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Abstract: The paper is concerned with the development of the search movement in the USSR and aims at two main goals: to recover the contradictions in the relationship between the sledopyty (pathfinders) and the state in the 1960–80s, and to identify the inherent mechanisms of the movement which shaped its role and significance in the everyday life of the Soviet people in the Brezhnev era. The article is broken into several sections focused on memorial politics towards the war burials which provoked the first searching initiatives in the post-war Soviet Union, the subsequent political instrumentalisation of the searching movement and the forms of the everyday pathfinders’ activity reconstructed via the archival materials of the provincial Red Pathfinders Club. The Soviet war commemoration campaign relied on the transference of commemorative roles to local activists who served to legitimise the national war memory being not only vox populi but rather manus populi — the nation’s hands which created their own memory. The results of such a politics were similar to the other cases of the state-supported social movements in the 1960–80s and provided for development of social activity on grassroots level followed by the discovery and revision of local history. The searchers became the key war history experts on the local ground and the principal agents of local commemoration keeping the prescribed official status of voluntary youth organisations with only entertaining and educational goals. The Soviet memorial politics controversies made for creation of a fundamental rupture between the searchers and the state which still remains vital until today.

Keywords: searchers, red pathfinders, anthropology of memory, history of the Stagnation, social movements, USSR.


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By the People’s Hands: The Sledopyt Movement in the USSR of the 1960–80s

The paper is concerned with the development of the search movement in the USSR and aims at two main goals: to recover the contradictions in the relationship between the sledopyty (pathfinders) and the state in the 1960–80s, and to identify the inherent mechanisms of the movement which shaped its role and significance in the everyday life of the Soviet people in the Brezhnev era. The article is broken into several sections focused on memorial politics towards the war burials which provoked the first searching initiatives in the post-war Soviet Union, the subsequent political instrumentalisation of the searching movement and the forms of the everyday pathfinders’ activity reconstructed via the archival materials of the provincial Red Pathfinders Club. The Soviet war commemoration campaign relied on the transference of commemorative roles to local activists who served to legitimise the national war memory being no only vox populi but rather manus populi — the nation’s hands which created their own memory. The results of such a politics were similar to the other cases of the state-supported social movements in the 1960–80s and provided for development of social activity on grassroots level followed by the discovery and revision of local history. The searchers became the key war history experts on the local ground and the principal agents of local commemoration keeping the prescribed official status of voluntary youth organisations with only entertaining and educational goals. The Soviet memorial politics controversies made for creation of a fundamental rupture between the searchers and the state which still remains vital until today.

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One of the key questions linked to the study of Soviet history as a whole and the period of stagnation in particular is the problem of the activity/passivity of the Soviet subject in regard to state power. Despite many attempts to reject the very dichotomy of ‘power — society’,¹ which made it essential to answer that question, the opposition between the state, embodied in the Moscow Kremlin, and the people, envisaged as a vague mass somewhere about its feet, is still a dominant analytical construct.²

¹ Despite the active revisionism of the totalitarian model of Sovietology in the 1960–80s, one of the basic theses of which was the incapacity of the ‘power — society’ model to explain the specifics of the phenomenon of ‘the Soviet’, the necessity for this sort of critique is as relevant as it ever was [Hellbeck 2010; 2015: 18–9]; cf.: [Yurchak 2005].

² A recent example of the use of this model was the paper of the Free Historical Society ‘What Past Does Russia’s Future Need?’, published on the site of the Committee for Civil Initiatives in 2017. The results of large-scale sociological research, which presented a complex picture of the contemporary historical memory in Russia, were reduced to a minimalist construction. The paper’s authors identified ‘first’ and ‘second’ memories, one of which was ‘the state memory, a heroised version of the state past, inculcated by state policy via the media and public holidays’, and the other ‘the totality of forms of memory that unite the individual with the wider community of memory via the history of the family, town or region (“popular memory”)’ [Rubtsov et al. 2017]. A detailed critical review of this project was published by Aleksey Golubev [Golubev 2017]. See also the materials of the discussion in the journal Istoricheskaya ekspertiza: ['Diskussiya…' 2017: 27–103].
So-called ‘patriotic upbringing’ — a concept that has become fashionable again in recent years — is used in historical research as one of the most telling examples of the political indoctrination of the population and the manipulation of social consciousness. The existence of a state requirement for patriotic upbringing, expressed in the state five-year programmes for ‘The patriotic upbringing of the citizens of the Russian Federation’ which have been regularly renewed since 2001, is widely understood to mean that all forms of social action within the scope of these programmes should be politically engaged and represent the result of ideological manipulation.

It is as a rule in this context that the search movement in modern Russia and its earlier form, the sledopyt movement of the 1960–80s, is examined. ‘In 1965 the idea of a military-patriotic upbringing received a powerful stimulus,’ writes Nikolay Mitrokhin, ‘produced by the political and social requirement to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the victory in the Second World War. The victory, which became the chief ideological value and symbol of the success of society, was used, within the framework of a developing long-term propaganda campaign, in particular as a means capable of returning young people with a negative attitude to the fold of the official ideology of a socialist society, prevent a noticeable generation gap, and “bring together” the “fathers” who had fought and the “children” of the post-war baby boom’ [Mitrokhin 2003: 276]. In this context the search movement is understood as an instrument of direct political pressure and control, a variant of the so-called cultural technologies of rule. The sledopyt movement of the 1960s satisfied the state strategy directed towards fortifying the legitimacy of the Soviet regime and agreed very well with an ideological conception which made the sacredness of the Great Patriotic War its cornerstone and the image of heroic victory, and incidentally solved the problem of inculcating ideology into young people. It is not hard to notice that these conclusions may easily be projected onto the present situation in Russia.

As well as the version of a political requirement, two other models for interpreting the search and sledopyt movement have gained currency today. The ‘heroicising’ model is represented by a vast quantity of current historical and publicist texts directed towards the legitimisation of the present concept of military-patriotic upbringing. Making active use of heroicising metaphor and style, the authors who follow this model attribute the key role in developing the sledopyt movement to the state. Thus the author of a dissertation on ‘The

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1 Sledopyt literally means ‘tracker’, but is used here with very specific reference to a particular movement in the post-war Soviet Union; cf. also the discussion below of the semantics of the ‘search’ [Trans.].

2 See also: [Tsukanov 2016].
PERIOD OF STAGNATION?

History of the Search and Local Studies Movement among Young People in Russia from the 1940s to the early 1990s: Materials from Kursk Oblast' defines the relevance of the subject of her research as ‘the place and role of the patriotic upbringing of the population and the necessity of transmitting social experience from one generation to the next’ [Melikhova 2011: 2]. ‘One of the leading places’, she continues, ‘in the many-branched and flexible value system of providing national-state security is occupied by the young people’s search and local studies movement’ [Ibid.].

