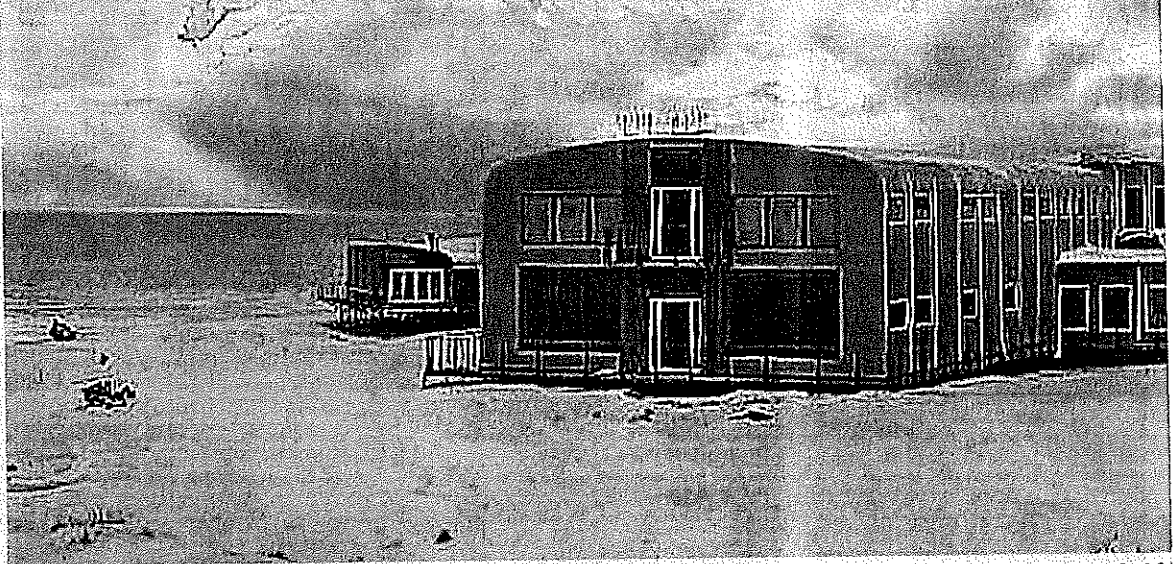


# News Stranded

## The iceman comet



The Marion Island base at Transvaal Cove, one of three scientific research stations that fall under the South African Antarctic program.

### Fighting and food shortages on SA's sub-Antarctic island

By **BOBBY JORDAN**

● A dream scientific assignment has turned into a horror show for a South African mission on the remote Marion Island.

The mission is stranded with an "unstable" team member, a faulty generator and a critical food shortage.

The Department of Environmental Affairs is monitoring the behaviour of a member who is "taking strain", prompting intervention from mediators. There are allegations of a violent confrontation between two members of the team of about 20 who have been stationed on the island since April.

"There has been one individual who has been taking some strain; we had quite a number of meetings," said deputy director-general: oceans and coasts Judy Beaumont.

"There has been a discussion going on for a number of weeks."

Emergency supplies have been sent to the island on an Indian ship following a provisioning error and equipment failure, Beaumont said. She said the supplies shortage was partly due to an inventory mistake that resulted in canned food becoming expired.

The Sunday Times is in possession of correspondence detailing some of the problems on the south Atlantic island.

"What I can tell you is that we all fear for our lives at the moment," says a note from one of the team.

Food sent to several overnight huts on Marion Island has been returned to the main base at Transvaal Cove in the northeast of the island "due to the low stock at the base", the correspondence says. The huts are used by researchers conducting field studies.

A source in direct contact with the team said conflict between two members had degenerated into a physical fight. A frying pan was used in the fracas. One person was injured and received medical treatment. The alleged aggressor then trashed the victim's room with an axe.

