

## **KIEV: The Host City of the Forty-Third Apimondia Congress**

### **John Phipps Kiev - its Early History**

Visitors attending Apimondia in September 2013 will not only find themselves in Europe's largest country, but also the city which was the Russian seat of power for two centuries. The story is often told that the Slavs, inhabitants of the huge area of land between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, were always fighting each other and, seeing how wasteful it was, decided to find someone to rule over them - but not from within their own clans. Apparently an invitation was sent to three Varangian (Viking) brothers and Rurik, the eldest, became the leader of the Rus with his stronghold being the city of Novgorod in the north of present day Russia. Sometime later, the descendants of Rurik made voyages down the River Dnieper firstly to make war against the Byzantines but later for trade, and we are told that enormous amounts of honey, wax, furs and slaves were exchanged for silks, wine and jewelry. On one of the voyages, two Vrangians, Askold and Dir, noticed a small town which occupied a very defensive position high above the river. When inquiries were made as to who its ruler was, they learned that the three brothers who had founded the burgh, named after one of the brothers, Kii, had since died and that the inhabitants had to pay tribute to another tribe. In 882 the Vrangians, led by Oleg, a descendant of Rurik, gathered their forces together and seized the town, choosing Kii (Kiev) as their centre of administration rather than Novgorod. **The Adoption of Eastern Orthodox Religion**

It was in Kiev too, in 998, that the Rus people turned to Christianity. Like the story about the founding of their capital, the sources of the material are found in the 'Primary Chronicle' and are as suspect as the account of King Alfred of England burning the cakes. Vladimir, the Grand Prince, allegedly sent envoys to find out about the various religions, ie, Islam, Jewish and the Western and Eastern Christian faiths. Their report makes interesting reading: "*We saw men worship in a temple that is called a mosque, where they sit and bow and look like men possessed; but there is no happiness among them, only sorrow and a dreadful stench. And we went among the Germans and saw their ceremonies, but we beheld no glory there. But when we entered the edifices of the Greeks we knew not whether we were on Earth or in Heaven. For on Earth there is no such splendour or such beauty and we knew not how to describe it. God doth truly dwell among men and there we saw beauty that we can never forget.*" It is cynical perhaps to suppose that Vladimir not only managed to secure trading agreements with the Greeks, but also chose Orthodox Christianity, as its followers were allowed to eat all types of meat as well as drink alcohol. Whatever the reason, Vladimir ordered that every pagan idol was to be destroyed and that a Christian place of worship should be erected. Kiev remained the centre of the Orthodox Russian Church until its seat was removed to Moscow in 1325. **Kiev Today**

beautifully-coloured and magnificent structures of Kiev's Orthodox churches and monasteries with their onion-shaped crowns and domes are a distinctive feature of Kiev and well worth a visit. Kiev is also a city of many parks, botanic gardens, a zoological garden, well laid out university campuses, tree-lined streets and museums of culture, archaeology, and science and technology. It is divided by the wide River Dnieper with its deep sandy banks which is as busy in the summer months as any seaside resort. It also has an extensive network of trams, buses and underground stations - the latter being the deepest in the world - all of which makes getting round the city both cheap and easy. **Bees and Beekeepers** But, of course, the main reason for going to Kiev is for the bees. For nearly two decades I have been in contact with Dr Alexander Komissar, who was a Professor of Apiculture in Kiev until his retirement. As a correspondent for the Beekeepers Quarterly he has written extensively about beekeeping in his country and described many of the innovations of Ukrainian beekeepers, several of them his own, which he allows others to manufacture freely. He is particularly known for his nucleus hives which have compartments, electric heating systems for overwintering colonies in the cold areas of Ukraine, ekes with many small bars which allow bees to build lovely combs of honey, enough for one meal at a time, a method for harvesting nutritious bee bread from colonies, and for developing a thriving business of producing solitary bees for garden and glasshouse use. I was able to see all these inventions for myself during a two week visit to Ukraine last spring. Alexander also took me to the apiaries of beekeepers he had written about; a beekeeper who uses a paraffin wax dip for preserving bee hives; a beekeeper who markets a filtered suspension of wax moth larvae in alcohol (a few drops of which in water is a good health tonic when taken daily); another beekeeper who together with his wife uses the Nagataki method of diagnosing body ailments both before and after the treatment - those consulting them have the splendid experience of sleeping in special sheds, lying on top of beehives; and an ex-aircraft engineer who has made a fortune from his beekeeping by designing and producing his own mini-nucs and raising and selling local queens. During my visit I attended an interesting conference held in a former Pioneer Camp (the Soviet posters were still on the wall), and, being an Orthodox country, those in attendance were sprinkled with Holy Water after a short religious service which marked the beginning of the event. The meeting was like no other one I have ever attended. Several beekeepers were on the platform together and this first session went on for three hours without a break except when a group of beekeeping suppliers started a shouting match which lasted for twenty minutes when the speakers claimed that a lot of the wax for sale was adulterated. Best of all was the visit to the apiaries. Most of the commercial beekeepers stay in the forest apiaries with their bees during the season. Everything was well organised.

