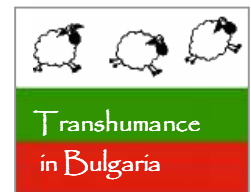


# Restoration of long-distance transhumance in Eastern Bulgaria

Join us from the 1<sup>st</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> May 2010



Although the Transhumance is of high importance for the maintenance of grassland habitats and culture conservation, the annual migration of stock from high pasture to low pasture and back has almost disappeared in Bulgaria.

That's the reason why FWFF-Bulgaria (Fund of the Wild Fauna and Flora) in partnership with RebelFarmer decided to support the restoration of one of the ancient long-distance transhumance route in Bulgaria.

Join a shepherd family, for the fourth edition, as they take a couple of days to move their stock of 250-400 Karakachan sheep between their summer base in the Kotel Mountains up to the Balkan summer highland pastures.

- Walking with the sheep over the slopes of the Stara Planina Mountains (about 1100m)
- With an experienced shepherd family and the director of the Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna's organisation
- Protective Karakachan dogs against a potential bear / wolf attack
- Main luggage pieces (sleeping bags, tents, mats, food) carried by horses/mules
- Catering organised
- Celebration of the St. George's shepherds' festival in Kotel
- Lodging in tents and accommodation
- Return transport to Kotel or Sliven to take the bus/train back to Sofia or Burgas

## Did you know that:

The transhumance is the seasonal movement of shepherds and their livestock between mountainous and lowland pastures in search of fresh pastures and appropriate climatic conditions. This practice is based on the difference of climate between the mountains (where the herds stay during the summer) and the lowlands (where they remain the winter).

In the past transhumance was widespread throughout Europe and especially the Balkan Peninsula but it has been totally lost during the modernization / communist period in Bulgaria in the 1940s due to the nationalization of economy including the livestock breeding.

- Its importance to pastoralist societies cannot be understated. Milk, butter and cheese - the products of transhumance - often form the basis of the local population's diet.
- Transhumance is also believed to be an economically effective way of livestock breeding
- It is of highest nature conservation importance as it avoids overgrazing in the lowlands and keep the mountain pastures opened. Open habitats that are well grazed insure a high diversity of plants and insects; it is vital as well for several species of plants, birds and mammals threatened of extinction nowadays due to habitat loss.





### Overall goals of the trip:

- A better knowledge of the pastoral activity in terms of territory and landscape management, biodiversity conservation, valorisation of the cultural and building patrimony.
- The discovery of shepherd's work: breeding techniques, reading the landscape, the dog and the herd. The understanding of the highest importance of transhumance for the local community that is facing economic problems in the mountains. And the possible support of this tradition towards representatives of the minorities in Bulgaria (Karakachan, Roma and Turkish) that are benefiting by participating in shelter's building, milking, lamb breeding, etc.
- A better understanding of the pastoralism/predator problem  
The new system of compensation given to farmers for damages caused by predators is believed to be a way to reduce the illegal use of poisoned baits towards large predators such as wolves and bears
- The understanding of the interest of rehabilitating and conserving large carnivores but also autochthon endangered breeds such as the Karakachan Sheep.
- The discovery of traditional transhumance "paths" passing through the Stara Planina Mountains
- To make traveling photos promoting the Transhumance towards local shepherds / herders / farmer, and towards national and international ecotourists.

**Landscape:** hilly landscape, meadows and forest in the Kotel Mountains (about 1100 meters high) with several indigenous orchids, mushrooms and the largest carnivore of Europe: Brown Bear as well as the FWFF Griffon Vultures just released. No age limit, but good physical condition is required to walk about 6-8 hours per day at a medium to slow tempo.

### Dates:

- 1<sup>st</sup> May: departure point south of Kotel (meeting point in Kotel then transport arranged by FWFF to the departure point called Dabovitsa village); night in a Bulgarian accommodation
- 2<sup>nd</sup> May: walk with the 250-400 sheep direction Medven, passing through an old oak forest
- 3<sup>rd</sup> May: walk with the sheep to Berov Chuchur, direction one of the FWFF farm passing a beech forest
- 4<sup>th</sup> May: walk with the sheep to the FWFF's farm Skenderevoto and stay for the night in this accommodation; watching Griffon Vultures at feeding site
- 5<sup>th</sup> May: walk west of Kotel in open highland on the way to the summer pastures, direction Batoyka Karakachan Camp
- 6<sup>th</sup> May: celebration of the St. George's shepherds' festival in Kotel; walking through the village with the sheep, traditional music and food, stay in a traditional Bulgarian house; visit of honey and carpets producers in the village or the historical museum etc.
- 7<sup>th</sup> May: walk without the sheep to the Suhi Dyal and back to the Batoyka camp; Milking sheep and discovery of cheese production
- 8<sup>th</sup> May: walk back to Sliven or Kotel where participants can take the bus / train to Sofia or Burgas

### Price: 350 euro per person

This price includes: accommodation, food, local organization, guide and translator, horses/mules carrying part of the luggage, transport back to Kotel or Sliven where participants can take the bus / train to Sofia or Burgas

**Accommodation during the tour:** you are asked to bring your tent, sleeping bag and mat (will be carried by horse). You will be accommodated 2-3 times in traditional Bulgarian houses.

**Meals:** organized by the FWFF's team. Food carried by horse.

**Participants:** The group consists in average of maximum 10 ecotourists, the director of FWFF & his wife (guiding and translating) and the shepherd family naturally.



**Sheep and shepherds:** there will be between 250 and 400 sheep (exact number set up just a few weeks before the tour). The shepherd's family consists in a man, a woman and a 6 years old boy. They do not speak English but you can speak with them thanks to the translation of the FWFF's director.

