouac. These measures are critical given the highly variable hydrological response of the ~2000 m elevation catchment above, where rapid weather changes can generate sudden inflow events, even during relatively stable autumn conditions.

At the current terminus (-800 m), work during the final days of the expedition focused on enlarging the narrow passage at the base of the 22 m shaft. A small pool was drained, allowing access to a new section and a vertical advance of 1.5 m beyond the previous endpoint, increasing the cave depth to **-801.5 m**. Visual inspection using a camera through an impassable constriction revealed a further shaft estimated at 3–5 m depth.



Niagara Shaft – photo: Cristina Stika

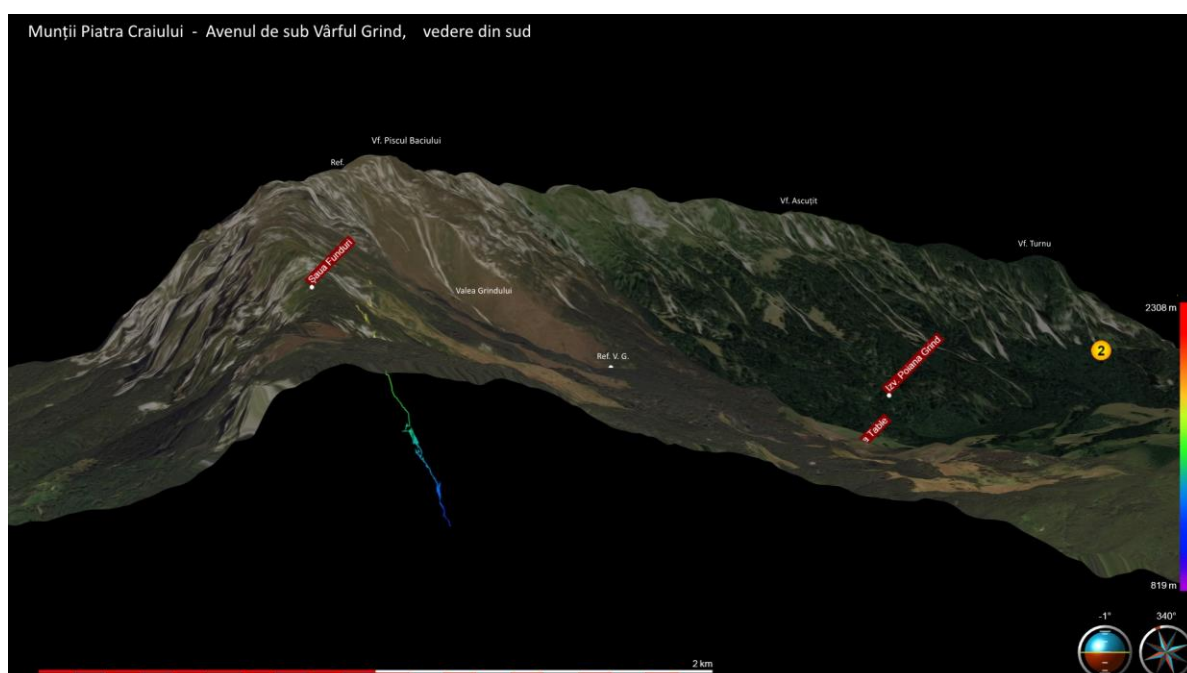
Later in the autumn, the expedition was followed by a derigging operation from –540 m to the entrance. Fixed ropes are not left in place between seasons due to the risk of damage from flooding events.

[Short movie about the exploration of new portions in 2019](#)

[Public-wide interest presentation film](#)

3.5. Grind 2025 expedition main objectives

- Exploration beyond the current terminus by enlarging the restriction point at –801.5 m and hopefully exploring new verticals
- Climbing a small waterfall wall at –400 m (side gallery with a tributary stream that leads to a parallel section, going up)
- Carrying out traverses and climbs in the Walter Gutt Shaft (at –500 m) and advancing on possible upward continuations
- Exploration of some lateral narrow leads below –600 m and a lead at –774 m (narrow horizontal gallery at the old sump level)
- Enlarging a narrow fracture in order to find an alternative route to bypass a potentially dangerous breccia plug area at –555 m (under the bivouac –540 m)
- Conducting geomorphological observations and structural measurements
- Photo/video documentation
- Further improve some rigging sections in various parts and replace more rope (10 years old rope)



Panoramic 3D model view containing Grind in relation with surface morphology of Piatra Craiului Mountains (south point of view)

Avenul de sub Vârful Grind

Munții Piatra Craiului
Hornurile Grindului

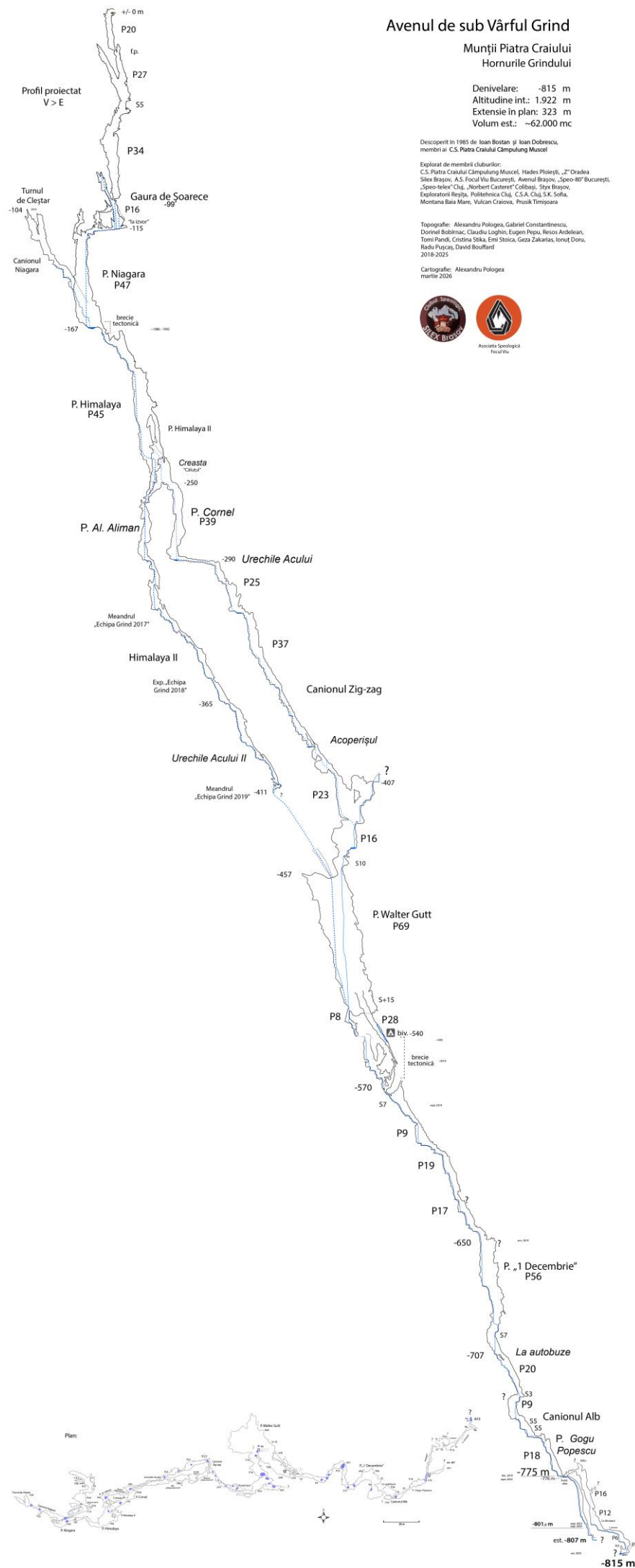
Denivelare: -815 m
Altitudine int.: 1.922 m
Extensie în plan: 323 m
Volum est.: ~62.000 mc

Descoperit în 1985 de Ioan Bostan și Ioan Dobrescu,
membri ai C.S. Piatra Craiului Câmpulung Muscel

Explozat de membrii cluburilor:
C.S. Piatra Craiului Câmpulung Muscel, Hades Ploiești, „Z” Oradea
Silex Brașov, A.S. Focul viu București, Avenul Brașov, „Speo-80” București,
„Speo-teles” Cluj, „Norbert Castreț” Colibași, Silex Brașov,
Exploatori Reșița, Politehnica Cluj, C.S.A. Cluj, S.K. Sofia,
Montana Baia Mare, Vulcan Craiova, Prusik Timișoara

Topografe: Alexandru Pologea, Gabriel Constantinescu,
Dorinel Bobiriac, Claudiu Loghin, Eugen Pepu, Răzvan Andelea,
Tomi Fandl, Cristina Sîrbu, Emi Stancu, Gicu Zărnescu, Ionel Doru,
Radu Pușcas, David Bouffard
2018-2025

Cartografe: Alexandru Pologea
martie 2026



Map resulted following
2025 survey of new parts

[Click for full
resolution map](#)

4. Grind 2025 – expedition chronology

4.1. Pre-expedition preparation trip (19 – 21 September 2025)

Participants: David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Marius Milascon, Lăcrămioara Pușcaș, Alina Moldovan.

A short preparatory trip was carried out before the main expedition in order to reopen the surface base, assess the drainage system integrity, assess cave conditions, and prepare the route for the main camp. On 19 September, the first team reached the speleological refuge, and a reconnaissance trip was made to Creastă. The cave was found to be relatively dry and the water level at the spring was low. On 20 September, the cave was re-rigged to the deeper sectors: David B. and Marius rigged the route from –540 m down to the –775 m bivouac, while Alina I. and Narcis transported equipment to the –540 m bivouac, with surface support (Lăcră, Alina M.) maintaining telephone communication from the refuge. The drainage system pipes were intact and water level in the sump was low. On 21 September, after completing arrangements at the refuge, the team descended to Poiana Grind and left the area, having prepared the infrastructure needed for the main expedition.



Drained sump – photo: Marius M.

4.2. Main expedition (26 September – 14 October 2025)

Friday, 26.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel

The expedition started with the first transport of equipment to the speleological refuge. Around midday, David, Tiberiu, Narcis, and Alexandru Macsinoiu carried the first loads up from Poiana Grind, making two trips. In the evening, David, Narcis, and Alex M. went back down to Șirnea and then climbed again with George and Alina to the refuge. The day was mainly about setting the camp in motion and getting the first essential gear higher on the mountain.

Saturday, 27.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Emi Stoica, Cristina Stika, Kateryna Medvedeva, Gabriel Manea, Florin Ifrimescu

The camp grew quickly. In the morning Kateryna, Gabriel, and Florin climbed from Șirnea toward Poiana Grind and then up to the refuge with more materials. Around midday, Alex P., Emi, and Cristina reached Poiana Grind, where they met Alina, George, and Narcis, who had gone down for another carry.

Underground, David and Tiberiu entered with three main goals: to reinstall the bivouac at –775 m, finish the water-capture system, and continue exploration at the former terminus at –801.5 m. They entered at 15:25, but because telephone communication was down they had to stop at the –540 m bivouac and wait for the line to be restored.

Outside, the rest of the team kept moving loads between Poiana Grind and the refuge and organized the collective equipment. In the evening, Alex P. went down to Șirnea, met Mircea and Ruxandra there, and climbed back with them to the refuge.



–98 m, above Mouse Hole – photo: Cristina Stika

Sunday, 28.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cristina Stika, Kateryna Medvedeva, Eugen Manțoc

The day combined cave logistics, water supply, and communication repairs. Around midday, Emi, Mircea, and Kateryna entered the cave to carry materials and exploration gear to the –540 m bivouac and to check the telephone line on the way down. In parallel, Cristina, George, Ruxandra, and Alex M. went underground to collect water from the spring at –110 m. At the entrance pitch, they repaired a telephone break that had also needed fixing the year before. The spring was flowing very weakly, and filling a two-litre bottle took about five minutes, so the water job turned into a long one. Cristina and George came back earlier, while Ruxandra and Alex M. stayed behind to fill the remaining bottles.

After lunch, Alina and Narcis went down to Poiana Grind for another equipment carry and came back up with Eugen. In the evening, Alina and Narcis left camp for Șirnea, followed later by Cristina and Kateryna.

Below ground, David and Tiberiu continued working near the terminus. Communication still caused problems, so they left a note saying they had gone to the bottom and would return on



“Gogu Popescu” Pitch, right above the –775 m bivouac; the primed pipe drainage pipes and the capture dam – photos: Alex P.

Monday by 14:00 if nothing changed. Meanwhile, Emi and Mircea spent a very long shift restoring the telephone between –580 m and –625 m. They repaired completely broken sections, soldered wires at –595 m and –625 m, and only started back up after midnight, finally exiting at 08:00 the next morning.

Monday, 29.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, George Nonoşel, Eugen Manţoc

David and Tiberiu stayed focused on the bottom, continuing work at the terminus and estimating that another day of effort might finally push the cave beyond last year's depth of –801.5 m. After their all-night shift, Emi and Mircea came back to the surface from the –540 m bivouac and the –600 m zone, having repaired the line and improved communications along the deep section.



–540 m bivouac “kitchen” – photo: Alina

On the surface, the day was used for camp maintenance and equipment organization. In the afternoon, Alex M. and Eugen went underground with more material, carrying loads as deep as –300 m and bringing water from the spring at –110 m. They later climbed back out during the night.

Tuesday, 30.09.2025 – advancements in terminus

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manţoc

The team spent much of the day preparing gear, arranging intercom units, organizing the refuge, and collecting equipment that had been left lower down. Emi and Alex M. went to the spring at –110 m for water and also secured the telephone wire from the entrance gate inward. At midday, Alex M., Eugen, and Ruxandra went down to Şirnea, after which Alex M. and Eugen returned to the refuge carrying more materials.

At the bottom, David and Tiberiu finally passed the constriction reached the previous year. They estimated they had reached about –804 m. A ledge and a diacalse became visible, and there was a promising echo ahead. They climbed back to the bivouac to collect batteries and other materials before continuing.

Wednesday, 01.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manţoc

David and Tiberiu spent the day resting at the –775 m bivouac and prepared for another push in the evening. The plan was to enlarge the saddle near the entrance to the diacalse at the

end, and possibly reshape the short vertical section there, now that the water no longer hit them as strongly.

In the afternoon, Emi and Alex M. went down to the –540 m bivouac with supplies. Their main work was maintenance: repairing the drainage hose system and doing general improvements in the bivouac. During the evening David and Tiberiu reported that the water-capture hose above the bivouac had silted up, which would need attention.

Thursday, 02.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș



Conditions near cave entrance on 02.10. – photo: Alex P.

David and Tiberiu kept working near the bottom, combining exploration with work on the drainage extension. Emi and Alex M. continued arranging and repairing the –540 m bivouac.

At midday, Cătălin and David Fazecaș arrived at camp after breaking trail through heavy fresh snow. More than 15 cm had accumulated around the refuge. In the evening, Alex P. entered the cave to descend to the –540 m bivouac.

Below ground, David and Tiberiu reported a major improvement: they solved the hose problem, the water flow through the capture system doubled, and they extended the telephone cable into the drained sump at –775 m. Emi later joined them and the team settled in for the night.

Friday, 03.10.2025 – new discoveries

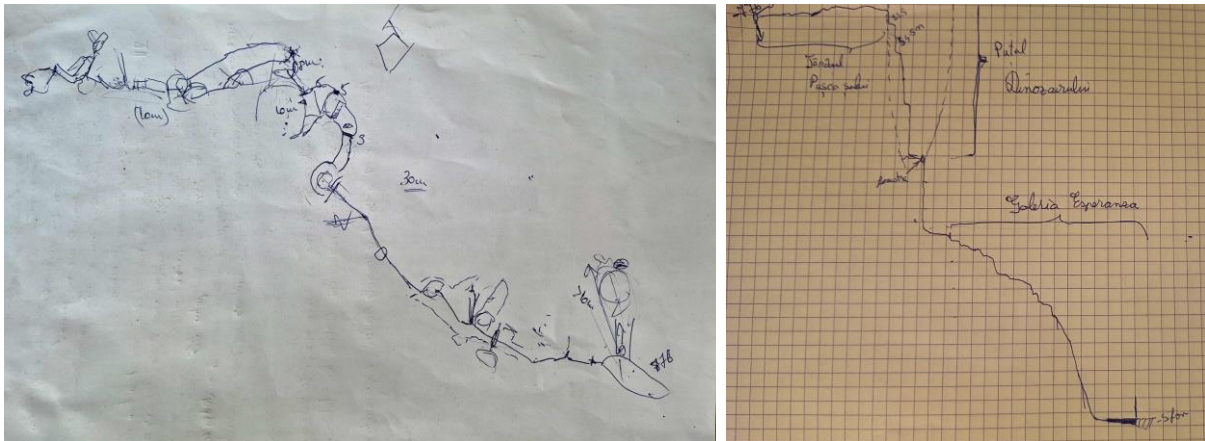
Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad

The snow stopped in the morning, but the forecast warned of a blizzard later on. Underground, this turned into one of the key days of the expedition.

