

Newsletter #9,

13 April, (Saturday), 11:30

The pace of life has slowed dramatically around here as we pass from the building mode to the experiment mode. When we record underwater acoustic signals or noise it is important that none of this noise is made by ourselves. So, there can be no walking or skidooning while a recording is being made. Even talking is frowned upon. We have to put our feet up and be quiet. So far, the recording periods have been only five minutes at a stretch, but it's remarkable the number of people who can nod off during a 5-minute quiet time. I think that everyone is still tired from the frantic building phase.

Right now the DREO folks are dismantling their little camp (Bearbait). They are pulling out the geophones and removing their electronics, but they are leaving the Octagon tent for other experiments. Chief Surveyor Gordon Ebbeson, at the behest of Stan Dosso, has surveyed the position of the Icepicks and just about everything else that doesn't move. The first picture shows Gordon at work. Nicole has been helping him with notes, radio work, etc., so they have been able to move along at a good clip. Nicole is apprenticing to Gordon, too, so if the thin-ice business doesn't pan out (bad pun), she'll have something to fall back on. I guess it would be more accurate to say that they are learning together, since Gordon is just a novice, too.

Our large bank of lead-acid batteries is being charged by the 6 kW generator. This will take a good percentage of the day since there are a lot of electrons to push back through the batteries. Francine, Jacques and Ivan are preparing another experiment in the Phantom tent, which covers the large 4x8-ft hole that we cut several days ago. So, they have shelter and heat for comfort, and a large ice hole for their work. It's an ice fisherman's dream. (Interestingly enough, we have never brought fishing rods; I'm not sure whether that's due to a lack of interest or a lack of time.)

14 April (Sunday) 0930

Yesterday Mark Rowsome (DREA) came out to stay at Paradise (It has a good ring to it, doesn't it), and he has started getting Phantom ready for its first dip.

Bob Creber and Chris Fletcher from SPAWAR (it used to be NRaD) and Kevin Amundsen from Benthos came out to test some underwater modems. (These are acoustic devices that can talk to each other in an underwater network.) We drilled 8-inch holes at several distances from the science tent: 0, 500, 1000 and 2000 metres. They lowered the modem units, and, wonder of wonders, everything worked first time. The modems will send data packets around the net for a couple of days, and the error rate will be noted and recorded. The modems will then be pulled up (with the help of the hot-water drill), and that experiment will be done.

One of the pictures shows the drilling of an eight-inch-diameter hole (the VLA hole). The drill is being turned by a ¾-inch electric drill. I know you can't see faces, but Ron and Francine are on the drill and Nicole (in red) is observing. I don't know who is watching in the background. One person is enough to do the actual drilling, but two (or more) are required when the cutter breaks through into the ocean below. The people holding the drill suddenly have to take all its weight; moreover, the drill wants to screw itself down through the slush in the hole, so the people have to lift the weight of the slush

as well. When the ice is quite thick (say 20 ft or more), we use a tripod to take the weight. The tripod also makes it easy to pull the drill stem out of the ice and to take the stem apart. In this picture the ice is only 6-ft thick.

Yesterday, everyone associated with Iceshelf 2002 came out to the camp and posed for Janice Lang who took the year's group picture. There were 34 of us, including Janice.

The DREO people are all back at Alert, and all of them except Lloyd Gallop and Janice will be going home on the next Rotator south. Lloyd will be staying partly to help us, but mostly, I believe, to look after the three-corner reflectors for Maureen Jeremy. Lloyd asked me to mention that he received a lot of help from Jim Milne and Dan Wile when he installed the four along Sickle Point.

The wind has picked up again this morning, but it is only blowing

15 to 20 mph, and the forecast is for no more than 20. The forecast also says that this 'small disturbance' will end by midnight tonight. We'll see... The wind seems to be bringing in warmer temperatures: yesterday at this time the thermometer said minus 35, and this morning it says minus 22. Of course it actually feels colder because of the wind. It's amusing that the only thermometer we have in camp is a little drug-store number that Dorothy brought. None of the 'scientists' seem to have any interest in the temperature.



If you remember, the jokers around here were asking me whether or not there were penguins in the Arctic. After my weather (and bear) prognostications they wanted to see whether I could get something (anything) right. The last picture today shows quite clearly that I got even that one wrong.



