

VICKY AULD

Edited transcript of a recording of Vicky Auld, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee at the Marguerite Bay Reunion, Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria, on 31st October 2010. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 21st April 2011.

Track 1 [0:00:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Vicky Auld, recorded at the Marguerite Bay Reunion in Bowness-on-Windermere, by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 31st of October 2010. Vicky Auld.*

Track 1 [0:00:13] Vicky Auld: It is Victoria Jane Auld. Date of birth 11/09/72 and place of birth Plymouth, Devon.

Track 1 [0:00:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you are how old now? 28?*

Track 1 [0:00:23] Vicky Auld: 38. [laughs]

Track 1 [0:00:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *I was being polite.*

Track 1 [0:00:25] Vicky Auld: Very!

Track 1 [0:00:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *What sort of background did you have. Did you have a private education, state school?*

Track 1 [0:00:30] Vicky Auld: I did. I was very lucky. I had a private education in a boarding school. My dad was in the Navy and so every couple of years we were moving away – around the country and then internationally – so I think the best place for me at that stage was boarding school.

Track 1 [0:00:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *Where did you go?*

Track 1 [0:00:45] Vicky Auld: A place in Torquay, called Stoodley Knowle. It was a convent school. I thought I was going to get out for sixth form but I actually ended up staying for a sixth year as well. It was a great place. I did a lot of sport and enjoyed myself, and still in touch with all of my friends from school now.

Track 1 [0:01:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you wind up at university?*

Track 1 [0:01:05] Vicky Auld: I did, yes.

Track 1 [0:01:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *Reading what?*

Track 1 [0:01:07] Vicky Auld: Physics and astrophysics, which was tougher than I thought it was going to be.

Track 1 [0:01:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why? What was your passion?*

Track 1 [0:01:14] Vicky Auld: I think at that stage it was astronomy. I was very interested in space science at the time, and I think the physics side was a natural progression into it at university. But through the course I just decided that actually

looking at stars was probably more pleasurable than understanding the fairly difficult maths involved with space physics. So I ended up getting more interested in the atmosphere, coming back down to earth and the impacts of the atmosphere on many of the ...

Track 1 [0:01:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *So did you complete the degree?*

Track 1 [0:01:45] Vicky Auld: I did, yes.

Track 1 [0:01:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *That was where? Where was that?*

Track 1 [0:01:47] Vicky Auld: That was at the University of Birmingham. Probably more play than hard work I think at that stage.

Track 1 [0:01:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was your degree, in the end?*

Track 1 [0:01:54] Vicky Auld: It was a 2:2 in Physics and Astrophysics.

Track 1 [0:01:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. What was your first brush, or inkling: brush with the Antarctic or inkling that some place called the Antarctic might exist?*

Track 1 [0:02:05] Vicky Auld: It was at university, at Birmingham, actually. I cannot remember the name of the chap (he was a BAS man), a biologist and he came and gave a lecture. I had just seen a poster and thought 'That looks pretty exciting; I will go and have a look at that.' I was not interested in biology particularly at the time, but the talk that he gave encompassed not just biology but all the other sciences that were going on down there at the time. So I had a word with him after that talk and was asking 'What could I do down there?' and he said 'Give it a couple of years, because we are not actually taking women down there for any physics-based work. So come back in a couple of years and see what we are doing.'

Track 1 [0:02:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *What year was this, then?*

Track 1 [0:02:43] Vicky Auld: That was '94 I think. Yes, '94. So I went and did a Masters after that, in atmospheric science, meteorology effectively.

Track 1 [0:02:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you feel when you heard about this organisation that did not take women?*

Track 1 [0:02:56] Vicky Auld: It was quite surprising actually. I think I had had a fairly lucky upbringing in the fact that I was thinking that I could do anything that I wanted to do in terms of career choice. To then suddenly find out that there were still careers that were closed off to women quite surprised me. But I do not think I thought much more than that at the time. I just thought: 'Well I am not ready either yet, so I will go and do a couple of years and see what happens.'

Track 1 [0:03:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *Whoever this biologist was, he had obviously got an inkling that things were going to change.*

Track 1 [0:03:28] Vicky Auld: Oh yes I think so, because already on the science bases that were marine biology based, there were women down there, and there were still women doing summers on all the bases at that stage, and on the ships. So it was just the wintering positions, that I was interested in, at Halley and Rothera, that they had not had women at that stage.

Track 1 [0:03:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you did your Masters, and then what happened?*

Track 1 [0:03:49] Vicky Auld: I waited for six months, knowing when the applications would come out; I applied for the job, and was very surprised to get it. I could not wait.

Track 1 [0:04:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was the interview like?*

Track 1 [0:04:01] Vicky Auld: Exciting, just very exciting to visit BAS in Cambridge, the headquarters, was special enough in a way. As you walk down the corridors there are lots of pictures of people doing things that you would love to be able to do. The interview was obviously ... I was pretty young, straight out of uni, so it was one of the first interviews that I had sat. A panel of three. The questions were interesting. They were showing you satellite pictures, of weather. You had to analyse the weather for them. That was something I was fascinated by at the time so it was interesting and it reminded me that 'This is what I want to do.' I was able to answer all the questions on where the bases are. Obviously I was interested in it so I had done a bit of research into it.

Track 1 [0:04:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *They were establishing you had done your homework, were they?*

Track 2 [0:04:48] Vicky Auld: Exactly, as in any interview.

Track 2 [0:04:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you remember who was on the other side of the table?*

Track 2 [0:04:54] Vicky Auld: Jon Shanklin who was one of the met men in the '70s that discovered the ozone hole, and he was my boss in the future, Richard Hanson who Personnel Recruitment Manager and there would have been a Base Manager of some sort but I cannot remember which one.

Track 2 [0:05:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. So what actually were you applying for, because you seem to have dabbled in a number of sciences by the time you got to BAS? So what were you going for in the end?*

Track 2 [0:05:23] Vicky Auld: Meteorologist, but the position was actually advertised as Meteorologist/ Physicist/ Electronic Engineer, and the idea was that they actually wanted a team of three, preferably one of each of those disciplines. My strength was obviously the meteorology at that stage.

Track 2 [0:05:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you know which base you were applying for?*

Track 2 [0:05:41] Vicky Auld: I knew there were openings at Rothera and Halley but I wanted Halley, because Halley was where to me the real science was going on at the time in my kind of discipline. That was where I wanted to go.

Track 2 [0:05:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did they tell you straight away?*

Track 2 [0:05:57] Vicky Auld: No, but it was only a day or two after that I got a phone call. Up until then it was pure excitement at the possibility of going South. At that point it was like 'Ooh, this is going to be two and a half years away from home. Two and a half years without friends.' I think the realisation: there was just a little bit of apprehension then. But it did not last very long and by the time you are getting to conference, it was just pure excitement again.

