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1830-10-05

PART ONE OF THREE PARTS

NEWSLETTER 06 OF MARION 47: SEPTEMBER 1990

HALLU TO ALL THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN SUNNY SOUTH AFRICA. SURELY SPRING HAS ARRIVED ON YOUR SIDE AND IS ALREADY OVERWHELMING YOU WITH ITS GREEN AND FRAGRANT CHARACTER. ON THIS TREELESS, VOLCANIC OUTCROP IN THE VAST SOUTHERN OCEAN NGERA DAYS AND THU RIVAL OF MOST OF THE SUMMER BREEDING ANIMALS WERE FOR MOST OF THE MONTH THE ONLY EVIDENCE OF A CHANGE FROM WINTER TO SPRING. THOSE OF US EXPECTING BETTER WEATHER WERE NOT DISAPPOINTED, AS THE LAST FEW DAYS OF SEPTEMBER WERE WARM AND WINDLESS. THE NORMAL CYCLE OF 2 OR 3 DAYS OF RELATIVELY FINE WEATHER FOLLOWED BY A WEEK OF STRONG WINDS, HEAVY SNOW, TORRENTIAL RAIN (USUALLY MELTING THE SNOW) AND HEAVY FOG WILL MOST LIKELY RETURN. IT PROBABLY WILL BE THE STATUS QUO FOR SOME MONTHS TO COME AS WELL. THE LONGER HOURS OF DAYLIGHT ARE A RELIEF FOR SOME OF US AS MORE WORK IS DONE PER DAY. FOR THE PRESENT, SUNRISE IS AT ABOUT 06H00 AND SUNSET AT 17H15.

TO THE FIELD-ASSISTANTS INVOLVED IN THE CAT-PROGRAM THIS IS BAD NEWS SINCE THEY WORK MOSTLY AT NIGHT. SOON THEIR TACTICS WILL CHANGE FROM LONG HOURS IN THE DARK TO EVEN LONGER HOURS IN DAYLIGHT CHECKING THE AREAS ASSIGNED TO THEM FOR THOSE UNWELCOME EXOTIC FURRY FELINES. THEY (THE FIELD ASSISTANTS) ARE DOING AN EXCELLENT JOB UNDER THE MOST ADVERSE CONDITIONS. THEIR CALCULATED TARGET FOR THE YEAR HAS ALREADY BEEN REACHED IN AUGUST. THE SESSION FOR SEPTEMBER WAS ONE OF THE LONGEST SO FAR. IT IS NO JOKE TO SPEND 4 WEEKS WITH A PARTNER IN THE CRAMPED CONDITIONS OF THE OUTLYING HUTS, WORKING AT NIGHT AT THE MERCY OF THE SUBANTARCTIC WEATHER AND CONSTANT TORTURE OF THE TERRAIN. SUPERFICIAL ATTEMPTS AT BATHING ARE UNDERTAKEN ABOUT ONCE A WEEK, IF AT ALL. ALTHOUGH COOKING IS RELATIVELY PRIMITIVE, SOME GUYS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN PRODUCING MARVELLOUS TREATS. A DAILY CHAT ON THE RADIO TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THE BASE STATION AND INTERSPERSED VISITORS FROM OTHER TEAM MEMBERS ARE THE ONLY CONTACT WITH OTHER PEOPLE. AFTER A SESSION, YOU EITHER END UP LIKING YOUR PARTNER OR HATING YOURSELF FOR NOT ACCEPTING HIM FOR WHAT HE IS.

