Nick Cox

Edited transcript of video recordings of Nick Cox interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 13th December 2012 and 7th February 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/153. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 23rd March 2020.

Part One

Part 1a `INTERVIEW_1_Pt1.mp4`

0:00 to 01:24:59

[Although this does seem to start abruptly, Chris's catalogue notes `OHCAT Nick Cox.doc` do confirm that this is where the recording starts. Any preceding part of the interview must have been unrecorded]

[Part 1a 0:00:00] Cox: Ideally you should have nice little triangular pointy-up ears on the top of this beautiful big broad dome head, the typical Greenland dog. But you see some that their ears are just dragging, hanging down like rags because they have been chewed on so much. But they tend to go for the head or anywhere, but a head … One pair, they were brothers actually, called Dex and Lego, and they went at each other. Lego attacked Dex and got him by the nose and he wouldn't leave go. We had stopped travelling for the day. It was blowing over 30 knots or whatever, so we indicated two sledges like that [makes inverted V sign with hands]. We couldn't talk above the wind, so you went like that which means that we are going to camp. And we would go through the well-tried system for getting the tent up on so on, and then the scraps started, actually on the span. Couldn't get the two dogs apart: Dex had got Lego by the nose and we actually had to …

[Part 1a 0:01.00] Cox: I was with a chap called Rudy Bramwell and Rudy sat on Dex and was screaming, poor chap. I actually got a ski, the straight end, i.e. the non-sharp end of the ski, and shoved it into the back of the jaw over the molars of Dex, of Lego, and then twisted in very gently and then of course it just opened his jaw and we then got him off. But poor Dex looked like a tin-opener had opened the top of his nose – a nasty hole – taken a bit out and he wasn't in good shape. So when we got everything organised, we were in the tent and so on, and it was blowing pretty hard by this stage, we got the vet bag out which contained acetylpromazine and filled a syringe (I can't remember what the dose was: 5 ml or something) and then put it in a thermos flask which we used each day, usually for hot fruit juice to have at lunchtime. Put the syringe full of acetylpromazine into the thermos so that the drug didn't freeze in the needle. Otherwise you would get out to the dog and press the plunger and nothing would happen. Went out and there was poor old Dex looking sorry for himself, with this great flap of skin hanging off his nose, and put the 5 ml, or whatever it was, into his back leg.

[Part 1a 0:02:38] Cox: And then we went back in the tent and waited the half hour that it took for the doping to work. With acetylpromazine they get dopey and easier to handle basically. So we pulled him into the tent; then Rudy sat on top of him and I put a little bit of Xylocaine local anaesthetic round the wound and then put some whopping great stitches in just to pull it all together. Because they've had

acetylpromazine they could lose heat quite easily so it was important that he stayed under cover. You could actually build a snow wall to keep him out of the wind but it was very windy and so we just cleared an area at the doorway of the tent and let Dex sleep there, this big wolf. He was very wolf-looking, a lovely lovely dog, a very fine broad dog. So he got his nose under his back leg and fell asleep by the door. And we got ready for the night, usual routine of the candle on the sledge box in between us and we melted the billy can of ice so that it was full or water and then put it aside so it would freeze overnight as a block of ice, so we would have a full billy there. And the alarm clock, the Little Ben alarm clock set to get us going in the morning. And then the box of matches: there was one match sticking out and the primer was loaded with meths, the primer ring and the bottle of meths beside it.

[Part 1a 0:04:17] Cox: In the morning, when you woke up, and your beard and moustache was frozen into the constriction at your sleeping bag, you would break that and your arm would come up and find the match, light the candle, light the meths that was already there, come back in and stay warm and watch. And then you usually just wait until the meths was just about finished and then come out again and get the meths bottle and give it double dose because if it was very cold you needed a double dose otherwise your primus would smoke and flare. And then come back in and watch with one eye through this little hole from your sleeping bag. When the meths was just about done, then you would have to go for it. If it was mighty cold, you would open up the string, tear away your moustaches and beard that had frozen. All your breath had frozen into this cascade of ice in the part of the sleeping bag, break that out, come out and pump like crazy, get the primus going and then a little bit of heat would come into the tent. And you'd then eventually put the …

[Part 1a 0:05:15] Cox: You used to take the billy can of ice and hold it way above the flame to begin with and then bring it down slowly, because if you put it straight on, it cooled the flame and produced a lot of carbon monoxide. So you waited a bit. So that morning bit was a bit chilly. But I am digressing. In the night, about three o'clock in the morning, Dexy the dog woke up and was feeling a lot lot better. The acetylpromazine had worked off and his nose was in good shape and he was a very happy dog. And in the dark, because this was winter travel, he got up and I was woken by a sort of thumping in the middle of my chest. I was lying on my back and it was Dex standing over me, just going just like this [thumps own chest] into the middle of my chest with his paw. It was lovely. And so I got him by both ears and pulled him down and gave him a good rub round the ears and 'Good boy, Dexy!' and this sort of thing until he got … Well this excited him even more so we set off this whacking great big dog, round and round the tent, over the top of me, over Rudy. Little Ben clock, primus, billy can of ice, everything all over the tent. It was lovely; good to see him well again.

[Part 1a 0:06:31] Lee: There have been occasions when dogs have saved men in the Antarctic, on more than one occasion, and I am just wondering whether you would get that reward more readily if you adopted the Nick Cox approach to dogs, as opposed to the master approach to dogs. Do you think there is a correlation between the ability of a dog team to think for themselves and save a man's life and the way they were treated?

Cox: Yes, I would like to think so. I can't actually think of an example. There's the Jack London stories aren't there? The sort of man and dog, and dog looking after man and so on. I think there are times, certainly, when … I didn't do the journeys like the golden era of BAS, when they were out for very very long times, and you must have built up an incredibly good rapport with your the dogs. In fact in many ways it is easier to be out for a long time because the longer you are out, the more settled the dogs got, got used to it. Being on base was just a waste of time for dogs really. So being out: they settled in; they became happy; they became easier and easier. But I do think there were times when I was out, where they dropped through crevasse bridges. I dropped through crevasse bridges and they pulled me out, because you were dongled on. You had your little loop-spliced dongler, a short bit of rope, 18″ bit of rope that went from your belt, your dog belt or dongler it was called, through to the top of the handlebars, and that pulled you out if you fell down a hole, or fell off the sledge or something. But one thing I did note was: the lead dog would know when I was nervous.

[Part 1a 0:08:22] Lee: Oh really?

Cox: That was a very real thing. People say 'They sensed when it is thin ice – sea ice – or crevasses.' But no, they didn't. They went forward as normal but they definitely knew when I was nervous, so if we were on a compass course, in a whiteout or something, I would say to the lead dog 'Irrrra!' and he would go off half a degree, being very careful. 'A bit more' and he would go left just a little bit. 'Good dog. Good dog.' 'Auk, auk, a bit.' And he would come down a little bit like this [indicating veering right] his ears absolutely straight on end, and slightly closer together in the middle of his head, that anxious …. Dogs do it when they see a stranger, the ears go together, and so on. Like the dog in front of BAS, that's rather like that. It's a lovely sculpture but it's a dog that doesn't know the person that it's looking at. They have gone together on the statue; they should be out to each side. They go like that [hands on head pointing upwards] when they are slightly anxious. But then, take them out of a crevassed area, or out of a whiteout, and you probably add another mile to the day's travel because your lead dog would just zig-zag, realised that I was half asleep, lovely weather, wandering along. And every now and again you would have to go down the centre trace and say 'Buck up. Come on. Concentrate.' Go back, and you would go straight, absolutely straight on course for a little while.

[Part 1a 0:09:56] Cox: But they knew when I was half asleep and it was easy peasy. And then back into whiteout or crevassing … So I think they knew, they sensed when I was nervous. But I think, going back to your question about the rapport with dogs, I think yes, they are more likely to get you out of trouble if they like you, and I think if the chips were really down, then it is better to really get on with your team. I can think of an instance where … and I was mighty scared. It was a very very big crevasse bridge, and I was on the bridge and I was with Geoff Summers, one of the most famous of dog drivers, fantastic dog driver. He'd crossed and had gone ahead, and we had discussed it. We had actually stopped and looked at this crevasse; we probed the side of it and it was not terribly strong, but then we leant out and we probed it and he said it got stronger and stronger. Actually what we thought was it was a crevasse that had collapsed because it had got too big. But actually the debris of the old crevasse bridge was obviously making a little pillar in the middle, so although it looked like one crevasse, it was possibly two.

[Part 1a 0:11:30] Cox: But anyway, to get round it was going to be such a colossal long trip. You could see this thing just going on and on and on across glaciers. So we thought 'Come on. We will try it now.' We went out, probed it a bit to open this sort of thing. And it was, it was fine. We went across. I went across and got into the middle of it and my two … not the lead dog but the two back dropped through on their traces. It's funny when a dog goes through a crevasse because they make a tiny little hole. You'd think it would be quite big. It's like a tiny rabbit hole: this tiny little hole and we had put them on fairly tight harnesses for crevasse travel and slack ones for sea ice and elsewhere, and they are tightly set for crevasse travel. And they swing with their paws down, staying in harness. It's always quite funny when sometimes they would be swinging like this [swinging arms]. Because you know we dropped them down at other times and you go and open up the hole, open up the bridge and look down. There are some blue walls of the crevasse and in the midst of this, these poor dogs hanging there in their harness, pendulumming.

[Part 1a 0:12:32] Cox: And sometimes it was very funny because if they didn't like each other, say it was two dogs that didn't like each other, when they swung together they would growl at each other. So you would be shouting down the hole telling them to behave themselves and stop bloody well growling. But yes, I was on this crevasse bridge, two dogs had dropped through, so I couldn't go anywhere. And I was standing on the sledge because if I got off on foot, or even on ski, or getting onto skis, I would likely go through. So it wasn't a very nice situation really because all of us, dogs sledge and me, were all on the thing. And then to compound things, Mary, who was a very sweet bitch in the team (usually there were one or two bitches in each team), she became unclipped. So just everything was going wrong. You always kept the swivel … the dogs were clipped onto the harness and there was a swivel where the clip went on.

[Part 1a 0:13:13] Cox: And likewise, when they were on the span, there was a swivel by the hook that went on, and you always kept that as close to the dog as possible so that the dog's heat would stop the swivel from freezing up, during the night. So you always kept all those bits as close together as possible. But obviously on the harness it was a long way from the dog, and every now and again a swivel, in very cold temperatures, could freeze up and this happened and it spun. The swivel in the rope didn't move as it should and the hook came off and she became unattached. And so she was wandering off, free, on this crevasse bridge. So I had two down the hole, me standing on the sledge and Mary wandering around and I was able to call Mary 'Come in. Good girl. Mary here, come in Mary' and of course she did. Put her ears flat and came in and I had to put her on a lead just attached to the handlebars. And Geoff, bless his heart, came down and pulled out the two dogs at the front and we were fine again. Off we went and we were fine.

[Part 1a 0:14:37] Lee: What was your feeling in 1994 when the Antarctic Treaty insisted that dogs had no place in the Antarctic?

Cox: Well I think they got it so so wrong. There is a need for them today. There are so many good reasons for having dogs.

[Part 1a 0:14:52] Lee: Such as?

Cox: First and foremost: morale of people on station, a bit like the pet dog in the house for those that like dogs. They add something; it's so subtle. It is so special. It's a focal point in the household, using the household pets analogy. We all laugh with them; we laugh at them. They don't mind being laughed at. They have got a sense of humour as well, as long as it's kind and nice. They need caring for. They are always happy greeting in the morning and wave you goodbye at night. That's always there. They need looking after; they are babies really. They need caring for. That in itself is well worth it. If you're going to put people in an isolated part of the globe, think of the things which are going to make you happy. Don't give them gymnasiums, DVDs, email, all the trappings of a modern polar station, fine, but it's all very – how do I put it? They entertain the individual, not the whole. And the dogs entertain the whole. Everybody has to understand them and look after them, so I think they are so important. Even just sticking for a team on the dogs, just enough for people to play with in the evenings, to look after; it's so so important.

[Part 1a 0:16:13] Lee: But you'd have to use them, wouldn't you? You'd have to take them on trips or they would get frustrated.

Cox: Oh yes, of course, but that would be great, to see another winter team there. Most fun, actually, is something like five dogs: easy to handle and just a little light load. Use them to go out to Anchorage, over to Leonie, go over to Blaiklock, go down to Horseshoe; just something, a bit of fun. The other thing is snow chemistry; they are useful for snow chemistry. And the other thing is that we …

[Part 1a 0:16:40] Lee: Sorry, for what?

Cox: Snow chemistry where you don't want to have skidoo or snow scooter fumes belching around the place. Pristine and clean, and the other thing is that we employ mountaineers to take scientists into the field – we call them GAs or polar guides, they tend to be known as, and they have wonderful CVs. They come into BAS to be interviewed and they have extraordinary CVs. They've been in the Himalayas, Alps, Scottish mountains, have done all these extraordinary things but they often don't actually have Antarctic experience, and it is quite different. It's another bit of training that's required before you are going to be of use to a scientist to go out in the field. And there was nothing like taking a new GA (or mountaineer) out with a dog team and in one short journey, they would learn about snow structure, crevassing, weather. Look around themselves; you are travelling so slowly. Just learn a thing or two, camp craft, the fact that you really do have to make the next step home because you might not necessarily make it, depending on weather and all these sorts of things. And add that to all those huge mountaineering skills and navigation skills and all these things, add that and they really were proficient polar guides.

[Part 1a 0:18:13] Lee: You talk a lot about the values of the Antarctic which won't have changed since the days of Amundsen and Scott a hundred years ago this week. I wonder whether, when you were in your pyramid tent, eating your traditional food and hearing the dogs howling at the moon outside, whether ever your mind went back to those early days. Did you relate at all to the heroic explorers?

Cox: Yes, you did. I think when you are in the field you do think about them. There is nothing like taking one of their books out in the field with you, just to conjure up … Because I think I am right in saying, for those of us interested in polar regions, we still cannot quite grasp: what were they like as individuals? What did they smell like? What did they sound like? Were they good company? And that sort of thing.

[Part 1a 0:18:59] Lee: You've met some of Amundsen's relations, haven't you?

Cox: Not relations, but I have met people who have met him. And spending quite a lot of time in Norway. They are famed for their longevity, and hundred-year-old Norwegians are two-a-penny almost. There are lots of them.

[Part 1a 0:19:20] Lee: What sort of picture have you built up of him?

Cox: Not a huge picture of him actually. Quiet and reserved I think is the one that comes over, very red in the face. I think the people I met who had known him, he was by that time a pop star. He was probably in the public domain with acting to a degree, I would imagine. But it was still lovely to get a little picture of what he was like. I met one man who remembered seeing the *Fram* in Oslo Fjord just before he sailed for the Arctic, which he didn't of course. He was lying through his rear teeth. He got to Madeira and announced that actually he was going to the Antarctic. But he saw the *Fram* in Oslo Fjord just about then. And I met people who knew Bjaaland[1], who sounded lovely, the great skier. I think he died in the 1960s; and somebody knew Wisting[2], met Nelson's granddaughter (that's nice). And then on the Scott side, Peter Scott and I actually met Peter Scott on *Discovery*, which was lovely, to see the man that looked a bit like his father on *RRS Discovery* which was absolutely lovely.

[Part 1a 0:20:45] Cox: And of course then Lord Shackleton, son of Ernest, and that was rather nice. When I was involved in training dogs for this Amundsen expedition, I came over from Norway one Christmas period, actually to go to a wedding. But I was over in Britain and so the members of the expedition said 'Come along to the Advisory Committee meeting, that's going to be held.' And it was held once a month at the BBC, because one of the glaciologists in the team was called Neil McIntyre and his father Ian, who writes for the *Times* and has written books, wonderful man, he was Controller of Radio 3 at the time. So Ian very kindly provided a place for the Advisory Group to meet. And the Advisory Group consisted of all sorts of bankers, captains of industry and all sorts of highly talented men who met once a month and had a couple of gins and some titbits to eat and guided the expedition, particularly the financing of the expedition.

