

DUNCAN BOSTON

Edited transcript of interview with Duncan Boston conducted by Chris Eldon Lee on 7th June, 2012. BAS Archive AD6/24/1/171. Transcribed by Catriona Zerfahs on 6th March, 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:01] Lee: This is Duncan Boston, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 7th of June, 2012. Duncan Boston, Part 1.

Boston: George Duncan Boston, born in Wakefield in West Yorkshire, on the 3rd of June, 1933.

[Part 1 0:00:18] Lee: So you are now 70...?

Boston: 79.

[Part 1 0:00:21] Lee: What was your father's occupation?

Boston: He was a head porter at the local hospital.

[Part 1 0:00:25] Lee: An educated man?

Boston: No. Only self educated, he was a clever man but like many people of his generation had very little formal schooling.

[Part 1 0:00:37] Lee: What about your schooling, Duncan?

Boston: Local primary school then onto a direct grant grammar school on scholarships, then apprenticeship with the National Coal Board, where I took mechanical engineering qualifications, then national service. [laughter]

[Part 1 0:01:00] Lee: With the RAF, is that right?

Boston: With the RAF yeah, and then I decided to change tack, leave engineering and went back to college, decided to be a teacher.

[Part 1 0:01:11] Lee: So did engineering run in the family, is that how you . . . ?

Boston: No, no, no. It was after I had taken my school certificate, in those days scholarships ended, you were considered to be educated. We were pretty poor and I needed to earn money, so my father got me what he thought was a good job, I suppose in a sense it was I mean the National Coal Board were very good employers particularly to their apprentices, particularly if like myself had been at grammar school you were seen as staff potential, so they saw you got extremely good technical education, day release and that sort of, at the local technical college.

[Part 1 0:01:57] Lee: When was the first inkling you had then that there might be a place on the planet called the Antarctic?

Boston: Oh, very early on. I was a very enthusiastic student of geography when I was at school and I also had a very, very good geography teacher, so I was pretty *au fait* with the maps of the world. I was also a very enthusiastic reader and user of the local library, and I can remember as a pretty small boy lying on the rug in front of the fire reading a children's edition of *Scott of the Antarctic- The Great Journey* with tears falling down my face and I thought 'What such brave men, I would like to go there', little thinking that, you know, it might be possible. But I must have only been 6 or 7 years old then.

[Part 1 0:02:52] Lee: What was causing the tears, do you think?

Boston: Such a moving story.

[Part 1 0:02:56] Lee: Because he died do you mean?

Boston: Well because they all died but after making such phenomenal efforts, and I was very conscious that they were you know the Captain Oates story was to a boy very, very moving. Still makes me weep to be honest. [laughter]

[Part 1 0:03:18] Lee: So that kind of went into the brain cells and stayed there?

Boston: Oh very much so, very much so.

[Part 1 0:03:23] Lee: So when was the first suggestion in your life that you might be able to go where he went?

Boston: Oh when I became a climber, climbing's what opened up my mind, which I discovered.

[Part 1 0:03:34] Lee: Tell me about that passion.

Boston: Well again through reading I discovered the books of Frank Smythe and I think before I ever thought about actually going climbing myself I think I'd read every single one of Frank Smythe's books. Then I got the idea this would be a jolly good thing to do. This was when I was still at school and I set about persuading someone to go climbing with me. I realised, I didn't really know very much about it, how you do it or what you do it with but I realised you needed a companion or companions and I eventually persuaded three rather reluctant companions from the grammar school to go to Ilkley which was probably the nearest known crag. I remember one of them particularly inappropriate because he was a boy called Philip Mittman who was actually quite famous because he'd been the youngest person at the time ever to swim the English Channel and he was built like a true Channel swimmer was Philip but he was a very amiable chap, so Philip found himself jammed in this rock chimney with me on a very wet day. I thought the whole experience was wonderful on this wet day on the rock but none of the other three ever came again with me. [laughter]

[Part 1 0:04:59] Lee: What was the attraction? Was it the physicalness of climbing or the joy of getting to the top?

Boston: Oh the physicality of it I think, the physicality and very quickly the comradeship of climbing. You've got to be close to people to climb with them and that's the thing that remains with me to this day the companionship.

[Part 1 0:05:23] Lee: It's the inter-dependence, isn't it?

Boston: Yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:05:27] Lee: Which I presume came in handy later in the Antarctic?

Boston: Oh yeah, yeah. But I mean at that time once I found climbing I wasn't really thinking about the Antarctic I was just thinking well A) about school, which was still central to my life; what I was going to do when I left school because by this time I had eh I realised I was doing OK at school. I took my School Certificate as it was then a year early. I had my School Certificate when I was only 14, and though the scholarships technically ran out at School Certificate they actually they ran out when you were 15 so I did get a year in sixth form by which time I had definitely got the idea I would like to go to university. That was not to be then.

[Part 1 0:06:16] Lee: What was the problem – finance?

Boston: Oh finance oh yeah, a common thing I mean the school I went to they were pretty well all the scholarship boys were all high flyers. I could mention lots of names like David Storey and Frank Laycock and people composer when you think some pretty bright lads, but most of them had to leave school when they were 15. I mean David Storey famously wrote his book about playing rugby because he became a professional rugby player when he left school, and then of course a playwright, but yeah it wasn't unusual but I had hoped for something better than going to work down the pit which is the pit in West Yorkshire was a fairly normal route but not one to be envied, but however, one learned to accept what life threw at you in those days and it threw the Coal Board to me, which I hated I must say, [laughter] but I stuck it out and got my National and Higher National which qualified me for some pretty good jobs after that, except I didn't like it very much.

[Part 1 0:07:31] Lee: So what interrupted the teaching career then because you were set on another job?

Boston: Oh that came much later.

[Part 1 0:07:40] Lee: Oh did it? After the Antarctic?

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:07:43] Lee: OK. So tell me about the transition from National Coal Board to British Antarctic or to FIDS as it was then.

Boston: Well I completed my national service, sorry I completed my apprenticeship and got my qualifications then went into the RAF and I had hoped to learn to fly, this was the goal

then, and the RAF welcomed me ‘Oh, my Lord. Just the sort of chap we need to fly’ and packed me off to aircrew selection down at Hornchurch, which I loved doing that was great was that, so I think I was there for I think it was a month and passed with flying colours I thought ‘Hey ho, here we go, where’s my Spitfire?’ [laughter] but then came the interview and they said ‘Well, yes you are just the sort of chap we are looking for. You passed everything with flying colours. Excellent. Would you like to just sign this?’ ‘This’ being to sign on full-time in the air force for 8 years and I said ‘Oh no, no, no, I’m not signing on.’ Because I knew in fact they did train national service pilots quite a lot of them in fact but they were always in batches and my timing was not very good.

[Part 1 0:09:04] Lee: Oh I see.

Boston: So I said ‘Nope.’ So they said ‘Well sign on for 3 years and you could be a navigator.’ I said ‘No, no I want to be a pilot.’ So that was a big disappointment but I just refused to sign on.

[Part 1 0:09:17] Lee: Is that erm, have you ever regretted that decision?

Boston: Oh often.

[Part 1 0:09:22] Lee: You have?

Boston: Often. Well, I’ve often wondered what would have happened if I’d signed on because I had 2 good climbing friends who did their national service about the same time as me and they had no hesitation in signing on, learnt to fly and then made the transition after their 8 years into commercial flying and both of them spent the rest of their life flying aeroplanes fairly lucratively. But there we are, we all have to make these choices, but that’s all they ever did.

[Part 1 0:10:00] Lee: Yes.

Boston: None of them ever carried on their climbing. I mean their climbing ended when they went in the air force, whereas I’m still climbing

[Part 1 0:10:09] Lee: So how did you then come to ...?

Boston: Ah well right. I did my national service and having not signed on I then just did my own job as general engineer in the air force quite close to home actually at RAF Leeming, which meant I could get away every weekend and carry on climbing every weekend so that was all good. When I, it was whilst I was doing my national service I started thinking about ‘Do I really want to be an engineer for the rest of me life?’ and the answer was ‘No’ so I talked to the education officers at RAF Leeming and they said ‘Well if you want to be a teacher there is absolutely no reason why not, your educational qualifications are good, any university or teacher training college will take you.’ So my mind was working that way but it was a big step to take because when I came out of the RAF I got a job with a big American firm called Foster Wheeler as a site engineer building power stations and this was a good job

you know it was extremely well paid, I have never been as well paid since and my mum, my mother was so pleased that her little lad now had a proper job with a car and everything, but 'It's not right, if I'm going to move I've got to do it'. So I wrote to 3 northern universities and said 'I don't know how you do it but I'd really like to be a teacher, I'd like to come to university to get a degree', and within they all answered more or less by return and said 'Certainly, you're now a mature student, you can come any time you like.' Which was all a bit surprising so I then had to think about the money. Fortunately my father, you asked earlier about my father, what his life was local politics. All the time he was a hospital porter he was also leader of the Labour Party in Wakefield, mayor several times over, his life was public life and I think he put in a good word for me and the education department said they'd give me a grant to go so that was taken care of. So the next thing I knew I was packing my suitcase and going off to something else I had absolutely no idea about at Liverpool University, which I must admit was a bit of a disappointment in some respects I thought it would be intellectually very, very demanding and really it wasn't, so I was able to devote my time to other things which were a novelty to me like lots and lots of girls around, I mean having worked down the pit you don't meet a lot of girls and in the air force there were no WAAFS around in RAF Leeming, so that was quite interesting and I started playing rugby again which I'd played at school which I thoroughly enjoyed and I had a pretty good time at university, but as I say I didn't think very intellectually demanding. But whilst I was there my prof, the geography guy...

[Part 1 0:13:37] Lee: Do you remember his name?

Boston: He was, oh gosh, do you know I was trying to think of that this morning.

[Part 1 0:13:42] Lee: Don't worry.

Boston: I'll find it out for you and let you know later or it will probably just sail into my head in an hour or so. He brought me, he rather took me under his wing because I was very keen on geography and having been around the world a bit through climbing we got on like a house on fire and he was also a very, very good teacher himself. Anyway he produced a little cutting one day towards the end of my time there and it was an advert from the *Telegraph* looking for people for the Antarctic and suddenly all those old thoughts came back and I thought 'Is this possible?' It just seemed so remarkable to see an advert for your dream, and I talked to him and he said 'Ach sure, marvellous just go. Write.' So I wrote off and in due course got quite a glossy letter back from Millbank and the next thing I was being interviewed by Mr Elliot and some very senior civil servants at the Crown Office, which was another rather strange experience.

[Part 1 0:14:55] Lee: Why was that?

