

BRYAN BOWLER

This is Bryan Bowler, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 11 June 2012. BAS Ref.: AD6-24-1-175-1-1. Transcribed by Neil MacPherson on 6 December, 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Bryan Bowler, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 11 June 2012. Brain Bowler, Part 1.

Bowler: I was born on the 22 April 1932 and I was born in Leicester.

[Part 1 0:00:24] Lee: So you're now 80 years old, Bryan.

Bowler: Yeah, that's true. Yes, that's true.

[Part 1 0:00:27] Lee: And still working?

Bowler: Oh, yes, yes. I'm a sort of groundsman at a jet-ski site. I mow the grass, pick rubbish up and go for bits and pieces and spares. And I do that during the summer. During the winter I bog off to France or live with my children. It's pleasant life, keeps me busy. God knows what it would be like if I wasn't working, I'd be bored stiff.

[Part 1 0:00:53] Lee: We're recording this interview in a rather bijou caravan.

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:01:00] Lee: Tell me about this caravan.

Bowler: Well I was flying gliders in Austria, on the... near Zurich, Zell am See and a German bloke asked me for a cup of coffee and he had one of these. He also had an aeroplane which I wanted to fly, so I was being nice to him, and I thought: 'Christ, I want one of these, lovely.'

[Part 1 0:01:24] Lee: What is it?

Bowler: It's an Eriba Puck. It weighs 380 kilos and that's all. It was built just after the Second World War, they started making them. The guy was an aerodynamics expert and, as you can see, it's big enough for two people to sleep in, two people to stand up in and you can tow it behind a 1000cc. And I've had several people, in fact one the other day, a bloke with a brand new BMW 4 X 4 said: 'I want it.' I said: 'It's not for sale, I'm going to give my daughter it. 'Cos and she likes it, she's very much caravanning and camping. He said: 'Well, I want second refusal then.' And that guy... You look 'em up on Ebay, not Ebay, on the internet, 40/45 years old, two and a half thousand quid. It must be the only caravan in the world that doesn't

depreciate. As you can see what it's like, it's got a fridge, it's got a heater, it's got a built-in sink, cooker, elevating roof, what more do you want really?

[Part 1 0:02:28] Lee: And just enough room for one mike stand. [Laughter]. You mentioned the family. You've got quite a young family, Bryan.

Bowler: Yeah, well I came... My first marriage was a bit of a disaster really and I came back and I met a Scottish girl, we got married and we had a young boy and he was about four and a half when he died from meningitis. That put me back a bit, a bit of a shock and during the process, ???[inaudible] got over that for a bit and I met this other young girl, no intentions of making partnership but we ended up being partners and we had three children together. But someone like me who could never keep a relationship going for very long.

[Part 1 0:03:24] Lee: How young is the youngest child?

Bowler: At the moment she's 12, 12 come 13 in a few weeks time.

[Part 1 0:03:33] Lee: Tell me about your parents, Bryan.

Bowler: Well my mother came from York, my father was a soldier and he met her in York. I think he nicked her off several other blokes, because she was very well educated and he was just a draftee. He was a rough rider in the cavalry and he got a job in Melton Mowbray with the Veterinary Corps and so we ended up there. He then worked for a transport company, the bus company, Barnes, and, bless him, he ended up in the office running the ruddy show. And then they had a major fall out with the management. It's the only time I heard him swear when he called the manager a bloody fool and that was the only swearword he'd ever used and he went to work in a wood yard, staffing manager there. I was in the army at the time and I used to come home and labour in the wood yard to keep fit, throwing doors about and generally keeping fit and out of trouble which was quite ??? [inaudible] for a young soldier.

[Part 1 0:04:45] Lee: Did you join the army straight from school?

Bowler: No, I did a bit of work. I worked as a radio operator type announcer in Northampton in the old days on radio relay and we used to make programmes up from Hilversum and Luxemburg. I mean you'll understand what it was like. We used to wake the town up at half past six in the morning because they were on cable net. That cable network it came off at half past six and woke everybody up. No-one in Northampton slept after half past six. [Laughter]. I enjoyed that but I'd always wanted to join the army. My father was an army man and I just wanted to do it and I was able

to go and join the army on a reasonably short stay. Got promoted very quickly and demoted even quicker. [Laughter]. I was up and down like a yo-yo for years. I enjoyed it. I ended up being a radio instructor, driving instructor and all that sort of crap. And then a bloke I knew... A Captain I knew and had got out of trouble, to put it politely, came in one day and said: 'Oh, I've got a unit for you. Come and have a look at this.' [It was] a special patrol unit, starting up. So I went down to the special patrol unit and they accepted me and after a lot of training and PE and that sort of thing, it was basically SAS without the guns. There were only 18 of us. They taught us to ski and read morse and we played badminton and threw logs about and we started PE first thing in the morning before breakfast and we had PE last thing at night before we went to bed. Basically we were 100% fit. I don't think anybody in the profession... The only people who were probably fitter were professional swordsmen.

[0:06:51]

That folded and I went back to my regiment, applied to join the army air corps, passed the air crew selection board and went flying. That only lasted because... I mean I wasn't a brilliant pilot but they only wanted four and they took 12 on and I was number six to go. Came back and they said: 'Go where you want.' 'Well, you know, I'll go back to my regiment 'cos I know everybody there.' Once you've been in the army, it's all a home for you, if you know what I mean. So I got back to my regiment and I was in the office one day doing something and this bloke who'd got me the job in the special patrol unit and been promoted, came in and said: 'Have you read...?' I said: 'No. What is it?' He said: 'Well, there's a firm called FIDS, one of their drivers has dropped dead, and they want to know if we can lend them one.' I said, 'So?' 'Well they want someone who can drive a tanker and ski.' Oops. [Laughter]. So I was sort of volunteered, you know. I went to Cambridge to see Sir Vivian Fuchs and we had a very pleasant interview and we talked about no snow whatsoever. And the only thing I said was: 'What books can I read on how they drive muskegs and look after tractors, tractors in the snow?' And he sort of said, he didn't say much...???[inaudible] he wanted me to write it. [Laughter]. I mean everybody knew all about it but I don't think anybody put it down on paper, so I got thrown in at the deep end.

[Part 1 0:08:39] Lee: What year was this, Bryan?

Bowler: It was '60, if I remember rightly.

[Part 1 0:08:44] Lee: So did you know where the Antarctic was, roughly?

Bowler: Yes, I wasn't totally uneducated. The top bit's the Arctic and the bottom's the other one and I'd lived in Germany by then about five or six years and I'd travelled to Austria, Norway, Denmark, Holland with the forces all the

time. I didn't go to Ireland until later, that was before the trouble. Nice place then. So I sort of volunteered one year driving Snocats.

[Part 1 0:09:25] Lee: I suppose what I meant was how much did you know about the Antarctic? Had you read anything?

Bowler: Naff all.

[Part 1 0:09:30] Lee: You hadn't read about Scott, Shackleton?

Bowler: I didn't like Scott.

[Part 1 0:09:32] Lee: You didn't like him?

Bowler: No. A burk. When you select your doctor on the premise that he can draw pretty pictures but knows naff all about scurvy, you're not the brightest of people. You may be very determined and very brave but I don't admire brave people unless they've got a bit of brain to go with it. I mean the bravest people to my mind are the bomb disposal guys. Very educated. Done a seven year course and still know if the put the thing in wrong there's a bloody great bang and that's the end of their career. So people who make cock-ups like Scott did, I'm sorry. OK, now Shackleton, totally different, my hero. You couldn't wish for a better guy.

[Part 1 0:10:20] Lee: So you knew about him before you went South.

Bowler: Yeah. I'm a fairly avid reader but I wasn't particularly bothered about it. In fact I wasn't particularly bothered about anything apart from my army career and flying sail planes. I mean I spent every weekend flying. I ended up an assistant car instructor and I was in charge of the ground equipment on a RAF base. That's the winches and the cars and the cable tree vehicles and I'd spend all day driving a winch. Or if it looks nice, I'd go down, jump in an aeroplane, fly for an hour or two and come back and go back on the winch. ??? [inaudible] and I enjoyed it, I had great fun. I was in RAF Bruggen and I did the first five hours that was ever done there. I was very proud of myself because I'd landed. Immediately the four came down ... brilliant day... you couldn't get down, so I wasn't really. No claim to fame at all so long as I was the first guy to get down.

[Part 1 0:11:24] Lee: Get down?

Bowler: To land. At Bruggen. I'd spent five hours flying.

[Part 1 0:11:28] Lee: Where's Bruggen?

Bowler: It's on the border between Holland and Germany, it's one of the biggest air bases in the world. Near Rheindahlen, you've probably heard of Rheindahlen. Quite close to there. That was when I was with the special patrol unit down in Crayfelt [phonetic]. Yeah, I had kicked around. I'd been to Norway for six weeks. The British army sent 50 skiers to Norway to have a battle with Norwegians and we beat them absolutely hollow. We didn't go out with the skis, we took the 'flu and nearly killed the poor sods. [Laughter]. Half of Norway went down with the 'flu that we brought them.

[Part 1 0:12:08] Lee: So did you actually join FIDS as such? Were you transferred to FIDS or did...?

Bowler: No, no, no. I was seconded by the army under detachment and, as such, would they mind paying my wages? They sort of said 'Yes, we'll accept that 'cos it's urgent.' And the bloke said: 'Well as it's urgent and he's got hard conditions, we'd like a little bit more.' So then they said: 'Well, we shouldn't do that.' 'Ah, but the other thing is ... no discipline, you see, so you've got to have a good bit extra for your bonus.' And I felt guilty. I mean I was earning so much more than the poor old Fids who were on seven pounds a week and suffering like mad. But, so what, it was there, I wasn't going to turn it down, thank you very much. I was paying UK tax anyway. I came back and walked into car showroom and bought a brand new car for cash.

[Part 1 0:13:22] Lee: How did you get down there?

