

3 February 2002

It looks like the worst of Skopje's winter may be over ... maybe. I'm not holding my breath, but we've had a lovely weekend after several weeks of thick, dismal fog. It was only recently that the sun regularly started to manage to burn through the murk by late afternoon. Couple this with the piles of gray, grimy snow that stubbornly refuse to melt, and the slush swamps that hung about the streets since the middle of December, and you get a godawful bleak winter. The worst in Skopje for 15 years, apparently. Aren't I lucky to be here to see it?

I went to Mavrovo today with J&E. Mavrovo is a national park, and something of a resort. Lots of people have vacation homes there that they use both in summer and in the winter. In summer, there's swimming in the lake and hiking in the mountains, and in winter everyone goes to ski. J&E wanted to ski, I just wanted to get out of Skopje for a bit.

It was shaping up to be a pleasant morning in Skopje when we left the city, and when we arrived in Mavrovo an hour or so later, it was absolutely glorious. Deep white snow, clear blue sky, and just enough sun to keep the chill off. There isn't a proper town near the ski slopes, but the mountainsides are built up with chalet-style vacation homes. It made a lovely scene from the window of the ski lodge where I spent most of the day reading, writing, and relaxing.



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I went for a long walk on a road that follows the edge of the lake, which is frozen into a long, level, snow-covered plain. And after I had walked for a bout 20 minutes or so, all I could hear was my own footsteps and the occasional soft clatter of small rockslides slithering down the hillside. It was so peaceful, which was remarkable considering that the ski slopes were absolutely packed with people, and that loudspeakers near the ski lifts were blaring pop music over the crowd at an incredible volume.



I'm glad I had the opportunity to get away for the day, because things are starting to get really busy at work. Next week I'm going to Sofia for a meeting, so I'll be gone for six days. Two weeks after I get back, I'm going to Egypt (finally!) for a training, and a week after I get back, I'm going to Cambodia for another meeting. If you don't hear from me for a while, it's because I'm still trying to puzzle out which time zone I'm currently in.