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Gregory Sedov

Kamchatka Journeys

Joyous adventures
to protected places

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**Kamchatka Journeys. Joyous
adventures to protected places**

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Аннотация

The book «Kamchatka Journeys» can be helpful both for tourists exploring Kamchatka peninsula and for locals. It can be especially interesting for the people planning to visit this region.

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The foreword

Kamchatka is an untraveled part of Russia. There are only a few books and travel guides dedicated to mysterious Kamchatka which can be found in Russian or a foreign language. The book KAMCHATKA JOURNEYS can be helpful both for tourists exploring the peninsula and for locals. It can be especially interesting for the people planning to visit this region. The style of this book is light, and there are plentiful jokes. KAMCHATKA JOURNEYS can be recommended to various ages due to its informal style and interesting plot. This travel guide will not leave even the most pretentious reader indifferent. KAMCHATKA JOURNEYS must be experienced by every person keen on reading and traveling. Enjoy the book!

Special thanks

I can't thank you enough – my parents, my wife Irina, my children Stepan, Tikhon, and Platon, also Anna and Sergey Butkovsky, Vladimir Rubakhin, Sergey Pivnyak, Oksana Yashina, Sergey Lyubarsky, Nikolai Tolstov, Alexander Stukov, Andrey Borodatov, Dmitri Derevyagin, Gennady Maslov, Vladimir Bogotopov, Vladimir Romensky, Gleb Parunov, Ivan Bychkov, Yevgeny Voloshin, Pavel Gogolev and many others whose help and valuable advice made it possible to publish this book. Dedicated to my mother.

Tolbachik

This strange place Kamchatka... Victor Tsoy

In summer, we made a decision to conquer active Plosky or “Flat” Tolbachik Volcano. We were told that its eruption had already stopped, and we intended to find out. We carefully prepared for the trip: we took a 6-wheeler ATV, bought some provision, and hired a professional guide. At first, nothing seemed to threaten our journey.

Tolbachik is about 500 km from Petropavlovsk. We left on Friday evening and arrived on Saturday afternoon. After the arrival we camped, set up the tents, and made a campfire. Kamchatka weather hailed the travelers with rain, fog, and wind. However, it didn't spoil our mood. The next morning, we reached Yuzhny Proryv or “Southern Break” – lava streams remaining from previous eruptions. The whole day we enjoyed the unique mosaic of plants, rocks, and lava caves. It looked like the moonscape had from a futurists' paintings. The guide showed us the area where such space equipment like the moon and Mars rovers, and the Venus ATV, were tested. The day was full of positive emotions. Actually, everything was too good on that day...

After a 15 kilometer cross-country hike, we returned to the base camp. Later that evening, the guide unexpectedly suggested

ascending the cone to see if there was any volcanic activity as the bright lava glow can easily be seen at night. Six of the most curious volunteered for the chance. The guide assured us that the ascent and decent would not take more than 3 hours. As it turned out later, we put too much trust in the guide.

We left the camp and took a trail, quickly climbed along the hardened lava flow, crossed it, and reached the cone. A majestic view opened before us – the crater was spattering fiery streams of magma from the bosom of the earth; the explosions vibrated the slag under our feet, and clouds of sulfur rose in the air. All this amazed us. We took some photos of ourselves against the slope and soon began to descend. Then true adventures started...

A thick fog suddenly appeared from nowhere. We lost the trail and, as it turned out later, took the wrong turn. Having realized our difficult situation, we tried to find the trail making stops and resuming the walk. Several times we ran into an impassible rock wall. The trail, as if in a frightening tale, completely disappeared! We started arguing about the right way. Everybody made completely opposite suggestions. The guide refused to admit he had been leading us in the wrong direction. He insisted that we should go straight on. According to his opinion, we had to descend as low as we could “as down it was not as cold as at the top”. We were slowly moving down on an old lava flow jumping over huge boulders. Meanwhile, it was far into the night. A strong wind was blowing, and we felt exhausted. Nobody was ready for such an adventure. First, we took the guide’s words

for granted, but when at about 2 a.m. we saw our footprints again, we finally realized we had been moving in rounds. This time even his strange reasoning that he “definitely saw this place in a calendar photo” didn’t assure us. To crown it all, he appeared to have neither a map, nor warm clothes, nor water. One girl was tired and could hardly move. Suddenly, she screamed falling from a rock to the ground. What could we do? Luckily, she was fine, but almost nobody had power to proceed.

We stopped and put our thoughts together. Accidentally, we found out we could make a call! We phoned our mountain climbers acquaintances, who were in city at that moment. They “cheered” us by saying that the terrain meant we were in a different place than where we were supposed to be. They also told us some basic rules: stick together, look after each other, and keep the spirits up. Our friends oriented us how to find the trail. In our opinion, we made the only right decision, which might seem illogical in the mountains, – to return to the place on the cone where we got lost and either stay there waiting for help or start finding the trail again and go down. Our guide was flatly against it saying we could freeze and totally get lost there. This moment was crucial.

All of a sudden, the sky became clear for an instant, and we saw a flash of red light at the far top and heard a distant roaring. It was the crater. After this “message” we reconfirmed our decision, turned round, and slowly began our next ascent on that crazy day. From time to time we turned the torches off

in complete darkness and looked forward to another eruption, which signaled us the right way, and kept on crawling up. Some of us were encouraged by the idea that the rescue team from the base camp might be waiting on the warm cinder top of the cone. By the morning we had reached the top of Tolbachik and later found the trail. It looked like nature took pity on us clearing up the star-spattered sky and showing a young crescent moon from behind the mountains. Occasionally checking our way, we had returned to the base camp by 6 a.m. absolutely worn out, where the other people were sleeping in peace. We experienced all delights associated with mountaineering – the night ascent to the active volcano, a search for the way back in the fog, communication with mountain climbers and so on. We are looking forward to next year ascending Kluchevskaya Sopka Volcano!

The hunt

Kamchatka. Spring. The fourth year of studying at the Institute. Get bored at German. I receive a message from a mate, “need an interpreter for hunting with foreigners”. A language practice with native-speakers is all a student can dream of. “Deal”, – I replied.

The next day we pick up the hunters at the Avacha Hotel. The group consists of a Norwegian, two Germans, two Swiss, and a family couple from Argentina. They arrived in the peninsular known as a haven for Kamchatka brown bears, and everyone is hoping to get a good trophy for their collection. From the Yelizovo airport we fly by helicopter to northern Kamchatka. The MI-8 is being flown by Sikorsky, one of Kamchatka’s most experienced pilots. Snowcapped peaks of the Sredinny Range slowly pass under the helicopter. Winding frozen rivers cut through the dales. There is not a living soul within hundreds of miles – a Martian landscape!

After the two-hour flight we disembark in the middle of a snowcovered field. The snow is knee-deep! In Petropavlovsk it’s almost summer. I look a bit weird in sneakers. “First, we should fix the antenna!” – says senior gamekeeper Petrovich. We assemble the unit of about 15 meters high and slowly set it upright. At the last minute the antenna tilts and then keels over. We check if everybody is okay. Beginning again, this time

we managed to fix it with spreaders. Then we set up the tents. To celebrate the arrival we treat ourselves and the Germans to a Martell Cognac.

The clients are worrying about the hunt. They check their guns first thing. The hunters proudly show their Brownings and Mausers and let everybody who wants fire a shot from the rare weapon. Our gamekeepers are skeptical about the heavy rifles and in their turn suggest trying a short SKS rifle. After shooting a pile of cartridges, everybody goes to lunch. My shoulder hurts after shooting from the German rifle. After lunch (several toasts have been proposed to the successful arrival) Sikorsky volunteers to demonstrate the performance capabilities of the Soviet helicopter. The blades of the Mi-8 are picking up speed; it takes off and disappears behind the forest. Suddenly, the huge aircraft turns up from behind the mountain, descends, makes a loop, and when it's several meters from the earth surface it soars into the sky. The foreigners gasp. The chopper returns, hangs in the air, and then slowly flies backwards! The scene looks like in a Sci-Fi movie. Sikorsky flies to a tall pine, chops all branches growing on one side of the tree with the anti-torque rotor, then it moves a bit forward, hangs, returns, and cuts the branches on the other side. The grateful spectators applause.

Everybody comes to the spacious tent for dinner, which serves as a canteen. The fire in the cast-iron wood stove crackles, the floor is carpeted with mountain pine boughs. We raise glasses to friendship between nations, to peace in the world, to the unique

Kamchatka nature. At the opposite end of the table Sikorsky explains in gestures the maneuver he did as the “Afghan run”. The Germans sit in a row and start singing military marching songs, which tunes resemble soundtracks of Soviet war films. One of the Germans raps the rhythm on the table with his hand. The Russian hunters start, in their turn, the folk songs “I’ll go to the field with the horse” and “A young Cossack is strolling on the Don”. The Norwegian guy tries to compete with gamekeepers in drinking. They are just smiling. The senior gamekeeper tells jokes. I’m trying to find a funny equivalent in English.

Translate to him! – Petrovich is unhappy with the lengthy pause in my translation. – You don’t know English, I’ll tell him myself. Listen and learn. The senior gamekeeper and the German start a conversation (they both poke their fingers and pat on each other’s backs):

- I, u! Frenz! Ok?
- Okey!
- Hunt! Ok?
- Okey!
- Bear! Pow! Pow! Ok?
- Okey, okey! Big, big bear!
- U have dollarz?
- Yes!
- OK!

When the hunt is over, you’ll give me your earnings. I translated everything myself, – sums up Petrovich. After the

festive dinner, the international team goes out to light fireworks. Finally, we go to bed.

In the middle of the night a dreadful roar wakes me up. It sounds as if somebody is scratching the tent from outside. My imagination conjures a terrible scene. A bear? – I ask. The Norwegian, – answers the gamekeeper yawning. Everybody turns over onto another side and falls back asleep. Curious, I get dressed, take a torch, and go out. I see footprints deep in snow leading from the entrance to the side of the tent. “It must be a bear!” – I hesitate whether I should go farther. I still can hear the roar. I keep on going shining with the torch – blood on the prints. I have the creeps. I turn round the tent and see in the flash of the light the Norwegian standing on all four limbs having sunk deep in the snow. The ice crust, which formed on the snow surface at night, cut his legs. He’s groaning like a trapped animal, most probably, having no idea what to do next. I rescue him and help to get back to the tent.

In the morning, Petrovich, who looked as if he hatching a plot, signals me to come to him. First, we’ll work with the Germans. We’ll take you to the farthest station so the Swiss don’t feel jealous. You’ll be staying there for about two days. So, we’re delivered to the station – a slapdash shack. We are met by two local gamekeepers. They look like they’ve been here since World War II and don’t know yet that the war is over. A box with vodka is being unloaded from the helicopter.

At night, outside the hunter’s cabin has descended a typical

Kamchatka snowstorm. The gamekeepers' faces change in the stove's firelight. Waving with their arms and dreadfully goggling, they interrupt each other telling the Swiss how they've met giant bears. How they drove to the bear by snowmobile, took a shot, missed it, the second gun misfired, then the snowmobile faded while the bear kept on running in their direction. By the morning, the size of the bears had overgrown elephants. Scared, the Swiss draw closer to each other. Perhaps they remember Napoleon's unenviable fate when he came to Russia. The thought that it may be their last day makes them drink vodka hard.

The next morning the sun is shining brightly with the fresh fallen snow sparkling outside the cabin. No helicopter today, – says a gamekeeper. Tell them to catch fish.

Are there fish?

None. But who cares?

The Swiss are given two sticks with the coiled line and a hook. They are catching something the whole day with great enthusiasm in a small brook nearby. By the evening I started feeling pity for them and recite Goethe's poem in German.

On the third day we fly by chopper. However we fly not to the camp, but to Milkovo village. While we were away, they've run out of vodka. We arrive at Milkovo and take a box of vodka. But now we fly to Kozyrevsk village. I look at the map and marvel at what a long way round it is. It's the only place where we can refuel, – merrily comments Sikorsky. I sit on a stowaway seat next to the door. During the landing I pull a red lever arm. The

door of the helicopter bales out. I'm looking at it with surprise. It was the wrong arm, – chuckles the flight mechanic. – It's an emergency catapult. After the landing we search for the errant door, find it, and place it back.

At night, I go and see the tourists. The couple of Argentinian pensioners – the husband and wife – are in one of the tents with “the last farewell” on their faces. The fire in their stove is dead. I light the fire again and make the clients feel cozy.

The following day we take the Swiss to hunt. We drop them off and fly away. A bit later Sikorsky starts using bad language. What's wrong? A Swiss shot a bear dead on the river. We fly to the river, land on a spit, hitch the bear, but we can't take off – there's not enough thrust because of the trees. The copilot gestures to the passengers to leave the helicopter and he himself jumps on rocks. The aircraft piloted by Sikorsky lifts off the ground begrudgingly and slowly disappears behind the forest. We cross the river waist-deep in water. On the last day, we collect the trophies, say goodbye to the gamekeepers, and return home.

Kamchatka. Spring. The fourth year of studying at the Institute. Romenskaya, the teacher of the German language, wakes me up: Sedov, you don't know German at all!

The earthquake

What do tourists in Kamchatka notice? First of all, unrivaled landscapes – from the oceanic coast to snowcapped mountains; secondly, the unique flora and fauna – salmon spawning in rivers, bears walking the city streets, rhododendrons blossoming in alpine meadows; thirdly, the amazing character of the people inhabiting the peninsula – people with a severe look but kind heart. However, visitors are rarely lucky to experience the natural phenomenon the locals are accustomed to.

Ask any Kamchadal about earthquakes. After making a serious face, they will readily tell you that Kamchatka, along with the Hawaiian Islands and Japan is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire – an area on the Earth with high seismic activity. Because of collision of tectonic plates the Earth's surface regularly shakes Kamchatka. The power of an earthquake is classified in points by the Richter magnitude scale (don't confuse with the famous Soviet pianist). The magnitude and depth of the epicenter are very important. The lower the magnitude and deeper the epicenter, the better. The activity is registered by special sensors placed throughout Kamchatka. Earthquakes may be followed by aftershocks – gradually dissipating shocks. Every Kamchadal is sure it is good if a volcano starts erupting. It means the Earth's energy is released through its crater in the form of ash and lava. Small earthquakes occur several times a month. Locals are not

very sensitive to them, but people who have come here from the mainland need time to get used to them.

After living in Kamchatka for several years, I arrived on holiday in Volgograd, located amid even, table-like, steppes. I was offered the lower bunk bed. At night an earthquake woke me up and I escaped home in my underwear. Some minutes later I realized that I was outside and returned home. There I found out that it was the person sleeping on the upper bunk who turned on the other side while sleeping. I had to explain to the puzzled relatives for a long while how to behave during an earthquake.

Kamchatka residents are certain that animals feel the forthcoming earthquake better than people, although it hasn't been proved scientifically. That's why locals keep various pets. It is believed that dogs start whining a few hours before the shocks, cats running on the walls as if treated with turpentine, and aquarium fish begin dancing pirouettes. These superstitions are similar to stories about dolphins pushing sinking people toward land. At least a half of the drowned people can't boast that happy salvation has pushed them ashore.

Now and then people spread rumors about the forthcoming catastrophic earthquake. Usually it happens in winter. Then some people stay in tents and cook on a fire. Scientists are skeptical about this information as even they can't forecast earthquakes for sure. But they also move to the forest just in case. From time to time, the local TV channels show reports about unprecedented stores of condensed milk, padded jackets, and castiron stoves,

stocked somewhere in case of a strong earthquake and guarded either by the militia or by Cossacks. These reserves are supposed to be given to the residents when they have no place to live. Some irresponsible citizens make attempts to find this blessed place with definitely mercenary interests in mind.

Once my friends and I were going for an hour in a snowcat to the base of Avacha Volcano. During the trip we enjoyed drinking fresh local beer. When I got out of the snowcat, I felt the ground suddenly shake. I thought I'd drunk too much beer. Later, the radio said there was an earthquake.

What should one do when they hear a din, the floor starts shaking, and the wineglasses in the sideboard melodically ring? Check if it's a tractor that has finally arrived to remove the snow in the yard. If it's not a bulldozer, it's good to get back in bed. If it keeps on shaking, it will be wise to take the bag with canned goods, medication, and important documents and stand in the opening of a bearing wall. A bearing wall is usually thicker and more reliable than others, provided the neighbor downstairs hasn't destroyed it with a pneumatic hammer, doing illegal alterations in the flat. The most desperate residents take a running jump out of the window. However, the information about a successful landing after a jump out of the window located on the floor above the third level can hardly be considered credible.

And now it becomes clear to visitors why the choice of a design decision is limited in Kamchatka. There are three

types of buildings on the peninsula. Take a match box and place it on a side – it’s an apartment house. Place it on a wide side – it’s a school. Turn it on a short edge – it’s an administrative building. All buildings are made with increased safety margins. Once, my wife asked me to hang a picture. It seems to have been a still life. Having broken three electric drill bits against reinforcement rods hidden inside the wall, I quit that idea. After the attempts to make a hole, the wall looked as if it had been shot with a large-caliber machine gun.

At times, a well-worn van with a metal speaker on top, like the one in pre-war French movies, runs on the city’s roads. A snuffling voice from the speaker calls for calm, advises not to plug in electric devices, and slowly move to the cemetery. It’s the way the emergency training is carried out.

Years ago we bought our first “Dolby Surround” home theater. We acquired a DVD about the work of CNN journalists during the war in Iraq. We invited guests and warned them not to be scared of unusual sound effects. The episode with Bagdad being bombarded was especially impressive. Roar, blasts, din. “The system is awesome! It even makes walls shudder”, one guest said. Later, we found out that it was a real earthquake.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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