

## **Week 2 High and Low-lights – Arrival in Antarctica**

Well the day finally came last Friday when the weather cleared enough for us to board the plane for Antarctica. The “ice team” was filled with anticipation as we checked in at the U.S. Antarctica Program terminal and followed instructions closely. We were boarding a military cargo aircraft (a C-17), which was from McChord Air Force base in Jay’s hometown of Tacoma, WA, so the procedures were a bit different than if one was flying a commercial flight. Once all 120+ passengers were boarded and the cargo placed in around us the flight began. It took nearly 6 more hours of flying until we reached our destination of McMurdo Station in Antarctica. As we got closer to the Antarctic Continent the views from the plane were spectacular – lots of snow, ice and whiteness!!



Check-in at the US Antarctic Program terminal in Christchurch, NZ.

Upon our arrival we were whisked from the ice runway to our first of many briefings.



C-17 military cargo plane used for transport to Antarctica.

There we received a quick introduction to the station and were assigned rooms. The rooms are dorm style, much like college with shared bathrooms and showers, but all and all they are comfortable. Besides briefings the 3 new members of our team have had to take about 7 training sessions to familiarize ourselves with operations here at McMurdo and more importantly to learn about the terrain and conditions

here in Antarctica as it is a place unlike any other on the planet. All this training is necessary in order to prepare for the unexpected, which can happen quickly and often here, as well as to keep us safe as we conduct our research on the ice.



View from inside the C-17 military cargo plane.



First glimpses of Antarctica via the plane.

Two of the most notable classes included Snow School and Sea Ice training. Sea Ice class taught us how to recognize cracks, pressure ridges and ice holes so we do not fall through the ice. We will be conducting our work on the sea ice, which is exactly what it sounds like, frozen ocean and thus as the tides move and shift under the ice – gaps or cracks can occur.

The other type of ice is shelf or glacial ice and that is land based ice in which crevasses form. Later in the season as the weather warms there may even be holes or places in the ice that are thin enough that could cause us “concern”. Thus, we also learned how to drill into the ice to determine its thickness and if it is safe to walk and drive on; we drilled into ice that was 15 feet thick, definitely safe. Snow School, better known as Happy Camper training, is for people who are new to Antarctica and who will be working outdoors away from McMurdo Station and thus have a potential to get “stuck” should weather inhibit safe transport back to the station. This class teaches you basic survival skills such as building an ice wall, setting up tents, setting up a stove to heat food and water, and tips on how to stay warm that will help you get through a bad storm until help arrives or conditions change and thus allow you to get back to McMurdo. Well as luck would have it during our (Linnea, Shawn and Jay) class, a storm did blow in and thus we had to build a camp and sleep overnight in “regular tents” in 45mph winds and a wind chill temperature of negative 44 degrees F or “Condition 2” weather. It would be hard to describe that experience with words, just let us say, boy was it cold. However, the good thing about training under such conditions is now we are more prepared should a “real life” scenario such as that arise as we are working out on the ice.

Most of the other time we have spent since our arrival has been getting the laboratory set up as well as preparing our field gear to be moved to a place yet to be determined. Yesterday we received our last bit of vehicle training and thus we were able to go out on a short scouting expedition last night after dinner. It was not long (about an hour from the station) until we spotted the first Weddell seals. A small group nestled along the frozen shores of Tent Island. These seals are some of the most docile wild animals around and we were able to get close enough to photograph them, hear the amazing sounds they make as well as see the ice holes they use to gain access to the water from the ice. We plan to do a few more scouting trips in order to locate other animals and then determine where we should set up our field site for the study.

It has been a whirlwind adventure so far and things are just starting...once we receive a few more important pieces of equipment that are scheduled to arrive soon, the study will be in full swing...until then – stay tuned,

The Ice Team



Panoramic View of McMurdo Station in Antarctica.



Braving the storm at Snow School  
(Happy Camper Training).



Drilling to determine the ice  
thickness at Sea Ice School.



Weddell Seal near Tent Island.



Seals' Ice Hole.