Another model (which we shall call the ‘romanticising’ model) mainly represents the outlook of the actual searchers and veterans of the sledopyt movement, as reflected in their reminiscences [Ikonnikov, Tarasov 1982; Kleymenov 1990; Lishin, Lishina 1990; ‘Vospominaniya…’ 2013], discussions on the pages of internet forums and in a number of academic publications, among which the most outstanding example is probably Nina Tumarkin’s book The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of the Second World War in Russia [Tumarkin 1994]. In this model the search movement is interpreted as a civil initiative on the part of its participants, an effort made in the name of remembrance of the war, the foremost motto of which was the expression attributed to Alexander Suvorov: ‘The war is not over until the last fallen soldier is buried.’

The boundary between the heroicising and romanticising versions of the sledopyt movement quite clearly follows the line of the attitude towards state policy on remembrance. In the one case the sledopyty go hand in hand with the state, and in the other completely independently and frequently in the opposite direction. One of the notes that Yu. A. Smirnov, the chairman of the directorate of the Union of Search Squads (SPO), has placed on its official portal is entitled ‘Particulars of a national forgetfulness approaching senility’ [Smirnov s.d.]. The theme of ‘forgetfulness’, or ‘non-memory’ (as a special section on the SPO site calls it) is a recurring motif in the discussions of contemporary searchers.

Despite the large-scale political instrumentalisation of the sledopyt movement, of which there is no doubt, its origin and evolution were determined by internal mechanisms, motives and interpretations. Moreover, state support for the sledopyty, which became noticeable from the middle of the 1960s, had contradictory consequences. Analysing material on the development of local studies in the USSR in the 1950–70s, Victoria Donovan comes to a conclusion that could

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1 This sentence was also used as the title of a dissertation by Johanna Dahlin, on the work of the Ingria Search Group [Dahlin 2012].

2 This section was removed from the site at the end of 2017, as was the previously mentioned article by Yu. A. Smirnov in April 2018.
equally well be applied to the history of the *sledopyt* movement: ‘The kraevedenie revival may have been a state-sponsored phenomenon that was driven by actors and organs at the political center, but it also resulted in the endorsement of local initiative and, in connection with this, a growing sense of entitlement among regional elites to shape their own cultural policy. By endorsing a patriotic politics that privileged the role of local historical knowledge in communist socialisation, the central authorities empowered local elites to make demands of the center’ [Donovan 2015: 478] (see also: [Donovan 2012: 400]). The support for the *sledopyt* movement rolled out in the same years led to similar results: a strengthening of local identity and local civil activism, which in turn determined a development of critical reflection on the state remembrance policy.

I have two aims in this work. One is to show the diverse nature of the interrelations between the *sledopyty* and the state, stressing the active role of the *sledopyty* in producing the material memory of the war in Brezhnev’s period of stagnation. The second is to trace the internal mechanisms of the *sledopyt* movement which determined its role and significance in Soviet everyday life of the 1960–80s.

The contradictory nature of the Brezhnev period, which has become its defining marker in modern historiography, was not only manifest in that ‘[t]he Brezhnev era was somehow both a time of modernisation, stability and accomplishment and a time of decay, stagnation and corruption’ [Hanson 2006: 295], but also in the specific forms of social revival that embraced many aspects of the lives of Soviet people everywhere. It was not only the *sledopyt* and local studies movements that were expanding so rapidly during these years, but also movements for the conservation of ancient monuments, for sport, for tourism, for ex-servicemen, and no doubt many others.¹ They were all rooted in the scattered initiatives ‘from below’ of the 1940–50s — in some cases even earlier — but they did not receive official state support until the middle of the 1960s, which made it possible for them to be institutionalised in the form of various all-union and local organisations and in consequence for them to spread rapidly over the whole Soviet Union.

The policy of state support for social initiatives is usually explained by the crisis of the Soviet system that supervened after the death of Stalin and the resulting search for new resources and methods for keeping it in a functioning condition. Yitzhak Brudny has used the

¹ See on the development of the local studies movement: [Donovan 2015: 467–8], on the ex-servicemen’s movement: [Edèle 2008: 175], on the movement for the conservation of ancient monuments: [Hosking 2006: 358], and on support for rural writers: [Razuvalova 2015: 16]. Nina Tumarkin also explains the birth of the campaign to sacralise the war and the great victory (which included a number of initiatives covering the whole country) as aimed at creating a common myth capable of sustaining support for a ‘weakening system’ amongst the whole people [Tumarkin 1994: 8].
concept of ‘the policy of inclusion’ to characterise the relations of the Soviet regime and the groups of Russian nationalists, meaning the creation in the 1960–70s of so-called ‘articulated audiences’ intended to fulfil their allotted roles and thereby silently support the existing state order [Brudny 1998: 16]. In Geoffrey Hosking’s view, the ‘socialist democracy’ proclaimed by Khrushchev at the Twenty-Second Party Congress, the realisation of which included support for social movements, was the general answer to the problem of the authorities’ crisis of credibility both within the country and outside it [Hosking 2006: 273–4]. The case of the sledopyt movement was just one variant of that policy.

At the same time, the material on the various movements of the 1960–80s are equally capable of repeating the conclusion drawn by Mark Edele about the development of ex-servicemen’s organisations. ‘The evolution of the veterans’ movement cannot be understood simply as a result of pressure from below or action from above. It required shifts in state policy to allow the actualisation, legalisation, formalisation, and further growth of preexisting mass desires, social relations, and organisational forms — which in turn influenced the way veterans thought, felt, and acted’ [Edele 2008: 155]. Not one of the widely expanded social movements of these years was ‘simply an artificial state creation but deeply rooted on an emotional and psychological but also a social level’ [Ibid.].

The sledopyt movement was no exception. Though it became one of the most noticeable social phenomena of the Brezhnev era, it was rooted in the scattered post-war initiatives that reflected the contradictions in the policy of remembrance regarding the ‘bodies’ and ‘places’ of death in war. The first sledopyty were unconnected with each other and had no intention of changing the policy of remembrance itself, but by the middle of the 1960s the movement had received powerful institutional support which set its general format and stylistic contours, and at the same time put the question of what role the state should play in the commemoration of the wartime past on the agenda.

The first part of this work is devoted to the characteristics of Soviet remembrance policy in relation to death in war, the contradictory nature of which provoked social activity in this area. In the second part I turn to the history of the instrumentalisation of the sledopyt initiatives in the 1960–70s and the specifics of the construction of that phenomenon which came usually to be called ‘the sledopyt movement’. And, finally, in the third part, using material from a small provincial club of red sledopyty, I shall try to examine the activities of its ‘rank and file’ members and the motives which determined the evolution of the movement from the middle of the 1960s till the end of the 1980s.
‘Bodies’ and ‘places’ of death in war

In the recollections of many sledopyty the starting point for the personal history of their ‘search’ was an encounter with irregular death. This does not mean death in battle: the first sledopyty were ex-servicemen and had been through the war themselves, so for them death on the battlefield was nothing new. Their memoirs describe peacetime encounters with death. ‘And so, when we came to the bog, that was the first time I saw at close quarters the people who had died in 1942. Nobody had had a chance to bury them, because the territory had then been occupied by the Germans, it was their rear, and the Germans, as everybody knows, did not bury our dead, and the people who had been killed were preserved in the bog, and looked as if they had been killed only recently. And that first time we went I was struck by this detail: when my mother and I were walking across the bog, I saw a fox. It’s a dreadful thing to talk about, but this is how it was: the fox seemed to be gnawing at something there. When I chased it away and approached, I saw a senior lieutenant lying there’ [‘Vospominaniya…’ 2013: 87]. This subject, from the memoirs of N. I. Orlov about his first encounter in 1946 with the Valley of Death at Myasnoy Bor is typical of many of the memoirs. The most lively impression left in the memory was the sight of unburied soldiers lying on the face of the earth.