At the bottom, David, Tiberiu, and Emi pushed beyond the –801.5 m point reached in 2024. While David and Tiberiu worked in the terminus area, Emi continued digging and enlarging the slightly ascending passage at the level of the drained sump at –775 m, a continuation that had already been tested in previous years. This led into a low passage about 20 m long with a small chamber, then a sequence of short drops of roughly 3, 5, and 5 m, followed by a 10 m shaft. After that came another shaft of about 8 m, then a 4 m drop and a short low passage. Beyond it, the passage



photo: Cristina Stika



Plane and profile sketches made Emi for new discovered passages – photo: Emi S.

descended in several steps into a 10 m canyon, followed by a 4 m drop and an 8 m shaft ending in a 5 m passage at a new sump. By late evening the team estimated they had discovered a new vertical continuation in this parallel sector and had rigged it to roughly 30 m below the old sump level.

At the –540 m bivouac, Alex M. and Alex P. kept improving the camp, including digging a small drainage ditch near the bivouac. At midday, Cătălin and David Fazecaș went underground to transport materials to –300 m and to bring water from the spring. At the spring, the previous day's snowfall could already be felt: the walls were much drier and the team returned relatively dry. At midday, Alina and Daniela climbed to camp through deep snow, reopening the route from Șirnea.

Saturday, 04.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu

The day was dominated by hydrological conditions. Warm weather caused rapid snowmelt from the previous two days, and by the afternoon the underground water flow had risen sharply. The bottom team had originally planned to begin the climb around noon, but the increase was so obvious that David decided to wait and take advantage of the expected overnight frost instead.

David stayed near the sump while Tiberiu and Emi retreated upward and stopped safely at Autobuze around –700 m, where they had supplies and could safely wait out the high water conditions. David remained on the upper step above the sump, watching conditions and coordinating with the surface and the –540 m bivouac. Throughout the day and evening the teams stayed in close telephone contact. By 18:30 Tiberiu reported that the flow had dropped by about 25%, but not enough to move safely. Only after 01:20 did Tiberiu and Emi start climbing toward the –540 m bivouac, reaching it at 03:30. David packed his gear later and also climbed, arriving at the bivouac at 03:30 and continuing upward in the early morning.

At the –540 m bivouac, Alex M. and Alex P. continued repairs and monitored the water situation. They also tested duplicating the phone base up to the sleeping floor in the refuge. On the surface, Cristina, Narcis, and Ruxandra climbed to the camp with ropes and other equipment from Șirnea, with Cătălin taking over part of the load from Poiana Grind.

Sunday, 05.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu

The underground teams used the drop in flow to get out. David, Tiberiu, and Emi began climbing toward the surface late in the morning. Conditions were better than the day before, though still far from ideal. David reached the surface around 09:00, and Tiberiu and Emi around 10:00. Because the telephone was not always properly set in the cradle, not all calls came through clearly during the exit.

At the same time, Alex M. and Alex P. also left the –540 m bivouac and climbed out, reaching the surface in the afternoon. While this was happening, Alina and Mircea made a short trip to the spring at –110 m to collect water. David Fazecaș, Daniela, and Cătălin left the camp that day.

Monday, 06.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljević, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović

With the forecast still bad and the cave carrying a lot of water, nobody entered underground. The day was used for movement between camp and the valley. In the morning Tiberiu and Narcis left the camp. Emi and Mircea went down to Șirnea to meet the Serbian cavers — Mladen, Nemanja, Milan, and Dragan — and helped them with their luggage and equipment on the climb back up. They all returned to the refuge in the afternoon.

Tuesday, 07.10.2025 – work in the top part

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljević, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović

With the water finally lower, the team spread into several small groups and worked in the upper part of the cave down to –290 m. The day was dense and productive, even if everything stayed relatively shallow.

Nemanja and Milan carried equipment to –290 m and later isolated a damaged rope by tying off above a section where the sheath had torn. Cristina replaced slings in the upper part of Himalaya. Mladen and Dragan documented the cave down to La brece and brought water from the spring at –110 m. David and Alex M. enlarged two tight places in the crawl at Urechile

Acului around –290 m. Alina replaced slings down to La brece and doubled an anchor above Gaura de Șoarece. Emi moved between teams, restoring telephone communication, soldering corroded wires, and installing new connectors where needed. Ruxandra and Mircea collected water, supported the other teams, and also made some drone filming tests.

It was one of those classic expedition days where many small improvements added up: safer rigging, better communications, better access, more water brought out, and a generally more usable route down to the working zone.



Entrance – photo: Alina I.

Wednesday, 08.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljević, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović

The weather turned bad again and the water stayed high, so there were no cave trips. In the evening, the team prepared equipment for the next day and waited for another drop in flow.

Thursday, 09.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljević, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Andrei Alexandru, Gabriel Stroe

At midday, Mircea drove the Serbian team down to their cars in Șirnea. On the way back he came to Poiana Grind with Adrian, Corina, Andrei, and Gabriel, and all five climbed to the refuge with fresh equipment.

In the evening, taking advantage of lower temperatures, David and Emi entered the cave with a full list of objectives: install telephone wire through the sump to the new terminus, survey the new area, secure the drainage hoses, transport exploration gear to the bottom, bring equipment back upward, attempt a chimney climb from the new sector, and unpack gear to the –540 m bivouac. They entered at 20:20, but already by La brece there was heavy water on Niagara, and when they reached the –540 m bivouac they decided to stay there because the route deeper down, especially at Walter Gutt shaft, was still too wet.

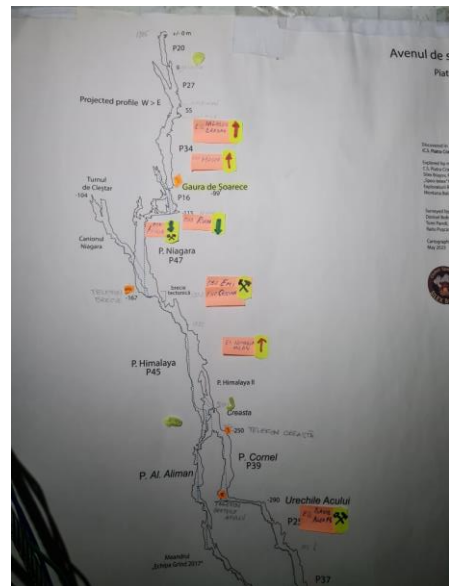
Friday, 10.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Andrei Alexandru, Gabriel Stroe, Dan Olteanu

This was another very active day, but again water decided what could and could not be done. Early in the morning, Alex P. went down to the –540 m bivouac to support David and Emi. Shortly afterward, Cristina and Alina also descended, intending to act as holders and to carry equipment up from the bivouac. At –290 m they found that Walter Gutt was carrying a lot of water, so they stopped there, rested, and later did a bit of work in the low passage at Urechile Acului as well as some small resistance and voltage measurements.

Around noon, David, Emi, and Alex P. pushed down to the 1 Decembrie pitch, but the water level was too high to continue safely to the terminus. They returned to the –540 m bivouac very wet and spent time trying to warm up while monitoring both the forecast and the flow underground. Later that night, with rain falling outside, they reported that the water was rising again.

At the same time, Gabriel and Andrei worked in the upper cave. They improved the rigging above Gaura de Șoarece, replaced part of the rope, collected water from the spring, and left a 70 m Korda's rope (10 mm, manufactured in 2025 and supplied through the FSE grant) at the platform. In the afternoon Adrian and Corina entered with the Mandeye LiDAR device and scanned from the entrance down to above Walter Gutt shaft. Adrian tried to go farther but got soaked because a real waterfall had formed at the head of the shaft, so the scan was limited to the upper and middle section. In the evening, Mircea went down to Poiana Grind and came back up with Dan.



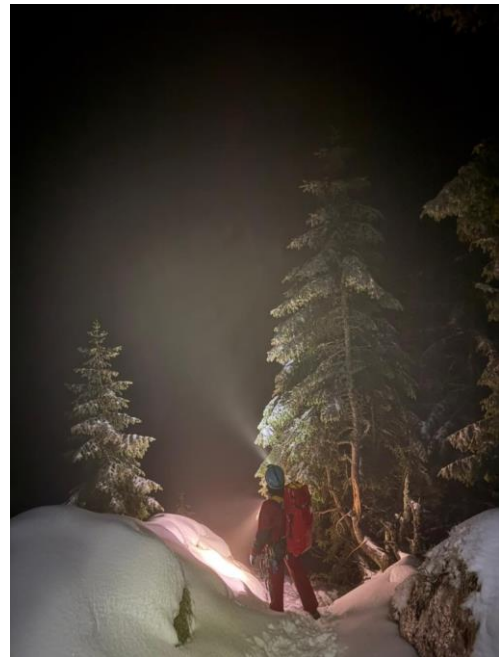
Live team locations via telephone updates –
photo: Alex P.

Saturday, 11.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Andrei Alexandru, Gabriel Stroe, Narcis Ghiță, Dan Olteanu

The day was quieter and partly transitional. Improvements were made around the refuge, while underground the teams mostly stayed conservative because of the continuing water issues. David and Alex P. remained below, and at 13:00 they were still resting and asking for the forecast.

In the afternoon, Cristina, Narcis, and Dan entered to collect water from the spring at –110 m and to leave equipment at the –50 m platform: three barrels, two of 6 liters and one of 8 liters, one of them containing several slings and 13 m of unsewn sling. At the entrance of Niagara, Dan and Cristina noticed stronger water flow than on previous days. Around 17:00, Alina and Ruxandra also went down to the spring for water.



Ruxi at the entrance – photo: Alina Iordache

In the evening, Alex M. left the camp and headed home. Later that night, Emi climbed out from the –540 m bivouac. On the way up he reported a lot of water at Walter Gutt, heavy flow below the Roof, and difficult conditions at the hot point near Urechile Acului, but he made it to the surface at 01:40.

Sunday, 12.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Andrei Alexandru, Gabriel Stroe, Narcis Ghiță, Dan Olteanu, George Nonșel, Oana Harabagiu

Early in the morning, Emi left the refuge and headed down toward Zărnești. During the morning, Mircea, Narcis, and George carried luggage to the cars in Poiana Grind. At noon, the underground team finally started the exit from the –540 m bivouac, but again the hot point at –290 m forced a long wait. David and Alex P. left the bivouac at 12:40 and reached –290 m in the afternoon, where the shaft above was still carrying strong water. They waited there for hours, checked in by telephone several times, and only decided at 22:40 to continue the climb even though the flow had still not dropped much. David reached the surface around 01:00, with Alex P. following about an hour later.



photo: Cristina Stika



photos: Cristina Stika

On the surface, Cristina, Adrian, Corina, Andrei, and Gabriel went down with their luggage to Poiana Grind. Adrian, Corina, Andrei, and Gabriel left the expedition, while Cristina climbed back up to the refuge. Mircea, George, and Narcis made another luggage carry to Poiana Grind, and Mircea returned to the refuge in the evening. Oana climbed up to the refuge with the four-legged Haiduc. Alina and Mircea later went down with luggage to Poiana Grind and then by car to Șirnea; Alina headed home, while Mircea stayed in Șirnea overnight.

Monday, 13.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Oana Harabagiu

The expedition entered its closing stage. Early in the morning, Mircea climbed back to the refuge and then went down again to Poiana Grind with another load before heading home. At camp, the remaining team started the final arrangements and made a preliminary inventory in the refuge.

After 15:00, Cristina, David, Oana, and Ruxandra went down to Poiana Grind with their luggage and headed home. Alex P. stayed behind and made two trips with loads to Poiana Grind before returning to the refuge. David unrigged last small portion.

Tuesday, 14.10.2025

Participants: Alexandru Pologea

Alex spent the final day alone at the refuge, finishing the expedition shutdown. He removed the access safety ropes, completed the inventory, and made two more trips with equipment and luggage down to Poiana Grind and the sheepfold. In the evening, he descended to Șirnea, bringing the main 2025 expedition to an end.

4.3. November follow-up expedition (12–17 November 2025)

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Petrică Baltă, Tudor Marin, Oana Harabagiu

In late autumn, the team closely monitored the weather in order to identify a suitable period for a return to Grind and to complete the objectives that could not be achieved during the second part of the main expedition because of high water levels that blocked further access below –650 m. Conditions during the six-day follow-up November trip proved favourable, with good weather and low water discharge in the shaft, allowing safe access to the deep sectors.

The purpose of the November return was to resume work in the terminal sector, survey the newly discovered branch beyond the former sump at –775 m, extract electrical gear, and complete the remaining technical and logistical tasks before closing the 2025 campaign. David B. and Alex P. descended to the terminal sector and remained there for several days in order to complete the main objectives. During this trip, the new passages were surveyed, confirming a total cave depth of –815 m and about 100 m of newly explored passage between the former sump and the new terminal sump, thus confirming a new national depth record for Romania. Cristina, Ruxandra and Tudor descended to around –295 m to un-rig and assist with hauling equipment upward. Adrian, Petrică, and Oana provided support in the refuge at the surface.

In addition to the survey, the team also documented the new terminal sector, carried out observations at the sump by submerging a camera on a telescopic stick, extended the telephone line toward the deepest point, identified a narrow but promising ascending continuation. A narrow but promising ascending continuation with active flow was also identified near the first pitch of the newly explored section, at –785 m.

The –775 m bivouac was closed and gear was properly stored at the place. Other equipment was extracted (drill machines, accumulators), loads were transported upward through the cave, and the cave was fully de-rigged, bringing the 2025 exploration campaign to a close.

[Full expedition daily log.](#)



Big pool at -620 m – photos: Alex P.



“Fishing” in the terminus sump with the camera as bait



-775 tight bivouac at drained sump level

5. Scientific & Technical Contributions

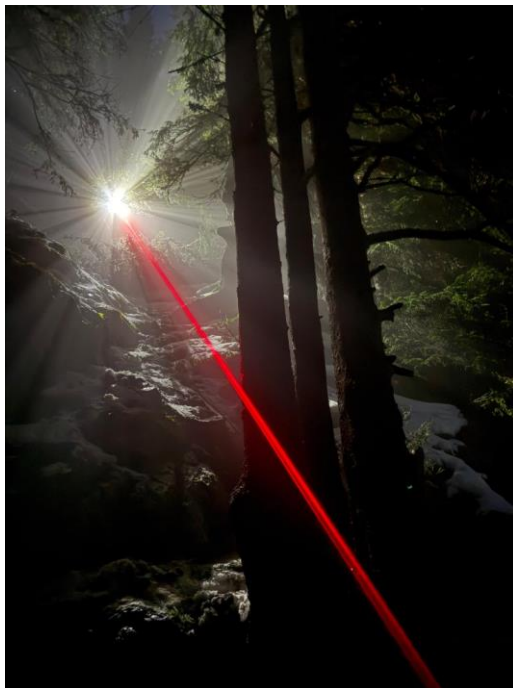
5.1. Surveying

The new sector discovered in 2025, between –775 m and –815 m, [was surveyed during](#) the November follow-up trip. A DistoX2 was used in continuous scanning mode, generating a “point cloud” of approximately 5,700 measured points. The production of [a relatively precise 3D model](#) of the newly explored passages allowed a more precise morphological analysis and structural / tectonic interpretation.

The same “point cloud” survey method has been used in the survey of the entire cave since the present survey campaign was initiated in 2018.

5.2. 3D scanning

During the expedition, a 3D scan of the cave was completed using [the Mandeye cave surveying device](#). The scan covered the main route from the entrance to approximately –450 m, at the top of Walter Gutt Shaft. The 3D scan and processing was made by Adrian Rădulescu.



DistoX2 calibration – photo: Alina Iordache

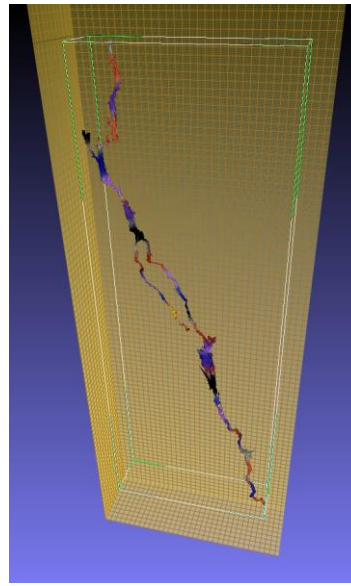


3D model resulted from Mandeye scan of main cave path between +/-0 and –450 – © Adrian R.

5.3. Observations

A few informal temperature measurements were taken.

During periods of high water discharge generated by rainfall or snowmelt, the response of the system could be directly observed. The hydrological response time was thus confirmed: following precipitation, water discharge in the lower part of the shaft was estimated to increase within approximately three hours.



Various topometric parameters analysis based on the 3D model



Temperature recordings at -540 m bivouac – photo: Alex P..

6. Incidents, difficulties, and lessons learned

During the September-October 2025 expedition, several unexpected situations were encountered, all related to the rapid hydrological response of the cave.

In the first case, a team returning from the terminus was forced to remain sheltered for more than five hours in the Autobuze sector after water discharge increased suddenly due to snowmelt. Once the flow had subsided, the team was able to resume the ascent safely.

