

-The Wanderer-

Marion Island Newsletter, Issue 4, July 2001



MAGICAL MARION COVERED IN SNOW !

A new Marion

Since our arrival on Marion we were all looking forward to experience snow. Not just two mm thick snow that disappears in three hours. Enough snow to build a snowman, have snow fights and sink in knee deep. What a surprise to wake up on 19 July and see our dreams have come true. Marion was not the Marion we got to know; it looks like a whole different island with snow all over, even covering the catwalks.



A fairy tale version of Marion Base

Throughout the day someone could be spotted outside, camera in the hand taking pictures of all the known, looking so unfamiliar now. Some went to Boulders and some to Trypot to catch all of it on film. We built a snowman (sorry, a snow babe under supervision of Pieter) after which we buried each other in the snow.

Beneke and I went to Juniors Kop (we planned to walk much further, but walking in snow turned out to be much more difficult than expected). The water in the crater on Juniors was frozen and for the first time ever I was able to literally stand on a lake. Going

down Juniors was much fun as we were trying to slide down. This Juniors-Express

idea did not work so well because the snow was too soft.

Despite all this, the water in base dried up because of frozen pipes (well, if I was a pipe covered in 30 cm snow, I would also have frozen). We started to melt snow for the dishes and other basic needs. Snow coffee was definitely a new one to me. Some of us tried to take a swim or bath under Kapua Bridge (where an ephemeral river appeared due to melting snow and rain), but the water was very cold. That was a real quick jump-in-and-out-and-run-for-the-dry room experience.

After a few days the snow melted but there was still no water. Eventually, under supervision of Bheki, we walked to the Van den Boogaard dam. Only to discover it was only a minor fault. We had water at last and after much difficulty Bheki got the hot water boiler to work again. After a week of no showers Bheki was our hero!

The snow melted, which brought back the Marion we know, but also the realisation that the new Marion might appear overnight.

Lizel (SQ2)

Magical Marion moonlight walk

Erika is the member in our team with the biggest fear of the "Marion Cold". Every full moon she will sit in front of her window in Sandton until the early morning hours, staring out over Juniors Kop in the moonlight. She would be dreaming about the moonlight walk she still wants to undertake, patiently waiting for the perfect weather conditions.

It was a Friday night. Full moon. The island was covered in a white snow blanket. It was a night with clear skies, stars shining brightly. We were all warmly tucked in under our duvets, watching the

legendary movie *Titanic*. After the intensive movie we retired to the bar with heavy hearts and some still wiping the tears from their eyes. All were ready for bed, until our metkassie on duty, Pieter, came in mentioning to Erika that this would be the perfect night for her moonlight stroll. Erika got all



The ice princesses

excited but the rest of us froze, knowing what was to come. With the picture of the character in *Titanic*, Rose, turning blue with ice crystals in her hair still fresh in our minds. No one, except for Erika of course, had the desire to wander off between snow-covered mountains at night. But Erika was determined. And so it happened that six of the Mi58 team left base around midnight with a wind chill of -17°C ! To describe the walk... How do you describe magic? I don't know if my vocabulary is rich enough, but I'll try. We left the catwalks behind as we looked forward. The landscape that we all came to love in the last three months was stretched out in front of us. Everything was covered in white, reflecting brightly in the moonlight. It gave us a feeling of a fairy tale, a true story. We walked at a steady pace, wanting to reach Juniors Kop before the weather turned. I couldn't keep up, couldn't help myself stopping every few steps gazing at the magic that was surrounding me. Every now and then a cloud obscured the moon for a moment, which threw ghostly shadows on the white mountains. We stopped at Penis Rock, looking at base in the distance. There we lay on our backs looking at the white halo around the moon. We sat, talking and laughing while absorbing the Marion magic. We kept ourselves warm drinking sherry. But the cold slowly caught up with us through every layer of clothing until it reached our bodies. This forced us to start walking back, our body-generated heat made us warm quickly enough. Sarette and Sam started burying Erika under the snow, the same Erika that

was shivering in Pretoria when just mentioning the word cold.

Back in base we all had a cup of warm coffee around the kitchen table, talking and laughing. We went to bed much later, filled with another warm memory of magical Marion.

Wilna

From freshwater to marine and coastal biology

With my biology studies being freshwater orientated, I never thought for one moment I will be separated from this field, the field of the biology of rivers, lakes and wetlands. I received all-important training, attended awareness courses, and studied the river from the headwaters to the mouth. I knew which organisms to find where in the longitude of a river. I learnt about fascinating concepts like the River Continuum Concept (which gives the best image and processes of a river) and the South African Scoring System Version 4 (which describes the health of a river using macro-invertebrate community assemblages). I miss names like *Beatidae harissoni* (mayfly larvae) and *Labio trimarculatis* (three dotted barb). I miss talks about the great lakes of Africa, Tanganyika, Sibaya and the only true inland lake in South Africa, Fundudzi.

