

## On the restless maturity of the Great Story Teller<sup>1</sup> and also on the adventurous life of the Lover of the loess profiles

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*The fact that Vojen Ložek will turn 70 this year and his companion Jiří George Kukla, 65 years, and that in the early May there was a symposium in their honor, at which both of them received the Jaroslav Petrbok medal, is not the reason to write about them in Vesmír, or even less to praise them. "That smells of Byzantism, which has the roots in this country" says Ivan Horáček. However, on the background of their lives we can recall the postwar fate of the study of the youngest geological past.*

Quaternary Geology as a systematically studied scientific field has been brought to us in the Second World War by the German geologists. They knew the subject well, because in the northern half of Germany hardly any geologic formation exists other than the Quaternary, and also because it is a discipline particularly useful in the projecting of highways or of large agronomic constructions.

V. Ložek at that time, although still a high school student, was a dedicated malacozoologist. He gathered snails from much of central Bohemia. Against the warning of Prof. Julius Komárek: "Don't get involved with those 'Boulder men'", he began studying fossil malacofaunas. He quickly realized that a small snail can not run away too far, and that therefore it can be affected by even minor changes of environment. Gradually he laid a foundation to an important field of paleoenvironmental analysis (he has been nominated a honorary member of the Philosophical Society in Cambridge and got the medal of A. Penck).

The archeologist F. Prošek initiated him<sup>1</sup> in the knowledge of prehistoric cultures and stratigraphy, and because at that time they frequently visited the Czech Karst, they used to meet regularly Jiří Kukla. In those days Kukla was an enthusiastic speleologist, who codiscovered a good part of the Koněprusy caverns, almost drowned in the underground lake in the Bozkov cave and led several adventurous expeditions into the badlands of southeastern Slovakia. Together<sup>2</sup> they got particularly interested in the loess sections with embedded soils and paleolithic artifacts. They documented tens of sections which do not exist any more, described their main features and realized that there had been a large number of ice advances, each of them a bit different than the others, and that the whole Quaternary system<sup>3</sup> was incomplete. V. Ložek meantime spent ten years busily traveling through Czechoslovakia, charting deposits of natural fertilizers. In every sheet of the 1:100,000 map he visited the most important Quaternary localities and so became familiar with most hills, valleys and settlements of Czechoslovakia. Furthermore he memorized the geographic settings so well, that a Hungarian from Hrušov would frequently mistake him for his compatriot, same as a guy born in Zábrdka valley. When my wife told him that she was born in Sopřeč, postal district Vápno<sup>4</sup>, she expected the usual amused reaction, but certainly not a brief information on the neighboring villages Vlčí Habřina, Žáravice and Strášov, accompanied by a brief evaluation of the neighboring important localities of Quaternary sediments.

With the demise of small brickyards V. Ložek dedicated more and more of his time to the karst sediments. Kukla's whereabouts were more adventurous. He worked as a geologist in Cuba and nearly got shot dead at night at sea, mistaken for an American intruder. For several years his boss was Che Guevara ("quite a fine chap, but it was impossible to talk politics with him"). After the Soviet occupation in 1968 he tried to get to the West. Kukla's history at that time was revealed to me by the legendary classic of the world of Quaternary geology, Rhodes Fairbridge, an Australian, known for his past as a military intelligence officer. Just in passing, let me mention his trip on the 19th of August, 1968, from Berlin to Prague, at which he was passing convoys of military vehicles. He told me: "In Prague I immediately visited the CIA representatives and told them that the occupation was starting. They answered that they did not know anything about it and that I saw probably the regular autumn maneuvers. Later they published a communiqué that the action of the five armies took them by surprise, because they didn't get any advance information."

But back to our story: Fairbridge explained to me: "We were exceptionally interested in Kukla. We drilled extensively in the ocean but didn't know the situation on the land. In the ocean it looked like 17 interglacials. Seventeen calcareous dunes were also found in Australia, and Kukla reported 17 fossil soils in the loess at Red Hill in Brno<sup>5</sup>. The number 17 was more or less a coincidence, but then it all fitted nicely together. Kukla, however, declined to depart to USA without his wife Helena. Complicated dealings with the Ministry of Exterior lasted almost a year. Finally we made a deal. We exchanged Kukla for one excellent American surgeon, who helped stabilize the health of the then president Ludvík Svoboda." Kukla himself doesn't know about this action. However, the fact is that among the group of the 50 foreign scientists whom the Americans tried to get for permanent residence through an NSF project<sup>6</sup>, there were Brits, Mexicans, a few Russians, one Bulgarian, and also Kukla.

In the USA he quickly realized that with his Czech style he wouldn't survive. He organizes symposia, writes, lectures. He warned President Nixon on climate changes. He was at the birth of the Greenhouse Effect action, originally planned more as a way to get money for continuing research. It later got out of hand because of the media. In the Antarctic, near the South Pole, he fell into an ice crevasse and almost froze to death; in Argentina he nearly killed a certain minister by the Czech Francovka<sup>7</sup>. He dives in the Cayman Islands, studies corals at Barbados, he cores in Chinese loesses

and in Ukrainian lakes. He takes part in every important climate action, knows everybody, testifies in Congress, exchanges opinions with Al Gore<sup>8</sup>.

Ložek meantime studies at home, and he is at home everywhere, where Czech or Slovak is spoken. And he publishes, writes more than Jaroslav Vrchlický but less than Jirásek<sup>9</sup> – almost 800 papers, including three principal monographs, and takes part in several tens of other works. His citation record compares to half of an average institute. He is curious and still roams through Bohemia digging dirt. He doesn't organize, doesn't attend meetings, doesn't like to answer letters. Several directorates of nature parks tried to get him into permanent inventory under the motto: "Ložek as a regional phenomenon", but he keeps escaping. His mobility even led to a hypothesis that there are several Ložeks, and each one works hard on a different profile.

Also, Jiří, today George Kukla, continues his restless life between New York, Dolní Věstonice and Tibet. His

first love, Miss Kmentová<sup>10</sup>, was an innkeeper's daughter in a restaurant of the 4th price-group<sup>11</sup>, and it is in similar establishments where Jiří is still today recharging his legendary criticism and insight.

Ložek and Kukla are characterized by their great field experience and knowledge of nature, capability of making startling syntheses, busy publishing activity, and selfless sharing of personal findings with the community at large. Apart of that they display a certain wisdom. Thank God for such people!

Notes:

(1) – meaning Ložek; (2) – meaning Prošek, Ložek, and Kukla; (3) – as understood at that time; (4) – small unknown, middle of nowhere hamlets; (5) – this is a mistaken information. The reference should be to 8 glacial – interglacial cycles within the Brunhes chron of normal polarity; (6) – the Senior Foreign Scientist Award of the US National Science Foundation; (7) – the alcoholic lotion for massaging; (8) – current USA vicepresident; (9) – prolific early Czech belletrists; (10) a first grade school classmate; (11) – the cheapest and usually dirtiest bars and restaurants.

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The interdisciplinary workshop "Mid-European Nature – Development, Protection and Perspectives", dedicated in honor of V. Ložek and J. G. Kukla, took place 3 – 4 May 1995 in the National Museum in Praha. Some of the extended abstracts of that meeting appear in this volume of *Geolines*. The introduction was originally published in Czech in *Vesmír* (1995, 74,7, 396–397) and was translated by G. J. Kukla for his 65th birthday celebration at Columbia University, New York.