

UNVEILING NORTHERN ALBANIA: THROUGH THE EYES OF RENOWNED WRITERS

These meticulously curated experiences take literary works to life, offering a profound understanding of the region's history, culture, and landscape. Experience beyond the beaten path and embark on a literary adventure that leaves a lasting impression.

1. Ami Boué (1794-1881): Unveiling North Albania through Exploration and Documentation

Ami Boué (1794-1881), a French physician with a keen interest in exploration, transcended the confines of his medical profession. Following the tradition of the Grand Tour, he embarked on scientific expeditions across Europe, driven by a passion for ethnology and geology. His travels ultimately led him to the Balkans, culminating in three journeys to Albania between 1830 and 1839. He published scientific works based on his travels. One of these works, 'La Turquie d'Europe' (European Turkey), was published in 1840 covering a wide range of topics, including geography, geology, natural history, statistics, archaeology, customs, agriculture, industry, commerce, history, and politics. In 1839, Ami Boué published 'Esquisse géologique de la Turquie d'Europe' (Geological Description of European Turkey), which focused on the country's geology and highlighted its underground potential. The author presents geological, ethnographic, and demographic data on the Albanian population within the Ottoman Empire.



Map 1: Ethnographic and demographic situation of the Balkan peoples during Ottoman rule, including the geographical distribution of religions in Albanian territories in 1876. Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Balkans-ethnic_%281877%29.jpg

Scientific Contributions:

Boué's scientific endeavors resulted in a series of publications that laid the foundation for further research on the region. His early works, "Essai géologique sur l'Ecosse" (1830) and "Mémoires géologiques et paléontologiques" (1830), provided valuable data on the geology and paleontology of various European regions. Notably, his magnum opus, "La Turquie d'Europe" (1840), offered a comprehensive analysis of Albania, encompassing its geography, geology, natural history, and cultural tapestry. This detailed work documented aspects like customs, agriculture, and commerce, providing insights beyond Boué's core field of expertise.

Unveiling Beyond Geology: Boué's inquisitive nature extended beyond the realm of rocks and minerals. His 1839 publication, "Esquisse géologique de la Turquie d'Europe," highlighted the untapped geological potential of the region, showcasing its diverse geological formations. However, Boué's contributions transcended mere observation. He meticulously documented social and political aspects of the region, including detailed registers of customs, traditional practices, and the prevailing political climate.

Journey and Observations: Prior to venturing into the Albanian territories, Boué carefully planned his expeditions. He navigated a route from Belgrade to the Black Sea, traversing the Balkan Mountains. To avoid potential encounters with plague outbreaks, he opted for a detour from Sofia to Burgas before reaching Istanbul. His return journey included Bulgaria and Macedonia, eventually leading him to the captivating Albanian provinces.

Gjilan served as a gateway to his deeper exploration of the region. From there, Boué traversed the Janina Valley and Graçanica, continuing to Prishtina and Prizren. Through meticulous observations, he documented the lives of the Albanian population within the Ottoman Empire, offering invaluable data on their demographics, cultural practices, and geological environment.

Beyond Scientific Legacy: Boué's influence extends far beyond geological maps and scientific publications. He played a vital role in preserving historical information through his detailed accounts and

descriptions. His work serves as a window into the past, offering a glimpse into the lives and landscapes of 19th century Albania, capturing a crucial moment in the region's history.

Exploring the Footsteps of a Pioneer: This section focuses on **Boué's exploration of the Albanian Alps**, highlighting the rugged terrain and diverse geological formations he encountered. It outlines his journey from Prizren through the Verbnica Valley, Kukës, the Drin Valley, and the Mirdita region. The description then details his descent back to the Drin, his ascent into the Has Mountains, and his eventual arrival in Pristina and Kosovo. Notably, it emphasizes Boué's venture into the Bjeshkët e Namuna, a notoriously rugged mountain range known for its challenging terrain.

The "Ami Boué Itinerary" : Inspired by Boué's pioneering spirit, the "Ami Boué Itinerary" invites contemporary travelers to follow in his footsteps through the heart of the Albanian Alps. The journey commences in Peja, offering scenic landscapes of Rozhajë, Plavë, Guci, and the imposing Qafa e Pejës pass. It then delves into the dramatic wilderness of Bjeshkët e Namuna, culminating in the charming village of Theth. Participants will subsequently cross the QafëTërthore pass, leading them to the breathtaking glacial valley of Boga.

Highlights of the Trek:

- Immerse yourself in the rugged beauty of the Albanian Alps, with the opportunity to climb peaks like Maja e Radohinës (2568m).
- Explore glacial-carst pits and steep ridges, remnants of ancient geological processes.
- Witness the transition from beech forests at lower altitudes to the imposing rocky landscape above.
- Experience the rich cultural heritage and traditions of the Alpine communities.
- Develop an appreciation for Boué's pioneering spirit and dedication to scientific exploration.

Customization: This itinerary can be tailored to individual preferences, offering options for shorter day trips, or extended multi-day adventures. As you embark on this unforgettable journey, remember to respect the fragile environment and local customs while exploring the fascinating legacy left behind by Ami Boué.

2. Antonio Baldacci (1867-1950): Unveiling the Botanical and Cultural Treasures of Northern Albania

Antonio Baldacci (1867-1950), an Italian polymath encompassing biology and geography, left an indelible mark on our understanding of Northern Albania. His explorations, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focused primarily on the Kelmend region, the Albanian Alps, and the Cem Valley. Notably, his work contributed significantly to bridging the gap between the "terra incognita" (unknown land) perception of Albania and its rightful place within the scientific and cultural spheres.

A Pioneering Explorer: Baldacci's scientific endeavors in the Balkans, including Albania, coincided with the "Grand Tour" phenomenon, a period of increased interest in regional exploration among the European bourgeoisie. Despite its geographical proximity to the cradle of civilization, Albania remained largely unexplored by European explorers (Donato Martucci & Rita Nicoli, 2013, p. 184). Baldacci's dedication filled this gap, paving the way for further investigation.

While other researchers like Hans Walter Lack and Zoltán Barina contributed valuable botanical and geographical knowledge through works like "Albanian Routes, 1872-1902" and "New Maps of Albania, 1914" (Lack & Barina, 2020), Baldacci's focus extended beyond mere documentation. His keen observations and scientific rigor provided invaluable insights into the region's cultural facets, encompassing social practices and human-environment interactions. Notably, his comprehensive work, "Albania, 1929," serves as a critical resource for understanding Albania's physical geography, vegetation, fauna, population distribution, and economic landscape (ASH, 1991).

Unveiling the Botanical Treasures: One of Baldacci's most notable contributions is the discovery and documentation of numerous plant species endemic to the Albanian Alps. Among these discoveries is the "Wulfenia Baldaccii," a plant named in his honor, symbolizing his lasting impact on the region's botanical understanding.



Picture 1: "Wulfenia Baldaccii" endemic specie

Delving into the Cem Valley:

Baldacci's meticulous research encompassed the Cem Valley, specifically focusing on the Kelmend region in 1902 and 1903. His observations highlighted the interconnectedness within the valley, despite the distinct characteristics of the Cem Vuklit and Cem Selcë branches. He noted the shared physical features of the river branches and the cultural similarities between the communities of Vukli and Selcë, emphasizing the unifying influence of the valley's geography. Baldacci's geological descriptions provided a detailed picture of the area's landscape. He characterized the western alpine section of the valley as a narrow basin with steep, compact rock walls, showcasing

clear waters and undisturbed trout populations. This concise portrayal not only aids in geological understanding but also highlights the potential of this region as a scenic tourist destination.

