

"The ice island on which we are working," Sorokin relates, "was discovered in pitch-black darkness on February 8th during a radar sweep. Specialists of the Arctic and Antarctic Scientific Research Institute recommended it to us and calculated where it should be in April. This is dense pack ice that is 4 meters thick. It's an almost circular chunk, 20 kilometers in diameter. In the center of it is a lens of smooth one-year old ice measuring 5 kilometers by 1 kilometer - an almost ready-made air strip."

In mid-March a radio buoy was placed on the surface of this giant ice island. "Smooth one-year old ice" is still not a landing strip. That still has to be made, and the next step was to deliver heavy equipment weighing several tons to a point 1200 kilometers from the Srednii airport.

A tractor could be brought in using a powerful Mi-26 helicopter, but, as the head of the High Latitude Expedition pointed out, this type of transportation would be several times more costly than dropping it from an airplane using cargo parachutes. The EKSPARK (Arctic parachute expedition) technique, which was developed over a number of years by enthusiast Aleksandr Sidorenko, an officer in the All-Union Volunteer Society to Assist the Army, Aviation and Navy (DOSAAF), has now proven its worth. Three organizations offered their services to Sorokin. The best proposal came from "Spetsatom" (a production corporation for robotics and emergency reconstruction work in Chernobyl) of the USSR Ministry of Nuclear Energy. For 150,000 rubles they promised to conduct four trips whereas their competitors had only agreed to three. In the event a tractor was damaged upon landing, the firm guaranteed delivery of a new machine free of charge.