Monday, September 21st

Woke up at 7:30 this morning … a good night’s rest. No dogs or roosters anywhere in the vicinity. Laurentiu was already up and about. We cleaned up (no shower for me) and made ready for breakfast.

*... The noclegis prices are quite reasonable ... averaging 35-40 zlotys per night per person ... that’s roughly $12-$15 USD a night (based on 2009 exchange rates.) Where the real money is made is on breakfasts ... running an average of 16 zlotys ($5+ USD.) Considering that not everyone wants to drag a picnic basket around, the cost and the convenience was excellent.

... We arranged to have breakfast ready at 8 AM ... and it was.

This is a typical breakfast in a Polish home ... breads, sausages, ham, jam, tea, fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes (in season) ... and an omelet (not shown in photo.) How quaint … tea is served in glasses as opposed to cups ... I suppose because it is cheaper to replace a water glass than a teacup. Regardless, the meal was filling ... nothing was left ... we ate everything.

*... Tomasz has a commendable trait ... he is a hearty eater. My height but slimmer ... his prodigious appetite is to be admired. During my visitation I marvelous at the amount of sustenance he could put away. Yet ... according to Danka ... when he is working on the farm or in the town’s administrative offices ... his appetite diminishes; often missing meals. I suppose, to fatten him, I should travel to see him more often.

After the meal, Tomasz announces that we will be leaving shortly to visit another attraction. Having a few moments to myself, I stroll the nearby area to get a feel for mountainous living.

The call went out from Tomasz … we are leaving for our next attraction. It dawned on me at that time that we are in the middle of a National Park - Karkonosze – but I knew nothing about it. Upon my return, I researched this part of Poland and here are the facts (wish I knew them at the time of my visit, as it would have made my awareness of history appropriate to the site visited):

The mountain range called Karkonosze in Polish (Czech: Krkonoše, German: Riesengebirge, English: Giant Mountains) lies on the border of the Czech Republic and Poland, between Bohemia and Silesia. It is part of the larger Sudetes range. Its highest peak is Sněžka (Polish Śnieżka, German Schneekoppe), which stands on the border between the two countries at a height of 1,602 meters (5,260 ft) above sea level, making it the highest peak in the Czech Republic and in the entire Sudetes range. They contain the source of the Elbe River. Large areas of the mountains are preserved as national parks by both countries: the Czech Krkonoše National Park, and the Polish Karkonosze National Park. In 1992 the Czech and Polish parts of the range were jointly designated a trans-boundary biosphere reserve under UNESCO's "Man and the Biosphere" program.

The Czech Krkonoše National Park (Krkonošský národní park, KRNAP) was created in 1963 as the second national park in Czechoslovakia, making it the oldest national park in the Czech Republic. Its area is approximately 370 sq km (140 sq mi), including not only the subalpine zone but also large parts down to the foot of the mountains. Poland’s Karkonosze National Park (Karkonoski Park Narodowy, KPN) was created in 1959 and covers an area of 55.8 sq km (21.5 sq mi). It covers the highly sensitive higher parts of the mountain range from an altitude of about 900 – 1000m. The strict conservation regulations of the Polish national park prohibit reforestation of damaged and dead forests. On the Czech side, however, large-scale reforestation projects are common.

Until the Middle Ages, the mountain range and its foothills were an unpopulated place of deep, impenetrable forests. The first traces of
human settlements probably appear near two provincial paths between Bohemia and Silesia in the 12th century. The first wave of colonization by Slavonic settlers goes back to the 13th century, but only includes the foothills, whereas the ridges of the mountain range were still unaffected. The second wave of colonization (Ostsidlung) during the late 13th century to the foothills was carried out mostly by German settlers, which first colonized the Silesian northern part, where farming conditions were better, and later the southern Bohemian part along the Elbe and Upa Rivers. Many agriculture settlements, market, and handicraft communities and cities were founded during this time, which formed a base for the further colonization of the mountain range.

