



## Flight in white

### Weather sends LC-130 on marathon trip

By Josh Landis  
*The Antarctic Sun*

The crew of the LC-130 scanned the sky for an opening in the clouds over Terra Nova Bay. A turbulent weather system had swung north across the Transantarctic Mountains. From thousands of feet up, the world beneath them was covered in white.

"I see the ice edge," Ed Anderson called out as the plane descended. Anderson, on board as a photographer, was looking for landmarks as the plane made its way toward the ice runway. So far, there were few signs the crew could trust to tell them they were on target.

Rocky outcrops came into view, then a penguin rookery, then a glacier. But still nothing they could go on.

Everyone on Skier 96 was tired. They'd been in the air more than nine hours, and they still weren't sure where they were going to land.

See "Flight"—Page 2



## Blow the man down

Strong storm systems slammed McMurdo earlier this week. Winds topped out at 74 miles per hour, and blinding snow shut down most areas around Ross Island. Photo by Josh Landis.

## Rock of ages

### Cape Roberts project probes Earth's past

By Jeff Inglis  
*The Antarctic Sun*

It's almost the year 2000, but in McMurdo Station's Crary Lab it's closer to 40 million years ago. The Cape Roberts project, in its third year of research, is still in search of layers of rock laid down during the Eocene Epoch, 35-55 million years ago.

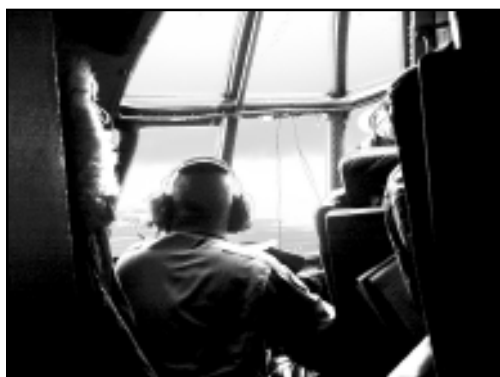
Cape Roberts is about climate change. Right now, climate pattern forecasts are made with only a few centuries of data. Cape Roberts researchers hope to add many million years to the known body of climate data.

But this is not Mac Weather's afternoon forecast. Knowing how climatic trends have evolved over massively long periods of time can help predict what the climate will be like in coming centuries.

In this search back in time, they are looking at material drilled from beneath the sea floor. This seabed core was drilled to a depth of 1968 feet on Friday.

The drill site is at Cape Roberts, about 75 miles northeast of McMurdo, just south of Granite Harbor, in the southwest Ross Sea.

See "Core"—Page 5



The crew of Skier 96 looks for a chance to slip through the storm and land at Terra Nova Bay. Photo by Tom Quinn.

**Trekking West  
Antarctica/Page 4**

**Towering over the  
ice / Page 7**

**A look back  
at Byrd / Page 9**

**Going to  
extremes/ Page 10**

*"Flight"—from Page 1*

The flight started at noon that day. It was a reconnaissance flight to take aerial photos of the South Pole station. Anderson and air operations supervisor Tom Quinn were on board to take pictures for National Science Foundation archives and operations planning.

The ski-equipped Hercules was operated by the 109th Airlift Wing of the New York Air National Guard.

The first leg of the flight, from McMurdo to 90 degrees south, went as planned. The pilot, Maj. John "JD" Degraaf, and co-pilot 1st Lt. Jason Reape circled Amundsen-Scott Station for about an hour at 1,000 feet, while

getting worse. About 50 miles south of Ross Island, Maj. Degraaf put the plane into a wide orbit, waiting to see if the weather would improve. He was also waiting for McMurdo's weather station to get the latest satellite image of the area.

When it came through, it was obvious that McMurdo's runway was out of the question. The next closest option was Terra Nova Bay, about 200 miles north.

Another LC-130 had landed there three hours earlier; there was a chance Skier 96 could do the same.

Terra Nova Bay isn't equipped to handle instrument-only approaches. Pilots have to line up with visual cues

Bedore voiced serious concern about going any farther. Degraaf agreed, gunned the engines, and pulled the plane out of its descent.

That left option number four: Siple Dome, a remote field camp that lay more than 700 miles away. Even though they'd already flown 2,000 miles, they had enough fuel to make it.

