The Russian chapter of the Explorers Club, with the participation of the Ford Motor Company and the support of the administration of the Chukotka Autonomous District carried out a winter expedition across Russia from Moscow to Chukotka in specially modified Ford Expedition automobiles.

**Goals:**
1. To traverse a route not yet traveled by man;
2. To visit places connected to the history of Arctic discovery and conquest;

**Participants:**
Alexander Borodin, co-leader, Chairperson of the Russian Chapter of the Explorers Club
Aleksei Mikhailov, co-leader, member of the Explorers Club
Andrey Rodionov
Victor Parshikov
Sergey Goryachev
Alexey Simakin


In the Arctic, the expedition passed through locations unified by their place in the history of discovery and conquest of the Russian Arctic, including points along the treks made by such figures as Dezhnev and Stadukhin, Bering and Dmitriy Laptev, Shalaurov and James Cook, Billings and Sarychev, Wrangel and Matyushkin, Kolchak and Vilkitskiy, De Long and Nordenskjold, and Stefansson and Bartlett. Among other landmarks, the expedition will visit the place where the American aviator Carl Ben Eielson was lost; the site of the Soviet North airplane crash; and places related to the heroic Chelyuskin epic.
The expedition crossed the Artic Circle at twice, and traversed the boundary between the Western and Eastern hemispheres. The most northern point on the route was at latitude 69°42’ North (Pevek).

Map of the expedition route
Friday, March 10

Expedition started from Moscow’s Red Square

Saturday, March 11th, 2006

After officially getting underway, participants in the Moscow-Chukotka Ford Expedition made their way to the Vologda region town of Velikiy Ustyug, believed to be the birthplace of the great Russian explorer Semyon Dezhnev, whose route the expedition is following. As we mark 400 years since the birth of Dezhnev, we wanted to draw attention to this important occasion and to an upcoming documentary film on the subject.

In general, we’ve been moving well along our route. We’ve managed to break up the routine of traveling these roads by indulging in everyone’s desire to conduct film and photo shoots. There’s also been a lot of interest in the expedition from people along the way.

Sunday, March 12th, 2006

The expedition safely reached Omsk on Sunday after covering about 2873 km. Everyone is feeling Ok, and the cars are also doing well.

We traveled through Vladimir, Nizhniy Novgorod, Kazan, and Izhevsk without stopping. In the Perm region, we enjoyed the hospitality of the Marshal Vasily Blyukher school in the village of Ferma. Many thanks to Nikolai Karavayev and his wife! Lunch at the school was fantastic!
Next we traveled past Ekaterinburg and Tyumen before arriving in Omsk. After a banya and a technical test at Ford-Omsk, the expedition will leave for Novosibirsk and Krasnoyarsk on Monday morning.

So far, we have been stopped by the traffic police just 5 times with a total loss of only 300 rubles in fines! Otherwise, everyone we’ve met along the way has been quite friendly.

Wednesday, March 15th, 2006

The Expedition has reached the city of Krasnoyarsk, having covered a total distance of 4300 km! The cars underwent their final tests at Ford-Krasnoyarsk. Special thanks to general director Yevgeny Kangun and service department head Yury Cheberyak.

We are leaving later today (Wednesday) for Yakutsk, which should take 2-3 days to reach. The off-road portion of the expedition begins along the way, in Ust-Kut.

We’ve got some pictures which we’ll send in soon. Everyone feels good. The cars are OK. We eat a lot and sleep very little!

Thursday, March 16th, 2006

After a full day’s stay in hospitable Krasnoyarsk, the Expedition departed Wednesday evening to continue along its journey. We spent the night in Kansk, the likely location of a famous film festival.

A lack of street signs in the city complicated the task of heading out on the Bratsk-Irkutsk highway. A local taxi driver good-naturedly offered to show us the way… for a mere 50 rubles! We decided to save our money and find the road ourselves.

After solemn passage along the dam of the Bratsk Hydroelectric Power Station, we took course towards Ust-Kut, the start point of the Baikal-Amur highway. In Ust-Kut, we encountered our first difficulties with fuel - the service station had no electricity.

Fortunately, there was one other gas station in town where we filled all of our tanks, totaling more than a ton (!) of 92-octane gasoline.

