

STEVE EMERY

Edited transcript of a recording of Steve Emery interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 20th November 2011. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/151 Transcribed by Andy Smith, 21st April 2015.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Steve Emery, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 20th of November 2011. Steve Emery.

Emery: My name is Steven Emery. Date of birth is the 28<sup>th</sup> of the 8<sup>th</sup> '53. 28<sup>th</sup> of August.

[0:00:17] Lee: So you are now fifty ...?

Emery: 58 is it? Something like that. I lose ... I've stopped counting. When I got to about 55 I stopped counting. Actually I stopped counting at 50, to be honest, but people keep reminding me. Born in Solihull, West Midlands. Was Warwickshire in those days but West Midlands now. That's where I was brought up.

[0:00:39] Lee: What sort of education did you have Steve?

Emery: A fairly conventional one, basically: infant school, junior school, and then senior school (secondary modern). I left there with a few O-levels and a couple of CSEs. Probably fewer CSEs than O-levels. Not a lot.

[0:00:56] Lee: Did you go on to college or an apprenticeship?

Emery: Basically I did an electrical apprenticeship when I left school. There was various jobs on offer. I won't bore you with the details but I ended up going and working for an electrical contractor, a local company. I did my electrical apprenticeship which then did a day release to Garretts Green Technical College doing City & Guilds exams. I spent five years there doing various exams, to come out of there with passes in all the City & Guilds levels that I could go.

[0:01:32] Lee: And why electrical engineering? Was that something you had always had in mind? Did you have a Meccano set or dynamo as a boy?

Emery: I think somewhere along the line, yes. I just seemed to get interested in it when I was at school, playing with batteries and little lights and all that kind of stuff. I could wire up plugs better than my dad could and stuff like that. I just seemed to get an interest in it. Then basically when we did all the careers interviews and stuff, I can remember going to ... it would have been Solihull Civic Hall. They used to do these career conventions back then and all the local companies (bear in mind this was the West Midlands, so you had a lot of engineering companies around at that time, that were taking on apprentices), the Rover Group, Wilmot Breedon, ... There were stacks of them and amongst all that lot were electrical generating boards or CEGB: Central Generating Board and it was them I originally applied to and actually got ..., went to the interviews etc.

[0:02:40] Emery: Eventually I got offered a job with them but because of where they were sited, in terms of getting from where I lived to there was always going to be a bit of a headache. You had got to travel halfway into Birmingham to get to their place from where we are. Although I say West Midlands, it was an awkward bus trip. Mum and Dad said 'You don't want to go there; that is too far to go. There's a local company down the road.' In hindsight it may or may not have been the right decision at the time but who knows. Life goes like that doesn't it? You make a decision or things get thrust upon you so if I had gone that route I may never have got down to BAS.

[0:03:19] Lee: Well how did the Antarctic first kind of surface in your life? What's your first recollection of knowing there was such a place?

Emery: Maps and geography I think. I always had an interest in geography. Maps in particular I always find fascinating looking at maps and I know we got atlases at home. One of the pages toward the back of the atlas was the Antarctic and this big white thing. 'Mm, I wonder what is down there.' I think as I had got older, I always had an interest in travel. I loved travelling but it was just in the UK and a couple of holidays abroad when I was still at school. I loved that and as we came to the end of my apprenticeship, you get to a point where you think 'It's about time I did something.' Working from home, living at home doing this job, it just seemed there was a lot more out there to go and look at. So initially what actually happened was: it was four of my mates in the pub one Christmas, just as we were finishing our apprenticeships. They were finishing their ... Somewhat drunk, we decided we were going to pack our jobs in and go off and travel round Europe and all the rest of it, which we basically did.

[0:04:37] Emery: We did pack the jobs in. Got the training sorted first, then packed it in. But it ended up as a long holiday round France, Spain and eventually got back to the UK, broke, and needed to get another job. So I went back to the company I had been working for, looking round all the time for other jobs and I saw an advert in one of the papers (I can't remember which one it was now), probably the *Mirror* but it might have been the *Sun*, not that I tended to read them that much in those days. But they were the only papers that were usually lying around on sites. It was an advert in one of the papers and I thought 'Right, I'll apply for that.' I was applying for a lot of other jobs at the time so it was just one of a number of applications. I eventually got a reply back saying 'Come for an interview at Cambridge.' Was it Madingley Road? Some little passage way in Cambridge somewhere, some back street office I seem to remember.<sup>1</sup>

[0:05:42] Lee: So not in the brand new building then?

Emery: No, it was because before that got built, well I say brand new building. Where they are now I believe, unless they have moved, was built in the mid-seventies, yes?

[0:05:53] Lee: So what year are you talking about, Steve?

Emery: This must have been '75.

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<sup>1</sup> All Saints Passage.

[0:05:57] Lee: Right, so they were still building it?

Emery: Either still building it ... because I think that opened while I was down South, from what I can remember. So it was down some little back street passage, somewhere in Cambridge. I trundled over, went for an interview.

[0:06:12] Lee: What do you recall of that encounter?

Emery: I know Eric Salmon was there, Dad Etchells was in there, and there was a third chap. I can't actually remember who that was now.

[0:06:24] Lee: Do you remember what they asked you?

Emery: Not that many questions. We got into the technical bit about electrics, 'What do you know about the electrical side?' But to me, and it struck me during the interview, and I quickly picked up on this, is that electrically they weren't really querying. After a few questions they had stopped querying how much I knew about electrics and what have you. It was going more onto the personality and how you would fit in. It suddenly struck me that this is a different interview to what I would normally have. They are not asking you any real technical questions. There was a few bits: 'What have you done? What kind of systems have you worked on?' All that kind of stuff.

[0:07:02] Lee: So you were being psyched out, were you?

Emery: I think they were trying to suss us out, yes. The only question I can definitely remember from that was being asked 'What are you like when you get drunk?' Which I think is a fairly standard one because I think everyone else has had the same question. I'm not sure what you say. Presumably if you stand there and say 'I get violent and start hitting people' the interview will come to an end quite rapidly, but most of the lads, it's a few drinks, get merry, eventually sit in a corner and go to sleep. Which was perfectly true, so it wasn't .... I didn't have to say much.

