

MIKE RICHARDSON

Edited transcript of a recording of Mike Richardson interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 1st May 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/163. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 10th December 2017.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Mike Richardson, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 1st of May 2012. Mike Richardson, Part 1.

Richardson: Mike Richardson. Date of birth is 12/2/49. Born in Hanover in Germany actually.

[Part 1 0:00:17] Lee: Oh right. Why was that?

Richardson: Well because my father, at that time, was in the Army, so actually you are born in a sort of enclave of Britain which is the British Military Hospital in Hanover.

[Part 1 0:00:29] Lee: So he was there just after the war?

Richardson: Yes. He was actually in the Army all his working life. We were very rarely in the UK. We trundled round between Singapore, Malaya, Northern Ireland, Germany, then back to Germany and so on.

[Part 1 0:00:44] Lee: Did your mother have a profession or was she a professional Army wife?

Richardson: She was a professional mother because she had six of them. We were a very ordered family so there was girl, boy, girl, boy, girl, boy. I was Number 2 but there was quite a lot of us.

[Part 1 0:00:55] Lee: Well the next question is probably more complicated than I expected, which is about your education. What sort of education did you have?

Richardson: Because of the Army upbringing, I think I had been to about seven schools in so many years, or in fact less than that. So I got eventually packed off to a prep school, a choral prep school, in Worcestershire, which doesn't exist now and I was very fond of that part of the world. And then I went to a public school in Sussex, Ardingly and from there went to Durham. I didn't really want to go to Durham at that time because I was grouse beating just after school, which is a great way of getting fit. I got two offers came in, one a day after the other, from St Andrews and Durham. I wasn't at home but my father was and he promptly rang up Durham and said 'He will be there in three weeks' time.' So my idea of taking a gap year out was sacrificed.

[Part 1 0:01:58] Lee: What was your father's name?

Richardson: George Richardson.

[Part 1 0:02:01] Lee: Was he that kind of man, then, to make decisions for other people?

Richardson: When he thought I was probably just going to gallivant around for a year, yes.

[Part 1 0:02:09] Lee: In your best interests?

Richardson: Absolutely.

[Part 1 0:02:12] Lee: I guess you were boarding at some of these schools, were you?

Richardson: Yes. I boarded from the age of about eight at this prep school and then also at public school.

[Part 1 0:02:21] Lee: So a bunk in a bunkhouse in the Antarctic held no fears?

Richardson: Not really. It's a sort of extension of a Boy Scouts existence in some ways, and of course BAS at that time wholly male.

[Part 1 0:02:35] Lee: Yes. Where did the interest in biology spring from?

Richardson: The funny thing was: I had never actually had any doubt as to what I wanted to do from about the age of seven, so it was a sort of a bit of a Gerald Durrell type existence as a kid. I had so many animals, it was almost positively embarrassing, particularly if you are at boarding school.

[Part 1 0:03:03] Lee: You didn't take them with you?

Richardson: Yes. I used to go backwards and forwards between what was then ... We were living in Harrogate. So I was going backwards and forwards between Harrogate and Sussex and I use to cram all these animals into old ex-Army ammunition boxes. At one stage I had like forty hamsters and about six ferrets and a few other things. I remember sitting on a train and we were just coming into Leeds. We hadn't gone very far when somebody said 'Oh look, a ferret.' I thought 'Oh My God.' The ferret was eating its way out of the box and by the time I had got to London, I had strapped a huge great thick biology tome over the top of this box and it was coming through the top of that as well. Basically I always wanted to do biology. It wasn't a question really; I just instinctively fell into it.

[Part 1 0:03:50] Lee: So you did go to Durham?

Richardson: I went to Durham to do zoology, yes.

[Part 1 0:03:53] Lee: Did that convince you that that was the career path you wanted to take?

Richardson: Yes, but initially, after three very enjoyable years at Durham, I had two PhDs lined up – one on the population energetics of water voles in Sussex and the other on the population dynamics of lesser white toothed shrews in the Channel

Islands.– sounds really fascinating, at Southampton. Then suddenly I thought ‘Hang on. I have just done three years at university. I am not sure I really want to do another three.’ It was at that point, I think probably just wandering round the careers office which I didn’t visit very often, I suddenly came across the British Antarctic Survey as a potential job. And I applied to BAS, again as a biologist, wanting to work on seals and seabirds. Really actually I wanted to work on mammals. It wasn’t going to be quite like that.

[Part 1 0:05:02] Lee: Where did your interest in the Antarctic come from? What was your first memory of knowing a place called the Antarctic existed?

Richardson: Funnily enough, it really wasn’t an interest in the Antarctic and it wasn’t actually really a great interest in BAS. It was an interest derived from the fact that I realised I didn’t want another three years at university. I suddenly saw BAS. I wanted to work on mammals and OK, it was in the Antarctic. Actually what really happened was having been interviewed, and I thought for this job possibly on seals – if it wasn’t seals, it was going to be seabirds – I turned up at Monks Wood, which was then where the Zoology Section of BAS was based, just near Huntingdon, because at that time BAS was spread all over the UK. I had only graduated, I think, on the Friday or the Saturday; so this was the Monday morning, and the first two questions I got directed at me when I turned up: one was ‘How much marine biology do you know?’ to which I said ‘Well none really because Durham doesn’t have a marine lab. It was snaffled years ago when Newcastle University was hived off from Durham, so I don’t know anything about marine biology.’ ‘Oh well don’t worry. You will soon pick it up’ they said. And the second question was ‘How good a swimmer are you?’ I said ‘Well actually not very good at all.’ ‘Oh don’t worry about that. We will send you on a diving course down at Swanage and you will soon pick that up as well.’ So the idea of working on seals and seabirds had gone out of the window and I was suddenly apparently going to be press-ganged into being a marine biologist.

[Part 1 0:06:47] Lee: Let’s just go back to that interview in London. What do you recall of it?

Richardson: The headquarters of BAS at that time were in this funny little terraced house – I don’t know if it still exists – just round the back from Victoria station¹. So I turned up there. I can’t remember precisely who was on the interview board, but Bill Sloman was (Head of Personnel) and the chairman of the board was actually Dick Laws who was then the Head of Life Sciences in BAS. It was quite funny really because I was sitting there and I wasn’t really well versed in interview techniques, one could say, and sufficiently not versed in interview techniques that the first question that the chairman of the board directed to me ... I looked at him blankly because I hadn’t even heard it because just over his shoulder, on the window sill, I was watching these sparrows mating and I was actually much more engrossed in watching the sparrows mating than in the interview. I think this must have gone down quite well actually with Dick, who of course was quite a good field biologist. Somehow or other, I got the job. Of course just after the interview, I then tottered off to Eland House, I think it was called or Eland Place or something like that, which was the old ODA offices just by Victoria station, and there was this really strange

¹ 30 Gillingham Street, London SW1V 1HU, now occupied by Shepherds Bookbinders.

character. I thought he was really rather humorous actually. I think he was an ex Lieutenant Colonel Surgeon, very colonial almost and very colonial looking who did the medical. It was such a wonderful bizarre medical; I have never come across ... Anyway I got the job.

[Part 1 0:08:35] Lee: Tell me about the medical.

Richardson: Well he would stand across the other side of the room and bellow at me. This was to test whether I was deaf or not, and then he would run through his set of questions which included things like have you got this? have you got that? 'Syphilis?' I said 'No.' He said 'Why not?' [chuckles] And then he told me, basically, ... since I was asthmatic. 'Big problem really because if you die the ground is so hard they can't bury you.' I said 'Well I probably won't get asthma in the Antarctic anyway so' I seemed to get through both the interview and the medical and got a job.

[Part 1 0:09:11] Lee: So what happened next, because that is usually a hiatus in Fids' careers? They get offered the job and then there is some delay or there is some hassle about when to sail and what you have to do before you go. Were you trained?

Richardson: Well you see in those days ... Everything is very preplanned nowadays so I suspect, well I know, that particularly on the science side, science projects are planned and funded etc. etc. years ahead, probably a 5-year plus horizon before things actually come to fruition. I think in those days, basically it was sort of ... You almost designed the project yourself. In fact that's what happened. So I turned up, as I say, at Monks Wood, and having been told I was now a marine biologist and I was going to be a diver, the next thing was: 'And by the way, the ship sails in October/ November. You have got three months to plan this project. Decide what project you want to plan and get on with it.'

[Part 1 0:10:14] Lee: So there was no BAS input into what you were suggesting?

Richardson: Not really. There was no design. It was just basically 'You think of something to do, and order all the equipment and get on a ship.' And that's more or less how it worked. In retrospect it was quite bizarre really. But I think, to be very honest, one was still almost in that phase of Antarctic presence, where the issue of presence had not yet been taken over by the importance of science. So there was an importance of the UK being in Antarctica and it was much more important to be just doing something useful, i.e. science, than sitting there playing tiddley winks.

[Part 1 0:11:00] Lee: Were you aware of that, the political implications at the time?

Richardson: Not really, no. No not at all. It became very much more apparent of course about 17 years later when I actually returned to Antarctica, the Antarctic agenda, but this time from a political perspective.

[Part 1 0:11:9] Lee: I suppose also, at that point, so little science had been done that there was quite a broad canvas to choose from really?

Richardson: Well that's right. I mean almost anything was useful because basically yes ... Having said that, particularly on the biology side, I think BAS was really quite

cutting edge at that time. There was some really important work being done at Signy both on the terrestrial biology side and also the inshore marine side. Some of the work that was done by BAS at that time I think was really ground breaking.

[Part 1 0:11:56] Lee: What did you choose to do?

Richardson: Since I didn't know anything about marine biology, it was quite a wide canvas. I opted to work on amphipods, small crustaceans. Actually some of the things I set out to do in the Antarctic weren't going to work because my equipment went on the blink and I actually did a much broader project than I had initially anticipated. So I was working on bivalves, and all sorts of things – benthic organisms generally.

[Part 1 0:12:30] Lee: And that involved you in the diving that you had to do, which you had learned before you left. What was the diving course like?

Richardson: Oh it was brilliant. It was really really well designed for diving under ice in the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:12:44] Lee: Really?

Richardson: Yes, really. You went down to Swanage. There was Andy Clarke and I. Andy was actually destined to go to South Georgia. In fact he didn't end up diving because he had an ear complaint and couldn't dive. So we went to Swanage and there was this diving school in Swanage. At the end of the pier they had this huge thing: just a big aquarium in full public gaze, and so you conducted half of your diving training in this aquarium on the end of the pier at Swanage. We did do a little bit of disappearing down into the actual waters of the bay itself but as I say, it was really well designed training for diving under ice at almost -2°C in the Antarctic, and it was quite an amusing experience.

[Part 1 0:13:34] Lee: Are you being slightly cynical?

Richardson: No not at all facetious or anything. This was my first experience of diving, was to be sent off to Swanage.

[Part 1 0:13:46] Lee: How do you learn to dive under ice on a pier in Swanage? I don't get it.

Richardson: Well you do. Once we got to base there were a lot of people on Signy who were diving and so they don't necessarily throw you into the deep end. So initial dives in the sea at Signy are obviously, you have got a lot of very experienced people you can go diving with.

[Part 1 0:14:09] Lee: Describe Signy when you arrived in '71? What was the base like?

Richardson: It was pitch dark and we were on the *Biscoe* and so we hove into Borge Bay and it was an absolute foul night. We were dressed up. It was so cold and depressing, blowing a gale and this little light ... You could see the light on the anemometer tower near the base, and then this little light came bobbing towards us. It

was two guys. It was Eric Twelves and Peter Hardy, coming out to the *Biscoe* in what was the base's little 16 ft clinker dinghy. It was absolutely appalling sea conditions. They just tied up alongside, leapt on board, stayed to have a drink, grabbed the mail and disappeared again. That was my first impression of Signy and of course the other thing that interested me was that we were dressed up to the hilt in clothing and these two guys came out on a foul night not exactly half naked but they weren't exactly dressed for the occasion as far as I could see. But that was a degree of acclimation² I suppose, to Antarctic conditions.

[Part 1 0:15:34] Lee: And the hut itself? How was that?

Richardson: Well actually, if I went back a bit, I remember before we got to Signy we dropped in to KEP and of course the BAS base in South Georgia at that time was probably was the biggest BAS base, and I remember being incredibly disappointed when I walked in there because it was so palatial. It didn't strike me as being an Antarctic base. It was just luxurious: the bar and the dining room and the lounge and everything about it was just amazingly well appointed. And so actually, when I arrived at Signy, which is a bit more down to earth, very much more basic, I was much more delighted. It was what I expected. I didn't expect any frills.

[Part 1 0:16:32] Lee: So was it a large bunkroom?

Richardson: Well Signy then consisted of ... There was the old part of the base, the old wooden hut which by now had become more or less the stores, engineering rooms, the genny shed and so on. But the main part of the base on Signy at that time was this thing that looked like a pale yellow double decker bus made out of fibreglass. It was pre-fabricated fibreglass panels that were stuck together, bolted together and then sealed with mastic. It was fairly basic. The interesting thing about the mastic was that the sheathbills (the mutts) loved the stuff and they would spend most of the summer running around on the roof pecking out the mastic so that we always had leaks through the roof. The yellow double decker bus, which of course has now gone since BAS rebuilt Signy, consisted of the bunkrooms which were very basic and not heated, the lounge, kitchen and so on, and then the laboratories down below. So in fact all the science laboratories and a wet room, a wet lab full of aquaria, were down in the basement, in the lowest part of the building.

[Part 1 0:17:56] Lee: Was it not heated because there were no heaters or because you were conserving energy?

Richardson: The bunkrooms, as I say, were fairly basic because they were just down one corridor on either side with some at the end and they were just literally partitioned off with a curtain from the corridor. I think they were largely unheated because we didn't have enough power. We were always getting notes down from London demanding to know why we were getting through so much power and I remember once sending them a telex which was pages and pages and pages of all the power consumption of virtually every socket in the building, but certainly we did not actually go so far as heating the bunkrooms. I remember one day stuffing a

² He probably means 'acclimatisation'.

thermometer down my sleeping bag and it was about –22 and I didn't repeat that process again.

[Part 1 0:18:56] Lee: Minus 22 with you inside it?

Richardson: No that was before I got in it.

[Part 1 0:18:59] Lee: So you were heating the sleeping bag rather than the other way round?

Richardson: That's right.

[Part 1 0:19:03] Lee: And what about the scientific facilities? Was the lab well equipped or ...?

Richardson: I think it was. The thing about Signy was, and I think it is a great shame that BAS ever abandoned that base effectively in the '90s.

[Part 1 0:19:19] Lee: It went summer only, didn't it?

