

Peace Corps

Edward L Frey

Prologue

What follows are letters that I mailed to Shirley, a friend and cyclist, that was with me on the Cross Country and the Western Tours. I had a computer available but internet service was so poor that email could not be sent so all of them were mailed. She then made a few copies and mailed them to others in our bicycling group who then passed them on to others. A 'chain' letter of sorts.

When I returned from Japan in 2001 Shirley picked me up at the airport in San Francisco and I spent a couple days at her place in Lake Tahoe. It was there that she said that she had most of the letters that I had sent and asked if I wanted them. Sadly, Shirley died soon after she had given me these letters. She fought her cancer for over 5 years and remained the same positive, cheerful person during that time as the one that I first met on the x-country ride in 1990.

A few years later I retyped them (including all the misspellings and poor grammar) as web pages in a newly developed website. There were no pictures mailed with the letters but I added them when creating the web pages.

I am now moving them from that website to this WordPress site as Pages. The Pages continue to have the appearance of letters but I am hoping that they will flow more like a book rather than a blog. *Note: Nothing on this page was included in any of the letters sent to Shirley.*

The Peace Corps experience all began while I was working in Reno and had become bored with what I was doing. So I was casually looking at the Help Wanted notices in the news paper and saw one that was looking for 'Ex-bankers'. I read the expected duties and experience required and thought that I was qualified and only then at the bottom of the notice saw that it was an ad posted by the Peace Corps. I contacted them which started a 13 month bureaucratic process to be accepted.

Dear Edward:

Congratulations! It is with great pleasure that we invite you to begin training for Peace Corps service. You will be joining thousands of Americans who are building stronger communities around the world. This call to action gives you the opportunity to learn new skills and to find the best in yourself.

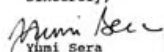
The next step is up to you. Please carefully read the enclosed Volunteer Assignment Description, Invitation Booklet, and other important details about Peace Corps service.

Please call us within ten days regarding your decision to accept or decline our invitation. If we do not hear from you within this period, the assignment may be offered to another applicant.

Because your invitation to serve in Peace Corps is contingent upon final medical and legal clearances, it is important that you respond promptly to any requests for further information. If you have questions, feel free to call us at (800) 424-8580, extension 2253.

We appreciate your desire to make Peace Corps service a part of your future. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,


Yumi Sera
Volunteer Placement Specialist
Professional and Technical Trades Desk
Office of Placement

Enclosures

Dear Peace Corps Invitee:

Congratulations on being invited to become a Peace Corps Volunteer. This invitation, offered after a highly competitive selection process, says a great deal about your character and commitment to others, and I urge you to accept this wonderful challenge to serve.

Life in the Peace Corps is an adventure that is both rewarding and demanding -- it requires hard work, patience, and a sense of humor. But you will have the opportunity to live in a different culture, learn a new language, and build lifetime friendships. As a volunteer, you will strengthen America's understanding of the world and leave a lasting impression of our goodwill long after you return home. Providing a helping hand and forging bonds of international cooperation, your service will make a difference for our nation and the world.

The Peace Corps is one of America's most important and successful institutions, and I hope you decide to add to its extraordinary tradition of service by becoming a Volunteer. It is "the toughest job you'll ever love."

Sincerely,

After receipt of the Acceptance Letter shown on the right there were a couple of telephone calls. In the first one the Peace Corps asked me if I would be open to accepting a Volunteer Position in a "former Soviet Union country"; I told them yes. For a couple of weeks I thought it would be one of 'stan' countries in Asia. Later, in the second call they asked me if I would accept Bulgaria; I told them yes. I had the opportunity to decline Bulgaria and they would have offered me a second country but it is VERY doubtful that a third country would be offered (you would be considered not serious and dropped). I was told by someone in the Peace Corps that for 1996 they needed to fill 10,000 positions. There were something like 500,000 inquiries and 100,000 completed Applications were received to get those 10,000.

I received the letter on the right from The White House soon after the Acceptance Letter. At that time I made a 5x8 framed copy of it and had it hanging on my wall at work until I left for Washington D.C. in June of 1996.

I don't have any of the paperwork that got me to Washington but I was sent instructions and a plane ticket. All the Volunteers in my Group met there for three days for orientation and then flew as a Group to Bulgaria and bus to Kyustendil where we had 3 months training.

In one of the 2 or 3 missing Letters written from Kuystendil I may have told about how some of the Training was individualized and the placement of Volunteers certainly was. The Pre-Training Questionnaire shown below helped the Peace Corps Staff in this regard.

experience:
 rible all professional and volunteer experience relevant to your proposed project (refer to your Volunteer Assignment Description). Attach additional sheets if necessary.

Financial Administrative Assistant	Company/Location Harris's/Henry, WV	Date (Start/End) 8/93 to Current
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description: Maintain a Personal Staffing System that measures labor hours work cards that are tied to business volumes. Also update data files and prepare reports on these business indicators utilizing a micro computer with 80286. Have experience with VisiCalc and Lotus 123 spreadsheets. I am proficient in Excel including the development of macros using the Visual Basic programming language. Assist five analysts with data input and reports or chart preparation.

Recent Partner	Company/Location Pattie's Pantry/ Rocklin, CA	Date (Start/End) 8/90 to 12/91
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description: Was an investor and operating partner in a start-up restaurant and responsible for the preparation of a business plan, establishing accounts, negotiating property leases, equipment leases, and arranging financing. Also worked with my partners in developing the market research data for the new firm. Circumstances were such that the proper level of financing could not be obtained and we discontinued the effort.

Five President/Cashier	Company/Location First Trust Bank/ Oxnard, CA	Date (Start/End) 7/82 to 3/90
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description: Was Controller from 7/82 to 6/84 with full responsibility for all accounting functions including preparation of annual reports. Also prepared consolidated budgets and developed various department or product cost analysis. From 6/84 to 3/90 I was responsible for all "operational" items to the included Purchasing, Materials Inventory, Transportation, and the data entry for checks and all accounting systems. Was also a member of the Bank Board Committee that formulated investment policy for the bank's portfolio. Possessable knowledge in the area of accounting data processing in a banking context.

experience:
 rible all professional and volunteer experience relevant to your proposed project (refer to your Volunteer Assignment Description). Attach additional sheets if necessary.

auditor	Company/Location Phoenix, AZ Valley National Bank/	Date (Start/End) 8/68 to 7/82
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description: Was a Staff Accountant from 8/68 to 8/75 with duties in Budget creation and analysis as well as internal/external financial report preparation. Auditor from 8/75 to 7/82 I performed audits in all headquarters department owned Subsidiaries. This included Purchasing, Personnel, Loans, Investments, and Data Processing.

or Achievement Advisor	Company/Location Junior Achievement/ Phoenix, AZ	Date (Start/End) 9/73 to 6/82
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description: Provided training to high school students involved in the Junior Achievement Bank for eight years and was Junior Achievement Center Manager in Mesa, Arizona for one year. Provided educational training in an informal "on" environment regarding the capitalist basis of United States business practice of a Bank in that system.

Senior Officer	Company/Location Phoenix Civil Air Patrol/ Phoenix, AZ	Date (Start/End) 4/70 to 6/73
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description: Maintained all financial records for the Phoenix Wing. In addition performed military training to CAP Cadets; high school students wishing to drill and related activities prior to entering the military service or go.

skills
 r Volunteer Assignment Description may indicate that you will need certain skills and abilities to complete your project. Please describe which skills and abilities you already possess currently have most of the skills required under the principal duties of Volunteers in Project Description. Able to discuss or provide training in counting business communications, writing, financial analysis, industrial design, preparing business plans, and preparing/presenting seminars.

write the skills and abilities for which you may need additional training and assistance during your Peace Corps service.

Recently need language training and training in Bulgarian business culture as well as how to get things done in the local way. Also, not strong in thinking and human resource management.

write any other experience, interest, or hobbies which may be useful in your project or in a secondary activity.

as a strong interest in travel in all of its forms with particular emphasis on touring. Would like to work with touring industry and/or begin new work as primary and secondary activities. Also been involved in this field at various times in life; including pin key, automatic sewing machine mechanics and league competition.

expectations
 write your goals and expectations, including adjustments to living in another culture, for your two-year Peace Corps service.

expect to learn as much or more than I teach. I will be only one teacher; I will have exposure to many others that will be teaching me. Also expect new opportunities for assignments, change. Expect that my level of effort will be more significant to a developing area than that same effort here where my personal goals are built upon the premise "you will become richer; your problems than you will trying to make money" and "success is more a matter of timing failure." The Peace Corps gives me an opportunity to put these "traps" into practice. I believe my childhood lifestyle and previous life experiences will help me make the adjustment to living in a new culture more easily of a shock.

Education
 List all relevant education and training. Be sure to include all formal coursework, occupational training and informal training which relates to your volunteer assignment. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

Degree or study title if none applicable	When earned/started, Date degree or certificate is applicable (MM/YY)	Where earned/started, City/State	Date (Start/End)
graduate	8/73 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/73 to 8/75
graduate	8/75 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/75 to 8/75
graduate	8/75 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/75 to 8/75
graduate	8/75 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/75 to 8/75
graduate	8/75 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/75 to 8/75
graduate	8/75 to 8/75	University of Arizona/Tucson, AZ	8/75 to 8/75

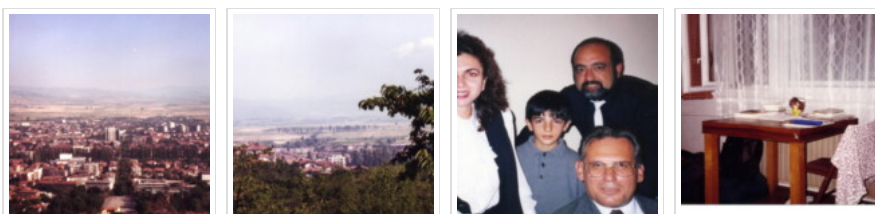
List any certificates and/or licenses you presently hold or have held, which may be relevant to your volunteer assignment.

International Bank Auditor
 Certified Internal Auditor

Foreign Language Ability

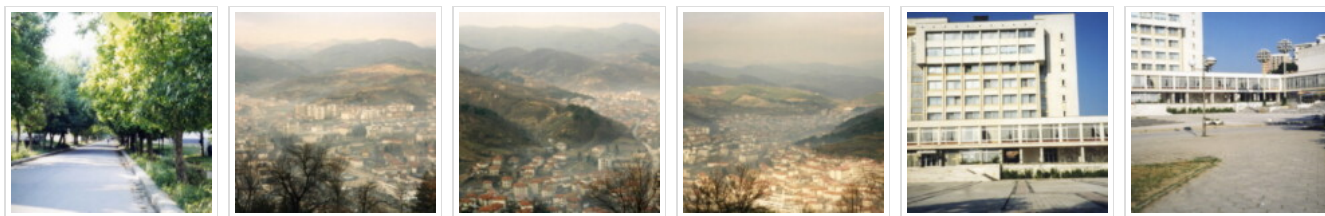
Language	When learned/started, Date certificate received	Current Ability	Estimated Proficiency
Travels	Community College - 2 units	8/95 to 5/95	
Travels	Community College - 2 units	8/95 to 12/95	K

However, I think the placements were driven more by the volunteers personality, character, language skills and how they might fit in with the community where they were to be placed.

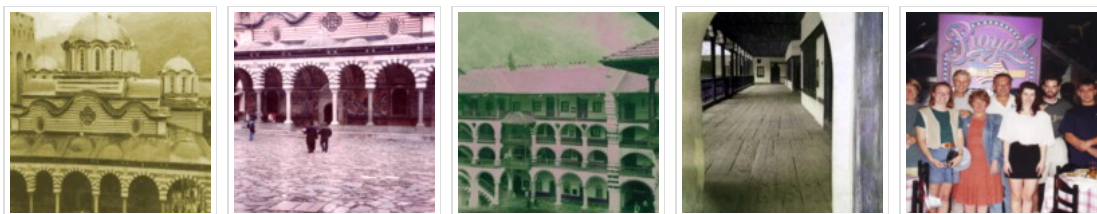


Two pictures of Kyustendil from the hills that border it to the east. My "host family" (The Miladinv's - Ivo, Silvia & Svetly) at the Peace Corps swearing-in and party (I think I'm about half in the bag). There was a younger daughter (Adi) that did not come not did the Grandparents or the brothers family (we all lived in a three story family house). My study desk in the children's room; they were moved out so the family could get the money for my staying there. Everything I had with me was in the large bag on the floor to the left rear.

There is at least one letter missing between 26 Jun 1996 and this letter, probably 2 or 3. The OFC is a group of "older" bicyclists that rode the x-country and or the Western Tour. I was assigned to serve my two years as a Volunteer in Zlatograd, a town in the south central part of Bulgaria on the border with Greece. I worked for the Zlatograd Community Development Center "CDC" a Bulgarian non-governmental organization. The Executive director, his assistant Milka, who was my counterpart/translator, and myself staffed the Center. In one of the missing letters I probably explained that I had to go to Peace Corps headquarters in Sofia each month to receive my living allowance.



The picture on the top left is the "Main Street" on the right bank of the Verbitsa River that I walk every day from home to my office. The next picture shows the Municipal Building, with its "square" just over the tree limbs. I lived in one of the shorter "blocks" that are below the tall ones at about the center of that picture. The Verbitsa River flows out of the canyon to the upper right and you can see the Alamotsi joining it to the left of the Municipal Building. The third picture shows the town on both banks of the Alamotsi to the left of the Municipal Building. The fourth picture is the town on the left bank of the Verbitsa or to the right of the Municipal Building. The two pictures of the Municipal Building: In the first my office is up the steps and on the left. The second picture, bottom left, is the Municipal Building right side 'wing'.



We went on a "field trip" to Rila Monastery which is a must see in Bulgaria. I took more pictures than these four but the developing in Zlatograd was so bad that the prints are almost worthless (this is the best Photoshop job that I can do on them). The group picture was taken on another Peace Corps "field trip" to Samokov that was intended to teach us how to travel in Bulgaria. That is Kristina (Bulgarian Language Teacher) in the center with Elisabeth to her right and Vangie to her right rear. I'm behind Kristina with Bob on my right and Bret to my left. The other boy and girl were our servers for this evening meal.



This is a picture of our Group (B-6). All Peace Corps Volunteers are special but this Group was unique in a very special way. Only one of this entire Group went home early and that was because of a medical problem. Also, that one individual felt so strongly about her Peace Corps experience that she returned to Bulgaria, at her own cost, to participate in our Close of Service activities in 1998.

26 June 1996

A brief note to let you know that I have arrived in Bulgaria and all is well. Was a LONG trip getting here from Washington D.C., but after a couple of days it worked itself out. The group of Volunteer Trainees I'm with remind me so much of our x-country & Western Tour groups. We "bonded" almost immediately because of the commonality of our purpose. Many different types but ONE purpose at this time. It is all very exciting! I know that high will drop off just as it did week by week for the Lifers but it is sure fun now.

We are about 90Km S.W. of Sofia in a town called Kyustendil (KOOSTENDEL) that dates back to Roman times. A hill rises on the East that has ruins of a Roman fortress and they have found many artifacts in the town itself. The area has many mineral water springs and the Roman town had a Bath that was famous. The Kyustendil valley is called the "orchard" of Bulgaria. Has cherries being harvested now with almost any fruit you can think off from a cold climate area yet to ripen.

Going to Sofia on Fri the 28th for a Reception hosted by the Embassy. The occasion is the 5th Anniversary of Peace Corps Bulgaria. Should be a "do" and the opportunity for us Trainees to meet and be met by some of the Americans here in Bulgaria.

We started language training on Fri the 14th of Jun. That was the day after we arrived in Kyustendil. It's now 4-5 hours a day 5 days a week. Also live with a non-English speaking "host family" that give me another 4-5 hours/day + all of Sat & Sun exposed to Bulgarian. The language is tough but I'm convinced I'll learn it. We finish our language session like we have done hard labor. Then get 4 more hours/day of Technical, Cross Culture, or Health & Safety training. Is the best prep I have had for anything in my life. It is intense! "The hardest job you will ever love" is starting to become a reality.

Won't know until about August where I'm going to be for the 2 years as a Volunteer. I may make Sofia with a Junior Achievement project that is underway. Or who knows?

Hope you are doing well!! If you make it to the Mississippi ride say hello to everyone, I'll try to keep some correspondence going from this end but right now I'm BUSY. It is a break to sit and jot something in English, but the Bulgarian hasn't helped my English spelling at all.

16 December 1996

Thanksgiving and the Christmas Season in Bulgaria is a time of unending bus travel it seems. The following has been my schedule of late and my plans for the next week or two. On 29 November I left Zlatograd for Sofia to pick up December money and do some shopping; buy an iron and a paring knife. That was a 6+ hour trip into Sofia. The next day, 30 November, I went to Blagoevgrad for Thanksgiving dinner with the "old people". The old people is like the OFC of the Peace Corps Bulgaria; any one over about 30 years of age qualifies because they are no longer kids. The old people also had two Peace Corps Volunteers that are marginal in age but qualify because of their engagement to Bulgarian women. The trip to Blagoevgrad was about 2 hours. Returned from Blagoevgrad to Zlatograd on 1 December via Sofia and Plovdiv. Was 2 hours to Sofia, 2 hours to Plovdiv, and 5+ hours to Zlatograd. The trip from Plovdiv was scheduled to leave at 1530 but actually left at 1745 getting me home at about 2300.

When I got off the bus the streets were a river of mud and water. It had been raining since 21 November, almost without stop, in Zlatograd and the south-central Rhodopes with a big storm on the 26-27th and then again on 30 Nov-1 Dec. The second big storm did some serious damage with buildings swept away, homes flooded, and two deaths; one died here in Zlatograd and another in the village of Startsevo near here. A State bus was lost out of the parking lot on the edge of the river where I left from on 3 December; going back to Plovdiv for a Peace Corps Small Business Development meeting on the 4th and In-Country Training on 5-7th. This was another 5 hour trip.

Then on the 8th I returned to Zlatograd again via Haskovo and Kurdjuli. Stopping in Haskovo to locate the PC-SBD Office there and have lunch with a PC married couple that are teachers in Haskovo. Was 2 hours from Plovdiv to Haskovo. Then on to Kurdjuli and a quick tour to locate the PC-SBD Office, the apartment of the Business Volunteer, and have a drink and conversation with her. Only 1 hour from Haskovo to Kurdjuli. Last leg was 2 hours from Kurdjuli to Zlatograd. So in 10 days I managed to put in some 4 days of travel with about 28 hours of bus riding.

This coming Saturday I will be going back to spend the night with the couple in Haskovo for their Christmas Open House on Sunday. Then on Saturday the 28th I will go to Sofia for 2 days; will pick up January money on Monday and return to Zlatograd. That should work out to some additional 23 hours on the bus.

Will be in Zlatograd for Christmas and New Years. The Christmas season started for a few Bulgarians in November with their practicing a form of Lent, or Advent, for 40 days. The tradition in Bulgaria is to eat a meatless dinner on Christmas Eve and open presents at midnight. Then they eat, drink and party for the 26-28th period to make up for the one meatless meal; not a bad trade all in all. Not sure what the New Year may be like but I suspect it is a continuation of the three day bash after Christmas.

On the afternoon of the 11th, the CDC office was the venue for a meeting of local people with the President elect, Peter Stoyanov, after he had toured the town to see the flood damage of 30 November and 1 December. I was simply an observer but was introduced to Mr. Stoyanov, shook hands and thanked him for coming to Zlatograd. This was all captured by our local cable TV cameraman. I am hoping that I can get a hard copy print of the event; if not it is preserved in the tape vaults of Zlatograd. Years from now when people look at such film they will say: "Who is that with Ed Frey". Ha!



This picture was given to me (no print of my shaking hands). The President Elect is at the head of the table, I'm in the background to the right.

I will now tell my tale of what it is like to furnish an apartment as a Peace Corps Volunteer. First, you must understand that all the propaganda that the Peace Corps publishes states that the Volunteer will live at the same standard of living as their counterparts. This means that the standard may be different from country to country or even within the country. The operative words here are "same standard as their counterparts". Operating on this principle, I began the process of furnishing the apartment that the Municipality had obtained for me. The agreement between Peace Corps and the Municipality was that the Peace Corps would provide a Volunteer, ME, and the Municipality would provide an apartment that was furnished to specific standards. In Zlatograd the Municipality rented an apartment from the local mining company, GROPSO, and told them (?) the standard that was to be met. When I walked in on 8 September it lacked more than it had; particularly the kitchen. In the kitchen there was a sink! A sink; with the large storage area under it which was wet from the leaking faucet. Attached to the sink cabinet was a work surface of about 30 inches

with 3 storage shelves under it. That was my kitchen! The bathroom is not easily described to an American audience but I will give it a shot. First, when you open the door you are looking directly at the sink; however, you can't open the door completely because it hits the toilet. The sink is cracked and most of the porcelain finish is worn off and the faucet leaks (as do almost all faucets in Bulgaria). The toilet reservoir is mounted on the wall at about the 6 foot level with a unique pipe connection to the toilet itself that provides the flushing action. When flushed the fill valve, with float shut off, sprays water on the walls and anyone that is foolish enough to still be within 3-4 feet of the toilet. The shower is opposite the toilet with a drain in the center of the bathroom floor. There is the equivalent of a

Rube Goldberg design for the plumbing; all of which is exposed and painted a dull hospital green. The painting scheme for the room is another dull cream color for the upper 1/2 over the same green as the plumbing.



In the kitchen, when this picture was taken, I had received a two burner stove that you can see (click on the picture) sitting on the floor to the left. In the bath room, it was impossible to get a picture that showed what I described – there wasn't enough room so everything shot from inside would be a closeup.

The living rooms are adequate; however, the two single beds have a unique spring system, and mattress, that I lack the ability to describe in this relatively short letter. The living room was furnished with two 1950's style stuffed chairs and a matching fold out sofa (all in a fetching shade of orange) as well as a kitchen table, 4 chairs, and a combination china hutch/bookcase. All is not bad – the place had been recently wallpapered and there is a new water heater. For the first three weeks it was like Christmas every day or two; I was receiving plates, glasses, silverware, a tea set, a few pots, bedding, toilet brush, a couple of meters of carpet runner. However, I did not have a cooking stove nor refrigerator nor any kitchen counters nor cupboards. The cooking stove finally came at the end of week three, the refrigerator and counters at the end of October or after about 7 weeks of complaining every day or two. By this time it has become cold at night and in the morning hours and I was without any heat in the apartment. Was given a heater, that could not heat the entire apartment, on 23 October. It worked for 5 days, was fixed and then worked for 4 days. So then they came up with an even smaller heater as a replacement. At this point the Executive Director of the CDC was very angry with the Municipality and he bought me a good heater from CDC funds. This brought me to the point, after two months, of having the basic standard furnishings of a Peace Corps Volunteer. You will note that there has been no discussion of a washing machine in this tale so far. A washing machine is not a Peace Corps basic in Bulgaria; my counterparts have machines and almost all, except for the very poor, of the people in Zlatograd do also. It is a Peace Corps basic to have an iron but not a washing machine or an ironing board; figure out that governmental thinking. I was given a Settling In Allowance that was to be used for acquiring the basics when all else failed. Therefore, in early December I purchased an iron and then used the remainder to have my bedroom and living room floors sanded, varnished, and then bought rugs (none of which are basic). On the 12th the Ex Dir. of CDC gave me his old TV and I had the local cable company connect me to 17 channels. Included are CNN, EuroSports, TNT, MTV, and a couple of other movie channels. I am now living almost as well as I did in Reno; maybe better, I didn't have a TV there!!

I hope everyone had a great New Years Eve and my best wishes to all for a great year of 1997! I look forward to hearing about the ride schedule of the group, and individuals, for the upcoming riding season.

6 January 1997

Note: I think there is one letter missing between the last letter in 1996 and this letter.

Thank you so much for your Christmas letter; received it the 30th of December. During the Holiday season here everything becomes even slower than normal. Your comments about the frustrations of e-mail are well understood by me. Since 20 December I have not been able to receive or send anything. Don't know what the problems are but, now knowing Bulgaria, I expect that I will be down for some time before it is resolved. I am convinced it is a server problem because there are messages that make it to the server but I can't retrieve them and it won't send my messages.

Was very good news that you had concerning your health! Not as good as being told that you can get off the chemo but still good. I received a card and letter from Al & Kay that had bad and good news about Al. He was diagnosed with colon cancer and has had surgery; now continuing with chemo and radiation. They are optimistic that they have removed the cancer and that he will be fine. Other family members also had cancerous problems during the year but all have been judged to be free of it and going to be OK. A tough year for the Henry's!

Well as promised I will try to give you some idea what the Holiday's are like in Zlatograd. I say "in Zlatograd" because I think that there is a bigger difference in how the Holiday's are celebrated within Bulgaria than how celebrated within the States. The first thing that is common throughout the country is the official days off for the Holidays. For Christmas almost all businesses and government offices were closed on Monday 23 December through Thursday 26 December. We then worked Friday 27 December through Monday 30 December then closed again on Tuesday 31 December through Thursday 2 January for New Years. Back to work again on Friday and Saturday the 3rd & 4th; took Sunday the 5th off – confusing even to the Bulgarians! Finally back to a normal week starting the 6th of January. From a practical standpoint nothing get done in the country from 21 December to the 6th of January. (This may account for my e-mail problems also?)

In Zlatograd I saw almost no Christmas decorations in the public areas of the town and very few in the businesses. Within our office and any of the other offices in the Municipal building there was no evidence of decorations except for a small tree in the employee's canteen. The Municipality did put up a very nice tree in the square in front of the Municipal Center. It was quite well shaped for a Christmas tree and some 40 feet tall. It was set up on Monday or Tuesday the 16th or 17th and a single string of lights were added on Thursday. That Thursday they also set up a small tree, maybe 3 feet tall, on the first floor portico roof that leads into the auditorium/concert hall to the west of the square. In addition to the small tree they also affixed three Bulgarian letters, spelled out with lights, to the auditorium wall behind the tree. The three letters are an understood abbreviation for Happy New Year in Bulgarian. The single string of lights on the large tree and those used for the Happy New Year message appeared to be about 20 watt bulbs and there were 6-8 in the string on the tree. On Friday I noticed that the string on the tree were all at the top and I asked Milka when they were going to finish putting lights on it She said that they were through; that was all they would be putting on. I then asked "Why". The logical Bulgarian answer was "If they put more on the tree at a lower level the people will steal them." My trip to Sofia on 28-29 December left me with the idea that there is more commercial decorating done in the large cities but there was no evidence that the Municipality does anything additional. We in America pride ourselves on the separation of church and state and our freedom of religion. In recent years there has been animated discussions on these subjects. But if those in the US that strongly support a completely secular government want to see what it would look like they should come and visit Bulgaria next Christmas.

There is more to this than just decorations! Christmas in Zlatograd was a very quiet time. You see fewer people on the streets, many of the shops close early, and you don't see the lunches/dinners at the restaurants that we are use to. My inquiry about all this indicates that this has become the customary way of celebrating Christmas since Communism. The only thing that has really changed is the days off. Under Communism they worked on Christmas as if it was any other day. Now, as a demonstration of their freedom (?) they take all the time off; then work weekend days to make up some of the time lost. There is one similarity here with Christmas in the US. It is the time of year that the dispersed family comes back to Zlatograd if that is were Mom & Dad still live, I saw more out of town cars during this period than normal. Only when there is a wedding in town do you usually see so many out of town cars.

The New Years is more of the celebration time of the Holidays. You see more activity on the streets on the 30th-31st. You need reservations at any restaurant New Years Eve; however they open at 1930-2000 and may not close until after sun up. There are fireworks set off at midnight, people gather around the Christmas tree in the square and dance, break liqueur bottles on the square (kind of like throwing your glass into the fireplace). So generally speaking they celebrate New Years as the rest of the world would. However, I noticed that leading up to Christmas there were few wishes for a Merry Christmas but immediately after there are many wishes for a Happy New Year. This continues into the year; the first time you see someone in the New Year you will wish them Happy New Year. Again it seems to be a hold over from the Communist period when the New Year celebration took the place of Christmas. Even Santa Claus was changed to be a New Years Eve figure, with a different name, and gifts are usually exchanged at New Years not at Christmas.

My current circle of friends in Zlatograd are work mates or work related so my Christmas was also very quiet because they were out of town. I must add that it was not any more lonely than my "normal" Christmas in the US. There in the years since 1990 my "family gatherings" have been at your Christmas Lunch and at John & Janis for their Christmas Dinner; both events happening before

Christmas. I did go out the night of 30 December and got pleasantly drunk, danced, “talked” to the locals, had fun, and made a general fool of myself at a local bar with Bulgarian folk singing. Stayed up for the New Year but didn’t mix with the drunk locals on there night to howl; watched TV, the local fireworks, and to bed!

You spoke of a nice 4 day soaking rain in your letter. I saw on CNN International that it turned into more that that with 25 counties declared disaster areas. Pictures of people sandbagging downtown Reno with the newscaster saying that casinos were closed for the first time in their history. You may know that most casinos don’t have locks on their front doors, sort of tradition! If they have to lock up they must chain the doors shut. I suspect from what I saw on TV that Harrah’s was flooded; at least parts of it would have been. It looked like any of the casinos that were south of the tracks probably were flooded in their basements if not the casino floors. With Harrah’s main casino below street level they had to be more at risk than others. I have lived in Phoenix, Sacramento, Reno, and Zlatograd, Bulgaria; all having had disaster level floods while I was there or soon after my leaving. Is there something I don’t know about going on here?

Don’t have much going on at work now. Devoted about a week to working with some USAID people trying to find a way to provide some flood relief money to the people in Zlatograd. Worked up a rough draft grant proposal that they then modified somewhat and maybe we will get about \$25,000 for a city clean up project. Worked on the translation to English of another grant request that my Director has completed concerning the areas economic development. This one will be submitted to the EU (European Union) sometime this week and focuses on the citizens attitudes on the subject. I hope we get this one for sure; it will be very interesting to see what the survey may find.

