

DUDLEY JEHAN

Edited transcript of a recording of Dudley Jehan interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 7th July 2012. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 18th December 2012.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Dudley Jehan interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 7th of July 2012.

Jehan: My name is Dudley Jehan. I was born in the island of Guernsey, Channel Islands, in 1938, 23rd of November, making me a Sagittarian.

[0:00:20] Lee: And you are now how old?

Jehan: I am now in my 74th year.

[0:00:24] Lee: OK. So Jehan is a Guernsey name?

Jehan: It is a French (Norman French) name; claim to fame: there is a knight, Jéhan, in St Malo, and there is a Saint Jéhan who is the saint of fishermen in some obscure cathedral whose name escapes me. And in Caen, the Abbaye aux Hommes, which is a very famous Catholic cathedral, Dom Jéhan in 1604 renovated it. Painter and decorator I guess. He did a bit of a job. So, steeped in French, really, although I have been told by a very learned lady that we probably came from the Mongols. I did visit China and look over the top into Mongolia and I thought 'Yes, that's where I came from. I rode with the hordes, pillaging and raping, across Europe, finished up at Guernsey. What a charming place to finish up.'

[0:01:32] Lee: It is interesting that there is a Jerseyman here this weekend. I will introduce you later on.

Jehan: Now you do know the relationship between the two ...?

[0:01:39] Lee: I do. I shall expect fisticuffs.

Jehan: That has spoiled the whole weekend for me.

[0:01:43] Lee: OK. Well he lives in Australia now.

Jehan: Oh, that's OK then.

[0:01:45] Lee: What was your education like on Guernsey?

Jehan: Very good. Did I take advantage of it is a good question? We still have an 11+ system and grammar schools. Can you believe it? I was fortunate enough to win a scholarship to Elizabeth College which was a public school on the island, which dates back to Elizabeth I. Very well known. It is not in the top 50 but it is a very well known and respected place and that was my education, which like so many young men, I wasted. I did my O-levels but left before A-levels and there were peers of mine going on to passing scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge and all the rest. I had no feel for that at all.

[0:02:39] Lee: So you took a job instead, did you?

Jehan: I took a job.

[0:02:42] Lee: In what?

Jehan: Well the first job I applied for ... On Guernsey in those days, you did not apply for jobs in the press. Your father who would know lots of people said 'What would you like to do, Son?' I said 'I am not really sure.' He said 'I have got a friend who is a lawyer. I will take you along.' So we went to this legal practice and I can recall sitting in a waiting room with my father, for the interview, and it was dark with a little window and there was a clock on the wall, a pendulum clock. After about 20 minutes I said 'Dad, I am sorry, I can't do this.' which embarrassed him a bit, so he apologised to his friend the lawyer and that was it. I joined the Met Office in Guernsey and that was wonderful. That suited me. I had a bit of a scientific background, joined the Met Office, went to London to train, worked at the old Heathrow airport for some years and back to Guernsey. Lo and behold, one day reading the *Weather* magazine, the monthly, and there was there was a Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey job application.

[0:03:51] Lee: What did you know about Antarctica at that point in your life? Had you read about it?

Jehan: Yes.

[0:03:56] Lee: What?

Jehan: This sounds a little contrived but believe me, it's not. My Mum, who was born in 1906, went to school until the age of 13 which was usual in those times, left school and went into service. But she loved history and studied history and she won a school prize and it was the book of Scott's first polar expedition. That was in my home all my life and I used to read that assiduously. We had a number of encyclopaedias as well, but Scott and the Antarctic; I read it, I read it, I loved it. Then of course as a young man growing up, I thought nothing more about it until this came up. I thought 'Well, Antarctica.' That seemed a bit of a step too far, Dudley I think. 'I will give it a go.' There we are.

[0:04:56] Lee: What was the interview like?

Jehan: It was pretty uncomfortable because it was quite plain that I did not have the necessary educational qualifications. I applied for a job as a meteorologist. They were not particularly looking for trained meteorologists; they wanted scientists, guys with science degrees, maths degrees, geography whatever. So of course Dudley goes along with his O-levels and I later learned through Bill Sloman, who was the HR Director (I guess) who interviewed me ... Later in my career I reached a fairly prominent position in BAS you might say, and I got to know Bill quite well and he spoke to me off the record and said 'You know Sir Vivian said "We can't take the guy. He has got an interesting background but we can't take this guy. He hasn't got the necessary qualifications,"' By all accounts, Bill Sloman and it could have been Eric Salmon I

think, anyway two of them stood up for me. I had two interviews – I might have even had more – and I really did not think that I would be accepted, but I was. I had a very frosty relationship with Sir Vivian at first but then time went on and five years later I was base commander at Halley and he was very different towards me after that. I got to know him very well through Maurice Sumner and in his later years, Maurice and I used to go to his flat behind Harrods, when he lived there with Eleanor. We would go to the BAS reunions in London and we would go and collect him, Maurice and I. It was great because I got to know him. He would treat me as an equal. But I do recall at the beginning that there was the feeling that I shouldn't be here. I ain't good enough. But I showed these guys.

[0:06:54] Lee: Do you think that was counter-psychology from Fuchs, that if he gave you a rough time, you might ...

Jehan: No because he didn't expose.... This came from Bill Sloman. If Bill hadn't told me, I would never have known, although it didn't surprise me at all. One of those things, really.

[0:07:13] Lee: What did you make of Fuchs generally?

Jehan: An academic. I would be very interested to talk to people who have been on an expedition with him. I have no first hand knowledge but he doesn't strike me as the sort of hands-on guy. You might say 'No reason that he should be' but when I think of some of the characters, and talking with a colleague over a glass of wine last night, there were some very bright academics as we know, and I think it is probably fair to say that Halley has a concentration of scientific brain, but there are always half a dozen guys who made the whole thing work and kept it going, and put the legs back on the table when they fell off and kept the generators running. Maybe because I am that sort of person, I tend to focus on that; that was my real satisfaction out of my involvement.

[0:08:15] Lee: As a professional meteorologist, was being a met man at Argentine Islands in 1960 a bit of a doddle then?

