UNCLOS Continental Shelf Project – Arctic Ocean – Update #7

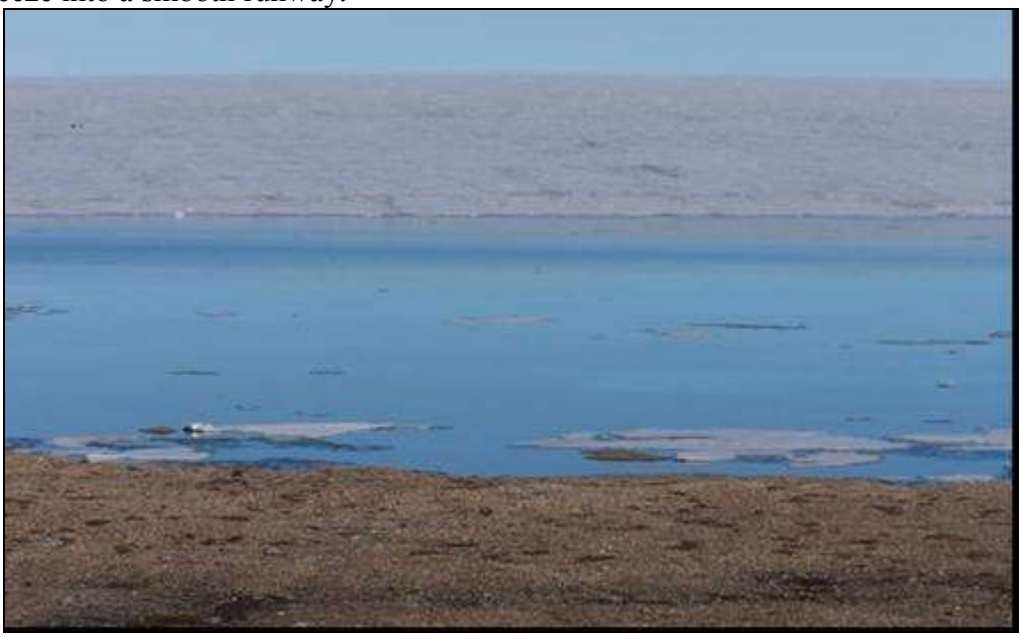
The Runway is the key to establishing & supplying the camp – and getting everything back out.

In the past we would look for "leads" where the pack ice had broken apart the summer before and then refrozen. If a lead refroze in October there would be five feet of ice by early March – and a perfect runway with only the odd drift across it to be knocked down with a drag behind a skidoo.

This is no longer the case There is more first and second year ice and for the most part it a jumble. The leads are no longer a safe runway because they may only be a few weeks old. In addition, the ice moves about all winter, creating new pressure ridges and new leads.

This forced the 2008 camp to be set up on shore-fast ice - that is, ice that is attached to the land and not in motion.

We checked out camp site locations on the shore-fast ice during the summer and the Ward Hunt site had an area of melt water between Ward hunt Island and the Ward Hunt ice shelf which would freeze into a smooth runway.



What looks like land on the far side of a lake is actually the Ward Hunt ice shelf.

The runway area looks different in March. There is more than a foot of snow on the ice that needs to be moved but under the snow, the calm water of the summer has frozen into smooth ice.

The initial flights in landed up on the ice shelf on skis and taxied down to the area of the camp. One reason was that with the sun very low on the horizon Ward Hunt Island casts a long shadow and the planned runway fell in those shadows and snow drifts were not visible. This was how the

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BobCat came in and was put to work creating the ice runway. The crew worked it 24 hours a day in shifts to carve out the runway. When 2000 feet was finished and the BobCat was working the last 700 feet the DC-3 landed, unfortunately blowing a tire on the landing. Bob carried on working while the tire was changed – but that is another story.

The runway needs to be 120 feet wide which is too wide for the snow blower to blow the snow to the edge of the runway in one pass. The procedure is to start in the centre and blow towards the edges and re-blow until the edge is reached. The snow is so dense that only a 2-3 feet can be cut off in each pass – so it is a slow process but the end result is a runway that can take planes on wheels and no huge banks on the sides – to catch snow the next time it blows.