

BRYAN HOLMES

Edited transcript of a recording of Bryan Holmes interviewed at his home in British Columbia by Chris Eldon Lee, via SKYPE, on the 14th May 2013. BAS archives AD6/24/1/217. Transcribed by Allan Wearden, January, 2017.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Bryan Holmes interviewed via SKYPE by Chris Eldon Lee on the 14th of May, 2013. Bryan Holmes Part 1.

Holmes: Bryan Holmes, don't forget the Y in the Bryan, was born in Church Stretton, Shropshire, the 17th of May, 1932.

[Part 1 0:00:23] Lee: So how old are you now Bryan?

Holmes: 80, I'll actually be 81 on Friday!

[Part 1 0:00:30] Lee: Happy birthday! You're speaking from Canada where you moved at some point?

Holmes: Yes, we moved to Canada in 1968 and spent the first few years - it was quite interesting - we spent the first few years in an isolated part in the Rockies. We were building all the infrastructure for a new coal mine and the railway line that connected it into the main stream and believe it or not we actually lived in a log cabin that one of the original homesteaders had used! My first week in Canada the temperature dropped down to -44 F which was colder than I ever had it in the Antarctic!

[Part 1 0:01:26] Lee: Tell me about your father, would you say he was an educated man?

Holmes: Actually we didn't - my mother divorced my father at a very early age - I didn't see very much of him and so I was virtually brought up by my mother. My father eventually remarried and moved back to Church Stretton and in my later years, no when I was in my 20's that sort of thing, we re-established contact. But in my earlier years saw very, very little of him!

[Part 1 0:02:01] Lee: What kind of education did you have Bryan?

Holmes: Me? [Lee: Yeah!] Well first of all the Oxford School Certificate at the primary school for boys, and won a scholarship from Church Stretton to the primary school for boys in Shrewsbury. Then I spent 3 years as an articled pupil to the County Surveyor, basically in the highways department, roads and bridges was the main focus of our work. And then later I spent 1 year doing a 1 year diploma course at University College London in survey and coincidental on the same course were 2 other ex-Fids, Norman Leppard and Peter Gibbs, 3 ex Fids out of a total of 7 in the course!

[Part 1 0:03:04] Lee: Lets go back to that later on, what was it that do you think drew towards surveying as a career?

Holmes: I think 2 things: one I was always interested in geography and travel, and it sort of combined with, surveying combined quite a bit of outdoors work of course together with obviously doing the compilations of the surveys etc, so it seemed to be quite a nice combination of outside and inside work.

[Part 1 0:03:40] Lee: What sort of things were you doing at Shropshire County Council?

Holmes: Basically surveys for new roads and realignments and a couple, we did the preliminary work for a lot of the bypasses, whereby the county council could from the planning point of view they wouldn't allow new development, on the line of potential bypasses! And so we surveyed the routes, oh let me think! Ludlow bypass, Bridgnorth bypass, Shrewsbury bypass and Oswestry.

[Part 1 0:04:29] Lee: Yeah, these days they have even bypassed the bypass in Shrewsbury!

Holmes: So I believe, yeah!

[Part 1 0:04:35] Lee: What do you think was your first awareness that there was a place on this planet called Antarctica?

Holmes: I think actually it was very probably - hey we are going back quite a few years! - but probably number 1 the film *Scott of the Antarctic* with John Mills etc, and I think in 1953/2 the ascent of Everest and you know I think those two combined, and so I thought it would be quite an adventurous undertaking, me in the land of snow and ice etc, etc that probably triggered it off!

[Part 1 0:05:21] Lee: What's the story then of you finding out and possibly going there and applying to FIDS?

Holmes: [Coughing. Lee: Bless you!] I had read quite a bit about it, I'd seen the occasional references in the newspaper to FIDS, to the Falkland Island Dependences Survey. You know the *John Biscoe* was departing with scientists to head south etc, so that had triggered my interest and then I was playing rugby for Shrewsbury and a newcomer arrived, by the name of John Green, who was at that time engaged to a Shrewsbury girl, Doreen! But to my surprise and delight I found that he had just returned from the Antarctic, he had been at base B, base B Deception Island. Was quite a few years older than me at that time, but he told me, when we talked about the potential of going to the Antarctic. He sort of gave me the names of the contacts, Bill Sloman, who was I guess the chief recruiting officer at the time, and told me to keep my eyes open on either the *Times* or the *Telegraph* for advertisements and then respond accordingly! So how old would I be at that time!?! 21, something like 22 and so that I added the *Times* to my newspaper deliveries, and sure enough there was the advertisement from the Crown Agents. So I made the application and had interviews and away it went from there!

[Part 1 0:07:25] Lee: What did you make of Johnny Green, who later became Sec FIDS didn't he?

Holmes: I liked him, I thought he was a really enthusiastic guy! I think that with some of his contemporaries he wasn't - how do I put it? - he maybe suffered a little bit by the fact that he hadn't done any of the major long distance sledge journeys, such as Ray Adie and Bunny Fuchs had done. You know, nothing of his doing, he had been more or less confined to bases without the sledging tradition, and I think that some of the contemporaries, for want of a better word, down played the fact, well he hasn't done a lot of sledging and I think he suffered a little bit from that!

[Part 1 0:08:26] Lee: Was he a good rugby player?

Holmes: I beg your pardon! Yes, yes pretty good he played centre three-quarter, I played wing forward.

[Part 1 0:08:35] Lee: And did he marry Doreen?

Holmes: Yes he did, and she was one of 3 very, very attractive girls in Shrewsbury, so when John was engaged to Doreen we were all sort of looking for the possibility sort of making contact with the other 2 girls but nothing came of it! [Laughter!] And she, she spent many years in Port Stanley I believe?

[Part 1 0:09:03] Lee: What Mrs Green?

Holmes: Yes.

[Part 1 0:09:06] Lee: Oh right, doing what Bryan?

Holmes: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:09:11] Lee: Doing what?

Holmes: With John being Sec FIDS and Doreen being there in support, John eventually became Sec FIDS actually the year I went down there in 1956 I think.

[Part 1 0:09:28] Lee: OK, so tell me about this application then, were you successful right away to apply to FIDS?

Holmes: Pretty well I think. I think what helped was the fact I had been very enthusiastic about the Antarctic and had read quite a lot about it, I think they were impressed by the fact that I had actually subscribed to and took delivery of the *Polar Record!* which was then the journal of the Scott Polar Research Institute and I think that was very probably, rare amongst their applicants that people had gone to that extent and had researched the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:10:13] Lee: Done your home work.

Holmes: Yeah.

[Part 1 0:10:18] Lee: Yeah, what do remember of the interview, I appreciate it was a long time ago, but do recall it at all?

Holmes: Well my recollection of it, Bill Sloman, Brian Roberts asking questions about a) my training and background and competence if you like about as a surveyor, but I think it really helped the fact that for a long time shown quite an interest in the Antarctic. They told me that, they gave an idea as to the sort of work that would be involved, the number of surveyors and geologists that they were hoping to recruit that year, I think at that time you've got to, this was at that time it just so happened, this turned out to be IGY, International Geophysical Year! But up, from which Antarctica became virtually an international area, but prior to that there had been conflicting claims for territory in Graham Land at that time, from Chile and Argentina and there was possibility that the case would be taken to the Hague to settle the land claims, so I think at that time Britain was pushing for completing high quality maps of the area, together with geological surveys in order to back up their potential claims through the International Court!

[Part 1 0:12:16] Lee: The motivation then, was as much political as it was simply the sake of being an explorer?

Holmes: From the Foreign Office point of view I think that was probably the case yeah!

[Part 1 0:12:27] Lee: Were you aware of that at the time do you think?

Holmes: Yes, I don't think there was anything hidden about it, I think it was just, well to back up our claim we are going to show that: A) we have got a major year long occupation of the territory, which Chile and Argentina didn't have at that time! B) The number of bases and people that were down there, and C) The number of exploration and mapping that was being undertaken, the Chileans and Argentinians at that time virtually I think their attitude, they put people on bases but they didn't carry out an awful lot of, hardly any sledging and not an awful lot of scientific work, you know they did met reports and that sort of thing, but not very much research into upper atmosphere and that sort of thing, that we were doing!

[Part 1 0:13:30] Lee: Now, do you feel that your work on bypasses in Shropshire was ideal training for surveying Antarctic coastlands, or did you have to go off and learn a new part of your trade?

Holmes: Well, if you have been up on top of Long Mynd on a windy day! [Laughter!] No, it was the thing that I found that I enjoyed with the Roads and Bridges Department, was the actual survey and mapping and using the surveying instruments, the theodolite, levels and that sort of thing measurements! I think that I enjoyed the whole aspect of it of it, but I think one that was probably the part that I enjoyed most of all. So the use of instruments was, I became reasonably proficient at it over 3 of years sort of thing.

[Part 1 0:14:27] Lee: Nevertheless I think you were sent off to do some training before went south is that correct?

Holmes: That's correct yes.

[Part 1 0:14:34] Lee: Tell me about that Bryan?

