In last year’s newsletter we headlined the grave threat to the natural environment throughout the B3P region from what some people are calling a veritable “tsunami” of actual and proposed hydroelectric schemes on rivers in the Balkans. There are over 2000 such schemes, big and small. Many of the rivers still run “free” or “wild”, flowing from their source to the sea without obstruction by dams or concrete tunnels. All this is in the name of supposedly green energy, though construction itself will be grossly polluting and will mainly serve to line the pockets of construction companies with lucrative contracts.

Within the Balkans Peace Park
To quote from TOKA, a leading campaign, www.toka-abania.org, “As far as we know, the Cemi River in Kelmend (which runs from Lëpushë past Tamarë and through Montenegro to Lake Skadar) is cleared for 14 hydropowers, Valbona
River for 14, Shala River for 6 and the Curraj River (from Curraj Eperm) for an additional 11. These constructions threaten to turn every river valley in Northern Albania into industrial dustbowls, negating the possibility of declaring the 86,000ha National Park of the Albanian Alps promised by the Albanian Government in 2015. This National Park, combined with neighbouring protected areas in Kosovo/a and Montenegro, will create the largest protected wilderness area in Europe, and could put the Balkans at the forefront of Europe not only in terms of nature protection, but as the pre-eminent eco-tourism destination of Europe. The declaration of the park has been blocked since 2015 by the Albanian Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy, who demand the zoning of industrial development zones within the park, despite hydropowers being illegal within national parks under Albanian law.” On maps such as the one here: www.balkanrivers.net/en/vmap you can see the huge extent of the proposed hydropower schemes. In Rugova (Kosovo/a) no fewer that 10 sites are listed between Kuqiste and Peja and we hear that 3 dams or tunnels have been built on the Lumbardhi river above Decan but another was stopped because of protests.

Support the campaigns:
TOKA - The Organization to Conserve the Albanian Alps  www.toka-albania.org
Watch the film “Blue Heart – protecting the last wild rivers in Europe” https://blueheart.patagonia.com backed by the outdoor clothing company Patagonia. Well done them! We are showing this film in Leeds on March 5th. Follow the issue on: Euronatur www.euronatur.org, RiverWatch www.riverwatch.eu/en and EcoAlbania  www.ecoalbania.org/en

No apology!
We make no apology for leading with this issue in the B3P newsletter. It goes to the heart of what the Balkans Peace Park Project is all about. “Peace” is not just the absence of war and conflict between people; it is about communities across borders working together to live in peace and harmony with their environment. In the quaint old English phrase building dams and tunnels on beautiful rivers is “driving coach and horses” right through the heart of our project.

ON THE MOVE IN B3P

1 TEAM CHANGES
At our AGM in December 2017 our chairperson Jen Dyer stood down and handed over to an international team with Kelsey Aho (US) and Teresa Lappe-Osteghe (Germany) as co-chairs and Ulrike Göss (Germany) as secretary. You can read about their achievements on the next page. At the AGM in December 2018 Teresa stood down as co-chair in order to concentrate on her PhD thesis at Sheffield University: Beyond Sustainable Development – The Role of the
Environment in EU Peacebuilding in Kosovo/a. Thank you Teresa for your ever-smiling commitment to B3P and good luck with the PhD.

Welcome back, Sylvia!

In Teresa’s place we are delighted to have Sylvia Shatwell returning after a three years absence to become co-chair with Kelsey. Sylvia volunteered with B3P Summer Programmes for the first time in 2012 in Vermosh and Lëpushë. In March 2014 she travelled through Albania and into Montenegro to establish links and plan for the first Montenegrin Summer Programme at Babino Polje, Montenegro. She returned as a volunteer with the Montenegrin Summer Programme in 2015 at Babino Polje and Grbaje. Sylvia is a social worker and works for Barnardo’s children’s charity in the UK. She is also on the steering group for the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust’s ‘Green Futures’ programme, supporting young people to access outdoors and environmental focused activities.

