



Prokletije – Montenegro



Mt. Arapit – Albania



Guri i Kuq – Kosova

BALKANS PEACE PARK PROJECT

Creating a trans-national, cross-border park in the adjoining mountain areas of Albania, Kosovo/a, Montenegro

UK Registered Charity No. 1105447

www.balkanspeaceparkdotorg.wordpress.com/

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A PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

After 16 years of activity, excitement, and sometimes disappointment, on the road to a Balkans Peace Park in the mountain region which straddles northern Albania, western Kosova and southern Montenegro we have come to a crossroads where we pause to think and consider where we go next under new leadership in the UK committee. Antonia Young, who with her husband Nigel has been the driving force behind B3P UK since its beginning in 2001, has retired from all official positions. We don't believe that retirement is in Antonia's nature; we are sure she will keep in close touch with developments in the UK and with her many friends in Kosova, Montenegro and Albania. E-mails about people and events in the region will continue to flow from her computer and her influence will continue to be felt in everything we do. She will be back in Albania very soon.



New leader

At the B3P AGM in London in September 2016 Dr Jen Dyer of Leeds University was elected to take over as Chairperson of B3P UK. Jen is Lecturer in Sustainability, in the School of Earth and Environment. Since the promotion of "sustainable visitor activities in the mountains" has been one of the main aims of B3P from the beginning we look forward to using Jen's expertise.

She has already been on two visits to the region. The photo shows her on a walk above Valbona.

2016 news, good

The good news is that it was a great year for our Summer Programmes; they ran in more places in more countries and with more participants and volunteers than ever. Altogether there were 9 programmes, including two separate programmes in the same venue. We have also heard that guesthouses and trek organizers for the Peaks of the Balkans and other trails had a very busy season.



2016 news, bad

The bad news is environmental, two massive development schemes in prime ecological and scenic areas. In Valbona in Albania construction has already started on a huge hydroelectric scheme, diverting water from the Valbona and Cerem rivers to run through tunnels to turbine sites, no fewer than 7 such schemes in what is designated a National Park. Local consultation was apparently minimal. See www.journeytovalbona.com/good/river-initiatives/ for details and protests. The other flagrant breach of ecological and environmental principles is on Lake Skadar, the magnificent and ecologically unique lake which is shared between Albania and Montenegro. Construction has started on a mega luxury resort, as the developers proudly proclaim, “*Porto Skadar Lake* is a luxurious Eco Resort with villas & spa & boating marina, nestled in the heart of the preserved wilderness of Skadar Lake National Park in Montenegro.” This is not in the B3P area but, as we found on the B3P cycle tour in 2004, cycling round the lake from Shkodra, it is, or was, a superb natural phenomenon. How could the Montenegrin government allow a 600 villa luxury development in a “preserved wilderness”? See Save Skadar lake on www.skadarlake.org.

However, some very recent good environmental news?

From the IUCN Transboundary Special Group

[“A boost to cross-border conservation between Albania and Montenegro](#)

National Agency for Protected Areas of Albania and Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro signed a cooperation agreement in December in Podgorica, deciding to enhance the cross-border cooperation in nature protection. Only the wise use of the biodiversity will guarantee the preservation of natural resources for the benefit of people in both countries.

[Read more](#)”

Can we wonder what they said about the Lake Skadar development?!

(The photo of Antonia Young on page 1 was taken by Jutta Benzenberg. The cropping was our mistake. Apologies!)

SUMMER PROGRAMMES 2016

The nine B3P Summer Programmes were held across the 3 countries of Albania, Kosovo/a and Montenegro in July/August 2016. Our roving reporter and all round star volunteer Ulrike Gös summarises the activities below:

Rugova, Kosovo/a 8th - 10th July

The camp in Rugova took place Friday to Sunday in Boje, a village in the upper part of the long valley with a small ski resort. 20 children between the ages of 12 and 14 years participated and were selected from the school “Britannica” in Peja, where they get additional English lessons in the afternoon. They were brought to Boje every day by bus. Organizers and teachers were all Kosovars who work at the American Corner in Pristina except for one teacher who works at “Britannica”. This was different to the other B3P camps where



teachers were volunteers through B3P UK. The photo shows Kosovar teacher Dorentina Isufaj and the Coordinator Durim Hasaj working with the students at Boje in Rugova. Here local and national staff and volunteers helped with logistics such as accommodation, access to school and working as translators. Thanks to the children’s high level of English, the majority of the lessons could be held in English and explored topics such as the environment, culture and film making. The children very much enjoyed the opportunity to practise their English, often in the form of games and in the outdoors!