Bowler: I went on the *Kista*. I had a tremendously good trip on the *Kista*. I got on with the Captain and First Mate very, very well indeed. The *Kista Dan*. I was absolutely gobsmacked how well they spoke English. In fact, one of them was keen on cameras and we were talking... There's a Danish bloke talking about spherical aberration¹. [Laughter]. The average Englishman doesn't know what it means. I also knew enough about Denmark because I'd been there. When they said: 'We're crossing the equator, you can have any meal you like,' and somebody said: 'I like roast beef and Yorkshire pudding.' ??? [inaudible] I don't know what the Danes can for Yorkshire pudding, so I opted for a smorgasbord. The Yorkshire pudding arrived rather like a lump of the outside of a dead cow. No, it were great and I got to Montevideo, we had a couple of days there, everyone was on strike and it was my introduction to meat there. It was the first time I had ever had a decent steak in my life. I'd say to people they take the legs off and put it on a plate. [It was] an enormous great steak. I enjoyed that. Then I went to Stanley and I met... John Green was there and he had the brilliant idea, 'Unload the muskeg and you show the islanders what they can do cross-

¹ A loss of definition in the image arising from the surface geometry of a spherical mirror or lens [Google].

country.' So they dumped a muskeg on the quayside and I drove it round the camp a bit and all the farmers came and looked at it and wondered. I thought later on when the Falklands war was on, 'Great twats, if you knew there were helicopters, you could have taken a load of muskegs down and they would have done the job a damned sight more efficiently.' You don't tell the General that, you can't tell a General that.

[Part 1 0:15:15] Lee: Had you seen a muskeg before?

Bowler: No. No, I hadn't. Well I had lived with tanks. I was a tank man, you see, originally.

[Part 1 0:15:21] Lee: So what was your learning curve like for a muskeg?

Bowler: Backwards. [Laughter]. You know I was used to 650 brake horse and 50 tons. So you give me something weighing , what, 5000 kilos and 100 brake horse, side ??? [inaudible] engine, whoops...

[Part 1 0:15:38] Lee: They were toys, were they?

Bowler: No, they were serious, very, very strong brilliant bits of kit. If I remember right... Well, I've only just heard about it, but I gather one of them we got down lasted 30 years. Do you know about ??? [inaudible].

[Part 1 0:15:58] Lee: I've a feeling it's still there.

Bowler: It's not running.

[Part 1 0:16:00] Lee: I don't know.

Bowler: Well I was reading somewhere that it was still running after 30 years. Now that is not a delicate piece of modern equipment, it's a tough old bit of industrial... I dropped one from about 6 foot, 'cos when you're driving through pressure ice, it's lumpy and I came over the top and it dropped on the... It didn't even drop straight, it dropped on the corner of the frame where the drive sprocket was and it went a horrible bump, thump and then drive off. I've done that with a tank and smashed the front bearing, the idler bearing. I did the death slide at Bobbington with a centurion. Did both front bearings in. A soldier forgot to bulldoze the ground and make it soft. 50 ton doing a 30 foot drop on a rock isn't a good thing.

[Part 1 0:16:55] Lee: Muskegs, you were pleased with their performance, were you?

Bowler: Oh, absolutely, it was brilliant. There was a lot wrong with them but not mechanically really. One of the problems was ??? [inaudible] it was the doors. They didn't fit. Well you know what the drift's like. You

???[inaudible] in the morning and you ??? [inaudible] before the snow. So, that was one problem. The other problem, and I don't know how... We cured it [and] to be honest it saved our lives. The snow was picked up by the tracks, obviously, and if the wind was in the wrong direction the radiator fan picked it up and it clogged up the radiators and they overheated. And we were running back from the third depot to Stonington when that happened. Well basically it was a case of the weather looked bloody awful, we're not going to make it with this heating problem, we'll stop on the sea ice on the east side of this island and wait till the weather clears and get on with it. Weather got bad, worse and it blew, there was a bang on the tent and Howard Chapman came up and said: 'Stick your head out and have a look at this.' There was more sea on there than on a picture postcard from Skegness. Before it was moving ice and it had bugged off. We'd now moved round the island overnight and I wouldn't swear blind to it but I would say between 50 and 100 metres the Bellinghausen had come. All the other ice had gone. Neny Fiord had gone, the bloody lot had gone out to sea. And we'd missed it by 100 yards. We'd have been camped on it if the engine had been running properly. So we panicked... Well, we didn't panic, we just got on with it and got on the island and sent a Mayday. I loved that. 'Mayday, Mayday, Mayday.' I'd always wanted to send one. [Laughter]. John Cunningham sent it. Who was the Base Leader? John Cunningham, wasn't it? John Cunningham said: 'Oh, don't worry, everything's alright. We'll go up and have a look at the sea ice from the top of the highest hill or something.' Then came back and said: 'Don't panic.' [Laughter]. I gather they told London about it and London sent a message saying: 'Remember Shackleton built a boat.' Shackleton had a ship with his boat. Fortunately, although it was fairly late on in the year, it froze. Dog team came out from Stonington with a few bits and pieces and the other dog team came back from further down and we got on with it and went down South and very nearly reached the King George Sound when I made a bad decision. When you're driving in those sort of conditions you're making a hundred decisions or a thousand decisions a day, you get 990 right, you get one wrong and the bloody thing goes through and sinks, which is embarrassing.

[Part 1 0:20:26] Lee: So this is another occasion when you were actually on the muskeg and you went...

Bowler: Yeah, we went from Stonington to Fossil Bluff and I'd loaded everything up reasonably with fuel and dog food and man food on every sledge, and we had tents. I think we had two tents or one tent and that was 'way back in the train so that if anything happened and we lost both muskegs, then we'd still got the sledge and the lifeboat equipment. When we ran back, I was coming back when the sea ice went out, we were carrying... I think we were carrying about four weeks lifeboat rations for us. So we went on to half rations, on HF6, that lifeboat stuff. It takes... well you don't enjoy a meal

on a lifeboat and I lost a considerable amount of weight. We all did but we got away with it, we were very lucky. I gather that previously the Argentineans had these wheels that floated and they lost some guys because once they go in the water they can't get out. The weight of the tractor on the edge of the ice, it'll spread out, it'll survive but when it's climbing out it puts all the weight on the ice and you just can't get out with the damn things.

[Part 1 0:21:59] Lee: So just take me through these two incidents in more detail if you wouldn't mind. The first one, one was where you were driving along the tractor and the water started coming up through the floor, is that right?

Bowler: No. I was driving the tractor and I'm leading with the rope still slack and I make a decision to go for this slight rise in the sea ice and it went woomp, just dropped. I looked out... I could get out because the door was open on the sea ice... I looked out and it was getting a bit wet, the snow. So I yelled and got another tractor and I climbed back in and tried to drive it out backwards but you don't really stand much of a chance, you know. I think the reason we lasted that long was because we'd put planks as outriggers for crossing cracks and that sort of thing and I think as we dropped through the water, the outriggers held a minute and gave me time to get out. And I got out and Howard Chapman took the photographs of the hole with a bit of wood floating in it. That wasn't one of my best days.

[Part 1 0:23:22] Lee: Were the two muskegs roped together?

Bowler: Yes.

[Part 1 0:23:25] Lee: So how come the second one didn't go in?

Bowler: Oh, it was a long rope and we cut it. It was about a hundred foot.

[Part 1 0:23:31] Lee: There was no chance of getting the muskeg back?

Bowler: Unless you've got a submarine that can go to several thousand feet. I mean it was deep water, it was the sea. We hadn't got into the Sound. I gather the Sound has meltwater now but this was oggin, proper sea. It was just...

[Part 1 0:23:55] Lee: One of those things...

Bowler: As I say, you make a hundred thousand decisions a day and you get one wrong... You can't go ahead checking it all the time, there's no way round [it]. This "Ice Road Truck" they've got radar now, they can tell how thick the ice is and I have a feeling if we'd known how thick the ice was we'd never have been there. [Laughter]. It's just as well we didn't know.

[Part 1 0:24:20] Lee: And you also had applied a policy of spreading the supplies out amongst several... Grouping it so that if anything went under, what was left would keep you going for a while.

Bowler: Oh yeah. Well it would seem daft to do anything else really. Of course, when we parked up at night we used to spread the stuff out. If you looked at it, it looked as though it was scattered. But you've got to do that because if you stick things in a line, the snow will then melt and concrete everything in in one complete... So, you spread everything out. Again, if you have a disaster like we had with the sea ice blowing out, at least if you've got one sledge you've got food and that sort of thing. You could survive for a bit until you stopped surviving or somebody came to get you.

[Part 1 0:25:10] Lee: And this trip when you were stranded on an ice floe for a while, which you were talking about a few minutes ago, was it near Mushroom Island, was it?

Bowler: No, I don't think it was Mushroom. I think it was one up from Mushroom. Mushroom I think was a depot, I'm not sure. There aren't many maps of the area and we didn't have maps anyway. It was 'way up, out of Neny Fiord, turn left and go South, young man. When you see the mountains on both sides, that's the fiord, go down there and you'll find Fossil Bluff on the right. I still don't know how far it was. I've no idea. I just put enough fuel on. If the tractors used more than one gallon per mile we were in trouble, but I didn't think they would and so I stuck three drums on each of the sledges, lashed them on with chains and realised that when you go through really rough sea ice and pressure ice, your sledges tend to tip over. So you don't just pile stuff on, you have to lash it down good and proper. That was the theory up in Norway with the polts² [phonetic], that's the Norwegian sledge that you tow behind you like a pram in reverse, and that's totally waterproofed and everything is carried inside there, so it seemed logical to do it that way.

[Part 1 0:26:32] Lee: But this was a trip you were taking down to Fossil Bluff, wasn't it, when you became stranded on the sea ice for a while?

Bowler: Oh yeah, that was first year.

[Part 1 0:26:38] Lee: In 1960?

Bowler: '60.

[Part 1 0:26:42] Lee: '60, OK. And there were four of you on that expedition?

Bowler: Yeah.

² Probably shortened word for "potkukelkka" (Finnish) or similar, a kicksled or chair-sled.

[Part 1 0:26:45] Lee: Yourself, Howard Chapman, Bob Metcalfe and Arthur Fraser?

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:26:50] Lee: OK. Just talk me through in more detail what happened. You camped the night on sea ice.

Bowler: Well we always camped on sea ice. We had two two-man tents and we stopped on sea ice. We ran down to probably Mushroom or we made a depot there. And I thought the original plan was to go back and fetch another load to take the weight off the aircraft flying fuel in order to take more fuel down.

[Part 1 0:27:21] Lee: I think this would be the spring of '61, would it, having arrived in 1960?

Bowler: Yes. That's when we built the base. We built Stonington in '60. John Cunningham was brilliant.

[Part 1 0:27:33] Lee: We'll come back to that shortly if we may. So here you are, heading south for Fossil Bluff with two muskets and a couple of sledges.

Bowler: No, we had about five I think.

[Part 1 0:27:42] Lee: Five sledges.

Bowler: We had quite a lot, quite a few.

[Part 1 0:27:45] Lee: And the progress wasn't very good, I gather.

