BELARE 2007-2008: INTERVIEW WITH STÉPHAN DUBOIS, BACK FROM UTSTEINEN



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Stéphane Dubois, building coordinator for the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica Station, returned to Belgium earlier than foreseen. Mr. Dubois, an inhabitant of the Rochefort region, was supposed to stay in Antarctica until March 9, 2008. The atmospheric conditions, particularly the extreme dryness, forced him to return prematurely: he was back in Brussels on December 21, after having spent 52 days on the white continent.

1/ What is a typical day like in Utsteinen?

Paul, the early bird, always wakes up the first and turns on the fuel stove in the mess tent around 6 am. Then comes Fons, Base Camp Manager, who gets the honk going by using a pear attached to a skidoo: it is 7 am. The "non military" regime means that everyone is free to get up whenever he wishes to do so. Having said that, everyone is usually up and ready to work on the ridge by 8 - 8 30 am.

Depending on the tasks that need to be done and on the time needed to accomplish these, we generally gather in the mess tent for dinner between 6 and 8 pm. There, we relax and stock up on calories before it is time to go back to our tent for a well-deserved sleep. Lights are turned out: its is 11 pm.

2/ What kind of problems do you face in your day-to-day life?

First problem is the cold, wind and sun. We have to dress to protect ourselves from the wind and the cold, which thereby reduces our mobility and makes us perspire as soon as we move. We also have to protect ourselves from the sun that burns our faces continuously.

Second problem is linked to comfort. Although it is all relative, it is difficult to raise our level of comfort to that which we are used to. The comfort offered by the organisation allows us to live decently but the slenderness of the tents, the toilets, the outside average temperature and the "basic" bathroom do provoke a few discomforts which can alter a little our daily life.

3/ What are your daily meals made up of?

Breakfast: fresh bread cooked the previous evening (the kitchen has a 21-litre kneating trough), jam, chocolate spread, cheese, cereal, milk, coffee, hot chocolate, yogurt...

Lunch: soup is served almost every day, a light warm meal, bread, cheese, ham... Nothing is thrown away, everything is transformed: we generally heat up the previous day's left-overs.

Dinner: Served with a little white or red wine, we are fed a warm balanced meal (noodles, rice, potatoes, mixed vegetables, meat or fish) with, most of the time, some dessert (cake, truffles, fruit salad, tiramisu or something other).

Cereal and fruit bars, chocolate or dryed fruit are served between or before meals.

4/ If you were to go back to Antarctica, what would you take that you did not bring with you the first time?

An inhaler ha ha ha! No, but an I-Pod, a portable computer or a small bassin, perhaps....