Being on Marion I've entered a totally different field. Coastal biology, another fascinating world. This includes the world of seals, petrels, albatrosses, cormorants, prions and killer whales. Here we study the simplest ecosystems to understand the much bigger and complicated functioning of the ocean. I mainly work on the seal species on the island, which include the sub-Antarctic fur seal, Antarctic fur seal and the four-ton giant southern elephant seal.

Was it true that university degrees do not educate us, they simply encourage us to learn more. They make us want to explore, read and maybe risk more to know what we still don't know. Will I ever feel I've learnt enough in biology or will I go on exploring more of its different disciplines? You never know. Read about the lives of the three seal species mentioned above in next month's issue.

Over and out!!!

Tambudzani wa Mulaudzi.

We would like to congratulate Tambu and Rabelani with their Wonder Boy who arrived on the 25th July. May he bring lots of joy in their lives!



Tambu checking an elephant seal tag

Unwritten Protocols

During take-over both teams, M57 and Mi58 were called to the dining room. Forms were handed out and we were asked to sign. This was the signing over ceremony where each of the twelve of us received our protocols stating our duties for the year. With big enthusiasm we signed but little did we know that some protocols were not mentioned. These are the voluntary duties which are of vital importance for survival as a team on a remote island.

Four months have passed in which each of us have discovered these unwritten protocols with the following cases worth mentioning:

- Beneke, our team leader and radio tech. His challenge and unwritten protocol: to learn, preferably quickly, how to handle six girls on an island. Support from various people didn't help much. Words from Kobus, "Good luck Beneke, remember if they decide on something they WILL stick together as one!" This Beneke seems to remember quite often. Chris, team leader of M57 asked us to go easy on Beneke and to support him, claiming that he knew what he was talking about because he had three women in his team.
- Liezl, our medic (known to us as SQ1). Our sunshine in the team making sure we practice our stomach muscles each day by laughing at her actions and jokes. When in need of a chat, just look her up.
- Then there is SQ2, the other Lizel. She is working on her doctorate on *Azorella* plants and is also the supporter of many in the team. Combining ideas with Pieter in the kitchen, they come up with surprising delicacies. Tidy by nature, she is always helping the desperate to wash dishes after supper. And a definite fuel in the fire of SQ1.

- Phaf our metkassie and gentle poet. He always walks around with a smile expressing his contentment with the island.
- Erika is working with insects. She assumed the responsibility to keep the rest of us on the right track by preparing church services for Sunday evenings. An event we look forward to every week. She is also our writer and storyteller, and entertains us with her "Liewe Ma" letters, featured in *The Wanderer* every month.
- Sam, our birder, took the task on her to make the sing-along sessions before church bearable with her guitar compliment. She also often entertains us with her guitar when sitting around the bar or standing around a fire.
- Bheki is our diesel mech. He was fortunate enough to be warned at his interview already of his unwritten protocol. He was told to remember that there would be six girls that will expect a lot of him. This can not be denied, requested by the girls shelves had to be constructed, bulbs replaced and taps reconnected, just to name a few. And Bheki's response to all of this "I don't mind, I love being in demand and to see six happy girls."
- Tambudzani, our sealer-man, his interesting stories after a serious team meeting always ensures that it ends on a light note. His most famous story features his legendary uncle - the lawyer.
- Pieter, our senior meteorologist, but also our teacher in cooking methods. He assists us with our cooking turn handing out advice and a helping hand. This prevents us from longing for any take away services and up to now we have had no suppers of toast and tinned food. Another service Pieter took on himself is handing out massages to relax stiff muscles of fellow female team members. A big bonus!
- Sarette is working on her doctorate looking at the thermal biology of insects on the island. She is also our cameraman, making sure each unforgettable moment and experience is captured on video. Her up to date digital photos are always handy to send out to friends and family.
- Segale, our chilled-out metkassie. He receives at least five phone calls a day, all mainland admirers. This makes us realise how fortunate we are for having such a highly demanded guy in the team. If ever longing for any positive encouragement just ask Segale. Ye baby man!

- And me? Oh, I just sit back and relax with a smile looking how these unwritten protocols unfold.

Wilna

PS. Wilna is the flower child in our team. She keeps everyone happy and ensures that the team functions as a unit. She also ensures that we are aware of the 'energy' that nature exudes.

