

As we stood in Edinburgh station on a sunny day last May, we asked ourselves "How do we recognise six Ukrainian chemists who have just crossed Europe by train?"

It all started when Edinburgh University Chemistry Society received a letter from the then Kiev State University Chemical Society proposing an academic and cultural exchange. After many agonizing months of letter-writing and fraught international 'phone calls, travel arrangements were finalised and our Ukrainian visitors: Professor Vasily Sukhan (Head of Faculty); Dr Sergei Nedil'ko (Sub-Head of Faculty); Dr Vladimir Zaitsev, Dr Igor Fritsky (Lecturers in Inorganic Chemistry); Dr Igor Kadenko (Research Fellow) and Ms Elena Gerasimenko (Undergraduate Student) had arrived. During their two week stay, we gave them a flavour of the chemistry teaching and research carried out at Edinburgh University. They also visited Scottish Nuclear at Torness, ICI Grangemouth and Heriot Watt University.

It was not all work though! Our guests were keen to visit the many art galleries and museums in Edinburgh as well as sampling 'local brews' and meeting fellow Ukrainians living in Edinburgh. An unseasonal heatwave displayed Scotland at its best, with an outing to Pitlochry and the Cairngorm mountains. The highlight was a tour of Blair Atholl Whisky distillery - in Russian! The first leg of the exchange concluded with an informal reception and ceilidh, where our Ukrainian visitors threw themselves wholeheartedly into the Scottish country dancing.

The second leg ...

Our introduction to the former Soviet Union began on the border at Brest in Byelorussia, when we had to leave the train at 2 a.m. to get our visas. After two hours, we returned to the platform - to find our train gone! After another two stress-filled hours it pulled back into the station, at a different platform. We had not realised that the trains have to change to a different gauge of track at the border. When we finally arrived at Kiev station it was with great relief that we recognised familiar faces!

Kiev is a beautiful city, with many awe-inspiring churches and historic buildings. The Ukrainian people are very friendly. Every time we travelled by bus or metro, people started talking to us - but not

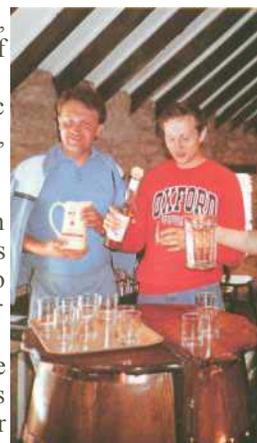
organ recital, a show of traditional folk music and dancing, and a performance of "Swan Lake". It was difficult to relax over a beer, however, as there are only three pubs in Kiev - one for every million people!

Our visit was not confined to Kiev; we went to the landscaped park in Uman, (about 100 miles south of Kiev) to admire the picturesque gardens. Ukrainian hospitality was much in evidence throughout our visit, with a weekend barbecue at a dacha and a lavish farewell meal at Professor Sukhan's home. Many toasts to friendship and future collaboration were made, accompanied by some wonderful food.

It was sad to say goodbye to our Ukrainian friends, but everyone involved benefited from this unique experience. We have set up a collaboration with Kiev University, and this summer, a Ukrainian student will spend three months in Edinburgh working on environmental monitoring of radioactivity in soils and vegetation. In 1994, we hope to send a student from Edinburgh to Kiev to work on a related project. If any other chemical societies are interested in this sort of exchange, we would urge you to write those letters - it is well worth it!

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KULTURE SHOCK IN KIEV

always in English! We spent some time in the Chemistry Department at the University, meeting members of staff and discussing their chemistry. We also visited several chemical and scientific institutes (focusing purely on research).

We were treated to a fascinating walking tour of Kiev with Igor Fritsky as our guide including visits to the churches of St Sophia and St Andrew, and the Lavra monastery, with its underground catacombs. Culturally, there is a lot happening in Kiev, and we attended a Bach

