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British Antarctic Survey Archives. Oral History Recording no. 6. Andrew Taylor.

A recording of Mr Taylor, a surveyor with Operation Tabarin, 1943-46 and expedition leader from February 1945 until March 1946. In conversation with Joanna Rae, Assistant Archivist of the British Antarctic Survey.

Date : 14 October 1987.

Location: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London.

Joanna Rae : Andrew, could you give me an outline of your career before joining Operation Tabarin?

Andrew Taylor : I graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1931 in engineering, intending initially to become an electrical engineer because I was keenly interested initially in the development of radio and television, but the Depression came along and in Winnipeg nearly all the electrical engineers were sacked almost instantly and many of them came to work, digging ditches and sewer lines and things for the city and for the Province. And the people that told them where to dig were the civil engineers. That was why I changed from the one to the other. And this led to my being employed by the Federal Government on subdivision surveys of townships in northern Alberta and northern British Columbia.

Subsequently, I was employed by the Provincial Government of Manitoba, in the Survey's branch of various surveys of all kinds in many parts of Manitoba. I left that job to become Municipal Engineer in the mining town of Flimflum in Manitoba, about 500 miles north of Winnipeg and I was there on municipal work at the time I joined the Army in 1940.

Joanna Rae : And were you sent over to Britain more or less straightaway?

Andrew Taylor : Within six months or so, I was sent over here and they had an engineering holding unit at a place called Borden, not far, I think, from Wokingham, where I'm staying at present. And I was there a few months and transferred to the Second Canadian Division, which was mainly located in eastern Sussex at that time. And I was one of two engineers with the CRA of the Second Division. There for more than a year and then transferred to a survey unit at Cobham on the..... And finally, I joined the Deputy Director of Surveys in the first Canadian Corps at Leatherhead and it was there that he was approached, my immediate superior was approached, to provide a surveyor who had been accustomed to working in cold climates and he pulled my name out of the hat. I had evidently done something that displeased him the week before and I was being banished in the deep south of Siberia.

Joanna Rae : So you were told that you were going, not would you like to go?

Andrew Taylor : I was told not where I was going, No. I guessed where I was going, but he refused to tell me. There were many things going on like that in those days, and I surmised it was something in Norway, or the Falkland Islands, or Spitzbergen, or something like that. So it was something of a surprise when I was told I wasn't having leave that weekend, but I

was to report to Commander Myer at an office in a hotel, I think, on Park Lane, as I remember.

Joanna Rae : And was that where you met the rest of the expedition, or

Andrew Taylor : I think I met most of them there. They had been together for some time. I was sort of an after thought and most of them knew a great deal more about the expedition than I did. I was assigned immediately to make a list of the survey equipment I might want to use down there and not knowing what exactly the type of work was going to be, they explained that to me, I , that list was a little longer perhaps than it should have been.

Joanna Rae : You mean, there wasn't a programme of the exact work that you'd be doing.

Andrew Taylor : There was no programme at any time, I never had a programme.

Joanna Rae : So it was up to you what you did?

Andrew Taylor : Completely. Completely up to me.

Well that sort of answers that second question pretty well, doesn't it?

Joanna Rae : That's right. I think we've covered that one there. Yes.

Was there any other surveyors?

Andrew Taylor : Not the first year, but Vic Russell was down the second year and he did some of the work that year and a great deal more the next year when he was

Joanna Rae : It would be interesting in fact to learn something more about the surveying methods that you used at that time. Could you tell me, for a start off, sort of how you went about the work?

Andrew Taylor : How we went ?

Joanna Rae : How you went about surveying a stretch of coastline, or something like that.

Andrew Taylor : Well, we had various means of doing it, depending on the work. Where we were doing a large scale map, we used stadier methods and things like that, but later when we were travelling we had to devise a completely different method and it depended on a sledge wheel which everyone, including myself, forgot to bring. So our ship's carpenter, Chippy Ashton, was a most resourceful man and he used to pick things up just on the possibility that they might be useful some time and one of the things he picked up was an old brass ship's log, which must have weighed eight or ten pounds. And we rigged a design for using this ship's log with a bicycle wheel. I don't know how the bicycle wheel got there but there was a bicycle wheel and we made a frame that we attached to the stern of the sledges and hauled this thing around and we calibrated by measuring out a mile distance I think it was and then we could interpret the readings in miles. And in addition to that of course we had to take astronomic fixes as we went along, which depended very largely on the progress that we might have made and also on the weather. When the weather wasn't clear we couldn't do this astronomic work.

Joanna Rae : so could you carry on surveying if the weather was poor, or did you have to stop everything?

Andrew Taylor : A little bit. Yes. We really didn't let the weather interfere with our progress a very great deal. There were times when it became so bad that icebergs flying through the atmosphere and things like that, that you just had to stop and there were times when the visibility was so poor you couldn't see what you were passing by, but it was seldom the weather interfered with our progress. Aside from the clear sky, we needed to take our star observations.

Joanna Rae : So you'd take star observations once a day, or something like that?

