Transcript of a recording of Jeremy Light, interviewed at Peterhouse College on 15 September 2007 by Chris Eldon Lee.

Jeremy Light, BAS Archive AD6/24/1/29, transcribed by Barry Heywood, 8 November 2015.

Light: Jeremy Light. I was born 30th January 1943 in Salcombe, South Devon.

[00:00:22] Lee: What were you doing before you came to BAS or Fids?

Light: I was a student at Aberdeen University, studying Zoology at first, then Honours in Botany.

[00:00:38] Lee: What drew you into going to the Antarctic?

Light: Two things. There was an old Fid called Ian McLeod [G.K.McLeod - Transcriber?] who went down to the Antarctic many times. I remember him saying that it was the only way he could escape from women. And then I was very lucky to be able to go to an evening slide show given by Dr Macklin who was on Shackleton's last voyage. No! not the last voyage – the famous boat voyage one. And that was really inspiring to me.

[00:01:19] Lee: You didn't want to get away from women particularly?

Light: No! No I didn't want to get away from my woman. [Lee laughs] We have known each other from practically birth.

[00:01:34] Lee: So how did you go about fulfilling your wish, your dream?

Light: Well, when I had finished my honours, I applied to BAS, but in fact, I had started on an honours project…I did some work on the high corrie lochans in the Cairngorms and found aquatic mosses there…quite a find…and so it seemed tailor-made for me when there was a job to study lakes on Signy Island. And I had to apply in the normal way.

[00:02:15] Lee: So someone had specified the project before…

Light: Yes BAS had lined up the work following Barry Heywood's work on the zoology.

[00:02:29] Lee: And how had you hear about the vacancy?

Light: Well, possibly McLeod said apply to BAS but I think it was BAS was doing the routine tour of the universities, and I went along to a talk by BAS.

[00:02:44] Lee: So you applied for the job. Was it a tough interview?

Light: Not very, no, because I had it from Barry Heywood, and I was never interviewed by Bill Sloman, who was the main personnel officer, and had a very shrewd way of judging people…and I was never on very good terms with him. I wondered if it was because he had never vetted me at the beginning.

[00:03:17] Lee: You slipped through the net!

Light: Yes!

[00:03:19] Lee: And they offered you a post.

Light: Yes.

[00:03:22] Lee: What were the terms? You were going for a couple of years?

Light: Yes. It was a standard couple of years contract. But to do the work on phytoplankton in the lakes, I had to develop a certain amount of special equipment, and as I was a mountaineer and happy in that sort of environment, I spent my first winter with BAS in the Cairngorms, developing equipment on the ice-covered lochans there. And so I went down, at the end of my first year with BAS…went South. So that meant at the end of my two and a half year contract… it meant that when I went down South I had only 18 months of my contract to run and at the end of that time then there was the question of renewing it. Should I stay on for another year? And I said yes. I would love to.

[00:04:23] Lee: What was the equipment you were developing then? Tell me about that. Is it new…brand new technology?

Light: Yes. Essentially, when you analyse…study the water in an ice-covered lake you have got to make a hole. And when you make a hole through the ice cover and snow on top, you disturb the surface a lot and that is certain to affect particularly the light passing through the ice. I had

to do my sampling and measurements some way away from the hole I had made through the ice. So I had to make stuff that would go through the hole and then angle out underneath when it was under the ice, then swing it round so that I could get repeat samples. So there was that, and there was a question of how to make a hole and keep a hole…the same hole open, so I had tubes of various sorts. I remember having cast iron metal tubes that I poured hot water inside to melt them when I came to sample; trying out greased tubes…greased plastic tubes…

[00:05:34] Lee: It is though as if the samples, the repeat samples were taken from exactly the same spot.

Light: Yes. I needed a regular sample point because I was doing this every week throughout the year.

[00:05:45] Lee: You took that technology with you when you went?

Light: Yes. It was ideal. I was able to try out several things; found out what worked. Make it up and take it south with me.