THE 290 SQUARE-KILOMETER ISLAND ENCIROLES 4 HIGH PEAKS, OF WHICH STATE PRESIDENT SWART PEAK (1230 M) IS THE HIGHEST. THESE PEAKS AND THE PLATEAUX BETWEEN THEM ARE COVERED IN PERMANENT SNOW AND ICE. THE WINTER SNOWLINE STARTS AT ABOUT 300 METERS ABOVE SEA LEVEL. GREY LAVA RIDGES AND PLATEAUX EXTEND DOWN RADially TO THE COAST. BETWEEN THE RIDGES ARE VALLEYS AND PLAINS MADE UP OF RAGGED-SURFACED BLACK LAVA FLOWS AND PILES OF SHARP BLACK ROCKS. THESE WERE FORMED BY MORE RECENT ERUPTIONS FROM THE EVER PRESENT SMALLER, RED, CONICAL VOLCANOS. THE LAST ERUPTION OCCURRED IN 1980. THE RUBBEDNESS OF THE ISLAND IS ENHANCED BY THE ABSENCE OF TREES AND SHRUBS. THE ONLY VEGETATION IS MOSS, FERNS AND GRASS, ALL OF WHICH GROW LESS THAN 10 CENTIMETERS HIGH. THE GRASS IS CONFINED TO THE WET COASTAL PLAINS. THE FERNS ARE PRIMARILY CONFINED TO THE OLDER LAVA. MOSSES ARE CONFINED TO THE GREY LAVA RIDGES. THE VEGETATION DIMINISHES WITH ALTITUDE.

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PART TWO OF THREE PARTS

TEN HUTS ARE SPACED AT BETWEEN 1 HOUR AND TWO AND A HALF HOURS' WALKING AROUND THE ISLAND. A FIT MAN, TRAVELLING FROM HUT TO HUT, CAN WALK AROUND THE ISLAND IN 20 HOURS. THE ISLAND IS DIVIDED INTO 5 WORKING-AREAS OF APPROXIMATELY THE SAME SIZE. THE RUGGED TOPOGRAPHY OF THE WORKING-AREAS DIFFER DRAMATICALLY. JACHA AND HEIN COVERED THE NORTHERN PARTS OF THE ISLAND, CONSISTING OF VERY WET COASTAL PLAINS DIVIDED BY 2 GREY LAVA RIDGES AND INCLUDING SEVERAL LAKES, LARGE AREAS OF VEGETATED LAVA WHICH ARE DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE, AS WELL AS ADJACENT FOOTHILLS AND THE RIVER BEDS IN BETWEEN. THEY HAD 2 HUTS AT THEIR DISPOSAL TO WORK FROM. SINCE THEIR AREA INCLUDED THE BASE STATION, THEY HAD REGULAR ACCESS TO HOT SHOWERS AND OTHER PRIVILEGES. PIET AND ANDRE BOTHA HAD ONE HUT AND THE BASE STATION TO WORK FROM AND COVERED THE EASTERN PARTS OF THE ISLAND. THEIR AREA CONSISTED OF COASTAL PLAINS DIVIDED BY SEVERAL GREY LAVA RIDGES AS WELL AS SMALLER BLACK LAVA VALLEYS. PROMINENT FEATURES OF THIS AREA ARE 4 VERY IMPOSING VOLCANOS AND A VERY NOTORIOUS VALLEY OF BLACK LAVA FLOWING DOWN FROM THE HIGHER MOUNTAINS, CALLED BLACK HAGLETT VALLEY. CHRISTO AND KONRAD COVERED THE SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE ISLAND AND TRAVELLED BETWEEN 3 HUTS. THE COASTLINE OF THIS AREA IS VERY RUGGED AND COASTAL PLAINS ARE ABSENT. VERY HIGH CLIFFS, ON WHICH SOOTY AND GREYHEADED ALBATROSSES BREED, SEPERATE THE COAST FROM THE ESCARPMENT. THIS AREA IS FURTHERMORE DIVIDED INTO 2 PARTS BY THE MOST NOTORIOUS LANDSCAPE ON THE ISLAND - SANTA ROSA VALLEY. IT IS A VALLEY OF RELATIVE YOUNG, UNVEGETATED LAVA WHICH FLOWED FROM A VOLCANO DOMINATING A WIDE VALLEY. QUOTING FROM AN OFFICIAL PAPER WRITTEN ON THE GEOLOGY OF MARION ISLAND: 'DO NOT EVER CROSS SANTA ROSA VALLEY IN A HURRY OR IN BAD WEATHER OR YOU COULD FIND YOURSELF IN DIFFICULTIES'. THAT SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. AGILE FOOTWORK IS COMPULSORY - A FALL COULD MEAN SERIOUS INJURY. ALBERT AND DELMAINE COVERED THE WESTERN PARTS OF THE ISLAND AND HAD 2 HUTS AT THEIR DISPOSAL. TO MOST OF THE ISLANDERS, THIS IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AREA. IT IS CHARACTERIZED BY WIDE COASTAL PLAINS CUT OFF FROM THE HIGHER PLATEAUX BY STEEP INCLINES AND IMPREGNABLE CLIFFS. THE PLAINS ARE REGULARLY INTERSECTED BY LAVA FLOWS REACHING TO THE SEA. ONE OF THE PROMINENT FEATURES IS 'KAALKOPPIE' - THE SITE OF THE MOST RECENT VOLCANIC ACTIVITIES. DEON AND PAUL WORKED FROM 2 HUTS AND COVERED THE NORTH-EASTERN PART OF THE ISLAND. THE TERRAIN CONSISTS MOSTLY OF POORLY VEGETATED LAVA REACHING TO THE SEA AND IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE. COASTAL PLAINS ARE ABSENT. ONE HUT IN THIS AREA IS FURTHERMORE THE ONLY ONE ON THE ISLAND NOT ON OR CLOSE TO SEA LEVEL. BEING ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF THE ISLAND, THE AREA ALSO SUFFERS FROM THE PREVAILING WESTERLY WINDS. DENSE FOG IS THE MOST UNPLEASANT CHARACTERISTIC OF THIS AREA. INHABITANTS OF THE HUT MAY BE TRAPPED FOR DAYS ON END DURING SPELLS OF FOGGY WEATHER. IN SUCH WEATHER, ANYONE WANDERING FROM THE HUT WILL GET LOST IN THE MAZE OF LAVA WITHIN A FEW MINUTES.

