



*The sun is almost here. In the days before sunrise, you can see - if you look closely - one of my colleagues grooming the skiway.*

## **After a year at the pole, it feels like home**

*By Shayne Clausson*

In the past week the sky has turned blue at the edges. After months of total darkness, we are finally beginning to see evidence that the sun is returning our way. I've enjoyed experiencing the long winter's night. I've never seen so many stars, so bright and seemingly so close. The green, blue and even red shimmering lights of the *Aurora australis* have been amazing to witness. These are things that you just can't experience anywhere else.

This is the time of year we can expect our fiercest storms. Just as the sky began to change last week, we got our first taste of sustained 30-knot winds. With our abundance of loose ice crystals and snow, it didn't take long for enormous drifts to pile up. The snow ramp into the dome entrance, usually a gradual decline, was almost instantly replaced with a 20-foot snow wall. The dome itself, made entirely of aluminum, thunderously protested as it was battered by the winds outside. Inside it was like listening to our first electrical storm in almost a year.

Despite the conditions, my colleagues seem to be getting braver regarding the elements. During the storm, we had two Polies camp out in a tent at the ceremonial Pole. Insulated with two emergency sleeping bags each, and fully dressed, they were able to sleep the night away in relative comfort. Five others spent that night in a snow cave, where they were considerably more protected from the wind. This Thursday (8/28) I am planning on spending the night out in the tent. With the sun returning, I think a lot of us are realizing that this may be our last chance to do some of the things we have been putting off.

The impending sunrise has also brought my attention back to the real world. Despite the beauty of the continent and the unique experiences that I have had, a winter at South Pole is still a long one. With the first flight to Pole only two months away, I have begun making travel plans. My sights are focused on the tropical South Pacific. I can think of nothing better than to relax on a warm beach, with nothing to do all day. It is hard to imagine warm temperatures, a sun that rises and sets daily, and an abundance of oxygen (Pole is at a physiological altitude of over 11,000 feet).

So with only two months left, my long journey of a year spent at the South Pole is drawing to an end. I have enjoyed my time here immensely, as there is no other place like it. Just as it was difficult to

leave my friends and family to come here, it will be hard to say good-bye to the friends I have made here. Coming down here, I never would have thought that a remote station at the very bottom of the world, isolated, dark and cold could ever feel like home. But that was a year ago, before I moved to the bottom of the world and made it my home.