

## TOURIST'S POTENTIAL AND SOME PROBLEMS REGARDING ITS REVALUATION IN TRASCĂU DEPRESSION

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**Abstract:** The studied area is located in the central north part of Trascău Mountain on a surface of 100 km<sup>2</sup>. The attraction of this area reflects the diversity of the landscape, by the assemblies of accommodation and the fact that the natives keep very old traditions, more than 1,000 years old. The natural setting offers plenty of leisure, because the region is full of caves and peaks. The most important are: Valisoara pass, the plate Bedeleu, Piatra Secuiului. It can also be an area of practicing trekking, mountaineering and paragliding. The anthropic objectives are also very rich, such as the ethnographic museum of Rimetea, the ruins of the medieval castle Coltesti, the cemetery of Rimetea, unique in Romania for the grave dug in the rock, traditional houses. Because of these Rimetea is already included in the cultural heritage of the world.

**Key words:** Depression Trascau, karst, tourism, Rimetea, guesthouses

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### INTRODUCTION

Trascăului Mountains are situated in the south-east part of Apuseni Mountains, prevailing Mureșului Valley downstream in junction with Aries River. It stretches on 75 km from the north Aries to Ampoiului Valley, along the valley and Muresului Passage almost perfectly.

The northern limit is separated from the contact depressions Iara and Hășdate. The eastern limit is represented by Culoarul Mureșului and Măhăceni Plateau. The southern limit may be considered the Ampoi Valley.

In the west, Trascău Mountains comes directly or indirectly into contact to Metaliferi Mountains, and in the north from Arieș with Muntele Mare-Gilău (figure 1). Between these limits, Trascău Mountains stretch along 1,200 km<sup>2</sup>.

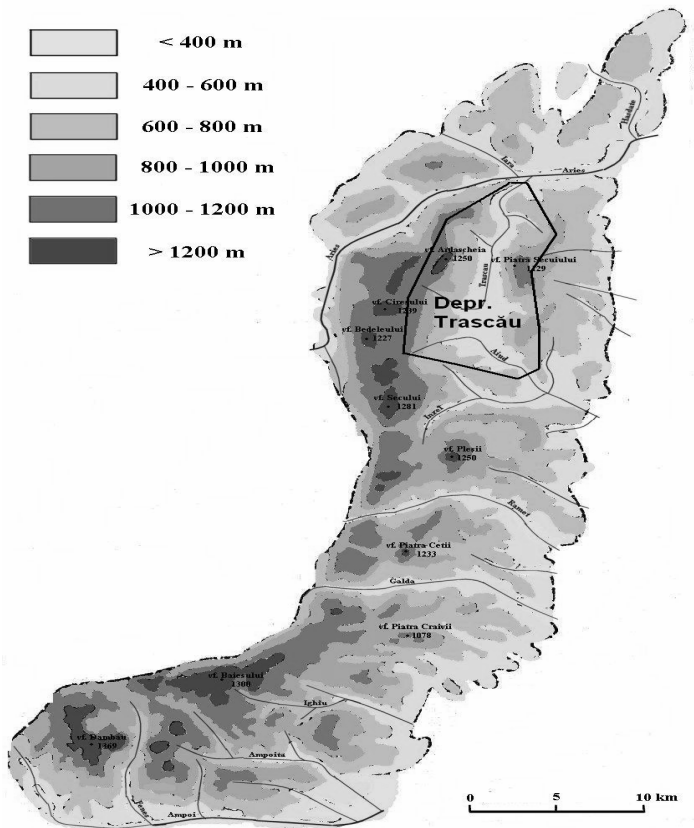
In this article I've chosen as study area Trascău Depression and its surroundings, having about 100 km<sup>2</sup>. Trascău Depression is situated in the central-north part of Trascăului Mountains (figure 2), which is bordering the Bedeleu massif in the west part, it is closed by Vălișoara passes (gorge) on the south and in the east it's dominated by Colții Trascăului with Piatra Secuiului peak 1,129 m.

