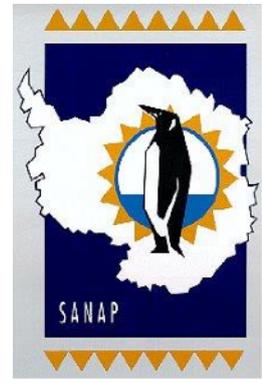




71° Below

SANAE 57 Newsletter
March 2018

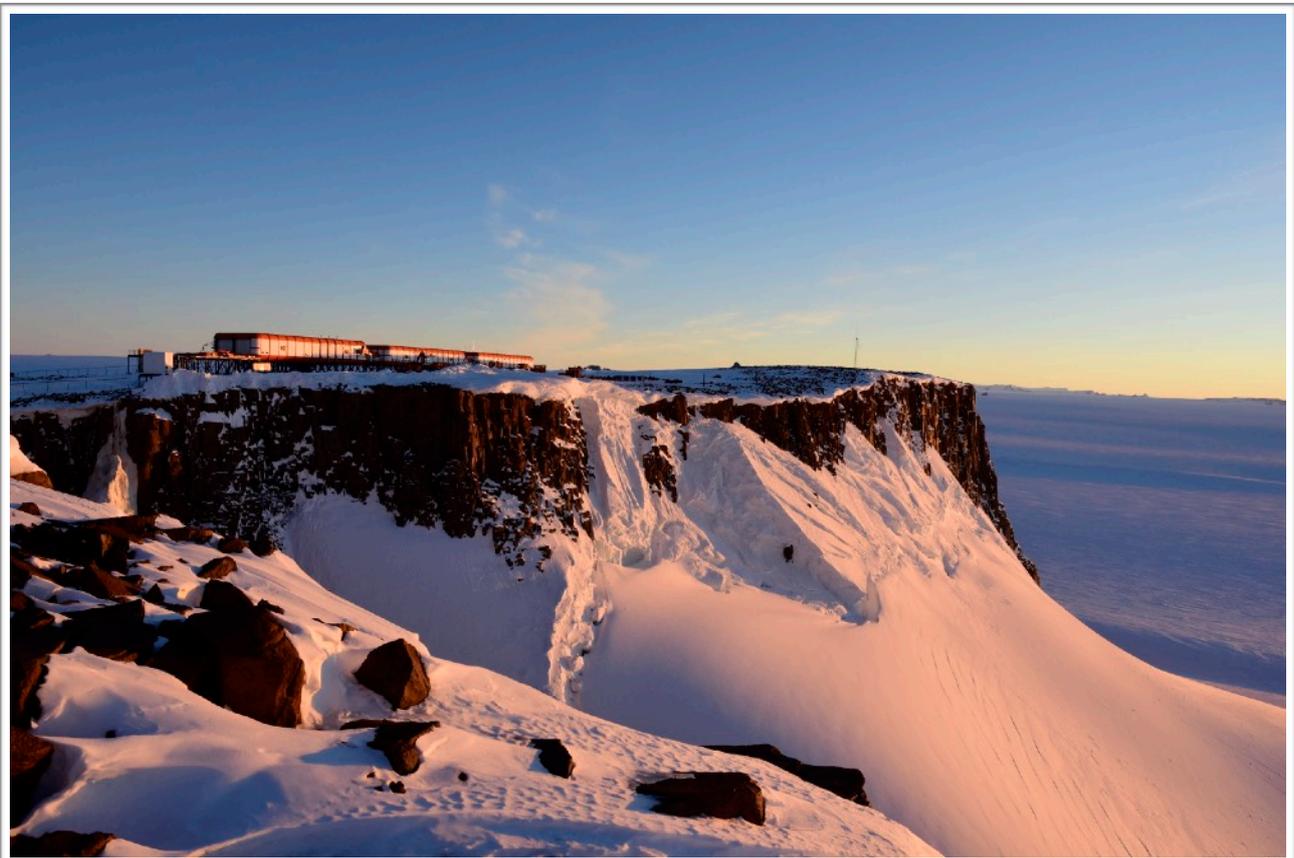


Well, another month has flown by and the team is settling in nicely and finding as much of a rhythm as is possible in this environment. We still have a lot of outdoor work to complete before winter sets in properly, during which we are largely confined to the base and close surrounds. I will go into this in more detail in a later newsletter. For this episode I want to get into the base itself and also answer some questions that I've been asked about life here and some further details about things in previous newsletters.

SANAE IV

The base is simply called SANAE IV. It stands for the South African National Antarctic Expedition, and is the fourth base that SA has owned on the continent. SA has had a continuous presence here since 1959, and were one of the original signatories of the Antarctic Treaty system, which was designed to protect Antarctica for scientific research and peace!

