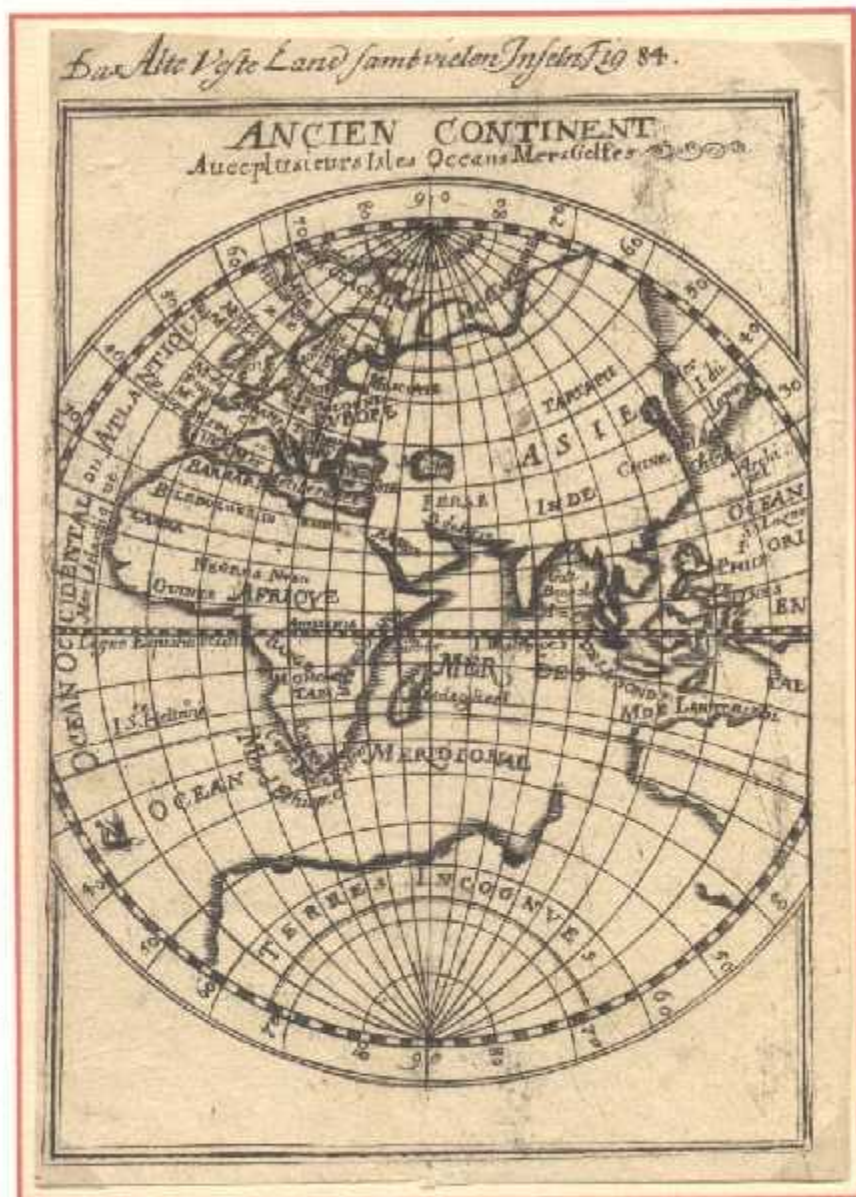


Experimental Flights Moscow – Antarctica – Moscow 1961-1962 & 1963-1964

This Exhibit details the First and Second **Inter-Continental Flights** between Moscow and the main Soviet Antarctic station - the Mirnyy Observatory - using flown covers and some supporting material. Mail carried on both these experimental flights is of exceptional rarity with very few examples recorded. These flights – **49,000km** - are among the longest documented. The 1961-1962 flight material is on pages 2-11 with the 1963-1964 material on pages 12-16.