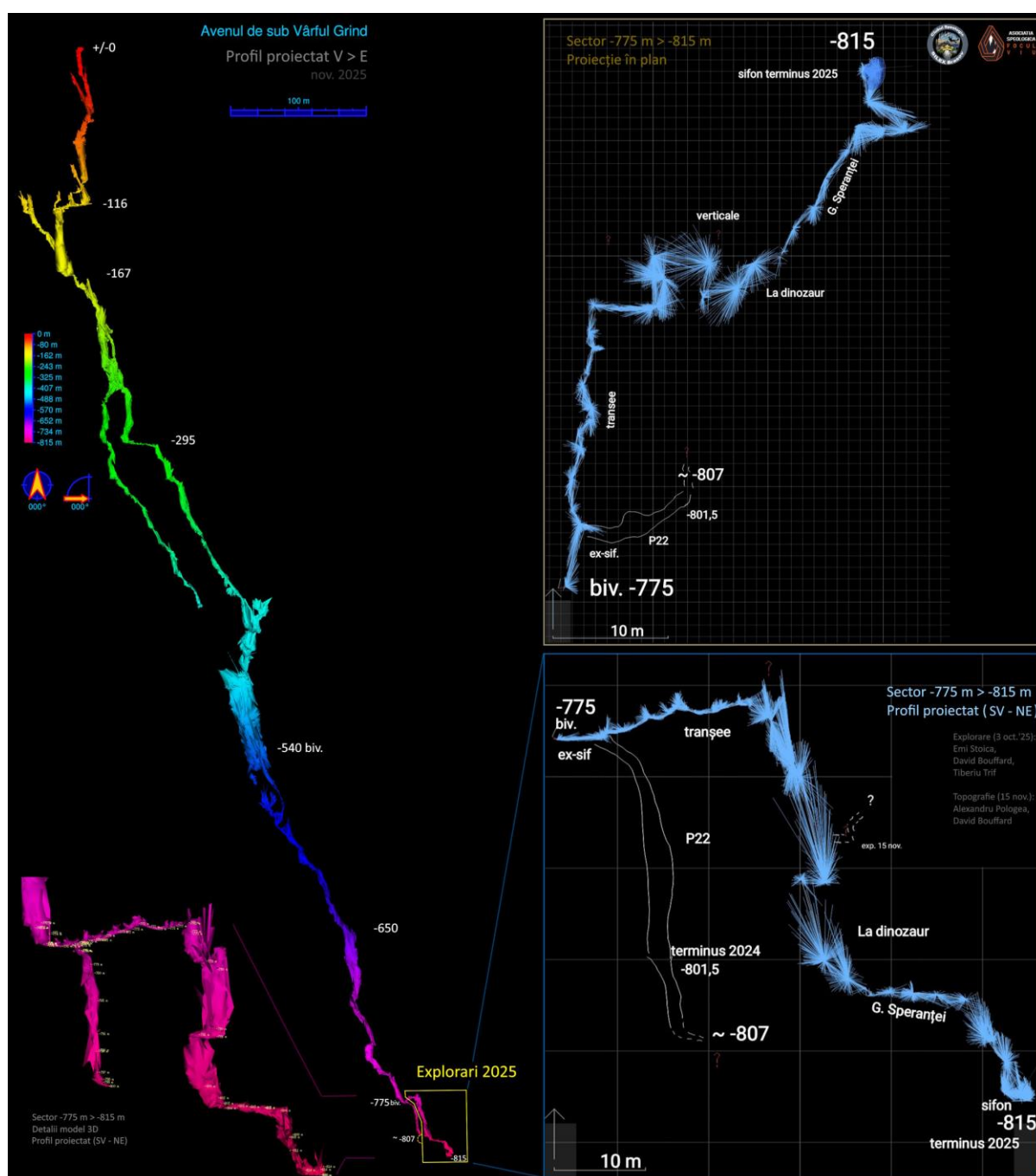
In the second case, a team ascending from the -540 m bivouac toward the surface was stopped by elevated water flow and had to wait at approximately -295 m for around nine hours, until the discharge on the pitch above dropped to a level that allowed a safe exit.

These situations highlighted the cave's rapid hydrological response and confirmed that high water remains the main objective hazard of the expedition. They also showed the value of the existing safety measures, particularly the underground bivouacs, the drainage arrangements, and the communication system, all of which were important in managing these situations safely. For future expeditions, close weather monitoring and conservative decision-making in unstable conditions will remain essential.

7. Geomorphological and speleogenetic interpretation of the newly explored sector beyond –775 m

Geomorphological and speleogenetic cave description of the entire cave

The newly explored sector developed beyond the former sump at –775 m represents a somewhat morphologically distinct branch (considering the horizontal passages), whose geometry and wall forms indicate a composite evolution, with an initial phreatic origin later



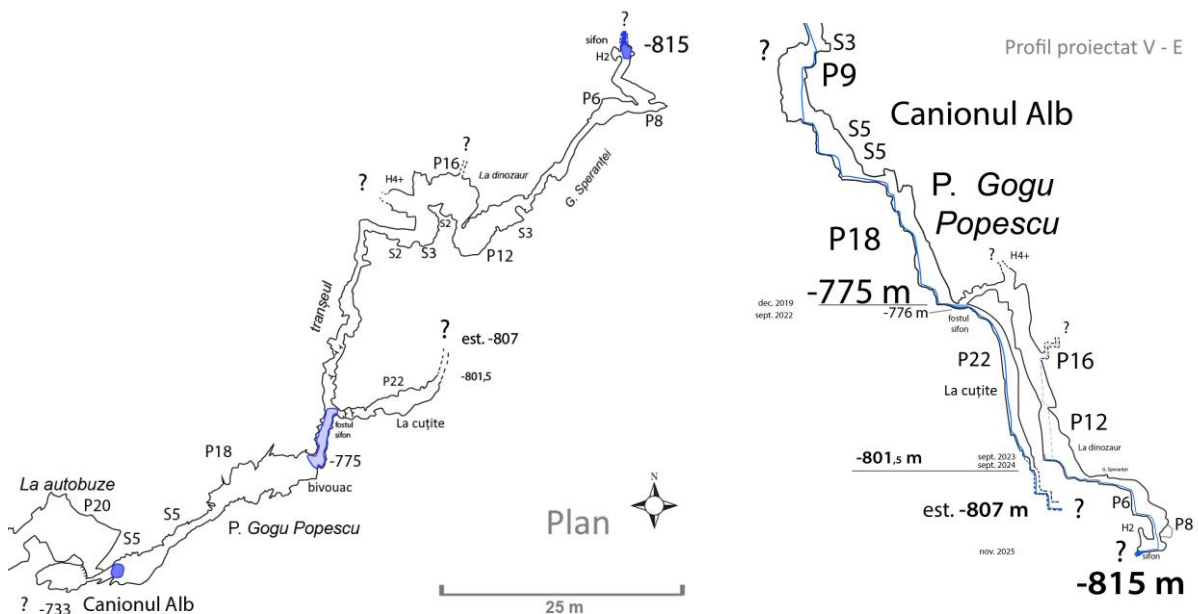
modified by vadose reactivation, and sediment infill. Since the installation of the drainage system, the former sump has become an intermittently drained, partially flooded passage, allowing direct access to the downstream continuation.

The first section beyond the former sump (“Tranșeul”) is a narrow, subhorizontal, slightly ascending passage, approximately 20 m long, trending roughly NNE–SSE to N–S and rising to about 4 m above the former sump level. Its cross-section is small, generally around 0.5–1 m wide and 0.5–1.8 m high, and it is partially occluded by fine sediment and local choke points. Morphologically, this conduit displays a suite of features consistent with development in a fully water-filled regime: smooth phreatic wall forms, ceiling domes, solution pockets, and multiple residual septa. The presence of numerous septa and lateral dissolution pockets suggests that the conduit may have evolved by enlargement along a preferential flow path in a fracture-influenced zone, with incomplete dissolution of wall partitions. The abundance of fine sediment and clay infill indicates a later phase of reduced-energy deposition, probably related to partial ponding or backflooding from the active passage at sump level and the new drainage path descending through the La cuțite pitch (P22), immediately downstream of the former sump.



“Tranșeul” passage photo: Emi Stoica

At the downstream end of this low gallery, the conduit turns sharply to the east (~90°) and passes into a descending vertical sequence initiated by short drops of about 2 m and 4 m. Below these, the cave enters the major shaft system of the new branch. Although now expressed as two distinct pitches separated by a ledge, this section is best interpreted as a



Plane (left) and W - E projected profile (right) draft maps of the terminal sector

single genetically integrated shaft developed along a principal fracture, later segmented by block collapse over which sediment accumulation formed a ledge. The pitches measure a depth of approximately 16 m and 12 m respectively. Their profile is distinctly bell-shaped, with a straight wall, suggesting important vertical dissolution under phreatic or epiphreatic conditions, later modified by gravitational processes and vadose entrenchment. The shaft geometry indicates strong structural control, with fracture guidance providing the main alignment of void development. The bell-shaped form, together with the chimney development above, is consistent with strong dissolution focused along ascending flow paths or zones of local turbulence in flooded conditions.



Clay deposit at ~ -804 m – photo: Emi Stoica

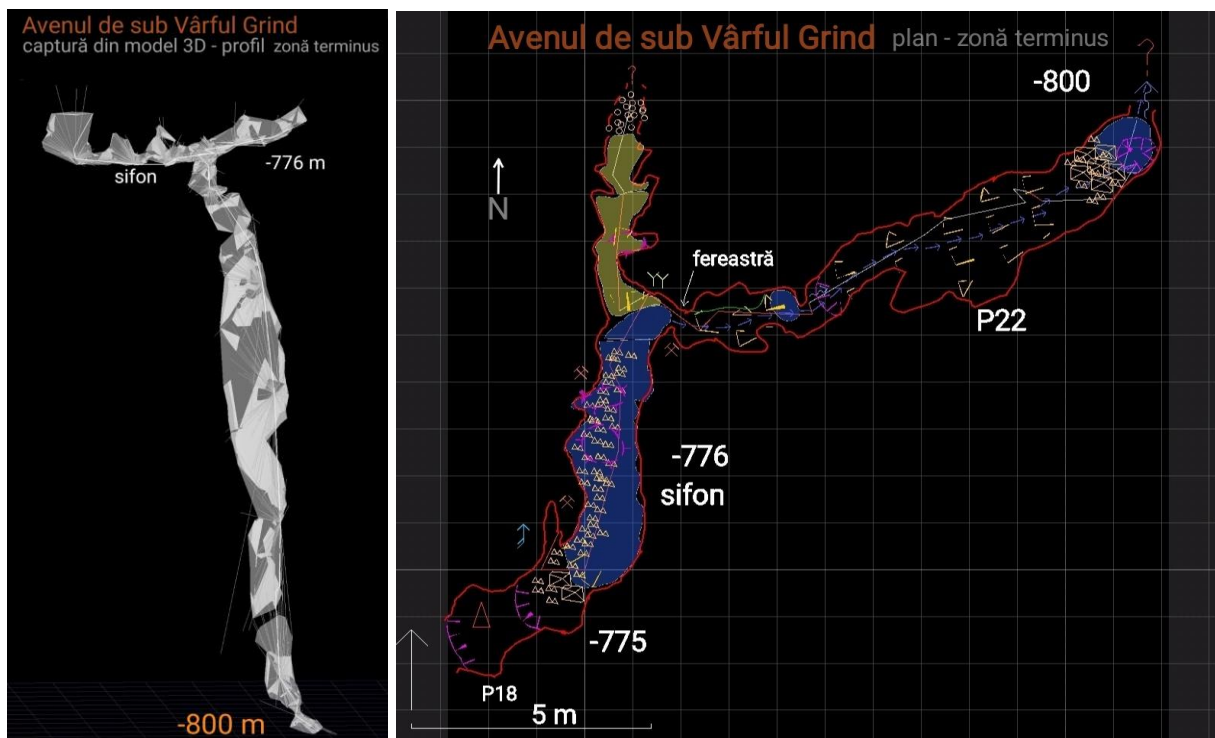
A chimney approximately 4–6 m high is visible above the entrance to the shaft series. From a speleogenetic point of view, this feature may represent an upward phreatic cupola or chimney developed by ascending aggressive water along the same fracture, possibly enhanced by convective circulation or local flow concentration. However, because the visible part does not fully resolve its upper geometry, it remains possible that this feature is an unexplored continuation reconnecting with the main cave path above, airflow behaviour observed in the sector supporting this hypothesis.

From the base of the main shaft system, at about – 803 m (“La dinosaur”), the cave continues with “Galeria Speranței” – a 10 m long, low, relatively linear conduit trending approximately SW-NE, followed by a 6 m bell shaped pitch, a slightly inclined 8 m pitch, and a short terminal gallery ending in the present sump at –815 m. The linear passage has important deposits of clay over its length. In contrast to the upper part of the branch, this lower section appears morphologically more vadose, with stepwise downcutting and a clear gravitational descent toward the sump. The terminal sump itself is small in visible dimensions, but its significance is likely greater than its present morphology suggests. Although the upstream conduit is relatively clean, the sump is rich in clay and silt, both on the floor and around the margins, indicating low-velocity settling and rapid remobilization under disturbance. Such turbidity conditions strongly limit visual assessment, and the sump could only be investigated for a short distance with a submerged camera. The available observations suggest that the flooded conduit maintains similar dimensions beyond the visible entrance, but its shape remains just partially resolved.

Hydrologically, the branch is active starting from –800 m (“La dinosaur”). At the base of the first major pitch, wet sediment and a small temporary seep or trickle indicate intermittent inflow, likely supplied from the lateral ascending continuation reached midway through the shaft system, at –785 m. Further down, a persistent active inlet (–800 m) emerges from the

wall at the base of the major verticals, confirming that this branch intersects an active drainage route. The coexistence of inherited phreatic morphology and present-day active flow indicates that the passage has undergone polyphase evolution, with older flooded genesis followed by later entrenchment and reoccupation by active water. The exact relation between this active inlet and the cave main stream disappearing in the end of nearby branch terminating around -807 m is not yet resolved. This is because the close proximity and relatively similar debit suggest it is the same stream but the level difference based on survey contradicts this as the inlet point is higher than the other's branch end. It is a possibility that survey errors in the previous years could cause a discrepancy. They may represent the same hydraulic pathway expressed at slightly different levels, or two closely related but separate flow routes within the same fracture-controlled zone.

Airflow observations add another important element to the speleogenetic interpretation. In previous years, the former sump zone exhibited a clear and sometimes strong draught, especially after drainage made the passage accessible. At certain times, the sector appears to undergo a marked breathing effect, suggesting communication with another void or higher-level continuation. In particular, at -775 m informal smoke test made with cigarettes indicated that the airflow did not rise through the most obvious shaft route, but instead appeared to follow an alternative path, with the draught apparently perceptible higher in the cave, around -725 m. This suggests the possible existence of a parallel connection linking the downstream sector to a higher part of the system, potentially through the chimney zone above the major shafts (-772 m). If confirmed, such a connection would have important implications for both the cave's internal ventilation pattern and the genetic interpretation of this branch.



Status before 2025 explorations - profile and plane draft map of 2023-2024 terminus area

An additional upward lead was identified in November 2025, when a pendulum traverse from the middle part of the main shaft system gave access to a narrow ascending passage – a lead explored in the first 10 m. This appears as a tight, temporarily active, vertical zig-zagging passage climbing approximately parallel to the shaft.

Analysis of the 3D model suggests that the vertical pitch in the newly explored sector, above “La dinozaur”, and the 22 m “La cuțite” pitch in the parallel branch at the former terminus appear to be developed along the same fracture plane, with a dip of approximately 68–70° and a ~ NNW–SSE to N–S strike (345° azimuth).

Taken together, the newly explored sector beyond –775 m can be interpreted as a polygenetic conduit system combining a partially drained former sump developed in phreatic conditions, an upper septate and sediment-choked phreatic passage, a fracture-guided shaft sequence with bell-shaped morphology suggestive of strong vertical dissolution, and a lower vadose-active continuation terminating in a sump.

The sector is therefore of particular interest not only as an exploratory gain, but also as evidence of the interaction between structural guidance, phreatic conduit development, sediment infill, vadose rejuvenation, and present-day active drainage within the deeper parts of the cave.

8. Logistics and field organisation

Preparation

The organization of the 2025 Grind expedition began at the end of 2024. A series of online meetings was held to coordinate the expedition, acquire the necessary materials, refine and finalize the objectives, and prepare the equipment required for the campaign.

An international open call for participation was launched, and an application for financial support was submitted to the European Speleological Federation (FSE) for a EuroSpeleo Projects grant. In the weeks preceding the expedition, the required materials and equipment were prepared and organized for transport to the speleological refuge.

Access to the expedition base.

Access to the expedition area was made from the village of Șirnea, following a forest road passable only by 4x4 vehicles up to the saddle known as Curmătura Groapelor, on the eastern flank of the Piatra Craiului syncline. From there, the route descends on another forest road to Poiana Grind, where vehicles were left. An older access option from Podu Dâmboviței, via

Brustureț and Valea Pietrelor, is currently no longer usable by vehicle because it was damaged by flooding, and can now only be followed on foot. From Poiana Grind, equipment was carried up to the expedition base at the Grind speleological refuge, first along the marked tourist trail to Grind Valley refuge and then along an unmarked but manageable path toward the Grind chimneys and the wall refuge. The approach from Poiana Grind to the refuge typically took between 1.5 and 3 hours, depending on the load carried, and the cave entrance lies about 10 minutes above the refuge. A large sheepfold is located in Poiana Grind, and livestock and guard dogs had to be avoided during equipment carries.



Packing gear – photo: Alina I.

After the first 5 days of the camp, weather conditions deteriorated significantly, with unusually heavy snowfall for this period. Such conditions were highly unusual: in the last 15 years of Grind camps, comparable snowfall had never been experienced, except perhaps for light superficial snow. As a result of the heavy snowfalls, access to the speleological refuge effectively turned into a winter alpine approach, sometimes requiring dedicated mountaineering equipment, including ice axe and crampons. This raised important safety concerns regarding the access route, especially on the steeper alpine slopes, where snow and ice created a substantial slipping hazard. In addition, navigation became more difficult because of the significantly reduced visibility.

