

PETRA SEARLE

Edited transcript of a recording of Petra Searle recorded at the Marguerite Bay reunion in Bowness-on-Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2009. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/60 Transcribed by Andy Smith, 24th May 2016.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Petra Searle, recorded at the Marguerite Bay reunion in Bowness-on-Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2009.

Searle: My full name is Margaret Petra Searle. My place of birth is Exeter, Devon, and my date of birth is the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1928.

[0:00:24] Lee: What did your father do?

Searle: He was in the Consular Service and retired from the Consular Service having done a full service in 1919 and met my mother about eight years later. So he was very elderly when I was born. He was 64 and my mother was 42 so I had very old parents which actually carries a few disadvantages to a young person. And his family, quite a lot of them were in the Consular Service scattered through the Americas. He finished up in Boston as Consul General there, and when Derek and I came back from the Falklands in the beginning of 1959, we had six weeks in South America, vaguely calling on one or two relations, who I don't think quite believed that I existed.

[0:01:25] Lee: Really?

Searle: But there was one particularly, a cousin, I think he was two generations below me, had started the Grange School in Santiago and when we got there, he had just died but his mother was still alive and she was my first cousin; she was 82 and I was 30 then. So it was all rather strange actually but I haven't kept in touch with them, or they with me.

[0:01:56] Lee: So what was your education like?

Searle: Well it was wartime. I was brought up in Northwood, Middlesex, and went to school there and then the war broke out when I was 10, and because there was just my mother and me, we self-evacuated and then came back again because there was the Phoney War. And then we went down to the South Coast and I went to a school my mother fancied down there and then France fell and it was fairly vulnerable. It was in Swanage so we self-evacuated to Cornwall for a rather marvellous winter actually, in Cornwall, where she was Billetting Officer and I went to a little class. I think she then got a bit worried about my education and decided that invasion was slightly in the air, well more than slightly in the air, that perhaps I ought to go to school where I knew somebody. And I had some very great friends from Northwood whose whole family, four girls, had all been to a school Moira House which was an Eastbourne school, evacuated to the Ferry Hotel here, the other side of the ferry on Windermere. So we came up here and I went to school there and she took a job as a matron in another school, what is now Blackwell. Well it was Blackwell but it's now the Arts and Craft Centre.

[0:03:33] Lee: Did you go on to Further Education?

Searle: Yes. The time up here was immensely happy and I made lots of wonderful friends there. War was a blessing in disguise to me. Yes, I then messed about a bit. I had a year in an Art School in Cambridge and a year in a Secretarial College in London and then I went to Nottingham University to read Geography. I had four years there because I hadn't got a Higher School Certificate and so I did an Intermediate before I did a degree.

[0:04:10] Lee: What was your first awareness of this strange place called the Antarctic?

Searle: Well I was always interested in slightly freaky faraway places because my mother had had a great friend who was on Everest, the first Everest expedition.

[0:04:33] Lee: Mallory?

Searle: No, the one before that, I think 1921. The doctor; he died on it<sup>1</sup>. So I didn't know a lot about it but Everest was my interest then, and 1953 of course was the Conquest and that was the year I started work at DOS<sup>2</sup>, and I suppose it was quite an easy switch to get interested in the Antarctic. When I first went to DOS ... When I left university, I had only got a 2.2 and there's not a lot you can do with a geography degree if you don't want to teach. So I took the Civil Service exams where everybody who has done it comes out on a long long list. Those with the highest marks get the Foreign Office, and that sort of thing, and I got the Inland Revenue. [Laughs] I needed a job so I went to the Inland Revenue in Kilburn.

[0:05:43] Lee: But not for long?

Searle: Well, a bit less than a year later I saw in *The Times* a series of jobs, a sort of little hierarchy of Records Officer, Map Officers, Junior Map Officers etc. I think it was nine people required at the Directorate of Colonial Surveys (as it was then). I thought 'That sounds much more interesting.' So I applied and got an interview. I actually had a very good interview. On the interviewing board was the Civil Director of Military Survey and he took me on. He wanted me to tell him how I would do a major triangulation of Africa and I said 'I have no idea.' And he went on and on, and I said 'We are wasting our time. I can't tell you.' And apparently that did the trick because I discovered afterwards that the only other ones that were interviewed were Firsts and Upper Seconds but because I was already established Civil Service, they had to interview me. So it's funny little things that change your life, actually. If I hadn't gone to the Inland Revenue, I would not have got that job. So yes, with this rather change of heart, I started work at Tolworth along with this little hierarchy of people who have remained my friends, one of whom was Derek (my husband). Neither of us had ever heard of FIDS in those days. He was working in the Map Library and I had been taken on as the Deputy Director who was really the Director of the organisation at Tolworth, as opposed to the field, as his PA. I think he liked my stubbornness and refusal to be put off.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Kellas

<sup>2</sup> Directorate of Overseas Surveys

[0:07:54] Lee: Was this a new unit, a new initiative?