Richardson: It went summer only and that was a purely financial situation. I by then was in the Foreign Office and I couldn't disagree. The funny thing was I probably knew more about the science of Signy than those who were making the decisions. I couldn't disagree with the science; I could only push this from a political angle. But the thing about Signy was: as an Antarctic island, it had got everything. It had got fantastic terrestrial biology in terms of peat beds and moss beds. It had a whole range of lakes. I can't remember exactly how many it is on Signy but it is about 13 or 16 lakes, many of them very very different qualities and it had fantastic opportunities for inshore marine biology, as well as a whole range of birds. There were a vast array of birds breeding virtually on the back doorstep of the base. So seals, birds, marine, terrestrial, freshwater biology – Signy had it all.

[Part 1 0:20:23] Lee: I know I am hopping about a bit, but when it came to that decision that Signy should go summer-only, did you try and oppose that?

Richardson: From a political point of view, in the Foreign Office, what BAS was suggesting at the time, to save money, was the closure completely of Signy and we would have gone down from ... And Faraday (or Argentine Islands as it had been) was in the equation as well because those two bases, Signy and Faraday, were in many respects very similar in terms of complement and in terms of cost. But they were only costing BAS, at that time, about £700,000 a year to run in total and we were arguing against decreasing the UK presence in the British Antarctic Survey³ from four bases down to two. If you looked at our counter claimants, and we are now into a much more political situation, the two counter claimants to our bit of Antarctica, if you can put it that way, Chile and Argentina, have the most bases that you can ... of any of the Antarctic states. And just from a pure presence point of view, we wanted to retain Signy. Now we got demoted effectively to a summer-only base and that in many respects emasculated it because by the time you move out all the

³ He probably mean British Antarctic Territory.

physical infrastructure to support a diving programme.⁸ For example, if you move all that sort of stuff out, and move it down to Rothera, then effectively you almost do away with the sustainability of diving at Signy and a lot of things just went and I think it was a great shame.

[Part 1 0:22:22] Lee: I seem to remember the explanation ... I was recording some interviews at the Signy 60th reunion (would it be?) in Cambridge, and the explanation seem to be that with the advance of air travel, there was no real need for people to spend the winter at Signy any longer.

Richardson: Well of course you can't get to Signy by air.

[Part 1 0:22:46] Lee: No but they could fly to ...

Richardson: No but the fact is ... you can have this argument backwards and forwards. I believe that in terms of the range of ... I haven't actually dived at Rothera but I have dived down the Peninsula, and the range of inshore marine habitats that exist at Rothera, certainly the range of terrestrial biology that you can do at Rothera, and there are no lakes ... So actually Rothera is – it might be much more characteristic of continental Antarctica, but in terms of diversity of habitats and diversity of species, I would argue it was actually a very impoverished place compared with Signy. At the end of the day it was all about money. Suddenly BAS had been brought up short because: obviously during the '80s, post the Falklands Conflict, something like £90 million had been thrown at BAS by Government and that £90 million of course then spawned the *James Clark Ross*, the rebuild of Rothera, airstrip, buying a Dash-7, extending the BAS headquarters in Cambridge, all this sort of stuff. But the more complicated logistics you bring in, which then needs sustaining and managing, which of course is then a cost. something has to give and suddenly your budget starts flat-lining or even goes down. So the more expensive toys you have, logistic equipment, that all needs to be then maintained and managed.

[Part 1 0:24:27] Lee: And therefore the more expendable places like Signy become?

Richardson: I think so. Obviously it's progress, running more complicated ships. It's a very simple situation. If you go from the simplicity of something like the *John Biscoe* to then the complexity of the *James Clark Ross*, and this is just an example, a ship example. It's the same as running Signy to running Rothera. These are much more expensive logistic operations.

[Part 1 0:24:54] Lee: Let's go back to your heyday then, at Signy, if we may. Tell me about the diving you did down there. First of all you had to get used to the idea of diving under ice.

Richardson: I was a lousy swimmer. I actually didn't like swimming. I remember at school we used to have to go and swim at ten past seven in the morning in an open pool and it was freezing. So instinctively I didn't really like it but that wasn't a great problem. There is a great difference between diving in the summer and diving in the winter and actually, perhaps oddly, diving in the winter is a lot easier. So you are not boating and messing around in small open dinghies and the dinghies we were using then were small and they were just little wooden clinker dinghies; they weren't RIBs

or Zodiacs or something. But of course in winter you can actually drive out to a diving site very rapidly having pre-cut your holes, perhaps in the morning.

[Part 1 0:25:54] Richardson: We always used to dive after smoko and there is a very good physiological reason for this because diving in the middle of winter under ice is not exactly thermally the most comfortable thing to do. It might sound a bit disgusting but if you have just had tea break, at about halfway through your dive, when it suddenly gets really cold, particularly if you turn upside down and have a pee, it actually warms the whole of the wetsuit up. We were at one stage doing some physiological experiments for – I can't remember the name of the medic. He wasn't actually at Signy; he was in South Georgia. He never got to Signy. He was due to get to Signy but actually got waylaid and became the medic in South Georgia, Dave somebody or other⁴. Anyway we were doing this physiological stuff for the medic in South Georgia which consisted of all sorts of things, basically testing the temperature effects on physiology of divers, which involved sticking probes up your rear end, swallowing radio pills and all sorts of other things, and then doing all these either mental or physical tasks underwater, like screwing brass nuts and bolts together, or actually with a whole series of stupid questions like 'A precedes B ...' and you had to say whether they were right or wrong.

[Part 1 0:27:30] Richardson: Actually what was amazing: when you are sitting down there after half an hour at a relatively shallow depth, you realise just how befuddled you were becoming, which was never normally apparent to you, because we would be diving at far deeper than the sorts of depth ranges that these experiments were being done. Dave came to the conclusion that we actually should all be clinically dead because we were measuring body core temperature drops of something like two degrees Centigrade. But what is interesting: of the five or six people who were doing his experiment, if you had just stood them in a line, from long and thin to short and tubby, you would have been able to have drawn his graphs for him straight away. If you had got a bit more blubber on you, you got less cold and if you were long and thin, you got extremely cold.

[Part 1 0:28:23] Lee: Your diving facilities were pretty rudimentary. I think that you went to Palmer later on and saw what the Americans had.

Richardson: Yes, we were still diving in wetsuits so it was all fairly primitive and basically you came in from a dive, leapt in a bath and that's what you did, just to warm up. I went down, it was actually just after Dave Fletcher had come in from Halley to take over from me as base commander in probably what was about February 1973 and having shown Dave around the facilities at Signy for about two or three days, I said 'Bye' and Paul Skilling and I ... Paul was the diver, professional diver, on Signy at that time; very a young guy actually – he was only eighteen when he turned up on base. Paul and I disappeared on the *Bransfield* to go down the Peninsula. I hadn't been down the Peninsula. I had only seen Signy and South Georgia and I thought this was a great opportunity. So we went down the Peninsula to do a bit of diving. We dived at Argentine Islands. We dived in the Back Bay at Stonington which was very interesting actually.

⁴ Dave Hughes, according to the Database of Winterers on the BAS Club website.

[Part 1 0:29:36] Richardson: It was completely different habitat and range of species than I had ever seen at Signy. I remember we collected loads and loads of scallops, quite difficult. The whole of Back Bay was full of brash ice which was great boulders of ice actually, so even getting into the water was quite difficult and there was a swell coming round the corner. But anyway there was all these, the Latin name at that time (I think it has changed) was *adamusium*, smallish scallops and I remember we were swimming around collecting these things, trying to shove them in a bucket whilst all at the same time they keep jumping out of the bucket. Anyway we collected a couple of bucketfuls of these things, told somebody on the Bransfield what to do with them, like purge them first before you are going to eat them.

[Part 1 0:30:23] Richardson: But anyway they didn't and quite a few people got really quite ill with these scallops. But it was interesting diving down the Peninsula. When we arrived at Palmer, I was amazed because Palmer station at that time was almost about the same complement as Signy. We used to play Palmer at darts over the air which was quite interesting. But Signy at that time was about 12 to 16 people; Palmer station was about the same. Well we had, say, four support staff: diesel mechanic, radio operator, cook and diver. All the rest were either scientists or scientific technicians. When you get to Palmer, it is a complete reversal. They had two scientists. Everybody else on base were support staff. I went in the genny shed and I said to these three guys. 'What do you do?' They looked at me and said 'Well him and him and me maintain these motors.' I thought that was incredible but their diving facilities were fantastic. They had got heated dry suits and diver to diver communications, diver to surface communications. I thought this was, compared with BAS facilities at the time, we were certainly very rudimentary.

[Part 1 0:31:42] Lee: And you were so rudimentary, you had to make your own wet suits?

Richardson: Yes, well Paul the diver really got into Paul was obsessed with trying to have a wetsuit that was really a dry suit so he used to experiment with wetsuits all the time. He was for ever making thicker and thicker wetsuits which were designed to exclude water totally. He even, I think, put a valve in the top of his head which he reckoned would purge all the air out of his wetsuit. The fact is it was very simple. If the suits got torn or something, it was actually very easy to repair them. On the whole it's not exactly the most pleasant experience sometimes. It's quite cold. The interesting thing was: from Dave's experiments, when you come out of a diving hole, you immediately start feeling warmer. You have finished the dive, you feel warmer but actually what is really happening to your body temperature is, it probably is at its lowest just as you are getting into the bath back on base which is probably about 20 minutes later. So there is a sort of lag factor there which is quite interesting.

[Part 1 0:32:59] Lee: Were there other dangers associated with diving through ice? Presumably you have got to find the hole again?

Richardson: Well we were roped up. There were a couple of occasions when ... I used to dive at night and I remember there was one occasion when ... Diving at night is actually quite interesting because it is almost as different as say going out into a tropical environment at night compared with the day. So if you went out at night, the air is full of whatever there might be – moths or mosquitos or whatever. If you dive at

night, the whole water column is absolutely full of things – annelid worms, amphipods ... If you are diving in the day, the water column is normally completely free of animals.

[Part 1 0:33:48] Richardson: At night it's like a soup of swimming animals. It's quite amazing. And of course it's a bit more scary. I remember one day diving under ice at night and obviously you have just got a torch. We had got to the end of our ropes and yet just beyond where we were, there were some really really interesting ... a whole wall of anemones or something like that. I can't remember exactly what it was. We wanted to go and look at them but we can't just let the rope go because obviously they would pull it in, so we tied the ropes to a little rock pinnacle and then continued with our dive. By now we weren't roped up but that wasn't all that scary. There was a time when we got an instruction from London. Because they wanted to rebuild the slipway at Signy the following season, could we go and survey the bottom, where the slipway was going to be, very accurately? Well the problem was that with sea ice in, there wasn't much space between the bottom of the sea ice and where this slip was going to be. It was literally ... we were crawling around like as if we were caving, trying to survey the slope of the shoreline there.

[Part 1 0:33:09] Richardson: I was a little bit worried because I came out of the diving hole and I was diving with Paul and I pulled in his rope and all that came up was the rope. I waited about three minutes before I thought 'I had better get back in there and find out where he is' at which point he just popped up. It was all a big joke as far as he was concerned. This guy was an amazingly powerful swimmer. I have never seen anybody who, for example, could drop his weights into say thirty or forty feet of water, under ice, and if you take your weight belt off under ice you actually get pinioned up underneath the ice as if you are trapped. And yet he could then swim down with a very thick wetsuit on and retrieve his weight belt. The rest of us would all be just literally stuck there like flattened silhouettes against the bottom of the ice.

[Part 1 0:36:11] Lee: Did you have any problems with leopard seals?

Richardson: Yes, leopard seals. I remember Owen Darling was on base when I first turned up and Owen used to go down to Gourlay every day in one of these little dinghies, 12 ft dinghy. And there was a leopard seal that particularly took an interest every day round the penguin colonies. Of course leps can stand ... It's a big seal, particularly the females. They can stand out of the water really quite high, 4 or 5 feet they will come out of the water, which means if you are in a little 12 foot dinghy, they are actually looking down on you rather than anything else. This animal basically got to the habit where it would grab hold of the gunwale of the boat and start shaking it. After that, Owen always used to carry a .45 Colt with him and any leopard seal that wanted to do that was liable to get a hole through its head. I remember one day, we were just about to go for a dive in the bay just off from the base. We were all kitted up. We were sitting there waiting to go diving and there was this lep in the bay.

[Part 1 0:37:19] Richardson: So being prudent, we decided not to dive. But Eric Twelves, the base commander, Eric was a wonderfully bloodthirsty sort of character really, in the nicest sort of way as a professional biologist. But Eric use to catch 'Noties' (*notothenia*) because he was working on them. He used to catch them in things very similar to lobster pots which he used to need to bait with meat of some

kind. And so Eric was desperate for some fresh meat for his fish pots and we needed to get rid of a seal in the bay at the time, so that poor old lep actually got a .303 bullet through it, and disappeared. Eric immediately said to Pete Hardy and myself 'Can you go and get it?' I said 'I think I will wait a few minutes because I don't really want to go in there if it is still around' which was just as well because about three minutes later it surfaced again, not looking too well and it got another bullet in it, and which point Eric said 'I am sure you can go and get it now.' It was a bizarre experience because I remember swimming through this ever increasing pink cloud towards presumably where this seal was.

[Part 1 0:38:42] Lee: Not knowing if it was dead?

Richardson: Well I presumed it was dead by now. Anyway there was this increasing pink cloud in the water and all the amphipods, thousands of amphipods, were already heading towards this thing, within minutes. It was incredible because they will actually reduce a seal corpse to literally bones within a few days. It is quite amazing. Anyway so I was swimming through this cloud with a stick and I eventually came across this leopard seal on the bottom and poked it gingerly just to see if it was going to spring into life. But the amazing thing was that this big animal and it was a very big female, it was about 12 or 14 ft long, underwater you could pick it up with one hand and almost throw it and it would glide off into the distance. It was just amazingly streamlined. Anyway that was a leopard seal that didn't last very long. Within minutes, Dick Laws, who was then Head of Life Sciences, (Dick is an ex- whaling inspector), in fact anything very large on the mammal scene, Dick was interested in. I have never seen somebody become so animated so rapidly as Dick clutching a huge great flensing knife. He suddenly started working on this leopard seal. They actually have ... I think I have eaten a variety of seals but leopard seal is quite amazing because a leopard seal steak is almost like a coal black ... well it's like a piece of coal. It's as black as a piece of coal. The myoglobin in those animals, in their muscles, it makes the meat absolutely black. It's quite incredible.

[Part 1 0:40:29] Lee: And tasty?

Richardson: Not as good as young elephant seal, let's put it that way.

[Part 1 0:40:33] Lee: There is some debate. I think, isn't there, about ... well there has been. I remember talking to Dave Fletcher last week about whether leopard seals are naturally aggressive or naturally inquisitive.