The first people who explored the inner parts of the Giant Mountains were treasure hunters and miners looking for gold, silver, ores and valuable stones, mainly on the Silesian side. In the 14th and 15th centuries, foreigners who spoke a different language than German came to the mountains. These foreigners were called "Wallen", and their journeys to the "treasure" deposits were recorded in so called "Wallenbüchern" (Wallen books). Mysterious orientation signs from these "Wallen" are visible to this day, especially on the northern side of the mountains. At the beginning of the 16th century (1511) German miners from the region around Meissen in Saxony started their work in Obri Dul directly below mount Śnieżka, and at the same time many other mines were opened in other central parts of the mountains.

By the orders of Christopher von Gendorf widespread timber cutting for the silver mines started in many places, which caused irreparable damages. These orders led to the third wave of colonization, which fully affected the mountain ridges. In 1566, he invited lumberjacks from alpine countries to settle in his domain. These people from Tyrol, Carinthia, and Styria changed the character of the mountains and shaped the cultural landscape significantly. Hundreds of families especially from Tyrol created another group of inhabitants that spoke a different German dialect and brought another domestic culture to the Giant Mountains. On the mountain hillsides, they founded new settlements, laid down the basis for later farming by breeding cattle, and built wooden dams to retain the water. The entire mountain range was already in the 17th century a densely populated region with meadow enclaves and cottages, which were used during the cattle pasturage in the summer and sometimes even through the winter. Around this time, non-Catholics found refuge in remote places in the mountains. Later entire village communities of non-Catholics from Austrian countries found asylum on the now Prussian northern side, where they settled in Mariánský Knípek, Michalovice, Jagnickow or Karpacz (Krummhübel).

During the 17th century the mountain range on the Bohemian side was divided among new landowners, most of them of Catholic faith and foreign to the region. Disputes about the borders of each domain followed soon, which were settled between 1790 and 1810. The court decision from 1790, which set the border between the Bohemian dominions and the Silesian Schaffgotsch dominions (which owned this region since the Middle Ages), defines the border between Bohemia and Silesia to this day. In 1918, the Republic of Czechoslovakia was founded, and the coming years were characterized by an influx of Czechs on the Bohemian side of the mountains. Usually these people worked for the government (opposed to the German inhabitants they spoke both Czech and German, which was required), but some of them also worked in the tourism industry. Many of these mountain huts were previously owned by aristocratic landowners and given to the Czech Hikers Club (KCT) after the Land Control Act. This influx was stopped when the Czechoslovakian side of the mountains was occupied by Germany in 1938, and many of these Czechs left the region, or were expelled. After World War II, almost the entire German population was expelled and replaced by Poles on the northern Silesian side and by Czechs on the southern Bohemian side of the mountain range. Today the population density on the area of the national park is 2.3 lower than before World War II as the resettlement was only partly successful and many houses are only used for recreational purposes at weekends. The population exchange moreover led to a decline of the cultural landscape. In large parts of the mountains the meadows run to seed, settlements decimated, hundreds of traditional houses and mountain huts decayed or turned into architecturally worthless objects. Countless memorials, chapels, shrines, landmarks and springs were destroyed, either because they were German related or ecclesiastic.

The day promised to be warm and sunny. The air was filled with chimney smoke reeking of coal. Tomasz was full of energy (he got up very early and took a 1-hour hike to some unknown location just for the sheer pleasure of hiking.) We loaded the car with water … and took off for destination(s) unknown to me. As was typical, Tomasz plugged in his CB radio and his GPS unit … GPS – Global Positioning System: a navigation aid for drivers. I already discussed my disdain for CB radios; here is my take on GPS:

... Love them or hate them, GPS units are very popular with motorists, even in Europe. They aid in reaching your destination in the fastest time or the shortest distance. Personally, I do not want one. Perusing a paper map before starting my drive is adequate for me. The TomTom® GPS unit Tomasz had was useful, but at times unreliable as to actual route taken. We backtracked many times. It also was a distraction. Why would I say “distraction”? Well, say you are driving at 80km/hr … posted speed is 70km/hr … and you are approaching a gentle curve in the road. This GPS unit starts to emit a howling sound (similar to a chasing police car or an ambulance) to warn you of the impending curve. This constant “wailing” was an irritant and, frankly, a distraction in the event the driver was started. I personally would have found a way to disable this feature. The other thing that caused me endless recurring nighttime “sounds in my head” was the units’ turning instructions, in Polish … “skręć lewo” – “skręć prawo” … turn left, turn right. Because the roads are rarely straight we always drove a meandering route with many turns and this constant instruction in Polish got to be a standing joke between Laurentiu and myself. In nothing else, Laurentiu left Poland knowing his left from his right. I suspected that Tomasz knew his routes quite well but used the GPS as a backup, or at least to stay technically current with electronic gizmos. Still … no harm.
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OK ... where are we going this time? Again, I have no clue as we drive west of Jelenia Góra. The road climbs uphill ... the traffic light. This is hiking country ... we encounter many backpackers winding their way from the main road into the forests. I do not ask what is going on ... I am sitting in the back waiting for instructions. Finally, Tomasz pulls off the road and onto a deserted parking lot. We get out ... this is the village of Stara Kamienica. Tomasz tells me that an important German person once lived here.

Stara Kamienica (German: Alt Kennnitz) is a village in Jelenia Góra County. It lies approximately 13 km (8 mi) west of Jelenia Góra, and 106 km (66 mi) west of the regional capital Wrocław (German: Breslau). The village has a population of 1,200. Prior to 1945, it was in Germany. Name means “Old House” or “Old Tenement.”

Besides, who is that person ... I was told it was none other than Gerhart Hauptmann. ?????? to me ... still no clue who he was or his achievements.

Gerhart Johann Robert Hauptmann (b: November 15, 1862 – d: June 6, 1946), recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, 1912: a German dramatist, born on at Obersalzbrunn in Silesia, the son of a hotel-keeper.

Hauptmann wrote his own short autobiography ... a requirement from the Nobel Committee:

Autobiography ... I was born on November 15, 1862. The place of my birth is Bad Obersalzbrunn, a spa famous for its medicinal springs. The house of my birth is the inn «Zur Preussischen Krone». My father was Robert Hauptmann, my mother Marie Hauptmann, née Straehler. I am the youngest of four children. I remember growing up in an educated and lively middle-class house.

I attended the village school, learned some Latin from a tutor, and had violin lessons. Later I went to Breslau, the capital of our province, where I lived in boardinghouses and attended a Gymnasium. Fortunately, my Breslau school period did not crush me, but it left scars from which I only slowly recovered.

I should have perished if there had not been a way out. I went to the country and began to study agriculture. The tortures of school, begun in 1874, ended in 1878. However, agriculture remained an episode. Once in solitude I reamed to stand on my own feet and have my own thoughts. I grew conscious of my value, my rights, and myself. In this way, I gained independence, firmness, and a freedom of intellect that I still enjoy today.

Hungry for culture, I resumed to Breslau where I spent a second, happier period. I attended the art academy, did sculpturing, learned what youth, hope, and beauty are, the value of friends, masters, and teachers.

I drew, sculptured, drank, wrote poems, made plans, and built castles in Spain. In this mood, I exchanged the art academy of Breslau for the University of Jena in Thuringia. In this mood, I exchanged Jena for Rome, and later Rome for Berlin.

Although I still worked as a sculptor in Rome, it was here that I finally decided upon literature. A play Vor Sonnenaufgang [Before Dawn] made me publicly known in 1889.

My later works I wrote partly in Berlin, partly in Schreiberhau in the Riesengebirge, partly in Agnetendorf, partly in Italy: they are the condensation of outward and inward fortunes.

Source:

After leaving the parking lot, we amble our way to this palatial house ... now a museum ... that was once Hauptmann’s primary residence.

Of course ... being a Monday ... as is common throughout Poland ... all museums are closed. Our only option is to walk the grounds. We have to come back, if interested in an interior tour, the next day.

Reluctantly, we return to the car, backtrack through Jelenia Góra and head west again on a different road. The road is bounded by the national forest on both sides ... a small river flanking on the left. We make our way to a hamlet called Szklarska Poreba. Again, no clue as to the reason. In time, we arrive at our destination, park the car, cross the highway, and start our climb upward on a well-worn out road.

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... briefly exploring a local "rock shop."

Finally we enter the forest itself ... Karkonosze National Park ... and begin our trek to our surprise site.

The first sign we see says ... Forest ... Not a Place to Dump Your Garbage.