Track 2 [0:06:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you get any sense at the interview that you were being sussed out psychologically? In retrospect you might have a feeling about that now.*

Track 2 [0:06:36] Vicky Auld: I think I was quite slow to grow up, so I probably was not aware of it, if it was going on. I remember being asked questions that I was expected to answer: things about 'What is your home life situation?' 'Who is going to miss you the most?' Things like this, I suppose they were leading questions but I think I expected those kind of questions to be asked because it was a job but it was also quite a life change for a lot of people that were going down at that time.

Track 2 [0:07:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was the reaction back at home to the idea of 'Our Vicky' going away for two and a half years.'*

Track 2 [0:07:13] Vicky Auld: Well my parents still swear to this day that I only told them that it was for 18 months. [laughs] But when they found out it was 2½ years, it was only actually about a month before I was going South. They were excited for me but I think they were wondering if this was the right thing to do. I think my dad was probably expecting me to go for a more structured career, maybe into perhaps a more professional discipline and stay in the discipline for the rest of my life.

Track 2 [0:07:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *There is that dilemma, isn't there? 'Will this interruption to my career path be good for me or bad for me?' Did you worry about that?*

Track 2 [0:07:57] Vicky Auld: No, because at the time that was all I really wanted to do.

Track 2 [0:08:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were determined?*

Track 2 [0:08:01] Vicky Auld: Absolutely. That was the next thing. Well not the next thing, the only thing on the list in terms of where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. I did not have any longer term goals than having a couple of years experience in the Antarctic.

Track 2 [0:08:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *Had you read about the Antarctic, as a child? The old Fids say 'Oh yes, I went to see Scott of the Antarctic with John Mills.' Did you have a similar moment?*

Track 2 [0:08:27] Vicky Auld: I do not think I did. My first recollection, as I say, the first dawning that this was a possibility, was at university. I had always been interested in space as I mentioned earlier. Perhaps to a certain extent the idea of living on a remote base, with very few people. Perhaps there is a link there, in terms of the fact that what are astronauts doing up in the Spacelab. But in terms of history of the Antarctic, I really only got involved with that once I was down there, and had the opportunity to read library books.

Track 2 [0:09:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *But looking back on it, do you think that the fact that you went to the convent school, and therefore had a fairly enclosed life period, several years, in a closed community, was actually quite useful to you? What was going to be required of you socially in the Antarctic?*

Track 2 [0:09:18] Vicky Auld: I have never thought about it, but quite possibly, because you are effectively living with a group of people of a similar age. I was going to say from all walks of life, but certainly not to the extreme that you get down on the BAS bases. In fact quite a lot of the girls were from military families, similar to me, but you are living with them 24/7. You get to know everyone very well. You know the people you like and you know the people you dislike, but you still find ways of living with them, so yes, I think that probably did help. I had not recognised that before.

Track 3 [0:09:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Glad I could surprise you with one question. So what was it like when you got there? Was it what you were hoping for?*

Track 3 [0:10:00] Vicky Auld: Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Magical place.

Track 3 [0:10:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Halley isn't it?*

Track 3 [0:10:03] Vicky Auld: This is Halley, yes. Just seeing the ice shelf as the boat was sailing towards it. Absolutely fantastic. Exciting I think. I am just trying to remember the moment, I think it was only in the second winter, when everyone went down to the ice shelf to wave goodbye to the ship and then you suddenly realise where you are and just how alone you are. But that first year, I think it was all so exciting. We arrived on the ice shelf by ship and then we were flown from N9 to base. It was only about a 15-20 minute flight but my first flight in a small aeroplane, effectively. Stuffed in the back and looking out of the windows at the base that you are about to live in for two years. A very exciting moment.

Track 3 [0:10:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *Not many convent girls have that experience, do they?*

Track 3 [0:10:55] Vicky Auld: Well I think more and more these days, I am glad to say.

Track 3 [0:11:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how was it, settling in? You were given a bunk?*

Track 3 [0:11:04] Vicky Auld: I was, yes. I was given a bunkroom. I am just trying to remember. I was sharing with Kate, who was a lady that had wintered a year before me, Kate Charles. There were two ladies that wintered before I joined, and they were the first ladies wintering at Halley. Lucy, who I was taking over from...

Track 3 [0:11:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *Lucy Yeomans?*

Track 3 [0:11:29] Vicky Auld: Lucy Yeomans, yes. She had done her first year and was actually quite involved with going out in the field and helping in other areas of met, so she was also moving over to Rothera. So I did not see much of Lucy, but Kate was the girl that I was going to be wintering with in my first winter. I think perhaps the hardest thing of settling in was getting to know Kate. She had obviously done her first winter and, as all these winterers are, it is like: 'All these strangers moving into my area.' So you have to take things quite slowly with them. It probably took all of the summer to become friends I suppose with Kate, who I am now very very good friends with and always have been after that winter, but I think I was surprised. I was used to meeting girls in the past in that situation where you are in the minority, trying to make a strong bond with the girls that you do have around you, and that took a while with Kate. That was probably the hardest thing about moving onto Halley. But in terms of settling in on the base life, 'like a duck to water' I think, I would like to say. I don't know what other people would say. Yes I felt very comfortable.

Track 3 [0:12:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *So Kate had been there the previous year and that was the first wintering women, that year.*

Track 3 [0:12:47] Vicky Auld: Mm-mm.

Track 3 [0:12:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you feel as though you were pioneering, although you were not actually the front line of the infantry. You were the second line, of the female infantry.*

Track 3 [0:12:53] Vicky Auld: No not really. No. Perhaps they had done in the first year, but even then there had been women coming down for summers. I think I was just excited to be there, doing the job that I had wanted to do for several years, at that point.

Track 3 [0:13:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were not aware of the fact that you were at the forefront-ish of a sea change within the organisation that had resisted women for so long?*

Track 3 [0:13:19] Vicky Auld: No, and I think perhaps that is in part due to the people that were surrounding me in that time, at Halley and certainly back in Cambridge. I did not have any awareness that there was any issues with introducing women down South for long periods, so it felt quite natural, I think to me. Surprisingly I suppose, when you say it now.

Track 3 [0:13:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just this thought that women were still on trial in your period, weren't they? If you messed up... I am just supposing for a moment that there were still some psychological resistance and perhaps there were still some people in BAS who might have been waiting for the women to fail.*

Track 3 [0:14:02] Vicky Auld: Yes. I think from the management and Cambridge side, I did not feel any of that at all, but from the winterers' side of things, obviously we were just a new aspect of their wintering. There were guys that were coming out after two years, that we met at conference when we were just about to go South, that obviously wintered two years with just the lads. When they first meet you and you are saying 'I am going to Halley to winter', 'Ooh, right! That will make a difference then, won't it? There will be no more brawls over the bar and things.' Although maybe that did not change so much. [laughs]

Track 3 [0:14:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *You don't think you modified the male behaviour.*

Track 3 [0:14:43] Vicky Auld: I think we probably did yes, to a certain extent, but even when you got down there, I think it was not so much resistance to you being down there, it more a kind of (excitement is not the right word), but you could see the guys were interested in finding out why you wanted to be down there. What appeals to you.

