

Galloping along frontier

Horse patrol for Belarusian borders revived

By Marina Rasolko

Saveiki border post, in the Verkhnedvinsk District, has been trialling horse patrols for the past two years, amid picturesque forests and meadows. The pure air is scented with wonderful natural fragrances and the silence broken only by bird-song and hoof beats. Wearing camouflage jackets, with guns on their shoulders, the sight of the border guards could surprise the unwary but the officers are just doing their job: patrolling the border area for signs of smugglers or poachers. Foot prints, cigarette butts or lighters, plastic bottles or broken branches give away the presence of those who would rather hide themselves.

Riders were used before the Great Patriotic War, of course, so the idea is nothing new. In fact, Osveyski equestrian school operates in the area, providing suitable horses (a Belarusian light draft breed). Chosen for their easy disposition, they remain calm even on hearing gunfire. Osveyski also provides ammunition and other necessary equipment.

Senior warrant officer Sergey Petrukhin tells us, "Our area is exotic, with endless marsh lowlands, hills and mixed forests. It's hard for vehicles to gain access and a true challenge to cross dozens of kilometres on foot. After rainfall, your legs simply sink. Unlike all-terrain vehicles, horses can



Polotsk horseback border detachment commonly seen around Saveiki border post

travel quietly and, naturally, hay is cheaper than fuel. Importantly, horses are also eco-friendly."

Saveiki is situated in the north of the country, protecting 50km of Belarusian-Latvian border. Belarus, Latvia and Russia meet at the site, encouraging the joke that a cockerel's dawn cry can be heard in three countries. Moreover, the state border starts at this post: a pole featuring a number one inscription is found there.

"All our guards can shoot while seated on horseback," continues Mr. Petrukhin. "Our horses are well-ac-

customed to gun fire, so are unafraid of sudden noises or explosions. Only officers who've passed special training at the local equestrian school are allowed to work with horses, having learnt cavalry and veterinary skills, besides others." They train in an exercising ring, practicing walking, trotting, cantering and galloping. They also learn how to tackle sudden rearing, if a horse should become spooked by a reflective object. Soldiers with veterinary or zoo-technical education are first in line to be sent to Saveiki. Officers also learn tracking skills, which

can show them how many people have passed and when. They can even define average height and weight and can spot 'tricks' (misleading prints such as false hoof prints).

Those who live near the border are most likely to be crossing, of course. Fishermen and those with relatives near the border are frequent 'visitors' but, for some, the temptation to smuggle is overwhelming: last year, around six dozen were detected. Illegal smuggling of cigarettes and alcoholic beverages (from Belarus to Latvia) is another problem,

with 'box drops' common. Saveiki is a relatively calm post but enterprising smugglers are detected. One section of the border passes along a river — around 20m in depth. Criminals once 'bridged' the banks of our two states with a rope, fixed to trees, using it to smuggle commodities to Latvia. In fact, officers tend to pick up criminals every two to three days, testing their strength and nerves.

It's hard not to feel philosophical about the use of horses, who have been true and faithful friends to man for centuries.

Where tasty dishes are cooked

Belarus and Latvia launch joint project to promote culinary legacy — *Bella Cuisine*

The trans-boundary cooperation programme for the border areas of Belarus and Latvia is uniting the Polotsk, Lepel, Miory, Glubokoe and Verkhnedvinsk districts of the Vitebsk Region, with the Aglona, Kraslava, Dagda, Rezekne and Ludza territories of the Latgale Region of Latvia. The 18-month *Bella Cuisine* project has been allocated about 500,000 Euros, helping the Vitebsk Region join the European Network of Regional Culinary Heritage.

A six-day culinary route has been organised through the cross-border regions of Belarus and Latvia, including four culinary festivals and the new international culinary heritage promotion centre, located in the city of Kraslava (Latvia). Belarus and Latvia are to host a number of events to promote the culinary heritage of the Latgale Region and Vitebsk Region, with cookery classes held for catering workers and experience sharing trips to Sweden, Latvia and Lithuania.

Relay moved to Minsk

15th International Congress of Slavists to be held in Belarus for the first time

The major scientific forum for those involved in Slavic studies is to be held in late August at Minsk's Centre for Belarusian Culture, Language and Literature (National Academy of Sciences). According to the Director of the Centre, Alexander Lokotko, about 1,000 scientists from over 40 countries will take part. "This scientific and cultural event is of national and international scale, contributing to Belarus' status as an independent Slavic state, developing knowledge about our Belarusian people and their culture, history, and science," says Mr. Lokotko.

The forum is held every five years by the International Committee of Slavists — a scientific organisation bringing together scientists from more than thirty countries in Europe, America, Asia, Australia and Oceania. It was founded in Belgrade in 1955. Previously, the Committee has held congresses in Moscow, Sofia, Prague, Warsaw, Zagreb, Kiev, Bratislava, Kraków, Ljubljana and Ohrid.

Fairytales draw us closer

Over 150 tales about modern Belarus sent to UNESCO by schoolchildren

The unique Belarusian-Omani project is dedicated to European-Arab dialogue between the West and the East, and between Belarus and the Sultanate of Oman in particular. The competition of children's tales was held from March to April, marking the International Decade of the Rapprochement of Cultures, lasting through until 2022.

The jury has selected the 13 best tales, for translation into Arab and English, illustrated and published as a collection. The competition was organised by the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs, the National Commission of the Republic of Belarus for UNESCO, and the Education Ministry.

Dribin felt makers ready to supply felt boots to Baden

Famous footwear chain keen to buy Dribin masters' felt boots for autumn-winter season

By Yury Chernyakevich

At first sight, it may seem incredible, but the masters of felt boot making from the Dribin District are no longer surprised at such attention — from Belarusian or foreign firms. Yelena Rebkovets, who heads the Dribin District Executive Committee's Culture Department, tells us that its hand-made clothes and household items, produced from natural materials, enjoy great popularity.

Dribin felt boots are always in demand in the

district, and far beyond, being both fashionable and comfortable. Their use of natural raw materials is supposed to be very healthy for feet. Of course, it's also wonderful to preserve such craft traditions rather than relying on imported goods. The local historical and folk museum even runs classes to teach the younger generation these ancient skills,

saving them from oblivion.

Around 30 craftsmen reside in the Dribin District, using dry felting and decoration techniques, using coloured wool, beads and embroidery to embellish the boots. Felting re-

mains a rare craft in Belarus, centred around the Dribin District. They even boast their own unique language — 'Katrushnitski Lemezen' — which was used through the centuries to keep masters' secrets from eavesdroppers.

