

-The Wanderer-

Marion Island Newsletter, Issue 5, August 2001



MEDICAL EVACUATION – WE LOST, WE GAINED



*The new MI-58: Back: Beneke, SQ1, Segale, Wilna. Middle: David, Phaf, Sarette, Sam, Aldo.
Front: SQ2, Tambu, Erika*

Few things can disrupt island life as a medical evacuation can do. When one goes to an island, one of the first thoughts is solitude. The next thought is separation. Living without your family and friends, social support structures and Kentucky.

The two weeks team training in Pretoria gives you the opportunity to meet for the first time the eleven other people in the team. We sat around the conference table, finding it difficult to concentrate on the introductory lecture and rather looked from one person to the next, trying to memorize the names placed in front of each face. A tea break is

announced. With shaking hands you pour yourself a cup of tea and twelve people all talk excitedly at the same time. Introducing ourselves, sharing expectations, questions and information. You take your seat at the table again. Sigh. A sigh of relief, realizing that I am not alone. There are eleven other in the same position as me. Still strangers to each other but united as a team, a team that will spend a year on an island.

Four months have passed and now we are sitting around our dining room table. Not much has changed; everybody is still talking together at the

same time. Now we share experiences and laugh at each other's jokes. Your eyes move from one person to the next and with a content smile you realize these twelve strangers became each other's friends, family, mentors and supporters.

It's a Saturday afternoon: the twelve of us are sitting around the bar. Afraid, knowing that the time has come to realize our suspicions. "Guys, I am sorry to tell you but Bheki is sick and needs medical attention. The department is organizing a ship to fetch him. There is a possibility that Pieter might leave as well". Silence, eyes filling with tears. So many thoughts but no words. A week of uncertainty followed with newspaper clippings intruding our quiet, peaceful island, shaking our isolated life. Bheki inspired us, asking us to keep the spirit high and accept our two new team members. We had little sleep, lots of questions, our soup supper with Bheki and then our last party as the old MI-58 team.

The ship arrived. The twelve of us were standing on the heli-deck staring at the huge ship. With the chopper approaching the island we gathered around in a circle listening to our song, "Simply the Best". The finality. The mighty sound of the chopper blades that we were only supposed to hear again in eight months time was heard. We greeted people we were only supposed to see again in eight months time. We said our last goodbyes to Bheki, our words constricted with emotion. Pieter was sitting in the chopper with his green beanie and a smile of contentment. We walked back to base pulling the luggage of our two new team members on trolleys.

The Outeniqua had to leave for Cape Town urgently early that evening and we were left on the point looking at the personnel carrier lowering the repair team down. Similar to the 29th of April only twelve of us stayed behind, waving the ship goodbye. We sat around the bar that night with music playing in the background. We drank our two crates of Black Label, listening to David and Aldo sharing their previous experiences on Marion.



Greeting new members and the maintenance team on the heli-deck

We talked and played pool until the early morning hours. Eleven of us went to bed, with the metkassie staying up for night duty. We realized that we have lost and we have gained. Everything will be alright. MI-58 will stay Simply the Best!

MI-58 team

Introducing our two new team members

David Sepheka, our new senior met. David spent a year on Marion in 1997 and went to Gough after that.
Welcome, David!



Our new diesel mac is Aldo Strümpher. Aldo spent a year on Marion in 1998 and went to Gough Island after that. Welcome, Aldo!

Katedraal

For four months we planned a trip to Katedraal. The night before I am packed and far too excited to sleep. We didn't go. We then had the moonlight walk, which satisfied me for a while. We sat at the dinner table again saying: we should have gone today. We were blessed with another day like the day-we-should-have-gone-day ... and we went!

