

ICE TIMES – SANAE 38

The Monthly Publication from Vesleskarvet, Antarctica - April 1999

LIFE AT SANAE IV

I walk into the dining room.

Fanus is standing on the table inconspicuously wrapping a dish-rag around the fire detector, which is mounted to the ceiling.

The smell of burnt toast hangs thick in the air. He continues chatting normally to a few people sitting around the table at his feet. (This is standard procedure)

It is mid morning here at SANAE and it is... toast-time.

The fire alarm screams anyway: “Fire Fire Fire Fire...” and stops after half a minute or so as a few more bleary eyed adventurers (?) stumble in; a typical day at SANAE has begun.

The sun is as high in the sky as one would expect it to be at around 7 in the morning back in Gauteng, yet it is 11 o'clock!

It is almost noticeable how the sun rises later and later each day and sets earlier in the afternoon. In a couple of weeks the sun won't rise at all.

Going outside does not happen every day either. The weather is our biggest controlling factor here and sometimes she does not play along at all.

This is an amazing place where the strange climate and conditions come together in a weird way.

Going outside requires special clothing although we think of it as normal now. I have forgotten what it feels like going out of the front door not wearing a zoot suit.

Firstly there is the normal clothing you are already wearing. That stays on. (Except shoes of course.) Then comes the thick blue standard issue socks.



Vesles in the distance...

Over one's clothes we have two options: A Farmer Brown type dungaree with jacket or a single piece suit with a hood, something like a human shaped sleeping bag. (Zoot Suit) The zoot suit seems warmer but both options have certain disadvantages:

- The available sizes for the zoot suit are inadequate for taller people like myself. (If you lift your knees too high when you walk your head bobs up and down and certain very private anatomical regions are rudely invaded. This also happens when sitting down suddenly.)
- Certain gasses need to pass freely from one's clothing from time to time and this is not possible when wearing the zoot suit. The only exit vent is here by one's face, so this is a distinct disadvantage.
- The two piece suit is OK except that it makes one feel like a robot because the material is a lot stiffer. It also allows a cold stab of wind onto one's lower back when struck from the wrong angle.

Then there is also a choice of footwear: Pumpkin coloured Japanese Onitsuka Boots or Black Canadian Sorel Workboots- much of a muchness. The Sorels have a steel toecap though, which is not always wanted at minus 25 Degrees.

Headgear consists of a variety of items, the choice of which to wear depends entirely on the wind and weather.

- Knitted balaclava- quite warm, tends to form a hard frozen area around the lower face though. It also promotes the formation of nasal icicles.
- Blue fluffy lined cap- generally for warmer weather, can be worn over balaclava on colder days.
- Black Rubber Mask (S&M mask). - This specialized item is worn over any other headgear when there is excessive wind. It is a multi-functional item as it can also be used for the following activities: S&M, robbing banks and scaring little children. See photo.
- UVEX Ski Goggles with interchangeable day/night lenses completes the headgear.



The Rubber Mask.

The last item on the list of clothes is of course gloves, of which we normally wear two pairs at the same time: Woolen gloves inside and leather gloves over them.

The concept of time here in Antarctica is a very different and interesting one!

Even at three in the morning, a few hardy souls can be seen wandering the corridors of Vesles, clad in sheepskin 'pantoffels' and department issue long johns.

Our evening meal, which is supposed to be supper, is actually lunch for some and even breakfast for others.

It is usually a festive affair with wit and humour and definite competition. It is a time when stories are shared and witty comments fly wildly.

Especially when there are guests at the table like Signore Tequila and Sir Dionysus alias Bacchus. They seem to visit quite often and we always enjoy their company.

The meal itself has nearly always been good and always interesting. We have some dedicated cooks here who stop at nothing to impress: Starters, main meal, pudding and drinks afterwards too. I must say we do eat well!

Food is one thing we will never be short of here. We probably have enough food to invite every nation on the continent for an evening meal!

Talk around the dinner table is mostly respectful and reserved as can be seen by the following example: "Baas, give me pleez the ATCHA" and the reply: "Shaddup, my Booi, jy gaan Ring Sting kry!!" And we all laugh hysterically, remembering the old South Africa days. This is said in jest of course.

After the meal it is usually movie time, and we have seen some interesting ones along the way! James has been chosen as our official 16mm movie operator so we have seen a few of the oldies as well.