And so ... we begin our trek through another section of a forest ... this time downhill for a change.

... eventually reaching the lower section with a river running through ... and coming face-to-face with our destination – Wodospada Szklarki (Szklarki Waterfall) ... a diminutive fall of probably 20 to 25 feet in height. A pretty sight, no doubt ... popular with hikers ... but underwhelming. We posed for a few pictures ... savored the scenery ... and continued on downhill ... to the main road, less than 100 meters away. (We walked the long route ... I guess for the exercise.)

Leaving the waterfall, we stopped at the local stalls at this other entry and sampled some unique Polish cheese ... oscypek.
Oscypek (Polish; plural: oscypki) is a smoked cheese made exclusively in the Tatra Mountains region of Poland (as well as anywhere the Gorals - natives of the Tatra mountains - emigrate, e.g. Lithuania, Ukraine and Hungary). Oscypek is a protected trade name under the EU’s Protected Designation of Origin geographical indication.

Oscypek is made using salted sheep's milk, with the addition of cow's milk strictly regulated by the protected recipe. Unpasteurized salted sheep's milk is first turned into cottage cheese, which is then repeatedly rinsed with boiling water and squeezed. After this, the mass is pressed into wooden, spindle-shaped forms in decorative shapes. The forms are then placed in a brine-filled barrel for a night or two, after which they are placed close to the roof in a special wooden hut and cured in hot smoke for up to 14 days. The first mention of cheese production in the Tatra Mountains dates back to the 15th century, in a document from the village of Ochotnica in 1416. The first recorded recipe for oscypek was issued in 1748 in the Żywiec area.

Before Poland voted to join the European Union, some Polish Eurosceptics warned that oscypek could be banned in the EU due to its use of unpasteurized milk and its production by unlicensed farmers. This fear proved unfounded.

Returning to the FIAT our next “port of call” was to a glass-blowing artisan somewhere nearby ... Lesna Huta ... how we found the place is still a mystery ... perhaps the GPS did its magical duty.

The place looked adequate ... the fare offering appealing ... the prices very affordable. Danka ordered a mushroom soup ... the three of us zeroed in on the house specialty ... schnitzel. As the top image shows clearly, the plate itself is huge ... 16 inches by 12 inches ... the schnitzel had to be at least 10 inches in diameter.

And how did the three hungry boys do in finishing this enormous meal?

Tomasz’s plate is at left ...

Ed's plate is in the middle ...

Laurentiu’s plate is at right.

Meal was delicious by any standard ... should last us until kolacja.

I thought our touring was finished for the day but Tomasz had another plan. He re-programmed the GPS and took off ... destination unknown, but nearby. We made a number of wrong turns ... one even down a primitive logging road (he had to back the car – in reverse.) We drove down simple country roads ... no signs of any kind ... no visible landmarks. Luckily, Tomasz stopped at an impressive large building (?) and asked for location of this particular house. Getting things straightened out, we turned back and within 200 yards found what we were after ... Dom of Wlastimil Hofman. Again, I had no knowledge of this person or his claim to fame. We knocked on the closed door and a kindly man let us in ... it was a small museum-like gallery of a Polish painter of some renown.
Wlastimil Hofman (1881-1970) was a Polish painter, one of the most popular painters of the interwar and postwar years. Hofman was born Vlastim Hofmann in Prague to Ferdynand Hofmann, a Czech, and Teofila, a Polish woman. In 1889 Vlastim moved to Kraków in Poland, where he studied at St Barbara’s School and then at the Jan III Sobieski high school. In 1896, he became a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, where he studied under Jacek Malczewski. In 1899, he went to study painting at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1902, he had his first showings in an exhibition by the “Sztuka” society. Further exhibitions followed in Munich, Amsterdam, Rome, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, and Warsaw. In 1904, he painted the first of his village (or peasant) “Madonnas.” In 1905, he started the cycle of pictures called “Confession.” In 1907, he was the first Polish painter to be made a member of the Gallery of the Vienna Secession. In the period 1914-1920, he lived in Prague and Paris. Back in Kraków in 1921, he had a house and studio built in Spadzista Street. Sometime around 1922, due to the influence of Jacek Malczewski, he changed his name to the less Czech and more Polish Wlastimil Hofman.

