

## *Notes on a Hungarian-Russian Expedition to Ukraine*

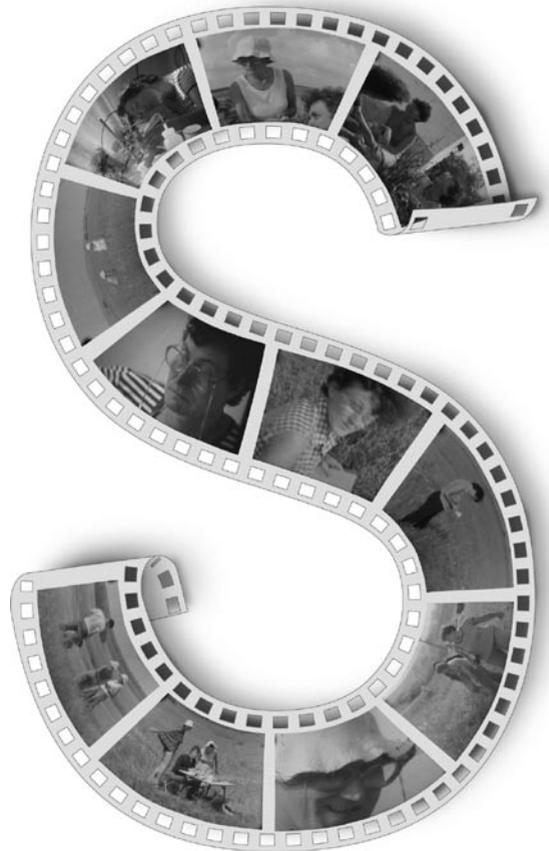
VALERY V. SNAKIN

---

*Institute of Basic Biological Problems of RAS, Pushchino,  
Museum of Earth Sciences of Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.  
E-mail: snakin@mail.ru*

AMONG THE EVENTS which have shaped my scientific career, a worthy place is taken by the meeting and subsequent cooperation with Edit Kovács-Láng. The acquaintance, which was formed accidentally during the former Soviet era, within the framework of an inter-academic exchange of researchers, now seems natural, appropriate and as if forever existed. Modest and purposeful, attractive and strict, highly professional and inquisitive, benevolent and persistent Edit, in my opinion, shows the true model of the scientist. In teamwork, especially under field conditions, such universal qualities as tactfulness, ability to apprehend problems with humor, and simplicity and elegance in dialogue possess supreme importance. All these were that Edit introduced into our teamwork.

Our common objective was to understand the mechanisms of exchange processes in the soil-plant system, the laws behind soil processes, i.e. everything that is termed as plant-soil interactions. Such work demanded *in situ* field research mainly, as laboratory experiments in this area frequently create artifacts. Along with this, we aimed at studying as wide variety of ecosystems as possible, first of all within our countries. The field work of scientists during Soviet times, particularly considering living conditions, was not easy, mildly speaking. It even demanded certain courage from fore-



Frames from an amateur film (by V. Pochuev) on our expedition to Homutovskaya steppe (Donetsk area, Ukraine, June 1985).

*Design by V. Khrisanov.*

ign scientists. Imagine roads in bad condition, paramilitary, on-the-move breakdown of our vehicle (UAZ-469), minimum of housing conveniences in field stations, poor food assortment, round-the-clock observations in the field under all weather conditions. Romanticism came to an end in the second day of work. But working with Edit was easy and simple, despite of everyday difficulties and problems of discrepancy between our needs and opportunities provided by our scientific instruments.

Thus the extensive scientific plan, which allowed us later to prepare solid scientific generalizations (Simon & Kefeli 1991, Snakin *et al.* 2001), was carried out permanently and without any tension. Only a handful of people made up the group of our expedition to the Ukrainian steppe (Reserve „steppe Homutovskaya”, Donetsk region, June–July 1985). Besides Edit and me, there were Dr. Rózsa Mészáros-Draskovits (docent at the Loránd Eötvös University), Dr. Tat’yana L. Bystritskaya (laboratory head from Pushchino), Pavel P. Krechetov (student from MSU) and Nadya Pochueva (engineer). Early rise (at 5 in the morning), a sip of “liquid pullover” (mornings are usually cool and wet in the steppe), and then work in the field. Last measurements were finished around 10 or 11 in the evening. We worked cheerfully and with enthusiasm. A few snapshots of this work are shown in the previous page.

I recollect that time with light sadness and with gratitude to Destiny that it has presented an opportunity to collaborate with the remarkable Person: Edit Kovács-Láng.

## *References*

- Simon, T. & Kefeli, V.I. (eds.) (1991): *Dynamics of primary production and soil processes in grassland ecosystems*. Acad. Sci. USSR, Puschino. (in Russian)
- Snakin, V.V., Prisyazhnaya, A.A. & Kovács-Láng, E. (2001): *Soil Liquid Phase Composition*. Elsevier, Amsterdam.