

## Diary 16 – 11 August 2014

This week, the last week of my first season as a GeoBasis field assistant, it is my turn to show a sneak peak of what is going on up here in the middle of nothing and everything. Leaving tomorrow feels surreal, but I will try not to be too sentimental. But honestly, the only good thing about leaving is knowing that I will be back.

Even though it does not get dark yet you can feel the autumn slowly sneaking into the field, vegetation is getting brown here and there, the shadows are longer and the birds left are stretching out before travelling all the way to Africa. With the birds, the guys in the sanderling team and a lot of other great people also flew away with the plane last Tuesday. Yet, there is still flying things in the area, Erik from COWI has arrived and are mapping the valley with his drones flying around. The other day it was even diving dangerously towards the ground like a bird when you approach its nest, which resulted in a broken tailwing, but luckily Erik got a new one up and flying and he is now smiling and highfiving while flying all across the valley. The mosquitoes did not leave yet, but they are slowly decreasing in number, which make a cup of coffee on the terrace almost possible now without getting it spiced up with mosquito proteins. That we have had opportunity to do several times this week, because this has been a week full of visits. Even here, in the middle of the great north, we occasionally get visitors for coffee and this weekend the neighbours from Daneborg came by twice. The marine biologist came by Saturday night when they were out for an evening walk in their boat and Sunday afternoon two Sirius guys (without dogs this time, some of us did not succeed in hiding the disappointment) came by.

Another not so common visitor also decided to say hello to station ZERO this week. Wednesday midnight I woke up to the sound of running feet, slamming doors and two flaregun shots – something was going on around the station and two minutes later we were standing 16 man tall in nightwear armed with binoculars, cameras and sleepy eyes. A polar bear was wandering about in the sand some hundred meters away on the fjordside, likely to be the same one that had been walking around Daneborg in the morning. The flaregun shots made it stay some hundred meters away, but it was not in a hurry and gave everybody in the station a great opportunity to experience the presence and greatness of such an animal in its own environment, swimming across the river Zackenberg, eating a bit of a musk ox carcass, rolling around and sniffing in the air to see what all the fuzz was about. This was an extraordinary event and it was amazing to experience it with everybody save home in the station. It would have made me feel quite different if I had met it alone in the field, and it was a great reminder of where we are and that we are visitors in the land of the polar bears.

Next morning logistician Kenny and a flare gun followed me down to the river to take the water sample even though it is in the station area, just in case the polar bear would be attracted to the smell of Helle's lovely breakfast or by one of many musk ox cadavers lying around. In general, people tend to be great at helping each other, which Lau and I enjoyed a lot this week. Kenny and Jonas built a new v-notch construction improving our water discharge measurements and Marcin and Torben have had time to help us fix some technical problems around the autochambers, even though they have had their own ups and downs with their flux tower, now standing proud and tall four meters high in the delta before going to Station North next spring.

On Wednesday Lau, Marcin and I took a trip to the summit of Zackenberg. On the way, we found a musk ox cadaver, which had not yet been marked by the BioBasis team. They try to keep track of the living things in the valley and during my stay here I have learned, that to be a good biologist, you must be fond of counting. They count everything living around here; muskoxen, dead and alive, lemming winter nests, snow hares and birds. They even count the flowers some places, walking around, looking like they have dropped something on the ground. This year, however, they have not been able to practice the large numbers except for

dead musk ox calves, which in house 4 had led to the discussion of, whether counting to zero is actually counting. They also counted zero fish when they went fishing this Sunday, even though their boss Niels Martin had arrived to make sure they were counting properly. Beside the ability to count things that are not to seen, they are also very skilled in far-out humour, you can feel they have all spent a lot of time here, Jannik especially on his 10<sup>th</sup> season is very good at this. They are masters in putting a smile on your face, when things do not seem to work out in the field, this (the laughing, not the things that do not work out) is a much appreciated skill by the GeoBasis team.

With the plane tomorrow, a lot of people are leaving. Besides me, Laura, who is working for Lena from Lund, is leaving. She has also been counting, both grass and fluxes. Repeatedly she has been walking out with an instrument the same size as herself, playing the harmonica (maybe to keep the musk oxen away?) while counting fluxes and she has made around 500 flux measurements during the past six weeks even though she brutally killed a computer doing so. Sigrid and Lærke, the flower power girls walking Aucella until the middle of the night, are also leaving Tuesday, which makes Helle the only female left at the station for now, together with only six other people left indicating that days are getting shorter and colder.

Roger out,

Line, GeoBasis field assistant