Jehan: Yes. I made a mistake a few weeks ago where a gentleman, Allan,¹ who has organised this interview for me (we have spoken on the phone a number of times). In conversation I said 'Base F: holiday camp! Very pretty but nothing happens.' 'Thank you very much' he said 'I spent two years there.' [laughs]

[0:08:46] Lee: He was the holiday camp cook.

Jehan: Yes he was indeed. And there is no doubt it is the most beautiful bit of Antarctica I have ever seen but after a year it didn't pall exactly but I wanted to do something different. I was serving with Maurice Sumner who was a very well-known character in BAS. He and I were met men and we made the decision together: 'Let's get out of here' and there was an offer to go to Halley. All the research that we were able to do, the conversations, everyone talked about Halley as being the 'end of the Earth'. It was underground. They referred to people at Halley as 'troglodytes'. 120

¹ Allan Wearden

days without sun, low temperatures. What a place to be! Imagine, you could be in Argentine Islands, looking at those magnificent mountains, but ‘Yes, let’s have a go at that.’

[0:09:47] Lee: Better or worse?

Jehan: That was the experience of my life, because of the challenges. There wasn’t a day when there wasn’t a challenge, and in preparation for this interview, because frankly my concern about this interview has been my memory is failing a bit. Some people recall easily; I don’t necessarily. So I read all the base journals I could. Base F holiday camp, my life consisted of Met, eating, doing a bit of skiing, going for the odd trip with the dogs for a mile or two and back to base. Always comments about the weather wasn’t good enough to ski or to go and sunbathe or whatever. Literally that, you know. Then I read the base journals of Halley and the contrast was just phenomenal. There wasn’t a day without there wasn’t something happening of some consequence. A lot of it was ‘the gennies have stopped working again’ and I got very involved with the diesel mech, supporting and helping him, because I was a bit of a mechanic. But there was always something going on.

[0:10:56] Lee: But was that because there were more people?

Jehan: No. At Base F there were 12. So there were three times as many on Halley. No it was the nature of the place. It took so much more maintenance to maintain. I was mentioning to a colleague last night that in the three winters at Halley, in the second and third years we built a new base hut with living accommodation on the surface and I never ever lived in that. I chose to live in the old one which was 50 foot below the ground. As base leader, I could choose to do what I wanted (within reason) and I had a room which was twice the size of this hotel room we are in, under this roof that every month another rafter or another joist would crack and break and the ice was pushing the thing down. Sorry, how did I get there? Why was it so busy? One, you had this massive scientific programme. Then of course the field programme which in a way Alan ‘Dad’ Etchells and I started because we were delivered these two wonderful new tractors, Canadian things, and told ‘Go off onto the polar plateau and establish a base in the mountains, so that lots of surveyors and geologists and clever people can follow you.’ So off Dad and I set.

[0:12:26] Lee: You were a meteorologist and you are now suddenly becoming a tractor maintenance expert?

Jehan: The one thing you realise when you join FIDS (well I did) was that being a meteorologist was the means of getting the job but you realise straight away ‘I don’t want to do that all the time. Anyone can do that.’ I wanted to drive dogs. I wanted to drive tractors, climb mountains, do whatever. Therefore as quickly as I could I moved out into what’s called a GA I think, as you may be aware. General Assistant, and on my second tour I recall that I was called to Millbank and I was interviewed because I applied for a job as a tractor mechanic. And this guy, who was an engineer I guess, interviewed me. ‘I have never learned a trade. I have tinkered with cars. I have repaired cars and whatever.’ For some reason I got through it and the next thing I knew, I was called a Tractor Driver. Mechanic, which was great.

[0:13:28] Lee: And Base Leader?

Jehan: Ah that was the fourth year. So the third year I went down as Tractor Driver. I led a little expedition to the Tottan Mountains. That was when I first met Dad (Dad Etchells).

[0:13:45] Lee: Then you came home for a while.

Jehan: No, when I met Dad I spent two years with him. I had been at home before. Base F (Argentine Islands), back home for a summer in Guernsey (wow how about that), then down to Halley Bay for two years and Dad Etchells was...; we worked together all that time. The base leader prior to me was Maurice Sumner and Maurice appointed me.

[0:14:10] Lee: So just so I have got this absolutely right. You were not in Halley Bay in '61 then?

Jehan: Yes. 1960 Base F, transferred to Halley '61. Came home. Went back '63/ '64.

[0:14:24] Lee: OK thank you for that. So at what point did you pick up this nickname 'Cuddles'?

Jehan: Right from the beginning. What is this 'Cuddly Dudley'? A character, I don't know whether it was a film character or whatever² but people invariably, even today occasionally, someone will say, will use that term Cuddly Dudley.

[0:14:50] Lee: Dudley Moore got nicknamed that, didn't he, the musician?

Jehan: Yes. But then of course I was named Cuddly Dudley long before that. May I just mention a claim to fame?

[0:14:59] Lee: Yes please.

Jehan: It is interesting how many times in the short while we have been talking, we have mentioned Alan Etchells, 'Dad' who I worked with. I named him that. We were working together in the tractor shed or whatever and I realised he is 11 years older than me. I was 26 at the time, so it is a big difference, isn't it? He was half again as old as me, and of course I started teasing him 'You are old enough to be my Dad.' It cottoned on and that is how he became known as Dad.

[0:15:31] Lee: Right, and what do you make of him otherwise?

Jehan: Gor, what do I make of Dad Etchells? One of the strongest characters I have ever met, a remarkable character.

[0:15:47] Lee: In adversity?

² According to Wikipedia, Cuddly Dudley was Dudley Heslop, an English rock and roll singer. AS.

Jehan: Ah, he is the man to be with. His skill as an engineer is remarkable. I take my car into a garage today and there is all this electronic testing equipment. When things broke and went wrong, the first thing you did was to say 'We haven't got a part for that. We will have to make one.' 'We will have to weld this.' or 'Get a big hammer and give that a whack.' He was a true natural engineer, quite remarkable, and to work on tractors and vehicles at -50 temperatures, by heck it is hard. It is tough.