SQ2, Beneke and I were walking past E-base commenting: this is the furthest we have ever gotten. More energy started building up as we were entering the new world. First Red surprised me, as it never ends. But neither did my cheerfulness. While thinking there's another kran up ahead I turned my head to the right and there was the hut! Indescribable feelings flooded through us. There was barely any snow and we had no problems with frozen gas or water. We grabbed a snack and Beneke and I was off to explore. The amazing red and black landscape stole my heart. While reading the log book I gained so much respect for a lot of people reaching the hut in nasty conditions. I felt like the last part of a quote of Walt Whitman on the wall: "Because you are here, and life exists; and identity, let the powerful play go on, and you may contribute a verse." What an honour!

Two days after we returned the mountains were clear and calling again. Beneke and I went, Beneke for a day trip and me to spent the night up there on my own. It was an amazingly beautiful day. It got misty when we reached First Red, but cleared again. We took some photos and Beneke left for base. I went off to explore again. Sitting on the krans, deep-white candy floss clouds were hanging over the land below me, thinning out over the sea, leaving Prince Edward Island completely visible. With still no breeze in the air, the sunset displayed all the colours of a smartie box, except green and brown.

The toilet is completely exposed, making you feel quite vulnerable. I only once tried to take the toilet seat from the hut to place on the drum. But running after it while it was blowing around in the wind with your pants down is not easy! As I was sitting on the drum stars appeared. The Southern Cross, Scorpio... it felt as if I could touch the Milky Way. WOW! I don't think I have ever been so close to the stars before. A star fell out of the sky and glowed as I have never seen a meteor doing. I could even see smoke. There was no sound, the most complete silence I ever heard. I almost thought it is the end of my life. How can one person be this fortunate in one lifetime? I got up the next morning just in time to see the sun rise above the cloudbank. Profound! I didn't feel like leaving. You get to base, find yourself being hazy... is this my life?

We heeded to the call of the mountains a third time this month. It snowed a lot the previous night, but a window appeared in the weather. Sam, Aldo and I left base. The thick snow slowed our pace down. What an experience for a true Phalaborwa breed (40°C plus!) The snow was thigh deep, we left our footprints in true blue ice! We reached the hut. The bottom of Aldo's pants was frozen solid. The temperature didn't allow us to be out any longer and everything started to become a hazy kind of whiteness. The toilet drum was barely sticking out above the snow. Aldo was in charge of the gas, switching the frozen regulator every now and again.

I finally experienced the flexible hut. Every now and again the wall will pat you on the back while you are lying on your bed. The floor acted like a trampoline with the wind jumping in beneath it. Thinking back: Am I over exaggerating... am I? The next day the "white out" and the wind kept us company all day long. We went outside to radio base and got blown over. We went back in, to defrost and make a decision. My opinion: if the wind is doing this to the hut - what will it do to me? We stayed. Even the water in the kettle froze overnight inside the hut.

Late afternoon Sam and I braved the "toilet in the wind", doing some touch your toes exercises. Trying to pull up your pants, the wind bends you over. Standing, bending, standing, bending... Just as we left

the hut the next morning, ice pellets attacked us fiercely. Being in a storm like that while singing and jumping (recovering balance) of joy! The wind



Erika at Katedraal Hut

melted a lot of snow making walking easier.

Marion weather did the chameleon thing again and we reached base under sunny, blue skies.

People who know me, know about my absolute love for smarties. With eating them in good times and bad times and in-between, your motto for life soon becomes: "WOTALOTIGOT". Once more I can't help to use these wise words in overflowing thankfulness. I've been to Katedraal for the first time, I've been to Katedraal on my own, I've been there in the snow... next time maybe in moonlight. I know that one day it will be my last day ever at Katedraal, but I have comfort, because when I look at the mountains now - not me or them are the same anymore. A part of the mountains will always be inside me and a part of me will remain there forever more...

Erika

Seals of Marion

Seals are carnivorous mammals falling under the Order Pinnipedia. They adapted to life in water by developing appendages called flippers, which are fin-like serving the purpose of fins.

On Marion Island we have three seal species. The southern elephant seal, Antarctic and sub-Antarctic fur seals.

