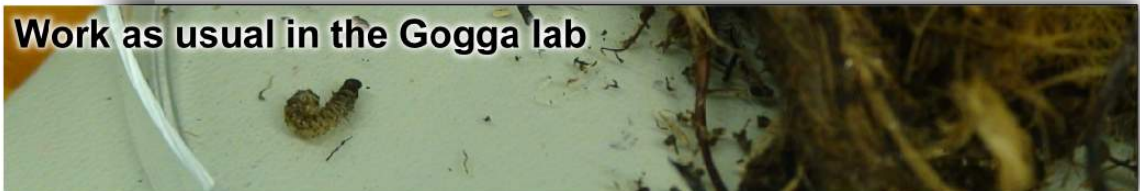




**Farewell**



**Work as usual in the Gogga lab**



**Mia and Ben's Epic 1 Day Round Island**



**Message from the Office**





## Farewell

That time finally arrived, the time to bid farewell to 2009, declaring it part of our history. Pictures would tell the story better but would also take too much space which we don't have. So, we will just have to settle for my lyrical content.

It is very much befitting to send our heart felt condolences to those who lost their loved ones and also rejoice with those who were blessed with additional members in their families.

Let me start the highlights with the thunderstorm we had at the beginning of winter. Who would have thought we could experience a thunderstorm of such magnitude but it happened just a few months in the expedition. Lightning and thunder with rain (thunderstorm with precipitation) and it lasted for over an hour. The lightning didn't seem close enough but the sound was loud and clear or maybe I should say the light from the lightning was pretty clear in the dark and the thunder was loud enough for everyone to hear.



We had a snow storm at the beginning of June during which we recorded the strongest wind for 2009. It felt like the base could be blown into the ocean. We weighed seal pups with the sealers, starting with fur seal pups and finishing with the elephant seals. Both occasions were very much exciting yet so far from a piece of cake. The fur seals proved to be agile, from getting away to biting but fortunately none of the Metkassies ever had to feel the sharpness of their teeth or rather the pups never got to taste a Metkassie's blood.

Weighing the elephant seal pups was a mission, not impossible though, an adrenaline rush as some of the beach masters charged at us every now and then. The pups provided a serious weight lifting and if not mistaken the heaviest pup weighed by a Metkassie was 190 kg. The elephant seal breeding season also granted us the opportunity to see a lot of killer whales.

During winter we also got to see Icebergs without having to go near Antarctica, right here in our back yard, having floated all the way from there. We also had hectic days, a day or two without a shower as the water froze inside the pipes leading to working in the cold at the tanks and a walk on the snow to the dam. We banded Wandering Albatross chicks with Ben. Here there was no escaping the super oily spray from the chicks which resulted in a couple of days of smelling like sushi. The breeding season for the Southern Giant Petrels arrived and nests had to be marked. Collecting catapillars with Asanda was close to torture, the cold, wind and/ precipitation while sitting on cold wet ground looking for a specific caterpillar at the right stage or size.

The arrival of the film crew added new life on the island and there was a lot of excitement in the base. The Grey Headed Albatross breeding season presented an opportunity to get a hut night as they call them here, to see these beauties and to go to the beach. It was nice to be at Grey-Headed, it felt like a holiday destination. Good Hope bay was full of life, the last of the elephant seals, a few Gazellas, different species of penguins and other birds. All three Metkassies got the feeling of walking in the mire at night, going mousing with the people from the Gogga lab.

There was also a trip to Katedraal to remove a panel which was a shelter between the pantry and the main hut as it had fell, declaring the hut inaccessible. We managed to remove and secure it on the side of the hut, finishing just in time as it started snowing within five minutes of getting inside the hut.

On Monday 09 November 2009 an earthquake was reported to have hit about 410 km NNE of the island at 00:21 UCT. Almost an hour later Mpho, Dianah and Asanda saw lightning which continued for almost an hour from the same direction. Since there is no known association between an earthquake and lightning, the two incidents constituted just an intriguing coincidence.

Recently I joined the birders when they went to take Macaroni penguins diet samples at Bullard. The sound and the smell tell you that you are approaching a big penguin colony. Once we started working I forgot about the smell.

Less than a week before saying farewell to 2009 our RM Young wind sensor broke. We were experiencing one of those strong winds once again and as the time for upper air approached all three of us were worried. I kept my fingers crossed, hoping the wind will calm down just a little so the balloon doesn't burst in my face. The walk to the new base was an unpleasant one as the wind threw me off balance on several occasions. The time for releasing the balloon arrived and of course it had to go and it went with the wind into the darkness of the night and I think only for those few minutes the wind calmed down to 30 knots (about 55 km/h). The next day we had to replace the sensor with the help of some of the team members.

