

## UNCLOS Continental Shelf Project – Arctic Ocean – Update #3



(March 5, 2009)

Thursday, March 05, 2009

Work continues at what seems like a hurried pace. Last year we arrived here in Eureka later and were here for a longer time, but we were also supporting the NRCan seismic survey. This year the focus is to get on the ice sooner in order to take advantage of good weather that normally accompanies cold weather and get as much sounding time in as possible on what looks like a more ambitious bathymetry program. On the other hand, the days are short and cold earlier in the year. Equipment doesn't want to run at 40 below and becomes very temperamental, unruly and unreliable. It seems like the most reliable pieces machinery we have are our own fragile human bodies. As we toil in the cold, Mike Black has given us an Ethiopian proverb that could apply – it says “A man who doesn't have a donkey will soon become one”.

By now we are hitting our stride as far as unpacking and sorting our gear goes. At the end of last season, everything was meticulously packed into the three twenty foot shipping containers just as tightly as could be and priority given to the order in which it would fit into the available spaces. This means that we now have to take EVERYTHING out in order to have any kind of access to whatever it is we might want at any given time. The dangers of leaving stuff piled outside range from having it blow away, to having it drifted under by blowing snow, to having it peed on or rummaged through (or both) by wolves that pass in the night.



Unpacking the containers

Photo by Mike Black



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This year, the original three containers have been joined by four more sent up on the summer sealift along with the two truckloads / Hercules aircraft loads of additional gear we have sent up in-between the sealifts. As we unpack the containers and arrange the gear into loads that will fit on aircraft to be sent out to the ice-camp we are building near Ward Hunt Island, we are already thinking about the challenges of end of season packing and how to improve our packing. All this gear, the seven shipping containers and two explosives magazines used in the 2008 seismic survey have to be relocated to Resolute for next season. We know we have more stuff than will fit inside all seven containers any-which-way they get packed. Furthermore, the containers cannot be fully loaded anyway or they will exceed the 10000 pound capacity of the crane used to move the containers, to get them on a Hercules or down to the beach and onto the sealift.

One thing that is becoming apparent is the difference in weight between the new Polar Haven tents that were delivered too late for use during the 2008 season and the ones we rented last year from a Resolute-based outfitter. The framework of the new tents is made of steel so is heavier than the rented ones which were aluminum. The reverse is true for the cover material where the Polar Haven tents we did use last year and stored during the summer are heavier than the new ones. This probably means that last year's did not get a chance to dry properly and we can only assume that we won't get that done again this year. Heated floor space is at a premium in Eureka and what exists is almost entirely covered with vehicles or equipment. These tent blankets are huge (50' x 16' or x 20' or x 24') and heavy and there is just no way to properly spread them out for the required amount of time to fully dry during the short time we have after tear-down.



Polar Haven tent components

Photo by Mike Black