THE SESSION AWAY FROM BASE ENDED ON THE 23RD OF SEPTEMBER. A FESTIVE SOSATIE-BRAAI ON THE EVENING OF THE 24TH WAS THOROUGHLY ENJOYED BY ALL. ANDRE BOTHA, ANDRE FOURIE, PIET AND DELMAINE USED THE TERRIFIC WEATHER TO ABSEIL FROM SOME OF THE HIGHER CLIFFS WITH ROPE AND HARNASS. THEY CAME BACK WITH EXCELLENT FOTOS AND EXHILARATING STORIES.

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THE TEMPO OF WORK ON THE SCIENTIFIC SIDE OF THINGS HAS INCREASED DRAMATICALLY. ANDRE FOURIE, THE BIRD-MAN, SPENT 9 DAYS WALKING AROUND THE ISLAND LOOKING FOR WELL HIDDEN NESTS OF GIANT PETRELS. THESE BIRDS NEST IN VEGETATED LAVA AND THEREFORE HE HAD TO CRISS-CROSS BETWEEN THE SEA AND THE ESCARPMENT TO REACH THE OCCUPANTS OF THE NESTS. LUCKILY HE FOUND AN ENTHUSIASTIC AND MUCH APPRECIATED ASSISTANT IN OUR MEDIC, BRUCE LAWSON. BRUCE IS A KEEN BIRD-WATCHER AND HAS IDENTIFIED AND POINTED OUT RARE BIRDS WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GONE UNNOTICED. HENDRIK AND FRANCIS, THE SO CALLED 'SEALERS', STARTED RUNNING AROUND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE MONTH WITH THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST ELEPHANT SEAL PUPS. THE PRESENCE OF HUGE, AGGRESSIVE BULLS ON THE BEACHES MAKE THE READING OF THE TAGS OF THE MOTHERS OF THESE PUPS AN INTERESTING GAME OF GRAB, READ, AND RUN.