Searle: At the Directorate? Yes, well it was expanding and I think he thought they needed someone with a geographical background as opposed to surveyors and cartographers and the like, to keep their records and supply their material and sort things out. But it was a bit more than that. There were quite a few jobs that came along, sort of one-off jobs. One was land use in British Honduras and one man would be dealing with this and would ask the Directorate if they would make the map and he could work in with them, and I would be the liaison for this sort of thing. Which was fascinating actually because there were all sorts of little jobs that came my way like that, one of which was South Georgia and Duncan Carse, and I had quite a lot to do with the South Georgia survey, a great deal to do with it actually.

[0:09:01] Lee: Can you elaborate?

Searle: Well you know a bit about the South Georgia survey?

[0:09:09] Lee: Pretend I don't.

Searle: Pretend you don't? Well the main part was a three-year organisation, three summers. The first summer was before I got there. The second summer there was one or two surveyors, whose names I won't mention. It was a huge task to do a survey. South Georgia is so rugged and nothing very much happened. It was fairly unsatisfactory and there were frictions. You probably heard of Dick Barton? Duncan Carse and his temperament? But I found him very easy to work with actually. And then the Directorate funnelled into his organisation Tony Bomford who was son of Guy Bomford, who was Director-General of the Ordnance Survey previously, who was a high-powered and amazing person, for the amount of work he could get through. And he and Stan Paterson, who was his junior on that third year survey, they did a wonderful job.

[0:10:21] Searle: Tony went on to be Director-General of the Australian Land Survey and Stan Paterson, I believe, is still in Canada working there. But anyway that was a really fascinating thing in which they did all the work but I funnelled it into the cartographers and the problems that went to and fro. The names problems came through me and went to the Foreign Office. One of the jobs that I was doing, among these little odd jobs, was looking after the Antarctic things, which was not very much at the time. When I got there, there were two surveyors who had been recruited: Norman Leppard and Dick Kenney, who I really just met before they sailed away in the old *John Biscoe* I think, the really old *John Biscoe*.

[0:11:18] Searle: They were both recruited from surveyors at the Ordnance Survey. They weren't fully qualified surveyors at all and they seemed very young to be going off to the Antarctic, but I didn't think that much about them. I wouldn't see them again for two and a half years, because the surveyors went to the Directorate before they went South, appraised themselves of what there was to know, and planned their work, this more so as time went on, and then after their two years, came back and finished off their surveys. Norman and Dick I didn't see for another two and a half years but the following spring, two surveyors came back from the Antarctic, who

were Ken Blaiklock and David Stratton, and it was chalk and cheese. I thought ‘What does this do to someone?’ I didn’t realise they were rather special surveyors.

[0:12:27] Searle: David Stratton had been in the Antarctic world; he had grown up in it. His godfather was Lord Mountevans, and Ken had already done two trips down there. I remember when I came into my office that morning ... I think I knew they were coming but anyway they were seated in my office. One was sitting on my desk and one was sitting on my map table. They had bowler hats on the end of their umbrellas and they were twiddling them as I ... They were obviously trying to make a funny of it all. Anyway they became very good friends and it was through them and Derek’s friendship with Ken that he began to think ‘Well the Antarctic is much more exciting than the Director of Overseas Surveys’ map library. I want to go there.’

[0:13:24] Lee: That was Derek’s thinking?

Searle: Yes. So that was the summer of ’54 and he recruited that autumn when they were expanding the number of bases. This is political rather more than anything else. Brian Roberts at the Foreign Office was keen to dot them right the way down the Peninsula, and they chartered the *Norsel* to take a second batch down. They didn’t actually leave London ‘til January ’55, so yes, Derek was on that ship.

[0:14:09] Lee: Was all this map-making also political?

