

Really Down South

Mooresville's Mike LeBaron spent much of last fall in Antarctica

This past November Mike LeBaron celebrated Thanksgiving in Antarctica.



Mike LeBaron spent six weeks in Antarctica last fall. He teaches earth science and AP environmental science at Lake Norman High School.



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LeBaron learned how to brave the elements during his stay.

LeBaron, who teaches earth science and AP environmental science at Lake Norman High School, was part of education outreach for the WISSARD project (Whillans Ice Stream Subglacial Access Research Drilling) at Antarctica's McMurdo Station.

His journey to the South Pole began two years ago when he saw a notice on Listserv for a group called PolarTREC. The notice was for people interested in working on a project at either the North or South Pole.

"I'm always good for applying, so I did, and I got selected," explains LeBaron, adding that he was supposed to go on the trip in 2011. "This project had so much stuff going on with it, they had to delay it a year."

So last November LeBaron rode in various airplanes for a total of 30 hours to arrive at McMurdo Station for a six-week stay, during which he investigated microbial life



LeBaron says temperatures ranged from 8 degrees Fahrenheit to the upper 30s (Fahrenheit). "I've slept in colder weather camping in the mountains of North Carolina," says LeBaron. "I went running while I was there."

While he missed his wife and family, LeBaron says he enjoyed being surrounded by scientists working on various projects. "The best part was in that environment of 900 people, about 115 to 200 of those people were scientists. Even the support people who

keep the place going are interested in the projects," says LeBaron. "Everybody there has one purpose, and that purpose is to support the science."

— Lori K. Tate,

photography courtesy of Mike LeBaron



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THE SCOOP

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in subglacial environments. PolarTREC paid for the trip, including LeBaron's training, gear (ever wear a 10-pound goose down jacket?) and also the cost of a substitute to teach his classes during his absence. "PolarTREC is set up to provide this for normally about 12 teachers per year," explains LeBaron, adding that the National Science Foundation is a funding source for the project.

While LeBaron was geographically far away from the hustle and bustle of daily life, he still had modern amenities, such as a TV, Internet access and a phone. He lived in a two-person dorm room and was served three meals a day in the mess hall. In addition, McMurdo Station offers a gym, store, barber,



Scientists from all over the world visit Antarctica.

weight room, coffeehouse, lots of outdoor recreation activities and even two bars. The maximum population of the community ranges from 900 to 1,000 people.

"It's like a self-contained town. The whole place is less than 10 acres in area," says LeBaron. "I was there for the summertime, and it was daylight 24 hours a day."

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