

December 2011

WANDERER

MARION ISLAND NEWSLETTER

Note from the Editor

This month made one think of holidays by the sea. When all the “vaalies” come down to the beach and you see an array of personalities and cultures all together in one place. The ones that simply aren’t used to local weather standing out amongst those that are. This month has been no exception with the only difference being that its animals come from the sea and the humans are simply just members of the M68 team. The humans are easily spotted as the ones still wearing winter clothes in the summertime. This summer we have seen an abundance of animals flocking to the shores of Marion to either to mate or moult. Birds, seals, killer whales or humans alike, the beaches resemble the eclectic mix of vaalies and locals one may find along the shores of South Africa during the holidays.

LAUGHTER IS MEDICINE

A man comes into the ER and yells . . .'

'My wife's going to have her baby in the cab.'

I grabbed my stuff, rushed out to the cab, lifted the lady's dress and began to take off her underwear.

Suddenly I noticed that there were several cabs - - - and I was in the wrong one.



... At the beginning of my shift

I placed a stethoscope on an elderly and slightly deaf female patient's anterior chest wall.

'Big breaths,' . . . I instructed.

'Yes, they used to be,' . . .replied the patient

By Bertus Boousen



Why one should always say yes when a birder asks your help on their round island M68 Base Engineer

It is a week before the big birder round island of November and I am starting to feel rather disinclined towards my decision to help the birders on their latest adventure. As is natural when you are a base engineer and the only stories you hear prior to the trip is how unbelievably tough and crappy it is going to be. I am told nightmarish tales about dreaded places such as the Devils Footprint, the Toffee lava and the disposition-shattering task of counting the Macaroni penguins at Amphitheatre.

Since this was to be, the round island with the most work, the birders decided to split the work in half. Otto and Maëlle was going to leave base in a southerly direction, make their way coastally towards Swartkops, while Marguerite and I would hike north, and make our way to Swartkops as well, which is on the other side of the island than base. We would be counting every occupied Rockhopper and Macaroni penguin nest on the island, Crozet Shags, Antarctic & Kerguelen Terns and Dark and Light mantled Sooty albatrosses around the island.



The day finally came to set off on the adventure, and how should I say this... I don't really know what to say because for some reason which is unclear to both Marguerite and me, we spent 12 hours in the field that first day and we barely got half the work done between base and Repetto's (the first field hut). Being utterly baffled and seriously knackered we concluded that I've had a whole day to get comfortable with the counting procedure and identification of different species, (which must have robbed us of about 5 hours by the looks of it) we are to work much quicker on the rest of the trip.

After the above-mentioned endless first day, the trip became truly fun. Being base-personnel, it is incredibly special to witness and experience the breathtaking landscape and wildlife images perceived on such a trip. I am trying to convey the juxtaposition that is base life and fieldwork, but is truly impossible. Around every corner, above every hill and inside every crevice you will see something mesmerizing. As they say photos paint a better picture than words, here are some of the incredible shots Marguerite took of various bird species.

This is a close-up shot of a Rockhopper penguin incubating. These guys are so cool and actually very comical in the way they go about their business. Oh yes, and they are everywhere! Marguerite and I counted approximately 28 500 occupied nests from base to Swartkops hut!



This particular incident came with mixed emotion. It is a shot of a Giant Petrel eating a White Chinned Petrel. The scene took place right next to Mixed pickle hut where the GP actually pulled the poor Whitehinned out of his burrow and mercilessly swung and bite him until he finally perished. It was a extremely exciting thing to see but one could not help but feel pity for the poor White-chinned petrel.

Nature is a cruel paradise and takes no prisoners.



This was a very special sight to see. We caught two wandering albatross lovers in the act! Being able to see the famous albatross love dance and then the act of mating was awesome. What was also very beautiful is the way that after mating the two lovers sits together for a long time and continues to touch and play with each other.



This is such a cool photo of a Crozet Shag and its chick. It almost looks as if the parent is giving the chick the twig and teaching it to enforce the nest. Great shot Marguerite!



But alas! We did not just see birds... How can I put this appropriately? We were harassed our whole trip by "goofy-look-alike" dudes named *Tropicalis* seals. This particular type of seal has made it their life's purpose chase us around the island. Seriously, some of them start charging you from as far as 35 metres away. These guys ensured some good laughs, some near-dramas and a few minor heart-attacks on Marguerite's part. As the reader might have guessed, the seals really scare her and the fact that they hide behind rocks and the fact that she was inches away from stepping on a big male's head, definitely did not calm her nerves about these aggressive animals. We were lucky to complete our trip without any teeth marks.... Nevertheless, I myself also had a few close encounters. One particular incident was quite funny when two males and one female at Triegaardt Bay chased me. They came from both sides and I had to make a run for it straight through the middle of them. Fortunately, Marguerite was not close by to witness me fleeing for my life with a backpack and gumboots. I bet it looked rather ridiculous.

