

DAVID SIMMONS

David Simmons interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 24th of September, 2012. BAS archives AD6/24/1/191. Transcribed by Allan Wearden on the 13th March 2016.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is David Simmons interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 24th of September, 2012.

Simmons: Yes my name is David Simmons, is that sufficient? Sutton, Surrey, is the place of birth and my date of birth was 31st of March 1933.

[0:00:22] Lee: So you're now 79?

Simmons: Yes.

Lee: Would you say your father was an educated man?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes he was.

Lee: Tell me about him.

Simmons: He was an engineer, civil engineer, got his degree at Bristol.

[0:00:38] Lee: What sort of things did he build?

Simmons: Well by the time I was aware he was with the London County Council, in the old days, when it, when everything went on through the London County Council and he was in there, in fact, in the drainage department, and because I can remember during the war when there was Blitz and things, he had to do duties in London every now and again.

[0:01:10] Lee: What repairing the damaged sewers!?

Simmons: Well, more supervising it wasn't an office job, he inspected things.

[0:01:22] Lee: What about your education, David, what sort of schooling did you have?

Simmons: Oh, straight forward grammar school and university.

[0:01:35] Lee: Which university?

Simmons: Birmingham!

Lee: Birmingham, studying?

Simmons: Physics.

[0:01:40] Lee: Oh right OK. When did you first learn there was a place called the Antarctic?

Simmons: Oh, probably aware of it at time but when I was, I think, probably just after I'd graduated and found a job, what with the Trans Antarctic Expedition and the Royal Society

Halley Bay Expedition, which wasn't a BAS or a FIDS thing! But one couldn't really be aware of, not be aware these things were going on, I looked at these and thought 'Oh! I'd liked to do something like that'.

[0:02:32] Lee: What was the attraction, David?

Simmons: A bit difficult to describe, something different, something exciting, I was keen on hill walking and things, outdoor activities and so it fitted in.

[0:02:56] Lee: Had you read about Scott and Shackleton?

Simmons: No, no very little. I read about them on base of course because there were books there, but no I wasn't at all knowledgeable, at least not that I remember!

[0:03:15] Lee: Did you have a job after university, or did you go straight to FIDS?

Simmons: No I had a job.

[0:03:19] Lee: What was that?

Simmons: With the Scientific Instrument Research Association and it was there, that period while working there, that I became aware of all the Antarctic things, things going on, and thought, 'Ah! Have a go at this', applied and got the job!

[0:03:43] Lee: So did you see an advert or just write up and hope for the best?

Simmons: Did I?

[0:03:50] Lee: Did you see an advert for a job or did you just write?

Simmons: Not quite sure how that worked out, but I was aware, can't remember now.

[0:04:05] Lee: Alright!

Simmons: What that was I can remember, going up for the interview.

[0:04:12] Lee: Tell me about the interview?

Simmons: Well in fact there was one I failed, which was for the Royal Society!

Lee: Oh, you'd applied to them had you?

Simmons: And that was with a great big panel of people, what's the name of the place, somewhere at a place where the Royal Academy is in that collection of buildings, but then I saw the FIDS one, yes it would have been FIDS then wouldn't it? The Falkland Islands Dependence Survey, I saw their advert and was successful on that one!

[0:04:54] Lee: What were you applying to do, what was the job you were applying for with FIDS?

Simmons: Ah, that was just scientist because what was going on then was very little work, research work by people who went to do it for their interest. It was all a question of collecting data that went to all the various institutes that it was at, that was particularly the case where I was on the Argentine Islands, where I think we'd had almost any sort of physical measurement thing, it was possible then we were given it to do. It was a static base, static base, and so in fact ozone in those days, magnetic measurements, seismic measurements, tidal measurements all sorts and a few odd things!

[0:05:54] Lee: How was your journey south?

Simmons: That was interesting because I was on the maiden voyage of the *John Biscoe*, sailed out from Southampton and curiously was one these reasonable, we seemed to be engaged in painting the outside of it! Which struck me slightly strange when it was a new ship but it certainly needed painting and keeping up, but I suspect from sort of looking back at it, it was all part of the 'Get people to work together', so it was a fairly normal thing. It was done on all the trips!

[0:06:49] Lee: Team work!

Simmons: Yeah, yes, it was, pictures of people in the hot, where they're holystoning the deck, not sure what that is!?

[0:07:03] Lee: So what year was this David?

Simmons: '56, so I spent the whole of '57 & '58 in the Antarctic and some of '56 in getting there and some '59 coming back.

[0:07:20] Lee: Did you know before you went which base you were going to go to?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes.

[0:07:28] Lee: It was Faraday wasn't it?

Simmons: Well, now called Faraday, it was called Argentine Islands. Well it was the only one that had that style of work being done, it was the only one that I would have, I didn't, I decided I didn't want to go just as a sort of gash hand, you know what I mean? I want to go and do something that at least from the point view of professional, well advancement, but at least I would be said to be doing appropriate work for graduate businesses still!

[0:08:10] Lee: Tell me about approaching the Argentine Islands, what was it like?

Simmons: That goes a bit, because we spent some time on the way down at the Falkland Islands, but I got to the Argentine Islands with hardly any, unlike many others, without stopping any other place at all so I didn't really see. I think we went into one, W, Horseshoe which was a bit farther south and I think that was when, not sure whether we actually saw, in the distance the *Royal Yacht* but only the *Protector* or whatever the naval ship was around, would certainly have been around with the *Protector*, because Phillip was doing his...

Lee: Prince Philip?

Simmons: Yeah, of the Antarctic amongst other things!

[0:09:25] Lee: Did you see him?