To mark the end of 2009 there was a full moon on new year's eve, also referred to as blue moon, which was the second full moon in one month. The clouds gave way to blue skies in the evening giving the moon an opportunity to shine before resurfacing again. With the night progressing towards 2010, the moon also shone at every chance between the clouds. At midnight we went out to find it clear as though beside the Lenticularis cloud that was in the same direction.

Let me take this opportunity to thank everyone back there at home for the support throughout the year. Special thanks to the forecasting team in Bolepi for the forecasts they provided throughout the year, your good work is highly appreciated by all of us.

2010 is here, let us all embrace it with optimism!!!

So long from the Metkassies!!!





## Work as usual in the Gogga lab

So, with Christmas having come and gone in a flash, the inhabitants of the gogga lab are back to work! And although the holiday break only lasted for 2 days, it was a great two days to tell the truth. Plenty of good food and good company made for an awesome few days off for everyone around base. However, eventually all good things must come to an end. This means that Asanda and I are again off to Mix Pickle for yet another 5 nights of mousing. However, this is the second last time that we will have to endure the rigours of Marion Island at night, on the west side of the island.

In the build up to Christmas, both Asanda and I had been keeping ourselves very busy, what with weekly nest checks for me, and plenty of exciting catapillar work for Asanda. She had also started taking core samples of the different habitat types around base, in order to identify the biomass and abundance of the different goggas that can be found around Marion!



However, now that New Year is upon us, it seems that time on Marion is a limited commodity. Breeding season will begin to become far more intense over the next few weeks for me, and Asanda will also be stretched with plenty of albatross related work over the remainder of our stay here! So, with only 4 more months until take-over 2010, the Gogga lab is hotting up work wise, which funnily enough is in keeping with the weather lately!

Seasons Greetings to everyone back home from James and Asanda in the Gogga lab!

James Wilshire  
Gogga lab  
Marion Island





## Mia and Ben's Epic 1 Day Round Island

It all started when...well actually I don't have a clue how it all started. There was talk about walking around the island in one day, who on the team would be able to do it and would anyone be able to do it under 17 hours. A lot of team members were initially keen. However, I suppose after some afterthought and realising what it means to walk around the island in 1 day, they decided otherwise.

So finally, Ben & I decided we have the required "organs of titanium" to attempt such a feat. We carbo-loaded on Ben's delicious lasagne the day before and went to bed early.

Monday morning 21 December (the week of the longest daylight days) Ben Dilley and Mia Wege got up at the crack of dawn to attempt the once thought, impossible. We took only the clothes on our backs, a light pack with 3 meals of lasagne each, sweets and coke for quick energy, small camera, water bottles and of course...guts!

We left feeling a bit nervous but quickly found our stride, cracking jokes all along the way. When we reached Stony Ridge the wind started pumping, shoving us around and making walking difficult. We had an intended schedule to stick to (so as to avoid walking at night) and we reached Kildalkey shaving 20 minutes of our time! Quick stop to refill our water bottles and of course leave evidence that we were there – sign the hut book. Ben took along a special pen which we used to sign all the hut books.



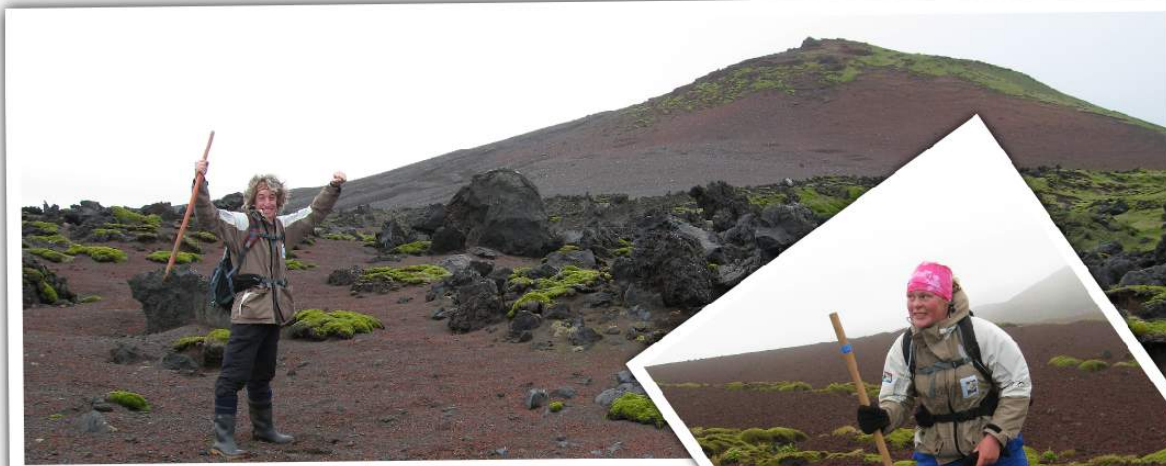
Then...Karoo kop! The wind pushed, we pushed back and the wind only pushed back harder. With every step we had to pump those legs. We took some videos and photos at Johnny's saddle of how we were bullied by the wind. Karoo kop was in its full glory! We lost a

