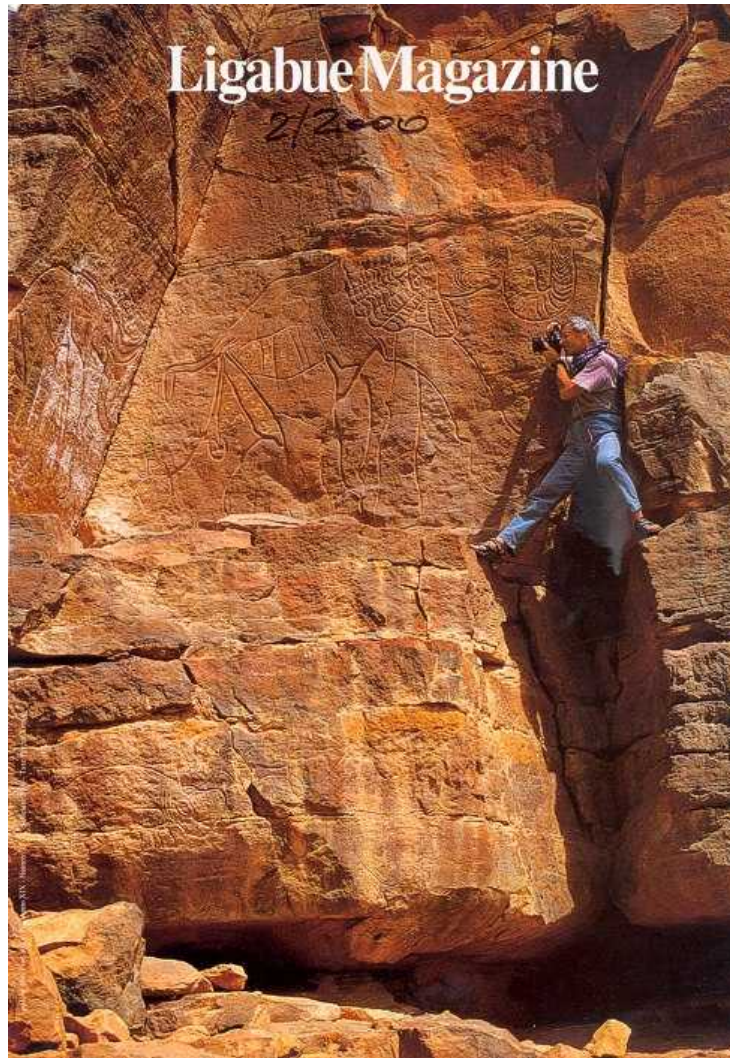


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ISLAND ON THE EDGE OF THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS
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Nelle pagine precedenti, idoli in avorio di tricheco. Alaska, XV-XVI secolo.
(Fotografia di Francesco Ferruzzi).

Previous pages, walrus-ivory idols. Alaska, 15th-16th century (Photograph by Francesco Ferruzzi).



Sotto, i pesci salmonidi vengono esposti ad essiccare e serviranno come alimento durante il lungo inverno; accanto, una statuetta ricavata dall'avorio di tricheco.