[0:16:28] Lee: I have been sent a selection of the reports from your era at Halley and quite a lot of the time it is talking about comparing the performance of one kind of vehicle to another. Eliasons and Muskegs.

Jehan: Ah yes.

[0:16:45] Lee: So can we talk a bit about tractive effort, then? You seemed to spent an awful long time trying to wreck Eliasons and Muskegs.

Jehan: No, quite the reverse. They fell apart and needed a massive amount of maintenance to keep ... They really weren't fit for purpose. These vehicles were delivered to Antarctica totally unfit of purpose. The Muskeg tractor, it is used all over Canada. It is a towing vehicle. It is a tracked vehicle that is used for all sorts of stuff. I understand (though I haven't seen them) that they use them in Switzerland in the ski resorts, whatever, which is great, but the moment you put them in a polar environment, up on the polar plateau, with ice, sastrugi ... It is designed to break things apart, so we spent much of our time, led by Al and other engineers, not only putting them back together but redesigning, design faults.

[0:17:47] Lee: Can you give an example of that?

Jehan: Yes. The first trip Alan and I did with our new tractors, they looked as if they had just come out of the showroom: all glossy and shiny, with 'British Antarctic Survey' on them. Off we go and within two or three hours, we realised there was a major problem because the cooling system was dragging snow into the engine compartment that was packing solid, to the point the engine stopped; it couldn't get any air. Everything was freezing. Now here is a vehicle that was designed in Canada and used in snowy conditions and it didn't work, and the first thing that Dad did was to say 'Well there are six blades on that fan, cooling fan. We will take three off.' That helped it a bit. Then we eventually reversed it. We did all sorts of things. That is an example. The batteries don't charge. Why don't the batteries charge? Because they are always frozen at the bottom. So Dad made up a little hot water container, run off the engine, that the battery sat in, so that the battery was kept warm. Now OK, pretty fundamental, but that had never occurred to Bombardier who designed these things for use, presumably, in the cold north of Canada. Those are just a few examples of things that were just not fit for purpose.

[0:19:12] Lee: And were the Eliasons even worse?

Jehan: Oh yes, they were a disaster. I don't know the history of motor toboggans but they were pretty early. For example they had a little petrol engine called the Briggs and Stratton, and they are used for pump engines, pumping water from wells, concrete mixers. It is a little commercial engine that does anything, Totally unsuitable, and that

was cobbled together with bits of angle iron, whatever, produced in some factory and all it did was shake itself apart. They were great fun to play with. They would tow us along on skis.

[0:19:55] Lee: There is one – this is 1963 – when you took two Eliasons and two Muskegs off together. You had one called ‘Wills’.

Jehan: That was mine. Number 4.

[0:20:08] Lee: How did they get those names, Sadie, Clem, Stancomb and Wills?

Jehan: Stancomb and Wills. The Stancomb-Wills Promontory was a prominent geographical area near Halley and they were sponsors of Shackleton I think and hence the name. ‘Sadie’ and ‘Clem’. Sadie and Clem lived in the Falkland Islands. Clem was a radio operator who became a manager, a senior manager, of FIDS based in Port Stanley, and his wife was Sadie. We got to know them very well so we named them after Sadie and Clem.

[0:20:51] Lee: So you named these things?

Jehan: Yes.

[0:20:54] Lee: The report I have got here compares the Muskegs with the Eliasons. Clearly the Muskegs were much more powerful creatures.

Jehan: Who wrote the report, may I ask?

[0:21:01] Lee: The answer is: you did. So the Muskegs would carry, would manage 2½ tons and the Eliasons only 1400 lb?

Jehan: My first reaction is: that was a very naïve comparison. I shouldn’t have even ... That was like trying to compare a motorbike with a 5-ton truck. So that really was a little spurious. OK, they were sent to us as a possible means of fast transport, pulling sledges that would be maybe akin to those pulled by a dog team. In other words, one Eliason could be equal to nine huskies and you don’t have to feed it, other than petrol.

[0:21:43] Lee: So it was husky power rather than horsepower.

Jehan: Yes, but then we know that Scott tried that didn’t he, and we know how far that got. You got about a hundred yards and realised the thing didn’t work and was never going to work.

[0:21:57] Lee: One of these broke down within 200 yards of the start of the trip. Muskeg No. 3 with a carburettor icing up. But generally speaking, it says here that ‘kegs in third gear found it difficult to keep up with the Eliasons, so the Eliasons must have been much faster.

Jehan: Oh yes. Mind you, they weren’t pulling heavy loads. You can put a load of a particular size behind an Eliason and it won’t go anywhere. Its speed over the ground

is nil, which is true of any tractor unit, isn't it? So I guess that on that occasion we were using them with very light loads. Yes, they were very nippy. One thing I do recall: we would ski behind them as I mentioned, on a long line, and the theory was that you set the throttle and you had to hold the throttle in place, which we did with a long nylon line. It could be about 30-40 ft long. You were skiing behind and you would keep hold of this line that keeps the throttle open and if anything goes wrong, you release the tension on it and the throttle is then meant to switch off. It has an automatic transmission so it stops. Only it doesn't because it freezes, and it freezes on, and if you happen to fall off your skis, then you see an Eliason going away in the distance. But one of the characteristics, which I think was done deliberately (I don't recall how it works) but if you left it alone without attention it would actually ride around in a big circle and eventually run out of fuel, so you could catch it. But the naivety of these vehicles was quite ...

[0:23:37] Lee: So you wouldn't actually sit on the machine?

Jehan: You could do. We used them as tractors. A comparison: four years ago I took my two grandchildren to Lapland to see Father Christmas. Now there's a story. Having got them to bed one evening, I went on a skidoo in moonlight through the forest, and this thing had a 500cc engine and it was phenomenal, the acceleration on this thing. The difference in 30-35 years between what we had there and ... I understand the guys have these vehicles now.

[0:24:23] Lee: There are skidoos in the Antarctic, yes, all over the place?

Jehan: Oh remarkable things, yes.

[0:24:26] Lee: I was going to come to this later but you kind of pre-empted it. The year after you left Halley, which was '65, there was an accident in which Wild, Bailey and Wilson went down a crevasse in a Muskeg, and at that time BAS was criticised for the way that men would ride the machines without anything probing ahead. What were you doing in your day? Were you doing that as well, or did you always have dogs in front?