The weather system that had thrown the area around the Ross Sea into chaos left Siple Dome free and clear. After a quick orbit over McMurdo, looking for one last chance to land, Skier 96 headed west.

There was only one catch: Nobody was at Siple Dome. Nobody had been there since January, and no planes had landed there in more than nine months. The runway wasn't groomed, and the condition of the supplies was unknown.

On the way there, Quinn and Anderson made contact with MacTown and got precise instructions on where the fuel and survival caches would be.

Then, almost 12 hours after taking off, the Hercules LC-130 skied to a stop at Siple Dome.

"It was a beautiful landing," said Anderson.

Quinn remembered, "I got out, kissed the snow, and figured out what to do next."

"It was the longest LC-130 flight that a lot of us had ever been on," said Reape.

It had been a long day, but it wasn't over. Quinn, Anderson and some of the crew made sure they could get to the fuel, the pump, the food, and everything else they needed.


Then they went to bed.

The LC-130's auxiliary power unit ran all night, keeping the plane—and everyone in it—warm in the minus 16 F air.

The next day they refueled the plane, and began to play the weather waiting game again—but this time, from the ground.

It would be another 24 hours before the plane would fly back into the cold skies and carry everyone back to McMurdo.

Flying in Antarctica, like doing most things here, presents a unique set of challenges, not the least of which is the weather. The crew of Skier 96 and their ground support had battled bad weather over nearly half the continent for the better part of a day, and found a way to get back on the ground safely.

"There was a lot of team effort," remembered Anderson. "Exactly how it should be." 



*Skier 96 takes on fuel at Siple Dome field camp, following a day-long ordeal in the skies over Antarctica. Bad weather prevented it from landing for nearly 12 hours. Photo by Tom Quinn.*

Anderson and Quinn hung out of the rear cargo door taking pictures.

The crew thought about landing. The plane's tanks had been topped off back at McMurdo with the intention of leaving some fuel at Pole—where everything arrives by air. But the temperature was minus 60 F. When the air is that cold, hydraulic hoses, rubber seals and other flexible parts become brittle. It was too cold for a safe landing and takeoff, so Skier 96 headed north without unloading any fuel. As it turned out, they would need most of it by the end of the day.

As the plane headed back to McMurdo, the weather there was

that guide them to the runway. When Skier 96 got there, there wasn't much to be seen. They circled out over the sea ice and started their approach.

"It was like flying into a wall of white," remembers flight engineer Master Sgt. Shad Gray.

They could see little, and they needed to know a lot before they could make a safe landing. Maj. Kurt Bedore, the navigator, was looking for landmarks to help him plot his course. He wasn't finding them.

"As we approached, we looked down and saw a lot of things that weren't matching up," remembered Anderson. It was at this point that

# Letters to the editors

## Computer Room Claustrophobic

I write regarding the new computer space on Highway 1. Note that I did not say new and improved.

In this new computer space, we now have two more computers (which will hopefully be operational before the new millennium) and a cozier, yet more open, atmosphere. That atmosphere of openness is due to the fact that you are literally breathing down your neighbor's neck—if you are not actually typing on their keyboard by mistake. Be prepared to rub elbows! Also being open to Highway 1 contributes greatly to the privacy one wants when writing personal e-mails.

Fortunately there is a solution to these problems, one that could help with the constant lines that form!

Very close by—right next door as a matter of fact—there is a nice room with six well-spaced, relatively private computers! An answer to all our prayers! Of course I'm sure that there is no truth to the nasty rumor that this room will be locked and inaccessible to the general public when computer training is not going on. I would be very disappointed if this rumor were true. Note I said disappointed, not surprised and disappointed. No, I have more faith than that in the powers that be.

—Ralph Horak



Welder Eric Bostwick cuts a section of pipe for the new fuel lines being installed by the ice pier. Photo by Josh Landis.

## Weather this Week

### Palmer

H/44 F

L/15 F

Min Wind Chill: -15 F

Max Wind: 40 mph

### South Pole

H/-27 F

L/-62 F

Min Wind Chill: -128 F

Max Wind: 29 mph

### McMurdo

H/23 F

L/3 F

Min Wind Chill: -22 F

Max Wind: 74 mph

## Check out the Sun websites of the week:



<http://bat.phys.unsw.edu.au/~aasto/>  
Live WebCam at the South Pole.

