

Story for performance #180  
webcast from Sydney at 08:03PM, 17 Dec 05



Source: Paul McGeough, 'Jubilant Iraqis turn out in millions to vote', *Sydney Morning Herald online*, 17/12/05.

Tags: [art](#), [seasons](#), [travel](#)

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Here's how it works. You begin by levelling off the surface. This is done with a huge home-made rasp—a block of plywood with a dense grid of pan-head screws drilled through it, and two handles on the back. We call this 'the cheese grater'. Lightly run the cheese grater over the surface, in a circular motion. Don't push too hard, or the screws will bite deep into the ice and leave ugly gouges. Let the weight of the tool do the work. The longer each sweep of the cheese grater, the more any slight variations will be evened out. It's tiring, but meditative. Best of all, the dust produced is non-toxic.

Once you're happy with the level, you can use progressively smaller rasps to tidy up the job. Who knows whether the gouges you've made will be visible in the finished product? For sure, early-on you'll be more concerned with this level of refinement. Later, it'll be a race to the finish and you won't have time to care.

Now you're ready to lay the slabs. Hoist them up and pat them into place with the palm of your hand. Assuming the ice is dry, and you've scraped off all the snow from the bottom of the new layer, the slabs should slide around quite easily. Locate the centre point, marked with a permanent Texta, and work out from there. Reach over the back of the wall, and using your fingers, roughly line up the rear end of the slab with the other layers. Don't spend too much time on this. It's okay if it's a bit rough back there. The most important thing is to match the front joins as best you can. These will be visible, even after gluing and chiselling.

When all the slabs are in place, it's time to glue. For this, you'll need a plastic bottle filled with water from the sink in the fika-room. Sometimes you can fill it from the tap outside the toilet block, but half the time when you turn the spigot nothing comes out anyway—something up the pipe has frozen solid. Personally, I prefer to fill a whole bucket with water and haul it back to the work site, immersing the plastic bottle whenever I need to. If you get enough water into the bucket, it stays liquid for nearly the whole day. Even when it crusts over with ice, it's easy enough to crack through.

So, your layer of slabs is in place. Your plastic bottle is full. All that remains is to carefully pour water down the front and back surfaces of the slabs, and into the joins. You can see it flow, capillary-style, down the surface of each slab and underneath. If it's cold enough, the water changes state instantly. A tiny creaking is heard, a miniature groaning, as the water snap-freezes and becomes rock-hard cement.

Sometimes, though, there is no sound. Who knows why?

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In Jukkasjarvi, it's coming up to 7.00 a.m. At least I think it is. In Sydney, it's 4.57 p.m., so I guess I'll be able to work out later what the time was when I wrote these words.

I can't sleep any longer. Stuart just stuck his head out the door of his bedroom, saying he's going to try and sleep till eight. By my current reckoning, I've been up since before five thirty.

During the night I dreamed that my computer caught on fire. First it was just a little flicker of flame emerging from the right-hand-side of the keyboard. I rushed around looking for a tea towel or some blankets to smother it, but by the time I got back it had grown, and engulfed the whole machine. I couldn't stop its spread. I woke up at (what I think was) 1.00 a.m., sweating and thirsty and needing to pee.

It's dark, of course. It was light when we landed at one yesterday afternoon, but already by three it was dark. Not that the noon glare was harsh. Nor have we seen the round ball of the sun itself. Mark says there are five hours of this feeble light at the moment, dwindling to almost nothing at all for about three weeks around the solstice. We will never see the sun while we are here. I ask Mats how they cope. Don't you get depressed with all this darkness? Well, he says. For that we have the liquor.

The liquor stores are something else. We drove down to Kiruna with the whole gang after dinner last night, on a booze mission. Liquor is sold through government outlets only, and you can't touch or pick up the bottles yourself. They're displayed in glass cabinets, each bottle with a price, country-of-origin flag, brief description, and a code number. You take a ticket from the machine, and when your number is called, you go to the lady standing at the counter, and give her your list of codes. She fetches your bottles for you from a bank of shelves behind. Like ordering a prescription from the chemist, or a book from an old fashioned library. Low alcohol drinks are the exception—you're allowed to forage for your own beer and cider from a special section, and there are plenty to choose from.

Stuart takes a number, and gets vodka and beer. I throw some odd looking ciders into his basket. Enough to ward off the light-deprivation blues for the time being.

In Jukkasjarvi, it's 7.24 a.m. No sign yet of daybreak.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Lucas Ihlein.*