A Hidden Gem Revealed: The Cem Valley

Baldacci's exploration shed light on the hidden gem that is the Cem Valley, formed by the confluence of the Cem Vuklit and Cem Selcës rivers. While the Selcës branch faces challenges due to its limited water flow, the Vuklit branch plays a vital role in sustaining the valley's lifeblood. The valley boasts a picturesque landscape dominated by oak trees, particularly along the Tamara-Grabom route. Embedded within are historical gems like the village of Tamara, named after the wife of a Vizier who, inspired by the rushing waters, ordered the construction of a bridge. This crucial infrastructure not only facilitated travel but also served as the catalyst for the village's establishment.

Beyond Exploration: A Legacy of Tourism and Research

Today, the Cem Valley thrives as a tourist destination, with local communities benefiting from visitor income and harvesting medicinal plants like sage and thyme. The presence of karst caves like the Malqe Gruda offers a glimpse into the valley's rich history, waiting to be further explored.

Following in Baldacci's Footsteps: Themed Itineraries

Inspired by Baldacci's pioneering spirit, thematic itineraries can be developed for contemporary explorers. These itineraries can encompass:

- **Challenging yet awe-inspiring journeys** through the Kelmend region and the Cem Valley.
- **Immersion in dramatic landscapes**, including the Cem River Valley with its steep cliffs and crystal-clear waters.
- **Exploration of the region's significance** for further scientific understanding and cultural appreciation.

Antonio Baldacci's legacy extends far beyond geographical exploration and botanical discoveries. He played a pivotal role in bridging the knowledge gap regarding Northern Albania, paving the way for further research, and highlighting its unique natural beauty

and cultural richness. By **revisiting Baldacci's work and retracing his steps through themed itineraries, we can gain valuable insights.**

3. Edith Durham: A Life Entwined with Albania

Born into a London family with a medical tradition in 1863, Mary Edith Durham's path charted a course far beyond the realm of medicine. While her artistic talents flourished at esteemed institutions like Bedford College and the Royal Academy of Arts, personal circumstances propelled her towards a life-changing journey that would forever link her destiny with the captivating Balkan nation of Albania.

Embracing Albania: A Multifaceted Legacy

Arriving in Albania at the **age of 37, Durham's multifaceted personality blossomed.** She delved into diverse fields, encompassing ethnography, anthropology, writing, and humanitarian work. This versatility resonated deeply with the Albanians, who bestowed upon her immense respect. Her contributions extended far beyond mere academic pursuits, as she actively engaged in political, social, and scientific endeavors, culminating in seven insightful books chronicling the complexities of the Balkan region.

Upper Albania / Shqipëria e Epërme: A Monumental Work

Among her literary accomplishments, Edith Durham's magnum opus, "Shqipëria e Epërme" (High Albania), published in 1909, stands as a testament to her profound connection with Albania, especially the breathtaking Upper Albania region. The stark contrast between the region's natural beauty, exemplified by the soaring Albanian Alps, and the contrasting conditions in Southern Albania, underscores the book's unique focus.

A Passion for the Untamed: The Enchantment of Theth

Within "Shqipëria e Epërme," Durham's description of Theth paints a vivid picture of an "uninhabited country" offering "magnificent isolation from the whole world." This portrayal underscores her fascination with the untamed spirit of Upper Albania, a region she sometimes felt was best preserved from external influences.

Queen of the Albanian Mountains: Enduring Recognition

Durham's unwavering dedication to Albania earned her the revered title "Queen of the Albanian Mountains." Her extensive journeys across the Western Alps and other mountainous regions, combined with her keen observation of the patriarchal social structures, provided invaluable insights into the lives of the people. "Shqipëria e Epërme" meticulously documents areas like Kastrati, Shkreli, Gruda, and Theth, preserving a rich tapestry of cultural heritage.



Picture 2: View from Upper Albania

Following in Edith's Footsteps: Themed Itineraries

Drawing inspiration from Durham's journeys and experiences, a selection of themed itineraries has been designed. Bearing her name, these itineraries offer visitors an opportunity to retrace her steps and discover the captivating landscapes and historical landmarks that captivated this remarkable explorer.

Variant #A: Edith Durham's Journey Through Upper Albania - A Day Trip Itinerary

This single-day field trip retraces the path of Edith Durham's initial exploration of Upper Albania, as documented in her factual account. Her first journey in North of Albania was carried out on Friday, May 9, 1908 following this itinerary:

Starting Point: Shkodra **Departure:**

Morning:

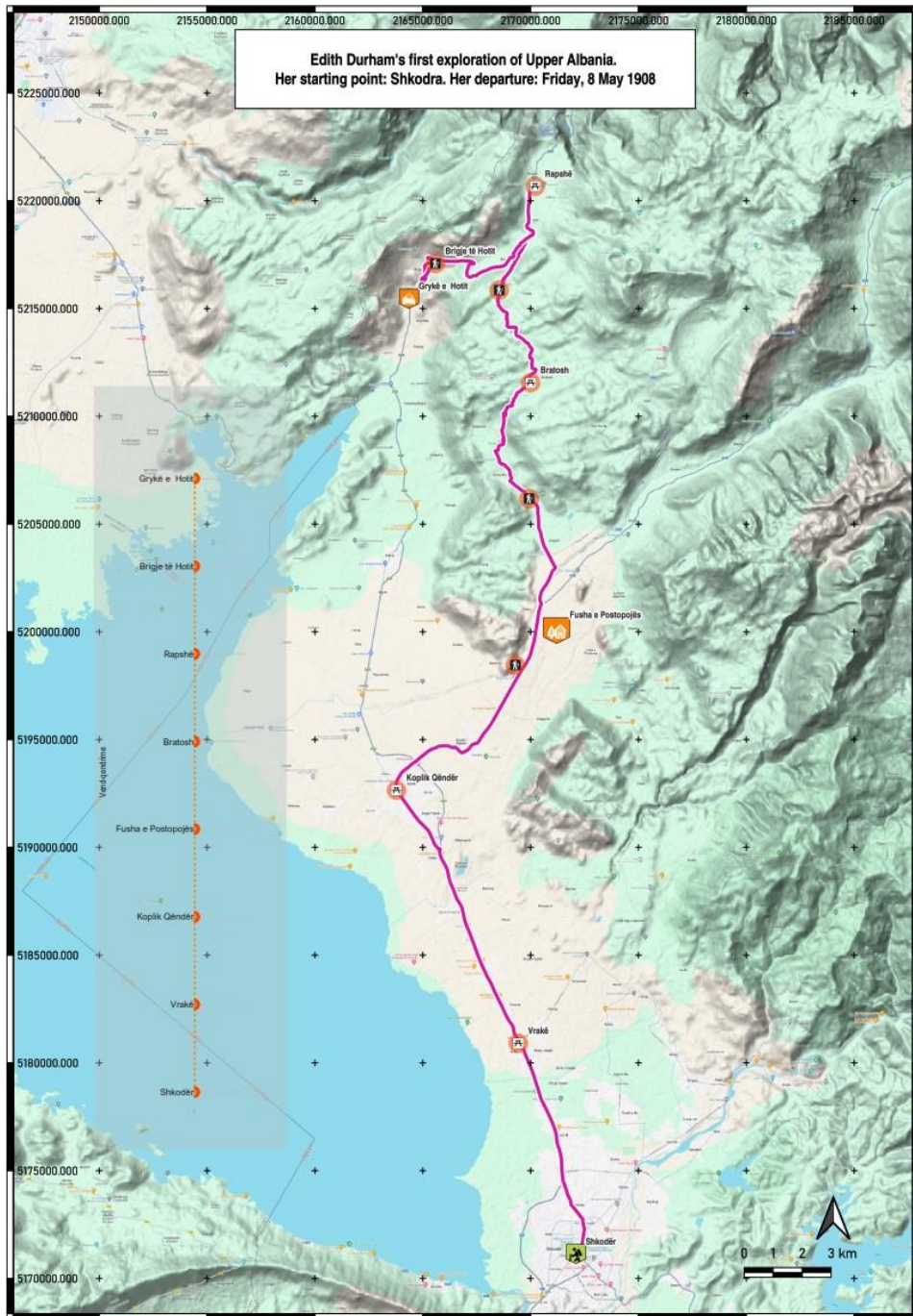
- **Shkodra - Vraka:** The journey begins in Shkodra, traversing through a grove before reaching the Serbian village of Vraka.
- **Vraka - Koplík:** The route continues to Koplík, the administrative center of Malësia e Madhe, passing through a predominantly Muslim community.
- **Koplík - Pustopoj:** The path leads towards Pustopoj, a rocky plateau named after the Serbian influence in the region.

