



Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme 2008 Report

June 16 to August 9, 2008

Thethi, Albania

Compiled by J. Todd Walters



Executive Summary

The 2008 Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme in Thethi, Albania, was a pilot programme on the local community level for the B3P. The aims of the programme were to help revitalize life in Thethi; to educate the children of Thethi concerning their environment and basic English communication skills; and to increase the desire of people to return to Thethi and re-establish their families and homes.

For the 8 weeks that the programme ran, the 19 international volunteers and 3 Albanian teachers taught 40 hours of English classes and 40 hours of Environmental Education classes to 83 registered students, with 55 of them receiving certificates during the graduation ceremony and festival on August 9, 2008. This programme was free for all students to participate, and grew in the number of registered students throughout the course of the summer.

In addition to the school, each Saturday, the Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme facilitated group meetings with the men in the morning and the women in the afternoon (gender segregation was by the villagers choice, and was beneficial to establishing an atmosphere where honest dialogue and discussion could be had.) Through this format, issues such as infrastructure development and repair, waste management, eco-tourism, marketing, and national park management were discussed – sometimes with an international “expert” guiding the discussion and answering questions after a presentation on a particular topic. All sessions were facilitated by our Albanian facilitator, Arian Gjura.

Finally, the Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme managed a grant from the German Embassy to Kosovo that allowed for some small scale infrastructure development and trail maintenance projects to be identified, and completed with local involvement. Our local partner in Kosovo, E.R.A was given funds towards the completion of their waterfall trail in Rugova, two bridges of significance in Thethi were repaired, four double-barrel trash bins were installed, two trail signposts were installed, GPS data was gathered on several local trails, and a summary was developed of future infrastructure development and trail maintenance projects within the Balkans Peace Park proposed area.

Like any pilot programme the Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme 2008 was not without its challenges and unforeseen circumstances; however the positive attitudes and flexibility of our volunteers allowed us to successfully overcome the few bumps along the way. For the people of the village, the programme was well respected and highly appreciated. There was not a day that went by when I did not receive a sincere and heartfelt thank-you from one of the villagers. The majority of the international volunteers felt that their time in Thethi was a significant life experience that created many opportunities for unique cultural exchanges and friendships to be developed, in a stunningly beautiful location, working with children who were eager to learn. We gained the trust of the village by living with as many different families as possible, and became accepted members of the community, who were honestly missed when they departed. We knew we achieved success when we were asked by the students if we could run the Summer Programme all year long!



Balkan Peace Park Summer School

Overview

- Registered 43 students on June 16, 2008
- Had 83 students registered as having attended at least 1 class as of August 8, 2008
- Graduated 55 students with BPP Summer Programme Certificates on August 9, 2008
- Students broken into 4 groups (A + B, and C + D)
 - A + B – older kids (15 and above)
 - C + D – younger kids (14 and under)
- Classes held Monday through Friday, from 9 am to 11:15 am
 - 1 hour English and 1 hour of Environmental Education for each student
 - 5 minute break in between classes for fresh air, a snack and water
- Teacher Binders developed to track...
 - Students registered, and attendance
 - Teacher Lesson Plans
 - List of Subject/Topic taught on a daily basis
 - Teacher journal for the day – personal reflections
 - Discipline Issues – who and what
- 2 Historical, Cultural and Environmental Field Trip Class Days

English Classes

- Taught by a rotating group of 19 International Volunteers in conjunction with an Albanian translator in each classroom.
 - older kids had a rotating translator
 - younger kids had Miranda Terthorja (whose role evolved from translator into teacher)
- Without an established teaching methodology for the whole programme to follow, each teacher brought their own – this has the potential to be both positive and negative
- Curriculum developed ad hoc, based on Student Teacher Inquiry
 - Focus on conversational skills valuable for discussions with tourists
- Need for an Advanced Class
 - Conversational (Peter, Mary, Chris, Alfred, John)
- Need for an Adult English Class

Environmental Education Classes

- Taught by 2 Albanian Teachers
 - Luigi Shyti (Environmental Education Teacher in Shkodra, Thethi Resident in Summer)
 - Pranvera Carku (Geometry Teacher in Shkodra, Thethi Resident in Summer)
- Curriculum Designed prior to programme
- Included idea for the “field trip” days to allow teaching to occur outside the classroom

Adult English Classes

- Developed Ad Hoc to address a need – the desire for opportunity for Adults to learn English
- Core group of 4-6 men attended Tuesday and Thursday at 11am
- All women refused the invitation
- Also utilized as a unique negotiating point in community integration with the village Kyreplak and the teacher he appointed for the village the previous winter.