Malczewski died in 1929. In September 1939, Hofman fled from the Nazi invasion because of his Jewish wife and during the Second World War was in the Soviet Union, Turkey, and Palestine. In 1942, he published a book of poetry called Through Darkness to Freedom. He returned to Kraków in June 1946 where he met his future (second) wife, a Polish Jew who survived the Holocaust. In May 1947, together with his wife, he moved to Szklarska Poręba (left) in the mountainous south of Poland. In the period 1953-1963, he produced religious paintings for the local church, including “Four Evangelists” “The Way of the Rosary”, “The Way of the Cross”, and “The Adoration of the Child”. He also produced many portraits of local people and self-portraits. In 1961, he was awarded the Cross of the Order of the Polish Renaissance. Wlastimil Hofman died on March 6, 1970.

We were given total freedom to photograph every painting in the museum but because we did not know of his importance at the time, captured only some images that appealed to us. Here is a sampling:

We made a donation to the caretaker … as this small museum is not part of any national system … it is self-supporting through visitations such as ours.

We managed to find our way back to the main road (thankfully) and continued on to our next site … by roads that were bewildering, meandering, and picturesque … still we managed to lose our way twice.
We are driving to the village of Karpach to see the Vang Church (learned after we got there.)

Karpacz (German: Krummhübel) is a spa town and ski resort in Jelenia Góra County. Its population is about 5,000. Karpacz is situated in the Karkonosze mountains - a resort with increasing importance for tourism as an alternative to the Alps.

Karpacz is located at 480-885 m above sea level. South of Karpacz on the border to the Czech Republic there is Mount Śnieżka-Śnieżka (1,620 m). In Karpacz Góra there is a Norwegian stave church, moved here from Vang, Norway in the mid-19th century.

Krummhübel is first mentioned in 1599 because of lead and iron mining. Since the construction of Krummhübel's first railway connection in 1895 history was connected with the development of metallurgy industries and with the progress of tourism. The village was part of Germany until 1945. Krummhübel's original German population was forcibly expelled from the village between 1945 and 1947. The town was subsequently repopulated with ethnic Poles and renamed Karpacz. In Karpacz Góra (German Brückenberg) is a gravity hill where bottles appear to roll uphill. According to legend, Krummhübel was the home to Rübezahl, a giant.

As typical, we find the parking lot, pay our fee, and start our trek to the Church. We elect to bypass seeing the town of Karpach as time is not in our favor.

Oh well … the trek is uphill and the path is uneven, rocky, but bounded by the Karkonosze forest. It takes us about 20 minutes before we sight the Church.

The Vang Church was built at the turn of the 12th century, in southern Norway, at the town of Vang situated by Lake yang - smjösi, and from there its name originates. In the 19th century, the church proved too small and a costly renovation was necessary. Thus, the decision was made to sell it. The money was needed to pay back a loan obtained for the construction of a new church.

Owing to the efforts of a Norwegian painter, professor Jan Krystian Dahl, who lived in Dresden this valuable monument of Viking architecture was acquired for 427 Marks by Frederick William IV, king of Prussia. After the documentation had been made by a royal architect, the structure was taken down and the pieces transported in boxes, by sea, to Szczecin in 1841 and from there — to the Royal Museum in Berlin. The King, however, abandoned the idea of locating the church on Peacock Island near Berlin; instead began to seek a site where a temple would provide a place of worship.

Dup to the endeavors of Countess Frederica von Reden of Bukowiec, in spring 1842, it was decided to have the tiny church moved to the Karkonosze so that it would serve the members of the Protestant Church in Karpacz and its proximity. The site for the church was a gift from Count Christian Leopold von Schaffgotsch of Cieplice. It is on a slope of Czarna Góra (885 m above sea level), midway between lower Karpacz and Mount Śnieżka. On 2 August 1842, King Frederick William IV laid a cornerstone, and two years later — on 28 July 1844, a solemn opening and consecration ceremonies took place with the participation of the king and queen, the Dutch prince Frederick and many other dignitaries.

The Vang Church was built following the best examples of the Scandinavian ecclesiastical timberwork architecture, and remains a unique example of a one-time Nordic art. The temple is made from Norwegian pine that, because of the resin it contains, has exceptional endurance.

