

11 Yugoslavia--Making Up Time

Platammon, Greece, to Skopje, Yugoslavia
Thursday, May 6

Heading northwest, we left our peaceful retreat around 8 A.M. Soon Neil called our attention to lofty Mount Olympus in the distance. Rising to a height of 9570 feet, it was regarded by the ancient Greeks as the chief abode of their gods. Today it marked our last encounter with Greek history. The stories of Alexander and Paul were now set aside as we headed toward the communistic country of Yugoslavia.

Neil told us that, due to dangerous driving conditions along the Dalmatian Coast caused by a recent Adriatic storm, we would take the forested inland route instead. This was a disappointment to some of us who had heard about the scenic Yugoslavian riviera. But Neil reassured us that we would enjoy equally the inland drive too, for it was diversified with spectacular alpine scenery predominating giving us a foretaste of terrain we would encounter in Austria. He then stressed that, with only eleven days until our scheduled arrival in London, it was imperative that we not be de-

layed again and that we make up time if possible. So, for these reasons, no tours would be scheduled throughout Yugoslavia.

Our border crossing was surprisingly easy and within an hour we were traveling on a modern highway through similar terrain to that of northern Greece, bare mountains and rolling hills.

Briefing us about Yugoslavia, Neil informed us that this country is composed of the republics of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia; and that the name Yugoslavia means "land of southern Slavs."

Regarding communism, Neil ventured that, under President Tito's policies known as Titoism or communist nationalism, Yugoslavs have enjoyed more freedom than their communist neighbors. In 1948, Yugoslavia was expelled from the Cominform for allegedly deviating from orthodox communist policy. This fact, coupled with Tito's disdain for Stalin's dictatorial policies toward all communist nations, separated him even further from Soviet communism. Consequently, he turned to the West for aid. Tito's independent stand against certain Soviet policies won him acclaim in the West and was regarded as a triumph of Titoism over Soviet imperialism.

Our drive eventually led into the lovely dense forests covering mountains and hills that Neil had raved about. In the late afternoon, we entered Skopje, a city which suffered a devastating earthquake in 1963. As a result, from what we observed, it was now mainly a town of stark high-rise buildings with a few old structures remaining.

Riding through Skopje to the campsite, we passed the old rail-

road station which had survived the quake and saw its clock with the hands still registering the moment of the disaster. We also caught glimpses of churches reflecting the Byzantine era and mosques reflecting the time when Skopje was the second city of the Ottoman Empire. Neil told us that approximately ten percent of Yugoslavians are still Muslim.

The campsite, located on the outskirts of the city in a large rustic park, was surrounded by stands of oak, beech and fir trees. We set up the cooktent again and prepared a dinner of bachelors consisting of meatballs, macaroni and cheese, and custard pudding. Though heavy, the food was enjoyed by all with several of us returning for seconds.

After dinner, Cindy designed a birthday card for Jen who would turn thirty the next day. Then I circulated it unobtrusively gathering as many signatures as possible.

Skopje to Belgrade, Capital of Yugoslavia
Friday, May 7

We made an early start for the long drive north through the republic of Serbia. Neil noted that it too had been under Turkish domination during Ottoman rule. Later Serbia and its neighbors came under the influence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which collapsed after World War I.

As our proximity to Sarajevo neared, though it was some distance to the west, Neil reminded us that it was there in 1914 that the assassinations of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his

wife by a Serbian student had triggered the beginning of World War I.

In the late afternoon, we began skirting cosmopolitan Belgrade at the confluence of the Sava and the famous Danube Rivers. Another modern city of highrise flats, rather sterile in its newer sections but beautiful in its old traditional style, it had a certain charm. The old and the new meshed in its cobblestone streets, storied brick buildings interspersed with modern buildings all sprouting television antennas. Telephone poles holding a myriad of wires detracted a bit from the loveliness of the broad boulevards, promenades and well-kept parks.

We learned from Neil that Belgrade had been leveled approximately forty times between the 3rd century B.C. (by the Celts) and the 20th century (by the Germans). Because of its ideal location, it had long ago been an important base for Rome's Danubian fleet. Today it serves as an important export and import center.

We eventually turned out of the city onto a winding road which climbed a densely forested mountain bringing us to our campsite. We set up camp in a meadow of thick grass studded with wild flowers. Adequate restrooms were nearby in the woods, but again the cooktent would have to be erected.

Having finished my three day cooking stint, I enjoyed afternoon tea with my tentmates on the grass outside our tent. Then I collected the remaining signatures for Jen's birthday card. After that, I joined Tanya and Jen for a walk. We followed local joggers in track suits on a path through the woods which opened onto

a lovely green parkland. Here Belgrade sports enthusiasts were engaged in soccer (the national sport), volleyball, basketball and track events. Their pure delight in sports reminded me of a similar attitude toward sports I had observed in Australia. I eventually left Jen and Tanya to pick a bouquet of wild flowers for Jen's party.

A delicious dinner of braised steaks, mashed potatoes and gravy was highlighted by a decorated cake which the cooks had bought while grocery shopping that day. They presented the cake to Jen while we sang "Happy Birthday," and I gave her the birthday card and flowers. We then lined up for cake and coffee or tea. Later Nino turned on the bus cassette and gave dancing lessons.

Another enjoyable evening soon came to an end, but, as luck would have it, Jen and six other girls became locked in the restroom. After trying unsuccessfully to extricate themselves, frustration set in, and they began yelling for help. Neil, whose tent was nearest, eventually awakened and rescued them. By 1:30 A.M. silence finally reigned.

Belgrade to Ljubljana
Saturday, May 8

At the usual early hour, we were on our way through more invigorating alpine country. Around 10:30, we made our morning loo stop. As usual, the fellows crossed the road. The girls followed a path leading into the dense woods. In the pris-

tine stillness surrounding us, we were surprised and thrilled to hear the calls of both adult and baby cuckoos perched high in the trees. For me, this was the highlight of Yugoslavia.

At 2 P.M., we took a ninety minute stop for lunch and a walk through part of the lovely city of Zagreb. We were amazed to learn from Neil that Mongols had invaded Zagreb in 1242. Today it was a major cultural center.

Unfortunately, we had come at a time when most of the shops were closed, and there was little activity on the streets except for an occasional tram. But Tanya, Nino and I did locate a market where we bought bread, salami, cheese, sardines and ice cream. We then found a well manicured city park where we shared the only available bench with a happy wino who clung to his bottle. As we ate, we watched mothers in western dress pushing baby carriages, old peasant women chatting together and children playing soccer on the grass. The men, we assumed, were at a sports event.

On the road again, we soon slowed to a stop behind dozens of vehicles. Inching on for twenty minutes, we passed the scene of a fatal accident where a semitrailer had landed on top of a sports car, smashing it. The gruesome sight brought to mind the overshadowing safety we had experienced thus far on the trip.

Nearing the Italian and Austrian borders, we reached Ljubljana in the late afternoon. As our bus rolled into another woodland campsite, this one beside the Sava River, we were greeted by two friendly drunken Aussies.

After setting up camp, Jen, Tanya and I enjoyed afternoon tea

on the riverbank followed by a delicious dinner with peaches and cream for dessert. Then most of us met in the bus to appoint a committee to design a logo for a group T-shirt, a souvenir which would be made up in Venice.