SANAE IV was opened in 1997. It is built on a nunatak, which is basically the top of a mountain that is poking through the glaciers that surround it. The nunatak is called Vesleskarvet, and means 'little barren mountain'. Vesleskarvet has a northern and southern buttress (with the gap between them colloquially called the 'Butt Crack'). SANAE IV is built on the southern buttress.



The main base consists of three separate blocks, joined in a long line by 2 small links. Each block (called simply A,B and C) are double-storey structures, and are built on top of a lattice work of stilts, keeping the whole structure about 4 metres off the ground. Also the whole structure is rounded to minimise wind resistance. These features allow severe weather to blow around and under us, and stops snow piling up and over the base. This design was actually pioneered by South Africa in the construction of this base, and the design has been copied in the construction of other bases in Antarctica since then.

The lower level of A-block contains offices, the medical centre and the comms rooms, as well as a large area for scientists to work. The top floor of A-block contains seventeen 2-bedded rooms, a laundry, and a recently renovated bathroom.

The lower level of B-block contains the dining room, kitchen, food stores, waste room, bar and games room. The top floor of B-block contains eleven 4-bedded rooms, laundry, bathroom, library, lounge and movie theatre.

C-block is the technical block and contains the generators, waste treatment system, workshops, technical store rooms, offices, water tanks, helicopter hangar and a helipad for the helicopters to land when they are here during the summer period.

The A-B and B-C links are the main access points to the outside, via stairs to the ground floor. They both contain changing rooms for snow-covered boots and clothes, as well as toilets. Both links also contain stretchers and medical response bags, so they are readily accessible in case of an emergency outside. Both links also contain a display cabinet for the memorabilia accumulated over the decades that this program has been running. These are currently empty as they are brand new and we have yet to place the items back into the new shelves. This will be a nice winter project for the team to complete, on a day when the weather doesn't allow us to go outside.

This is just a brief overview. There will be pictures to follow once I have taken them! Its been a bit of a busy period with clean-up, inventory and stock-taking as well as getting orders prepared for the coming take-over.

Q&A

How many trips to the ice-shelf are required?

Well, I think it depends on how much cargo there is. From what I can gather this was not a normal take-over. The construction equipment alone came in 8 containers, some of which were well over 10 tons. This is extremely challenging to transport. Then we have scientific equipment, food (3 containers), the new team equipment, and much else. Then we need to do the fuel runs. We did 5 of those in total. Due to some technical issues the base used more fuel than usual last year, so we needed more fuel than usual. During take-over they hire a team of dozer drivers who do much of the driving. The old and new year teams also do cat-trains, firstly to learn the logistics of the cargo runs and how to drive these intimidating machines, but also just to assist the drivers who are human and also need to rest. We are all hoping there won't be as many cat-trains required this coming year.

Are there any penguins nearby?

Sadly no. We are too far inland for there to be penguins. We do have a protected colony of Snow Petrels nearby us. We had a team of biologists that went there this last summer. I will be including some details of this trip and other scientific work in the future.

How do people get from the ship to the ice-shelf?

Good question...basically in a rope basket that we hold onto, four at a time, while it swings us out and up onto the ice-shelf. There is a small space in the middle of this basket which we can put some small bags. It's not as scary or dangerous as it sounds...promise!



What was that girl in the skirt doing in the January newsletter?

That is a small figurine that was on the bridge of the SA Agulhas II. To be honest I have no idea of it's actual significance.

Where do the logos come from? Do they change each year?

The team logo, the one for SANAE 57, was designed by the team. Each year team designs their own. We got some help with an initial logo, and then adjusted it until everyone was happy with it. It becomes, automatically, the official logo for this year's expedition. We even have a rubber stamp of it to stamp passports, should people want that! Each team also designs a flag. Our flag incorporates the logo, as well as the flags of the first countries to sign the International Antarctic Treaty system.



The other logo with the penguin and map of Antarctica is the official DEA logo for this program. This doesn't change and has been the logo since the beginning of the program, as far as I know.

What do you do in your leisure time?

Well, there will be more of this and all our other activities in upcoming newsletters.

Weather news

I will start including a small section on weather, which is starting to get a bit interesting. You know you are in Antarctica when -10°C is a warm day, good for as much outdoor work as we can squeeze in before it gets really cold!! We only really record dry temperature. The wind chill affects things quite dramatically. For example, as I'm writing, the dry temperature is -18°C , but with the wind chill the apparent temperature is -33.8°C .

Maximum temperature:	-3.9°C
Minimum temperature:	-22.9°C
Strongest wind gust:	48.8m/s (175.7km/hr or 97.6 knots)

Our Sponsors

A huge thanks to our sponsors who generously donated some of their quality products to the overwintering team to make our winter more homely! We have tucked into the fantastic coffee from Arabikaz and ContiCoffee with relish. Cobus has some experience working as a barista and has been teaching those who want to learn how to make a cappuccino with proper foam! We also celebrated our freedom from the construction crew with some excellent Belgian beer, kindly supplied by the Belgian Beer Company.

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