

# OASIS STATION - Bunger Hills

## Soviet Antarctic Expedition

This exhibit shows many aspects of the Oasis Station from the initial Soviet exploration of the site in 1956 through Soviet and Polish occupation and closure. A wide range of materials illustrate the story: radiogram, telegram, photographs, flight covers, tripod datestamp, souvenir items and 'real' mail.

### Treatment:

This is mainly chronological in 4 sections:

- Exploration Phase
- Soviet Expeditions
- Reactivation & Transfer to Poland
- After Closure

### Importance:

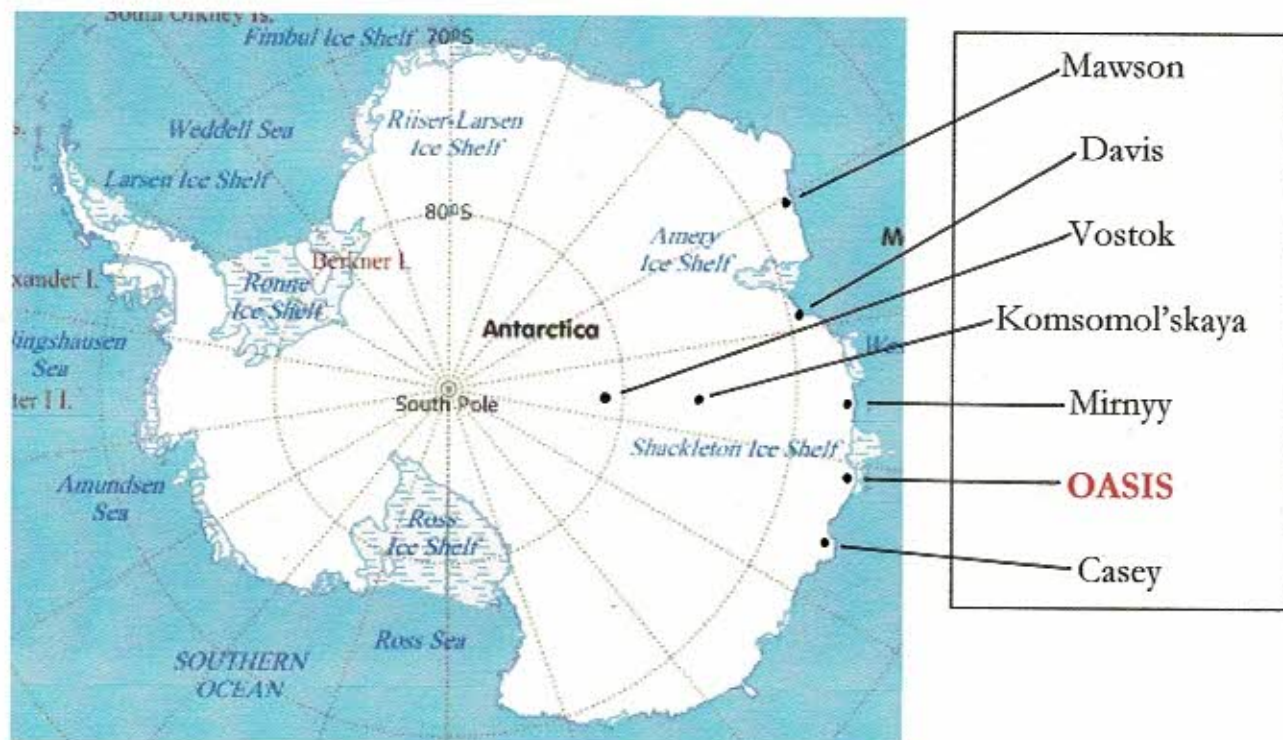
Oasis is in a region of 425km<sup>2</sup> mainly ice free with small lakes, a unique polar environment for research - biological, magnetic, aerological and geological all contributing to the IGY - International Geophysical Year

### Rarity:

This is the only known exhibit on Oasis Station.

Collectors recognise that the Oasis datestamp is the scarcest of all the Soviet Station postmarks.

