

COMENIUS MEETING IN ESTONIA

2nd - 7th NOVEMBER 2010

08.00 Wednesday 3rd November.

We were picked up from our hotel, hotel Centrum, by minibus and taken to Kalmetu basic school.

Upon arrival, we were given a warm welcome by staff and children, and shown to our meeting room where introductions took place. Information about the school was given in the form of a carefully prepared pamphlet in English, along with badges with our names on. Refreshment was available.

We were led to a sports hall cum assembly hall, where children were sat waiting to greet us. Firstly, the deputy headmaster welcomed us. Then children stood at the front of the hall, and greeted us in the languages of each of the countries represented at this meeting. We were then invited to stand and introduce ourselves. We also gave some background information about ourselves and where we were from, and thanked our hosts for their generous hospitality. Children then presented us with small stone badges with the Estonian flag painted upon them.

After this, we were given an interesting, and informative guided tour through the school. This tour included a visit to the computer classroom, music room, handicrafts classroom, and classrooms where children were studying. Other amenities were also shown.

We returned to the meeting room where we were welcomed by Wim.

Dolls that were brought from our countries were exchanged, as were letters from pupils. Sadly, due to problems with communication, not all of us had brought sufficient dolls and letters to exchange. It was agreed that this exchange would be carried out at a later date. It was also agreed that six diaries, one for each grade, will be produced by children from each of the participating schools. Each diary will be accompanied by a doll, the child writes to the doll. The doll is the focus. The child will affix a photo of him, or herself in the diary, and write a self description.

Logos, produced by children from the participating schools, were presented.

Once again Estonian hospitality shone bright with the excellent selection of cakes, biscuits, coffee and tea provided, along with bottles of local wine to take home.

Participants also presented a variety of different cakes, biscuits, and chocolates that were shared. A special chewing gum from Xios, Greece was distributed.

Plans for visits in 2011 and 2012 were talked about. The first two were tentatively set for the second week of February and the first week of March 2011.

After this we had a filling and tasty lunch in the school canteen.

We were then taken by mini bus to Viljandi for an interesting walk around the town. It was guided by the school's history teacher. It was a pity about the pouring rain. Numerous sights of historical interest were experienced, including a walk around the ruins of Viljandi castle, a visit to the local history museum, and a guided tour around the Näiv art gallery. We enjoyed views of a lake, and walked over a long wooden suspension bridge. We marvelled at the panoramic views of Viljandi, and its surrounding countryside from the vantage point of a water tower, and also had the opportunity to admire local handicrafts in a nearby specialist shop. We also saw statues of historical importance, and were given information about Viljandi's rich and varied past.

Thursday 4th

We were picked up from our hotel by mini bus and taken to school.

Upon our arrival, the headmaster greeted us, and gave us a warm welcome to his school. Children were seen to be examining the logos for our Comenius project, getting ready to choose the ones for our final scrutiny and selection.

After our arrival at the meeting room, we exchanged gifts, and shared experiences. Refreshment was taken. The videos of our schools and places of origin were passed to the school computer teacher. A short time later, we were shown to a different room where we, and pupils from the school, were able to enjoy our video presentations. After the first four, we adjourned for coffee and cakes, and shared our opinions about what we had seen. After that, we went back to see the rest of the presentations.

A scrumptious Lunch was eaten at the school canteen. Lovely soup!

From here, we went to the assembly hall for a concert to celebrate the schools 140th "birthday", and also to celebrate the fact that this new school building is the fourth school to be built on these grounds. A speech was given by the head master. The Estonian flag, along side the school flag was then brought in with great solemnity, while teachers and children sang the Estonian national anthem. A candle lighting ceremony was held; four candles, one for each school. Then thanks were given to the local council. This was followed by an enchanting play enacted in English by fourth formers. Songs were sung by children. Prizes were awarded by the sports teacher, and poetry was read. The Comenius logo competition was held, with the laurels going to Czech Republic. After this, we had a break for coffee and cake, and a walk around the school.

This was followed by the distribution of the video presentations, along with other material.