A male *Tropicalis* seal, which strangely allowed us to get close enough to take a photograph.

On the topic of Devils Footprint: The only way to describe this desolate place consisting of razor sharp black lava rocks is to use the following metaphor. Do you remember when Frodo and Sam was making their way across the barren plains of Mordor and climbed their way up Mount Doom? Well this place is more strenuous than what those two hobbits did. To make our way through this maze of razor sharp rocks was very crap in an obvious way, but actually very cool in a very weird way. This experience will not soon be forgotten. Another funny story is when a rock the size of a rugby ball fell on my head. One would ask the question of how this is possible, but it really did happen. Let us just say that I was climbing down a rock formation when a piece broke off to hit me straight on the melon! Strange but true.

The monstrous task of counting the nesting macaroni's at amphitheatre which is situated at Swartkops hut can unfortunately not be described as a pleasurable event.

Because it simply wasn't. When we started our way up the hill of the amphitheatre, the penguins was not yet visible, but I could hear the distinct murmuring sound of what I thought to be a couple of thousand penguins. Ah, ignorance is bliss. As soon as we got to the top, my heart sank so far down my chest when I perceived the magnitude of this colony. There is no doubt in my mind that I would have been thoroughly impressed by this sight had we not have to count all these birds. The only thing I will say to the birders is that this count surely must be a joke, and you guys fell for it and so did I. Haha, but it was still an awesome experience.



Two different views of the Amphitheatre at Swartkops.

That is a lot of penguins...

To finish this article I must once again mention how unbelievably fun this trip has been for me. Being able to see the island from a different perspective was something that I will always remember and keep close. Thank you is due to the birders for inviting me to partake in such an amazing round island. It was truly a pleasure from my side to help you and guys have an awesome job here on the island.

"reaching out to embrace the random,

reaching out to embrace whatever may come

Spiral out... Keep going..." **MJK**

All Photos by Marguerite Schoeman

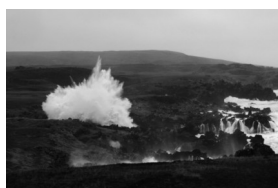


An Icy Nostalgia

By Otto Whitehead

‘Summer’ has arrived, and so I thought it appropriate to remember winter and her icy extremes.

A tranquil pitter patter swirled down from the ceiling and licked at my eardrums. On the window in front of me a hundred or so little droplets cascaded steadily downwards as I watched them with simplicity. I watched how they would sometimes reach out to each other in moments of stillness and upon touching would scurry off with gravity. I watched how as the wind blew, their movements would shift in a jagged synchronicity, catapulting them in unison across the glass. I looked past them and saw the ocean explode into the sky.



‘It’s wild out there’ I thought, turning my eyes on a frigid sea saturated with mountainous swells. I watched as an icy blue crest unfurled an angry lip and crashed into the shallows, turning everything white. The surge

launched up the volcanic rock-face of the shore and scattered a vast white blanket over the sky. It lingered, suspended momentarily as if each droplet had wings. Then it fell gently and the droplets returned to a sense of peace and place, filtering back into the ground or wallowing in a rock pool. I thought about how water is constantly on the move. But then I was quick to remember a watery state frozen in time: ice, and its many forms.

A few weeks ago (in mid-June) I woke up one morning and opened my blinds. It was a Sunday and it was appropriately sunny. The blue sky made for an eye-indulging contrast to a landscape carpeted in snow and the grasses were hushed and sitting still; there was no wind. ‘A perfect day to explore the ice plateau’, I thought, and rushed outside to gaze inland. The peaks were silhouetted against a clear sky and it was all too perfect. I quickly packed my backpack and Johan and I set off into the heart of this wintery wonderland.

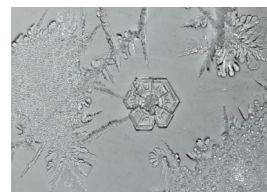
Looking around I was amazed at how the snowfall had completely transformed the landscape. It was unbelievable. I kept trying to find new adjectives to describe its epicness and constantly found myself muttering ‘It’s amazing.’ I’m always fascinated with how wilderness has the ability to astound and confound, leaving one sedated by awe. It’s that vast nothingness that symbolises everything. It encompasses all that is wild and untouched, tranquil and perfect. Each step was done so with a smile, gradually edging closer to Katedraal Hut. I kept on thinking to myself: ‘Here I am, on a volcanic island in the middle of the Southern Ocean, more than two thousand kilometres away from any civilisation, and I’m wading through this surrealistic, snow-carpeted wilderness in a T-shirt as sunshine streams down from a blue sky above.’ Never in my wildest dreams.