In the north, to Aries Valley the depression closes gradually; here we can find a small field of passes. The average altitude of the depression is of 550 m. The complexity and diversity of the region attract many tourists, though accommodations were set up only in the last decade.

Together with the picturesque natural frame there is also a rich potential of historic, religious, cultural and ethnographic resources which make it very valuable and appreciated by foreign tourists.



**Figure 1.** The position of Trascăului Mountains in Apuseni Mountains  
(Source: Mîndruț, 2000, adapted)



**Figure 2.** The position of Trascău depression in Trascău Mountains  
(Source: Măhăra, Popescu-Argeșel, 1993, adapted)

## METODOLOGY OF WORK

In this article I've studied some of the tourist's natural and anthropic resources, its tourist's substructure and the factors which lead to the development of the tourism in this area. The tourist's attractions are caused by their landscape complexity and diversity. On the other hand I've analyzed the statistic dates about the increase of number of accommodation conditions in the last twenty years in Rimetea (Hun: Torockó) village and surroundings.

## TOURIST'S POTENTIAL OF THE NATURAL FRAME BASED ON THE KARSTIC RELIEF

No doubt, an important role in defining the features of the natural frame of the region is the karstic relief with specific forms, which express their strong personality. Moreover, integrating this type of relief in a developed morphology on other rocks (effusive, metamorphic and sedimentary) is made in a harmonic way (Măhăra, Popescu-Argeșel, 1993).

The relief represents a very important touristic factor of attraction in Trascău Depression. In this case we have peaks, ridges and slopes, passes, gorges, straits and other karstic forms: caves and dolines.

*The steep slopes and calcareous ridges* situated next to the depression offer the region a valuable "alpine air" given the fact that its highest peaks are Ardașcheia (Hun.: Ordaskő) 1,250 m in the west and Piatra Secuiului (Hun.: Székelykő) 1,129 m in the east.

The imposing steep slope of Piatra Secuiului, which dominates with 600 m the depression, impresses with the white calcareous rocks, lacking woods, having cracks, cave openings, arcades, detritus and imposing walls (figure 4). Because of the inclination and its many verticals, the mountain is hard to be penetrated; we can climb it through some well established tourist's marks. A beautiful landscape opens from the plateau situated in its upper part: north-west from Arieș Valley, south-east from Mureș Valley, on the west the landscape is like a deep basin with deep rocky walls. If we go further to west, we can rest our look on wooded slopes Bufnița, with the drifts of the former mines of iron. On the left we can see the laced ridges of Ardașcheia. Furthermore, on the south there is the place of Colțesti (Hun: Torockószentgyörgy). The basin closes by rocky gates, where Vălișoara pass begins (Varga, et al, 2000).

The shorter part, situated in the north of Râpă is called Colții Trascăului, where the fortress of the Szekler was situated in the Middle Ages; this is one of the fewest fortresses which resisted the Tartar's attacks. Because of this deep peak, the sun rises twice for those people who live in the north part of Rimetea. This phenomenon starts producing from May until the beginning of September; after the sun rises, it covers the mountain and appears again near Râpă, when it seems like rising once again after 2-3 hours (Varga, et al, 2000).

The peaks of Piatra Secuiului and Cheile Vălișoara allowed the development of a tourism based on sports such as mountaineering or paragliding (the last one is a relatively new sport, which appeared at the beginning of the '90s).

Seeing as a whole the landscape of Trascău Mountains evidences the big number and variety of gorges and defiles. On the Trascău depression and near its vicinity you can find some gorges too. These make me appreciate differently the problem because they are very important if you get their touristic value and present the main character of the terrain.

*The Siloșului (Hun: Szilas) gorges* lay on the center basin of the river with the same name. This has also 300 m length. Because of their short length the Siloșului gorges have a limited touristic potential, but we can recommend it as a good relaxing place.

