

CLIFFORD PEARCE (Cliff)

Edited transcript of an interview with Clifford Pearce conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at British Antarctic Survey HQ, Cambridge, on 4th July, 2009. Transcribed by Ken Hill, 23rd November 2010.

Track 1 [0:00:04] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Cliff Pearce, interviewed at BAS HQ Cambridge on the 4th of July 2009. Cliff Pearce.*

Clifford Pearce: My name is Clifford John Pearce, I was born in Stanmore in Middlesex in 1935.

Track 1 [0:00:25] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was the date?*

Clifford Pearce: The 18th of August.

Track 1 [0:00:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *And what were you doing before the Antarctic loomed into your life?*

Clifford Pearce: I had been at Keele University, and in 1956 the Government stopped compulsory National Service, so I was doing a Diploma in Education and I went straight into a job in a school in Hertfordshire, and within a month or two I thought 'Oh my goodness, I wish I'd done National Service.' You know, I'm going to have a life of student/pupil/teacher and whatnot, so immediately I started applying for other opportunities. I applied for a job in Saskatchewan, where the advert read 'No weaklings need apply'. I was not appointed, but subsequently I was appointed as a meteorologist to the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey. And that was a great oasis in what promised to be a desert.

Track 1 [0:1:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, I didn't want to spend my whole life surrounded by teachers and children, and I wanted to see the world, and this was a marvellous opportunity.

Track 1 [0:1:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *So was your application to FIDS one of a whole batch of things you sent off, or were you quite serious about it?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh I was quite serious about it, and this was the only one I actually got to formally applying for, and fortunately because I'd got a degree in geography I was accepted and went on a training course as a meteorologist.

Track 1 [0:2:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *You'd had no previous meteorological experience?*

Clifford Pearce: No previous meteorological experience, no.

Track 1 [0:2:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *Can you remember much about the interview, the process of you getting the job?*

Clifford Pearce: Bill Sloman was the interviewer, and I went up to Millbank, and I can't remember much about the interview except that it was a very pleasant occasion, and I went home excited at the prospect, and even more excited when the letter of appointment arrived, at which point I gave in my notice after one year of teaching, and I went on a training course at Stanmore in Middlesex, two miles from my home, and then I went to London Airport for twelve weeks to practice my new-found skills. It was the summer of 1959 and I was there to get practice on cloud forms and types, and we had a cloudless summer. So every day was beautiful blue skies. But I learned something.

Track 1 [0:3:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you take to meteorology like a duck to water, or not?*

Clifford Pearce: Because I had a geographical background and I had an intrinsic interest in meteorology, it was easy. The course at Stanmore was good, and putting it into practise at London Airport was extremely good. So it was appropriate for me.

Track 1 [0:3:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *So unusually for Fids at that time you were trained?*

Clifford Pearce: I was properly trained as a meteorologist. I think in those days we were called meteorological assistants, but we became promoted - a matter of semantics later on rather than expertise.

Track 1 [0:3:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you think you were prepared for the Antarctic in any other way - did you really know what you were getting into?*

Clifford Pearce: I had been following, in 1958, the crossing of Antarctica, so the answer is I did have a pretty good knowledge of what it was about, yes.

Track 1 [0:4:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you really wanted to go?*

Clifford Pearce: I really wanted to go, yes. There was no question. As soon as the advert came up, and the acceptance came up, I was very, very happy.

Track 1 [0:4:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *And how long were you signed up for?*

Clifford Pearce: I signed up for two full years, and I was actually away from England for two and a half years. We set sail on the *Kista Dan* on December the 19th, 1959, and we sailed into a terrible storm in the Bay of Biscay, when all of us were in our cabins for four or five days, which was not a pleasant experience.

Track 1 [0:4:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *But in some respects it was preparing you for the Antarctic?*

Clifford Pearce: It was. In our cabin, down in the bowels of the ship, a very small cabin, there were four of us in bunks, one on the bottom bunk, one on the top, twice, with just a very small passageway down the middle. So we were in very close contact.

Track 2 [0:0:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did you cope with that claustrophobia?*

Clifford Pearce: I was OK.... I mean I used to get out every time I could, and spend hours and hours on the decks, and I did have my - well I haven't got it now - my Brownie 8 cinema film camera, and held on to a rail, and took a picture of the *John Biscoe* (sic) wallowing I don't know how many degrees from side to side. So I was up for it, but it was uncomfortable.

Track 2 [0:0:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *What were the stops on the way down?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh, one of my dreams... we passed Madeira, and I desperately want to go back to Madeira, I've never been there. Then we sailed through the Cape Verde Islands but we didn't stop, and then we went by Fernando de Noronha, and then we stopped in Montevideo, where we were waiting for some aircraft shipments to come down from Canada, and at that point Sir Vivian Fuchs and Alfred Stephenson joined the *Kista Dan*. One of my memories there - I spent my time in my cabin with Brian Taylor, a top class geologist. I was with him at Fossil Bluff. And while in

Montevideo harbour he got some buckets, and he got four buckets of liquid mud from the bottom of Montevideo harbour, brought them into our small cabin and spent days and days and days combing through this mud to identify the creatures from down below. He never completed all four buckets, but this was typical of Brian. His whole life was one of perfectionism and research, and he gave me a good forewarning of the calibre of Brian.

Track 2 [0:2:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it testing your tolerance in any way?*

Clifford Pearce: I think it may have tested our tolerance, yes, because there wasn't much room in this cabin. But we were all in such a positive framework of co-operation. There were no problems at all.

