

Reminiscences about Boris Chirikov

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Abstract

These are reminiscences given by Andy Sessler to Peter Koch for presentation at the conference dedicated to 70th of Boris Chirikov held at Toulouse, July 16-18, 1998. They are available at <http://arxiv.org/abs/cond-mat/9903412>

I first met Boris in March of 1965 when Budker invited a small number of people (about 12) to Novosibirsk to discuss the technical aspects of storage rings. At that time he told me about his new work, which was unpublished (I believe) at that time and has subsequently become known as the ‘Chirikov criteria’.

We ‘hit it off together’ and ever since then have been good friends. At that time we did a number of ‘fun things’ like spending evening Under The Integral Sign (a scientific club; really an eating club and night club) and also going cross country skiing. To do that one checked out skis, of course free in those Soviet Days, and that was done one afternoon. Then, the next day, we went to the ski area. The ski area was a small hill (this was Siberia) covered with pine trees. The Soviets could change direction while going down hill, but the Americans were doing their best just to stand up on their skis. That meant that in order not to hit a tree you had to point your skis correctly, before you started down the hill, to about a milliradian. I was doing that fine through most of the afternoon, but then I mis-calculated and hit a tree. I broke the tip of the ski off (and was damn fortunate not to have broken anything else) and remember walking, through deep snow, for what seemed like miles and miles. For many years I had the ski tip as a souvenir of my first meeting of Boris.

Some time later, in 1967, I was spending the year at CERN and Boris visited us. My chance to get even. I suggested that we go to Zermat and do a bit of real (down hill) skiing. So my family (5 of us) and two Soviets, Boris and Ben Sidorov (now deputy director of the Budker Institute), piled into my car and drove from Geneva to where one takes the train to Zermat.

The next day was terribly cold and everyone, except Boris, decided not to try and ski. Boris was not going to miss out on anything and I, as host, felt I must go with him. Me in lots of down and him in a simple sweater. Well, it was really cold. We rode the lift up, skied down and when I took off my gloves my fingers were all white. Boris rushed me to a first aid station and proceeded to rub snow on my hands. Well, he saved my fingers, sent me in for the day, and continued to ski all day, coming in, at the end of the day in fine form.

Through the years we continued to send cards (as well as scientific papers) and I remember one where Boris said it was 40 below and he had stopped skiing. Not to be out done, I sent back a card saying that the Soviets might stop at 40, but Americans certainly kept skiing. He then wrote back saying that I didn’t understand: it was the skis that stopped working when it got so cold.”

Boris and I, did, once write a paper together. Well, Boris really did all the work, but I do remember a very pleasant day working—for some reason— in his kitchen. Boris had the idea that there hadn't been a paper since World War II co-authored by a Russian, German, and American. (I don't know if this was true or not, but it was an interesting thought.) So, we invited Eberhard Keil into the collaboration."

Once, Boris's wife, Olga, was 'allowed', I think that is the right term, to go on a vacation consisting of a cruise on the Black Sea (and maybe also the Mediterranean). The cruise was for artists (she was a well-known opera singer). The first leg consisted of air to Moscow and it was arranged that she and I went together. In Moscow she escorted me around, including a very lengthy tour—and very special tour led by a friend of hers—to the Tretyahov Gallery. All very good, but she didn't know a word of English and I don't know a word of Russian; we just smiled at each other for a few days."

Boris, I hope you have a great time at this Conference at which your 70th birthday (how can we all be so old so soon?) is properly noted. The honor is richly deserved. I feel touched to have had my life touched by you."

— Andy Sessler