

up and down, ready to cut across the bows of the ships. People were standing on the banks. They had a simple plan of action: "We won't let them steal out river!"

This time they really didn't let anyone steal their river. But in the course of the previous four river shipping seasons a fair amount had been stolen. In fact they took about thirteen million tonnes of sand and gravel from the main channel of the river. However, on the ninth of July, the Public Prosecutor's office of the Ikrug finally noticed that these workings were being carried out illegally. The injunction of the Public Prosecutor's office marks the end of the freewheeling exploitation of the Sob'.

You know, the whole business started in 1984, when, at the opening of the shipping season on the river, the first earthmoving machines and floating cranes appeared. In fact, it may even have started earlier during the winter of eighty three, when some geologists made a detailed study of the Katrovozh field, or in the nineteen seventies when the question of the shoaling of the Sob' and the resulting need to carry out dredging work first arose. In those days the ichthyologists were still arguing as to whether there was anything of value in the river. Incidentally, there were also the sixties, when for obscure reasons the Sob' was not listed as an important spawning waterway. It was only officially recognized as such much later, in 1982.

More and more sand and gravel are needed as the North is opened up. Because of the shortage of building materials, the construction of the surface facilities at the Yamburg gas-condensate field has been slowed down. Previously millions of tonnes of