



Wormherders on Ice

Antarctica, the vast icy desert that remains virtually untouched by humans, is the elusive seventh and least-visited continent on the face of the earth. It is the highest, driest, coldest, windiest, and emptiest place on earth. Antarctica, whose existence was only hypothesized until finally sighted in 1820-21, now houses over forty research stations run by some seventeen countries and is the focus of the largest multinational research effort in history.¹

Imagine my surprise and delight at being invited to join a soil ecology team making the trip to Antarctica during the 2006 austral summer! I had no idea what to expect or what to pack. My trip to the bottom of the world was an experience I will never forget. I had been working for Dr. Byron Adams for nearly three years when the invitation came. Adams has been part of the Long-Term Ecological Research program (LTER) in Antarctica for five years and had made annual trips to the South Pole during that time.

At BYU, my fellow labsters and I take pleasure in saying that we work in the Nematode Evolution Lab, and though we all entered the lab with little or no knowledge about nematodes, we have learned much of their ecological significance.



Getting their extreme cold weather gear from the Clothing Distribution Center.

Nematodes are microscopic roundworms that seem to occupy virtually every habitat on earth. They fill numerous ecological niches from plant and animal parasites to free living. Plant-parasitic nematodes are of great agricultural significance, because they are responsible for the loss of an estimated 12.3 percent of the world's annual crop yield, which makes them the most damaging agricultural pest in the world.²

Nematodes also play a very important role in the growing field of genomics and molecular systematics.

No Events