Track 4 [0:15:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were a novelty? I do not know quite how to put this but women were 'in short supply' weren't they? Did they have any problems?*

Track 4 [0:15:10] Vicky Auld: There were two girls in my winter. 16 of us in total. No I did not have any problems but I was very lucky. I do not know if you know the background but I met a chap John Davies on the way. He was wintering with us in that first year and I am still with him now.

Track 4 [0:15:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you formed a relationship on the base?*

Track 4 [0:15:31] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 4 [0:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *Very wise.*

Track 4 [0:15:34] Vicky Auld: Oh it was a fantastic time.

Track 4 [0:15:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *So that added to the magic of the experience?*

Track 4 [0:15:40] Vicky Auld: I would not have said I was wise about it; it was just a natural thing. Yes it worked out well for us.

Track 4 [0:15:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Let us talk about your first winter then, doing the work you were doing. Tell me about what work you were doing, in more detail.*

Track 4 [0:15:52] Vicky Auld: Meteorology, basically. They call it Operational Met; it is not quite forecasting at that stage. We did not have any forecasters helping the pilots, but what we did was take weather obs every 6 hours, in a team of three so we worked different shifts. We launched weather balloons once a day, we took ozone

measurement sometimes over 20 times a day depending on if it was sunny or not. Whenever it was sunny you did a lot of measurements. Then on top of the staples like that, then we also had quite a lot of research equipment. It was quite an interesting time at that stage for me. Atmospheric chemistry was a growing science, so there was quite a lot of new kit going down for that, and then a lot of Stable Boundary Layer research, so we got to fly kites with little sondes underneath them through the first 500 metres of the atmosphere, measuring variations in temperature and wind speeds and suchlike. Then we would send this data back to the scientists back in Cambridge, who would then ask for little tweaks in various experiments to help get the data they were after. So it was much more operational than actual research at that stage.

Track 4 [0:17:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Had you had some special training before you headed South so you knew what to do when you got there?*

Track 4 [0:17:06] Vicky Auld: Yes, we had.

Track 4 [0:17:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that adequate?*

Track 4 [0:17:08] Vicky Auld: Yes I think it was adequate. It was adequate, yes. We had training in taking weather observations, had training in the science kit we were using down there. I was quite interested in the science and I think perhaps that was a change from the past in that the met man was quite often the person that wanted to go South but did not have a particular trade that was wanted. I think they were trying to change that a little bit and get a least one out of the team of three going down as a met man to be Met trained before they got there. So I obviously had quite an interest in the science and I think that helps the job to an extent that you can add a little bit for the researchers back in Cambridge.

Track 4 [0:17:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *To a layman like myself, can you explain the purpose or point of the work you were doing? How did it fit into the grand picture?*

Track 4 [0:18:02] Vicky Auld: Yes, well I think pretty much everyone is aware that the Antarctic Survey are looking at climate change. There are a lot of people taking ice cores, that are telling us the history of 200,000+ years ago, and how the climate was changing then. Well quite a lot of what we were doing was helping those records, effectively, so not only were we just keeping normal met records of how the weather was changing at the surface, but by looking at what was going on between the atmosphere and the snow surface itself, so both in the Stable Boundary Layer and in the first 5 or 10 metres of the snow, you can actually see how the current climate is transferring itself into the snow in the very first layers. Then slowly that will get compressed as more snow gets on top of it, so in future years you can see how that ice core was affected by the atmosphere above it, when it was on the surface.

Track 4 [0:18:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *We knew about global warming and the hole in the ozone layer before you went South, so was that actually one of the reasons why you wanted to do that kind of work?*

Track 4 [0:19:06] Vicky Auld: It was yes. I mean certainly during my Masters I had got very interested in climate change aspects, and the actual everyday Met, so even when I came back from BAS I was looking at joining the Met Office as a forecaster;

that was quite high on my list of things that I would quite like to try. So yes I was fully aware of the science that they were involved in and was quite keen to get involved.

Track 4 [0:19:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *You are at the Marguerite Bay reunion this weekend, so you are well aware of the guys that were there before you, and the meteorologists who were doing their obs 50 or 60 years before you. It is that basis of work that allowed the BAS scientists 25 years ago to draw the conclusions they did, which led to the publication of the worries about global warming and the ozone layer, so what is it like meeting the guys this weekend who were down there doing the kind of work that you are doing now?*

Track 5 [0:20:01] Vicky Auld: It has been brilliant. I just wish it was lasting a week so I could actually talk to everyone and get the stories that I would love to listen to. One night is definitely not enough.

Track 5 [0:20:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you there on base at Halley? Were you aware of the ghosts of those men?*

Track 5 [0:20:15] Vicky Auld: Yes, oh yes you were, because apart from the fact that every time you sat down in the dining room there were pictures of all the winterers, all around the walls, looking at you. It was something you often did, strangely enough; you would go and look at each picture and study the faces, and the names underneath, and think ‘What was it like then?’ But you start to realise, when you talk to the guys, how meticulous and methodical they were, without even... I do not know if they recognised at that stage how important the data would become in the future.

Track 5 [0:20:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *They didn’t. As you say, it was just an excuse to go South, in many cases. Then suddenly, half a century later, the work they did is now vitally important.*

Track 5 [0:20:57] Vicky Auld: Absolutely, and given the situations they were working in, you start to realise, even though they were enjoying themselves I am sure as much as I did, how important it was that they actually started these records going, 40 or 50 years ago.

Track 5 [0:21:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *One of the big differences between their day and your day, and again between your day and now, is communications. I mean they were doing 100 words a month. Today you can pick up a phone, ring an extension, and get Halley. What was it like in your day, in the ‘1990s’?*

Track 5 [0:21:27] Vicky Auld: In 1996? Yes, well I saw quite a change because even in ’96 we had one A4 fax a week from family, and 400 words on email, I think it was, a week. It might even have been per month, I cannot remember. But even in the first two years that I did South, that changed quite rapidly. And obviously over the next few years, going South repeatedly, it is a different world these days. I think it has changed the base quite significantly.

Track 5 [0:21:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *So from year to year you could measure the differences in communications?*

Track 5 [0:21:57] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 5 [0:21:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *As an aside, there is a guy who is here this weekend called George Kistruck, who was down there in the '60s. At Fossil Bluff I think he was in the late '60s, and he developed a technique whereby, rather like the Germans, he would run two or three words together. So for your 100 words, you could actually get 300 words out.*

Track 5 [0:22:18] Vicky Auld: Fantastic!

