



Izborsk Fortress. Photo by John Hurd

Izborsk Fortress, Russia

The Longest Held Fortress on Russia's Western Frontier

Site Significance

Located in the western Russian region of Pskov near the border with Estonia, Izborsk Fortress has survived for over 1,500 years and is one of the most ancient Russian towns, mentioned in chronicles as early as 862. Izborsk began as a small settlement of the Slavic Krivich tribe but a more permanent wooden fortress was built in the mid-10th century, later replaced by a stone fortress occupying the hill's entire summit at the end of the 11th century. In the early 14th century, Izborsk Fortress was moved to neighboring Zheravya (Crane) hill 700 meters from the first site, where it still stands today. Abandoned in the 16th century, deterioration rapidly accelerated as the mortars which previously sealed the walls and towers disintegrated, and wood roofing protecting the ancient walls disappeared. The region's extreme weather cycles of freezing and thawing further contributed to the deterioration of Izborsk's last remaining walls and towers.

Preservation by Design®

Project Accomplishments

Planning

GHF worked in partnership with the Pskov Department of Reconstruction (Pskov) and leading Russian archaeologists from Pskov, Moscow and St. Petersburg to develop Izborsk Fortress and Greater Pskov's site management plan in support of the Russian government's application for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, and to complete archaeological conservation and authentic restoration of this jewel of Russian history.

Project Partnerships

- Ministry of Culture, Russian Federation (Co-Funder and Experts)
- General Directorate, Pskov Reconstruction Office (Conservation & Planning)



Threats

Collapse and Destruction of Walls and Towers

Lack of Integrated Archaeological Science and Expertise

Completed Date

2003

Conservation Science

Conservation of the Izborsk Fortress proceeded section by section, with each area surveyed, mapped and researched, then consolidated and stabilized, with some selected towers and walls restored. Restoration used authentic materials and adhered to historic architectural design. In particular, GHF conservation efforts were targeted at the stabilization and conservation of the Nickolski Gate and walls associated with this gate, which has been achieved with a high standard of planning, documentation, craftsmanship and management. All works done are reversible and do not threaten the well-being of the historic fabric.

Community

GHF led the design and development of the first professional site interpretation system in Russian, English and other European languages, which were incorporated into an improved on-site museum. GHF further established the Izborsk Project Trust as a matching co-investment with the Russian government and GHF private-sector donors in Russia to fund and manage conservation of the entire Izborsk Fortress to the highest archaeological conservation standards, while helping to build a major tourism opportunity for Pskov.

Recent Accomplishments

- Conservation of the Nickolski Gate and its associated walls.
- Stabilization and conservation of additional deteriorating walls and towers.
- The design and development of a professional, multi-lingual site interpretation system.



Nickolski Gate before (top) and after (bottom).
Photo by John Hurd



Restoration of interior wall. Photo by John Hurd

Izborsk Fortress, one of the last remaining ancient fortresses which protected Russia's since its founding in 500AD.



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