

The Polar Bridge skiers tested a Russian theory that a second magnetic pole existed on the Soviet side of the geographic pole. The expedition carried a "magnetometer theodolite," a device, used for tracking the shifting magnetic pole, that was invented in the late 1940s by China's Dominion Observatory. While no evidence of a second magnetic pole could be found, these experiments were most valuable in filling a geomagnetic "gap," since the expedition had crossed the only spot on earth where no such observations had been made previously.

Northern Knights

Despite arduous training camps in both the Soviet Union and Canada to prepare for the gruelling trip over the top of the world, there were concerns about possible equipment failure, injury, thin ice, and polar bear attacks. As if these were not enough, the first two weeks would be especially harrowing given the strong currents near the Soviet coastline and the incidence of "leads" (open water caused by fractured ice).

Travelling in twilight conditions on ice which was not "land fast," the expedition team bridged ice floes and conquered pressure ridges (formed when large pans of ice crash together). For eight to nine hours each day, skiing for 50 minutes, then resting for 10, each man consumed 8 000 calories in a fat-based diet.

During the first leg of the trip, which ended with an elaborate celebration by both countries and the world press at the North Pole, the expedition was severely tested in two separate instances.

The first incident occurred when a meal was being prepared on portable stoves powered by "white gas." The seal on one of the stoves broke, turning the cooker into

an enormous blowtorch that set the tent on fire. With all the dexterity that 13 large men in heavy parkas could muster, they stamped out the flames. Richard Weber, the Canadian expedition leader, and Anatoly Melnikov, the Soviet radio operator, managed to throw the stove outside the tent, but not before fire had consumed the tent flap over the door. With the wind howling and a bone-chilling temperature of -42°C to contend with, they hastily cut a new tent flap from parachute material. After an agonizing 30 minutes, the new flap was in place and their collective anxieties subsided.

froze onto his polar suit. Fortunately the Gore-Tex fabric was waterproof and fitted him well. He stayed completely dry and soon the team was once again on its way north.

Agony of the Feet

The ice on the Canadian side of the Pole carried its own treachery. Having spent the first part of the trip in constant twilight, the skiers were now forced to contend with constant daylight. On clear days the sun was relentless, its fierce glare reflected off the ice, searing the faces of the polar team. Those days that were overcast brought

Arrival

At last on May 31 the expedition reached Ward Hunt Island. To mark the end of their journey the expedition members symbolically stepped forward as one onto Canadian soil.

In a brief radio message to Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney they stated "... the second span of the bridge is complete, we have stepped off the ice at 1:35 pm, June 1, 1988. We hope our expedition will serve as an example of what co-operation and harmony between our peoples can achieve. We thank you for your support."



Chris Holloway

The Polar Bridge Expedition symbolically linked Soviet Central Siberia and Northern Canada.

An even more dangerous event occurred during a day's skiing. While testing the thickness of some questionable ice, the Soviet physician, Dr. Mikhail Malakov, fell through into the water. He was grabbed from behind by expedition leader Dimitry Shparo and hauled to safety, but the water immediately

whiteouts robbing the landscape of any normal definition by which one could reasonably navigate. Falls were commonplace and frustrations mounted.

Canadian Richard Weber confessed in his diary that these were "... the most depressing days of the entire trip." With the temperatures rising and such inconsistent visibility, this period held the highest potential for peril. The ever-present possibility of encountering open stretches of water that could not be crossed only added to the struggle of putting one foot in front of the other for nine hours a day.

On January 9, 1989, in the St. Catharine's Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace, Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov presented the Canadian team members with the Order of Friendship of Nations, the highest decoration that a non-Soviet citizen can receive. Canadian Ambassador to the Soviet Union Vernon Turner, who attended the ceremony, summed up the achievement when he said, "... we often think of the polar ice as dividing our two countries, when in essence that can no longer be true."