

The air is filled with the scent of pine. The forest stands on sand and quickly takes up the moisture from the ice and snow still melting in the ravines. Summer proper has not yet arrived, and the thickets exhale cold air. For this reason, one senses all the more acutely the virgin state of nature in these parts and the concern about its fate expressed by the local ecology groups. Already, we are travelling along the kimberlite pipe, diamonds lie below us. And among them are lilac-coloured diamonds, the first ever seen on Earth.

We make a sharp left turn to enter the geologists' camp. A few moments later I meet A.I. Ivanov, head of the 17th Expedition of the Nevskoe Geological Production Association. Ivanov is young and Intelligent, and he speaks unhurriedly about the pipelines they have discovered (theirs account for three of the five) while we await V.A. Medvedev, the local "patriarch". Valerii Anatolevich was on the verge of giving up his life as a prospector and had secured himself housing and a warm spot in the Ukraine, but people summoned him to these forests, counting on his experience, knowledge and intuition. He responded immediately. And those who had thought of him were not mistaken.

"Let's go, it's not far. We'll show you the diamonds," Medvedev suggested.

Soon we find ourselves in the geologists' living area. Also located here is an experimental laboratory and ore-processing complex protected by a high fence with barbed wire. I can understand these people's excitement - after all, they are showing me what is perhaps the most important and most mysterious of precious stones, rich in legend and lore. And, most importantly, diamonds that they have found. I didn't think I would see so many - you could pick them up in handfuls. And some of them are large.

"Fifteen carats, and this one is also fifteen," explains the head of the special section M.A. Boidalo. "This one is gem quality, this one, too..."