

Edited transcript of a recording of Ian Smith, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 28th October 2011

Ian Smith. BAS Archive AD 6/24/1/141/1 Transcribed by Barry Heywood on 7 April 2016

Smith: Ian Smith, known on FIDS as Ian Flavell Smith - or Smith Flavell was it? - and nicknamed 'Flay'. I was born in Nottingham on 29 June 1944.

[00:00:23] Lee: How old are you now?

Smith: [Laughter] 67. Yes, I think I am 67!

[00:00:36] Lee: So where does Flavell come from?

Smith: Well, I have not really got deep into this sort of thing but it seems to be a 'Midlands'' name.

[00:00:46] Lee: But it's a real name, is it?

Smith: Oh yes. Strangely, there are Flavells near Melton Mowbray, where I live. One of the big Solicitors locally is a Flavell, but I have never pursued it. I don't think there is any connection.

[00:00:58] Lee: So to pursue the point; are you double-barrelled or is it three names?

Smith: No. My father used it in the Army...in the war, because he was Smith. So he used it to identify himself. That's why FIDs used it. My brother uses it as well. He is in business so it gives an air of distinction. I don't use it. Well I sign myself 'Ian Flavell Smith' to distinguish it from anything else but I am 'Smith'.

[00:01:24] Lee: Fair enough. What sort of education did you have Ian?

Smith: My father was in Education and moved around a certain amount in the primary school years. So I went to various junior schools, then finished up in Croydon. I was lucky enough to be part of what was called the 'Dulwich Experiment', where they got the people that came out top in the 'eleven plus' in Croydon were given chances to go to some of the public schools in the area. There was 'Whitgift' that was just down the road from where we lived, there was 'Trinity', which was in Croydon

and there was Dulwich College, which was 7 or 8 miles away over the top of Crystal Palace. That is where I chose to go, which was of course a wonderful school. It was one of the top-ranking schools. We used to vie with Winchester, and Manchester Grammar for the top entries into Oxford and Cambridge. I went to Charmouth [a village on the Jurassic Coast – Transcriber] when I was 10 for a holiday, and found ammonites. I realised that I wanted to be a Geologist. That was it really. I did Science through school and then moved on to Bristol University to do Geology, and then I was lucky enough to get a job with BAS to train as a Geophysicist in Birmingham. So that was an MSc, paid money as a student, and had a year in Birmingham before I went south. So that is the education side.

[00:03:01] Lee: I normally ask people what their first connection with the Antarctic was. In your case it is fairly obvious...because you were in Shackleton country, Dulwich, weren't you? [After Shackleton's death in 1922, Dr J Q Rowett OA, a school friend and sponsor of Shackleton's final expedition on the *Quest*, presented the *James Caird* to Dulwich College - Transcriber]. Tell me about that.

Smith: The very interesting thing is...you know that we were struggling on the 35-45 year interval. I started there in 1955, and Shackleton had been down 1914 to 1924 when he died. So it is pretty recent, actually. But there were these wonderful oil paintings in the Lower Hall in the school, and the *James Caird* boat was in a little enclosure. These ancient history things were absolutely magical. Mythology, really but there in reality.

[00:03:48] Lee: Is that what dun it? [stet – Transcriber]

Smith: It set the seeds. And there was the International Geophysical Year [An international scientific project that lasted from July 1, 1957 to December 31, 1958, which encompassed eleven Earth sciences: aurora and airglow, cosmic rays, geomagnetism, gravity, ionospheric physics, longitude and latitude determinations (precision mapping), meteorology, oceanography, seismology, and solar activity. The timing of IGY was particularly suited to some of these phenomena, since it covered the peak of Solar Cycle 19 – Transcriber]. So I heard the word 'geophysics'. There was a lot going on that stimulated that interest. It all tied together. Yes, it was 'what dun it'! When the BAS opportunity came up, it just seemed like a God-given opportunity.

[00:04:14] Lee: How did the opportunity arise? Did you spot an Advert? Did you experience the 'milk round'? [The BAS senior staff tour of Universities to recruit graduates – Transcriber]

Smith: I don't know if I can remember, exactly. I was in the 'milk round'. I was looking for jobs with oil companies. There were lots of 'oil' opportunities then. How I spotted it, I don't know. May be the Careers people said "what about this?" It just seemed obvious. I had an interview with Bill Sloman and Griff. - Don Griffiths, the Professor of Geophysics in Birmingham - who had had a lot of research work in the Antarctic. I obviously did all right and started...I can't remember when I went to Birmingham to start but it was a few months before the beginning of the Academic Year. I was doing all sorts of amazing things like plotting James Cook's positions to try and identify the true position of the South Sandwich Islands, and things like that... from 'dead reckoning' [Captain James Cook, British explorer, navigator, cartographer and Royal Navy captain, took possession of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands for Britain in 1775 – Transcriber]. This was just before satellite positioning came in. It was truly wonderful stuff to be doing. Griff. and his team were working in the South Sandwich and around the South Orkneys, doing magnetic measurements in particular. They needed to get the best positions they could of these areas. That is the sort of thing I was playing with.

[00:05:44] Lee: So this rather took over your geological leanings did it?

Smith: I suppose that I am a Natural Historian really. I like Nature and geophysics was a mechanical way of doing it really. I was still trying to solve geological problems but I still have a considerable interest in the workings of Nature and wild life. So everything about it was 'manna from heaven'. You couldn't wish for a better opportunity. Strangely, ...I don't know if you want me to move on?...I was looking through my diary to try and refresh my memory. There was quite a lot of hesitation. You know, when we were in Stanley going to finally leave Civilization, there are various comments in there [the diary – Transcriber]... 'Will it be all right?' 'I feel a bit apprehensive about this!' I can't remember any of that. I just remember it being an enormous adventure, and everything about it being amazing.

[00:06:46] Lee: I guess you signed up for the usual two winters?

Smith: Yes. I had committed to two winters

[00:06:56] Lee: Did you know where you were being sent?

Smith: Pretty much, yes. I didn't know what I was doing. I was sent a letter, presumably typed by Janet, telling me what my plans were. I was delivered that on the *Shackelton*, I think, probably after I had left Southampton.

