IVOR MORGAN

Edited transcript of a recording of Ivor Morgan recorded by Chris Eldon Lee on the 26th of October 2012. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/193 Transcribed by Andy Smith, 24th April 2019.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Ivor Morgan, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 26th of October 2012.

Morgan: My name is Ivor (I-V-O-R that's the English way) P Morgan. The P stands for Prothero which another Welsh … It's a family name.

[0:00:20] Lee: Where were you born?

Morgan: I was born actually in London, England. Ah well you laugh at that. I have also lived in London, Ontario, Canada. Right?

[0:00:32] Lee: OK.

Morgan: And I was born on the 3rd of August 1937.

[0:00:37] Lee: So you are now how old?

Morgan: I am 75 years old.

[0:00:41] Lee: OK, right. And you are very Welsh, despite the accent and the overseas …?

Morgan: I was born to a very Welsh family and I grew up in a Welsh community in London. I went to a Welsh chapel which is a Welsh-speaking chapel. There used to be a network of these. London is, was the main … for a lot of Welsh families from Cardiganshire (as it was then, now called Ceredigion) who set up in the various milk businesses around London. It was a network of Welsh families and I am descended from these Welsh families. During the war I spent part of that war in Wales, in the middle of the Welsh countryside. I went to a village school. I learned to read and write in the village school and every summer and every spring I spent in Cardiganshire working at my relatives' farm until I was in my late teens, I think, probably.

[0:01:45] Lee: Had you intended to be a surveyor?

Morgan: I had never ever thought about being a surveyor. I was trained as a scientist, a geologist type, and while I was doing my undergraduate I was thinking about becoming a foundations engineer. So I started doing some civil engineering: things like structures. And then, when I had finished my undergraduate degree,… Basically I was a scientist mostly – pure science, physics and stuff. So geophysics with a bit of engineering. I looked around for work and I was looking for, I think, a challenge. And I had a lot of big companies – a surprise to me – they were actually interested in me. I think it might have been my RAF background because I had been an officer and I'd had a position of some responsibility in those years. A rather bizarre situation, that I was in the military to do.

[0:02:55] Lee: How do you mean?

Morgan: I think I had never expected to be commanding officer of a small radar station at the age of 20, for instance. That wasn't on my …

[0:03:09] Lee: Radar?

Morgan: Right. I was on a station. I actually closed that one. It was the monitor station for Southwestern Gee Chain. If you really want to know what Gee is, you have to look up some books. I was also Station Adjutant of Royal Air Force North Weald, which is a famous Battle of Britain station. That also closed, after my time, and that's another accident you know. So I think those things actually probably made me interesting to some of these other firms. I remember British American Tobacco wanted to employ me, and there was a very small ink firm and I remember the question this guy asked me. He said 'I want you to ask yourself this question. Can you devote your life to ink?' And I said 'Since you ask me in that way, I think the answer is No.' And then I met Bill Sloman from what was then FIDS and it just tickled my fancy. It was something I had been looking for. I wanted a challenge. I had no real idea what I was going to do. I had been trained as a surveyor and that only happened after I was employed by FIDS, and we had Steve from Imperial College London who used to do this.

[0:04:42] Lee: His name is …?

Morgan: Stephenson. Everybody calls him Steve. I don't know what rank he was at Imperial College but he was a member of the British Grahamland Expedition back in the 1930s and he had been heavily involved in Antarctic activities all along and he had a lot of us that went through, the surveyors went through Steve. And we worked out of DOS, Department of Overseas Surveys as it was then. Then it changed. I think before that it was Colonial Surveys or something. These were people who were really experience in mapmaking, who knew what they were doing and so that is where we started. I had no idea, really, what we were going to do. I knew that the basis of surveying but I didn't know anything about what sort of support you would get. I had not thought through the whole business of communication. I was just talking with somebody about the whole business of Morse Code. We all learned to send in Morse. I can't receive very well in Morse. And that is a technology that has simply gone; it just has disappeared. We all learned, but we learned down there, so we had no idea when we went.

[0:06:15] Lee: Why did you want to go down there? What was the attraction of the Antarctic?

Morgan: I think it's because nobody had … In my naïve way I thought it was the last place on the Planet that humans had trodden really, basically. And that was of course, I guess, biased by my view of Western Europe. And we also thought of course the jungles of Brazil hadn't been trodden by humans but of course that is very very naïve, But Antarctica was a place that nobody had been and the mountains hadn't been climbed and all of that. This was it, and I was a skier, already a skier, and so it was attractive and I thought it would be very beautiful. My family were dead against it.

[0:07:08] Lee: What did Mother say?

Morgan: You have to understand the Welsh. Country people come from, although it is a beautiful area in that Wales, rather like the Irish, it is a country of: used to be of tenant farmers. My grandfather, my mother's father had grown up almost starving and he was a farm labourer and had struggled to pay to get food on the table. He worked for a tenant farmer as a farm labourer. My other grandfather was also, not quite as poor as that but he was also a man … and this is how they all clubbed together. In London it was easy. I'm told that the meetings of the milk folk in London were conducted in Welsh, not in English. So the idea of Antarctica for her: she said 'Look, you have got all this education behind you. We expect you to make money.'

[0:08:09] Morgan: You see that is the Cardie mind-set. There are a lot of Cardie jokes in Welsh about how careful we are with money. I understand those jokes and I understand the motivation behind those jokes and I think there is something in it and I think I am a real Cardie. We are careful. You won't find too many Cardies these days with my sort of background who are poor, I think. And I think that is to do with that and so going to Antarctica was essentially a denial of all the things that I had, and I would go off to the ends of the Earth, in my mother's view a dangerous place because she had no experience of it. But my parents had no experience of university or any of these things.