bit of time on the uphill but just kept pushing and working hard. We made up our time on the downhill. The best part is, through all this we kept our spirits high. We stopped to take a photo and there was always time to crack a joke...or two...or three.

At Watertunnel we again only stopped quickly to fill up on water. Ben attempted to eat an energy bar but Karoo kop's cold turned the energy bar into a hard toffee. We pushed on to Greyheaded hut. The plan was to stop, eat, change our socks and do comm's with base from Greyheaded. However, seeing as the Urban Brew crew was at Rook's we decided to only stop for a bite there (where they can serve us...brilliant!) We did radio in to base from Greyheaded though. Delia was sitting anxiously at the radio waiting for the call, she was very relieved to hear from us on time. We told base about the wind we had to brave and that we are still walking against the wind. To our shock and dismay, Delia said there is absolutely no wind at base! WHAT!!! Of course Mpho received blame immediately. How could he have ordered weather like this for us on such an important day? Ben said that it's okay, at least when we get to the other side of the island it will push us home. I added that walking against this wind would also just make our story more legendary.

The stretch between Greyheaded and Rook's was probably the toughest for me. We were still walking against the wind, my legs started feeling tired and I wanted food! Again, the constant joke telling kept us going. At Rook's we were greeted by a very friendly and positive film crew. They served us with a much appreciated hut coffee, we put clean socks on and devoured our first portion of lasagne. When we left Rook's our spirits were lifted, our legs felt rested and the jokes were flowing! We did however lose 35mins off our planned schedule...will we make it?





We took the scenic route to Swartkop's (i.e. walking coastal). We mastered the toffee lava, flew around Le Grange and sailed across the Chinese Tea Garden. The wind died down halfway to Swartkop's and we made up a considerable amount of time. This is where, for the first time, finishing this actually felt like a possibility. We loaded up on some sugar at Swartkop's, which didn't pay off over Kaalkoppie. This is where we realised that if you complain about things that irritate you, you walk faster. By the time we reached Mixed Pickle we have caught up on all the time lost earlier. We were now back on schedule!



At Mixed Pickle we once again carbo-loaded, put on some fresh socks and radioed base. The ever-present Delia was waiting for our call and so were a few other team members. We told them that we are still feeling fresh, our spirits are still high and to all those at base who doubted us...well I can't write those words, but you get the idea.

The "big one" was lying ahead of us...Azorella, which was completely shrouded in mist. We were so pumped up and ready for this, we demolished Azorella like it was no more than a speed bump. We climbed to the top in 1

hour (my personal best) and...we were still cracking jokes and taking photos. Our legs still felt fine and ready to go! My boots started giving me blisters though which was worrying. Ben said that his feet were also starting to take punishment now, but there is no way that we are stopping at this stage.

We reached Cape Davis having walked in thick mist and no visibility all the way from Mixed Pickle, legs feeling strong but feet growing tired. Pushed on to Repetto's, the final hut, where we once again changed our socks, radioed base and ate our last tub of lasagne. Neither of us was hungry but we forced the food down. We didn't want to run out of fuel on the home stretch. We told base that we are coming home! Ben said that he would phone base with the satellite phone when we are 5 minutes out. Everyone wanted to come to cheer us home and greet us at the heli-hanger. We also ordered some cold beers to be ready for us at the heli-hanger. The final stretch became a race against the light. On top of Long Ridge we stopped and drank those "emergency cokes". That gave us a needed energy boost. Walking through Hoppie's Hell was painful – not because our legs were tired, but because our feet were aching.



