

At The Limits Of The Possible

SHMIDT ISLAND, SEVERNAYA ZEMLYA  
ARCHIPELAGO. The northwest extremity of Shmidt Island in the archipelago of Severnaya Zemlya. 4 March. 12:50 Moscow time. Temperature minus 37 degrees. The expedition "Arktika", organized by Ekonomicheskaya gazeta and the Moscow branch of the Geographical Society of the USSR Academy of Sciences, has set off for the North Pole.

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The difference between this expedition and previous expeditions is its autonomous nature - during the entire trip there will be no air support. There is enough food for 55 days. During that period the group, headed by Vladimir Chukov, expects to reach the top of the world and demonstrate that it is possible to survive under extreme conditions.

In 1987 this group, consisting of ten people, left the same archipelago, Svernaya Zemlya. But the polar barrier did not fall to them at that time. At 88 degree north latitude they had to stop because one of the members of the group fell ill. Only 180 kilometres of terrain (and not the most difficult at that) remained to the recalcitrant Pole-a mere ten days' march.

And now a fresh attempt to reach the top of the world. It seems as though on this day the Arctic has decided to give "Arktika" a gift: The usual blizzard is absent and visibility is excellent. But everyone is concerned about a large patch of open water. How long will it delay the group? It's quite possible that the expedition may have to "retreat" west to get around the water. And only then go north toward the Pole.