Celebrating the bicentennial of the discovery of Antarctica

English version provided by the author

Celebrating the bicentennial of the discovery of Antarctica

**Information Paper submitted by the Russian Federation and ASOC**

In 2020 Russia and Antarctica hosted a series of events, held to mark the bicentennial of the discovery of Antarctica by the Russian navigators Faddey Bellingshausen and Mikhail Lazarev during their 3-year long circumnavigation of the world in 1819–1821.

The celebrations began on 28 January 2020 with a teleconference which linked the Russian Antarctic station Bellingshausen and the Situation Center of the Russian Government. First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Andrey Belousov congratulated the staff of the Russian Antarctic Expedition. Congratulations on behalf of the President of the Russian Federation were read out by the Assistant to the Head of State Igor Levitin. The participants of the teleconference noted the importance of public-private partnership in the implementation of infrastructure projects in Antarctica. This was followed by an official solemn rally which took place at the Bellingshausen station, with the participation of such distinguished speakers as the Minister of Natural Resources Dmitry Kobylkin and the head of the Federal Service for Hydrometeorology and Environmental Monitoring Igor Shumakov. The rally was attended by employees of the Russian Antarctic Expedition, crew members of “Admiral Vladimirsky” and “Yantar”, the oceanographic research vessels of the Russian Navy, as well as personnel of nearby Chinese, Chilean, Uruguayan, Argentine stations and German specialists who conducted research at the Bellingshausen station. Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid and the crew of the “Admiral Bellingshausen” yacht, on which she arrived at the station, also took part in the gala dinner held in the conference hall of the station.

On January 8, 2020, a bronze monument to Captain second rank, Faddey Bellingshausen, the commander of the Russian South Polar Expedition, of 1819–1821, was unveiled at Bellingshausen station in a solemn ceremony. The monument unveiling ceremony was attended by members of the 64th Russian Antarctic Expedition from the Bellingshausen winter station.

As part of the anniversary celebration, a contest was held among school students from St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region testing their knowledge of Antarctica and the history of Antarctic research. The three winners of the competition with a teacher accompanying them flew to the Bellingshausen station at the end of February 2020, where they spent three days getting acquainted with the work of polar explorers and the nature of King George Island (Vaterloo). During the year, several teleconferences were also held linking Russian Antarctic stations and several secondary schools.

An exhibition dedicated to the bicentennial of the discovery of Antarctica was organized in St. Petersburg’s Mikhailovsky Palace. The exhibition featured more than a hundred paintings, drawings, sculptures, as well as numismatics, decorative and folk art from the collection of the Russian Museum. The exhibition included unique materials related to the history of the discovery of the sixth continent: drawings and watercolors made by P. N. Mikhailov – a participant of the circumnavigation of the world by the sloops “Mirny” and “Vostok” in 1819–1821.

In the 2021/2022 season, there is a plan to install a memorial plaque at the Novolazarevskaya station bearing the inscription:

On January 28 (16), 1820, 155 km in the direction of NNW from this point, the sailors of the Russian South Polar Expedition of 1819-1821 on the sloops “Vostok” and “Mirny” under the command of F. F. Bellingshausen and M. P. Lazarev discovered and mapped the icy coast of Antarctica for the first time in the history of mankind.

In 2019–2020, the Federal Agency for Fisheries organized a round-the-world expedition of the training and sailing vessels “Krusenstern”, “Sedov” and “Pallada”, dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica.

Within the framework of the civil society education initiative, a number of events dedicated to this anniversary were also held.

The Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition (ASOC) together with government organizations, scientific and civil communities, developed and conducted a series of environmental awareness events. Their goal is to draw attention to Antarctica, the challenges it faces, and the need to protect its unique nature.

“In the Icy Embrace of the Southern Ocean” – this is the name of the photo exhibition created jointly by the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition and the International Environmental Fund “Clean Seas” with the support of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation. The exhibition took place at the Ministry of Natural Resources of the Russian Federation and the State Duma, the French Embassy in Moscow, as well as at the Primeval Russia nature festival in Gostiny Dvor, “Russia – My History” museum in St. Petersburg and the Museum of the World Ocean in Kaliningrad. Visitors to the exhibition made a virtual trip to the southernmost continent with the help of photographs by John Weller, Paul Nicklen and Stanislav Zakharov, where they saw whales and penguins, ice floes and icebergs, mysterious creatures and the most frost-resistant fish – everything that the researchers of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean were able to capture with their equally frost-resistant cameras. At the exhibition, it was also possible to walk on the ice of the world’s coldest continent using VR glasses.

