PETER GIBBS

Edited transcript of a recording of Peter Gibbs interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 19th June 2011. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/127. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 24th December 2013.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Peter Gibbs, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 19th of June 2011. Peter Gibbs.

Gibbs: Peter Gibbs, and I was born in what was Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, Salisbury after which we moved to Bulawayo, and that was on the 30th of September 1934. We then moved down to the Cape. I was schooled in Cape Town, didn't come to UK until 1953 to university (Oxford).

[0:00:40] Lee: Would you say your parents were professional class, or …

Gibbs: Very professional class. My father was in the Church and he was quite senior in the Church. He was Dean of Cape Town and then they came to UK. He was to be Dean of Chester, so Chester was our base during the time I was …, the last two years of my Oxford time, and I didn't see a lot of them because directly after Oxford I got myself recruited to go down South.

[0:01:10] Lee: What did you read at Oxford?

Gibbs: I read geography then. Oxford wasn't quite as up to date as Cambridge in Modern Geography; it was more historical. But I also did glaciology which interested me very much, and I had a very good tutor called Marjorie Sweeting. And I did of course go to university 10 years after that, to specialise in surveying: University College, London, in which I did a diploma.

[0:01:43] Lee: Was that before or after the Antarctic?

Gibbs: That was after the Antarctic. That was 10 years later, although I didn't do much surveying, theoretical surveying. In those days Colonel Denis Wiggins of the DOS would give you some practical tips on plane tabling and there was another excellent Polish man who was a surveyor but who knew a lot about field astronomy. He gave us an impromptu course on observing stars, and Alfred Stephenson who was Antarctic 1936 I think (BGLE[1]), he was available to give us some practical tips also, and to look, usually unsuccessfully, for a clear night sky, when we could practise observing some stars.

[0:02:43] Lee: What are you memories of 'Steve' (as he was nicknamed)?

Gibbs: He was a wonderful chap. We corresponded a lot. Steve, a very dry sense of humour, imperturbable fellow and of course I have the books, quite a few polar books. So I have fond memories of Steve, yes.

[1] British Graham Land Expedition.

[0:03:03] Lee: What was your first awareness of the place called the Antarctic, actually existed?

Gibbs: I was aware very young. We had in our home various books, particularly Apsley Cherry-Garrard's stories of the Scott expedition. That was my mother's but we had other books too, and we collected quite a few: we had a lot of books in the house. So I was very keen to get recruited and to go down South and experience this myself.

[0:03:43] Lee: So was this a desire you had since boyhood?

Gibbs: Yes, indeed it was. Probably from the early teens, I would say. As a teenager I did quite a bit of exploration, and as soon as I left school, a colleague and I did the first navigation of the Orange River, from source to mouth, which was quite a long, four month trip.

[0:04:06] Lee: Where is that?

Gibbs: That's South Africa. You start at Mont-aux-Sources in Basutoland and you finish at Alexander Bay on what is called the Diamond Coast, and it includes some fine and spectacular sights like the Augrabies Falls, one of the highest in the world, about five hundred and something feet[2], and a spectacular canyon in granite, below the falls. So it is a little-known area there because there's not much population around the area of the lower Orange River. But I was always keen to explore, and that was one of the trips we did. Fortunately we had time between finishing school and going to Oxford.

[0:04:52] Lee: Where do you think the explorer streak came from in the family?

Gibbs: That is difficult to say but we were always innovative sort of people, but I can't say that there was a famous explorer in our ancestors. They were either bankers or (my side of the family) in the Church, and we don't have any famous – or notorious – explorers to …

[0:05:30] Lee: So what was it about the Antarctic that made you so determined to get there? Was it the heroic stories?

