

Expedition Anadyr 2011 – Trip Summary

The Beginning: Anadyr group first met in Mrs. Whaley's classroom to discuss the National Park Service grant given to West High School to take a small group of willing students across the Bering Strait to study environmental impact in **Anadyr, Russia**. Anadyr is a remote coastal town only accessible by plane. The estuary surrounding Anadyr has been classified an **Important Bird Area** and remains essential habitat for many migrating bird species. We would be researching and producing a three part project. We would be surveying local **bird populations** and measuring the release of **Carbon Dioxide** gas from the tundra, as well as making a survey of **tundra vegetation**. Our group would collect **stories** from the locals and natives and gain their perspective on how climate change affects day-to-day life.

We hoped to raise awareness about **climate change** and encourage active protection of the tundra and estuary environments. Although the people in our group came from different backgrounds, we were all **excited** to collaborate with the Russian high school students in Anadyr. Four of the teens in our group had been taking Russian: Lizzie Bjorklund, Zoë Danner, Thomas Sawden, and Natasha Adler, not to mention the Russian teacher, Mrs. Whaley. Sarah Warnock of Alaska Geographic, Sarah's son, Noah Warnock, Mariah Savoie, and Rachelle Russo would also be going for the cultural exchange. They

would be **relying** upon the Russian students for help understanding the locals and the culture.



We met at the Ted Stevens international airport at 4:30 am, exceedingly **tired** and unprepared for a long journey. We arrived in Nome in the early afternoon and spent a few hours walking around downtown, seeing the sights and gaining knowledge on the town's local history. We took a cab ride out to Safety Sound to see **Muskox** and watch biologist do bird surveys on the tundra. A few hours later we headed back to Bering Air to load up our chartered plane and begin the short hop across the Bering Sea.

The flight was a remarkably

short two hours, made **pleasant** by the spectacular **ice sheets** below and the slowly approaching Asiatic land mass ahead. We arrived twenty two hours into the future.

Thursday, May 26th

The plane landed in Anadyr's partially **military** airport and we waited for twenty minutes or so as Russian customs agents checked our visas and passports. We were led through a long and winding hall, ending at a small room where we filled out compact immigration cards. We then had to pass a long,



silent, and extremely uncomfortable security checkpoint where militarized customs agents filled out papers and stared intently at us.

Finally, we stepped out into the **drizzly** Russian afternoon. We piled into taxis which brought us to the edge of the Anadyran River. We would be crossing in **Padushkas**, large fan-powered boats with inflatable bottoms enabling them to skip and skim over the treacherous sea ice. The trip across took roughly twenty minutes, and before we knew it, the city of **Anadyr** was in sight. After a short drive, we ended up at the **Lyceum**, a local school that would be hosting us for the next two weeks.



Our rooms were small but comfortable. Rachele, Zoë, and Lizzy shared one room, Aviva, Natasha, and Mariah occupied another, and Noah and Thomas stayed across the hall. After settling in, we were fed a meal of Russian-style cafeteria food, which consisted of borscht, **compote**, and Russian bread. We then proceeded to a fairly large computer lab to become acquainted with Russian Lyceum students. All of them smiled nervously and laughed among themselves as we filed into the room. The English teacher, **Natalia Vladmirovna** had us play name games with the Russian students we would get to know so well over the next two weeks. . After a few hours of games, we were led into the cafeteria (or canteen, as they called it) and fed **goulash** with buckwheat, onion salad, and **compote** for dinner. At about 7:30 we fell into bed, exhausted.

Friday, May 27th

At eight the next morning, we were led by Dasha to the canteen for a breakfast of **square** eggs and **delicious** Russian bread, all washed down with a dark sweet tea. Thomas and Noah's room soon became established as the main hang-out spot, as it had the best lighting (the window faced east), and the best atmosphere. Following our rest, we teamed back up with the Russians for a guided tour of Anadyr.

As we walked out of the building, Ms. Whaley paired each American with a Russian guide, whom they got to know fairly well during the three-hour tour. Hospitals, schools, and apartment buildings lined the main streets, splashed with a vibrant variety of colors, adding a vivid charm to the partially decrepit structures. Our Russian companions all spoke excellent English, making communication between parties fluid. Zoë, Thomas, Natasha, and Liz all enjoyed talking with their guides in Russian and trying to improve their language skills. Following the tour, we returned to the lyceum and ate a lunch of salmon soup, rice with beets and beef, and bread and **compote**.



Later, back at the Lyceum, we played **charades** with the Russians, which turned out to be surprisingly fun given the language barrier. At 6:00, we ate dinner in a fairly small kitchen on the third floor of the lyceum, where we were always served by a charming Russian woman, the "house mother" for the entire

school. After dinner, Lizzy, Noah, Natasha, and Thomas went for a walk, and Aviva, Zoë and Mariah went for a run.

Saturday, May 28th

Breakfast the next morning was interesting, consisting of a thick white porridge filled with cheese and served with **hot chocolate** and bread.

Later we strolled (Russians do a lot of that, as most of them don't own cars) down to the local college where students go to learn technical skills. At the college, we attended a native dancing and poetry concert, which was very interesting to compare to the native Alaskan dances we were familiar with. The show was followed by a tour of the coastal section of Anadyr where we saw the shipping ports, many boats, and a Soviet-Era statue of Lenin. Dinner was composed of a chicken and potato stew with a hot pink beet salad. Bed at 11.



