OCTOBER 25, 1998
Only 4 Pages? Better than Nothing.
It's a Harsh Continent.

The Antarctic Sun

Published during the austral summer for the United States Antarctic Program at McMurdo Station, Antarctica.

Charlie Blackmer, left, was a lucky one, reaching McMurdo with just one boomerang flight. Others were not as fortunate, with some passengers reaching seven and eight such flights. Photo by Alexander Colhoun.

BOOMERANG!

Delays Bring Ups and Downs, 'Retail Therapy'

by Ginny Figlar

CHRISTCHURCH, NEW ZEALAND — Oversized cold-weather boots worn on downtown streets. A 4 a.m. parade of shuttle buses destined for the airport. Scruffy Americans hunched over computers at Internet-access shops and cafés.

Christchurch residents may have noticed these unusual sights this month as hundreds of United States Antarctic Program participants endured long delays and boomerang flights in their quest to get to McMurdo Station this season.

"I'm beginning to think I'm never going to get there," said Christine Gamble, an ASA employee, frustrated after her second boomerang flight brought her right back to Christchurch. She finally made it to McMurdo after a long, 22-day wait in the garden city.

Just as everything under the sun recently has been blamed on El Niño, Brian Stone, manager of terminal operations for Antarctic Support Associates, said the numerous flight delays and boomerangs can be attributed to the unusual weather patterns caused by La Niña, El Niño's evil twin sister.

"We've had a lot of big delays before," Stone said from his Christchurch office, recalling similar delays in the mid-1980s, when weather was hampered by another big El Niño/La Niña cycle. "It just seems to be compounded (this year) because we have a lot of the support personnel here."

Many Antarctic personnel took advantage of their free time in New Zealand, venturing to Hanmer Springs, Akaroa and Lyttleton for a change of scenery. Fun turned to frustration, however, after passengers spent eight or 10 hours on a boomerang flight and got into a daily cycle of early-morning check-ins.

"I think that's what has made it bad from a passenger stand-

...story continued on Page 3

"Glittering white, shinning blue, raven black, in the light of the sun, the land looks like a fairy tale. Pinnacle after pinnacle, peak after peak, crevassed, wild as any land on our globe, it lies, unseen and untrodden."

Roald Amundsen, after discovering Queen Maud Range in 1911

Photo by Alexander Colhoun

Editor's Perspective

by Alexander Colhoun

Seven months away from the Antarctic slipped by like wind-driven snow racing over the ice shelf, and my return to the ice comes with a mixture of excitement and surprise. Stepping off the U.S Air Force C-141 Starlifter and out onto the pure white snow that crunched under my bunny boots like styrofoam brought back a flood of memories, and for an instant it felt like a dream.

"Back in Antarctica?" my mind questioned. "Could it be this easy?" Easy may not be the right word for many returning participants as we discuss in this premier issue, but the journey never seems to lack excitement.

Returning to the ice was like returning to summer camp with scores of familiar faces and many new ones. Likewise, *The Antarctic Sun* has returned to McMurdo and the United States Antarctic Program with much of its old style but with a few new changes.

Most importantly, *The Sun's* staff doubled with the addition of a second editor, Ginny Figlar, a field-tested journalist whose reporting experience includes time with *The Denver Post*. A recent graduate of the University of Colorado at Boulder School of Journalism master's program, Ginny focused on science reporting and is an excellent addition to our staff. Valerie Carroll will continue her role as *The Sun's* publisher in Denver.

Other changes have us reaching out to you. We are always looking for new correspondents from all stations. If you are interested in writing, you can reach us by e-mail at sun_news@asa.org.

Readers familiar with last season's *Antarctic Sun* will notice changes inside the paper. We have made design changes to make the paper more readable, including the use of more white space and fewer page jumps through stories. We will also add two new sections: Beaker News, Beaker Views and Highway One.

If this leaves you wondering what happened to the rest of the paper this week, you've asked a good question. This season's late start in conjunction with a broken copy machine has delayed our first full issue. As a result, we are unable to deliver a copy to each individual in the program. However, the newspaper is available on the World Wide Web at **http://www.asa.org** and can also be found at your work center.

We appreciate your understanding as we strive to get our work done under unusual circumstances. As they say, "It's a harsh continent." No expression could be more accurate, but no group of people on the planet are better prepared to cope with these challenges than participants of the United States Antarctic Program. ✹

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Web address: http://www.asa.org

Agroup of first-time Antarctic adventurers, silhouetted against sastrugi ridges of snow, made their way around Cape Armitage last Sunday. Photo by Alexander Colhoun.

point," Stone said. "A lot of people have done a whole lot of flying and gotten nowhere."

