

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MARIAN KUC TO THE NATURAL HISTORY KNOWLEDGE OF CHRZANÓW

PIOTR GRZEGORZEK

Piotr Grzegorzek, Muzeum w Chrzanowie im. Ireny i Mieczysława Mazarakich, ul. Mickiewicza 13, 32-500 Chrzanów, Poland

I heard about Marian Kuc for the first time while I was a student of the Faculty of Biology and Environmental Protection at the University of Silesia in Katowice. Even when I was a student in years 1974–1980, the matter of his moving abroad was still contentiously discussed and definitely negatively judged. A little bit later, in 1982, when I was employed by the Chrzanów Museum I frequently came across herbarium specimens which bore his name. That was when I found out that he was from Chrzanów.

In the second half of 1991 a corpulent elderly man who spoke perfect Polish visited the museum. As was my habit, I earnestly showed him round, but without asking who I had the pleasure of accompanying. I showed him, among other things, the only araucarite which the Museum had at that time in a permanent nature exhibition. There was also a picture of a group of young people there. Among them there was a young Marian Kuc, which I did not fail to mention, since his was the only person in that group whose name I had been given. I passed this information on to each tourist as a matter of routine. Only after we had seen all of the exhibitions did the elderly man confess that he was Marian Kuc. At that point, I showed him a collection that he had donated to our institution, in which there were collections acquired during the Spitsbergen expeditions.

We met again in 1992 while the Museum was in the process of preparing temporary nature exhibitions. He brought to realization the huge project 'Before the glacier disappeared' on a small area while I occupied a much larger area with the 'Nature's varieties' project. Both exhibitions were very

successful and were widely commented on. In the same year he came up with the idea of organizing at the division of temporary exhibitions an Urbańczyk House, a 'geological museum under the open sky'. At that time, it was the first one in Poland and one of thirty such facilities in the world available to the public. During the same year, in cooperation with many people, he created at the Chrzanów Museum the Araucarite Society of Chrzanów. In justifying his initiative, he emphasized that 'he has a moral right to exhort to protect what he considers most valuable in his homeland, to protect araucarites'. The picture of the environs of Chrzanów, very different from the image saved in his memory from the years immediately after the war, motivated him to take some action. Littered gorges and the common practice of 'acquiring' valuable specimens for commercial purposes particularly irritated him.

On October 5, 1992, the Society's constitution was approved and Marian Kuc became its honorary president. Its main objectives were to collect specimens for private collections while simultaneously preventing the devastation of their habitats. Furthermore, the Society aimed to promote the knowledge about araucarites with the help of, among other things, a published brochure. Its statutory activity was completed in accordance with the regulations in the autumn of 1996.

During this period (1994–1996) three araucarite rallies were organized whose goal was a walk from Kwaczała to Wygiełzów through the route that connects the peak parts of the ravines on the southern slopes of the Kamionka hill. Around 70 araucarite gardens and the exposition in the garden



Fig. 1. Selection of the material donated by Marian Kuc to the Museum of Natural History in Chrzanów in 2007. From left Marek Oratowski, Marek Szuwarzyński, Piotr Grzegorzec and Marian Kuc.

of the Urbańczyk House are a lasting result of his activity in and around the Chrzanów area. Areta Jaracz contributed significantly to the Society's work by involving into its activity a large group of Chrzanów I High School youth. Also thanks to the determination of Marian Kuc the local government cleaned litter from the Gródek Ravine in Kwaczała.

The year 1993 was mainly a year of formation for the geological garden. During this period Marian Kuc took me to many of the places from which the specimens were obtained. It was he who during that year introduced me to Żabnik, the ravines in Kwaczała and to many other interesting places around Chrzanów. There were also many other destinations of our shared excursions. During this year, among others, we looked for a carnivorous plant. *Aldrovanda vesiculosa*, in the Valley of the Upper Vistula.