The two fur seal species do interbreed and produce a hybrid. Hybrid bulls have been recorded on Marion holding harems. The fur seals breed during December but the periods of lactation differ. The Antarctic fur seals wean their pups at about 110 days of age while the sub-Antarctic fur seals lactate their pups for up to 300 days.

The elephant seal is the biggest of the seal species. They have three haul outs per year. Their breeding

period is from August to November, a haul out for adults only. Moulting takes place from November to March for sub-adults. Adults moult from December to mid April. This can be very confusing as some age group moulting periods overlap. The third haul out is the resting or the winter haul out, this is only for some sub-adults, one-year-olds and under-yearlings.

The following studies are conducted on the seals:

Elephant seals: Every year since 1983, during late October and through November pups are marked with roto-tags. Up to now approximately 9 000 animals have been tagged. Tag resightings are recorded and up to now approximately 55 000 resightings have been recorded.



Sub-Antarctic fur seals

Fur seals: Pups are weighed at specific dates throughout the year. Observing seal penguin predation as well as recording any man made seal entanglement are also part of the activities. Faecal samples are collected which are taken to the lab from which the diet of the animal can be analysed.

The reason for these studies:

These studies are very important for understanding the importance of the island to the seals. Results are analysed and used for decision making are taken and for updating the Management Plan of the island. Monitoring the recovery of the populations that were once threatened to extinction by the sealing industry is also an important goal. More importantly to me, it contributes to scientific knowledge.

U ralo murwa Mulaudzi, out.

Happy birthday Sam, David and Segale!

The month August

August is the first month that I didn't leave base since I got here. Well,



there were a number of reasons why. The first reason being that I had to do double shifts with our new senior met, David until he got his way around the office. I kept myself busy with finishing my fifth book. My birthday came fast and lastly the most important reason of all, I was waiting for news about my soon to be born daughter, Boipelo. The waiting was killing me. The doctors estimated that she will arrive around the 9th, 10th or 11th. Finally on the 14th I got a call from home with my mother congratulating me. I shared the news with my fellow Islanders, and celebrations were in order. Finally Tambu will stop talking!

Segale

Congratulations Bra Segale and Masechaba!

Round Island – At last!

The three of us left early morning with our backpacks packed to the brim and a matching agenda. The weather was perfect. The idea was to count every single paddy and gentoo penguin on the island. We were to conduct a beach debris study, monitor wanderer colonies, stop at Mixed Pickle for Azorella work, collect insects and determine if we will make base alive after almost 100 km of walking on Marion!

Day one was relatively easy walking, if you like swimming through mires. We trailed the beautiful coastline, discovering the breathtaking beaches of Marion. Our first stopover hut was Kildalkey, the hut Hans frequents. It was a night of clear skies filled with stars, looking at it while singing our favourite songs. We were blessed with perfect weather on day two as well. After passing the noisy king penguin colony at Kildalkey Beach we headed inland towards Johnny's Hill where Tambu joined us. Our perfect weather started to turn at the top of Karookop. This is Marion after all. After having our usual lunch of provita, ham and mayo at Watertunnel Hut we headed on for Greyheaded. Sam and Wilna took the coastal route through Santa Rosa Valley to count paddies, while Sarette and Tambu walked the inland route. Both parties had their own story to tell when they eventually arrived at the hut. Sarette fell in a dry riverbed, landing with a rock on top of her that resulted in a bruised backside and an injured wrist. Sam and Wilna found it hard to describe Santa Rosa, so different to any other place on Marion. It was very dramatic, with stark black lava ending in the ice cold water. Discovering a beautiful arch was the last beauty before cutting inland over black lava. Has anyone ever kissed Greyheaded Hut before? After a supper of boerewors provided by Tambu we fell asleep. We started our third day going down to Goodhope Bay. After Sarette's proclamation of feeling like a truck has hit her, recovered in hospital

and back in the field again we headed for Rooks. We were blessed by amazing scenery. We walked on the edge of a really high cliff, feeling like we were on top of the world. When you look at the vastness of the southern ocean it reminds you of the isolation. Absolutely nothing obscures the view.