Recent pictures have been courtesy of Garry and Francine.

Best wishes,

Ron Verrall

Newsletter #10,

16 April (Tuesday) 13:30

This is turning out to be quite a windy spring. The last email ended on Sunday with the wind blowing about 20 mph and predicted to end at midnight. Actually, it was quite calm by the time we went to bed, and it stayed that way for most of yesterday (Monday). The temperature was up to about minus 26, and it was a lovely day. We discussed how the people back home could never believe how lovely it could be when the temperature was up to minus 20 and the winds were calm.

Then, towards the end of the day the wind picked up yet again and blew hard all night. The tents were very noisy as they flogged in the wind, and I woke up at 0100 and didn't get back to sleep until 3 or 4. Garry slept through most of it, but his snoring didn't bother me at all since I couldn't hear it for the wind noises.

I mentioned before that the underwater modems brought up by the Americans have been working very well. We would like to get a measurement of their maximum working distance, so we went out about 8 km yesterday while the weather was nice, and we temporarily deployed a modem in two different places. We had quite a large party: Garry, Francine, Don Mosher, Jacques, Stan, Nicole, Janice and me. The ice is quite rough in the whole area, and it takes quite a while to go any distance. Moreover, the visibility and the definition have to be good so that one doesn't have minor accidents and get stuck in the lumpy ice. There are problems enough even when the visibility is perfect. In the late afternoon toward the end of the measurement period I was getting rather antsy since we could see the sun disappearing behind clouds, and this means poor definition. I was wanting to head for home, and the 'scientists' wanted to do 'one more thing'. It's hard to get a large group moving, and by the time we got going the definition was pretty bad. Since I didn't want to travel through very heavy ice in conditions like that, we ended up

taking a very long way home in order to end-run the bad ice. By the time we got home we were certainly ready for hot coffee and/or whatever. We were all pretty frosted up.

Francine snapped the picture of Nicole while she still had white sideburns. They dragged me into the picture, too. I had already pulled off my toque and balaclava and was cooling off.



We went out again today with a much smaller party. Although the wind was blowing about 20 mph, it wasn't lifting much snow, and the visibility was quite good. So, in spite of the much colder conditions, we were able to make very good time through the rough ice. I wasn't worried at all, whereas I was quite concerned yesterday. However, the wind was steadily picking up, and the blowing snow was getting worse, so we cut our trip short after only one hole and returned home for lunch. Since the wind kept increasing we didn't go back out. (Found 5-ft ice. Was quite pleased.)

One of the measurements at these remote locations involves the use of a computer to initialize a piece of equipment (a sound-velocity-vs-depth profiler). One of today's pictures shows

Francine (you'll never recognize her) hiding under a parka working on her computer which is sitting on her skidoo. The parka was to help her keep the bright sun off the computer and to keep it warm. The photo is courtesy of Bob Creber; the parka is courtesy of Nicole, and what remains is Francine.



2100, Tuesday

The wind dropped in the afternoon, the sun is shining, the temperature has risen, and the weather is now quite lovely. You can see forever, and the light and shadow on the neighbouring cliffs is spectacular even though the cliffs are several km away. People are walking around wearing light jackets and toques and saying, 'Isn't this gorgeous!' During the rather miserable storms at the beginning of the month I promised Francine that the weather was sure to be good by the middle of April, and I missed by only one day. Let's hope that the good weather sticks.

Today we had a planning meeting and discussed in detail the way in which we would install the several arrays under the ice. The scientific phase is about to begin with a vengeance.

More later when we actually get Phantom operating and we get a horizontal array installed.

Best wishes, Ron Verrall

Newsletter #11,

17 April (Wednesday) 21:00

Today was another day pretty much wasted by the sighting of a bear. Dorothy walked out of her tent at about 0600 this morning after hearing footsteps, and she saw a bear no more than 50 ft away. She woke Francine and me (Garry was overnighing in Alert) and we woke the rest of the camp. We also informed Jim Milne in Alert, who notified the Station.

