

Antarctic researchers mark winter solstice with icy plunge

June 21 2018



This handout photo taken on June 19, 2018 and released by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) on June 21 shows a swimming hole being prepared at the Casey research station as Antarctic researchers welcome the solstice by plunging into icy waters

Scientists based in Antarctica welcomed the winter solstice by plunging

into icy waters Thursday as part of a "mad tradition" heralding the return of brighter days after weeks of darkness.

In temperatures of -22 degrees Celsius (-7.6 degrees Fahrenheit), staff at Australia's Casey research station marked midwinter's day by cutting a small pool in the thick ice before stripping off and jumping in.

Casey station leader Rebecca Jeffcoat said midwinter day—the shortest of the year—was the most anticipated occasion on the Antarctic calendar and has been celebrated from the time of the early explorers.

"Swimming in Antarctica's below freezing waters is something of a mad tradition, but our hardy expeditioners look forward to it, with 21 of the 26 people on station brave enough to take an icy dip this year," she said.

"Midwinter day is really important in Antarctica because it marks the halfway point of our year here on the ice and it means the sun will spend slightly longer in the sky each day."

Celebrations took place at all three of Australia's Antarctic research stations and its sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island base, with feasting, an exchange of handmade gifts, and messages from home read out.

Jeffcoat, who is experiencing her first Antarctic winter, said the continent was extraordinary.



This handout photo taken on June 19, 2018 and released by the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) on June 21 shows Barry Balkin taking a dip in a swimming hole prepared at the Casey research station as researchers welcome the winter solstice

"The environment is spectacular and harsh, and we experience the most incredible range of conditions, from below freezing blizzards to auroras, or the midwinter twilight as the sun skims the horizon," she said.

"It is challenging being so far from family and friends, but we have built a really close knit community of friends on [station](#) that we'll likely have for the rest of our lives as we've shared this great experience together."

Australia currently has 75 researchers living and working on the frozen

continent as part of the Australian Antarctic Program, with most of them on 12-month postings.

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Citation: Antarctic researchers mark winter solstice with icy plunge (2018, June 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-antarctic-winter-solstice-icy-plunge.html>

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