During this period, the forest road from Șirnea to Poiana Grind also became more difficult, and access by 4x4 vehicles could no longer be carried out each time under the same conditions as at the beginning of the camp. Altogether, these circumstances required repeated replanning and reorganization of both equipment transport and participant access, so that people could reach the refuge safely during the available weather windows and the necessary materials could still be moved during this part of the expedition.



Poiana Grind and sheepfold – photos: Alex P.

Underground communication.

Communication between underground teams and the surface was ensured by an analogue cave-telephone line running from the refuge, across the cliff, to the cave entrance and then along the main route inside the cave. Connection points along the route allowed teams to plug in portable handsets and call the surface, and, when necessary, the line could also be accessed directly from almost any point. Calls from the cave to the refuge were possible at all times, as a surface duty person was always present to answer day or night. Communication between underground points was also possible when teams coordinated their calls. Surface-to-cave calls could be made when a handset was connected underground, for example at a bivouac, although this option was less practical because the ringing was often



Electrical measurements – photo: Emi S.

difficult to hear in cave conditions. During the 2025 expedition, the number of portable handsets/intercoms was increased so that each member of an underground team carried one, significantly improving both safety and communication. At the start of the expedition, several repairs were needed, especially near the entrance and at weak connection points. In recent years, and again in 2025, the team progressively replaced mechanical connectors with soldered electrical joints protected with grease, which improved line quality and long-term reliability. The final section of the telephone line, while it was extended between –775 m and the deepest terminus, was still not operational and remains an objective for the next expedition. Electrical measurements were made to determine connection quality.

Team organisation underground

As in previous years, underground teams were generally organised in pairs, and only occasionally in teams of three, in order to optimise movement through a cave that is almost entirely negotiated on rope. Larger groups were normally split into smaller teams for efficiency and safety. Solo movement was not encouraged, although a few exceptional solo traverses did occur on longer sections of the cave. These remained possible only because of the constant communication maintained with the surface and with other underground points.

Bivouacs

Two main underground bivouacs were used. The –540 m bivouac has a capacity of about five people: three places in a Steinberg tent, one in a hammock, and one on a camp bed. It includes a small improvised kitchen area, and water is captured nearby from a sheet-fed drip about 10 m higher. The bivouac is located in a confined space at the base of an inclined shaft and is one of the very few naturally sheltered places in the cave where a bivouac can be installed. However, it is a muddy and uncomfortable location because of the tectonic breccia and the sediment that turns to mud in the presence of active seepage from the wall above. The second

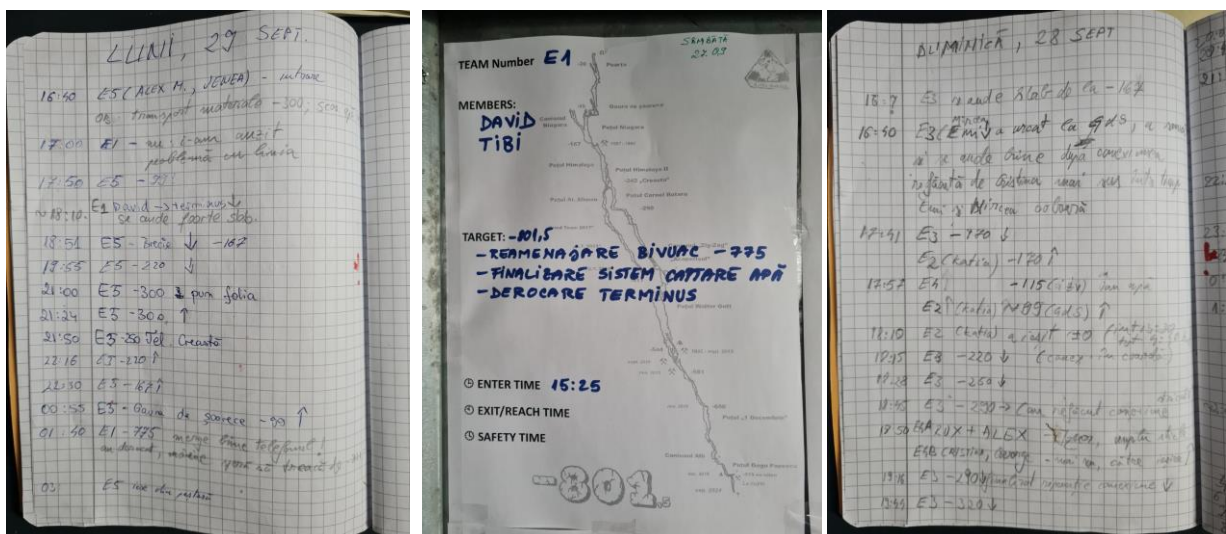
bivouac, at -775 m, was first established two years ago. It occupies an even smaller area at the base of a shaft and has a maximum capacity of three people, all in hammocks: two immediately beside the former sump and one on a small ledge about two metres higher. This bivouac is more exposed to water and possible flood pulses, so the drainage and bypass system installed around it was a major safety measure. Even so, during periods of high discharge, water still runs down the walls and across the floor, making the bivouac temporarily unusable for sleeping and requiring all equipment to be packed carefully into sealed bags. Tarpaulins were installed above the hammocks, and all materials were stored in protected containers when the bivouac was closed between expeditions. The drainage system and the dam built above it held successfully through the year, despite concerns that high flows might damage the hoses.



Telephone station adaptation
– photo: Alex P.

Rigging improvements

A part of the 200 meters of rope (Summum model) received from Korda's was used to replace old rope (over 10 years old rope) on some segments. The remaining part was transported in the cave in 2 places in order to be used for new parts at the bottom, for replacements of old rope or for artificial climbing in the next expedition. 20 slings were replaced with new ones in the top part.



Telephone / action logs and team trip sheet – photos: Alex P.

Hydrological conditions during the September-October expedition

Although conditions during the first third of the expedition were relatively favourable, with lower water discharge in the shaft, the hydrological situation then changed significantly during the middle and second part of the expedition. In addition to unusually heavy snowfall for this period (no such record in the last 15 years of expeditions), the cave was affected by rapid snowmelt generated by subsequent spells of relatively warm weather with positive surface temperatures. This led to accelerated melting of the newly accumulated snow, and these episodes were further compounded by rainfall. As a result, significant volumes of water infiltrated into the massif, a process favoured by the lack of a substantial soil cover at the surface, by the intense visible fracturing of the limestone, and by structural context (60° limestone layers dipping).



Ad-hoc water protection – © Alex P.

Although the cave is predominantly vertical, it functions as an efficient collector for the surrounding area. Consequently, from the middle part of the cave downward, and especially toward the terminal sector, substantial quantities of water became concentrated through tributary inflow. These conditions did not produce very large flood events capable of significantly filling the passages, but they did make movement through the shafts and between sectors impossible. This was due both to the fact that the rope route lies very close to the main active watercourse and to the reduced dimensions of some of the connecting passages between shafts. Under such conditions, access was most of the times impossible, and at other times teams could not move safely beyond the relatively protected bivouac points.

9. Table of participants

Nr.	Participant	Club	Country
1	Cristina Stika	Focul Viu	Romania
2	David Bouffard	Silex / A.C.C.	Canada
3	Alina Iordache	Silex	Romania
4	Alex Macsinoiu	Silex	Romania
5	Mircea Toma	Silex	Romania
6	Emi Stoica	Silex	Romania
7	Alexandru Pologea	Silex	Romania
8	Ruxandra Nedelcu	Silex	Romania
9	Dorinel Bobîrnac	Silex	Romania
10	Narcis Ghiță	Silex	Romania
11	Gabriel Stroe	Focul Viu	Romania
12	Eugen Manțoc	Abis C.	Moldova
13	Dan Olteanu	Silex	Romania
14	Adrian Rădulescu	Focul Viu	Romania
15	Corina Gheorghiu	Focul Viu	Romania
16	Tiberiu Trif	Prusik	Romania
17	Cătălin Radu	Silex	Romania
18	Nemanja Milosavljevic	PSK DVIG	Serbia
19	Mladen Milošević	SAIS	Serbia
20	Milan Milivojević	SAIS	Serbia
21	Dragan Petrović	SAIS	Serbia
22	Daniela Vlad	Silex	Romania
23	George Nonoșel	Silex	Romania
24	David Fazecaș	Cristal	Romania
25	Gabriel Manea	Focul Viu	Romania
26	Florin Ifrimescu	SNS	Romania
27	Andrei Alexandru	Focul Viu	Romania
28	Kateryna Medvedieva	Silex / UkSA	Ukraine
29	Oana Harabagiu	Silex	Romania
30	Marius Mișacon	Silex	Romania
31	Lăcrămioara Pușcaș	Silex	Romania
32	Alina Moldovan	Silex	Romania
33	Petrică Baltă	Focul Viu	Romania
34	Tudor Marin	Focul Viu	Romania

Full names of participating organizations:

	Organization name	Organization name (English)	Country
1	Clubul de Speologie Silex Brașov	Silex Brașov Speleology Club	Romania
2	Asociația Speologică Focul Viu București	Focul Viu București Speleological Association	Romania
3	Clubul de Speologie Prusik Timișoara	Prusik Timișoara Speleological Club	Romania
4	Clubul de Speologie Cristal Oradea	Cristal Oradea Speleological Club	Romania
5	Societatea Națională de Speologie	National Speleological Society - SNS), Romania	Romania
6	Clubul de Speologie Abis Chișinău	Abis Chișinău Speleological Club	Moldova
7	Планинарско спелеолошки клуб ДВИГ	D.V.I.G. Mountain Speleological Club - P.S.K. D.V.I.G.	Serbia
8	Sportsko speleološko udruženje SAIS Knjaževac	Knjaževac Speleological Sports Association	Serbia
9	Українська спелеологічна асоціація	Ukrainian Speleological Association	Ukraine
10	Alpine Club of Canada	Alpine Club of Canada	Canada

10. Media and links

Expedition invitation: <https://www.frspeo.ro/grind-2025-expedition/>

Social media posts with results summary (in Romanian):

1. [Expedition start and expedition preparatory trip](#)
2. [Expedition post 1](#)
3. [Expedition post 2](#)
4. [Follow-up 6-day expedition after main expedition](#)

Press release following main expedition end (in Romanian language):

<https://speosilex.ro/grind-2025-comunicat-de-presa/>

11. Financial report

Incomes:

	Source	Amount (EUR)
1	FSE grant	800.00
2	C.S. Silex Brasov sponsorship	605.70
3	Silex members in-kind contribution (3x Ac. Li-Ion 18V)	617.65
	Total	EUR 2023.35

Expenses:

	Source	Amount (EUR)
1	Chisels, SDS drill bits	86.05
2	Waterproof container 10 L	58.82
3	Plastic sheet, bags, cable ties	15.46
4	Carbide	30.20
5	Expansion anchors, screws	67.54
6	Small consumables	6.54
7	Chisels, spit anchors, SDS drill bits, hammers	141.69
8	2x sleeping bag	127.45
9	Intercoms and electronics	134.81
10	SingRock tubular webbing (41 m – 20 mm; 6 m – 16 mm)	67.94
11	24 slings (60–120 cm)	119.59
12	Waterproof containers 6 L	50.98
13	Fittings, foil, hammock, sleeping mats and others	187.62
14	Gas soldering tool	42.96
15	Sleeping bag liners	19.60
16	Accessory cord	51.76
17	Dry bag (waterproof backpack, duffel type) 55 L	88.23
18	Flat bar	17.77
19	Camping water containers 10 L	38.62
20	Fishing rod	9.80
21	Tap, T-connector	6.14
22	woven sacks	9.06
23	Bags, tape, trowel, accessory cord	27.06
24	3x Li-Ion battery, 12Ah, ProCORE 18V	617.65
	Total	EUR 2,023.35

Participants covered their own food, transport, and personal equipment costs, and also contributed personal technical equipment, including drilling machines, batteries, and other rigging and exploration gear. Most of the additional exploration materials, such as hangers, bolts, and other technical equipment, were provided as in-kind contributions by the organizing clubs, mainly Silex Braşov, with further support from Focul Viu and Prusik.

12. Results review

Metric	Before 2025	After 2025	Gain
Depth	–801.5 m	–815 m	+13.5 m
Length	~1.7 km	~1.8 km	+100 m

Achievements related to proposed objectives

- exploration beyond **–801.5 m** → completed - reached about **–807 m** on that branch
- exploration from the former sump at –775 m → completed / new branch to **–815 m**
- Walter Gutt traverses/climbs → not started due to high water flow
- climb at –400 m → not started due to high water flow
- traverses bellow –600 m → not started due to high water flow
- geomorphological observations → partly completed
- rigging improvement → completed
- photo/video documentation → completed

Although the secondary objectives proposed for 2025 were numerous besides the terminus exploration — intentionally more numerous than strictly necessary, as a common yearly approach, in order to allow flexibility depending on conditions, participant numbers, and available resources — not all of them were completed, which was expected from the beginning. However, the objectives that were achieved, together with the new opportunities that emerged during the expedition, more than compensated in the final results. The general view of both the participants and the organizers was that the 2025 exploration campaign was a successful one.

13. Conclusion and perspectives

The Grind 2025 expedition, conducted across its three phases, can be considered a clear success. Despite the fact that more than half of the main expedition period was affected by adverse weather conditions, including unexpected early winter conditions at the surface, the team achieved significant exploration and technical results during the total of 28 days over the three phases.

These conditions led to exceptionally high water flow within the cave, which at times made access to the newly discovered sectors impossible. Nevertheless, the expedition succeeded in

extending the cave and establishing a new national depth record, maintaining the strong momentum and cohesion of the team involved in this long-term project.

The discoveries made in the newly explored sector offer promising prospects, particularly for potential upward continuations. Although the sump at –815 m represents a technically demanding objective, there is realistic potential for it to be explored and possibly passed. A dedicated diving attempt is already planned for the autumn 2026 expedition.

An important outcome of the expedition was the development of the team itself. Less experienced participants reached greater depths or spent time in the –540 m bivouac, gaining valuable experience in a demanding alpine cave, especially under difficult hydrological conditions. Teams working at the terminus further strengthened their capacity to operate and organize efficiently in complex and high-risk environments.

The challenging surface conditions also demonstrated that expedition logistics and operations can be successfully adapted to early winter environments, highlighting the commitment and resilience of the surface teams.

The Grind exploration project continues to be a reference initiative in Romanian speleology, fostering collaboration between clubs and regularly bringing together both national and international participants.

The improvement and near completion of the drainage system in the former sump area at – 775 m represents a significant technical achievement, particularly given the difficulty of the cave. This development enhances both safety and exploration efficiency, providing confidence that the newly discovered areas can be explored under improved conditions. The newly identified fossil passage also contributes positively to safety considerations.

Finally, the morphology and spatial organization of the newly explored passages suggest a possible transition of the cave system from a predominantly vertical structure toward a more horizontal development, opening new perspectives for future exploration.

For the [2026 expedition](#), the main priorities will be to dive the sump at -815 m, continue exploration of the ascending lead at -785 m, technical climbing of the -785 m chimney, and resume work on the -807 m branch. Additional technical objectives will include completing the final functionality of the underground telephone line to the deepest sector and continuing targeted rigging replacement. Secondary objectives will include climbing the small waterfall wall at -400 m, carrying out traverses and climbs in Walter Gutt Shaft to investigate possible upward continuations, exploring several narrow lateral leads below -600 m and the lead at - 774 m, investigation and eventually enlarging of the narrow fracture below the -540 m bivouac in order to search for a safer bypass of the breccia-plug area at -555 m, and continuing geomorphological observations and structural measurements.

14. Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the collaborating organizations for their financial and equipment support, in particular the European Speleological Federation (FSE) and KORDA'S, whose contributions significantly enhanced the success of the 2025 campaign (via EuroSpeleo Projects). We also wish to thank the Romanian Speleological Federation (FRS) for providing the framework through which the application for the FSE grant was submitted, and for serving as the umbrella organization supporting cave exploration within the Romanian speleological community. We are likewise grateful to ProAlpin mountain hardware shop for supplying a high discount on valuable equipment. We also wish to thank Cheile Grădiștei for kindly lending us a terrain vehicle, which proved highly useful for the expedition's logistics. The expedition also benefited from the use of equipment acquired through a 2024 exploration grant from the UIS (International Union of Speleology).

We would further like to thank the Piatra Craiului National Park for issuing the exploration permits required for all phases of the expedition. We also thank the participants and participating organizations for their financial and equipment contributions, which supported the successful implementation of the campaign. Beyond their exploratory significance, the results achieved in 2025 are also a reflection of the strong team spirit developed among speleologists from multiple clubs and nationalities. Our sincere thanks go to all participants for their commitment and contribution.



