

Diary 19: 2 - 10 September

Bambi – the water is stiff!

Klonk-klonk; a rather loud sound just outside the Twin Otter and something white passes the window just next to my head! It is ice that accumulates on the plane because we are flying in cold and moist air and break off from time to time. Even it sounds "dramatic" it is actually OK as long as it is not over too long time. I recognize that the pilots are moving the plan to higher altitudes and Jørgen, sitting on the other back seat of the plane, points to his watch that shows the altitude we are in 4000 m. This is not typical for a plane with no pressure compensation. Still it seems not possible to find better conditions and the klonk-klonk sounds continues during the last part of the trip from Constable Point to Zackenberg and it becomes also very bumpy. Our butts leave the seat on several occasions!

So it is a bit of a relief to see the field station approaching below us and shortly after to be on the ground. Great for us who are arriving (Jørgen Skaftø, Kirstine Skov and me). But not so great for those five who are on their way home when the pilots tell us that there will be no more flying today due to weather. So the-ready-to-go guys must walk back to the main building and put linen back on the bed (situations like this have taught us to keep the used linen out of the bin until the plane has left) and find things to do while waiting. I know the feeling. Fortunately, the weather improved (less wind) and the plane departs next morning.

Then, for the next week or so, we are only four people at the station. Lars and Kirstine, who is responsible for all the Bio- and GeoBasis sampling and maintenance of equipment plus countless "small" projects that their bosses ask for, Jørgen who shall keep the station running and also have to start preparing the winter season, which means closing down many of the summer facilities, refill the food storage (a lot of goods came in during early August by ship to Daneborg and was shuttled to Zackenberg by the Twin Otter) and collect equipment from the field. For me, the most important task is to retrieve data from loggers and sensors that have been deployed in two lakes since last September and to get the equipment out again before the lakes freeze over.

Fortunately, I got everything up already on Saturday with help from Jørgen, as it is not a piece of cake to locate the underwater rig with the equipment and then lift it out of the water. No reading glasses were lost this time! Anyway, I spend the afternoon happily looking at data from a whole year. It is really amazing to see how light and temperature change during the winter period. As we have had frost during the last couple of nights and almost no wind it does not take long before the first ice forms on the lakes. Therefore, the lake instruments were made ready during Sunday and put back in the lakes. Just in time I think, as Sommerfuglesø already had nearly 50% ice coverage!

One of the days, it started to snow intensively and suddenly the whole landscape changes from the typical autumn coloration to white. The snow stayed in the mountains down to approximately 100 m but disappear on the ground within the next day. The temperature is slowly decreasing and gets below zero during nights so all the small ponds became ice-covered within few days. It is great fun to watch the geese walking on the thin ice on the ponds. They can see green plants below but cannot get them.

There are quite many musk oxen in the area now. Lars has seen several of those that have been collared with a GPS. It is a bit fun to know that these oxen are simultaneous "seen" by scientist in Denmark. The male musk oxen are in the "head banging" time of year. They are testing their internal hierarchy in a rather funny way; two males meet and look very intense on each other for a while. Suddenly they run against each other and stop when their foreheads meet with loud sound. Then they continue the starring part and perhaps take one more head-

banging round. One of them (the loser) will then walk away but not far from the other one. After a few more minutes they'll start grazing next to each other. Until the next starring exercise begins...

We have had visitors from the Daneborg gang. Oliver Müller from Germany, who is a PhD-student from University of Bergen came together with Maria L. Paulsen (Danish), also a PhD-student from Bergen. They took soil cores in several places for Oliver's project that focus on comparing the microbial communities from run-off inland to the sea (Young Sund). They worked hard and got nice samples. They got a little extra time as the wind picked up and the planned boat trip back had to be postponed for one day. So they suddenly had time for more sampling, a guided tour at Zackenberg with Lars and to enjoy a dinner with us.

Days are getting shorter. The snow buntings are gathering in big groups and are eating as much as they can. Flocks of geese pass by in the air every day and a few foxes have been seen. It is a quiet time at the station with plenty of room for working and thinking.

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