

# The Ancient Fortress of Apoulon/Craiva

**Tags:** Natural wonders, historical sites, by car, hiking, Piatra Craivii, rural landscapes, the fortress of Apoulon, Craiva Veche

## *Helpful information*

- ◆ From Raven's Nest - 2 hours drive, about 100 km. Easy access by car up to the village of Craiva Nouă; park the car, then hike to the base of the fortress for about 30 minutes, followed by another 30 minutes of hiking up.
- ◆ The duration of the hike is about 2 hours.
- ◆ Basic hike equipment required.
- ◆ Activities: trekking; paragliding.

## *Description*

About 20 km near the city of Alba Iulia, an important Dacian political, economic and social center used to run the lands, the fortress of Apoulon. This is considered to be the last known refuge of king Decebal, during the Roman expansion.

Build out of stone, at 1083 meters high and overlooking Cricăului and Bucerzii valleys, it was the basis of the soon to become capital of an important Roman gold center, Apoulon. Archeological research in the area uncovered several sanctuaries, ancient homes as well as vases and coins of the greek-roman empire.

6000 years ago, when the first traces of the Apuseni gold were discovered, the human settlements start to grow not only in the fertile area, near water banks, but also in the mountain areas, up to 1300 altitude. Later, the great tribe of the Apouli - name given to the dacians living in Trascăului Mountains - have built the upstanding fortress, considered the second most important after the Sarmizegetusa Regia, in Orăștie Mountains.

After losing a battle at Sarmizegetusa, king Decebal retreated to the strong fortress built to last attacks and sieges. After months of attacks and deprivation strategies, Decebal was defeated and Romans conquered the lands. Legend has it that the Dacian leader, Decebal, has put an end to his days here after losing the second great war with the Roman Empire, in 106.

## *Archeology*

On the old ruins, archeologists could distinguish a "murus dacicus" type of wall, used for the building of a compartment inside a religious sanctuary, with a size of 36x67 meters and 3 meters thick walls, similar to Sarmizegetusa Regia ruins. Due to its rough terrain, stone terraces were built to ensure the stability of the fortress. They can still be seen overcoming time degradation to this day.

The peak of its development lies in the sec. I BC, and its end is due to the wars with the Romans. However, some constructions, such as the temple on the 5th terrace, cease to exist a century earlier.

Coordinates offered by the geographer are fitting and it is not at all an accident that the rock is seen from Alba Iulia: the Roman town of Apulum, built just 20 km away from the Piatra Craivii, would take over the name of the former Dacian fortress. It is said that the center of the seas would have been the most prestigious outside the Orăștie Mountains.

### **Medieval Castra**

The archaeological researches began in 1960 and aimed at the medieval fortification on the upper plateau. The Dacian dwelling was well documented by various materials found by accident. The place had been redeemed since the transition period to the Bronze Age and the middle bronze (the Wiettenberg and Ottoman cultures), then by the Dacians (2nd century BC - 1st century AD).

In the 13th century, a fortification was built on the "Acropolis", partly with elements from the ancient Dacian fortress, which would play the role of a royal fortress. The fortress has functioned continuously until the next century. At the beginning of the 16th century, the site was used as a hiding place and continued to be used as a place of refuge by the nearby populations until the 17th century. A spot with several decapitated skeletons was found, testifying a terrible massacre from which neither the women nor the children escaped, in the aftermath of the assassination of Michael the Brave.

### **The sunk village of Craiva Veche**

The village was partially destroyed by a landslide half a century ago and its inhabitants moved to the valley. Their houses were overwhelmed, and nowadays we can see only hedges of stone weathered by weeds, a lonely door frame and stairs leading to the sky. Only the church has standing walls, and beneath the gorges can still see abandoned fountains or cellars where the barrels of the old Bucerde wine were once resting. The village was not left behind entirely, because one day, a man decided to move there.