Track 5 [0:22:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *The kind of innovation that was going on.*

Track 5 [0:22:22] Vicky Auld: Yes, I think it is important for the guys back home. Before you go, you do not really realise it, but you are South you suddenly start thinking 'Please use the words that you have got to tell me everything you can.' Because you start to realise how important it is, and it is only when you get down that you realise you probably should have told your friends and family that it is actually really important that you stay in touch and let you know as much of what is going on as possible.

Track 5 [0:22:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *You met somebody while you were at Halley, but were you lonely for the wider world?*

Track 5 [0:22:50] Vicky Auld: No, I was not really. I think perhaps I was used to moving into new groups of friends and absorbing myself in wherever I am, so I do not remember being lonely. I think the only time that I remember really wishing that I could get home was: I had had some bad news. A housemate from university had died and I was not able to get back to his funeral. That for me was quite hard. I did feel quite lonely then obviously because no-one else knew him, so I could hardly talk about someone that no-one knows. That was probably the hardest time.

Track 5 [0:23:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *It is interesting in these interviews how often that kind of thing comes up. It is a common experience over the decades. Did you get out much?*

Track 5 [0:23:37] Vicky Auld: Get out much? Out of the base or out travelling?

Track 5 [0:23:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yes, travelling.*

Track 5 [0:23:42] Vicky Auld: Not compared to the old boys.

Track 5 [0:23:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *No dogs to feed?*

Track 5 [0:23:47] Vicky Auld: No dogs, no; just women as an alternative. We had two trips a year. So one was a 7-day and one was a 10-day trip, where we would take a GA out. At Halley it was a group of four people. Well we would take a GA out; the GA would take us out, is probably more appropriate to say. Usually it was the GA and a new winterer, and a second year winterer and a new winterer. So you would rope up in pairs, usually with someone more experienced in front of you if you were the first

year winterer. If you were lucky you would get down to the coastline, go and see the emperor penguins, explore Gin Bottle and the Rumples, and also get in towards the Chasms (where the ice shelf meets the continent). I think they called it 'Winter Training Trips' but for me, I had never put on a pair of crampons before. I had walked up a few hills, but even then it was not a particular hobby of mine, so this was all really really new to me and very very exciting. Total trust in the GA and their experience to get you out of places safely, and I think sometimes not really an awareness of just how dangerous things might have been. Despite being roped up, your front man still can fall in a crevasse at any point.

Track 6 [0:25:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did that happen?*

Track 6 [0:25:15] Vicky Auld: Yes it did, but not really falling; more maybe tripping in up to the thigh rather than falling in deep crevasses as you hear from some of the older boys that you have probably been interviewing more recently. But yes, you were always aware of what could happen at any stage and depending on where you were travelling, you knew whether you were in a likely crevassed area or not, so you just took extra precautions when you were there.

Track 6 [0:25:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were there any major scary moments?*

Track 6 [0:25:43] Vicky Auld: Not really. I was trying to think of this before and I think for me the scary moment I developed myself really because I had tripped and sprained my ankle when we were out in the field, in the Rumples. I had sprained an ankle and then obviously in the process of getting back to the skidoos I had managed to hurt my other ankle and tear a ligament, so I was kind of stumbling back home thinking 'I have got to get myself out of here now.' But it was not particularly scary; it was just an awareness of just how remote you are, and the fact that there is no alternative. You just have to get yourself home.

Track 6 [0:26:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *You felt vulnerable?*

Track 6 [0:26:27] Vicky Auld: Yes, very vulnerable. But that was about the scariest moment we had.

Track 6 [0:26:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. A lot of the reason for the British Antarctic Survey being in the Antarctic over the years has been the politics of being there. Did that ever cross your mind, that you were there for political reasons as well as for scientific reasons?*

Track 6 [0:26:50] Vicky Auld: Not so much in those first two years at Halley. Perhaps more when I did a winter at KEP, because as a base commander at KEP you also sign yourself to be a magistrate of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Government area. So to an extent there, and with the history of South Georgia particularly, then you start to realise the political side. But I think in those first two years at Halley I was not particularly aware of that.

Track 6 [0:27:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *And all these trips, these field trips, they were recreational or were they serious?*

Track 6 [0:27:32] Vicky Auld: They certainly had a serious side. I personally was thinking of them as a recreational opportunity because you are getting out of base, seeing things that you have never seen before, but you were with a GA and you were being trained every day with different techniques, including crevasse rescue. Even simple things like if you are falling down a slope with crampons on, how to get yourself out of trouble with ice axes and suchlike. So there were definitely development opportunities there and even in the process of travelling to where you were going: techniques of how to ride skidoos roped up; how to follow a particular compass direction for twenty miles or so; how to put up a tent safely in the wind; how to survive in a tent for a few days in a blow. So there were definitely training opportunities within it but at that age I just saw it as a recreational opportunity.

Track 6 [0:28:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *You did not need to go travelling in order to do your job though, did you? Met work?*

Track 6 [0:28:35] Vicky Auld: No.

Track 6 [0:28:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was all based at the base?*

Track 6 [0:28:37] Vicky Auld: It was, although the met guys and some of the ionospheric scientists did have opportunities to travel in the summer when the scientists came down to visit. So there were certain summer projects that the scientists would need an assistant out in the field. Sometimes they were static, in a tent in one place, and occasionally they were travelling. If they were static they would often take a scientist with them; otherwise they would take GAs (Field GAs).

Track 6 [0:29:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Sorry?*

Track 6 [0:29:04] Vicky Auld: Field GAs. They would take the mountaineers basically, the mountain leaders with them as support, but occasionally if you did have a static site, you would get the wintering scientists going out and joining the guys from Cambridge for a week or two out in the field, so it was useful to have training already.

Track 6 [0:29:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *Those black and white photographs of former Fids on the wall. Most of them, for them, the Eldorado, the promised land was getting to the Shackleton Mountains, wasn't it? Was there any option for you to do that?*

Track 6 [0:29:34] Vicky Auld: There was. That was the highlight of my first trip South I think, was the chances a couple of times to sit in that co-pilot seat of a Twin Otter and fly around the Antarctic. That is special to anyone, I think, and I did get a chance to pick up some scientists from the Theron Mountains one season, and then in my middle season I had a day flying out to the Shackletons, picking up fuel drums. So we would fly into a fuel dump site, dig out the drums, lift them up for another year so they would sit on the surface and slowly get buried again for the next year. Move on from there to a science site, pick up people and kit and bring them back to base, so it was brilliant days out in the field doing that, and again the training that you have from your trips during the winter just make you feel more comfortable about going into those kind of remote areas.

Track 7 [0:30:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *I know because I have got the notes in front of me, that that was the beginning of a career, wasn't it, for you?*

Track 7 [0:30:39] Vicky Auld: A new career. Well it is only just starting really, but yes.

Track 7 [0:30:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *As a pilot?*

Track 7 [0:30:43] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 7 [0:30:43:] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. We might come to that later on. OK so you did your first year. Very successful. Everybody thought quite a lot of you really. So much so that you were then asked to be a base commander.*

Track 7 [0:30:53] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 7 [0:30:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *Much to perhaps your own surprise.*

Track 7 [0:30:56] Vicky Auld: Absolutely to my own surprise. There were only four of us staying on for a second winter so it was really limited for that post.

