

Diary 18 – 23 August 2012

Transient summer, floods and memorable songs

Quickly another week has passed and for myself another field season. As usual, the short duration of the arctic summer has surprised and amazed me. It has only been a few days since the last mosquitoes finally surrendered and the grass on Aucella still was green. Then suddenly the cotton grass of the fen lost its pappus, something everybody at the station witnessed during an afternoon storm that almost resembled complete whiteout, except for the lack of cloud cover and the well above zero degrees Celsius.

These indications of an approaching fall might be nature's way of beginning the annual hibernation, but the research at the Zackenberg station is evidently in the middle of the season peak. Almost full house and new installations shooting up, very much in the same manner as the Mountain avens and white Arctic bell-heather buds did in late June.

In the GeoBasis team, the summer of 2012 has been filled with technical problems from the usual suspects. Dataloggers crashing for no apparent reason, gas analyzers were tiring from extreme fluctuations in temperature and huge sensitivity towards small inaccuracies in voltage supply, and internal as well as external pumps giving up at random time. Nevertheless, most of all 2012 has been the year of the floods (doom, destruction, but maybe not so much fire...). First, Maria was terrified by a battery box (with seven car batteries) and wires/switches covered by 20 cm of water during snowmelt at one of the permanent gas flux sites in the fen. A couple of weeks later, myself and my colleagues, Lau and Laura, tried to get our nerves under control, while drying the gas analyzer at the methane station. It had taken huge amounts (I mean more than 80 ml or so) of water in, the reason for which remains a mystery. A few weeks later all sensors in the river were flushed into Young Sund, by maybe one of the biggest surges in the history of Zackenberg, at least it feels that big!

That being said, 2012 has been an amazing summer GeoBasis-wise, not only challenging and educational on the work front, but also filled with great experiences assisting Gernot Weyss on his quest to A. P. Olsen Land and Asiaq-Greenland Survey on their trips around the fjords between Wollaston Forland and Clavering. Personally, I came with Gernot to the main source of the Zackenberg River and got to witness the surge by the glacier front! We have been accused of starting the surge, mostly as a joke, I think, but who knows how sensitive the system is? Maybe our presence did cause the outbreak of the lake, in that case, I will hereby deliver my apologies to Laura who had to do the surge monitoring at the hydrometric station all on her own, because her colleagues were out hiking and sailing.

The last week has been dominated by the arrival of cargo from the annual supply ship 'Arina'. During the weekend, planes (MIGs) were dropping from the sky. As soon as the boxes touched the precious Zackenberg ground, they were unpacked and their contents put to its proper use. For us in the GeoBasis team that resulted in a couple of hours spent preparing wood and building boardwalks in the fen. I hope that the permanent stations now can be visited daily without major wear on the sensitive vegetation. Most of the wood was driven to the fen in the Argo Saturday night; Caroline helped us driving it out to the heath, where we met the two vinos Katrine and Tora, who also needed a ride for their generator.

Aside from the hourly flights, the past week has also been filled with the delightful comments from the GeoBasis senior Birger Ulf Hansen. He has had nothing but praises for his talented field assistants, especially after they sang his name to the tune of 'Money, money, money' by ABBA. 2012 has also been the year where most long-term visitors to the station got their name incorporated into a song, thanks to Jannik Hansen (whose name fits Handel's 'Messiah').

Have a great fall!

/Kirstine Skov ('Ohh, when the saints'), '10, GeoBasis field assistant