Team Spirit

Through our own Marion Island Newsletter – *The Wanderer*, I would like to thank all the people who have made my day and shown unity during my birthday. The first birthday for the Marion 58 team on Marion.

How do we come about having team spirit? The discipline of the team starts with dialogue, the capacity of members to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together. This involves recognising the patterns of defensive interactions that undermine spirit, but if recognised and surfaced creatively, we can actually accelerate team spirit. Team spirit is vital because the team, not individuals, are the fundamental unit on Marion. So the intelligence of the team exceeds the intelligence of the individual and the team has the right to be treated fairly. Respect each other and each others property in order to be respected. We have the right to make mistakes but we have to learn from these mistakes. We have to learn to appreciate, listen to other people's ideas and to compromise to keep the team spirit high at all times.

Bheki



Bheki on his birthday at the bar

Dijo tsa motshegare kwa Ship's Cove

Mogologolo o ne a e opile lenaka fa a re o le ore le santse le go tlhabetse. Seo se direga fela jalo kwano mo Marion. Fa le tlhabile, le raya gore tswaya o

bone tikologo mme seo ke se ke se dirileng mo bekeng e e fetileng.

Le tlhabile sentle mme fela jaaka re setse re le itse, seo ga se ree gore le tllile go wela fela jalo. Ke ne ka

batla baithaopi ba ba ka tsayang loeto le nna mme ka fitlhela ba le babedi ebong Beneke le SQ1. Kgato ya bo bedi e ne e le go baakanya seo re yang go se ja.

Loeto le ne le se leleele jaaka ke ne akantse. Ura morago ga gore re tloge re ne ra amogelwa ke motlhaba o montsho le dinonyane tsa lebopo la Ship's Cove. Ke lebopo le le lengwe fela mo setlhakatlhakeng le le nang le motlhaba a mangwe otlhe ke matlapa. Marion e nnile teng morago ga gore go nne le *volcano*. Ke ka jalo motlhaba le matlapa a kwano a leng mantsho. Palo e e kwa tlase ya dinonyane e tlhaga morago ga gore bontsi jwa tsona di fudugele setlha seno sa mariga.

Re ne ra simolola go baakanya dijo tsa motshegare mme yona ya simolola go komakoma. E sarasarile go se go kae mme ga ya ke ya kgoreletsa maikaelelo a rona a letsatsi. Re ne re ipakanyeditse maemo a a tshwanang le a, a bosa. Dijo di ne di siame fela selo se le sengwe se re neng re tlogetse e ne e le letswai. Ditebogo go metsi a lewatile ka re ne raina nama teng.

Ura di le pedi morago ga gore re fitlhe, ke fa re simolola go leba gae. E ne e le letsatsi la me la go fepa ditshaba e bile re ne re sa batle go kabelelwa ke diphefo dikgolo le dipula.

Lesole ga le nke le ikgata motlhalala, gape tsela kgopo ga e nke e latsa nageng ka nako tsotlhe. Ka seo ke kaya gore tsela ya go boela morago e ne e le ntsha e bile e le khutswanyane. Ditebogo go moeteledipele wa loeto Beneke.

After getting volunteers we started walking and an hour later we were there. The place still has the wreckage of a ship that sunk there some time ago. There are also many elephant seals on Ship's Cove.

It was a sunny day and we had a couple of determined people in the team. So a picnic at Ship's, the most beautiful sandy beach by far, was in order. Beneke, Segale and SQ1 went off, ending up having a great day. Came back with smiley faces, lots of photos. Another memory on Marion was formed.

We had to leave this wonderful place two hours later, as it was my turn to feed the multitudes.

Segale

Another day at the office...

We awoke to find that the wind had died down. I am not sure what it is, but the weather feels as if it has been much worse than usual for the past few weeks,

so a windless day was most welcome. I woke the girls, encouraged them with a strong cup of coffee and put pies in the oven to bake while we got ready. The plan was to get going ASAP to ring 70 odd wandering albatross chicks at Sealers Beach. On the way we stopped for a breather at Ships Cove. This is by far my favourite place! It is the only "sandy beach" on the island – not quite white sand though rather a black volcanic equivalent! We flopped down on the blechnum to catch our breath after climbing Skua Ridge and I counted the gentoos while the girls lay back taking in the view. It is really quite breathtaking. The vegetated cliffs create an amphitheatre with a king penguin freckled beach as the main stage. Looking out to sea the bay is protected from the north by a massive outcrop of grey lava rising sharply out of the ocean. Quite spectacular! As we were sitting there we saw a small pod of killers enter the bay – two females and a sub-adult. They gracefully made their way across the bay, through the kelp beds and out of sight. We continued towards Sealers beach feeling so privileged to have encountered these "angels of the sea"!

