



Members Bulletin

“Avalon” Historico-geographical Society

year 2013

Editor's note

We are glad to present to your attention the third issue of the annual Members Bulletin, where we as usual make our best to give an account of the activities in which “Avalon” HGS and “Avalon” PF were engaged in 2012, as well as tell you about our mutual achievements, progress and future plans.

We had expected that 2013 would turn out to be a rather eventful year rich in projects. Nevertheless the passing year has surpassed our wildest expectations. There is no doubt it may be referred to as the year of strategic partnerships and expansion of the sphere of interest.

Geographic scope of our tourism projects now covers not only Kazakhstan, but also Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The cycling community of Karaganda, VeloKa-

Dear members of “Avalon”!

raganda, has become the cycling community of all Central Kazakhstan. The number of our members and volunteers keeps growing in various ways, also geographically. We have moved to a more spacious office, moreover, now we have a second office in Almaty city, too. Our organization's staff has increased. We have participated in the founding of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society.

Naturally there are even more plans to be fulfilled. These plans concern other regions of Kazakhstan, as well as other countries, for instance, Nepal.

In 2014 “Avalon” HGS is turning 10 years old. I am sure we will approach this beautiful anniversary with even bigger achievements.

You know everything is in our hands!



Vitaliy Shuptar
President of “Avalon” HGS
and “Avalon” PF

Contents

Biodiversity and Ecotourism.....	1
VeloKaraganda.....	4
Educational courses.....	6
Expeditions.....	6
Other events.....	7
Organizational moments.....	8

Biodiversity and Ecotourism

December 2013 marked ending of the activities on the project “Ecotourism in Central Kazakhstan: conservation of the PA natural resources and creation of economic opportunities in the rural areas”

which was implemented by “Avalon” PF in cooperation with “Karaganda regional ecological museum” PA, “Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan” company and “Aktogai forest and fauna conservation department” SE with financial





support from GEF/UNDP Small grants programme.

In the framework of the project land improvement activities in the territory of Kyzylarai nature reserve have been carried out. Camps in Torkora, Shaban and Myrzakozha places were arranged, paths leading to Aksoran mountain from the south and the north-east were marked, a circle route to the waterfalls, situated in the southern part of the mountain range, was established. Three information stands regarding the rules of stay at the nature reserve were installed at the entry points to the nature reserve as road signs.

Several workshops (regarding energy saving, energy effectiveness and working with tourists) were held in Shabanbai Bi village

using our own resources, as well as in cooperation with “EcoObraz” PA. Ecotourism development council was finally founded. The latter is legally executed as a joint operation agreement. This agreement stipulates the ecosite management scheme, as well as financial relations between its parties, including the assignments to ecosite development fund which will be used for common needs. In the framework of the project five guest-houses were properly equipped with furniture, bed linen, household appliances, sanitary wares, signs, registration books, etc.

Five new tours were developed which are to be put into practice by “Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan” company, a leading tour operator in Central Kazakhstan. Kyzylarai oasis, as well as all important tourist objects in its territory, including paths, camps and guest-houses, were marked in Google Maps system. In January 2014 the printed editions of Map-scheme of Kyzylarai mountain-forest oasis, as well as Kyzylarai guidebook for local guides will come off the press.

Tourist Information centre in Shabanbai Bi village will be officially opened in the beginning of the next season. For now all necessary equipment, as well as printed materials and electronic information have been delivered and mounted in the library area on the second floor of the rural district's administration building.

In May 2013 we organized a media trip to Kyzylarai for represen-

tatives of the Kazakhstani mass media outlets. As a result numerous publications appeared in the magazines, newspapers and web-resources, a series of panoramic photos came into being on “360 cities” portal, a two-part documentary from “Unknown Kazakhstan” cycle came into existence.

Updated information on Kyzylarai and Shabanbai Bi will be added to the forthcoming editions of Lonely Planet Central Asia and Kasachstan Entdecken guide-books both of which will come off the press in 2014.

As a direct consequence of the ongoing promotion of Kyzylarai ecosite a number of its visitors has been ever growing, notably a considerable part of them are residents of Kazakhstan. In fact, the ecosite is also promoted without our input, as is evident from a large number of publications appearing on the Internet and in mass media through the help of travelers who had visited Kyzylarai.

It goes without saying that we are not going to rest on our laurels as we have such a feeling that from now on the destinies of “Avalon” and Kyzylarai have been united forever. That is why we will try to search for opportunities to continue developing tourism in the territory of the oasis and implement other socially useful projects in Shabanbai Bi and its vicinities (besides, there is a chance that these activities will be supported by the state).

