# The Alchemical Journey

## Part 2



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*This is a continuation of the story begun in "The Beginnings," Spring 2018 issue of* The HEXAGON.

*This 2nd episode follows Part 1 which appeared in the Spring issue of The HEXAGON. The Alchemical Journey is a story of how the Rediscovery sites were tracked down by Jim and Jenny Marshall, beginning in the summer of 1999. The first choice of sought elements was tellurium reported from the Transylvania Mountains of Romania. This was the most difficult choice, because "If we can do this one," Jenny and I decided, "we can do them all." This journey was begun before the days of Google Maps; and archival maps had to be located. This 2nd episode continues with our entry by train into Romania.*

**Through heart of Hungary.** Three hours after passing the Austria-Hungary border, we arrived at the Nyugati Pályaudvar train terminal (west station) in Budapest, Hungary. After traveling all day we simply wanted to crash, then move on the next day to Romania. First, we exchanged money—dollars to Forint—at the exchange booth in the train station (Hungary has never adopted the Euro as its currency, even to this day). Looking down the street, we spotted a large hotel only 200 meters away. While traveling in Europe over the years, I had found that choosing the closest hotel to a train station was usually the best bet, because (1) it avoided fatigue from walking long distances with luggage; (2) its prices were more reasonable than fashionable hotels downtown; (3) it generally was not strongly promoted by tourist guides, thus was not mobbed by tourists and would almost always have vacancies.

Nevertheless, I was nervous. As we approached, I said, "This hotel looks ritzy, and I still don't know how I'm going to handle the language—I don't know a word of Hungarian!"

"Let's go in," said Jenny. "I'm tired."

We pushed the doors open and saw high ceilings with chandeliers and bright lights, and we heard the familiar chatter of guttural German! I immediately relaxed. As we found out later, the Germans with their prospering economy frequently visited countries to the east, taking advantage of the low prices of the former Communist block. Behind the front counter stood a classy maiden in a handsome tan suit. She eyed us curiously. She was accustomed to the neatly dressed Germans lounging about in the lobby, and we obviously didn't look like anything she had seen—older adults with backpacks, hiking boots, water-proofed REI jackets, and wide-brimmed hats (Figure 1)

She asked, "Jó napot kívánok! Segíthetek?"

Gulp. I couldn't understand a single word. Jenny's friendly smile drew in the counter agent who tried another language: "Sind Sie Deutsch?"

The crisp accent of Berliner Hochdeutsch! She had been trained in classic German. Here was a friend indeed.

I said, "Wir sprechen Deutsch bischen, aber wir sind Amerikanischen."

"Oh," she brightened with a broad smile, "Americans, where are you from?" in flawless English. Jenny was loosening her tight nervous grip on my arm. I was feeling much better myself.

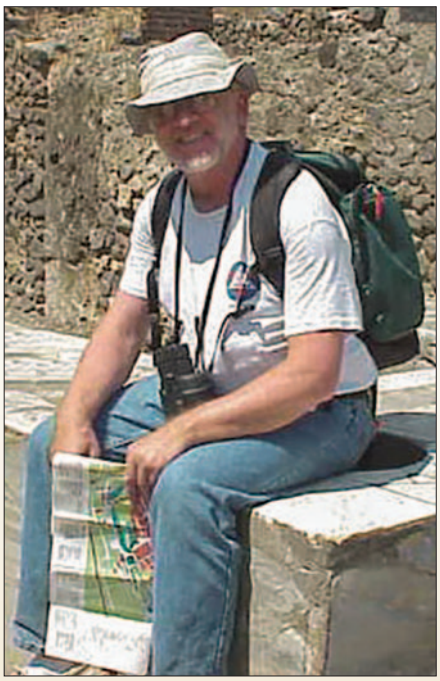


*Figure 1. Resting by the sidewalk during our short walk from the Budapest train station to the hotel Our total luggage was in our backpacks.*

"Texas, near Dallas," I responded.

Jenny said, "My Dad was a rancher. Here, you can have this," as she passed a bright-colored Texas lapel pin to our young lady friend. We had brought a stock of Texas souvenirs to pass out to our European hosts: Texas pins to the Eastern Europeans, Texas quarters to the British, and Texas bandanas to the French (who were partial to cowboy movies).

