

# The Antarctic Sun

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## Breakin' ice is hard to do



Icebreaking was slow-going for the *Polar Sea* yesterday. In the last eight miles of an 11,000-mile journey the ship hit resistant, "rubber" ice, according to U.S. Coast Guard Cmdr. Stephen Wheeler. The crew switched from diesel engines to more powerful gas turbines, which can burn more than 30,000 gallons of fuel a day. The *Polar Sea* is clearing a path for a tanker, freighter and other ships scheduled to arrive later in the season. *See related story on page 2.* Photo by Josh Landis.

### Quote of the week

"Don't we have a gun somewhere?"

- McMurdo Station  
official listening to band  
at Christmas party

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# Scouring old wounds

By Kristan Hutchison Sabbatini  
*Sun staff*

**M**cMurdo has seen cleaner days, and much, much dirtier. When Robert Scott first landed here the hills looked similar to Bratina Island, across the McMurdo Ice Shelf. For Antarctica, it is lush. Clumps of moss and lichen grow along the paths of snowmelt. Shallow puddles at the base of the hill are fuzzy with algae. White clamshells speckle the dark shore, while rocks coat the hillside, holding down the volcanic dust.

But on this corner of Ross Island the layer of black rocks was scraped away to build McMurdo station. Fuel and oil have been spilled on the loose dirt, streaking the spring runoff streams with

**See Clean on page 4**



Environmental manager Bill Gilmore scoops a soil sample from the site of an old fuel pump station to test how clean up of the area is progressing.

# Icebreaker's here

## *Polar Sea* clearing channel

By Beth Minneci  
*Sun staff*

The icebreaker *Polar Sea* was within sight yesterday, and was expected to reach Hut Point late last night after a two-month journey from Seattle.

"We'd hoped to be here sooner," U.S. Coast Guard Lt. April Brown said, "but the ice was not cooperating."

Originally scheduled to arrive Dec. 28, tough ice tossed the big, red ship off schedule just before Christmas. Then, eight miles out of town yesterday, the *Polar Sea's* progress became sluggish again. The ice was soft, but difficult to break through, Brown said.

"It's like hitting a pillow with a hammer," Brown said. "They're riding up on it, but it's not breaking."

At one half-mile an hour, the ship moved thirty times slower than in open water, and about one-eighth its typical speed in ice.

The *Polar Sea* and its 130-person crew left Seattle Nov. 4, stopping off

the coast of Hawaii for supplies and in Australia for fuel and recreation before reaching Antarctic waters Dec. 18.

Similar to its sister ship the *Polar Star*, which was in Antarctica last year, the 399-foot *Polar Sea* is equipped with a science library and five science labs that support experiments and research.

In addition to marine and climate science onboard, the *Polar Sea* delivered a series of automated weather stations to different places in Antarctica. It brought a film crew to the giant icebergs off Ross Islands that are slowly moving north. On the islands and capes closer to McMurdo, several research parties were shuttled around.

For the next several weeks the icebreaker will move back and forth in McMurdo Sound before docking, said U.S. Coast Guard Cmdr. Stephen Wheeler, cutting a channel through the ice for a fuel tanker that is expected



The *Polar Sea's* path to Antarctica.

Jan. 17, and a supply ship, the *Greenwave*, scheduled to arrive Feb. 3.

"We've got a lot of channel work to do before it's cocktail hour," Wheeler said.

The *Polar Sea* is scheduled to depart in February. On its way home, it will stop at the Samoan Island of Ta'u, where it will deploy a remotely controlled vehicle into the center of an active underwater volcano about 2,000 feet below the water surface. The ship is scheduled to reach Seattle mid-May, about a month later than is typical, because of the research in Samoa. ■

## Journey covered 11,000 miles, three continents

*The crew left Seattle Nov. 4, stopping near Honolulu then at Sydney and Tasmania, Australia, before arriving in Antarctic waters Dec. 18. U.S. Coast Guard Cmdr. Stephen Wheeler provided the following e-mail communication from the ship describing full moons, Australian nightlife and rolling seas along the way.*

**Nov. 17:** Friday, southwestward toward Australia. We have been extraordinarily lucky with the weather on this deployment. The first few days out of Seattle were a little lumpy, but not nearly as bad as the North Pacific has the potential to be in November. A few cases of seasickness. Saturday night, officers made pizza on customary pizza and bingo night. Offered helicopter rides as some of the prizes.

**Nov. 20:** Monday, sat off Honolulu, flying several hours to pick up supplies. Weather is steadily warmer and more humid, but the engineers are doing a great job keeping the air-conditioning pumping. Gorgeous on deck, a few tropical rain showers yesterday, and the nights have been knockouts with the full moon shining. Last night, I finally picked up the Southern Cross rising in the southern sky. On our way!

**Nov. 29:** We have Australia on radar. Mother Nature continues to smile on us with good weather. At Sydney, we will take about 500,000 gallons of fuel in the morning, then move to Woolloomooloo Bay (I kid you not, Woolloomooloo), an excellent location, right next to the famous Sydney Opera House. The crew is looking forward to getting ashore for a few days, and they cer-

tainly have earned it.

**Nov. 30-Dec. 6:** Sydney is the big city, heavy traffic, lots of people and lots of things to do and see. We moored right downtown. We were able to take in the countryside outside of the city, and enjoy the clubs, shops and tourist sites in Sydney. Temperatures, high 70s.

**Dec. 8-14:** Hobart, Tasmania, a much smaller town, with more of a picturesque, almost English-countryside kind of atmosphere - pubs as opposed to clubs, and little or no traffic. Kind of like comparing Boston to Maine. Occasional late spring showers in both places.

