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Barnstormers recount Siberia travails
By TRACY CONNOR

NEW YORK, Aug. 30 (UPI) — Using a mix of old and new technology, a group of American and British explorers have returned from a 20-day barnstorming expedition along the northern fringes of Siberia.

The group, which also included nine Russians, touched down in 14 arctic cities in mid-July, using two decades-old biplanes for transport and sophisticated equipment for communicating with the United States.

Ron Davies, 74, who works for the Smithsonian Institute and studies the history of airlines, said at a news conference at New York's Explorer Club Tuesday that the driving force behind the expedition was an interest in the former Soviet Union.

"It was there, so we decided to do it," he said. "It's bigger than the 50 states, traverses 11 time zones and 3,500 miles of our route was north of the Arctic Circle and even any tree lines."

Shane Lundgren, 33, the expedition leader and a pilot, said, "We've all seen pictures of Russia — Red Square and Boris Yeltsin — but Russia's a huge country and I don't think we get a very good picture of what's going on behind Moscow."

The 13 members of the expedition flew in two 1947 Antonov An-2 biplanes, single-engine craft with fixed landing gear and the ability to take off in 200 feet, Lundgren said. When the battery died, they hand-cranked the propeller, he said.

Davies said the advantage of using the biplane was the spontaneity of the trip, which started in Moscow July 8 and ended July 27 in Magadan. "Many of the people in the villages were quite surprised to see anyone," he said.

The travelers smoothed the way by doling out bottles of Absolut vodka, eating native food like venison and raw fish and showing off the fancy equipment.

The expedition brought along a Kodak digital camera, a Magnavox satellite telephone, a global positioning system from Trimble Navigation and an Apple laptop computer.

Eric Treisman, an attorney and freelance writer, went along to cover the trip for Wired magazine, sending daily dispatches to the United States.

Bryan-Brown recalled that the Siberians were nonchalant about the technology. When he was setting up the satellite telephone in Farika, a small fishing village, one fisherman walked up to him and said, "I'm sure Moscow will be sending us one of those in a few days."

Lundgren said the expedition cost \$100,000, paid for out of his own pocket. The group is contemplating another trip next year, possibly to the North Pole or Mongolia.

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