Saturday means clean up time, so everybody is hard at work cleaning floors and washing

surfaces, dealing with the waste and tidying the kitchen. The availability of a plastic bucket and queuegee on a Saturday is not big at all.

Our Snow Melting Machine (Smelly for short), needs constant attention. Her appetite for snow and ice is astounding, yet her hunger is never satisfied.

We as the mechanical team are kept quite busy (and fit) tending to her needs.

Between all this there is work do as well, but the details of the work are available in the monthly reports, not here....

OUR FIRST AURORA

On the 16th of April, an amazing event took place in the skies above Vesleskarvet.

Conrad's voice was heard over the intercom at 12 o'clock midnight: "There is an Aurora taking place at the moment directly overhead, if anyone is interested." Why wouldn't we be interested?

We had only heard about this amazing phenomenon.

We all pulled on the minimal of protective clothing (as mentioned above) and hauled outside. The sight was spectacular I must say, although there was not really enough light to take any pictures. The aurora stretched overhead in twisting bands of greenish blue with certain areas being more intense and fast moving than others. Wonderful!!

PHOTOGRAPHY

If one walks around the base, cameras are a common sight to be seen lying around.

Photographic moments happen all the time, so the camera has to be close.

We do our own development here, colour slide as well as Black and white, so every so often there is a surprise slide show as well.

We also have two digital cameras here at the base, which work very well for recording all events quickly and easily. (Duncan still owns a very squashed digital camera after the Challenger rode

over it on our trip to Moteplassen. Any normal person could not get their camera under the tracks of a 25-ton machine; but then again, Duncan is far from normal when it comes to wrecking cameras)

Generally, photography is a very popular hobby in these parts.

EARTHQUAKE IN THE FREE STATE

The earthquake that occurred in the Free State during the month was actually recorded here by our Sideline Seismologist, Fanus. Together with other recording stations, it is possible to pinpoint exactly where the shock waves originated.

DOCTOR DRIP DRIP !

This was the fateful month in which Doc Ernest decided that we had to learn to push needles into each other's veins. It was actually quite a vein wrecking experience but we lived to tell the tale. Karel seem to enjoy it so much he volunteered to have it done to him twice and Mike could not be found anywhere! Apart from the odd botch-up here and there it went off fairly smoothly.



Pushing the needle in...

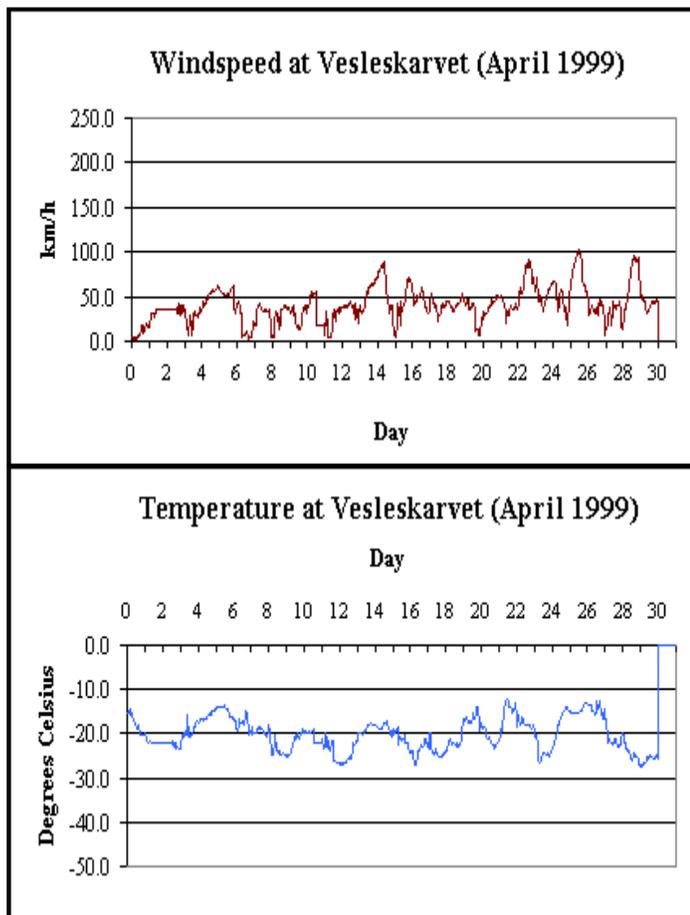
HOW COLD???

Cold is a weird thing here. Cold can mean a nice day or it could mean a terrible blizzard. It is just the degree of coldness if you like, that varies.