STEVE NAUDE, THE DIESEL MECHANIC, SPENDING HIS 2ND CONSECUTIVE YEAR ON THE ISLAND, IS ONE OF THOSE RARE ALL-ROUNDERS WHOSE HANDS ARE ALWAYS BUSY. WHEN HE IS NOT TENDING HIS ENORMOUS GENERATORS, HE IS SEWING, COOKING, OR STANDING IN AS A SECOND RADIO OPERATOR, RADIO MECHANIC OR MEDIC. EVER THOUGHT HOW IT FELT TO BE INJECTED BY A DIESEL MECHANIC? IAN, THE RADIO OPERATOR, IS A WIZARD WITH RADIO COMMUNICATIONS AND HAS BEEN RELAYING MESSAGES FROM SANAE TO THE REPUBLIC AND VICE VERSA TO MAKE SURE THAT WEATHER REPORTS REACH THE REPUBLIC REGULARLY AND THAT THE GUYS AT SANAE GET THEIR LETTERS AND MESSAGES. THE WEATHER AT SANAE FREQUENTLY PROHIBIT DIRECT RADIO CONTACT WITH THE REPUBLIC. GERARD, THE RADIO MECHANIC, HAS GIVEN UP TRYING TO FIX OUR TV. AN AIRDROP ON 13 SEPT SUPPLIED HIM WITH NECESSARY SPARES FOR THE CATPROGRAM TO CONTINUE, BUT ALAS AND WEEP, IT DID NOT INCLUDE THE SPARES NEEDED TO REPAIR THE TV. SINCE THEN, GERARD, JACQUES AND BRUCE LEFT THE BASE STATION FOR A TRIP AROUND THE ISLAND. DANIE, JACQUES AND GERHARD, THE 3 METEOROLOGICAL OBSERVERS, ARE TRYING THEIR BEST TO ACCOMMODATE OUR DESIRE FOR GOOD WEATHER. THEY SPEND LONG AND DIFFICULT HOURS AT THEIR COMPUTERS TRACKING THE MOTIONS AND PHENOMENA IN THE UPPER ATMOSPHERE. WHEN NOT ON DUTY, JACQUES AND GERHARD ARE EITHER IMPROVING THEIR PHYSICAL APPEARANCE IN THE GYMNASIUM OR PHOTOGRAPHING EVERY BREATHING MEMBER OF THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

IN THE VICINITY OF THE BASE STATION. THE TECHNIQUES NEEDED TO DEVELOP THE FILM PROVED TOO MUCH FOR JACQUES. 3 FILMS WERE SPOILED BEFORE HE REALISED HE HAD THE CHEMICALS MIXED WRONG.

WEATHER DATA FOR SEPTEMBER:

AVERAGE PRESSURE	1008.9 HPA
AVERAGE TEMPERATURE	4.5 DEGREES CENTIGRADE
LOWEST MINIMUM TEMP	-2.2 DEGREES CENTIGRADE (01/09/90)
HIGHEST MINIMUM TEMP	7.0 DEGREES CENTIGRADE (22/09/90)
LOWEST MINIMUM WITH WIND FACTOR (AANVOELBARE TEMP)	-24.0 DEGREES CENTIGRADE (01/09/90)
HIGHEST MAXIMUM TEMP	13.7 DEGREES CENTIGRADE (27/09/90)
LOWEST MAXIMUM TEMP	1.6 DEGREES CENTIGRADE (29/09/90)
HIGHEST WIND GUST	115 KM/H (17/09/90)
AVERAGE HUMIDITY	81 PERCENT
SUNSHINE PER DAY	3.2 HOURS
TOTAL RAINFALL	179.9 MM
AVERAGE SEA TEMPERATURE	4.5 DEGREES CENTIGRADE

WEATHER DATA SUPPLIED BY DANIE FERREIRA
NEWSLETTER BY HENDRIK PANSENGROW