

Polar Honours of the Russian Geographical Society 1845–1995

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Abstract

This paper presents, for the first time in English, an overview of Russian polar exploration and research (almost exclusively Arctic) through a study of medals awarded by the Russian Geographical Society, their recipients and achievements, during the period of 1845–1995.

Introduction

The Imperial Russian Geographical Society (IRGS) was founded in St Petersburg on 6 August 1845 and was subject to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Society was composed of four departments: Physical Geography, Mathematical Geography, Statistics, Ethnography. As an incentive to those active in the geographical sciences, soon after the IRGS was founded a competition was organized and medals of the Society were awarded to explorers and researchers for geographical discoveries and investigation, including prominent work in the polar regions.

The Society encouraged all persons in Russia interested in the geographical sciences to freely take part in the exchange of ideas and the start of useful public enterprises. Goals were set, the means of achieving them were discussed, and the results obtained were worked up and published. Already completed works were assessed. By 1970 it had published more than 2000 volumes of geographical literature, including the annual *Zapiski* (since 1846) and *Izvestiia* (since 1865).

The advent of the First World War and the Russian Revolution caused a serious disruption in the issuance of medals. After the formation of the Soviet Union, the Society changed its name in 1926 to the State Geographical Society, and in 1938 to the Geographical Society of the USSR. Eventually some of the medals were resurrected with appropriate design changes in 1946 on the Society's 100th anniversary. In 1992, the year after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Society reverted to its original name, the Russian Geographical Society. The main offices of the Society are in St Petersburg.

The vast Arctic territories of Russia comprise nearly half the total land area within the Arctic Circle. This region had been recognized for its vital importance to commerce and communications since the time of Tsar Peter the Great (1672–1725). These realizations went hand in hand with geographic and ethnographic research, plus a wide range of other scientific aims of the IRGS. In particular, Russian rulers

concerned themselves with the navigability of a North-East Passage (or Northern Sea Route) and, to a lesser extent, a North-West Passage. The first was of special interest for improved communication with vulnerable Far Eastern territories.

Besides commerce and communications, there were also key military implications. A classic example occurred during 27–28 May 1905. The Russian Baltic Fleet, after steaming 18,000 nautical miles from St Petersburg in ten months, was obliterated by a Japanese squadron during the Russo-Japanese War. A direct result of this historic defeat was the Imperial Russian Navy's sponsorship of the Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition of 1910–15, which led to the beginning of the practical opening of the Northern Sea Route.

One hundred years previously, and at the other end of the world, Fabian von Bellingshausen led an important Antarctic expedition in 1819–21. This produced what is now generally accepted as the first sighting of continent. He also guided his two ships in only the second circumnavigation of Antarctica, the first of which was by James Cook. Seeing no material benefits from Antarctica, Russian exploration and research of the continent did not begin until 1956 for the coming 1957–58 International Geophysical Year (IGY).

The medals, the recipients and their achievements

All of the Society's medals were desktop medals, issued in cases and not intended for wear. In the realm of pure numismatics, it is not without interest that Russian sources indicate that all the medals were minted pieces (struck from dies), except two, both of which were cast (created from moulds) – the Great Gold Konstantin Medal and Count Fedor Petrovich Litke Gold Medal. There is no indication in the records as to why these two medals were cast and the others minted.

Between 1946 and 1991 the following document was issued with the medals:

GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY (Founded in 1845)
[Wording around a seal]

**The Academic Council of the Geographical Society
of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
at the session of [date] has awarded**

[recipient & medal]

**for outstanding scientific work in the area
of the geographical sciences**

**President
of the Geographical Society
of the USSR**

Academic secretary

No.

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

(on behalf of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR)

Notes regarding the specific regulations for each medal are found under each medal's heading. However, a general review of some of the procedures for awarding medals during 1946–95 will aid the reader in understanding the award process during this time, and also serve as a general guide for the IRGS period:

- Only those works completed or published during the five years preceding the presentation of a medal were eligible for competition for medals, with the exception of cases concerning the Great Gold Medal.
- Members and non-members of the Society were equally eligible, but with works of equal worth preference was given to those from full and honorary members of the Society.
- Works to be judged were submitted by members of the Society's Academic Council, by the chairs of departments, as well as councils of branches and sections of the Society. In addition, scientific societies, scientific research institutes, higher educational institutions, departments, public organizations and individual citizens submitted works.
- To examine the works submitted, the Academic Council of the Society appointed an expert committee, with a chairman and secretary elected by the committee from its members.
- The expert committee invited reviewers from among individuals most competent to assess the submitted works, independently of whether or not they were members of the Society.
- The expert committee presented its conclusion (with justification) to the Academic Council, and the final decision for awarding medals was taken by the Academic Council through a secret ballot.
- Medals not awarded for one year comprised a reserve fund, and may be later awarded by the Academic Council at its discretion until this reserve fund is exhausted.
- The decisions of the Academic Council and the awards of the medals, along with

the reviews, were published in the *Proceedings of the Geographical Society*. The award of one of the Society's medals did not bar a recipient from later awards of this or other Society medals for new achievements.

The Great Gold Konstantin Medal (IRGS)

The highest award of the IRGS was a prize, consisting of a gold medal worth 200 silver roubles. The founder of this gold medal was the Society's first president, His Imperial Highness Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich (1827–92). Hence the medal was called the Konstantin Medal.

The Konstantin Medal was founded on 3 December 1846, and was awarded annually on the decision of the president for useful works in geography 'to a traveller who has distinguished himself by the importance of his discoveries and research; or to the author for the best written work in the areas of Russian geography, ethnography or statistics.' The Konstantin Medal was awarded annually from 1849 until 1929, and during 1924–29 was called 'The Society's Highest Award'. After 1929 the medal ceased to be awarded.

Regulations

Judging the merits of individual achievements for reward relied upon specially developed regulations, one set of which was approved by Grand Duke Nikolaevich on 28 November 1887:

- a) Any unusual and important geographical achievement, execution of which is accompanied by great difficulty and danger.
- b) Scholarly travels and expeditions in Russia and contiguous countries, if their results are made known through reliable reports and contain new acquisitions in the area of geography, pertaining to any of its main branches, as long as these descriptions have not already been published.
- c) More distant travels of similar merit, by land or sea, but only if made by Russians and described in the Russian language.
- d) Successfully executed extensive geodetic operations leading to more precise knowledge of the shape of the globe, precise geographical determinations of positions, if they embrace considerable areas of land, difficult of access, in Russia itself or in contiguous countries, and extensive topographic investigations and surveys in little-known lands and seas, if these are executed by Russians.
- e) Expeditions in Russia and contiguous countries undertaken to carry out investigations in any branch of physical geography, in the widest sense of the word, successfully completed and contributing important results to science.
- f) Works by Russian scholars, leading to material refinement of methods used in

geographical investigations in the areas of both mathematical geography and physical geography, on condition that they have been applied in practice.

g) Independent critical analysis (by Russian scholars) in any branch of mathematical or physical geography, and also independent and significant cartographical works, even if based on materials not obtained by the authors themselves, on condition that this work involves outstanding gains in the area of geography.

h) Ethnographic and linguistic investigations concerning peoples living in Russia, or related to them, if they have led to any new or important results.

i) Works in the area of the statistics of Russia, containing full and reliable statistical descriptions of considerable parts of the state, or systematic investigations and works casting new light on any important branch of our governmental, public or economic life.

j) Historical-geographical investigations elucidating any important and previously obscure area of the ancient geography of Russia, or of contiguous countries in the east.

k) Original works in Russian in the area of descriptive geography, including geographical dictionaries and critical histories of travels for considerable periods of time.

Within the procedures for awarding the Konstantin Medal there was a specific sequence of submission by the departments by year:

- 1) Departments of Mathematical Geography and Physical Geography
- 2) Department of Ethnography
- 3) Departments of Mathematical Geography and Physical Geography
- 4) Department of Statistics

The prize was preferentially awarded to a department whose turn it was, but testimonials received concerning works from the remaining departments were taken into consideration for the competitions in subsequent years.

Description



Obverse: Bust of Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, facing left, surrounded by: 'GRAND DUKE KONSTANTIN NIKOLAEVICH'. Below the bust, in smaller lettering is: 'FOR THE BENEFIT OF GEOGRAPHY'. On the lower edge of the bust is: 'P. BRUSNITSYN.'



Reverse: An oak wreath and a small six-pointed star in the upper centre. Beneath is: 'RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'. Below this is a blank space for engraving the name of the recipient and the year of award. At the bottom edge: 'V. ALEKSEEV.'

Obverse designer: Pavel L'vovich Brusnitsyn.

Sculptor: records indicate that Vasilii Vladimirovich Alekseev (Professor, Imperial Academy of Art) was the 'manufacturer', and this likely indicates he created the medal's mould.

Diameter: 65 mm

Composition: pure gold

Manufacturer: cast at the Imperial Mint (St Petersburg)

Weight: 54.29 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient's name and year of award.