Track 2 [0:2:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you met Fuchs. I guess he was already something of a hero wasn't he?*

Clifford Pearce: He was something of a hero. He was then head of the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey, and he was coming down on a visit. He didn't visit every year, but he was coming down for a visit, and he was on the *Kista Dan*, for it must have been sixty, seventy days with us from Montevideo.

Track 2 [0:2:56] Chris Eldon Lee: *So was there much meeting between the two of you?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh, Sir Vivian Fuchs was incredibly pleasant and communicative and happy to see you. I'd got a copy of his book with me on board, so I got him to sign it with *Kista Dan* and the date and the specific latitude - he was most pleasant and co-operative.

Track 2 [0:3:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were there any ways in which he didn't live up to his reputation or to your hopes?*

Clifford Pearce: I don't think so, except we got stuck in the ice in the Bellingshausen Sea for two weeks, and young men being young men, there was too much drinking and too much exuberance, and eventually Vivian Fuchs put up a notice to say the bar is closed until further notice, which we thought was a bit over the top. But we accepted it. It was a cause for a lot of jokes, but it was no problem really.

Track 2 [0:4:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Presumably you went to the Falklands first of all?*

Clifford Pearce: We went to the Falkland Islands for a couple of weeks. One of my memories there was a magical trip out on the ship's jolly boat to Sparrow Cove where the *Great Britain*, the famous old ship that was the first iron ship to cross the Atlantic, had been dumped there, when it had been dismantled I think coming round Cape Horn, and we went out to visit the *Great Britain* there, and - I don't know - thirty five years later I visited it in Bristol, where it has been restored, and is a fabulously attractive.... but I loved the Falkland Islands, yes.

Track 2 [0:4:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *But what were your feelings about the Great Britain the first time you saw it?*

Clifford Pearce: It was just a rusting hulk, enormous, but there was nothing we could really see of its grandeur, except I think the figurehead may have still been on it, but it was a sad saga of the end of a great ship. But, like phoenix it arose from the waves, or the depths.

Track 3 [0:0:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *You said you loved the Falkland Islands, can you elaborate on that for me?*

Clifford Pearce: It's wild, it's windy, it's beautiful landscapes, tussock grass, lots of wildlife. Of course, we used to go down to the penguin rookeries and we used to go out to an old bar I forget what it was called, in the wilderness area, it was a famous Falkland Islands watering hole...

Track 3 [0:0:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *The Rose?*

Clifford Pearce: I can't quite remember the name of it now, but we used to go out to this remote hostelry, yes, all very exciting. And of course the waterfront, with its memories of the First World War, and the memorial to *Exeter* and *Ajax*, the battleships, it was all fascinating, and the people were incredibly friendly.

Track 3 [0:1:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *So from there, you thought you were going to one place, and you went....*

Clifford Pearce: I was supposed to be going to Horseshoe Island. But we had the most terrible journey down there. We got stuck in the ice, Horseshoe Island could not be relieved, so they flew an aircraft from Deception Island on to the ice at the Argentine Islands, and then brought out the base men and most of the dogs, and they flew in four men as a stopgap, and the men went to Horseshoe Island and later sledged to Stonington, but the two of us who were supposed to be going to Horseshoe Island, mere, well I was a mere met assistant, and the other one was Frazer White the radio operator, we had to stay on board the ship until we were put ashore at Deception Island, so it was a very disappointing start to the journey. Having said that, for fifty or sixty days we were down amongst the ice, and we could see the beauty of the landscape, and you know I wanted desperately to get down there after a year. So that's basically how I ended up at Deception Island.

Track 3 [0:2:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *And your Kista Dan icebound experience happened that way?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, yes, it happened on the way down from the Falkland Islands to Deception Island. We had the aircraft on board, we assembled them, and then we continued our journey, got stuck in the ice, and then we stopped at the edge of the fast ice to try and relieve the bases, but we had to depend on the aircraft, because the exciting thing that happened there was, in the true British system, we had to call out help. And there just happened to be the biggest icebreaker in the world, the *USS Glacier*, that was doing some work relieving an Argentine vessel, and it came to our aid, and I think it was 5,200 tons, we were 1,300 tons; they had 228 crew members, we had 57 on board; they had ten engines, each of 2,000 horse power, we had one engine of 1800, and the *Glacier* came up round us and just cut an enormous trough around us, and then sort of said 'Follow me', which is what we tried to do.

Track 3 [0:4:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *And succeeded?*

Clifford Pearce: Well we tried to do it, but the *Glacier* was sending back such huge chunks of rock (sic) that it was just pushing us back into the ice. So in the end they put a great chain between us, and they towed us out until we reached open water and headed for Deception Island.

Track 3 [0:4:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how many days were you trapped in the ice?*

Clifford Pearce: I think it was sixteen days trapped in the ice. The fact is we would not have got out of it for scores and scores of days without the *Glacier*. And of course we were thinking of the *Endurance*, which was trapped in the ice. The *Endurance* had a straight-sided profile, we had a bowl-shaped bottom, so as the ice came together, the *Kista Dan* was gently lifted up and tilted over. It was

an enjoyable experience. We used to go out on the ice - we had to go on the ice to collect blocks of ice to replenish the water supplies.

Track 4 [0:0:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you at all concerned or alarmed at being trapped?*

Clifford Pearce: I think not really, because we knew... this was the beginning of aircraft. We knew something would turn up; and we knew that the icebreaker was two or three hundred miles away. No - it was all truly exciting.