Track 7 [0:31:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was a winter base commander post?*

Track 7 [0:31:05] Vicky Auld: Yes. They like to have a second year winterer coming in as a base commander if they can. But I was still only 24 I think, maybe 25. So personally I felt that I was probably way too young to be doing it.

Track 7 [0:31:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have older people on base with you?*

Track 7 [0:31:24] Vicky Auld: Yes, I did actually. I mean one of the guys that came down, Dave Routledge, who is a GA, had already wintered many times before and has wintered many times since. [Transcriber comment. Before coming to Halley, Routledge had wintered twice before, at Rothera in 1991 and 1992. Andy Smith.] I think he was our oldest guy on station at the time and I do not remember how old he was, but significantly older than me. So it was quite a decision to make. It was not like I was going to jump and say 'Yes.' I was willing to do it but it was something that I was quite aware of. It was going to be quite tough I think.

Track 7 [0:31:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *With just four people it was still tough?*

Track 7 [0:31:58] Vicky Auld: Oh sorry, there were only four people staying on for a second winter.

Track 7 [0:32:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right.*

Track 7 [0:32:03] Vicky Auld: So it was basically a choice out of four of us I suppose, and certain jobs, things like the radio officer for instance, they do not often make radio officers BCs because they have got so much to do already. So there are only certain jobs where there is that capacity to be able to do more on top.

Track 7 [0:32:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how many people were under your commandership?*

Track 7 [0:32:21] Vicky Auld: There was sixteen again that winter, I think, yes.

Track 7 [0:32:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you cope?*

Track 7 [0:32:25] Vicky Auld: I had a lot of support. It took about a month and a half, in that winter, once we said goodbye to the ships, to feel comfortable in the role, but I did have a lot of support from friends and from the new winterers. I think it took while for everyone to get used to it, but eventually I felt quite comfortable and I am very grateful for the support that I got.

Track 7 [0:32:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *Does this mean you are down in history as the first female base commander?*

Track 7 [0:32:57] Vicky Auld: No. The first female winter base commander I think. There was a lady called Maggie Ayre who was the first female base commander I think. She did a season at Bird Island.

Track 7 [0:33:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *At that point did you have any sense of being a pioneer, for your gender?*

Track 7 [0:33:12] Vicky Auld: I was definitely aware at that point, yes, because quite a few people were telling me. 'You know you are the first female base commander, don't you?' So yes, I was aware at that point.

Track 7 [0:33:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So again, it was a good idea not to cock it up.*

Track 7 [0:33:25] Vicky Auld: Yes, I hope I did not, but it was a tough year. I think for a lot of people, the second winters are not as easy, for various reasons.

Track 7 [0:33:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *Because?*

Track 7 [0:33:37] Vicky Auld: Perhaps because the first years are always so fantastic. A lot of people have a great time in their first year South. In the second year you have kind of seen things before. You are seeing people make the same mistakes that you made the first year, and it is quite a long time to be away from home, plus some of your friends from the first year have left you. So you are with a new group of people, trying to resettle into a new group. So I think generally speaking, second years are tougher than first.

Track 7 [0:34:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *You have not got to answer this. Did your partner stay?*

Track 7 [0:34:14] Vicky Auld: No he did not.

Track 7 [0:34:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *So he came home*

Track 7 [0:34:16] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 7 [0:34:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was that?*

Track 7 [0:34:19] Vicky Auld: Very tough, but obviously in the long term things have worked out well for us. The original decision: we were both supposed to be wintering for two years but for various reasons he was not able to.

Track 7 [0:34:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you really were a bit exposed then, when you took over command and when that ship sailed away, tooted three times?*

Track 7 [0:34:39] Vicky Auld: Mm.

Track 7 [0:34:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *What sort of things were you having to do, as base commander in the winter. I mean the base is largely closed down, isn't it, in terms of operations?*

Track 7 [0:34:47] Vicky Auld: Yes well there are certain things you still have to prepare for in the winter, in terms of making sure you have got sufficient fuel above the ground, stored on sledges, to make sure that the fuel flubbers can stay full throughout the winter. It is all managed by people in their own roles, but you have just go to oversee and make sure that things happen at the right time of the year. So making sure the containers and the dump lines (where we keep all our extra kit) are all moved so that the snow drifts do not build up too much throughout the year behind them. So there is quite a lot of just base tasks that need groups of people, not just one person in their own field doing it, but they need some assistance from other people, so you just have to time that and make sure the right people are available at the right time.

Track 8 [0:35:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were administrating?*

Track 8 [0:35:37] Vicky Auld: Yes, very much so. But you had a lot of help from previous winter base commanders and from the base commander that had just left, the guy that had come down for the summer to oversee the summer management. They give you a good full season of training, so you know what you have got to do.

Track 8 [0:35:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you had quite a lot of warning did you? You knew well in advance you were going to be taking over?*

Track 8 [0:35:38] Vicky Auld: Yes, pretty much from the middle of the summer I guess, onwards we were training up.

Track 8 [0:36:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *Traditional Fid base managers would never ask anybody to do something they could not do themselves or were not prepared to do themselves. Were you able to follow that tradition, or did you have to...? Did you find yourself having to ask to do things you either would not or could not do yourself?*

Track 8 [0:36:20] Vicky Auld: I think I had participated in pretty much every base task in the first winter. Obviously when you are moving heavy fuel drums, sometimes you need two girls, sometimes you need a guy and a girl to do things, but certainly in terms of the strength that you need to do tasks, at that stage even then things were

becoming so mechanical, you had so much mechanical assistance, that there was really very little grafting in that respect.

Track 8 [0:36:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were able to say 'Do as I do.'*

Track 8 [0:36:55] Vicky Auld: To a certain extent, but then things like working some of the vehicles, for instance the cranes and some of the D4 bulldozers, only certain people are trained up to do certain jobs. For instance I could drive a bulldozer but I could not drive the cranes. Certain people were trained up for certain things, so you did not ever have to do everything at that stage. So yes, I was asking people to do things that I could not do, in that I was not able to operate the crane.

Track 8 [0:37:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yes, but they were not things you were not willing to do, physically. Technologically you could not do them.*

Track 8 [0:37:28] Vicky Auld: No no definitely. So far as I remember, I was willing to do absolutely anything.

Track 8 [0:37:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have to discipline anybody?*

Track 8 [0:37:35] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 8 [0:37:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *Is it something you can talk about, without naming?*

Track 8 [0:37:41] Vicky Auld: Probably not.

