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M44/174

10/8/87

NEWSLETTER - JULY 1987

WINTER IS STILL IN FULL SWING ON MARION ISLAND. JULY WAS GENERALLY GREY AND COLD, SUNSHINE WAS A RARE OCCURENCE, AND HOWLING WINDS WERE AN ALMOST DAILY REMINDER THAT WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE LATITUDES KNOWN AS THE ROARING FORTIES. ONLY THE ISLAND'S FEATHERED INHABITANTS ARE TRULY IN THEIR ELEMENT. GENTOO PENGUINS, THE ONLY ONE OF THE FOUR LOCAL PENGUIN SPECIES TO OVERWINTER ON MARION, ARE NEARING THE END OF THEIR FORTY-DAY INCUBATION PERIOD, AND GIANT PETRELS ARE ENGAGED IN ELABORATE COURTSHIP DISPLAYS AND NESTBUILDING.

THE HUMAN INHABITANTS OF MARION ISLAND ARE AFFECTED IN A VERY DIFFERENT WAY BY THE SUB-ANTARCTIC WINTER. SOME EXHIBIT A MARKED TENDENCY TOWARDS HIBERNATION, AND THE DEPOSITION OF PROTECTIVE LAYERS OF ADIPOSE TISSUE IS WELL ADVANCED IN MOST INDIVIDUALS. MORE SO IN SOME THAN IN OTHERS, OF COURSE. THIS PROMPTED A BATTLE OF THE BULGE BETWEEN VOSSIE AND MARIANNA, WHO ARE NOW COMPETING TO SEE WHO CAN LOSE THE MOST WEIGHT BEFORE THE SHIP ARRIVES. WITH THE GOING TO THE PRESS OF THE NEWSLETTER MARIANNA WAS FACING DISQUALIFICATION FOR REFUSING TO DIVULGE HER INITIAL MASS.

ON A RARE NICE DAY, EARLY IN THE MONTH, ANDRE J, MARIETA, KRIS AND FRANK LAUNCHED AN ASSAULT ON MARION'S CENTRAL HIGHLANDS. THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS TO REACH THE ICE-PLATEAU - C. 5 HECTARE PLAIN OF SOLID ICE AT 1 000 METRE ELEVATION, WHERE IMPRESSIVE ICE CAVES AND RAVINES SERVE AS REMINDERS THAT MARION WAS EXTENSIVELY GLACIATED UNTIL ABOUT 15 000 YEARS AGO. THE EXPEDITION CAMPED IN A SHELTERED SPOT AT 750 M ELEVATION, INTENDING TO MAKE FOR THE ICE PLATEAU AT AN EARLY HOUR THE NEXT MORNING, AND TO SPEND THE DAY EXPLORING IT. BY ALL ACCOUNTS, THEY SPENT AN EXCEEDINGLY COLD AND UNCOMFORTABLE NIGHT, WITH EVEN MARIETA FAILING TO KEEP FRANK WARM. CAME MORNING, THEY EMERGED FROM THEIR TENTS INTO A PEASOUP FOG THAT PUT AN END TO ANY FURTHER INTREPID MOUNTAINEERING, AND FORCED THEM TO RETURN TO BASE. THEY REACHED BASE, MIRACULOUSLY, BEFORE NIGHTFALL, AND IN SPITE OF ANDRE AND MARIETA'S NON-EXISTENT SENSE OF DIRECTION. KRIS'S COMMENT ON THIS SAGA WAS RATHER CRYPTIC, AND IN POLISH.

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THE HIGHLIGHT ON THE ISLAND'S JULY SOCIAL CALENDER WAS A TOGA PARTY ON MARIANNA'S BIRTHDAY. FESTIVITIES COMMENCED WITH A FIVE-COURSE DINNER, AND WERE CONTINUED, AFTER COFFEE AND CIGARS, WITH DANCING AND GENERAL REVELRY. THE RIDDLE OF MARIETA'S STRANGE AND SECRETIVE BEHAVIOUR DURING THE PRECEDING DAYS, AND OF THE DISAPPEARANCE OF KRIS'S WOODWORKING TOOLS, WAS ALSO SOLVED DURING THE COURSE OF THE EVENING, WHEN SHE PRESENTED MARIANNA WITH A VERY PROFESSIONALLY MADE WOODEN BOX FILE FOR HER COLLECTION OF COLOUR SLIDES. GARY'S OFFERING WAS A WOODCUT DEPICTING TWO DANCING ALBATROSSES. GARY, INCIDENTALLY, WIELDS KITCHEN UTENSILS AS COMPETENTLY AS HE DOES A CHISEL: HIS FINGER LICK IN CHICKEN (JUST AS THE CORPORAL MADE IT) AND ECLAIRS WILL GO DOWN IN THE ANNALS OF ISLAND CUISINE, AND CONTRIBUTE IN NO SMALL MEASURE TO OUR INCREASING GIRTHS.

THE THREE METKASSIES CAN ALWAYS BE RELIED ON FOR ADDITIONAL, UNOFFICIAL ENTERTAINMENT. FRANK'S FORCASTS ARE PARTICULARLY FUNNY (OR RATHER FAR OUT, MAN). ANDRE M HAS BEEN OBSERVED DOING SOME VERY INTRICATE FOOTWORK DURING A BALLOON LAUNCH TO AVOID LEAVING THE LAUNCHING PLATFORM WITH HIS BALLOON ON A GUSTY DAY. AND HENRIE'S NOT INCONSIDERABLE LENGTH IS NOT REALLY AN ADVANTAGE, EVEN THOUGH HE LAUNCHES HIS BALLOON FROM A MUCH HIGHER ELEVATION THAN FRANK: HIS LIMBS TEND TO GET ENTANGLED IN STRING.

JULY WAS ALSO OUR LAST MONTH OF SOLITUDE. WE SHALL SOON WELCOME AN ADDITIONAL 20 MEMBERS TO OUR TEAM, AND, OF COURSE, SAY GOODBYE TO MARIETA AND MARIANNA. WE THEREFORE AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF THE SA AGULHAS, EARLY IN AUGUST, WITH MIXED FEELINGS - NOT LEAST BECAUSE IT IS A REMINDER OF HOW FAST OUR TIME ON THIS EXCEPTIONAL PLACE IS RUNNING OUT. FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, WE ARE STILL ENJOYING OURSELVES - THAT MUCH OUGHT TO BE CLEAR, ALSO THAT ALL IS WELL WITH US: GREETINGS TILL NEXT MONTH.

WEATHER DATA - JULY 1987

HIGHEST TEMPERATURE.....12,7 DEGREES
LOWEST TEMPERATURE.....-0,7 DEGREES
AVERAGE TEMPERATURE.....5,9 DEGREES
TOTAL RAINFALL.....163,0 MM
HIGHEST WINDSPEED.....165,2 KM/H
TOTAL HOURS OF SUNSHINE.....69,9
AVERAGE HOURS OF SUNSHINE PER DAY.....2,3

NEWSLETTER BY: JAN CRAFFORD
WEATHER DATA BY: FRANK SOKOLIC

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