PEAK IN EAST ANTARCTICA NAMED AFTER VETERAN OF BELGIAN ANTARCTIC EXPEDITIONS



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A peak in the Sør Rondane Mountains now bears the name of Professor Tony Van Autenboer, a geologist and leader of many Belgian geological research expeditions between 1958 and 1970.

Born in 1932, Professor Van Autenboer was instrumental in convincing Belgian authorities to take part in the International Geophysical Year (IGY) 1957-58, which saw several nations from across the world take part in a concentrated effort to study the Polar Regions. His efforts also led to Belgium becoming one of the original 12 signatories of the Antarctic Treaty, which designated the continent as a place for peaceful scientific research.

Not long after, Professor Van Autenboer led a number of geological research teams conducting research in the Queen Maud Land in East Antarctica, where Belgium's first research station, the King Baudoin, was built in 1958 during the IGY. With a geophysical observatory set up at the King Baudoin station, Professor Van Autenboer and his team were able to conduct important geophysical research in a part of Antarctica that had not been previously studied over several seasons from the late 1950s until 1970.

In 2004, Alain Hubert and the International Polar Foundation asked Professor Van Autenboer to assist them in preparing the survey expedition to find a location to build the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica (PEA). He sat with the expedition team beforehand, going over maps and photos to select promising sites based on his intimate knowledge of the area.

“He helped us to choose the site of the PEA, and gave us precious insight into what we should expect from each location that we surveyed in 2004, ” recalled Nighat Amin, who took part in the 2004 survey mission and is in charge of logistics management and environmental impact reporting for Belgian Antarctic Research Expeditions (BELARE) today.

As the world’s first and only zero-emission polar research station, PEA has become a significant point of pride for Belgium.

“Tony was someone who represented a link between the past and future,” explained Ms. Amin. “Following his death in September 2022, we felt it was only natural to name a peak in the Sør Rondane Mountains after him - a peak on which we’ve installed a communications relay station. It represents the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next in honour of all that he did for us in advising and supporting our activities.”

The radio relay that sits atop Van Autenboer Peak allows automatic weather stations in the vicinity of the peak to send data directly to the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica. From the station, the weather station data is sent to Europe and is available to all who are interested in using it.

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