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Dr. A. B. Harper excavating near Khuzhir, Olkhon Island, 26 August 1975.

The Soviet-American Siberian Expedition

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During August and early September 1975, I was one of a delegation of five North American scientists who visited and worked in the U.S.S.R. as members of what that country's Academy of Sciences designated the Soviet-American Siberian Expedition. This marked a milestone in Soviet-North American scientific relations, constituting as it did the first North American team of anthropologists, biologists and geologists to be given the opportunity to pursue intensive field research in the Soviet Union. My objectives in writing this report are to describe briefly the nature and purpose of the expedition, the data collected and the political and scientific conditions under which the North American delegation was permitted to work.

The North American delegation included, in addition to myself: Dr. William S. Laughlin (chairman), University of Connecticut; Dr. Donald W. Clark, National Museums of Canada; Dr. Albert B. Harper, University of Connecticut; and Dr. David M. Hopkins, U.S. Geological Survey. Apart from support personnel, members of the Soviet field team included Academician A. P. Okladnikov (leader) and Doctors I. V. Atseev, A. P. Derevyanko and S. L. Troitsky, all of them members of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. The expedition was supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation, the Wenner-Gren Foundation, New York, and the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. The latter assumed all travel and other expenses within the U.S.S.R., and also made available to each member of the North American delegation a generous amount of spending money.

The 1975 expedition was a direct outcome of a combined U.S.-Soviet archaeological project undertaken in the Aleutian Islands during the summer of 1974 when, for two months, five Soviet scientists, including Academician Okladnikov and Dr. Derevyanko, worked under Dr. Laughlin's guidance. In other words, the invitation to us to visit the U.S.S.R. was extended in specific recognition of Dr. Laughlin's successful efforts to bring together in Alaska a joint U.S.-Soviet team for the purpose of attaining research objectives through intensive field work. I mention this because the Aleutian project of 1974 constituted, both in intent and practice, quite a radical departure from the general pattern of exchange visits between North American and Soviet anthropologists, biologists and earth scientists, which, while they have resulted in very useful comparisons of data and ideas, have rarely involved actual field research under the conditions which the visiting scientists enjoyed at home. Purely and simply, therefore, the Aleutian project amounted to honest joint field work, and was not a guided tour, and this characteristic was directly reflected in the reception accorded us in the Soviet Union in 1975. Additionally, it should be noted that both the 1974 and 1975 endeavours reflected an increasing mutual desire for cooperation between North American and Soviet scientists (as especially expressed during the past decade) in approaching

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FIG. 1. Presentation to Academician Okladnikov. Left to right: A. K. Konopatsky, A. P. Derevyanko, J. M. Campbell, A. P. Okladnikov, D. W. Clark, W. S. Laughlin, R. S. Vasilievsky, D. M. Hopkins. Photograph by A. B. Harper. Copyright: Laboratory of Biological Anthropology, University of Connecticut.

research problems which bear in common on the archaeology, human biology, and Pleistocene and Holocene histories of Siberia and northern North America.

The 1975 expedition was mainly exploratory, its primary purpose being that of collecting substantive evidence relative to the past and present natural environments and the human prehistory of western Lake Baikal in central Siberia. We spent the first week of August in Moscow, while our hosts obtained the necessary clearance for us to travel into Siberia, and another week in and near Novosibirsk in western Siberia, while clearance was being obtained for us to travel further eastward. We devoted much of this waiting time to discussions with Soviet scholars, and to examinations of museum collections. At Akademgorodok (Academic Town), on the outskirts of Novosibirsk, we presented Academician Okladnikov, in his capacity as Director of the Institute of History, Philology and Philosophy of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., with the flag of the Arctic Institute of North America (Fig. 1) inscribed with the signatures of myself (as Fellow and Governor) and Drs. Clark, Hopkins and Laughlin (as Fellows). Also inscribed was the name of Dr. Walter A. Wood, Fellow, Governor and founding member of the Institute in recognition of his exemplary role in northern research.

On 14 August, we flew to Irkutsk, and two days later the whole field party, consisting of seventeen men and women, set off in a northeasterly direction in two military-type vehicles. We encountered several small enclaves of Buryat shepherds

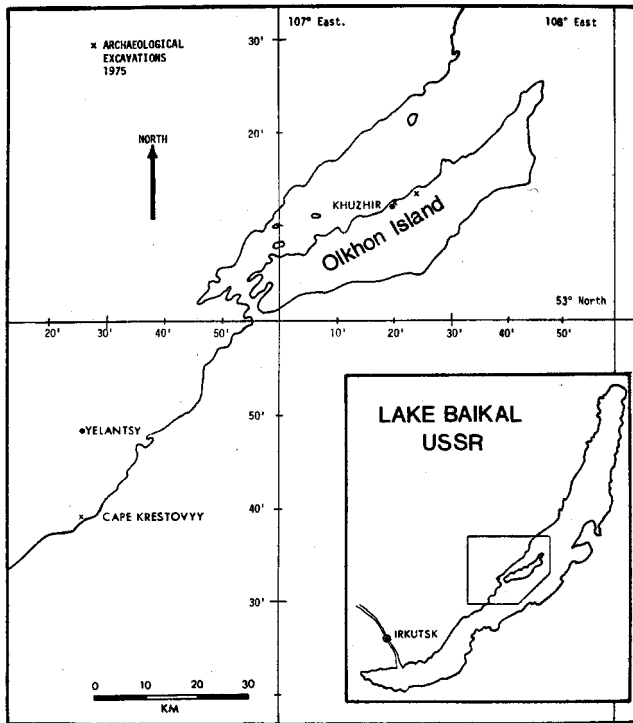


FIG. 2. The environs of the two major camps. Copyright: Laboratory of Biological Anthropology, University of Connecticut.

