

# Echoes of WWII years remain in depths of lake

Belarusians to lift famous Soviet 'Titanic' from Ladoga

By Anna Tolkachevskaya

A Russian search team has asked Belarus for help in lifting a railway barge which sank in 1942, carrying Soviet machinery. It currently sits on the bottom of Lake Ladoga. Diver Igor Matyuk, a famous Belarusian specialist in lifting machinery, has responded promptly, offering his unique equipment, which allows extremely heavy cargo to be lifted 'by hand'.

Researchers began work at Lake Ladoga in February, camping on the frozen lake for almost two months, with 12km separating them from the bank, travelling by 'unsinkable vehicle'; it's almost impossible to anchor safely during the summer. "Directly below our base was the sunken barge, fully loaded with civil machinery and equipment: carriages, generators and tankers. The Germans took a great deal of effort to sink it in the autumn of 1942, so that it wouldn't reach the occupied city," explains Mr. Matyuk, who heads the military research team at the Minsk District Organisation of Soldiers-Internationalists.

In the war years, Lake Ladoga was the ultimate hope of Leningrad. "The Road of Life" was the only route into the city for the Soviets. Now, the bed of the lake is a treasury of artefacts.



Belarusian search team ready to dive for sunken vessel

Several dozen times, Mr. Matyuk and his colleagues have dived under to study the 50m vessel, which is also 9m in width, designed to transport railway carriages. It even has four rails, on which carriages, tankers and a locomotive are standing: all to be lifted to the surface.

At the initial stage, the Russian-Belarusian team lifted two huge tractors to

the surface, in addition to a coal powered engine and the remains of a sailor. Every day, they make new discoveries, raising them from the watery depths. A box of instruments, unwritten envelopes and a cigar-holder are among the more unusual finds; no doubt, all have their own interest value.

Another barge also lies at the bottom of Lake Ladoga,

named the 'Ladoga Titanic' locally, as so many passengers drowned on the fateful night of September 17th, 1941. To be raised this summer, barge #725 suffered a crack to the hull during a storm and the crew's SOS signal brought a response from Fascist air scouts and, later, battle-planes. The total number of lost souls is unknown, as there was no

manifest, but around 1,500 are thought to have been travelling. The tug-boat Orel picked up 216 survivors.

The Belarusian search team has major plans to raise a famous KB military vehicle, driven by tank man Kolobanov, which was found recently in the marshes. It is to be restored for display at the new Great Patriotic War Museum.

## Home for smew ducks



By Andrey Kovalev

**Small smew duck listed in Red Book nesting in Belarus' Zhitkovichi District**

The Belaye fishing farm is taking part in the *Bio-Diversity* project — jointly organised by the UNDP, by the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection and by APB-BirdLife Belarus Public Association. Project representative Irina Novak tells us that no more than 30 pairs of the duck currently nest in Belarus. Since 1998, their number has been falling, as they tend to nest in tree hollows, which are few in number in our country. Moreover, the bird is being

'pushed' from its natural habitat by larger bullheads and female birds and offspring are often killed by pine martens while they nest.

Twenty especially prepared nesting boxes are being placed near ponds, designed to protect against competitors and predators. The boxes' entry holes are small enough to avoid entry by bullheads and barbed wire protects against pine martens.

Organisers note that people sometimes destroy nests, mistakenly believing that the birds eat fish. With this in mind, the recent campaign aims to inform local residents of the true nature of their native environment: 'Unique Population of Smew in Belarus' stands are now installed at the entrance to the fishing farm ponds, with posters distributed among residents.

It's expected that support can expand the bird's population to other fishing farms countrywide.



Minsk Upper Town skyline near River Svisloch

## Minsk's latest tourist guide

**Belarusian capital presented as contemporary European city, offering delicious cuisine, comfortable accommodation and rich historical and cultural legacy in recently published guide**

The edition invites tourists to promenade Troitsky Suburbs and Svobody Square, to visit the Holy Spirit Cathedral and St. Simeon and St. Helen's Catholic Church, as well as

seeing Minsk-Arena and the National Library. The 'Wonderful Minsk' route takes you from the Railway Square to the Lower Town.

Those who enjoy sports can play tennis, go swimming or try carting. You can even take a helicopter ride or make a parachute jump. Moreover, the guide recommends buying souvenir craft items: those made from straw and linen, and embroidered napkins and cloths.

One chapter is dedicated

to sites surrounding Minsk: travellers are invited to see Rakov, Zaslavl, Ratomka and Khatyn. The Museum of Folk Life in Ozertso and that in Dudutki are also highly recommended, alongside the Raubichi and Silichi ski centres, and Yakutskie Mountains Active Leisure Park.

The guide allows those unfamiliar with the city to tour independently and, being pocket sized, is easily portable.

## Orthodox duchess canonised

By Yuri Bestvitsky

**Bobruisk's Eparchy gathering materials to canonise granddaughter of famous poet Alexander Pushkin — Duchess Natalia Vorontsova-Velyaminova**

The Bobruisk Eparchy's Department for Canonisation is convinced that Orthodox Duchess Natalia should be canonised, having worked to improve the life of those in her locality.

Using her own funds, she opened a school for peasant children in the Bobruisk's District Telusha village in the late 19th century (at which she taught), constructed a library and built St. Nicholas' Church. The latter still has a congregation, having survived revolutionary chaos and occupation by the Nazis. Now restored, it is a spiritual symbol and a major cultural and historical site.

The granddaughter of the prominent poet lived with her husband Pavel Vorontsov-Velyaminov (of the ancient ducal family) on the Vavulichi estate of his mother, not far from Bobruisk, until her death in 1912 of a sudden pneumonia. Most residents from neighbouring villages and the town of Bobruisk attended the funeral to bid her a final farewell and she is now buried in the local park, her grave tended by residents and pupils from the local school.

## Improving quality of life

**Minsk to organise foster families for elderly and disabled**

"The new 'Foster Families for the Elderly and Disabled' project is being launched in the capital, promoting the status of those caring for the elderly. In addition, training seminars are to be offered to relatives," explains Zhanna Romanovich, the Chair for Labour, Employment and Social Protection Committee at the Minsk City Executive Committee. She stresses that rising numbers of elderly require us to take a new approach. Since 2004, pensioners have comprised 20 percent of Minsk residents. Accordingly, social centres offering services to the elderly are more important than ever and resources need to be directed into this sphere to ensure smooth operation. A plan to develop such centres has been made for the next four years, aiming to enhance the quality of life for the elderly, while reducing the burden on the city budget.