[00:05:57] Lee: Sounds like you were prepared above the average for your expedition. Most of the chaps I talk to heard about it and were there within 6 weeks or so, having scrambled round to get what they wanted. You seemed to have had a fair amount of preparation time.

Light: Yes, I think I was lucky in that respect. But I wasn't the first to study the lakes. Barry Heywood had a fair idea from his work what the next stage was.

[00:06:25] Lee: So…what was your scientific ambition upon departure for the Antarctic?

Light: To follow the seasonal rhythm of phytoplankton growth and associated environmental factors: the light, the nutrient depletion particularly. Particularly under the ice because the Americans and others had done the lakes in the summer when they were open…open water…in other parts of Antarctica. Nobody had done a study throughout the winter and studied what happened under the ice in spring when there is quite a lot of light but of course the ice stops the water circulating. I found fascinating things happening. The phytoplankton…the microscopical cells can't control their position at all when the lakes open but under the ice they were able to move up and down. Move up into the light when

they were photosynthesising and once they had depleted the upper layers of nutrients they went down and took the nutrients from lower down.

[00:07:45] Lee: These were new discoveries! Very much new work! When you got to Signy what was the lab like? How sophisticated was it?

Light: Well I suppose that was only in comparison with what I had been used to as a student, so they seemed well equipped for me. I don't remember having any restrictions, of thinking I wish I had this facility or that. It wasn't limited by the facilities at all.

[00:08:18] Lee: You had plenty of time.

Light: Yes, I had a little field hut by the lake where I would spend the night. I always went there alone. There was never any question then of not being able to go alone. Personally I think the journey there – a mile or so – day or night, summer or winter – was no more dangerous than going down to the shops at home…no cars to run me down! This field hut was an important facility I needed. In fact, the first one, that had been flown in the year before, hadn't been properly secured and had just blown away. I remember it being called a 'rollalong' and the first one certainly rolled along several hundred yards. And so they hurriedly flew in another one when I was there. I was able to secure it against all gales.

[00:09:21] Lee: This is down to rocks. Inside was it luxurious?

Light: It was double-skinned. I'm not sure if there was insulation within the two walls. It had a lining. It had a metal outside. I found it cosy enough. One was used to that sort of thing. I suppose I was lucky in that I done a lot of winter mountaineering in Scotland beforehand. The conditions weren't too bad. One arrived in summer and as the autumn progressed…winter progressed…you adapted, as it got colder. I had a little primus, and I had benches and basic lab equipment.

[00:10:08] Lee: Tell me about it.

Light: I particularly need to do carbon 14 uptake experiments to measure photosynthesis, which needed equipment on the spot.

[00:10:21] Lee: Would you spend several days at a time there?

Light: A routine trip would be 2 days but then I had special experiments like 'could the full moon in winter, the full moon, affect the

phytoplankton?' So then I did experiments throughout the 24 hours. So obviously I had to be there throughout the whole time. At other times I did an experiment clearing a window through the ice…removing the snow…to see what would happen if the light was very much more. Special experiments, and I would stay longer.

[00:10:59] Lee: What was the answer to your question about the full moon?

Light: Yes, I did get results that showed that the phytoplankton was affected by it. But exactly what the effect was, was a bit inconclusive. One of the big subjects there was the uptake of organic solutes by the phytoplankton as opposed to photosynthesis. I forget now what it is called…autotrophy (heterotrophy? - Transcriber) rather than phototrophy? And that was the conclusion that it was affecting their uptake of organic solutes…organic food.

[00:11:45] Lee: Lets look at some of the things that you have mentioned before…the notes you have thought about in advance. Obviously that was a regular trip. You made other journeys as well beyond that short trip to the hut by the lake.

Light: I suppose I have had a great sense of curiosity. I tended to poke my nose in all sorts of holes. So that meant doing work on the other lakes. It wasn't my main work but we didn't know how deep some of them were. I remember having a great afternoon doing a bathymetric survey of one of the lakes when the ice had freshly formed in the autumn. It was only a couple of inches thick but it was really top quality and one could go along and make a hole with an ice chisel to measure the depth very quickly and in about an hour and a half we had made a superbly accurate bathymetric survey. And then, in another lake when we had started diving we found aquatic mosses in the lakes, which was a big discovery. They were utterly different to the mosses on the land but only, it turned out, in their growth form. They were the same species but whereas they were half a metre tall in the lake, they were a centimetre tall on land.