[00:07:11] Lee: So this is Ray Adie, telling you what you were doing?

Smith: Yes.

[00:07:14] Lee: So Janet Thomson was writing the letter?

Smith: Probably. I had forgotten that connection you have made...that she was his secretary. I hadn't appreciated that.

[00:07:23] Lee: I think she was still, at that point. So you received the famous 'sealed orders'. When did you open them?

Smith: Well...then! I think. I have got them here actually.

[00:07:34] Lee: Have you? I have never seen any!

Smith: Have you not?

[00:07:38] Lee: How exciting! I F Smith, RRS *Shackleton* White envelope...slightly smaller than an A5 envelope.[Sounds of envelope being opened – Transcriber] Dear Smith...very formal!

Smith: Did you know him?

[00:07:58] Lee: I never met him.

Smith: No. He was a very stiff man. He was not a popular man really.

[00:08:04] Lee: I've heard a lot about him. He gets talked about quite a lot.

Smith: Yes, I bet he does.

[00:08:07] Lee: It is broken down into time spans. What you are to do during a particular time span. The reports you have to give, and

consulting your Base Leader for equipment. How interesting. I won't dwell on that now.

Smith: I will send you a copy, if you like. Would you be interested?

[00:08:27] Lee: Yes, thank you. 'Dated 10th October 1967. Yours sincerely Raymond J Adie.'

Smith: So I am pretty sure the Captain - 'Frosty' [Captain Turnbull – Transcriber] would have given it to me. I would have opened it, then and there. I didn't know what was going to happen. I think in the end...we adhered to that to a great extent – the overall plan – but things fell apart...Cape Jeremy and things like that. Reading my notes. I just wondered what the ship's crew thought about this. You know, ferrying lads around to jump off on the ice to go off doing silly things. You wonder whether they were cynical about it, or what [Laughter]. I still don't know, really, why we were there. Whether the Science was the thing or the foothold on the Antarctic was the important thing? I would be slightly cynical about the Science to be quite honest.

[00:09:35] Lee: But you were very much aware of the political implications even then, were you?

Smith: Oh yes! I don't think we were told about it. We obviously knew about the Treaty, and we knew about... well there is the classic story...I am sure you know of the visits from Deception Island of the Chileans and Argentinians delegations... so politics was there. We knew we were there for ...

[00:10:00] Lee: Flying the flag?

Smith: Flying the flag, yes!

[00:10:05] Lee: Of course, you had to go to Deception Island for a different reason.

Smith: We did, indeed! Which was thrilling!

[00:10:10] Lee: Tell us the story. [Pause]

Smith: We'd been to Deception and we'd bathed in the warm water [sea water in the shallows of Port Foster, the drowned caldera of Deception Island, which is warmed by geothermal vents – Transcriber]. The lads

[members of the British Scientific Base on Deception Island? – Transcriber] were talking about rising and falling sea-levels. We, the Geologists, had said, “it is all right – it is a dormant volcano” [laughter] - from our depth of knowledge; we had been given two lectures on it 2 years before, so we knew all about it! We sailed off towards the South Shetlands. I don’t know how many days out we would have been – 3 or 4, a week maybe – to the East. Suddenly we got this radio call that things had blown up! The lads had abandoned...there was no one in any specific danger, but they did not know what the consequences were going to be. So the dear old *Shack[leton]* turned round and sailed East... I think it was doing 12 knots...13 knots...every rivet was under stress! We sailed back and when we got back within a, I suppose...I would be wrong to say how far...but we started to see what was going on. There was this huge cloud hanging over the island. We could see that before we got to the island, and then the ash started to fall on the ship. It was dust or grains of sand started falling. There was a good cover as we got near to Deception. But anyway, we met the evacuees because they had been picked up by the *Piloto Pardo*, I think that was the name of the Chilean ship. We met them somewhere, I can’t remember where that was.

[00:12:00] Lee: At sea?

Smith: [Pause] We certainly transferred by boat, but whether we were at sea or it was a landfall I can’t remember. I think it might have been at sea.

[00:12:15] Lee: Did you actually go into Deception, through the Bellows? [the narrow entrance into the drowned caldera, called Neptune’s Bellows – Transcriber]

Smith: We did! Yes.

[00:12:19] Lee: Under those circumstances; under those volcanic conditions?

Smith: Now this is were [pause] things get hazy. We went in but whether it was then or whether it was later, I can’t remember. I think it was then because the Third Officer was a very good photographer, and he took a lot of photographs. Yes, we went in through the Bellows, and he got photographs of the eruption. You could see it coming out of the ground. Obviously, we have all got photographs of it. We went back and we rescued kit. The reason that I am hazy about it is that we went back in when we left the Antarctic. The Base had been destroyed by subsequent

activity. The first time it was intact but we took people's kit off. I don't know whether we tidied up – maybe there was paper work and stuff like that. This is very laborious and I don't know whether this is relevant now, but I have got a transcript of the message that the Base Commander sent back to Stanley or to London, obviously to London eventually. I have written it out longhand of what he said, and his transcript.

[00:13:46] Lee: Pass me a photocopy of that later on.

Smith: Yes. So we were very much in touch with what was going on. But I think he was saying things about destroying the safe, or things of that sort. But maybe there were other tidying up of the bureaucracies as well as other peoples' personal equipment.

[00:14:01] Lee: Destroying the safe?

Smith: Well there was obviously confidential information maybe to do with these visits, which had been had. They [the Base Commanders – Transcriber] had magistrates' responsibilities so there would be legal responsibilities. So I think he had a legal responsibility to prevent them falling into alien hands.

[00:14:23] Lee: How were the FIDS as they came on board?

Smith: I think they were excited rather than...they had got over their fear. It must have been extremely frightening for no one understands what the consequences of this were. I mean, whether an evacuation was necessary, I can't judge. Then Base wasn't destroyed at that stage but obviously no one knew what the consequences were, so the correct thing to do was to get them out. So they went over the top to the outside of the island, and that is where they were picked up. I think that they had been out for a couple of days, maybe. That's the sort of detail I really can't remember.

[00:15:05] Lee: An interesting introduction to the Antarctic, wasn't it!