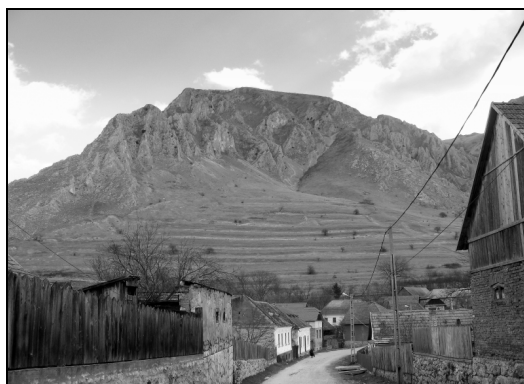
In the same limestone crag, where the Siloșului gorges are, you can also find the *Gorges of Plaiului valley* (named as the Pietrelor valley). But the difference between these is that they are longer, having more than 1.2 km and its gorges profile appears less classical. The gorges are situated in the middle basin and partly superior of Plaiului valley. This stream flows across the settlement Izvoarele to flow in Aiudului valley in the south part of Trascăului depression. You can also watch and admire from the distances the road Buru – Aiud, which give you a perspective to

the core of the limestone crag. We can perceive their beauty just looking closer, with other words climbing the path on the left side (Popescu-Argeşel, 1977).

The *Vălişoara* (Hun: *Kőközi*) gorges, named also Aiudului gorges or Poienii is the most spectacular part being a gate from south in Trascău basin and because of its size. They are orientated at north-west – south-east being more than 1 km long. Their touristic characters are very remarkable (see figure 3). The right part of the gorge, formed by Bogza Peak, describes a winding line, with a big saddle in the middle part. The two extremities, the rocky verticals give difficult passages to mountainers; in some parts the differences of height being more than 150 m. The gorge had been a natural gate for people from this region against Tartar and Turkish. The acces in the gorge is facilitated by the road Aiud- Buru (nowadays being in a bad condition) which cross it from one point to another.



**Figure 3.** Vălişoara pass (gorges)  
(photo: Bántó Norbert)



**Figure 4.** Piatra Secuiului massif  
(photo: Bántó Norbert)

Most of the caves are just simple (cavities) underground hollows by 10 m (some under 20 m), without ways in. At the *Piatra Secuiului* there had been found out, in superior part of percipe a number of 10 caves out of which only 3 go beyond 15 m. The most known and visible from the basin is Caluc cave with two entries. The tradition relates about the story of Aiud College's students, who found refuge here during the revolution of freedom 1704-1711.

The caves of *Vălişoara* gorges are connected with the isolated limestone massives which appear in the south part of Trascaului basin each side of Aiudului valley (Data, Bogza, Piatra Velii, Pleasa, Cornilor, Rachis) namely in Valisoara gorges and nearby.

Here had been found a number of 27 caves (for example *Preuşa cave*, *Piatra Lacului's cave* etc). The entry of some of them can be seen from the road which is parallel with the valley. Most of the caves are shorter, the longest being of 134 m (Cocean, 2000).

### **Tourist's potential of the anthropic frame**

Aside from the natural touristic targets, the anthropical purposes (those created by man) have a very important role in the rise of the touristic potential. The rate of attraction of the anthropical objectives is given by the following acquirements: the antiquity of the object, its unique, its dimension and function.

One of the most important historical building is the ruin of the medieval Colţeşti fortress (castle) named also Trascău fortress or St. Ilona fortress, which was mentioned in documents since 1289 (figure 5). The fortress is situated on a peak on the west from Colţeşti and it can be reached by a cart road with the help of tourist marks.

Between the religious buildings we notice the churches of Rimetea and Colţeşti villages. The Unitarian church of Rimetea was built in the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, its tower being built in 1670 and its ship in 1796. There are three churches in the village of Colţeşti (Unitarian, Calvinist and Catholic). These

were built at the beginning and the middle of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century. There is a little Franciscan monastery near the Catholic Church. There was built an Orthodox monastery at the end of the '90s in the north part of the depression between locations Rimetea and Buru (Varga, et al, 2000).

Here we have to remark the cemetery of Rimetea, which attracts our attention for its architectural valence of graves which are unique in Romania. There are graves buried in the relatively mild rock on the west side of the village, all of them being orientated to east namely to Piatra Secuiului. These graves are familiar and hereditary from generation to generation. Because of the decrease of the number of population it isn't necessary to dig other graves (Varga, et al, 2000).

