

http://firstascent.co.za/view-newsletter.php?Var_NewsletterID=48
<http://www.firstascent.co.za/news.php?id=466>

01 March 2011

And the Forecast is...Minus 17 degrees!



Written By – Paul Lee Expedition leader

Minus 17 Degrees, wind speed 190 kph, visibility zero: commonplace blizzard conditions here in Antarctica. 11 men and women comprise the over-wintering team which will spend the 50th anniversary year of SANAE at the South African Base.

We approached First Ascent September 2010 and they did not hesitate to assist with clothing. First

Ascent is uniquely South African and supportive of any unusual expedition; it makes us proud that we can come to the Antarctic dressed in South African-made gear. The team consists of scientists, technicians and the doctor, Abigail Paton, each fulfilling a lifelong dream and goal in spending a year on the most inhospitable, brutal and overawing continent in the world. Situated about 170 km inland on a snow buried mountain (Norwegian name: Vesleskarvet) the base is surrounded by splendid snow covered peaks whose serene beauty on the rare still day hide the dangers of crevasses and the unceasing threat of severe weather.

The team left Cape Town on the 8 of December, 2010. Now March and winter darkness is fast approaching The Supply ship SA Agulhas will only return next summer in 2012 to bring in the new team. Meanwhile there is plenty of work to be done. Scientific research includes meteorological and climatic observations, aurora recording, cosmic and seismic ray research, continental drift analysis. Much of the information gathered here is needed for your daily lives to function back home. The technical team is also constantly busy, monitoring instruments, maintaining generators, co-ordinating water, electricity, heat, fire surveillance, emergency evacuation schedules and field excursions. All this is the life force of the base, without which we would not be able to survive and certainly no science would take place.

Added to this agenda is time for exploration and sport. Some cross country skiing, hikes, trips to nearby mountains and of course a chance to put the First Ascent clothing to the test. When the weather is wild, which it is most of the time, we are confined to base, which is large and comfortable, has a gym, theatre, sauna, library, climbing wall and a well stocked kitchen, although the fresh veggies and sushi is a bit lacking! A local telephone number on the 021 code is a marvel of satellite technology and makes calling home affordable, while internet and email is at the click of a mouse. Think how long it took for Scott and Shackleton to get a message home!

We keep a family lifestyle and the team meets daily for dinner at 7 pm, 2 members being assigned to cook the feast. You are in charge of your own breakfasts and lunches. We roast our own espresso coffee, bake bread and of course the braai happens on the weekends, but the rugby is missing as we have no DSTV. Suppose we can't have it all. Oh and I mustn't forget we have to clean the base, process our sewage, recycle our waste and get on with the mundanely of laundry and internet banking, just like home.

So the hair grows longer and the beards more ridiculous, the daylight hours recede and we wait in earnest for the first aurora australis (it should be a good year) and the burgeoning blizzards of the Antarctic winter.

For more info <http://antarcticadventure.yolasite.com/about-us.php>