Grind Explo 2026

Period: **19 September – 4 October** 2026

Location: **Avenul de sub Vârful Grind** (Piatra Craiului Mountains, Southern Carpathians, **Romania**)

The annual exploration expedition in *Avenul de sub Vârful Grind* **("Grind Pit")** will take place between **19 September** and **4 October** 2026, in Piatra Craiului Mountains, in the center of Romania. The exploration camp is co-organized by Silex Braşov and Focul Viu Bucureşti speleology clubs. In the past years, other speleology clubs in Romania and from abroad have been involved in the explorations as well.

Location, surroundings and geologic context

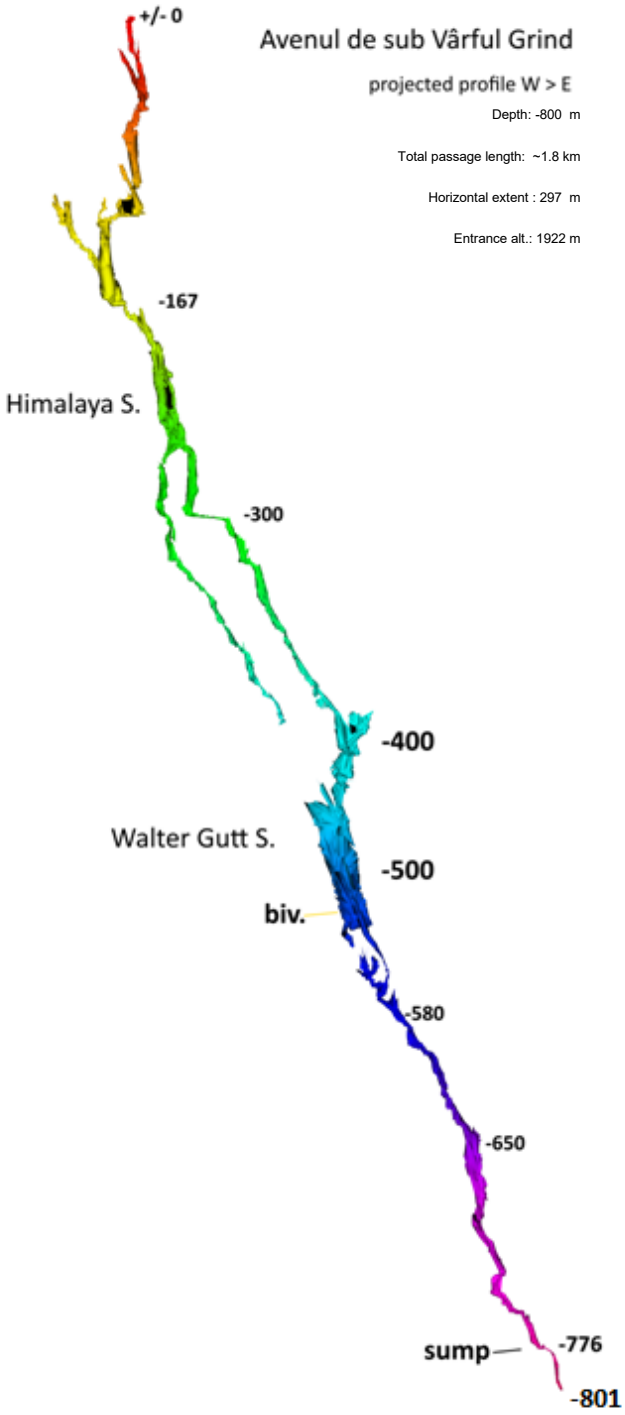
Avenul de sub Vârful Grind is the deepest cave in Romania, with a current depth of 815 m. It was discovered in 1985 in an area where there is one of the highest depth potentials in the country. The entrance is at the altitude of 1922 m a.s.l. on the eastern slope of the mountain's main ridge. It is located below the ridge, on one of the Hornurile Grindului steep valleys.

The karst setting is placed in Piatra Craiului Mountains (Southern Carpathians), a 25 km long, saw-like limestone ridge, of Jurassic age (Kimmeridgian-Tithonic). The limestone stack depth is maximum 1500 m. The highest elevation in the massif is "Vârful La Om" ("Piscul Baciului" Peak) at 2238 m. The massif is regarded as one of the most beautiful sites in the Carpathians, with specific high energy karst relief consisting of deep valleys, big walls, and sharp limestone towers. The mountain range is located near the city of Braşov (35 km away) and it is part of the Piatra Craiului National Park.

