

Come See the Biggest Battle of 1812

This weekend the Battle of Borodino will be fought again outside Moscow

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

August 31, 2018



More than 1,000 men and 300 horses will display their fighting spirit this weekend. **Dustin Taylor / MT**

This weekend there will be a huge battle outside Moscow: For the 57th time, the Battle of Borodino will be fought on the fields and hills about 130 kilometers to the southwest of Moscow.

It was first fought in 1812, and then every year since 1962. In 1995, the state declared the day a special holiday in honor of the event. This year the Ministry of Culture, Borodino Museum, Russian Military-History Society and International Military History Association are expecting participants from over 80 cities in Russia and around the world. At least five representatives of foreign embassies will also attend, including from France.

The Battle of Borodino is the biggest reenactment in Europe. This year more than 1,000

soldiers, officers, generals — and an emperor — will take to the battlefield, dressed in perfect reproductions of French and Russian uniforms and armor, and shooting off weapons and canons from that time period — although with blanks. Over 300 horses, also in full battle uniform, will also take part.

But wars are not only fought on the battlefield. In addition to the military men there will be camps filled with all the people who accompanied the armies: cooks, doctors, aides, runners, and camp followers. Before, during and after the battle they will be doing what their predecessors did in 1812: cooking meals, sewing uniforms, tending the horses, caring for the weaponry. They will demonstrate 19th century surgery, calligraphy, sword-making and much more.

The War of 1812

All of this is in commemoration of the fierce battle fought here during Napoleon's invasion of Russia 206 years ago. The battle was the bloodiest of the era: over 70,000 men were wounded or killed, compared with 55,000 in Waterloo. Although the Russian army retreated, the exhausted and depleted French army did not destroy the Russian forces.

Napoleon would claim Moscow, but it was a Pyrrhic victory: Tsar Alexander I did not surrender and the city was burned almost to the ground by the departing Muscovites. By the time Napoleon's army left Moscow, it had lost 66 percent of its men. Snow, freezing temperatures, starvation and illness claimed more on the winter retreat. In the end, only 23,000 French soldiers survived to cross the Russian border.

If you don't know the battle from the history books, you may know it from a poem by Mikhail Lermontov called "Borodino," or from Leo Tolstoy's literary reenactment of the battle in "War and Peace," or certainly from Pytor Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture."

How to visit

Although the main event is on Sunday, organizers recommend that families with children come on Saturday: cars will not be allowed close to the site on Sunday, and children might have trouble with a 3-kilometer walk to and from the battlefield.

On Saturday from 10 a.m. you can wander around the "camps" and visit the museums and monuments. At 4 p.m. there will be dress rehearsal of the battle, which should be as dramatic and interesting — maybe even more so — than on Sunday.

On Sunday the day will begin at 10:30 a.m. with ceremonies and services for the repose of the men who fell here. The reenactment begins at 2 p.m. and will run about 90 minutes. There will be cafes and stands for snacks and drinks throughout the area.

If you want great seats and a great view, you can order places in the bleachers (1,000 for a plain bench and 1,500 for a padded seat). Call +7 496 385 1546 to reserve them (staff members speak French and English). You can get there by car; commuter train, bus and a 3-kilometer walk; or by minivan taxi and bus.

Full instructions and other information is on the [site](#).

Original url:

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