

NASA's GRIPS balloon team arrives in Antarctica

4 November 2015, by Sarah Frazier

Members of the GRIPS balloon team began arriving at McMurdo Station in Antarctica in late October 2015. GRIPS, short for Gamma-Ray Imager/Polarimeter for Solar flares, is an instrument that studies the extremely high-energy particles released by solar flares, information that will help scientists pinpoint the processes which set off these explosive events. GRIPS will launch this December, suspended underneath a football-field-sized balloon, and will circle above the frozen Antarctic for several weeks.

The GRIPS team will spend the month of November assembling and testing the instrument and balloon. The [launch window](#) opens on Dec. 1, 2015, but the team will have to wait for calm wind conditions to send their payload soaring to heights of nearly 25 miles. Since the sun doesn't set at all for several weeks of the Antarctic summer, GRIPS will be able to observe the sun continuously during much or all of its flight, which the team hopes will last anywhere from 14 to 55 days. The 24/7 summer sunlight also provides a constant source of energy, powering the [instrument](#) the entire time.

Scientific balloons are a low-cost way to access Earth's upper atmosphere up to the edge of space, allowing scientists to make measurements that are impossible from the ground.

Provided by NASA

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