

January 2012

WANDERER

THE MACARONI EDITION

brought to you by the Fatties and Moaners of Marion

From the Editor

No good idea goes unchallenged. When challenged, however, a good idea becomes great. A good idea would be to tell our loved ones at home about the awesome animals of Marion. A good idea would be to show them that there is more to Marion and that we have experienced most of it. But a great idea would be to present it through Otto's Lens. Be awakened to a new world that we would normally walk on, sit on and stand on without any notice.

Through all the previous editions of the Wanderer we have had data on the temp, rain and wind. In this edition we will get to know the instruments and challenging maintenance procedures behind them as Zodwa and Shadrack take you through a typical day.

Not many people experience mires on their way to work every day. On Marion we talk about mires like you would talk about traffic. Our expert has extensive knowledge and experience on the subject. Bertus assesses a mire like a pro golfer would assess a green before a putt.



The word "mire" is one that is used on a daily basis by the islanders on Marion. It serves as a dinner conversation, a warning, or an entity that is cursed and complained about around drinks in the braai room. This also allows some harmless banter that is exchanged between team members while reflecting on a particular bad "mire" experience. However, in my experience people back home are not familiar with the word. Reactions like "Huh? Mire?" and questions like "What is that?" compelled me to take some time to convey the entity on Marion island which is (THE MIRE).

The reason why I refer to a mire as an entity is because I for one, struggle to understand the reason for its existence on the island and fail to see where it fits together in the big picture that is Marion Island. Upon thinking (rather subjectively I have to add), I came to the obvious conclusion in the entity which is a mire, there exists a hidden agenda filled with malignant intent. (Ha-ha)

According to a dictionary, mire has the following definition:

mire/mī(ə)r/

Noun: A stretch of swampy or boggy ground.

Verb: Cause to be stuck in mud.

Synonyms: *noun.* mud - ooze - slough - sludge - morass - bog - slime

This dictionary extract will surely define the word for any reader that until now was still unsure what a mire is.

During my time on the island, I have identified and categorized a few different mires. These will be explained to the best of my ability. (Once again I implore the reader to accept this as a subjective perception.) Each has different qualities and characteristics, but they all serve a common purpose: to suck in towards the center of the planet.

#1 The Evident Mire

Once you get the opportunity to go hiking on Marion Island you will undoubtedly come to know these traps. These seem to have a pale yellow colour and once you get to know them, it is easy to spot where their boundaries are. It goes without saying that an island newbie will unfortunately have to learn the hard way, how to spot these traps. They are found over the entire island and come in all shapes and sizes. Unless you enjoy wet socks and cold feet..., stay well clear of these areas.

#2 The Waterbed Mire

These are quite interesting as far as I am concerned. They are the only type of mire that appears to be dangerous to walk across. The general mushy and sludgy visage of these mires is enough to make you refrain from walking across them. What makes them interesting is that they do not seem to ingest you! In spite of the relative safety, these mires seem to provide a very un-comfortable feeling while walking over them. The ever-brooding feeling that the ground underneath you is going to give away, compels you to be careful. They have certain slow bouncy attributes, hence the name, waterbed mires. I for one do not want to know what will happen to the poor islander when the metaphorical bed breaks... These are not so common and are found in ditches, next to slopes and around rivers.

#3 The Secret Agent Mire

As the reader might deduce from the name of this particular mire, these stealth fighters work for the "Great Magnet" and have only one goal: to sneak attack the unsuspecting islander. These mires are perfectly camouflaged and manifest themselves as luscious, solid looking green grass. Beware, do not let them catch you off guard! Once you are in strike range, it is too late! It has been scientifically proven that these stealthy traps strike faster than a "pofadder". The unsuspecting islander will be enjoying his hike totally oblivious to the danger surrounding him or her... and GULP! This is the scene you can look forward too.



