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Nov 17, 2016 12:25 GMT

Rock Seven: Climate research leads on deployment of ‘small satcom’ for secure data from remote and inhospitable locations

- *Arctic and Antarctic use of Rock Seven’s Iridium satcom devices helps to reduce cost of remote environmental research while showing viability for critical commercial applications*

With the growing need to secure new data from remote and inhospitable areas of scientific interest balanced against commercial challenges and tough competition for academic budgets as a background, the UK's Rock Seven is reporting an upsurge in its Iridium satellite communication products being used for environmental science applications in both the Arctic and Antarctic. Several successful deployments have proven the robustness of the company's RockBLOCK and RockFLEET systems, highlighting their suitability for reducing costs not only in the research sector, but also in commercial industries such as oil & gas and mining.

Rock Seven is the manufacturer of the innovative RockBLOCK, a tiny device that can be integrated with most computing platforms to provide global data transmission capabilities even at the Poles. The system is currently being used by a team from the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research – New Zealand (NIWA) to measure the effects of storm waves on sea ice. RockBLOCK has been integrated on specially developed wave buoys deployed on to sea ice floes in the Arctic and Antarctic by NIWA. The system transmits GPS position and signal strength data from the buoys every hour, allowing the teams to plot the movement of the ice against wave data.

“The research is vital as it supports investigation into current environmental changes at the Poles while informing the development of future models,” said project contributor Scott Penrose, Software Architect at Digital Dimensions. *“RockBLOCK helps us collect data from our wave buoys using Iridium Short Burst Data, which is the easiest and most cost-effective way, especially considering the low cost of the device itself. Despite this, the system is more than capable of operating in such extreme environments whilst providing reliable data according to our set schedule.”*

Rock Seven's Iridium technology is also being used in the Arctic by the Laboratory for Cryospheric Research, which is dedicated to the monitoring and understanding of the frozen earth including glaciers, ice caps, ice shelves, snow and sea ice. Laboratory members are undertaking research across northern Canada, including monitoring glacier changes in Kluane National Park, examining ice shelf and sea ice interactions along northern Ellesmere Island, and measuring glacier and ice cap dynamics across the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. A team from the laboratory is using Rock Seven's RockFLEET product, combined with a solar panel and extra battery pack, to provide long term position monitoring of sea ice in the region.

“Operating in such extreme environments can be costly, so research teams are more often looking at ways to reduce their spend. RockBLOCK and RockFLEET fulfil this need, whilst still providing the reliability of much more expensive systems, in terms of hardware and airtime costs,” said Nick Farrell, Director of Rock Seven. “There is real potential for technology transfer from research to commercial industries based on these developments. We are seeing more interest from the Oil & Gas industry for instance, where data originating at facilities in remote or hazardous locations can inform if an engineer needs to visit or not.”

Designed to work with any platform with a serial or USB port, including Arduino™, Raspberry PI™ and Intel Edison, as well as Windows, Mac and Linux computers, RockBLOCK is a simple and reliable way to integrate two-way communication into sensor and measurement based research projects. It can send messages of 340 bytes and receive messages of 270 bytes using Iridium Short Burst Data (SBD), which offers global, pole-to-pole coverage. At just 76.0 x 51.5 x 19.0mm, the system can be integrated easily into almost any sensor station. The RockFLEET system offers the same communication capabilities as RockBLOCK but comes in a sealed form factor for permanent installation.

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About Rock Seven

Rock Seven is a manufacturer of Iridium-based satellite tracking & communication systems and an airtime contracts provider. The Rock Seven portfolio includes the RockSTAR & RockFLEET tracking systems, the RockBLOCK M2M product, and The CORE web-based tracking management solution.

Founded in 2005 the company aims to make satellite communications & tracking accessible to everybody in a simple and easy to understand way. Rock Seven provides services to a wide range of organisations, ranging from government and military to NGOs, private companies, ship-owners and consumers.

<http://www.rock7.com>