Track 4 [0:0:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *You ended up in Deception, which was not where you hoped to be, but what were your first impressions of sailing through the Bellows?*

Clifford Pearce: Well some people have a terrible expression about Deception Island, because it is circular, and with a big hole in the middle, and it's ugly and grey in the summer, it's sometimes known as the arsehole of the Antarctic. So my first thoughts were apprehension. It was a fabulous year - it was a fabulous year without question, because of the landscape, because of the people, because of the excitement of what we were trying to do. So initial disappointment, but after a year and a month, I think fulfilment in all sorts of ways.

Track 4 [0:1:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *What were the projects you were involved in with some of the early aircraft in the Antarctic?*

Clifford Pearce: We had a proper aircrew with us - two pilots, or flying officers; an airframe fitter and an engineer. And we had the first proper FIDS base ever, and the first thing they had to do was get the planes ashore and put them together. We had a De Havilland Otter and a De Havilland Beaver. So there was a lot of work involved in that, especially as earlier on, when we were at the Argentine Islands, one of the aircraft on board had been badly damaged when the *John Biscoe* crashed into us. So we had the Otter, and we had a damaged Beaver. A new wing was brought down for the Beaver, and both planes were made good.

Track 4 [0:2:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just take me through that collision between the two ships, because in the book it does sound quite alarming.*

Clifford Pearce: It was alarming because we were tied up to a headland in the Argentine Islands, and the *John Biscoe* was quite close to us, and I think maybe our hawser parted. One of the ships, I think it was the *John Biscoe*, suddenly swung round in the violent waves that were going, and just swung round and caught the wing of the Beaver, and it just fell off. We were alarmed because there was petrol and all sorts of fuel and bits of aircraft and so on. It was alarming, yes.

Track 4 [0:3:06] Chris Eldon Lee: *How did the crew respond to that?*

Clifford Pearce: It was a Danish crew, so we could hear lots of Danish expletives, and running about. I think they responded professionally. Although there was a fuel leak, I think it was probably one or two drums. There was no terrible danger because they acted quickly.

Track 4 [0:4:33] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you surprised at the accident?*

Clifford Pearce: I was surprised, but you see, we had had such a terrible time - getting stuck in the ice - and we were at the ice edge, and the Otter had flown down to relieve the men at Horseshoe Island, and suddenly we could see the ice breaking up. Everybody was running around, and the pilots got into the Otter, and we thought they're not going to make it. The ice floe was getting smaller and smaller. They took a long run, and jumped off just in time. So accidents were part of our early FIDS

experience. We used to describe our nights as nights of terror, because we had lots of nights of terror, with icebergs moving around, and the captain making decisions as to whether he should move the ship, or whether the iceberg would glide by. It was an exciting period.

Track 4 [0:4:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you on deck at night sometimes?*

Clifford Pearce: The worst incident of that was when I was on met duty in the middle of the night, and of course it was light, and I could see this iceberg coming round, and I could see the chap on duty making signs to the captain, and the captain moved the ship too late, and the iceberg came along, and a corner of the iceberg just elbowed its way into a porthole and shattered the bed inside - made it six inches shorter. Then it ran along the side of the ship, ripped off the rails, and then a great lump of ice on the top fell on to the deck, and once it had fallen on to the deck, the loss of weight on the iceberg caused the iceberg to rise up and roll over - it rolled away from the ship. But by the end of the incident there were lots of Fids on deck to see what was happening.

Track 5 [0:0:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was the ship tipped at all?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, it was tipping - unsettled, but not in danger.

Track 5 [0:0:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Just looking back at that now, with a philosophical eye, what did it teach you, that instance, about the power of the Antarctic?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, we used to have a phrase: 'The Antarctic is bigger than all of us', and we used to use this from time to time, because we knew we were a mere, tiny ship in this vast wilderness. Yes, Pete Bates used to coin the phrase 'It's bigger than all of us' and we would laugh at the power of the ice floes, the power of the ice to grip the ship, to icebergs rolling away, and also the power of an iceberg just to move through solid ice. You know, if it was on the move, it would just grind its way through the ice. Oh yes, it was a dramatic time.

Track 5 [0:1:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did it in any way change your attitude towards the Antarctic - were you more cautious after this?*

Clifford Pearce: I think we had a healthy respect, especially when we were on our own on the land. But at sea it was somebody else's responsibility. I don't think we were..... although there were times when we were..... There was a famous time at Hope Bay on the way out when we packed escape bags because we knew we had blown on to the shore, and we could see this light, this Argentine light on the cliffs above us, and all the Fids were gathered in the saloon with their escape bags. But the captain put the ship in reverse and eased it off. It was always a big laugh, but with an undertone, an undercurrent of danger. But the dangers were usually when you were on your own or with a dog team, when you couldn't rely on other people to help you.

Track 5 [0:2:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK, we left you at Deception Island, trying to reassemble one of the planes. Talk me through that process. Did you have hangars?*

Clifford Pearce: There were no hangars, but the Otter, which was in flying condition, we tied down on the runway, and one of our duties, was every week or so, was to dig it out, because it drifted up to the wings. And the Beaver - there was an old whaling station at Deception Island, and the Beaver, the nose of it, was parked in a building to give some shelter, so that the aircrew could fix up the wing there. And then when that was done, we put that on the open runway as well. They were both parked outside throughout the winter.