[00:13:12] Lee: That was a big surprise!

Light: Yes. At the time, I am not sure that any aquatic mosses had been found in Antarctica.

[00:13:25] Lee: Did you postulate theories as to why they should be so much taller under water?

Light: Yes, the lowered light levels tended to etiolate them, make them long and lanky. And the lack of wind meant they did not have to withstand the high winds, and that was the main factor that keeps the terrestrial mosses very short.

[00:13:49] Lee: They were protected. Were there any more interesting journeys that were more for leisure rather than for work?

Light: Yes. I suppose peripherally they were included in one of my scientific papers - ice…discovering ice tunnels on Signy. There was one big one under a glacier where water had been passed over rock further upstream and had been warmed by the rock and then gone back under the ice and the heat in the water had melted the tunnel. But I found others in strange situations in three lakes besides the one I was mainly studying where one lake drained away through the winter. Half of it drained away and it drained out through an ice tunnel from the second lake. It was fun just going exploring this tunnel.

[00:14:51] Lee: You went in?

Light: You could get in and travel for about 50 yards I suppose. It got slowly smaller and smaller until you couldn't go any further. And then having realised that anywhere that melt water went over rock and then went back under the ice, it could cause this, we found one other nice one on the west side of the island.

[00:15:13] Lee: You had no qualms about entering these tunnels?

Light: No, they seemed completely stable. One other thing I remember, finding nice structures in the ice. I went into a sort of crevasse in the ice formed on the side of the main glacier and I remember going into that. That was the sort of thing that one had to be more careful about.

[00:15:47] Lee: But you were still doing things in the early '70s that perhaps guys 10 to 15 years later would not be allowed to do?

Light: Well, yes…it seems yes, that once 'Health and Safety' got their hands on the place…personally I think 'it was not for the better' I feel very strongly that wilderness is essentially part of the human experience and that is much best done alone. So for me, not being able to go out

someway from Base alone would be a great restriction. So we just assessed the risk sensibly about where we went and who…how many went with us. I don't think anybody ever…we didn't even think about going across the sea, the Straits, to the large - Coronation Island - opposite. That was always a serious trip and one always went in a group.

[00:16:55] Lee: We have been watching this afternoon some amazing photographs you have taken. Clearly you are a good quality amateur photographer or maybe semi-professional. What came through to me from all those pictures was a sense of the spirit of the place, and you just touched on it a few moments ago, implying perhaps that the modern Antarctic researcher's life is a bit mundane because they are not allowed to have this wilderness experience alone. How important was that to you? Can you put a finger on that kind of spirituality you might have drawn from your environment.

Light: I've just been reading recently my diaries, I remember being really, I sort of call it, being touched to the depths of my soul on two occasions. One was going up…out at night, on the sea ice far enough from Base so that there was silence – no sound of the generators – and realising the essence of that experience was its simplicity. There was no other life around me. There was no noise. There was no colour. There was no sound. And that simplicity was, I don't know, I just had a very deep spiritual experience I think…being in that…

[00:18:32] Lee: Was it a relationship with nature, or with a god, or just with the environment?

Light: [long pause] It's difficult to really say. [long pause] It's a good question, and it is difficult at the moment to put a finger on it…to go further with that.

[00:19:06] Lee: There was certainly some there?

Light: Yes, it was a very powerful and memorable experience that I treasure greatly.

[00:19:12] Lee: Your pictures show the beauty of Antarctica. Again, a further relationship. You go to the Antarctic and you are probably surprised how beautiful it is.