[0:09:04] Lee: Had you been aware of the Heroic Age of the Antarctic, Scott and Shackleton?

Morgan: I had been aware of Scott. I had been slightly aware of Shackleton. I am not and never have been a fan of Scott. I know that may be a rather nasty thing to say but I think when I heard about horses being taken to snowy places and walking, that offended all my mathematical training and physics training, and everything I knew about horses. And so I couldn't understand how anybody could be that naïve, and so Scott I had a lot of problems with, and this was just a conceptual makeup of his expedition. And manhauling. So basic logistics. But Shackleton's ideas were much different, and I had fortunately, a few years ago with the Antarctic Club, sat down to one of the last survivors of the Shackleton expedition, and he was one of the ones left under the longboats.

[0:10:12] Lee: Can you recall his name?

Morgan: It escapes me at the moment but I can certainly let you have that name.

[0:10:22] Lee: Carry on.

Morgan: And I said to this man, I said 'Did you truly expect Shackleton to come back?' and he sets off in the ship's longboat over 800 miles of some of the worst seas in the world. 'Oh yes we knew he was going to come back.' That is a level of naivety that we have, maybe, as Brits. I'm not sure that I was quite that naïve. I did think there would be dangers but it was snowy waste, and exciting and nobody had done it before, and I think that was it. Very very simple.

[0:10:58] Lee: Like most Fids, you travelled South via Port Stanley?

Morgan: Yes.

[0:11:01] Lee: And this would be 1961?

Morgan: ’61, yes.

[0:11:06] Lee: What was Stanley like in those days?

Morgan: It was interesting to me. Although my background was Welsh, I had met all sorts of people here in Britain through the various things I had done, and I had been very friendly with a young lady from what you might call Upper Class England, and so I had seen how they had lived. And it had been, at times, a source of great mirth for me, to meet some of those folk. And I get to Port Stanley and I see this little village, really. I mean that’s all it was. It’s one street – no junctions – just went along the shore. And you had one person – I think he had a Rolls Royce – that was the doctor, and there was the Governor whom I knew; I knew his daughter.

[0:12:01] Lee: That’s Arrowsmith, is it?

Morgan: Arrowsmith, yes. I can’t remember the daughter’s name now. And then they had these dances and there was this upper class in the dances. You sat together and these were the local … Basically I think they were skilled trades type people or shopkeepers. And then there were the others, and there was clearly this class distinction that I thought was rather curious, that you go to this place; you have this little village, and then, all of a sudden, it sort of develops this sort of structure. One of the big advantages of being Welsh, I think, is that we don’t have that. It’s an English thing and I grew up in a community where we had surgeons in our chapel in London. We had people who were hourly paid and we were all together. We didn’t have this. Now education is a big difference with us but it’s not a question of class in that sense. We don’t have this upper and lower class and we don’t have an aristocracy.

[0:13:18] Lee: Do you find it offensive or repulsive or disturbing?

Morgan: No, I find it …

[0:13:25] Lee: I meant in Stanley.

Morgan: Not really. Oh in Stanley? I thought it was peculiar and I just wondered how it had happened, and I think it’s just like something you might just write a novel about, and create like William Golding. It’s that sort of thing: *The Lord of the Flies*, how you create, how humans create these sort of structures. No, I don’t find it even offensive in Britain. If people don’t mind it, that’s fine. I don’t bow to royalty; I don’t bow to anybody. I mean I wouldn’t bow to the President of the United States. And the guy has been to the same university that I have been to. You know, what does it matter? It doesn’t make any sense to me.

[0:14:09] Lee: Did you have a sense, though, that it's almost like travelling back in time to go to Port Stanley at that time, wasn't it?

Morgan: Yes it was.

[0:14:17] Lee: Decades earlier.

Morgan: It was; it was.

[0:14:18] Lee: Did you look at this and think to yourself 'I wonder how long this will last?' It was inevitable that it would change?

Morgan: For various reasons, yes. I went out onto the sheep stations actually, we had a visiting vet at the time. His name was Mike Godsal. They hadn't seen a vet in decades there. And Mike and I used to play bridge together on the ship, and so I went with him out to the sheep station and he pointed to a sheep with one of these people running the sheep station and he said 'You have got some, I think, with liver fluke' or something. The guy said 'Oh no,' he said. He just told one of his men to catch a sheep. And they killed in right in front of us. And, sure enough, they had it. Mike knew what he was doing and there was a whole issue.

[0:15:12] Morgan: They had been through the economy there and the way the labour that flew all over the island got there, how they were indented was a curious period of history. And so in one sense, they had tried selling meat, for instance. They had even built a factory to do it, freeze it and so on, without success, which meant that basically the business was for wool, and there was no prospect of it being anything else. The pace is a totally barren place except for sheep. Sheep can live there, but you look at the sheep count and you look at the number of sheep per acre, you don't see many sheep. I've been across some of the places that they fought this war – very sad to me, to fight a war over something that is basically pretty barren. It kind of reminded me of some of the moorlands we have in Wales or in Scotland. There are no trees.

[0:16:23] Lee: Let's take you further south, because your first season was at Stonington?

Morgan: Yes.

[0:16:28 Lee: And you were doing survey work out of Stonington. So I guess this is the old fashioned dogs and sledging work, is it?

