Destination Antarctica!

On November 28th, 2001, we, the 43rd Antarctic Exploration Team boarded a flight from Narita to Perth, Australia.

We got on board an ice-breaking ship, the Shirase at Freemantle on the west coast of Australia on the following day. Immediately upon our arrival, we loaded fresh foods, inspected the survey and observation equipment, and attended a reception on board the ship. We started off on a journey toward the south from the quiet pier on December 3rd.

On the 2nd day of our journey by the time the boat reached more turbulent waters, we were already in a battle against seasickness and with a loss of appetite. We passed the 55 degrees South Latitude line on December 8th and encountered huge waves, which made our boat rock violently from side to side - 37 degrees on the port side and 32 degrees on the bow side. What discouraged us the most was the broken bottles of precious booze. All the same, the customary "Shirase College" was opened as usual and I was appointed as the President of the 43rd Shirase College.

Showa Station, Once Again

We finally arrived at the 1st helicopter port of Showa station at 16:07 on December 20th, 2001. This was my second visit to Antarctic.

The Shirase cast its anchor on an iceberg in the offing of the Showa station (LUTOU - HOLM BAY) on December 23rd.

We were supposed to share a summer camp with the Shirase support team until the relief of wintering team on 1st of February. During this period, we completed most of the construction work, shipments of goods and necessary transactions for taking over the exploration. The wind contained sand on the bare ground and occasional swirls of dust raised by vehicles made the Showa base look like a construction site in the mountains.

During the nightless period, we started our day at 6:00 in the morning and worked from 7:20 to 19:00 everyday. We were allowed to take a day off every 10 days.

Relief from the 42nd Wintering Team

A ceremony was held for the relief team on February 1st. The 43rd wintering team took over the task of the precedent team. All the members of the 43rd team moved from the summer camp to the residential building at the base. The days grew shorter, and we had a glimpse of a faint aurora.

On February 12th, the wintering team bid farewell to the last helicopter taking leave. It circled over the base a number of times and went off with several members of the 42nd team and the 43rd summer team who stayed behind to assist the wintering team. On the next day, a maximum wind velocity of 45.7m/sec was registered, an indication of the extreme conditions in the polar region. Starting from the first curfew issued from the 14th to 16th, we were occupied with handling a succession of commands. It was the first and precious experience for most of the team.
Showa station was buried with snow before long by the first blizzard on February 23rd followed by blizzards on March 3rd and 9th, lasting for 28 and 39 hours, respectively.

The passage of low-pressure systems brings blizzards and a rise in the temperature. The lowest temperature recorded after the start of our camp was -29.3°C, and this record was the fourth lowest temperature in recorded history. However, the temperature rose to +0.5°C on the March 10th. We experienced unpredictable shifts of weather.

These spells of rough weather do break once in a while. The loveliness of a sunny day is breathtaking.

**Enchanted by the Beauty of Nature**

Under the sky full of stars, I awaited the moment of the celestial glow of aurora drawing a curtain over the stars, looking for the only constellation I know -Scorpion-. Wiping the sleep from my eyes, it was an ecstatic bliss to gaze up at the aurora in the sky after waiting patiently. It is the moment of joy for one who reached the southernmost land.

From around May 24th, the sun crepeds low over the horizon. It is known as the "rolling sun".

The records of sunrise and sunset finished on May 30th. The sun no longer peeped above the horizon.

The Mid-Winter Festival was held from June 20th to 23rd and happy greetings were exchanged with the Antarctic wintering bases of various countries. We also sent off our messages from the Showa station. Our "hand-made" festival went on 3 days, and nights. Although we did not have any ladies in our 43rd team, we were lucky enough to witness "girls" everywhere at the base during these days of great merry-making.

We had the sun above the horizon approximately for 4 hours in August. However, there are still restrictions on field activities. Therefore I have not yet had the good fortune to encounter penguins or seals. Let us wait and see!