Boston: Well I found it so, I realised it was very, very civil service but it was strange in those days one put one's best suit on and about the only tie I had was my old school tie, my

Old Savilian¹ tie, and I walked into this room and ‘Oh’ he said ‘Jolly good, I see you’re an Old Savilian.’ He said ‘Did you play rucker?’ I said ‘Yes’ because it was a very good rugby school was Queen Elizabeth’s at Wakefield, still is, and most of the interview was about rucker and then Elliot got his oar in and started talking about climbing.

[Part 1 0:15:35] Lee: So who was asking you about rugby then?

Boston: Oh the civil servant, the senior, this mandarin, he didn’t seem terribly interested in the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:15:44] Lee: And then Frank Elliot started quizzing you.

Boston: He started, he was quizzing me about my climbing career because by then I’d had several seasons in the Alps, some holidays yeah I was a fairly experienced climber by this time, and I realised that they pretty well had me picked out for Base ‘O’ right from the word because at Base ‘O’ was - this was why it wasn’t a very successful base because it was really badly situated for moving about unless you were a climber, but anyway that’s beside the point. Anyway that went well and I was told I could go.

[Part 1 0:16:24] Lee: Did you get the sense that it was a serious interview or was it just a formality?

Boston: Oh I think it was a serious interview, oh yeah. I mean you don’t pack people off to the Antarctic without some thought. I think these guys were a lot cleverer than I took them for, you know, certainly much more astute.

[Part 1 0:16:43] Lee: So they were sussing you out were they, psychologically?

Boston: Oh I think so, I think so. ‘Can you think on your feet?’ and all that sort of thing, yeah, but by that time I was fairly used to responsibility because the bit of engineering I’d done as a site engineer carried a lot of responsibility with it and I was used to handling a lot of grown men, so yeah, and climbing gives you a lot of these attributes as well.

[Part 1 0:17:12] Lee: Medical?

Boston: Oh the medical was no problem I mean they sent you for a very good medical of course. Yeah, no problem passing that, I’ve always been lucky in having, (what’s the cliché?), robust good health. [laughter]

[Part 1 0:17:28] Lee: We are talking about the summer of ’57 aren’t we at the present?

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:17:32] Lee: And you were then told that you were sailing in October ’57?

¹ An ex pupil of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Wakefield (after a leading founder Thomas Saville).

Boston: Yeah. They actually took me on board almost immediately because, I think I said earlier it seemed a little bit of an amateurish outlook the way things were organised and they asked me to go, as I was available they asked me if I would go and travel around and visit a lot of the firms who were supplying equipment for the trip so I went down to the south coast, nearly all the firms seemed to be on the south coast, and I went to visit Top Boat who provide a lot of our small boats and talk to them about repairing fibreglass boats which I knew nothing about and also down to the people who supplied the outboard engines and the likely ins and outs of operating these in ice and just generally going round picking up information.

[Part 1 0:18:33] Lee: So it was more a case of you learning from them than you telling them what you wanted.

Boston: Oh yeah, but it all turned out to be extremely useful and it was er (...)

[Part 1 0:18:42] Lee: How do you mean?

Boston: I didn't realise it at the time but small boats were to play a very, very important part on Danco Coast base because of the difficulties of travelling and they became our major method of transport and they do take a hell of a bashing as you can imagine down there, so knowing how to repair them and how to do deal with the engines and things was all extremely useful.

[Part 1 0:19:14] Lee: So you were learning stuff on the south coast which you would use later?

Boston: Oh very much so, yeah.

[Part 1 0:19:19] Lee: That wasn't regular practice to send somebody off for a couple of weeks?

Boston: No I think that might have just been an opportunity that presented themselves to my masters, and they 'Oh this is a good chance, really'. I've no doubt we would have managed anyway but it would have been a slower learning process.

[Part 1 0:19:37] Lee: Maybe it was an experiment as well to see whether that was a worthwhile project...

Boston: Possibly, possibly.

[Part 1 0:19:41] Lee: ...that they might have repeated later

Boston: I mean it gave a very pleasant tail end to a summer to me travelling around fancy free, expenses paid yeah, enjoy it . [laughter]

[Part 1 0:19:52] Lee: But October was looming and the departure date. How did you get to the Antarctic?

Boston: On the *Shackleton*.

[Part 1 0:20:00] Lee: Right.

Boston: In a sense that was the biggest adventure of all because I'd certainly never done a long, apart from Channel ferries I'd never really been to sea at all.

[Part 1 0:20:15] Lee: Tell me about the *Shackleton* in 1956, '57, what was it like?

Boston: Well at first it looked - we arrived with various people at Southampton looking for this boat and the guy at the dock gate said 'Oh go down such and such a wharf.' He says 'You can't miss it because there's a big ship next to it' - the big ship was the *Queen Elizabeth*, the old *Queen Elizabeth* and it was absolutely enormous. 'Well, that's big but where's ours?' and there was some dockie passing and we asked him and he said 'Down there' and we looked over the edge! It looked absolutely minute sitting, and it was literally moored next to the *Queen Lizzie*. Anyway we got on board and really it wasn't as small as all that, but it was quite a small ship but it was a very nice ship was the *Shackleton*, it was very ele[gant], unlike a lot of the ships that went to the Antarctic it was quite a beautiful, elegant ship it was a nice shape, and when you first got on board you knew nobody of course. There wasn't a single person, although there was a chap who'd been at school with me but I didn't remember him and he didn't remember me, I'm trying to think of his name now, can't remember his name, he lived then in Blackpool but I'll think of it later, anyway we just spent the first hour or two getting to know each other, and they all looked, we were all terribly young, and this is what, when you looked at them, they all looked very young to be going off on a big adventure.

[Part 1 0:21:59] Lee: Well you were what 23, 24?

Boston: I was one of the older ones, very much so yeah. I mean a lot of them were almost straight out of school certainly straight out of university, but they were a bunch of likely lads, so of course we all went straight back ashore, went to a pub thinking it would might be our last time in a pub ever and we all finished up on the *Queen Elizabeth* because we met some of the crew of the *Queen Elizabeth* who invited us back there, so we were all fairly thick-headed by the time we sailed at - we didn't sail all that early because all the bigwigs came down from London to see us off, a bit of ceremony and things.

[Part 1 0:22:43] Lee: So would Fuchs have been amongst those people? Or was he already in the Antarctic?

Boston: He'd be down at Halley Bay by then.

[Part 1 0:22:52] Lee: Trans Antarctic Expedition.

Boston: He'd actually be on the crossing by then a full year before then.

[Part 1 0:22:57] Lee: Were you aware of that?

Boston: Oh yes.

[Part 1 0:22:58] Lee: You'd been following it had you?

Boston: Yeah yeah, erm, and then eventually we set off you know and quite a lot of the people who were going their parents had come down but I'd asked my parents not to come I don't know why, but they didn't, I said my farewells at Wakefield Station. So there lots of tearful farewells and people waving bye bye and off we went down Southampton Water and, yeah, it was all pretty exciting really [laughter] so we spent a long time on that first afternoon and evening just leaning over the side watching England receding in the distance and becoming smaller and the next day down Channel the bad weather came and the next few days we were all as sick as dogs but we gradually as one does you get used to it and the next thing a week later you're down well into the Atlantic in good weather and the sunshine and then it became a magic mystery tour really. I absolutely loved the journey down the Atlantic, the steady rhythm of a boat just cruising a long way. It was doing what, 10 knots, no more than 10 knots all the time, but beautiful weather, sitting out on the deck at night with somebody playing a guitar and looking up at the stars and it just seemed, well it went on for 6 weeks before we landed but it seemed to go on just for ever [laughter] and I can't imagine why people want to go places in aeroplanes now I mean I would love to go on another long voyage like that, it was just wonderful.

[Part 1 0:24:49] Lee: Did you have duties to perform on ship?

Boston: Well, they tried to keep us busy because we were a lot of young lads with really nothing to do except eat 3 times a day and drink at night, so they'd get us on chipping paint you know the classic on any ship, but as it happened fate took a hand. We were only about 5 days out when the doctors on board diagnosed the first cases of Asian flu which if you look in the records '57 was the great Asian flu epidemic in Britain and the crew must have picked it up quite a bit earlier from somewhere because it didn't affect any of us at all, none of the Fids were affected but virtually all the crew but the captain got it, so we finished up doing running everything, Fids were steering, Fids were cooking, Fids were running the engine so the course became rather erratic after that, but we just kept the ship going and in the event by the time our first stop was Montevideo, by which time all the crew had recovered so, it was quite interesting.

[Part 1 0:26:05] Lee: Never come across that before. Interesting story, thank you.

Boston: Because I'd been an engineer so I stood an engineer's watch for about 4 weeks I should think.

[Part 1 0:26:18] Lee: Night watch or day watch?

Boston: We were on shifts.

[Part 1 0:26:22] Lee: On shifts yeah.

Boston: Yeah, which it was no great, I mean all you basically all you had to do was be in the engine room I mean those engines just keep thumping away, thumping out power so long as

everything is oiled and greased and there's plenty of fuel going in nothing happens except very, very hot going through the tropics in the engine room. I was glad to get out of there. But again another interesting experience.

[Part 1 0:26:52] Lee: Tell me about Port Stanley when you got to it, what were your impressions of Port Stanley?

Boston: [pause] I thought we'd arrived on the west coast of Scotland to be honest. Did you arrive by sea when you went there?

[Part 1 0:27:10] Lee: No.

Boston: Well if you do (...)

[Part 1 0:27:12] Lee: Well I didn't go to Stanley though. We did go by sea from Ushuaia.

Boston: Ah right. Well I mean you can smell the Falkland Islands 100 miles out can't you? The peat smoke [laughter] you really can. But I thought it was just like a little Stornoway or somewhere like that really and all the people of Scots extraction. Very primitive place I mean I'm not, it must be a very different place now I mean there was no airport there was nothing really. Everything happened round the Port Stanley ship which just zigzagged backward and forward to Montevideo and back so there were only strangers in Stanley about once a month, but a very pleasant place and we went duck shooting. I immediately found out there were some crags on the island so organised some climbing, we had a game of rugby, the *Shackleton* played the *Protector* at rugby, that was a brutal match especially as there was no rugby field on Port we actually played on the racecourse. And we went to dances, we went to governor's cocktail parties, yes, it was interesting but all the time you were aware the serious business was about to start and then we got kitted out with all our Antarctic gear and stuff like that, which was all pretty primitive actually. I don't know what clothing is issued now but apart from a windproof suit of double ventile we had nothing specialist at all, it was mostly old army gear. But I had taken some of my climbing gear like a duvet jacket and things of my own but, yeah I was a bit surprised at the poor quality of some of the gear, very surprised when it came to use it - how useless it was, but the essential stuff like the windproof gear was all made by Edgingtons. I've actually still got my old sledging anorak and sleeping bags and things. Sleeping bags were superb, all that stuff was made by Edgingtons, tents, everything, so that was good. The place, before we got to Stanley of course Montevideo was the place we all liked, that really was like being abroad, new language, new architecture, we thought Montevideo was a wonderful place really liked it and the Montevideans loved us I mean straight away the local papers '*El Scientificos* are in town' [laughter] and everywhere you went free drinks, yeah, oh they really liked you there.

