

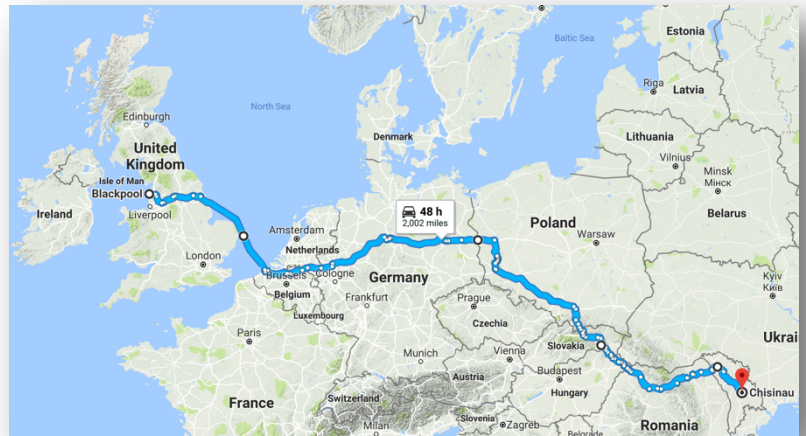
# Convoy Report May 2018



## Journey to Moldova

### Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> May

Leaving Blackpool, I'll admit I had a few nerves in my stomach and it wasn't because of the disastrous haircut and Ali G beard trim I'd just been subjected to before I set off (Note to future convoy drivers never try a new barber just before you set off).



CWUHA has been a huge part of my life since I can remember. The charity started when I was just 8 years old and I grew up watching my Dad leave on convoys to faraway places I'd never heard of and waiting by the phone for his evening calls to hear the amazing stories from the day's events.

We arrived at Hull just after lunch time and met up with the other drivers at the Hull depo before heading over to docks to catch our ferry to Zeebrugge. It was a lovely sun set over Hull as we set off and we all settled in for our overnight experience on the ferry. Though I wasn't expecting the array of Butlins style cabaret and bingo games. Phoenix Nights on water comes to mind. Though Beth and Truck did win on the bingo, so we had some luck on our opening night.

### Friday 11<sup>th</sup> May

After a few hours kip on the ferry in what can only be described as children's bunk beds we set off for long drive to Poland. We drove 919km, travelling through Belgium, Holland, Germany and arrived at our hotel just past the border in Poland. Once we arrived at the hotel, we were greeted by the other 3 vans who departed from Dover.



## Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> May

We left bright and early from our lovely hotel in Poland after recording a message of solidarity for all those taking part in the TUC march in London.



We had another long drive through the breath of Poland and into Slovakia. What struck me through our 12-hour drive was how beautiful and picturesque Poland was. It was a stunning drive and enjoyed on our return drive.

We arrived at our 'Pension' in Slovakia, which ended up being a lovely hotel in a small town. After another long drive we managed to find a lovely cave like bar, which did fantastic food and drink. Tony and John are still raving about the wine.

## Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> May

Another early start with our aim to arrive in our 7<sup>th</sup> country, Romanian through Hungary and the Romanian mountains. It was another beautiful day driving through some lovely Hungarian and Romanian towns and villages.

Once we got into Romania, I noticed a stark change in the houses and roads the further we travelled. You couldn't help but notice the more we went across the country the more deprivation we saw. The roads in Romania aren't the best so this really reduces the distance you can cover in a day, especially with a van full of aid.

We arrived at our hotel in Vatra Dornei, which over looked the Dorna river. It was a quaint little town and we had a nice look around before heading to bed, with our final push to Moldova tomorrow in our minds.







## Monday 14<sup>th</sup> May

Over the years I've listened to many convoy drivers complain about the border into Moldova and the time wasted hanging about. Though experiencing yourself is a whole different matter.

We arrived at the Romanian side of the border in good time. However, after a small mix up with

some of the forms and the wrong V5 form for one vehicle, it took a bit longer than expected. We spent just under 3 hours at the Romanian side of the border between Moldova and Romania and then proceeded to the Moldovan border check, which took another couple of hours.

At the Moldova border we were greeted by Lenny and Steve, who had set off a day before in the bigger truck and Victoria, who worked her magic and helped get the vehicle without the proper V5 into the country.



We then arrived at our hotel base for our time in Moldova in a town called Balti and we all headed to the bar for a well-earned drink and downtime.

## The Phoenix Centre

Tuesday morning, we set off from the hotel and headed to the Phoenix Centre in Rîșcani to unload the aid for the centre and meet the amazing children and staff.

