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ASSOCIATION

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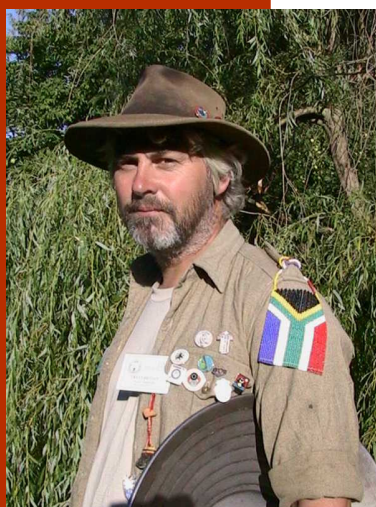


*The 2004 World Goldpanning Championships
Slovakia*



Paul Thurkettle

“Gold prospectors are clever and inventive people and over many years I have seen many different designs of goldpan tried in competitions. But now is different”



Editorial

Welcome to Golden Times!

It seems a long time ago since I went through the stressful process of “gluing” all the articles together and getting it out to everybody. I hope you like the new style, please as always give us feedback and continue to send your articles to us. At the 2004 WGA meeting, all Nations pledged to send articles to make Golden Times, your truly international magazine. Submissions have

improved but I hope to make GT a 40 page magazine!

We have many ideas for the future and I look forward to talking with you this year in person and by email.

This issue will be created for distributed by email, web site and in print. We are also investigating producing a quality printed version to each nation and it's members. For now in whatever form you see this, enjoy! Paul

A year is a long time in gold prospecting! I feel that so many things have happened in my first year as President, and mostly all good things! I am also pleased that the new WGA board is working well together and that the Rules Committee seem to work tirelessly to give us better and fairer competitions. I am also proud of the way good

prospectors will quietly step forward to help when help is needed. The world of gold prospectors is unique, it has made my life much richer and more colourful. We are special and seem to have a special freedom - great isn't it! There are a few things that we need to think about and I would like to share my thoughts with you here.

Last year, with a paper called '5 +5', I asked everybody who reads Golden

Times and each of the National Representatives to give me their thoughts on what is good, and bad, about the WGA. This was to help me as the new President to know what people think and want. I have now had the opinion of many people and this is very helpful to me - thank you all who replied to me.

Gold prospectors are clever and inventive people and over many years I have seen many different designs of goldpan tried in competitions. But now is different. The 'Swedish Flat' or 'Ferrari', as some people call it, is a very fast and very beautiful pan designed for racing. It has set record winning times for men and women in the last few years and this is wonderful - except that the traditional goldpan designs are being abandoned. In the men's final in Slovakia last year I think I saw only three traditional pans against 27 Ferraris: of course the Ferraris won everything! People are saying to me that we must have the best of the new, but not lose the best of the old. The rules committee have been asked to look at how we could have two

classes, an open class (where the rules are the same as now) and a new official 'traditional class' where we keep and practice the skills of using more traditional goldpan designs. I think that this is fair and it will make our championships more exciting to watch. Each official category we have makes a new world champion every year, so we already have several 'world champions' - a man, a woman, a veteran, a child and, of course, the whole national team. It is time to make a traditional champion before there are not 27, but 30 new Ferrari pans in every final!

'No tourists 'till Friday' - I heard this in Slovakia as a slogan for those people who want a fairer selection process for the championships. And, if possible, a selection process that keeps most people involved in the competition all week. Now, after they have travelled across the world, about half of all people competing are out on their first day: and become 'tourists'! Also I have talked with very unhappy people about the heats over the last few years. They showed me the very different cut-off times in the elimination heats and I agree it is not fair for one cut-off time to be about 9 minutes and another, maybe the next heat, to be around 23 minutes! Again our hardworking Rules Committee have been asked to bring ideas to the next meeting of the Council of National Representatives in South Africa this year.

I like these ideas very much. I know we enjoy our world competitions, but it is also very serious. We are competing with careful and fair rules to show the world that those people who win medals in the official classes are absolute masters in the ancient skill of goldpanning - and should have the respect of the gold prospecting world.

The new website, www.worldgoldpanningassociation.org is excellent - I hope you have had the chance to visit it. Do please help to keep it up to date. We will work now on adding more to the site, like maybe a 'For Sale and Wanted' page to help prospectors to find, or sell, gold books and equipment.

Mid-winter is the time for dreaming! I have a new plan for a gold prospecting trip in the summer - I hope you too have good plans being made. And I remember warmly the excellent world competition our friends in Slovakia gave us in 2004, and I look forward with excitement to the very special competitions our friends in South Africa and Spain are planning for us in 2005! I think we can all look forward to a good year of gold adventures, and friendship, and the special freedom which is enjoyed so much by gold prospectors.

Vincent Thurkettle



The World and Slovakian Presidents ride in style

Want to know when the competitions are around the world?

**Goto:
The WGA website:**

**[http://
www.worldgoldpanningassociation.org](http://www.worldgoldpanningassociation.org)**

Organizers:

**Remember to let the Communications director know of your championship
thurkettle@hotmail.com**

“The floor is yours WGA”



**“Attended by over
6100
geologists from
141 countries”**



The WGA on the 32th International Geological Congres in Florence

2004 is over and with it another series of good goldpanning meetings and events. I am impressed how much effort you are able to put in the preparation of many serious and funny events, and how our small family develops and varies.

The last championship successfully organized in Revištské Podzámčie was an extraordinary event for me, as I had to miss the most important last two days of our top competitions. For the first time (and the last, hopefully), I arrived to the championships not to compete. I left the wonderful place and you long before the end to take part in the 32th International Geological Congress which was held in Florence, Italy.

The geological congress is held once a four years and usually serves as the biggest show in geology, Earth

Science and associated professional activities generally. As such, it is also a unique representative forum with huge impact on the geological public. It is usually divided into several levels and many special and topical sections. I felt that once I was going to participate in it, as the executive WGA vice-president, I had to take the advantage of the moment and introduce the WGA to the public.

I presented our World Goldpanning Association in the symposium „Geotourism and Geoparks“. This interdisciplinary topic points to the elevated interest in natural rocks, landscape, earth materials and traditional skills related to local mining, protection of natural and cultural heritage, and a new role of Earth sciences in natural tourism and preservation.

I listened to many contributions on newly born geoparks, touristic areas based on valuable geological features or cultural landscape formed through centuries by exploitation of raw materials. Each of these contributions were specific and unique, but also kind of very similar to each other: how to protect the features listed first, then how to pack nicely a certain part of a country for advertising (the more remote and exotic the better), offer it and sell to tourists. At the beginning to the pioneering and enthusiastic tourists preferring the pristine nature to the luxury, and later to feed the crowd by ready made “meals” demanded by standardized tourism business.

In spite of the fact that the presentation was the last in the section before lunch, I had a feeling that listeners woke up a bit. They apparently registered the main differences from the previous speeches: crazy title, the WGA is a voluntary worldwide network, running on non-commercial basis, and it does attract people, lets them do funny things, prospect for gold and gems, see remote countries and sing and dance together, and does not leave much junk over! The powerpoint presentation was completed just few short days before



the Congress in Revištské Podzámčie with the acknowledged contribution and eye of Vincent, Fred, Kim, Arturo, Koos and Richard. I hope that some fragments of that very special atmosphere born from the interference between medievaly natural and dynamic Slovakia, gold panners from many world corners, and animate coulourful South Africa was successfully transferred from the Golden City to the audience in the room No.36.

