

Czech Republic Study Tour 2006
March 26 to April 3, 2006

March 26

Today we started out in the fog and rain from Prague (Praha) and went to the Bohemian Paradise, a “protected landscape” in northern Czech Republic (CR). There are 24 “protected landscapes” in CR. People from the local chapter of the CSOP (Czech Union for the Conservation of Nature) gave a presentation on the three areas comprising the Bohemian Paradise. The BP is also a designated European Geopark, a place where geological rarities are found but not mined or sold commercially. The designation carries no legal protection.

An interesting aspect of the presentation was that many rare species of orchids (14) live in agricultural fields (meadows) here. Efforts have been made to get farmers to not plough or fertilize or apply pesticides or even to allow their fields to grow up into forest in order to protect orchid habitat. It was an example of a cultural landscape that now harbours rare species requiring management. I made a comparison with alvar habitats—naturally occurring limestone plains that on occasion must be burnt to enable the native flora to persist.



Sandstone outliers in the Bohemian Paradise (MS photo)

There are 60 land trusts in the CR; 43 have been accredited by the CSOP; the accreditation program began in 1998.

We visited several “rock cities” sandstone formations that are 300 million years old. Climbers use the area and have installed rope holds in the face of the rock. The fellow giving the tour was not convinced they would be granting carte blanche permission to the climbing association again. The area is mostly privately owned, with some state land.

We proceeded to drive to Vlasim where we arrived just before dinner. After dinner we had a presentation by CSOP representatives on the organization of their umbrella group. There were many differing facts and figures bandied about. It would appear that there is a wide disparity among CSOP member land trusts in terms of capacity and the accreditation process

could have been pursued by many more than the 43 that got it; however for reasons unknown, it was not.



Our tour guide Vasek gives a presentation at the Vlasim Land Trust's headquarters (Stojan R. photo)



Vlasim Land Trust headquarters, Vlasim. CR (Stojan R photo)

March 27: Vlasim

We started out with a walk in a Chateau Park managed by the local Vlasim chapter of CSOP. This land trust has a wide variety of projects it undertakes including managing a tree nursery, stream rehabilitation etc. Funding comes from the European Union (conservation fund) and locally. The land trust manages the above-noted chateau park containing numerous structures from the 'romantic' or baroque period. 450-year old trees line walkways between buildings including a chateau, a Chinese pavilion, a castle lookout on the banks of the river and others. Lots for them (land trust) to worry about!



Vlasim Chateau park's main building (Stojan R. photo)



Chinese pavilion managed by Vlasim land trust (MS photo)

The stream rehabilitation project we visited was 2km long and involved restoring a ditch created during the Communist era to a gravel, meandering stream. Cost: 200,000 Euros, 85% paid by the state and 15% by the municipality. We walked up Blanik Hill, a protected landscape area with extensive, mature forests (largely even-aged, homogeneous

plantations) and walking trails. At the top was a tower with expansive views over the Bohemian landscape.



Participants inspect a map of the stream rehabilitation project being undertaken by Vlasim Land Trust (MS photo)



Lookout at Blanik Hill, part of the Bohemian Paradise "Protected Landscape" (Stojan R. Photo)



Coming down Blanik Hill in the snow. Enormous beech trees populate the south-facing slopes of the hill (not shown here). (Stojan N. photo)

March 28th: Radnice Environmental Centre

This day we visited a 16th century synagogue owned and renovated by the local chapter of CSOP. They acquired the building four years ago; it had been used as a mechanic's garage and was sold to them for \$4,000. This land trust owns 5 ha of land

including meadows and peat bogs. Each nature preserve has a management plan done for a 10 year period.

There was much discussion in the room of membership, funding etc. where experiences from other countries were shared. The Radnice chapter of CSOP charges \$10/year to join, all of which it sends to the headquarters of CSOP. They only have 13 members., which they described as average for a Czech land trust. These people related that in the whole of the CR, there would have only ever been 2 or 3 donations of land—the holdover effects of Communism where, once land was returned to the citizens, they were/are not eager to give it away. They stated that it would be extremely unusual to have >10 ha plot of land in conservation; even moreso to have **no** active management taking place (in other words, management is expected to occur, usually for rare species).

