

Russians drive from Russia to Canada over North Pole

May 16 2013, by Michel Viatteau

Russian explorers headed home Thursday after proving it is possible to drive from Russia to Canada across the North Pole, in buses with bloated tires over drifting ice, using a pickaxe to clear the way.

Their two-and-a-half-month hitherto untried odyssey aimed to road test the hand-crafted vehicles on ice and water, conduct a few [scientific experiments](#), and bring together a band of adventurers drawn to the vast and pristine Arctic, expedition leader Vassili Ielaguine said during a stopover in Ottawa.

At the "speed of a (farm) tractor" or about 10 kilometers per hour (6.2 miles/h) and carrying three tonnes of donated [diesel fuel](#) and supplies, they traveled more than 4,000 kilometers (2,485 miles) in 70 days from the Russian archipelago Severnaya Zemlya (or Earth North), after being dropped off by a Russian icebreaker, to the pole and then to Resolute Bay in Canada's far north.

Their two bright red vehicles were built around two-liter Toyota [diesel engines](#) and using old parts from prototypes that some of the team had used back in 2009 to drive from Russia to the [North Pole](#) and double back.

During this trip, the seven men came across a handful of [polar bears](#), which "did not appear to be aggressive," said Ielaguine, as well as seals. But it was a group of mustachioed [walruses](#) on the Canadian side that left the biggest impression on the wary travelers.

They also had an opportunity to see "exceptional [aurora borealis](#) light up the entire sky," he said.

At one point "Heaven helped us," said Ielaguine, describing coming upon a wide chasm that appeared too dangerous to cross and almost forced them to take a long detour, risking that they might run out of fuel.

Suddenly the ice floes shifted beneath their feet and closed over the [open waters](#) ahead of them. They kicked the vans in gear and drove, but barely two minutes after crossing to the other side the gap opened up again.

Although the vehicles' fat tires would keep them afloat, Ielaguine said: "We don't like falling in the water, because you have to clean the suspension, which gets completely covered in ice."

In such emergencies, a rope is tied between the vehicles allowing one van to drag the other out of danger.

Similarly, the trekkers never walked alone on the ice because falling through a patch of thin ice into the icy waters of the Arctic Ocean wearing heavy parkas would mean certain death, as they would be unable to climb out before paralyzing hypothermia set in.

In Resolute Bay, they were given a warm welcome, and a garage to store their trucks while the team flew home to rest and prepare for another leg of their grand adventure.

The vehicles are to be retrieved next February and driven West across the Bering Strait and back to Russia.

Dubbed "Iemelia" after a lazy character in a Russian fable who travels on a magic stove the vehicles could eventually see commercial success.

When he arrives in Moscow, Ielaguine said he is meeting with investors interested in manufacturing them.

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