At the centre of the recollections of the 1960–70s is not any surprise at death itself, not even the lack of ‘due remembrance’ (that theme would appear later), but the discovery of ‘stray’ death, of dead bodies without any ‘regular’ burial place.

As Katherine Verdery has convincingly shown, the politics of death are an important instrument for organising and transforming communities: ‘[T]o rebury a dead person is not simply to reassess his place in history; it is to revise national genealogies, inserting the person as an ancestor more centrally into the lineage of honored forebears’ [Verdery 1999: 105]. Soviet policy towards dead bodies during the Second World War reveals a remarkable history of the separation of death into ‘bodies’ and ‘places’, which became part of different spheres of control, practice and discourse. Even before the end of the war, the ‘places’ fell into the sphere of the policy of remembrance. The ‘bodies’ remained exclusively the object of statistics and accounting. As the account of war losses ceased to be topical, and furthermore became something to be hushed up, dead

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1 Regulation concerning the personal record of losses and burials of fallen personnel of the Red Army during wartime (15 March 1941).
bodies were more and more consigned to oblivion [Konasov, Sudakov 1997]. The different histories of the ‘bodies’ and ‘places’ of death in warfare did much to determine the state of affairs that the first sledopyty encountered.

From the beginning of the war, it was army administration that was responsible for keeping account of the dead bodies of fallen fighters. The ‘Regulation Concerning the Personal Record of Losses’,¹ which until 1944 laid out the rules for dealing with the fallen, obliged commanders, the army staff and the Recruitment Office ‘to keep a strict record and promptly present lists of irrevocable losses’. ‘Death’ in this document meant ‘losses’, ‘a reduction in personnel’, and was closely linked with questions of future mobilisation and supply. The statistics of losses occupied the first place.

The problem of burial was also covered in the document, but how it was to be solved was subordinated to utilitarian norms that identified dead bodies as a health risk to the living: they should be removed as far as possible from living space. Burial places should be chosen no closer than 300 m to water sources and settlements, living quarters or main roads. On the grave mound there should be a pyramid of boards or stone, on which should be written or branded the number of the grave. No other signs, names, dates, etc. were permitted on the grave. Such burials were faceless sarcophagi whose purpose was to isolate the dead bodies from the living to the greatest possible extent. The regulation said nothing about what was to be done with the graves in future, once they were no longer under military jurisdiction. Nor did it say anything about what was to be done with the corpses of soldiers from enemy forces.

A short regulation of the State Defence Committee² assigned this responsibility to the local administrations — the executive committees of the provincial and local Soviets of workers’ deputies, who had to organise special teams of local citizens to collect and bury the bodies of enemy soldiers, liquidate enemy cemeteries, check the condition of the common graves of the men and commanders of the Red Army, and if necessary carry out reburials.³ Thus from this time on the counting of losses was under the control of the Army, but the actual graves were in the care of the civilian population.

¹ Title in full: ‘Regulation Concerning the Personal Record of Losses and Burials of Fallen Personnel of the Red Army during Wartime’. Issued together with Order no. 138 of 15 March 1941.
² Title in full: Regulation no. GOKO-1517 of the State Defence Committee, 1 April 1942 ‘On the Removal of the Corpses of Enemy Soldiers and Officers and on the Restoration to a Sanitary Condition of Territories Liberated from the Enemy’.
³ The recovery, documentation and burial of the corpses of the men and commanders of the Red Army immediately on the field of battle was supposed to be carried out as before by military units in accordance with the orders previously issued by the People’s Commissariat for Defence.
By the end of 1943 burial places had obtruded themselves into the sphere of living space. By Order no. 644 of the People’s Commissar for the Economy of the RSFSR and the Commander of the Rear of the Red Army\(^1\) responsibility for maintaining the graves was transferred to republican, regional, provincial, or municipal infrastructure departments. The military authorities’ involvement remained in questions of recording common and individual graves and raising monuments. From that time on responsibility for military burials was shared between the communal services and the military commissariats. With the publication of this order the symbolic meaning of ‘death in battle’ changed: the key concepts were no longer recording and sanitary conditions, but the ‘good order’ and ‘cultural content’ of the graves of the officers and men of the Red Army. The order required ‘all military cemeteries to be maintained in good order’ and provide for fences, paths and green vegetation. In this way the burials became part of the landscape, to which criteria of beauty, cultural standards and effective planning and maintenance were applied.

As early as 1944 places of death became fully-fledged objects of remembrance policy. On 14 February order no. 023 of the People’s Commissar for Defence was issued, bringing into effect the ‘Instruction for accounting for the personnel of the Red Army (in wartime)’. This was the first document in the whole war period that gave a detailed description of the procedure for the burial of the fallen. While it left burials within the competence of regimental commanders, who were to appoint special burial squads, this document contained several new elements. Firstly, it permitted the burial of other ranks in individual graves. Secondly, it required the monument erected over the grave to be inscribed with the rank, surname, name and patronymic of each of the deceased, and also the date of death. Thirdly, completely new criteria were now to be applied to the burial place: ‘The best sites both in settlements and in adjacent localities are to be chosen for the graves: cemeteries, squares, parks, and gardens, and outside settlements, barrows, copses, crossroads, etc.’ The transformation from statistical units of war deaths which were a threat to the living into monuments meant not only that personal data would be indicated on the pyramids, but also that the graves themselves would be transferred from localities distant from human habitation to its centres: squares, gardens and parks.

The post-war policy of memorialising the places where the war dead were buried continued the tendency set out in the ‘Instruction for accounting’ of 1944: military cemeteries officially became ‘cultural monuments’. On 14 October 1948 resolution no. 3898 of the Council

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\(^1\) Order no. 644 of the People’s Commissar for the Economy of the RSFSR and the Commander of the Rear of the Red Army, 29 December 1943.
of Ministers of the USSR, ‘On measures for the improvement of cultural monuments’ came into force, and on 28 May 1949 the instructions for the order of the reckoning, registration and maintenance of archaeological and historical monuments on the territory of the RSFSR was confirmed.1 According to this document, constructions and places connected with the Great Patriotic War were included among historic monuments, along with a whole series of other places,2 and were to be registered and preserved. Resolution no. 373 brought ‘passports’ for historic monuments into use. They were to be filled in by local residents for the registration of war graves discovered around the places where they lived. However, the lists that were drawn up by the executive committees of the provincial and regional soviets in response to this resolution did not, as a rule, include either individual or common graves.