Gibbs: Yes, well I mean the whole experience I think. It is an amazing continent, to see and actually to undertake some journeys. Also at that time, of course, dogs were the transport and at my interview Bill Sloman was in the FIDS office and he was interviewing me, and he said 'How do you get on with dogs?' And I said 'Absolutely fine. We have a bull terrier, and I have had several bull terriers,' I said 'and I look forward to getting on with dogs and seeing if I can get them to pull a sledge.' So that was perhaps a point in my favour, for successfully being recruited. I hadn't got any surveying qualifications, but they did obviously see a way, by getting Colonel Denis Wiggins to give me some tips in surveying, and sending me on a short course to Ascot where Steve gave some instructions to two or three of us. But as I say, I had always been extremely keen to visit the Antarctic and to travel there.

[2] 183 ft according to Wikipedia.

[0:07:02] Lee: How did you get down there? What was the routine in those days?

Gibbs: Well *John Biscoe* had only just been launched[3] and so it was the maiden voyage of the *John Biscoe*.

[0:07:12] Lee: This was the new metal version?

Gibbs: Yes, not the old *John Biscoe*, previously the wooden *John Biscoe* served in the … No, this was the new *John Biscoe*. Has it been replaced now? I can't remember.

[0:07:25] Lee: No. It ended its days as a tramp steamer in the Mediterranean somewhere.

Gibbs: Really? Well that would have been 55 or so years ago, and so we were on the maiden voyage, and we were recruited as supernumeraries. Captain Bill Johnston, he was the skipper, and we had to holystone the decks and complete some of the painting of the ship that …

[0:08:02] Lee: Oh it wasn't quite finished?

Gibbs: [laughs] Well it might have just been to keep us occupied and out of mischief. It was something like a 2-3 week voyage, with a break at Montevideo for one rather riotous night, and then on to Port Stanley.

[0:08;22] Lee: Do you remember any teething troubles with the ship?

Gibbs: No, the *John Biscoe* seemed OK. It was the *Shackleton*, I think, that had some fairly major troubles. No, we didn't have any problems with *John Biscoe*, no.

[0:8:39] Lee: So you arrived in Stanley at the turn of 1957?

Gibbs: Yes, it would have been so, yes.

[0:08:46] Lee: What are your memories of Stanley, all those years ago?

Gibbs: Most hospitable people, small community. Everybody knew each other, and very generous, kind, nice, welcoming people. I don't think we took advantage of anyone but I do remember Doctor Slessor, who had been in the Antarctic ten years previously, and visiting him. He was … We went to tea there and sounded him out on Stonington Island and his memory of it, and we had some great walks, We also had a long weekend when three of us, including Dr Henry Wyatt who was coming down, …. We got on very well. Well we went to have a picnic, over two nights I think. The bosun of the ship, using the ship's motor boat, took us across to a place called Sparrow Cove, where indeed the *Great Britain* (now restored here in Bristol) was a hulk. Well it wasn't in Sparrow Cove quite, but not far from there, was it? It was there, yes. Yes, it was in Sparrow Cove, and we managed to build a bit of a Robinson Crusoe raft, and get across and get on board.

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[3] 1956.

[0:10:15] Lee: Really? What condition was it in?

Gibbs: Well it was in a pretty messed up condition of course. It had been lying there for some time, since it failed to round the Horn, I believe.

[0:10:27] Lee: Is there a family connection between the Gibbs and the *Great Britain*?

Gibbs: Well, I didn't know that at the time, but there is. A twice great uncle, William Gibbs, made a lot of money out of shipping guano off the South American islands, and he did in fact own the *Great Britain*. That was only one of his ships, or the major ship; he used that. It was mentioned in the talk last night[4], not his name but the fact that it was used for shipping guano, I think. I wasn't aware of that and it was very exciting to discover later on that this amazing ship had been in the family, as it were.

[0:11:17] Lee: Catch up with your story about the picnic.

Gibbs: The picnic? Well it was a great event. We were very naughty young lads of course and we had borrowed a .22 from somebody aboard the ship. I'm sure that was highly illegal. We shot some duck and had great fun cooking them over a fire, and to our great surprise …Well the *HMS Protector* was in Stanley then and some officers flew over in a helicopter, landed on our beach and (I don't know why they chose me) landed and asked me for my permission if they could shoot hares on my land. [laughs] I will never forget how amusing that was.

