

EXPEDITION "IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF L.A. ZAGOSKIN".

YUKON-2009. ALASKA-2010*

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in studying Russian heritage abroad. One of the clearest examples of this heritage is Russian America. This area has become a special junction of several cultures and civilizations. For centuries, aboriginal culture of the Aleuts, Eskimos, and Indians had been forming there and, then, it was faced with a powerful Russian civilization, which was replaced by European civilization in its Anglo-American version. Synthesis of different cultures in Alaska makes it a unique field of research.

In 2009–2010, two research expeditions to the rivers Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Innoko were conducted in Alaska. The expeditions went the way of the famous Russian explorer of Alaska, Lavrentyi A. Zagoskin, who, in 1842–1844, studied internal territories of Russian America. In 2009, the first phase of the expedition took place (Fig. 1). The project participants have repeated part of the historic route of the Yukon River. The path length was 1400 km. During the expedition, research on the ethnography and history of local communities in Alaska, public meetings, and cultural events were carried out. In the Orthodox Church at the settlement Russian Mission in the Yukon, parish registers of the Russian period in Alaska were found. Some of them belonged to the 1860s, when Yacov Netsvetov, who was later canonized, was the priest at the church.

The second stage of the expedition took place in 2010 (Fig. 2). Two groups repeated Zagoskin's routes along the rivers Kuskokwim and Innoko. The route of the northern group went along the Innoko River, from the village Shagelyuk to the confluence of the river with the Yukon, then, by the Yukon to the settlement Russian

Mission. Of this settlement, the northern group portaged to the Kuskokwim River, where it connected with the southern group. Then, the combined group travelled to the village of Bethel, on the Kuskokwim. Overall, 600 km were covered, including 146 km of portage from the Yukon to the Kuskokwim.

The southern route went by the Kuskokwim River from the village Mac Grat to the meeting point with the northern group in Kalskag. Then, the combined group reached Bethel. The southern group covered about 700 km.

During two seasons, the expedition carried out research in 35 remote villages. For the first time in 160 years after the sale of Alaska, the Russian people visited these places. Compared with the available, for research, the Kodiak, the Anchorage, and the Fairbanks regions, the interior of the expedition region is still virtually unknown.

In addition to political and educational objectives associated with maintaining Russia's international prestige and with perpetuating the memory of Russian travelers not only in our country, but in the U.S., the expedition allowed us to identify and study previously unknown documents of the Russian period in Alaska, to collect a large ethnographic material, to perform a reconnaissance survey of the terrain, to study linguistic features of the local population and to gather a wealth of material about religious beliefs and practices.

The expeditions are the largest expedition in Alaska since the Russian-American Company. Due to the wide geographical coverage, they have identified the most important aspects related to the development of Russian history in Alaska. The results of the expedition include various fields of science and demonstrate the richness of Russian heritage in Alaska.

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Fig. 1. Route of 2009 expedition

Historical and ethnographic research.

During the expeditions, ethnographic surveys based on a specially developed method were conducted; they included polling, collection of official data, and observation of realities of the indigenous population. The structure of the collected data allows one to perform a comparative analysis of ethnographic information in relation to the book by L.A. Zagoskin.

Most of the settlements studied by the expedition are small in number (300–500), and are highly mono-ethnic. The main occupation of indigenous peoples is self-relying, i.e., hunting

and fishing. In all the villages, there is a high level of technical equipment of households. Income level recorded officially is low (approximately 30–40 thousand dollars per year per household). Important sources of income are wages at the shifts, as well as income derived from activities of corporations of the indigenous peoples formed in 1970 under the law on the recognition of claims of the indigenous peoples.

Data were collected on the character of settlements' structure, the presence of domesticated animals, clothing, household plots, diet, etc. Members of the expedition were able to visit a traditional *potlatch* feast, as well



Fig. 2. Route of 2010 expedition

as personally try desserts of the ancient Eskimo delicacies – *akichak*, *agudak* – which, according to Russian sources of the XIX century, are known as *tolokusha*. It is a finely chopped red or white fish, mixed with fat and frozen berries.

Historical research. During the expedition, church documents (parish registers and records of the population) found in the archives of Exaltation of the Holy Cross church at the settlement Russian Mission were studied. The documents that have never before been used for scientific research have led to the conclusion that the influence of Russian culture was great, even after the sale of

Alaska to the United States. All the paperwork was conducted in Russian; there are Russian names and surnames of local residents. Mixed population (descendants of Russian and Eskimo and Aleut) was significant; the actual ethnic Russian immigrants from the provinces of Russia, who lived in Alaska after its transfer to the United States, are also mentioned.