"Oh, thank you! Welcome to Buda. Good to have you here. How can I help you?"

We quickly learned that prices dating from the drab days of communism were still in effect, and we could get a room for $80 for a room that in London would have cost $500. We were feeling really good by now.

We were ravenous. After checking in, we partook of the hotel restaurant. I chose—what



*Figure 4. Countryside scene of haystacks in Romania.*

else?—goulash, and we were astonished at the elegance of Hungarian cuisine. The waiter who welcomed us to the leather-holstered booths was dressed in a smart maroon jacket and black trousers, with a serving towel draped over his arm and holding crystal wine glasses by their stems, upside-down in his fingers. This was a very lovely country indeed!

We later found out that most of the front counter agents spoke many languages, and in later visits to Hungary, we used the agents to translate digital photographs we took of plaques about the city, as we sorted out which ones were scientifically and historically important.

And tomorrow we would see the world that Edward Clark explored in the 1700s! (See *The Alchemical Journey. Part I.*) Some of these lands that Clarke visited had historically been a part of the Ottoman Empire, and he described travel to Romania as a strange and mysterious adventure—Clarke marveled at many "astonishing sights"—remarking, for example about the women's attire resembling Arabs, where there "shouldn't be any connection" with those people. This wonder of Clarke was due to ignorance of Western Europe about such lands; he was using Pliny's works, the ancient Roman historian, as a guide. So far we were doing OK. We went to sleep in good spirits and a light heart.

The next morning, after a sumptuous breakfast, we took off in a taxi for the train station. With 1st class Eurail passes, we had never had any trouble just hopping on a train, without any reservations, and just going anywhere we wanted—this time, due east.




*Figure 2. Sign welcoming us to Romania on the customs office, in four different languages: Hungarian, Russian, German, and French—no English.*

**On to Romania.** Three hours later, we arrived at the Romanian border, and we quickly learned that we were in a different country indeed. Even though we didn't understand the language, we understood the conductors as they vigorously waved everybody off the train. We followed the others who were moving out. The agents were guiding, shouting out commands, leading us to a small plaster wall building.

We didn't have to do that when we passed from Austria to Hungary, when there was only a quick check by a conductor who moved smoothly down the aisle in the train car!

They motioned us through a door with a large sign above the transom (Figure 2).

"What does that sign mean?" asked Jenny.

"The first language I don't recognize," I said. The second is Russian. The third is German, I know what that means, it's 'Dispatcher.' The fourth is French, meaning the same thing."

The lady in front of us, black hair with a blue babushka, turned and said with a thick accent, "First language Hungarian. This customs. You welcome for information."



*Figure 3. Romanian train conductors return our passports.*

We passed through the door. There was an officer with a sullen look, dark blue uniform with loose black tie, and cap with winged insignia. When it was our turn, he asked a question or two, totally incomprehensible to us. Suddenly he shrugged his shoulders and stamped our passports.

But he didn't return them! This terrified Jenny, and made me nervous as well. We clutched each other; they motioned us back to the train. We walked down the platform, passing crewmen, again in blue uniforms and caps, banging the wheels with a steel mallet.

"What are they doing?" asked Jenny. "They'll break the wheels!"

"Actually, what they're checking for cracks. Listen to the tone—if it's a clear ring, like a bell, that's good. It's when it sounds 'clunk!' that they worry."

"What happens if they try to run a train with a cracked wheel?"

"You don't want to know."

We followed the passengers to a line assembled at the end of the train. Attendants at the track inspected our Eurail pass and let us back on board. After a half hour, two conductors in blue uniforms (Figure 3) passed through and returned our passports. Jenny ushered a sigh of relief, as did I.