Dinner was served in Cafeteria № 14 of the Ust-Kut Steam-Locomotive Depot. They fed us like a locomotive crew - without having to wait in line. Once again, we were able to conserve cash – we paid only 420 rubles ($15) to more than adequately feed the entire crew!
After Ust-Kut, we headed off-road for the first time. We’ll need to travel about 1000 kilometers to get to Vitim.

Friday, March 17th, 2006

We spent all night traveling along the winter “highway”. The air temperature was about -15° C. The trail was entirely passable. Every 100-150 km was a rest stop were we could drink tea, grab a bite to eat, get the latest news from long-haul drivers, and argue about the state of Russian economy and complex international issues. One more topic for discussion: the influence of world oil prices on the cost of diesel fuel in the village of Peleduy.

As morning approached, the expeditionary caravan was forced to make an emergency stop when the engine gave out on one of the cars. The collective reasoning of the expedition participants was able to establish the reason for the malfunction.

The skillful hands of Andrey Rodionov (with the active creative assistance of the rest of the team) were able to restore electric power to the fuel pump, and after five and a half hours in the great outdoors, the expedition set out again along the winter road. We made a stop for lunch/dinner not far from the village of Nepa, along the Nizhnyaya Tunguska river.

Saturday, March 18th, 2006

Traveling just after midnight along the Ust-Kut – Mirniy winter road, we decided to take a right turn towards Vitim. As morning approached, and as we got closer to Vitim, we crossed over from a winter road to a “normal” dirt road. Our calculations on fuel consumption proved to be accurate.
We made another refueling stop in Vitim before heading back along the picturesque winter road to Lensk. After major snowfall in the Peleduya region, everything looked sunny and we were greeted by great weather for the remainder of our trail to Lensk. The road twisted and turned, first passing along the frozen Lena River, then rising high along the shore, then off into the forest, then back along the river.

Victor enthusiastically recommended subjects for video shoots, for which he has now obtained the nickname "Vittorio de Sica" and an invitation to the film festival in Kansk! By lunchtime we were already in Lensk, having traveled no less than 7000km from Moscow. Cafeteria № 1 at the Lensk municipal river port made our day by supplying us with fresh pastries.

We decided to continue our journey towards Yakutsk along the Lena River through the town of Olyokminsk, thereby changing our initially-planned route through Mirniy. We headed along the river from the village of Nyuya. Unfortunately, a snowstorm in the past three days had covered the winter road and did not allow us to get further than Turukta. We were forced to return to the Lensk-Mirniy trail. A few lost hours, a few extra kilometers. Everyone is in a good mood.

Sunday, March 19th, 2006

We arrived in Mirniy after midnight to refuel, and were astonished by the inflated prices for fuel. Nowhere before and (thus far) nowhere afterwards have we encountered 92-octane gasoline for 25 rubles (!!!) per liter! We were also perplexed by the kind folks from the Traffic Police in Mirniy, who took up half an hour writing citations for "noncompliance with regulations on mandatory insurance coverage." It was our first problem with the traffic cops since Nizhny Novgorod.
We spent the whole day on the Mirniy-Yakutsk highway. The Yakut names of the villages around were remarkable for their extensive use of the letters “Y” and “Yu”: Khatyn-Sysy (not to be confused with Kysyl-Syr), Ynakhsyt, Sydybal, Kyundyadya and Dyullyukyu. Tea houses in Yakutiya are called by female names, and not only Svetlana, Irina or Olga, but also Kaleria, Yevdokia and Praskovya, and instant coffee (independent of the manufacturer) is called “Nescofe” (sic).

Tuesday, March 21st, 2006

In the Sakha Republic capital of Yakutsk, we had the pleasure of being hosted by the cordial Mr Afanasy Nikolayevich Maximov, “the mistress of the house of hunters and fishermen” Valentina Prokofyevna and her daughter Dasha. We spent the day visiting the city’s landmarks and stocking up on food and other necessary supplies. We rested up before setting out on the long and difficult road. We also had our last chance to communicate with the “Mainland” – there’s no cell phone service from here on out…

