

In the land of youth

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Neptune, Mermaids and Pirates

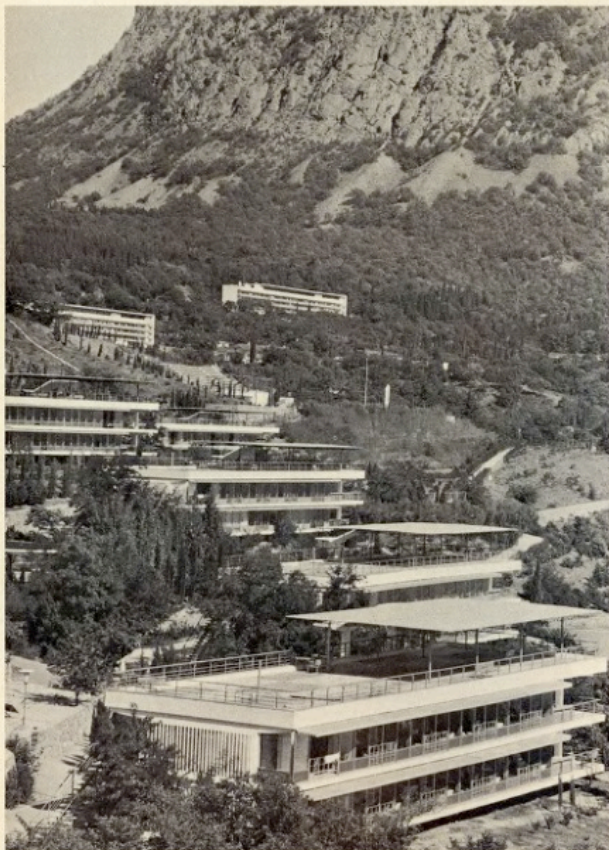
Where would you see a live King Neptune, his young daughters the mermaids, and a gang of pirates with curved sabres in their hands and flintlocks in their belts, growling out a wild

song about "The Black Roger"? In a children's theatre? But this was not a theatre with an artificial sun and blue sea painted on canvas.

A real, hot southern sun shone in the sky and, almost rippling along on the sea, coming towards the shore was — no, not a caravel in full sail — just a ship's boat.

But aboard it, dancing and brandishing daggers and sabres, was a crowd of pirates. With them they had captives, bound with thick ship's cable — mermaids with long, flowing green hair. Having landed, the pirates, like true freebooters returning with a rich prize, set about feasting.

But their revels did not go on for long. Neptune arose from the briny deeps with his faithful lieutenants, the knights from Pushkin's "Tale of Tsar Saltan" and gave short shrift to the pirates, who with agonised shouts of "We won't do it again", vanished like the wind. As a sign of gratitude to Neptune, the mer-



Early morning at the Morskoi Camp.

maids, released from bondage, gracefully performed a joyful dance.

Their audience, hundreds of boys and girls, joined in, wildly expressing their delight, right by the edge of the water. On their bronzed bodies they wore only

swimsuits — just as it should be on the beach, for this was the beach of the Morskoi Young Pioneer camp, and the spectacle I watched with them was the opening of the Neptune Festival.

Neptune, who was wearing a seaweed beard down to his feet

Reveille!



and a golden crown on his head, towered over the scene, sitting on a throne with a trident in his hand. Just then he sounded his horn, calling for silence. First of all, he asked whether the order he had issued some time earlier had been carried out. Under this,

everyone who could not swim had to learn by the day of the Festival.

"Yes!" came a great chorus of voices.

"All right. Later on I'll see for myself", said the monarch of the sea. "And now tell me who's

The Neptune Festival in full swing.



climbed Mount Ayu-Dag."

It seemed that most of them had.

"And who was afraid to sleep by the campfire at night when you went on a camping trip?"

No one, it appeared.

After that Neptune went

through the complaints and meted out punishments to the culprits. Both complaints and punishments, like everything else that day, were a very jolly business, like a game in which everyone took part.

The Neptune Festival finished



They made friends at Artek.

with swimming competitions. There were serious ones in which the winner was decided with the aid of a stopwatch, and a more light-hearted variety, including a kind of egg-and-spoon race with table tennis balls for eggs. A dropped ball knocked a swim-

mer out of the competition.

Later on I heard that the Neptune Festival was one of the traditions of the Artek Young Pioneer Camp. It is interesting to note that the children themselves write the scenario for the occasion each time, they make the

costumes and the properties themselves, and perform all the roles.

What Is Artek?

In my story about the festival by the sea I used two words: "Morskoi" and "Artek". It's time

to explain. But first let me turn to the Guide to the South Coast of the Crimea. It says: "The warm, mild climate, the abundance of sunny days, the beauty of the mountains and valleys

It's terribly hard to tear yourself from the beach on a fine day like this.



along the coast, and the luxuriant subtropical vegetation has made this area famous as the finest resort zone in the USSR."

