

Objective lessons expand sense of history

Tourists invited to walk 1812 battle sites

By Victor Andreev

Our Vitebsk and Smolensk tourist agencies have created a joint project entitled *The Patriotic War of 1812: 200 Years On*. It covers the sites of the most important battles with the French army, which took place in Belarus and the neighbouring Smolensk Province.

The Belarusian route is to feature Polotsk, Vitebsk, the Rossony District (with Klyastitsy village) and the Beshenkovichi District (with Ostrovno village). Leo Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* about Ostrovno, where a strategic battle took place between the French army and units of the Western Russian Army. In 1962, an obelisk was unveiled here to honour the event.

Tourists will be able to see monuments and memorials honouring

the victory over the French enemy, and hear about heroic battles. Moreover, the trip will have an animated re-enactment. Tourists will be able to try on costumes from that time and 'fight' either on the French or the Russian side.

A school museum at Klyastitsy has a unique display devoted to the victory of Russian troops — under the command of Lieutenant General Wittgenstein — over superior French forces, commanded by Marshal Oudinot. This battle ended Napoleon's advance on St. Petersburg — the capital of Russia at the time. Schoolchildren have organised fancy-dress performances illustrating this battle for several years, which they now plan to demonstrate to tourists.

The new project involves Belarusian archivists, scientists and



Tourists in Belarus offered variety of interesting historical routes

local historians. Before the route is unveiled, it is to be appraised by the National Academy of Sciences, the Sports and Tourism Ministry and the Culture Ministry. Vitebsk's Regional Executive Committee's Department for Physical Culture, Sports and Tourism is the main authority coordinating the tour, which is to last for three days and include the city of

Polotsk. The city celebrates a double jubilee next year, as its 1,150th anniversary is also arriving. Its comprehensive city development programme envisages the restoration of a monument to the heroes of the 1812 Patriotic War, which used to grace Svobody Square (from 1850 to early the 1930s). A new monument was installed in December 2009.

Now tourist facilities dedicated to the Napoleonic War are appearing across Belarus. Meanwhile, uniforms and other archaeological finds are exhibited at the Bivouac museum-estate, opened by entrepreneur Sergey Tolstik, near Borisov (near Brilevsky Field, where Bonaparte lost thousands of his soldiers crossing the River Berezina).

Postcards from poet Adam Mickiewicz's time remind us of our glorious past

Novogrudok Castle, from the great poet's time, being restored, while three halls of Radziwill Palace in Nesvizh soon to welcome first tourists

By Viktor Andreev

Novogrudok Castle was many times rebuilt but the 17th-18th century wars left it in ruins. Poet Adam Mickiewicz, born locally, saw Kostelnaya Tower in its former glory and his sketches remain with us — often depicted on postcards. A hundred years ago, the tower crumbled, leaving only fragments of its walls. The other towers are in total ruin, with nothing remaining. However, the National Academy of Sciences is unearthing the basements of the towers and remains of the walls, which are to be preserved for future generations and opened to tourists. Kostelnaya Tower is to undergo full restoration, since some of its walls still stand.

In the 1920s, Polish archaeologists worked at the site, with their work now continued by Belarusians, led by Andrey Metelsky — a senior research officer at the National Academy of Sciences' History Institute. The Director of the Novogrudok Museum of Local History, Tamara Vershitskaya, comes to the Castle every day. She tells us, "In my view, work is being conducted thoroughly and competently."

This autumn, bones of aurochs,



Remains of Novogrudok Castle walls

cross-shaped bricks, remains of ceramic goods, colourful tiles for ovens and 17th-19th century coins were found on the site, with further study continuing. In fact, years ago, scientists from Leningrad (today's St. Petersburg) discovered Byzantine age articles in Novogrudok, which are now kept by the Hermitage.

By spring, the Castle should be completely restored, with work on its towers to follow. The remains of a princely palace and an old church are yet to be unearthed. Meanwhile, the Culture Ministry is developing its *Castles of Belarus* state pro-

gramme, which envisages the restoration of medieval fortresses in other Belarusian cities.

Soon, three halls of restored Nesvizh Castle are to open to visitors: Kaminny (Fireplace) Hall in the southern gallery, plus Maly Stolovy (Small Dining) and Bely Balny (White Ball) in Kamenitsa. The latter has its original panels, columns and fretwork along the edge of the ceiling, and chandeliers from the Radziwills' times. There are plans to organise costume balls there, while a local exhibition will include Slutsk sashes, medieval coins, medals and documents.

Old mechanism delights once more

By Yelena Stasyukevich

Unique mechanical batleika revived in Grodno on eve of Christmas

The Christmas batleika (a traditional puppet theatre) with a mechanical electrical mechanism, was invented in the 1960s by a senior priest at the Franciscan Church in Grodno, Arkady Valtos. However, the authorities soon banned its use, leaving it to be stored in an attic for several decades. It was recently rediscovered, with restoration initiated by the cur-

rent senior priest of the church.

Artist-restorer Vladimir Kisly has repaired the old mechanism, allowing Grodno residents to enjoy the unique puppet theatre once more. A similar mechanism also exists in the Vitebsk Region. Grodno's batleika features figures of the Holy Family, alongside shepherds, the three kings and other characters who have come to honour Jesus' birth. Around 20 figures revolve around the cradle, moving their heads and taking off their hats; they may be even playing musical instruments soon.

Estate on banks of River Berezina

By Tatiana Lapushkina

19th century architectural monument goes under hammer in Belarus for first time

Pototsky's House, built in about 1850 in Berezino, has lain neglected for the past three decades, lacking an investor. In November, it was put up for sale at auction for a nominal amount but sold for an impressive Br112m. The buyer is a Minsk construction company which plans to reopen the historical building by 2015, with a hotel, restaurant and hunting hall in traditional style.

"To recreate the interior as it would have looked in the times of the Pototsky owners, we've used archive materials and have interviewed descendants of the famous

family, who now reside abroad," explains the Head of the Berezino District Executive Committee's Sports and Tourism Department, Yevgeny Buloichik. "All the necessary documents have been prepared, with the reconstruction project registered on the 2011-2012 state tourism development programme."

The new owner has tenant rights for 50 years, with a license to operate entrepreneurial activity (after fulfilling all points of the architectural plan). They should employ ten people and must maintain the building as a tourist site. According to Mr. Buloichik, this should aid water tourism in the region, as the estate is located on the banks of the River Berezina. It's to be included on a rafting route, which should enjoy great popularity.