<http://www.antdiv.gov.au/stations/live.html>  
Live WebCams at Australian stations in Antarctica.

[http://www.ssec.wisc.edu/data/comp/latest\\_ant.gif](http://www.ssec.wisc.edu/data/comp/latest_ant.gif)  
The latest satellite view of Antarctica.

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**Web address:** <http://www.asa.org>

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Great Gift Items  
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The Store!

### HOURS

Sun 11-2

Mon closed

Tue 7:30-8:30, 11:30-1:00,  
5:30-7:30

Wed 11:30-1:00, 5:30-7:30

Thu 7:30-8:30, 11:30-1:00,  
5:30-7:30

Fri 11:30-1:00, 5:30-7:30

Sat 7:30-8:30, 11:30-1:00,  
5:30-7:30

# Speaking of Science...

## Going the distance Researchers cross continent for climate clues

By Dr. Paul Mayewski  
Special to the Sun

In a few days 11 members of the U.S. component of the International Trans-Antarctic Scientific Expedition—ITASE, for short—will be heading off for a 700 kilometer traverse over portions of West Antarctica.



*Dr. Paul A. Mayewski is the chair, ITASE Executive Committee and Field Leader, U.S. ITASE.*

Our base of operation for this first in a series of four austral summer traverses will be Byrd Surface Camp. In following years we will travel toward Pine Island Bay, Siple Station and eventually end up at South Pole.

At the end of each field season the two Tucker SnoCats, sleds and much of the equipment we'll be using will be left to

winter where the traverse stops. At the start of each new season, people, food, fuel, batteries and scientific equipment will be flown in to start the next leg of the traverse.

Why are we doing this? In a nutshell, we want to understand the history of climate change—and change in the chemistry of the atmosphere—over the last 200 and more years in Antarctica. To attack this problem over a region as vast as Antarctica we have joined forces with 14 other countries that are also interested in the same scientific problems.

Why the last 200 years? It is within the last 200 years that humans have emerged on the planet as a major force in terms of climate and their impact on the chemistry of the atmosphere (air quality). Over the last century temperatures have risen over much of the globe and there have been dramatic changes in the levels of greenhouse gases, acids and toxic metals. Prior to the last century human impacts on climate and air quality were less.

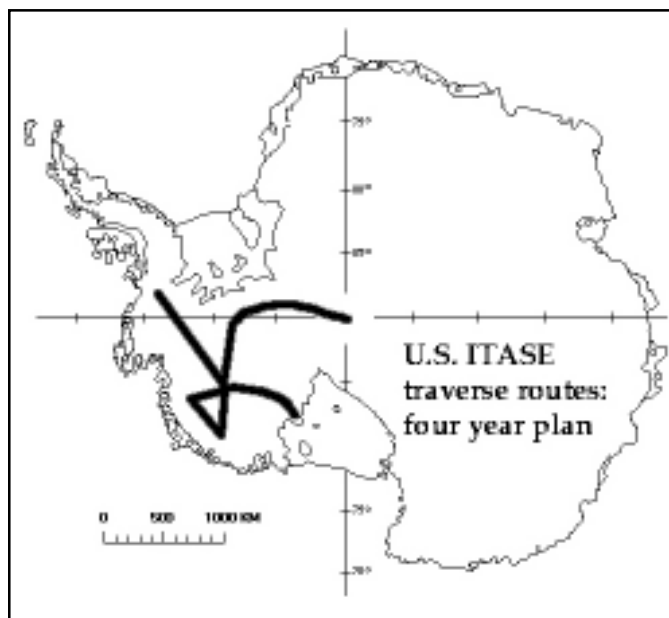
Why do we care about studying climate change and air quality over Antarctica?


For starters, we only have instrumental records of climate in the Northern Hemisphere that go back about 100 years. Most of the Southern Hemisphere is ocean, with poor instrumental coverage, and barely a handful of stations in Antarctica have climate records that go back 50 years despite the fact that Antarctica is one-and-a-half times the size of the United States. Significantly shorter records are available to study changes in air quality.

Despite its extremely remote location Antarctica plays a major role in the Earth's water balance, ocean circulation and atmospheric circulation. Furthermore, while it probably has the most pristine atmosphere on Earth, it is not immune to the effects of human pollutants—that have, for example, dramatically altered the natural state of ozone in the atmosphere over Antarctica.