Andrew Taylor : No, probably once every 4 or 5 days if we were moving. At the base stations at Port Lockroy and Hope Bay I took many, many observations there before arriving at a final result and that result was done at Port Lockroy in 1944 and at Hope Bay in 1945 was still being used, according to Vivian Fuchs book, in 1983, so there must have been something right about it.

Joanna Rae : It sounds like it. What do you think was your greatest surveying achievement? Do you feel particularly that you did one particular piece of work particularly well, or that it was the first that had been done in that area?

Andrew Taylor : At Hope Bay, we had always envisaged the general plan of surveying further south down Crown Prince Gustav Island and perhaps going round the entire island.

Joanna Rae : That was James Ross Island?

Andrew Taylor : A surveyor has a totally different aim in life than a passing traveller, who just wants to get here to some place that no-one has been before, whereas a surveyor is trying to record something a little more accurately than it ever was recorded before. And in the map that resulted from our year's work around Crown Prince Gustav Channel, especially where there were numerous islands, some of which had not been plotted at all before, I think that probably was the best part of the survey work. The survey work developed after we had landed after we had landed our stores, after we had built the bulding in which we were going to live, after we had transported the remaining stores, which by that time were covered in deep snow drifts, up to where we could use them and then preparing the dogs and harnesses and things which David Jameson and Victor Russell pretty well took charge of.

Joanna Rae : So did you put a high priority on survey once you had all the domestic arrangements settled?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, we had to get ourselves some kind of protection.

Joanna Rae : Ooh yes, of course.

Andrew Taylor : Initially

Joanna Rae : But You put a higher priority on survey than geology for example?

Andrew Taylor : Pardon?

Joanna Rae : You put a higher priority on survey rather than geology, did you?

Andrew Taylor : I didn't put priorities on anything really, come to think of it. As I told somebody the other day, the whole thing was dominated by a saying my Mother used to give me, that Satan would always find mischief for idle hands to do and I laid out a programme in which each man had a certain responsibility to do throughout the year we were going to remain there and also prepare some kind of report or maps after that was over. In other words, there would be something definite resulting from each of their year's work and in most cases it worked out very well, but some of the scientific people were very reluctant to trust me with their science, scientific reports. I heard one of them say that he would trust another scientist with his wife in bed before he would trust him with something that had not been published.

Joanna Rae : What was the accuracy of the maps that were available to you at that time?

Andrew Taylor : Well, as I recollect, the maps that we used were either hydrographic maps of the area or those of Nordenskold South at Hope Bay, at Hope Bay and the Nordenskold map gave a general outline of everything, but the details were really not very accurate and there were times when they had a lot of other things on their mind than surveying, such as whether or not they were going to be rescued and get back home. I think the map that we did was far from perfect, I know, but it was an improvement on theirs, which was what we set out to do.

Joanna Rae : Yes. And of course a lot of the features were unnamed at that time.

Andrew Taylor : Well, I had to put names on things on everything. In the notebooks I had to make cross-references. One day, I would take a shot on something and name it Joanna Rae Point and the next day I would have to put the same name on it, so that you could make this inter-section.

Joanna Rae : Yes

Andrew Taylor : And they have evidently committees here for the removal of names that anybody in the field gave to them, because I can hardly recognise any of them on that recent map.

Joanna Rae : Yes, quite a lot of the names in that area have changed, haven't they?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, well some of them probably needed changing, when you get a name like Ice Point or Rock Heap, or something like that, there are probably thousands of them used already.

Joanna Rae : Yes, yes. What were the main problems you encountered when doing survey work?

Andrew Taylor : Well, I think the main problem was probably the wind. The wind didn't blow continuously but when it did blow it shook your instrument, made it vibrate. We did something at that time that helped to settle it a bit. We made some diaper-shaped canvass

and tied each corner to a leg of the tripod and then filled it with rocks, which weighted the whole thing down and steadied it up a great, great deal.

Joanna Rae : That's interesting.

Andrew Taylor : The wind and the cold – it's a cold job taking star observations with a theodolite and where you have to handle every brass screw with your bare hands and the temperature well below zero.

Joanna Rae : Yes. Did anyone encounter frostbite?

Andrew Taylor : Oh yes, my hands were, my fingers without touching the screws were black all the time. And then at the time, we're getting on to your next question now, coming round James Ross Island in the deep snow. The snow was so heavy it submerged the ice and our feet got wet and the temperature of above was twenty or thirty below and they froze into great clods, which you had to attack with an axe to get them free and I remember that night in the tent when I had to get my footwear off, separated from the sock and then when I began to peel the sock off, the sole of my foot came with it and so I stuck it back on. I didn't have a bandaid big enough.

Joanna Rae : No. How horrific, oh dear. But they have obviously recovered completely, more or less?

Andrew Taylor : Pretty well, I don't think they did them much permanent harm. David James had trouble too at the end and he, his feet became much worse than mine were.

Joanna Rae : Perhaps we can go onto that journey a little later in the conversation, because I'd like to ask a lot more about that. Perhaps we could deal first with your time at Port Lockroy, as that came first chronologically. And perhaps I could ask you something about the problems with trying to establish Hope Bay in the first year. Obviously, it must have been a great disappointment to you all to not be able to establish the base.