[Part 1a 0:21:56] Cox: But also on the committee were Sir Vivian Fuchs and Lord Shackleton. The meeting I went to was lovely because I knew Sir Vivian Fuchs anyway; so we had a good chat. He was fascinated to hear about the dogs, and again regaled his stories of Blackie, his lead dog, and it was always lovely to see him. And we sat down at this very long table. It was totally over my head. I'm not good at money at the best of times but this meant absolutely nothing to me. So I enjoyed looking round the table at these folk and I love watching people smoking pipes, and

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[1] Olav Bjaaland, who went with Amundsen to the South Pole.
[2] Oskar Wisting, another of Amundsen's South Pole team.

people smoked indoors in those days. This was 1985 I think and people smoked indoors then, so I watched Sir Vivian filling his Kapp & Peterson pipe, a little briar pipe. And he had a tin of Three Nuns tobacco and he spent a lot of time carefully filling it and pressing it down and so on. Then he got out his Swan Vestas matches and he set about lighting the pipe. And he lit it and of course it took a few goes because he kept listening to whoever was talking and the match would almost burn his fingers and he would shake it and then he would do another one.

[Part 1a 0:23:14] Cox: And then eventually he got to a point where he had actually lit the tobacco and put the pipe in his mouth and puffed away: great belches of smoke. And then he started listening to whoever was talking again, and he'd forgotten the golden rule of pipe smoking is to shove your thumb on top of the tobacco to stop it erupting once it's newly lit. And bits of Three Nuns, glowing red, fell into his lap. I watched this; he hadn't noticed at all. He was listening intently to whoever was talking at the time – Alan Tritton it might have been he was listening to. And the next thing anyone knew was a curtain of smoke, very thick, coming from his waistcoat up in front of him, and because he was smoking, he didn't realise. I didn't dare say anything but eventually somebody the other side of the table waved his hand to whoever was talking and said 'Just wait a minute. Sir Vivian, your waistcoat is on fire.' Sir Vivian went 'Ohh!' and he was flailing away like this, putting out this fire on his waistcoat.

[Part 1a 0:24:12] Cox: He did it again later on. He was so embarrassed. But then later on in the meeting, Lord Shackleton got it into his head that we weren't up to this expedition and there was no way we would be able to drive these dogs, that we were absolutely useless, and that we weren't up to it. When Lord Shackleton got very excited, he would blink a lot, like this. And he leant back in his chair and Sir Vivian was two or three seats … on the same side of the table but two or three seats away. And he leant back in his chair like this, behind all the people, and he said 'I don't know what you think, Bunny, but if they are anything like my father or that man Scott, two weeks skiing and they thought they knew everything.' I wish I'd had a tape recorder. It was lovely. He was just being naughty but he enjoys being naughty.

[Part 1a 0:24:58] Lee: I just wonder whether you think that Fids of your generation would actually have coped with the Scott or the Amundsen expedition. If you grafted somebody from today or 25 years ago, into their party, how would they have coped?

Cox: I think their ability to suffer cold … I don't think we are equipped to stand up to cold as they were. Born in Caldbeck, a lovely fellside village up in Cumbria, brought up amidst lots of farmers, and my childhood, farmers who had lived in some pretty raw conditions; fell farms with oil lamps and a rag carpet on a stone paved floor; water from the well; a bit of a woollen glove that their granny had knitted for them to go out and use in the winter; wellies with a bit of straw in the bottom to keep your feet warm, or clogs even. They were a tough lot, they really were. They worked high on those fells gathering sheep in the most raw weather. They'd have a woollen overcoat with a bit of baling twine round it and if it was wet, which Cumbria often is, they'd have a hessian sack tied round their shoulders to turn the water. And I always remember a sort crimson-coloured pair of gloves, if ever they did wear them. Most often than not, they didn't. One family in the village called the Coulthards, a very famous farming family in Caldbeck, lovely lovely family, very very good farmers ….

And the farm boys: Nipper, Ernie, Geoff, and the others, they were never allowed to wear gloves, all year round.

[Part 1a 0:26:53] Lee: They were being toughened, were they?

Cox: They were being toughened. I remember Geoff telling me, he said when you went in for tea break, you would go and actually shove your hands through the ice in the trough out in the yard and that actually brought your hands up to some sort of real temperature, without being so screamingly painful when they went indoors. You read Shackleton's accounts of sitting in that boat, 1916 in the boat journey, Worsley in charge, and the cold that they endured, I am not sure that we are actually up to it there.

[Part 1a 0:27:31] Lee: If central heating had invented earlier, we might never have got to the Pole.

Cox: I think we would find it pretty tough. We live longer because of all this living in little hothouses, but I don't think we are as tough along the way. I think, socially, we would do as well and I always say to people going North or South, new ones and some are a little bit nervous about it … and I always say 'You know, it's great. You will love it.' The cold is nothing. It's modern equipment – cold is nothing and actually Arctic and Antarctic cold is actually quite nice anyway. Usually it's a pretty dry cold. The summer seasons are the worst, where there's a bit of humidity in the air but a good cold, proper cold, actually isn't that bad; if you do all the right things, then you will be fine. Food, these days, is far too good. It's embarrassingly good. So we have heating, we have good clothing. And we have entertainment; we have email. We don't want for anything.

[Part 1a 0:28:33] Lee: Perhaps not as single-minded as well?

Cox: Yes, I think you are probably right, but I think what people still have nightmares about: what is a rough ride in a polar region and always has been and always will be is social order, social harmony.

[Part 1a 0:28:50] Lee: Do you have experience of disharmony?

Cox: Oh yes, every year for 35, 36 years now, and of course along the way, you do and my job as a base commander, one of them is to try and keep harmony, probably Number One job really. But yes, I have seen fall-outs. And I have seen the debris left after a major fall-out. I remember going into a Faraday station in – I can't remember which year it was – 1979 I think it was, I forget. And they'd had a very poor winter. They had fallen out. They had burned the food store down. Nettlefold[3] the cook had been producing basically macaroni. They had been living on … but they had fallen out. I went onto that base and it was horrid; it was just so horrid. The team members were shifty, unhappy, paranoid. The base was dirty. Things weren't repaired. It was awful. They'd had a horrid horrid time.

[3] T Nettleship, listed as Electrician at Faraday 1979 in the *Database of Winterers* (BAS Club website).

[Part 1a 0:29:59] Cox: I've been on bases, very lucky the three winters I've done and the field trips and so on, where people have mostly got on very well, but you do … It's inevitable that you do have people fall out and I have seen people fall out badly. I've seen fisticuffs; I've seen people actually break out fighting and you have to deal with it, sort them out, talk to them down and try and remember them. 'You'll be so proud of your stint here. Just remember: if you can get over this, go and make up.' I remember having two people who corresponded on a base. They wrote nasty letters to each other – that's a funny thing to do on a base. So I had to take one of them, the stronger of the two, and I said 'Look, if you went into one of the boat sheds and found him strung from a beam tomorrow, you'd never forgive yourself. He might do that. You are wearing him down. Be a big man. Go and make up.' The only thing I think to have on a base was, or still is, to have (you get them occasionally) people with a very good social thermometer They can sense the mood of a base very very well, and sometimes you get some nasty piece of work who is grinding people down in a very sort of insipid way. And as the base commander you can't do anything about it. You can't nail it.

[Part 1a 0:31:19] Cox: Outwardly they are very nice and they would be very charming to you but in the public domain, on base, they are nasty. They are grinding; they are undermining people, saying facetious things about them behind their backs and you get them. They are very bitchy and the most unlikely people do it. They are fed up; they are homesick; they are not happy and they start getting bitchy, and you couldn't actually nail it but you get some people who are very good at dealing with it. One of the best people … we had a lovely boatman down South called Pete Macko, 'Mad Macko' we called him. He loved it; he liked to be called Mad Macko and he was, he was a loose cannon, not the easiest one to employ because he was a real old character and didn't always abide by the general rule so he was well worth harnessing and having around. One, he was brilliant at his job as a boatman, first class, but to my mind his greatest trait was this ability to read a group of people and wade in with his gloves off if anything was going awry.

[Part 1a 0:32:29] Cox: He used to time it beautifully, usually at a meal, and he would tackle whoever it was. It didn't matter who it was. He would give them stink, in the middle of a meal, about whatever it was, and everybody would just close their eyes and think 'Ah. Good for him. We've all thought it. We never dared say it.' And the social order would go on into harmony again. They are the gems, these people who have got the ability to … and it was actually very kind. He wasn't actually being unkind. He would do it in a most lovely way, hit the button and on we would go into a new gear. So if I did see … I've seen all sorts of ghastly things and as I say, those are the things that people will have nightmares about. I've still had people who have phoned me up, still apologising for the way they have behaved because they regret it and it's awful. You've had this wonderful time North or South and the one thing they can remember is how appallingly they behaved. It's very rare.

[Part 1a 0:33:30] Lee: Let's pick up on your career, if we may, because that's part of the reason why we are here. So you left school at 16 with no particularly strong qualifications and there was a bit of a gap before you became involved in FIDS.

Cox: Yes, I phoned my parents. I was at this extraordinary boarding school, and I phoned my parents from a telephone box and I said … We had this schoolmaster,

wonderful man, called John Bull, who had been South with BAS, or FIDS as it was then, in 1955 and 1956. He was diesel mechanic at Signy Island in 1955 when they built Tonsberg House, and then he went on as GA /Mountaineer at Anvers Island, did some great dog sledge journey on Anvers. The Bull Ridge on Mount Francais is named after him, and he was there when Prince Philip arrived at Anvers in '56. Lovely lovely man and he used to take me aside We used to just go and sit in a little room and chat about the Antarctic, and I loved it. I used to hang on every word. And he told me of course about BAS and he said 'It still exists' and got me the address and I wrote to them and I got a lovely letter from Bill Sloman saying there were two problems: one, I was too young.

[Part 1a 0:34:54] Lee: You were sixteen?

Cox: Sixteen. And the other, I had absolutely nothing to offer. The minimum age for joining up was 21 and I should really have something to offer. And they gave me – I've still got it – it's a foolscap piece of paper about BAS and it has all sorts of things on it, like it was about survey and geology then. It described the bases and it described dogs and tractors. There weren't any snow scooters or skidoos then. It was dogs and tractors and there was a bit about the beer ration. It was lovely, a lovely piece of paper. Anyway I talked to John again and agreed that I probably wasn't going to leave Brookfield with anything much to my name really and I wasn't good at desks anyway. End of a lesson, I would look at all the drawings, usually of little sailing boats all over a piece of paper, and I wasn't very good. There was mayhem there anyway. So I spoke to John and he said 'The sure way of getting a place if you are good enough is to get a trade.' So I thought 'Right, great. That's the way to do it.' So I phoned up my mother and father and I said 'Look, is this all right? I would really like to do an apprenticeship and have a go at this' and they said 'Great; if that's what you want to do, do it.' Wonderful; always full of enthusiasm. So I left school and went to a village carpenter, George Todhunter, and Arnold Morton – wonderful very skilled joiners in Caldbeck. Built cartwheels, built carts, worked on farms, farm buildings, some new buildings but mostly old ones. But it was broad brush and great discipline: started work at eight, finished at half five, worked until one o'clock on a Saturday, ten minutes for your tea break, all weathers. It was wonderful. I really learned how to work.

[Part 1a 0:37:02] Lee: Did you enjoy it?

Cox: I found it hard, actually. I did find it hard, (1) because my friends were all heading off to university and socially they were having a very good time and the freedom. I got, I think, £8 10s (£8.50p) a week and I paid my keep, a fiver a week.

[Part 1a 0:37:29] Lee: Did you work at it for those four years?

Cox: I stuck at it. I did enjoy it and the things I loved about it was getting to know Cumbrians very well, knowing Caldbeck so well which I love so dearly, and the wonderful people. I lived in the village; people in lots of houses. Everybody knew everybody. It was a bit like being with a big family really. So getting to know Cumbrians, and George and Alan were absolutely magnificent and they took this young fellow who wasn't best gifted at woodwork. I liked woodwork but I wasn't a natural. And they knocked me into shape and they taught me how to work and they

were morally very sound people, thoroughly good people, gems on this Earth. So I came through it, actually, having learned all sorts of things other than woodwork. And I wrote to the Antarctic Survey again, I think it was in July 1975 or June '75 and went for interview at Victoria, Gillingham Street, one of the last I think to be interviewed at the BAS Office. And I had this wonderful interview where Eric Salmon talked to me mostly about beekeeping because I kept bees at the time. And my parents also kept all sorts of animals. We had nine badgers. I have got a badger bite on my eyelid there where one of the badgers bit me through the eyelid. But Father and Mother reared badgers and had the first badger ever to breed in captivity. It went to London Zoo actually. When they reached puberty they went on. We had roe dear, foxes, crows, hawks.

[Part 1a 0:39:23] Lee: So the interview was a casual affair?

Cox: It was very casual. We talked about badgers and beekeeping mostly. I then went on to see Colonel Hayward who was at the Colonial Office for my medical. I went in and I am sure this had happened many times before – I sat in the waiting room, full of people who were going to be 'medicalled' ready for going abroad here, there and everywhere, sitting in the waiting room, and this very splendid man with a great shock of grey hair and a very fine silver dog-tooth check suit and waistcoat and a big red rose in his lapel. This was Colonel Hayward, the doctor. He came to the waiting room and stuck his head in and looked at everybody waiting in there with me and he said 'Careful of this man. Raving lunatic, going to the Antarctic for two years. Sorry to keep you waiting Mr Cox. I'll see you in a couple of minutes.' Then I went in. We went through the medical process and he said 'Right. Strip down to your boxers.' And then he said 'Right. I want you to pretend that you are on the deck of a rolling ship in the Antarctic and the ship is sinking and you have got to jump twenty feet down into a lifeboat.' So he said 'I want you to put your hands on your head.' So I put my hands on my head, standing in a pair of underpants in the middle of the room.

[Part 1a 0:41:02] Cox: He was sitting at this very fine desk, sipping a cup of tea, and he said 'Now then, I want you to jump in the air and land on your knees on the floor. So I did and landed. It was a carpeted floor so it wasn't too bad, and he said 'Good good. Now keep your hands on your head. I want you to jump back up on your feet again.' So I did that. 'Very good.' he said. 'Right, jump in the air again, onto your knees.' So I landed on my knees again. Then he said 'Right, wait there.' And he put his tea down on the thing and he came round, this quite elderly man, smartly dressed with his rose in his lapel, he came round and he said 'Right, Mr Cox, now I'm a bag of frozen potatoes. I want you to lift up this bag of frozen potatoes.' And the next thing I knew, there I was on my knees on the floor, on the carpet, and the next thing I had this man hanging round my neck, and he eventually fell on top of me. And he said 'Right, stand up.' So I stood up and he rolled off across the carpet. Anyway he seemed to think I was fit enough and signed up.

[Part 1a 0:42:08] Lee: What sort of questions were they asking in interviews in 1975.

Cox: Well it was always interesting with Hayward because Colonel Hayward, the doctor, he did a lot of fielding. Once you had got your clothes back on, and he sat back at his desk, he did a lot of fielding around about you as a person. It was very clever as well. He wanted to psych you out and he psyched you out sexually in a very

sort of pleasant and careful way. He psyched out what you were like as a person, basically and he was very clever at it.

[Part 1a 0:42:44] Lee: And in the formal board, where you sat opposite those three senior …, was there a sense that they had already decided you were …

Cox: I think they probably quite liked me. I think they reckoned I was probably all right for it but a lot of it: the chat was 'How would you be in a group of people? You are going to be very isolated. You know you will only get a hundred words home every month' and so on. A lot of talk on Scott and Shackleton. They drew on the oldies. It was one thing that we probably all had in common, was that we knew the old ways.

[Part 1a 0:43:24] Lee: And then of course they sent you to Signy, which not quite the Antarctic.

Cox: Not the Antarctic. Yes, and that was a bit of a disappointment, I must say, when I saw that, and I looked on the map. But the BAS Conference, or the Cambridge Conference that year was held at the Scott Polar Research Institute and we stayed at Corpus Christi, just along the road. And when I heard it was Signy, I thought 'Oh for goodness sake, dotted out there at the north end of the Weddell Sea. That's not good enough. I want to be in the thick of it.' And they didn't have dogs either. But they had signed me up as boatman and so I was rather keen about that, and then the more I learned about it, and certainly when I got South, Signy is the most misunderstood base in the Antarctic, I think. And, if I might, just to describe Signy, it isn't understood. It sits out there on its own, Scotia Arc, north end of the Weddell Sea. On the map it looks just Banana Belt, sitting out there way north. And it's not; it's got … I would say, having travelled in the field, sledge journeys south of Rothera as a GA, and wintered at Rothera and visited other places, there isn't a tougher climate than Signy.

