

Loški utrip (Loka Pulse :-), october 2005, Škofja Loka/Slovenia

The cycling nomads on a peace mission also in Škofja Loka

by Damjan Likar

Stani Martikova, 39, of the Czech origin and Frenchman Richard Ferge, 33, have set out on a five year long cycling world tour from a land of the Marseillaise last December, spreading among people the message of peace. In Škofja Loka they stopped for four days in August. They characterized the city as one of more peaceful cities on their route.

How come you have decided for a world tour for peace?

Ferge: We have met in London, where I was studying and following my profession of waiter sommelier. Stani had been living in the city for three years and was working for a charity foundation. She has done a lot of cycling before meeting me, and when meeting me, she suggested me to buy myself a bike to drive around London, and reduce my taxi bills. We became enraptured with cycling and made our first longer journey from Alaska till south of Latin America, about 27.500km in 44 months.

Why have you decided for promotion of world peace?

On our first cycling tour we have met loads of wonderful people, and realized that world is far from being as dreadful as media is presenting it to us on everyday basis. That's why we wanted to spread the message of peace. We firmly believe that we can all coexist irrespective of political orientation, religion, color of the skin, sex.

What was your itineraire till now on this tour?

We started in France, followed the road to Spain, Marocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Italy and now we are in Slovenia. We cycled 7500 km till now. We plan to continue our tour towards south till Turkey, then we will most probably turn towards Russia. We plan our route according to the weather which became increasingly unsettled. We also carry small flags with the inscription "peace" in the language of all the countries we visit.

What was the biggest surprise on this route?

Algeria. Our friends advised us not to go there, because we could be killed. And it turned out to be quite the opposite. We felt really safe and comfortable there. The natives are extremely kind and hospitable. In general we find Arabians very pleasant. They have less prejudice about Europeans then we Europeans have about them. Even in Quran one can find passage that says that other religions need to be respected. In the Bible one can find quite the opposite: that people of other religion, disobedient children, homosexuals, adulterers must be killed... The politians are to be blamed for making huge damage to the islamic world, since they put together talibans and muslim religion.

Where one can then find the root of violance in the world?

Stani: As history witnesses the root of the violance was religion. Today the roots lie rather in the economics. Politicians will claim quite the opposite. Even more, they will do anything to cover the connection between economics and wars they create. I would also like to mention the violance towards animals. As vegetarian I believe that animals as well have the right to peace and to their lifestyle. Many children around the world haven't got a clue where the steak on their plate comes from. In some cases they believe that meat grows on trees. The violance towards animals is closely related and connected to violance towards and among men.

How do you find Slovenia and Škofja Loka?

Slovenia is one of the cleanest countries we have visited so far on our tours. I think you know how to appreciate the beauty of your country. We feel safe in Slovenia. Škofja Loka is one of the more peaceful cities on our route . There are not many tourist and this gives us opportunity to observe the life of the locals better and more relaxed. We are missing a fountain in the centre of the city around which people could gather. You also do not have a hotel. So we were lucky to contact Gregor Kamnikar in advance, who offered us free accomodation. We met lots of such friends thorough organization Hospitality Club. It is an organization where members correspond with each other and offer each other support on the travel (free accomodation, useful info...)

Have you got any bad experience at all?

Seldom. One of such happened in American Federal State of Oregon. We have arrived at countryside late in the evening and were looking for the house of our friend. We rang at one of the houses and all of a sudden a woman came storming out of this house with a rifle in her hands. She threatened us she would shot us on the spot if we would not withdraw from her property.

Have you thought of having kids?

The bikes are our kids. We do not plan to have children. There is enough of children in the world that need to be taken care of. Well, actually we have met a couple like us. While on the tour they got a baby. They just put him on the back of the bike and continued their tour.

(in the pinky frame)

If you wish to follow the world tour for peace, you can visit their website www.velomad.com (in slovenian velomad would mean “mad bikers”) or you can write them to info@velomad.com. Stani and Richard would be delighted to get some info and contacts for the countries they plan to visit.