Pictured at left are Desi Gancheva and Sara Willemse two CCSS students with Bulgarian backgrounds.

Bulgaria is a small south-eastern European country with a resident population of about 8,000,000, but with thousands more of its people spread across the world as immigrants.

This is the Bulgarian coat of arms…

while there are no lions in Bulgaria, animals that occur in the wild include wolves, deer, bears, beavers, and foxes.

Some History.

Bulgaria was founded as a country in 681 AD, but was Christianised in 865AD. The main religion is Christian Orthodox. The Thracians were the ancient people that occupied Bulgaria and are one of the three ancestors of the modern day Bulgarians. They did not have writing but their legacy survives in the numerous treasures and tombs they left and one of the most talented ancient commanders, Spartacus, was a Thracian born in the Rhodope Mountains.
In the late 7th century a branch of the Bulgars led by Khan Asparuh migrated into the northern Balkans, where they merged with the local Slavic and Thracian population to form the First Bulgarian Empire in AD 681.

In 1886 the great war that finally freed Bulgaria from the Ottoman (Turkish) empire took place with the help of the Russians. One of the greatest and most deciding battles of the war took place upon the peak of a mountain—Shipka.

This is more or less where it happened.

Both the Russians and Bulgarians fought against the Turks at an earlier battle at Stara Zagora. The Turks won and the Russians fled north to defend the mountain passage at Shipka, which is at the start of the mountains as seen above. This was an important route north and the Turkish then went ahead and the battle took place. The Bulgarians and Russians defeated and soon after the war was won.

Folklore.

Bulgarian folklore is expressed through traditional dances, songs, stories and music.

Folk dancing in Bulgaria started in the olden days in village gatherings but are now danced at parties, festivals and weddings.

Women's Folk Costume from the Region of Stara Zagora, which is where my family resided.

The clothes that were once worn are now the traditional attire, which is worn by folk dances on stage. Folk dancing, singing and being a folk musician are professions and there are large folk ensembles, which travel around the world.
Although Bulgaria is small, it has different regions and every region has their own particular style of music, dancing and singing. 

Men's Costume from Graovo, Bulgaria

**My Bulgarian holiday:**

In September 2006 my family and I went back to our homeland for the first time since leaving there ten years ago! I remembered very little, as I was only five when I left, and I found it very interesting.

What struck me the most was that there were so many tall buildings in the cities, that it was perfectly ordinary for people to live in flats, and that the land was not so flat as in Australia, and the vegetation was so different! No eucalyptus trees! Instead there were tonnes of pine trees, oaks, and birches.

Bulgarian cities, like most European cities are full of cafés, restaurants and shops. Everything is very close by. There are many ruins in Bulgaria of Medieval castles of the early empire and also Ancient Roman ruins. In fact, there have been Roman ruins found in central Stara Zagora (my city) and there are many other Thracian treasures being searched for.

This is the main entrance to the ruins of a Bulgarian castle built centuries ago. It is situated on the hill Czarivets in **Veliko Turnovo**, the old capital. For centuries the Bulgarian czars occupied it.
At left is an example of some beautiful Bulgarian mountain and forest scenery that I travelled through.

**The Rila Monastery**

This is the largest and one of the oldest monasteries of Bulgaria, which has become a historical symbol and a major tourist destination. It has been listed by Unesco as a cultural world heritage site.

It was first built almost a **thousand years ago** by Saint Ivan Rilski in the Rila mountains as a safe place, deep in the mountains, where monks have preserved Bulgarian history and teachings. Although many parts of it were destroyed by the Turks over the centuries, (during the Ottoman occupation of Bulgaria) it was fully restored after the war at the beginning of the 20th century.

Notice the steep mountain and pine forest in the background. The monastery is set in a valley and the whole place is incredibly beautiful. Photo at right shows some of the courtyard of the Rila Monastery with the author, Desi Gancheva in the foreground.

The **oldest** part of the monastery is this tower, that was built for the monks protection during Turkish invasions.
During my holiday I also visited the site of the famous battle at Shipka. Now a huge monument stands upon this mountain in commemoration.

These are just some of the places I visited in Bulgaria.

Written by Desi Gancheva Jan 2007.