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After Borodino Battle, Cars Returned to Moscow at a Snail's Pace

By Jonathan Earle

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Participants in period costume taking a break in front of about 180,000 spectators at Borodino on Sunday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

BORODINO, Moscow Region — Sunday's epic Battle of Borodino re-enactment triggered an equally epic traffic jam as an estimated 180,000 visitors snarled local roads and highways on their way out of town.

Rose Griffin, a British national, said it took six to seven hours to make the 100-kilometer drive back to Moscow at an average speed of 15 kilometers per hour. A tree squirrel running at top speed would have arrived at least an hour earlier.

Other visitors to the re-enactment — part of the authorities' lavish $35 million celebration to fete Russia's victory over Napoleon in the Patriotic War of 1812 — sat in traffic until morning, an event coordinator said by telephone.

"Organizers and transportation officials didn't have a plan. You simply can't move that many people at one time on two-lane roads," the coordinator said, speaking on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to speak to the media.

Rain showers turned parking areas near the battlefield into mud, complicating efforts to reach the two highways that straddle the site.

It took two hours for a bus carrying journalists to travel 4 kilometers from the battlefield to Minskoye Shosse. A mosquito flying at top speed would have taken about as long.

"The transportation system collapsed. This always happens at large public events," the coordinator said. "Unfortunately, it's unavoidable in Moscow and Russia."

Traffic conditions on the highway were exacerbated by large numbers of Muscovites driving back from their summer cottages in the suburbs for the start of the work week.

Traffic jams are a chronic problem in and around Moscow, and Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has worked to ease traffic flows by, among other things, creating dedicated bus lanes and cracking down on illegally parked cars.

Griffin said that despite the transportation nightmare, she was glad she had made the trip to the battlefield.

"Being able to spend such a significant anniversary in the company of hussars, Cossacks and cannon fire was worth sitting in the car for an extra few hours," she said in e-mailed comments.

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