Richardson: No, I don't think they are. I think they are naturally inquisitive and they are a big predator. But it is exactly the same situation as I think you get with a terrestrial predator. They are fearless because they don't have anything preying on them. Well leopard seals could have killer whales, but on the whole it's the same sort of curiosity as I suspect you would get from a big cat. They are not frightened of what's around them and they will come up. But of course they are also testing the situation, so probably a diver blowing bubbles is an interesting experience for them but I don't know what the dividing line is between their interest in you as to whether they are simply interested in you or whether they suddenly see you as a potential meal. We had another interesting experience with leopard seals because we used to have this stupid competition in Signy. Just as the sea ice was freezing, but it wasn't

sufficiently frozen to support you wholly, we used to have this thin ice race at Signy which was basically to get to the other side of the bay, just the cove.

[Part 1 0:42:01] Richardson: Normally the prize was a week's supply of chocolate. And you could do whatever you liked. You could wear great big long planks of wood or you could do what you liked to get to the other side of the cove. Paul Skilling and I had got a small ice floe and we were using this as a sort of battering ram to go through the new sea ice by using a grappling hook and pulling ourselves forward. The problem was that our ice floe was progressively getting smaller by the minute, so that as we neared the other side of the cove –we were about twenty yards from the other side – by now we were actually standing on a piece of ice, up to our thighs in water,. So our ice floe was actually under water and suddenly there was this enormous snort from just behind me and this leopard seal four or five feet out of the water, suddenly was literally right behind me. I think that put the adrenalin level up a bit.

[Part 1 0:42:59] Lee: How was that resolved?

Richardson: Well luckily they had seen us from the base and they were over with a boat very rapidly. I didn't really want to be in the sea, standing on a submerged ice floe, with a leopard seal within three feet of me.

[Part 1 0:43:14] Lee: So was there any Health & Safety precaution about that? If you were going diving, were there ...?

Richardson: No, not really.

[Part 1 0:43:21] Lee: There was nobody watching out for leopard seals in the bay?

Richardson: No. We were cautious about leopard seals but the numbers of incidents that we had with them ... Most of the leps in the summer would be around the penguin colonies rather than in Borge Bay itself, so they normally weren't a great problem.

[Part 1 0:43:38] Lee: Did you make any discoveries that helped your scientific work?

Richardson: Well I think it is like science, you know. It moves forward in little steps. I think the results I produced were probably as interesting as most people's PhDs at that time. I don't know; I can't think there was anything absolutely startling but it added to the sum of things I think.

[Part 1 0:44:04] Lee: You were appointed base commander for your second year, and third year I think as well. Was that a surprise?

Richardson: Well yes sort of, yes. There was twelve of us on base the first winter in Signy. I can't remember how many we lost then but I think there was about eight of us went on into the second winter, I can't remember. Yes it was a bit of a surprise because I always regarded myself as a sort of ...I resembled much the same as I had at university which was to look like a completely semi-wild Jimmy Hendrix, and not particularly well versed in discipline. So yes, I was surprised. I took over from Jerry Light who had been the base commander before me. And you suddenly have to

become slightly more responsible on base, although quite frankly activities on base, particularly physical activities, were run more by common sense than they were by Health & Safety rules.

[Part 1 0:45:13] Lee: But you were presumably having to give the go-ahead for certain adventurous activities.

Richardson: Yes, but you would always judge the person's capability rather than the actual activity. There were some people on base who were instinctively brilliant at handling boats, who you wouldn't worry about at all. There would be other people who, quite frankly, shouldn't be near a small boat. Unlike when Jerry Light was base commander, and Jerry was an experienced mountaineer, we didn't have anybody who was wildly enthusiastic about climbing mountains and that sort of thing, so you didn't really have to worry too much. Mere amateurs weren't going to put themselves into very difficult situations. I did at one stage have to ban ... The guys were getting more and more enthusiastic about winter sports, but winter sports consisted of hurtling down quite precipitous slopes on tin trays. Unfortunately our cook took off, landed on his face. I think we were about twenty feet up, at which point we had to curtail the winter sports a bit. If I remember rightly, at that time one of the guys broke his leg on South Georgia, just from skiing, and this is pleasure skiing rather than doing anything about work. No, I think on the whole, activities were ... There weren't actually many rules and people just acted with common sense.

[Part 1 0:46:57] Lee: This may be a red herring, but were you aware of Jeremy Light's telepathy experiments?

Richardson: No.

[Part 1 0:47:04] Lee: OK, well I will tell you about that later on. Did your base commander duties ever get in the way of the science you were trying to achieve?

Richardson: Yes, very much so actually. It was interesting. I don't know whether it was my incompetence or not, but I was the last scientific base commander on Signy. I didn't know whether London thought 'My God, we can't have any more of these scientists doing this role.' I don't think it was like that. I think there was a realisation that ... For example, my last summer on Signy – we are now talking about early 1973 – Signy at that time was a base designed to sleep and house just about 20-odd folk, and because we had the turnover on base, and because we had a major building programme on base (they were building a new generator shed out the back) the base complement went up to 43 and people were literally sleeping anywhere and everywhere. And by the time you are running a base of 43, and trying to do a science programme yourself, I was spending probably 70% or 80% of my working day trying to cope with being a base commander.

[Part 1 0:48:23] Richardson: Floods of telexes coming in from London, sorting out whatever one needs to sort out on base with the personnel, so it became a major ... You were being pulled in both directions and it was (I don't mind admitting it) very stressful. The funny thing was, when I got back to Monks Wood, in April or May 1973, I wasn't feeling very well and I didn't know if it was my chest but it actually turned out to be my stomach was causing problems. I went into the hospital in

Huntingdon to see a guy about my stomach. I was talking to him. I said I was from the Antarctic etc., etc. He said 'Oh, that's interesting. I had a guy came in last year, just for exactly the same problems as you. What was his name now? Jerry Light.' As though this was obviously a common complaint of ex base commanders. So yes I think there was ...

[Part 1 0:49:21] Lee: Was it tension?

Richardson: Tension. Well you are trying to do two things at once and it worked out in so far as I was reasonably successful in doing the science and so was Jerry, but I think it was the right move, that they then, after my tenure, brought in professional base commanders to run the base. So Dave Fletcher came in in March 1973 and took over from me, from Halley.

[Part 1 0:49:48] Lee: Do you think you had any influence on that decision to ...?

Richardson: No, I think I didn't have. I wasn't complaining to London that 'I can't do these two jobs.' There was no mention of that. I think that somebody somewhere decided that if you are going to have a science complement, you can't be expecting them to do the management as well.

[Part 1 0:50:08] Lee: And I suppose there is always with these things the amount of management that needs to be done increases with time and numbers.

Richardson: Even in those days it was very considerable because virtually every telex going in either direction to Stanley required to pass over the desk of the base commander. That and doing all the ordering of stores, all the things that go on on a base. So it was quite an onerous job, even in those days.

[Part 1 0:50:40] Lee: Communications forty years ago were rather more rudimentary than they are today?

Richardson: Well yes. In some ways you get used to it because that's what you've got. There wasn't a problem. In fact in some ways it was almost advantageous. I begin to think at least we were at the other end of the world and we didn't have to worry about it. We didn't have to worry about what Society was doing just round the corner, but in fact if you are in almost daily or hourly email contact or phone contact back with the UK, you are remote but you aren't and it must be a very different feeling actually. We were remote and we didn't worry about it. In fact it became very very difficult ... We used to almost sit there communally chewing the ends of pencils trying to work out 'What do we say this month that we didn't say last month?' I think we were given 200 words ration to send home a month, or something like that, and it went to both girlfriends and parents, but you were racking your brains as to what you could write in November that you didn't write in July.

[Part 1 0:51:51] Lee: That's interesting. You are the first person to mention that. Most others complained about the lack of words.

Richardson: Oh no, I found it very difficult. There was one occasion, just one, ... My ex-girlfriend is just in the room next door.

[Part 1 0:52:03] Lee: Your wife?

Richardson: My wife, and I remember one day being in the radio shack and Jay, our radio operator, who was a complete and utter ham loonie ... At one stage he drilled a hole up through the roof of Tonsberg House, the wooden building on Signy, and he erected this great big V-shaped twizzling aerial to increase his capabilities of ham radioing. One day I was in the radio shack just by chance and he was having a telex sched with a guy in Southwest Africa at that time (Namibia), and the guy in Southwest Africa was having a radio sched with somebody in Devon. I just happened to say 'That's interesting. My girlfriend lives in Devon.' So he said 'I will pass a message through.' The guy in Devon obviously phoned Sandy, my girlfriend (now wife), and I had a reply within about a quarter of an hour. That was the only instance, I thought, of almost modern-day communications. We used to have the 'goon show' in the evenings, ten o'clock every evening, when you would ring up the BAS ships and so on. We used to have, sometimes, mad communications like we could spend hours playing darts matches with Palmer station over the air. They used to think we cheated.

[Part 1 0:53:26] Lee: I guess you didn't?

Richardson: No, we didn't.

[Part 1 0:53:30] Lee: Yes, I have come across this before. There are two boards, one at each station, and you just throw your own darts and then rely upon the ...

Richardson: Yes and there was one stage where we had to finish and it was finishing on a double bull and they just didn't believe us.

[Part 1 0:53:47] Lee: I was interested in your working day, because if it wasn't for the goon show, the need to be up at ten o'clock at night, you might have changed your clocks.

Richardson: Well we seriously thought about this because ... well it's rather like in the UK actually. Often the best weather in the day is probably quite early in the morning. We used to get up reasonably early and start work almost like a day in the UK. But we seriously as a base, we sat down as a community and we were contemplating moving our clocks so we would just literally change all the clocks, and move them back so we would all get up at five o'clock in the morning and if it hadn't been for the poor old radio operator, who would still have had to sit there at ten o'clock at night, which by now would be about one o'clock in the morning, I think we all would have moved the clocks deliberately. Of course after about day one, it wouldn't have mattered two hoots. If we got up at five o'clock, we would think it was eight o'clock.

[Part 1 0:54:44] Lee: Were you aware of protecting the environment of the Antarctic at that point in your life? I know later on you were deeply involved.

Richardson: I was a biologist and therefore you are interested in the environment, both the living environment and the environment landscape generally. But we were

very cavalier and in some situations actually being cavalier didn't probably biologically matter that much, but every spring. when the penguins are laying, you wait until they have just laid their second egg (which is pretty synchronised) and then you go and nick it. So we were collecting probably about 1500 penguin eggs, chinstraps or adelines, every year and that was our egg supplies. We put them in boxes of flour and they were just by the back door of the base opposite the toilet and the Elsan. These boxes of flour had thermometers sticking out of them and when anybody went to the toilet, they were supposed to check the thermometers, see what they were doing and either open or close the back door to maintain the temperature of our eggs.

[Part 1 0:56:03] Richardson: Every week we turned these boxes of flour containing eggs over. They were pretty inedible insofar as having them as fried eggs but they were passable if you made them into omelettes and put a lot of mixed herbs in them. But that was just one instance. We also were very energetically trying to fill up ... There's a little cove over the back of the base at Signy, aptly named Gash Cove, and we were very energetically trying to fill up that cove with empty beer bottles and tin cans. That is where your rubbish went, basically into the environment and so many of these things weren't exactly what you would call environmentally friendly. It was a bit of an irony, twenty years later, to suddenly find you are actually in the midst of negotiating very tough rules which would completely change how we think of environmental measures in Antarctica.

[Part 1 0:56:59] Lee: You were also feeding the wildlife, weren't you, sometimes?

Richardson: Well we fed the wildlife, either deliberately or inadvertently. The waste pipe from Signy ... And this is another thing: sewage treatment plants: forget about it. It went straight out from the base into the sea and the waste pipe that came out of the kitchen at Signy ... I remember one of the sheathbills – we used to call him Wastepipe Willy – he was slightly smaller than the other sheathbills and so he could run up the pipe and get the best pickings of whatever was coming down from the kitchen before the other ones. Of course this was a self-monitoring mechanism, that if he got too fat, he wouldn't get up the pipe. But the other thing was: we thought nothing about ... There was a bird table just out the back of the kitchen in Signy where we used to feed the mutts and in our second winter we were reduced to eating tinned chickens.

[Part 1 0:58:04] Richardson: The first winter we'd had a wonderful supply of frozen food because we had a big deep freeze, a big deep freeze building, so we had best Argentine steaks, upland geese, reindeer from South Georgia, you can hardly call it lamb from the Falkland Islands. The second winter all that went because the deep freeze was converted into a constant temperature room for the invertebrate biologists, so we were down to tinned chickens. And it is quite a remarkable feat of watching a great skua; it's rather like one of those egg-eating snakes. Have you seen the pictures of an egg-eating snake? Well they can completely dislocate their jaws to eat an egg. If you watch a great skua eat a tinned chicken, it's about the same. It's quite remarkable. But of course by today's standards, it's completely unacceptable.

[Part 1 0:58:58] Lee: Did you have any inkling of that in the '70s?

Richardson: No not at all. Nowadays, particularly on chicken and poultry products, that is one of the things that has been banned very strictly from the Antarctic in terms of poultry should not come into contact with native birds at all because of disease problems. But we had no inkling. No, as I say, I don't think we were deliberately cavalier. You were simply working under the rules – well they weren't rules but we were working under the practices of the time, which you didn't think anything of.

[Part 1 0:59:34] Lee: And there weren't any repercussions really, in the end?

Richardson: No.

[Part 1 0:59:38] Lee: The environmental protection plan came in later?

Richardson: No, we had bloody great bonfires. We threw tin cans into a cove and actually they would come out of the cove and sometimes liberally redisperse all over Borge Bay, but actually probably at the end of the day, the environmental impacts ... the environmental footprint was probably very very small. A base like Signy, with a very small complement, I think has a very small environmental footprint. That said, I think it is a very good thing ... You see now, with the bigger bases, strict controls on environmental ... I've been around virtually every base on the Antarctic Peninsula in terms of actually formally carrying out inspections under the Antarctic Treaty. Inspections nowadays are mainly environmental inspections and you can see the efforts that everybody is trying to put in to clean up their act and on the whole doing very well.

[Part 1 1:00:44] Lee: But the counter argument has always been that there is such a tiny tiny pinpoint of human activity in the Antarctic that actually in the end it doesn't make that much difference.

Richardson: Well you are probably right but one is striving to clean up your mess and your impacts but if you put them in context, you are probably absolutely correct. There has been a lot of talk in the Antarctic Treaty of trying to say 'Reduce diesel combustion.' But if you looked at all the bases in the Antarctic that are burning diesel, in relatively small generators, they will have a local effect, certainly just around the base, and it's probably a very localised effect, but if you looked at the atmospheric effluent overall, it is peanuts compared with for example one tourist vessel. I remember looking at a tourist ship. It was actually in Seattle, and saying to the guy, one of the managers of the tour operators, saying 'Presumably this thing had got the power generation of a small town.' And he said 'Incorrect, this thing has the power generation of a medium sized town.' So if you have got large tourist ships operating on the Antarctic Peninsula, those ships alone are probably putting out far more in terms of polluting aerial effluent than all the bases put together. So yes, you can put it in a scale like that.