Track 5 [0:3:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *And when spring came?*

Clifford Pearce: When spring came we had the excitement of getting them organised and going up for test flights. My first flight ever was in a De Havilland Beaver over Deception Island, and there was this sense of excitement and magic - it was a magical experience. Only for half an hour, to prove that the aircraft were safe. Then a few days later, obviously in furtherance of the progress, the aircraft men were supposed to fly down to the Argentine Islands to take a party further south. The day that they departed, September?, we were all on the runway as they took off, two planes. They flew down to the Argentine Islands and the Beaver landed on the ice and slowed to a stop, and broke through, and the base members got out the dog teams to try to pull it out, but the skis were digging under the ice, so it was a total write-off. So that was the one and only purposeful flight of the De Havilland Beaver. The crew had to abandon everything, get back in the Otter and fly back to Deception and wait for another aircraft to arrive.

Track 6 [0:0:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *The plane to survive, then, was the Otter....*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, the Otter.

Track 6 [0:0:20] Chris Eldon Lee: *And then that was again based at Deception with you. Were you part of the relief of Stonington?*

Clifford Pearce: The answer is yes. After a year at Deception Island we went down again, and we had problems. On the way we built the Adelaide Island base, and then we crossed to Marguerite Bay, and we stopped at the edge of the ice three or four miles from the base, and we had Muskegs on board, and those Muskegs went in and they relieved the base - the four men who had been flown in off the edge of the ice at the Argentine Islands. So that was their relief, and it was magical for people like me to go ashore and see this famous hut. But that's jumping forward.

Track 6 [0:1:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *So let's get back into sequence if we can. So you were at Deception for one year?*

Clifford Pearce: One year, yes.

Track 6 [0:1:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what sort of work were you doing there - met work presumably?*

Clifford Pearce: We were doing meteorological observations every three hours, and they were radioed to Port Stanley for feeding into the South African Meteorological Southern Hemisphere Forecasting System, so that was a major commitment.

Track 6 [0:1:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *And was that just you, or.....*

Clifford Pearce: Oh no, you see I was the extra met man. There were three met men.... the original base was scheduled to have five members: three met men, a radio man, a cook, that was it. So I made up a fourth met man, which was of some help. We shared the work. Well, that was the reason for the base. Well that was a reason for the base. I think the original reason was to fly the British flag, especially as there were Argies and Chiles down the road.

Track 6 [0:2:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you have much contact with them?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes. We used to visit each other's base on a regular basis. There was a triangular trade. We had, I think it was 500 cigarettes a month for every member of the base, but only one or two smoked. So we had a surfeit of cigarettes. We also had gin. So we would put cigarettes and gin on our sledge, go to the Chilean base. The Chileans had a lot of sheep, and they had a pig, and they

would give us fresh cuts of mutton. Then we would go across to the Argentine base, who specialised in vast quantities of wine, so they would give us wine, and in this way we had a very purposeful trade. We were incredibly friendly with the Chileans, who loved us - they really enjoyed us coming. The Argentines were a very formal military base, and there was a real officer-and-men regime. The officers lived in one section, the men lived in the other. The men waited on the officers at mealtimes, and we were talking to the doctor and he told us of one Argentine member who was very unstable and was kept in his room I think it was for a hundred days, which we thought was over the top. The Argentines could get radio home virtually whenever they wanted, and we got the impression that the Argentinian members of the base just lived to be on the radio. They also had a full-time doctor, and they had all sorts of ailments. On the British base we had virtually nil contact with home, and we had no doctor and we had no illnesses. But the Chileans were so friendly, and I remember going to the Chilean base one day, with the dogs, sledging, and it was a pretty foul day and we hauled up on the ice, and Fernando Mancina, the leader, came out and threw his arms up in the air and said: 'Ah, only the British and the Chileans would travel on such a day as this!' It was always lovely, and we went to their parties, and their Presidente's Day, and they used to visit us. So it was mutual, and it was a lovely fraternisation.

Track 7 [0:0:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *Communication was in English? How did you communicate?*

Well, some of them..... on the Chilean base, the senior officers could speak English, and the same on the Argentine base. But hardly any of us could speak Spanish, so it was in English, and thanks to the officers of the two bases, they could manage.

Track 7 [0:0:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *I got the impression that the Argentine personnel didn't really want to be there.*

Clifford Pearce: Absolutely. It was lucrative financially, whereas Fids - for two years I was paid £550. But, we had no money (sic) to spend it on, and we honestly never thought of the finances of it. We were just happy to be there. We were all civilians apart from the RAF personnel. The rest of us were all young blokes, civilians, and we just wanted to be there. So money didn't come into it, but for the Argentinians and the Chileans, it paid them to serve two or three years, because they could save up money to use at home.

Track 7 [0:1:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *Eventually you managed to get to Fossil Bluff, which was perhaps not where you were expecting to go. Give me the story of that.*

Clifford Pearce: In the second year I was scheduled to go to Stonington Island - there were thirteen of us scheduled to go to Stonington Island. Now Fuchs decided that we must try and get a new base at Fossil Bluff launched. By now the airstrip had moved to Adelaide Island, and planes could take off from Adelaide Island, a base that we actually built in 1961 on the second summer. So they built this base at Fossil Bluff two weeks before anybody was going in there. Who went in there? They had to have a geologist, Brian Taylor, and they had to have two other useful people. So they decided out of the thirteen of us, John Smith, who'd been at Detaille Island and Deception Island, he should come down as - base leader's the wrong word - but officer in charge, and that I would go. So it was pure luck who went. So there was a geologist Brian Taylor, and he was a serious geologist, he'd come down with us, with his buckets of mud, and because he couldn't get into his base, he'd gone home for a year. Now he came back, and was able to get into Fossil Bluff. So It was just luck that I and John Smith joined Brian Taylor. But we were very lucky.