[Part 1a 0:44:40] Cox: In many ways, the closer you get to the South Pole, the better it gets. You get the lovely big high-pressure systems. On Signy you get low-pressure systems queueing up between Cape Horn and the Peninsula, just waiting to hit you over and over again. You get on average sixty days with gales every year. It's like living in a black and white photograph. It's just overcast. It's not the most pretty place. It's blowing; it's howling. It has the same temperatures as Rothera, which people don't quite realise. The temperatures: because you are in the Weddell Sea system, it's actually very cold there. The sea ice is as good as down at Rothera, and as unpredictable. But the big thing, being at Signy, is that you are so isolated. An aeroplane has never landed on Signy. There have been three occasions when BAS bases haven't been … well actually in reality two cases when BAS bases haven't been relieved at the end of a winter. One was Stonington, was it '47 or '48, I forget, when Stonington[4] wasn't relieved, and the other was Signy in 1980. There was a case when two scientists[5] had to spend a winter at Belgrano because they couldn't be pulled out, but that was slightly different, but two cases where ships couldn't get there. At Signy, the ships got within about 135 miles and had to turn round and leave them to winter.

[4] It was after the winter of 1948.
[55] It was actually three men: Phil Marsh, John Young and Dog Holden, in 1978.

George Hawthorn and Pete Christie had spent their third winter there, those there for a summer had to do a winter, and so on. But it is, it's a raw place.

[Part 1a 0:46:18] Cox: The other thing at Signy, you really did live the outdoors. I loved Rothera but you did the outdoor things basically when you went on a journey. Every base had its raising food dumps and repair things that have blown away, but at Signy throughout the year you worked outside, whether it was taking limnologists out to a lake, whether it was going out to sea with divers, marine sampling either through sea ice or by boat. Every day the little group of us sat round that table and you used the workforce to the best you could. 'I'm going to be with so-and-so. We need two people over there.' But essentially everybody lived and worked outdoors through the year. You certainly endured more cold and longer days in the cold than anywhere, at Signy. It's a funny little place. It's a cold, windy little spot, stuck way out in the middle of nowhere.

[Part 1a 0:47:24] Lee: How was the boat work?

Cox: I loved it. I loved it but I must say I was a little bit surprised because I was told I would be boatman and BAS had just bought a fishing launch or marine sampling launch called *Serolis*. They also had one built for South Georgia. And I went to Cheverton's boatyard on the Isle of Wight to learn how to use the boat and how to repair it. I had a very entertaining time there, at Cheverton's boatyard, followed by (the following day) I went out with Mr Methold who was the head man at Cheverton's. We went out on a sea trial. What I hadn't realised until then: the *Serolis*, this boat, had actually been launched once before and had been put back in the boatyard. And Mr Methold is wandering around in quite a nervous state. He was a very lean man with a very long fringe that hung way down over his nose when the wind caught it. He kept having to flip it back and he wandered round the boat in a very agitated state while I helmed her round the Solent, trying her out, And he had thermometers outside and one in the engine casing and what I learned later was that this was a second trial because the first trial he had taken her out with Ricky Chinn, a famous man in BAS, showing off this brand new boat and all the lagging in the engine casing caught fire. It was air cooled.

[Part 1a 0:48:51] Cox: And Mr Methold was so embarrassed by this that he emptied his briefcase and baled water from the outside with his brief case and emptied it over the engine to put the flames out. So he was a bit nervous. So I went South with these two boats and arrived at Signy with this splendid launch. But the other boats were horrendous. We had a Zodiac inflatable dinghy with an absolutely clapped out 18 horsepower Evinrude. It was a horrendous thing. It had parts of the throttle mechanism, had been repaired with bits of Anglepoise lamp and the water cooling impeller had been carved out of a piece of wood and put in there. The man who was looking after the gear was sacked, the diver; he went out on the ship. I went in, but up until then the diver had looked after the boating gear. And then I had nine Seagull outboards, a wooden dinghy called *Mwah* [phonetic] and a little plastic dinghy called *Prion*.

[Part 1a 0:49:55] Lee: There was an incident, wasn't there?

Cox: There was, yes, a horrid incident. The ship had sailed and we were at that funny time: raw weather, shortening days, horizontal snow many of the days, just getting its teeth into winter. As I say, at Signy it's business as usual but that sense of being very much on our own. We went out one day, just after lunch, took a group of divers out: Julian Priddle, John Brook, Doug Allen, and (I've forgotten, sorry). We went out in this clapped out Zodiac dinghy which … I'd run out of repairs even by then for it. I was using bits of plastic off old inflatable bags to glue on as patches to patch the dinghy with. It was a horrendous thing. And we went out. We weren't very far away; we were off Bear Rock and they were doing one of the dive sites there, and because we were going to be on station for a while, rather than motoring around, I shoved a hook over and put the anchor down. They all got their gear on and went over the side. It was a really dark day and a bit breezy and a bit of swell. And over the side they went and I sat there. Standard boating gear then was a ventile anorak and gloves with a canvas outer which I dipped in linseed oil to waterproof them, and battledress trousers.

[Part 1a 0:51:31] Cox: I actually eventually found a pair of waterproof trousers which were covered in bitumen and I had actually taken my own waterproof jacket South with me, which was a Paisleys of Glasgow sailing jacket, double breasted with buttons and a corduroy collar. BAS didn't supply you with boating gear. We had lifejackets and a pair of waders which just ensured you went down really fast if you went over the side. So I was sitting, the usual thing, getting a rather cold bottom in these battledress trousers, sitting in this boat and slush in the bottom of the boat. And the wind really got up, suddenly got up. It really did whip up and the next thing I knew, we were pitching and diving in a breaking sea; it was very nasty. I had a little plastic bottle full of thunder flashes which I would throw over the side if a leopard seal turned up, but actually waited until the end of the dive because I thought 'No. this is all right. It's getting pretty bouncy this but we'll be fine.'

[Part 1a 0:52:31] Cox: And eventually they came up, four of them, and usual routine: came over, I got the cylinders off, into the boat and then they came over the side and started pulling their fins off. I went up to the bow to pull the anchor up, having started the engine. Dougie was at the aft end and actually when I was pulling the anchor: as I pulled it up, she was dipping, taking waves over the bow and it was a nasty black steep sea. I shouted aft to Dougie, I said 'Dougie, you just take her in; the less wandering around in this boat, the better. You take her in.' I pulled the anchor and as soon as I weighed, clutched her into gear, the engine went. I think it was probably a shear pin but there was no way we could do anything about it. We swept off, broadside on to this horrendous sea. As soon as we got out of the lee of Bear Rock, we were in a very tough sea and it was snowing, and it didn't look at all good. There wasn't the wherewithal on base to come and get us. There was a plastic dinghy. They couldn't run the *Serolis*; nobody knew how to run the thing. In fact *Serolis* was in the shed.

[Part 1a 0:53:40 Cox: That's right: she was in the boatshed for the winter and they couldn't have come out in a wooden dinghy or a plastic one. So it didn't look at all good really and we shot off downwind in this sea. The divers went over the side, holding on to the rope strops on the side of the dinghy and flinging for all they were worth inland to try and get back to land. And I was paddling and I caught up with John Brook looking up at me and he was saying 'It's all right for us. We can just

leave you and swim for it if need be.' Which they could, in wetsuits which we dived in then. But of course they didn't leave me and we kept going and we got near to somewhere off Berntsen Point, not very far, but we missed that. There was just a big breaking sea, there was no way we could land; it was too big breaking waves. So then we drifted out into Paal Harbour and just shot on South, but eventually we got into a lee, but we were really … It was … We were exhausted and very frightened when we actually pulled up onto a snow back and walked back to base. It was an anxious time, anxious yes. Not nice to go off to sea in a little boat.

[Part 1a 0:54:52] Lee: Was that the occasion when you were wearing a tie?

Cox: Ah no, that's an awful story. Then, when you went South, you were told in your joining instructions to take a suit with you. Extraordinary now, but you took your suit to wear on Midwinter's Day, which of course is Christmas really. You work Christmas Day – it's a mid-summer day, Christmas. So Midwinter: big celebration because the Sun would be returning and Christmas time really; time for a bit of fun and games. So yes, I took a suit with me and on Midwinter's Day we all turned out in our … looking very strange: rosy red faces, standard rather dry stand-on-end hair, all with the same sort of haircut. Lots of dirty bits of Elastoplast on fingers, lots of cuts and … The other thing I always remember is people in the winter used to do this on the table [drums on table] quite often at smoko because they had very often frost-nipped tips on their fingers, with big wodges of skin on the end, and you couldn't help but do that: tap your fingers on the table. So we looked very odd, stuffed into our suits and ties and so on.

[Part 1a 0:56:07] Cox: It was a big party; we had a couple of gins I think before and then we all went into the radio shack and we listened to a radio show broadcast from Port Stanley, and then we had the meal which started I think at about three or something and went on into the evening. We drank far too much. And a friend, David Maclean, a very dear friend, took me to the ship when I sailed from Southampton in 1975 and they gave me, as a leaving present, for the name rather than the drink, a bottle of Southern Comfort. Awful drink but I kept this for Midwinter's Day. So I took out this bottle of Southern Comfort and we were drinking it at the table. We drank far too much, and somebody looked out of the window and in the dark, or rather in the light of a lamp outside, could see lots of frost smoke coming out through the sea ice. And this lovely frost smoke was coming out through the cracks because Midwinter actually is very early winter, as here in the UK. It gets colder after usually. But the sea ice had formed and the hinge zone, where the sea ice met land, had cracked into big pans, so it went up and down with the tide. Later on it all got snow covered and you can't tell land from sea really, but at that time it was still …

[Part 1a 0:57:23] Cox: And I had, on occasion, gone out floe-hopping on these bits of ice. As long as you kept up a good speed, you could run out, jumping from floe to floe and come back onto land again. It was a little bit of fun. Anyway a group of us decided that we would go out and look at this frost smoke. And so there we were, in our suits, with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other, in a terrible state. We went out onto the ice foot. The ice foot again is where the sea ice really does meet land and it is a bit like a swimming pool edge. It's a cut off because the sea ice breaks and drops as the tide goes down and then comes up at high tide. So it was slightly high tide so there was probably about a two-foot down onto the sea ice but on the floor, So

we stood on the ice foot, on the edge, looking at the frost smoke coming out and it was all very nice. And then I, idiot that I am, suddenly realised 'Ah, how about we go floe hopping? A great idea.' So I put my bottle of Southern Comfort and my glass down in the snow and jumped off the ice foot onto the first floe and just shot off out to sea into the darkness, because the light only penetrated so far. And it was fine; I just kept going, jumped floe to floe and as long as you kept up speed, even a floe two feet or even three feet, as long as you just hit it and kept going, you were fine. You just kept going.

[Part 1a 0:58:43] Cox: But, idiot that I am, I got quite well out into the darkness, stopped to shout at the others to say 'Come on! This is great. Come on.' And of course as soon as I stopped, the floe that I was standing on just capsized and over I went. Next thing: I was in the ice, all these blocks of ice locking round my head, and in a suit and tie. So I started swimming back towards base, pushing floes aside as I went into the light, and these heroes who were waiting for me on the ice foot, had put their bottles down in the snow and they had their drinks and they were looking at their drinks and making sure they didn't spill them, and had their hands down like this, ready to pull me out when I got there. But they were very much more interested in their drinks than me Anyway eventually I got into shallow … and I stood up – all these ice blocks – and they pulled me up. And we were like a bunch of kids really. My suit froze, almost like Tom & Jerry cartoon fashion, like this, and we went inside and I sat in the bath because we kept a bath to reheat after diving, and I sat in the bath and started to defrost, sitting there. And Richard Anthony who was the radio operator was going like this, in my neck, the whole time, prodding my neck. And I said 'What are you doing that for, Richard?' He said 'I'm sure your balls are in there somewhere.'

[Part 1a 1:00:11] Lee: For the record what year was this? What base was that?

Cox: That was at Signy in 1976, Midwinter '76.

[Part 1a 1:00:19] Lee: Your other role at Signy, rather strangely bearing in mind your father's profession, was doctor.

Cox: Yes.

[Part 1a 1:00:25] Lee: I sense a very limited medical training.

Cox: Very. Absolutely right. I was at the Cambridge Conference in Scott Polar and Ricky Chinn, again, came to me and he said during a coffee break 'Would you mind being the medical officer for Signy for the two and a half years you are going to be there?' I said 'Yes, fine.' And he said 'It will mean, and I hope that's all right, staying on after the conference to do a St John's Ambulance first aid course.' So nobody did a first aid course other than those … At that time Adelaide had a doctor and Halley had a doctor and South Georgia had a doctor but Signy and Faraday didn't, and as I say, Signy is the most isolated of the stations. It really should have had a doctor. At the others there was a chance of getting out by plane or something. Anyway on the last day of the conference, I went back to my room at Corpus Christie and there was a corner of a piece of paper stuck on the door. It said 'Sorry, First Aid course cancelled. Will contact you when we have organised another one.'

[Part 1a 1:01:40] Cox: Anyway I was driving home on the way back up to Caldbeck, thinking 'This is crazy. I've got this responsibility.' So I told Father about this and he said 'Oh good, that's fine. I will sort something out. Your Uncle Bruce …' who was not a real uncle but a very close friend who was general surgeon, Bruce Maclean at the Cumberland Infirmary. He took me into theatre on a few mornings, just to show me. And Bob Macmillan showed me anaesthetics and showed me how to take an appendix out. And they showed me basically how to operate: some of the basics of it. And then finally sent me off to Bill Bousfield in Carlisle and I spent a couple of mornings with him; he was a dentist. One morning pulling teeth and the other just looking at teeth. And then I spent a bit of time in Accident & Emergency in Carlisle and then I spent a lot of time with my father, taking the cyst off the top of somebody's head, looking at the medical history of people going round to farms and then seeing what he did.

[Part 1a 1:02:37] Lee: But BAS never trained you?

Cox: No. They gave me *The Ship's Captain's Medical Guide*, this ancient 1950s or '40s guide to medical …, shoved that under your arm and went on. But the interesting thing was: I told Ricky that this is what I had done and he said 'Wonderful. This is great. What a good idea.' And the following year, BAS adopted this same system and they took those who needed a bit of medical training, took them to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital and did their training similar to mine. That's what they did and then, later on again, they actually put doctors into each of the stations.

[Part 1a 1:03:16] Lee: So as recently as 1975, there was no real medical organisation, no organised medical training for the doctors to go to the bases?

Cox: No no.

[Part 1a 1:03:24] Lee: The First Aid Officers?

Cox: Yes, First Aid Officer. Nobody did First Aid other than the First Aid Officer.

[Part 1a 1:03:31] Lee: Are we still in the era when wisdom teeth were removed and appendixes were whipped out beforehand?

Cox: Yes, wisdom teeth were all removed, so yes we all had those removed, but they'd had trouble with … You are absolutely right; the policy had been that everybody had their appendix removed but there had been problems with adhesions, post-operative adhesions. People who'd had their appendix removed during the summer then went South in the autumn and then, lo and behold, actually they had a post-operative problem. So BAS were beginning to question the policy. So when I went South you were given the option. 'It's your decision to have your appendix out.' So some on the station did, went and had their appendixes out. I think they took one look at me and …

[Part 1a 1:04:15] Lee: Did you have yours taken out?

Cox: Well thankfully Bruce Maclean had taken mine out when I was a nine year old, so I didn't have one. So some had an appendix and some didn't.

[Part 1a 1:04:24] Lee: What was the trickiest medical problem you had? I am thinking of … Wasn't there a retina?

Cox: Yes, that was one I really couldn't do anything about and that was awful. One chap had a detached retina and I couldn't do anything, just watched his sight just basically deteriorate through the course of the winter. And we got him out and there was nothing I could do other than semi-diagnose it over the radio waves to Doctor … and he was pulled out by the *Biscoe*, *John Biscoe*, and, poor chap, was home in a week or something ridiculous. So in many ways it was worrying and it was sad but it wasn't anything I could really do anything about.

[Part 1a 1:05:06] Lee: What was the trickiest thing you had to do?

Cox: One of the trickiest: some quite tricky stitching, open to the bone wounds, leg wounds, hands. So I did quite a lot of stitching which funnily enough I quite enjoyed actually. We used to use the washroom. The medical stuff was all in a cupboard; that was the surgery, and when I emptied the cupboard there were bottles of Euthenol from 1948, used for putting dogs down with. So there hadn't been much attention to clearing the cupboard out. There was some ancient old stuff in there.