Searle: Umm, not entirely. Yes I suppose it was in a way. It certainly wasn’t development in those days in the Antarctic. You do need maps for talking about almost anything and DOS supplied maps to FIDS (as they were then) for free. There was no money between different Government departments; it was just completely straightforward, and I think one reason why they were so keen to do it: my boss was very keen to do it, because in the early days of DOS, it was very difficult, when you had taken on mapping the Colonies, to have much to show in the early days, because mapping is a long drawn-out process to get the triangulation and everything done to actually having a map in front of you.

[0:15:11] Searle: But the Antarctic ones were extremely quick to do because the early ones were not mapped as such. It was whatever anybody had done before, sort of fudged together and I was the fudger in some cases. It was about my level of survey knowledge. There were rather a lot of jokes on that score. I was definitely a person for my time and I finished at the right time I think, when more professional things came in. All these fudges and maps and things and the production was quite quick and so it put the DOS figures up of map production of the year ’54 suddenly started rocketing. Too many questions were not asked about the quality of some of the maps. But all those maps had to go to be approved before they could be printed, to the Foreign Office, Brian Roberts and Ena Thomas. So I used to trot them off, and we would talk about them and he would pick holes in them and they would be put right.

[0:16:17] Searle: And at the same time I used to go for other questions, to FIDS Scientific Bureau which was the science arm of FIDS in those days. FIDS was largely run by the Crown Agents in this country, and directed by the Governor in the Falkland Islands. But as far as supplies and that sort of thing, it was all contracted to the Crown Agents and Barbara Wells was the link woman between this, who organised these

things. The Scientific Bureau: presumably they started realising there was science coming back, and it was set up in Queen Anne's Chambers near Victoria Station, with Bunny Fuchs in charge, Anne Todd as his sidekick and a typist, and that was all. Well that was before the days of almost anybody having heard of the Trans Antarctic Expedition. They were very informal and they were great fun. One of my jobs was to take things there, discuss map symbols and that sort of thing with them.

[0:17:28] Lee: What did you make of Fuchs?

Searle: Great fun, but I knew him before Trans Antarctic and I think inevitably fame and things changed him a bit, and it certainly put a bigger gulf between him and post TAE Fids. He was Sir Vivian then, whereas when I knew him, he was just Dr Fuchs, or Bunny to everybody, and really except slightly older than other people on the base, not that different.

[0:18:05] Lee: Let's go back to how the maps were made. These chaps would go off for two and a half years with their theodolites. Would you hear from them again, in two and a half years?

Searle: At the end of the two and a half years.

[0:18:16] Lee: During?

Searle: Not really no, not during.

[0:18:19] Lee: So they weren't sending things back to you?

Searle: No. They would maybe have had a revised programme. The programmes in those days were largely to do with where there were gaps on the maps which happened to be near where they could reach. And the way they did it was really left to them. The early ones – Derek had a geography degree as well, and had done rather more surveying, but he went for his astro training, a sort of crash course on the roof of the Royal Geographical Society with Alfred Stephenson. And that was through the clouds and fog of London.

[0:19:04] Lee: Smog, wasn't it?

Searle: He always did find astro rather difficult. So the early training of those Fids – the earliest ones of course were ex-Army wartime RE surveyors, so they really were much more competent than the next batch which probably started about '50 / '53 ish until they did start getting better quality surveyors. Obviously that's a generalisation; there was great variety in it.

[0:19:40] Lee: Just going back to my point, though, they would go off for two and a half years. They would come back. They would then try and finalise the maps in your offices?

Searle: They would come to the office, yes, and they would work for anything from a fortnight to three or four months, and the computing section would take charge of their computations and that sort of thing, and despair in certain respects.

[0:20:08] Lee: Difficult to go back and check anything, isn't it?

Searle: Yes, but I have a great deal of time for DOS. It was almost an inspirational institution in the early days. It was set up by Martin Hotine immediately after the war for the purpose of surveying the British Colonies and eventually the Dependencies, well not the Dependencies but the other concerns, and everybody was focussed on that. Although there were lots of rows, it was a great deal of dedication from virtually everybody from the lowest to the highest. And I lived through that period and I have that only and when I talk to people from DOS now, they say 'Yes, but you don't know how it changed when we were being disbanded, or possibly sent to Glasgow.' And various other ideas that Margaret Thatcher had for them. I think it was partly because it was immediately post war and there was still a sense of everybody pulling together, and that is a big contrast to me from how BAS developed where I don't think everybody has always been pulling together there. No the surveyors, and I still refer to them as 'my surveyors', the ones that came when I was there ... Barbara McHugo, who took over from me and lasted much longer, and was much more adept at her survey, in fact became the first woman director at the Ordnance Survey when they moved there, she took over from me. They were on a much higher technical level when she was dealing with them and she wrote this book about the topographical surveys in FIDS.