Spalene Porice (CSOP Chapter)

The group visited a wildlife rehabilitation centre operated by the local land trust. Other trust activities include purchasing orchid meadows, developing wildlife corridors, repairing foundations of old ruins, mowing meadows and creating public resting places. They are working with the state to acquire/manage an old sandstone quarry. A major project was to establish the CR's first *reed bed sewage treatment system* for the village. We visited this site which had a series of graded lagoons (reeds or cattails not growing at the time, and had been harvested) to treat the sewage of 2,000 people. There are now, according to our guide, 250 of these installations in the CR, of which 150 treat sewage from between 300 and 600 people.



Barn owl at Spalene Porice wildlife rehabilitation centre. (MS photo)



Participants inspecting a reed-bed sewage treatment area which treats the effluent from a town of 2,000, operated by the local land trust. (Stojan R.)

Later that day we visited wildlife corridors the trust had established in the countryside around town. It was unclear whether there was an intended species focus or not.

March 29th: Pozembovy spolek (land trust) of Prostejovsko (city/region)

This land trust had 30 properties of which 11 are owned by the trust. This organization (chapter of CSOP) has 150 members of which around 25 are active volunteers. They have 2 employees and 2 or 3 part-timers. Total area managed: 45 ha, 33 ha of which are leased. We learned a bit about the Czech “Place for Nature Campaign” which was started a few years ago and is ongoing. Local Chapters raise money for land acquisition.

Later that day, near Novy Jicin, we visited another wildlife rehabilitation centre operated by a local land trust where we saw owls, magpies, hedgehogs, golden eagles and white storks.



Land Trust Study tour group at Novy Jicin. L – R Vasek Izak (tour guide from CR); Hernan Collado and Gwillem Mas (Catalonia, Spain) Denise Rimbaldi (Brasil); Brent Mitchell (QLF) and Stojan R. adovanovic (Serbia). (MS)



Viewing wildlife corridors (new one in left background). Patches of forest in the rolling countryside are connected using this method. (MS photo)

March 29th: White Carpathian Mountains and Kosenka

We went on a long walk of 3-4 km distance one way. The walking was extremely difficult due to thigh-deep snow and inappropriate footwear on my part. The purpose was to view orchid meadows maintained by the local land trust. Our guide, Mirek Janik, informed us of a Canadian visitor he had had who operated and maintained a website dedicated to the art of scything, used in the maintenance of meadows: www.scytheconnection.com. The group is hosting an international brigade of scythers this summer. Our host, Mirek, treated us to copious quantities of slivovice a plum brandy which is drunk from very small glasses, repeatedly, over a long time period. We had a lively discussion of their management approaches over hearty Czech soup and bread.

One main topic of that discussion was the “Place for Nature” campaign for acquiring environmentally significant land. First, they (Council of land trusts) considered acquiring funds to buy lands on a habitat and species approach. They rejected this idea because it would appeal to only a small percentage of the public. Then they decided to buy land considered to be endangered that nonetheless had natural features. When they had difficulty finding suitable acreages they made the decision to ask local chapters for ideas of lands to buy that were endangered. Not many properties were ready for sale; in the

first year only two were ready to be acquired. Last year was the first year they had more properties to buy than money to spend.



Land Trust leader Mirek Janik (right) surveys orchid meadow with Brent Mitchell (QLF) (MS photo)



Denise Rimbaldi of Brasil in White Carpathian mountains orchid meadow. (MS photo)

Later that day (around 7) we visited the **Certoryje Land Trust**, a small group which manages—for the CR-- a state nature preserve which has orchid meadows over a landscape that looks, when seen in aerial photographs, like a piece of striped material. The old farms are on average 0.1 ha in size and there are more than 3,000 of them. The group has an agreement with a farmer to mow 700 ha of meadows for payment. Landowners within this national nature preserve pay no taxes on their properties and often the land is abandoned or has no clear title. Hay from the property management is sometimes sold, sometimes burned, sometimes composted. This group also has an environmental centre where courses are held and concentrates on maintaining traditional gene pools of a variety of fruit trees grown in the region. The land trust only owns around 1 ha of land, for which it paid 50,000 crowns or around 12,000 euros. The best time to visit the orchid meadows is between the middle of May to the end of June.

Friday March 31th

This morning we travelled two hours to Brno and a quarry site outside the town. This was a rehabilitation project of our guide, Vasik, who met the only employee on-site. The group is trying to establish orchid meadows and native vegetation. We then proceeded to the Moravian Karst region where we were accommodated in a hotel, the same spot where

the host organization (CSOP) was having a meeting of their council of land trusts. Each land trust (us) gave a presentation on our activities and took questions.