At the Third Conference of the Special Committee of the International Geophysical Year [IGY] in September 1955 in Brussels, the Soviet Antarctic Explorers announced their plan to organise an experimental flight from the USSR to Antarctica. The main tasks of the flight were to verify the possibility of using heavy turboprop airplanes to establish a regular air route to Antarctica and to organise and arrange methods for scientific research using heavy aircraft.

The decision to bring the wintering-over scientists and technicians from Moscow to Antarctica and return by air would be one of the most spectacular feats of Soviet aviation. The planned route was Moscow – Tashkent – New Delhi – Rangoon – Jakarta – Darwin – Sydney – Christchurch – McMurdo Station – Mirnyy – a distance of **24,500 Km** each way.



The **First Trans-Continental Flight** involved IL-18 and AN-10 aircraft November 1961 to February 1962.

A **Second Trans-Continental Flight** on the same route with IL-18 and Tu-154 aircraft took place 1963-1964.

References:

The Moscow-Mirnyy-Moscow Flights of 1961 and 1962, ПОЧТА #24 P6-19,
A R Marshall

Moscow-Mirnyy-Moscow Flights 1963-1964, ПОЧТА #32 P38-44,
A R Marshall

Soviet Antarctic Expeditions 1961-1963; 1962-1964, A V Nudelman,
[Translated from Russian]

Hemisphere Map:

"Ancien Continent" Fig 84 by Mallet German edition 1688 after the French edition 1683.

Antarctica is "Terres Ingognues"

State of knowledge as seen by incomplete mapping of Australian Continent is circa 1657.

First Experimental Inter-Continental Flight Commemoration Datestamp Flight Moscow – Antarctica 1961. Airmail to New Zealand

Two long-range turboprop aircraft were allocated. The IL-18D was fitted as a passenger plane while the AN-10 was for cargo. Extra fuel tanks were fitted giving them a reserve of 22,000 kg sufficient for a flight range of 7,000Km. The maximum take-off weight for the IL-18 was 61 tons and 60 tons for the AN-10. The designers re-equipped the AN-10 with wheels and skis that proved satisfactory on test flights north of the Arctic Circle. At the same time a group at Mirnyy searched for suitable sites for airfields. 33 persons flew from Moscow to Mirnyy.

Commanded by Alex Afanasyev [Commander of Northern Sea Route] and Mark Shevelev [Civil Polar Aviation]. Pilots: [IL-18] Alex Polyakov [Hero of the Soviet Union] and Mikhail Stupishin; [AN-10] Boris Osipov and Pytor Rogov. Polyakov and Osipov were awarded Hero of Socialist Labor with the investiture of the Order of Lenin. All crew members received awards – Order of Lenin, Red Banner of Labor or Badge of Honor having “*demonstrated courage and mastery of aviation engineering.*”



Illustrated Commemorative Datestamp “Supersonic Flight Moscow-Antarctica 15-XII-1961 – 24 XII” at Moscow in black. [The flight did not arrive at Mirnyy as anticipated on 24.XII.1961 due to poor weather].

Additional 10k stamp cancelled Moscow 24.12.61, boxed “International” and PAR AVION marking indicating correct airmail [16k] to New Zealand. This was not carried on the experimental flight but was held at Moscow GPO and dispatched only after confirmation that the flight had arrived safely in Antarctica.

Only recorded use Commemorative
datestamp on mail to New Zealand

Moscow-Mirnyy – IL-18 Annotated Flight Cover 1961; AN-10 Mirnyy-Vostok-Mirnyy

The IL-18D and AN-10 airplanes left Moscow December 15, 1961 via Tashkent, New Delhi, Rangoon, Jakarta, Darwin, Sydney, Christchurch, McMurdo Station for Mirnyy. It was the intention to fly direct Christchurch-Mirnyy but with poor weather predicted, a decision was made to land at McMurdo and an experienced American pilot joined each plane.

The planes landed at McMurdo Station December 24th but were delayed by storm conditions at Mirnyy. The AN-10 landed at Mirnyy December 25th with the IL-18 arriving December 27th, 1961. Total flight of **25,045 Km** in around 45 hours flying time.



