

## 95 year PLAST UMPZ in Canada

My adventure which would turn out to be the best experience of my life all started on July 31st this year. On that day I flew to Melbourne as part of the first leg of my journey to Canada for the “Yuvileina Mizhkraiova Plastova Zustrich”, also known as UMPZ. The night before I left had been torturous as I had been packing and repacking my rucksack just to get everything to fit.

The next day, I met up with the other plastuny from Melbourne at Tullamarine Airport who, like me, were about to embark on this unknown UMPZ adventure. With news of a plane crash the night before, I was very nervous that morning. We checked in, received last minute tips about remaining safe, farewelled our excited, but worried, parents and proceeded through the international terminal. We had two hours of waiting before we eventually boarded United Airlines for Sydney. This flight went fairly well as my mood changed from being nervous to very excited. In Sydney, we boarded for Los Angeles and after a 17 hour flight filled with movies and sleep we finally arrived. After queuing for ages at US customs we boarded our flight to Toronto and arrived late at night, but without baggage!

From the airport, we were then taken to the Plastova Domivka in Toronto. There we met our billet families. My family were the Tarapack family. They were a very nice family and made me feel very welcome in their home and showed me the sights of Downtown Toronto including the Super Dome and CN Tower. The CN Tower is the largest building in the world. It was mind blowing to view. On our first day there, yellow school buses like you see in the movies shuttled all the plastuny who had already arrived in Canada on a tour in and around Toronto. We toured with plastuny from Germany as well as Ukraina. We experienced Niagara Falls by travelling on the Maid of the Mist boat which took us directly under the falls. The view was stunning. We also saw Ukrainian churches, one of which was a wooden church in the traditional Hutsulskyi style. Apart from our bus breaking down on the way home for one hour, our first glimpse of Canada was a memorable one.

After our short stay in Toronto, it was time to go to tabir. Plastuny from Ukraina, Canada, America, England, Argentina, Germany, France and Australia met at a local high school where we were registered, provided our wristbands and taborovi spivanyky (camp songbooks) and then placed into our groups ready for a bus trip to our various pidtabory (camps). Each group was given a different coloured neckscarf to wear. I was in the group of yunaky uchasnyky (green scarves) as were Julian Danylak and Anton Tkacz from Melbourne. There were about 200 in our Tabir Uchasnykiv, c.100 boys and 100 girls aged between 13 to 15.

Finally we departed, travelled north east of Toronto and after 4 hours arrived in Algonquin Park which is half the size of Tasmania. When we arrived, we were split into our hurtoks and kurins (groups) and taken to the location of our pidtabir. My kurin comprised yunaky from all English-speaking countries - Canada, America and Australia.

Our kurin had three druzhi (leaders). One was named Victor. He was my hurtkovyi druh and was the only person attending the UMPZ from France. The other was Druh Mattii from New York and everybody addressed him as Druh New York. The third was Druh Konstantyn from Ukraina and he was, in my opinion, the ultimate plastun.

Algonquin Park was warm, quite green, with a very large lake and early morning mists. The native animals were interesting for us Australians mainly as we had never before seen chipmunks, squirrels or loons. We set up our tents close to the lake which was the furthest spot from our camp kitchen. The kitchen was covered with a tarp and we did all our own cooking using gas and fuel burners. Lashings of barabolya or 'Deb' accompanied most meals and the food was good. It was here that I was introduced to real Canadian maple syrpy with my pancakes. We even had an iron chef type competition between all the hurtky in making borsch and varenyky.

For the first couple of nights I shared a tent with Boris, a yunak from Ottawa, Canada but later joined two yunaky from Toronto. One was named Roman and the other was Olesh. By the first day of tabir, they ended up becoming my two best friends. Everyone had so many questions for each other and I lost count of the number of people who asked whether we keep kangaroos as pets! Being Australian was great because everybody gravitates to you to hear your accent.

We spent our days working towards our yunatski vmilosty (merit badges) which covered things like cooking, canoeing, Canadian ecology, observing the Native Indian culture as well as developing a profile about ourselves. As part of our vmilist work, we went on a canoe hike over three days and two nights through an open lake and swamps. The canoe hike wasn't particularly difficult but we managed to get lost and arrived at our first sleeping destination at about 10:00 pm. Unfortunately, we didn't reach our designated overnight location which changed our route plan for the rest of the canoe hike. There were also a lot of leeches and beaver dams in the water. These are dams built by beavers using twigs and branches to keep the water in which they live still. We had to climb up them but going back down was a lot of fun because it was like a waterslide. The best part of the hike was a campsite where we could hear our voices echoing across the mountains.

After the canoe trip we had the privilege of being involved in a native Indian Pow-Wow. At the Pow-Wow we danced with the Indians and they taught us a lot of interesting things about their culture. The Indian dances were a lot of fun for everyone.

Most nights we had a vatra (campfire singalong) together with the yunachky and I realised that vattras are underrated in Australia. Vattras were so much fun in Canada with everybody singing and really getting into it. Stiyku (night patrols) were full of unexpected surprises too. One night, some of the yunachky said they had seen bear cubs so my friend Roman and I patrolled the entire Uchasnyk tabir cautiously listening out for every sound. After we finished and were returning to our pidtabir we heard rustling in the trees and

saw shadows of what looked like a bear. As we walked past the bushes the rustling became more intense. The commandant happened to be awake and he went to investigate but the rustling had stopped. We truly thought there were bears but maybe we were wrong.

After 9 days in the Canadian wilderness, we headed off by bus to the capital city of Canada, Ottawa for the next stage of the zustrich. Yunatstvo from all the other tabory around Canada came together in Ottawa. Our stay there was the most fun imaginable during the entire UMPZ. Everyone slept in dorms shared by four and we had such a good time relaxing and spending time with our new friends from tabir. Our days were spent sightseeing. We visited the Museum of War, the Museum of Civilisation as well as Parliament House on Parliament Hill where there was a spectacular light show at night. At the end of the evening, everyone crossed arms and sang "Nich vzhe yde". It was amazing because there were so many plastuny all together in one big circle. Every plastun and plastunka that night was so pumped up that on the way back to our dorms everyone was running across the streets singing Ukrainian songs very loudly. We also attended a zabava (dance) on the second night in Ottawa held inside a large warehouse. The zabava was a lot of fun as we danced to a band playing both old and new Ukrainian music. We were all in our Plast uniforms and it was really hot but that did not stop some great Ukrainian dancing especially from the Canadians. The zabava quickly turned into a mosh pit as everyone danced into the night.

The third stage of the zustrich was at "Plastova Sich" in Grafton which is about 1½ hours from Toronto. Grafton was very green and lush, but cold at night. Everyone came together for these final four days. There was a display of all projects prepared by each kurin/country as well as giant vatra which had two fires burning. We also had a day of different activities on the Open Day including games and a defiliada (parade) with over 1400 plastuny. There was also the Zolota Gitara (Golden Guitar) competition where all of the yunatski groups went against each other in a music competition of mostly original compositions. The Rozviduvachy 2 yunaky won the competition but I thought that the Skoby Virlytsi yunaky should have won because their song was really good.

On the final day of the zustrich everyone received their UMPZ and vmilist badges and gathered for the closing ceremony. The flags of Ukraina, Argentina, America, Australia, Canada, England and Germany were lowered until the next UMPZ in Ukraina in 2012 to mark 100 years of Plast. Then came the final moment when everyone had to leave and it was sad because some people would never be seen again. I made some great friends, experienced new things and now I can't wait for the next UMPZ and only hope I can go again.

Plastun uchasnyk Markiyan Wojewidka, Adelaide (aged 13)