In the Balkans. Our team in the Balkans is developing:

- Jonid Sula with an MSc from the Agricultural University of Tirana has been a very active supporter and coordinator for B3P’s Summer Programmes for over 5 years. At the AGM he was invited to become an Honorary Vice-President of B3P and Regional Coordinator of B3P in the Balkans, including B3P Albania.
- Jonid often works closely with Klejd Kosta from Tirana, another keen supporter of our Summer Programmes.
- Ita Angoni at EcoAlbania played a big part in the Forum on “Development in Protected Areas” which Kelsey and Teresa promoted in Tirana in May 2018. (See item on page 4)
- Dr Inis Shkreli, Anthropologist and Lecturer in Sociology, Cultural and Natural Heritage at the Mediterranean University of Albania, has been a close associate with Antonia Young over several years. She leads an Albanian NGO, The Action Centre for the Survey of Cultural dynamics and Cultural Interactions. She hosted the May 2018 Forum meeting at her university.
- Green Home Montenegro were active partners in the Transboundary Summer Programme in Kosovo/a in July 2018. See page 6.
- Longstanding friend and supporter of B3P since 2003, Ellen Frank, Director of ERA (Environmentally Responsible Action), joined in the Tirana Forum in May by Skype from Peja in Kosovo/a, helped to set up the Trans-Boundary Summer Programme in Rugova (See pages 5 and 6) and welcomed Richard’s Balkans Mountain Minstrels 2018 to Haxhi Mill in June. See page 8
2 B3P MEETING IN TIRANA MAY 2018

Forum for organizations, activists and communities in the Balkans Peace Park region: “Development in Protected Areas”

Initiated by co-chairs Kelsey and Teresa and hosted by Inis Shkreli at the Mediterranean University in Albania the forum was attended by:

Kelsey Aho (B3P-UK), Ita Angoni (EcoAlbania), Dorentina Isufaj (B3P volunteer from Kosovo/a), Klejd Kosta (B3P volunteer), Teresa Lappe-Osthege (B3P-UK), Inis Shkreli, Jonid Sula (B3P volunteer), Antonia Young (B3P-UK). Present via Skype: Ellen Lajqi (ERA)

We began the afternoon workshop with a brief introduction of B3P’s actions and objectives for 2018 by Kelsey Aho and Teresa Lappe-Osthege. We then proceeded with more detailed introductions by participants, who also each touched upon areas of common challenges and potential future collaborations the emerging discussion, we identified the following areas for common action:

1. public awareness;
2. environmental education:
3. nature protection and conservation;
4. cultural interactions across borders;
5. energy creation and infrastructure.

Towards the end of the first session, Ellen underlined the importance of the regional aspect of any action that was to be taken by the present organizations. This reiterated focus on the regional dimension provided the background for the discussion in the following session.

In the second part of the workshop, we split up into two groups. Group One discussed areas 1-3 and 5, while the Group 2 focused on area 4. The aim of these focused discussions was to identify achievable short- and long-term actions that could be taken in partnership by the present organizations and individuals.

Group 1

Initiated by Ellen Frank Lajqi of ERA, we proposed a transboundary summer programme at ERA’s Sustainable Mountain Education Centre, Hajla Cabin, Kosovo/a to include five 18-24 year-olds from Kosovo/a, Albania and Montenegro, with a preference for youth from the B3P region. On behalf of EcoAlbania, Ita Angoni offered to manage the Albanian components of the summer programme.

Group 2

We explored the possibility of creating an App that would log cultural treasures and history in the region. It would combine existing tours and information, and bring it together in one place to facilitate use by tourists, thereby increasing awareness among the tourists of the cultural heritage that exists in the region.
Letter of Intent

After discussing both proposals among the whole group, we signed a Letter of Intent to create a Regional B3P Committee, which, in the short-term, would meet at the Action Centre for the Survey of Cultural Dynamics and Cultural Interaction in order to fulfil the legal requirements necessary to apply for public funds, but would become its own entity in the long-term. Jonid and Klejd have started to plan for activities in Tirana that would provide a flexible framework for recruitment of interested volunteers.

3 TRANS-BOUNDARY SUMMER SCHOOL

July 18th – 23rd at ERA Group’s “Sustainable Mountains Education Centre” in Hajla, Rugova, following the decision at the May Forum in Tirana. A collaboration between EcoAlbania in Albania, Balkans Peace Project (B3P) based in the UK, ERA group in Kosovo and Green Home in Montenegro.

From a google form and a call for applications in English, Albanian and Montenegro, 53 applications from Albania, Kosovo/a and Montenegro EcoAlbania chose 5 participants from the 29 Albanian applicants, ERA chose 5 participants from the 15 Kosovar applicants, and Green Home chose 5 participants from the 9 Montenegrin applicants. The 20 participants were part of this 6-day youth exchange program. Situated at 2000 m altitude, the group of youngsters had the opportunity to experience the beauty of the National Park “Bjeshkët e Namuna”, understanding in this way the importance of wildlife preservation.