Holmes: OK, we went to what at that time was the Department of Overseas Surveys and Directorate of Overseas Surveys which was at Tolworth in Surrey. We were, I think there was probably about 4 surveyors at that time, who were designated to go to the Antarctic and we were given virtually an overview on the area at the particular time Hunting Aero Surveys that were under contract to fly air photographs for mapping the length and breadth of Graham Land. So we did have a certain number of air photographs to look at, and using stereoscopes to see the the contours and that sort of thing, and from then we were given quite a bit of research into the potential bases that we might be going to. Which varied from Signy Island, Admiralty Bay and then several of the bases farther south, south of the Circle, Horseshoe Bay, Detaille Islet and there was a gap in the potential survey partly because of the sea ice and the currents, ocean currents which prevented the formation of sea ice. So there was a gap virtually between Anvers Island the Argentine Islands, which was Base F at that time, and the north end of Adelaide Island and this part was inaccessible, and it was intended to establish a new base somewhere along that coast line, in order to provide a link!

[Part 1 0:16:49] Lee: This is an area which FIDS hadn't got to at that point isn't it?

Holmes: Yeah, so having been given, spent quite a bit of time on the background researching work that had been done before, in particular when potential base J was going, the BGLE - the British Graham Land expedition of 1936/37. We were able to research the work they had done, so that gave us a background into the area we were likely to go and then from there, we then went under Alfred Stephenson who was the senior lecturer in survey at Imperial College London. We went down and had a 2 week survey camp in Ascot, where we introduced to the position fixing by astronomy which wasn't something that was you would normally take in Great Britain at the time!

[Part 1 0:18:04] Lee: Yeah!

Holmes: So we did quite a lot of work under Steve on astro-fixes! This was of course in the days before GPS. Petra Searle was our main contact at DOS and she did an excellent job with providing us with all the background information to the areas we were going to, and pleased to see she is still involved in some ways with the BAS Club.

[Part 1 0:18:42] Lee: I'm reading her notes now as part of the research for this interview! And she tells me you were quite a 'stunner' back in the 60's and 50's!

Holmes: Oh! [Laughter!] Didn't seem to get me anywhere!

[Part 1 0:18:57] Lee: No sadly not! There were people on this course with you including Peter Gibbs and Angus Erskine, do those names ring bells?

Holmes: That's right yes, and Peter and I became good friends, I went to his wedding, one of the ushers at his wedding, and we also when as I said coincidentally, we found ourselves on the same survey course at University College London! And together jointly, one of the tasks, well 2 of the tasks we had to do, sort of field work tasks, one of them was a fairly

detailed survey on a large scale, so he came to Church Stretton with me and together we surveyed the farm belonging to, again one of my former rugby players so we spent quite some time doing that. And then we had to do triangular and plane table survey on the Isle of Wight. Most people stayed in hotels, the other class members Peter and I pitched a mountain tent on one of the cliff tops there, and conducted our survey from there! Angus was also on the course, beg your pardon he was also at DOS doing the, we met doing some of the preliminary work there and the end of the, when we returned back to England Angus and I shared an apartment in, just off Regents Park when we were working at DOS doing the completion of the maps! A little bit later on he, Tom Murphy who had been his predecessor as Base Leader at Base W and I headed off to Scandinavia and we had, oh about 3 or 4 months working a way up the Norwegian coast from the Jotunheim up over the Arctic Circle into Northern Sweden and climbing on the way, and we climbed Kebnekaise which was the highest mountain in Scandinavia at that time! And then found our way back to the UK and went our separate ways.

[Part 1 0:21:46] Lee: Petra Searle suggests that the *Biscoe* was delayed on that journey of 1956, that was the year you went isn't it? [Holmes: Yes.] And that you, Peter and Angus had lots of spare time on your hands, which was not always used productively!?

Holmes: Well what happened was in fact, it was partly a political thing, It was the maiden voyage of the *John Biscoe* at that time. And it just so happened that the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Phillip was doing a tour of the Southern Hemisphere and the British possessions and contacts there, and he had I think he had been to the opening of the Olympic Games in Australia on board the *Britannia*, and part of their visit, quite a few of the minor possessions such as Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha, and he expressed a desire to go to the Antarctic as well! So the *John Biscoe* was delayed somewhat so that its journey could partly coincide with Prince Phillips visit there, and as a result we finished our course about 3 weeks before the ship was going to leave. So I think to get us out of her hair I think, Petra sent us up to Aviemore in Scotland to do some climbing and working this crevasse rescue in the crevasses on the Cairngorm Mountains! So we spent 3 weeks up in Aviemore which was then run by the Scottish Council of Physical Recreation.

[Part 1 0:23:47] Lee: Glenmore Lodge?

Holmes: Glenmore Lodge, that was exactly it, yes!

[Part 1 0:23:53] Lee: And did that crevasse rescue training come in handy ever?

Holmes: Well believe it, there was snow there at this time of the year it must have been late October or something of that sort, so we tried our hand at skiing not very successfully! And did a few, found a couple of ravines and we pretended that they were crevasses and did some rescue work out of these ravines, and while we were there there was also one of the permanent instructors who were there, 'Wee George', George McLeod was envious of us heading down to the Antarctic, so we said 'Why don't you apply because they need general assistants and mountaineers and that sort of thing?' And he said 'Och they wouldn't take any notice of me'! And we said, 'Well apply anyway' and much to his surprise and our delight

he did have an interview, and there was an opening and George was recruited and he actually flew, the ship had already left. All this was late in the season and I believe he flew down to Montevideo and joined the ship there!

[Part 1 0:25:10] Lee: So tell me then of the departure on the *Biscoe* and the journey south, Bryan?

Holmes: Well it was quite interesting the first for, number 1 it was the maiden voyage for the ship, from my own humorous point of view, there had been it just so happened that in Church Stretton there'd been quite a big social occasion was the Hunt Ball! So thought that'd be a good send off and we'll go to that one, and that was actually the night before we actually had to get to Southampton, so attended this resplendent in dinner jacket etc, probably over indulged myself went back home and had to catch a midnight train from Shrewsbury to London/Southampton! And so quickly changed, fortunately had all my things already packed and everything else, got on to the train went to sleep. Got off to make the connection at London to go on to Southampton, looked resplendent in a brown sports jacket, brown slacks and I still had on my black patent leather shoes from the night before! [Laughter!] And so we departed OK, and Mike Smith, who was 2nd Officer, Kelly Johnson was the Skipper, and Mike Smith sort of appointed me as the 'King Fid' onboard the *Biscoe*, you know quite a big group.

[Part 1 0:27:11] Lee: I was really intrigued with that, because it was your first time with FIDS, and yet you were appointed as 'King Fid'. Can you remember why that was?

Holmes: Not the slightest idea, no! No, I haven't got the slightest idea. It worked out well, Mike and I got on quite well. Another funny thing was set out on the *John Biscoe*, I had somewhat of a hangover from the night before and had made this connection, the one the last train to Southampton was a little bit late, but I can't remember the times, but say you were expected to report onboard at 10 o'clock, well I didn't get there till 10.45 because of the train connections, so when I got onboard with my head throbbing somewhat(!), Mike Smith looked up and said 'You must be Bryan Holmes and you're bloody late!' 'Actually I'm bloody lucky to be here at all!?' [Laughter!]

But the first 4 days we were going through the Bay of Biscay, and it sort of lived up to its reputation for having bad weather and one by one people sort of succumbed to the weather and the waves and it left only I think of all the people onboard, there was only 5 of us that very fortunately weren't sea sick! And then as the days got better then you know other faces start appearing you hadn't seen before, the rest of the journey was quite good! In fact it was non-stop trip to Montevideo, we would normally, I think there had been problems at the sea trials with the *Biscoe* as well, and it had to miss out what had been a planned routine trip to Ascension Island and this was normal apparently for the ships heading south to call in at Ascension on the way down. And we had to forgo that and went straight to Montevideo, so stock up there, we had maybe 2 days in Monte, 2 or 3 days and then on to Port Stanley where we rendezvoused with the *Britannia*!

[Part 1 0:29:44] Lee: What was the *Biscoe* like, I guess you weren't a seasoned sailor?

Holmes: It was fairly slow, as I say fairly slow it was incredibly slow! Probably about 10 knots was our average speed I think - I go that fast in my sail boat now! - but reasonably comfortable. I think it was an improvement on what, well I'm sure it was an improvement on the old *Biscoe*! We had bunks, individual cabins with 2 bunks in it so you shared with someone else. We were at that time we were told, we had to sign on as supernumeraries to the crew, we were told that this was to make sure we didn't have to have our, it made it easier when we got to Montevideo and any other potential foreign ports of call and as supernumeraries to the crew, it was easy to get through customs and immigration in transit. In fact after we had got through the Bay of Biscay, Mike Smith said 'You are supernumeraries to the crew so now you have to work'! So they put us all to work. Hey this is a brand new ship straight from John Browns on the Clyde, but put us to work re-painting everything! But at that time the ship, I believe later on they were changed to red or some striking colour but at that time they were grey, I recall we were all, I've got photographs of us painting on 3 stages, hanging from the mast painting the mast, the bridge, creosoting the deck on all the rest of it! So anyhow it kept us occupied on the way down, it kept us out of trouble I suppose!

[Part 1 0:31:58] Lee: What were your duties as King Fid then, did you have any special responsibilities?