**Dec. 16:** The Southern Ocean is unique in that there are no land masses to block the wind and seas that roll around Antarctica. We picked up a fairly heavy swell as soon as we cleared Tasmania. Only a few cases of sea sickness and little damage due to heavy rolls, and roll we did. Thirty degree rolls were fairly common. For the last few days, the order of business was to work with one hand and hold on with the other. This is normal for this neck of the woods. In the past few days we have made the transition from Hobart's 60 and 70 degree summertime temperatures to the high 30s. All hands are sporting parkas, warm boots and gloves. Of course, some of those who were born in the more northern climates are still strutting around in T-shirts, reveling in the cooler weather (Give them another day or two). Late tomorrow, we start work rebuilding and servicing remote, unmanned weather stations along the coast, working eastward toward the Ross Sea and McMurdo. ■

**web sites of the week**

# Icebreakers galore

- <http://www.uscg.mil/datasheet/icepolr.htm>  
*Design details and features of the Polar Sea*
- <http://www.natice.noaa.gov/icebreak.htm>  
*Encyclopedia of icebreakers including the Polar Sea, Polar Star and Nathaniel B. Palmer*
- <http://www.fma.fi/english/icebreakers/index.html>  
*Video of Finnish icebreakers at work*
- <http://www.uscg.mil/d9/britol122700.mpg>  
*Video clips of the Bristol Bay breaking ice in the Great Lakes.*

## LETTERS to the editor

In the fifteen years I have been coming to Antarctica, a lot has changed. Two different contractors; the transition from VXE-6 to the ANG; the devolving of responsibilities from military to civilian; the emphasis on waste management and environmental protection; the construction of Cray (and loss of the Thiel Earth Sciences Lab); the unlamented demise of Depression Jamesway and the construction of the dorms; the new Galley, and so on.

One thing, however, has remained the same: the uniformly high quality of the support staff in McMurdo and in the field camps. My field work involves moving a lot of equipment through McMurdo

and into the camps. It involves vehicles and generators, lumber and sleds, camping and living equipment, electronics and computers. I suspect I have had to deal with almost every work center in town.

I have rarely encountered a surly or unhelpful person. People have gone out of their way to accommodate me in the face of shortages, bad weather, bureaucratic obstructions (and yes, perhaps once or twice, poor planning on my part).

I say it in my outbriefs and I say it to all who will listen, but I wanted to shout it from the rooftops: Thank you.

- Sridhar Anandakrishnan  
University of Alabama

## the week in weather

### around Antarctica

#### McMurdo Station

High: 32F/0C  
Low: 14F/-10C  
Windchill: -26F/-32C  
Wind: 29 mph/46 kph

#### Palmer Station (Saturday)

High: 47F/8C  
Low: 30F/-1C  
Avg. temp: 36F/2C  
Wind: 62mph/100 kph

#### South Pole Station

High: -13F/-25C  
Low: -23F/-30C  
Avg. temp: -18F/-28C  
Wind: 23 mph/37 kph

### around the world

#### Saturday's numbers

#### Oslo, Norway

High: 27F/-3C  
Low: 19F/-7C

#### Norway, Mich.

High: 22F/-5C  
Low: 10F/-12C

#### Norway, Oregon

High: 56F/13C  
Low: 39F/4C

#### Norway, S.C.

High: 39F/4C  
Low: 24F/-4C



## HELP! MAKE A CHANGE

The finance department has less than \$30 in quarters to serve about 800 people in bars and the store.

*Bring quarters to the finance office, next to the ATM machines, Bldg. 155*

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## Last call for OUTGOING PACKAGES

# JAN. 5



is the last day parcels weighing 4 pounds or more are guaranteed for air delivery.

Parcels mailed after this date could travel by sea instead of air and may arrive in late March or early April.

This is also the last day the post office will accept any parcels being mailed to the Clothing Distribution Center in Christchurch.

*The above dates do not apply to incoming mail or letter mail.*

*Contact the post office with questions.*



# Clean

from page 1



Dianna Alsup basks in the sun on Bratina Island after taking samples that will be compared to McMurdo Station's soil. Bratina is thought to be much like McMurdo was before people arrived.

rainbows.

The environmental monitoring department is trying to restore McMurdo's environment, if not to the pristine quality of Bratina Island, at least as close as they can get. A group of researchers from Texas A & M University have been developing a monitoring program to see how successful the environmental efforts have been, including comparing soil samples from McMurdo to ones taken on Bratina Island.

Already the monitoring program has documented improvements in the McMurdo environment.

"Things have come such a long way at McMurdo Station that we don't really have as many environmental concerns as we used to," said Bill Gilmore environmental manager on the Ice. "Greenpeace used to camp out up at Arrival Heights. Now they leave us alone."

In 1994, soil samples from around the station pinpointed six hot spots with at least 10,000 parts per million of total petroleum hydrocarbons, 100 times the maximum allowed in the United States. As might be expected, the worst areas at McMurdo were the sites of fuel tanks, pipelines and the helicopter pad.

Tests of 748 soil samples collected last year, including the six hot spots, produced only two readings that high. Most of the readings were below 500 parts per million.

"You can see the (hot spots) disappearing, which is kind of what you expect, since people are being more careful than in the past," said Stephen Sweet, one of the researchers monitoring the soil.

Protecting the environment has become a program-wide task, with every individual helping out, Gilmore said.