Light: What I did…I did develop there, personably, about life…Before, I think, I saw life as plants and animals, biological life. But while there, I

came to the feeling that ice is living. That is why I called my show [Photographic display – Transcriber] 'Living Ice'. In fact, it follows the same seasonal pattern as biological life, at the same time. So in April there, the Antarctic autumn is coming on and the ice is growing. It is coming out of the sea. The sap, you could say, the sap is rising, and there are considerable similarities to what happens in the spring in the northern hemisphere of biological life. And then so to me, I saw, in mid winter, in the middle of June, a great time we celebrate down there, it was the peak of the creativity of ice, as it is the sort of peak in the sense of biological life in the northern hemisphere. And then the decline similarly in the autumn, biological, the sap from plants goes back into the soil. There, the ice melts and goes back into the sea. Since then I have felt strongly, when we lived in Wales, had a water turbine for our electricity supply, that the stream, which gave us the water, was a living thing. The rhythm was quite different. With water and ice, the time scale, the rhythm isn't…it certainly isn't as different as it is with rocks. The mineral world. Later I went down to the Peninsula, to Ablation Point and there I felt, just as much the rocks were living. With no biological life there, one saw a rock, probably thousands of years old, which had slowly over time fallen apart…a real great grandparent of rocks. The pieces had fallen to the ground, and the ice movement had slowly moved them in a stream down the slope. In some cases the rocks had broken into long needles…poles of ice, of rock. And these were very fragile. But there had been no hoofed animals to trample on them, or seals or penguins down there, that was far enough south. That has made me see life as being a much wider experience than just plants and animals.

[00:22:30] Lee: Thank you very much for that. Nobody else has put it quite as well as that. Thank you…we talked about some odd events. You mentioned, Mid-Winter. When you were there, when you arrived, was there already a mid-winter celebration? Was it something new?

Light: Oh yes, we've always celebrated the coming back, the return of the sun. So Mid-Winter parties have always been a great tradition. There are two things that come to mind. One humorous experience; the person who was on the gash rota, I think it was called, clearing up, helping the cook, the cleaning rota…if it happened to be Mid-Winter's Day…was, by tradition, to be the waitress, so had…there was a set of appropriate clothing for that. I happened to be…it happened to be my turn [Lee: Ladies garments?] Yes! And I caused a bit of a stir when, in stead of as usual, people had put balloons full of air in their bra, I had put balloons full of warm water in mine.

[00:23:36] Lee: [Laughs] That was a moment of inspiration! [Laughs]

Light: Yes, yes. I do remember others getting quite interested, shall I say.

[00:23:49] Lee: [Laughs] You were fondled, were you?

Light: I was indeed, yes.

[00:23:57] Lee: Was this innovation continued in future years?

Light: I have no idea about that. And another thing that we started in our year was making presents. I think this was a 'come and go' on BAS bases over the years. In my first year we had presents. But people just put in what they had too much of…booze bottles…but we made presents. We managed to sow the idea. We all really got very enthusiastic and produced some remarkable…works of art, really. Somebody made a chess set out of old whaler's oak and old whalebone with the pieces being preserved examples of different Antarctic plants on one side and Antarctic animals on the other. I got a working model of a canon made out of old whaler's brass and oak. I realised I would need a firearms certificate for this because it could sink a ball bearing a full inch into a piece of wood! And so fine, we got these presents. How were we to distribute them? So we thought up a system of drawing – they were all wrapped up – and to add a bit of extra spice, I thought 'lets make some dummies'. And so…I was Base Commander…I made the dummies. Then I had to be the last one to choose the present, and most of my dummies had been chosen by others before it was my turn to choose a present because I knew which were the dummies.

[00:25:53] Lee: So one wasn't making a present for a particular individual, you were making a present to go into a pool. Did that mean some guys didn't get a present?

Light: No, because everyone had made something.

[00:26:04] Lee: All right, so you got one present.

Light: Yes, so those who had drawn a dummy had to wait their turn for the second round.

[00:26:15] Lee: Did that carry on?

Light: That I don't know. I would like to know whether that did. That is the essence of true giving. To give, without knowing…to give to anybody.

[00:26:28] Lee: Would people disappear into dark corners to make their presents over a period of time?

Light: One or two kept it secret. No - the canon, the engineer had to work on the lathe in his odd moments. I made an ice flower, like one of the photos I have shown, out of little pieces of Perspex. So no. People couldn't hide what they were making.