Well I think that is my update for now. Wishing you the best for 1997 – all down hill with tail winds!!!

11 February 1997

Well as you are aware, or I presume you are, Bulgaria had it's first demonstrations in Sofia on the 10th of January. I received most of my initial information by watching CNN International. However, when the first day's violence was not repeated CNN dropped coverage for more "news worthy" events i.e. violence in Korea, Albania, Serbia and Algeria. Now I watch the 2 Bulgarian channels and there are continuing demonstrations in Sofia and most of the larger towns. There has also been some blocking of the major roads through Bulgaria that is disrupting delivery of goods to Europe from Greece and Turkey and vice versa. Here in Zlatograd there have been supporting meetings and marches since the 16th or 17th. The Peace Corps has directed all Volunteers to avoid being in the areas that have any demonstrations. This is for our safety but more important it is to make sure that the parties cannot claim that the Peace Corps is supporting one side or the other. Therefore I have not actually witnessed what is going on in Zlatograd; just know that there are meetings and small marches. I believe that the Socialist Party (former communist) will drag their feet as much as possible believing that the demonstrations will go away. However after writing this; they agreed on the 4th of February to have new elections for Parliament late in April. Because of the economic conditions here, you can expect to see Bulgaria in the news a lot more this year. The elections for a new Parliament are not going to correct that (the President said that very thing the night of the 4th to the demonstrators). It is an economic disaster that will only get worse before it gets better. The average working Bulgarian is now at about \$20 per month with inflation in 1996 at 311%. The Leva to dollar rate has gone from 450/1 on 24 December to 770/1 on 23 January – or a 71% decline in the first month of 1997. It was at 2750/1 yesterday or an additional 257% in 2 weeks. The South American countries were able to function in the early '80s with that kind of inflation and currency devaluation's but the Bulgarians don't have a clue. The next big news will be the governments default on one of the foreign debt payments that are coming up this year. I think it is now only a matter of time before they default because of the slowness of their privatization effort, the value of what they are selling, and the lack of tax revenue.

The rest of this letter is going to be just random thoughts or observations that you may find interesting. Maybe you won't?

The winter dress for Bulgarian women would cause apoplexy in the Save The Animal Rights Groups. There are fur coats present on the streets like you haven't seen since the 1950's. And the little foxes curled around well dressed throats; (you remember them yes?) where the fox is biting his tail to stay in place. The other styles of dress that you need to picture are in four groups. First, there is the traditional peasant look with a smattering of regional folk dress thrown in; this is for both men and women. Next is the cosmopolitan European look which the middle aged to older women pull off reasonably well. This is set off with a hat; in all seasons, but particularly in the winter. The same age group of men do not fair quite as well; most of them look like every well dressed Communist stereotype that you have ever seen in the movies. Then there are the young. The girls tend to wear high heel platform boots and short-short to mini skirts the year around (in as striking a neon color as possible). The guys have taken their clue from James Dean and early Brando. Fortunately the baseball catcher look was not popular during that period and it hasn't really caught on yet. Lastly, there is the Bulgarian "gansta" look which is to wear an athletic warm up suit with as many gold chains as possible around what was a neck. The "muscle" here in Bulgaria are called "the wrestlers" or are referred to as "the guys with no necks". This uniform is also very popular with many others; cutting across age divisions and sex. My best guess is that it is the Bulgarian conspicuous consumption item of the times and may have the same panache here as designer jeans in the rest of the world.

The architectural styles also give you the feeling that the country made that "first great leap forward" in their first five year plan after 1945. From then on all construction followed that pattern and you see government buildings that have that 1930's to '50's look even when they were built in the late '80's. Monuments and statues built during the communist period tend to be huge, with lot of angles, or depicting some armed struggle. (A bridge in Kustendil has a massive naked woman on each corner; 3 are armed with swords somewhat in the style of our Miss Liberty, the 4th is gripping a machine gun.) The private homes are generally not different today from what was built 100 years ago. Almost no change at all in design and very little in construction technique. There are 26 pine tree logs in the roof of all homes that are built; therefore the exterior dimensions are always the same. The interior may be divided up into different room configurations but the dimensions of the box is always the same. Here in Zlatograd there is an interesting tradition concerning the finishing of the roof. Once the log rafters have been placed and before the tile roofing is put in place a pine log cross is affixed to the chimney. The home owner then puts a collection of plants (each type of plant bringing some kind of good fortune) on the very top of the cross as a bouquet. Friends are invited over for a party; they bring with them lengths of cloth, towels, shirts, undergarments etc. which are placed on the cross member of the cross. These fabric gifts will be given to the workers that are building the roof but the colors bring particular good fortunes to the home owner and his family. This decorated cross will remain in place until the tiles have been installed.

A few words about hospitality and the rude character of the Bulgarian people. The Bulgarian host will force food and drink upon you with as much intensity as any American grandma that I have ever met. However, there seems to be a difference that I couldn't quite identify until recently. That difference revolves around a theory that I have been developing to explain much of Bulgarian behavior. My theory is that the basic Bulgarian character is based upon pretending. They have lived for so long in a society that required that you pretend that it has become a basic part of their character. This goes back before Communism in their history but I think it explains why they were the solidest supporters of Communism and the Soviet Union. Therefore, you can go to a Bulgarian home and be treated with the utmost in hospitality but the next day be treated rudely in a post office line by that same host. This is not a civil society! We in America may murder each other at a rather high rate compared to the rest of the world and Bulgaria. But, our relationships with each other on a day to day basis is far more civil than here. If a Bulgarian knows that I am an American they treat me with the utmost politeness and respect but if they think I am just some other Bulgarian I get the normal treatment – that is I am treated rudely. There is no concept of standing in line to wait for a bus or for any other service. To look at the group of people outside a bread store, or waiting

for a bus, you would think they have come together as a lynch mob. There is pushing and shoving and the most illogical of all is the desire to crowd onto the bus before those getting off have finished doing so. You have seen pictures of the “pushers” that are employed by the Japanese subway system to cram people onto the subways there? Well here it is much the same with buses and trolleys but absent the “pushers”. Bulgarians would find the very concept of a movie line stretching around the block to be ludicrous; they would all pack themselves into a mass pressing against the entrance and then spill into the theater upon the doors opening. To press in front of someone at the post office window or a shop counter is done as a matter of course.

A brief note on the butchering of a hog by my neighbor during the Holiday Season. Some day between Christmas and New Years (I forget the date) an upstairs neighbor and one downstairs went it together and bought a pig. I saw the butchering process from my balcony; watching it off and on for the 2-3 hours that it took. First the pig was brought to the back area of my apartment block and placed on the ground on what looked like an old door. The upstairs neighbor then took a blow torch (the kind that you see in the cartoons with the big nozzle for the flame) and singed the hair of the pig and scrapped it off with a butcher knife. After the hair was all removed he gutted the animal and the downstairs co-butcher washed the intestines for sausage casings and all the other organs with a garden hose and pails of water. They then halved the hog, divided up the internal organs as agreed upon and carried it to their respective apartments. I was able to have some of it with my upstairs neighbor on Saturday the 25th of January; it was quite good! However, the adage is “Any one interested in laws or sausages should never watch either being made.”

Again I’m in a country facing a domino theory. The first time I helped in an election that put a dictator into power for over 30 years – the Dominican Republic. Then I was involved in the first military defeat of the US since we became an independent country – and all of Viet Nam became a Communist nation. Now I am helping (?) Bulgaria, a former Communist country, become a democratic capitalistic country – what might their chances be?

17 February 1997

Note: I think I first wrote about how my mail was delivered (it went to Peace Corps in Sofia and they forwarded), gave a mailing address and discussed mail problems in one of the missing letters between 26 June 1996 and 16 December 1996. I refer to the arrangements that Shirley made to distribute my letters as the "chain" or "tree".

I haven't heard from you in quite some time but that may not be because you are not trying to reach me. I continue to have mail problems. Specifically, I can't seem to rely on Peace Corps Sofia to get my mail to me. I continue to receive envelopes that are open, are torn open through handling, appear to have been opened and resealed, or I don't ever receive the weeks mailing (this has now happened 2 times). I think that the large package of mail from Peace Corps Sofia is attracting attention and causing me some of these problems. Therefore, I have decided to have all personal mail sent directly to me here in Zlatograd. This will require whoever is looking for/at my mail to diligently search the mail every day and try to find a single letter rather than a large fat envelope. It will force them to throw my mail away one letter at a time rather than the entire weeks worth.

Mail To:

CommunityDevelopmentCenter

Edward L. Frey

1, St. Stambolov Str.

Zlatograd 4980, Bulgaria

On 5 February I visited the Gorubso lead/zinc mine at Erma Reka (a village about 16 Km from Zlatograd) and discussed the companies plans and problems with using hot mineral waters that are present in the mine. Descended to the 300 meter horizon and walked through a gallery that has become primarily the site of deep water pumping shafts. The designation of 300 meter horizon indicates that we were at 300 meters above sea level; we entered the elevator shaft at 650 meters above sea level. Therefore, we descended 350 meters, or 1150 feet, to the gallery or what you could call the horizontal tunnel. These pumping shafts were sunk into a large "lake" of underground hot water with the intent of pumping it down to allow for deeper lead/zinc mining effort. However, the inflow is such that to pump is down is very expensive. The water is 87°C, or almost 190°F, and under 18 atmospheres of pressure. So what you have is a superheated mineral water that is under enough pressure that it could shoot about 180 feet in the air. The gallery has enough of this hot water being forced up through faults in the rock that there is some natural flow and it heats the gallery to at least 100°F with ventilation. The waters contain Carbon Dioxide that is being released into the gallery so without ventilation you would soon die from lack of oxygen. An additional problem is the Calcium carbonate that is present in the water which causes a rapid buildup inside any piping through which it flows. This requires the replacement and or removal of the pipes and the buildup or flows will be choked off within a short time. This is obviously an expensive issue also. There is hope that the waters can be used as mineral waters to drink, for mineral water baths, for greenhouse heating, or mine building heating. The expenses of extraction and the Calcium Carbonate problem may make some of these hopes only that; the profitability of the plans is suspect and does not appear to be well thought out. This is a State company that is on the "isolation" list. This list includes state owned companies that will receive no further credit and must become profitable within the next year or be closed. The Erma Reka mining site is not the only one in this area but it is the closest to Zlatograd and employs 318. There is also a branch administrative office of the company here in Zlatograd that probably employs another 300-400. When, or if, the company is closed it is going to effect the town in a big way. However, it has already effected the town because of the workers drastic decline in real wages in the last 9 months. Their real purchasing power has declined by a factor of 5 during that time so they obviously haven't been putting as much money into the economy. Is a big problem for this area with not much chance that it is going to be corrected anytime soon. The mines would probably have been closed long ago in any free market economy.

The situation here is not good even if you do have money. Since the hyperinflation began this year approximately one half of the shops have closed their doors. Probably closed for a long time with some operators going broke. The shops that are still open have almost nothing for sale because of distribution problems and the problem of not knowing what something is going to cost when it is delivered. Prices are changed every day, sometimes during the day, for those goods that the State does not control. The state controls gas prices and the refining of all gasoline! However this is a good example of what happens to goods that are under State control in a hyperinflationary environment. The most expensive gasoline is now priced at about 400 BGL/Liter. Let us assume that crude oil is at \$20/barrel and further assume that the entire barrel can be refined into the most expensive gasoline. Then what you end up with is approximately 220 liters of gasoline that cost \$40 that you are selling for about \$32. It doesn't take a genius to realize that if you do this for very long you will go broke. It also doesn't take long for people to realize that if they buy Bulgarian gas at 400 BGL/Liter they can take it to Serbia, Macedonia, Rumania, or Greece and sell it for around a \$. Guess what? Bulgaria now has a fuel shortage that is further complicating the distribution problems of goods and peoples ability to get around.

I will close for now. Hopefully all is well with you and I will hear from you soon. Please put this into the "tree" so that anyone that may have written, or may want to write, will understand the new address issue. How are you coming along with your e-mail resolution for 1997? That seems my best media for communicating. There may be people here that are reading all my e-mail but from all indications they haven't been able to throw any of it away!

11 March 1997

Received your letter around the end of February but things have been busy enough for me that I have not taken the time to get a response back to you. Have dropped a note to Jack who wrote a kind letter to me indicating that he was #7 on the "tree" but I don't know which of my letters. Also sent and received e-mail to Merle & Molly when I heard about Owen's health problems; will try to get a note to him today (10 March) via e-mail. Have been in regular communication with Brenda & Jim concerning Calcium Carbonate and most recently a plea for Jalapano seeds to plant (I am starting to go into withdrawals – the Tabasco that Clyde sent me is gone).

I have been in contact with John & Janis on a regular basis via e-mail for the last month or six weeks. I asked them to look into getting a Rock-n-Road Tour-Ex built for me and sent over here. Was a good idea at the time but the cost of sending it is the cost of another bike!! Have put that idea on the shelf; and now I'm looking into getting a bike built here. I will be going into Sofia on Thursday 3 April through the 6th. While there one of my goals is to go to some "bike shops" near a cycling track and see if I can get them to build what I want. There is nothing at all here in the Zlatograd area. However I did see 4 road riders on the 1st of March near Plovdiv. That is the second largest town in Bulgaria and they probably have some shops that sell bikes also, but don't know where they are. I also need some translation help in describing what I want and I think I have arranged that in Sofia. We will see how it works out and report in a later letter.

As you know, my primary "job" or reason for being in Bulgaria was to provide Business Consulting to small and medium size private Bulgarian businesses. That is a big joke considering the economic conditions and the attitude of Bulgarian businessmen. The economy is in total collapse with a political attitude for the last 6 years that was anti private business. The new Parliament that will be elected in April may make the necessary changes to encourage small business but the effect will be a year or more away. Therefore, I am working on social projects that the CDIC (my NGO) is involved with. Also involved with the High School as a teacher/discussion leader for their 4 Management classes. Will probably get involved in a similar way with the 2 Banking classes that are at the School. Working on a water testing project with Peace Corps Volunteers and students from Stara Zagora and Kurdjuli. They will come to Zlatograd to do some water testing and to teach our students how to do it. They will do a home stay while they are here one night then the next day we hike into the mountains and stay overnight. Not a lot but it has kept me involved; along with writing letters I'm planning on writing a couple of articles for Peace Corps publications.

One of these articles may be based on the following experience that I want to share with you.

After a rather long, dark, and cold winter in the "banana belt" of the south central Rhodopes it became like spring in Zlatograd. We had a light snow storm on the 6th of February and the following days became clear and bright. The weekend of the 15th had the feel of early spring with a crisp morning, sunny and cool afternoon, with bright sunshine. I had not been hiking since the last part of October or early November so I promised myself that if the following Saturday was as nice I would be out in the mountains.

My hiking in the fall had been to the east and west of Zlatograd; following the road that passes through town with excursions into the mountains that rise up to the north and south.

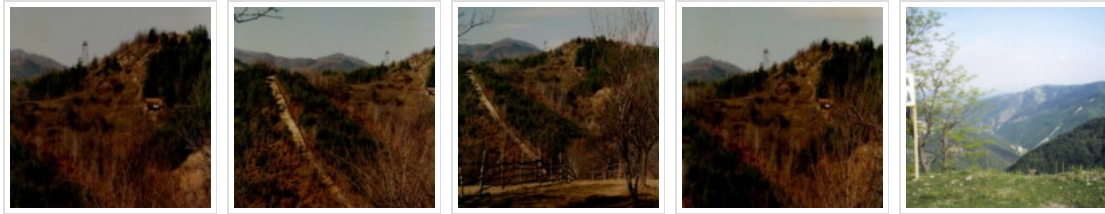


Most of my pictures taken during the Fall of 1996 were on the roll that was developed in Zlatograd and are almost worthless. Here I have three of mushrooms that I found and have done my best to Photoshop. These were very pretty. When I showed this close-up to my neighbor that goes out mushroom hunting (and cooked some for me); he got very excited and told me in Bulgarian then in very poor English "Don't eat, they are poison!" Then there is this one: the dam and reservoir for the Zlatograd municipal water supply. I'm sure if the border guards had found me taking pictures of it they would have had me in to see the Commandant.

These hikes did not take me far enough to the south to be at the Greek border and the 22nd was a great day to explore this option. Therefore, I chose a dirt road that climbed a mountain ridge out of Zlatograd to the south west. This became a livestock trail within 2 Km that had branching trails leading to mountain huts and small fenced garden plots. After making some dead-end trail choices I found myself at the top of the ridge and was facing the "internal border" fence and a Buwka (the Bulgarian term for the lookout towers along this internal border).

This internal border fence is some 2 – 3 Km from the Greece/Bulgarian border. I have been told that there is the same fencing arrangement along all borders around Bulgaria and that the circumscribed area (internal border area) is larger than the country of Albania. The tower was approximately 25-30 meters tall and is well placed on the ridge top. It must provide a view for some 20 Km in any direction, but most importantly it offers a commanding view of two canyons leading into Greece and 10 Km of the internal border area. Because of the fence I was not able to climb the tower to verify what I have just indicated to be the possible views. The tower is

located within the internal border area and you must cross the fence to access it. The border guards patrol along the south side of the fence and therefore have access to the tower, however it now appears not to be used. The fence has the same appearance as pictures you may have seen of concentration camp fences; or the barbed wire portions of the Iron Curtain.



The first four pictures show where the internal border fence is (the dirt road is on the Greek side of the fence) and the lookout towers on top of the ridges. The Border Area sign is from the days of Communist Rule and it was still standing at the top of the pass between Zlatograd and Madan to the west.

It is about 3 meters high with barbed wire on both sides of the supporting posts about 20 centimeters apart and a “V” of barbed wire along the top. From my ridge top position I could see a gate into the internal border area about 2 Km away at the bottom of one of the canyons. Also saw a two man patrol approaching the gate from the ridge opposite me, saw them stop and talk to the gate guard and then proceed to their barracks within the border area. I decided that my next move should be to approach the gate guard, engage him in my “best Bulgarian” and then follow the road from the gate back to Zlatograd.

I put this plan into action and all seemed to be going well. I told the guard who I was, where I worked, how long I had been in Bulgaria and how long I had been in Zlatograd. Asked him where he was from in Bulgaria – Smolyan. (The language staff would have been proud!) The guard then called his Commadant (maybe a Lieutenant) and gave him the information from my Lichna Carta (my Bulgarian resident documents), a business card, and our conversation. The Commadant was apparently impressed enough that he invited me to come up to the barracks to have a talk but time was getting late and I declined; saying that I must go home and eat lunch. I bid my guard friend farewell and started for Zlatograd via the road from the gate. However, I had proceeded only about 300 meters from the gate when I heard the guard running to catch up with me. I stopped, and he again said that the Commadant wanted to talk to me – that we should go back to the gate. Since the guard was most persuasive and was carrying what I thought to be a loaded AK-47; I thought a conversation with the Commadant was a great idea and lunch could wait. The Commadant joined us at the gate and went over my Lichna Carta and business card. He then made 2-3 telephone calls; providing information to someone concerning my Lichna Carta data. After a 30 minute wait he made another telephone call and then invited me to follow him for a walk into Zlatograd.

Since I had not approached the gate via the road from Zlatograd I was unsure of the distance or where in town we would arrive. As I was to discover, we arrived on the western edge of the town and then walked about half way through town to the center. It was now almost noon on a very nice day and as the Commadant and I strolled through town I greeted 4 people that worked at the Municipality that knew me. After each greeting I tried to explain to the Commadant who the person was and what they did at the Municipality. I could see that he was becoming a bit more sheepish after each of these encounters and it was starting to dawn on him that I was exactly who I said I was. It was now also dawning on him that the only thing he was going to get out of this effort was the exercise of walking an 8 -10 Km round trip into Zlatograd. He delivered me to the Commander’s (maybe a Captain or Major) Headquarters in Zlatograd and went in search of the Commander – the last I was to see of the Commadant. The Commander arrived a few minutes later and the best that I could understand I was not allowed to be near the border fence. However, I was free to go and there was “No Problem”. I had my counterpart call the Commander on Monday to clarify the situation. It seems that the rules are as follows. A person with a Lichna Carta can not be in the border area without a Bulgarian with a regular Bulgarian Passport. However, there seemed to also be a certain amount of good humor on the part of the Commander. He may have treated the incident as a welcome break in the monotony of border patrolling in a changed Bulgaria. After the fun of Saturday I decided that I would go along a ridge to the south east of Zlatograd on Sunday and get some pictures of the Buwka. This I did without incident! However, what this has shown me is the prisoner mentality that had to be present in Bulgarian’s minds during the Communist years. It also is illustrative of what has changed during the last 7 years – not much! During the Communist years the town of Zlatograd required non residents to posses special documents to enter the Municipality; this requirement no longer exists but the patrols continue. It is important to note that the patrols continue along the internal border not along the Greece/Bulgarian country border. Take care when in the proximity of any border area. Because I am well known now in the town there was no harm done and I found it be as humorous as I think the Commander did. However, if I had been in a different sector of the border, or if I was not known, the situation may have been more serious. On Saturday the 8th of March I hiked from Zlatograd to Alamotsi with two students. Again border guards stopped us on the road that was near the internal border fence. When they radioed my Lichna Carta information into their Commadant they got an answer back that brought big smiles to their face, a laugh, and a prompt return of my Lichna Carta. Maybe they have the same Commadant?

I submitted this for inclusion in a Bulgaria PCV newsletter under the title *On The Edge (of Bulgaria)*.

Maybe I will get another letter to you before you go to the Natchez Trace Ride in May; if not remember to say hello for me!

1 April 1997

My situation has improved somewhat in March over the conditions that existed in February. My purchasing power has gone down drastically because the inflation rate has exceeded the increase in the exchange rate for the Dollar, but at least now there is something to buy. In Zlatograd about one half of the shops were closed during a 6 week period that started with the demonstrations on 10 January. The other half of the shops quickly sold out everything and for about a month there was nothing to buy. I could not find rice, beans, flour, cooking oil, sugar, salt, or lentils at all; eggs, cheese, and meats were sometimes to be found. Things got so bad you couldn't find beer, wine, RAKIA (Bulgarian brandy) or coffee and cigarettes; the very staples of a Bulgarian diet! As I have commented before, there was a petrol shortage that contributed to the distribution problems as well as the demonstrators blocking highways. I was able to go to Plovdiv on 1 March and bought 3 kilo of beans, 1 kilo of rice, 1 kilo garlic cloves and 1 kilo of chili powder to give me a margin of food security. The large towns have goods to buy in their shops and markets; their problem is that residents have no money. The small towns are experiencing shortages because their residents have no money plus distribution problems. The interim government is in place now and they are starting to meet with the IMF and EU. It is primarily these two organizations that will be able to give Bulgaria some money to stabilize the economic situation. More importantly the interim government has started to raise controlled prices to market levels or decontrolled them. This has brought goods back onto the shelves and in some cases kept them from being exported out of the country. I read an article about tons of goods that are in short supply here in Bulgaria being intercepted at the borders without proper export papers. I'm sure this has been going on for a long time with the Socialist governments people getting big money in bribes or a piece of the action. If the Democratic Union Party can stay reasonably graft free then Bulgaria has some chance! Not sure what the prospects of that are but the President and the interim Prime Minister seem to be on the right track and have the support of the people; now it is a question of them keeping it and staying the straight shooters that they now appear to be.

I will now put a few of you to sleep with some statistical information that quantifies the problems that I referred to in the discussion above. The "market basket" of goods and services that the government monitors rose by 205% during February. This was the largest monthly increase in the last 7 years and exceeded the annual increase for the years 1994 and 1995. Furthermore, the government is forecasting a 100% increase during the month of March. The following was taken directly from Bulgarian Business News (an English language publication)

“ The caretaker Cabinet has started decreeing deregulation of the prices of certain basic goods and services.... The first to be decontrolled were grain prices, and then the method for cigarette price formation was revised. As from March 1st the government introduced minimum prices which are suggested by producer enterprises, and dealers can add to this up to 20 per cent mark-up and apply 22 per cent VAT to the sum. *(My comment: This is decontrolling prices? But, you must remember this is Bulgaria where the government set the price before as well as the mark up. It is looked upon as a big step!)* The new pricing method pushed the prices of Bulgarian cigarettes up by a factor of 2 to 2.5 **but they instantly reappeared on the market.** *(My emphasis added.)*

Another quote from the paper; this time they are quoting Daniela Bobevea the interim Minister of Trade and Foreign Economic Cooperation.

“ The state monopoly generates the scarcity of goods, which is why the cabinet will be phasing in price deregulation.

How about that someone in the government has finally got it right!!!! The Cabinet also passed a new law concerning profiteering. It set up a Commodity Exchange and Wholesale Marketing Licensing Committee that has required that wholesalers use cash registers with fiscal memory and has sent inspectors to do spot checks for profiteering. The wholesales protested and complained of heavy handed treatment by the Committee and insisted on milder controls or they would shut down the wholesale and retail outlets. In Varna they did close down; obviously effecting the distribution of goods. In Plovdiv they started trading at night to avoid the spot checks so the Committee set up a night shift also. The law on profiteering has also increased the controls at border customs with the following results. The border crossing into Turkey intercepted cigarettes worth 1,000,000,000 BGL (about \$500,000); 660,000 pounds of cooking oil was stopped at the Greek border (remember I couldn't find any in Zlatograd); and 19 metric tons of copper ingots at the Serbia crossing. A survey at the beginning of this year found that 3% of Bulgarians are affluent and 90% are poor. It also found that 25% of all Bulgarians were deep in debt and 20% are using their last savings to survive. It also found that 70% of the households cannot afford to buy any consumer durables and have money for food only. But, it was also noted that food consumption declined by 30% in constant dollar terms for January 1997 versus January 1996.

I have been out hiking again during March; partially for the exercise and for a project that I will discuss below. I told you about my experience with the border guards on the hike of 8 March but that was only part of the story. First I need to give you some background to put this hiking around in context. In late February I had a PCV from Stara Zagora visit me for 2 days. He is an ecology volunteer that has been to Zlatograd a couple of times and wanted to take the opportunity to come back and visit. It seems that he likes this area as well as I do and wanted to see it at least one more time before he goes back to the US in September. Well, in the course of our talks he brought up a project that he and the ecology PCV from Kurkjuli have been working on with students from their towns – water testing. He also said that they were working on getting some grant money to do water testing in the Rodophe's and wanted to combine the testing with a tent camping trip for their students. One thing lead to another and I am now working on a joint water testing project with them.

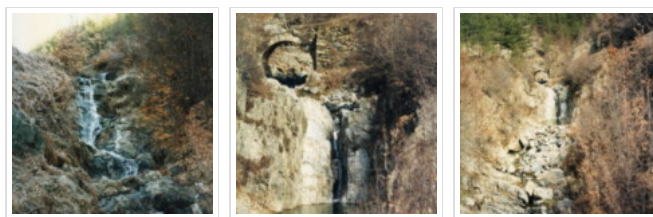


The group of students hiking through the mountains and then they are taking a break. It might have been the first time that some of them to have been out mountain hiking either because they are “city kids” or because hiking is even less of an activity in Bulgaria than in the USA. They are at the Erma Reka settlement pond on the Erma Reka River that flows into the Verbitsa and then downstream past Zlatograd. The lead mines are upstream from here and this “pond” was created to settle any lead out of the water before it continues on. This is one of two students from the University in Sofia that came along to collect the water samples and then test them at the University.

The idea at this point is that they will each bring 6 students and will help Zlatograd with a river clean-up on day one. They will then do a home stay that night; one Stara Zagora and one Kurdjuli student at a Zlatograd students home. The next day we hike “somewhere”, do water testing, camp out, and do a hike to return to Zlatograd. It is the “somewhere” that I have been trying to discover during March. The 8 March hike was to Alamotsi, about 13 Km from Zlatograd, then over a high steep mountain ridge and down into Erma Reka. The total was something over 20 Km with some of it rather quite difficult for this out of shape middle aged couch potato. I was doing this with a couple of Bulgarian teenagers that are genetic clones of mountain goats and they were hiking my ass off. To make matters even more interesting we arrived at that point of no return going over the ridge and got caught in what they affectionately call “the bear is getting married”. This is a literal translation of a saying that the people in this region have for the condition of snow falling while the sun is shining. We did manage to get off the mountain during the snow storm and then waited for an hour for a bus to take us back to Zlatograd; it was another 16 Km walk from there and I wasn’t up to it. The two students thought that the hike was too difficult for the project and there was no suitable camping site so I wrote that route off. Went out alone the following Saturday from Zlatograd to Erma Reka Reservoir, about 8-10 Km, via dirt lumbering roads and livestock trails. This route looked like what we would want because of the access to water for testing and also a lot of evidence of ecological damage that we could point out and discuss with the students. However I could not find a suitable camping place and decided to continue the search the following week.

When the next Saturday arrived I had a teacher PVC guest arrive from Smolyan. He also brought snow with him apparently and I awoke to a dusting of snow on the ground and a sky that did not look very promising. Decided that it probably was not a good day to try the Reservoir again but ask my guest if he wanted to do a short hike near Zlatograd and search for a road that I could see on maps of the area but had not yet found. So we left under an improving sky that gradually became almost sunny and nice. However, this was short lasting and we again arrived back in Zlatograd in the midst of “the bear is getting married”.

Went out last Saturday with one of the same students that I was with on the hike of the 8th accompanied by his younger sister. We followed the route to the Reservoir again; making some better trail selections and checking a camping site that would be on the return to Zlatograd. This would give us a total hike of about 16 Km for the day and should work out well with good water sites, lots of ecology issues, fun hiking, etc.



Two pictures of what seems to be an old Roman bridge. Weather is spring-like and we were getting some snow run off.

The weather was not through with me yet though; we were still 5 Km or more from Zlatograd and we started getting rain. So in 4 hikes during March I have finished 2 in snow and one in rain. I missed a good chance on the 31st; it was raining in the morning, changed to heavy wet snow during mid-day, and finished the day sunny. The 1st of April shows promise of being either a new month and new weather conditions or an April Fool’s Joke; it is a beautiful sunny, yet crisp, morning!