[Part 1 1:02:28] Lee: One thing that is a constant worry though, even now, is the spread of disease in the Antarctic. I can see that whilst physical pollution is quite contained, disease could get anywhere, couldn't it?

Richardson: That's true. There were concerns when we were negotiating the Environmental Protocol, there were actually major concerns about distemper from

dogs affecting seal populations. It is a problem and I think bio-security has become more of an issue. It's probably not as tough as it ought to be. Luckily, to some extent the sheer environment of Antarctica mitigates against quite a lot of invasive species, insofar as they can't survive, whether they are pathogens or introduced species. But it is a problem, yes.

[Part 1 1:03:26] Richardson: Just going back to this whole business about environmental standards. It was a bit of an irony really to be exposed to what we were doing in the 1970s and then sitting round a table in the 1990s negotiating what were going to be very tough rigorous rules for how to deal with environmental issues in the Antarctic. And then I think there was even the older school, which was pre-us in the 1970s and an example of that was ... It was quite funny at times because the first negotiations of the Environment Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty actually took place in Vina del Mar in Chile in late 1990, I think it was October. Anyway we would be sitting there discussing various things and there was at least two occasions when we thought we had just clinched it. We had just managed to get the Russians to agree to phase out open burning in the Antarctic, when the distinguished delegate from SCAR at the other end of the table, suddenly put up his hand.

[Part 1 1:04:40] Richardson: Now the distinguished delegate from SCAR at that time, who looked like Rasputin, was Nigel Bonner, ex-Head of Life Sciences at BAS, and Nigel would suddenly stick his hand up and say 'I don't know what all the fuss is about. A bloody good bonfire and a few parties, drink a few beers, no problem at all.' You roll your eyes and think 'Thank you Nigel. We just spent two days trying to agree that point.' Or a couple of days later, and we had managed to persuade the Italians ... The Italians were saying 'Why don't we ban all firearms?' Up goes the hand of the distinguished delegate from SCAR who explains to the Italians that firearms are necessary as a major sampling tool for certain forms of wildlife. And then he ends off this intervention, which is typical Nigel, basically 'If it moves, let's shoot it.' He ended this intervention saying 'And anyway they would be the solution to the dog problem.' And there is a sort of stunned silence in this international meeting, so it is all about different standards over different generations of people who have been exposed to the Antarctic.

[Part 1 1:06:03] Lee: Where did you stand on the withdrawal of dogs from the continent?

Richardson: Well I was in a difficult position and since this is a historical archive to a degree, I was in a very difficult position. It just goes back to the comment you were making a few minutes ago about things like introduced disease. Most countries, most states, sitting there in the room wanted the removal of dogs. There were only three parties still running dogs in the Antarctic: ourselves, the Australians and the Argentines, and we were under enormous pressure from for example the US to get rid of the dogs. We were all rather reluctant to do so but, as I say, people were throwing all sorts of arguments at us. Now before I went to this particular Antarctic meeting, I discussed the matter with the then Director of BAS, who basically said 'Well off the record, it would suit our purposes if in fact they just went.'

[Part 1 1:07:28] Richardson: Fine. They did go at which point the Director of BAS, of course, 'nothing to do with him', So I suspect I was working to a BAS management

agenda which most or all of the staff in BAS would not be aware of and would have not supported, because I knew that there was a very considerable backlash and the last dogs were at Rothera at that time and people were very genuinely upset when the dogs went. But at the end of the day it goes back to the footprint. OK, there is always a problem about disease but you can minimise that by biosecurity but you could easily argue ‘What is more environmentally friendly? A team of dogs ...?’ There was also the problem that we were killing a lot of wildlife to sustain the dogs, so an awful lot of elephant seals or Weddell seals got hit on the head to feed the dogs at Stonington. But in terms of: is it more environmentally friendly to fly helicopters around or skidoos than dogs ...?

[Part 1 1:08:47] Richardson: There was actually quite a funny twist to the dog issue because at that time ... I had by now joined the Foreign Office and I had Sir Ranulph Fiennes and Mike Stroud were doing their Antarctic crossing. We had not been totally happy about Sir Ranulph Fiennes’s crossing because we were never very happy about unsupported NGO activities but since the Prince of Wales was the patron of Sir Ranulph and the last thing the Foreign Office wants is a nasty little note from the Foreign Office⁵ to the Foreign Secretary saying ‘Why are you being so beastly to my dear friend Sir Ranulph?’ He went and then I got a request from Sir Ranulph Fiennes, that they wanted to use the laboratories. When they arrived at McMurdo, he and Mike Stroud wanted to use the laboratories at McMurdo to do physiological checks.

[Part 1 1:09:55] Richardson: However, the Americans had exactly the same view as us about non-governmental activities. In other words, if they were not sponsored by a government, the US would not provide any support whatsoever to NGO activities. So Tucker Scully in the State Department, basically said ‘No.’ So I said ‘Look Tucker, we have both got a problem. I have got Sir Ranulph Fiennes who want physiological laboratory space and you have got this guy Vaughan.’ I can’t remember his other name⁶ but he had been the first dog sledge guy with Byrd, and he wanted to go back to the Antarctic to visit Mount Vaughan or whatever it was, and he needed some dogs. It was the Senator for Alaska I think who was causing all sorts of problems in the US government, demanding why the government wasn’t supporting dear old Vaughan.

[Part 1 1:10:56] Richardson: So I got on to Tucker Scully and said ‘Look, if you can give me some laboratory space at McMurdo, I can get you some dogs for Vaughan, as long as he then takes them out of Antarctica and makes sure he disposes of them, deals with them correctly. Even then the Americans wouldn’t play ball so we couldn’t give the Rothera dogs to Vaughan and Sir Ranulph Fiennes didn’t get his laboratory space and what actually did happen was that Vaughan picked up some dogs in Chile, flew to Antarctica. There was a problem on the plane as far as I remember. I think they were carrying a skidoo or something like that with petrol in it and petrol fumes filled the plane at which point they turned the electrics off. I think the windscreens all froze up. They crashed when they landed. Half the dogs escaped, never to be seen again. So that was a little story probably that never hit the press either.

⁵ He means the Prince of Wales.

⁶ Norman Vaughan (*Antarctica – An Encyclopaedia*)

[Part 1 1:11:57] Lee: That's a new one on me, absolutely. Disposing of the Rothera dogs was a tricky problem too, because the eyes of the world's press were upon Rothera, and so they couldn't really just be taken out and shot, could they?

Richardson: No. I think it was a tragedy at the end because of course that was the fate of virtually all BAS dogs because they didn't tend to come back to the UK because if they did they would probably have killed and ate most of the dogs in the street. And a lot of BAS dogs tended to be suffering from ... As far as I remember, the Stonington dogs, they did have problems with entropionism (is it?), ingrowing eyelids, and arthritis. And most sledge dogs, as far as I recall, didn't go past five or six years and would then end up, humanely, with a bullet. But of course you couldn't do that with the last remaining dogs at Rothera and if I recall, despite all the precautions that were taken, in terms of inoculating them against everything, I think they went back to Canada and I don't think many of them or any of them outlived another six months, or something like that.

[Part 1 1:13:09] Lee: There were three survivors.

Richardson: So it was not a very satisfactory situation and it was indeed the end of a particular era for BAS.

[Part 1 1:13:19] Lee: Let's take a short break, if we may Mike, and come back and do some more.

Richardson: OK.

[Part 1 1:13:25] [End of Part One]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Mike Richardson, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 1st of May 2012. Mike Richardson, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:09] Lee: Did you ever fear for your life in the Antarctic? Any scary moments?

Richardson: Yes. On the whole I thought it was quite a benign environment but of course it isn't. There were two occasions when we did things that on reflection we should not have done. One was climbing and one was boating and you can get caught out. I think it must have been early '73 and the sea ice had just gone from Borge Bay and it was a beautiful day. It was one of these absolutely windless bright sunny absolutely stunning days. We were laying a mooring right across the other side of Borge Bay so in fact the mooring was going to consist of a concrete filled 45-gallon oil drum and we had built a raft specifically for this, so that the drum was suspended just underneath this raft. And there we were, lovely day, Paul Skilling and I, in typical Fid shirts (my Fid shirt normally used to resemble rags hanging off me), jeans and waders. That was it; it was such a beautiful day, but of course the water temperature was still probably about -1.8. The sea ice had only just gone. Anyway just as we cut this mooring free from the raft, one of the ropes snagged around the rowlock of our 16-ft dinghy and it promptly flipped.

[Part 2 0:02:02] Richardson: So by now we have gone from a lovely day where we hadn't a care in the world, and were sitting on an upturned boat that was actually awash – it was almost below the surface of the water – wondering what to do and we didn't have very long to worry about it because we thought we had better get the hell out of there pretty rapidly, and so we just took out waders off and swam for it. We reckoned we were about 60 yards from shore and I remember I was quite conscious of the fact that I was just going unconscious when in fact one of my feet touched the shore. And quite frankly, it goes back to me being a lousy swimmer. I wasn't really up to anything else. Paul on the other hand, who was our professional diver, a very strong swimmer, he then ran back to base, right the way round the whole of Borge Bay in his stocking feet, losing a sock en route, going across a glacier to actually raise the alarm at base. In fact they then came and picked me up in the boat.

[Part 2 0:03:11] Richardson: Later on that day we then went dived on the boat and retrieved all our equipment, including cameras, from the bottom of the sea and I always remember it took quite a long time ... I had to do quite a lot of work on my dear old Minolta: shoved it in a bucket of fresh water then some alcohol and then shocked it back to life again with a voltmeter and it kept working for another two years. But I did realise that I think if that incident had happened another thirty yards off shore, I think I would have passed out. I remember always that it would have been quite a euphoric way to go because it was just literally so cold, it wasn't painful. The interesting thing was that Paul and I had completely different physiques but we came up in bruising which was almost identical, such that if you stood us side by side, we had massive bruising all over those parts of your body, so what you were doing was, you were desperately trying to swim very rapidly and at the same time your body was presumably trying to withdraw all the blood into your core so everything was rupturing. So all over our biceps, thighs, back muscles and so on, we had this massive bruising and as I say, we looked like a pair of twins, and I took months to regain any sensitivity in my fingers, literally months, from that episode, which turned out all right but could have been a tragedy.

[Part 2 0:04:50] Richardson: And the other incident was sort of similar insofar as it was a fantastic day. We had gone over to Coronation Island, I think three of us and this is winter. We had gone to Shingle Cove and then Jerry Light turns up. Jerry was an ex-instructor from Glenmore Lodge in the Cairngorms. Jerry turned up and it was such a lovely day. He said 'Why don't we go for a climb up that ridge?' So we said 'OK. Fine.' We were all completely inexperienced and again it was a fantastic day and we were all dressed completely inappropriately for going climbing. We were literally in shirtsleeves etc. Anyway we got towards the top of this ridge when suddenly the very characteristic föhn cloud you get over Coronation started suddenly to appear. I think Jerry was sufficiently experienced; he realised we had better get off this ridge very rapidly. We started going down and the wind speed went up from effectively zero to about 70 knots within literally minutes, certainly about half an hour.

[Part 2 0:06:01] Richardson: When we got back to base and looked at the temperature record, we saw that the temperature had dropped by about 40 degrees within an hour. Anyway we roped up, we were going back over this icefield and we realised that we were not going to make Shingle Cove and the hut at Shingle so we had to dig in. The

trouble was: we hadn't got any spades. We had only got ice axes and we hit ice about three feet down. So whatever snow hole we could dig, was basically like a shallow We hollowed out a shallow concavity under the snow and we all got in there but we couldn't even get our feet in. Our boots were sticking out all night and all our equipment ... Again, I think if we hadn't ... We just spent the night in there and I think if we hadn't dug in then, I don't think we would have survived.

[Part 2 0:06:55] Lee: You were base commander for both those incidents?

Richardson: No, Jerry was base commander at that particular time.

[Part 2 0:07:04] Lee: The first one? Or for them both?

Richardson: No I was the base commander when we managed to upturn the boat.

[Part 2 0:07:08] Lee: OK. What passed for Health & Safety in those days was really just personal experience being passed on from one season of Fids to the next.

Richardson: I think in those situations you could say personal inexperience.

[Part 2 0:07:19] Lee: Was anything ...? Did that become part of the base folklore, that you don't do that, because you nearly died? In other words were there lessons learned that could be passed on to the next generation?

Richardson: There wasn't even a log as far as I recall, where you would write these things down in terms of formalising such incidents. Happily they didn't end in tragedy or injury. They could have. Just before had I arrived on base, three of the guys had taken the dear old *Desmarestia* which was our 16 foot clinker dinghy. Again, the ice had only just gone and three of them, I think it was Ian Rabarts, Owen Darling and the diesel mechanic at the time⁷, they had gone off to Orcadas, the Argentine base on Laurie Island (that must be 25-30 miles away) in an open 16 ft boat. They had taken all the gear. They had taken a number of engines, an amount of fuel, all this sort of stuff.

[Part 2 0:08:26] Richardson: Even so, I think they went for about a fortnight and the Argies were absolutely amazed when ... I think there was a guy Somebody said when they turned up, the place was deserted except there was one guy wandering around outside. He clearly then heard the noise of an outboard engine and the dear old Argies at Orcadas were absolutely amazed to get a visitation from three Brits turning up in a little 16 foot wooden dinghy. London certainly heard of that instance and sent a sharp note down to base, saying 'Such travels were not to be repeated.' But on the whole, some of these things never actually got as far as London or Stanley and there was no formal record kept on base as to these near misses, you could say.

[Part 2 0:09:20] Lee: In retrospect, is that something that you now have sleepless nights about? Close calls?

Richardson: Well not really.

⁷ A.H. Gilmour, according to the *Database of Winterers*

[Part 2 0:09:26] Lee: Perhaps not sleepless nights but is it something you now think 'Actually, knowing what I know now, we would never have done that in the first place'?

Richardson: Well yes, but the boating accident was an accident. It should have gone smoothly. It didn't by a mistake of just ...

[Part 2 0:09:41] Lee: But you weren't equipped.

Richardson: No, we weren't. We probably should have been in survival suits or something, on a boiling hot day.

[Part 2 0:09:50] Lee: Today you would be, I guess?

Richardson: Today I think it has probably swung the other way, where you can hardly move for Health & Safety. Actually the Health & Safety Act didn't come in until years later and I was by then working for the Nature Conservancy Council in Shetland. I always remember when the Health & Safety at Work Act came in. We got a note from Edinburgh (or whatever it was) saying we were now entitled to have protective clothing. I actually wrote back with one of my facetious responses, saying 'Thank you very much. I actually have all my own protective clothing in terms of anoraks, boots, hats. What I could really do with is a suit to protect me from the bureaucrats,' [both laugh] I don't think that went down too well in Edinburgh.

[Part 2 0:10:35] Lee: Let's take you to the north of Shetlands, for want of a better description, because you sailed back out of the Antarctic in '73 I think?

Richardson: '73 yes.

[Part 2 0:10:47] Lee: And then landed this job in Shetland?

