

Jiří Kříž from a collaborator's perspective

NIGEL C. HUGHES

Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, University of California, Riverside,
CA 92521, USA; nigel.hughes@ucr.edu

I would like to thank the editors of this issue for allowing me to contribute on Jiří Kříž as I knew him. My association with Jiří began through a developing research interest in the Silurian trilobite *Aulacopleura koninckii*, known in large numbers from the Na Černidlech site, above Loděnice. Such studies have been a significant part of my research career and are summarized and reflected upon in a recent paper celebrating the life of Euan Clarkson (Hughes in press). It was a comment in Euan's famous palaeontology textbook (Clarkson 1986) that first led me to *A. koninckii* and thus ultimately to Loděnice. As that research summary is forthcoming, here I comment on Jiří as a scientist and citizen, a unique person who cheerfully forged his own path across changing times. I owe him a major debt for the welcome and help that he extended to me during our investigations.

I began working on *A. koninckii* in late 1992 during a postdoctoral appointment in the Smithsonian Institution, a position Jiří had also held some 20 years beforehand. It was there that he developed a strong

friendship with John and Mary Lou Pojeta, John being also an expert on Palaeozoic bivalves. It was a conversation with John's colleague Bill Oliver that first prompted me to write to Jiří, but Jiří's reputation as a field-based palaeontologist particularly of Silurian rocks had long been established internationally by that time. I was then working on specimens of *A. koninckii* repositied in various American and British museums (particularly the Schary collection in Harvard), but it was clear that new fieldwork at the locality of origin was necessary in order to understand more of the environmental context in which these fascinating and important fossils had been living and were preserved (Hughes *et al.* 2014).

Jiří's reply to my enquiry showed that I had written to the right person: he had the necessary experience at the Na Černidlech locality to relocate where Barrande's workers had quarried most intensively, having been part of a team that re-opened the pits in the late 1950's (Kříž 1962). When we first got to the site in autumn 1995 there was barely a hint of what in the 1840's must have been a notable rock face and I felt dubious that we could ever expose fresh rock. Jiří, undeterred, immediately set to work with a shovel saying "after all, we are professionals", and over the following days we dug a substantial trench into the side of the hill that was reinforced with wooden planks as the trench's size resulted in a serious possibility of wall collapse. As we dug, we mined through the debris of previous excavations and the exercise became something of an adventure in geoarchaeology, as



Jiří Kříž roasts sausages at the Na Černidlech site in autumn 1995. Archive N. G. Hughes.

we found some Cambrian trilobites from Skryje that apparently Barrande's workers had left among the fossil-rich slabs of the Liteň Formation. Lunches were sausages cooked on a campfire of wet wood that somehow Jiří always seemed to be able to ignite, and whose smokey flavour was fabulous.

As we worked, Jiří told stories. I soon realized that for Jiří the lineages of palaeontologists were to him much as those of the bivalves he studied systematically, each with their set of characteristics shared and unique. For him, being extant or extinct mattered little and I began to appreciate that among Czech palaeontologists the colossal contributions of Joachim Barrande remain as living, as opposed to historical, documents. Along with Barrande, Jiří had other heroes, Bedřich Bouček and Vladimír Havlíček among them, but he also had plenty to say about why others were not so high in his ranking. Through these stories I began to learn his own history: his time in the geological high school and at Charles University where, by chance, he was a classmate of another friend, Urmila Deb, whom I knew from the university in India founded by Rabindranath Tagore. I learned that his decision to return to Czechoslovakia at the end of his Smithsonian Fellowship had a major influence on his subsequent career, because his superiors in Praha were not expecting him to come home. As a consequence of doing so, Jiří said he was allowed more individual latitude within the Central Geological Survey (currently known as the Czech Geological Survey), the organization in which he spent his career. As he was a highly individualistic person, this suited him well.

