

UNCLOS Continental Shelf Project – Arctic Ocean – Update #8



March 21, 2009

There were 25 of us in the 60 seats on the plane plus an Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) team, 4 gravity meters with their own seats and everyone's Arctic kit on a chartered flight from Ottawa to Alert. Fifteen were part of the AUV team that will be staying in Alert while 5 Danes, hydrographers George Schlagentweit and John Mercuri and Alain Belzile (NRCan) will be going on to the Canadian Hydrographic Service (CHS) ice camp at Ward Hunt Island via Eureka. Dick MacDougall and Julian Goodyear from DFO and Janice Lang, a Defence Research and Development Canada (DRDC) photographer will stop in Alert to observe the AUV experiments – then go to the CHS camp at Ward Hunt Island.

The flight from Iqaluit to Resolute was in clear weather and there was a surprising amount of open water in both Foxe Basin and Lancaster Sound. The good weather held as we went over Eureka and Lake Hazen and the spectacular snow capped mountains of Ellesmere Island.

We arrived in Alert in -38C temperatures and were met by a small bus. While one group went up to the living accommodations the rest of us stayed at the runway – the geodetic survey and Canadian Hydrographic Service staff went to the “Hilton” to calibrate the seismic instruments- and the 3 of us scheduled to stay in Alert as well as the Danes who were going on to Eureka and then on the Ward Hunt ice camp stayed at the runway and watched the plane being unloaded, intent on getting our baggage. In 2008 the charter flight unloaded freight but forgot the baggage.

As we were shutting down a Kenn Boek Air DC-3 landed. It was arriving from Calgary with an airborne gravity team of 1 Canadian and 2 Danes who are also working on the Canadian and Danish UNCLOS programs. This is the same turbo DC-3 that crashed on take off from a glacier in Antarctica in December 2007. While we were standing on the runway waiting for baggage, the second DC-3 came in from Ward Hunt Island to deliver Tim Janzen in time to go out on the jet and be home in Burlington, ON for the birth of their 3rd child and to take the 5 Danes, George Schlagentweit, John Mercuri and Alain Belzile to Eureka.

The first DC-3 is flying airborne gravity and magnetic surveys all the way out past the North Pole. It is flown by Ray Cameron from Prince Albert Saskatchewan – co pilot Gavin Baird of Penticton, BC. Ray says he is a year younger than the aircraft which was built in 1942. The aircraft has been completely rebuilt by Basler Aviation – the huge piston engines replaced by turbine engines.

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Ray and the DC-3 returned from three months in Antarctica at the beginning of March where it had been flying gravity, magnetics and ice penetrating radar. All except the radar is mounted for this joint Canadian-Danish mission from Alert, Eureka and Station Nord in Greenland.

The next day they installed a “stinger” for the magnetometer on the tail of the aircraft. This device extends about 15 feet behind the aircraft. It was a cold job with many small screws to be started by numb fingers.



At -38°C face masks, moustaches, eyebrows and even eye lashes gather frost. Our DRDC photographer calls it “Arctic mascara”. Julian Goodyear’s handlebar moustache attracts Janice’s camera. Oddly enough his solar panel makes less frost than my head with a little hair on it.

Dick MacDougall.