This bear was quite evidently a different bear than the first one; it was bigger and whiter. It, too, looked in very good shape – i.e., not hungry. After rolling around in the snow for a while – presumably giving itself a dry-cleaning, it wandered over to the Octagon that is 600 m away from the main camp – the Octagon that was called ‘Bearbait’. (I assume the irony is not lost on anyone.) This tent is temporarily unoccupied, so there was nothing to prevent the bear from going in for a really good look. Kevin Whalen, with a gun over his shoulder and pot lids in hand walked toward the tent shouting and banging. The bear seemed to understand the message, for he reluctantly wandered away. He went back to the rough ice bordering the east side of William Island and was there for most of the day. (We checked the tent later and found absolutely no damage.)

Gerry White and the station SWO (Station Warrant Officer) brought out the Station’s BV soon after we called in the news, and what followed was a bit of slow-motion cat-and-mouse. The folks in the BV couldn’t find the bear to frighten him/her away. When the BV left, the bear would reappear again. Then the BV would come back. Eventually – towards suppertime – when the BV returned for the third time we saw the bear running away across William Island. It looked large enough to be a big male, but, as my daughter Helen said when referring to the corpse of a rodent, ‘fear is the great enlarger’. The bear seemed to have some sort of den, which indicates that it might be a female since only the females den up during the winter and spring. However, there was no cub, so why would there be a den? Also, Gerry said that the den was pretty small and not very solid, so it probably wasn’t a winter-over den. And no-one else saw it since it got destroyed in all the BV’s running about.

Rather interestingly, the bear ignored the BV while the vehicle was still on land, but as soon as it started over the ice, the bear stood up and took notice. The final time this happened, the bear took off at great speed over William Island – even though the BV was at least a half mile away – maybe more. Can the bear detect vibrations in the ice??

Also, we marvelled at the speed the bear could run. He disappeared over the top of the Island in record time. Keep in mind that most of this was seen through binoculars or by straining and squinting. “Where’s the bear? Do you see it? Where did it go? Do you see it now?” Nicole and Sophie, who are the youngest, had a definite advantage. The binoculars, of course, were either frosted up or impossible to focus – usually both.

18 April (Thursday)

We stood a bear watch again last night, but there are enough people out here that we could pair up and still have to stand watch for only one hour. I was out between 0200 and 0300, and, again, the lighting of the distant cliffs, hills and mountains was quite beautiful. It was cold (-35) standing around, though. The most interesting thing was the

snapping and cracking of the ice as its surface got colder and colder. The surface ice wants to shrink, but the ice underneath won't allow it, so the surface cracks. The crazing of your teapot's glaze is another example of the same process.

I imagine the bear slept through it all.

The underwater vehicle, Phantom, gave problems yesterday, so we couldn't use it to string lines under the ice. In a perverse way this made us not mind the fact that we were wasting a lot of time on the bear. Without Phantom we couldn't have done anything major anyway.

Today we experimented some more with the underwater modems. We installed modem number 5 out at about 7 km from the camp. It was an interesting drive to get there through a combination of rough ice and old pans with their heavy rolling ice. We skirted wide around the bear's apparent territory. After doing a short test with the various installed modems talking to each other and to the new one, we decided to leave the new one in the water for further testing. We came back to camp for lunch, and several hours later we went back to the modem site to pull it out.

By this time, of course the ice hole had necked in, and the modem couldn't be pulled past the constriction. We were prepared for this, however. We had the furnace burner that is usually used in the hot-water drill, and we had a big pot for water. We heated the water and poured it down the hole. The first picture shows Ron and Garry heating water. We could



have had a great tea party, but we forgot the tea. One pot-full of water was just sufficient to enlarge the hole enough to pull up the modem (a tube about 5 inches in diameter and about 2 ft long). Low tech to the rescue.

The other two pictures were also taken at the 'modem' site. The first shows Val Shepeta hamming it up for the camera on a chunk of ice. The second show a group of people trying to retrieve the modem. Nicole is watching for bears in the background. Neither picture shows the people very well, but the three pictures together give a sense of the ice roughness. Note that there is lots of snow, so picking a route through the ice rubble is not terribly difficult.

On the trip back and forth to the modern site we passed bear tracks in a couple of places, but we saw no bears – either at the camp or en route. There will be a bear-watch tonight.