To tackle major issues of climate change and air quality we are mounting a multi-disciplinary program that uses the over-snow traverse as a research tool. We will collect ice cores that capture year-by-year changes in climate and air quality. Radar mounted on the traverse vehicles will be used to look for crevasses and study near surface layering of snow and ice, ice depth and subglacial topography.

Global Positioning System studies will be used to assess changes in snow accumulation and ice movement. Ground-based observations will be used in the interpretation of satellite images.



To ITASE, Antarctica has two very important properties. First, it has locked within it a "time machine" that can help significantly in the recovery of environmental information needed to determine how the Earth functions in a natural versus humanly affected state. Second, Antarctica is like the proverbial canary in the coal mine with respect to Earth's air quality. It is relatively pristine today so it provides a baseline from which we can assess future change. 

*"Core"—from Page 1*

It's a huge team effort, involving over 60 people, including researchers, technicians, and drillers, among others. They're all looking at what they know about the earth's structure and applying it to the question of climate. At the same time, they're taking advantage of this rare opportunity to look back in time to further their own studies.

The daily schedule in Cray is a mix of routine and adventure. They begin each day by doing a basic classification of the core which arrives late each night from the drill site. In the middle of the morning they report to each other on research progress.

"With a project like this, with so many specialists, you have to keep informing each other," said project coordinator Peter Webb.

Each of the scientists working on the Cape Roberts project is a prominent scientist back home. Here, though, they're in among a whole group of high-power researchers. But they share time and space well, and are good-natured about their interactions.

After lunch, the specialists look at the core which was explained in the morning. They plant small toothpick flags at areas where they want samples taken. In total, the samples number in the hundreds each day, according to Matt Curren, one of the core curators who extracts the samples.

Each sample is taken for further analysis. Paleontologists look for fossils in their samples; scientists studying the magnetic field of the earth look at the alignment of particles in their samples; sedimentologists and stratigraphers look at the layering in the sediments.

When the samples have been analyzed, the scientists come back together to discuss what they've found. They compare different types of evidence relating to the age of the core material.

The evidence varies widely. Some of it—sedimentary and fossilized—shows what the climate was like, which

the scientists then match up with similar climate sequences from the rest of the world.

"We know what the climate was like in other parts of the world 30-40 million years ago," Webb said. "The purpose of this project is to try to understand present climate and future climate by looking at the past."

Antarctica is a special place for doing this type of work because it was the heart of Gondwanaland, the super-continent from which all landmasses on earth eventually broke off and slowly moved to their current locations.

The scientists also look at the changes in the earth's magnetic field. They already know the history of shifts in direction and polarity of the earth's

publication to the Ice. *Terra Antarctica* (sic) is an Italian earth science journal which publishes the results of the Cape Roberts Project team. An editor and a graphic artist for the journal are here at McMurdo working full-time to prepare the scientists' work for release to the wider community of world climatologists.

Before leaving the Ice in mid-December, each researcher must complete an initial report, describing their work on the core and preliminary results. Within 6 months they put out a final science report, which is also published in *Terra Antarctica*. Less than a year after they begin a season of drilling, the results of research and examination are available to the science world.

What these results reveal is of great import to determining climate change trends.


"The cores are really a proxy for the climate, plants, and topography," Webb said. Sea level, average temperatures, plant and animal life, and other information are contained in the core, a cylinder of rock just a few inches thick.

The Cape Roberts Project is a multinational collaboration, in which the U.S., New Zealand, and Italy are the major shareholders (and major funding sources).

Also participating are

Australia, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The project is going well, in its third and final year of drilling.

"Cape Roberts is successful," said Italian researcher Marco Taviani, speaking of the time and energy spent, as well as the money and international collaboration efforts.

The project expects to wrap up work and leave the Ice in mid-December. In the meantime, though, they're hard at work inspecting, marking, analyzing, and collaboration. The phrase Webb sometimes ends meetings with seems to run their lives: "Okay, let's go look at some more core." 



Ross Powell (left) and Massimo Pompilio choose the locations from which they would like the Cape Roberts core sampled. Photo by Jeff Inglis.

magnetic field. By finding out what the magnetic field pattern is within the Cape Roberts core, they can match up core sections with periods of time.