[Part 1a 1:05:46] Lee: Were your carpentry skills important to you?

Cox: Yes, and I think particularly then, everybody did everything, so the carpenter got everybody else round to help with the carpentry, as did the diesel mech, got people to help with what he was doing. I think they reckoned it was 20% or less time. The scientists got 20% or less time given to science. So you were in charge of that area, upkeep of the carpentry things but everybody mucked in and helped. It was nice. I had once chap who … somebody threw a beer can and it took his front tooth out. The dental system then was that: the sitting room had these 1950s armchairs, horrid plasticky, hardly upholstered, with chrome arms on the armchairs, very hard 1950s-style thing. So the patient sat in the armchair and then me, the dentist, sat on a bar stool behind the chair. And then we had this tiny little washer, ancient old washer, and spin dryer that you used to do your dhobi or clothes washing once a month or whenever you did it. And all the dental or medical things were always lined up on top of the washer and that, for the dentistry, consisted of an Anglepoise lamp and the dental tools that they provided, and a little puffer thing that you used for cleaning camera lenses, with a little brush on the end of it, which you used for drying the tooth whenever you needed to. And the poor fellow was sitting in the armchair, sticking his head back in my crutch, backwards while I was sitting on the bar stool.

[Part 1a 1:07:33] Cox: It always took me a little while to get my left and right sorted out, because I wasn't very good at working with a mirror. So I was usually working on the wrong tooth for a little while until we got that worked out. And then I used to put Oil of Cloves and Zinc Oxide fillings in, and I think I did that twice a week. The diet was so bad; that was one of the problems. Dentists, when I got home, said 'Your gums have really retracted with the diet.' But anyway poor Richard Luxmoore, he was missing a front tooth. Somebody had hit him with … threw a beer can; just lobbed him one and he missed it and it got him in the tooth or in the mouth. So anyway we had in the dental box, sets of plastic teeth and they were a bit like one of

those Airfix models: a sort of stick with things sticking off them; and then there was incisors and canines and premolars and molars and so on, on this stick, and Duralon glue, a double-part glue. Anyway we tried the incisor as it should have been and it was a bit like putting a size 12 boot on a size 7 foot. It just wobbled about; it just didn't fit at all, but the one that would fit onto his gum and onto his tooth was actually a canine. So we stuck this canine in and he looked a bit like a walrus with this great big tooth sticking down over his bottom lip. So I got a Junior hacksaw from the chippy shop and we sawed it off and then with a file used for sharpening saws we filed it flat and rounded the edges and it was about a quarter of an inch thick, at the stump, but from the front it looked like an incisor tooth.

[Part 1a 1:09:14] Lee: You did two winters at Signy and then came North and having got relatively close to the South Pole, you then put your mileage at the other one. Is this right?

Cox: Yes. I'd been home for four days. I'd been away for 33 months South; went '75, got home in '78. I'd been home for four days and I got a telephone call, and it was from Brian Harland who was a very famous Arctic geologist, went to the Arctic first in 1938, used the Scott Ration; that was one of his stories, an amazing man, tough as they come. And Brian phoned up and he said 'We are mounting our annual expedition to Svalbard and I need a boatman, a skipper for a 28-foot boat to deploy our field parties with.' Would I be interested? And of course I was, so I left three weeks later, still having not quite used to being in a civilised part of the globe. I hadn't got used to drinking milk, seeing females, seeing children funnily enough. I made a very strange noise I remember. I used to go 'Mmmmm' and my family all have such a good sense of humour, they would tease me about it.

[Part 1a 1:10:26] Cox: But that was one of the things that came out after two and a half years was: I used to make this very strange noise. And another thing I remember: you had lost all the niceties, the sort of little words you say which lubricate conversation, and they had all gone. It's so simple being in the Antarctic. At the end of the winter, you could say half a sentence and people knew what you were about. You could tell half a story and people would start laughing because they already knew the punch line. John Croxall came on base one time and he was first ashore. It was so windy that they only managed to put him and a film … We didn't have films on the base then. So John Croxall came ashore with a film and he lived with us for a week, until the weather was good enough for the ship to try again, with the winter team, and he couldn't believe it, that we spoke in half sentences. You would just say the beginnings. So when I got home, you had to learn to carry out a conversation again and I can remember going to a pub for the first time and buying a round of drinks. Using money was a bit odd because we hadn't used any on base. But the other thing was you bought a pint of beer and you gave it to somebody and they would say 'Thank you very much.' And then you would say something: 'Not at all' or 'I hope you enjoy it' or 'Good.' And it had gone and I couldn't sleep at night. It worried me so intensely that I had forgotten actually how to communicate. I could carry out a conversation but all those little things that you needed to be able to live with normal people, seemed to have disappeared.

[Part 1a 1:11:59] Lee: A veneer?

Cox: A veneer; that's a very good way of putting it. So anyway, having been away that time, three weeks later I went up to the Arctic and that was very exciting.

[Part 1a 1:12:09] Lee: I was going to ask you about Brian Harland, because he was up there in the 30s, wasn't he?

Cox: He was. An extraordinary man, one of the toughest people I have ever come across and I have travelled with some very tough people. Again, going back to the old school, ability to cope with low temperature, cold, discomfort, poor food. This man thrived on it. He was a Cambridge undergraduate in 1938 studying geology, here at Downham[6] I think and then he and some student friends wanted to go to Svalbard (or Spitzbergen), which at that time was very like the Antarctic. People just didn't go there, or very few did. Easily as isolated and easily as dangerous. Anyway he went along to remnants of the Scott expedition, Wordie and Debenham and some others, to get advice and they told him 'Use the Nansen man-haul sledge and this type of harness.' I have actually got some of these sledges. I own some of them now. He gave them to me. They are lovely.

[Part 1a 1:13:30] Cox: But the big thing was 'Use the same rations.' They used the same rations that Scott had used on his expeditions. And Brian, who ate so little, he used to go to Svalbard annually and he would buy a 14-foor double ended Strandebarmar boat, a fjord boat with a sail, oars and an Atco one-cylinder outboard motor, so unreliable, which he only used when there wasn't enough wind to drive him along. And he used to travel to the north coast of Svalbard every year. Nobody was there; there were so few people. He did that every year from 1949 through until I don't know when – on into the 60s, when he got a bigger boat. In 1952 he hit very bad weather and went into Ny-Ålesund where we now have the base. And when he went into Ny-Ålesund , there was a little mining settlement there and he bought his first waterproof jacket. Up until then he wore a tweed jacket and a tie, and he wore a ventile or a cotton, Blacks or somebody else's windproof jacket. Tough as they come, but he went to Debenham and Wordie and they said 'Use the Scott ration' which he did, and they mapped New Friesland which is the northern peninsula on Spitzbergen.

[Part 1a 1:14:57] Cox: If you look at the map, much of the names are Brian's names. Very exciting expedition. He fell through a crevasse, broke his ankle. They accomplished a lot but Brian said that ration – this is a man who ate so little – he said at best lasted about two minutes for the main meal. And he said when he returned to the UK he couldn't sleep at night unless his bedside locker was covered with food. Psychologically he was quite disturbed by the lack of food and we are talking about a man who really was as tough as they come.

[Part 1a 1:15:36] Lee: But he rang you in seventy …?

Cox: Seventy eight, when I had just returned from the Antarctic, and invited me to go up and I became very good friends with Brian. He wasn't an easy man to work with. He was a bit of the Tilman ilk. You sailed before you were ready and you just jolly well put up with everything that you encountered along the way. You didn't have radios. Well we did have radios but they didn't work to contact … Nobody knew

[6] Probably means Downing (College)

where you were. I could be away from base for six weeks at a stretch without calling back, to pick up some more food, a bit more fuel, pick up water along the way. We had some depots laid by the *Copius* which was a converted Hull trawler, wooden trawler that went up from Yarmouth for us, with a wonderful man called Mike Tussen [phonetic] who drank a lot of gin and eventually the gin got the better of him and he hit a rock in Stormbukta and the *Copius* sank. But he would bring up our food from the base and lay some depots.

[Part 1a 1:16:40] Lee: What were the terms of the expedition?

Cox: Geology. Svalbard then, it was geology and only geology. You didn't really see any of the other sciences. That was the main thrust. We had our little boats. There was a Dutch vessel called the *Plancius* and one tour ship that you occasionally saw, pretty rare, called the *Europa*. But there was nobody about. Ny-Ålesund , where we have the base now, had seven people there. That was a joint King's Bay and Norwegian Polar Institute station. Longyearbyen was a mining barrack. There was nowhere to stay. We slept on the floor of a geologist's house up there. There was one flight every two weeks into Ny-Ålesund . It was actually in many ways more isolated than the Antarctic journeys, and certainly more uncomfortable. The sea trips were far more dangerous and uncomfortable than any sledging journey. And it was actually very nice always to draw on (and still do) boating trips. On a sledging trip if you get lost, you stop, wait till it's hotted up. If your tent blows away, you dig a hole into the snow and get shelter and you are living in fresh water, so no shortage of fresh water. So basically you stay put on snow and ice. Eventually it will come right. In a boat, you are on the biggest desert of the lot: the ocean, and if you are lost you can't immediately – and this was before GPS – you couldn't immediately work out where you were. If you were in a rough sea, you can't just say 'I'm going to stop now.' You just jolly well endured it.

[Part 1a 1:18:23] Lee: Did you have a tricky moment in Arctic waters?

Cox: Yes, a few actually. We had quite a lot of dramas up there.

[Part 1a 1:18:29] Lee: Can you explain about one?

Cox: One was a fire on board which was very frightening. The boat was a beautiful – I own her now actually – she's in a boatshed up there yet. Double ended pine on larch, double ended boat built in Bergen in 1965, called *Sorterella* [phonetic], beautiful boat, and we were working south, working ice going down towards Hornsund, which is the windier part, and she had a dry exhaust then and the dry exhaust caught fire with fuel, and the frames of the boat, which are the ribs some people call, and that wasn't at all nice. The other downside to it was that once I had actually got the fire out, I didn't know where we were, so I resorted to throwing crumpled bits of paper over the side and taking compass bearings on bits of paper, trying work out our drift, and work out where we were, because we tended to work five nautical miles off shore, but often in fog. The other time, again in the Hornsund area, we were in Gåshamna on the south side and deployed a field party who … We couldn't get through ice and they were working an area down in Stormbukta.

[Part 1a 1:19:52] Cox: The geologists, we had got them fairly well south, a place called Røysneset but then went back up around Suffolk Peninsula and into Gåshamna to anchor and while we were there the winds got up to 90 mph. I'm not sure what that is in knots – I was only told in miles per hour. There was a Polish station on the north side of the fjord, and they were recording 90 mph. There were two boats and actually that year my father had just retired and he was a great yachtsman and keen navigator. He was skippering the other boat for me, a boat called *Arctotteris* [phonetic] and he had quite a shallow draught and managed to get into some shallow areas and anchor. *Serolis* drew four foot and I couldn't get into shelter. And we had 55 metres of chain out, with an angel which is a heavy iron block which you hang partway down the chain just so that it sags the anchor chain and means you get more of an acute angle on the anchor. So I set an angel and we were still going astern dragging anchor and rapidly. The sea was so big it had broached the beach and gone inland. So there were bergs and bergy bits going inland. It was very extraordinary.

[Part 1a 1:21:10] Cox: And we were in among bergs going backwards and on the depth sounder we had a metre under our hull and we were going to founder and I don't know … There were only two of us on board. We had a chap called Henry Methold who was ex-BAS. He was a general hand, and I don't think we would have survived it actually. We only had life jackets on but no immersion suits or foul weather gear or survival suits and I think another boat would have had real trouble getting to us: big breaking sea. Anyway we were dragging aft and I started up the engine to motor into it and Henry was trying to pull up the anchor. But the wave shapes were such that she was on her beam ends really, coming down steep on her bow partly because we were pulling the anchor up. And our aft end was leaping in the air, sticking way up in the air and she came down on top of our auxiliary dinghy, pram dinghy, and sat on it. And she was on a short painter so the painter was short enough that she couldn't get it round the prop, but because she sat on the boat, she actually pushed the boat under water and all we could see was the aft end of a dinghy, commando dinghy – it floats – the aft end of a dinghy sticking out from under the water and the bow of the dinghy was under the boat and the painter went round the prop shaft and then back to the other side. So the engine: we lost power.

[Part 1a 1:22:40] Cox: I jumped onto the aft end of the dinghy and put my head under water to have a look, getting beaten up because we were pitching up and down, saw what the problem was, went over the other side. I had to check first whether it was round the prop, whether we needed to turn the prop a little bit to untangle it first, so it actually didn't. It just took a turn round the prop. So I cut it free and I came up with the dinghy. Henry had come aft by this time, shouting at me over the wind 'Don't be such a blasted idiot', grabbed me by the shoulder. I came up, the boat came up and smashed my ribs down the left hand side. We tied the dinghy onto the port side, I got back into the helmsman's hatch. The wind tore the hatch off its lashings and the hatch came down and hit me like a hammer on the top of my head. We got the anchor up, went out to sea, but it was like being in a silver … Everything was silver; it was very beautiful. The whole of the surface of the sea was being taken off. It was just horizontal bright silver water, beautiful but very noisy.

[Part 1a 1:23:50] Cox: And the dinghy was torn away. We got that some days later, and Henry was thrown across the cabin and went with both his knees straight through the engine casing, put a hole straight through the engine casing and broke the throttle

cable, and waves were coming over us and coming through the helmsman's hatch. So Henry worked the throttle by hand on his knees in the bottom of the boat and I shouted from the hatch where I was at the helm. And we spent a day and a half in this, going round a triangular course, just doing the best we … And we lost power over and over again because the dirt was all mucked up in the fuel tanks, but we kept going and the depot of gear is still there yet, down in this place called Bjørnskaubukta which means Polar Bear Poo Bay. We left all the gear; it's still there yet, where the field team were. Yes, some very exciting and some very very lovely times down there, up there rather, up North.

[Part 1a 1:24:53] Lee: Can you hang on a sec. [inaudible]

[Part 1a 1:24:59] End of Part 1a

Part 1b `INTERVIEW_1_Pt2.mp4`

0:00 to 09:19

[Part 1b 0:00:00] [Chatter about continuing with the recording. Not transcribed.]

[Part 1b 0:00:57] Lee: We are hopping about between polar areas but there's a story in the Antarctic about a visit by Greenpeace.

Cox: Yes, it's a lovely story. It's one of my favourites. I sometimes fall asleep chuckling about it actually. It was just so nice and I'm a great believer in practical jokes and I played quite a lot of practical jokes myself. It always lifts the world generally; it's always a bit of fun, practical joking. I was at Signy Island as the base commander there when it was a wintering station and a great group of people on the base. But I got there; we had moved on from telex to faxes by that stage and I got a fax message, first from BAS and then from the Foreign Office, to say that Greenpeace had a ship in the area, the *Gondwana*, and she was carrying out Antarctic Treaty inspections, and although they weren't actually Treaty members, we should treat them with all due respect and allow them to tour, which of course we would have done.

[Part 1b 0:01:57] Lee: What year was this in?

Cox: This was in – I might get this wrong but I think it was 1990. Anyway sure enough we had heard from other bases 'Yes, we've had the *Gondwana* today. She's off the Peninsula.' But then we didn't hear anything. And then, lo and behold, one evening I was working in the office and Roy Glover, the radio operator, came along and said 'Nick, we've got Greenpeace on the blower. They want to call tomorrow morning.' I thought 'For goodness sake, they could have given us a little more lead up time.' So we went along and spoke, and their leader (I can't remember what her name was), she had gone to bed. So I spoke to the radio op and said 'This is not a lot of lead up time. We are in the last three days of the summer season. We have got scientists on base who are working day and night.' They really were, getting experiments finished, getting sea freight ready. We really were a scramble. It would have been a change of itinerary and *HMS Endurance*, the old *Endurance* was going to do last relief and the place was just chaos.