[0:12:12] Lee: Was it granted?

Gibbs: Yes. We kept up the pretence and then gave permission. They must have thought we as landowners were living as peasants, but still they did indeed. I didn't quite go along with the shooting of hares from a helicopter, being rather …

[0:12:29] Lee: Unsporting?

Gibbs: Although I must say in those days, thinking later of killing of seals for dogs, we were not very animal-friendly minded. But they did, they went off and shot hares. And then, feeling in need of a bit of exercise, I decided to walk back from there to Stanley, which was I suppose about 20 miles right round the estuary. I hadn't reckoned on the fact that coming into the estuary were one if not two rivers which had to be quite forcefully swum. However I got across and finished the walk about just after dark. Angus Erskine, Lieutenant, was going down for one year and I remember he and I joined together for a fairly late dinner that night, after I had dried out. But it was great fun. I enjoyed Stanley and I very much enjoyed the people. I thought it was a grand place. It lacked trees but the people and the moorland rather like the north west of Scotland had its attractions, I must say.

[0:13:52] Lee: Had you always known you were going to go to Horseshoe? Was that part of the plan?

[4] Given on board the *Great Britain* at the 2011 BAS Club Reunion in Bristol.

Gibbs: No, I think that was … Yes it was divulged later because before we went South, Petra Searle whom I saw again last night at that reception, after many years, she was in charge of mapping for the Antarctic sector of the Directorate of Overseas Surveys. She told me, or anyway I was advised that it was to be Horseshoe Island. In actual fact, although that was the base, the *John Biscoe* landed three of us at the new refuge called Blaiklock Island, a new refuge hut.

[0:14:40] Lee: That was there before you arrived, was it?

Gibbs: No, it wasn't. We built it. We had some very good carpenters on board and within a few hours that hut had been built, a couple of hawsers slung over, and they were very competent people. So while we knocked in a few nails, the real building job was left to experts and they put it up in very quick time. And while that was being done, thanks to Bill Johnston's cooperation, the motor boats dropped a couple of depots for us, one up at the Jones Ice Shelf about 8 miles from that refuge hut, which linked the island to the mainland which used to be called the Brind Peninsula; it's changed I think to Arrowsmith now, isn't it? And also another one on some little islands called Pyrox Islands at the foot of the Neny Glacier, the other direction to Stonington. So we had these two depots there which helped us later on, and I had a good ski run back to Blaiklock hut from the Jones Ice Shelf. So I got to know the island a little better on that very first or second day.

[0:16:16] Lee: Was it at Horseshoe that you got to know John Rothera?

Gibbs: Yes, John Rothera was one of the three of us. There was John Rothera, Nigel Proctor and I. We were left at the refuge hut, so we weren't left at the main base, Horseshoe Island, because the idea was: we could then get on with manhaul exploration and work, geology and surveying, several months in advance of sea ice forming in the fjord. So that's what we did and my goodness, we did appreciate those early manhaul tales of the Heroic Era, when trying to pull your supplies for two or three weeks.

[0:17:11] Lee: So it wasn't a 'stroll in the park', then?

Gibbs: [laughs] Well at times it was of course. You had breathers and … The amazing thing about the Antarctic is that although the average temperature is always below freezing, if you get into a place with no wind and the sun in your face, you can really relax – wonderful experience.

[0:17:34] Lee: You were putting in control lines with John Rothera?

Gibbs: Yes, we were indeed. Triangulation was then the 'in thing' because long distance measuring, electronic distance measuring hadn't been invented yet. So we were doing triangulation and that did involve a bit of minor mountaineering, building your cairns and testing inter-visibility which you could usually do quite easily because of the clear atmosphere. You could usually see whether something was going to go through or not. But many of those first survey stations were extremely exposed places, tops of small peaks going up to about 3000[5]. One was up near 5000 actually I

[5] Feet of course.

think, quite high. But the wind would get up and, my goodness, if you weren't taking exercise (you were observing), you could soon start uncontrollable shivering and it was quite difficult. So we usually used to … After having completed an observation, we would get warm running down these mountains.

