

Spiritual Itinerary to Tăul Muced

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Any fairy tale begins with “Once upon a time”, and ends with “and they lived happily ever after”.

The tale which is to be unfolded in the following lines may start like this, because once upon a time there was and there is still a lake which this story is about, but it depends on us all whether it will live happily ever after. This is the tale of a piece of heaven whose existence in its complete splendour depends greatly on the people whose soul can be mirrored by the surface of a lake and who are not afraid of the reflection of their thoughts.

When you read about a fairy tale spot, without knowing it, without ever being there or seeing it at least on a photograph, you close your eyes, and if those words open your soul, you can surely imagine the real splendour described there. You will surely love that spot, and you will long to see it, to feel its embrace at least for a single time.



I hope to be able to lead you into the marvellous world of the *Tăul Muced*,¹ somewhere high, where the clouds can doze off among the pines, the silence floods your ears, and the time becomes dilated. In that area there is a magnificent spot awaiting *man* to recognize its supremacy and to feel himself ephemeral.

Starting from Năsăud,² from beside the dear Someș, for which we cannot do too much, and which bears more and more the ugly signs of human activities (plastic bags and bottles), you pass through villages where old men still drag with their carts the imaginary line of tradition, you leave behind the asphalt road (which is somehow a nickname for it), and from the village Romuli you turn right to a forest road, which, were it able to speak, it would make you shudder with the tale of trees that have been cut for lumber to make money.

By and by, you forget about the yet open wounds nature suffers at man's each step, and you begin to see that enough beauty is still left to enrich your soul, and to make you feel better and cleaner than you are.

The road twists and turns through woods, going either on the right or the left bank of *Strâmba River*, stubbornly trying to take its gurgle to the plain, though this is not easy among the stumps and forest tractor tyres "lost" by none knows who. Once again, the coolness of the forest enlivens you, the clear air dilates your lungs, and you can hardly wait to get there.

After eight kilometres a crossroad appears, where, if it is necessary, you may camp. Strâmba River forks into its two sources: *Nistor's Spring* ahead, and *Bârloaiei Spring* on the right. You go straight on to a modern private chalet. You climb up through an old spruce forest, where, when mushrooms grow, you can be sure that you go home with enough golden chanterelles or king boletes for a stew, which you can savour with a steaming maize porridge.

After four further kilometres you arrive at a place where you will see: *Pietrii Pass* – a crossroad trodden by our ancestors who knew to tread with awe in the world of the mountain, who respected the forests, though they used wood for heating, who were friendly with animals, though they hunted from time to time, who drank the water of springs, but they also cleaned and attended to them. Today, you can see all this only by closing your eyes. If you open them, you observe that you can

¹ Tăul Muced: a peat lake in Rodna Mountans situated 1,600 m high.

² Năsăud: town in Bistrița-Năsăud County, on the bank of Someșul Mare, known as the centre of Năsăud Border Guard District (<http://ro.wikipedia.org>).

hardly pass on a narrow path beside the deep and muddy tracks of forest tractors.

You raise your eyes resignedly, but ahead *Capul Muntelui*¹ greets you with its whitened rocks, placed in a wall erected by divine hands and, lower, with its glades sprinkled with huge natural conglomerates, and... you feel saved. Here you can also see the road running down to the Izbucl Albastru al Izei (the Blue Spring of Iza River), a spot blessed by nature, which can be the subject of another tale.

Turning your back to *Capul Muntelui* and climbing some 40 minutes, passing a hut built for forest workers, you take a marked road which goes towards *Tăul Muced*. The road is impassable unless you go on foot, since it is deepened by the water torrents running down the slope each spring in the last few years, and at each violent storm, which shake our regions more and more often.

You go slowly, admiring the landscape which rewards you fully with a panorama of Maramureşului Mountains and Țibleş Mountains, behind. You reach the winding road that climbs through a recently planted forest (a rarely used, grassy road) and a region getting flat, having tufts of grass and moss, which show that you are getting near a damp place.

The path ends, and you turn right walking some 100 m in the high grass and among immense spruce stumps. From that place you must see the information board with the name and height of the lake.



¹ Capul Muntelui (the Head of the Mountain): a chalky cliff in Rodna Mountains, 1194 m high, a high placed geosyncline met also in Ceahlău.

Be careful where you step, for there is water among the clusters of bilberry and *Sphagnum* moss. Only when you get to the board, you can see the lake in its complete splendour.

We, who love it, attend to it, and study it, are fascinated with the simplicity of its grandeur. It lies motionless 1400 m high, encircled by a spruce and juniper curtain, among which bilberry and cotton-grass colour its contours when the summer sun takes a rest on its surface. Dragonflies and water spiders dare to fly across it, and, if there is a slight breeze, you can see the clouds and the reflection of the wood dancing on the dark brown glitter of the lake.

For more than ten years we have been visiting it as a friend. At the beginning, we did so only to find peace and the absolute beauty. Only in the last three years we have succeeded (with the aid of a project and of some well-meaning people, authorized to serve nature, the Management of Rodna Mountains National Park) in making this natural treasure the object of our studies of biodiversity.

We wish to reveal something: even if you mean well, even if you wish to do something beautiful, you may, out of so much enthusiasm, err, you may do more harm than good. Therefore, our entire study was based on a man–nature relationship. *Tăul Muced* has always been (and will surely continue to be) a place where we went gladly each time, we rejoiced in the healthy spruce trees around us and in the bilberry thickets unharmed by the late frost, but we were also saddened and suffered when a birch had been felled by the storm, when the mad wind had broken a spruce tree in two, when some passer-bys had scattered their tins without thinking that they should have left only their footprints in nature.



If you get closer, you sink into the water-filled moss, and you may see the footprints of bears or roe deer, which come from time to time to drink from the lake. It is dangerous to go near to the lake, for, because of the peat, the terrain is delusive. The bank consists of a mass of *Sphagnum* moss, which begins to rot and floats.

Only 20 cm from the bank the water may be 2 m deep, though it seems to be shallow. The illusion is caused by the peat which is slowly deposited. To convince you, we can say that we have checked the depth with a measuring stick of 2.5 m. When we introduced it into the water many and spectacular, but foul smelling, sulphurous bubbles began to appear resulting from the processing of peat. The water of the lake is rather acid; therefore, we could only see dragonfly larvae hiding in the stratified peat.

You may walk around the lake, but carefully, for there are two other pools, small, but very deep, in which many animals have died; being thirsty and coming to near they fell into it and could not get out. It is good to know that accidents can be avoided if one is intent to the warnings of the lake: when you observe that water remains in your footprints, you are near enough. It is not good to wish for too much. You can admire everything and be safe at the same time.

The perfect place to chat with *Tăul Muced* is the spot from where Capul Muntelui can also be seen in the background. To feel the beauty in all its splendour, you must stay with your eyes closed, and try to hear everything around you. Then open your eyes, and complete the image. You will find yourself in a place where everything is perfect, where you can make promises for betterment; that nothing is too late, that you have yet much to do; and that you can do it if you want to.

You will feel strong, for you are in such a place: the water of a lake more than ten thousand years old lets you look at it today and it reminds you that you can resist if you do not forget beauty, goodness, and your neighbour.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi