

Sofia Andreyevna is copying out *Resurrection* and is thinking Tolstoy has lost some of his chops as a writer.

Tolstoy started the Nonviolent Resistance Group.

Mohandas K. Gandhi became a fan of Tolstoy.

Tolstoy is wondering who the hell this Gandhi fellow is.

Rudyard Kipling wrote on Tolstoy's wall: Gandhi is an Hindu of small stature and a formidable barrister.

Tolstoy and Mohandas K. Gandhi are friends.

Vladimir Chertkov started the group I'm a Tolstoyan!

Tolstoy demands I'm a Tolstoyan! be deleted from Facebook.

The Facebook Team wrote that only group creators can delete groups from Facebook.

Tolstoy is hating himself and wondering why anyone would want to be a Tolstoyan.

Sofia Andreyevna is copying out the special collector's edition of *Anna Karenina*.

Tolstoy is renouncing all corporal pleasures and wants Sofia Andreyevna to do the same.

Sofia Andreyevna is thinking Tolstoy can shove it where the Creator cannot find it.

Tolstoy wants Sofia Andreyevna to sell all of her earthly possessions.

Sofia Andreyevna thinks that *Anna Karenina* doesn't really hold up on the 70th reading.

Chekhov is dead.

Tolstoy is renouncing everything.

Tolstoy is renouncing Facebook.

The Facebook Team says Tolstoy cannot be removed from Facebook.

Tolstoy thinks the Facebook Team is morally degenerate.

Sofia Andreyevna is reflecting back on her life and thinking Facebook has been a tremendous solace.

Tolstoy has left for the railways station.

Paul Greenberg

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### “Use Tolstoy to find your way...”

“I wouldn’t pet her if I were you,” the driver’s companion advised when we got in.

I recalled her remark as I carefully slid out of the backseat of the dusty Niva, avoiding as best I could disturbing the sleepy spaniel who had greeted Tom Newlin and me with a low, menacing growl, but who had otherwise lain impassively wedged between us and our packs as we bounced along the lane.

I had just finished explaining to the driver and his friend how we had ended up lost on some back-country road, a few miles from the tiny village of Rusyatino, in a sparsely populated northern part of the Tula Oblast. By now, I had performed the spiel a few dozen times, so my delivery was so quick and polished that I could recite it in a single long breath: We were two American professors, scholars and admirers of Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy, walking from Moscow to Tula, following the historical path of Tolstoy, who during the 1880s liked to walk the two hundred kilometers from his Moscow home in the Khamovniki district of Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana, his ancestral home ten miles south of Tula.

We had taken a detour of a few kilometers from Tolstoy's route to spend the night in a shalash, a grass-covered hut made by leaning sticks together teepee-like, in an apple orchard on a hill, on the grounds of the museum-estate of Andrey Timofeyevich Bolotov, Russia's "first agronomist and pomologist." (Tom, in one of those lucky turns of fate, had written a book on Bolotov a few years ago, so the staff there was eager to host us.) After a breakfast of boiled potatoes, pickled peppers, and "Bolotov tea"—a tincture, the director explained, made according to the exacting recipe of Andrey Timofeyevich from grasses and herbs collected on the estate—we set off again on our hike. Within minutes, we were lost.

I kvetched to the Niva's driver that our maps, like apparently all maps of Russia, were terrible, imprecise, illegible, and I suspect intentionally misleading. The road we were on did not appear on any map. We couldn't figure out where in the hell we were, or how to get back to the Old Warsaw Highway; and there were moreover no signs and no people to make things any easier. Just a lot of land, silence and *безлюдье* ("a lacking of people," one of my favorite Russian words). The driver and his friend nodded in time with the bumps as they listened to my rant. His laconic reply: "Yes, that's how we defeated the Germans." I pointed out that the trick worked pretty well against Napoleon, too. More nodding.

They dropped us off on a slightly wider, though no less rutted, track. The driver looked solemn as we tossed our packs on our backs. We shook hands. The highway was just one and a half kilometers ahead, he explained. (It was more like six or seven kilometers, a difference that is merely academic for someone tearing along in a car but altogether significant for us trudging pedestrians.) His parting words: "Use Tolstoy to find your way (Ориентируйтесь по имени Толстого). If you say his name, Russians will do anything for you." We'd already figured that one out, but we thanked him

again for stopping, told him how kind and hospitable Russians were, and set off.

Our hike from the outskirts of Moscow to Yasnaya Polyana this June was not just homage to Tolstoy, marking the one-hundred-twenty-fifth anniversary of his first trip in April 1886. (We had originally planned the "stroll" for August 2010, to coincide with the centenary of Tolstoy's death, but the historic heat wave and fires that beset the area had spoiled our plans.)

We each had our reasons for spending four and a half days straight hoofing it across the midriff of Russia: Tom, who teaches Russian at Oberlin, aimed to take measure, at ground level as it were, of the relevance of Tolstoy's cantankerous views about technology, consumerism, and voluntary poverty. By eschewing bourgeois trains and aristocratic carriages, and walking like ninety-nine percent of Russians did in the nineteenth century, Tolstoy was making a social, technological, and ecological statement that resonates perhaps more clearly today than even in the 1880s. "I am walking, mainly, to recuperate from the luxuries of life and perhaps to take part a bit in the real," he wrote a friend before leaving. Walking is travel's answer to contemporary foodies' "slow food" and audiophiles' "lo-fi."

Sara Winter, a documentary film maker based at the Eugene Lang College, The New School for Liberal Arts, accompanied us for part of the way, taking footage of the Russian countryside, the people we met, and Tom's and my more or less continuous deliberation about Tolstoy, for a film she is making about Tolstoy and Yasnaya Polyana.

For me, the main allure was the way the hike exemplified a side of Tolstoy nowadays rarely noted, though part of the Tolstoy legend during his lifetime. He was a dynamo. No contemporary account of meeting Tolstoy—and I've read scores of them—was complete without some mention of the author's vigor, his physicality. One of the earliest photographs of Tolstoy, taken in 1856 with the other contributors to the journal *The*

*Contemporary*, shows the nabobs of Russian literature like Goncharov, Ostrovsky and Turgenev, nattily dressed and loafing like Bohemians on upholstered chairs; behind them stands Tolstoy, Leo the lion, arms crossed, in his army dress uniform, glowering and uncomfortable, clearly ready to burst out of the salon. It seems to me that nearly all the famous pictures and paintings and caricatures of Tolstoy depict him in motion, on his feet, working with his hands, which is odd for a man famous as “the great writer of the Russian land.”

Tolstoy was a lifelong fidget, and could sit at his desk or in the parlor for only a few hours before fleeing for the outdoors. Like many geniuses, he had failed out of school, largely because it did not suit his temper. He was a soldier, a passionate hunter, a swimmer, a walker, a gymnast; he loved to skate, to cut hay alongside his peasants, to ride his bike, to play tennis, to chop firewood by the Moscow River in the dead of winter. His son, Ilya L'vovich, recalled how Tolstoy, while visiting his Samara estate in the 1870s, vied in a kind of traditional tug-of-war with the Bashkirs who lived in the area. Two contestants sit opposite one another, the bottoms of their feet touching, each grasping with both hands a stick planted between them. Whoever could pull his opponent to his feet was the winner. Tolstoy beat every Bashkir save one, who weighed eight poods, or roughly three hundred pounds. The biologist I. I. Mechnikov, visiting Yasnaya Polyana in 1909, marveled at the eighty-one-year-old Tolstoy, astride a horse galloping across the fields and leaping over ditches. D. V. Nikitin, a physician who attended Tolstoy near the end of the latter's life, wrote that he had “never seen in all the long years of practice an old man with such a young and powerful body, without the slightest sign of sclerosis.” In 1895, when he was sixty-six, Tolstoy jotted down in his diary that “life is movement,” a dictum he apparently lived by.

This inexhaustible store of energy helps explain Tolstoy's artistic fecundity, as well. Boris Eikhenbaum, Russia's greatest Tolstoy scholar, marveled at the sheer output of manuscript pages, estimating that over his sixty-year career, Tolstoy wrote *on average* fifty printer's sheets a year including diaries and correspondence, or roughly the equivalent of half of *War and Peace*, every year, for sixty years. And Tolstoy was not a professional writer. He wrote in his spare time, when not skating or swimming or walking or...

In his essay “L. Tolstoy and Dostoevsky,” the Russian symbolist poet and novelist D. S. Merezhkovsky famously depicted Russian literature's two giants as the main branches, emerging in opposite directions, from the one trunk of Russian culture, Pushkin. Dostoevsky was the “seer of the spirit,” always depicting how the internal substance affects the external, how the spirit battles the body. Tolstoy was the “seer of the flesh,” whose genius lay in carefully revealing the internal state through “small, striking observations and discoveries” about his heroes' bodies, observations that, by their very ordinariness, amaze the reader. In *War and Peace*, Pierre asks Karataev a question at night, and understands that Karataev, whose face he cannot see, is smiling, because Karataev's “voice is altered by his smile.” Merezhkovsky marvels: “Tolstoy was the first person to discover the simple and minor detail that had, for a thousand years, escaped the attention of observers: That voices as well as faces can be ‘smiling.’” Merezhkovsky remarks: “It would seem that in world literature there has never been a writer who rivaled Tolstoy's ability to depict the human body in words.”

It's easy to imagine sickly Dostoevsky's introspective “psychological” art stemming from his physical frailty, while Tolstoy's physicality, his mordant and often uneasy familiarity with his own flesh, naturally migrated into his artistic technique.

I cannot swim, skate, hunt, cut hay, defeat Bashkirs in feats of strength, ride a horse, nor even

play tennis. But I can walk, and I was eager to experience, however indirectly, Tolstoy's long hike, an experience he described in an 1886 letter to his friend and confidant V. G. Chertkov, as "one of the

vigorous man in his fifties, incredibly famous in his own country and, increasingly, worldwide. He was married to a beautiful and adoring woman nearly twenty years his junior, the father of a large and

### Yasnaya Polyana

The Ant Brotherhood was revealed to us, but not the chief secret—the secret he said he had written on a green stick.

(Tolstoy's journal)

Everything speaks of late summer—horses grazing well into the middle distance, nuzzling their companion shadows on the trampled earth; the sky a transported blue, a few slow clouds, suspended from childhood.

Yasnaya Polyana—Tolstoy's ancestral home. He moves easily toward us in the photograph, loosely gripping, not leaning on, his cane. Taking his afternoon walk in these fields he played in as a boy.

As he passes, two horses raise their heads, fasten on something beyond the borders of the scene, appearing for all the world to meet our gaze. So they are captured in the instant of the shutter's release. As with the old

man, Russia's Homer, who peers out at the camera's location, but now into a world no closer to heaven than his own. His soul in torment at the end and he torn from all he had loved, had called home.

I think of the green stick his brother Nicolay had buried at the edge of a nearby wood, on which he said he had written the secret of universal love and the banishment of evil from the world. "I believe such truths exist," the aging

Tolstoy wrote, and in that spot among birches bordering a woodland path, at his request, he is buried.

—Jim Bishop

best memories of my life."

Tolstoy made three such treks during the last half of the 1880s. In the early 1880s, his family had begun to spend the winters in Moscow so the boys could continue their education and the girls could make their entry into society. Tolstoy was then a

merry clutch of children, comfortably wealthy, and suicidally depressed.

Tolstoy's sixth decade coincided with a period he called in *A Confession* "my internal perestroika," a period of increasing disillusionment with Orthodoxy, the Russian state, his vocation as

writer, and his family. He wrote little in the way of belletristic fiction, choosing instead to write works, largely unpublishable in his own country, of social criticism and theology. By 1885, he had eschewed the life of an aristocrat and adopted an austere life of physical toil. He gave up hunting, meat, and, with great difficulty, tobacco. He decided that money was a means of oppression, and sought not to spend any, and instead to make do with radical simplicity and self-sufficiency. He hauled his own water, cut his own firewood, emptied his own chamber pot, cleaned his rooms, and made his own boots.

Sticking to such self-appointed asceticism was hard enough on his familiar, bucolic country estate. The winters he spent in the city, unable to escape the very “lifestyle” he found morally repugnant, brought him nearly to suicide.

In a way, then, these pedestrian treks were unintentional dress-rehearsals for his final hike, the “flight from paradise” that Tolstoy famously made at the age of eighty-two from Yasnaya Polyana, fleeing the old for the new, but instead dying in a railway hut, in the whistle-stop village of Astapovo, in the south of Russia, amid a media scrum.

Despite being a dedicated lifelong diarist, Tolstoy wrote very few entries during this period, but plenty of other sources like letters and memoirs offer precise details of his walks, giving a composite picture of his walks.

He would set off from his Moscow home as soon as the weather turned nice—too early, it seems, as he often ended up walking through cold, rain, snow and sleet. He took along young, male friends to keep him company. Anna Seuron, a Frenchwoman and governess for the Tolstoy family who published a detailed account of their life in the 1880s, offers this packing list. “He took only what was necessary. He carried a linen bag for bread, a shirt, two pairs of socks, some handkerchiefs, and some medicine for his stomach, which often caused him problems. To this he added a notebook with a pencil tied to it for taking notes.” (The notebook, a

gift from Seuron, had carbon paper, a novelty at the time.)

Tolstoy was not a purist: He took a carriage to the toll gate at the end of the Kiev Highway, roughly where the MKAD (the Moscow Ring Road) lies today. He accepted rides sometimes from passing carts and friends, and likely resorted to a train. In 1886, he bragged to Chertkov that they only “hitched” a ride twice for a total of twenty-five versts (twenty-six kilometers). He walked very quickly, covering thirty kilometers a day. “Tolstoy walks straight and wide, with his chin up, in a grey cap, his hands stuck into his belt. He walks, always chatting in his resonant and earnest voice,” noted M. A. Stakhovich, who accompanied Tolstoy on the first walk. Stakhovich, thirty-three years Tolstoy’s junior, couldn’t keep up and rode a train most of the way to Yasnaya Polyana.

Sofya Andreevna, his wife, worried about his health and complained to her sister: Lyovochka [Tolstoy] has set off again for Yasnaya Polyana on foot, with a pack on his shoulders. This really irritated me and I protested, but he, as I say, took the bit in his teeth. He isn’t eating meat, isn’t smoking, and doesn’t drink alcohol.

In her memoir *My Life*, she marvels that at the very moment when Tolstoy’s fame was spreading through Europe, he was tromping in peasant bast shoes along the muddy highway. To assuage her worries, he daily sent reports back to Moscow from railroad stations along the way. He sent news from Podolsk (just south of Moscow), his wife received the note the next day and sent a reply, which Tolstoy received the third day, *poste restante*, in Serpukhov. One could hardly expect a letter to travel so quickly today in Russia.

Tolstoy walked mainly along a road then called the Warsaw Highway. (This seems confusing, since it runs due south from Moscow, but it led travelers to Podolsk, where the eastward Polish Road began.) No more than a cartroad in Tolstoy’s days, it leads the traveler through the ancient cities of Podol’sk,

Lopasnja (renamed Chekhov in 1954), Serpukhov, and Tula—names that appear as postmarks on Tolstoy's letters back to Sof'ya Andreevna. The Warsaw Highway was the only major road south of Moscow, and alongside it, in the 1860s, was built the Moscow-Kursk train line, which is today the electric-train railway (the "elektrichka"). Today most traffic between Moscow and Tula goes by the Simferopol' Highway (also known as M2 or the Crimean Highway). The "old" Warsaw Highway, along which we marched, is busy in the Moscow Oblast with local traffic, but largely empty once you cross the Oka River into the Tula Oblast.

Some nights Tolstoy spent in hotels. During his first walk, he wrote his wife that he had spent the night in a hotel room that he made sure to "sprinkle with chamomile." This detail confused me until I found mention that it was a common means of repelling bedbugs.

Other nights on the road he would stay with friends, or knock on peasant huts and ask for a place to pass the night, often sleeping with a dozen other travelers. The highways in the 1880s were crossroads of two worlds. They were full of various "wanderers" (странники) and "runners" (бегуны), schismatic Old Believers who had followed Christ's command to leave home, as well as traditional Orthodox pilgrims visiting shrines and relics. Moreover, peasants from outlying villages were increasingly often working as migrant labor in urban factories. Fellow walkers thronged the highways, all of them needing a free place to spend the night. Russian hospitality demanded that no one be turned away, and no one took money. Tolstoy reported to his wife that he was treated to tea and steamed milk, and cabbage soup. He wrote his wife upon arriving at Yasnaya Polyana, complaining of "a little tiredness" after his five-day march.

Like Tolstoy's wife, our American and Russian friends—and our own wives—worried greatly about our safety. We were repeatedly warned by our urban Russian friends that the countryside was

full of drunk and dangerous Russian thugs. We would be attacked, or run over, or kidnapped and ransomed. We would collapse of exhaustion, far from competent medical attention. We were foolish, generally. Who walks a hundred miles when there are buses and trains? Repeatedly, when asked for directions, Russians would insist that we needed to take some form of transportation to get to our next destination.

The whole venture was deemed very American by our Russian friends, despite its origin. The sentiment seems to have deep roots. In 1886, while Tolstoy was away on one of his walks, three elderly Americans showed up at the Moscow house, asking to see him. Sof'ya Andreevna explained that he was away, and tried to dissuade them from following him. "We came only to see Tolstoy." She finally relented and gave them directions to where they might find him, at Prince Urusov's estate, a family friend. She wrote in her memoirs that "They made the trip to the prince's village in one day, traveling from morning to evening without a stop, and then headed back to America. Only Americans would be up for an adventure like that!"

In many respects, Tolstoy had it easier than us, his modern imitators: There were no cars or trucks in his day. Russian drivers yield little road to pedestrians and often use the highway shoulder as a passing lane. Such shenanigans make walking along a highway unpleasant and sometimes treacherous. Whenever possible we followed footpaths, railway lines, or parallel surface roads.

This year's weather was kinder than last, and we enjoyed pleasant conditions with a wind at our back the entire way. Walking eight or ten hours a day turned out not to be terribly challenging, even with packs on our backs and the rolling hills that characterize the countryside south of the Oka River valley. The monotony made the march more mental than physical. We amused ourselves by arguing about Russian culture, about teaching, or simply marveling at the Russian countryside.

As we walked mile after empty mile through the most populous area of Russia, the vastness and emptiness of the black-earth expanses vexed and confused me like never before. *The* burning question of the nineteenth century, a question Tolstoy seriously occupied himself with, had been “the land problem.” (Not for nothing did Tolstoy title one of his best tales “How Much Land Does One Man Need?”) I marveled at the paradox: Have ever so few people fought so bitterly over so much land? The land question was a political one, not a problem of scarcity and “resource allocation,” and the endless Russian horizons helped me to sympathize a bit with the liberals and radicals who protested, often violently, the absurd landlessness of the peasants.

The same extraordinary hospitality that Tolstoy met with in the 1880s extends into our own time, our friends’ warnings notwithstanding. Without exception, the people we encountered on our route were curious, chatty, and ready to help. People repeatedly offered us free drinks and food. They stopped and gave us directions and advice. (One wag, when we asked whether there were a quieter road running south, answered no, and advised us to “sing while you walk.”) They gave us a lift, even when our destination lay far out of their way. They opened their homes to us. A lifeguard even

motored us across the Oka on his boat. They all refused our money.

One moment in particular reminded me why I find Russia, despite its infuriating contradictions and unpredictability, such a remarkable place. We stopped at a roadside tent restaurant near Stolobnaya for a glass of kvass and a bowl of okroshka, a cold vegetable soup. The only other patron sat across the tent, smoking and drinking a beer, peering at us intently over his sunglasses. While not exactly menacing, he did not broadcast friendliness. Our waitress finally got up the nerve to ask us the predictable questions, and the fellow across the tent listened intently to our explanation. A few moments later, he strode to our table and introduced himself. He told us that what we were doing was important, that he admired us, and he fished out of his bag a book of Esenin’s poetry. He handed it to me, explaining that “everything you need to know about Russia you’ll find here,” and left.

I paged through the book and found its margins full of his penciled in remarks, stanzas underlined, and favorite verses dog-eared.

I read it often along the way.

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