After all this work, they learn what the climate was like millions of years ago. But, just as in high school, no science project is complete without a written report. Formal academic science publication can take a long time, sometimes even years. Submission to journals, review, and then actual publication are all both bottlenecks and opportunities for verification of results.

Not so with Cape Roberts. They've solved the problem of publication delay by bringing their own

# In Brief

## McMurdo lead testing complete

Another round of water sampling at McMurdo Station ended this week. It was part of routine monitoring of levels of lead and other contaminants in the water system on station, said environmental engineer Cassandra Graber.

A subject of concern to the community, water contamination levels have dropped over the past five years, Graber said.

Lead, in particular, has been the subject of several health alert notices around McMurdo. Graber emphasized that the lead in the water is introduced by old pipes after purification. "The lead is not in the water when it's stored at the water plant," she said.

To minimize lead in the water, work has been done to alter the water chemistry, lowering the reactivity of the water with lead in the pipes. Also, some old parts of the plumbing system have been replaced in various places around McMurdo, Graber said, noting that neither process is complete.

Results of the testing will be available as early as next week, Graber said. They are being verified by a U.S. lab. Locations with excessive levels of lead or other contaminants will have signs posted with more information.


Another routine sampling of water will occur station-wide in January.

## FAA Visits Ice Runway

A team from the Federal Aviation Administration visited McMurdo Station's ice runway at the end of October to examine, test and certify the navigational equipment used by pilots flying into and out of McMurdo.

The FAA check is the final step of approval of runway procedures and equipment, said air traffic control manager Dave Ferguson. He said that the FAA thoroughly examines the equipment and procedures at the ice runway every year.

Operations have been underway for some time at the ice runway. Ferguson stressed the value of the inspection as outside affirmation of U.S. Antarctic Program airfield procedures.

The FAA team certified its approval of all the airfield's operations, Ferguson said. Another FAA team will return in December to inspect Williams Field and the South Pole airfield. 

## Faces on



## What is your favorite place in Antarctica?



"The Antarctic cods. I visit them every year and I feel quite bad when we eat them at Christmas."

**Joel Mayron**

Schenectady, New York  
LC-130 pilot

"The inside of a helo and I'm hoping to be on one before I leave."

**Natalie Sudman**

Livingston, Montana  
archaeologist/janitor



"The ice caves."

**Keith McKinney**

Minnesota  
Aviation Technical Services

"Scott Base, the best hosts on the continent."

**Don Bowen**

Denver  
Finance





# Keeping the planes apart

By Jeff Inglis  
The Antarctic Sun

It's a blue-sky day out on McMurdo Station's ice runway, but the world's turned upside down in the tower.

An LC-130 is leaving for the South Pole and the tower crew is thinking "north."

"Planes fly north to the South Pole," air traffic controller Heidi McCaffray said, watching the aircraft head between Black Island and White Island.

Here, that statement makes sense.

Close to the magnetic poles of the earth, navigation by compass is unreliable at best and dangerous at worst. Navigation is by "grid," based on calculations involving the longitude of a current position in relation to the 180-degree longitude line, explained air traffic controller Robert Virgil.

Since McMurdo is so close to 180 degrees of longitude, "grid north" is very close to true south.

Oddly, though, helicopters use true north and south for their navigation. It means the tower has to keep straight not only the type of aircraft on the radio, but also its direction—in real space and on its map.

They manage to do this with ease, fulfilling their basic mission. According to tower manager Mike MacLean, "We keep the airplanes apart."

That's may not seem too tough at an airport which deals with only about a dozen different planes all season. But it's not all that easy.

Runways are busy places, even when there are no planes around. Surveyors are out on the runway checking the sea ice movement, snow plows are keeping the path clear, maintenance workers are checking lights and navigational equipment, and the decelerometer crews are measuring the braking qualities of the ice.

Any time a plane comes near, to take off or land, the tower clears the runway of all people and equipment and calls out the fire department's crash vehicle in the event of a mishap.

It's all done by radio, and largely without the aid of tower radar, except in bad weather. Then the machine in the downstairs closet goes to work. It's the

pilot's eyes, connected to the airplane only by the voice of the tower controller, every five seconds during final approach in bad conditions.