Andrew Taylor : I was just taken along, like you might take a small dog along, and I didn't know very much about what they were trying to establish at all. I knew the ships had gone in to, one ship anyway, the Scoresby, had gone in with Marr and twenty others, to look at Hope Bay. I don't think it affected me at all but it must have had a terrible effect on Marr, I think.

[tape goes off very slightly]

the ice conditions in Antarctic Sound at the time. Neither vessel, neither skipper of either vessel wanted to remain in Hope Bay for any length of time and Scoresby came back and joined the Fitzroy and then we started southwest along the Antarctic coast in search of an alternative site on which a base could be built and we didn't find a suitable site until we had reached the latitude of Port Lockroy. The site was quickly chosen and thereon goodyear I leapt, which was not on the mainland of Antarctica and was not a real island – it was just a little dibble of rock in the shadow of Wiencke Island. But unloading began almost immediately from the Fitzroy and in about five days the entire cargo had been removed onto the island. At the same time, construction of the base building had been started by Ashton and one or two willing helpers and within a day of the departure of the ship, we had it

enclosed, so that we could at least sleep in it and fortunately we had no bad wind or blizzard at that time.

Joanna Rae : Were you in fact short of time then? Was the ship running short of time?

Andrew Taylor : The ship was concerned about running out of fuel, I believe, at that time and they were very anxious to get back. Neither ship seemed to particularly enjoy, seemed to particularly enjoy being anchored off the Antarctic coast during the period we were there and this is perhaps what skippers are paid to do.

Joanna Rae : Do you feel that the year at Port Lockroy was limited in terms of the survey work or other scientific work that was possible?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, it was. We had one small boat and most of the surveying was done overland on the ice. We made, as I recollect, a large scale map of the harbour at Port Lockroy and then did parts of the coast of Wiencke Island, both on the east side and on the west side.

Joanna Rae : Had that been mapped before at all?

Andrew Taylor : I'm not sure at this time, I'm not certain. There was a map of Wiencke Island, as there was of the whole coast. Things like that I can't remember, you know, it was a long while ago.

Joanna Rae : Yes, it was a long time ago. Do you think the decision to abandon Hope Bay that year put a strain on Marr?

Andrew Taylor : Oh, I'm sure it did, I'm sure it did. I'm sure he felt very badly about it. This may have been his instruction, that he was ordered to establish the base at Hope Bay and if that was the case, then he couldn't help but feel that he had failed to do that.

Joanna Rae : Did you hear at any time what the official opinion on that was? Did he get support in his decision?

Andrew Taylor : I heard very little about official opinions about anything.

Joanna Rae : So you were left very much on your own then, really?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, very much. Yes.

Joanna Rae : Could you tell me about the changeover period in January/February 1945, when you took over command of the expedition?

Andrew Taylor : I may be a little rusty on dates, but my recollection is that it was about, it may have been in October that we heard that Marr wanted to return to the Falklands to talk to the Governor. I don't think I was aware at the time of what he wanted to talk to the Governor about and the ship made an effort to get down in response to his request. The Scoresby came down, but it didn't get very far on his way, as I recollect, before it returned to the Falklands. I tried again about a month later and came there and picked him up and took

him away and as he was going out of the door at the very last moment he could have made this comment. He turned to me and he said, "Taylor, I'm leaving you in charge". And that was the turnover.

Joanna Rae : That was the first you'd ever known about it?

Andrew Taylor : Well that was just, I was in charge of Port Lockroy. ?Flack? was in charge of Deception, it didn't affect him. No.

Joanna Rae : Right, right.

Andrew Taylor : And he was away longer than we thought, longer than we had expected he would be away, but I think it must have been, I couldn't remember the date in January that I believe they returned, and the time they returned they brought with them David James and Vic Russell and somebody else.

Joanna Rae : Marshall probably.

Andrew Taylor : Marshall, Freddie Marshall, yes. And they brought also the replacements for Port Lockroy. When we were vacating it, when we went back then to Deception, some stores had been brought down there at about that time by the Fitzroy and there was a lot of transferring of cargo from one ship to the other and from shore to ships and we kept hearing rumours of Marr having a nervous breakdown and Eric Back, the medical officer, examined him a number of times during this period and eventually, well I had the impression and I think we all had, that he wanted to go home. This was the underlying

purpose of his initial visit, to see the Governor. He wanted to go home. And Eric Back considered that he was undergoing a nervous breakdown and he thought he should go home. And I think he started, I think they started to take him back to the Falklands and the Colonial Secretary was there with him and he was, strongly felt that Marr was making a mistake in doing this and tried to persuade him to come – to change his mind and stay. And I believe he persuaded him to stay until Hope Bay was established and he came back to Deception and then, seemingly, became – his condition became worse and finally they called Flett and I in to a meeting in one of the buildings at Deception and Nick someone, the Secretary, whose name I think was Bradley, said to me that Marr had been in such ill health that he had decided eventually that he had to go home and that he had recommended that I take his place and if I would agree to do this, he would report this to the Governor and eventually there would be some official paper come down, which was what happened. And Marr went then back with the Secretary to the Falklands. I don't know that I ever met him again.