Track 7 [0:3:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *This was all rather a last minute decision?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh, we shrugged our shoulders and said 'Well, that's FIDS'. Because it was chaotic. The huts had been built, and then it was right at the end of the season, so they had to go. So they flew in some loads of stuff, and dumped them, and then dropped us in and said 'Goodbye chaps, we'll see you in, well, we'll see you in a year.' The dogs were supposed to come back down after seven or eight months. So Brian and John and I were literally left on the ice with this great pile of stuff, and this built hut, with some things that hadn't been built. There was a beautiful generator, all wired up, completely in the open, so we had to build something round to protect it. But the other thing we had to do was sort out all the stuff, all the food that had been hurriedly put together outside the hut, so that we carried in things like beautiful bottles of Piccalilli in which the vinegar had frozen, so they were all shattered, and we noted that what should have been a crate of sugar for some reason was a crate of tinned tomatoes. There were crates and crates of dehydrated runner beans; there were excellent supplies of dehydrated meat and fish, and there wasn't enough flour, there wasn't enough dried eggs, which were very important on FIDS bases. So we took time to classify and sort it out and make sure that we'd got enough - not that there was anything we could have done about it. But we did have lots of sledge boxes, which are boxes for two men for ten days that you take out when you're sledging. And we knew that this gave us a back-up if the rest ran out. But it was chaotic. We moved in, and we had to complete the building of the Rayburn stove for cooking, which John did, and I put together the... we had to do the wiring from the generator into the hut for the electricity, and I was successful... that did work - for a month! But basically it was a challenge - it was a challenge, and we were all working together, and eventually we did have a hut that was weatherproof, and we did have power, and it was comfortable. In the inside of the hut we had to make our own spaces, and one of the spaces was for an inside WC - which we did not want. So to combine the provision of a decent facility with energy, exercise, we went outside and we used ice axes to dig a fourteen foot deep hole, and then we dug into it long corridors, and off the corridors we built beautiful circular areas which we called bogloos, and they were very, very comfortable.

Track 8 [0:2:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean - things you could sit on?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, we carved out a big hole that went down into the depths, in the ice, and then we put a wooden board across the hole. It was sheltered, comfortable, and, you know, it was very dignified. So that lasted us for the whole winter. The sad thing is, leaping ahead 35 years, all the ice melted everywhere down there, and the BAS had the job of cleaning up all the site, which must have been pretty noisome.

Track 8 [0:2:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Um, yes, after 35 years! So did this have a roof, this system?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, it was down 14ft into the ice, so it was a tunnel. You climbed down, and there was a tunnel, and this guaranteed its weatherproofing. And of course it never melted. So it was really, really good.

Track 8 [0:3:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *Let's just go back to the bit about having Fossil Bluff staffed over the winter. We're talking about nineteen sixty...*

Clifford Pearce: One, yes.

Track 8 [0:3:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *So it appears to have been a late decision?*

Clifford Pearce: Well I think it was only late because we couldn't get in their earlier. You see we were held up getting into Stonington Island till very late. But eventually we got into Stonington Island, and Fuchs said 'Well, let's get the hut built...'

Track 8 [0:3:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *This was at Stonington?*

Clifford Pearce: The hut was built at Stonington... 'Let's get a hut built at Fossil Bluff so that it's all ready, so we can start early next season.' So it was a good system really. By the time they should have come, the hut was there, and this forward base was properly installed.

Track 8 [0:4:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *That's the one you inhabited, and you were the first?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, we were the first occupants on Alexander Island. Alexander Island had been seen by Bellingshausen. Kings George VI Sound, which is a great fissure, an ice-filled fissure between Alexander Island and the mainland, was visited by Vivian Fuchs and Adie in 1947. Earlier it had been visited by Stephenson, who was on the *Kista Dan* with us, and two of his British Grahamland Expedition team, and the third visitors were Finne Ronne and Carl Eklund, 1940, they came down the Sound. So they were responsible for calling it Fossil Bluff. But they didn't leave the Sound, so we were the first to actually live there, and to explore the hinterland.

Track 9 [0:0:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *And just to clarify, it was being supplied from Stonington, when you were preparing to take all the supplies on to the Bluff, which turned out to be not adequate - that was all being done at Stonington?*

Clifford Pearce: No, it was being done at the Adelaide Island. Adelaide Island was an airstrip, and they could offload everything there, and then they could fly over Stonington to Fossil Bluff. We went over into Stonington Island, and the Otter - two Otters - went over and landed on the ice to pick us up and take us to Fossil Bluff.

Track 9 [0:0:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you had no say over the supplies?*

Clifford Pearce: We had no say over the supplies, and another thing is, I was a meteorologist, and I knew that our meteorological equipment was in the depths of the ship, so I went round and collected everything we needed - a barometer and maximum and minimum thermometers, everything I could. We had something called a whirling cyclometer, which was a wind measurer. We had to make do, but we were able to measure every aspect of weather for a full year. But it wasn't a properly organised base.

Track 9 [0:1:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you acquired bits of equipment from various sources, because all your stuff was deep down inside the ship.*

Clifford Pearce: Absolutely. Correct.