At Sealers we dressed in our albie puke-ware and got to work. First you have to catch them by their beaks. You only get one chance – if you miss you will smell like fish oil for the rest of the day (and in some cases months, years...). Once you have hold of them you gently pull their left leg out from under them and ring them as quick as possible. Once ringed the next challenge is to move away without the chick falling off its nest or puking on you! They are so gorgeous and oh so soft. It is very tempting to cuddle these soft fluff balls. They look like they would smell like baby powder, but make NO mistake – they DON'T!!! I wonder what their parents think when they get back to their chick and find that they have regurgitated. We finished up by lunchtime and found a nice spot just next to the king penguins and enjoyed our pies.

On the way back Wilna and I had to do the annual beach debris accumulation census on Ships so off we went down on to the beach while Sarette and Liezl waited at the top. We were no sooner down on the beach when we heard them call "Killers!" I rushed down to the waters edge. Like a bolt of lightning they crossed the bay, frolicked in the waves for a few brief moments and then they were gone. It was such a lovely time of the day and Wilna and I enjoyed walking along the waters edge. The moist sand created perfect reflections of the penguins. An inquisitive gentoo walked right up to us. It was quite amazing - he just stood there looking at us. I felt so honoured as these birds are so shy. We stayed down there as long as possible and then had to go as it was

starting to get dark and we still had a 45 minute walk home. Once again we saw killers – this time at Duikers point.

There was an equally big surprise waiting for us at base – the hot water was back!!! After a lovely hot shower (first time in just over a week) we felt almost human again and fell asleep tired happy campers! Another great end to a great day!

Sam



Sam & Sarette ringing an albie chick in the snow

Marion

Marion, somewhere between there and nowhere. A place that teaches one to appreciate what you have when you have it, what you will miss when you don't have it any longer. Nobody leaves Marion untouched. Whether it is improving human relations, a deeper perception of the inner-self, an awe of the temperamental weather conditions, or an astonishing appreciation at the marvel of the epitome of creation.

Marion teaches one to be humble. It also teaches you what humans should be like. It is a crime-free society, twelve people finding that the only crime would be not to seize the day. Nowhere on earth is as peaceful as this Eden. Here we are at peace: working, playing and sleeping in a different world.

One gets used to get along with only your two feet as a means of getting from point A to B, your only concern is safety. Not protecting yourself to not get hijacked, raped, burgled or killed, but ensuring that you had a sufficient meal before you leave base to take on the numerous elements that Marion throws at you.

Spending hours outside on a sub-Antarctic island is challenging, yet so rewarding. When you return to base your spirit is revitalized, energy exudes from you as you discuss the day's experiences with your

friends. Friends that have become family, counsellors, priests, confidantes. You have to make do with what you have – but even that requires no compromise.

One feels awkward, sipping Coke, sitting on a beach surrounded by docile gentoo penguins and slumbering elephant seals. Time goes by, yet there is no time. What is time anyway? Some human created period trying to explain the phenomenon of getting older, of tides changing, of seasons passing.

Marion teaches you to see time pass, as every time you look at an albie chick, it has grown, every time you visit a far-off beach, the king chicks have grown. And with time, each of us becomes. We become a part of Marion, allowed to spend what seems to be a fleeting moment in Eden. What will we take home with us?

Memories. About the island, it's people, it's animals, the ongoing circle of life, a constant reminder that we are also part of a cycle. We live, we die. It is up to the individual to experience life. Living. Easier said than done. I want to remember to live, not to waste one second. Marion has taught me that.

Sarette

Quote of the month

“Today is a gift, that's why it's called the present.”

Liewe Ma

Hoe gaan dit met Ma. Met my gaan dit goed. Ma ons het annir aand Traweel Pisoot gespeel en dis 'n biekie snaaks want hille het gevra oor 'n baie bekende famielie. Die een mysie het gesê dis die Waltins want almal ken tog die Waltins maar dit was virkeerd. Hille sê dis die Kennidies. Wie dit okal was.

Ma die een mysie in die span bistiedeer vools. Sy was annirdag baie ontstelt want iemand het vir haar gesê sy is nie 'n reel bidir nie want sy dra nie altyd haar bainokiewlirs by haar nie. Ons het saam gaan nait birding doen. Mens kan dit net doen op aande wat dit mistig is. Dan skyn jy in die vools se oë sodat hille jou sien. Dan kom hille af en ons sit vir hille 'n ringetjie aan. Ek weet Ma gaan nie daarvan hou nie maar die belangrikste van nait birding op Marion is dat jy moet drink op die djob want annirs sal jy virklym.