Holmes: Other than allocating people to do, so Mike Smith would give us the work that had to be done and I would sort of allocate different people to do different jobs and most people, everyone complied it was a way of keeping occupied on the way down there. I think it also included helping out in the galley which wasn't a very popular job, but somebody had to do it as they say! There was a cabin boy, who was quite something. He was a, Kelly Johnson was the Skipper and I think they - and I can't remember the name of the cabin boy - but he was typical Glaswegian, he'd been working in the ship yard and Kelly had taken a liking to him and offered him a job as a cabin boy, and he was a typical Glaswegian sort of didn't stand any nonsense from anybody no matter if they were a top scientist or what! You know we are all equal on this, and he was quite a character!

[Part 1 0:33:24] Lee: Some Fids say that the journey south is very important, because you tend to bond with your colleagues on the way down?

Holmes: I'm sure that was the case yes, in some cases people knew exactly which base that they were going to and what work they were doing, and met other people going to the same base I think that was in the majority of cases that was, so....I'm sure it was important fact you know, you knew you were going to be together for a minimum of year and possibly two. And I think the one thing that I learnt and most of us learnt was to be tolerant of others that might have a different point of view to yours, hey but you are going to be together for a year or more and you had to understand their point of view, and optimistically hope that they would understand your point of view even if it was different, sort of thing. I think one learnt quite a lot of tolerance in my spell there!

[Part 1 0:34:38] Lee: Did you take to it, because it's very, very different from County Hall in Shrewsbury Square isn't it, the environment you were heading for?

Holmes: Exactly, yes, but as I said I had read quite a lot about it and reasonably well prepared to what to expect kind I think. Luckily the 6 of us that were at base together all got on well together and there was no friction between us so it worked out quite well I think, you know the same thing, the other people learned to be tolerant as well and put up with my idiosyncrasies as I did theirs I suppose so!

Part 1 0:35:20] Lee: When did you find out where you were going to go?

Holmes: Well knew before we left that I was going to the new Base J, but what we didn't know was where Base J was going to be located. We knew it was going to be south of the Argentine Islands and north of Base W which was on Detaille Island! But we had to find, we knew that we were going to have to find a base and optimistically we were hoping it would be on the mainland, and not on one of the islands, where obviously you are restricted because you had to wait for the sea ice. And other than knowing the general area I was going, we didn't know specifically what the location was going to be.

[Part 1 0:36:13] Lee: Let's come to that shortly, tell me about you're arrival at Port Stanley and coming in alongside the *Britannia*?

Holmes: Yeah, that was interesting. We were, again everyone learned whether you were going to be an ornithologist at Admiralty Bay or you were going to be a general assistant farther south, you knew that the work had to be done, so we all buckled down and we had to off load the supplies from the *John Biscoe*. They were transported up to the general store and then re-sorted when the ship's eventual route was determined, so that the first base you were going to visit was on top and the last base you were going to visit was on the bottom and all this had to be taken out, taken ashore re-sorted, reloaded so it was fairly heavy physical work and everyone buckled into to do. We found the Falkland Islanders were fabulous, lot of great fun, very hard workers, very good seamen but you know we all worked as stevedores you might say on the thing! And while we were there Prince Phillip arrived on the *Britannia*, there were a couple or three receptions and he also took part in a horse race!

[Part 1 0:38:04] Lee: Tell me about that, did you see it?

Holmes: Yes, so at the reception they, the funny thing is it was at the town hall and needless to say it was dress up affair, and we drew lots that there was going to be 4 Fids who were invited to take part in this official reception. And so we actually drew lots to see who the 4 were going to be, and I lucked out as to be one of them and Angus Erskine lucked out to be another one! So we'd had a hard day's work off-loading the ship and went to the Port Stanley pub with the crew to slake our thirst and thought 'Oh good lord, we've got to be at the reception in half an hour!' So dashed back to the ship, changed, so of course there's no transport there, ran down the dock, ran down the road, got to the reception about 5 minutes before Prince Phillip did! And to find that the doors were virtually closed and everyone was all anxious awaiting the arrival of the royal party, so they had to open the doors let Angus and

myself in! The only way down into the hall was down the red carpet down the centre of the room, so we did the royal salute waving to the crowd as we walked down! And then about 5 minutes later the royal entourage arrived and that was that! Then they had, it was the annual Port Stanley Day races, so it was big event so they found a horse for Prince Phillip, and obviously a pretty fast one and I think quite legitimately he won the race, I don't think the others held back, but it was quite something, quite a day's entertainment anyway!

[Part 1 0:40:24] Lee: Did the whole island turn out?

Holmes: Oh yes, yes!

[Part 1 0:40:27] Lee: Did you meet his Royal Highness?

Holmes: Yeah, what happened then, we went our separate ways, we went to South Georgia on to Deception Island and then just south of Deception Island, the *Britannia* had also visited some of the northern bases not accompanied by us, but he then transferred from the *Britannia* on to the *Biscoe* at sea and before he did that his ADC Mike (think of his name in a minute) came over on board to make everyone aware of the protocol involved, so the skipper said 'Well anything I should do about polishing everything up, and making everything spic & span?!' Mike said 'Now look, Prince Phillip has spent many, many years at sea, and there's nothing you can do in a day, which is going to impress him anymore, he knows how a ship operates and bits get rusty and things, so you don't make any special arrangements at all!' He said 'What about food?' 'Same thing applies, no special arrangements!'

So Prince Phillip transferred at sea on to our ship, and I was still King Fid so I had to introduce him to all the members of FIDS who were going down to bases and that sort of thing. And he was onboard for 3 days I think, 3 or 4 days, and he shared his time eating between the wardroom and with us as the FIDS. And the one funny thing I remember, a couple of funny things, was when he first came on board and introduced everybody he said 'Well he said is the cocktail, is it cocktail hour yet?' So 'Oh yes, what would you like sir!?' The other thing Mike said that, 'Address him as "Sir" not "Your Highness" or not something just address him as "Sir" all the time'. So at the one meal we were having a lot of the people were in the early stages of growing beards, including Prince Phillip, and so I think it was Vince O'Neill one of radio operators said to him, talking about beards and that sort of thing and said to him 'What about your beard Sir, are you going to keep it on, when you get back to England?' And Prince Phillip sort of fingered the stubble on his chin and said, 'I don't know I quite like to' he said, 'but let's face it, it depends on what the wife says!!?' [Much laughter!]

[Part 1 0:43:32] Lee: So you got on with him quite well then did you, did he impress you then?

Holmes: Yeah, he was very much, he impressed you, very much one of the boys. Yes, but absolutely no side to him whatsoever you know, easy to talk to, easy to get along with that sort of thing.

[Part 1 0:43:54] Lee: Did you have to salute him in the corridor!?

Holmes: Ah no, no. The farthest south he went was to Base W, which was just south of the Antarctic Circle. I think that was the big thing about and he wanted to get all sorts of records, so they, they actually went out and played tennis on the ice for a, outside Base W so at least he could claim and the potential *Guinness Book of Records* of having played farther south than anyone else!

[Part 1 0:44:31] Lee: I was reading they had to change the rules to allow lobbing?

Holmes: I believe so, yeah!

[Part 1 0:44:36] Lee: Tell me about the arrival at Prospect Point then, as had they chosen the exact base position by then?

Holmes: Yeah we searched, again a couple of interesting things was before we set off from Britain, as I said there was the Hunting Aero Surveys had a 2 year contract to fly photographs over Graham Land, covered as much as they could. In year 1 they had atrocious weather lots of low cloud cover etc, etc, and they had only been able to fly about 10% of their contracted area, so we were virtually told before we left UK, 'Well we have this aerial company down there but you can virtually ignore them, because you know the weather isn't suitable and they're not achieving very much'! In fact when we arrived at Deception Island, which is where their operating base was, they had float 'planes, which could operate off, from inside the island, they'd had a long spell of very good weather, and they had in fact completed a 100% of their flights! So now all of a sudden we had to change our prospective plans of doing the normal sledge wheel traverses, and plane table surveys but optimistically controlled by a triangulation, just now we had to, we had air photographs of the whole of our section of Graham Land and we were to provide ground control, to identify certain points on the photographs that would prove the basis of the new maps there. So we now had photographs of the whole coastline, so we were able to pinpoint 2 or 3 prospective areas that looked as if they would be on the mainland, and looked as if they would provide access farther inland as well. So that helped immensely that we checked out the first couple that weren't very satisfactory and eventually picked out Prospect Point, and that's where we established the base, but that was with the aid of the air photographs that Hunting had flown!

[Part 1 0:47:17] Lee: So when you arrived at Prospect Point, was there nothing at all?

Holmes: No, absolutely nothing, just, the most of that stretch of coastline were deeply indented bays fed by glaciers, high ice cliffs that sort of thing. And Prospect Point which was one of the few places, where there was in fact a rocky outcrop which provided decent landing and potential for a base. There were only 1 or 2 or 3 potential places down that whole coastline.

[Part 1 0:48:00] Lee: So the exact location which was chosen, really by Bill Johnson the captain was he rather than by FIDS?

Holmes: I think it was probably a mutual, mutual decision there is, Ron Miller was the designated Base Leader he was a general assistant/mountaineer who'd done quite a few trips from Base W, Angus Erskine who'd spent some time in Greenland and myself and the

skipper, you know we sort of went ashore and said 'Let's make a trip up a potential glacier which looked like a way up on to the Plateau'. So my recollection was that certainly myself and Angus, Ron Miller went, skied probably for about 4 miles up the glacier from Base J, from Prospect Point, and it looked quite promising there, so we turned round and said 'Yeah it looks like good potential', and so the decision was made there and then to this is where the base was going to be!

