

-The Wanderer-

Marion Island Newsletter, Issue 1, April 2001



Introducing “The Wanderer”.

The monthly newsletter was called the Paddy for many years until changed by Marion 57 to the “Skua”. They felt the name was appropriate for skuas “are never absent in the act of taking an opportunity, but always brave enough in being out of range”. We decided to stick with birds but to go bigger.

After a long search for a name for our newsletter, Sam (the birder, obviously), came up with “The Wanderer”. Being said the whole room went quiet, deep in thought while chewing on the chicken cordon bleu, the first of many successful dinners by Sarette.

The ever-present wandering albatross, who soars so effortlessly above us, seem to capture the hearts and minds of all who wander across the Southern Ocean to this wonderful island. These majestic birds have a wingspan of up to three metres and can live for as long as 70 years, so many would have seen them, team after team, year after year. They spend many months wandering the ‘big blue’, but are guaranteed to return to Marion Island, their home.

The twelve of us, Marion 58, all in the spring and summer of our lives are searching for meaning and purpose and indeed living it on the way. One thing all of us have in common was making the decision to wander off and experience a year away from the hustle of what some call civilized life. In the year lying ahead of us we are planning a lot of wandering around on this “Jewel of the Southern Ocean”, so withdrawn from reality. Exploring its secrets and energy, which will unavoidably result in wanderings in our own soul and in those of our team-mates. We would like to invite you to wander with the twelve of us through our experiences so far from known reality, energy in the middle of nowhere. What a beautiful life! This monthly newsletter will be available at <http://www.geocities.com/kildalkey>.

Enjoy wandering with the twelve of us.

Wilna and Samantha

Eerste indrukke ...

Die oomblik het voor my oë stilgestaan: toe Marion 57 die helikopter deur toe trek. Om vir ‘n laaste keer oor die eiland te vlieg en dan ... op die Agulhas te

land. Volgende jaar is dit ons wat terug gaan na die bekende wat dan ‘n onbekende is.

Marion Eiland is mooier as wat ek my ooit kon voorstel! Daar huiwer ‘n vraag in my gedagtes: Wat het ek gedoen om dit te verdien? Al antwoord wat ek kan kry is: Dit is net genade ... Psalm 113:3 “Van waar die son opkom tot waar dit ondergaan, moet die naam van die Here geprys word!”

Ons reis hiernatop op die SA Agulhas was baie voorspoedig en ‘n hengse avontuur. Dis nogal ‘n kuns om te stort en hare te was, die stort gordyn vas te hou en te sorg dat jy nie uit die stort uit val nie! En om wieg-wieg te eet is half vrolik! Om die groot oseaan te aanskou is ‘n voorreg wat my lank sal by bly.

Toe klim ons hier af en die son skyn!!! “Take over” was dol. Baie werk, baie leer en min ruimte. Min tyd om te dink en te sien en te waardeer. Na ‘n ewigheid het die oomblik van waarheid aangebreek: Nou is ons net twaalf eiland bewoners - vrede op aarde

Die Skeppings-schoonheid van Marion slaan jou asem weg. En wanneer jy weer asem het, kan jy steeds nie woorde vind nie

Vandat die son opkom tot wanneer dit onder gaan en van wanneer dit ondergaan tot wanneer dit opkom, sê ek dankie!

“Ek is ‘n dromer, omdat ek ‘n realis is.” Anoniem

Dankie DEA&T, PWD, J.R., S.C., UP, familie en vriende.

Erika Nortje (Veld-assistent – Insekte)

Genesis

One never knows what the future holds. That is so true. I never dreamt of being able to come to Marion – at least until I applied for the field assistant post (which I was selected for). Thank goodness for that. Time (since the interview) has flown so fast that I am having difficulty expressing my feelings of the past two months in a short letter – excitement, packing, having to say goodbyes to family, friends, a university etc., everything so familiar and taken for



Sam, Beneke & Liezl: "Goodbye Cape Town"

granted. Team training in Pretoria was interesting – twelve people with one common goal, i.e. making a success on Marion, having to get to know each other in a short (rushed) space of time. Then, back to Port Elizabeth, finish my MSc, do last minute shopping (WHAT DO YOU BUY???), say all farewells etc.