The wind had sculpted beautiful snow dunes with ripples as you’d find on the bottom of a still lake or calm beach. The sun was low and

the snow sparkled in its angular presence. As it set, the sky was gradually coloured in layer by layer, with a deep blue closest to the stars and a rosebud pink softening the billowy clouds on the horizon. A sliver of moon smiled and so did I, this landscape was contagious.

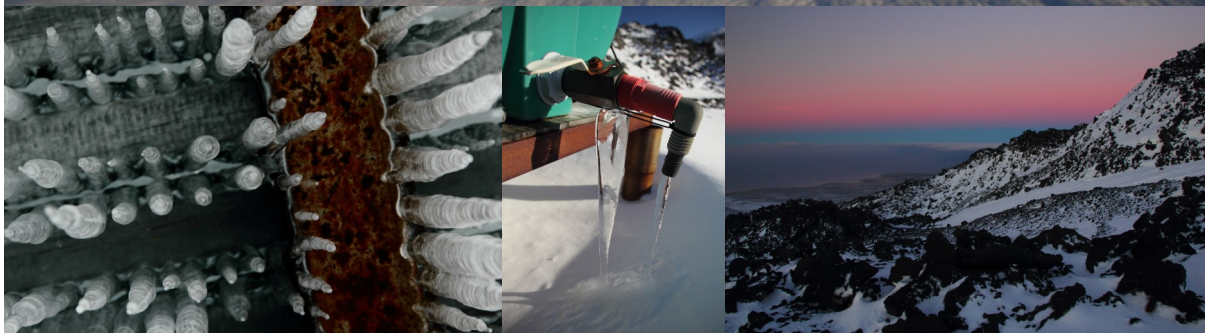


When we reached the hut we found that some snow had forced its way inside through gaps in the door and air vents, the water in the kettle was completely frozen, the floor of the pantry was an ice rink and the walls were covered in the most beautiful ice crystals. ‘It gets seriously cold up here!’ I remember thinking.



We soon got to work turning the kettle ice into hot chocolate, put on the heater, and enjoyed an awesome evening in Marion’s icy attic.







All images by Otto Whitehead



The hitch hikers guide to The Marion Round Island

First edition (Preparation) You will need the following to make your trip as comfortable as possible. Your back pack should be suited to your own specific size and needs. Most team members have back packs with volumes ranging from 65 to 85 litres. It is important that your back pack is comfortable and adjusted to your requirements. What might be a minor irritant after 100 metres will become agony after a couple of days in the field. A sleeping bag. Most team members have sleeping bags that a comfort rating of minus 5 degrees. Depending on how your personal thermostat works, you could use a thermal sleeping bag inner which adds a few degrees onto the comfort rating of your sleeping bag. Your very own pillow case. This is to ensure that your luscious locks don't touch anything but clean linen for the duration of the trip. A head torch. This is a must for the huts on the trip. It makes reading and other tasks much easier with having your hands free. Head torches have also be known to be used as strobe lights during the famous hut parties. If your trip is a solo one, a mp3 player would be a good addition. This will ensure that you will have epic tunes while you are seeing epic sights on an epic trip around an epic island. EPIC!!!! A portable speaker is also a good choice if you are walking with other islanders. It will help set the mood for those famous hut parties. A useful tip to optimise the sound quality in the huts is to place the speaker and mp3 player on an empty tote bin. This has a profound bass boosting effect. A GPS with routes and specific points around the island for those misty days, when navigation could become a bit tricky. Never underestimate how easy you can get lost on Marion. It has happened to many a hardened Islander. Thermal underwear, spare socks, gloves, beanie, spare t-shirt, fleece, buff and hut shoes. All these items are important in being as comfortable as possible in the huts. Multi-tool for the huts who don't have can openers and such. It is also always good to have a multi-tool of some sorts with you. You never know when you will need to help an entangled seal or bird. Basic toiletries that would last for four to six days. These should most definitely include wet wipes. These little disposable pieces of heaven can make a hut bath or wipe down very comfortable. A camera and spare batteries. One can never have too many spare camera batteries. A day will come when you see a killer whale right in front of you and the battery in your camera decides that this will be the opportune moment to pass on. Yes, that scenario has indeed happened. Gortex jacket and pants are essential when going on a round island trip. They could mean the difference between being totally soaked when arriving at a hut or being totally soaked when arriving at a hut. Yes, that's correct!! I am indeed trying to bring the water proof qualities of the Gortex items into disrepute. They do work rather well as wind breakers, but depending on the age of the items, they tend to lose their water proof abilities.

This is an "all you need to know" about the famous Marion Round Island trip. This trip is sometimes seen with trepidation and fear, but this guide will make one see that a Marion Round island trip can be one of the most rewarding and memorable trips one can undertake.

