FIRST TEAM CHANGEOVER FOR THE SEASON



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It’s amazing how time flies when you are in Antarctica, away from the pandemic crisis, and focusing on the mission. The BELARE team has been at the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica for three weeks now, and we’ve already seen the first team members and scientists leave.

On Wednesday 16 December, we said goodbye to Alexis Merlaud, from the Royal Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy (BIRA-IASB), and Armin Sigmund from the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), who accomplished their task of installing weather stations and a number of instruments to monitor atmospheric parameters and the ozone layer thickness in this part of Antarctica.

Until the next flight scheduled mid-January, only one scientist, Preben Van Overmeiren from Ghent University (UGent), will remain at the station to continue to study the origin of organic and inorganic particles transported in the atmosphere all the way from Africa and South America to Antarctica.

The departing crew included engineer Benoit Verdin, who installed and maintained scientific equipment, most of which continuously gathers data year-round. He also performed maintenance and worked on improving the station’s communication system.

Also leaving was engineer Aymar de Lichetvelde, who started up and improved the water treatment systems at the station - a delicate process involving several tanks, filters and a bioreactor. The season's first cook Thomas Duconseille, the season’s first doctor Martin Leitl and Station Manager Nighat Johnson-Amin also left.

After spending a one-night layover at Novo Station, they departed Antarctica on a flight back to Cape Town the following day. Two days later, they’ll be home in time for Christmas.

Fresh Faces

The plane that brought out the departing team members also arrived with some fresh faces who will be working at the station for the next part of the season.

Engineers Guus Luppens and Johan Demuylder will be working on maintaining and improving the station’s sustainable energy production systems, wich funcion on wind and solar power. In their spare time, they’ll also continue to create solar-powered devices to help give scientists renewable energy sources to run mobile living quarters used during field expeditions and to power their equipment in the field.

Also newly arrived is the station's Chief Doctor and mountain guide, Jacques Richon. This year will be his 10th Antarctic campaign at the PEA Station.