Track 9 [0:1:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *On the human resources, the human supplies, once you got to Stonington, no, once you got to Fossil Bluff, and you counted the supplies you had, you realised quite soon that in fact you hadn't got enough to see you through to the following spring. I get the impression there was no structure involved in that....*

Clifford Pearce: Well, this is.... obviously there are internal stresses in the base, and I think it's fair to say that Brian and I would have preferred a rationing system to eke out our supplies. On the other hand John was very laid back about this, and I think just.... be careful, and this meant that we tended to run out of the best things early, when with a little more husbandry we could have made them last.

Track 9 [0:2:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what were the meals like towards the end of that supply line?*

Clifford Pearce: Before our base was relieved by dog sledge, which happened in November - we had dehydrated runner beans in every meal for the whole year. We had a superfluity of dehydrated runner

beans, and they were good. The others, we had to make do and mend - we used to make jellies - blancmange - out of gelatine and cocoa. We used to make omelettes out of pea flour - pea flour omelettes were a speciality - of course a meaningless term. But we had to resort to experiments. Mostly though, we respected each other, and knew that we were trying. But whereas at Deception Island you could go down to the beach and kill a seal, or collect some penguin eggs, or kill a penguin, at Fossil Bluff there was nothing. We saw a bird, I think it was March the 4th, and then the next living creature we saw, September the 16th I think, which was a snow petrel. In between, there was nothing, nothing. A year later, Brian, who stayed on a year, was amazed to see three penguins walking past the hut, a hundred miles from the sea, on their way southwards. But they would never have made it. But we never saw any penguins.

Track 9 [0:4:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was that isolation, because you describe at one point how your colleagues got up on a sledge run, and you were there on your own, and you knew that apart from a patch of moss or the odd tuft of grass, you were the only living thing within any distance of you?*

Clifford Pearce: Absolutely, but it wasn't a cause for concern because there were no germs, there were no illnesses to catch... obviously one could have got appendicitis, and basically we were fit with our heart and lungs, so as long as one was careful one was OK. Having said that, five, six or ten years later one of the men at Fossil Bluff actually died from something awful inside. But I don't think it worried us too much. It was a unique experience. For two weeks at a time I was the only person in this wilderness, and I used to go out and walk, and look at the fossils, and try and keep myself occupied, and then I used to spend a lot of time writing. It makes one a bit of a philosopher, and a poet, and certainly I wrote thirteen chapters of a book, which was then put in my loft for forty years until I suddenly had the desire to finish the other thirteen chapters.

Track 10 [0:1:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *I don't know whether you are a religious man or not, but did you sense anything special about the Antarctic, any spiritual influences?*

Clifford Pearce: I myself didn't, but I do remember Shackleton's famous thing in South Georgia, whereby he felt there was a fourth man watching over them. No, I used to romanticise and philosophise about the moon. I think I put in my book a quote from T S Eliot about 'the scollop-shaped moon drifting across the sky', that sort of thing. But I didn't get too religiously centred at that time. Although I'd spent my youth as a choirboy, so I was steeped in religion at that time.

Track 10 [0:2:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you get used to the beauty?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh, the beauty was just magical. We saw it when the sun declined, and when the sun rose, and it used to cast a pinkish glow over the landscape, which was magical. I saw the aurora australis only on one night brilliantly. It was there occasionally, and I used to love that experience. And we used to go out when the moon was up, because the moon light gave the landscape a magic, a marvellous ambience. The other thing we used to get was optical phenomenon - I think it's called St Elmo's Fire? Or the Spectre of the Brocken, one whereby the light shines through your body, and your body is enlarged on the landscape below, if you're on a mountain, hundreds of feet lower. All these sorts of things - we used to look out for parhelia and corona.

Track 10 [0:3:13] Chris Eldon Lee: *What's that?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, they're visual phenomena caused by the sun, which creates a big circle around the sun. Sometimes the circle is vertical, sometimes you can just see the edge of it, so you get crosses and things, I mean we were very.... it sharpened our awareness of nature. And then of course we had

the calms, and we had the strong winds, hurricanes and things, so we were aware of how important and grand the natural phenomena are.

Track 10 [0:3:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *You also had three months, didn't you, of darkness, that far south?*

Clifford Pearce: Absolutely.

Track 10 [0:4:10] Chris Eldon Lee: *How was that, it strikes me as being difficult...*

Clifford Pearce: It was. Around June and July it was absolutely dark for all the time, and we used to go out, especially if the moon was up, we used to go out to get exercise, but it was dark and it was silent. I called my book *The Silent Sound*, because here was King George VI Sound, and it was a world for much of the time absolutely silent. And then you get shrieking winds, and then occasionally you'd get ice settlements, which were like gunfire. So Fossil Bluff in the winter was dark, it was quiet, and for most of the time we had no communication. The only communication we had was through a pedal generator. One of us would have to pedal, and the other could tune in and we could hear words coming from Stonington Island. But the only way we could respond was by morse. John was competent at morse. So we were cut off, absolutely, yes.

Track 11 [0:0:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did that worry you at all? Were you every apprehensive?*

Clifford Pearce: I don't think so. I don't think it worried me because we accepted it, you know. This is what it was all about. And it was interesting. We'd got no doubts as to our safety at the end of it.

