

DOUG BEEBE

Edited transcript of a recording of Doug Beebe interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the 23rd June 2013. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/228. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 27th July 2015.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Doug Beebe, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 23rd of June 2013. Doug Beebe Part 1.

Beebe: My full name is George Douglas Beebe. I was born on the 7th of July 1937, in Audenshaw, just outside Manchester.

[Part 1 0:00:20] Lee: So how old are you now then Doug?

Beebe: I'm 75 now. I'll be 76 next month.

[Part 1 0:00:25] Lee: Would you say that your father was an educated man?

Beebe: Well not highly educated, but he was quite a clever man. He worked in the brick industry, when I was young, making bricks for J & A Jacksons. But his speciality was actually making curved bricks for building mill chimneys, so he knew about radiuses, arcs and how many bricks thick chimneys had to be. He had to work all those sort of things out. So that's how I learned about circles and things as a kid.

[Part 1 0:01:02] Lee: He was a craftsman, then, really?

Beebe: Yes. He started work in warehouses in Manchester, following his father, my grandfather, who worked for S & J Watts in Manchester, in the warehouse. My father followed his father but then the recession came and he had to get another job. He got a job in the brickyard and stayed there throughout the Second World War. He did volunteer for the Army but was turned down because he was deaf in one ear through a football injury. And he then became a Special Constable; so he tried to do his bit for the war effort. As I say, he worked in that industry until the late '40s when he became groundsman and steward of the Denton Cricket Club, and he saw his time out there until he died in 1960, just after I had gone in the RAF.

[Part 1 0:02:19] Lee: What about your own education, Doug? What sort of education did you have?

Beebe: Well I started at Poplar Street Junior School until 11 and then I went to West End Secondary Modern Boys School at Ashton under Lyne until I was 15. Then I started an apprenticeship in Stanford Motors as an apprentice motor mechanic.

[Part 1 0:02:44] Lee: Do you think you were destined to be a man who worked with his hands?

Beebe: I think so, yes, because I failed the 11+, not really understanding what it was at 11 years old, which was a disappointment to my father because if I had have passed it I would have gone to Audenshaw Grammar and the cricket coach there was Cyril Washbrook who my father knew, you see. So when I didn't get there, that was a black

mark against me I think. But no, I went to West End, enjoyed my time there, was captain of the cricket team for the school, played football for the school, was vice-captain of one of the houses. So yes, secondary modern schools then were the up and coming form of education after grammar schools.

[Part 1 0:03:41] Lee: Did you play cricket as an adult?

Beebe: Yes, I carried on playing through my teens and up to going into the Royal Air Force. I tailed off a bit later on but through my middle teens (16, 17, 18, 19) I played.

[Part 1 0:04:00] Lee: Who for?

Beebe: Denton.

[Part 1 0:04:01] Lee: And what was so attractive to you about motor mechanics?

Beebe: Mother had got a car.

[Part 1 0:04:9] Lee: It needed fixing, did it?

Beebe: Well she got a car quite early on in my life. She had her own business on Guide Lane. She traded under the name of Ray Porter and she bought an old Austin 10 through a friend of my Dad's and I just paid an interest in the car. I was interested in the garage she bought it from. My father had a car. And it stemmed from that really. I mean I had done woodwork at school. We didn't do any engineering at school but yes, I was quite handy with my hands, as it were, so I got an apprenticeship at Stanford Motors; I stayed there until I was 21. I finished my apprenticeship at 21, stayed on as a mechanic, but left in the June of the year I was 22, knowing full well that I was going to get called up for National Service. I'd had deferment on deferment on deferment to go to New Heath Tech and get my qualifications there. So I packed my rucksack and went off to the Alps climbing for the season, as one did.

[Part 1 0:05:24] Lee: Was that a new interest or had mountaineering been something in your background?

Beebe: Oh no. From school ... We had a schoolteacher called Bernard McKenna who took us youth hostelling and it stemmed from that. I got into fell walking and then progressed on to rock climbing and mountaineering, and so it was a natural progression.

[Part 1 0:05:44] Lee: Tell me about National Service. Where did you end up?

Beebe: Principally at RAF Leeming, near RAF Mountain Rescue Team. So I was spending my time flogging over the moors or climbing on the Lakeland crags, for the largest part of my two years National Service. It started off with basic training and then trade training and they wanted to make me a policeman which didn't go down very well. I discovered that if I got into the RAF Police, I couldn't get in the mountain rescue team and the only object of getting into the RAF was to get into the mountain rescue team. That was why I was there. They said 'No no. If you're a policeman you

could be in charge of the guardroom, so if there's a callout, you wouldn't be able to go. So I said 'I don't want to be a policeman then.'

[Part 1 0:06:35] Beebe: And they didn't take very kindly to that, so they made me an admin orderly which was great from my point of view because admin orderly, you can get on full time mountain rescue service, which eventually I did. It came about because when I had been in the Alps I had met a chap called Derek Walker and he'd told me 'Wherever you get posted, fill in this form and get it into the system,' So I did that at Bridgenorth, at Netheravon, ... I eventually got posted to West Drayton and filled it in there and put it into the system. I didn't hear anything so I wrote a postcard to Derek and said 'It doesn't seem to be working, this system of yours. I am not getting anywhere.' And the thing was that, at West Drayton, although I was an admin orderly, I could drive and the CO had a driver from the pool of drivers, from Uxbridge. When I was posted there, I got the job of CO's Driver which was very nice and treated very well.

[Part 1 0:07:47] Beebe: Anyway Derek pulled a few strings or contacted people and I was duly called into the CO's office and he said 'You seem to have friends in high places.' I said 'Sorry sir. I don't understand.' He said 'You filled in a form for the mountain rescue service.' I said 'Yes. I have filled one in every camp I have been to.' He said 'Well I put your application in the bin.' So I said 'Well aye. Go on. Sorry about that.' I thought I was in trouble as it were. He said 'For all the time I've been here I've wanted my own driver. Now I've got one, he's wanting to leave.' He said 'Anyway I've had a message from the Air Ministry that you've to go on trial for the mountain rescue service at Leeming, so pack your bags. You are going up there for a fortnight.' So I went up and met the team up there, fitted in, came back and packed my bags and went up to Leeming.

[Part 1 0:08:55] Lee: Did you actually do any mountain rescues?

Beebe: Yes we did one or two. The first one I went on was a cave rescue in the Yorkshire Dales, because in the mountain rescue team we ... Well the team had substations at various places, like Keswick Police Station and all the cave rescue systems in the Yorkshire Dales and the first call-out was a cave rescue. In the mountain rescue team, we'd got three guys: 'Plug' Lodge, Keith Richardson were two of them, who were really experienced speleologists. They were very very good quality cavers and the civvy teams knew this and so they called out the mountain rescue team as and when necessary. Yes, we went on quite a few Search & Rescue operations over the time I was there.

[Part 1 0:09:49] Lee: At what point in your life do you think you became aware that there was a place called the Antarctic?

Beebe: Well. I mean I knew from geography lessons ...

[Part 1 0:10:03] Lee: The white bit at the bottom?

Beebe: Yes and the white bit at the top, and it got cold. I went to Norway in '55 and found out about ... I mean I knew what glaciers were but I hadn't been on one until then, and climbed on one in Norway. But as far as actual people in the Antarctic was

concerned, I suppose it was around the same time I was in the RAF because we were all interested in climbing and mountaineering and having a good time.

[Part 1 0:10:44] Lee: You went to visit the *Fram* when you were in Norway?

Beebe: That was much later.

[Part 1 0:10:49] Lee: Oh was it? OK.

Beebe: Yes. After I came out of the RAF, I had to get a job because having resigned my job before I was called up, the firm weren't obliged to keep a job for me when I came out. I accepted that; there was no problem. The first job I got was in a drawing office with Salford City Transport doing bus body design and organising the apprentice training scheme. Then I wanted to get into education and I made no secret of the reason for wanting to get into further education: they had very good holidays and it meant that I was able to use the holidays climbing in the summer. So I got a job in Birmingham at Handsworth Tech teaching motor vehicle engineering and after the first year, my sergeant who was still in the RAF was organising an expedition to climb in Norway. He planned on going to the Trolltinden Wall in the Jotundheim but he invited me to go, even though I was out of the RAF.