**Climate:** Not surprisingly, the Central Balkan range experiences weather patterns that are extremely variable. It can be pretty wet and misty. July and August are usually the warmest months. Interestingly, autumn tends to be somewhat warmer than spring. Temperature between 10°C and 25°C in May. We recommend participants to bring a sleeping bag rated to 0 degree comfort and a 3 season-tent.

**General security issue:** the area we will walk through has a good road network and a mobile phones coverage allowing emergency team to rescue anyone in a limited amount of time. The shepherds are local people completely familiar with the area and the people living around. The shepherds and FWFF team members will have mobile phones. There will be a car bringing salt to the sheep. This car can also be used for emergency situation.

**Protection against ticks:** taking a few precautions can drastically reduce the risk of disease transmission from ticks. Although we will avoid tick infested areas, we may pass through low-growing grassland. Ticks like to rest on grass and low-lying brush (less than 1meter) and 'catch a ride' on a passing person. They don't climb into trees to jump on their prey! They can not jump.

To reduce your chance of getting a tick-bite:

- Wear long-sleeve shirts and pants, and remember to tuck pant legs into socks or shoes for extra protection.
- Wearing light-colored clothing can help you see ticks more easily
- When passing in wooded areas pull long hair back and tuck it into a cap
- Stay in the centre of paths
- Use an insect repellent with 10% to 30% DEET for protection against insect bites
- Inspect yourself each day for ticks — especially behind the neck and ears, in the groin area, and under the arms, in the scalp.

**Insurance in general:** Participants should have their own *health insurance* and an *indemnity insurance* protecting the insured for claims made by third parties resulting from errors or omissions committed by the insured.

Personal belongings are at the participant's risk at all times.

#### **Transportation to the departure point and back to your country:**

The price mentioned doesn't include the go & return trip to your country.

You have to organize it on your own. Please find below some helpful links on that matter (there are all in English). In Bulgaria, the covering of towns and villages by buses is extensive and they are almost never late.

- To reach Sofia: directly by train or flight (see <http://wizzair.com>; [www.germanwings.com](http://www.germanwings.com); [www.easyvols.fr](http://www.easyvols.fr) or [www.ticketracker.nl](http://www.ticketracker.nl), [www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com), etc) then take the bus to Kotel  
Bus Sofia-Kotel or Sofia-Sliven can be checked on [www.centralnaavtogara.bg](http://www.centralnaavtogara.bg) (about 10 Euro one way).  
There are also trains to Sliven, then one can take a bus Sliven-Kotel
- To return back from Kotel or Sliven to Sofia:  
Check buses on <http://www.centralnaavtogara.bg> (about 10 Euro) or even check <http://www.biomet.bg/english/schedule.php> or <http://etapgroup.com/etap/en/offices/>  
Check the trains on [www.bdz.bg](http://www.bdz.bg) or [www.db.de/site/bahn/en/start.html](http://www.db.de/site/bahn/en/start.html)

**Note:** we facilitate the exchange of information on that matter between travelers participating to the tour by providing a list of participant's email. There are great chances that you will be able to travel with one or more persons to reach the departure point or leave the Kotel area to go back to Sofia.

**Accommodation in Sofia:** when arriving in Sofia and before taking the train or bus to the departure village of the transhumance, you could stay in one of the numerous budget hotels (less than 20 euro / night); here are some of the recommended places tested by our previous participants:

**The Rooms**

Address: Pop Bogomil, 10 - Sofia 1202  
Phone: (+359) 2 983 35 08  
Email: [theroomshostel@yahoo.com](mailto:theroomshostel@yahoo.com)  
Website: none

**Hostel Mostel**

Address: 2A, Makedonia Boulevard  
Phone: (+359) 889 22 32 96  
Email: [info@hostelmostel.com](mailto:info@hostelmostel.com), [booking@hostelmostel.com](mailto:booking@hostelmostel.com)  
Website: [www.hostelmostel.com](http://www.hostelmostel.com)

**Be my guest hostel**

Address: 13 Ivan Vazov street  
Phone: (+359) 2 989 50 92, (+359) 2 980 21 42  
Email: [bemyguest@abv.bg](mailto:bemyguest@abv.bg), [bemyguest@mail.bg](mailto:bemyguest@mail.bg)  
Website: <http://hostel-sofia.com>

**Sofia guesthouse**

Address: 27 "Patriarch Evtimiy" Blvd  
Phone: (+359) 2 40 30 100  
Email: [info@sofiaguest.com](mailto:info@sofiaguest.com)  
Website: [www.sofiaguest.com](http://www.sofiaguest.com)

**Taxi in Sofia:** Use "OK" taxi services in front of the airport or train station. Traveling from the airport to the Budget hotels doesn't cost more than 10 leva. Nevertheless, after 10 pm, taxi drivers charge you 20 leva for the same distance.

**Contact and deadline registration:** volunteers interested in taking part in the walking experience should register by the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. Please contact [rebelfarmer@hotmail.com](mailto:rebelfarmer@hotmail.com) for filling out the registration form.

View more pictures & radio broadcasting from the long-distance transhumance in Eastern Bulgaria on <http://www.rebelfarmer.org/transhumance-in-bulgaria.html>

**In partnership with:**

The Fund for Wild Flora and Fauna (FWFF), registered as charitable organization dedicated to conserving the nature on the Balkans. Being familiar with the problems of livestock breeding in Bulgaria and the success of restoration of the Transhumance in Spain and France, and the still practiced transhumance nearby Macedonia, FWFF decided to restore it in Bulgaria as well. Out of this collaboration emerged this walking tour.