Smith: For us...we were obviously worried about our colleagues and friends, because obviously we had been with them, many of them. Yes! We hoped it wasn't going to continue like that [Laughter]

[00:15:20] Lee: You finally got to Stonington in March, and you inherited the famous Admirals [a dog team – Transcriber]

Smith: I did, yes.

[00:15:26] Lee: Had you worked with dogs before? Was it all new?

Smith: My experience with dogs was my parents had a rather mad spaniel for a few years. I knew I liked dogs but I was completely new to dogs.

[00:15:41] Lee: How did you get on?

Smith: Oh, fine. In the diaries there is an awful lot about the dogs. It was a very interesting relationship. You become part of the team. I was the boss dog. I was challenged by some of them, and the relationship with others of them, in particular the leaders, was very intimate and delicate. I overstepped the mark on some occasions. I've got that in the diary. I'm afraid we used to beat the dogs – that was the way we imposed our authority. It is a pretty brutal regime. They are brutal to each other, and we had to patch up some rather nasty injuries. We used to beat them with pretty nasty thumpers.

[00:16:32] Lee: Ropes?

Smith: Yes. I don't remember feeling any remorse about doing it, specifically hitting them. I do remember Chris Madders, the Radio Operator... whom I think we talked with last year... He kept the pup team at Stonington. He said, "If I was leading I wouldn't beat them". So we were conscious that we shouldn't be but we felt we had to do it.

[00:16:55] Lee: Thirty year later, the guy who managed the last ever Admirals used thumpers.

Smith: Really!

[00:17:02] Lee: 1994.

Smith: It is very interesting. They were lovely dogs. We had just been on this trip to Greenland and we bumped into some huskies up there. They are lovely, friendly dogs. They are yapping and barking looking... "come on, stroke me". I know, with dogs, you have got to believe in yourself and you have just to go and do it. So I walked up to these dogs and stroked them, and they were lovely. I am sure that was what they were like in the Antarctic. But you know, we had quarrels and I overbeat one of my leaders, 'Myfanwy', who was a quite small dog but

she was very bright. But on the odd occasion I gave her too much punishment and the trust was broken. I mean, that was a very important lesson...be very careful how far you push people, and dogs! I had always felt, and I believe more now, actually we are all animals. We happen to have some wonderful skills, but we have lost other skills. We should treat all animals...I am not a Buddhist...[laughs] but I think we should treat all animals with decency. I don't know now...yes, I would punish them, but there may be other ways of punishing them. I don't know, but we did...beat them very hard. I thumped 'Twisty' and broke my little finger – my bone here – that still gives me the odd bit of rheumatism so that was my fault [laughs]. I got bitten on a good few occasions. I stitched up dogs when they had been biting themselves. We were part of the melay but I had to be the 'King'.

[00:18:47 Lee: Did you get far with them?

Smith: Yes! Yes! I couldn't tell you the distance. But the Summer, when we finally got down to King George VI Sound we travelled for [pause while consulting diary (?) - Transcriber] I can't tell you how many days it was – 160, 170 days travelling with dogs – sorry, 150 days traveling with dogs that summer season. We had probably 'lie-up' one day in four. I don't know how this is going to work out as a sum but we would probably average 15 miles a day so maybe we would travel 100 days and maybe 1500 miles on that summer expedition.

[00:19:44] Lee: Let's talk about the Cape Jeremy [69°24'S 68°51'W, a Cape at the northern entrance to George VI Sound – Transcriber] escapade. I guess you were with dogs on that occasion.

Smith: Yes, I had the Admirals there.

[00:19:57] Lee: There is quite a lot in 'Ice and Men' about this. Reading the book, it does seem like an utter ordeal. You survived. What is your account of the story?

Smith: There are so many different layers to it. [pause].

[00:20:13] Lee: Why were you going in the first place?

Smith: My job in that letter [Adie's letter of instruction – Transcriber] was to do geophysics in George VI Sound and Alexander Island, and then on the Plateau on the east of the Sound, so we were trying to get down there.

[00:20:26] Lee: It was a sledge trip?

Smith: It was a sledge trip. I was the geophysicist. I was with Laurence Wylie who was the geologist, Alistair McArthur, who was the Base Commander and my G.A., Shawn Norman, who I assume was going to work with Laurence. We were going down...the Fossil Bluff team was the one that had been dumped by the Pilatus PC-6 Turbo Porter episode the previous winter. So we were setting off to go to meet them at the Bluff and sort things out there, then take off and do a geophysical summer, then come back over the plateau. We set off and the dogs went well. We had done a fair amount of driving the few days going south. Then we started to run into poor weather conditions. Very warm, now I don't know if that is important because we got warm weather. I've got a record of it being plus 11 centigrade and rain. I don't know if that is actually germane...it probably isn't. We got down as far as Cap Jeremy and started running into soft snow, deep soft snow, and then we hit these cracks, which was quite frightening. We had been travelling over sea-ice. We started to slow down and we started to be a little concerned about our food supply. But we found seal. We were a long way away from the true ice front so the seal had obviously worked their way through these cracks. We were obviously concerned about what had happened 6 years before at Horseshoe Island [Fallières Coast 67°51'S 67°12'W – Transcriber] where a team of two men...three... yes, had got lost [Stanley Black, David Statham, Geoffrey Stride, drowned when sea ice broke up during depot laying trip to Dion Islands in 1958 – Transcriber]. We wondered if this was happening. Obviously we were pretty worried. When we began to realise there were major breaks in the ice, we got back to London. Fuchs of course had sledged down over the ice and knew the area. Not that that was particularly relevant, but they had satellite photographs of the area, which was wonderful technology coming in. I don't think they were as it were videos but they could see photographs of the current situation of the ice. What they recognised was there were some big bergs in the area and they were moving. So maybe, it was a consequence of extra high tides and tidal flow, and the bergs were moving out, taking the sea-ice with it. That's a sort of 'cold' analysis after the event.

[00:23:21] We were slowing down, and doing sort of half-a-mile a day.

- A. The weather was very poor
- B. It was incredibly hard going and
- C. We actually didn't know where we were going.

