

2011 Albania Trip Narrative

I began the 2011 trip with Marash and I guiding three clients into Central Albania, near Mt. Korab, the highest mountain in the country. We did day hikes to some beautiful alpine lakes; one 11 hour trek along some pretty sketchy sheep tracks; and passed through mining country, including a tour of one of the former political prisoner camps where many Albanians were worked to death during Communist times.



Then it was back to Shkreli Komuna (American equivalent is a county), where I met with School Directors where we reaffirmed our priorities, 1) English Program; 2) Library Books; 3) Kindergartens; 4) Scholarships; 5) Repairs.

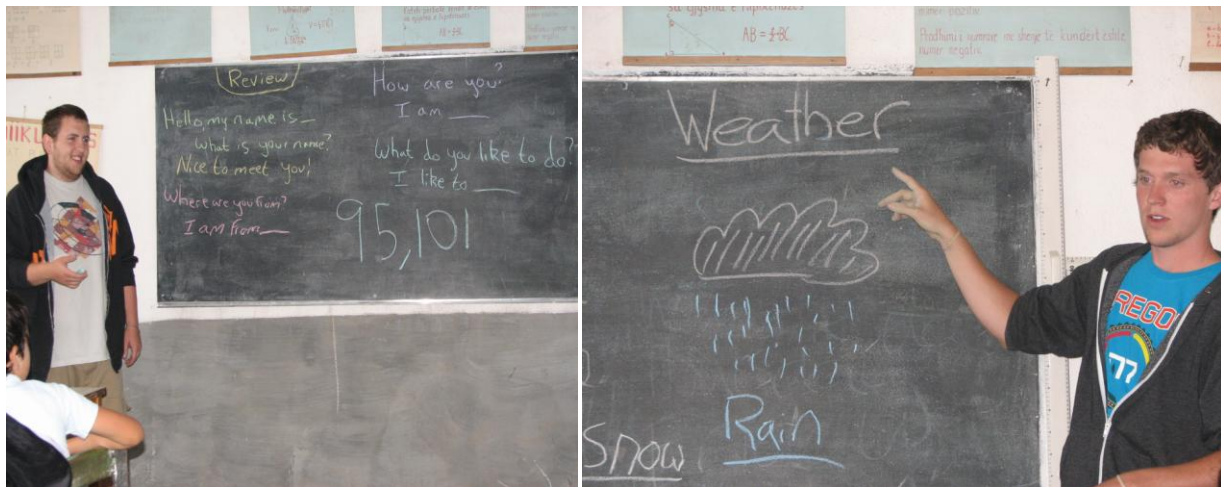
This year we had three Oregon State University students come to teach conversational English.

Charlotte Roehm spent two weeks in Boga, living with Dafina Rakaj's and Regjina Rakaj's families. She had a great time and connected with the girls in the village really well.



Charlotte with cousins Emiliana Gegaj and Elona Gegaj,

Jake Elliot and Eric Saylore went to Vrithi and stayed Violeta Milaj who is the mother of one of AAI's scholarship recipients. They stayed for nearly a month, and performed very well in the classroom, and had fun trading English lessons with Albanian lessons with their host family.



Jake and Erik teaching class.

In a ceremony at Boga school, I was presented a "Certificate of Appreciation" from the Komuna for my many years of service to the people and students of the area. It was nice to see my friends and students all in one place. We concluded the night with a sit down dinner for seventeen.

I personally repaired the gate at Boga school—it seems to be broken every year. And then I made arrangements with a fabricator to build three swing sets and three teeter-totters that will go to Boga, Xhaj, and Vrithi schools. Apparently some “Austrians” (all I could find out) are working on the Zagora school, so I’ll wait to see what they do before spending money there.

I met with most of our scholarship students, and received scholarship applications from many students for the 2011-2012 school year. We’ll decide in September how many we can fund this year.

All in all, a pleasant and rewarding trip. I love the people and their mountain environment.

Steve Cook, President