Sunday, May 29th

The following day, we were woken up earlier than usual to walk to the college for breakfast. However, the breakfast memo had not arrived, so we returned hungry to the Lyceum. Oatmeal, apples, and granola bars for breakfast! That morning, Sarah explained the structure of the project. There are two general groups: research and production. The production team consisted of Zoë and Liz

taking pictures and videos and Natasha and Mariah writing, and the research team featured Thomas and Rachelle doing carbon readings and Noah and Aviva watching birds. After breakfast, at 9:10, we left the Lyceum to go to the **tundra** to gather information on bird and plants. The weather shifted to our liking, with bright blue skies, no clouds to be seen, and nice, warm temperatures. We left the small town behind and walked along the dusty road. We walked for about an hour until we found a suitable spot to sit down and listen to a lecture on tundra plants and birds. Sarah told us that disturbed tundra could take at least one hundred years to completely come back to its pure natural state. We squished across the mud and found a small hill that was out of the wind to continue our observations. Noah set up the scope to spot **birds**, while we searched the sky for movement and listened to Sarah talk to us about our projects. We arrived back in the Lyceum in time for lunch and project time with the Russians. Dinner was at the college.

Monday, May 30th

We rose bright and early at 6:00 in the morning to get out on the tundra on time. At 7:00 everyone trooped out and began the long walk to the tundra. We completed bird and plant surveys throughout the estuary. After several hours, we headed back to town to take a tour of the local art school. A woman took us on a tour through a school, showing us pictures and bone carvings all done by young students aged 5-18.





She showed us remarkable works of art done by young children and proceeded to show us a bone carving demonstration done by one of the teachers. In less than 20 minutes, he produced a smooth, polished, and beautiful work of art. After the tour, we had lunch then rested in our rooms for an hour before our dance lesson.

Our instructor was a native Chukotkan named **Vlad**, whom we saw at the concert a few days before. He taught us to dance like whales, shrimp, waves, and even seaweed. Although we all felt **ridiculous**, we had a great time anyway. After the dancing lesson, we

hurriedly ate dinner and rushed upstairs to put on warm clothing for our trek into the tundra. We were going to be interviewed by the local television station and **broadcast** all over Chukotka. They wanted to capture us in action, and before we knew it we were out on the tundra being filmed taking CO2 measurements and looking at birds. After working, Zoë, Thomas, and Noah were interviewed by news reporters as the rest of us piled into the van. We spent the rest of our evening talking.

Tuesday, May 31,

We woke up early and had oatmeal for breakfast. Our long trek to the tundra seemed shorter than usual, as our legs were getting strong from all the hiking and stair climbing that comes along with living in Anadyr. There was an unusual amount of heavy fog obscuring our view of the horizon, making bird watching much more difficult. We shared snacks and huddled with the Russians, packing together like **penguins** to conserve body heat before continuing on our way to set of plant surveys and CO2 test sites. Soon after we finished, the fog lifted and the town suddenly appeared out of nowhere. When we got back we had an hour until our final dance lesson with Vlad.



At 7:00 we gathered into the gym for some sports with the Russians, led by an ex-Soviet Olympic coach. We played games like volleyball and basketball, and had a blast. We invited the Russians to tea in our rooms, but there was no tea! We improvised and had American candies and chocolate instead. We talked for an hour then crashed out in our beds as soon as they left.

Wednesday, June 1,

We finally got to sleep in until 7:30 again and had breakfast in the cafeteria. Directly after breakfast we headed out to the tundra again with the Russians. At **Ruff Point** we split into two teams, one for bird observation the other for plant surveying and CO2 testing. After we completed our jobs we huddled

together for warmth while sharing a **magnificent** lunch with Russian tea, bread, salami, cheese, Russian candy, tea cookies, apples, and piroshky (Russian jelly cookies).



We traipsed back to Anadyr and went to the school of arts for a music concert. We were treated to songs played on a variety of instruments, from guitars to accordions. At 8:00 was the **disco**, where lights flashed, songs (both in English and Russian) blared, and people danced up and down to the beat. We danced with our Russian friends until 10:00. We all came upstairs, exhausted.

Thursday, June 2,

We woke up at 7:40 and had breakfast, and went to our Russian lesson at 9:00. At 10:30 we went to the museum for a tour with Natalia. The exhibits there had many artifacts from the Chukotka people and told a lot about their history. After lunch we had “Games” with the Russians, and competed with each other in groups of Americans and Russians. Later we worked on our project in the lab and listened to a native lady named Fatimah tell us about her experiences surviving in the Chukotkan tundra.



Friday, June 3, and Saturday, June 4

Both days were quieter, and spent mostly on the project and out on the tundra for a last chance to collect data. We had a nice tour at a magnificent Russian church, and another at the Children’s Creativity Palace, where they showed us native dances and offered us a traditional tundra tea with food from the land – **berries**, native leaves soaked in **seal** oil, and other actually delicious treats. The next day we got together with the Russians and had a cooking lesson, where we made crepes stuffed with ham and cheese, apple pastries, ham and **ketchup** pizza, and herring and potato pastries, also delicious. Later we brought the food to the lab and ate our freshly cooked food and played games, both in Russian and English. We quieted down with some tea and Russian sweets, and finished the evening with singing, games, and bed.



Sunday, June 5th

Today was our last day in **Anadyr**. We got up early in the morning to say goodbye to our Russian friends. We took two padushkas across the Anadyr River to the airport. After waiting several hours in the main terminal for our authorization to come through, we climbed onto our Nome-bound plane. We arrived in Nome in the **past**. Several hours

later, we arrived in Anchorage exhausted and glad to be home, yet sad at leaving Chukotka.