In the list of historic monuments issued in 1960 together with Resolution no. 1327 of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR ‘On the further improvement of the conservation of cultural monuments in the RSFSR’ there were only two objects connected with the Great Patriotic War: the communal grave of the Soviet defence forces at Mamayev Kurgan, and the communal grave of the heroes of the Signals who fell at Stalingrad, at the village of Nizhnii. But a similar list drawn up in 1974 includes dozens of communal graves. And yet even this list is far from complete: it does not include the majority of the individual or common graves to be found all over the territory of the RSFSR.

Bringing war graves into the purview of remembrance policy had contradictory results. On the one hand, the burials were defined as monuments that were of value to the state. On the other, the document neither supposed nor required that all wartime burials should be included in the number of historic objects. Moreover, the codification of burials as part of the historic and cultural heritage concerned only the ‘places’, not the ‘bodies’. The bodies themselves remained exclusively objects of military statistics.

From November 1941 they were subordinated to the department for recording losses of personnel at the front of the Chief Directorate for the Formation and Recruitment of the Troops of the Red Army, which was part of the Directorate for the Mobilisation and

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1 Full title: Resolution no. 373 of the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, 28 May 1949 ‘On the confirmation of the instructions for the order of the reckoning, registration and maintenance of archaeological and historic monuments on the territory of the RSFSR’.

2 Historic monuments also included constructions and places connected with the most important historical events in the life of the peoples of the USSR, the revolutionary movement, the Civil War and the building of socialism; monuments of memorial significance, connected with the life and works of outstanding statesmen and politicians, popular heroes and famous scientists, artists and technologists, and their graves; monuments of the history of technology, the armed forces, the economy and living conditions.
Recruitment of the Army. A year later, on 31 January 1942, the Central Bureau for the Personal Recording of Losses of Army Personnel on Active Service was created. Later the bodies of other ranks were reassigned to a special Directorate for Recording Dead and Missing NCOs and Other Ranks.

After the war the distinction between ‘bodies’ and ‘places’ became even stronger. The departments for recording losses dealt with the applications from local military commissariats regarding lost relatives, while the graves that existed became monuments of the military past together with other historic localities. The unidentified corpses of officers and other ranks that remained on the field of battle were ‘bodies’ without ‘places’ and fell outside the sphere of competence of any state structure.

The first people to search for them in the 1940s were not sledopyty with a deliberate mission to perpetuate the memory of the Great Patriotic War. They were simply people who came upon bodies that had not been committed to the earth, or upon graves that had no one to look after them. The sledopyty of the 1940s and early 1950s were simply trying to find a proper place for these bodies in the world of the living.

The ‘search’ and ‘expedition’ of the red sledopyty

It rains in the woods
And our footwear is sodden.
Expeditionary days
Shall ne’er be forgotten.1

The active creation and subsequent political instrumentalisation of the sledopyt movement began at the end of the 1950s and expanded to embrace the whole Soviet Union in the mid-sixties. The specifics of this process were that sledopyt activity was defined as a spare-time activity for young people and a method of educational work. The identification of the dead, the discovery of their relatives, the setting-up of memorials, the registration of burials and the upkeep of cemeteries were mere side-effects of the useful work of the sledopyty. At the same time the sledopyt clubs and squads gradually became the main and only institutions to carry out commemorative functions connected with the fallen of the Great Patriotic War. The disparity between the institutional role and social significance of sledopyt activity also led to ambiguous results.

The red sledopyty first entered the world of Soviet children and young people en masse with the publication in the Leningrad newspaper for Young Pioneers, Leniskie iskry, of the story of Genka the Orderly, to whom the entire first column of the paper was devoted on 26 May

1 Song of the red sledopyty [Nechaev 1968: 126].
1957 (Ill. 1). It told of how a boy in a Red Army cap came to the editorial office, and introduced himself as a Chapaev orderly who was looking for traces of Comrade Kuzinin, the commander of a cavalry squadron of the 25th Chapaev Division. ‘You’re never a sledopyt?’ exclaimed the members of the editorial board. ‘Yes, but not an ordinary one, a red sledopyt,’ answered Genka [‘Krasnye sledopyty’ 1957: 1]. This is how the game called ‘Red Sledopyty’, announced by Leninskie iskry, began, and continued on its pages even after it had officially finished in October 1957. Four issues later Leninskie iskry published the order of the Red Sledopyt (RS) Staff [‘Prikaz Shtaba KS’ 1957] which defined the rules of the game (Ill. 2). ‘Red sledopyty,’ it said, ‘search for lost traces of the heroes of the revolution, the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War, old battlefields, the routes taken by partisan units, the graves of courageous warriors and young heroes, and objects connected with our heroic past. These objects are to be deposited in the museums of the Revolution and the History of Leningrad. They record the stories of people who lived through these events, old communists, the first members of the Komsomol and the Pioneers, and the songs and sayings of the peoples of our countries. The places where battles for our Fatherland took place, and discoveries connected with the history of the Soviet state are to be drawn or photographed. Young poets are to compose verses and songs dedicated to the glorious history of the first Soviet state in the world. Red sledopyty will leave good memories behind them wherever they go, restore the heroes’ graves, help people like Timur,¹ and assist the kolkhozes and sovkhozes’ [‘Chto nado znat’ 1957: 1]. Pioneers were awarded merit stars for taking part in the game, and anyone who accumulated ten stars got the right to wear a special badge [‘Prikaz Shtaba KS’ 1957: 1]. In the next issues there appeared a column headed ‘RS 1917–1957’, in which the stories of individual lads and sledopyt squads were published.

The publications in Leninskie iskry were the stimulus for the social mobilisation of the sledopyty and set the format for their future collective identity. The official texts that accompanied the triumphal march of the sledopyty through the expanses of their Soviet homeland bestowed upon them all the attributes of an organised youth movement: the Red Sledopyt emblem and song were published in Leninskie iskry, and a model history of the first Leningrad searchers was published in the book Burn Brighter, Bonfire! [Moyzhes, Bogdanova 1959]. ‘The Song of the Red Sledopyty’, written in 1962, words by Sergey Grebennikov and Nikolay Dobronravov, music by Aleksandra Pakhmutova, became the best-known hymn to the search.

¹ An idealised schoolboy in a book by Arkadiy Gaydar, Timur and His Team, who rushes round doing good works, and after whom a network of children’s volunteer groups, the ‘Timurites’, was named [Trans.].
In 1968 Molodaya Gvardiya publishers brought out a collection entitled *Sledopyty Stride Across the Country*, representing in fictionalised form the whole range of *sledopyt* activities. ‘My dear friend,’ says the preface, ‘the little book that you have in your hands will tell you all about the red *sledopyty*. Their units stride along the
roads of the military glory of our people, learning from it to be
courageous and valiant, to love the Soviet Fatherland as its heroes
did.’ And further on: ‘This book will tell you about exciting searches
and interesting finds. Each chapter is one page from the great
expedition, one of the roads it has taken’ [Nechaev 1968: 2]. The
stories in the collection were an indication of the directions of the
search. The first five of them are devoted in order to the story of
a photograph of Lenin, revolutionary events, the Civil War, the
Young Communist organisation, the First Cavalry Army and the
Spanish Civil War. The remaining thirteen are about searches
connected with the Great Patriotic War.