Simmons: Yeah, there was a lunch on the *Biscoe* I was trying to think of the table I sat on, because there was several tables, sat with. No the name's gone, believe it or not! [Lee: So?] A physics type person or science person.

[0:09:58] Lee: FIDS had lunch onboard the *Biscoe* for the Duke?

Simmons: Yeah, [Lee: OK] as far as I can remember yes.

[0:10:06] Lee: What was the *Biscoe* like on its maiden voyage, was it a smooth and comfortable voyage or..?

Simmons: Going down yes, I don't know there were perhaps rough times, I don't remember. I'd done a bit of sailing before so wouldn't have been, I might not have felt very well, but I wouldn't have been put out by the bad weather, it's what you expect sometime. Whether the crossing which is liable be uncomfortable between the Falkland Islands and Cape Horn and the Antarctic Peninsula, I don't think on that occasion it was an uncomfortable trip at all. I do also remember the first sight of the Antarctic in the distance.

[0:10:59] Lee: What was it like, was it actually out?

Simmons: Oh it was the Peninsula you could see the hills and ice and things.

[0:11:10] Lee: You said to Amanda the scenery was something you really appreciated.

Simmons: Oh yes, absolutely.

[0:11:16] Lee: What was so special?

Simmons: Well it was just! I'd show you some pictures but you've probably seen them, not sure how to describe it, it was just magnificent, I could fish out something!

[0:11:37] Lee: No don't worry I'm just trying to get the words!

Simmons: No, that's more difficult. [Lee: It is!] I was always keen on photography and landscape photography, so that was ideal.

[0:11:50] Lee: Talk me through the arriving at Argentine Islands talk me through arrival and what you had to do.

Simmons: Well we'd spent some time in the Falkland Islands over, probably over Christmas, but got to Argentine Islands, seen very little else on the way which was a little bit unusual and because we'd gone down to, I think, to liaise with Prince Phillip and his party and then went down to where I got off as it were, and it's on this island about 5 miles off the Antarctic coast. The ship ties up or whatever it does there, and you get off and usually there's a lot of

work done, all manual work with the cargo to keep the base going, running up and down the beach or whatever it was and that's all it was in those days, it was entirely manual!

[0:13:19] Lee: Were you able to get your scientific programmes underway straight away?

Simmons: Oh there were already working, somebody had been down there the year before, made a very good job of setting things up, and then had had a furious row with the authorities and then resigned! So I think the place had been empty, but I was what you might say the assistant scientist to a chap called Joe Farman, you probably have heard of him? He was the senior that was sort of laid down, most people are done fairly equally but that was, you know.

[0:14:09] Lee: So there was no real handover period for then for scientists, there nobody to show you the ropes?

Simmons: But that would be the normal situation, well Joe Farman had got there a month before I did on a different ship and so there wasn't any problem there, he probably had to find out what's because there wouldn't be anybody handing over, think it was vacant for a while.

[0:14:45] Lee: What was the hut like in '56/'57?

Simmons: Oh it was quite comfortable. I mean there was one big dormitory room with enough bunks for everybody, about 12 or 14 people, and you did get ice if bits left for ventilation or even if it was cold, used to ice and things inside, but there were anthracite stoves around and that was no problem. They was a sort of communal not sure what you would call it, lounge isn't quite the right word?

Lee: Mess room.

Simmons: Mess room, that's the right word, and then there was the sort of the radio people's office and the met people had their office. And then we had our instruments on, the ozone one was in fact actually on a roof structure!

[0:16:00] Lee: So how did that work?

Simmons: Well you have got this huge and a very heavy machine, which the previous chap had made a beautiful mounting for, and it hung from not quite from the ceiling, but sort of this little tower he had put up, and you swung it round and it was on sunny days at least, and it was sometimes a bit frustrating because when you might want to go out and do something, you were expected to take more observations! And you sort of pointed the optical bit at the top, at the sun or whatever it was, I forget just what all the different observations were, it was to look at the ultraviolet light coming in this rather splendid instrument designed by, (name's gone), Professor somebody at Oxford University, oh Dobson!

[0:17:03] Lee: Dobson yes.

Simmons: Dobson yes! Well done, well done! The Dobson Spectrometer!

[0:17:10] Lee: Tell me about some of the chaps on base.

Simmons: It was a very mixed group, particularly the first year, in that they were quite a few old hands from different backgrounds. There was somebody that had got a basic Met Office Observer, there were few if any, not sure if Joe and I weren't the only graduates, there was a diesel mechanic and a wireless operator and unlike some base we had a fulltime cook, who had Sundays off and we took it in turns to do that on Sundays. There was a diesel generator, was somebody looking after the diesel engines. Somehow that made up about 5 met people, because of the things they were launching, the radio sonde balloons, which in bad weather could be quite a procedure but that's all, of which I'd and of the thing we were doing. I'd been to the Shetland Islands as part of the training, which was nothing to do some people imagined with getting fitter or anything, it was because of the observatory there had all the things that we had got in the Antarctic and were doing, to learn how they worked.

[0:18:52] Lee: So before you went south, you went north then?

Simmons: To the Shetland Islands, yes.

[0:18:56] Lee: Describe the facility there please, what do you remember of that place where you were training?

Simmons: Quite fascinating because Lerwick is the capital and then about a mile, 2 miles, I don't know, I can remember in those days I would have walked it from the town, but on a hill, it was fairly flat, and it was, not sure what the meteorologists would call it, was one of about 3 in the country, meteorological observatories or something, where they went in for and the magnetic work, that got separated and eventually more appropriate people than the Met Office dealt with that. But there were the magnetic measurements, the ozone measurements, they were the 2 biggest, and various other odd things!

