

-The Wanderer-

Marion Island Newsletter, Issue 7, October 2001



OUR HOMES FROM HOME

Marion is waking from its winter sleep and a multitude of animals returned to this southern ocean island for the summer breeding season. The activities at the breeding colonies and beaches beckon exploration. Field assistants and team members alike now work and play more often in the field and stay over in the field huts.



This month we take you on a tour of these beloved huts, which for years has provided protection for tired Marionites. After a hard day in the field the hut is a haven for your tired body. First thing to do is to open the gas outside and light the stove. Next you get the generator going to charge the batteries of the radio for comms to base. These are some of the routines before you end up tucked into your sleeping bag, dirty but happy, sipping on your coffee with condensed milk. In candlelight you tend to have deep conversations about life and often share humorous moments with your accompanying teammates. At the most inconvenient time you will need to visit the bog (long drop). You have to get out of your cosy sleeping bag to brave the icy cold outside. A night spent in a hut is memorable indeed.

Some of the huts date back to the days of the cat hunters and the graffiti on the walls and the stories in the hut book tell many stories. This and the hut's location give each home away from home it's own character.

We selected a few notable quotes and other funnies from our huts.

Kildalkey hut, where Hans the cat hunter likes to pay a visit in the early morning hours. The graffiti on the wall tells the story:

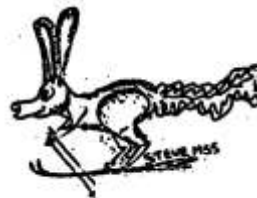
"ODE TO HANS"

*When Hans cums knockin' at the door
ter git hi'self a few supplies
give um wot he's looking for
Be nice an friendly don't act wise
treat him good & keep him happy
lotsa coffee make it snappy
An when he's gone yuh lock th' door
wipe yuh sweat an know before
the dawn he's out there in th' snow
somewhere on the ice plateau
Bringing up the score..."*



Is Hans really out there? Sam, Sarette and I have received a visit from Hans, he opened the door after two spooky knocks. We wasted no time and bolted the door.

Watertunnel hut is a welcome sight while coming down windy Karookop. The sunny top bunk bed is a favourite and the hut book urges you to keep a sharp lookout for the often seen killer whale pod. The hut book recounts epic tales of struggles in the wind over Karookop.



17/11/97 – "Just finishing practicing my 'rock – dancing' techniques on Karookop in 60 knots wind. Perfected the 'pirouette' with a half twist and final

lava head butt! Drank two liters of Clifton, off to Greyheaded. Hope to do some more lava head butting in Santa Rosa. Boy, this is fun!"

*24/01/98 – "You're f*****g up the geology, ouk!"*

28/12/99 – “Wow, amazing! Two massive icebergs floating past the hut. Beautiful, you can hear the ice cracking, absolutely awesome!”

24/03/00 – “After this stint I will apply for my pilots license, I am skilled in crosswind take-offs, back flips and 360° turns and emergency landings. I hate this wind!”

29/9/00 – “A cool cruise trough Santa Rosa, just to be welcomed by the tunnel killer pod. Male, female and two female calves. This is what you get on holiday while gone for a year on holiday!”



About an hour later through Santa Rosa Valley you are at Greyheaded hut. The area is strikingly green and you look up at Greyheaded Ridge from within the hut. Goodhope Bay is close by.

7/7/98 – “HELP, S.O.S., Greyheaded sinking! Portholes on bow and starboard taking in water in heavy seas. Glug... glug... glug... It appears that Greyheaded has more consistent running water than base!”

15/10/99 – “... perhaps realizing once again that the beauty of this island lies in her strength and power she uses on her visitors. Leaving them no choice but to bend and to kneel in acceptance of her glorious perfections.”