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Prepared by Alexandru Pologea and Cristina Stika

March 2026

v. 1

Annex 1 – Participation attendance

Participant	Club	Country	Precamp																			November expedition													
			F 19.09	Sa 20.09	Su 21.09	F 26.9	Sa 27.9	Su 28.9	M 29.9	Tu 30.9	W 1.10	Th 2.10	F 3.10	Sa 4.10	Su 5.10	M 6.10	Tu 7.10	W 8.10	Th 9.10	F 10.10	Sa 11.10	Su 12.10	M 13.10	Tu 14.10	W 12.11	Th 13.11	F 14.11	Sa 15.11	Su 16.10	M 17.11					
1 Cristina Stika	FocuŃ Viu	Romania				p	x	x						p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p						p	x	p				
2 David Bouffard	Silex	Canada	x	p	x	x	p							x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p	p		p		x	x	x	x	p				
3 Alina Iordache	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	p				p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p													
4 Alex Macsinoliu	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p														
5 Mircea Toma	Silex	Romania					p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p												
6 Emi Stoica	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p														
7 Alex Pologea	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p		p		x	x	x	x	p				
8 Ruxandra Nedelcu	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	p					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p					p	x	p					
9 Dorinel Bobirnac	Silex	Romania					x	p																											
10 Narcis GhiŃă	Silex	Romania	x	p	x	x	p	x	x					x	p	x	x				x	p													
11 Gabriel Stroe	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																	x	x	p														
12 Eugen Mantoc	Abie C.	Moldavia					p	x	x	x	x	p																							
13 Dan Olteanu	Silex	Romania																	p	x	p														
14 Adrian Rădulescu	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																	p	x	x	p					p	x	x	p					
15 Corina Gheorghiu	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																	p	x	x	p													
16 Tiberiu Trif	Prusik	Romania				p	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	p																				
17 CăŃălin Radu	Silex	Romania									p	x	x	p																					
18 Nemanja Mitosavljević	PSK Dvřg	Serbia												p	x	x	x	p																	
19 Mladen Milošević	SAIS	Serbia												p	x	x	x	p																	
20 Milan Milivojević	SAIS	Serbia												p	x	x	x	p																	
21 Dragan Petrović	SAIS	Serbia												p	x	x	x	p																	
22 Daniela Vlad	Silex	Romania									p	x	p																						
23 George Nonogel	Silex	Romania				p	x	x	p													p													
24 David Fazecaş	Cristal	Romania									p	x	x	p																					
25 Gabriel Manea	FocuŃ Viu	Romania					p																												
26 Florin Ifrimescu	SNS	Romania					p																												
27 Andrei Alexandru	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																	p	x	x	p													
28 Kateryna Medvedieva	Silex / UkrSA	Ukraine				x	x	p																											
29 Oana Harabagiu	Silex	Romania																			p	p									p				
30 Marius Milascon	Silex	Romania	p		x	x																													
31 Lacramioara Puşcaş	Silex	Romania	p		x	x																													
32 Alina Moldovan	Silex	Romania	p		x	x																													
33 Petrică Baltă	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																																	
34 Tudor Marin	FocuŃ Viu	Romania																																	

Legend:

p	day climbing to camp; or descending from camp
x	full day in surface camp or in the cave
xp	mostly full day in the camp and arriving/departing from camp

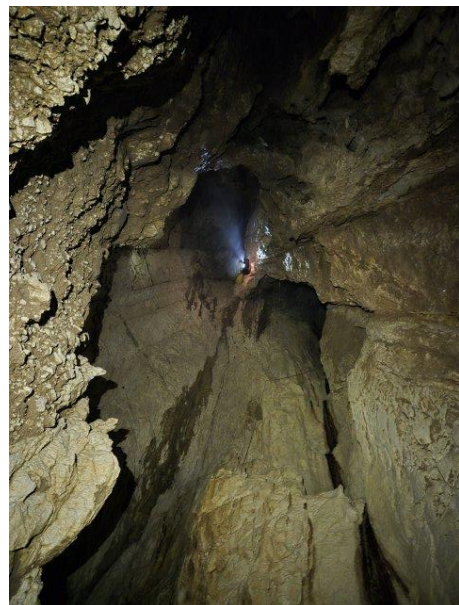
Annex 2 – Geomorphological and speleogenetic cave description

Avenul de sub Vârful Grind is a predominantly vertical alpine cave developed in the Upper Jurassic limestones of the Piatra Craiului Massif, [with an entrance at c. 1922 m](#) a.s.l., a present depth of 815 m, a plan extent of 323 m, and a main route [comprising 26 pitches](#). The cave is strongly controlled by discontinuities, especially fractures and locally faults, while in the deeper sectors its geometry is increasingly influenced by the steep dip of the limestone beds (c. 70°). In morphogenetic terms, the system represents a composite vadose-phreatic cave: the overall morphology is that of a major vadose shaft system, but several sectors preserve clear evidence of development under flooded conditions, later modified by entrenchment, collapse, and reactivation by active drainage.

In the upper part, down to roughly –295 m (“Needle’s Ears”), the cave is developed mainly along fissures and possibly faults, forming a succession of steep vadose shafts with only short horizontal interruptions. Several tributary elements occur in this sector. A fossil tributary joins the main route at –35 m, probably connected to the scree-covered slope above the entrance. A second tributary with temporary flow enters at –116 m from an impenetrable fissure. The most important upper tributary intersects the ceiling of Niagara Pitch and descends to a hydrological confluence at –167 m; upstream, it forms a fissure-guided gallery with small cascades, short vertical steps, potholes, closed chimneys, and locally abundant calcite flowstone. This sector illustrates the superposition of fracture guidance, local phreatic enlargement, and later vadose incision by low-discharge active flow.

Below –295 m, the cave morphology becomes more strongly conditioned by the structural grain of the massif, especially bedding control. The pitches and short connecting galleries tend to follow the dip of the strata, and several shafts are developed in steps. A particularly important parallel branch is the Himalaya 2 sector, between about –210 m and –390 m, consisting of a narrower series of shafts aligned subparallel to the main route; its active trickle suggests tributary status, although the confluence with the main stream has not been identified. From approximately –358 m, at the beginning of the Zig-zag Canyon, the cave acquires a more meandering character in plan, while still retaining large structurally controlled drops. Between –588 m and –710 m, the projected plan is distinctly sinuous, with several bends, indicating progressive transition from simple fracture descent to more organized vadose canyon development.

A key morphogenetic threshold occurs at Walter Gutt Pitch, where the main active stream is lost at about –527 m and reappears c. 25 m lower in a parallel shaft system. This indicates a locally complex drainage pattern involving bypass routes and reorganization of flow within adjacent fracture-controlled voids. The main route continues through a large wall window into the shaft hosting the –535 m bivouac, below which an important tectonic-breccia accumulation occupies the passage. This breccia body, composed of limestone blocks in a red-clay matrix, long formed a major choke between –540 m and –558 m, and similar collapse-related obstructions

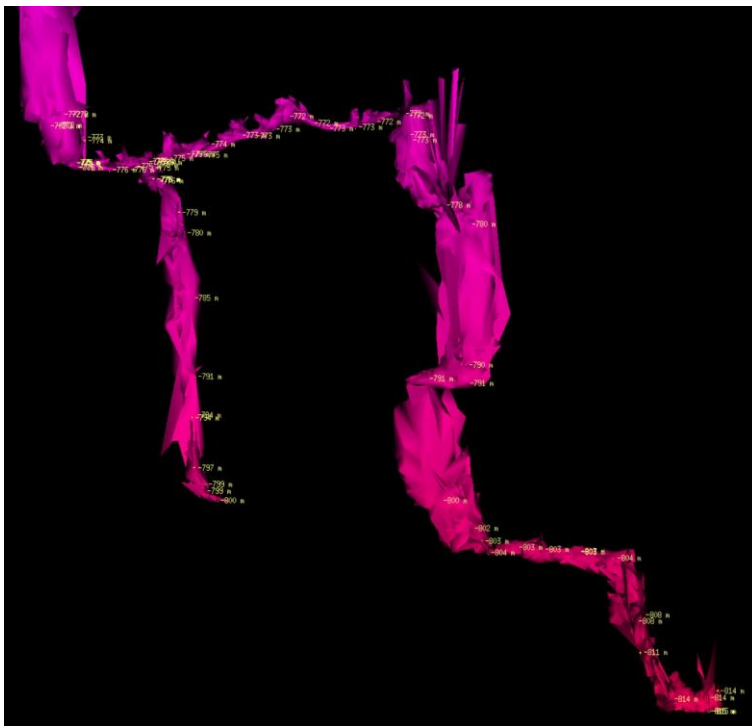


Niagara Shaft — photo: Cristina Stika

recur lower down, notably near –580 m. The lower cave therefore combines primary dissolutional voids with strong secondary modification by breakdown and sediment trapping. At the same time, infiltration water descending from the bivouac sector joins the deeper active drainage at –567 m, confirming the persistence of present-day hydrological activity through the lower system.

Below the breccia zone, the cave maintains a predominantly vertical, bedding-influenced geometry, with short horizontal connectors at –596 m, –619 m, and –752 m, and several major shafts including drops of 19 m, 17 m, 56 m, 36 m, and 18 m. Most pitches show typical vadose sculpturing, including flow grooves, septa, and large potholes at their bases, testifying to repeated drainage of substantial water volumes. Speleothem development is generally modest and concentrated in upper parts of pitches and ceilings, though calcite flowstones are locally important, especially in upper sectors where flood flow is less focused. The cave as a whole is therefore best interpreted as a deep alpine drainage system formed along a major structural alignment (notably a WSW-ENE / ESE-WSW fault-controlled trend), subsequently modified by episodic sediment choking, collapse, and multi-phase hydrological reactivation.

From a speleogenetic and hydrogeological perspective, the present terminus at –815 m is especially significant. The small vertical difference between the deepest known point and the most plausible regional resurgences, together with the morphology of the terminal sector, suggests that the cave is approaching the epiphreatic limit of the massif and may connect farther on with a more subhorizontal,



3D model view of -775 to -815 sectors; SW – NE projected profile view

partially or wholly flooded conduit system. The exact resurgence remains unknown: dye tracing from the cave has so far been negative, and drainage may be directed either toward the major springs downstream of Prăpăstiile Zărneștilor or toward the La Gâlgoaie / La Bile spring system in the Dâmbovicioara basin. In this context, *Avenul de sub Vârful Grind* is not only the deepest known Romanian cave, but also one of the most important sites in the massif for understanding the interaction between structural control, deep shaft development, active karst drainage, and the transition toward the epiphreatic zone.

[Geomorphological and speleogenetic interpretation of the newly explored sector beyond –775 m](#)

Annex 3 – Full daily log

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Pre-expedition trip - 19 – 21 September 2025

Friday – 19.09.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Marius Milascon, Lăcrămioara Pușcaș, Alina Moldovan.

Activity Summary: In the morning, David, Alina, and Narcis climb to the speleological refuge.

In the afternoon, around 14:00, David and Alina enter the cave and rig down to Creastă, exiting at 20:00. The cave is quite dry, and the water level at the spring is very low.

In the evening, Marius, Lăcrămioara, and Alina climb to the speleological refuge.



Photo 1. Team getting ready to enter the cave
– photo: Alina Iordache



Photo 2. Team at the terminal sump, finishing rigging
– photo: Marius Milascon

Saturday – 20.09.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Marius Milascon, Lăcrămioara Pușcaș, Alina Moldovan.

Activity Summary: In the afternoon, David and Marius descend to rig the entire cave, while Alina and Narcis descend to transport equipment to the bivouac at -540 m. Alina and Lăcrămioara remain at the phone in the speleological refuge.

Team 1: David and Marius

Objectives: Rigging the cave down to bivouac from –775 m

Entry time: 13:10

Exit time: 02:40

David and Marius descend rigging down to the bivouac from –540 m. At 14:00 they arrived to the Creastă. At 15:10 they called from Zig-Zag. At 18:15 they were in the bivouac from –540 m and they continue rigging. They returned to the bivouac around 22:05 and they exit the cave at 2:40.

Team 2: Alina and Narcis

Objectives: Transport equipment to the bivouac (–540 m)

Entry time: 14:00

Exit time: 3:40

Alina and Narcis descend with equipment to the bivouac from –540 m. They arrived at 15:20 on Niagara pit and at 18:15 from Walter Gutt pit. They leave equipment to the bivouac and they return to the surface. They called at 21:30 from La Gunoaie.

Sunday – 21.09.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Marius Milascon, Lăcrămioara Pușcaș, Alina Moldovan.

Activity Summary: In the afternoon, after completing arrangements at the refuge, everyone descends to Poiana Grind and heads home.

Main expedition 26 September – 14 October

Friday – 26.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel

Activity Summary: At midday, David, Tiberiu, Narcis, and Alex M. climb to the speleological refuge with the first part of the equipment needed for exploration, making two trips from *Poiana Grind* (meadow and sheepfold; 1372 m asl).

In the evening, David, Narcis, and Alex M. descend to Șirnea, from where they climb together with George and Alina to the speleological refuge (~1900 m asl).

Saturday – 27.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Emi Stoica, Cristina Stika, Katya Medvedieva, Gabriel Manea, Florin Ifrimescu.

Activity Summary: In the morning, Katya, Gabriel, and Florin leave Șirnea without luggage, heading toward Poiana Grind, and then climb to the speleological refuge carrying materials and equipment.

At midday, Alex, Emi, and Cristina ascend to Poiana Grind, where they meet Alina, George, and Narcis, who have come down for another equipment transport.



Photo 3. Team climbing to the refuge – photo: Alina Iordache

Meanwhile, David and Tiberiu descend into the cave down to –775 m, with the plan to set up the bivouac and improve water drainage in the working area.

Throughout the day, several trips are made between Poiana Grind and the speleological refuge. The camp is being organized, and collective equipment is arranged.

In the evening, Alex P. descends to Șirnea, where he meets Mircea and Ruxandra, and together they climb back to the refuge.



Photo 4. Team climbing to the refuge – photo: Cristina Stika

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives:

- Reinstall the bivouac at –775 m
- Completion of water capture system
- Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

Entry time 15:25

There was no telephone connection, the team stops at the bivouac at –540 m to wait for the telephone connection to be restored.

Sunday – 28.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Alexandru Macsinoiu, George Nonoșel, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cristina Stika, Katya Medvedieva, Eugen Manțoc.

Activity Summary: At midday, Emi, Mircea, and Katya enter the cave with the goals of carrying materials and exploration equipment to the –540 m bivouac and checking all telephone wire connections on the way down.



Photo 5. Team at the cave entrance – photo: Cristina Stika

After lunch, Alina and Narcis descend to Poiana Grind to bring up more equipment and then climb together with Eugen.

Cristina, Ruxandra, Alex M., and George enter the cave to collect water from the “spring” inside the cave.

In the evening, Alina and Narcis, followed by Cristina and Katya, leave the camp and descend to Șirnea. During the night, David calls from the terminus: together with Tiberiu, he continues explorations in the terminus zone.

Emi and Mircea restore the connections between –580 m and –625 m in the final hours and then plan to return to the surface.



*Photo 6. Team in speleological refugee
– photo: Cristina Stika*

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives: Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

At 1.55 they called.

Team 2: Katya

Objectives: Transport equipment to the bivouac at –540 m

Entry time 12:55

Exit time: 18.00

Team 3: Emi and Mircea

Objectives: Transport equipment to –400 m and to the bivouac at –540 m

Entry time 1:05 PM

Exit time: 8:00

At 16:40, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece (Mouse Hole)* after descending to *La brechie* without being able to establish telephone communication. At 17:40, they descend again to *La brechie*. At 18:45, they call from *Urechile Acului*, reporting that they have restored a

completely broken connection. At 19:45, they call from below *Urechile Acului* (–320 m). At 20:45, they call from *Acoperiș (The Roof)*, and at 21:30, from the bivouac at –540 m.

A note from David is found, stating that they went down to the terminus but, in the absence of phone communication, they will return on Monday by 14:00.

At 22:40, they call from *La prelată* (–580 m). At 23:00, they call from –595 m, where they restored a connection by soldering the wires. At 23:38, they call from –625 m, where Emi restores another connection, also soldering the wires. At 00:45, they begin the ascent from –625 m. At 02:00, they call from the bivouac (–540 m). At 04:31, they call from *Urechile Acului*, at 06:24 from *La brechie*, at 07:00 from *Gaura de Șoarece*, and at 08:00 they exit the cave.

Team 4: Cristina, George, Ruxandra, Alex M.

Objectives: Bring water from inside the cave – from “the spring”-*La izvor* (–110 m)

Entry time 2:00 PM

Exit time: 20:00 (Cristina and George)

2:00 (Ruxandra and Alex M.)

At the *gate – La poartă* (–20 m), they restore the broken telephone connection that has been previously repaired last year. At *Gaura de Șoarece*, they meet the other teams and, after letting them descend, continue down to the spring to fill the water bottles. The water flow is very low — a 2-liter bottle takes about five minutes to fill. At 18:00, Cristina calls from *Gaura de Șoarece*, saying she will return to the surface with George, while Ruxandra and Alex M. remain at the spring to fill the rest of the bottles.

Monday – 29.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, George Nonoșel, Eugen Manțoc.

Activity Summary: David and Tiberiu continue exploration work at the terminus point, estimating that with one more day of effort they will exceed last year’s recorded depth of 801.5 m. In the morning, Mircea and Emi return to the surface after a long shift that extended to the –540 m bivouac and then down to –600 m, where they repaired the telephone connections and made improvements.



Photo 7. Team prepared to enter the cave –
photo: Ruxandra Nedelcu



Photo 8. Team descending to the Gaura de Șoarece –
photo: Ruxandra Nedelcu

Throughout the day, various arrangements and maintenance activities are carried out in the camp.

After lunch, Eugen and Alex M. descend down to –300 m with equipment.

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives: Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

At 01:40, they call, reporting that they have been working and hope to soon pass beyond the –801 m point.