A gas burner always on the go for black tea, a camp fire for cooking, fresh fish from the river, forest mushrooms, a pressurised hot shower made from a aluminium beer barrel painted black, fresh water from a spring and comfortable beds in the large bee house which also housed colonies in two tiers and room for extracting honey. The main means of transportation were ex-Soviet military jeeps and lorries, relics of the Chechnya war. The Carpatica type bees are very gentle and build up quickly and are ready in time for the first major flow from acacia, after which the colonies are moved on to the numerous fields of sunflowers.

**Chemobyl** As we were not far from Chernobyl, I joined Alexander on an organised visit. Just after the disaster it was Alexander's job to visit the region and collect samples of ducks from the marshes around the plant which had stopped over for a while on their northward migration. He found the ducks to be heavily contaminated with radiation - so word was sent out to hunters along the birds' route that they were unsafe for eating. Alexander also tested honey from a couple of hives after the disaster. Whilst he found very little if any radiation in the honey, the pollen was heavily contaminated. The visit to Chernobyl? Well, I purposely bought rolls of B&W film in my belief that using this type of media would best and most dramatically depict what had been, up until then, the world's most serious nuclear energy disaster. How wrong I was, for my small group arrived on an unusually warm spring day with no clouds in the clear blue sky. The previous day had marked the 26th anniversary of the disaster and all the memorials were bedecked with garlands and small posies of flowers, tributes to those who had died at the scene. Whilst the buildings which we had been allowed to enter tragically revealed that in haste everything had been left behind, the shafts of light filtering through the dusty windows illuminated them in pastel shades. In the town of Pripyat, trees bursting into leaf were laying claim to what had once been pavements and balconies, and a few butterflies and a bee were feeding on the freshly opened cherry blossoms. In the unused children's playground, the ferris wheel towered over us and, like all the other structures made ready for the May Day opening, still retained many of its bright colours. As I walked round the quiet and deserted streets I almost felt that when turning a corner I would see some of the former inhabitants leaving their apartments as if it was just another ordinary day. Around the nuclear plant itself lorries carried their loads of cement to Reactor No 4 where a new sarcophagus was being built but, not far away, the cranes surrounding Reactor No 5 suggested that work was still in progress, although it had been discontinued decades ago. With many personnel on the site the whole scene was, to me, one of normality, a feeling consolidated by the beautiful day and the clear reflections of parts of the plant in the lakes that had provided the cooling water. However, when we strayed from the paths to test the emerald green moss which thrived everywhere, the readings from the dosimeter shot up

revealing a high level of radiation. In the midst of so much beauty, the plant and township surrounded by forests of pine, birch and lakes, there still lurked the potent remains of the unforgettable catastrophe. Apart from the original dangers concerning the explosion itself, the perils of a nuclear disaster are **insidious**, invisible, but still deadly if not respected. So, I needed to use colour photography together with these words to highlight the fact that, despite the apparent visual normality, all is not as it appears; that whilst nature is reclothing the area in glorious beauty there remains the danger of the unseen, insidious nuclear pollution which has already wrecked the lives of so many people. I was left with a sense of great sadness and emptiness. Surprisingly, maybe, I didn't leave Chernobyl thinking that there should be an end to nuclear power stations. Chernobyl was an accident that wasn't supposed to happen. The nuclear industry has to learn lessons from this incident and the others in the USA and Japan. Harnessed correctly nuclear energy is an important and clean method of producing power though safety has to be of paramount importance. In the past too many people have died from the exploiting of coal and gas reserves and the effects of smog. Because of past reliance on the coal and oil industries the environment has been despoiled, in some places for ever and the continued use of fossil fuels will increase even more the carbon dioxide levels which are responsible for global warming. (*Fortunately, throughout our escorted visit, care for our safety was of prime importance, and at various times during our visit, as well as when we finally left the zone, we were thoroughly monitored for any signs of radioactivity.*) **OUR VISIT TO CHERNOBYL WAS ORGANISED BY YURI - Of UkrainianWeb.com. He organises tours for small groups which are collected from Kiev and transported, accompanied by a guide, to the Chernobyl exclusion zone. The tour lasts for a day and includes an excellent (safe) lunch at the staff canteen at the power station.**XXXXIII INTERNATIONAL APIMONDIA CONGRESS 2013 I am sure that anyone attending the conference will find their visit both interesting and worthwhile. The Ukrainian people are friendly and good hosts and their culture is very different from what we experience in the west. I have seen more innovations in this country than elsewhere - sadly, as yet, they are not ready to market many of their products because of the difficulties involved with exportation and bureaucracy. Should they achieve membership of the EU, then important markets would open up for the country. For details of the Apimondia Congress see: **[apimondia2013.org.ua/en/](http://apimondia2013.org.ua/en/)**