[00:26:56] Lee: No where to hide!

Light: No…beforehand, one had in mind the present one hoped one would draw. What was the best.

[00:27:06] Lee: What impact do you think that had on the bonding of the men on the Base? Was it significant?

Light: Yes. I think that probably was. I'm not sure if one had a year when relations weren't really good that people would be that generous…to put a lot of time in making something that someone, one didn't get on with, might get. I don't know.

[00:27:36] Lee: But in your four years?

Light: Yes, yes they were. We didn't have any problems.

[00:27:44] Lee: You mentioned…I guess you were the Postmaster as well. Base Leader…and you mentioned an interesting moment in Postmaster history.

Light: Yes, I was there when Britain went decimal.

[00:28:03] Lee: 1971?

Light: Possibly 1972 [17 February 1971 – Transcriber] and so the new decimal stamps were sent down…and you know, stamp collecting is…of Antarctic stamps is quite popular, and there are a lot of stamp sales. When they arrived…I forget exactly why the timing was as such…I had to sell the old Imperial stamps and the new decimal stamps at the same

time, and accept the same currency for them. I suppose that was not highly advanced Mathematics but for me that was quite complicated.

[00:28:50] Lee: Were these ordinary British stamps or British Antarctic stamps?

Light: British Antarctic stamps.

[00:28:54] Lee: So they were a special design?

Light: Yes. So one had a completely new set of decimal ones arriving

[00:28:59] Lee: So might you have created one or two rather valuable specimens by doing that because you presumably had to cancel the stamps with the date stamp.

Light: Yes. Actually we could have stamped, postmarked stamps, other than the date. We could always change the thing. As I remember it one strictly kept to the proper dates.

[00:29:33] Lee: But if you were selling decimal stamps prior to decimalisation day and cancelling them with the correct date, you were creating unique first day covers.

Light: Yes. I mean, the date, the day that the ship came in, wasn't exactly the changeover decimal date so it had to be that day…for some reason.

[00:30:00] Lee: This changeover was the day the ship came in?

Light: Yes, but I doubt if there was another British Post Master who had to do that.

[00:30:08] Lee: I am still not quite clear why you had to do it simultaneously. Can you remember why you were selling the two sides by side?

Light: [Pause] Good question. Because if it was before the date, then I wouldn't have been allowed to sell the decimal ones. It must have been after the dates, so you could ask 'why was I allowed to sell the old Imperial ones after the changeover date. No, I can't remember [Pause] lost in the mists of time.

[00:30:41] Lee: [Laugh] A little quirk of history. There was talk downstairs of the 'thin ice race'. Again I think this was something you must have been instrumental in.

Light: Yes, I have always been keen to have some fun, and always an important time of the year at Signy was when the island no longer was an island. In the autumn when the ice formed and was thick enough for us to travel we changed from being an island to being a piece of land in a plain of ice. So we could travel freely once the ice was strong. So it was very important to us to test the ice…was it strong enough? So in the autumn…it was really I suppose, it was the responsibility of the Base Commander to decide 'OK, we can now go out on the ice'. But of course, one tested it before that. Once the ice was strong enough to go out on, normally clad, it had to be absolutely safe. But there was a period before that…it is sort of a trampoline. The sea when it freezes has several inches of ice crystals, which slowly lock together, and you can move over this surface. It is risky and you don't do it unless there is an emergency, or as we did for an ice race, clad up in wet suits. So we thought it would be fun to see if we could get out to the little island, a hundred yards or so from Base. We had a month's chocolate ration as the first prize, and we thought we would make it a bit more fun and make it fancy dress also. So people went out…you were allowed to wear ski…and lighter people were generally at an advantage as not having the same weight to go through the ice. People returning, were being waylaid by those going out. The first person was at risk of being stopped from winning on his return because the others were still going out. It was a lot of fun, and it became established as an annual event.

[00:33:19] Lee: In your time?

Light: It sounded this afternoon, as it was said, as if it continued until Signy was no longer a wintering Base…and the tradition was transferred down to Rothera Base.

