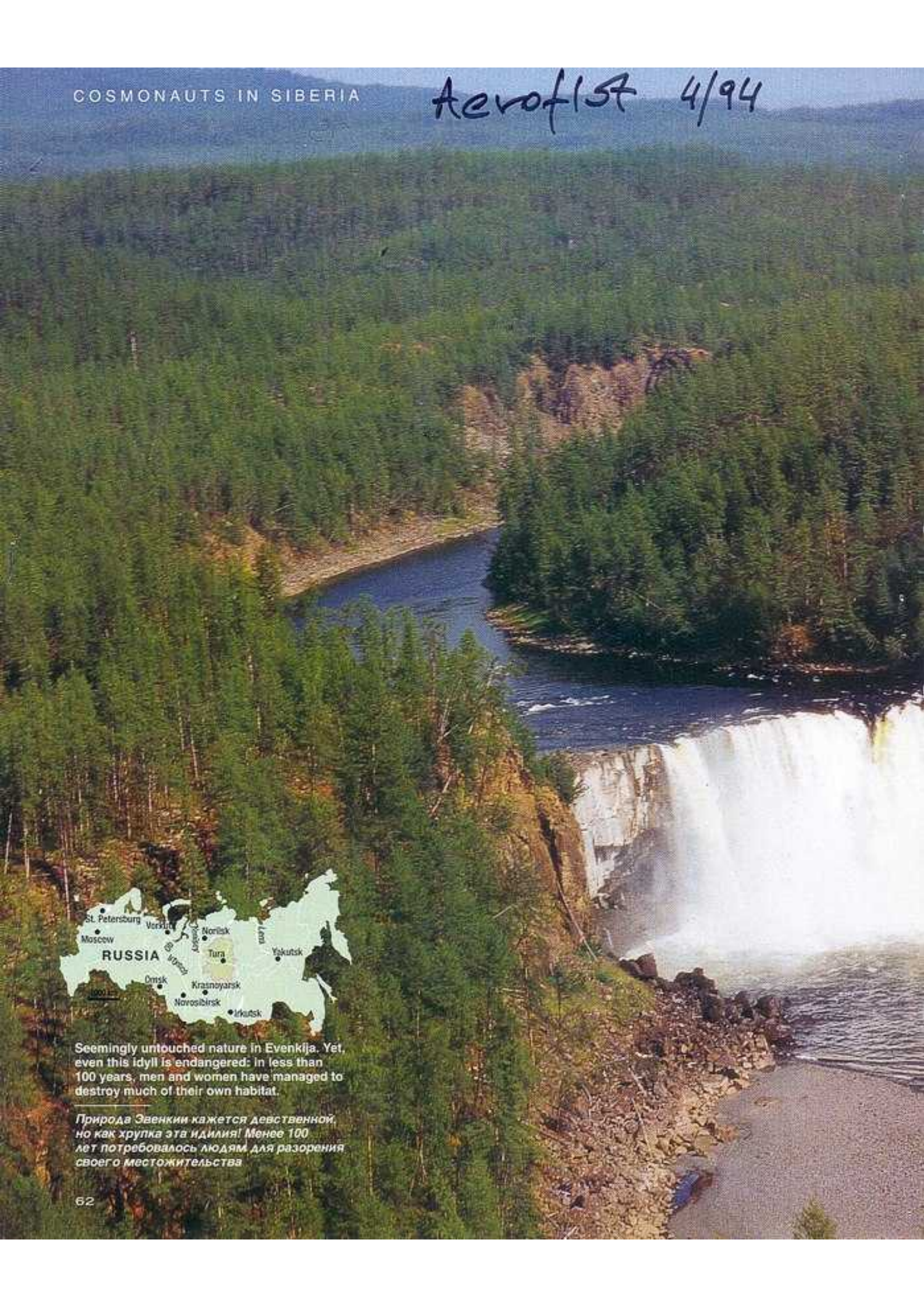


Aeroflot 4/94



Seemingly untouched nature in Evenkija. Yet, even this idyll is endangered: in less than 100 years, men and women have managed to destroy much of their own habitat.

Природа Эвенкии кажется девственной, но как хрупка эта идиллия! Менее 100 лет потребовалось людям для разорения своего местожительства



Protect the Earth!

Давайте спасем Землю!

By Jacek Palkeiwicz

Photos by Jacek Palkeiwicz and Eduard Jigailov

Six international cosmonauts are remaining on the earth to take part in an ecological mission designed to draw attention to the dangers facing our earth. At the last moment, they want to prevent the earth from becoming as uninhabitable as the moon.

Шесть космонавтов из разных стран мира идут по Земле, чтобы своей экологической миссией привлечь внимание человечества к опасности, грозящей нашей планете. Они хотят воспрепятствовать превращению Земли в необитаемую пустыню.

COSMONAUTS IN SIBERIA

When I was up there and experienced that wonderful adventure in space, the most exciting moments were precisely those that involved observing the Earth", the celebrated cosmonaut, Vladimir Djanibekov once admitted. "Seen from the space station the Earth looked like a sparkling jewel, but it wasn't until one looked at one of the many points more closely that one discovered things that can't be seen from the Earth's surface."

