

Dreaming of Avocados

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I got burned out on teaching environmental education for the Appalachian Mountain Club of New Hampshire, so moved into helping them maintain a series of back-country hiker huts.

There is a long history of folks from that region going down to the Ice. Work in Antarctica often attracts seasonal workers, people used to winter weather, working outdoors, trail crew types. I had a couple of friends who had been down and got a contact name from them. This is a common Antarctic story, most people down here found out by word of mouth.



Winter population is 50–60 people. Summer we have around 250 people; it's about 4:1 men-women during the summer.

No airplanes arrive from mid-February until mid-October. All supplies arrive by plane and must arrive during those four summer months (October to mid-February). Our lives run on the fuel from the planes.

It is generally woman-friendly in the construction trades here. I have worked in some more traditional construction jobs in the States and have felt like my gender was an issue. Never the case here.

I have my own tiny bedroom in Summer Camp, a cluster of military Quonset huts for summer residents. Since I have returned for six summers, mine sports some more personal touches—a little window, a real wall to the hallway instead of the basic canvas curtain, a little table where I can put my laptop and watch movies in bed.

I spent a winter here in 2005. It was amazing, but difficult. The sun sets in March, and we don't see it again until September. Strange things happen to people's spirits. Sleeplessness is common, irritability is to be taken lightly. I knew I would see the Southern Lights, but had no idea the frequency, variety, or grand scale in which they would occur.

I walked outside daily in the winter, one of the few to do that. I came to recognize the boot prints of those few other people. Since we all wear issued extreme cold weather gear, folks all look similar when outdoors. However, most develop a surprisingly keen ability to recognize each other by our walk from very, very far away.

I spent my birthday here during my winter. It was heartwarming to see what friends came up with for gifts when shopping wasn't an option. I received a knitted hat, a song written and performed for me and about me, and a six-pack of the rationed beer (rationed b/c we didn't have very much on station). The lunch cook made my favorite, mac and cheese, even baking a portion just for me since he knew that the crusty topping was my favorite.

The Science Carpenter Shop, where I work, supports the carpentry needs of the science groups. For example, we would install a domed window and heated compartment in the roof of a building to house a camera that looks at meteor trails. We do a lot of prep for the small, movable buildings the scientists take to their specific site. I got a building ready to be pulled five miles to a seismic station.

Freshies, or fruits and vegetables, are a rare treat. Though the food is very good here, when I think about the end of my season here, I dream of avocados and tomatoes.