[0:20:00] Lee: But FIDS sent you there to train specifically?

Simmons: In the instruments, yes.

[0:20:04] Lee: Right!

Simmons: Yes, nothing to do with it being arduous or anything!

[0:20:12] Lee: Not survival training!?

Simmons: No, I'm not quite sure what the arrangement was. But there was accommodation and meals provided on a mess basis.

[0:20:34] Lee: So when you went down to Argentine Island, the equipment was familiar?

Simmons: Oh there was nothing that I hadn't, it was well organised so I don't think, oh I think there was a tide gauge that we installed but that was a basically a simple thing and clearly there wouldn't have been one of those!

[0:20:55] Lee: So there was no real need for a handover as such?

Simmons: Well no, not too much, well it was particularly important then because I think this chap that had resigned, had left, he must have come out again the same time I went in, no I'm not quite sure because he did quite a bit of work too. But then there's quite a long period between the first visit and the last.

[0:21:23] Lee: So the ozone measurement you were doing, I guess you had no idea at that point how valuable they would become?

Simmons: Oh no, no!

[0:21:33] Lee: Just tell me a little bit more of what you were measuring?

Simmons: It measures the ozone content in the upper atmosphere, by comparing the absorption of several different quite narrow wave length bands of ultraviolet light as they came through. Because of it being, of differently absorbed and so according to the amount of ozone there'd be different comparisons of 2 different wave lengths, one of which was affected and one wasn't, roughly I think that's what it was!

[0:22:18] Lee: How are you reading these measurements, was it coming up on a screen?

Simmons: Oh heavens not it those days!

[0:22:24] Lee: How was it done then?

Simmons: It was entirely a wonderful machine, mechanical, no that's not quite the word, but it's, I think there is a proper technical name for that sort of spectrometer, I forget what it is, one had to there was just a sensitive galvanometer and you had to centre that, by adjusting the absorption on one of the wave lengths or something like that. And so there was this needle that was bobbling about and you had to try and keep it on that centre line, and then because of the nature of, this is going back a bit, well not electronics, but for electrical measurements, and the way of that measurement was got on to record, was you sat there twiddling this thing and you tried to keep fairly still and what you put on a circular disc which, part of that, was a smoked plate! And there was a little needle thing and a clockwork bit on it, so as you did this you scratched a little message as it were in the smoke, in the smoke on the smoke plate because scratched it off just blank I think it was probably a little paraffin lamp or a candle or something, you just went like that sort of a yellow flame which produces black stuff and you coat a disc with that!

[0:24:31] Lee: So you were smoking your own plates? [Simmons: Oh, yes.] And then you re-used the same plates again would you?

Simmons: Oh, yes.

[0:24:36] Lee: OK, and..?

Simmons: Just record the - I forget! - I think we'd then take these away and read them I don't remember all the details, but that was a fascinating, that I think when I went back again I

think it was a different method. That was quite old fashioned but there wasn't electronics in those days!

[0:25:03] Lee: So when you got this smoky plate with the marks in it, scratched in it, were you measuring with a slide rule or a ruler or something like this?

Simmons: Yeah, something like that.

[0:25:15] Lee: Against a graph, but coming up with a figure?

Simmons: Oh, yes up with a figure, yes a number.

[0:25:22] Lee: And would the ozone density fluctuate a lot?

Simmons: Oh, yes it did vary, quite a bit.

[0:25:34] Lee: From day to day, hour to hour?

Simmons: Well I think there was a daily variation, but that's not something I dealt with, when I came back the two had been separated, I don't remember all!

[0:25:47] Lee: Fair enough!

Simmons: I don't remember all the technical details.

[0:25:58] Lee: Was there anyone on base that you got on particularly well with, who you have fond memories of?

Simmons: I got on particularly well with I think with the cook the first year.

[0:26:11] Lee: Who was?

Simmons: Gerry er...?

Lee: Gerry Cutland?

Simmons: Yes that's right Gerry Cutland, who later became a steward on the ships, and he was there for the first year and in fact I've got a nice picture of him, seemed to get on and in fact it's been used in somebody's, an American's, book about Antarctic food!

[0:26:30] Lee: Oh right! He has a reputation for being a very good chef.

Simmons: Oh yes, he was well he was very good at, (what's the word?), improvising at making, producing good results from whatever he was given, yeah even if he had to find out. He had been a, I think he'd done, one of these vans he'd done some catering, but not a lot on a high scale, in the West Country I think, possibly even on a vehicle.

[0:27:13] Lee: Yeah, so you ate well?

Simmons: Oh, yes I think we did, yes, and depended a bit too, because there was quite a variation in what people would eat. Some would eat anything, which I tended to be in that

group, then there were others that turned their nose up at all sorts of things. We ate seal meat reasonably often and that I think it might have been difficult to be justified just for us, but we'd got a couple pensioned off sledge dogs and they needed feeding as well. So the seal was killed for them, but somehow penguins, penguins were tried but somehow sort of, what's the word, attitude! Nobody really wanted to, other than perhaps try and see! We did have cormorants and cooked was extremely good, we'd shoot one or two and then hung them up and they made very good food!

[0:28:40] Lee: But penguins were too friendly to eat were they?

Simmons: I think so, it was just something in the culture, would try but it wasn't at all common.

[0:28:55] Lee: I need to ask you about some of the other readings you were doing, so tell me about the tidal readings, was that a daily reading or hourly or..?

Simmons: Not sure if we needed to go and read that or whether it recorded on to a drum, I don't remember!