[Part 1 0:12:08] Beebe: Fortunately the Principal at Handsworth Tech, Herbert Marshall, was very very understanding. I had only been there a year but the expedition went a week before we broke up for the summer holidays. Ossie Ravenscroft, who was my immediate superior, I said 'I have had this invitation but I can't go. We don't break up until ...' He said 'No. You have worked hard this year. Do you think you can get all your registers, all your exams marked and all your records up and completed in a week?' Normally you had got a fortnight to do it and I said 'I suppose I could if I really pull the stops out.' He said 'Well I will have a word with Mr Marshall and if he is agreeable, if you can do it, then you can start your holidays a week early but you have got to come back a week early.' I said 'That's fair enough. I don't want an extra week's holiday.' Mr Marshall agreed so I was able to go on this expedition to Norway and that's how I came to be in there in '63.

[Part 1 0:13:24] Lee: So at what point did you become interested in going to the Antarctic?

Beebe: After the expedition in Norway, my heavy expedition gear was brought back to the UK via Bergen, and I hitch-hiked down to Oslo and went and looked at the *Fram* and it all stemmed from there really.

[Part 1 0:13:37] Lee: What was it about the ...? The *Fram* of course was not the Antarctic; that was the ...

Beebe: Well the *Fram* was Amundsen's ship. We met some young ladies while we were over in Norway and one of them ... Well there were two girls. One of them went out with Pete Brown and the other went out with one of the other lads. I think it was Doug Fletcher. Just for a stroll; and we met them on a bus and they were going to the same area as us and when I was down in Oslo, one of these girls said 'Come round.' They were very nice and very hospitable people. She said 'We have this museum of

the *Fram*.' So on her say-so, I waltzed out of Oslo and up to the *Fram* to have a look at it, and it was in reading about the *Fram* and the fact that he went down to the Antarctic in it, stimulated me and got me interested.

[Part 1 0:14:49] Lee: And so the attraction, was it the ice and snow or was it the mountaineering you might be able to do down there?

Beebe: I think it was the ice and snow. I found out that there were mountains down there, eventually, but it was the ice and snow. When I got back to Birmingham I read Shackleton's book¹ *Endurance* and thought 'Ooh, they had a bit of a rough time. I hope it's not like that now.' That sort of stimulated the interest and got me going, yes.

[Part 1 0:15:26] Lee: So how did you actually make the next step? There was a moment of fate, wasn't there, in a shop?

Beebe: Yeah. The Students Union at Handsworth Tech, we had got a little climbing group together and they decided they'd got some money and they wanted to buy some climbing equipment. And I had got a very good relationship with Bob Brigham at Manchester at Brigham's shop because I had dealt with his father when they were out in Conran Street. He had just moved into the centre of Manchester in Cathedral Street. So I went in there and said 'We want to buy some climbing ropes for the Students Union and some gear.' As we were talking, I just happened to say. 'Hey Bob, have you ever heard of this outfit called FIDS?' He said 'Oh yes, I have supplied them with some climbing ropes just quite recently. Hang on a minute.' He went in his office and came out with the address and he said 'There you are.' So I wrote to them.

[Part 1 0:16:30] Lee: Completely on spec? Not replying to an advert?

Beebe: No no. Completely on spec, I just wrote to them asking how did I go about applying for a job, because I didn't know where they advertised. I hadn't any idea. I don't think they were going to advertise in the *Times Educational Supplement* which is where I looked for jobs at that time. So I just wrote to them and I got a reply.

[Part 1 0:16:54] Lee: From?

Beebe: Bill Sloman, saying 'Yes, please let us know your qualifications, and experience and so on.' So I sent him a letter back and eventually filled forms in and went down for an interview.

[Part 1 0:17:10] Lee: I appreciate it is now nearly 50 years ago but what do you recall of the interview?

Beebe: Being asked very basic engineering, motor vehicle engineering questions: 'But if you haven't got a battery charger, how would you get the maximum out of a battery under cold conditions?' So having read a little bit and knowing what sort of conditions they were working under down there, I said 'Well just get it as warm as you could.' And they said 'How would you do that?' I said 'Well that depends on what you have got to heat it up with.' Not knowing, and they said 'We have Primus

¹ The book was actually titled *South*.

stoves.’ I said ‘Oh well, hang it over a Primus stove.’ ‘How long do you think that would take?’ I said ‘A blooming long time because there is a lot of mass there. A battery is a very solid object. To warm it up and really get it heated through would take a long time. I don’t know how long but it would take a long time.’ They seemed to accept that.

[Part 1 0:18:20] Lee: Did they also ask you about your mountaineering interests?

Beebe: Just a little, yes. They asked me what I had climbed, and at that time I had climbed some reasonable big mountains, like Mont Blanc.

[Part 1 0:18:37] Lee: Did you walk out thinking you had got the job?

Beebe: No. No, there was no indication of that. I mean it was all very amicable and very nice but they said ‘We will be in touch.’ I explained that, working in education, I had got to give a full term’s notice. Otherwise I wouldn’t have got back into education at that time. They said ‘We appreciate that, So we will let you know well in advance.’ and they did. Then the contract came through and I signed the contract and I signed on for £500 a year for two years and agreed to go to Cambridge for the one-week course there, and that was it. And then a bit later on, I got another letter asking me if I would accept an alteration in contract. Strange, but I accepted it, because they had just become BAS and they had given you a rise of a pound a day. So my money went up by £365 a year, and on £500, that was a large percentage increase. I have still got that letter somewhere at home.

[Part 1 0:19:52] Lee: I hadn’t heard that before. Oh right? I hadn’t realised there was a big difference between FIDS and BAS. How interesting. OK. But did you know where you were going to be sent at that point?

Beebe: No.

[Part 1 0:20:03] Lee: When did you find out you were destined for Halley?

Beebe: I think they notified us shortly after we had been to Cambridge, that you were going to Halley Bay.

[Part 1 0:20:17] Lee: Would you know what that meant?

Beebe: Yes I did, by the time I got notification, because they had explained where the bases were when we were at Cambridge. They said ‘This is Stonington, Deception,’ and so on, ‘and then there is Halley over there.’

[Part 1 0:20:32] Lee: A thousand miles away?

Beebe: Yeah and somebody said ‘Oh, you are going to the blue-eyed bay.’ I didn’t originally understand what that was at all, until later.

[Part 1 0:20:47] Lee: What does it mean?

Beebe: We were called the blue-eyed bay because we got more films than anybody else, because we'd got quite a stock of films to see us through the long winter. And the retort was 'Well you are in the Banana Belt.' because they weren't as far south.

[Part 1 0:21:06] Lee: What was the journey like? You went via South Georgia I think, didn't you? Stanley and then South Georgia?

Beebe: Montevideo first. We set off from Southampton and I have got to confess: I don't know whether it still applies to me but I wasn't a very good sailor so the first few days I was rather sick but eventually got my sea-legs. The doc – well we had got two doctors on board at that time ... (a) I was suffering from sea-sickness, (b) I had trapped a finger badly, working in the garage for a friend, and the nail was due to come off. So the doc (not the doc John Wilson that came to Halley Bay but the other doc) took it off for me, after we had been at sea for a few days, which hurt but it was necessary because he said 'If we don't get rid of that old nail, it could affect the growth of your new nail.' So anyway you can see it's reasonably all right now.

[Part 1 0:22:20] Beebe: But that was one of the first things on board ship: being seasick and having my finger nail taken off. The journey down to Monte was very good. We got down to Montevideo on I think it was New Year's Day. The thing I remember: various things on board ship but the food was absolutely superb. On I think it was the Christmas Day (I think the day was celebrated on Christmas Eve), on Christmas Day the chef came in with the most magnificent baked Alaska and it was a big platter. It was like that and it was in the shape of a swan, made out of meringue over a massive block of homemade ice cream. And he came in with it into the saloon and it was absolutely beautiful because he had obviously had a blow-lamp on it to darken the wings and so on. It was a work of art; it was a shame to actually break it up and eat it.

[Part 1 0:23:37] Lee: This was on the *Kista Dan*, wasn't it?

Beebe: Yes, the little red ship.