The Rimetea Ethnography Museum is the most valuable cultural purpose to visit in the Trascău depression, being rich in show-pieces and highly appreciated by tourists. The interesting past of Rimetea determined many historians and ethnographers to make various studies at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of their activity there have been made a lot of valuable scientific articles. All these made the inhabitants appreciate even more the old objectives of some handicrafts. The idea to collect these valuable objects and gather them into a museum came up in the '50s. The museum opened its gates in the building of the city hall in 1954, where the exhibition took place in 5 separate rooms. Nowadays, there are more than 11,000 exhibited pieces (Varga, et al, 2000).

Tools that were used in the mining, foundries and in processing the iron are exposed in the first room. Here can be noticed a traffic warning signal which says that the traffic should be on the left side of the road. In the next room there are presented tools from ironing and tools used for domesticated purposes. In the third room we can see objects from the crockery, tools for processing iron.

In the fourth room we can see decorations from the houses: painted furniture, decorative objects (figure 6). In the last room we can admire the most valuable objects of the museum, representing pieces of the local port, all placed in show-cases, fixed up according sex and age.



**Figure 5.** Trascău medieval fortress ruins  
(photo: Bántó Norbert)



**Figure 6.** Ethnographical Museum of Rimetea  
(photo: Bántó Norbert)

The native house of the last Transylvanian encyclopedic Brassai Sámuel (1797-1897) can be found in the village of Colțești. The other famous man of the village is Gergely János, a renamed botanist and researcher in the Botanical Garden of Cluj-Napoca, who, in his PhD thesis, described the flora of the Trascău area. Other valuable elements are the houses of Rimetea. They have a specific architecture with a Szekler and German influence. These influences can be noticed in the architecture of the basement and the roof of the houses. Due to their apart traditional Hungarian style these houses were included in the international inheritance of Rimetea and won the title of „Europa nostra” in 1999. Other objectives can be also observed such as: water-mill, blacksmith, the dumped iron mines.

### THE ACCODOMATION

In the Trascău depression the tourism began in the '50s, initially only in a hayloft, camping variant, then in an organized form after the '89 changes. The Trascău depression, but mainly Rimetea (Hun.: Torockó) is visited by a great many people and the tourists' number increases continuously. Over 75% of the tourists are foreigner, and 80% of them come from Hungary, but you can meet here people from Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Poland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and even groups from Japan.

**Table 1.** Classified guesthouses in Rimetea

(Source: [www.erdelyiturizmus.hu](http://www.erdelyiturizmus.hu), [www.welcometoromania.ro](http://www.welcometoromania.ro), [www.szekelyfoldiinfo.ro](http://www.szekelyfoldiinfo.ro), [www.antrec.ro](http://www.antrec.ro))