In October 2013 joint team of “Avalon” PF and “Nomadic Travel Kazakhstan” company explored Ortau, another mountain oasis in Central Kazakhstan, with respect to the possibility of ecological tourism development in its territory. The oasis is of interest due to its several properties, namely natural resources and historical heritage, and we could not but use it to the benefit.

In April 2013 we proceeded to the implementation of a four-year-long project “Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains”. Activities in the framework of this project will be carried out by “Avalon” PF in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in cooperation with Nature and biodiversity conservation union of Germany (NABU), its



affiliated branch in Kyrgyzstan, Rural Development Fund of Kyrgyzstan (RDF) and Association for the conservation of biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) with the financial support of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ). The project is aimed at establishment of integrated management system for the specially protected natural areas (SPNA) in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains”. Prevention and response to the inherently unecological projects, trenching on the lands of SPNA, can also be considered one of the project's main objectives. Project activities cover the following protected areas: Ile-Alatau National Park, Almaty Nature Reserve, National Park “Kolsai Kolderi” and Chon-Kemin Nature Park. In this connection, as the project activities began, “Avalon” PF opened a new office and got staff members in Almaty, Lina Valdschmit and Saltore Saparbayev.

In general 2013 may be regarded as a preparatory stage of the project activities. However, some things have already been done. We bought all necessary equipment and spent all summer and fall in constant field trips to the project territory. A great number of meetings with partners took place, primarily with executive managements of the project-related SPNA. Our staff members participated in animals record keeping and took trips aimed at GPS-coordinates calculation and photofixation of the routes in question. Several training modules for SPNA employees and local communities' representatives were prepared. A large amount of photo material was shot. Special mention should be made of regional conference on “Biodiversity protection in the transboundary region “Northern Tien Shan mountains” which was held in October 2013 in Bishkek city. Among its participants were the representatives of state, public and scientific organizations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, as well as numerous international organizations, operating in the region.

In 2014 we are planning to carry out the greater part of project activities, including establishment



of the supporting fund of Ile-Alatau National Park and rural fund in Kurmently; promotion of the travel potential of the Northern Tien Shan mountains by means of social networks; elaboration and correction of the routes' passports, initial infrastructure development and GPS-marking of the routes; record keeping of motor transport and tourists, visiting the project territories, followed by analysis of collected data with respect to recreational load; organization of workshops for SPNA employees and members of local communities; revision of SPNA management plans; trail cameras mounting and other activities aimed at wildlife monitoring. The list is to be continued.

The fact that our activities in the Northern Tien Shan mountains are also included in the plans of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society, will hopefully have a positive impact on their effectiveness. We also hope to get help from the volunteers who love mountains and traveling, since there are a lot of things to be done

regarding the Northern Tien Shan and, thus, all kinds of help wouldn't go amiss.

In 2013 “Avalon” also took part in other events, concerned with ecotourism development and biodiversity conservation in Kazakhstan, namely the public hearings “Ski resort Kok-Zhailau – for what and for whom” (Almaty, September 2013), which had been organized by initiative group “Let's save Kok-Zhailau”; the first founding congress of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society and its topical council “Tourism, Traveling, Regional ethnography” (Astana, November 2013); round table “Aims and ways of sustainable ecotourism development at SPNA and in their vicinity”, organized by “Tabigat Alemi” company (Astana, December 2013), as well as the traditional tourism exhibitions KITF and Astana Leisure.

On May 2-3 Penjikent hosted a workshop on “Social networks and their role in tourism development”, organized by “Avalon” HGS and





Zerafshan Tourism Board (ZTB) with support of KIMEP University and the US Department of State. Over a period of two days two members of “Avalon”, Vitaliy Shuptar and Vladislav Chumilo, had been sharing their knowledge with travel industry representatives of Zerafshan valley, as well as local students majoring in tourism. They highlighted capacities of social networks in promoting the services, provided by certain guest-houses and tour operating companies, as well as promoting Zerafshan valley as a travel destination in general. This workshop became a logical continuation of Tech Forum Central Asia II, which had taken place in the end of 2012 in Almaty.