Afternoon:

- **Pustopoj - Upper Kastrat:** The path winds its way to Bratosh village, nestled within Upper Kastrat territory.
- **Upper Kastrat:** Anthropological observations are interwoven with local lore. Durham's perspective on the origin of the name "Kastrat" (Latin: "castrum") is juxtaposed with the local belief linking it to their hero, Skanderbeg. The region's strong Christian identity and resistance against Turkish rule are emphasized.
- **Kastrat History:** The guide recounts the region's historical struggles for independence against the Ottomans, including the tragic episode of 1883, involving betrayal, diplomatic intervention, and a broken truce.
- **End Point:** An inn (An inn in Hot in Çesme or Shala in Kastrat where travelers rested).

This variant offers a glimpse into a single day of Durham's exploration, showcasing the potential for further itineraries inspired by her life and work. This itinerary offer valuable insights into the culture, society and history of the area as documented in Durham`s publication "High Albania" (1909).

Edith Durham, a revered scholar and champion of Northern Albania, deserves recognition for placing the region on the international map. Her groundbreaking publication, "Shqipëria e Epërme" (English: "High Albania"), documented her initial journey through the region. This itinerary invites you to retrace Durham's steps, using the provided map as your guide.



Map 2: Edith Durham's first exploration of Upper Albania. Crafted by Adi Garuci

Essential Information for Travelers: The Cultural and Historical Landscape of Malësi e Madhe

Malësi e Madhe, a captivating region bordering Shkodra Lake and Montenegro in Northern Albania, offers travelers a unique blend of rich cultural heritage and stunning natural landscapes. Prior to embarking on their journey, visitors are advised to familiarize themselves with the region's distinct history, vibrant folklore, and diverse natural environment.

Historical and Cultural Significance: The name "Malësi," derived from the Albanian word "mal" meaning "mountain," aptly describes the region's mountainous topography. However, its significance extends far beyond mere geography. Malësi e Madhe possesses a distinct cultural identity, differentiated from other parts of Northern Albania throughout its history.

Ancestral Connections: While not direct descendants, the inhabitants of Malësi e Madhe proudly trace their heritage back to the Illyrian tribe, the Labeat. This ancestral connection is evident in the presence of several historical settlements like Balesi and the imposing "Kelmend Fortress," remnants of the Illyrian past.

Venetian Influence: Until the late 15th century, Malësi e Madhe enjoyed close ties with the Venetian Republic, reflected in the historical dominance of aristocratic families like the Balshaj and Cernovic dynasties. This period of interaction left its mark on the region's cultural fabric.

Echoes of the Past: A Tapestry of Folklore. Malësi e Madhe is a treasure trove of folkloric traditions, serving as a repository of rich oral history. Epic songs like "Këngët e Mujit e Halilit" and "Ded Gjo Lulit" continue to be passed down through generations, showcasing the vibrant cultural heritage of the region.

Beyond the Picturesque: Unveiling the Essence of Malësi e Madhe. While the dramatic landscapes, including the impressive Shpella e Frashërit cave and the Syri i Sheganit underground water system, undoubtedly capture the attention of many visitors, it is crucial to remember that the true essence of Malësi e Madhe lies in

understanding the local way of life, deeply rooted history, and unique perspective. Following in the footsteps of renowned explorers like Edith Durham, travelers are encouraged to delve deeper and appreciate the human dimension that breathes life into this captivating region.

Edith Durham Route: Unveiling the Cultural and Natural Splendors of Shkrel (Variant #B - Two Days)

This two-day itinerary, titled the "Edith Durham Route," invites travelers to embark on a journey through the captivating region of Shkrel in Northern Albania. Inspired by the explorations of renowned writer and traveler Mary Edith Durham, this itinerary unveils the region's hidden villages, cultural treasures, and breathtaking natural landscapes.

Day 1: Immersed in Nature's Grandeur

Morning:

- The journey begins in Shkrel, where Durham vividly described the valley's scenic splendor nestled between the Bigaj Gimaj-Kunorë Lohe and Veleçik-Bridash mountain ranges.
- Explore the Përroi i Thatë River, a unique natural formation shaped by limestone, carving a deep canyon through the valley. Learn about the historical influence of an ancient emir on the river's course.
- Embark on a hike to the source of the river, traversing the "gray desert of arid rocks" known as Karst. Observe the captivating transformation of the sunlit rock formations, their hues changing dramatically at dawn and dusk.

Afternoon:

- **Cultural Crossroads:** Cross the creek bed near Bërzheta and head south towards Reçi. Explore the village of Lohja, a microcosm of religious diversity with both a mosque and an imam, contrasting with the predominantly Muslim village of Reçi, which boasts a priest.

- Witness the majestic snow-capped peaks of the Shkreli Mountains, contrasting vividly with the dark pine forests below. Immerse yourself in the surrounding beauty, renowned as some of the highest peaks in the Western Alps.

Evening:

- Experience the charm of popular tourist destinations within the Shkrel Municipal Nature Park, including Razëm, Reç, and Bogë. Take leisurely walks under the shade of the chestnut trees in Reç and Lohe, as described by Durham herself.
- Ascend the hill above Reç to marvel at the breathtaking panorama of the surrounding fields and Shkodër Lake. Appreciate the protected chestnut groves, categorized as a Natural Monument.

Day 2: Unveiling Traditions and Landscapes

Morning:

- Delve into the local customs and traditions documented by Durham in Shkreli. Learn about the solemn oaths practiced in Reç and the significance of the sacred stone.

Afternoon:

- Embark on a nature expedition through marked trails like Kunorë Lohe, Veleçik-Bridashë, Maja, and Rabës, immersing yourself in the captivating alpine landscape of Boga and experiencing the diverse flora and fauna of the region.

This two-day itinerary offers a glimpse into the captivating tapestry of Shkrel, where nature, culture, and history seamlessly blend. By retracing the steps of Edith Durham and engaging with the local communities, travelers gain a deeper appreciation for this remarkable region's unique character and enduring legacy.

Trek with the "Queen of the Highlanders": A Two-Day Itinerary Inspired by Edith Durham in National Park (Variant #C)

This meticulously curated itinerary invites you to embark on an immersive exploration of Theth National Park, following in the footsteps of the legendary explorer, Edith Durham, fondly known as the "Queen of the Highlanders." The two-day journey delves into the heart of the park, showcasing its breathtaking natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and diverse wildlife.