Joanna Rae : Were you given any instructions about the programme for the coming year?

Andrew Taylor : No instructions whatever that I remember. There was no programme laid out and in view of what I have mentioned to you before we started this run, it's understandable why there was no programme, but I

Joanna Rae : Did you have any contact with the Advisory Committee – Neil Mackintosh, Brian Roberts?

Andrew Taylor : Never.

Joanna Rae : No.

Andrew Taylor : Never. Not until I returned to London.

Joanna Rae : Because, in fact, you were very uncertain what the purpose of the whole expedition was.

Andrew Taylor : I didn't know. I wasn't uncertain – I didn't know. I assumed that it was something political that was beyond my understanding, or they would have told me

Joanna Rae : How did you feel about suddenly being in charge of the expedition?

Andrew Taylor : It was sort of exciting. It was something that had never occurred to me at all. And it, I found it rather exhilarating. Once we had got the decks cleared away. The problem was a little complicated too by the fact that The Eagle, during her passage south, about in the latitude of Cape Horn had encountered a very bad gale which had blown Captain Shepherd off the bridge and he landed on the rail of his ship. If he had gone another foot over the side, he'd have been gone. And broke several ribs. And Dr Back wasn't ready to give him a release to sail the ship down to Hope Bay and we didn't quite know what was going to happen, for a little while. Whether we were going to Hope Bay or whether we were going back to the Falklands or whether we were staying in Deception.

Joanna Rae : It all depended on the Eagle? Whether Captain Shepherd wanted to sail?

Andrew Taylor : Fortunately, the next day the weather broke clear and fine and he allowed him to go and then once he was there, we made a clear passage there [indistinct] in a way. And once he was there, he could take things a little more easily for the week or two it took to unload his ship.

Joanna Rae : But even that wasn't without incident, was it? There was a bad storm while he was actually in Hope Bay?

Andrew Taylor : Oh yes, it might have caused all sorts of trouble. If the same storm that ultimately blew her out of the harbour, had happened within a day or two then, it would have been a very hard thing on Captain Shepherd, as it was indeed when it ultimately did happen

Joanna Rae : When The Eagle was damaged, what effect did that have on the establishment of the base?

Andrew Taylor : It didn't have a great deal of effect, I don't think. We had already one ship load of cargo there and had all the equipment we needed to finish the house, except a few things like linoleum. We had some boards to lay on the floor and we thought we'd lay this linoleum over it, that would keep the wind from blowing up from the floor, but they took that away and made it air conditioned instead. There were little things like that, we had to change our plans a bit here and there, but I don't think there was anything very important.

Joanna Rae : You'd got all the essentials ashore?

Andrew Taylor : Mmm.

Joanna Rae : If we could continue talking about the leadership for a little while. Ted Bingham was appointed in July 1945 to lead the next year's expedition. Could you tell me what degree of communication or liaison there was between the two of you? It's never been very clear if there was any link.

Andrew Taylor : It was very clear there was absolutely none.

Joanna Rae : There was none at all?

Andrew Taylor : None. He just came ashore and told me that he was now in charge and I should get on board ship and go, wherever we would go. There was no communication with Ted. He told me how much he was going to accomplish in the next two years, but it didn't quite develop, I don't think.

Joanna Rae : Presumably, you were told he was coming, by the Governor, or the Colonial Office in London.

Andrew Taylor : No, the Colonial Office in London had nothing to do with me. They just ignored me, I was still a dog on that tour that I was when I climbed aboard the ship first. There was such a strong feeling of secrecy about it that I think in the end they realised they couldn't trust us, so they didn't inform us of anything. And finally when the ship was coming down to relieve us, they didn't inform us of that. We had no official advice until Mark Easy, the skipper of the Scoresby, came ashore about three in the morning and shook us all up and asked if none of us wanted to go back to Stanley with him.

Joanna Rae : Oh, goodness me!

Andrew Taylor : And fortunately, of course, the radio operator, Farrington, heard a Port Stanley news broadcast, which told everybody there all about it, but they didn't tell us.

Joanna Rae : They didn't tell you?

Andrew Taylor : No.

Joanna Rae : How did you feel about that?

Andrew Taylor : Well, it didn't make us feel particularly happy, but it sort of fitted in to the pattern that had been my experience in military affairs and a great many super secret operations are kept that way for the purpose of suppressing any knowledge of the incompetence of the people that are running it and that seemed to fit pretty well.

Joanna Rae : If we haven't already covered it, could you outline your duties as expedition leader?

Andrew Taylor : Well, we all had plenty to do to get the base ready to begin with, but once it was nearing completion, the one matter that began to occupy my mind was what do I do with all these people and, as I said, I tried to lay this programme out that would give each of them some sense of responsibility for carrying on what he was supposed to do. In the case of people like Vic Cook, of course, Tom Berry and his helper from the Falklands, John Blythe, they knew what they were supposed to do a lot better than anybody else did, so I

didn't try to interfere with them at all. He was a wonderful, wonderful cook, who had been trained in the service of the P&O liners, running east and gradually worked his way up until I believe eventually he became the Purser and he delighted in showing off a little bit some of this experience, such as carrying in six steaming hot large plates of soup at one time, with four up this arm and two on the other hand and delivered them, one by one, to each of us.