[0:22:14] Lee: So they would be there in your office with their pencils and their rubbers ...?

Searle: That's right.

[0:22:17] Lee: Trying to make sense of two and a half years of research?

Searle: Exactly that, yes.

[0:22:21] Lee: And were they coming to you to say 'What do I do now?'?

Searle: Not so much technically because they would go to the Computing Section, but to a certain extent yes.

[0:22:34] Lee: You were a mother hen, were you?

Searle: Slightly, yes. They were great, they were great fun.

[0:22:42] Lee: How were the maps ...? Were they hand-drawn, with mapping pens and ...?

Searle: You mean before they were printed?

[0:22:51] Lee: Yes.

Searle: Well, yes. All Ordnance Survey were hand drawn, and then, with more and more technical aids coming in ... But yes. Mapping today is a complete closed book, as far as I am concerned. Once GPS came in, and you could find your position on the

Earth's surface without having to go into very complicated calculations, the whole thing changed and it stopped really quite abruptly, I suppose in the '80s probably. I retired.... Derek came back from Horseshoe Island in 1957 and we married at the end of that year, and I left DOS at the very beginning of 1960. So all those new innovations came in afterwards and I never needed to know, and I don't think I would ever have got my little mind around it.

[0:24:01] Lee: Back in the Antarctic, it must be very very difficult, because (a) part of it is moving all the time, and (b) ...

Searle: It isn't, not really, no. I mean the ice coastline might be moving a bit but no it isn't moving. Mapping was not in that sort of detail. The errors could be 50 miles out in my early days and if you got it on a map, it was there for everybody to say 'That's not right.' But then they started saying 'That's not right.' It was easy to have the wrong thing down on a map. It wasn't as though somebody was going to lose their way by it because nobody was going to those parts. The idea was to cover the whole Peninsula at 200,000 which we did, and there would be maps with just one round loop for an island and a bit of ice shelf coast, and that would be that sheet printed. In a way it was a waste of money and time but it was politically quite useful.

[0:25:07] Lee: Did they resemble Pooh's map of Hundred Acre Wood then?

Searle: No. If you knew something about maps, you could realise it was very generalised but no, they were perfectly proper maps. And one thing we did in the early days: all the surveyors' sledge journeys from which they made the maps, particularly the ones south from Marguerite Bay, were plotted on the maps, so that somebody coming after them, could know where they had been. It would be easier for them to journey that way or to make corrections or whatever. The Map and Survey Library at DOS, where these other people who were recruited with me worked, kept all these records and supplied them and informed the new surveyors when they came to do their work. From the Inland Revenue, a small office in Kilburn to the atmosphere at DOS, especially with this floating in and out of surveyors, was great fun. It was marvellous actually.

[0:26:26] Lee: How big was the print run, because you weren't going to sell many copies, were you?

Searle: No, probably 200 upwards, up to 1000 maybe, depending on that. Some were quite small, and the Ordnance Survey ... That was another bit of liaison I had. The Ordnance Survey did all our printing, so that was ... When any map was produced of the Colonies, it used to take a little journey round most of the offices at DOS for everybody to look over to find mistakes. You would have your cup of coffee poring over a map and just annotate it round the margins. They very much encouraged other people to take the initiative to say 'Is this right? Change this.'

[0:27:17] Lee: What about the naming of landmarks? You mentioned earlier that sometimes that had to be resolved as well.

Searle: Yes, well that was very much ... You have heard of Brian Roberts probably. He had been on the British Grahamland Expedition and he had the Antarctic at heart.

There was quite a lot of friction between him and Fuchs. Well it may have been in the early run up to the Trans Antarctic Expedition and I had to deal quite a bit with both of them. They were both perfectly easy to deal with and I think the friction was a little more imagined than possibly real.

[0:28:04] Searle: They had different goals. Brian Roberts' was to develop British Antarctic Territory, to get it mapped, and he was really behind the air survey of 1955/6 and the money. I think it was the fact that the money that was needed for that could be in conflict with the money that was put into the Trans Antarctic Expedition. I think possibly in the end both was forthcoming but that was a slight source of problems. But he was meticulous in the way any name was placed, that there could be absolutely no doubt what it referred to. And I used to take these maps up there and we would pore over them and then go and have lunch in a pub and go back and pore over them again. I was fortunate because I lived in North London and I travelled daily to Tolworth, so the Foreign Office and Victoria were on my route home, so I think there was no friction about me having time off to do this quite a lot. No, in their separate ways, I really got on very well with both of them actually, and liked them both very much.