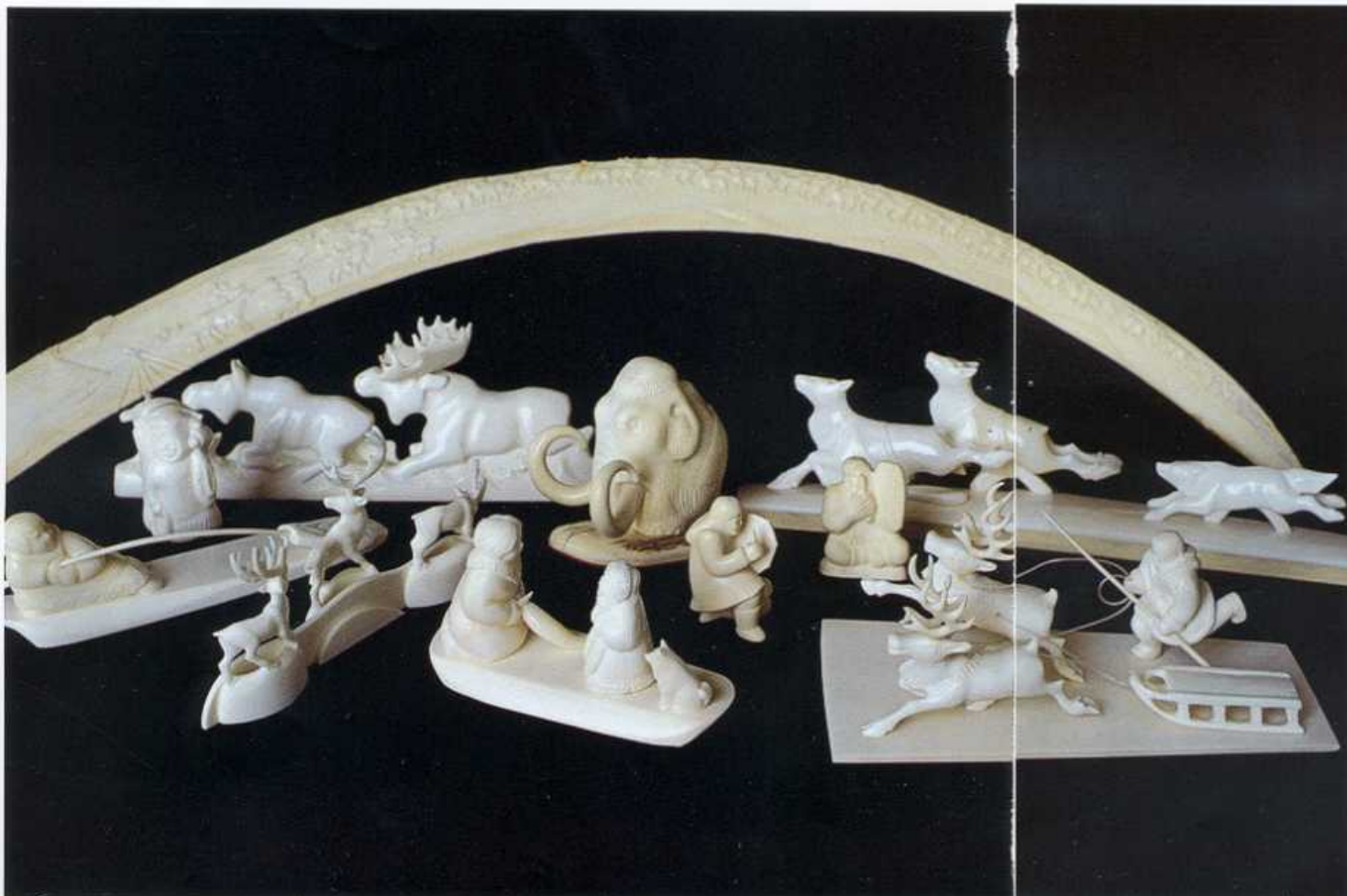
Below, salmonid fish are hung to dry and will provide food for the long winter; alongside, a statuette made from walrus ivory.

On top of all the red tape, our trip in Chukot has now run into bad weather, and Provideniya airport is closed. It's midsummer, but the sky is cloaked in heavy cloud, which shows no sign of clearing, and the icy north wind has sent the temperatures plummeting to 8°C. My friend Victor Burstein informs us that in this part of the world you can even be grounded for anything up to five or ten days. Which is a problem in a province twice the size of Italy, almost completely covered in tundra with no roads. Here the only means of transport is the helicopter. We have come to the very edge of Russia to reach the island of Big Diomedé. Called Ratmanova by the Russians, it lies slap in the middle of the Bering Strait, forty kilometres on each side from the mainlands of Asia and America, right on the International Date Line, where they



Alcuni oggetti artigianali in avorio di mammut e tricheco provenienti dalla Siberia Orientale.

Some craft objects made from mammoth and walrus ivory from eastern Siberia.



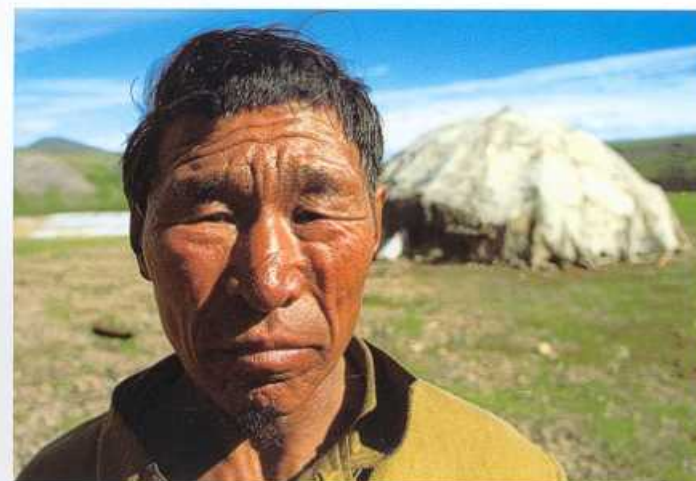
Uomo ciukcio della propaggine siberiana più remota.