The concepts of ‘search’ and ‘expedition’ took the first places among
the chief metaphors in the literary context that emerged. They were
intended to create the romantic aura and attraction of the sledopyt
movement. ‘As you turn over the pages of the story, your heart cries
out of itself “The search, long live the search! Good luck to you,
sledopyt!”’ [Nechaev 1968: 115].

‘Search’ became a watchword to which young pioneers and
Komsomol members were supposed to respond. ‘On one of the
photographs given to us by the children,’ we read in a story told as
if by schoolchildren, ‘was written “To the Red Sledopyty of Class 5A
from the Pioneers of Moscow School no. 288. In memory of our
search”’ [Nechaev 1968: 43]. It was this inscription, the author
thinks, that inspired the pupils of Class 5A organise a Red Sledopyt
club in their school. Even some years later ‘search’ sounded like
a magic spell in literary texts about sledopyt: ‘They were in Class 5
when their first search began. The girls wore silly little plaits, and the
boys had fringes or unruly curls on their cropped heads’ [Kochergina,
Novikova 1971: 103].

The ‘search’ was the form in which sledopyt work was organised. ‘One
search begins with an old faded photograph, another with a cartridge
case or a helmet found on a battlefield, a third with a letter from an
old soldier or a mother who is still waiting for her son to come back’
[Ikonnikov, Tarasov 1982: 12]. Once they had chosen a particular
topic, the schoolchildren would unravel it, using almost detective
methods. They would consult the archives, go to the library, question
their neighbours and write to people who were from the same place
as their hero. That was how it looked in the books. But precisely
because ‘the search’ was a literary cliché of the sixties and seventies,
it fulfilled an important discursive role: books about sledopyt,
arranged as collections of stories about individual searches, became
a new genre of local history which was not known or represented in
any other form.

The ‘expedition’ was the other metaphor that was used to describe
sledopyt work. Although according to Leninskie iskry the sphere
of interest of red sledopyty included local folklore, old soldiers’ reminiscences and even assistance to collective and Soviet farms, the sledopyt movement was primarily associated with expeditions to sites of military glory. At the beginning of the sixties such expeditions often took the form of tourist trips, and not sledopyt events. In Sergey Mikhalkov’s play The Forgotten Trench, published in 1962 and first staged at the Central Children’s Theatre in Moscow in February 1963, the schoolchildren’s expedition to military sites is discussed as a natural way of spending out-of-school spare time that the reader would understand, and the word sledopyty is nowhere to be found in the text. It is purely a matter of an expedition which the schoolchildren go on together, led by their teacher. One of the first expeditions to military sites organised in Novgorod Oblast took place in 1958 and was led by Yuriy Robertovich Baranovskiy, a Moscow schoolteacher who had served at the front [Lishin, Lishina 1990: 41–7], and was also devoid of any form of an organised sledopyt expedition.1

In 1964 the Central Committee of the Komsomol, the USSR Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of DOSAAF2 issued a resolution ‘On the further reinforcement of military-patriotic upbringing of schoolchildren and raising the level of the work of DOSAAF organisations in schools’, which included expeditions to battle grounds and activities to organise rooms and corners of military glory among the practical measures to ‘further reinforce the military-patriotic upbringing of schoolchildren’. In 1965, when a campaign began in the whole country to memorialise the victory in the Great Patriotic War, the project to create a movement of red sledopyty received a new impulse. On 1 June 1965 Komsomolskaya pravda published the appeal of the Komsomol Central Committee ‘The Feats of Our Fathers’, announcing the beginning of an All-Union youth tourist expedition to the sites of the Soviet people’s military glory [‘Podvig ottsov…’ 1965: 4].3

From that moment on ‘expedition’ and ‘search’ became the main symbols of an era whose vanguard were the red sledopyty. The literary collections of the 1950–60s were organised as travelogues of journeys along the roads of memory and history: Memory Calls Us to Travel [Zefirov 1968], Sledopyty Stride Across the Land [Nechaev 1968], By the Sacred Paths [Po dorogam svyashchennym 1974], Along the Heroes’ Road [Sedina 1974], Along the Road of Our Fathers, the Road of Victory

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1 The history of the All-Union tourist expedition of young people to places of the military glory of the Soviet people and gatherings of the sledopyty was also included in G. S. Usyskin’s book Sketches of the History of Russian Tourism [Usyskin 2000].

2 A volunteer organisation working in support of the armed forces [Trans.].

3 See: [Hornsby 2017] for more detail on the history of the All-Union youth expeditions to sites of military glory.
PERIOD OF STAGNATION?

Ekaterina Melnikova. By the People’s Hands: The Sledopyt Movement in the USSR of the 1960–80s

[Grandova, Timofeeva 1974], On the Heroes’ Path [Sorokin 1977], Off on the Way of Romance [Achmiz 1977] — these are all names of books about the work of the sledopyty who discovered unknown pages in the history of their native land. Not only the sledopyty, but the whole country followed them along the highways and byways of the great victory. ‘Our expedition continues,’ said Marshal I. Kh. Bagramyan, chairman of the Central Staff of the All-Union Expedition. ‘We are all on the march, marshals and privates, the old guard and the young guard, now the soldiers of history, the guides of new, young generations into the world of courage, memory and duty’ [Ikonnikov, Tarasov 1982: 6]. Juliy Ikonnikov, a journalist from Komsomolskaya pravda and an active participant in the post-war memorial movement, adds that ‘[A]ll our life, in reality, is nothing other than an expedition across the sites of the people’s glory’ [Ibid.: 13].

The All-Union expedition to battlefields and the annual gatherings of the sledopyty which took place in various towns from 1965 to 1987 were supplemented by military-patriotic games and expeditions that took place throughout the country. In 1967 Pionerskaya pravda announced the start of the Zarnitsa war game [‘Prikaz no. 1…’ 1967: 1], and in 1972 the tourist and local studies expedition of Pioneers and schoolchildren, ‘My Homeland the USSR’, began.

Right until 1981 the Great Patriotic War was by no means the only theme for searches and expeditions. The Red Sledopyt Staff heading in Leninskie iskry was ‘RS 1917–1957’, and the All-Union Youth Expedition to Places of the Military Glory of the Soviet People did not limit the children and their teachers to the theme of the most recent war. Moreover, in 1966 it was renamed the ‘All-Union Komsomol and Youth Expedition to Places of the Revolutionary, Military and Labour Glory of the Communist Party and Soviet People’. The new name specially underlined all the possible variants of the heroic past, of which one part was the revolution, the Civil War and even more widely, local history. The first activity devoted to the memory of the Great Patriotic War was the All-Union search expedition of the Komsomol, young people, Pioneers and schoolchildren, ‘The Chronicle of the Great Patriotic [War]’, which began in 1981 [Postanovlenie... 1981].