Best wishes,

Ron Verrall



Newsletter #12,

20 April (Saturday) 20:00

The proximity of a bear (or bears) is disturbing camp life and slowing progress. We are maintaining a bear watch, so this means that nearly everyone has his (or her) sleep disturbed for an hour every night. This really means two hours of sleep lost. Then, when a bear does get too close, the alarm goes out, and everyone gets up again. For the last couple of nights we have had the Station's BV out with us (Kevin Whalen driving). The bear doesn't like it, and he stays away. This is very reassuring. We also get more sleep.

Yesterday we had several new additions to the camp. Peter Holtham, Troy Richards and Sterling Mayo (all from DREA) came out. Although Peter has worked in the Arctic many times, this is the first visit for Sterling and Troy. Troy is staying in the same Octagon as Garry and I. When he came in to go to bed last night, the tent was pretty cold. This was his first night in an Arctic tent, remember, and I had already gone to bed. He looked at his little thermometer on the table and said with some surprise, 'Minus two!!'. I was a little cold, too, since the temperature at table level is warmer than the temperature at bed level, and my sleeping bag hadn't yet warmed up. But I had to maintain the Arctic façade. 'Perfect', I sighed, and snuggled into the sleeping bag. He looked a little nonplussed, but he adapted just fine. (Garry complains about being cold sometimes, too, although he is plenty warm enough when he puts his second sleeping bag over his first one.)

The last couple of days have involved the installation of one of the horizontal arrays of hydrophones. Yesterday, with the aid of Phantom, we strung a line under the ice from the Phantom tent to a hole 350 m away. Phantom, in spite of an expensive refit, is not working as well as it was two years ago – much to Garry's disgust. The video system, in particular, is not as good. One of the consequences is that Phantom cannot see as far under water as it used to. Our technique is to put a bright flashing light down an ice hole in order to guide Phantom to the right location. The maximum distance we can go is now only 50 or 60 metres. So, in order to get Phantom out the 350 m from its launch point, we had to drill about six intermediate holes and coax Phantom along.

We finally got it out to the ultimate hole. We lowered a weight on a string, Phantom grabbed it and headed back to the Phantom hole as we paid out the string. Phantom has no trouble finding its way in the 'home' direction since it is hauled back by its umbilical cord, the umbilical being pulled by three or four people. It was two thirds of the way back when the voice on the radio said, 'We've dropped the weight'.

'Oh Lord! we thought. All that work wasted.'

'We'll go down to the bottom and look for the string and the weight', the radio said.

Garry looked at me. 'Good luck', we both thought. 'There's not a chance in a thousand that they'll find that thin line in 80 metres of water.'

Not to worry. In less than two minutes, Phantom had dropped to the bottom and found the string and then the weight. Away it went again. Again it dropped the weight. Sheesh! Again Phantom powered itself down to the bottom and found the weight. This was starting to be monotonous. Finally Phantom arrived at its big ice hole and delivered the string to the outstretched arms.

Today Mike, Ivan and Jacques prepared the array for deployment. I went out with a group of hot-water drillers to recover all the pieces of equipment that had been frozen into the ice over the last couple of weeks: ice picks, modems and hydrophones. We even opened up the hole that will be used to pull out the horizontal array of hydrophones. The weather was warm; the sun was shining and there was no wind. Don Mosher, Francine, Val, Lloyd and I had quite a pleasant day, and the new hot-water-drill operators learned a few more tricks of the trade.

When we returned to the camp the array was just about ready for installation. We melted out the ice in the pull hole (again) and used the 350-metre-long underwater string to pull a stronger rope between the two holes. We attached the rope to the array and started pulling the array into the water at the Phantom hole and toward the 'pull' hole. We were almost done when Jacques, who was monitoring the health of the system announced that all the hydrophones had been 'lost'. This doesn't mean physically lost; it just means that their signals were no longer getting to the surface. I'm not sure whether they will be able to fix it in place or whether we will be pulling arrays back out of the water tomorrow.

The first picture today is of Ron and Garry on bear-watch. Photo by Val.



The second is of
Ivan Bond,
Francine
Desharnais and
Jacques Rouleau
testing out an
underwater
'eyeball'. Photo
by Garry, I think.

Best wishes,
Ron Verrall



Newsletter #13,

25 April (Thursday) Noon

I've just realized that I haven't written anything since Saturday. We have been very busy, and I have had a bit of a cold. I haven't felt very communicative.