We were looking forward to taking of those gumboots and putting our feet up. When we phoned base and Mpho heard it was Ben on the phone, he started shouting like he had won the lottery. He would not stop shouting. Delia had to take the phone from him so we could tell them we're almost there.

20 hours and 10 minutes after we left base, we stepped onto the heli-hanger. WE DID IT!!! Everyone was there waiting for us with banners and beers. Hugs all around and cheers from everyone. We moved from the heli-hanger to the bar where we were sprayed with champagne and received our medals. The team made both of us a little trophy which reads "Tour de Marion. Round Island Champion", with the time, date and our names. Thank you to the team for this warm welcome.

James asked the very important question: did we have fun? I can truly say, yes. We had loads of fun and laughed all the way around. No matter what the weather threw at us, we kept our spirits high. We would walk and tell jokes and take photos. The team members who doubted us beforehand also received some verbal punishment from us, but all in good spirit. The most amazing thing about this experience, for me, was that my legs did not really feel that tired. Our feet were very tired and burning with pain but our legs felt like they could go another 20 hours. You might ask how did a "ballie" and a "chick" complete such a massive walk. Simple. We applied the "Boo-ya method" all the way around. What is the "boo-ya method"? It is when 2 crazy Marion Islanders knock their walking sticks together and shout "BOO-YA!!!" as encouragement or congratulations after a steep climb.

The next day Ben & I got to rest our legs and put our feet up. We even got coffee in bed...we should do this more often then. Those of you who were wondering how far we walked. Ben kept the GPS on the whole way round to make a trackline. The final distance: 63 km's. The GPS only takes a reading every 100 meters. So, if we walked over a hill or through a dip in that 100 metres it would not record that extra distance. Therefore it is actually more than 63 km's....

There you have the tale of the first ever "BALLIE & CHICK 1 DAY ROUND ISLAND PAIR!" and our epic (and legendary) adventure.

BOO-YA!!!  
Mia Wege.





## Message from the Office

This has been a wonderful year with so many activities, which were celebrated with lots of excitement. At first for those who had never been at the Island I assume that it felt like it was going to be a difficult and a loooong journey, but at last it ended up like a cruise with lots of fun and enjoyment. I must also admit that at times when it came to work, they had met lot of challenges like the harsh weather of the Island but they still showed lots of positive spirit within themselves. We celebrated our festive season as a family at the Island and are now facing the new year with renewed spirits.

We would like to thank everyone who supported and sent us well wishes during this year, and I hope everyone back on land enjoyed the summer holidays. On behalf of the team, I would like to say if this past year did not bring you joy just leave it behind, let us ring in the New Year with good things in mind. Forget about every bad memory that brought you heartache and pain, and let us turn a new leaf with the smell of a new rain. Let us forget past mistakes by making amends for this year. Have a wonderful and a prosperous New Year!!!

Till next time, Cheers!!!!!!!!!! Kholekile





## Climate Stats: MONTH YEAR



### Pressure

Maximum	1019.3 hPa
Average Maximum	1005.7 hPa
Average	1001.2 hPa
Average Minimum	995.9 hPa
Minimum	973.9 hPa



### Temperature

Maximum	11.4 °C
Average Maximum	7.7 °C
Average	5.3 °C
Average Minimum	2.8 °C
Minimum	-0.9 °C



### Humidity

Maximum	99 %
Average	82 %
Minimum	49 %



### Wind

Maximum Gust	36.0 m/s (130 km/h)
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### Rainfall

Total	187.0 mm
Highest in 24 hours	49.6 mm
Total days without rain	6 days
Total days >1mm	18 days



### Sunshine

Total	140.6 hours
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## Marion 66 team members:

Asanda Phiri – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Ben Dilley – Field Assistant (Birder)

Delia Davies – Field Assistant (Birder)

Derek van der Merwe – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Dianah Mabizela – Meteorologist (snr)

James Wilshire – Field Assistant (Gogga)

Johan Hoffman – Radio Tech (deputy leader)

Kholekile Cita – Medic (team leader)

Mark White – Diesel Mechanic

Marlene van Onselen – Field Assistant (Birder)

Martin Postma – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mia Wege – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Mpho Koalepe – Meteorologist

Nangaadzishumi Nefehere – Field Assistant (Sealer)

Nkoane Mathabatha – Meteorologist

Innocent - Conservationist (Camera crew)

Marianne - 2nd Camera

Riaan - 1st Camera

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