

HØST-ØST 1998

The Swedish orienteer Per-Olof "PEO" Bengtsson (65) has for the last 40 years spent a lot of time uniting the orienteering world. At the 1960ies the orienteering sport was organised in just a few countries, with Scandinavia and Switzerland as the leading. The young Bengtsson had a vision to make orienteering more known in the rest of the world, and has lived for that ever after.



Nowadays IOF contains about 50 countries, and the orienteering world has become much more than just Scandinavia and Switzerland. PEO has run and taught orienteering in almost 70 countries, and his company *World Wide Orienteering Promotion* has organised more than 100 journeys to all over the world.

But PEO is not completely satisfied, and has no plans about quitting his "missionary work". He wants orienteering to the Olympics, maybe most of all as a women's sport (!), he is working to get more orienteers on TV, and he is still organising journeys for orienteering people.

To check out what it is like travelling with WWOP, n3sport joined this years *Høst-Øst* ("Autumn in the East" in English)-travel for 8 days in Eastern Europe. *Høst-Øst* has been organised for 31 years, and hundreds of Scandinavian orienteers have during the years had the opportunity to meet new o-friends, and see what it's like to run orienteering in other countries. The *Høst-Øst* travels are mostly done by busses, and mostly in Eastern Europe. And this year was no exception:

Sunday

We went from Smålandskavlen at Sunday October 25th, in a bus, heading for Karlskrona (SWE). There we met the other bus, and we ate dinner together. And who were we? About 60 orienteers. Mostly from Sweden, about 15 where from Norway, and a few from Finland, Slovakia and Australia (!) Some had been at Høst-Øst many times before, and could title themselves as "legends," others had there debut this year. Approximately the half of us should travel for two weeks, the rest should head home after 8 days.

It was a good feeling! So many new friends, not only amongst us in the busses, but maybe also some "locals." In front of us were thousands of kilometres of travelling in bus and an orienteering event every day, mostly in a new country, with a different terrain, different people and different cultures. ". So many adventures!! -And of course, the exciting slogan for Høst-Øst: "You never know, when you're travelling with WWOP"



So, we finished our dinner, a little bit better known, and headed for the busses. The night should be spent at the ferry between Karlskrona(SWE) and Gdynia (POL), and we had just the time to get on it. But OOPS! One of the busses had already broken down, and we had to squeeze all of us into the one that still was driveable.

On the boat there were party and dancing, and dancing... and actually we knew each other a lot better when we early next morning woke up in Poland.

Monday

So now what?? Kilometres of Polish and Belorussian roads, and a crowded bus where 6 people had to stand between piles of luggage. "You newer know...." We often changed seats with those who had to stand, and suddenly we were at Ostróda, the arena for the first orienteering event.



Common start and loops in a fast, very nice terrain: Høst-Østs most sovereign orienteers introduced themselves for the first time: Emil Wingstedt (student world champ '96) and Emma Engstrand (Swedish night champ '98) did convincing races and won comfortable!

After some fixing on the bus, and a shower and lunch in a military camp, we headed for the Belorussian border. Everyone knew that this would be a very long bus ride, so we were well prepared, and at the backseats the party was going on for hours. But the roads were pretty poor, it was indeed very crowded, and the stop for the dinner never happened. And when we, on top of that, had to stop for almost three hours on the border between Poland and Belorussia, people were pretty exhausted when we arrived at our hotel in Grodno, Belorussia at 04 AM.



Emma Engstrand and Emil Wingstedt

Tuesday

Luckily should we stay in Grodno for almost two days, so we had plenty of time to recover for the next bus ride into Ukraine. After breakfast we competed in an event some kilometres outside the city, together with belorussian orienteers (some of them had travelled all the way from Minsk). As in Poland the day before, there were 3 courses (Long, Medium & Small). As the "not-competing- so-much-anymore" journalist I had chosen the Medium course. And it was indeed long enough



for me. Of course the terrain was a bit different from what I'm used to in Oslo, but I blame neither that, nor the map. And, I got completely lost!