I was going to add a discussion of my trip to Sofia, the 3rd to 6th of April, but see that this letter is probably long enough. I will save that for next month. If it turns out like most of my experiences here have it will be a long story of it’s own!

3 June 1997

Note: There is at least one letter missing between the one dated 1 April 1997 and this one. In it I talked about my purchase of a bike in Sofia. I also told about leaving my US bike and a box of cycling clothes with John & Janis when I left for Bulgaria. Before buying the bike in Sofia I asked them to mail me the box plus the seat and pedals from my US bike and also buy me an altimeter cycling computer. I then had these parts installed on the new bike when I bought it.

As I told you via e-mail, I am now receiving your e-mails; it was great to hear from you. I am also receiving snail mail at the Zlatograd address and it seems to be working well. I am now getting mail in 2 weeks or less; the first week of May being an exception because of a weeks vacation in Bulgaria to celebrate Orthodox Easter. The other benefit is that I now think I am receiving it; I had another weeks mail from Sofia go missing in March and again in April. I have been trying to get caught up on “stuff” since Bulgaria’s Orthodox Easter week (28 April to 1 May). We PC Volunteers were not so lucky; we got to travel to Bourgas for 3 days of In Country Training (IST) in Bulgarian. For me, and perhaps 1/2 of the Volunteers, that required a full day of travel to get there and a day to return home. I needed to be in Gabrovo on 14 May for a one day PC Business Program meeting and having never traveled there before I asked Milka, my counterpart, for advice. She called the bus companies and obtained information that indicated that I could leave Zlatograd at 0615, transfer to another bus in Kurdjali at 0930, then change again in Stara Zagora at 1330 – I would then arrive in Gabrovo. AAH if such things were only so simple! The first parts worked well; that is to say I got to Stara Zagora at about 1130. However, upon making inquiry at the State bus station I was informed that there was no bus to Gabrovo. I then asked the private micro-bus drivers about a bus to Gabrovo and they said that I could go by micro-bus, or State bus, to Kazanluk then transfer to a State bus that went to Gabrovo. So I returned to the State bus station for a second time and asked “is there a bus from Stara Zagora to Kazanluk and from Kazanluk to Gabrovo?”. This time the answer was YES!! Remember that these conversations are going on in a language that I am certainly not very good at, but I can generally ask if a bus is going some place and when. So it is obvious that I asked the wrong question the first time; I asked “is there a bus from Stara Zagora to Gabrovo?”. The answer is NO! (You must go through Kazanluk and transfer to another bus to go to Gabrovo – however this information was not offered, only NO) So as a sign of protest against the State bus service and the principle of the thing I catch a micro-bus from Stara Zagora to Kazanluk, arrive at about 1400, and discover that there are no State buses from Kazanluk to Gabrovo on Monday through Thursday. You can check on your calendars but I will make it easy for you; I am traveling on 13 May for the meeting on the 14th and guess what the 13th is – a Tuesday – NO bus! Obviously I asked the wrong question again; I should have asked “TODAY is there a bus from Stara Zagora to Kazanluk to Gabrovo?”. So I wait around for a train at 1630 that will take me to Gabrovo; the same train I could have caught in Plovdiv at about 1300 or in Stara Zagora at around 1500. The train then requires 2 additional changes in towns that I know nothing about; but (with my great Bulgarian language skills) I elicit the help of a couple Bulgarians that are also going to Gabrovo and do finally arrive. YES, after only 250 Km, one bus, two micro-buses, three trains and a total of 14 hours on the road I arrive. When I returned to Zlatograd (by another route I can assure you) I asked Milka how she had gone to Gabrovo; she was attending a Counterpart Training Conference on the 15th. She happily said that she had gone to Sofia then to Gabrovo; it was a total of 10 hours on two buses but a friend had told her that it was easier!!!! Between 3 April and 15 May I put in about 60 hours of sitting on buses and trains. A good 1/4 of my work time here is spent sitting on public transport!

When I got back from Bourgas we finally had spring here in Zlatograd. Within the 5 days that I was gone everything just took off and the town was in bloom when I returned. The weather in Bourgas, on the Black sea, was cloudy, cold, and rainy while we were there so it was just as well that we had IST and couldn’t be out much. Had one field visit to a town called Nesebur that dates back to the times of the Tracians. It has also been home to all the subsequent civilizations that have passed through this part of the world; Greeks, Byzantines, Roman, Ottoman, and now the Bulgarians. Has the look and feel of a Greek island town or what I picture the sea side towns of southern Italy to look like. Some of the ruins of previous occupants are visible and there is a museum (not open, which is not uncommon in Bulgaria; museums seem to be repositories of things versus places to go see such finds). If you wish to visit a museum in the smaller towns you must: find out who the curator is, track them down, make an appointment to visit, and hope they show up to unlock the museum at the appointed time for your visit. I never thought of it but Bulgaria is cover with Roman ruins and there are museums in almost every town that have ancient civilization artifacts stashed away; the secret is to get them open up for viewing. Money is part of the problem as it is in Russia but only a part of the problem; the other is the attitude or mind set that is present. During the Communist years the curators were responsible for the “stuff” in the museums, and I suspect that responsibility was a scary thing to have. Therefore, to avoid possible problems it probably made sense to lock it up. This is supposition but it seems to explain the behavior.

Well, I have got everything together and took my new bike out on Sat & Sun the 24th and 25th. First real ride that I have done for almost 2 years; I don’t count the short jaunt that I did in Sofia as a real ride. I had the bike, and a Postal Express package that contained a missing computer transmitter, delivered to me by the Director of Peace Corps Bulgaria on May 21st. Later than I had originally planned but I got everything. Then, as is common in Bulgaria, I faced another small problem. As I think I told you, the wheels are not quick release so I needed wrenches to get the front wheel off to put on the transmitter. This took some conversation and inquiry but I found that my buddy Vladimir had wrenches and it only took him 3 trips to come up with the correct size. We got the transmitter on with little difficulty but then found that my mechanic in Sofia had mounted the computer bracket to the handlebar facing in the wrong direction. Changed that, and then proceeded to try to get a signal to the computer for at least an hour. Finally found that the computer was not making complete contact with the bracket – locked it into place and presto I was in business. Well almost; I couldn’t get the computer off the bracket without moving the bracket on the handlebar because it locks so tightly. Had been doing all this work at the office on Friday afternoon so called it quits for the time being; took the bike home and shimmed the bracket, tightened it down and all was well.

I did only 16 Km on Sat with 18 Km on Sun with 116 meters of climb on Sat and 84 meters on Sun. The Sunday climb numbers are probably closer to correct; when I set the altimeter on Friday we were having a rain storm come through so I think a lot of the Sat climb was simply change in barometric pressure. This route is toward the East and the return has almost all of the climb; not much of a climb but enough that you know you are going up. The bad thing about the route is that it is the EASY one; everything else will be more difficult. I will be giving you more information about the terrain as I expand my range and fitness. I was impressed with your 128 miles on the Natchez ride (with one day of 44 miles!) after not riding for so long. I am going to ease into it more than that!!! You will also get some practice in converting from Km to miles, and Meters to feet as you get my riding reports; I have set the computer to metric because of the maps and road signs that I have to work with. That is another thing that makes riding here even more of an adventure than in the US. I have three maps of this area; two auto road maps and a tourist map set – none of which agree with each other in all respects. Distances are shown as being different, or not shown in the case of the tourist map, towns are labeled with different names or are to be found in different locations. The tourist maps are the most detailed, I don't know how accurate, and they are at a scale of 1 Cm to the Km so I can estimate distances reasonably well.

I submitted the following to the Peace Corps Training Officer in Sofia with the recommendation that maybe some of these issues be talked about at this years Pre Service Training (PST). Maybe the questions would not be answered but just talking about them would perhaps shed some light on Bulgarian customs/character. Maybe they also give you some better idea of those same customs/character?

THINGS I NEVER LEARNED IN PST CROSS CULTURE

1. Why do Bulgarians cluster together like a swarm of bees, or livestock during a storm, while waiting in what Western society would consider a queue or “standing in line”? Not only do they form the cluster but they then push, shove, and jostle each other; all the time complaining about their rightful place in the non-existent line.
2. Why do Bulgarians “curb their children” as Western society curbs their dogs? That is to say; why do they assist their children to urinate or defecate in public places?
3. Why do you get a very general answer when you ask a Bulgarian for specifics? Conversely, why do you get to hear everything the person knows on the subject when you ask for a summary? If you ask what time it is; they tell you how to build a watch.
4. Why do Bulgarians make left turns in front of oncoming traffic? This is true of all modes of transport be it walking, bicycle, car, truck, or donkey. There is no concept of yield to on coming traffic or yield the right of way.
5. Why do Bulgarians prefer to eat their food cold? Even IF it happens to be served hot to the table they will wait, or toy with it, until it has assumed room temperature.
6. How do you politely get a Bulgarian to go home, or leave the party, when you have invited them for drinks and or dinner? It seems that if they are left to decide this on their own it is the old college rule; they leave when all the booze is gone.
7. Why is it chic to have a pedigree dog and is there any social ranking attached to the type of dog you own? Does the dogs barking continuously add additional cachet to the owner? This does not seem to be simple liking for pets.
8. Why is there great pride in the literacy of the people of Bulgaria yet it is so difficult to get anyone to commit anything to writing? It appears to be an oral society not one of letters.

Well that is about it for this month, I will get this off to you within the next day or two and hope you receive it before you leave for Tahoe.

18 July 1997

Well I was out of the office again during 8 – 14 June at a training conference for Junior Achievement. It was held at a Black Sea town some 40 Km south of Borgas called Primorsko that you may find on maps that are available to you. It is a resort town with a lot of hotels and restaurants that gets most of its tourists from Russia and former Soviet Block countries. I was asked twice if I was from the Czech Republic. There was a group of young kids with chaperones from St. Petersburg and I met a woman from a town that I never was able to pronounce (it was close to Moscow). The travel effort was similar to what I wrote concerning Gabrovo; to return to Zlatograd I had to stop in Haskovo and stay overnight. There were no connections that would get me home the same day unless I got very lucky with connections and that did not happen. Coming back I traveled by micro-bus, then train, and 2 city buses to Haskovo; the next day it was another train and bus into Zlatograd with long waits between connections. Had good weather at the sea except for one afternoon thunderstorm that was as bad as I have seen anywhere for a long time; wind, lightning, thunder, and rain by the bucket full for a about 30 minutes. The purpose of the conference was to train Bulgarian teachers to teach Junior Achievement in 10-20 High Schools this fall. I was there primarily to talk about my experience as a JA Consultant/Advisor to JA companies for 8 years while working in Phoenix. Here in Bulgaria there have been Peace Corps Volunteers teaching JA for a few years now but Peace Corps Bulgaria is working with the Ministry of Education to get it added to the school program. This year will be the first attempt at having Bulgarian teachers teach the program. Some of them seemed to understand the concepts fine but others don't have a clue what a free market is all about and will have a tough time teaching it. I hope for the best but have my doubts about the effectiveness these first few years. I did meet a teacher from Sofia that does seem to understand what it is about. More importantly she sent me a post card to keep the meeting alive, so to speak, and we have agreed to meet for dinner in Sofia.

Have managed to get in only a few rides since I got my bike but slowly extending my distances with each ride. Sunday, 1 June, I did an out and back ride to the east for about 34 Km with some 228 meters of climbing; about 150 of the climb on the return leg. At the 10 Km point there is a sharp hill that rises up some 60 meters in about 1 Km; it is just east of Preseka and I think of it as "Pray Sucker Hill". My one excursion to the west took me to Erma Reka; about 16 Km and a steady climb of over 200 meters. It was 8 Km to the turn off to Erma Reka; if I had continued due west the climbs are MUCH more difficult. I will let you know about them as I try to get out of town to the west. Have been a little over 40 Km, round trip, to the east. It is more up and down with a net climb coming back from the east; total climb of a little over 300 meters. We are heating up here with afternoon storms that are raising the humidity. Last summer was dry, this year has started out much wetter; good for the crops but I do not do well in high humidity. Then the last week of June and the first week of July were very HOT; the most miserable that we have had either last summer and so far this one. It is hard to believe that it can be so damn cold in the winter and then get so hot and humid in the summer. Of course the people from the upper mid-west in the States understand this kind of weather! Discretion on my part, as well as being lazy, lead to only one ride during this time. That and my trips out of town are cutting into riding time but I get some in; the temperatures have dropped back down to something more reasonable again so I hope to get myself up and out this weekend.

I was out of the office 9 – 12 July on a trip to Sofia and Kustendil. If you remember it was Kustendil where I was in Pre Service Training (PST) last year at this time. We had 12 weeks ending at 1730 Monday – Friday; this year they get away with 11 weeks and are out at 1630 every day!!! The new Volunteers I talked to still hate it. I went into Sofia on the 9th and then to the Peace Corps office on the 10th to get my June & July Living Allowance plus reimbursement for travel to Gabrovo in May and Primorsko in June. Those two trips plus my trip into Sofia to get reimbursed cost me over 100,000 Leva when you include the per diem that we are allowed when away from home. The per diem is based on US Dollars per day but is then paid at the current Leva/Dollar exchange rate when you actually get reimbursed. So, I arrive at the PC office bright and early on the morning of the 10th to get paid. WRONG. I can not get paid using the rate of the 9th I must wait until the rate for the 10th is released by the Bulgarian National Bank at 1000; this is the policy as stated by the assistant payroll clerk and the Admin. Officer is not in of course. So I cool my heels for an hour and a half until the new rate is posted. My patience is rewarded and the rate has gone up by 12 Leva to the Dollar; so I receive about 200 Leva more than I would have by using the rate of the 9th. This equates to a little over a Dime – Ten Cents – One Tenth of a Dollar; gives me a very good idea of what my time is worth here in Bulgaria! It would have been even more appropriate if the rate had moved the other way and I could have received less in Leva plus waiting the one and a half hours. I then went to my bike shop in Sofia to try and get a baggage rack for my bike but they had none that would fit. Maybe next trip? Met my Director at the train station and we then traveled together to Kustendil for a presentation to the new Volunteers on the 11th. He talked about the Non Government Organization that I work for and some of the projects that it has been involved with. I then talked about what I have done to help him or things that I have worked on independently and what it is like for a Volunteer to work in a small town. Another Volunteer added his contribution and we filled an hour and a half. So the Director and I traveled for about 17 hours round trip by bus and train to present for one and a half hours!!!! It doesn't seem time effective does it? But this is Bulgaria and it is the Peace Corps. Had a pleasant dinner with the teacher that I met in Primorsko while in Sofia. Her English is as bad as my Bulgarian so we have a fine time trying to communicate, but it was good to be out on a "date" of sorts – anyway I had fun!

As you may know Bulgaria established a Currency Control Board at the "suggestion" of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. That is to say the IMF & WB said that if Bulgaria wanted to receive loans to help get the country back to a functioning society it would set up a Currency Control Board. Boards have been used in Argentina and Latvia or Lithuania in recent years; Argentina's is still in operation. What the Board provides is a structure that takes the politics out of the economic operation of the country. It prohibits the printing of more money unless the central bank of the country has central reserves to back the local currency. So on 1 July the Board started operation here with the Leva fixed at 1,000 Leva/German Mark and no more Leva can be introduced into the

economy until the central bank reserves increase. This shuts down the inflationary pressures that a country face but it also shuts down imports unless exports are also increased. It will also make it difficult to increase wages without significant increases in productivity. In very simplistic terms what this all means is it will force Bulgaria to become a market economy; and give up the communist central planning that they professed to have given up some 7-8 years ago. Some statistics to put the situation into a context and make it easier for you to picture what we are faced with so far this year. The inflation rate during June was only 0.8% with food prices declining at 1.1% (crops are being harvested), non-food up 2.0% and services up 4.4%. The year to date rate of inflation is 484.2% because of the hyperinflation in January & February. One of the primary factors leading to the decline in inflation since then has been what is commonly described here as the “pauperization of the country’s population”. From Bulgarian Business News:

“ The majority of Bulgaria's population may be described a 'passively poor'. People count on social allowances and on incomes which are not connected with the production sector.

What this means in Zlatograd is the 85+ metric tons of food and medicines that have been donated by our Greek Sister City and another town in Greece. Also a cash donation from the George Soros Foundation to the very poor of Zlatograd that I think is about \$50,000. It also means that people here grow most of their own food and preserve all they possibly can to carry them over until the next harvest season. It is estimated that 192,216 Leva is needed every month now to meet essential necessities, however the average monthly wage is 142,535 Leva. In addition, 55% of all Bulgarians are paid less than the average wage and a minimum pension is 27,000 Leva and the maximum pension is at 81,000 Leva. It is little wonder that sales have dropped over 46% this year over the same period last year and the Currency Board will probably make it worse because of the increased cost of imports. The price of bread and other products from wheat is still controlled. Surprise! Surprise! Last year Bulgaria needed to import around 500,000 metric tons of wheat and the projections are for twice that this year. Prior to 1944 Bulgaria was an agricultural society that was capable of feeding its own population and export a surplus. The Soviet Union industrialized Bulgaria, got people off the farm, collectivized those remaining, and now they are incapable of feeding themselves. The same pattern as you see in North Korea now and in China before it liberalized the collectives. The restitution of land here in Bulgaria has been going on now for 7 years and they still don't have it finished; furthermore, they claim to need some millions of dollars to finish the process. But even if you have had land returned to you it doesn't mean a whole lot because you don't have title to it and can not sell it except in very limited circumstances. The privatization of state owned companies has been just as badly handled during this time and continues to be a mess. Again, from Bulgarian Business News.

“ Bulgarian industrial enterprises lose \$500 million annually due to the outdated equipment in state-run enterprises. The average age of technological equipment is 24-26 years.

The privatization process requires bidders to put up massive amounts to upgrade these companies and also to retain the existing employees. This makes bidding on state owned companies a very risky and long term investment to say the least!

11 August 1997

There is an article in the April 1997 issue of National Geographic entitled *Moscow The New Revolution*. This article contains many statements that are so appropriate to Bulgaria that I must use them to give you a better idea of life here.

“ Street names change overnight, erasing honors given decades ago to Bolshevik warriors; ... a gay bar opens down the street and features 'transvestite night'...

It is interesting to note that street names in Bulgaria were also changed to the Russian Bolshevik names (from the names of Bulgarian warriors) and are now being changed back. In April I went with Molly, our Peace Corps Medical Officer, and the couple from Haskovo to a recently opened gay bar in Sofia. Didn't stay but for one drink and it was early so the place wasn't really hopping yet. But, what was very interesting was that it was '3 M Night' and we received a complimentary roll of 3 M Magic Scotch Tape as we entered. They also had a VCR tape running on an oversized TV monitor advertising all kinds of 3 M products. Can you imagine a 3 M Night at any gay bar in the States? The experience was stranger than the people who were coming in!

“ The rules of class and privilege in Moscow are approaching the draconian code of the industrialized West. Money talks and nobody walks. If you have cash (or a credit card) in Moscow, you can taste it all:...

This is an apt description of Sofia, Plovdiv and other large cities in Bulgaria also, with one big exception; credit cards are not accepted except at the most expensive hotels. There is virtually no banking system here so most charge slips are shipped to some out of country bank for subsequent processing. Then accompanying 4 pages of photos is this caption in part.

“ Misha's parents worked the land as peasants in Safonikha, a village 60 miles northwest of Moscow. Now in order to feed themselves, Mish and Nina, who have no children, tend a third of an acre there from April to September, living in the one-room family home. Though both suffer from health problems, they toil long hours all summer, growing bushels of cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, beets, onions, cabbages, and potatoes. During the winter, which they spend in Moscow...every month Nina and Misha visit Safonikha to collect food

This is the same pattern that you see in Bulgaria; it is the very unfortunate that don't have the village garden to go back to.

“ Pensioners, a quarter of Moscow's population, are among those least able to adapt to the new Russia. Says Nina, 67, 'it's better to be young'. It takes cunning, flexibility, privilege, and youth to make one's way in the new world. Suddenly an outwardly classless society has fractured into classes of radically different experiences and levels of wealth, and the result has been a Moscow filled with resentment, confusion, and jealousy.

This is also true today in Bulgaria. There is a proverb in Bulgarian "I don't want anything for myself; I only want less for my neighbor". That proverb is no longer holding true, there are Bulgarians that want it for themselves and they want a lot of it!! Although there is no overt discrimination, except against the Gypsies, there is the feeling by people in the cities that they are superior to the country bumpkins. Even more so than the city versus country attitudes that exist in the States. Here you also have the old guard intellectuals that no longer have a place in the society. They are highly educated by communist standards; but all their training is now worthless because the ideological principles behind that education have been deemed worthless. There is much more to the article and I recommend reading it for an understanding of what is going on in Moscow/Russia but probably all of the old Soviet Block also.

I am becoming very Bulgarian! On Friday, 25 July, we had visiting Bulgarians from an NGO in Sofia that were here to verify that we had distributed a grant from the Soros Foundation as the Foundation had prescribed. They had with them two representatives of Refugees International (an American NGO), a man about my age and a girl that appeared to be in her twenties, who were doing a needs assessment of Bulgarians. As the meeting started Zdavko, my Executive Director, introduced all of the Zlatograd people and the American's interpreters (they each had one) translated. I heard him introduce me as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bulgarian but did not hear the translations. As the meeting progressed I only offered a short comment from time to time but spoke a few sentences about the replacement pedestrian bridge that is now under construction. After that short speech the young girl said in an aside to the other American 'He speaks with an American accent'. I then said 'That is because I'm an American'. She had not understood during the introduction that I was a Peace Corps Volunteer and thought I was just another one of the Bulgarians in Zlatograd. At dinner, after the meeting, we talked briefly and she emphasized this point by stating 'You fit in; I thought you were Bulgarian.' Now if I only knew the language! A brief word about dinner. It began at about 2130 and followed the pattern that I have described before. The only thing that I want to comment on here is the main course. It was Chavarma (phonetically with long A's) which is lamb that has been roasted on a spit over an open fire. I had it one time before but on that occasion I didn't see it on the spit. This time I had the opportunity to see it and found that here they roast the WHOLE lamb; I mean it is roasted with the head attached. So when they bring you a cold plate of roasted lamb it may in fact include some choice, morsels carved from the head; I didn't ask, didn't see any eyes on the plate and I didn't want to know.

Not knowing the language brings up the shocker to my easy going days. Milka has quit and gone to Sofia to work for a Bulgarian construction company that also has offices in two or three foreign countries. I knew she was very unhappy here in Zlatograd, was having troubles with her husband, and had made application for at least two jobs since the beginning of the year. I had written a recommendation for her for one of those applications and did what I could to encourage and help her. But, at the same time I had those mixed emotions that have been described as "It is like watching your mother-in-law drive over a cliff in your brand new BMW". I was

without any counterpart/translator for a week plus and now have a college student helping out in the office; her English is minimal and only reinforces how good I had it with Milka. The plus side – she is beautiful! Milka is very attractive but this Nevena is a real knockout. Zdravko is looking for someone to work full time starting in September; Nevena will be going back to school then and we will need someone. The chances of finding anyone here in Zlatograd with English that is as good as Milka's was is rather remote so I will probably be learning better Bulgarian because I must. The crutch has been removed!

You may have had news there about the flooding in northern Europe. That flooding was mostly on the Oder River between Germany, Poland, and Czech Republic which does not flow into the Danube and will not affect Bulgaria. The Oder flows north into the Baltic. Was your trip down the Danube plagued with rain or were you gone before it started? We had no heavy rain here; only what I would call normal afternoon thunderstorms and maybe not even normal rainfall from them. It seems to be drying up here and I see more people irrigating their gardens if they have the water available. But, what that does is lower the water pressure to my apartment and it may have contributed to a burst water main near me this last Saturday. My water was off part of Saturday, Sunday, and again Monday morning when I got up. So it was a cold water shave and cold water sponge bath; I keep a bucket full of water available for such eventualities. This weekend I saw news of a land slide in the "Snowies" of New South Wales with a number of people killed as well as reports on the European flooding. I found the opening remark by the CNN International reporter to be rather absurd. He said "Today's news is headlined by the weather, most of it all bad". Have you ever watched, or listened to, a newscast where the weather was the headline news and it was about GOOD weather. If the weather isn't BAD and killing people it is not news! This is particularly true of CNN International; the network of today's killings in all the wars around the globe and any other acts that may have taken human life. I have reached the point that I don't like to watch it and prefer Euronews TV if I can get it.

To follow up on last month's Long Letter; some additional comments on land restitution in Bulgaria and the impact on agriculture. This is quoted from Bulgarian Business News.

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Before taking a summer recess, Parliament passed an amendment to the Agricultural Land Tenure Act, transferring jurisdiction over applications for supervisory review from the Supreme Administrative Court to the district courts.

The cases filed with the Supreme Administrative Court by July 1st, 1997 added up to 5,770, which means that their finalization will take more than three years, experts say. They believe that the revision will speed up farm land ownership restitution.

According to figures released by the National Statistics Institute (NSI), by July 1st, 1997, or six years after the entry into force of the Agricultural Land Tenure Act, title to 34,318,000 dca, or 62.4 per cent of all restitutable land, has passed to the rightful owners. Of this area, 18.7 per cent has been restituted within existing or restorable old physical boundaries, and 43.7 per cent through land distribution plans, the NSI figures show. Restitution of the remaining 20,717,000 dca, or 37.6 per cent of all land subject to repossession, is in progress. Most of this land, 18,196,000 dca, has been allocated for use for one or more years, albeit not to its rightful owners. This procedure, called 'provisional entry in possession', has taken hold in recent years as land reform in Bulgaria has been delayed. Provisional entry in possession is used mainly to allocate land to cooperatives, of which 3,119 have been registered so far, and they farm 43 per cent of the country's agricultural land, the NSI said.

Nearly BGL 4,500 million have been spent since the land reform began in 1992, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. According to expert estimates, completion of land reform will cost some USD 19 million.

The pace of farm land restitution slackened last year, the experts admit. Since the start of land reform, former owners or their heirs have repossessed 6 per cent of the land in 1992, 9 per cent in 1993, 18.8 per cent in 1994, and 16 per cent in 1995, according to NSI statistics.

Land reform in Bulgaria is not exactly deadlocked, but is running into serious difficulties with the unending amendments to the Agricultural Land Tenure Act, the Ministry says.

The Act was originally adopted in February 1991 and has since been revised on ten occasions. Lingering ambiguities and gaps in the legislation have been one of the reasons for the delay in farm land restitution in recent months, agricultural experts argue.

Nearly 13 million decares, or 27.6 per cent of the cultivable land in Bulgaria, went untilled and unplanted last year, statistics show. The idle land almost doubled from the 6.5 million decres left unused in 1995.

More than half of the abandoned land is privately owned, according to Agriculture Ministry figures. In mountain and highland areas, more than 90 per cent of the farm land has been derelict for two or three years now, which irretrievably damages its fertility. Fifty-two per cent of the owners of restituted agricultural land live in urban areas and are not willing to engage in farming.

You would think that after 6 years and 10 amendments to the Act there would not be any "ambiguities and gaps". However, I think it was probably to someone's benefit that there were delays. The first group that I see benefiting are the cooperatives that have been "allocated land under provisional entry in possession". They have been using land that doesn't belong to them at no rental cost to them. I suspect that the people that did the "allocating" probably also benefited; so maybe the cooperative did pay rent, so to speak, but not to the rightful owners. If the owner does not wish to farm the land he can not sell it and it's only value to him is it's rental value. The saga continues!!

25 August 1997

Note: In this letter I refer to a map that I drew utilizing Excel and I have not attempted to replicate it for this web page. You can see most of the places that are mentioned in this letter by going to [Bulgaria Map](#) See

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Bulgaria/@42.7075224,24.4205256,8z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x40a8fec1c85bf089:0xa01269bf4c10!8m1!1e1>
enter a city/town name in the upper left to find the smaller places that I name.

In my last letter I commented on the heavy rains in Central Europe and the subsequent flooding; then I went on to say that we were somewhat dry. Well it was no sooner written than we began to get rains here everyday and received almost 2 weeks of daily rains. A year ago I came to Zlatograd for a site visit at about this time of the year also; I don't remember the exact date but around the second week of August. They were experiencing a long dry spell then also but during the three days I was here it rained everyday. It was the Mayor's view that I was very lucky for the town and had brought them rain. A more realistic view, as it turns out, is that it ALWAYS rains in Zlatograd around this time of the year! One of the rains had accompanying hail that did a lot of damage; particularly to tomatoes and grapes here in the town. That was damaging enough and will cause some people grief but nothing like the harm that would have been done if the hail storm had been in the tobacco fields outside of town. As I was looking out the window of our office I was thinking of the poor souls only cash crop being pounded into the ground. Fortunately that didn't happen and there looks to be a bigger harvest this year over what I saw last year. I'm certainly not a supporter of tobacco products but in this region it is almost the only agricultural cash crop they have. Speaking again of agriculture, I must tell you of the Rhodpe "thrashing" system that I discovered on the 17th of August. I was riding the return leg of my 47 Km ride (more on this later) from Zlatograd and in the village of Dobromirski (phonetically, long o's and i's like long e) I noticed what seemed to be a load of straw spilled across the road. It was maybe 4-5 meters in length, covering the width of the road and was maybe 300-400 Cm high. I braked and eased off the side of the road onto the dirt to pass and got a better look at the straw. It was then that I found that I was not looking at straw but rather a wheat thrashing operation. The cut wheat had been carefully arranged on the road to cover the paved surface and allow for passing traffic to drive over it; thereby thrashing it. They would then sweep the grain from the road surface and I presume separate the grain from the chaff by tossing it in the wind.