Morgan: Yes, it was, very much. I guess we lived the way that you see in the movies. We would have dogs, we would put food on the thing. My first experience down there was with the ships though. We did hydrographic survey on the way down, and that was an eye opener because we lost a helicopter. Well not personally. I wasn't mine. Yes, we had two on board *HMS Protector* and I was working with the other one but this one, I would guess it is still there actually. Fortunately nobody was killed.

[0:17:09] Lee: What happened there?

Morgan: We were providing control for oceanographic work and the ship would drive up and down and take soundings, the sonic. And then out of this would come the marine maps which I am sure are still being used. And I would doubt anybody is going to go back and change them because that doesn't happen. It costs money and nobody has run aground because I look at the newspapers still. But nobody has run aground where we've been anyway. And so yes, getting to base there were dogs. I like dogs a lot and I was disappointed of course when I got there because I couldn't get a dog team because I was a surveyor you see. Dog teams are given to other people. But in my second year I inherited a team from Johnny Cunningham, called the Admirals, which was actually one of the oldest teams. I think it was one of the last teams to exist down there actually, the Admirals and the Huns. And I loved it, absolutely loved it.

[0:18:20] Lee: At Adelaide this would be?

Morgan: They took it to Adelaide. They had been at Stonington before.

[0:18:30] Lee: What was special about working with dogs, having your own team?

Morgan: Well I think it's not just … I've worked also with machines. We had these early skidoo type things. When you get back after a hard day's work, the thing sits there. There is no greeting. I got back after surveying with dogs, and all the dogs get up and they greet you. It is just: you need something. I think humans need affection and dogs give it in abundance, and when I think of the animals that I had, remarkable creatures, and the places that I went with them, they saved my life so many times, that I had so much to be grateful for, using them. We went to places that tractors could never go, going up and down glaciers, you would never take a trailer-tractor. You would lose it. So I think it is something that the human psyche needs, and if I rank the things I missed down there: I missed women. At that time we didn't have women, female company. But without dogs there, that would have been absolutely, for me, awful. Just to be there in an environment, isolated from half of humanity, with only machines, that would have been a huge ??? [incomprehensible].

[0:20:19] Lee: You also said you missed insects.

Morgan: Yes, I did.

[0:20:23] Lee: Can you elaborate on that?

Morgan: It's a funny thing, you know. You spend hours out and you can't see a fly; and you can't see a bee, and you do this for more than two years of your life, and you start wondering about it. You get no mosquitos; there's no nothing. Not spiders. I mean nothing, nothing that essentially is living. Now it's not totally true because there are some lichens down there but there are no plants either. And so you do miss it. I suppose plants also, to some extent, but more the insects, it's life. And it is dead. This is a pristine place – was – and we get more and more pollution down there and this is sad, but it was pristine – and dead.

[0:21:16] Lee: Were you ever bowled over by the beauty of it all?

Morgan: Oh absolutely. It is stunningly beautiful just about everywhere. I know that all the tourists go down. They go through the Lemaire Channel and they are bowled over because the mountains are beautiful. And I think when people think of Antarctica, they still think of Scott pulling his … you know, manhauling across the plateau. There is a plateau which is fairly flat, all of that, but the striking thing I think are the mountains and the sheer beauty of the colours that you get from the sun, and the clarity. I was able to, I'm sure, with my ex- World War II theodolite telescope, which was not good, I was able to pick out man-sized objects easily at forty miles. I mean that is amazing, because the air is totally clean and it is so pristine you could see the mountains. It's only the curvature of the Earth that stops you from seeing anything. It is so crystal clear. That shows itself at my time which unless you have wintered there, you have never really experienced … But wintering there and having that whole sky with that clarity of air is just an extraordinary experience.

[0:22:47] Lee: You describe sitting on the top of Petermann Island.

Morgan: Yes.

[0:22:50] Lee: Can you remember that moment?

Morgan: Yes, I can. I course you know about seal and you know about whales and stuff like that, but when you look out on the Bay and you see dozens of the biggest whales that there are on the Planet, marching up and down and blowing – I could hear them – and then another patch. God knows how many seal; the water was alive with them. The bay must have been stuffed full of krill and they were there feeding. But it was just extraordinary. It was just a totally silent day – no clouds in the sky – and I was sitting there. I can't remember what instrument I had, probably …. We worked then with these microwave instruments called tellurometers, and theodolites of course. And I can't remember who was with me just like that, but we just sat on the top of Petermann Island and it was extraordinary, just listening to this mass of animal life down in the water, just extraordinary.

[0:24:02] Lee: How much survey work could you get done? Was it intensive?

Morgan: In summer we were basically working the islands. First of all we started off in the north with South Shetlands and then we moved down, as I say, to Petermann Island. It was always using the helicopters from *Protector.* Yes, we were out in the field. I haven't counted up the months a year but many, probably more than half the year I was out in the field. I don't think people do that anymore. People say 'Well how did you shower?' [Laughs] What a question! Have a shower? How about a wash? You don't wash. You don't shower and of course you get pretty steamy, and your beard grows and that can get pretty disgusting at times because it's cold and your beard freezes. All of that, and the joke is that somewhere there is the meal that you had two weeks ago. But yes, it's different. And you live on a airbed which has got a sheepskin on it, and a double sleeping bag, and we'd go out to the minus God knows what, minus forties or whatever and you know how to do it.

[0:25:37] Lee: Did you feel a connection with the Heroic Age? Did you feel as though you were experiencing the kind of things that Scott and Shackleton were experiencing?

