



The Hermit's Cave, a less known cave in Bucegi Mountains, Romania

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Abstract. Romania has a diverse karst all over its territory. More than 12,500 caves of all types were discovered and mapped so far. Bucegi Mountains include 34 caves, from which some are very popular, while others are barely known, at least by the public. One of such caves is the Hermit's Cave, close to the more popular Ialomiței Cave, in Mount Bătrâna, at an altitude of 1,530 meters. In this paper we will discuss about its location and we shortly describe it.

Key Words: entrance, floor, Ialomița, Mount Bătrâna, Peștera Pustnicului.

Introduction. After the "Emil Racoviță" Institute of Speleology has been established on April 26, 1920 in Cluj-Napoca city, Romania has become the center of the World's speleology Constantinescu (1987). The number of cave discoveries has increased year after year, thus, from 980 known caves in 1965 (Bleahu & Rusu 1965; Bleahu & Povară 1976), more than 8,000 caves were known in 1982 (Sencu 1983), 10,500 in 1986 Constantinescu (1987) and over 12,500 in 2006 (Lascu 2006).

Bucegi Mountains stretch along the upper portion of the Prahova Valley, in Southern and Eastern Carpathians. The massif has many peaks of more than 2000 meters high (Ghinea 2002). Regarding the karst within the Bucegi Mountains, 34 caves are known by now. The main karst systems are: Bătrâna - Ialomiței Cave; Horoaba; Strunga - Coteanu; Tătaru Mountain; Zănoaga Mountain - Lespezi Mountain; and Rătei (Arsene 2004).

In the present paper we will discuss about a small cave, much less known than other caves in Bucegi Mountains, named the Hermit's Cave or, sometimes, the Spring's Cave, and rarely the Small Cave (in Romanian: Peștera Pustnicului, Peștera Izvorului, and Peștera Mică respectively).

The Hermit's Cave (Peștera Pustnicului) location. The most popular and visited cave in Bucegi Mountains is, without a doubt, Ialomiței Cave, also known as Ialomicioarei Cave or Ialomița Cave (Urechia 1979; Orghidan et al 1984; Cocean 1995; Lascu 2006). Basically it is mentioned in almost all books, blogs, vlogs etc. which describe Bucegi Mountains. It is located at 1,530 m altitude, on the right side of the Ialomiței Canyon, in Mount Bătrâna (Orghidan et al 1984; Cocean 1995; Goran 1982) (Figure 1). At the entrance to the cave there is a monastery (Ialomiței Monastery), built in the 16th century, founded by the Voivode of Romanian Country, Mihnea cel Rău (Figure 2). In order to avoid any confusion, we have to mention that the monastery comprises two separate parts: the main one (which is few hundred meters away from the cave entrance, comprising domestic animals enclosures, the kitchen, guest rooms, and few other buildings) and the location at the cave's entrance, which has been built more recently, comprising a little church and monks' rooms.



Figure 2. The new buildings of the Ialomiței Monastery, at the entrance to the Ialomiței Cave (Source: <https://ro.pinterest.com>)

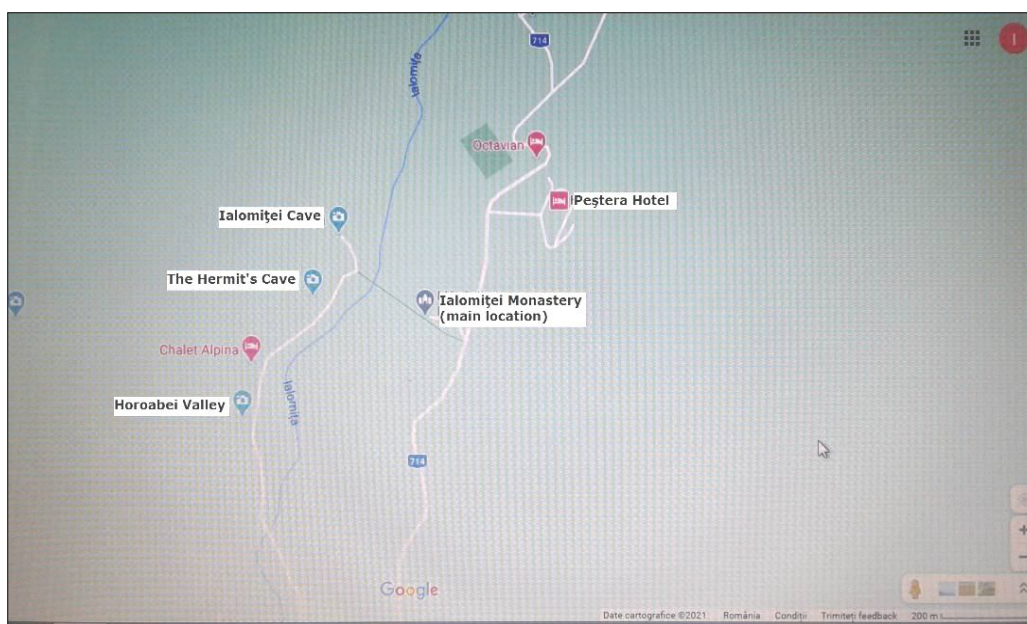


Figure 3. The location of Hermit's Cave (Peștera Pustnicului) (regular Google map).



Figure 4. The location of Hermit's Cave (Peștera Pustnicului) (satellite Google map).

