

The New Cold War

A Report from Russia's Avalanche Institute

By John Brennan



Attendees and event organizers from almost 20 countries pose for their commemorative group photo.

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In the fall of 2006, I had the good fortune to attend Apatit's third avalanche conference in Kirovsk, Russia. Apatit is the largest mining and mineral concentrating enterprise in Europe. Its headquarters are in Kirovsk, a community well known in Russia for its mountain sports and tourism.

Apatit founded its avalanche institute back in the 1930s, and this year's conference coincided with the institute's 75th anniversary. The conference and avalanche institute are both located in the northwest corner of Russia, inside the Arctic Circle. It was necessary to obtain a visa to enter the Russia Federation, but this was easily accomplished with the incredible support of the organizing committee. Hotel reservations were equally simple.

Most attendees came through Moscow or St. Petersburg. I opted for the latter and spent a touristy day enjoying that city. A very inexpensive 18-hour train ride was nixed in favor of a \$400 round-trip, two-hour flight north. Another night was spent in the coastal town of Murmansk—which played a key role during portions of World War II.

From there a three-hour van ride took folks to the small mining community of Kirovsk, where the conference took place. Slightly over 60 people from close to twenty countries were in attendance. I was the only person from North America. English was the main language of the event while a translator was present for folks who presented in Russian.

The hospitality of the organizing committee was incredible, with almost daily

field trips and functions. As opposed to some other conferences, I was notified that my abstract was accepted before having to pay for the conference. Even though I was traveling on a free "Frequent Flier" trip, I would not have been able to justify the trip otherwise.

It was a great experience to both attend the conference and to visit Russia. This event is only held every five years, but Moscow will be hosting an avalanche conference in September of 2007. See www.igsoc.org/symposia/2007/russia/ for more info on that event. In any case, beam me at jb@avalanchemitigationservices.com if you have any questions.



The Apatit Avalanche Forecasting Center is located in Kirovsk, a small town located inside the Arctic Circle in NW Russia.

John Brennan has worked as an avalanche and explosives specialist at Snowmass, Colorado for more than a decade. He's also patrolled and done avalanche consulting at Las Leñas, Argentina. He's an affiliate member of the CAA and sits on the American Avalanche Association's board as the Rocky Mountain Section representative. John has long been fascinated by anything that blows up. Here he's holding a prime example of Russian ordnance—a 160 mm mortar round that weighs almost 40kg and packs 9kg of high explosive payload.



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 Box 2759, Revelstoke, BC V0E 2S0
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