Team 5: Alex M. and Eugen

Objectives: Transport of materials down to –300 m

Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 4:30 PM

Exit time: 03:00

At 17:50, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*. At 18:51, they call from *La brechie*; at 19:55, from *Creastă*; and at 21:00, from *Urechile Acului*. At 21:24, they begin the ascent, and at 21:50, they call from the phone at *Creastă*. At 22:15, they call from the phone at the base of the Himalaya section, and at 22:30, from *La brechie*. At 00:55, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Tuesday – 30.09.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc.



Photo 9. Team descending to the Spring – photo: Alina Iordache

Activity Summary: During the day, the team prepares the equipment, sets up several intercom units, and organizes the gear stored in the refuge. They also descend to retrieve equipment left in the Grind Glade.

Emi and Alex M. descend to the spring at –110 m to collect water and secure the phone wires from the Gate. At midday, Alex, Eugen, and Ruxandra descend to Șirnea, after which Alex and Eugen climb back to the speleological refuge carrying materials.

David and Tiberiu work at the terminus and manage to pass the constriction reached last year, estimating their depth at –804 m. A ledge and a diacalse are visible, and an echo can be heard. They climb back to the bivouac to collect batteries and other necessary materials.

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives: Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

At 14:55, they prepare the equipment. At 16:40, the exploration at the terminus continues. At 22:00, David calls from the terminus, saying he is starting the climb to the bivouac at –540 m to bring more gear. At 22:38, he calls from *La autobuze (Buses)*, at 23:15 from –600 m, and at 23:42 from the bivouac. At 00:47, he begins to descend again; at 01:10, he calls from –600 m, at 01:40 from *La autobuze*, and at 02:02 he calls again from *La autobuze*.

Team 6: Alex M. and Emi

Objectives: Fixing the connection at the input (soldering the wires); Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 18:30

Exit time: 22:30

At 18:42, they called from *Gaura de Șoarece*. At 20:27, they called from *Gaura de Șoarece* again, they are on their way out.

Wednesday – 01.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc.

Activity Summary: David and Tiberiu rest in the –775 m bivouac, and in the evening, they descend again to the terminus, intending to enlarge the saddle at the end, near the entrance to the diacase. They may also reshape the small vertical section, as the water no longer flows as strongly over them.

In the afternoon, Emi and Alex M. descend to the bivouac at –540 m, where they carry out repairs to the drainage hose system and perform other maintenance work.



Photo 10. Bivouac at –540 m – photo: Alex Pologea

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives: Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

At 17:40 they call to say they are getting ready for work.

At 23:07 they called saying the water capture hose above the bivouac was silted

Team 7: Alex M. and Emi

Objectives: Transport of materials and repairs to the bivouac at –540 m

Entry time: 18:45

At 19:15, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*. At 19:54, they call from La brechie. At 20:38, they pass Creastă, and at 20:51, they reach Urechile Acului. At 22:10, they call from Gunoaie, and at 23:06, they call from the bivouac, saying they will clean up and go to sleep.

Thursday – 02.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș.

Activity Summary: Tiberiu and David explore in the terminus and working on the extension of the drainage system.

Emi and Alex M. make arrangements in the bivouac at –540 m.

At midday, Cătălin and David F. climb to the camp, cutting tracks through the heavy snow that has fallen on the mountain.

In the evening, Alex descends into the cave to the bivouac at –540 m.

Outside, more than 15 cm of snow has accumulated at the refuge.



Photo 11. Niagara pit – photo: Alina Iordache

Team 1: David and Tibi

Objectives: Exploring at the terminus (–801.5 m)

At 16:00, they call, reporting that they are working on the drainage system. At 21:50, they report having solved the problem with the hose and note that the water flow has doubled. They have also extended the telephone cable into the drained sump (–775). At 23:36, they confirm that Emi has arrived at their location and that they are going to sleep.

Team 7: Alex M. and Emi

Objectives: Repairs at the bivouac at –540 m

Emi calls at 22:41, he is preparing to get down to the terminus

Team 8: Alex P.

Objectives: Transport of materials and repairs to the bivouac at –540 m

Entry time: 22:20

At 23:25, he calls from Gaura de Șoarece, and at 00:00 from *La brechie*. At 00:56, he calls from *Urechile Acului*, at 02:27 from –420 m, and at 03:45 he arrives at the bivouac at –540 m.

Friday – 03.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Eugen Manțoc, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad.



Photo 12. Team at –800 m – photo: Emi Stoica

Activity Summary: The snow stopped in the morning, but the forecast indicates a blizzard in the evening. David, Tiberiu, and Emi are working at the terminus. They advanced well beyond the –801.5 m point surveyed last year. Emi continued digging the slightly ascending passage at the drained sump level (the horizontal continuation besides the previous sump at –775 m), reaching a low passage approximately 20 m long, with a small chamber, followed by a sequence of short drops (3, 5, and 5 meters) and then a 10-meter shaft.



Photo 13. Terminal syphon – photo: Emi Stoica

After several short drops, a further shaft of approximately 8 meters follows, then a 4-meter drop and a short low passage. Beyond this low passage, the passage descends through several steps into a 10-meter canyon, followed by a 4-meter drop and an 8-meter shaft ending in a 5-meter-long passage that terminates in a new sump.



Photo 14. Girls climbing to the refuge – photo: Alina Iordache

Alex and Alex M. carry out bivouac maintenance at –540 m.

At midday, David F. and Cătălin descend to transport equipment down to –300 m.

At the spring, the effects of the previous day's snowfall are already noticeable; no more water flows along the walls, and the team returns relatively dry.

At midday, Alina and Daniela climb to the camp, “cutting” tracks through the heavy snow deposited since their departure from Șirnea.



Photo 17. Team leaving to the cave – photo: Mircea Toma



Photo 16. Touristic refuge – photo: David Fazecaș

Team 1: David, Tibi and Emi

Objectives: Exploration in the terminus

At 15:53, they call, reporting that Emi has made a new advancement / discovery in the horizontal passage end at the level of the –775 drained sump (previously dug slightly in the last two years), and that they are going to explore it. At 20:00, they call again, saying they will report back later. At 23:44, they call, estimating that they discovered new verticals on this parallel sector which they rigged, descending about 30 meters below the sump level. At 01:30, a meeting is held with team E8 and the refuge.

Team 7/8: Alex M. and Alex P.

Objectives: Repairs for the –540 m bivouac

At 10:55, Alex P. calls, reporting that they will carry out various repairs in the bivouac. At 18:13, he calls again, confirming that they will remain one more day. At 22:00, he reports having made a water drainage ditch near the bivouac area. At 23:00, he calls again, trying to obtain information about team E1. At 01:30, a meeting is held with team E1 and the refuge. At 02:20, Alex calls, saying he is preparing the exploration equipment.

Team 9: Cătălin and David F.

Objectives:

- Transport of materials at –300m
- Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 1:30 PM

Exit time: 20:30

At 14:18, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*. At 15:02, they call from La brechie, and at 15:39, they reach Creastă. At 16:00, they call from –290 m, saying they will eat before starting the climb to the surface. At 17:00, they begin the ascent. At 18:13, they call from La brechie, and at 19:22, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Saturday – 04.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu.

Activity Summary: In the cave, although the terminus team had initially planned to begin the climb at noon, the warm weather from the previous day melted the snow that had fallen over the past two days, resulting in a noticeable increase in water flow during the afternoon. The terminus team — David, Emi, and Tiberiu — decide to climb the following morning, taking advantage of the surface frost and the expected decrease in water flow inside the cave.

At the bivouac, Alex M. and Alex P. set up camp at -540 m.

Also at noon, Cristina, Narcis, and Ruxandra climb to the camp, carrying ropes and other equipment on foot from Șirnea. From Poiana Grind, part of the equipment is taken over by Cătălin.



Photo 18. Team climbing with heavy equipment – photo: Alina Iordache



Photo 19. Team in the -540 m bivouac – photo: Alex Pologea



Photo 20. Grind team – photo: Alina Iordache



Photo 21. Niagara pit – photo: Alex Macsinoiu

Team 1: David, Tibi and Emi

Objectives: Exploration in the terminus

Call at 13:15, reporting that the water flow has increased significantly and that Tibi and Emi are climbing. At 14:58, David calls again, saying the flow has risen even more. At 15:57, David reports that the flow has decreased, but stones have fallen into the shaft leading to the sump. At 17:30, he calls to propose a meeting at 19:00, and at 19:00 he calls again for coordination with teams E1b, E8, and the refuge. At 21:00, he calls back, confirming that he is fine, standing on the upper step of the sump, and waiting for the flow to decrease. At 23:00, he begins packing his equipment and plans to climb once everything is ready. At 01:30, he confirms that he has gathered almost everything, prepares his banana, and estimates that he will start climbing in about 30 minutes. He arrives at the bivouac at 03:30. He calls at 05:21 from –400 m and at 06:20 reports having passed Urechile Acului.

Team 7/8: Alex M. and Alex P.

Objectives: Repairs at the bivouac at –540 m

Alex P. calls at 12:50 giving preparation details for Alina and David F.

They call at 13:35, also noticing the increased water flow. They call back at 14:00 to check the status of team E1 and the weather forecast. He calls again at 14:20. At 15:00, Alex prepares to descend to the Autobuze. He calls at 18:27 to confirm the meeting scheduled for 19:00, and again at 19:00 for coordination with teams E1b, E1, and the refuge. At 20:16, Alex P. puts the surface team (Alina and David F.) on standby. They call back at 21:00; they

are still working in the bivouac area. At 01:00, he calls to report that he is repairing the water house in the bivouac. At 01:40, Alex M. calls, and we conduct several tests to duplicate the phone base from the refuge to the upper floor, where we sleep. At 02:52, Alex calls again to check the status of the other teams.

Team 1b: Tibi and Emi

Objectives: Return to the surface

At 14:19, Tibi and Emi call, saying they will remain at Autobuze (–700 m) and will not climb further due to the high–water flow. At 15:29, Tibi calls again, reporting that they are fine, they have food, they are safe from the water, and they can stay in place for an extended period. At 16:00, he calls to confirm that they are all right and mention that they prefer not to call at fixed intervals. At 17:13, he calls again, saying the flow is still high but they are fine. At 18:30, he reports that the flow has decreased by about 25%. At 19:00, he calls for coordination with teams E1, E8, and the refuge. At 21:00, he calls again, confirming they are fine and waiting for the water level to drop before climbing. At 23:00, he reports that they are still waiting. At 01:20, he calls to say they are starting the climb to the bivouac. At 02:26, he calls again, reporting that they have climbed the 1 Decembrie section. At 03:00, he calls, but no sound is received. At 03:30, he reports reaching the bivouac, and at 06:27, he calls again, saying he is climbing toward Urechile Acului.

Sunday – 05.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cătălin Radu, David Fazecaș, Alina Iordache, Daniela Vlad, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu.

Activity Summary: At lunchtime, Alex M. and Alex climb to the surface.

David, Tiberiu, and Emi begin to climb to the surface in the late morning – the water flow has decreased considerably, though conditions are still not ideal.

Mircea and Alina descend into the cave to the spring at –110 meters to collect water.

David F., Daniela, and Cătălin leave the camp.

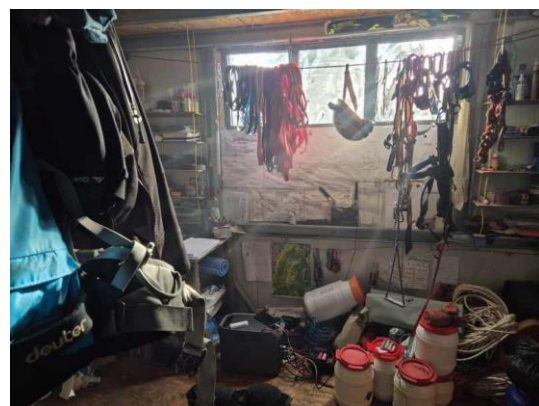


Photo 22. Sunny morning at speleological refuge – photo: Cristina Stika



*Photo 23. Team going to the cave
– photo: Alina Iordache*



Photo 25. Cavers leaving the camp – photo: Daniela Vlad



Photo 24. Team planning activities– photo: Cristina Stika



Photo 26. Alex. P., Ruxandra, Cristina, David B., Alina I., Alex M., Narcis, Tiberiu, Mircea, Emi – photo: Alina Iordache

Team 1a: David

Objectives: Surface exit

Exit time: 09:00

At 01:30, he confirms that he has packed almost everything, prepares his banana, and estimates that he will start climbing in about 30 minutes. He reaches the bivouac at 03:30. He calls at 05:21 from –400 m, and at 06:20 he has passed Urechile Acului. No further calls are received, as the telephone was not properly placed in its cradle.

Team 7/8: Alex M. and Alex P.

Objectives: Repairs to the bivouac at –540 m and exit to the surface

Exit time: 16:00 - Alex M.; 16:50 - Alex P.

He calls at 01:00, reporting that he is repairing the water collection tarpaulin in the bivouac. At 01:40, Alex M. calls, and we carry out several tests to duplicate the phone base from the refuge to the upper floor, where we sleep. At 02:52, Alex calls to check the status of the other teams. At 08:51, he calls again, saying they are preparing their equipment and will go up to the surface. At 11:12, simultaneous calls are received: Alex M. is at Gunoaie (–480 m), and Alex P. is leaving the bivouac (–540 m). At 12:15, Alex P. calls from –420 m. At 12:27, Alex M. calls from below Urechile Acului, and at 12:54, he reports having passed the crawl at Urechile Acului (–290 m). At 13:30, Alex P. climbs to Urechile Acului. At 14:10, Alex M. calls from La brechie, and at 14:25, Alex P. calls from Creastă. At 14:50, Alex M. calls from Gaura de Șoarece, and at 15:15, Alex P. calls from La brechie.

Team 1b: Tibi and Emi

Objectives: Return to the surface

Exit time: 10:00

They call at 01:20, saying they are starting the climb to the bivouac. At 02:26, they call again, reporting that they have climbed the *1 Decembrie* wide shaft. At 03:00, they call, but the connection is unclear. At 03:30, they arrive at the bivouac. At 06:27, they call once more, saying they are climbing toward Urechile Acului. No further calls are received, as the telephone was not properly placed in its cradle.

Team 10: Alina and Mircea

Objectives: Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 10:10

Exit time: 12:30

At 10:43, they call from Gaura de Șoarece, reporting that they are going down to the spring. At 11:26, they call again from Gaura de Șoarece, saying they are heading toward the surface.

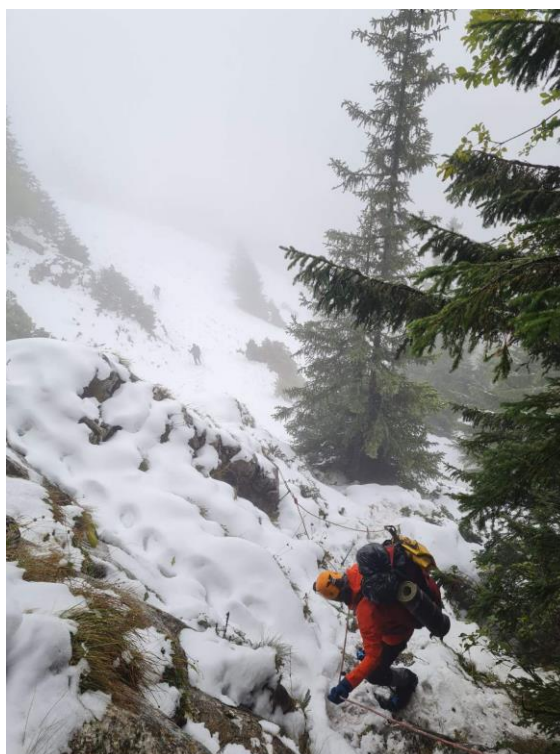
Monday – 06.10.2025

Participants: Tiberiu Trif, David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Narcis Ghiță, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljevic, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović.

Activity Summary: Given the weather forecast and the increased water flow in the cave, no entry is made today.

In the morning, Tibi and Narcis leave the camp.

Emi and Mircea descend to Șirnea to accompany their Serbian colleagues (Mladen, Nemanja, Milan, and Dragan), assisting them with their luggage / equipment. They return to the speleological refuge in the afternoon.



*Photo 27. Team climbing to the speleological refuge
– photo: Mladen Milošević*



Photo 29. Grind team – left to right: Mircea, David B., Cristina, Emi, Milan, Mladen, Alex M., Nemanja, Ruxandra, Alex P., Alina I. – photo: Alina I.

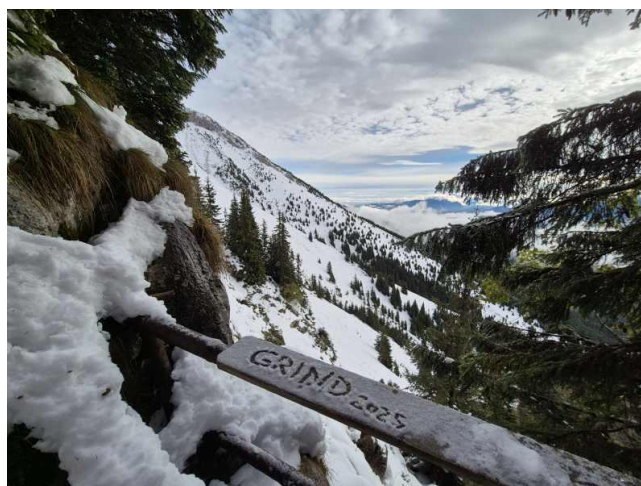


Photo 28. Heavy snow in the mountain – photo: Cristina Stika

Tuesday – 07.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljevic, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović.

