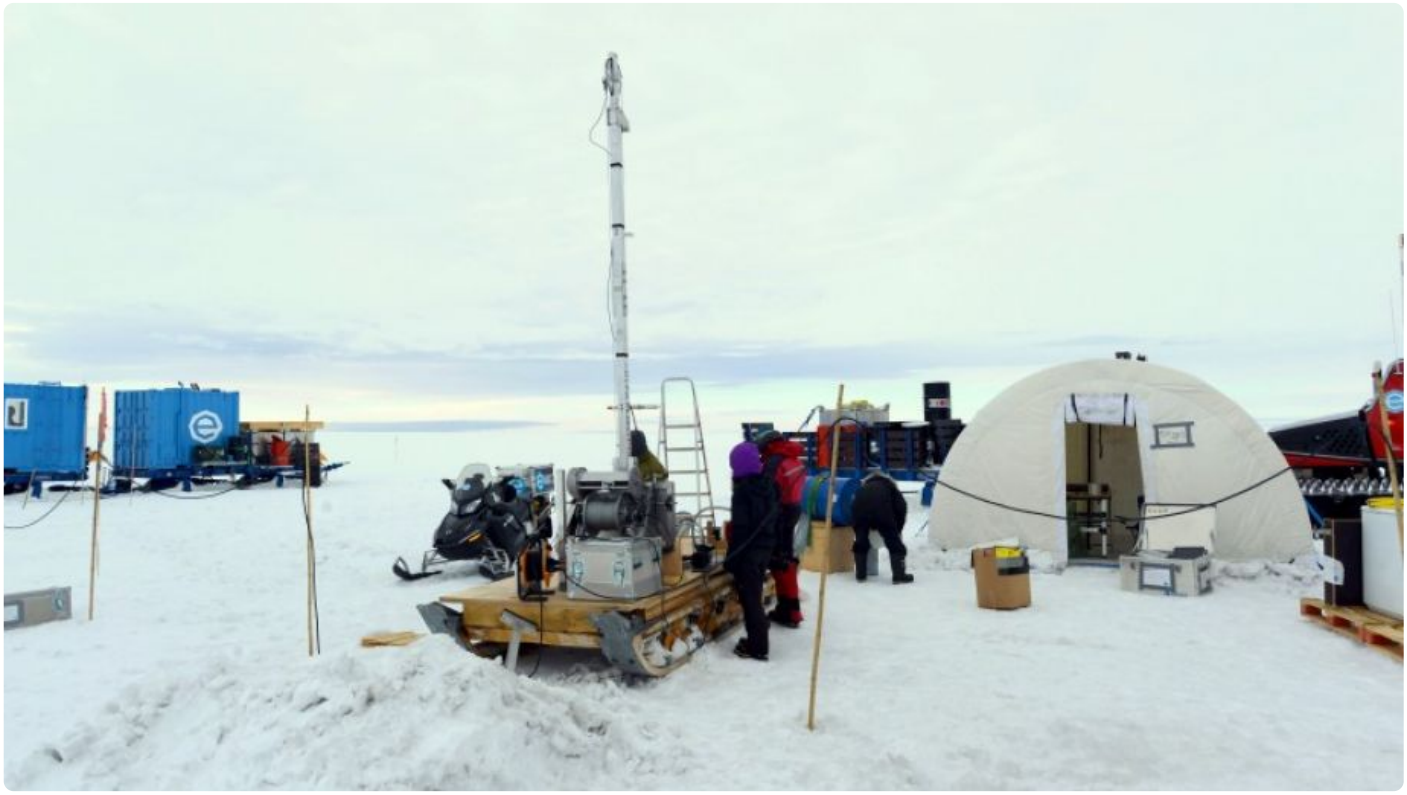
BACK FROM AN ADVENTURE AT THE COAST!



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The team of scientists who spent a few weeks on the King Baudoin Ice Shelf has returned from their field expedition and is preparing to head home in time for Christmas.

It's nice to be back after a long journey

Alain, Christophe, Jos and all the scientists made it back to the Princess Elisabeth station safe and sound on Wednesday evening after a 22-hour drive from the King Baudoin Ice Shelf at the coast. Two Prinoth tractors made the journey hauling eight sledges filled with scientific gear and ice cores back to Utsteinen.

While sleeping in a tent in the snow was a fun experience for many who sojourned on the ice shelf, the expedition team was happy to finally be able to sleep at the station again.

Scientific research a success, despite setbacks

Bad weather and technical difficulties with the ice core drill hampered progress for the IceCon team. Due to time constraints, they had to stop drilling of a planned 150-metre ice core at only 107 metres. But according to the IceCon project's blog, the scientists involved in the project were very satisfied with the work they

managed to accomplish this season. Even if they weren't able to go all the way to the bottom of the ice shelf for the 150-metre core, there is already a wealth of information in the one 107-metre and two 30-metre ice cores the IceCon team managed to drill.

Meanwhile, Denis Lombardi was able to install all the seismometers he had planned to install while on the ice shelf. And InBev-Baillet Latour Antarctic Fellowship laureate Jan Lenaerts managed to take enough firn cores and set up an automatic weather station (AWS) on the grounding line of the King Baudoin Ice Shelf for the BENEMELT project. The AWS will collect meteorological data and transmit them to the Princess Elisabeth station over the next year until Jan returns next season.

The ice cores the scientists drilled during their time in the field have been put into deep freezers to keep them safe at a constant temperature. The freezers containing the ice cores will be shipped back to Belgium on the Mary Arctica, the ice-class cargo vessel bringing supplies to the station. The ship is scheduled to arrive at the coast in late January, when the annual unloading of cargo supplying the station will take place.

Now the scientists are busy packing up their gear for their flight home, which is scheduled to depart on Friday 19 December. Only one more day in Antarctica! It's been a whirlwind month in Antarctica for them - both literally and figuratively!

Penguins' paradise

Before leaving the coast, a few interested souls, including expedition leader Alain Hubert and veteran Belgian reporter Jos Van Hemmelrijck, paid a visit to the emperor penguin colony on the coast that members of the BELARE team had visited during the last two seasons. They were happy to report that the colony was very healthy and had grown over the last year, with an estimated 24,000 penguins.

The story of the penguin colony is an interesting one. Alain and other BELARE team members were the first humans ever to see this colony in person, after its existence had been discovered a few years ago when satellite imagery picked up traces of penguin faeces in the area...

Jos will tell us more in the coming week as he recounts his time in the field and sends us some amazing footage of what he saw.

Stay tuned!