Life in the Atacama Field Journal
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Plan
- Transport robot to the desert
- Scout landing site

Status and Progress

Transport robot to the desert. In our previous field work with Zoë we’ve delivered crates of components, structure, and tools to the desert and then spent several days assembling the robot from small parts. Our strategy this time was to ship to Chile in a big crate, do minimal reassembly in Antofagasta, and then drive the complete robot out to the desert. Hopefully this saves time and is easier. We’ll see how it works out.

Zoë was transported to the desert partly assembled in this truck. It is amazing where a truck and a good driver can go.

Scout landing site. Our initial field plan was for an east-west traverse (or west-east depending upon conditions) across the core of the desert to the altiplano, the western slopes of the Andes. Our previous field work has investigated the western coastal range into the central core.

We are working in the winter of the southern hemisphere so we when to examine the pass through the Domeyko Range that runs north-south along the core of the desert and divides the hyper-arid region from the Altoona. Our plan was to cross the range at the Portezuela de la Sal.

Upon reaching the pass we found a rare dusting of snow. Much of it will probably sublimate in over the next few days. However we could also see that higher up in the altiplano, above 3800m, that everything was under snow already. While this would probably be fine for Zoë and it ability navigate, it would confound the science instruments and our ability to collect samples with the
drill. So we will begin our traverse at a start point farther west and decide based on conditions whether to cross the Domeyko range or concentrate on the core of the desert.

In a pass through the Domeyko Range we scouted the eastern part of the study area. In the distance the altiplano rises above 4000m and the volcano Llullaillaco (6700m) on the Chilean-Argentine border. Snow is rare in the Domeykos but several centimeters cover the altiplano. It won’t last but it is in our way right now.

**Upcoming**

- Start robotic science investigation.

**Weather**

Afternoon: Bright sun, cool, 12C

Overnight: Clear, cold, 0C