Valbona, Albania. 25th - 29th July and 1st - 5th August

The Valbona programme lasted two weeks and comprised English and environmental lessons. The environmental lessons were given by a team from the Albanian environmental organization **Eco Albania**. Nearly all the 50 children of the beautiful valley came to attend school. The volunteer teachers had to learn very quickly how to tackle the task of teaching children with such different levels of knowledge and who seemed apparently unused to sitting down and listening for more than five minutes! However, the children were also incredibly keen to learn and our volunteering team brought a wide variety of skills so the joy for us teachers was immense and we indulged our creativity in making animal masks and drawing pictures of our homes. One day we also went for a litter picking excursion and brought back a 6 large black bags full of rubbish. After lessons had finished, the older children played volleyball or football, while the younger ones showed an incredible passion for our generous stock of coloured pens.

Lepushe, Albania. 1st - 5th and 8th - 12th August

Lepushe also ran over two weeks with about 40 young people between 6 and 20 years old. We taught them English and **Eco Albania** provided some environmental education as well. After the lessons, the sports student group from **Leeds Beckett University** offered different sports such as football, volleyball and baseball. While Rugova and Valbona are areas with very intensive tourism by the standards of Albania, Lepushe and Vermosh are still in a deep 'slumber'. Therefore, what I wrote about the children in Valbona was even more extreme here, a steep learning curve to overcome difficulties and intense joy experienced at the same time!!

Vermosh, Albania. 1st - 5th and 8th - 12th August

As the Vermosh coordinator had to resign very shortly before the camps started it was a great job by the Lepushe international coordinator, Ken Palmer and the Albanian national coordinators, Jonid and Klejd, to get the camp in Vermosh running at the same time. Lepushe and Vermosh lie about 10 miles apart. Ken succeeded in getting 3 Albanian English teachers and the sports students did their job alternately in Lepushe and in Vermosh. There were about 20 children attending in Vermosh.

Babino Polje, Montenegro. 15th - 19th August

About 25 children from the small Montenegrin town of Plav travelled daily for one week in a wonderful, noisy, big orange truck to the assembly of small wooden tourist huts at Babino Polje. Every morning the children were already in the very best mood from the ride in an open vehicle on a steep road full of holes and managed to cheer up the international volunteers who started each morning without water and became stinkier as the week progressed (but the setting was worth it, we very much enjoyed being in the woods!). The level of English was quite different between the students but good enough to teach mainly environmental and touristic topics. On Wednesday, the national coordinators from **PSKHrid**, organized a fantastic educational excursion to tourist sites in and around Plav. We were also lucky enough to have an excellent photography project running and this was undoubtedly the favourite subject of all the children. The photos were proudly displayed during the closing ceremony and the outcome is still visible on www.hellohrid.com.



Grbaje, Montenegro. 22nd - 26th August

Grbaje is the entrance to the Prokletje National Park and offered a dramatic and stunning backdrop for the second week of activities in Montenegro where approximately 25 children came

from the small town of Gusinje, very close to Plav. Our greatest challenge this week was the weather! None of us were prepared for the cold, damp conditions and had to swiftly adapt our lessons accordingly, keeping us on our toes. Aside from that, the camp in Grbaje was held in the same manner as in Babino Polje with an excursion on the Wednesday and a photography project running throughout the week producing some fantastic pictures! The web site with the pictures is www.hellogrebaje.com. This photo shows Elizabeth Gowing playing the Yenga game with the children in Grbaje.



Local Press Report on the Programme in Babino Polje

How do others see us? A reporter from a local newspaper came to the final day's Graduation Ceremony at Babino Polje. Elizabeth Gowing has sent this rough translation from the Montenegrin newspaper report. <http://www.fokuspress.com/najnovije-vijesti/2827-zavrse-na-lijetnja-skola-u-plavu-djeca-ucila-o-zastiti-zivotne-sredine-organizatori-odusevljeni> If you can find it!

"The Balkans Peace Park Project organization works in the Prokletije area, in Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro. In Britain the Prokletije are not as well known, but we are doing our best to make people familiar with the environment. We promote Kosovo in Albania in Vrmoša, Valbona, Tetu and Ljepuču In Montenegro we promote it in Plav and Gusinje," said Elizabeth Gowing for the **Fokus** portal. Teachers from Italy, Germany, Ireland and England, in cooperation with the Hajro Šahmanović elementary school in Plav. volunteers from the Prokletije National Park and Hrid mountain sports club, taught children for five days. The children were divided into four groups, and each worked for an hour with different teachers. They learned about protecting the environment, biodiversity, the development of tourism in the Prokletije National Park and about local products.