[0:07:43] Lee: I gather it was a question they slipped in right at the very end, when your guard was down.

Emery: Probably. Yes it probably was towards the end, certainly.

[0:07:50] Lee: It's not exactly an ice breaker, is it?

Emery: No. 'What are you like when you get drunk?' But after that, I can't really remember that many, that much of the questions, other than the fact that certainly the technical bit was up and over, and then they were trying to tell me more about what the Antarctic was like and people that go down there and what people see and that kind of stuff.

[0:08:15] Lee: So were you being further persuaded or ...?

Emery: I think it was more being persuaded that that might be something that they thought I might want to go and do. Or probably in more reality, they were fairly desperate at that time because it was quite late on in the year. I wasn't aware of that at the time but what I subsequently found out was: it was fairly late in the year so we were probably interviewing I suspect somewhere around August time. End of August, maybe even into September. Bear in mind that the ship would be leaving at the end of October. It was all a bit rushed. So I think they had got to a point where they needed an electrician and were scouting around and anyone that looked likely they could do the job and wouldn't cause too much of a problem, they would jump at. The only thing that didn't strike me at the time. Subsequently you think about it. As a support staff, I was very young, because obviously most of the support staff tended to have done their apprenticeships and were usually in their mid to late twenties, and I was either just 21 or just coming up to 21 at the time or 22. Was it 22?

[0:09:26] Lee: Did that matter when you got down there? Did you feel at a disadvantage at all?

Emery: No not really. I didn't bother me. It was just something that came out. You get down there and you get to meet people, because obviously what actually happened for me was I went, had the interview, got offered the job and then it was 'Can you go for a medical?', down in London somewhere, some office somewhere ...

[0:09:53] Lee: In Harley Street?

Emery: Probably. I assume it was. I can't quite remember now. If it wasn't Harley Street, it was the one next door to it. Some old colonel guy who you have probably heard of as well, and like everyone else, I can remember standing in what was basically an office, stark naked and him asking you to turn round. You think he is going to look at part of your anatomy and he doesn't; he jumps on your back. Him saying 'Some of the guys throw me off, throw me across the room when I do that. Are you all right?'

[0:10:27] Lee: What was he trying to ascertain?

Emery: I think probably your reaction and also if you ... I don't know whether he was trying to see how strong your back was, but I don't know. You would need to ask him for that. I don't suppose he is still with us; I don't know.

[0:10:42] Lee: I never heard that before. That's interesting. OK.

Emery: No, I went through all that and then obviously the offer of a job. The thing that was obviously concerning them was: I had never worked with generators. I knew the theory of them and done all that at college, but never worked on a generator. So they rushed me over to Oakham, to I think it was Markham Engineering, to do a two-day course there, to go into the factory and go round with a guy to try and understand not so much the engine side but how the alternators worked and it there was a problem what to do etc. etc. on the alternators. Which was quite a leap from what I had normally been doing, as you can imagine. And so that was, you suddenly realised what you were getting yourself into, because all of a sudden I got this paid trip across to Oakham which was not too far from where I lived but obviously there were no

motorways in those days – not that way, anyway. I had only got a battered old mini, which I was far from sure was going to actually get me that far. But we went over there, stopped in a hotel (a little kind of pub), met up with the chap and had two days being shown round the factory, of how they produced these things and the chap explaining about how to change the diodes in the back of them and all this kind of stuff, most of which I understood at the time but whether I would have remembered it again in 6 or 12 months' time or whatever I am not so sure.

[0:12:09] Lee: So you got a sense that you were actually entering something quite significant then?

Emery: Mmm, yes.

[0:12:14] Lee: That was the first time, I guess, as a young lad, that you had been treated to a hotel.

Emery: Absolutely yes. I think the first realisation that this was slightly different to normal interviews was when I got there, and I'd had the initial interview in Cambridge, was that they were offering me money for coming across and did I need a rail warrant and stuff like that. I didn't really understand what they were talking about. Any other interview, you turn up, you have your interview and you go home again at your own expense. Nobody is offering you money to actually go for an interview. So that was ... you suddenly realised that was a bit different.

[0:12:51] Lee: Let's get you down there. Did they tell you which base you were going to go to at this stage, and did you know where it was?

Emery: During the interview, yes. Halley Bay came up. They tried to explain where it was. I think it was put to me: 'If you can imagine the Antarctic, there's that bit that sticks up towards South America. There is a big bite out of it. We're kind of down towards the bottom of that bite.' That was about it. It was very white, very flat, and a lot of sea ice and I did obviously get back home and have a look on a map and just about work out where it was. But the other thing that really interested me I suppose was the fact that the boat was going to go from Southampton across to America and then down to Montevideo, and then down to the Falklands, before going down there. More travel and that was an interesting factor to me.

[0:13:41] Lee: What did Mother think, if the other side of Birmingham was too far for 'my little Steven' to go?

Emery: I think by that time they had ... They were OK with it. Actually I think they were quite pleased, or proud, that I had actually been offered the job. Whilst they were a bit wary about the travel when I was first starting off from school, both myself and my sister, they encouraged us if you like to actually go off and do other things. My sister had gone off and worked in France when she was in her late teens, au pairing and stuff initially. They encouraged her to do that so me going away was quite a jump but it was obviously with a proper body. They were more comfortable with me doing that than disappearing off to France with my mates for a few months. So they were OK with it. They were fine I think.

[0:14:35] Lee: When you got to Halley, (and we are truncating this because we have only got an hour), when you got to Halley and you saw what you had let yourself in for, can you recall your reaction to (a) the environment and (b) living underground?

Emery: I think by the time I got down there I knew a bit more about it. We had been round the Peninsula and all the other bases so I had seen most of the other environments and knew Halley was quite different, and obviously the loading and unloading of the ship was done at N9 so it was about a 40-mile trip I seem to remember, from where we were unloading to where the base was. And we got stuck on the way doing that, in a blow, so we ended up camping overnight, so it took us a couple of days, and I was one of the last ones to go in. But yes, you come down into the base. I can remember there being an odd smell and thinking 'I don't know whether I am going to like the smell of this, for all the time climbing down into the base.' There obviously is a smell down there which after a few hours you don't even notice.

