

Hi all, and congratulations on finding our small little community at the bottom of the world.



Our Station

The Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station was originally constructed in 1956, as a research station to allow scientists from around the world to come here to study everything from the polar ice to the most distant galaxies and everything in between. It is owned by the United States, under the direction of the National Science Foundation, however it is home to scientists and researchers from all over the world. Its name, Amundsen-Scott is in reference to the two explorers who were the first to reach the South Pole. Amundsen, a Norwegian led a team to the Pole that arrived in December of 1911 and Scott, from Brittan followed close behind with his team, arriving at the pole in January of 1912. Now, almost 100 years later I think they would both be amazed to see what has become of the South Pole. What was once a barren and inhospitable landscape... well, it's still barren and inhospitable but now there's a very fancy research station with warm beds, great food, flat screen TVs and even an ice cream maker.

My name is Mel MacMahon and I'm the station manager here for the winter season of 2010. Let me show you around one of the coolest places on earth.

Our Location

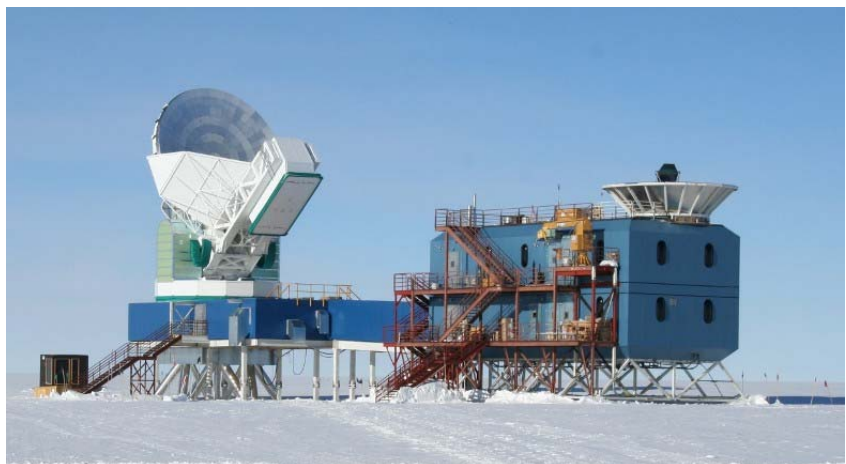
The Geographic South Pole is located roughly in the center of the continent of Antarctica. Antarctica is unique because it is not owned by any country and has no government of its own. Instead, countries all over the world have agreed that the whole continent should be dedicated to the pursuit of science and the improvement of our world, for everyone. So there are lots of research stations owned and operated by different countries all over the continent, ours just happens to be at the South Pole.





With an average high temperature during the summer of -12°F and about -85°F in the winter, the South Pole is not the best place to work on your tan. It is however a great place to come if you want to look at the stars. As you might have guessed, Antarctica is mostly covered by ice, a lot of ice, at the Pole the ice is approximately 10,000ft high. So, our station is about 10,000ft above sea level and has a near zero humidity factor. In a nutshell, that means that the air here is so clear and pure that you get a better view of the stars than most other places on earth.

So, every year we get lots of Astronomers and Astrophysicists coming to the South Pole to do their research. Some of them use huge telescopes to study the edge of the universe or Galaxies far far



away and others look at things much closer to home, like the ozone layer or the Aurora Australis (the southern equivalent of the Northern Lights) which dance across the night sky all winter long.



Oddly enough, at the South Pole the night sky is all we ever see during the winter and similarly we see only daylight during the summer months. So, in a way, people who live at the South Pole experience only one long day and one long night, every year. The sun rises around the September equinox and stays in the sky 24 hours a day until March 21st, when it disappears below the horizon for 6 months. Those of us who are here now are working hard to get as much outdoor work done as possible while it's still bright and warm, relatively speaking.



Another interesting fact about the South Pole is that once the temperature starts to drop at the beginning of winter, it becomes too cold to operate any machinery like tractors, trucks or airplanes outside for any length of time. So, now myself and the other 46 people who are living in the station with me are completely cut off from the outside world. We will not see another person or get any more food or fuel or mail until the temperature warms up again in October. The picture below is of the very last plane leaving South Pole, on Feb 15th, 2010.



As well as having enough food and fuel, we need to have a variety of people here who can keep the station running over the winter. There are no other stations within hundreds of miles of the South Pole and so we have only ourselves to rely on. Of the 47 people we have here on station, we have carpenters, plumbers, electricians, doctors, engineers, computer technicians, cooks, mechanics and a variety of scientists who operate all the telescopes and other research equipment.

Our School

As I'm sure you've guessed by now, we're not really a school here at the South Pole, at least not the same as schools back in the states. However, we do have a lot of teachers and lot of students. Most of the scientists who come here are also teachers or professors at universities in their home states and most of the other people who come here are very interested in all the science that goes on at the Pole. So, we have classrooms and lectures every week where everyone gets to learn about new topics in science. It's always a lot of fun to go to these classes and the best part is, there's never any homework.

A Day in the Life

For most people here, their day depends very much on what they do and what time of year it is. If you're an electrician then you might spend your day wiring up a new camera to take pictures of the sky. The chefs spend their day cooking up some great food for us to eat. Since there are so many people from all over the world here the chefs will often cook all kinds of different dishes ranging from Italian to Thai to Indian to Chinese foods and every once in a while, my favorite, Bacon Cheeseburgers.

During the winter months things are a little quieter. The day usually starts with some snow shoveling. For those of you that live in the northern states you're probably quite familiar with having to shovel snow off your driveways in the winter. Here at the pole, we get quite a bit of snow accumulation and so we have to use bulldozers to move our snow – now that's a lot of fun. After that we do some research, looking at the stars and galaxies for a while, with a little break for lunch. At the end of the day we usually have dinner and then play volleyball or basket ball in the gym and then get together to watch a movie before going to bed. Every day is different down here and it's always very exciting.



I hope you've enjoyed this virtual tour of the South Pole. Hopefully someday you will come down and see it for yourself.

Please feel free to email me if you have any questions about our little spot here at the bottom of the world: mel.macmahon.contractor@usap.gov