In 2010, a unique historical experiment to study the routes of Russian travelers and potential for transport and trade communications of rivers and lakes of Alaska has been implemented. The northern expedition group “Alaska 2010” made

a water-land transition from the Yukon River to the Kuskokwim Rive (Fog. 3). The transition (portage) was performed along the same route that was used by the local population of Alaska and by the Russian explorers, including the L.A. Zagoskin. In the course of this experiment, it has been shown that the role of climate, water level, time of year, and other natural phenomena were underestimated by researchers, who studied the local population of Russian America and the history of colonization of these territories.

Historical and archaeological research. In 1844, L.A. Zagoskin discovered and gave a brief description of a downfallen fortification, seven miles of the mouth of the extreme right arm of the Yukon River – the Aphun River. This fortified settlement described by L.A. Zagoskin is typical of many central Russian and Siberian forts – *ostrogs* – and fits in well with the Russian tradition. Meanwhile, Russian settlements at the mouth of the Yukon River have been unknown to science and the tribes that, according to American archaeologists, have never built fortifications. Thus, Zagoskin's data do not fit into the

accepted pattern of development in Alaska. Perhaps, this settlement relates to an old legend about the first Russian settlement in Alaska, founded in the XVII century by people from the lost ships of Semen Dezhnev or some other expedition. During the expedition in 2009, a reconnaissance survey of the assumed site of this fortified settlement was carried out. At this location, the Yukon noticeably recedes from the shore, exposing a number of shore ridges. The settlement is now at a distance from the modern river. The coordinates of the location: 62°59'38.40"N, 163°47'21.29"E.

The southern group examined the Kolmakovsky redoubt, founded in 1841 by Russian manufacturers. This is one of the monuments of Russian Alaska recognized, in the U.S., among the national historic treasures. The members of the expedition corrected the data on the location of the redoubt. The exact location is 61°34.197'N, 158°53.907'W. During the last century, there were two excavations at the redoubt. The blockhouse and other buildings were moved to the University Museum, Fairbanks,

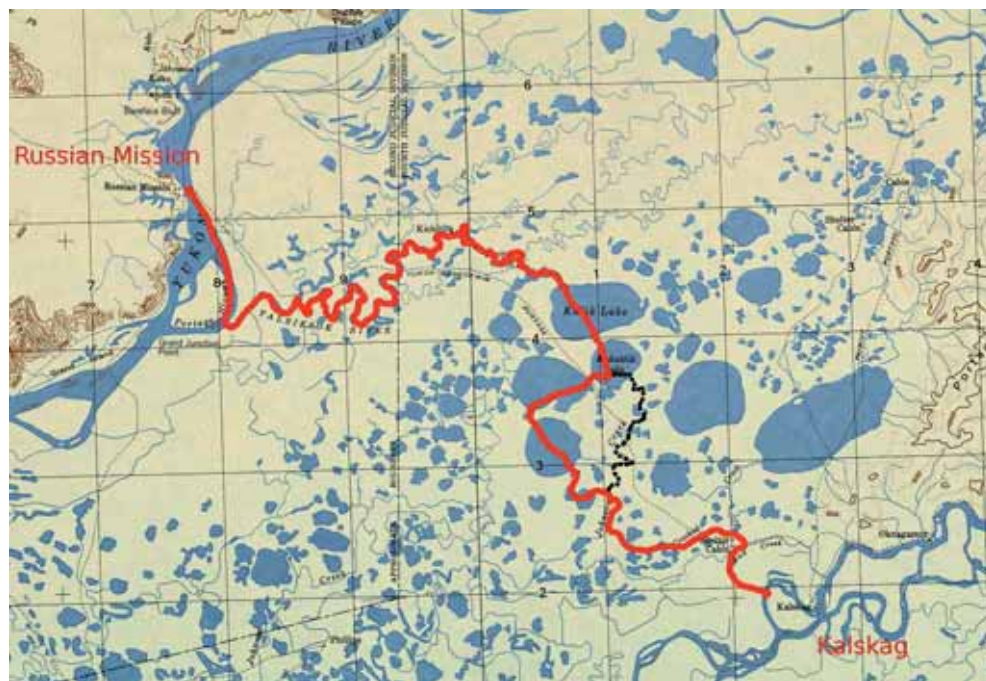


Fig. 3. Route of 2010 land portage

Alaska. Currently, among thickets, there are the foundations of six structures and the foundation of the fence.

Linguistic research. Many elements of the influence of Russian culture have survived to our time and play an important role in the lives of indigenous peoples. Among these naturalized elements, are Russian words that are used in the language of the Indians and Eskimos. During the expedition, a small vocabulary of Russian words, prevailing in popular culture, was collected. Among them, are words for food and household items, “chai”, “sakhar”, “moloko”, “lozhka”, “nozhik”, “platok”, “banya”, etc (i.e., “tea”, “sugar”, “milk”, “spoon”, “knife”, “scarf”, “bath”). Until now, there was no such dictionary.