Swartkop hut lies close to Swartkop Point and is one of the truly mystical places on Marion. The point was created by a volcano and reshaped by the feet of thousands of penguins over centuries. The beach has massive boulders that gives it a stage like appearance towards the Amphitheatre, which fills up with Maccies in early spring. Close by lies a hill of compressed layers of volcanic ash eroded to what we know as Kaalkoppie.

5/11/96 – ‘A soul renewing walk from Rooks – moments of solitaire along the way, allowing us to



absorb all the rights, sounds and scents that mother Marion has to offer...”

21/07/99 – “What a wonderful place. No other place has touched my soul like Swartkops on a misty afternoon.”

14/08/01 – “Swartkop beach is magic, the place where dwarfs, gnomes, giants and fairies all live together. Where mountains and sea collide. Rocks carved over years by the sea, master art. I fell in love with Swartkops!”

Mixed Pickle hut is my favourite due to its comfort and surrounds. It overlooks the sea while from the back window you have a view of spectacular mountains. It is situated close to a big fur seal colony and the area is rich in burrowing birds, providing varied night sounds.

11/07/98 – “Excellent walk from Swartkop, spending a lot of time on and around Kaalkoppie in great weather. Saw the first albie chick of the year that is starting to moult out of its downy covering. Is as pesky and curious as ever, his progress is watched with a great deal of interest.”

14/02/99 – “It’s been one of those quiet and peaceful days. Travelling between fantasy worlds today and I am still lost in thought. Sometimes it seems so easy to lose your mind, but luckily I’ve already found mine, o I hope it’s mine.”



Crossing Azorellakop and passing Cape Davis follows and then you arrive at the last hut before base, Repettos.

7/12/00 – “On the last leg of the ‘count-everything-that-moves’ round island. Had a very lekker walk yesterday spent an hour watching killers hunt in Storm Petrel Bay and got investigated by quizzzy Gazellas while counting Rockies. Off to base, beers and showers.”

These quotes add to the history of each hut. Writing about your experiences of the day in the hut book is where you become part of the history of this energy filled place. Like the quote on the wall of Katedraal hut from a Walt Whitman poem:

“That you are here—that life exists and identity,

That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse”.

Wilna, Sarette and Beneke

Quote of the month:

“No fear when your Captain Morgan sponsored pocket-knife is near!” - Sarette

(Describing the usefulness of this multi-functional tool in our field work)

An entomologist’s field day at Trypot

It takes ten minutes to don the outfit: one or two layers of thermal underwear, two pairs of woollen socks, overall pants, a polar fleece top and a rainproof suit (gortex). Did we pack gloves, beanies, and latex gloves? Yes, and the coffee is

in a flask. We stop at the lab to fetch sampling gear and off we go. The fifteen-minute walk to Trypot Beach is interesting, as we always keep a lookout for killers, signs of giant petrels feeding and the odd gazella bull protecting a half-eaten squid from hungry skuas.



At Trypot we scan the harem for additions to their family, locate the bachelor elephant seal bull and take a breather. The quiet Trypot Beach has been transformed into a cacophonous retreat of king penguins and noisy bleating elephant seal harem. Since the gentoo penguins moved closer to the coast, we can observe these skittish birds from a distance. All these animals have entertained us with many comical activities.

After the break we put on our latex gloves and we each go our separate way. Liezl is off to sample pogons (springtails) and Sarette patrols the beach for

the flavour of the day, which can be kelp flies, isotomurus, or beetles. If one considers the amount of clothing we wear, it may sound normal that for an hour we pooter (suck up) insects through narrow glass tubes without feeling the effects of the cold. Maybe it is the level of concentration it requires to sample these tiny insects that keeps you warm. Between sampling sessions we have coffee, maybe a piece of chocolate or biscuits, chat about anything interesting we saw and then resume our duties as ‘field assistants’ (ignore for now that Liezl is actually the medic).