Richardson: Well that was two years later because I spent two years ... I had to go back to Durham to ... Durham required at that time that you spend a year in residence in the university to qualify for a PhD and so I spent another year at Monks Wood which was quite funny.

[Part 2 0:11:12] Lee: Why was it funny?

Richardson: Well Eric Twelves, ex-base commander before Jerry Light, was still there and I stayed with Eric and his wife Jane for a while, who lived just down the road. Eric and I used to terrorise Monks Wood. Monks Wood was actually a National Nature Reserve and they had just spent many thousands of pounds erecting a fence around the wood to keep the rabbits out or something. And Eric and I religiously went round this fence and chopped holes in it at about twenty yard intervals so that when the farmer started combining his corn, all the pheasants that were in it all ran through the fence and were promptly caught in our traps. Eric used to go round every night and blow pheasants out of the branches in this National Nature Reserve. I had also got ferrets and I remember one morning, Dick Laws had us in and said 'The Director of the Institute wants to see you two.' That was Sir Kenneth Mellanby.

[Part 2 0:12:24] Richardson: So we went in to see Mellanby and he said ‘Gentlemen, could I remind you that this is a National Nature Reserve and you don’t seem to be doing too much beneficial for Nature at the moment, so could you desist.’ So that was my time at Monks Wood. I then went up to Durham and then I had applied for this job for the Nature Conservancy Council, the then Nature Conservancy Council, since disbanded, for Assistant Regional Officer’s job in the north west of Scotland. It would have been covering the whole of the north west of Scotland. And Jerry Light had also applied and actually, unbeknown to me, Peter Tilbrook, who was the Head of Terrestrial Life Sciences in BAS, had also applied to the Nature Conservancy Council. Well I got a note back from Edinburgh saying they would definitely like to have me for interview so I thought ‘Well that’s fine.’ And then some time later, Jerry came in and said ‘I have got an interview in Edinburgh on Monday.’

[Part 2 0:13:30] Richardson: So I rang up this woman in the Nature Conservancy Council and said ‘Where is my interview?’ and she came back a few minutes later and said ‘I am terribly sorry but you haven’t been shortlisted.’ So I sent her a fax which relayed back to her that I was going to be invited to interview and she came back and said ‘I am terribly sorry. I was reading the wrong list.’ Well obviously they must have been reading the wrong list all the time. Anyway the long and short of it was that actually I got offered a job and Jerry didn’t. Peter Tilbrook went to become the Deputy Regional Officer in Northwest Scotland. They rang me up and said ‘Terribly sorry. You haven’t got the job dealing with the north west of Scotland but would you like to go ...? We have got a similar job in Orkney and Shetland.’

[Part 2 0:14:12] Richardson: I said ‘Can I get back to you?’ I went home that night and I was desperately scrabbling around trying to find a map of any description that would actually show Shetland and Orkney not in the Moray Firth, and of course they didn’t exist in those days. So I actually had no idea where it was. It sounds terribly naive but of course Shetland is 200 miles from Aberdeen. I went up for a recce in the June of 1975 and took the job in September that year. So I was actually the sole representative of the Nature Conservancy Council at that time covering both of the Northern Isles. So I used to commute between Shetland and Orkney virtually on a weekly basis.

[Part 2 0:14:53] Lee: Just one man?

Richardson: Yes, it was a one man band. They increased it by another man in 1978, just at the time when we had a major oil spill in Shetland, and by the time I left, I think I had about six or seven staff in Shetland and about five in Orkney.

[Part 2 0:15:11] Lee: Did any of the skills you picked up in the Antarctic come in handy in Shetland and Orkney?

Richardson: Yes. Well it’s a funny thing and it’s not just that progression, going from ... The reason I had gone for the Nature Conservancy Council job was that I realised ... You asked me earlier: did I make any stunning discoveries in terms of science and the answer probably is no. They were probably relatively mundane but they would have been novel but I did come to the conclusion that I wanted to be a biologist but I didn’t necessarily want to just do pure science and look at the left leg of a shrimp for

the next forty years or something. I wanted to do something more practical which is why I wanted to do practical Nature conservation and certainly some of the things that I had picked up in the Antarctic assisted the Nature Conservancy Council's job and undoubtedly many of the things I dealt with, with the NCC, were to be useful when I finally went back to Antarctic work at the international diplomatic level.

[Part 2 0:16:21] Lee: You started a family in Shetland?

Richardson: Yes. At that time, just as we moved to Shetland, oil was just hitting the scene and there was a tremendous pressure on housing. We rented a little croft house right at the end of the south end of Burra – delightful spot and it wasn't very long before we started a family but we didn't quite know what we were in for because it was almost the stage of like lambing and my wife, who was very pregnant, but what we didn't realise until she had actually given birth to one, the doctor suddenly grabbed a stethoscope and said 'Oh my God, there's another one in here', we didn't realise we were going to get twins. So what was our little croft house, also doubled up for the Nature Conservancy Council's office and also was effectively the nursery. Also when it rained, the rain came in through the roof, so we had cots and buckets strategically places around the floors.

[Part 2 0:17:28] Richardson: And the job was endless. You could have done it 25 hours a day and 8 days a week and you still would not have really done what you wanted to do. But it was just one of those sorts of jobs. But it was a great place to bring up kids, a great place to live. The job was fantastic and even by the time I got many more staff, I always had a very very simple philosophy with the job which I always used to say to my staff, is: 'We know what they want in Aberdeen so we will just give them three times more than they expect, in which case they will keep away from us.' Which then enabled us to do fantastic fieldwork. As long as you delivered all the paperwork that they were expecting, we would then clear off and go and count kittiwakes for three weeks or tag seals, or do something useful.

[Part 2 0:18:20] Richardson: It was a great job because it did encompass everything from very practical biology and nature conservation through to all the bureaucratic side of conservation which is dealing with planning applications, and the fishing industry and the aquaculture industry and the farming industry and the oil industry and actually for the first ten years of my time in Shetland, oil was the dominant factor because North Sea oil was just hitting the scene. They were building the huge oil terminal at Sullom Voe in Shetland, which at that time was the biggest civil engineering project in Europe. There was the other oil terminal being built at Flotta in Orkney and so the politics of oil was very much to the forefront at that time.

[Part 2 0:19:04] Lee: How do you mean? Were you, on behalf of the Nature Conservancy Council, having to fight some kind of rear-guard action against ...?

Richardson: Well you are not fighting a rear-guard action because the decisions had been taken.

[Part 2 0:19:14] Lee: But you are still trying to protect, presumably?

Richardson: But the decisions had been taken, that oil was going to come ashore in Shetland etc. etc. It was going to be massive. At the height of production of the throughput for Sullom Voe, that terminal was taking the equivalent of about 75% of British oil consumption. It wasn't actually necessarily coming to the domestic market. A lot of it was going to the States but it gives you an ideal of the throughput of that terminal at that time. It was very significant and what you are trying to do is to minimise the impact of what is inevitable development, because the decisions had been taken. The decisions had been taken in Whitehall in London, in Parliament. Major Acts of Parliament had been passed in terms of the Zetland County Council Act which gave the local authority ... – Orkney as well passed legislation. So all those principal decisions had been taken. What you are then faced with is making sure, through contingency planning etc. etc. that the impacts of oil are minimised.

[Part 2 0:20:20] Richardson: What is interesting is that I was very closely associated with an organisation that was set up which was an organisation composed of central government, local government, the oil companies, all the statutory agencies, the environmental NGOs and so on, which was called the Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group. What I found interesting is that twenty odd years later, I am actually now the chairman of that group. I thought it was a bit bizarre because after I left the Foreign Office, I suddenly got a call saying would I take on the chairmanship of this organisation. I said 'Well it is twenty years since I was involved in Shetland.' They said 'Yes, but there's probably no-one else knows the Shetland environment better than you, and the politics better than you.' So despite that time lag, I now find myself returning to work that I was involved in in the 70s and 80s.

[Part 2 0:21:20] Lee: Was anything at that time, in the boom time of the 70s, nobody quite realised how long the oil would last for. Now we know it has got a life expectancy and it is going to start drying up in due course. Any of the planning that took place then, was that taking into account that actually what was really happening was a temporary measure?

Richardson: Yes but of course it was a ... We, as the UK and the Thatcher government at the time, took a very different approach to oil than say the Norwegians. The Norwegians take a view that 'Let's keep a lot of it in the ground.' And Norwegian oil exploration and exploitation was always characterised by how much they haven't taken out of the ground, whereas at that time, in the late 70s/ early 80s, there was a desire in the UK for balance of payments or whatever, to get it out and sell it off. Yes, the throughput of oil particularly coming from the East Shetland Basin, let's say the big fields like the Brent and Ninian fields, has decreased very considerably, but of course what is happening now is tremendous developments and exploration going on in the very deep water, and very rough water to the west of Shetland. I am talking about very deep water.

[Part 2 1:22:38] Richardson: And so you have got oil and gas fields coming on stream now which also are starting to feed into Sullom Voe. So for example Laggan-Tormore which is being developed by Total, that will feed into Shetland in another two years' time. It will have major gas pipelines coming into Shetland where the gas will be processed and then fired off down through another pipeline to the Scottish mainland. So you are seeing a progression in oil development with fields diminishing, even closing down. Of course what happens is: the technology improves and the economics

of oil change, so as you know, with oil the price it is now, it then becomes economic to go back and redevelop fields. And there is new technology, so what you couldn't get out twenty or thirty years ago, with new technologies you can, and fields that were non-viable some time ago, become then viable.

[Part 2 0:23:37] Lee: Is there anything that happened when you were with the Nature Conservancy Council, that you really really regret, things that you couldn't stop from happening? In the oil business I mean.

Richardson: We had spent five years drawing up contingency plans for oil spills, both around Shetland generally and particularly for around the Sullom Voe area, and I was intimately involved in those. And all our planning was predicated around North Sea oil, i.e. the stuff that was coming into Sullom Voe. So we knew all about the physical and chemical properties of Brent and Ninian crude. and within three weeks of Sullom Voe opening, we then had a very very substantial oil spill but it wasn't of North Sea oil. It was a tanker. This was New Year's Eve. Brilliant! It was New Year's Eve. It was blowing an absolute hooley. It was blizzarding; it was Shetland; it's dark; it's the middle of winter. It's New Year's Eve. There is no-one around. Nothing works and as they were berthing a tanker, one of the tugs ... They were berthing it with three tugs and one of the tugs caught fire in its engine room and released its tow.

[Part 2 0:24:58] Richardson: The tanker swung and crashed into the mooring dolphins and ruptured its own fuel tanks and we had a massive massive oil spill of heavy bunker C going into Sullom Voe in January, very cold waters, and that was one hell of a mess and it caused a phenomenal amount of damage. In some ways, in the long run, it was almost a godsend because I am not saying the oil industry is complacent ... We had spent, sitting down with the oil companies, a lot of time doing contingency planning but there is nothing like contingency planning when the reality suddenly hits, because suddenly you realise that all the things you thought you had in place, actually don't work. And so after that spill, the issues that were put in place in Shetland were infinitely tougher than they would have been. So that spill was environmentally quite horrendous, killed a lot of wildlife, but the ramifications of that, which you now still see today, are still there. It tightened up the whole attitude towards oil spill contingency planning.

[Part 2 0:26:10] Lee: The reason why I am pursuing this line of inquiry is that of course we are going to see something very similar happening in the Falklands in the not too distant future.

Richardson: Well I find the Falklands situation ... I mean because I was until fairly recently a trustee of Falklands Conservation, and although I resigned from a trustee of Falklands Conservation, they said to me 'Yes but can you still be our oil expert and if we have issues that we want to discuss, can we come to you for advice on oil?' The thing that I am still bemused about in relation to Falklands oil, and it is part of this Falklands situation that you still see – it has always been there as far as I can see – is this parochialness. The Falklands have never really wanted incomers. Shetland embraced oil but controlled it. Shetland was ruthless in how it controlled the oil industry. They didn't just march in and say 'We are here.' Shetland basically set the rules and they were very tough rules and economically Shetlanders made an enormous amount of money and benefit out of oil.

[Part 2 0:27:25] Richardson: Now the Falkland Islands, because they don't want oil ashore, they don't want anybody quite frankly. They think that it can be dealt with wholly offshore and remote. Now that's fine if you have got a hinterland, if I can put it that way, that you can rely on. In other words in the same way as most North Sea oil developments are operating out of Aberdeen or Montrose or wherever, and there is an awful lot of money to be made out of not just the oil industry *per se* but oil-related activities including waste disposal. But if you are relying on support for Falklands oil coming from Montevideo or Argentina or somewhere, fine, but to do it remotely, I can't see how it will really work.

[Part 2 0:28:15] Richardson: The mechanism I have seen for Falklands oil would be very similar, or seems to be similar, to the way that for example the Schihallion Field west of Shetland works. Schihallion basically has a sub-sea mechanism, sending oil up to a floating ... it's effectively like a floating tanker, and you then have a shuttle tanker taking oil from that to Sullom Voe. But in Shetland, that shuttle tanker is going twice a week, but in the Falklands where you have no support from South America, your shuttle mechanism is going to be weeks or months, So that to me would suggest that the economics are all completely different. I don't know how it will work. I have always thought, even post the Falklands Conflict, if they had actually willingly embraced increasing their population, which they didn't, actually politically it would have been to their benefit. It is actually far easier to justify defending twenty thousand people than two or three.

[Part 2 0:29:24] Lee: So the Falklanders don't want the oil on their shore, therefore they don't want the development that goes with it. They don't want the housing and the affluence that goes with it?

Richardson: Even with fishing. I was very closely associated with the fishing industry in the Falklands because I used to be closely involved with the organisation which was called the South Atlantic Fisheries Commission, which was a bilateral commission with Argentina. We used to meet twice a year, alternating between Buenos Aires and London, but if you actually look at the way the Falklands has handled their fishing industry, they have made a lot of money out of it but actually it is the least amount of money they could have made out of it insofar as what they are effectively doing is little more than selling licences, often to either foreign fishing companies or to joint ownership mechanisms, largely with Spain, say. Whereas what they don't do is put any added value to their fishing, in other words bring the product ashore and process it, in which case you would make an awful lot more money. But of course they make the point that they actually haven't got the employment. They haven't got the personnel to do that. So there are no fish factories or anything in the Falklands, so it is a remote operation. They sort of want it but don't want it.

[Part 2 0:30:45] Lee: That is going to change, isn't it.

Richardson: It hasn't changed even since '82.

[Part 2 0:30:50] Lee: The British Exchequer needs money out of the Falklands to reverse the decline ...

Richardson: I think they are still some time away from really working out how they are going to deal with this stuff. To give you some idea of what happened in Shetland. Because you did have an onshore facility and all the things that go with it, even building that facility you had work camps that were occupied by up to six thousand construction workers, and since Shetland only had a population of only 22,000, that is quite an influx. But it hasn't been detrimental to Shetland at all. Shetlanders were very outgoing and embraced it and controlled it. It is very difficult to operate a very big industry like that without realising that there are repercussions of all sorts.