[0:29:13] Lee: But obviously it was something down on the water's edge, wasn't it?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes.

[0:29:18] Lee: Like a ball cock?

Simmons: Just like a cylindrical tube, with something floating in it, it went up and down on a bit of wire or something else, with a pen marking something or whatever it was, don't remember!

[0:29:34] Lee: Geomagnetism, were you reading those, taking geomagnetism reading as well? [Simmons. What?] Taking magnetic readings?

Simmons: Oh, yes that was one of the main things!

[0:29:47] Lee: Tell me what you can remember about that? [Simmons: What I?] Tell me what you can remember about that?

Simmons: Oh well!

[0:29:54] Lee: Sorry I shouldn't speak like that!

Simmons: Yes, adjust the volume a bit! Well that had a separate hut, a few hundred yards away from the main hut, which was entirely non-magnetic. When we went over to it to take the measurements, we had to make sure we weren't wearing anything steel, metal that would do that, and there were 3 instruments, you measured what direction it was and how strong it was both vertically and horizontally. And you had static instruments that did and you went and took these measurements oh, 2 or 3 times a week I think it was, but then the main measurements were the other part of the same non-magnetic hut, where you had drums with photographic paper and you had these little magnets and, suspended, and beams of light, and

these recorded on to the photographic paper that was turning round so at the end of each day we had a piece of photographic paper about that big with lots of wiggly lines on it! And then you had to look at these, compared to the reading and see what the position was or what difference the size was. And so those were done every day and in fact, we chose, or Joe chose, I'm quite happy with 12 o'clock Greenwich Mean Time to change them so that were standard, which meant it was 9 o'clock in the evening when we changed them, and I think we managed to do that, regardless of weather, I don't think we fell down on that one! Which was quite a business because it was some way away from the thing and not particularly a simple flat route!

[0:32:18] Lee: And so you'd take readings from these photographic plates as well and were they just then stored up and taken back to the UK?

Simmons: Yes, yes.

[0:32:28] Lee: So those reading weren't sent off in Morse code? Or was the radioman not relaying the readings to somebody in Stanley?

Simmons: No, no I think that was, there may be some measurement of how disturbed it was, and there may have been some summary, it was all pretty quiet and still or it was doing that! And then the radio contact was very limited in those days, I mean I think we had 1 airmail message from family of not more than a couple of hundred words once a month or something, that's one of the biggest changes of course!

[0:33:26] Lee: Did you go into the radio room much?

Simmons: Not a lot no not really, Jack got on with it, occasionally go if there was something particular, might be a few people there listening to it, but it was mostly Morse rather than voice.

[0:33:55] Lee: So were you able to pick up the BBC?

Simmons: I think we did pick up something, but I'm not very sure, uncertain about that.

[0:34:04] Lee: So did you find the work you were doing, this routine readings and recordings work was interesting or did you get bored?

Simmons: I found it sufficiently interesting and sufficiently given the feeling that you were doing something useful, because the people that wanted these results when you'd taken them, so you were taking stuff that you believed to be [Lee: worthwhile!] useful and worthwhile! As the ozone turned out to be!

[0:34:37] Lee: But very much so, yeah. Do you think? Oh sorry go on! Do you think you were aware of the fact this was part of a bigger plan, International Geophysical Year?

Simmons: Oh yes, oh absolutely yes, that is what it was all about, and they were something probably we did on forms for the IGY, I can't remember all the details!

[0:35:04] Lee: Would you be in touch with other bases doing similar work to yourself?

Simmons: No.

[0:35:09] Lee: No, so really you were quite isolated then?

Simmons: Oh yes in that sense yes, there were other places to doing it, in fact not so many on the magnetic side I think, but on the meteorological side everybody! Although the meteorologists, there were 5 of them, were separate and they looked after their business, although we might have occasionally helped them sometimes a bit, extra hand was needed to try the thing up in the air without it hitting the ground!

[0:35:48] Lee: Oh the radio sonde! [Simmons: The thing!] Did the isolation bother you at all, did you miss the rest of the world?

Simmons: No, it didn't bother me particularly no. I think it might have some people, but I don't think it did many of the people there, they wouldn't have been there I don't think if that was likely!

[0:36:12] Lee: So apart from work how else did you occupy your life, your time?

Simmons: There was music, a record player, I took music down, records down, old [Lee: 78's!], no they were 33's but there were not stereo in those days! And whenever the opportunity put on your pairs of skis, because it was an island but it was a couple of hundred feet to the top of the hill, and so there were plenty of opportunities to go skiing, skiing down to, when the sea ice froze, over to some of the other islands, so there was plenty of opportunities to get on your skis and probably had to, to get to the magnetic hut on some conditions, can't remember!

[0:37:17] Lee: How much did you pay to 'Health & Safety' in those days?

Simmons: Well in a formal sense none, but the sense of behaving sensibly and being aware that you were in a dangerous place for acting accordingly was, were quite aware of it but not in any formal way!

[0:37:46] Lee: Did you have any scary moments?

Simmons: Yes,... possibly. There was certainly one case, it was when I was going round, I think I was walking and not on skis, a bit of ice, but just ice round the base, round the island, somewhere wasn't strong enough and I went through but to somewhere to where I was standing up, up to about here, and pulled myself out and I certainly think in the brief time I was there, it sort of didn't penetrate to the inner levels, so it wasn't really, that wasn't particularly scary but just a bit I think, 'Oh, be careful!'

[0:38:44] Lee: And was there any, because you were there for 2 seasons I think weren't you?

Simmons: Yeah, 2 of us did, we were the only 2 I think?

