RETURNING HOME FOLLOWING A SEASON TO BE PROUD OF



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The last 2020-2021 BELARE crew left Princess Elisabeth Antarctica on Tuesday 16 February after securing everything and putting the station into winter mode. The station is now running on its own and will do so for the next eight months. It will continue to provide energy for the scientific equipment gathering data for various meteorological and geophysical projects running all year long.

After a short flight in a Basler (DC-3), the ten last members of the BELARE team for the season reached the Russian Novolazarevskaia Station, where they had a six-hour layover before boarding a Russian (IL-76) Ilyushin to continue their trip to Cape Town.

As this was the last flight of the season out of Antarctica from the Dronning Maud Land to Cape Town, the last crew members for the 2020-2021 austral summer season leaving from various stations in the vicinity, including six from the Indian Maitri Station and several non-overwintering crew from Novolazarevskaia Station, accompanied the remaining BELARE crew members on the flight.

Once everything was prepared, the plane took off in the dusk of the waning austral summer, destination Cape Town. After an uneventful six-hour flight, everyone arrived safe and sound in Cape Town in the early morning the following day.

A touch of summer before heading home

The warmth of the South African summer was a welcome change from the bitter cold of Utsteinen, which is experiencing longer and longer nights now that the austral autumn is approaching quickly. Most members of the team spent a day or two recovering from the long journey from PEA at a hotel, where they quarantined as a group.

At the hotel, they held debrief meetings for the season and completed the necessary COVID-related paperwork to be able to travel back to Europe, facilitated as always by IPF South Africa Director Michel De Wouters.

Unfortunately, the pandemic forced the usual post-season decompression ritual in Cape Town to be more restricted. Although every member of the team was living in an isolated and completely COVID-free environment at PEA for the last several months, the whole team stayed together as a group at the same hotel in Cape Town, observing local safety guidelines, before those in the team who were travelling back to Europe did so.

Once all team members observe the local COVID quarantine guidelines for their respective countries of residence, many of them will return to their lives as doctors, engineers, mechanics and technicians, with the happy memory of having contributed to the exciting improvement projects that were undertaken at the world’s first zero-emission polar research station this past season.