Of the 15 controllers on staff, two are on duty at any given time. Sometimes there are more, if they're training or checking equipment. There's a bed in the tower, too, in case the controllers get stuck at the runway. They don't go home until all the planes are in.

There's also a weather person in the tower, taking readings on the instruments outside and observing conditions on the sea ice.

Sandra Lorenzana, one of the tower's rotating weather crew, said she does hourly observations as well as special reports and



Mike MacLean and Heidi McCaffray supervise the runway as an LC-130 lands. Photo by Jeff Inglis.

more frequent full reports if the weather is changing rapidly. These are called into Mac Weather and Mac Center, she said, to assist them in determining severe weather conditions and informing the pilots of what to expect during approach and landing.

A bit later in the season, MacLean said, there will be two towers operating around McMurdo; one will be at the ice runway until it shuts down, and the other will be at Williams Field. Last year they just had one tower and were unable to move it and set it up again in time for flights to arrive on schedule. Now, with an extra tower (which is presently at the ice runway, just next to the operating tower), Williams Field will be up and running with fewer delays. ❄️

## COLD HARD QUOTES

Compiled by Sun staff

In the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, almost every journey was extensively chronicled. Here are a few of the gems from these historical writings.

"Polar exploration is at once the cleanest and most isolated way of having a bad time which has been devised."

—Apsley Cherry-Garrard

"We have found the kingdom of blizzards. We have found an accursed land."

—Douglas Mawson

"[The Australians] inquired whether we had compartments in our ships to prevent us from sinking? How we intended to keep ourselves warm? What kind of anti-scorbutic were we to use? Where were our ice-saws? To all of these questions I was obliged to answer, to their great apparent surprise, that we had none."

—Charles Wilkes

"On the 19th, when I had slaughtered two hundred [penguins], I stopped killing the poor little fellows, and very thankful I was."

—M.C. Lester, of the British Imperial Expedition

"The afternoon may be so clear that you dare not make a sound, lest it fall to pieces."

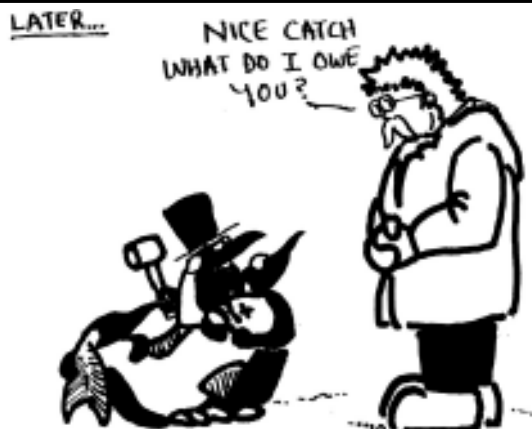
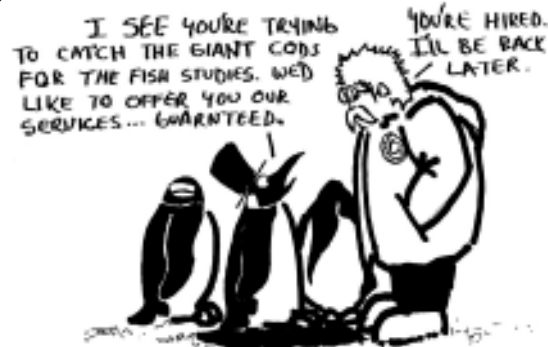
—Richard Byrd

"There was so much to worry about that there was not the least use in worrying."

—Apsley Cherry-Garrard

# Ross Island Chronicles

by Richard Doralac



## Continental Calendar

### Our Antarctic Week

#### Monday

Norbert Wu slide show—8:30 p.m., Galley  
Belly dancing lessons—7 p.m., 208 lounge

#### Tuesday

Swing dance lessons—6:30, gym

#### Wednesday

Skua bingo—8 p.m., Gallagher's  
Belly Dancing Lessons—7 p.m., 208 lounge

#### Thursday

Computer training for new users—6-7 p.m.,  
computer training room

#### Friday

Karaoke—8 p.m., Gallagher's

#### Saturday

FMC party—6 p.m., Building 136

If you have an item for the weekly calendar, e-mail us at [sun\\_news@mcmurdo.gov](mailto:sun_news@mcmurdo.gov), call 2407, or drop by our office in Building 155.

