

Diary 13 – 22 August 2011

Having huts and having hats

Many words can be used about a week in Zackenberg Research Station, but boring is not one of them. And this week was no exception.

To adjust oneself to a certain amount and type of people in Zackenberg is quite impossible. In the beginning of the week, we were so many people that the names on the blackboard in the kitchen that tell where we go every day had to be squeezed way too tightly together, but after flight day, numbers fell drastically (or so it felt like, at least). The most noticed consequence of which being that the coffee was moved back to its old place on the kitchen table.

The reason for so many people to be here at the same time was partly that a micrometeorological station and the methane autochambers run by GeoBasis were advancing from a tent for the instruments and into two brand new huts. Also new masts etc were installed. So from Sunday, when the materials arrived with planes and had to be brought to the stations, and until Thursday around noon, where the pickup plane would come, a team of scientists, carpenters, technicians and logisticians were working many hours a day to finish the project. Not only did the huts have to be erected, but systems were changed, sensors were dug into the ground, masts were raised, and software was installed. A tight schedule that meant a busy atmosphere, the cancelling of photo- and movie night and a lot of calls on channel sixteen telling that people were not going to be home for dinner.

The process of building was, however, further disturbed by the arrival of our first autumn storm. Attempting to make poles for the huts and sensor masts completely horizontal while having wind of 15 m/s speed and rain was not ideal, so at a certain point people gave up fighting Mother Nature and came inside. Other activities, such as Gernot and me trying to write down data on depths of the permafrost, were also made a bit more interesting by the rain on the (paper) field charts. A good thing that came out of the storm, however, was that we precipitation-starving geographers actually had our first rainfall sample to analyze the day after.

In the end, and after some long nights for at least some scientists on the hut team, two huts were actually almost finished and the most important parts of the instrument installing was managed in time. Only Mikkel had to stay behind a couple of days and get out next week. So Thursday we

said goodbye to our Russian, Swedish and Korean population, but did, however, welcome Javier from Spain and Joel from Colombia who are sent here by the IT University of Copenhagen. The station is somewhat quieter now, and we expect even more quiet days ahead, because Gernot & Gernot have returned to Freya glacier Saturday and will stay there for a while.

This Saturday was, however, in no sense a quiet one. It was the day for the long-expected Zackenberg Beach Party (or Beach Party, as the sign read). It was situated by the old trapping station on the western side of the Zackenberg River and gathered just about the entire population of North East Greenland (around 35 people). From Daneborg we had the Sirius guys, logisticians and a group from DTU Space, and from Zackenberg almost everyone participated as well (even Gernot and Gernot, who had to be pushed ashore with the last of the high tide after dinner...). As a beach party it was perhaps a little different from the most common ones, though. Everybody was wearing lots of layers (Javier just around 7), hats and gloves, and Zackenberg even brought the really big blue surf survival suits that the insect guys usually use to keep warm while looking at a flower for 40 minutes. The layers were quite necessary, since the trapping station only has space for four or five people sitting comfortably inside. And as the night grew older, my lack of especially a hat was did make things a little too chilly.

To get to (and from!) the party, we also had to pass smaller obstacles such as the Zackenberg River. It was, as Lau said, the first time he had started for a party wearing waders and a rifle. And the content of the party was perhaps also a bit out of mainstream beach party style, since party games included "Pløk Ræven!", rubber boot throwing, person-on-person-climbing and nail hammering. As fun as it was, though, only two Zackenbergers stayed the whole night.

So all in all a very busy, but interesting week at Zackenberg. It should be noticed that this was also the week where BioBasis Team Noémie and Lars found their first lemmings nest during transecting!

Let's hope their luck sticks around.

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