[Part 1b 0:02:57] Cox: We were just flat out and they called casually at ten o'clock one evening to say they were coming in at half seven the following morning. Not the best way of dealing with things. So I was a little bit firm and they didn't like it very much. I said 'If it's all right with you, we won't … We can't make it a full run ashore for everybody. I'm sorry but the base here will stop. We so rarely get ships. So bring your inspection team ashore and the Press that you've got, but I hope you don't mind, not a full blown …' I said 'I'm very sorry but we are just so busy.' So anyway they agreed to that. Sure enough, the following morning at half seven they came up on VHF radio and we arranged for them to come ashore, but they were a little bit miffed that we hadn't gone the full 'everybody come ashore and have a look round'. So the inspection team came ashore and the Press, and they ran divers in another dinghy into Gash Cove where we had thrown rubbish, or used to do when that was … This was one of the things. And they were picking rubbish off the seabed to look at it to see if it had been thrown, and I said to them actually 'You are looking at a station that was built in 1948 and there were ways then that certainly aren't acceptable today. We have got a waste management system now. We don't throw things in the sea and we are doing things … It's a bit like smoking in the old days. You could smoke in a restaurant and it was acceptable once and it isn't acceptable now, but we can't do anything about the past, sorry.'

[Part 1b 0:04:26] Cox: So we had this little story and anyway we went on. So Greenpeace came ashore, the inspection team, all their little notebooks and so on. Just prior to the arrival of Greenpeace, we had an extraordinary thing. We had never seen anything like it before: hundreds, possibly many thousands of dead penguins coming up on the beach. At first we thought these penguins that were lopping up on the beach, we thought 'Leopard seals; there must be a lot of leopard seals. No this can't be leopard seals.' They looked rather leopard seal like because when a leopard seal grabs a penguin, they grab them and then slap them around on the surface. And a penguin skins like a rabbit: one little cut and grab them and then 'zzzipp', the skin just comes off ever so easy. And these looked rather like a leopard seal had got them, basically a pelt. Poor little penguin pelt; head intact, flippers intact, feet intact, and this little pelt but the rest missing. There were hundreds and hundreds; they were underneath the ice foot; they were up the beaches all along the coastline. On the beach in front of the base we had a stack of them, a pile which was getting on for 2ft 6" to 3 ft., a metre high and probably a metre across and it was just a pile of penguin pelts. We just stacked them up. They were everywhere.

[Part 1b 0:05:46] Cox: We drew a conclusion that there were Russian fishing boats working in the area and there were factory ships out there and trawlers and fuel ships (tankers) to refuel them, working offshore. And what we reckoned was happening was that the fishing boats were catching penguins or getting them, unintentionally probably, in their nets, but what they had done: they had frozen them all down and they were having a big skinning an butchering session on the factory ships and the whole fleet would be eating penguin meat for a while, because they all seem to have been cut the same way as well. They all looked as though they had been dealt with in the same way. Any way it didn't look very good. Greenpeace came ashore and the place was festooned. They stepped ashore on our little jetty and underneath the jetty there were dead penguins and they were lolling up the beach. Our pile of penguins on the beach. It didn't look at all good. And there was a sort of early video camera. There was a man with a huge big camera and was filming anything and everything around

the station. And of course penguins. It was very embarrassing. They asked me about them. I said ‘Obviously I don’t want to point the finger but we think it may be the fishing fleet out there.’ But they didn’t like it. It didn’t look at all good.

[Part 1b 0:07:05] Cox: Anyway eventually we went into the main living hut, and in the living hut we had loud speakers which were attached to the VHF signal, so if somebody got into trouble out on the ice, or out at sea, if you called on VHF there was a good chance somebody would hear you. It would be broadcast all over the building. And what I didn’t know, while this tour was going on – I was solemnly walking around with this group of around ten Greenpeace inspection team people – was that Pete Macko (‘Mad Macko’) or Crazy Pete, who I mentioned earlier, a very good boatman, was out over near Starfish Cove with a group of divers, and he was in his dinghy while the divers were down. And Pete was watching me and my Greenpeace team through a pair of binoculars and he timed it perfectly because he watched me go in through the front door of the hut with this team of people and he waited a little while and then he called on the VHF:

[Part 1b 0:08:00] Cox: ‘Signy, Signy, Signy. Are you there Signy?’ And I was busy so Martin Barber, who was a lovely lovely Geordie chef, pushed his way through the Greenpeace team, wiping his hands on a kitchen cloth, picked up the handset, and said ‘Hi there, Pete. What is it you want?’ And Pete said ‘Sorry to bother you, Martin. I just wanted to know what’s for lunch today. Is it penguin pie again?’ [Laughs] It was awful, and all these little notebooks came out, and they solemnly wrote down ‘penguin pie’ or whatever. Of course they knew he must be joking but they didn’t like it. The whole thing had set off rather badly. It was wonderful.

[Part 1b 0:08:48] Lee: I think we have to stop.

Cox: Yes.

[Part 1b 0:08:49] Lee: It’s been marvellous. I think we have to continue some other time. It’s been marvellous. Thank you very much indeed.

Cox: Well thank you. It has been lovely.

[Part 1b 0:08:57] Lee: I’m just thinking I have got to get to Bernard.

Cox: Yes, of course,

[Part 1b 0:09:00] Lee: Are you willing to reconvene?

Cox: No, I would be very happy to. It’s nice, I must say. It’s nice and you are so lovely. The skill of interviewing is very clever.

[Part 1b 0:08:57] Lee: [?? inaudible] a fraction of the notes that I’ve been given so I need to talk to Amanda about that and see whether she will fund it.

[Part 1b 1:09:19] End of Part 1b

Total time for interview 01:34:18 = 94 mins 18 sec

Agrees with OHCAT Nick Cox.doc 0-95 mins

[End of Part One]

Part Two

Part 2a

INTERVIEW_2_PT1.mp4

0:00 to 13:38

[Part 2a 0:00:00] Cox: Then we would move on, and they were just exhausted.

[Part 2a 0:00:03] Lee: And this was geological research, was it?

Cox: Geological research, yes, and he really … I would say that he was the world authority on Svalbard geology. He produced the most beautiful book in the last years of his life.

[Part 2a 0:00:24] Lee: How close did you or could you get to him?

Cox: I actually got quite close. We became very very good friends and we had long chats, polar chats, spiritual chats. He was a lovely person, misunderstood by so many. The establishment didn't like him. He didn't get his Polar Medal until he had done something like – I don't know … He had put everyone else into a tin pot, the amount of years he put in, and true hardship, and he, as an individual I think introduced more Britons to Polar Science than anybody. He introduced so many. I have met people on the Executive Board of NERC. I have met Chris Brasher, the runner, he went there. Andy Clarke who is here with BAS, he was introduced to Polar … I mean just so many, here there and everywhere, people who were introduced to Polar Science by Brian Harland. But he was cantankerous and I wish I could remember the details of this.

[Part 2a 0:01:44] Cox: He talked to me one day about the choice of Sir Vivian Fuchs for the Trans Antarctic Expedition and Brian was furious that Sir Vivian was chosen because there were two other candidates which he reckoned were far far better, much better, much stronger candidates. And I might get this wrong, so this is perhaps wrong to talk about on tape, but I will recall the bits I do remember that Brian told me. There was to be a vote held at the Scott Polar about the leader and Wordie of course wanted Sir Vivian Fuchs. Wordie had introduced Fuchs to polar work in Greenland and wanted Fuchs. As I remember, Brian said that the decision was made over a weekend when all the members of the committee, or whatever it was, weren't present. And Brian, in his own way, stood up and said 'This is a nonsense. We have to wait until everybody is here, to make the vote.' But it didn't; it went by, and was the reason he was selected, and of course made a fantastic job of it and wonderful man. But the process Brian didn't like, and he would have worried it like a terrier with a rabbit. It would have bothered him so he would have gone about it and probably put so many noses out of joint.

[Part 2a 0:03;05] Cox: His wife used to join us up North, Elizabeth, who is still alive, beautiful to this day, beautiful in every way: in look, in nature, character, but a lovely lovely person. And when Elizabeth arrived, Brian always was much calmer, kinder and easier so we always liked it when Elizabeth was with us. But just driven, and geology, geology geology. He slept geology. He did a lot of geology out in China as well and did a lot for China during the fifties. He and Elizabeth went out to China during the fifties and did much work there with the Chinese. Very special times. He expected us to just work and work. The food was appalling; the equipment was appalling. It was downright dangerous. Life jackets you didn't wear. We didn't wear boat suits. We didn't have radios that worked. We'd dump a field camp and pick them up a month and a half, two months later and we'd have heard nothing from them. But as far as he was concerned, that was nothing compared to the old days.

[Part 2a 0:04:21] Cox: When he first … he went in 1938 and then he went up to Svalbard again in, I think I'm right in saying, 1947. He arrived in Longyearbyen, the main settlement, and he bought two Strandebarmer boats which are a Norwegian fjord boat based on the longship. They are a beautiful 14-foot double-ended … the Strandebarmer had something like seven planks on each side, and comes with a sail, a mast and a little – I think you would probably call it a spritsail. And he would buy two of these and he had two Atco outboard motors, air-cooled single-cylinder, a bit like a lawnmower engine really but attached to a propeller, very unreliable. And wearing his tweed jacket and jersey and a tie, he and his colleagues set off from Longyearbyen and made the journey up to the north coast and they did this year upon year. To do that journey in those little boats, you are talking about four or five inches of freeboard, open little wooden boats. They must have been frozen. In 1951, they were on their way up and they hit some bad weather. And normally they would just put ashore and camp when they hit bad weather. But this time they were near the mouth of Kongsfjord, so they decided to go in to Ny-Ålesund which was a little coal mining town then or settlement. And he went in and he said they were looked after wonderfully by the coal miners. They were put in a little cabin and there was a little pot stove. They were able to dry out their gear, have some good food and so on. And he said 'The other great thing about that visit was I bought my first waterproof jacket.' Extraordinary, a tough nut.

[Part 2a 0:06:09] Lee: Are you aware of any … As you say, he kept pushing the boundaries physically and safety wise, did he ever have a problem?

Cox: One person was lost and Brian, as long as I ever knew him, used to almost shudder, used to shrink at the very thought of it.

[Part 2a 0:06:33] Lee: What happened?

Cox: He was so sorry and it was … It could happen today. It could happen to any geologist. It was a rock fall. A tiny little bit of frost shattered rock, particularly in the summer when the ice that's holding all the frost shattered rock together begins to give up and you get little bits of rock fall and it hit the fellow in the back, the middle of the back and killed him. So to be honest it's one of the things we are still doing to this day. We still have geologists working below rocks. We put hard hats on but mostly don't think about the back. I actually, for the ones up in the Arctic, now I have

motorbike reinforced, whatever you call these things, shields, armour which whatever type of scientist – biologist, entomologist, geologist – I get them to wear that as well because more often than not they are actually stooping down, looking at something and the rocks are as likely to hit you in the middle of the back as on the top of the head. So awful thing to have happened, and poor Brian, he and Elizabeth wept over that for years and years and spent a lot of time keeping in touch with the family for the rest of their lives.

[Part 2a 0:07:51] Lee: You made several trips to Svalbard, starting around about 1982,when having come back from …

Cox: Yes, '78.

[Part 2a 0:08:00] Lee: '78, I beg your pardon.

Cox: I went to the Antarctic in '75 and came home in '78 and then went up to Svalbard in '78.

[Part 2a 0:08:09] Lee: You made repeated visits to Svalbard? How did that come about?

Cox: I fell in love with the place really and I loved the old-fashionedness of it. It really suited me. A sort of bit of masochism I think really. Most didn't go more than once. There were one or two … There was one called Mike Chantrey: he did two or three seasons. Mike Hambrey, a geologist, he probably did as many seasons as I did as well: six seasons. But for most, a little taste of it was enough It was a pretty tough regime and I must say I used to be quite nervous before going up there because you knew you were going to get some real dramas (we always did), and scared. I think I was probably more scared up North than I ever was down South; yes, genuinely scared. In the polar regions the climate can be pretty cold and tough but when you are on ice, and sledging, there are lots of plusses. You have got fresh water which is great, so as long as your primus is working, you've got water. If you get lost, you can stop until you find out what is going on and then set off again. If there's a drama or injury or whatever, you can stop and just deal with it, whereas at sea, polar sea, you've got intense cold with damp sea winds. It can be rough. If you get lost, you carry on getting lost because you just keep drifting. If you have an injury. Or some sort of a drama, being at sea just makes it worse. You are not going to be comfortable. The patient or whatever is going to have a pretty rough time of it, bobbing around in a …

[Part 2a 0:09:52] Cox: So the big desert is the sea. And whenever I was in the Antarctic in a tent with somebody and the tent was beginning to shred because of slabs of ice hitting it in gale force winds or whatever was going on, I always used to say 'Well thank goodness we are not in a boat because this is nothing.' When you are in a boat and things are going right, … So yes, I did get scared up in the Arctic.

[Part 2a 0:10:15] Lee: Are there a couple of dramas you could tell me about?

Cox: Yes, one that comes to mind, we were down in a place called Gåshamna, down in Hornsund deploying some geologists and we tried to get down to Sørkapp, right down the south end. Svalbard's a bit like the Antarctic: the further north you get, the

windier it tends to get. You have got all the low pressure systems coming round and hitting the north end of the Peninsula. Up in Svalbard, it's rather the same: the more south you get, you get the low pressure systems coming round the south end of Greenland, or off the east coast of Greenland, and hit the south end. So it is very windy, and a lot of ice, funnily enough, down in the south end as well. We wanted to put some geologists into a place called Stormbukta and we tried it in the past. One year we tried it and all the tents were blown to pieces and we had to get them out just because life wasn't tenable. It was so windy and they just couldn't get their work done. Then I was the second go.

[Part 2a 0:11:27] Cox: We went in and tried to put them in by ship and we got icebound, which wasn't a problem for the shore party but we couldn't get them as far south as we could. The pack ice was ten tenths pack ice and we just couldn't get through it. So I went north again up into Hornsund, just to wait, having left the field team at a place called Bjørnskaubukta, and then we said we would come south again if the ice cleared. Otherwise they were just going to have to walk south on their own. But waiting in Gåshamna there were two boats: *Sorterella* and *Arctotteris*, which that year my father was skippering. My father was a keen sailor and he had just retired so he came up and skippered the other boat for me, and we had a mechanic and a general hand. And we were waiting in Gåshamna when a wind got up and within certainly an hour or so it got up to a real old fury, to the point where it was taking the surface water off and throwing around horizontal spray.

[Part 2a 0:12:28] Cox: There is a base, a Polish station, on the north side of Hornsund and they were recording, I don't know what it would be in knots but it was 90 mph winds and we were on a lee shore. So we were getting no shelter and the waves were very very big. So Henry Methold, who was the general hand on board *Sorterella*, he and I anchored, 55 metres of chain out, and a 35 kilo CQR on the end of that, and we set what is called an angel, where we had the flywheel of a motor and you lower that partway down the chain to take a bit of sag out of the chain, or rather make more sag in the chain and better hold. And my father took the other boat *Arctotteris* and put her – she was very shallow draft but managed to get into very sheltered area up in the corner. We had too deep a draught. We couldn't go there. And the wind got up to such a state that our chain, 55 m of chain, anchor and the angel, we began to drag, and quite swiftly. So I called to Henry and said 'Henry, we are going to have to get the anchor up and steam out to sea. And we started dragging quite fast and Henry was having trouble getting the anchor up. I was putting power on, but we drifted

[Part 2a 0:13:38] End of Part 2a

Continues at [Part 2b 0:27:21]

Part 2b

INTERVIEW_2_PT2.mp4

0:00 to 39:49

[Part 2b 0:00:00] Lee: Go and grab some lunch then we'll go and do Bernard Stonehouse. I went to see him after I saw you last time.

[Part 2b 0:00:05] Cox: Yes.

[Part 2b 0:00:06] Lee: And in the first two and a half hours we got as far as 1950. It was getting a bit …

Cox: Oh really? But really good recall I see.

[Part 2b 0:00:12] Lee: Yes he has. I said to him 'Bernard, next time we meet, we have got to do 60 years in an hour and three quarters. Is that all right?'

Cox: Oh, how interesting. Oh it would be wonderful.

[Part 2b 0:00:20] Lee: What are you going to do? Are you going to listen

Another voice: I will just stay around and listen and just see how it all goes.

[Part 2b 0:00:34] Lee: OK. So this is Nick Cox, Part 2 on the 7th of February 2012. We talked a lot last time about the Antarctic, but you've experience of both polar regions. I just wonder how much you feel your personality has been shaped by your polar experiences.