Exchange of information and experiences

The young people from the different countries discussed the most “pressing environmental issues” and experienced hands-on demonstrations of environmentally-friendly practices. Of particular importance was the exchange of information and experience of the most important natural areas in their countries, problems and threats posed to these areas, as well as the ongoing work to protect them. Another important part of the programme was to develop their ability to adapt to the outdoors. They were acquainted with the basics of camping in the wild,
keeping the surrounding environment clean, as well as land navigation using only map and compass. (Photos by I.Angoni, EcoAlbania. Thank you!)

**New friendships and contacts**

Through this programme, among others, the young participants created new friendships and contacts that will serve to continue their work for the protection and promotion of the cross-border area of Bjeshkët e Namuna / Prokletije / Albanian Alps – the area that forms the Balkans Peace Park.

4 OTHER SUMMER PROGRAMMES 2018

Thank you, Jonid for this report on the three Summer Programmes which he organized in Lepushe, Thethi and Valbona. Each programme lasted two weeks. The subjects were English language, environmental and cultural topics. The total number of students was 65; the number of volunteers were 3 in Lepushe, 4 in Thethi, 5 in Valbona. ChwB and Eco Albania were invited, but were busy during the SP and therefore couldn’t assist this year. In Thethi, volunteers from ERA including Ellen and Skender attended. In Valbona the SP was supported by two teachers from Valbona: Mario Lazer Çardaku (mathematics student, son of the head teacher) and Markeljan Kol Gjoni (local tourist guide). The children enjoyed them very much! There were also 3 volunteers from abroad. Part of the children do not live the whole year in the village but only for the summer season. 6 cheerful photos can be seen on: [https://balkanspeaceparkdotorg.wordpress.com/2018-summer-programmes](https://balkanspeaceparkdotorg.wordpress.com/2018-summer-programmes)

5 ERASMUS – European Student Exchange Programme

On 30th January 2019 a joint application was made to the Erasmus Programme via Bradford University Peace Studies Department for 10 students to take part as interns in “peace” activities in the B3P region. The application was submitted jointly by B3P, EcoAlbania, ERA, Green Home and ACSCDCI which is Inis Shkreli’s project, the Action Centre for the Survey of Cultural Dynamics and Cultural Interaction at the Mediterranean University in Tirana. A great example of inter-country planning and cooperation! Antonia Young held a meeting at Bradford University for students who might be interested in the opportunity of an internship in the Balkans; 30 students came to hear her, some of whom were Rotary Peace students. We wait to hear the result of the application.

6 EUROPEAN GREEN BELT DAY 2018

On 22nd September 2018 and as part of European Green Belt Day over 50 people hiked to the 3-country Tri-point peak, Tromedra/Trekufini, where Kosovo/a, Albania and Montenegro meet at 2365m. This was yet another cross-border, three nation collaboration between ERA Group, TOKA, NGO Triton, EuroNatur and Balkan Natural Adventure.
7 CROSS-BORDER TREKKING

a) Peaks of the Balkans Trail (PoB)

The popularity of this now well publicized circular trail through the Prokletije/Bjesjkët e Namuna mountain range in Albania, Kosovo/a and Montenegro is increasing rapidly year by year. It was established in 2012 by Local Action Groups in the 3 countries supported by the German development organization GIZ. We like to think that it was prompted by B3P’s trekking and cycling activity across the borders from 2003 onwards, a view that is supported by our friends in the region. We in B3P are delighted to see what a great success this whole enterprise has been. Congratulations to all concerned. Inevitably, however, together with such increasing numbers trekking the magnificent route comes a number of consequences. With usage the route has altered in places and the waymarking and the PoB map need updating. The footpaths become eroded, waste disposal is problematic, and guesthouses get bigger and bigger, thereby tending to feel more like impersonal hotels and less like the welcoming family homes they used to be, especially for those who arrive on foot and not by car on the modernized roads. Also, some of the villages and homes in the region which are not on the PoB route feel left out of this tourist bonanza, a cause of resentment in some communities. We hope that more adventurous mountain walkers will venture into other areas such as Lëpushë and Kelmend.

