

SOLOVSKI



The Solovetsky complex is an outstanding example of a monastic settlement in the inhospitable environment of northern Europe, which illustrates the faith, tenacity and enterprise of late medieval religious communities.

The six islands of the Solovetsky Archipelago are in the White Sea, 290 km from Arkhangelsky. Humans lived on the islands as early as the Mesolithic period, when the climate was better than today. The main prehistoric settlement period was in the 3rd millennium BC, when villages, sacred sites, and irrigation systems were built on Big Zayatsky and Anzer Islands, including 22 stone labyrinths, over 600 stone burial cairns, and several stone alignments and circles.

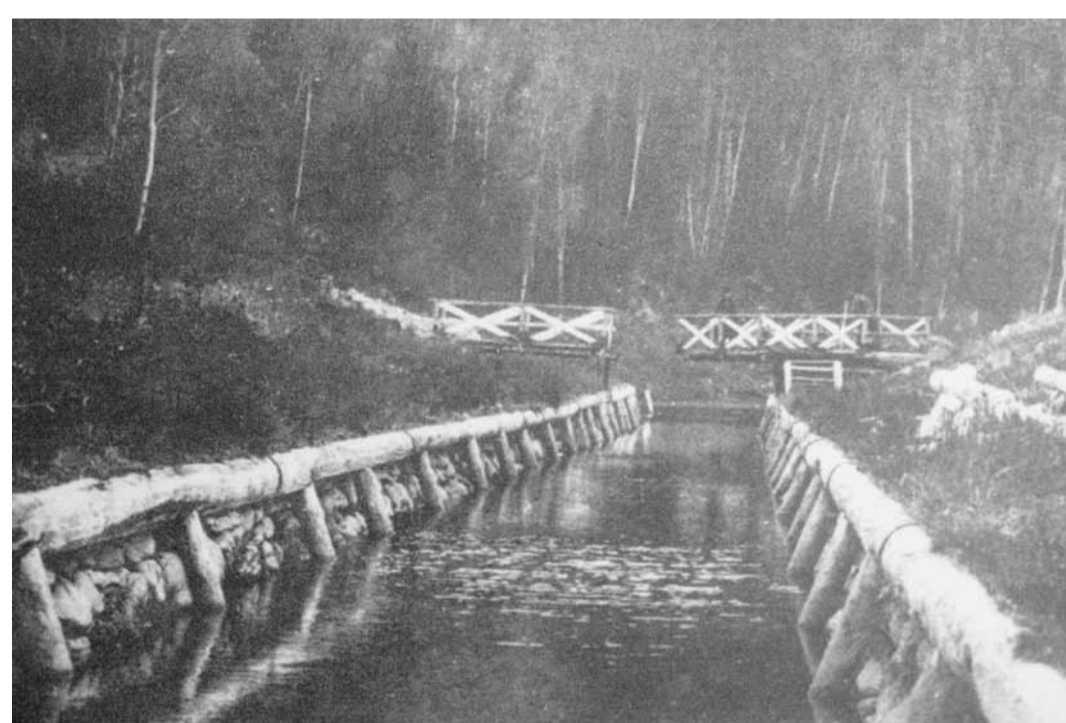
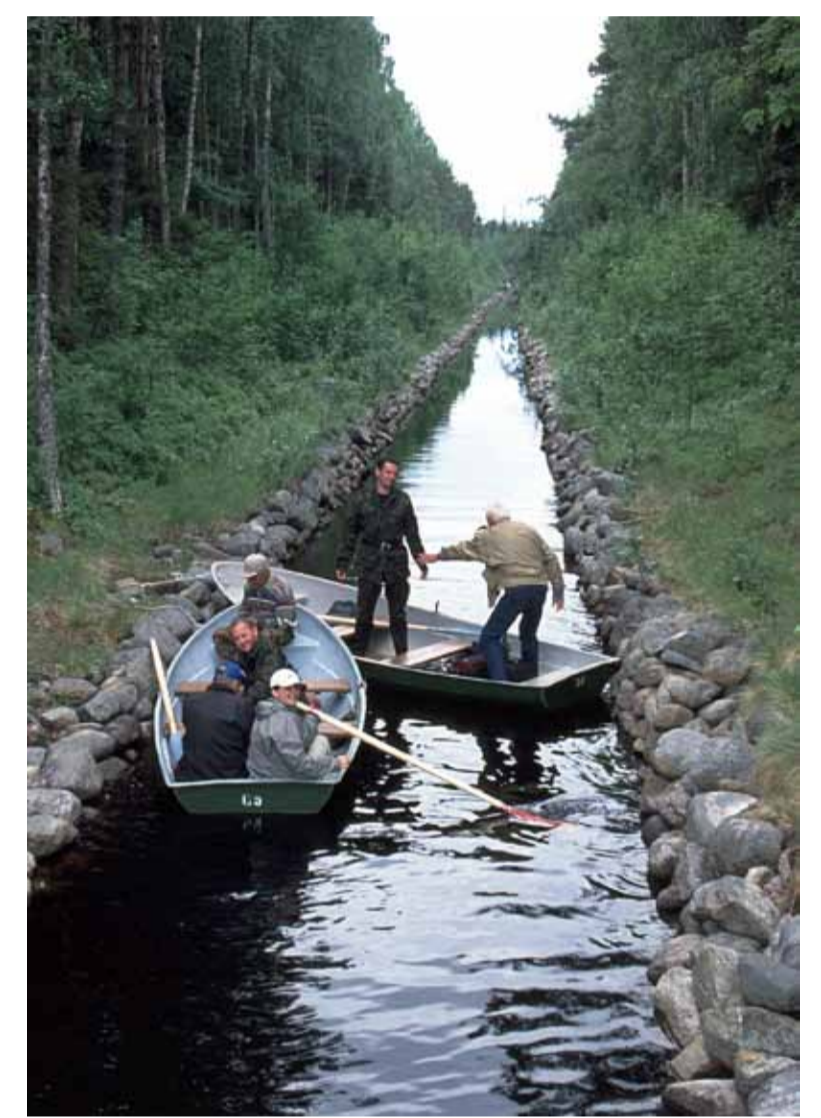
The Solovetsky Monastery was founded by three monks in the 1430s. It expanded in subsequent centuries to cover not