Then another conductor came through—again a blue uniform, this one ill-fitting with buttons almost busting off his overstuffed jacket. He looked at our Eurail pass and then started blustering with away questions. We didn't know what he wanted. Then he went over to the seat where Jenny's soda was perched and slapped at it hard with the palm of his hand—the bottle bounced off and spewed all over the cabin. Then he started yelling at us and waving his arms. Jenny. cowered into a corner, I sputtered in English and then in German, but there was no common language. He slapped



*Figure 6. Dr. Dana Pop, curator of the Mineralogical Museum at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.*




*Figure 5. The Transylvania Hotel, built during the Communist Era in the 1970s. This was the "plush" hotel, according to Dana Pop, frequented by visitors and wedding receptions (now called the Belvedere Hotel).*

the seat again and again. He ranted and raved for 10 minutes, and then stormed out.

Then the train lurched, and we were on our way.

"Let's go find some company," I suggested, maybe we can find out what was going on." We gathered up our belongings and passed several cars forward. I heard English! A young couple was chatting away, and we immediately made acquaintances. "We're John and Lisa. We belong to the Peace Corps and we're were going to Cluj-Napoca."

We asked them about the conductor who made a scene. "Jenny was scared and was crying," I said.

John said, "Yes, he wanted to see a reservation."

Lisa added, "You should have asked for one at the border, at the train station."

"We don't speak Romanian. We thought reservations aren't required with Eurail pass!"

"They are in Romania," said John.

Jenny said, "They were very angry. Do you think we are in trouble?"

"Don't worry about it. Don't take anything personally. These people are still of the old school and practice the Communist culture of being incredibly regimented. Everything according to a rule. And this is the first year Romania honored the Eurail pass; they're just following their old ways."

An elderly matron with a gingham apron showed up at the end of the car.

"She's the cook," said Lisa. "She's serving soup if you wish. She stews it up every day."

The couple ordered some, but Jenny and I refrained. Two ceramic bowls of some steamy gruel appeared, and our friends slurped it with gusto. "It's really good," the young man said. The odor of garlic permeated the car—we knew were entering Dracula country.

"Look at the scenery outside," John said. "It's a throw-back to a century ago." Indeed, outside the countryside appeared like a classical van Gogh or Bruegel painting, with majestic wheat sheaves standing like huge scarecrows in the fields (Figure 4, found on page 31)—quite unlike the Western scene in the U.S. where bales of hay were earlier stacked like so many Pyramid blocks in a courtyard, or later with the steel shortage when they were spindled into huge rolls. Jenny, the eternal photographer, was now absorbed in this mystical scene and had forgotten all about the unpleasant encounter with the conductor; she was snapping pictures constantly with her new Sony Mavica. The plains of Hungary had transitioned into the Transylvanians, rolling hills of Bram Stoker's novel; we passed through gorges and valleys as we passed through towns with unusual names—Oradea, Alesd, Huedin.

The towns and countryside dreamily rolled by. We drifted in and out of sleep. After a couple of hours, we woke to the landscape of Cluj-Napoca, a sprawling metropolis nestled in a valley. We had a reservation at the Transylvania Hotel, arranged by Dana Pop. At least we thought so—they had no email, and they never confirmed my fax.

We grabbed our backpacks and descended onto the station platform. Dana had given directions for how to get to the hotel, due south about a kilometer. After a few minutes we saw it—a gleaming white castle, high on a hill, like the Kingdom of Oz. By the time we climbed to the summit, we were exhausted (Figure 5).

Dana had made a nice choice. The hotel was exquisite, with lush furniture and gorgeous curtains. Jenny was impressed, "It's all magic, it's like the Kingdom of Oz." With the recent lifting of the Iron curtain, crowds had not yet appeared and prices were still low—$40. The room was large and lavishly decorated with heavy velvet curtains. The dinner hall was huge, with high ceilings and chandeliers—and most-

ly empty. Only a table or two was occupied other than our own.

I called Dr. Dana Pop at the Mineralogical Museum, and left a message. Outside our window, we could look down on the sprawling city of Cluj-Napoca, all lit up with neon signs. Across town somewhere we knew was the Babeș-Bolyai University with more than 30,000 students, the largest university in Romania. We slept well, it was like we were in Shangri-La.

**Babeș-Bolyai University and the Mineralogical Museum.** The next morning, we got a call from Dana. She spoke perfect English. She would pick us up at 9:00 a.m., "Would that be all right? Of course!