Activity Summary: Following the expected decrease in water flow, five teams entered the cave and carried out activities in the upper section of the cave, down to –290 meters. The teams were reorganized along the route according to specific operational objectives, members forming different teams. The work performed included technical work of rock break up, replacement of slings, improvement of equipment, and the transport of a significant quantity of water outside from the *spring* (–110 m).



Photo 31. Heavy rain on Niagara pit
– photo: Mladen Milošević

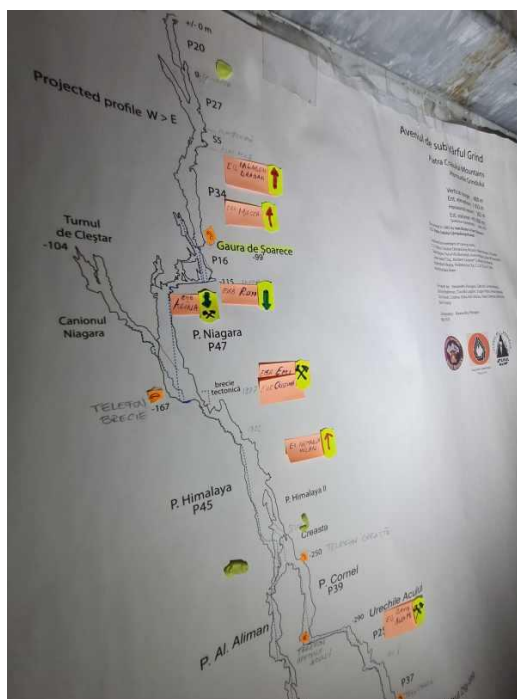


Photo 30. Grind teams in cave – photo: Alex Pologea

Nemanja M. and Milan M. transported equipment to – 290 m.

Cristina replaced the slings in the upper section of the Himalaya shaft.

Mladen M. and Drăgan P. collected water from the spring at –110 m.

David and Alex M. performed a substantially enlarged of two sections on the slope at –290 m (*Urechile Acului*).

Alina replaced slings down to the *La brechie* (–167 m) and doubled an anchor above *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Emi reestablished communication connections and provided assistance to the other teams.

Ruxi and Mircea collected water from the spring and supported the other teams in their activities.



Photo 32. Nemanja passing through *Gaura de Șoarece* – photo: Cristina Stika

Team 11: Nemanja, Milan, Cristina

Objectives:

- Equipment transport up to –300 m
- Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 15:00

Exit time: 0:55 - Nemanja and Milan; 3:35 - Cristina

They call from *Gaura de Șoarece* at 15:45, reporting that Cristina will remain with team E12. They call from *La brechie* at 16:40. At 17:35, they call from *Creastă*, waiting for the other teams, and at 18:10 they call again as they continue their descent. At 18:40, they reach –290 m. At 19:25, after leaving their equipment and taking a lunch break, they begin climbing to the surface. They call from *Creastă* at 19:55 and reach *La brechie* at 20:40. At 23:02, they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*, confirming that they have isolated the rope above with a knot where the sheath had torn.

Team 11b mixed: Cristina, Emi, Alina and Ruxandra

At 18:05, Cristina calls, saying she is descending to check the equipment on the Himalaya and replaces the slings from the upper part of the Himalaya shaft. Around 19:40, she sees the members of team E11 climbing the Himalaya, and around 19:55 she hears team E13. At 20:40, Cristina calls from *La brechie*, waiting for E14, who have the drill. At 22:00, she reports restoring the telephone connection together with Emi, who soldered the wires and installs new connectors (when stripping, they find the conductive wires rusted for at least 10 cm). At 22:45, she calls to confirm that Ruxandra and Alina are descending, after giving priority to team E11 to climb. At 23:10, she reports that all four are preparing to

ascend. Emi and Ruxandra call at 00:00 from *Gaura de Şoarece*, and Alina and Cristina call at 01:33 from *Gaura de Şoarece* — Alina doubles one of the fractions above.

Team 12: Mladen and Dragan

Objectives:

- Cave documentation down to –167 m
- Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time 15:15

Exit time: 23:40

They call at 16:25 from *Gaura de Şoarece* and at 17:25 from *La brechie*. At 18:27, they climb *Niagara* s. At 20:00, they call from *Gaura de Şoarece*. At 20:25, they begin the ascent from *Gaura de Şoarece*.

Team 13: David B. and Alex M.

Objectives: Enlargement at –290 m (the crawl at *Urechile Acului*)

Entry time: 16:40

Exit time: 3:50

They call at 18:40 from –290 m and begin the enlargement of the low passage. At 22:10, they report that the work is in progress. At 01:28, they call again, saying the work is finished and they are starting the climb to the surface. They call at 02:20 from *La brechie* and at 02:50 from *Gaura de Şoarece*. They meet Alina and Cristina at the exit of the cave.

Team 14: Alina and Emi

Objectives:

- Change of slings
- Plate & carabiners check (equipment in general)
- Check phone connections (tinning)
- Bring water from the spring (–110 m)

Entry time 18:15

Exit time: Alina - 03:30; Emi - 02:30

Call at 20:00 from *Gaura de Şoarece*. Call at 21:05, they replace slings and descend.

Team 15: Ruxandra and Mircea

Objectives:

- Bring water from the *spring* (–110 m)
- Drone filming tests
- Support other teams

Entry time 19:00

Exit time: Mircea – 23:00; Ruxandra – 02:30

Call at 20:20 from *Gaura de Şoarece*. Call at 21:05, Mircea is going up, Ruxandra is going down towards *La brechie* with E14.

Ruxandra calls at 0:00 from *Gaura de Şoarece (the Mouse Hole)*.



Photo 34. Team ascending – photo: Cristina Stika



Photo 33. Serbian team and Cristina getting ready to enter the cave – photo: Alina Iordache

Wednesday – 08.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljevic, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović.

Activity Summary: Due to the weather and the high water flow in the cave, no trips were made today. In the evening, the equipment was prepared for the following day.

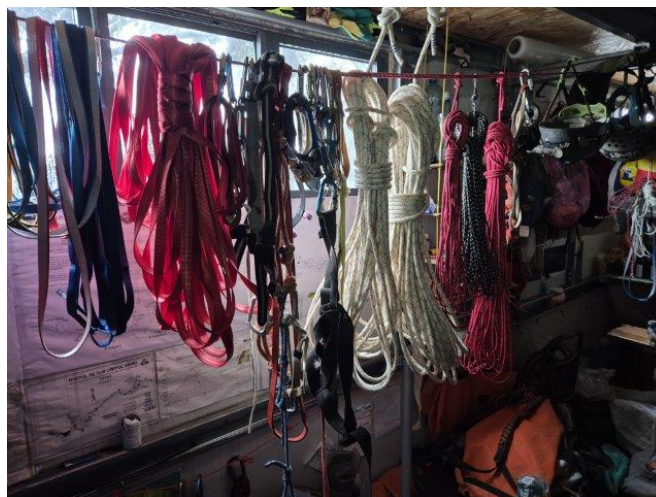


Photo 35. Equipment – photo: Cristina Stika

Thursday – 09.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Nemanja Milosavljevic, Mladen Milošević, Milan Milivojević, Dragan Petrović, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Alexandru Andrei, Gabriel Stroe.

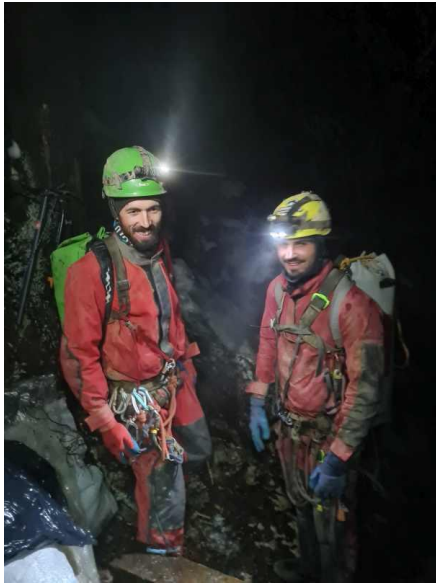
Activity Summary: At midday, Mircea drives his colleagues from Serbia to their cars in Șirnea and then returns to Poiana Grind with Adi, Corina, Alex A., and Gabi and climb up to the speleological refuge with more equipment. In the evening, taking advantage of the lower temperatures, David and Emi descend to the bivouac at – 540 m.



Photo 37. Rigging – photo: Cristina Stika



Photo 36. Kordas rope for Grind pit



*Photo 39. Team leaving to the cave
– photo: Alex Pologea*



Photo 38. Grind teams in cave – photo: Alex Pologea

Team 16: David and Emi

Objectives:

- Install phone wire through the sump to the new terminus
- Surveying the new area
- Securing drainage hoses
- Transport of exploration equipment to the terminus
- Transporting equipment to the surface
- Chimney climb from the new area
- Unpacking to the bivouac (–540 m)

Entry time 20:20

At 21:00 they call from Gaura de Șoarece. At 21:30 they call from La brechie, reporting heavy water on *Niagara* shaft. At 22:40 they call from the bivouac (–540 m) and decide to remain there due to high water along the route, especially on *Walter Gutt* shaft.

Friday – 10.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Alexandru Andrei, Gabriel Stroe, Dan Olteanu.

Activity Summary: At 07:30, Alex P. descends to the bivouac at –540 m.

At 09:00, Cristina and Alina also descend to the bivouac at –540 m. There is a strong water flow on Walter Gutt, and they decide not to go any further. They stop at the narrow passage at –290 m and rest there. At noon, David, Alex, and Emi descend to the 1 Decembrie well but do not continue to the terminus because of the high-water level.

Also at noon, Gabi and Alex M. enter the cave to improve the rigging above the *Gaura de Șoarece* and replace part of the rope, then collect water from the spring at –110 m.



Photo 40. Cave entrance – photo: Alex Andrei

They leave a 70 m Kordas rope (10 mm, manufactured in 2025, part of ESF grant) at the platform.

At 14:00, Adi and Corina enter the cave, scanning with the Mandeye Lidar up to above *Walter Gutt* s., where a large amount of water is flowing at the entrance to the shaft.

In the evening, Mircea descends to Poiana Grind and then climbs with Dan to the speleological refuge.



Photo 41. Lidar scanning – photo: Alex Andrei

Team 17: Alex

Objectives: Support for E16 in terminus

Entry time: 7:50

Calls at 08:50 from *La brechie*, reporting a large amount of water. Calls at 09:26 from *Creastă*, saying there is not as much water on the *Himalaya* shaft. Calls at 10:55 from *La gunoaie*, noting again that there is a lot of water coming down. Calls at 11:34 from the –540 bivouac, confirming heavy water flow on *Walter Gutt* s. and speaking with E18.

Team 16/17: David, Emi and Alex

Objectives: Work in terminus

They call at 11:54, saying they are preparing to descend to the terminus. At 14:06, David calls from –625 m (below *Prăbușiri*), reporting that they plan to descend as far as December 1st and then decide what to do; the water level is very high, and the sound of the waterfall can be clearly heard. At 15:20, they call from –650 m, saying they are returning to the bivouac because the water is too strong and conditions are risky. At 16:20, they call from the bivouac (–540 m), saying they are very wet. At 17:25, Emi calls from the bivouac, trying to warm up. They call again at 20:28 and at 22:20, when they are informed of the weather forecast and the heavy rain outside. At 00:40, they call once more, noting an increased water flow, as it has been raining continuously outside for two hours.

Team 18: Alina and Cristina

Objectives:

- Holder for E16, E17
- Climbed with equipment from the bivouac (–540 m)

Entry time 9:15

Exit time: 19:10

They call at 10:00 from *Gaura de Șoarece*, reporting that the walls of the shaft are quite wet. At 10:30 they call from *La brechie*, saying they are continuing downward, having put on their capes and avoided getting wet. At 10:50 they call from the base of the *Himalaya* shaft. At 11:23 they call from –290 m, saying conditions seem fine, but they are concerned after hearing about high water on the W.G. s. At 11:34 they call again and speak with Alex P. . At 12:20 they call with the intention of returning to the surface, and at 12:43 they report they plan to work a little in the low passage from *Urechile Acului* before heading back up. At

14:00 they call while performing small resistance and voltage measurements. At 15:40 they call from the base of the Himalaya shaft, saying they met E20, who is continuing the descent. At 16:40 they call from *La brechie*, and at 17:51 from *Gaura de Șoarece*, reporting that there is a lot of water on Niagara and that they left a filled bottle at the exit from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Team 19: Gabi. and Alex A.

Objectives:

- Replacing the rope above *Gaura de Șoarece* (*Mouse Hole*, -99 m)
- Bring equipment to the platform (-50 m)
- Bring water from the *spring* (-110 m)

Entry time: 11:45

Exit time: 17:55

Call at 13:26 from *Gaura de Șoarece*, reporting that they are descending. Call at 14:08 from *Gaura de Șoarece*, climbing with 10 bottles of water and meeting Adi and Corina. Gabi re-equips while Alex P. remains below. Call at 15:46, saying they have changed the rope and are climbing.

Team 20: Adi and Corina

Objectives: Lidar Scanning

Entry time 1:30 PM

Exit time: 22:00

At 14:08 they are at *Gaura de Șoarece* with E19, and at 15:40 they are passing toward Cornel, meeting E18. They call at 15:45 from Zig-Zag. At 17:26 they call from *La gunoaie*: "I'm going up" – Adi tried to descend the *Walter Gutt* s. but got very wet, as a waterfall had formed at the head of the shaft." They call again at 17:52 from below *Urechile Acului*. At 20:17 they call from *La brechie*, and at 21:00 from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Saturday – 11.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Alexandru Andrei, Gabriel Stroe, Narcis Ghiță, Dan Olteanu.

Activity Summary: Various improvements are being made during the day in the refuge area.

At 16:00, Narcis, Dan, and Cristina descend into the cave to collect water from the spring at –110 m. Three barrels (two of 6 liters and one of 8 liters, one of them containing several slings and 13 m of unsewn sling) are left at the platform at –50 m. Dan and Cristina go to the entrance of Niagara and notice a stronger water flow compared to previous days.

At 17:00, Alina and Ruxandra also descend to the spring.

In the evening, Alex M. leaves the camp and heads home.



Photo 42. Team at the Spring – photo: Alina Iordache

Later that evening, Emi climbs from the bivouac to the surface.



Photo 43. Team exiting the cave – photo: Alina Iordache



Photo 44. Team in the cave – photo: Cristina Stika



Photo 45. Night in the mountain – photo: Alina Iordache

Team 16/17: David, Emi and Alex

Objectives: Work in terminus

They call at 1:00 PM but they're still resting, ask about the forecast.

Team 16b: Emi

Objectives: Return to the surface

Departure time from the bivouac at -540 m: 21:30

Exit time: 01:40

They call at 21:00, reporting that the climb will start in half an hour. At 21:30, they call again to say they are leaving the bivouac. At 22:15, they call from *La gunoaie*, noting a lot of water on the *WG*. At 23:10, they report from above the *Zig-Zag* that there is heavy water flow beneath the Roof. At 23:30, they call from the hotspot at *Urechile Acului*. At 23:43, they call from *Creastă*. At 00:22, they call from *La brechie*, and at 00:57, from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Team 21: Cristina, Narcis and Dan

Objectives:

- Bring water from the Spring (–110 m)
- Bring equipment to the platform (–50 m)

Entry time 16:20

Exit time: 20:15

Call at 17:03 from *Gaura de Șoarece* – there is a lot of water on the walls and above *Gaura de Șoarece* it is dripping well. Call at 17:45 go up from *Gaura de Șoarece*, they met with E22.

Team 22: Alina and Ruxandra

Objectives: Bring water from the Spring (–110 m)

Entry time: 16:50

Exit time: 21:00

Call at 5:45 PM from the *Mouse Hole (Gaura de Șoarece)*. Call at 7:15 PM, go up from the *Mouse Hole*.

Sunday – 12.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Emi Stoica, Alexandru Macsinoiu, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Alina Iordache, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Adrian Rădulescu, Corina Gheorghiu, Alexandru Andrei, Gabriel Stroe, Narcis Ghiță, Dan Olteanu, George Nonoșel, Oana Harabagiu.

Activity Summary: Early in the morning, Emi descends from the refuge, towards Zărnești city.

During the morning, Mircea, Narcis, and George transport luggage to the car in Poiana Grind.

At 12:00, the team in the cave begins their ascent to the surface but stops due to the strong water flow at the hot point at –290 m (*Urechile Acului*).

At noon, Cristina, Adi, Corina, Alex A., and Gabi descend with their luggage to Poiana Grind. The last four leave the camp, while Cristina climbs back to the speleological refuge.

Mircea, George, and Narcis descend again with luggage to *Poiana Grind* meadow. Mircea returns to the speleological refuge in the evening.



Photo 46. Team leaving camp
– photo: Cristina Stika



Photo 47. Cave entrance – photo: Emi Stoica

In the evening, Oana climbs to the speleological refuge, accompanied by the four-legged Haiduc.

Alina and Mircea descend with their luggage to Poiana Grind, then continue by car to Șirnea. Alina heads home, while Mircea remains in Șirnea until morning.

Team 16/17: David and Alex P.

Objectives: Return to the surface

Departure time from the bivouac at –540 m: 12:40

Exit time: 01:00 – David; 02:00 – Alex P.