Based on the possible water drainages and spring elevations, the maximum cave depth potential is estimated at 1000-1100 m.

Cave description

The cave is a typical alpine vertical one with few horizontal passages and consists of a sequence of 26 consecutive shafts (along the main course) without major tributaries, the longest tributary being the one that is intercepted at -167 m. Apart from this, the more important lateral/parallel shaft sequences are the Himalaya 2 sector and the one below the Walter Gutt Shaft (which merges with the main course at -567 m). Large bell-shaped shafts are intercalated with narrower portions. The galleries are clean, with almost no sediment.



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
- Grind Explo 2025 expedition report

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 descent. In the following years many work trips were made for digging at this point – a cooperation of several speleological clubs. In 1992 there was a breakthrough, and by 1995 the depth of 540 m was reached. Another massive breccia plug stopped the further advancement and subsequent explorations failed to produce results in the coming years.

Recent explorations

Following a period of 15 years with few exploration trips made, in 2010, Focul Viu Bucharest restarted the explorations. In the following years, Avenul Brașov and Silex Brașov joined as expedition co-organizers. Other clubs in the country and a few from abroad participated to the explorations (SK Sofia had a consistent contribution). The cave was rerigged, several parallel sectors and verticals were explored and digging was restarted at -540 m. In the autumn camp of **2019** the breccia plug was surpassed and in November there was a breakthrough of a major boulder collapse at -581 m. That lead to the discovery of new verticals so that in December 2019 the depth of 775 m was reached - where a

small sump blocked the way. In the following years there were explorations in other parts during the camp organized in 2022 the local small sump was passed (6 m long, 1 m deep).

Short movie about the exploration of new portions in 2019

Public-wide interest presentation film

In **2023** the sump was dived and passed again. A drainage system was installed and activated in multiple steps, lowering and maintaining the sump water level at a minimum level. After enlarging the sump gallery in subsequent trips, this narrow area was passed and a new 22 m pit was explored, down to the current terminus at -800 m. The terminus is a new narrow area but the cave seems to continue further.

In **2024** camp (6-24 September) the main objectives were work in the sump area and making some sectors safer to pass. One short trip was made one week before the camp in order to rig (fix ropes) from entrance to -600 m and one trip was made in order to de-rig from -540 m to entrance. Ropes will not be left in their place over the year as high water and floods can damage them.

The semi-sump at -775 m was drained using the primed pipe system used before. An advanced minimal exploration camp for 2-3 people has been installed in a narrow and difficult place in its vicinity, with protection against water falling on the pit from above.

In the semi-sump's rock margin, a channel was dug using "technical work" over several days, so that the entire water from the semi-sump basin can flow freely downstream in order to be able to easily pass the 6 m narrow semi-sump gallery without a neoprene suit. In the drained floor of the sump gallery a channel was dug in sediment and rock clay/small boulders and filled with big boulders to keep the semi-sump drained and prevent warping with sediment. A very narrow passage downstream (at the top of the 22 m pit) was enlarged. At the top of the pit above the previous semi-sump we built a small dam from concrete and we installed a big pipe in order to divert water through it (and pass the sump through the other pipes installed here) to make the small exploration bivouac safer from small floods possible in the autumn period from rain (2000+ m ridge area above has a hard to predict weather as in many high altitude areas, even in the most stable period, in the autumn).

In the terminus point (at -800) in the last days, at the base of the 22 m pit, after enlarging the place, a small poll was emptied and we could enter in the new section, advancing 1.5 m vertically from the previous point. Using camera, through an impenetrable window, we could see another 3-5 m deep pit. We think there is a high possibility for it to be followed by another vertical continuation here.

The international speleological exploration expedition ***Grind 2025*** took place 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**). 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.

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.

The Grind Explo 2025 expedition report and the FSE Eurospeleo project 2025 expedition summary.

2026 expedition main objectives:

- Dive into terminal sump at -815 m
- Explore leads found in the new sector explored in 2025 between -775 and -815
- Exploration in the old terminus branch by enlarging the restriction point at ~ -807 m

Secondary objectives:

- Climbing a small waterfall wall at -400 m (side gallery with a tributary stream that leads to a parallel section, going up)
- Carrying out crossings/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, (geology) structural measurements and water samples
- Photo/video documentation
- Further improve some rigging sections in various parts and replace more rope (10 years old rope)

Exploration details and requirements:

There are just a few short portions that are tighter or that require crawling. However, apart from the first part, the cave is a physically demanding one and it requires good fitness and good SRT skills. The cave has good and safe rigging.