After digging in the Rooks container and finding lunch we headed on to Swartkop. If you haven't lost your heart on Marion yet Swartkop is where you are guaranteed to. Everything is green, almost luminous. It looks like the green fell from the sky, draping itself over pitch-black lava. Swartkop beach is a place where Marion fairies, gnomes and dwarves live together. Boulders and towering black lava form an amphitheatre. The sun sets in a cloudless sky, lights up the rock formations and gives the sea a bronze sheen. We spent our third night at Swartkop where Sarette analysed and discovered the truth about how we are "governed by gravity" as it was not easy to walk over black lava, but we were all so happy that the tiredness was a pathetic price to pay. We headed on to Mixed Pickle on day four. We crossed Kaalkoppie where the last volcanic eruption took place in the 80's. Chocolate brown cliffs have been carved into wonderful shapes and patterns descending into the light blue ocean. It fascinated us. Can you lose your heart twice? A perfect west coast sunset blessed us. We drank red wine staring over an orange coloured sky and deep blue ocean. It was the perfect way to end our day. Tambu left for base the next morning with our letters to the team, asking for a restock of Myprodols and bandages for the huts since Sarette has been clearing it all. Wilna and Sam spent the day in the mountains where they measured azorellas in ice pellet showers while Sarette spent the day on the beach collecting insects (and spotting killer whales). Day six was the day we had to go over the big "A" – Azorella kop.



Sam, Sarette and Wilna - packed and ready to go

We were privileged that the mist stayed away long enough for us to get over the peak. After lunch and a power snooze at Cape Davis we headed on to

Repettos. It was great to see the side of the island that we have gotten to know in the past four months: to see Prince Edward Island again and passing Boot rock - a massive rock rising out of the middle of the ocean, with waves crashing against the sides and birds roosting on the top. Day seven and it was time to head back to base. It was a full day, ten gentoo colonies, 130 wandering albatross nests, two beaches for debris search, paddy count and 30 birds to ring! Erika and SQ2 met us at Ship's Cove to supply the things we missed, cold beers and Coke. We stepped onto the familiar catwalks in unison, tired, but happy and so much richer. We had a great party that night in which we could share our round island stories with a complete Marion family.

Wilna, Sam & Sarette

Katedraalkrans

Drie pare *bootse* ratel oor die *catwalks*. "Jissie, ek is so trots op ons. Dis die verste wat ons nog gekom het!" Erika, SQ2 en Beneke is oppad na Katedraalkrans en hulle trek by die Gogga-lab verby...

Maar na vier maande van beplanning, wensdenkery en amper gaan is dit die verste wat hulle nog gekom het. Die verkenners het lankal nuus gebring: Juniors is oorwin, selfs toe die kratermeer gevries was. Tafelberg is van links en regs opgeklim. SQ2 het een keer tot by First Red gevorder, maar iemand het nog die krans van naby gesien nie. Steven het gewaarsku om nooit die krans te klim nie, mens moet omloop. Die oorname-bende (Jay, Lindie en Gert) het ook gewaarsku: Moenie 'n GPS gebruik nie, hy laat jou reguit loop en dan moet jy krans oor.