Hey! The Coffee House is  
open mornings, too!  
Here's when:

Tue & Fri	6am-8:30am
Tue—Fri	7pm-11pm
Sat	7pm-midnight
Sun	9am-10pm

Check the Rec Boards in  
Highway 2





# Perspectives

## Early Days at Byrd

By Ed Walmsley  
Special to the Sun

Twenty years ago, I was in my third summer support tour on the Ice, and had just been promoted to Chief Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy Seabees. My crew of five equipment operators and I had just finished constructing a new ice runway and were settling into a daily maintenance cycle, when I was informed that I would head up a crew of eight guys to rebuild Byrd Surface Camp.

When I learned I was going to Byrd, I wondered if I was the right person for the job, since I was the more junior of two chief petty officers. I had lots of doubts and unanswered questions about how I would do. I wondered if the right crew had been chosen; I didn't know much about these guys, their abilities and how they would work together.

In those days, the camp was rebuilt every two years. With all the necessary supplies, a hundred pounds of clothes and personal gear each, we were airlifted to the remote site in late October. Our mission was to provide remote weather reports, provide a refueling stop for aircraft returning to Williams Field, and to build a new station.

The day we landed it was overcast, and the wind was starting to whip up. We disembarked to find the entire camp buried to the top of the Jamesway huts. Only the marker flags gave us any idea of their location. Our first jobs were to get inside the Jamesway, establish radio contact with McMurdo, and get the heaters working.

When you arrive at Byrd, you face the realization of how remote it really is. There is nothing, just snow meeting the horizon for 360 degrees. There were a few gentle changes in elevation, but it was mostly flat. It was bitter cold, well below zero with the wind blowing every day. In

the first few days, things were hectic trying to solve unending problems of cold machinery, locating existing food supplies (they had been left by previous occupants), determining priorities, and living at this remote station.

Construction on the new camp started the second week and slowly we developed a daily routine. We started receiving necessary supplies, fuel for our use and the aircraft, and sent weather observations to MacTown. The crew I had working for me got along well—except for the cook. I ended up firing him, and we all took turns being the cook!

We spent three to four months living and working at the camp. We worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week. When a plane was due, we all worked no matter how long it took, until it continued on its way. We were also an international crew—a New Zealand Army member was in charge of terminal operations.

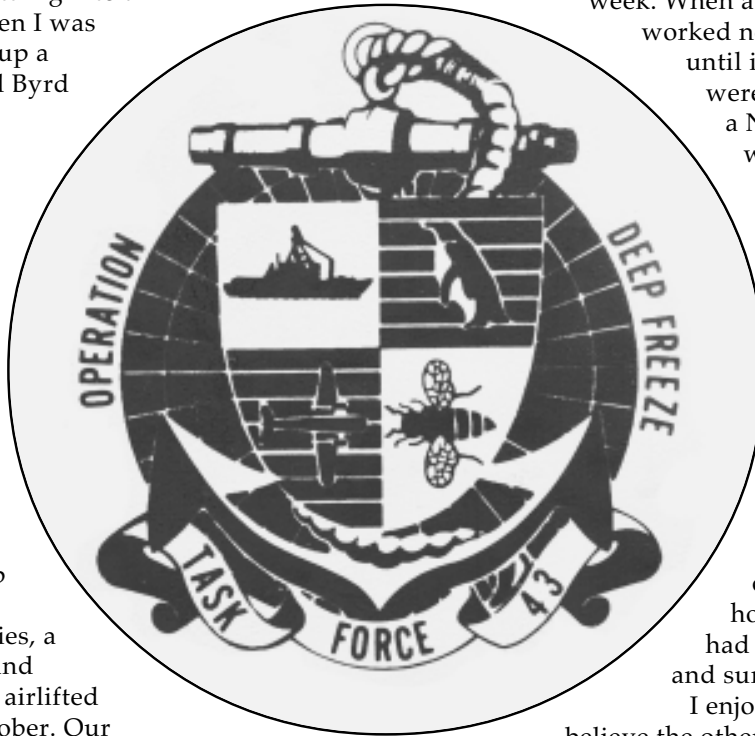
Sometimes it was hard being away from home, since mail was very sporadic. Thanksgiving dinner that year had to be improvised. We were supposed to have turkey and all the trimmings, but the plane couldn't get it to us. Instead we had steak and lobster, which we literally excavated from the old Byrd Camp. I don't know how old it was or how long it had been there, but we all ate it and survived!

