
Off the Beat

Psyched by the midnight sun

The most difficult thing to get used to in Antarctica, at least for me and for many other summertime visitors I talked to, is the continual daylight. It is easy to accept intellectually that the sun doesn't set at "night," but psychologically it still seems to be a recurring surprise. Even after a full week there, we would catch ourselves hastening to take a picture or to plan some outdoor activity "before it gets dark." I'm told the same thing still happens to people who've been there for months.

Sleeping isn't difficult; our sleeping quarters were windowless. But with the absence of darkness people do tend to be active to late hours. I was writing one night between midnight and 3 a.m. in a vacant room in the administration building at McMurdo—sunlight was streaming in the windows—and the building was surprisingly alive with activity. About 2 a.m. one of the administrators came in, saying he just wanted to see what was in his in-box.

McMurdo is on the same meridian as New Zealand, and it, like most of Antarctica in the summer, operates on New Zealand time. The sun merely circles the horizon throughout the 24-hour day. From McMurdo, you know it is midnight when the sun is due south, above and just to the left of the high point on Black Island; at noon it is due north.

Perhaps the most peculiar clock-and-calendar situation exists at the newest U.S. research station, Siple, 1,552 miles from McMurdo. Siple is on the same meridian as Chicago, so it operates on U.S. Central Daylight Time. But it uses the same day of the week as McMurdo does. Because McMurdo is just on the other side of the International Date Line, this means, the clock time at Siple is the same as at Chicago, but the day of the week is one day later.

Seal cordon bleu

Just because a biologist spends months at a time studying seals in Antarctica doesn't necessarily mean he sides with those who would protect seals against any commercial use for man. Gerald T. Kaufmann, a biologist participating in the University of Minnesota studies of Weddell seals, condemns what he considers the hypocrisy and emotionalism in the anti-seal-harvest movement. "That's all it is, emotion," he says. He presents a tuna

analogy: "If tuna looked like seals, there'd be cries of protest against killing them. Especially if they had those big, round eyes." He believes that Antarctic seals are so abundant (there are an estimated 30 million crabeater seals alone in Antarctic waters and perhaps 10 million Weddell seals) and world food supplies so short, that seal meat should be used as a food source. Not doing so, he says, "is a waste of protein."

Antarctic hors d'oeuvres

The Antarctic cod *Dissostichus mawsoni*, described in the article on fish antifreeze in the Feb. 23 SCIENCE NEWS, may not look especially appetizing, but its meat is a rare delicacy at McMurdo Station. When properly prepared—and Taiwan-born Yuan DeVries, herself a fish biologist, knows how—*D. mawsoni* is delicious. Yuan had a small birthday reception for her husband (and colleague) Arthur DeVries Dec. 13, at which the main hors d'oeuvre was deep-fried *mawsoni*. Tasting fish caught from 1,600 feet beneath ice-covered McMurdo Sound, while sipping champagne and looking out a picture window across 50 miles of Antarctic landscape is an almost transcendent experience.

Fly the friendly skies

Flying the aircraft that carry scientists about Antarctica is full of challenges for pilots of the Navy's Antarctic squadron, VXE-6, "the world's most experienced Antarctic airline." Occasionally landing on the ice in total "white-out" conditions—where nothing is visible—is one of them. The pilots set their instruments on their ski-

equipped LC-130 Hercules transport planes for a rate of descent of 1,500 feet per minute and merely wait until they touch down on the surface. Then they radio to find out where they are and taxi to their destination. Another problem is taking off when the plane is heavy and the snow is sticky. Sometimes the pilots will taxi up the side of a hill, then turn around and start their takeoff run downhill to try to gain additional velocity. The squadron commander tells of one pilot who tried to take off 17 times before giving up.

Their huskies don't mush any more

Dog sleds are no longer needed for getting about in Antarctica, but the men of the main New Zealand research station on the continent, Scott Base, have for years maintained two teams of huskies. The New Zealanders have a strong emotional attachment to the dogs, and they have no intention of giving them up. There has been some criticism that because the dogs no longer serve any vital function (although they could be used for transportation in emergencies), that they are no longer worth the cost (the salary of one full-time keeper) and the seal meat they consume. But Robert Thompson, head of the Antarctic Division of New Zealand's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, strongly defends having them. In a land where men live in isolation for months at a time, the huskies, he says, serve a vital need as a source of recreation. "I quite honestly think it's well worth it to have them there."

—Kendrick Frazier



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Fat Albert is mushing in a race from Anchorage to Nome, but his Antarctic relatives are living in honorable retirement at New Zealand's Scott Base.