Noise from the hand-held radio gets our attention. ‘Trypot, Trypot, come in for Marion Base’. We reply to their call and they inform us, ‘we saw three killers passing Paddy Rocks – they are headed in your direction’. We thank them and say goodbye. We move closer to the beach to wait for the dorsal fins of the killers to slice the sometimes calm waters of Trypot Bay. Seeing these animals fills you with awe, reminding us of being very privileged to be here. As the pod moves on to Archway we resume sampling.

Eventually we are driven back to base by hunger and cold, leaving with a warm feeling of contentment. How’s that for a nine-to-fiver?

Sarette & SQI

Mixed Pickle, the easy way!

My second trip to Mix had me worried, as the previous trip of five months ago was still very fresh in my mind. The last time we went we did not know the route and were very unfit. We ended up having scenic walks on previously unknown routes. On top of that, we did not keep up the comms schedule and after a few days three team members pitched up looking for us. We returned to base with them, without having done even half our work.

But this time everything went according to plan. Wilna knew the route and we were close to being island fit. We set out for Repettos on a sunny day and reached the hut after only three hours (vs. six hours the previous time). Then on to Cape Davis and there we spent our first night out of base. The following day we headed for the much-feared Azorella Kop and Mixed Pickle. It wasn’t as bad as I remembered. We reached Mixed Pickle after only four hours (vs. seven) and even managed to get some work done on that same day.

Not surprisingly, the Azorella girls found that the radio antenna was broken but luckily we had a handheld radio with us and we could let base know we were safe and no rescue team was necessary this time. The weather played along and the next day we managed to do a lot of fieldwork. In the afternoon Wilna decided to go to Swartkop “to have comms with base” as we thought the Mixed Pickle radio

would not work. That evening I was alone in the hut and it was really weird. My glasses were broken so I could not even read. Just for the 'fun' I turned the radio on at six o'clock and I could hear someone calling. I thought that if I charged the batteries I would be able to have a conversation. I pulled the rope to start the gennie and oops, it broke. Go Azorella girl!

The next day I continued with the killer-watching as planned even though the weather was bad, as I did not know if it was going ahead or not. Three hours later I was freezing, but luckily Wilna returned and said that it was postponed. Wilna was unable to make comms the previous night (she imagined Beneke being very proud of her walking to Swartkop to make comms). Luckily the comms at Swartkop were better in the morning. That evening we tried the radio, and it worked without an antenna or charged batteries! Azorella girls again...

While Wilna did killer-watching on the 10th, I managed to get work done in the mountains. Oh, by the way, we did not see any killers.

At this stage we longed for the creature comforts of base. On a misty morning we left our favourite hut and set out over Azorella Kop for Repettos. We met Tambu between Cape Davis and Repettos. We were very happy to see someone from base after a week. He was on his way to weigh seal pups at Cape Davis, and immediately we decided to help him. After helping him we ended up spending the night at Cape Davis. Finally we headed for base and could not get there fast enough.

Oor die algemeen was hierdie tog na Mixed Pickle baie lekkerder as die eerste keer. Hoe fikser mens word en hoe meer mens hierdie wonderlike plek leer ken, hoe mooier word hy. Selfs net om by die see te sit en die aanhoudende golwe te sien stem 'n mens rustig. Die tevrede gevoel na 'n berg uitgeklim is met die wonderlike uitsig as beloning. 'n Baie sterk wind weet nie eens jy is daar nie, dit laat jou net weer besef hoe klein en swak jy eintlik is. Maar dan weer, ander kere voel jy 'Nkalakatha'; 'I'm on top of the world'.

SQ2

Weather statistics for the month:

Average Pressure	1010.2hPa
Highest Pressure	1026.7hPa
Lowest Pressure	975.9hPa
Average temperature	4.7°C
Highest temperature	11.9°C
Lowest temperature	-1.4°C
Strongest Wind	129.6km/h
Total rainfall	152.6mm

Macaroni Day



A hundred maccies were weighed at Bullard North

Liewe Ma

Hoe gaan dit met Ma met my gaan dit goed. Ma ons het ons tyt geskyf. Nou skyn die son langer elke dag. Al wat ons gedoen het was om ons oorlosies te stel en eers was ons maar biekie deermekaar so ek weet nie hoe die son geweet het om van die eerste dag af langer op te bly nie.