According to the more experienced islanders and more particularly the field assistants there is a method of walking to avoid falling into mires. Apparently, the trick is to "glide" across the mires. Since I cannot fly and neither have a jetpack with me while I am hiking, I presume this is a skill that is exclusive to only certain people. Believe me when I say I have tried gliding, I have tried walking unbelievably slowly, I have even tried running through the mires, all with the same miserable result. The only method of crossing a mire with relative success is to crawl on all fours. This is obviously not a very attractive way to cross, but hey, whatever works. The secret agent mires are usually found on plains that look very attractive to walk across. Beware and do not be fooled.

#4 The Toxic Mire

This particular model is fortunately easy to identify by two of your senses. They look very dangerous from a distance and you can smell it when you are in the vicinity. There is however a catch, the boundaries to these toxic traps are very fickle and it is very easy to misjudge where it begins or ends for that matter. One misjudged step or one optimistic leap can result in horribly stinky boots, socks and pants. Believe me you don't want to go to a hut in toxic clothes. It does not matter how much the other people in the hut like you, you will be the most unpopular islander there and you will be voted off the island first. These mires are usually found in and around penguin colonies so be extremely vigilant when navigating through them.

These are the four different types of mires that I have encountered and identified throughout Marion Island. There is no question in my mind that this island is one of the most special and beautiful places on the planet. However not being able to walk 20 meters without literally being sucked in 20 times has the tendency to compromise any sense of compassion for the island. The feeling that the island will not let you progress is utterly frustrating, especially when you fall every step of the way and your companion moves seemingly unfazed past you over the mires.

Falling in about a hundred mires on a hiking trip has the ability to demoralize and frustrate, but I ensure you that Lady Marion has the ability to suddenly diminish these thoughts and create a prevailing sense of bliss.

To end on a light note: No matter how wet your socks and pants are, how cold your feet are, not even if a particular wicked mire swallowed one of your gum boots, I promise you will have a good laugh about it that night.

Mashudu the Gogga???

I still remember the last the day that we arrived in Cape Town harbour in the early morning in mid-May 2009 at the end of the M 65 expedition. It was a relief to me that I was out of this place on the M 65 expedition. I remember telling who ever came around me that I would not come back to this place again. There were many reasons behind that decision until late last year when I received an invitation to come down again and start looking at a unique opportunity with new inspiration for what I am about to embark upon.

Here I am in the very same place it all started since my last expedition. This is the one place, which made me realise that everything is possible when one believes. I have assisted on a number of projects during my time as an undergraduate, from 2005 and beyond. It got to a point that I hardly got some time out of the lab since my return to the University of Venda (Univen) in 2005 after a drop out of studies in 2004. At times, I had to sleep in the lab in the Univen



zoology department to get the work done, but ironically, whatever I thought was hard work at the time, it was not experience enough when I come in Marion on 2008. I struggled big-time that when the Red Taxi (*M.v SA Agulhas*) left Marion for Cape Town in May 2008, I was not even sure why I had to stay behind on the island. I remember being joyful with others when the boat disappeared between the Islands, where as deep down in my heart, I was in big conflict with whether I was going to make it or not.

With the entire lesson, which I learnt on my last expedition, I now see myself a different individual who has grown up and became much more focused. I prepared myself for the interview for this trip which happened in February. With Shady and Ryan from my last expedition (M 65), it is very easy for me to be adjust to the new team. I am in this place again with different objectives, working on a different project. On the last expedition, I generally worked with paddies, mice and invertebrates whereas this time I am a gardener (plants). Special thanks to Kersti, who is assisting me in the lab and out in the field. Since the very day we met in Erika's office (CIB), we have now developed an amazing working relationship, which is now the core of our success in this place.

I was very humbled to take over from Allen whom I was together with in the same lab in Univen. I still remember his joyful dances when he was waiting for his 2 minute flight from the Island to SA Agulhas sailing to RSA. He was the 14th Venda to be part of an over-wintering team on Marion Island (Wall of Fame photos). Of all the 14, I am the only one who is over-wintering the 2nd year where as for those who managed to visit this place, it was either for take-over or other *voyages* except for over-wintering.