They call at 7:40, saying they are waking up and packing their equipment to get ready to leave.

At 12:16, they call again, saying they are preparing to depart. At 12:45, they report that David is climbing while Alex P. is now leaving the bivouac at –540 m. At 13:20, David calls from –400 m, saying he is waiting for Alex P. At 15:20, they call from the hot point at –290 m, saying they are taking a break; the water is flowing very strongly on the shaft above. At 18:50, they call to say they plan to wait. At 21:00, they call again — still waiting. At 22:40, they report they have decided to continue the climb, although the water flow has not decreased. At 23:44, they call from *La brechie*, saying they are climbing and mentally preparing for another shower. At 00:22, David calls from Gaura de Șoarece, saying Alex P. is a bit further behind. At 00:32, Alex P. calls from *La brechie*.

Monday – 13.10.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Mircea Toma, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Oana Harabagiu.

Activity Summary: Early in the morning Mircea climbs to the cave refuge and then descends to Poiana Grind with a luggage / equipment transport, then he heads home.

Final arrangements are being made at the camp, making a preliminary inventory in the refuge.

After 15:00 Cristina, David, Oana and Ruxandra go down to Poiana Grind with their luggage and head home.

Alex P. makes two trips with luggage to *Poiana Grind*, then returns to the speleological refuge.



Photo 48. Șirnea village— photo: Cristina Stika

Team 23: David

Objectives: Unrigging the rope from the entrance shaft of the cave (down to -20 m)

Entry time: 13:30

Exit time: 13:55

Tuesday – 14.10.2025

Participants: Alexandru Pologea

Activity Summary: Alex P. makes the final arrangements at the refuge, removes the access safety ropes, makes inventory and then makes two trips with equipment / luggage to *Poiana Grind* meadow (and sheepfold). In the evening, he leaves home, marking the end of the expedition.

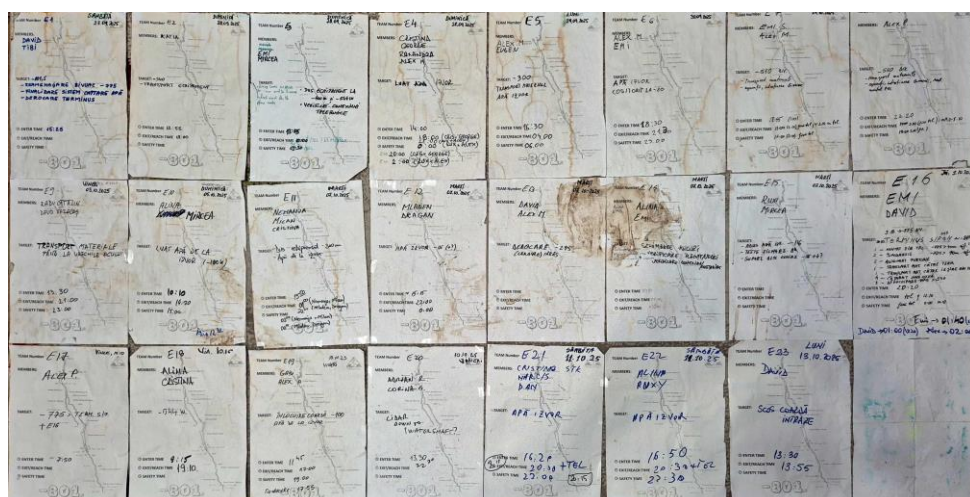


Photo 49. Grind teams 2026

November expedition- 12–17 November 2025

Wednesday – 12.11.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea.

Activity Summary: In the evening, David and Alex climb to the speleological refuge.

Thursday – 13.11.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu.

Activity Summary: Alex and David descend to the bivouac at –775 m.

In the evening, Adi climbed to the speleological refuge.

Team 1: David and Alex P.

Objectives:

- Surveying the new area
- Transporting equipment to the surface
- Unpacking to the bivouac (–775 m)
- Unpacking to the bivouac (–540 m)
- Unrigging the entire cave

Entry time: 17:30

They called at 20:00 from the –540 m. At night, around 1:00 Alex and David arrived to the bivouac at –775 m.

Friday – 14.11.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu.

Activity Summary: Alex and David descend to the bivouac at –775 m.

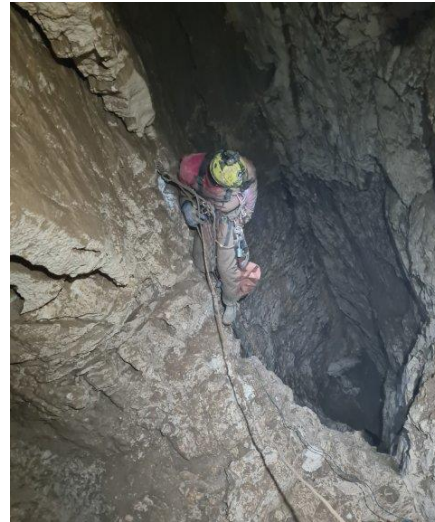


Photo 50. David B. at terminal sump – photo: Alex Pologea

They lay out the telephone line to the new sump at a depth of –815 m, and survey and document the newly discovered section.

David explores a small side passage at around –785 m depth; it is very narrow but continues.

Various improvements are carried out during the day in the refuge area.



*Photo 51. David on terminal pits
– photo: Alex Pologea*

Team 1: David and Alex P.

Objectives:

- Setting phone line
- Surveying and documenting the area

Saturday – 15.11.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Petrică Baltă, Tudor Marin.

Activity Summary: Various improvements are carried out during the day in the refuge area. Alex P. ascends with two equipment bags from the –775 m bivouac to the one at –540 m, then returns to the terminal bivouac.



*Photo 52. Alex and David in the –775 m bivouac
– photo: Alex Pologea*

In the night, Tudor, Petre, Cristina, and Ruxandra reach the speleological refuge.



Photo 53. reaching the speleological refuge – photo: Adrian Rădulescu

Team 1: David and Alex P.

Objectives:

- Work in terminus
- Transport equipment to the bivouac from –540 m

Sunday – 16.11.2025

Participants: Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Petrică Baltă, Tudor Marin.

Activity Summary: At noon, Adi and Petre descend to Poiana Grind and head home. Alex and David pack up the bivouac at around –775 m and begin ascending while derigging. They reach the bivouac at –540 m, where they collect additional equipment and waste. Alex carries three bags, while David carries two and continues ascending while derigging.

At 21:00, Tudor and Cristina descend to *Urechile Acului*, where they meet David and Alex and each take over one equipment bag.



Photo 54. Teams at *Urechile Acului* – photo: Cristina Stika

At 03:00, David and Alex P. exit the cave and descend to the speleological refuge.

After the boys reached the refugee, Ruxandra enters the cave to help with the equipment. Cristina and Tudor continue ascending while derigging. Ruxandra collects one bag of equipment from *Gaura de Șoarece* and heads toward the exit. At 8:00, Cristina and Tudor exit the cave.



Photo 55. Teams just getting out of the cave – Ruxandra Nedelcu

Team 1: David and Alex P.

Objectives: Return to the surface with all the equipment

Departure time from the bivouac at –775 m: 12:40

Exit time: ~02:30 – Alex P.; ~03:00 – David

They call at 10:40, saying they are waking up and packing their equipment. They leave the bivouac at 14:30. They called at 15:30 from *La autobuze*. They called from the –540 m bivouac at 18:00 and they leave the bivouac around 19:00. At 0:00, they meet Team 2 at *Urechile Acului*. They call from at 1:30 from *La brecie*, saying they are climbing and mentally preparing for another shower. At 2:20, David calls from *Gaura de Șoarece*.

Team 2: Cristina and Tudor

Objectives: Transport equipment from the *Urechile Acului* to the surface

Enter time: 22:00

Exit time: 8:00

At 22:30 they call from *Gaura de Șoarece*. They call from *La brecie* at 23:00 and at 0:00 they meet Team 1. They take over one equipment bag from David and Alex and start ascending while derigging. They meet Ruxandra at the Spring. They call from *Gaura de Șoarece* at 5:00.

Team 3: Ruxandra

Objectives: Transport equipment from the *Gaura de Șoarece* to the surface

Enter time: 3:40

Exit time: 6:15

She calls from *Gaura de Șoarece* at 3:40, she descends down to the Spring (*La izvor*) and she exit the cave at 6:15.

Monday – 17.11.2025

Participants: David Bouffard, Alexandru Pologea, Adrian Rădulescu, Cristina Stika, Ruxandra Nedelcu, Petrică Baltă, Tudor Marin, Oana Harabagiu.

Activity Summary: After a good night's sleep, we started packing the equipment. Around noon, Oana arrived at the refuge, and together with David they coiled the telephone line from the surface.

Final arrangements were made at the camp, including an inventory at the refuge.

In the evening, everybody descended to the valley, managing to transport all the equipment in a single trip, and then headed home.



Photo 56. Team descending in Poiana Grind – Cristina Stika

Annex 4 – Pictures



left to right: Cristina, Alex M., Gabriel, Mircea, Alex. A., Corina, Adrian, Ruxandra, Alex. P., Alina I. – photo: Alina I.



Mircea, David B., Cristina, Emi, Milan, Mladen, Alex M., Nemanja, Ruxandra, Alex P., Alina I. – photo: Alina I.



Cristina, Ruxandra, Corina, Alina I. – photo: Alina I.



Alex. P., Ruxandra, Cristina, David B., Alina I., Alex M., Narcis, Tiberiu, Mircea, Emi – photo: Alina I.



Cătălin, Mircea, Cristina, David Fazecaș, Ruxandra, Daniela, Alina I. – photo: Alina I.



Katya, Cristina, George, Eugen – photo: Alex P.



Cătălin, Mircea, Cristina, David, F., Daniela, Alina – photo: Alina I.



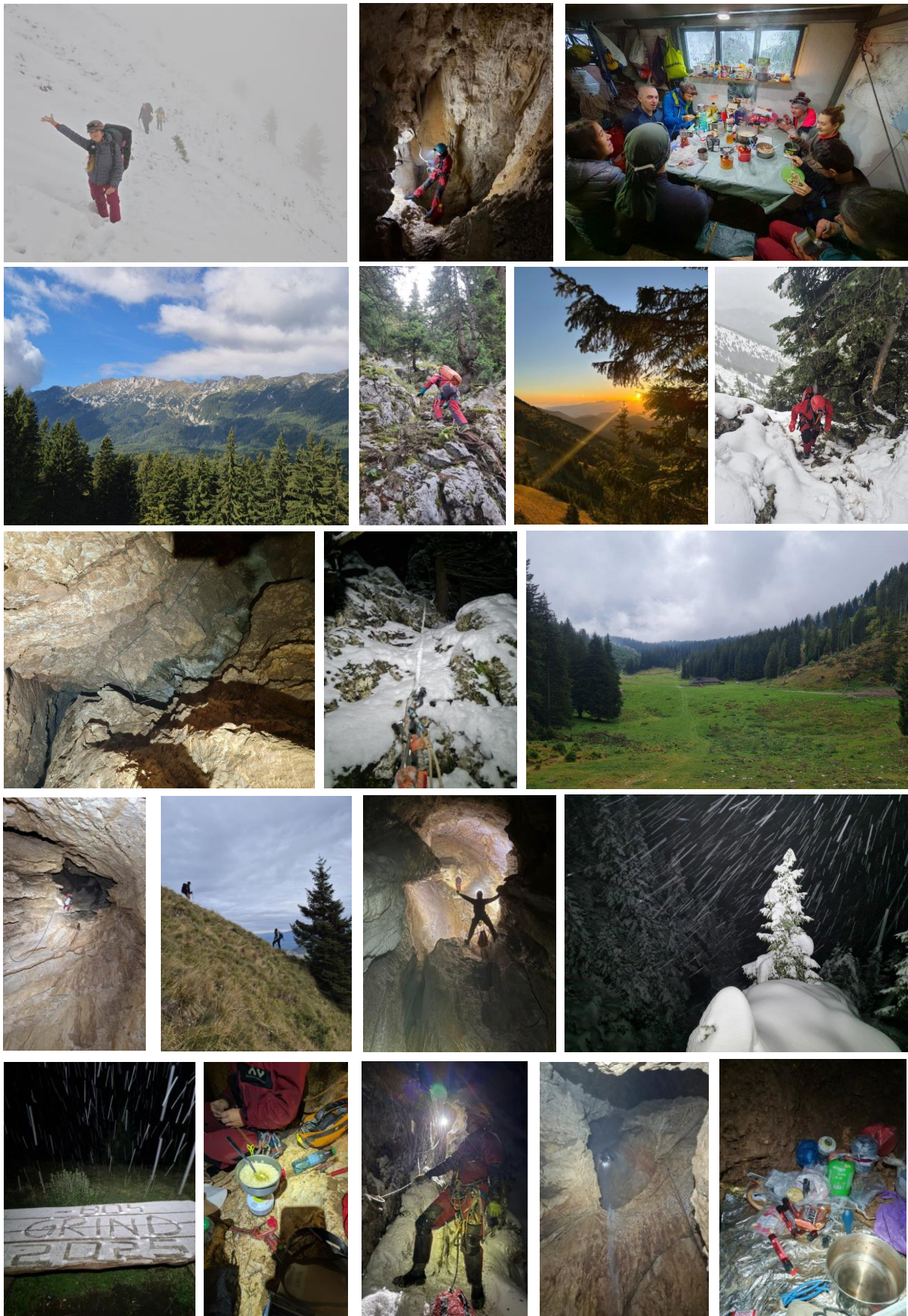
photos: Alex P.



Stored gear near the bivouac
photo Cristina Stika



Sump at -815 m – photo: Alex P.



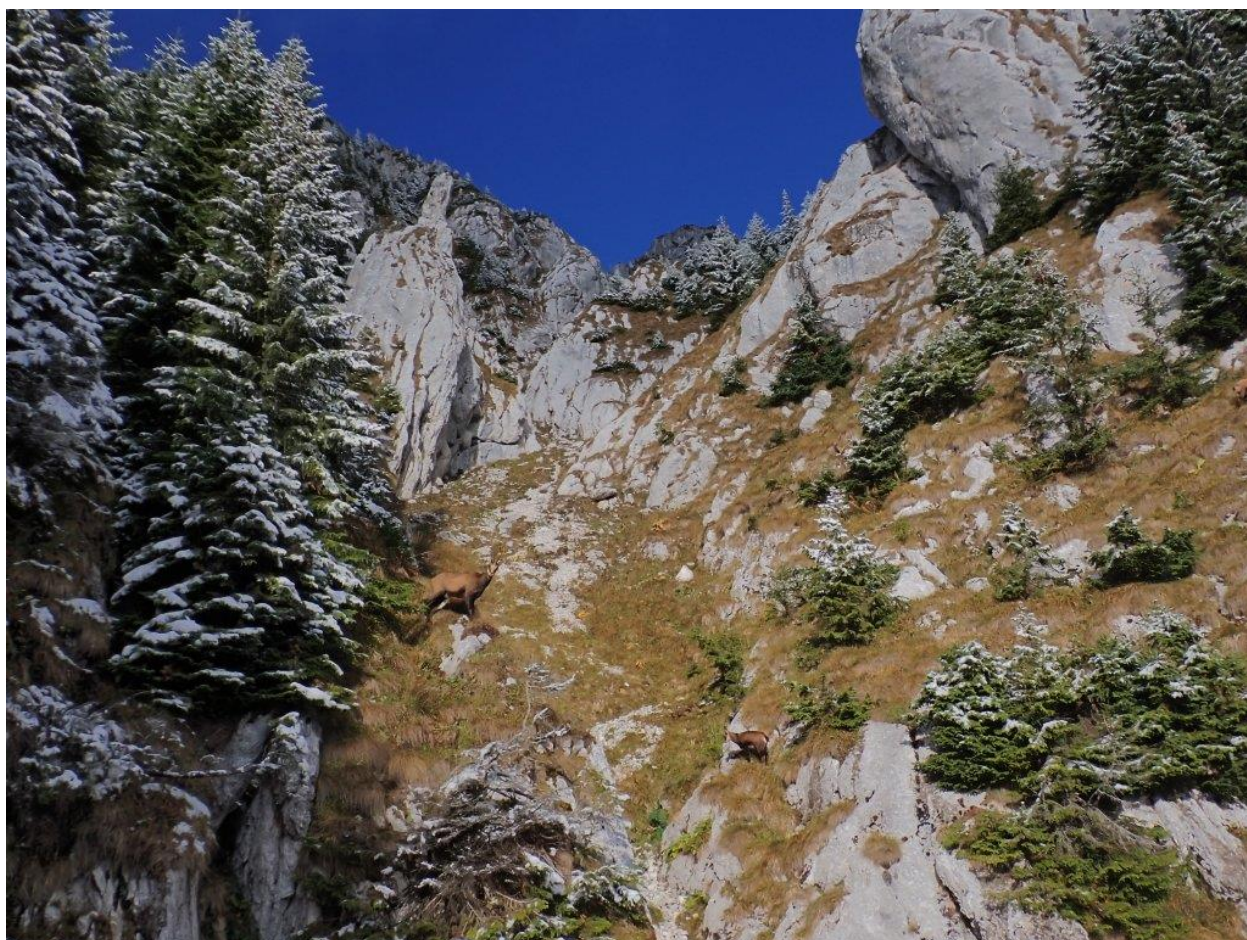


photo: Emi Stoica

To be continued in 2026 expedition!

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