

ANT-XXIX/9 - Weekly Report No. 1 From Cape Town to Neumayer

December 20 - 29, 2013

When the small advance party of four people arrived in Cape Town on Monday, it was still sunny with temperature above 30°C. Departure of Polarstern was scheduled for 19 December. That gave us a few days' time for preparations on board and besides this, to observe the logistical efforts to unload Polarstern after the previous cruise and to load her again for our expedition and the supply for the Neumayer station. What equipment should be removed from the containers before they are put ashore, as it will be required again during our expedition? How are the containers to be stowed that they won't jeopardize work on board, and yet still being accessible for unloading at Neumayer station? The whole operation resembled a "tetris game" with real containers, which was eventually professionally managed - thanks to the AWI logistics department and the responsible people on board. I would like to express my gratitude to everybody involved in this work, which often takes place behind the scenes unnoticed by most scientists, but without which no expedition would be possible. However, one challenge couldn't be arranged for - neither by the ship's command, nor by AWI logistics department, and that was the Cape Doctor. This is a downslope wind typical of spring in Cape Town. The Cape Tonians call it Cape Doctor because of its cleansing effect on the local climate. From Tuesday onwards, this storm reached gale force of 10 Beaufort so that the harbour had to be closed and a small tanker vessel, which should have brought polar diesel fuel for the Neumayer station, could only enter Cape Town port on Thursday evening. Therefore, our departure had to be delayed until Friday morning 08:00 a.m.

So far, the transfer voyage towards Neumayer has been rather calm, which is quite unusual for this region. For unpacking expedition boxes, setting up laboratories and scientific equipment, a moving vessel is always a bit tricky. Therefore, everybody onboard appreciated the favourable conditions, which also fostered celebrations on Christmas Eve. A formal reception was held in the Blue Saloon on Christmas Eve with contemplative words by the captain and chief scientist. A choir accompanied by the electronic organ presented Christmas songs including "Silent Night, Holy Night" in nine languages of the different cruise participants. Even Santa Claus found his way on board and distributed Christmas presents (Fig. 1). Culinary highlights were the two Christmas meals on Christmas day and on Boxing Day.



Fig. 1: Santa Claus - this year even on board Polarstern. ©Ambroso (ICM)



Fig. 2: Planning meeting in the "Blue Saloon". © Bornemann (AWI)

Two days in advance of our arrival at Atka Bay, temperatures have now dropped. At minus 1.5°C and with light winds from Southeast, we are still sailing in ice-free waters. Based on the latest satellite imagery, we are rather optimistic that we will be able to reach Neumayer station without need for heavy ice breaking; but only future will tell.

The supply of Neumayer station is scheduled to take two days. After that, scientific research will finally start. After many planning meetings (Fig. 2) and preparations, 53 scientists from 10 countries and different disciplines are waiting to start with their work. We will start at Austasen southwest of Neumayer in an area where a disturbance experiment had been conducted 10 years ago. Now, we will study, how fast such an area can be re-colonized

under Antarctic conditions. This station will also be used as a “shake down” station for all research teams, who want to test their sampling gears, before we move on to our main study area far south in the Weddell Sea, the area of the Filchner Ronne Ice Shelf.

What we are going to study there and how this will be accomplished, I will explain in the following weekly reports.

Best regards

Rainer Knust
(Chief Scientist)