The idea that a bear might be nearby has slowed our progress. More accurately, our nightly bear-watch has disturbed everyone's sleep so that for several days we got badly behind in our rest. Not only did we get up for our own watch, but we woke up whenever anyone else in the tent got up or when someone walked by. Also, this sort of situation was new to most of the people, and the thought that a bear might wander into camp was not very conducive to sleep. However, the situation has improved recently. We have not seen a bear for quite a few days now, and we have not maintained a bear watch for the last two nights. As a result we are all catching up on our sleep, and true cheerfulness is replacing forced joviality. (A good bunch of people – these. Nary a sharp word the whole time.)

I mentioned in the last email that Peter Holtham and Troy Richards had swept into town. In the interim they have worked all hours and have completed their experiment. They installed their equipment, buried hundreds of metres of cables and then collected data. Yesterday they packed it all up, and today they swept back out of Alert. Peter said it was really nice to come into a camp where everything was already set up. Our guys were saying how nice it was to get to know Peter (and his subtle sense of humour) a bit better. They were very impressed by how tough he is, and they were calling him 'Father North' by the time he left. Today is 'Rotator' day, and we have lost quite a few people to the south: Dave Thomson, Nicole Collison, Jason McInnis, Bob Creber, Chris Fletcher and Kevin Amundsen as well as Peter and Troy. I certainly hope that they got all (or at least some of) of what they came for and that they all had an interesting time. I know that Nicole, her bubbling sense of humour and her infectious laugh are missed already.

The horizontal array (known as UCARA) has been operating – but only reluctantly. I've lost track of the number of times we have hauled it up for a quick fix. However, data collection is finally in full swing. Two days ago Nicole organized an experiment that involved the use of several types of noise sources (including the implosion of light bulbs) at nine separate holes. The sound was detected at several bottomed hydrophones (as well as by UCARA), and the data was recorded at the Science Tent. Nicole had eight or nine guys slaving away for her – drilling holes, lowering sources, breaking lightbulbs, moving cables, etc., etc. I said that it reminded me a whole lot of Cleopatra and her entourage. The whole experiment ran very smoothly. It was all done in an afternoon, whereas I had figured we would be working until midnight. I think she has a good set of data. (Stan Dosso should be smiling.)

The weather has remained quite lovely. Temperature is about -20, and there is no wind. Yesterday we could see forever, and it would have been a good day to take a group on a little tour for rest and recreation. Often data-collecting time is good for that sort of thing since the camp has to be quiet anyway, and the best way to make people be quiet is to send them somewhere else. However, everyone was working hard, and no-one wanted to leave what they were doing. Today, it is snowing gently and the mercury is rising. The

extra snow is good for the skidoo ride into Alert, but now we worry about what might happen if there is a blow.

A few days ago eight of us took a two or three small toboggans and one big work sled up to the hills bordering Jolliffe Bay, and we had a couple of hours of downhill sledding. The small sleds were pretty rough on the derriere, but the big sled, with its metal hitch removed and its surface covered with foamies, was a treat. As many as six people would pile onto the sled at the top (or as close to the top as we dared) and sail majestically down the hill. A certain amount of air time was racked up when we hit the bumps at the bottom. A big skidoo would then haul everyone back up the hill. Later we were told that the laughs and squeals could be heard back at the camp. It was good fun and very good for morale. Sophie, our young military assistant who had been treating me with a fair degree of deference, made a momentous discovery. "He's just a big kid!"

26 April (Morning)

Yesterday afternoon and evening was another great day for data collection. Francine did her bottom-bounce experiment. She had six or seven guys working for her all afternoon popping lightbulbs and the data all looks good, so she's quite happy. Gordon got one of his experiments completed in the evening – finishing about midnight.

The weather yesterday afternoon and evening was quite snowy – visibility down to a few hundred metres. Warm though! This morning the conditions are lovely – visibility back up and warm with no wind.

We are beginning to make plans for the backhaul. As people return home we no longer need such a large camp. So far, two Octagon tents have been packed up, and we're eyeing another one.