No	Name of the guesthouse	Cat.	No. of rooms	No. of places	Address	Prices for 2010 (euro/pers/day) for accommodation and half board supply
1.	Anna	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 198	8,5
2.	Abélia	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 4	8
3.	Ági	2	5	13	Rimetea no. 186	9,5
4.	Ágota	2	9	18	Rimetea no. 278	7 (16 with half board supply)
5.	Andrea	2	3	9	Rimetea no. 128	8
6.	Aranyos	2	3	10	Rimetea no. 285	8,5
7.	Babi	2	4	10	Rimetea no. 138	8,5
8.	Béla	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 273	7,5 (17 with half board supply)
9.	Bitai	2	6	20	Rimetea no. 1	17 (with half board supply)
10.	Borbély	2	2	5	Rimetea no. 67	6
11.	Botár	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 130	8
12.	Both István	2	2	7	Rimetea no. 277	7,5 (18,5 with half board supply)
13.	Brassai	2	8	45	Rimetea no. 272	6,5 (12 with half board supply)
14.	Dalma	2	2	5	Rimetea no. 144	8 (18 with half board supply)
15.	Deák T. Zsuzsa	2	3	9	Rimetea no. 280	23 with half board supply
16.	Dr. Demeter Béla	3	8	20	Rimetea no. 55	16-18 with half board supply)
17.	Duló Annamária	2	3	8	Rimetea no. 63	7 (16 with half board supply))
18.	Dulló Enikő Sára	2	2	7	Rimetea no. 212	between 7 and 8
19.	Elza	2	3	9	Rimetea no. 308	7 (15,5 with half board supply)
20.	Faluvégi	2	5	15	Rimetea no. 173	7,5 (17 with half board supply)
21.	Floarea de colt	2	17	36	Rimetea no. 175/A	8-10 (16 with half board supply)
22.	Hainal	2	2	5	Rimetea no. 82	8 (17 with half board supply)
23.	Klára	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 62	6
24.	Kelemen Irén	2	3	8	Rimetea no. 233	8 (17 with half board supply)
25.	Móricz János	2	4	9	Rimetea no. 140	9
26.	Móricz Piroska	2	8	16	Rimetea no. 155	9,5
27.	Muskátli Toma Mária	2	7	15	Rimetea no. 299	11
28.	Pálincás	2	3	10	Rimetea no. 169	8,5 (18 with half board supply)
29.	Panoráma	2	7	16	Rimetea no. 74	20 with half board supply
30.	Petri	1	2	4	Rimetea no. 58	7
31.	Rita	2	4	10	Rimetea no. 172	8 (18 with half board supply)
32.	Rózsa - Móricz Ilona	2	4	10	Rimetea no. 301	7,5 (18,5 with half board supply)
33.	Sára	2	3	8	Rimetea no. 90	6
34.	Sárika	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 125	7,5 (17 with half board supply)
35.	Simándi Anci	2	2	5	Rimetea no. 109	9,5
36.	Simon Melinda	2	3	6	Rimetea no. 260	7
37.	Somodi	2	2	4	Rimetea no. 64	6
38.	Szabó Gizella	2	3	8	Rimetea no. 2	10
39.	Szizlakert	2	8	24	Rimetea no. 241	8 (16 with half board supply)
40.	Tamás Elvira	2	2	5	Rimetea no. 116	9,5
41.	Torockó	2	21	53	Rimetea no. 157/A	17-19 with half board supply
42.	Tündérlak	2	2	6	Rimetea no. 195	7 (14 with half board supply)
43.	Zabos	2	2	4	Rimetea no. 190	13
44.	Conacul Secuiesc (Coltesti)	4	23	52	Coltesti no. 10	21,5 (31 with half board supply)
45.	Vernes L	1	2	4	Rimetea no. 234	6
46.	Vaida A	2	2	4	Rimetea no. 48	8
47.	Kiss	2	4	8	Rimetea no. 84	8
48.	Kelemen A	2	5	11	Rimetea no. 186	8
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>225</b>	<b>587</b>		

There is no clear evidence on the total number of tourists, the increasing number of them can be deduced from the number of tickets sold. An increasingly bigger number of tourists visited

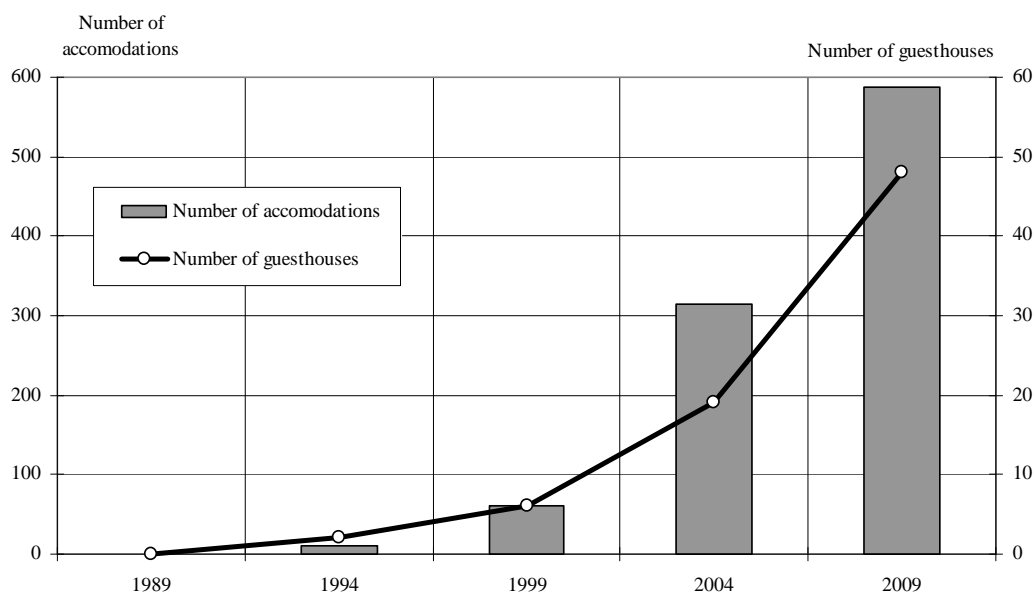
the commune lying at the foot of a big rock/mountain, named Piatra Secuiului (Hun.:Székelykő), in the latter years. This can be seen mainly from the numbers of visitors of the Ethnographic Museum. For example, during 2008 there were over 14,000 visitors ([www.kronika.ro](http://www.kronika.ro)).