"Transcontinental Flight Moscow – Mirnyy Antarctica by Aircraft "IL-18" and "AN-10"

*"ANTARTICA Observatory Mirnyy via
Tashkent, India, Burma, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, McMurdo Station Antarctica"*

Transit Cancellations:

Moscow-340 15.12.61; Tashkent-28 16.12.61; Eastern Court
New Delhi 18.12.61; Darwin NT Aust 20.12.61;
Potts Point NSW Aust [Sydney] 21.DE 61; Telegraph Office Christchurch 22.DE.61
New York 17038 McMurdo Station DEC 25 1961. Mirnyy 27.12.61.

Carried on IL-18.

Continental Cancels :[on reverse]: Antarctic Expedition [Mirnyy] 1.1.62; Komsomolskaya [date unclear]; Vostok 13.1.62 [First of two AN-10 test flights on Skis to Vostok]

One of 3 recorded Moscow – Mirnyy Transit Covers

Sydney - Mirnyy: Mirnyy - Sydney

One of Six Covers



Flight Cover annotated:

"First Flight U.S.S.R to Mirny-Antarctica via Australia and New Zealand and return to U.S.S.R."

Signed "Shevelev" Head of the Flight Group and Head of USSR Civil Polar Aviation

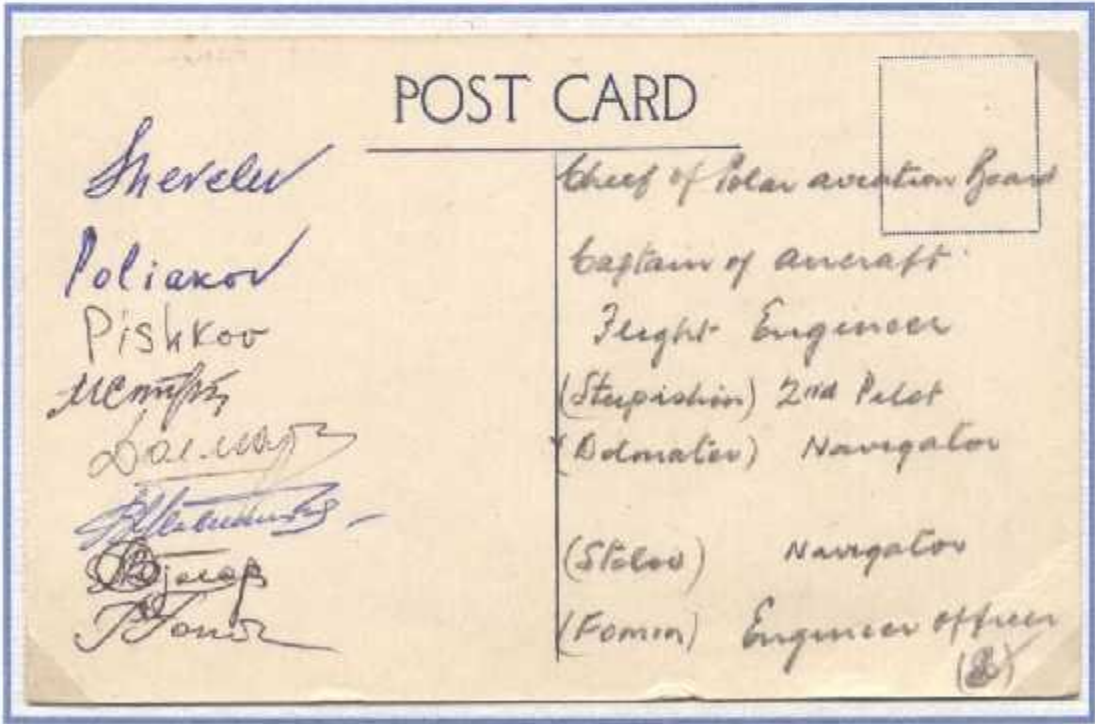
Sydney Airport 22 DE 61 -
Departure date for Christchurch

Mirnyy 25.1.62 [Moscow time]
Departure of Return flight

International Airport Sydney
27 JA 62 - arrival of return flight
from Christchurch.