Award Document: No special document was issued with the medal. After presentation of the medal, a congratulatory letter was sent to the recipient on Society letterhead, along with information on the award, plus a request for a written confirmation of receipt.

Recipients

1849: Gofman, Ernest Karlovich [Hoffman, Ernst Karl]: 'Russian geologist, for his work on an expedition to the polar Urals (1847).' (the date according to RGS Archives) A source in the Russian Academy of Sciences states the research took place in 1845.

1861: Middendorf, Aleksandr Fedorovich [Middendorff, Alexander Theodor von] (1815–94): 'Russian naturalist, Academician, for his work, *Sibirskoe puteshestvie* [Siberian Journey]; investigations on Poluostrov Taimyr [Taimyr Peninsula] in 1841–

1845.’ The Taimyr Peninsula was Eurasia’s northernmost point.

Middendorf was the leader of a scientific expedition sent by the Imperial Academy of Sciences of St Petersburg to study the natural history and ethnology of the Taimyr Peninsula, Yakutsk province, Amur Valley and the Sea of Okhotsk. Although backing was acquired by Karl Ber in 1841 (see below), the expedition’s departure was delayed until the following year because Middendorf could not be immediately released from his professional duties at the University of Kiev.

The wealth of knowledge obtained during this arduous expedition was such that it is still the foundation for all research on the Taimyr. The geography and plant and animal life of the peninsula were all described for the first time. In addition, the hydrography of its rivers were described, along with ethnographic collections and observations throughout the journey. Maps of the Taimyr and the Turukhansk region, and meteorological and geothermal observations, also formed part of the results. It would be nearly six decades later before another exploring expedition visited the region, this time led by Eduard Toll’ in 1900 (see Kolchak below (1905).

Middendorf was also the Chief of the Scientific Staff on the *Variag* (1870), during a Russian expedition making oceanographic and meteorological observations between Novaia Zemlia and Iceland, so as to better understand the Gulf Stream in high northern waters. Observations on the distribution of fishes was also carried out.

1861: Ber, Karl Maksimovich [Baer, Karl Ernst von] (1792–1876): ‘Russian naturalist, Academician, one of the founders of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society, for his Caspian investigations and reports on Caspian fisheries, for his explorations on Novaia Zemlia and other areas of Russia.’

Ber led a scientific expedition sponsored by the Imperial Academy of Sciences to Novaia Zemlia and Russian Lapland from June to September 1837 in the *Krotov* and *Sviatoi Elisei*. Published results include descriptions of the physical geography, rock formations, climate, vegetation and animal life of Novaia Zemlia. Ber identified the Taimyr Peninsula as the ideal location for further research (see Middendorf above, 1861).

1878: Nordenshel’d, Nil’s Adol’f Erik [Nordenskiöld, Nils Adolf Erik] (1832–1901): ‘famous Swedish Arctic explorer, professor; for his explorations and voyage in the Arctic Ocean in 1875–1876 (to the mouths of the Siberian rivers).’

Throughout the seventeenth century there were attempts to develop trade between Europe and Siberia by reaching the region of the Ob’ and Enisei Rivers through the Kara Sea (Kara Sea Route). In 1874 a privately financed British expedition made it to the northern end of Obskaia Gulf, which forms the outlet of the Ob’ River. Unfortunately, shallows waters forced a retreat. It was possibly the first expedition since the seventeenth century to sail to the Ob’ from western Europe, and it offered encouragement to many others to follow suit.

Nordenskiöld led the Swedish Kara Sea Route expedition in the *Proven*, from June to November 1875, to conduct scientific observations in the Kara Sea and to visit the Enisei River, so as to prove the practicality of a commercial sea route between Europe and Siberia. The 1874 a British expedition and the Swede’s voyage showed the way, but Nordenskiöld took the ship *Ymer* on another expedition to the Enisei in 1876 to prove the route’s navigability from year to year. The following year, three separate commercial expeditions completed the voyage. Best known for being the first to complete a North-East Passage in the *Vega* (1878-80), Nordenskiöld led eight Arctic expeditions, and his achievements place him among the most notable polar explorers of all time.

1885: Iurgens, Nikolai Danilovich [Jürgens, Nikolas]: ‘full member of the IRGS, leader of an expedition to the mouth of the Lena River during the First International Polar Year (1882–1883); for his leading the work of the Ust’Lenskaia polar station.’

The expedition was organized by the IRGS and sponsored by the Hydrographic Department,

departments of the army and navy, plus other institutions. It was the first of two Russian contributions to the International Polar Year (IPY), with the full dates being December 1881–December 1884. Under the IRGS Small Silver Medal, see Andreev (1883) for the other Russian IPY station.

Iurgens was one of three scientists at the expedition station, in addition to support staff. Their mission was to conduct magnetic and meteorological observations for one year and carry out other scientific programs. In 1883 the Russian Polar Commission proposed extending the work for an additional year, and long sledge journeys were also made in 1884.

1896: Chernishev, Feodosii Nikolaevich (1856–1914): ‘Russian geologist and paleontologist, Academician [of the Academy of Sciences]; for his scientific activities and his work on the Pechora River (1892–1893) and on Novaia Zemlia in 1895.’

From July to September 1895, the Russian government-sponsored expedition on Novaia Zemlia made geological and astronomical investigations.

1897: Nansen, Frit’of [Nansen, Fridtjof] (1861–1930): ‘famous Norwegian Arctic explorer; for his unparalleled, epoch-making feat in exploring the Arctic Ocean: his ice-drift from the Novosibirskie Ostrova [New Siberian Islands] to Svalbard aboard *Fram* in 1893–1896.’

Nansen participated in or led several Arctic expeditions between 1882 and 1913, and as an explorer he is best known for the drift of the specially designed *Fram*, the rounded hull of which would safely rise up under ice pressure. Based on the evidence of relics from a shipwreck, Nansen guessed that a current would allow him to explore the heart of the Arctic Ocean, and he was correct. Observations proved that the Eurasian side of the Arctic basin was indeed a deep ocean, and thus probably contained little or no new land.

In April 1895, a ‘farthest north’ record was set by sledging to 86°13’06”N. This surpassed, by 307 kilometres, the 13-year-old record of a three-man sledge team from the United States Lady Franklin Bay Expedition (1881–84). Importantly, the wide-ranging six-volume scientific report contained scientific results in oceanography, bathymetry and bottom deposits of the Arctic Ocean; birds, crustaceans, diatoms and protozoa; astronomy, terrestrial magnetism and pendulum; geology of Khaborovo and Zemlia Frantsa-Iosifa [Franz Josef Land]; and very detailed meteorological statistics.

1901: Bogdanovich, Karl Ivanovich (1864–1947): ‘full member of the IRGS; for his journey to Bering Strait and the Anadyr’ area, and for his work on the geology and physical geography of Russia.’

Bogdanovich wrote *Essays of the Chukotka Peninsula*, which was published in St Petersburg in 1901.

1905: Kolchak, Aleksandr Vasil’evich (1873–1920): ‘hydrologist, Admiral; for carrying out a rescue expedition and explorations on Ostrov Bennetta [Bennett Island] in 1903.’ This was part of the Novosibirskie Ostrova.

Eduard V. Toll’ commanded the *Zaria* (on which Kolchak served as a lieutenant) during this 1900–03 expedition, sponsored by the Imperial Academy of Sciences. The objective was to locate and explore ‘Zemlia Sannikova’ [Sannikov Land], north of the Novosibirskie Ostrova, which had been reported by iakov Sannikov about ninety years earlier, but its existence had never been confirmed.

On 29 August 1901, the tiny Ostrov Bennetta, discovered during the 1879–81 DeLong expedition, was sighted, and is now believed to have been the real ‘Zemlia Sannikova’. A few days later, Toll’ retreated south to make his winter quarters at Kotel’nyi Island. In June 1902, Toll’ and three companions sledged northward to explore Ostrov Bennetta and search for Zemlia Sannikova. Repeated attempts to relieve

Toll' that season failed due to heavy ice and the *Zaria*.

In August 1903, Kolchak landed on Ostrov Bennetta and discovered Toll's hut and records. The documents showed that Toll' reached the island on 21 July 1902, and left for the homeward journey on 26 October. No sign of the missing explorers could be found, and it has never been determined what happened to them. Presumably, they died while crossing on the ice between Ostrov Bennetta and the Ostrov Novaia Sibir' [New Siberian Island].

Substantial knowledge of geography, meteorology, geology, biology and geomagnetism of the Taimur Peninsula and the New Siberian Islands was gained during the expedition. Nicknamed Kolchak-Poliarnyi (Kolchak the Polar), Kolchak went on to command the *Vaigach* in 1910 as part of the Russian Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition's first season. The work of this major expedition is covered under Vil'kitskii below (1914). During his naval career, one source states Kolchak was awarded the 'Order of St Anna (*sic*), 4th class', but photographs and paintings of him seem to show the Order of St Vladimir with swords as a neck decoration. These same images also show Kolchak wearing the breast badge of the Order of St George.