Morgan: Do you know, I don't think I thought about it that much. I'm sure that we lived pretty much the same way that they did because we used primus stoves and you put in methylated spirits and you had to heat the meths when it was cold. Everybody gets used to the idea that methylated spirits is very flammable and is going to become gas. Well we had to heat it in order to get the meth going and then you have the meth gets the paraffin going. Americans would probably use what they call white gas and they don't use a starter. That's much more explosive. But we were using old fashioned primus stoves and that's how we dried our gear. If you run with dogs, it's a very different thing. You see all these pictures now of all these people wearing these down jackets. You can't do that. A down jacket doesn't work. You just fill up with ice because you sweat and that goes into the down jacket and it freezes because it's cold. And even if you have an anorak on, you actually line the inside of the anorak – it lines with ice. So in the evening you have to hang it up in your tent, inside out or it doesn't matter much as there's no moisture in the air, and it dries out. It dries out from the fumes from your little primus stove.

[0:27:09] Lee: Is that efficient? It dries out quickly, does it?

Morgan: Yes it does, because there is no moisture in the air, you see, because the temperature is so low. The relative humidity is like zip, you can tell.

[0:27:21] Lee: And you were in tents that were not that dissimilar from Scott?

Morgan: Very similar. Actually the tents we used were … I was up in Cambridge three years ago, looking at the gear they use now. The tents are virtually the same. They look like tetrahedra[1] and they have pole in each corner and the triangle, as I know from my undergraduate studies, is a very powerful shape. And a tetrahedron is about as strong a shape as you could have. So there are huge advantages to that shape to withstand winds, and Antarctic winds, what we call katabatic winds that come off the plateau, can be over 200 miles an hour. I don't know what the fastest are because nobody has ever measured these things. But they are very fast. You need a tent that can withstand that. And there have been occasions, I know, when these tents have not withstood it, but they are very rare. So this is: a better design we have yet to find. And round ones wouldn't do it quite as well I think.

[0:28:36] Lee: There are some lovely anecdotes in your notes. I would like to guide you through them if I may. You were talking about one evening being at anchor on *HMS Protector* when an iceberg hove into view, and the captain seemed to have a rather unusual technique for dealing with this situation.

Morgan: Well it wasn't the captain. I think it was the Officer of the Watch. You have to understand that I am ex- Air Force and so I know they always call the Air Force the Junior Service. I mean quite honestly I am glad I was not in the Navy. But yes, the Officer of the Watch summoned about twelve able bodied seamen, grasping this large wooden pole, trying to push off this iceberg which was above us. If you have an iceberg that big, you know it is much bigger than the ship. If you know anything about physics, approximately ninety percent is underwater. So what you have got is a little tip, and you can guarantee it is all solid and if you are not familiar with ice, well it's like I can assure you … it's like hitting granite, if you hit in there.

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[1] This is not strictly true. A tetrahedron has four triangular faces, so a tetrahedron tent would have three triangular sides and a triangular base. A polar pyramid tent has four triangular sides and a square base.

[0:29:48] Morgan: And there they were and of course I was asking a simple question: I said 'Are you pushing the ship away from the berg or the berg away from the ship?' I was there with a friend and he thought we were just taking the mickey out of him, and we were both indeed laughing. It was a futile effort. You can imagine. It is just the friction of their shoes on the deck, trying to push away this humungous thing. The ship was … the *Protector* was over a thousand tons I'm sure, well over It was just a totally useless exercise. They should move the ship. That's the sensible thing, to say 'Hey, look. A berg. Move the ship. Pull up the anchor and just move.' That did not seem to cross their minds.

[0:30:38] Lee: Was there a collision.

Morgan: It just slipped past. Oh that can happen, but that is the best thing. The worst thing is: that was one of the oldest ships commissioned in the British Navy, so, as I understand it, it was from World War I and been modified.

[0:30:57] Lee: So did it feel like an antiquity on board?

Morgan: Yes it did, because you would sling up a hammock. People would walk down the gangway and there would be hammocks hanging and people would be in those things. I was very fortunate when I was on board because I was in the wardroom, so I was one with the officers. But it is a very different culture to the Air Force. I think the Royal Air Force is different because the people that fix aircraft and the pilots that fly them don't have a class distinction in there. They know each other by their names. The guys flying the planes know that the guys who fixing the planes: they've got to do it right otherwise they are dead. In the Navy they still quote Nelson for heaven's sake. They fly a helicopter and every time they want to send something, they are looking in a book for some Nelson quote. Yes I thought it was bizarre. Anyway all part of my education.

[0:32:12] Lee: Your first summer you did some work in the South Shetland Islands and at that point, talking about the difference between the Army and the Navy, there was a helicopter which went missing.

Morgan: Yes.

[0:32:22] Lee: What's that story, Ivor?

Morgan: Well this I followed up some years later because I realised that one of the reasons that the Navy did this down there was to train their people in extreme conditions. And we had Marines on board who go off for training trips and so on. And I guess it is unfortunate that the Navy hadn't had any specialised training in flying helicopters in these conditions. And so that apparently I had related this when I was later in Canada. I had met some executives from Okanagan Helicopters. Now these guys work in the Rockies and they work in cold conditions and so on, and they train pilots to work in these conditions and I related to him the crash and this one with Alan

Wright where Alan was being winched down the mile (I don't know what happened to Alan) where the helicopter loses its ground effect and they told me that it's quite simple. They said 'This is pilot error but it is lack of training.' They said you can't blame the pilot; they just don't know how to do it. But he said 'This is just lack of training, but you understand that this can happen if you've not encountered these conditions' (which the Navy presumably hadn't). But there were people around in Canada obviously who did know how to fly in those conditions.