A Chukchi from the remotest areas of Siberia.

will toast the arrival of the third millennium eleven hours earlier than in Italy. Hyped up by commercial ventures, the millennium festive fever has been raging in Polynesia since last year. The major tour operators and governments of the coral atolls have been vying to lure guests seeking the thrill of popping the first bottles of champagne, and so winning a place in the Guinness Book of Records.

In actual fact the first day of 2000 is only the beginning of the last year of the twentieth century, given that there was no year zero. The nice round figure of 2000 has, however, captured the imagination as a symbol for a new era.

The first people to enter the third millennium will be those on the Western edge of the Date Line, established by the International Convention of Washington



in 1884. This demarcation between East and West basically follows the 180° meridian, but in some areas the line deviates to avoid splitting a country in two. If you go westwards beyond the Date Line, you add on a day, whereas by going the opposite direction you "lose" twenty-four hours and have to repeat the same day. Only the islanders of Tonga, Fiji and

Chatham will be able to admire the first dawn of the new year from their own country. The Kingdom of Tonga has attracted most interest. During the huge event planned for the new millennium's eve, the 260 guests lodged in the Date Line Hotel in the capital of Nuku'alofa will be able to have their photograph taken in front of the sign proclaiming "Here, where time begins".



Sotto, a sinistra, le etnie siberiane hanno ormai perso la propria identità. Costretti dal regime sovietico alla russificazione che avrebbe dovuto portare il progresso, sono oggi completamente dimenticati e abbandonati dalla nuova Russia; a destra, una marea di renne. Questi animali sono la ricchezza delle popolazioni nomadi perché vengono utilizzati per i trasporti e forniscono alimentazione e vestiario.



Below, left, the native Siberian peoples have now almost completely lost their own identity. Forced to undergo a process of "Russification" by the Soviet regime in the name of progress, today they are completely neglected and abandoned by new Russia; right, a herd of reindeer, a great resource used by the nomad peoples for transport, food and clothing.



Sotto, e accanto, i bambini vivono a stretto contatto con le renne con le quali imparano a familiarizzare fin da piccolissimi. In questo mondo avaro, il margine di sopravvivenza è estremamente basso. Alla elevatissima mortalità infantile si aggiungono la tubercolosi e altre malattie difficili da curare per la mancanza di collegamenti.

Below and opposite, children live in close contact with the reindeer, becoming very familiar with them from a very young age. In this harsh world, the margins for survival are very slight. In addition to a high infant mortality rate, tuberculosis is rife and other diseases are difficult to treat because of communications problems.

A destra, con semplici utensili, i Ciukci intagliano con maestria l'avorio di tricheco, rappresentando i momenti salienti della loro vita quotidiana.

Right, using rudimentary tools the Chukchi skillfully carve a walrus tusk to represent the key moments in their everyday life.

The Republic of Kiribati, including the Gilbert Islands, Phoenix and the Line Islands scattered along the equator, resorted to a gigantic publicity stunt. With remarkable foresight, seven years ago the government moved its border for the new day 30° eastwards, that is by 1,600 kilometres. Overnight the natives of the Caroline Islands found themselves ahead of the others. This ploy of shifting

the Date Line was immediately condemned by the authoritative Royal Geographical Society, the Greenwich Observatory, and many other geographical institutions. A careful examination of the globe, however, reveals that the key place for the turn of the millennium is the little-known island of Big Diomedé: 169° longitude West, where the Date Line swerves

eastwards by as much as 11° towards the 180° meridian, thus avoiding Chukot being divided into Saturday and Sunday. The furthest point east from Greenwich, this is where the new dawn will break. And here the celebrations will take place nineteen minutes before the islands of Tonga and forty-four minutes before Fiji. Our helicopter skims low under the thick ceiling of heavy cloud. On the right are





Pagina accanto, una pelle di tricheco che sarà utilizzata per la costruzione di un umiak, il leggero canotto che viene usato dagli indigeni del Grande Nord.