1909: Shekl'ton, Ernest [Shackleton, Ernest] (1874–1922): 'for exploring the south polar wastes and their physical geographical conditions.'

Shackleton was a member of the British National Antarctic Expedition (1902–04), and was with Scott and Wilson during their record journey towards the South Pole in 1902–03. Organising and leading a bid for the South Pole in 1907–09, Shackleton achieved a 'farthest south', reaching latitude at 88°23'S, just 155 kilometres from the pole.

1912: Amundsen, Roald (1872–1928): 'famous Norwegian explorer; honorary member of the IRGS; for his explorations of the Antarctic continent and his explorations in the Arctic.'

Amundsen is best known for beating Robert Falcon Scott in the race to the South Pole in 1911. In addition to this achievement, Amundsen's accomplishments were unequalled by any other polar explorer. He was the first to navigate a North-West Passage; only the third to pass through the North-East Passage; and the first to fly across the Arctic Ocean (becoming one of only two men on the expedition to see both Poles for the first time). Indeed, Amundsen may well have been the first to sight the North Pole. True if neither Cook or Peary reached it by sledge, or Byrd by air, but the two latter claims are shrouded in controversy to this day.

1914: Vil'kitskii, Boris Andreevich (1885–1961): hydrographer, 'for his work in discovering new polar lands.' Son of Andrei Ippolitovich Vil'kitskii (Count Fedor Petrovitch Litke Gold Medal, 1891).

The Imperial Russian Navy sponsored the Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition 1910–15. Andrei I. Vil'kitskii, head of the Chief Hydrographic Directorate, had been deeply involved in organizing the expedition, and was also Boris's father. Boris Vil'kitskii was expedition leader and captain of the *Taimyr* in 1913 and 1914–15.

The *Taimyr* and *Vaigach* were specially constructed ice-breaking survey ships, and the ultimate goal was to develop the Northern Sea Route as an important lane of communication across Russian territories. To accomplish this objective, it was vital to carry out a systematic survey of the waters north of Siberia. Six seasons of operations garnered notable discoveries and achievements: Severnaia Zemlia (Northern Land), an archipelago discovered in 1913 off the Taimyr Peninsula and the last major land discovery in the Arctic Ocean; several smaller islands; the first through passage of the Northern Sea Route from east to west, with the resulting charts and pilots covering the entire route from the Bering Strait to the Kara Sea. The main objective of opening up the Northern Sea Route to regular shipping was not realized, and only after the Revolution did the Soviets begin to seriously capitalize on the route. To read further on this last great ocean voyage of discovery, see *Charting The Russian Northern Sea Route: The Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition 1910-1915*, by William Barr (translator and editor; 1976). Also, under the P. P. Semenov Silver Medal, see Matusевич and Evgenov (1924).

The Great Gold Medal (USSR)

Probably due to the advent of the First World War and the Russian Revolution, there were no additional awards of the Great Gold Konstantin Medal. The establishment of the USSR eventually brought about the resurrection of this award in 1946, which was renamed the Great Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR. The polar work of the first two recipients bridged both Imperial and Soviet eras.

The tradition of the award was revived with the celebration of the Society's 100th anniversary on 29 August 1946. By a resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, new regulations for the medal were confirmed, and it was now called 'The Great Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR'. The medal was awarded every three years along with 2500 roubles. In 1992, the Geographical Society of the USSR reverted to its original name, and the inscription on the medal was changed accordingly. In addition there is no provision for a monetary prize.

Regulations

- a) An important geographical exploit, whose achievement is associated with difficulty and danger.
- b) Scholarly travels and expeditions in the USSR or other countries, if their results are made known by trustworthy reports and include completely new and exceptionally important acquisitions in the area of geography, even if descriptions of these travels have not yet been published.
- c) Eminent and totally independent investigations into the theory of methodology of geography, promoting further fruitful development of geography as a science.
- d) Works that have led to especially critical improvements in ways and methods used in geographical research, under conditions of their successful application in practice.
- e) Works on the various branches of geography, throwing a completely new light on major problems in science that are important in principle.
- f) Multi-year, fruitful works in the area of the geographical sciences if, in aggregate they deserve the award of all three of the named gold medals, but if the latter have not yet been awarded.

Description



Obverse: A radiating five-pointed star with 16 rays in the upper part of this circle (evidently representing the 16 Soviet Republics), over a table globe (showing the Middle East, Asia and Australia), atop a book, with a compass to the left, criss-crossed behind with a rolled-up map, telescope and laurel branches, with books on either side. The whole is encircled by: ‘GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF THE U.S.S.R.’ In the exergue: ‘FOUNDED 1845’.



Reverse: An oak wreath, with a small five-pointed star at the top centre; below is a blank for engraving the recipient’s name and the year of award.

Designer: Russian archival sources are unclear, but the basis for the obverse design was surely taken from the reverse of the Count Fedor Petrovich Litke Medal by V.V. Alekseev. A notable difference being the radiating star replacing the burning oil lamp (see below).

Diameter: 65 mm

Composition: gold alloy (pure gold, pure silver and copper). The medal is layered in gilt, 5.0 micrometres thick.

Manufacturer: Moscow Mint (mint mark 'MMD' stamped on the reverse).

Weight: 168 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient's name and year of award.

Award Document: A 'Certificate of Honour', on which was recorded the date of award, the name of the medal and the patronymic name and surname of the recipient.

Recipients

1950: Vize, Vladimir Iul'evich [Wiese/Wieze] (1886–1954): 'corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Rear-Admiral, member of many famous expeditions in the Arctic 1912–1934, on board *Sviatoi Foka*, the icebreakers *Taimyr* and *Malygin*; leader of expeditions on board the icebreakers *Georgii Sedov*, *Sibiriakov*, *Fedor Litke*; for the sum total of his geographical work and explorations in the Arctic.'

Born at St Petersburg, Vize was of German roots and studied chemistry in Germany and physics in Russia. Vize was the Geographer and Meteorologist during the Russian North Pole expedition 1912–14, led by Georgii Iakovlevich Sedov in the *Saint Foka*. He became a leading figure in Soviet Arctic studies and served as research manager for expeditions on several ships, including *Georgii Sedov* (1930), *Sibiriakov* (1932) and *Litke* (1934). Wrote about the problems of oceanology, meteorology and ice forecasting in the Arctic. Vize received the Stalin Prize in 1946 and was awarded many orders and medals. See also under the Society's Small Gold Medals (1925).

1958: Urvantsev, Nikolai Nikolaevich (1893–1985): 'Russian geologist; geographer, professor, one of the discoverers of the Noril'sk ore-bearing area in Taimyr (1919–1922); in 1930–1932 he carried out the first exploration [with Georgii A. Ushakov] of Severnaia Zemlia [North Land]; for the sum aggregate of his geographical work and explorations in the Arctic.'

In 1933–34, Urvantsev led the first oil exploration expedition onboard the steamer *Pravda*, to Nordvik, Northern Siberia. His wife, Dr Elizaveta Ivanovna, was the chief medical officer of the expedition, which was sent by the newly formed Glavsevmorput' or GUSMP (Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route). A twice recipient of the Order of Lenin and several medals, Urvantsev was also an Honorary Member of the Geographical Society of the USSR and held the honorary title of Honoured Worker of Science.

1960: Al'man, Khans Vil'son [Ahlmann, Hans Wilson] (1889–1974): 'famous Swedish glaciologist and physical geographer, member of expeditions to Svalbard, Iceland and Greenland in 1931–1940; for the sum aggregate of his geographical work and for exploring polar lands.'

Ahlmann also organized the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition 1949-52. This venture represented the first multi-national Antarctic scientific expedition, which paved the way for the much more expansive International Geophysical Year of 1957–58. British members of the expedition received the Polar Medal with clasps for 'ANTARCTIC 1950–51' (one issued, posthumously), 'ANTARCTIC 1950–52' (four issued) or 'ANTARCTIC 1951' (one issued, posthumously). All eighteen expedition members received the silver Norwegian Medal for Civil Services with the clasp 'MAUDHEIM 1949–52' (the name of the base). In addition, the Norwegian Polar Institute issued a bronze table medal called the Maudheim Commemorative Medal.

1979: Papanin, Ivan Dmitrievich (1894–1986): ‘Russian polar explorer, Rear-Admiral; for his geographical achievements and his enormous contribution to the task of organizing oceanographic research in the USSR.’

Papanin was the Geophysicist on North Pole 1 (NP-1) during 1937–38, the first of a series of drift stations in the decades to follow (which came to be closely associated with the Cold War). NP-1 was established just a few miles from the pole and eventually drifted more than 1600 kilometres in 274 days. The station supplemented meteorological information being gathered from a network of stations across the Soviet Arctic, that were supporting shipping on the Northern Sea Route. A twice Hero of the Soviet Union (the first time for NP-1 and afterwards for his role in the expedition of the icebreaker *Sedov* (1937–40), for many years Papanin was the Soviet personification of a polar explorer.