The official calls to search and the moving stories of expeditions created the heroic image of the sledopyty continuing the exploits of their fathers and grandfathers¹ and doing their duty by their

¹ It is telling that in literary stories about the search the first person narration of the searcher merges into the first person of the hero of the Red Army (cf.: ‘I read the records of Zaruba taken from Sergey’s letters, and between the written lines I see a dark January day in ‘44, dark ragged clouds flying past low over our heads, and the slope of the heights, frozen, whitish-grey, covered in frosty grass. We had just made a sudden sortie and, almost without firing a shot, broken into the German trenches and
contemporaries and descendants [Dahlin 2012: 213–4]. On the pages of books and newspapers the leaders of the Komsomol and the army called upon young people to go ‘on expeditions along the routes of duty and memory’, and the All-Union Expedition itself was called ‘Operation Duty’ [Ikonnikov, Tarasov 1982: 15]. ‘We expect you, young sledopyty,’ says the Komsomol Central Committee proclamation of 1965, ‘to fill the museums with new exhibits, set up new obelisks and, where it is necessary, tidy up the graves of the fallen heroes, create films and photographic exhibitions, write down the reminiscences of participants in the Great Patriotic War, describe and mark out the routes, and hold gatherings with military games and competitions’ [‘Podvig ottsov...’ 1965: 4].

By creating the symbols of popular duty and popular will which demanded the eternal remembrance of the heroes and their exploits, the state transferred all the functions of the commemoration of the wartime past to the sledopyty. ‘Traditions are not only grasped through words and from the pages of textbooks,’ said Marshal I. Kh. Bagramyan, ‘they must be let into the heart. And that means yourself climbing that nameless height which people of your age defended to the last cartridge and the last drop of blood in the dread year of 1941. It means finding the dugout that the partisans returned to after a raid behind enemy lines. It means yourself setting up a modest obelisk with a red star and the name of a fallen warrior on what was until not long ago a nameless grave’ [Ikonnikov, Tarasov 1982: 4]. In response to the Komsomol proclamations, accounts were published of how Pioneers had taken responsibility for a common grave, discovered the identity of one of the fallen and found his (or her) relatives, set up a monument and organised a school corner of military glory. Young people, representing the whole Soviet people, had undertaken the work of memory and duty, working on building sites and collecting money to put up monuments and obelisks [Timofeeva 1959: 8].

The paradox of the remembrance policy of the 1960–80s was that it transferred the power of commemoration to a society which the organised sledopyt movement was supposed to represent. The past itself, in the persons of hundreds of thousands of unburied soldiers, whose identities had not been established, nor their graves discovered, and also their relatives who knew nothing of the fate of those of the fallen who were listed as missing, ceased to be an object of state regulation. Moreover, the sledopyt movement was to a great extent a construct created on the pages of Soviet newspapers and other publications of the 1960–70s.
Do-it-yourself memory

We’ll write it down, we’ll draw it, we shall find out everything,
From everywhere exhibits to museums we shall bring,
With flowers we’ll adorn the grave within the woodland found,
And on the map we’ll mark at last the battlefield renowned.¹

The large-scale campaign for gatherings of young people in the whole
Soviet Union, military games and expeditions that began in the sixties
and continued until the end of the eighties helped to form an image
of the sledopyt movement as a single, monolithic union of school and
Komsomol groups working to perpetuate the heroic Soviet past. In
practice the work had various directions and no centre, and was
conducted in towns and villages by individual teachers and groups
of schoolchildren. This activity was connected simultaneously with
tourism, the creation of school museums and the commemoration
of the fallen of the Great Patriotic War.

To analyse the practices of sledopyt work I shall make use of material
from one small sledopyt club preserved in the archive of the
V. F. Sebin Local Studies Museum at Pitkäranta. The history of this
club is quite typical for organisations of this sort, and although the
available material is fragmentary, it allows one to see certain internal
mechanisms of the sledopyt movement.

Pitkäranta, the regional centre of the Pitkäranta District of the
Karelian ASSR, was a place of heavy fighting during the Winter War
(1939–40) and the Great Patriotic War (1941–4). The places where
the fighting took place immediately adjacent to the town are still
known as the Valley of Death, even though in Soviet times it was
renamed the Valley of Heroes. The first group of sledopyt in
Pitkäranta was formed in 1965 by Vasiliy Fedorovich Sebin.
According to Sebin’s own reminiscences, the group was made up of
children and adolescents ‘who had been late or absent from their
lessons because they were looking for weapons and explosives in the
woods’ [APGKM, The Military and Patriotic Education..., f. 3]. The
Valley of Death, full of traces of the fighting, is to this day a place
where war trophies may be looked for.

Vasiliy Fedorovich Sebin himself was born in 1925 in Cherepovetsky
District, Vologda Oblast, took part in the war, and after the war
worked as a military leader in Pitkäranta School no. 1. After the post
of military leader in non-specialised schools was abolished in 1947,
he taught PE and initial military training. In different years he was
also deputy head and Party secretary at the school, and in 1989 he

¹ Sasha Petrov, Class 7B, School no. 207. ‘Song of the Red Sledopyt’, entered for the Red Sledopyt competition in Leninskie iskry ['Nash konkurs' 1957: 3].
became a member of the presidium of the Pitkäranta section of VOOPliK.¹

The first squad was made up of eighteen adolescents, pupils in Classes 5–7 (Ill. 3, 4). By the end of the 1960s it was called the Red Sledopyt Club and had several dozen members. The impulse for forming the squad came from a letter which they had received in December 1964 from pupils of the school at Chistovskoe in Kazakhstan, asking about the location and condition of the grave of their countryman, Lt S. Ya. Kireev, Hero of the Soviet Union. As Sebin writes, ‘the Pioneers began the search, then the members of the Komsomol, but without success’ [APGKM, The Military and Patriotic Education, f. 3]. It was after this that Sebin decided to gather the local schoolchildren and organise a *sledopyt* squad. ‘In the same years I was working as the school Party secretary and I decided to use them in the necessary direction. I went with them on expeditions on days off, sometimes with [illegible], talked to them and said “Pitkäranta is rich in war traditions, let’s start a museum of military glory,” and the children took up the idea warmly, and, most of all, they stopped missing lessons, and they all finished school on time. Afterwards the squad became the Red Sledopyt Club, and had fifty-sixty members’ [Ibid., f. 4].

The school room of military glory (1967–9) was transformed into the Museum of Military Glory (1969–75) for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of the region and was allotted three rooms on the premises of the local cellulose works. Later it became the voluntary museum (1975–80), the school museum (1980–91), and since 1991 it has been the Pitkäranta State Local Studies Museum, which after Sebin’s death was named after him (Ill. 5).