Jehan: No. Let's start with the first occasion (I think) that anyone from Halley had driven a tractor over the ... Halley Bay is built on an ice shelf some 600 feet thick; therefore it rises and falls with the tide, 2 feet, something in that order. So there is a hinge, a junction between the main polar plateau and the ice, and that bit of course has broken up, full of holes, and we had to cross that to get up onto the polar plateau. It was a horrendous area. We called it the Bob-Pi crossing, God knows why³. I don't know who named it that. So that was our first experience. We left base for the first time. Off we go in these shiny new tractors, 30 miles across fairly flat sea ice. It was great and then we came to this area. We had no clues, no idea, no experience and on the first occasion we went, Dad's tractor goes down a hole. We spent days digging the thing out and pulling it out, winching and whatever. So we learned from that.

[0:26:06] Lee: What did you learn from that?

³ It was named after Bob Lee and Mike 'Pi' Jarman who first made the crossing in 1962. AS.

Jehan: We learned from that, that actually some of the things which are the most dangerous you can't see. Crevasses bridge over because of the continual blowing of the wind. I am not a glaciologist but the nature of glaciology is that you actually get a bridge forming over a crevasse. The crevasse could be up to ... I think there is a theoretical maximum width and depth – laminar flow stuff – but it is going to be 12-15 feet wide, or could be, and the bridge will build which may be 12-18 inches thick. It could well support a man and might even support a tractor. Now in bad light conditions you cannot see these things. In good light conditions, with the sun shining, there is invariably an indentation if you look carefully enough. Sometimes you can approach an area and say 'Look at that crevassed area.' You will see a whole series of indents and think 'Wow. Either we find another way or one guy (and I was reminded by Dad again over a glass of wine last night) you were the first one who got a guy out on a rope, 100 feet of nylon rope, on his skis, with a pole probing in front. At first we thought 'Well it is a load of rubbish, isn't it? We are not going to get anywhere' But it helped avoid that situation.

[0:27:40] Lee: So in '64 you were using that tactic wherever you felt there was a danger?

Jehan: Yes. Now I don't know the circumstances of the three poor guys, but I believe (and this is purely word of mouth) that they were probably travelling in conditions in which they should not have been travelling, and by that I mean light.

[0:28:00] Lee: They were off course.

Jehan: That didn't matter. What's on course; what's off course? It's not like being on the side of a motorway because there isn't a motorway. The place you are is no better than that place over there. It might even be worse. Light is absolutely critical and a condition which is well known by people who are familiar with polar regions is called whiteout, where you have a total cloud cover and the light is percolating through it, and you have no horizon. In the most extreme cases, and I have experienced it as many of my colleagues will have, you could actually stand; you couldn't see any horizon and as you started walking you would actually start falling over because you had no reference point. The first time I really realised this was some 15 years ago I took up flying and got my pilot's licence and when the instructor explained to me the importance of the horizon, I said 'You don't need to tell me that because I have been in Antarctica and I know that if you can't see, if have no reference or no shadow, then you have got real problems because you don't know if you are on your head or on your feet, to put it bluntly. I believe that could have been certainly one of the causes.

[0:29:26] Lee: So the protocol in your day would be that it was OK for men to be on tractors in areas known to be clear of crevasses, but anything unfamiliar you would have a man out in front?

Jehan: You would need a pretty clear indication that there were problems in the area, that there were crevasses, and either that would be visually or in some cases, on the edge of this disturbance there would be some small crevasses. You say 'Ah. Hang on. We are breaking through little Look out guys. It appears to be in that direction, and it is going to get worse.'

[0:30:07] Lee: So when you (as you inevitably would have done) heard about the 1965 loss, the crevasse tragedy, what was going through your mind when you heard that news?

Jehan: I know the moment precisely. I was on the *Kista Dan* on the way back⁴. Of course I was the Base Leader the prior year. They were out in the field when I left.

[0:30:31] Lee: They had already gone had they?

Jehan: Yes, they had gone. In fact they were out in the field over the period in which we relieved the base. I guess I can say this. Just a short story to get the context of it. Over a period of a week – a week is the period in which the base is relieved – the ship comes in and thousands of tons of stuff is unloaded, and during that week if the wind blows, the ship goes and you are left with all this stuff on the ice. You have probably experienced it. For a base leader, that is the most intense time. I didn't sleep for a week. That was because Gordon, our doctor, helped me with, I think they are called benzedrine tablets.

[0:31:37] Lee: Uppers?

Jehan: Uppers. I had never experienced it before, but I guess you could say I kept awake for most of that week. So having got on board the ship, I had gone down, crashed out for I think two or three days. I can recall someone coming (I don't know who) and saying we had just heard on the radio that this had happened. My first thought was, probably selfishly, 'Oh my God. I am glad I am not the Base Leader.' I thought of Phil Cotton, which was maybe a slightly selfish way of thinking.

[0:31:56] Lee: But you would have been the base leader who actually sanctioned the trip?

Jehan: Yes, indeed. I did.

[0:32:02] Lee: So was there any kind of sense of guilt at all there? Not necessarily justified guilt, but ...

Jehan: Do you know, that has never occurred to me. I'm sorry, that may sound very strange but that never occurred to me. Now why? Because they left within my period of tenure. 'Off you go guys. I will be home in a month's time. We are handing you over to someone else.' In my mind they were gone. They were handed over to the next base leader, the next group of guys in the next year so it had never occurred to me before.

[0:32:44] Lee: I'm not suggesting you should at all. In fact what I understand from other interviews it that they were off course. They thought they were going through a safe area and they strayed into a crevassed area and were not expecting to be there. But you knew David Wild in particular, didn't you?

⁴ There is a problem with the chronology here. *Kista Dan* would have been heading north before the winter of 1965, whereas the crevasse accident occurred after the winter, on 12th October 1965. AS.