The Hermit's Cave (Peștera Pustnicului) description. To reach this cave you have to follow a steep, sinuos and not easily visible path. Since the cave is not put on the maps, few people know about it, that is why the path to it is rarely walked. The cave entrance is only visible when you reach very close to it. It cannot be seen from the Ialomița stream 20 m below. The first description of the cave was made by Haret (1924). The entrance has an irregular trapeze shape, slightly above 4 meters width and 5 meters high (Figures 5a, 5b, 6); it opens in a chamber of 4 meters length, then it transforms in a narrow corridor, which, somewhere on the half way to the end of the cave, becomes so narrow that the one who wants to reach the end needs to crawl over this section. After this sector, you can walk on your feet all the way to the end. Just before the end a ramification appears. From this point, on the left side is a small niche, and on the right side a wide chamber (7 meters high, 4.25 meters length and 2.5 meters width), named Văgăuna Prohodului (in Romanian) or Burial Dump opens. From this chamber, you turn

right, to the North, and the cave ends within another chamber, which has a small water spring.



(a) (b)
Figure 5. The entrance in Hermit's Cave: (a) on July; (b) on December
(photo by Gabriel Prundaru).



Figure 6. The cave entrance, seen from the first chamber (photo by Adrian Ciorba).

On the center of the entry hall, there are few religious items, such as a metal cross in the memory of three monks who lived in Ialomiței Cave, along with candels, images of saints, of Virgin Mary and of Jesus, a small gypsum-made statue of Virgin Mary and child Jesus, another old cross made of wood close to the right wall, and flowers (either fresh or withered).

Haret (1924) noticed some markings on the walls near the entrance, specifically names and dates, obviously made by humans, either written with the pen or, worse, carved in stone. We also noticed such signs (both barely visible and recent ones) on autumn of 1994, then again in autumn of 1995 and in winter of 1996.

Most of the cave's interior is dry (Figure 7), with few humid areas on the walls (Figure 8). The floor is completely dry within the entire cave. There is also a small surface covered with fine sand.



Figure 7. The cave floor and walls are dry, few meters off the entrance (photo by Cristian Pop).



Figure 8. Humid walls, close to the cave's end (photo by Cristian Pop).

As you go deeper, the darkness grows until completeness, and once you reach the end of the cave you can only hear the sounds produced on the entrance. Any other sound in the surrounding environment cannot be heard. During the first author's trips during 1994-1996, no animal tracks were noticed, either within the cave or in the vicinity of the entrance. On 1994 and 1995, the trips took place on early November. At that time the weather was dry, the soil around the cave was also dry, most of the cave's floor is rocky, so, even some animals would have passed the area, it would have been difficult to spot their tracks. In late December 1996, the first author has visited the cave for three consecutive days; even it heavily snowed in the area during those days, no animal tracks were observed on the fresh snow. However, a mountain guide who visits the cave very often along the whole year told us about its frequent utilization as temporary shelter by animals, mainly foxes and, sometimes, bears. During a trip on early November 1995, the first author and two other people were already staying in the distant part of the cave for around 15 minutes, when a fox entered the cave. Someone who remained on a short distance outside the cave, noticed the fox was barking loudly when entered the cave. Although it continuously barked, we only heard it when it was few meters near us. It was sniffing and barking, and eventually left the cave after approximately one minute. The

above mentioned person who remained outside saw the fox when it also walked out of the cave, and it kept barking until it disappeared nearby. It seems this specific fox was a regular visitor of the spot and it used to see humans before since it moved calmly all the time, and it only barked, showing no signs of aggression.

The Hermit's cave (Peștera Pustnicului) through the history and legends. For hundreds of years, this cave was inhabited by hermits from the nearby Ialomiței Monastery (Ciorba 2013). The cave is still surrounded by a religious ambiance even in our times. Many religious items could be found both at the entrance, and in the last chamber, where a small springs exists (Figure 9). The small niche in the end of the main corridor is a well known place for prayer by the Christians. At that niche, there is a bench-shaped stone, where two people can stay side by side, and another 3-4 people can stay on the floor, if they use mats; religious objects can be found in this niche too (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Religious objects in the spring's chamber (photo by Bogdan Veselovski).



Figure 10. The small niche in the end of the main corridor, containing religious objects and few mats (Photo by Cristian Pop).

According to Bălan (2011) and Ciorba (2013), in the beginning of the 19th century, a hermit from Ialomiței Monastery wanted to pray in solitude for the rest of his life. Thus, he left the monastery and found this small cave. The cave was already inhabited by a bear, but they lived together in the cave for many years. Many witnesses had seen the uncommon pair during the years. At some point, they had not been seen anymore and until these days nobody knows what eventually happened with both the hermit and the bear. Until now this is the only documented case in the Romanian monasticism of such unusual cohabitation.

As we mentioned few lines above, in the end of the cave there is a large chamber where is a small hole in the rock. In this hole, freshwater gathers drop by drop, both from the condensation and from the leakage from the cave walls (Ciorba 2013; Brînză 2015). Somewhere below its edges, the hole must have a sink (yet to be discovered), because the water never overflows. And there is always water in the hole. It is said that this water has healing properties, and some cases of unexplainable healings are mentioned in the Christian literature. Perhaps a chemical analysis of this water could bring more accurate and reliable information.

Conclusions. Without a doubt, the Hermit's Cave (Peștera Pustnicului) is remarkable from many points of view. It has a long monastic history, being the only known cave in Romania where a hermit and a bear used to live together for years. There are few aspects that could help in its preservation for long term. First, it is less known by the public; second, there are no orientation/touristic signs to it; third, it is well blended within the mountainscape, being hardly visible even from nearby. We kindly recommend to be visited by small groups of people in order to keep it clean and undisturbed as long as possible.

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