



## ***Ice People: Where's Werner?***

**By Brian Miller**  
**February 04, 2009**

Something like *Encounters at the End of the World*, only without Werner Herzog philosophizing about the meaning of the Antarctic, this documentary instead takes the Frederick Wiseman approach to that frozen land and the scientists who work there. Big tractors chew away at the snow encroaching at McMurdo Station. Cargo-laden jets land like skidding dinosaurs on the ice. And out at a field geology station, four researchers dig trenches by shovel and, for more delicate fossilized leaves, spoon. They cook, empty their pee bottles in an oil drum, and occasionally talk to the camera. (They aren't even identified until the final credits.) Global warming is the subtext, I suppose, but Anne Aghion's film is really about the gritty, quotidian nature of science. "Data is data," says one guy with a shrug; his shovel is as valuable as the million-dollar centrifuge back home. He and his colleagues are earnest and hardworking, but not particularly interesting. *The Real World: Antarctica* this ain't. Like Herzog, Aghion ultimately falls back on the awesomely strange and forbidding landscape, so alien and yet (relatively) close to civilization. Schlepping to a site, one of the geologists says that more people have climbed to the top of Everest than to where they're standing. Then they dig another trench.