

Soviet Antarctic Expedition Transcontinental Flights 1961-1967

Synopsis 2-frame Exhibit Ross Marshall 2025

This exhibit began its philatelic journey as 1-frame in 2006 and was shown at FIP exhibitions in Israel 2008 and Philakorea 2009 receiving 83 and 85 points. In 2010 at Chicagopex it received Vermeil award. It was then incorporated into a 4-frame then 5-frame Transcontinental Airmail Exhibit which received the ASPP Grand award at AmeriCover 2016.

It had always been my intention to return to an exhibit based on these two experimental flights. Material is exceptionally scarce, and it has been only by considerable research in Russian expedition reports than enabled the exhibit to be displayed in 2-frames with the addition of relevant material for 1965-1967.

The exhibit has Three Sections:

- **First Experimental Flight 1961-1962 Moscow – Antarctica - Moscow**
- **Second Experimental Flight 1963-1964 Moscow – Antarctica – Moscow**
- **Flight Leningrad – Perth – Leningrad with Ship support 1965-1967**

It is noteworthy that the Arctic & Antarctic Research Institute responsible for the Soviet Antarctic Expeditions paused flights after each experimental flight and adapted the arrangements based on the knowledge gained.

The most obvious change in the exhibited material relates to the aircraft used on the Second Experimental flight. The Commemorative datestamp and the 1963 stamp commemorating the event has profiles of 2 different aircraft – one an IL-18, the other a Tu-154. My research discovered that, in fact, the Tu-154 proved to be unsuitable in testing, and was replaced by another IL-18.



These flights, between 33,000 & 49,000km depending on the route - are among the longest flights documented. The exhibit details each Experimental flight with flown covers with supporting commemorative and other relevant material. The flights from Leningrad to Perth and return have not been documented previously. The exhibit documents the experimental period with chartered Aeroflot aircraft up to SAE-12 when commercial flights to Perth commenced. Test flights restarted in 1980 to the Molodezhnaya Station.

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Soviet Antarctic Explorers, through the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute [AARI], had been discussing developing air routes to Antarctica since September 1955, but the logistics were challenging. The aim was to test the possibility of using heavy turboprop aircraft to establish reliable air connections for the rapid deployment of members of the Soviet Antarctic Expeditions and to test heavy lift aircraft with large cargo capacity. These flights, between 33,000 & 49,000km depending on the route - are among the longest documented.

This 2-frame Exhibit details AARI involvement in the development of air routes and transport options with the two experimental flights and lessons learned with resulting changes to aircraft and routes from the first experimental flight in 1961 to the last in January 1967 after which commercial flights rather than Aeroflot contracted flights were used. Mail carried and souvenir covers are used to demonstrate the story. Flown covers are of exceptional rarity with very few examples known – shown with double border & explanation.

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"Du Globe Terrestre"

“*Ancien Continent*” Fig LXXXVI p 231
by Alain M Mallet Paris edition 1683

Antarctica is “*Terres Incognues*”

**Circa 1657. Earliest map showing
Moscow and Antarctica**

State of Knowledge as seen by incomplete
mapping of Australian Continent

References:

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