Day 1: Arriving in a Picturesque Paradise

Morning:

- The adventure commences in Theth village, nestled amidst the **majestic peaks of the Albanian Alps**. Admire its picturesque charm, aptly described by Durham as the "most beautiful Albanian village."
- Embark on a captivating hike towards the enchanting **Grunas Waterfall**, cascading 30 meters down a verdant mountainside. Feel the refreshing spray and capture the breathtaking scenery.
- Gain valuable insights into the park's captivating biodiversity and cultural significance at the Theth National Park Visitor Center. Based on your interests, you can tailor your exploration for a personalized experience.

Afternoon:

- Feel the adrenaline rush as you traverse the thrilling trail leading to the **towering Gjeçaj Waterfall**, plunging over 24 meters within a dramatic rocky gorge. Immerse yourself in the awe-inspiring power and beauty of nature.
- Witness the captivating Pusi i Zi / **The black well**, a natural marvel formed by the confluence of underground springs. Marvel at its deep, crystal-clear water and unique black color.

- Engage in insightful cultural exploration by visiting traditional homes or learning about local crafts, experiencing the warmth and hospitality that defines the people of Theth.

Evening:

- Savor a delicious dinner featuring regional specialties like "byrek" and "fli" under the starlit sky, indulging in the flavors of the region.
- Immerse yourself in the local culture by enjoying traditional music and storytelling around a crackling bonfire, fostering a sense of connection with the community.

Day 2: Delving into Natural Wonders

Morning:

- For adventurous individuals, an exhilarating hike to the Col of Peja awaits, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding peaks. This glacial landscape evokes a sense of awe and grandeur. For those seeking an even greater challenge, the ascent of Maja e Harapit beckons, boasting the highest vertical cliff face in the Balkans at a staggering 800 meters.
- Explore the depths of Harap Cave, one of the longest horizontal caves in Albania. Witness its captivatingly intricate formations and hidden underground lakes.
- Unravel the mysteries of Bira e Rrathëve, a karst cave situated near Grunas Waterfall, revealing impressive formations sculpted by time and nature.

Afternoon:

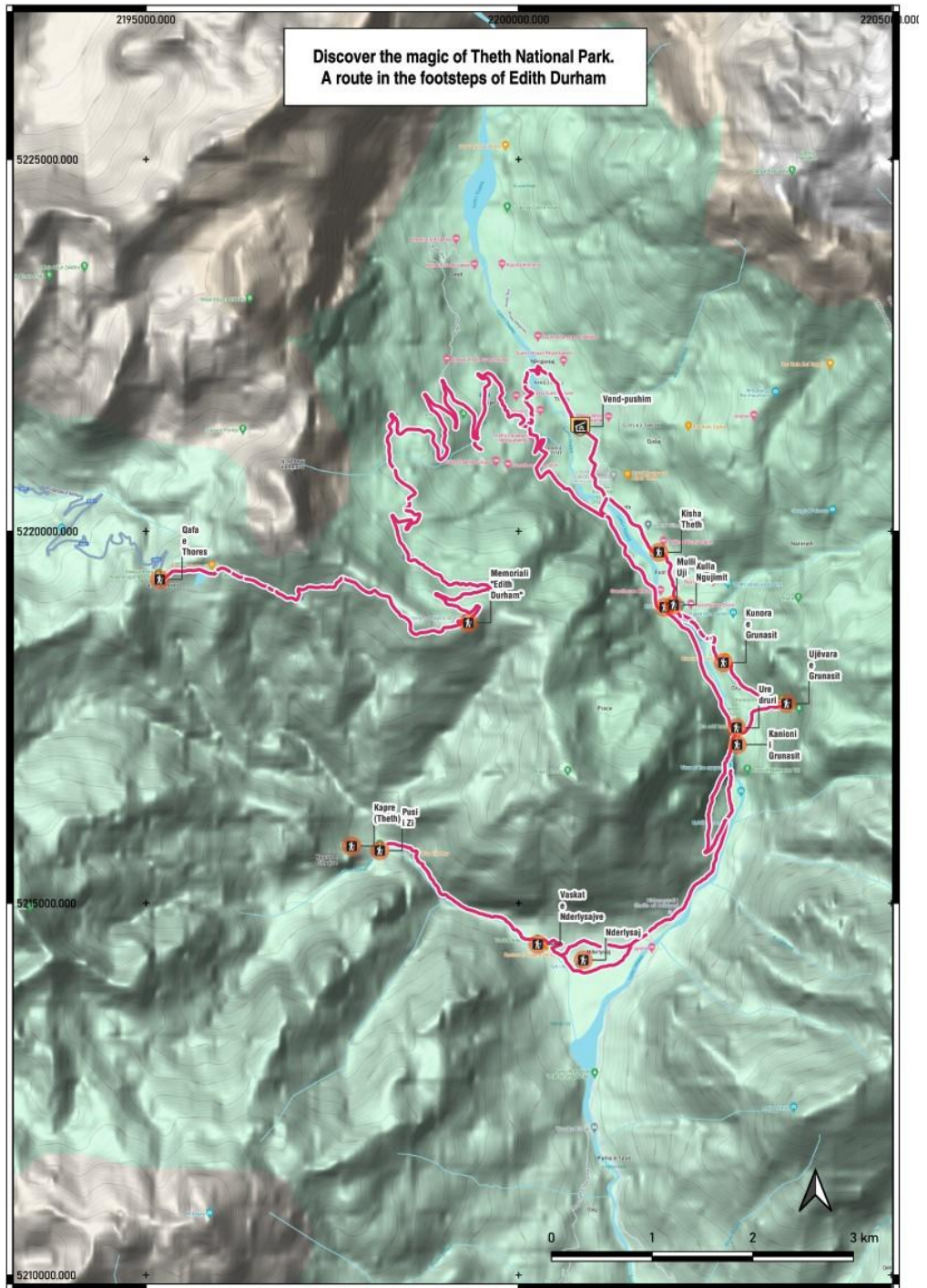
- If you choose to forgo the challenging hikes, a scenic drive to the serene Lake Pass of Peja presents a captivating alternative. Nestled amidst breathtaking mountains, this tranquil haven offers a moment of respite and reflection.
- As your journey nears its end, unwind in the tranquility of nature, reflecting on the unforgettable experiences and the timeless beauty of Theth National Park. Embrace the spirit of Edith Durham

and create your own unique adventure in this captivating national treasure.

This itinerary highlight key attractions and activities based on Edith Durham's descriptions. Below are some photos of these destinations.



Picture 3: Blue eye or black well Theth



Map 3: Unveiling the Enchantment of Theth National Park: An Itinerary Inspired by Edith Durham. Crafted by Adi Garuci

Discovering Theth National Park's Cultural and Historical Treasures for the Visitors

Theth National Park, nestled within the majestic Albanian Alps, transcends its breathtaking natural beauty, and unveils a rich historical and cultural tapestry. Each landmark whispers tales of tradition, resilience, and enduring values, offering visitors a window into the heart and soul of this unique region.

Steeped in History: The Immersion Tower and Theth Church

The **Immersion Tower**, a three-story stone sentinel dating back over four centuries, embodies a pivotal facet of Theth's history. Its imposing presence and narrow windows speak volumes about its role as a beacon of reconciliation. Within its walls, countless blood feuds were resolved according to the tenets of the Lek Dukagjin Canon, echoing centuries of conflict resolution, and fostering societal harmony. Standing tall since its 1892 reconstruction, the ancient **Theth Church**, dedicated to St. Anthony, serves as a testament to faith and community spirit. Its sturdy construction and thatched roof, immortalized by Shtjefën Gjeçovi, reflect the dedication of its young pastor who actively promoted peace and non-violence in Theth.