1988: Treshnikov, Aleksei Feodorovich (1914–1991): ‘famous polar researcher, Academician, President of the Russian Geographical Society (1977–1991), leader of many Arctic expeditions; for his pre-eminent geographical achievements, execution of which involved enormous difficulty and danger; participation in Arctic and Antarctic expeditions, the results of which included totally new and important data in the area of geography.’

Treshnikov’s introduction to the polar regions began with his 1940–41 wintering in the Novosibirskie Ostrova. He was subsequently involved in defence of the Northern Sea Route during the Second World War, before participating in the 1948 Soviet expedition to the North Pole. In 1954–55 he was leader on the *NP-3* drift station in the Arctic Ocean, before leading the Second Soviet Antarctic Expedition. He remained active in polar matters until the 1980s.

Treshnikov’s awards included: Hero of Socialist Labour (1949); four Orders of Lenin (1949, 1955, 1960, 1984); Order of the Red Banner of Labour (1981); Order of the Badge of Honour (1946); Order of the October Revolution (1974); Medal for the Victory over Germany in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945; Medal for the Defence of Soviet Polar Regions; Jubilee Medal for the 30th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945; F.P. Litke Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR (1965; see below).

The Count Fedor Petrovich Litke Gold Medal (IRGS)

On 21 December 1873, the council of the IRGS instituted the medal named after Count Fedor Petrovich Litke (1797–1882), becoming its second highest award. Litke was one of the founders of the Society, the first Vice-President and an Honorary Member, a well known Arctic explorer, Admiral, and President of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.

The Count F. P. Litke Medal ‘was established to encourage the work of Russian scholars in mathematical and physical geography in general and by foreigners, in the physical geographical study of Russia.’ The medal was awarded annually from 1873 to 1930, and thereafter ceased to be awarded.

Regulations

Meritorious achievements eligible for the award of the Count F. P. Litke Gold Medal were judged by regulations, one set of which were approved by His Highness on 21 December 1873.

- a) **Sea travels and voyages if they produced results of importance to geographical science, for example, surveys of unknown or little-known coasts, investigations of sea depths and of the properties of the sea bed over considerable areas, observations on ocean currents and sea temperature over fairly extensive areas, observations on the distribution of marine plants and animals, etc.**
- b) **Overland travels and explorations of greater or lesser extent and of inadequately known areas, if the results of such investigations are sufficiently important in a purely geographical regard, or if the descriptions of the journey represent a true and accurate characterization of the physical nature of the country.**
- c) **Very important coastal observations, for example, investigations into the formation of deltas at the mouths of rivers, the erosional effects of the sea on sea coasts and the distribution of sediments by waves on coastal spits and shoals, the investigation of tides and the detailed analysis of multi-year observations on fluctuations of sea level.**
- d) **Hydrographic observations on lakes and rivers of vast dimensions, and specifically on fluctuations of water level in rivers, changes in the direction of river flow, the drying-up of river channels and of water bodies in general, and investigations into the contributing causes of the shallowing, silting-up or drying-up of rivers.**
- e) **Observations on water masses in a frozen condition, namely permanent snow, firn, glaciers and floating ice, their formation and the role they play in the physical history of our planet, and also investigations of erratic phenomena.**
- f) **The establishing over large areas of determinations of latitude and longitude and observations of the magnetic elements.**
- g) **Observations on the swing of the pendulum and, in general, all observations whose aim is to determine the shape of the Earth and changes in the force of gravity due to the internal arrangement of the Earth's masses.**
- h) **The analysis of a large number of multi-year meteorological and other physical observations, if only from one branch of physical geography, for example, pertaining to storms, earthquakes or wind, if such analysis leads to fairly important results for science.**
- i) **Works in Russian on physical or mathematical geography, containing a summary of anything from the full range of science, if, moreover, the essays are at the level of the current state of science and may serve as a guide for teachers.**
- j) **Works covering any extensive branch of physical geography, for example, investigations of climate, terrestrial magnetism, the distribution of plants and animals etc., although based on observations by others, but representing independent analysis and classification of the available data. Such works may refer to either the entire global surface or to Russia alone.**
- k) **Descriptions, in terms of physical geography, of more or less extensive parts of the Empire, although not based on the author's own observations but including not only a summary of everything known about these locations, but also independent views and conclusions pertaining to different geographical data, e.g. the relief of the country, its hydrographic network, climatic conditions, geological structure, etc.**

l) Geographical maps of more or less extensive areas compiled from sources that have been critically investigated in memoirs pertaining to these maps.

m) Original maps and diagrams presenting a graphic representation of physical-geographical facts, for example, hypsometric or orographic maps, etc., relating to the whole of the Empire or at least to extensive parts of it.

n) In general, any type of independent research in which physical geography plays an important role.

Description

Obverse: Bust of Count F. P. Litke, facing right, surrounded by: 'ГРАФ [COUNT] FEDOR PETROVICH LITKE'. At the edge of the image: 'V.A.'



Reverse: The attributes of science depict a table globe in the centre (showing the Middle East, Asia and Australia), atop a book, with a compass to the left; crisscrossed behind are a rolled-up map, telescope and laurel branches, with books on either side and a burning oil lamp behind. The whole is encircled by: 'FROM THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'. In exergue: 'FOR WORKS ON GEOGRAPHY'. On the left, above the exergue: 'V.A.'



Designer: Vasilii Vladimirovich Alekseev (Professor, Imperial Academy of Art)

Diameter: 50.8 mm

Composition: pure gold

Manufacturer: cast at the Imperial Mint (St. Petersburg)

Weight: 104.14 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient's name and year of award.

Award Document: No special document was issued with the medal. A congratulatory letter was sent to the recipient on Society letterhead, along with information on the award, plus a request for a written confirmation of receipt.

Recipients

1888: Bunge, Aleksander Aleksanderovich (1851–1930): ‘for exploring the Novosibirskie Ostrova [New Siberian Islands].’

Bunge was the medical officer and naturalist with the IPY, 1881–84; joint leader with Toll', Russian geological expedition to Novosibirskie Ostrova, 1885–86; Medical Officer and winterer, Swedish-Russian Arc-of-Meridian Expedition 1899–1900 (for which a special Russian badge was awarded, dated 1899–1901). For the 1885–86 expedition, in addition to their geological and natural history surveys in the Novosibirskie Ostrova group, Bunge and Toll' made meteorological observations.

The Swedish-Russian Arc-of-Meridian Expedition actually encompassed work from 1898–1902, and was sent out to measure an arc of meridian over about four degrees of latitude in the Svalbard archipelago. The aim of this scientific expedition was to define the shape of the earth by means of very precise astronomical determination of latitude and longitude, as well as topographic work. This should then be compared to the result of similar investigations from near-equator latitudes.

1891: Vil'kitskii, Andrei Ippolitovich (1858–1913): ‘for his explorations on Novaia Zemlia.’

At the request of the IRGS, Vil'kitskii was sent out in 1887 to make pendulum observations of gravity on Novaia Zemlia. During 1894, 1895, 1896 and 1898, Vil'kitskii was the leader of hydrographic expeditions mainly focused on the Barents-Kara Sea route. He also received the Society's Small Gold Medal (1887) and was father of Boris Andreevich Vil'kitskii (Great Gold Konstantin Medal, 1914).

1902: Knipovich, Nikolai Mikhailovich (1862–1939): ‘for the sum aggregate of his work in the North of European Russia.’

Captain and leader of a Barents Sea expedition in the *Naezdnik* (1893), this was one of a series of five hydrographic expeditions undertaken between 1891 and 1895. The other expeditions were confined mainly to the Murman coast and the White Sea. The Barents Sea was sometimes called the Murman Sea. Knipovich was the leader of the Scientific Murman Expedition 1898–1908 (to 1901 only). Sponsored by the Russian government, through the agency of the Committee for the support of the coastal peoples of northern Russia, the ultimate objective was the development of fishing and sealing industries in the Barents Sea and along the Murman coast.

1907: Breitfus, Leonid L'vovich [Breitfuss, L. L.] (1864-1950): ‘for studies of the Barents Sea.’

Breitfus was the biologist with, and (from 1902) leader of the Scientific Murman Expedition 1898-1908.

1910: Bukhteev, Afanasii Mikhailovich: ‘for his work on studying the tidal phenomena of the Murman Sea [Barents Sea].’

Lieutenant commanding the naval transport *Samoed* in 1896, Bukhteev was sent out by the Ministry of Marine to take Oskar Backlund's Solar Eclipse Expedition to Malye Karmakuly (southwest Novaia Zemlia) and to carry out hydrographic surveys on the southwest coast of the archipelago.

1914: Sharko, Zhan [Charcot, Jean-Baptiste] (1867–1936): 'for his work of studying the Antarctic region, Alexander I Land, and Peter I Island.'