[0:29:23] Lee: So how were names chosen? Were we into the era of naming things after the people who worked there?

Searle: Well there aren't anything like enough. If they worked in the field, in the early days, they inevitably had a name after them. Or if they had close associations with it, if they had done work to do with maps or geology or some sort of field thing, Brian Roberts would suggest that they had, that such and such was named ... Well I don't know that he suggested it; he said it would be and like it or lump it. There was a vast amount of mapping. The surveyors were down there. They were finding new mountain ranges and they all had peaks and valleys and glaciers.

[0:30:22] Lee: There was a shortage of names?

Searle: Absolutely, yes. So they would go into themes, like Antarctic air navigators or constellations or all sorts of slightly weird and wonderful names. But to a certain extent they had a purpose because they were generally grouped in an area. I know Derek got into great trouble over this, well trouble with a lot of Fids, because he did his second trip to the Antarctic, when I met him in Port Stanley. After that he came back and used some American air photography, some oblique photography from Ronne's expedition, which was very good photography but it had never been used and it was completely haphazard in the flight lines they took. They just wandered about all over Alexander Island and south Peninsula, and he spent a couple of years at Birmingham putting what he could get out of these into a map. It was before the era of satellite images, so there was no guidance elsewhere. Then he spent about three months at the Foreign Office getting all these things named, and in desperation they suggested a musical theme that would have almost endless things. So just about everything in Alexander Island that wasn't named before, has got a musical theme and it maddens most of the Fids. But that was a slightly later development, when he was working at Birmingham and I had left DOS.

[0:32:11] Lee: So the naming of landmarks was a fairly casual affair? It didn't go to committee; it wasn't scrutinised?

Searle: Oh yes, but Brian Roberts was the secretary of the Antarctic Placenames Committee, but I don't think anybody dared to quarrel ... He had done so much research on it and he had so much Antarctic background himself, that I think it all just went tick, tick, and it was approved.

[0:32:33] Lee: Did you get to deal with these aerial photographs yourself?

Searle: What, the obliques and things?

[0:32:29] Lee: Yes. The American ??? [inaudible].

Searle: They only came into our possession at DOS fairly late in my time there. I think it was about '59. They resulted from the time when Jonathan's Walton's father was down there.

[0:32:59] Lee: Kevin?

Searle: Yes, when Ronne and the British were all on Stonington Island for that year, and the Americans had the aeroplanes and the money, and the Brits had the dogs and a few more safety ideas. They did work together after a few spats beforehand. The idea was that we would supply them with the survey detail to use the photos and they would supply us with a copy of the photos and Brian Roberts spent years trying to get those out of the Americans and eventually succeeded, which was more or less as I was leaving. That was one reason why Derek took on this, it was a two-year task actually, making this map and doing various other things from it. We had quite a lot of casual photos, and the surveyors took photos on their trips and they would from the ground make pans and put them together and have a line of, a range of mountains and mark them off, and Brian Roberts would use those. So he was very careful about things being named, and now I think they are still careful. He produced maps at 200,000 from our series, on which every name was placed in exactly the right place, and everybody had to follow that. I think on the whole it worked, actually.

[0:34:37] Lee: Tell me a little bit more about Derek. How did you meet your future husband?

Searle: Well we were both recruited on this hierarchy of nine, for geographers for the library.

[0:34:50] Lee: You started on the same day?

Searle: We started on the same day, yes, and reading his diary the other day, I discovered it was the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1953 and he died just two days short of 50 years that I would have known him. He had got a geography degree from Sheffield but after being nearly three years in the Army in Germany at the end of the war. So he went to university as a mature student, and did quite well at Sheffield, did a teaching diploma but never taught, and then started at DOS on the same day, but he was only there less than 18 months before he went off to the Antarctic. And then came home

and went to UCL London to do the Postgraduate Survey Diploma for a year when I was still working at DOS. I was the only breadwinner in those days; in fact I even had to pay his fees to go there. And then, I did think he was basically a surveyor actually but geographers do struggle to know what to do with themselves a bit. Then he was invited by BAS, as they were then, to accompany Professor David Linton. Have you heard of him? He was Derek's professor at Sheffield and was at that point moving to be Head of the Geography Department at Birmingham but had got a sabbatical year. It actually all sprang from the fact that Brian Roberts wanted a physiological survey, using the Hunting's air photos of 1955 which were detailed vertical ones of the northern Peninsula and islands.

