



S61

NEWSLETTER

July/August 2022

The wind's chill

July, the coldest period of our stay here, started off with mighty winds all through to the end of August. The Sun marked its return with stunning scenes of majestic colour brightening up our dark and pale surroundings; it was bittersweet though as we were unfortunate to be eluded (three times sadly☹) by the Aurora (Southern polar lights).

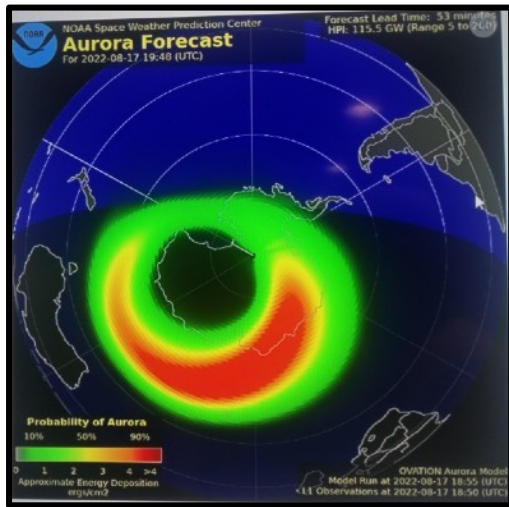


Night vs Day



Orange is the colour of light

Eagerly we waited with expectations rising with views of the feint yet alluring sightings of light dancing in the heavens. When the time came for that amazing spectacle the moon and the clouds denied us the opportunity.



The peak of our forecaster

It was not all doom and gloom as there was a lot to celebrate and do inside the base. We had birthdays for Eric who turned 25 and I (Maanda ☺) reached 30 years of age, chocolate cake always brings a smile to many. The team participated in the winter games and the enjoyed filming and acting in the making of our movie for the 48 Hour Film Festival.



30s club newest member



25 year old Viking

For this issue of the S61 newsletter Our Team leader and Doctor Mr. JC Laubscher will intrigue us and let us know about the man behind the great beard.

JC's Tale

Q1: What do you do here?

I am the Team Doctor for the 61st South African National Antarctic Overwintering Expedition. As such, it is my responsibility to look after the health of my fellow expedition team-mates and to manage the base's hospital facility. The base is equipped to provide a comprehensive spectrum of medical support and I am here to facilitate that as and when required, ranging from garden variety general practice to acute and emergency care. Additionally, I am also tasked with the management and oversight of the base's various stores of food. This involves maintaining an inventory of all the frozen, cold and dry stocks as well as tracking consumption over each month.

Besides that, I am also the expedition team leader which means I am also responsible for overseeing the major and minor duties and objectives required from us in maintaining the operational harmony of the base and its equipment. I'm not even sure if I need mention that last part since the team really leads itself (we have a very dependable wealth of experience amongst the overwintering veterans in our team) and all it requires of me is an appetite for paperwork, which I'm not wildly fond of. All in all though, my job here is one that doesn't attract attention when everything goes well, generally. So I try hard to make sure things keep going well.

Q2: Would this experience be good for younger or older doctors?

I think this this posting is an extreme one which requires being able to live in seclusion for over a year, with complete strangers (though they soon become friends), far away from all your family and friends. I think this maybe lends itself more to a younger practitioner with all the prospects of a full career ahead of them and looking for an adventure. But with that said, I think it is also essential that one has a certain degree of maturity and self-reliance to weather the inevitable solitude of such an expedition. And, of course, one has to be pretty confident as a doctor without any immediate support if things go wrong which is often something one gains with experience over time. In the end, the adventurous spirit knows no age...

Q3: Expectation Vs Reality - what did you expect coming here and how does it compare with the reality of what you have experienced of Antarctica and SANAE IV so far?

This posting kind of fell into my lap when I agreed to take it on, so in many ways I did not have time to consider my expectations in a meaningful way. What I did know was that it was far away from the coalface of the C-19 pandemic and I was not exactly aggrieved at the prospect of living without it for a year. That was the dealmaker for me. As far as SANAE IV base and Antarctica was concerned, I only had a sketch of it in my head, mostly made up from anecdotes I'd heard from previous visitors who I'd met during my three previous voyages on the Agulhas II for takeover relief missions to Marion and Gough Islands. Those peoples' stories made me want to visit and see it all for myself although I wasn't sure I was up to the task of an overwintering experience.

All I knew about Antarctica was that it was about as remote as one could get, very cold and inhospitable to life and cold. And more ice than you can shake a stick at. I had been

told that it is the only place on earth where you could experience absolute silence and that was something I had to experience to understand and certainly it was an epic sensation when I first took in the vast expanse of this wilderness all covered in snow and solace. It is something I marvel at still, especially on the days when the weather breaks after a storm and the landscape gets a look of tranquility after the lashings that it took for days on end before. And I think that's the allure of this place for me – it's that cocktail of danger, beauty, violent temperament and tranquil majesty all rolled into one. It's truly epic. The other important truths I have since learnt about this place is that no undertaking, big or small, is ever as simple as you think and there is an undefinable strangeness here that makes everything behave a bit oddly, from electronics to duct tape and even the light from the sun itself.

On a less philosophical note though, the most noteworthy way in which my expectations were pleasantly challenged was in living with and getting to know everyone in this team and becoming a part of a shared identity with them. I was concerned about the pitfalls that clashing personalities and conflicting opinions could potentially generate in any group brought together from diverse backgrounds, but that concern faded fast right from the start as I got to know this group of extraordinary individuals and I count myself as privileged to be among them.

Q4: Are you homesick yet?

Without a doubt I miss my family and friends and my two cats back home in Cape Town. Also, I miss driving around in my car almost as much. I don't, however, miss sitting in traffic or the rising cost of fuel, nor the chore and expense of shopping for groceries or running errands nor the noise and frenzy of city living in general. Another thing I miss now is being able to make use of the outdoor beauty and abundance in Cape Town, like forest and mountain trails and beachfront cafes and although I've never been much of an outdoor sort of person, I can feel its absence now after being confined indoors for so long to escape the brutality of the Antarctic Winter. I will also never, ever again complain about the "cold" of a South African Winter after this because it would be entirely unwarranted and silly.

Q5: Would you return for another overwintering expedition?

Ask me in four months' time. The truth is that I'm not entirely against coming back, but the pot would have to be sweetened with one or two things in order to make it a certainty for me. That said though, I anticipate arriving back in SA and wishing myself back here within a week. I definitely hope to stay involved with the SANAP operations and take part in further voyages on SA Agulhas II. I have really grown to love this place though and I imagine I will be leaving a piece of my heart here when I go.



JC conquering the Snow Bath

It is a pleasure to have JC in our team.

When the team partook in the winter game, we won our event (the CrossFit competition) thanks to the remarkable heroics of our athletes **Eric, Fez and John.**



Fez working hard on the rowing machine

I think the highlight of the two months that have come and gone was the filming our 48 hour film festival movie, the team proved that indeed we are a unit and a big shout out to the guys for the great effort. Inspired by the teams love for football, a Football studio talk show was parodied. Please do check the video out on www.wiffa.aq



*Aurora sports
Anchor team*

We do hope you enjoy this read! 😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊 thank you till next time.

EDITOR: MAANDA MULAUDZI