



After the maniacal whirlwind of peak seal reproductive season, human festive season, and a couple of personal celebratory events, the month of January seemed blissfully quiet by comparison. At least until the latter part of the month when the *R.R.S. Ernest Shackleton* descended to begin an epic relief but that comes a little later in the story. January the first saw just six tired, somewhat seedy people on base, but unlike most of the western world a day of rest was out of the question. Nature continues calling throughout the short Antarctic summer.

I think without a doubt Sarah was probably the most relieved person on the island in early January. After eating, breathing, talking, walking, smelling, touching and tasting fur-seals non-stop from late November, the fun and games finally came to a close on the Seal Study Beach. Given the pomp and importance placed upon the new gantry that had been erected last year it seemed appropriate that a closing ceremony was held to mark the cessation of duties.



Chris plays the last post... on the swanni whistle!

Chris might have conducted a halt to proceedings with the seals, but his work with the penguins was just getting into stride. Macaroni Penguins at this time of year guard their chicks until they are old enough to fend for themselves and then head to sea, foraging to feed the ravenous little mouths. Penguin chicks grow at an astonishing rate, almost visibly increasing their girth whilst you admire them.

Plenty of satellite tracking coupled with diet sampling discovers where the hard-working adults forage, and what they are bringing back for the youngsters. The

gateway that was installed a few seasons back has been bringing in some amazing data, penguins are fitted with individual transponder tags that ‘ping’ every time an adult wanders through allowing precise timing of trip duration, and precision is what these critters have in spades. Often birds will repetitively return within half an hour of the same time of day after their foraging trips.

The punishing time that Jaume endured shouldering the burden of the heavy seal season, ended in January, he headed home for some well deserved R+R and a rapturous reception for his 40th birthday. This left us with a bare 5 people on base for a period, quite unusual during summer, but most relaxing and peaceful. It wasn’t just a one way deal on the island movements though, in return for taking Jaume the *R.R.S. James Clark Ross* left behind a cargo tender to help speed transfer of cargo for the new base rebuild. Having our own little



Jaume hard at work, cuddling the pups



boat moored in the bay somehow seemed fitting, but although the mariners kindly left the keys in the ignition they neglected to provide us with some transport for getting to the end of the jetty to the boat. Instead we made the most of the quiet time by enjoying the views on some splendid evenings.

The cargo tender 'Rockhopper' in the bay



The view of South Georgia from La Roche on a balmy summer evening

And then like the invading Mongols from the north the *R.R.S. Ernest Shackleton* arrived to begin the mammoth task of offloading 1700m³ of cargo to rebuild the base. The first permanent hut on the island was established in 1962 and continuous occupation has occurred since 1982. Over the years various extensions and out-buildings have been added to give the view you see on the webpage. The next 12



Lonnerberg House, the first permanent building on the island

months sees around 80% of those facilities consolidated into a new, modern accommodation building, with the old structures of Lonnerberg House, and Prince House being demolished and removed. It will be sad to see our unique base with its many idiosyncratic and homely features make way for the shiny new model, however the new science equipment and resources being provided will provide an excellent boost to future research.



The two cargo tenders are currently working overtime, and some seriously hard days are being performed by everyone, on both the ship and on the shore. More than a little good fortune with the weather conditions has been enjoyed, and offloading has progressed with furious pace. The seals have found the new JCB, by far the biggest machine on four wheels ever seen here, a very exciting place to sleep underneath in the evenings!

The landscape is changing before our very eyes as you can see from the aerial shot below.



Transformation in progress, unloading the tender at the new aggregate jetty

More pictures of amazing metamorphosis in next month's newsletter, and perhaps a few words about the albatross that have had a break from the limelight.

Love to Family and Friends
Isaac

Photographs by Sarah Robinson and Isaac Forster