Off to Cape Town – then the Agulhas – what a RAVE. The first time since Christmas I have nothing to do except enjoy what the Agulhas and ocean have to offer. Beautiful weather that held all five days of the journey to Marion, inviting birds to visit us with their elegant wings spread wide.

Wow! What an experience – being surrounded by ocean for days on end – heading in one direction – MARION! Then we saw it – our home to be. First impression: It is BIG.

Marion 57 were having a braai, their fire a symbol of life and hope in a cold environment. I felt sorry for them – having to leave this incredible place, but at the same time elated at our opportunity to be here. When I opened my eyes the next morning I was dazzled by the beautiful sight that met my eyes. Snow-topped mountains, the island a medley of greens, browns and blues. Colours here seem more vivid. Hard work lay ahead during take-over... cargo slinging – unpacking containers, project training, experiments, sampling etc.

I was fortunate enough to have a couple of day-trips to Tafelberg, Trypot, Macaroni Rocks and a 3-day trip to Kildalkey. The king penguins, gentoo penguins and elephant seals have stolen my heart – their innocence portrayed in understanding, perceiving eyes. No camera will ever be able to fully capture the serenity of Marion – the fresh air in the mountains, testosterone off a musky seal bull, the smell of penguin colonies – the isolation. It is really amazing. Even killer whales hug the coastline with curiosity – showing off their magnificently streamlined dolphin-shapes.

I would like to thank everybody involved in my smooth transfer from Port Elizabeth to Marion (DEA&T, PWD, UP, UPE, sponsors, family and friends). As I mentioned earlier, my words cannot describe Marion, or my experience of it. I read a quote in the Readers Digest (which I have modified somewhat): *Marion is a breath of the air of paradise.*

Till next time.

Sarette Slabber (Editor and FieldAssistant – Insects)

Insect Girl

Coming to this island is like a dream come true. The first time I heard of a place called Marion Island, I was in Grade 10 and I said to myself "Lizel, one day you are going to be on that island." Well, here I am!! Vandat ek aangestel is (omtrent drie weke voor spanopleiding) tot nou toe was alles nog 'n ongelooflike ervaring. Die skeepsvaart was baie lekker (behalwe vir die eerste drie dae wat ek nie te wel gevoel het nie). Oorname was eerstens baie uitputtend - vir iemand soos ek wat glad nie sportief is nie, enskielik berge op en berge af en deur moerasse met rubberstewels aan moet ploeg, was nogal erg. By Mixed Pickle het ek vir die eerste keer ongerepte natuur gesien en stilte, behalwe vir die robbe se gekerm. Dit klink rerig soos 'n dagsorg vir robbe.

Tweedens het ons in oorname ook 'n klomp nuwe vriende gemaak. Daar was lekker kuiertjies in die laboratorium met die akademië asook lekker danssessies en kuiers in die bruinstoor met PWD. Die inlywing was groot sports met Wessie aan die voortou. Die dag toe die SA Agulhas vertrek was dit met gemengde gevoelens - hartseer om van nuwe vriende afskeid te neem, maar ook blydsak om uiteindelik die basis en eiland vir onself te hê.

I am really looking forward to this year and my project (I am one of the insect girls). I also got the nicest room in base, the only one with a stable door (thanks Charl for keeping it mouse free). Thanks to all, especially Marion 57, for a stunning takeover. Also to Dr Melodie McGeoch and Christine for helping to set up the Azorella project (more about that in the next issue), Kobus and Sandy for fantastic coordination and PWD for a not too shabby kitchen, Murphy's Rise (new catwalks to the point) and Rocha's crane. Hope to see you all again next year!!

Lizel Hugo (SQ2) (Field Assistant – insects)

SEALERMAN

Hallo out there. Five days on board the Agulhas, feeling anxious to set my foot onto Marion, but it

happened. That was exciting. Still wondering what could happen next, I was already in the farm (field), checking the livestock that I inherited from another sealer (Pierre). I am so happy and feel so privileged to spend a year in inarguably one of the most beautiful places in the world. All I can say about the island is that it is very small and fragile I think. I'm out.