Cox: I'm trying to see … I haven't really thought about it a lot. In a sort of off-the-cuff, I would say enormously. Changes from where you are to where you get and thinking of where I set out from, the sort of things I do now, the sort of things that come immediately to the surface are … I think first and foremost the polar regions are made by the people and thankfully, or hopefully, the polar regions will be the same for ever more but the people change. And the people I've had the privilege to be with and work with and share these extraordinary places with have shaped me enormously.

[Part 2b 0:01:46] Lee: In what way?

Cox: One, I think, is to make you realise just the depth each individual, even the most unlikely person, the huge depth, and to never read a book by its cover. And I think we all know it to a degree but in the polar regions, you really do get to see deep into people and whether that be through joyous occasion, through sad occasion or somewhere in the middle, you are intensely aware of your colleagues. And you are also, subconsciously I think, always aware that survival depends on it. And I think when it goes wrong, is when people don't give, and it probably goes for UK as well or the rest of the world, if you don't give that factor enough … or lay enough importance on that factor, then things can go badly wrong and actually we sort of just skim along on a veneer of putting up with each other and getting by and being rather selfish, But in the polar regions, I think you fast realise that if you don't get on, things could go (in the old expression) pear-shaped and we could all be in a mess.

[Part 2b 0:03:10] Lee: So there are two things at work here. One is spending a lot of time in the company of a small number of people but also the extremities of the circumstances.

Cox: Yes, and I think if Society collapses, in these isolated little communities, then it can be awful: one uncomfortable but the other: dangerous because those times when a drama or a problem, you do really rely on each other. And that's when you suddenly realise: all these friendships and that putting up with each other, and the good times and the bad times, we forged links, and it is the most marvellous thing. Some of the people who I've spent time with are the most unlikely people, the ones who you have met here in the UK before going South or North up to the Arctic, and you subconsciously I suppose, put them into a little pocket of what you think they are like and so on. And what you find at the far end can be just so vastly different. And more often than not, rewarding. It's nearly always a positive rather than thinking you really like this person and then being rather disappointed. It's usually build, build, build. There's so much good in folk and the polar regions are a wonderful way of displaying it.

[Part 2b 0:04:38] Lee: Is there a personal experience you can share?

Cox: You know, there are so many, it's quite difficult to draw on. The other little point, this leaps to mind. It was in the Arctic, and I hope it's all right to use his name and I think he would be happy if I did. But we used to take along two first-year students with us each year, geology students, and it was a way of giving them a bit of experience and also for us to have some gash hands. And we got a very very (I would say) spoilt little rich boy. His parents owned one of the High Street electronic shops, which we all in this room know instantly, major, major national network of cameras, computers, that sort of thing shop. And he was a first-year student at Cambridge and he turned up with us. And he was so precious, so precious and I must say pretty irritating. He had just had an air control system, whatever you call it, in his sports car, and he'd just got the latest Bang & Olufsen, whatever it was, music stuff. He was just dripping with this thing and he was so precious and not much use. I dumped him, with a wonderful New Zealand geologist called Hamish Campbell at a camp in wild, wild weather, very difficult to put them ashore, and left them.

[Part 2b 0:06:18] Cox: We didn't get back – it wasn't very long but it was probably about six or seven weeks before we returned, and hadn't spoken to them on the radio once. The radios were not terribly reliable. And came back in to this place called Svastihel [phonetic] in an awful sea, and I tried to get ashore but the waves were too big each time. I rowed back because I thought 'If I get stuck in these waves, I won't able to get back out to sea again', when I saw this chap walking into camp. I looked at him. I thought 'Great.' So I rushed in on the crest of a wave. He ran into the waves and got himself drenched, pulled me ashore. I thought 'Well this is a turn-up.' And there was this fellow who was just chalk and cheese. I mean he couldn't have been more different. He was delightful. It was all there but it just needed a little bit of the rough and tough and get down to his basic being, and he was the most delightful person from then on. That's actually not the best example. There are just so many of them. I remember interviewing one time here at BAS and Grahame Hughes, who was in charge of radios here now, or comms, he was on the board because it was radio operators we were interviewing that day.

[Part 2b 0:07:31] Cox: And the last one of the day came in and before he came in, Grahame said to Richard Hanson and the rest of us on the board, 'This is actually a bit of a no-hoper, this one. We are looking at this chap for Halley, a radio operator for

Halley. He's too young. He's actually still at college, but I liked him. I liked his application form and I think it's worth giving him an interview: one for experience and hopefully he will come back later when he has cut his teeth a bit more.' And this little chap came in. We all had to go over our desks like this [leans forward] to see him. He was tiny and he had this wonderful set of buck teeth that almost come out, straight forward out of his mouth, and a rather bad haircut. And he sat down there. We all sort of peered over at him and lovely, strong Liverpudlian. I went through the base commander bit about himself and how would he do, getting on with people at close confines, and his drinking habits and just general prodding round a bit about himself. And he was delightful; he was lovely. Richard Hanson spoke to him and then Grahame came to the technical bit, and Grahame turned on the technical bit for a little while and asked him a few questions and he answered them well and then he upped it a bit and he answered those well.

[Part 2b 0:08:42] Cox: Then he upped it a bit more and then he got out of his depth, But he said the 'golden words' for BAS, which was 'Mr Hughes, if I don't know how do that, I will contact you in Cambridge and ask you how to do it.' Which is always what BAS loves to hear, rather than 'I will just try and muddle through.' And he got the job. But one of the lovely things was: one of my questions was 'How would you get on at close confines?' and he sat up and he said (I can't do a Liverpudlian; I wish I could) 'I am from a big Roman Catholic family. I have got seven brothers and sisters and we live in a tiny little house in Liverpool.' He said 'I put up with anything and everything, every day, and when they are all getting through to me, I just go up and walk round the yard and then back into the house and I'm fine again.' He was delightful. Two poor examples really, but there are so many gems down there: people who become their real selves.

[Part 2b 0:09:39] Lee: Talking to the old Fids about the interviews they had with Eric Salmon and Bill Sloman all those years ago, and they will say that they were being quietly psyched out. They asked a few technical questions. Once they had established the fact that you could do the job, the rest of the interview was all about personality and one's ability to survive psychologically in those circumstances. Even interviewing people in more recent years. Has that changed?

Cox: I think yes. I think that the role of the base commander in the interview board is to have a little bit of a delve around about the person. Yes, I think that still is important. I think where it becomes tougher for BAS and certainly tougher for the people going South is that in older days, everybody left from the ship. We went down to Ocean Dock, Southampton, got on the ship, and you had at least six weeks or two months or two and a half months I think in my case the first time I went South, in which to live at close confines with your intake and people going to other bases. So by the time you stepped ashore in Antarctica, you knew your base mates very well. You knew people from all the other stations extremely well. You all knew each other's names and a lot of the hard corners had been chipped off. The King Fid, as they called it on the ship, would keep a close eye, and anybody who wasn't 'summerable' in the Antarctic would be picked out then and sent home. At the end of the summer, somebody who wasn't winterable, the base commander could talk them into … or send them home. So it was a more protracted but a much better system for the sort of shakedown before embarking on a your polar stint.

[Part 2b 0:11:32] Lee: So would that suggest then that there might be slightly more misfits who would get there these days than there used to be?

Cox: Possibly. It's all counterbalanced as well probably by the fact that these days they have got email and telephones and all these things which can … a good thing and a bad thing but overall I imagine must be a good thing if you want to deal with somebody who is not the best fit. But I think having time to get to know each other is a good thing. The other thing: the BAS interview used to have … I think I was one of the last to be interviewed at Gillingham Street and again, we talked about this whenever we talked about polar things, but we also talked about beekeeping. I was rather keen about keeping bees at the time and sailing and skull collecting. I am a keen skull collector – very odd. But you then were sent on to Lister House to have a medical by Colonel Hayward and he was the one who really probed around, and he really did want to know about you.

[Part 2b 0:12:45] Lee: Psychologically?

Cox: Yes, and he really was very good at it as well. Wonderful Army moustache. I can't remember what rank he was, oh colonel sorry : Colonel Hayward and a wonderful big white moustache and long silver hair and a dog-tooth check suit with a big hanky. He was a perfect piece, and when you waited in the waiting room with others who were having medicals ready to go abroad here there and everywhere. He would stick his head in the waiting room and say 'Mr Cox?' I went like this [puts hand up], a 21-year old, a bit shy. He said 'Sorry to keep you waiting.' And he would turn to everybody in the waiting room and said 'Watch out for this man. Going to the South Pole for two years. Stark raving mad!' He used to say that and then when you went in, he was lovely. He'd sit there having a cup of tea and he would say things like 'Strip down to your boxer pants. Right good, now I want you to imagine you are on the deck of a rolling ship and you have got to jump fifteen feet down into a …

[Part 2b 0:13:42] Here the recording jumps to a repeat of the material at the start of Part 2a.

[Part 2b 0:27:21] The recording here follows on from the end of Part 2a above and then continues as follows:

Cox: but we drifted and before we knew it, we were in among grounded icebergs on the beach. On the depth sounder we had just over a metre under our keel and we were going ashore fast and we could see that we would break up. I don't know whether … We didn't have lifejackets or immersion suits or any of that sort of thing. We were just in our waterproof tops and we worked with a whistle. We had a system for working in a high wind when you couldn't talk to each other; we worked with whistles. So I whistled one when I was going to rev up and Henry had a system for two blasts or something when he wanted me to move forward and three to stop or something – I can't remember – so that he could try and get the chain up. But as we were doing this, the boat was pitching on her beam ends in this steep sea, and the dinghy which was very good (it was a French commando dinghy, orange plastic thing but unsinkable) was on a very short painter so it couldn't get round the prop. But the wave shape was such that the stern of the vessel kept going up and came down on top of the dinghy and pushed it underwater. And the painter went down from one side of

the boat, round the propeller shaft to the bow of the dinghy, and only the stern end of the dinghy was showing out of the water. It was under the water, tied round the propeller shaft.

[Part 2b 0:28:40] Cox: So we lost power and were going quite fast. So I leapt over the side and stood on the dinghy, trying to see down below, to see what I could do, what I could cut free with a knife, which I did. I climbed down the dinghy and actually went down into the water, put an arm down, felt round and cut the … I bobbed, came up with the dinghy. Henry by this time came aft, grabbed me and told me I was a complete idiot not having a safety harness clipped on. And as I leapt out, the stern came up and there was my chest in, the ribs in down this side. Henry went back to the chain. We tied the dinghy off alongside and I remember the helmsman's hatch blew off as well. We had a fierce fierce wind. And we set out to sea. We spent a day and a half out at sea. We couldn't get across the fjord; the waves were far too big, with water coming in through the hatches. Henry got thrown across the cabin and both his knees went through the engine casing and broke the throttle cable. So he was on his knees in water in the bottom of the boat, working the throttle of the engine for me, and we took turns for a day and a half, going round in a triangular course in this very big sea. We were very glad when it eased up. We had a fire on board, got stuck in ice for up to a week at a time, just working ice floes and stopped here and there. Yes, some very exciting times. Yes, you were always just slightly anxious.

[Part 2b 0:30:19] Lee: Did you every question your sanity?

Cox: Not really. I think afterwards … It's a funny old thing, isn't it? When you are scared, that adrenaline rush is sometimes the highs aren't they? You actually feel happy as a king in a way. It's something that …

[Part 2b 0:30:40] Lee: Life is very focussed?

Cox: Very focussed, yes. I suppose being responsible for the others on board, you were skippering. And the navigation: there was no GPS so it was all dead reckoning and land sights, but it had to be absolutely full on. We had moments lost in fog and quite big seas as well, so you were always a little bit anxious were we going to turn up where we should be. Yes, very special times.

[Part 2b 0:31:09] Lee: Tell me about working with dogs in the Arctic rather than the Antarctic.

Cox: Yes, dogs in the Arctic: we had the Greenland dog which is the polar sledge dog. Huskies are probably related to a more temperate wolf, probably the Siberian or Alaskan timber wolf. It's more long legged and lighter weight, and more interbred now, whereas the Greenland dog is as near to the wolf that you can get, and we used them up in Svalbard, for recreation it must be said. But having driven dogs down South … I came home from Rothera in 1981 having had some wonderful journeys. We'd just had the coldest winter on record at Rothera and had some wonderful sledge trips down there and had all the BAS ways of driving and my own, my own ideas about dog driving. But then I joined a … it was the only time I ever joined a private or adventure expedition, for want of a better word. And I joined an expedition which was organised by a Norwegian girl and an Englishman, and the Norwegian girl was

Monica Kristensen who was a glaciologist who did a PhD here at the Scott Polar Research Institute and I'd met actually at Ny-Ålesund when I first went North. She did her field work, did two winters up in Ny-Ålesund when it was quite an isolated place.

[Part 2b 0:32:41] Cox: And Neil McIntyre was the British glaciologist was doing his PhD at Scott Polar as well. And they put together this great idea: 'Why don't we see if Industry could sponsor some research in Antarctica? Just see if we can do it.' So they spoke to me and said would I come on board and do the logistic thing and the dog driving and I was very happy to do so and put together a plan. It was wonderful putting down a map of the Antarctic, working out how much food we would need, how much fuel, how many depots. I reckoned we needed five to do the trip, which was to be from Bay of Whales to the South Pole and back to Bay of Whales, so a proper South Pole journey. And again before GPS so it was all sextant based and so on, and it looked possible with two teams. Four of us: two glaciologists and two dog drivers. So I worked on this in the UK for a while. Rob Swan and Roger Mear, they were also at the same time working on doing the Footsteps of Scott expedition which was a success, which they did.

[Part 2b 0:34:00] Cox: So that was going on. So there were really sort of beginnings of the sort of adventure expeditioning – I suppose the first really. Roger Mear and I both went to my Dad who taught us celestial navigation; he teaches yachtmasters and celestial navigation. So we both learned to use a sextant. And then I went down to South Godstone in Surrey and swapped my car for a left-hand drive VW Combi van and went to Norway with it. And we hired a farm in eastern Norway where it's coldest, one of the colder parts, and then I drove round Norway selecting Greenland dogs, either buying them with expedition funds, or we had a sort of hire system where we borrowed dogs, essentially. And then lived and went gently mad, I think, for a winter in Norway on my own at this farm called Wangen [phonetic].

[Part 2b 0:35:10] Lee: Completely alone?

Cox: Well most of the time. I saw people at weekends. I did see people at weekends but not slowly and not for very long, and Neil and Monica came up every now and again, but much of the time I was on my own to begin with, and went slightly batty with all these dogs. We had what's called in Norway a 'dugnad' which is all the people in the local village would come and you put on beer and a stew or something and do a joint task. It's lovely. It's a sort of tradition in Norway. So lots of people came and we built some dog pens, because I had this idea that I would like to see if it was possible to have some social harmony among the dogs before they went on the sledge traces, i.e. have them loose in dog kennels. So we built seven, I think, dog pens in which the dogs were chained and then I embarked on this experiment to see whether we could have them loose within their pens. Because unlike the husky, the Greenland dog is actually very aggressive towards each other, and there is a very strict social order. The wolf instinct is very very strong.

[Part 2b 0:36:30] Cox: So within a group, you can decide 'That one looks a good one.' And so on, and make a good dog team, sledge team. They will decide who is the king dog and that will be the alpha male, most aggressive. And then there will be the social structure all the way down to some poor little runt who is bottom of the pile,

suffering permanent diarrhoea and a gibbering wreck, poor thing. And you can't interfere with that but bad dog drivers, to my mind, try and interfere with it and impose their wish. My belief is that's their business; go with it. Bad dog drivers beat their dogs and many a time I have seen a really good dog driver and you go over and of course they sit and are very biddable and they do all the right things, and then what I tended to do is, when the dog driver wasn't watching, I would go over to one of these dogs and just scratch my head like that. If the dog went like that [cowering action], you knew that it had been belted, and they are lacklustre as well. I always think of dogs as being like soldiers. You are asking them ultimately to do the most awful thing.

[Part 2b 0:37:38] Lee: How did the Greenland dogs get on in their pound, loose in their pound?