The temperature in the first shafts is 3-4°C, rising towards 6°C towards the bottom. The only bivouac is placed at -540 m, in a safe place, and it can fit ~4-5 persons. The plan is to install a minimal bivouac at -775 m to improve work/exploration efficiency (this is an uncomfortable place). There is telephone cable on the main path in the entire cave, used for safety and team synchronisation/organisation, with a permanent connection to a surface team. Each team will be given a telephone that can be used everywhere by connecting to the cable.

Normally the cave is relatively dry, with only a very small amount of water flowing down the shafts, which will not get you wet. However, weather can suddenly change and rain can make the cave much wetter. There is no risk of a major flood filling up the galleries, but there is the danger of getting very wet in case of a sudden rain (from main stream increased flow or from dripping water), and for this reason we always stay in touch with the surface team for updates.

For the teams that go in the lower parts (especially under -540 m) it is highly recommended to have cordura overalls/suit for wet caves (that is also slightly breathable). For the parts down to -540 m normal cordura (dry cave) overalls/suit is an option, but the choice depends on the amount of rains before the camp, (how dry the cave will be at that point). The best is to have two cordura suits available at the camp to choose from (one for wet caves and one for dry/semi-dry). Classic Neoprene suit is definitely NOT an option. PVC (plastic) could be an option for the terminus part – but it is not recommended as the single suit (in case of a dry period it is too hot on the way up, and a few short parts are narrow). There are also places with small pools at the base of the shafts (~ 25 cm deep). Considering this, it is recommended to wear normal (high) caving boots or other shoes that offer complete protection from water. Wearing neoprene socks for a few days in a row is not recommended.

Camp location/details and access

The camp will be located near the entrance, at an altitude of ~1900 m a.s.l. in a remote place, "in the middle of the mountains". We will stay in the refuge/shelter built for the exploration of the cave – a new building, quite a cozy place overall with a stove inside but with basic functionality (flat place for sleeping and a table). If there is not enough space for everyone, then some of the participants will bring tents for camping near the shelter. There is no water in the area. Water will be taken from a spring inside the cave (-100 m) or from a spring 1.5 hours away from the camping place/cave. Participants will need to bring their equipment for outdoor camping (or for staying indoor in the shelter) – mat, sleeping bag, cooking equipment, etc. You will need thermal clothing (underlayers) for inside the cave (consider it a cold alpine cave) and for outside – as for moderately continental areas in autumn at 1900 m altitude. We expect warmer outside temperatures and dry weather in general but because of the autumn period and altitude the outside temperature can vary from warm days (20°C) to cold days/nights (down to 0 - 2°C).

The camp/shelter can be reached via a 2 – 2.5 hours long hike, depending on whether a part of the road is made with off-road cars (with no offroad cars 1 – 1.5 hours are added). Access to the trail start point is done through the Șirnea village (Brașov county) or through Podul Dâmboviței village – both relatively easy to get to from Bucharest (the capital) and from other areas. Most of the hike is an easy one, on a way-marked trail with the final third a little steeper but on grassy terrain (no technical portion) and in easy to navigate, open terrain. There is cell phone signal at the camping site and on the final part of the trail. A GPS track will be provided as well.

Participation:

You can participate the entire 2-week period or a shorter period at choice. The minimum required number of days are 4-5 in order to have 2 days for climb/descent and access to the village/trail; and the others for working in the cave. Details about timing and possible objectives to participate depending on the period are to be discussed with the organisers.

Depending on the participants and objectives in each period, there will be available exploration/work trips of 1 day (to a certain depth); or multiple days with bivouac stay at -540 m with work objectives in the lower part of the cave.

Participants who are not ready to enter the cave are welcome and they can help with light support work at the surface. For them, hiking in the beautiful surroundings is also a viable option for some days.

We have and we will provide all needed equipment for rigging, digging, passage enlargement, surveying, etc. You are required only good appétit for exploration. The funding of the expedition is made primarily from organising clubs' internal resources. The 2025 expedition has been awarded exploration grant from F.S.E. (European Speleological Federation) and its partner sponsor Korda's via the EuroSpeleo Projects funding program. In 2024 the expedition was awarded an exploration grant from U.I.S. (International Union of Speleology) and technical equipment support from ProAlpin. The 2026 expedition we will continue to apply to ESP and UIS support. Grind 2026 is happy to have the moral support of the Romanian Federation of Speleology and to be hosted by Piatra Craiului National Park.

