

Restoration of old apple orchards in Rychleby mountains

North-East Moravia, Czech Republic

Once upon a time, there was an apple seed. Planted into the fertile soil, it grew and put out first tiny leaves, strengthened narrow branches... Or how was the story of Czech old apple orchards in Rychleby Mountains?

The border parts of Czech Republic were settled in 13th century mostly by the colonizers of German nationality and their stay lasted till the World War Two. In 1946 they were forced to leave their homeland known as Sudety; very important part of culture of our country disappeared, a lot of villages were abandoned and only few of them newly inhabited. Some of those German villages disappeared completely and their previous locations were agriculturally cultivated or forested.

Two years ago – 60 years after the war – people from Czech youth organization named Brontosaurus found number of old fruit orchards in Rychleby Mountains in site of previous German villages which grow there as the remains of Sudetian settlement. Brontosaurus people were interested about in three bigger orchards on the sites called Růženec (Rosenkrantz), Hřibová (Pillsberg) and Zastávka (Stillstand). The most effort was concentrated on Zastávka, which consists of big orchard (about 80 trees - apples, pears and some plums) and small groups of trees scattered on the hill. They can be found on the edge between forest and pasture, together with stone remains of several German houses, which creates a strong genius loci of the locality...



From the ecological point of view this place is quite important, especially because:

- ➔ there are several **old local varieties of fruit trees**, which are rare in Czech Republic. These varieties are also very well adapted to the conditions of this mountain region.
- ➔ they are **proper biotops** (sites) for some species of birds and insects, which need old trees with some cavities and decayed wood.



The orchards are of course important also from cultural and historical point of view – one can feel there the connection between present time and the origins of the region. (Actually, „The Way towards The Roots” is the name of one long-term project of local Brontosaurus branch). Old orchards should be also protected according to Czech National Programme of Biological Diversity Protection.

So we decided to focus on Zastávka locality to make this orchard functional, producing and deserving attention of people. During last two years some work was done. Until now we have:

- improved the condition the oldest trees by cutting down dry and not well rising branches

- removed shrubs and some competition trees
- made the list of varieties of present fruit trees with a fruiterer specialist
- in spring and summer cut tall grass, nettles and weeds in orchard
- plant some new apple trees of old varieties where suitable
- organized a discussion meeting with people from local village



By this work we have prolonged the life of the rest of old trees in orchard. We financed it from the grant of Partnership Foundation, got on the smaller project we wrote about the orchard.

The project has one important weakness - the ownership of the place. One smaller part of the orchard is owned by national company Czech Forests. The second one is in ownership of a bigger private agricultural company, which rented this orchard for 30 years to group of three young local men. We deal with them about the future of the place, but even if the dealings go quite well, the future is still not clear.

Future plan:

- 1) make a deal with owners and renters - as soon as possible
- 2) find specialists to make a botanical, ornitological and entomological research and raise the value of locality - till 1. 9. 2008
- 3) create the management plan of the site - harmonogram of works, funding, material, people and background needed for the long-term maintenance of orchard - till 31. 12. 2008
- 4) find the use of apples (making juice for Brontosaurus members, special edition for sponsors and patrons of local Brontosaurus branch) - autumn 2008
- 5) small apple celebration in the orchard for locals and Brontosaurus connected with juice production, music, art, theatre... - October 2008
- 6) create educational panel on the site (wooden construction is already installed) and leaflets with information about the importance of the orchards - spring 2009
- 7) presentation of plan to local people, educational excursion for public - spring 2009



Continuously: organize Brontosaurus work-weekends to maintain the orchard, monitor species on the locality (possibly university students' work)

Indicators of success: number of people involved (Brontosaurus + local), biodiversity in the orchard (species counted), number of trees producing and thriving

Next year we hope to organize an international summer camp in our region, so the orchard would be probably one of the topics.

Zdeněk Frélich and Veronika Fišerová
Brontosaurus Movement
Czech Republic