Now its January, it is unbelievable to see how this expedition has flown by. However, there is still some work to done here. I am still as excited as I was upon the arrival in mid-April 2011 and it feels good to be on this privileged place and I am cherishing every moment of the time down-under.

Mashudu

Weather or not?

A Day in the life of a Metkassie

A lot of people think that being on an overwintering expedition as a Metkassie it's all about sitting around and doing nothing. Well let me give you a closer look at what being a Metkassie is all about and walk you through a day of Metkassie duties.

Sea Temp

This is the measuring of the temperature of the sea, done at the crane point by a Metkassie on duty on Day Shift. You drop a Thermometer in the sea for about 10 minutes and take the reading for the Main Synop at 06:00 Zulu. You also check the state of the Sea i.e. Swells & wind waves.



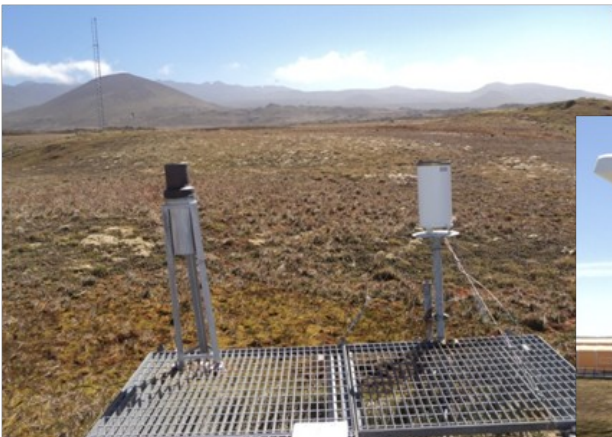
Above: *Crane point for sea temp*

Pictured below: *a typical swell*



Met Camp

This is where the Stevenson screen is situated. In it, it has Maximum, Minimum, Dry Bulb & wet bulb thermometers. We take the maximum & minimum readings and reset both the thermometers. There is also the Ranguages, the Automatic & the Manual, we change the manual so that we can measure the rainfall before the 06:00 Main Synop.



Above: *Ranguages*

Below: *Stevenson screen with Thermometers*



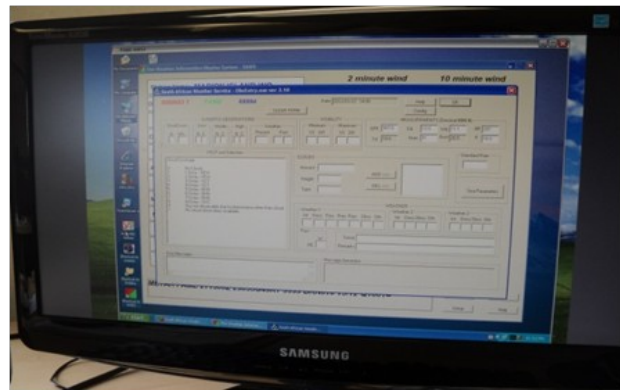
The clouds

We check what type of clouds are in the sky, how much of 8 octas is covering the sky, what is the height of the base for that cloud group.



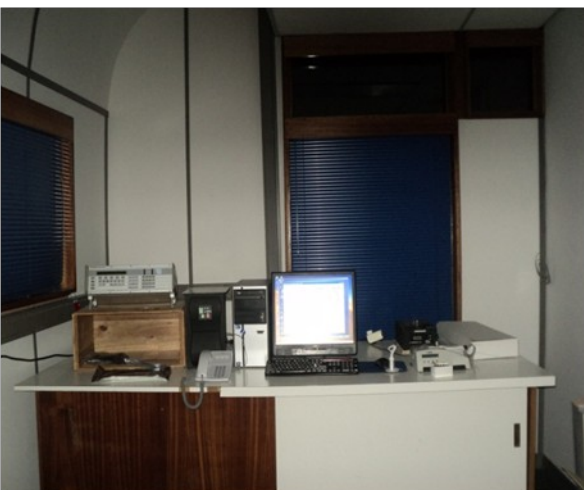
Synops / Meters

This is where the information that we have collected outside goes.



