

BELARE 2007-2008: A VISIT TO ASUKA STATION



The building team has been working away securing the anchoring points of the station and making headway on constructing the garage. Alain Hubert and a few other team members have retrieved some useful material from the abandoned Japanese station, Asuka. The Ivan Papanin should arrive at Breid Bay in less than a month.

Work on the various fronts has been advancing at a good pace. The hammering and drilling start as early as 7 am and continue all day until roughly 7 pm. Many holes have now been drilled in the bare rock of the ridge at Utsteinen. This stage is essential in order to set up solid anchorage for the station and the work required before the workers even insert the anchoring poles is not easy. To dismantle, move and then set up the drilling equipment again is not a simple task on such a rocky slope, but the workers are highly spirited and their motivation is high.

The garage building crew has already added part of the roof to the northern part of the garage. First side panels covering the southern part of the garage (the part which leads to the station on the ridge) have also been mounted.

Two days ago, Alain Hubert and three other members of the team headed towards ASUKA, an old Japanese station located on an ice sheet north of the Sør Rondane Mountains. Although it is only 60 km away from Utsteinen, the weather is completely different. Winds can reach up to 70 km per hour, bringing temperatures

down to a very unpleasant level. Some old equipment (sledges, diesel fuel, wood, etc.) was found buried in the snow. They were able to recuperate some of the material and bring it back to the base camp on the old sledges (an old model with a wooden top) to be used for the Princess Elisabeth construction.

It is amazing to see how equipment has changed in just a decade. Last year, for instance, the BELARE 2006 team visited the old Belgian station, the Roi Baudouin, and had hauled back some boxes full of polar gear. This year, the team has unpacked them in order to let them dry in the sun. They intend to send the valuables back to Belgium as a memorandum of Belgium's history in Antarctica.

Tomorrow, two old Basslers (DC3 planes) will bring in another 3500 kg of material and food supplies. The next flight won't be until December 17th. For three weeks, the only way of communicating with the rest of the world will be to use the Iridium phone. Utsteinen is located in an area that the Inmarsat satellites do not cover, reminding us that the team is located at the bottom of the world and far from civilization (4400 km from Cape Town, South Africa).

The Ivan Papanin is making progress on its journey in the southern hemisphere. Estimated Time of Arrival in Cape Town, South Africa, is November 25. [You can track the Ivan Papanin on its way to Breid Bay.](#)