[0:38:51] Lee: You and Joe, Joe Farman? [Simmons: Yeah.] Were there any really, really bad weather patterns, any bad blows? Oh! [Laughter]

Simmons: Yes really quite huge amounts of drifting!

[0:39:08] Lee: How did the base get on as a group, first year, second year?

Simmons: The second year, the met team particularly seemed I think to get on quite well, but they were a slightly higher proportion of graduates just wanting to do something in the Antarctic that made up the met team. No, by and large I think we got on reasonably well.

[0:39:41] Lee: The first year?

Simmons: Yeah, I think so yeah.

[0:39:45] Were there ever any arguments or disputes?

Simmons: Oh there were those I imagine, but don't remember those, I don't remember!

[0:39:59] Lee: It's a very strange thing to do isn't it, to go to the Antarctic for 2 years and to lock yourself away?

Simmons: Oh, I don't know!

[0:40:06] Lee: And be a scientist?

Simmons: Oh, the Antarctic in the IGY period with everybody was full of people doing that!

[0:40:15] Lee: Were you aware of Vivian Fuchs' expedition?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes we were certainly aware he was doing it, not sure if whether we would have kept up with his progress or not. Not quite sure how the timings, it was about the same time, but not sure how it fitted in.

[0:40:45] Lee: Tell me something about your trips out and where would you go on your skis?

Simmons: Well mostly it was up to the top of the hill or round the islands or round, there were 2 or 3 islands quite close together. On one occasion only I think, I don't think we were, adventurous perhaps isn't the right word, but we were about 5 miles off the shore, off the Peninsula and so skied over when it was really, solid, to climb up, not a very big hill to Cape Tuxon like it was called which was quite, by the time we'd done that and if the sea ice was a slight thaw, then didn't slide through and so completely exhausted when you got back! And also we had boats, and so we went on little trips to other islands and we went up to Petermann Island, where there were some Argentines and sort of had a couple of visits to them, and there visited us but I think that they were there only in the summer and don't think that stayed, that place stayed.

[0:42:22] Lee: Did you get on with the Argentines?

Simmons: Yeah, what there was of it they may even have been, not even sure if that would happen, but quite often perhaps, protest notes, each was swapped and then you sort of put them away and have a party!

[0:42:53] Lee: So Gerry would be catering for the Argentines from time to time would he?

Simmons: Oh I think they only came once or twice, I don't know whether that would have been.

[0:43:01] Lee: How did the British food compare to the Argentine food, did you get steaks?

Simmons: I've no idea!

[0:43:06] Lee: No idea, OK it's a long time ago! You say the challenges were more personal ones than physical ones, was this about becoming a man growing up or what do you mean by that?

Simmons: Well, perhaps just being around with all that's involved and perhaps if you don't get on with everybody, then that's what, more difficult to deal with, one could really look at the question well, if you have got the right clothing and things, the other isn't a problem? I mean not everybody would agree, but that's how it seemed to me anyway.

[0:44:02] Lee: As the time came to sail away again, in fact you didn't sail away again did you, you left by other means of transport was it?

Simmons: Yes, I did for some reason because of the logistics of getting the right number of people on boats and things, *HMS Protector*, I think that was the naval ship some 5 or 6 miles away, but they sent their helicopter over and I was packed off on to this helicopter! And then I spent at least 2 or 3 weeks on the Falkland Islands before *Biscoe* then went back, same ship to England and did a bit of walking round the Falkland Islands.

[0:44:51] Lee: Just tell me about this helicopter ride were there any spectacular?

Simmons: Oh yes, there's something called the Lemaire Channel where you have got 2 great hills and a channel through, and we went actually through between those in the helicopter, which was quite fun!

[0:45:12] Lee: Its now nicknamed 'Kodak Alley'!

Simmons: Yes, probably.

[0:45:17] Lee: So you flew to *Protector* and she took you back to the Falklands?

Simmons: Yeah that's right.

[0:45:21] Lee: So you had some time on the Falklands, so tell me about the Falkland Islands in the 1950's, what were they like then?

Simmons: Difficult to describe, quite what's the word? Primitive is not the really the word. Almost entirely English people, there would be 2 maybe 3 different groups, there was the

Colonial Office people and I'm not quite sure how many that would have been, and there was the Governor of the Falkland Islands. There was the Falkland Islands Company which owned, not sure if they do own as much now, but owned something probably more than 50% of the sheep farming land in the place, and then there were, you didn't quite call them indigenous people, but [Lee: Locals!], they settled, people, them or their families had settled on the Falkland Islands, quite a few from Scotland and Wales. And I can remember at the time by being slightly shocked, isn't quite the right word, but not being entirely approving in that they were treated by very the Colonial Office, Government House parties or something, socially there seemed to be 3 very different groups! And we somehow fitted in the government people I suppose is what we were, but the indigenous is really not the right word but, the settlers!

[0:47:20] Lee: The natives!

Simmons: The settlers if that's the right word, they were definitely a lower class! And I can remember thinking this was really a bit off! For it to be as obviously as it was that there was a social distinction between the different groups.

[0:47:37] Lee: So there was a clear class system?

Simmons: Oh, yes as far as the government, Government House, went when it was doing parties or something!

[0:47:50] Lee: So how did that manifest itself, would people not talk to each other in pubs?

Simmons: It may have only been in garden parties and things, that Government House ran, I'm not quite sure, no I could have described what life was like there, when I was staying coming back, staying in digs basically or some quite nice lady that lived in a house by herself, who I think had come from Scotland who seemed to be the classical pictures on the wall of, would have been Queen Elizabeth by then wouldn't it, oh and highland cattle! Two of the necessary things they would all have their pictures and there was 2 or 3 bars there and things.