A spectacular photo journey

While they were staying at Pavlin Polia’s guesthouse in Thethi in June 2018 Richard Hargreaves’ UK “Mountain Minstrels” group met a French couple who were about set off on their PoB trek. Quentin and Mariette from Rouen in northern France are professional travellers, photographers and writers. Intrigued by the concept of the PoB trail they interviewed Pavlin and Richard to learn more about it and the B3P Project behind it. The photo record of their camping journey along the PoB is stunning and can be seen on www.shoesyourpath.com

Balkans Mountain Minstrels

2018

Having trekked in the B3P region on foot or mountain bike most years since 2003 Richard’s ‘dream’ of a music-making trek one year came true in June 2018. His group of 8 singers with his flute and 4 ukuleles was reduced by illness and accident to only 5, but, nevertheless, with 2 ukuleles and the flute we journeyed from Peja along bits of the PoB trail to Shkodër, playing and singing, mostly popular songs from the 1960s and 1970s, with some folk songs and, of course, Albania’s “Lule Borë”, wherever we stayed. A full ‘trek log’ is on the B3P website,
Some highlights were:

“Awesome”

Musically we depended 100% on the leadership of ace ukulele player Lindsay Wilkinson from Grizebeck near Ulverston in Cumbria. Richard’s wife Jane valiantly recorded as much as she could on her little Canon compact camera, so we do have a Powerpoint rendering of the journey. Singers Richard Lindley and Errollyn Bruce from Keighley were so impressed by the scenery and people they met that they are going back in June 2019 to walk the PoB trail independently.

Everything, from airport to airport, was arranged for us by Lendita Hyseni at Kosova Outdoor in Peja; she also followed us on Facebook all the way to Shkodër and said the group were “awesome”. Richard would never say that but it was kind of Lendita to do so.

b) Balkans Mountain Minstrels 2019
May 26th to June 2nd 2019
Pristina - Peja – Hajla cabin – Peja – Gusinje – Vuthaj – Thethi – Rrogam - Pristina

Some of these young folk musicians are in a group of seven who all play in the UK’s National Youth Folk Ensemble and are coming on a 7 day “Music Across Borders” mountain trek for B3P during their school or college Spring half term holiday. With 4 fiddles (violins are called fiddles in UK folk music), a viola, a banjo/ukulele player and a cello (Yes, a cello, making the logistics a challenge!), they will play and sing traditional UK folk and dance
tunes in a variety of styles and THEY ARE VERY KEEN TO LEARN AND PLAY BALKANS MUSIC. Richard (with his flute and ukulele) and Jane, and Peter and Mary, parents of fiddle player Owen, come with them, a party of 11 people. They will give concerts in Peja, maybe in Gusinje and Thethi, and just play and sing in guesthouses on the way.

MUSIC FOR THE RIVERS AND AGAINST THE HYDROPOWER SCHEMES
With their “Music Across Borders” they want to celebrate the B3P Project and ERA’s transboundary work helping young people to value the great environment they live in, but they also want to contribute to the Balkans campaigns to keep the unspoiled rivers free from the ravages of hydro dams and tunnels.

8 A NEW B3P LEAFLET
On his recent travels in the region Richard was dismayed to find there was little information available or knowledge of the Balkans Peace Park Project. He has designed a single sheet leaflet or ‘flyer’ in 3 languages which can be photocopied and left in guesthouses and tourist offices all over the region. It should be ready soon.

9 LOOKING AHEAD
a) At the end of the AGM in Leeds in December 2018 the Co-chairs Kelsey and Sylvia outlined their plans and hopes for 2019:
   • Maintaining and establishing relations with national and regional NGOs and environmental organizations in the B3P region
   • More of Jonid’s Summer Programmes!
   • Partnering with ERA to host another transboundary Summer Programme
b) We would welcome people who are inspired by the B3P project to join us on the UK committee or to join the team led by Jonid in the Balkans.
c) We need a new Treasurer on the UK committee! John Milsom has done a great job for many years but he needs to retire. Any offers?!
Support our work?

Our successful and enjoyable Summer Programmes and their extension into all three countries depend considerably on funding from donations. B3P is a small charity which relies on the generous support of interested friends and followers. We are hoping to cover the modest costs for the year which include the coordination of our international volunteer programmes, publicity and other administrative costs.

If you would like to donate you can do so by going to our new Go Fund Me! Page at www.gofundme.com/B3P2019

We really appreciate your support!

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Photos
Page 1- New tunnel on Vjose river by Patagonia Blue Heart. Ropojana river by Shoesyourpath.com  Thank you!
Page 8 - 2018 Minstrels by Jane Hargreaves.