Today, the island is also a nature reserve, and is covered by forest, through which the canals thread their way.



Above left: On of the canals built around 1900 as part of the development of a hydro-electricity scheme, with the remains of a wharf on the right for handling timber.



Above: This canal was slightly earlier, built to improve water supply to the monastery and for rafting timber. Note the swing bridge in the distance.

only the main islands of the archipelago, but also large areas on the mainland. There were major changes in the mid-16th century, inspired by Father Superior Philip Kolichev, who built roads, founded a dairy farm, joined up several lakes with canals to provide fresh water, and created new industries. A stone fortress was built in 1582-94, and Solovetsky became the economic, religious, military and cultural centre of the whole region. It was a place of imprisonment for state criminals, but also attracted many pilgrims. Its military function ended in 1714, but the Solovetsky fortress continued as a prison. The monasteries on the smaller islands became trading outposts, leading to improvements to the harbour and the construction of warehouses. The Makayev monastery became a botanical garden, supplying hothouse fruits to Russian cities.

This ended during the Revolution, when the monastery was abolished and replaced by the 'Solovky' State Farm, in turn abolished in 1923, when the islands became the first GULAG for political and other prisoners. Then, from 1939 to 1957, the islands were used by the navy for training. In 1967 a museum was established, and in 1990 the monastery was reinstated.

The heart of the complex is the monastery itself, on Solovetsky Island. The central square is flanked by the Church of the Assumption, with its refectory and cellarage, the Saviour Transfiguration Cathedral, the Bell Tower (1776-77), the Church of St Nicholas (1831-33), and the Holy Trinity, Zosimus and Sabbath Cathedral (1859). The north courtyard includes several craft workshops. In the south courtyard area are a drying barn, a water mill, a wash-house and a bath-house.