[Part 1 0:49:25] Lee: Was Fred Wooden with you at this point?

Holmes: Yes he was, he had previously been on the Danco Base O, on the Danco coast.

[Part 1 0:49:36] Lee: Yeah, what's confusing me is, I interviewed Fred about 18 months ago and he seemed to think the concrete base for the hut was already in place when you arrived?

Holmes: No!

[Part 1 0:49:45] Lee: No, you made the concrete base, did you?

Holmes: No, yeah, what happened before we went down, as I said earlier on, there was this little bit of a delay after we'd done our training at the Directorate of Overseas Surveys, I actually went down to the Boulton Paul's factory in Norwich, where the hut was preassembled, pre-cut and all the different components were all given coded letters as to, you know whether they were posts or beams or whatever! And we also had, loaded on the supplies I believe, some ready mixed concrete, but it was called Ciment Fondu, F-o-n-d-u and it is C-i-m-e-n-t, think it was a French product, but in fact you could make, rare in that you could mix it with salt water, to make concrete! So we definitely poured the bases and you know made for them and cribbing for them, actually used some discarded oil drums, cut them at the right level and filled them with concrete. No, we definitely poured the bases there! It may be, Fred may have arrived on a second trip down there, by which time we had already laid the concrete bases.

[Part 1 0:51:28] Lee: OK that makes it clear, so did the hut go up readily bearing in mind you'd seen it already, was it easy to construct?

Holmes: The ship stayed alongside or anchored in the bay and we used the scow for, you know we still slept onboard the *Biscoe* and it was a huge help in that we had the whole of the Fids crew, that were in transit, to A) offload the stores and B) help pour the concrete, lay the foundations and put in the floor etc, etc! And some stage when it went up to relieve the other bases, some of the guys that were still in transit stayed behind with us till we were virtually sure the hut was finish-able. We'd got all the exterior up by the time the last ship, the ship wasn't there all the time it was sort of relieving the other bases, but its last visit was March I think, by which time they were, everyone was quite comfortable that we had shelter and the 6 of were able to finish the interior ourselves.

[Part 1 0:52:46] Lee: How was it to live in Bryan?

Holmes: We actually, we lived in tents for quite a long spell probably for about 6 weeks I would think while still building. We built a sort of, what the routine of the time was, we had an isolated storage area, so that in the case of a fire one still had some form of shelter and food and fuel. So this was remote from the actual hut itself and we actually built the walls of cases of food then put a tarpaulin over the top and we used this as our cookhouse, but while we slept in the tents!

[Part 1 0:53:44] Lee: And when you moved into the hut proper was it comfortable, was it, did you enjoy living there?

Holmes: Yeah, yes it was quite good. The interesting thing was that we had a wind[up] gramophone, record player at the time and I have the recollection of at some stage, you know we'd all be asleep in the tents and whoever had the gramophone would put on, one that sticks in mind I think was Joan Hammond singing *Oh Silver Moon!* [Laughter!] And you're lying in your tent, listening to this beautiful soprano voice sort of echoing out over the snow there!

[Part 1 0:54:32] Lee: Was it 5 or 6 of you altogether in the base?

Holmes: Yeah, yeah 6 of us!

[Part 1 0:54:37] Lee: And how did you all get on?

Holmes: Very well, different personalities of course but yeah no conflict whatsoever, I suppose a couple of very, very minor disputes but nothing significant! As I said I think the one thing I learnt there was to be reasonably tolerant of other people and thoroughly enjoyed. I think a lot of the stuff was disassembled so for, as an example, as all the sledges which didn't come as a complete sledge, they came as a kit form. So we had a huge workshop probably a third of the base hut was a workshop and we, had to assemble all the sledges together and this sort of thing and working together making it comfortable inside, painting it etc, etc! And were you aware about our generator problem and the radio?

[Part 1 0:55:52] Lee: Tell me about it?

Holmes: Right OK. Well as I said it was the maiden voyage of the *John Biscoe* and one of the routine things that the ships' officers had to do when on watch was to measure the amount of water that was in the bilge of the boat. They all leak through the different glands from propeller shafts and that sort of thing and what we didn't, what no one knew at the time that they, OK, 'How you measure the water in the bilge?' There was a vertical probably a 2 inch pipe went down from somewhere in the vicinity of the bridge, down into the bilge of the boat. You dropped actually, a lead line on the end of a length of rope down into to there and then noted where the water level was on the line when you pulled it back up, and then operated the pumps until the water was below the level of the lead line. What we didn't find out until we reached Port Stanley was there had been, there was kink in the pipe(!), which may have been during the actual construction or might have been during the loading so the lead line never reached the bottom of the bilge, and well, all the way down we thought the bilges were dry and pumped dry every day. In fact there was about 3 foot of water in the bottom of the hull!

[Part 1 0:57:26] Holmes: This spoiled quite a lot of the equipment that was destined for our base, a lot of the survey equipment, some of the geological supplies this sort of thing. Our theodolites were immersed in water and the radio set, which was designed specifically for a small base, and the small generator that was due to power it, that was also immersed in water! We were able to, from stores in Port Stanley, able to replenish most of them but not the radio! We found a spare radio at Deception Island, which was designed for a large base, a lot of personnel and a large diesel generator etc, this was the only radio available so this was loaded on for us to use. After we had built the hut and moved in tried, went to operate the radio, found it actually took way too much power to operate! We would charge the batteries up from the generator for 24 hours, switch the radio on, Arthur Rumbelow our radio operator would sort of make contact and about after 4 or 5 minutes the batteries would go dead! Because this massive radio had taken too much power out of them! So we were virtually incommunicado sort of thing, and we tried all sorts of things, we'd charge the batteries up for 2 days, we wouldn't have any lights on in the hut we would just use candles and hurricane lamps to conserve the power, switch the radio on the same thing lasts for 3 or 4 minutes and then drain the batteries!

[Part 1 0:59:35] Holmes: So Arthur was typical of a lot of the radio op's in the south, was an avid ham operator, but he, and he'd also brought with him quite a lot of radio magazines and he came to us after another frustrating session, and said 'Look I think I might be able to build a small radio that would get us in contact, but I need to cannibalize a lot of the parts off the existing radio'. He said, 'I've bought all sorts of things down with me, transistors and coils and lord knows what, so I think I could make a radio, but if it doesn't work there's no way I can put back together again into the big radio'! So we debated this, and said 'Well nothing to lose, go for it'! So he got a Huntley and Palmers biscuit tin and his soldering iron out and so cannibalized several parts off this immense radio which probably stood, I don't know, maybe 5 feet high by 3 feet deep sort of thing and assembled all these parts into his little Huntley and Palmers biscuit tin, which absorbed very, very little power and said 'Well this is it, the big day, let's see it works!' And sure enough it did! [Laughter!] We were able then, we were in communication with everybody, with all the bases, with Port Stanley, we even got the BBC overseas broadcasts to the Antarctic and everything!

[Part 1 1:01:22] Lee: So was that a worrying time then that you might have been out of touch for the year?

Holmes: Yes, yeah that was it. The following year I believe they did bring down the smaller radios, that were was designated for the bases. But the other thing that also made a difference was our sledging radios were also damaged, and we had difficulty communicating when we were on sledge trips.

[Part 1 1:02:00] Lee: Was Arthur able to do anything that?

Holmes: Unfortunately no, I think we'd run out of Huntley and Palmers biscuit tins by then!! [Laughter!]

PART 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Bryan Holmes interviewed via SKYPE by Chris Eldon Lee on the 14th of May, 2014. Bryan Holmes Part 2:

[Part 2 0:00:13] Lee: Tell me a bit more about Fred Wooden, what sort of a man was he?

Holmes: Very, very meticulous in everything he did, and for example we built a darkroom in the loft, where we had an enlarger, we developed our own film, enlarged it. And it became quite a hobby for most of us, and Fred was insistent that absolutely no light should penetrate the darkroom, so having built it we had to then close the door and keep him in there for an hour(!) [laughter!], so that his eyes became accustomed to the dark and he would be able to pick out if there were any sort of stray beams that got in there. And if there were then he patched them up etc-etc! And what else? He also built the, the equivalent - I'm not quite sure if it was an Aga stove - but it was that type of stove that we used for heating, cooking, melting ice for the drinking water etc. And again he was very, Ron was getting frustrated (the Base Leader) who wanted to activate the oven and Fred was insistent that it had to be absolutely 100% in perfect order before he would let anyone touch it, before ever using it! Yeah, we all got on well together, a good guy!

[Part 2 0:01:50] Lee: Let me ask you now if I may, and I think Fred was involved in quite a bit of this, tell me the survey work you did manage to do, because of course once you went farther up that slope it didn't really get you anywhere did it!?

