MORE ARMENIANS IN ANTARCTICA

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By Artsvi Bakhchinyan, Yerevan, 28 July 2023

My recent "Armenian Painter in… Antarctica" article raised great interest among *Keghart* readers. Some readers asked whether there were other Armenians and Armenian traces in Antarctica.

Certainly there are: like painter David Paige, the visitors were mostly Armenian-Americans. There were also specialists from the Soviet Union.

Two Armenians from the United States and the USSR appeared on the icy continent in late 1950s. Congressman **Steven Boghos Derounian** (1918-2007) visited the North and South Poles in 1958 as a delegate of the Department of Foreign Trade and Interstate Affairs. He traveled more than 4,000 miles and reported to Congress his impressions. In 1957-1959 Soviet scientist **Khristofor Zakiev** (Zakian, 1908-1998) led a group of glaciologists in the Third Soviet Antarctic expedition. At the "Mirni" station, he studied the thermal regime of Antarctica. On Dec. 14, 1958, along with a group of 17, overcoming 2,800 kilometers, he reached the 4,000- meter pole of inaccessibility (geometrical center of Antarctica). Zakiev's exploration work was summarized in the monograph "Antarctic's Snow Cover" (in Russian, 1960) and in many articles.



It is interesting to speculate whether Derounian and Zakiev met among the icebound Antarctic in 1958 and exchanged some words in Armenian.

Two peaks and one lake in Antarctica bear Armenian names. Mount Simsarian in Antarctica is named after Dr. **James Hagop Simsarian** (1907-1970), a geologist and leader at the World Meteorological Organization and the World Weather Watch. He served also at the U.S. State Department for a quarter century and was adviser to Eleanor Roosevelt on human rights. Simsarian was the chief spokesman for the United States at the meetings that produced the 12-nation Treaty on the Antarctic, signed in 1959.

The second Antarctic location with an Armenian link is Ahmadjian Peak--a prominent ice-covered peak, seven kilometers southwest of Mount Fox in the Queen Alexandria Range of the Transantarctic Mountains. It was named by the Advisory Committee on Antarctic Names (US-ACAN) for Prof. **Vernon Ahmadjian** (1930–2012), who was United States Antarctic Research Program biologist (lichenologist) at McMurdo Station in Antarctica in 1963-1964. Owing to his lichen field, the National Science Foundation awarded him also the Antarctic Medal in 1967.



Lake Karentz of Antarctica, a 1.3-mile permanently frozen body of water, is named after **Dr. Deneb Karentz**, biology and environmental science professor at University of San Francisco. The daughter of Rose and Varoujan Karentz, she earned her BS at the University of Rhode Island. Deneb became involved in Antarctic research in 1986. She returns often to Antarctica and visits Karents lake dedicated to her by the United States Board on Geographic Names in 2005 in recognition of her contribution to the study of Antarctica. It is noteworthy that Karentz is also active in Armenian community, particularly with the Bay Area Support Committee for Armenia's Cosmic Ray Division, a local group that raises funds for research on cosmic rays at the Alikhanian Physics Institute in Armenia.

In 1986 a book about Antarctica, "Underfoot - an Island of Ice" was published in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg). Two of its three authors were Armenian. The first is eminent polar explorer, engineer-oceanographer **Artur Chilingarov** (Chilingaryan, born 1939), son of Armenian father from Gyumri and a Russian mother. By 2008, he had visited Antarctica 48 times. Chilingarov directed the Tiksi observatory of the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute in Leningrad. In 1971, he headed the Bellingshausen Station of the 17th Soviet Antarctic Expedition. In 1986 he was awarded Hero of the Soviet Union title "for exemplary performance targets for the release of the research vessel Mikhail Somov from the ice of Antarctica, leadership in rescue operations during the period of drift and displaying courage and heroism." In 2007, he led a helicopter expedition to Antarctica and visited the South Pole and Amundsen-Scott station. Chilingarov keeps contact with Armenia where he was honored twice with medals.



The second Armenian author of the aforementioned book, **Eduard Sarukhanyan** (born 1940) is Doctor of Geography, oceanologist, honorary polar explorer, and one of main specialists of Southern Ocean. Between 1975 and 1979 he was the head of three expeditions in the Southern Ocean and in 1978-1979 he was head of the POLEX-South-79 expedition in the area of the Southern Ocean

between Africa and Antarctica. In 1981, based on the results of original experimental and theoretical studies of the structure and variability of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current, Sarukhanyan defended his doctoral dissertation on the "Large-scale Dynamics of the Waters of the Southern Ocean" topic. He is the author and co-author of more than 150 scientific papers, including eight monographs and four popular science books. In the book "My Polar Years" Sarukhanyan describes the extraordinary adventures he experienced together with his friends at the drifting station "SP-19" and on expeditions to the Southern Ocean.

Soviet engineer **Pyotr Zaryan** (born 1961), currently living in Sweden, worked at the Arctic and Antarctic Research Institute of St. Petersburg (1979-2005). In 1986-1987 he stayed in Antarctica for 17 months as a member of the 31st Soviet expedition, working as a reparation engineer and in charge of radio equipment.



Today one can see even the Armenian banner and the word "Armenia" in Antarctica. In 2006 **Karo Hovasapyan** from the United States reached the peak of Winson Mountain of Antarctica and waved the Armenian flag on it. He is the only Armenian who has been in the highest peaks of all continents.

Test pilot, Hero of the Russian Federation **Ruben Yesayan** (born 1946, Yerevan), deputy general director of the Russian State Aviation Research Institute, visited Antarctica 43 times (by 2008). In the 2000s, he flew to the South Pole and the central regions of Antarctica. The trip included a unique operation of landing 28 platforms with diesel fuel from an Il-76TD aircraft to the "Vostok" polar station (2007). Yesayan made his first landing in the homeland of penguins in 2001. Ten years before that, not a single pilot from Russia had flown to the land of icebergs. The giant IL-76 with 60 on board had to pass for the first time on the Russia-Antarctica route and make a risky landing on the icy runway. Yesayan succeeded to make that flight, and on the Novolazarevsky station, each participant wrote how many kilometers is the distance from his capital to Antarctica. Yesayan also wrote and painted the letters: "Armenia: 13,330 km. Yesayan." Thus, today the visitors of Novolazarevsky station can see among the vast expanses of polar ice the name "Armenia"…

There are no comments yet.