Opposite, a walrus hide will be used to construct a umiak, the light canoe used by the natives of the Great North.

Sotto, maschera sciamanica in avorio di tricheco. Thule, XIX secolo. (Fotografia di Francesco Ferruzzi).

Below, Walrus-ivory shamanist mask. Thule, 19th century (Photograph by Francesco Ferruzzi).

the waters of the Bering Strait, on the left, the green tundra with low hills still capped in old snow. An hour and a half ago we left the town of Provideniya and more recently Lorino and Lavrentiya. According to our American map, we should now be over Naukan, but there is no sign of it. The pilot explains that the Eskimo village, built around 1400, was abandoned forty years ago. We reach Cape Dezhnev, the easternmost Russian point, known in Europe as East Cape. At the centre of a rocky promontory, about 700 metres up, a white obelisk with a bust of the discoverer stands out from the cloudy grey background.

The pilot veers round 120° and

in no time we are above the majestic Big Diomede. At least 400 metres high, the sheer cliffs are inaccessible from the sea and the low rounded hills have patches of snow which won't even thaw by the end of the brief Arctic summer. The wild land is only covered by a light carpet of lichens. There are no animals, only sea birds and puffins. There have been no inhabitants since 1947, when they were deported to the mainland



Pagina accanto, punta di arpione in avorio. Cultura del Mare di Bering, Alaska 500 a.C. – 500 d.C. (Fotografia di Francesco Ferruzzi).

Opposite, the ivory tip of a harpoon. Bering Sea culture. Alaska 500 BC–500 AD (Photograph by Francesco Ferruzzi).

Sotto, due cacciatori di ricchechi nello Stretto di Bering. Nel 1879, passò da queste parti il "Vega" dello svedese Nordenskiöld che per primo circumnavigò il continente euroasiatico. Allo storico viaggio partecipò anche l'ufficiale italiano Giacomo Bove.

Below, two walrus hunters in the Bering Strait. In 1879, Vega the ship of the Swedish explorer Nordenskiöld passed through the strait on the first circumnavigation of the Eurasian continent. An Italian officer, Giacomo Bove, took part on this historic voyage.

In basso, colonia di otarie sulla riva dello Stretto di Bering. Otaria deriva dal greco e significa "orecchio". Questi animali, che vivono in grandi comunità, durante l'inverno migrano verso i climi più caldi del Giappone.

Bottom, a colony of otaries (sea lions) on the banks of the Bering Strait. The word otary derives from the Greek and means "ear". These animals live in large communities and in winter migrate towards the milder climes of Japan.



to make way for a handful of military, brought in to defend the northernmost point of the island. Our arrival is a special event for these men completely cut off from the world. Once the sight of a helicopter was fairly common. But now that Russia is in an economic crisis and no longer has the resources to sustain the army, helicopters only land a couple of times a year with food supplies. Life here for the twenty-eight soldiers really is tough. They are demotivated and what makes matters worse is that they are out there on their own, symbolically marking an almost meaningless border. Gennady, a lad from the Moscow suburbs, should have finished his military service two months ago, but he is still here because the helicopter due to bring his replacement was grounded, first by



Pagina accanto, un rompighiaccio nelle acque dello Stretto di Bering. Durante l'inverno i convogli di navi raggiungono la Ciukotka partendo da Murmansk e seguendo il Passaggio Settentrionale.

Opposite, an ice-breaker in the waters of the Bering Strait. In winter convoys of ships reach Chukot from Murmansk by following the Northern Passage.

Sotto, la Grande Diomede è l'ultimo lembo di terra russa (169°01' long. ovest) e si trova a 11 fusi orari rispetto all'Italia. E' lunga otto chilometri e larga quattro.

Below, Big Diomede is the last strip of Russian land (169°01' long. west) and is 11 time zones away from Italy; it measures eight by four kilometres.

bad weather and then because there was no fuel. "What do we eat?" He echoes my question. "Dehydrated potatoes, *kasha* (a kind of barley broth), dried fish and tinned food. Every now and then we can enjoy some lard. Fruit and vegetables? You've got to be joking, I can't even remember what they taste like. In summer we pick a few herbs that grow in the tundra or gather sea bird's eggs on the

cliffs." Not surprisingly most of the military personnel have various kinds of problems due to a diet very short in vitamins: infections, night blindness, toothache and acne. The accommodation is terrible. They sleep in a squalid shack in dreadful conditions with no hot water and outdoor latrines. The dormitory is cold and it's easy to imagine what it must be like in



La Grande Diomede è situata al centro dello Stretto di Bering e, quattro chilometri più a est, sorge la Piccola Diomede. Tra le due isole passa la Linea del cambiamento di data; mentre sulla prima è già oggi, sull'altra è ancora ieri.