[00:33:35] Lee: So this is something that you introduced that is still happening now…Good fun, eh!...It is effectively the first ice trip of the winter…OK. [Pause] [00:33:46] Signy became quite a substantial Base for diving. I am not quite clear…I have heard various dates as to when diving started at Signy. But it was already happening when you arrived at Signy in 1970?

Light: Yes, it had started a few years before that. I arrived in '69, but I think it started in the mid-60s [first diver, Peter Redfern, arrived summer

1964 – Transcriber]. So it was routine part of the marine biologist's methods. I had done quite a bit of diving beforehand. I think I must have got an agreement from Barry Heywood, we could, I could dive in the lakes, which is why I had my own wet suit. So it was peripheral, sort of poking your nose into corners of research. I dived in the lakes there. [Lee: Under ice or…?] Yes, in winter occasionally, I would go out with the marine biologists and help them. In the lakes, I don't think I did work under the ice. No, and the lakes weren't very deep, 10 metres maximum, so there wasn't any great risk. But when I was passing though South Georgia, I went out with one other to a good size lake that looked quite deep. Nobody had any idea of its depth…and did a dive in that to see if there were aquatic mosses. That is the sort of thing that would never be allowed today. I went with another person to help carry all the diving equipment, and did the dive on my own. But I mean, if you are on your own, you don't dive as deep as if you are with someone else. I think I went down to about 25 meters. I was tempted to go down deeper because the mosses were getting thicker and better the deeper I went but, being a mountaineer, I was used to assessing risk and I decided when that was enough and back up to the surface.

[00:36:01] Lee: The sea diving, I guess, was a bit more challenging because you didn't quite know what you were going to find down there. Was that something you did to [??????] yourself, or just occasionally? What is your memory…

Light: Just occasionally, because that was not my work…occasionally, it was to help the marine biologists. Occasionally it was to take underwater photographs. Once or twice it was to go with the others to see the lovely coral caves. The only place where there was a real diversity of aquatic life was where the icebergs couldn't scour the bottom. There were one or two caves, very shallow, but still completely protected from the ice and were just full of an Aladdin's cave of treasures. So that was something one would go to visit.

[00:37:00] Lee: Again…there was a Health and Safety issue again.

Light: You were always going in pairs. Even in those days you were always going in pairs under the ice. Yes, I think that would have been the case. One could have dived alone if you were just in open water down to 10 meters. Under the ice…what I remember was, you never ever dived under the ice without a rope. That was absolutely the number one rule, and we were always in pairs. Because if you had a problem with your air supply then you would need another the share the air supply while you

got out…There was just one other dive, which was very memorable. One a second trip south when we went down the Peninsula to study large Ablation Lake, one practically the size of Signy Island. This was permanently ice covered, but we were fascinated to discover what was in it. The ice was still three metres thick by the height of summer. But it turned out to be a tidal lake, and there was a tide crack between the ice frozen to the shore and the floating ice. This sort of opened up into a sort of water crevasse. We looked at this quite carefully because there was the question of whether the ice could slip and suddenly close shut. It didn't. It seemed to be absolutely safe and so I did make a dive down that into Ablation Lake. There was an extraordinary wall of freshwater ice but tidal. It was a sort of ice foot, this frozen ice, to the shore, that happens all round the coast, which was present in this lake. The ice formations in this wall of ice were extraordinary.

[00:39:10] Lee: Was that research or adventure?

Light: The dive was for research. Yes we wanted to know what life was in the lake. Was there any bottom moss, vegetation? What was there in the water? But just seeing this wall of ice was pleasure. Wasn't there to study that.

[00:39:33] Lee: What were communications like in the 70s? Your badge [Reunion Event Name Badge – Transcriber] says that you came out for one winter, and went back down again.

Light: I went down for 18 months having already done a year, but stayed down there for my second winter. So I did the normal two and a half years, and then wrote up my results, and went down the second time, down the Peninsula with Barry Heywood in the summer of 73/74. So I spent a year back in the UK.

