

LAST DAY AT STATION FOR BELARE 10 TEAM



Today the BELARE 10 team closes the station for the winter and starts the journey back to Belgium. Over the past week, everyone has been busy finishing up their work for the season and making the final overwintering preparations.

GEOMAG instruments installed and transmitting data

Over the past few weeks, the station team helped Stephan Brack from the [Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium](#)'s [Geophysical Center of Dourbes](#) set up a triaxial variometer, which measures the Earth's magnetic field vectors in three directions, and an Overhauser magnetometer, which measures the strength of Earth's magnetic field. All the necessary work was completed without any problems. Thanks to a fiber optic cable linking the instruments to the station's satellite antenna, data from the instruments is now being transmitted in real-time to the Geophysical Center in Dourbes.

A third instrument invented by scientists from the Geophysical Center will be installed in the shelter next season.

Thumbs up for the Hiluxes

It was the station's chief mechanic Kristof Soete who came up with the idea of modifying Toyota Hiluxes - fitting them with treads instead of tyres - so they can be used in Antarctica. Since they've arrived on the White Continent, the station team has used them extensively. "They've made transporting people and equipment much easier," Kristof explained. "The vehicles are more fuel efficient and mobile than tractors and can transport much more than a skidoo."

The Hiluxes "can climb up steep slopes covered in snow with no issue, and cross a crevasse half a metre wide without any problem," Kristof continued. "They have a lot of cargo space, and they provide good comfort and protection to the driver and the passengers."

After testing them out in the rough terrain of Antarctica, Kristof says some improvements can still be made to the suspension of the vehicles. But he pointed out that it was his intention from the beginning to see how well they did during their first season in action, and then make any necessary modifications. Once back in Belgium, he and fellow mechanics will start working on preparing the necessary modifications, which he plans to install on the Hiluxes when he gets back to the station next season.

Going through the final checklist

The mechanics and the electricians have spent their final days at the station doing the final maintenance on the backup generators. This includes putting in new oil, new filters, running a diagnostic check, and doing a test run.

While the station continues to run on wind energy after the sun disappears entirely during the dark months of the Antarctic winter and solar energy is no longer available, the back-up generators are necessary to ensure the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica can keep running in case something happens to other sources of power. The station uses much less energy during the eight months that it's uninhabited, but some energy is still needed to keep the systems of the station and the scientific instruments running.

Mechanics Kristof Soete and Walter Cumps have also been servicing the vehicles to make sure they're ready to go as soon as the team arrives on site next season. They've been keeping track of the running hours of each vehicle and noting any maintenance requirements and new parts that need to be ordered for them.

The team has also stored all the vehicles in the container park next to the air strip 2 km from the station. The containers were sealed today with heavy-duty tape and secured with rope to make doubly sure no snow gets into the containers over the winter.

"As a mechanic at the station, there are no boring days," Kristof admitted. "There's always something to do!"

Heading home

The remaining members of the BELARE 10 team are scheduled to close up the Princess Elisabeth station later this afternoon and head for the Russian Novo station, weather permitting. From there they will fly on to Cape Town, and then back to Belgium. Most of the BELARE 10 team is scheduled to be back home by the weekend.

Here's wishing them a safe journey home, and congratulations on a job well done this season!