The activity of the local schoolchildren was not confined to *sledopyt* work. Sebin was chief of the local staff of the *Zarnitsa* and *Orlenok* games,² and took part in organising gatherings of boys, shooting competitions, and so on, and the children who were members of the squad regularly received awards for these and other events organised at an all-Union level and taking place in the region and the republic.

The diversity of forms of social mobilisation in which the members of the Red Sledopyt Club took part ensured that the actual institution of the school society would last, and gave its members the chance to meet people and travel, and opportunities for social mobility and to rise in the world.

For Sebin the main purpose of the work was not travel and tourism, but commemorating the military past. The formula he used to give

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¹ The All-Russian Society for the Preservation of Historical and Cultural Monuments [Trans.].
² Military games run on a competitive principle [Eds.].
Ill. 3. Members of the Red Sledopyt Club at Pitkäranta School no. 1
[APGKM, Photographic material]

Ill. 4. Serezha Vetchinnikov, squad leader, reporting to the headmaster that the squad is ready to depart on an expedition lasting many days.
(The leader of the expedition, V. F. Sebin, stands with his back to us.) 1966
[APGKM, The Military and Patriotic Education, f. 8]
a reason for sledopyt activities is telling: ‘Pitkäranta is rich in war traditions, let’s start a museum of military glory.’ For the sledopyty of the 1940–50s a museum was not the inevitable result of their work. However, in the mid-sixties school museums of military glory became the universal showcases for local knowledge and a form of local
commemoration of the military past. The idea that one should not only see and discover local military history but preserve it, display it and recount it came to the fore at this time, and determined the forms the work took and their chief value.

The ‘necessary direction’ of search work, of which Sebin spoke, meant not only organising the schoolchildren who were wandering freely over the battlefield, but also discovering the local war with its own landscapes and heroes. The transformation of the local memory, the chief agents of which were Sebin and his sledopyty, became the main task, and the locals, who knew ‘neither the date when their town was liberated, nor who liberated it’, were the main objects of the transformation. The Red Sledopyt Club work plan for the school year 1965/6 included both conversations with old soldiers and refining the lists of the fallen. Planned for the same year were the creation of a Book of Military Glory, which was to record the names of everyone who had taken part in the battle for Pitkä rantta, and of maps which were to show all the burial places, defensive structures and fighting in 1944 [APGKM, Plans of Activities..., f. 69v]. At the museum there were excursions, history and literature lessons, Pioneer meetings, seminars, plenary sessions of DOSAAF and VOOPiK, lessons in courage and political education.

The urge to educate in sledopyt activity can also be traced in the justification for its results: ‘Thanks to the activity of the sledopyty,’ writes Sebin, ‘the date of the liberation of the town and who liberated it have been established, and the facts show this: now every resident of the town knows the date of liberation and who liberated it, because since 1969 the town has celebrated 10 June as the day of liberation and receives its liberators’ [APGKM, Sebin V. F., Report on the Experience, f. 34].

By changing the local memory of the war and creating a local hagiography of its heroes, the red sledopyt squad turned out to be the chief, and often the only, war remembrance institution, being simultaneously the collector of information and its basic source. The club materials kept in the local studies museum contain hundreds of applications to various offices requesting them to provide material on the divisions and armies that fought in the region, and also on the soldiers and officers who perished there. In their attempts to collect information, the schoolchildren and Sebin himself wrote to the department for recording losses of personnel among the NCOs and other ranks of the Soviet Army, the Party archive of the Karelian regional committee of the CPSU, the archival department of the Council of Ministers of the Karelian ASSR, and to town military commissariats. A typical reply from the Department for recording losses of personnel reads: ‘In response to the letter from the Red Sledopyt Club I can inform you of the burial places of the Heroes of
the Soviet Union: Sgt Viktor Vasilyevich Chernyaev is buried to the south of Lake Nietjärvi in Pitkäranta District; Sgt Ivan Pavlovich Martynenko is buried four km to the north of the town of Pitkäranta. The Department has no more exact information about their places of burial’ [APGKM, Archival Documents, f. 94].

Col. Lebedev, who signed the reply to the sledopyty from the Sortavala Military Commissariat and informed them that ‘the Military Commissariat knows nothing of the fate of Vasily Fedorovich Alekseev, nor where he is buried,’ recommended that to find out the data that interested them they should get in touch with the red sledopyty of Sortavala Middle School [APGKM, Archival Documents, f. 59]. By the end of the 1960s the red sledopyty clubs had become the main institutions for local military history. Instead of applying to the archives and departments for recording losses, ex-servicemen, relatives of the deceased and members of other sledopyty societies wrote to each other.

The letter from the Pioneers at Chistovskoe School, which began the activity of the Pitkäranta club, was a typical form of application to the sledopyty:

Dear Pioneers of Pitkäranta Middle School no. 1,

The Pioneers of Nikolai Ostrovsky1 Troop are writing to you. We have discovered that our countryman, the Hero of the Soviet Union Semen Yakovlevich Kireev, died and was buried in your town. We still don’t know much about him. Since we are starting a museum in our school, we would very much like you to write about our countryman and send us a photograph of him. Perhaps you know something about his relatives.

Yours sincerely,

The Pioneers of the Troop [APGKM, Letters..., f. 44].

Despite the large-scale campaign to perpetuate the image of a sacred war and great victory and a whole range of events across the country that were designed to unite young people in a single impulse of remembrance, the sledopyty movement had neither a centre nor a common structure, but existed in the form of a horizontal social network which connected the clubs throughout the country. A map showing these connections became a school museum exhibit (Ill. 6).

1 I.e. named after the famous writer and author of How the Steel Was Tempered (1934) [Eds.].
2 There were similar applications from sledopyty in other schools. I shall give only two examples. ‘Dear friend, red sledopyty, The Pioneers of Class 5B of Läskelä Middle School are writing to you. We want to fight for the name of a Karelian hero. Please send us the names of some heroes who fell for our Homeland in Pitkäranta District. Pioneer greetings from the pupils of Class 5B’ (1968) [APGKM, Letters..., f. 48]. ‘To the Red Sledopyt Squad from the Pioneers of Squad 2 of Mantsinsaari Eight-Year School. We, the Pioneers of Squad 2, ask you to help us to choose a hero in whose name our squad could struggle. We would very much like him to have fought in Karelia. With Pioneer greetings, II Squad’ (1968) [Ibid., f. 46].
Gradually the local sledopyt squads took on commemorative functions connected with the local memory of the war: they collected information about the places where fighting took place, and the army personnel, found the relatives of people who had been killed, established the locations of common and individual graves. V. F. Sebin took an active part in the registration of burials at VOOPlK. In the draft of his report on the activity of the search group he specially mentions that ‘during the fifteen years of the search group’s activity, forty-six common graves have been identified and registered at VOOPlK, as against six in 1965. It has been established from documents that over 35,000 soldiers died for our region’ [APGKM, Sebin V. F., Report on the Experience, f. 35].