Bowler: No. Well you know the weather is slightly changeable. It's pleasant for 10 minutes or an hour or so, next comes a howling blizzard and you can't see a damned thing. That then stops and the overcast and the whiteout, you can't see where the hell you're going or what you're driving into. We tried driving at night on lights, which worked on a compass, just to stop us going out the Bellinghausen too much, and that didn't work very well because you couldn't see too far ahead. I don't know of any better way of doing it. Whiteout's atrocious. I wouldn't believe what it was like. Second year, we're going down, we're fairly heavily loaded, it's in whiteout and the engines weren't pulling properly. My engine certainly wasn't pulling properly. I've no idea why this is. Everything's alright, so we stopped and went in the caboose and had a cup of coffee and slept and woke up in the morning half way up the bloody iceberg. We'd been climbing. That's why the engines weren't pulling. 'Whoops! What are we doing up here?' We went back down and that was a weird effect. The iceberg was in a field of icebergs like a city, if you can imagine, with roads between it. And that was

the first time the sound of the engines had come back, echoing back. It was an eerie experience rather like driving down a ... you know like these futuristic films after the atomic ... just like driving through a city, big wide streets, which were frozen leads, and the sound coming back was really eerie, it was really strange. Because you know out there it's so silent, you could hear a dog howling its head off about five miles away. Whiteout, it's one of the biggest problems. I don't think there's any way of defeating it other than probably a very accurate compass and very good lights and then you could drive at night but who the hell wants to go to sea ice anyway? When you got aeroplanes and helicopters, it's the old-fashioned...

[Part 1 0:30:02] Lee: OK, the muskegs were generally speaking in tandem, weren't they, one behind the other?

Bowler: Yeah, I tried to keep them like that.

[Part 1 0:30:10] Lee: Why was that?

Bowler: Safety. I mean I had been out with John Green on an island, I don't know which island it was, Adelaide probably, I've no idea, on the way down and we went for a jolly. Went for a drive and enjoyed myself and John Green enjoyed himself and then a bloody great whoop and we climbed out more or less and turned round and a bloody great crevasse you could get a double deck bus down. We'd missed it, thank god. It didn't strike me at the time just how dangerous life was. I'd heard that the Trans Antarctic Survey guys had given a Muskeg to the New Zealanders or the Australians and that had fallen down a crevasse having crossed the Antarctic and killed the driver, he'd been squashed or whatever. So I thought, well, if we rope them together in twos, if the first one goes down, it's going to carry on going down, with the ropes long enough it'll cut it and the guy behind will brake and it won't squash the guy 'cos they didn't have roll bars or anything. Now I would not drive anything across country in the Antarctic without a roll bar. Wouldn't squash. But I'm not going to do that when I'm 80 if you don't mind. [Laughter]. No, it wasn't a design fault because they were designed to the run on the muskeg in Canada which is basically a load of gorse bushes and heather and not a lot else. But no deep holes to fall down.

[Part 1 0:31:45] Lee: Were you part of the plan to put holes in the roofs of these muskegs?

Bowler: Oh, yes, I did that first year, yeah.

[Part 1 0:31:49] Lee: That was you, was it?

Bowler: Well, yeah, I'm a tank man. You need escape hatches all over the place. So you cut a hole in the roof and put a canvas bag on and tidied it up and make sure the knot was on the inside. [Laughter].

[Part 1 0:32:07] Lee: So let's go back to this trip south in the first year with the two muskegs. This was the occasion you woke up one morning and it was explained that you were actually adrift on an ice floe.

Bowler: No we weren't adrift on an ice floe, no. What had happened was the ice floe was attached to the island. If we'd been adrift we'd have been bye-bye, wouldn't we? It sort of pivoted round the island and the bit 50 yards on had all gone but we were still touching the island and it was fairly solid ice. There were leads and god knows what 'cos the whole lot had moved round and, of course, the obvious thing to do was get on solid ground as quick as you can.

[Part 1 0:32:45] Lee: Tell me the process. What did you do first?

Bowler: Howard and I had a little discussion like: 'Let's get the f...' and we got the ice chisels out, the ice axes out and we chiselled away through the pressure, if I remember rightly. We got one tractor on as fast as we could with the tents and that sort of thing and then we got the fuel on.

[Part 1 0:33:13] Lee: On to the land?

Bowler: On to the island, yeah. Off the sea, because we'd had enough of that. Didn't want to go on there any more as it wasn't very nice. And then Arthur and Howard sort of helped putting the tents up and that sort of thing and we were on there for god knows how many weeks, I've no idea. Quite some considerable time. They were worried, the experts, the geologists, it was very late in the year and it doesn't very often freeze. So we'd got to be here until the Chileans come and get us or the Navy sends a helicopter down in the middle of the summer and we've only got a few big tractors. It's going to be a bit embarrassing. Fortunately the weather turned quiet and cold and the leads froze. I'd got enough fuel to get back to the depot and at the depot we had enough fuel to get down to Fossil Bluff. So off we trogged down to the.... Actually, the dog team came up and said: 'You're alright, all the leads are frozen,' and we went off down south.

[Part 1 0:34:18] Lee: So whilst you were on Mushroom Island, I think it was Mushroom Island, were you waiting...?

Bowler: Oh, yeah, I'll take your word for it.

[Part 1 0:34:23] Lee: Waiting for something to happen?

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:34:26] Lee: On limited rations?

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:34:27] Lee: And limited tentage?

Bowler: No, we had two two-man tents. You get used to that, don't you?

[Part 1 0:34:34] Lee: Do you know what happened to your Mayday, did you get a response?

Bowler: Yeah. John Cunningham heard it and said: 'Don't panic, everything's alright. I'm looking at Neny Fiord and the sea ice is still there, no problems at all. I'll go and check.' And he went and checked and [said]: 'I don't want to worry you...' No, I mean ... I think...

[Part 1 0:34:58] Lee: Were you worried?

Bowler: No, I don't think so. You can class us as being stupid, if you like. I don't think you're gonna face that sort of thing 'cos you rely on luck an awful lot and we knew that we weren't too badly off, we had a dog team that could probably get back to us if the lead froze over at all.

[Part 1 0:35:24] Lee: From Stonington, you mean?

Bowler: No, not from Stonington, from down Mushroom . They were on the way down. We had two dog teams with us as well. They were out ahead. Well, I don't think we panicked at all.

[Part 1 0:35:44] Lee: Arthur seems to think you discussed cannibalism at one point.

Bowler: Oh, yeah. We discussed a lot of things. I don't know if you remember or not but at one stage when we were down there they had a missile crisis.

[Part 1 0:36:00] Lee: The Cuban missile crisis.

Bowler: Yeah. The Americans were threatening to bomb the Russians, the Russians to bomb the Americans and we sat down quite seriously and talked about how long we could survive, which worked out about seven years. What would the radiation be like if we came back to civilisation? Would there be any? What would be left of the World? We were all on our own down there and I wouldn't think we were the only people thinking that way, so... No, I don't think we discussed cannibalism seriously. There wasn't very much on Arthur Fraser anyway [Laughter].

[Part 1 0:36:38] Lee: Mercifully, the sea ice did re-form.

Bowler: Oh, yes.

[Part 1 0:36:40] Lee: But then you were hit by a lay-up, weren't you, at that point?

Bowler: I was?

[Part 1 0:36:45] Lee: You were stuck in a blizzard which lasted for 13 days.

Bowler: Oh, yeah. So what? That happens frequently for a bit, yeah. The weather could be like that. It can go weeks on end with howling gales and that sort of thing and it's 'Oh, sorry about that,' sun comes out. That's what you expect. It's the Bellingshausen which is fairly crazy and is affected by the Antarctic Convergence³, which is a belt of rubbish going all the way round the world at the bottom with nothing in the way. I remember seeing a Chilean fishing boat in the middle of it. We were hang on a bit, half ahead trying to survive, this Chilean boat comes sliding down with his nets out. I mean you've got to take your hats off to these guys.

[Part 1 0:37:32] Lee: You had your own personal little crisis whilst that blizzard was taking place because you ran out of cigarettes.

Bowler: No, I ran out of cigarettes after I lost the tractor. I was the only one who smoked, I think, and I had all my cigarettes on the tractor. And I rescued everything I could like an empty binocular case and me and the fags went. I was without cigarettes for about... I don't know how many weeks it was. I was at Fossil Bluff and an aircraft flew in. I think it was Bob Bond, I'm not sure, it might have been Ron Lord, came to the door and was waving a packet of tipped cigarettes at me. He was pretending to open them saying: 'I can't get it open.' And I'm on my knees saying: 'Please, aw come on.' 'Sorry I was only joking.' [I] turned round, I'm being filmed. [Laughter]. 'You sod!' Anyhow, I didn't mind, I got my cigarettes again, because I was a heavy smoker in those days.

[Part 1 0:38:34] Lee: Had you tried to improvise in the meantime?

Bowler: Yeah, tried tea leaves and toilet paper, it didn't work. I don't think I got mentally affected by it. It was just, once you get the nicotine, it gets into you. I used to thrive on it, I loved it. I was a serviceman, tax-free cigarettes. They used to give us cigarettes. I didn't know they were harmful. When I was skiing, I trained on Rothman's and gin. I did fairly well, I was third in the division. What was that – 10,000 men?

[Part 1 0:39:10] Lee: Arthur also mentions an occasion when you began to feel unwell in his tent, headaches.

³ A zone continuously encircling Antarctica where cold, northward flowing water meets warmer subantarctic water, creating high marine productivity.

Bowler: Well, I've suffered from sinus trouble all me life but I can't really remember that, it wasn't a major thing. It could be, he could be right, yeah.

[Part 1 0:39:26] Lee: 'The snow almost buried our tent. It had melted next to the tent's surface and when that froze, we were effectively in a sealed space, progressively starved of air.'

Bowler: Yes, that's true. We had a bung in the air vent and, if the candles went out, we used to take the bung out and clear it up. That was nine days but I think it was a black tent. Yeah, I can remember that distinctly, that was a ... I mean I've always thought it was bad, then you realise that some of these kidnap guys spent a year in a cellar, while what we went through was nothing.

[Part 1 0:40:00] Lee: You had a black tent?

Bowler: At one stage, yes.

[Part 1 0:40:03] Lee: Which was going to absorb heat.

Bowler: Well, it was pretty bloody miserable, considering the amount of time you spent in it during the day. It was just continuous night, you know.

[Part 1 0:40:13] Lee: Was this a pyramid tent?