Cox: Loose in their pound? Well it was a very long and frustrating experiment. To begin with I would take dogs out. I was joined later on by some other people Knut Allmot and Per Hembry and Erne Hansen and they joined me. So we had a system where we took the dogs out on leads to begin with. Fun, let them enjoy it. Let them walk together until they start fighting. Then you'd have to break up the fight. Then we would find dogs that were absolutely happy with each other, and then you would start matching: 'Well let's really try and match those because they would make a good back pair.' They are sort of the engine room, nearest the sledge. They are the thickos. They always need somebody in front but they are good at pulling heavy weights. And you would get them so they were working quite well together and then they get brighter and brighter and lighter and lighter as you get nearer the front of the traces. And then having established that those two might do quite well together, put them in the pens together as neighbours and then starting by letting one off the chain, and letting it loose and then it would go round, ears up and close together, and stalk around and very embarrassed and frightened. And walk round and then eventually go for one of the dogs. An awful bloody fight. You break that up, put it back on its chain and then start again another day, or perhaps mismatch them again. And eventually got to the point where you had one that would stay loose and wander round and then another one that would stay loose and wouldn't fight with the other one that was already loose, until eventually I got them during the day

[Part 2b 0:39:18] Sound cuts out.

[Part 2b 0:39:49] End of Part 2b

`INTERVIEW_3_PT2.mp4` should be called `INTERVIEW_2_PT3.mp4`

0:00 to 42:32

Total 95:59

[Part 2c 0:00:00] Cox: Philippa I would think

[Part 2c 0:00:00] Lee: Yes I remember it being a lovely experience.

[Part 2c 0:00:04] X: Running again.

[Part 2c 0:00:05] Lee: OK.

Cox: Turn the dogs loose. Are we still on there or shall we …?

[Part 2c 0:00:09] Lee: Yes we are.

Cox: They built up and during the day I could have them loose. It was very exciting. And then I used to go in the pen and walk round the pen and try and get them excited. I used to go 'Up, dogs' [claps hands], like this, going round there getting them excited and then they would fight and you would break them up. I had so many holes in me I went down to the sykehus (hospital) locally with wounds; we all did. We all got bitten because … They don't actually mean to bite you but when you are breaking up fights, particularly when they don't have ropes attached to them, you are more likely to get bitten. But eventually it was lovely because we were able to put them on traces and it was so calm. They just thought about the working. They were very happy with each other.

[Part 2c 0:00:50] Lee: How were they as workers? Were they as good as Antarctic dogs?

Cox: Oh yes, they were good pure Greenlanders, or as pure as you can get. Oh yes, very good workers. It hadn't taken that competitive edge off them at all and you still had fights. If there was a bitch in season they would start fighting – all flirting with the girls, because you tended to have one or two bitches in each team. So that was still there but they were happier, particularly for the ones further down the pile; there wasn't that cross feeling they were going to get torn to shreds at any moment by one up the ladder, or one down the ladder. So it made for very happy dog driving. The other thing I learned there in Norway was the importance of hydrating dogs. At BAS there was so much work done on nutrition: Orr and Bostelman, and Taylor and others. They looked very closely at the ration which was 450g one day, 450 the second day, 900 on the third day and that gave 3300 calories on the average. They did very well on that on a sledge journey. It was very good food but they did have to eat snow so some of those calories were used to melt the snow. And as we know, if you pick up snow and eat it, it doesn't really quench the thirst. So as I learned with the Norwegian drivers was if you, just before you are taking them out, off the span to put them on the sledge, just lift up the fur just by their collar, lift it up and if it stays put, a bit like a hair brush, then they haven't got enough water. If it settles down and goes silky-ish, then they are hydrated. And we would put some water in them and they would work so well.

[Part 2c 0:02:45] Cox: In the Antarctic they were like Brillo pads; they were hard, stiff fur and their pee was like a cheap whisky, with a deep amber colour. It was so dehydrated, the poor things. So I often wonder. I wish I could have tried it. The ration per day for two people, with the BAS sledge system, was a pint[7] per two people a day, and that would dry your clothes, make your food, drink and so on. If we had perhaps increased that by 25% and had a billy big enough just to melt a bit of snow and go

[7] Of fuel, presumably.

round the dogs and give them a bit of water, it might have been worth carrying that extra weight because of the extra energy the dogs got from having water.

[Part 2c 0:03:29] Lee: You put the Greenland dogs to good use in '86 with a fairly substantial sledging trip.

Cox: No, that was actually a skidoo trip, '86 in Svalbard, on the east coast. That wasn't dogs.

[Part 2c 0:03:43] Lee: Did you use the dogs for any …?

Cox: Yes, down South. In the North, no. They were all training trips. They were put to use. They were taken down to the Antarctic but actually in the North it was all dog training.

[Part 2c 0:04:01] Lee: So you were training dogs in the North …

Cox: Yes, to use in the Antarctic.

[Part 2c 0:04:04] Lee: Tell me about the skidoo expedition, because you were doing the east coast of ….

Cox: Of Svalbard, yes. We took some surveyors in 1986. It was funny because I came from the record cold winter at Rothera, and we were out dog sledging down near Stonington and it was −48 down there, and then I went up to Svalbard and had the record cold winter for Svalbard. And it was cold. We went up there on the 4th of February so it was still dark. On a clear day you could see a bit but on a cloudy day it was dark. And we took skidoos and units, over to Svea and then worked out on the east coast with a group of surveyors. I was in charge for the first month and then Mike Chantry came up and he took charge of the survey base camp and I went out field-wise.

[Part 2c 0:05:49] Lee: Was this training?

Cox: No, it wasn't. It was actually putting in some survey lines for some seismic surveys that were being done, and Mike Hambrey and Mike Chantrey and I would go and we weren't sure and none of us were sure about doing it. Then we thought 'Well if we don't do it, somebody else will, and we will make sure this is done properly and clean and tidily.' It was tough work actually. We were doing a hundred miles plus, each day, and doing all the crevasse work into some very dodgy areas. But the main thing was: it was a very cold season, and the surveyors that we took had just come from the Gibbs Desert in Australia and Bangladesh. I remember the first day, taking the chief surveyor out – his name was George – and we were working from base at that time. We weren't actually out in tents but we were later on. And I said 'George, an important thing …'. We had been up since five, just getting gear ready. I said 'George, an important thing is: don't sweat. It's an outdoor day and if you sweat, at minus 40-something, it will just freeze on you.

[Part 2c 0:06:09] Cox: So shed quite a lot of your gear. Get down to just some lightweight stuff, just a fleece and a pair of trousers and snow boots and that sort of

thing, and a thin pair of gloves and we will go out and dig out the skidoos, sledges, get them all brushed down, tidied up, get the sledges loaded, get the engines warmed up and then we will come back in and we will pile on all the gear: the goose down suits, the goggles and I don't know what, huge mitts and so on.' So anyway we did this. We came in and we kept reasonably cold. We hadn't put a sweat on digging the 'doos out, and we got togged up. We went out and he immediately froze up, googles: he couldn't see through them, spikes coming out of his nose of ice and he was completely gombled up, the poor chap. He couldn't cope with all this heavy gear and so on. This little voice came out from under all this frost and he said 'What is the temperature, Nick?' And I said 'Forty two, George.' He said 'Minus?' [laughs] I said 'No, George. It's plus forty two.' So we took these fellows who were reasonably inexperienced out into this extreme cold. One lost a toe to frostbite. Another – actually one of our team – one of the mountaineer lot, lost his thumb, and another (he was a Norwegian) lost a bit of his face. So it was extreme cold.

[Part 2c 0:07:31] Lee: Those were things that could not be avoided?

Cox: They could have. I mean I think, to be honest, we should have calmed down a bit and stayed in our tents, and not pressed it quite so much. Ski handles were falling to bits. You held on the plastic and it just fell to bits. A 12-volt battery exploded. Gear that had seemed adequate, once you tipped the … I don't know what … It could well have been minus fifty. We were higher and going further east as well and you suddenly realised that it has its limits. We were fine but you had to be careful. One of them, Ted Courtney, he made the mistake, in the evening, of trying to get a knot undone on a sled. In those days, skidoos didn't have heated handlebars, so it was purgatory on these blasted things. You got so cold and all the blood went to your core. So you used to stop skidoos every now and again and do star jumps and then get back on and drive a bit more just to try and get some circulation in the hands. And came back in and of course it was dark and Ted couldn't get a knot undone and he took his mitts off and laid them on top and started undoing the knot, and he pulled the rifle (as there were polar bears, we had rifles) off the top of the sledge and he just touched the metal and he said that sank, most of the heat-sink then. It just absolutely did his thumb, just in a moment. So yes, we should have been smarter. We should have known and at least had a pair of silk gloves or something on.

[Part 2c 0:09:10] Cox: But it is possible, but it goes back to the old thing: the old-fashioned ways were the better. Dog driving at minus forties is uncomfy, of course it is, but it's not that bad. Minus 48 with dogs, I remember they didn't like it because the snow goes like sand. You pick it up and it just goes through your fingers; it's like desert sand rather than snow, and so it's very gritty and they were bleeding paws. So even while you were pulling, the dogs would dive down and push their noses and their chests into the snow and while they were going on, pushing at the back legs, going like this [licking hands] trying to get the grit out of their pads, poor things. And when you stopped and called a halt, they would push their bottoms into this grainy sand, or snow, and then lie there with their paws sticking in the air, four paws sticking in the air just to keep then off the sand. So you would be with a sledge and all these upside down dogs, as it was so chill. One of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen was sledging down the coast of Millerand Island, going down towards Stonington and it was −45 or something like that and Geoff Summers had the other sledge and team. And he was probably half a mile to a mile out to one side of me and the sun showed at

the time, … I think it was August time and the sun showed for a bit at about two. Two o'clock it was at its best but it was very low, and it was a lovely canary yellow wash over everything: sea ice, mountains, snowscape.

[Part 2c 0:10:55] Cox: And Geoff was coming along but all I could see against this beautiful lemon yellow wash was this 80-foot long lilac coloured rugby ball that was going along, and what it was, it was of the vapour coming off the dogs and Geoff. I couldn't see the dogs and I couldn't see the sledge and it was just like a lilac coloured rugby ball, this oval shaped thing travelling along, and every now and again I could just see Geoff's head coming out through the top of it, and this huge thing just wandering along in this yellow snow. It was gorgeous; one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. But the dogs don't like it. The only thing that Geoff and I found, we made the mistake (again, novices), we didn't have a mouth cover and of course if you are talking to the dogs much of the time, cheering them up and keeping them entertained, shouting 'Irra' and 'Awk', the directions for the lead dog, and one night we actually went into San Martin, the Argentine station.

[Part 2c 0:12:02] Cox: They were in dire straits because they'd only had half a relief the previous year because it was an Argentine national holiday so the ship did half a relief and went further north where they could anchor and have a party. So they only had half the fuel, so they were living around this kerosene tank which they melted snow in. They had a little paraffin stove beside the radio, trying to keep that warm. The base was frozen. But we went in there and I remember that night coughing and coughing and coughing and I instinctively knew there was something wrong. So in the bunkroom I turned upside down. I stood on my head and all the fluid just poured out of my mouth, all this fluid that had built up on my lungs through breathing in so much cold air during the day. So I learned to have a scarf, or these days we have neoprene face masks, but then you put a scarf or something round your mouth.

[Part 2c 0:13:01] Lee: So was there a crevasse rescue then, in '86?

Cox: Yes, up in the Arctic. We were out on the east coast and we got a call from the Sysselmann, who is the governor of Svalbard, to say that somebody had fallen down a crevasse. This was Easter time and just when the Norwegians were beginning to venture out of the settlements and do their own recreation trips and so on. They didn't have rescue equipment in Svalbard then. It's funny; now they have got everything: helicopters with winches, mountain rescue teams. Then there wasn't anything so they said could they come over with a helicopter, a Bell 212 helicopter, and pick us up and go and look for this casualty. So he came over and four of us got in and we flew around and we went over to the Bakaninbreen which was surging at the time. We had gone part way up the glacier earlier in the season and we were punching holes through crevasses with our skidoos. I remember going over some and bridges collapsing behind us. Norris Riley was with us, who was an ex-Halley Fid from the '60's. He was there. I remember going up the Bakaninbreen that day.

[Part 2c 0:14:16] Cox: But we flew over and sure enough, we could see a skidoo and two people standing and we flew over and it was extraordinary they got that far. There was probably something like 20 feet between each crevasse and they had managed to get a long way before somebody had actually got off, walked forward to look at the next …, what he thought was the next crevasse, and fell down one. Anyway I got the

helicopter to leave us because we couldn't talk over the noise, and this poor chap Knut Mikkelsen, he had fallen about 20 metres, a long drop, and had hit a secondary bridge. But the secondary bridge was only about three or four metres long and if he'd missed that, we wouldn't have found him. He would have just disappeared. Quite interesting. He'd fallen down but he had also stuffed the back of his mouth with snow and he'd had trouble breathing at first. It had packed up into the back of his mouth. But he was all right, surprisingly; surprisingly good and we winched him out and then the helicopter came over and we lifted him out. It was actually one of the oddest things. Time slows down and thankfully he was OK. But quite interesting.

[Part 2c 0:15:33] Lee: Let's bring you back to BAS because all that we've been discussing for the last quarter hour was nothing to do with British Antarctic Survey. But it came in rather handy when British Antarctic Survey started taking an interest in the Arctic.

Cox: Yes, it's been a sort of change in outlook here and it's of course music to my ears. There was a little bit of a conception until quite recently that 'The Arctic's not cold, is it?' And, believe you me, it is. The Antarctic has the record cold, −89 or something, but the Arctic doesn't do too badly. You certainly get −70 something up there. For a lot of BAS scientists, funnily enough, the coldest they have ever been is when they do Arctic work because they tend to go for the Antarctic summer but you can actually go up to the Arctic from the UK for the spring and be dipped into some horrendous weather. There was a group – not BAS, I hasten to say – a Scott Polar team, recently, up at Summit in Greenland, and I think they had it down to getting near to −60, and they had to give up work actually and were picked up and flown out.

[Part 2c 0:16:50] Lee: How did you return to the BAS fold?

Cox: I was latterly Base Commander at Signy Island when Signy was a wintering station in '91 and I had got wind that the British Government were keen about establishing a station up in the Arctic when I was up in Svalbard in 1989. And it was one of the boat journeys and I was due to do the Svalbard season and then join BAS and go down South in '89. So I got home in September from the Arctic just in time to do the Cambridge Conference, and then went down as Base Commander to Signy. But during that season in '89, we were at Ny-Ålesund and there were seven inhabitants at Ny-Ålesund then, seven Norwegians living there. But the Norsk Polarinstitutt and Kings Bay were the company who owned the property. The Director of the Norwegian Polar Institute at the time was a lovely man called Odd Rogne and Odd became Secretary of the International Arctic Science Committee. And he had ambitions to make Ny-Ålesund , which then was this little settlement with seven people, into an international research station.

[Part 2c 0:18:16] Cox: I knew Odd well and he said 'Look, you persuade the British to come here to Ny-Ålesund and I will make sure you get the best property. We will look after you and make this a Norsk-British venture.' He said 'There are two people coming from NERC to Ny-Ålesund this summer in August.' So I changed the itinerary so that we could pick up field parties and move them and come into Ny-Ålesund for I think it was the 16th of August 1989, which we did. And sure enough, Tony Mayer and Dave Hill from NERC were in Ny-Ålesund on this recce trip. They were going to all sorts of places to look. So they spent time with Odd Rogne and they

spent time with me and we went out for a walk and they said 'Look, if we do go for this – this does look like the right place – would I set it up?' I said 'I would be delighted to.' So I told BAS this, joined BAS. And we knew that two or three years hence we might get the nod to go back North. This happened. I was doing the morning radio sched, with fax as it was then, with Roy Glover the radio operator at Signy, and this letter came through, one saying would I go and set up a station up in the Arctic? and the other was would I move to Cumbria? which was the cream on the cake because they wanted … I never heard the true reason but it was 1991 and of course it was the renewal of the Antarctic Treaty, and I think it might have been seen politic to not have an Arctic Institute set up here within BAS.

[Part 2c 0:19:56] Cox: So it was decided that I would move to Merlewood Research Station , a NERC station up at Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria. So my wife and I, we moved up there and went up there in … Got home in April '91 from the Antarctic and went up in May, up to Svalbard. We had actually … Kate and I had planned to get married in June, so they kindly let me come home just for a few days, and got married to Katy, bless her heart. And then went North again, and the beginnings of what is now a thriving international community. But the change in the North is extraordinary because most governments, most countries, looked to the Antarctic for all the obvious reasons: twice the size of Australia and untouched. But increasingly it has been seen the importance of the Arctic, (1) nearest to the main populated parts of the world. And it is just changing so rapidly in so many ways: the political, the human side, and the natural side. It is all changing at such a pace. I think we are right to do our bit there.