Based on data collected by the exhibitor over nearly 30 years, I record only 37 examples to date of which about half appear to have entered the postal system. Items that are considered unique have a **red matt**; Items where 5 or less are known have **dark blue matt**



Midway between the Antarctic coastal stations of Casey (Australia) and Mirnyy (Russia), in Queen Mary Land, is an area of rocky outcrops bounded by a plateau and a series of glaciers, and separated from open sea by a permanent ice shelf. Members of the western party of **Mawson's 1911-14 expedition** were the first to sight this area, but were prevented from reaching the hills by extensive crevasses. In **February 1947**, during "Operation Highjump," **Lieut. Commander Bunger** (US Navy) landed a sea-plane on a lake adjacent to these hills, which were subsequently given his name.


**Oasis Station**, 400km from Mirnyy, was selected by the Soviet Antarctic Expedition as a scientific base in **January 1956**, but it was not officially opened until **15 October 1956**. It is located at 66° 01'6"S, 100° 04'5"E, at 29 meters (95 ft) above sea level, in the area of Bunger Oasis, a dry stony, but ice-free location. The frequent hurricane force winds were the reason the area was largely ice-free with construction, maintenance and supply often disrupted.

### Timeline

1956	1957	1958	1959
Exploration + Inauguration SAE-1	SAE-2 summer and winter	SAE-3 summer and winter	Reactivated to Poland & closed

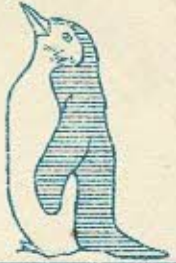
## Exploration Phase

Members of the first Soviet Antarctic Expedition [SAE-1] were interested in the **Bunger Oasis** from the earliest days of their arrival, even as the construction of Mirnyy Station was in progress. On **23 January 1956**, 8 men of different scientific specialities arrived in this region, 400km from Mirnyy, on IL-2 aircraft and a Mi-4 helicopter on reconnoitring inspection. A temporary expeditionary base was established 20 km from the Oasis. After a week of carrying out scientific observations, they flew back to Mirnyy.



Комплексная Антарктическая экспедиция Академии Наук СССР

# РАДИОГРАММА



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ПРИЕМ: *РРР 24/1/56*

ПЕРЕДАЧА:

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МОСКВЫ 71/182 25 23 18 43

Д/в ОБЪ АВСДКУ

ПОЛУЧИЛА БИЛЕТ НА ДВАДЦАТЬ ШЕСТОЕ БРА СДАЛ ВСЕ ЭКЗАМЕНЫ ХОРОШО  
ПРОДОЛЖАЕТ РАБОТАТЬ ГЕОФИЗИКЕ МАРТЕ СОБИРАЕТСЯ ЭКСПЕДИЦИЮ  
АРКТИКУ ЦЕЛУЮ КРЕПКО МОЕГО ДОРОГОГО

ГУЛЯ

*м/ч  
получен в "Оазисе"  
28/1/56 в 7:00 м  
VAB м/ч*

**Radiogram** sent from Moscow 24/1/1956 to **Professor Avsyuk** on board the D/E Ob'. It is annotated as received by Professor Avsyuk at **Oasis 28/1/56**.

The message on **Antarctic Expedition Radiogram** stationery is from his wife, Gulya, informing the Professor that their nephew Yura had passed all his navigation examinations very well and was continuing his work in geophysics and to say that in March he is going to the Arctic as part of an Arctic Expedition [probably Drift Station NP-5].

**Professor G A Avsyuk** is described as Senior scientific associate, glaciologist and Doctor of Geographical Sciences. He was part of the seasonal personnel of SAE-1 and was part of the first Soviet landing party on the Antarctic continent. He returned to the Soviet Union on the Refrigerator Ship Number 7 and presented a preliminary report on SAE-1 to the Antarctic committee.

1956	1957	1958	1959
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## Exploration Phase

Soon after the return of the initial exploration party, it was decided to establish a new scientific station, not part of the IGY schedule, in the region of the Bunger Oasis.

Initial flights between **5th and 13th April 1957** delivered the first expedition cargo to the frozen ice fjord.

On **5th August** an An-2 with a small party headed by E S Korotkevich explored the area for a suitable site and landing strip. For 5 days they explored the area for a suitable site without success. They returned to Mirny on August 11<sup>th</sup>.

