A SURPRISE VISIT FROM GERMAN VIPS



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The Princess Elisabeth team gets a surprise visit from a number of German VIPs, including two ministers, a member of the Bundestag, and AWI senior staff.

A German delegation arrives unexpectedly

With not one but two different planes arriving at Utsteinen airstrip, this past Saturday was a busy day! After AWI's *Polar 6* landed in the afternoon after yet another observation flight, a second plane circled over the Princess Elisabeth station at low altitude and landed five minutes later.

This Basler was coming from the Russian station Novo. Amongst its passengers were three German politicians: two ministers and a member of the Bundestag, the German Parliament in Berlin.

Princess Elisabeth station manager Alain Hubert was at the airport to welcome all the VIP's: Dr Eva Quante-Brandt, Minster of Education and Science of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen (where Bremerhaven is located), Cornelia Quennet-Thielen, German Federal State State Secretary and Department Head at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, and René Röspel, a member of the Bundestag's Committee on the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. They were accompanied by senior staff members of the Alfred Wegener Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI), Germany’s polar research institute headquartered in Bremerhaven.

Since the weather was not so good at Novo station, the delegation decided to take a detour and have a look at AWI’s Polar 6 aircraft, which is based at the Princess Elisabeth station for the 2014-15 research season. "We also wanted to take the opportunity to see the Belgian station,” remarked Minister Quante-Brandt.

We were all delighted at her remarks, and told her that as Belgians, we were proud to work at the Princess Elisabeth station! "You rightly should be!" answered the minister.

Showing off the station

After their inspection of the *Polar 6* and its impressive load of scientific instruments, the delegation made their way to the Princess Elisabeth station for a short visit. Our cook, Riet Van de Velde, served them some biscuits and freshly baked "pains au chocolat".

Over a hot cup of coffee, the ministers marvelled at how cosy a polar research station can be on the inside, in stark contrast to such a cold and hostile environment outside.

We then showed our VIP-guests around in the technical heart of the station. With great interest they listened to Johnny Gaelens, our electricical engineer, who explained how the station’s renewable energy was produced and its use efficiently managed.

Their interest in the station’s functioning was certainly not feigned. Before heading back to the plane, René Röspel asked what it would take to equip his house in Germany with sufficient solar panels so he could live off the electrical grid.

As the plane was taking off, we felt very happy that the German officials had taken the time to visit us at the station. We certainly made an impression!