As many as 360 people were crowding into Christchurch backpacker hotels and bed-and-breakfast inns — and spending their per diem money in Christchurch shops and restaurants. It caused a "bit of a boom" for business, said Jodi Apiata, an employee at Bivouac Outdoor.

boom-er-ang ***n.*** *a flight that doesn't reach its destination and returns passengers several hours later to their point of origin*

"Pretty much every day eight to 10 people come through," Apiata said, adding that sales have been "fantastic" for the beginning of October. While he said that most of the Antarctic program customers seemed "happy to be stuck here," he also said some people had been spending money as a sort of "retail therapy."

Michele Reba, who will be a surveyor technician at the South Pole, purchased a Gore-Tex coat, a fleece vest and gloves from the outdoor store with surplus per diem money. "I've been eating breakfast and that's about it," she explained as the reason for her purchasing power.

"It's been fun to stay," she added. "I mean, we're going to get there eventually."

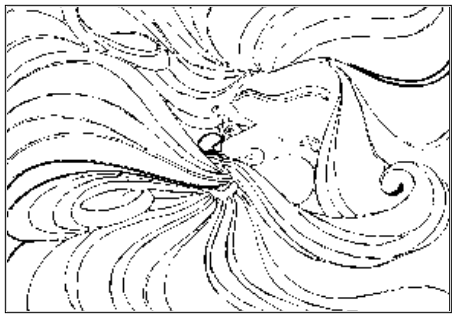
In terms of the impact on National Science Foundation projects and plans, Stone said he wasn't too concerned yet. In just one day, 239 people and 150,000 pounds of cargo made it to McMurdo — more than the total amount of cargo shipped during Winfly, Stone said.

"Two good days of flying and we're back on schedule," he said.

Stone and others in USAP know the realities of trying to get so many people to the most remote continent on Earth. And many of those stuck in Christchurch for a few weeks soon learned that Antarctica is a harsh continent, even before being there.

"It's the cost of doing business to go to Antarctica," Stone said. "It's just kind of the way things go." ✹

Weather Central



by George Howard

As mainbody transportation began this year, the semi-permanent Ross Sea low pressure system wreaked havoc with air and ground operations at McMurdo Station.

Early in the month, the low was situated only a few hundred miles east-northeast of Ross Island and generated local winds as fast as 72 mph. Picking up the snow in its path, the wind brought visibility to zero in many areas outside town. Windchill temperatures dipped below minus 60 F.

By mid-October, the low slowly moved further eastward and winds diminished. Though its journey had lengthened, moisture still made its way across the Ross Ice Shelf to blanket layer upon layer of low clouds over McMurdo. Overall, the season averaged 1.2 degrees Celsius lower than normal.

As we move into November we can expect to see more widely spaced, faster-moving weather systems. What's that mean? A little bit more blue sky.

Waste Management's Top Ten

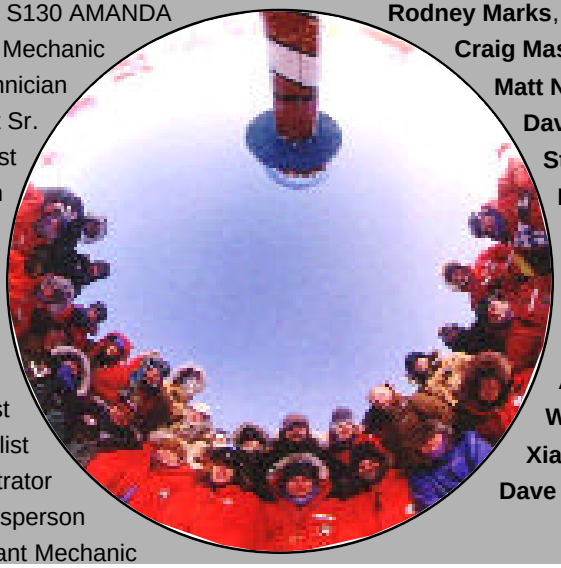
Things to do in Christchurch, New Zealand

10. Walk the Botanic Gardens...last time to see flowers before everything around you is ice and rock.
9. Daily trip to Kathmandu store (20 percent off for USAP).
8. Send e-mail updates to friends and family: "still in Christchurch"... "still in Christchurch"
7. "Only 80 shopping days left before Christmas..."
6. Wait for the movies to change at the theatre.
5. Have "last good meal" at the Dux....seven nights in a row!
4. Lay open-mouthed under Guinness tap at Bailie's.
3. Watch flight crew do another round of shots.
2. Fly four hours south, turn around, fly four hours north...
1. Two words: per diem.