[0:15:35] Lee: What did it smell of?

Emery: I don't know. I think it was probably a combination of food and body odours I suspect. It wasn't particularly pleasant I seem to remember. But you come down, when you come down ... When I first went into there, you come down the main shaft. The gash area was fairly close by, which you walked past and then into where the kitchen area was. So you had got smells associated with that. And the accommodation block was kind of behind you. You probably got it all blowing into that one area and then disappearing off up the shaft. But it soon went and I went round and you look at it. 'Oh well!'

[0:16:16] Lee: You raised your eyebrows then, as if perhaps it wasn't quite what you were expecting.

Emery: I think I was expecting it to be something like that but the reality kind of hits home. The electrician I was taking over from was Steve Norris, who I think you may have already interviewed. I think I have seen his name on one of the papers somewhere. He was obviously an ex ship's electrician I believe and obviously a lot more experienced than me so all this was fairly standard to him and obviously he had done an excellent job from what I can understand, the previous year. I think he looked at me and thought 'Is this lad going to know what he is doing?' Obviously very inexperienced, hadn't come from a ship or that type of background or industrial background; had come from an electrical contracting background which probably wasn't the norm for what they normally picked up on, but you ....

[0:17:15] Lee: Did you sense, as a younger Fid, that you were getting any kind of particular attention from the base commander? Was he being a bit more fatherly towards you?

Emery: No. Obviously the first year was Ernie who was a diesel mechanic, who I had met on the boat and got on well with.

[0:17:36] Lee: Who was the first year?

Emery: He was Ernie Thornley I think it is.

[0:17:40] Lee: Ernie Thornley?

Emery: Yes. I think it is Thornley or something like that. No I don't think so. If there was a problem, or they needed work doing, that was down to you to get on and do it. I like to think that when the stuff came up, I just got on and did it and wasn't really standing there looking puzzled 'He-e-elp!' I suppose it is one of those things. You go through a fairly fast learning curve and try and pick it up as you go along if you don't understand it.

[0:18:15] Lee: So were you thrown things you couldn't cope with or were you actually equal to the job all the time?

Emery: I can't remember anything that really threw me. There was issues with the generators, not so much of them breaking down, and obviously the diesel side wasn't that much of a problem. There was issues about how they operated synchronised together and what have you. I had done all the theory at college so I knew how it should all work, but there were aspects about it which basically we couldn't seem to get both generators to run together. You have to synchronise them together to get this supposedly seamless changeover, which meant starting one up, syncing it in with the other one. Then shutting the other one down, and they tended to drive each other as you speeded one up and slowed the other one down, they tended to drive one another. Well to my way of thinking and my knowledge we should have been able to run both of them together in parallel and share the load to give the base a lot more power because we were always short of power. It was very easy to get them to overload and shut down.

[0:19:25] Lee: When you say you were always short of power, do you mean the level of the power was not adequate or that they kept on tripping out? What do you mean?

Emery: Right, it's a case of the generators were always running probably around three quarters of their capacity most of the time, but there were certain things that were obviously going on on the base, like when they were generating hydrogen for the balloon flights. And at certain times if we had too many heaters on, the load could actually go over the top and could actually go over 100%. The generators would probably live with about 110% for a few minutes but if you started extending that into half an hour they would just trip out. It was more that the diesel engine couldn't cope with it, rather than the actual alternators. The alternators were more than powerful enough to cope with the extra load but the actual engines driving the alternators couldn't. They would just stall if they got too overloaded or running that long, on overload for too long. So if you were ever working outside, and you suddenly heard the engine note change, and it started to cough and you could see a bit of black smoke pouring out of the ..., run fast, and try and turn everything off, as you were running down towards the generator room and trying to shut everything down as you went down.

[0:20:47] Lee: So if you turned some of the appliances off, it would recover, would it?

Emery: Yes. If you could get there quick enough and shut off various areas like the accommodation block or lounge block, stuff like that quickly enough, then you would

keep the science and those people going while the generator recovered and would carry on. But it was just that you couldn't run everything as normal, as you would in a house, and turn everything on and off. The generators just could not cope with that.

[0:21:16] Lee: Did you have a kind of a scheme that everybody was aware of, especially in the winter, where you couldn't turn that switch on until someone else had switched something off? Was it organised like that?

Emery: Well basically the general practice was that the accommodation block didn't have any heating in it, which was something I tried to change when I got down there, because there were some fan heaters or little blower heaters, or convection heaters I think they were, sat in the accommodation block. But everyone goes to bed and they are all sat there in -10, -15 or whatever, and no heating on in that block, so it wasn't a particularly pleasant place to be. You got into your sleeping bag and you didn't move very far. So we tried to get some temperature back into that area, and it was OK when the base load, you could control it, but you did get to the point where you couldn't afford to have that lot on and certainly by the time the second year came round, and more stuff had been brought into the base, and the load had gone up a bit more, we had to trim it all the way back down again. So there was that; there were certain heaters that were around the base which we just never ran. Our workshops where I was and the carpenter were, we rarely had our heaters on in those areas.

[0:22:34] Lee: What was the solution? Another generator?

Emery: Another generator, or getting the two that we had got to work better. One of the things we did do was go over to the ... what was then the old base to us, which was the '66 version<sup>2</sup>, which must have been Halley II I think, Grillage Village it was also known as. We found an old generator down there, just a small one, that had been left lying around in the garage somewhere, and managed to drag that out and get it back over to our base and I was able to rig that up and do a bit of a switching arrangement so we could always get that on line, the idea being that we could possibly have powered certain bits of the base, or certain equipment, from that little one. Did that a little bit but it wasn't really powerful enough to make a big enough difference although I think on a couple of occasions when we had to have both generators shut down ...