Track 8 [0:37:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. I will not ask you about the incident, but again that was a challenge to you wasn't it?*

Track 8 [0:37:46] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 8 [0:37:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how was that?*

Track 8 [0:37:47] Vicky Auld: Very much so. I do not really get angry and that was the first time I have actually had to think 'This person needs to listen. I need to make them listen.' Because they were not listening, it was actually quite tough for me. I actually was getting angry inside and that was quite unusual for me. Yes.

Track 8 [0:38:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you control your anger?*

Track 8 [0:38:09] Vicky Auld: I did, yes. It was the first time I have wanted to punch a wall! It is the only time in fact that I have wanted to punch a wall, but I didn't.

Track 8 [0:38:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there anybody you could talk to? Was there a deputy.*

Track 8 [0:38:23] Vicky Auld: There was, yes. In actual fact I just said to the chap at the time 'Come back when you can speak properly to me. We will deal with it then.' But yes, I had a great deputy: Steve Leighton who was a sparky (electrician) and he

had already wintered at Rothera. I guess he was a 'lad's lad' as well, so he could always deal with people in a completely different aspect, to the way I was trying to deal with them, as a winter BC.

Track 8 [0:38:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the one thing you could not do was lad-to-lad relations.*

Track 8 [0:38:54] Vicky Auld: Yes, that was kind of tough. [laughs]

Track 8 [0:38:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just backtracking slightly, had you actually had any man management training from BAS or anybody else?*

Track 8 [0:39:00] Vicky Auld: No, and that is something that has changed again these days. Guys that have been identified as winter BCs generally get some training before they go down. Certainly as BCs they get training before they go down.

Track 8 [0:39:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. Thank you for talking about that. That was fine. We have not finished yet though. So the time came for you to actually leave Halley. You did two winters, then you came back to Britain. Is that right.*

Track 8 [0:39:28] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 8 [0:39:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *To settle down and never go South again?*

Track 8 [0:39:32] Vicky Auld: Well when I was watching the ice shelf go past in the distance, as we were leaving Halley, I was thinking 'I wonder if I will ever see this again.' At the time I think I probably accepted that I would not. But even when I got back to the UK (we sailed all the way back to the UK), by the time I got back to the UK I was already thinking 'Is there a way, in the future, to get back?' But I felt that that was enough at the time – that I should probably go and try and have a career perhaps in the scientific discipline that I had trained in already. So that was my intention when I came back.

Track 9 [0:40:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what went wrong with the master plan?*

Track 9 [0:40:15] Vicky Auld: Well I actually had a job up here in the Lakes, as an environmental scientist for a few years, using my Met background looking at basically modelling and monitoring of pollution emissions from factories and suchlike, which was quite interesting. From a scientific point of view it was great, and living in the Lakes was lovely; you could get out and go climbing in the evenings. Not helped by my partner still going South every year, so there was always this urge to think 'Well, I would really like to do that again.' Eventually, after three or four years back in England I just thought 'Well OK, this BC job at KEP is...' Basically Les Whittamore, who is the base commander for KEP and Bird Island, had phoned me up a couple of times just to see if I was still interested in going South. For a couple of years I had been saying 'N o no. Keep phoning but not this year.' Eventually it was 'Well OK, it is time to go back.'

Track 9 [0:41:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So can you put your finger on what it was that turned the corner for you, and changed your view from 'No I won't.' to 'Yes I will.'?*

Track 9 [0:41:29] Vicky Auld: I think perhaps I felt that I had given the current job I was in sufficient time for me to grow and develop within it, and even though I enjoyed it, it was nothing like the time that I had had working down in the Antarctic. I think that recognising that made me decide 'Well, while I can, I would like to go back.' There was nothing more major than that, I do not think, just slow realisation.

Track 9 [0:41:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have to apply, or were you hand-picked?*

Track 9 [0:42:00] Vicky Auld: No, I had a phone interview for the KEP BC post, so I presume there were 4 or 5 of us interviewed for the same post. That is the normal routine.

Track 9 [0:42:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you surprised when you got the positive response?*

Track 9 [0:42:14] Vicky Auld: Was I surprised? I was pleased, but I was hopeful because I had had these phone calls every year or so.

Track 9 [0:42:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Yes. You were being groomed.*

Track 9 [0:42:24] Vicky Auld: I was hoping that they were still willing to take me, even though I had been away for three or four years, which is probably the limit before people feel like you have lost touch with the system that is currently working down there.

Track 9 [0:42:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *You drop off the radar after a few years?*

Track 9 [0:42:37] Vicky Auld: A little bit, yes, I think so.

Track 9 [0:42:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was it like? Obviously you were not going to be as far south as you had previously, and perhaps the ice was not quite as thick?*

Track 9 [0:42:45] Vicky Auld: No certainly not, but there were lots of mountains.

Track 9 [0:42:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me about South Georgia.*

Track 9 [0:42:49] Vicky Auld: Oh, magical beautiful place. I had never seen mountains like that before, and I think a certain appeal for me was also that it was actually quite normal, which might sound a bit strange. But compared to the isolation and remoteness of Halley, the community that were living in South Georgia (it was not just BAS guys); so there was a BAS team of nine of us, but there were also two couples, and then in the summer months there was the Morrison construction team coming in to clean up the Grytviken whaling station. So it was like a little community, and to me that seemed much more normal living circumstances than the challenges of living with one small group at Halley. So that was very different for me and the fact that you can get up in the mountains and have a walk and ski every day, that was fantastic.

Track 9 [0:43:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *And again you were base commander at South Georgia?*

Track 9 [0:43:43] Vicky Auld: I was, yes.

Track 9 [0:43:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *For the year, or for the summer?*

Track 9 [0:43:44] Vicky Auld: Well they only have one base commander. You are basically based down there for the full year, as a base commander. Yes so you are winter and summer base commander.

Track 9 [0:43:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was it, being a base commander all the time?*

Track 9 [0:43:59] Vicky Auld: Quite, yes that was fine. I did not find that a problem. I guess I had matured a fair bit more at that stage, and I knew what I was letting myself in for. It was a great job; I really enjoyed it.

Track 9 [0:44:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So was your Met work still pertinent at that point, or were you now doing something different?*

Track 9 [0:44:20] Vicky Auld: No, it was a base commander role, so you were fully established in the management roles really. To a certain extent: we did have some met equipment, and no metman specifically there. But the met equipment was all pretty much automatic, so occasionally we would try and fix things when they went wrong. But beyond that, it was more assisting with the comms, because we did not have a comms manager, so trying to keep the IT side of things up and running, and the radio side of things. That was the added-on role to the management role. And a lot of boating; that was the new experience for me. I had done a little bit of sailing when I was a kid but I got a chance to go and work with the RIBs when we were out there, so did a lot of work on a boat.

Track 10 [0:45:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *The RIBs?*

Track 10 [0:45:06] Vicky Auld: Yes they are 5½ metre rigid inflatable boats.

