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Preserving the Symbol of Siberia, Moving On: Sobol' and the Barguzinsky Zapovednik (Part II)

By Elena Agarkova

LAKE BAIKAL –A harbinger of those to come after him, Zenon Svatosh came to Baikal's north shore to stay here — voluntarily — for the rest of his life. He probably had no inkling of his fate in 1913, when Russia's tsarist government included him in the Barguzin expedition, one of the three expeditions that went out to study surviving sable populations in Siberia. Svatosh spent the remaining 35 years of his life setting up Russia's first strict nature reserve, deciphering sable habits, and teaching. This newsletter is about Svatosh and other men and women whose dedication to saving a pristine piece of Siberia allowed the zapovednik to survive through many tumultuous decades.

By the time Svatosh came to explore the Barguzin Mountains, he had already made a name

for himself as a dedicated scientist and explorer, even though he had not yet turned 30. He caught the travel bug early on. Zenon was born in 1886 to a Czech family that settled in a village in the Northern Caucasus Mountains. After becoming orphaned as a young child, he moved to the Crimea to live with his grandmother. By the time he was 25, he went to East Africa for two years with an expedition of the zoological museum of the Emperor's Academy of Sciences to collect specimens for the museum's African collection. His work commended him well, and immediately upon returning from the tropics he received another assignment, this time heading to the polar ices of Spitsbergen (the old name for the Svalbard archipelago, after the biggest of three islands). Government instructions for Rusanov, the head of the expedition, stated that his



A view of the zapovednik coastline.



men were to “explore natural resources of the Spitsbergen archipelago and take measures with the goal of their potential future exploitation by Russian entrepreneurs and manufacturers.”¹

Svatosh, the expedition’s zoologist, was in charge of studying the flora and fauna of northern islands and seas. Together with two other members of the expedition he returned home to report on its results. The rest of the crew suffered a different fate. Rusanov, breaking all instructions from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, did not come back to Alexandrovsk, a port in the Murmansk region of Russia, on the Barents Sea. Instead, seeking “to do everything possible for the greatness of the motherland,” Rusanov decided to cross the Great Northern sea route from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, on his wooden boat named Hercules.

The expedition disappeared amidst polar ices, and its fate became clear only 22 years later. In 1934 the crew’s belongings were found on a small island near the shores of Taymir. Among them were two business cards with Svatosh’s name.

One year after his return to St. Petersburg Svatosh started to get ready to leave

for Baikal. By July of 1914 Svatosh was working in Sosnovka as the expedition’s administrator, preparing supplies and gear, hay for the horses, and collecting flora and fauna specimens. During the winter he studied sable biology with Konstantin Zabelin, another member of the expedition. The next summer Svatosh hiked across the Barguzin mountain range via the Bolshoy Chivyrkuy valley. When the expedition ended, Svatosh agreed to stay another winter in Sosnovka until Zabelin’s return, to supervise the guards, construction, and to continue studying sable.

On May 17, 1916 the general-governor of Irkutsk region issued a decree establishing the Barguzinsky zapovednik. The Russian Senate confirmed creation of the reserve seven months later, on December 29th. The zapovednik’s original territory encompassed 200,000 hectares of strictly protected land, and 370,000 hectares designated as a hunting reserve.

Svatosh spent almost the entire rest of his life at the reserve. In 1924 he replaced Zabelin as the director of the zapovednik. He left in 1933, only to come back in 1942, and worked as the vice-director of the reserve until 1945. He spent the remaining four years of his life teaching in the Barguzin settlement, and was buried there in 1949.

The zapovednik’s first employees worked in extremely difficult conditions, far away from any human settlements. According to Svatosh, “the reserve’s territory and the hunting area is comprised of dark, wild taiga, where



Some of the original zapovednik staff on the shore of the reserve in 1923, including Zabelin (first on the left) and Svatosh (fourth from the left). Photo courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.

1 Russian, American, British, Swedish and Norwegian companies started coal mining on the archipelago at the beginning of the 20th century. The Spitsbergen Treaty of 1920 recognized Norway’s sovereignty, specifying that there would be no military use of Svalbard, and that the other nations retained the rights to their settlements. The Treaty also gave citizens of signatory states rights to exploit mineral deposits and other natural resources “on a footing of absolute equality.” As a result, several permanent Russian settlements grew up on the islands, and in 2005 about 45% of Svalbard population was Russian, Ukrainian and Polish.

any movement in winter is possible only on skis, and on foot in the summer.” After less than a year of its existence, the zapovednik entered a dismal period — the October Revolution of 1917, Civil War and economic devastation did not spare Baikal wilderness. During the reserve’s first years staff did not receive salary for months and had to exchange essential work gear for food. However, prior to 1918 the reserve’s employees managed to build several buildings for a sable nursery and two inspector stations. The zapovednik hit a critical low point during the Civil War years, its future shaky and uncertain. The staff had to get rid of the sable nursery. Svatosh estimated that in 1920 at least 150-200 sables were killed on the territory of the reserve. But for dedicated enthusiasts the reserve wouldn’t have survived; Zenon Svatosh sold his personal belongings to pay the staff.

Konstantin Zabelin, the first director of the Barguzinsky zapovednik, was only a year older than Svatosh. He was born in a village in the western part of Russia, in a teacher’s family, and in 1905 began his studies at the Moscow University. During his university years he was arrested twice for participating in student demonstra-



The zapovednik’s boat bears Zenon Svatosh’s name.

tions. In 1913 he was included in the Barguzin expedition, sponsored by the tsarist government. After coming out to Baikal in 1914, Zabelin dedicated the rest of his life to the reserve and to saving the Barguzin sable.

After two years of exploring the wild northeastern shores of Baikal (during which time he survived a serious bout of malaria),

he briefly returned to the west, to St. Petersburg. But Zabelin went back to Baikal in April of 1916, to lead as director of the Barguzinsky zapovednik. He stayed at that post for eight years, and then moved to Ulan-Ude, to the regional forestry department. Zabelin kept his ties with the zapovednik, and in 1925 organized the capture of a number of sables for delivery to St. Petersburg, for breeding. During his years in Ulan-Ude he published several books and articles dedicated to zapovednik management and organization of fur-breeding farms. He came back to the Barguzinsky zapovednik in 1931, and stayed there until his death in 1934, managing the reserve’s



Zapovednik employees in the early years. Photos courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.



experimental hunting area. Zabelin's grave lies on the shore of the Sacred Sea, on the territory of the reserve, under a small Dauriskaya larch.

Both men wrote about their experiences at the reserve, and their writings reveal that in some respects life at the zapovednik has not changed much since its early days. I translated parts of Konstantin Zabelin's article from 1929 because he did a superb job describing the life of an average inspector and listing the reserve's main problems to date:

"There is gold in the Buryat-Mongol republic — not the metal, but the more expensive kind. This gold is the precious Barguzin sable. Nothing in the world can compare to it. A kilogram of pure gold costs more than 1,000 rubles. Do you know how much buyers paid a hunter for one Barguzin sable skin, which weighs much less than half a kilogram? 1000 to 1500 rubles was the norm, sometimes 2000, 2500, and more. But these are local buyer prices. World prices are much higher. For example, one of last year's Barguzin sables sold for 12,000 rubles in London, more than 8 kilograms of gold.

sable, in terms of export profitability? Probably none. But it seems we don't need it at all in the USSR.

Why, you'd ask, is it possible that such a precious animal is not protected, that no hunting norms exist for it? Oh, it is protected... There is even a sizable zapovednik in its habitat area, where all hunting is prohibited. The zapovednik



The Zabelin family. Photo courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.

What other type of good can compare to

has a special hunting area, where hunting is permitted, with limits on the number of hunters, the seasons and methods. It's like a real organization. But only "like." In reality this enterprise is so amateurish, so naïve, that we should not expect any sable preservation. Here are the facts.

The Barguzinsky zapovednik, together with its hunting area, occupies 6400 square kilometers. To protect all of this land, the budget provides for... 5 inspectors. 1300 square kilometers per each one! If an inspector could patrol his area in a car, perhaps that would constitute protection. If he could use even a horse, that would resemble protection. But this takes place tens of kilometers away from any human settlements, in a deep mountain taiga, where winter travel, when you need protection [for the sable] most, is possible only on skis. Given this type of transport — and steep mountains — an inspector needs not 2-3 days to check all areas where a poacher may be, but one and a half or two weeks. And during this time the inspector does not get to spend every night under some crumbling roof. Often he has to sleep out in the open, in weather that dips below 40 Celsius. And he can't even bring a fur coat! It's just not possible. He can barely carry enough food for himself, crawling up the mountain in his skis. And the constant danger! From crossing turbulent mountain streams that never get covered

up with reliable ice, to avalanches, meeting a bear or, finally, a poacher's bullet. It's understandable that a rare brave inspector risks going out alone. Usually they do it in groups of 2-3 people. Of course this reduces the protected territory even further. And while inspectors check one area, the poachers, who always follow the inspectors meticulously, devastate another, unhindered.

Do you know what salary an inspector gets under the existing budget for his difficult, accountable work, full of deprivations and danger? 35 rubles a month. Less than a forest inspector, whose job is much easier and much less dangerous. In the meanwhile life in the zapovednik is 1.5 times more expensive than in the nearby settlements. All goods have to be delivered over Baikal, from 100-200 kilometers away, depending on the destination, by boat or on sleds. The summer is half bad, but in autumn, when Baikal rages, not one trip happens without some loss: some stuff gets wet, some spills or sinks when you need to unload the boat quickly and drag it out to shore (sometimes several times a day), so that the unexpected bad weather doesn't break it into pieces. Sometimes Baikal plays up, holding travelers hostage at some peninsula for a week and not letting them put a boat in the water to go further. It's better in winter, even though still difficult: there is no road, the snow is deep, there are cracks in



On winter Baikal, platforms of ice push and climb on top of each other, creating torosy, spectacular ice ridges that make driving across the lake very complicated.



(right) Zapovednik rangers in 1930s. Photo courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik. (above) These days inspectors wear almost the same gear they did more than seven decades ago. Photo by E. Darizhapov, courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.



the ice, ice ridges. The inspectors most often don't have horses, and one winter trip costs a significant part of their monthly wages.

Approximately from the middle of October until the first days of January, and also for about a month and a half in spring, travel across Baikal becomes impossible, and the zapovednik is cut off from the rest of the world. An inspector needs to save up food and all necessities for this period. It's a difficult task: he does not get a salary advance, and credit is limited. It's especially difficult in the autumn, when in addition to food he needs winter clothes and boots. Despite their resourcefulness, it is not always possible to get everything necessary, in needed quantities. It sometimes so happens that by the first half of winter the inspectors are if not starving, then definitely not eating enough. It's not easy to fulfill your job responsibilities when you are hungry, amidst Siberian cold, other deprivations, and constant danger!

And still, do people apply for this work? They do. Sometimes it's necessity, sometimes other reasons. But they leave the zapovednik at the first opportunity. Because of this the inspectors' contingent changes constantly, which of course negatively affects nature protection. Most often

it is local peasants who apply, because for one reason or the other they haven't been able to find another job for the winter. The reasoning is usually as follows: "I'll get through winter somehow, the salary is not the best but it's sort of stable, and by spring I'll be back on my land." This type of inspector has friends, relatives, and fellow villagers among the poachers. It doesn't make sense to destroy your relationship with these people: they'll burn your wheat or hay, kill your horse or do something else nasty. There are examples. And a court won't help: they do their deed accurately, without any proof. You may know who did it, but won't be able to prove it. Or they can kill you too. That has happened: during the zapovednik's existence, poachers have already killed two inspectors. It's a favorable environment — taiga, wilderness. More than a few days will pass before a murder comes to light, and the first wind or snow will cover up all traces of it.

By the way, the poachers usually have an advantage over the inspectors. Rare exceptions aside, the poachers have a 3-line caliber gun,² whereas inspectors normally have an ancient Berdan single-shot rifle [*berdanka*].³ This weapon, given its cumbersomeness, heavy weight, and military qualities, is not fit for an inspector. It's

² Russians began producing their famous multi-round Three-Line rifle, commonly called the Mosin-Nagant (after its inventors), in 1891. The reference to "Three-Line" is based on an old Russian measurement, the "liniya," that equals approximately 0.10 inches. Three *linyi* are approximately 30-caliber. The rifle did so well in numerous revolutions, wars, and uprisings sweeping across Eurasian planes that it lasted well into the second half of the 20th century. Users (from regular soldiers to insurgents supported by the Soviet leadership) appreciated its ruggedness, reliability, accurateness, and ease of maintenance. In 2006, the Guns Magazine described the Mosin-Nagant rifle as follows: "What costs less than \$70, is machined from steel forgings, is robust, powerful and accurate, and appears in enough models and variations to keep a collector happy for decades?"

³ An American firearms expert and inventor Hiram Berdan created the Berdan rifle in 1868. The *berdanka* was standard issue in the Russian army from 1869-1891 until the Mosin-Nagant rifle replaced it. It remained widely used in Russia as a hunting weapon, and sporting models, including shotguns, were produced until the mid-1930s.

not enough that *berdanka* is not a safe self-defense weapon, but it can also cause injury and even death during normal travel through mountain taiga. Imagine what happens when someone who is coming down a mountain on short skis with the speed of a courier train, maneuvering among trees and having both hands occupied by a steering stick, catches something with the end of his *berdanka*. This is why inspectors, who disrespectfully call their gun a “dummy,” sometimes prefer not to take it with them.

Of course, there are energetic, careful, and conscientious inspectors. But they don’t last: that kind of person can always find a quieter, better-paid spot. One cannot keep him in the zapovednik with the ideas alone.

There is another scenario: a person becomes an inspector with a specific goal, to somehow gain from being close to the sable — either by making a profitable deal with the poachers or, by studying the system, inspectors’ trails and mountain crossings, to become a poacher himself the next winter, with a minimal risk of getting caught.

As bad as the inspectors might be, sometimes they apprehend a poacher. In this case he doesn’t suffer much — in the worst scenario he’ll pay a fine much smaller than the cost of a sable skin. This makes poaching in the zapovednik a profitable business even when things don’t work out so well for the criminal. They’ll take away the illegally caught sable? He fears that the least: given the size of the skin, it’s not difficult to hide it securely, and

in this respect the poachers are virtuosos. During zapovednik’s existence there has not been one case of confiscating the precious crop from a poacher.

A reader may ask a question — is it possible that they [the zapovednik staff] have not raised alarm, have not notified the “proper agencies”? They have... They receive the same answer: “staff limitations,” the “budget,” the “regime...” In 1926 there even was a federal commission, which examined the zapovednik and admitted the necessity of establishing a real inspection service. It ended there. And every year the [zapovednik staff] tries to solve the situation with their own resources, but that doesn’t help much.”

Konstantin Zabelin painted a bleak and perhaps unnecessarily pessimistic picture. Despite all odds, the zapovednik employees succeeded in bringing the rare Barguzin sable back, in less than 20 years. They also helped sable spread beyond the Barguzin Mountains, through breeding and re-settlement programs. But it appears that for the employees themselves the situation has not changed much since the 1920s. The majority of inspectors still come and go, unhappy with the low salary and harsh working conditions. They still lack proper equipment, food, or transport. Their days on the job can be excruciatingly difficult and dangerous. But some stay.

Sergei Bashinov has been working in the Barguzinsky zapovednik for 27 years as an inspector. Born in a northern area of the Irkutsk region, he came here after graduating from a mining institute in Bodaibo, a gold-mining town north of Baikal. He majored in development of natural resources, so his lifetime job happens to be on the opposite

*Sergei Bashinov
taking measurements
on winter Baikal.
Photo by E.
Darizhapov, courtesy
of Barguzinsky
zapovednik.*



side of the spectrum. I spent some time trying to get him to tell me what brought him to the zapovednik. He answered tersely, in short sentences, sometimes in monosyllables. His wife, Irina Lyasota, who leads the zapovednik's science department, convinced him to talk to me since he has so much experience working as an inspector. Prior to the interview Irina warned me, in a joking manner, that her husband is not gregarious. He lived up to his billing, remaining shy throughout most of the interview. When he talked, he described a hard and unusual life in a matter-of-fact way.

I first asked Sergei why he decided to come to the zapovednik. He held one of his long pauses and said, "I just came. Romantic notions, you know." I asked if he specifically wanted to work in the zapovednik, and he replied, "Yes." When I asked him why, he said, "Well, you know, [because of] nature..." Finally, after a fifth attempt, he revealed that he came here after reading a book by Semen Ustinov, a prominent Baikal scientist and writer, who worked in the zapovednik in the 1950s. The book, *Seaside*, was about Ustinov's years in the reserve. "So was it this book that inspired you to come to work here," I asked Sergei, just to be sure. "Yes," he replied.

We talked about inspectors' responsibilities, which today include not only protecting the reserve's flora and fauna, but also 'housekeeping duties': inspectors have to maintain and clean the trails, build bridges, fix existing structures and, most importantly, put out fires with what little ammunition they have. They work for a month straight and then get ten days off. This means the inspectors spend a month away from their family on the territory of the zapovednik, communicating with the mainland only by radio.

To my question whether being away so often was difficult, he answered simply, "No, it's okay." But surely not every person is capable of living like that for months at a time? Sergei agreed that one must have a certain disposition for it. "Sometimes you sit alone in a winter hut for a whole month. It can be hard for some people to go without human interaction for so long. These people, we try to put them in a pair [with someone else]." Still, no wonder few inspectors stay at this job long. Sergei, with almost three decades of service, is a rarity. For example, this season the zapovednik hired five more inspectors. "By the end of the year, maybe two of them will remain," said Sergei.

Sometimes inspectors have company on their watch. This spring Sergei had four sables living with him in and near his winter hut. Since the zapovednik had fulfilled its original mission remarkably soon after its establishment, the Barguzin sable has multiplied throughout the region. Sable has a reputation for being elusive, but Sergei said he'd get up in the morning to find a couple of them already sitting on his porch, waiting to be fed. He gave them fish — "It was a hungry year."

Not only sable looked to humans for sustenance this winter. Irina Lyasota, Sergei's wife, said people had sev-

eral confrontations with hungry bears in Davsha (the reserve's former headquarters, currently an observation station with several inspectors on duty) and Nizhneangarsk (a small settlement north of Severobaikalsk where the reserve has its headquarters now). One inspector forgot to bring his dog in for the night and came out only to find the dog gone and a bear lying in its place. In Nizhneangarsk, a bear tried to steal a calf. Its owner, an old woman, and her old lady friends who happened to be there, tried to frighten the bear by throwing bricks and buckets of water at it (not a bear-scaring technique recommended by experts). Both the calf and the bear took off for the nearby forest; by the time the police arrived on the scene, they found only a bunch of bricks lying in a puddle.

The worst incident happened in Davsha to a young employee of the local meteorostation. A bear attacked him right outside of his house. According to Irina, he somehow kept his composure enough to remember advice he has heard before. He stuck his fist down the bear's throat (sticking your arm into the animal's mouth would not work because the bear would bite right through the bone). As the bear clawed at the man's back, his wife heard the commotion and ran outside. "She must have been really opposed to becoming a young widow," said Irina as she shook her head in amazement, "because she started screaming so loud that within a couple of minutes someone ran over with a rifle and shot the bear."

The zapovednik's inspectors had to shoot two bears this spring for attacking humans. But such accidents are rare on Baikal, which has a large bear population, because humans have not encroached too much on the animals' territory. There is still plenty of wild land for them to roam. Also, since mass Alaska-style tourism has yet to come to Baikal (if it ever does), Siberian bears have not developed a habit of foraging for human food around campsites or garbage bins. When I asked Sergei if the inspectors get afraid of the bears, he chuckled. "No, you get more scared of humans than bears." Later I wondered whether some of his reaction may have been motivated by bravado, because Sergei went on to mention an inspector who did not take his clothes off for two weeks straight when he was on duty alone. "He wanted to be ready to get his rifle. Someone was walking around the whole time he was there." That seems like an irrational reaction to potential danger outside (after all, one can get a rifle without having clothes on), but you cannot always expect rational reactions in stressful situations. Another inspector apparently would turn on his chain saw to keep him company in his hut.

It gets more difficult than dealing with bears for the inspectors. One of their most important responsibilities involves fighting fires. Fires caused by humans rarely occur in the reserve, and the vast majority are sparked by lightning. Regardless of their cause, the inspectors have to put out each and every fire. In the U.S., foresters and park rangers used to follow the same indiscriminate fire-suppression policy, but after decades of biological studies and intense arguments the policy shifted. By 1968 the U.S.



Zapovednik employees putting out a fire on the territory of the reserve. Photo by E. Darizhapov, courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.



Park Service began managing the forest by allowing natural fires to burn in some areas and to intentionally start fires sometimes. While they still make every effort to put out fires started by humans, the U.S. Forest Service and other land management agencies often make a decision to let natural fires burn. As controversial as these decisions may be sometimes, they do provide rangers with a degree of discretion that Russian inspectors do not have.

If Barguzinsky inspectors will not go out to put out every fire on the territory of the reserve, no matter what the circumstances (how much manpower they have, how big the fire is, how far away it is), the state prosecutor will bring a criminal case against them. So they load up with tents, buckets, chainsaws, axes, shovels, enough food for three days in the forest, and hike to the fire. During the Soviet Union years the zapovednik had a contract with the regional Forest Service agency to use their helicopter. The helicopter flew over the reserve's territory every day. Today inspectors have to watch for fires from observation towers on the shore or from the water. "The faster you get to the fire, the smaller it will be and easier to put out," explained Sergei. "We used to put them out instantaneously. The fire would not get bigger than this room, we'd drop three to four people in and they would manage it." These days the reserve's boat has to pick up the inspectors from different stations, deliver them to the shore of the zapovednik, and they walk on foot, sometimes as much as 23 kilometers. "If you walk with all this gear for a whole day, the next morning you are not much of a firefighter," confessed Sergei. And even if the inspectors do not feel utterly exhausted, often they just don't have sufficient manpower. Sergei asked me, rhetorically, "What can fifteen people do with a big fire?" Apparently, they simply continue to do their job. "So we dig, dig, dig, and wait for the weather [to change], and pray that it will rain." Sergei remembered one month in the mid-80s when the inspectors spent more than a month putting out fires, one after another. "There were thirteen of them. We just kept being transferred from one to the next. Once we came out of the forest just to take a dip in Baikal and had to immediately go back in."

So what kind of people apply to be an inspector? "Other sick people like me," laughed Sergei. He paused, looking as if he was thinking something over, and added, "But I'm not planning to leave."

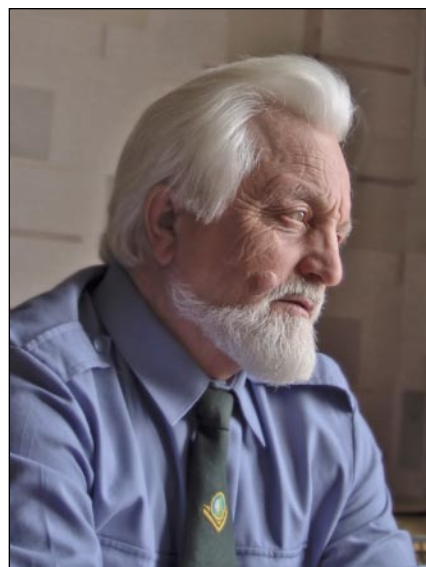
I wondered what sustains Sergei's quiet determination — love for the Barguzin Mountains, comfort in his work, inertia, lack of other job opportunities? Probably all of those factors combined. However, one thing became clear to me as I talked to the people who spend their time caring for the land known as the Barguzinsky zapovednik. The reserve survived extremely difficult times, and most of its successes can be attributed to its devoted employees. They avoid using the word 'enthusiast' when talking

about their jobs, preferring to talk about responsibility and simply doing one's work well. The zapovednik's current director, Gennady Yankus, even said to me that "enthusiasm is not always useful because an enthusiast is not capable of self-criticism or of adequately assessing his role and his work product."

Yankus himself presents a great example of steadfast everyday devotion. He became the director of Barguzinsky zapovednik when he was only 31, and managed to stay at his post for 38 years, through numerous political upheavals and system reforms. This undoubtedly required many qualities, empty enthusiasm not being one of them. He appears to have a talent for navigating bureaucratic labyrinths, and certainly takes a practical approach to running the reserve. In fact, his first question to me was, "How can your foundation help us?"

Most of zapovednik's current problems come down to one thing — lack of money. This is a common issue for Russia's nature reserves and national parks, and this year has been especially trying for the Barguzinsky zapovednik. In yet another change in the protected territories system, Moscow transferred management of all *zakazniki* to the zapovedniki.⁴ The Barguzinsky reserve received the Frolikha *zakaznik* (more than 100,000 hectares of land), located just north of the zapovednik's territory. But instead of increasing the reserve's budget (so they could hire more inspectors to patrol this territory, for example), Moscow actually cut it by 15 percent.

In Yankus' words, "We need to work [in the *zakaznik*], but it is absolutely impossible because we barely make our ends meet as it is." He explained that just one boat run from Severobaikalsk to Davsha (200 kilometers over water), which delivers inspectors for their monthly watch, costs 30,000 rubles, or almost \$1,000. "We did one run this



An official portrait of Gennady Yankus. Photo by E. Darizhapov, courtesy of Barguzinsky zapovednik.

⁴ A *zakaznik*, a special type of protected territory, differs from a zapovednik or a national park by its temporariness: it is established for a particular time period and purpose, for example, to protect a rare colony of birds or plants in need of recovery. Any human activity on the territory of *zakaznik* can be limited permanently or temporarily, if it contradicts *zakaznik*'s purpose or harms the ecosystem at issue.

Irina Lyasota saying goodbye to a group of Russian and German volunteers from the Great Baikal Trail and Baikalplan, who are going to a trail-building project on the territory of the Frolikha zakaznik, last summer.



month, and we don't have the money for another one. We just don't. But if we don't do another run, then our people will be there without food, or, if we don't deliver the inspectors there, then we'll have forest fires, etc."

Some less obvious problems surfaced when the zapovednik received the Frolikha territory. An investigation by zapovednik's employees last year revealed several illegal activities happening at the zakaznik, including illegal construction and tourism. Some of this activity happens to be sponsored (or protected) by governmental entities. "There is a 'fishing research base' in Frolikha Bay that belongs to the Fish Protection Agency," said Yankus. "Apparently, they study fish there. But when you get close and see all the nets, the dogs, the men and women, it becomes quite clear what is actually going on." He heard from one of the workers that they take out 20 to 30 sacks of fish per day in winter. "But what can you say to the Fish Protection Service?"

Everyone knew far in advance that the *zakazniki* would be transferred to the strict nature reserves for management. Ultimately, this is a huge improvement from the previous state of affairs, because *zakazniki* kept moving from one federal agency to another, and actually ended up without an 'owner' for the past few years. Incredibly, one of the things that got lost in the bureaucratic shuffle was the budget line financing the *zakazniki*. This means that right now the strict nature reserves do not receive any additional money to manage the newly transferred land. "This is a problem that we — and nature — have to pay for now," according to Yankus. Perhaps to compensate for budget cuts and additional territory management responsibilities, the Ministry of Natural Resources also (finally) gave zapovedniki a right to earn money by conducting certain types of commercial activity (and keeping the profits). But to do something as simple as souvenirs, the zapovednik needs start-up capital, and

right now it simply does not have any spare funds.