[Part 2c 0:21:18] Lee: What bit are we doing there? What was your main …In the time that you were in charge of that base, what was the base's main function?

Cox: Run the Arctic. I am still in charge of that base. The main function, like the Antarctic, is to support science, and second to that, political. When I first went to the Antarctic in 1975, we were told 'Don't have any doubts about this. You are there for political reasons.' And scientists were told 'And science comes next.' And then Joe Farman and colleagues found the ozone hole and everything just changed then and science came up neck-and-neck or even ahead of politics, which was lovely. Same in the Arctic. The science is seen as very very important now, but the politics is obviously very strong. We have got this long-standing and wonderful relationship with Norway, so it is lovely to be in what is essentially Norwegian territory. Svalbard has a treaty agreement but it is part of the Kingdom of Norway. So it is lovely to work cheek by jowl with them on something that is becoming of huge importance. Whether it is the opening of the Northeast Passage, depletion of sea ice, the American-Russian relationship; just the rapidly changing climate. It's so important that Britain does its bit up there.

[Part 2c 0:22:57] Lee: Was BAS the same beast when you came back to it as it was when you left, or had it evolved in those years?

Cox: Since when I returned to do the Arctic thing here at BAS?

[Part 2c 0:23:09] Lee: Yes.

Cox: Yes, it changed a little bit. It had to. It had to more canny. When I joined BAS, it was a little, pretty much unknown, outfit. Occasionally people: 'Oh yes, I knew somebody who went to the Antarctic.' Or 'Where is it? Is that at the North Pole, where the polar bears live?' There wasn't a huge amount of general knowledge about polar regions. So I think BAS has been very very savvy in as much as they have educated the general public and politicians and so on, so I think that has been marvellous, the way they've done that. And I think they are keeping up with technology and change. It's much more difficult. I think polar regions are much more dangerous places now. We used to take some woolly individual with a tartan shirt and a stubby pencil and a notebook, some enthusiast who wanted to go to these places. And they could go there and have an exciting and reasonably sometimes dangerous time but they'd love it and so on. These days, you are catering for scientists with a head like a rugby ball who are brilliant at their given subject but quite often they have no ambition to go somewhere cold. But the way things have evolved, they have become a … they have done maths, they have become a modeller. They've done this; they've done that and then suddenly they find that they are working in a laboratory here and then the next thing: they are asked to 'Actually we would like you to do some field work.' And the other thing is: because they have become so accessible, and because of tourism and all these things, people have it in their mind's eye that it's easy, and of course a lot of it is.

[Part 2c 0:25:01] Lee: But it's not that the Antarctic that has become more dangerous. It's the attitude of people going down there.

Cox: Attitude, yes. You are dealing with more novices, for want of a better word: people who have got there, who really don't have very much experience at all. They might have lived a very urban life and no wish to get their hands cold at all, and find themselves in this place, They tend it like it but they wouldn't be the person to take you into a crevasse field or the person to … There are odd bits where you do have to use a little bit of nous, to have a bit of experience, to get you out of it.

[Part 2c 0:25:50] Lee: But I am thinking also of BAS as an organisation, which has gone through a number of Directors between your big two periods here, each of whom had their own agenda. The relationship with NERC has changed over the years. There was the Falklands ??? [inaudible] which changed the funding regime. I am just wondering how you feel the organisation, as a creature, has been changed in the time you have been associated with it.

Cox: To be honest, it hasn't changed much. I think that's the overall feeling. Maybe I've just been with it too slowly to notice. Maybe I should have evolved with it and …

[Part 2c 0:26:30] Lee: You've spent far too much time in the cold.

Cox: Too much time in the cold. So maybe I haven't noticed because it has all come rather gradually. But I think the overall thing is: you are still always aware of the enthusiasm, and that's still there, and I think for anybody who goes North or South now, a youngster, it's as exciting as it ever was. It's easy to say 'Oh it's so easier now you have got the phone, email and all this fancy gear to wear and satellite phones and all these things.' But for the individual to go there, the Big Outdoors is always the same. And as an organisation here, if there is a criticism – nobody is to blame – there

is just more bureaucracy, and we are all hidebound by it and that's something which, if we were selling insurance, if we were running a retail shop, or whatever; bureaucracy is bureaucracy. But somehow it's a little more galling when you are dealing with such practical people, working in these rather unusual places, that you find that you are taking up so much time with blasted bureaucracy. So that has changed and BAS is weathering it the same as everybody else. I think the flavour is there. I think you probably … and I am sure there will always be polar enthusiasts. Let's just hope – I am sure we will – that the Big Outdoors down there, and up there, will be just the same for them as it had been for us. Always has been.

[Part 2c 0:28:00] Lee: You said in your notes that during your wintering years with FIDS that ten individuals had died and that you knew some of them.

Cox: Yes, difficult time, very difficult time. It just seemed to … Between '75 and '82, which was my wintering spells, I knew them down South. I wasn't on base with them but I knew them and was South at the time. All of them awful. All of them avoidable, of course they were. All of these things are avoidable but that's too easy to say. I think one thing they all had in common was that they all tended to happen close to base. There's a funny old thing about polar bases. They are dangerous places inasmuch as there is a sort of social order which means that you will be there for your day's work or if you are stuck in a tent somewhere 'I had better get back because I have got my duty to do.' And so on. Or there is something else, some X-factor there that is at play. There is a social order that you are amateurish if you stay out and so on. Local glaciers: people don't take them seriously. They go 'Ah well, it's a local glacier. It's not a problem. Hundreds of people have been up there.' Of course they have, but hopefully they have all been just as careful on that glacier as they would if they were three or four hundred miles from base.

[Part 2c 0:29:28] Cox: Out in boats: boating is probably one of the most dangerous things that we do. It was always rated – I don't know if it is now – but it was always rated as the most dangerous occupation, and again, you are close to base. 'Oh it can't happen. Somebody will help me or something.' And of the accidents, there were the three on Mount Peary. So they weren't exactly on base but they were a little expedition from base, and decided were lost. And then three slept out on sea ice and they tried to get back to base on ice that really wasn't strong enough, and were washed out or fell through. And then there was two down the hole on the Shambles, Bob Atkinson and John Anderson. I had actually just handed the Players dog team over to John Anderson when I left in '81. So I had just got home when I heard that poor John and Rob had fallen down a hole. And again, there was a bit of pressure there. They were just the other side of Macleod and wanted to get back to base. It's not too long a drive on a skidoo to get back, and they pushed it – one skidoo. But it was a combination of things; again a bit of 'base-itis' at play I think. And then poor Miles Mosley who was hit by an aeroplane ski, which was just awful. That was no fault of anybody. It was just an awful downdraft or whatever and it clipped him. And then Trevor Phipps who had a brain tumour and that was a sort of isolation thing. But it was an awful sequence of events.

[Part 2c 0:31:07] Cox: And then when the three were lost on Mount Peary – that was in '76 – the previous summer the *RRS Shackleton* came into Signy and then sailed north up towards Port Stanley and on her way up, an Argentine warship came in and

fired, I think it was eight shells or something, over her bow to try and get her to heave to. As often happens, relations with Argentina weren't just that good. But they did want to escort the ship into an Argentine port, and the captain wouldn't heave to. The Argentine ship kept firing shells so the captain got on the radio and said 'I must tell you that we are doing seismics and we have explosives on board.' So the Argentine ship pulled away, I don't know how many cables away, but did continue to fire. But the *Shackleton* kept on course and she got to Stanley. But it was a nasty event. The Labour Government, who were in power at the time, sent a mini task force. They sent a nuclear sub and one or two grey surface ships I think, down, just to fly the flag a bit. 'We weren't amused!'

[Part 2c 0:32:25] Lee: When was that?

Cox: '76, but then, during that winter of '76, the following winter, the three poor fellows were lost on Mount Peary, and change of government in Argentina. And they very kindly made their Twin Otter at our disposal to do a search for them. So there was a warming but it was all a bit confused down South. We weren't really very clear; we were on telex then and you didn't really get a huge amount of information. We could have listened to the World Service but I'm afraid we didn't. So it was all a little bit confusing. But anyway the Twin Otter with some Argentines came down and they picked up Rick Atkinson and Trevor Phipps and Mike Chantrey at Adelaide and flew over Mount Peary. And they saw the blown-out tent and so on, and no sign of anybody. And then the weather was so bad the Twin Otter left the three Britons at Palmer Station, the American station on Anvers Island and went back up to King George Island, and then came back and brought Trevor Phipps with a brain tumour and they got him up to South America where he died, poor chap. And then got Rick and Mike back to Adelaide and then flew north and the Twin Otter flew into a mountain on King George Island and wrote them … the crew were lost. Awful.

[Part 2c 0:33:52] Cox: Then the following summer, we knew of course of the accident and so on, and the search, but we still weren't quite sure what was going on Argentina-wise and our radio operator was and we had been out of contact with the outside world for weeks and weeks at a time. Then sometimes we would get on again and he would break the radios again. And so we were a great team. But we hadn't had anything, so it was a bit of a surprise when in November 1976, somebody came into the boatshed where I was working and said 'There's a ship.' We weren't expecting our first ship until the end of December, BAS ship. So we came out and there was a launch coming in and everybody said 'Who is it?' We had no idea who it was. And there was an ice foot the sea ice had just gone, so there was an ice foot and this launch came alongside and there were two Marines standing around it.

[Part 2c 0:35:03] Cox: An Admiral stepped ashore into the snow and the captain and some officers. And we were all looking at each other, standing in a row like this. 'Who on Earth are they? Argentines? But the Argentines don't like us, do they?' We were all trying to put this all together and they came in and the admiral said he was on a friendship tour really, just to say hello and apologise for the things that went on the previous summer. One little thing there: I was actually working a little dinghy called

Mwah [phonetic], a little wooden clinker-built dinghy in the boatshed, stripping varnish off her, and I was using Nitromors, which is an acid gel. I didn't know but I had got a little bit on my fingers like this and when I went out (there is a delay before it starts burning) and shook hands with one of the Argentine officers, and he got Nitromors on his hand. So we saw him just … I ran back and plunged my hand in a bucket of water which I had in the boatshed, and I saw this poor chap wiping his hand. It probably didn't do our relations with the Argentines any good. But they had a helicopter on board and they went on to King George Island to look for the air crew and sadly downed the helicopter as well; that came down. So an awful sequence of events.

[Part 2c 0:36:22] Lee: There are just two things we haven't discussed. Well there are lots of things we haven't had time for but there are two things I was going to ask you about. In '83 you became part of the management of the Discovery Project. I would like to hear a bit about that. At least it was safe I presume on the Thames, was it?

Cox: Yes, I'm not sure it was safe; it was hilarious. The Maritime Trust were restoring *Discovery*. She used to be on the Embankment, by Embankment tube station and they moved her down to St Katherine's and she became part of their little museum there. They had several old ships in St Katherine's Dock, open to the public. And there were quite a few Fids who had worked on her, to help with the restoration. When I came home in '81, I tried to shake off the polar bug and went to work on a fish farm in Northwest Scotland. A friend of mine had an idea to open a fish farm, which went by the bye and I got a letter from Brian Harland, asking me to do the next season in Svalbard which I just couldn't not, so I went back to polar things. I met up with Mike Chantrey again, ex Adelaide and Rothera, and Mike said 'Forget fish farming. Come and work with us on *Discovery*. It's great. You can work and you can leave on expeditions whenever you want.

[Part 2c 0:37:36] Cox: So from *Discovery*, I worked on two Svalbard trips and the beginning of that dog trip which we did in Norway, training dogs for the Antarctic. And it was great, so I went and joined, I had never lived in a town before so living in London was quite good fun, and Mike and I actually lived on board *Discovery*. We had a kitchen up in the forepeak, a modern kitchen which we built, and he lived in a cabin beyond that and I actually lived in I think it was Armitage's cabin, just off the wardroom, aft end on the port side And we had riggers and shipwrights and people from the Greenwich Museum and so on. And then the Maritime Trust asked me if I would manage the project, the shipwrights and all this sort of thing. It sounded a great idea.

[Part 2c 0:38:25] Lee: It was under restoration, was it?

Cox: Under restoration but open to the public at the same time, so we had bits which we cordoned off because we were working on it. It was a big job as well. We took the whole of the bilges apart and put in a plumbing system which sprayed Poly-bore into the timbers and so on. So it was at that sort of stage. It was fascinating and one of the lovely things: I was actually doing some graving work down on – I can't remember which deck it was, one of the decks, I can't remember. Anyway I looked up and there was Peter Scott and his second wife, Philippa, came aboard, so it was lovely to meet him on board his father's ship. And another day, an elderly man came on board and I

cannot remember his name, which is awful, and he asked to be shown round and I showed him round. His father, as I remember, was the Canon of Christchurch and Wilson stayed with his family, both on the *Discovery* and the *Terra Nova* expeditions. And Scott stayed with another family on the other side of the road.

[Part 2c 0:39:38] Cox: We went up on the foredeck and he said 'Ah yes, I remember the foredeck' and he was absolutely right because all the other bits of the ship had changed slightly since Scott's day and he said 'I remember standing on this foredeck with Captain Scott.' But that was in 1901. But he remembered the *Terra Nova* expedition very much better; he was much older. And he said 'You know, I think I was the last person to have contact with Captain Scott before he left for Antarctica because we went down to Lyttleton Harbour to watch the *Terra Nova* sail, and I was a Boy Scout, and we flashed "Good Luck" with an Aldis Lamp as they sailed out of Lyttleton Harbour.' It was a very special time. And then we had people who came and made films on board and advertising and so on. So it was a very special time. I would say it was a bit dangerous sometimes because we used to sometimes have parties in the evening on board and then go and climb up to the truck on the top of the mast, which was 90 foot off deck level; with a few drinks under the belt, it wasn't the best thing to do.

[Part 2c 0:40:48] Lee: Did the MBE come as a surprise?

Cox: A huge surprise.

[Part 2c 0:40:56] Lee: This 2006, isn't it?

Cox: Yes, a huge surprise and it embarrasses me that I got this thing. So humble. It was lovely, whoever nominated me.

[Part 2c 0:41:06] Lee: Do you know who it is?

Cox: I think was the BAS Directorate, well in fact I know it was the BAS Directorate and it was lovely of them and I don't think I deserved it because you look around all these people doing marvellous things who don't get these things, so you think 'Why on earth should I get something?' But then I did and it was lovely of them. Yes, but it was a huge surprise. I thought this was another bill that came through the door. It had a little window in it and it was a big big surprise. Yes, it was very nice of them to nominate me for it.

[Part 2c 0:41:43] Lee: What did the Queen say?

Cox: She was lovely. She only has those few moments. An equerry had primed her that I had got the Polar Medal so she talked about the Polar Medal a bit, and she talked about the interest now in the Arctic, which was lovely. She is clever and I am sure is genuinely interested for those moments, and uplifting. Yes, she is wonderful.

[Part 2c 0:42:19] Lee: Shall we leave it there, on a high note?

Cox: Thank you very much. Thank you.

[Part 2c 0:42:23] End of interview.

[Part 2c 0:42:32] End of recording

Agrees with OHCAT Nick Cox.

[Part 2 1:04:40] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1a 0:04:17] Antarctic camping.
- [Part 1a 0:09:56] A tricky crevasse crossing with dogs.
- [Part 1a 0:14:52] Dogs as morale boosters.
- [Part 1a 0:21:56] Sir Vivian Fuchs' pipe smoking.
- [Part 1a 0:28:50] A bad winter at Faraday.
- [Part 1a 0:39:23] A medical with Colonel Hayward.
- [Part 1a 0:44:40] Isolation and bad weather at Signy.
- [Part 1a 0:49:55] A frightening boating incident at Signy.
- [Part 1a 0:57:23] Floe-hopping in a suit.
- [Part 1a 1:07:33] An amateur dentistry job.
- [Part 1b 0:04:26] Dead penguins and a visit from Greenpeace.
- [Part 1b 0:08:00] 'Penguin pie again?'
- [Part 2b 0:07:31] Unexpected interview result.
- [Part 2c 0:10:55] A beautiful sight near Stonington.
- [Part 2c 0:35:03] Acidic handshake for an Argentine naval officer.