

Parishville-Hopkinton teacher prepares for trip to Antarctica

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Glenn W. Clark, a science teacher at Parishville-Hopkinton Central School, will travel to Antarctica next winter as part of a scientific mission to explore Totten Glacier System in eastern Antarctica. The yellow arrow on the map indicates where Mr. Clark will be staying during the trip.

PARISHVILLE — While it's not unusual for people from the north country to travel south for the winter, no one will be going as far south as Glenn W. Clark, who will be leaving in January to spend nearly two months in Antarctica.

Mr. Clark is one of 17 teachers selected from around the United States for the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States PolarTREC program for the 2013-14 research season.

He will be paired with Amy Leventer, an associate professor of geology from Colgate University, Hamilton, who has been traveling to Antarctica for research since 1984.

Mr. Clark, a Parishville-Hopkinton Central High School science teacher, said he heard about the PolarTREC program from Ms. Leventer, whom he met while leading a hiking trip three years ago.

“After a day of hiking, she popped the question and asked if I would ever consider going to Antarctica,” he said, adding that he applied for the program twice before being accepted this year.

“My first two applications resulted in making the final pool of applicants, but not making the final cut,” he said. “However, the third time was a charm.”

Mr. Clark’s trip tentatively is scheduled for Jan. 25 through March 12, depending on the weather.

The trip, by ship departing from Tanzania, is expected to take several weeks.

Mr. Clark said he’ll be part of a team headed to the Totten Glacier System in eastern Antarctica.

“It’s one of the most uncharted, misunderstood parts of the world,” he said. “Because it is so remote, it’s going to take us weeks to get there.”

Even after arriving in Antarctica, Mr. Clark said, most of his time there will be spent aboard the ship, working 12-hour shifts, seven days a week for the duration of his adventure.

“Basically I’ll be doing the rigging and working in the tail of the ship,” Mr. Clark said, adding he’ll also spend some shifts on the bridge of the ship or up in its crow’s nest serving as a marine mammal observer.

“I’m not only going to be helping them, but I’ve got to document it, too,” he said, adding that it is one of the main reasons for bringing teachers along on the trips.

“These research scientists are brilliant,” he said. “The whole mission of PolarTREC is to disseminate information back to classrooms and the general public. The reason they have teachers come is to have them explain that what’s happening there is real and that the polar region is in jeopardy.”

Should the Totten Glacier System ever melt, Mr. Clark said, the results could be disastrous.

“If this ever does go, it would raise the level of the ocean seven meters,” he said.

Those interested in following along with Mr. Clark’s adventure or any of the 16 other journeys, 11 of which will be to the Arctic rather than the Antarctic, can do so online.

Mr. Clark said he’s anticipating an experience like no other.

“I’m looking at this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” he said, adding this also will be the longest time he’s ever been away from his two children.

Even though it will be summer there, the temperature could be 30 to 50 degrees below zero, he said.

To prepare for the trip, Mr. Clark recently spent six days in Fairbanks, Alaska, for an orientation that included teachers and scientists from other trips.

The trip and Mr. Clark's substitute teacher will be paid for in full by the National Science Foundation Office of Polar Programs, the agency that funds the Arctic Research Consortium of the United States.

Meanwhile, he said, he is looking for schools and organizations interested in hearing about PolarTREC and participating in events during the trip.

"We want to get the word out about PolarTREC and climate change," he said. "That's what our mission is."