"Every drip adds up, especially when you're dealing with a place in the world that's easily impacted," Gilmore said.

Studies done in similar conditions in the Arctic found sea ice traps and carries spilled oil, releasing it in

pockets of open water during the early thaw. The spilled fuel is slower to evaporate and break down in the cold environment, taking decades rather than years to naturally disappear. In the meantime the fuel drains downhill in summer runoff streams to the water, where it can poison fish eggs, kill algae and amphipods and coat the feathers of seabirds.

Gilmore's goal is to surround every fuel container, from the tanks on the hill to the bottles carried into the field, with a secondary containment system. The new fuel tanks are surrounded by buried plastic and berms capable of holding all 2 million gallons in case of a leak. Older tanks are slowly being retrofitted.

"There's lots and lots and we've gotten to a few," Gilmore said.

Preventing new spills is only half the job. The environmental department also tries to identify and clean up old spills, such as the site of the old playhouse.

"It's really contaminated," Gilmore muttered, reading the results of soil samples from the playhouse site. "But we knew it would be."

The playhouse was once used as an equipment repair shop, in the days before mechanics worried about fuel and waste oil draining into the ground. The total petroleum hydrocarbons in the soil samples are as high as 15,000 parts per million. In the United States soil cleanup is mandated if the contamination is above 100 parts per million. The soil from the playhouse site will be removed this season and stored in berms covered with heavy plastic. Eventually Gilmore hopes to bring in equipment to clean the fuel-drenched dirt stored near the fuel tanks.

## **"Greenpeace used to camp out up at Arrival Heights. Now they leave us alone."**

*- Bill Gilmore, environmental manager*

Already the environmental department has removed 2,000 tons of fuel-contaminated soil and 697 drums of fuel, ice and soil from McMurdo in the past two seasons. The drums and fuel were shipped north, while the soil was piled into berms.

The garbage and spilled fuel had been accumulating since the station was established in 1956, Gilmore said. Back then nobody thought about the environment. They dumped garbage on the ice in Winter Quarter's Bay or buried it in the nearby hills.

In the early 1990s the United States Antarctic Program went through a complete environmental turnaround.

"Ever since then everything that's come down has basically gone back, except sewage," Gilmore said.

Sewage is a big exception. The station produces 40,000 to 60,000 gallons of sewage a day, depending on the season. The sewage is chopped into sludge, diluted with brine and water from the Crary Lab and

**see next page**



Eric Bollen shows off the sausages he and other general assistants were charged with picking out of rock piles. The sausage surfaced near the sea ice last week when a bulldozer was digging there. The general assistants wore yellow suits to cover their clothes and surgical masks to protect their lungs. To make fun of the task they wrote "The Sausage Response Team," and drew sausages dancing on their suits.

**from previous page**

released into McMurdo Sound.

"It's like going through a blender and then being discharged," Gilmore said.

A low tidal current spreads the sewage toward Hut Point, coating the bottom with a pile of human waste 120 feet long and 50 feet wide, said Rob Robbins, the scientific diving coordinator who regularly dives in the area. The pile is white from a bacterium that slowly eats it away, taking eight years to digest four months worth of sewage, Robbins said.

Though releasing untreated waste would be illegal in the United States, it is allowed under The Antarctic Treaty, said Jim Smith, research director for Montana Microbiological Services. He has been studying the impacts of McMurdo's sewage on the environment since 1991 and has seen big improvements in the way waste is handled. Food waste used to be washed out with the sewage. Now food waste is separated

**Though releasing untreated waste would be illegal in the United States, it is allowed under The Antarctic Treaty**

and shipped north. The sewage is also diluted with seawater from the Cray aquarium at a rate of 175 gallons a minute.

"It changes the temperature and it dilutes it out 5 to 7 times," Smith said.

The next step is a sewage treatment plant, which the National Science Foundation plans to have built by 2003. The plant would extract water from the sewage, leaving a thick, brown sludge. The process usually reduces the amount of sewage by about 80 percent, Smith said. If the sewage were being stored in an Olympic sized pool, it would take 85 days to fill instead of 20 days. The plant would release 58,000 gallons of treated water and store 12,000 gallons of sludge to be shipped north.

Emptying human waste directly into the ocean has been standard practice for research stations in Antarctica, but now the New Zealand and Australian stations also plan to build sewage treatment plants.

As McMurdo Station gets cleaner, the environmental department is able to look farther afield. Debris was already removed from Marble Point and cleanup continues around Pegasus field. Later this season Gilmore's team will assess an abandoned research station at Cape Hallett in order to plan for its cleanup. Gilmore suspects hazardous waste lingers among the collapsing buildings and debris, putting the nearby rookery of 180,000 pairs of penguins at risk.

"There's direct interaction between the penguins and all the debris that's out there," Gilmore said.

The assessment will determine whether Cape Hallett can be restored to the purity of Bratina Island, or whether some of the landfills and other debris should be left undisturbed.

"The treaty requires you to basically remove everything within reason," Gilmore said. "It does leave a little wiggle room, but (cleaning it up) is the right thing to do." ■

**Highway One**

**What is your New Year's resolution?**



**"Typical, I'm hoping for a happy, healthy New Year for my family and myself."**  
Harold Grandchamp  
*Shuttle driver*



**"To look like a GQ model - lofty goal."**  
Atlas Craig  
*Lead computer technician*



**"Save money for college. That's a big thing."**  
MeLissa Brown  
*Insulation helper*

# Better Dorms and Gardens

A peek behind dorm doors into righteous rooms.