Flights in **September** found a site and brought materials and construction workers with the first hut completed 25 September.

The first Li-2 flight to the ice fjord airstrip adjacent to the Oasis landed **27th September** and brought a **husky dog team** and driver.



Photograph annotated "Antarctica Oasis 1956"

## Soviet Antarctic Expeditions:



Photograph annotated "Oasis Bunger 1957" - Li-2 aircraft on ice fjord

The station, comprising just 3 huts, was **inaugurated 15 October 1956**, with a flag raising ceremony by M M Somov head of the First Soviet Expedition. Two men were left conducting observations at the station

It was gradually expanded over the summer season.

Expedition members were flown in from time to time to make observations in different scientific fields.

The **SAE-2** winter-over personnel [7] under G I Pashchenko, flew in at the end of **January 1957** to relieve the summer workers. A meteorologist, radio operator, aerologist, seismologist, magnetologist and an aurora specialist made up the winter party

1956	1957	1958	1959

## Soviet Antarctic Expeditions

Second Expedition members were flown in from time to time to make observations in different scientific fields. A geological group completed a 2-month mapping of the oasis and fjord using a motor-boat and helicopter returning to Mirnyy February 27th. Having explored the oasis over several months the final summer seasonal group of geologists, glaciologists and biologists returned to Mirnyy in early **March 1957**.

МИНИСТЕРСТВО  СВЯЗИ СССР

**ТЕЛЕГРАММА**

850

Посланы телеграммы, охватывающие 4) время отправления телеграммы (первое и последнее) и следующие за ними — минуты

Получены телеграммы, охватывающие 4) время отправления телеграммы (первое и последнее) и следующие за ними — минуты

\*) Цифры, указанные после дефиса, означают: 1) № телеграммы, 2) количество слов, 3) число, 4) время отправления телеграммы (первое и последнее) и следующие за ними — минуты

Г. 0821	ПЕРЕДАЧА:	Адрес:
10 . . . м.	10 ч. м.	МОСКВА ЯХАЧЕВСКОЕ ШОССЕ 15
Бланк № 38	№ связи	КВ. 10 ГЕТНИКОВОЙ-
Принял: <i>МВ</i>	Передал:	
МИРНОГО 595 45 2 1800		
ЗАМ ПУТИ = 10 . . . ч. . . м.		
Служебн. отметки:		

ВСЕ НОРМАЛЬНО СЕГОДНЯ ПРИЛЕТЕЛ ОАЗИСА БАНГЕРА 400 КИЛОМЕТРОВ ВОСТОЧНЕЕ МИРНОГО СРЕДИ ЛЕДНИКОВ ОБНАЖЕННЫЕ ГОРЫ ОЗЕРА СКОРО КООПЕРАЦИЕЙ ТАУБЕРОМ ВЫШЛЮ ПИСЬМА ФОТО ГОСТИНЦЫ МАЕЧКА ТАК ДЕРЖАТЬ СЕНЫРКА БЕРИ ПРИМЕР ЛЮДА БУДЬ УМНИЦЕЙ ПРИВЕТ СОСЕДЯМ ДРУЗЬЯМ ОСОБО ЛЮКЕ

ЦЕЛУЮ = ЛЮСЯ =

*ОСЯ*

Тираж, тип. № 10-5482-21-7-55 г. т. 24.823x100

SAE-2 Telegram Mirnyy to Moscow 3.2.57 [Moscow A-183 datestamp on reverse -3.2.57-9]

The telegram has: "All in OK. Today returned from Oasis Bunger by airplane 400 Km to the east of Mirnyy between ice mountains and lakes. In the next few days, on the "Kooperatsiya" will send letters and photos by Mr Tauber" then some comments about [women] Maechka, Senyurka and Lyuda with best wishes to friends and neighbours.

Signed Lyusay [corrected in m/s to **Osya Kukin** – aircraft radio operator seasonal worker on SAE-2.

The *M/S Kooperatsiya* departed Mirnyy 15 February 1957 via Capetown to Riga – arriving 4 April 1957.