After my speech, I was surprised by several people who contacted me with their comments: the moved guy from Finland who supervised the Gold Symposium in Tankavaara for years, and by chance appeared at the right symposium. He was pleased to unexpectedly hear about the role of Tankavaara in the history of the WGA. Another good moment came with the official representatives from South Africa, who had no clue about the WGA and the 2005 championships being now prepared at Pilgrim's Rest. I hope I encouraged them to contact Christine and other organizers from SA and perhaps to help with some geological programme for goldpanners, or even just to come and see the event. The Ukrainian geologist from the University of Kyjev was amazed by the existence of such a crazy organization like WGA and by its wideworld activities. Our expansion to the East can start now...



I had a good talk to Tatjana, the young lady from Croatia, who takes

care for the geopark activities in the Drava River Valley. Drava is goldbearing river with a nice and visible gold. Tatjana would like to complement already established attractions by the tourist goldpanning facility. She just needs few pans and a good teacher!! Why not to go and help her?

After all, my impression was that our efforts were not in vain, and that at least some people now know what we are doing. The message for us is to keep aside from the main commercial channels, to preserve the effect of free motion, picturesque clothing and self-service entertainment at our events. The abstract was published in the 32 IGC electronic abstract volume, and the WGA web page address was also given there. I sent Paul the full version of the powepoint presentation to be used wherever it might be necessary.

Before we meet again, I have to give a word of sympathy to one who spent many good moments with us. I am very sad we will no more meet our friend Gertraud Schmidwenzl from Germany, who was for years one of the most reliable and supportive member of our meetings. If only she could enjoy our events looking from behind the invisible corner.

Good luck to all panners, to the clubs preparing new events, and especially to our friends from Navelgas and Pilgrim's Rest. Hope to see most of you in summer.

Yours, Veronika Stedra

In Memorium ..



Gertraud Schmidwenzl

Dear Goldpanning friends!

My mother Gertraud Schmidwenzl (Veitz) lost the hardest competition of them all, she died on Monday the 17th January 2005 early in the morning.

She was a Goldpanner since 1986 and won lots of competitions over the years. In 1987 she was the Goldpanning World Champion and until 2004 she took part and won lot of national and International prizes. In 1989 she organized the World Goldpanning Championships in Germany. Winning was not important to her, asked what is the special thing for you to pan gold, she would answer, "We

Goldpanners are a big international family and it's the greatest thing to meet each other around the world, sit by the fire and to be in nature.

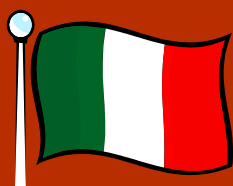
She never got tired showing Goldpanning to the public in Germany. The children were the most important thing for her, she always said, children today are the future for us Goldpanners.

We all take her words always in our hearts and we should never forget her. We will miss a great Goldpanning woman, mother and grandmother. I want to try to continue her good work into the future.

The best wishes and good luck for this year!

Isabella

Italian Schools of Gold, Past and Present



Those of you, our Golden Friends who are in regular contact with us or have visited us in Biella, will probably have heard the name Diego Rossetti mentioned. In fact, in early October, just one month ago as I write, we panned in the third edition of the annual Diego Rossetti Memorial Trophy, held at our Goldpanners' Arena at Vicimula. This Event is proving itself to be increasingly popular with each edition and this year it included panners and friends from five different nations including South Korea and the U.S.A. -old friends who return to pay homage to the memory of a good man who is no more. Competitors put aside for once their prized 'Ferrari's' as required by the rules of this Event and pan only with the traditional batea, similar to that used by Diego. Forgive me if I make a slight digression here to remark that the best results are not achieved by names associated with very fast and technical pans but indeed that the results table could be an INVERTED list of the winners in WGA competitions!

But just who WAS this man whose name is legendary among Italian panners? Diego was none other than the first 'maestro' of gold panning in the Biella area. He could recall the days when, what is a hobby for most of us, was vital as a means for making ends meet in difficult times. He was an expert in his field, one of those famed for being able to make the gold 'hop' in the pan. But he was much more than that. He was a quiet man, a true gentleman. -And friend and mentor, as well as teacher, to many of our members, including Arturo, our President. Diego particularly loved the company of children and was gifted in his approach to teaching them. He spent countless hours and days on the banks of

the Elvo, patiently and lovingly transmitting to these children his skills and his passion for the activity of gold panning. In his day, lessons were informal, loosely structured and, as befitted the times, leisurely. Children were not obliged, as they now are, to divide their free time into micro-sessions which claim to cover, in a single weekend, every conceivable facet of life (and sub-life) on the planet and which, more often than not, are stress-inducing to a young psyche...

Diego passed away too soon, but our Association in Biella honours him annually with a traditional-style competition, the trophies for which are donated by the Rossetti family and include, rightly, a really bumper one for the Junior category!

One of the primary aims of the Biella Gold Prospectors' Association is that of promoting a knowledge and love of this activity. Since Diego left us, we have moved into a new century, a new age in



Old friends return to pay homage

many ways, and while striving to maintain the ethos of his mission, we have had to move on. A structured school of gold panning, brainchild of President

Arturo, has been created, which caters for children of all ages and from a wide geographical area. There are seven volun-



Ana works with the children

tary 'teachers' including the 'headmistress', Anna Salogni, who runs her school with great efficiency but also with maternal warmth and tangible enthusiasm and energy. She really is a worthy successor to Diego and the little ones adore her.

An average of 800 children are introduced annually, in all weathers, to gold panning at the Victimula school. Lessons usually take place at the troughs in the Arena. The reason for using this area rather than the Elvo river, as in Diego's day, is two-fold. In the first place, the Victimula Arena is adjacent to both the Bessa Nature Reserve and the Museum of Gold and is thus logistically preferable for our young guests who, with their short little legs, also visit both these sites on the same day and often under a searing sun! Our choice of location for the

school, however, was further determined by safety factors and prompted by a couple of close shaves on the Elvo banks. We were forced to trade romanticism for safety! While an adult neo-goldpanner can exult, relatively without risk, in the liberty of working along a stony stretch which leads temptingly down to an auriferous water-course, most young children are simply attracted to the water, as moths to a flame. On finding themselves set loose all together, and coming, as many of them do, from large urban settlements, they are unaware of the dangers inherent in slippery rocks and treacherous currents. Children will, after all, be children.

Anna and her team often look after groups of 50 or more youngsters at a time and on one (memorable!) occasion this summer they had a group of 104 kindergarten kiddies! That takes patience as well as skill. Our Association in fact, on reflection, wisely decided last year to take out an insurance policy to cover injuries which we fervently hope and pray will never occur...

At the start of a typical lesson, Anna and her staff ensure that the little panners are suitably



Diego is gone, but not forgotten

at-tired and comfortably positioned, all with a clear view of the demonstration which introduces the lesson. A pan of sand and gravel, gold flakes al-

ready seeded, has, prior to their arrival, been prepared for each child and they have been helped to fill their tubes with clean water. When the moment comes for them to try their hand, the teachers mingle with them, providing the necessary assistance. Most of the youngsters quickly learn the washing movements but experience more difficulty when they get down to the concentrate, and teachers are in great demand for help at this point.

I asked Anna to share one or two of her particular experiences with us. She provided me with several anecdotes... On one occasion, during the excruciatingly hot and humid summer of 2003, a party of exhausted primary-school children who were taking part in a summer camp, trudged into the Arena on their return from a particularly torrid Bessa park and simply flopped down, fully clothed, to recline in the cool water of the troughs, utterly refusing to have a panning lesson!

Then there was the day of mayhem when 70 children from Turin poured out of their coach, only to discover that 70 pairs of rubber boots had not been loaded onboard! Try resolving that, bearing in mind that Italian youngsters (and adults too) invariably dislike panning bare-footed in troughs...

Anna has often mentioned the delight expressed by children, particularly those who live in major cities like Milan, on coming across specimens of tadpoles, tiny green frogs, dragonflies, crickets and brightly coloured butterflies, all of which abound (together with the rather less-beloved native, the mosquito!) at Victimula.