By Sun Staff

Like it or not, and most of us don't, we're grown ups who have to share bedrooms like toddlers and college kids. To cope, some creative, Type-A homemakers turn the situation into an opportunity to dress up their living space. Some mail themselves elaborate lights and tapestries from home. Others use scrap material found on base. The following are a few choice dorm improvements.

## Saucy Buddha

Brian Connell's room is a sanctuary. Colorful lights, Nepalese-style prayer flags and Asian drawings surround a lowly-lit space that soothes visitors with its peaceful air. Add some Eastern music or meditative chants and the senses can easily conjure the smell of incense and sounds of small birds flitting through the fake foliage.

Connell had a vision for his room. He wanted to create a place where people could gather, have a few drinks and relax. He envisioned the transformation of his room into a social lounge, and called it The Saucy Buddha.

He bought the prayer flags and tapestries in San Francisco. The lamps and rice paper prints came from a shop in New Zealand. The wallpaper is brown wrapping paper, found here on station. Connell's symbolic Buddha found reincarnation on the Ice after spending its last life as a bookend.

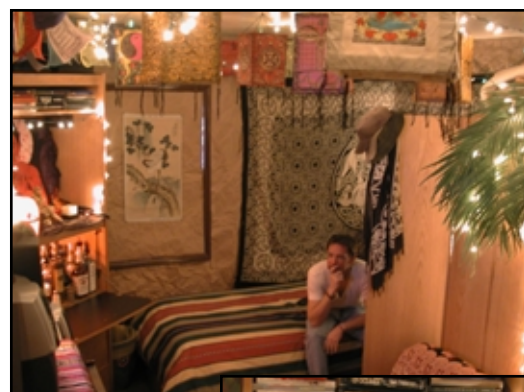
"I had an idea of what I wanted in my head," said Connell, a cargo supervisor. "I wanted an Asian motif... I wanted it to be comfortable, and for everyone to feel welcome here."

It definitely is all of those things, but its status as a party room hasn't quite developed. Last season, Connell turned his living space in Building 155 into a popular after-hours club called the Kit Kat Lounge. This year the social calls in 203-C have been decidedly less energetic.

"I was intending to make it a party place like last year... but I may have given it the kiss of death by making it so relaxing," Connell said.

Not that anyone is complaining.

"I'd seen it come together in stages as he put it together," said Connell's roommate, Manny Gutierrez. "But when I got home from work one day, the door shut, and it was an entirely different world." ■



Brian Connell turned his room into a The Saucy Buddha lounge with the help of colorful lamp shades, rice paper prints and detailed tapestries. The Saucy Buddha is a haven for anyone who wants to stop by.



Stockings hang on Lee Carpenter's fireplace.

## Log cabin

One quiet, romantic evening, Lee Carpenter's girlfriend revealed a wish to him. "We talked about back home and what it would be like to have a fireplace, so I just made one," Carpenter said.

To put the hearth together by Christmas, he worked after-hours in the heavy shop, gathering scraps from locations on station. Pieces of plywood make the eight-foot frame. For the fire, orange, red and yellow Christmas tree lights are pushed through punch-holes in the back. The lights illuminate chunks of a telescope lens, broken in curvy flame-shapes. Between the lights and the lens pieces a fan motor turns a sliced cardboard piece that interrupts the light flow, producing a flickering effect. Saw dust and glue make the stucco finish. Carpenter estimated spending 12 hours on the job.

With the dorm lights down, the faux fireplace glows like a real one.

"When someone I care about asks for something, I try my best to get it," said Carpenter. "She really liked it." ■



# Light and bright

Welcome reads the mat outside the Woods' door and the décor inside repeats it. Primary colors brighten the walls and bed - blue, yellow, and red. Mobiles hang in corners and above shelves, bringing color without crowding.

"These rooms are so drab, dark and dingy, anything with color just makes it a little bit cheerier," said Deb Woods.

The room is so nice they feel little need to go out, instead entertaining friends in their tiny living room, defined by a loveseat and two chairs. Ruffled curtains and velour blinds dress the window and darken the room at night.

Creating a comfortable living space from the small rooms is easier for couples, Terry and Deb Woods agreed. By pushing the single mattresses together into one bed, covered with a blue, yellow and red comforter and pillow and leaving the wardrobes flat against the wall they create more space.

The key is to keep all the décor small, light and cheap, the Woods said. Mobiles and origami fill space, then pack away easily. The wall posters, actually sheets of wrapping paper, roll up into a cardboard tube.

Everything was found in skua or purchased with per diem in New Zealand. Deb picked a bouquet of fake flowers out of a snow pile for the window ledge. They bought an inflatable laundry basket and globe in Christchurch.

"Most of it is just hand-me-downs from other people," said Deb.

"And Wal-mart," Terry chimed in. "The key to it is there's nothing of any value. We could walk out tomorrow and leave it all behind." ■



Terry and Deb Woods made their room into a home to relax and entertain friends.

# Purple velvet parlor



Almost every foot of Bevin Lynch and Steve Forguson's dorm room is covered with Christmas tree lights, blue satin cloths, sun and moon patterns and rich-colored sarongs. The result is something like a parlor in the middle of a wizard's forest.

On the ceiling, winding around colorful cloths to each corner hangs orange autumn foliage and little sparkling lights. Purple drapes are dusted with a gold shimmer. Add to that a blue, luminous art piece that looks like it might channel messages from outer space.

Like many dorm residents who go all out, much of the stuff came from skua and from friends leaving town. Some of the most prized possessions were free. Other decorations were lightweight and inexpensive to bring down.