1956	1957	1958	1959

## Soviet Antarctic Expeditions



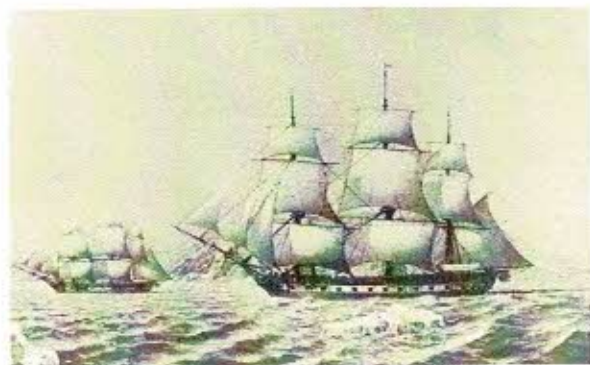
The photograph annotated  
 "The aircraft Oasis Bunger 6/III.57" has a  
 Mirnyy cancellation 22.3 57 6 on reverse.

Figure on right is A A Lebedev an aircraft pilot  
 – part of the seasonal SAE-2 contingent with 3  
 members of the SAE-2 seasonal scientists about  
 to return to Mirnyy.

The winter party built observation huts for  
 magnetic and seismology studies. One hut was  
 damaged and radio mast broken by several days  
 of hurricane winds to 150km/hr

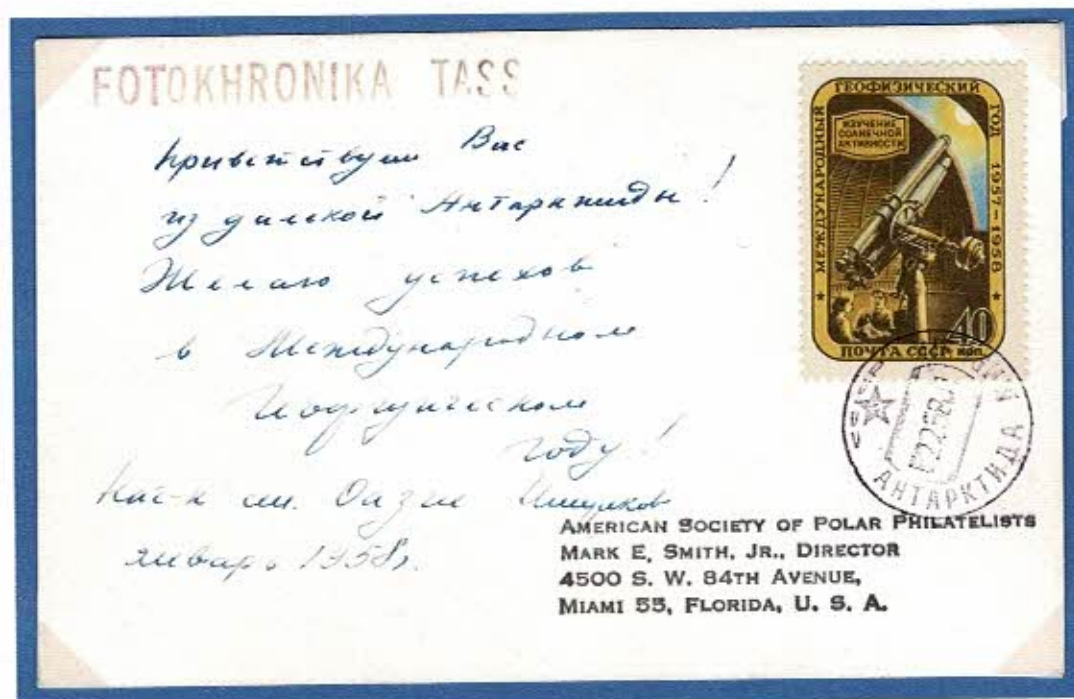
On January 9th new personnel took over and the former staff flew to Mirnyy. For two weeks from 10 January 1958 scientists from SAE-2 and SAE-3 conducted a wide range of scientific tests, experiments and observations. They departed for Mirnyy **24 January 1958** leaving behind the wintering party of 6 headed by Station leader B I Imerekov to continue the observation programme and construct a hut for a C-180 camera. Winter supplies completed by May 12th by An-12 aircraft.