[0:18:52] Lee: What can you tell me about John Rothera? I haven't really met many people who knew him.

Gibbs: Well you know I am not sure. He has gone out of circulation but he was a Yorkshireman, very pleasant, great sense of humour – somewhat reserved sense of humour, but he loved things like … if you remember the Goon Show, and he was a very pleasant chap indeed. Strong, not very tall (maybe 5 ft 7″ or so), and we three did get on very well. We had many great laughs. I always had the impression that he wasn't too happy under conditions of duress, but he was a strong chap and he did extremely well.

[0:19:52] Lee: Were you surprised when BAS chose to name their new research station after him?

Gibbs: Oh yes, I think that was fantastic because, you see, John Rothera had surveyed down that fjord, was that Bourgeois[6]? Anyhow the fjord between Pourquoi Pas and Adelaide Island. I hope it's still called Adelaide; these names change. But he had done the surveying. He had run a …, some sort of control down there. We did control with field astronomy. He had taken some shots there, and various intersections and so on. So as Rothera base was chosen down that coast, I think it's situated not right down the southern tip, but we ourselves had travelled down to that southern tip, the Avian Islands, I remember, I am very pleased that he got that … that the name was chosen, yes I do.

[0:21:02] Lee: Your second season you were transferred to Stonington, and you were appointed base leader?

Gibbs: Yes, that's right.

[0:21:12] Lee: And you were re-opening Stonington?

Gibbs: Well we were. Stonington had been evacuated about ten years previously.

[0:21:18] Lee: What was the thinking behind re-establishing it?

Gibbs: Well because Horseshoe Island was often … Derek Searle had been in charge of Horseshoe Island two years previously, who was coming out when we went in, had been very frustrated because the sea ice wasn't good enough to travel down the coast. So his two years were really confined to the island. He did a magnificent map of the island, detailed, so it wasn't time wasted. But I know he did, he was very anxious to have done more major journeys. Stonington of course was linked to the Northeast Glacier and a tiny island which is no longer. I have heard that the glacier has retreated. But you could use that glacier then and get inland up onto the plateau and

[6] Bigourdan Fjord?

travel north or south or over to the east coast, and that's in fact what we did. But luckily enough too, we also had very good sea ice so we could not only … Well we got up onto the plateau directly, within a couple of weeks of getting to Stonington, and did a bit of reconnaissance and I found a route that went down to the col of the Leaning Glacier, the little side glacier which was navigable and perfectly safe, and that was a major discovery on that autumn journey towards Midwinter. So we were then able to plan some summer journeys that came back via that route, to get back to Stonington. So it was fortuitous and a happy event.

[0:23:16] Lee: The base, when you reopened it, was rather iced up, I seem to …

Gibbs: Yes, it was. Freeze and thaw had left up to 2 feet of ice, and you had this experience of walking into the main living room, bumping your head on the ceiling and the chairs with ice up to the level of the seats, almost. So we had an awful lot of ice-axing to do, but having lit a very warm stove, which the American expedition under Finn Ronne had left behind, a pot-bellied stove, the heat inside the hut built up and everything got very wet, and remained wet of course. We could never get the water below the floorboards much. The floors were always rather damp because the snow and ice went up to the level of the windows outside. The hut had been totally covered in snow.

[0:24:17] Lee: Were you not digging drainage ditches?

Gibbs: We did, yes. We did. We needed to, to try and alleviate that problem. There was a bit of slope and that's one of the first things we did. Having got all the ice out, we discovered that as it thawed, with that Föhn wind that would come down the glacier, it all melted and water would start seeping in again. But we did, certainly before long it was very habitable and a very cosy place.

