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From water to ice

Science teacher to get hands-on experience in polar research
 By Joshua Palmer
 Times-News writer
 TWIN FALLS - Last year she was riding the waves of the Pacific Ocean while studying thermal vents hundreds of feet below sea level, but this year she will be more than 10,600 feet above sea level studying how human activity has impacted the atmosphere.

Jo Dodds, who has taught seventh-grade science at Vera C. O'Leary Junior High for 22 years, will spend three weeks in Summit, Greenland, with researchers from the U.S. Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering group to study how humans affect the atmosphere.

Summit, which is little more than a small camp for researchers, is located in an area where the air pressure is the equivalent of breathing at an altitude of 13,000 feet above sea level.

"High-altitude sickness is a condition that can be a problem in the area," Dodds said. "The researchers who lived at Summit before say it wasn't too much of a problem in the beginning, but some really struggled with it toward the end of their stay."

Dodds will sleep in a tent at the camp, where temperatures can fall below 30 degrees Celsius. The good news is that she won't need to pack a flashlight because, well, the sun will never set during her three-week stay on the polar ice cap.

Although the accommodations will be less than comfortable, the destination will be appropriate because this year is International Polar Year.

"We will be studying Firn (a snow that is left over from previous seasons) so that we can better understand change," Dodds said. "My goal is to bring that information back to the students so that we can learn more about these changes."

Dodds' students can follow her polar adventures through a Web site where she will maintain a journal and photo album. Students can even communicate with her.

"My students' biggest question is 'How do researchers know how these things happen?'" she said. "So my goal is to be able to show them how we know what we do."

Times-News writer Joshua Palmer covers education. He can be reached at jpalm@magicvalley.com or at (208) 420-0526.

Polar adventures

Follow Jo Dodds, a science teacher at Vera C. O'Leary Junior High, as she studies change in one of the least-habitable places in the world. Dodds will spend three weeks with researchers at Summit Camp in Greenland, where the altitude is more than 10,600 feet and temperatures during the spring months are about 28 degrees below zero. People can follow her adventures online at www.polartrac.com/greenland-ice-studies/overview.

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