[0:33:53] Lee: So what were the two incidents?

Morgan: Well the one was the crash, which as I understand it, and I was not involved in it … The Fids were in it and they were inside it and this thing landed on the top, if not down at sea level; it was quite high and it crashed apparently because it lost its ground effect, the cushion effect as you get close to the ground, bounced off and started rolling, and fortunately stopped, I believe on the edge of a cliff somewhere. And nobody was hurt, amazingly, although the pilot was in a state of shock obviously. But the Fids of course, inside, Fids are very durable sort of creatures, being tossed around. Figures got out shaking their heads. It wasn't that, so we were down to one helicopter. That finished our survey. You can't fly down there with just one helicopter. That's no good.

[0:34:57] Morgan: The second one was Alan – that was somewhere off Adelaide, and he was being winched down, and the same some of thing happened except that he had been winched onto the island and at that point the helicopter lost its ground effect. Now he's there and this is like a comedy thing except the helicopter is now plummeting down and, as I understand it, almost crushed him, at which point – as you can guess – it took off again and shot into the air. Of course Alan is still tied on to this helicopter. So at this point presumably he shoots up in the air. I did not see this but it is that sort of thing. And we landed on all sorts of weird islands of course. One of the things that they did learn, which is to use dye. We get whiteout conditions. You can't see where the surface is; you don't know whether it is 20 feet below you or 200 feet. So you drop dye out and this would mark the snow, and you could see exactly where the surface was, so the pilot could see where it was. That was OK.

[0:36:14] Lee: There was one incident where you yourself were involved on Adelaide Island when you lost your gear due to a helicopter malfunction.

Morgan: Oh yes. Well that's because they took … I was going to be carried by helicopter to the north part of Adelaide Island and my whole sled was ready. We were going to use the skidoo for this thing, not dogs. And I said to them 'Well is it OK? How are we going to take it out?' They said 'We have got this belly hook under the helicopter.' I said 'Is that safe?' They said 'Oh yes, it's safe.' And of course they take off. There's my whole thing hanging under it, all my gear, and they get halfway across the bay and the hook releases and everything plummets and is smashed in the water, so I lost the whole thing. I have no idea why that happened. I suspect they don't either. But of course my theodolite was there, so I had to take the theodolite that one of the Naval officers had, that we had been working with. We had been working with Barry – I can't remember his surname but I took his theodolite instead, which wasn't actually as nice as mine but I could live with it.

[0:37:84] Lee: It sounds like it's a miracle that any surveying ever got done, with all this incidents coming along.

Morgan: Well I think in retrospect, it is amazing what the Brits have done in Antarctica for the amount of money that has been spent. I think the way we lived: I don't know how many people would do what we did for as little money – we certainly didn't go for money – and live the life that we lived. I just wonder how many people would do that. I think you have got to be into … You have got to enjoy the adrenaline kick. I guess we were looking for something different. It's certainly not … I mean even I, and I expect everybody to do everything … But there are things that happen down there that I would never do. There is the young woman who was killed in, I think 2005[2], and she was snorkelling and she was caught by a leopard seal.

[0:38:43] Lee: Kirsty Brown.

Morgan: Yes. I would never … I mean crazy as I am, and I have been helicopter skiing in Austria. I have done all these things. I would never go snorkelling in the Antarctic. I think you have got to be crazy. I do crazy things and I am fortunate to have lived through them, but snorkelling? I took my hat off when I heard about it. My friend Dave Nash, who is not here, David's daughter was the doctor on the base. Dave's daughter went down and so I heard about it soon afterwards. It was tragic but there are things that I just wouldn't do. I think that we did was pretty extreme.

[0:39:33] Lee: Well did you have some scary moments?

Morgan: Lots, and these can be divided – I was just talking to somebody – into two categories: (1) what I call jollies – doing things that the Survey didn't ask us to do, and there are lots of those. With Ian McMorrin I was up on Lenny Island. We were looking to see the sun. We hadn't seen the sun for a few months. So we climbed up and had an avalanche right below my feet, literally below my feet, and there was a crack between Ian and me. That's one. Another one: I was climbing another mountain with Ian – Roman Four. We had climbed it and I think when you are in your twenties you think you are immortal, invincible. We had baggy pants because that's what FIDS gave us, or BAS I guess it was then.

[0:40:32] Morgan: I caught my crampons in my pants and I literally took off and I somersaulted; this is a very steep snow gully. And fortunately at that moment my brain seems to have speeded up or something. I was able to – it seemed like I had all the time in the world – to get hold of my ice axe and put it under me in the textbook fashion, and as I hit the snow I rammed it in and I stopped. And that was a close one. So those were what I call jollies. And then there were some things that were in between, and that was again with Ian. Ian and I were out in a Norwegian pram dinghy. I don't know if you know what a pram dinghy is. It's a clinker-built little thing. It's not very long. It had a little outboard on it, and we were looking for seal and this giant whale popped up right alongside the pram dinghy, a creature the size of which I had never seen in my life. I think it was probably just curious but it is a hell of a feeling when you think this is like a mountain, that comes up beside you and keeps coming. This is a blue whale of course and it is kind of scary.

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[2] 2003 (see Antarctic Monument website).

[0:41:57] Lee: A Moby Dick moment?