There were many expeditions that took place without my participation, but everybody whom he involved into those activities, it's difficult to list them all, stresses that it was only thanks to him that they got to know the most interesting nooks of the Chrzanów area. He closely cooperated with

Eugeniusz Kepiński who emphasized the unusual gift Marian had of establishing direct contact with strangers. During this year we also participated in the outdoor session of the Mycological Section of the Poznań Branch of the Polish Botanical Society organised by prof. Anna Bujakiewicz. On August 29, by chance. We ran into the bryologist Piotr Szmajda. After our return to Chrzanów we continued carrying out field trips. It is hard to list them all. Among other things, in a large group, on September 11, we collected araucarites from the Dąbrowica Glade in the Oklesna region. On September 18, together with young people from the I High School of Chrzanów, we obtained geological specimens and mosses from the Zelatowa quarry from the Zbójnik hillside. During this year we were also supposed to acquire very splendid specimen of black oak from the gravel pit in Jankowice. Marian Kuc made all the arrangements and when the case seemed to be coming to a successful finalization, the oak was burnt. Well, apart from words that are commonly considered to be offensive, he didn't have anything to say with regard to this matter. On September 23, 1993. during the Days of Chrzanów, the foundation stone of the geological garden, a big



Fig. 2. Marian Kuc with the participants of the excursion organised for collecting araucarits in Gródek ravine in Kwaczała near Chrzanów in 1994.

araucarit from Zagórze, also called Proboszcz, was installed. In the creation of the garden Marian Kuc was helped by Grzegorz Wrzeszcz, who as a consequence got to know many interesting nooks of the Chrzanów area. That is why he has no regrets for an old Polish Fiat 125p which was used for that purpose and ended its days during this service.

In 1994 we were still conducting excursions into the environs of Chrzanów, continuing works related to the garden which at that time was called a 'geological museum under the open sky'. We often visited the same places as in the previous year acquiring new specimens. During this time and in the following years Marian Kuc had been collecting araucarits. During this year the first Araucarit Rally took place. Before it happened, I participated in the field trips during the territory demarcation. The rally was supposed to be one of the promotion forms for the kwaczalska arkose; unfortunately, in 1996 it took place for the last time.

In the following years we kept travelling together and we continued the expansion of the geological garden. The most important activity in 1995 was the acquisition of a large araucarit from a side branch of the Gródek ravine. There were two specimens. One of them shattered and the remains were left there. After my report, Marian Kuc took the lead in this matter.

On September 27, 1997, Marian Kuc organized a scientific meeting under the slogan 'mineralogical and petrographic study of petrified trees'. Prof. Maria Reymanówna, among others, graced that meeting with her presence. Unfortunately, I didn't take part in it, because at that time I was attending a field session of the Polish Botanical Society's Mycological Section of its Poznań Branch. It was one of many activities that Kuc carried out at that time in the region of Chrzanów which took place without my participation.

To sum up, starting in 1991 each time Marian returned to Poland he had a prepared plan of



Fig. 3. Marian Kuc with Areta Jaracz during the opening of the exhibition 'Before retreat of glaciations' in the Museum of Natural History in Chrzanów in 1992.



Fig. 4. Opening the memorial table dedicated to Marian Kuc in the Museum of Natural History in Chrzanów on 6 June 2011. From left to right Józefa Kuc, Ryszard Kosowski, Zbigniew Mazur and Ryszard Ochyra.

activities that he consistently realized until 1997. During that period he established contacts with the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy in Kraków and the Earth Sciences Department of the University of Silesia. As part of this cooperation he participated in field activities for students to whom he passed abundant knowledge gained during many years of research in both hemispheres. I met him for the last time in the 20th century in 1997. Again, we visited many places in the Chrzanów area. It was in this year that he made his final decision to go back to Canada. Several days before his departure, on September 23–28, he participated in the Second National Mycological Symposium in Janów Lubelski. The reason for that was the 40th anniversary of the existence of the Polish Botanical Society's Mycological Section.