[0:23:37] Emery: Assume we had had a fault on one engine and while they were working on that, the other one went down as well, so we had to have a complete shutdown. I was able to get this little one up and running and switch it back on to the main base, just to give us some lights around the base for a short few hours while they got the other ones sorted. But it was just a constant thing, that the generators were always struggling. I am sure that people will tell you more about why but it was to my mind: we should have been able to have both sets running together in parallel. There was an argument about doing that, because obviously you are then wearing them down on equal terms and there was an argument: have one running, you have always got one on standby and all the rest of it. But at peak periods, if you could have run them together, it would probably have helped matters but ...

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<sup>2</sup> Actually built in 1967.



[0:24:29] Lee: Were you at Halley for two years?

Emery: Oh yes.

[0:24:31] Lee: So at the end of your first year was there a requisition went off to London, or did you request for more power?

Emery: There was never any chance that they were ever going to put another generator in there, basically because the shed was that far down, it wouldn't have been big enough to have taken another one, or not another full size one. There would have been major engineering issues about trying to get another one in there.

[0:24:55] Lee: So it was always going to be make do and mend.

Emery: Yes, and I think even by that time, they had got a kind of time limit planned for that particular base, so they weren't going to invest any more money down there than they needed to.

[0:25:08] Lee: With the best will in the world, if the power kept on going off, were you not terribly popular at times?

Emery: Occasionally yes, you did get 'What's happened now?' Especially if the scientists were in the middle of an experiment or doing something and they suddenly had a complete blackout, they weren't always very happy. But I think everyone understood the situation and tried to work round it so if they knew there was a certain thing they were going to do and definitely needed power in that particular period, then we were all aware of it and we just did everything we could ...

[0:25:42] Lee: So they could make a request, could they?

Emery: Yes. We could make sure that everything was turned off or we were down at a minimum load and make sure nobody went along and turned anything big or hefty on. Because it could be like the cook just putting one of his big grills on or three or four hotplates or a grill or something going. Although he had got his Aga for the main cooking, there was the electric stuff in there. And it could be that and couple of other heaters going on at the wrong time would be enough to tip you over, so it was a case of 'Right. They are doing this. That block's off; this block's off ...'

[0:26:19] Lee: You've talked a lot about the generators. I presume there was a genny mechanic working with you, but did you kind of learn each other's trades?

Emery: To a point, yes. Generator engines, or diesel engines I got to know a little bit more about but the first year Ernie was looking after them and Pete Witty the second year. So yes, we obviously worked fairly closely together, in making sure his bits ... But I suppose Ernie was the BC for the first year, so he had kind of got a dual role. He was a diesel mechanic and BC and got himself involved in other stuff as well.

[0:27:03] Lee: So did you find, generally speaking, that your college training actually stood you in good stead.

Emery: Yes. Without that kind of background, if I was just relying on what experience I'd had, it was all right looking after the circuits within the base: 'I want sockets here, I want sockets there; I need these light looking at.' or whatever. That was all fairly straightforward, so the generator bit was the bit that was different.

[0:27:32] Lee: That was the war zone, was it?

Emery: Yes, only inasmuch as if anything ... I always knew that if anything major went wrong with one of those sets, that was going to test me to my absolute ultimate. As it happened, we never really had that many problems. There was a few checks I could do occasionally.

[0:27:51] Lee: So you never got into the 'spare part' crisis?

Emery: No. We had got them there and I knew we had got and I knew the basics of what I should have needed to do if they .... It was how they generate; how alternators work and changing diodes and stuff over. All I would say is: it stood me in good stead for when I came back to the UK and over the years got involved in a company I worked for (Honeywell) and I ended up dealing with lots of generators on lots of sites and understood what they were all talking about, and understood why we couldn't actually get these two to work together. Which was another interesting point once that penny had dropped. But electrically then, it was just a case of: the rest of it was relatively straightforward. I seem to remember at first when in the second year there was a thing done by Sheffield University I think it was, which Harry (we called him Harry; his name isn't Harry), John<sup>3</sup> ...

[0:28:55] Lee: Don't worry.

Emery: We spoke to him last night on the phone as well. He is over in Japan at the moment. They were doing something and there was a caboose going to be about 3 km off base and it needed power going down to that and he had got little light bulbs in containers to keep instruments warm. I remember reeling all that down there and connecting all that stuff up and putting the sockets into ... all that kind of stuff. That was interesting but fairly straightforward.

[0:29:22] Lee: So were there any innovations or new moves or new developments that you were able to establish in those two years? Apart from the occasional heater in a dorm?

Emery: I don't think I did anything striking. I know certain people have gone in and they have done these little mods, and there's all sorts of little things going on. I think my main objective was to keep what we had got going. I don't think I can honestly say I did anything that was unique. I think the only claim to fame I may have had was when ... – it was only electrical because of what I used – was when we lost a couple of lads out in one of the blows.

[0:30:07] Lee: I was going to ask you about that next. This is George Morgan and Roy Whitfield? Tell me that story please.

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<sup>3</sup> John Matthews.

Emery: Right. At times it goes a bit hazy but if my memory is right, we'd had a fairly lengthy blow. It was the middle of winter time so it was permanently dark and we needed to get fuel in and I don't think some of the machinery was working. So we hadn't got the IH's or whatever to drag the stuff around. So I know we'd all had to go out to manhandle drums of fuel round to the generator area so we could refuel the gennies. I don't remember the exact reasons why but I know George and Roy had been probably drinking at the time, for whatever reason, and probably shouldn't have gone out in those conditions but they had. We all came back in after getting all the fuel sorted by which time it was blowing quite hard. You can't really ... you've got no visibility and it would have been ... If it had been light it would have been a whiteout condition but it's dark anyway. Obviously where we had been working we had been following lines and dunnage posts etc., just to know where we were, and suddenly somebody realised that two were missing.

[0:31:31] Emery: We organised a search round the base and they obviously weren't on the base and then it dawned that yes they had gone out and nobody had seen them come back. So we organised a search to go and search round the immediate area, which did actually mean tying people up and keeping them on ropes so we could spread out and not lose anyone. But something I'd noticed when we had been out travelling, and coming back to the base, was that you could see lights high up and we'd had a couple of lights up on gantries there at certain times, and I always knew that you could actually see those from quite a way from the base, even when there was a bit of wind blowing and you had got the drifting snow.