Wednesday, March 22nd, 2006

In the second half of the day, after saying a fond farewell to Valentina, we set out further along our route. After crossing the river Lena and passing through the village of Nizhny Bestyakh, we headed towards the northeast. By the following morning, we had traversed the Sete-Dyuban and Suntar-Khayata ridges and emerged on the Oymyakon Plateau. The temperatures in this area are extreme (the coldest temperature on record for the northern hemisphere, -72.2° C), but for us it was practically spring-like at just -24° C. Along the way, we took a short break at the new bridge over the river Bryungade. Its builders had mostly completed their work and were preparing for its official opening. A native of Khabarovsk, “Alekseich”, who had been left charge of maintenance, told us about the rich history of the construction of the Yakutsk-Magadan highway. He plied us with “bridge-builders’ tea” (tea with thick sweetened condensed milk) and gave us a package of Pilot brand candy, from the Khabarovsk candy factory, for the road. By dinnertime, we had arrived in Ust-Nera, the administrative center of the Oymyakon ulusa (district). We’ve traveled almost 1000 km since Yakutsk…
Thursday, March 23rd, 2006

We carried out some minor automobile repairs on the premises of ATP CJSC Sarylakh-Surma. We will always remember, with appreciation, bus driver Yevgeny Ivanovich, who ably assisted us in our search for the necessary spare parts and/or their substitutes. After filling our tanks to the brim, we struck out to the east along the Magadan highway. We had 88 km of good roads up to and across the Burustakh River bridge before we turned left and back onto the winter trails. Waiting for us up ahead are a few difficult kilometers through the mountain passes of the Chersky ridge, all covered in deep snow…

Sunday, March 26th, 2006

We fought the snow for nearly three days and, by the afternoon of the 26th, were moving along the Tirekhtyakh River through the territory of the Momsky nature preserve. Here, we passed by the highest point in Sakha, Mt. Pobeda (Victory). By evening we had arrived in the village of Sasyr, where we spent the night. The thermometer read -34° C…

Monday, March 27th, 2006

This small settlement, once a center for reindeer herding, left an indelible impression on us due to the quantity of satellite television dishes on houses of all types. In the morning, we each had a cup of ice cream, purchased in the local store for 6 rubles, before getting back on the road. We made a short stop for lunch at “the horse riders’ place”, a small hunting house with a basketball hoop and the inscription “NBA” on the facade. Here, for anyone passing by or
passing through, there is lodging for the night (a cot with blanket), food (everyone who stops in leaves something edible) and heat (a small stove with firewood). From there, we traveled relatively slowly, but without stops…

Tuesday, March 28th, 2006

We reached the Sasyr pass through the Momsky ridge before dawn and by daytime we were already in Zyryanka, the administrative center of the Verkhnekolymsky district. Over the past several days, we passed some of the most picturesque places on our route. It was also the most difficult part of the journey so far. We’ve traveled 10250 km from Moscow. From here, we head down from the highlands and north along the Kolyma River.

Wednesday, March 29th, 2006

We spent the whole day in Zyryanka. Friend of the Expedition Sergey Serbinov met us when we arrived and took care of us. We toured the sites of the town and gave our “iron horses” yet another technical inspection.

Mangazeyka and Usun-Kyuyol

Thursday, March 30th, 2006

We headed back on the road after lunchtime. After traveling about 100 km from Zyryanka, we reached the forest-tundra transition area and its frozen swamps. After dark we passed by the settlements of Mangazeyka and Usun-Kyuyol.

Into the Arctic Circle

Friday, March 31st, 2006

Sometime before dawn, our trail veered onto the Kolyma River, where it became wider and more even. It got a bit warmer after sunrise. At about 11:00, to the delight of the Expedition participants, we crossed the Arctic Circle.
After traveling 400 km from Zyryanka, the team rolled into the town of Srednekolymsk, the administrative center of the Srednekolymsky ulus. The inhabitants of this small Yakut city are very proud of its rich history, and especially of the fact that it is several years older than the city of Saint Petersburg.

For their assistance and hospitality, we would especially like to Vladimir Nikolayevich Shebarshin, the deputy head of the Srednekolymsky ulus administration, and Vladimir Nikolayevich Tokarev, director Of the Srednekolymsky branch of the Yakutia state public utilities enterprise.