Weekend Meetings

In an effort to expand the impact of the Summer Programme beyond the students and the school, each Saturday the Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme facilitated group meetings with the men in the morning and the women in the afternoon (gender segregation was by the villagers' choice, and was beneficial to establishing an atmosphere where honest dialogue and discussion could be had). All sessions were facilitated by our Albanian facilitator, Arian Gjura – and utilized an elicitive approach, seeking to draw out the issues and dynamics that the villagers wanted to focus on and learn about and discuss. Through this format, issues such as infrastructure development and repair, waste management, eco-tourism, marketing, and national park management were discussed – sometimes with an international “expert” guiding the discussion and answering questions after a presentation on a particular topic. Useful information was gathered over the course of the 8 week programme which will help improve and channel the programme's direction in the future. In particular, the womens meetings gave the B3P programme access to a unique window of information and feedback from an often ignored and marginalized portion of the population. In addition, the fact that we lived in the community for 8 weeks allowed us to establish trust and build relationships with the villagers, both women and men, and we were therefore more able to readily discuss issues in depth with open and honest feedback that might not be accessible in focus groups conducted in less community-based ways.

Weekend Meetings – Guest Speakers

- Waste Management - Robert Mangham of OSCE
- National Park Management - Alan Hulme and Paul Sheehan of YDNP
- What Tourists Want - Richard Hargreaves of BPP Committee
- Citizen's Role in Democratic Society - Eralda Nikshiqi of World Vision
- Writing a Letter to the Government - Eralda Nikshiqi of World Vision
- Eco-Tourism – Arian Gjura – BPP Facilitator
- Marketing Thethi – Arian Gjura – BPP Facilitator

Weekend Meetings - Opportunities for Improvement

1. Need to increase attendance beyond just the core groups
2. Need to develop actionable projects that the villagers want and are willing to help implement
3. Necessity to keep the weekly men's meeting and women's meeting separate; but still to host at least one ALL village meeting.
4. Establish a standard time each week (that the villagers agree upon) and don't change it
5. Establish Accountability – at what point will the meeting be cancelled if everyone shows up late...30 min? 1 hour?
6. Need to publicize the meetings and their purposes and topics better
7. Potentially invite sponsors, donors and other partners to attend and see first-hand the value of the weekend meetings.
8. Try and secure a sponsor for each weekend based on topics



Development Projects (Grant from German Embassy in Kosovo)

The Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme won and managed a grant from the German Embassy to Kosovo that allowed for some small scale infrastructure development and trail maintenance projects to be identified and completed with local involvement. This helped to stimulate the local economy, created jobs, and allowed the B3P to expand our impact in the proposed Peace Park region. We were able to fulfill additional aspects of the greater B3P vision including – sustainable rural development, income generating opportunities to create additional reasons for young people to want to stay rather than migrate to urban centers for jobs, and environmental protection and ecotourism.

Our local partner in Kosovo, E.R.A was given funds towards the completion of their waterfall trail in Rugova, two bridges of significance in Thethi were repaired, four double-barrel trash bins were installed, two trail signposts were installed, GPS data was gathered on several local trails.

The culmination was the completion of an analysis, including location, for future infrastructure development and trail maintenance projects within the Balkans Peace Park proposed area.

- a. Bridge Gjecaj (Hydroelectric)**
 - i. Used by shepards, livestock, access to corn mill, access to hydrocentral
 - ii. Constructed by Thethians – Lek Gerla; Ndue Gurra; Tonin Rxanxa; Gjon Gjecaj;
 - iii. Made of white pine (estimated 8-12 years for life of bridge)
 - iv. Built July 22-28, 2008
 - v. Cost – 1,080 EUROS

- b. Bridge Gerla (Grunas, Waterfall)**
 - i. Used by tourists and Thethians to access Cataract Thethi and Grunas Archeological Site
 - ii. Constructed by Thethians – Lek Gerla; Ndue Gurra; Tonin Rxanxa; Gjin
 - iii. Made of red pine (estimated 40-50 years for life of bridge)
 - iv. Built August 3-7, 2008
 - v. Cost – 1,850 EUROS

- c. Trash Bin Installation and 3 Trash Clean Ups**
 - i. Used by tourists and Thethians
 - ii. Constructed by Thethians – Ndue and Tom Shyti , Clean Ups conducted by students and teachers
 - iii. Units with TWO - 200L barrels installed by the church, school, road bridge and upper parts of road
 - iv. Installed August 5, 2008
 - v. Cleanups – June 27, July 16 and August 8
 - vi. Cost – 500 EUROS

- d. GPS Trail Mapping**
 - i. Used to identify trails and routes within the Balkans Peace Park
 - ii. Data gathered by Todd Walters and rendered in GIS by Mark Rupa
 - iii. Future data to also be provided by local partners ERA and HRID
 - iv. Completed September 15, 2008
 - v. Cost – 2,500 EUROS

- e. Trail Maintenance and Infrastructure Development Strategic Plan**
 - i. Identify areas of current and future trail maintenance and infrastructure projects
 - ii. Develop a strategic plan for completing those projects
 - iii. Develop a year round trail maintenance plan
 - iv. Reports to be compiled and written by Todd Walters and Mark Rupa
 - v. Completed September 30, 2008
 - vi. Cost – 2,250 EUROS



- f. ERA Partnership – Rugova Valley Waterfall Trail Development**
 - i. Year 2 of a 3 year plan to develop an Environmental Education Trail
 - ii. Project is ERA designed and implemented
 - iii. ERA will also seek GPS trail data, and identify future trail maintenance and infrastructure projects
 - iv. Funds Transferred – July 14, 2008. Summary Report forthcoming
 - v. Cost – 3,000 EUROS