Postcard written **January 24 1958** by **B I Imerekov**, Oasis Station leader SAE-3. Mirnyy dated 2.2.58



"Vostok" and "Mirnyy" off Antarctic Coast  
 1820" annotate "Oasis Station"

One other similar card is known



1956				1957				1958				1959			



## Reactivation & Transfer to Poland

On **17 November 1958**, Oasis Station was temporarily closed down and its personnel flown to Mirnyy leaving a store of provisions, fuel and household necessities. At the end of 1958, in accord with a decision of the Soviet Government, Oasis Station with all its equipment was transferred to the Polish Academy of Sciences. The **First Polish Antarctic Expedition** arrived at Mirnyy on the "*M/S Mikhail Kalinin*" in December 1958. On their arrival at Mirnyy, Soviet planes and helicopters transferred the Polish explorers and their equipment to Oasis. The station was reactivated **2 January 1959**.



**Oasis 2.1.59. [Reactivation date]**  
 Mirnyy 14.1.59.  
 Timaru New Zealand 24 AP 59  
 Collector mail correctly franked  
 "International"  
 One of 3 reactivation dates known.

The **Oasis tripod datestamp** is known from 24.7.58 to 16.9.59.

Because the early date is prior to arrival of SAE-4 ships, assuming the dates are correct, then the Oasis datestamp must have come with SAE-3 ships, which arrived at Mirnyy in November and December 1957.

The postcard January 24<sup>th</sup> 1958, shown earlier does not have the Oasis datestamp.

It is possible that the datestamp arrived with SAE-4 and the dates are suspect!

The later dates are well after the closure of the Station.

One reference "*Letters from Antarctica*" by E.B. Milovidov, where he affirms that, by the time of the 4th SAE, the tripod-type postmarks of "Oasis," "Pionerskaya" and "Sovetskaya" were all at Mirnyy Station.



Oasis 7.1.59

1956					1957					1958					1959				

## Reactivation & Transfer to Poland

A series of flights from Mirnyy to Oasis Station were carried out in early January by airplane and helicopter. These delivered the Polish explorers and their cargo along with members of SAE-4 who reactivated the Station and checked the observation recordings. The airstrip was 3.5km northeast of the Station on a frozen sea fjord.

Helicopter Mi-4 flight Mirnyy to Oasis, pilot V V Afonin one of the SAE-3 winter helicopter pilots Mirnyy 11.1.59 with boxed "International"

One of 4 known Mirnyy-Oasis Flight Covers



Helicopter Mi-4 flight Oasis to Mirnyy, pilot V V Afonin

Oasis 15.1.59 with boxed "International"

One of 4 known Oasis-Mirnyy Flight Covers

1956

1957

1958

1959



## Reactivation & Transfer to Poland

**Y I Tolstikov**, Director of SAE-3 and Station Leader Mirnyy signed the deed transferring ownership of Oasis Station from Russia to Poland.  
He was at Oasis for the official ceremony on January 23, 1959.

**Signed Yevgeniy Ivanovich Tolstikov** – Director SAE-3 and Station Leader Mirnyy at Oasis 15.1.59 - Reactivation period  
**No other Tolstikov signed covers are known**

**Souvenir** use of first Antarctic illustrated envelope with datestamp impressions of each of the 6 Antarctic Stations open during SAE-3 with signatures of the Directors of SAE-1, SAE-2, SAE-3 and Vostok Station Leader SAE-4



**Mikhail Mikhaylovich Somov** – Director of SAE-1 and Station Leader Mirnyy

**Aleksey Fedorovich Treshnikov** – Director of SAE-2 and Station Leader Mirnyy

**Yeniamin Stepanovich Ignatov** – Station Leader Vostok SAE-4.

Sovetskaya 1.1.59; Mirnyy 6.1.59; Komsomol'skaya 15.1.59; Pionerskaya 15.1.59; **Oasis 15.1.59**; Vostok 15.2 [59]

1956					1957					1958					1959				

## Reactivation & Transfer to Poland

The Oasis Station was transferred to the Polish Academy of Sciences and was renamed **Dobrowolski Station** named after Anton Dobrowolski in honour of the Polish scientist who joined the Belgian expedition of 1897-1899 and carried out extensive scientific work in the Antarctic.