Garry Heard is now writing newsletters, and he is churning them out at a great rate. Some time ago we were told that my Newsletters, since they went to both government and private addresses, had to be considered DREA documents, and it was government polity that they had to be put through the appropriate review process. Since that was hardly practical I just removed all government addresses and left only the private ones. The emails are private, and Garry has no official knowledge of them. Soon afterward, Garry was told that the lab wanted email updates, but that they should be technical, contain no pictures and be sent only to the lab. He started off writing very factual reports that, in all honesty, were pretty dry. As the days went by he was told that it would be nice if his emails were a bit more folksy, and yes it would be great if he could include a few pictures. The latest word is that perhaps these newsletters could be distributed to family and friends (after appropriate censoring, of course). As a result of all this, Garry has found a new avocation. He is pouring out newsletters like a firehose gone mad. And they have gone from being very dry to being quite amusing. I tell you all this since there is a distinct possibility that some of these missives may end up in your email, and you might wonder why. His slant on things is by no means the same as mine, so you might find them quite amusing.

The two pictures today are of people sitting around eating and talking. The first shows Dave Thomson and Gordon Ebbeson in the foreground, Lloyd Gallop and my bald pate just behind, and Mike Haggarty in the background.



The second picture shows Jacques Rouleau's broad back, Val Shepeta and his Russian mink hat, Don Mosher telling a story and Mike Haggarty politely listening.

Best wishes,
Ron Verrall



Newsletter #14,

28 April (Sunday) Morning

Garry declared that Friday would be a 'weather day' so that everyone could catch up on his sleep. In actual fact, the day was gorgeous, but everyone dutifully slept in. Later, several went to Alert for the rest of the day. Francine and I went on a little skidoo trip to get her acquainted with some of the local sites.

The two of us were scooting over the relatively smooth snow between Jolliffe Bay and Blackcliffs Bay when a wolf came in from the side and ran along behind me (in front of Francine). She stopped, unsure of what to do, and I continued on - quite oblivious to the furry friend following. After a minute or so the wolf stopped and turned back toward Francine. She turned her skidoo around, but didn't go anywhere. (I learned all this later.) Shortly afterward, I looked around to check on Francine and discovered her gone. I stopped and waited for a bit - figuring she was just adjusting her balaclava or parka, but after about a minute I headed back - figuring that she had had skidoo trouble. I went around a big chunk of ice and saw a black spot in the distance. That would be Francine. But she wasn't moving. Then I saw a white spot moving. 'Ah, @#*%! (darn) - a bear', I thought. So, I swung off to the right to see if I could distract him. After a few seconds I saw that it was just a wolf. Still, it was a big wolf, and he was very interested in us, and so I wasn't terribly keen in going over to socialize. I circled around him and got back to Francine, and by this time he had loped off, undoubtedly disgusted by our unfriendly behavior. Francine and I sat for a while and discussed wolves in general and this one in particular. The area was obviously his territory since his dessert-plate-size prints were all over the place. On leaving, monsieur le loup had headed directly toward the Black Cliffs, where we had been going, so we decided to do the polite (i.e., discretionary) thing and go elsewhere.

We found tiny Oopik Island in the middle of Blackcliffs Bay. It's only about 50 metres across, and its high spot has an elevation of about 3 metres (at low tide). It is usually quite hard to find even though it is marked quite clearly on the map. Francine can now join that select group of people who can say they have set foot on Oopik Island. 'Ooh ... Aah'! you say.

We were told later by Lloyd Gallop, who also went to Oopik Island that day (a popular tourist spot), that wolf tracks had followed directly down our skidoo tracks right to Oopik Island. He (the wolf) was obviously keeping track of the interlopers.

After Oopik Island, Francine and I went to Eggerton Creek to see the clay hills, and then we went to the head of Blackcliffs Bay and climbed the rather steep hill to see the cairn that commands such a vista of Blackcliffs Bay and the Arctic Ocean in the distance. Francine took a few tourist pictures, and then we went back to camp for tea.

29 April (Monday) 1800

Garry seemed to have primed the pump by declaring Friday to be a weather day, for Saturday and Sunday were truly weather days with high winds and poor visibility. (Ain't it the way?) We did, however, get a fair bit of work done on Sunday, since the winds were moderate in the afternoon. Today (Monday) the wind was calm, and we got a lot of

acoustic work done – mostly for Francine. The high winds had blown in the warm weather, for it got up to a balmy –8 degrees today. It was quite delightful.