One's attention is drawn to its exterior door frames (left) leading into the church, with their attached columns decorated with snakes and plants interwoven in intricate design. Mounted on their capitals are stylized lions, in their symbolic roles of the beasts that guard the entrance. On opening the main door, one is dazzled with an unparalleled interior portal that separates the church from its cloisters. The columns in front of the altar depicting David’s Victory over Goliath and the prophet Daniel in the pit of lions were reconstructed by a distinguished sculptor, Jakub of Janowice. His are also the cross, made from a single trunk of oak in 1844, and the figure of Christ made of linden 1846. On both sides of the altar, made in 1890 by Ryszard Zającz, are two candelabra on stands, they present a swan — a symbol of faithfulness, and a heart, a symbol of love. The candles on these Norwegian candelabra are lit only during wedding ceremonies. The font, Lower-Silesian baroque, made around 1740 comes from a church pulled down in Dziekanowice, near Walbyrzych. The pulpit was made from the wood brought from Norway. The church is encircled with cloisters that provided room for penance and, in former days, a place to leave hunters' traps. The roof gables are topped with pinnacles in the shape of gaping dragons' mouths making them look like the ornaments characteristic of the Viking long ships. The tower, made from Silesian granite, protects the small church from the strong winds blowing from the side of Śnieżka. In the churchyard are also the parish buildings put up for the needs of the local Lutheran parish (left.)

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The above images are of the interior of the Church ... the door carvings are examples of the intricate carvings mentioned.

Images of the exterior church details ...
It was another brief evening ... after showering and watching German TV ... it was lights off at 9 PM. Tomorrow morning we leave for our next (?) destination.

... In the mountains one has to bring one's own entertainment ... there is virtually nothing to do as darkness falls. No clubs, no pubs, pizza joints, amusement parlors, etc. The countryside shuts down ... sidewalks are rolled up ... and people just turn it. Anyway ... with the hectic activities of the day behind ... people are just too tired for any more fun.

**Tuesday, September 22nd ...**

My luck ran out as the next-door German shepherd next door barked most of the night; we slept with the window open. Had to resort to sleeping with my earplugs. Got up at 7:15 ... cleaned up ... and waited for breakfast being served. Must tell you, Willa Polanka’s WC closet was so small and so narrow that when one sits on the ‘porcelain princess’ one’s head hits the wall ... one must sit sideways (which is awkward) or with knees up to the chin.

Finally ... breakfast:

The image cannot do justice to the cold plate served – farmers cheese with radishes and sour cream, yellow cheese, ham, tomatoes, cucumbers, rolls and bread, fresh churned butter, jam, and endless pot of tea. Delicious !!!!

There is no ‘check-out’ from Willa Polanka ... we pack our bags, lock the room, and leave the place. First order of business today is to return to the **Gerhart Hauptmann** house in Stara Kamienica (remember, it was closed yesterday.)

After driving through Jelenia Góra we arrive at the same parking lot and head to the museum.

It was open ... we paid our entry fee (moderate) and were given free rein to wander the museum ... no big deal, as only four rooms were open to the public and the majority of displays were pictorial.

However, it was the architecture and the frescoes of the reception hall that dazzles the visitor.
Our next attraction is to visit an old iron-ore mine near Kowary ... a lesson in geology that should entertain Laurentiu.

**Kowary** (German: *Schmiedeberg im Riesengebirge*) ... in 1945, Kowary was returned to Poland. It lies approximately 14 km (9 mi) southeast of Jelenia Góra. The town had a population of ~12,000.

As we drove through Kowary, I was unimpressed by this industrial city. It appeared worn out ... apartment buildings along our driven road were either decaying or ready to fall down. Maintenance was an unknown notion ... the atmosphere was depressing, oppressive, and melancholy. Virtually all single-family homes were even in worse condition ... bricks exposed because the concrete 'plaster' was peeling off in sheets. Poverty seemed to be the most apt description for this hovel of a town. Must be a remnant of the mining days long gone. Pity !!!!!

