

Donald and Alice in... Hungary and Romania.....and Ukraine.

Ever since we first visited Prague and Vienna briefly some ten years ago we have come to think of the Balkans as a romantic area rather than the cockpit of violence and war as it has often been accurately described in history books and the daily media. We are not blind to the history of conflict in the whole area but we have felt drawn to and welcomed by the people we have met in Hungary, Romania and the Ukraine. We are particularly warmed by the "Partnership in the Gospel" which we have enjoyed with Christian believers in these countries. It is also true that strolling along the banks of the great River Danube or camping by a stream in the Carpathian hills can be romantic but I emphasize that helping to run an EEFC camp leaves little or no time for romancing.

It was through the appeals of EEFC-ers in Aberdeen and the call of Christian brothers and sisters in Hungary to "come over and help us" that we agreed in the summer of 2004 to go to the camp at Berekfürdő, a small spa town about 80 miles East of Budapest. There we found a well-organized camp staffed by enthusiasts from Scotland and Hungary and a group of about 40 youngsters aged from 8 to 18, all dead keen to improve their English and usually willing to participate in our Bible studies. They were a joy to teach- so open and friendly and, once they got to know you, full of questions about you, your family, your house, your hobbies, your pets and so on. We were really sorry to leave them.

Since 2004 we have been at camps twice and have visited/toured on three occasions to all current EEFC sites, which are located at Debrecen, Hejce, Tivadar, and Hódmezővásárhely (generally known as Hod) in Hungary and also Bucsin and Lake Lesu (Mahanaim) in Romania.

Included in visits by one or both of us have been the Lidia Home orphanage in Târgu Mureş of which EEFC were co founders some 16 years ago and are still significant financial supporters, a neighbouring orphanage called Dorcas Home, a Care Home in Oradea called Julia Home and a rehabilitation centre for alcohol/drug addicts in Ózd. Ózd is not far from Cluj Napoca where is located the children's` home to which George Macdonald, Ian Matheson and Donald drove the minibus purchased by the Falkirk congregation in 2001.

This year we visited Debrecen where we saw a very successful camp, then Bucsin and Mahanaim to discuss the detailed application of the £10,000 gift received from WFM, and Hejce where we learnt of the sudden death of János Victor, son of Rev István and Judy, who have played hosts to EEFC camps for the past 22 years. We were able to visit these good and godly people and convey to them the sympathy of all connected with EEFC at their tragic loss.

From Hejce we travelled to Ukraine in response to several appeals to restart EEFC camps there. Our chauffeur/interpreter was Rev Dáni Szábó, an itinerant preacher and long-time partner of EEFC. In Ukraine we were met at Nagydobrony by Rev Dr Laszlo Horkay the retired bishop of HRC, who is also well-known to EEFC people, and his wife. After a good lunch in their home we drove to a proposed new campsite in the small town of Szolyva (pronounced like Soeyva) and were shown round a well-fitted centre already in use for Ukrainian youth camps. Szolyva lies in a foothills area about 50 miles east from the Hungary/ Ukraine border at Csop (pron. Chop) and has about 17,000 inhabitants. It is on the main railway line from Budapest to Moscow, so intrepid travellers could stop at the EEFC camp (if established) and then carry on to visit Russia. Just think of the scope for EEFC camps there!!