Holmes: Well that's not quite right! We had a very successful year actually in that we started from scratch, we built a small concrete monument on rock from which was the base of our survey and we took star observations from that, said its latitude and longitude. We measured a baseline from there about half a mile across the sea ice, to another, to a neighbouring island and that was the other end of the baseline. From that we built up triangulation system linking the mainland with off-shore islands, and we extended that from Base J right the way up to the Argentine Islands. We then used the, each leg of the triangulation, so that we started off with a baseline of half a mile and you extend that by observing 2 triangles more or less at right angles to the baseline, then you build from that to make more triangles from that one so ultimately the legs of the triangulation were anything from 10 to 15 miles in extent from where the main survey stations were. Then we used those triangulation points to control identifiable points on the air photographs, and then when we went back to Tolworth at the end of our stint in the Antarctic, all this stuff was used together, to try to get the air photographs to make a new map of the area. So we were able to complete this scale map 1:200,000 in one season, which was pretty good going actually! The only, we also joined up with the Royal Navy hydrographic survey unit who were, the previous year had worked in the vicinity of Port Lockroy down to Cape Rey and with John Wyn Edwards, he was delighted that we had done this triangulation scheme, that he could use to control his line of soundings and so the few areas that we hadn't been able to reach, because of lack of sea ice or bad sea ice were able to extend it and meet up with his previous year's hydrographic survey. So all in all we had a pretty successful survey season!

[Part 2 0:04:51] Lee: When you went off to do the hydrographic work you actually lived on the boat is that right?

Holmes: That's correct yes.

[Part 2 0:04:58] Lee: The work you were doing with John Wyn Edwards was being done from a boat?

Holmes: Right. OK, so what happened was he came down on the HMS *Protector* and they had with them, what we used was a probably about a 34 foot motor boat which had, which was equipped with sophisticated navigational equipment and sounding devices etc, etc! So in essence what one has to do is find survey fixed marks on the land or on prominent rocks or reefs or whatsoever, and then use those as control lines to run from one to another running a line of soundings. And you know crisscrossing the whole of the area with these lines of soundings and that. So there was the two phases. One of them was to establish the control beacons on land, and then the second phase was to run the soundings using those control beacons to locate where you actually were in the water.

[Part 2 0:06:19] Lee: You make it all sound as though it all went very smoothly, were there no snags?

Holmes: Yeah, what happened was when John came, he wasn't aware of how much we'd been able to achieve through the winter, so he was delighted that we had done quite a lot of the triangular work, so Fred and I and Robin Curtis the geologist all joined his group and we actually established a separate base, an independent base at what was called Wordie, which was just about a mile south of the Argentine Islands on a separate island, from Base F at the Argentine Islands. This in fact had been one of the earlier bases that was used by the British Graham Land Expedition [note: Site of.] so we used that as our base and in his survey party there was John the surveyor, 2 leading seamen as survey assistants you might say, a diesel mechanic, radio operator and an ordinary seaman. So they, a group of about 6, and myself, Fred and Robin Curtis the geologist, so we spent the whole summer and of course with the summer, you have got almost 24 hours of daylight and so we were able to work long hours and achieve quite a bit during the summer, pretty good weather most of the time!

[Part 2 0:08:03] Lee: So that was a coming together of FIDS personnel and naval personnel to do the job together?

Holmes: That's correct yes.

[Part 2 0:08:11] Lee: Was there a greater discipline under naval command?

Holmes: No, there was, no. Again if you are a smaller group you have to get on together! So the guys still referred to John as Sir, most of the time(!) and to his face, didn't know what was said behind his back, but no, he was very good and it again all worked highly successfully I thought!

[Part 2 0:08:52] Lee: Were there no tricky moments at all?

Holmes: A few. The one time we were out in the boat and quite a long way from base, 30 miles I would think something of that sort, and the wind, suddenly a strong wind got up and started doing something reminiscent of the Shackleton's *Endurance*, pushing all the ice floes up against our small boat and we *were* somewhat concerned, that we might get crushed in the ice there. So we, using boat hooks pushed the ice floes away and worked our way close enough, that we could in the event of it being necessary that we could actually hopped off the floes and got on to land! And we had a hand held radio at the time, and we could've kept in touch with people. Then fortunately the wind dropped and again. Using the boat hooks, were able to push the ice floes out of the way and get back into clear water! But that was probably the diciest thing that happened, but it was interesting. The other interesting thing was that we surveyed the Lemaire Channel, which is now one of the iconic of features you know of Arctic/Antarctic cruises, very, very scenic!

[Part 2 0:10:25] Lee: Is this the trip you took in August '57?

Holmes: Yes, yes!

[Part 2 0:10:29] Lee: The double sledging trip?

Holmes: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:10:33] Lee: Tell me about that then Bryan?

Holmes: About which, the ...?

[Part 2 0:10:36] Lee: Tell me about that sledging trip, in August 1957.

Holmes: Right. OK, we did numerous short sledging trips to start with as the sea ice established, linking all the, getting farther and farther from base, but we might be away for 3 days, 4 days establishing trig stations on other offshore islands. And then we decided we would make the one big trip to go up to the Argentine Islands, the *John Biscoe* had drop off some.....a depot of food, both man food and dog food, at one of the small islands that they more or less to the northern extent of the area that we were going survey. And it was very odd in that they, they also had air photographs and were able on the radio keep in contact with us, and actually pinpointed the, comparing their air photographs with ours, and sort of measuring how much from the margins exactly for this depot. So we had, the first trip was successful in that we got up to, and carried out the triangulation and got up to this particular location, nothing there, absolutely no food, no sign of it! We spent probably 2 days digging out snow drifts and ledges and all the rest of it, absolute nothing there! So this curtailed our trip, we were planning on using this to resupply us just so we could carry on farther north, so we had to stop at that location, turn round and slowly head our way back completing our survey. Got back to the base then and then said 'OK, now what we'll do we'll load up with the sledges and we don't have to stop on the way, we'll just', we are talking not a huge distance 60 miles, 70 miles something like that [Lee: Yeah] and 'We'll, we don't have to stop to do surveys on the way, we'll just carry on till we get to where we finish. We've now got enough food and supplies to carry on, to carry the survey farther north'.

[Part 2 0:12:30] Holmes: Up until this time the weather had been pretty favourable, it had been cold roundabout 0⁰F I suppose, but this meant the sea ice conditions were good. We set off and were about 2 or 3 days out and suddenly the temperatures rose up to hovering just below freezing you know like 28/27⁰ F. that sort of thing. This made the snow that was on top of the sea ice like the water, the sea had percolated through made it very, very heavy going, very slushy, very, very difficult to travel! We were camping on the sea ice at this time, pitching our tent on the ice, and then eventually we got through on the radio, this was probably about we were about 4 days out of base by this time, you know about 30 or 40 miles up the coast, and got on the radio and had an urgent message to say the sea ice in the north where we were heading for had broken up(!), partly due to the high temperatures and the wind, so there was virtually no point in heading up any farther because we wouldn't be able to, the ice was breaking up there. So then, 'OK well I guess we'll have to turn round and go back to base!' Then we got a radio message from our base saying, the sea ice had broken up around the base as well! So there we were stuck in the middle, stuck in the middle we couldn't get up to Base F and the Argentine Islands and we couldn't get back over the sea ice to Base J, our home base! And it was very tough going and this slushy, sort of calf deep slush that we were trying to wade through, so we, we had spotted a, basically it was, the mainland was ice cliffs all around but we had spotted one spot where it appeared as if the cliff, it was just a very, very steep slope and it ended in a little rocky promontory at the bottom. So we aimed back for that, we actually broke through the ice in a few places and found some reefs, and we actually, the ice was too thin for the sledge, a laden sledge, to travel on, but what we did we took all the stores off the sledge, got the dogs and the sledge without any load on across this weak ice. And then we personally carried each box on skis across this weak part, got back on to the firmer ice reloaded the sledge and made it, managed to get back to this promontory!

[Part 2 0:16:08] Holmes: This was the other side of Ferin Head, we were on the north side of it the base was on the south side of it. It was way too steep to get the dogs up the cliff as it stood so we determined, there was 3 of us at this time, Ron Miller, myself and Robin Curtis, so we determined that Ron and I would try and ski back over the glacier to get back to base, leaving Robin with 18 dogs(!) [laughter!] and a tent and a whole host of supplies, to stay behind and look after the dogs so we should get back! This worked out quite well to start with, in that Ron and I had to cut steps up the cliff, got up on to the glacier, managed to ski over the glacier, found our way back to the base, arrived back about 5 o'clock at night. And the others, we were out of radio contact with them then, because we had if you like the small radio sets were virtually sort of line of site radios, and because we were the wrong side of the, of this Ferin Head we were out of contact with them at the base! So they were delighted when Ron and I sort of skied down the slope to the base, then we had to assemble stuff, block & tackle and all sorts of other things, to go back to bring Robin and the dogs up! The problem was that the weather, a blizzard set in! [Laughter!] And I think we were stuck at the base for something like 6 days in a blizzard!

[Part 2 0:18:06] Lee: Yeah!

Holmes: With Robin and the other side of the glacier, not even knowing if Ron and I had got back safely or not, because he was out of radio contact! And ultimately when the blizzard stopped Ron, Dave Chalmers and I man-hauled back the ropes, block & tackle and all the rest of it and were able to haul everything up the cliff top, one dog at a time sort of thing, re-assemble them at the top and then eventually got back to base, so quite an adventure!

[Part 2 0:18:38] Lee: Now just so I can get this clear in my mind that was in September 1957?

Holmes: Yes, that was in, yes it would be in the spring of, the Antarctic spring sort of August or September something like that.

[Part 2 0:18:57] Lee: There was one major double sledging expedition down the Grandidier Channel?