Jehan: Yes I did. One of the things in my last year as base leader: I didn't leave the base. I didn't travel. I could have done I guess but my role was there, and I was always preaching to these guys about the importance of: if the light goes, if the weather is not right, stop. The guys used to say 'Oh you are always on about ... You are always safety minded. You are always safety conscious.' But this was a mantra of mine when I was travelling. What is the point of risking yourself, because you are not only risking yourself, you are risking everyone else. We had a guy, who I won't identify, who was an extremely tough guy, a paratrooper. Free-fall parachuting, all this sort of stuff. And he was an absolute liability because he had no sense of danger and he would jump out of his tractor, we would be in crevassed areas, he would jump out of his tractor and he would go wandering off. 'For God's sake come back. If you are going to do that, put a rope on. If you fall down a hole, we have got to spend our time getting you out.' He would say 'Oh don't worry about that sort of thing.' I have always been cautious.

[0:34:25] Lee: It sounds like you were Health & Safety conscious before Health & Safety was invented.

Jehan: That sounds dreadful. I am going to deny that, deny having anything to do with Health & Safety. I think it is about survival; it's not about Health & Safety. In later life, I was a yachtsman for many years, and the same on board boats with my family and friends. 'Clip yourself on. Tie yourself on. You are no good to anyone if you fall over the side.' I have always had that survival instinct. It is survival, not Health & Safety because today's Health & Safety is meant to be about safety and survival, but it has gone over the top, hasn't it? I hope I wasn't too much but the first thought that came to my mind when I heard that news, I woke quite groggy and I guess it took me a while to actually absorb it really. My first thought was 'I bet they have been travelling in conditions that they should not have.'

[0:35:27] Lee: Was there also a sense of 'There but for the grace of God go I.' because you mention one or two close calls, near things, in your travelling?

Jehan: I don't know if I thought that.

[0:35:38] Lee: What were your near calls, your near things? This was in '63. Crevasse.

Jehan: Similar things yes. Crevasse rescues. That was what it was mainly about. There was always the cautious person I suppose. Always in the back of your mind: a vehicle breaks down or both of them break down and you are 200 miles from base. You can't call the AA out, can you? You are totally reliant upon getting it fixed. On one occasion (I can't recall the date) coming back from the mountains. Two tractors: Alan and me, empty loads, coming back fast. Fast is 10 knots, 15 knots; that's fast, wow! And the wheel bearings started seizing on our tractors because they hadn't been cleared properly at the factory. We could see ourselves in a position where we would have to abandon the vehicle and limp home with one. It was getting near the end of the season i.e. autumn and the thoughts go through your mind 'What happens if this thing breaks, stops?' You would have to rely on someone coming from the base with another vehicle and they have to cross the crevassed area coming for you. There were these thoughts all the time.

[0:37:01] Lee: Conclusion, by D. Jehan: 'Autumn journeys of this size are not to be recommended ...

Jehan: I think I recall what that refers to.

[0:37:14] Lee: ... in future unless everything is prepared before the ship arrives.' In fact you had to prepare after the ship had gone and you didn't leave until four weeks after the ship had gone.

Jehan: Yes, and it was too late from a weather point of view. That was ... Some of the naivety, frankly, ignorance I will use that word. We were ignorant. We just didn't understand, and one of the gripes that I have against the British Antarctic Survey, and I expressed it in a number of reports, there was a whole load of experience before us and the obvious was the Trans Antarctic Expedition across the Antarctic with Sno-cats. The leader of that expedition was Sir Vivian Fuchs, who was also the director of British Antarctic Survey. You would think that they would have shared reports, knowledge, experience with us. We asked and asked and we never got anything. Almost as if you must reinvent the wheel itself.

[0:38:15] Lee: You say in your farewell report, 1964 ...

Jehan: Oh, I didn't realise I had written one of those.

[0:38:22] Lee: Well general report for the '64 season.

Jehan: Oh yes, OK.

[0:38:24] Lee: 'Couldn't selected reports be exchanged between bases, and so share the experiences gained. One wonders how often a base has struggled with problems which have already been experienced and overcome by other bases. The amount of time wasted because of these incidents must be considerable.' So basically you are suggesting that BAS should make all base reports available to future base leaders.

Jehan: I am not aware they have ever done so.

[0:38:49] Lee: Did that ever happen?

Jehan: No.

[0:38:52] Lee: You also suggested that people coming South should read base reports of the base they are going to before they arrive. Has that ever happened?

Jehan: Not that I am aware of.

[0:39:01] Lee: It's not rocket science this, is it?

Jehan: No.

[0:39:03] Lee: Was this a big frustration?

Jehan: Yes it was yes, a great frustration, but the stupidity of it. In the last 30 years of my life, almost 40, I have run companies, a whole series of companies doing all sorts of stuff. But if one adopted that same attitude, you would be 'reinventing the wheel' every day, and for a group of highly intelligent people 'By the way Mr Jehan, we are not sure we should employ you because your academic qualifications are not up to scratch.' There were some things that BAS Headquarters did that wasn't very bright.

[0:39:43] Lee: What were your relationships with BAS Headquarters like anyway? You were in Halley for two years. Did you see anybody from HQ?

Jehan: Not in the two years. In the year before we did. In my second year at Halley we saw someone. Headquarters meant nothing to me. We were living our own isolated life. I had occasional communications from Sir Vivian Fuchs or from Sir Edwin Arrowsmith, the Governor of the Falkland Islands, High Commissioner for British Antarctic Territory. What a title! Great guy actually. They would communicate quite often in Naval code. That was great. One of the things as base leader, the outgoing base leader would hand the code book to you, which was kept in a safe, and showed you how to use it. You waited for your first message to come in code. Great stuff.

[0:40:46] Lee: This isn't a one-time pad? This is something more complicated?

Jehan: Yes it is.

[0:40:48] Lee: A one time pad. So to make sure you had the right one time?

Jehan: Yes indeed⁵.

[0:40:52] Lee: You say that 'Halley Bay has not been visited by Headquarters Officers for three years.'

Jehan: Oh I said that? Right. Yes it was the fourth year. I was going back four.

[0:41:03] Lee: And you go on to underline that it was not useful, in trying to generate a sense of pride. 'For a wintering party to be successful they must feel a sense of pride in their base. This has been difficult to instil.' Was that simply because nobody seemed to care from HQ?