[0:32:19] Emery: It just seemed to sit above it and you could just make them out. So I said 'I am just going to try and put some light up on ...' We had got this tower at the back of the generator shed which Ernie had built, out of 45-gallon drums, which is what I think he spent most of his time doing: welding 45-gallon drums together. But we had got a big tower with steps in it and I am not sure what it was doing, other than a marker. I can't remember what his plan for it was, to be honest, but it was guy-roped up so it was fairly sturdy. I just got a couple of lead lights, clambered up there and then just clamped them to the top of this tower, so it was about 15/ 20 foot up, something like that.

[0:33:02] Emery: Then apparently (you would have to ask George and Roy) but they ... I think then George suddenly realised that they could see a light and George, being the met man that he is, worked out in his brain that it wasn't the moon because it was in the wrong place. It must be the base. So they basically followed that and came back into the base, because what they had done: they had wandered out and hit the perimeter drums and were sheltering behind one of the drums on the perimeter of the base, but could not really work out where the base was, and it would have been quite easy to have walked towards what you thought was the base and actually walked straight through it, which has happened before. So they were sat huddling there, wondering what they were going to do.

[0:33:52] Lee: So you didn't find them? They found their own way back?

Emery: They found their own way back, yes.

[0:33:55] Lee: Were there any changes to procedures as a result of that little scare?

Emery: I think there probably was. I can't remember the details. I know we did tend to keep lights permanently up after that. I seem to remember rigging some up on a more permanent basis and trying to keep them in, because people realise that yes, you could see them a bit farther away than what they had been led ... what everyone thought they could. But I think the base just more or less carried on as it was really.

[0:34:24] Lee: Generally Health & Safety today is ... We all know what it is like now. How was it in 1977 on Halley?

Emery: Different.

[0:34:35] Lee: Why? In what way?

Emery: It was a different world back then, shall we say? It's something we've spoken about tonight, last night and in other meetings. People are a lot more conscious ... I'm not down there now so I don't know what they have to go through but I don't think any of us would ever have heard of risk assessments, method statements and all this kind of stuff. Yes, we had a talk on the way down about the Antarctic and being careful and be careful of the sea ice and all that kind of stuff. The Antarctic doesn't suffer fools lightly, so you don't take risks. We'd had all that kind of general talk on the boat on the way down. There were guidelines about people going out in certain conditions, and you shouldn't go out.

[0:35:27] Emery: All that said, it was quite common for two people to go off on a jolly together towards the Hinge Zone or up towards one of the other ... Mobster or areas that people could go off to and camp overnight or be off. And you could go out for maybe supposedly a planned fortnight but you might be out for three weeks if the weather got bad and you couldn't move. So there was a lot of teaching how to survive out there in your tents, in terms of the practical kind of things that you did and how you would operate; what food you would take with you and how you would load your sledge up and all this kind of stuff. But it wasn't that formal; it was more a case you learned from the guys that had been down there the previous year. There were certain things that you could or couldn't do, but we went down when we could, we could get down onto the sea ice and walk around there, albeit that there was a very detailed record of one of the lads that had been lost in a previous year. I am not sure how long; a few years<sup>4</sup>.

[0:36:34] Emery: When they were running dog teams out of there, he had gone down onto the sea ice to do a training run with the dogs. I think the idea was to go down somewhere near where our point was, Halley Bay area, and then run round and come back up Mobster, whichever way round. He disappeared and they never saw him again, so the assumption was that he had gone through the sea ice with the dog team and never got back. I can't remember the guy's name but it was quite well detailed so we were all very aware that you could go down there and if the wind changed and the sea ice started going out, you could disappear with it.

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<sup>4</sup> This was Neville Mann in 1963.

[0:37:15] Lee: So it wasn't exactly gung-ho then?

Emery: No, but it was a case of we were aware of the dangers and it was a common sense type of approach which for most of us worked but you have to say that there were people who were down there who you would question whether their common sense was the same as everyone else's. And that goes for the scientists right through to some of the service support teams. Some of the accidents that have happened down there, what on earth were they thinking about? So yes, some of the lads were obviously aware, straight out of university, very little practical experience, and do things that you do think it's 'Why have you done that?'

[0:38:09] Lee: So when you had to climb this 45-foot drum tower to put the lights on top, what precautions or Health & Safety ...

Emery: Maybe being who I am I just climbed up it.

[0:38:21] Lee: No rope?

Emery: No. There was nothing to tie on to. It was just like: what he had done, he had cut half-moon holes in, so there was handholds and footholds to climb up it in a straight line. It was high enough and you didn't want to fall off it, but it wasn't that high, so I didn't think too much about it, other than that's what I was going to go and do and that's what I did. But that wasn't gung-ho. You didn't go and get permission from the BC: 'I'm going to go and do this?' 'I'm going to go and do that' and off you went. That was my attitude at the time anyway, but being a youngster, you are invincible at that age, aren't you?

[0:39:12] Lee: There were a few accidents. There was the loss of a skidoo at one point in your time down there.

Emery: Yes, yes.

[0:39:18] Lee: Tell me about that, that story.

Emery: Right. We had again gone down onto the sea ice to see the emperors, the penguin colony, which was a fair trundle round. We went down Mobster Creek I think at the time which is a relatively easy slope down onto the sea ice through literally a creek area, if you like. You have no doubt had it explained several times before. Out onto the sea ice and then along following the coast round to where the penguins and an occasional seal were. We went down. It must have been before relief, so it must have been early summer but the sea ice was starting to crack up so there were – I forget what they call them now (my brain's gone) – cracks in the sea ice where it went slushy.

[0:40:11] Lee: The Hinge Zone?

Emery: No, this is actually down on the sea ice. The Hinge Zone is the inland bit. If you can imagine all the sea ice, when it starts to break up it tends to be big chunks but you will get like a crack running through it.

[0:40:25] Lee: Would that be a lead?