T.W. (Tambudzani Malaudzi)



Elephant seal at Trypot Beach

At last!!!

When paging through my diary, 25 January 2000, the day I left for Cape Town for my Marion interview - with a heart full of expectations and excitement. After all this is my dream. Then turning a couple of pages... 11 February 2000, a day I will never forget. The disappointment, too deep for tears. I didn't get Marion! Give up? Never! I reapplied immediately. The 11th of February 2001, on my way to Pretoria once again, this time not to be failed. And then the phone call... congratulations - you are in.

Sitting in front of my desk in my comfortable room, Seaview nr. 32, looking out over a calm sea, two elephant seals standing opposite each other wrestling with their necks, a fur seal hopping past them and a wandering albatross flying past my window. I'm here - will reality ever sink in? Since an exciting and exhausting team training in Pretoria, it felt like an everlasting time before it will be the true Marion at last, only the twelve of us. The five-day Agulhas experience was unforgettable. And then the unforgettable moment, Sunday afternoon 8 April, 16:45, sitting on the monkey bridge staring into infinity - There is Marion. Okay, you had to squint your eyes to see it but there was the jewel of the Southern Ocean - 85 km away. The sun was setting - throwing orange lines on the water and in the sky, king penguins swimming on the left of us and two sperm whales in the distance. Magic!

We had to wait till the next morning to be flown out. What a torturing night with a lot of failing efforts to

go to bed. At last our first steps on Marion. Marion 57 members, some with long beards and long hair, some dressed in clothes that tell their own story of mire trampling.

The three weeks of take over, days filled with forced orientation and focus. Time is short with lots to be done. Little time for sleep or you might miss out. Sitting around the bar at night with stiff muscles, listening to old stories and experiences of old team members and islanders and experienced PWD members. Making notes in your brain of every single piece of advice for survival on Marion.

The moment arrive, Sunday morning 11:00 with the last chopper flight departing, ten pairs of eyes staring down to the helideck, looking at us as the helicopter lifts off. I looked around me, Marion 58, 12 excited bodies jumping up and down, shouting: "This is it, this is it!" Standing at the point waving the Agulhas off.

With a great Marion 57, who left their home full of footprints and memories for us. With their 'Skuas' and shared experiences and advice in our hearts. Thanks Marion 57 for setting a great example. "Experience is not what happens to you, it is what you do with what happens to you". Thanks to everybody. Kobus for his peaceful ways of coordinating, Franz, Sandy, Steven and Melodie and all the other scientists for sharing their knowledge, PWD for getting the base in perfect shape and the parties in Zone 5. All of you made the first month on Marion an unforgettable one.

Wilna Wilkinson (Field assistant - Azorella)

Twelve candles celebrating our freedom - first night by ourselves - enjoying Wilna's cake.



Settling in

Being responsible for the most important departments on Marion Island is not always easy, especially when you have been called here and there, not having enough time to complete the year planning task.

However, April was the month of base take-over, and the first month in which we as a team were left alone. During take-over, many things happened. We have become familiar with Marion base and its surrounding environment. The outgoing team, Marion 57 showed us all that there was to know. The PWD guys, under the leadership of Mike Murphy and Dave Hendrikse, were fantastic, as was Nole (Marion 57). The take-over period was marked by several construction projects by PWD. A crane for the sea point was erected, employing modern technology, the kitchen was renovated, and the scientists were busy with their planned tasks.

I have become convinced that if something must be done in a professional responsibility, and must be done as soon as possible, after separating what is important from what is urgent.

Well, as part of our strategy (Marion 58) to ender the field of Mice Killing Competition. Marion 58 under the leadership of Director Beneke is competing for a contract to serve DEA&T and NPWD for a less budget expenditure on food stuff, as well as on electrical components by campaigning against the existence of the mice families around the base, and there are also at present active discussions among MARION 58 team members about the spread of killing.

I would like to thank the DEA&T guys by making the mission successful, especially Kobus, Sandy and Franz. You were wonderful. I would like to send many thanks to Kobus as a officer-in-charge. I say "Viva Kobus, Viva!"

Bhekis Majola (Diesel Mach)

How did I end up part of Marion 58?