Bowler: Yeah, it was a two-man tent. That's a brilliant idea. They sent me some black rope down. Lovely. Shows up in the snow, doesn't it? Absorbs the heat, melts into the snow, sun buggers off, melt ice, solid, you've got 200 yards of rope concreted in, you can't get out. And the other thing was it was polypropylene rope and so I put it on the track on the sledge, drove off with the sledge, drove off, sledge wouldn't move. So I'm still pulling, sledge comes out and comes howling back like a catapult, just like a rubber band. Best part of a ton and a half of sledge comes howling back. Whoops! Got that wrong. That was polypropylene rope. John did the same actually. He was teaching his hand to abseil.

[Part 1 0:41:08] Lee: John?

Bowler: John Cunningham. And he was jumping off this cliff and three times he did it, absolutely perfect, on nylon rope. You know these guys, these professional climbers. He came to a rapid halt at the bottom and he steps off and the last one was a terylene rope which stretched and he made a hole in the snow. [Laughter]. He stood fully composed. He was cursing himself, I think.

[Part 1 0:41:37] Lee: So at one point, according to Arthur's notes, and I'm not quite sure of the order of all this, you were also frozen into your tent at one point with a weight of snow on top of you.

Bowler: Em...

[Part 1 0:41:47] Lee: You were dug out by Howard and Bob.

Bowler: Well, no, I honestly can't remember that. But it's quite possible. That sort of thing happened anyway. It's not the sort of thing that sticks in your mind. Tenting under those conditions ... You were always having disasters. Somebody once set fire to..., No he didn't, he spilled tea on a sleeping bag, which was a crime. The next time it happened he tried to dry it out with a stove and set fire to it. [Laughter]. I think that sort of thing sticks in your mind more than being frozen into a tent.

[Part 1 0:42:29] Lee: According to Arthur's notes, you had to blow a whistle to attract attention to alert people to your predicament.

Bowler: Yeah, probably. I can't remember any of that at all, quite honestly. I know I'd had enough of these damned tents, trying to organise things. Tractors are worse to start off. The dog team, at least the dog team wants to go. The tractor's got to be preheated. It's so cold that if you get the engine running and you start up, the clutch depressed, and the engine is only just running, you take the clutch off, the gearbox oil is so thick and so heavy, it stalls the engine. You've got to, well we used to preheat the gearbox. We had a second gear ram, we had a Herman Nelson⁴ with three leads on it, we had one lead on an engine, one lead on the gearbox and another lead on an engine. So to start the tractors up, the first one started then we transferred all three... all two other ones to heat the gearbox and engine again. We used to get them running. They would start without pre-heating down to about minus 10, minus 12. Occasionally, if the forecast was bad, it was going to be cold, we'd pre-dilute the oil. We'd put petrol in the oil and run them for a few minutes to get it all mixed up and give you a chance to start in the morning. I thought that was heresy until I was talking to the aircraft guys and that's actually on the Beaver engine where you put a little switch down and it pumps petrol into the oil. And, of course, when you start up in the morning, you've got to run it till vapour comes off and keep your fingers crossed that the flame trap works. I knew one ??? [inaudible] it blew the bottom of the engine... [Laughter] These things happen.

[Part 1 0:44:17] Lee: You were also short of supplies. You were short of fresh meat in particular and a group of King penguins strolled by.

⁴ A space heater manufactured in Canada.

Bowler: Ah, that's when Arthur apologised.

[Part 1 0:44:30] Lee: Tell me the story, if you wouldn't mind.

Bowler: Well, there were these King penguins on a walkabout and we thought, well when the dogs teams come we'll have a treat for them, you see, and we'll kill three penguins, or four penguins, whatever it was and we selected them. We said: 'We'll eat bits and the dogs can have the rest, cheer them up, bit of fresh meat'. And we each selected a penguin and the funny thing is, penguins are a little bit like... They go up and down. You look at the big ones and when you turn round, and you look at it the next time it's gone down. They sort of expand and contract whilst they're standing there. And we all picked our penguins and, as I say, I'd done a lot of skiing and the best way to kill a penguin is with an ice-axe. Well, with the other two rushing round trying to kill a penguin with an ice-axe, my kneecaps were hiding behind my knees, with these ice-axes flashing round. Anyway, I killed mine and Arthur couldn't quite get a handle on killing a penguin with an ice-axe and he chased it and it escaped and went and joined its mates. They're a bit stupid, penguins. He took a swipe at it and missed, hit the one next to it. It stopped dead in its tracks and he bent down and said: 'Oops, sorry'. He was actually such a nice guy, he really was. He was a devout Christian. Both he and Bob Metcalf were, which we respected and Howard, in his wisdom, said I would go with one and we'd get a Christian each which rather ruined the language. So if we got stuck on this island, Howard and I used to go to the top of this island and have what was known as the daily swear. [Laughter]. Off we went to the top of the island and swore like good 'uns for 10 minutes.

[Part 1 0:46:40] Lee: So you parted company with Arthur after a while. He went in one direction and you went on to Fossil Bluff. How was the rest of that journey down?

Bowler: No, we all went down to Fossil Bluff.

[Part 1 0:46:48] Lee: You all went down.

Bowler: Yeah. I think Arthur went off with a dog team, as he should.

[Part 1 0:46:56] Lee: Arthur returned to base to carry out a geological programme and Bryan and the others went down to Fossil Bluff.

Bowler: Could be, I can't remember it.

[Part 1 0:47:05] Lee: Was the rest of the journey fairly uneventful.

Bowler: Apart from losing the tractor.

[Part 1 0:47:09] Lee: That was when you lost the tractor. So, when you arrived at Fossil Buff with one tractor too few, what was your reception like?

Bowler: Well, they were rather pleased. I think the aircraft had been but they were still rather pleased to see strange faces and when you've been on your own for six months or so during the winter even I look attractive! [Laughter]. Howard, I'm sorry, Bryan Taylor, who was on his own, I saw him walking down the side of the mountain saying 'I'm not going to make a pig of this', and speeded up his walking and ended up running towards us. He was very glad to see us. I don't think he'd been back on base when the aircraft came. He'd been out on his own, knocking bits off Antarctica. I know he brought most of it back. There must be a big hole in Fossil Bluff where he'd been...

[Part 1 0:48:04] Lee: But they'd been there for more than six months. They'd been there for quite a long time, hadn't they?

Bowler: No, I don't think so. They got flying in in the autumn, they built the hut, flown in the autumn. Yeah, just over six months, seven months. It was something like that. It wouldn't have been that crazy because the summer season was, what, five or six months. I mean, god knows how they survived with just three of them. It was bad enough with ten of us on the base, never mind three. They got on alright, I gather. Nobody got murdered or anything.

[Part 1 0:48:34] Lee: So, am I right in thinking you made a second trip?

Bowler: Yeah, well, we lost one and FIDS in their wisdom said: 'We'll try it again'. There must have been a brilliant set-up of logistics to get another tractor, the charging set I wanted, the Herman Nelson I wanted, all the stuff I wanted, all came down on the boat. It was absolutely brilliant. I didn't realise it at the time but I must say that the blokes on the Biscoe, in particular, were incredibly helpful. 'Can I have one of these planks?' 'Have two.' 'Can I have that?' 'No, you flamin' well can't. I'm going off duty in ten minutes and if it's not there when I come back, I don't mind.' And anything I wanted, I could have. And it was the same on base. The diesel mech did an awful lot of work for us. On the boat, the first baskets ??? [inaudible] came down deck cargo, got swamped with sea water and the electrician on the boat, I mean he couldn't do everything but if we got the starter motors off and the dynamos off, he boiled them up in distilled water, reoiled them and we put them back. Some of the stuff we couldn't get out. The voltage controls we couldn't get into. They of course ended up a sort of greeny-bluey mush. Didn't work very well. I had to replace them with different wattage bulbs. But, as I say, everybody was so helpful, they really were.

[Part 1 0:50:07] Lee: So the second pair of Muskegs, when they arrived they weren't working properly because of the seawater problem?

Bowler: No, that was the first lot.

[Part 1 0:50:13] Lee: The first lot.

Bowler: As far as I understand, the second lot...well, the first lot came down and I did a trip with them and took Stonington base in over sea-ice. I think we started over 15 miles out, ended up about three miles out. But the whole of that base was taken in – you see on the photographs. We ran that about 18 hours a day or something like that. We ran fairly busy. Got the ship unloaded. But as I say, they were very, very good.

[Part 1 0:50:44] Lee: Tell me about building the hut there, that John Cunningham...

Bowler: It's not a lot that I can remember because it was just plain work and at the time we didn't appreciate how good John Cunningham was because he didn't appear to be organising anything but he had everything really going nicely. And of course, poor lad, I presume he didn't have a university degree but he had more brains than your average elephant, he was good. I admired him tremendously, he really was good gear. And I went to see him, you know.

[Part 1 0:51:16] Lee: Recently?

Bowler: No. I used to have a business delivering mobile homes. I had a lorry, I was the driver and I went up to Aviemore with a caravan. [I said] 'I heard John Cunningham's here'. 'Yes, he is actually, he's out'. 'Give him my regards, next time I'm here I'll come and see him'. About a year later I went up there again, went into the ??? [inaudible], 'Is John Cunningham...?' 'Oh, he's dead'. 'Pardon?' 'He's dead'. 'How did he die?' It was something about trying to save a girl student in Wales and he drowned and John Cunningham hated the sort of women climbers being adventurous and to end up with that happening to him it was bad luck on John's part. I thought he'd survive anything. He did the crossing of Georgia with that – what was his name, can't remember – slightly crazy explorer that spent a year on Georgia. John did the crossing and took photographs of that. Duncan Carse, was it Duncan Carse? Yeah, probably, I don't know. Unfortunate initials, V. D. Carse. [Laughter]. I think they were his initials, not his qualifications. Yeah, I admired John because he was also a very, very good photographer. He would wait hours for the light to be right. He would go out and photograph a typical bloody icicle and get it perfectly done. Have you heard the story about the dark room and the paper and that sort of thing?

[Part 1 0:53:06] Lee: Please tell.