For partipating in "Grind 2026" Expedition, registrations can be made at:

https://tally.so/r/KYkRek

Invitation in English at: https://www.frspeo.ro/grind-2026-expedition/

Invitation in Romanian at: https://www.frspeo.ro/tabara-de-explorare-grind-2026/

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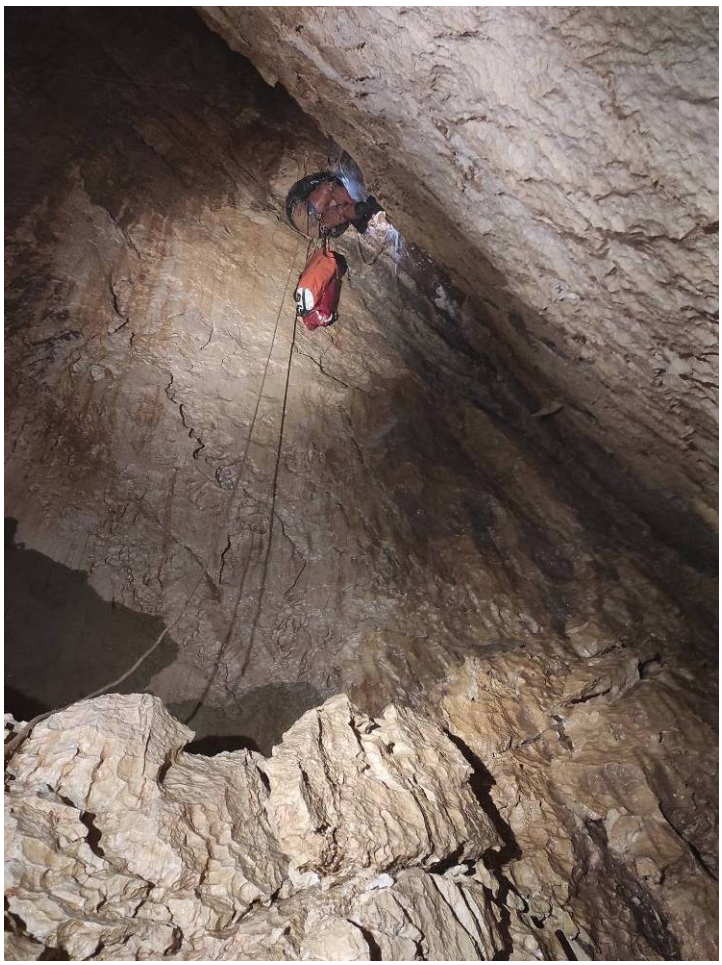

