

A singular adventure

WHEN Anna du Toit took on the task of giving crash courses in cookery to the SANAE (South African National Antarctic Expedition) teams nine years ago she little dreamed it would lead to the adventure of a lifetime.

At the invitation of the Department of Transport she recently boarded the SA Agulhas in Cape Town. Her destination: The icy wastes of the South Pole.

The motivation behind her trip was to allow her to check out the facilities at the base in order to assess the effectiveness of her three-day course.

After a nine-day voyage the boat anchored about 25 km from the base, which was reached by helicopter. The home comforts of the base — now four years old and under 10 m of snow — are most impressive, says Miss Du Toit.

Microwave

The kitchen was of course the main focus of her interest. The 16-man team enjoy the use of a large electric stove with a convection oven as well as a microwave oven. She has nothing but praise for the catering prowess of the men, who laid on a swish cocktail reception for her and the other guests.

She was amused to discover a sewing corner, equipped with two machines for the odd spot of mending.

Being summer, the temperatures was about -6 deg C.

The base itself is air-conditioned, but before venturing outside she donned vest and long-johns, trousers and a thick jersey, anorak pants and jacket, wool socks, sturdy boots, a balaclava, protective gloves worn over woollen gloves, and dark glasses to protect against the glare from the snow.

Awesome

In winter temperatures drop to below -40 deg C with winds of 200 km per hour. Back in the familiar surroundings of her Pretoria office where she was getting down to drawing up a report on her visit, Miss Du Toit grappled with words to describe the awesome landscape of the south, with snow stretching evenly to the horizon.

"I can talk about the pack ice, icebergs as tall as five-storey buildings, the seals and the albatross, but it doesn't begin to describe the reality of the experience. It was the chance of a lifetime especially thrilling as it came the year before my retirement," she reflects, adding that she doubts if she herself would be able to spend 14 months in such isolated and harsh surroundings.

As a result of her observations and informal chats with the men, she will be making a few adjustments to her cookery course to improve its practical impact. For instance she will add a section on microwave cookery, using mixers and blenders, making sprouts, carving meat, and converting recipes into larger amounts.

Anna du Toit, a home economist with the Department of National Education, was the first woman to visit the South African scientific and meteorological research station in the Antarctic in an official capacity. She spoke to AVIS PERKS about her experience.



Miss Anna du Toit, the first woman to visit the Sanae base officially.