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LIFE AT THE END OF THE EARTH

Will Kenton has spent the past 11 months living in one of the most remote places on earth. The 29-yearold, from Hay, has watched from Antarctica as the coronavirus pandemic swept the globe, grateful to be able to go about his work at Davis Station and not be "stuck" at home. He said while the challenges of living on the world's coldest continent were immense, experiencing the spectacular scenery and incredible wildlife of the South Pole made it all worthwhile. Full story: Page 6

Picture: Supplied

HIGH ALERI

A royal commission has warned the extreme climate conditions that fueled last summer's bushfires, burning out hundreds of thousands of hectares and blanketed the region in smoke, will only intensify in the years to come. The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, which made public its findings in a 594-page report yesterday, concluded "further global warming over the next 20 to 30 years is inevitable". The report recommends the federal government take a more active role in disaster management to combat the risks of a future where "floods and bushfires are expected to become more frequent and intense". **STORIES: PAGE 8**

REGION'S BEST PROPERTY GUIDE



NEWS

Life in the South Pole

Riverina man's tales of Antarctic

BY ANNIE LEWIS

ILL Kenton often jokes that he went from the hottest, flattest, driest place on Earth to the coldest, flattest, driest place on Earth. And it's from there the Riverina man has watched on as the world froze when a pandemic hit.

After growing up in Hay, the 29-year-old now works as a "jack of all trades" on bases in Antarctica, the ice-covered landmass which is considered virtually unliveable.

It all started when an advertisement popped up on his social media calling for tradesmen to work on the stations on the southern-most continent.

"I applied for the first year and didn't get it, but I applied the second year and got through to the next stage of the application," Mr Kenton said.

"I got flown to Tasmania for a workshop for three days which involved team-building exercises to test how you would react to different situations. Then, eventually, I got a summer season."

Mr Kenton flew down to Antarctica for the first time in 2018 and spent six months at Casey Station. The cold weather was a shock to him on arrival, but Mr Kenton said he struggles more acclimatising to the Riverina's heat when he returns home.

After finishing his first



UNIQUE WORKPLACE: Will Kenton, 29, is in the middle of his second stint working on stations in Antarctica as a "jack of all trades". Pictures: Supplied



TRAVERSING HIGH SEAS: Will stands in front of the Aurora Australis, which was launched in 1989 and served the Australian Antarctic program for 30 years.

season and then taking a six-month break, he then journeyed on the ice-breaker Aurora Australis for his next stint in 2019, taking up residence at Davis Station.

"I am a fitter and turner. The main trades you have are plumbers, sparkies, and diesel mechanics," Mr Kenton said. "I float between all those three trades to help them out or repair other parts.

"I am on the projects team as well, and we are involved

Pop up Office: Lockhart

in building a new powerhouse down here, so there is plumbing and carpentry involved in that.'

The primary way that the pandemic has affected those living on the icy tundras is that Mr Kenton's return home date is slightly up in the air.

The ice-breaker Aurora Australis was discontinued earlier in the year, and while construction of a new one is underway, COVID-19 has slowed down production,



STUNNING OUTLOOK: Will captures a shot of a sunset that takes Antarctica into a 24-hour night. More recently, expeditioners saw their last sunset for five weeks.

meaning a 12-month trip has been extended to about 17 months.

"When the ship came down in February to drop off supplies and pick up the summer crew, they were quarantined in the bay for a few days because that was the very beginnings," Mr Kenton said.

"We all thought it would blow over. but then we saw on the news that it wasn't. But for us down here, there has been no social distanc-

ing. We were one of the only ones to have an Anzac Day ceremony."

Mr Kenton joked that luckily the bar has always stayed open, and the crews do not have to worry about booking a table. He added it has been surreal to watch the pandemic unfold.

"I think it is a bit hard for everyone to fully understand what it has been like for people back home," Mr Kenton said. "We have missed the entire year pretty

much, so things like going to the supermarket and having to social distance seem bizarre. It's almost like we will have to be reinducted into normal society."

Mr Kenton said now is almost the perfect time to be in Antarctica, away from the ramifications of coronavirus spreading throughout the world. Adding that while it can be a "cold and brutal" place to live sometimes, there is nothing that can quite capture the beauty of it.

"I am much happier to be here, rather than stuck home during COVID," Mr Kenton said.

"Once the winter started, all the ocean froze up solid around the station so we could drive out onto it.

"The seawater and the freshwater combine and create a nice solid blue ice, which is slippery but beautiful. Driving along it is pretty special, as you are amongst icebergs.'

While Mr Kenton loves being down there, living at the end of the world comes with its challenges. From strict regulations when it comes to going out exploring to the isolated nature of the gig, it can sometimes be tough.

"The water situation can be a bit dire as well,' Mr Kenton said. "We can't make a lot of freshwater this close to the ocean. The ship provides with about 200,000 litres of water and then we have to make a further 1.2 million litres of water out of a reverse osmosis machine."

Mr Kenton said he would forever appreciate the once-in-a-lifetime - or twice in his case - chance to live in Antarctica.

"Hopefully I can come back again, but after a longer trip back home because I do miss it," he said.





Dr Joe McGirr MP INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR WAGGA WAGGA

Dr Joe will be running **30-minute appointments** to discuss local concerns and collect feedback at Lockhart.

When: Friday 20 November, 2020 Time: Between 12pm and 5pm (access via Chambers side door)

Authorised by Dr Joe McGirr MP. Funded using parliamentary entitleme

Where: Lockhart Shire Council Chambers To book your 30-minute appointment:

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GRUB IN THE SCRUB Bernadette Jackson

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