While I'm talking about wheat maybe I should talk a little bit about the Bulgarian idea of a free market economy in what is described as "staple foods". Effective 1 July, the start date for the Currency Control Board, prices were liberalized (decontrolled) for almost all goods and services as required by the IMF, Among the exceptions are "staple foods": wheat flour and bread, cow's milk/butter/yogurt/yellow cheese, white cheese, pork with bone, veal, lamb, perishable sausages, eggs, sugar, and sunflower cooking oil. All of these products continue to have government set prices and wholesalers/retailers are allowed a ceiling price mark-up or face a profiteering charge. First, lets talk about sunflower cooking oil. At the beginning of July the government released 6,000 tons of cooking oil from it's contingency reserves with the intent of flooding the market and holding prices down. This oil will be sold through state stores at a controlled price of 1,150 BGL/Liter. When cooking oil was included on the list of exception items, the government contends, some dealers and speculators bought and stored larger quantities of oil with the intent of creating an artificial shortage then selling at higher prices when government prices were raised. Imported cooking oil sells at 1,600 BGL/Liter and the government suggests that the speculators are attempting to force prices to that level. At the beginning of August an additional 2,000 tons of oil were released from the contingency reserve, but government spokesmen now say prices will increase further to international levels (i.e. market prices). Secondly, there is milk and milk products. Around the 1st of July milk purchase prices were set at 150 to 200 BGL/Liter depending the region of the country and the season of the year. At that time the dairy farmers protested the low purchase price and demonstrated in many parts of the country claiming that at the set prices they are selling at a loss. Then to make matters even worse, the state owned milk processing companies are virtually broke and have big debts to the farmers for milk purchases. As a result, during 1996 the number of cows decreased by 13,000 and milk production was some 17 million liters less than anticipated by the government and state processing companies were working at 20-40% of capacity. In addition, on the 1st of August the European Union suspended the importation of Bulgarian dairy products because a processor fail to pass sanitary inspection. Additional inspections will be performed in September and the import ban could be removed at that time. There was also a significant increase in the price of dairy products in early August with some products becoming unavailable. "The market deficit of dairy products has been absolutely intentionally created by traders with a view of profiteering, the Chairman of the National Pricing Committee (NPC) claims. The NPC and the Ministry of Trade initiated large-scale inspections of wholesale warehouses aimed to establish if these commodities have been hidden in order to create an artificial deficit and push prices up further." At the same time the government has authorized the duty free import of 3,000 tons of cheese between now and 15 October and released 500 tons from it's contingency reserves. They have also raised milk prices to a level of 300 to 350 BGL/liter effective 1 September; but it is anticipated that will result in cheese prices that are higher than the duty free prices and the governments attempts to set and control prices. I think what these two examples show however is the governments consistent position that the problems are created by the private traders and warehouse operators attempting to profiteer through creating artificial scarcity. It should also be noted that the producers in both of these cases are state owned companies that are buying mostly from private farmers. In addition, it is the state owned producers that have the export licenses that allow them to sell the products in free market economies outside Bulgaria. This is the situation now under the "Reform government" that has come into power; I can only guess at what was going on before. There is a lot of reforming still to be done to say the very least!

On the reverse of this page I have drawn a map of my current cycling range and will send others as I hopefully expand my horizons. In the past I have mentioned town names that I thought you could find if you had access to a good world atlas. But, now that I am riding in the area I will be talking about villages and small towns that it would take a detailed map to find. In fact the village of Alamotsi doesn't even appear on automobile map that you can buy here in Bulgaria. I have shown the name in Bulgarian, both in normal capital and lower case letters as well as in all capitals, and the also in the English phonetic spelling. Therefore, if you do have an atlas maybe you

will have a chance to match it to the general area that I am talking about. My rides to the west have been to Erma Reka and as far as the beginning of the dirt road to Alamotsi. My efforts are primarily toward the east with a 47 Km ride on 17 August that included about 3.5 Km (round trip) of the old road to Kurdjuli; now a dirt road (not shown on local maps) that goes to Doulitsa. Looking at maps that I have it seemed that this could be a short cut to Preseka but the road is not very good and I climbed a 100 meter hill from where it starts. The paved road to Preseka has two long steep hills that I know will be tough but at least I get the benefit of the down hill. The dirt road was so rough that I didn't get any benefit from all the up hill work I had put into it. On 24 August I rode as far as the top of the first climb and it was a 4 Km 140 meter low gear gut-it-out effort; but it is doable. My goal for now is to ride to Kurdjuli and back some weekend before it gets too cold this fall. That will be about an 80 Km ride each way which doesn't sound like much but it is plenty for the bike I have and the terrain that I have to contend with. Will keep you posted on how it works out. It is good fun – and the natives think I'm CRAZY!!!!

16 September 1997

This month's Long Letter is not a letter at all but rather an article/story that I wrote that will be included in the Bulgarian Peace Corps News Letter in October. Hope you enjoy it! I started year two in Bulgaria last week and in some ways the story is a celebration of my first year in Zlatograd. More regular stuff plus my cycling efforts next month.

This statue of Delyo and Julsuma stands near the street on the left side of the Zlatograd Municipal building square.



THE BALLAD OF DELYO

THE LEGEND

It was a Sunday in Belovidovo and the sun was just beginning to lighten the sky above the mountains that enclosed the Verbitsa valley. The fog was still swirling gently and would dissipate like smoke as the day warmed. So it was a rather normal spring day on this 11th of April 1756; yet as we will see it was the beginning of something exceptional.

Minka, the wife of Jordan, had been in a difficult labor since the previous evening and had yet given birth to what Jordan was sure to be his first son. Jordan's brother Emilo had been with him throughout the night to help assuage his worries while Emilo's wife Penka assisted as midwife. During the long hours of labor Penka had assisted Minka but at the dawning she had left for home to tend to her two sons. Her midwife duties being taken up by a neighbor that almost every one called Widow Yaga. Soon after Penka's departure there was a flurry of activity by Widow Yaga and the two waiting men finally heard the cry of a new born. As was the custom, they entered the bedroom to see for themselves if Jordan's prayers had been answered. Minka was cuddling the infant in her arms but it was easily noted that yes Jordan finally had the son he had long prayed for. They also noted that the infant had very pale hair, almost like a golden silk, and very bright blue eyes; but there was another troubling physical attribute that all were aware of but fear precluded talk of such things.

Nedelcho, that was the name that Minka and Jordan had selected for their son, had grown up as an only child but did not feel the absence of brothers and sisters. He had his two cousins, the sons of Emilo, and many neighbor children to play with or as he grew to work with. The job that Nedelcho liked the best was when he was allowed to shepherd the flocks into the Rhodope Mountains that surrounded his home. Although he had no schooling and could neither read nor write he received a good education in the mountains. He learned the ways of the animals in the forests; how to find ones way through the tangle of beech and oak trees, the blackberry and wild grape vines; and he learned to read all that nature had written. Although he loved the mountains and the forests, when he was fifteen he joined his Uncle Emilo and his cousins when they departed for Enije. It was the normal work pattern for his Uncle to go to Enije every fall and return to Belovidovo in the spring; working through the winter in relative warmth near the White Sea. Nedelcho was apprenticed to his Uncle to learn the trade of tailor so that he too would have an opportunity to earn money to buy the things that could not be grown or made in Belovidovo.

The work in Uncle Emilo's tailor shop was not physically hard for Hedelcho but it was exhausting his spirit. It was the first time in his life that he felt that he was a slave to the Turkish Masters that demanded his work. In the past a part of the crops, part of the wool shone each year, an occasional sheep, or some days of labor were required by the Master in Belovidovo. But, he had felt a freedom from oppression and did not feel the slave that the demands of tailoring made him feel. Also weighing on him were the insults and taunts of the Turkish and Greek children that he was subject to everyday as he walked the streets of Enije. His anger prompted him to seek out a blacksmith to fabricate a knife and upon receiving it he once again began the walk home. However, this time when he was confronted

with the daily jibes, catcalls, and insults he threatened his tormentors with the newly made knife. This action quickly silenced his harassers but it also brought upon Nedelcho the quick response of a Turkish soldier who struck him with the flat of his sword. With no thought to his life Nedelcho immediately struck back with a fist to the soldier's chest; knocking him from his feet into a cloud of dust in the street. The soldier could see in Nedelcho eyes and face a look that was uncommon to any Bulgarians that he had come into contact with before; he also knew that he would not attempt to trouble him more. Nedelcho also realized what he had done and he now understood the feelings that he had been struggling with. In the crowd that had formed to watch this drama was another Bulgarian. With the realization that he now did not need the knife Nedelcho approached his countryman and said "Take this knife for protection against your oppressors; I now know that I have the strength to prevail without it". When Uncle Emilo returned home he had heard of Nedelcho's confrontation and was not in a mood to approve his request to visit Belovidovo on Easter Sunday. That day was also the Turkish religious day of Bayram and there was much tailoring required in preparation. Nedelcho did not wish to disobey his uncle but he also wished to visit his mother, father, and aunts; so he left for Belovidovo when his uncle retired for the night. It was 80 Km to Belovidovo from Enije but Nedelcho made the journey and returned before Emilo arrived at the shop Easter morning. Nedelcho said "I visited Belovidovo last night and have brought a loaf of bread for us from Aunt Penka.". It was unbelievable that any man could have made such a trip, much less during the night, in less than two days. Emilo did not believe Nedelcho; but upon seeing the still hot loaf of bread, which he could recognize, as being of his wife's hand, he knew it to be true. It was then that he remembered what he had seen some 15 years before at the child's birth. The infant had a tail – a sign that the devil had taken a soul and in exchange had bestowed the man with superhuman strength, speed, and wit. Emilo became very frightened when he thought what might happen to him and his sons if the Turks were to come for Nedelcho because of his fight with the soldier. He also knew that they would hear of Nedelcho's trip to Belovidovo; that was not something that could be kept a secret. Therefore, he gave Nedelcho some new clothes and his wages and begged him to return home.

Emilo was certainly correct when he thought that the actions of Delyo, for that is what people were now calling him, could not remain a secret. The news of his fight with the Turkish soldier and his Easter Sunday trip was conveyed throughout the region even before Delyo could reach home. For this time Delyo was not in any rush to reach Belovidovo; he was using the journey as a time to reflect on what had happened and what he was going to do. Perhaps that was why he did not notice that he was now on the side of the mountain range where waters flowed into streams feeding the Verbitsa River rather than the White Sea. It may also be why he was unaware of the haiduk that surrounded his camp and were upon him before he could react. If his normal wits had been about him they would have never caught him in such a trap. The haiduk leader said: "Give us your valuables and your fine new clothes Delyo and we will spare you." Delyo give up what was demanded and said only: "If I had known how easy it was to get new clothes and money I would have apprenticed with you rather than my Uncle Emilo. We shall meet again sometime." A letter from Kour Aga, the Pasha of Karaolan Region, awaited Delyo when he arrived at his mother's home. Because of the tales that were being told, the Pasha was requesting that Delyo serve in his army. Delyo agreed to visit Kour Aga but only if he had a Turkish soldier escort preceding him; not following him, giving the false appearance of his being delivered. This was not acceptable to the soldiers but Delyo forced them to abide by his wishes. Kour Aga was very impressed when he saw them arrive in this fashion and knew that he had selected the right man. Delyo agreed to serve in the Pasha's army but only if Kour Aga stopped all forced Muhammadan religious conversions, stopped all violence against Bulgarians, and Delyo must be granted a permit to carry a musket (a privilege reserved to Turks). Kour Aga agreed to all these terms and Delyo served one year in his army. But, the Pasha broke his vow by allowing violence and conversions to resume and Delyo left. He was then asked to lead the forces of Alemin Bay in Ugurli and knowing that he could use this army to protect Bulgarians, Christians, and the poor – he accepted. And so it was that he also served the Pasha of Ugurli for one year before leaving. His apprenticeship in the armies of these two Turkish Masters would serve him well in his undertaking to protect the oppressed from haiduk bands or from Turkish domination.

Delyo went into the forests and mountains that he loved so much and that provided him the sanctuary from which he could carry on what he now saw as his life's work. There were others that joined him there, from Belovidovo came Dumlovsti and Karagovsti, and they formed a band of haiduk that was something more than the robbers that the term normally connotes. To the Turkish forces that were trying to capture them they were just another band of robbers and murders. But to the poor of the Central Rhodopes they were good men that helped relieve some of the oppression of those Turkish forces. Yes they robbed the wealthy, those that had acquired their wealth from the slave labor of the oppressed; and yes they killed, in revenge, for the killings or rapes that were inflicted upon the Bulgarians, the Christians, and the poor. Delyo and his band lived this way for some thirty years and he became celebrated in song as a hero of the people. He was to be found returning many times to Belovidovo for he had come to love Julsuma, and she to love him; he visited her as frequently as possible while avoiding the patrolling troops. Julsuma could have been mistaken for Delyo's daughter when they were seen together; her small stature and forever-young appearance belied the woman that she was. Although she was very happy to have Delyo with her she was apprehensive that the Turks would trap him when he came to visit. He said to her: "Do not fear for me; the Turks can not catch me nor can they harm me, I am protected from them." But, as he was approaching Belovidovo one cold January morning in 1798 Baba Yaga met him in the forest. She said: "I have come to warn you Delyo that there are troops awaiting you at the house of Julsuma; you must not come into town this day." Delyo thanked her for the warning by rewarding her with pieces of silver and retreated back to the forest. Baba Yaga was an old woman that was approaching death and was troubled by the secret that she possessed. Therefore, she went to the Pasha of Belovidovo and said to him; "I know that Delyo can be killed only with a silver bullet made from silver of his own. I have that silver and I give it to you so that you may kill the one whose soul has already been taken by the devil." Silver bullets were cast and another trap was laid for the time of Delyo's next visit to Julsuma. Two shots out from what sounded like an area near the river where they had met many times before. She rushed to their meeting place and there found Delyo lying on a large rock; which they had sat upon on many pleasant afternoons. He was in a pool of his own blood and close to death but had the strength to say: "I have many fine horses, many rich clothes; but I will not see the Rhodope spring." As an additional insult to the man that they had killed, and a warning to others, the Pasha commanded that Delyo be hung from a tree near the center of town. The news of his violent

death, and the treachery of Baba Yaga, was soon carried through the Rhodopes. Because Kour Aga and Alemin Bay had great respect for Delyo they came to Belovidovo to claim his body and provide an honorable burial. But before they left they told the Pasha; “It was a very bad mistake to kill Delyo and to dishonor him in this way, the people will not forget”. This prophecy had been barely spoken before the most famous song of Delyo, “Izlel e Delyo Haiduk”, was being sung to honor the legend that he had become.

THE FACTS

Perhaps the story you have just read is true but then again maybe it is only this authors understanding of the legend. The fact is, we only know what some thirty folk songs from the Central Rhodope Mountain Region in Bulgaria are able to tell us. There is no surviving written history of a man named Delyo or Nedelcho; but there were fifteen song written in Belovidovo Region, eight from Smolyan Region, and seven from adjoining Regions. This is at least circumstantial evidence that someone of that name lived in the Central Rhodopes. It is a fact that towns named in the songs: Smolyan and Belovidovo in Bulgaria and Enije and Ugurli, now in Greece, did exist. Only Smolyan has the same name today; what was known as Belovidovo is now called Zlatograd. Historical records carry the names of Kour Aga and Alemin Bay as rulers of regions in the Rhodopes that are now in Greece and the names Dumlovsti and Karagovsti are family names in the Zlatograd Region that can be found in records of that period. It is a fact that the people of Zlatograd venerate a statue of Delyo and Julsuma that overlooks the Municipal Square. The statue is more than that of a local legend; it also stands as a memorial to those that fought for independence from Ottoman rule. Wreaths are placed at its base on every important Bulgarian National Holiday and on Zlatograd Town Day. I have seen wedding parties dancing the hora in front of the statue before proceeding on in their celebration. Even today, there are people in Zlatograd that will show you a rock in the Verbitsa River that has a red stain on it that they will swear is the rock on which Delyo died. I believe that legends endow the hero with character, behavior, and values that mirror the culture from which the legend originates. From the legend we can get some idea of what the culture of the place is like. I will leave the study of this to the social scientists but even the reader or listener of the legend will form an impression. Lastly, it is a fact that the most famous song, “Izlel e Delyo Haiduk”, was recorded on a golden record and placed aboard the Voyager spacecraft in 1977. Voyager passed from our solar system some years ago; when and where it will be found I do not know. I do believe however that it will be found, the record will be played, and once again a song of Delyo’s legend will be heard. I wonder what the listeners will write as their ballad of Delyo?

25 September 1997

Note: This letter had a copy of a Bulgaria highway map attached as the last page that I have not attempted to replicate for the web page. You can see most of the places that are mentioned in this letter by going to [Bulgaria Map](#). See

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Bulgaria/@42.7075224,24.4205256,8z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x40a8fec1c85bf089:0xa01269bf4c10!8m4> enter a city/town name in the upper left to find the smaller places that I name.

Well it is the beginning of my second year and it is like starting over in some ways. My counterpart, Milka, quit in July and I had a temporary during August while my Executive Director was on vacation. When he returned on the 9th of September one of the first things that he told me was that he had also quit. So starting the 15th I have a new counterpart and a new Director. Life would have been much simpler if I had been able to work with the same people but maybe the challenge of starting over will make the year seem to pass quicker. Most volunteers find that they are able to accomplish more during their second year because of the ground work they have laid during the first. I see that a lot of what I did isn't going to help and I will be doing some of those same relationship developments again with a different group. Because of who the Director is you get a whole new approach, a new group coming to the office, and different requests. It appears to me that the new Director is trying to create an even closer relationship between the Municipal government and the CDIC (supposedly a Non-Governmental organization), I am only speculating about this, but the previous Director may have been under pressure by the Mayor to blur the relationship and he quit versus comply. The national government is slowly making some efforts to "reform"; I see no evidence of the local government signing on to that effort. There was a Professor here on 19 September talking to my director, Municipal employees, and the NGO's Board Chairman (a local Bank Manager) about privatizing property. The reaction of those attending was that we can't do it here! Also, there is one State company in town that has been attempting to do an employee buy out for almost 3 years now and it hasn't been privatized yet- maybe because it is making money. It seems that the companies that get privatized are either losing money or are very heavily indebted with very little to show for the acquired debt.

I did a Living allowance trip to Sofia on 10 September and returned on the 13th. The extra days on this trip were for a mid-service medical checkup by the Peace Corps Medical Officer and a dental check/cleaning. Since pre Peace Corps I have had a flaky scalp problem that was diagnosed by a doctor in Reno as a pre cancerous growth and he "burned" it off with liquid nitrogen. Then here in Bulgaria while I was in PST a Bulgarian doctor said it was bad dandruff and gave me some strong shampoo. In February I had the new PC Medical Officer look at it along with a rash that had formed on my arm and she said it was Psoriasis. When I went into Sofia soon after that she sent me to a Bulgarian Dermatologist and it was diagnosed as a skin edema. This last trip the PCMO sent me to another office and three Bulgarian Doctors looked me over and diagnosed it as Psoriasis. Because of swelling in the first joint near the nail in my pinkie finger and a couple of toes they took x-rays to see if Prosaic Arthritis was forming. Fortunately that hasn't happened yet, they have me on Ibuprofen now to reduce the swelling; doesn't do anything to restore the nails which have been virtually destroyed. Also have some medicated creams that seem to be helping to control the Psoriasis; however, they have told me that there is no cure. I can look forward to trying to control this stuff for the rest of my life. I am fortunate at this point to have a relatively light case compared to pictures that the PCMO had in a Medical Publication of what it can look like. Not life threatening but it doesn't do much to improve your quality of life!

On a much more positive note: my bike riding is coming along fine considering the amount of training that I have/have not done. On 20 September I rode to Kurdjuli via Podkova and Momchilgrad. Returned on Sunday via Gebel. The last page of this letter has a Bulgarian map with crosshatching to identify the route and a circled "X" pointing to referenced towns. I have previously talked about Preseka Hill and Radar Hill, these are both along the route to Podkova. In those previous rides I had gone over the top of Radar Hill and then climbed back up it on the return home for a total of 62 Km. I estimated that the distance to Kurdjuli at 75 Km and, by traveling the route in a bus a number of times, thought that by riding Radar Hill both ways I was doing about the same amount of climbing. Well the distance part was real close; it is 75 Km from my house to the bus station in Kurdjuli. The climbing situation is a little different. The 62 Km ride ended up with 688 meters whereas to Kurdjuli I did 896. The climbs just keep getting longer and steeper! Preseka is 60 meters in about 1 Km, Radar is 124 meters in 3.3 Km, then there is 172 meters in about 3.5 km, 212 meters out of Podkova in 4 Km, and a 60 meter climb in less than 1 Km to the summit before dropping down into Momchilgrad. If you remember the Western Tour, as I do, the downhill into Momchilgrad is like the run into Osoyoos, British Columbia. The return was only 57 Km but also had 868 meters of climbing with 540 of it in 19 Km out of Gebel. The downhill from there is 3 Km and 328 meters; on a training ride at the end of August I attempted to ride up this and had to walk about half of it. It also has some sharp curves in it so the downhill is a hard break almost all the way down but I still recorded 59 Km/Hr coming back from Kurdjuli. Because of the steep climb out of Momchilgrad coming back to Zlatograd and the so far unrideable climb over the top to Gebel this seems the way to do the round trip to Kurdjuli.

The map also shows my planned 7-8 day tour from Zlatograd to Kurdjuli, Haskovo, Plovdiv, Perushtitsa, Asenovgrad, to Kudrjuli and Zlatograd via Gebel. If the weather will hold I am planning to leave here on Saturday 4 October and return on Friday or Saturday. Will let you know how that works out and write about the experience in the next Long Letter to you in October.

Just a few words on the game hunting here in Bulgaria. In the Kurdjuli/Haskovo area I had heard about some efforts to improve tourism by breeding hares for hinting tourists from Greece. Just came upon an article in the Bulgarian Business News on this topic and thought I would pass it on. This years open season for quail and wood-pigeon (dove) began mid-August to 31 October with a charge of 8 Marks each to foreign hunters. The other game that can be taken include hare at 80 Marks, pheasant – 15, goose – 50, fox – 100, jackal (I think really wild dogs) – 50. Then you can get into the exotic stuff: a deer at 10,150 to 36,000 depending on weight or a bear with 400 CIC point at 17,000 plus 300 Marks for each additional CIC point. The article points out that last year Bulgaria had Europe's largest bear

population; estimated at 880. The article also says: “The stock of big game tend alarmingly down, and there is a shortage of mature trophy specimens to meet hunting demand. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Land Reform must take urgent measures to rehabilitate game breeding, experts say.”

An indicator of the economic health of Bulgaria, or any country, may be the number of new cars purchased. Here is how Bulgaria looks. In 1996 Bulgarians bought 7,557 new cars. I don't have a purchases per 1,000 population but the raw numbers show that new car sales in Poland were 376,000, Czech republic at 155,000, over 200,000 in Hungary, 113,000 in Romania, and even Slovenia bought 62,000. In the first half of 1997 Bulgarian sales were down by a third from the first half of 1996! Since 1992 there have been 60,000 new cars sold here and the average age of a car on the road in now almost 20 years.

Last but not least the autumn session of the legislature has decided to debate bills on forest restitution, privatization, foreign investment, and amending the law for agricultural lands. I like the last one the best; remember that is the one that has been amended many times and thereby blamed for the delay in returning lands. Well they are going to debate another amendment. I don't think I have told you before but the PROCESS in Bulgaria is what is all important. The results do not mean that much; if you do the process correctly that is what is important.

16 October 1997

Note: The Western Tour was an eleven week, 4750 mile Bicycle Tour of the Rocky Mountains and Pacific Coast that Shirley and I did in the summer of 1991. You can see most of the places that are mentioned in this letter by going to [Bulgaria Map](https://site.edwardfrey.com/map/easternrhodope.html) See <https://site.edwardfrey.com/map/easternrhodope.html>. then zoom or drag.

As I write this, it is Monday morning the 13th of October and I am back in the office after a week off to do what I think of as my Central Rhodope Tour. But, before I talk about the Tour maybe I need to discuss what my mental state was leading up to it's start.

You know that I bought my bike in April, had it delivered in May, and have been doing some training rides; but nothing that you could describe as hard training. What efforts I made were sustained by a vision that I had of maybe riding from Zlatograd to Kurdjuli, then from Zlatograd to Plovdiv, then maybe around Bulgaria. But, I had a nagging doubt that the body, the bike, or perhaps both of them were not up to a tour. I had a concern that the weather would become too cold for me to get in a week long ride at the beginning of October, I was also doubtful of my ability to carry enough stuff on the bike to do a week. I think I told you that I had bought a bike rack in Sofia on my last trip, but I have no panniers. The rack that I bought is normal in appearance to any other rack but has a spring loaded metal arm that holds the "load" onto the rack (I hope you can picture this). So I carried on a mental debate about taking my larger backpack, wearing it as a backpack on the bike, or going light with a Bulgarian knapsack tucked under the spring loaded rack hold down. The weekend tour that I wrote to you about used this light load approach but I had a full knapsack and was on the road for only two days. What to do? More thinking, more mental debate, more considering, more apprehension. On Friday the 26th of September a young neighbor boy saw me at my normal outdoor breakfast coffee and talked to me for almost 30 minutes about him riding my bike. He had asked me before and I had been putting him off but he was very persistent and I said tomorrow; with the hope that he would let it drop. Alas, he was pounding on my door at 0700 on Saturday morning. I told him "Go away!" – that I was still in bed, still sleeping; and if he was going to ride my bike it was going to be later. He was awaiting me in front of my apartment block when I returned from morning coffee around 0900 and I got the bike for him and said "OK do a 15 minute ride, I want to then ride for an hour or two". It was almost 45 minutes later that he returned partially riding, partially pushing the bike. He had crashed it and bent the left front brake pad down against the tire and was rubbing both the pad and the tire very badly because he didn't know how to release the brakes. He points to the problem, I give him hell about his crashing the bike, he walks away; not one word about being sorry, not one word from his parents, nothing about fixing the damage. I took it to a local tire repair shop near my apartment (they had installed my rack for free) and they got the brake readjusted. Then after riding a couple hours on Sunday morning I took it back again for some additional tightening and repositioning of handlebars and left side brake levers. Nothing to be done about the torn left side handlebar covering or the scraped leather on my Brooks saddle or the small ding in the paint on the left side of the new bike rack. Nor was there much that could be done with my worry that I had not found all the damage and something would fall apart during the upcoming week Tour. During the week leading up to the planned Tour I start to develop a cold; woke up on Tuesday with a terrible headache because of sinusitis, then get the typical scratchy throat. Another worry! I'll get sicker as the week of the Tour goes on and have to quit or would feel so bad I just couldn't ride. Then there was the on going concern about what the weather may do – at 1500 on Friday 3 October a heavy cold rain begins to fall. My mental state – depressed!!!!

The morning of 4 October showed a clear bright sky, I felt no worse than I had the previous day; so I was pack up the knapsack and ride. The knapsack contained: 1 large water bottle 1 pair riding shorts, 1 pair cycling socks, 1 pair boxer shorts and a nylon warm-up suit (for after ride wear), wrist watch, pen, 5 sheets of paper, 3 tourist maps, wallet, Swiss army knife, razor, shaving cream and brush, toothpaste & brush, comb, and 5 one-gallon zip lock bags to store everything in. There was also usually a small bottle of fruit juice and a packet of peanuts or a bread roll in there for a snack break. The interesting thing about this list of "stuff", plus what I wore every day, is that it was enough for the week. I was also staying at volunteer's apartments in Haskovo and Plovdiv and hotels every place else so I carried no sleeping bag. My concern was for naught. Of course the great weather that I had during the trip made this light travel approach work; if I had gotten rain I would have had problems continuing in it. But, I had decided that I would wait out bad weather or terminate the trip if necessary. I can't claim to be much of a self contained tourist after this one trip; but, (we once talked about this) to be un-teathered from the baggage truck is a freedom to be experienced! I had made a hotel reservation for the 4th, my first night on the Tour. I had obtained the telephone number, hotel name, address, written description on how to find it and a map to assist me in finding it from the business volunteer in Kurdjuli. I was fearful that I wouldn't have a place to stay and did a lot to make sure that everything was arranged. However, I was unable to make the same kind of arrangements for my night in Asenovgrad; in fact I didn't know where the hotel was but I did know there was one. Guess what! I had a better hotel experience in Asenovgrad that I did in Kurdjuli. As I rode into Asenovgrad I stopped at a restaurant and had lunch and asked about hotels. The waitress told me about one "in the Center" and when asked about others she said "the Hotel Art". As I proceeded toward the center of town I saw a small sign "Hotel Art" with an arrow and followed it to what looked like a regular residential home. There I made inquiry about a room with it's own bath and the proprietor (also riding a bike) led me across town to a restaurant /bar/hotel that is in a restored 1850's era home. What they offered was described as an apartment and consisted of a bathroom, a shower and a huge room with massive king size bed, a sofa, 2 stuffed chairs, coffee table, refrigerator (didn't work), vanity area, cable TV, potted plants, and the elaborate wooden wardrobes and carved wooden ceiling decorations from the period. I visited one of these homes (now a museum) in Samakov during PST and it was all roped off so you could just stand in the doorway and gape at the wood work; here I was sleeping in the room! So again a worry, a fear, a concern has been overcome – not that I won't try in the future to identify where there are hotels that I might stay at. But, what I now know is that I have the ability to ask for, find, and negotiate for a room in out of the way towns in Bulgaria.

Bicycle tours have always been good for my mental state; that's why I keep doing them! But, the telling and the doing are two different things. The fellow tourist will read through the description and be carried back in reverie of their previous rides rather than concentrating on the description. The non-cyclist will read it and not "get it" or dwell on thoughts such as "Why didn't he just rent a car?" So be it; this was the Tour.