And so, our School of Gold would seem to be much more than what its name implies. It plunges the children into the heart of a thriving eco-system, which, on account of the novelty factor, they often find quite thrilling. They are led to experience firsthand what no TV documentary, however impelling, could hope to transmit...

Finally, retrieving their gold is,

of course, of paramount importance! Even the older children get so excited at their first glimpse of flakes in the bottom of their pans that they yell with delight, temporarily casting off that grown-up composure so dear to them! Occasionally, a particular child may express disappointment at the dimensions of the golden flakes, having been misled, perhaps by the movies or by some misguided adult, into expecting to find nuggets of Klondike proportions! But no child is ever sent away empty-handed. Anna's team sees to that! And each child jealously guards the tube containing the fruits of his labour, his new treasure, to be scrutinised and re-counted ten times over, during the coach-trip home and later proudly displayed to all and sundry. And not forgotten.... We of the Biella Gold Prospectors' Association want that child to return. We need him, in a certain sense. Children are the future. - For our beloved activity as much as for any other. Thank you Diego and thank you Anna.

Geraldine McCrossan

Want to see your adventures in Golden Times?

Send your articles in (with pictures if possible) to:

thurkettle@hotmail.com
(please put the word gold in the subject line)

If required we can translate your article or provide help to you



Is there gold in the Netherlands?

This is the question we, Dutch, are often asked when we are at the championships all over Europe. We always had to say we don't know, and it bothered us.

So, the only way to find out was to search for gold, within the borders of the Netherlands.

This, however, sounds easier than it is, because what is the best location to search for gold? We do not have mountains, almost all our streams and rivers are canalized and there has never been a prosperous metallic mineral mining of any kind in the Netherlands (the only mining activities in the Netherlands have been coal, gas, sand, marl and salt). All of them are not associated with gold.

The only thing we did know is that gold can be found in the streams in the Ardennes (in Belgium). In addition, gold has been



The Dutch team

found in the upper (German) part of the Rhine River.

We decided to search for gold in the streams of Zuid Limburg, which is the closest to the Ardennes. A group of 5 per-

sons (Dirk Swager, Frenk Hink, Walter van der Poel, Marcel Berkhout and Ruurd van Wijhe) went to the beautiful city of Valkenburg and stayed in the hotel called "De Goudsberg" (meaning: "The golden mountain").

Zuid-Limburg is the southernmost part of the Netherlands and the highest mountain is situated in this area (an astonishing 321 m above sea level).

There are a few streams that looked promising. And we decided to search in two streams ("de Geul" and "de Gulp") at the point where they flow across the Dutch-Belgian border.

So first: "De Geul". After a quick scan we found a nice spot (although there was a warning for the presence of algae) and started. Because gold panning is relatively an unknown activity in the Netherlands, different people stopped and asked why we were standing in the middle of a river. After two hours of panning and sluicing (with 5 persons) we decided to try to find our luck elsewhere, because no gold was found at this spot.

Next stop: "De Gulp". Again a quick scan of the area was needed in order to reach the actual stream, but a nice spot(s) (with extremely curious cows) was found, and after a refreshing lunch we started to wash and sluice with increasing enthusiasm.

After another two hours the sluices were cleaned and.....

ONE IMMENSE PIECE OF GOLD!

Frenk and Dirk found a piece of gold so small, that a magnifying glass is needed to see it. But it was unmistakably gold. The location of the discovery can be



seen in the picture, together with the five hard workers that found it.

So now the question "Is there gold in the Netherlands" can be answered with a positive: "YES".

And although we only found a small piece, all of us returned home with a satisfied feeling.

Ruurd van Wijhe

News from "Down under"

From Anne Doran (reproduced with kind permission of the Maryborough Advertiser)

Man strikes gold near Maryborough

By Sarah Mennie

A 2500 gram gold nugget was discovered between Maryborough and St Arnaud last Friday.

South Australia man, Len Brennan, had been prospecting for nine hours when he struck gold.

"I'd had a very long day," Len said. "I hadn't found any other gold, most days are like that but the days you do find something are usually quite rewarding," he added.

Len has been coming to Maryborough to prospect during the summer "for years".

"If I do well I normally stay.

"I've always had a good time but nothing that's any better than that in one piece," he said of his new found nugget.

While Len explained he expected his nugget to fetch a minimum of \$27 per gram, which places its value in excess of \$65,000, he said it would be difficult to estimate an accurate dollar figure for his find.

"I plan to sell it but the market will have to be tested," he said.

Len came across the hidden treasure late on Friday evening.

"I dug it out early Saturday morning," Len said.

"As soon as I woke up I thought about the noise I'd heard and still thought it sounded like mineralisation, so I had another go.

"I removed a couple of inches of top soil and it sounded exactly what it looks like.

"It was down about 26 inches deep in cement-like ground.

"To be honest I was disappointed. "I expected a piece of gold the size of a football from the noise it was making.

"I prised it loose from the bottom and took it out to throw it from the hole and then realised from the weight of it that it was the nugget.

"It was smaller than I anticipated," he said.

After checking with his detector that there was nothing left, Len took his nugget back to camp and boiled it in his billy.

"That gets all the gunk off," he explained.

"Then I was absolutely enthralled in it, I was elated . . . very excited," Len smiled.

He had no means of weighing it where he was so Len broke camp.

"I cleaned up leaving no trace," he said.

Len explained he has discovered several memorable pieces.

"I've been at it since I was about 10 and I don't expect to find a piece of gold bigger than that," he said.

Len will return to South Australia in time to celebrate his 60th birthday at the end of March.

In the meantime he is reluctant to return to the area where he found the nugget.

"Too many people know about it now and too many know what my vehicle looks like," he chuckled.

Len's nugget will be on display at Coiltek Gold Centre for the next month.



Eureka . . . Len Brennan holds the 2500 gram nugget he detected at an undisclosed location between Maryborough and St Arnaud last week. 25/02/05 02

Reports on the 2004 World Goldpanning Championships



A review of the World Goldpanning Championships 2004, as seen by the organizers.

1. Organisation of the championship and the concomitant activities.

The feverish rush during preparing and organising the championship is just the history now. There was still something to be arranged a few days after, however, the life returned back to the beaten tracks of the every day's busy routine. My intention is to inform about the championship those participants, who are glad to return back in memories, and also those, who for some reasons were not able to come under the Reviste castle, on the bank of gold-bearing river Hron.

The championship program was published in our guide book, which was distributed for the first time during the World championship 2003 in Switzerland. It could also been found on the internet.



Historical map of the Middle Slovakian mining region

The first event was supposed to be the excursion to gold deposits in Romania. Unfortunately, due to the low number of interested, it did not take place.

However, there was interest in excursions to several localities in Middle Slovakia, organised before the competitions. During six days the following localities of historical gold, silver, and copper were visited: Nova Bana, Pukanec, Banska Bystrica, Spania Dolina, Kremnica, Banska Stiavnica, Zlatniky, and Hodrusa-Hamre.

As part of the concomitant events, was the exhibition "Gold and Goldpanners" in Banska Stiavnica on May 29 - September 15, 2004. In the first part, the visitors could see the mining techniques used in Slovakia, documented by photos and models. The dominant showpiece was the original wooden sluice used in the 1st half of the last century for goldpanning in river Danube. Further were photos from the different goldpanning events. The last part demonstrated the achievements of Slovakian goldpanners on the international competitions. The samples of alluvial gold from different localities in Slovakia and abroad were also exhibited.



Original wooden sluice used in the early 20th century

The ceremonial opening of the championship was on Wednesday, August 18th, afternoon. The ceremony culminated by introduction and selling of Slovak - English book "Zlato na Slovensku - Gold in Slovakia, compiled to the occasion of championship. The good mood of the evening was maintained by brass music.

Thursday evening was devoted to Slovakian folklore and introduction of the European championship 2005 in Spain.

