

Subject: Scholes cabin 5: Beanies and bikinis

31 December 2009 1255 UTM 70.1217 S 4.0933 E

Dear Stirling,

It is New Year's eve. The unloading is going well. Several teams fly off to SANAE IV today. The weather is beautiful - cold but calm and sunny, after several days of howling wind and partial cloud. Things are about to get a bit crazy here.

The oceanography team was finally allowed off the ship, onto the ice. The price was that we had to pose, on the ice in front of the SA Agulhas, in as little clothing as was safe and more-or-less decent. That meant snow boots, funny hats and bikinis. It is for a good cause: the SANAE 50th year calendar. It was a real blast, and of course the Adelie penguins came slithering and stumbling over to see what the fuss was. I thought the ship might roll over because everyone was crowding the port rail!

The funny hats are because the theme for tonight's party is 'Hats'. Everyone is busy in the labs and the cabins, making hats out of anything they can lay their hands on: scraps of cardboard, foil, and plastic, recycled items of clothing.

I have been reading Apsley Cherry-Garrard's book on the Scott expedition of 1911. It is called "The Worst Journey in the World". But I am struck by how much fun they had, well, at least up to the tragic end. They had a crossing-the-line party, and fancy-dress parties, and sing-songs. When there is no television, you have to make things up to stay entertained. Our stunts have helped to build a team that is cheerful and efficient when we have work to do under sometimes difficult conditions.

I will be thinking of you tonight, as we start a new year. Of course, you will start 2010 two hours before I do. Walk outside, into the silky Karoo night, and look for the Southern Cross. Project the long axis four-and-a-half times its length beyond the tail of the kite, and then drop a line straight down to the horizon. That is where I will be, looking at the same sky.

Love to you and Mom,

Dad