We arrive at the mine ... park almost 1km downhill (8zl) ... and walk uphill to the mine. We have a reservation for a scheduled guided tour. After purchasing the tickets (19 zl each + 3 zl for photos) ... we park our butts and wait 45 minutes. There is a spa facility next door but it seems deserted ... perhaps it is past the tourist season. National forest surrounds the mine ... picturesque. More tourist arrive ... mainly Germans.

From the Kowary mine brochure (translated here):

**SINCE THE WALLENS’ TIMES** ... The natural resources of the west Sudety Mountains were identified in the early Middle Ages when precious ores diggers called the Wallens came to the Silesia region. The Wallens had the extraordinary abilities to steal the secrets from the earth. They made a living looking for ores and minerals and processing what they had found. In the exploration they used geological as well as the occult and magic knowledge acquired from their ancestors. Traces of their activity are still left. Many caves with strange signs engraved on the walls are probably indicators of the places rich in mineral resources or some hidden treasures. After the Wallens penetrated the unknown regions of Karkonosze their discoveries started ores exploitation.

The Medieval records credit the Wallen miner Laurentius Angelus as the founder of the first iron mine in the Valley of Jedlica River in 1148. The first notice about Kowary comes from the document decreed Prince Bolko II in 1355 that prohibited the export of the ore from the principality. Granting the city mine rights in 1513 or King Zygmunt Augusts’ arms commission in 1564 are examples of the documents that certify the significance of the Kowary mines.

The Thirty Years War led to the decline of the mine and metal industry. In the second half of the 19th century, the exploration was restarted; new iron ore was found and the mine industry in Kowary experienced a kind of revival.

**TO ATOM** ... In the 1920's the iron ore mines were search and exploited for uranium ore by the German people. During World War II, some research was conducted in Oranienburg on the uranium ore from Kowary ... in response to the needs of the German atomic industry.

After the war, the uranium ore was exported to the USSR for atomic bomb production. The workshop at the mine took care of the exploitation and preparation of the ore that was to be sent to Russia. The entire operation was top secret and the work and lives of the miners were controlled by the so-called apparatchiks.

Until 1973, 20 research tunnels were drilled and some underground work was carried out (dozens of kilometers and up to 700 meters deep). In 1973, the company was taken over by Wroclaw Polytechnic that conducted some research with explosives and offering lessons to students studying mine workshop.

When the healing properties of radon were discovered, underground radon inhalation place was built on the premises of the mine, the third in Europe. It served from 1974 to 1989. Diseases like circulatory, respiratory system diseases, gynecological diseases and some potency problems were effectively treated.

When Wroclaw Polytechnic stopped their activity in the mines the mine was closed and majority of the equipment stolen.

**AND NOW** ... the mine tunnels of Kowary offer visitors an experience of mine traditions and different techniques of exploitation by walking the tunnels of exploratory mine number 9.
Images from our tour ...

The guide is in the red shift … it is cold (5 to 8 degrees C) and damp (100% humidity) in the mine tunnel … the old sanitarium chamber is the image with the rusted lounge chairs. The tour lasted about 45 minutes … interesting but unspectacular to someone who has toured mines in the USA. Was it worth the trip … absolutely, as it depicted European mining and mine tunnels in the 19th century.

Tour over, we retrieved the FIAT and left the region for our next destination … somewhere near Klotzko. I’m not certain of the road we took leaving Kowary … it was rural and mountainous … clear-cut logging territory. I was told that we are heading to the Polish / Czech border in order to reach Klotzko.

At the border …

... with the old border checkpoint being dismantled (an EU directive) ...

The crossing point is at a high mountain pass … a ski area is adjacent to this old checkpoint. Crossing into the Czech Republic, we are in alpine territory but gradually head down into a river valley. The road is excellent … mountains on both sides. Traffic is light … we move at a good speed. In time we enter a moderate-sized city (Trutnov) … skirt the city on a fast superhighway … and within a 20 minutes Tomasz exists this fine road and takes some backcountry country lanes east to re-enter Poland … which we do at Nachod. The cities of Nachod (so named on both sides of the border) are busy and heavily commercialized … it was a struggle to wind out way through the heavy traffic. It took us nearly 2½ hours to traverse this Poland/Czech segment. Clearing Nachod we opt to stop at a blacktop rest stop for a breather and a snack … sandwiches that Danka prepared as well as some refreshing bottled water. The FIAT is brutal on the kidneys.