Joanna Rae : An entertainment in itself.

Andrew Taylor : Oh, he was a. Most of us never ate any better in our lives than we did down there. Except there was nothing he could do with tins of herrings and tomatoes to disguise them, they were still tins of herrings and tomatoes.

Joanna Rae : Did you get a lot of them?

Andrew Taylor : Tons!

Joanna Rae : Did you have a favourite meal? One that

Andrew Taylor : He could do wonderful things with penguin eggs and he made omelettes often for breakfast and they were absolutely delicious, mixed with a little tomato or something like that. He was a wonderful cook and I have often thought since did more to contribute to the success of our expedition than any one person. I didn't realise it at the time, but I realise it now. He had a very good sense of humour, too, and would laugh and joke with everybody. Very, very seldom would he lose his temper or anything and we've lost track of

him completely. We don't know where he is. I would like nothing better than if old Tom could appear on Friday with us.

Joanna Rae : Yes, that would be lovely. Do you feel that being a Canadian made a difference to you as an expedition leader? Do you feel it put distance between you and the rest of the expedition?

Andrew Taylor : I didn't feel myself that there was anything between us. The work we were doing and the life we were living. We all shared equally and I never felt there was any differences developed because I was a colonial.

Joanna Rae : No.

Andrew Taylor : Because I really wasn't. I was born in Edinburgh.

Joanna Rae : Was there an officers and men feeling?

Andrew Taylor : No. None whatever. None whatever. There was no spit and polish about us.

Joanna Rae : Can you tell me something about the personalities on the expedition? It must have been

Andrew Taylor : Well, some of the chaps knew Marr very, very well, long, long before they had joined the expedition and it would be better to get that information from them than

from me. The impression I had of Marr was that he was a very sincere and conscientious man, who was always willing to do more than his share of any hard and difficult physical job there was to do. He was something of an introvert and seemed to have trouble in sharing his thoughts with other people. There were some who knew him, as I say, very, very well and no doubt he told them a great deal more than he told me, but he was a very kind man, who I think had probably seen much better days. He was a little bit over the hill.

Joanna Rae : He was quite old by that time, wasn't he?

Andrew Taylor : I don't know his age at that time, but he might have been 45 or 50, which is the prime of life to me now, as I look back.

Joanna Rae : I believe Alan Lamb was one of your particular friends?

Andrew Taylor : We were very, very close and I had as much admiration for Lamb as I had for anyone on the whole outfit and I think most people felt much the same way about him. He was a very, very competent person in many, many ways. He could write well, he could draw well. He was a photographer and knew not only how to push a button, but how to develop and print a picture. We had a monstrosity of a panoramic camera that was manufactured about 1904 and I don't think had been used up until the time we got it. And we finally got the works moving and ran a film or two on it from somewhere up the side of a mountain and Lamb developed a, built a wooden wheel that would submerge. He wrapped the film round this wooden wheel and then there was a tray or a trough that the chippy had made for him, in which the developer and washing fluids were in there. And this, he would turn this to first develop it and then put different fluid in there to fix it and then he used paper

and printed it and this used to be referred to as the “Bloody big wheel”. He had some kind of a song about it, as I remember.

But he and I travelled together almost, almost every trip I was on Lamb and I were sharing once of these six foot square tents and we’re both over six foot tall, so our feet stuck out a bit into the snow. But he was, he liked cooking, he liked messing around with things. So we divided the work that way. And he did all the cooking all the time when we were going. And we’d put the tent up with a groundsheet inside and then I would throw in the bed rolls and boxes of things that he would need and while he was getting the, with a pile of snow that he had to melt. While he was getting the meal ready, then I got the dogs tied up and tidied up the sledge so that if a blizzard developed, everything wouldn’t be buried in the morning.

And we never had a harsh word between us in the two years, not one. Not even when he cooked a seagull for Christmas dinner in 1945.

Joanna Rae : Did you not like that?

Andrew Taylor : No, I didn’t like it very much. I don’t think he did either.

Joanna Rae : Because the period when you were returning from your first journey at Hope Bay must have put everybody under quite a lot of strain.

Andrew Taylor : It did, and it put Lamb under more strain than anyone, because I had been, I’d done a lot of travelling in northern Canada in the bush, where the snow is softer than it was in the Antarctic and it had been drilled into me – never go anywhere without your

snow shoes, and I had a pair of snow shoes. And the others had skis. And there were some skis that were left at an island we called Vortex Island, because the first time we saw it, the wind was blowing in almost a whirlwind, right up from the Point. And I think, I don't know whether they were Lamb's skis or James' skis, but Lamb ended up without anything on his feet in this snow, terribly, terribly, deep.

Joanna Rae : How deep? Over knee high?