Picture 4: The church of Theth



Picture 5: Theth LockIn Tower

Whispers of Tradition: Mills, Clothing, and Architecture

The park's cultural heritage whispers through the **12 small mills** scattered throughout. These remnants of a bygone era served as the lifeblood of local communities, relied upon for grinding grain. While only two remain operational, they offer a glimpse into a way of life sustained by tradition. Traditional clothing further paints a vivid picture of the region's identity. Women adorned themselves in the

flowing "**xhubletë**", each area boasting its unique decorative flair. This garment accompanied them even to their final resting place. Men, as described by Edith Durham, sported the distinctive "**xhamadan**" and "**kësulë**", reflecting their cultural heritage. The very **architecture** of Theth reflects its environment and unique needs. Houses, constructed with sturdy stone and sloped roofs to withstand harsh winters, typically comprise two or three floors, often built on slopes or nestled against mountains. This design showcases the practicality and distinct social norms of the communities, with separate access points for animals and families.

Hospitality and its Shadows: BESA and Beyond

Edith Durham's writings paint a contrasting picture of Theth's cultural landscape. While she was warmly received and offered generous hospitality in local homes, her encounters with "**dark towers**" hint at a history steeped in conflict. The practice of revenge, documented in the Lekë Dukagjini Canon, highlights a darker aspect of the region's past. However, Theth's cultural tapestry extends beyond the shadows. "**BESA**," the unwavering commitment to one's word, exemplifies the Albanian spirit of honor and integrity. Durham further delves into the region's rich customs, uncovering fascinating marriage practices, unique funeral rituals, and a deeply ingrained respect for women, a principle rooted in the legacy of the powerful Queen Teuta.

An Invitation to Immerse

The cultural and historical sites of Theth National Park beckon visitors to embark on a journey beyond breathtaking landscapes. Each stone, each tradition whispers a story, inviting exploration into a world where resilience, faith, and community spirit have stood the test of time.

Rose Wilder Lane's Journey (1886 – 1968)

Following in the Footsteps of Rose Wilder Lane's in Northern Albania

Rose Wilder Lane, an American writer, was born in South Dakota. Before travelling to Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Albania, she

worked at the Red Cross office in Paris. Her most famous book, 'Majat e Shalës,' was inspired by her journey to the mountains of northern Albania in 1921. Lane states, 'In this work, I share only what I have witnessed during my travels among the tribes of the northern Albanian Mountains.' "Majat e Shalës" is a written account of an adventurer's life filled with numerous adventures. The tales documented in Rose Wilder Lane's notes revolve around an expedition carried out by a team of foreign missionaries in the northern region of the country, traveling from Shkodra to Shalë, Theth, and Shosh. The author uncovers the unique history of the rough terrain and cultural regions while demonstrating the interdependence between the environment and the mountain people's resilient character. Lane observed the ridges and horst-graben formations in Albania. He witnessed Albanians, both rich and poor, gathering materials to bake bread. Lane described the physical, moral, and psychological appearance of mountain Albanians, mainly Dukagjinas. He appreciated the natural beauty of Albania, comparing it favourably to Switzerland. The book 'Majat e Shalës' expresses sympathy and noble feelings. The statement was made during a period when Albanians were frequently perceived as the final vestiges of barbarism in Europe.

A Three-Day Itinerary

This itinerary follows the footsteps of renowned American writer **Rose Wilder Lane**, venturing into the rugged beauty of northern Albania as documented in her acclaimed book "**Peaks of Shala**." Prepare yourself for breathtaking landscapes, captivating cultural encounters, and insights into the region's unique history and traditions.

Day 1: Delving into the Kir River Valley

- **Morning:** Begin your journey in Shkodra, where Lane embarked on her adventure. From there, travel towards Pult through the Kir River Valley, marveling at the dramatic scenery carved by the river between the Maranaj-Bigaj-Gimaj and Ershel-Cukal Mountain ranges.

- **Afternoon:** Witness the river's transformative power at Ura e Shtrenjtë, home to stunning canyons and designated as a natural monument. Explore the Zhylla Cave, another natural wonder, before reaching Prekal, where the mountains narrow into dramatic cliffs.
- **Evening:** Arrive at the Kir village, where you can spend the night and appreciate the vibrant local culture.



Picture 6: Kir river Valley

Day 2: Unveiling the Shalë Valley

- **Morning:** Continue your journey into the heart of the Western Alps, reaching the enchanting Shalë Valley. Discover charming villages like Nicaj-Shosh, Ndreaj, Vuksanaj, Nicaj-Shalë, and Ndërlyaj, each offering a glimpse into rural life steeped in tradition.
- **Afternoon:** Immerse yourself in the natural beauty of the Shalë River as it traverses the valley, forming basins and carving through the impressive Shalë and Shosh gates, another natural monument.

- **Evening:** Conclude your day in Theth, where Lane found respite and connection with the local community. Explore the village and soak in the tranquility of this mountainous haven.