[Part 1 0:23:42] Lee: Did that take you all the way to Halley, that ship?

Beebe: Yep. We went into Monte first, then to Stanley, then to Signy, then to South Georgia and then down to Halley.

[Part 1 0:23:51] Lee: Tell me what you thought of Halley, because it's pretty bleak, isn't it? There's not much to see?

Beebe: No, that's true. Well when we were there it was. The first impression was 'Where is it?' Because we drive up on the 'kegs. We were driven up from the *Kista*, up the long ramp of Halley Bay and then up, and you saw these aerials stood up. 'Oh, right.' And we had been told that the huts were under the snow. Actually there was one roof showing, of the Office Block, so they were still going into that from the surface, getting into the Office Block. But the rest of ...

[Part 1 0:24:35] Lee: Was this Halley II?

Beebe: No, this was Halley I.

[Part 1 0:24:37] Lee: Oh it was still Halley I? OK.

Beebe: Yes. The IGY hut was about 60 feet down at that time, and then there was the Living Hut and then there was the Office Block. So you had got three levels and you had got shafts going down to them to get down because the Living Hut originally had been designed for a double storey but they never put the top storey on. So it had a flat roof which kept caving in, causing a few minor problems with lumps of ice and drips.

[Part 1 0:25:15] Lee: Had they trained you up on the equipment, on the 'kegs' and the other ... ?

Beebe: No.

[Part 1 0:25:20] Lee: So as a mechanic you were meeting these strange creatures, these new machines that you hadn't seen before?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:25:28] Lee: How did you familiarise yourself?

Beebe: Well just by working on them. Unfortunately there was only the changeover days with the mechanic that was there before but Brian Porter who was the other mechanic ('Shreddy'), I think he had worked on 'kegs somewhere at one time or he had been on a course. So he knew them but they were basically a straight six side-valve engine that powered the tractor.

[Part 1 0:26:03] Lee: Were Muskegs the only tractors you had?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:26:06] Lee: Were they fit for purpose?

Beebe: I think so, yes. They weren't built for the job they were doing; they were built for working in Northern Canada, over the tundra up there but they were comparatively light, light ground pressure so they had got rubber tracks, rubber driving sprockets. Yes, they worked well once you got them warm. One of the things that we did: they sent down with us Bailey heaters. I don't know if you remember those but you could get them in, I think it was up to 250 watts, like an overgrown light bulb, to insert in your water system to keep the water warm which was great in the UK. But the temperatures down there were – not on. Brian Porter and I talked this over and said 'It's useless fitting them. They don't get hot enough, but the system is good. So we got an immersion heater element and made a tube for that and put that in.

[Part 1 0:27:25] Lee: Into where? Into the radiator?

Beebe: No, into the cooling system. We modified the flow of the pipes from the radiator so we could house this – some of them were 3 kilowatt immersion heaters because we had got some of those on base. We put them in and an umbilical cord to a

socket and so you didn't have to go out and start the Webasto heater, the hot air heater, to warm the engine and thin the oil out because you could plug it in when you were on base and this immersion heater would keep the whole engine warm. You used to ...

[Part 1 0:28:00] Lee: So the cooling system became a heating system?

Beebe: Yes, it did.

[Part 1 0:28:03] Lee: Was that your idea?

Beebe: Well Brian and I worked it out between us, when we saw these Bailey heaters and said 'The idea's good but the ...'

[Part 1 0:28:12] Lee: Would you have to refer that to ...? I don't know who the Base Leader was in your first year.

Beebe: Phil Cotton.

[Part 1 0:28:16] Lee: Oh right OK. Would you have to that to Phil Cotton?

Beebe: No I don't think so, no. We just got on with it. We said 'We fancy doing this.' Alf Amphlett was there to redo, rewire the IGY hut. When we were talking to him he said 'For some reason or other, we have got a stock of these immersion heaters down there - Solex.' 'Oh well, we will have a couple of those.'

[Part 1 0:28:46] Lee: You rescued them from the IGY Hut, did you?

Beebe: Well they were on stock. They weren't being used. They were just in stores.

[Part 1 0:28:55] Lee: Were there other modifications you made to the Muskegs?

Beebe: None.

[Part 1 0:29:00] Lee: Does snow not tend to get into the radiator grill?

Beebe: Yes. We had covers. We had engine covers over that, made out of canvas but they were already on when we went down. We did make ... The Webasto heaters were on the roof of the cab on two of the tractors and we had to make ducting to get the hot air down into the engine compartment, particularly onto the sump to thin the engine oil out. So we soldered I think they were tea tins, or some sort of tins, together to make the ducting and get the hot air down there. It worked.

[Part 1 0:29:52] Lee: A bit Heath-Robinson perhaps?

Beebe: Well it looked it, yeah, but it did work. We made a good job of soldering the tins together and making sure that the vibrations wouldn't shake them apart and so on by stiffening the joints

[Part 1 0:30:08] Lee: Were the tractors kept in sheds or ...?

Beebe: No, they were kept outside. We had a workshop, a garage to work on them and that had a long ramp but we worked on them outside if conditions permitted and it was necessary, much to John Wilson's chagrin, I suppose. He started a programme of dexterity in a fridge. Now it sounds daft in the Antarctic to have a fridge but he did and he put both Brian and I onto it. But then when he found out we were replacing points and distributors outside in the cold, handling little screws, just putting your silk gloves on so they didn't burn your fingers, he took us off it and said 'No. You are getting too much practice outside. It's no good. I'll do it on other people.'

[Part 1 0:31:04] Lee: Do you think you were holding your own with these Muskegs? Was maintenance OK or were you always fighting a losing battle?

Beebe: They were getting a bit tired by the time we got there, yes. But I think this was why some of them broke down at various times because they had been worked hard in previous years. Maintaining the engines was no problem, but it was the other things that packed up on us really.

[Part 1 0:31:39] Lee: Did you get out into the field much?

Beebe: Yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:31:42] Lee: With Muskegs or with dogs?

Beebe: With Muskegs initially. It was only after the accident that I turned to being a dog man, simply because they wanted somebody to work with Rod Rhys Jones, Geoff Lovegrove and Tony Haynes.

[Part 1 0:32:01] Lee: So these notes I have got from Rod about lie-overs, that was later, was it?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:32:06] Lee: OK. Can we talk about that accident, because it happened not long after you got there, I think? Is that correct?

Beebe: Well it happened the next summer. We arrived in January/ February '65 and the accident happened the next summer. We had already done one field trip with Phil to bring the caboos back.

[Part 1 0:32:31] Lee: Oh yes, tell me about that.

Beebe: Ah well, after the unloading was over, Brian and I serviced the tractors and then we shot off because there was two guys out in a caboos with a mini-beastie, and the generator had gone. So they hadn't been able to do anything. They must have been bored out of their skulls with no work to do. So that was my first experience of going across the Bob-Pi Crossing with Phil chipping his way in front and ...

[Part 1 0:33:00] Lee: With an ice probe?

Beebe: A 'bog-chisel'. It was a long pole with a chisel end, a metal chisel end on it and it was known as a bog-chisel, because I think at some places they had used them for chipping frozen excreta in the bog to make it go down.

[Part 1 0:33:22] Lee: Turdicles?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:33:24] Lee: So he was probing for crevasses.

Beebe: He was yes, and he took the route up and I was following his line and all of a sudden it went 'Phshp' sideways.

[Part 1 0:33:38] Lee: The caboose?

Beebe: No, this was when we were going up the Bob-Pi Crossing and I had put one track into a crevasse, and the pictures in *Of Ice and Men* with Brian Porter standing there with his foot on the tractor but it was me that was driving. It was me that got the spare batteries clattering round my legs, and emptying acid all over my feet. So just one of those things.

[Part 1 0:34:05] Lee: How did you deal with that?

Beebe: Well we just climbed out. Knowing the acid had got onto my boots, onto my Mukluks and my waterproofs, I just rubbed it with snow and hoped it would dilute the acid, but it didn't. After about a week or so they all started to fall apart.

[Part 1 0:34:24] Lee: Did it ...?

Beebe: It didn't get through to me. No it didn't. The only injury to me was the bruising through batteries bouncing out of the rack and crashing into my legs.

[Part 1 0:34:37] Lee: How did you get the tractor out of the ...?