Tomorrow will be the last day of experimentation, and only three or four people will be involved with that as the rest of us tear down the camp. Quite a number leave Thursday on the next Rotator, and this will leave us with a fairly small group to finish packing up the camp, drying out all the tents and getting everything put away or put in Bunyans for transport home (Halifax).

The first picture today shows Mark Rowsome and Peter Holtham, and the second shows Richard Van Der Pryt and Nicole Collison working at the Spinnaker building in Alert. Both pictures were taken some time ago, and both are compliments of Garry Heard.



Best
wishes,
Ron Verrall



Newsletter #15,

4 May (Saturday)

I haven't written any sort of a newsletter for almost a week, but my excuse is that nothing exciting has happened. Our chief task has been the dismantling of the camp, hauling it into Alert and looking after all the equipment. At Alert the tents are opened up and hung to dry in a tall warm building – known as the Hurricane building (after a project of the same name). The electronics, hydrophones, projectors, etc. are crated up and put into 'Paul Bunyans' (large steel containers that load directly onto the Hercules aircraft. They will go back to DREA in Halifax. Most of the miscellaneous camp gear (stoves, plywood, fuel barrels, ice drills, hot-water drill, tools, shovels, ice picks, etc. etc.) will be packed away in our 'Spinnaker Building' and left in Alert. And, of course, the skidoos will all be left, too.

We moved off the ice and back into Alert on Wednesday, I think it was, and since then we have been doing day trips to tear down the camp. We are constrained somewhat by the meal hours at Alert, so we don't get in long days, but all of us are happy to be putting in more reasonable days. Six or seven of us go out to the camp in the morning, bring back a skidoo loads each at noon, and then do the same thing in the afternoon. (We certainly have a lot of STUFF.) We have several people staying at Alert to clean, dry, put away, pack for shipment, etc., all this equipment that the rest of us haul in.

On Thursday we didn't go back out in the afternoon because the wind picked up to the point that visibility was very poor. The thought of taking down tents in that wind was frightening. So, we stayed and worked at the Spinnaker Building.

That brings up the whole weather topic again. Usually, by this time of year the weather is warm (minus 20 to minus 15), calm and sunny, and one day runs into another without any indication that conditions will ever change. This year (bad cess to it!) we have had high winds, threatening black clouds and snow (for Pete's sake!) Skidooing is made slow and painful by the flatness of the light. In other words, there are no shadows, and you can't see the bumps and hollows. Those who have skied in flat light will know what I'm talking about. My reputation as all-round seer and soothsayer has taken another thumping since I predicted great weather by the end of April. Today, however, is gorgeous. Perhaps we're in for a spell of the good stuff.

Last Thursday the Rotator took south another batch of our people. Don Mosher, Mark Rowsome, Richard Van Der Pryt, Lloyd Gallop, Janice Lang and Dorothy Edwards have disappeared from the scene. Sterling Mayo and Sophie Nantais left a few days previously on a Herc special. All will be missed, especially by those cleaning up.

Back a week or two ago when we were putting the hydrophone array (known as UCARA) on the bottom we came across something that might be interesting to those involved in the old Spinnaker Project. Mark Rowsome had Phantom on the bottom cruising along the newly installed array so that we could inspect it, and what should we see but the old yellow fibre-optic cable that had been laid in 1996. The big underwater vehicle, Theseus, had laid the cable from shore out to an array deployed by an American team. (No longer working, of course.) The sight of the cable brought back all sorts of memories of successes, frustrations and failures – documented by my Newsletters of

1998. Meanwhile, as the memories flooded back, Phantom moved along the array, and about 20 metres farther it crossed over the second of the two yellow cables, the so-called Phase 2 cable.

Later, when UCARA was being hauled back up, Mark and Val, the guys doing the man-hauling complained about the amount of drag. The initial thought was that the rope that had originally pulled UCARA into place had not been properly melted out and freed from its imprisonment in the ice. “Nonsense”, we, the hot-water drill team said, with fingers crossed behind our backs. “We melted out the ice hole and threw the rope end down the hole. Everything went smoothly.” Moments later the true culprit was revealed. The last hydrophone in the UCARA array had snagged one of the yellow fibre-optic cables and had hauled it to the surface. No wonder Mark and Val had had to pull so hard.