Postcard signed by some of Crew of the IL-18 Aircraft

Only example known



1933 Faith in Australia Souvenir Postcard [signed by Ulm] used to commemorate the first Russian flight to Australia. Signatures of M I Shevelev - Head of the Flight Group; N N Poliakov [Polyakov] - Captain of IL-18; A S Pishkov - Flight engineer; M P Stupishin - Co-Pilot; M A Dolmatov - Navigator; P I Goncharov - mechanic; V A Stulov - 2nd navigator; P M Fomin - Flight engineer. [Missing are V V Menshikov - Radio; N V Romanov - engineer]

IL-18 Landing at Christchurch from Sydney

The IL-18 departed Sydney for Christchurch December 22nd 1961 at 0656 hours [Moscow Time]. The 2120 Km flight took 3 hours 43 minutes under favourable meteorological conditions. Throughout the flight the airplane maintained constant radio contact with Mirny Station and with Soviet vessels in the Southern Oceans. The IL-18 carried a crew of 10 with 16 scientists and journalists, landed at Christchurch International airport at 3.56pm before a crowd of 2000, the **first Soviet plane to land in New Zealand.** [Harkess Photograph]



IL-18 at Mirny Antarctica

"Mirny in Antarctica I, 1962"

[Shevelov Photograph]

The 1800m airstrip at the Mirny Station was prepared over 12 days and was ready December 7th but snow continued to cause problems. A reserve 2300m airstrip at Bunger Oasis was prepared in case the Mirny airstrip was closed. The flight plans were changed and the planes flew to McMurdo. Blizzard conditions again were a problem. The Mirny airstrip was cleared for the AN-10 on December 25th with the IL-18 covering the 2560Km in 4 hrs 25m on December 27th



AN-10 Departing Christchurch for Antarctica

The AN-10 aircraft landed at Christchurch International airport from Sydney at 4.38 PM on December 22nd just 42 minutes after the IL-18 had touched down. The flight from Sydney had taken 4 hrs 5 minutes. This aircraft had been re-engineered to use both wheels and skis. The wings being positioned above the fuselage made this aircraft an ideal candidate for ski-equipped activity on the ice. The AN-10 left Christchurch for McMurdo Station December 23rd covering the 2560km in 7hrs and 50 minutes. Both planes were delayed at McMurdo by blizzard conditions at Mirnyy. The weather cleared sufficiently for the AN-10 to depart December 25th arriving 4 hrs 55 minutes later. The crew of the AN-10 then assisted in the work on the airfield so the IL-18 could fly in.



AN-10 being readied for take-off Christchurch [Harkess Photograph]

The engineers then fitted the AN-10 with skis and began a successful series of short test flights in the Mirnyy region. The **first continental test flight** was a 6-hour return trip [1410km each way] to Vostok Station January 13th 1962 where seismic equipment was unloaded. The following day a **second continental test flight** Mirnyy - Vostok - Mirnyy was made transporting 4 tons of diesel fuel and other freight.

The **third continental test flight** was a 400km journey from Mirnyy to the reserve airfield at Bungee Oasis transporting a total of 20 tons of fuel in barrels to create a fuel reserve to top up the tanks of both the IL-18 and AN-10 on the return flight to Moscow via Christchurch.

Members of the aviation group who were transported to Vostok on the AN-10 flights and who remained to install equipment, returned to Mirnyy on IL-12 flights on January 17th, 19th and 20th 1962. Covers with **Vostok** date of 20.1.60 were returned by A A Afanas'ev on the last flight.

McMurdo – Mirny Souvenir Cover

Yuri Avsjuk participated in the epic flight Moscow – Antarctica – Moscow. He is listed in “*Soviet Antarctic Expeditions 1961-1963*” as “*Yu. N Avsyuk junior scientific associate, gravimetrist*” As a personal souvenir he created this **unique** 1961-1962 flight cover. The signed annotation at the top left translates as:

“All postmarks and cachets were applied in Antarctica during the 1st flight Moscow – Antarctica [1961-62 y]”



US Navy DEC 27 1961 – McMurdo Station [departure of IL-18] McMurdo Station cachets – Task Force 43; First Atomic Reactor for the Antarctic; USARP McMurdo Station with two additional cachets on the reverse.