Big Diomede lies in the middle of the Bering Strait, while four kilometres east is Little Diomede. The Date Line passes between the two islands; so while it is already today on the former, it is still yesterday on the latter.

Sotto, una guarnigione militare russa sulla Grande Diomede. Qui inizia il tempo. I 28 soldati sono i primi ad assistere alla nascita di ogni nuovo giorno.

Below, the Russian garrison on Big Diomede. Here time begins and the twenty-eight soldiers are the first to witness the dawning of a new day.

In basso, Uelen, il villaggio che si è sviluppato sul Capo di Dezhnev, più conosciuto come Capo Est.

Bottom, Uelen. This village has developed along Cape Dezhnev, better known as East Cape.

winter when the sun barely scrapes up over the horizon and the temperature is down at -30°C with polar winds howling over the island. But what is even more striking is the decay and mess: rusty old barrels and abandoned tools, broken windows. Giorgio Fornari, our film director, who has spent most of his life filming in hot countries, can hardly believe his eyes: "it looks like a war has



Sotto, la caccia alla balena con l'uso del tradizionale arpione. La convenzione internazionale permette alle minoranze etniche di catturare più di cento balene l'anno.

Below, hunting whales with the traditional harpoon. An international convention allows ethnic groups to capture as many as a hundred whales a year.

In basso, sulla spiaggia di Lavrentiya giace la carcassa di una balena tagliata a pezzi il giorno precedente.

Bottom, cut up the previous day, a large whale carcass lies on Lavrentiya beach.

Pagina accanto, un anziano ciukcio. Quando non esisteva lo Stretto di Bering e i continenti erano uniti, era possibile migrare dall'Asia all'America.

Opposite, an elderly Chukchi. Before the existence of the Bering Strait, the continents were still joined together and migrations could occur from Asia to America.

just ended".

There is no question of any fun or entertainment. There is no leave and the soldiers never see their family during the two years of conscription. Free time is spent watching television - only one channel with terrible reception. Anyone wishing to work out by training with weights in the improvised gym will burn up the calories, and they are never in any