On our arrival we were greeted by all the children from the Phoenix Centre, smiling and really happy to see us. Instantly, the long trip was made worthwhile.

Like many, I've seen pictures of the Phoenix Centre over the years and to see the work Victoria and all the staff have done to is breathtaking. I knew all the months of hard training I did for the London Marathon was totally worth it when I saw how the money raised was used and it instantly made me want to do it again.



# Sports Orphanage in Chişinău

On the Wednesday we left for the capital city Chişinău with an unexpected police escort. Now driving in Moldova is a little different than driving in the UK, it's a bit chaotic and not everyone follows the highway code, so the escort was fantastic. Also the experience of the police grinding a Capital City to a brief halt whilst 7 vans travel through was a sight to see.



When we arrived at the Liceul Internat Republican Cu Profil Sportiv, which translates to the Republican Sports Orphanage we were greeted by Vlad Tromfim, a former orphan at the centre and now lives in the UK.

Vlad, on visiting his local post office saw a CWUHA poster in the foyer and noticed the charity regularly visits Moldova. He then got in touch and asked if the charity would visit his old orphanage and that's how we ended up at the centre.

Before we unload the vans, the charity with the help of the centre organised a football tournament for 500 children. Children of all ages took part and received a CWUHA goodie bag and medal curtesy of Union Line.



We then received a tour of the orphanage, which reminded me of an old soviet military base you see in the movies, with the traditional school dining hall to feed all the children 3 times a day. The facility had very little, however the amazing staff worked with that they had to ensure the children were well looked after.





As you would have guessed by the name of the orphanage, sports are an integral part of daily life, with the children finding focus and drive in a variety of sports. What many of us found remarkable was the number of children who went on to compete in various Olympics Games.

After the tour was over, we finally got to hand our individual boxes to the children, who had waited patiently through a thank you service by staff and local VIPs. The best way I can describe what occurred is a sea of 500 faces on Christmas morning, happy and excited to open their box.





# Vulnerable Families



Thursday morning, we set off to the Phoenix Centre for a musical show by the children. Many of the children in the centre have serious disabilities so performing an hour long show for us was no easy task and it was remarkable and a joy to watch.

A few of us then headed out to local villages to deliver packages to vulnerable families. To say what I saw was heart breaking is an understatement. The absolute poverty these

families live in is devastating to see first-hand. We instantly knew the packages of food, clothes and toiletries would make such an impact in their lives.

I will never forget the look of gratitude from one of the fathers who we delivered aid too. You could instantly see a huge weight had been lifted of his shoulders and his family had been given much needed supplies and toys for his children. It's a look I will remember for the rest of my life.



After arriving back from delivering the packages the staff at the Phoenix Centre held a lunch, which is Moldovan custom, to thank all the drivers for their hard work. It was great to try some traditional Moldovan food, vodka and enjoy a good dance. A few also challenged Vlad to a wrestling match, which they instantly regretted.

A very mixed day of feelings but one knowing we had made a difference.



## Football Tournament

Friday, we headed out to Rîșcani for the Football tournament. We saw teams of all ages taking part and it was fantastic to see so many young girls also playing, which normally doesn't happen.

It was a nice day to enjoy the football outdoors and see the impact CWUHA has on helping local children off the streets and into something proactive. All the children enjoyed the medals and gift packs and it was a pleasure to watch some quality football.



## The Journey Home



After a day off to enjoy the town on the Saturday we set off early Sunday morning heading for home. The plan was to take the same route back with a slight detour in Poland. After Tony mentioned he had family in a small town outside Brzeź, Poland he hadn't seen in years, we all agreed to take a slight detour with Tony to visit his family.

All I can say is what a night. His family were very welcoming and made us all feel at home and like we were part of the family. I couldn't tell you what the local dishes they cooked but they were delicious. Poland is a beautiful country and one I will definitely be going back too.





## Till next time...

On leaving Hull docks en-route to Blackpool I realised my 4,000+ mile round trip will soon be over - via a quick stop to the Apple Store to repair my phone screen and I was sat contemplating what an incredible experience the convoy had been and one that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Over the 6 months prior to setting off I'd begged, borrowed, asked for donations from family and friends. Purchased, collected and packed 95 boxes full of clothes, goodies and toiletries for children in an orphanage who have very little and packs for vulnerable families in the local villages. All possible because of the generosity of others.

Taking part in a convoy is incredibly tough, with long 12-hour days driving on strange roads and in countries you've probably never visited before.

However, despite all that seeing the smiles on the kids' faces instantly made it all worthwhile.

This charity really does do exactly what it says on the tin – Delivering a smile to needy children.