Throughout the year we took an active part in discussing tourism matters in the group “How to develop tourism in Kazakhstan” on Facebook (unfortunately, its operation has been suspended for the time being). In the course of the discussions held with the authorities and other participants of travel market in the framework of the group mentioned above and beyond it, some conceptually interesting projects were elaborated, which are to be implemented in 2014. First of all this refers to the joint project of “Avalon” and KITA (Kazakhstan inbound and domestic tourism association) regarding the Traveller's passport of Kazakhstan, as well as event tourism in the territory of Kyzylarai oasis. This year we established connections with most of the ecosites in

Kazakhstan (including potential ones) and in 2014 we are planning to share with them our experience in the field of ecological and community-based tourism, as well as assist them in the promotion of their travel potential by means of social networks and other instruments.

If things shape up in our favour, in 2014 our activities on ecotourism development will be supported by the volunteers of ASA programme, our longtime partner.

In the beginning of this year we issued the new tourist map of Central Kazakhstan (which also included the updated version of Karaganda city map) in three languages (English, Russian and Kazakh). The map was elaborated by order of Department of tourism and sport of Karaganda region.

Photographs taken by our members were made available to the Tourism industry committee for the arrangement of the official website of tourism in Kazakhstan. The photographs will also be used in the photo album about Karaganda region, issued by Nugerbekova PE. Moreover, we are currently taking part in the new project of “Silk Road media” publishing house, another longtime partner of ours, concerning the creation of the photo book “100 experiences of Kazakhstan” which is to be published in March 2014.

We do not lose hope of finding funding for the issue of our own non-profit magazine about tourism and traveling and, thus, go on searching for such opportunities.

VeloKaraganda

Our bicycle-related initiatives slowly spread beyond the pale of Karaganda city. When talking about cycling community of Karaganda, the so-called VeloKaraganda, we now also mean cycling communities of Temirtau, Zhezkazgan, Shakhtinsk and Abai. Among those the cycling community of Temirtau may be called the most considerable and demonstrative one, due to a large number of photographers in its ranks. Increase in participants of our cycling forum may be also regarded as one of the growth indicators (as of end 2013 there are 404 people, which is roughly one hundred more than last year). The list of our longtime partners in the field of bicycle promotion (US Department of State, Department of natural resources and environmental management, “EcoObraz” PA, “ALTEL” company, “Limpopo Karaganda” shop, “Bassar Electronics” company, music club and band “Pyatiy ugol”) has been expanded. Now it also includes “Eurasian bank” JSC, “Insight Media” agency and “Redbull” trading mark. In the same way as before we keep holding to our traditions of going on trips to Dariya in May and to Karkaraly in September, as well as organizing “VeloCity” in June and “Avalon-Trophy” in August.

On June 9 was held the 6th annual bicycle festival “Karaganda VeloCity”, organized by “Avalon” in cooperation with “Centre of coordination and information on ecological education “EcoObraz” PA and “Eurasian bank” JSC. The event was supported by Department of natural resources and environmental management of Karaganda region, “ALTEL” company, “Limpopo Karaganda” shop and International school project for application of resources and energy (SPARE). This time the festival had a slightly different format than always.

One of the distinctions was due to the participation of “Eurasian bank” JSC and cooperation with the initiative group “VeloAlmaty”. Thus, this time the usual festival programme was complemented with the bicycle contests for children (their youngest participant was just 3 years old). There were no losers in children contests (all participants received prizes), adults-oriented

contests, on the other hand, turned out to be very challenging and competitive. The first places in groups F16+ and M16- were taken by Nataliya Kiss and Konstantin Rudikov respectively. In the most numerous group M16+ Vladislav Kalyachkin, Anton Tretyakov and Sergey Savin proved to be the winners (all three are members of “Avalon” HGS). Moreover, Sergey Savin cheered the public with the energetic and optimistic “VeloCity anthem” of his own making.

We may not but rejoice at the numbers of “VeloCity-2013: almost a hundred of participants at bicycle march, around 50 young cyclists and more than 60 adult participants in the festival programme. Growth of the festival's level is also illustrated by the fact that it had been included in the republican plan of events held in the framework of “Year of ecological culture and environmental conservation”.

On August 11 in quite awful weather conditions, though quite favourable for such an event, we held the traditional bicycle cross-country race “Avalon-Trophy”. The bicycle race site was, however, quite unconventional for this time we decided to build race track in the vicinity of Temirtau town. The event was sponsored by “Limpopo Karaganda” shop and “Bassar Electronics” company with trade-mark “Garmin”. This year 47 cyclists took part in the race, notably they represented not only the bicycle communities of Karaganda region and Astana (the latter had joined us last year), but also those of Pavlodar and Shymkent. The first



places in the race within five subgroups were taken by Mikhail Esaulenko (Pavlodar), Dmitriy Ivanov (Temirtau, “Extreme” team), Oleg Sharipov (Temirtau, “Extreme” team), Svetlana Dymovskikh (Pavlodar) and Sergey Kovalchuk (Pavlodar). The hosts of the race (i.e. cyclists of Temirtau) managed to take a half of all medal places, notably among the winners were two members of “Avalon” HGS, Nikolai Zakharchuk and Olga Toporkova.