Jehan: I am guessing but I think that I was probably influenced by the views of a large number of people. In other words that was not a specific view.

[0:41:32] Lee: It was a compendium?

Jehan: I believe that's the case, and they were probably rumblings. If you read any reports from Halley at that time, over a period of two years we had massive problems with diesel generators, to the point where it almost wiped out scientific work. Our diesel mechanic Barry Kraehenbuehl, an Australian, a remarkable wonderful guy, he

⁵ Not true. The one-time pad is technically a cipher and more secure than the codebook system used by BAS. AS.

worked to a point where he just couldn't go any further and we had to collect a group of people around to help and support him. We had horrendous problems. We had little support; a lot of that was because of communication. We would send telegrams via Morse Code to the manufacturers, Meadows-Macfarlane Generators, saying 'Give us some help. This is going wrong; that is going wrong.' And about three or four weeks later you would get a message back. It was clear they had no idea. They would say 'Pop down the road and get this spare part or get a specialist in.' They had no idea of the isolation and the difficulty of doing these things. And I guess we felt that 'BAS will be in their fancy offices in London or wherever they were at the time, and we have these frustrations and difficulties. We have indented for so and so and it hasn't arrived. Maybe they haven't got the money. Nobody tells you.' You can finish up a bit 'us and them', can't you?

[0:43:07] Lee: But at that time BAS was largely run by people who had been there and done it?

Jehan: Yep. Well my close friend Maurice Sumner, who left Halley the year before me, and went and worked for Headquarters. A totally competent guy but then maybe the system did not allow ... They were civil servants. I talked to Maurice after his time at BAS and it was a highly Civil-Service organisation and there were some things you couldn't do, couldn't get done.

[0:43:37] Lee: It is interesting isn't it, if you have got a slightly untidy house and you have got visitors coming, you will tidy up for them, won't you? And you make that point here that when you had visits from the Argentinian icebreakers you tidied up the base first, and that helped to instil pride.

Jehan: We were very good at tidying. If you spoke to my wife, one of the things that drives her mad is that I go round the house tidying. Everything has to be straight and tidy for me. I certainly imposed that on Halley and I know some of the guys used to rib me for it. 'Oh stop being an old woman.' But then I think that shipshape and all that ...

[0:44:15] Lee: And just going back to your previous conversation: 'Unfortunately some people consider it cissy to use ropes and harnesses in crevassed areas. It is hoped that they don't have to learn their lesson the hard way.' Is that a reference to your chap who was a bit gung-ho?

Jehan: Yes.

[0:44:34] Lee: There was another kind of machine that you had a go at, called the Lansing.

Jehan: Ah that was the most wonderful machine, the Lansing Snowplane.

[0:44:41] Lee: Is the word 'wonderful' in inverted commas?

Jehan: Yes it is. Bunny Fuchs tells the story. He was doing a lecture tour in Canada, and he had a call at his hotel by a salesman, saying 'Sir Vivian, if you look out of the window, (and he was on the fifth floor) you will see in the car park below a

snowplane. We would like you to come and look at it. He said these people badgered him for I think over a year, trying everything. Eventually they bought one and sent it to Halley. It weighed 12 cwt, which was a very light sports car. It had an aero engine on the back of 300-400 brake horsepower with a propeller. The power to weight ratio was phenomenal. In theory you could sit in this thing, round skids, skis. It didn't have any brakes because there was no need to stop in it. If you had the right surface conditions it would probably do 80 mph.

[0:45:48] Lee: 80 mph and no brakes?

Jehan: That is the theoretical speed. We never got anything near that because the first thing that happened is that the snow conditions are so much different from Canada and they would use these as sports planes in Canada, shooting around the place.

[0:46:06] Lee: An amphibious propeller-driven sledge, with up to six people?

Jehan: Yes. Well the first problem is: when it has sat on the snow for a while, you can't get started. You have got to break it free, ideally, rather like a ...

[0:46:19] Lee: It ices up to the snow?

Jehan: Yes, until you get it moving. The same with a dog sledge. You shake it, then you have to push and eventually off it goes. Well if you are sitting in your plane, with the aero engine 400 brake horsepower going on behind you and nothing is happening. So you get out and shake it and try and move it. You have to be a bit careful because the next thing is, it goes 'Shhummp'! [laughs] So it was another of these vehicles that in theory was very attractive. I had great fun with it because I used it in the last year as my run-around, around Halley.

[0:46:57] Lee: A BL's Rolls-Royce?

Jehan: Yes. I loved that.

[0:47:00] Lee: I have highlighted the number of times the word vibration appears in your report. There are four mentions of vibration so I presume vibration was something of a problem, was it?

Jehan: Yes, it was. Imagine putting an engine on top of a very light aluminium frame. There were no rubber mountings to suppress the vibration, because I guess if you did ... At -40 rubber goes virtually solid. So yes, it was another machine, rather like the Eliason, that was designed to shake itself apart, and it is pretty easy to make a machine that will shake itself apart.

[0:47:40] Lee: How was it going uphill?

Jehan: Pass. Sorry, you avoid hills. Keep it flat.

[0:47:47] Lee: 'The vehicle did not take kindly to the slightest uphill gradient.'

Jehan: There we are yes.

[0:47:51] Lee: And sastrugi?

Jehan: Oh dreadful. The bumping and banging. Not viable.

[0:47:58] Lee: It wouldn't cope with sastrugi?

Jehan: No.

[0:47:59] Lee: 'Very disappointing' is your summary. So apart from being Sir's runaround, what was the fate of this machine?

Jehan: I read online, some time ago, that it had finished up being buried and a group of people dug it up. So it will be 50 years old now⁶.

[0:48:20] Lee: Rather like a crashed plane.

Jehan: Yes, they just abandoned it. They gave up on it. The idea of this whirring propeller over your head is not very pleasant, but there we are. It was great fun.

[0:48:37] Lee: So bearing in mind these failures, what did work? What did you rely upon, technically?