You would go a hundred yards in one direction and you would meet a lead and have to veer off and work your way round it. Things were pretty tough. We went on to half rations, and then we got the seal, which was wonderful. My mouth watered when we saw a seal...a live seal. You think "food!" I think we got very despondent because we felt we were just trapped. There was nothing we could do. We were advised after - I don't know the period of time - I think when Sledge Delta, that was Sykes, Doyle and Postlethwaite, were despatched from Stonington with stores to meet us at somewhere like Puffball [Puffball Islands, Fallières Coast 69°2'S, 68°30'W - Transcriber]. We were lying up at that stage. We were lying up because that was the advice that we had got from London. They were coming down south with extra stores, and we were going to go back when conditions allowed. We were in horrible conditions. I was sleeping on top of sledge boxes, and they were filling with water. It was wet melt water. It wasn't sea-water. My sleeping bag was getting wet but it was still warm. We weren't actually in particular danger of freezing but conditions were just unpleasant. I think we felt miserable because we were just sitting there, thinking we had just to wait until things got better.

[00:25:01] Lee: You were running out of food and fuel, weren't you?

Smith: Yes. I think we had probably done all right by getting the seal, but paraffin was a problem. We weren't able to dry things out. So I think, just generally, it was one of misery, rather than sort of fear. Although we were obviously a bit concerned about what was happening. I think we realised...I have a feeling that Fuchs might have told us that the sea ice didn't look as though it was going out, but bergs were moving around. So I think maybe the level of fear hadn't...I don't know whether we actually felt fearful, in the sense we were really in trouble but we didn't know what was happening.

[00:25:40] Lee: He [Fuchs - Transcriber] was also convinced that it would refreeze, that the temperatures, the warm temperatures were fairly temporary and that it would freeze up again quite quickly at some point.

Smith: Well when we went home we covered 5, 6, 7 days of the travel on the way down, in a day. We got out to the Puffballs, the Puffball Islands, where we met Sledge Delta, I think it was, in a day. It was just the difference, when we decided we were going to go because it was colder, the surface had settled, it was easy.

[00:26:17] Lee: So it was a combination of the physical complications, wet boots, damp sleeping bags, rising water, and the psychological concern you actually could not find a way out.

Smith: Yes. We were trapped. There is no question about that. I don't remember being fearful we were actually going to be swept away...be lost. But we did not know what to do. I think the rays of hope were when Sledge Delta started coming down, and they were covering the ground really quickly. We thought it is obviously travelable. It is not just us. We had a very difficult passage getting this far south but we should be able to pick it up and get out.

[00:27:0] Lee: Did the temperatures drop, did it refreeze?

Smith: Oh yes. I have probably got a record of what the temperatures were. Yes, it was unseasonable. I have no doubt it was unseasonable.

[00:27:10] Lee: Unless I have got this wrong, you were between the mainland and the island, weren't you, at this point. Is that right?

Smith: Well, one of the problems I had with going through my diaries is that I haven't actually got a map of where it is. I think we weren't, as it were, embayed by Alexander Island. I think we were still outside that, although we could see it. It was there.

[00:27:43] Lee: So you weren't in the Chanel? Therefore the ice wasn't trapped between the mainland and...

Smith: No, it could have got out...

[00:27:48] Lee: ...it could have blown out.

Smith: There was certainly none of the smaller islands; the Puffballs and...Oh the names will come back. But, there is a small scattering of islands on the way south.

[00:28:00] Lee: Did you contemplate your Maker, at that point?

Smith: [pause] No, I don't think so. We just felt pretty miserable because we just felt incompetent, well impotent really. No I don't think so.

[00:28:16] Lee: You were no longer in charge of you own destiny!

Smith: That is really the point. Yes. We had quite a few exciting experiences, which were, sort of, going in to a hole, something like that, and thinking “Bloody hell. I have got to get out of this”. Sorry, I am jumping ahead. On a glacier, in a crevasse, you know, you go through a crevasse and you think I have got to get out of this, Whoosh. You think afterwards “that was close”. I don’t think we had anything like this on Cape Jeremy. There was this lead, which was opened up. You could see these leads opening up. “Whew, this is really worrying!” But it wasn’t chilling fear. It was “what are we going to do, sort of thing”

[00:29:01] Lee: You met up with the sledge coming down from Stonington in the end. There was one coming from Fossil Bluff as well.

Smith: I don’t think they were contemplating a rescue. We were planning on meeting them.

[00:29:11] Lee: They were going to lay a depot...give you supplies.

Smith: I think they were bringing food, and we were going to meet them, and go back together. Hand-shaking, really. I don’t remember whether they had changed their strategy. But you know, when we got stopped, in decent travelling conditions we were probably less than 50 miles...2 – 3 days... from the edge of the Sound.

[00:29:32] Lee: So which way did you go when you met up with Sledge D? Did you go back to Stonington?

Smith: Straight back to Stonington. It took 3 or 4 days. We had probably gone down with...expecting to take 30 days...we had probably got down in 20 days. We realised we were in real trouble, and so at 20 days was the furthest we went, and then we got back in 3 days. It was that sort of imbalance in travelling conditions.

[00:30:02] Lee: Thank you very much for talking about that. You were on the fringe of the Ken Portwine story as well. The Stonington doctor, Mike Holmes, was doing daily sheds with Argentine Island. You were able to hear some of that. That’s right? [Portwine was the cook on Base F, Argentine Islands. Holmes diagnosed his condition as ulcerative colitis. The condition was stabilised with drugs dropped from an Argentine Navy plane. Portwine was evacuated as soon as possible to Argentina, where he died in hospital – Transcriber]

Smith: Well we knew Ken, because we had come down together on the ship. So I knew him quite well and it was pretty worrying. It was a friend who was obviously in serious problems. We didn't know the seriousness of the disease, though Mike probably would have said...but Mike Holmes would probably have said, "An operation will sorted it out". But when the series of disasters happened, we were pretty shocked. There was nothing we could do about it, other than just keep our fingers crossed, the poor bloke.

[00:31:04] Lee: How was Mike coping with that? Was he composed? Was he getting nervous?

