



British Antarctic Survey

THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF PENGUINS IN THE ANTARCTIC, INCLUDING THE CHOCOLATE BAR. BUT FOR EVERY BAR THAT GOES OUT, EVERY WRAPPER MUST COME BACK! WHEN THE BAS WANTED A REVIEW OF ITS CATERING OPERATIONS IT CALLED IN ALEXANDER JON RICHARDSON & ASSOCIATES



“We wanted to confirm we were getting the best value for money and the best managed catering for our staff”

Sue Reason



The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) is a component of the Natural Environment Research Council. Based in Cambridge, it has, for almost 60 years, undertaken the majority of Britain's scientific research on and around the Antarctic continent. It now shares that continent with scientists from around thirty countries.

BAS employs over 400 staff and supports three stations in the Antarctic, Rothera, Halley and Signy, and two stations on South Georgia, at King Edward Point and Bird Island.

Ice-strengthened ships sustain the Antarctic operations. RRS James Clark Ross has advanced facilities for oceanographic research. RRS Ernest Shackleton is primarily a logistics ship used for the resupply of stations. The Royal Navy's ice patrol vessel HMS Endurance has helicopters and provides valuable logistic support. Four Twin Otter aircraft fitted with wheels and skis are operated from Rothera and Halley, while a wheels-only Dash-7 aircraft provides the inter-continental air-link from Rothera to the Falkland Islands, and flies inland to blue ice runways.

FCSI review of catering

Richard Wedgbury conducted the first ever review of the BAS catering operation in Antarctica. Two of the five stations employ professional chefs who can cater for over 100 in the summer; the other stations share the catering on a rota basis. Chefs are usually employed for four to 18 months, starting November.

“In recent years our station at Rothera has increased in size,” says Sue Reason, BAS Purchasing Officer, “and we have also



added the station at King Edward Point and have extra staff involved in re-building the facilities at Bird Island.

“We wanted to confirm we were getting the best value for money and the best managed catering for our staff”.

The review looked at the purchasing operation, menus, standards, training and health & safety.

A catering operations manual was produced, covering all aspects, taking into account emphasis on environmental issues, for example, minimum use of disposable towels and sterilising temperature probes in boiling water rather than use wipes. Catering staff also have to be careful what they put down the sink – the sewage treatment plant at Rothera relies on bacteria to work efficiently and chemicals can kill them.

A detailed specification for the frozen foods required covered cuts of meat, thickness etc.

Cyclical menus were produced to cover a 6-week cycle and provide nutritional balance

“We have a turnover of chefs, who each have their own standards and way of working but we now have a benchmark for them to follow. Chefs used to do their own menus, which works well if the chef is good.”

There is a plentiful supply of ingredients for chefs to work with – and the manual gives them a source of ideas for menu planning, which they can build on using their own initiative.

There is more food supplied than is strictly necessary, to cater for personal tastes. New staff go out to Antarctica every season

and Sue Reason needs to balance the taste for muesli or corn-flakes for breakfast before the staff are even selected.

A standards manual was also designed by Wedgbury to help Station Commanders – who usually have no catering background – assess the chef’s performance. “They don’t know the questions to ask,” says Reason, “and the manual helps them assess performance and aids management.”

Training manuals covering health and food safety have also been prepared – “This only gives something in written form that they should know already – but it is there as an aide memoire.

“It was useful to have advice from a professional to confirm that what we were doing is right,” says Reason. “It also gives us the background to deal with professional chefs in terms they will understand and appreciate.”

Food at the Antarctic

At the larger stations, the day starts with breakfast such as cereals and toast (bread is baked on site). Mid-morning means a light snack such as a bacon or cheese roll. Lunch is soup and a choice of two hot dishes. Afternoon brings a snack of biscuits and cake with hot beverages.

The main meal of the day comes in the evening, with a choice of meat and vegetarian dishes. On Saturdays, there is a big evening meal, often themed and everybody is expected to come together and join in the fun.

“In their winter (our summer) there are less people on site and

Continued on page 20 ⇨



Top left
The kitchen at Signy Station
Centre left
The Saturday night dinner
Left
The kitchen at Halley Station

they tend to suit themselves. There is still the big Saturday night and the chefs save some of their 'goodies' (such as pesto sauce or smoked salmon) for the staff who are overwintering – who need less calories daily because they tend to remain on station during this period.

"21st June – Mid Winter is the big day of the year, when nothing less than a five course meal is served."

Staff are allowed alcohol. Each person overwintering has their own private stock, kept in bond and drawn as required. The station also provides two cans of beer per night for all staff at any time of year.

Under the terms of the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty, the BAS is legally obliged to remove all of its waste, apart from sewage and grey water, from Antarctica. In practical terms, this means shipping out approximately twenty cubic metres of hazardous waste (e.g. paint, batteries, laboratory chemicals) and a thousand cubic metres of non-hazardous waste i.e. chocolate and crisp wrappers every year.

All waste has to be correctly sorted, packaged and labelled for shipment back to the Falkland Islands or the UK, where it is recycled or safely disposed of by licensed contractors.

BAS has shown its commitment to reducing the amount of wastes produced in Antarctica through initiatives such as the introduction of reusable packaging containers.

It also removed an old waste dump, a legacy of the early days of British science activity in the Antarctic in the 1960's and 1970's. The £500,000 clean up took place near the remote BAS summer field station at Fossil Bluff, Alexander Island on the Antarctic Peninsula. Over 50 tonnes of waste including hundreds of fuel drums, an engine block and general rubbish was removed. Hazardous wastes such as lead-acid batteries, medical syringes and asbestos were also cleared away. The wastes were first flown to Rothera Research Station and then shipped to the Falklands Islands or UK for recycling or safe disposal.

British Antarctic Survey www.antarctica.ac.uk
Alexander Jon Richardson & Associates www.ajr-online.com