The invitation evening to world championship 2005 in South Africa had a splendour character. The organisers certainly persuaded even those goldpanners, who did not intend to attend World championship 2005. Pleasant contribution to the evening, and to the whole championship were the performances of South African folklore group. They had also performed in nearby Zarnovica and Kremnica.

The culmination of the cultural and social program was the country ball on Saturday, August 21-t.

2. Competitions in goldpanning.

The competitions were divided by organisers to: free, unofficial, and official.

Free competitions on Wednesday, August 18.

The intention was except for the fun of participants to familiarise with the environment and competition material. Also the organising and time measuring should be tested. The following competitions were in offer:

- Goldpanning polythlon

The competition consisted of log's sawing, stone throwing at target [Carpathian bear], goldpanning, beer drinking. Eight three member teams were competing.

- Goldpanning on sluices, washing the sand right from the river Hron. Only gold grains above 0.315 mm were accepted. The champions recovered in one hour 22 grains over 0.315 mm.



Performance of the South African folklore group

- Golden fever, goldpanning for the prize of Hodrusa-Hamre village master. It consisted from mass panning of implanted gold grains from a large pile of sand, and final panning of 30 competitors, who recovered 30 biggest grains in the initial part.

- Enduro, competition of individuals [75 kg of sand] for the prize of mayor of Zarnovica. 30 goldpanners participated.

Unofficial competitions.

They are an integral part of each championship. They took part along the official competitions from Thursday, August 19. to Sunday, August 22. in these events:

- children under 12 years [18 competitors]

- women beginners [30 competitors], men beginners [41 competitors]

- open 2 member teams [99 teams], open 3 member teams [77 teams]

- open 5 member teams [29 teams]

The number of competitors proved the popularity of these events. The competitions of the proficient men are still an unsolved problem.

. Official competitions.

They were in progress from Thursday to Sunday, August 19-22. In different categories the following people won the medals:

Juniors under 16 years [38 competitors]

- Carmen Goodwin - South Africa, 3:03,26 min.

- Benny Wallin - Sweden, 3:13,46 min.

- Tari Rossi - Finland, 4:05,68 min.

- Anita Patala - Finland, 1:31,48 min.

- Ulla Kalander-Karlson - Sweden, 1:46,03 min

- Raisa Arho - Finland, 1:52,25 min

Men [284 competitors]

- Anti Seppälä - Finland, 1:20,71 min

- Johan Gronlund Naantali - Finland, 1:43,37 min

- 3. Toni Bichsel - Switzerland, 1:49,05 min.



Veterans [82 competitors]

1. Erkki Rannikko - Finland, 1:32,76 min.
2. Ape Järvinen - Finland, 1:35,56 min.
3. Kuisma Isakki - Finland, 1:39,09 min.

National teams [15 teams]

1. Finland, 9:42,79 min.
2. Netherlands, 11:55,81 min.
3. Spain, 14:17,27 min



4. Statistics.

The participation of countries. The first figure means the total number of participants both in unofficial and official competition. The second means the number of participants in official competitions.

1. Slovakia 130/10
2. Finland 99/92
3. Czech Republic 75/64
4. Poland 63/50
5. France 35/32
6. Germany 32/28
7. Italy 29/29
8. Austria 26/25
9. South Africa 25/14
10. Sweden 24/24
11. Spain 23/18
12. Netherlands 21/18
13. Switzerland 20/20
14. Great Britain 13/12
15. Australia 11/9
16. Canada 5/5
17. Japan 2/2
18. Belgium 2/2
- USA 0/0

The number of medal won by the participating countries: gold, silver, bronze.

1. Finland: 4, 2, 3
2. South Africa: 1, 0, 0
3. Sweden, 0, 2, 0
4. Netherlands, 0, 1, 0
5. Spain, 0, 0, 1
6. Switzerland, 0, 0, 1

Also this time, the dominant position of goldpanners from Finland, lasting for several years, has been confirmed.

5. Organisation and technical backup.

World championship I goldpanning can be considered as a mass event. After having experienced similar competitions, we intended not to underestimate its preparation and running. In the preparation and running participated eighty members of the Slovakian goldpanning association and other volunteers. They were ready to toil just for food and free camping. Important was also the help of the firefighting and rescue group from the Ministry of Interior, who took care of the hygienic facilities and supplied food for organizers. For the case of bad weather they also erected a large tent, however, thanks God, it was not used.

Time measuring was executed by a commercial company. Financially and personally contributed the Ministry of Environment. An immense support we received, in all aspects, from the town of Zarnovica. Great support we also received from our sponsors and advertising partners.

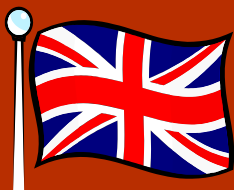
6. Afterwards thoughts.

I would like to divert my thoughts to some other subject, to flat competition pans called "gramophone records". They were developed, as many before, [perhaps less successfully] exclusively for the competition purposes. They have little common with those used for panning in free nature. Perhaps, it need not be panning any more, but just washing off the competition sand. The question is, do we want to leave the traditions of being in the free nature, or to go to squares and sport stadium. We gave to the last championship the epithet "Return to nature". By this we wanted to express, which way is closer to us. However, this should be decided by WGA. There are more alternatives. Either the "gramophone records" will be approved, or banned, or the competition would be divided to panning by the new and traditional pans. Further solution could be two rounds competition on new and traditional pans. By my opinion, the WGA decision should come before long. Of course, the opinions among the goldpanners are different.

7. Conclusions.

In my contribution I would not like to assess the organization of the championship. I leave it to others. The fact is, we had to put into it a lot of physical and mental effort. I am sure, it was worth of, and I hope, the majority of visitors liked it in Slovakia.

Richard Kaňa II. Chief of the organising group



Slovakia 2004

Thirteen Britains travelled to the World Goldpanning Championships in Slovakia, a few of us spent a couple of nights in Bratislava and even though one member had his passport go missing (the British Embassy came to the rescue) this did nothing to spoil our enjoyment of this beautiful city. Some made their way to Revistske Podzamcie by train some by bus, the bus was a fairly direct route with only a couple of stops. We arrived in Zvolen at 4pm only to find the last bus to Zarnovica had already left. With a little help from a friendly local we got a taxi - sounds good doesn't it, and it was - that is apart from the driver not knowing

where he was going. As he drove along he managed to juggle four mobile phones and the steering wheel between his two hands plus occasionally looking at a map and the direction he'd tucked behind the sun visor and all this at 80 mph. However we did arrive safely but the nerves took a while to settle.



The British Team

The weather throughout the week was very hot and it was a bit noisy at times - mostly at night. We were camped in ready erected scout tents, half wood half canvas with a sort of shelf for you to sleep off the floor which worked quite well for most of us. The South African camp was directly opposite us and to promote 2005 there sponsors shipped over 8,000 bottle of South African made Castle ale. As you can imagine the promotion started early in the week, which was ok for beer drinkers but not so for those who didn't, however it was all taken in good part. On site there was a restaurant and although the menu was a bit limited the food was excellent and very cheap, I think we tried just about everything during the week. There was also a temporary grocers/supermarket erected in an army tent where you could get anything from fresh fruit, tea and butter to shaving cream and washing pow-

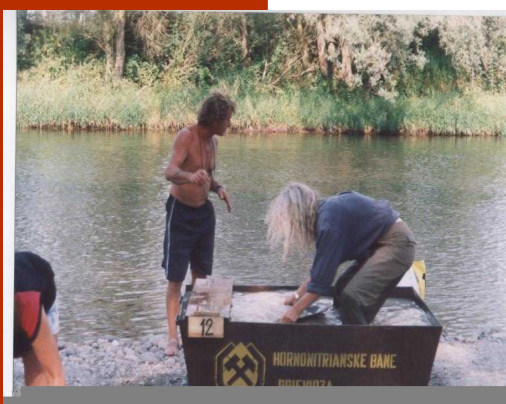
der, very well organised.