While at McMurdo the Soviet personnel visited the Atomic power station under construction, examined the scientific laboratories, visited Captain Scott's hut and the New Zealand Scott Base 7km from McMurdo

Komsomolskaya 14.1.62 [date of second AN-10 supply flight to Vostok Station]

Vostok 20.1.62 [reverse] date of last Li-12 flight from Vostok Station

Mirny 25.1.62 [Moscow time] **departure date** of the IL-18D from Mirny on **return flight**.

Yuri Avsjuk was previously a member of SAE-3 as navigator and gravimetrist. He participated in the Traverse to the **Pole of Relative Inaccessibility** and was responsible for determining its exact position.

Mercy Flight IL-18 Mirnyy – McMurdo then 130B McMurdo – Christchurch

While in Antarctica, the IL-18 was involved in the rescue of a critically ill Australian. Alan Newman, at the Australian Base Mawson suffered a cerebral haemorrhage on November 2nd 1961. He had two operations but his condition deteriorated and it was clear that evacuation from Antarctica was required. A ski-equipped Li-2 aircraft from Base Novolazarevskaya flew to Mawson and transferred the patient and his doctor to Mirnyy December 30th where he was stabilised. The IL-18 flew the patient and his doctor to McMurdo Station at 4.30am on January 5th 1962. The Americans had arranged a Hercules 130B to fly them to Christchurch. This left 11pm January 7th arriving at 6.20am on the 8th at Christchurch where the patient was flown to Sydney on a commercial flight.

Carried Christchurch –
Mirnyy Flight.

Antarctic Expedition
1.1.62 [Mirnyy]

IL-18 to McMurdo

Received at Lyttelton
11 JA 62

Carried Mercy Flight



Timaru 18 DE 61

Carried Christchurch –
Mirnyy Flight

Mirnyy 4.1.62.

IL-18 to McMurdo

Received at Timaru
11 JA 62.

Carried Mercy Flight

Three Mercy Flight Covers recorded

Return Flight: Mirnyy – Christchurch Section 1962



Endorsed: "Antarctica-Mirnyy, IL-18, A S Polyakov"

"Antarctica-Mirnyy, AN-10, B S Osipov"

Both placed on aircraft at Christchurch for the Christchurch – McMurdo - Mirnyy leg of the flight from Moscow.
Continental Cancellations: Mirnyy 11.1.62; Komsomolskaya 14.1.62; Vostok 20.1.62 [Li-2 last return flight]

Carried on Mirnyy - Christchurch leg of return flight to Moscow
Antarctic Expedition [Mirnyy] 22.1.62. received at Lyttelton 6.2.62.



Return Flight Mirnyy - Christchurch

On January 24th 1962, both aircraft were farewelled from Mirnyy, the AN-10 at 4pm and the IL-18 20 minutes later. Because of poor ice conditions at Mirnyy, affecting take-off loadings, both planes landed at the ice airstrip at Description Bay in Bunger Oasis [flight time 50min for 400km] to refuel for the 4,950km flight to Christchurch. Time to Christchurch 8hrs 20min [IL-18]; 8hrs 50min [AN-10]. The return route was the same via Sydney, Darwin, Jakarta, Rangoon, New Delhi, and Tashkent to Moscow arriving February 2nd 1962 - 23,725km - 44hrs 34min for IL-18 and 47hrs 40min for AN-10]

Enclosed Letters Mirnyy Antarctica 22.01.62 to Mr Harkess at Lyttelton, New Zealand.

Mirnyy St. Antarctica
22.01.62

Dear Mr Harkess!

The reading of your letter delivered a true pleasure to all participants of the Soviet antarctic expedition.

We will execute your requests much better at the next time if you will use English language.