Beebe: We got another tractor and just winched it out sideways, pulled it out, being very careful not to drag the track off sideways. Yes we just put a 3-to-1 with pulleys and the winch cable; just pulled it out.

[Part 1 0:34:57] Lee: And then you got the caboose and brought it back?

Beebe: Yes. We got the caboose and brought it to the top of the Crossing. Then we went off to do depot laying for the next spring journey to the Tottanfjella mountains. One tractor broke down there by the driving sprocket sheared on one side. So we made a ski for the tractor out of oil drums, cut oil drums up and lashed a ski onto it; and then lashed the other two tractors together and put cables in and towed it all the way back to base – across the Crossing – and the caboose.

[Part 1 0:35:41] Lee: You had to be very inventive, didn't you, because resources in the field are pretty minimal?

Beebe: Yes they are. You make use of what you've got.

[Part 1 0:35:50] Lee: So were your creativity skills being challenged a lot more there than they had been back in this garage in England?

Beebe: Yes, I suppose they were, yes. I never considered that before. You just got on with what you'd got.

[Part 1 0:35:09] Lee: Let's talk then, if we may, about the expedition that came to grief in the summer of '66², with Wilson, Wild, Bailey and Ross, who went off. My understanding of it was that you were involved in the early stages of that expedition but then there was a mechanical failure at Pyramid Rocks?

Beebe: Yes. We broke a drive shaft, prop shaft.

[Part 1 0:36:34] Lee: It splintered? Did it splinter between your legs?

Beebe: Yes. Well the Hardy Spicer coupling went, between my feet yes, and rattled round. If it had been the other one that had gone it would probably have taken both my feet off, but it just clattered round and that was it.

[Part 1 0:36:53] Lee: That must be slightly alarming?

Beebe: Yes, but you know, we came out of it all right. So we towed that one up to Pyramid Rock and depoted it there, with the arrangement that the next journey out would bring spares out to repair it. And of course we did that the next year. So that was one tractor out and that left us with two. We serviced one and got that ready for more work and Dai Wild went off with that one, with John and Jerry and Ian Ross. Brian Porter and I were left at Pyramid Rock with the other one, working on the other tractor. Rod and Lew went off with one dog team, and Geoff Lovegrove and Tony Haynes went off with the other. They went off to go along the mountains.

[Part 1 0:37:53] Lee: Lew is Lewis Jukes, is it?

Beebe: Lewie Jukes, yes.

[Part 1 0:37:56] Lee: So the fact that you stayed at Pyramid Rock, was that always part of the plan?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:38:00] Lee: It was? So there was no way you would have been with the Wild party.

Beebe: No, it was just one tractor going that way because Dai Wild had been that way the previous year and knew the route. So he was quite happy: one tractor, enough fuel to get him down to where he wanted to drop the depot and drop John Wilson and Ian Ross. Because they were going to a range of some isolated mountains further out, and

² In fact it was 1965. The accident occurred on 12th October.

they were passing a mountain called Stella which Ian wanted to look at on the way back with the dog team. So the plan was that they would go out to the mountains and then Jerry Bailey and Dai Wild would come back in the tractor. And Rossy and John would work the far ones and then work Stella on the way back.

[Part 1 0:38:59] Lee: What was the first indication you had that something had gone wrong?

Beebe: A dog passing the tent door. I was in the tent at Pyramid Rock. I can't remember exactly what I was doing but I was in the tent and I saw this dog and I thought 'Where's that dog come from?' And then there was another dog, and it was Rossy coming back with the ... Ian Ross coming back with the dog team. That was the first indication we got that there was something really wrong.

[Part 1 0:39:38] Lee: Tell me about that moment. What do you remember of it?

Beebe: Well I went out; you know, jumped out of the tent and saw Rossy and I said 'What are you doing here?' He said 'There's been an accident.' He was broken. He was still shaking. He was in a terrible state. To put a lighter note on it, he had been a heavy smoker, and when we were leaving Halley to south, I had said to him 'You are going to have to cut down on your smoking, or I need another sledge to carry your fags.' And he said 'Yeah.' I admired him from the point of view that he cut his consumption of cigarettes down to less than ten a day, in fact I think he was down to about three a day by the time we got to the mountains. But when he came back from that accident he was chain smoking again. It had affected him that way.

[Part 1 0:40:35] Lee: Can you remember the conversation?

Beebe: Not exactly, no.

[Part 1 0:40:39] Lee: The gist of it though was ...? Did he explain?

Beebe: The gist of it was: he said 'The tractor's gone down a hole. The others are dead.' And it transpired that he had been riding on the back sledge, keeping an eye on the dogs, because we didn't carry the dogs on the sledges. They ran on a trace between the sledges, so they were getting the exercise. We weren't sure about actually carrying them on sledges at that time. That was an innovation, as it were. What he said was, he had been looking at Stella, this mountain as they were going past, through a pair of binoculars, and when the tractor stopped it meant that he was able to focus his glasses on it and he was having a good look at it. When it didn't set off again, he turned around to see why not and it wasn't there, and that was it. It had gone down and the first sledge had broken loose off the back of the tractor and the A-frame had dug in and jammed it on top of the crevasse by digging into the opposite side.

[Part 1 0:41:48] Lee: Did he tell you what had happened, what he tried to do?

Beebe: He did yes. He said he had been shouting down to Jerry after a while and then it all went quiet. It had obviously affected him more than he realised and I think more than we realised at the time as well because he had got a very heavy machine for doing charges through the ice, which was a heavy solid piece of gear. And he brought

that back with him on the sledge in the dog team, but he took the Primus prickers out and only had one in his Primus stove because he wanted to reduce weight. Totally illogical but that was the way it had affected him.

[Part 1 0:42:42] Lee: Had he talked about weighing up whether to go down after them or not?

Beebe: No, I don't think he ever mentioned that.

[Part 1 0:42:52] Lee: Right. So what was the next thing that happened? Did you try to reach base.

Beebe: Well we got the radio that we'd got, going.

[Part 1 0:43:03] Lee: His had failed, hadn't it?

Beebe: Yes. We'd got one. Brian Porter had got one in the tractor, so we got busy and we contacted Rod and Lew, and Geoff ...

[Part 1 0:43:19] Lee: In the other sledge?

Beebe: Yes, and Geoff Lovegrove and Tony Haynes, and said 'There's been an accident. You'd better come back to Pyramid Rock.' I think it was when they got back, we made contact with base. Or it might have been before, I honestly can't remember. But I can remember my Morse was not very good; other people were much better on the key than I was so I was the leg-man. I laid on my back and pedalled the generator and that was when they sent the SOS out to Halley, that we had had a fatal accident.

[Part 1 0:43:56] Lee: What was the instruction from Halley, from Phil Cotton?

Beebe: I don't know what ... I don't know whether he sent us any instructions or not, but Geoff Lovegrove it was who then took the leadership of the party and said 'Well we will have to go out to the site and rescue what we can. So we then got the tractor and followed the tracks out to where it was. When Brian and I were at Pyramid Rock, each evening I had been going up to the top of, climbing the nearest mountain. I had got a route up there that I could virtually trot up really, and with a pair of binoculars, looking for headlights coming back in if they were motoring in the evening. Of course I never saw any. So that was my evening exercise, and morning exercise, because I would go up in a morning, go up in an evening. But when all of us got back to Pyramid Rock, then we all went out. There were seven of us, went back out there and did what we could, rescued the equipment.

[Part 1 0:45:14] Lee: Can you describe the scene when you arrived at the accident location?

Beebe: Rather barren, flat area; didn't look crevassed at all really, but the sledges were there and the front sledge was jammed on the lip of the crevasse, with the A-frame stuck in the other side. So we got busy with the other tractor and pulled them away from there and got them clear and that, and then very carefully looked which

way the crevasse was running and realised that it was somewhere just over a hundred feet deep. It was a split type of crevasse; it wasn't one of these bottle-shaped things or anything like that; it was just a straight crack in the ice. The tractor was about a hundred feet down.

[Part 1 0:46:12] Lee: If you looked over the edge, could you see the tractors?

Beebe: Yes, you could see the tractor down there.