Track 10 [0:45:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that boating with a purpose or was that again recreational?*

Track 10 [0:45:13] Vicky Auld: Both. The boats were there for business, basically. So we were taking the Fisheries Officer effectively, over to the fishing ships for inspections and release, so that the fishing ships could then go and fish in the local waters. They were not using their own small boats so we would take the Fisheries Officer from the base to the ships. We did have Boating Officers down there but obviously they needed crew and so every one on base was trained up to crew for the boats and a few extra helm guys were trained up as well.

Track 10 [0:45:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *And then you went, for three summers, to Bird Island as base commander?*

Track 10 [0:45:55] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 10 [0:45:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *That was five base commander posts?*

Track 10 [0:45:59] Vicky Auld: I guess, yes.

Track 10 [0:46:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *One at Halley, one at South Georgia and three at Bird Island.*

Track 10 [0:46:03] Vicky Auld: Yes. That was when I started coming back to the UK for the UK summers, analysing the last season and planning for the next season, and going down there for the southern hemisphere summers.

Track 10 [0:46:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were being employed by BAS 12 months a year by that time? Working at Cambridge?*

Track 10 [0:46:20] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 10 [0:46:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK. Tell me about Bird Island. What sort of things were you doing there? I know this is just a thumbnail sketch, but... What stands out?*

Track 10 [0:46:27] Vicky Auld: To me it was like Jurassic Park. If South Georgia was like: what's that film from *The Hobbit*?

Track 10 [0:46:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *Lord of the Rings?*

Track 10 [0:46:38] Vicky Auld: *Lord of the Rings*, yes. The scenery at South Georgia was kind of *Lord of the Rings* territory, whereas when you went to Bird Island, suddenly you had got these strange animals everywhere and it was full of green mosses and ferns and tussock grass.

Track 10 [0:46:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *Primeval?*

Track 10 [0:46:53] Vicky Auld: Yes, it was a very strange place, initially, because I had no background in biology at all, and I was surrounded by zoologists whose every waking hour was involved working with animals, which was very very new to me. But they obviously loved this place and you could see that everyone created a very special bond with the Island and anyone who spent any time there creates, I think, exactly that bond. What an opportunity! Someone who never had: not in interest in animals (I have always wanted pets but I never actually had any when I was a kid), to suddenly be involved helping scientists every day, walking round albatross and fur seal colonies is quite amazing. It really is quite mind-blowing the first few times and then suddenly you start getting used to it, after a couple of seasons. I do not think you ever take that place for granted. But everyone you talk to I am sure, who has been to Bird Island, will remember it as a very spectacular place.

Track 10 [0:47:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *Because you have such a long career with BAS, we have to go on. In 2006 you were, if you like, deputy manager or deputy base commander at Rothera.*

Track 10 [0:48:07] Vicky Auld: Station Support Manager, yes.

Track 10 [0:48:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *Am I right that that is kind of vaguely deputy?*

Track 10 [0:48:11] Vicky Auld: There are a few different managers under the base commander, so we all run different areas.

Track 10 [0:48:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *All of them deputies?*

Track 10 [0:48:17] Vicky Auld: Yes.

Track 10 [0:48:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was that?*

Track 10 [0:48:18] Vicky Auld: Quite an easy season.

Track 10 [0:48:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *How dare you?*

Track 10 [0:48:25] Vicky Auld: Sounds a bit cheeky but [laughs] I think, in a way, I was hoping for the Halley BC in the future so this was a perfect growth season for me, because I had only been managing a small base mostly full of scientists who I felt quite an affinity with. To move into a big base like Rothera, I got a chance to see how a big base manager was running their base as well. So that was quite a good opportunity. In terms of the job itself, it was very much admin, which was relatively easy at that stage, so another opportunity to go and sit in the co-pilot seat that season and that was when I started thinking in the long term 'This could really be something I would like to do in the future.' Long term future. But yes, it was a great season; I enjoyed it. It was quite different from the other bases because of the large community. In summer you have got over 100 people there.

Track 10 [0:49:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *So was it in fact, instead of being one community, was it several communities in the same building?*

Track 10 [0:49:32] Vicky Auld: Definitely, yes. I did see that quite a lot, particularly in the science community, were quite strong there, and maybe the summering construction teams were usually quite a tight-knit bunch. But everyone seemed to merge quite well. There were a lot of well-organised night social events. There was a great band on station for the season, so we had a couple of really good band nights, and they had a thing called the Folk Night where everyone does lots of different sketches. Absolutely hysterical night. I have got very fond memories of the social events from that season.

Track 11 [0:50:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *I presume you were watching the then base commander a bit like a hawk, trying to pick up tips? What were you learning about your future responsibilities as a base commander?*

Track 11 [0:50:25] Vicky Auld: How to be calm. It was Steve Hinde who was the base commander at the time down there. I think he had only done a couple of seasons at that stage, but he had obviously already earned the respect of everyone, and listened to everyone. So during his weekly meetings with other managers, he would make sure

that he was aware of what everyone else was wanting to say or what they thought the issues of the week were. So yes, it was a great opportunity to learn from him.

Track 11 [0:50:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which came in handy when you went back to Halley?*

Track 11 [0:50:59] Vicky Auld: Mm.

Track 11 [0:51:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *And you did two summers at Halley.*

Track 11 [0:51:01] Vicky Auld: Oh just one. It was one summer: '07/'08.

Track 11 [0:51:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh, right.*

Track 11 [0:51:05] Vicky Auld: The first construction season, yes definitely the first.

Track 11 [0:51:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *This was the new build, the one that is still going on?*

Track 11 [0:51:10] Vicky Auld: Yes. I came back to the UK and almost immediately moved into that role really.

Track 11 [0:51:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you know that was going to happen.*

Track 11 [0:51:18] Vicky Auld: No no I didn't, no. I think I was hoping it would but it was only two or three months, 3 months maybe, before we went South that season that I started moving into that role, over that summer, starting to meet all the construction team managers that were involved in the Halley VI Project – managers from BAS. So everything was already rolling by the time I got involved, and it was purely taking over the role from Pat McGoldrick who was the Halley BC before me, in the last few months. Exciting times.

Track 11 [0:51:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *By this time was the fact that you were a woman completely irrelevant?*

Track 11 [0:51:59] Vicky Auld: I felt it was. I am not sure if everyone else did. But yes, I think that throughout the career with BAS I have been quite lucky in that I have never had anyone make it obvious to me that there's any issues there.

Track 11 [0:52:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *Great. So tell me about this. I mean building a new base, even in the old days, was a pretty hectic experience and building a new hi-tech base at Halley which is hopefully the 'base to end all bases' which would not be sunk under the snow in ten weeks, ten years...?*

Track 11 [0:52:31] Vicky Auld: Well it was exciting. I do not know if you have seen the Halley VI video?

Track 11 [0:52:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *I have seen the model at BAS.*

Track 11 [0:52:36] Vicky Auld: The model, yes.