Darren, my boyfriend, happened to be watching 50/50 one Sunday evening, when an insert on Marion Island came on. Knowing how much I love seabirds he recorded it for me. Later that evening I watched what he had recorded and was blown away by how beautiful Marion Island was and the amazing abundance of life it holds. The next week or so I couldn't stop talking about what I had seen on TV. I daydreamed about going to Marion one day, but never in a million years thought that little old me would be able to go. The next week was Christmas and on Boxing day I went over to Robben Island with Leisha from Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) to do some work on the african penguins (Jackass). I still could not stop talking about what I had seen on TV, so no sooner were we on Robben, but I mentioned Marion Island. Leisha had been over on take-overs before so she told me more about the work, how to apply etc. I contacted DEAT and MCM, applied, got an interview and hey presto here I

am! It is incredible how this was put on my path when I wasn't even looking for it. I love how life works!

So after a whirlwind three weeks we said our good-byes and we were off into the sunset – literally.

We got our first glimpse of the island at about 5pm on Sunday 8th April. It was a perfect evening – Not a breath of wind, full moon reflecting on perfectly still water. Magic. You could literally feel the excitement in the air.

The next morning we woke early in eager anticipation for our first real look at our new home. We were again greeted with perfect weather and eight ORCAS!!!! I felt like the luckiest person in the world. I realized that day the inadequacy of the English language – Words cannot begin to express what we were all feeling. I kept on feeling like I was dreaming, like I had walked into a documentary. We hurried around getting our bags repacked and off the heli-deck to board the helicopters – what fun!!!! This is such an adventure – each part blows me away!

As soon as I got the chance I took a short walk to investigate, I had only walked about 50m from the base when I saw my first wandering albatross with a gorgeous white fluffy chick, to my left about another 100m away were about 200 king penguins, soaring above was a menagerie of different birds, in the dip about 80m away was a massive bull elephant seal catching a few zzzzzz, and to the right was more fluffy sub-Antarctic fur seal pups than I could count. I had tears of JOY streaming down my cheeks – I felt totally complete, surrounded by peace and love, at one with nature – a moment I will treasure for as long as I live.

I guess for some DREAMS DO COME TRUE.....

Samantha Petersen (Deputy Leader & Field Assistant – birder)

The arrival

The arrival sparked an amazement of joy – the night to remember, on the peaceful place called Marion Island. Stormed by a group of people with a mission, for without a mission one has not place on this tiny beautiful paradise of wonder.

For it is indeed for a purpose, a purpose accomplished by few.

After takeover

After takeover reign, the peaceful nature of our little paradise left with our own way of doing things our vocations, our creativity, our sense of being, our emotions, our oneness and that is Marion 58 and our beautiful paradise.

Ephaphrus Mamabolo (Met team)

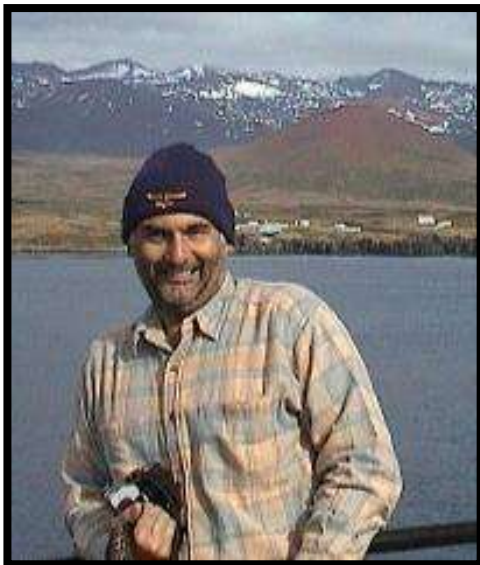
Standing in the door

Marion to me is like an unopened parcel. When you receive a parcel you have to remove the wrapping to see what is inside. You can shake the parcel to listen what's inside, you can guess the contents by feeling the weight of it or maybe you can ask the people who wrapped the parcel about it. But you have to remove the wrapping to really know what you have in your hands. Ahead of me I have a year to carefully open my special gift and enjoy the contents with my fellow team members.