The sarongs are from different places around the world. "Those are easy enough to throw in your back pack," Lynch said. The fake foliage was from a dollar store in Australia. The strings of lights were from home.

In a corner on a chair is a yellow, sun-shaped pillow tossed on a dorm chair covered in the same design. A light scarf lined with fringe hangs off a standing lamp. Tall and slender wine and champagne glasses rest on shelves made from scrap wood. On top of the shelf is an aluminum foil covered ball, the foil orb.

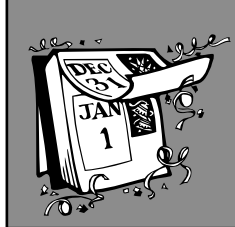
"That's the most sacred thing in this room," said Lynch. ■

see Dorms page 9

Top: Bevin Lynch and Steve Forguson relax in their purple den. Far left: A sun-spotted chair is a cheery place to sit. Left: These plastic bits emit a blue glow when illuminated by black light.

# our Antarctic week

**31**  
Ob Hill Uphill, 10 a.m., race starts on road halfway up Observation Hill



**1**  
Icestock and Chili Cook-off, noon to 6 p.m. outside building 155

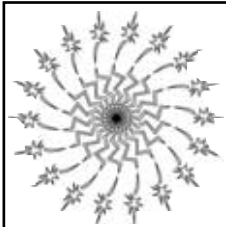
**2**  
Slide show "From the Aleutians to the Himalayas" by Scott Darsney, 8 p.m., galley

**3**  
Boondoggle Bingo, 8 p.m., Gallagher's

**4**  
Acoustic night with Hiram Henry, Sarah Krall and Boom Mancini, 8 p.m., Coffee House

**6**  
Explorers movie series, 8:30 p.m., Chapel

**6**  
Helo Party, 8 p.m., helicopter hangar



**COLD HARD FACTS**  
*Infrastructure*

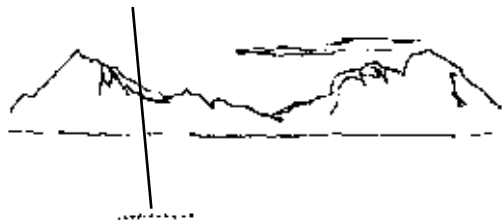
- Number of buildings in McMurdo: **200**
- Size of the largest building: **68,000 sq. ft.**
- Size of the smallest building: **72 sq. ft.**
- Oldest buildings still in use: **No. 63 and No. 73, both built in 1958**
- Current count of station equipment maintained by FEMC: **5,208 pieces.**
- Number of FEMC work orders generated from Aug. 24 to Dec. 15: **11,004**

## Ross Island Chronicles

By Chico

It sure was a good idea, bringing in the New Year with the scientists this year.

Let's hope they have plenty of champagne.



10 ... 9 ... 8 ...  
HEY ... ANYBODY HOME?

3 ...  
2 ...  
1 ...



**HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!**

Scratch "I will be more tolerant." From my New Year's resolution list this year.





*Dorms* from page 7

# Star trekking in Nepal

Upon entering Pauli Dietsche's dorm, the first optical sensation is the dizzying, celestial array of colorful lights. Red, white, blue and orange mini-bulbs beam like stars in constellations. More lights stuffed into green and blue bottles hang here and there. Oriental lamps made from paper and Popsicle sticks are bright, white lanterns. Under the beds is a glow that resembles the blue hovering car lights seen underneath Camero and Trans-Am cars back home.

The lights can be dimmed for a warming effect, or turned on and off in different combinations. What's more, all of them can be controlled remotely from anywhere in the room.

"The benefit is you don't have to get out of bed to turn the lights off or dim them," Dietsche said.

Colorful ornaments are important to Dietsche, and to Bob Zook, the initial tenant who started the scheme last winter and left recently after about 14 months on the Ice.

"In a place that's so devoid of color, especially in winter, you can come home and," Dietsche stops mid-sentence, looks around and sighs. "Where in town is there stimulating color?"

Zook made the Japanese lanterns and a large rectangular light fixture painted with bamboo canes and leaves for a Sushi party during the winter. He used medical table paper and flag poles.

On the wall, three-dimensional geometric shapes made from coffee stirrers and small pieces of pastel paper are curiosity pieces.

"I don't know where Bob got the idea for them," Dietsche said.

Standard dorm furniture was arranged to create the walk-in closet, which is two lockers against the wall, facing, with a door of each opened to meet. Next to it, a desk lights up when the top is lifted, revealing a bar. Several shelves from skua keep books and knickknacks organized.

In August, Dietsche moved in with ceiling and wall hangings and a woven bedspread from Nepal, and more lights. The rich-colored tapestries and sarongs are bursting designs of red, blue and purple.

The splashy space is candy to the eyes and warmth to the heart. ■



*Pauli Dietsche watches television in his colorful room.*



# Techno palace

Glowing eyes stare down from the collages and posters covering the walls in Jay "Thor" Johnson's room. Plastic spiders and Christmas lights dangle from a cargo parachute covering the ceiling. Black lights and a strobe from a cop car give the room an eerie glow.

Johnson started making collages four years ago to cover up the blandness of four white walls and institutional furniture. He cuts the pictures from magazines then sticks glow-in-the-dark dots over the eyes.

"If I want to look at blankness I can just walk outside," Johnson said.

Last year he brought down 70 pounds of additional decorations, distributing the weight among friends who were carrying less than the maximum 75 pounds of luggage. Packing away the decorations into eight boxes takes him a week at the end of the season.