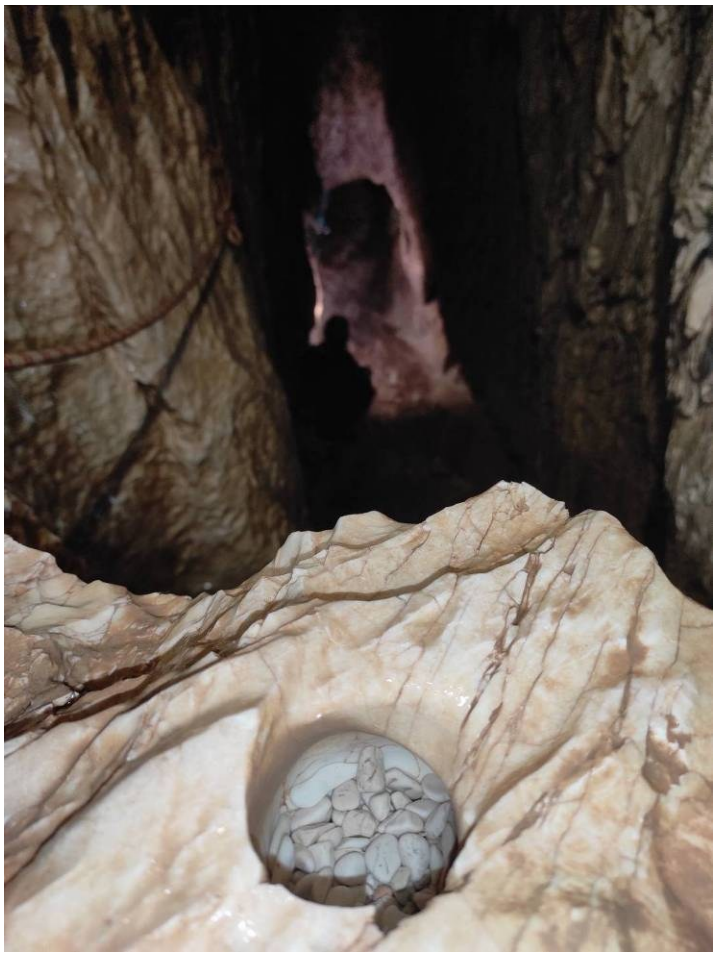

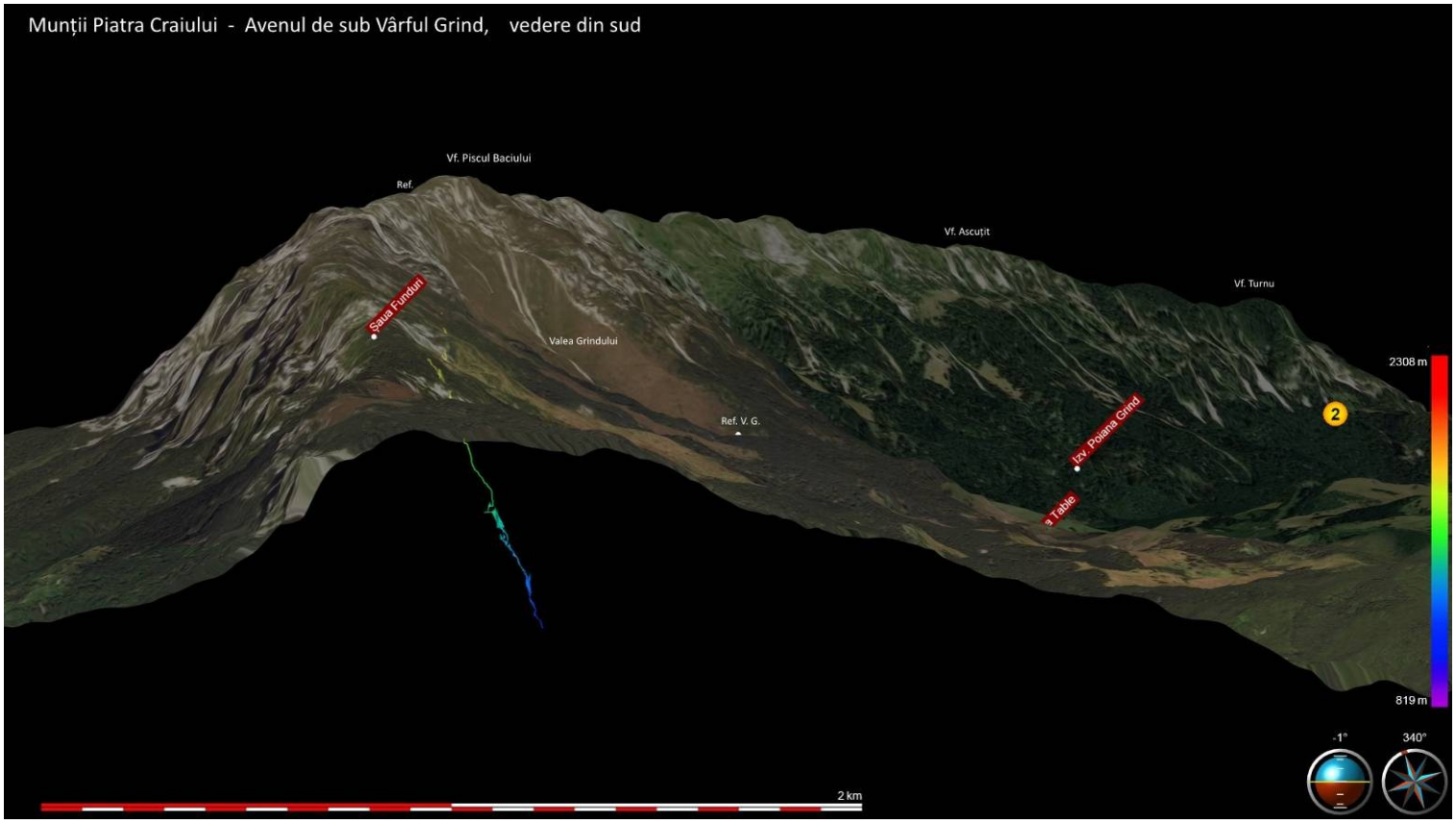
Munții Piatra Craiului - Avenul de sub Vârful Grind, vedere din sud
Vf. Piscul Baciului
Ref.
Vf. Ascuțit
Vf. Turnu
Șaua Funduri
Valea Grindului
Ref. V. G.
Izv. Poiana Grind