Smith: He...you won't have met Mike of course...he was a pretty solid character. Quite eccentric, in many, many ways, but pretty solid. He was quite James Robinson Justice like, I suppose. I can remember having arguments with him, probably over this. He was saying, "Doctors have a much better understanding of humanity than the rest of you do" and I saying, "No you don't. You are just basically a technician who knows how to put things right". No, in all his medical things, he was absolutely rock solid. That is my memory of the Ken Portwine thing. He was a pillar [Pause] I don't think Mike would mind if I said he liked a drop or two. We used to have a drop or two in the evenings and talk about things. He was obviously concerned but I think that he was doing his job, and doing it professionally.

[00:32:22] Lee: It wasn't getting to him, as such.

Smith: Not that I identified, no. He was extremely good. If I can veer off, we had the odd serious dog operation. Major operations on particularly females, when they were giving birth, or not being able to give birth, and that sort of thing. I was the anaesthetist. Laurence Wylie was the second pair of hands, and Mike Holmes was operating on bitches, delivering pups. They were cut open and he was absolutely rock solid. We just did what he told us. I never got the feeling of any qualms or uncertainty. He was probably a very good doctor, very calm. Yes, you need people like that really. [joint laughter]

[00:33:20] Lee: You went up to Horseshoe for a while, is that right. You went up to Horseshoe on the *Biscoe* and worked with Mike Burns, Ian Sykes, Pete Rowe and Brian Gargate.

Smith: No, this was different. Brian would have come down on the *Biscoe*, I think. He was left at Stonington with the Wintering party. The

first four of us, Sykes, Rowe, Burns and myself, were left at Horseshoe for the winter, and then in the summer, or in the spring, Brian Gargate, Mike Pawley and one or two others, came up for an early spring season before the main summer event.

[00:34:12] Lee: Just the four of you then at Horseshoe. What was the thinking behind sending just four men to Horseshoe for the winter?

Smith: I don't think it is in the letter. I don't think so. Basically, because Cape Jeremy had come up we didn't do our summer work in the Sound, so we looked for an alternative. We worked quite a lot of Adelaide, Laubeuf Fjord and around Horseshoe in that first summer. We put together a Proposal that we should spend the winter at Horseshoe doing more work there. The Proposal was accepted so the four of us lads went off camping in Horseshoe. Fabulous, absolutely fabulous. I remember saying we are being paid for this [Laughter]. It was an absolutely wonderful time...a tremendous experience. There were the four of us but then there was Ian Sykes with the Vikings, Shaun Norman with the Terrors, and me with the Admirals [dog teams – Transcriber]. We also had 24 dogs...it was a wonderful time.

[00:35:25] Lee: How was Horseshoe compared to Stonington? How do you characterise the two Bases.

Smith: Horseshoe was intimate because there were the four of us, and it was a little team of four. Stonington, the first experience, was 17 of us, and we did bond as a team. But it was a bigger team. The organisation was totally different. I was there because I wanted to geophysics with Mike [Burns – Transcriber], and we had Pete Rowe, who was a geologist, and Shaun, basically who was looking after the useless geophysicists [General Assistant – Transcriber]. [long pause]. No Burns wasn't there...yes he was.

[00:36:22] Lee: I am pretty sure he was. I can look in my notes later.

Smith: Sorry, my memories are getting concertinaed. Yes, it was Sykes not Shaun. So did we just have two teams? We just had two teams...it was the Admirals and Sykes with the Vikings. Yes. Sykes spent a lot of time at Horseshoe the first year. That is why I have various memories of him being there. So Sykes was looking after Mike Burns and I, and Pete Rowe was the geologist. We did lots of work while the sun lasted, and we had strange days when the sun was down...the three hours of twilight. We got out and did the dogs. We took them for little runs. I don't think

we did much scientific work. We lived very strange hours. We got up to see the sun and we went to bed at probably 3 o'clock in the morning. We got up again when the sun was coming over the top. It was a wonderful experience. You can't imagine...four blokes being left in this wonderful scenic spot with lots of work to do...feeling totally self-sufficient...more or less, being able to do just what we wanted.

[00:37:51] Lee: Does that include doing any canoeing?

Smith: When did the canoe fit in?

[00:38:00] Lee: There is some debate as to whether Ian Sykes took his canoe to Horseshoe or not.

Smith: Not, dare I say, not for the winter. [long pause] I have vague memories of it being on the ship, but why that should be?

[00:38:20:] Lee: I will ask Ian Sykes. I am seeing him next. I thought that you might be able to give me a clue.

Smith: I remember making it.

[00:38:26] Lee: Making it? You made it?

Smith: No, he made it. I failed because...well I thought what is the point of a canoe. I was going to make a sledge boat, which I did but I didn't finish it.

[00:38:40] Lee: It never sailed

Smith: My sledge boat? No! The idea was, because we knew we were going to Horseshoe, and we knew about the three lads, we thought about having a rescue device, which would be a floatable sledge. So I build this canvas shell and superstructure. I had built a canoe in my youth before that, so I knew about building canoes. Sykes and I built these things together but mine never got completed...

[00:39:09] Lee: Did anyone ever make a sledge boat?

Smith: Well I think I was following a plan or a scheme, which was at Stonington, but my memories of that are rather vague. Whether it was used, I don't know. I am pretty sure that I had a schema of some sort but it seemed like an obvious thing to do really. We were crossing...we were

in quite vulnerable places. It seemed obvious, so that is why I did it. But why I didn't finish it, that me [laughs]

[00:39:40] Lee: I have to ask you about Pete Rowe's dreams!

Smith: Oh, really? Where did you get that...

[00:39:49] Lee: Sorry, I can't reveal my sources.

Smith: [laughs] Of course not. [laughs] Well we all used to talk about why our sexual appetites seemed to disappear. We thought, maybe they are giving us bromine and all that sort of stuff. The four of us in Horseshoe, sharing a room, and Pete used to have these obviously really erotic dreams. Well it sounded very erotic. [laughter] We used to tease him unmercifully about it, his sleeping noises that he would make. Women obviously featured quite a lot in our fantasies and discussions. I can't remember particularly that it was a physical thing, it was much more mental I think. Whether Pete had any strong attachments back home...I don't think he did but he certainly...

[00:40:49] Lee: He kept you awake did he?

Smith: Oh yes! Well when we were awake we heard him. We used to tease him about it. Whether they really were erotic dreams I really don't know. We used to swap notes about dreams. We got some extraordinary ones, definitely Antarctic type dream. I don't remember personally having many erotic dreams so maybe they did feed us bromine, I don't know.

