

Heard Island: in search of a friendly card

Scheduling landings anywhere on Heard Island are a challenge for any operational planner. In the coming season, the Heard Island 2003-04 Program requires the placement of six independent field parties from two to ten people at sites that range from the most sheltered anchorage, Atlas Cove, to the most exposed, Capsize Beach on the south-east coast, named to commemorate the dunking of the 1964-65 *Patenela* Expedition as they fled the island.

The beach is steep, so the surf dumps savagely and the longshore drift in the prevailing south westerlies ensures you only get one chance. If all goes well, a party of three biologists will be landed with all their equipment and supplies for two months. If it doesn't,

they'll have to be deployed overland from Spit Bay, requiring the support of others in the 28-member expedition.

A few kilometres up the coast, three more biologists, part of the Antarctic Marine Living Resources (AMLR) contingent, will be landed at Doppler Hill onto a pebbled and black sandy beach, slightly more friendly than Capsize but still a significant challenge. The most frequently used landing site outside Atlas Cove is Spit Bay where a further four of the AMLR team will spend the field season. Being on the northern facing coast, it is more protected from the swell and fierce winds but here, the beach is steep and rocky, making a firm footing impossible while trying to pull inflatable rubber boats

from the surf. And there's just enough room to land a LARC, off-load and turn into the surf for the trip back to the ship.

Stephenson Lagoon appears from the most recent satellite images, to have expanded enormously since the last ANARE expedition three years ago and a wider, deeper entrance from the sea is anticipated, making deployment of the ten member botanical team possible. Attempts to land two tank huts converted to laboratories will be made but the conditions will need to be just right.

A team of three glaciologists will be landed at Brown Glacier, another pebbled beach and another tank hut for refuge at the end of cold days high on the glacier. The final group of two biologists will be landed at the base of the Jacka Glacier in Atlas Cove, if the fierce willie-waws and swell are kind enough on the day.

Theory and practicality will meet during the six days allowed for deployment with the only certainty that it will be played out by nature's rules and the turn of a friendly card.

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ROB EASTHER

The sea off Spit Bay in a less than friendly state – but wait another hour.

New HIMI management plan being developed

It was reported in *Australian Antarctic Magazine* 4:41 that the Australian Government had declared in October 2002 a 6.5 million hectare, fully protected marine reserve (the world's largest) in the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) region of the Southern Ocean. In early 2003 the AAD received formal authority, under delegation from the Director of National Parks, to administer the new reserve and to prepare the management plan required under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The new management plan will replace the *Heard Island Wilderness Reserve Management Plan* made under the HIMI Environment Protection and Management Ordinance 1987, which has guided activities in the HIMI Territory since 1996. It will be written to reflect obligations arising from the area's nationally and internationally recognised natural and cultural values, to take into account up-to-date knowledge of these values gained from recent visits, and to ensure a best practice approach to management of the area. The EPBC Act also specifies mandatory inclusions in the management plan, plus a series of management principles which must be taken into account.

One of the greatest threats to the values of the reserve is the human-assisted introduction and spread of non-native species. To ensure that human activities are managed in a way that will not jeopardise the near pristine ecosystems, the AAD has commissioned a formal risk assessment by an independent expert. Recommendations arising from this assessment will contribute to strategies to minimise the risk of introductions. The AAD is also coordinating a research program in some marine areas adjacent to the marine reserve, to assess these areas for possible future inclusion through expansion of the reserve boundaries.

The EPBC Act requires that the public has an opportunity to provide input to the reserve's management, and a comment period on the proposal to prepare a draft management plan was held between March and May. As well as being a statutory requirement, this process allowed the wider Australian community, most of whom are never likely to have the chance to visit HIMI, to voice their opinions about how this remote yet potentially vulnerable external territory should be managed. The AAD received several submissions which will be considered in the preparation of the management plan.

Current intentions are to make a working draft management draft plan available to the 2003-04 AAD research expedition to HIMI, to allow valuable field-testing of proposed management measures and to ensure that what looks good on paper is also meaningful and effective on the ground (and in the water, on the ice, etc). Comments arising from on-ground experiences will be incorporated into the draft plan, which will then be subject to a further round of public comment before presentation to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage for approval and, if approved, consideration by Parliament.

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Further information about the HIMI Marine Reserve is available from the AAD website at: <http://www.aad.gov.au/himi_marine_reserve>.