[Part 1 0:46:18] Lee: A decision was taken to go down on a rope?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:46:24] Lee: And did you volunteer for that?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:46:26] Lee: Was this your mountaineering, mountain rescue experience coming into play?

Beebe: I think it was, yes. I just said to Geoff 'I will go down if you want me to.' And he said 'Yes. I think you are the best guy for the job.' So I went down. The prime objective of going down was to (a) take photographs and (b) rescue anything we could, particularly a radio, because we were short of radios. But there was nothing to be brought out, equipment-wise, so I just took photographs from where I could and then came out.

[Part 1 0:47:07] Lee: Did you think twice about going down?

Beebe: No.

[Part 1 0:47:09] Lee: You were quite happy it was going to be safe?

Beebe: Oh yes. I didn't consider that I was in any danger at all, going down, because I could abseil in and if necessary I could prussik my way out. But we had got Electron ladders so we rigged the Electron ladders and Shreddy Porter said 'I'll throw them down after you've got down.' So I said 'Yes, that's fine. I can ... I don't know how I'll climb an Electron ladder with crampons on, but it will be entertaining.'

[Part 1 0:47:42] Lee: What's an Electron ladder?

Beebe: It's what you use in caving for cave rescue. It's like wires down and rungs across. They are only nine inches wide and they roll up so they are quite good for rescue work.

[Part 1 0:47:58] Lee: So it's a kind of metal rope ladder?

Beebe: Metal rope ladder, yes, basically, and you clip them together. They have got a karabiner attachment. They come in 25 ft lengths so we'd got ... I think we'd got four of those, or was it three? They didn't reach the bottom anyway. It was somewhere up

there, was the Electron when Shreddy threw it down. He was on the edge, as the communications with me, up at the top. So when I was ready for coming out, he said 'What are you going to do?' I said 'Well I can't fly to it. You are going to have to give me a pull.' The crevasse was too wide to bridge at that point, to get up to the bottom of the Electron ladder. So he said 'We'll pull you up and then you grab the ladder.' So I said 'Right, OK.'

[Part 1 0:48:49] Beebe: So they did; they hauled me up on my lifeline until I could get my feet level with the bottom of the ladder. And I got hold of the ladder and got my feet on and I said 'Right, I am on the ladder,' So then they relaxed. Of course my weight came onto the Electron ladder, the Electron ladder cut into the lip of the crevasse like a cheese-cutter, and all these blocks of snow came tumbling down on my head, which wasn't pleasant. I had a breather there and then I started to climb up and Shreddy said 'Would it be quicker if we pulled you?' I said 'It would.' I had made about twenty-odd feet by that time. And I said 'Yeah it would, if you can.' He said 'Hang on.' And all of a sudden the rope went tight and I came out the top like a cork out of a bottle, through the gully that the Electron ladder had cut into the lip of the snow, because they were like a Tug-o-War team. Everybody was on the rope and pulled me out.

[Part 1 0:50:02] Lee: Can you describe what you saw when you got into the crevasse, if you looked down?

Beebe: When I got down, the tractor had gone down tail first, and so the cab had been folded over the front of the tractor, and that was it. Everything was crushed in there. I could see Jerry, who had obviously been driving because he was in the centre seat, but I couldn't really see the other two at all. They must have been somewhere in the crushed cab. The crevasse had narrowed off towards the bottom. As it had slid down, it had obviously folded the cab over the front and it was jammed between the two walls of the crevasse. The bottom of the tractor was jammed tight in the crevasse.

[Part 1 0:51:02] Lee: So Wild and Wilson had been killed instantly?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:51:05] Lee: But Jerry Bailey, who was in the cab, and therefore higher up ...?

Beebe: Well he was in the driving seat, so he was nearer the front, and the others would be slightly behind him. So they were crushed, but as the cab folded over, it had crushed his bottom part but folded him almost out through the windscreen.

[Part 1 0:51:27] Lee: And that's why he could call for a while?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:51:30] Lee: Before he passed away as well? How were your feelings at that point? What do you remember of that?

Beebe: Well obviously upset at losing three good friends, but I was there to do a job. Geoff had said 'They will want photographs of this.' So I had taken a camera down and I took photographs and BAS got all the photographs. We never saw them.

[Part 1 0:52:00] Lee: You didn't keep prints?

Beebe: No. I think I had got slides in at that time, and they had them all. So we didn't have those. I don't think I got emotionally upset at that point, in fact I don't think I got emotionally upset ever, but it was sad that they had lost their lives that way.

[Part 1 0:52:31] Lee: Was there anything that could be rescued from the tractor?

Beebe: No, nothing.

[Part 1 0:52:35] Lee: It was so completely crushed?

Beebe: Yes, The tractor was crushed. Anything that had been on the tractor, I looked at, because there was this layer of snow below the tractor. There was a gap underneath it and snow, and this was the snow that that fallen down and filled the bottom of the crevasse. Jerry Bailey had a large trunk that he carried on the roof, and that was nowhere in sight, and the only thing I could work out was that that had gone further down into the crevasse and then been covered by snow. But I couldn't find anything on there. I have got to confess I was walking about very gingerly on this snow because I thought 'If this goes, I am going to be further down than the tractor is.' So I was prodding with my ice axe to make sure my footings were all right.

[Part 1 0:53:36] Lee: When you got back out again, what was the next thing? You had to explain to your colleagues what you had seen?

Beebe: Yes, just explain, just what I've said. The surprising thing is: it had gone straight down. It hadn't turned or wobbled or anything. It was perfectly upright, with its tail, towing hitch, down, looking up to the top.

[Part 1 0:54:04] Lee: The bonnet and the windscreen looking to the sky?

Beebe: The front of the tractor and the cab was folded. The cab was folded over the front of the tractor but it was still vertical.

[Part 1 0:54:17] Lee: Was there anything religious that happened at that point? Did Geoff ...?

Beebe: Yes, Geoff was very good that way. Although he knew that John Wilson was – was he an atheist or agnostic, I can't remember which – but he said 'I know John was not religious but he knew Dai and Jerry and he said he would like to say a few words. So we made a cross; we put it up.

[Part 1 0:54:58] Lee: A wooden one?

Beebe: A wooden one, yes, and we had a short service and he said a few words and then we hitched everything up and went back to Pyramid Rock.

[Part 1 0:55:01] Lee: Was there any question of trying to retrieve the bodies?

Beebe: No.

[Part 1 0:55:05] Lee: Why was that?

Beebe: Well (a) we hadn't got any equipment that could retrieve the bodies. It just wasn't feasible; it wasn't possible in my view. You would need cutting gear to cut into the cab to ... It wouldn't have been nice. It was far nicer to leave them where they were and treat that as a grave.

[Part 1 0:55:34] Lee: The question also arises what to do with the bodies, because you couldn't re-bury them, could you?

Beebe: If you got them out, you are only going to dig another hole and put them in it. So leave them in the one they are in.

[Part 1 0:55:49] Lee: Tell me about the mood on base when you got back. Were people ...?

Beebe: I think they had got over it by then, basically.

[Part 1 0:55:56] Lee: Was anybody blaming anybody, or blaming themselves?

Beebe: Not that I am aware of, no. One of the things was, we found out afterwards that Dai Wild had actually done the route before but he had been a certain ... he wasn't on exactly the same line he had followed the previous summer.

[Part 1 0:56:26] Lee: He'd gone astray?

Beebe: Well I don't know whether he had gone astray but he was probably straightening the route out, to the mountains, and wasn't aware that there were any crevasses there. And the thing was: I think we only saw one other crevasse in that area, so it was a bit of a freak spot that he'd hit. But no, I don't think there was any blaming.

[Part 1 0:56:58] Lee: So the base leader, Phil Cotton the base leader didn't feel remorseful in a way?

Beebe: Oh I think he felt remorseful, yes. He was certainly upset because he had worked with Dai all the previous year. But I don't think there was any blame levelled at anybody. It was just one of those very unfortunate accidents.

[Part 1 0:57:21] Lee: The practice that they were following was to have the dogs behind the lead tractor, and in *Of Ice and Men*, Vivian Fuchs suggests that if the dogs had been leading the tractor rather than being behind, they would have stopped at the crevasse.

Beebe: Yes, possibly.