[0:24:49] Lee: I would like to talk to you a bit about the three men who were lost on the ice, if you are agreeable, and your part in the attempts to find them again. This was in June '58 and you were out sledging when news reached you that Geoff Stride, Dave Statham and Stan Black had gone missing.

Gibbs: Yes, that's right.

[0:25:08] Lee: What are your memories of that?

Gibbs: Well indeed, I have fairly clear memories of that. We were right up on the plateau at the time when the news came through, so there wasn't anything we could immediately do to help. But within a week or so, we were back at base. We still couldn't do very much practically because there was a skirt of ice but you couldn't get up to Horseshoe Island from Stonington for another – I can't remember how long – maybe another ten days. We listened eagerly into the calling, radio communication, but there was no answer and when the ice did enable us to get up – perhaps it was two to three weeks, I can't remember how long it was (I would have to look that up) – but we got up to Horseshoe and then I could have long discussions with John Paisley, the leader at Horseshoe, whose men had gone off and lost. Now they had two teams of dogs at Horseshoe, the main other 45 dogs or so had come down with us to Stonington to make up four teams. But all these dogs had gone off and the interesting

thing was that even two to three weeks after this sad event, dogs were beginning to reappear, and on the way up to Horseshoe, when the ice was good enough to make that journey, we picked up two dogs who were stray. There was also another one or two (I can't remember) at the Argentinian base on the way up, and in dribs and drabs 10 of the 14 missing dogs all made their own way back, which was quite miraculous and wonderful.

[0:27:16] Lee: On that point, some of them seem to have had their traces cut, with a knife?

Gibbs: Yes. It did look as if, in the desperate circumstances of a sinking sledge through thin ice or something, one of the drivers had seen the dogs hopelessly floundering around and had managed to get out a knife and cut. There was no firm evidence as to quite which it was, but certainly they had … I think others had been chewed and some had been cut. We did write up a report on all this but whether there was any clear conclusion, I can't say, but as soon as there was enough ice, Chris, we … I know that SecFids …

[0:28:18] Lee: John Green?

Gibbs: John Green, thanks, was against this and the Governor was against this but we rather pushed the issue. As soon as there was thin ice, we were off searching.

[0:28:30] Lee: At that point, thinking back to that decision to go, to look for the men, were you actually expecting that they might still be alive, or had you …?

Gibbs: Yes, well we thought they could be, you see.

[0:28:43] Lee: There was a genuine hope that something had happened that would save them?

Gibbs: Oh yes, very much so. Of course I have thought on that quite a lot since, because our search journeys … The general direction of the storms would have been down towards the Dion and the Faure Islands in Marguerite Bay and we thought that had they made a landfall there, they wouldn't have had any means to communicate. Radio, never very reliable anyhow, the old '68' sets, I think they were, and things. But sometimes they didn't work too well even when a party went … and the conditions were often, you know your signals were blocked by mountains and so on. But we hadn't heard, but nevertheless we did have hopes that we would find them.

[0:29:45] Lee: Talk me through what you remember of that discussion with John Paisley about what to do, because you were both flying in the face of authority, in doing what you did.

Gibbs: We were, I suppose, but we did decide that anyhow, even if the decision was not to go, too risky, that we would do so and that was very naughty I know. But under the circumstances there, the authorities couldn't do anything about it.

[0:30:12] Lee: This was the 'captain going down with the ship' theory, that the base leader has to care for his men?

Gibbs: You could say that, but we were both very keen to try and rescue these people. It could have been … It was winter of course. Conditions can be very cold, and if you have got wet, and if you can't light a primus, you have very few days. It was just too hard, so we hoped very much that they might have been …, that we might have found them. But that was not to be the case. We did journey out to the Faure Islands. The ice was pretty dicey. We got there, a 15-mile crossing I think, from the Dions where the emperors had a colony which was very fine. I think it's the only colony on that side of the Antarctic.

[0:31:03] Lee: That was where the three men were going when they went missing?

