

Driving Down Russia's Spine

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✓ Verified Book of Driving Down Russia's Spine

Summary:

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In 2015, "The Spine of Russia" a month-long, Kickstarter-financed journey took a mismatched duo of Russian and American journalists on a 6000-kilometer road trip from the frigid shores of the Barents Sea to Sochi, Russia's southernmost tip on the Black Sea.

The goal was to view Russia from the ground, to collect powerful images and honest human stories that offered a more subtle, complex picture of the United States' resurgent global rival. The trip captured over 3000 still images and 43 in-depth interviews with Russians from all walks of life. This book is the story of the trip, intertwining fascinating subject profiles with digressions into historical and cultural themes relevant to understanding modern Russia. It is a story told with humor and with the insight derived from the author's three decades of intimate interactions with Russia.

Among the many interesting stories in the book:

- An expedition to "The Well to Hell"
- A music school in one of the most polluted towns on earth
- An energetic youth activist branded as a foreign agent
- Russia's largest manufacturer of barbells (who also makes cloudberry preserves)
- A roadside berry seller recently paroled from prison
- A blacksmith who is a Jehovah's Witness
- A bone-chilling trip to the foundation place of the Russian state
- The slightly off-kilter leader of St. Petersburg's Cossack community
- A retired village doctor who can't stop working, because he won't be replaced
- A piece of Nebraska transplanted into the middle of Russia's Black Earth region

There were also craft beer makers, ballroom dancers, policemen, restaurant owners, an opera student, a priest, a single mother, an accessibility activist, teachers, docents, a best-selling author, soap makers, journalists, a sailor, a winemaker, and a woman taking on the male-dominated world of Russian hockey. And no trip to Russia would be complete without a run-in with security officials in leather jackets. So there is also that.

Taken together, the stories from this epic road trip create a compelling portrait of modern Russia and the people who live there. The book could not be more timely; recent events show how vital it is for Americans to continue working to understand Russia.

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