Ma ons het 'n watirhangersnood. Dis nie dat ons nie watir het nie. Maar die wiend tsjil vêktir was die een dag mienis 23 en toe het al die watir gevries. Wiend tsjil biteekin aanvoelbare tempratier. Nou drink ons sneeu koffie. Die sneeu lê op die Yland soos die aisieng op Tannie Anna se wortilkoek.

So van koek gepraat Ma. Ma weet mos wat is 'n tradiesie. Dis soos om vir 'n nuwe onnirwysir 'n poets te bak. Met virjaarsdae het ons hier ok so 'n tradiesie. Die een wat virjaar word geboei met 'n bôl en tsain. Dan moet hy die heel dag so loop tot hy die kersies op die koek doodgeblaas het. Die diesel mac het eerste virjaar. Ek kon ok nie wag dat hy die kersies doodblaas nie want dan kan ons die koek eet maar ek dink hy was blyer as ek.

Ma ons speel nou wintirsport. Tafiltennis. Eers het ek biekie gesikkil want ek het gedink dit werk soos skwash waar jy teen die miere en die dak ok mag speel. Maar nou dat ek weet gaan dit ok nie so goed nie want van die mense speel soos regte kampioene.

Ma weet mos hoe ons balonne altyt weggevaai het wat ons by die kerkbizaar gekoop het. Die weerwaarneemirs gibryk sikke groot balonne om die wind in die lig te meet. Hille balonne werk dieselfde as bizaar balonne net annirs om. Hille wil hê dit moet vinnig wegvaai annirs moet hille dit weer doen. Dis nogal snaaks Ma. In die weerkantoor is hille baie proefesjoeneel maar met die balon lyk hille soos 'n kloun wat uit die sirkis geskop is.

Ma die een mysie werk baie in die donker kamer. Dit is nou nie soos die donker kamer waarin ons donkerkamerkie gespeel het waar ons mekaar gesoek en skrik gemaak het nie. Dit is 'n donker kamer soos van 'n fotoeplek. Ma weet mos. Ek dink sy is baie goed met die fotoes wat sy ontwikkel maar die lyster dink nie so nie want hy sê in die land van die blindes is een oog koning. Maar dit klink eedir asof hy nie weet waaroor dit gaan nie. Yntlik ontwikkel sy skyfies. Dit is nou nie skyfies soos tjips wat ons by Zorba se kafee koop nie. Die grootste verskil is dat mens nie op hierdies sout en asyn sit nie, mens sit gheemiekaliee daarop en dan sit jy dit in 'n skyfie masjien en hy gooi dit op 'n skerim. Dan is dit amper soos 'n biekskrien fliet. Dit beweeg net nie behalwe as die wind waai.

Ma sê vir Ouma sy moenie sê ek is haar grand dotir nie want ons loop die meeste van die tyd in ouvirols rond en dis glad nie grand nie.

Groetnis Kleinsus. (*Erika*)

Kleinsus is tellieng Mom about hour snouw koffie and frouzin paips. About working in the dark room and the metkassies. They is verie proefesjinal in the offis bat when they relees the biloon they look laik clown that was kickd out of the sirkis. Then also that hour girls are no-once grand dortirs cos we wher ovirols and thats not grand at all.

The weather wizard:

July 2001 was a month of high pressure systems. We recorded a record maximum temperature (18.6°C), almost 3°C higher than previously recorded. We had 30cm of snow from the 19th to the 21st. The average temperature for this period was around -1°C. Wind gusts of 75km/h caused the wind chill to drop to -23°C at times. July had 10 days of sunshine and 2 days with 50 – 90% of possible sunshine.

Weather statistics for the month:

Average Pressure	1010.5hPa
Highest Pressure	1032.2hPa
Lowest Pressure	989.5hPa
Average temperature	4.9°C
Highest temperature	18.6°C
Lowest temperature	-2.9°C
Strongest Wind	126km/h
Numbers of days with rain or snow	26
Days with more than 10mm of rain	17
Sunshine hours for the month	61.5h

Educational tip for the month:

Did you know that *wind chill* is the temperature that is felt on exposed skin when it is windy and cold?

The formula to determine *wind chill* was developed by NOAA. It is based on a normal skin temperature of 33°C. With a temperature of 4°C and wind speed of 40 km/h the *wind chill* will be -11°C and at 0°C, with a wind speed of 70km/h the *wind chill* will be a low -20°C. For more information contact the Weather Wizard.

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

As you might or might not have heard, by the time this Newsletter was finished we were expecting a naval vessel to perform a medical evacuation. Read all about it in the next issue.



Ships Cove as seen from the south