[Part 1 0:30:18] Lee: I suppose by '57 they were getting into the routine of there being an annual call.

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:30:22] Lee: Or two one each way.

Boston: Well we spent a lot of money there you see, but yes it was a nice experience that and of course I don't know if it still is, but of course the old *Graf Spee's* upper mast was still sticking out of the harbour some way out but they were there so that was interesting because we'd all seen *The Battle of the River Plate* yeah liked that, we weren't there all that long, long enough to water up and refuel basically probably a week, 10 days at the outside, then we were off to Port Stanley. But Port Stanley was good and by then we were starting to get a better idea, it wasn't till I got to Port Stanley I was told I was going to be Base Leader.

[Part 1 0:31:12] Lee: Who told you?

Boston: Ship's captain.

[Part 1 0:31:17] Lee: Had he decided or had it been decided . . . ?

Boston: Oh no I think it had been decided before that and he would have just got a radio message.

[Part 1 0:31:25] Lee: You don't think he was watching you whilst you were . . . ?

Boston: Possibly, he may have reported back, possibly, I don't know. That would be guessing anyway, and then of course we got some idea, up until then we had no idea who was going to be on the base with you, 'cos you'd met all these people on the boat and there was the other parallel boat coming down the Atlantic about the same time with another load of caffies and I discovered that all the people I was going to be on the base with were actually on the *Biscoe*, they weren't on the *Shackleton*, so they were going to be total strangers to me, which was one of the things I found a little odd. But there we are that's the way it was done and then when we got the itinerary you know we were going to go to South Georgia first to resupply there, then to Signy then Admiralty Bay. I might have got this order a little bit wrong I can't remember, then to Deception and then down the peninsula, Hope Bay and so on. The trip out to Georgia was okay, it wasn't too rough, 'cos that can be a hell of a passage as we found out later, but there's exciting going to Georgia because we'd all heard and read about it and I know you went to South Georgia yourself it was a pretty exciting place with having these huge mountains straight out of the sea, and of course it was still a very active whaling place then in '57, two big whaling station factories. So we sailed round the corner into Grytviken and there was all this smoke and smell and big hairy giants with flensing knives, quite an eye opener that, and all these catchers scurrying to and fro, dragging dead whales and of course we paid the usual visits to Shackleton's grave which was quite moving. A few days there, again there was some delay I think they found something wrong with the ship that had to be corrected so we got a bit of climbing in there actually [laughter] went up Mount Paget, which was good.

[Part 1 0:33:53] Lee: Had you taken all your own ropes then?

Boston: Oh there was plenty of climbing gear around I mean there was mountains of it everywhere.

[Part 1 0:34:02] Lee: And it was all OK quality because you were talking earlier about (...)

Boston: Oh no the climbing gear was good.

[Part 1 0:34:06] Lee: OK.

Boston: Well I'll come back to that later because there was one little problem we had that restricted our movements was very up to date climbing gear, it was good quality was there but there could have been more of it. We had to do a lot of ice climbing and but to be honest I suppose a lot of it hadn't been invented really things like modern pterodactyl axes and front point crampons and that sort of thing, but traditional climbing gear plenty of it. Yeah, and we could wander round these whaling factories too but very fascinating seeing a whale cut up, I mean it was a real big job sperm whales you know amazing. And then we were off again on the way to, I suppose we would be heading for Signy Island first, can't remember, but then we got into the ice we saw it, we started seeing icebergs and then we saw pack ice for the first time, just loose brash stuff at first, and we got in and out of Signy alright, and then we came out and then we had the first big adventure because we actually got we were held fast for about 5 days, and I know Captain Brown, the skipper of the, he was very, very surprised by this he said 'This shouldn't be happening at this time this far north'.

[Part 1 0:35:57] Boston: Anyway eventually he worked the ship out of it and it was by this time it was fairly late in the evening not exactly dark but poor light and he was trying to catch up time probably going too fast I don't know but zooming round the top edge of the ice and we were up down below playing bridge actually it must have been about 11 o'clock at night, a God awful 'Bang!', and sudden silence then a lot of running feet. The story we'd hit an iceberg it wasn't in fact it was a big growler² but it tore a bloody great rip in the side of the boat well below the waterline and almost immediately she started going over and the skipper straightaway said 'Got to lighten this thing and get it heeled over so just start throwing all the cargo over the side', no messing, deck hatches off and just everything whatever it was just straight over the side and then started using every pump on the ship to pump all the liquids over onto the starboard side, no port side, and eventually he managed to get this big, it must have been 6 – 10 foot long. It wasn't a hole as such it had ripped the plates so that if you can imagine two edges they were out of align like that but she was taking water at a phenomenal rate. By this time all the holds were full of water and all the lifeboats were over the side, Maydays had gone out, but he did eventually get the boat heeled right over so this big tear was out of the water, and then they started 'What do we do now?' and it was decided by this quite, all this I'm saying it in 5 minutes, but we're talking a good 24 hours which was really quite frightening. The good thing was the weather was good it was almost flat calm, if there had been any seas running at all that ship would have been gone straight to the bottom no

² A large fragment of broken iceberg.

messing you know absolutely no doubt at all about that, but it was flat calm, and by this time the Mayday had been answered by a whale catcher, one of the little catcher boats, and it come alongside and the skipper decided to get as many people off onto that as he could which he did which meant more to the Fids, but he asked one or two of us who'd got some engineering experience to stay on board if we were willing, and the idea was to get as much water out of this and try and build a coffer dam behind this big tear which we did do, though a bit rough and ready, working up to your certainly up to your waist in water at times up to your neck in water which was very cold water I might add but eventually we made some sort of repair on it.

[Part 1 0:39:16] Lee: Just explain a bit more about the repair.

Boston: Well what you do a coffer dam basically you build a wooden frame inside where the hole, bigger than the hole and then we use some stuff called cement fondu which is cement that will set in seawater and it will set underwater and it would just fortunately we had a lot of this stuff on board because it was in regular use at all the bases so we had tons and tons of it and so this was mixed up and it was all packed into this dam, this coffer, and once that had set it was still leaking because you can't do this job neatly but it would allow the boat to move and the idea was then that we could go very, very slowly back to South Georgia where they'd got a drydock. We also put the traditional thing for any ship that's got a hole is a mat over the side where you use a big tarpaulin or something like that and you get it right underneath the boat, wriggle it back with rope 'til it's over the hole and the idea any water pressure pushes it into the hole or gap and these two things together made an effective repair, but all the time by this time quite a lot of time had gone by probably up to about 10 days or so during which time the boat had just been sitting there and fortunately the weather had remained good.

[Part1 0:40:53] Boston: And then out of the blue came the *Protector*. It had come hotfoot all the way from Cape Town, it had in fact been in Cape Town having repairs done and they got this news, the *Protector* was our ship it looked after the Antarctic and it just came absolutely flat out from Cape Town in 10 days which is, I think that made some sort of record. The skipper said he'd just about burnt the engines out, they had been on the red line all the way but they got there and then they just took over because they're experts on board in the Royal Navy always have experts I mean they are wonderful and they straightaway put divers over the side and they inspected these repairs and said 'Ah, we could do better than that', and then they produced all sorts of wonderful gear that they have on Royal Naval ships and they had this big, I remember this thing called a boltgun which fires threaded bolts into metal explosively just goes 'Bang!', bit like a nail gun, but a big bolt threads itself into metal and they just put a ring of these all the way round this repair then they cut a big piece of plate steel to match all it and drilled holes to match all they'd cut then they just bolted the whole thing with a sort of sausage of canvas, and putty and all sorts of masticky material.

[Part 1 0:42:32] Lee: This was also slightly above water?

Boston: But they'd got it heeled over again yeah bolted it all up they said 'Yep that'll get you to South Georgia' [laughter] cos the skipper for some reason decided he was going to go to South Georgia backwards to keep the pressure off this thing you know but anyway the *Protector's* guys said 'Ah no, turn it round, go a bit faster.' But we went very slowly about 5 knots and we got it by this time yeah it worked and we got it to South Georgia. The *Protector* also took all the people off the catcher onto the *Protector* so the *Protector* and the *Shackleton* sailed off together saying 'Thanks' to the catcher. We were very, very glad to see that boat.

[Part 1 0:43:19] Lee: What nationality was the whale catcher?

Boston: It was Norwegian. We were glad to see them I'll tell ya, really, the more we saw, it's a funny thing it's the only time I've ever been shipwrecked, if it was being shipwrecked, and it's a horrible lonely feeling I mean you are frightened make no mistake about it I think everybody is terrified, but you have to keep thinking. When you see someone else there straightaway you know you're not going to drown, because if this goes to the bottom you can get on that one so everything is a million times better so we were glad to see that. I mean they are tiny things those whalers, if we'd all got on it would probably have sunk with the sheer weight but it didn't.

[Part 1 0:44:06] Lee: So how long did the whole episode take would you say from hitting the iceberg to making it to South Georgia? Two weeks?

Boston: Two weeks.

[Part 1 0:44:14] Lee: Yeah. But then presumably then you were stranded?

Boston: No 'cos they repaired the ship in South Georgia. We were stranded in South Georgia for, you know it threw the whole timetable out plus of course we'd thrown all the cargo away, the cargo of course was what was going to replenish the bases so I mean tremendous logistic problem. Anyway they got the ship to South Georgia and it would just go in their drydock, only just, and they got it in, cut all the old plates out, just welded new ones in, good as new.

[Part 1 0:44:48] Lee: In the space of a few days?

Boston: Oh yes, yeah, and then we went back to Port Stanley by which time of course the airwaves had been full of 'What do we do?' and basically they had to reorder all that year's supplies because not everything went over the side but nobody knew exactly what and it was almost impossible with all the mess to discover what had gone and what condition the stuff was you know boxes of food that had been underwater for 2 weeks, so it was just 'Reorder everything', and somehow they got it out to the Falkland Islands in about a month. I don't know who organised that - these mandarins in London presumably who I didn't think much of but (...)