[00:40:06] Lee: The second time you went down wasn't to Signy?

Light: No, we stopped there just on the way back.

[00:40:12] Lee: So in the Signy period, what were communications with the rest of the world like, because I guess…?

Light: Well it sounded as if they were…weren't much worse than they were in the early 90s. John Shears, this afternoon, mentioned there was then a 300-word limit on Fax or Telex as it was called. And we had that. But what surprised me was I didn't miss better communications. I

imagined I would go down there and avidly listen to the World News, and what's happening in the rest of the world, but one really lost interest in the rest of the world, and I wasn't the slightest bit interested in the news. Yes, it was great to…the highlight of the month was to receive a telex letter from Gail. There was once we telephoned. Then, it was just possible to telephone from a ship, but the communication was pretty poor. There was quite a long gap…I…it was great to be in contact but I can't say we actually communicated an awful lot. So, in a physical form of communication that was all there was.

[00:41:40] Lee: Did you feel homesick or lonely?

Light: No, No! I just loved it there so much. But I did notice that, for I think it was 5 months, several of us dreamed of what we were missing. After that period, we stopped dreaming of those things. Beforehand, Gail and I had decided to see if whether… We were interested in telepathy…was this possible? So we'd agreed to contact each other by telepathy three times in the 18 months I was there.

[00:42:19] Lee: At fixed times?

Light: No, we didn't arrange any time because we felt then that we could afterwards compared notes and see which of the times…if they coincided then there was pretty good evidence for it. Two times we were very close and another time we were an hour or two out.

[00:42:39] Lee: How would that work? That would be…On three occasions Gail would try to send a thought to you and on three occasions you would send a thought to Gail. Is that how it would work?

Light: Yes. We thought lets try and make contact three times. Yes.

[00:42:52] Lee: How did you do that? What did you mentally do to make contact with Gail? You sent her a thought?

Light: [Pause] Yes, I suppose, just meditate on that, using a quiet moment [Pause] A quiet time, said to one's self. Concentrate, meditate on that. Just focus on it.

[00:43:22] Lee: On the receiving end, how did you experience the reception of that thought?

Light: I can't say that I really felt it as a transmission and as a reception. It was just a moment when we were in contact.

[00:43:43] Lee: Thank you for that. We've got to the end of our discussion, I think. But there is one thing that I want to ask you about. Every so often, you come across someone who has worked in the Antarctic who has a landmark named after them. I think you come into this category?

Light: Yes, there is a lake on Signy, which I didn't actually study. I did actually swim in it when it was warm, called Light Lake.

[00:44:09] Lee: How did that come about?

Light: Well, when I was there, they just had numbers. I worked on Lake 2. Then when a new map was made of Signy, not long after, I think, I was there, they decided to put names to many of the features on Signy, and the freshwater biologists got their names on lakes. Others got their names on other features. So my lake, Lake 2, became Heywood Lake and this little lake, on the other side of the island became Light Lake. Not just names. Where I discovered the aquatic mosses, that became Moss Lake. Another one Sombre Lake. I mean there were 14 lakes and there weren't 14 freshwater biologists. There were not enough of us to go round!

[00:44:59] Lee: Is it important to you, that, or is it just a quirk?

Light: I suppose it tweaks the ego a bit, pleases the children. Yes.

[00:45:10] Lee: What happened to you when you came back? When you came back to reality, in inverted comas, did it take some time to adjust back to not having this power and solitude? Did it irritate you?

Light: I don't remember being irritated. I remember being absolutely exhausted going shopping for the first time. Just the whole experience of going out, of traffic, of roads, the shops. That whole activity. That, and trees. Trees were extraordinary objects, after being two and a half years without them.

[00:45:49] Lee: How do you mean?

Light: Well they were just amazing! As if someone coming from another planet and had never seen a tree. I mean they were just huge,

powerful, important [Pause] and as an ecologist, I knew in my logical mind, of course they are. The most important plants on the planet.

[00:46:23] Lee: You'd missed them!

Light: Yes, I can't say that I had longed for them when I was down there, but it wasn't until I came back and experienced them again, I realised how much I had missed them.

