

At the End of Your Rope

By [Michele A. Berdy](#)

January 27, 2011

The  **Moscow Times**

Конец: end, finish, death, rope, trace

Конец is a cool word.

The primary meaning is an end to something either physical or temporal. But конец can take you around the world, drag you under water, cast you out to sea, haul you to the edge of town, bring you to meet your Maker and even hide the evidence. Not bad for five letters and two syllables.

It's a word you probably use in the office every day. Я опоздал и слышал только конец его доклада (I was late and only caught the end of his speech). Шеф хочет получить отчёт до конца недели (The boss wants the report by the end of the week).

The annoying abbreviation COB (close of business) — usually concluding an unexpected e-mail from the home office requesting a fully loaded, 50-page proposal — might be neatly rendered ККД (к концу дня — by the end of the day). And certainly your response to such a

request might be the laconic but expressive: **Конец!** (We're screwed!)

Out in the world, **конец** can mean the edge of a town: **он живёт в конце города** (he lives on the outskirts), or a place far away: **он живёт в другом конце города** (he lives on the other side of town). **Со всех концов** means “from everywhere.” **Конец** can also mean an end of a trip. A one-way ticket is **билет в один конец** (literally, “a ticket to one end”), and a round-trip ticket is **билет в оба конца** (literally, “a ticket to both ends”).

On the water, **конец** refers to the mooring rope, which I imagine must create Monty Pythonesque situations when there is a landlubber on board. A sailor shouts: **Держи конец!** (Grab the rope!), and the nonsailor clutches the end of a pole. **Отдать концы** (literally, “to give up the rope”) means to cast off, but in slang it means “to die.” Context, as always, is everything.

I assume that the rope and nautical meaning of **конец** has given us the visually vivid expression **и концы в воду** (literally, “and the ropes into the water”), which means that there will be no trace found.

Sometimes this means that a person gets disappeared: **Он больше не объявлялся, пропал — и концы в воду** (He never showed up again — he disappeared without a trace). In other contexts, it means that no evidence will ever be found: **Вскрыть шкаф, взять деньги и концы в воду** (Bust open the cupboard, take the money — and no one will be the wiser).

Probably the image of tangled ropes or threads has produced the expression **концов не найти** (literally “to not find the ends”), which can mean that you can't find the source. When a friend sent me a wonderful parody of newscasts, I asked who the author was. The reply was: **Концов не найдёшь!** (You'll never figure out who wrote it!) In other cases it means not being able to get to the bottom of something: **Все перепуталось, и концов не найдёшь** (It's all a mess and you'll never sort it out).

This is different from the ability to make ends meet: **сводить концы с концами**. To do so, you can **работать без конца** (to work endlessly). But **на худой конец** (in the worst case scenario), you can always file Chapter 11.

True, declaring bankruptcy is **палка о двух концах** (a double-edged sword). But it's not the end of the world.

Michele A. Berdy is a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, whose collection of columns, “The Russian Word's Worth,” has been published by Glas.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/01/27/at-the-end-of-your-rope-a4569>