French scientist, medical doctor and polar scientist, the much accomplished Charcot is best known for his Antarctic expeditions in 1903–05 and 1908–10. In January 1909, Charcot was able to come within two miles of Alexander Island; far closer than anyone since its discovery in 1821 by Russian explorer Fabian von Bellingshausen. Although believed to be an island by Charcot and mapped as such, it was not proven to be so until 1935 during the British Graham Land Expedition. One year later, Charcot came within three miles of Peter I Island, the first time it had been seen since Bellingshausen's discovery in 1821.

The F. P. Litke Gold Medal (USSR)

The tradition of this award was revived with the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Society on 29 August 1946. A resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR sanctioned new regulations concerning the F. P. Litke Gold Medal.

The word 'Count' being removed from the title, as royal titles and nobility did not exist in Soviet society, the medal was awarded every two years, along with 1000 roubles. From 1992 the Geographical Society of the USSR reverted to its original name, and the inscription around the outer circumference on the obverse was changed accordingly. In addition, there was no provision for a monetary prize.

Regulations

- a) New and important geographical discoveries in the polar lands.
- b) Sea travels and voyages, if their execution produced important results for the geographical sciences, e.g. the surveying of unknown and little-known coasts, investigation over a considerable area of sea depths, seabed sediments, currents, the physical and chemical properties of sea water, and sea ice and observations on the distribution of marine organisms, etc.
- c) Important coastal observations, for example, investigations into the formation of deltas, of the different types of coasts, of tidal phenomena; the detailed analysis of multi-year observations on fluctuations of sea and lake levels etc.
- d) Hydrological observations on lakes, rivers and other waters on land, executed on a large scale.
- e) The study of permafrost, firn and glaciers, their formation and development and their roles in geographical processes.
- f) Extensive geophysical investigations and triangulation work with a view to determining the shape of the earth.
- g) Analysis of a large number of multi-year climatological observations, if such analysis leads to results important to science.

h) Works on the geography of the polar lands, oceanography, hydrology of the land, glaciology, permafrost studies, geophysics, hydrobiology, meteorology and climatology, including an independent overview of everything included in science in its full range, if those works are at the level of the current state of science.

i) Compilation of geographical maps of the seas, oceans and polar lands if they are produced independently on the basis of primary sources and produce essentially new results.

Description



Obverse: Bust of Count F. P. Litke (from the 1873 medal) encircled by: ‘FEDOR PETROVITCH LITKE’.



Reverse: Encircling a wreath of laurels: ‘FROM THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF THE U.S.S.R.’; a radiating five-pointed star with 16 rays above the wreath (evidently representing the 16 Soviet Republics), and just below the star: ‘FOUNDED IN 1845.’; a central blank space for engraving the recipient’s name and date of award.

Designer of bust: Vasilii Vladimirovich Alekseev (Professor, Imperial Academy of Art).

Diameter: 50 mm

Composition: gold alloy (pure gold, copper and pure silver) For decoration, there was a gilt layer, 5.0 micrometers thick.

Manufacturer: Moscow Mint (mint mark 'MMD' stamped on the reverse)

Weight: 99.00 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient's name and year of award.

Award Document: A 'Certificate of Honour', on which was recorded the date of award, the name of the medal and the first name, patronymic name and surname of the recipient.

Recipients

1963: Leonov, Aleksandr Kuz'mich: 'for the book *Regional'naiia okeanografiia. Moria SSSR, ch. I [Bering Sea, Sea of Okhotsk, etc.]*.'

1965: Treshnikov, Aleksei Fedorovich (1914–91): 'for his book *Istoriia otkrytiia i issledovaniia Antarktidy [History of Discovery and Research in the Antarctic]*.'

Treshnikov also received the Great Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR (1988) and many other medals (see above).

1967: Senchura, Leonid Ivanovich: 'for his work on mapping the Arctic.'

The Great Gold Medal of the Division of Ethnography and Statistics (IRGS)

This medal was established in 1879 and was equivalent to the Society's small gold medals. Works eligible for receipt of the medal were scrutinized annually, and the compilation of reviews rests with a committee selected by the Ethnographic and Statistical Departments.

The medal was awarded by the Council of the Society in the sequence established for the small gold medals. It was awarded annually from 1879–1930, with the award being announced at the Society's annual meeting.

Regulations

On the basis of a proposal from the Ethnography and Statistics Departments of the IRGS, the Great Gold Medal is awarded for scholarly works through regulations approved 16 October 1879.

On behalf of the Ethnography Department:

- a) For ethnographic, linguistic and anthropological investigations relating to peoples living in Russia or to related peoples, if such works make a significant contribution to science.
- b) For original travel accounts in Russian of primarily an ethnographic nature.
- c) For collections of new ethnographic data, relating to peoples living in Russia, or to related peoples, if the compilation and publication of such data satisfies scientific requirements.

d) For historical-geographical investigations that explain any important area of the ancient geography of Russia or of contiguous countries to the east, and of the Slavic lands.

On behalf of the Statistics Department:

a) For works that present thorough analysis of previously unrecorded statistical data, collected by the author personally, and pertaining to some branch of statistical investigation or to some particular location.

b) For compilations representing scientific statistical analysis of data, collected by different institutions by means of either some separate statistical operation or a separate enquiry, or else recorded in various institutions by way of routine records.

c) For independent investigations into statistical questions, based on a critical study and codification of data both from primary sources and from published materials.

d) For statistical charts and diagrams for which are appended verifying documents in the form of tables or explanatory text, if, in the compilation of such charts and diagrams any new methods are used or if the charts and diagrams relate to themes of statistical research for which the cartographic method has not previously been used.

e) For works having as their theme historical-statistical research on the basis of scientific analysis of both data of a statistical nature encountered in historical memoirs prior to the era of Tsar Peter, and of historical-statistical date of a later period.

Note 1: The insignificance of a territorial unit that is the object of investigation will not serve as an impediment to the receipt of the medal. The chief stipulations in judging the merit of a work are: the accuracy and appropriateness of the statistical method, critical evaluation of the sources and the completeness of the research itself.

Note 2: The medal is awarded only for works bearing the name of the author, but independently of whether these works were executed on the personal initiative of the author, or on behalf of some governmental, public or private institution.

Description



Obverse: The seated figure of Minerva (Roman goddess of wisdom), facing left, with her left arm resting on a shield with the Russian State coat of arms (double-headed eagle); in her right outstretched hand she holds a laurel wreath. Behind Minerva, on the left is a table globe resting on two books, and on the right a rolled-up map. Encircling the whole: ‘FOR WORKS ON STATISTICS AND ETHNOGRAPHY.’ In exergue: ‘V. ALEKSEEV.’



Reverse: A laurel wreath, with a radiant, five-pointed star top center; and encircling the whole: ‘FROM THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.’; a central blank space for engraving the recipient’s name and date of award.

Designer: Professor Vasili Vladimirovich Alekseev (Full Member, Imperial Academy of Arts).

Diameter: 50.8 mm

Composition: pure gold

Manufacturer: Imperial Mint (St. Petersburg)

Weight: 74.03 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient’s name and year of award.

Award Document: No special document was issued with the medal. A congratulatory letter was sent to the recipient on Society letterhead, along with information on the award, plus a request for a written confirmation of receipt.

Recipients

1894: Toll’, Eduard Vasil’evich [Toll, Baron Eduard von] (1858–1902): ‘for his expedition to the Siberian coast of the Arctic Ocean, to the mouths of the Iana, Lena, Khatanga and to the Novosibirskie Ostrova.’ Possibly received the N. M. Przheval’skii Large Silver Medal for the same expedition. (see below)

Toll was joint leader, geologist and zoologist, geological expedition 1885–86; leader, scientific expedition 1892–93; Geologist, *Ermak* 1899 (first cruise only); leader, exploring expedition 1900–03 (died in Novosibirskie Ostrova, circa November 1902 (see under Great Gold Konstantin Medal, Aleksandr Kolchak, 1905).

1894: Shileiko, Evgenii Ivanovich: ‘for his expedition to the Siberian coast of the Arctic Ocean, to the mouths of the Iana, Lena, Khatanga and to the Novosibirskie

Ostrova.’ The 1892–93 expedition under Toll’. Possibly received the N. M. Przheval’skii Large Silver Medal for the same expedition. (see below)

1905: Zhuravskii, Andrei Vladimirovich: ‘for his participation in two expeditions to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra.’

1909: Vasil’ev, A.S.: ‘for his work in the area of mathematical geography on Svalbard.’

Vasil’ev was an astronomer on the Swedish-Russian Arc-of-Meridian Expedition during 1899–1901. Under the Count F. P. Litke Gold Medal, see Bunge (1888).

1928: Grigor’ev, Andrei Aleksandrovich: ‘for his geomorphological investigations in Yakutiia.’

1934: Urvantsev, Nikolai Nikolaevich (1893–1985): ‘for the first exploration of Severnaia Zemlia.’ Under the Great Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR, see Urvantsev (1958).