[Part 1 0:45:37] Lee: So you found yourself back at the Falklands Islands.

Boston: We were back at the Falklands for Christmas as it happened.

[Part 1 0:45:44] Lee: Before we talk about that was there ever any kind of enquiry or ...

Boston: Well according to...

[Part 1 0:45:53] Lee: ... court martial or something?

Boston: According to the 'bible' there was, and this story is related in there.

[Part 1 0:45:58] Lee: In *Mice and Men*?

Boston: It's not related the way I just told you it.

[Part 1 0:46:02] Lee: Right.

Boston: I think in fact - Captain Brown never worked for the Falkland Islands Dependency Survey again, and I think he was, one gets the impression from what it says in there that he hadn't been as careful as he could have been, but no there was no great, no loss of life, no serious damage anywhere, just one of those things. They were very underplayed in that book.

[Part 1 0:46:33] Lee: Is that your view as well? Do you think he was unlucky or was he foolish or . . .?

Boston: [pause] It's a very strange environment. I think the skippers of those ships that go down into the ice have incredibly difficult job because they're not icebreakers they are just ice-strengthened ships, and I think they're probably asked to do more than the ships are designed for. They are very experienced mariners, Brown was and Johnston on the *Biscoe*, Johnston on the *Biscoe* was probably one of the most experienced ice navigators in the world at the time, and I think they have to take some very difficult, I mean they've got to get to those bases, there are guys down there who are depending on them and so I think they take shortcuts in order to get there.

[Part 1 0:47:40] Lee: Well Brown was already delayed by...

Boston: And Brown was already delayed when it hadn't expected, I mean further down they had more and more time as you know if you go down the Lemaire Channel and start getting down into Marguerite Bay they're going to meet ice they know they're going to meet ice. If they go down to the Weddell Sea they know, but sailing just out of the Roaring Forties you don't really expect to meet pack ice but he did and it held him up so he was probably going faster than he should have done, and perhaps the lookouts weren't as good as they should have been, but it was I mean it wasn't that he rammed into it, it was just a bit of brash ice, but you get to know brash ice is dangerous stuff, its like tungsten steel, so yeah but I wouldn't like to blame him for anything I think they're probably being a bit harsh there.

[Part 1 0:48:31] Lee: Was there any kind of discussion about who was to blame amongst the Fids at the time you know back at Stanley?

Boston: No we were 100% with the crew. By this time, the ship's officers were all British, but they were all bloody good, they really were. All the crew were Shelties from the Falkland Islanders and they were just absolutely first class natural seamen you know, I mean they were great guys and I would find it very hard and I think everybody else felt the same, to blame these guys for anything [laughter] they were little gods to us, they were great guys, totally reliable who would do the right things you know. There were the odd one like the cooks [laughter] who'd be the first into the lifeboat, that sort of thing but no they were great guys. Never really talked about it very much, we had all been very frightened and were very glad to be alive to be honest.

[Part 1 0:49:32] Lee: So did you think, did your life flash before your eyes at some point?

Boston: Not exactly.

[Part 1 0:49:38] Lee: You didn't think you were going to die?

Boston: We realised we'd be OK if the weather stayed good, if the weather turned bad and we'd already met some fairly rough I mean you are just out of the Roaring Forties there its a bad, bad place to be and if the weather had got bad as later we saw it, 18 months later coming out we met the really bad weather and we all thought we were going to die then without any accidents, and as I say once that whaler had got there we all felt OK well we didn't think we were going to die then well we knew we weren't.

[Part 1 0:50:21] Lee: So you had a rather unexpected Christmas on the Falklands.

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:50:26] Lee: What was Christmas like in the Falklands?

Boston: It was good. But it's the time they use their racetracks and they have their races and everybody has parties. They all realised we'd just had a bad experience so people went out of their way to invite us to meals out and things like that and I know that the chap who was the new, Elliot the SecFID had retired by then and we had a new chap called Green.

[Part 1 0:50:55] Lee: Johnny Green.

Boston: Johnny Green, who I got on extremely well with and in fact he and his wife invited me to spend Christmas with them which I did do. That sort of relationship I kept up for quite a long time because he went to work for Outward Bound and I had friends who worked at Outward Bound and so I kept coming across Johnny, who remained a good friend, but then I don't know what happened to him, he just seemed to vanish, no idea, I certainly was seeing him in the '70s when he was bursar at Aberdovey Outward Bound School and then he just seemed to, I don't know what happened to him. It's a pity because he was a really nice guy, very lively bloke [laughter] with an incredibly dishy wife [laughter] yeah, so yeah Christmas was OK and then all the stuff began to arrive and then we all had to work jolly hard sorting all this gear out, where it was going to go, and then we set off again, but not via South

Georgia this time it was straight south to the bases, and I think the first place we went to was Admiralty Bay.

[Part 1 0:52:13] Lee: I presume you would have got quite a warm welcome because they were, they'd been delayed there hadn't they?

Boston: I mean there was people who had expected to come out. I don't think they were too worried because of course when you got down into the ice it was only just really the spring or very early summer so there was still quite a lot of time to play with. I don't think they were too anxious, they might have been anxious about whether they were going to get any more fags and booze and mashed potatoes [laughter].

[Part 1 0:52:40] Lee: Letters from home.

Boston: Letters, this is what they always wants, yeah, the bags of letters [laughter]. It's amazing how when you only get post once a year how important it becomes. So yeah, then so we got down into the ice proper and saw the mainland of the Antarctic and that was very exciting. I suppose with all these cruise ships that go down there now this is what they all get excited about, but it's just an amazingly beautiful place, isn't it? I can't imagine anybody not being excited seeing the Antarctic peninsula for the first time.

[Part 1 0:53:26] Lee: What did you make of Danco Island when you finally got there? Your home for the next 18 months.

Boston: [pause] Well my mountaineer's eye was at work, well it had been at work for some days going down that coast. I thought 'This is not going to be an easy place to work'. You go down with the idea of charging along with a dog sledge well you did in those days, all anyone wanted to do was get down to the dogs, and I'd learnt early on that we were going to have no dogs at Danco and I thought 'Why not? Why can't we have dogs' and the moment I went down the Lemaire Channel I realised how utterly useless dogs were going to be, but I thought Danco is an incredibly beautiful place, it must be one of the most beautifully situated huts in the Antarctic, it's a phenomenal place. Did you ever visit when you went . . .?

[Part 1 0:54:29] Lee: No no.

Boston: It's just surrounded.

[Part 1 0:54:32] Lee: I've been to that area.

Boston: I mean being down the Lemaire Channel I mean its just surrounded by all these mountains straight up out I mean my description was always 'The Alps by the sea', but the island itself was tiny, it's a very small island and its also covered with bloody penguins and in the summer the stench is horrendous, so that was a bit of a damper but we were welcomed by Dick Foster and his party. There were quite a big group staying there when we got there because like all Antarctic they get lots of summer visitors, there must have been about 15 or 16 people when we got there, but we only wintered 5, but some of them were just people

down just for a couple of months to do a particular job you know. Anyway Dick did the handover, showed us round and we thought 'This is going to be our home.' The other big surprise because we were brought up with stories about how everybody lives in these constant blizzards on these Antarctic bases and the weather was absolutely wonderful. We had about 2 months of cyclonic weather it was just blue skies and wall to wall sunshine for days after day after day it was amazing. We were actually walking round sunbathing, and somebody says 'It won't last.' [laughter]

[Part 1 0:55:57] Lee: And they were right?

Boston: Yeah, and of course you were very busy when you go to a base you got all the stuff you know you work really hard getting all the stuff ashore, so yeah you're working, I don't know 15, 16 hours a day, really hard labour, still living on the ship then of course and you realise how much stuff you need to run a base. I remember thinking - the first mate said 'Right, tomorrow we're gonna shift coal,' [laughter] and we'd got about 40 blokes doing nothing but carrying sacks of coal for a whole day, I don't know how many tons there were there must have been about 400 tons of coal.

[Part 1 0:56:50] Lee: So what did the *Shackleton* have, did it have a little dinghy to get...?

Boston: No it had a - I'll show you a photograph if you want, a thing called a scow, a lighter, like a big barge and they lash the ship's boat to it. This used to be an immaculate album really it just got falling to bits.

[Part 1 0:57:20] Lee: Looks well thumbed these days.

Boston: That's a scow you see lowered from the ship.

[Part 1 0:57:27] Lee: So there's a derrick.

Boston: A derrick into there then they lash the motorboat and it comes inshore and everything is humped by hand.

[Part 1 0:57:34] Lee: Through the waves.

Boston: There's no easy way, no mechanical aids at all.

[Part 1 0:57:40] Lee: This is Danco Island these steep sheer cliffs?

Boston: Yup yup it is just surrounded, that's the view from the base just straight across to Rongé Island but that's an offshore island there. I'll find you other photos if you want... no that's Deception Island.

[Part 1 0:58:00] Lee: Oh that's Deception is it?

Boston: Yes.

[Part 1 0:58:03] Lee: With a V shaped entrance yes. Well we'll look at the pictures later on then, Duncan, because they don't come out terribly well on the wireless. [laughter]

Boston: So yeah, but it's very hard work when you arrive at a base and of course if you're lucky you only have it to do at the base then you get off and somebody else has to do the rest but we'd already visited the Admiralty Base, Deception Island, Signy Island and Hope Bay so we were getting quite used to this humping.

[Part 1 0:58:34] Lee: So what surprised you about Danco? Were you surprised by its location or by the size of the...?

Boston: The big thing was the location. I just thought 'Who on Earth got the idea of putting a base here?' And of course this was true it only lasted really as an effective base for what, 2 years, and then they closed it down a year later. Because it proved impossible really to do the job properly. I mean all bases have a variety of jobs you've always got the weather and the tides and things to measure which are just ongoing jobs but our major task at Danco of course or the task that was given to me were ground fixes for the big aerial survey that had been done 2 years earlier. The British Government for some reason decided they were going to map the whole Antarctic peninsula properly and so they got, what's the big . . .?

[Part 1 0:59:43] Lee: Huntings.

Boston: Huntings to go down and they set up a base at Deception Island and they just flew all summer just trip after trip, row after row and finished up with literally millions of photographs, runs of photographs, you know continuous runs, but which are absolutely useless without having accurate fixes because you know they're not straight lines, and so our job was to find locations that you could recognise on the photograph that were accessible on the ground where you can do 17 star astro-fixes, Ordnance Survey standard fixes and do a bit of filling in with plane tabling, and the obvious place for these are small islands where you can get a fix easily and mountain tops, hence they needed a mountaineer in charge.

