

November 4, 1987 telephone conversation between Paul LaViolette (Starburst Foundation) and Herman Zimmerman (Division of Polar Programs, NSF)

Zimmerman: ...You want to go 1988-89 if I understand it.

LaViolette: Yeah, that would be nice.

Zimmerman: You have letters from the Russians telling you to come ahead and do that?

LaViolette: Well, in the letter to Dr. Wilkniss...

(line interference)

Zimmerman: What was I saying?

LaViolette: You asked me if they had offered me the samples?

Zimmerman: Yeah.

LaViolette: In the letter to Dr. Wilkniss, they mention my request, because I had written to them a year and a half before that letter. So, that's two years ago. That's when I first asked them. And, they agreed to give the samples if there was a plane to transport them from Vostok.

Zimmerman: You have a letter to that effect that...

LaViolette: Yeah, its the letter that you say you read, the one to Dr. Wilkniss.

Zimmerman: Wait a minute. Let me get that out and make sure I'm remembering it correctly. Hold on one second.

LaViolette: It didn't have a date on it, but... Do you see the letter there?

Zimmerman: Yeah, I believe it's a letter that's dated... It's not dated. But we received it on May 19th, 87'. And the paragraph you're referring to is the bottom paragraph on the first page that says, "We would like to inform you that we have received letters from Dr. LaViolette asking to provide him with 9 ice core samples from the Vostok core." Oh by the way how big is that... How much material are we talking about?

LaViolette: The size of the samples? Between 5 and 10 centimeters long, whole samples.

Zimmerman: I see, it says "We can do this when your plane arrives in Vostok..." Of course, now we don't have plans for that at all. (reading) "Our glaciologists would like to get, if possible, 10 continuous snow samples down to 1.5 meters from the deep South Pole hole." (pause, thinking)

LaViolette: Implying an exchange there.

Zimmerman: Yeah, uhm... (he pauses)

LaViolette: You don't know . Have you invited them?

Zimmerman: (laugh of embarrassment). Maybe you can give me some information on tha...

LaViolette: You see, the whole thing ices framed in an exchange, a mutual exchange type of thing.

Zimmerman: Yeah, this. (reading) "1.5 meters from the deep South Pole hole..." uhm "10 continuous snow samples, down to..."

LaViolette: In other words, they're going to dig a pit, a 1-1/2 meter deep it and sample the snow, let's say for the last 20 year accumulation.

Zimmerman: So, they want us to invite a couple of people there, or whatever, to .!

LaViolette: To dig in the snow, basically.

Zimmerman: Uh, OK, now do you have Wilkniss' return letter?

LaViolette: No, I don't, I don't have that.

Zimmerman: Well Wilkniss replied on July 3rd [actually on July 31st], (reading) "We have no specific..." after going through a couple of sentences here. "We have no specific research proposal from Dr. LaViolette at this time." So we didn't know what to make of all this. (chuckle)

LaViolette: He [Wilkniss] said that, that he doesn't know what to make of it?

Zimmerman: No, no, no, I'm sorry, that's what I... In a sense you wrote the Russians, but you didn't write us. So we didn't know quite how to do this. Well let me... I don't want to make hurdles that don't exist... By the way this letter goes on to talk about the 1989-90 season as probably a better time to get this all coordinated.

LaViolette: Two years from now!

Zimmerman: yeah. But, if they want to... and maybe we can do this quickly... if they want to just go to South Pole with one guy, we can send one guy there... I'll tell you what,... God, but everybody's leaving...

LaViolette: I think it's pretty significant also from a political standpoint, you know, the idea that we are exchanging scientists now in the Arctic, Antarctic.

Zimmerman: The problem is that... You know I wish that I had known this three months ago. Or, I wish you had called three months ago, and I could have...

LaViolette: Yeah, I spoke with Dr. Wilkniss in June, and he didn't seem to be very helpful. He wasn't very much interested in pursuing this letter. I mean that was the reaction I got from him.

Zimmerman: That's too bad. I wish he had... (unintelligible) ...until now. Uhh. You talked to somebody who's concerned about some really big money problems and so on, and, you know, this turns out to be a minor thing (laughs).

LaViolette: Excuse me?

Zimmerman: I mean this is a much lesser sort of thing. Let me... I'll tell you what I'll do, if you'll write me a letter so that we can act on something... I'll tell you what, before I put you to all that trouble, let me go and knock around and see if I can come up with the logistics and let me see if I can get sort of a tacit approval to kind of move it ahead this coming year. I'll do that. OK, let me just ask some folks here. Well all I'm speaking to you..., the reason I keep talking is that I'm trying to think out loud about how to go about doing this, and... There's bureaucratic hurdles all over the place here. I tell you what, let me try and get back to you, you know, before you go to all this trouble...

LaViolette: So, you'll get back to me when, then?

Zimmerman: Well, before the end of the week.

LaViolette: Oh, OK. By the way you had mentioned other people that had requested core samples?

Zimmerman: Yeah, I'm not sure I'm at liberty to say their names which is why I paused. It occurred to me that for all I know you guys are in competition and...