The next morning, a little green Ford pulled up, and Dr. Dana Pop stepped out. She looked Italian with her olive complexion, and reminded us that indeed Romania, southern Europe, was once a part of the ancient Roman Empire (Figure 6).

Dana drove us to the University. She was excited to have visitors who came all the way from America to explore the riches of Romania. She showed us around her mineralogical museum (Figure 7), several large rooms full of ceiling-high cases of minerals from all over the world— but concentrating on samples from Transylvania. All were labeled with the Romanian equivalents of the Western names.

"Here's quartz," she said, pointing out a beautiful crystal. The label read, "Cuarț."

"Another cedilla," I said. "The letter 'ț' is pronounced like 'ts.'"

"Let's take you to the Romanian specialties." She took us to the case of Apuseni (Transylvania) specimens. "And here are some from the mine you are interested in." It was a sample of tellurium, found in nagyagite.

"I would love to have a sample of that!"

"That is no problem. Here." She pulled out a drawer and handed me a dark mineral, about the size of golf ball. "This is Romanian nagyagite. It's yours."

Jenny and I looked at each other. Just like that! Element number 52 was now included in our elemental collection! Jenny carefully put it into her big leather travel bag, in a special pocket she had reserved for minerals we collected during our European travels.

"This is incredible. How do you say 'Thank you very much'? in Romanian?" I asked.

She laughed, "Mul umesc foarte mult." It sounded like "Multi-mes foahrti moolt."

"Or should I say Hungarian?"

"Oh, they aren't here anymore. I don't know Hungarian. They live mainly further north and west."



*Dr. Pop in her mineralogical museum, holding a sample of nagyagite, the mineral in which Müller von Reichenstein discovered tellurium Nagyagite is a complex lead-gold telluride-antimonide-sulfide which bleeds out gold when heated. Although named for the Nagyág mine in southern Romania (Romanian name Sacaramb), 100 kilometers southwest of Cluj-Napoca, Receichenstein's sample was from the Fa a B ii Mine, 20 kilometers north of Nagyág.*

Just then two little girls danced out, cute as a button.

These are my two daughters, Smaranda and Sinziana. They are 11 and 8. . . . Say hello to Jim and Jenny Marshall, girls."

"Hello," said Smaranda, with a curtsy. "We are very happy to have you visit us." Impeccable English!

"We want you to come see us at our home," said Sinziana, mimicking her sister's curtsy. Again, perfect English!

"You can see, they are preparing for world travel, said Dana. "They must speak English to cope in the future world."

"We will serve you pancakes tonight," said Smaranda.

"We have syrup too," said Sinziana. "We just bought some special from the store, just for you."

Jenny said softly to me, "I've fallen in love with this family."

"We have an appointment with the miners tomorrow in the mountains," said Dana. "We need to rent a car today, so that they will have it ready for us tomorrow."

"We're renting a car?" I asked.

"Yes, to go to the Apusenis, the Transylvanians. I don't trust mine."

"We're going to Fascebánya?" asked Jenny.

"Why, yes, I thought that was why you came here."

"You *know* where the mine is?"

"There is an Australian syndicate in the Zlatna area, developing a gold mine. Virgil Berberich is the manager. He thinks they might be able to locate the historic mine. If so, he can take us there. We're meeting him tomorrow."

Jenny had tears in her eyes. "I didn't know they were going to *take* us to the mine! That was just a dream!"

**NEXT—Drive to the Apusenis.**

## A Note for Contributors

We certainly appreciate the added appeal of pictures in *The HEXAGON*. When taking photos for submission, please:

- Always use a flash indoors.
- Do not edit or alter your images. *The HEXAGON* production staff can and will determine if an image needs color correcting or additional processing.
- Set your digital camera quality to its highest setting with the least compression. Photos that are less than 8 inches wide at 72 dpi, or that have a file size of less than 1 megabyte, may be too small for print production.
- Please send us the image file that is directly from the camera. Photos that are extracted from Facebook pages or Word documents have file sizes that have been compromised.
- Even print photos are welcome!