I met with Irina in the reserve's office in Nizhneangarsk, located in a one-story wooden building. As we talked, one of the young employees would occasionally stick her head into the office (which Irina, a vice-director of the zapovednik, shares with several other employees) and tell her she had a phone call. Irina would excuse herself and go to the director's office to take the call. She said the reserve's phone station broke down some time ago, and the reserve's budget did not have extra money for replacing the phones. The only remaining working phone was in Yankus' office. It seems that Yankus has recently convinced a wealthy visitor to make a donation toward a new phone station. Until these funds come through, everyone will have to continue using the phone in their director's office. "Naturally, Yankus does not enjoy it much," said Irina as she walked out.

Irina tended to downplay her role in the zapovednik's affairs, but this remarkable woman appeared to be doing five jobs at the same time, running the reserve's science department, working with the (often uncooperative) local administration on tourism issues, organizing volunteer projects in the reserve, and filling in for her boss whenever he went away. She struck me as someone so purely devoted to her job that my first instinct was to help her in whatever way I could. Irina came to Baikal in the early 1980s as a student, to do a summer internship in the zapovednik. She fell in love with the reserve — and with Sergei, and one year later returned to stay.

She and her director, Yankus, have many ideas for projects that could benefit not only the reserve, but the local population and potential visitors. Looking to American national parks for inspiration, they would like to develop tourism in the Frolikha zakaznik. Since regular tourists cannot access the protected core of the zapovednik, cre-



A sunset on winter Baikal.

ation of infrastructure for travel and recreation on the territory of the zakaznik would give people access to remarkable wilderness while keeping it under the reserve's strict control. It would also allow the reserve to earn some money, and enable it to hire more locals as tourist guides, interpreters, and inspectors. As Yankus did a quick search among the many grant applications on his shelves for the proposal, he told me that Shenandoah National Park was the first one he visited on his trip across the U.S and Canada. He especially liked that "It is the people who love, nurture, and protect the parks. The country needs these entities. It's not the government but the population that needs them." One can only have that kind of connection if people have regular access to the land and can take responsibility for its fate, whether by paying admission fees, sponsoring a piece of a hiking trail, or volunteering in the reserve.

The Barguzinsky zapovednik has some partnership programs that bring in Russian and foreign tourists and volunteers. For example, for the past two years the reserve worked with the Great Baikal Trail, a local organization devoted to developing sustainable tourism on Baikal, and their partner Baikalplan, a German NGO, to build 90 kilometers of hiking trail in the Frolikha *zakaznik*. In a rare instance of Russian corporate charity, the Moscow office of Hewlett

Packard became of the project's sponsors. After months of planning, 26 volunteers from Germany, France, Russia, and Switzerland came to the north of Baikal for almost two weeks, to live in the wilderness, build bridges, and clear the trail. The next step involves finding and training local guides, developing tours and marketing them. The success of this endeavor depends on the amount of time Baikalplan and GBT volunteers will be able to devote to it, and on the local administration's willingness to support them. But even though the Frolikha trail may be a promising beginning, it is still a small drop in the bucket in terms of the zapovednik's needs.

In addition to creating tourism infrastructure in the Frolikha *zakaznik*, the reserve would like to build a visitors' center in Khakusy, a rustic hot springs resort carved into the reserve's territory. Irina Lyasota also talked about developing a line of zapovednik-themed products, from postcards to magnets and bags. These types of souvenirs sell well in American national parks, and could provide the zapovednik with some disposable income. But all of these projects could come true only if the reserve found a sponsor.

And yet they soldier on. When I asked Irina's husband what he loved most about his job, he looked puzzled for a moment. "In my job? I love everything." □

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