# 3

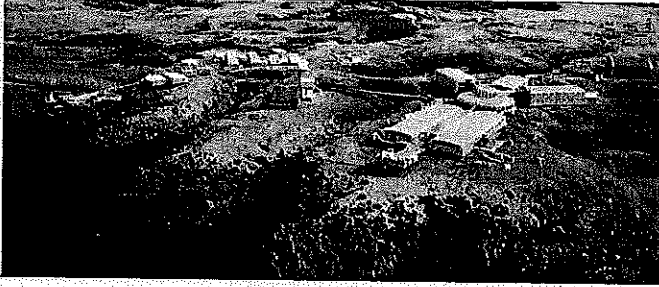
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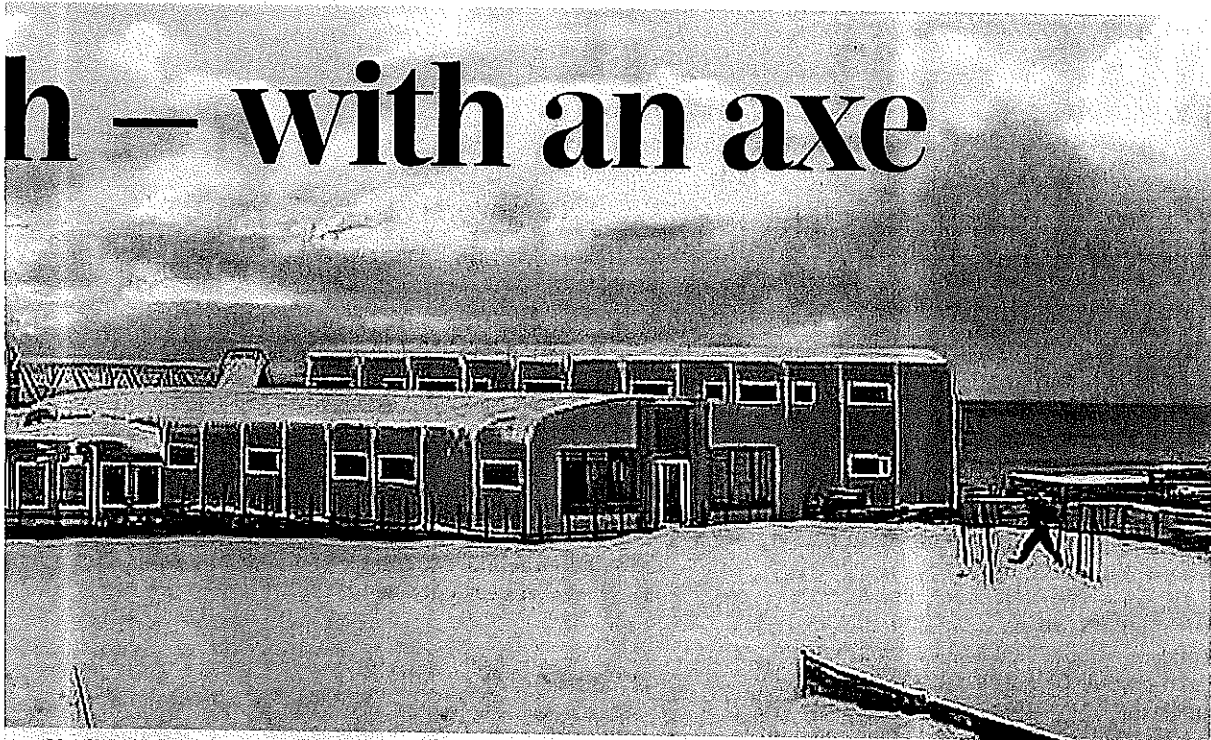
TO OVER  
Average annual  
highest point, the



### Base notes

Marion Island, 1769km southeast of Port Elizabeth, was incorporated into South Africa in 1948. It is 19km long and nearly 12km wide, and has an area of 316km<sup>2</sup> and a 72km coastline

# h – with an axe



can National Antarctic Programme. The others are on Gough Island and in Queen Maud Land, Antarctica.

# 20

L NUMBER  
on Marion Island

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ERAGE  
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R 3 000MM  
ainfall on the island's  
1230m Mascarin Peak

"We islanders are a very, very close bunch. We are not happy with what is going on," said the source, who questioned the government's commitment to ensuring the safety of the team.

"When you put in blood, sweat and tears and you know how things can be and you see the guys just screwing it up, it really upsets us. That's our home. I would not go back right now."

Another message from one of the team details the extent of the food and equipment problems: "We are running dangerously low on food. We are also now shutting down our power generator in the day to minimise its use as we have run out of oil to service it. Two of our three power generators have broken down with irreparable damage and our last main generator is going to break down soon due to lack of maintenance.

"When that happens, we have been told to move to our emergency base and go live there for the next three months."

Beaumont denied that there was a crisis on the island and said supply shortages were not uncommon.

"Teams are there for quite a while, for be-

tween 10 and 12 months. Inevitably you need something, or something could break down.

"There is no critical shortage," she said, adding that using the Indian vessel, which will stop by the island, was more practical than an expensive air drop.

Environmental Affairs Department director-general Nosipho Ngcaba said she was unaware of the situation but would investigate.

Department of Science and Technology spokeswoman Veronica Mohapeloa said she was awaiting comment from government officials.

Several former islanders questioned whether the government was still conducting the necessary psychometric tests to ensure proper team selection.

Beaumont said management systems were in place to ensure additional intervention if the situation degenerated.

"There is quite an extensive training that a team go through before they go so that they are fully prepared.

"Some people invariably take more strain than others," she said, adding that the Christmas-New Year period often proved particularly difficult.