In the CR, our hosts from CSOP explained, under the EU program called Natura 2000, 20% of the land base in the CR is the target for protection. The state is now preparing a law regarding the regulation of NGOs, recognizing that they won't be able to manage all the land and will need help from the non-profit sector. Under this framework, the state is trying to figure out how to support NGOs; currently there is no distinction—tax-wise—between a for-profit corporation such as a golf club, and a non-profit land trust. As a result, land trusts have difficulty attracting charitable donations. They will be looking at an option whereby as a citizen you can designate/direct 1% of your taxes to the charity of your choice.

In the CR, our hosts reported that 40% of the land base is owned by the State, 40% is privately owned and 20% is municipally owned.



Hepatica growing in Moravian Karst region (MS photo)



Barbara, 2.5 (tour guide's daughter) happily accompanied us to the vast cave system in the National Park (MS photo)

April 1, 2006

From Brno we proceeded by train to Budapest.

Observations on the Land Trust Study Tour:

It is interesting to connect with land trusts that are managing cultural landscapes, not just properties but agricultural fields which have previously been mown by low-impact farm methods. In addition, these land trusts concern themselves with walking trails and views from various vantage points on their lands. This has been an interesting contrast with our approach in New Brunswick where, for the most part, natural processes are allowed to take their course with little or no intervention or active management.

The land trusts here have a wealth of scientifically trained volunteers and advisors, lots of fancy computers and mapping but few actual supporting members. Nonetheless the breadth of projects they are undertaking is wide: wildlife rehabilitation, public education,

stream rehabilitation, wildlife corridor establishment, land acquisition, recycling promotion, mowing of meadows for orchids, pond creation etc.

QLF First Alumni Congress, Budapest (April 2-6)

In Budapest the QLF convened a congress with delegates from 35 different countries including Israel and Palestine. The group stayed two nights in Budapest and two nights in Buch National Park. A stewardship workshop was held during which time I gave a presentation on the Trust and the Upper St. John project. We heard presentations on:

- a Catalonian foundation formed by 3 or 4 banks for the purpose of acquiring and managing conservation lands;
- a Paraguayan NGO which owns 20,000 ha of land and has easements on 300,000 ha more;
- a project by a Belizean NGO that practices integrated landscape and protected areas management (there is a Belizean Association of Private Protected Areas!)
- CSOP the Czech Union for the Conservation of Nature which has established a network of land trusts around that country;
- A Bulgarian Biodiversity foundation (land trust);
- A Mexican land trust;
- The Golden lion tamarin(primate) reserve in Brasil.

The next day we had a funders panel with people there from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, the Boston Foundation, the Cloverleaf Foundation and others. We also had a presentation and participated in a discussion of future directions for the QLF guided by QLF board member and Harvard professor Jim Levitt whose book, *From Walden to Wall Street; Frontiers in Conservation Finance*, was in our congress packages.

There was a bit too much to report on, but we also: saw the endangered Great Bustard (bird) in its natural habitat; went to a Hungarian horse show; had dinner on a cruise boat on the Danube the night the river reached its highest level in 100 years (the boat was docked securely with motor running to resist the pull of the current); met George H. Bush's 2nd cousin (George Walker, Ambassador to Hungary) at two receptions hosted by the US embassy; met the Canadian and Mexican ambassadors who attended a reception at the Walker embassy; listened to endless speeches; ate huge quantities of food, networked and compared notes with other land trust people and laughed a lot.

In all, the events, which were completely paid for by CSOP and QLF except for airfare, were extremely useful to my work and I would recommend participation in future QLF organized conferences. The contacts I made will be helpful and well worth the airfare and time spent.

After the conference I sent the following thank you to the QLF President Larry Morris:

Congratulations to you and Beth Alling for the marvellous congress you put on in Hungary. What a fantastic gathering it was for me and the other delegates to be part of.

I will highlight some of the tangibles I took away:

- *I found out about a marketplace matching donors with non-profits;*
- *I learned about an internship program in Canada we're eligible for;*
- *I found two foundations interested in rescuing a project that is in jeopardy due to Revenue Canada's capital gains rules;*
- *I gathered resolve and made a commitment to do a business plan for the Nature Trust for the next 3-5 years to get us "to the next level" organizationally, and*
- *I met people from all over the world who are now my friends.*

It was a tremendous effort I'm sure, to pull all of the logistics off but you did a super job. Thank you for including me and the Nature Trust of New Brunswick in such a global gathering.

Best wishes and congratulations,

*Margo Sheppard
Executive Director*



View from Budapest Hilton, the site of the QLF Congress, April 2006. Hungarian parliament buildings in distance. (MS Photo)