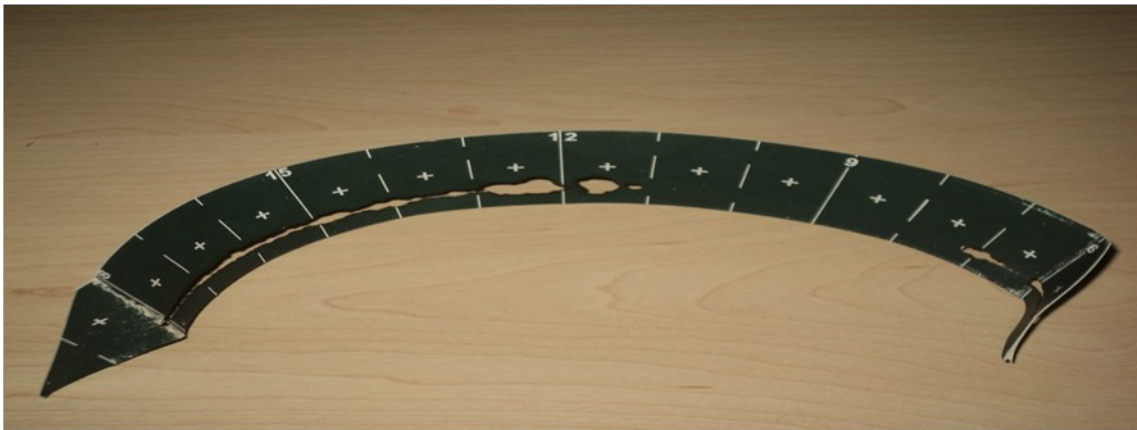
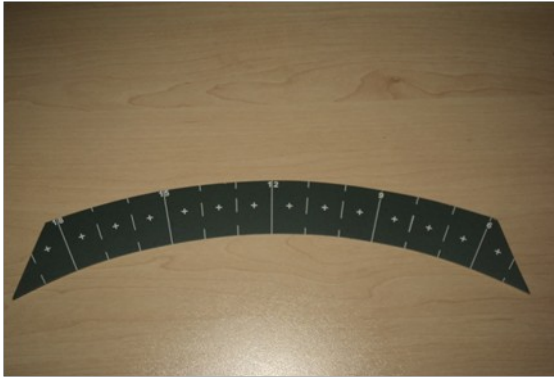
Upper air

This is when we release a balloon that has a Radiosonde attached to it



The Sunshine chart

This measures the approximate time of sunshine for the day & it must be replaced at the end of the shift but only when the sun is out of the way. (laughs)



This is what we Metkassies get down to on a day shift. Well I hope that this was very informative & that it has shed some light about us Metkassies and the Metkassie duties. It has been a pleasure putting this article together and more pleasurable performing those duties for the duration of the expedition. I must say this has been the coolest job in my entire life and I wouldn't mind doing it again *wink*.

By Zodwa Miya - Metkassie

WHEN BREAKS!

Monday morning is the day we do skivvy (cleaning of the base) on Marion Island. It was one of those windy days on Marion (19/12/2011). I just got out of the kitchen door into the cargo area when I saw Zodwa holding the R M Young sensor, I froze for a moment. My reaction was that I just replaced that sensor last week. The sensor was completely blown of the mast onto the mires (area of wet swampy ground). On its flight down the propeller hit the catwalks and it was damaged. The records show that the damage happened at 04:30sast. Knowing the winds on Marion I had to wait for a day to be able to fix it. I also saw it as a chance to replace the wind mast. I started moving all the equipment down to the meteorological camp and the following morning when winds subsided, I asked available team members to help lower the mast. I brought the tools to take the old one apart and assemble the new one. It took me a while to transfer all the stay wires to the new mast but in about 2 hours the mast was done and ready with the new 4 core cable prepared and ready for use. I connected the R M