So kom dit toe dat ons op 'n goeie dag besluit kom ons gaan. Nie dae se wonder of beplanning nie, nee. Die weer lyk goed, kom ons gaan. By E-base klim ons van die vaste weë af en durf die moerasse aan. Baie inval en uitklouter het ons goeie moerastrappers gemaak en gou staan ons aan die voet van Juniors. Regs om deur bietjie mosmoerasie en Tafelberg skuif voor ons in. Daar klim ons op die gryswa rif en kom gou by die voet van First Red. Die was nogal 'n verrassing. Halfpad op blaas ek soos 'n os en besef niemand het nog ooit mooi verduidelik presies hoe steil First Red is nie. Die kop is 'n vulkaniese keël van rooi scoria (klippertjies). Mens loop nie maklik op scoria nie en teen 'n steilte op loop dit glad nie maklik nie. Amper soos om op seesand te loop gly jy die helfte af vir elke tree wat jy op gee. Bo gekom het ons die ongelooflikste uitsig terug see toe. Van Long Ridge af tot by East Cape met die Susters, Juniors, Hendrik Fister, die basis en Trypot tussenin. As bonus: net die puntjie van Prince-Edwardeiland se Van Zinderen-Bakken piek steek bo 'n wolkbank uit.

Ons skud ons vere reg vir die laaste skof. Die krans lê sommer nou skuinsbo naby ons en vol moed durf ons die ruwe swart lawa aan. Ons loop op en linksom die krans tot op die vlaktetjie agter die krans waar die hut moet wees. Niks nie. Gits? En die wind kan hoeka so sterk waai hier bo. Dan maar bietjie verder stap, miskien is dit nie so naby nie, maar almal sê dan tog die hut is by die krans? Stadig agterom en toe skree Erika: “Daar’s die hut!” Verligting! Binne snuffel ons rond, pak goed wat van rakke afgeratel het terug, kry die stoof aan die gang vir koffie en rus ‘n bietjie.

Dit is die storie oor hoe ons daar gekom het, dit was maklik om te vertel. Oor wat ons gesien het is glad ‘n ander storie. Ek weet nie wat om te sê nie. Die berge het ‘n ongelooflike verlate skoonheid, stem mens weemoedig. Laat ek volstaan om dit te sê: Dit was ‘n voorreg om die Katedraal te geklim het. Mag ek weer daardie gevoel beleef.

I have found it. Some of it. People spend their lives searching and never finding. I have found it. At least some of it. When I first set my eyes on the eerie desolation of the Marion Mountains I knew I found something I did not know I was looking for. Once before in the Sinai on the Red Sea coast I saw something similar and was filled with the same emotion than at the Katedraal. The feeling of being filled with beauty and awe and respect. I cannot describe it, I can only urge you to go out and find it.

Beneke

Welcome back skuas!

The skuas returned to the island this month. Although still scarce it’s great to see them back. That means one thing – summer is close!



Quote of the month: “So what! I’ll handle it!”

Liewe Ma

Hoe gaan dit met Ma. Met my gaan dit goed. Ma moet tog nie allis glo wat die koerante sê nie want hoe sal hille nou weet wat op Marion aangaan. Al wat yntlik gebeur het is dat ons twee spanlede vir niefes ingeruil het. Die oues was nie heeltemal gesond nie nou noem mens dit ‘n mediekil eevakuasion. Ons ou diesel mac se maag wassie lekker nie maar die annir ou is nou nog nie seekir wat hom makeer nie. Ma onthou mos nog Oom Koos se bierman se seun wat ge awol het en toe sê die Doktr yntlik het sy hart net die army gefail. Latir het dit gelyk of dit sy longe is wat moeg is en toe latir was

dit al die tyd ‘n spier in sy rug wat die klep toe gedrik het. Maar die Kolinel het gesê hy reken dis dalk iets met sy ore te doen of is dit nou iets tussin sy ore. Ek kan nie meer so mooi onthou nie maar die Kolinel is tog ‘n slim man Ma.

O ja Ma daar was rereg twee mense wat weggekruipt het op die nywie se skip. Die een mysie hier het so slim woord vir hille. Sy sê dis skippelinge. Dis darem snaaks dat hille kon opklim as dit ‘n nywie skip is en toe sê ek vir ons Iyer ons moet dalk maar ons bol en tsjain vir hille leen.