Jehan: Well the greatest strength was the people, and the people worked, and in my four years I have known some characters who found it difficult to cope with life, and were maybe not able to contribute as much as one would hope, but generally speaking the people were the great strength. You could get anything to work. You can get anything to work with the right group of people, can't you, and the remarkable thing about Fids is that whatever happened, whatever broke, you could always fix it. It has always been a crowd of guys saying 'Come on. We are all in this together.' Quite remarkable, the way in which people were quite selfless in a way.

[0:49:35] Lee: You had been a base member for three years before you were made base leader. Did the appointment come as a surprise?

Jehan: Yes, an absolute shock.

[0:49:42] Lee: Shock?

Jehan: Yes. Why should I have thought otherwise? Why would I have thought 'Hey, I am the right ...' In a recent telephone conversation with a colleague of yours, he used the term which quite amused me. I had not thought of it before. He said something to the effect 'When you left Base F to move to Halley Bay, you did that as a career move.' Those were his words. I thought 'Hang on a minute, BAS wasn't a career. I didn't plan out: I am going to do this job or apply for that, as one would do corporately, moving up the scale or whatever.' That never occurred. So when Maurice came along and said ... For a start I was due to go home, after three years. I was due on the boat with Maurice.

⁶ It was buried and dug up again more than once. It ended its days at Halley II. Source: Z-Fids website.

[0:50:34] Lee: So it was a double whammy, was it?

Jehan: Double yes, and about a month before he said 'I would like you to be Base Leader.' I said 'I am going home.' He said 'Well, I would like you to stay. What do you think?' I do recall immediately saying yes. I didn't hesitate.

[0:50:46] Lee: So having experienced being a base member for three years, and then you were appointed Base Leader, what was your policy or your approach to the role, because you had three years worth of watching somebody else do it, to form an opinion?

Jehan: I had one piece of advice from Maurice. Bear in mind we were close friends, still are. He said words to the effect 'These are a disparate group of people.' He wouldn't have used those words but you know what I mean. There were people who were very strong; there were those who were not as strong; some were even weak. 'You must ensure that any issues, problems, disagreements are focussed upon you because you are the strongest person here. You are the strongest and that is why you are base commander, base leader, and when you see issues and problems starting, try and focus it on yourself. Try and get people to focus, so if there is an argument or an issue because "This isn't right; that isn't right, You should be doing that. He is not pulling his weight.", focus it on me.' I took that advice and that was the only bit of advice he gave me.

[0:52:01] Lee: You became a kind of sin eater?

Jehan: Not sin, problem eater. Life, particularly at midwinter, is very intense, as anyone going down South will know. It is not a usual way to spend your life, 30 guys, no girls around the place, 120 days of darkness. 'God, it's cold out there. What are we doing here?' There were times when, I don't know what was in other people's minds but I can recall some occasions thinking 'What the hell am I doing here? It's Saturday night. I could be out with my mates in the pub, going to the dances with the girls.' There were times when you thought 'What the hell am I doing?' When the pressures and the tensions started and it often happened with the chef. I can recall at Christmas lunch, a superb meal that two chefs had prepared, and one of the guys sat down and said 'Brown sauce please.' And the chef said 'No, not today. I have spend a lot of time preparing this meal. No brown sauce.' 'I want brown sauce.' You could see there was an issue, on Christmas Day. I don't recall how, but I stepped in quietly and disarmed it. One was forever looking at these little tensions going on and you would try and relieve it, either keep the people apart or, if need be, get them together and sort it. It was the toughest leadership job I have ever done.

[0:53:37] Lee: Christmas Day chef must be just about ... It's the one day on the year when the chef is being relied on by absolutely everybody. No fun.

Jehan: Absolutely. You could imagine at home that your wife has prepared the Christmas turkey and you say 'Got any tomato sauce please.' [laughs]

[0:53:51] Lee: So where do you think you gathered these people skills from (as we would now call them)? Was it just by watching what was going on around you?

Jehan: I have often asked myself that question. My father was a hell of an influence on me. He was not a particularly educated man but he turned out to be a highly successful businessman. He was very good with people. The early years of my life in Guernsey, of course, we were occupied by the German forces. So there was a situation where we were short of food. If anything broke you had to mend it because you couldn't go and buy it in a shop, and people learned to be very resilient. I think part of the reason that I fitted in so almost preferably with the BAS way of life was that I had grown up, with my brothers and father, in this way of making do and mending things, inventing things. I guess that formed part of my, if you like, psyche. Dad was a very clever businessman. He really was very clever. He used to talk to me a lot and I would like to think that I have gained quite a lot of business acumen and built up very successful businesses. I always think back to that. I got that from my dad. People management, leadership, business, it's all out of the same pot, isn't it really?

[0:55:31] Lee: It is interesting that as a child you had an overbearing enemy. They were the Nazis. As a base leader you had an overbearing enemy. It was called the Antarctic. It was like a foreboding presence in both cases, shaping your life.

Jehan: That's a bit deep, isn't it? Wow OK, so the reason I went down South was I thought 'This will emulate the Nazi presence.'?

[0:55:54] Lee: No, no.

Jehan: Interesting thought.

[0:55:57] Lee: Just a common enemy.

Jehan: Yes, there is nothing like a common enemy, is there? I understand that there is a Jerseyman on this reunion and there is this wonderful rivalry between the two islands, but the only time there is no rivalry is when the British Government start dealing tough with us, which they do, totally unfairly. I am afraid your British Government forget that we are self-governing and Guernsey and Jersey stick together in adversity.

[0:56:26] Lee: You had stayed an extra year. You had been South for four years with a short break. What were your feelings on that final relief, when you knew you were catching that boat home? Were you glad to go?

Jehan: No. I was glad to get home, but frankly, I think if I had been invited back again I would have probably done so, although I knew that it wasn't a good thing, because I think one can become institutionalised. I realised that was the time I needed to go out and get a real job.

[0:57:01] Lee: What does a meteorologist who has worked in the Antarctic do for a living?

Jehan: What, when he has left?

[0:57:06] Lee: Yes.

Jehan: Well if he has got any sense he will do anything other than meteorology. It is a very interesting job, but it pays peanuts.