Karaganda cyclists in their turn took part in “XC Open Pit 2013” cross-country race in Astana, organized by the initiative group “Bikes Astana” and “Extreme athletics” PA, and took four medal places (Olga Toporkova, a member of “Avalon” became one of the winners). In April 2013 we also participated in the Ili bicycle trip which had been organized by “Astana Adventure Association” and its leader Diaz

Baiseitov in the framework of “Tamgaly-Tas” festival.

In late September by the initiative and with support from our member Vladimir Loktionov, was organized the 3rd bicycle cross in the Karkaraly mountains. It is worth mentioning that during this journey another member of “Avalon”, Sergey Savin, presented his “Anthem of the bicycle tourists of Avalon” which from now on will accompany our bicycle-related events.

As for the plans for 2014, aside from our traditional events we are planning to organize the joint bicycle trips in the neighbourhood of Astana in Astana-Karaganda-Pavlodar format. Moreover, we are thinking of organizing a more challenging long-term bicycle race in the vicinity of the Kyzylarai mountains, as well as of holding bicycle-related events in Temirtau and Zhezkazgan cities. There are some





plans on making propositions aiming to change the standard regulations, concerned with the rights of bicycle owners.

The bicycle project implemented by “Avalon” with the support of the US Department of State continues (you will recall that it is aimed at mounting of the additional bicycle stands, bicycle excursions elaboration and creation of Tourist bicycle city map of Karaganda, supplemented with QR-codes). Moreover, most of the planned activities have already been carried out. Thus, in 2013 bicycle stands were mounted near the “ALTEL” company office and “Sportika” fitness-club. Excursion routes were elaborated. As a result of social polls and votes, the most interesting tourist objects of Karaganda city were chosen, the preparation of

the respective information packages is almost completed. Taking into consideration that bicycle infrastructure develops in Karaganda at an increasingly quick rate, we decided to postpone the publication of the map until the beginning of the next season.

One should not underestimate the positive example effect. While looking at the neighbors who had already mounted the bicycle stands and seeing the respective news in mass media, some organizations which are not involved in our activities began thinking about doing the same. That is how last year Karaganda got at least 6 new bicycle stands without our direct participation (but often with our consultative support). As for Karaganda region, here we would like to tell you about the administration of Nurinskiy

district that set a good example by mounting 15 bicycle stands in its district centre, Kiyevka settlement, upon its initiative and using its own resources. This is in no small part due to deputy-akim of the district, Askhat Aimagambetov.

Educational courses

In February 2013 in cooperation with Alexander Novikov, a survival specialist and a member of “Avalon”, we held our first winter survival course. Unfortunately, respective summer course could not be held because of insufficient number of participants. Next year we are planning to continue holding such courses and expand their geographic scope to the vicinities of Astana city.

In winter-spring 2013 “Avalon” held a 4-month-long English course for travelers “Travel English” which had been elaborated and implemented by a full member of “Avalon”, Oxana Shuptar.

This summer we also held English summer field camp for teenagers (older than 13 years old) “Step out!”. Under the guidance of our American volunteers, Douglas and Shelly Fears, as well as of our member, Alexander Novikov, camp's participants got an opportunity to experience camp life and learn some of its subtleties, as well as participate in various games and improve their English. We are planning to hold such camps also in 2014.

Expeditions

Expedition activities of “Avalon” in 2013 were mostly concerned with the projects on ecological tourism development and biodiversity conservation. In concordance with this such regions as the Kyzylarai and Ortau mountain oases, as well as the Northern Tien Shan mountains (both on the sides of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) had been thoroughly explored by the members of “Avalon”. The detailed account of those activities was given earlier, in section “Biodiversity and Ecotourism”.

2013 turned out to be a very eventful year and by this reason we had to make some corrections to our plans of bicycle journeys, in fact, some of them had to be postponed until much later.



However, in 2014 we are planning to continue exploring Central Kazakhstan and would like to make a reality of some journeys in the footsteps of Russian and foreign pioneering explorers of 18th-20th centuries. It is quite possible that we will repeat the expedition “Bronze ring of Sary-Arka” which took place in 2008. At the moment our plans for 2015 (now they are also the plans of Kazakhstan National Geographic Society) include “The Jade Gate” expedition (that same expedition that we planned to go on in 2011).