Maar Ma al is ons tyt nou andirs is dit nog baie dieselfde hier as in Syd Afrika want as ons by ons hys se versters ytkyk sien ons ok Kielirs. Toe hou ons iets soos die biertwag wat mens in Syd Afrika het en ons noem dit kielir fever. Dan sit almal op 'n plek om die yland en soek kielirs. Ons kielirs is mos daai groot swart en wit visse wat nie visse is nie. Maar dis net ek en die een mysie wat reg virstaan het want ons het kielirs getel. Die een groepie het virgeet wat die andir klee is toe soek hille net groot wit goed en sien toe 'n ysberg. Twee van die andir het sommir 'n tent saam gevat en die paps getel wat gebore word. En paps is klyn en swart so ek weet nie hoe hille so 'n fout kon gemaak het nie. Maar die ergste was die weer Ma. Daar het amper niks van ons ytgesteek ondir die sewe laa klere wat ons aangehaat het nie en die yspellits het dit nog reggekry om ons aanteval.

Ma twee van die mysies was weer op 'n round ailind en toe het ons die laaste dag gegaan om hille te help om wanderers te tel. Maar daar is sikke annir vools wat kleinkies het mens noem hille djie pies al is hille name yntlik djaint petrils. Hille is virskriklik ongiskik want as mens by hille verby loop dan spoeg hille jou.

Ma dit gan nie so goed met my werk nie want van die koelembilla is nie gelukkig nie. Daar is van hille waarmee dit goed gaan want hille het nie mans nodig

nie. Mens noem dit patoegineties maar dit beteekintlik patoenienodignie. Want net die ma was nodig om babakies te kry.

Ma ek kan nou nie meer skryf nie want ek gan op fakansie en op die round ailind is daar nie kampiwtirs nie net HF radieous en jille tegnoeloegie is nog nie so dat ek met jille ok kan praat nie. So tot later dan.

Groetnis
Kleinsus Erika

Kleinsus explains to mom about our time zone change. It was easy enough to set our watches two hours ahead, but the sun is clever enough to shine for longer by itself. She also shares some stories about our killer fever day where we saw an iceberg and an ellie pup being born.

Sooty Albatross

Oopgesprei in vlug, jou lyfie lyk so lig
Vryheid is die indruk wat jy gee
Ironies, want bedreig is in
jou wit oog geel smile geryg.
Wilna

The Master of the Sky

A dark shadow glides over Mixed Pickle Cove. The Master of the Sky spots potential prey on the rocky boulder beach beneath him and then quickly changes direction. He dives down in a virtual free fall using the noise of the huge breaking waves as cover. Stealthfully he sneaks up to his unsuspecting prey and launches his attack. He rips his target's left eye out of its socket in order to blind and disorientate his victim. With blood dripping from his bloody beak he readies himself for the next blow. Oh, this is going to be a grizzly scene!

Pain flashes through me like a lightning bolt. I wake up confused. While snoozing I slid down and now a sharp rock is sticking in my back, but that is the least of my problems. The side of my left eye hurts like hell and when I open my eyes I stare the Wizard of Wings in the face. Fifteen centimetres from my face I see him glaring down at me, his beak covered... Covered in seal poo! Suddenly it makes sense; the blasted Paddy pecked me in the eye while I was taking a nap. If this were a pebble beach you would have been dead my friend, but this time you are saved by the boulders...

Beneke

(Based on some truth. And a Paddy is not a flying Irishman. The lesser sheathbill is the only terrestrial bird of the Prince Edward Island group. On Marion there is about 3000 birds. It is a small white bird,

about the size of a half grown chicken, with a black sheath over half its upper beak.)



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