Zarnovica was the nearest small town 1 km away and transport there was a bit ad hoc so we had to make full use of the site facilities such as they were. The organisers had arranged bus excursion on a number of days most of which were well supported. One such tour took us to Banska Stiavnica, an ancient gold-silver mining town with fascinating old buildings, there was an excellent museum with the upper floor given over to geology, the best display of rock and mineral samples I've seen in a long time, you name it and it was there. On the ground floor there was a display of mining relics plus a separate exhibition of gold and goldpanning set up by Richard Kana of Slovakian Goldpanning Association. In town we made a few purchases and found a very good restaurant for lunch and as it was so very hot we soon found another place for cool drinks. The route to and from camp took in some of the local scenery, lots of interesting things were pointed out to us, all in all an excellent day trip.

The camp and competition site were well placed alongside the river, Alf Henderson and his brother Malcolm found a few grams of fine gold otherwise I think most people used the river to cool off. In one of the competitions Mick Gossage got a medal - not perhaps the one he wanted but hey a medals a medal. To get it he took part in the Enduro - first everyone made a mad dash to a huge pile by the river side where the 30 people finding the biggest nuggets went through to a conventional pan off against the clock - well done Mick. There was a very lively, colourful and entertaining evening hosted by the South African contingent to promote World Goldpanning Championships in Pilgrims Rest in 2005 however I'm sure someone will write an article on that night alone. All to soon another very hot and exhausting week was over, we said goodbye to friends old and new and we were on our way back to Britain and lots and lots and lots of rain, nothing changes.

Barbara Copley BGA

**“Gorgeous
sweet Tokaij
wines, mysteri-
ous schnapps -
and beer, beer,
beer! Sleep? –
none needed”**



Diary of a Greenhorn

**My First Impressions
Slovakia - August 2004**

The Beginning

It's midnight. I am so excited. The rain beats on the windows of my tiny cottage in my little home village in Norfolk, England. But - tomorrow! Tomorrow I will be in the bright, dusty bustle of my first Gold Camp! Sleep is far away as the rivers and forests of Slovakia course through my mind.

The Days

These days are long, warm and full of colour.

Prospectors arrive from all corners of the world to meet old friends and new - swap stories of times past and of new adventure. All are larger than life, each nation, man and woman have in common both their individuality and their love of the special world they have made for themselves - the gold world! I can see that this world means so much to these people - it's their future and their past, their freedom, travel, friends new and old, good fortune and hard times, the joy of coming together and the sadness of parting. There is one common language amongst them all - their friendship in gold.

Each carefree hour passes - the anticipation builds, the camp fills and comes to life - with long awaited greetings, talk of techniques, pans new and old, teams in huddles, and practice, practice, practice in the icy stream - the Competitions begin! Spectators cheer - panners dart glances at the clock... quickly finish... hands are shaking...there's the black sand...and...there's my gold! Pan high and out! Beginner's excitement, maybe beginners luck!

The Nights

...And what nights..

Starry bright, crisply cold canvas-covered nights. Warm firesides, crackling through till dawn. Wonderful voices float over the darkness - stories, songs, laughter - Africa then Slovakia then England and many more. Gorgeous sweet Tokaij wines, mysterious schnapps - and beer, beer, beer! Sleep? - none needed.

The Parting

All unforgettable. I have learned, played, sang and laughed my way through my first Gold Camp adventure. I have had the very good fortune of meeting you all. You have taught me much by letting me glimpse your world. Where else and with who else could I have gained so much?

And South Africa....It's midnight. I am so excited.

Mary Russell
Beginner

Minutes of the W.G.A. Annual Meeting

Banska Stiavnica 19th August 2004

Representation: Attending this meeting of the W.G.A. Council of National Representatives were the full board and representatives from the following countries: AUSTRALIA, AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, CANADA, CZECH REPUBLIC, FINLAND, FRANCE, JAPAN, ITALY, GERMANY, GREAT BRITAIN, NETHERLANDS, POLAND, SLOVAKIA, SOUTH AFRICA, SPAIN, SWEDEN and SWITZERLAND.

Welcome and Verification: The meeting was opened by the WGA President, Vince Thurkettle who welcomed the delegates and asked if anybody had items to add to the proposed agenda.

Vince then asked delegates to agree with him when he accepted the Meeting as valid on the grounds that "We are here". Unanimous agreement was given.

Funds: The WGA Treasurer, Esko Orava set out the various financial transactions for the past year. Vince (who was the previous treasurer) handed over to him on approx. 1st April 2004. The Euro has become the official unit of currency for the W.G.A. Then followed a reading of the Balance Sheet which showed a positive balance of € 4.047,61

It was emphasised that also in matters of competition rules (official protests), the Euro is now the recognised unit of currency. The Board are searching for new ideas to make money and all ideas are welcome. Esko pointed out the embroidered W.G.A. logo and asked if anyone had proposals for future fund raising. This theme was also taken up by Vince, who then thanked Esko.

Entry Fees: An agreement was reached in Coloma, USA regarding competition entry fees, but it appears that it has not always been respected. Mike Gossage (Chairman of the Rules Committee) took the floor and illustrated how this agreement set the maximum entry fee for official categories at \$25 US. Mike felt that a certain confusion may have arisen over the wording "SHOULD BE" and this would explain why the agreement has sometimes been disregarded. Mike asked the World Council how it wished to proceed. Vince asked for a vote on the matter. Firstly on whether the official categories competition entry fees SHOULD be fixed in order to allow every competitor to know in advance how much a competition would cost him. A brief discussion ensued and delegates voted by an overwhelming majority (27/3) in favour of setting a fixed entry fee.

The next question was what that sum should be and Vince gave the Assembly some time for reflection and discussion before taking a vote. The prices to be fixed are for Men's and Women's Professional, Veterans and National Teams. A problem was voiced to the effect that some Nations have already fixed and published an entry fee that exceeds €25,00 for 2005, 2006 and 2007. It is agreed that this can be honoured. However, the voting gave a clear majority for a fixed entry fee of €25,00 for Events being held from 2008. Mike proposed an entry fee of 3 times the individual fee for the National Team Event, that is €75,00. This proposal was carried unanimously.

Bids: Vince then invited the WGA Secretary, Arturo Ramella to speak on this subject. Arturo expressed his concern over the fact that there were, at this point, no bids to host the 2008 World Championships or the 2007 European Championships. He hoped that in South Africa next year there would be a range of prospective candidates from which to choose. He therefore asked whether there were any delegations present that were able to express an intention to bid in the future. The Austrian delegation presented an intention to bid for Rauris 2008 and they were followed by Zlotorja, Poland and by Australia. Arturo stated that there was a possibility of a 2008 bid on the part of Italy. Veronika then mentioned the very real possibility of hosting an International Event in the Czech Republic and she proposed Zlate Hory as a venue for the 2007 European Championships.

For the moment, these delegations should let the Secretary have a letter of intent (*before December 31st*), indicating their desire to present an official bid and following that, they should present the whole documentation for the vote at next year's Meeting in South Africa. Noreen Sailor (Canada) proposed a system whereby those nations who are not present could participate in the discussion about bids via e-mail or post. It was agreed that this should be looked into.