We decided to “change shoes” on the automobiles and ride on wheels again. The evening was spent in the company of local aviator Anatoly Vasilyevich Shebarshin, the former head of the Srednekolymsk Airport, and Peter Serafimovich, the acting deputy chief of the same airport. We ate fish soup and sang songs with themes like “time to get on the road…”, “under the wings of aircraft…”. We drank tea with frozen okhta, a tasty berry but one unlike any other.

After thanking our hospitable hosts and getting a strong Srednekolymsk bear hug, we set out again. We spent the night in Nalimsk, about 18 km from Srednekolymsk. The outside temperature fell to -36° C.

Saturday, April 1st, 2006

We set out early in the morning along the Srednekolymsk-Argakhtakh-Andryushkino-Chersky winter road. In Andryushkino, we made a short stop to repair the trailer. The GPS showed that we had reached latitude of 69° N. The village was hosting a competition in traditional Yakut fighting, so our presence here went practically unnoticed…
Upon departure from Andryushkino, we had to overcome some high snowdrifts. Things improved relatively soon, thanks to the efforts of the Yakutia road crews, who had passed by the day before. We drove all night without stopping. The road was winding, and intersected numerous lakes along the riverbeds.

Sunday, April 2nd, 2006

On the morning of April 2, the travelers and their three Ford Expedition automobiles arrived in the town of Chersky, the administrative center of the Nizhnekolymsky district (Sakha Republic). As the type of gasoline they required could not be found in Chersky, they had to travel to the village of Petushki to refuel at the oil storage facilities of JSC Sakhanefte-gazbit. At 15:00, the expedition participants visited the College of Peoples of the North. It was visible that the guys were tired, but their mood was cheerful. They even joked: “Why do you want to photograph us before lunch?” In order to keep the complaints to a minimum, I also photographed them after lunch. The deputy director of the college, Svetlana Mineeva, recounted the history of this educational institution and described how they prepare young specialists. Here, these visitors to the Lower Kolyma region dined and then headed over to the Nizhnekolymsky Museum of History and Culture of Northern Peoples. At half past five in the evening, the expedition continued on its way. For the motorists, up ahead awaits the city of Bilibino in Chukotka.

The Expedition Reaches Chukotka!

Sunday, April 2nd, 2006

Early in the morning, the Expedition drove out onto the Kolyma River near the village of Karlukovo and covered the remaining 200 km to Chersky traveling along the frozen river. We passed through the settlements of Kolymskoye, Timkino and Yermolov, while staying just a little bit away from the village of Dve Viski (“viska” means “channel” in Yakut, but in Russian it sounds more like the phrase for a double scotch!). Just a few kilometers from Chersky, on the left shore of the Kolyma, is the legendary Nizhnekolymsk (formerly the Nizhny Kolymsk outpost) from whence Russian explorers set out further to explore new
lands. It was from this place that Semyon Dezhnev and his comrades departed in search of the Bering Sea.

We arrived in Chersky by around 11:00. There, we were accompanied by the deputy head of the district administration Sakhamin Afanasiev. We visited the local folklore museum, dined at the Nizhnekolymsk College (special thanks to the director of the college), and refueled.

After dinner, we departed in the direction of Chukotka - the central objective of our journey. After following the Kolyma for another 20 km or so, we diverted off into a winding channel. We found a well-warn road which helped us quickly make it to the town of Anyuysk – the first settlement on our route located inside the Chukotka Autonomous District. About 50 km prior to reaching Anyuysk, we came across two young men in a broken down Buran snowmobile. They had been on their way to Chersky. We took one of them, Slava, with us to get help.

The big surprise in Anyuysk was the large number of adolescents riding bicycles. Snowdrifts, -25° C, bicycles. Isn't it a bit strange?

Monday, April 3rd, 2006
We spent the night on the road, and the recently-made road quickly led us to Bilibino. The city is home to Chukotka's atomic workforce, as it has the world’s northernmost nuclear power plant. We slept, got ourselves together, filled up on fuel, and headed northeast. Thanks to Roman Kopina and Leonid Gorenshteyn for their warm reception in Bilibino.