IT Young and did all the wiring thereof and it was then good to go. After thorough checking that all was in place and the readings of the multimeter are correct, I got onto the 2-way radio and called the office to activate the winds. I asked the junior meteorologist to read the values and they were corresponding. Now I'm happy, mission accomplished. Man power was needed to raise the mast. It was raised and to my surprise the stay wires were short. I asked myself how is this possible because I used the same wires and to the same direction as the previous mast. The winds were picking up and none of the stay wires were hooking. I then went for the spanners and started loosening the crossby clamps. I managed to get 3 anchors and the fourth; I had to extend the anchor point. All stay wires were on the hooks and it was time to align the mast. Time is 14:15 and we have winds .

Two days later another project started, which was to replace the automatic rainfall gauge. The stand was so rusted and it was just a matter of time before it would collapse. This was an easy task but still with it, one must be careful. It took me just over an hour to setup and complete the mission.

It is now 2012 and I was looking forward to having a problem free year, which of course did not happen. The morning

of the 7th at 00:15 the R M Young sensor was hit by a bird into pieces. Zodwa was on shift and when she was busy preparing for upper air ascent she noticed that the wind was 2 knots where as outside, it was pumping at least 35 to 40 knots. She then waited for daylight to come up and for the rain to go. At around 02:30am in gusty winds, she went to check what was wrong. She came across the tail of the sensor some 30m away from the mast. At that moment she knew it is damaged and she left me a lovely letter. As I walked through the tube, I noticed the sensor was swinging badly. I then knew that it was damaged. The winds were not helping because they were pumping. With the help of the wind sock, I could check the strength and decided to take the mast down and put up new sensor. The team members helped me to do all the work and at 10:15 the sensor was up and running. We are now on our last one and we hope and pray that no bird will fly into the sensor until the ship arrives in April

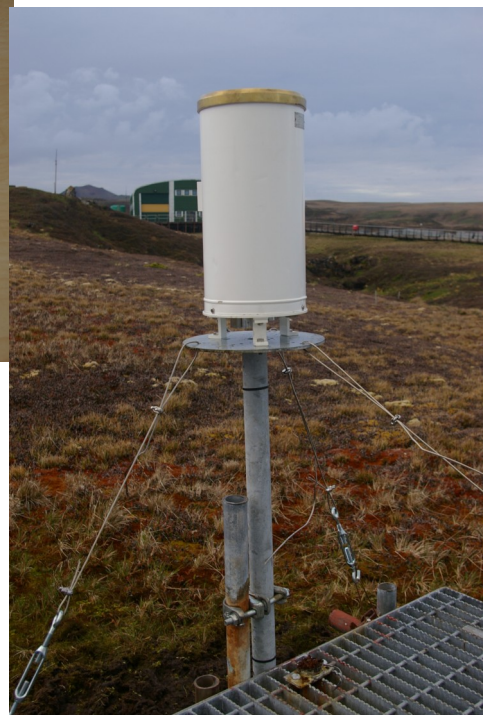


Above: Old mast on the left new mast on the right



Above: The R M Young wind sensor after bird strike

Below: New installed Automatic rain gauge



“Stretching his hand up to the stars, often a man forgets the flowers at his feet.”

– Jeremy Bentham

Marion Island clearly has its stars, and I’m not talking about the clear nights. Macaroni penguins take centre stage at the Amphitheatre whilst wandering albatrosses roam the mire-strewn plains of Goney, attracting the attention of passers-by with bubble clicks and wide spread wings. The seals lounge about on the beaches and nearby slopes like royalty, making it very clear that you are an intruding peasant and curse you for waking them up from their afternoon siestas. “Off with his head (or leg)!” I can sometimes hear them say. I think I’ve been here too long. Let us not forget the killer whales, their stardom heightened by their mysterious lives in the deep blue. All these large creatures and their seemingly obvious ways of living are the first to receive our praise and attention, and will forever live their lives in the spotlight.