Emery: A lead. Yes, the beginnings of a lead possibly and when it's moved about slightly, the wind can catch it and it will get a bit slushy in the middle. Some of them might only be a few inches wide to three/ four foot or even more. You obviously don't go across those bits. What you tend to do is go across the thin bits and if you are on a skidoo ... Some of them you could just step over and it's not a problem. You just drive straight over them; it wouldn't be an issue. We had been down there, taking photos and stuff. I had driven down there and I think a couple of the lads who were here today were down there. But we got there and I had gone down with Phil Hart. I hadn't realised until that day because it just hadn't occurred to me, that all the time we had been down there, he had never driven a skidoo because he had run with the dogs. I had been out with him with the dogs and it just never occurred to me that he had never been on the skidoo all the time we had been down there. So when we decided to come back, he said 'Can I drive back?' I said 'OK' and he jumped on it and off he went. I wasn't thinking any ... I was just sat on the back following the other lads.

[0:41:47] Emery: We were trundling along and he was coming up to one of these leads. Well the lads on the other skidoo just went straight across it, which was what I was expecting him to do but for some reason, at the last minute he obviously, I wouldn't say panicked but for whatever reason, he thought he couldn't make it. So he tried to turn to miss it. In actual fact what he did, he left it so late he actually ended up turning and driving on to the slushy bit and then driving along the slushy bit, with the skidoo slowly disappearing underneath. He baled off and got onto the hard stuff and I am baling off and desperately trying to hang onto to the skidoo at the same time, and it is just slowly sinking down through all this slush with me desperately hanging on to it on the ice and slowly going down with it. When it got to my chest I decided it was time to let go of the skidoo and then just managed to haul myself out. I think Phil probably by which time Phil had got to us and helped pull me out, but I was certainly up to my chest in the water and the skidoo had gone.

[0:42:53] Lee: So there you were, soaking wet, quite a long way from base. How did you cope with that?

Emery: Well the other lads had come back. They had spotted what had happened. They turned round and we came back. I can't remember whether we all got onto the same skidoo or what. I know I certainly was put on a skidoo to get back to the base quickly because everybody was obviously worried about the cold and freezing and all the rest of it. So they slung me on that. I don't know whether the other two started to walk back and someone went back for them or whether we all managed to ... Because if we had got a sledge with us they might have got on the sledge, I really can't remember now.

[0:43:29] Lee: Was the skidoo ever seen again?

Emery: No. It was about 600/ 700 foot I believe, straight down, so ...

[0:43:36] Lee: Any inquiry on base, blame apportioned or ...?

Emery: Yes, well I know Phil went in and told Ken<sup>5</sup>. They had a brief conversation. I think Ken's attitude was 'Are you, was everyone OK, yes?' And then I think there was a bit more flying backwards and forwards to Cambridge. I did expect to have a lot more flack over it than I got. I think Ken probably had a bit more than I ever had which he obviously fielded and I am not sure quite what was said.

[0:44:11] Lee: Did you sense that the base commander was going to have a buffer zone between London and the Fids.

Emery: Yes, he certainly knew how ... I think Ken had understood how BAS worked and how to deal with them and how to field certain stuff. And he had got other issues going on at the time so that was probably another problem he didn't need. But it was: we had all got back. There had been an accident, yes and there would be some inquiry. But I certainly never had any come back: 'You shouldn't have been down there.' Nothing official anyway, which looking back, I am even more amazed that there wasn't more hassle. I think if it happened in this day and age there would almost a national inquiry, but ...

[0:45:02] Lee: When you said he had other problems, were you alluding to [REDACTED] [REDACTED]?

Emery: Mm. You knew there was a problem going on but I wasn't aware of any of the details or any of the information that was flying backwards and forwards at the time. I wasn't aware of that until after we came back. You just knew there was a guy on site who was struggling for whatever reason. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] He was obviously struggling, but he was one of these chaps that, for whatever reason, I didn't have that much to do with him. I knew him, spoke to him. We socialised towards him; no issue, but it wasn't somebody who I got close to. You tend to find that with certain people either because you work with them, or you just get on with them. You tend to be closer with them than others. I don't whether anybody really got that close to him, but I didn't have any need to have regular day-to-day contact with him, other than seeing him and saying hello, and doing the normal things.

[0:46:08] Lee: Did you sense that the base was, not quite sending him to Coventry, but keeping him at arm's length because they couldn't work out quite what was going on?

Emery: I think to a point after a while it became that way. In all honesty it happened during the first year as well. There was a couple of lads that seemed to struggle with the isolation and the environment, and I think if you are coming to the end of your two years, most of us started to go a bit funny. I certainly know I said a few things – I probably had a pop at Ken on a couple of occasions – which in hindsight were probably uncalled for. That was just how things were. Towards the end of my time there, there was obviously a big programme going on at Rothera and I was quite keen to go on to Rothera after we got out of Halley, because obviously Halley gets relieved but the boat doesn't come back to the UK for a few more months and it has got to trundle round. There was a lot of work going on at Rothera and there was stuff going

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<sup>5</sup> Ken Lax, the base commander.

on at South Georgia, and certainly myself and a few of the others wanted to go to Rothera because it was a base we hadn't been to. So we wanted to get over there and see that, but we got told 'No, you are not going there. You are going to South Georgia.' which didn't appeal at all.

[0:47:32] Lee: So did you go, or did you go home?

Emery: Basically what happened: we then had a change of mind and got off the boat somewhere in South America, in Argentina, not Buenos Aires.

[0:47:46] Lee: You left the Antarctic?

Emery: Yes, we came out of the Antarctic, went into South America and then had a few months round there and caught the *Biscoe* back to the UK.

[47:58] Lee: One or two more things just to ask you about, if I may. You talked about going down to get the generator from the IGY hut, the 1957 ...?

Emery: No the generator came out of Halley II.

[0:48:10] Lee: But you also went down to the IGY hut, which was at least 20 years old by that time?

Emery: Yes. It was a good way down.

[0:48:17] Lee: What was it like in there?

Emery: Collapsed.

[0:48:21] Lee: Can you describe it?