The spirit of Spinnaker keeps raising its head.

1830 Late news. We now have everything off the ice, and the ice camp is all cleaned up. This afternoon we took down the kitchen tent and the last Octagon (Dorothy’s), and we packed everything remaining onto six skidoos and the BV. All that remains now is to put everything away in the Spinnaker Building and pack all the Bunyans for the trip south. Francine is still keen to see more of the area, so we may spend an afternoon or two exploring.

Best wishes,

Ron Verrall

Newsletter #16,

12 May (Sunday)

Hello all:

This will be my final newsletter for this field trip. Most of us are home now, and only three long-suffering souls remain in Alert to finalize the cleanup and the shipping: Al Tremblay, Val Shepeta and Jim Milne. I would like to give special kudos to Jim, who has not often been mentioned in these Newsletters. He managed our affairs back at the Spinnaker building and with the Alert people. He ensured, for example, that the equipment we needed on the ice was always sent out 'immediately' – often before we even recognized that it was needed. Moreover, throughout the whole exercise he has constantly maintained good working relations with the people at Alert. His diplomacy, his people skills and his knowledge of Station procedures have made our work in Alert run very smoothly.

Before we left for home we managed to spend a couple of afternoons exploring the area by skidoo. Don Richard had brought downhill skis with him; he wanted the experience of skiing 'north of 80'. So, a suitable hill was found, and he got in several runs – being carried up the hill by skidoo and sled after each run. After his last run we were standing around our skidoos chatting in the warmth of the late afternoon sun, when a couple of wolves came over to investigate us. We talked to them encouragingly, but I guess that there were too many of us, and even the bolder of the pair was somewhat intimidated; he came no closer than about 100 yards. The other one – a very pretty all-white wolf – got no closer than about 300 yards before she (?) sheared off and abandoned us. We felt quite privileged to have seen them.

On Thursday eleven of us left for the south: Garry Heard, Francine Desharnais, Al Graham, Dan Wile, Jacques Rouleau, Ivan Bond, Mike Haggarty, Don Richard, Kevin Whalen, Bill Keeping and I.

It's a long trip down from Alert. Ours began on Wednesday morning when we had to surrender our bags to the transportation people at Alert – a full day before we actually left. This meant that our access to clean clothes and our other belongings was quite limited until such time that we arrived at Trenton. On Thursday the military Hercules took us to Thule, Greenland – a trip of an hour and a quarter – where we overnighted. I'm not sure why the flight is broken there, but 'ours is not to reason why'. On Friday we continued on to Trenton, Ontario, a flight of about seven hours, which is particularly long since the high noise level in the Hercules prevents us from talking to each other. Everyone tries his hardest to fall asleep and pass the time in oblivion. Once we finally arrived at Trenton the schedule had us overnighting in Trenton, going by bus the next day to Toronto and flying home from there.

However, the folks going to Halifax lucked out. First they were told that our flight, after landing at Trenton was going to continue to Greenwood, Nova Scotia, a fairly short drive from Halifax. The Haligonians were very pleased at the news since this meant they would get home Friday night rather than Saturday. Next they were told that they would have to switch Hercules aircraft in Trenton, but (darn!) the Herc to which they were switching was not serviceable. This ended up being great news, rather than bad, since the flight

was then switched to a nice, quiet, jet airbus that would fly them directly to the Halifax airport rather than Greenwood. I didn't actually see them take off, but I assume that they made it. I, too, made it home according to schedule – 24 hours after the rest of them, and I'm very happy to be here – sitting in the warm sun, looking out over the green valley and typing at my own desk-top computer.

As always, I enjoyed the Field Trip. I do like the Arctic. We worked very hard at times, but that's to be expected, and once the exhaustion was slept off we could look back with satisfaction at our accomplishments. I find, however, that it is the people that make a trip truly enjoyable, and the folks this year were great. I hope they invite me again.

Finally, I would like to give heartfelt thanks to Darryl Gittens, who rescued me after I found that I couldn't easily disseminate these newsletters from the Arctic to 170 (plus) addresses. I emailed the newsletters to him, and he sent them to everyone else.

Thanks for listening, and thanks to all of you emailed me with comments.

Best wishes,

Ron Verrall