

TEN DAYS LEFT BEFORE THE END OF THE SEASON



BELARE 10 leader Alain Hubert recounts finishing the technical facilities and garage ahead of schedule, and thanks the team who has made everything possible.

The best team in Antarctica

The three to four weeks prior to closing the station are always very busy from a technical point of view. This year the main challenge was to rebuild one part of the technical facilities (which include the garages) on the south side of the station. Given the fact that the supply ship arrived very late this season, it left us with only three weeks to finish the construction work.

Nonetheless, we've been able to build a structure that solves the issue of the ice moving around it as it flows. We've put together a two-floor wooden building articulated on three timber beams 17.5 metres long and almost 6 metres high. The entire structure of the new technical facilities building and garage is anchored onto the rock of Utsteinen Ridge on one side, and supported on the other side by a structure built on 12 posts sunk 5 meters deep into the ice. This new structure can slide with the ice as it slowly flows around Utsteinen ridge, and it can be jacked up when necessary in order to keep the level of the entire building horizontal.

Like many things here at the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica, all the time we have to find solutions to for the upkeep of the station and room to grow.

We all were a bit afraid of not being able to complete the work before the end of the season, which would have been catastrophic, as the snow would invade the empty space over the eight months the station is uninhabited. But you have to take into account that I have here the best team on the entire continent: guys who enjoy working seven days a week in -20°C weather to make sure the job gets done!

We've even managed to finish building the technical facilities ahead of time! Now we have enough time to finish other tasks, like the new science shelter to be set up on the ridge, moving 39 solar panels onto the ridge, as they can no longer be on the garage anymore, and properly prepare the station, the vehicles and container park for overwintering.

Supporting scientists all the way

We haven't forgotten our mission to support scientific research. I'm leaving tomorrow with the new Toyota Hilux to pick up the 17th seismometer station Denis Lombardi from the Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium installed at the grounding line of the King Baudouin Ice Shelf 160 km away from the station. While we're in the field, we also have to collect data for microbiologists at the University of Ghent.

Back at the station, our team continues to collect atmospheric data for scientists. The daily launches of the meteorological balloon with a radio sounder attached to it continue. They will continue doing this until we have to leave at the end of February.

The 2014-15 season is the tenth season since we made the first survey to determine where to build the Princess Elisabeth Station, which we started building in 2007. This is also the sixth season during which our team has supported scientific teams coming to the station to conduct research scientific season without any injuries or major problems.

A special word of thanks

Together with the International Polar Foundation team in Brussels and Cape Town, we succeed in doing our job despite the challenges that have come our way over the years.

This season is one of the best ever for the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica polar research station. I would like to thank the all team and all the people who support what we do. We will continue to go ahead with new projects at Princess Elisabeth and do our best to support the work of all scientists coming to the station to conduct research that helps humanity better understand the planet we live on.