Marian Kuc did not return to Chrzanów until 2005. At that time he finalized many projects. Among others, he deposited in our Museum his geological collection and a part of his library. In

2007 he returned once again. That was when we looked through and systematised the geological collection, including numerous araucarits, before



Fig. 5. Memorial table dedicated to Marian Kuc on the Monument of the Persons of Merits in the Museum of Natural History in Chrzanów.

inserting them into the collection of the Museum. His last visit was a brief one in 2010, on September 10. He came straight from the airport to participate in the opening of one of my exhibitions, on white storks, entitled ‘The adventures of Kajtek – that is a meeting with the storks’. He also took part in a Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Chrzanów Land session that was held on September 29 as a part of the Museum's 50th anniversary celebrations. On October 4, we went on our last trip ‘in the search of araucarits’ to Zagórze and Wygiełzów. On that same day we accomplished the formalities of transferring to the collection the last araucarit. We were very seriously preparing to create a research centre that was supposed to be called the Araucarit Research Centre. I found him in a very good shape at that time, but I didn't know why he was mostly focused on discussing his future funeral details. He left Poland on October 5. He was planning to come back in April 2011 in order to continue the work on the petrified wood.

At this point, I have to mention that it was only thanks to trips with Marian Kuc that I got to know quite accurately the area of Chrzanów, which in the following years resulted in the foundation and development of the Walker's Club. I decided to bring others closer to the natural beauty and wealth of this land, just as he brought it closer to me.

In 1982 the collection received his donation of large butterflies and dragonflies from Surinam and a starfish and dogfish acquired in Yugoslavia. The skull and cervical vertebra of a muskox from the Canadian Arctic Archipelago were other donations handed over in 1993. In 2000 our museum received a package from Argentina that contained herbarium specimens collected in Antarctica and in the vicinity of Ushuaia in Tierra del Fuego in Argentina.

The geological collection of 182 items, including at least 61 araucarits, was the largest single transfer of natural museum-pieces, finalized by correspondence in 2009. Additionally, the garden is embellished by 90 araucarits which he acquired over the years.

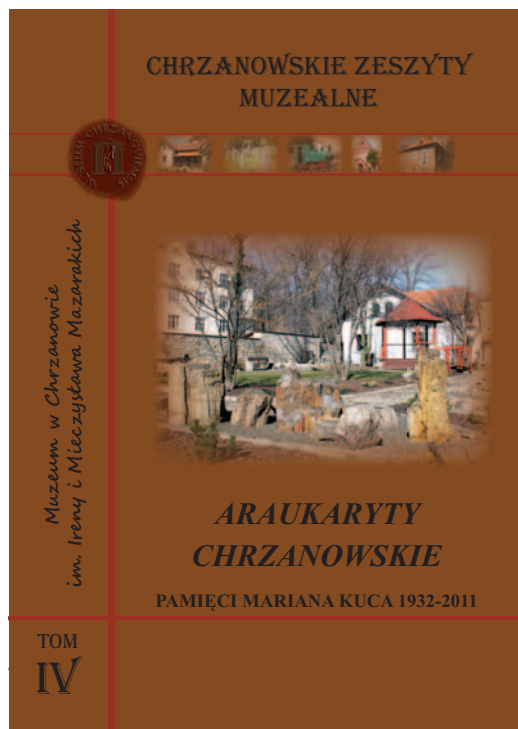


Fig. 6. A memorial volume dedicated to Marian Kuc published by the Museum in Chrzanów.

Moreover, our museum received numerous books and reprints of scientific publications. This part of the donation also includes a manuscript of several legends of Chrzanów. The collection of ‘Oświęcimskie’ publications and Canadian journals with the presentations of his own research, need to be mentioned here as well.

The geological Museum under the open sky was renovated and became the Oriental Garden of Geology. On June 6, 2011, it was named after Marian Kuc. During this ceremony, on the monument dedicated to the men of science and culture that have contributed to Chrzanów, a plate with his name was installed. The fourth volume of Museum Notebooks of Chrzanów entitled – ‘Araucarites of Chrzanów – in the memory of Marian Kuc 1932–2010’, appeared in April 2012 in the first anniversary of his death.