



An aerial view of Shayne's headquarters, the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station -- located on the world's highest, driest, coldest, most remote continent.

Brrrrrrr!

Shayne Clausson ('95) calls his reports from the South Pole "the Ice Cube Dispatch." In this installment, he arrives at the bottom of the world ... and prepares for winter

In less than 10 days the last flight of the season departs from the South Pole. I arrived at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station on October 26, 2002, and have lived and worked on the Antarctic plateau throughout the summer season. I have signed on for a year contract, working for Raytheon Polar Services Co., which means that I will be stationed at the South Pole until November 2003.

On Oct. 10, my adventure began as I boarded a flight from Los Angeles bound for Christchurch, New Zealand. There were about 60 of us from the U.S. Antarctic Program on the flight, and after about 17 hours of air travel, we landed in Christchurch. We were transported to our accommodations for a night's rest and were off the next morning to the Clothing Distribution Center to pick up our Extreme Cold Weather (ECW) gear. Those of us that are wintering over received three large orange duffel bags full of gear to try on. The gear included two of the warmest parkas manufactured, a mix of hats, boots, gloves and goggles.

After a few days in Christchurch we boarded an Air National Guard C-141 flight bound for McMurdo Station off the coast of Antarctica. We spent about a week in McMurdo, waiting for the weather to clear at the South Pole so that we could make the first flight down in over eight and a half months. From February to October the weather prevents flights to or from the South Pole.

Arriving at the South Pole was an amazing experience. Fifty excited faces belonging to the crew that had just wintered over greeted us at the skiway (we call it a skiway because the planes are outfitted with skis in place of wheels for landing gear. We were the first new people they had seen in nearly a year. Not only did the plane bring in a new crew, but it also brought fresh vegetables and something that they had been out of for months --beer.

Stepping off the plane, I was shocked by the utter cold. Nothing I have ever experienced prepared me for temperatures that extreme. When we landed it was -50F with a wind chill close to -80F. Despite being wrapped like a human burrito in my ECW gear, the cold was still searing.

That day seems a long way off. It is amazing how quickly the body adjusts to extreme cold. I typically wear hiking boots, jeans, t-shirt, jacket and hat when walking around in -20F to -30F

temperatures. Not that much different from home on a cold day.

The changes have not been limited to physical ones. Living in a close community like this forces you to change the way that you interact with others. There are 220 of us down here during the summer. All of us living, eating, working and playing together. A high degree of respect and tolerance for others resonates throughout the community. We have carpenters, cooks, electricians, plumbers, scientists people from all walks of life working side by side with a common goal in mind. That goal is to turn an otherwise treacherous environment into a safe place to conduct science.

We are all here for science. With its cold temperatures, pure air and six months of darkness, the South Pole is one of the best places on Earth for the study of astronomy and atmospheric and environmental sciences. We conduct dozens of experiments, funded mainly by the National Science Foundation and university programs throughout the year. We are in the process of constructing a one square kilometer neutrino detection system for Ice Cube, one of our largest projects. This will be the largest scientific instrument ever constructed and may be able to shed light on the theory of "dark matter" and the origins of the universe.

A season of hard work draws to an end. We have all worked a minimum of six days per week, nine hours a day, getting the station ready for winter. Our population of 220 will reduce to 60 during the nine-month winter season. The work will continue throughout the winter, but right now it is time to wrap up summer projects, say goodbye to many close friends and settle in for a long, dark, cold winter. The winter is what I came to see ... like it or not.

--Shayne Clausson ('95)