Holmes: Yes, we had one fairly successful, well successful, triangulation trip up till we ran out of food you might say, until we couldn't find the depot and what incidentally we concluded with John Wyn Edwards when the ice had all cleared during our hydrographic survey, we went to that same location. Now there was no snow on this rocky island, absolutely not an item, not a box of food to be found there! We looked we wondered if something had happened, tidal wave had washed it away, but it was high it was like 30 or 40 feet above water level where they'd left it. We looked down into the clear water and there were no boxes there, we think that an Argentinian party that was operating in the summer had come across this supply of food, didn't know what it was, didn't know that we had left it there, didn't know it was for our purposes thought they'd discovered a little bit of a gold mine! We think, but we don't know if they had taken it and taken it back to the base and gorged themselves on it! [Laughter!] I hope they enjoyed the dog food that was the only thing! [Laughter!] Yeah, I might be doing them an injustices, but it disappeared it must have been taken, just absolutely no sign of anything there!

[Part 2 0:20:39] Lee: Let me ask you a bit more about using aerial photographs, because were you fully aware of how much aerial photography had been done, when you were making that long sledging trip?

Holmes: Yes we were, we'd already got the photographs with us at that time.

[Part 2 0:20:56] Lee: How clear were they, because aren't photographs, aerial photographs of the Antarctic aren't they largely white!?

Holmes: Don't forget we were on the coast, so there it was an awful lot of offshore islands that we would virtually the triangulation whereas one base would be on the mainland and on a rocky outcrop somewhere, and the other, the other side would be on one of the offshore islands. So in the summer, so I think the only trick was trying to distinguish which was an island and which was an ice floe.

[Part 2 0:21:38] Lee: Did you meet Peter Mott?

Holmes: Yes I did, yeah!

[Part 2 0:21:41] Lee: What did you make of him, the guy who ran FIDASE-Hunting's?

Holmes: Yeah, he had some ex-FIDS surveyors working with him at the same time as well. They didn't provide much in the way of the survey, that wasn't their brief, their brief was just to fly the photographs. But he had a couple of ex-FID surveyors working with him in the base from Deception Island and Deception is a, Deception Island is a huge submerged cauldron of a former volcano, so once you get inside the narrow entrance, which is called Neptune's Bellows, once you get inside there, there is a huge enclosed harbour. Obviously you can get bad weather, and they do get bad weather there as well, but in the summer time it makes an ideal seaplane operating base.

[Part 2 0:22:49] Lee: When you produced the new maps, were you able to compare them with anything earlier, with earlier maps, or were you starting on virgin territory?

Holmes: No, we, the BGLE, the British Graham Land Expedition, had done some basic mapping of the area, so we had various outlines of the different things but the equipment they had at that time wasn't as sophisticated as it is now, or even as it was then when we were there! So although there was, for the want of a better word rough outlines of the coastline on the islands, they weren't necessarily obviously as accurate as you can get from air photographs.

[Part 2 0:23:45] Lee: And how different were the new maps you produced to the rather rougher version, you had before you?

Holmes: I've got to think about that a bit! The, I think in general, in general they were reasonably close. I've got to think about this because, Alfred Stephenson who took part in the BGLE was our instructor before we went to the Antarctic sort of thing! In general they weren't bad at all, but they weren't totally accurate, they weren't as detailed, you might have the location of an island being almost like a kids drawing of an island, whereas we were able to actually delineate all the inlets and bays and we also with the triangulation able to do contours and everything, and establish the heights of all the peaks and that sort of thing. The other one interesting thing that we did while we were at the base, thought it might be handy to, to have the, to be-able to collocate it to the worldwide tides. So we actually set up a tide-pole just off-shore in a cemented, in a concrete block with graduated in feet sort of thing, and because we didn't have a sophisticated tidal gauge, we pitched - this was in the summer - we actually pitched a little mountain tent close by and we took it in turns with an alarm clock, to go 24 hours a day for 6 weeks(!), to actually, if you, if it was overnight you'd wake up with the alarm clock, you would wake up every hour, get your binoculars out, read what it said on the tide pole, record it, so we actually recorded the height of the tides for every hour for 6 weeks! That this was operating at the base, which was quite unique.

[Part 2 0:26:18] Lee: This was brand new, brand new information was it?

Holmes: Yeah, so apparently all sorts came from the hydrographic office, there was all sorts of typical tides that once you get the tide, you could plot how the tides operate over a certain

period of time, and say 'Oh yes, this compares with so-and so' and then come up with a whole 12 months of tidal tables.

[Part 2 0:26:47] Lee: And the hydrographic chart you produced from Cape Rey to Ferin Head, was that new or was that again an improvement on something that had existed before?

Holmes: No that was new, it hadn't been done before!

[Part 2 0:27:02] Lee: So that was virgin water?

Holmes: Yeah, yeah.

[Part 2 0:27:06] Lee: And were you using the traditional sounding system to get the depth?

Holmes: With the John Wyn Edwards one, [Lee: Yeah], yes echo sounders and basically the self recording paper printout. So you'd start on the water, take some bearings to 3 or more fixed points that you'd surveyed on land, so you knew the coordinates of all those points, so you took observations, horizontal observations, with a horizontal sextant, to each of those so you knew where you were starting from then you ran off at a certain speed on a course directly towards one of the other beacons, and then every - not quite sure what - either minute or every 5 minutes you press a plunger down, this would then put a mark on the map, on the sounding chart, and you actually wrote on it this was 1 minute, 3 minute, 7 minutes etc, and then they were able interpret this and when you got to the end of the run, you took another fix and then you knew that whole run had taken - pick a number! - 21 minutes from A to B, so then you could interpret all the different intervals along and say 'This is where the soundings took place!'

[Part 2 0:28:44] Lee: Were there ever any surprises or unexpected results from this survey work?

Holmes: Yeah, we found quite a few reefs that we didn't know existed before, fortunately we found them on the sounder and not by running on to them! I don't think other than that, I don't think so, it was you know, but it was interesting to know that those charts now are the ones used by the cruise ships that come down the Lemaire Channel and the Grandidier Channel and so on and so on! The other one interesting thing was that, when the *John Biscoe* was coming down to relieve us at the end of our year, first of all, again Mike Smith was the 2nd officer and he radioed and said he didn't think they could get in because it looked as if a lot of sea ice where they were in the north and where our base was. And then we radioed back and said 'The sea ice was pretty clear here, so what we'll do we'll climb up one of the summits and give you a really good overview' So Ron Miller and I set off and climbed up one of the subsidiary mountains adjacent to Sharp Peak, which was a very prominent feature there, and then we could way oh way, I don't know maybe 35 or 40 miles up the coast, we were able to spot where the ice was and drew a little sketch map, went back down and radioed Mike and told him where the clear ice started, which was only about 5 miles from where the ship thought they were stuck. And so he, they were able to break through this 5 miles of pack ice and get into open water, so he was quite tickled with the fact you know, had

we not been able to do that we'd have been stuck there for another month before the ship could come into relieve us I think!

[Part 2 0:30:58] Lee: All this was happening, Bryan, at a time the Trans Antarctic Expedition and the International Geophysical Year were taking place!

Holmes: That's correct yes.

[Part 2 0:31:08] Lee: Were you chaps in your hut aware of all those 2 things, did you much contact with them?

Holmes: Not really, not while it was taking place. We met with the expedition members in London before we left, in fact George Lowe who was one of the New Zealanders, sort of Ed Hillary's climbing buddy was actually designated to be, not with Hillary's side of expedition but with Fuchs' side of the expedition. And he actually accompanied Peter Gibbs, Angus and myself on this survey course at Ascot, and we met up with all the people before they set off, and we did know of their events but not on a, not on a routine basis. But then when we got back to England, we all arrived back virtually at the same time so we sort of met up with a lot of Trans Antarctic people, at all sorts of get together and social functions and that sort of thing in London on the return trip.

[Part 2 0:32:25] Lee: Did it matter that they might have had more exciting time than you?

Holmes: Difficult to say!

[Part 2 0:32:34] Lee: Were you jealous of their adventures, the TAE?

Holmes: But not until we got back. We didn't get the reviews that were being sent through to the press and that sort of thing, I think the press were trying to build up a story of a conflict between the 2 parties and that sort of thing, which probably didn't happen! But no, we weren't aware of any of this while we were in the south ourselves! How do I feel about which?

[Part 2 0:33:09] Lee: When the time came for you to come home again, [Holmes: Yes], having done just 1 year south, rather than the usual 2 what were you feeling were you happy to come home or were you sorry to leave?

Holmes: Well a little bit of both, is that I had absolutely thoroughly enjoyed every minute of being down there in that 1 year, and I think I basically sort of came to the opinion of, well the second year might have been a little bit off an anti-climax after the comparable success and certainly enjoyment of the first year. So all in all I think it was probably from my point of view I think a good decision! As I said, absolutely I wouldn't say no regrets as I was sort of full of enthusiasm for what we'd done, and what I'd experienced in that 1 year a second year might have been a bit of an anticlimax!

[Part 2 0:34:16] Lee: You sent a message ahead of your return journey which was picked up by one of the national newspapers?