When I left Zlatograd on Saturday morning it was still cold enough that I could see my breath and the fog was laying in the narrow valleys. By the time I reached Radar Hill it had warmed up and was very pleasant. The ride that first day was the same route that I wrote about when describing my weekend tour. Zlatograd to the Kurdjuli hotel was 77 Km and 912 Meters (the registered climbs being within 16 Meters of those previously recorded gives me some faith in my computers Altimeter function). After a Bulgarian breakfast, double espresso and a *banitsa*, I left Kurdjuli via a secondary road to the east of the heavily traveled main road. My previous experience with this route being only some map study. It didn't appear to be to very difficult; however, the contour lines on the tourist maps that I'm using are at 100 Meter intervals and you can do a lot of undisclosed climbing. As it turned out I rode the shortest day [not correct] of the Tour into Haskovo; doing only 53 Km and the climbs totaled 576 Meters. The day was again cold when I left but warmed up on the first climb of some 200 meters. I had white and pinkish sandstone cliffs to my left during this early part of the ride and some fall colors could be seen. A second climb took me north to a summit overlooking the plains where Haskovo is situated. At this summit, near a village called *Most*, there was a Sunday market gathered in a meadow. It appears that farmers from the region congregate here to trade their crops, donkeys, mules, freshly slaughtered or live sheep, or buy trade goods from Haskovo or Kurdjuli. The third days ride from Haskovo to Plovdiv was a long and flat 86 Km and 340 Meters. I intended on leaving Haskovo via a secondary road to the west of the main street that travels north to join the "Interstate" that I would ride to Plovdiv. As it turned out, I did finally find the road I wanted but had ridden about half the distance to the Plovdiv Highway among ugly apartment blocks rather than along a colorful park. After turning west toward Plovdiv it was 76 Km of almost dead flat riding on a road that carries cross country traffic from Istanbul to Sofia and beyond. It is like riding the Interstate in the U.S. but without the wide shoulders; it is two lanes with fast cars, big trucks, tractors, mule drawn wagons, pedestrians, and bicyclist all sharing the road. As I write this I realize that it sounds quit dangerous, but I felt comfortable on the road during the ride (maybe the Western Tour was good training). After resting for a day in Plovdiv I left in late morning so as to arrive in Perushtitsa around noon to meet a fellow volunteer for coffee. This ride was somewhat the reverse of Haskovo – Plovdiv; from the plains to the Rhodpe foothills rather than riding out of the foothills. The scenery during both days rides was farm crops along the road, scattered trees, small streams, the Balkan Mountains to the north across the plain, and passing through a small village about every 10 – 15 Km. At times I would be riding along vineyards, or corn fields (now being hand picked and shucked, with the stalks being cut by sickle), or peanut fields (also being harvested and hand picked off the plants). Near Perushtitsa there were also apple and plum orchards and I was occasionally passed by a tractor pulling a trailer full of grapes or apples. The days ride into Asenovgrad was 38 Km and matched exactly the 340 Meters of climbing into Plovdiv. The ride from Asenovgrad to Kurdjuli was the most spectacular of them all as the 80 Km and 1,072 meters might suggest. The first 30 Km were along the foothills to the east and very similar to the previous day from Perushtitsa. But, then the climbing began up into the mountains proper and up into the fall colors of oak, beech, birch all contrasted by the green conifers. I rode through this scenery for about 20 Km before dropping down toward Kurdjuli which offered great scenic vistas of mountain range upon range in the distance. As the distance and climbing indicate it was a tough ride but there was one marvelous finishing touch to it all. That was a 6 Km downhill into Kurdjuli that I did in excess of the posted speed limit (50 Km/Hr), passing a State bus that had previously honked at me on a climb, and following a van full of Bulgarian workers that were waving encouragement for more speed. The final day of the Tour retraced my return route from the weekend ride previously described; that is through Gebel and back into Zlatograd. Totals for the 8 days (7 days of riding) were 420 Km and 4,088 meters of altitude gain. Perhaps half of what we did during some weeks of the Western Tour but enough for me at this point. I had a good time at it has shown me that my vision of doing a "Touring Around Bulgaria (TAB)" next spring is a possibility – and planning has begun. Mundane stuff next month, life is more exciting on a bicycle.

11 November 1997

As I suspected when I had finished writing about my Central Rhodope Tour; it is back to the mundane and I am having a hard time thinking of news worthy topics. Fortunately, I received a long e-mail from our 'old cobbler' Evan in the land of Oz that gave me a marvelous quote from the book *Off The Map* by Mark Jenkins. If you have not read the book, I recommend it is a good read. I had read it some years ago but did not remember this passage that I think you will like.

“ There is something about journeys. You're lucky if you manage one in a lifetime and by the time you're done you're swearing 'by GOD never' I'll never do it again. But then some evening, months of years later, while you're browsing through the atlas, whistling or humming or eating, whoop! A few weeks later you're gone. And if you somehow find yourself on one more good long journey, something gets in you, like a worm gone up through your feet. From then on, somewhere inside every unbearable trip (because there will always be another trip), you'll swear up & down "this is it damn it, GOD damn it this is it, period.' But then you'll find your way back to your own warm bed and clean bathroom and beautiful world and discover they're just as they were when you left and after another month or two or six, this thing inside you will start to swell and throb. You'll become restless and sore as if your bed was too soft and your bathroom too bright and suddenly your beautiful worlds has again grown moldy with mediocrity. So you'll pull out the atlas and fall into it and the next morning buy an airplane ticket and just when everyone thought you were finally figuring it out, you're gone.

As I said at the close of last months letter “the planning has begun”. Just one more long journey! I have put together a Touring Around Bulgaria that will be approximately 2,000 Km, 27 days of riding, 4 rest days, staying at 19 different Peace Corps volunteer's apartments, and 7 hotels. The last couple of weeks I have written all the volunteers a letter asking if I can stay with them on specific days in April and May. Have also talked with two other volunteers that have expressed some interest in doing part of the TAB with me so maybe I will have some riding company. I also got a very kind e-mail from John & Janis. John has taken pity on me and my lack of proper panniers and has offered to give me a set of his old ones. An offer that I was quick to accept! I was probably a fool to try to do the Central Rhodope Tour with the scant equipment that I had to do it with. But, it worked out well and now I will try to do a better job on the longer trip. Some of the additional bits of equipment that I am going to pick up before I start it will be a replacement tube, wrenches, tube patches, and a pump. I was willing to “pack it in” on the last trip but in the spring I will be too far from home to quit unless it becomes absolutely necessary. You may be very surprised that I am writing letters to volunteers this far in advance but it is necessary because of the mail situation here in Bulgaria. Many of the volunteers do not have their mail sent to their site and I go to Sofia approximately every other month to pick up messages left for me (not knowing if they will be sent to me or if I will receive them). So the communication process is more complicated than it should be under most circumstances. Finding a hotel in Bulgaria can also be a bit of a problem. Because the working class Bulgarian did not use hotels during the Communist years there are towns that may have only one. That one is now normally not something that we would stay in if one of its' rooms were offered in the US (they may not even be allowed to stay open in the US) You can only hope that a private hotel has opened somewhere in the town. A Bulgarian travel agent, and friend, is doing the hotel research for me and I will update you on that effort later. Milka's 'umfriend' in Sofia works for the Bulgarian government in a department that does mapping and he has offered to work up profile maps of my proposed route. This will be a great help or a big discouragement; I'm not sure which. However, I do seem to be able to ride a route easier if I know what to expect and can pace myself on the climbs. If I don't know what the climb is like it works on my mind as much as it works on the lungs and legs.

From an article by Jeffrey Tayler a Moscow-based writer, former Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco '88-'90, and former PC administrator in Uzbekistan.

“ I suddenly glimpsed the fundamental Soviet-Russian trichotomy: endure passively and move ahead, inch by inch; steal, using either firepower or the prerogatives of political office; or descend into bottomless rage and self-destruct. I had six thousand miles to cross in the former Soviet Union: I would have to endure, to be as mulishly passive and persistent as Russians were, just to survive the trip. Yet my conviction was that passivity only let tyrants reign and made committing injustices appealing. It was wrong to tolerate so much. The whole country either seemed to be queuing up, waiting for changes to be dispensed in increments, if at all, or crashing the lines and looting. Solutions, changes, reforms – all the shibboleths of the post-Soviet era – rang hollow and sounded like the trumpery of Western outsiders, of naifs. The Russian masses – the wizened laborers, the grit-eyed grandmas, the drunks with scarred hands, the thugs with their prison cant – pressed in and crushed ahead, knocking the breath out of those few who worked for change, or those who even hoped for it. It was impossible not to assent to the assertions of my Soviet-era dissident friends who averred that the lines, the corruption, the sham Marxist ideology, were all created intentionally to weary the population into submission to authority, to set people against one another, to quell their spirit of dissent and resistance. Was it by chance that humiliation and despair reigned even in such mundane things as buying train tickets? The thought of what torments lurked in matters of greater significance was daunting; how could you start a business? Strike out on your own, take a risk? Fully realize your potential? Soviet rule, and now Russian governance and the mafia, ensured that these notions remained Western fancies inapplicable here, and reduced so many to the state of rats gnashing their teeth at one another over scraps. Yet the gnashing itself was rarity; for the most part, Russians accepted and endured, lashing out only under extreme duress or when drunk.

You could substitute the name Bulgaria every place that you see Russia and this would be as true as what he has written. I have said it before, it seems that everything that is written about the former Soviet Union is true of Bulgaria. I told my new Executive Director that if there were a vote I thought that the people of Bulgaria would vote to become part of the new Russian Confederation of States. He argued that no that would not be the case; that Bulgaria was an independent country with its' own history, culture, etc. and was not like Russia. But, I see more similarity between Bulgaria and Russia, than I do differences, from what I read and from what people tell me that have been in both countries.

I received a letter from Homer & Ginny in which they made the comment that it seemed that what I was doing here was more like “survival” that what they thought Peace Corps work was like. I told them that all PC volunteers live with the people that they are attempting to help and most of the time those people are simply trying to survive so that is what we are doing also much of the time. I few examples come to mind that I will pass on because the longer I stay here the more they are beginning to wear me down. On my last trip to Sofia, 27-29 October, it was snowing in the morning when I left Zlatograd. About half way to Plovdiv we left the snow and had light rain which was good and bad. It was good that the snow had stopped because I had to go over two rather high passes to get home. I was hoping the roads would not be covered with snow; the buses here do not know what chains are – it can be a little unnerving to travel during the winter. It was bad because with the melting snow and the light rain we developed a rain storm INSIDE the bus. Water began dripping from the roof of the bus along both sides near the window seats and forced many of us to seek a dry spot in the aisle. This had happened once before and I was in an aisle seat so I had forgotten about it; now I remember – sit in an aisle seat when it is raining! I mentioned the barking dog problem once before in my “What I Didn’t Learn in PST”. That was done in a humorous way. The problem is not funny and the Bulgarians do not attempt to do anything about it. One dog in my neighborhood that is a big problem belongs to my friend(?) that tried to grow jalapeno peppers for me. I asked him to do something about his barking dog and his reply was that he liked to hear him barking. I can not believe this is true but I do think he likes the dog to be barking all the time because it irritates his neighbors; this is one of the ways that he can “get back” at some of the things that they do that irritate him. I see little or no affection by Bulgarians for their dogs, they are status symbols and tools to “get even” with others. The second big irritant that is even more in evidence now than during the spring or summer is the constant pounding. There is someone pounding on something almost 24 hours a day. The big addition now is the splitting of fire wood for heating. My guess is that over one half of the people here heat their house/apartments with fire wood and every bit of it is split by hand. The reason the symbol of Communism was a hammer and sickle is that was as advanced as they ever got in the development of tools! A good example of this was last Friday when one of the Municipal workers cut the top off of a 55 gallon steel barrel with a large hammer that had an adz on one side and a sledge on the other. He then proceeded to “smooth” the cut down by beating the edge of the barrel against the concrete steps that are about 50 feet from our office. This whole operation went on for over an hour!

So much for this session. Will get it off to you today or tomorrow. Hope all is well with you and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

8 December 1997

It is Monday morning, 8 December, and I have finally sorted through the mail that was waiting for me from last week while I was out of the office. Have managed to get answers off to those e-mails that involved work. Now I am starting on this months Long Letter and e-mail notes that had stacked up from the week before my departure.

I left Zlatograd on 1 December to go to Sofia for a meeting with the Country Director and another Medical appointment. Have been on fairly heavy dosages of Ibuprofen to reduce the inflammation and swelling of the first joint of both pinkie fingers. This seems to be working however it does nothing to replace the nails that I have virtually lost from both of those fingers. Don't have the inflammation in the toes but have also almost lost one big toe nail with 2-3 others being attacked and soon to be gone. The more troubling aspects of the disease are in my scalp and I can not seem to get it under control. Have other eruptions here and there on my body and they seem to respond to the treatment that I have been given; the scalp is more resistant. I am now on a regimen of applying a Bulgarian coal tar liquid preparation that has been prescribed by a Bulgarian Dermatologist. This stinky stuff I apply to the scalp every evening and then sit for an hour before shampooing it out. The shampoo never gets it all out and when ever the hair becomes damp I can smell the coal tar. People must think that I have a strange liking for some very unique shaving lotion. But, even with this stuff I am not nearly a "ripe" as many of the Bulgarians that I come in contact with; said contact being 5 or 6 feet in many cases. The meeting with my Country Director was to go over the first draft of a Form 171 (the official Form that you use to apply for employment with the Federal Government). I am applying for a paid staff position with the Peace Corps; specifically I am trying to get hired as an Administrative Officer. The position is an assistant to the Country Director and is responsible for all the operational issues in a particular country. They do all the cash management, budgeting, accounting, purchasing, personnel administration, and generally those things that keep the Peace Corps working on a day-to-day basis. I also plan on submitting a similar application for the position of Auditor, Peace Corps Inspector General. This position works out of Washington, DC but I would spend about 2/3 rds of my time in countries where Peace Corps has volunteers. The job is to audit the work of the Administrative Officers, particularly the financial records, and issue reports; each country assignment taking 2-3 weeks. The Auditor position could allow me to visit almost every country that PC is in, almost 100, within the 5 year work period. The Administrative Officer is assigned to one country for 30 months with the opportunity to stay for another 30 or to transfer to a second country for the remaining 30 months. You can work for PC as a paid staff person for a maximum of only 5 years. The advice of my Country Director was to forget the Form 171 and submit a normal resume but in more detail than for a private sector job. In addition I indicated that I wanted to work as an AO in this Region so he will send the Resume to contacts that he has to assure me a shot of getting considered. There is the official application channel and then there is the real world channel that you must use to get hired. He is going to try to get me connected with this real world channel! More on this as time goes by.

I was fortunate to catch a ride with the PC van going to Borovets on Tuesday, 2 December. If I had not managed to do that I would have had to take a trolley or bus from my hotel or the PC office, transfer to a second trolley, then public bus or minivan to Samakov, transferring to another bus or minivan to Borovets, and then walk or taxi to the In Service Training (IST) site. With the PC van I got in at the PC office and got out at the front door of the Forest Workers Training School (the IST site); it is small wonder that the PC staff does not understand the trials of travel by PC Volunteers. The IST was similar to what I have written about in the past; more classes in Language. However, I think that I have previously told you that they are not useful for me and I have learned almost nothing by attending the three ISTs that I must attend while here. There will be another one in the spring of 1998 but that one will not require mandatory attendance. To take its place, from required travel at least, there will be a mandatory Close of Service (COS) conference in March. At this conference we will be provided administrative information about leaving Bulgaria, job hunting advice, educational opportunities, etc. Because I am planning on doing my TAB in April I look upon this as an interruption in my opportunity to do some training!

The time that I will have to train before I start the TAB ride is of considerable concern to me because of the weather. When I left Zlatograd on the 1st it was raining quite hard, almost blizzard conditions near Pamporovo, then rain again all the way into Sofia. We also got snow twice while in Borovets. As I was returning to Zlatograd on Saturday the 6th it began to snow in Sofia at about 0900 with light snow until we dropped below the 600 meter snow line near home. Then here Sunday morning we had a light dusting with snow falling most of the day but no accumulation below 500 meters; so this morning the town is ringed with what appears to be snow capped mountains. I prefer it this way, I have always enjoyed looking up at the snow on the mountain peaks but don't want to live in it! If this winter is a severe and long one I am afraid that I will have little or no time to get in some training and that is going to be a problem. Will simply hope for the best and be prepared to endure the pain of riding into shape on the Tour. While in Sofia on Monday – Tuesday I did get to my bike shop and bought a pump, tube, and patches so I am already ahead of the last tour from a preparation point of view. Just now received a telephone call from the Receptionist at PC Sofia that said my package from John & Janis, with panniers, had arrived. Have also talked to about half of the volunteers that I intend staying with on the tour and received assurance that I can stay; will use the COS conference to make additional contacts and get maps/written description of where they live. So, it is coming together. If only I could get someone to provide the same assurance for good weather to train in and to do the tour.

From Bulgarian Business News.

“

Anti-corruption laws will most probably top the agenda of the Government and Parliament immediately after the Christmas recess, the Floor Leader of the ruling Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) Ekaterina Mihailova said.” and “When we checked the resorts of Pamporovo (in the Rhodope Mountains, Southern Bulgaria) and Borovets (in Mt. Rila, Southwestern Bulgaria), we came across contracts which are exceedingly detrimental to the State, the Minister of Trade

and Tourism Valentin Vassilev said. One of the most outrageous cases is a five-year contract with the private Baumax Company. Under the contract, Baumax installed magnetic card-operated turnstiles at the cableway stations in Pamporovo in exchange for 35 per cent of the takings. In this way, the company received 240 million Leva last winter season (Note: around \$130,000). The cost for processing the magnetic cards themselves were for the account of the resort, under the contract. Legally, Baumax may not receive more than 10 per cent for the services contracted with the management of the resort, the Ministry's experts claim. A clause in the contract entitles Baumax to recover \$2 million in damages in the event of a termination of the deal by Pamporovo Inc. After the end of the high winter season Baumax removed all facilities and practically terminated the contract, the Ministry argues.

The former Socialist government entered into many of these kinds of contracts during their 6 years in power and it is only now that the UDF is trying to do something about it. However, the Socialist opposition will fight the anti-corruption effort in Parliament for as long as they can and put up as many roadblocks as they can. Why? Because currently there are between 85 and 100 members of the Ministry of the Interior (former Secret Police), customs officers, bankers, judges, prosecutors, and employees of other Ministries under investigation.

Last but not least, because the Christmas Season is fast approaching I want to wish you, and belated greetings to all on the "Tree",
MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR.

THE VOLUNTEER'S CHRISTMAS EVE

It's mighty lonesome-like and dear.
Above the Rhodope the moon rides high,
And shows up sharp and needle-clear
The emptiness of earth and sky;
No happy homes with love a-glow;
No Santa Claus to make believe:
Just snow and snow, and then more snow;
It's Christmas Eve, it's Christmas Eve.

And here am I where all things end,
And Volunteers are hurled;
A poor person without a friend,
Forgot and dead to all the world;
Clean out of sight and out of mind...
Well, maybe it is better so;
We all in life our level find,
And mine, I guess, is pretty low.

Stripped to the buff and gaunt and still
Lies all the land in grim distress.
Like lost soul wailing, long and shrill,
A dog barking cleaves the emptiness.
Then hushed as Death is everything.
The moon rides haggard and forlorn ...
"O hark the herald angels sing!"
God bless all men – it's Christmas morn.

(THE TRAPPERS CHRISTMAS EVE By Robert Service – shortened and modified)

7 January 1998

Well, I have made it into the New Year and the year that I leave Bulgaria. From this vantage point it seems that September is a long way off but I know that it will be here sooner than I think.

I don't think that I told you about the Bulgarian work schedule last Christmas and New Year. If I did, bear with me because I think it is so bizarre to our way of thinking but at the same time something that we should consider emulating (some companies do). The week preceding Christmas called for an official work day on Saturday the 20th and we then took off the period 24 – 28 December as the Christmas Holiday. Worked the 29th and 30th and then took off 31 December to 4 January for the New Year Holiday; working the 10th of January to make up the time off(?). All of these Holiday and work days being officially proclaimed by the Parliament and/or the Governmental Cabinet and dutifully published in the official paper of record. It is the governmental process and pomp that I find most amusing even when they do have a good idea! The mid-November time period in the United States is no time or place to be a Turkey; similarly Christmas week is no time to be a pig in Bulgaria. Last year I wrote about the slaughter of a pig during this period that I watched from my apartment balcony. Didn't witness that same process this year from the balcony but noticed at least 4 slaughtering going on in town during the 24 – 28 of December. One of the ones that I missed was my counterpart/interpreter and her husband's pig becoming a Holiday treat (I received a portion of it as a post Christmas gift). Last year I wrote that it was VERY quite here in Zlatograd during the Christmas Holiday with most of the celebration happening during New Years. That was true this year also but there were some slight differences. Last year there were few restaurants and shops open during the period; this year almost everything was open as usual. Last year also saw almost no Christmas decorations; this year most of the restaurants and shops have some kind of decorations – Christmas trees are present in some numbers this year. There were two large trees erected outdoors that competed in size and ornamentation with the official Municipality tree that graced the Town Square in front of my office. This is the tree around which the citizens of Zlatograd danced the Horo on New Years Eve. The Municipality also put some decorations on the tree this year (donated by a business in town) whereas last year it was the barest Charlie Brown tree you would ever have wanted to see. So there are some subtle changes going on; but, you have to look hard and wait the long wait!

The other difference this year had to do with the fact that I have been in Zlatograd for over a year now and have developed a social life of sorts. Last year I had been here about three and a half months prior to the Holidays and didn't know that many people yet so I got few invitations. This year I received presents, invitations, and was involved in activities that were not readily open to me last year. I spent Christmas dinner and New Years Eve with the Bulgarian family that has adopted me; they also gave me a nice gift. One of my regular restaurants gave me a gift and a second one gave me free deserts during the Holidays. The second one also invited me to come in and talk with the owners son from Samolyan (who didn't show up) with free drinks and dinner if I had wanted to eat. I got home made wine, a cabbage casserole dish, and some of the freshly kill pig from my counterpart/interpreter. Went out for drinks with my English Conversation Group one night and then we did a hike on January 2nd. This was the first hike that I had been on since last April when I went with the ecology group during the weekend water testing project. Was great to get out again after doing nothing since my week bike tour in early October. I need to do some more of this between now and February or March when I will try to get in some bike training rides. It is going to all be weather driven.

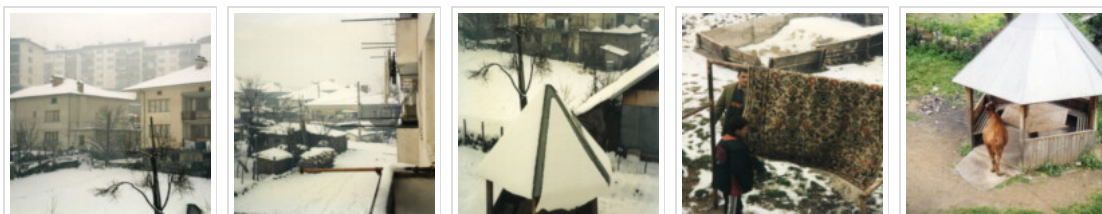
Which leads me right in to a discussion of our weather. But as an opener to that topic I offer a Johnny Carson routine.

Johnny: It is so cold in Bulgaria that ...It is so cold in the winter in Bulgaria that ...

Audience: HOW COLD IS IT!

Johnny: It is so cold in the winter in Bulgaria that exhibitionists don't "flash"; they just describe their genitals to their victims!!

That was the news here in mid December; it was COLD – COLD – COLD. We had about a foot of snow on the night of the 15-16th with light snow falling most of the 16th. Then everything turned to a sheet of ice on the 17th with temperatures staying below freezing most of the day on the 18th and 19th. I think the morning of the 19th was the coldest with the temperature at day break being around -15 Celsius (that is about 5 Fahrenheit). But we then warmed up some and got rain on and off through the 23rd; this melted most of the accumulated snow and more importantly got rid of the ice problem. Since then the weather has been cold mornings and nights but the days have been mostly clear and warm for this time of the year. The mid day temperatures are in the 40's to low 50's with no more rain since just before Christmas.



The pictures in the top row were taken from my balcony looking toward the south where the newer apartment blocks have been built and toward the west (note the dried chillies). The two on the right are also from my balcony but I am looking directly below my apartment at the "Bulgarian rug cleaning post". The weather has warmed up somewhat and the owners of the rug are probably getting ready for the Holidays. The one on the far right is the same gazebo as shown in the center but during the summer when it is actually in use.

The improved weather is what made the January 2nd hike possible and is what has now got me hopeful that I can get in some more hiking and bike training before the 11 April start of my tour.



My hiking group by a waterfall that shows how the snow melt is running off but it probably freezes up at night. This is not just my hiking group but is also the “core” of my weekly English Conversation Group. The young man was also a many times hiking and biking companion; his sister is standing directly behind him. The white spot in the center of the third picture is Startsavo, our goal for today’s hike where we will catch a bus back to Zlatograd. In the foreground, which looks very bare, summer grazing will be available for the cows in the area, however, there are more cows than the grazing can support. In the far right picture the cloud of smoke that you see just over the nearby ridges is Zlatograd and the many wood burning stoves in town.

Other things on the agenda in the near term. I am working on the job application with Peace Corps for the Admin. Officer position that I wrote of last time. I have heard from a couple of people that were misled by me or misunderstood; the potential job will not be in Bulgaria. I hope to stay in the Europe, Mediterranean and Asia Region but the Admin. Officer in Bulgaria is not scheduled to leave before mid year 1999. I am looking for a position that would let me start work around 1 January 1999. I have a Small Business Development meeting 26-27 February in an undisclosed town (rumor has it that it will be Plovdiv). Also will be away from Zlatograd on 12-14 March for the Close of Service Meeting (COS); the thinking is that the meeting location will be in Bansko where it was held last year. So when you add 2 travel days to each of those trips plus trips to Sofia between now and the end of March I will be away from home 12-15 days in the 1st Quarter.

I wrote some time ago about the problems of milk and cheese production in Bulgaria and thought I would up date that discussion. I am quoting from the Bulgarian Business News and I think you will see why I have restricted me cheese consumption since last July!

“ Declaration and registration of all milk livestock became mandatory under a new Ordinance on the Purchase and Certification of Liquid Milk, approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Land Reform. The National Veterinary Service will issue veterinary cards for all milk producing farm animals so as to keep track of their health condition. The Ordinance sets requirements to the raising of the livestock, milk storage and transportation, said Mrs. Antoaneta Georgieva, expert at the Ministry.... The country’s purchasing stations are in perfect condition and do not need additional equipment, Mrs. Georgieva said. The Ordinance will take effect on January 1st, 1998 along with a new standard classifying Bulgarian milk into extra, first and second grades. Five Bulgarian dairies will be making white and yellow cheese for the EU countries, said the Minister of Agriculture Ventsislav Vubanov. A total of 30 have applied, but 25 fell short of Western Europe’s requirements for hygiene and sanitation. The designated five dairies have been inspected twice by EU veterinary officials, Mr. Vurbanov said. If they pass the last check, in January, the temporary ban on export of Bulgarian milk products to the West European market will be lifted. The ban was imposed on July 16, 1997 after a commission of the EU veterinary authorities found during an inspection in April that some Bulgarian processing enterprises do not comply with EU production hygiene standards

So, as the article points out, the problem was first identified with inspections made in April. The reaction at that time was one of denial by Bulgarian officials and expanded testing was asked for and the problem was found to be even bigger; therefore the EU imposed the import ban in July. This is also a good example of the timely action that the government is capable of; even after the ban by the EU is still took them from July to December to enact an Ordinance. If it had required a new law, passed by Parliament, the process would probably still be under way! I might add that one important question that the article does not address is WHAT ABOUT DOMESTIC PRODUCTION? There were 25 producers that failed to meet the standards for EU export but it says nothing about them not selling into the domestic market nor does it talk about those producers that did not apply and therefore were not inspected. I continue to eat some cheese; after all the meat situation is probably even worse – I just haven’t seen anything in print about it.

More on last months discussion about the fight against crime and another good example of prompt action. From the Bulgarian Business News under the headline “Incumbents Declare War on White-Collar Crime”.

“ Representatives of eight public institutions gathered at the end of December in the office of the Prosecutor General of the Republic Ivan Tatarchev to discuss specific measures for combating white-collar crime. This meeting, which local political analysts described as unprecedented, came shortly after it was reported that the European Union is granting \$10 million to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Bulgaria, for the fight against corruption... After the meeting, it emerged that criminal justice legislation must be urgently amended. An ad hoc parliamentary commission, probably know as the Anti-Mafia Commission, which was formed last autumn, will become a standing committee in 1998, said its Chairperson Ekaterina Mihailova...

There is nothing, I say again NOTHING, that creates faster action in the Bulgarian government than the opportunity to get some grant money. You know of course that grant money is money that need not be paid back; it is a gift, and everyone here is after grant money, will do/say whatever is necessary to get it. But real change – I will keep you updated. The standing Commission approach with lots of talk is what I expect!

16 February 1998

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness....” Thank you Mr. Dickens for that great opening to this month's Long Letter. I thought I would try to write about something other than the weather and my Psoriasis; however, both of those subjects will also be touched upon because they fall into the motif that Charles (I have started to speak of him in this familiar way) has established.

The weather has provided the best of time (that is in the singular because it has come singularly) and the worst of times! We had another big snow here on Sunday (January 31st) afternoon and through the night into Monday morning. It was bright and sunny on the 2nd but very cold and everything a sheet of ice once again. It then began raining the morning of the 3rd and rained through the afternoon of the 4th then turned to snow again through the night. All of this coming after a Saturday that had become warm enough that I was thinking about trying to ride on Sunday. Strange weather here that I can't get used to nor predict an hour, a day, a week or a month in advance. It has been a similar tale of good and bad with my ongoing struggle with the Psoriasis. The best of times, a season of Light, now being with me in the fight. This follows the worst of times that had come when we had the very cold weather in mid-December. During that interval I had a very bad flare-up and traveled to Sofia on the 12th of January for another Dermatologist to offer an opinion. However by the time I got to see him it had already begun to show great improvement; he simply confirmed the treatment that the PC Medical Officer and I had already worked out, I think I have told you before that no two people seem to have the same symptoms, nor respond the same to the same treatment, so every individual works out their own, diagnosis, methods of treatment, medicines, and dosages.