Marion Island has a coastline of roughly 73km long, while the trip around the island will undoubtedly be further than that. There are varying views on the exact length of a typical round island trip with estimates ranging from 80km to over 100km.

This guide aims to introduce hikers and Island enthusiasts to the Marion Round island trip. It will range from what to take with in your pack all the way through to what one could expect to see on such a trip.

Back Pack and contents.

It would be wise to keep the weight of one's Pack down to minimum on a Marion round island. The average weight for most team members ranges between ten and fifteen kilograms. As always there are exceptions.

A sturdy pair of Egoli rubber Gumboots. These wonderful couture pieces of footwear are the single most important item needed on any trip on Marion Island. They keep your feet dry in a saturated environment and with enough pairs of socks will keep your toes snug and when coupled with green cross or hi-tec inners will create a comfortable base for your feet. They are after all the base on which your entire trip is going to take place, so look after your feet and they will look after you. Or they will hurt like hell. Either way you really need Gum boots.

A dry bag of some sorts to pack all the above mentioned items into. Marion Island is a very moist place and it is important to keep your luggage dry. Anything from normal black bags to specifically designed dry bags do the job well.

A good book is also an idea when going on a round island trip. The huts can become rather boring after the great walks between them. A book will help pass the time until you once again can wander out into the vast unknown adventure that is Marion Island.

There are many islanders that take other items to make their trips as com-

fortable as possible. These items include fillet steaks, cheese, salami, chicken, wors, whiskey, beer, vodka, jellybabies and many other amenities that people have preference for.

Now that your back pack is packed and ready, you should consult the weather gods. There are two weather deities that are used on Marion Island. They have varying degrees of accuracy when predicting the weather, because the honest truth is that the weather on Marion Island doesn't care for the careful predictions of the South African weather service or the Y.R. website. A great and wise Geomorphologist once said, "Be prepared for the worst, expect the worse, hope for the best and that way you will never be disappointed."

Right, now that you have consulted with SAWS and Y.R, the next step on your Round island trip is the procurement of a sturdy walking stick. A walking stick on Marion Island is indeed a versatile tool and thus should not be taken lightly. They are high-tech pieces of precision that are used as seal deterrents, support structures, balance keepers, mire extractor devices, flipper hookers, bird catchers, PG poles, an-

chors, tripods and many other things. The dimensions, weight, construction and grip of the walking stick all play an important role when choosing the perfect stick for the trip.

You are now ready to get underway on your Marion round island trip. At this stage of the trip people are filled with varied emotions. These emotions seem to be closely and mysteriously linked to the weather, duration of the trip, route to be followed as well the purpose of that specific round island trip. However the most powerful emotion felt when leaving on a round island trip is undoubtedly one of excitement.

Regardless of the purpose, duration of the trip and even the weather, you are about to set out on a trip that normal hikers would have to pay good money for. You are about to walk into a special reserve that houses many wonderful and rare sights that not many people get the opportunity to experience. You could see the birth of elephant seal pup on Archway beach, or a pod of killer whales at Cape Davis beach, or a wandering albatross fledging on Goney Plain, or a colony of penguins at the Amphitheatre, or a cave filled with howling seals at Rooks Cave, or

you could see an entire colony of nesting Grey-headed Albatross at Grey-headed Ridge.

Either way, you are about to embark on a trip that will not soon be forgotten.

Can you wait for your first step off the cat walk?

By Gareth Isenegger



Photos by: Gareth Isenegger



Wanderer



Photos by:
Gareth Isenegger



MARION ISLAND SEA TEMP AND CLIMATE STATS REPORT

Date	Sea Temp	Date	Sea Temp	Date	Sea Temp
01	5.4	11	6.5	21	7.6
02	5.5	12	6.6	22	7.2
03	5.7	13	6.6	23	7.0
04	5.4	14	6.4	24	7.1
05	5.7	15	6.9	25	6.8
06	5.7	16	6.5	26	7.8
07	6.0	17	7.5	27	8.4
08	6.0	18	7.0	28	6.9
09	6.5	19	6.6	29	7.1
10	6.5	20	7.4	30	7.0
				31	6.2

Ave Max Pressure	1013.3
Ave Min Pressure	1003.8
Ave Pressure	1009.0
Max Pressure	1027.9
Min Pressure	990.8
Ave Max Temp	11.4
Ave Min Temp	5.7
Ave Temp	8.6
Max Temp	19.3
Min Temp	0.2
Ave Humidity	84
Max Humidity	100
Min Humidity	21
Max Wind Gust	38.2m/s, 74.2knots, 137.4km/h
Total Rainfall	131.8
Highest in 24 Hours	21.4
Total days with rain	17
Total days > 1mm	13
Total Sunshine	149.5