Track 11 [0:0:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *That's provided of course the base was relieved, wasn't it? There must have been some mounting tension the following....*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, the base was due to be relieved by two dog (teams) and two Muskegs from Stonington Island, and they left Stonington Island on August 26th, jolly good - we were all elated with the news. It was only 150 miles. And then a few days later we heard the call 'Mayday, Mayday, Mayday' - we could listen in to this conversation although we couldn't join in - and the ice had broken up, and the Muskegs and the dog teams had to go on an island called Compass Island, and they sat there for a month while the ice re-froze. And then they came on a bit, and then they lost a Muskeg because the ice wasn't solid enough... Muskegs are designed not to sink. This one floated for about thirty seconds and disappeared with people's cameras and things on it. Eventually, after I think it was 100 days, November 27th, two dog teams and one Muskeg came in. The last 90 miles they did in three days, on King George VI Sound. But it was the first 90 days that were the trouble. So we weren't relieved until almost December, and the whole objective of being relieved was to start the summer sledging programme. But by early December all the ice was starting to melt, and the snow, and that made it very difficult for travel.

Track 11 [0:2:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *So that programme never happened?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, we went out. I went out for a hundred miles, fifty miles down King George VI Sound, travelling at night because it was colder, on a depot-laying journey. And then we all came back, and the surveyors went out for - I forget now what it was - about forty days, during which they could only travel on nine. They took their telerometers as far south as they could, to start a surveying system. But it was a mere shadow of what should have been done. And of course the geologist - they couldn't help him. He was limited to climbing over mountains with John and I in support, and we camped for a month, and so on. So the relief of Fossil Bluff was very late - November 27th - and pretty annoying. Our final relief was on, I think, February 4th 1962, when two Otters finally made it.

The weather in January 1962 was terrible and they couldn't make any flights, but they finally arrived early in February, and brought all our meal, and some fresh meat, and all sorts of goodies which we thoroughly enjoyed. I have to say when the sledges arrived, on November 27th, they brought some treats. They brought some seal steaks and they brought some penguin eggs, which we could use for omelettes.

Track 11 [0:4:12] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was the state of your supplies before the sledges arrived? Were you really close to starvation?*

Clifford Pearce: Oh no. We certainly couldn't have lasted another year, and many of the boxes were completely empty. We were using more and more sledge rations. Our diet was poor to say the least.

Track 11 [0:4:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *You couldn't have gone sledging because a) you were waiting to be relieved, and b) you had used up the rations?*

Clifford Pearce: Yes, and oh, of course, we had no dogs to pull the sledges! So the only way we ever travelled - the three of us - was man-hauling. John and I, in April - it was beautiful - we travelled across King George VI sound - it's fifteen miles either way - and that was a beautiful experience, then with Brian we used to climb all the mountains and camp on the glaciers while Brian would work his way up these sedimentary slopes. Fossil Bluff is noted for a fantastic variety of fossils that hark back to the Jurassic time when it was tropical, and it's one of the features of continental drift that this continent must have drifted over the millennia. We even had coal. The coal was further south than Fossil Bluff. There was coal, and if we'd known that at the beginning I think we would have used it.

Track 12 [0:0:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were the fossils spectacular at all?*

Clifford Pearce: There were ammonites, snail shells and belemnites, cylindrical, cigar-shaped fossils, and lots of small ones. There was also fossil dung, called coprolites and there were fossil plants - beautiful palm leaves and all sorts of vegetation. So there was a good variety.

Track 12 [0:1:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *Any mammals?*

Clifford Pearce: No, no mammals to my knowledge. I don't think there are any mammals in the Antarctic. Some giant penguins I think - 14ft high penguins was mentioned? I'm not sure about that. Fossil penguins, but no mammals, no. none at all.

Track 12 [0:1:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *When you think about this frozen land that you were trapped in, suffering every day, experiencing every day the cold temperatures and the desolateness of it all, and yet you know that in the dim and distant past that had been tropical territory, what did you think of that strange dichotomy?*

Clifford Pearce: Well I suppose as a geographer, and Brian was a jolly good geologist, you know we used to talk about it and say how marvellous it was... I'd read all about Alfred Wegener and his continental drift theories: we used to talk a lot about it. We didn't have many books to read at Fossil Bluff - we had about fifteen or sixteen - but one of the books we had was a geology book by two people, Crumline and Schloss [phonetic], and we used to have that in the tent while we were camping and John and I used to read great chunks of geology from it. But our main books that we used to read - fortunately we'd brought War and Peace and The Brothers Dostoevsky, and Evelyn Waugh and David Copperfield. But I can remember reading David Copperfield and Brideshead Revisited - two books in five or six days - so we soon got through our minor library. Miniscule.

Track 12 [0:2:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So how would you fill your time?*

Clifford Pearce: In my case I'd spend a lot of time writing, which did come to fruition eventually, many years afterwards. John was a brilliant painter, and his reason for coming down in the third year was to make a film, and he made a film which has been shown on the BBC - often in the form of snippets from it. So that was his task, painting and getting his film organised, and Brian spent the whole time geologising. He had a workbench and he had done so much work in the light - every minute of every day Brian would be up on the slopes, and so he had a vast amount of material to record and process. Specimens would be boxed up to take back to Birmingham when his time was finished. And of course then we had base duties - not many duties on such a small base, but we were on duty for one week in three, when we did the cooking and getting the fresh water and keeping the fire going - we had anthracite, and the anthracite was getting short towards the end. The rest of the time we used to love going out. There was a little valley nearby called Hollow Valley, where I could study everything as a geographer - the U-shaped valleys, the features of glaciation, and it gave us something to do. I think I could say we were never, never bored. We never played a game of cards in our whole time there. We used to have a Fossil Bluff Vocabulary Society, when one of us would pick out some ridiculous word from the dictionary, and we would learn it and put it up on the list. So we had words like nictitropic, turning in one direction at night, or concupiscence, and a vast variety of words, just to keep us interested.