When I stood there, in the middle of nowhere in a forest someplace in Belarus, and while I heard a wild dog barking not far away, and I desperately tried to find where I was, it struck me that: "WOW! This is life!" ...I don't know if I had the same thoughts five minutes later, when I was status quo, and the dog was so much nearer. But it was for sure a non-forgettable experience. And when I at last reached "home" to the bus, and we drove towards dinner, sightseeing and party in Grodno I realised that the boy who would arrive in Oslo in week, he is not the same that left for Smålandskavlen a week earlier!

So after a shower, lunch (yeah, tasted very good!!) sightseeing and shopping we dressed up for dinner and party together with our belorussian friends. And what a party! Live music, good tasting food and as much beer and champagne and... and.. you could dream of!



Wednesday

The first days of Høst-Øst we had been blessed with pretty nice weather, but when we woke up at Wednesday, it was windy and the rain was pouring down. Luckily it wasn't too bad during the event. Emma Engstrand was now tired of winning the medium course, so she ran the longest one, -and it was maybe her day to get lost. (Ha Ha)

After a shower and lunch back at the hotel in Grodno, we had to say good bye to the Belorussian orienteers, and headed now for l'Vov in Ukraine. The looong bus ride from Belarus back into Poland, and then into Ukraine should be a bit more comfortable, than earlier at Høst-Øst, because the good news was that the bus that we had left in Sweden now had been fixed, and had caught up with us. So we now split into two busses, the sleepingbus -and the partybus.





We left Grodno at 1.30 PM and the first stop was the border between Belarus and Poland. Here we stayed for 3 hours and 12 minutes. Incredible how many stupid papers you have to fill out: "Do you bring drugs?" Nope!

Back in Poland the other Bus broke down... The one we had driven all the way, now seemed tired, and needed a rest for approximately 1,5 hours. Luckily it was a petrol station nearby, so while the chauffeurs tried to fix it, we others spent the time by getting some food.

Back on the road the party continued in the party bus, and those in the sleeping bus continued sleeping. The roads were not too good, so we slowly headed for the border between Poland and Ukraine. Here we arrived about an hour after midnight, and stayed here for exactly 2 hours and 52 minutes.



If the roads had been poor in Poland and Belarus, they were nothing compared to those in Ukraine. With a speed all down to 10-15 km/h we bumped towards the city l'Vov. Our Hotel, the sanatorium l'Viv, had planned to serve us dinner the night before, but we didn't reach there until 07.44 AM (!), so we ate breakfast instead. ...You never know when you're travelling with WWOP ...

Thursday

We were pretty exhausted after the long bus ride, so the most of us spent the next hours in bed. Others headed for sightseeing in l'Vov, a city with around a million inhabitants. The contrasts compared with Grodno were pretty conspicuous. l'Vov was huge. Tramcars and traffic jam! The people were friendly, and I for the first time felt as a tourist! After a while we also found the post office, and bought stamps for the postcards written for those at home. It was nice to see that all over the city it was restoration of old buildings. l'Vov seemed as a city in progress!



After lunch it was time for the event of the day. It had started raining, and the marking to the arena wasn't too good (and there were wild dogs on the way to the arena, too). The courses were very tough, in an extremely hilly terrain. Emil Wingstet was of course the fastest runner (as always) in the mens class, and in the womens class Emma Engstrand now got beaten by Annika Björk.

The shower-facilities at our hotel were a bit "eccentric," but after a while we all got dressed up for dinner and banquet together with the local orienteers. Food, dancing and drinking, -we were so good at that!!

When the party ended some of us went downtown in l'Vov for more dancing in a discotheque. The guard in the door gave us a reminder about earlier days with cold war and "big brother is watching," but the music were more like western club, and not like what the Ukrainian girls at the party at the sanatorium had taught us about local dances.

