

Geological Prospecting Expedition has been operating on Belyi Island, the vegetation cover on 16% of the island's territory has been totally removed and the deer population has plummeted from 3,500 to 600 head. The northern rivers have lost 30% of their valuable fish species. These are the results today of the initial effort to open up the Yamal Peninsula. What will happen tomorrow?

Let us look at a few extracts from a recent statement by V. Melnikov, Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Vice-President of the International Association for the Study of Permafrost, and Director of the Academy of Sciences' Institute for Northern Development Problems, published in a Tyumen' regional youth newspaper in August: "The use of caterpillar all-terrain vehicles on the Yamal Peninsula threatens disaster..." Dr. Melnikov goes on to list the reasons for his concern: "The natural complexes here are very unstable even without human interference. Highly active cryogenic processes, especially thermoerosion, thermokarst, and soil creep determine the high natural mobility of the peninsula's generally gently-sloping surface. Some slopes are constantly sliding downward, while others may remain immobile for years and then suddenly slip, exposing icy subsoil. Ravines grow and branch out very quickly, and small puddles turn into lakes." Finally, he remarked: "Once the thin protective layer over the ice masses, which is unable to withstand the slightest mechanical action, is removed, the way is wide open to increasingly active processes penetrating to great depths with unpredictable consequences."

Sergey Zalygin's opinions on environmental questions are widely respected; he was the first to oppose the notorious 'project of the century' -