Andrew Taylor : Up to your waist, three or four feet deep. And no supporting party either. What seems to have happened was that the snow had been forming, probably as rime, on the 2000ft summit on James Ross Island and then the south westerly winds had blown the lighter snow off, about the consistency of flour, and then it gradually, in the lee of this quite high island, it settled down, just like dust, snow dust, and it wouldn't support anything, it wouldn't support skis, not snowshoes, nor dogs, nor men, nor sleigh, nor anything else. There were days when we weren't able to make much over a mile a day and this was something we'd never contemplated at all. And they ran out of dog food and our rations, we didn't actually run out of them, but they were getting low. We had some things that we had cached at Vortex Island and we knew if we could get back there, we were alright.

Joanna Rae : So how much distance were you covering under those kind of surface conditions?

Andrew Taylor : It might only have been about twenty miles, I can't just remember.

And we might have perhaps gone a little nearer the coast and found better conditions a little

further out and found better conditions, but I think we managed to discover the worst of them.

Joanna Rae : It's always the way of, isn't it, you don't know once you're in [sound became distorted][track 23]

Andrew Taylor : left that area, we had to decide to leave some things behind and we made a cache right in the middle of this snow field, almost out of sight of the coast, at the time we did it anyway. And marked it with the tripod which was set up. And I think we may have had a flag on it, I'm not quite certain. And this lightened the load on the sledge quite a bit and we ran into a magnificent blizzard the next day and footing firmed up tremendously and we got as far as a place called The Naze, where the wind was blowing furiously and it's quite a thing to have a picnic and a tent to put up in a gale that's blowing sixty or eighty miles an hour. We had an awful time getting the tents up. Finally, we had to tie a line securing the pinnacle of the tent behind us and then spread the legs out that way and fix them. The next day we woke up and it was beautifully fine and the sun shining and just round the corner from where we had camped, there was a bare, sandy beach with a display of fossils on it, the like of which I've never seen in all my life. And, seemingly, these fossils had been contained in a bag of sand that had gradually been eroded either by the sea or by the wind, but the fossils were too large and heavy and remained there and gradually became more and more concentrated as they went down and some of them were as big as a football. I don't remember what they would have weighed, but probably 25 pounds.

Joanna Rae : Did you bring any of the fossils back?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, a lot of them, a lot of them were brought back and people went back to the same place a year or so later and found a lot more.

Joanna Rae : In fact, there's a lot of work being done on James Ross Island at the moment.

Andrew Taylor : Is there?

Joanna Rae : Yes. Obviously, a very interesting site. Perhaps you'd like to tell me something about Chippy Ashton?

Andrew Taylor : Chippy Ashton was one of the most popular and capable people we had. He was a man who could turn his hand to almost anything that could be made by human hands and make it out of the most complete garbage that you could set your eyes on. I told you before how he manufactured our sledge wheel from an old ship's log that he'd picked up. We also designed a tide gauge, a graphical method of recording the tides, by setting this on the ice, some distance offshore. And we had a wheel on the end of the mechanism that turned very slowly through a counterweight, hung into the water, so that when the ice went up, the wheel, the length of this line on this side extended and you got a different reading on the chart. And that was made out of things like carpenter's clamps, which he used as a screw handle on, a carpenter clamp to move the needle along to make his. I never heard what happened. I wrote a report on that, it'll be one of those on your list. And I put Ashton's name on it, which pleased him a very great deal. And he did do a lot of the work in connection with the

Joanna Rae : Because I think the tide gauge was washed out to sea at one stage and there had to be a second one made.

Andrew Taylor : I think that's right, there was a second one made, yes. But he was a very, very likeable man and he just couldn't sit idle and do nothing and one of his hobbies was putting a little four-masted schooner in a bottle. And he made one, as far as I know, for everyone on the expedition. This trip, I've seen the one he gave to David James, I've seen the one he gave to Eric Back, I've seen the one he gave to Victor Russell, and I, there was another one. Who am I missing?

Joanna Rae : Have you been out to see Taff Davies?

Andrew Taylor : Taff Davies. Yes, yes.

Joanna Rae : That's the one I've seen. Lovely.

Andrew Taylor : Lovely. But, everybody just loved Chippy. And he came back home here. I don't think he'd been married before. He'd been at sea for a long, long time. He could do things with strings and lines that were to me unbelievable. And he was planning on marrying when he returned and I think he did marry, in Manchester, and Eric Back was at the wedding. I don't know what, he was Best Man at the wedding. And then Chippy got a job, apparently in a flour mill and the dust of the flour mill killed him.

Joanna Rae : It's a sad end.

Andrew Taylor : Yes. He and Tom Berry were very close friends. He was one of the few people that could say nasty things to Tom without getting in trouble.

Joanna Rae : And what about David James? He was another character, I should imagine.

Andrew Taylor : Well, I didn't know David James until he came down there, of course, but he took over the handling of the dogs immediately, which saved me a great deal of trouble and with Vic Russell's help, they looked after the dogs the entire winter until we were ready to go on, go travelling and David James and Vic came with Lamb and I on the first trip that we were on and they were tent mates, just as Lamb and I were tent mates.

Joanna Rae : Did any of you have experience of dogs before Hope Bay, of working with dogs on a sledge team?

Andrew Taylor : Well, I had worked with them a little in surveying in northern Canada. But the problem was altogether different there. The travelling through the bush instead of using the fan formation they have here, had down there they're in single line, one behind the other. And if there's a track for them to follow, they will follow that, so that you're not really driving them the way you are down South, you're steering them, as you do there.