[00:41:20] Lee: I think you would have known. You have to feed yourself bromine.

Smith: Well maybe it was in the tea! [laughs]

[00:41:26] Lee: Were there no pin-ups then?

Smith: Yes there were. If you have seen the photographs of Horseshoe, there definitely were pin-ups. I don't remember them being sort of...in the sense of them being erotic. I can't remember thinking any need to think, "I must look at these women". They just seemed remote and beautiful. We did have one pin-up which I can remember quite clearly, which was a girl very well endowed, kneeling down with gravity helping her in a particular direction. I had a pin-up on my bedhead, which was

just a lovely face. It wasn't erotic at all. I just thought that she was a beautiful woman. I think, by and large, women featured in that way. We just missed them as women, and not just as physical entities.

[00:42:23] Lee: Of course, the real thing was in very short supply, because BAS at that time did not allow women to go to the Antarctic. I am just wondering how the dynamics of Horseshoe Island hut that winter would have changed if one of the four men had been a woman.

Smith: I continually wonder! Looking at my diaries, on the way south, I had various encounters, and I am always thinking "Could this be something big?" I had...I don't know if I could call her a girl friend...when I left Britain I had left a young lady behind with no promise or anything. But I was pretty worried because I got a lot of letters from her. I thought, "This is dangerous. I don't know if I am that committed". So women were important to us. I was 22-23. I was young and inexperienced really. I shared a flat with Pete Rowe when I got back and he got one of my women, and I felt pretty hurt about that. So that was living with lots of women around, in Birmingham afterwards. If that had been the three of us, or four of us...three plus one woman...I think it would have been devastating. I think it would have been really hard. There would not have been any escape and it would have been very obvious. I think it is a real challenge to have organised something like that. So I very much believe in...actually I don't believe in sexual gender equality. Women are different in the way they think...the way they organise themselves...to men. I think they would have been a huge benefit if the personal...the sex element of it had been able to be organised in some way or other. I think they would make a huge benefit to the way of life when there are enough people to dilute the one to one type of thing.

[00:44:31] Lee: You mean big assemblies rather than small ones?

Smith: Yes! It would have been a very interesting experience. I sure people have got hurt because of this, because of having women on Base; as people do everywhere. I feel it could have been potentially an absolute disaster on a little Base like Horseshoe.

[00:44:53] Lee: Did you really auction off your sister?

Smith: [laughter] My three sisters came down to the ship, when we got back. I am not a very wealthy man...[laughter] But, I did go on holiday...when we got back, Mike Holmes organised a holiday to the

Ring of Kerry in the summer of 1970. He went along with one of his doctor friends, a chap called Terry Allen, and I went along with my sister. That's where that started. Mike Holmes actually brought along a rather attractive...he had some French friends who came along with their daughter, who was very attractive. I kept a correspondence going with her or a good number of years. No, I didn't make very much money out of it. With Mike Burns and my sister, Marion, that really happened...Mike stayed down a year after I did, and came back...Marion was at University in Liverpool when we were together in Birmingham. Mike and I were best pals and she used to come down and see us. I think that is how it started. I don't think I was instrumental in plugging that one together.

[00:46:27] Lee: So where did this rumour come from then?

Smith: Well, it is a good 'crack' isn't it [laughter]. Yes, I mean, a chap with three sisters...Jane is still unmarried. She still couldn't get the right FID!

[00:46:30] Lee: OK, so two out of three married Fids?

Smith: Yes! I don't know who started it. It sounds like a Terry Allen...no it wouldn't be a Terry Allen story because he would have been the one who parted with the money. So I can't say who I can blame for the story [laughter].

[00:46:45] Lee: Where were you when Apollo 13, no Apollo 11 that is, landed?

Smith: Oh, right. Yes. [pause] I think this was when...This was July '69.

[00:47:08] Lee: I think you were on the Jones Ice Shelf

Smith: The Jones Ice Shelf. I am trying to think what happened. We had wintered on Horseshoe, and then went over towards Adelaide, across...We were at Base Y- Horseshoe- which was opposite Pourquoi Pas – French for 'Why not? So, that is why the British named it Base Y. We went round Pourquoi Pas and across the Jones Ice Shelf to Adelaide. We met Ian Kerfey and Rod Pashley, came back with them, back across the Jones Ice Shelf and met a survey team there. They said as we arrived "tie the dogs down and come in quick...they are landing on the Moon". We actually heard them...I mean it is actually incredible isn't it. Well I suppose it is 'old hat' now. We could hear these chaps landing on the

Moon, and they were broadcasting back to us on Earth. There were six of us crammed in this tent, probably feeling as remote as they did on the Moon. So there was a great feeling of 'kinship'. I sure that they did not feel the same for us, but we felt we were doing the same sort of thing. We were on an adventure, and we were very few people pretty isolated from anything else. If things went wrong, there was very little anyone could do to help. We were self-sufficient, dependent on our own resources.

[00:48:35] Lee: You shared a vulnerability.

Smith: Indeed.

[00:48:38] Lee: What were you listening to? BBC World Service or South American Radio or...?

Smith: I wouldn't...I really don't know. Probably it was the World Service

[00:48:48] Lee: You recorded it was in English, presumably.

Smith: Yes it was certainly in English. We did a lot of listening to the World Service. Yes, it was wonderful. So I would be pretty sure that it was. Why we weren't aware...or maybe we were aware... They were camping and were listening. Maybe if we had been camping at the same time we would have listened. I can't remember exactly why we hadn't stopped in advance. It was certainly a really momentous thing. It was the 27th of July...I can't remember, '69? It was something that really sticks in my head, particularly. And then of course, when we came back through South America, after we had been dropped off, we came back in... I remember arriving in Monte[video] and...was it Apollo 16 was crashing back to Earth...

[00:49:45] Lee: 13!

Smith: 13, was it? Yes there was a disaster. We were listening, or hearing, about that. I think the lads landed safely in the Pacific and were safely picked up. That was another sort of phase, I can remember. I can't remember how we were hearing this but, then again... The word is vulnerability. Potentially things could go very wrong for any of us.