Johnson had to search for a roommate who shared his decorating taste. He found Logan "Bear" Borland in a bar.

"I walked in and I absolutely fell in love with it," Borland said. "It's a lot like the Rave scene."

With the walls almost completely covered, Johnson is thinking about the ceiling and maybe building a loft. After adding another couch and a Foosball table the room would be done, he said.

"You can only put so much in a room." ■

*Jay Johnson glances up at the cargo parachute covering his ceiling. The collage on his wall was done over four years.*

# Writing Festival



Thanks to all who participated in this year's Writing Festival. As we all know, there is rich talent on this continent. And considering our busy schedules, the submissions were impressive.

Of the three categories - Poetry, Fiction and Finish This Story - poetry was the most popular choice of expression. Though no guidelines for content were given, almost all of the entries were inspi-

rations stirred by our unique surroundings in Antarctica.

Here are the stories and the poem our judges picked as their favorites. And a bonus entry - a blasting notice from Monika Tucker in fleet operations that was unexpectedly poetic. So we created a "McMurdo All" category this year:

*Greetings! Please stand by for the soft rumbling sounds of dynamite ripping through rock at the new sewage treatment plant site, down by the sea.*

- Monika Tucker

# Poetry

**Untitled**

*"Frozen Kansas," he said, but I've never been to Kansas.*

*So I don't know.*

*Did he mean the rippling of the snow in the wind like fields of wheat? No, wheat wouldn't crawl along the ground to vanish as it neared my feet, wouldn't pour over its own sculpted edges, wouldn't be the same and different at any scale.*

*Did he mean the enormous empty sky?*

*No, a Kansas sky wouldn't spin around in one long spiral, wouldn't make one yearn to stay awake and awake, wouldn't, couldn't, glitter and sparkle in dancing circles and make the snow-not-wheat glitter and sparkle with it.*

*Maybe he meant the way the horizon extends to curve away to everywhere. Maybe he meant the way we're so much smaller than the land yet cling, dig, create, destroy, alter everything we touch.*

*Maybe he meant:*

*Earth = Ice = Sky = ...*

*- Victoria Landgraf*



**Victoria Landgraf** is originally from Cleveland, Ohio, but fled to New England in her late teens, living in Connecticut and Massachusetts. She has since lived Manhattan. Her first Antarctica stint was 1998-99 at McMurdo Station. She was instantly hooked, and is now at the South Pole, with plans to winter-over.

## writing festival

## Finish This Story

Monday morning on the Ice Runway. It's always a little slow out here after Sunday's relaxation, but the weather's clear and we're loading planes. Me? I'm just sitting out here, watching the action, wasting time before I get to start my day's work.

The past week has been pretty crazy. The holiday season is beginning, and the weather's been wild for months now. My partner, Pat, and I are still planning to head over to Castle Rock when we get a chance.

Looking out the window of the big red van I'm in, I see a flurry of activity over on the cargo line, and the fuelies are walking around near their shed, waiting for the first pit stop of the day. A big dozer stops on the apron, and the driver hops out for a smoke. The firefighters are heading onto the runway to clear away a couple of penguins who have set up camp in the middle.

But there's something different about today.

*Clyde Turkeybaster from the Heavy Shop was intently studying his handheld GPS receiver while dragging two of the ubiquitous orange gear bags out onto the sea ice, well off the flagged route. He lived on the fringe of McMurdo society, always choosing to dine alone and he never attended parties. It was well known by everyone that he never slept, ever. Clyde spent all of his time after work back at the shop, tinkering in a small room that only he had the key to. He stopped a few hundred yards away from the usual runway activity and pulled open the zippers. Were my eyes deceiving me in my back-to-work delirium or was the orange fabric moving?*

*At this same moment, a deep throbbing pulse was felt rather than heard by all, changing to a booming bass beat that would make any teenager in a lowered Accord proud to play. Then the spaceship appeared. Not from the sky as I was expecting but from up through the ice, precisely three meters from where Clyde and his twin alien born off-spring were waiting. The kids looked like Clyde in that they had long beards that would ZZ Top members jealous, they were wearing filthy Broncos Championship baseball caps and had grease under their talons. Other than that, they were the usual gray-skinned, large-eyed little bald guys seen regularly around Area 51 and at George Lucas' house.*

*The spacecraft resembled a single-wide mobile home more than the long, sleek, silver phalluses of Hollywood producers' imaginations. My guess is that the creators of this intergalactic white-trash dream had met Clyde at some point at his home in the States and they wanted to make him as comfortable as possible when he visited them during his pregnancy. Mounted in several places along the side of the vessel's toothpaste green vinyl siding were old truck rims around which clear flexible tubing of a rather large size was coiled. From the stains on the inside of the hose, I deduced that our visitors were sucking our masticated discharge into the vehicle for use as some sort of fuel. Or possibly food.*

*The kids and Clyde worked their way over to the screen door, which had the stereotypical torn mesh and the closer that always made it slam too hard, and knocked. You would expect that Elvis or Bigfoot would have answered the door but it was only another little gray guy, clean shaven of course but wearing a knockoff Patrick Roy jersey that was many sizes too large. Clyde embraced his little tykes and sent them inside.*

*It was over before I knew it. The spaceship had taken off, Clyde went back to the heavy shop, and I began my daily work as a urine barrel leak checker. Clyde soon after exploded in some sort of alien-devised, delayed reaction spontaneous combustion. We don't talk about it much. Stranger things have happened since then.*

- Franz Schwab



**Franz Schwab** has been on the Ice just two months, working in the frozen food warehouse. He is originally from Oregon, but has lived the last five years in Vail, where he was purchasing director for a hotel.



writing festival



**Karen Joyce** hales from New Castle, Pa., and was leading a vivid life in San Francisco before coming to Antarctica 10 years ago. When off the ice, she is trapped in suburban Denver, where she has been committing occupational suicide by writing a comedy novel about life in McMurdo.