Joanna Rae : So you were using a fan formation in the Antarctic?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, in the South, yes. I was never the best dog driver they had down there, by any means. I hadn't the same interest in dogs, I'm afraid, that I had in some other things. Dogs, they were, one of my friends who had been captured at Dieppe, met me in

London when we were both on our way home and he was asking about the dogs and he said, “how did the dogs do down there where there are no trees for them to water?”. And I said, “Well, they used to come along and water our sea boots.”

Joanna Rae : In fact, there was quite a lot of difficulty with the dogs when you first arrived, wasn't there, when you were trying to get the hut up and the dogs were running around?

Andrew Taylor : The dogs were running loose and bringing dead penguins into our camp area, which we didn't want. And there must have been a million penguins right up against us. And in the spring when they began laying eggs, we got quite a supply of eggs from them that way. And they would tape off an area, maybe 50 feet square, which might contain several hundred nests because they were so close together. And they went round and marked an “X” on every egg that was there. And then going around the next day and finding an egg that had no mark on it, they assumed that was a fresh egg. Just laid that day. And, as I said, Tom Berry could make wonderful omelettes with these penguin eggs. I never took much to them, because the first, to begin with anyway, I never took much to them. We had had a birthday celebration the night before and my stomach was a little bit queasy and I came to the table and he had boiled two of these eggs which are monstrous things, about this size and the whites are quite translucent and he peeled the shells off and they sat on a big plate looking at me like two great octopus eyes. I took an aversion against penguin eggs, but finally I got over them.

Joanna Rae : Yes. Were there many practical jokes carried out on each other?

Andrew Taylor : Oh yes, there was always something going on and the best one was towards the end of our stay there when Farrington, the radio operator, produced a wire that he had just received from the Governor, to the effect that everybody at Hope Bay next year were going to be transferred to some island away south of the Argentine islands for that third year, which created a scene of despondency it's hard to imagine. And he kept it up for the better part of a day before he finally couldn't withhold himself any longer.

Joanna Rae : I suppose that sort of joke went down particularly well, because none of you knew what on earth was happening anyway?

Andrew Taylor : No, we didn't, we didn't.

Joanna Rae : Perhaps we could finish off with some, if you could tell me something about the relief of the expedition and how you all got home. That was in March 1945, the Scoresby arrived and – how did you all get home from that? Of course, some of you stayed there a little longer anyway.

Andrew Taylor : Briefly, briefly what happened was that we went aboard the Scoresby and I don't remember whether the Scoresby took us back to the Falklands or not, but we stayed at the Falklands for a couple of weeks and we had a lot of reports that I had planned right from the start would be available and finished at this time and many of them were incomplete, for one reason or another, so we got, we had an office set up in Port Stanley and for the two weeks we waited for a ship to go to Montevideo, where we expected we were going to have another joyous week or two, as we had coming down and they weren't there

each day. Completed, most of them, they weren't all finished, but a good part of them were done.

Joanna Rae : And you made a list of them as they were finished, did you?

Andrew Taylor : We had made the list at Hope Bay. We made the list as they were developing. That's why they're higgledy, piggledy, they're not arranged in any particular order. So when the ship arrived to take us to Montevideo, we were all in a high good humour at this, but again, there were things happening that they hadn't advised us about and the Fitzroy was intercepted by HMS Ajax and we were put aboard the Ajax.

Joanna Rae : I've always heard that the military personnel went aboard the Ajax and civilian personnel went home aboard the Highland Monarch. Is that right?

Andrew Taylor : That may be so, I can't remember that at all. I know that some of them, they went partly home, I think, on, I think they went partly home on the Ajax, whether it was the first part or the last part of the journey. It seems to me there was an interchange took place at Freetown and then, none of us had any money of course, so when we were passing Lisbon, I arranged to send a wire. No, I arranged for money, I think, from the British Consul in Lisbon, who gave us £150, which we distributed around between the, well I don't know, a dozen people maybe. And it turned out that this was all going to have to be spent for customs duty on things that people had brought home. So I sent for another £150 and I sent it to London here to the, what did Chippy call them? Rope and, rope and tackle brigade or something like that, he called them. And they chose to ignore that and when we got here, they had no money for us at all and by that time the boys, before they got off the ship, had spent

the money they had to begin with on the duties that were charged aboard ship. Some of them were whisked away by Roberts and his friends and some of the boys had connections in London that they could go to. Three of them had no connections, no money, and spent their first day in London sleeping in an abandoned air raid shelter. And they had all cleared out, I still had all the reports and specimens with me and I stayed aboard the empty Ajax for the weekend before I could transfer them to somebody competent to look after them, on Monday. So that was my reception, which just fitted in with everything else.

Joanna Rae : Rather low key.

Andrew Taylor : Very.

Joanna Rae : Were you, sort of, debriefed by Mackintosh or anything on your return?

Andrew Taylor : No. No. I went to see Roberts about one thing and another and he diddled me around. I just seemed to be waiting on things to happen and I had been away from home by that time for more than five years and my oldest son was born. I hadn't, after I left, so I didn't want to spend an indefinite time diddling around with Roberts and I went down to Sussex where some friends that I had made while I was with the Second Division, allowed me to work there and finished up what I had to do and went home.