I enjoyed my time at Byrd and I believe the other guys did as well. We did it all as a team.

Our mission was considered a success and most of us received Navy commendations of various types. Looking back on this challenge of 20 years ago, I feel it was a positive experience which taught me a lot about teamwork, and about working for a common goal.

I'd even consider doing it all again if the opportunity was available. ✨

*Ed Walmsley lives in Bremerton, Washington. He served in Operation Deep Freeze during 1965-66 and 1977-80. His email address is [marieed@telebyte.net](mailto:marieed@telebyte.net).*





## PROFILE

## Going hot and cold

**From Africa to the Pole, Walt Fischel travels the world's extremes**

By Josh Landis  
The Antarctic Sun

Anyone who's lived at the South Pole knows about extremes. It's one of the coldest and most isolated places in the world.

Walt Fischel knows. He spent the last year at Pole as an ironworker helping with the massive construction project to renovate and upgrade Amundsen-Scott Station.

But Antarctica is only one of Fischel's extremes. The other is the hot, dry, wild land of Africa. It's a place he discovered for himself a few years ago, and a place he's planning to make his home after he leaves the Ice.

"I've been a lot of places, and that's where I want to stay," said Fischel on his recent trip through McMurdo on his way north.

His most recent trip through Africa was an adventure of action-movie proportions. In 1997 he traveled the entire continent from south to north. He crossed war zones, tangled with crocodiles, and put his life in danger more than once.

"I was shot at, robbed, thrown in jail, hijacked, and spit at by Egyptian cobras," Fischel says, listing just a few of the close calls he had on his journey.

His connection to Africa began in his college years when he had a roommate, Puso Kirby, from Botswana. Fischel decided to visit Kirby, who lives on the 15,000-acre Mokolodi game preserve. That was all it took. Fischel was hooked.

When asked what moment in his travels he remembers most vividly, Fischel recalls being face-to-face with mountain gorillas in Uganda. Fischel met some forest guards who, with a little financial persuasion, brought him to a place in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest where he could sit among the gorillas.

"It was scary as hell," remembers Fischel, describing his frightening and moving encounter with the gentle giants. "They're docile creatures, but if you upset them, they could tear you to pieces."

Fischel had other moments where the danger came from

human hands. Against the advice and warnings of locals in Kenya, Fischel decided to cross the lawless, desolate expanse of desert in the northern part of the country.

"They told me it couldn't be done, but I didn't believe that," he said. The road was said to be full of hijackers, and no bus would make the trip, but Fischel found out he could hitch a ride on top of a truck with other intrepid (or desperate) souls who also wanted to cross the desert.

Just hours into the trip two Somali bandits, just as predicted, stopped the truck to rob it. Guns drawn, it looked like they were going to succeed, until the man sitting next to Fischel pulled out his own automatic rifle.

"All of the sudden people were shooting and everyone was ducking," he remembered. The bandits got away, and the truck rolled on to its destination.


There was also a time Fischel was the one on the wrong side of the law. He'd been hunting pheasants with Kirby, and forgot to take the shotgun shells out of his backpack. They sat there for weeks, as Fischel crossed border after border. When he tried to reenter Botswana, the

customs agents searched his bag, found the ammunition and threw him in jail.

It looked like an African-bush version of "Midnight Cowboy" was shaping up, but he was lucky. Kirby was also the son of Botswana's assistant attorney general. The police chief gave the man a call, brought Fischel into his office, and explained that there was a loophole in the law where he could be freed if he was a relative of the assistant attorney general.

"You are related to him, right?" the chief asked, looking Fischel in the eye.

He didn't have to be asked twice. "Yes I am," Fischel replied, and he was on his way.

It's a long way from the South Pole to the African bush, but it's a trip Walt Fischel made on his journey of extremes. He says he wants to open up an iron-working business there, and stay for a while—at least until he heads back to his other extreme at the bottom of the world. 



Walt Fischel, right, looks on as R.J. Rue welds two sections of fuel pipeline together near the ice pier. Photo by Josh Landis.