I have seen and heard a lot about Marion Island. On Gough I saw many slides and videos, spoke to people that has been there and listened carefully to their stories. I thought I had a good idea about what makes Marion tick. A simple thing showed me how wrong I was. On the slides I could recognize cushion plants (*Azorella*) immediately, I knew they were plentiful around Mixed Pickle hut and also *Azorella* kop. What I did not know was how beautiful and delicate these plants are. It even grows right on the doorstep of base. The minute small leaves, interesting patterns, hard spongy feel, deep green colour, it was so different to what I imagined. A new world opened and I am standing in the door.

Join us this year as we open our parcel and enjoy with us this strange place called Marion Island.

Beneke de Wet (Team Leader & Radio Tech)



Addie Burt (Chaplain to the Marion 58 team)

"We are all travellers in the wilderness of this world and the best we find in our travels is an honest friend". Thank you Addie for what you mean to us.

Weather Wizard

News from the Marion Island Weather Office

The month of April in a summary:

Max air pressure	1037.3 hPa
Min air pressure	978.8 hPa
MSL pressure	1017.6 hPa
Max temperature	13.6 C
Min temperature	0.1 C
Mean temperature	6.1 C
Total monthly rainfall	167.6 mm
Days with rain or snow	22 days
(13 days just over 0.1mm)	
Max wind gust	72.0 km/h
Mean Daily Sunshine	2.83 (h)

The month was fairly cloudy with little sunshine, 27 cloudy days with light drizzle and rain. One of the average of 2 thunderstorms a year came thundering over late the evening of the 22nd leaving only 40.7 mm of rain. The frequent snow on the mountains behind the base leave us wondering when the snowman will bring snow to our doorstep.

The Met team.

Liewe Ma,

Marion is nie soos die Armie nie - ons was verniet bang. Hoe gaan dit met Ma? Met my gaan dit goed. Dit is wel rerig so dat ek nie kan pas kry nie. "Seven days" is nie lank genoeg vir die Aghullas om Suid-Afrika toe en terug te syl nie. En weet Ma hier is ok mense wat in beheer is en hille skree nie eers op ons nie - tog lyster almal en selfs die tjoppir lyster vir hille al swaai hille net hille arms. Ek sal graag vir die Majoor dit wil sê maar wat is die kans dat sy of haar hondjie my sal glo.

Was dit nou ongelooflik Ma! Om op die see te wees. Ek, van die Bosveld - op die grote oseaan. Ma weet mos hoe klyn 'n groot skip word as mens se oë nie meer so ver soos die land kan sien nie. Tog bly dit 'n skip al voel dit so klyn want ons roei nie. Net as mens roei mag jy sê boot. En nou is ek 'n ylandbewoner. Dis rerig lekker, want ek hoef nie eers my klere te stryk nie. Ek dink dis net omdat mens nie rerig nate in dik jasse en ghorteks kan stryk nie - selfs die Kolinel sou gesikkel het, ek is seker daarvan. Ons maak wel skoon, maar ons poliesh nie die vloere nie en fryf nie die krane met braso blink nie en die beste van alles is dat ek nie eers my bed hoef te blok nie! Niemand hou inspeksie nie - selfs nie eers die Spanlyer of die Diesel mac nie.

Die son skyn nie baie nie maar as hy skyn is dit mooi al is dit nie warm nie. Die wind is nogal kwaai, Ma,

dit huil harder as Hahienas en byt ook seer - veral jou vingers en tone en jou nees. Ja, Ma - ek trek warm aan, maar dit help nie altyd nie en onthou as mens gaan stap met te veel klere aan raak jy stomerig. Ek sal later meer oor my werk vertel want jille gaan sikkkel om te verstaan. Ek werk met diertjies wat ek in miljoenstes van 'n gram weeg. Hille lyk soos teddie bere en spring soos vlooië en vervel soos reptiele en party lê yers wat soos pêrels lyk.

Ma moet tog asseblief vir die biere verdydelik dat ek nie rerig familie is van Kleinjan Kluitgraaf nie, maar net amper moontlik so op 'n manier dalk verlangings kan familie wees.

Groetnis,
Kleinsus (Erika)

Sponsors:

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Thank you! Marion would not have been the same without your support!