Communications: The WGA Director of Communications, Paul Thurkettle (who was unable to attend the meeting) had asked Cecile Thibaud (F) to represent him. She distributed a sample of the new WGA website together with a letter from Paul to the World Council. In this letter Paul explained that the spring edition of Golden Times was cancelled due to work on the new website and to a lack of articles suitable for publication. Paul suggested creating a communications team with a member in each country responsible for collecting material for publication. Vince then stated that good communication is vitally important for the WGA and for four years Paul has been asking for articles to publish. Vince asked if each nation present would now pledge at least one article per year for publication in Golden Times: this was agreed. A debate followed as to whether the Golden Times should be incorporated into the new website and cease to be a standalone publication. The good news was that the website costs amount to only €34 a year! Cecile invited delegates to check out the new website and to make any necessary corrections to addresses etc. The view generally accepted was that Golden Times is a very important publication to many people, especially those without access to the website, and it must be published in a form that allows hard copy production.

Statutes: It was agreed that Kauko has done an excellent job in preparing the draft statutes. The statutes are still in draft form partly due to the great amount of legal terminology involved. It will not be put to the vote this year. It is hoped to create a small working party, which will prepare the way for a vote next year. We are seeking candidates for this working party.

Competition: Mike opens the discussion by saying that he feels it is time to look at the competition with new eyes. We meet in friendship each year, but it is also the occasion of a World Championship. Mike reminded us that in 1994 the Rules Committee was formed and he would now like to produce, and publish in the Golden Times, a list of addresses of people who can be contacted for help in organising a Championship from a rules point of view. Then we just have to check on how the Competition is being conducted.

Mike confirmed that the couple of problems which had arisen here in these Championships have been immediately resolved. Different aspects of the rules had been involved, such as not capping the tube. It was decided not to disqualify for this breach in the opening round, but that from tomorrow, any competitor failing to comply will be subject to a two-minute penalty. This is correct and just, because while disqualification may be avoided, an infraction HAS been committed and the competitor must be penalised.

Vince noted that participation in the Competitions continues to rise; here in Slovakia there are about 600 competitors. In South Africa next year about 1,000 participants are expected. He questioned whether the current system can support such numbers fairly? Vince said that he has been made aware of general concerns about the significantly different cut-off times for heats and the move away from all forms of traditional panning. Also, many competitors are unhappy that they cross the world to have one pan in the opening heats and then about half of them are 'tourists'!

Mike suggests that there is also the problem of speed and goes on to report that here today, he personally verified the fact that it was taking some competitors about 12 seconds just to get the pan into the water! Vince urged delegates to consider in which direction they want to see competitions go. He asked the meeting to give the Rules Committee a mandate to look into fairer alternative elimination systems and consider the best way for us to keep traditional panning along with the development of new pan designs. There was a discussion of early ideas and the council gave approval to this mandate for the Rules Committee.

WGA Future: Vince reminded delegates that on the back page of Golden Times there was a questionnaire, '5+5'. He said that he had had very few replies and needed nation's views on what is good or bad about the WGA. All opinions will receive the board's most careful consideration. The WGA is much more than just an organiser of competitions! Vince asked delegates who had not yet replied to please give him their views a.s.a.p.

The chairman thanked the representatives for a productive meeting and declared it closed.

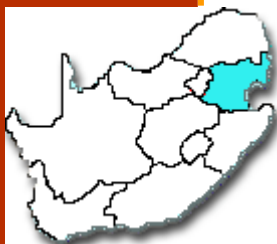


SOUTH AFRICAN
GOLD PANNING ASSOCIATION



Greetings from South Africa and all the best for 2005.

We are all excited and very busy preparing for the World Championships in September at Pilgrim's Rest. We are sure it will be a memorable event for all gold panners and we look forward to seeing everybody here in our historic village.



About a hundred and thirty two years ago gold diggers and prospectors, from all corners of the world, joined the rush to Pilgrim's Rest in a quest for gold. And now it is about to happen again! In September this year South Africa will host the 2005 World Gold Panning Championships at Pilgrim's Rest in Mpumalanga.

Pilgrim's Rest is a small hamlet situated 1253 metres above sea level on the escarpment of the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. Surrounded by mountains and shady forests this area is one of the scenic jewels of the country. Once a bustling gold rush village it is now a heritage site and which offers the visitor the opportunity to experience something of the life and times of an early South African gold mining community and industry. In 1872 after alluvial gold was discovered in the Pilgrim's Creek diggers and gold prospectors from many parts of the world rushed to this valley to peg their claims and to seek their fortunes. Since then the black and white diggers and miners of the village shared the fluctuating fortunes of gold mining industry. Today Pilgrim's Rest reveals the life and times of those adventurous hardy men and women who in their search for gold were the pioneers of the largest gold mining industry in the world.

The gold panning championship site is situated in a grassy meadow on the banks of the Blyde River – meaning river of joy. The site is a mere 3-minute stroll from the historic village and one only needs to cross a small bridge over the river to enter the caravan and camping park. Pilgrim's Rest and the escarpment region has a moderate climate making camping a popular activity. The Pilgrim's Rest caravan and camping park covers a large area and boasts excellent facilities (swimming pool, electrical points, 6 ablution blocks with a total of 60 toilets, 50 showers + 24 baths all with hot water). The park also provides tented accommodation but please book in advance at +27 (0) 13 7681427. At the competition site there will also be stalls offering an extensive variety of culinary delights, unique and interesting crafts and curios, a mineral market and live entertainment.

The programme for the championships promises a great deal of excitement and plenty of entertainment. The actual competition will extend over six days, starting with the heats on 20 September and culminating on Sunday 25 September with the finals and medals ceremony. Other not to be missed events are the special pre and post championship excursions, Street Parade of participating nations, Official Opening event, Gold Symposium, Diggers Pub Crawl, Commemorative Wheelbarrow Race, Promotional Presentation Evening by Finland (the 2006 World Championships hosts) and the Diggers Dance. Apart from these events Pilgrim's Rest will be in festive spirit and the venue of a magnificent experience to be remembered.

SUNDAY 18 September 2005

Gold Panning in the Pilgrim's Creek
Excursion: Geological Tour
Day excursion: Panorama Route and Bourkes Luck Potholes & Shangana Cultural Village
Day excursion: Cheetah Project & Moholoholo Bird Rehabilitation Project

MONDAY 19 September 2005

Registration for Official Categories closes at 16:00
Gold Panning in the Pilgrim's Creek
Mineral Market
Excursion: Geological Tour
Street Parade & Official Opening
Street Party

TUESDAY 20 September 2005

Team 3 Heats
Team 5 Heats
Individual Heats
Excursion: Geological Tour
Mineral Market
17:00 Gold Symposium

WEDNESDAY 21 September 2005

Individual Heats
Mineral Market
Excursion: Geological Tour

THURSDAY 22 September 2005

Individual Heats
Mineral Market
Excursion: Geological Tour
Diggers Pub Crawl
AGM of the WGA

FRIDAY 23 September 2005

Quarter Finals
Mineral Market
Excursion: Geological Tour
16:00 Wheelbarrow Race
Finnish Presentation Evening: Hosts of the 2006 WGPC

SATURDAY 24 September 2005

Semi Finals
Geological Tour
Diggers Dinner & Dance

SUNDAY 25 September 2005

Finals
National Team Competition
Prize Giving and Closing Ceremony

How to get there from Johannesburg International Airport

Travel Options:

1. Connecting flight to KMI Airport in Nelspruit (Nelspruit 110 kilometres to Pilgrim's Rest)
Travel options from KMI Airport to Pilgrim's Rest
Car hire at airport (or for rates, quotations & reservations)
2. Citybug Shuttle Service to Nelspruit ()
3. Johannesburg to Pilgrim's Rest: (450 kilometres)
Car hire at airport (or for rates, quotations & reservations)
Camper hire at airport (for rates, quotations & reservations)
Transfers via Nelspruit to Pilgrim's Rest on Citibug
Would need to book with Citybug Tel: +27 13 741 4114 ()

For more information please contact René or Sherry at the South African Gold Panning Association - ireinders@nel.mpu.gov.za

Please note:

In order to find accommodation, goldpanners should refer to the official booklet that was handed out at the presentation evening in Slovakia. Camping tariffs were negotiated with the owner of the caravan park. Other accommodation venues charge standard rates and DO NOT charge more because of the Gold Panning Championships. Hotel and B&B accommodation are already a problem in Pilgrim's Rest and therefore it will be easier to contact the central reservation agency in Graskop (as they know where accommodation is still available) at www.panoramainfo.co.za. (Please take note that this address had a typing error in the booklet). If you make a booking through them, they will charge a small commission. The S.A. Gold Panning Association will have a shuttle service available for gold panners that stay in Crystal Springs and Graskop, both places are about 10-15 km drive away from Pilgrim's Rest.