Bowler: Haven't you heard it? Ah, well. We had a guy who should be nameless, who was a bit hamfisted, and, if anybody knows about cameras, he broke a Voightlander. Now this is the equivalent of bugging up an anvil, you know. So, he said: 'Can I go in the darkroom tonight, John?' John said: 'Yes, but No. Tomorrow. We've only got one bulb left. Knowing you, it'll burst. Might not be your fault, but it'll burst. Knowing you, you'll leave the paper open. I'll sort it out and you can go tomorrow'. So, this guy said: 'I'll use an ordinary bulb'. 'OK, fine, fair enough'. So the next night he goes up and John says: 'Now then, do what you like. Box of papers, you use those and none others because you'll leave them open. Get on with it'. And he strode downstairs. John's got that silly grin on his face. This bloke comes down: 'Hoi!'. 'What?' 'Look at this!' He's got a photograph of an iceberg or something and written across the middle is 'Swan 100 watt, 240 volts'. [Laughter]. He says: 'This can't happen'. The guy goes up, gets the bulb out, gets emery paper, grinds the name up, puts it back in, puts the paper in, 'Swan 100 watts 240 volts' comes out again. Now we've got, oh, five or six guys with degrees, all saying 'Well, it's a condensing lens, it can't happen.' ??? [reply inaudible]. So, anyway, he goes up again. I told you how careless he was. He dropped an unexposed sheet of paper in the developer and it came up '100 watt etc'. John had been up and made a negative and exposed all the bits of paper, so when he did it, the film came up. And he was sitting there laughing his head off. Brilliant practical joke. I don't think I've heard of a better one. [Laughter].

[Part 1 0:55:24] Lee: How was it that you did a second year, because you were only signed up for one, weren't you?

Bowler: No, I didn't sign up for anything. I think it was expected that I would do two anyway. I wasn't due to come out and I think I'm probably being a bit pedantic, but I don't think one year is anywhere near enough. I think what you should do, you should do two years and then probably have break of two or three years and then go back again. 'Cos it's a very specialised, tricky business, and you don't realise just how tricky it is until you... whether anybody would volunteer to go back a second time, I don't know Probably. I think I would have done actually.

[Part 1 0:56:08] Lee: Where did you spend the winter? At Stonington?

Bowler: Yeah. Oh yeah, at Stonington. Still had the tractors and I used to feed the dogs going round with the tractors when the weather was pretty bad and...

[Part 1 0:56:19] Lee: Did you put the tractors to sleep for the winter?

Bowler: Oh yes. Well, you've seen the sheets.

[Part 1 0:56:21] Lee: Well tell me how you did that, please?

Bowler: Well, we had ??? [inaudible]. God bless the boat. We had a couple of canvas hatchcovers. We laid them out on the ground with a piece of wood on them and drove the tractors forward onto them and threw the sheets all over the tractor and looped ropes round them so that they were totally waterproof, they were totally snowproof. The dogs certainly weren't. That kept them in good order.

[Part 1 0:56:50] Lee: There was probably condensation.

Bowler: Is there condensation there? It's bone dry. It's so dry that you get ablation. Do you know what ablation is?

[Part 1 0:57:03] Lee: No.

Bowler: Well, ice turns into vapour without going through the water stage. It ablates, everything is dry. I used to smoke. After about three days with having the tin open, you could pick the cigarette up, the tobacco would fall out and you'd end up with a tube of paper. Tastes the same.

[Part 1 0:57:24] Lee: And they were OK wrapped up for the winter?

Bowler: Oh yeah. I took them out, had a certain amount of work to do to them. What I was going to say was when the sun came back, it was up on the mountains, we weren't going to have it for about a fortnight or so and I ran trips. Speedboats round the bay ??? [inaudible] the *Bluebell* and we took the guys up to look at the sun. We went up the mountain and sat in the sun for five minutes and crept back down. "It's still there".

[Part 1 0:57:56] Lee: In the Muskeg?

Bowler: In the Muskeg, yeah. About five or six miles, something like that.

[Part 1 0:58:03] Lee: Let me just change the disk. We'll talk a bit more.

This is Bryan Bowler, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 11 June 2012. BAS Ref.: AD6-24-1 175-1-2. Bryan Bowler, Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: What were the Muskegs like to look after? You had to maintain them and also try to improve them.

Bowler: Well, I didn't know anything about them. I knew they made a few mistakes, like somebody sent a two-stroke charging set down. Now, a two-stroke in cold weather is a bit of a laugh but when you want to use it seriously, it's not funny. To tell you how bad it was, this ??? [inaudible] I actually got it in the base, warmed it up, started it and when I walked out into the cold, it stopped. I knew how it felt, but I didn't want to do that so I asked for Briggs and Strattons which is a reliable engine, 'Please four-stroke, please easy to start', and I got them and I got nearly everything I wanted. The only thing I didn't get, right, was one tractor had got a positive earth and one had got a negative earth. Now a negative earth tractor, if you have a generating set, you leave a spanner on it, it tends to dissolve the spanner. And a bright flash puts people off actually. Ron got the shock of his life a few times. The only way I could do it was, the generator had ??? [inaudible] so I put them inside. They had personnel sack, which was a big bag. I bolted them inside the bag, folded the bag up, tied the neck – driftproof, lovely. When you wanted to run, roll the bag down and get them started. Bit of a problem there 'cos they had these auto-recoil starts and the balls froze in the auto-recoil, so they didn't work so 'Please can we go back to a bit of string' sort of thing. As I say, one was positive earth, one was negative earth, the problem was the spanner again, there was a bright flash and the spanner disappeared, closely followed by Ron. [Laughter].

[Part 2 0:02:08] Lee: Who is Ron?

Bowler: Ron Gill, the bloke who took over from me, he was a driver down there.

[Part 2 0:02:14] Lee: Were these the first Muskegs the Antarctic had used?

Bowler: No, they'd had them, they'd had two or three on the British Antarctic Crossing, the one Fuchs went on. '57 were it? '63? Thought it would be earlier than that. Yeah, and I gather they had performed very well and Bunny Fuchs had said he regretted leaving them behind when they were still working and they carried on with Sno-cats and I think they finished with one Muskeg and gave it to the New Zealanders and that fell down a hole, having crossed the Antarctic, it fell down a crevasse. I think it killed a couple of them, I'm not sure. No, they were absolutely super... I gather Bombardier made them, I think somebody said they made over three

thousand of the damned things. No, they were tough old birds. One of the troubles the first year was they would get cargo covered in salt. They were running nicely until one day going up in the afternoon halfway up the glacier to the airfield, it stopped. So, I was on base, I dashed... I went up there in the other Muskeg, couldn't find anything the matter with it, pushed the button and the damned thing started. What is it? And this happened three or four times and I'm beginning to feel a right steaming burk. I'm the Muskeg expert, I know everything about them. Oh no I don't. I don't know what's wrong. And so one afternoon, somewhat lateish, I was on base again, somebody comes down, says: 'One of your Muskeg's stuck again'. 'God Almighty'. I went back up there and someone was there already, so I said: 'Look, I'll tell you what, I'll do a check on the plugs, start checking the normal way the carburettor, plugs, go through the series you do'. Now this is in the evening, getting a bit dusky and I've got another bloke with me. Starter motor and the whole of the plug system, the ignition lit up. What had happened was it had got salt water on it. When the tracks were going and throwing snow up, if the wind was in the wrong direction, it got in the radiator, blew moisture in and everything shorted out. 'Help, Bryan!' Once I saw him coming up there, it'd dried out. 'What's wrong with it?' So with a liberal application of WD40 and clean the plugs up, we never had that problem again. It made me feel an absolute idiot for a few days, you know. I still don't know how I could have found it without someone else.

[Part 2 0:05:20] Lee: I've got here your notes about your second season, an extract from your report back to base about Muskegs and you were begging for several improvements, in particular somewhere sheltered in which to work on them.

Bowler: Well, yeah. People do not realise, where tractors are concerned, the difficulty of working on site with tracks. Now, I never had any trouble with tracks. I wasn't begging, I was only suggesting that they send a workshop, covered, so that you can work in the cold. You can't work in the snow you can't work in the wind. If you can keep the wind and snow off you, you stand a chance. Something inflatable but with enough room to get at the tracks. That's important to get at the suspension because I thought that sooner or later you'd have trouble with suspension. Because once you took the side beam off, there was a loud ping, everything went off line and you had to get it back with turn buckles and screws and cables and that sort of thing and pull the metal ??? [inaudible] out that supported the suspension. They used to ping out of line, you had to pull them back. You needed cover to do that, so I said 'If they're going down to Fossil Bluff, they needed some form of cover.' I wasn't begging, I was only suggesting, saying that.

[Part 2 0:06:39] Lee: 'Badly needed' was the phrase you used. Did they get the shelters?

Bowler: Don't know.

[Part 2 0:06:50] Lee: You were also asking for a compass.

Bowler: Yes. That was in case anybody else wanted to do sea ice and drive at night. In whiteout the only way round that is to drive when you've got visibility, that's at night-time with lights. And you need a reliable compass, 'cos the one I had was 27 degrees out. That's a bit much, really. Soon drop in the Bellinghausen if you were unlucky. And the deviation was 40 west, which was the general direction of the Bellinghausen, you know. No, I thought it would be a nice idea. Probably for use inland, I don't know, it might still be useful. But I had a compass there that did not work. It was an aircraft compass. They were only cheap, you could adjust them to take off the vehicle magnetism. Cut the magnets, 10 minutes or so you can swing your compass and you know which way you're going.

[Part 2 0:07:52] Lee: You applied quite a bit of plywood casing to them as well. What was the thinking behind that?

Bowler: Basically, the recirculation... the idea was to recirculate hot air because under certain wind conditions, snow conditions, snow was thrown up, froze on the radiator, you got the engines overheating. So, if you covered them in plywood, as I did, we put slides in as well, not only did you stop the drift getting in at night but you could recirculate warm air and melt the ice on your radiators and still drive, still run on. And the other thing was, I was quite proud of those because on base when I built them, I got a set of screws and I brazed nuts to the end of the screws and if you couldn't pull it with the speed brace – you know the sort of handle you use for winding nuts with – I went back to square one and removed them so you could actually take it to pieces with your mitts on and using your speed brace. I was quite proud of that. [Laughter]. Simple things in life.

[Part 2 0:09:02] Lee: One of the bigger modifications was a cable, a winch cable.

Bowler: They came with winches. The only big modifications [was] I came up with the idea of building a crane and Ron Gill fabricated a crane out of scaffolding and that was one of the most useful adjuncts you ever come across in your life. I mean you could pick fuel drums up, when your sledges got cemented in as they do, you could lift them out as opposed to pull them. Oh that crane was well worth its weight in proverbial platinum, never mind gold.

[Part 2 0:09:34] Lee: Did you build them on both machines?

Bowler: No, no. Just on one. It would get a bit complicated, I think.

[Part 2 0:09:44] Lee: There's a note here about Ron Gill. I've been asked to ask you why Ron Gill was always sent out on the sea-ice first?

Bowler: I'm not going to tell you, apart from the fact that both John and I weighed about 12 stones [Laughter] and Ron Gill weighed about 18. So one night, he was in the base saying: 'I've only just come on base.' Both John and Bryan they take my word on checking the ice with an ice chisel and we're going 'If Ron doesn't fall through, we're going to be alright.' [Laughter]. But he wasn't all that bad because when you fall in the sea-ice, you don't get wet.