Emery: The story behind it was that the people in our first year, they had been down there, or somebody had found a way down there but the markers: they had lost, where it actually was. You had got the flat bondu and no sign of anything. But they managed to work out where it was, and I think it was Vince Carter and Graham Mawdsley had more or less worked out approximately where one of the shafts should be, to actually find a way down into this place. Because we couldn't take the bulldozers and stuff across there, because there was a danger it might go through. We had to go across and spend a few days digging. We eventually found the top of the old shaft which had obviously had a board put across it but all the markers had disappeared. It was about 6 ft down so we dug down to that, cleared it ... Put a new shaft on and put a kind of scaffold arrangement over the top which we could put some electron ladders, steel ladders onto. Then two of those roped together, somebody on the top with a rope and you climbed down the ladder and you came out alongside one of the huts, actually into the melt area of one of the huts which you could only get into by climbing through a window I seem to remember.

[0:49:41] Emery: There wasn't a lot in there. Then you could work your way around the side of this hut. Bear in mind that you are working in the melt caves around the hut. By crawling through another little hole somewhere, you got onto a staircase, a



kind of Dexion type staircase and which then led down into another melt area, and eventually – I can't remember it exactly all now but ... – the two things that stick in my mind are (a) having to crawl through this little gap where you were literally crawling through an 18-inch, two foot wide gap, and you think 'How much ice is above me here?'. Went to this kind of ladder area, climbed in down there and then getting into what was the original IGY base, where most of the roofs were all collapsing – big oak beams in there that just broke – being in there and the fireplace and a few other bits and pieces. But there was nothing in there other than old fires that had been left and abandoned and a bit of junk that people had looked at and decided it wasn't worth rescuing and taking back out again. But it was well and truly collapsed but you stop and think 'The longer we are down here, if anything happens you are not going to get out.'

[0:51:03] Lee: Did you think that at the time or is that a retrospective view?

Emery: That was not the first time I went down there.

[0:51:10] Lee: You went more than once?

Emery: Oh I went down several times because I ended up being one of the few people that knew how to get down there in the end. So after the first time, then we had several people wanting to go down there. So I went down a few times but there was one occasion and it was probably one of the only occasions I really and truly got frightened down there. I'd had one of these dreams the night before. I knew I was going to take some lads down the next day and I had one of these dreams where I had gone down there and thinking about it and in my mind something had collapsed and we were stuck down in the bottom. I got up in the morning with this in my mind, thinking 'A premonition? Should I say no? I know the lads were keen to go down and no, I've got to be strong about this. It's just a dream; it will be all right.' I never said anything to anyone at the time but we went across there.

[0:52:06] Emery: We went down and I was feeling apprehensive all the way and I remember getting down there; it was with Phil Hart by that time. We had got right down to the bottom, to the IGY base, and bear in mind that our lighting at that time was with Tilley lamps (these pump-up things that will be hissing away at you) and then start to splutter and die on you. Then pump up. So we sat down there. We had got into this bit and Phil was looking round and there was suddenly an almighty crack. YU-BANG. And we both stopped. I am walking round thinking 'What on earth is that?' You mind is thinking 'Is this it?' Phil looks round 'What was that?' I said 'It's probably just the heat from the Tilley lamps making something move. I think we had better get out of here.' We went out and everything seemed fine. Whatever it was we couldn't actually see. I assume it was one of the beams had just given a little bit more, but I got out of there as fast as I could that day and it was only when I got back up I thought 'Thank goodness for that.'

[0:53:13] Lee: Was that the last time you went down?

Emery: No, I went down again; I took somebody else down after that, and I seem to remember: when the relief people came in, there was a chap who was on the logistics side and I can't remember his name now, I think he was a carpenter originally, he

wanted to go down there. He knew we had been down there and he wanted us ... I either showed him how to get down there or I might have even taken him part way down. That was during the relief when the boat came in, so it was a quick flit in and out; there wasn't a lot of time. But I did go down there a couple of times. And I went down the following year I think. I must be mad!

[0:53:54] Lee: What's all this about listening to *The Archers*?

Emery: Surreal moments. You go off from the base. We used to have our jollies and one of the things that you could take with you was a short-wave transistor radio, a bog-standard transistor radio which had got a short-wave band on. I had gone out with Phil with the two dogs. We only had the two dogs on the base at the time. So we had been training with the two dogs to tow the sledge, which they could do. We had got an extremely lightweight sledge which I believe Ken had helped make a few years before. But you are limited to what you could take in terms of weight and I had insisted that we take this radio. Phil didn't want to take it because it was extra weight but I had been out on a few trips by then and I knew if we got stuck in a blow, you are lying there in your tent.

[0:54:53] Emery: Once you have read a couple of books, there is nothing else to do. So having a radio is always going to be a bit of a lifesaver. So basically that's what happened. We had gone off. We had been out for a few days. It started to blow and about the third day of being stuck in the tent, listening to the radio, the old *Archers* comes on. I'm lying there listening to an *Archers* edition, probably the omnibus edition on a Sunday, in the middle of the Antarctic, wind howling around outside. 'This is just not for real.' It's a programme – I shouldn't admit to this I suppose but I have always listened to the *Archers* on and off over my life, if not every week or every day, it's kind of tuned in every now and again. So I understood what was going on. I think Phil was a bit nonplussed with it all, but it was just sat there, listening to the radio, thinking 'You can't be lying here.' and you think of all that world going on elsewhere and everything else happening and you are just lying in a tent, nobody around for miles, miles from anywhere ...

[0:55:57] Lee: And there's Walter Gabriel?

Emery: Yes, or whoever it was in them days. I can't quite remember now.

[0:56:02] Lee: It must have been him.

Emery: Yes, it probably would, yes.

[0:56:05] Lee: At that time: Chris Gittins. He used to live near here.

Emery: Did he? Yes, I suppose he would have done.

[0:56:09] Lee: So what were you listening to it on? Was it on BBC, the World Service?

Emery: It would be the World Service, yes. That was basically (from what I could understand) probably the one broadcast to go down through South Africa and it just kind of carries on.

[0:56:26] Lee: Halley's not renowned for its wildlife, but you did get to see the whales, didn't you?