The N. M. Przheval’skii Prize, N. M. Przheval’skii Gold Medal and N. M. Przheval’skii Large Silver Medal (IRGS)

Major General Nikolai Mikhailovich Przheval’skii (1839–1888), a geographer and member of the Academy of Sciences (1878). He organised five expeditions to Central Asia, exploring there between 1870 and 1888, and obtained numerous zoological, botanical and mineral collections.

The N. M. Przheval’skii Prize

In commemoration of Przheval’skii’s name and work, the Council of the IRGS instituted the Przheval’skii Prize, approving regulations for the award on 3 December 1891. These regulations were introduced for three years, and after this period they were subject to final approval, with the changes dictated by experience.

These regulations had some interesting features:

- a) The prize may be awarded in the full or half amount.
- b) The prize may be awarded twice to the same individual for the same journey: once on his return from a journey, and again on analysis of data gathered during that journey. A twofold award of the prize for same journey does not apply to individuals who have also received the Konstantin Medal or the Count F. P. Litke Medal for this same journey.
- c) Following an award of the prize, the recipient can receive it again for another journey.

Recipient of the Prize

1908: Zhitkov, Boris Mikhailovich: ‘for his explorations of Polustrov Iamal [Iamal Peninsula, northwest Siberia].’

The N. M. Przheval’skii Gold Medal

Regulations

Archival records are unclear, but it is presumed the gold medal was instituted in 1892 and the following regulations were approved in 1895.

- a) Overland travels and investigations of more-or-less extensive locations either little-known or totally unknown, if the results of such investigations are sufficiently important with regard to geography, or if the description of the journey presents a true geographical characterization of the country.
- b) The production over large areas of geographical coordinates and observations of the magnetic elements.
- c) Geographical maps of areas of greater or lesser extent, compiled from primary sources, critically examined in the explanatory notes attached to the maps.
- d) Works on cartography, geodesy, mathematical geography, geomorphology and military geography, including a full summary of data available to science, and at the level of contemporary science.

The N. M. Przheval’skii Large Silver Medal

Regulations

The silver medal was instituted in 1892, and regulations were approved by the Minister of Internal Affairs on 23 February 1895.

- a) The N. M. Przheval’skii Large Silver Medal is equivalent to the small gold medals awarded by the Imperial Russian Geographical Society for works within the Society’s range of activities.
- b) The medal is awarded exclusively for travels, not limited to those made within the Society’s sphere of activity.
- c) Awarded to members and non-members of the Society for works on the study of the natural environment of Central Asia.
- d) Award of the medal is made by the Council of the Society and the award of the medal was announced at the annual meeting.

Descriptions of Gold & Large Silver Medals



Obverse: Bust of N. M. Przheval'skii facing right, encircled by: 'TO THE MEMORY OF NIKOLAI MIKHAILOVICH PRZHEVAL'SKII/FOR TRAVELS'.



Reverse: A laurel wreath, inside of which at the top centre is: 'I.R.G.O.'; below is a blank space for the name of the recipient and year of the award.

Designer: Professor Vasilii Vladimirovich Alekseev (Full Member, Imperial Academy of Arts)

Diameter: 70 mm

Composition: gold/oxidized silver

Manufacturer: Imperial Mint (St. Petersburg)

Weight: unknown in gold: 157.03 gm (silver)

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipient's name and year of award.

Award Document: No special documents were issued with the medals. Congratulatory letters were sent to recipients on Society letterhead, along with information on the awards, plus requests for a written confirmation of receipt.

Recipients of the Large Silver Medal

1894: Toll', Eduard Vasil'evich [Toll, Baron Eduard von] (1858–1902): 'for their recent journey to Siberia.'

The 1892–93 expedition under Toll. (ref.: *Natural Science: A Monthly Review of Scientific Progress*, April 1895, p. 281).

1894: Shileiko, Evgenii Ivanovich: 'for their recent journey to Siberia.' The 1892–93 expedition under Toll. (ref.: *Natural Science: A Monthly Review of Scientific Progress*, April 1895, p. 281).

Note: According to Russian archival sources, Toll' and Shileiko each received the Great Gold Medal of the Division of Ethnography and Statistics for the 1892–93 expedition (see above). It seems doubtful that two different medals were awarded for the same expedition. There is no record of gold medal awards for polar work.

The N. M. Przheval'skii Gold Medal (USSR)

The tradition of the award was revived to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Society in 1946, but only the N. M. Przheval'skii Gold Medal (sometimes referred to as the Przheval'skii Memorial Gold Medal) was sanctioned. The medal was awarded every two years, along with 1000 roubles. In 1992 the Geographical Society of the USSR reverted to its original name, and the inscription on the reverse, around the outer circumference of the medal, was changed accordingly. In addition there is no provision for a monetary prize.

Obverse: Bust of N. M. Przheval'skii facing right (copied from the 1895 medal), encircled by: 'NIKOLAI MIKHAILOVICH PRZHEVAL'SKII'. Directly below the image is a small five-pointed star.



Reverse: A wreath of laurel, surrounded by: ‘FROM THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF THE U.S.S.R.’; a radiating five-pointed star with 16 rays at the top centre (evidently representing the 16 Soviet Republics), and inscribed below: ‘FOUNDED IN 1845.’; a central blank space for engraving the recipient’s name and date of award.



Designer of obverse bust: Professor Vasilii Vladimirovich Alekseev (Full Member, Imperial Academy of Arts).

Diameter: 50 mm.

Composition: gold alloy (pure gold, pure silver and copper) For decoration the medal is covered in a layer of gilt, 5.0 micrometres thick.

Manufacturer: Moscow Mint (mint mark ‘MMD’ on reverse)

Weight: 98.00 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterward engraved with the recipient’s name and year.

Award Document: A ‘Certificate of Honour’, on which was recorded the date of award, the name of the medal, and the name of the recipient.

Recipient

1974: Korotkevich, Evgenii Sergeevich: ‘Vice-President of the RGS, polar explorer, member of a number of Arctic expeditions and leader of the Fourth Antarctic Expedition; for his work, *Poliarnye pustyni* [*Polar Deserts*].’

The P. P. Semenov Gold & Silver Medals (IRGS)

In memory of the services of the Vice President of the IRGS, Petr Petrovich Semenov (1827–1914), a gold medal was established in 1899, ‘to encourage primarily Russian travellers and scholars in the geographical study of Russia, in the widest sense of the word, and of adjacent countries, but also of more distant countries, which have some connection with Russia.’

The P. P. Semenov medals, both gold and silver, were awarded annually from 1899-1930, and then the award ceased.

Regulations for the Gold Medal

Approved by the Minister of Internal Affairs, 6 July 1899.

- a) Overland travels and investigations of more or less extensive and inadequately known areas, if the results of such investigations are fairly important with regard to geography, or if the descriptions of the travels present a reliable characterization of the physical environment of the country.
- b) Overland travels and investigations of more or less extensive and inadequately known areas, if the results of such investigations are fairly important with regard to geography, or if the descriptions of the travels present a reliable characterization of the physical environment of the country.
- c) Descriptions, with regard to geography, of more or less extensive parts of the Empire, and equally of countries identified in section I, even if not based on the author's own observations but including not only a summary of everything known about these places, but also independent views and conclusions concerning the various geographical data.
- d) Observations on permanent snows, firn, glaciers or floating ice, their formations and the role that they play in the physical history of our planet, and equally pertaining to the distribution of ancient glacial formations.
- e) Research into the geographical distribution of plants and animals, if they include any new phytogeographical or zoogeographical results.
- f) Geographical maps of more or less extensive areas, compiled from sources that are critically assessed in the explanatory notes accompanying these maps.
- g) Original maps and diagrams representing a graphic representation of physical geographical facts, for example, hypsometric, orographic, geological maps etc., pertaining to more distant countries, which have some connection with Russia.
- h) In general any type of independent investigation in which physical geography plays a significant role.

Regulations for the Silver Medal

The Petr Petrovich Semenov Silver Medal, established by the IRGS in 1899, with regulations approved by the Minister of Internal Affairs on 6 July 1899.

- a) The P. P. Semenov Silver Medal is equivalent to the Society's Small Gold Medals.
- b) The medal is awarded by the Council for works that in the opinion of the Department, merit the award of a Small Gold Medal, but where the latter may not be awarded in that these works do not lie within the sphere of activity of the Society.
- c) Not more than one Semenov Silver Medal may be awarded in any one year.

Description



Obverse: A bust profile of P. P. Semenov, facing left, in senatorial uniform, with his orders, medals and the sash of his order over his left shoulder. Above is: **PETR PETROVICH SEMENOV.**



Reverse: A female figure in classical dress seated on a rock, a laurel wreath on her head, facing right. She holds a pen in her right hand, while a globe rests between her right arm and leg; an open journal/book is in her lap. Her left arm is extended and she has a lit oil lamp in hand. To the right, in the distance, is a desert with a traveler riding a camel. Around the circumference: 'IMPERIAL RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY'. On the lower left side: 'A. VASIUTINSKII.'