Your Russian friends.

Леруши, Антарктика
22.01.62

Уважаемый м-р Харкесс!

Интерес Вашего письма доставил всем участникам Советской Антарктической экспедиции истинные удовольствия.

Вам мы просим в следующий раз мы бы хотели более четко, если бы перебрали в англійскому языку.

Ваше русские друзья.

Return Flight Mirnyy – Moscow 1962 [then commercial airmail to New Zealand.]

Both covers cancelled Novolazarevskaya 1.1.62. It is likely, because of date unreliability, that these were carried on the Li-2 aircraft that was involved in the **Mercy Flight** Mawson to Mirnyy on December 30th. Addressed to Timaru New Zealand both have boxed "International" marking, transit cancellation **Moscow-339 5.2.62** and backstamped **Timaru 26 MR 62**. Carried on the return flight Mirnyy to Moscow which landed February 2nd 1962.



**Three Mirnyy – Moscow Flight
Covers Recorded**

Second Experimental Inter-Continental Flight

Moscow – Mirnyy Souvenir Cover. November – December 1963

The First Experimental Flight 1961-1962 was deemed a success and, after evaluation, it was decided to send members of SAE-9 on a **Second Experimental Flight** using IL-18 and Tu-154 aircraft. Pilots: A S Polyakov, M P Stupishin

- **November 10th – December 6th 1963.** Preparation of main airstrip at Mirnyy Observatory.
- **November 20th – 23rd 1963.** Preparation of a standby airstrip at Lake Transcription in the Bunger Oasis area.
- **November 21st 1963.** IL-18 and Tu-154 depart Moscow via Tashkent, New Delhi, Rangoon, Jakarta, Darwin, Sydney, Christchurch, McMurdo Station, Bunger Oasis for Mirnyy.
- **December 3rd 1963.** Aircraft landed at the alternative airstrip at Description Bay, Bunger Oasis on. The new arrivals of SAE-9 were transferred to Mirnyy the same day by Li-2 and IL-14 aircraft
- **December 7th 1963.** The IL-18 and TU-154 flew to Mirnyy



Standard 6k Airmail envelope and additional 6k [Sept 16th 1963 Arctic and Antarctic research] to commemorate the flight with Moscow K-339 Commemorative Datestamp 20-XI-1963;

Moscow-339 20.11.63; Tashkent-28 21.11.63; New Delhi 22.11.63; McMurdo Station cachets on reverse; Mirnyy 3.12.63; Mirnyy 175th Lazarev commemorative cachet; Komsomolskaya 15.1.63

Only Recorded Example

83 men in total; 16 crew; 2 newspapermen; 15 men for Molodezhnaya winter crew; 4 seasonal workers for Molodezhnaya; 23 construction workers for Molodezhnaya; 6 seasonal flight crew; 7 men for the Vostok-Molodezhnaya Traverse; 6 for Mirnyy Station. A F Treshnikov head of Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute; M M Somov SAE-9 Leader; Yu A Khabarov deputy head of Arctic and Antarctic Authority. Aircraft commanders A S Polyakov, M P Stupishin who were also involved with the First Experimental Flight.

Christchurch - Mirnyy, - Christchurch December 1963 - January 1964.

Carried on Christchurch-McMurdo-Bunger Oasis IL-18 Tu-154 Flight then Li-2 aircraft to Mirnyy arrival date 3.12.63 with Antarctic Expedition 3.12.63, Mirnyy cachet.

Komsomolskaya and Vostok cancellations. Deep Freeze US Navy McMurdo Station and US Pole Station cachets. Carried on December 15th 1963 Li-2 flight Mirnyy via Mawson ANARE [18 DE 63] to Novolazarevskaya [25.12.63] with SAE-9 personnel.

Carried on flight Mirnyy - Christchurch and mailed at Bryndwr 7 JA 64 [Christchurch suburb] to Australian address.

One of 2 recorded covers Mirnyy - Christchurch Return Section Flight



Souvenir envelope with Soviet, Australian and New Zealand stamps.

