# A STORMY WEEKEND AT PRINCESS ELISABETH



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A bad storm made its way through Utsteinen over the weekend, creating a bit of inconvenience for the station crew, but also some recreational opportunities.

## The wind began to howl

Bad weather had been predicted, and it hit us on Saturday night.

I awoke at 3:30 in the morning to a deep growling noise. The wooden wall next to my left ear was vibrating slightly from the wind rushing over and under the Princess Elisabeth station.

I opened the shutters of my window, which usually offers a brilliant view on Teltet Nunatak and the radio antenna to the east of the station. When I looked out, I could see nothing but white. It was a complete white-out.

Wanting to see if I might be able to get any kind of view outside, I decided to go to the office at the north side of the station. From its windows I could just make out the shape of the  satellite dish trough the driving snow and the closest of several wind turbines spinning madly, its propeller blades folded backward to the wind.

From the tower window, which faces west, I could see great clouds of snow over the gap where the garage's roof once was. The anemometer (which measures wind speed) at the airstrip measured wind speeds of 30 knots. The wind howled throughout the early morning hours, peaking at 40 knots around 6:00 am. But by the time we were having breakfast, it appeared that the worst of the storm was behind us.

## With a storm comes inconvenience

Johnny Gaelens, our electrical engineer, nearly lost his way in the blizzard when making his daily visit to the southern ridge to collect data form the scientific instruments there. He reported that snow had infiltrated the shelter, and that one of the computers was down.

Showers and toilets had to be closed on Saturday morning to save water, as there was no way to fill up the snow melter. Someone has to shovel snow into it from the outside, and conditions were too adverse to be able to do that.

The weather was so bad that cook Riet Van de Velde and construction worker Ilir Berisha - who both have a habit of sleeping outside in tents - were forced to seek shelter inside the station. When the wind died down a bit Saturday afternoon and I was able to go outside, I found the tents crushed by the snow and the canvas shredded. Good thing they came indoors!

## The day after

On Sunday, Jaques Touchette spent the better part of the day working with the snow blower to clear snow out of the parts of the garage we're currently repairing, and getting things back to normal. Nicolas Degand and Chick Blaise donned their coveralls and took a pair of shovels to fill the snow melter. We had water once again!

However as Sunday is traditionally the day for recreation for the station crew - a day to enjoy the wonderful an unique natural environment of Antarctica - some of the outdoor sports enthusiasts at the station decided to take advantage of the freshly fallen snow for some winter sports activities.

The wind in the afternoon was just right for Riet to go kite skiing down at the airstrip, where he could zoom up and down the open expanses unhindered. Doc Jaques Richon, who is also a keen skiier, later joined Riet for a trip to Teltet Nunatak, which has excellent slopes to do some proper downhill skiing. "The fresh snow was absolutely wonderful!" Jacques told us.

Alain Hubert also took a break from his busy schedule and headed out on his own for a long cross country skiing session. When he came back to the station for supper, he was grinning all over "It's good to have a break from all that paperwork!" he said.

While the storm created a bit of hassle, at least it provided some opportunities to enjoy Antarctica!