[00:50:10] Lee: Rescue missions weren't an option, were they!

Smith: No, no. They bailed out and they were safe. They were rescued. How close was it?

[00:50:19] Lee: I am interested that you should bother to listen to the World Service. So, although you were away for over two years...

Smith: Well two and a half with the shipping

[00:50:29] Lee: ...you maintained a keen interest in world affairs. You didn't lose interest in the rest of the planet.

Smith: I don't think we were missing it. But I think my eyes were opened because we were listening to a lot of Radio. We did have specific broadcasts for us. Frank Muir, I think. I can't remember quite what it was.

[00:51:00] Lee: 'Calling Antarctica'

Smith: 'Calling Antarctica'. There was a very attractive presenter, whose name I can't remember. But I am sure that it is in my diary. We got her photograph. I think she did it quite regularly. I don't think it was personal. I don't think she read out any personal messages. May be she did, I can't remember.

[00:51:18] Lee: It wasn't Maggie Filbin, was it?

Smith: That's it - Maggie Filbin. But Frank Muir did one of these, and he said, "Don't hurry back lads. Stay where you are. You are having a much better time than we are!". [laughter] Typical Frank Muir's dry humour. I can always remember that. Lovely. That was great but the things that I found really interesting was listening to the Moscow Radio. Talking about Capitalist Running Dogs! The Soviet propaganda was thick then. We could get that very clearly [good radio reception – Transcriber], and all the World broadcasts. I think it was the Chinese as well. And we could get something from Mozambique. So you could actually listen to the radio most of the time and hear what was going on.

[00:52:14] Lee: That is the interesting thing. You didn't feel you were so far away that it didn't matter any more.

Smith: [Pause] No. When we left, I remember thinking "I am not sure that I really want to leave". This is fantastic. I didn't need to leave. I wasn't keen to get back even though we did retain some sort of interest. I

suppose I am not political particularly, and so I wasn't obsessed about what was going on. But it was very interesting to hear, and certainly the Soviet propaganda, which I would not really have heard back home. It was pretty interesting, you know, the fact that that was their attitude. They were giving this pretty crude sort of propaganda.

[00:53:00] Lee: The Cold War was pretty cold at that time!

Smith: Pretty damn cold yes! [laughter]

[00:53:05] Lee: Brian Gargate then, you weren't with him on the Sound, St George's Sound?

Smith: Yes. We were doing geophysics. He was my General Assistant, my GA. He was a policeman, being given some sort of secondment for a year, and he came down and we worked together for that time. I think he and I got on really well down South. He was mid-thirties, I should think, and married. The rest of us were just boys.

[00:55:01] Lee: It is interesting, isn't it- Bill Sloman, and FIDS generally went for graduates, straight out of college or university, because they had yet to form those kind of relationships. It was better to get someone before they had fallen in love.

Smith: Yes, that is interesting. The other older boy was Ken Doyle, who I think... He was older than most of us but I don't think he had got any relationship at home.

[00:55:29] Lee: Did Brian go up with you onto the Plateau?

Smith: Yes. We went all the way –that 150 days he and I were together, more or less all the time.

[00:55:42] Lee: Were you mapping? Or is that simplifying things?

Smith: Yes, in a general sense. I was taking readings, gravity readings and magnetic readings, every mile, half mile, 4 miles, 8 miles, depending on the direction we were going. We were trying to map out the grain. I had an interesting conversation with Petra Searle – we were together on this trip to Greenland recently – and she gave me a paper by her husband who had mapped Alexander Island. She said, "I wish you had had this paper before". Somehow or other she had got the story that I was very dissatisfied with the quality of the topographic mapping. I had no idea

how the map had been put together. Well I had gathered this had happened but I didn't know the issues, but his paper was very revealing because it was an incredibly difficult thing. It was a jigsaw without any guidance, and he had put it together. There were major problems in the map, which we had found and I had noticed in my diary. I had made comments about this map being bloody awful. We were the first people to travel over the ground and to realise you were going towards this place, which should have been on bearing such and such, and it was on a totally different bearing because Derek Searle hadn't been able to orientate the photographs. He had tried really hard with great ingenuity but there had been errors in it. But I didn't know that. So it was very interesting and I said that I would try and find my maps to talk to Petra about them. But I haven't been able to find them. I don't know if I have got any, actually, but it is a real shame. It would be very interesting to know what they look like now. So yes, we were plotting out contours of gravity anomaly and magnetic anomaly.

[00:57:32] Lee: Just because it was there or was there a second reason for doing it?

Smith: You can read gravity and magnetic anomalies in terms of geology. So the first thing with gravity is that it would show the thickness of the ice, and in those days the ice echo sounding system was beginning to work but it wouldn't work over...I think I am right in this...it wouldn't work if there was water under the ice. It wouldn't work over sea ice. You could go over the sea ice and if you could read the gravity meter, if the sea ice was thick enough or stable enough, you could actually determine the thickness of the water under an ice shelf or sea ice. With the magnetics you are looking for magnetic rock. It gives magnetic anomalies so you can begin to see where minerals might occur or where the grain of the geology is deviated from what is expected through faults and so on, which you may not be able to see from geological mapping because the vast majority of the geology is called ice! This black stuff that sticks up is rare so the Geologist is doing an awful lot of guesswork. So what we were trying to do was to help the Geologist to draw lines, mapping faults and delineating formations. Dare I say it didn't really work? I don't think we actually put Geology and Geophysics together. My subsequent career that is what we were doing. We were actually defining depths of sedimentary basins, lineations that were concealed because of sediments on top. So you can look beneath the surface with Geophysics and see things that were concealed. That I why I am rather cynical about the scientific work that we did in our day. I think that there have been huge amounts subsequently but I think that much of what I did,

to be quite honest, was not very interesting technically. I was able to show that Horseshoe Island was two islands. The Shoemith Glacier joining the two actually goes below sea level so geographically it is two islands joined by an ice cap. We plotted the depths of various fiords beneath the Plateau. You could see how thick the ice was. We had so few readings because it was a single line and it didn't really build up to very much. But having said that, when my work and Mike Burn's work and Pete Kennet's previous and Geof. Renner's work were put together it begins to show the anomalies, the features that maybe can be interpreted. But in my day with the relatively small amount of data, it didn't add up to much.

