REBUILDING THE GARAGES



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The station crew keeps busy as they implement a solution to deal with the garages, which have been moving with the slowly flowing ice over several years.

Abuzz with activity

Everyday at noon, someone at the Princess Elisabeth station continues the daily weather balloon launches for Alexander and Quentin, now back in Belgium. The scientific instruments nestled in their different shelters collect data to be sent via satellite connection to computers eagerly awaiting information in Europe and around the world. Our guests from the Alfred Wegener Institute fly their daily observation flights over East Antarctica or the high plateau. And everyone patiently awaits the ship that will bring lots of goodies for the next season.

But all is not quiet at the Princess Elisabeth Station. There is a lot going on. The station’s staff is working very hard around the clock. The mechanics, the electricians, the plumbers, the carpenters and the jacks-of-all-trades keep this place running.

And at the moment, the crew is busy dismantling the garages.

Why would they want to do that, you might ask?

Firstly, there is not enough room to store everything. We need more space to protect vehicles and equipment over the winter months.

Secondly, the north and south garages of PEA are built on the ice. The ice just behind the ridge where the station is built does not move as fast as a glacier. But it does move - eight centimetres to the west and eight centimetres down every year. Over the years, the garages, which are built of wood, started to tilt and crack more and more.

A cunning plan

The PEA staff had to come up with a cunning engineering solution: new garages built not directly on the surface of the ice, but onto supporting beams that will be anchored to the rock on Utsteinen Ridge on one side and the rest on a sliding support on the ice. The support is a massive trestle made of steel-capped wooden pillars sunk into the ice and frozen solid.

To test the feasibility of the engineering solution, the station team conducted a trial last year in the central part of the station, where the tower leads into the garages. The solution seems to work fine.

After the supply ship arrives - which will hopefully be next week - the timber for the new garages will be unloaded from the Mary Arctica and transported to the station.

The new garage must be ready before the end of the season.

There’s still lots to be done, for sure!