

Man on the run ... ugebrev 12, 14. august 2005

This week the letter will be in English. Just because your obedient servant does not speak Danish... Then why was I chosen to write this story? Maybe just because of one laughable incident that happened this Monday. And it could have been not so laughable, at least for someone, if ... But let us start from the beginning.

It was one fine morning, 8 August, when I was going to check our automatic chambers. Here, I should tell you, that we (Torben Røjle Christensen, Lena Ström and myself) are in Zackenberg this year with a main aim of preparing and testing a system of automatically closing chambers for monitoring of gas emissions - methane and CO₂ - from the

fens in the valley. This seems to be a really promising - to obtain flux data almost in real time, with 1 hour time resolution, in automatic mode 24 hours per day. And it now even seems to be possible in practice also... But this is not the story.

The story is about this fine morning 8 August... And I should tell you that morning was really fine. All the first half of this week the weather was perfect: sunshine, clear sky and +5 - +7 centigrades. This kind of weather let you see the overpowering beauty of the Arctic nature, which can be really seen only in such places like Zackenberg.

So this fine morning I went to our system that is installed about 1.5 km northwards from the station. This is quite an easy run that takes about 15 min, 5 min more to check if the system is running fine and collect the data, and 15 min back - and 24 hours emission picture is in your pocket! When I approached the place and had a look around (Oh, how beautiful!) I saw that I had just passed by about 10 meters a huge muscox lying behind a slight fall in the terrain. Luckily it took no notice of me either. There are many muscoxes hanging around this area, but they are usually quite peaceful and sometimes even scared of us.

The system was all right, and I had nothing to do but take a few pictures of mountains and download the data, then go back to the station. This time I kept track of the mentioned muscox and made a big loop around to stay at least 100 meter clear of the animal. But the animal was also keeping an eye on me, and when I finally started to move away it raised up... And ran fast towards me! This was absolutely surprising! In fact, I had a flaregun in my backpack - first day we came Henrik Philipsen and Marc Overgård Hansen shown us this thing and learned to use it, as well as a rifle and flare pencil. But the flaregun seems to be useless if it is lying in your backpack, not charged and inside a holster! If a muscox falls into attack, it approaches within 5-10 seconds even from 100 meters!

I tried to run aside, but it was following me! Oh, God! The last thing I could do was to shuffle off my backpack and throw it in one direction while running to the other. I hoped to win just a number of seconds, while the bull is thinking what is the real target. But that was a total escape! The muscox totally switched to my forlorn backpack and I could withdraw in peace ... What a good lesson! Later we came for the backpack, now all three, with a charged flaregun - and the muscox ran away as soon as he saw us ... The interesting thing is that the backpack was not damaged at all! The bull just wanted to show its excellence. It did it, indeed... All the rest of the week I had a flaregun ready all the time when out of the

station, but no more muscox tried to attack, even from much closer distance. They are very peaceful creatures; just sometime male hormones overcome them. This is remissible ...

The rest of the week was quiet. Tuesday morning a helicopter brought a new power generator. This is a big deal, a sign of coming advances. Next year a new house will be constructed and we can sleep in real rooms! Unbelievable!

But the whole station already as it stands seemed unbelievable to me just 2 weeks ago. Electricity and hot water, delicious food, shower and even "normal" WC at 74° North - isn't it a miracle?

Wednesday afternoon a plane came, now with equipment for the satellite link to the met. station that Jonathan Petersen and Peer Sarkov from ASIAQ are installing. They seem to be happy now ...

The rest of the week everyone worked on own research. Every day here is so costly, that if you are here aiming to do a particular thing you often find too little time to take interest in what others are doing. But a long winter is coming for all discussions and decisions ...

/Mikhail Mastepanov