[0:48:51] Lee: Did you enjoy Stanley?

Simmons: Oh, yes that was quite fun. Well we went along to the Falkland Islands Store something like half a dozen of us, perhaps not so many, got a bit of food and went for a couple of days marching off to the other end of the island, which was quite fun!

[0:49:22] Lee: When you got back Britain, you'd left FIDS at that point?

Simmons: No!

[0:49:31] Lee: Tell me.

Simmons: We'd then I think had one or two changes in location, but we'd lots of work to do on the records we'd taken and both Joe and I, first I think in Crown Agents and then in, I've looked around it a couple of times to work on this and in fact Joe, that for Joe coalesced as it

were to him, into him being in charge of running that side of FIDS and to initially organise part of Edinburgh University. And if I'd wanted to I could have probably stayed there as well.

[0:50:31] Lee: Who else was in the building, I think Anne Todd was there and Fuchs?

[Simmons: Sorry!?] Who else was in the building, I think Anne Todd was there and Fuchs?

Simmons: Oh!

[0:50:42] Lee: Sloman?

Simmons: Oh, yes he was there yes, I don't remember, yes he was the person that was around all the time, because he was the one that originally was part of Crown Agents too and so we would have been, sometimes used to go out, Bill Sloman, Joe and myself for a sandwich or a beer lunch!

[0:51:13] Lee: What did you make of Sir Vivian or Vivian as he would have been then?

Simmons: Who?

[0:51:18] Lee: What did you make of Vivian Fuchs?

Simmons: Well, I didn't really come across him very much, no because we might have been working under some scientific bureau or something, and we wouldn't have been involved with him.

[0:51:39] Lee: And Anne Todd?

Simmons: Yes, yes she was there.

[0:51:41] Lee: What was she like?

Simmons: Oh, she was fine yes, yes she is still around here? [Lee: Yes.] Right, a wonderful lady!

[0:51:52] Lee: So how long did you have to write up your results?

Simmons: I can't quite remember how long I had, but that was my choice they could have extended indefinitely as it was with Joe Farman, was it a year or 18 months or something like that I don't?

[0:52:16] Lee: And then you left FIDS to embark on 2 other careers?

Simmons: Yes, that's right yes, I think I got a short job in Chelmsford with an English Electric Valve Company, didn't really get on very well and went from there into teaching.

[0:52:39] Lee: Was that better?

Simmons: Oh, yes I enjoyed that, well it mattered! You know you were doing something that mattered that you were doing it as it were, which I couldn't feel that about the other work that I was doing!

[0:52:58] Lee: You were in teaching for a couple of decades, then in 1980 you returned to BAS. What was it that attracted you to come back to BAS?

Simmons: Well, I'd always been interested and always had the thought that if things had turned out differently I might have been, might have been there, and you could sort of say some dissatisfaction with the teaching. It was the senior people and the extra curriculum stuff that I really liked, rather than the routine classroom business, and I could look at where I was in 1980 and think 'Well', and thought 'Is this going to carry on for the rest of the time in this rather boring way?', think I might have been wrong in that assumption! And so, sort of got itchy feet!

[0:54:00] Lee: Did you feel that BAS had changed much in those 20 years?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes in quite a bit!

[0:54:07] Lee: in what way?

Simmons: Oh, I went down after a year or so, to see what was going on at the base, bases, yeah the work I was doing and the hut had improved a bit, and there was more individual cubicles for people to sleep in, it was all a bit more civilised, a lounge and bar, it was upstairs. But that really the big change came after the Falklands war, because then the communications were put on a completely different footing! And then it became much easier to send much more information and that was one of the biggest changes I think, this being from when I was there. It was the change in how you could spend, phone up their families, don't know that I'd want to!

[0:55:26] Lee: Did you think that the ethos of BAS was the same as it had been in your FIDS day, or was it evolving as well?

Simmons: Oh, it was evolving, but I think the evolving since I joined BAS in 1980 has been much bigger than it would have been between when I was first there and 1980, well that's a guess.

[0:55:48] Lee: But you were there for 13 years I think weren't you? [Simmons: Yeah!] So you did see it change a lot.

Simmons: Yes, although yes oh so many different things!

[0:56:01] Lee: Give me an example of a couple of things, how it changed, was it less friendly, more professional?

Simmons: Yes more professional in a way, and there was many more although not that welcome was done at Argentine Islands carried on, carried on in much the same way for collecting data for other people, it became much more geared for people towards doing their

own research projects and going down, and possibly just for the summer. But that would have been at places like Rothera for the geologists and whatever the other one was, the where biologists went? [Lee: Signy!] But of course when I went down in the first time, not of course where I was, sledge dog trips by people doing surveying was one of the major things that people were doing and that of course vanished completely! Nobody travelled around too, for that because it was done, it could all be done by aeroplane and things!

[0:57:23] Lee: What was your job that you actually applied for at BAS?

Simmons: Well it was to continue and to try and sort out some of the publication of the values of some of the work that some of the geomagnetic work, that had carried on for quite some time and then for training some of the people that were going down.

[0:57:48] Lee: How was training young Fidlets compare to working with students in a school?

Simmons: Oh rather different, much more informal yeah, yeah we'd go away initially up to the Shetlands and then somebody decided we were being a bit indulgent and it was a bit expensive! So we then found somewhere, where the same equipment was and took them up there.

[0:58:21] Lee: Had you had to apply for this job or were you asked?

Simmons: Oh, I applied yeah.

[0:58:26] Lee: What do you remember of the second interview then in 1980? What do you recall of this interview in 1980?