[Part 1 1:00:46] Lee: Had you had any training in surveying, or was that someone else's job?

Boston: No we had another geographer who was a trained surveyor but he quickly showed me how to do 17 star astro-fix, that wasn't a problem and of course I was a geographer so it was second nature and the mathematics of it I'd got through my engineering training, like most of the technicalities are fairly straightforward, the problem is getting to these places and I straightaway realised that all these mountains and ice cliffs were going to be bloody difficult to climb plus you get to the sea in the Antarctic and you get an ice cliff, and this is where it comes back to the climbing equipment. With modern climbing equipment I could have been up and down those cliffs no trouble at all but with old-fashioned equipment there was only one or two places where you could make it.

[Part 1 1:01:46] Lee: So what were you missing, what were you lacking in those days?

Boston: Oh good modernised climbing equipment.

[Part 1 1:01:52] Lee: Such as?

Boston: I mean I wouldn't say lacking that's not quite fair it just hadn't been invented. I mean how much do you know about climbing, modern climbing?

[Part 1 1:02:00] Lee: Well just explain to a (...)

Boston: I mean modern climbers now climb vertical ice faces it is the absolute norm thing to do. There are things called pterodactyl which are hooked ice axes and they use crampons which have got front points on so they just kick them into a vertical face and they just 'Ding ding ding' and walk up but I mean that technique hadn't been invented, the equipment hadn't been invented in the '50s and er (...)

[Part 1 1:02:31] Lee: So every fix you were able to establish was hard won, was it?

Boston: Oh yeah, what you were always looking for were breaks in ice cliffs, this is why Cape Reclus was established because there was what was thought to be an easy route onto the plateau. It proved not to be easy in fact and it was only ever used once because the idea was to do a big trip from Hope Bay to Danco Coast which was in fact done, Wally Herbert and some of them did it but it took them it was something like, it was under 300 miles and it took them about 80 days, which is a phenomenal long time and the way was prepared by Foster and company who got up from Cape³ and found the route up so a lot of the work had been done for them and it still took them, so you know it was reckoned they were hoping for a regular route and it just proved to be impossible, well not impossible, too difficult.

[Part 1 1:03:36] Lee: So if you wanted to knock off a mountain top not far from Danco base hut who would do it and how long would it take you? Would you go - you wouldn't go solo, would you?

Boston: Oh no no. Well you'd take the surveyor with you for a start.

[Part 1 1:03:47] Lee: Who was the surveyor?

Boston: A lad called David Evans.

[Part 1 1:03:51] Lee: And was he an experienced climber?

Boston: Not really, [laughter] not really, but he was young, all the lads used to come with me, they all climbed I mean it weren't like you'd climb a day climb from here with a light sack you'd all the survey, a theodolite's heavy and later on we got a thing called a telurometer which required, which made the surveying easier but required car batteries to fire it up - imagine climbing a mountain with a couple of car batteries.

³ Cape Reclus.

[Part 1 1:04:23] Lee: Did you do that, did you?

Boston: Oh yes.

[Part 1 1:04:25] Lee: Several times?

Boston: Several times.

[Part 1 1:04:27] Lee: Were there any close calls in that climbing regime?

Boston: Not really, the climbing itself was straight, it was often hard work but it was straightforward enough.

[Part 1 1:03:37] Lee: But the weather would be very changeable?

Boston: Well this it was always about the weather. You'd plan to go to a peak which, you wanted as many points as possible a bit like the Ordnance Survey used to do with their trig points, you want to be able to see as many as possible from any point you visit and we were doing it precisely the same sort of thing, but you'd climb up there in good and get up there and the clag would come in and for a star fix you've got to have a clear sky. We were prepared to work through the night and what we'd usually do is go and camp on a peak, take camping gear up there and camp and wait but there's a limit to how long you can wait. So it was very, very frustrating.

[Part 1 1:05:26] Lee: So were you or were you not succeeding in getting the kind of fixes you needed to get?

Boston: The ones we got were good but there were a lot of gaps. I don't think they ever produced the quality of maps for the Antarctic peninsula that the - the odd ones I've seen have got an awful lot of gaps on them, but it meant that with modern conditions and helicopters I mean if you could helicopter up there, once or twice we got the *Protector* to fly their helicopters up to places for us and that was easy but in those days the helicopters the *Protector* flew had enormous limits placed on their use in the Antarctic - I don't think they were allowed to fly above 2,000 feet and this sort of thing but the peninsula is 7,000 foot high in places so it was only the very edges they were able to fly but when you could use them I mean you could do a month's work in a morning, it was terrific.

[Part 1 1:06:32] Lee: So the helicopter would take you up there and hover around waiting whilst you took . . .?

Boston: Well the skipper would say 'Are you going to be able to do it quick?' I mean if we had really good weather, say 'OK'. We'd prefer to do this job at night the actual surveying.

[Part 1 1:06:52] Lee: In the dark?

Boston: In the dark yeah, much easier, if you got a clear, so what'd you'd possibly do is get the chopper to fly you up there with your camping gear, set up a camp and say, you know, 'Come back tomorrow for us' or two days or whatever, but that wasn't the *Protector*'s main

job and I think they were always bending the rules to help us so it didn't happen that often, but it happened often enough to realise that that's where the future lay for surveying in the Antarctic and I guess that's how its all done now.

[Part 1 1:07:26] Lee: So would you know and the *Protector* know that these helicopters were breaking the rules? By flying too high?

Boston: Oh I'm not suggesting they ever flew too high, I'm suggesting they were operating right on the limit.

[Part 1 1:07:42] Lee: OK.

Boston: Yeah yeah, no I don't think we would have asked them to I mean hellfire it's a dangerous enough place the Antarctic without doing that, and these are needed for other things I mean the *Protector* only had 1 helicopter, it didn't have a fleet of them and if it got bust a lot of more important things could possibly have fallen by the wayside.

[Part 1 1:08:05] Lee: So all in all it was a frustrating time, was it, trying to survey?

Boston: Yeah. I think looking back after what, I'm looking back 50, getting on for 60 years, a lot of things in the Antarctic are frustrating, yeah, I think so. I think what outsiders don't appreciate is how unadventurous most of the time is. I suppose like a lot of people when I came back I'd got people you know - Round Tables and things invited you to come and give you lunch and give us a talk and I did a lot of talk to people about life in the Antarctic, and the thing I always used to stress was how probably more than 75% of your time on a base is taken up with just living, the ordinary things you know everything we take for granted here - you want a glass of water, you go to the tap, turn the tap on. In order to do that on a base somebody has probably got to spend about 8 hours a day humping bloody great lumps of ice to be melted down. You go to the lavatory there, there are no flushing lav oh there might be now I don't know but there certainly weren't then there was just a chemical lavatory and every day that had to be emptied somewhere and everything is difficult, takes a lot of time, and then you add to that fairly constant very bad weather. I think the thing that gets everybody you'll know as you've been what gets you down there is that damn wind, that constant howling of the wind and it becomes very depressing actually that. I don't know how many people have gone barmy down in the Antarctic it must be quite a few I suspect.

[Part 1 1:10:15] Lee: Did you get depressed?

Boston: Not in the modern terms of the word, no. As Base Leader I felt it was my job to cheer everybody up so I wasn't allowed to be depressed but I used to get the blues occasionally, yes of course I did. You devise little rules, don't you? I remember having a talk when we were coming out after then talking with John Paisley and George MacLeod and one or two others they'd all been Base Leaders, just us sitting having beer and comparing what we'd found difficult or easy being a Base Leader and they'd all done what I do of developing strategies to deal with various things but they'd all been different strategies, there was no common thread at all, but they'd all been equally effective.

[Part 1 1:11:12] Lee: What was your strategy?

Boston: As few rules as possible, but the rules that you have have got to be clearly understood and everybody agrees that they are good rules - only that way are they going to obey them, and some things were quite difficult to do I don't know whether it is still the same now. There was an awful lot of booze on British bases, technically it was rationed but it was a ration that I have never got anywhere near in my entire life [laughter] and some people, everybody had a different strategy for handling booze. The favourite thing was a Saturday night bash and then nobody has a drink for the rest of the week. I thought 'It's a bit daft that' because sometimes people need a drink because they're a bit pissed off to be honest so they can't wait till Saturday night so I said 'Anybody can have a drink anytime on the understanding that you mustn't drink on your own. If you go to the bar for a drink, you've got to offer to get anybody else who wants one, one.' So in other words there was going to be a little drinking party. That was that and the other second rule was that nobody ever gets really drunk unless it's a special occasion like Christmas Day or Midwinter's Day but otherwise drunkenness is out, and that worked very well for us. Most evenings someone would say 'I think I'll have a dram, anybody else want one?' and that would be it, or it might be someone's birthday or whatever and so 'Let's have a little party' so we'd have a little party and of course Christmas Day and Midwinter's Day and that worked fine for us. I don't ever remember anybody ever getting drunk on my base and certainly nobody ever, ever got nasty with drink. In fact I don't think ever anybody got nasty with anybody else.

[Part 1 1:13:17] Lee: Let's pause for a moment and reconvene shortly.

Boston: Yeah.

Part 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Duncan Boston, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 7th of June, 2012. Duncan Boston, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:10] Lee: Were you ever able, Duncan, to get any fixes without resorting to climbing mountains?

Boston: Oh yeah. When we realised the difficulty we started concentrating more on sea level ones using small boats so we were able to do the usual area all around Paradise Harbour and down Lemaire Channel and further north up to Cape Reclus and beyond and the work rate improved considerably once again when the weather let us.

[Part 2 0:00:42] Lee: And from Hunting's point of view fixes at sea level were just as valuable as...?

Boston: Oh yeah, oh yeah just a point on a map. These points allow them if you produce these photographs and lay them out as you think the aeroplane's flown they're long wavy lines and you need to straighten them up and so that's what you need the fixes for.

[Part 2 0:01:05] Lee: Did you find yourself doing much Base Leading, as such?

Boston: Not consciously except when you came to the - I mean the other curious part for a Base Leader again I'm not sure if this is true any more but you were the Base Leader, you were the postmaster, you were the harbourmaster...

[Part 2 0:01:28] Lee: Magistrate...

Boston: ...magistrate, diplomatic representative so you did have this big safe with all this diplomatic bumff in, diplomatic notes to be delivered to visiting Argentinian warships all this sort of which happened and of course everything that went out from the bases had to be coded on one-time pads which meant (...)

[Part 2 0:01:56] Lee: But that was a hangover from the war, was it?