Arrival, Return Mirnyy - Christchurch - Sydney January 1964.

The Il-18 and Tu-154 planes landed in Antarctica December 3rd 1963 [Moscow time] and the SAE-9 personnel were transferred to Mirnyy the same day. The return flight was direct from **Mirnyy** departing **January 3rd 1964** and landing at **Christchurch** in the early hours of January 4th. Departed for **Sydney** the next day where one of the planes had undercarriage repairs following the rough takeoff from Mirnyy. Left for Moscow via Darwin January 7th, 1964.

One of 3 recorded covers Mirnyy - Christchurch - Sydney Flight



Postcard "Soviet Pilot Cosmonauts" issued 2-63 – Yuri Gagarin, Paul Popovich, German Titov and Andrain Nikolaev.
Possibly carried on the flight from Moscow and cancelled on arrival at Mirnyy.

Mirnyy 3.12.63 [Arrival]

Antarctic Expedition 3.12.63 [Mirnyy]

Mirnyy 175th Lazarev cachet

Vostok [red] 1.12.63 Komsomolskaya 64 [at Mirnyy?]

Continental Flight:

Li-2 Flight from Mirnyy via Mawson [1400 Km] and Molodezhnaya [800 km] to Novolazarevskaya [2000 Km] with members SAE-9. **Mawson ANARE 18 DE 63**, **Novolazarevskaya 25.12.63**.

New York 17046 JAN 4 1964 – Military airport at **Wigram**, Christchurch, New Zealand
Christchurch Airport 4 JA 1964.

Sydney International Airport NSW-AUST 7 JA 1964

Return Mirnyy - Christchurch - Sydney January 1964.

The return flight was direct from Mirnyy departing **January 3rd 1964** and landing at Christchurch in the early hours of the 4th. Departed for Sydney the next day where one of the planes had undercarriage repairs following the rough takeoff from Mirnyy. Left for Moscow via Darwin January 7th, 1964.

One of 3 recorded covers Mirnyy - Christchurch - Sydney Flight



Envelope issued as part of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Admiral M P Lazarev – inscribed “Commander of Sloop ‘Mirnyy’ which discovered Antarctica in 1820.” Issued in quantity of 30,000 – sold at 1 kop. Used as flight souvenir.

Mirnyy 1.1.64

Antarctic Expedition 1.1.64 [Mirnyy]

Mirnyy 175th Lazarev cachet

Komsomolskaya 1.1.64 [at Mirnyy?]

New York 17046 JAN 4 1964 – Military airport at Wigram, Christchurch, New Zealand

Christchurch Airport 4 JA 1964.

Sydney International Airport NSW-AUST 7 JA 1964

Moscow - Mirnyy - Moscow 1963-1964.

The return flight of the IL-18 and Tu-154, carrying members from SAE-8, left Mirnyy base on January 3rd 1964 via Christchurch, Sydney, Darwin, Jakarta, Rangoon, New Delhi and Tashkent arriving at Moscow January 11th 1964.

Cover carried **Moscow to Mirnyy** flight and returned on **Mirnyy to Moscow** return flight.
Total distance **49,000km**

**Only Full Flight Cover Moscow - Mirnyy
and Return recorded**



Moscow-Mirnyy Flight:

Aeroflot IL-18 envelope [13/IV-63] with 6k commemorative stamp cancelled with **Commemorative** datestamp **Moscow K-339 20-XI-1963**

Mirnyy-Moscow Flight:

Mirnyy 1.1.64, Komsomolskaya 1.1.64 [datestamp at Mirnyy] received **Moscow K-9 13.1.64**

These Experimental Flights from Moscow to Mirnyy in Antarctica were successful enabling key Soviet scientists to reach Antarctica more rapidly than by ship and proved the value of heavy aircraft in Antarctic research. From the 1964-65 season [SAE-10] scientists travelled by commercial airliner to Perth Western Australia then by ship to Antarctica. More test flights on a route via Africa took place in 1980 and 1981 with a regular air route to Molodezhnaya from 1983.