

## Photos capture architecture and life in Russian North

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The historic Church of the Dormition, at left, was built in 1674 in Varzuga, Russia, along the Varzuga River. On the right is the Church of St. Athanasius the Great, built in 1854 for winter services (west view from bell tower). Photographed July 21, 2001. (Copyright William Craft Brumfield)

When Tulane University professor [William Brumfield](#) talks about his newest book of photography from travels in the Russian North, he describes it this way: “This is a journey around the White Sea,” representing an estimated 18,000 miles of travel over more than two decades.

This wooded region straddling the Arctic Circle is very isolated but home to architectural marvels, from ancient towns and farms to wooden and brick churches, some of which date back to the 16th century. Brumfield captures them in nearly 200 spectacular color photographs in the book, *Architecture at the End of the Earth: Photographing the Russian North*. It will be available soon in the Tulane University Bookstore and is selling now on [Amazon](#).

The book is described perfectly by its publisher, [Duke University Press](#), as “at once an art book, a travel guide and a personal document about the discovery of this bleak but beautiful region of Russia that most readers will see here for the first time.”

[Brumfield's book](#) includes portrayals of village life as well as images of cemeteries, monasteries and other religious structures, many of which are abandoned and in danger of collapsing, so that his documentary photographs have an important role in preserving history.

“Communities in the deep forest were defined by the presence of a church, and the area was also a refuge of religious dissenters,” he says. “Time has taken an enormous toll. I've been able to record many things that are no longer there.

“It's fate that you are grateful that you found what you found, and you preserved something. To discover traces of that culture is a remarkable experience.”

The professor of Slavic studies, who began photographing Russia in 1970, has 50,000 black and white negatives and 55,000 digital files preserved at the [National Gallery of Art](#).

As summer came, Brumfield headed back to Russia for more research, saying, “The journey continues.”



At Great Solovetsky Island on the White Sea in Russia is the Transfiguration Monastery (16th century), in a southwest view across Felicity Harbor. The scene is calm at 11 in the evening after rainstorm. Photographed June 29, 1999. (Copyright William Craft Brumfield)

'I've been able to record many things that are no longer there.'—Professor, photographer and author William Brumfield