Emery: Yes.

[0:56:32] Lee: Tell me that story.

Emery: I think that was the first year, again obviously summer time. I think there was myself, a couple of the ionosphere guys whose names are going out of my brain at the moment<sup>6</sup>. It's only old age is kicking in at the moment; I can't think of the names. Just gone down there. So it would have been the end of '76. Towards the end of '76, certainly before the relief, if my memory is right. We had gone down there and we had managed to find a route down onto the sea ice which was nearest to the base, so it was near the Halley Bay area. It was where the boat would come in initially. So it was the nearest point to the base to where the ice cliffs were and found a route down. So you could actually walk down and on to the sea ice. We had just gone across there. I assume I had gone down on a skidoo; I think it was probably Graham Mawdsley and Dudeney?

[0:57:46] Lee: John Dudeney?

Emery: John Dudeney. Could have been. No not him.

[0:57:49] Lee: Don't worry.

Emery: They were down there and we were just walking around there. I think they had sat down on the – it was almost like being on a rocky beach in the UK, only it was all white and you had got a bit of slush and a bit of open sea moving just offshore. We were sat there looking out and all of a sudden, pshh, a spout from an old whale and then three or four of them started to come up and blow. We were just kind of 'Oh!' I think our first thoughts were 'They are not going to dive under the ice are they and try to lift it up or something like that?' I don't quite know what these whales were actually doing there or what they were hunting or whatever. The next thing we know, all the emperor penguins that were around started suddenly flying out the water. So as we were taking steps back, I am trying to get some photographs of these penguins coming out and the whales in the background.

[0:58:53] Lee: Were they killer whales?

Emery: No I don't think so. At the time they said they were bottlenose whales. I am no expert on whales. I don't think they were killers. But I think the penguins see something that big and get out of the water anyway. As far as I am aware they weren't killers, so the bottlenose tends to be the favourite, although I think I said in there

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<sup>6</sup> The two ionosphericists in 1976 were Steve Chambers and Clive Sweetingham.

minkes because I am not sure whether the bottlenoses are known to go that far South<sup>7</sup>. And as Ken said yesterday, he thinks that's what they would be. No they were just swimming around offshore. Well I say offshore – a few yards out off the ice – and penguins flying in all directions.

[0:59:37] Lee: So you didn't stay a third year and you came back via South America. And then, rather remarkably, you went more or less ... When did you go back to Halley?

Emery: I didn't. Oh, back to Honeywell? I thought you were going to say 'go back down there.' I didn't go back down again. I did get offered the chance by a chap called Miles Mosley I think it was, in late '79. I think it must have been '79 or even early '80, to go back down to South Georgia, which I nearly took up but declined, by which time I had got a job with Honeywell.

[1:00:11] Lee: 29 years later, you are still with them?

Emery: Yes, I was, until four or five years ago. It was never the plan, by the way. That was just how it happened.

[1:00:24] Lee: How did those two years in the Antarctic rate in your life?

Emery: I wouldn't say important. Certainly something I am glad I did. No regrets whatsoever. I would say one of a few highlights, certainly, but fairly high up. That was something I'm glad I did, an experience. If the right opportunity came along, I would like to go down again, but I wouldn't want to go down and do two years like that. But you do get the urge to go and see places again. I wouldn't say the word important because it possibly attaches too much importance to it but it certainly for me it meant that when I came back to the UK, I had a slightly different outlook on life, it certainly changed my outlook, meeting a lot of different people from different backgrounds. You have seen things and experienced things that you wouldn't have done if you had just stayed in the UK and gone down the conventional step of always working for the same companies. All different things like that, and although I've spent a lot of time with Honeywell, the advantage of working for one big company is that you actually end up changing roles every now and again because things change within a company.

[1:01:52] Emery: So the job I started with certainly wasn't the one I finished with. You kind of moved on somewhat. So yes, it was a very great experience and I suppose you would put it similar to people that had gone and joined the Armed Forces, and it is a big chunk of their life. I look on it I suppose a little bit like that. It was an experience. I learned a lot: how to deal with people; how to get on in a small environment and all that kind of stuff, was well as some technical stuff which, when I came back to the UK, stood me in good stead. You get used to trying to think your way round problems, because every now and again something crops up and you think 'How do we get round that one?' I suppose, like everyone else, you suddenly start thinking about things from a slightly different angle and you come at it naturally. Yes it was a very ... I hesitate to use the word important but certainly a defining moment I

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<sup>7</sup> I saw bottlenose whales near Halley Bay in 1972. Andy Smith.

suppose and a change of career moment for me. Otherwise I would have just gone on working for contracting companies and probably stayed in that field. Who knows?

[1:03:13] Emery: Things come along, you make a decision and you go off in one direction. I don't look back and think 'That was a mistake. I should have done it this way.' It may have worked out differently, but I suppose I am lucky. I have gone through life and things have worked out pretty well for me anyway So I have got no regrets. If you go down one road and it all falls apart, then you do have regrets on it, don't you? But that hasn't happened to me so it has worked out well. And obviously the fact that we are meeting these lads here every couple of years, yes there is a bond there. You are still there after all this time. There are certain guys I know from my first year, when I ever meet up with them, you can fall into a conversation like you haven't been away. It might be 10, 20 years or so since you may have seen some of them. But you just pick up where you go off and it is a bond and a friendship that will be there until we all shuffle off.

[1:04:19] Lee: It has been a pleasure, Steve. Thank you very much indeed.

Emery: OK.

[1:04:22] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Back test at the medical. [0:09:53]
- The smell of base. [0:15:35]
- Power shortage: juggling the load. [0:19:25]
- No heating in the bunkrooms. [0:21:16]
- Two men lost (temporarily) in a blizzard. [0:30:07]
- A beacon to guide them home. [0:32:19]
- Health & Safety - 1970s style. [0:34:35]
- A skidoo lost through the sea ice. [0:41:47]]
- Visiting Halley I. [0:49:41]
- A frightening moment in the old IGY hut. [0:52:06]
- Listening to the Archers in the field. [0:54:53]
- Bottlenose whales offshore. [0:57:49]