

MINERAL RESOURCES AND MINING

Europe's First Diamond Deposit Discovered in Russian North

There was a moment when Napoleon's power might have begun to crumble had the Emperor not received a loan, for which he pledged his own diamond-the "Pitt".

I was to be met at Archangel airport by a man who is sitting on a diamond operation worth billions of dollars. As I was flying there I was wondering just who had found it necessary to conceal information about the fabulous riches discovered in this ancient coastal land. In a region where, in the past, you couldn't find poor peasants, the villages have become deserted and are falling into ruin. A reverse migration has developed - from the White Sea region to Central Russia. Those who departed their native region never even suspected that they were leaving behind a jewel of a land, in the literal sense. If the people had known the whole story, maybe they would not have given up their comfortable perch and would have waited for the bad times to pass. But what would have been the use, given that the geologists' telephones were bugged and they were forbidden to speak about the precious stones they had found. "The KGB made their dissatisfaction known to us when we forgot that," said G.I. Luchnikov, a leading diamond geologist for the "Arkhangelskgeologiya" Association.

I don't know what's going on in our country. What kind of masters of the land are we? If we really were the masters we wouldn't be keeping the diamonds in the ground while pennies are jingling in our tattered trousers. The Australians discovered diamonds at the same time in their country and are already developing them to the utmost. It has been more than ten years since the geologists E.M. Verichev and A.F. Stankovskii discovered a rich "vein" on a hot summer's day in the steep bank of the Mel River - the water had receded and the vein lay exposed. Lady Fortune was smiling... No matter what else you make of it, this was one of the discoveries of the century, deserving of the most prestigious award.