In the last ten years not only the numbers of tourists have increased but the number of the accommodations, too. More and more private houses are being transformed in guesthouses currently. In Rimetea more than 90% of the pensions have two marguerites. Their numbers have been constantly increasing. In 1999 only 6 guesthouses were officially registered, with 60 accommodations. By 2009 we could find 48 officially registered guesthouses only in Rimetea where 587 people can sleep (figure 7, tabel 1). At the bathroomed private houses it is possible to claim accommodation with half board supply. Most rooms are furnished with 2 or 3 beds but there are places with a bigger capacity.

Prices for 2010 are established depending on the comfort category which includes accommodation and half board supply with the price between 12-31 Euro/day/person. The prices are very favourable, mainly for the foreigners.

The tourists' big number is shown also by the fact that in lots of places you need a preliminary reservation for accommodation (by phone or internet).

Two bigger guesthouses were built in the north of Rimetea in the latter years which receive guests mostly in summer months, with full board, and they prefer the one week's holiday claims. There is the possibility to accommodate and to camp 40 respectively 50 people. In 2008 Conacul Secuiesc was opened with the highest comfort category (4 marguerites) with the capacity of 52 places. Although this unit cannot be found in Rimetea, as it was expected to be, it is situated in Coltest village, at only 3 km distance from Rimetea. From all the above mentioned guesthouses 18 are part of the ANTREC (National Association of rural, ecological and cultural tourism).



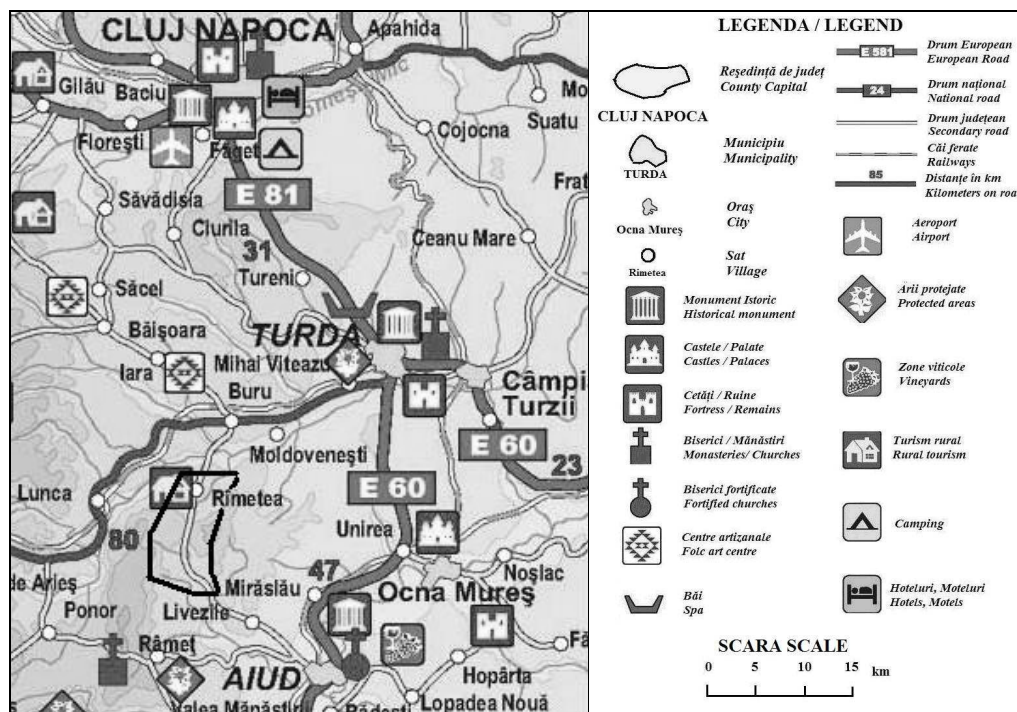
**Figure 7.** The increase of guesthouses and accommodation in Rimetea between 1989-2009

