

Living at the Bottom of the World



Palmer Station was named for explorer Nathaniel Palmer, one of the first to sight Antarctica.

Where Was I? Palmer Station is on Anvers Island, 20 miles west of the Antarctic Peninsula. To get there, I sailed from the southern tip of Chile on the RVIB (Research Vessel Ice Breaker) *Nathaniel B. Palmer* for four days on rough seas and through thick sea ice.

Why Did I Go There? I was in Antarctica to study invertebrates (animals without backbones), such as sea stars and sea urchins. I worked with the divers to collect invertebrates and to set up experiments—and I helped them with their equipment. Sometimes the divers found interesting animals to show everyone—like giant sea cockroaches!

What's it like to live in Antarctica? If you lived at Palmer Station, the United States research station where I spent three months, it would be like this:



This sea cockroach is really an Antarctic isopod.



Scientists at Palmer Station use inflatable boats to explore nearby areas.

Because the weather outside was very cold and windy, I wore special clothing issued by the U.S. Antarctic Program—thermal underwear, socks, boots, a hat, a waterproof coat, and gloves. Anytime I was near the water, I wore a bright-orange float-coat that worked as a life preserver. The divers wore even more warm layers plus a watertight dry suit to protect them from the icy water. They also carried more than 50 pounds of equipment.

Inside the station, I worked in the indoor aquarium and the laboratories, examining specimens through a microscope. I wore clothes just like yours—Palmer Station was kept well heated and protected from the weather outside.

Exploring On weekends, we hiked or skied on the glacier behind the station or took short boat trips. To be able to explore or work “off-station,” everyone first went to Survival School—a safety and survival training class.

When we were on the glacier, we stayed on marked paths to avoid falling into deep cracks in the ice hidden

by snow. On boat trips, we avoided dangerous icebergs. We were careful not to disturb any animals, because there are strict rules to protect them. A few times, penguins and seals visited us at the station, though.

Evening Activities After a long day of work or play, we relaxed. Everyone ate dinner together in the cafeteria. Then, I’d head to the game room. We watched movies on a big-screen TV, played computer games, and even had parties. No TV or radio stations come into Antarctica, so we communicated with the outside world using e-mail. We got regular mail, but it took about a month for it to get to the station in good weather.

Because I woke every day at 7:00 A.M. (in spring, this was four or five hours after sunrise), I was exhausted by 11:00 P.M. You need a good night’s sleep to be ready for another exciting day on Palmer Station!

Adapted from an article by David Krakowski as told to Jessica Perez



Penguins explore Palmer Station, too!