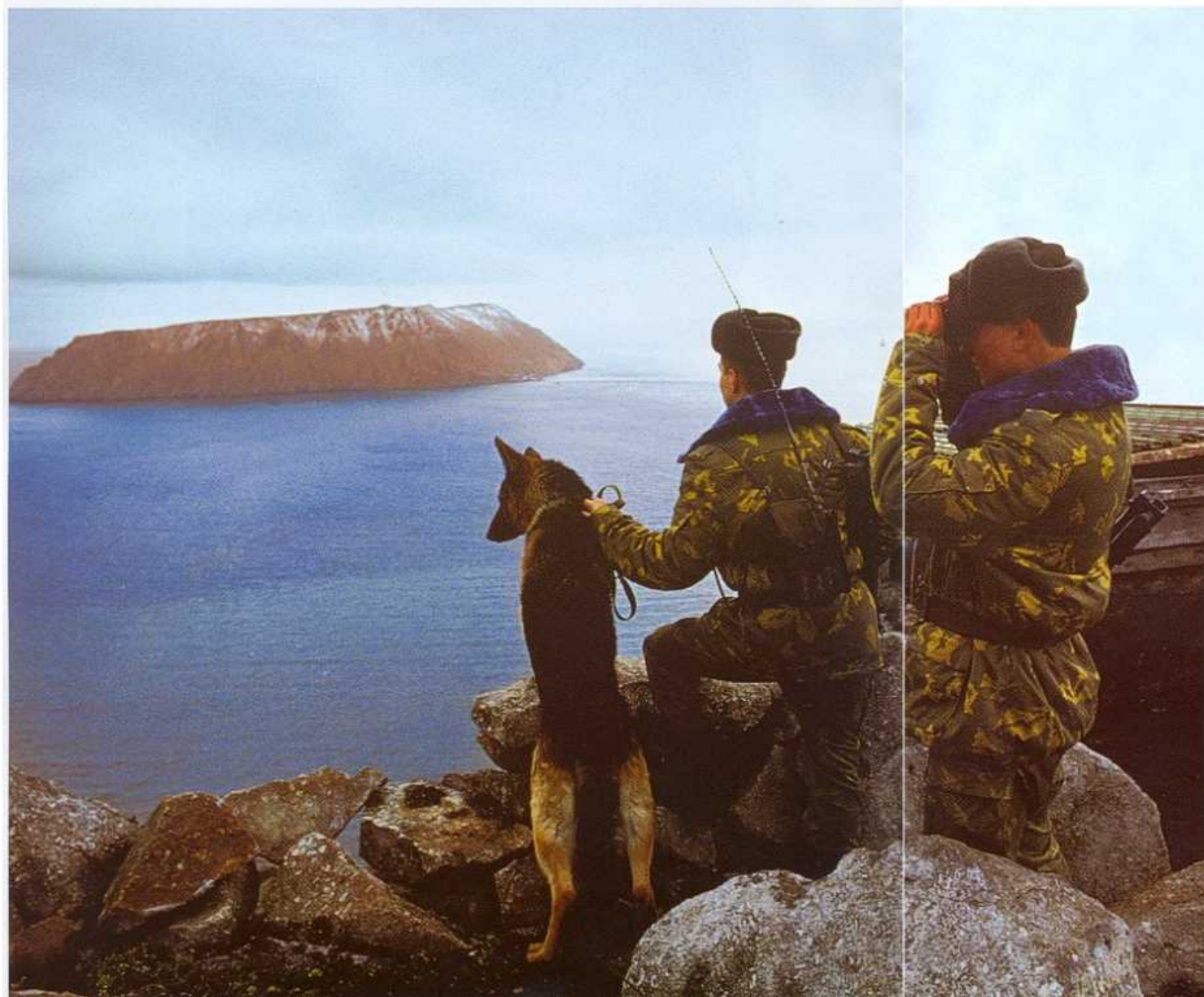
great abundance. So the favourite pastime is simply sleeping.

Only four kilometres of sea separates the island from the United States island of Little Diomed, less than three kilometres long. On Big Diomed it is Thursday, but over there, beyond the imaginary Date Line it is still Wednesday. Whereas the Russians on Big Diomed will be the first to see in the new millennium, the



La Grande Diomede. Una pattuglia russa osserva Ingeluk, il minuscolo villaggio eschimese di appena 80 abitanti, situato sull'opposta Piccola Diomede e appartenente agli Stati Uniti. Le due isole sono state segnalate sulle carte geografiche nel 1732.

Big Diomede. A Russian patrol observes Ingeluk, a tiny Eskimo village of only eighty inhabitants situated on Little Diomede, just opposite but in United States territory. The two islands have featured on maps since 1732.



Sotto, soldati di frontiera in perlustrazione nelle gelide acque dello Stretto di Bering che divide la Siberia dall'Alaska.

Below, frontier soldiers survey the icy waters of the Bering Strait separating Siberia and Alaska.

In basso, postazione militare russa sulla Grande Diomede. L'isola fu scoperta dall'esploratore russo Dezhnev nel 1648, ottanta anni prima del passaggio di Vitus Bering.

Bottom, Russian military post on Big Diomede. The island was discovered by the Russian explorer Dezhnev in 1648, eighty years before Vitus Bering sailed through the strait.

Americans and the neighbouring island will only raise their glasses twenty-four hours later. From the east coast you get a good view of Ingeluk, the tiny Eskimo village whose eighty inhabitants have tidily arranged houses, a little school, a shop and a Catholic church. From Big Diomede you can see the seaplanes or helicopters coming in to guarantee a decent way of life for the



L'estate vera oltre il Circolo polare artico è di breve durata, ma di notte il sole quasi non tramonta.

Summer inside the Arctic Circle is short-lived, but at night the sun almost never sets.

neighbouring islanders. In 1926, in this area the explorer Diamond Jenness found some remarkable items from the ancient Okvik Eskimo culture, dating from the third century BC.

Every now and then, an America submarine surfaces offshore, but no sirens sound, because no one believes in the enemy threat any more.

One of the soldiers asks why we have come. I try to explain that I wanted to explore and film the place where day begins. He stares at me incredulously, probably wondering if I have some fresh bread or an apple. But more likely, he is dreaming of the day when he will finally leave this forsaken island at the edge of the world.