To commemorate the anniversary of Antarctica’s discovery, a series of street photo exhibitions “Discovering Antarctica Together” was held in Moscow. Audience outreach exceeded hundreds of thousands of people. What is more, the theme of last season’s VDNH skating rink was “Antarctic Winter”. The organizers and partners of the event were: Planet MEDIA, the Ecocenter “Zapovedniki” [protected areas], the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, the Clean Seas Foundation, the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute.

The annual and long-loved Primeval Russia Nature Festival held a thematic day which was entirely dedicated to Antarctica. Vyacheslav Fetisov, Deputy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, opened the Antarctic Day with a story about his journey with the UN Ocean Ambassador Lewis Pugh, who became the first person to swim in ice tunnel of the Antarctic ice sheet in January 2020.

The animal photographer Stanislav Zakharov and the world-famous documentary photographer John Weller showed the unusual side of Antarctica to the visitors of the festival - from the point of view of underwater photographers. John Weller even held a master class, sharing his experience of underwater filming. He also talked about how he joined forces with his colleagues to protect the nature of Antarctica.

Specialists of the Institute of Biomedical Problems of the Russian Academy of Sciences talked about a new scientific study in Antarctica that simulates the work of cosmonauts on the surface of the Moon.

The photographer Vladimir Alexeyev shared his experience with the audience. While working on his “Secret of Ice Crystals” project, he decided to check how much Antarctica has changed in the 200 years since its discovery. He sailed to the white continent on board of an ancient 3-mast ship in the footsteps of the brave explorers, and documented the current state of the ice and life on the continent, which is still most uninhabited by humans. This photo story helps us to know Antarctica better and to understand how heavily dependent it is on what is happening on other continents. The Antarctic Day program was organized by the Ecocenter “Zapovedniki” and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition ([*https://fotocult.ru/about/program/20200208/*](https://fotocult.ru/about/program/20200208/))

All-Russian environmental lesson “Discovering Antarctica together”. The lesson was developed jointly by the Ecocenter “Zapovedniki”, the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, the Clean Seas Foundation, the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute. The lesson has been supported by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation.

This lesson is about the feat of the continent’s discoverers. It is also about the continent itself, its structure, geography; about the animal world and the importance of creating marine reserves, about the influence of Antarctica on the World Ocean.

The lesson has been actively used all over Russia. It is designed for a very wide age bracket: from kindergarten to schools and universities. A total of 1083 lessons have been held up to now, in 1059 educational facilities in Russia. 39,500 children have taken part in it so far. An interactive map is available at the lesson website: [*https://заповедныйурок.рф/opening\_antarctica\_together/*](https://заповедныйурок.рф/opening_antarctica_together/). The lesson has been translated into English and Chinese.

At the end of November 2020 Moscow welcomed offline and online guests at the international forum “Days of the Arctic and Antarctic”. The International Environmental Foundation “Clean Seas” and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition organized two events of the Forum – the scientific session “Marine Protected Areas of the Arctic and Antarctic” and the environmental lesson “Discovering Antarctica Together”. The main message of the meeting was eloquently formulated by Maria Gavrilo – Candidate of Biological Sciences, leading researcher of the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute and head of the Open Ocean project. She said that these days everyone should focus on “Turning their ego into eco!” ([*https://cleanseas.ru/novosti/kak-ego-prevratit-v-eko/*](https://cleanseas.ru/novosti/kak-ego-prevratit-v-eko/)).

On December 1, 2020, the premiere of the film “Antarctica: Russia’s Gift to the World” was held online with the support of the Russian Geographical Society. It was timed to coincide with the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica by Russian navigators and the International Day of Antarctica. The film by John Weller, the world-famous documentary photographer and the founder of the Sealegacy is devoted to one of the most pressing problems of our time – the global warming. In the film, scientists talk about the melting of ice, the need to create protected marine areas and protect the world’s oceans. The film was made with the participation of Artur Chilingarov, the First Vice-President of the Russian Geographical Society, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Alexander Makarov, Director of the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute (AARI); Alexey Ekaykin, glaciologist, leading researcher of the AARI Laboratory of Climate Change and Environment; Maria Vorontsova, marine biologist, international expert who participates in meetings of UN conventions; Elena Zharkova, Russian representative in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition ([*https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/sostoyalas-premera-filma-antarktika-dar-rossii-dlya-mira*](https://www.rgo.ru/ru/article/sostoyalas-premera-filma-antarktika-dar-rossii-dlya-mira)).

Unfortunately, the pandemic has affected plans to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the discovery of Antarctica by Russian explorers. Thus, a number of events had to be canceled or postponed to a later date. So, the international conferences “Antarctica 2020” *(*[*https://polarresearch.aari.ru/main.php*](https://polarresearch.aari.ru/main.php)*)* and “Antarctic marine ecosystem futures” *(https://antarcticfutures.org/)* has been postponed to Spring 2022.