2005 European Goldpanning Championships



The Spanish Goldpanning Federation and authorities welcome you to our country, in particular to our village, Navelgas, located in the Principality of Asturias, in the north of the Iberian Peninsula. Navelgas belongs to Tineo Township and has approximately 500 inhabitants.

Amongst other services, in the village you can find a health centre, two self-service supermarkets, a police station, two banks, several bars and two restaurants where you can taste the delicious food of the north of Spain, and dishes typical of our region.

Also, within only 20 km distance you can find hotels and other types of accommodation, as well as visit a fishing port typical of the area and beaches.

In Navelgas you will be able to visit the remains of Roman mines more than two thousand years old. It is also possible to pan for gold in the river.

Approximate **prices** for the following items:

Small beer	(1/2 pint)	1€
Bread	(1 kg)	0.95€
Milk	(1 litre)	0.95€
Mineral water	(1.5 litre)	0.50€
Meal		8-10€

There will be a free camp site installed for the championship which will have toilets, 8 showers for men and 8 for women, all with hot water, a restaurant and a building that will lodge helpers. For information about rooms and distances please contact: pedro_queipo@hotmail.com



How to get there by car:

From the south of France follow: Bayona - San Sebastian - Bilbao - Santander - Oviedo - Grado - La Espina - Tineo - **NAVELGAS**.

From Asturias airport follow: Soto del Barco - Pravia - Cornellana - La Espina - Tineo - **NAVELGAS**.

Alternatively follow: Soto del Barco - Lluarca - Navelgas.





Program

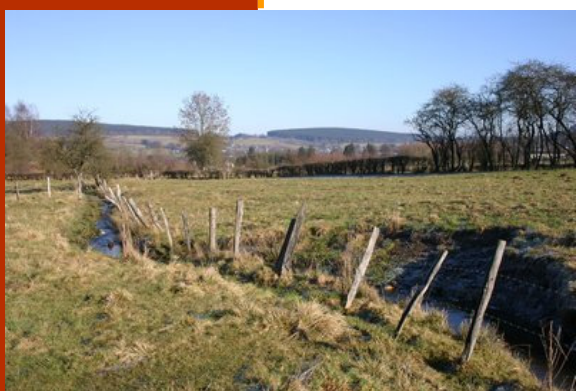
Monday 25th July	Registration Free panning in the river Visit around Tineo council
Tuesday 26 th July	Registration Trip to Las Medulas (remains of roman mines, Human Heritage)
Wednesday 27 th July	Registration Visit to remains of roman settlements of the first century B.C. in San Chuis Chao San Martin and Coana
Thursday 28 th July	Start of the competition; preliminary rounds. Opening parade Tasting of typical products of the area.
Friday 29 th July	Preliminary rounds Official Dinner at 21:00
Saturday 30 th July	Semi-final rounds
Sunday 31 st July	Finals for all categories.
CHILDRENS: Mix. Children younger than 12 years old (5€).	
JUNIORS: Mix. 12 years to 16 years old (10€).	
BEGINNERS: Men and ladies (15€).	
SKILLED: Men and ladies (20€).	
VETERANS: Mix. 60 years old participants or older (15€).	
TRI-PAN: Minimum 1 and maximum 2 ladies (30€).	
COUPLE: Must be composed by a man and a lady (25€).	
TEAMS: Must be composed of 5 people (minimum 2 ladies, maximum 3 ladies) independently of their nationality (40€).	
NATIONAL TEAMS: The same nationality. Must be composed of 5 people (minimum 2 ladies, maximum 3 ladies) (40€).	

The Spanish federation and the village of Navelgas have the pleasure of inviting you all to the European Championship of 2005.
Bienvenidos Welcome!

A perfect day



0.1 of a gram from Bretagne
being smelted



The spot

Pierre is my cousin on my father's side and he is going to marry Anne-Claire in July. We don't see each other very often. Not that we don't appreciate each other but simply because occasions to meet are too rare.

A few months ago I offered to provide a little gold for their wedding rings.

Anne-Claire is French, from Bretagne and Pierre from Belgium. Since I happened to have some from both areas I thought it could be my wedding present.

At first, my idea didn't receive any echo but then a month ago, Pierre phoned me because he had heard of my proposal and was very enthusiastic about it. I felt

extremely happy that he welcomed the idea so well and speaking about the technical details the project formed in our minds, instead of simply smelting some I'd give, to go and find the Belgian gold together the next week-end. The goal of the excursion was just to find a few speck so Pierre could claim he had actually found some gold used for the rings. I didn't expect us to find much. Gold is very scarce in Belgium and for the last twenty years the best spots have been done and redone. Nowadays, if one finds a few dozens visible flakes, it is a reasonable day. It is for this reason, amongst others, that my outings had become scarcer and scarcer in Belgium. Having prospected the creeks in all directions for the past fifteen years I needed extra motivation to go and Pierre was offering me a wonderful one.

This one day trip was a good occasion to make up for the scarcity of our meetings. So we had decided Pierre would stay from Friday until Sunday and we would take advantage of the opportunity to celebrate my brother's birthday together.

Friday evening we took care of the French gold (from Bretagne). I didn't have very much so we managed to smelt a little ball of 0.1 of a gram using a little gas torch. It was not easy for such a small quantity to keep all the flakes together especially when you know that the average size was 0.1 of a millimeter. I have had the chance to do this several times and every time I'm fascinated by this mixture that turns from something quite dull when heated into an extremely shiny little ball having withstood a temperature of about 1000 degrees. It is in such moments that we are reminded why we feel so much for that metal which, after all, only has a very subjective value. Pierre, no doubt, shared my feeling.

The next day, Saturday, we left early because in Belgium during the winter months it gets dark early in the afternoon and the spot I intended to prospect with Pierre was one hour drive away. I didn't really know where to go. Of course the goal was to find as much as possible but, logically, all the good spots I knew had been good spots and there was no certainty there would be more to find. So I opted for a creek where the ratio number of flakes / weight was the best. It was "coarse, chunky" gold (according to Belgian standards of course) in reasonable quantity and the chances to find bigger flakes were good. The weather was perfect. A blue sky in every direction and a bright sun just above the horizon. As we stopped a small herd of reeboks ran into the bush two hundred meters away.



A good pan

The landscape stood still frozen by the winter air. Not a sound to be heard and little clouds of vapour escaped from our smiling mouths.

The spot

I had no idea where to dig so we tried several pans here and there to find a likely spot. It was unbelievable. I couldn't find anything but one or two minute specks. I knew I couldn't expect much but so little was really disappointing. Pierre on his side, who panned only for the second time in his life worked with concentration but didn't find much either. So to make sure we wouldn't come back with empty vials I decided to resluice the dirt in a spot that had given good results in the past. The gold content was constant. 1 tiny flake per pan. We started sluicing the dirt. It washed easily since it was a "secondary" deposit and we proceeded quickly. From time to time we checked the first carpet where we could see an odd bit appear regularly. I knew the key to a minimum success was to wash as much as possible and we worked with a will only pausing to take pictures of each other and to express our happiness to be working together in such wonderful conditions.