[0:57:12] Lee: So what was your future career?

Jehan: I had none and I don't think I was alone in this but for three years when I got back home I was unemployable. I would go to a job interview and I could talk about my leadership skills for example and I can recall one potential employer saying 'Look, this is a waste of time. You have wasted three or four years down in Antarctica. This guy (who I happened to go to school with), he spent the last four years working in my business. He knows all about it. He is of more value than you are.' There was no recognition, and when I think of, over the decades, the people, senior people in my companies, who I have sent away on these very expensive week-long management stretching courses, climbing mountains, team building stuff. We put so much importance on it, don't we? Yet at that time it was just not recognised. I may as well have said 'I have spent the last five years in Timbuktu.' He said 'You are no use to me.' So I became self-employed, building houses, renovating, made a bit of money and then I got into business.

[0:58:27] Lee: So in your future life, what skills you learned in the Antarctic, do you think served you best? What were you drawing upon from your Antarctic experience that helped you in your orthodox life later on?

Jehan: I guess the most important was that last year's experience as base commander. That gave me confidence. I joined a company, I recall, out of desperation. With one baby and another baby on the way I went along to this company, builders merchants, and I said 'Have you got a job?' So the guy said 'We have got no jobs. However, while I have got five minutes, sit down and tell me about yourself.' So I did. He said 'Come back tomorrow.' So I did. He said 'I have found a job for you.' I stated there and then (it was quite a big company), I said 'Within five years, I want to be on the board.' It took me six and I was quite disappointed over that. I finished up as chief executive and I am now chairman of a group of eight companies throughout the Channel Islands that effectively I built for someone else. I am not the beneficial owner. It is one of these big family businesses. They own ships, they own all sorts of stuff. But the most important thing I have brought, I think, ... I have my own background. I have talked to you about Dad. I have talked to you about the fact that I can do things and fix things. The important thing is you understand, when you employ someone and you say 'I want you to do that.' If you have no idea what that entails, they are going to get away with murder, aren't they? So one must be able to say 'Hang on. I could do that.' Or 'You didn't do a very good job.'

[1:00:15] Jehan: No I think what I learned as base leader was the core of leadership skills. The first thing I did when I was appointed a director, I changed the whole company around saying 'The most important things about this company are the people we employ and the customers.' I was looked at round the board table askance 'It is not about that. It is about profit; it is about money. The people you employ, if they don't work you kick them out of the door. Customers ...' There was a mantra around that board table 'If customers don't like it, they can b*** off and go

somewhere else.’ I took the culture of bases. Yes you have a base commander who has no authority whatsoever. Thirty-odd people at Halley Bay. You are the base commander. On the face of it you have all the authority in the world. You have nothing because they turn round to you and say ‘Hey, forget it mate. There are 30 of us. We think you are useless.’ That’s it, isn’t it? You could only persuade, encourage and I took that to businesses and I am still doing it today. We have Investors in People.. We have all sorts of ... Throughout all our 8 companies I have the highest levels of training and customer service, and it is the key. I learned that at Halley Bay.

[1:01:40] Lee: One of my final questions often is how do you rate the Antarctic in terms of your whole life. Most chaps say ‘Well it was the best years of my life.’ I going to suspect that you will just say ‘It was a stepping stone to the best years of my life.’

Jehan: Yes, and this is where I find myself at odds with a number of the people who I will be spending the next 24 hours with.

[1:02:05] Lee: The reunion members?

Jehan: They are living and they have lived that experience throughout their lives, and possibly even to the detriment (although it is not for me to say) of careers and whatever. That is the most important thing that happened to me in my life and has enabled me to achieve what I have, whatever that is, and what I am today. But the last 40 years, every day has been a new step, and at 74 I am still working 4 days a week. I have to, doing not only that, all sorts of jobs. I chair post offices and all sorts of things because I just love it, but it goes right back to that time. But you mustn’t spend your life looking back, and I just used that.

[1:02:52] Lee: So have you ever wanted to go back, as a grown-up, so to speak?

Jehan: You know it has often been suggested ‘Why don’t we go on a holiday to Antarctica?’ I say ‘No thanks’, because what I gather, and I may be wrong, you are on board a very comfortable ship. If the weather is inclement they are not going to land anywhere. You are probably going to be around the periphery of Antarctica. You are not going to see the Antarctic that we did and I don’t want a second-best thanks. So I would rather ... Let’s leave that as a memory. However, somebody yesterday evening said ‘I have a CD compilation of photographs and there are quite a few of you. I am sure you would like them so you can look at them and reminisce.’ I didn’t say anything and after a while he said ‘You are not really interested are you?’ I said ‘I am sorry, not really.’

[1:03:41] Lee: So why do you come to the reunions, than?

Jehan: That is a very good question. I don’t attend many.

[1:03:48] Lee: You can’t be slightly pregnant, can you?

Jehan: I don’t attend many. For a start it has cost me £500 to get here from Guernsey, which is crazy isn’t it for a couple of days. Sorry, that is by the bye. I am here because I know I am going to meet Gordon Bowra, Dad, mainly those two. There might have

been Maurice. That is the primary reason, and on this occasion it was because I was badgered into what I am doing now. I think somebody said 'If you don't do it now, it will probably be too late.' I thought 'OK, I will do it.' When will I attend the next one? I don't know.

[1:04:22] Lee: Well I am very glad you have done it. Thank you, Dudley.

Jehan: Thank you. It has been quite a pleasurable experience actually. Yes.

[1:04:31] ENDS

Possible extracts:

- Sir Vivian Fuchs', changing attitude. [0:04:56]
- Base F Holiday camp. [0:08:15]
- 'Dad' Etchells. [0:14:59]
- Unsuitable new tractors. [0:17:47]
- Eliason motor toboggans. [0:21:57]
- Dangers of crevasses in poor light conditions. [0:26:06]
- Experience not passed on. [0:37:14]
- Generator problems and poor manufacturer support. [0:41:32]
- The Lansing Snowplane. [0:44:34]
- Advice on being appointed Base Leader. [0:50:46]
- 'I want brown sauce.' [0:52:01]
- Unemployability after 4 years South. [0:57:12]