Boston: I think so yeah, and they were very, I mean we get on about the Argentines invading the Malvinas now but though there were I think a much greater general sense of awareness of these claims by both the Argentine and Chile and of course we had an Argentinian base and Chilean base near us but it did lead to minor diplomatic incidents.

[Part 2 0:02:27] Lee: Such as?

Boston: Well we had one day an Argentinian warship came down the channel, came to a big halt after firing a couple of guns to tell us we were there [laughter] and then this very be-medalled and beribboned admiral came ashore with a lot of marines with guns and things and announced that we were trespassing on Argentinian State Land and we must move ourselves blah, blah, blah, but I'd already been primed about this. You went to the safe and took out the appropriate diplomatic note from Her Britannic Majesty and handed this over telling him he was also trespassing on British Crown Lands and he then threw his hat and said 'Well that's done, let's have a party!' [laughter] and there were little incidents like this but you know I think the diplomats and the politicians took all this very seriously but we didn't. I mean we loved visiting their base and they loved visiting ours, we were very good friends with the Argies and the Chiles they were good guys.

[Part 2 0:03:37] Lee: In the summer, you were there for 2 summers and 1 winter so in the summer when the numbers were up beyond 5 into double figures, did you ever find yourself having to adjudicate or arbitrate or make decisions, solve problems?

Boston: Not seriously I think not quite in the way you're implying, there were no problem between men but sometimes there were problems about the work programmes. You'd suddenly got a patch of good weather, everybody'd want to do their thing and I think as I intimated earlier there weren't enough people, specialists, so everybody had to do everybody

else's jobs at times so there might have been a bit of an argument about the timing of things but nothing serious, no, everybody was, I always got the feeling that everybody there was on their best behaviour. I mentioned earlier like you didn't know who was going to be on the base with you and when I got to the base apart from the people who were going out I just met some strangers and I really knew nothing about them and if I was really, really honest if I'd lined everybody up on the ships and said who I'd want to go to the base with I don't think any of the 5 people I wintered with I would have chosen, but I never had a cross word with any of them and I think they were in the same frame of mind - they knew we were there once that ship had gone nobody was going to come and move us so we had to survive, so we genuinely made a very adult decision to just get on with each other. This is about being a Base Leader - I got the idea that it would be good if everybody had a little hidey-hole I mean I had a little office and the surveyor had a survey office and the geologists had a geology office and the diesel mech had his diesel shed and the radio operator had his shack so we all had in our jobs our little private part we all agreed we wouldn't go in each other's private places unless invited.

[Part 2 0:05:57] Lee: Right so that worked, did it?

Boston: I think so yeah. Because we shared, all the living space was shared, we all slept in the same room but if somebody wanted to go and sleep in the diesel shed or whatever they could do and nobody would say anything about it and it is difficult particularly in the long dark nights you know but yeah, hard, but I think it made us all better people for it. As I say we never had a cross word but I've never, never ever followed up any of the people I wintered with.

[Part 2 0:06:33] Lee: Did you ever make a decision as Base Leader which you regretted?

Boston: Ah [pause] yeah going out on certain days when I wish I hadn't but that's not the same point.

[Part 2 0:06:49] Lee: Was that the trip to the main plateau you're thinking of? Boat trip?

Boston: No, no that was an adventure that had to be done.

[Part 2 0:07:00] Lee: Well tell me about that then.

Boston: Well the main one meeting up with the Hope Bay party had been the year before, not with me, but at one point I decided we had this Cape Reclus hut and I decided I would take the whole base up there before the winter came in so this would be the sort of autumn time still reasonable weather and it would, we would use that route to get access to some good survey points - that was the idea and of course Dick had told me all about this it was a man-hauling job so it's hard work but once you get up there you should be OK. So we took the decision and went, piled all the gear into the boat and sailed off up to Cape Reclus which about a day's on good weather about a day's trip, a good day's trip, and we got there and I was absolutely horrified when we got there everybody said it was small but put 5 blokes into it you couldn't really lie down, you had to stand up, it was tiny, absolutely tiny with no bed it

was just a shed like a garden shed, anyway we got there and immediately I planned this trip with 2 sledges, 5 of us man-hauling, and it's a very steep start. Anyway we got up the first bit and then it seemed to go OK, anyway to cut a long story short we got up we never got right onto the plateau because of this passage which Dick called 'The Gangway' or something on the initial trip but that was high enough for us, we were at about 5,000 feet then it gave us access in sort of quite easy journeys like an hour or two to a lot of good survey peaks, so we set up camp and we did the survey and that went quite well and then the bad weather came in so instead of being up there for about a week as I had planned we were actually up there for about 3 weeks [laughter] but then the weather cleared and we came back down but this bad weather had done something we certainly hadn't - it had brought the bloody sea ice and we found ourselves totally blocked in.

[Part 2 0:09:16] Lee: So you were at Cape Reclus with no...

Boston: Cape Reclus.

[Part 2 0:09:19] Lee: ...no sea passage back to...

Boston: No sea passage back and certainly not enough food in the normal sense to last the winter. So I decided 'Let's go seal hunting' [laughter] just in case, and I put out a radio message. I managed to, again you've got to remember how awful the radios were down there, the main radio set in the main base was OK but all we had was a field radio which were absolutely useless but I did manage to get in touch with I think it was Hope Bay and they passed messages on for me. So I told them what had happened and they got a message out to London, well to Falkland Islands then to London, so a big panic on and nobody could believe that the sea ice was in and they actually sent a Royal Naval ship again from Cape Town and it didn't get within 100 miles of us but just got total pack ice so no. They started making all sorts of plans to fly and do air drops to us and do all sorts of things and I must admit I was getting pretty worried, I thought 'Seven months in this hut with these guys living on seal blubber is not going a whole load of laughs' [laughter] I thought 'Yer s...' Anyway while pondering this I got up one morning and I thought 'It's quiet', because you know if the ice is there its very noisy and the ice had just gone.

[Part 2 0:10:55] Lee: It had all gone had it?

Boston: Just gone, just like that, it was just open water. I said 'Come on, get out of bed and get those boats in the water, throw all the gear in', and off we went and actually when we got round the corner the sea ice hadn't it was still around but it was all brash ice you know it had broken but these boats were pretty small 14, 16 foot dinghies they were with outboards and actually we holed one and that got a bit dicey, we're just thumping through and I realised the boat Dave Evans and meself in one boat, the other 3 in the other and I realised me feet were getting very wet and I looked down and the boat was half full of water and we dug down into the gear and there was a hole about that big in the boat, so we just headed, there were an island off right so we just headed for it and just ran the boat straight up on the beach which as it happened was a good thing because the weather came in bad, a blizzard blew in

from nowhere so the 5 of us were on this island for 3 or 4 days till it blew over during which time we did a rough patch on the boat on the hole and when the weather cleared we got back to the base so that was that, so that was our adventure at Cape Reclus [laughter]. We kept having all these near misses but they were all, I mean looking back they were great days but make you extremely apprehensive while they're happening.

[Part 2 0:12:36] Lee: Was there a lesson to be learnt there or was it more ...?

Boston: You can't trust the weather in the Antarctic it's as simple as that. You can't make long-term plans I mean this is true of all mountains but when the mountains are stuck in the Roaring Forties it just is very, very difficult.

[Part 2 0:12:57] Lee: So the omission was to take more supplies, more food, was it?

Boston: To where?

[Part 2 0:13:07] Lee: On that particular trip.

Boston: Oh no no we just wanted to get some more surveying done, as far as I was concerned Cape Reclus was a useless place.

[Part 2 0:13:13] Lee: If the wind hadn't changed and the ice had not gone out you would have been short of food.

Boston: Oh but we couldn't have carried any more food in these small boats.

[Part 2 0:13:21] Lee: So there was nothing you could do?

Boston: What I supposed if you learned a lesson if you want to do a trip like that you've got to preplan it and stockpile. We could have done 3 or 4 trips before and take nothing but food up to Cape Reclus and really stockpile but by which time the problem the season would have been over an' no I don't think we did anything wrong.

[Part 2 0:13:43] Lee: It would also have been a pessimistic thing to do, wouldn't it?

Boston: Yeah, yeah, I don't really think we, I think what went wrong when we did a lot of work on that trip, in 5 days we got so much work done because we were on the spot so we were just surveying for 5 days and it showed you what could be done if you could get to places quickly but it wasn't to be and as I say nowadays they just use a helicopter to do all this.

[Part 2 0:14:10] Lee: So did you then feel bad about having put your men at risk as Base Leader even though it wasn't necessarily your fault

Boston: No no I didn't feel bad about that. I don't think we did anything wrong. We came out of it alright, I think we were lucky but I think we would have survived the winter - probably all been stark raving bonkers when they came to take us out [laughter]. I always

remember a picture of those Shackleton's guys at Elephant Isle all covered in grease from the sealskin but I am sure we would have survived yeah.

[Part 2 0:14:49] Lee: You were around in the Antarctic at the time of the first influx of tourist ships weren't you?

Boston: We saw the very first tourist ship through.

[Part 2 0:15:00] Lee: The *Navaro* [phonetic]?

Boston: I can't remember if it was, what its name was I forget it might have been a Russian ship but they were all Americans on board and it was an American cruise firm [incomprehensible] they kept this very, very quiet it wasn't well advertised at all [whispers] just like that really and one of lads one day said 'There's a ship, there's a ship!' and we always knew if there was a ship about because you got lots of forewarning if any I mean the only ships around were the Royal Naval ships, whalers or the FIDS ships and somebody said 'It's not a ship, John', and sure enough right it was quite a big ship coming down the channel just couldn't believe it and it was this damn tourist ship came and anchored off Danco Island and all these fat American ladies came ashore. Of course we had a great time playing explorers.

[Part 2 0:16:03] Lee: What did you do? What was it like?

Boston: Aw we just played it up like anything, we put all our expedition gear on and went out and told them wonderful stories and they all took our photographs and they gave us big meals and gave us lots to drink and told them all sorts of stories. We were just playing, we were young lads and we hadn't seen any women for there were no young women there unfortunately [laughter] we just played it for all it was worth, anybody else would do the same. Then they went off.

[Part 2 0:16:35] Lee: You didn't mind having your isolation broken into?

Boston: No no it was just an amusing in[cident]we were all amazed at the rashness and stupidity of I mean taking a perfectly, they do it all the time now I mean there is a big disaster there waiting to happen I think.

[Part 2 0:16:58] Lee: As you saw the ship sailing away did it occur to you this might be the future? That tourism was going to take off?

Boston: Oh I mean yeah once you've got one they're all going to come following after aren't they? Which is what's happened about the same in the first when Branson takes his first ship to the moon. No, no it's just the way things are really.