The canonisation of the heroes of the Great Patriotic War in the mid-sixties was accompanied by an active campaign to name squares, streets and schools after them. However, the specifics of this situation were that the people from a particular town or village had as a rule perished while fighting for some other locality. The names perpetuated in the names of streets meant nothing to the locals. The Pioneers got in touch with each other in the hope of getting information about
people from their own home locality, whose relatives they might still meet and to whom they might erect monuments where they had lived.

In Robert Hornsby’s opinion, one of the chief tasks addressed by the All-Union expeditions to places of military glory was the glorification of particular republics, towns, villages and factories and their inclusion in the common Soviet history of the victory [Hornsby 2017: 444]. The encouragement of local forms of commemoration became an important feature of remembrance policy in the post-Stalin years [Ibid.: 443], and the sledopyt movement was part of it. The work of the sledopyt allowed the military past to be localised in the landscape and at the same time for one’s locality to be fitted into ‘big history’. Leninskiye iskry was full of notes about discoveries made by sledopyt in various corners of the Soviet Union in the 1960s. But, paradoxically, despite the considerable attention paid by the central press to the Pioneers’ work, ‘big history’ took little notice of their discoveries.

The activities of the sledopyt continued to be associated exclusively with young people’s spare time, tourism and leisure activities, and received no support from regional administrations or military commissariats, nor did it have any effect on remembrance policy or the writing of history. In playing the part of the first discoverers of the local past and creators of the local pantheon of heroes, the sledopyt never became anything more than active Pioneers and Komsomol members and their leaders who had found a useful outlet for their energies. As he remembered his work, V. F. Sebin wrote in his notebook, but then crossed it out: ‘In 1972, as leader of the red sledopyt, I decided to leave and give up this work that was “no use to anybody”. The 1972/3 new school year began, and in September and October I said nothing, no sign of any sledopyt work, and what happened? The insistent requests of the school sledopyt to accompany them on their expeditions again made me carry on the search work, look after the museum, and go on expeditions’ [APGKM, Sebin V. F., Report on the experience..., f. 36].

The absence of any special institutions to commemorate the fallen in the USSR and the practice of delegating these functions to grassroots youth organisations led to even greater contradictions at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 90s. Debates about the past, mass publication of memoirs and autobiographies, the creation of the ‘People’s Archive’¹ and a whole range of other initiatives connected with what Lisa Kirschenbaum has called ‘the mode of expos’ [Kirschenbaum 2006: 233] made ‘memory’ and ‘forgetting’ the chief categories in the discussion of the past as a whole and

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¹ On the spike in the number of publications of memoirs and the creation of the People’s Archive at the end of the 1980s see: [Paperno 2009: 1–2], and on the debates about the past on the pages of journals and in literature: [Eliseeva 2001; Voronina 2016], and on the general obsession with historical ‘revelations’ during perestroika: [Tumarkin 1994: 164–5].
remembrance policy in particular. ‘Memory’ was a key concept for the sledopyty too, allowing them to assign their activity not just a national, but a universal and global significance. Regarding themselves as the chief agents of the local commemoration of the past, the first discoverers of local history, and to a large extent carrying out these functions in reality, the sledopyty could no longer content themselves with the role of organisers of young people’s spare-time activities that the state had allotted them. In the new system of categories the ‘sledopyty’ saw themselves as struggling with ‘forgetting’, considering that their own activity had become just as much an object of forgetting as the heroic deaths of the soldiers of the Great Patriotic War.1

Conclusion

The history of the sledopyt movement, like many other forms of social mobilisation in the Brezhnev period, was connected with a whole range of contradictions. All-Union campaigns to perpetuate the memory of the war relied on civil initiatives, delegating commemorative functions to local activists instead of creating any state institutions of remembrance like those that exist in Europe and the USA [Hoshower-Leppo 2002; Groen et al. 2015]. The sledopyty became not only vox populi, but also manus populi, the hands of the people, who created their own memory of the past, which thus acquired legitimacy and was capable of becoming a foundation of the national idea.

As with the development of local studies, sledopyt work was included among the instruments supported by the state for inculcating the concept of ‘the Soviet’ throughout the USSR. But the result of this process was analogous: local groups of schoolchildren, led by ex-servicemen and teachers, came up against not so much the great ‘memory’ as the great ‘forgetting’ — nameless graves, unburied corpses, a lack of information about military actions and the soldiers who fought in them. The discovery of the Winter War, which in the 1960–80s was not supposed to be written about or talked about, was a direct result of the work of V. F. Sebin’s group in Pitkäranta, just as the discovery of the Valley of Death at Myasnoy Bor was the result of N. I. Orlov’s work.

1 In V. F. Sebin’s notebook there is a note relating to this time: ‘22 June, the Day of Remembrance for those who fell in the war, those who did not come back. It is hard to believe, but it is a fact: the remains of the warriors lie on the Earth like the skeletons of fallen and abandoned animals. And this in a civilised society. Not even barbarians would allow such a thing. In justification people will say “work is being done.” We know it is... But the funeral rites of fallen soldiers should not be extended for decades and laid upon small groups of schoolchildren. And if 45 years has not been enough for this sacred work, then let us finish it in the nearest future. The sense of our guilt is bitter. These holy people did everything they could, and sheltered us from disaster. And we... [Lower down, in a different ink:] It is an insult to the memory of the fallen, those who were killed in battle’ [APGKM, Notebook, unfoliated].
The activation of the work of the *sledopyty* led to a reassessment of military and local history, and they became the chief experts on the local past. At the same time in the official campaign of the 1960–80s the *sledopyt* movement was defined as a youth movement with exclusively educational and pedagogical purposes.¹ The children, the *sledopyty*, were allotted the role of grateful descendants and lovers of the past, but certainly not that of authors rewriting the history of the Great Patriotic War.

The mismatch between the social role of the *sledopyty* and their state status and the contradictions of Soviet remembrance policy as a whole created a distance between the searchers and state institutions which is noticeable even in the 1993 law ‘On the perpetuation of the memory of those who fell in defence of the Fatherland’, which established the rules for search work.² According to this and subsequent legislative acts, commemorative functions for ‘the perpetuation of the memory of those who fell in defence of the Fatherland’ are still today a matter for voluntary societies.

**Abbreviations**

APGKM — Archive of the V. F. Sebin City Local Studies Museum, Pitkäranta

Archival materials

APGKM, Archival Documents. Archive of the PGM.
APGKM, Letters of the ‘Red Sledopyt’. Archive of the PGM.
APGKM, Notebook.
APGKM, Photographic material.

¹ Methodological recommendations for organising search activities in Pioneer squads were issued by the Chief Directorate for Popular Education of the Moscow City Executive Committee and the Moscow City Institute for In-Service Training of Teachers. In this brochure it says that ‘[t]he class leader will consult the Pioneers and their leaders, assist them, and if necessary correct the activity of the red *sledopyt*. He may also take part himself in the search, together with the children. Now, however, his activity should be limited, especially if at an earlier stage the pedagogue has created the necessary conditions for the Pioneers to work independently’ [Ivashchenko, Ivanova 1979: 2].

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PERIOD OF STAGNATION?


Translated by Ralph Cleminson