QUIET STATION, BUSY SCIENTISTS AS CARGO SHIP PREPARES TO LEAVE BELGIUM



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With most of the scientists at the coast, things have been calm at the Princess Elisabeth Station. In Belgium, preparations are being made for the departure of the cargo ship bringing supplies and equipment to Antarctica.

Holding the fort

The station has been quiet a lot quieter over the last few days. The IceCon scientists and InBev-Baillet Latour laureate Jan Lenaerts have been making progress on the King Baudoin Ice Shelf now that the weather has improved. Jan managed to take five firn cores for his BENEMELT project, while the IceCon team took some radar soundings of the neaby area and worked on drilling the second 150-metre ice core for their project. Veteran journalist Jos Van Hemelrijck and Polar Quest winner Roger Radoux have also gone to the ice shelf to accompany Denis Lombadri from the Royal Observatory of Belgium and expedition leader Alain Hubert as Denis installs more seismometers for the SMEAIS project.

The only scientists left at the station are Alexander Mangold and Quentin Laffineur from the Royal Meteorological Institute of Belgium. They spend their time keeping track of the data their 12 instruments collect, and launch a meteorological balloon to collect atmospheric data every day at noon. They share the data they collect with the German Neumayer Station at the coast, which puts together weather forecasts for the Queen Maud Land region of East Antarctica.

Keeping Alexander and Quentin company at the station are engineers, electricians and mechanics who take care of the day-to-day functioning of the station. There's always something to keep them busy!

> *“We're only 12 people now, so it's been much quieter this week,” Alexander explained. “It will be a lot busier once everyone is back form the coast. We'll have 35 people at the station again.”*

Cargo ship to leave Zeebrugge

Meanwhile in Belgium, preparations are being made for the departure of the cargo ship that will transport supplies and equipment from the North Sea port of Zeebrugge to the BELARE team in Antarctica. Unfortunately, the cargo ship doing the job this season has been delayed by bad weather in the North Atlantic on its journey from Greenland to Belgium. Instead of arriving the morning of Friday, December 12th as scheduled, the cargo ship is expected to arrive sometime on Saturday, December 13th.

Once the ship arives, the loading of the cargo will begin in earnest. Food and equipment are part of the cargo, along with two new specially adapted Toyota Hi-Lux vehicles. The heavy-duty Hi-Luxes have been modified to haul heavy loads across snow and ice in Antarctica: Instead of tyres, they have caterpillar tracks!

The ship is scheduled to arrive at the coast of East Antarctica in late January, after a short stopover in Cape Town. Hopefully the sea ice around the coast of East Antarctica will be easier to handle than last season!