

The Igloo Story

It was during the 1970s that Malcolm Wallhead designed an igloo-shaped hut, ideal for setting up in remote places to escape the pressures of city life. With no finance to make a prototype at that time, the design was stored away until 1982, when a call was received from the Antarctic Division's Field Equipment Officer, Rod Ledingham. He was seeking a third quote for modifications to a fibreglass, caravan-shaped unit so that it could be flown, suspended under a helicopter, to summer research sites in Antarctica. Malcolm persuaded Rod that a caravan shape was not as aerodynamic as a dome shape, and offered to make one of his igloos instead. The first Igloo Satellite Cabin was transported to Antarctica aboard the Nella Dan. Although uninsulated, this Igloo is still in use as a storage shed today.

The first exported Igloo (019) was made in 1986 for the Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, England. This Igloo was flown by various aircraft to Loneyarbyen, Svalbard, then to Nordestland where the camp was called Igloobyen.

Since 1982, over 50 institutes and organisations from 19 countries have purchased Igloos, but not all for use in polar areas. Several have been used for bird observations on tropical and temperate islands; a mining camp was set up using 13 units on an island subject to tropical cyclones, and others were set up for accommodation on islands around NZ. One was used for line maintenance in the highlands of PNG.

Most unusual were four Igloos purchased by Google in Zurich, for use as small meeting rooms in their offices. One Igloo was purchased for a touring Antarctic exhibition organised by the American Museum of Natural History in New York. This Igloo is currently in Genoa, Italy.

Originally, Malcolm and Anthea Wallhead ran the business as a partnership called Malcolm Wallhead and Associates. After Malcolm died in 2000, Anthea has been General Manager, in charge of administration and marketing, with Penguin Composites manufacturing the Igloos under licence. The business is now called Icewall One.

