

5th World Ranger Congress – Diary reports.

The CMA provided bursaries for two of our members to attend the recent IRF World Ranger Congress. Kevin Vigars (North Region) and Phil Snell (Home Counties/East Anglia Region) were the recipients and we present their Congress diary reports herewith.

By Kevin Vigars

“Arriving at the Congress (this being my first one), I was full of apprehension and with no real expectations. I was programmed to deliver a short presentation on Local Access Forums, which to be honest I thought was just an English thing – but how wrong could I be!

On arrival at Stirling University - the Congress venue, the first people I met were from Australia (perhaps unsurprising as approximately 50 of the delegates came from that country). We stayed in the halls of residence – a little reminiscent of my university days – oh to be young again!

The conference was very well organised and the speakers & site visits gave me hope that with combined resources we could make a difference – albeit a small one. However, contact with rangers and other countryside professionals highlighted that the need for resources across the world is one of the biggest battles facing all of us (some harder than others). It was good to see that wherever we came from, the over-riding ethos was that we do it not for the money but because we love our work, protecting the natural environment and sharing our experiences and knowledge with anyone we can.

The experience was one that I had not anticipated and watching a short film highlighting the challenges experienced by rangers across the world I count myself lucky that at least I can arrive home alive at the end of the day. The networking opportunities the congress opened up for me were truly excellent – in fact, because of my presentation (and subsequent discussion) I have been invited to go and talk to the Executive Director of the Essex National Heritage Area, one of 24 heritage areas affiliated with the National Park Service in the USA.

Overall, the experience was one that I will hopefully be repeating again. The networking, the speakers, the visits and yes – the social activities, all proved that rangers across the world are dedicated passionately to the same cause, albeit a massive cause!

Bolivia* here I come!!!!”

*At the end of the Congress the IRF flag was lowered and presented to the host country of the next World Ranger Congress which will be Bolivia.

From Phillip Snell

“Yesterday I had been in Denmark and now today I was in Scotland. This was the most I had travelled in a couple of years and it had left me feeling a little dazed arriving into Glasgow airport. But not for long, a purple vision reared up before my eyes, too much caffeine? Sleep deprivation? No, it was the erstwhile CMA/SCRA volunteers of the 5th World Ranger Congress on airport duty to meet and greet delegates (and what a great job they all did to ensure a fabulous event).

Well, if I was feeling jaded imagine how the delegates from the far flung corners of the globe must have felt. However, it was straight off to the opening ceremony for all 300 of us (except for some poor souls trapped in limbo in some featureless airport transition zone). Mustered high up on the battlements of Stirling castle we were piped in by a full band, much to the awe of the delegates who had just disembarked from three double deckers. Ranger uniforms as diverse as the countries they represented complemented the highland attire as we strode in to the main hall of the castle. Within minutes I was deep in conversation with a ranger from the states and then another from the Czech republic and this pattern continued throughout the congress. It was as comforting to talk about shared problems as it was enlightening to hear of never before considered difficulties. To share common practices or to learn new approaches, whether through formal presentations or less formally over a couple (or so) beers! The ranger is as diverse in name or country as the skills required by each ranger every day. And perhaps this *bon ami* is the true skill of the ranger and one reflected in the congress title "People and Place" as after all, the problems of the planet and particularly those of biodiversity can be traced back in some way to anthropological actions. So, some

rangers bedecked in impressive uniforms are at the front line, pitting their very lives against poachers and the like where as the more modestly dressed like myself deal more and more in education and interpretation. Perhaps not such a heroic cause but if we can reduce the demand for endangered species and explain the importance of protecting the biological assets then maybe one day these front-line rangers will not have to risk their lives. But I would not like to leave this short piece on such a sombre note. My opportunity to give a short presentation shows the willingness of all rangers to give time to one another as the whole auditorium rose at my behest to make "living trees" from the imaginations of 40 different countries (see attached photo). A thin green line, often unseen, but one I am pleased to be a small part of".

Phillip Snell (Milton Keynes)

Kevin and Phillip part-funded themselves to attend the Congress and both gave a presentation during one of the technical sessions. They also manned the CMA stand promoting our Association.