This is where Artek is — an all-Union Young Pioneer Camp, the biggest of its kind in the Soviet Union. It covers an area stretching along the Black Sea coast from Mount Ayu-Dag to the resort of Gurzuf, nearly five miles long. On this territory there are, in fact, five camps, one of them being the Morskoi camp referred to earlier. Each has its own dormitory blocks, canteens, medical posts, beaches, and sports

itches. Add to that a Pioneer Palace with a concert hall, a museum, and a library with 100,000 books, a school block (children who come in term-time continue with their lessons), a Young Technicians' Station and, finally a stadium with seats for 10,000, and now the picture of Artek is more or less complete.

"You must visit our museum," I was advised when I arrived at Artek. The "museum" turned out to be a large room with a host of photographs on the wall and ten display cases. But there was a tremendous amount of in-

The pilot's costume this holiday-maker is wearing is the real thing—only not full size. The plane that can be seen in the picture is also real, and is an exhibit at the Young Cosmonauts' Club, for it no longer flies. This club was opened on the initiative and with the direct help of Yuri Gagarin.



"Is it a bite or not?"

teresting information here. Take one old photograph: amidst thick greenery by the sea there were four tents, and nearby stood a deal table and long benches beneath an awning. That was how Artek began in 1925, when 80 Moscow schoolchildren spent two summer months here. Now Artek has grown to the extent that it accommodates 27,000 children from all over the country every year.

There is also a colourful map showing both hemispheres. Fanning out from the Crimean Peninsula are thin lines to all parts of the world — to Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and Australia. These are

Artek's international contacts. Soon after the Second World War, children from abroad began to come to Artek. In the last twenty years more than 12,000 children from 105 countries have spent summer holidays here.

By the side of the map is material evidence of the fruitful international contacts of Artek — a Certificate of Honour from the World Council of Peace and the gold "Fighter for Peace" medal of the Soviet Peace Committee.

Two fat albums contain the autographs of honoured guests who have visited Artek. Among them have been Mikhail Kalinin, Kliment Voroshilov, Maurice Thorez, Palmiro Togliatti, Walter



When a new batch of children arrive at the camp there is always a traditional Pioneer assembly in the stadium.

Ulbricht, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and well-known Soviet and foreign writers, composers and cosmonauts.

"Artek is a real Paradise, but

an existing, earthly one, where the children spend their time building up their physical strength, acquiring knowledge and engaging in sport." This was

what Henri Barbusse wrote after visiting this camp by the Black Sea at the end of the twenties. Anyone who has spent even a few hours there cannot help agreeing.

I was at Artek for several days, and although it was a comparatively short period it provided impressions enough for a book. But here I shall confine myself to giving a brief account of what happened on just another day at the Morskoi camp.

An Ordinary Day

It began at seven o'clock as usual, when the silence was shattered by the silver strains of the Young Pioneer bugles sounding "Reveille". The children spilt out like peas from the pod onto the square in front of the dormitory blocks, and then it was "One, two! One, two! Trunk bend..." That was the daily dozen. After that they washed and breakfasted.

When the sea was calm, the children usually went to the beach after breakfast, but this time they had to get by without their swim. In the night there had been a bit of a storm, which had died down by morning. There was scarcely a cloud to be seen, but the waves were mounting higher and higher. Well, so one could go fishing from the jetty — it's supposed to be the best time after a storm. That was what two of the boys plumped for, anyway. One of them was a fair-haired, blue-eyed, sturdy youngster, and the other was the exact

opposite — lean, and with great black eyes. It was Mitya Morozov and his pal Bagautdin Abdu-rahmanov.

"May we have permission to go fishing, please?" they asked a girl with a Young Pioneer leader badge pinned to her blouse.

They asked, because what they were proposing was not part of the strictly observed order of the day, and discipline is discipline at Artek. But the idea is not to cramp initiative, as I could see for myself at every step.

Olga Mazo, the Young Pioneer leader, did not object, and a whole group of boys with rods and lines in hand set off for the jetty.

"We're going to the park to get some specimens for our herbarium," announced several girls, clustering around Olga Mazo. Another group of girls had changed out of their everyday costume (they have a parade uniform, too) into white shirts, dark blue shorts, and little white sun hats, and were off to the volleyball court. In a few days there was to be a match against the neighbouring camp, Pri-brezhny, and there was some stiff training to put in so that they wouldn't let the side down.

Before ten minutes was up everybody had found some occupation that really appealed to them.

There was a brief lull, and I took advantage of it to talk to Olga. Twenty-five, she was working at Artek for the second year,

having come there straight from the Kiev Teachers' Training College ("Most of our Young Pioneer leaders have been to teachers' training college," she explained). Did she like it here, I asked. Very much. The children didn't leave one a minute's peace, she said, but that was a good thing. And then every one of them was different.

Take those young fishermen. Mitya was Russian, son of an office worker on Sakhalin, while Bagautdin was from Daghestan, a shepherd's son. As for the girls who had gone to collect plants, Galya Shniper was Jewish, daughter of a teacher in Novosibirsk, Lyuda Fase was a Mordvin — her father was a factory worker, while Khairi Kudbidinova was a Tajik, and her mother, a Dushambe weaver. "You see," she said, "it's a real International."

