

Danube Day 2014 in Ukraine



United by its rivers on Danube Day

The Danube rivers were celebrated at 7 events across north, west and east Zakarpattia Oblast and in neighbouring Ivano-Frankivska Oblast; as well as the Delta flatlands to the south.

On the eve of Danube Day, youths from villages around Uzhgorod gathered at **Baranintsi** to await results of the **Battle of Plastic!** In the preceding 2 weeks, boys from competing villages had worked hard to collect the most dumped plastic bottles. Anticipation was high at the plastic weigh-in as entrants would receive payment according to the weight of their 'treasure'.

"About 4 tonnes of plastic floats down the Danube daily. Most affected are the fish populations as they have nowhere to spawn. Our actions are aimed primarily at preventing plastic pollution. We are working hard to ensure such waste is reduced."

Olena Marushevsky, Zakarpatska Oblast Branch of All-Ukrainian League.

Weighing in at 191kg, Baranintsi United football team was proclaimed overall winner. In exchange for their plastic hoard, the team received Ukrainian national football kits courtesy of Coca-Cola Beverages Ukraine. But really it was a win for the whole community and its rivers: not only were 521kg of plastic recovered but villages received eight 1100-litre recycling containers from Coca-Cola Beverages Ukraine to help address the problem long-term.

"It is important children view plastic not as rubbish but material that can be recycled." Andrij Bublik, Coca-Cola Beverages Ukraine.

The day saw awarding of the Zakarpattia **Danube Art Master** crown to Diana Bilyak from Uzhgorod, beating 91 others to the top prize. She shared the Ukrainian title with winners from Ivano-Frankivska: Alla Lukan and Diana Mytskan from Kosiv. Both eye-catching art-pieces depicted Earth: one declaring: "Clean Tisza – Clean Planet"; the other: "It's in our hands". The contests were run by the Zakarpatska Oblast Branch of the All-Ukrainian League and the Western Centre of the Ukrainian Branch of World Laboratory. To see the wealth of creativity inspired by rivers across the region, see Facebook and Flickr.

"If we look for the uniting things, we should follow the rivers: they have no borders despite their diversity and difference"

Prof. Olexandr Obodovsky of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

A record-breaking attempt at **Ukraine's largest map** was the challenge in **Kvasovo**, Berehiv rayon. 100 children worked on the 20m² map showing Ukraine united by rivers. The network covers the entire country: the map serving as a visual reminder of Ukraine's diversity and inter-connectedness.

Next day saw the opening of a **water drill-hole** and pump, built by villagers as part of an EU technical assistance project. With groundwater levels having dropped recently, the new drinking water source is very much needed. Lined by 100 young trees, **An Alley of the Divine Heroes** was also opened and blessed to commemorate those who died in the Maydan (Kyiv's Independence Square) in 2014 and in the recent conflict.

High up in the Carpathians at the crossroads of major hiking routes in **Pryslip**, Mizhgirsky rayon, another ceremony brought a community together for the opening of a **new shelter at the source of the River Rika**. The action was part of a 6-year project to restore each of Ukraine's 6 major Tisza tributaries, following a 5-country commemoration of the Tisza's source in 2011. Local children presented a play on why rivers should be protected and everyone joined in a village celebration.

All 6 Zakarpattya events were led by Zakarpattya Oblast Organization of the All-Ukrainian Ecological League with Coca-Cola Beverages Ukraine and partners. A separate event took place in **Bushtyno**, where Tiachiv Water Management staff cleared weeds and debris from a local water source.

Far to the south, the sight of a man standing in the Danube up to his waist, dressed smartly in suit and white shirt, brought many smiles to **Odessa** residents on Danube Day. Ivan Papushenko, President of the Bessarabia Swimming Association, didn't seem the least bit concerned, despite being surrounded by others in usual swimming attire.

"There's really no room to swing a cat on the beach today and, while not all holiday-makers are aware today is International Danube Day, many are glad to be photographed next to a man in a suit... proudly proclaiming: Happy Birthday Danube!"

Except from Odessa News online: 3/7/14.

The club's **swim relay** - involving the Ukrainian flag as baton - takes place every year. But with 20 years of international river cooperation to celebrate, members chose to dedicate activities to Danube Day... and yes, Ivan does dress up every year, as a mark of respect to the River God.

Danube Day Partners

Zakarpatska Oblast Organization of All-Ukrainian Ecological League; Coca-Cola Beverages Ukraine; European Union Delegation to Ukraine; Tisza River Basin Authority; village councils and communities of Baranintsy, Kvasovo and Pryslip; Western Centre of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory; Tiachiv Water Management; Bessarabia Swimming Association.

Danube Day 2014: Get active for a living Danube!

For general information about the 14-country Danube Day celebrations, view www.danubeday.org or email the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR): benedikt.mandl@unvienna.org.