

The Arctic Circle: Icy Traces

Throughout August 2008, one Hertford student was in the northern reaches of Sweden, 100km within the Arctic Circle. As part of his Masters' dissertation, Thomas Jellis lived and worked with a group of glaciologists at the foot of *Storglaciären*. Awarded a 'Special Graduate Travel Grant' by Hertford College, he was able to study the ways in which



Tarfala Research Station

the ice is measured, as well as be involved in the process himself. Employing an ethnographic approach, Thomas was involved in the day-to-day activities at the research station at Tarfala. By being on the fieldwork site, the research tried to bring a sense of what life in the field is like, in a site where work and play are, at times, indistinct. Drawing on notions of the practices of place, the study was interested in the performances involved in (re)creating a history of ice.

After a two-day journey – involving a flight to Stockholm, followed by a 17-hour train journey, a bus trip, a helicopter ride and a hike – Thomas was able to participate in various monitoring programmes, discussions, maintenance and social activities over a three-week period (06/07/08 - 28/07/08), during the station's summer season. As well as being lucky enough to be awarded the grant from the College, Thomas negotiated a reduction from Stockholm University, who own the station. He worked as a *hantlangare* (which loosely translates as assistant), helping out around the station, as well as joining the teams which would go on to the glacier to perform the measurements.

This fieldwork is by definition conducted in intimate, unpredictable and unorganised interactions with specific geographical localities.

These specific characteristics, such as the crevices and slow-moving or buried ice-poles, influence, shape and to some degree even constitute results. Although this may have earned the field sciences a reputation for being further removed from the scientific 'ideal' set up by the laboratory, fieldwork remains a crucial tool for making the world available for scientific investigation.

The dissertation argued that the precise locations of scientific endeavour are elusive and require a rethinking of the idea of fieldwork as distributed and relational, rather than found at a particular point. Indeed, since the measurements began, they have developed with each successive year and are on-going practices. The research



Probing the ice

involved a panoply of places, personalities and practices and through grappling with the field's stability/instability suggests that Tarfala is a setting for place-specific practices of knowing.

Thomas has been a member of the college for the past five years, reading Geography as an undergraduate and completing a subsequent MSc in 'Nature, Society and Environmental Policy' with distinction. He has now completed his first year as a doctoral student and is interested in thinking about spaces of aesthetic experimentation and what it means to be experimental.

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