

Geographica

Crossing the Bering Strait—on Skis

About 55 miles separates Russia from Alaska at the narrowest point. But when veteran Russian Arctic adventurer Dmitry Shparo, 56, and his son Matvey, 22, made a historic first crossing of the Bering Strait on foot in March, they ended up traveling some 180 miles because the flow of the ice carried them northward.

They conquered choppy ice and snow, skirted open water, and avoided the occasional polar bear. "Never did I see a place with so bad an ice situation,"

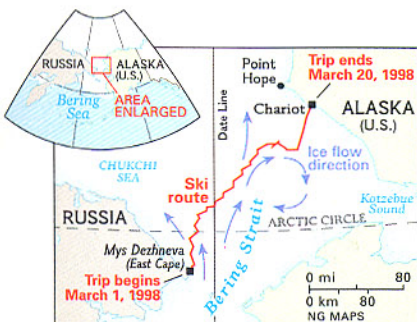
says the elder Shparo. This was his fifth attempt to cross the strait.

Matvey hauled the sled carrying supplies (upper right). His father bore a backpack that initially weighed a hundred pounds;

fierce winds often turned it into a sail. On their best days they skied ten miles; on their worst, less than two, spending nights in their tent (lower right). The trip took 21 days, far longer than expected, forcing them to halve their daily 5,000-calorie ration partway through. Dmitry lost 22 pounds. It was worth it, he believes. "This trip was my happiest because I was with my son, my good friend," he says.



BOTH BY DMITRY SHPARO



A Siberian Tiger Trail in China

Good news for Siberian tigers: Last winter the first international survey of the endangered cats in northeast China's Jilin Province found tracks and droppings indicating that four to six tigers were present close to the Russian border. Large forested tracts—ideal tiger habitat—exist in the region. But tiger numbers are held down by the low density of prey such as deer and boar, says Dale Miquelle of the Hornocker Wildlife Institute (GEOGRAPHIC, February 1997), a leader of the UN-supported survey. The team has urged provincial officials to create a plan to establish a breeding tiger population in Jilin.



MARC MORITSCH, NGS IMAGE COLLECTION