This can be found in the Vălișoara pass, only a few metres from the road. This camping can accommodate 2 persons in each wooden cottage which were innovated between 2002 - 2004. After the reconstruction works, the cottages were provided with electricity and water. In the neighbourhood there has been built a new and modern football pitch. You can find here a bar and a restaurant but it is open only during the summer time, from April until October.



### THE TRAFIC NETWORK. ACCESSIBILITY

The Trascău depression and its neighbourhood is relatively easily accessible due to the county alley asphalted road crossing by. So we can approach it from more directions, the routes being the following: Cluj-Napoca– Turda road E60, E81, DN1 – Buru road DN 75, from the north, Târgu Mureş – Turda road E60, DN15 – Buru , road DN75 from the east, Alba Iulia – Aiud road E81, DN1 – Poiana Aiudului road DJ 107M from the south and Oradea – Ştei road E79 – Câmpeni – Buru road DN75 from the west.



**Figure 8.** The main traffic network and touristical resources in the east part of Apuseni Mountains  
(Source: [www.harta-turistica.ro](http://www.harta-turistica.ro))

The nearest railway station is in Aiud where we can get easily from the different parts of Transylvania, because this town lies on the main line No. 300. A bus service sets off from here twice a day (every day), three times on Thursdays.

The Trascău depression is connected to the other parts and spectacles of the mountain by marked tourist routes. We can mention the gorge of Turda – Rimetea – the rocky pass of Râmeți, Rimetea – Piatra Secuiului – Colțești, Colțești – Vidolm, Colțești – the karstplaine of Bedeleu - the cave from Sălciua or the pass of Vălișoara – Bedeleu - the Poarta Zmeilor cave – Sălciua routes.

### CONCLUSION

The Trascău depression and its surroundings are very attractive with their wonderful scenic spots, being natural or created by man. The centre of the depression and the most visited place is Rimetea. This settlement became one of the most important centres of the Transylvanean rural tourism due to those more thousand years old traditions which are alive and respected very much by the villagers. This place offers various ways of recreation and a lot of interesting things for each generation. The Unitarian Church in the centre of Rimetea and the ruins from Colțești are very popular to visit. You can also admire the traditional costume, the painted furniture, the utensils and



the local specific embroideries in the museum and at your hosts. Its architectural style and its inner rural decorations reflect the needlework of the houses and the cultural heritage of this village.

Tourists come here not only for the cultural and historical values they can find but also for the wonderful landscape which is an ideal place for mountain climbing, touring, different trips, camping and paragliding.

The first accommodations appeared at the beginning and in the middle of the 90's, but we noticed a massive raising of the accommodation capacity between 1999-2009, due to the „Europa nostra” award. The number of the tourists grew faster. Over 3/4 of the tourists are foreign and more than 80% of them are coming from Hungary. The only weak point of the region is the access road DJ 107 M which is very bad.

Finally, we can say that this area should be taken as an example for the other Transylvanian settlements, as owing to the tourism here several families' material problems have been resolved. This is a normal consequence of the process, because the increasing numbers of tourists influence not only the income of the guesthouses but also the state budget.

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