Morgan: Certainly Moby Dick. I didn’t communicate with this creature. Maybe it was trying to communicate with us. It certainly did in some way. And then other moments which I would class as just part of the job. We did probably a fairly epic journey I think, from Adelaide across to Stonington all the way to King George VI Sound. At the entrance to the Sound, was a lot of what we call pressure ice, and this pressure ice can be quite tall, I mean twenty or thirty feet tall. We were trying to find a way through. So the gang of us – there were six of us on this journey - we were walking through and I was leading, and I had, in those days, skis but they were loose bindings. And suddenly the ground fell and I fell about ten feet, I would think, maybe a little bit more, I don’t know. I remember looking up at this wall of blue ice and here am I swimming in the slush, in the sea: a crevasse in the pressure ice. Fortunately one of the gang had a rope, had the presence of mind to take a rope with us, and so I was hauled out in short order. That is really, in retrospect, without that rope they would have had to have tried our axe to get … By yourself you would be dead; you can’t get out. Blue ice is like granite. That’s one. Another one in the Sound …

[0:43:48] Lee: That was Jim Shirtcliffe who had the rope, was it?

Morgan: It was Jim Shirtcliffe. Jim Shirtcliffe had the rope.

[0:43:53] Lee: How did you recover from that, because you would have been completely wet, exhausted?

Morgan: You don’t stay wet very long. It just freezes; you crackle. You walk like something out of a movie, like a toy soldier. You crackle and actually, once it warms up … As I remember, I don’t remember being terribly cold once I got out. I was certainly … I had to get back to the tent and dry off everything, but you freeze so quickly, that once you are out, it’s OK because you have got your gear on and you warm up inside it. It’s not like you are wet. That doesn’t last long down there. Coming down from the Sound, I remember, at the end of our survey season, this is from the actual Antarctic plateau, and we were using this glacier that we had used to go up. It had been like going up the M6, you know; it was fantastic, beautiful, like a highway. The sun had been working on it – there is a lot of sun down there in summer – and the bridges were falling on the crevasses, and that is scary.

[0:45:13] Morgan: When you have crevasses that are three or four feet wide, you have got to take then absolutely at right angles, and even then, you are worried about your dogs going in. This is really …; if you want an adrenaline kick, this was more than really I had ever hoped for. How I got down, let alone Dave, I never heard his story, … But I couldn’t stop; that was the terrible thing. You have a brake on these sleds. I couldn’t stop and I was worried about stopping anyway because my dogs wouldn’t have known what was happening and they would fall in. So you get down the bottom – I tell you: this was one of those moments. You just know that Somebody was looking after you. But it was just amazing that we survived. So some of these events that you have, like that, when there is nobody to blame … When you are in a plane, you get lost, and that happened, but those things, you know, are different. This one:

all my fault really. I mean why did I take this route? I didn't know a better one and I had to get down, and Somebody saved us, and it was just one of those days.

[0:46:37] Lee: Your reference to an Almighty Being is interesting there but you …

Morgan: Well we used to say that there was a …, there was some mythical goddess who looking after us, actually. It wasn't the Almighty.

[0:46:51] Lee: You said that among yourselves, did you?

Morgan: Yes. I have forgotten her name now, but there was some … this mythical creature that was looking after all the Fids, because there were so many of these incidents. We had them with aircraft. I can think of several.

[0:47:08] Lee: You were flying with Bob Bond over to Stonington one day. Tell me about that one.

Morgan: Yes. Well this is what happens. There were no navigation aids. You do have a compass down there but the compass is unreliable down there because the geographic pole, the south pole[3] ain't where you think it is. Most people don't realise that it is actually offshore down there; it's not on the continent. So that's a problem. And going to Adelaide from Stonington: it's not very far. I think it is only about seventy miles if you are a crow – a difficult journey if you're not a crow, unless there is really good sea ice, which doesn't happen that often. We took off, a normal journey, and I was in the co-pilot's seat and the clouds came in. I couldn't see anything and of course Bob couldn't see anything either. I don't know if he remembers this even. He probably had so many of these incidents.

[0:48:16] Morgan: And he turns to me and he says 'Where do you think we are?' And I thought 'That's not a question I want hear from the pilot. He is supposed to know.' And at that moment a break in the cloud. I could see a peak. 'There are mountains there. You see you can hit them.' This is not without risk. And I saw this peak up to the left and I made a guess. It turned out that that was wrong, and we just kept going because he had a pretty cool head. I have a great deal of respect for Royal Air Force pilots. And eventually we broke out of the cloud and of course we had gone way too far south. We just turned round under the cloud, back under the cloud into Stonington.

[0:49:01] Morgan: But you know, no navigation aids; you are guessing all the time. There is a lot of risk associated with the way we used to do it. Of course they have got GPS these days which will help a lot. You wonder what is going to happen if suddenly the satellites up there get blown up, because we fly all the time now with GPS and if we lose those satellites it is going to be total chaos on this planet. But that is where we are. I didn't have that many scary moments in the aircraft. We got used to taking off on glaciers and landing on glaciers (that was totally normal), or landing on the Sound which is flat. This is just normal. These are not made runways. You are landing on skis all the time and so that ceases to be exciting; it's just some of these other little things.

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[3] The south magnetic (dip) pole is offshore, but the compass points away from the south geomagnetic pole, which is not offshore, though far from the geographic pole.

[0:50:10] Lee: You were called to the rescue of George McLeod who had fallen down a crevasse?

Morgan: Yes.

[0:50:18] Lee: This was on King George VI Sound, I believe.

Morgan: Yes.

[0:50:21] Lee: What was your first knowledge of the problem?