[Part 2 0:31:49] Lee: So the ostrich has its head in the sand?

Richardson: Well I think so. I don't think they have really thought it through yet, as to how they think they are going to operate.

[Part 2 0:31:57] Lee: They have got time of course. It will be a few years yet.

Richardson: Yes, but not that much time. Between finding oil and economically bringing it ashore or wherever would be about ten years at most – between five and ten years.

[Part 2 0:32:12] Lee: Thank you for that. We ought to spend the next half hour talking about the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, if I may. Strange commute from Lerwick to Whitehall? How did it affect the family?

Richardson: It affected all of us I think. If I went back, when I went home, that time in 1975, and pronounced to my wife that we were leaving Cambridgeshire and we were going to this place in Shetland to take up a new job, I think I nearly got a divorce. Fifteen years later, when I suggested we were going to go from Shetland and I was taking up a job in London, I nearly got a divorce again because we had brought up the three kids in this amazing environment in Shetland. My wife was very heavily embedded in the local community. She ran the playgroup and she ran the Brownies and she ran everything, so it was a major change for all of us. The twins by then were about twelve or thirteen.

[Part 2 0:33:24] Lee: Speaking with a Scottish accent I guess?

Richardson: They spoke, well not a Scottish accent, they spoke absolute broad Shetland. I was up in Aberdeen a few weeks ago and an Aberdeen taxi driver, when he realised I used to live in Shetland, he said 'I can't understand those guys at all.' Orcadian is very different. Orcadian is very sing-songy with Scottish words. You could say it is almost like Welsh. If you listen to it, it's almost like Welsh intonation with Scottish words. Shetland is something else. It is a dialect which is drawn from almost Dutch Germanic Scottish Norwegian and Old English. They never use the word 'you' or very rarely. It is always 'thee' 'thou' 'thine'. They will use 'you' as 'ist du', 'ist du coming?' It is a very very strong dialect.

[Part 2 0:34:20] Lee: How did the children cope at school then, when they came to London?

Richardson: Well we actually moved down to Sussex. My youngest, who really did speak broad Shetland; he didn't speak English. Luckily he wasn't the sort of lad that was going to get bullied. They thought he was just an odd peculiarity. They couldn't understand him for a while but he joined the local school football team and that group of kids (he was then seven or eight) are still ... There is this unbelievable group of mates who are now late twenties or just about thirty; they are still as strong as can be but yes, it was a major major economic social and professional switch in life.

[Part 2 0:35:05] Lee: Does he still speak Shetland?

Richardson: No, they lost that within about 18 months; it was quite interesting.

[Part 2 0:35:13] Lee: So talk about your new role: your new pinstripe suit, bowler hat, furred umbrella, briefcase. What were you going to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to do?

Richardson: It's a funny sort of career progression to go from BAS to the Nature Conservancy Council and then end up literally overlooking the Cenotaph. I said earlier that I decided to leave BAS and go for the Nature Conservancy Council because I didn't really want to look at the left leg of a shrimp for the rest of my life. I was always trying to persuade my staff in the NCC to think beyond the immediate horizons and a lot of them did. Guys who used to work for me are now directors of WWF in Canada or whatever it is. Anyway it was a Thursday afternoon and one of my staff just sauntered into my office and tossed this advert in front of me in *New Scientist* and said 'There you are. There's a job absolutely designed for you' which was in fact the then Deputy Head of what was the Polar Regions Section in the Foreign Office.

[Part 2 0:36:14] Richardson: So I applied and I didn't think very much of it and I got then an interview and got hauled down to the Civil Service Commission in Whitehall and the funny thing was: Who do I meet in the interview room, who had interviewed me in 1970, but one Dick Laws. He said 'Oh, it's you again is it?' [Laughs] And as I walked out of the interview room, I ran straight into Inigo Everson who used to be my boss two removed because Inigo was at that time when I first joined BAS, Head of Marine Life Sciences in BAS and Inigo looked at me – we were very great friends – and said 'What are you doing here?' I said 'Probably the same as you, Inigo.' Anyway I got the job. Yes, it is a bit different going from wearing an old tatty Barbour and steel-toed wellington boots, wandering round Shetland, to suddenly discovering you're commuting into London in a pinstripe suit. But having said that, I felt I needed a challenge, a new challenge, and although the working existence was very different, actually many of the things that I was dealing with in the international polar scene were things that I dealt with simply on a local basis in Shetland. So the actual working agenda wasn't that different.

[Part 2 0:37:40] Lee: Just the scale?

Richardson: The scale completely different and of course I had never been involved in international meetings at all. I had been to one, on the island of Ushant (Ouessant). I had gone to an international meeting about island communities. That was the only exposure I had ever had to an international meeting and then suddenly you get pitched

up in London and you supposed to be fronting up the Union Flag at an international meeting.

[Part 2 0:38:07] Lee: Well there were two significant international bodies who had meetings that you had to get yourself acquainted with: one was CCAMLR and the other was the Antarctic Treaty. Am I right in thinking that?

Richardson: That's right. My job initially was to understudy John Heap who was then the Head of the Polar Regions Section in the Foreign Office. By the time I took over from him two years after that when he retired in 1992, there had only been three heads of the Polar Regions Section in Foreign Office since 1943. So the UK had this tradition of long institutional memory, dealing with the political side of the Antarctic which has always stood the UK in very good stead. By the time I took over, my principal responsibilities in terms of providing ministers with advice on the polar regions generally, was to head up the Consultative Meetings of the Antarctic Treaty parties and also the Antarctic Fisheries Commission CCAMLR.

[Part 2 1:39:19] Lee: Before we get onto that, just tell me a bit more about John Heap. What sort of guy was he, both as somebody you knew privately and also as your immediate boss?

Richardson: Well of course I didn't know him at all. I knew him by reputation, and before I actually started the job, on the 2nd of January 1990, John invited me down just for a day, just to talk things over, and I stayed with him one night just near Cambridge, at Harston. He picked me up in his car and within five minutes he said to me 'Of course you are working for an outfit, i.e. the Foreign Office, which is completely staffed with people who know absolutely nothing about anything. They are all generalists and you will be one of the very few specialists in the Foreign Office. That is what you are supposed to be.' But John had been doing the job for a very long time and he was a wonderful tutor. Effectively I was understudying. It was a deliberate understudy for two years up to when he was going to retire.

[Part 2 0:40:27] Lee: Succession planning?

Richardson: Yes. It was absolutely brilliant, the sort of thing the Foreign Office doesn't normally do. If you have three days of handover, you are lucky. And John was just a wonderful tutor but the best way of understudying him was to see him in action and he was just a past master. He said to me one day ... No, I will just go back. The first day I turned up in the Foreign Office was the 2nd of January and John grilled me all morning and then he said 'I think we will go for a lunch.' And we ended up in this little wine bar near Leicester Square. It happens to be next to the sex shop, and I can never find this wine bar unless I look for the sex shop. We had two bottles of wine; then we were onto the third. I thought 'I hope it's not like this every day.' When I came out of there, I would barely be able to feed the squirrels in St James's Park, never mind think.

[Part 2 0:41:27] Richardson: But John basically said to me 'It's all very simple really, international meetings. There are really only three rules. One is that it has got to be your paper they are discussing on the table, not somebody else's. Two: you have got to know more about the issue than everybody else in the room, and you have got to be

absolutely briefed.’ And he said ‘After that, it is just pure theatre.’ It used to be so brilliant watching him because he would sit there and then he would suddenly say ‘Well I need hardly remind the meeting of the decision that we took in 1952 in respect of ...’ whatever it was. Of course everybody else in the room would just sit there mesmerised, had no idea what the hell we decided in 1952. He would just play this game and he could do it very well. Effectively he could out-negotiate virtually anybody else in that room with these various ploys. It was brilliant to watch. I think I probably inherited a degree of it.

[Part 2 0:42:32] Lee: So that actually made your christening rather more difficult because you hadn’t been there since 1952. You were coming in a rare new boy?

Richardson: No, I remember various people ... I remember the Director of the Norwegian Polar Institute saying to me ‘You have got very large boots to fill.’ It slightly worried me but actually, after a few years, people were saying to me ‘John Heap was very good but you seem to be almost better.’ And by then the agenda had become even more complicated. I don’t say that about myself. It is simply other people have said to me and I am always slightly surprised because I feel I just do the job.

[Part 2 0:43:12] Lee: There is a lovely story which I want you to tell me about: some backroom diplomacy which took place in Oslo.

Richardson: Yes. I hadn’t been in the Foreign Office very long. So I joined in January and there was to be a meeting in Oslo and it wasn’t actually an international meeting as such. It wasn’t a diplomatic meeting; it was actually more of an academic, a political science meeting and we were meeting in the Oslo Plaza – a big hotel. So it wasn’t a meeting of governments; it was a meeting of academics and policy makers.

[Part 2 0:43:47] Lee: This is 1990?

Richardson: This is 1990 and John Heap was extremely exercised at that time because this is the time ... You have to realise they had just finished negotiations, eight years of negotiations of the Antarctic Minerals Convention, CRAMRA, and within months of signing that or finally adopting the text of that minerals convention, it was all falling apart. Initially it fell apart because the Australians and the French indicated they would not sign it. John was exercised but as he said to me ... I was totally new to all this and completely wet behind the ears, and he said to me ‘Don’t worry about that too much. They say they are not going to sign it but they can always join later. Then there was this crucial thing where the New Zealanders, who had signed it and would have been the depository state for CRAMRA, basically indicated they were not going to ratify it and they indicated that at prime ministerial level, at which point it was dead.

[Part 2 0:44:51] Richardson: So that was late 1989. That was a time of tremendous stress within the Antarctic Treaty system because no-one knew what was happening. No-one knew what would happen next because suddenly the consensus that had been arrived at over eight years of negotiation of CRAMRA had dissolved and if you have no consensus you have a free for all, and this was a great worry to John. Anyway we turn up in Oslo and, as I say, I was very new to this game and there was one evening

where we were going to Oslo Castle for an evening reception with the Norwegian Foreign Minister in attendance. And John said to me just before then, he said 'Halfway through the reception, we will just slip out. Don't make it obvious. We and a whole lot of other people will just sidle out, but not all together.'

[Part 2 0:45:49] Richardson: So we sidled out and, lo and behold, all of these people who apparently had mysteriously disappeared from this reception, all reappeared around a table at a restaurant in downtown Oslo. What really amazed me was: there we were now, round a dinner table, and halfway through dinner John suddenly said 'Well gentlemen, the reason I wanted to get together this evening is: here is the text of a draft environmental protocol to the Antarctic Treaty which I would like you to consider.' And he literally just shoved this text round the table. It was an amazing illustration of backroom diplomacy at work. What John put on the table then was very much a skeletal document, just first draft, but it was to prove to be the text that by the time we got to Vina del Mar in October or November of 1990, which was going to be the first negotiations of something but no-one actually knew what it was actually going to be. The Australians were promoting a conservation convention.

[Part 2 0:47:03] Richardson: The problem would have been, as we saw it, was that a conservation convention, given that many of the things in the Antarctic Treaty system by now were becoming environmental, an actual convention would have possibly in parallel have eroded the Antarctic Treaty itself. The New Zealanders came forward with a very complex environmental protocol text, but the thing that actually won the day was our skeletal draft environmental protocol that John had first produced and had subsequently worked up that evening in Oslo. I thought it was quite remarkable, and it was the UK text that was then developed further, actually largely by the Norwegian ambassador during that meeting. But there was about five ... At that time in the Antarctic Treaty system, there was a little cabal, people would say not a healthy cabal perhaps, but that cabal consisted of the Heads of Delegation of the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand, Norway and France. It was a very tight-knit little community.

[Part 2 0:48:14] Lee: And they all had respect for John Heap, obviously?

Richardson: Absolutely, yes. Very much so. I remember when John retired, the Chileans wanted to give him some amazing national honour but he couldn't actually accept it.

[Part 2 0:48:28] Lee: What, diplomatically?

Richardson: Well he was held in very great respect by the Antarctic community.

[Part 2 0:48:35] Lee: Did you ever try and pull off any stunts like that yourself?

Richardson: Well you are doing it all the time. Yes, I learned a lot from John and you do it all the time. The whole point about international diplomacy is: it's not just what happens in a formal setting around a room with loads of flags. Actually the art of it is what happens not in that room, in the corridors and in backroom meetings, and sometimes meetings at ridiculous hours of the night, two o'clock in the morning in some hotel room in Kyoto or something.

[Part 2 0:49:11] Lee: It's the same with everything. It's the same with the Cabinet isn't it and all that kind of stuff?

Richardson: Yes, and I always remember the head of the New Zealand delegation at a CCAMLR meeting coming up to me, storming up to me and saying 'I hate you; you are always talking to people.' [Laughs] 'Oh just wise up.' I said. 'That is what you are supposed to do.'

[Part 2 0:49:30] Lee: So when you went back to the Antarctic in the late '90s, was it, you went back again?

Richardson: I went down as a sort of recce trip. John said 'Get yourself back off down to the Antarctic. See how it has changed.' That was 1992. I was on the *James Clark Ross* but I really didn't have much of an agenda. I was just going for a look-see, to see how things had changed. And what was really interesting actually was, lo and behold, we turned up back at Signy. It's a funny thing in life; when in March 1973 when I left Signy, you had no idea at all that you are ever going to turn up again. And so we were heading towards Signy in the *James Clark Ross* and someone said to me 'What does it feel like going back? What does it look like?' I said 'Well actually, oddly enough, it has changed colour.' Signy, from a distance, except for the snow and ice is grey. It is largely schist rocks and, lo and behold, Signy had changed colour. By now it was pale green and the reason largely was because when we were on base, and I was on base for say two and a half years, I think in that time if we saw five fur seals in two and a half years, that was about it. By 1990, and particularly by the spring, or the January period of 1990, I think there was something like 22,000 fur seals on Signy. Well it's a very small island and fur seals actually ruin the environment. You are talking about the footprint we had; by now this number or density of animals has completely mangled the freshwater systems and the lochs from their excreta and you get this tremendous flush of *prasiola* algae.

[Part 2 0:51:30] Richardson: So in fact Signy had changed colour. It was quite bizarre really. But the base was also interesting because the one critical thing was that suddenly there were some women around. We used to have big debates on base, I remember when we were there in the '70s, about 'Would this work?' We had a very very harmonious existence for two winters on base. I can't even remember, ever, a serious argument or a row ever, and we used to have these discussions about 'Well if you threw a few women in here, what would happen?' The general consensus was that it was a thoroughly bad idea because clearly it wouldn't remain harmonious. When I went back to Signy in 1992, there were two or three women on base, scientists. There were some, as far as I can remember, one or two Dutch girls working on marine biology algae and it had changed the dynamics of the base, but had changed the dynamics for the good. You could see that straightaway. I thought that was very interesting.