Holmes: Oh that one! [Laughter!] So, OK we were all on the *John Biscoe* coming home, we called in at Montevideo as was the norm. And the ships officers were, one of them, John Morley, came back onboard delighted because he got some, he'd picked up some 12" vinyl discs of the songs of *My Fair Lady*, so we said 'What's all this about?' So he said 'It's a new show that's just starting up in London. They've been very, very secretive about it, there are no gramophone records would be released until the show started! And there was sort of quite a black market in people trying to get them from overseas etc, etc, so now I've got them and I'll be much in demand in England, because these records aren't available there!' So we said 'What's all this about?' and he told us all about the show and *My Fair Lady* and so on, so after a few drinks one evening the conversation got round to the fact about, wouldn't it be nice if we could sort of get some advantage from the fact we'd been in the Antarctic for a year, well 2 years in some cases!?

[Part 2 0:35:51] Lee: The show was sold out for months and months ahead wasn't it?

Holmes: Yeah, so somebody said, 'Well tell you what, why don't we try and get, talk about this show *My Fair Lady*, why don't we try and get tickets for that?', we all having our duty free whisky and that sort of thing, 'Yeah that'll be a good idea'. So we all sat down and scribbled this cable to say something like, 'No fair ladies for a whole year in the Antarctic, how about trying to line us up with some fair ladies and tickets to the show on our return'!? I think something along those lines, and we thought which newspaper should we send it to, 'Well we'll send it to the *Telegraph*?' 'Ah, no that's too staid! Send it to the *Daily Express*.....maybe not, how about the *Daily Mirror*?' 'Oh, I don't want to be associated with the *Daily Mirror*!' And at that time there was a newspaper called the *Daily Sketch* which was a slightly upscale version of a tabloid, so 'Yeah the *Daily Sketch*!' So we gave it the wireless operator and he sent off this cable, and we forgot all about it, this had probably happened at about 1 o'clock in the morning, after demolishing about half a bottle of whisky or something!!

[Part 2 0:37:15] Holmes: Then a couple of days later the radio operator came round and waving and brandishing a cable, saying 'Look you've got a reply from the *Daily Sketch*!' So we said 'A reply to what?', 'To that cable you sent off!' 'Oh God! We'd forgot about that!' Anyway they actually sent a reporter down to the ship, but realised that maybe they were intruding a bit when all the one's family and friends meeting us. But they said 'OK, here's a phone number, contact us when you, in a couple of days when you get home!' So I did and they said, 'Well we can get you tickets to a matinee performance and we shall provide some escorts for you'! So myself, John Wyn Edwards and Angus Erskine sort of went along, went to the *Daily Sketch* offices, went and had lunch with 3 blonde models and a reporter, went to the show, went backstage and met Julie Andrews and then we thought this has started off pretty well! As I say it was a matinee performance, so went off to a nearby pub with the 3 girls and said 'Well OK, where next!?' And the one girl said, 'Well I have to get home to feed my baby'! And the other one said 'My fiancée is just coming to pick me up'! [Much laughter!] Oh, so it ended there and then at about 6 o'clock in the evening, but a very enjoyable day!

[Part 2 0:38:52] Lee: At least you got to see the show!

Holmes: Then the follow up on that we were concerned about having our leg pulled unmercifully by all the other Fids, who were still involved in the Department of Overseas Survey. The next day there was nothing in the *Sketch*, the next day absolutely nothing the third day nothing, I said 'Oh thank god for that'! Had a full day, a really enjoyable day out etc and no repercussions, then the next day one of the guys came in brandishing I think 12 copies of the *Daily Sketch* that he handed out to everybody, 'Look at these guys!' [Laughter!] And there was the photographs of us, A) with the 3 girls on the embankment and then, B) backstage with Julie Andrews! So it was quite good!

[Part 2 0:39:46] Lee: There's one story I'd like to hear about while in the Antarctic and this concerns some rather dubious label changing on tins of food, what's that story Bryan?

Holmes: Oh, ha-ha! Yeah well, as you know the 6 of us at the base when we weren't sledging you took it in turns 1 week as cook, and the other week as what we called 'gash hand' - which was a naval term I think - which meant you did all the housework, you went and cut all the snow blocks to melt for ice, took the garbage out and did the housecleaning and all that sort of thing! So when it was my turn all the food was actually stored up in the loft of the hut, so it was out of the elements, didn't freeze etc and there was some food was more popular than others! The very unpopular one was, for some reason or other, was canned string beans, for some reason or other very mushy and totally flavourless, nobody liked them! But the popular ones was the canned fruit, so Dave Chalmers was the, we each had designated tasks in addition to our normal duties, so Dave Chalmers was designated as being the store keeper, so each week he went up and collected the stuff from the inventory of the stores and brought it down and put it on the counter, 'That's your food for the week!' So after a couple of turns of this I thought, and as I said we all got on well together and played tricks on each other, so I got up into the loft and would, and took the beans and with a razor blade cut the label off the beans, and cut the label off a tin of apricots or pineapple and swapped the labels and put them, and swapped the tins over! So Dave would come down and say 'Here's your stuff Bryan' and give me the cans of beans, but in fact they were tins of apricots! [Laughter!]

[Part 2 0:41:52] Lee: Did you ever confess?

Holmes: I didn't tell him until after we'd left! [More laughter!] But it was quite funny at the end of the week, 'Didn't we have apricots on Monday?'! I said 'Well yes Dave, but the secret is to sort of come up with a recipe and spread them out a little bit and make e'm last longer!' But that was quite good!

[Part 2 0:42:20] Lee: I've got a note here that might make no sense at all so please dismiss it if it doesn't make sense. It's a note to do with Fred Wooden and you and a Polar Medal, did you receive the Polar Medal?

Holmes: Yes I did!

[Part 2 0:42:36] Lee: Tell me about that?

Holmes: But the odd thing was, when I received the notification I was actually working in Nigeria and an invitation to go to Buckingham Palace etc, etc. So I had to decline it and they said 'OK we'll put you on the list for next year instead', so my tours in Nigeria were of 18 months duration, so when it came round the next time, the second year I was still in Nigeria! So what they said then, and I had no idea if I was ever going to be in England, at that time I was under a 2 years' contract of the time of the investiture at Buckingham Palace, so they said 'Well we are having an investiture in Lagos at the High Commissioner's Office could you attend that?' So I said 'Yes I could do that'. So I had the, received the Polar Medal from the British High Commissioner in Lagos Nigeria for my time in the Antarctic, which was a little bit unusual. The others were getting theirs, all the MBE's and CBE's, for their colonial service in Nigeria sort of thing and me getting a Polar Medal for being in the Antarctic!

[Part 2 0:44:01] Lee: When you got back to Britain, was there much after work to do, much drawing and cartography work to do, when you got back?

Holmes: Yes quite a lot. Number 1, we had to recalculate our, with the aid of the - not quite sure what the term is - the head of their computation division, we had to go over our all our records the angles that we had measured and the triangulation and making it, so basically the 3 angles of a triangle should add up to 180 degrees. Well maybe the 3 angles add up to 170 degrees 59 minutes and 18 seconds, so you had to decide where to distribute this odd 42 seconds which you had out in the triangulation sort of thing! So we had to spend some time doing, adjusting the computation and from that calculating the latitude & longitude of each of the different triangulation points. Then we had to assist with using stereoscopes interpreting the contours on the all the mountains, and the base was at sea level and the top was at 20,376 feet sort of thing! But you had to then using the stereoscope sort of virtually sketch out the contours on the mountain, at equal intervals so we spent quite a long time in the Directorate of Overseas Surveys working on that!

[Part 2 0:46:02] Lee: Did you ever have to make it up!?

Holmes: Pardon?

[Part 2 0:46:06] Lee: Did you ever have to make it up?

Holmes: No I don't think so! There was - interesting now that one has a GPS and so on and find out - astronomical fixes were out a little bit, but not by very much when you look at the scale of the map, it was virtually, it was way within the scale at which the maps were being produced in, it was just a pin prick! But there were re-adjustments that have been made since I believe.

[Part 2 0:46:44] Lee: Did you draw the maps yourselves or was that done by somebody else?

Holmes: It was a little bit of both. There were staff at the Directorate who, that was their job doing the computations and the adjustments and that sort of thing, and mathematically oriented, and the other it's a very unusual mapping system that they use(!) which would probably take me 2 hours to describe. But in effect what happened was that they used the negatives of the, of the flight, they had a whole series of projectors overhead which virtually

replicated where the photographs were taken from the 'plane. And they had to adjust, when a 'plane is flying photographs it isn't going, although it appears to be going on a particular elevation, because of the wind and pressure although it is dropping and rising, dropping and rising. So they actually adjust the images to coincide on a huge model of the template on the floor, so that they'd already been pre-scaled showing where all our photograph identification points are, so all the projectors are adjusted slightly so that everything falls into place, and the....trig point coincides, with on the ground along what had been plotted on this base, coincided where they were on these photographs, very complicated procedure but quite interesting!

[Part 2 0:48:43] Lee: I've got a quote here from Vivian Fuchs from *Ice and Men* who said that, 'In that period at Prospect Point in 1957', when you were there, 'the journeys that those surveyors made were highly dangerous and their determination not to stagnate at base was highly commendable'!

Holmes: Yeah! Well I don't think we ever considered staying at base, you know we knew..I think the area we were had been travelled before by this, the British Graham Land Expedition in 1936/37. They had come across similar conditions of sea ice and sea ice breaking up and that sort of thing. What we found, the conditions we found weren't totally unexpected, you could always say that we anticipated having those sort of conditions and made the most of it! We travelled whenever we could and just that it was the sort of thing we had expected doing, you might say!