Man has upset the balance of nature to a dangerous level. The ecological picture is deeply distressing: whole oceans are dying, flooding is destroying large tracts of land without natural protection, some lakes have almost reached extinction point. At the same time energy requirements are on the increase, population growth has got out of control, many different species are condemned to extinction, air pollution has far exceeded the tolerance level, not to mention the destruction of forests by the logging industry. The world prefers to

"islands" still exist, even if there are only a few of them; indeed it is precisely for this reason that they are protected by force - so that coming generations do not inherit an Earth that has been completely annihilated.

And so, at the end of July, we land in Tura, capital of the province of Evenkiya, twice as large as Italy and an independent district of Krasnojarsk. The team includes the following cosmonauts: Sigmund Jehn from Germany, Vladimir Remek from the Czech Republic, Clemens Lothaller from Austria, Anatoli Azebarski from the Ukraine, and the two Russians, Sergei Zyrianov and Gennady Manakov. The young director of the Tura Aviation Enterprise, Andrei Chernov is waiting for us. He has chosen the route together with Zyrianov.

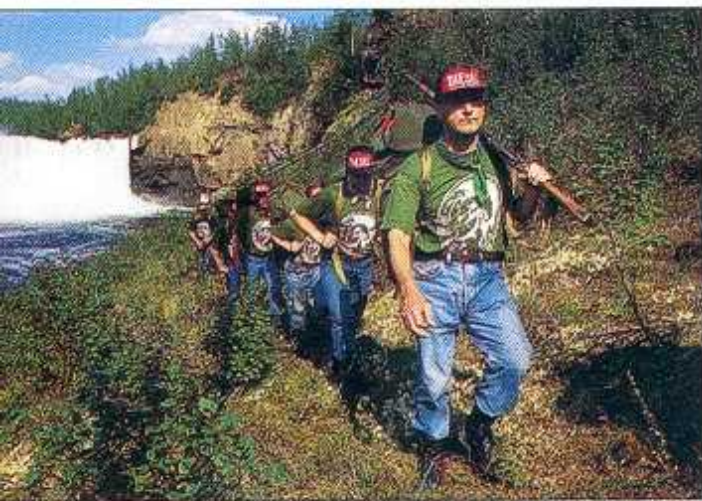
For the past few hours we have been on board an M1-8 helicopter, flying over the endless green forests. Below us lie majestic valleys interrupting the silent flow of the taiga. A waterfall pours into the Beldutchnaja River. The pilots say that this is one of the largest waterfalls in Russia. Although it cannot be compared with the Niagara falls, we are still just as fascinated.

We land on the bank of the Taymyra River. Our downward trip is to start here. We stow away our luggage while the helicopter fades into the distance, leaving us behind in the absolute silence of a world which seems to have remained unchanged since the day of creation, and where we are now completely dependent on our own skills.

We build two 7-metre long rafts with wood from fallen larches, and after hoisting the national flags, we're ready to go. Our craft benefits from the fact that Sergei, who was born in Siberia, has already had experience navigating this river. Sigmund soon teaches us how to steer and row. The gentle current carries us at a speed of 4 kilometres an hour, but after a few hours, the calm of the scenery we are passing through no longer matches the menacing roar of the rapids. But we all realise that sailing down these waters will be fraught with surprises and difficulties to overcome. The speed of the current increases, the