After dinner — they had self-service canteens, taking turns at clearing the tables — Morskoi slept the sleep of the just. Every afternoon, in the heat of the day, the youngsters have a two-hour siesta, after which they resume their energetic pursuits.

Fans crowded round the table-tennis tables by the open-air swimming pool, reacting exuberantly to every good stroke. By contrast, on the flat roof of one of the dormitories everything was in subdued key. Budding artists were at work on a magni-

A campfire on the sea shore is also romantic and unforgettable.



We like dancing ...



... music, and designing model rockets.



ficent view — the bay, with cliffs rising sheer from the water. After a while the table-tennis enthusiasts went off to the "Hundred Pastimes Club", perhaps to rack their brains over some technical teaser, to assemble ingenious machines from meccano sets, or to play chess.

The Young Technicians' Station was particularly popular that day, in some rooms youngsters were busily sawing, planing, or glueing, in others girls were cutting out or embroidering.

In the model shipbuilding room, Slava Ilugin, a schoolboy from Chuvashia, was fixing a radio aerial to the mast of a five-foot-long model.

"The boat's controlled by radio," he explained. "I've already

launched it once, but there's something not quite right with the radio."

On other benches I saw liners, submarines and frigates with snow-white sails taking shape.

Next door some of the girls were having a needlework lesson, learning to embroider new stitches, do appliqué, and even cut out a dress. They showed me their work with considerable pride.

I did not get away from the Young Technicians' Station until supper time — everything was so fascinating. I saw model aeroplanes that really flew, little ornaments and other souvenirs made from wood or plastic, and albums of excellent photographs, and a hundred and one other things —

all the work of the youngsters of Artek. I even saw a film made in the Artek film studio by keen young cameramen, directors, etc. — they have their own cine-cameras, developing and printing laboratory, and all the necessary lighting apparatus and equipment for cutting.

In the evening there was dancing and singing — in the avenues in the grounds, by the sea, on the balconies of the dormitories. There the Russian Birch-tree Dance, the Ukrainian Gopak, the fiery Lezghinka from the Caucasus, and slow, graceful Estonian dances were performed.

So it went on until 10 o'clock, when the bugle went again for bed.

Two Interviews—or One, and Some Notes from a Diary

"From the exhibits in our museum and your own impressions you can already see that Artek has grown tremendously in the 45 years of its existence," Yevgeni Rybinsky, director of Artek, remarked. "We're still developing and extending. Here are a few figures from our long-term plans, which have been worked out by state bodies.

"In the next few years the Lazurny and the Kiparisny camps are to be reconstructed and enlarged, so that each of them will have accommodation for 1,200,



Letter from home. "If you like, I'll read it out loud."

instead of 1,000 as at present. A new camp — Vozdushny, for 1,200 children, is to be built, and also a gymnasium and a covered swimming pool, and a second cinema-cum-concert hall seating 1,200.



"The state is rather generous over facilities for youngsters — Artek's annual budget runs into more than 7 million roubles. None of the children have to pay for their holidays here, a large number being paid for by the

It's quite a problem finding just the right spot for the young cameraman — there are so many places at Artek crying out to be filmed.

state and the remainder by the trade unions."

My other interview was not exactly an interview, and was not at all of an official character. I was asking Olga Mazo, the Young Pioneer leader of the Morskoi camp, a few questions about life in the camp, and in reply she brought out her diary. Some of the entries were brief, some longer, there were facts, observations and reflections. Here are some extracts, published with Olga's permission:

"I put a questionnaire to the Young Pioneers in my detachment with questions like 'what would you like to learn at Artek,' and 'would you like to teach your friends here anything.' Not all of them answered the first question, but everyone replied to the second. One of them wanted to teach others to play the guitar, another chess, one of the girls was willing to show the rest how to knit a jumper, another wanted to explain how to go about getting a collection of minerals together, and so on. I know from my own experience — although I haven't much — that they can teach something to others if only they want to. All my kids are different, but they're all good-hearted and generous."

"Yesterday my detachment went on a trip to Sevastopol. I've been there several times before,

but always find this hero-city very moving. We spent the whole day there, walked about a lot, looking at places where the city's defenders won glory during the Second World War. The expression on all the children's faces was so intent and serious that they seemed to be making an inward vow to be worthy of all those who died to make it possible for them to have such a happy childhood."

"We went off on a long hike and camped for the night in a most beautiful place — Ai-Danil. I'd got the impression, somehow, that Ira Zhukova was rather frail and delicate. Nothing of the sort. She could do everything just as well as the boys. And if someone had the cheek to say: Call this tea? (somebody did) she'd retort: 'A thousand times better than at home!' How everyone laughed when they were catching crabs! In the evening we switched on the transistor, listened to music, looked at the stars and sang songs and dreamed dreams. The sea, the sparks rising from the campfire, the singing — it was unforgettable. It's very important to be able to dream, and know that around you there are good friends. Artek remains a memory of youth for one's whole life!"

Artek is often called "The Young Pioneers' Republic". I prefer another name — Land of Youth.