We would also like to say a few words about the expedition to Eastern Kazakhstan, held by “Avalon” HGS in September 2013 in the framework of independent inspection of the territory of Bakyrchik mining enterprise for presence of the objects of historical and cultural value. This is another promising direction of our activities which we plan to develop.

In March trekking expedition “Makalu foot” (East Nepal) took place. In the course of the expedition Vitaliy Shuptar and Dmitriy Ulybyshev planned to make a journey from Tumlingtar town in East Nepal to the base camp of Makalu. Unfortunately, due to unfavourable weather conditions

these plans were not meant to be executed. On the seventh day of the trek the team of “Avalon” was forced to turn back.

In December 2013 expedition in the footsteps of a Russian traveler and writer, Peter Goullart, took place in the Malaysian part of Borneo island. This journey made by Vitaliy Shuptar, Yelena Kim and Marina Belyayeva was another step taken by “Avalon” in order to popularize Goullart's heritage. You will recall that in 2007 our team already went on a trip in the footsteps of the traveler by visiting Yunnan and the legendary Lijiang. This time the goal was set to cast light on the second important period of Goullart's life, the years he spent working in Sarawak, which he later described in his book “River of the White Lily: Life in Sarawak”.

Other events

In 2013 we held Traveller's club in Karaganda Ecological Museum twice. In April we welcomed in our club Anton Krotov, a famous traveler, president of the Academy of free travel, writer and author of more than 40 books, whose travel biography includes more than 75 countries all over the world. In November the lovers of mountain trekking and Nepal got together in order to listen



to Vitaliy Shuptar and Dmitriy Ulybyshev who shared their knowledge in this field, based on the experience gained during their journeys to Nepal in the last years, as well as during their latest expedition.

During 2013 members of “Avalon” took part in organizing and holding of “Garage Sale” charity events which had taken place in Karaganda EcoMuseum several times.

Celebration of the ninth birthday



of “Avalon” HGS, which took place in nature's lap to the north of Karaganda went quite fine.

Organizational moments

In comparison with 2012 this year the number of “Avalon” HGS members has increased by 70 per cent. Their geographic scope has expanded as well, partly due to new people (most of whom are our old good friends), partly because members of “Avalon” travel all over the world and change their location. However that may be, at the moment “our” people are to be found not only in Kazakhstan, but also in Russia, the Netherlands, Germany, Azerbaijan and Australia.

Membership fees (they still make 2400 tenge per person annually) help us to cover partially the society's expenses (by the way, now you can make payments via

Yandex Money). However, there is still quite little money for carrying our large-scale activities. We are kindly asking all our members to pay membership fees for the respective calendar year in time.

We are expanding the list of members' privileges. Since last year all the full and associate members of the society, as well as all “young avalonians” are entitled to be granted 5% discount upon purchasing goods (GPS-receivers, radiostations, optics, etc.) in the Karaganda branch of “Bassar Electronics”. The full list of members' privileges is as always available at the website of “Avalon”.

In 2014 we are planning to considerably extend the domain space and further develop our main web-resource www.guide.kz. We're going to make it even more bilingual, special attention will be paid not only

to its Russian, but also English versions.

Aside from the website and bicycle forum, we continue using social networks, including Facebook (403 subscribers as of end 2013) and V Kontakte (533 subscribers). We have recently begun working with Google+ too. The respective pages have been created for establishing connections between the society and its members (present and future ones), as well as for contacts between the members themselves. Please use them!

Moreover, “Avalon” is now to be found on Foursquare and Google Maps, too. So, visit us, check yourselves in, make “Avalon” even more famous.



Present bulletin is distributed among the members of HGS “Avalon” and young avalonians in printed form. It is available to the third parties only in the electronic form, which is usually published with a bit of a delay. Just as usual, we would like to kindly ask you to keep us updated about your contact data and notify us about the change of post address and e-mail in proper time, so that we would be able to deliver you this bulletin, as well as other pieces of information about our society's activities.

Detailed information about “Avalon” and its realized projects is available at www.guide.kz, as well as on our Facebook-page: www.facebook.com/avalongeographic, V Kontakte-page: www.vk.com/club27602301 and Google+ <https://plus.google.com/110564846475924275058>. We are also on Foursquare: www.4sq.com/17vV0oT and Google Maps (Google Places): <https://plus.google.com/101035541698303947937/about>

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