



Report on the IAG Regional Conference and Post-conference Field-trip and Intensive Course in the Altai Mountains

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Participating in the 2015 Regional Conference and the follow-up intensive field course was certainly a long awaited event in my calendar for this year. Not only because I had the opportunity to finally visit the Russian Federation (and Central Asia in particular) - presently my name stands alongside these of the few Bulgarians who have ever attended any of the scientific forums organized by IAG, and also for the reason that I became the first-ever grant holder from my country. The last fact is something that undeniably boosted up my professional image back home.

The 2015 IAG Regional Conference itself was rather different in comparison to similar events I had previously attended. As a significant plus I should mention that all presentations were held in the same lecture hall, hence there was no chance to miss an interesting report simply because it coincided with another that you also wanted to hear. Besides, most attendees seemed to know each other from before, which certainly helped in providing a very warm and friendly atmosphere, where newcomers like me got easily integrated. For instance, such a trivial event as the daily conference lunch became a wonderful opportunity to get acquainted with others.

As a young researcher from a marine institution, I was very happy to attend the rather interesting presentations in coastal and submarine geomorphology. Nevertheless, my opinion is that the cited field was inadequately presented at the conference. This is a shortcoming which can be easily overcome by 2017 with the joint efforts of all members of the working group on submarine geomorphology.

Certainly, the most interesting person I met in Barnaul was Dr. Leszek Starkel from Poland, a person whom we, the young geomorphologists, nicknamed "The living history of geomorphology". Personally speaking, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that he has a solid experience in working with physical geographers and geologists from my country on topics related to the Quaternary development of the Bulgarian mountains. He knows virtually all senior geographers (and thus all habilitated lecturers at Sofia University where I studied), whose career flourished in the late 60's and the 70's of the XX century. What is more, his ability to speak several languages and also to apply them when communicating with others really struck me!

The intensive field course in Altai Republic was undeniably a mind-opening experience for all of us who were visiting this part of Asia for the very first time. Moreover, as a Bulgarian it was an invaluable opportunity to walk on the land from where the ancient Bulgars are believed to have started their migration towards the Balkan Peninsula. I would like to express once again my sincere gratitude to all our mentors for their eye-opening teaching abilities and ever-friendly attitude towards us, the less experienced youngsters. Although my scientific field is quite different from the scope of the field course, I found a lot of similarities when discussing the reconnaissance of ancient shorelines, signs of lake transgressions and regressions (after all, the Black Sea was also a huge lake during most of its Late Quaternary development), deep- and shallow-water types of sedimentation and their detection in geological profiles etc. It was very interesting to attend the gradualism-versus-catastrophism debates that spanned over the period of the field trip regarding the post-glacial evolution of Altai. However, at this stage of the scientific progress concerning the paleogeography of the area, I found the arguments of the Russian scientists more plausible. As a young researcher with two MSc degrees in landscape-related studies, whose successfully defended doctoral thesis is in the field of coastal and submarine landscape sciences, I can hardly agree with the expressed vision concerning the existence of a barren glacial environment that was totally absent of any life. Even in the harshest landscapes on Earth life does exist. Thus, namely the lack of any biological evidence on local and regional scale for such catastrophic events in the past makes me confident that further research should also cover this aspect of the area's paleogeographic evolution.

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