Morgan: Well the thing is that we were on east side of the Sound, up on the plateau. They were on the west side of the Sound and up from the Sound in a very very difficult area, full of crevasses it turned out, and the first thing we heard was on the radio, that George had fallen down this hole. Fortunately he's a very tough guy. Miraculously, I would say having seen the hole, he had been able to … He was a mountaineer; he had been able to climb out – and that is incredible – without falling back, because he had broken God knows how many ribs and heaven knows he was in bad shape. So we went across and rescued them. That meant going down from where we were, crossing the Sound and going up the other side. And we found them.

[0:51:15] Lee: Were you racing against time?

Morgan: Yes, in very difficult … They were in a terrible place. It was just awful – crevasses. But all's well that ends well. He's still alive as far as I know and still … I think he's now back in Scotland but he's a tough guy.

[0:51:54] Lee: What could you do when you got there?

Morgan: Well what we could do was to give Ralph, Ralph Horne, … You have to remember that the guy was basically an invalid and he's got a dog team which was not Ralph's business either. He was a geologist. And so somebody had to give him some assistance and we had the people to do that, so we could give him physical help with the dogs and the whole thing. It just is so much easier. George really was badly injured. If he had been in this country, he would have been in hospital obviously, but he was just bruised, broken ribs and I don't know what else was wrong. But the hole he went into was impressive. I have a picture of it.

[0:52:41] Lee: So was he evacuated from the Antarctic?

Morgan: No, he just recovered.

[0:52:48] Lee: On base?

Morgan: Yep. We were in the Sound. He went away across with us at that time. That's the way things were. The aircraft came down later because we had done the journey over sea ice from Marguerite Bay. These were journeys I don't think people will ever do again. So that was truly an epic journey. I was always nervous about camping on sea ice. I talked to Bunny Fuchs after returning. He had worked in that area, and it was clear from what he said that when he had been down there the ice was much better, the sea ice. He didn't have to deal with the variation and the uncertainties that we had to deal with. And I guess it was just part of that trend that we now call global warming, which obviously didn't just start ten years ago. It has been going for a while. And that's why we had to leave the base on Adelaide Island. I have seen pictures which are astounding to me. But there are a lot of people who still don't believe it is happening.

[0:54:11] Lee: Were there moments of humour as well, amongst all these near misses?

Morgan: Lots of humour. I thought the one on *Protector* was funny.

[0:54:21] Lee: What's the story there?

Morgan: Well that was pushing off the iceberg, and of course it was potentially tragic. Falling in a tide crack is kind of humorous. It happened to me. A tide crack is a thing, if you are not familiar with it, is: as the … Of course all sea rises and falls with tides, and then where the ice meets the shore, there is a crack. This thing goes up and down. And I just had a colleague who was working up in Alaska and he heard that I had been to Antarctica. We talked about things and of course I forgot to tell him about tide cracks and he nearly fell in one in Alaska, and that was of quite large dimensions, the one he fell in (or nearly fell in). But the one I fell … – it happened every so often, because you thought you were on pretty sound ice and boom, you just go through – very embarrassing. You just get out; you are like stiff with water again. Yes there are those moments. The Antarctic, I don't think of that as the humorous part of my life so much.

[0:55:51] Lee: Well there is a very good story about the baked bean tin.

Morgan: Oh the baked beans? Oh yes, well one of our chores was to be cook and we worked with a stove that I think people would probably call related to an Aga, and these were stoves that were running all the time. We don't have those sort of things now where I live because summer is too hot. But we had this stove always going. I think it was Ron Gill, our diesel mechanic, who had left some cans of baked beans on the stove to defrost because everything we brought in the house was frozen, and he left them there too long These things had exploded, and exploding baked beans travel in straight lines, it turns out, and the flex on the light: I remember everything that was in the way of the baked beans left a precise shadow on the ceiling or wherever and it was absolutely perfect. So even if there was a hole in the flex, it would have done the whole thing. The chain would be up there. I thought it was remarkable. Of course we did have tomato ketchup all over the ceiling. Yes, that was certainly amusing but everything has its downside. You had to clean that stuff off.

[0:57:25] Lee: Were there any instances where you were being innovative in the Antarctic? You were solving problems, introducing new ideas, new technology?

Morgan: Well I tried to introduce the idea of using our handheld cameras for survey work, so that we would do a panoramic view. So I created a thing out of brass it must have been – we had some brass there – really so that you could put the camera on it and just go angle: say thirty degrees and move another thirty degrees, or whatever.

And indeed we used those photographs and they were sent back to DOS. You look at some of the readings; you don't know what is down there, but when you have a whole panoramic photograph, it really give you a much better idea of where you are and what sort of country you are dealing with, and whether the points you are looking at make any sense, on so on. I found them very useful myself.

[0:58:26] Lee: Was that adopted by other surveyors after you?

Morgan: I don't know. To really make that work, you would have had to have had a little bit more precision than mine had when you set up the camera, but yes it was used back in DOS, I know, by Bob Metcalfe. Those photographs we took were used by him.

[0:58:46] Lee: You and Dave Nash also did some work on the Port Stanley radio station?

Morgan: Oh yes. The thing about radio stations is that they have a big antenna and you have to orient this thing to maximise the signal strength. And they wanted to know what was the best place to … You had to know where the signal was coming from. You had to orient this antenna from the station there. So we did, yes. We provided them with where they should put this antenna and I have forgotten the details of that thing. Yes we did. Port Stanley was full of all sorts of surprises. That was something I never thought I would ever do. Actually one time in Port Stanley, that was funny. My vet friend, Godsal (Mike) … There was a house that had a huge number of cats And the cats kept on breeding and having kittens. So the chore was to go and spay all these cats, and one day I went as Mike's assistant to catch these cats in this house.