[0:37:13] Lee: This was under FIDASE<sup>3</sup> was it?

Searle: Yes. Using those photos, to make a sort of résumé of what the country was for political reasons or whatever. But anyway I think it was Brian Roberts who instigated this and this was floated around as to who might do this and I think Bill Sloman was commissioned, when he went round on his recruiting trips to universities, to mention this. Well he mentioned it at Sheffield, asked David Linton if he would ... if he had any ideas, and I think between you and me (it won't be between you and me), he pricked up his ears and said 'I think I would like to do that.' Anyway he said 'I will do it.' But he needed a sidekick to look after him. He and Derek had always got on very well, so Derek was recruited for this. I think Derek was quite excited to be going back again, just for a summer. We had only been married about nine months. Anyway Bill Sloman, who did a lot for me and was very very kind to me, thought 'Why don't we sent Petra down to Port Stanley at the same time, to sort out the maps?' There was quite a lot of survey stuff in Stanley, sort that out and see what was useful. 'Generally give her a little trip.' Bill, you've obviously heard lots about Bill Sloman, wonderful man to 95% of people. Just a few didn't think so.

[0:38:49] Searle: Anyway he arranged all this and I dithered a bit. I thought 'I don't know about this.' Anyway I think I stranded him slightly because he was telling everybody that I wanted to go and he was making the arrangements, and I was on the point of almost letting him down on this and turning round and saying 'I'm not sure.' But anyway I did decide to go and he arranged for me to go down on the *Tottan*, which was going down to Halley to relieve the ... I think it was the end of the International Geophysical Year before it was handed over to BAS as Halley base. Anyway the *Tottan* was commissioned to take that lot down. There was a spare cabin and I was put in it, well technically, but then Sir Raymond Priestley who was in charge at BAS in those days, because Bunny was on the Trans Antarctic, thought 'Not over my dead body' and he vetoed it. So I was booked to go down on the *AES*, a little Danish cargo boat that plied between Europe and the Falkland Islands and had nine passengers and I was one of them, so that was an experience in itself.

[0:40:20] Lee: How do you mean?

Searle: Well there was one Dane who had gone back. He had lived in the Falklands most of his life, but he had been the first to see the German battleship in the First World War, off the Falklands. I am not sure of the story, but he had alerted

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<sup>3</sup> Falkland Islands and Dependencies Aerial Survey Expedition

everybody. And he had gone back to Denmark in 1958, as it was then, to receive a medal from the king, taking with him his daughter who was married to a Falkland Islander. Well they were virtually Falkland Islanders themselves. Then there was one girl who was going out to marry a Falkland Islander and some lads who were going out to work on a sheep farm. So we were rather a mixed bunch but it was quite fun.

[0:41:18] Lee: So you got there in the end?

Searle: Oh yes, I got there in the end, yes.

[0:41:22] Lee: What was your impression of the place?

Searle: Of the Falklands? Well I had heard so much about it that I think it was more or less as I expected it to be, but I arrived about a week before Christmas and stayed – Derek was South then with Linton – and stayed until the end of January. So I was there for all the high days, holidays and everything that was going on and I just had a wild exciting time. It was off on a little ship here to Kidney Island one day, off somewhere else. I went over to Bluff Cove and Fitzroy. And it was parties at Government House, parties here there and everywhere.

[0:42:08] Lee: Why did you not get any further south?

Searle: Well women didn't go further south then. It just was not done. Sir Raymond was, he was from the Heroic Age and women stayed at home and waited for their men to come back again. No, I don't think women started going South until, well certainly until Bunny had retired. I think Bunny was against it. I think probably Dick Laws was against it as well actually, but I think they probably did go. For one thing the accommodation on the newer ships was much more suitable, and in fact I think the ones who did go, Anne Todd and some others, they journeyed round on the ship, saw the bases and came home. But I saw a lot of life in the Falkland Islands. I kept a diary of that time and it was a really exciting change, a different thing for me, and I was in occasional radio contact with Derek further south.

[0:43:24] Lee: Where was he?

Searle: They were mostly in the South Shetlands and Gerlache Strait, and Hope Bay – round there. He did have a little stint at Hope Bay and did a bit more dog driving then, which I think it was a big thrill to get his hands on dogs again.

[0:43:47] Lee: How did you get married? Where?