Fiction

**The Lost History of Ross Island**

*It is commonly believed that the first visitors to disembark on Ross Island were Sir Robert Scott's party in 1902, the vanguard of the grand Antarctic epoch known to us as the Heroic Era. Full of noble purpose, their ships groaning with supplies, these men represented the pinnacle of England's Imperial power, the final vainglorious stage of British exploration - the hardest of men striking out at the last godforsaken frontier.*

*But what has been excised from the history books, and forgotten by all but the survivor's descendants, is the colony of fifty-three prisoners deposited at Hut Point in 1866 by the British sailing frigate, HMS Inveterate. The very worst of the worst were these men, the most incorrigible criminals culled from the most heinous prison in the new world: the infamous Port Arthur goal, on the lee coast of Tasmania. A cesspool of horrors was Port Arthur: hideous tortures were applied to all, and the men who could best withstand the inhuman punishment became heroes to the rest, thus scaling up the level of excruciating torment beyond fantastic imagination. At last the warden, at wit's end and under great pressure to reform from the colonial government, had the most egregious offenders shackled and thrown into the hold of the Inveterate, to be shipped off to what was hoped would be their demise on Ross Island.*

*In a gesture of magnanimity, the warden had provided the men with enough hardtack and fuel to last perhaps a month. But what he hadn't reckoned on was the men's thieving resourcefulness: all of them had hidden sharp knives somewhere on their persons, which they immediately made use of near Hut Point by butchering the fat seals that basked helplessly nearby. They quickly became expert at the arts of rendering fat and tanning seal hide, giving themselves the wherewithal to survive the coming winters.*

*If only they could have made peace with one another. The fifty-three original inhabitants entertained themselves by making a gruesome sport of torturing and killing the weak, using the same grisly methods employed by their former jailers. By 1868, after the British press had so inflamed the sensibilities of the public and made such a scandal of the prisoner's fate that a rescue vessel was dispatched to Hut Point, their rescuers found only eleven black-faced survivors, clothed in sealskins, with beards halfway down their chests. These men were taken back to Australia to a hero's welcome, and were compensated for their troubles with gifts of choice farmland on the Tasmanian coast. And to this day, their descendants consider themselves honored to have sprung from this ignoble lineage.*

*And what remained of their camp for Scott to find? Only a few bleached bones and the crude stone cairns built up as shelter against the brutal elements. But the men of Scott's party could not be convinced that the keening winds they heard blowing through their hut at night were not the restive spirits of the men who came before them, the lost prisoners of Ross Island.*

- Karen Joyce

About the judges

**1 Salvatore Consalvi** is a Dining Room Attendant who dreams of becoming a Lead Dining Room Attendant in hopes that one day he can become a Janitor.

**2 Jean Mather** is a retired chimney sweep looking for adventure. This part of her life as a janitor is a "jumping-off point" for places unknown.

**3 Ralph Horak** is a heavy-equipment operator who longs for the days when Antarctic contract employees are given the respect, pay, and straight answers they deserve.

**4 Jason Gray** is a firefighter and habitual Ultimate League Frisbee-chaser. That is, when he's not barreling down a river in some gorge, in the sport of "canyoning."

**5 Torre Knowler** has a degree in marine biology and is currently catering to the needs of 10 ravenous Emperor Penguin chicks. In spite of this, she strives to lead a fairly normal life.

# South Pole

## DISPATCHES

By Tracy Sheeley  
*Sun correspondent*

### Trekkers

Our first expedition group skied in on Dec. 20. Rolf Bae and Eirik Sonneland of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition visited with us for two days before continuing their journey to McMurdo Station. Prior to their takeoff, they had wintered-over in the Dronning Maud Land region of Antarctica. On Oct. 21, two days before the flight of the first South Pole mainbody flight, they began skiing from their winter base Troll. We are expecting several more expeditions to arrive in the near future.

### Holidays

A very Merry Christmas was had by all, as we celebrated with gingerbread house construction, Christmas movie viewings galore, a feast on Christmas Eve and carols sung by our own choir. Christmas morning started with the annual raising of the U.S. and POW flags on the 6610 crane.

The popular Race Around the World commenced promptly at 10 a.m. on Christmas Day. This race runs around the ceremonial and geographic South Pole, so contestants make three laps around every time zone (approximately two miles). Rewards include a T-shirt and a great deal of laughter. Teddy Anderson, a carpenter helper, and John Kovac, a scientist with CARA (Center for Astrophysical Research in Antarctica) took the winning places this year. Participants were quite creative in their forms of locomotion, completing the laps on skis, snowboards, vehicles of all shapes and sizes, couches (being towed by said vehicles) and the old standby – feet.

### Construction

In the midst of all this social activity, we are accomplishing a



The MARISAT/GOES satellite dish was recently placed at South Pole Station. The dish will allow Pole to be in constant communication with the rest of the world. The station now goes through daily blackout periods when the satellites it uses for internet and phone communications dip out of view. Photo by Jerry Macala.