Congratulations!

South Pole Winter Participants

Eduardo Andres, grantee S130 AMANDA
Tommy Barker, Heavy Equipment Mechanic
Johan Booth, AURORA Science Technician
Victoria Campbell, Meteorologist Sr.
Gumby Carlson, Maintenance Specialist
Jon Conrad, Electrician
Carol CrossLand, Materialsperson Sr.
Lis Fano, Meteorologist
Dave Franco, Computer Technician
Nathan Hill, grantee S257 NOAA
Katy Jensen, Winter Site Manager
Rod Jensen, Maintenance Specialist
Mary Lenox, Inventory Control Specialist
Drew Logan, Network Administrator
Diana Logan, Materialsperson
Paul Lux, Power Plant Mechanic



Rodney Marks, grantee S132 SPIREX
Craig Massey, CUSP Science Technician
Matt Newcomb, grantee S132 VIPER
Dave Pernic, grantee S132 CARA
Steffen Richter, grantee S130 AMANDA
Eric Riley, Communications Technician
Jeff Ryan, Equipment Operator/Waste Specialist
Eric Sandberg, grantee S257 NOAA
Robert Schwarz, grantee S130 AMANDA
Will Silva, Physician
Xiaolei Zhang, grantee S132 AST/RO
Dave Zybowski, Cook

photo by Robert Schwarz

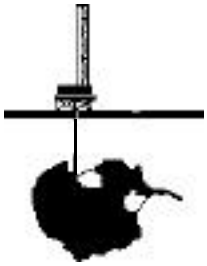
Cape Roberts Project Takes the Field

by Alexander Colhoun

Science News

It's now or never for Cape Roberts.

The project, an internationally organized core-extraction program based on a sea-ice platform off the Victoria Land coast, is poised for what researchers hope will be a breakthrough season of drilling. Scientists will study these cores with hopes of gaining a clearer understanding of global climatic changes of Earth's distant past.



With two seasons completed and limited core removed from beneath 200 meters of ocean, the 1998 season finds researchers at the plate with the bases loaded and a full count.

"It's very important to have a good season this year," said Scott Borg, the National Science Foundation science representative in Antarctica. "If the ice beats us again we have to admit we can't predict sea-ice behavior sufficiently well."

That may be a bitter pill to swallow with more than six years of planning behind the project, but researchers are hopeful that 1998 is the year for success.

"Scientifically, (Cape Roberts) has great promise and we feel well situated for a great season of drilling," Borg said. Project researchers have reason to be optimistic. The sea ice is 2 meters thick, well above the minimum threshold for the rig, and temperatures have been lower, maintaining ice strength and thickness. In addition, massive plastic air bags have been deployed under the ice to decrease ice sag caused by the weight of the 50-ton drilling rig.

Early signs remain positive. By week's end, drillers had removed 60 meters of core and were encouraged by their progress.

All of which falls in sharp contrast to the 1997 field season. Shut down early due to unstable ice conditions, the result of storms at sea that traveled inland, the drilling team and rig were forced to evacuate from the site having drilled just 150 meters of core.

"We fell short of our target, but we were very fortunate with what we did drill," said Peter Webb, the United States representative of the project. Researchers' disappointment in the quantity of core were offset by the quality of material that was recovered, in particular, cores of Quaternary sediments that were entirely unexpected.

In geologic time, the Quaternary period is the shortest and most recent period of the Cenozoic Age, lasting just two million years. "These sediments held quite remarkable records," Borg explained. "At one time during this period a variety of shelled organisms, characteristic of somewhat warmer water, inhabited the sea floor."

The discovery of these marine fossils are helping researchers understand the history of the Transantarctic Mountains and McMurdo Sound's climate history. In particular, researchers now believe that glaciers were advancing into the ocean and later retreating back into the mountains in a long series of cycles. "It was a dynamic landscape," said Webb, "a really interesting environment."

Recovery of the core is merely the beginning of a long research process. Project scientists spent the past summer analyzing core sections and writing up their initial conclusions, culminating in what Webb calls a "spectacular effort" — the publication of a preliminary project report, with a second in-depth analysis due out in January.

For now though, as researchers from all six project-member nations -- Australia, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States -- begin to descend on McMurdo, their minds are occupied with one thought: extract more core. If Mother Nature decides to cooperate, the Cape Roberts project just may hit a grand slam. ✹