[Part 2 0:52:37] Lee: You did have an agenda though, when you went back in 1999 and 2005 because you were now involved in inspecting the huts, the bases.

Richardson: Well inspections under the Antarctic Treaty are one of the provisions that are written into the Treaty and when they were written in, it was all about ... If you go

back to the Treaty of '57, it was all about ... there were great concerns that people would be doing things in Antarctica that they shouldn't be doing, particularly on the military side. So the actual principle of inspections was all geared around that. However, by the time you get post the introduction of the Environmental Protocol, Antarctic Treaty inspections had become much more environmental. They were almost like an environmental audit in effect, and the UK has always been to the fore in conducting inspections. We have probably carried out more inspections than anyone else and I was very keen to continue that but I was also very keen to do it in association with other parties and in two ways. It didn't always work out but what I really wanted to do was (a) to bring in third world parties, if you can call it that, so we were always trying to invite India or someone to join us.

[Part 2 0:53:59] Richardson: The other thing is that there is a tremendous divide between East and West Antarctica. They barely talk to each other, so what happens in the Australian sector is completely different, or could be, from what happens on the Peninsula, and I felt that a degree of fertilisation of ideas and exposure of situations one between the two would be good. So we were always keen to carry out inspections in association. We were clearly leading the inspection team but we wanted to do it in association with other parties, so in 1999, I teamed up with the Germans – it was actually an East German guy that came with me – so we had a German-UK inspection team.

[Part 2 0:54:41] Richardson: And then we did another one in 2005. Because the Argentines would always complain that we didn't speak Spanish. Initially I had taken ... In fact there was one in 1992, where we took an Italian who was a fluent Spanish speaker but still the Argentines complained. So in 2005, I teamed up with the Peruvians and also with the Australians to try and do these two things, of bringing some expertise in from the other side of Antarctica. In both of those inspections, in 1999 and 2005, we carried out more inspections of facilities, bases, historic sites, tourist ships than anybody else had done before. I don't think there are many bases on the Antarctic that I haven't actually visited. It's a very very interesting process because you can see how each different state implements the Environmental Protocol and you get to see more sewage treatment plants or generating rooms, or mechanisms for removing waste disposal, whatever. It's a very very interesting process.

[Part 2 0:55:55] Lee: Did you ever find anything naughty going on?

Richardson: Yes, we did.

[Part 2 0:56:01] Lee: Give me an example.

Richardson: Well it is a means of exposing some of those and you have to do it diplomatically because you don't want to totally embarrass these parties in front of the whole of the Antarctic Treaty system, but for example when we first inspected Great Wall base (the Chinese base just next to Bellingshausen), their fuel system was absolutely catastrophic. Their generator shed was absolutely diabolical and in a polite language ... We took photographs of this stuff. It was an oil spill of some magnitude waiting to happen. Their pipework, their tankage, everything was just horrendous. It was interesting that when we got back in 2005, the generator shed at Great Wall was

state of the art. Somebody had taken some notice and there was a brand new generator shed, brand new generators in there.

[Part 2 0:57:01] Richardson: It was absolutely ... you could have eaten your lunch off the floor in there. The pipeage and the tankwork was still woefully inadequate and in fact the buildings generally were woefully inadequate. The thing that really disappointed me in carrying out Antarctic Treaty inspections was actually the quality and the facility of science. That really got to me. You could go up and down the Peninsula and really, at the end of the day, very few of those stations were carrying out what I would have called credible scientific programmes. There was an awful lot of basic mundane technical data collection going on which might have been seismic or it might have been Met or whatever it was but the numbers of stations, you could number them on one hand that were really doing ground-breaking science.

[Part 2 0:57:54] Lee: And was that because even then, being there was more important than what you were doing whilst you were there?

Richardson: Well it is interesting that the greatest influx of states into the Antarctic happened just at that time of the negotiations on the Antarctic Minerals Convention and I think there were states that thought 'Oh my goodness, we don't want to be left out when the cake gets cut up.' And the fact that they all crowd together there on King George Island simply because it is the one point of easiest access ... They haven't actually chosen their bases to maximise what they can do in terms of science. They have chosen their bases just simply for ease of access from Punta Arenas or wherever.

[Part 2 0:58:43] Lee: Commuting?

Richardson: Commuting yes, so to me Maxwell Bay and Admiralty Bay, they are the dross of Antarctica.

[Part 2 0:58:52] Lee: What were the big issues involving CCAMLR whilst you were in the Foreign Office?

Richardson: Well the biggest issue was: there has always been overfishing, for the last few years particularly on Patagonian toothfish, *Dissostichus*, a very high lucrative fishery, high value fish, and we were always suffering from IUU fishing: illegal unregulated unrecorded fishing⁸, and we had a degree of that round South Georgia. So in '93 we actually extended the maritime jurisdiction round South Georgia to 200 miles and we rapidly brought in very strict regulation of fishing for South Georgia, still under the overall regulation of CCAMLR and we managed to bring our own domestic fishery under very tight control and remove illegal fishing. But overall within the CCAMLR area, this was the scourge and I remember my last CCAMLR meeting, for a fortnight we sat there arguing with the Russians about their vessels fishing illegally, but it was like arguing that black was red or something.

[Part 2 1:00:08] Richardson: These guys, their morality was somewhere else. It was a big problem and I think it probably still is a problem. I haven't been in touch with what's going on in the last few years but it was an enormous problem of effectively

⁸ Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (according to *Wikipedia*)

one was ..., and it wasn't just a problem that was going to affect the fishery itself. If you are fishing in an irresponsible way, you are not too worried about what you are doing in terms of killing off albatrosses, so incidental catch of seabirds: huge mortality of albatrosses and petrels was always a problem associated with illegal fishing or actually even with the legal fishing.

[Part 2 1:00:49] Richardson: But we were very very successful in bringing in stringent measures, often very simple measures to deal with incidental catch of seabirds and in the early years, it would be true to say that even round South Georgia, we were killing thousands. By the time I left we were down to – I think one year we killed one gentoo penguin that happened to jump out of the water and smash into the side of a fishing vessel. But we had managed to remove totally the idea that ... There was no mortality of seabirds at all but the problem continues elsewhere because South Georgia's say black browed albatrosses, they then get thumped in the waters, say, to the east of Brazil or off Namibia, wherever. So there remains a major problem for seabirds resident in the Sub Antarctic and the Antarctic when they go outside of the area.

[Part 2 1:01:50] Lee: Will that ever be solved or have you recognised ...?

Richardson: It's gradually gradually being solved but regulation of fisheries in the high seas is a huge problem and it remains a huge problem, and in certain parts including the southwest Atlantic where there is no regional fisheries organisation, then effectively it is a free for all.

[Part 2 1:02:17] Lee: Were you concerned about the levels of krill in your time at the FCO?

Richardson: No actually. At that time it wasn't a problem and it wasn't perceived as a problem. The interesting thing about krill was that the total allowable catch for krill in the Atlantic sector was of the order (and this is based on scientific, the best scientific evidence) that the total allowable catch that could be taken was something like 4.5 million tons. Well we were still only taking a mere hundreds of thousands of tons but I suspect, as global warming kicks in and sea ice becomes less common, the amount of krill around could diminish, which of course will have a knock-on right through the food chain, because krill, particularly the early stages of krill, very much rely on sea ice presence. Effectively it is their food supply. It's the algae that grow underneath pack ice that actually sustain krill.

[Part 2 1:03:23] Lee: I seem to remember a *Tomorrow's World* type programme, not that many years ago, where it was suggested that human beings might start to consume krill.

Richardson: Well it was interesting. There was a major switch in the krill fishery that occurred at the time that the USSR transformed itself into Russia and satellite states. The USSR was fishing krill simply as an industrial take, rather like you do, say sand eels. They are going for fishmeal or whatever, and so they were fishing quite large amounts of krill in the early '90s. I think as far as I remember four or five thousand tons of the stuff: very low value but taking high tonnages. Then suddenly when Russia realises it has now become more economic and actually has to buy fuel rather than just ... – the USSR couldn't care less about the fuel; it wasn't part of the

economic equation – the take of krill diminished very considerably and people started catching krill in a much more refined way and they were taking much smaller quantities of krill and processing them in a very much more careful way. The funny thing was: one of the major products from krill, would you believe, was actually using it for fishing (angling).

[Part 2 1:04:56] Lee: As bait?

Richardson: There are problems with krill in terms of high fluoride levels and all sorts of other things, actually trying to process the stuff. It goes into self-autolysis very rapidly if you don't treat it very quickly. It goes into sort of mush almost, pretty rapidly and it has high fluoride levels. Trying to remove the exo-skeleton etc. etc., processing it is quite difficult. But undoubtedly it is a huge protein source if you can actually get your hands on it. Aquaculture of course is the other big thing. I think, as aquaculture develops people will be wanting a protein source for that more and more and more, and Southern Ocean krill is possibly where they will go.

[Part 2 1:05:39] Lee: Aquaculture? By that you mean fisheries?

Richardson: Fisheries. It doesn't matter if it is aquaculture in the Far East which has really taken off, but aquaculture in the Northern Hemisphere with salmon or whatever.

[Part 2 1:05:51] Lee: Towards the end of your time – we talked earlier about diplomacy that was successful with John Heap and you were facing a very difficult situation with the Argentinians, who for some reason in 2004 to 2005, were beginning to fall out with the rest of the Antarctic presence.

Richardson: There's a few instances. We were under enormous pressure right from the early '90s about the siting of the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat and this did not get resolved until early 2000s. This was a huge diplomatic battle that just went on and on with us – I have to say – dragging our feet. Argentina being almost outrageous but eventually they won the day because it was one of these situations where ... It was just before the St Petersburg Antarctic Treaty meeting. The Argentine Foreign Minister is in London and the Foreign Office comes up with 'What is it that we can be nice to the Argentines over?' Unfortunately, contrary to my advice, the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat was given away, as far as I'm concerned.

[Part 2 1:07:09] Richardson: I always made the point that you can give something to the Argentines and you don't get anything in return. They will simply ratchet up the next cog and say 'By the way, our next agenda item is X.' It wasn't so much on the Antarctic Treaty scene that we were falling out over the Argentines but we certainly were falling out over Southwest Atlantic fisheries. And there was another organisation I was involved in called the Southwest Atlantic Fisheries Commission which was a bilateral commission just between us and Argentina. So we used to have meetings revolving twice a year between Buenos Aires and London, discussing the fisheries around the Falklands. Now under the previous Argentine administration with President Menem, this was working, and di Tella, his Foreign Secretary, he had a completely different attitude towards the Falklands, where he felt that he could woo them.

[Part 2 1:08:11] Richardson: It probably was more worrying to the Falkland Islanders to be seduced by an Argentine Foreign Minister than to actually have one that is trying to kick him in the side of the head because they don't quite know where they are coming from. Initially that sort of relationship was working very well and particularly on the scientific side, these bilateral fisheries commission meetings were actually very productive. There was always a reticence of the Argentines to agree, at the end of the day, how much fish we should have in the Falklands and how much fish they should have, but at least we were talking. And then, I'm afraid, particularly when Kirchner took over as President, things started to go wrong and fisheries came under a lot of pressure and eventually – it wasn't while I was still in the Foreign Office but very shortly after I left – I think the whole fisheries discussions have gone off the agenda. They are not talking and it has got progressively worse.

[Part 2 1:09:16] Lee: They are just fishing as much as they like?

Richardson: Recently, a few months ago, there was an announcement by the Argentines that they were simply going to fish out ilex squid before they could get into Falklands waters because the ilex, basically, migrate from Argentine waters where they hatch, into Falklands waters and there is a revolving mechanism there. If you fish out the young Argentine squid, you are causing an enormous amount of damage because you are taking vast amounts of small fish of low value, small squid of low value, and you are doing it quite deliberately and it's a political ... You are actually ruining your own fishery for what the Argentines would regard as a greater political good, which is to bring economic pressure onto the Falklands but it is quite outrageous really.

[Part 2 1:10:11] Lee: If you hadn't happened to retire, what would you have done to save that situation? Could you have saved that situation?

Richardson: I don't think you can, basically, because that ongoing debate about sovereignty over the Falklands ... Even in the climate of the Menem / di Tella years, it was still difficult. When you then come to the Kirchner presidency, when the Falklands can be used very deliberately by a government which might want to disguise its own domestic woes, it's a very difficult situation and fish is only one of part of the equation. It's fish; it's tourism; it's charter flights; it's oil; it's everything quite frankly. It's an almost impossible situation.

[Part 2 1:11:11] Lee: What would John Heap have done?

Richardson: I don't think there is an instant solution. All you can try and do is keep the dialogue going by whatever means you can, but if they slam the door, which is really what they did, the openings are so much more difficult.

[Part 2 1:11:32] Lee: But the door was slammed after you stepped down?

Richardson: Yes.

[Part 2 1:11:35] Lee: So would it have been slammed earlier if you had been there? Were you holding the situation?

Richardson: No, I don't think so because there is so much bigger fish to fry. At the end of the day, fish is only one part of the equation. The Head of the Polar Regions Section is relatively small beer compared with the overall political situation which is engaging presidents and foreign secretaries. It's probably one of these political situations that the Falklands have just got to wear and get through. You never know what will happen downstream.

[Part 2 1:12:11] [End of Part Two]

Part Three

[Part 3 0:00:00] Lee: This is Mike Richardson, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 1st of May 2012. Mike Richardson, Part 3.

[Part 3 0:00:10] Lee: Let's talk a bit about tourism, because that was also something of a contentious issue in your Foreign Office days. The Brits were quite in favour of it; other nations didn't always agree.

Richardson: Well, tourism has been going on since the late '50s and we took the view initially, along with the US ... Tourism is a peaceful activity and legitimate under the Antarctic Treaty Environmental Protocol and we were of the view that if the Environmental Protocol was appropriately and rigorously enforced, it should also deal with tourism. Actually things did go awry and we were very much dependent on effectively the self-regulation that was going on at the time through IAATO. And then I think a major problem surfaced in terms of the changing complexion of tourism which the Treaty parties just simply did not respond to and should have, and IAATO became incapable of handling, and that was the large ship issue. So I remember inspecting, in 1999, the *Marco Polo*. Now at that time the *Marco Polo* was by far the largest tourist ship operating in Antarctica but it only carried 400 passengers.

[Part 3 0:01:59] Richardson: By the time you get to 2005, which was the last time I attended an Antarctic Treaty meeting – sorry 2006 in Edinburgh, we had vessels carrying 2300 passengers, and you can put 1000 crew on top of that, I would think, as well. And there were at least ten if not twelve such vessels, not of that size but well bigger than the *Marco Polo*, operating in Antarctica. Now IAATO couldn't do anything except, in effect, embrace the operators of those large vessels, but also in so doing, weakening their own by-laws, because the only other option they would have had, would be to say 'Sorry, we don't want you guys in IAATO' at which point the large ship operators would simply have operated outside IAATO. So there was a 'Catch-22' going on there and we simply could not get ... When you say the UK was supportive of tourism, we were supportive of tourism but certainly on the large ship issue, I wanted much more rigorous control. And I was very very disappointed in 2006, where I thought we could actually do something and I drafted a paper which would have brought in fairly rigorous control of large ship operators and I could not get the Department of Transport here to clear it. They refused point blank.

