

BELARE 2007-2008: THE IVAN PAPANIN SHIP LEAVES CAPE TOWN



At the end of November, the Ivan Papanin arrived in Cape Town for a last stop-over before leaving for Antarctica. The ice-class cargo ship filled up on fuel and food supplies for the crew and loaded the last containers full of frozen goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, gas for the vehicles at Utsteinen, wood and other small elements of use on the building site. The Ivan Papanin left South Africa on 1 December.

Eighteen people in total are now on board the ship. Some will debark at Breid Bay where they will complete or relieve the team currently on site since October, while others (ornithologists, journalists ...) will stay on board and travel back to Cape Town. Amongst the ship's crew, eight military officers are coming in to replace their colleagues in Utsteinen who have prepared the site for the arrival of the Princess Elisabeth Station.

The Ivan Papanin left Cape Town under a shining southern sun. Unfortunately the good weather did not last. On the second day of travel, a storm picked up and the ship entered the renowned "Roaring Forties" (latitudes between 40°S and 50°S), reputed for its hostile waters. The ship has been pitching and rolling ever since. The weather has been so bad that the Russian captain has even forbidden anyone from going out on the outer decks. The waves hitting down on the hull are so powerful that they could carry away anyone standing on the edge.

The crew's days are filled with discussions, debates, observations, films and documentaries. Various work will soon have to be carried out in the ship's hold so as to prepare the equipment for unloading. Several containers need to be rearranged, the sledges and vehicles have to be prepared and the other machines, in separate pieces, need to be reassembled and ready to go as soon as they arrive.

But the ship has not entered the Southern Ocean yet. All on board await the sight of the first icebergs, a sign that the frozen continent is close by. At that moment, a new episode will begin for the Ivan Papanin during which she will have to make her way through the icy waves.