[Part 2 0:17:23] Lee: You say you didn't have depression in the modern sense of the word but one gets the impression that if you are on a base all winter, in the dark, just 5 of you that details become magnified.

Boston: Oh yeah.

[Part 2 0:17:38] Lee: And did you ever have that kind of...?

Boston: Well again I devised a strategy, well I devised it but we all agreed it, I decided I'd devise the Moan Session.

[Part 2 0:17:51] Lee: The Moan Session?

Boston: The Moan Session. I said to them, we were sitting having a drink and I said 'You know probably if we lived anywhere else we probably wouldn't be sitting here together on a Saturday night like this' and they all agreed this. We were very disparate people, didn't really have anything in common apart from our ages and being in the Antarctic and I said 'You know there must be times when we do things that are annoying other people and we do our best not to say anything about it but it still annoys us inside.' I said 'Why don't we try a session say a certain time once a week say on a Monday night when anybody can stand up and say anything they want about anybody else and we'll all agree that we will listen and not respond to it and go away and try and forget it.' And they all thought about this for a long time as I did and I thought 'Have I opened a box here I'll wish I hadn't?' Anyway we tried it and it worked.

[Part 2 0:19:03] Lee: Tell me about some of the moans then. What do you recall?

Boston: Oh well John Hobbs [G.J.Hobbs] the geologist he smoked a pipe, a Peterson pipe. We all smoked in those everybody smoked like chimneys on the base but he smoked a and he used to sit in bed every night and read and he used to get his pipe and he used to - I don't know if you've noticed with pipe smokers they sort of make popping noises 'Pop, pop, pop,' and this used to drive me up the wall but apparently I used to do something that irritated him exactly the same. I used to go to bed it all seemed when we went to bed because we were all in the same room and we all used to read in bed and I always used to have a bar of milk chocolate every night sitting there chomping milk chocolate and this used to annoy. We didn't say this at the same time but at different times but we all had a little and we just came out with it and thought 'Oh I must try not to do that again.'

[Part 2 0:20:12] Lee: So you did try to modify behaviour?

Boston: Oh yeah we did oh yeah. Hobbs and I would just think that people said what they said what was it? Two of these lads were Welshmen you know, Hobbs was a Welshman and David Jones [E.B. Jones] the wireless operator was a Welshman and they both came from the same valley in South Wales and this was something that used to annoy the rest they used to, they had a little clique of two talking about life in the valleys [laughter] and that didn't go down too well with the rest of us but then the surveyor, Pete Evans [D.G. Evans], he was another Yorkshireman he was from Sheffield so we had 2 Yorkshiremen then but we never had any serious row we didn't even have any non-serious rows. We learned to sit on things, I mean you used to hear terrible stories occasionally about British bases but mostly about American bases and Russian people murdering each other, having huge fights and things and

I used to think 'I can imagine that happening but why doesn't it happen with the Brits?' That was one of the things when I was telling you we had this coming out from them about Base Leaders talking together I said 'Come on, how many of you have had really serious rows?' and they said 'No', occasionally people would sulk and that sort of thing [laughter].

[Part 2 0:21:50] Lee: How about the winter? How did you pass the time in the winter?

Boston: We kept very busy. Hard to imagine stuck in a little hut in bad weather on a base but there were just so many things that have to be done. If you've been down just living is, I mean on our base we had no specialist like we had no doctor, we had no cooks or anything like that, we all had to learn to cook and the way we did it, again every base did this differently, but we decided to do one person would be on cook for a week and he would not have to do anything else but he was expected to get the recipe books out and learn to cook properly and I must admit we did eat extraordinarily well, but the cook didn't even have to wash up, all he did was cook and we quite enjoyed being cook because it was actually quite restful but there was a routine to it so it was a very busy job and then all the other jobs were shared out and then you were always planning trips and getting gear ready and checking sledges, checking boats, checking engines and all this just a phenomenal amount of work. That doesn't mean to say that people couldn't sit and be quiet if they wanted. I mean my view was 'You can sit and do nothing if that's what you actually want to do but I don't want to see anybody sitting doing nothing because they haven't got anything to do', and there's a big difference between the two isn't there and that seemed to work for us.

[Part 2 0:23:30] Lee: And how about entertainment I mean the library was fairly modest wasn't it because it hadn't been there very long?

Boston: We had a surprising number of books I was amazed at how many there were when I got there and authors I'd never heard of but you started at one end of the bookshelf and worked your way through. Nowadays everybody would have music with them but because the only music they had was a windup radio a windup record player with plastic discs which were played over and over and over again [laughter] some of which music I never wish to hear again. I never want to hear *Eine Kleine Klach Musique* (sic) [laughter] again. We tried to educate ourselves I said the radios were very poor the field radios were dreadful.

[Part 2 0:24:20] Lee: Could you get the BBC at all on that?

Boston: You could on the main radio and Dave would tape if we wanted to listen to things on World Service he would tape them onto a tape player...

[Part 2 0:23:33] Lee: Reel to reel?

Boston: ...and we would play those. People had little hobbies but we never seemed to have time, I mean I got quite interested in carving ivory you know the whales' teeth which you could get hold of, any whaler came down you were scads because they always had sacks full and I was going to carve myself a chess set out of it, I think I made about 1 pawn [laughter] I think I still have the rest of the whales' teeth somewhere.

[Part 2 0:25:04] Lee: Midwinter's Day did you do the traditional gift making or was that almost impossible to do it in secret?

Boston: To do what, sorry?

[Part 2 0:25:12] Lee: The gift making or is that perhaps that's later?

Boston: Not even heard of that. No-one ever gave gifts [laughter].

[Part 2 0:25:18] Lee: The tradition these days is on Midwinter's Day you each make a gift for somebody else on the base, done by lottery so you know who you have to make a gift for.

Boston: Ah do you know I've never heard of that and we certainly didn't.

[Part 2 0:25:30] Lee: It was too early. One thing I forgot to ask you about was tidal records. You were keeping records of the tide?

Boston: OK tide we had a tide machine yeah.

[Part 2 0:25:38] Lee: Were there ever any surprises?

Boston: [pause] The only surprise about the seawater was, was how constant it was winter and summer it hardly varied at all but the actual heights of the tides and things followed a fairly normal pattern. They weren't particularly big tides there but you could get big surge if there was a big storm out beyond the islands it would come surging up all those channels, Lemaire Channel and places and that could affect ???[inaudible]. It was just one of those routine things like the met, the screen had to be read 6 times a day, the tide had to be read 4 times a day, that was that and then it was just put in a radio message and off it went to London.

[Part 2 0:26:25] Lee: So how was Midwinter's Day? Did you celebrate particularly?

Boston: Only in the sense that here's an excuse to celebrate so we had a bit of a party and a bit like you do at Christmas, you knew the days are going to get longer now. You look forward to of course we weren't that far south and we never lost daylight totally. But you did look forward to seeing the sun properly there you counted the days up to that.

[Part 2 0:27:04] Lee: How did you feel when departure became imminent and you were having to start thinking about going home again?

Boston: Well it didn't happen that way for me because the idea, I mean I was on contract for 2½ years not 1½ and they must have looked me over and decided I was doing alright because they asked me they said, well I always knew I was going to Stonington because they were going to reopen Stonington and they mainly said 'Was I prepared to go down there for the second year?', and...

[Part 2 0:27:34] Lee: As Base Leader?

Boston: ...and I was going to go as Base Leader, yeah, and I was really looking forward to that because it was going to be very, very different, I mean I'd never been down there but I'd heard lots of stories from people who had and I had realised it was going to be very different, I wasn't going to be hemmed in by these big mountains and we were going to get proper sea ice, there were going to be dogs, it was going to be totally different experience and a bigger base of course. So I were really excited about that and of course we had to close Danco that was decided I think everybody had come to the same conclusion that I had or they had probably come to it a long time before that, this place was of no use actually to the Survey and we closed it down so it was just totally closed down, all the valuable stuff taken out but enough left for it to act as a mariners' refuge, which was a nice thing to do and we left little messages in there for people to find and that sort of thing.

[Part 2 0:28:37] Boston: And then we all piled on the *Biscoe* and set off south but then we ran into an immense pack ice and we never got, I think the nearest we got to Stonington was about 120 miles away, and then despite Johnston's sea knowledge, ice knowledge, promptly got jam packed stuck totally and completely and he realised he wouldn't be able to get the damn thing out on his own so the SOS went out to the Americans. The Americans as usual were always helping us and they promptly sent a full ice-breaker round from McMurdo, right round the Antarctic so that eventually arrived. Big cheers and the Yanks of course laughing at the silly buggers getting themselves stuck. This was not American Navy, American Coastguard which seems a bit curious but all their ice-breakers in the Antarctic are Coastguard but they are proper ice-breakers. This one's called the *South Wind* just a great floating powerhouse and promptly got stuck alongside us [laughter] and it really couldn't get out and they tried to send for another so eventually there were 2 ice-breakers the *South Wind* and the *North Wind* and eventually it was Captain Johnston who got the 3 of us out, it was his knowledge of how to work ice plus their power but showing them where to use their power that got all 3...

[Part 2 0:30:13] Lee: So British brains and American brute?

Boston: Yep, but it was those things are just brute strength but this was seriously thick pack ice like about 10 foot thick [laughter].

[Part 2 0:30:22] Lee: Can you explain what Johnston did then to . . .what was his approach to the problem?

Boston: He had a good, he knew how to work the weather, what the weather would do to the ice...

[Part 2 0:30:33] Lee: Right.

Boston: ...and so he would say 'The weather forecast is for easterly winds, you start working out towards the west of it, its gonna break first there', and of course they had about 4 or 6 helicopters and they had those up constantly looking for ice leads and in all honesty that was probably the most valuable I mean they could be up 6,000 feet and they could see for

200 miles you know but it's a good job because it wasn't that we were just working our way to a lead to get out it took a long time to get those ships out, it was seriously being considered all 3 of us were there for the winter because winter was coming on.

[Part 2 0:31:18] Lee: So how did that feel, was that depressing?

Boston: By that time I had resigned myself to the fact that I wasn't going to get into Stonington and I was going home which that was a bit depressing but then you start getting elated because you know when you've been away that length it is nice to go home. I'd sledged into Stonington with a dog team to look the base over, so near and yet but we just didn't have the logistics to move everything in over the ice it was just too big a job.

[Part 2 0:31:53] Lee: So you got to Stonington in advance to do a recce so to speak and how was Stonington because it hadn't been used for a couple of...?