[Part 2 0:10:23] Lee: Don't you?

Bowler: No. You're clothes are so cold, the moment you hit the water you have a protective barrier of ice and that lasts for about half a minute before it melts and you get wet. So you drag an ice encrusted Ron out, dust him down, send him up in front. [Laughter]. It wasn't dangerous. I don't know, it was just one of those things we did, I suppose.

[Part 2 0:10:50] Lee: How did you get on with the four-legged tractors, the dogs, the huskies?

Bowler: I loved them, they were great fun. I was very lucky in that I would be on base when they used to leave them behind, pregnant and nursing, whatever. And I used to clip them on my belt and go ski-joring up to the airfield, three or four dogs at a time. I thoroughly enjoyed that, that was good fun.

[Part 2 0:11:17] Lee: And was there some sort of story about a Beaver aircraft as well?

Bowler: Yeah. I'd been flying. The pilots used to let me sit up front and have a 'cabbie'. And I was flying one day and – I think it was Ron Lord – disappeared down the back and when you're flying for somebody else, you like to give the aircraft back, when they take over again, at exactly the same height and at exactly the same heading. So I'm concentrating on flying this Beaver, I'm not that used to it but the damned thing was unstable. It wouldn't keep the correct height and I was juggling everything in the front, Ron stood down the back [thinking] 'What the hell's wrong here? Can't be turbulence.' Anyway, he comes back: 'Everything alright?' I said; 'Yeah, I'm managing, it's a bit tricky.' 'It is, I'll go and jump up and down in the back, mess you about.' [Laughter]. Then I remember taking off one day, coming downhill at Stonington and the sun had been on the snow, and I think that we were fairly heavily loaded at the time and it was a flight to Fossil Bluff. So it would be sort of mid-day and the sun was pretty long, as you know, and the ice was giving way under the skis and we had everything on the instrument panel was in the red and the only thing that wasn't working properly was the speedometer and that wasn't going up like it should have been. We virtually fell off the end of the cliff just ... I can't

remember which flyer it was, turned round and said: 'I'm not doing that again!' ??? [inaudible] a chance. Again, we just said: 'Oh, Lord. That happened.' It's just one of these things. Second year, third year you know what you're doing. First year you haven't a clue, have you?

[Part 2 0:13:26] Lee: There seemed to be very little training in those days.

Bowler: This is what I'm saying. On the other hand, if you give people too much training they've got to realise what crap they're going to end up with and say: ??? [inaudible]. They have to be very carefully taught by someone who really understands the personality of 21 year old graduates.

[Part 2 0:13:54] Lee: Snowy petrels. Did you come across any of those?

Bowler: What?

[Part 2 0:13:57] Lee: Snowy petrels.

Bowler: Oh, yeah. I mean I loved them. I thought they were brilliant. They were down there middle of winter, almost pitch black and you'd go out and there'd be a white flash go past. What on earth they eat down there I have no idea.

[Part 2 0:14:12] Lee: This was Stonington?

Bowler: This was Stonington, yes. And I think there were snowy petrels in King George Sound. There was a sort of rock bluff several hundred feet up and there were snowy petrels nesting up there. As I say, what they eat I don't know. They were the most amazing birds.

[Part 2 0:14:32] Lee: Was that the only life, wildlife you saw in the winter?

Bowler: Yeah. Obviously penguins weren't there, seals weren't there. Seals only came up at a certain time to pup and penguins, where we were we only had adelies. Basically junior Hitlers, had tempers, as you can imagine. I've been proposed to by an adelic.

[Part 2 0:14:57] Lee: Have you?

Bowler: Yeah. I was standing there and an adelic comes up, a stone in its beak, lays it at my feet and says: 'How's about it, big boy?' [Laughter]. I turned him down, obviously. Emperors used to – only the young ones - go walkabout 'cos we were nowhere near their nests. Snowy petrels and skuas of course and then in the sea we saw orca. I remember seeing an enormous pod of these killer whales. You couldn't count them, there must have been 80, 90

of them together. God help anybody who gets in the way of that lot. They really were horrendous.

[Part 2 0:15:41] Lee: Did you have any close encounters?

Bowler: No. Shot lots of seal, what we used those days to feed the dogs.

[Part 2 0:15:51] Lee: Is there a long solo ski trip with Bryan at some point?

Bowler: No, it wasn't long. It was probably about 9, 10 miles, something like that. No, the diesel mech was playing about with his injector pipes breaking and packing up. There was a bit of a problem. Then somebody said there was a base, an Argentinean base some way away: 'They'll have generators on./' I said: 'I'll pop over,' and John Cunningham 'Yeah, alright, weather's OK.' So I chucked a pair of skis on and put a few bits of rations in me pockets and I didn't take anybody with me 'cos I was so big-time, I still am about skiing, there wasn't anyone could keep up with me. I was so used to it. I done six weeks every year or ten weeks every year. We used to kilometres 25 kilometres a day without straining too much, it was fine. I got there and found injector pipes, took them off the generator. Don't know if the Argentineans ever got it running again, I don't know. And I found a record. It was the 'Los Paraguayos', ??? [inaudible] thing. And I legged it back to base, skied back to base and - was it Mike Tween, I don't know, the diesel mech at the time, - gave him these pipes and put this record in the base. I don't know if you know the rule about playing records?

[Part 2 0:17:26] Lee: No, go on.

Bowler: Well, John's theory was you can play as many records as you want as long as it's somebody else's. You may not play your own records. Well this 'Los Paraguayos' came in all the time, they wore the damn thing out, it was on all the time 'cos it was something new.

[Part 2 0:17:43] Lee: What was the theory behind that policy of not playing your own records?

Bowler: Well, you can imagine what it's like if somebody likes the Beatles and plays the same tune over and over again, somebody is going to fall out with it and say: 'Sod off!', you know. So, somebody else had to ask for it. I mean you listened to your headphones in the bedrooms whenever anyone didn't want it. No restrictions there. Actually playing loud music, as you can imagine...They were all very sensible rules all very sensible.

[Part 2 0:18:12] Lee: Was there any classical music played?

Bowler: I didn't play it at all. I had a few comedy LPs, one of them Bob Newhart and that sort of thing. I mean he was my hero, Bob Newhart. I've not heard anything as brilliant since.

[Part 2 0:18:31] Lee: Got the driving lesson?

Bowler: Yes. And the submarine.

[Part 2 0:18:35] Lee: I don't know that one but I know the one about Raleigh finding tobacco. [Laughter].

Bowler: You're laughing at it and haven't even heard. I tell you what. I prefer modern days. You work for the BBC. How the hell did they get away with 'Mrs Brown's Boys'? Have you seen it?

[Part 2 0:18:59] Lee: Yes, I have.

Bowler: And it's so funny where she... some of the things she does, and then you look at it and it's assisted by a Southern Irish radio programme, and they're on about contraceptives ??? [inaudible] how they did it, I don't know.

[Part 2 0:19:15] Lee: How much flying did you do down there then?

Bowler: Not a lot. I went around... I don't really know, it was quite a bit. Usually the second year they get you out. I had a bit of a run-in with the Navy at one stage. I was on the *Biscoe* and they wanted a tellurometer or something putting on this island. And we got a helicopter, going out to this island, they were checking the load off – one tellurometer, three batteries, two days food, tent. 'Whoa! Two days food, no way.' 'Ah well, it's weight restriction.' I said: 'There is a weight restriction, I'm going to wait till you get...'. And I actually had a sort of verbal punch-up with his lordship the Admiral, whoever it was. I said: 'We're not going. We're not going on there with limited food, for Christ's sake. I want six weeks at least'. Mumble, mumble, mumble. So anyway, we made them fly the food out first, 'cos we didn't believe they would fetch it later, and they said 'We will fetch you in two days.' Two and a half weeks later they got us out. Admittedly there wasn't any urgency because we'd got food, but if we hadn't had food. There are people who don't realise what can happen with weather like that.

[Part 2 0:20:49] Lee: There's reference to an 'Admiral's taxi service.'

Bowler: [Laughter]. Oh that was the beginning of the end, that was.

[Part 2 0:20:58] Lee: This is the *Protector*, wasn't it?

Bowler: No, he was on the *Biscoe* at the time.

[Part 2 0:21:05] Lee: Go on then, tell me the story.

Bowler: Well, I don't know, he came on the base, it was at Stonington on base, he had a little radio or something and the Admiral decides he wants to go back. So it's blowing a little bit down the Neny Fiord. I was new, first year. 'Try me and I'll take you.'

[Part 2 0:21:26] Lee: Was it a Beaver?

Bowler: No, I was in the Muskeg.

[Part 2 0:21:29] Lee: Oh, right.

Bowler: So I'm driving the Muskeg down Neny Fiord and his lordship 'I say, you drive this rather well, did you teach yourself?' So I turned and said: 'Did you teach yourself to be an Admiral, then?' [Laughter]. Anyway, we got him to the boat and it was engines running, don't forget this is sea-ice. 'You're not going back, get on.' We put the cabins [phonetic] on, lifted them on board the ship.

[Part 2 0:22:09] Lee: The Muskeg?

Bowler: Yeah, they put the Muskeg on the ship and pulled away from the ice and 'The Captain wants to see you.' 'What have I done wrong now?' I went up and he says: 'Never do that again!' I said: 'What?' 'Look.' And I looked out and there's bits of sea ice coming past with me tracks I'd just made on it.

[Part 2 0:22:35] Lee: Was it broken right behind you?

Bowler: Oh yes, and in front, it was all over the place. I didn't realise how bad it was and, in fact, he'd been holding the ice in with the boat where we came up to it. You don't realise what it's like, he would understand that. Anyway, the Admiral got home and dry.

[Part 2 0:22:50] Lee: So how did you get back to Stonners then?

Bowler: Oh well, you wait a bit till the storm blows itself out and then chunter [phonetic] up against the ice and dump you off and tell you to bugger off again.

[Part 2 0:23:02] Lee: That's with the Muskeg.

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:23:04] Lee: So they saved you, the ship saved you.

Bowler: I don't know how it was. I got told off for it as well.

[Part 2 0:23:17] Lee: Were there any other close calls you haven't mentioned yet?

Bowler: I don't know really. I mean every day we seemed to ??? [inaudible]. Again, you didn't realise how tricky life was until you hear a couple of years after I left there were two other guys died out there. And they were closer than I'd been solo on the skis. I must have been mad. 20 miles on skis was nothing.

[Part 2 0:23:50] Lee: So, there's no Base Commander telling you what to do and what not to do.