Searle: We got married in Northwood, Middlesex, my home, with some Fids around as Best Man and that sort of thing. No, it was all very conventional.

[0:44:05] Lee: You stayed in the mapping world quite a long time.

Searle: Well I only stayed then ... Getting back from this trip to Port Stanley, I only stayed just less than a year. For one thing we had got unpaid leave to travel in South America for six weeks. We slightly overstayed our stint but in those days we were travelling cheap and we came back from Lima on a ship which we had booked before

we went out, which was a slight hazard of would we get there. It cost us £79 for our voyage home, with all found. I went back to work and Derek went off to Birmingham to start this map business. I handed in my notice at the end of '59 / beginning of '60, and then retreated with a baby to Birmingham.

[0:45:15] Lee: You sallied forth again later, didn't you?

Searle: Yes. I had 24 years at home, bringing up a family, and then Bill Sloman rang me up out of the blue (we did see quite a lot of the Slomans from time to time), and said 'Your old job is moving to Cambridge. Are you interested?' Because that was the time when DOS was being disbanded. What was left, except the Antarctic stuff was going to Southampton, and the rest was going to Cambridge. So I had this interview and there was a panel of three, one of whom was Eric Salmon, who was an old friend. Another was the official Civil Service one, and another was my future boss. I know I was only voted in by two to one.

[0:46:13] Lee: We are talking about Charles Swithinbank?

Searle: Yes. Then he afterwards told me who he had wanted.

[0:46:21] Lee: But did you get on with him?

Searle: Yes.

[0:46:25] Lee: That's a qualified yes, isn't it?

Searle: Yes, it's a qualified yes. I had nearly five years at BAS. I was 55 when I went there and I arrived in this big organisation, which I had known it as a tiny organisation, full of young men going in all directions and pieces of paper flying about in all directions. I am sure their attitude was 'Who on earth is this old woman who has come here?' I was put to begin with (because the room I was going to have wasn't available), I was put in a big room with several young geologists and a visiting geological professor from New Zealand, my first day. And nobody actually told me what to do or anything, and at 11 o'clock they all got up with their mugs. Nobody said 'Come and have coffee with us.' Nobody said 'Do you know where the ...?' I didn't even know where the dining room was. And that attitude stuck with me a little bit. It wasn't the sort of 'We are all in it together' that I had known at DOS.

[0:47:39] Searle: Well it wasn't at DOS in those days. Time had moved on and the wartime spirit which did last then, had gone. But BAS was a lovely place to work and the material that was coming to me from DOS was new to everybody at BAS. There were no surveyors in those days. Survey as such, had finished. So I knew actually more about the material than anybody else there, and really what I was, I was not doing anything very creative. I was holding and maintaining the air photos, maps, satellite images, for anybody who wanted to use them, and I had a complete stream of people coming in 'Can I have this? Can I have that?' So I was very much a map library librarian there, which was fine. And it was just before BAS really got round to any mapping of its own which they now do. And it was also the very early days of satellite imagery actually, which was a good thing because there was quite a lot of technicality I would probably not have picked up again.

[0:48:57] Lee: I was going to say, there's a 24-year gap in technology wasn't there, so you must have ...?

Searle: Yes, but I didn't ... The actual maintenance of material ... I had got a geographical mind. I could find things, I could understand them and read them. I was less strong in the production of them but at that time it didn't really matter. So I think I filled a useful slot but probably retired at the appropriate time.

[0:49:29] Lee: So you were a woman of your own time, twice?

Searle: In a way, yes. But the satellite images, that had a big significance on the map Derek made of Alexander Island. If you've read the papers he wrote on it, about how it was produced, you would realise it was really basic mapping from almost nothing. Well along came the satellite images and of course told you everything about where the surrounding islands were. And there was one particular island, Latady Island, which you could say Derek discovered, because it was not on any previous map, and Ronne had never carefully looked at them. And it required quite a lot of careful use to see that Latady Island, which is south of Charcot Island, were two separate islands. They had been mistaken for the same thing, and Derek had mapped the eastern end of it which was all you could see from the air photos, and made it a relatively small island because a good geographer doesn't draw something in that they can't see. Well in fact it's a very big island and it was much bigger than that and along come the satellite images and rather scuppered Derek's map in many ways.

[0:50:51] Lee: So the satellite imaging was sweeping away all that heroic historic surveying, wasn't it?

Searle: Yes, but it wasn't that detailed. A surveyor who had done a detailed map, the actual juxtaposition of one geographical feature to another was perhaps not as accurate because of their ground survey, but often the detail was more than certainly you could get out of the early satellite images. I am sure you can get to that now; you couldn't in the '80s.