as we drove through their territory for some kilometres over wagon roads and horse trails. (In the days that followed, the Buryats and other native peoples of the region provided a supplement to our field rations in the form of fresh vegetables and mutton on the hoof.) On 17 August, after a day and a half of travelling, we established our first major camp in a pine-larch forest on the edge of a large expanse of steppe a little distance inland from Mys (Cape) Krestovyy ($52^{\circ}38'N$, $106^{\circ}27'E$) on the northwest shore of Lake Baikal. Six days later, we moved north-eastward to Olkhon Island ($53^{\circ}10'N$, $107^{\circ}20'E$), where we camped on the steppe-taiga border near a Buryat hamlet until 1 September, when our field activities ended. The locations of these two major camps are indicated in Fig. 2.

The work at the two camps was organized as follows: Drs. Atseev, Clark, Derevyanko, Harper, Laughlin and Okladnikov partially excavated two archaeological sites, of the period from about 8000 B.C. to 1000 A.D., which were in the main representative of Mesolithic and Neolithic encampments whose inhabitants were heavily reliant on the hunting of large game, including the Baikal seal. In addition, the investigators just mentioned, and other members of the field party, briefly excavated a locality which contained lithic specimens (probably artefacts) directly associated with the bones of extinct megafauna. Dr. Hopkins and his Soviet counterpart, Dr. Troitsky, formed interpretations of the geological stratigraphy of the archaeological localities just referred to; collected invertebrate and vertebrate fossils; discovered, and partially excavated, another Neolithic site and, more generally, assessed major regional climatological and geomorphological events of about the past 10,000 years. My own work was directed toward recording

certain characteristics of the present-day regional environment — mainly, its late summer climate, terrestrial plant communities, and vertebrates.

The various studies resulted in the accumulation of a comprehensive body of data. In addition to meteorological observations, we recorded a few live fishes and mammals, and nearly 70 species of birds. The collections we assembled included numerous artefacts; human skeletal remains; a total of more than 75 fossil, soil and radiocarbon samples; about 100 specimens of recent invertebrates, and more than 400 plant specimens. That we were permitted to remove these collections intact and without search (together with our journals, and more than 7000 undeveloped still photos and 33 reels of film) testifies to the freedom we enjoyed both in the field, and in Moscow, Novosibirsk and Irkutsk.

At the governmental, political level we were accorded every courtesy, and permitted every freedom of action, and at no time did an official of any rank cause us inconvenience or embarrassment. I say this, incidentally, as one whose political views are quite tangential to those most commonly expressed and practised in the U.S.S.R. It is a simple fact that, as Western scientists, we were not only treated with great consideration by every official we met, but were permitted to do just about whatever we desired.

The single anxiety we noted on the part of the authorities (we also noted, as I have remarked, the ponderosity of its bureaucracy in regard to our being cleared for the field) was their concern that we might report Siberian poverty to the Western press. Apparently, the Soviet officials believed that we would consider the Buryats, living in their *yourts* surrounded by garden plots, and possessing herds of horses, cattle and sheep, to be poverty stricken. There may indeed be poverty in the U.S.S.R., but we did not observe it among the Buryats and their neighbours.

What impressed us even more was the atmosphere of scientific freedom we enjoyed in the field. We were told that we were the first group of outsiders in the history of the U.S.S.R. to have ever been permitted to work in the two areas we visited. This fact was confirmed by the Buryats, as well as by the other natives of the region who, though they greeted us with invariable friendliness, sometimes failed to hide their astonishment at our presence. Perhaps because we were such strangers to those peoples, or else because tradition required it, our Soviet hosts politely insisted that the entire field party pitch its tents in a close pattern. Beyond that courteously enforced rule, there were no restrictions. At both camps we pursued our own individual research projects, and we travelled without supervision or escort wherever our studies took us in the surrounding terrain.

To do my own work, I had to spend much time alone and was often out for many hours on traverses of several kilometres through the taiga, or over the steppe. Except for occasional Buryat horsemen, whose language I did not understand, I saw no one on those wanderings, and I worked as freely and as without interference as ever I had in Alaska, Greenland or the Yukon. Precisely the same was true of the experiences of my North American companions. One may therefore hope that the Aleutian project and the Soviet-American Siberian Expedition augur well for future opportunities for those scholars who, while remaining true to their own beliefs, are little interested in grinding political axes and more concerned with empirical research into the natural and cultural histories of the North.