Simmons: Oh the one that I got the job from? That would have been similar, but that would have been a BAS interview and there would have been Joe, there would have been Bill Sloman and there would have been, can't think of his name for the moment, the chap who had been head of that division, Piggot! A very idiosyncratic character, he was going out as I was coming in, oh though he stayed around but he was no longer the head of the group.

[0:59:17] Lee: Everybody smiles when his name comes up! [Simmons: Yeah!!] Tell me about him, what's your memories of Roy Piggot?

Simmons: No I don't really, as I had very little direct to do with him, no I would have been aware of all sorts of things, but I can't put my finger on anything at the moment.

[0:59:42] Lee: So was the job mainly teaching next year's geophysicists?

Simmons: It was partly that, and it was partly continuing and trying to tidy up, being able to publish, yeah, added values or whatever it was they were doing for all the magnetic work that had been going on, which had quite a big backlog! Of that when it was all done, it was a bit empty!

[1:00:19] Lee: So you made 2 or 3 trips back south again?

Simmons: Yes, yes mostly summer, yeah just for the summer, so go round and check on things, because there was, but that time the geomagnetic stuff I looked after, there were 3 bases where that went on, Halley Bay which had originally been independent Royal Society and was a BAS base and so was Grytviken until the Argentine business went and then that became a military place. I'm not sure whether we ever went back there, don't think in any formal way, I don't think so. I know I went back and did some measurements there.

[1:01:11] Lee: Did you sense that the Antarctic had changed as well in those 20 years?

Simmons: Oh, heavens yes! From the point of view of the Peninsula and the Argentine Islands there was much, much less snow around, and it wasn't very pleasant because the hill on the top which was, which had deep snow, which would all pack down but sort of melted away and was icy, icy bits which weren't nearly as much fun for skiing! Because that particular year, one or both of them I think were cold or unusually cold and had rather more thick sea ice than existed before, since then but apart from that, it's all been getting warmer!

[1:02:17] Lee: Did you notice that the warming in your first trip, in your second spell at BAS, that the ice had retreated?

Simmons: Yes, I think by then [Lee: Between your 2 spells?] I could see on the Argentine Islands which I knew very well, the permanent snow and ice cover was considerably less than it was.

[1:02:44] Lee: Had Fids changed, were the people different that were going south?

Simmons: The people at Argentine Islands base, no they were similar because it was similar work being done, similar people, but for places like Rothera it would have been different because of the travelling. You know there wouldn't have been any geographical mapping work, it would all have been technical stuff that geologists were doing so that Rothera, which was the main base for that was quite different place than it would have been when I first went down!

[1:03:31] Lee: Do you think you fitted back into the organisation OK or...? [laughter!], or did it feel strange?

Simmons: Possibly a bit odd, more so later on when there was an opportunity to do some research of my own, but it didn't quite work out!

[1:03:59] Lee: Can you expand on that, what were you hoping to do?

Simmons: Oh no, I wasn't hoping to do anything it was more not so much the opportunity coming up, but the ethos had changed in the way it worked, and without doing my own research project I wasn't considered as doing well! But that's a difficult subject, I don't really want to very much.

[1:04:37] Lee: OK! I'm just wondering so in those 13 years of your second spell, was your job fairly standard throughout the whole period or did it change a lot?

Simmons: It tended to change because of the backlog got rid of, the teaching of people was, that carried on in a similar way, but I'm not quite sure there was a space for something, can't quite remember what?

[1:05:21] Lee: It seems to me talking to other Fids, the organisation changed with the change of Director, so when Dick Laws retired?

Simmons: Oh, yes I think it probably did, because he was totally opposed to ladies on the base!

[1:05:38] Lee: What was your view on that?

Simmons: I thought, I was doubtful about it being permanent wintering, but for visitors and people more or less, I think he virtually wouldn't allow his wife to go down or to get off the ship! And I think it sort of got pushed a bit, because I think the Chief Engineer or somebody said it's sort of seaman's tradition, that wives can come, senior people can come onboard, but then after he left that side of it changed, although I don't think the ladies had started actually wintering on any of the bases before I left, one or two certainly appeared working in BAS!

[1:06:43] Lee: Do you think it presented problems the inclusion of women?

Simmons: I wouldn't know, because I have not been involved since that's happened!

[1:06:54] Lee: Yes OK. So your training of geophysics, that carried on throughout your entire 13 years?

Simmons: Yes!

[1:07:07] Lee: So you were having to keep up with the changes in the science then, weren't you?

Simmons: Well actually the science was much the same, I think some of the instruments had changed slightly, but I think the magnetic ones particularly that took up the most time, the photographic paper and things, that was still being done that way, much to the annoyance of the head of department, who thought this was appallingly old fashioned! It did change eventually, but though in fact that base that I was at vanished, because it was closed and sold to the Ukrainians I think it was.

[1:07:55] Lee: That's right, yeah. And the quality or the nature of the new recruits coming into your teaching, training sessions were they changing, were they becoming more...?

Simmons: No I think they were similar. Yes, I don't think there was a great change, because it was the same sort of people, and we were interviewing them and we were choosing, but by and large new graduates, some straight after or even going on the interview before they'd even taken their degree, as I think instead of doing it, what was the word, not a sabbatical year, you know what I mean?

[1:08:46] Lee: Yeah, a gap year!

Simmons: A gap year, as it were.

[1:08:51] Lee: So you were actually on the interview panel for these new recruits were you?

Simmons: Oh yes, yes that stayed that way all the time, so would someone dealing with the ozone and meteorological side.

[1:09:11] Lee: Did you produce any papers?