If the true temperature is say, minus 10 and there is very little wind, then it is a brilliant day! If the wind picks up and true temperature stays at -10, then it can be called terrible weather, depending on the wind speed of course.

The other day we had the coldest temperature yet because of the wind. The true temperature was around -25 and the wind speed was hovering around 100km/h. Put these two figures through a funky equation and one gets a wind chill temperature of -62 Degrees Centigrade.

In reality, if one is wearing all the right clothes (as mentioned above) your body does not really get cold. It is mainly ones hands and face that feel the chill.



GRUNEHOGNA WEEKEND

For the long weekend at the beginning of the month, some of our team went to visit our local "Bosveld Resort" at Grunehogna. (Grunehogna is a small base situated about 40km from Vesles. The Air Force used to live there while SANAE IV was being built.) The game viewing was limited but the guys had a good time anyway. Kleinbaas Karel, our correspondent on the scene reports:

"Woensdag aand na baie wyn besluit ons dis tyd vir 'n klein paasnaweek vakansie na ons 'bosveld hideaway'.

Ons (in)famous rooi kaboos gepak met matrasse en baie kos. Aan die Challenger gehak en siedaar - drie skidoos en 'n klein trein, rits ons die pad af (op) bosveld toe! Lekker om weer die skidoo op die langpad (100 baan highway) te laat wikkel en as die oppervlak goed lyk druk jy die trotteltot teen die handel, sit jou kop af laag uit die wind uit en hou vas. Groot pret op 'n pragtige dag.

Aan gekom daar, Donderdag middag laat, het ons 'n paar minute gesukkel om die gennie aan die gang te kry en toe, siedaar, warm water, ligte en verwarmers. Lekker cozy in die bosveld lodge!

Vrydag oggend steek 'n nare wind op uit die suide. Die lodge is gelukkig in die windshadow van die pragtige Grunehogna - 'n groot berg met fantastiese geologiese verskynsels. So dis rondlê, laatslaap en droom oor 100 weird ou dinge. Bietjie af gaan na die windscoop en klippe bekyk, speel en klim op die hardste blou ys ooit!

Son-onder en maan-op is dit braaivleistyd in die groot Yskas. J&B is goed in die koue. Dit vries nie maklik nie. Bier en wyn vries te gou, J&B word net lekker koud. Dit hang natuurlik af hoe baie water jy bygooi...

Saterdag is nogsteeds *winderig* en die dag gaan verby in 'n semi-slaap droom stasie.

Winderige Sondag evac ons terug, maar gaan speel eers vir 'n ruk op Schumacher en ry sy 'supertube'. Uiteindelik met rittel, hop, spring en stamp-stamp, kom ons almal veilig terug na die groot huis op die berg.”



Dr. Vleisbraai gepla deur die maan!

SOME QUOTES - SANA38

- “Thanks for eating my food.....” Said earnestly by James after having cooked the evening meal.
- “I feel like getting up, but that means getting up!” Said in a lazy voice by Ryan after a hearty meal.
- “Conrad to the radio room for a phone call” Said more than four times a day by random people.
- “I think I will go now and sleep for an hour then wake up for lunch.” Said by Andre straight after a good breakfast at 12 o’clock midday.
- “Where are we?” Said by (or to) anyone who is confused for any reason. Originally said by Ryan at the end of an important meeting during the Take-Over.
- “ When I die, I want my body donated to science fiction!” Said by James after too much sherry.

Author: Ryan Earle, **Photos** (from the top): Duncan Cromarty, Niel Malan, Karel/Duncan(?), Karel Koster

Questions asked to some of the team members:

To Mike: What do you do in your spare time?

Answer: From time to time I can be seen swinging from the beams under the building like an ape. I am practicing to relate to all the boys when I get back home (Don’t ask me what this means)

To James: Why do you eat so much ATCHA?

Answer: It makes me feel so HOT!!

To James Again: What do you miss that we don’t have here?

Answer: Women of course and nothing else.

IN GENERAL

We have many things to look forward to next month. Here are but a few: More aurorae, more good food, and “Radio Darts” with Neumayer Station (German) and Hally Station (British).

SANA38 would like to thank all the people involved in making this experience a reality for us. Thanks to all our loved ones and families back at home and to the Department of Environmental Affairs & Tourism for the support and logistics involved in the research and protection of this great continent: **Antarctica.**

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