Returning to the road we were unlucky to be stuck for nearly 8 miles in an uphill traffic jam … slow moving … behind a farmer’s tractor. No chance to pass ... 18-wheelers anxious to pass, but unable. It was agonizing crawling at a snail’s pace … but in time managed to break free and pick up speed towards Klodzko city … some 20 km away.

The Land of Klodzko is surrounded by mountain ranges forming a natural barrier separating it from the rest of Silesia and creating a kind of individual enclave. The military importance of this part of present Silesia region necessitated that a new town be raised … namely Klodzko.

First mention of this town comes from the 10th century and until the beginning of 17th century, the Land of Klodzko was under Czech political and economical influences. Between the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, the Land of Klodzko was under Austrian domination and after so-called Treaty of Hubertusburg of 1763; this region was Prussian until 1871 and German until the end of World War II.

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We enter Kłodzko and immediately head south ... bypassing the town for the day (we will return tomorrow for a better visit.) Our destination this time is the town of Łądek Zdrój ... a picturesque resort of luxurious baths; situated at the lower elevations of a mountain range separating Poland from the Czech Republic. Tomasz relies on his GPS for routing as we head down narrow country roads better suited to horse-drawn carts than autos. The route is confusing as nothing but farms surround us ... but the GPS announces to turn left onto a dirt lane heading towards a derelict barn. We have arrived ... but sure as Hades, this does not look like an agro-tourist noclegi. Tomasz inquires ... wrong house ... better yet, wrong location – our noclegi is still about 6 km father on. We back up ... scold the GPS unit ... and drive on, relying more on sight than a computer. Eventually, we find our noclegi even after a last-minute confusion re: actual address. We pull in ... park ... and search for the lodge keepers ... The Jurkiewicz. It is 4:30 PM.

The place is a converted farm building, with barn beams, posts, and even loft stairs (right) in place. Our room is an en-suite ... comfortable, clean, and hopefully quiet (no dogs or roosters.)

Town is a 10-minute walk away. First sighting of Rynek (central square) ... and city hall ...

View of town 1 km away ...

The Rynek was an attractive square ... fresh, bright, clean, full of locals enjoying the early balmy evening. Tomasz led the way farther on ... no idea of where.

Away from the square we went ... on cobblestoned streets ...

... spying a well-fed local (probably too many pierogis) ...

... past a war-damaged (?) church left as a ruin ...

The reason this place was chosen by Tomasz is that in his early years he worked for six months nearby as an agricultural worker (picking vegetables as best as I remember.) We lugged our bags up the loft stairs to the second (or is up uppermost) level. After a full day of driving, exploring, navigating through unfamiliar countryside, we rested for about ½ an hour before Tomas beckoned us to walk to town for a brief (and our only) exploration of this resort town.
… past some glorious homes lovingly maintained …

… along the river …

… and under the new bridge spanning the river …

… past the theatre building …

… as well as some relics from the recent past ...

... to our real destination – The Basin Pijalnia (bathhouse.)

(I am certain the bathhouse is still in business and functioning but it was closed at the time we got there.)

A walk around the bathhouse grounds before heading back to our rooms.

It was time for a “brewskie” … stopped at a riverside pub (virtually empty) for a cold one.

It was dark as we made our way back through the Rynek.

Back in our ‘lodge’ it was kolacja time … and Danka (again) set out our evening meal. That woman is tireless … full of energy; always making sure we three men are well fed and nourished.

... In noclegis you bring your own food, prepare it, and clean up. If not, you go hungry.

Our meal included hard-boiled eggs, fresh bread, goose pate, salad, sausages, tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, and tea. In appreciation, I washed the dishes. One must remember this is a community dining room, you are the help. We crashed about the same time - 9 PM. No TV in room, outside was blissfully quiet. A quick shower and it was lights out on another Tomasz-guided day. Oh yes … thank you Danka for feeding us.
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Researching the great flood of 1997 that hit (BIG TIME) the town of Łądek-Zdrój (population less than 7,000), here is a gallery of images that tell a most depressing tale of that event.