[00:46:39] Lee: Is there anything you wanted to say that I haven't drawn from you?

Light: I think it would be good for the Signy Records, that you get a record of the only boat trip to Orcadas, which was made…I didn't go on it myself…it was made when I was there.

[00:46:59] Lee: Orcadas is a small island of…?

Light: No Orcadas is the Argentinian Base on Laurie Island. I caused a diplomatic incident.

[00:47:06] Lee: Do you want to tell me the story?

Light: Yes. Also because it brings up the thing of risk. Head Office, when they heard about it, were [Pause] what's the word…

[00:47:17] Lee: Incandescent?

Light: Yes! They had seen it as highly risky! But we had lived there…we had the British Tradition of having two years of experiences transmitted from second year people to first year people. It is a very powerful way of being able to work and travel in the environment safely. The outboard motors we had were extremely reliable. The person, the boatman knew them backwards. Could strip them down virtually blindfold. So the motor power was, I think, very safe…little risk there. Having been there two years, we had a very good idea about the weather, for that was the main risk if it had turned nasty during the trip. The Argentinians had a very good meteorological service and forecasting the weather…and it was made. They had a great party, the three of them when they got there.

[00:48:13] Lee: They were invited over, effectively?

Light: No! We just said, we would like to go. We had radio contact so they knew that we were coming. And set off. Absolutely no problem during the trip, and when they arrived, the Argentinians were over the moon to see the three of them because they moved everything out at the end of the year – a whole new team of people and equipment comes in. As a result they sensibly had no skills for traveling far from the Base and didn't try to. So they greatly respected our ability to travel there. And so they had a great party for a week or so, and then when the next weather window, which the Argentinians could forecast, they came back. Afterwards Head Office, as you said, were incandescent, and we got a terse telex saying 'this journey shall never be repeated!' It was a bit later, that we discovered the diplomatic consequences. Apparently the headlines in the Antarctic [Argentinian – Transcriber] daily papers had been 'Ship-wrecked British rescued by Argentinian heroes'.

[00:49:34] Lee: The Argentinian papers?

Light: Yes! So that didn't go down very well with the Foreign Office.

[00:49:45] Lee: The shipwreck was purely fictional?

Light: Absolutely! Absolutely. There we were, we had travelled there. They had no ability to rescue anybody. They couldn't travel at all. [Laughter] It was so far from the truth, it was ludicrous. Others saw it differently.

[00:50:02] Lee: Did the expedition come back bearing gifts?

Light: Yes we did. I forgot what it was though. I think it was goodies, you know, the food treats they had which we didn't have. I can't remember what it was.

[00:50:18] Lee: You, yourself, were not on the trip?

Light: No! not on that trip.

[00:50:22] Lee: But you sanctioned it!

Light: No it was the year before I was there, so I can back out of being responsible, for saying OK to that. It was the year before I became Base Commander.

[00:50:32] Lee: Was it a case of drawing lots as to who should go?

Light: I don't remember that. It was mainly…certainly the boatman, who was the most experienced, and two others. I forgot how it was initially decided. Obviously there were people who wanted to go and there were many people on Base who wouldn't have wanted to make a trip like that. I would have done if it had been the next year and as Base Commander…

[00:51:01] Lee: Pulled rank!

Light: Yes.

[00:51:03] Lee: Thank you very much indeed.

Highlights

[00:04:23] Designing equipment for working under lake ice.

[00:06:25] Research aims.

[00:11:47] Discovery of aquatic mosses.

[00:19:13] Development of a personal philosophy.

[00:22:30] Mid-winter activities.

[00:28:03] Duties as Postmaster when Britain went decimal.

[00:30:41] Signy Thin-ice Race.

[00:33:35] Start of diving at Signy.

[00:37:00] Diving under ice, including under 3 metres of ice in Ablation Lake, Alexander Island.

[00:43:43] Naming of Signy Island lakes

[00:45:10] Mental adjustment on return to UK.

[00:46:39] Boat trip from Signy to Orcadas, Laurie Island, and diplomatic repercussions.