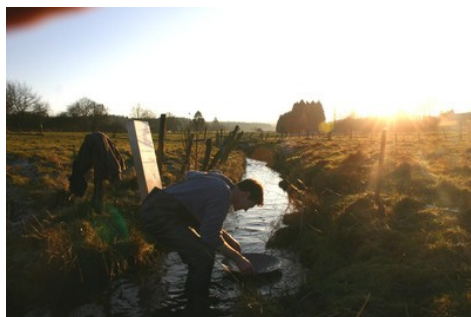
Sluicing and panning

As I was pouring a bucket in the sluice box I noticed a layer of clay in the bank of the brook that looked good. It was very unlikely that there was any gold in it, it was too obvious but I thought why not. You never know until you try. Pierre was surprised and asked about this sudden inspiration and all I could answer was I had to satisfy an irrepressible curiosity. This feeling which very often is disappointed but which, occasionally, also leads us to something worth it. And worth it, it was. In the first pan I washed, I discovered not less than thirty little specks, some of them being well above 1 millimeter. This was a very good spot. Pierre tried a bucket and got about the same. We kept smiling. Gold had changed our mood from happy to be there to lunatic, in a positive sense I mean.

**“It was just ...
a perfect day”**

When it was time to eat we were sure there would be "something" at the end of the day and we stopped to make a little fire and grill some chicken breast marinated in olive oil and spices. It is at that very moment when I took a good bite from the chicken that the idea of this article imposed itself in my mind. I thought, this is really what I like about prospecting. Being with somebody I really appreciate, sharing the sheer enthusiasm of being in the wild looking at the marvelous nature and having experienced the magic pleasure of seeing gold appear at the bottom of the pan. A feeling, I believe, shared world-wide and that brings so many of us together.

That day finished with cramps in the jaws and frozen fingers. The gold we had found totaled a very good weight of 0.12 of a gram and it got dully smelted into a shiny little ball. It was just ... a perfect day



Bruno



A Happy Pierre

The 'Royal Charter' Revisited

"No clean dry man ever found gold, nor had the tale to tell"



Twin Foxes with divers out

"In my worst dreams I had not imagined"

We had learned a lot from the first expedition and so on the new expedition we were much better equipped. Also we planned a much longer trip, six weeks, to allow for bad weather and repairs. The main changes were that we had a boat this time, a tough 8 meter ex-army aluminium water-jet powered boat. We had the best under-water communications and two under-water cameras rigged to a LCD screen in the boat. And most importantly, I had a team made up of 12 friends and family. Each had agreed to give the expedition all the time they could manage.

I hope this stirs your blood with excitement, it did ours! By the time I set off in

mid June 2004 I almost couldn't sleep with final planning worries and the burning desire to



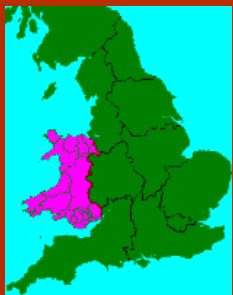
Preparing to use underwater cameras

find gold: lots of gold! 'There is no rest for a man once treasure has fastened upon his mind.' Says a very old saying - I can confirm it's completely true!

Another old prospector's saying says that, 'Much silver is spent to find gold.' Sadly I found that that saying is true as well. By the time we set off for the coast of Wales we were all very happy, but much poorer!

Our first days were in bright sunshine. We fitted the equipment to the boat and then launched her in good spirits. In sheltered water near the harbour we did two days of sea trials, checking that everything worked, and then set off out to sea and back to the wreck of the 'Royal Charter'. This ship was bringing gold prospectors home to England from Melbourne, Australia in 1859. Then, when almost home, a terrible hurricane smashed her onto a rocky shore. All the women died, all the children died. Of over 500 people on-board, only 38 men survived that terrible night.

We became aware of the first problem as we



“To this day we do not know if she sank naturally or whether she was sunk deliberately by some unknown rival.”



Crew watch stormy seas

approached the shore - the sea was brown like a thin soup, impossible to see in. It was an 'algae bloom', millions of tiny plant particles blocking out all visibility in the sea. This bloom lasted 8 days and we could do nothing but wait, while the sun shone warmly and local people told us how unusual it was to have an algae bloom in late June. We took the opportunity to name the boat, 'Twin Foxes' and splashed champagne over her deck and the crew! The name came from her having two engines and two owners; and the English have a thing about foxes! As the sea finally began to clear, swarms of big jellyfish arrived, we tried to ignore them and dived, and all took some stings! You might know the cure for jellyfish stings - and if you do, you will know it is disgusting on a small boat!

Believing our troubles were over, we used the clearer sea to practice digging holes in the sea-bed, and tested our special diving masks with in-built communication. We also took the time to anchor over the

and their families who died there. I'm not very religious as such, but I do believe in showing proper respect. Then, just as we were about to start working on the shipwreck, we heard some bad weather warnings. The locals told us that the wind was going east and we must go and find shelter quickly. So we hurried the boat all the way back to the sheltered place we had started from, and waited. Sure enough, a day later a storm struck sending huge waves crashing against the shore and blowing trees across many roads. The storm took three days to die down and when it finally did, the sea was thick with grey mud. We waited patiently for five days for the sea to clear again. Then we



Digging the first 'hole'

rushed back to the diving site, with everyone eager to start hunting for gold. Really, I'm not joking when I say we had only two days of work before it all happened again as a second storm came in.

I agree with people who say you must pick a team on friendship and character, for if things get difficult friendship will carry you through. At this point everybody was showing stress and frustration as we were three weeks into a six week trip and had hardly started!

So, the second storm finally passed, we let the sea clear of mud again and then went to get the boat. However, we found that during a calm night with a flat sea she had sunk!! To this day we do not know if she sank naturally or whether she was sunk deliberately by some

'Royal Charter' shipwreck and say a prayer for the many hundreds of prospectors

"I have only one regret about the trip, that I was not there every single day, it was the best thing I have done in years."

Gordon Thurkettle

unknown rival. It took a total of 10 days to get her out and get the engines running and slowly repair all the electrical parts. This is when the spirit of my team was



Working to repair engines after the sinking

most tested, we worked in the rain for days and some nights to make the repairs - the team were brilliant. We had the

sort of cheer good soldiers have, the worse it was, the more people joked and worked harder. But I was getting tired. I texted my friend Mary and said, 'I am getting worn down by this. I've been wet, muddy and oily with diesel for weeks now, it's getting difficult.'

She wrote back, 'No clean dry man ever found gold, nor had the tale to tell.'

Late in the last week of the six week expedition we had everything working and

got back to the shipwreck. Nervous bliss! We anchored, dug a hole through the sand and muddy sea-bed, and three of us dived down 8 meters to look. As I reached the bottom and looked I was amazed to see specks of gold everywhere amongst little hematite stones - I pulled out my breathing regulator and screamed, 'GOLD!!!' We cleaned a few grams of gold dust from this hole and then moved 10 meters and dug another - a silver coin from the wreck! Late in the afternoon we dug a third hole and I went down and found a small pocket of gold dust, with one small nugget! This was what we had planned for 10 months and it felt wonderful. However, our time was gone and people had to prepare to pack up the equipment and leave.



Charlie Lifts the anchor on the last day

In my worst dreams I had not imagined that in six weeks of summer we would dive for only five days. And yet ... It was some words from my father that really made me think. He is 70 years old and had been on the boat all the time he could and had worked on after cracking his ribs in a fall on the second day. A week after the expedition was all over he rang me and said, 'I have only one regret about the trip, that I was not there every single day, it was the best thing I have done in years.' It made me think that he spoke for the whole team - with all the many troubles, expense and hard work, it had been a really great adventure. So, listen to the sad folk songs of the sea, but still go out there; it's what life's about.

Vincent Thurkettle



At helm, with Lapin Kultra hat



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