

Over the Abyss... With No Safety Net

(Enisei River Shipping Incurs a Loss)

In all my years as a journalist I can't recall more than five or six instances where an official at any level actually sought a meeting with a correspondent. More often than not it was the other way around. And so it was altogether unexpected when the phone call came in from I. Bulavy, deputy head of the Enisei River Steamship Line.

"Even veterans of the steamship line can't recall such a difficult navigation season," Ivan Antonovich began. "Last summer we seemed to have been hit by every possible disaster. And it was partner enterprises that presented us with the biggest surprises, and that with admirable consistency.

"Let me cite the most recent example. At the scheduled time we brought the fleet out of Dudinka and Igarka. But on the approach to Lesosibirsk it turned out that there wasn't enough water in the shoals at one place to get the ships through.

"The Angara caused us particular concern all summer. This tributary of the Enisei gave the steamship line headaches as never before: lack of water, lack of rafts for towing, and the rafts sitting too low. All of this hampered timber floating operations and put the crews behind in their schedule.

"And then to top it off, as the saying goes, a lock became unserviceable in the second third of October near the Boguchanskaya hydroelectric power station, currently under construction. This was at a time when there were still roughly 18 ships behind the dam. For the week that the fleet sat idle we suffered additional financial losses.

"As a result, we were doing a shaky tight-rope-walking act for the whole navigation period. We were constantly working 'on the edge'. But the worst of it was that we were doing it without any safety net.