



Fig. 1

SOME INTERESTING ASPECTS OF ANTARCTICA



Fig. 2

PERSONS WHO HAVE not been to Antarctica might find the following aspects and features, common to Antarctica and the way of life on the Continent, rather interesting.

Ablation

Ablation refers to the removal, or erosion, of ice and snow by wind action. It is the wind, carrying sharp ice grains, which is responsible for sculpturing many beautiful and unusual ice forms (Fig. 1 above). This is a general example of ablation. Another form of ablation, not so common, is possibly even more interesting. If a person walks or a vehicle travels over newly fallen soft snow, then the weight of the person or vehicle compacts the snow, and footprints or vehicle tracks will be clearly visible imprinted into the snow. Shortly after this a wind might blow and remove the light, soft surface snow – all the surface snow in fact except the compacted footprints or vehicle tracks. If sufficient surface snow is blown away, the compacted tracks eventually stand out proud above the average snow surface level (Fig. 2). Sometimes tracks have been preserved for years in this manner.

Freezing and refrigeration

To Sanae field parties the depot at Pyramiden, some 300 km south of Sanae, is perhaps the most well known. The nunatak Pyramiden was named after its pyramid-like shape; very often nunataks have been named after the



Fig. 3

objects or shapes they are thought to resemble. However, it is the depot at Pyramiden and not the shape of the nunatak that is of interest. Amongst the supplies at the depot are numerous boxes and articles left behind by the famous Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition (NBSAE) of 1949-52 to assist them in making a rapid pre-winter return to base – base for this expedition being the now disused Maudheim, located between Sanae and Halley Bay.

Amongst the articles left behind are reindeer skins (used for bedding), ski's, clothes, medical supplies, food and other sundries – and all of these articles are in a remarkably good state of preservation. It will never be forgotten how, twenty years after these supplies had been left at Pyramiden (now regarded by Sanae personnel as a historic monument) an open packet of Norwegian “flat bread” was carefully examined. A single slice was removed from the packet and thawed over a heater. When tasted, it seemed as fresh as the day it was bought.



Fig. 4

This certainly is a tribute to Antarctica's freezing and refrigeration capabilities.

Figure 3 shows a Sanae expedition member posing next to the personal box of Dr. V. Schytte, a member of the NBSAE. It is usually a feeling of excitement, great interest and awe that a Sanae expedition member experiences when he visits Pyramiden and studies the relics of those who went before him.

Fauna and flora at Sanae

A frequent question put to ex-Sanae expedition members is, “What animals and plants are found in Antarctica?” The answer is always simple: Antarctica has no large land animals; polar bears and reindeer for instance are found only in the Arctic, and Antarctica is a dead continent as far as natural land inhabitants are concerned. In contrast, the Southern Ocean which surrounds Antarctica teems with an abundance of seals, penguins, whale, the four major southern ocean fish families and other marine micro-organisms such as plankton.

The numerous birds to be seen over the continent are all migratory and so it is clear that the continent itself is devoid of permanent inhabitants except for a few insect species and a variety of lower forms of plant life.

Concerning the insect population, the only native fly, *Belgica antarctica*, is a small midge, about a centimetre long. It is found on the west coast of the Antarctic Peninsula and is in actual fact the continent's largest land animal. A variety of other smaller insects, rich in numbers but few in species, are found to inhabit the occasional freshwater ponds and patches of damp soil to be found in some coastal regions.

Concerning plant life – among the rocks of the nunataks to the south of Sanae, numerous mosses and lichens are found. These are typical of Antarctic plant life except in the Antarctic Peninsula where the milder climate permits more advanced plant species, such as grasses, to grow. Figure 4 shows some lichens and mosses photographed on Marsteinen, a nunatak south of Sanae.