Boston: It hadn't been used for 2 years it was in good nick, yeah, it had been well looked out the people who'd left it had done it properly. There'd a bit of ice on the floor you get condensation you get ice on the floor it's nothing but you could have moved straight into it, lit the, got the Aga going it would have been OK yeah I didn't have any problems about that.

[Part 2 0:32:25] Lee: It's interesting isn't it because you were there for 2 years and then kind of put it in your memory banks and severed connections with BAS after that.

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:32:34] Lee: But in recent bad times you have actually made contact with some other Fids?

Boston: Well the Fids I made contact, oh no that, I mean the one alluded to that is pure chance in that some people I go climbing with, who are all local people from the Lancaster/north Lancashire area, someone introduced this young woman into this, well when I say young she was in her 50s, very nice lady and climber, been out climbing once or twice with her and one day I don't know I'd never met her husband at this point, her husband was still working then he had a job as a sort of warden for Natural England (sic) on the Silverdale site and she mentioned him and I said 'Is that what he . . .?' and she said 'Oh no he was in the Antarctic at one time.' I said 'Oh!' I said 'I was in the Antarctic' [laughter] and the next thing she's introducing me to her husband but...

[Part 2 0:33:31] Lee: How did it feel though to meet somebody who had a more recent trip?

Boston: Oh it was really interesting yeah as I say but it was when we got talking I mean he was talking about these trips he did on these skidoos, being flown into places to take a measurement and flown back out again but he'd never wintered there. He'd been down there twice but he'd never wintered there. It seemed very few people seem to winter there any more.

[Part 2 0:33:55] Lee: Mm, there are about 35 people wintering in the Antarctic, Brits in recent winters.

Boston: And is that just because of the logistics? More or less everybody wintered I mean that was actually a big bone of contention. Up until 1940, '57, the year that I went down there it was traditional that anybody who wintered in the Antarctic got a Polar Medal, they were just dished out like candy, winter you get but suddenly if you wintered you weren't going to get a Polar Medal but only Base Leaders would get a Polar Medal everybody else said 'Bollocks to that, its not on at all' [laughter] and so the Brits said 'Alright we won't give anybody one' and there it rested and you know very few Polar Medals have been dished out you know they've been given out to these professional explorers now which rather hits the idea certainly devalues Polar Medals I think but there we are, sour grapes.

[Part 2 0:35:00] Lee: But did you feel any kind of kindredship with this modern day Fid?

Boston: Oh yeah they'd been to the Antarctic's the Antarctic they'd been down there. It's the way I feel about modern climbers I mean I'm an old fashioned climber and its 60 odd years ago I climbed with people though I'd only been climbing 5 or 6 years and they'd got all this and they're light years ahead of me in ability [laughter] the difference but they're still climbers and you'd still be friend with them, talk to them but when I'm sitting down in the café with some of the lads I climb with now the younger ones I haven't a clue what they're talking about [laughter].

[Part 2 0:35:45] Lee: You came back to Britain, you resumed your teaching career.

Boston: Well I started I, hadn't taught.

[Part 2 0:35:51] Lee: You started your teaching career you wound up as a Head Teacher. Did you ever use anything you gleaned from the Antarctic in your subsequent life?

Boston: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:36:03] Lee: Particularly as a headmaster.

Boston: I said we used small boats a lot, I got very interested in boats and navigating on water and learnt quite a lot down there and that was an interest I carried on until 2 years ago, became quite a keen sailor, sailed a lot, me Yachtmaster and all sorts of things, yeah, so that's one thing I learnt down there. Surveying techniques I've used occasionally in other walks of life, but when I became a teacher I just got very interested in, I was a ladder climber, I got very ambitious about teaching. I mean within 7 years of starting teaching I got my first headship so that's led [talkover] of the 40.

[Part 2 0:36:53] Lee: Senior?

Boston: Well I'd moved into, it's very curious my history. I almost went into teaching reluctantly secondhand and I thought what I wanted to do was teach clever kids Geography and English. My first job was in a grammar school and after one year I thought, 'I'm going

to be doing this same curriculum for the rest of my life.' And it's quite nice teaching bright kids because it's easy so long as you've done your homework it is incredibly easy [laughter] and grammar schools are very civilised places to work. I thought 'No, no', so I went to a comprehensive school, I came up here to the Lake District and I worked in the first comprehensive school in West Cumberland as it was then, now Cumbria, and that was an eye-opener but not unpleasant, you know, but I first discovered handicapped children there. I realised there were all these kids wandering around, nobody seemed to do anything, they just wandered around the place so asked the headmaster what basically 'Who are all these children wandering round, they keep coming and peering through my classroom door windows?' 'Oh,' he says, 'don't worry about those, don't worry.' I said 'Well actually I do worry about them.' I said 'Who are they?' He said 'Oh' he said 'they're all the less able children who don't fit in with anybody else,' he said 'but they're no trouble at all, they're quite happy just to wander round.' I said 'Well, that doesn't seem right.' He said 'Nevertheless that's the way it is.' I said 'Well do you mind if I let them come into my room?' He said 'No. Why?' I said 'Well I'm just not happy about them wandering around here, somebody should be looking after them.' So I got these kids in, and this was the most surprising thing that ever happened in my life, I asked, I gave them all a sheet of paper and I said 'While I'm just finishing this lesson, just write me a little story about yourself, where you were born, how old you are and what you're doing.' And they all looked at me blankly. None of them could read or write, and it had never occurred to me that children could get to 12 or 13 and not be able to read and write [laughter] – something I quickly put right actually. I just got interested in these children and started doing some reading and going on a few courses and the next thing I'm running a special needs group, and then I did a deal with an authority, let me go back to university and do a specialist degree and then I did my Master's. This is why I got the headship so quickly because I'd done my home work but I did and it became an incredibly rewarding life. I mean A) I liked being a headmaster and I also liked organising things for handicapped kids and I think I were quite good at it too.

[Part 2 0:39:57] Lee: Again looking back on it do you think you ever use any of the man management, people personal/personnel skills lessons you learned in the Antarctic in your headship?

Boston: Oh in being a headmaster oh yeah a bit like being a Base Leader [laughter].

[Part 2 0:40:13] Lee: Well that was my question really.

Boston: People are people aren't they, yeah, and I think you meet the awkward squad wherever you are and managing the awkward squad is what it's always about, getting them onside and in the Antarctic that's what you were doing all the time.

[Part 2 0:40:34] Lee: Were you sad to leave the Antarctic when the ship did get out?

Boston: Of course. Very mixed I mean by that time I knew I was going home and I wanted to see me mum and dad and it was pretty mixed feelings.

[Part 2 0:40:48] Lee: Have you ever wanted to go back?

Boston: Yes.

[Part 2 0:40:51] Lee: But you haven't done that?

Boston: I often thought about it, I even thought about getting the money together and going on a tourist ship and I thought 'No I'm not going to do that' - that idea lasted about 3 seconds but when Amanda got in touch with me about this thing, I thought 'There ought to be a *quid pro quo* here', so I actually wrote to British Antarctic Survey the big chief, who is he Vice Admiral Somebody or Other, and said 'Doing all this and I must be one of the if not the oldest eldest people who was down there still alive'.

[Part 2 0:41:33] Lee: Ah no there are chaps in their 90s I'm sorry.

Boston: OK yeah, and I said 'It'd be rather nice to have a quick trip out', I said, 'I understand that people have flown down there now so there's not a lot of time involved any chance of a flight down?' [laughter] and I had the most adamant, definite refusal I've ever had in my life - health and safety. Now you've already told me that some people have been back so it's not true that is it?

[Part 2 0:41:59] Lee: Erm, people who go back don't go back with BAS, well let's just talk about that in a minute off mic my . . . no people that go back don't go back with BAS they go back with different organisations. But not they don't always come back cheerfully, it's a mixed experience I think for most people.

Boston: Oh yep.

[Part 2 0:42:17] Lee: I suspect it might be for you too.

Boston: Possibly.

[Part 2 0:42:19] Lee: Yeah.

Boston: I'd just like to sail down the Lemaire Channel again.

[Part 2 0:42:23] Lee: Well that's still possible.

Boston: Into Paradise Harbour...

[Part 2 0:42:25] Lee: So let's just...

Boston: ...which is where all the tourist ships go.

[Part 2 0:42:28] Lee: Looking at your life, final question, looking at your life overall how important were those 18-20 months in the Antarctic?

Boston: Oh crucial, absolutely.

[Part 2 0:42:39] Lee: For the memories or the way it changed you?

Boston: Both, most important for the way it changed me. I came back a very different person that went down.

[Part 2 0:42:50] Lee: What was the significance?

Boston: I grew up [laughter]. I grew up in my world. I used to like to think I was quite worldly wise because I'd been a climber, I'd been to the Alps a few times but I actually lived a pretty narrow life. I went to work and at the weekends I went climbing and that really was about it. I still do, I still liked me work until I retired, and I still go climbing but I do, I'm interested in a lot of other things and I've enjoyed particularly I enjoyed getting married and I enjoyed watching my daughter grow up - this would be the absolutely crucial thing but in doing that you learn to have family holidays and things of that sort which as a young man I wouldn't even have thought about and no doubt I would have come to it but I can just enjoy new experiences now quite happily, I don't have to go climbing much as I love it [laughter].

[Part 2 0:43:54] Lee: It's been great fun, Duncan, but we must stop. Thank you so much...

Boston: My pleasure.

[Part 2 0:43:58] Lee: ...for your memories.

Possible extracts:

- *Shackleton* tied up next to *Queen Elizabeth*. [Part 1 0:20:15]
- Fids working the *Shackleton* due to crew sickness. [Part 1 0:24:49]
- *Shackleton* holed in the ice. [Part 1 0:35:57]
- Emergency repairs to *Shackleton*. [Part 1 0:39:16]
- *Protector* to the rescue. [Part 1 0:40:53]
- A frightening experience. [Part 1 0:43:19]
- Danco Island, Base 'O'. [Part 1 0:53:26]
- Daily life at Danco Island. [Part 1 1:08:05]
- 'Diplomatic incident'. [Part 2 0:02:27]

- Co-existing on a small base. [Part 2 0:03:37]
- Trip to the Plateau – fears of being stranded. [Part 2 0:06:49]
- First tourist ship. [Part 2 0:14:49]
- The ‘Moan Session’. [Part 2 0:17:51]
- Passing the winter. [Part 2 0:21:50]
- Re-opening of Stonington frustrated by ice conditions – Americans to the rescue. [Part 2 0:28:37]
- Comparing notes with a more recent Fid. [Part 2 0:33:31]
- Back home and a teaching career. [Part 2 0:36:53]
- Personal impact of the Antarctic experience. [Part 2 0:42:39]