Joanna Rae : Yes. Yes, I noticed some of the reports that we've got are signed by you at Hoyle in Sussex.

Andrew Taylor : Were they? Well, yes, I worked pretty hard there. I must have been there three weeks anyway, maybe more.

Joanna Rae : And what happened after Tabarin? Could you sort of outline your career after that?

Andrew Taylor : Well, I had a little bit of leave coming to me by that time and I had spent most of the five years I'd been away from home looking forward to the day I could get out of the Army. But when I got near Ottawa, having sent all my gear ahead, and they advised us to wear battledress for the Atlantic trip. This was in early June, I think. But then they pulled me off the train at Ottawa and tried to persuade me to stay in the Army, because they had some more cold weather work they wanted me to do and I didn't allow them to do that for the better part of a week, but the temperature there was about 98 or a 100 and I was wearing a battledress and all my other clothing was in Winnipeg. I had nothing to change into and they finally wore me down and so I stayed another seven years in the Army, for which I get no pension of any description, not for that service and not for the Antarctic service.

Joanna Rae : That doesn't seem quite fair, does it? And then you were doing some work on the DO line, weren't you?

Andrew Taylor : Yes, while I was in the Army, one of the jobs they put me on was the compaction of snow for roads and runways and we ran over our budget year after year and finally they closed that off and as soon as we closed that off the Americans took it on and everything that we had accomplished had have been discovered by the Americans in our reports, but they didn't say that, and, but this method we used was primarily one of mixing up

a matrix of snow that was to be used for a road-to-runway surface, with a power mixer which fractured and broke all the finer parts of a snowflake. And we put a demonstration on at a place called Cappus Casing, about 1952, I think it might have been early 1952, in which we took this machinery into a muskeg swamp, with little sticks of spruce trees not much bigger than my finger. And this machinery broke it all up into splinters, which tended to reinforce the snow matrix. We drove into that eight o'clock one morning and at ten o'clock the next morning, a DC-3 loaded with wheels, landed on it. We had, it was a spectacular demonstration. But everything had just gone right for it, it could just as well have gone wrong. It was mild when we did our work and it got very cold overnight, frozen, solidified. And well, we, our work continued a little longer after that and we introduced flamethrowers into this canopy, in which the mixing took place. It was on sleigh runners and as it was pulled along by tractor, you see, the mixing was going along as it moved. But we introduced these flamethrowers in, and this melted all of the fine speckles that was snow and just left the hard core at the centre of it, which then solidified into something much better. And I was surprised the other day, somebody sent me a reprint of a Russian magazine, which I had translated and it indicates that the Russians had used the same method with a much better design of equipment than we had had, and are using it in the Antarctic and landing four-engine jets on it.

Joanna Rae : Interesting.

Andrew Taylor : So that was, during this period I was in the Army. Also, during the period I was in the Army, the same people that persuaded me to stay in discovered suddenly they'd persuaded too many people to stay in and they didn't know what to do with them, so they sent them back to school. None of the English speaking schools would have me, I don't

know whether it was because I'd been in the Antarctic or not, but I finally ended up at the University of Montreal in France, where I got a Masters and a PhD.

So after that, then, I went working on my own in a consulting capacity, but the problem of finding support for projects in those days, which is the 1950's, was totally different from what it has been this last ten or twenty years, where almost anything a person can dream up will get support. It wasn't that way then. We were living hand-to-mouth for part of the time. It makes me quake to think of how nearly I came to going stoney broke.

Joanna Rae : But you survived?

Andrew Taylor : Yes. Well part of the. The Dualine? came along about 1956 and they had an American outfit who were putting up out western electric with a prime contractors in this firm of engineers in New York, where they subcontractors who had a contract of, establishing the sites of each of the forty two stages, from Alaska to Baffin Bay and that was the job I became involved in. Although it was an American contract, it was a British RAF officer by the name of Stephen Cooke Yarborough, who had been a Major, I think, in Burma, who was the head man, but I was the senior Canadian Engineer on it and we were working out of Churchill. We had six field teams that went out to do the actual survey on the ground and each one, we had a hundred, at least a hundred engineers and draughtsmen working. We had three girls doing nother but churning out prints of everything we made and on a distribution list of about 130 addresses and that lasted, in the field, from February till about the end of May and then I was sent to New York to finish up reports on the thing again. And at the same time I had a contract running with the American Office of Naval Research for the physiography of the Queen Elizabeth Islands, which I finished within another six months of

that. And finally, surveying some mining claims one winter, northeast of Norway House, with the temperature about 35 below. I'd been out, observing from about six o'clock to about eleven o'clock at night and had a six mile trudge on snow shoes back to camp. And when I got there everybody was sound asleep and the wooden stove, the wooden fuel stove, was out. There was a can of spam or something that was frozen so hard, I couldn't eat it, so I went to bed without my supper and that was when I decided to retire – at the age of 63.

Joanna Rae : I'm not surprised. Thanks every so much. That was great. Thank you.