

On that trip we set down along the lower reaches of the Alazeya near the winter station at Kokunya. The snow, bound fast in cruel frost, stamped down and swept clean by gusting winds and malicious snowstorms, did not squeak under the boots, it rang. We warmed ourselves inside the station, built by the Ukagirs - and sipped fragrant tea. Our hosts spoke unhurriedly about their life in the harsh tundra. Ice-covered fish were piled atop a stack of firewood on the outer porch, and there were clumps of blue ice on the station.

"In the winter you can't get water, so we use ice. That's why the tea tastes so good - there's no chlorine in the water," said our hostess.

The aviation detachment also carries out ice reconnaissance and guides sea-going ships. Experienced pilots assess the solidity and thickness of the ice by its colour, hummocks and cracks, although, of course, instruments are also used. In helping the ships set course, the aviators also lead them along the course. In the east they meet the ships at the Chukotka Peninsula and carefully accompany them to the Indigirka. In the west they take the ships under their wing near Severnaya Zemlya, at Mys Kosisty, parting from them at the Bering Strait. Not infrequently, the savage northern wind pushes the ice into shore. It is extremely important to alert seafarers in time.

Recently river-going ships have also been sailing from Tiksi to the Olenek, the Indigirka and the Kolyma. Here even now, in the summer, you can see ice fields any day. Storms rage frequently, but the river motorships cut their way through the icy waves because the crews know that they will be alerted to dangers in good time, the elements will not catch them unawares.