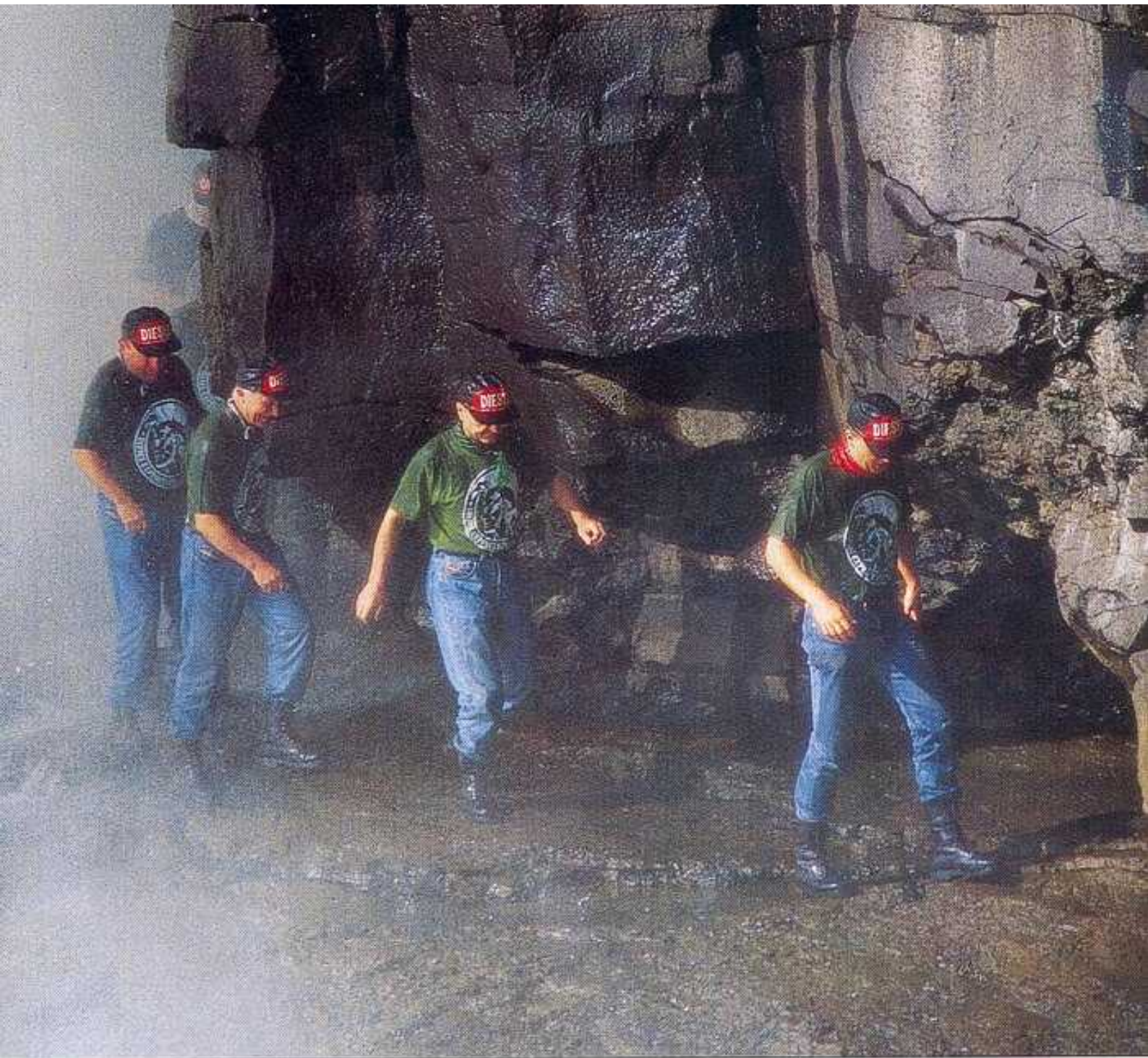
water starts to foam, the dull voice of the river increases in intensity like the rolling of thunder.

We look for a safe way through the waves. It is impossible to stay in complete control of our vessel in the rapids. But to our great relief, after 100 metres of stormy water the worst is behind us. While our friends on the other raft are suddenly brought to a halt by some stones jutting out of the river, Vladimir falls into the water and doesn't notice that our raft, which weighs over a tonne, is threatening to crush him against the rocks. It is in situations like this that the true spirit of the group shows itself. He is imme-



ignore the insane crimes against nature perpetrated by the industrialised nations, even when it is against our own interests.

I asked some of the heroes of space travel, eye-witnesses to the catastrophic state of our planet's health, to take part in an expedition to the heart of Siberian order to draw attention to this problem. This initiative, authorised by President Yeltsin and undertaken under the patronage of the Moscow City Bank and MTK (the Moscow television station), was intended to be a message of love and respect to a nature which has been so cruelly abused. We wanted to find confirmation that the still uncontaminated



Things were cosier in outer space: for ten days, cosmonauts from Russia, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Ukraine fought their way through Siberian wilderness

Десять дней космонавты России, Германии, Австрии, Чехии и Украины пробирались нехоженными землями Сибири - не уютнее ли было в Космосе?



diately rescued by his fellow-travellers. But the river teaches us never to allow ourselves to become distracted by anything.

Before evening arrives we have to use large sticks to lift the boat out of the water a few more times and launch it again in deeper water. In spite of being tired out everyone helps out at our

The end of the exhibition: still in the helicopter bound for Moscow, the scientists write a letter to the United Nations asking that the Siberian Evenkiya province be declared the world's first natural park.

Конец экспедиции: уже на пути в Москву пишется письмо в ООН с просьбой объявить Эвенкию Национальным парком №1 нашей планеты



resting place. Gennady and Sergei catch two buckets full of fish in half an hour. The river had taken all we had to give just a short time ago and now it was rewarding us generously. From today fish will be our staple diet, prepared in a wide variety of ways: barbecued, as a soup and raw.

From time to time, we come across a few elks and reindeer, but when the wind betrays our scent, these majestic animals make off at a gentle trot. Here, Man is not yet an enemy. We see many traces of bears, but fortunately they keep their distance. Perhaps the danger is not as great as we think, but the expedition leader has to do all he can to prevent any accidents happening.

Our adventure on a still untouched tip of land lasted only 10 days. It's difficult to describe the emotions, the sense of wonder and exhilaration one feels living in direct contact with nature, drinking water from springs, angling practically bare-handed and breathing in the clear pine-scented air. And precisely this is being lost to mankind. On the return flight we write a letter to the General Secretary of the United Nations requesting him to declare Evenkiya National Park No 1 on the planet Earth. Man's stupidity and greed is turning what was one a natural paradise into a wasteland. So let's try to save these irreplaceable treasures and, in doing so, restore this earth to health ■