As evening approached, we hit a rough patch of road with deep snow and broken tracks. We only drove about 50 km from Bilibino when we decided to “change shoes” on the cars again and travel further on the caterpillars. We managed to get one car refitted before bedding down for the night, and the second one completed at dawn. The air temperature is -36° C, but there’s no wind. Not too bad…

The Northernmost City in Russia

Tuesday, April 4th, 2006
We traveled onward, slowly, but without significant problems. Even the heavily-traveled section of road from the turnoff for Kupol, a major gold mine currently under development, to Pevek wasn't much of an obstacle, although here we did run across more than one truck that had either gotten stuck in snow or turned over on the slippery shoulder.
The mountains and wooded landscapes gave way to almost Martian vistas. Before nightfall, we made it to the village of Rytkuchi, a reindeer-breeding community on the shores of Chaun Bay. The Expedition has reached the ocean!
Not long after midnight, we arrived in Pevek, the northernmost city in the Russian Federation. At latitude 70° N, on the coast of the Arctic Ocean, it is also the northernmost point on our route. Since leaving Moscow, we've traveled 12250 km.

Wednesday, April 5th, 2006

We are staying in a comfortable house 10 meters from the coastline with a great view of the Arctic Ocean. Complete silence. At night, the aurora borealis lights up the sky. We've been getting some rest… We've been cleaning ourselves up… and we've been looking at the film and photos we've taken over the course of the expedition.
Alexey Simakin has demonstrated his culinary talents. For dinner, we were served Pevek-style smelt fish salad and Polynesian turkey with rice. Then we rested some more…

Thursday, April 6th, 2006

We are getting ready to continue our journey. One car, “the technical”, will remain in Pevek in preparation for subsequent shipping to Moscow. The other two will travel further. Here, we will also leave behind the trailers which have served us so well thus far, as we'll be pulling sleighs behind us from this point on. We still have about 1500 km to go until we reach Anadyr…

Friday, April 7th, 2006

We left Pevek early in the morning and, by 10:00, we were already in Komsomolsky. The headquarters of the Chukotka prospecting cooperative is located here, which is also the start point for the road to the Volunistiy mine, which almost halfway between Pevek and Anadyr. We continued along this road and then along the Palyavaam River.
By evening we had reached the turn-off towards Cape Schmidt and stopped for the night. The nearest populated area was still 200 kilometers away. It was therefore quite a surprise when, at 2:00 in the night, someone knocked on the window of one of the Fords!
A reindeer herder had been passing through and decided it was his responsibility to welcome these guests of the tundra. None of us managed to fully wake up, so no conversation was had. The Chukchee continued on his way into the darkness…

Saturday, April 8th, 2006

We got underway early, just after dawn. After several tens of kilometers pushing through the tundra, we came upon a well-traveled winter road. Coal transporters use this section of road to deliver fuel to all the nearby settlements.

The first of these settlements we reached along this stretch was Polarniy, located right on the coast of Arctic Ocean. From there it was another 80 km to Cape Schmidt. This section of road proved to be quite complex. Fog and deep snow slowed down our advance and only just before Schmidt did the going get easier. Several kilometers from town there was a marker – the 180th meridian. So if we were to head directly north from here, across the north pole and straight ahead from there, we would eventually arrive in Greenwich. Here we were, trying to travel as far east as we could and we ended up in the Western hemisphere!

Cape Schmidt greeted us with strong winds and light snow. A walk out to the tip of the cape proved to be somewhat less than pleasant – the wind nearly blew us into the ocean.
Cape Ryrkarpys, later known as Irkarpys, and then Northern, and finally Cape Schmidt, has seen a bunch of legendary people over its history. Semyon Dezhnev was here, as were James Cook, Nordenskjold, and Schmidt with his crew on the Chelyuskin. There are separate monuments to Cook and Schmidt here. Cook looks similar to Baron Munchausen while Schmidt looks more like Lev Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana.

It was already dark when we set out on the winter road towards Iultin and Egvekinot. We were in a hurry as a cyclone had been approaching the coast. Visibility fell to 5-7 meters, the snowfall got heavier, and the winds picked up. After traveling only 20 kilometers we decided to stop for the night. The winds outside our windows got stronger and stronger, and it was very cold.