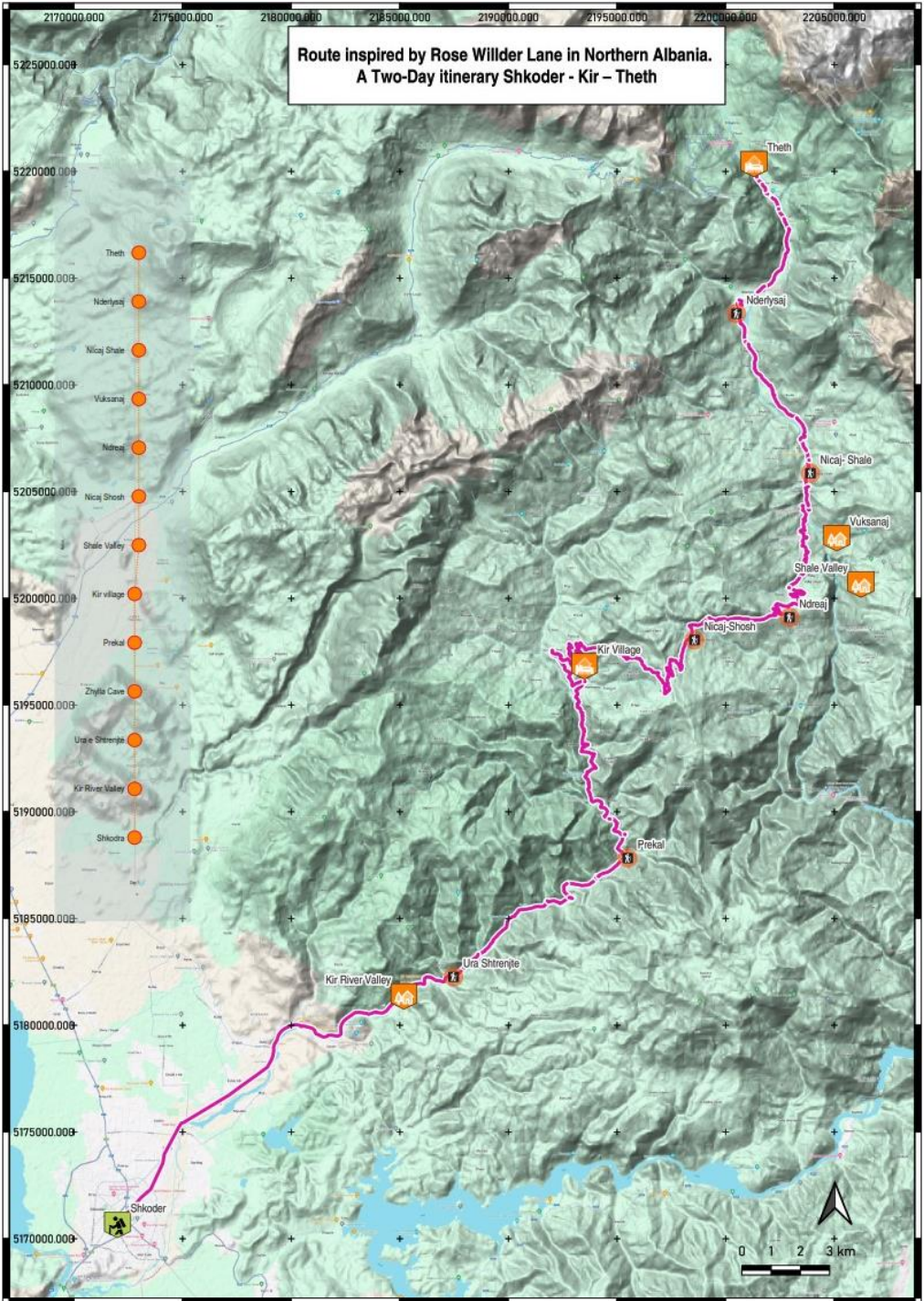
Picture 7: Shalë Valley

Day 3: Exploring Cultural Riches and Natural Wonders

- **Morning:** Delve deeper into the unique customs and traditions observed by Lane. Learn about the concept of "vengeance pardon" and understand its significance in resolving conflicts within the highland communities.
- **Afternoon:** Witness the respect for diverse faiths, as exemplified by the story of Rexha's dinner. Appreciate the heartwarming gestures of inclusivity despite religious differences.
- **Evening:** Reflect on your journey, revisiting Lane's insightful descriptions and appreciating the enduring spirit of the people and the timeless beauty of the region.

By embarking on this journey, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for Rose Wilder Lane's enduring legacy and experience the captivating blend of nature, culture, and history that continues to draw travelers to these remarkable regions of Albania.

Lane succeeded Edith Durham as a missionary among Albanians and aimed to educate the Western world about Albania and its people. She believed that Albania was beautiful and saw the mystery of life reflected in the faces of every Albanian she met. Lane focuses on the phenomenon of revenge, which is explained in the Canon. She observed and prescribed the concept of a "vengeance pardon", where the cross plays a significant role in pardoning a bloody conflict and transforming it into a symbiosis with extraordinary values for the highlanders. Additionally, the author describes various customs observed in the life of the highlanders in northern Albania. Despite the oppressive Canon laws, which punished errors with death, there existed a certain delicacy that was heartwarming. Additionally, there were prohibitions against harming women and taking revenge in the presence of women, showing a respect for women in Albanian culture. Moreover, Lane observed that the Albanians respected each other's religion.



Map 4: Rose Lane thematic route. Crafted by Adi Garuci

4. Franz Nopcsa: A Life Forged in Exploration and Discovery (1877 - 1933). Unveiling the Beauty of Northern Albania

Baron Franz Nopcsa von Felső-Szilvás (1877-1933) wasn't just an aristocrat, he was a maverick figure who left his mark on various fields. This charismatic individual was an explorer, scholar, geologist, paleontologist, and albanologist, leaving a legacy that transcends categorization.

He conducted extensive explorations in Albania, interrupted only by his suicide on April 25, 1933. There are approximately **25 studies and scientific works in the fields of ethnology, paleontology, geography, and geology of Albania**. Some of the most significant works include 'Aus Sala und Kelmenti' (1910), "Albanien. Bauten, Trachten und Great Nordalbanien" (1925), 'Mountain Tribes of Northern Albania and the Law of Customs' (Canon) which spans over 600 pages, and 'Religious Views, Habits and Customs' which remains in manuscript. "Geography and Geology of Northern Albania" (1929) is a significant 620-page work with maps and tables in the respective fields. The National Library of Albania holds manuscripts of numerous travelogues of great interest to Nopcsa under the title "Albania. News Book." These are six handwritten volumes in pencil, in diary form kept between 1905-1913, of 200-600 pages. The text contains the author's descriptions and impressions from expeditions to northern Albania, including geographical, geological, historical, ethnological, and demographic information. It is accompanied by numerous maps, sketches, and illustrations.

Nopcsa's adventurous spirit wasn't confined to the realm of fossils. He developed a profound affection for Albania, particularly the northern region of Malësi e Madhe. He spent years traversing the country, mastering the language, and meticulously documenting its culture, folklore, and geography. His passion for Albania even led him to play a role in politics, briefly serving as an advisor to the newly formed Albanian government.

Baron Franz Nopcsa von Felső-Szilvás provided the first accurate description of the Lëpusha valley. Therefore, we propose a thematic

route named after this exceptional researcher of geography and geology: Selcë-Gropat e Selcës-Qafa e Perdolecit-Lëpushë. During one of his many expeditions to northern Albania in early September 1907, he visited Lëpusha and was amazed by the valley's beauty. According to Nopcsa (1910: 88 [Translation: A. Pieroni]), the area is characterised by wide valleys with beech woods, rare trees, and glades. The summit of Mount Trojan serves as a distinguishing feature, distinguishing it from the Viennese wilderness.

The developed itinerary invites you to delve into the stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage of northern Albania, guided by the legacy of renowned explorer and scientist Franz Nopcsa. Join us on a journey through dramatic valleys, captivating villages, and breathtaking mountain peaks, **as documented in Nopcsa's extensive travels and research.**

Day 1: Unveiling the Selcë Valley

- **Morning:** Begin your adventure in the village of Selcë, nestled amidst the Kelmendi mountains. Immerse yourself in the village's charm and explore the fascinating Selcë Canyon, carved by the Cem River. Witness the impressive 25-meter waterfall and marvel at the diverse karst formations lining the path.
- **Afternoon:** Hike to the natural monument "Lëndina e Greçës," a meadow brimming with colorful wildflowers and medicinal plants. Learn about its historical significance as the site of the 1911 General Assembly of Albanian Leaders.
- **Evening:** Witness the breathtaking sunset over the valley from Gropat e Selcës, the source of the Selcë River. Enjoy a traditional dinner at a local guesthouse and learn about the region's customs and traditions.

Day 2: Journey to Lëpushë

- **Morning:** Ascend to Qafa e Bordolecit, enjoying panoramic views of the Western Alps. Admire Maja e Grebenit, a towering peak, and learn about its significance in Nopcsa's explorations.
- **Afternoon:** Descend into the Lëpushë Valley, following the Vermosh River. Discover the village of Lëpushë, known for its

cascading waterfall and stunning meadows. Explore the "Kanioni i Bashkimit" natural monument, where the Lëpushë stream converges with the Vermosh River.

- **Evening:** Participate in the vibrant "Logu i Bjeshkëve" event, celebrating the beauty of the Kelmendi region. Savor local cuisine, traditional music, and lively cultural performances.