[01:00:39] Lee: In the end, you did have to leave, regretfully. I am just wondering if someone ended up in prison, on the way home? In Uruguay?

Smith: [laughter] Yes. I was travelling with Ian Sykes and Barry Whitaker – I think that is it- yes. We travelled a bit with Andy Wager and someone else. We parted our ways in Argentina. Then we got into Uruguay and it was when the Tupamaros was active. I don't know who they were but they were anarchists or a group of some sort [left-wing urban guerrilla group in Uruguay in the 1960s and '70s – Transcriber]. They were fairly violent. We landed up on the banks of the Paraná river, somewhere or other – I have no idea where it was [this river is in Argentina – Transcriber]. I didn't keep a diary at that stage. We left our bags where we were sleeping - we slept on the riverbank. We went into the local town for a meal. When we came back, we were suddenly surrounded by police, and they marched us off into prison. They 'banged' us up for 2 or 3 days and took my camera off me. I think Sykes...I have never seen these photographs, but Sykes took a picture with his Nikkormat – the same camera as I had – of me being fingerprinted in the prison. I had a book by Arthur Koestler called 'Arrival and Departure' which was about the dialogue between Communism and Fascism and on the front there was a picture of a Swastika and a Hammer and Sickle merged together. They found this and they thought "Bloody Hell – what are you trying to tell our local people?"

[01:02:35] Lee: Do you know why you were arrested?

Smith: Because they didn't know who we were or what we were doing. Tupamaros were a very active and frightening group and they just thought they had just come across the river from Argentina and...Anyway, it turned out we were good boys really.

[01:02:53] Lee: Was the Consul involved? The British Consul?

Smith: No. I don't know whether we were able to make contact. I can't remember that. Sykes may be able to recall.

[01:03:03] Lee: They just released you in the end, did they?

Smith: They put us in jail for I think one or two nights, and that was pretty unpleasant. I mean primitive. All I can remember is being in a box. There was no food. If you wanted food your family brought it in for you. So what did we have? I don't remember having any food. I can't remember what the toilet arrangements were. It was pretty crude. Then we were just released. I seem to remember... I am not quite sure how this works out... we got very friendly with one of the military guys. I don't think he was instrumental in releasing us. We became very close friends for a few days. We went around to various places. He introduced us to his friends. He was a nice guy. He was really pleased to meet some Brits. I haven't kept contact with him, which is a real shame. I can't remember his name but I have photographs of him. I think he was probably on the staff in the prison. I remember seeing the inside of the prison. It was a pretty grim place. I was pretty glad we got out but I don't know if any consular activity was worked.

[01:04:16] Lee: When you got back was it inevitable you would be working for NERC?

Smith: Not really.

[01:04:28] Lee: Why did you choose to?

Smith: I realised I wasn't going to do a PhD. There wasn't the material in what I had collected and so I wrote up my results. I decided I had to move on when my contract ended. I looked around and this was the day of the Rothschild... do you remember when Lord Rothschild recommended that the Science Research Council should be much more pro-active. Trying to do not only their own research, but actually trying to provide information that Industry needed. They started what was called The Mineral Recognisance Program for the British Geological Survey - the Institute of Geological Sciences in those days. This was partly funded by the Department of Trade and Industry; I think that was what it was called in those days, or maybe another one. That was putting money into the Geological Survey to do focused research. I was

precisely the right person to do it. I got practical experience in doing that in the field; a bit of experience of working with other people. The interview went straightforwardly. They obviously liked me; liked what I could offer and I went into another wonderful job [laughter]. It carried on for another 35 years of wonderful work.

[01:06:09] Lee: All over the world?

Smith: Yes. I was given a Polar Medal for some unaccountable reason. When I met Her Majesty I was able to say to her... Well she said "What are you doing now?"... I said, "More or less exactly the same as I was doing in the Antarctic". [laughter]. It was true. I was having a wonderful time, going out to very interesting places all over Britain, Africa, South America, the Far East, taking readings in places where people were actually pleased to see you. They thought you were actually going to make a contribution. Whether we actually did was a mute point. It opened your eyes to the World and to the real problems people were having in different parts of the world.

[01:06:45] Lee: Was the Polar Medal a surprise? Why were you honoured?

Smith: I can't say whether it was a surprise or not. I mean I was very pleased to have been given it. I suppose I am a little bit cynical about it really. I think that they have a check list. "how many do we give? 20? Who have we got?" Some who I think should have got it, didn't and other people who I thought perhaps were less deserving - me if I can say that - got it. It was very nice. I was very flattered obviously to have been selected. I hadn't blotted my copy book and I had done what I was expected to do. But it wasn't distinguished service. I would have done it if I had not been paid. If I had got the Polar Medal, it would have been very nice. It was very nice icing on the cake. It was very nice to meet the Queen and to go to Buckingham Palace. I am not a great one for honours. You do things because you want to do them, because you enjoy them. I don't think you need recognition. Very nice - that's an appropriate description. I still look at it with pride.

[01:08:05] Lee: Good. It has been lovely to talk with you. Thank you.

Smith: Thank you very much Chris. I have enjoyed it.

Highlights

- [00:03:01] Dulwich College and early connection with Antarctica
- [00:04:15] Working for Don Griffiths in Birmingham before travelling South
- [00:07:23] The famous 'Ray Adie sealed orders'
- [00:10:10] Deception Island volcanic eruption
- [00:15:26] Working with Huskies
- [00:19:49] Cape Jeremy escapade
- [00:30:02] Ken Portwine tragedy
- [00:33:20] Overwintering on Horseshoe Island
- [00:42:25] Thoughts on having women on Research Stations
- [00:44:53] Auctioning of three sisters rumour
- [00:47:08] Hearing of Moon Landing
- [00:48:48] Appreciation of BBC World Service and 'Calling Antarctica'
- [00:55:42] Geophysical work on Plateau east of George VI Sound
- [00:57:32] Value of gravity and magnetic anomaly readings
- [01:00:40] Imprisonment in Uruguay
- [01:04:28] Subsequent working for British Geological Survey
- [01:06:09] Award of Polar Medal