It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity – how better to describe the Clinton Presidency. This is the first time since I have been in Bulgaria that have wished to be in the US and getting US news. Not specifically the news, but the reactions of the people to the news. More precisely – I miss the jokes that must be springing forth like pesky gnats on a long bike ride. My news sources are limited to CNN International-Asia, The Wall Street Journal-Europe, Newsweek-Europe, and what gossip I might hear from others (not much of this). From these sources I see that the media has now decided the CHARACTER does in fact matter; whereas the same sources were claiming it not to be important in 1991. In fairness, The Wall Street Journal thought that character was and is important. However, if the polls that Newsweek took are correct, character continues to NOT be important to the American people. The poll information that I am referring to is that about 1/2 of those surveyed think that Clinton is lying and 1/2 also think that even if he is lying that should not be a reason for him to leave office. Does this mean that the character of a potential and/or serving President of the US is only important when the economy is not doing well. The American people do not seem to care that Clinton said in 1991 “I did not have a long relationship with Gennifer Flowers: and then in 1998 says “I had a relationship with her”; but, claims to not have lied because he used the word “long” in 1991. In 1991, and continuing in 1998, it was – “It's The Economy Stupid!”. Have we Americans become as materialistic and disregarding of moral values as this may indicate? I have an additional thought that concerns Mr. Clinton's appearance when he came before the American people and said: “I did not have a sexual relation with that woman... I did not ask anyone to lie, never.” Always before when I have seen him trying to convey anger, compassion, sadness, or virtually any other emotion you can think of, he was biting his lower lip. Why was there no lip biting during this denial? Has his body language been untruthful in the past or only in this instance? Also, from what little I have heard so far I find a remarkable disparity in attitudes when contrasted to the Judge Thomas – Anita Hill controversy. However, there is one commonality in the two situations. In the Thomas-Hill conflict the Republicans asserted that the left-wing democrats had conspired to defeat the Thomas nomination. In the Clinton-Lewinsky-Jones_Flowers-“numerous-gates” scandals the Democrats are asserting that there is a right-wing conspiracy to destroy the President and all his good works. One of the funnier sound bite that I have heard so far was from a spokeswoman for a right-wing think tank that said: “I feel slighted that I have not been invited to participate in the conspiracy.” I also saw a short clip of interviews on the street in Moscow by CNN-International that quoted a woman as saying “That is the way a man should act!” and a second saying “If the United States doesn't want him we will take him”. The attitude here in Bulgaria is somewhat like that, but the emphasis is on the scandal and they said that it is accepted that Bulgarian politicians will have affairs and mistresses. However, if it becomes a media discussion item then that politician if going to be driven from office because they have violated the accepted conventions of behavior. It seems that we in the US no longer have such a thing as accepted conventions of behavior; everything is now acceptable!

It also seems to me that we are in the best of times, the worst of times when the world's economy is scrutinized through nothing but rose colored glasses. I am not sure who it was that said common sense is not very common, but I am bothered by the seemingly common belief that everything is just great with the US economy. When almost everyone is in an epoch of belief I start to think circumstances are soon going to change. It is now common knowledge that the melt down in Asia will not significantly impact the US economy. It is accepted that the US budget is balanced and we can now start to spend the surplus on all the social ills that have, or will, plagued us. It is common knowledge (or belief) that inflation will continue to go down, interest rates will not rise, unemployment rates will remain low and you must be invested in the stock market. All the experts are quick to point out that the situation is different now than it was in 1929 and it can't happen again. But, then also was the best of times, was the worst of times; that is the similarity! Then also was a time of common belief that the economy could only move in one direction. A time when there was a “war” on alcohol Vs the War On Drugs. A time when many people thought that moral value were under assault; but others said it was finally a liberation of the individual. It was only immoral if it was against the rule of law; and many laws must be changed.

The time that I have been in Bulgaria has neither been the best nor the worst of times if I am correct in my estimate of what is still to come. It may also not have been the best or worst of times for Peace Corps Volunteers in Bulgaria. However, from what I have seen it has not been a good time to be here as a PC Business Volunteer. The Small Business Development Program started in 1991 by setting up Peace Corps Business Centers that were completely paid for by Peace Corps. These Centers were to provide Business Information and Consulting to the small businesses in the communities where they were established; this was primarily in the larger towns of Bulgaria. During my PST there was a great deal of discussion about why this Model I did not work and why the Centers were being converted to Model II's; that is to say the Bulgarians bore the expense of the Centers and PC only provided the Volunteer Consultants. It was also at this time that Volunteers were starting to be placed in any organization (with a wide range of proposed duties) that would accept them and pay for their apartment and utilities. Last year PC Staff and Volunteers met in Gabravo to discuss the direction that we, the Volunteers, thought the Program should take. There were a number of different responses of course, but the largest percentage was in favor of directing efforts toward Business education. Now over six months later we are going to meet again and discuss the new direction for the Program; that is the effort will now be directed to working with various organizations toward Community Economic Development. What happened to Education? I cannot see that this will be any more effective that the effort has been to offer service to Small Business. Generally speaking the PC Volunteers have not been asked to Consult! I think I told you before that most Bulgarians will say that they know everything they need to run their business well; the ONLY thing they need is more money. My experience here with the Zlatograd Municipality indicates that they have the same belief about Community Economic Development; all they need is more money and they can develop the local economy. I may have more to say on this after the meeting next week (25-28 February) in Plovdiv. I will also devote some time to the issue of various magazine and newspaper subscriptions for the Small Business Development Program (I now see that my space is limited).

Not very exciting this past month but the letter gives me an opportunity to vent a little!!!!

25 March 1998

To continue with last month's letter and a discussion of the Peace Corps Small Business Program subscription issue. When I first arrived in Zlatograd the Peace Corps was sending to the office a subscription for Wall Street Journal-Europe, The Economist, Bulgarian Business News and Central European News. Then I started to receive a weekly Bulgarian Language newspaper called *Capital* in January 1997; which the Center was already receiving because they had subscribed some years before. The Peace Corps did not make any inquiry of the Volunteers about *Capital* prior to sending it out and because it was in Bulgarian it was virtually useless to us. A few Volunteers can read some of the simpler articles in the daily newspapers because they are written at a lower level of the language as are most of the US dailies. But, *Capital* is a business newspaper with rather advanced Bulgarian and few if any Volunteers can comprehend its articles. Also, during this period the Peace Corps allowed the Wall Street Journal-Europe subscription to lapse and it took Volunteer complaints and almost 9 months to get it reinstated. So, the former Small Business Development Program Director and Assistant quit in September 1997 and we get a questionnaire concerning subscriptions soon after from their replacements. They then call for Volunteers to serve on a Subscription Committee around year end and it finally meets to discuss the issues for the first time in February 1998. In the interim, that is from September 1997 until now, the subscription to the Economist, Bulgarian Business News, and *Capital* have all expired. Furthermore there is a brief notice in the Newsletter pointing out that the Subscription Committee is meeting and for the first time I find out that there is only \$1,000 in the subscription budget with Wall Street Journals alone costing \$500 per year. I am disgusted enough by this time that I am all for giving the \$1,000 to a worthwhile Bulgarian charity and forget that we ever had anything to read that would help us do our jobs (what ever those are to be now?).

The meeting in Plovdiv 25-28 February provided no enlightenment on the subscription issue (it wasn't even mentioned) and very little on Community Economic Development. However, because the Training Officer for the Europe, Central Asia, Mediterranean Region was present; I now see that this direction has come down from Peace Corps – Washington. It is not something that the staff in Bulgaria have decided. Education, what we as Volunteers thought was most important is encompassed within the broad scope of Community Economic Development. But, the message that I got from the Regional Training Officer was that the new thrust of the Program will be to work with NGO's in Bulgaria toward developing the economy. I am not convinced that this will be any more effective than what has been tried here in the past. There are strong cultural problems that only time and education are going to change. Throughout most of Bulgaria's history it was not a good thing to be a businessman. In point of fact, at most times they were looked upon as a lower strata of society if not with actual contempt. During most of their history foreigners made up the business class and my guess is that over time it will come to that again. Then the Bulgarians will once again have a business class that they can resent and profess is stealing the wealth of their country! They seem to prefer that arrangement rather than be involved in business themselves. I know this is an extreme over generalization but it is the impression that I get from the community that I am in. Perhaps it is not the same throughout Bulgaria; in fact, other Volunteers seem to see evidence of local business activity in their areas. Maybe it will happen here also but first – time must pass!!

The Close of Service or what they are now calling Continuation of Service, (COS) meeting was held in Borevets on 12-15 March. There were arrangements made for a bus to take everyone from Sofia to Borevets on the 11th but I knew that my connections would be tight to catch that bus at 1600. As things worked out it was a very close thing; I must have missed it only by minutes. Perhaps it was the 18 cm of snow on the ground that morning, and still falling, that had something to do with it. Or maybe it was the lack of snow plows on the road from Zlatograd to Madan. Or was it the lack of chains for the bus and becoming stuck for some 15 minutes? It was not for want of the bus being prepared; they carry shovels and sand in the baggage compartment for just such an eventuality and nobody was unduly concerned when we became stuck. It was then that I realized that I probably have been here long enough; for I too was not unduly concerned and found the delay a great opportunity to read without trying to overcome the constant shaking that normal travel here entails. I did arrive in Sofia just in time to catch a ride with a Peace Corps driver and van that was taking supplies, copiers, computers, easels, etc to Borevets. The program started the next day and we had a full day; from 0900 to 1700 with an hour and a half lunch and two 30 minute coffee breaks. Then on Friday it was back to the grind at 0900 to 1000 with the remainder of the day off; this allowed many of those that wanted to get in a good day of skiing. That evening at 2000 a banquet was held with speeches by the County Director, the American Ambassador to Bulgaria, 3 representatives from the Bulgarian Ministries that Peace Corps works with, a Mayor representing all the host country organizations that we work for and a Volunteer. Then Certificates of Service were handed out to all the Volunteers, photos were taken, the salads were finished and the appetizer was served (the normal Bulgarian progression of events made it now about 2200). Upon my completing the appetizer I begged to be excused and called it a night; I had been getting sicker and sicker as the day wore on and I just couldn't make it any longer. I missed the Saturday program, which was of the same schedule as Friday excepting the banquet; as I caught a ride back into Sofia where I spent the day in bed at a hotel. Then on Sunday I had a miserable trip back to Zlatograd; sneezing, coughing and nose-blowing all the way. Stayed in bed on Monday also; the first full sick day that I have had while in Bulgaria. Most of the snow had melted by the time I got back to Zlatograd but we had cold winds most of Monday (16th) and then snow flurries again around noon on Tuesday (17th). Blessed with snow flurries on Friday the 20th, an accumulation of maybe 2 cm on Saturday the 21st, more flurries on Sunday and very cold almost all the time. Only three more weekends before starting my TAB, very little training. Sick – and IT'S STILL WINTER!!!

The last thing that I want to write about this month is the situation with Gorubso, the mining company that I have written about in the past. You will remember that about this time last year I was writing about my experience of going down into the mine in Erma Reka and seeing the hot waters. This was at the 300 meter horizon if you will remember. The active mining for lead and zinc is currently taking place at the 500 to 400 meter levels with horizons every 50 meters. These levels are all connected via elevator shafts and ventilation shafts of course. While my counterpart and myself were in Plovdiv for the SBD meeting there was an elevator accident that killed two

of the miners; one of them being the cousin of my counterparts husband. This necessitated her leaving the conference and returning to Zlatograd for the funeral. I don't remember if I have told you about funerals here in Zlatograd and most of Bulgaria. They generally bury the dead within 24 hours of their death because there is no embalming done here. It is also the responsibility of the family to prepare the body because there is no such person as a "funeral director". The other issue concerning Gorubso that I wanted to touch upon is the economic situation that the company is in and what is happening currently. I think I have told you in the past that I was forecasting that the mines in this area would be closed down within the next 5 years. Whenever I mention this to the Mayor I hear nothing but "no, no – that won't happen". However, Gorubso is one of 27 big State owned companies that are loosing lots of money and the government has promised the IMF that they will be sold, or closed, to cut the State budget deficits. These companies have been assigned to big outside consulting companies to effect the sale within the next 1/-24 months. But, what the local miners did in early February was start a sit down strike for a 200% increase in wages. This brought the Minister of Labor to Zlatograd and Madan to negotiate with the strikers. What was finally decided was they would receive a 30% increase in wages (which is in violation of the IMF agreement) and the 7 regions that have Gorubso mines can break up into separate companies and/or subsidiaries of the overall company. Within the week after this agreement was announced there were some 15 miners in the CDIC office talking to my Director about the problems they were having in dividing up the company. My guess at the moment is that they are fighting over the Assets; just wait until they start to talk about the Debts and who is to get them! The bigger problems that I see coming from all this is that it has made the Gorubso company even less salable (if that was possible), it opens the door for other company employees to use the strike weapon, and it puts future IMF loans in jeopardy.

That is it for this time. My next Long Letter will be in late May or June when I will be writing about Touring Around Bulgaria.

15 May 1998

Note: You can see most of the places that are mentioned in this letter, and the next three, by going to [Bulgaria Map](https://site.edwardfrey.com/map/tab.html). See <https://site.edwardfrey.com/map/tab.html>. and then use zoom plus drag navigation.

A quote from John Ciardi, "If you can succeed at a thing you didn't set out to do much. The only thing worth trying is the impossible. We're all going to end up as some sort of failure, but at least take a big bite." My TAB was such a bite! I think I will tell the story directly from the notes that I made during the trip because I can get something off to you quickly but also because when I read them they conveyed a feeling that I hope comes across to you the reader. The text that I have inserted within [] is clarifying information or things that I have looked up after completing the trip. The rest of the text is generally as I wrote it including the random thoughts.

9 April:

Did an interview on the telephone with Bulgarian National Radio, Program Horizon, about 3:00 this afternoon. Was unexpected and may be a precursor of things to come. Tod Sword [a former Volunteer now living in Los Angeles] told me via e-mail through PC-Sofia that an article was written about my trip in Demokratsia newspaper and was posted on their Internet homepage.

[An American will take a cycling tour around Bulgaria.

Zlatograd,

An American Peace Corps Volunteer, Edward Frey is going to spend his vacation on his bike, touring the roads of Bulgaria. The expert has been working for two years in the development Center in Zlatograd, where he consulted the local business people. Since October Mr. Frey has reserved the hotel rooms in each of the places, included in his itinerary (all the rooms are facing south). The PCV intends to visit his colleagues all around Bulgaria during his journey. The American will make this unique tour around Bulgaria on a specially delivered bike from Italy.]

It is interesting that I am probably least prepared for any tour that I have ever been on and I am the most relaxed I have ever been. Is this a sign of maturity; or am I simply a fool for trying such a thing. [The best rides are the ones where you bite off much more than you can chew, and live through it. A quote from Doug Bradbury.]

10 April:

Rina [a part time worker in our office] received a call from Smolyan radio late yesterday asking about my bike tour. She was afraid to tell them anything. They called again today and she gave them the information and my itinerary. I talked to a representative of the Bulgarian News agency about meeting journalist and a photographer in Varna and Sofia. Did a 11 Km shake down ride with the full loaded panniers. It felt good on the road but a little rougher ride; also slower response. Watch lean angle! Keep speeds down on turns!! I guess I'm ready; the Bulgarian media is going to force me into doing this even if I didn't want to.

11 April:

Zlatograd – Kardjali: 55.7 Km, 640 Meters, 3:36 Hours

Woke at about 5:00 and waited to start. Left at 8:11 (perhaps 7:11 would have given me more luck). Do not feel 55 years old today but do feel the lack of training. Stopped and saw Sherry [Teacher Volunteer] in Jebel for a few minutes. Photo #1 of two cows hitched to plow was taken in Pripek; a good photo opportunity village. Walked about 2 Km of the 4 and 220 meters of the 330 climb out of the Verbitsa valley to go through Jebel to Kardjali.

12 April:

Kardjali – Haskovo: 52.9 Km, 560 Meters, 3:20 Hours

It is Easter; photo #2 of stork in village of Chiflik. Climbed almost everything in 28×2 only a short distance in 28×1 [not sure of the number of teeth on the freewheel cogs; 1 is lowest with maybe 32 and 2 is maybe 28]. Dinner with the Federoff's [a married couple of Teacher Volunteers] and Annalise [Business Volunteer].



Pripek is in the eastern Rhodopes and this is the rule rather than the exception. I never saw any motor driven farm equipment anywhere in the Rhodopes while I was here; I did see a cow and a mule yoked together but did not have my camera. If I had still been wearing my Martinista I could have taken it off now that I have seen a stork. This is not only my first stork of the year it is the first one that I have ever seen.

13 April:

Haskovo – Stara Zagora: 65.6 Km, 352 Meters, 4:11 Hours

Wandered around town for almost an hour looking for Maureen's [Business Volunteer] work site and home. Got close in both cases and then Maureen came home and found me outside her apartment block entrance. No photos; very rolling plains now being plowed with

equipment versus cows and mules although there are some of them also. Took a break at Sredets, small village, about 20 Km from Stara Zagora. Was almost dead flat from there into Stara with a cold side/head wind from the west. Did most of the climbs in 38×1 and 38×2.

14 April:

Stara Zagora – Sliven: 72.1 Km, 312 Meters, 4:24 Hours



A mural in Sliven as you enter town.

The map that Elisabeth [Business Volunteer] gave me was not bad; however, I was not able to see a statue and was confused but found the Municipality building easily enough. Photo #3 of an electric switching station wall; a historic mural. [Very typical of the many murals that are present on buildings throughout Bulgaria]. My muscles are sore and I am very saddle sore; good that I have a rest day tomorrow.

15 April:

Rest Day in Sliven

Muscles are sore! Talked to Nelly [my counterpart/interpreter in the office] and she told me that there was an article about my trip in the April 11th issue of Trud [a national newspaper]. [An American Touring Bulgaria By Bike Today Edward Frey, US Peace Corps Volunteer set off from Zlatograd on a bike-tour of Bulgaria.

The tour will end up on May 1st in Vidin, North Bulgaria. On May 11 Frey will

come back to Zlatograd. His route includes over 25 Bulgarian towns and villages, among them former Bulgarian capitals of Veliki Preslav and Veliko Turnovo. Especially for this event, Frey purchased a state-of-the-art bike from Italy.] While I was in the Sliven office the local newspaper was doing an interview with Kathryn [Ecology Volunteer] and proceeded to interview me about my trip also. Had lunch with Elisabeth and Teressa [Business Volunteer]; Teressa picking up my check for helping her prepare her income taxes. In the late afternoon Kathryn called to tell me that the journalists had called her and told her that a Bulgarian cyclist, Volodya Forokin, was in the local hotel. He apparently has done a lot of long distance cycling; around the world perhaps, and they thought I would like to meet him. I went to the hotel and the desk clerk said there was no one there by that name – a mystery.

16 April:

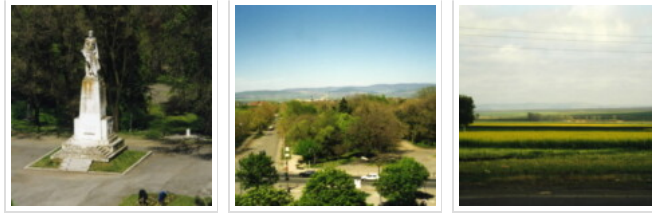
Sliven – Karnobat: 58.8 Km, 224 Meters, 3:22 Hours

The first half of the days ride was at 20+ Km/Hr, the last 10 Km was a slog uphill into the wind. At the first traffic light in Karnobat is a wide walking street with narrow roads on each side that goes to the town square and Center [every Bulgarian town has a Center and signs are almost always present that point the way]. Also at this first light is an old Balkan Tourist hotel with a pleasant staff. A good restaurant to the left of the square and a good bar with conversation stations past the square and turn right when the shops quit. Had a Burgaska, the local beer of Burgas – I'm, getting close. On the climb into Karnobat I was run off the road by an oncoming trucker that gave me the finger while he was doing it. About 10 minutes later the same thing, sans finger, from either a police car or one of the government Minister cars. Continue to hear "frog songs" from the various ponds along the road since day 1. Today was a little like the east side of the coastal mountains into Livermore but not as high. Rolling hills with wheat, barley or just freshly plowed. Only a few of the vineyards seem to be taken care of. Those being pruned sound like the chirping of crickets as 20 or more workers are cutting. It was a good ride, even with the wind in my face and I am enjoying the idea of no Volunteer to entertain or them me. Today is a free day. Photos #4 & #5 from hotel room looking north over part of Karnobat.

17 April:

Karnobat – Borgas: 62.1 Km, 372 Meters, 3:46 Hours

A great ride until entering Borgas then it was "bumper" bike with the traffic. However, only one driver gave me a nasty horn in town. Photo #6 is at the junction with the main road just out of town; very bright yellow flowering plants were being harvested (I am only guessing it may have been saffron). The first climb of the day out of Karnobat was not as high as my trip sheets indicated [this data was provided by a Bulgarian friend of my former counterpart, Milka] but I did 172 meters more during the day than he had identified. It seems that his climbing information is not very accurate on days that have a lot of smaller climbs. This day was small valley country with the road following along the ridge line but there was usually a drop into each village and a subsequent climb back out of town. I found the Pottle's [a married couple of Teacher Volunteers] apartment OK by asking about six times; just keep asking and asking as you close in on it. Watched Will [Business Volunteer] play basketball with the Borgas "A" League team, because they are in the cellar of the league they will play "B" League next year. The Sliven team beat them badly. Had dinner with Pottle's, John [Business Volunteer from Pershanitsa], Hidi [Ecology], Will, and Jeremy [Teacher Volunteer from Krumovgrad]. I had left my shaving brush at the Federoff's in Haskavo and they being the helpful souls that they are mailed it to Will in Borgas. I had already bought a replacement for not much more than they spent on postage; I must say thanks when I see them – but really, come on guys.



These two pictures are of the park to the north of the hotel I stayed in at Karnobat. A field of something (?) near Borgas. I didn't identify what the plants were but it made a nice picture.

18 April:

Borgas – Obzor: 72.1 Km, 820 Meters, 4:45 Hours

The big climb that starts 38 Km out of Borgas I am now calling the “wall”; it is almost 7% for the first 4.5 Km then 5% for the remaining 3 Km, a total of 448 Meters. As the total climbing for the day shows, that was not the end of climbs and even the smaller ones became very tough by days end. Was in the 28×1 almost the entire day! As I was doing the big climb I could hear cuckoos calling in the woods. Telling me something? The forest is like that in Zlatograd; oak in leaf, and all the lilac bushes are in bloom. Traffic thins out a lot after Nesebar. There is a large hotel in Obzor but it doesn't open until about 1 June [the Black Sea owned hotels have a season and are only open 4-5 months; can you imagine trying to make a profit under such conditions]. By asking, asking, asking I found out that the Mehena [a traditional Bulgarian tavern] in town also had rooms. When I found it I got a Bulgarian rate quoted without presenting a letter in Bulgarian that explains that I should not be charged the tourist rate. There were two rooms with three beds each, they served a good lunch and service was very friendly. Still hearing frog songs among the cat tails that line the road between Borgas and the “wall”. A lot of vineyards out of Borgas that look maintained, also on the Obzor side (but just small ridge line plantings). Obzor still a fishing village with the 3-4 months tourist trade. Short rain showers at 6:00 this evening that blew in and out like the dark clouds at 5:00. No photos because trees line the road almost all the way from the start of the climbing with boring stuff before that. A lot of good Balkan mountain stuff on the down hill side into Obzor but clouds and haze cut off any good sea shots.

19 April:

Obzor – Varna: 71.6 Km, 728 Meters, 4:54 Hours

Today is BELIKI DEN, Orthodox Easter. The first climb of the day out of Obzor was higher than my trip sheets indicated plus there was another 100 meter climb that was not on the trip sheet; did 388 meters more for the day than trip sheet indicated. Stopped at about 11:00 because of rain; waited it out for approximately an hour and thought it was through. Within 3 Km I got drowned but the “Bulgarian suit” coat is not bad for water protection. When getting ready to start riding again from the rain stop I discovered that the bike rack front support to the bike had broken. A metal strip broke across where the bolt hole was. This is a problem! I can do nothing now, probably nothing tomorrow, maybe in Dobrich on my rest day. Need to get it fixed before it does serious damage to the rear brake cable. The hotel Sandrovo was not open [not the season]; asked Bulgarian Army gate guards [hotel is on the grounds of the former Communist Party's villas] what was open and they sent me to the Sana. After trying to talk to the girl at the reception desk in my bad Bulgarian she asked me if I spoke English (hers was excellent). Photos #7 & #8 of Black Sea south of Obzor, #9 & #10 north of Obzor: #11 from Varna Bridge; got the eagle eye from soldiers in a jeep while taking them. Photos #12 & #13 are of the Sana hotel – very strange construction. Journalist from Bulgarian National Radio and a photo journalist found me at the Sana [on the 10th I had told BNR that I would be at the Sandrovo]; did an interview and had pictures taken. Had dinner at the Ludo Mexican Restaurant to the right if going toward the Grand Hotel-Varna (there is a complex of hotels in the area plus a private hotel that I wish I had found earlier). Denita Petrova, daughter of the Ludo's owner had excellent English with an American accent. She was an exchange student in Maryland for 2 years. Try to get back to her with name of Teacher Volunteer in Varna. Plus, give her the recipe for flour tortillas from the PC Cookbook; tell her to experiment a little.



In the rows above the pictures show that I rode through hills high above the Black Sea south of Obzor with only occasional views of it. That is Obzor in the distance, historically a fishing village on the Black Sea now a sometime tourist stop in the summer. I'm not sure that the owner understands the subtle meaning of “a Micky Mouse Garage”. Two pictures of Varna Harbor from a bridge on the south

side of town. I didn't make a journal note of the second picture. The Sana Hotel was built on a very steep hill, almost a cliff, with the lobby at the top of the hill and you went down to the floors. This is a hallway on one floor that the rooms are entered from. Then this is the stairwell that goes from floor to floor – I think that is three floors down. I hazard to guess what an OSHA Inspector might have to say about this (note the slick marble floors).

To be continued:

18 May 1998

Touring around Bulgaria – Part II

20 April:

Varna – Dobrich: 77.7 Km, 852 Meters, 6:38 Hours

A killer of a day! It was 500 meters into Balchik and another 100 meters looking for Bob [Ecology Volunteer]; only to find that he was not at home. Having a Volunteer's address is almost worthless; you need to get close to their apartment and keep asking where does the American live [Bulgarians don't know the street names of their town any better than Americans do]. A strong left side (south) or head wind from climb out of Balchik to Dobrich. A real pain! Photos #14 & #15 (*I must have lost these*. from top of climb from Albana to the farm land that stretches to the west [the Dubian plains, the grain belt of Bulgaria]. You then drop from about 250 meters elevation to less than 100 into the south part of Balchik. It was a mistake to schedule this but I have done it. Last but not least I had a rear flat about 1 Km from the Dobrich town entry sign (maybe 4 Km from Mary's [Business Volunteer]. Pumped it four times and got within 5-10 minutes walk of the apartment and called Greg [Business Volunteer] who had the key. A big thanks to him! Also, a lot of thanks to Mary for the washer!

21 April:

Rest Day in Dobrich:

Tanya, Greg's counterpart, found a bike repair shop for me near the bus station about 1 Km from Mary's. The guy told Tanya and me the bike would be ready in one hour; I couldn't believe it was when I returned [my experience with Bulgarians providing things when they say they will has been less than positive]. The rack was brought closer to the front because of his repairs and I convinced him that a slot in the metal needed to be cut out more so the rack could be pushed toward the rear as much as possible. Now I will hope for the best and see if I hit the panniers with my feet tomorrow. Today is cold a wind continues to blow from the west. If that continues tomorrow I will have a problem doing 80 Km into Novi Pazar; can only hope. Send message for Tanya; many thanks for her help!

22 April:

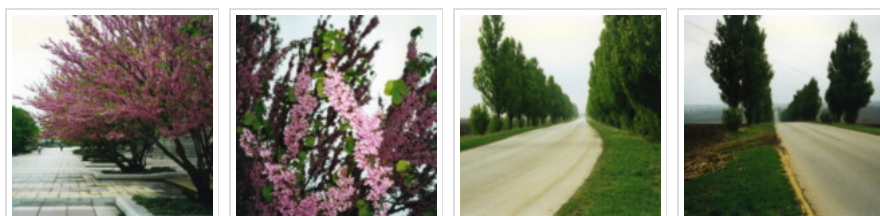
Dobrich – Novi Pazar: 83.3 Km, 724 Meters, 5:09 Hours

As I left Dobrich it was cold, cloudy and a wind blowing. It had rained during the night and looked like it would again at any minute. Helmet mirror fell off as I was adjusting it – didn't break when it hit the street – then a car ran over it but missed it with its wheels. Tanya's PATUVAPUT VUYATAR [loosely translated as travel with the wind] was also working; I reached the flat farm lands again and picked up a slight tailwind. It got stronger as the day went by and I motored into Novi Pazar at over 16 Km/Hr. Photos #16 & #17 are of the rollers, farms and the uncommon popular trees lining the road. Usually it was walnut or fruit trees or more commonly it was no trees. The hotel in Novi Pazar is a dump but the girl on the front desk was very friendly and did the best she could for me. The center walking street is very typical of Bulgarian towns; there is also still in place the speaker system that we have in Zlatograd [a hold over from the Communist years to make public announcements to the populace]. Saw another stork near Momchilovo and heard, maybe saw, a cuckoo earlier in the day. I seem to hear them on the climbs and they are taunting me! After dinner I stopped in the hotel bar restaurant for a beer and the hotel manager bought me a second one. Also, the desk clerk (and a student at the university) sat down with me for about an hour and practiced her English as well as asking some insightful questions.