Study on the history of religions in the region. In the lower reaches of the Yukon and Kuskokima, Eastern Orthodoxy is widespread; it has been also actively developing after the sale of Alaska to the United States as a way of resistance to segregation and forced Americanization. After the sale of Alaska, its territory was divided among various denominations for missionary work. Currently, the population of Alaska Orthodox is 8–10% (the highest in the U.S.); in the study area, the vast majority of the indigenous population professes the Orthodox faith. Orthodox churches and chapels were built in the period of Russian America. Some of them served 80–100 years and are now abandoned. In the second half of the XX century, Orthodox communities have built new temples that are currently active.

Orthodoxy is the most striking influence of the Russian period on the modern Alaska. It is through the lens of Orthodoxy that many representatives of the indigenous peoples perceive and understand Russian period in their history.

In general, the study area in Alaska (basins of the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Innoko) is a unique scientific ground. Here, traditional cultures of Athabaskan Indians and Yupik Eskimos have been formed and existed for centuries. It included life-support systems

such as game hunting, traditional beliefs, and cultural practices. Natural and climatic conditions (i.e., harsh climate, the presence of land rich in game but hard-to-access, permafrost, the abundance of water bodies – lakes, rivers, and wetlands) had a great influence on these cultures. The steady traditional civilization of the local population provided for their existence in this harsh environment.

In 1840s–1860s, the civilization of the local population (Athabaskan and Eskimo) came into contact with the powerful Russian civilization, which had completely different life-support systems, based on cultivation, rather than on appropriation of food, and on other cultural traditions, based on the Christian Orthodox faith.

Beginning in the 1860s to the present period, European civilization has emerged in the region; it began to exert its Anglo-American influence on the local population. It was close to Russian in its economic structure and life-support system, that is, it was based on cultivation rather than on appropriation. However, culturally it was based on other principles of Christianity, i.e., on its Protestant form.

The groups of Alaska’s population studied (Athabasca and Eskimos) living at the present, were under the influence of two powerful civilizations that have passed like waves in the area. The traditional Indian and Inuit ways of life were, at first, influenced by the Russian civilization and, then, by the Anglo-American. The study showed that despite the short period of time when the Russian people were in close contact with the local population, they had a serious impact on their traditional way of life, both material and spiritual. Therefore, the task of further study and promotion of heritage of Russian America is extremely important, both politically and in social and cultural aspects.

Mikhail G. Malakhov
Alexander Yu. Petrov
Viktor G. Shlyakhin

CORRECTIONS

to the paper "Assessment of overbank sedimentation rates and associated pollutant transport within the Severnaya Dvina River basin" by Belyaev V.R. et al, published in the previous issue of the journal (Geography, Environment, Sustainability, № 03 (v.04) 2011, p. 68–84)

Dear readers,

The authors apologize for three errors that have been found in the table 1. The corrected version of the table is presented below with corrections highlighted by gray fill.

Table 1. Total contents of selected heavy metals in floodplain overbank deposits of the Severnaya Dvina River basin in 6 analyzed sediment sections in comparison with global clarke concentrations in soils, global clarke concentrations in clay deposits and maximum allowable concentrations (MAC) for soils according to the Russian health and safety standards (mg/kg)

Values in excess of the MAC (AAC) are shown in bold

Heavy metals	Global clarke in soils	Global clarke in clay deposits	MAC (AAC) ¹	Overbank deposits of the Severnaya Dvina River basin (n = 90) ²	
				Average	Maximum
Mn	200–500	700	1500	431	3210
Cu	20–25	60	55	11	30
Zn	60	90	100	39	114
Pb	20–30	20	30	5	13
Ni	20–30	60	85	23	76
Co	8–10	20	(30–40)	7	22
V	100	120	150	32	98
Cd	0.5	0.3	(2)	0.1	0.7
Cr	50–70	110	(100–200)	25	68
Sr	90–120	220	–	30	136
As	4–9	6.6	(10)	4.0	15.7

¹ Approximate allowable concentrations (AAC) are given in brackets for elements if MACs are not stated in the Russian health and safety standards.

² n – number of samples.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University
Moscow 119991 Russia
Leninskie Gory,
Faculty of Geography, 2108a
Phone 7-495-9392923
Fax 7-495-9328836
E-mail: GESJournal@yandex.ru

DESIGN & PRINTING

Advertising and Publishing Agency “Advanced Solutions”
Moscow 105120 Russia
Nizhnyaya Syromyatnicheskaya, 5/7, 2
Phone 7-495-9167574
Fax 7-495-9167673
E-mail: om@aov.ru

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