[Part 2 0:50:05] Lee: Do you feel that you might have taken risks?

Holmes: Hey, we were young! [Laughter!]

[Part 2 0:50:16] Lee: I'll take that as a 'Yes' then!

Holmes: Yeah! But it was strange travelling on the sea ice. I remember the onetime with Robin Curtis we were, Robin and I, were travelling on the sea ice from island to island, and Ron Miller and Fred Wooden were travelling close to the mainland parallel with us and then we were linking together with this triangulation. We were going round the end of this one island and the ice looked fairly thin, and what we used to prospect is an ice chisel, which is virtually what it sounds like, a long handled chisel, almost like with a hoe handle with a 2 inch chisel on the end of it, and you plonk this into the ice, and the rule of thumb was if it withstood 4 blows it was safe to travel on! [Laughter!] And there was one occasion when we were sort of going along and it going through after 3 blows, and at one stage I said to Ron, actually in frustration, put my head clasped on hands in the hole leant on it, and said 'This is getting tough', and as I said that, the actual ice chisel broke through the ice, just went straight through the ice. 'Oh man I hadn't realised it was going to be that tough'! We were able to circumvent it, move away and find some firmer ice and get round, but yeah as I said it was one of those things you knew there were risks, but I guess accepted them!

[Part 2 0:52:03] Lee: When you left FIDS you worked quite a long time in Africa, and were caught up in the very beginnings of the Biafra war, which led you to emigrate to Canada, was there a key moment when you made that decision to get out?

Holmes: Yeah, we were surveying and designing new roads, sort of under the auspices of World Bank and we were actually in Western Nigeria at the time, but fairly close to the Niger River which was the border between Biafra and Nigeria. At that, it was in the early stages of the war and it seemed to be a confrontation between 2 sections of the army without the civilians being too involved at that time, but it got to the stage where - OK going back a little bit is in the earlier days when I was first started in Nigeria. A) the police force, and B) the army, were both very proficient and very well disciplined. There were quite number of British officers in senior positions, in both the police and the army, but the Nigerian themselves were very good. I think as the Biafra war developed each of the 2 sides the Biafra's and the Nigeria's started to.....recruit more people to build up their manpower, their strength, and the training and discipline that these guys got, compared than what for want of a better word what the regulars got, was abysmal! They were you might say, they were given a pair of boots and a rifle and a cap and that's it and said 'You're in the army now'!

[Part 2 0:54:15] And the contractor who was doing some work for us, an Italian contractor came in, came into our office one day and said 'That's it I'm closing the job down, I'm leaving'! We said, 'You can't do that you're under contract! We can close the job down, you can't!' He said, 'I don't care what you say', he said 'I'm closing the job down'! 'Why what's the problem?' He said, 'I'd be prepared to be shot for some things, but not for a packet of cigarettes'! He said, 'Some Nigerian soldiers burst into my house last night, my villa last night, and asked for some cigarettes and I told them to go away! They said "If you don't give us a packet of cigarettes we'll shoot you!!"' He said, 'I don't mind being shot for some things but not for a packet of cigarettes, I'm going'!! So this made us - at this time we had a little girl who was aged 4, a baby, my son, was born there, he was a matter of months old, my natural term of duty we were on an 18 month contract that was coming to an end and we decided, 'No it would not be a good place to take the kids back to' sort of situation. So that was, under normal circumstances I would have probably have almost made a career of working in West Africa! But that incident and several others like it were the triggering factor, not a good place to have your kids!

[Part 2 0:55:58] Lee: What led you to Canada?

Holmes: I had a sister living here actually, I hadn't seen her for 15 years so at the end of our, we had 3 months leave at the end of our after an 18 months tour, so the economy in Britain at that time 1968 was not all that good! Checked into various potential job opportunities and, we had our suitcases packed, we didn't have a house we were renting the accommodation there, and then said, 'Tell you what why don't we keep travelling, we've got everything packed, go over and visit my sister in Canada, and spend a year or two in Canada and then we'll come back'? So that's in fact what we, how it started off and in fact when we got there, we found we liked it and the job opportunities were pretty good and so after 2 years we decided we maybe should think about things. 'Maybe we won't go back to Britain maybe

we'll' - in fact we went back on holiday to make a decision and all my contemporaries more or less said, 'If you've got a decent job in Canada I would stay there, I wouldn't come back!' So basically that's how it happened.

[Part 2 0:57:23] Lee: Well you had 30 years of decent jobs on multi-million pound, multi-million dollar, projects in Canada! [Holmes: Yeah.] But I just wonder throughout your long career how highly you rate that 12 months in the Antarctic?

Holmes: Very highly. I think it's the one thing I've, well I do rate it very highly, but the one thing I've noticed, my own personal views and that with others, some people sort of more than myself it seems to be more of a highlight in that they forever living that experience in the Antarctic! You know than for the rest of their lives so that seems to be the central focus of it. That's not been my case I think partly because there aren't many other people out here to contact, to sort of keep in touch with on that, you know recounting the 'good old days'! But dozens of my friends here have no idea that I spent 18 months in the Antarctic, so I hadn't sort of - how do I put it? - I wouldn't say boasting of it, but I haven't sort of been the one to sort of say 'Hey guess what? I spent 18 months in the Antarctic and it was hell'! But as I said just listening and hearing about other people have made that as there central focus of their ongoing life afterwards!

[Part 2 0:59:14] Lee: You have though I believe bumped into some old Fids in some rather unusual places haven't you?

Holmes: Yeah, yeah.

[Part 2 0:59:19] Lee: Have you a couple of examples that we can close with?

Holmes: Well the biggest coincidence by far was the fact that Angus Erskine and myself, as I say it wasn't just we'd both been in the Antarctic we'd actually shared an apartment together, but actually climbed together in Scandinavia and then gone our separate ways. He'd gone back to his career as a naval officer, I'd emigrated to Canada and it was one of these odd - I can't - don't know what the year was - it was when South Africa, the embargo on South African sporting events ended, and I was in Canada, picked up the newspaper one day and said, 'Well look at this they're offering weekend expeditions to England on British Airways'. It was probably November, sometime a slow time in the year for something ridiculous like \$350, something like £200 for a return fare to London!

[Part 2 1:00:36] Holmes: And I jokingly said to Jan, 'Jesus you know I could leave work on Friday, England are playing South Africa at Twickenham I could watch that game, try and get a ticket for the game, go and visit my relations back in Shropshire and be back at work on Monday morning!! All for £200, \$350'. She said, 'Well why don't you?' So I telephoned my cousin in England and said, 'What are the chances of getting tickets for the England v. South Africa game?' He said, 'Pretty good I've got 2, I was going to take my son but I'll take you instead if you like'. So this is what happened. Went to Twickenham, left the game, together with 65,000 other people got on train back to either Waterloo or Victoria again with all this crowd, walking up the platform came face to somebody, and we tried to sidestep each

other both left and both right and so on, 'Sorry-sorry!' And then looked up and it was Angus Erskine! And Angus had, was then stationed in, I'm not quite sure a liaison with the US Navy in Annapolis, Maryland and he had come back to England for that same weekend for 3 or 4 days(!) to attend some naval conference in London and was just catching a train back to eventually go back to Maryland. 2 of us were in London that same weekend and only that weekend and we'd gone face to face on a platform on Victoria station! Absolutely incredible!

[Part 2 1:02:25] Lee: It's a great story. Your stories have been wonderful, Bryan, and I'm very grateful to you for your time and for sharing your memories of your time in the Antarctic!

Holmes: OK!

[Part 2 2:35] Lee: God bless you and give my regards to British Columbia!

Holmes: I will do that yes indeed, come out and visit sometime.

[Part 2 1:02:40] Lee: I'd love to!

Interesting clips:

- Climbing peaks in Scandinavia. [Part 1 0:18:57]
- Reception for Prince Phillip and him riding a winner at Stanley Races. [Part 1 0:38:04]
- Prince Phillip being asked if he was keeping his Antarctic beard. [Part 1 0:40:27]
- Building the new base at Prospect Point. [Part 1 0:51:28]
- Having to build a new radio out of spares in a Huntley and Palmers biscuit tin! [Part 1 0:59:35]
- Tricky moments in survey boat in pack ice! [Part 2 0:08:11]
- Breaking sea ice while out with the dog sledge on a survey trip! [Part 2 0:12:30]
- Taking the dogs up an ice cliff one at time on a rope! [Part 2 0:18:06]
- Setting up a tide gauge and reading it over 24 hours! [Part 2 0:23:45]
- Sending a cable from Montevideo after a few whiskies to the *Daily Sketch* about *My Fair Lady* saying 'No fair ladies here after leaving the Antarctic!' [Part 2 0:35:51]
- Attending a matinee of *My Fair Lady* with 3 blonde models, and meeting Julie Andrews backstage all courtesy of the *Daily Sketch*! [Part 2 0:37:15]
- Receiving the Polar Medal in Lagos Nigeria! [Part 2 0:42:36]
- Biafra against Nigeria war. [Part 2 0:52:03]
- Meeting Angus Erskine again quite by chance on Victoria railway station after a rugby game, while living in Canada at time! [Part 2 1:00:36]