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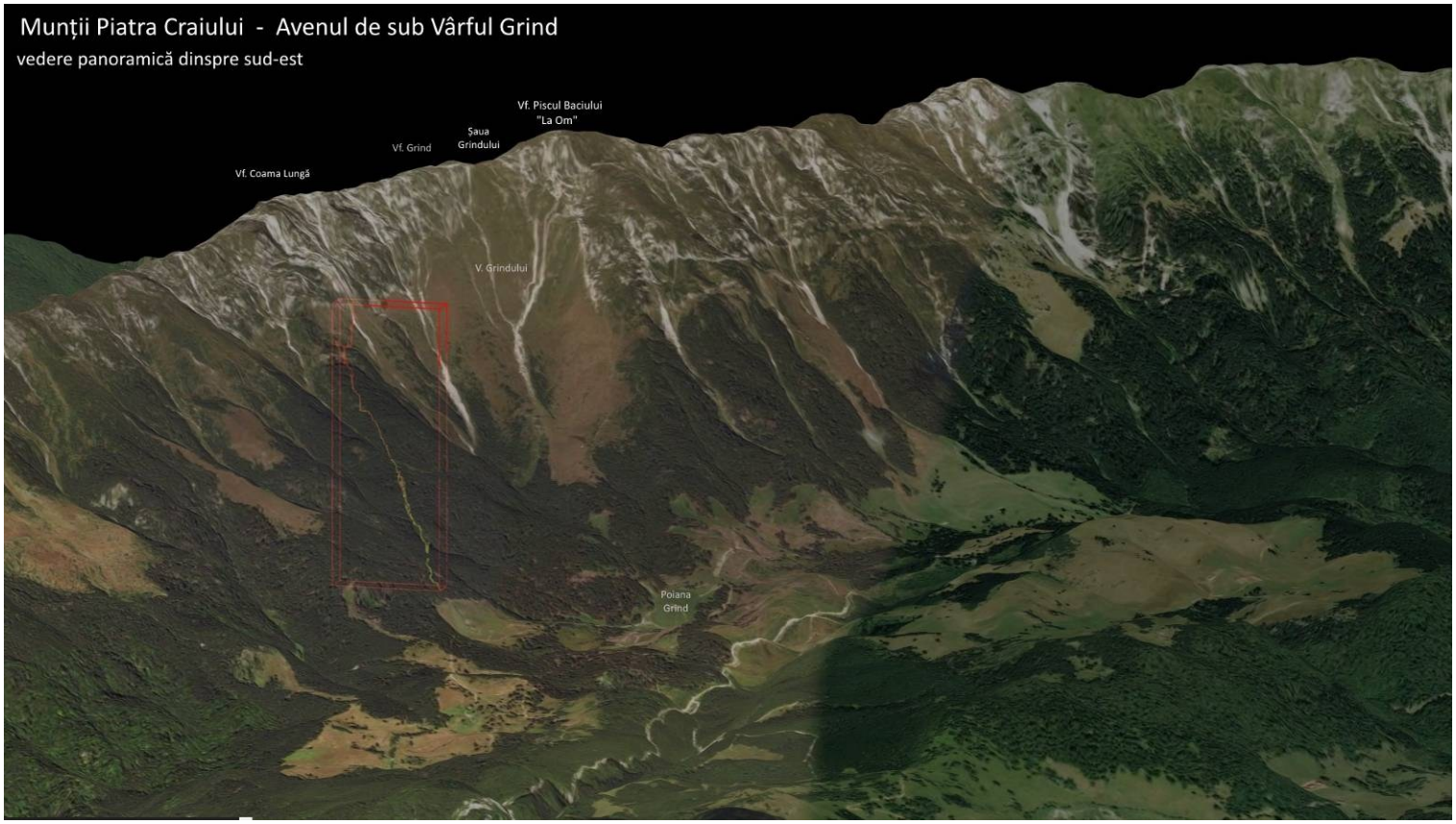
Munții Piatra Craiului - Avenul de sub Vârful Grind
vedere panoramică dinspre sud-est
Vf. Piscul Baciului
"La Om"
Șaua
Grindului
Vf. Grind
Vf. Coama Lungă
V. Grindului
Poiana
Grind