Track 13 [0:0:32] Chris Eldon Lee: *Does this volume still exist?*

Clifford Pearce: It does - I was looking at it only a couple of days ago, yes, I forget how many words there are. And another thing, I nearly brought one to show you today, John, who was an artist, he did 1200 one and a half inch rectangles - a glossary of geographical terms, and we would feed him the terms and the dictionary, and he came up with 1200, and every one was a geographic definition and a picture. Some were very easy, like volcanoes, dykes, and pipes in volcanic rock and so on. But it was fabulous, and I treasure a copy of it which John gave me a few years ago. So we were fairly self-reliant. Brian had some arm springs, for developing his chest and muscles. We used to get on pretty well.

Track 13 [0:1:40] Chris Eldon Lee: *At the time, did you think the work you were doing was pioneering work, important?*

Clifford Pearce: Well, we knew we were the first down there, and subsequently I think the answer is it was a pretty good show. For example I wrote up the complete record of the meteorological observations at Fossil Bluff for nine months of the year, and that appeared in the first ever edition of the British Antarctic Survey Bulletin, a scientific report. One thing, Brian produced subsequently twelve top level scientific reports on all aspects of fossils and sedimentary rocks in the area. And John was successful in that he had his film, which is in use. So at the time I don't think we registered the pioneering nature of it, but when we look back - typical of the FIDS - we were at all these tiny bases doing a complete survey of the Antarctic Peninsula - a complete geological study of the Antarctic Peninsula, upper air physics, medical research. All these little bases put together a fantastic mosaic of scientific work. So the answer to the question is we were one tiny grain of sand in a big sand dune of information.

Track 13 [0:3:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *How were you finally relieved, how did you escape?*

Clifford Pearce: We were relieved by air on February 4th 1962 and we were flown back to Stonington Island, where we had a magical month at Stonington Island, the most historic base - Hope Bay is another one - for travel and research. Americans and British on the same island. So that was fascinating. And then from there, I think it was early in March, we got on board the John Biscoe, and travelled slowly up via Adelaide Island and the other bases, and up to the Falkland Islands, and then

South Georgia. Our first females were at South Georgia, three of them of the eighteen British colonial base, so to speak. Then back to the Falkland Islands and then up through the Atlantic back to Southampton. So the relief was a magical experience from the day we left Stonington Island to the day we arrived back at Southampton. It was all magical.

Track 13 [0:4:44] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was going to be nearly forty years before you got back, was that right?*

Clifford Pearce: It was going to be 2000 when I got back, so that was nearly forty years. I had a chance to join a cruise organised by the FIDS Club of old people like me.

Track 14 [0:0:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Veterans.*

Clifford Pearce: Veterans is the word, and we went down as far south as almost into Stonington Island, but not quite. We got to the farthest south of any tourist ship at that time, 68 degrees south, and we also called on - I think we had nineteen landings, on Rothera, the modern British base, and Adelaide Island and many of the islands, and a few new ones. So it was forty years. John Smith was on board, so it was a magical time for reminiscence.

Track 14 [0:0:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you shocked?*

Clifford Pearce: I wasn't shocked, I was sad. I was sad at the disappearance of the dogs. Because the dogs in Antarctica leave no trails. They travel over, and anything they might leave disappears. They leave no mark, whereas sledges and tractors and aircraft leave the trail of oil drums, and often equipment. So I was saddened at that change. But I recognise it needed to happen.

Track 14 [0:1:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *When I said shocked and surprised I meant at the retreat of the ice.*

Clifford Pearce: I was also surprised at the retreat of the ice, I think the Wordie Ice Shelf, down in southern Grahamland, has gone completely, and at Adelaide Island, where we struggled to build a base right at the foot of the ice piedmont, the ice had retreated up the slopes and there was bare rock. And at Deception Island in the summer I don't think there's any snow and ice at all. So yes, it is sad in many respects. But there is still a lot of ice and snow and wonderful landscapes to see. I know that at Fossil Bluff now, in the summer, the whole of the sound is a great lake, and that Fossil Bluff itself is sinking, and they're having to support it with various structures. And whereas the Otter that relieved us came up to within fifty yards of the front door, it can now only get to within a kilometre, right down on the sound. So there are massive changes in the snow and ice.

Track 14 [0:2:50] Chris Eldon Lee: *Did you spot any signs of global warming in 1961 at all?*

Clifford Pearce: No, not really. The only thing we experienced in 1962, believe it or not, was the effects of a tsunami in Chile, which actually spread across the seas, and the evidence was the ice had all been lifted up and broken, you know, irregularly. But that's not a warming feature, it's just a storm feature that happens. No I don't think we thought anything was going to change in 1960-62, not like it has now. I think another change that seems sad is the necessary intervention of health and safety, which must be severely restricting on what can be done. I mean John and Brian and I, in getting to one of the bases was really quite a hazardous journey. I myself was terrified, coming down this ice slope. But we got used to it, and we used to do it regularly. Nowadays you'd need a risk assessment and a troop of supporters to even consider it. And I think maybe it's lost a lot of its adventure and excitement. But it's still a beautiful place.

end

8,500words

NOTE:

Track 12, 0:1:42

Clifford refers to a book on geology by Crumline & Schloss. No title. Unable to check spelling.

Since the normal spelling of Cliff's surname is Pierce, is it worth putting a cross-reference in the index?

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