Lectures were held in the Hrid hiking club's eco-village, and on two days we visited cultural attractions in Plav and Gusinje: the musafirsku soba at the Plav Cultural Centre, the Velemun Botanical Garden, the Ali Pasha springs, the old mosque and the Redžepagića Kula. They made brochures depicting the cultural heritage and natural beauty of the area, which will be available in the Tourist Organization of Plav. The aim of this is that children know what to recommend for tourists to visit and taste," said Emir Feratović of Tourist Office in Plav. One of the volunteer teachers said, "We do not know how the program will look for the next year, but we hope to continue to work with this year's volunteers. We are grateful for having the chance to stay in beautiful Plav. It's my first time in Montenegro and we are very pleased with the summer school."

The children were given certificates of participation. After Plav, training was planned in the Grebaje valley and children participated from Gusinje municipality."

SUMMER PROGRAMMES 2017

Despite a successful run of Summer Programmes in July/August 2016, we are going to have to make some changes to B3P activities in 2017. This is largely due to a lack of personnel to apply for and monitor funds and capacity for SP coordination. At the AGM in September we discussed how this could present an exciting opportunity to renew/refresh/revitalise B3P activities with the capacity and small amount of funds we DO have and to make sure we are organizing activities that are relevant, appropriate, sustainable and useful to the communities we are aiming to support in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. . **Please do contact Jen (j.dyer@leeds.ac.uk) if you would like to be involved in any way - the more expertise and enthusiasm the better!**

Angela Selmani

People come and go, as always happens in voluntary organizations. Someone who has now withdrawn from all B3P activities, for personal reasons, is Angela Selmani. Angela was Secretary for some years and then, most importantly, the secretary in UK for the recruitment and deployment of volunteers and the administration for the series of Summer Programmes. Her enthusiasm and knowledge of Albanian are much missed. We thank her very much for the big part she played for B3P for several years.

NIGEL YOUNG'S REPORT TO THE AGM ON THE YEAR 2015-2016

At the AGM in September Nigel stood down as Chair of B3P UK. In this report to the meeting he looks at what B3P has achieved in its 15 years and suggests some possible developments for the future.

"As well as a report, it is something of a valedictory as I retire to a less active presence.

In general terms, B3P has achieved a lot in 15 years. We cannot claim all the credit for the moves towards enabling a truly trans-national "peace" park, but we have kept alive the vision of cross-border cooperation, trans-boundary conservation and collaboration across frontiers. We have helped inspire ideas like the Peaks of the Balkans trails and maps and giving a context for the linkage of 5 national parks across contiguous national borders (see the new maps on our website).

Increased cooperation and collaboration

Our annual Summer Programmes have demonstrated a consistent and selfless commitment to the region's mountain villages and their wellbeing. The benefits of these will continue! Of course, the problems of development, new roads, hydro-electric schemes, illegal logging,

family/land disputes remain enormous; and so does the issue of good schooling, but the fact that we have collaboration with local and regional NGOs is heartening, especially as it involves cross-border linkages and interaction and cooperation between Albanians and non-Albanians, a real advance!

There are increasing numbers of trans-frontier stakeholders (e.g. guest house networks), and a workshop on this would be an ideal project to fund. For the future, we need to research ways of facilitating cross-border exchanges between the national parks - possibly workshops on environmental issues for adults.

The Montenegrin Summer Programme with Elizabeth Gowing, was an auspicious continuation of work with Prokletije National Park. Simon Woodward's work in Lepushe with students from Leeds Beckett University, and Jonid Sula's and Klejd Kosta's continuing roles, have given us continuity in the region, along with Arber Jashari's group in Prishtina and our links with the Kosovan ministry and ERA which continue.

An International Supporters Network or registry?

Last year, I made the suggestion that we might integrate our data bases of UK and international supporters, adding the non-governmental people we have worked with both inside and outside the region, and our contacts in international bodies. These still need updating. Jen created a very lively supporters' meeting in London, with an inspiring address by Elizabeth Gowing, and we might aim to do similar events both in the UK and in the region next year. Indeed a radical evolution for B3P would be to become an international NGO, while remaining a British charity and aiming to raise money for this, not only in the UK. We have several active members in each of Kosova and Albania, three in Switzerland, two in Germany, one moving to Bulgaria, and one in Alaska. We have strong contacts in other parts of North America. Several supporters abroad suggest we need an international council with meetings by skyping and physical meetings possibly in the region each summer. That may be ambitious, but a good way to link research projects and information."

PAVLIN'S HOUSE in THETHI



Last year we reported on the devastating fire which destroyed Pavlin's guesthouse in Thethi. Now we can see how he has rebuilt it. The house is much larger but still in



keeping with traditional architecture in the area.