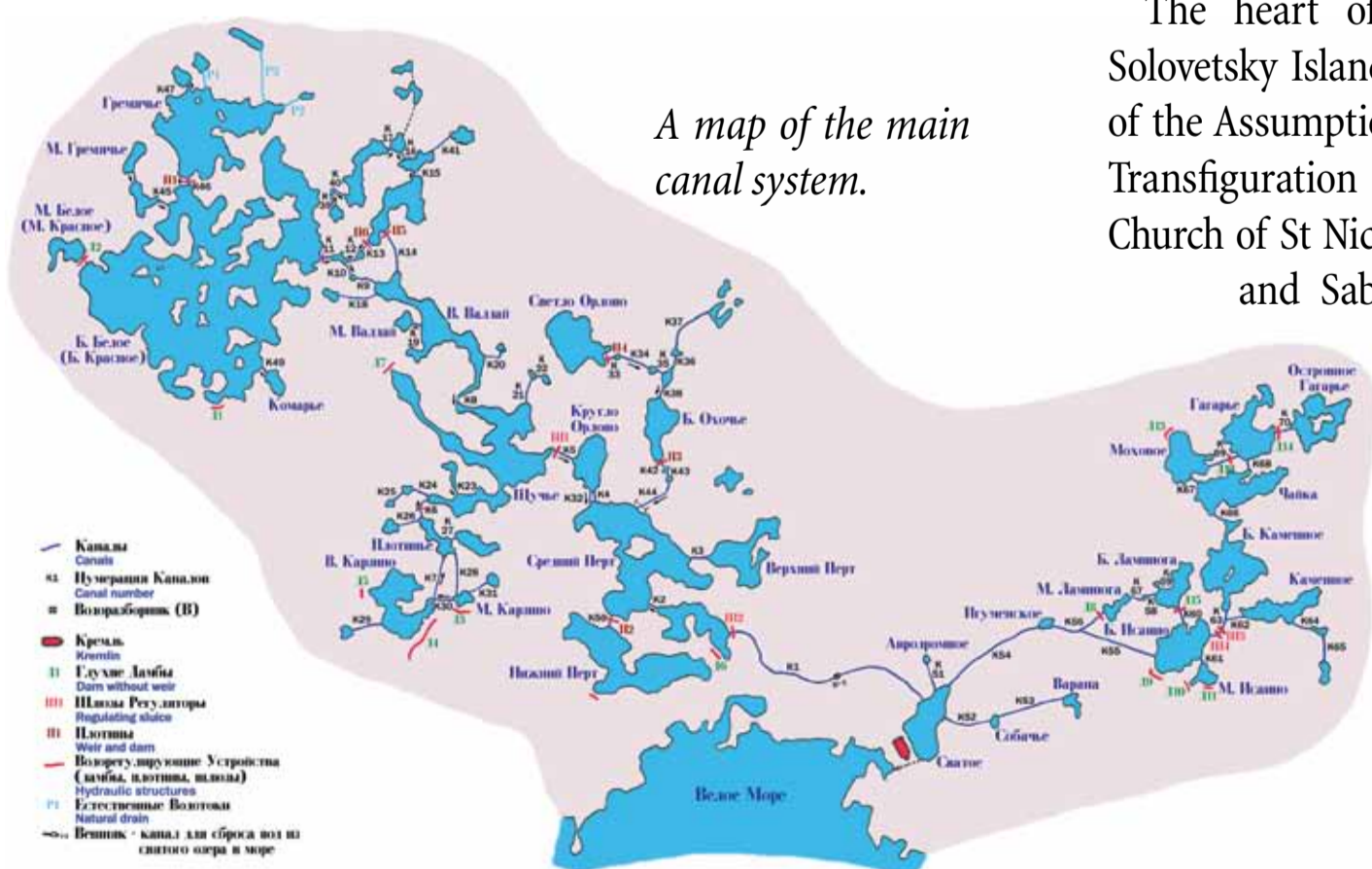
The Solovetsky Monastery Fortress was built in 1582-94 from glacial boulders. The monastery village includes chapels built to commemorate several tsars, hostels for pilgrims, and buildings dating from the GULAG period.



One of the wharfs used by boats transporting stone.

There are industrial installations of various kinds, including a dry dock, a hydroelectric power station, and a water mill. All these require large quantities of water, and the monks developed a canal system across the main island. Initially used for land drainage and water supply, over the centuries it was developed for transport and power. It is the world's most northerly canal system.

<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/632>
<http://www.worldheritagesite.org/sites/solovetsky.html>



A map of the main canal system.

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