There are, however, many amazing little worlds on Marion that we so hardly get to be a part of simply because they’re too small. I brought along with me, on this adventure of a lifetime, a very special friend who I’ve become very fond of - my Canon 100 mm f2.8 macro lens. These are some images of life through her eyes.



Above: This is the flightless moth *Pringleophaga marioni*, endemic to Marion Island. Thousands of years ago the ancestors of this moth could fly and were blown in the direction of a newly formed volcanic chunk in the Southern Ocean. The relentless winds made flying too dangerous and slowly after many generations wings became useless and the moths resorted to walking.

By Otto Whitehead



Above: A macroscopic Antarctic Tern's eye-view of *Lycopodium susurrus*.

By Otto Whitehead

Below: The common chickweed *Cerastium fontanum*. It's not native to the island, but together with garlic flakes and balsamic vinegar it makes a lovely salad.





Above: An intimate look at a prickly ball of *Acaena magellanica*. The tiny arrows on the end of each spike, which carries the plant's seed at the bottom, attaches to the feathers of birds, fur of seals and clothes of humans. What a clever dispersal strategy.

Below: One of many lichen species on the island grows on the mouse-walk at the old base.





Above: Perching on a *Blechnum* bud a fledging aphid (?) gets ready to experience the life of an albatross.

Below: This moss definitely is a pretty flower thing.





Above: Not much is known about the mushrooms of Marion Island except that they have one hell of a kick! Just joking, this species is thought to belong to the genus *Galerina* and is deadly poisonous.

Below: The red eyelash fungi has only been found at three sites around the island; Kaalkoppie, Azorella Kop and Van Den Boogaard.





Above: A caterpillar of the small flightless moth *Embryonopsis halticella* munches happily away on a blade of *Poa cookii*. These caterpillars spend their entire days on these plants until they are ready to cuddle up in a warm silk-lined cocoon sleeping bag where they'll chill out and think about how great it's going to be to fly.

Below: A flower of the coastal plant *Cotula plumosa* which can be found in the many salty cracks of Marion.





Above: A stem flower of the prickly ball plant *Acaena magellanica*.

Below: A lichen of the genus *Cladonia* peers out from a macroscape of hepatics.





Above: A flower of broadleaved *Callitriche antarctica* plays host to a wandering down feather.

Below: Psychedelic lichens like this carpet the volcanic rocks around Marion.





Above: A spider wades through the busy undergrowth of a macroscape.

Below: A miniscule flower of the invasive *Sagina procumbens* peers out from the crowd.





Above: A newly sprung bud of the small fern *Blechnum penna-marina* begins its life with an unfurling yawn.

Below: An aphid-like creature likes to be roaming across a yellow-like sea of, like, lichen, ekse.





Above: The gemmae cups of the liverwort *Marchantia berteroana* are home to the plant's little kids, gemmae, and when the time is right and the rains come, they'll get splashed out and fall to the ground where they'll develop into new little liverworts.

Below: A before and after portrait of the flowering herb *Ranunculus biternatus*.





Above: If you can tell us what this little red thing is then we'll send you a coconut quality street sweet via albatross mail.