Gibbs: Yes, that was their objective.

[0:31:09] Lee: You had to take a difficult decision, the insight …, but according to Fuchs' book you had to make a difficult decision about whether to actually go for a final push through some dubious ice.

Gibbs: Yes. Yes, it was. We did a bit of a reconnaissance, a quick trip out toward the Faures. There was a good iceberg there you could climb up and we …. So we didn't at once go all the way. We went four miles, came back. We had a look at the ice ahead. It was thin ice but … It had only reformed about three weeks before, I suppose, and it was still thin, but we thought we were right to take a chance on it, and no doubt if we had been stuck out there, the authorities would have castigated us. But we did, we got out there and we searched around. The Faure Islands are none of them very high. None are more than a few feet, 15 feet or so above sea level, as far as I remember, not being precise. But they are low islands. In storms the spray could go right across the islands and freeze ice on the rocks.

[0:32:30] Gibbs: They are a scattered group. They had been visited before, from Stonington, and described by surveyor Blaiklock who had been out there. That was with Bunny Fuchs; I can't remember the party, but they had been visited before, so they must have had good ice and secure ice to do that, indeed because I think they left Bernard Stonehouse to study the emperors for a while then. Well we got there and we had two or three nights. I know a bit of a storm rose up and we were confined to the tent for a while. We did rather wonder whether it would have taken the ice, our ice bridge, out. But it hadn't. On the return there were some leads up to 4 or 5 feet across, but the lead dog Caesar was an absolutely first class dog and he managed to do the leap and the others followed and we got back all right. But I know it was an anxious journey, the return journey after that bit of storm.

[0:33:41] Lee: Fuchs describes it … I don't think he uses the word 'heroic' but he refers back to the Heroic Era. I wonder whether you felt at the time you were being …?

Gibbs: No, I never thought anything was heroic, really.

[0:33:53] Lee: Was it beyond the call of duty?

Gibbs: No, I didn't personally think so. I thought one had a correct duty to go and search for the missing chaps. They were young: Geoff Stride, Stan Black, and Dave Statham, and the interesting thing is that Stan Black, his sister I have communicated with quite recently, before that memorial service at St Pauls. I communicated with her and she sent letters and I sent letters and she did say to me that … I explained all the circumstances that I was aware of, for their journey out to the Dions, and she had never in fact been advised of the main objective, and what had happened, and she said that helped her a great deal, even though it was some fifty something years later.

[0:34:56] Lee: So FIDS actually hadn't told her?

Gibbs: Well, they told her the tragedy but not the circumstances of the tragedy, no, not in any detail which I was able to fill in. It helped her, I know. But it was an extraordinarily sad event, when people as young as that … and of course it is I know, and John Paisley felt this very much in his life. He and I got to know each other extremely well. At that time of course we journeyed together, John and I, and many years later when I was doing an Outward Bound when he was in charge of Outward Bound School working for the Adult Education Authority of Edinburgh. He had further tragedies then because six of his students were killed on the Cairngorms under blizzard conditions[7].

[0:35:57] Lee: I didn't know that.

Gibbs: Yes, it was a very sad event.

[0:36:01] Lee: Rather oddly in the book, Fuchs talks quite a bit about Paisley's sense of premonition. It's the only time in *Of Ice and Men*, Fuchs is anything other than practical.

Gibbs: John Paisley: yes you know there is a … more than this. I mean I am not too sensitive to these things but he certainly was. John Paisley and his mother. No doubt he was very concerned. I suppose I was too but he was very concerned about this forthcoming journey, and the return from the Faure Islands, and he actually at breakfast said he had had an experience during the night, that his mother had come to him and said 'It will be all right, John, if you leave now.' Well we didn't discuss it too much but I said 'Well that's good news. Let's go!' [laughs] But he was that kind of person that can indeed have telepathic experiences, and his mother had apparently recorded in her diary 'John is in deep trouble but I think all will be well.'