Ma weet mos van die mense wat around the world in eighty days gedoen het. Hier is ok sikke mense Ma. Een ou en drie van die mysies het om die yland gestap en mens noem dit ‘n round ailind. Hille het dit in ses dae gedoen en dis nou as mens tagtig deur dertien en ‘n derde deel dat jy ses dae kry. ‘n Derde kan ook betekin drie en dertig punt drie. Hier is ‘n paar scientists hier en hille werk sikke goed yt. Maar Ma dis ongelooflik om te dink mens loop weg aan die een kant van die basis en dan kom jy van die andir kant af trig.

Ma weet mos dat ek so sikkal om my kamer aan die kant te hou van kleins af al. Nou het die mense hier gepraat oor entropie en hille sê dis ‘n wet wat sê dinge gaan van ‘n meer geordende posissie na ‘n ongeordende posissie. En dan gaan energie verlore en jy kan dit nie weer terug kry nie. So nou worrie ek nie meer nie want ek weet daar is entropie in my kamer aan die gang en mens kan tog nie teen die weetenskap inwerk nie Ma.

Ma hier is twee speed kwiens. Dis nou nie die wasmisjiene nie. Dis twee van die mysies en ons noem hille die SQ’s. Mens sê dit soos in Eskiew 1 en Eskiew 2. Hille is regtig nice Ma en hille hou nogal van skoonmaak en opruim en ons is vreeslik dankbaar daarvoor.

Dit gaan al beetir met die kosmaakery Ma. Net die een keer het ek die birdir gehelp om pietsa te maak en die deeg was nie te lekker nie want as jy die kors gekou het het dit oral in jou mond vasgeplak. Maar die Iyer doen erger dinge Ma. Hy maak vir ons viskos. Dis nou nie kos soos in wat visse eet nie maar sikke visserige kos. Hy noem dit fênsie name soos pajêla en poetineska. Ek het maar brood geëet.

Ma moet asseblief vir boetie sê hy moenie vir die mense virtel dat die wind hier ‘n hond yt ‘n bos yt waai nie want hier issie honne of bosse nie. Hy moet liewer sê dit waai koelembilla yt mos yt. En dis kwaai Ma.

Groetnis Kleinsus. (*Erika*)

Kleinsus tells Mom not to believe the newspapers cos how would they know. All that really happened is that they swopped two team members for new ones. And also about the pietza the birdir made which was

stickyhir than chewing gum. But the leader is worse. He made them fish food. Not like the food fish eat but fishy food. He calls it fancy names like pajêla and putineska.

The weather wizard:

August, statistically recorded as the coldest month on Marion started off with a cold front covering the mountains with snow. Strong wind gusts prevailed, which rattled base. This was followed by a few beautiful sunny days. Cold front activity resulted in some of our teammates getting stuck at Katedraal Hut. Spring is upon us although Marion and it's unpredictable weather always stand up to it's name. Leaving heaters on in base is definitely suggested!

Weather statistics for the month:

Mean Temp (°C)	4.7
Max Temp (°C)	11
Min Temp (°C)	-1.2
Average Pressure (hPa)	1004,3
Mean Wind Speed (m/s)	7.8
Max Wind Gust (m/s)	29,2
Days (rain/snow)	27
Mean Daily Sunshine (h)	3.3

<http://marion.sanap.org.za>

The Marion Island web site has moved to <http://marion.sanap.org.za>

We found a few interesting pictures in the archives and added them to the site. Have a look under "mammals" and "birds". Some sections of the site are not finished as yet, so visit often to see the changes. In the near future you will be able to listen to the animals and birds as we are planning on uploading some audio files.

Regards

MI-58WM - Marion Web Master

Back copies of the newsletters are available here:

http://www.geocities.com/kildalkey/the_wanderer_April.doc

http://www.geocities.com/kildalkey/the_wanderer_May.doc

http://www.geocities.com/kildalkey/the_wanderer_June.doc

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



Left to right: Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta with Katedraal Hut bottom right.