Bowler: No, John was a tough guy. If he thought you could do it, he let you do it. He made me Deputy at one stage, god bless him, for what it was worth. Mind you, I think everybody else had left except me and the radio op. I admired the guy. He let everybody go and do as they wanted as long as it wasn't crass stupidity, which in my eyes it was I suppose, but having seen me skiing and ski-joring, he knew what I could do. That sounds a bit big-headed, doesn't it?

[Part 2 0:24:30] Lee: No, not at all. It's personal experience, isn't it. Tell me about building this caboose. Where did that idea come from?

Bowler: Well, basically a two-man tent is a bit of a job to put up anyway in bad weather and when it's been snowing a bit, it takes a long time to get down and having taken it down, you've then got the tractor to start, which basically you're looking at sometimes up to two hours for moving. You look out of the window and after two hours it's bloody manky again, so you put the tent back up. So, I thought if I make a sort of caravan – again, god bless the boat builders, there was lots of spare plywood around – I'll build a caboose and I made it like a brick wall, eight foot plus a four foot bit, then the other side was four foot, ??? [inaudible], spaced to keep it strong and I had four by twos everywhere, had a sloping roof and an escape hatch in the roof. Gash hole in the floor and I didn't build it on the sledge, I built it separate from the sledge so that it was attached by bits of rope, so the sledge could move without pulling the caboose to bits. We actually, one day, to give you an idea how lucky you could be. We looked out, good weather, Ron and I, someone else, there were three of us in it. Two of us went outside to start the tractors. Ron made the coffee or tea and from getting up to moving the tractors, 20 minutes. Now that's a helluva improvement on two hours when time is important because the weather's going to change if you're not careful. Well, I thought it was a good idea, you know.

[Part 2 0:26:27] Lee: So what were the pros and cons compared to tents? Were the caboose OK in heavy snow, in heavy drifting or could you get snowed in?

Bowler: Well, you got a route, you can go back to the route. And the glory of it was to a certain extent was ... I've got some ring bolts and I put them on the end of the caboose so that the aerial bolt fitted in and you then went out in the snow, 50 to 100 metres, put another pole with a couple of guys, came back in hanging on the wall all ready to use the radio. So you could do a radio sched in next to no time at all. Whereas the other system of using an ice-axe and unpacking everything from bags and god knows what could take quite a long time. Alright, it was scientific and people wanted temperature and winds and all that, but it only took three quarters of an hour out of trip time. You were very restricted with daylight as well and weather. I thought the caboose was a good idea. Thoroughly recommended it.

[Part 2 0:27:33] Lee: Was it cosy?

Bowler: Very.

[Part 2 0:27:36] Lee: What was in it?

Bowler: Well, it was 12 foot long and about four foot wide and at one end there were two people slept and then at the other end the other person slept and opposite him was the cooking stove and all the bits and pieces and the gash hole, and the door. So three of you could lie in comfort without being too ... It had a window. I had a couple of broken Muskeg windows and I made them double glazed. And I turned canvas inside out and nailed it down so that the nails were hidden and all the joints were drift-proof. I gather it worked anyway, that was the main thing. I wasn't bothered about what happened afterwards, I was at Fossil Bluff.

[Part 2 0:28:32] Lee: You slept in it yourself, did you? Did you sleep in it yourself?

Bowler: Oh yes. We used it on the trip down. It really was, it was...??? [inaudible] everybody else wants to be stupid. That's the way to do it.

[Part 2 0:28:43] Lee: And how did it perform in high winds, because presumably it was rather like a...

Bowler: Well it rocked and rolled. A two-man tent's got a little thin panic rope that you hang onto in a high wind to stop it blowing away. I don't think we had a lot of trouble. We used to get wind scoops and you'd get frozen in. You get the same with a tent anyway. I think possibly the advantage of the tent was of course the weight. Used with dogs and skidoos and that sort of thing. You couldn't tow a caboose around unless you made the whole thing out of polysterene and then it would blow away.

[Part 2 0:29:22] Lee: So, did you not use it on the move? Did you not...?

Bowler: All the time, yeah. In fact I used to run a mobile café with it down King George Sound. I went out and the guys were dragging a tellurometer up and down the nearest mountains, coming back, charging the batteries, having a cup of coffee. It was a mobile café really.

[Part 2 0:29:45] Lee: The caboose made the journey from Stonington to Fossil Bluff, did it not?

Bowler: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:29:48] Lee: On the first or second year?

Bowler: Second year.

[Part 2 0:29:50] Lee: Second year, and it's still there.

Bowler: Is it?

[Part 2 0:29:53] Lee: I presume it's still there.

Bowler: Well, how the hell did it last 50 years? We did a good building job on it. [Laughter].

[Part 2 0:30:01] Lee: Well, it was certainly there in the 60's. George Kistruck talks about using it as an emergency store and also a reserve shelter in case the hut burnt down.

Bowler: Oh, yeah, that would make sense. Oh no, you can't expect ... your explorers get used to this tent and, as I say, the weight problem, but for the tractors it weighed virtually nothing.

[Part 2 0:30:27] Lee: This is Jonathan Walton writing in the 70's: 'The caboose was nowhere near as comfortable as the pyramid tent but it was convenient not to have to pack the sledge every morning. It was entirely weatherproof. We took the 'kegs as far south as Coal Nunatak and as far north as Carse Point several times. It was used frequently on several trips to and from Sporten ??? [phonetic] Glacier. In 1973 Aphrodite broke through ice covering a melting pool and submerged. The rear towbar was about two foot underwater. With the assistance of the on Blodwin and some ice filled scaffolding poles and some ingenious pulley systems, Jim Bishop and Roger Tindley extracted Aphrodite, put her on a Maudheim⁵ and took her back to the Bluff.

⁵ A type of sledge.

Bowler: With a re-build that would be reasonable. I would say, because it's so basic, providing they can fly the stuff in, it's fairly simple engineering. There's nothing over-clever about a Muskeg. It's a basic agricultural tractor. And the gearing and steering I had no problem with. I thought they might have it later on but I don't know. I'd be surprised if they had much problems. There might have been a bit of condensation problems because you do get that...

[Part 2 0:32:08] Lee: Jonathan Walton suggested that by the mid-'70's the skidoos were beginning to take over.

Bowler: Well, mid'70's, that's 15 years. It's not bad, is it? No, of course, a skidoo's got to be much better 'cos it's much lighter and when you're slogging up on the glacier it's not going to fall through quite as many crevasses, are they? But for actually running up and down the Sound and being a bit of a transport café for the surveyors who are going up and down putting tree points in, it did the job.

[Part 2 0:32:40] Lee: What do you remember then? So when you arrived at Fossil Bluff the first time, were they still in the process of setting it up at that point?

Bowler: No, no, no. It was already built. They'd spent the year there or the winter there. I think it took us 90 days and the aircraft had been down there about three or four weeks earlier. The second trip only took about 23 days and the aircraft only beat us by three days.

[Part 2 0:33:12] Lee: But on that first, were you taking things down, supplies down to Fossil Bluff?

Bowler: We were just taking the tractors down and fuel and that sort of thing and I thought we had taken as much fuel as we could. Two or three trips from base, relayed the stuff down to get as much fuel down there as possible. But the trouble with fuel, a couple of drums of fuel, the poor old Beaver was looking a bit... It's quite a weight, you know. But we didn't have any instructions on what to do or how to do it – just take these two down to Fossil Bluff.

[Part 2 0:33:46] Lee: So would you say that Fossil Bluff was complete by the time you arrived, as a base?

Bowler: Oh, yes. Yeah. Generator had broken down.

[Part 2 0:33:53] Lee: Did you fix it?

Bowler: No. ??? [inaudible]. And somebody brought some soap because they'd run out of soap about a month previously. [Laughter]. One of the radio

operators came down and very politely said: 'Not very tidy, Fossil Bluff. It's a little bit dirty. Would you mind if I washed it?' And somebody said, 'Well, if you've got any soap we'd rather have a wash first!' It was a bit basic. The food was a bit horrible. There was a bit of a cock-up on labelling or something and they got about 4,000 tins of freeze dried beans and not a lot of anything else. Probably somebody has mentioned that, I should think. Again, this Admiral guy came down and said: 'Furthest, furthest sailor since Scott.' And I said: 'Well, I'm a soldier and I've just come back from down South.' Couldn't resist the navy. 'So, what would you like?' 'Can we have some meat?' 'Well, I'll fly back to the ship and I'll get you some sent down.' And the *Biscoe*, god bless 'em, sent down a large lump of mutton, which we couldn't eat.

[Part 2 0:35:08] Lee: Because ?

Bowler: We'd lost the muscles in our jaws. We'd been living on sledging rations and dried food and tinned food for six months, nothing to chew, and our jaws weren't strong enough. We'd lost the strength. There are some funny things happen, you don't realise.

[Part 2 0:35:29] Lee: According to BAS records there's still one Muskeg in the garage at Fossil Bluff today.

Bowler: Well, that kind of makes it a World Heritage site. [Laughter]. Why not? No, I'm pleased. I know I couldn't ... I didn't appreciate really what we were doing. I didn't understand it. I was just a delivery job.

[Part 2 0:35:49] Lee: Did you appreciate it now? Do you realise how important that was?

Bowler: To a certain extent, yes. But, so what, it was your job. I was in the Forces, I'd finished that job. I went back to the army, obviously, and I got flown straight out to Singapore, which was a bit of a change from Fossil Bluff. And Singapore said: 'Ah, we want you. You go down to Kuching, which is in Borneo. So I said: 'Alright.' I got on a plane to Borneo. I was met by the boss at the airport. 'Now then Sergeant, got a job for you. Don't unpack. I was in UK one and a half days earlier. 'Don't unpack, you're going up country. You've got a troop. You're troop leader. You've got a troop up at the sharp end there. Somebody stood up in Parliament and said there were no Australians in Borneo. Well, unfortunately they hadn't counted the Captain, the Sergeant and this unit you're going to take over. Now get the hell up there quick!' 'So, what do I do?' 'Well, just liaise with the Ghurkas, see what they want and every time anybody blinks, they should see an armoured car.' And that was me job. I was 003 I think it was, south, on the equator. Instead of snow, it rained – 300 inches a year. Second wettest place in the World. So that was OK. It's a job, it's your life, it's your work. You don't bother too much. I've been in armoured cars, I've been in crashes.

I've been upside down in an armoured car. I've actually landed me own glider in a hedge, which was a bit of a cock-up. I'm used to things going wrong but never permanently and I've never considered that all these things are going to be permanent. The Bowinghausen [phonetic] nearly got me but I didn't appreciate it at the time.