[Part 1 0:57:40] Lee: Do you go along with that?

Beebe: Yes because they could smell them. It sounds silly but those dogs know where the holes are. I don't know how. The dog brain is not my forte, as it were, but they certainly knew where crevasses were, so possibly he's right. But on the other hand, the dogs weren't pulling a load when they were being transported on a centre trace between the sledges. So they were just getting a trotting day out really and saving their working life to pulling a sledge, so we were able to cover greater mileages that way. Later on we put dogs onto sledges and carried them, and that meant that you got more range in a day.

[Part 1 0:58:37] Lee: So there was no change in practice then, even though this accident had happened because the dogs were behind the tractor rather than in front? In future expeditions that situation remained the same? Or was there a modification in the procedures?

Beebe: If you knew you were in a crevassed area, then yes, the dogs went out in front.

[Part 1 0:58:57] Lee: After the accident?

Beebe: And before.

[Part 1 0:58:59] Lee: Oh right?

Beebe: Because they had done that on the Bob-Pi Crossing.

[Part 1 0:59:04] Lee: So if Dai Wild had suspected there might be crevasses around, he would have put the dogs out in front?

Beebe: I think he would, yes, because he was an experienced field man.

[Part 1 0:59:15] Lee: The fact that Jeremy Bailey survived for a while, and could shout up to Ross, that was kept quiet at the time, wasn't it?

Beebe: It was.

[Part 1 0:59:27] Lee: Were you told not to say anything?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:59:32] Lee: Was it explained to you why?

Beebe: It was explained to me why, much later. It was to spare the feelings of the relations of the people who had died, to say that they all died instantly. But in Jerry's case, that was not so.

[Part 1 0:59:52] Lee: So there was a cover-up but for good reason?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 0:59:56] Lee: Did you go and see the relations?

Beebe: No.

[Part 1 0:59:58] Lee: Did anybody from Halley go and visit the relations?

Beebe: Oh I think yes, some did, but I stopped off in the Falkland Islands. I didn't come back to the UK, so yes, I think they did.

[Part 1 1:00:12] Lee: So really one of my questions here is: were there any lessons to learn? But in fact there weren't really, were there?

Beebe: Well there were from the tractor point of view, because they started fitting cages over the tractors then, to stiffen the tops so that they wouldn't crush, and the living cabs that were on the two that we had were in comparison quite flimsy structures. They gave good shelter for the driver and the people travelling in. You had got two bunks in there so two of you could live in there. You didn't have to put a tent up, but they weren't strong. They wouldn't take an impact like falling into a crevasse. So somebody came up with a design whereby they built like scaffolding poling over the top, and bolted to the actual chassis of the tractors.

[Part 1 1:01:04] Lee: And you did that, did you?

Beebe: No, that was done later on. I think we were involved in just one of those mods.

[Part 1 1:01:16] Lee: So it was a kind of a roll bar effect?

Beebe: Yes, it was. Exactly.

[Part 1 1:01:19] Lee: So that was the lesson that was learned from those deaths?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 1 1:01:27] Lee: Let's talk about something else. Thank you very much for doing that. You actually had your own complications whilst you were down there, because you slipped a disc, didn't you?

Beebe: Yes. [Laughs]

[Part 1 1:01:41] Lee: What's the story there?

Beebe: That was later on. We went out to depot lay for the Therons trip the next summer. So after I got back from being in the mountains with Rod, and doing the surveying there, we got back to base. The ship came in and then the autumn journey was to lay depots ready for the spring journey going to the Therons. So Milne Samuel was leading that field party and we went out, with the tractors and heavy loads, to depot lay. We got to where we were to lay one depot and the weather started to blow, and it blew and it blew and we sat there for 21 days. So the programme was then 3 weeks behind and we were in trouble because we couldn't complete the programme

with 3 weeks out like that, no. So Sam decided that we would make one big depot which was like the size of a bungalow and then we high-tailed it back. And it was while I was digging a tractor out with that. My foot slipped and I twisted and slipped a disc out in my lower spine which took the use of my right leg away which hurt. I managed to keep going, being very ginger and walking with a terrible limp and falling over from time to time. And then when I got back to base, the new doctor, Ron Lloyd, said 'You've slipped a disc.' and he looked at my spine and he put me in plaster of Paris from my armpits to my crutch.

[Part 1 1:03:46] Lee: Were you able to do any work at all?

Beebe: Not really, no. Climbing ladders was a bit difficult. I couldn't get over to the garage really. So I did paperwork.

[Part 1 1:04:01] Lee: For three months?

Beebe: For three months, yes, and just helped round the base and did what I could helping the cooks, doing anything that wanted doing: sweeping up, doing gash, doing whatever I could possibly do to try and keep myself busy and useful as it were.

[Part 1 1:04:22] Lee: Did the treatment work?

Beebe: Yes it did, yes, because when the plaster came off, then I could walk without a limp and I hadn't got this searing pain down my leg. And he said 'Oh, it's back in. You will have to watch it because it could go out again without too much effort.' So I had to be a bit careful and he decided that I should wear a corset.

[Part 1 1:04:51] Lee: Which he just happened to have with him, presumably?

Beebe: Oh no. Like everything else in FIDS, you had to make it or mend it. You either make it out of Dexion or you mend it with Araldite. We got some sail canvas. He'd got tourniquets, like straps with buckles on, in his supplies, so we got the sail canvas out and a sailmaker's needle and twine, and stitched this corset together. He said 'It needs stiffening at the back.' by which time I was able to get over to the garage. So we got some 3/8" steel rod and bent that in a vice. He kept offering it up to my spine, saying 'Stand up straight. Right, that's the right curvature. We'll stitch that in.' We stitched in into the corset and strapped it on and that stiffened my lower spine and stopped me damaging myself further.

[Part 1 1:05:49] Lee: Before that you'd had another blizzard lie-up, with Rod Rhys-Jones and a rather limited library.

Beebe: Yes, when we cut a book up, yes.

[Part 1 1:06:00] Lee: You did what?

Beebe: I'd got a book *Hawaii* by James Michener and I am not a quick reader. Rod devours books; he's a much quicker reader than me. He kept saying 'Will you hurry up and finish that book. I've finished all mine.' He said 'Well just tear the first four chapters out and I'll read that.' Eventually I did understand and said yes, because I

didn't like ... I thought it was desecration to actually tear a book apart, but this was a paperback and we were under extenuating circumstances, so we did and the thing was: He was such a quick reader, although I gave him the first three or four chapters, I had still only got to Chapter 6 when he had finished them. Eventually we swapped over and he finished the book and I was reading the bits that we had torn out. But yes, we were there for quite a few days.

[Part 1 1:06:56] Lee: Ten days?

Beebe: Ten days, yes.

[Part 1 1:06:58] Lee: There was one other book, apparently, *Teach yourself Spanish*.

Beebe: Oh that was his. Well he had read that and read that and read that, and still not learned Spanish.

[Part 1 1:07:10] Lee: Oh right.

Beebe: He wanted something else to read. We had got fed up of reciting the contents of a soup packet. We could tell you how many monosodium glutamates there were in a packet of candy soup, things like this.

[Part 1 1:07:24] Lee: Another incident that Rod mentioned is how the huskies couldn't quite cope with your Lancashire accent.

Beebe: 'Aarrgh now'

[Part 1 1:07:33] Lee: Exactly.

Beebe: Yes, exactly. At Pyramid Rock, it was decided that I would take Lew's place with Rod, and Lew, because he had got a lot of rocks to fetch back (he had just found a new fossil bed) he would travel back with Brian Porter and Ian Ross. They would go back and I would stay out in the field with Rod to be part of the survey party with Geoff Lovegrove and Tony Haynes. So yes, I would become Rod's sledging partner for the first part. Then partway through that period, we swapped over because we realised that Geoff and Tony were going to be staying out the whole of the season and so it might be nice if they sledged with other people for a week or two.

[Part 1 1:08:24] Beebe: I sledged with Geoff Lovegrove and Tony sledged with Rod. The first day with Rod, I'd not got any experience with dogs really, apart from helping to feed them and play with them on base. My Lancashire dialect came out because Rod had said something to me and I said 'Ah, now ...' and the dogs stopped. He said 'What did you say that for?' I said 'Well, it's just an expression, you know.' And he said 'Well that stops the dogs.' Of course 'Aarrgh now' was the signal for the dogs to stop running, so I had to stop saying it. The other thing was that we came to a very large split in the ice, like a crevasse but it was probably a hundred yards across, and it was full of snow but of course the snow went like that. He said 'We are going to have to cross this.'