### Progress on the new station pods is continuing smoothly – with a different skyline evolving outside the Dome each day.

great deal of work as well. Progress on the new station pods is continuing smoothly – with a different skyline evolving outside the Dome each day. Steel is going up over the first floor level now (and it looks big!). The new power plant is on schedule, with many of the final pieces falling into place and testing beginning now for its completion, which is set for Jan. 17.

The installation of the MARISAT/GOES terminal is also on schedule, despite flight and weather delays. The MARISAT reflector was raised to its pedestal on Dec. 20, and all structural construction on the RF Building has been completed. System testing and acceptance will begin for MARISAT, South Pole's next satel-

lite system, in January.

### Science

The vast world of science at South Pole is humming along as well, and preparations are beginning for the winter season, when science really shines. One group is happily based in a new building from which to conduct research. The group is studying thermal infrared (long-wave) radiation processes near the surface of the Antarctic Plateau. One of their tools is a Tethered Balloon System (TBS). The TBS measures the humidity profile and properties of low clouds and diamond-dust ice crystals. Their research contributes to the climatology of cloud properties and improves the representation of radiation processes in climate models. ■



# ICE STOCK 2001

## a bunch of mixed-up music



By Kristan Hutchison Sabbatini  
*Sun staff*

The band room was busy all week with musicians preparing for Icestock. The annual music festival takes place New Year's Day, outdoors.

"It's almost like a mini-Dead show," said recreation supervisor Bill Meyer, "with people stage diving and passing people around on their shoulders and juggling."

Usually the weather turns cold for Icestock, but even if the snow is flying the show goes on. Only once has Icestock been moved inside, Meyer said. Guitarist Mark Eisinger played his first Icestock in temperatures 20 below zero.

"After about four songs my fingers were so numb I couldn't feel my guitar pick," said Eisinger, who will be playing his fifth Icestock.

The harsh weather punishes instruments and demands they receive special care, Eisinger said. In five seasons he's gone through three guitars. The dry air warped the guitar necks backward.

"Probably the best thing a guy could do is hang a guitar in the bathroom, but that really isn't practical," Eisinger said.

For Icestock Eisinger tunes his guitar outside, otherwise it goes out of tune with the change of temperature from indoors to out.

Meyer believes Icestock started some time in the late 1980s as a mostly acoustic folk-music event. As a younger generation of musicians came to McMurdo, more rock groups formed. This year the musical lineup includes the punk rock band Spot, Eisinger's trio playing Grateful Dead tunes, an improvisational experimental music group, and Meyer's rock band, The Obvious.

The only constant in Antarctic music is its diversity, said Eisinger. In the past he's been in bluegrass and Celtic bands.

"Pretty much Antarctic music is what people bring down and what they like to play," Eisinger said as he set up in the band room for a practice last week. "One thing you need to be is flexible down here."

Dylan Roan hadn't played drums since high school when some friends put together a band two winters ago and needed a drummer.

"Being down here got me back into it," said Roan, who practices with his band, Spot, once a week. The punk rock band plays loud, fast and mostly original music.

"The other day I had a song stuck in my head, but it was our song," Roan said.



Top: Mark Eisinger fingers his guitar and sings with Andy Woods, left, and Justin Gibbens, middle, during a practice for Icestock. Left: Hudi Brenman squeezes out a tune during the Christmas party.

Meyer said half his band's 10 songs are originals written by band members Bill Ames and Brad Hasley. The rest are covers of Led Zeppelin, Blues Traveler, Dada and Bighead Todd and the Monsters.

The Obvious would have prepared more songs, but their singer twice had to go to field camps, Meyer said. The constant moving and odd work schedules make it difficult to keep a band together. That may be why so many musicians perform alone, Meyer said. A few singer/songwriters will play at Icestock.

On the other end of the music spectrum is Hudi Brenman, who will play anything from an accordion to a heater vent.

During a Cajun-styled improvisation in a Jamesway at Williams Field, he grabbed a pen and TV antenna and began playing the heater vent like a washboard.

"It was probably the most fun I've had in years," Brenman said of the two-hour concert he and his band gave for eight people. "We ended up just joking around with the audience and playing stump the band."

The spontaneous concert fit Brenman's band, which mostly improvises pulling from classical, jazz and ethnic musical traditions. Even their name is spontaneous, changed for each concert. At the Christmas party they were the "The 12 Tones of Christmas."

Brenman performs with Justin Gibbens, Charles Kurnik and David Breitenfeld. He chose them, not solely for musical virtuosity, but for a willingness to play around with musical ideas.

"What it's turned into is a very much free-form style that's very much influenced by classical music," Brenman said. "We write a lot of music on the spot."

For example, on stage at the Christmas party, Brenman gave Gibbens just a beat, seven-four time, and they started to play. The result was awful, Brenman said, yet musically satisfying.

"I don't think we care about the audience at all and part of the problem is our music may have become way too self indulgent," Brenman said. "But we're only here for a short time and we're going to do what we want to do." ■

## Get the music on CD

This year McMurdo musicians and their fans will be able to take home an Icestock 2001 memento.

G.W. Krauss recorded live performances at the Coffee House and the Women's Soiree for a CD. The second week of January he'll try to record studio sessions of musicians in the band room as well. The CD will include klezmer, blues, spoken word, choral singing and punk.

"It's a real diverse population so you end up getting a lot of different styles," Krauss said.

Krauss is collecting donations to cover his costs and will send the CD to those who contribute. So far he's raised \$210, enough to buy blank disks, record and mail them in March.

Anyone who wants to contribute music or money to the project can e-mail Krauss at [kraussgr@mcmurdo.gov](mailto:kraussgr@mcmurdo.gov).