I first went to Praha some six years after the Velvet Revolution, which he told me had had unpredicted consequences for him. In the aftermath of the revolution, lists of employee names were disclosed at the "Survey", identifying individual affiliations with the previous regime. Given the relative freedom Jiří had enjoyed in his research, several people were surprised, he told me, not to see his name among those identified. But for Jiří this posed a new threat: he was one of a limited number of senior persons without such status, which meant the prospect of rapid promotion into the higher-level management. That prospect filled Jiří with horror but he again managed to turn this to advantage by being appointed head of the commission charged with where locally to bury nuclear waste. The project was initiated in the 1980's, and Jiří was able to lead it while simultaneously working on a series of projects focused on Silurian stratigraphy. The final years of his employment Jiří spent mostly doing just what he loved most – pure stratigraphic and palaeontological research. His contributions to this area are celebrated within this issue by those qualified to do so.

It was as chairman of the Central Control and Audit Commission of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation (ČSOP) that he told me he played a small part in the Velvet Revolution. At the time of the mass protests in Václavské náměstí [Wenceslas Square] (in front, of course, of the National Museum and its Barrandium) it was rumoured that several students had been killed by the authorities. Then government, keen to divert attention away from such events, decided to broadcast nationally the proceedings of the annual meeting of the Czech Union for Nature Conservation as a safe and dull diversion. Chairman Jiří, live on television, proposed and then conducted a minute of silence for the students reportedly killed, thereby being one of the first to bring the news of the uprising to national attention.

Jiří gave his time freely to ČSOP as part of his commitment to natural history in its broadest sense. During one of my last trips to Praha he treated me to a special viewing of the night sky at the city astronomical observatory and, like so many Czech citizens, he was an avid mycologist (and chef). At the weekends we travelled into the countryside to collect mushrooms, and the sight of trains heading out of Praha packed with families, each member of which carrying an appropriately sized basket, was an unforgettable reminder of the connection between natural history and citizenry, their taxonomic skills having serious practical consequences. For me, this sight was utterly charming.

Later, when I was employed the Cincinnati Museum Center, Jiří visited me after attending an international Silurian meeting and we took a road trip to Nashville, Tennessee to visit the Grand Ole Opry because of Jiří's love of American country music, and particularly that of Johnny Cash. On the drive back, I was surprised to learn that Jiří's scepticism of governmental decision making did not extend to private enterprise and in his considerable optimism that, with minimal regulation, businesses would responsibly self-regulate their environmental impacts. Occasionally he said other things that I found to be startling, reminding me of how different his life experiences had been from my own. His opinions, whether on science or other matters, were strongly held and to change them required time and some tact. He could be convinced but only if the argument was strong.

Jiří was as proud a Czech as one could imagine, but his vision of what that meant was catholic in the broadest sense: he was passionate that all should appreciate and feel part of why his homeland is so



The trilobites *Aulacopleura koninckii* from the Na Černidlech locality. Photo J. Kříž.

special. Thus, he saw Barrande as the greatest of Czech geologists, whilst acknowledging his French heritage. Given the changes Jiří experienced in his life, the continuity of palaeontological research from generation to generation provided him with a fundamental and secure mooring, and he seemed to view forebears in the field as if his friends. It was my good luck to experience that enthusiasm and to feel somehow part of that tradition, thanks to his expansive vision.

Jiří was married thrice and was the father of two children. He and his third wife, Jana, who has outlived him, visited us in Riverside where I was delighted to introduce them to my partner, Mary Droser, and our children. In 1996 Jana worked in the famous Krátký film studios located near Barrande's rock in Praha, and I was privileged to make a visit there, seeing the workshops in which the puppets were being constructed and their props being forged with a skill that appeared to have been handed down artist-to-artist since the Middle Ages. Animated movies were also made onsite and when growing up my sole familiarity with Czechoslovakia were Krátký cartoons shown on BBC TV that featured a good-natured, open-hearted mole with a spade who made it his business to help all those he came across. Whenever I think of Jiří, the first image that comes to mind is of him digging that pit at Na Černidlech accompanied by an erratic but continuous monolog in Czech or English of funny voices or phases of song that were frequently unintelligible but enormously entertaining nonetheless. Along with his massive contributions to Silurian geology, it is the Krteček (Little Mole) within him that abides.

I would also like to thank all the Czech geologists and palaeontologists who have assisted with our work on *A. koninckii*, and other scientists who have been part of that work, particularly Giuseppe Fusco. Paul Myrow, Jiří Šimůnek and Alena Šimůnková kindly assisted with the text.

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