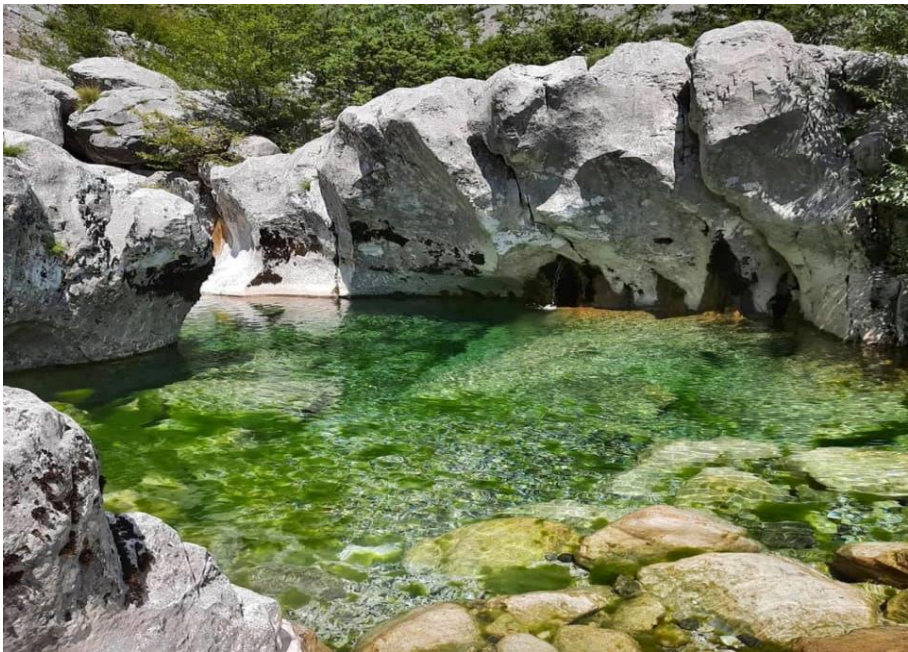


Picture 8: Lëpushë Waterfall in the Forest

Day 3: Exploring Peaks and Pastures

- **Morning:** Embark on a challenging trek to the summit of Maja e Vajushës, traversing a network of scenic paths documented by Nopcsa. Be rewarded with breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and valleys.
- **Afternoon:** Relax by the refreshing Koprish Springs, renowned for their crystal-clear water and natural beauty. Learn about their significance as the source of the Cem I Selcës River.
- **Evening:** Reflect on your experiences while enjoying a farewell dinner in Selcë. Share stories and insights with fellow travelers, cherishing the memories of your journey through Nopcsa's footsteps.

Embark on this immersive journey and discover the captivating blend of nature, history, and culture that Franz Nopcsa documented and cherished. Experience the timeless beauty of northern Albania and create your own unforgettable memories.



Picture 9: Selca canion waterfall



Picture 10: Vermosh River

5. Lea Ypi Route: Unveiling a Life Through History and Architecture

Lea Ypi, a renowned philosopher, and author, draws upon her childhood experiences in communist Albania to explore the complexities of freedom in her acclaimed memoir, **"Free: Coming of Age at the End of History."** The first section of the book details the author's upbringing in communist Albania. Albanian architecture from 1945 to 1990 was characterised by the connection between architecture and politics. The physical environment underwent significant changes during this period to reflect Communist ideology. New cities and heavy industrial landscapes were constructed, existing urban centres were rebuilt, and monuments and statues were erected. Buildings that did not align with the dictatorship were demolished. Albanian construction and architecture up until the 1990s were guided by the principles of socialist realism. This ideology

was reflected not only in cultural, media, and political buildings but also in residential, social, educational, and service buildings (*Ndrecka and Nepravishta, 2013*).

Inspired by Ypi's life story, "A Life Through History and Architecture" was adopted for Shkodra city through the lens of her experiences under a communist regime. By intertwining Ypi's personal narrative with the Shkodra city's architectural and historical remnants, this journey offers a unique perspective on Albania's transition from a closed society to a democracy and the enduring impact of ideology on individual lives.

https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/61089500-ree?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=sV5LY8g4BX&rank=1.

The events have been relocated from Tirana, the city of Lea's memories, to Shkodra, where the communist regime's pressure was prevalent. All site descriptions and objects have been adjusted to fit the city of Shkodra.

Shkodra: A City Shaped by Ideology

Shkodra, Ypi's childhood home, serves as a microcosm of Albania's tumultuous past. Its architectural landscape bears the distinct imprint of socialist realism, showcasing buildings constructed to embody the ideals of the communist regime. These structures, along with Ypi's personal narrative, provide a window into a bygone era and its lasting influence.

Key Landmarks and Narratives:

- **Xhabije Neighborhood:** Witness the imposing communist-style apartment building Ypi describes in her memoir, exemplifying the Party-State's control over individual living spaces. This neighborhood serves as a tangible reminder of the regime's efforts to regulate and standardize daily life. This group of buildings is situated in Durrës, in the city that Lea remembers.
- **Parruca Neighborhood:** Explore the early shops and pharmacies, remnants of the controlled commercial landscape depicted in Ypi's memoir. These establishments offer insight into the limited

choices and state-controlled economy that characterized communist Albania.

- **Migjeni Theater (1950):** Admire the Soviet-inspired architecture of the Migjeni Theater, reflecting the cultural influence exerted by the communist regime. This theater served as a platform for state-sanctioned performances and limited entertainment options available during Ypi's childhood.
- **Republika Cinema (1956):** Imagine the limited entertainment options Ypi describes, where state-controlled cinema played a significant role. The Republika Cinema serves as a reminder of the regime's control over information and leisure activities.
- **Hotel Rozafa (1970):** Marvel at the once-tallest building in Shkodra, the Hotel Rozafa. This structure, symbolizing the regime's focus on infrastructure development, stands in stark contrast to the more modest dwellings characterizing the surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Municipal Library:** Consider the limited access to information and the curated content available during Ypi's formative years through the lens of the Municipal Library. This institution, while offering a space for learning, also reflects the regime's control over information dissemination.
- **Former 5 Heroes Monument:** Reflect on the historical narrative presented by this monument, contrasting it with Ypi's personal experiences and observations. This monument, dedicated to communist heroes, offers a glimpse into the official state ideology and its potential dissonance with individual experiences.
- **Post Office and Railway Station:** Imagine the restricted communication and travelmöglichkeiten (German for "travel opportunities") Ypi describes. The post office and railway station serve as tangible reminders of the regime's control over movement and communication, restricting individual freedom.
- **Vau i Dejës Hydropower Plants:** Consider the industrial focus of the communist regime and its impact on the environment, a topic Ypi addresses in her work. These hydropower plants, while

providing energy, also represent the potential environmental consequences of rapid industrialization.

Beyond the Itinerary: This journey through Shkodra's landmarks serves as a springboard for deeper exploration. Engage with residents, delve into historical archives, and critically analyze the architectural styles. By engaging in these activities, you gain a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between individual lives, ideology, and the built environment. Following Lea Ypi's footsteps, you embark on a journey not only through her personal narrative but also through a crucial chapter in Albanian history, fostering a deeper appreciation for the enduring themes of freedom, identity, and societal transformation.

6. "Cendres Ardentes: Following Marc Voltenauer (2023)

The novel 'Cendres Ardentes' explores the events between Switzerland and Albania from the 20th century to the present day. It belongs to the crime thriller genre and incorporates elements of Albanian tradition, including the concept of canon and vengeance. The author's original concept for the book was altered after his visit to Albania. "I met people there and my story changed completely," the author tells the Swiss media.

This exploration delves into the intriguing world of Marc Voltenauer's novel "Cendres Ardentes". Voltenauer, a Swiss author known for his crime thrillers, draws inspiration from his personal experiences and in-depth research to craft compelling narratives. This itinerary follows a two-day route inspired by the novel, weaving through historical sites and captivating landscapes in northern Albania.

Voltenauer's Inspiration:

Born in 1973 in Geneva, Voltenauer embarked on a career in banking and pharmaceuticals before pursuing his passion for writing. His first novel, "Le Dragon du Muveran," garnered recognition, followed by the award-winning "Qui a tué Heidi." "Cendres Ardentes" reflects his evolving style, incorporating elements of the crime thriller genre while weaving in Albanian traditions like the concept of canon and vengeance. Notably, the author explains how his initial vision for the book significantly shifted after a transformative visit to Albania, highlighting the enriching power of firsthand experience.