[Part 2 0:37:50] Lee: So looking back over your long, long career in the Army and subsequently, how do those two years in the Antarctic rate?

Bowler: Oh, they ruined me completely.

[Part 2 0:38:00] Lee: They ruined you?

Bowler: Oh yeah.

[Part 2 0:38:02] Lee: Why was that?

Bowler: Well, I'd survived, hadn't I? You get that feeling- I don't now what the base guys are like – but, when you get out in the field and you have a rough old time of it, which we certainly did, you're not King of the pile. You're not the best guy in the world or anything like that, but you're not bothered about the ones that are. I've done what I needed to do. I've spent a considerable amount of time staying alive, working at it hard and in the Army people spend a lot of money trying to kill me and they failed as well. So you're pretty... you feel pretty bullet-proof, you know. Even now, I've had the odd heart attack and that sort of thing. I'm not particularly worried about it. I'm going to slip it sooner or later but, like Woody Allen, I just don't want to be there when it happens.

[Part 2 0:38:55] Lee: So that suggests that you built up confidence and self resistance, self reliance.

Bowler: Yeah. Well the trouble there is you've got this attitude: nothing outside worries you all that much because you'll always survive, you'll always be able to do something. I suppose there's a sense of achievement but it didn't feel like that, it felt like 'So what, tick, done it.' That's a good Fid saying 'Tick, done it. What next?'

[Part 2 0:39: 22] Lee: Were there things that you learned in the Antarctic that were useful later in your life ?

Bowler: No. Got me into trouble. Would you believe it, the Army sent me on a winter warfare course [Laughter] and we're out in the Miredown [phonetic], out in the Far East there.

[Part 2 0:39:43] Lee: Whereabouts?

Bowler: It was in Germany. And it's mid-winter and one of the instructors there was a very clever bloke but he wasn't properly dressed, he was wearing langlauf boots⁶ which were not proper. So, in the morning we'd all built our tents and shelters and that sort of thing. His Majesty's got frostbite. So, 'Right, you're the senior bloke here. Organise a party to get him on a sledge and get him out.' 'Sod him, he can walk.' 'What?' 'I'm not pulling him. That's self-inflicted, he can walk.' 'It'll hurt.' 'I'm not bothered, I'm not pulling the stupid sod. I told him, he knows all about it. If he doesn't listen, that's his fault.' 'But he's an instructor.' 'So what, now he knows, he'll be an even better instructor when he gets his foot back.' I was like that. I just didn't give a damn. I knew what I was on about. I wouldn't get frostbite.

[Part 2 0:40:37] Lee: Did you fall out with anybody whilst you were in the Antarctic or whilst you were working with BAS?

Bowler: No. If anybody says they fell out with me, I don't believe it. Ron was a little bit difficult to get on with to start with because he had no idea what was up. He'd just come from Malaya or somewhere and was used to high temperatures and he several ooh nasties with batteries and things because he didn't realise. I used to run my batteries with very high specific gravity. I only kept them for a year. Ron actually had frozen batteries that cracked and broke and that was because some clever bloke sent electrolyte down in carboys⁷ and when the carboys spilled, it burnt all the labels off. There were two different strengths. The batteries got filled up at the wrong strengths and when we put them out in the tractors they froze and cracked. I think I used a bit of strong language where that was concerned. 'You'd better get it right now 'cos you ain't going to get a second chance.' But I think that was about the only time I had a quarrel with anyone, I think. He may have thought I had fallen out with him but I don't think I did. I don't think I did. It was difficult. You were up against a load of undergraduates, or graduates rather all knew it all or thought they did, till they tried to play chess against John Cunningham. Ho, ho ho!

[Part 2 0:42:16] Lee: He was good, was he?

Bowler: He'd play three or four of them at a time and beat the arse off them. He was good, yeah. And he was a shipwright from Glasgow. Tough guy. More brains than the average set-up you would see, he really was. And what he'd done, his experience in climbing and that. He had stories about climbing in the Himalayas and that sort of thing. Hilarious the things he got up to, all illegal.

⁶ A type of ski boot.

⁷ Aka a demijohn, a container used for transporting liquids.

[Part 2 0:42:52] Lee: The real reason you and everybody else were down in the Antarctic was nothing to do with science or exploration, it was all to do with politics, wasn't it?

Bowler: Erm, yeah, I don't think it's ... Well, they did find the ozone hole, the hole in the ozone layer and they made millions of quid and got a big organisation out of that. It was the most fortuitous discovery ever known to anybody in Cambridge. No, I didn't...

[Part 2 0:43:20] Lee: I mean in your period it was a case of flying the British flag.

Bowler: No, we didn't have a flag.

[Part 2 0:43:27] Lee: Metaphorically.

Bowler: No. It may have been to management but it wasn't to us. What they said they wanted to do an aerial survey, because there were no maps. The map I saw was "King George Sound, Continuous Mountains in this Area". So someone had an idea we'll do a survey. To do a survey we've got to put trig points down on the top of these mountains. Then a load of enthusiastic mountaineers and me climbing up these mountains, first ascent. I mean what would a climber give for a first ascent? We used to do it every day with a battery on your back. No, it was just a job. We were nowhere near the Argentinians. We didn't meet any Argentinians. They came across the Bay once I was away. Certainly Chileans we didn't meet. We didn't meet anybody, we were a very sort of select little bunch 'way out on an island there, waiting for the World to blow itself to pieces, as I said earlier on.

[Part 2 0:44:35] Lee: Were you genuinely concerned about the Cuban missile crisis or was it tongue in cheek? Presumably you were hearing about it on the World Service, weren't you?

Bowler: Well, you couldn't be concerned about it all that much when it was 13,000 miles away. I mean we wouldn't have heard the bang. But, there was always that possibility. I don't know how you felt about it. But I should think everybody round that – I think Andrex thought an awful lot about it [Laughter].

[Part 2 0:45:01] Lee: I was nine. I do remember Richard Dimbleby telling me on the television, no, radio I think it was, that when it was all over it was safe to go to school the next day.

Bowler: Yeah, well we didn't have that. Have you heard the story about Radio Peking?

[Part 2 0:45:27] Lee: Go on.

Bowler: Well, radio communications were tricky and you wanted to listen to something. I was with Howard Chapman and the only station we could get was Radio Peking. And we only just got it, and it was half way through a programme...

[Part 2 0:45:48] Lee: In English?

Bowler: In English, yes. Ladio Plee-king. And the announcer said: 'If you answer three questions collectly, you'll get a picture of Chairman Mao and a copy of Chairman Mao's thoughts and a two-week visa for something in Shanghai. If you get it wrong you'll get two copies of...' [Laughter]. So we listened to this and the programme finished. "Question one: What is the standard diet of honourable Chinese people?' We had a big argument because some of these clever geologists, bloke's got a degree in geography he says: 'Millet!' 'No, got to be rice.' So we put down rice. 'What utensils do the Chinese use to eat this food with?' So they don't use spoons or their fingers. No, no, chopsticks. So we put down chopsticks. 'What world wecord is held by Chinese lady athlete?' Oh, shit! We hadn't heard the programme. So we send a cable off to Stonington saying: 'Would you please send this to Radio Peking?' Question one, rice; question two, chopsticks; question three, Howard had thought something up. And we got something back from Stanley, 'Are you sure you want to send this?' 'Yes.' 'Question one, rubbish; question two, chopsticks; question three, 5,000 metres ladies open freestyle rickshaw.' [Laughter]. We never got a copy of Chairman Mao's thoughts, apart from 'If you've got a spare rocket Base E should get it.'

[Part 2 0:47:31] Lee: Should we call it a day?

Bowler: Yeah, I talk too much, I'm a bit verbose.

[Part 2 0:47:37] Lee: Not at all. Is there anything I've missed? Anything critical I've missed?

Bowler: Not really, not really. I don't know if anybody talked about the day I nearly fell off a mountain.

[Part 2 0:47:50] Lee: Go on. Where was that?

Bowler: I don't know. Some unnamed lump on the other side of the Sound. And John had said: 'We won't rope together, no need for it. Don't have your ice-axe tied to you because you could break your wrist.' And we were climbing up the side of this bloody mountain or whatever and the ice step broke away and I slid down the slope towards a big hole. I hadn't got the ice-axe. That was sliding down. I was spreading myself out on the ice - I had crampons on - I was spreading myself out on the ice to slow myself down 'cos the

ice-axe was travelling very slightly faster than I was, and I managed to slow myself down enough until this ice-axe met me. I'm still sliding down this slope towards god knows what and I got this ice-axe. I'll always remember to my dying day, I got both arms round it and dug it in and went: 'Phew, that was close!' [Laughter]. Got back up the slope and carried on and did it all over again. No, you didn't worry over much.

[Part 2 0:49:05] Lee: You didn't have sleepless nights.

Bowler: No. You did get big eye, of course, as you probably know. It's daylight all the time and people can't sleep. Or on the base during the winter everybody stops up till three o'clock and doesn't get up till early smoko at lunch-time or whenever it was. Did you hear about rice cakes? Rice cakes?

[Part 2 0:49:28] Lee: Rice cakes?

Bowler: Again, someone who'll be nameless, a scientist. It was his turn to be cook – we did turn and turn about for a week. He said: 'I can't do cakes.' John said: 'Of course you can.' 'I can't do cakes.' 'You're a scientist, follow the recipe.' So, alright, ??? [inaudible] ten minute to smoko, some beautiful cakes. Little jam on top there, little scone things, absolutely gorgeous. 'Pffutt!! Bloody hell! What have you done?' He said: 'I followed the recipe.' 'You can't have done.' 'Mind you, we didn't have any groundrice, so I used ordinary rice.' [Laughter]. That's true. I don't know. I've enjoyed talking.

[Part 2 0:50: 17] Lee: It's been an adventure, thank you very much.

ENDS.

Possible points of interest:

[Part 1 0:22:00] – Two tractor sinking incidents on the sea-ice.

[Part 1 0:26:32] – 4 Fids stranded on the sea-ice.

[Part 1 0:44:30] – Apologising to a dead penguin after killing it.

[Part 2 0:02:00] - Spanners disappearing in a bright flash.

[Part 2 0:10:24] – 'When you fall through the sea-ice, you don't get wet.'

[Part 2 0:14:57] – Proposed to by an adelic penguin.

[Part 2 0:29:35] – Mobile café in King George Sound.

[Part 2 0:35:25] – Loss of jaw strength needed to chew meat.

[Part 2 0:47:50] – Close call after losing and regaining ice-axe in a fall on unnamed mountain.