23 April:

Novi Pazar – Veliki Preslav: 49.3 km, 376 Meters, 3:36 Hours

Rained in the afternoon after I got into Novi Pazar; rained on me when I went to dinner and then more during the night. Photos #18 & #19 are of flowering trees on Novi Pazar walking street. Left at about 8:15 and road to first town west where I had a front flat after crossing railroad overpass. Walked about 1 Km back into the small town asking, asking, asking for "autoservice" for tire repair. I patched the old tube while the shop worker installed a spare that I was carrying. Was a very cold wind from the north northeast that was not much help until I turned south at Shumen. There was a road that skirted the east side of Shumen and I was able to avoid going through town; avoided a climb and the town traffic! Stopped at an autoservice on the edge of Veliki Preslav for more air in the front tire (note: Should carry a converter for Schroder to Presta valves). [Veliki Preslav was the second capital of Bulgaria; built during the 10th century under King Simeon, the Golden Age of Bulgarian culture].

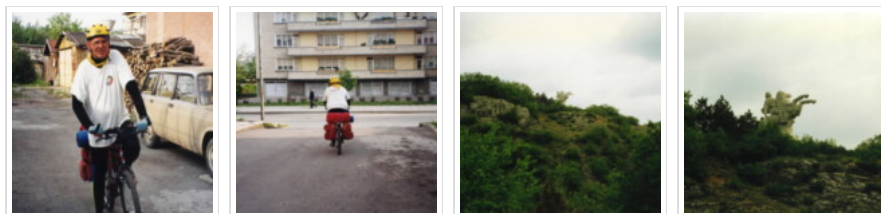


This is the "walking street" in the center of Novi Pazar with a grand display of spring flowering trees. The poplar lined roads across the Dubian Plains west of Dobrich.

24 April:

Veliki Preslav – Omurtak: 50.2 Km, 648 Meters, 3:50 Hours

Sunshine this morning! However, it clouded up by noon and was getting colder rather than warmer. Made more inquiries about a hotel in Antonovo and have been told there is none. Therefore, I decided to stay overnight in Omurtak about 50 Km from Veliki Preslav. The hotel room is better than others but there is no private bath. No blankets or towels in the room; only a light coverlet. Got towels before the desk clerk got away but the lack of blankets became apparent only when I laid down to rest for the afternoon. Photos #20 & #21 of a rider and white horse monument near Razboyna in a very scenic canyon that begins in Turdovishta and climbs some 300 meters in 23 Km. There is the White Horse Motel and Complex Paradise near the mouth of the canyon that were suggested to me a places to stay by Tanya's colleagues. Yesterday, when entering Veliki Preslav I saw my first swineheard [have read about them in medieval novels but now have actually seen one; they also have turkeyherds here in Bulgaria which I had never even read about]. Today the frog songs continued and cuckoos were calling again as I climbed the canyon. I also got the impression that Turdovishta and Omurtak were very much Bulgarian-Turkish towns.



This is what we look like upon leaving Veliki Preslav. Then two pictures of the large sculpture at the mouth of a canyon that will take me up into the Balkan Mountains.

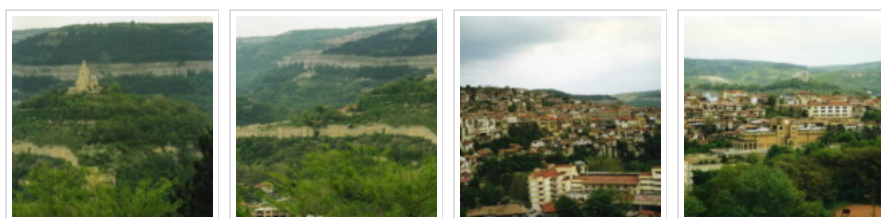
25 April:

Omurtak – Veliko Turnovo: 82.9 Km, 672 Meters, 5:21 Hours

I asked again at a gas station at the turn to Antonovo and again was told that there is no hotel. There is a complex near there that appears to be for school kids; maybe a place to stay but probably not a place for any number of tour participants. Also, the climb from Omurtak to Antonovo is 280 meters; wouldn't want to add that to yesterdays ride. I was also told that there were private hotels in Omurtak but saw no signs. If you knew that they were there I guess that you could ask where is there a private hotel but when I arrived in town I did ask if there was another hotel and was told no – maybe I'm asking the wrong question or maybe there are no others? I called Graig [Ecology Volunteer] when I got into Veliko Turnovo and was somewhat relieved that I didn't find him at home.

[After a time, habituated to spending so many hours a day on my bike, I became less and less interested in my friends. My wheel had now become my one and only friend. I could rely on it, which is more than I can say about my buddies. It's to bad that no one ever photographed me with my friend. I would give anything to know what we looked like. By Henry Miller from his My Bike and Other Friends].

Light sprinkles as I came into town and then rained while I was at lunch at 3:00. The two star hotel that I am staying at here and the one in Omurtak have no relation to the same scale. There is a nice room, clean bathroom, have blankets, towels and the promise of hot water at 5:00! Photos #22 & #23 of Veliko Turnovo as coming into town from east; #24 & 25 are from the hotel window shooting toward the east. Raining again and gray with low clouds at 4:15; hope it gets it out of it's system before tomorrow. [Veliko Turnovo was established as the capital of Bulgaria in 1185 under King Peter IV; the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. It has very interesting fortifications remaining and worth a stop!]



Two pictures of the old fort at Veliko Tirnovo. and two pictures of Veliko Tirnovo of today.

26 April:

Veliko Turnovo – Selievo: 77.2 Km, 640 Meters, 6:02 Hours

I saw a two star hotel on the square here but did not check it out; I guess it's not much from external appearances. Started the day in Veliko Turnovo in a light sprinkle that turned into a downpour at the top of the climb into Gabrovo. I put on the Bulgarian suit jacket at the top to keep from freezing on the downhill. Stopped only briefly on the way out of Gabrovo to eat a banitsa [Bulgarian breakfast pastry, kind off] and take pictures #26 & #27 of the Lady Godiva of Gabrovo [a huge naked lady riding a horse side saddle that stands on a pedestal with the town name on it. If the Communist had spent the money they put into monuments on the roads in Bulgaria it would be a much better place today.] Had a lot of trouble finding Sara's [Teacher Volunteer] apartment because of many confusing entries to the town and the town center [this was also the only town where it appeared to have a sign on every corner pointing to Sofia but was pointing in a different direction]. Spotted another stork near Sevlievo and heard cuckoos in the forest on the climb into Gabrovo; rain doesn't seem to keep them from calling. Sara cooked up spaghetti for lunch and I joined a farewell party for dinner. Colin, a British teacher, was returning home after his year of volunteer service [a program similar to the Peace Corps]. Also at the dinner were the British counterparts and one of their husbands, Ivan. He was insistent that I should take the main road to Lovech and Pleven rather than the "gold roads" [the secondary roads are colored gold/yellow on Bulgarian maps].



Two pictures of the Sculpture at the entrance to Gabrovo on a very rainy day.

27 April:

Sevlievo – Pleven: 75.3 Km, 788 Meters, 5:18 Hours

Took the “gold road” to Lovech. The day trip sheet that I had was apparently also based on the main road. The distances are virtually the same but the climbing on the secondary road is about 100 meters more with some short sections of it being very steep. A very steep downhill into Lovech also; it is doubtful that I could ride the route in the opposite direction. Trip total exceeded 1,000 Km today! Photo #28 was from near the summit before Lovech. The sun came out finally around 11:30 and a cropduster was spraying the wheat/barley fields in the foreground; the Balkan Mountains fade away in the distance. Best view of the Balkans that I have had because of the weather and usually in a canyon with trees blocking the view [my bet is that the main road would also be this way]. Pleven is a pretty town with a big Center walking street shopping area near my hotel, but is scarce on restaurants. There is a strange overhead gondola/buckets affair that travels from east to west about 4 Km outside of Pleven. There seems to be some kind of material carried in the buckets: What, from where, to where, why? Need to know this to satisfy my curiosity! [Went under it again and past the plant that it is carry material to. It is a cement plant, and the materials are mined about 5 Km away and carried via this cable way from the quarry to the plant]. Clouds rolled in and wind picked up after I got in today. Wind is from north northwest; I think. That would help tomorrow! Hotel staff very helpful and nice. Restaurant staff does not have the same attitude! The hotel side seems to be influenced directly by the hotel manager – reading my letter and giving directions to help me. They need the same management on the restaurant side of the operation.



A picture of the Balkans in the far distance. I have been riding in them but rain has kept me from getting any pictures.

29 April:

Rest Day in Cherven Bryag:

Rest Day!! I got my washing done yesterday so it is truly a day of rest. Will go to Karen’s school to talk to her Prep [preparation for the university] class about my trip and other questions. Then we will do a walk about in town and Karen will cook dinner; she made French Toast for breakfast and it was wonderful [how long has it been since I had French Toast?]. The class question session was typical Bulgarian: Do you like...? Which do you like best...? What town do you like...? Do you think Bulgarian women a beautiful? However, I had fun and they seemed to enjoy the time spent; it was good English practice for them if nothing else.

[You ride a bicycle because it feels good. The air feels good on your body; even the rain feels good. The blood starts moving around your body, and pretty soon it gets to your head, and glory be, your head feels good. You start noticing things. You look until you really see. You hear things, and smell smells you never knew were there. By Nicholas Johnson from Test Pattern for Living]

To be continued:

20 May 1998

Touring Around Bulgaria Part III

30 April:

Cherven Bryag – Montana: 91.0 Km, 976 Meters, 6:41 Hours

Stopped at a tire shop that we had passed yesterday and asked when he would open; he said that he would open at 7:00 which was perfect – not open at 7:30! Hand pumped the rear tire which seems to have a slow leak and got away early because Karen was going to work. The climb into the first village, at 8 Km, had a section that exceeded 8% and by the time I reached the half way point for the day I was already over the days projected climbing per the trip sheet. Every village during the day was a drop down into it and a steep climb back out; the trip sheet missed a lot of these. Hard stiff climbs for the first 30 Km then long gradual climbs with sharp down hills for another 30; last 30 was 50-60 meter up and downs. It rained in the late afternoon yesterday and heavy rain during the night. There was a lot of water and mud on the road; therefore, I was a mess when I arrived in Montana. Also started to rain again about 30 Km out and pored some 5 Km later. Very wet but not too cold plus I got to wash up all my stuff at Kerry's [Teacher Volunteer] when I got in. Note: There are no directional signs in many of the villages; must stop and ask someone or risk taking the wrong turn. Also, many of the signs that do exist have the old town names [some towns have changed their names since the fall of Communism; many street names have also changed]. The distances shown on many of the signs means nothing; it is not uncommon to see a sign indicating "x" Km to town "Y" and 5 Km later see the same distance to the same town shown. Photo#28 (no Photo #29) is of the Balkans from the first big climb out of Cherven Bryag. Was the first clear day available for distance shots!

1 May:

Montana – Vidin: 89.5 Km, 564 Meters, 6:08 Hours

Photo #30 is of the steam or fog rising from a sunflower field in the early morning as the sun heats up the land. Very clear this morning but as the morning vapors increased it formed cloud banks in all directions. Photos #31 & #32 of the Danube from near Archar. The road stays near the river for about 15 Km but trees hide the view much of the time (fall would be a better time to visit along the river). Although I was following "gold roads" there was fairly heavy TIR [European long haul truckers] traffic and a lot of Sofia cars. [The next day out of Vidin I discovered why this was so. I had selected the alternate, that has become the primary, route from Montana to Vidin for all traffic.] I found the Center easily and called Erik [Business Volunteer]. He walked down to meet me and lead me back to his apartment; this seems the easiest way of all to find someone's place. I am not recovering as much as I would like with just the one rest day. Considering that I drop Pomporovo and go into Smolyan. Also need bike repair in Sofia if I am going to continue.



Another picture of the Balkans in the far distance after climbing back up onto the plains. The ground is starting to dry out after the many days of rain. Two pictures of the Danube River downstream from Vidin.

2 May:

Vidin – Belogradchik: 57.8 Km, 740 Meters, 4:42 Hours

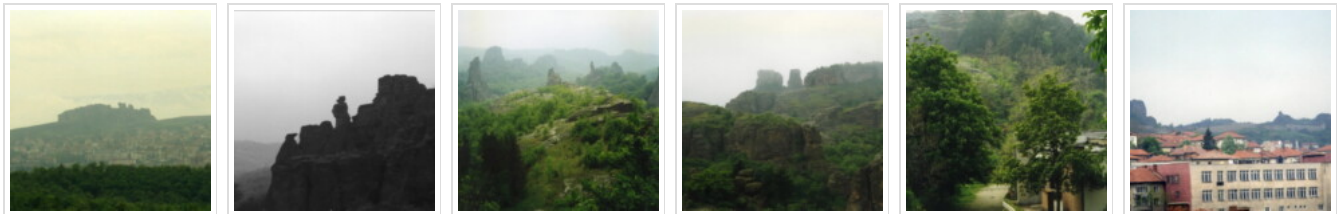
It rained again during the night and looked like it was clearing at 6:00; could still see some blue sky when I left Erik's. But, started raining while I was having coffee and I got rained on for about an hour. When it quit raining I got a few moments of sun but the day continued to be very gray and hazy and couldn't see the mountains that I was riding into. There were no signs from road E-79 that pointed to Belogradchik and the highway map that I was using was little help so I missed a turn. I did a little extra distance down into the village of Bela and a very stiff climb back out to join the correct road but didn't have to backtrack to the missed turn. I rested at 300 meters elevation and at 500 meters where I pumped the back tire again; I had pumped it up at Erik's in the morning. I also pumped it again when I stopped to take photo #33 at first sight of Belogradchik. Pumped it two more times before getting into town where I stopped and asked the first person I saw where an autoservice was. He in turn stopped the first car to come past and it was the local tire repair and balancing guy [Enio Yordanov Milenkov]. We found the hole in the tube had been caused by a broken spoke head and then discovered four more broken spokes. It is amazing that the wheel didn't collapse! The roads of Bulgaria have taken their toll. Enio has a friend with spokes and a friend with a private hotel. I'm in the hotel and waiting for the guy with the spokes to return from a picnic(?) at 5:00. When I went to the shop at 5:00 they had discovered that they had no spokes of the proper length and Enio said he would go to Vidin tomorrow and buy some. He then drove me to the two restaurants that were open, I selected the second one, and he returned later with his wife [Elza] to pick me up. I had told him that my friends were expecting me the next day so he took me to his apartment to use the telephone. From there I called Molly [Peace Corps medical officer] in Sofia and told her that I would be a day late and to relay that message to other Peace Corps staff. Elza is a real knockout and they have a very nice son, maybe 8 years old. Both Elza and Enio are attractive, caring people; living in a wonderful part of Bulgaria. He owns the tire shop and has considerable skill as a furniture builder if

his table and beds are any example. What is their future? Maybe tomorrow I will get some pictures of this area with no rain. There are blessings with every problem.

3 May:

Wheel Building Day:

I woke up twice during the night to heavy rain. It was raining again around 6:00 this morning and is another gray, cloudy day – but I'm not riding. It was drizzling rain when I went out for breakfast at 8:00 and again at 11:00 to find some water. I have been watching the low clouds/fog drifting past the buildings about a block across from me and sometimes they are completely hidden. There will be no pictures if this continues! I saw a few of the nearby rock formations that this area is famous for earlier when I was out looking for breakfast and water and they appear to be a very dark red sandstone. But, that is not exactly correct either; more like a red clay that has solidified with rounded river rocks mixed in. The weather has then sculpted them into some very strange forms. Enio has driven the wheel to Vidin for a bike mechanic to rebuild. This is a very good example of who you know and how everything that gets done in Bulgaria is because of connections. While I was at his apartment he received 2-3 telephone calls and wrote down numbers. He then made a couple of calls and wrote down a number; I could understand enough of the conversation to know that he was talking about my wheel. So it turned out that he knew someone, that knew someone, who knew the wheel builder in Vidin and therefore I could get my wheel rebuilt on Sunday. The bike was back with a rebuilt wheel, plus six spare spokes, and two punctures fixed by 2:00. Enio had driven round trip to Vidin, paid for the rebuild, cleaned the bike up, oiled the chain and brought it to me. He was then almost apologetic when he said that he had to charge me 25,000 Leva; that is about \$15 at the current exchange rate. A huge, huge thank you is in order; Bulgarians can be so good, so nice – why not to each other? Photos #34, #35, #36, #37 are all of the rock formations to the east of town. I will be riding down through the canyon that they tower over tomorrow, I hope! Photo #1, second roll, is of the fort walls from the center of town; taken in low light, cloudy, and far away even for telephoto – it is a Maybe shot. [The fort was built by the Turks and utilizes the natural rock formations that were above the town as part of the walls. I was not able to walk up to it because of weather, shoes, and general laziness but on a nice day I think it would be a worthwhile stop. There is a Tourist Hotel in town that was open to accommodate visitors but there is no other evidence that this is a tourist town as we would know it.]

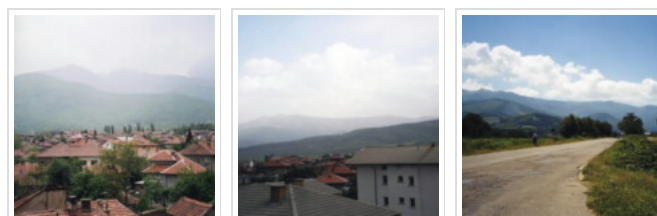


This was my first view of the town and the famous rocks. Then three pictures of the rock formations that surround the town. The unique shapes have all been named but I have given my own names to the two in the second picture – Popeye & The Raven. The picture on the far right is of a garden area next to the state owned hotel (it was open while I was there but I saw no one around). The second row center is a shot over the rooftops in town of the fort walls in the distance.

4 May:

Belogradchik – Berkovista: 83.5 Km, 728 Meters, 5:58 hours

I left Belogradchik in a very heavy fog and saw almost nothing of the rock formations in the canyon. The first big climb was two gradual 80 meter climbs that were truly gradual over the 10 Km versus the trip sheets normal 80 meters in the 10 Km and then flat for 4. However, the 200 meter climb that started at Dolni Lom started off with 70 meters at 12 % the got the other 130 meters in the remaining 5.5 Km. Good time and good down hills until Gavril Genovo; at the top of the pass it was face on into a very strong head wind for the rest of the day. Because of fog and clouds; no pictures for the day. Forested foothills of the Balkans again. Photos #2 & #3 were from Mark's [Teacher Volunteer] balcony and show the canyon, over the hill in the foreground, that I will ride tomorrow. The pictures were taken between rain squalls that are blowing in hard from the south. If this continues tomorrow I am in big, big trouble. The bike felt good today. The ride was so hard into Belogradchik because of the spokes going. Wheel flopping into brake pads etc. I am still amazed that I rode it into town with five spokes gone. God looks after drunks, fools and apparently us half drunk foolish bike tourist! I talked to Mark's Advanced and Beginner Adult English Classes – a combined effort that probably was not as effective as separate, but we tried. They had some of the same questions as Karen's Preps but are more reserved in their questioning.



Two pictures of the mountains and Petrohan Pass, the second highest pass in Bulgaria at 1,444 meters. The third picture was taken after the Tour to show the road where it begins the climb.

5 May:

Berkovitsa – Sofia: 40.9 Km, 1,148 Meters, 4:30 Hours

Into Sofia, but the climb out of Berkovitsa was a death march. I met with a combined Prep, 8th and 9th class of Mark and one of his colleagues at 7:30. Answered the typical questions and left town at 8:30 in a light rain that became heavy as I climbed. Finally got out of it at around 800 meters elevation but into very heavy fog that I was afraid to ride in. Visibility was about 30 meters so I walked the bike some 3 Km and 160 meters until it lifted. Then when I topped the pass at about 1,400 meters it was back into rain and freezing on the downhill. Climbed a steep little 70 meters out of Rintsi that was not on the trip sheet and then the 220 meter one that was to be at 5% turned out to begin with 1 Km at 9%. I quit! I could not have ridden into Sofia on the route that I had selected in the best of conditions and on my best day. I need to look at the map again on this one. I then caught the very first truck that I waved down after deciding to hang it up. The driver and his assistant were going to Pernik and dropped me very near Molly's, but I got a taxi to the Peace Corps office, dropped off baggage, and then to the bike repair shop. Cleaned up at the PC office and then went with Molly to visit a sick friend, pick up her daughter, McDonalds, the commissary, and then to dinner [gives you some idea that the expat community lives a little different than we Volunteers]. The washer and dryer at Molly's is in full swing with shoes and panniers drying on the balcony. I will go into the PC office for Living Allowance in the morning with Molly and then pick up bike in the afternoon.

6 May:

Rest Day in Sofia:

Visited with PC staff in the morning and got April and May Living Allowance. Saw Ryan [Ecology Volunteer from Pernik] briefly and went to Chinese restaurant with Katie [Teacher Volunteer from Novi Zagora] for lunch. Waited around at PC until 2:30 when a driver came back and we picked up the bike. He then took me to Molly's where I set off the alarm upon entering the house [she had said that she would not set it but force of habit prevailed]. It was an exciting few minutes with the alarm screaming, the dog howling, and me scrambling for a telephone and Molly's number; all the time expecting big security guard goons to come and beat hell out of me. Had pizza dinner with Milka [former counterpart] and Valeri Lazarov [her friend that provided me with the data for the daily trip sheets and the profile maps]; they had planned on taking me to a real nice place but it was full because of St. George's Day [he is very important in the Orthodox church].

7 May:

Sofia – Kustendil: 78.0 Km, 756 Meters, 5:12 Hours

I left Molly's a little earlier than normal hoping to avoid some of the morning traffic in Sofia but wasted about 10 minutes messing with the bike computer sending unit. It was not registering Velocity of Distance; finally realized the computer was not making a good connection at the handle bar bracket. Later in the day I saw again that it was not registering and repositioned the sending unit once more and think that it is now OK. The bike mechanic in Sofia didn't have the computer and I thought that he had moved the sending unit while working on the bike. Note: Always check the handle bar connection FIRST!! While in Sofia I had the following done to the bike: New head set & crankset bearings, new chain and brake pads, oil and grease everything, adjust and tighten everything, including my sagging Brooks saddle. Total cost was \$30; everything is more expensive in Sofia. No photos, no interest and very hazy because of clouds. Rained again last night but I got in today without getting wet. I went to the Business Center office and John [Business Volunteer] was not there. A note on the door said "Ed, I will be back". No information about when or where he might be. After waiting about 45 minutes Rod [Ecology Volunteer] stopped by and said that John's parents had come into Bulgaria and I was welcome to stay at his place because John was involved in trying to get them settled [John's father was a Peace Corps Volunteer in India in the early 1990's; he told some great stories at dinner]. Because I started at Molly's I cut off some 8 Km from the trip sheet distance and maybe 150 meters of climbing – a good thing. The first climb of the day hurt a quite a bit but the bigger one didn't seem to match the trip sheet data and only a short segment was painful.

To be continued:

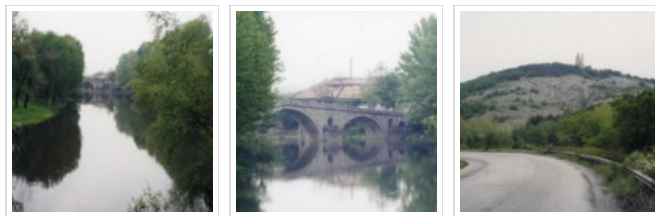
21 May 1998

Touring Around Bulgaria – Part IV

8 May:

Kustendil – Blagoevgrad: 73.4 Km, 484 Meters, 4:24 Hours

Photos #4 & #5 are of the Roman Bridge at [Nevestino]. Because I wanted to get the pictures and because I saw no signs I ended up on the wrong road out of town. I was about 6 Km toward Dupnitsa when I realized where I was and the mistake that I had made. To go back was almost as far as going forward; so being a forward “looker” I continued on the road to Dupnitsa. This ended up adding 10 Km and 25 Meters with about 10 Km more of the busy road to Blagoevgrad and Greece. Now that I have done it I am glad and probably should have selected this route. Photo #6 is of the monument near the summit between Nevestino and Dupnitsa; #7 (didn’t scan – blurry) was of the cloud covered Rila Mountains near Dupnitsa. I stayed in a hotel because Dean & Dorthy [Business Volunteers] were both out of town; Dean had offered his apartment but because I was a day late he had other obligations. He wanted to make arrangements to get the key to me and still have me stay there but he is on the 5th floor of a very narrow stairway and I thought it not worth the hassle. Saw a stork for the first time since Chevron Bryag to Montana and Montana to Vidin where I saw a lot of them. Cuckoos are calling again from the wooded areas. I have a question for Jim [Ecology Volunteer in Plovdiv and bird expert]; Do cuckoos avoid areas above a certain altitude? I don’t remember hearing them above 800-900 meters; maybe tomorrow. Note: The three star hotel here has a great bathroom with “mixit” valves (the sink one moves around badly but it works); however, shower is into the tub with no shower curtain and the floor gets soaked with no drain – a wet sloppy floor after every shower. AGAIN, they almost got it right but the “it’s good enough” attitude of this country was just too strong!

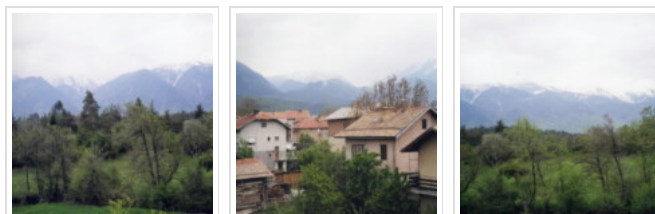


Two pictures of the Roman Bridge at Nevestino about half way between Kustendil and Dupnitsa. Another monument at the top of a pass on the way to Dupnitsa, which is the hometown of Nelly, my counterpart/translator.

9 May:

Blagoevgrad – Bansko: 60.6 Km, 952 Meters, 5:13 Hours

A little down hill and some wind behind me made the first 17 Km quick even after walking a 175 meter tunnel on the busy road to Greece. Then when I turned off for Bansko and started the climb the wind became a side wind and then in my face. The last 6 Km of the climb was at about 5% and I felt tired but didn’t hurt too badly; rested at 500 meters elevation, 750 meters and near the summit at 1140. The day started with some sun but the higher and further south I got the blacker the sky became. Photos #8 & #9 are of Pirin Mountains from near the pass summit: #10 also of the Pirin from Cliff’s [Business Volunteer] balcony. Angela [Business Volunteer from Razlog] came in just before Cliff and I were going out for dinner; we all then went to their favorite Mehena. Angela was video taping “stuff” for her Bulgarian Peace Corps experience to show friends back in the USA. Is it better to take back pictures of what you have experienced or not? Most people you show them to could care less; it’s like showing people pictures of your children. Why do people do that?



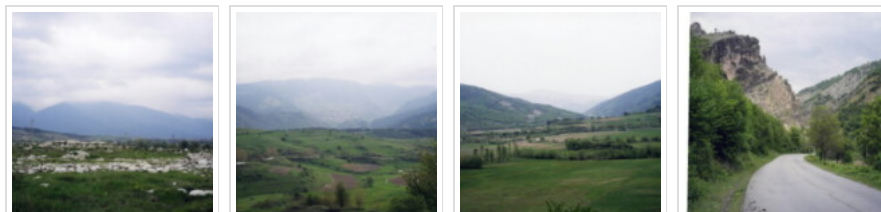
Two pictures of the Pirin Mountains from near the summit of the pass between Blagoevgrad & Bansko. Another picture of the Pirins from balcony apartment in Bansko.

10 May:

Bansko – Gotse Delchev: 52.6 Km, 84 Meters, 3:25 Hours

[I had originally scheduled today to be a ride from Bansko to Dospat a total of 101 Km and a predicted 1,010 meters of climbing. Because of how I have been feeling and the accuracy of climbing information I have decided to split the trip into two days.] I had dark clouds again this morning, wind blowing – it is another stormy day. I got rained on last night on the way to dinner as well as the mid section of today’s ride. Almost all down hill but still a struggle with some tail wind. Thought about “bagging it” all the way into Gotse Delchev. Will make a decision in the morning. The private hotel Marabelle near the old Balkan Hotel [not working] was the first hotel to complain about me taking my bike to the room [also the most expensive at 20,000 Leva]. I threatened to leave, asked for my money

back, and they said it was OK if I wanted to “sleep with my bike”. The restaurant was good; however, packed with smokers and the waitress was less than attentive or pleasant. OH, when will they ever learn! Photo #10 (two number 10s, did not scan – blurry) of Pirin as leaving Bansko; #11 & #12 of Rilas from same location; #13 at the junction of the road to Gotse Delchev where it meets the Mesta River; #14 near the mouth of the canyon that the river follows into Gotse Delchev. Note: These photo #s seem messed up – I have taken 15 pictures and have forgotten one of them. I have heard no cuckoos since crossing the pass into Bansko. Ask Jim about this. I did see another stork north of Gotse Delchev, after the canyon widens out; the first one since about half way to Kustendil. [Jim said that my observation of no cuckoos at higher elevations is correct; they tend to stay at lower elevation where the habitat is more to their liking. South side of the Rhodope Mountains does not have much to their liking; the same is true of the storks, they prefer lower areas with ponds and slow running water not the fast streams of the mountains].

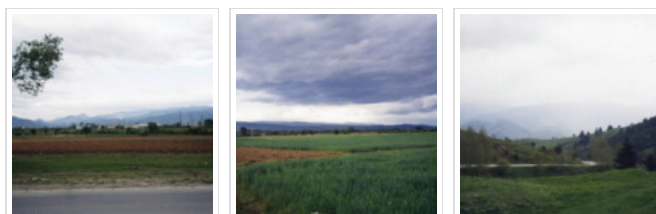


Two pictures of the Rila Mountains from near Bansko where you have good views of the Pirins and the Rilas. The road begins to follow the Mesta River. The Mesta then flows through a canyon before entering the Gotse Delchev valley.