[1:00:08] Morgan: I don't know if you have ever tried to catch cats. They don't come willingly to have their insides cut open and their bits tied. And there we were and we'd had a party the night before and it was the funniest thing: chasing these bloody cats around with towels, throwing a towel on a cat, trying to roll it in a towel. This is how you do it, but then you have to unroll it sufficiently for Mike to actually do the surgical stuff. I forget how many cats they had but it was like a dozen of them; it was not like two or three, and so this was a bizarre interlude. I think the whole entry of a veterinary surgeon type to the Falklands must have been quite novel. I think they hadn't had one in decades, maybe half a century.

[1:01:11] Lee: Key change? Can you put your finger on any other key change which you think is the way Fids are today compared to your day?

Morgan: I would think that it has to have changed. We were very small in number. In a base with us: maybe ten or twelve people; absolutely no privacy for anybody; no women. I mentioned that before, but it's not that. It's just that there is also, when you go out in the field, no support. You know that if you get into trouble, there's nobody can come and help. I think that aspect has changed in a big way. I think people, more and more, who work down there are there for a very short period. They go in in the summer and they come out.

[1:02:06] Lee: You think the lack of wintering has changed things a lot, do you?

Morgan: Yes, I do and I think it changes the social adhesion of a group. Some of my closest friends still remain from those days: Ian McMorrin I mentioned, Rourke Bryan who was a Met man at Adelaide. Rourke was a professor of Geography at the University of Toronto, so he's another North American like me. But these people I have known now all those years and will continue to know until the day I die. And a number of the people here at this reunion I have known for the … not quite as closely as I do Ian, and he is one of my closest friends.

[0:02:53] Lee: You have flown from Massachusetts?

Morgan: I just flew on Wednesday.

[1:02:58] Lee: For this?

Morgan: For this. This ties in. My wife and I bought a little cottage in Britain about three years ago, so I have a tenant change right now, in Oxfordshire, in the Cotswolds.

[1:03:15] Lee: You have had a very long and illustrious career after your FIDS days: a lot of time in North America, India, Germany, China. How does the Antarctic rate in the life span of Ivor Morgan?

Morgan: You know, I was sitting down with a good friend of mine in Boston – he's Australian – and we were talking about what motivates us, and he is clearly motivated … I have known him for thirty years. He has set his sight on making money, and John is rolling in money. He has had a heart bypass operation. He owns high-rises in Boston and God knows what, and he runs his own firm. He is a marketing guy. He has got his own firm that is specialist and stuff. And we sat down. He said 'What drives me?' and that was an interesting question, and I think I look for challenges. I never thought I would get a doctoral degree from Harvard University and people listen to me and I am such a Brit.

[1:04:35] Morgan: And so there is somebody here, she says 'You are an American professor.' And I said 'Nobody has called me that before.' It's like an insult. I said 'Well I have got a doctorate from an American university.' 'An American university? Oh my god.' Even if it's Harvard, you know, for some reason people think it's something less than you would have here, and of course in my field, that's absurd, truly absurd. So I think that was a challenge. It was extremely risky. I had a young child at the time and I had very little money. Money has never been a motivator for me but I have still got that Welsh country thing, so it's not that we lived that badly; it's just that I am not like my Australian friend. I do not have high-rises but I do have a house in New Hampshire on a lake, and all that stuff. So these days, that is not the problem.

[1:05:47] Lee: But you also have two years in the Antarctic in your memory, don't you?

Morgan: Oh absolutely, yes, and I have memories of China which are still very vivid to me. I did a fair amount in Shanghai. And living in Switzerland, living in Spain. My Spanish connection now goes back twenty years.

[1:06:05] Lee: I was wondering where on that list of locations, the Antarctic lies for you.

Morgan: Oh I think it is still right at the top. It’s still the one that has given me the biggest challenge, the biggest adrenaline kick. But even going to Switzerland gave me a big kick because I didn’t really know how that was going to pan out. This is a very well-known institution. And then going to Spain you have a different challenge. It’s the language. My French wasn’t that bad. I do speak German because my wife is German, but that has taken me forty years for heaven’s sake. And then I dump into Spain and my Spanish: nothing. A lot of my contemporaries at university went to Spain in the summer. I never did; I went to France. So all of a sudden, there I am in Spain and in Catalonia, where they speak Catalan as well. So that was really a big challenge. It has been an extraordinarily enriching experience for me and I still work with those folk after twenty years. Mind you, some of them now come to Boston. I do things in Boston for them, but it really has been super. But when I stack them all up, as an experience, I still think this was most extraordinary.

[1:07:36] Lee: Marvellous, Ivor. Thank you very much indeed.

Morgan: A pleasure, an absolute pleasure.

[1:07:42] [End]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [0:18:30] Advantages of dogs over vehicles.
- [0:20:19] Missing insects.
- [0:21:16] The beauty of Antarctica.
- [0:28:36] Trying to push away an iceberg.
- [0:33:53] Two helicopter incidents.
- [0:36:14] Surveying equipment dropped in the water.
- [0:40:32] A couple of scar incident.
- [0:43:53] Crackle after a soaking.
- [0:47:08] Pilot: 'Where do you think we are?'
- [0:50:10] Rescue of George McLeod.
- [0:55:51] Exploding baked bean tins.
- [1:00:08] Catching cats in Stanley.