[0:51:21] Lee: But the '80s satellites were supplementing the earlier work, not replacing it?

Searle: Well in some ways they were replacing them because they were making maps, photographs, using the satellite images laid together to make a map and to my mind it was very crude. They certainly had their uses but you really needed both to get a good map. And now they are using both.

[0:51:51] Lee: Some of the notes I have been given about you, Petra, say that you were very rigorous in your map production.

Searle: I, personally?

[0:52:01] Lee: Mm.

Searle: I am not sure that I have produced any maps actually, whether I am rigorous or not.

[0:52:08] Lee: Sorry, very rigorous in your approach to map production, other people's I guess, in your quality control.

Searle: Yes, I would apply the rules rigorously that could be applied, yes, probably, but they were usually other people's rules like Brian Roberts's or the mapping people at Tolworth.

[0:52:33] Lee: You are here at Bowness on a Fid reunion for Marguerite Bay. Are you a Fid?

Searle: Well no, I am not a Fid because technically a Fid is somebody who has wintered in the Antarctic. But there are becoming fewer and fewer technical Fids and they are mostly biologists or electricians or somebody who maintains a base. I am not aware that anybody had actually defined what a Fid is.

[0:53:04] Lee: Do you feel like one?

Searle: No, but I certainly feel a close association with innumerable Fids actually.

[0:53:13] Lee: You have been, haven't you now, to the Antarctic? You finally made it?

Searle: I finally made it, yes, and I am so glad I did, and interestingly Derek didn't really want to go.

[0:53:23] Lee: This was in 2005?

Searle: 2005. He wanted to remember Horseshoe Island ... He was the first at Horseshoe Island and the eight of them built the base, and he was Base Leader the second year. He wanted to remember it with the dogs on the span and life going on there. I don't think he really wanted to see it mothballed and I am not sure that he would have enjoyed it that much actually, so lucky.

[0:53:51] Lee: He decided he didn't get to go, and you had to decide whether to go or not?

Searle: Yes.

[0:53:56] Lee: What was your thinking?

Searle: I didn't know closely anybody who was going and I needed somebody to share a cabin with and I preferred to have somebody I knew rather than to be put with somebody. I had a friend, well I have a friend who I hadn't known very long, that Derek and I had met at the Scott Polar Institute, who had great interest in the Antarctic and for whom money was no problem and had been on a couple of trips anyway. By chance, the first autumn lecture at the Scott Polar, which I went to if they were interesting from time to time, was by Charles, and this friend rang me up and

said 'Would you like to come and stay the weekend and come with me.' Because it is always difficult when you lose somebody, to launch forth on your own, very difficult, actually. I don't think people realise how difficult it is. And when I was there I thought 'Well, supposing I ask Mary to come ...', and she leapt about six feet in the air and said 'Yes. please! I'm coming.'

[0:55:19] Lee: So how was it? When you went to Horseshoe, and you saw this place that Derek had talked about, how was it?

Searle: It was all right. We had a sort of calm, slightly overcast whole morning there and I just walked about on my own (I didn't want to be with anybody) just sort of taking in much of which I knew, trying to imagine what it was like. It was all right. I'm very glad we went and also very glad we got to Stonington, about which I had heard so much from the surveyors who had been there, and Derek. Well no not really Derek, because he did just get there, but hardly. But it was only just over a year after he had died and I don't think I had really found myself after that. I think it has been a long process actually, of which FIDS has helped enormously because I just love being with people and talking Antarctic, and Fids and things like that, and they have been great companions. And on that trip, of course, I got to know lots of people much better. But some of the old friends, like Ken Blaiklock and Peter Hooper, the ones who were down with Derek, have also been good friends as well. Dick Taylor. I think you know some of those, don't you?

[0:56:52] Lee: So you are a Fid really?

Searle: What is a Fid?

[0:56:56] Lee: We'll leave it there, shall we?

Searle: Yes.

[0:57:00] Lee: Hanging in the air?

Searle: Yes.

[0:57:02] Lee: Thank you very much indeed.

[0:57:05] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Early production of Antarctic maps [0:15:11]
- FIDS Scientific Bureau under Vivian Fuchs [0:16:17]
- Naming geographical features in Antarctica [0:29:23]
- Memories of a stay in the Falklands [0:41:22]
- BAS at Cambridge - a very different organisation [0:46:25]