



Researchers and crew members from the icebreaker Amundsen play hockey on the world's largest outdoor rink, the frozen Arctic Ocean.

Wandering Arctic researchers forced to go with the floes

Scientists aboard icebreaker are gambling that new camp is stable enough for lengthy experiments

PETER CALAMAI
SCIENCE REPORTER

ABOARD CCGS AMUNDSEN—Canada's peripatetic polar researchers are about to roll the dice in hopes of a bigger scientific payoff.

Current plans call for the Amundsen icebreaker to shake free of its frozen berth later this week and knife farther west through the ice-encrusted Arctic.

The floating research centre is searching for a dual-purpose parking spot to support a long-term ice camp but also allow the ship to regularly slip away and probe the scientific mysteries of fleeting ribbons of open water called flaw leads.

The move will take the 98-metre ship close to where it was two weeks ago when shifting ice prompted a four-day struggle through often unyielding floes to reach the current location, about 40 kilometres south of Banks Island at the western end of the Arctic archipelago.

Yet a long stretch of clear, -25C days has firmed up the ice pack back in the original part of Amundsen Gulf between the island and the mainland Northwest Territories around Cape Perry.

Chief scientist Tim Papakyriakou acknowledged that the planned re-

turn move is a gamble because of the unpredictable weather and often capricious ice movements.

"We're flipping a coin and some people are going to be heartbroken if this doesn't work," he said.

Those hopes will be dashed among dozens of scientists on board who have pinned their research on being able to continuously track chemical, physical and biological changes at one location as the Arctic races through its springtime explosion of life.

Such "time series" measurements are just as crucial to unravelling various polar puzzles as are "spatial" measurements, which record the same characteristics at different locations.

The ship provides the mobility for spatial measurement, especially in the flaw leads, ribbons of open water hugging the coastlines in the archipelago that offer a unique window into accelerated climate change.

For the time-series measurements, however, researchers need a camp on ice that won't drift until the general breakup after mid-June.

Quebec oceanographer Yves Gratton is one of those waiting anxiously for the long-term ice camp so he

can deploy special detectors there that record the direction and velocity of currents as often as every second.

"The mixing of the water under the ice has a big influence on what happens to the bugs," he said in a joking reference to a wide range of small marine critters.

A professor at the National In-

Some people are going to be heartbroken if this doesn't work

TIM PAPAKYRIAKOU,
CHIEF SCIENTIST

stitute for Scientific Research in Quebec City, Gratton plans today to put two acoustic Doppler current profilers temporarily through the ice at the ship's current location, to buttress the meagre existing data on Arctic currents.

Yet the crucial profiler installation would be at the planned ice camp, which includes a heated hut so researchers can stay for days as the ship make short excursions.

Before the Amundsen was fitted five years ago with labs and special equipment, Canadian scientists didn't have a safe way to track what was happening in these icy waters

as winter surrendered to spring.

But science is still often at the mercy of the weather.

When poor ice conditions and unappealing forecasts convinced Papakyriakou and others to move the ship, they also opted to set up a day-use research camp about 50 kilometres farther east in the middle of Prince of Wales strait.

But most of the equipment was pulled out of that camp over the weekend before research got underway there in earnest. That decision had to be made now because the heavy-duty helicopter currently on-board will be replaced by a smaller model later this week.

"You have to roll with the punches. People who have worked in an Arctic research campaign understand that," said Papakyriakou.

The exact timing of the Amundsen's move will be decided by ice guru Dave Barber, a University of Manitoba researcher who takes over Thursday as chief scientist for the next leg in the ship's 10-month expedition to investigate Arctic climate change.

Barber is a driving force behind the Circumpolar Flaw Lead System Study, Canada's largest project for International Polar Year which runs from March 2007 to March 2009. More than 200 scientists from 14 countries are involved and making exhaustive use of the Amundsen.

University loses round on holiday policy

York's practice of cancelling classes for Jewish holidays found to be discriminatory

LOUISE BROWN
EDUCATION REPORTER

An Ontario Human Rights Commission investigation has found that York University's long-standing practice of cancelling classes on Jewish holidays discriminates against students of other religions.

While the investigator's report must now go before the commissioners themselves for consideration, her findings are seen as vindication for York history professor David Noble, who has complained for years it is unfair for today's diverse multi-faith campus to scrap classes for three days and nights each year to honour one group's religious holy days, but not others.

"This is fantastic. It's just too bad it took four years to have a third party confirm that this is an illegal practice," said Noble, who is a non-observant Jew.

The university began cancelling classes 34 years ago for the two days of Rosh Hashanah and one day of Yom Kippur, originally because administrators said many professors and students would miss those classes anyway.

But a recent report prepared by York professor Thomas Klassen paints a highly diverse picture of the 51,000-student campus, with Jewish students estimated to represent about 5.8 per cent of students, Muslim students about 4.8 per cent, Catholic students 34.9 per cent, Protestant 22.1 per cent, other Christian 7.3 per cent, Hindu 3.6 per cent, Buddhist 2.1 per cent and Sikh 2 per cent.

Klassen, who opposes cancelling class on Jewish holidays, estimated this breakdown by cross-referencing the postal codes of students' home addresses with Statistics Canada data on religious affiliation — a process he said is often used by universities and medical researchers to take demographic snapshots.

In her report to the Human Rights Commission, which was sent Friday to Noble and university officials, investigator Kim Hanson concludes the practice violates the Ontario Human Rights Code's protection against discrimination based on a person's "creed."

"The university's practice of not scheduling classes on Jewish high holy days clearly results in differential treatment on the basis of creed, in that individuals of one group, those of Jewish faith, are given preferential treatment over others," the report concludes.

York spokesperson Alex Bylik said the university has no comment yet on the confidential report, for which it has 21 days to respond to the commission. York has stressed that students of any religious background can ask to be excused from class for a religious holiday.

Senators, speakers, MPs have money, will travel

TIM NAUMETZ
THE CANADIAN PRESS

OTTAWA—MPs and senators from all parties have spent more than \$3.7 million of taxpayers' money travelling the world since January 2006, parliamentary records show.

Delegations of MPs and senators led by Commons Speaker Peter Milliken and Senate Speaker Noel Kinsella had racked up \$1,014,503 in travel costs to last January.

MPs and senators in parliamentary exchange associations spent \$2,757,393 on "official visits."

The junkets have been a tradition for years on Parliament Hill, defended by politicians as a way for Canadian representatives to learn and benefit from the experiences of lawmakers in other countries.

MPs and senators on the new Canada-China Legislative Association ran up travel and hotel bills totaling \$291,466 on only eight trips be-

tween March 2006 and August 2007.

Members of the Canada-United States Interparliamentary Group spent at least \$365,335 on 23 trips across the U.S.

The most popular destination was Europe, where the attractions for Canadian MPs cost taxpayers a total of \$749,706 in flights and expenses for 24 trips by the Canada-Europe Association alone.

Paris is a frequent destination, as are London and New York. But the roaming parliamentarians have also taken in more exotic locales.

Destinations over the past two years included Mongolia, Morocco, Jordan, Madagascar, New Caledonia, Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas, Bermuda, Beijing, Trinidad and Tobago, Panama City, Kuala Lumpur, Hanoi, Islamabad, Shanghai, Vienna, Sweden, Ireland, Burkina Faso, Costa Rica and Malta.

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