11 May:

Gotse Delchev – Dospat: 55.1 Km, 1,092 Meters, 5:09 Hours

[Decision to split the ride from Bansko to Dospat was a good one. If I had tried that I would have been looking at over 8 hours riding and the way I felt yesterday would have never made it. The shorter day gave me some needed rest.] I got into Dospat about 2:00 and tried to catch a ride into Smolyan for about an hour. I then tried to find a hotel – there is a state hotel that wasn’t working and looked like a dump. Then went to the bus station and asked about a state bus to Smolyan and was told only at 6:20 in the morning. The clerk also told me of a private hotel but when I found it, it was also locked. At a nearby garage the mechanic tried to telephone and about that time the manager/owner came back. He promptly moved me in! No money, no paperwork, no problem with my bike, nothing – he said we will do that later. However, there is no hot water so that will be later also! Photo #16 & #17 were taken near Gotse Delchev of the Pirins west of the town and the Rhodopes to the southwest. There were black storm clouds all day and also a very cold wind; fortunately it was at my back most of the time. Photo #18 is a very typical Rhodope Mountain view; the far peak is probably in Greece. All other possible pictures were blocked with trees along the road (what a concept it would be to develop Viewing Areas where cars, and bikes, can pull off the road and people can take unobstructed pictures). The restaurant in the hotel was closed but the owner called in the cook to make me dinner. Never asked me for anything and charged me the Bulgarian rate for the room. I’m back in the Rhodopes!



Two pictures of the Rhodopes & Pirins from near Gotse Delchev. Then entering the Rhodopes with the distant mountain peak in Greece.

12 May:

Dospat – Tour End: 25.5 Km, 348 Meters, 1:53 Hours

The TAB is over! I broke another spoke as I entered the village of Teshel and have called it a wrap. I am sure that I could not have finished the scheduled 67 Km and some 1,230 meters of climbing even if everything was perfect. Again, I need to rethink this segment of the route. A state bus from Dospat to Devin ignored my attempt to flag him down; however, 8-10 trucks did respond but none were going to Smolyan. I did finally get a taxi to take me there and called Nelly for help in getting into Zlatograd tomorrow. The Smolyan Hotel is the “Poster Child” of Bulgarian hotels. It looks like, and the desk clerk talks like they are part of the developed world; but, no water at 5:00, Bulphone [a card operated public telephone] doesn’t work well, in coming calls are not directed to the room – in short everything looks like it should but nothing WORKS. I finally got a call back from Nelly when I was standing at the front desk complaining about not getting her call. She said the Plumen [my NGO Director] and his father were coming to Smolyan tomorrow and his father would take be back to Zlatograd after he had left Plumen in Pomporovo. Photo #19 is of the reservoir at Dospat; #20 through #22 are Rhodope Mountain shots. The last one, #22 was taken from my balcony looking south and I think of it as “Pines in the Oaks”; the dark on light green is striking to the eye; I look forward to seeing the picture. It was raining again at 3:00 when I was returning from lunch!



Two scenic pictures of a twisty road in the Rhodopes then a picture of the dam and reservoir at Dospot. The gash in the mountain side is a collapsed lead mine tunnel just down from the pass summit. The first picture in the second row is from the last pass that I did not get to ride: it would have been almost all down hill for some 16 Km. This is the headwaters of the Verbitsa River with Zlatograd in the distance. The last picture, “Pines in the Oaks” , was taken through my hotel window at Smolyan and marks the end of my TAB.

So that was Touring Around Bulgaria (TAB) as seen from the notes that I made as it was happening. Since I have been back to work I have recounted where I went on a number of occasions now and have answered the always asked questions many times.

What town(s) did you like best?

I don't like towns much and enjoyed the villages more because they had prettier yards and much less traffic. If I were to come back to Bulgaria in 5 years I would visit Zlatograd, Obzor, Veliki Preslav, Veliko Turnavo, Belogradchik, Berkavitsa, Bansko, and Dospat again.

Did you have any problems with Bulgarian drivers?

Not any more than drivers all over the world that I have come in contact with while on a bike. There are those that are nice and those that are not. It seems that car drivers all over the world think that bicycle riders are both blind and deaf, therefore, the driver must be very close to the cyclist before he should blow the horn to let the cyclist know that a car is near.

What did you learn about the Bulgarian people while you were on your tour?

Nothing that I haven't learned while living here for two years. This was not a tour to learn about the Bulgarian people.

What interesting things did you see?

I saw, and some times road over, the Mountains of Bulgaria: the Rhodope, Sredna Gora, Balkan, Vitosha, Kon, Ossogovo, Rila and Pirin. I crossed and road beside the Rivers of Bulgaria: the Verbitsa, Maritsa, Kamchiya, Yantra, Osam, Iskar, Danube, Strouma, and Mesta. I saw the forests, farm land, vineyards, orchards, spring flowers, cows, horses, donkeys, mules, pigs, geese, ducks, chickens, birds, and more dogs than I want to think about. I also saw the people of Bulgaria; working the land that could feed the populace and produce food for export – why not, it did it before? And I met some of the people of Bulgaria; some of their names appear in the story. The names of others I do not know but remember them non the less – like the man who hobbled to the street in a small village to shout “Bravo” and applaud me! Or the villager that gave me a pat on the back as I was leaving him after asking directions and a short chat about where I was from, where I was going!

Why did you do this ride around Bulgaria?

I am an explorer/wanderer! I think Robert D. Ballard, the discoverer of the Titanic says it best. “Everyone is an explorer. How could you possibly live your life looking at a closed door and not go open it? Exploration is still the epic journey, to dream, to prepare yourself, to go forth to be tested mentally, and physically by the gods. To pass the test, be given the truth, and then come back and share the new wisdom”. But Mr. Ballard goes on to say “Science gives legitimacy and worth to exploration. You see a lot of stunts today, but if you're not doing worthwhile science, you're not a explorer. You're just wandering around.” I also rode around Bulgaria because that is what I do when I am on vacation. I have ridden many touring miles in America, Canada, Mexico and Australia because it is fun and it does good things for me mentally; it clears the mind of those things that are not so important and lets it rest.

Would you do this Touring Around Bulgaria again?

I will ride here some more before I leave Bulgaria and perhaps I will return some years from now to ride here again. But, will I do the Touring around Bulgaria again; I think Mark Twain answered that question when he said: “I am glad I did it, partly because it was well worth it, and chiefly because I shall never have to do it again.”

23 June 1998

I have lost e-mail capabilities once again; and having less than three months left in Bulgaria I no longer have the strength to fight with the Bulgarians to get it fixed. Therefore, NO NOT send any e-mail letters to me in Bulgaria. It has been over a month since I sent the last installment of my Tour notes and I guess that you have tried to reply via e-mail. Sorry!

I have been in Bulgaria for just over two years now. I flew out of Reno two years ago, 10 June 1996, arrived here on the 13th and will leave on 1 September. I knew that at the beginning of this year that the time would fly but it has been even quicker that I had thought.

My future plans are undecided but I am trying to get a paid staff position with the Peace Corps. I have received notification that I am qualified and on the "List" for an Administration Officer position. I am now waiting for 1st Quarter 1999 open positions to be announced and will then make application for the country that I want. If everything works out perfectly I will be someplace else in the world in January of next year. Things rarely are so perfect but I do hope I get an assignment during the first quarter.

Somewhat dependent upon the job seeking process, I will take a month or two to get from Bulgaria to the U. S. when I leave here. Now I am thinking about a month in South Africa where I want to do a couple of weeks biking and maybe a couple of weeks normal tourist stuff. Then, if money will allow, I would like to stop in Ecuador for about two or four weeks. This would get me back to the States in late November or early December. Enough time to gather up what few belongings that I still have and buy some new clothes before leaving again. Almost everything that I brought with me to Bulgaria is going to stay here; the laundry facilities here are tough on clothes. It will also let me attend Christmas dinner with John & Janis and other old friends. I may end up flying into San Francisco and will certainly try and stop over to see you while there. Then again, all of the above plans may go out the window and I will end up doing something entirely different!

It has also been a long time since I have given you an update on the economic situation here. From Business central Europe, one of the very few publications that I still receive, I extract the following.

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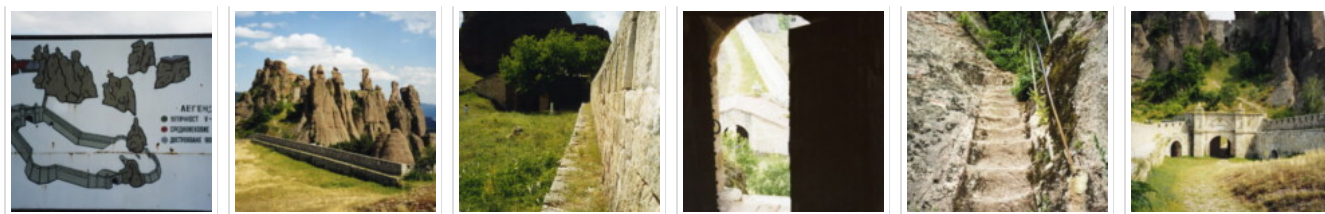
As Bulgarian premier Ivan Kostov celebrated his first year of power in mid-May, he had much to congratulate himself on. And he duly did: a currency board working nicely; forex reserves topping DM 4.6 billion; inflation around zero for two months running; last year's budget deficit just 2.4% of GDP, and this year's budget actually \$200 million in surplus at the end of April.

And then there was the IMF's decision to release the last two tranches of last year's standby facility. By way of a midsummer treat, there's every prospect of three-year agreements with the World Bank and the IMF – worth around \$2 billion between them if Bulgaria delivers, not to mention the accompanying halo. So is everything in Mr. Kostov's garden rosy? Far from it. For a start, industrial production is tumbling. No wonder. Exports are way down because of the currency board: they're becoming too expensive thanks to the combination of rising domestic costs, fixed exchange rates – and no compensating productivity gains.

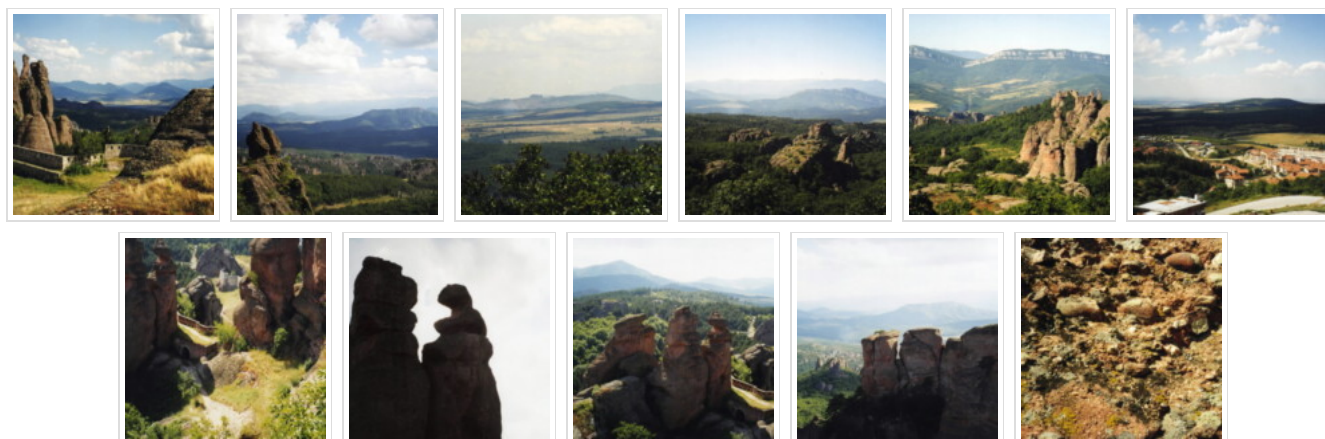
If anything, productivity is getting worse. Unemployment hasn't kept up with the output crash, and dollar wages are rising. There's also the danger of current-account problems: exports are tumbling, but hyper-liquid banks are throwing money at consumer lending, which almost doubled in the past six months.

So based on that it doesn't seem that things are so bad and appear to be improving however still with problems. I think some mind numbing statistics will show that there is further to go than the article above indicates. The 'basic cost of living' in Bulgaria is now set at 29,500 Leva (\$17) per month. This is enough to buy one loaf of bread and a container of yogurt a day; no rent, electricity or anything else. The 'minimum standard of living' is now set at 95,500 Leva (\$50). Using those two living standards it has been found that 4% of Bulgarian families have less than the basic cost of living; i.e. they are on the border of starvation. There are 65% under the minimum standard of living figure; most of them being pensioners and the unemployed. Just from my observations here in Zlatograd I would say that these numbers are probably correct. There is also the problem with privatization of state owned industry. I have talked at length about agriculture and land restitution; the fact that there have been a dozen amendments to the law. Well the privatization law has been amended 15 times in the same period. And the government wonders why there is very little interest by foreign investors? It is not only that the law changes so frequently but generally the government puts such a high minimum price and such restrictive terms on the sale that Western companies want no part of the deals. At the beginning of this year the government forecast that privatization sales would bring in \$800 million this year; now they have revised that down to \$200 million this year and next. The money that they receive is then used to support the state budget. So any surplus that they may be bragging about could be from a one time only revenue source. The longer I am here the more pessimistic I become about the economic chances of this country!

I will be away from Zlatograd for a week in July. Will first go to Samakov to participate in a panel discussion on Bulgarian culture and adapting to it for the new Volunteers in their Pre-Service Training (PST). Then into Sofia for two days for my Close Of Service physical, pick up June & July Living Allowance, do some shopping and spend some time with a travel agent. Maybe by the time I finish with the travel agent I will have a better idea of where and how I am going to get home. After finishing with the PC Medical Officer I am going to go to Belogradchik with Milka, her 'umfreund' and daughter on Saturday returning on Sunday. While there I have arranged for a dinner with the guy who helped me so much when I was in Belogradchik. I wanted to get back and see him before I left and with Milka's friends car it is going to be a much easier trip than public transport.



The picture at the top left is of a sign showing the outline of the Fort and the years that it was constructed. It was first begun by the Romans then in the 8th century the Bulgars added to it and then the Turks in the 18th century. The top row and the other picture are of the Fort.



The top row are views of the surrounding area from the Fort followed by a picture showing the eastern portion of the town of Belgradchik and the far hills are in Serbia.

The next four pictures show the oldest, and highest, part of the Fort which used the natural rock to form the fortification. In the first of the four foreground there is a hole and cistern that was carved from the rock. The last picture is a close-up of the rocks composition; which I think is what the geologist call conglomerate .

Note: The following was enclosed with this letter in a newspaper column format, one sheet of paper with two columns front and back.

Two Tours By Edward L. Frey for Bulgarian Newsletter

I have friends in the United States with military experience, bicycling experience, or in some cases both that ask, "How long was your tour in Bulgaria?" I am not sure of the question. Are they asking about my bicycle tour or are they inquiring about my tour of service in Bulgaria? My Bulgaria tour of service was two years and three months; my bicycle tour was only one month in duration. The surprising thing is that there is a lot of similarity in the two tours. Here in Bulgaria the more frequently asked questions are: Why did you come to Bulgaria? Why did you do the ride around Bulgaria? I have found that I want to respond the same to both questions but need the help of others to express the answer clearly. John Ciardi provides that help when he says, "If you can succeed at a thing you didn't set out to do much. The only thing worth trying is the impossible. We're all going to end up as some sort of failure, but at least take a big bite." I think that coming to Bulgaria as a Business Consultant Peace Corps Volunteer qualifies as trying the impossible. To use a cheap bike imported from Italy as a touring bike for an eighteen hundred kilometer ride around Bulgaria is the "big bite". My simple answer to both of the questions posed above is; I am an explorer and wanderer! Robert D. Ballard, the discoverer of the Titanic, explains this best when he says: "Everyone is an explorer. How could you possibly live your life looking at a closed door and not go open it? Exploration is still the epic journey, to dream, to prepare yourself, to go forth to be tested mentally and physically by the gods. To pass the test, to be given the truth, and then come back and share the new wisdom." (Sounds similar to the Continuation Of Service goal of the Peace Corps does it not?) Mr. Ballard goes on to say, "Science gives legitimacy and worth to exploration. You see a lot of stunts today, but if you're not doing worthwhile science, you're not an explorer. You're just wandering around." I rode around Bulgaria because that is what I do when I am on vacation; I wander around. I have ridden many touring miles in five countries, on three continents, because it is fun and it does good things for me mentally; it clears the mind of those things that are really not so important and lets it rest. Nicholas Johnson in Test Pattern for Living has phrased it in these terms. "You ride a bicycle because it feels good. The air feels good on your body, and pretty soon it gets to your head, and, glory be, your head feel good. You start noticing things. You look until you really see. You hear things, and smell smells you never knew were there."

This always elicits the next obvious question; What did you see? During my bike tour I saw over twenty-five of the larger towns in Bulgaria and countless villages. This answer will then always prompt a Bulgarian to ask, which town did you like best? My honest answer, and the one that causes the fewest hard feelings, has been that I do not like towns much and enjoy the villages more because

they have prettier yards and less traffic! However, if I return to Bulgaria sometime in the future I will make a point of visiting Zlatograd, Obzor, Veliki Preslav, Veliko Turnavo, Belogradchik, Berkavitsa, Bansko, and Dospat again.

I also saw, and sometimes rode over, the mountains of Bulgaria: the Rhodope, Sredna Gora, Balkan, Vitosha, Kon, Ossogovo, Rila and Pirin. I crossed and rode beside the Rivers of Bulgaria: the Verbitsa, Maritsa, Kamchiya, Yantra, Osam, Iskar, Danube, Strouma, and Mesta. I saw the forests, farm land vineyards, orchards, spring flowers, cows, horses, donkeys, mules, pigs, geese, ducks, chickens, birds, and more dogs than I want to remember. I also saw the people of Bulgaria; the language teachers and Peace Corps staff, the Community Development Center staff in Zlatograd, the many people of Zlatograd and many more during my two years here. I never knew the names of some people that I met on my bike tour around Bulgaria – I remember them nonetheless. The man who hobbled to the street in a small village to shout “Bravo” and applaud me! The villager that gave me a pat on the back as I was leaving him after a short chat about where I was from, where I was going!

One of the more surprising questions that I had from a journalist after completing my bike tour was; “What did you learn about the Bulgarian people while on your tour?” Perhaps I was to blunt, but I told him that I learned nothing that I had not learned about them while living in Bulgaria for two years. The tour was not to learn about the Bulgarian people! It would be impossible for someone to come to Bulgaria for a month long bike tour and learn very much about its people. A more interesting question, that only a few of my bicycling friends may ask, would be; what did you learn about yourself while on your tour?

Another repeated question that I am sure my cycling friends will want to discuss was: “Did you have any problems with the Bulgarian drivers?” I have to say that Bulgarian drivers are no different from drivers world over that I have come in contact with. It seems that all drivers of cars, trucks, buses and other motorized vehicles that use the roads think that bicycle riders are both blind and deaf. Therefore, the driver must be very close to the cyclist before he should blow a horn to let the cyclist know that a vehicle is near. There are some drivers, this is true in Bulgaria also, that think that bicyclist do not belong on the road and will risk the cyclist’s life to prove that belief – I can only suggest discretion before valor when facing such a confrontation.

A final question, like the first one, leaves me unsure what the questioner is asking; “Would you do your tour again?” Is the question; would you come to Bulgaria again as a Peace Corps Volunteer or, would you do the Touring Around Bulgaria ride again? I will ride here some more before I leave Bulgaria and perhaps I will return some years from now to ride here again. However, will I do the Touring Around Bulgaria or will I be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Bulgaria again? I think Mark Twain answered those questions when he said: “I am glad I did it, partly because it was well worth it, and chiefly because I shall never have to do it again.”

25 August 1998

Well, it is almost over! I went into Sofia on the 13th for a dental appointment on the 14th; I had a cavity to be filled and was not looking forward to it. I hate dentists in the United States; having a Bulgarian working on me doesn't make it any more of a pleasant experience. The more important aspect of the trip was for me to get my travel money to get back to the United States. Peace Corps gives you the choice of receiving cash or a ticket back to your home of record; almost everyone takes the cash and goes home via some roundabout route. So I got the cash, payed the travel agent, and picked up tickets.

I fly from Sofia on 1 September to London Via British Air, overnight there and then to Miami on 2 September. I will stay overnight in Miami and send most of my baggage, including my Bulgarian bike, to John & Janis's via UPS. Then on 3 September I fly American Airlines to Quito, Ecuador for a month and return to Miami on 5 October. I will then go to Washington, DC by Amtrack. I have never seen the Atlantic coastal states and thought this would be a good chance to do so. Upon arriving in Washington I will spend a day or two getting some interviewing clothes and making an appointment with the Chief Administrative Officer for the Region that Bulgaria is in. I have sent him a couple of letters requesting such an interview for an Administrative Officer position in his Region and informing him of my travel plans. Hopefully I will be able to arrange the interview with him and any other regional Chiefs that have open positions. While I am there I may also look into other positions that the Peace Corps might have open; maybe Internal Auditor in the Inspector General Office.

Assuming that all the above works out I will probably then travel via train from Washington DC to Sacramento or Roseville and then to John & Janis's in Placerville. Maybe getting there by the end of October if I don't make any other stops along the way. A lot will depend on how the interview process at Peace Corps goes and does it look like I have a job lined up there. If I do not I will have to reconsider to some extent and may make some other stops along the way to California.

Finally, as closing remarks from Bulgaria I am including the Observations and Recommendations that I typed up for the CDIC Director and my counterpart. All in all not an auspicious closing to this last Long Letter from Bulgaria. It has been an experience that I will long remember and will want to talk about far more than anyone will have the patience to listen.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

What is presented below are comments on what I have learned about Bulgaria (particularly Zlatograd); its people, its land and economy; and the Community Development Center in Zlatograd. It should be understood that these are my opinions and are not the opinions of Peace Corps or the United States Government. It should also be recognized that the opinions expressed may be based on incomplete information or a misinterpretation of the facts as I understood them. That is to say; I could be wrong. But, I offer them in reply to your request and hope that they may be useful.

A) The primary purpose for my assignment to the CDIC in Zlatograd was to provide consulting to the businesses of Zlatograd and to assist the CDIC, and the Municipality, with economic development. I have done very little in these areas; however, the following comments are offered:

1. I made the decision that I would not impose my ideas concerning what needed to be done by companies or the community and would work only on issues that were brought to me. I continue to believe that this was the correct approach; if I had dictated what was important it would have been resented and not sustainable after I left. However, my decision resulted in not being asked to provide much consulting.
2. The general attitude of the business community is that they know everything that they need to know about their business and the only thing that they need is more money. This is generally true of local government people also; advice is not needed, they just need more money and they will be able to develop the economy. Such money should be given to them freely, under few restrictions, on a very liberal terms. Maybe the best way to describe it is that the banks and other financing sources are expected to operate like the government did under Communism i.e. providing funding to firms to keep them open even if they can not make a profit.
3. The general business environment in Bulgaria has changed very little since 1989. There is a lot of talk about privatization but little action. Also, most companies that have been privatized would not be considered so by most observers in the United States. The Bulgarian national government retains a significant share of almost all companies that have been sold; less than a majority share but what could be considered a controlling interest.
4. Many of the privatization deals that have been closed so far have been management/employee buy outs. I believe that most of them will eventually fail. I do not think that management has become more adept at management nor have the workers become more productive just because they are now share holders. If the company was having problems as a State owned company I believe that most of those problems will continue. Management/employee buy outs in Bulgaria are generally used as a method to guarantee continued employment and have little to do with making the company more efficient or more profitable.
5. State owned companies, and many privatized ones, provide governmental social services. i.e. subsidized housing, meals, transportation. As the economy changes this practice will change and place more of the cost on local government.
6. The recent efforts to begin economic development planning by the CDIC is a worthwhile effort but is very constrained by the State. The basic governmental structure of Bulgarian government has not changed since 1989. Local government receives approximatly

90% of its operating funds from the State and has very little opportunity to acquire developmental funds at the local level. The economic development of Bulgaria, and therefore local economic development, continues to be centrally planned. Now by a democratically elected Parliament that may change every four years, or sooner, that may then redirect economic efforts and funds.

7. It seems to me that Zlatograd would be better served by advocating a change in the way local government is funded rather than trying to change which political region it may be in. There may be some current advantage in one Region over another but I believe it is the funding system is in need of reform in the long term. Without such reform local government will always be dependent upon beneficent funding by State and Regional government.
8. I am also of the opinion that economic development in Zlatograd is focused upon maintaining the status quo. I believe that it may be more worthwhile to concentrate on the question, what could we do if all the major employers today were to go out of business? I am also somewhat concerned that most of the 'planners' have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo rather than providing imaginative thinking to the process. I would suggest that outside consultants be utilized to overcome this bias that is only natural to be present.

B) It was not a part of my assigned duties to evaluate the operations of the Community Development Center; only transfer what skills that I could to the staff and assist in what ways I could when asked. However because you asked, I offer the following observations about the staff, two Directors and two Assistants during my tour of duty, and the Center in General.

1. I would recommend that the Assistants be provided with the opportunity for formal computer training in Word and Excel. Both Assistants that I worked with had some knowledge of Word but minimal at best and almost no knowledge of Excel. Furthermore, all staff members should become better trained on file maintenance. The Director should also establish file retention policy. Something saved is worthless if it cannot be retrieved because there is no established policy for filing like documents. It is also a waste to save documents that will never be used again.
2. The most obvious failing that I saw of both Directors was the lack of information sharing with Assistants. Many times the Assistants did not know what was being worked on by the Director. In almost all cases if the Director were to attend a conference or seminar for professional development or simply to gather information this information was not shared. I would recommend that more effort be made by the Directors to keep Assistants informed and to develop their skills. The best measure of how good a job the boss is doing is how well the office functions when he/she is gone. A well trained and well informed staff is a step in the right direction to making the office function well.
3. I would also suggest that the CDIC establish computer classes for the community. I believe that the demand for such classes is as strong as for English classes and may offer opportunities to 'cross sell' all classes. The CDIC could also make its computers available to the High School Computer class on a more formal basis as a contribution to the community.
4. I would also suggest that more time and effort be made by the CDIC to get college information to graduating students. Not just to have information available at the Center, but perhaps 'market' that information by speaking to students at the school or a Cable TV announcement. Perhaps become more knowledgeable about scholarship sources within Bulgarian universities and in Europe. Maybe act as the catalyst to secure money that could be used as a scholarship fund in the name of the CDIC or the Town of Zlatograd, administered by the CDIC.
5. Changing attitudes, providing information and educating the community could be of considerable benefit to Zlatograd as well as the CDIC. I recommend that the Center do more active educational projects; perhaps using TV of the local news paper to reach as large an audience as possible.
6. Which brings up the bigger issue; what should the CDIC be doing? It appears that it is trying to be all things to all people. It seems to undertake any project for which grant money can be obtained. The over all strategy has seemed to be to work on those things that the primary USAID sponsoring grant required, but only enough to keep the grant monies flowing. There has been little commitment to some of the 'business plan' goals originally set out under the LGI funding and I do not suggest that there should have been more commitment. What I do recommend is that the CDIC become more focused in its purposes and work very hard on those things that it decides to be important for the long term.

C) The following comments do not fit in the previous categories but I thought they may be of some use to you.

1. The original USAID-LGI Business Plan included a goal of the CDIC becoming a Municipal Information Center; that is to say, the Center would disburse information about what the Municipality is doing. I understand the objective of this goal but personally I am happy that the Center has done very little to effect this goal. It is my belief that the Center should work WITH the Municipality to accomplish common goals but not work FOR the Municipality. It is too easy for the citizens of Zlatograd to believe that the Center is a part of the Municipality without reinforcing that idea. I think that the Center should be very careful and not tie itself to closely to the Municipality. One of the reasons for establishing a NGO is to provide some continuity of purpose that the political offices of the Municipality can not provide because of the election process. There is also the danger that any scandals that the Municipality may become involved in will also damage the NGO if they are closely connected in the minds of the citizens.
2. There is considerable talk about tourism in Bulgaria, and in Zlatograd, but unfortunately most Bulgarians have traveled so little that they have a poor concept of what tourism is throughout the rest of the world. The most important concept regarding tourism is that people travel to a place because of its natural attractions or man made attractions; that is they go to the place because there is something to SEE or Do when they get there. I suggest that Zlatograd is not a place for tourist but rather a place of retirement. By this I mean that it is a place that people can come to for a short or long period of time and retire. To retire meaning to withdraw to a place of privacy, shelter, or seclusion which suggests serenity and peace. The people of Zlatograd speak of it being such a place of serenity, peace, quiet and beauty but all those qualities are being destroyed by the very people that speak of them so highly. The beauty is being destroyed by the overcutting of the forests for export or for heating local homes; and by the overgrazing of the land

by too many animals for it to support. The peace and quiet of the area is being violated by noise pollution from the same sources that people seeking solace here are trying to escape i.e. noisy neighbors, barking dogs, noisy restraints/clubs and increased traffic. The pure air is polluted by the burned wood of the forest and the dirt thrown into the air by increased traffic. The beauty of the area is also violated by a citizenry that has little pride in its appearance; dumping trash along its roads and littering with no thought of the visual pollution they are causing. If Zlatograd emulates the "developed" towns of Bulgaria, and the world, it will destroy the reasons for people wanting to retire there. Perhaps all of these issues are worthy of efforts by the CDIC for future projects?

3. Finally, I am not sure that anything will be accomplished in Bulgaria, or Zlatograd, unless the citizenry develop virtue. The definition of virtue that I use was written by Tocqueville in "Democracy in America"; 'virtue is the moral power which each individual exercises upon himself and which prevents him from violating another's right'. I believe that such virtue is lacking in Bulgaria and unfortunately we are losing it in the United States. I further believe that historically such virtue has been imposed or taught and is not something that is in the basic character of man. Such impositions or teachings diminish freedom but without it I believe there is only chaos and a democratic, market driven economy will not survive.

Edward L. Frey
Peace Corps Volunteer
Zlatograd, Bulgaria
1996 – 1998

Note: Shown below are Letters and Certificates received from the Director of the Peace Corps or from the White House during my volunteer service in Bulgaria.

