European Greenbelt

Outline

Phil McKenna

**[Plot**: 25 years ago two biologists hatched an audacious plan. Transform the former no-man’s land separating Western and Eastern Europe into an eco-corridor running through the heart of Europe. Now, a quarter center later, one of the world’s largest conservation efforts is re-wilding a continent in ways few thought possible.

**Subplot:** An unlikely friendship between two boys who overcome seemingly insurmountable barriers.

**Subplot 2**: Redemption. Frobel grows up in shadow of ugly, horrid wall. Wall disappears overnight. He spends his adulthood trying to preserve its memory for future generations by conserving the unintended beauty of its no-man’s land. ]

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**Lede (1972,** **Foritz streambed, Hassenberg, Germany, inside the Death Zone)**

13-year-old Kai Frobel crawls into no-man’s land for first time, revels in its wild beauty while hiding from East German guards who would likely kill him.

**Nut Graph**:

25 years ago two biologists hatched an audacious plan. Transform the former no-man’s land separating Western and Eastern Europe into an eco-corridor running through the heart of Europe. Now, a quarter center later one of the world’s largest conservation efforts is beginning to re-wild a continent in ways few thought possible.

**Ugly Wall (1975, Liebau, Germany)**

16-year-old Frobel watches, from across the border, the demolition and forced resettlement of a 700-year-old East German village, because it was too close to West Germany. [will recount how around the same time, Frobel watched his dad, the village doctor, patch up a West German farmer whose face was blown off when a land mine drifted across the border onto his field. And, how Frobel would see flares go off and hear gunshots at night, as refugees tried to cross the border]

**Greenbelt today**

Additional nutgraph on present status of greenbelt throughout Europe and how no-man’s land of the Cold War accidentally created eco-corridore of today.

**Tracking Lynx (Present, Harz National Park, Germany)**

Tracking lynx in a national park along the former inner German border with lynx biologist Ole Anders. We find a recent deer kill, a sign that after a 200-year absence, lynx are again thriving in the region.

**First Survey (1976 Hassenberg, Germany)**

17-year-old Frobel conducts first formal survey of border zone, finds rare bird species thrive in the death zone. Presents his findings at a science fair put on by Bavarian Ministry of the Environment. Wins first prize.

**Backstory: History of German’s (and Europe’s) domestication.**

Recount early US conservationist Aldo Leopold’s visit to Germany in 1930s. He concludes that the country lacks wildlife, a quote that has been a call to action for Frobel and others in Germany.

**Enter Gunter Berwing (Present, Frobel’s childhood bedroom, Hassenberg, Germany):**

I’m standing with Frobel in his childhood bedroom. Looking out window he shows me where border fence and towers stood. Then he shows me the house where the aunt of Gunter Berwing lived. From there I describe how Frobel and Berwing first became pen pals, through Berwing’s West German aunt and their shared interest in birds. [Will try to quote an actual letter from the time; the Stasi kept a copy of all of their letters in their files which Frobel and Berwing later obtained.]

**Frobel and Berwing First Meet (1982 Sonneberg, East Germany)**

Frobel gets special, 1-day permit to enter East Germany to meet Berwing in person. They look for birds, talk about enviro issues. Around sunset as Frobel prepares to leave, the two sit on a hill looking across border to W. Germany. They calculate how long it will be till Berwing is 65 years old and can pay Frobel a similar visit in the West.

**Birth of the German Greenbelt (Hof, Germany, December 1989)** One month after Berlin Wall comes down, Frobel invites a couple dozen East German conservationists to a meeting to discuss future of the Inner German Border no-man’s land. Hundreds of East Germans, including Berwing, attend. The “Greenbelt” [Grunesband] is born.

**European Greenbelt is born (2003, Bonn)**

Greenbelt expands from Germany to EU-wide with support of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union’s last head of state. [I will include quotes from Gorbachev’s speeches from the Bonn conference and hear from Frobel how they got Gorbi’s support.]

**Greenbelt in far north (Present, Norway-Russia border)**

I visit the Norway-Russia border, a massive wilderness where brown bears thrive. Ecologists first discovered the ecologic wealth of this region when looking at Satellite images in the 1970s that revealed a band of old-growth forest on the Russian side of the border. The secret to the environmental success, I find out, is that Russian continues to maintain a kilometers’ wide no-man’s land enforced by guard towers and electric fences. Studies show bears seek out the safety of this no-man’s land, crossing the border from nearby Finland into Russia each winter to hibernate.

**Is the Greenbelt Enough?**

Outside comment from leading conservation biologists on the effectiveness of ecological cooridores for sustaining biodiversity.

-Ilkka Hanski, head of the Metapopulation Research Group at University of Helsinki.

-Paul Beier and Andrew Gregory of University of Northern Arizona, who run the site [**www.docorridorswork.org**](http://www.docorridorswork.org/research-team/)and who are now studying the EU Greenbelt.

Will examine the prospects for the Harz lynx population that I visited; the long term sustainability of their population depends on an effective corridor linking them to other larger forests along the Greenbelt. It’s coming, but not there yet.

**Greenbelt in Albania (Present, Albania-Macedonia border)**

When the Iron Curtain fell, this poor, isolated country was a haven for wildlife. Today its would-be greenbelt has been clear-cut and its animals shot or caged. I’ll tour the Shebenik Jabllanicë National Park, which was created a few years ago along the former no-man’s land between Albania and Macedonia to protect endangered lynx. Today, one solitary cat, at most, remains.

**Closing Scene (Present, Foritz Streambed, Hassenberg, Germany)**

I tour with Frobel the site where he first entered the no-man’s land as a boy. Now the area, one of the few places in Germany where a waterway hasn’t been shackled into a straight, cement-lined canal, is a jewel along Germany’s Greenbelt. Recent conservation efforts returned an adjoining section of the stream to its historic meanderings. We walk through fallow grasslands along the recently restored streambed where endangered dragonflies once again thrive.

[I need to find a way to include Berwing in something more recent than the 1989 meeting in Hof. Perhaps my upcoming meeting with him and Frobel.

He continues to work on the Greenbelt, though at a local level, whereas Frobel works both on a local and, more sexy, international level. Berwing works for the regional nature conservation department in Sonneberg where he grew up, and also works as a volunteer for BUND, Frobel’s ngo, purchasing new areas of the Greenbelt for the organization near Sonneberg. The two talk every couple months, see each other a couple times a year, and remain good friends.]