Designer: Anton Fedorovich Vasiutinskii

Diameter: 50.8 mm

Composition: pure gold or pure silver

Manufacturer: Imperial Mint (St Petersburg)

Weight: unknown in gold: 92.39 gm (silver)

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterwards engraved with the recipients' names and years of award.

Award Document: No special documents were issued with the medals. Congratulatory letters were sent to recipients on Society letterhead, along with information on the

awards, plus requests for a written confirmation of receipt.

Recipient of the Gold Medal

1912: Buturlin, Sergey Aleksandrovich (1872–1938): ‘for his research in Iakutskaja oblast [region]’ and other locations in the north of European Russia.’

Recipients of the Silver Medal

1905: Shparberg, Mikhail Nikolaevich: ‘for his participation in the expedition to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra [bordering the Barents Sea].’

1930: Zhongolovich, Ivan Danilovich (1892–1981): ‘for the sum aggregate of his work on astronomical determinations of the sites of magnetic determinations and observations on gravity in the north of the USSR in 1921–29.’

The P. P. Semenov Gold Medal (USSR)

The tradition of the award was revived to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Society, but only the P. P. Semenov Gold Medal was sanctioned, as were new regulations. From that time the medal has been awarded every two years, simultaneously with the award of the medal a monetary prize of 1000 roubles is awarded. From 1992 the Geographical Society of the USSR reverted to its original name, and the inscription on the reverse around the outer circumference of the medal was changed to: ‘FROM THE RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY’. In addition, there was no provision for a monetary prize.

Regulations

- a) First ascents of high mountain summits if these ascents produce new geographical information.
- b) Ethnographic expeditionary investigations of peoples of the USSR and other countries that produce new and important results.
- c) Geographical descriptions of more or less extensive parts of the USSR and other countries, although not based on personal observations, but including not only a summary of what is known about these locations, but also independent views and conclusions concerning various geographical data.
- d) Works on general physical geography, paleogeography, biogeography, the geography of soils, economic and political geography, statistics, ethnography, ethnology, historical geography and the history of geographical knowledge and discoveries, including a full summary of the materials available to science and at the level of the contemporary state of science.

Description



Obverse: Bust of P. P. Semenov, facing left, encircled by: 'PETR PETROVICH SEMENOV'. Semenov's portrait was copied from the 1899 medal.



Reverse: Encircling a wreath of laurels: 'FROM THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF THE U.S.S.R.'; a radiating five-pointed star with 16 rays at the top center (evidently representing the 16 Soviet Republics), and below the star: 'FOUNDED IN 1845.'; a central blank space for engraving the recipient's name and date of award.

Designer of bust: Anton Fedorovich Vasiutinskii

Diameter: 50 mm.

Composition: gold alloy (pure gold, pure silver and copper) For decoration the medal is covered with a layer of gilt, 5 micrometres thick.

Manufacturer: Moscow Mint (mint mark 'MMD' on reverse)

Weight: 99 gm

Naming: Issued unnamed, but afterward engraved with the recipient's name and year.

Award Document: Along with the medal, the recipient received 100 roubles and a 'Certificate of Honour', on which was recorded the date of award, the name of the medal, and the first name and surname of the recipient.

Recipient of the P.P. Semenov Gold Medal (USSR)

1973: Belov, Mikhail Ivanovich: ‘for his monograph *Istoriia otkritiia i osvoenia Severnogo morskogo puti*, Vols. III and IV [*History of Discovery and Development of the Northern Sea Route*].’

The IRGS Small Gold & Small Silver Medals

To reward and encourage works in the area of activity of the IRGS, small medals began being issued by the Society in 1858, in gold, silver and bronze. Archival records do not reveal any bronze awards for polar work. The Society’s Small Gold and Silver Medals were awarded annually from 1858 until 1930.

Regulations

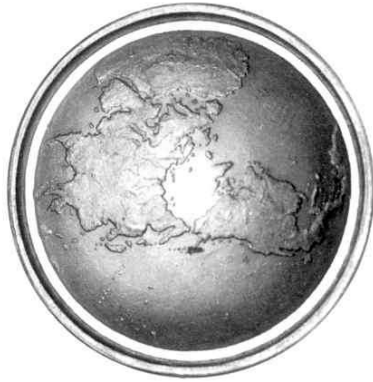
a) The small gold medals are awarded not more than four times per year. If fewer than four gold medals are awarded in any one year, more may be awarded in the following year. The number of silver and bronze medals is not specified, although they may be awarded at any time, as works meriting them are completed. The final award of these medals also depends on the Council, to which the departments may submit nominations.

b) The small gold medals are awarded for independent scholarly works in one of the areas of Society activity that contain new scientific results, or an assemblage of previously unknown facts and data, or at least a systematic collection of previously reported facts and data on some object of investigation that provide the possibility of fully embracing it. The gold medal may be awarded not only for written scholarly works, but also for significant projects of some other type, executed or performed, within the range of the Society’s activities and that achieve its assumed goals.

c) The silver and bronze medals are intended for works and donations that benefit the Society, and for studies of lesser merit, and also for successful completion of the Society’s missions.

d) In making the final award of the small gold medal the Council pays particular attention to the merit of the works, and is not constrained by whether the medal has been awarded to any particular department in any particular year.

Description



Obverse: A convex map of the northern hemisphere from a aerial view of the Arctic.



Reverse: An oak wreath, at the top of which is a small, six-pointed star. Within the wreath is: 'THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.'; and in smaller curved wording below: 'FOR USEFUL WORKS.'

Designer: The initials 'PB' appear at the bottom of the wreath, surely belonging to Pavel L'vovich Brusnitsyn (designer of the obverse of the Great Gold Konstantin Medal).

Diameter: 36.5 mm

Composition: pure gold/pure silver

Manufacturer: Imperial Mint (St Petersburg)

Weight: 39.65 gm (gold) or 28.45 gm (silver)

Naming: The medals were minted without names; for the Silver Medal, the name of the recipient and year were engraved on the reverse, but for the Gold Medal, details were engraved on the edge.

Award Document: No special documents were issued with the medals. Congratulatory letters were sent to recipients on Society letterhead, with requests for written confirmation of receipt.

Recipients of the Small Gold Medal

1880: Nordkvist, Oskar Arvidovich [Nordqvist, Oscar Frithiof, 1858–1925]: ‘for carrying out the orders of the Society as to his participation in the expedition of Professor Nil’s Adol’f Erik Nordenshel’d [Nordenskiöld, Nils Adolf Erik].’

Nordqvist was the Interpreter and Assistant Zoologist on the *Vega* (1878–80). Under the Great Konstantin Gold Medal, see Nordenskiöld (1878).

1880: Tiagin, Evstafii Alekseevich: ‘for meteorological observations on Novaia Sibir [New Siberia].’

One of the New Siberian Islands. Lieutenant Tiagin established the Malye Karmakuly relief station for shipwrecked mariners in 1877. He constructed a station, which consisted of a house, bathhouse, lookout post and lifeboat. Tiagin was appointed the first superintendent of the station, and returned to spend 1878–79 there, making meteorological and other observations.

1886: Eygner, Adol’f Georgievich [Eigner, Adolf Georg]: ‘for analysing the meteorological data from the Ust’-Lenskaia polar station.’ Under the Great Gold Konstantin Medal, see Iurgens (1885).

1887: Vil’kitskii, Andrei Ippolitovich (1885–1913): ‘for his work in determining the length of the second pendulum on Novaia Zemlia.’ Also received the Count F. P. Litke Gold Medal (1891).

1905: Sergievskii, Dmitrii Dmitrievich: ‘for his geodesic work on Svalbard.’ Swedish/Russian Arc-of-Meridian Expedition. Under the Count F.P. Litke Gold Medal, see Bunge (1888).

1914: Iokhel’son, D.: ‘for his participation in the Society’s Kamchatka Expedition.’

This is Vladimir Iokhelson [Waldemar Jochelson] (1855–1937), who was joint leader of a United States-Russian ethnographic expedition in 1900–02, sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History (New York) and the Russian Academy of Sciences. Vladimir’s wife, Dina Jochelson-Brodsky, was also an anthropologist and handled all of the anthropometric and medical work and most of the photography during the field work conducted by her husband. As she was such an integral part of the expedition, there was evidently confusion in recording the award and her name found its way into the Russian records. This was part of the American Museum’s much larger Jesup North Pacific Expedition of 1897–1902, the objective of which was to study the racial and cultural relationships between the natives of northeastern Asia and northwestern North America.

1924: Evgenov, Nikolai Ivanovich: ‘hydrographer and oceanologist; Arctic explorer; participant in the hydrographic expedition aboard the icebreaker *Taimyr* in the Arctic Ocean; for hydrographic investigations on the west coasts of Novaia Zemlia and in the mouth of the Olenek.’ Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition 1910–15.

