

Weekly report no. 1 (ANT XXI/2) RV "Polarstern" 17. - 23.11.2003

We are on the way. More precisely, we are at 53°S, 10°E, close to Bouvet Island, where we will take our first samples tomorrow.

Saying farewell to Cape Town on Monday was not easy: marvellous spring weather with temperatures about 25°C, light sea breeze and African sun. Until the last day "Polarstern" had to wait for a set of Argentine king crab traps. They arrived, almost at the same time as the group flight from Germany, therefore nothing to delay we put to sea at 20.00. For two months we will be at sea, will see land for two days only at Bouvet Island and then only the shelf ice coast of the Antarctic continent.

"We" are 49 marine scientists from 11 countries and 44 crew, further supported by 2 meteorologists, 4 helicopter pilots and mechanics as well as 4 guests from the AWI logistic department, who maintain the gear that will be unloaded at Neumayer base; in total 103 people. The vessel is heavily loaded, carrying material for working on the ice shelf as well. The bow and stern decks as well as the holds are crowded with numerous containers, fuel tanks, snow cats and skidoos, polystyrene igloos and countless boxes. It is difficult to enter the large wet lab at the stern because of aluminium boxes, traps, and the Lander from the Netherlands standing around, and more material from the unloaded containers is added constantly. Everybody is busy between boxes and bags, carrying polar clothes bags into the cabins, setting up gear, testing electronics. The labs, bare cases some days ago, are filling up with microscopic optics, chemical devices and electronic equipment. "Polarstern" is getting polar fit.

During the first two days many colleagues suffered from the rough waves induced by a gale that had passed through earlier; a combination of pitching and rolling badly influenced stomach and brain ability. In time you adjust to the vessel's movements, the "round" feet get flat, as seamen mock, and the mess nearly orphaned at first is now well visited at meal times. The grey South Atlantic was pleasantly calm between Wednesday afternoon and Friday lunchtime, without white horses, with long, flat waves, almost not moving the vessel. The sea temperatures, that had south of the Cape been a pleasant 20°C being influenced by the Indian Ocean, dropped today (Sunday) to below 0 degrees and the air temperatures followed. In contrast to the subtropical front the polar front was quite diffuse; the temperature dropped gradually from +5° to -0.8° here at Bouvet.

South of Cape of Good Hope we met some whales, then it went lonely around the vessel, until we gathered the usual crowds of albatross and storm petrels around us in cold waters. Friday night the gale with force 8, later 9 reached us, that had been announced some days before, and the wave height increased to about 7 m. It started to be wobbly again, forcing us to move into the wind as objects started to move by themselves in the cabins. On Saturday the sea calmed down again, and the scientists were praised for

well securing equipment in the labs – which is quite unusual. So far the weather has been fair to us, taking into account the latitudes we are sailing in.

The only change to the daily routine of this week has been the search for a drifting mooring of the AWI physics department on Sunday morning. For this we had to change our set course to the East. The search itself lasted only two hours, although two small floating buoys and the Argos beacon had broken loose and they were hard to spot in the rough sea. Now we can approach Bouvet and start to get interested in the sea ice conditions around Neumayer.

Best wishes are sent in the names of my companions from the lonely South Atlantic

Wolf Arntz