

Project Cornerstone

Newsletter #15:

6 April, 2009 (Monday)



The three souls who were stuck out on the ice, Alex, Alban and Peter, returned last night just moments after I sent off the Newsletter. They all said they had a good time out on the ice. Peter said it was his first time at a camp on the sea ice, and he wouldn't have missed it. Here are the three of them after practising their igloo-making skills.

The camp was about 180 nautical miles north of here at a latitude of $85^{\circ} 30'$. Its purpose is to be a refuelling station for the helicopters that are flying for the Danes. The fuel (in drums) is flown into North Camp by Twin Otter from Alert. You can see by the sign that when our guys arrived they more than doubled the population of the town. Jorgen Skafte and Kirsten Christoffersen are the usual residents.



The sea ice drifts with the current and the winds, and while they were there they drifted eastward across the 60 degree longitude line. They joked that they were drifting from Greenland waters into Canadian waters, and they all checked their passports.

Back at Alert the weather this morning was not great. It was foggy, and the visibility was only a quarter of a mile or so. It improved throughout the day, but at 1700 it is still cloudy, and the remnants of the fog remain. The flatness of the lighting made the skidoo trip down to the AUV camp this morning a little more exciting than usual. It was hard to see the bumps coming. Those who have skied in flat lighting will understand the sensation. Luckily, no-one flew off.

The big job today was to get the AUV taken apart, put into crates and taken up to the Spinnaker building. We understand that if we get it ready on time it will go south with the Hercules on Wednesday. Otherwise, it may be here for a month or more. By noon Ron, Darrell, Peter and Dan had most of the pieces in crates, and things looked very promising.

In the afternoon, however, the operation ran into a bit of a snag. Garry, Don, Val, Warren and Nicos went to dismantle the radio repeater – the device that allows us to talk over large distances with our VHF Radios (Handi-talkies). There is a map in Newsletter 2, and the repeater is on the high ground directly east of William Island. It takes only two people to do this job; the others went along to see how it was done. Well, on the way up the hill Garry saw a smudge in the snow that didn't look right, and so he watched it as he drove along. It is important to note here that Garry didn't have his glasses on, the other skidoo was well behind, and the ones riding on the sled were facing backward. As Garry watched, the smudge stood up. It was framed against a cairn, and it was big! A bear! Well, that's not very good, so he turned around, and they beat it for home. Garry reported the sighting to the Station, and the Station made a general announcement that a bear was in the neighbourhood and no-one was to go outside until it had been scared away. This put an immediate stop

to the dismantling of the AUV. Ron, Darrell and Peter returned to the Spinnaker building.

Jim Milne took a skidoo to investigate. (He had the blessing of the SWO, I'm sure.) (See right.) He went up the hill and looked around. He called Garry on the radio and asked him just where he had seen the bear. "Right up at the



Cairn", says Garry. "Well", replies Jim, "There are no tracks up here but wolf tracks."

The Station made another general announcement. The emergency was over.

It appears that a trick of perspective had tricked Garry (and Warren, too, who swore he saw the bear) into thinking that the animal was as large as the cairn. Well, Garry is embarrassed, and the rest of us are highly amused. It will be years – if ever – before he lives down a false alarm like that. The more charitable among us are saying, "Better safe than sorry."

The boys went down to the AUV tent to finish packing up the Explorer. By suppertime it was up at the Spinnaker building and on a Hercules pallet. They are feeling very pleased.

We have to pack up our clothes and other personal gear and deliver our bags to the shipping people by noon tomorrow. This, you realize, is a whole day before the plane leaves. Moreover, I suspect that if the plane is delayed by a day or so, well, that's just too bad for those who like clean clothes. The folks, however, are in going-home mode, and they don't really care about small inconveniences.

As a bit of a filler, let me tell you about the 'Hotbox'. Once upon a time we needed to be able to take a computer out on the ice. And, to keep it working we needed to keep it warm. So, we designed a plywood box that held a small stove made of an aluminum pipe. The chimney was made to screw into the plywood top. It screwed down onto the stove and wedged it in place. The chimney is just below Warren's wrist, and it's a bit hard to see. (Usually, we left the computer inside the box and looked at it through a Plexiglas lid.) The Hotbox was a joint effort between Dave Baade, Colin Ganton and me.



The stove burns charcoal briquettes. Usually it is quite easy to light. It takes just a little Diesel fuel and a match, and the coals light in about 10 minutes. This year Garry, Don and the boys had a devil of a job to light the briquettes and keep them burning. You can see the depths to which they were reduced.

On the other hand, this may just be 'Tease Garry' Day.

Pictures today were by Peter King, Don Mosher and Dan Graham

Best Wishes, Ron Verrall.
We'd like to hear from you.
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http://a76.dk/expeditions_uk/spring_2009/index.html#cornerstone



Whatcha smokin' brother?