Simmons: Did I? [Lee: Yeah.] Very little I had a couple of things in the *Polar Record* or something, but they were mostly, oh and a couple of weighty books with all the summaries of all the results.

[1:09:41] Lee: Julian Paren and you wrote a paper in 1983 about the movement of the Brunt Ice Sheet would it be? [Note: Julian says he wasn't involved in this at all!]

Simmons: Oh yes, that's a point because in fact that shows up one thing in that p'raps with better management or with more encouragement I might have done something else! This was something that Charles Swithinbank had suggested I did, and so I looked at about 3 ways that the shelf the base was on was moving. There was an anomaly in the geomantic somewhere, I don't remember now, I've got the book somewhere, there were about 3 different ways I could look at this, and so I produced a thing deducing the movement of that ice shelf which I think have been found, so I've been told found useful on several occasions since then! Now that was encouragement from Charles Swithinbank to do that work!

[1:11:05] Lee: Was this anyway evidence of global warming that you were observing?

Simmons: Well the whole place had got warmer, but I'm not sure whether that particular measurement, that set of measurements that I produced did that, I'm not they have maybe something else, I did produce a couple of papers that's true, concerning the movement of the ice shelf, which was perhaps worthwhile and interesting because it, which wouldn't necessarily have normally been done, tied up different methods of measuring this over a slightly different time period managing and to fit them together and show an overall movement.

[1:12:02] Lee: Well, it was speeding up wasn't it?

Simmons: I don't think this was very large, I would have to have a look now! I think that may have come later, yeah I think much bigger changes since I've left.

[1:12:22] Lee: OK, and Julian says 'Ask', we have already touched on this, but Julian says 'Ask him about the joys of taking 6 Fidleets to the Shetlands'. Well, was a permanent joy or was it a headache?

Simmons: [Laughing!] Well I enjoyed doing it yes, yes we'd hire a car at the weekend and go and off travelling yes. No I'm sorry when that got put a stop to, oh quite right in a sense that it was rather an extravagant way of doing things, but!

[1:12:57] Lee: What else do you recall from that second spell that stayed with you and is of interest?

Simmons: Well there was the, although I wasn't on the team, there were 2 different groups, yeah there was the whole performance of the ozone hole business!

[1:13:21] Lee: What was it like at BAS at that time, because the paper was produced, written in late '84 I think, wasn't it?

Simmons: I'm not quite sure.

[1:13:34] Lee: Published 6 months later, so was there any anticipation at BAS that something big was about to explode?

Simmons: There was something, but any of my comments I think would be off the record on that!

[1:13:58] Lee: Alright, OK. But I don't mean you personally, I was just wondering whether if BAS generally felt there was something significant about to be published? [Simmons: Oh?] Anticipatory!?

Simmons: You know Joe, an awful lot of work and man hours of working out was produced, and I think John Dudeney, and it wasn't his department at all, but I think he sensed this was something quite important! But I think at the time the BAS directorate didn't realise this was going to be, a [Lee: Significant!], significant, no, something breaking!

[1:14:53] Lee: Breaking news!?

Simmons: Yes, would have been quite an important thing!

[1:14:59] Lee: Yes, it was Dick Laws at that time?

Simmons: I think it was.

[1:15:04] Lee: Yes, he admits that when he saw the paper, it didn't mean much to him, perhaps that's not fair, he didn't see the earth shattering significant of the thing!?

Simmons: Few people did!

[1:15:19] Lee: So there were some, those that saw it coming?

Simmon: Yes!

Lee: The big news!

Simmons: Yes!

[1:15:27] Lee: So a lot of the world's eyes were turned to BAS at that time weren't they? [Simmons: Huh?]. The world's media and the world's eyes turned towards BAS and its geophysical programmes at the time

Simmons: Yes, yes.

[1:15:38] Lee: Did that make a difference to what you were doing, get more recruits, or applicants?

Simmons: I don't think so, I can't, my memory's not very good, I don't remember any particular, significant from a point of view in a way.

[1:16:01] Lee: When the time came to leave BAS finally was there, what were your feelings, sorry to leave, glad to get out?

Simmons: I wouldn't say it was either of those, it was a bit more the sorts of things I was doing were disappearing and therefore, it seemed to fit in with my retiring. I don't know what I would have been doing if I'd stayed, if I hadn't have been retiring age.

[1:16:43] Lee: So the geophysical research work that you were doing, was coming to a close was it? Or was it the nature?

Simmons: Oh the research work, the measurements would have been done different ways, in fact the idea of static stuff was because it coincided with the selling of the base to the, [Lee: Ukrainians!] Ukrainians, yes, so I wouldn't have had anything to do anyway in that case!

[1:17:23] Lee: Looking back over your life as a whole, how does the Antarctic and FIDS and BAS rate?

Simmons: Oh, fascinating, really glad from the point of view of interesting things, great pictures and things. Oh yes I've had a good time! Professionally perhaps not terribly sensible, but enjoyed myself and had a good time.

[1:17:50] Lee: Oh, I think quite a few of us can say that, quite a few of us can say that!

Simmons: Yeah!

[1:17:54] Lee: It's been lovely David, thank you very much indeed, thank you!

Simmons: Right!

Interesting clips:

- [0:05:54] Maiden voyage of new *John Biscoe*.
- [0:09:25] Lunch with Price Phillip!
- [0:10:06] More on the maiden voyage of the new *John Biscoe*.

- [0:22::24] Working on the Dobson Spectrometer, taking the ozone readings.
- [0:29:34] Explaining about the geomagnetic readings.
- [1:09:41] Producing a paper on the movement of the Brunt Ice Shelf.