[Part 3 0:03:25] Lee: On what grounds?

Richardson: They did not want to put constraints on tour operators with economic implications etc. etc. etc. The Americans also would not agree to lots of things and I was drafting resolutions, literally sitting at the table, trying to at least bring in some degree of control, and the Americans just simply kept blocking them. The irony was: two years later, when the Americans were hosting the Antarctic Treaty meeting, Clinton stood up and in her initial delivery speech to the Antarctic Treaty delegates, the one thing she indicated the Americans wanted to do was precisely what I was trying to do in Edinburgh two years earlier but the Americans blocked.

[Part 3 0:04:11] Lee: Had you nobbled Hillary?

Richardson: No no. Basically I had a Head of the US delegation who wouldn't move at that time, and the trouble with the Americans actually is very characteristic at international meetings. They trawl round Departments of State in Washington, find out all the various views of the various departments, and by the time they turn up at an international meeting, they have a position. It is then very very difficult to get the Americans at that meeting to change their position. They can't *ad referendum* go back to say 'We will go and talk to Washington and see if they will move.' They invariably won't move. So this is the situation: we weren't going to get movement in Edinburgh but, OK, you lost two years but at least things were starting to move.

[Part 3 0:05:01] Richardson: Even now, the large ship issue is not being controlled by the fact that they are large ships. It is largely being controlled by regulations brought in to deal with heavy fuel oil, but my view is, and it always has been for years now, that these very large vessels which are not ice-strengthened, carrying enormous numbers of people, which means that Search and Rescue facilities would be woefully inadequate, in fact totally inadequate ... If you have a major accident, the *Costa Concordia*, in Antarctica, you are not only looking at probably what would be a major environmental situation in terms of fuel oil, but much more importantly, I think you are looking at a human tragedy of considerable dimensions. And even when the *Explorer* went down a few years ago, she had 150 souls on board, the seas were relatively flat. They were in open lifeboats, but if the conditions had been different, and the nearest rescue vessel had been 15 hours steaming away, the waves had been 30 ft high, the wind speed had been 70 knots and the temperature had been -10, ...

[Part 3 0:06:16] Lee: Not uncommon?

Richardson: Not uncommon. Then you are facing an obvious situation and I really do think that the whole thing needs tightening up. Having said that, I think environmentally, in terms of tourism impact ... As I mentioned right at the beginning, there are things that people don't think about like the amount of exhaust effluent that comes out of very large tourist ships. But in terms of physical impact on the Antarctic environment, I think it is probably pretty minimal. There are some pretty stringent rules now in terms of tourists and wildlife, tourists and the environment generally. And at the end of the day, there is a benefit. People going to the Antarctic effectively come back invariably as ambassadors for the continent if you see what I mean.

[Part 3 0:07:03] Lee: Can you see a time when a cap will be imposed on the size of ships?

Richardson: Well at the moment we could have, the way things were going a few years ago, you could have said ‘Well what is the carrying capacity of the Antarctic continent overall or sectors of the Antarctic or whatever?’ At the moment it is actually self-regulating because of the economic climate, so in fact there is a downturn. So we are actually below where we were a few years ago in terms of overall numbers, numbers of ships. You are seeing a change in the dynamics of ships. The smaller ships have gone out of the marketplace and you are getting larger ships anyway. Yes, it is quite possible that you will have to bring in a cap. How it will be worked, I don’t know but it is something I think that might need to be considered if in fact growth in tourism simply continues to increase.

[Part 3 0:07:55] Lee: I think I was thinking actually of a cap on the size of ships.

Richardson: Oh yes, I would definitely like to see a cap. We did it in CCAMLR. We managed to bring in ... It wasn’t actually a mandatory measure; it was a resolution but is adhered to by most countries. We managed to bring in a resolution which indicated that any vessels fishing south of 60 would be ice-strengthened. Now if we are doing that for fishing vessels, we damn well should be doing it for very large tourist vessels. As far as I am concerned, if there is one Health & Safety aspect that we really ought to be addressing, it is that. Otherwise these ships are extremely vulnerable.

[Part 3 0:08:41] Lee: It must be easier to police tourism than it is to police fishing, isn’t it?

Richardson: Well it is a very easy industry to regulate, but you see that fact is that you keep running into huge problems. I tried to, for example, suggest the easiest way to regulate tourism would be to do it through port state control rather than doing it through actual activities in Antarctica. Invariably, most of the tourist ships going to Antarctica are departing to Antarctica from very few ports. If the countries operating those ports all had agreed standards, then that would actually greatly improve matters. I didn’t dare call it port state jurisdiction because the Argentines would go berserk at the idea that we were a port state in respect of Port Stanley.

[Part 3 0:09:32] Richardson: So I coined the notion of departure state. You don’t use the word jurisdiction; you just have departure state control over vessels, but you couldn’t get any agreement on that simply because the dear old sovereignty issue, it always looms somewhere in the background, or it looms to the fore, and that was an instance where ... It wouldn’t have taken very much for the Ushuaias, Punta Arenas, Stanleys, Cape Town, Lyttleton or whatever, the countries controlling the departure ports for Antarctica, to have got together and said ‘These are the standards that we are going to enforce on all vessels departing to Antarctica from our state.’ Difficult. Some of these things can take light years to move forward.

[Part 3 0:10:21] Lee: As I was warned, you are talking about the things you didn’t quite achieve in your time at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but what did you achieve? What is your shining success?

Richardson: Well it’s rather like science, you know. When you say ‘What did you achieve in science?’, you move forward in small steps and I think it is the same with

diplomacy, although we did move forward very very considerably. OK, CRAMRA got ditched just before I turned up in the Foreign Office but within two years we had got the Environmental Protocol. I was very closely involved in the negotiations of that. On the CCAMLR front, in terms of ... We have still got illegal fishing going on but we made huge strides and I think the UK ... There is a very interesting paper just come out. I haven't read it yet. I have glimpsed at it but John Dudeney ...

[Part 3 0:11:15] Lee: I've seen it.

Richardson: You've seen it? John Dudeney sent me the paper. It is a Walton and Dudeney paper. That demonstrates that if you look at the Antarctic Treaty parties as to how many papers have been tabled, the UK is out in front. If you then look at the size of delegations and so on, the UK is way out in front and I made some comment to John. I said 'I have glimpsed your paper. It is nice to know I probably wrote some of those papers.' He said 'Well between you putting virtually all of them on the table from the Foreign Office point of view, and the science ones going down from the BAS point of view, the UK actually is very much in the forefront at the political side of Antarctic operations.' Sometimes it is quite funny. You can write papers that then move things forward sometimes at the most peculiar times.

[Part 3 0:12:17] Richardson: I remember knocking up a paper at six o'clock in the morning and it was on the table by nine o'clock. There was one day when the Americans, in Lima, had completely scuppered the idea that we were going to have a polar shipping code. The Americans insisted that they were going to take Antarctica out of a polar shipping code. I thought that was complete nuts, completely nuts. They'd had a meeting in the IMO, International Maritime Organisation in London, literally three or four days before we turned up in Lima, and the IMO, at the insistence of the Americans, had inserted in the language for that meeting something like 'Unless the Antarctic Treaty parties decide otherwise, Antarctica will be removed from the polar shipping code.' Well of course the Americans knew that the Antarctic Treaty parties couldn't decide anything other than otherwise because they held the whip hand since it is a consensus.

[Part 3 0:13:16] Richardson: So I looked at this language and I thought 'That is pretty clever.' So we sat around a little tiny table in the street in Lima one evening, John Shears, Neil Gilbert and I, and we wrote a working paper that evening which I put on the table the next morning at nine o'clock which basically set out three options. And Tucker Scully, the Head of American delegation said 'This is one of those typical papers from the UK where there are three options but actually two of them are non-workable and you can only buy into one of them.' I was desperately trying to keep the whole thing alive and the option I set out is that basically we, the UK, would host a meeting to discuss Antarctic shipping, in the IMO, in London, the following year. It was the only thing I could do at the time to resurrect a situation which was going down the plug hole. But in terms of what did we do, well I think we did a lot of things. It was a very very busy time for the Antarctic Treaty system.

[Part 3 0:14:23] Richardson: I wouldn't want to put my finger on any particular thing but the fact that the UK could, of all the Antarctic Treaty parties, be way out ahead in terms of substantive papers that went down on the table. I think that is a telling thing. You also have to realise that because we are sufficiently devious, sometimes papers

go down on the table that we have written but actually go down under somebody else's name, because I know perfectly well that if I put a paper on the table, it might well immediately produce a reaction from our Argentine counterparts. So what you do is you either disguise yourself by dragging four or five other states around you, so it is a joint paper going down on the table, or you simply show it to your Dutch or your Norwegian counterparts and you say 'What do you think of this?' And if they say 'That looks really good.' I say 'Right, it's yours.'

[Part 3 0:15:22] Lee: A flag of convenience?

Richardson: Yes, it's a diplomatic flag of convenience, because if they support it, you say 'You stick it down on the table. We will come in and support after you, even if we have written it, it doesn't matter.' So ownership sometimes doesn't matter in these things. It is the results that matter.

[Part 3 0:15:41] Lee: Was that your initiative to do that?

Richardson: Yes.

[Part 3 0:15:43] Lee: John Heap would be proud, wouldn't he?

Richardson: Well I am sure John Heap used to do it as well, but is the sort of thing one does. It's a form of constructive deviousness.

[Part 3 0:15:54] Lee: I had this with Dick Laws, who was a biologist and ended up being instrumental in the way we defended the Falkland Islands by advising the military at that time, and you were also a biologist with specialist interest in the back legs of shrimps, and here you are dealing with world political issues at the Foreign Office. I just wonder: how do you know which battles to pick and which ones to leave alone?

Richardson: It is almost just instinct, isn't it?. It's also the time scale. You have to be quite canny to know ... and this is why sometimes the time horizon is important. Sometimes it is how far to push an issue as well. Sometimes it is best just to inject the germ of an idea in year one, knowing that it won't come to fruition possibly until year five, but you have to live with that. You do need, in something like the Antarctic Treaty system, which is a wholly consensus decision making process, you do need the patience of Job. You know instinctively that some things aren't going to fly, so what is the point? You would just be making a rod for your back if you try and push it before its time or perhaps it will never be at the right time, but it is difficult. I think sometimes it is just gut feeling. You know what will fly, what won't fly. You know how to fly it and it is a question of sometimes not trying to do too much by yourself but knowing where your allies are and knowing where your adversaries are.

[Part 3 0:17:43] Lee: Which of your gongs means most to you?

Richardson: I got two. I was absolutely amazed to come back from my last CCAMLR meeting, it was delightful. We had been to an Antarctic fisheries meeting. I then had a week's gap and then we had a meeting of the Albatross and Petrel Agreement in Christchurch. I came back from that and of course I had been away for five or six

weeks with my wife and there was this envelope amongst all these envelopes, with the Buckingham Palace thing. So I was absolutely amazed to see a letter giving me a CMG.

[Part 3 0:18:24] Lee: Which is?

Richardson: Well a CMG is almost a diplomatic service ... So senior ambassadors, if they don't get a knighthood, get a CMG, Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George, or in the Foreign Office they call it Call Me God, and then the next one up is a knighthood which is Kindly Call Me God, and the one above that is God Calls me God. So the hierarchy of the Order of St Michael and St George goes like that. That was amazing. I think actually, finally getting the Polar Medal was actually equally amazing and I was actually blown away at my retirement do in the Foreign Office when suddenly BAS produced this framed picture of Signy Island and Moe Island next door, where one of the bays on Moe Island had suddenly got a name, and it was called Richardson Cove. That was also, I thought, just brilliant.

[Part 3 0:19:34] Lee: It all began with a pamphlet at Durham University, wasn't it, this pamphlet from BAS?

Richardson: Yes.

[Part 3 0:19:42] Lee: Did you have any inkling of what would happen in your career?

Richardson: No but it's a funny thing. People sometimes think it seems to be a mad career progression. You could actually think it was a career regression, but actually I have always thought it was very logical to be a seven-year old who was interested in hamsters, and biology generally. So I went from biology degree, zoology degree doing applied zoology, or pure research; then going into much more applied conservation work and then actually using all of those skills, scientific skills, and actually scientific skills are really really useful in international law, because actually science is not that dissimilar from the legal side. It is strictly structured, but using all the things that you have been exposed to though a whole career ... As I said before, dealing with the Antarctic and all of the matters the Antarctic were dealing with ... It didn't matter if it was Environmental Impact Assessments, Protected Areas, you name it, I had done that. So you were converting the science, the science that I was brought up with in the early '70s through BAS, you then are using the scientific skills to direct you in terms of policy. It's very sad in some ways that there aren't enough scientists going into the policy field, and I have always thought it's a shame there aren't more. But I have always been very comfortable with the three jobs I've had. They have been incredibly different, equally challenging and I wouldn't have changed them for the world.

[Part 3 0:21:40] Lee: I can smell parsnip soup.

Richardson: Good.

[Part 3 0:21:44] Lee: Thank you very much

Richardson: I hope that worked.

[Part 3 0:21:47] [End of Part Three]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:08:35] The bizarre BAS medical
- [Part 1 0:14:09] First impressions of Signy
- [Part 1 0:16:32] The yellow double-decker bus
- [Part 1 0:25:54] Diving under ice: tricks of the trade
- [Part 1 0:36:11] Problems with leopard seals
- [Part 1 0:42:01] Thin ice race; meeting a leopard seal
- [Part 1 0:47:04] The last scientific base commander
- [Part 1 0:52:03] Ham radio contact with home via Namibia
- [Part 1 0:54:44] Penguin eggs stored by the toilet
- [Part 1 1:04:40] Nigel Bonner's and the Environment Protocol
- [Part 1 1:06:03] Withdrawal of the dogs
- [Part 2 0:02:02] A close call after a boat capsizes
- [Part 2 0:04:50] Saved by digging a mountain snow hole
- [Part 2 0:08:26] A daring boat trip to Orcadas
- [Part 2 1:39:19] Very few specialists in the Foreign Office
- [Part 2 0:40:27] Boozy versed day at the Foreign Office
- [Part 2 0:44:51] Diplomatic manoeuvring in Oslo
- [Part 2 0:49:30] Changes at Signy: fur seals and women
- [Part 2 0:56:01] Poor fuel system at Great Wall station
- [Part 2 1:05:51] Disagreements with Argentina
- [Part 3 0:05:01] Large Antarctic tourist ships: potential risks
- [Part 3 0:13:16] Paper written in a Lima cafe