Thematic Focus:

The novel delves into the historical and cultural dynamics between Switzerland and Albania, spanning the 20th century to the present day. The narrative unfolds primarily within the northern Albanian region of Bjeshkët e Namuna, encompassing parts of Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo. Voltenauer explores the strong connection Albanians residing outside their homeland maintain with their language, customs, traditions, and values, particularly those rooted in this specific region. Additionally, the book sheds light on the societal traits prevalent during the communist period in Albania,

examining its impact on the events depicted in the story.
<https://www.bepolar.fr/Cendres-ardentes-Marc-Voltenauer>

Itinerary:

Day 1:

- **Shkodër:** The journey commences in Shkodër, a historical city in northwestern Albania. This vibrant center provides a glimpse into the country's rich past and cultural tapestry.
- **Spaç:** Next, the route leads to Spaç, a central Albanian town with a significant historical legacy. During the communist regime, Spaç housed one of the most notorious prisons, a grim symbol of political oppression and inhumane treatment of prisoners. Today, the prison serves as a museum, offering visitors a chance to learn about this poignant chapter in Albanian history.

Day 2:

- **Bajram Curri:** From Spaç, the travel continues northward to Bajram Curri, a town nestled within the Bjeshkët e Namuna mountains. This region, renowned for its breathtaking scenery and rich cultural heritage, is central to the narrative of "Cendres Ardentes."
- **Delve into the Heart of Valbona National Park & Çerem Village:** The itinerary takes a captivating turn as it leads you deep into Valbona National Park, a paradise for nature and outdoor enthusiasts. Lush landscapes surround the charming village of Çerem, your final destination on this route. Here, you can find a tranquil escape amidst the park's breathtaking beauty.

Exploring Çerem: Çerem, situated at an elevation of 1,150 meters, presents a unique experience for visitors seeking adventure and natural beauty. Nestled within a glacial valley, the village offers access to diverse hiking trails leading to waterfalls, lakes, and other captivating natural wonders.

Challenging Hikes: For those seeking a thrilling adventure, the route via the Qafa e Presllopit pass (2,050 meters) presents a challenging

and rewarding experience. This path traverses rugged terrain near Maja e Kollatës and offers breathtaking panoramic views of the Albanian Alps.

Scenic Routes: Alternatively, the trail across the slopes of Maja e Gjarprit provides a scenic alternative for those seeking a less strenuous, yet equally picturesque journey. This route offers stunning vistas as you ascend towards the peaks of Kunjin e Armëve and Gjarprin e Çeremit.

Discovering Çerem's Charm: Upon reaching Çerem, be captivated by its unique charm. This village, nestled within the Valbona National Park, is part of the renowned "Balkan Peaks" cross-border trail. Explore the village, observe the interplay of the river carving its path through the surrounding geological formations, and witness the vibrant local culture.

Immersion in Nature: Beyond the village, a vast array of hiking opportunities awaits adventurous individuals. Explore diverse landscapes encompassing the Markofçe, Trokuz, and Dobërdol mountains, culminating in the ascent to the peak of Sylbicë.

A Unforgettable Experience: This journey, inspired by Marc Voltenauer's "Cendres Ardentes," promises an unforgettable experience for travelers seeking to explore the historical sites, cultural richness, and breathtaking landscapes of northern Albania. Whether you seek challenging hikes, captivating scenery, or immersion in local culture, Çerem offers a unique perspective on the region's allure.

Optional:

Valbona - Lugu i Presllopit trail: This trail offers panoramic views of the Alps, including Jezerca (2694 m), Kollata (2556 m), Maja e Hekurave (2560 m), and other peaks.

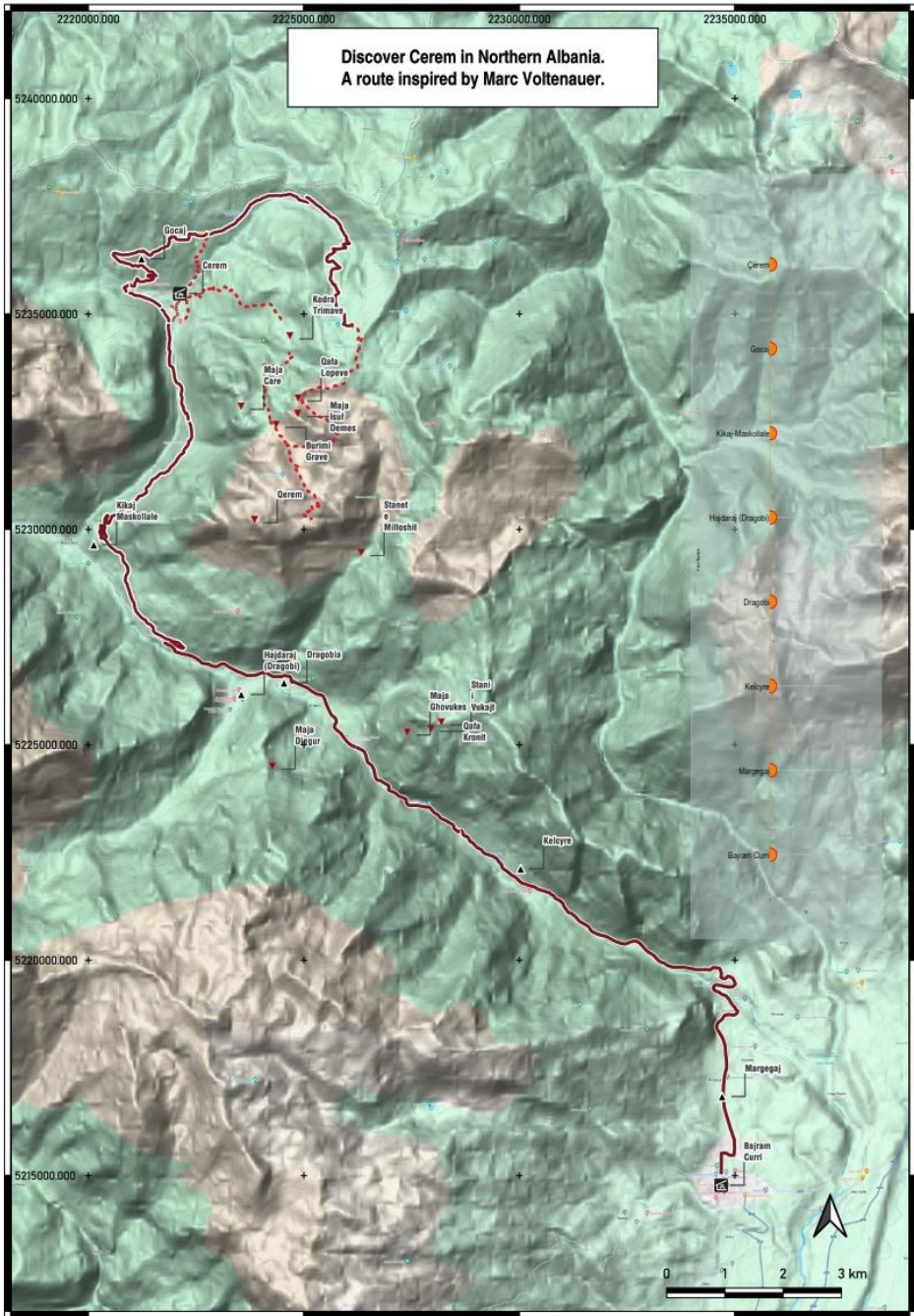


Picture 11: Buni Glacial lake in Jezerce

The Plateau Trail: This trail is named after Marc Voltenauer and offers views of the Bjeshkët e Namuna mountains.



Picture 12: Views of Maja e Jezercës



Map 6: Exploring Cërem: An Itinerary Inspired by Marc Voltner