[Part 1 1:09:25] Beebe: So we went over the lip and of course downhill, like that, and then as you come to the other side, you are going up and you have got to get across the crack on the other side. He said 'Shout at the dogs. Shout at them. We have got to get them up there. You have got to shout.' This was on my first day and I was having trouble staying on skis, let alone shouting at dogs. So I shouted and the dogs were going and then I had the ability to whistle rather loudly without using my fingers. I whistled and the dogs took off as though they had got a ... something had hit them from behind. We shot out over this lip and up onto the ice again and Rod said 'How did you do that?' I said 'That's the way I whistle.' 'Save that until we need it.' So yes, that was my first day of sledging with Rod. The first take off from Pyramid Rock, I finished up laying across the sledge because I couldn't stand up on skis. I was hanging on for grim death.

[Part 1 1:10:33] [End of Part One]

Part 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Doug Beebe, interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee, on the 23rd of June 2013. Doug Beebe Part 2.

[Part 2 0:00:10] Lee: 'Ask about the flushing of the toilets on the ship.'

Beebe: Well when we first arrived at Halley Bay, on *Kista Dan*, the first person up the gangplank was Sam.

[Part 2 0:00:22] Lee: What was his full name?

Beebe: Milne Samuel. He lives in the Cayman Islands now, and he was one of the Fids that was coming out from Halley Bay. He dashed up the gangplank, dashed through the saloon, went to the toilet and flushed it and I thought 'That's a bit strange.' And he came out with a smile on his face. He says 'I've been waiting two years to hear that.' Because there were no flush toilets and so he had missed flushing a toilet for two years and that was his first action on the *Kista Dan*.

[Part 2 0:00:53] Lee: He came back, didn't he, to do more work?

Beebe: He did. My first year he was in the UK and then he came back again for my second year. I got to know him then but my first meeting with Sam was this incident on the *Kista*.

[Part 2 0:01:09] Lee: Did you do much survey work at all? Were you out with a ...?

Beebe: Well I was out with Rod surveying yes, and with Geoff Lovegrove. So I was humping tellurometers up mountains and things, so that they could get their readings and so on.

[Part 2 0:01:25] Lee: So you did get to climb some Antarctic mountains?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:01:29] Lee: Any ones in particular?

Beebe: Well Station K was a first ascent; S was a first ascent. Both those had been attempted the year before by Dai Wild, and Dai Wild had said it would be good if we could get a survey point on top of those, rather than just looking at them from a distance. And Geoff Lovegrove said 'Do you think you could teach me enough ice climbing to get us up these mountains?' So I did and we got up them. There was a third one which I can't remember now but Geoff has got the details of that.

[Part 2 0:02:02] Lee: Was this tough work or was it fairly straightforward?

Beebe: K and S (the Sphinx) were serious climbing. They weren't difficult climbing but it was a matter of picking a route, and K was reasonably straightforward. There was a bit of ice climbing you needed crampons on to get up and I think Dai Wild wasn't too familiar with crampons the year before and this is what ... A steep ice slope had stopped them. But Geoff and I, Geoff's very good. I taught him to use an ice axe and crampons and we tackled those two and enjoyed ourselves.

[Part 2 0:02:54] Lee: Did it beat Cumberland?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:02:58] Lee: Was there an extra thrill about ...?

Beebe: Oh I think there always is if you are doing something that you know has never been done before, then there is a sense of achievement there. There are still places in the world where mountains have still to be climbed. Some of them are quite inaccessible but ... Well not today they're not because you can fly in and out. But it was nice to say 'Yes, I have got a first ascent.'

[Part 2 0:03:28] Lee: Tick?

Beebe: Tick, yes, and they weren't ... They were detached mountains in their own right. It wasn't part of the ridge that you just got up and just went from one to the other because the ice on the other side was much higher. These were actual standing-free peaks, as it were, not particularly big or daunting, nothing like the Matterhorn or anything like that, but nevertheless they were there and it was good to do them. Rod, I remember, when we did the Sphinx was not impressed because when we came down, he said 'If you'd have fallen off there, who would have been picking up the pieces? We would.' I said 'Yes, but we didn't fall.'

[Part 2 0:04:17] Lee: You obviously got on very well with Porter, the first mechanic you worked with?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:04:24] Lee: But then was he replaced by Peter Blakeley?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:04:27] Lee: How did you get on with the new man?

Beebe: Great. Smashing guy.

[Part 2 0:04:30] Lee: Tell me more.

Beebe: He came in. He had been down with Paul Whiteman who was the Base Leader. They knew each other and we were friends from the moment we met, and he is a smashing guy. He lives in Leyburn at the moment, recovering from a stroke at the moment but we have been friends ever since.

[Part 2 0:04:55] Lee: There were at times nearly thirty people at Halley, weren't there?

Beebe: Thirty-two the first year and 28 the second year.

[Part 2 0:05:03] Lee: Did they all get with each other all the time or were there odd men out?

Beebe: The first year I had been on base probably 6 months, maybe a bit more, when somebody pointed out to me that two people never sat on the same table at smoko, lunchtime or dinnertime. I hadn't noticed. It was two people that just agreed to avoid each other. But the second year I think was a much more cohesive group and we all got on great. Like I say, Peter Blakeley and I have been friends ever since. We've been on family holidays together since then.

[Part 2 0:05:54] Lee: So in that first year it was understood by the larger group that these two chaps were to be left alone separately? There was no attempt to forge a friendship between them? It was just accepted, was it?

Beebe: As far as I know, yeah. Like I say, it had happened before I'd got on base.

[Part 2 0:06:15] Lee: They agreed to differ?

Beebe: They must have done. I don't know whether I wasn't perceptive enough or what, but it had never occurred to me and I had never noticed that these two never sat on the same table. It just hadn't registered in my brain at all.

[Part 2 0:06:36] Lee: Were there any other funnier moments that you remember?

Beebe: What, on base?

[Part 2 0:06:40] Lee: Yes.

Beebe: Oh aye, all sorts of things. First year the washroom, gash day, the black hand gang (that was Alf Amphlett, Shreddy Porter, myself and Robbie Reid), our gash day ... You do understand what gash is? Yes? I'm not talking a foreign language? We were cleaning the washroom, Brian Porter and I, we were in the washroom. Robbie came in and he said 'I'm going to have a shower.' Now the shower system was a bit Heath Robinson. So we said 'Aye OK. Carry on, Robbie.' We were cleaning the

washroom up and there was a bath. And the system was that you filled a bowl with hot water and you put it in the bath, and then you filled a 5-gallon oil drum with hot water and it had two hooks on it.

[Part 2 0:07:38] Beebe: There was a bar in the ceiling and you hooked that over and you stuck a watering can rose on the tap and you stood underneath it and turned the tap on and off. So Robbie gets busy arranging his shower and he put the 5-gallon drum up with hot water, and then said 'Oh I forgot my clean clothes and my towel and my washing gear.' So off he went up to the bunkroom. Shreddy Porter said. 'Right right.' So we lifted it down, poured the hot water back in the hot water tank, filled it with cold water and hung it up again. We carried on cleaning and Robbie came back and he went into the bathroom, he stripped off and Shreddy says 'Now's the time to go.' So we disappeared and you could hear the screams from the bathroom all over the base when he turned the water on, because he stood in a bowl of hot water, pouring ice-cold water over himself. So yes, that was one of the practical ...

[Part 2 0:08:33] Lee: Any catering stories, that you remember?