Lieut. Evgenov work on the expedition staff from May 1913, and was first the navigating officer on the *Vaigach*, but then transferred as navigator aboard the expedition flagship *Taimyr*. Under the Great Gold Konstantin Medal, see Vil’kitskii (1914).

1924: Matusevich, Nikolai Nikolaevich (1879–1950): ‘hydrographer, Vice-President of the Geographical Society of the USSR; led the Northern Hydrographic Expedition; Engineer Vice Admiral; for his work in the area of hydrography in the north of European Russia.’

As a hydrographer in September 1915, Matusevich transferred from the steamer *Kolguev* to the *Taimyr*, during the Arctic Ocean Hydrographic Expedition 1910–15. He received the Order of Lenin, as well as several other orders and medals.

1925: Vize, Vladimir Iul'evich [Wiese/Wieze] (1886–1954): ‘polar explorer, Rear-Admiral, corresponding member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR; author of works on oceanology, meteorology, ice conditions in the Arctic seas and ice forecasts, history of exploration of the Arctic; for his work on geophysics in the Arctic.’ See also under the Great Gold Medal of the Geographical Society of the USSR (1950).

1926: Roze, N. V.: ‘for magnetic observations and other work in polar lands.’

Recipients of the Small Silver Medal

1871: Afanas'ev, Nikolai Petrovich: ‘for his topographic work carried out during the Chukotka Expedition.’

Afanas'ev was the Topographer on an IRGS-sponsored 1868–70 scientific expedition led by Gergard Maidel' to study native peoples of the Kolyma region and the Chukotka Peninsula.

1872: Maidel', Eduard Vladimirovich [Meidel, Edward W.]: ‘for the report he presented on the meteorological and magnetic observations on the Murman coast in the Barents Sea, carried out by him on the Society's instructions.’

1877: Shvanenberg, Ivan Davydovich [Schwanenberg] (1831–1900): ‘for his report to a session of the Imperial Russian Geographical Society for his voyage in the sailing vessel [*Utrenniaia*] *Zaria* from the mouth of the Enisei to St. Petersburg.’

Shvanenberg captained the ship in this Kara Sea Route trading expedition, the first such voyage from Siberia to Western Europe, although there had been several trips along this route in the opposite direction.

1877: Mr Nummelin: ‘for meteorological observations carried out by him at the mouth of the Enisei over a period of 11 months.’

1883: Fus, Viktor Egorovich: ‘for determining the geographical coordinates of the polar station on Novaia Zemlia.’

1883: Andreev, Nikolai Pavlovich [Andreev, K.P.]: ‘for the results of the meteorological and hydrological observations carried out by him in the White Sea and off the Murman coast.’

Andreev was the leader of second Russian contribution to the IPY, this one for 1882–83. The mission was to make meteorological and magnetic observations at Malye Karmakuly on the west coast of Novaia Zemlia's south island. In May 1883 the first recorded crossing of the Novaia Zemlia was made by one of the explorers, although one of his Nenets guides had made a crossing before him. Under the Great Gold Konstantin Medal, see Iurgens (1885) for the first Russian contribution to the IPY.

1883: Krivosheia, N. V.: ‘observer at the Novaia Zemlia polar station; for placing at the disposal of the Society the natural history collections which he assembled on Novaia Zemlia.’

Krivosheia was a Zoologist and Botanist with the IPY 1882–83. See Andreev above (1883).

1885: Fedorov, Evgraf Stepanovich (1853–1919): ‘for his orogeological investigations in the northern Urals.’

Fedorov was a mathematician, crystallographer and mineralogist.

1887: Kuznetsov, Nikolai Ivanovich: ‘for his work on the expedition to the northern Urals.’

1895: Zhdanko, Mikhail Efimovich (1855–1921): ‘for his report on his work in the Arctic Ocean.’

Zhdanko was an officer of the Hydrographic Department who commanded the *Dzhigit* in the Barents Sea in 1895. Though his main objective was fisheries protection, Zhdanko also made surveys and carried out other scientific observations.

1901: Timofeev, Timofei Efimovich: ‘for his report on the wintering and work on Novaia Zemlia.’

Timofeev was a Zoologist with the scientific expedition onboard the *Mechta* (which was beset by ice and abandoned off the Savvina River during the expedition). In the spring of 1901, a 106-day sledge journey to the interior and east coast yielded discoveries of several new rivers and lakes, as well as improved maps of parts of the east coast of the north island.

1901: Peterman, Adol’f Adol’fovich: ‘for his report on ice conditions in the Arctic Ocean.’

1901: Gol’m’e, Anton: ‘for his report on ice conditions in the Arctic Ocean.’

1902: Sumarkov, Aleksandr Nikiforovich: ‘for his assistance on Buturlin’s expedition to Ostrov Kolguev [Kolguev Island].’ Ostrov Kolguev is southwest of Novaia Zemlia.

1904: Zhuravskii, Andrei Vladimirovich: ‘for his participation in the expedition to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra.’

1904: Grigor’ev, Andrei Aleksandrovich: ‘for his participation in the expedition to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra.’

1904: Rudnev, Dmitrii Dmitrievich: ‘for his participation in the expedition to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra.’

1904: Shparberg, Mikhail Nikolaevich: ‘for his participation in the expedition to the Bol’shezemel’skaia Tundra.’

1927: Nikol’skii, N. N.: ‘for his work at the polar geophysical observatory at Matochkin Shar [Matochkin Strait, Novaia Zemlia].’

The Semen Ivanovich Dezhnev Prize (USSR)

Semen Ivanovich Dezhnev (*ca.* 1605/08–73) was an illiterate Russian Cossack whose trading expedition from the Kolyma River eastward to the Anadyr’ River region during 1648–49 proved that Asia and America were not joined by a land bridge but separated by what would come to be called the Bering Strait.

At the time, Dezhnev was largely unaware of the importance of the discovery, and since few written records were kept, the voyage fell into obscurity. In 1733 Vitus Bering persuaded the Russian government to launch the largest program of Arctic

exploration undertaken by any European country until the twentieth century: Bering's Great Northern Expedition (1733–43). Detachments from this expedition surveyed the entire Arctic coast, and for the first time landings were made on islands off the Alaskan coast. It was during this expedition in 1736 that Gerhard Müller, a member of the new Russian Academy of Sciences, while gathering historical materials in Siberia, uncovered in Yakutsk the report of Dezhnev's previously unknown voyage.

The S. I. Dezhnev Prize, established by resolution of the Council of Ministers of the USSR No. 2992 on 10 August 1948, was worth 1500 roubles. Starting in 1948, it was awarded by the Academic Council of the Geographical Society of the USSR once every three years for the best works and investigations on the geography of Northeastern Asia.

Regulations

- a) The S. I. Dezhnev Prize will be awarded for the best scientific works and investigations accomplished during the three years preceding the year of the competition.
- b) In the absence of works worthy of receiving the prize, the competition will be considered as not taking place.
- c) Where the prize is awarded for a collective work and where there is no indication of the contribution of each author, the prize is shared equally among all the authors.

Recipients

1958: Belov, Mikhail Ivanovich: 'polar historian; for his work *Arkticheskoe moreplavanie s drevneishikh vremen do serediny XIX v* [*Arctic Voyages from Ancient Times to the Middle of the 19th Century*] that relate to the Russian discovery and exploration of the Bering Strait to 1800] in the publication *Istoriia otkrytiia i osvoeniia Severnogo morskogo puti* [*History of Discovery and Development of the Northern Sea Route*].'

1960: Gakkel', Iakov Iakovlevich (1901–65): 'polar geographer; for his work *Materikovyi sklon kak geograficheskaia zona Severnogo Ledovitogo okeana* [*Continental Slope as a Geographic Zone of the Arctic Ocean*].'

In 1932 Gakkel' joined the Arctic Institute and he took part in twenty-one expeditions, often as leader.

1965: Pinkhenson, Dmitrii Moiseevich: 'polar historian; for his monograph *Problema Severnogo morskogo puti v epokhu kapitalizma* [*Problems of the Northern Sea Route in the Epoch of Capitalism*].'

The Otto Iul'evich Shmidt Prize (Russian Academy of Sciences)

In connection with the 100th anniversary of the birth of the well known Soviet polar explorer, scholar and academician, Hero of the Soviet Union Otto Iul'evich Shmidt (1891–1956), the Academy established this prize in his name. It was to be awarded by

the Division of Oceanology, Atmosphere Physics and Geography, Division of Geology, Geophysics, Geochemistry and Mining Sciences since 1995 for the best works in the area of exploration and development of the Arctic.

Prize competitions are held once in three years in terms specified by the Russian Academy of Sciences' Presidium. Prizes awards are timed to birthday or memorable date related to the life and work of the recipient.

The prize has not been awarded since its creation in 1995.

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Sergei B. Lavrov (1928-2000) (Professor, Russian Geographical Society).

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