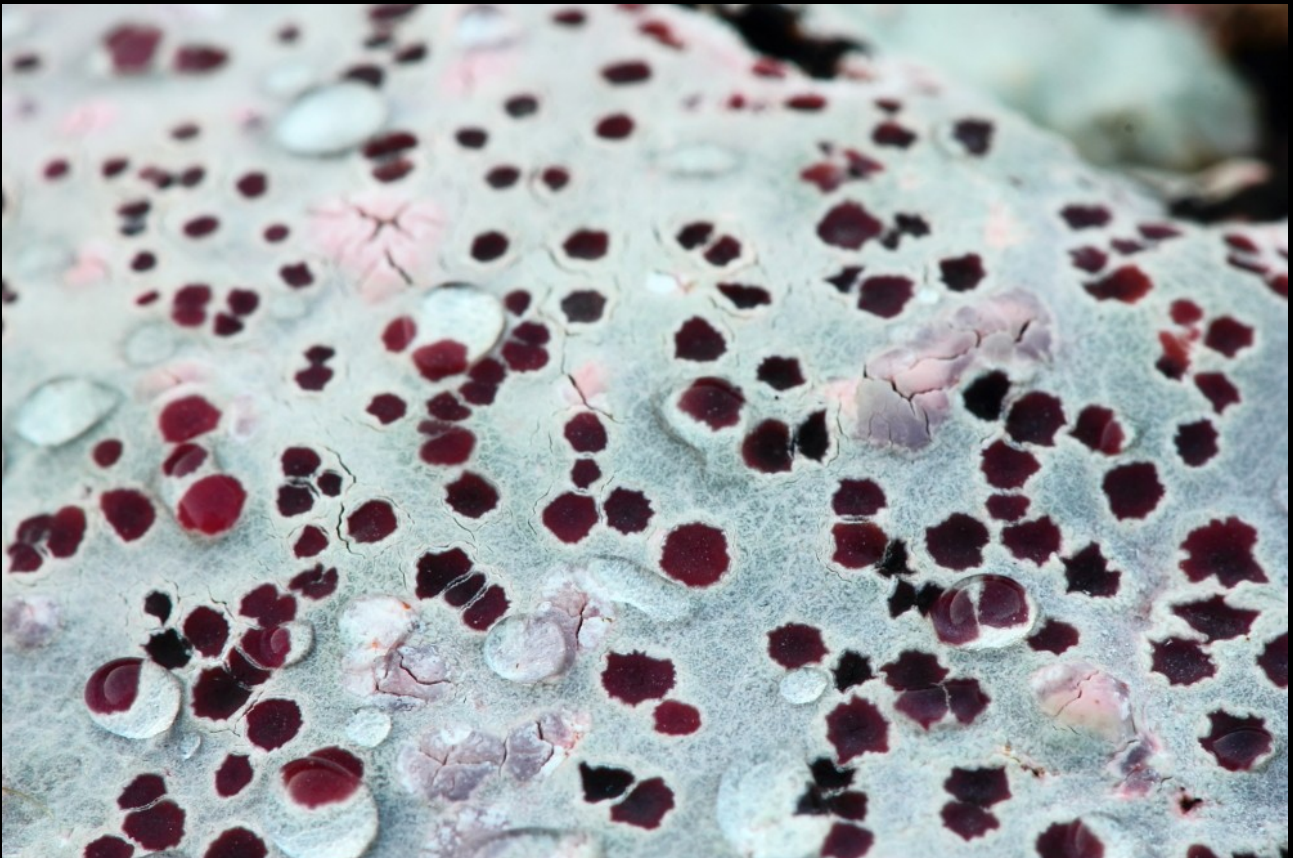
Below: This is *Matchstickitus lionensis*. Just joking, it's a little sprout from one of the 100 or so species of moss on the island.





Above: A little creature wades through the intricate macroscape of an *Azorella* cushion.

Below: Another psychedelic lichen spreads its colourful presence over a streamside boulder.



Monthly statistics January 2012

Ave. Max Pressure	1010.2
Ave. Min Pressure	998.3
Ave. Pressure	1004.3
Max Pressure	1025.6
Min Pressure	977.4
Ave. Max Temp	11.7
Ave. Min Temp	5.3
Ave. Temp	8.5
Max Temp	19.0
Min Temp	1.4
Ave Humidity	83
Max Humidity	100
Min Humidity	32
Max Wind Gust	43.2m/s
Total Rainfall	122.6
Highest in 24 Hours	25.2
Total days with rain	22
Total days with 1mm or more rain	19
Total Sunshine	189.8