Beebe: Oh yes, Harry with his masking tape (Harry Rogers). We were on our gash day and he was dishing up the mashed potatoes and of course he got a big pile of mashed potatoes, scooped it out with his metal ladle spoon. I'm holding a plate and he went 'Plitt', like that and instead of just flicking the mash just half onto the plate, he hit the plate and the plate went 'Poom'. So his mashed potatoes were able to break a plate. It happened twice I think, that. Then one day, when we were on gash again, the normal thing was you had soup and a main course at lunchtime and then main course and a sweet in the evening. We were there ready to dish up and we said 'What's the soup, Harry?' 'Ahh, I haven't made any.' I think it was stew, mashed potatoes and peas. So he was hurriedly putting the peas through the liquidiser while we were taking out pea soup. But you know these things happen. We took a turn on helping the cooks and I decided one day that I would make butterfly buns. I thought I would like to do that so I made these butterfly cakes, got them made, scooped the tops out, cut the tops in half, made the butter cream to go in. The only thing was: I got the wrong sugar, and so the sugar was gritty. So they got christened 'road-maker's buns with gravel cream'.

[Part 2 0:10:23] Lee: When it came time for you to leave, at the end of your second year, had you had enough or were you sorry to leave?

Beebe: No, I think I had had enough, to be honest. I suppose you could say yes, you could have done it again but I'd got a girlfriend who had waited two years for me and I wanted to get married.

[Part 2 0:10:47] Lee: You got married in Port Stanley?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:10:50] Lee: So she flew out, did she?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:10:52] Lee: Is this the same lady you are with here this weekend?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:10:54] Lee: Her name is ...?

Beebe: Anne.

[Part 2 0:10:56] Lee: OK.

Beebe: We've been together since 1967.

[Part 2 0:11:01] Lee: So why were you keen to get married in Stanley? Had you got something lined up?

Beebe: Yes, the original plan was: we were going to go to the Mexico Olympics. This was the plan. So my mother and Anne flew out to Montevideo, got the *Darwin* down to Port Stanley and we got married in Christ Church Cathedral on Anne's birthday.

[Part 2 0:11:22] Lee: How was that?

Beebe: Fabulous. The lads that were in Port Stanley, had an archway of ice axes outside the church when we came out. They really ... Ted Clapp stood in for Anne's father and gave her away. It was a really magical day, yes.

[Part 2 0:11:42] Lee: Did the local people come and support the wedding as well?

Beebe: Yes, they did, everybody, because I was living in digs with Nellie and Richie Anderson up on Philomel Hill, and I was working in the garage. Well I had just finished by the time I got married but when they came out I had been working in the garage for Richard Hills, because Ted Clapp got me a job there as a mechanic.

[Part 2 0:12:04] Lee: In Stanley?

Beebe: Yes.

[Part 2 0:12:06] Lee: How had you kept that relationship going for two years?

Beebe: Telegrams, flowers. Anne had been to see and stay with my mother. It just lasted. All for picking her up at a bus stop. That was the way we met. I'd already signed on with BAS and my birthday is in July. Well we were having a party at my mother's house and I had got a friend, a girl from Keswick who was working in Manchester, who I invited to this party and I just said 'We are having this party. Some of the lads from the Mountain Club are coming up and various people, but we are short of females. We haven't got many girls coming. Do you know anybody who would enjoy a night?' She said 'Well, there's this girl who has a flat near me. We work together in different departments in Lewis's in Manchester.' She said 'The only thing is: she works. She's a cashier at a bingo hall.' Because she had two jobs. So she said 'We could run out and pick her up.' So we ran out to this bingo hall and she had finished. She had gathered all the money in and done the accounts and so on, and she said. 'Oh she must be on her way back to the flat, so we'll run round.' And as we

came away from the bingo hall, she was stood at the bus stop waiting for the bus. So we pulled up and Lynne said to her 'Look, this party's on. Do you want to come?' And Anne said 'Oh yes, OK then.' That's how we met.

[Part 2 0:12:53] Lee: So the lack of punctuality of Manchester Corporation buses was quite useful then?

Beebe: Yes, it must have been, yes.

[Part 2 0:13:59] Lee: But you stayed in the Falklands for a while? You got a job. I presume New Island is a Falkland Island, is it?

Beebe: It's an island on the far west.

[Part 2 0:14:07] Lee: You were the manager, whatever that means?

Beebe: Yes. Well the owner, Jack Davis ("Cracker") was coming to the UK, as they say 'coming home' for 6 months and he wanted a stand-in manager for the island on a 6 month contract.

[Part 2 0:14:24] Lee: What were you managing?

Beebe: Basically a sheep farm. He had got three and a half thousand sheep on the book; he'd got nearer 4½ thousand on the islands itself, because it was a group of islands: there was New Island, Knob Island, Coffin Island and Ship Harbour Island, things like that. He owned all this. He had got a 17-year old son who he couldn't trust with the job. He'd got a son-in-law who I don't think he trusted. He'd got his wife's father who was eighty ..., well in his eighties anyway, and a navy called Davey on the island. And Tom Smith, his son-in-law, and Helen had got two children. That was the total inhabitants of the island settlement.

[Part 2 0:15:20] Lee: And how was that, because you were not a qualified shepherd, were you?

Beebe: No I wasn't. I didn't know very much about sheep at all. I had been into Derbyshire in my youth hostelling days, digging sheep out of snow drifts and so on for farmers but no, I had to rely on Tom Smith (who turned out to be a great guy) and Raymond and Davey to actually do ... but I learned a lot about sheep there and it was a very enjoyable 6-month honeymoon.

[Part 2 0:15:59] Lee: You never made it to the Mexico Olympics?

Beebe: No, we didn't. No no, Nature took its course. Anne got pregnant and we were advised to, by the doctor, because she's only small as you've probably seen. She's still 'vertically challenged' as they call it or something like that. Anyway the doc said 'If it's a big baby, you could birthing complications, so I suggest you get to civilisation somewhere, rather than risk having problems.' So we came back to the UK.

[Part 2 0:16:31] Lee: Did you stay in education? Did you return to education?

Beebe: I did, yes. When we got back, fortunately my mother had a house in Denton that she had converted into two flats and the tenants of the flat upstairs had just left. So we were able to move into that until I got a job, and I got a job in Keighley in Yorkshire starting in January through to the summer.

[Part 2 0:16:56] Lee: Final question. How do you regard those two years in the Antarctic in your lifespan as a whole?

Beebe: Oh I think enjoyable, extending. It certainly made me think about life and what I was doing. Made me careful, but I think I was still inclined to take risks in certain directions at times, which I have done all my life. But I enjoyed it and I made some life-long friends, which has seen me through life up to now, and it has been enjoyable.

[Part 2 0:17:51] Lee: And so has the last hour and a quarter. Thank you very much indeed.

Beebe: You are very welcome.

[Part 2 0:17:59] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:17:10] The FIDS interview.
- [Part 1 0:18:37] £1 a day rise as FIDS becomes BAS.
- [Part 1 0:22:20] A swan-shaped baked Alaska.
- [Part 1 0:26:06] Immersion heaters for the tractors.
- [Part 1 0:29:00] Hot air system made from tins.
- [Part 1 0:32:31] Use of a 'bog-chisel'.
- [Part 1 0:33:38] Battery acid destroys boots and windproofs.
- [Part 1 0:34:57] A tractor ski made from oil drums.
- [Part 1 0:38:59] Ian Ross returns alone after the accident.
- [Part 1 0:41:48] Ian Ross badly affected.
- [Part 1 0:43:19] Using a pedal-powered generator.
- [Part 1 0:46:26] Descending to the crushed tractor.
- [Part 1 0:48:49] Being pulled out of the crevasse.
- [Part 1 0:50:02] The crevasse and tractor described.
- [Part 1 0:52:35] Nothing could be retrieved.
- [Part 1 0:54:17] A cross and service to remember the dead.
- [Part 1 0:59:15] Bailey's brief survival not publicised.
- [Part 1 1:00:12] Crush protection cages made for tractors.
- [Part 1 1:01:41] A slipped disc; in plaster for 3 months.
- [Part 1 1:04:22] A home-made corset.
- [Part 1 1:06:00] Tearing up the last unread book in camp.
- [Part 1 1:08:24] A Lancashire accent stops the dog team.
- [Part 1 1:09:25] But whistling accelerates them.
- [Part 2 0:00:22] Two years without a flushing toilet.
- [Part 2 0:01:29] Two first ascents.
- [Part 2 0:05:03] Two people avoided each other.
- [Part 2 0:06:40] An unexpected cold shower.
- [Part 2 0:08:33] Three cooking stories.