[0:37:25] Lee: So you were taking his sensibilities very seriously?

Gibbs: Yes. Well you know we were … He wrote all this but we didn't discuss it much over the primus at breakfast time or anything. In fact my main recollection is: in spite of the very sad circumstances, we were having a jolly good time, and having an awful lot of laughs. Somehow, down in the Antarctic you are really tuned up to a very high level of appreciation of everything, and you tell stories. John used to tell …

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[7] 21-22 November 1971, 5 students from Ainslie School and an instructor died. (Wikipedia)

[0:38:10] Lee: So the pall that would certainly have fallen upon the Peninsula after those three deaths, that didn't linger for a long time? Is your memory that it was a … ?

Gibbs: No. Once we had done what we could, we couldn't find them. They were given up as lost men. We just sincerely hoped and prayed that they had died quite quickly and under not too much duress. The fact is of course, if you do get totally soaked, as you know, in water below freezing almost, you don't live for more than two or three minutes and we thought that must have happened. Sledge dogs are different; huskies have proved quite otherwise. They shake themselves off, get on an ice floe and carry on.

[0:39:00] Lee: Was there an attempt to do some sort of memorial at the time, either a service or a physical monument, in the Antarctic?

Gibbs: Not at that time, no. That all came later. We then got on with the survey and depots and things, almost directly.

[0:39:18] Lee: Let's move on then, for a few more minutes, to talk about that, because you had a marvellous opportunity to manhaul up Sodabread, which must have been a real struggle I would have thought?

Gibbs: Yes, well of course we had dogs and what wonderful animals they were. We got up to the top of Sodabread Slope and left a good depot right on the plateau there, in order that we could do a journey down the coast and come back that way. The depot served very well because … This was a journey of approximately 450 to 500 miles. Nothing like the big heroic journeys, but of course we hadn't got depots out, so as I recall, you could only really do a journey of about … lasting two months, because 70% of your sledge load would have been dog food. So with heavy sledges, we left on a journey which went down to the Wordie Ice Shelf, and then further south, around some mountains (I forget) on the edge of the King George VI Sound, filling in some blanks.

[0:40:35] Gibbs: Stephenson had mapped some of that when Stephenson crossed over in 1936, but otherwise a lot of that territory had not been surveyed. So we were able to make a traverse that came up from there inland, some inland glaciers which were very suitable. I don't know if they have been named; they probably have. But we took all photographs. Surveying then used to be measuring the cyclometer wheel, taking a compass bearing at every stop and turn of direction, recording these and taking compass shots which would intersect features either side. And also carrying a little battery of three barometers which you would treat very reverently, and tap and take a reading of all three and then mean those out. Later on, that date and time, check the isobars between the base which had a mercury barometer and you, to see if you needed to make any correction on the barometric pressure difference. So that recorded your height. I mean they were fairly approximate but possibly accurate to 100 or 200 feet.

[0:42:02] Lee: You were hit by a "fumigator[8]" at one point. I think that was around the surveyed area, wasn't it? Do you remember that particular storm?

Gibbs: Yes, indeed. You could get the most vicious winds coming down Sodabread Slope, katabatic winds coming off the plateau.

[0:42:19] Lee: How did you cope?

Gibbs: Well we didn't have the terrible experiences that had been experienced by others later on, then. We didn't lose our tents, and managed to survive it all right. These wonderful tents of the Ventile cloth; very excellent things they were .

[0:42:39] Lee: Stonington was just re-opened for the one season. Do you remember achieving most of what you hoped to achieve in that season, or was there still work left to be done when … ?

Gibbs: There was always work left to be done, but I think we were very happy and successful in what we did manage to do.

[0:42:55] Lee: Because when the time came for the season to finish, the ship couldn't get in, could it?

Gibbs: No, it couldn't, indeed, and thanks to the Americans of course … They had an icebreaker, I think it was *Northwind*, and they flew a helicopter across to Horseshoe. We did pack up the base, heavy sledges. I know I was towing two sledges with the Admirals and others too. We took everything we could, the books and the reports.