Track 11 [0:52:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *But the listeners may not have done, so please do describe it.*

Track 11 [0:52:41] Vicky Auld: It is a very iconic building that they are aiming for, with a completely new design. So it is seven capsules and a main capsule (for living accommodation), built on skis, with hydraulic legs. The idea is that you can actually move this in the future, inland, as the ice shelf starts moving out; you can re-position the base in the future, which is completely novel. It looks very modern, and it is a massive project.

Track 11 [0:53:09] Vicky Auld: I think the main difference of the Halley VI project from previous Halley builds is that... I am not aware exactly of the number of management that was involved with the previous builds, but certainly when I moved into the Base Commander role, I think perhaps the base commander plays a different role these days than it did in the past, in that you have a Halley VI project team, you have a construction (sub-contractors, basically) management team, you have a logistics manager for the base, and you have obviously got your flight ops and operations managers. So there is a massive structure of management that have been involved with this project for years before I got involved with it. I was very much coming into it at the last minute. But it felt very exciting and everyone was excited by the fact that this was going to be a big year. Even before we got down, we knew we were not going to be taking the whole structure down that year. It was purely a first-start trial in a way, the first couple of modules up and built, and see how they fared over a winter. So that was it: exciting times.

Track 11 [0:54:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *But as the base commander, how much did you have to do with the new building, because in fact all that was being done by people who again had expert knowledge beyond your remit.*

Track 11 [0:54:24] Vicky Auld: Yes, I think in terms of actually the structure of the building, not a great deal, but what the involvement was, was making sure that the current base ran as it should. That the science as much as we were still trying to achieve was being achieved. That everyone was getting fed and watered. I mean it sounds basic but that everyone had a bed for the night and they are getting fed and watered, and making sure that there are not any massive problems between the different teams, because I think there was quite high potential, and there had been problems in the past with construction teams coming in. We had guys from South Africa, 40-odd people from South Africa who had never been South before, coming in to help with the Morrison team. I think it was mostly trying to make sure that everyone gelled to achieve the maximum that we could from the season.

Track 12 [0:55:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you had over 100 people in your consciousness?*

Track 12 [0:55:18] Vicky Auld: We did, yes.

Track 12 [0:55:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *You did, as base commander?*

Track 12 [0:55:22] Vicky Auld: Yes. But I think even then, every night there were 6 or 7 of us, sitting at a management table, trying to decide what needed to be done the next day: who needed which vehicles, who needed assistance from other people. So it was a big team effort, and it certainly felt like that all the way through the season.

Track 12 [0:55:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you get much time off?*

Track 12 [0:55:44] Vicky Auld: Not in that season, no. Actually in fact as a base commander you do not really get a lot of time off. I remember at Bird Island particularly, time off was when you were going to help the scientists. You have got to walk up the hill and a chance to look at the animals. That was what I considered time off. That last season at Halley I got two days off that I remember, where I actually got out in the field. Not just for the management, for everyone it was a very tough working season. We were still working 12 hours a day, with a few hours either side just to... as required, when people have questions to ask you at the end of the day.

Track 12 [0:56:29] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why did you not go back in 2008/9?*

Track 12 [0:56:33] Vicky Auld: Because I think at that stage I had decided that I wanted to fly. The last couple of summers before that I had been doing a Private Pilot Licence, and it suddenly seemed an achievable thing to do, that I could actually go and get a Commercial Licence. It was a tough decision this, especially having joined the Halley VI project effectively.

Track 12 [0:57:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which was wasn't finished?*

Track 12 [0:57:04] Vicky Auld: No, and I could see that that was going to take another 3 or 4 years. So I should either leave then or finish the project, rather than staying halfway through. Even though I am still interested in how it is going now, I have made the decision and I have jumped ship, so to speak, and moved on.

Track 12 [0:57:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what is the next episode in your life?*

Track 12 [0:57:26] Vicky Auld: Well I have qualified now as a commercial pilot. It is two years since I left BAS. I have just got my first flying job, so hopefully, next week I will be taking passengers for the first time.

Track 12 [0:57:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *With who?*

Track 12 [0:57:38] Vicky Auld: With FlyBe.

Track 12 [0:57:39] Chris Eldon Lee: *From where to where?*

Track 12 [0:57:40] Vicky Auld: My first flight is Manchester to Belfast and back.

Track 12 [0:57:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *With a co-pilot?*

Track 12 [0:57:46] Vicky Auld: As a co-pilot. Oh yes, you spend 4 or 5 years sitting in the co-pilot's seat before you become a captain.

Track 12 [0:57:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *You are going to have to wear a uniform, Vicky.*

Track 12 [0:57:53] Vicky Auld: And ironed shirts [laughs]. Not a very BAS thing to do, ironing your uniform before you go to work. Yes, it is quite a different life.

Track 12 [0:58:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *You have been chatting to the veteran Fids here this weekend, and we both realise how loyal they felt towards FIDS. There was a great sense of... Because of the conditions they were working in or wintering, they were out of touch with the rest of the world and they were pioneering. There was a great sense of loyalty to each other and to FIDS as an organisation. Was that the case with you and BAS?*

Track 12 [0:58:26] Vicky Auld: The loyalty? Absolutely. Yes, it was very hard to leave when I did, because I felt like I was letting them down, having thought that I would be doing the Halley VI project for a few years. It definitely felt that I was letting them down, but then you do recognise there are always people that feel the same loyalty that you do, that are just waiting to have the chance to do the same thing that you have done. I do not think they are ever struggling for people to work for them in the long term. It is something that once you have had that chance to winter, I think a lot of people might feel that they would like to give back something to BAS as a whole. Certainly the way that I felt, it was, particularly in the Girton conference, you felt like you were trying to instil the same excitement that you had, when you first went down. When you are working as a base commander, you get that opportunity: to describe a base in 5 minutes, or 10 minutes, or however long you have, and just try and get people excited about what is coming up for them. So yes, there is definitely a loyalty there.

Track 12 [0:59:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *Good luck with the new career.*

Track 12 [0:59:45] Vicky Auld: Thank you very much.

Track 12 [0:59:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Try not to turn the plane south by mistake. Vicky, thank you.*

Track 12 [0:59:50] Vicky Auld: Thank you very much.

Track 12 [0:59:51] ENDS

Snippets:

- BAS wintering posts closed to women. Track 1 [0:02:53]
- Excitement at being at Halley. Track 3 [0:10:53]
- First women winterers at Halley. Track 3 [0:12:42]
- The value of old data. Track 5 [0:20:15]
- Changes in Antarctic communications. Track 5 [0:21:13]
- Field trips. Track 5 [0:23:47]
- Co-pilot in a Twin Otter. Track 6 [0:29:34]
- First female wintering BC. Track 7 [0:32:53]
- The appeal of South Georgia. Track 9 [0:42:49]
- Working with animals at Bird Island. Track 10 [0:46:38]
- The Halley VI project. Track 11 [0:52:41]
- Loyalty to BAS. Track 12 [0:58:03]