A FIELD EXPEDITION TO THE COAST AND ANOTHER TEAM ROTATION



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This past week has been quite busy at the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica for the team, with a trip to the coast and the last change of a few of the team members for the season.

A trip to the coast!

Last week, Preben Van Overmeiren from Ghent University travelled to the coast for a few days with BELARE Expedition Leader Alain Hubert and Deputy Station Manager Henri Robert to remove sampling stations for the CHASE project, which is coming to an end this season.

The atmospheric particle samplers, which members of the CHASE project had set up in strategic locations along a 240 km transect from the Antarctic Plateau to the coast, had been taking samples of organic and inorganic particles in the atmosphere for the last three years. The project's goal has been to track where these particles are coming from, whether they are of natural origin or anthropogenic, and to get a better understanding of atmospheric circulation in the Southern Hemisphere.

As a lot of snow had fallen in the Dronning Maud Land in East Antarctica this past year, the poles supporting the sampling instruments for the CHASE project were buried deep in the snow. It took almost six hours to dig out the supports at several stations and pack them up safely for the trip home.

While at the coast, Alain took a detour to collect containers of waste prepared during the previous season nearby for further evacuation. Depending on the ice conditions, which often makes the loading and offloading of the ship at the coast a tricky operation, they will need to be relocated to be shipped back to South Africa when the next scheduled ship comes to pick them up.

Alain and his mechanics drove a Prinoth tractor with a residential container, while Henri and Preben travelled via modified Toyota Hilux to the coast and camped on-site. Overall, the 200 km trip to the coast took about 14 hours each way, with stops along the way to collect the scientific samples and equipment for the CHASEproject.

Rotating team members

Not long after their return from the coast, it was time to say goodbye to seven members of the expedition who had finished their rotation, including Preben, who was returning home after finishing his tasks for the CHASE project, as well as Guus Luppens and Johan Demuylder, who had done an excellent job of adding to the station's renewable energy capacity during their stay.

While it was sad to see our friends go, we welcomed veteran cook of 11 seasons at PEA David Rigotti, as well as carpenter / electrician Paul Dudas, who is joining the team for the second season in a row and will help to finish work on the new north annex.

There are no more flights in and out until the last plane of the season, which is scheduled for 16 February. For the next month, the BELARE team plans to concentrate on assisting scientists who are collecting data remotely, preparing the station for the coming winter, and completing the construction work that must be done before the end of the season.