In the meeting that followed, it was found that the dates for the 2011 meetings that had been agreed the day before were no longer convenient for the Greek representative. Both the Dutch and Spanish had to give way for new dates, these being for the mission to Holland, April 2011. Arrival 27th, with the meeting for three days 28th to 30th, where they coincide with both the Dutch Queen's day celebrations, and the Canarian Canary day celebrations. The meeting in Sicily will be held 7th to 12th February 2011.

It was agreed that between one and six Christmas cards will be prepared by children from the participating schools to be sent to the other schools in this project, and that they would be sent by post.

A fairy tale that was started in Poland will be passed on to Greece, and will later journey through the schools represented at these meetings.

Legends from each country are to be selected. They are to be written out by pupils, and after that, translated in to English where necessary. On completion, they are to be enacted and filmed. The finished product, which should not last for more than five minutes, is to be taken to the next meeting in Sicily, Italy, in February 2011.

Multi level expositions will be prepared to be shown in Italy, and Holland. These will give information about each country, their culture, and the participating schools. They will include examples of handicrafts, paintings and drawings.

Information about our internet forum (<http://kalmetu.vil.ee/comenius>) was given by the computer teacher. Clear instructions on its use were given by both the teacher and Annika. Passwords and usernames were created.

After the meeting, we were taken to a nearby function hall. A welcome speech was given by the headmaster. A traditional Viljandi Balsam drink was distributed and toasts were made; *TERVISEKS!*

A great many tempting, and delicious, traditional dishes were laid out in the form of a buffet. Local ladies gave an exhibition of their line dancing, after which, entertaining Estonian party games were played. Later, traditional music, and other styles of music were played by local musicians. To a greater or lesser degree, everybody danced and sang at some point this evening. A truly wonderful and memorable time was had by one, and all.

Friday 5th

At 09.30 we were collected by coach to see the Mayor of Viljandi. He welcomed us and gave us cultural and historical data about the area. The councillor for sports and culture followed this by giving us information about her sector of interest. We were then presented with a book about the area.

Shortly afterwards, we were taken to a kindergarten to inspect its facilities. This was a lovely new school, with excellent amenities for children from one and a half to seven years of age.

We then set off by coach to Soomaa Nation Park.

Upon arrival, we entered a reception building where we were offered a selection of pizza rolls and cakes to eat, along with hot coffee and tea to drink.

A Soomaa Park warden talked us through a presentation of the park, and showed us a documentary about the area. A demonstration of the art of dugout canoe building was also included. All of this gave us a good idea about this ancient bog land's history, its fauna, flora, composition, and inhabitants.

From here, we were driven closer to the centre of the park for a long refreshing hike through the bogs. We admired the scenery, felt the magic of its woodland, and gazed upon its mirror like ponds and lakes. Afterwards, we were driven back to our hotel for a nice hot shower.

Saturday 6th

In the morning we were left to our own devices. Most of us went shopping, and some of us went to Viljandi open market in search of local delicacies and bargains.

Just before one o'clock, we were taken to Viljandi's gothic style red brick church, to enjoy a lovely concert given by school children, and local choirs and singers. Darius, a priest, and one of the Czech Republic's representatives, gave a moving sermon about the Comenius project and its meaning. He gave us all his blessing.

After this experience, we were taken to a quaint restaurant near the school for a fine lunch. From there, we went on foot to school. There, we had the opportunity to see the concert again, with the addition of extra songs sung by the female voice choir. After this, there was a choice of events, live music and dancing, or a smaller, more intimate party for invited guests. At the party, an excellent buffet of good taste was laid on, which included a choice of fine wines to drink. Speeches were made. Entertainment was provided by a saxophonist playing a selection of subtle jazz music. The musician, incidentally, is the son of one of the school's teachers. We later returned to the hotel by mini bus.

Sunday 7th

Time to leave. Annika came to the hotel to wish us farewell. A sad occasion after all we had experienced. She accompanied us to the near by bus station, and helped us to buy tickets for the bus to Tallinn international airport. So, we began our journey home.