

OTKRYTIE AND BLAGONAMERENNY IN AUSTRALIA

In 1820 the Russian ships *Otkrytie* and *Blagonamerenny* visited Australia, making a stop on their long way from Kronstadt to the Russian colonies in North America. The aim of the voyage was the search for a sea route from the northern part of the Pacific Ocean into the Atlantic.



The route of the Otkrytie and Blagonamerenny

Otkrytie and *Blagonamerenny* put to sea from Kronstadt on 17 July 1819 together with their twin ships *Vostok* and *Mirny*, which, under the command of F.F. Bellingshausen and M.P. Lazarev, were destined to make the brilliant discovery of Antarctica and forever cover themselves and the Russian fleet with glory.



Otkrytie and Blagonamerenny

The sloop *Otkrytie*, under the command of Captain-Lieutenant Mikhail Nikolaevich Vasil'ev, was launched in 1818 at the Okhta shipyard. She had a displacement of 900 tonnes; the ship's length and beam were 39.5 m and 10 m respectively; she carried 28 guns, and her crew consisted of 63 men. The transport *Blagonamerenny* (formerly the *Svir*), under the command

of Lieutenant Gleb Semenovitch Shishmarev, was of smaller size (530 tonnes, 36.5 m x 9 m, 20 guns). Her crew consisted of 71 men.

After a short stay in Rio de Janeiro the ships parted: *Vostok* and *Mirny* went south, while *Otkrytie* and *Blagonamerenny* set course for the southern tip of Africa, rounding it on 5 January 1820. On 28 February the sailors of the *Blagonamerenny* sighted the shores of Australia. On board the ship was the young lieutenant Aleksei Petrovich Lazarev — the youngest of the three seafaring brothers. His notes became the fullest and most substantial description of the stay of the *Otkrytie* and *Blagonamerenny* on the fifth continent.

The expedition was to a considerable degree of a research character, which showed itself even before the ships dropped anchor in Port Jackson. The naval officers carried out a complex of hydrographic observations, including regular soundings of depths and measurements of the speed of coastal currents. On going ashore, the Russian visitors immediately asked the governor of the colonies, Macquarie, to allot them a place for the construction of an observatory, a forge and a repair workshop. At the same time they requested and received permission for the naturalist Fedor Stein, who was aboard the *Blagonamerenny*, to carry out botanical and geological research in the mountains west of Sydney.

Many Russian officers of the expedition took part in the scientific research. Some helped the astronomer Pavel Tarkhanov; others showed interest in other branches of science, enthusiastically assisting the *Blagonamerenny*'s surgeon Grigory Zaozersky, who was engaged in the search for fossil fauna. Fortune favoured him: the skeletons of two animals belonging to already extinct species were found. These skeletons were later taken to Russia and placed at the disposal of the Academy of Sciences together with a large number of other objects of ethnographic and biological interest.

Governor Macquarie, true to tradition, was exceptionally hospitable towards the Russian sailors. He received them several times, and himself paid them two visits. In his diary he wrote that he “was received ... with the most marked attention and respect”. Despite his advanced age (59), he himself accompanied the mariners on excursions around Sydney, Parramatta and Windsor.

“In Parramatta,” recalled Al. P. Lazarev, “we were met by the governor’s wife, who had gone there on purpose ahead of us... endeavouring to anticipate our wishes in everything, she, under the guise of simple conversation, found out what dishes the Russians like most, at what time they breakfast, and so on, and everything... was done to please us.” On the departure of the sloops *Otkrytie* and *Blagonamerenny* on their further voyage, Elizabeth Macquarie presented the officers with preserves, fruit and liqueurs. After M. N. Vasil'ev mentioned the interest of the dowager Russian empress Maria Fedorovna in botanical rarities, L. Macquarie prepared for her “a small box” containing a herbarium of Australian flora. This present was safely delivered to Russia.

Friendliness towards the Russians was shown not only by the governor. Within ten days of their arrival in Australia the number of invitations received by the naval visitors had grown to such an extent that they were obliged to divide into groups of 3–4 men in order to satisfy all who wished to entertain them. The necessity of accepting invitations became tiring and to no small degree interfered with the performance of their duties. “These dinners,” wrote Al. P. Lazarev, “for all the kindness of the hosts, became extremely tiring for us and often tore us away from our duty.” “We hardly even had time to be at home,” echoed N. D. Shishmarev.

Nevertheless, at least one officer remained constantly on board each of the Russian ships. Stores of fresh water and timber were continuously replenished (both were supplied to the Russian visitors, unlike the mariners of other countries, free of charge!), repairs to the spars and rigging went on, and the sailors caulked the ships' hulls. No one forgot that a difficult and dangerous voyage into Arctic waters lay ahead.

Among the scientific results of the activity of the Russian naturalists who accompanied the naval men, first place must be given to the work of Fedor Stein — a naturalist and geologist who undertook an expedition into the Blue Mountains, in the organisation of which the Russians received great help from Macquarie. Together with Stein went Emelian Korneev — a talented artist. Stein was given horses, provisions and guides; he was accompanied by the commandant of Parramatta (a suburb of Sydney in which the governor's residence was located), W. Lawson, and the Scottish botanist Allan Cunningham, who in the past, during his research in South America, had received help from the Russian consul in Brazil, Georg Langsdorff.

Stein's field research included the study of the relief, of the chemical properties of the water of rivers and streams, of rocks and of occurrences of useful minerals. It is difficult to describe and to overestimate the full significance of the pioneering activity of Stein, who assembled a significant collection of geological samples, plants and insects. To him belongs the honour of compiling one of the first, entirely realistic, schemes of the geological development of the Blue Mountains region. Korneev's drawings, in their turn, could have given Russian society an idea of the natural conditions of a little-studied part of New South Wales. Unfortunately, he never succeeded in publishing his works, and they have not survived.

Little known remains the fact of Stein's discovery of occurrences of lode and alluvial gold in the Blue Mountains. It is now known that gold had been found in Australia even earlier, but 29 years still remained before the first gold rush. Apparently Macquarie learned of Stein's find, but, as in other cases, for political reasons news of it was not allowed to spread. The colonial administration justly considered that in a land where 40% of the population were convicts, news of gold could cause disorders, and for several decades it stubbornly concealed all information about the presence of gold in the depths of Australia... In Russia, too, Stein's works did not receive due recognition. In those times Russian scientific geology was under the press of censorship, and works devoted in one degree or another to questions of the evolution of the Earth were practically never published, as contradicting religious postulates.

The visit of the Russian ships was somewhat marred by the desertion of several sailors. From the documents that have come down to our time it may be supposed that there were 4–6 fugitives in all, among them the drummer of the *Blagonamerenny* P. Elizarov and seaman 1st class of the *Otkrytie* S. Yuryev, as well as one petty officer. The cause of the flight was, in the opinion of M. N. Vasil'ev, quite prosaic — longing for female affection. With the help of the Sydney police at least two of the fugitives — Elizarov and Yuryev — were caught, the latter being sentenced for “the committing of a crime” to punishment with the cat-o'-nine-tails and to “cleaning the heads”.

On 26 (14) March 1820 the Russian ships, having exchanged gun salutes with the shore batteries, left Sydney. Before them lay a long voyage into the northern waters of the Pacific Ocean.

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