Members of the **First Polish Antarctic Expedition** left Gdynia 4 December 1958 aboard the Soviet ship "*Mikhail Kalinin*." The leader was W Krzeminski [head of Institute of Geodesy and Cartography], Cz Centkiewicz [deputy leader and polar explorer], Z Zabek and J Sledzinski [scientific workers], M Zalewski and Cz Novicki [members of the Polish Spitzbergen expedition] and Cz Howiski [historian and photographer]. The expedition was joined by **Professor S Z Rozycki** of the Polish Academy of Sciences to take over Oasis Station.

**Oasis 18.1.59** receiving datestamp of Gdynia-2 16 5 59  
Addressed to **Professor Stefan Zbigniew Rozycki**  
at "**Oaza Bungara**" c/- "*Mikhail Kalinin*"



**Oasis 18.1.59** receiving datestamp of Gdynia-2 16 5 59

The official transfer of Oasis Station to Poland took place on **23 January 1959**. The transfer deed, drawn up in Russian and Polish, was signed by **E I Tolstikov** as the representative of the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route of the Merchant Marine Ministry and **Professor S Z Rozycki** as representative of the Polish Academy of Sciences. After the transfer deed was signed, the national flag of the Polish People's Republic was raised over the station.

The Dobrowolski Station was closed **30 January 1959**. The members of the Polish Antarctic Expedition flew back to Mirnyy and rejoined the *Mikhail Kalinin* for the return trip to Poland.

**Two of eight recorded covers** from the Polish Antarctic Expedition at Oasis / Dobrowolski Station all dated Oasis 18.1.59.

1956					1957					1958					1959				

## Reactivation & Transfer to Poland



Oasis 15.1.59 to NP-8 Drift Station with receiving datestamp 27.9.59

The Drift Station NP-8 was operational from 19 April 1959 for 1069 days drifting 5976km – 3 shifts of crew

One of 2 Oasis - NP-8 Drift Station cards known

The official handover of Oasis Station to Poland occurred **23 January 1959**. After a 7-day cycle of observations the Station was shut down and all personnel flown back to Mirnyy. Closed **30 January 1959**.

Only **one example** is known of the Oasis datestamp used during the 7-days while the **Dobrowolski Station** was operational. This is shown here dated **24.1.59**.

This card has a print date 3.III-58 and Print Order 290. This **Antarctic Postcard** is part of a series of at least 4 Antarctic views that were produced from original paintings done by **I P Ruban** who was a seasonal participant with **SAE-2** where he is described as a painter.



1956

1957

1958

1959

## Oasis After Station Closure

The latest recorded Oasis datestamp is **16.9.59** and is shown below.

Whether the Oasis tripod datestamp was ever at the Station has not been confirmed. One credible source states that the datestamps of Oasis, Pionerskaya and Sovetskaya were actually held at Mirnyy. This date is many months after Oasis Station was closed so the datestamp had not been left there. It is very likely that it was at Mirnyy.



Oasis 16.9.59 with 1950 commemorative issue and 1956 Antarctic issue. Soviet IGY envelope addressed to the USA IGY representative Stanley Ruttenberg

1956					1957					1958					1959				

### Return of First Intercontinental Flight – Mirnyy to Moscow 1962

For the proposed last leg of the Flight from Christchurch to Mirnyy a **reserve 2300m airstrip at Bunger Oasis** was prepared between December 7 and 28<sup>th</sup> 1961 in case the Mirnyy airstrip was closed. The Oasis Station The flight plans were changed and the planes flew to McMurdo.

The AN-10 was fitted with skis and had two test flights Mirnyy-Vostok-Mirnyy. The **third continental test flight** was a 400km journey from Mirnyy to the **reserve airfield at Bunger 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. The Station was reoccupied until the aircraft had been refuelled.

On **January 24<sup>th</sup> 1962**, both aircraft were farewelled from Mirnyy. 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. The return route was the same via Sydney, Darwin, Jakarta, Rangoon, New Delhi, and Tashkent to Moscow arriving February 2<sup>nd</sup> 1962.