Friday

The next day we woke up early, ate breakfast, and travelled immediately out to the event of the day. It was common start with loops, in a pretty exciting terrain. We had to hurry up, because we had to be packed up and finished lunch before 1.30 PM.

In front of us was another long bus ride. We drove from flat wasteland, to more hilly terrain, and back to the wasteland again. Ukraine is a land with different kinds of nature (and roads), but it was certainly the low living standard out in the country that made the hardest impressions on us well-fed West-Europeans. After some very bumpy hours, we finally reached the border between Ukraine and Hungary. Here we stayed for exactly 3 hours and 15 minutes. At this time we were pretty used to all the waiting at the borders, so instead of be



frustrated about the customs officers playing cards with our passports, we had a great party in the backseats of the party bus.



After an astonishing dinner in Nyiregyhaza we continued towards Budapest. Unfortunately one of the busses made a very poor route choice, and ended up an hour behind at our Hotel Garden. We were now back in a western hotel, and when we in the middle of the night caught some cabs down to a night-club, we discovered that the prizes now were western too...

Saturday



We should spend the weekend in Budapest, and compete in Spartakus Cup, some of the biggest events in Hungary. When we arrived at the arena the terrain amazed us, at least those of us that hadn't run in such a terrain before. Steep hills, open areas with grass, extremely thorny bushes which was impossible to pass, and sand-pit -like formations, all mixed up!! It was for sure very exciting to run in such a terrain, and the courses were demanding too. At least at the physical part.

Back at the hotel it was time for the last dinner all of us together, the "legends- dinner." The Høst-Øst legends are those who have spent 5 weeks or more at Høst-Øst. They have their own

exclusive society, and it was now the time to admit new members. After some songs and some ceremonial stuff, three more members were admitted.

We had now been travelling for almost a week, and those who should travel just 8 days were close to the end of this years Høst-Øst. The rest had still one week to go. Their final destination was the large events in Venice, and together with some "new ones" who had arrived in Budapest for joining Høst-Øst from there, should they travel down south through some of the countries in former Yugoslavia.



After dinner, we all together caught some cabs, and went out dancing on a night-club at the castle Var.



Sunday

For those of us that only should travel 8 days, this was the last one. I ran to the start with mixed feelings this day. Of course I was pretty tired of all this travelling and running and all these parties. So my warm bed far back home seemed very attractive to get back to. But otherwise, it was a bit sad too. So many nice people, and so many adventures. During the week I had hoped that the last day would never come! We ran, as always in 2-days events south in Europe, our courses backwards the second day. But that didn't matter, because the terrain was all the same, and I loved it!



Then the sad moment appeared, and we had to split into one South-going and one North-going bus. For those who were heading south, the fun had just begun. For us that were going home, the 1998 edition of Høst-Øst had ended. In front of us were so many kilometres of just non-stop travelling that it seemed to be no meaning figuring out the exact number. Except one stop for dinner in Praha (CZE), and three hours at the ferry between Rostock(GER) and Trelleborg(SWE) I sat on a bus all the way to Oslo, where I arrived at Monday at 11.50 PM! A bit boring, but we now knew each other so very well, and there very plenty of good memories to talk about...

When I finally jumped into my bed, I had to smile. I had had so fun, and the thoughts went to those who still were making Europe unsafe. ...You newer know when your'e travelling with WWOP... Just one year, until next Høst-Øst....



Epilog

So, after one week of "Høst-Øst -travelling", I have learned, and I have maybe changed opinion about Scandinavians in Eastern Europe. I'm sure PEO and WWOP, with all his travels has meant very much for the Orienteering World. But the times are changing.

My impression is that I have learned more about orienteering in Eastern Europe, than I have taught orienteering generally. So, if the Scandinavians in earlier days had to teach, and "the other ones," those in Eastern Europe had to learn from them, I think it's the other way around today.

So maybe the mission about the WWOP-travels isn't what I thought in front of Høst-Øst, to "convert" the peoples we meet, but to learn from them.

Erlend