Congratulations to Pavlin on the rebuilding and on what he says was a successful visitor season in 2016. Some of us can't wait to get back to Thethi and stay with Pavlin and his family again.

Severe winter

It has been a severe winter in Thethi. Pavlin says, "We are having real winter here in Theth. In the first days of January it started snowing and the temperature went crazy, down to -20°.

One week it was very cold and some days we were without water and the power was cut. Now it's OK. There isn't too much snow but the road is closed from Qafa Thore to Theth. Yesterday the military helicopter brought some humanitarian aid such as sugar, pasta, rice, oil, flour, etc. Also yesterday we had the first tourist for this year. They came by helicopter, an Albanian couple who stayed for 3hrs."



Children love it!

Unlike many families in Theth, Pavlin's family stay in the valley all year round. He says they are very happy there.

ANTONIA'S VISIT TO KOSOVA, AUGUST, 2016

Antonia attended the 35th Annual Language, Literature and Culture Seminar in Prishtina, with about 150 internationals and the same number of locals, organized by the Albanological Institute within the University of Prishtina. This is part of her account of the visit.

Workshops

"I last attended in 2004, when I gave a presentation on the Balkans Peace Park Project. This time my presentation was an update on the same, including Kosova's contribution of this year. This was a long weekend workshop held for young people, within the B3P region

(Rugova), and run by the B3P team in Kosova, follow-up to their tremendous input of a team of eleven who assisted our Valbona (Albania) Summer Programme last year. Since this presentation was limited to 10 minutes, I scheduled a further presentation which I shared with Ismail Hetemaj, Head of Nature Conservation within the Kosovar Ministry of the Environment. He's been a very good friend to B3P since we first met in 2003 and we've met at several UNEP and other meetings. Ismael has also visited us twice in Yorkshire where we organized with the Yorkshire Dales National Park for intensive and instructive visits in the park. I'm not sure I could do all that again!

Serbian lecturer and students

In our audience was Merima, the Professor of Albanian Language from Belgrade and her 7 Serbian students. She had been with me in 2004 when I took a group of Seminarists to visit Rugova and the Peace House in Drelaj founded by Dritan Shala of that region. (*On that occasion a plaque on the wall of Peace House was unveiled by Antonia as she gracefully removed a Yorkshire Dales tea towel. Editor*) The Serbian lecturer urged me to take her students to Rugova and I managed to secure a bus for 30 of us to make the day trip, starting with a visit to the ERA centre in Peja - the Environmentally Responsible Action centre in a beautifully converted old mill. Ellen Frank gave us an excellent account, alternating fluently between English and Albanian, of their work and relationship to B3P and PoB. Ellen, who is American, came on the first international cross-border trek in 2003 and has stayed in Kosova ever since. She took us to the spectacular Waterfall Trail, which ERA have worked on for several years and which needs a lot of attention annually.

A Bear Sanctuary

While in Kosova, I was taken, by Ismail's son, Jeton, to visit the Bear Sanctuary, 19km south of Prishtina, which was founded about 5 years ago after Kosova passed laws making it illegal to keep bears in captivity. I do remember seeing one, brutally caged, outside a restaurant, several years ago. 15 bears have been rescued, including 2 bear cubs which they attempted to return to the wild, but there was too much publicity and too many curious people, which made it impossible to pursue that project. The bears are given plenty of space, quietness, woodland and ponds as well as food. They are not permitted to mate, since this would be bringing new life into a non-wild situation. Albania does not yet have

these laws, and apparently has about 50 bears in captivity. This sanctuary plans to take about 5 bears each year. I also met with Aleksander Trajçe who is writing his Ph.D on the brown bear in the Balkans."

Marubi photographic museum in Shkodër

On a day visit to Shkodër from Prishtina, Antonia visited the 'amazing' Marubi museum. With EU funding, three generations of the Marubi family have created the most advanced photographic archive in Europe, from the latter half of the 19th century until the 1940s. It was opened this year.

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Support our work?

Our successful and enjoyable Summer Programmes and their extension into all three countries

depend considerably on funding from donations.

Donations can be made preferably on line at:

www.justgiving.com/balkanspeacepark

or by cheque to Balkans Peace Park Project, sent to Hon Treasurer B3P,

The Camp, Gladestry, Kington, Hereford UK

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Get involved?

We are always interested to hear from people, in the UK or abroad, who might be able to join in our work or help on our current projects in the Balkans.

Please check our NEW website

www.balkanspeaceparkdotorg.wordpress.com/

or

our Facebook www.facebook.com/B3PBalkansPeaceParkProject