

## CONDITION FUN\*

*\* The state of the Antarctic spirit, as well as a righteous rock band.*

Creativity is awesomely alive in Antarctica largely because of the extreme geographic isolation. If “it” isn’t handy, whatever it is, you find a way. There are traditions that took hold many years prior, there are events that may become traditions in time and there are brand new things that take shape as a result of someone’s particular passion. There’s everything you could want or hope to create in a contract season for a captive audience that’s got nowhere else to go.

### **B-icles**

Antarctica has bicycles. Having just witnessed a bike share program roll out in Boise, ID, the even more sparsely populated southern continent is comparably ahead of the times. These were your standard mountain variety versus a bike designed or outfitted for ice and snow. McMurdo Station has about 80 buildings, ranging in size, and not a great deal of ground to cover, so the bicycle reduces your 10-15 minute walk across town ever so slightly and gives somewhat speedier passage to the outlying accessible areas like Hut Point, where Robert Falcon Scott’s first hut still stands thanks to the conservation work of New Zealand’s Antarctic Heritage Trust.



## Music

Chilly Antarctica has a hot music scene – not just at Icestock, the annual outdoor concert that takes place each New Years – throughout the summer and winter contract seasons. There are regular places to play for smaller crowds and other annual celebrations that offer a choice lineup. New Zealand's Scott Base throws a great concert. In 2013, Metallica became the first major act to play the southern continent, but countless bands, albeit unknown, rocked the ice first.



## **Film Fest**

What artistic community would be complete without a film festival? The Antarctic Film Fest premieres the latest in cinema toward the end of each summer. It was open to all and attracted a wide range of filmic sensibilities. Personal opinion, but my hands down favorite was a hilarious-romp-homage to Derek Waters of Drunk History to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1911 race between explorers Scott and Amundsen to reach the South Pole first. [I don't know if you can or want to link to this, but at minimum you should see it if you haven't. Hilarious: <https://vimeo.com/35084075> ]

## **A Charlie Brown Christmas**

The tiniest something is missing if there's no A Charlie Brown Christmas during the holidays, and while the cartoon was available for viewing, performing it as a play somehow enhanced the joy. There was plenty of recyclables in Skua (Antarctic version of a thrift store, but free) to approximate children's costumes, and there was plenty of volcanic ash to make a dirty, dirty Pig Pen. I'm not sure what year it started, and I don't know if it's still stickin' around. It's one of those fun ideas that could have fallen into the crevasse as people rotate.





## **Keeping Up (Navy) Tradition**

The U.S. Navy has a long history with Antarctica, from the early explorers to the continued logistics support provided today. The International Geophysical Year (IGY) 1957–58 offered a major shift in focus for Antarctica, giving it up for science as the main point. To prepare for this change, the Navy launched Operation Deep Freeze in 1955, establishing McMurdo as a base to support the coming scientific studies. The military tendency to name equipment gave personality to the various tractors, dozers, conveyances and more. Many also had an image or character painted on that mapped to the name. While the age of some of the machines sees this artwork fading, there are a few who restore what they can, and though the Navy no longer runs McMurdo, they continue to have a presence each year during ship offload.



## **Dodging balls**

Dodgeball is another of the activities that surfaced through someone's initiative. The gym it took place in also had an area for roped climbing, offered basketball and at one point delivered unicycle lessons. Side note, the gym annually housed the Australian contingent on layover, before forwarding on to their stations. McMurdo has karaoke equipment, but someone has to volunteer to run it for it to happen. There's yoga, I took a few sign language classes, and a few of us set up a writing group at one point. There's a great Rec department, but many activities, even those that border on tradition, won't happen without a champion. And when the champion of many years decides to no longer return, the vacuum could become permanent. Friendly competition between departments or bases makes the 54 hour work week, with Sundays off, that much more exciting.





## Tri-polar

A handful of workers not stationed at Amundsen-Scott South Pole may be lucky enough to get a lift there for a short visit. Did you know the Pole has many poles? There's the Magnetic Pole that wanders. There's the Geographic Pole. Flowing with the more than two miles thick ice it sits on, at a rate of about 30 feet per year, the geographic marker is re-surveyed and repositioned every January 1. Not only does the marker physically move, the exact point for the pole does as well due to irregularities in the Earth's axis. And there's the pole that's purely for show – the Ceremonial South Pole. This is an area set aside for photo opps located a short distance from the Geographic South Pole, so it has to be moved every so often as well to keep it close to the geo pole. To add one more pole, there's the Southern Pole of Inaccessibility, which is the point deepest in from the Southern Ocean. This one isn't actually near the South Pole, is hard to reach and isn't so well defined anyway. It isn't moving per se, but there are different coordinates claiming it depending on where you start measuring from (ice shelf, sea ice, land edge you think is underneath the ice shelf...).