[0:43:30] Lee: But the decision had been taken to abandon Stonington once more?

Gibbs: Yes, it had.

[0:43:34] Lee: Were you part of the decision or was it an edict from above?

Gibbs: No, that would have been an edict from above.

[0:43:40] Lee: Did it make sense?

Gibbs: Well with the ice conditions as they were, and they couldn't get the ship in, it made sense of course. And also I think plans had been laid then to get an aeroplane and to have a big base at Rothera later on. So that did make sense indeed. Otherwise Stonington was a very suitable base for further work. The work we did also didn't just include surveying. There was geology, being done by Nigel Proctor; he collected a lot of specimens. There was human physiology by Dr Henry Wyatt. It could be uncomfortable because we were his guinea pigs.

[0:44:28] Lee: He was checking you out for dehydration; is that right?

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[8] Fids' nickname for a strong easterly katabatic wind local to the Marguerite Bay area.

Gibbs: Acclimatisation, yes, dehydration, and your saline levels do change as you are acclimatising. I suppose the blood gets thicker, so you urinate a bit more than you would do normally (cold diuresis). If your body… and these cold diuresis tests were quite uncomfortable, because he would have us in the hut without any bedclothes on and no clothes on for an hour or so, until we were actually shivering, and trying to crack jokes to compensate for the discomfort. Then he would measure the cold diuresis effects on the quantity of urine you passed. Anyhow we were all good-humoured about it.

[0:45:25] Lee: … relieved to hear it.

Gibbs: Thank heaven. So I think he got quite a lot of information which might have helped others later on down the line.

[0:45:38] Lee: Our time is short. There's a car for you shortly. Just tell me a little bit about what you did after the Antarctic. What field did you work in?

Gibbs: Well it was surveying. I needed to get qualifications, land surveying. Having done a diploma at University College, London, which interestingly was under a Colonel Biddell who had been in the Indian Army Survey. Also an instructor was Dad Mason who had been of course a surveyor ten years before in the Antarctic. So having got this qualification, I joined the Directorate of Overseas Surveys and they posted me to Zambia (Northern Rhodesia it was then) first and then Botswana. So for ten years we worked for them in surveying. And I then also had a course. They put me on a course of photogrammetry, and I learned something of mapping from photographs, again at University College, London.

[0:46:46] Lee: So did you stay in surveying through your career.?

Gibbs: I did.

[0:46:49] Lee: And therefore progressed with all the technological developments? I mean surveying has changed enormously.

Gibbs: Yes, it has enormously changed, I know, from the old sledge wheel and compass traverse to satellite surveying. But I did see all these and managed to keep abreast of the other technologies, and I think it has been a very interesting career and would really recommend any others, who are looking for a career, surveying.

[0:47:14] Lee: Across that time, how highly does those two years in the Antarctic rate?

Gibbs: Very highly I would say. One's memory is very sharp for the tremendous experience of the Antarctic and the colleagues there, and the circumstances. So as a result, one has accumulated a small personal library of books. So I would certainly recommend anyone to try and get that experience if they get the chance. I appreciated it very much.

[0:47:57] Lee: And I have appreciated this time, Peter. Thank you.

Gibbs: No, thank you very much. I'm glad you didn't put me through the mill.

[0:48:05] Lee: That's right.

Gibbs: No, thank you.

[0:48:10] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Dog experience more important than surveying qualifications. [0:05:30]
- A Falklands picnic to explore the *Great Britain*. [0:08:46]
- Surveying methods in the 1950s. [0:17:34]
- Re-opening Stonington. [0:21:12]
- The loss of Black, Statham and Stride on the sea ice. [0:25:08]
- Disobeying orders to search for the lost men. [0:28:43]
- John Paisley's mother's premonition. [0:36:01]
- Closing Stonington again. [0:43:40]
- Cold diuresis experiments. [0:44:28]