Sunday, April 9th, 2006

We woke up early, drank some tea, and slowly got moving. We felt sure that the cyclone would catch up with us. We only got away from it around lunchtime, when we drove onto the Iultin tract, at which point we realized we’d gotten lucky and avoided the worst of the storm. The winds died down, it looked sunny. The only thing that succeeded in spoiling our mood was the upset stomach that everyone came down with. We cured the epidemic with the kind assistance of activated charcoal.

After noon we arrived in Iultin, Chukotka’s own ghost town. The settlement never quite flourished after it was set up as a center for tin mining and processing, and this city of several thousand was abandoned in 1993. The residents departed in haste, almost like an evacuation, and took with themselves only what was necessary. Afterwards, the city died…

Our anxiety only grew after we passed through the town’s barren streets and through a mountain pass, where the road rose sharply uphill, past a cemetery, and then along a cliff. The dazzling whiteness of the snow meant it was not always possible to see the edge of the cliff. We moved slowly and carefully. The ghost town behind us said goodbye with unblinking eyes, as represented by the empty windows of its buildings. As soon as we passed, the winds picked up. Visibility dropped to 1-2 meters. Andrey got out of the car and led the expedition further. Our speed was reduced to that of a pedestrian. At the site of an impassable bridge, the trail turned off into the tundra. There were markers along the trail at a distance of 2-3 meters from each other, but only the
nearest one was visible. These were the remains of the storm that had raged in the Amguema tundra the day before. The tail end had caught us.
We made a short stop in Amguema, which has been completely rebuilt over the past few years. The village provided a unique visual treat – a town full of contemporary well-built housing, with all of the necessary infrastructure, way out here in the tundra.
The final 80 km to Egvekinot were quickly traversed. Along the way, we crossed the Arctic Circle for the second time.
It was already dusk when we arrived in town. We had arranged comfortable lodging for the night – our own two-room apartment, graciously provided by Muslim Abakarov, the head of Chukotkommunkhоз in Uelkal.

Monday, April 10th, 2006

In the morning, we cleaned the ice and snow from our automobiles, which made each of them about 200 kilograms lighter! Then we visited the Egvekinot Folklore Museum (special thanks to Tatiana and Timofeicha for the cordial reception).
At noon, we drove out onto the ice of the Bay of the Cross (Zaliv Kresta) in the direction of Uelkal. Movement became difficult once again, as shallow but sticky snow reduced speeds and increased fuel consumption. After a short conference, we decided to return to Egvekinot and, rather than taking the shortcut across the bay, to go the long way around.
Bright sun, blue sky, mountains, snow, ice - these were the most picturesque scenes we encountered during the whole expedition. After traveling 130 km, we arrived in Uelkal at about 3:00 a.m. The major storm here a day earlier had left snowdrifts as high as a two-story house. All-terrain vehicles and Ural trucks, who had waited out the storm, were now preparing to head back on the road. A tractor-sled train approached the village from Anadyr, after having holed up 70 km from here. The weather was improving…

Finish Line in Sight

Tuesday, April 11th, 2006

Having refueled our automobiles in the morning from the supplies of Chukotkommunkhoza in Uelkal, we set out on the final stage of expedition. It was only 180 km to Anadyr. These were the hardest kilometers yet…

The vehicles finally began to object to being pushed to their technical limits. About 100 km from Anadyr, the bolts holding on one set of caterpillar tracks tore away and the tracks fell off. The car was a depressing sight. After a short conference, we resolved to take one bolt from each of the other tracks and reattach it.

We finished the work at night, at which point we were met by another unfortunate incident. The locks somehow closed on one vehicle with the engine still running, but we eventually managed to get the door open. Fortunately, there were no further incidents as we got back underway in our race towards the finish line.

Wednesday, April 12th, 2006

The expedition traveled the final 80 km exclusively using positional coordinates, without any sight of road or trail. As morning approached, we passed by the settlement of Shakhtyorsky and then across the Anadyr River estuary. By 11:00, we had arrived in the capital of the Chukotka Autonomous District, the city of Anadyr.

The Expedition has been completed successfully! Over the course of 32 days, our Ford Expedition traveled almost 14000 kilometers from Moscow to Anadyr, with approximately one-third of the route passing along winter roads, frozen rivers and off-road. Hurray! We’re too tired to celebrate just yet and we’re finding it hard to grasp just what we’ve accomplished. It will probably all begin to make sense in a few days time.