

PETER HOOPER

Edited transcript of interview with Peter Hooper conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at BAS HQ in Cambridge on 4th July 2009. Transcribed by Alex Gaffikin 22nd July 2011.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:00 sec] Peter Hooper: My name is Peter Hooper, Peter R Hooper. I was born in Edinburgh by chance. My family were actually living in Canada at the time and they were just visiting Edinburgh where my mother came from – in 29th January 1931 I think.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:27 sec] Chris Lee: *So are you a British, Scottish or Canadian?*

Peter Hooper: I am British, Canadian and American, how's that? I have passports for all three.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:00:34 sec] Chris Lee: *What were you doing before the Antarctic hove into view?*

Peter Hooper: I went to St Andrew's University I got a degree, first class, in geology and then I started a year's research, well I started a three year research PhD in the Scottish Hebrides, only to be told after a year that Professor Wager at Oxford regarded the Scottish Hebrides as his, and that no one else was allowed on, and my HARCA [phonetic] grant was ceased forthwith. So I found myself, I guess in the spring of 54 or summer of 54, without a job and without many prospects frankly after one year's research. And wasn't sure at the time whether that was a convenient excuse by my supervisor, for thinking I wasn't going to get very far, and he might as well terminate me or whether it was genuine. And I still don't absolutely know that. So anyway, I was there without a job. I then went off with a group of old friends from the university in an old London taxi, and toured through Europe into Yugoslavia, which was the first year they had opened up. It was called 'Belgrade or Bust', we had on our front, and we spent, I should think, almost two months driving round there and got back.

And I got back to find I'd missed an interview at Kings where I should have probably got a demonstratorship, they were very kind to me and even had me go along and talk to them a bit, but they had given it to somebody else so they really couldn't do much about it. So there I was without a job and then one of my friends was also looking for a job at the same time and noticed an advertisement for a geologist needed in the Falkland Island Dependency Survey. Well I had no idea what the Falklands Islands Dependency survey was.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:31 sec] Chris Lee: *But being Scottish, you knew it wasn't off the Hebrides...*

Peter Hooper: I knew like Bob it wasn't off the Hebrides, I had a vague idea it might be one of those groups of islands in the Southwest Pacific that we had so many of in the past and sort of rather vaguely. So I applied for this, any job...

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:02:45 sec] Chris Lee: *So you applied without looking at a map?*

Peter Hooper: Indeed! Fortunately before I went down for an interview I had discovered that the Falkland Islands Dependencies were in fact part of the Antarctic Peninsula etc. So I did discover before I went to the interview. So I went down and was interviewed, I was the only candidate – I knew that because when I sat outside the interview room, Johnny Green who was the assistant SecFIDS rushed by, Johnny Green was always late, rushed by, didn't quite close the door properly behind him and I heard him say as he approached the other two sitting at the desk, 'well this is the only guy we've got, I guess we've got to take him!' So that was good. So I went in and we had a brief interview, there wasn't much to be said.

Disc 1, Track 1 [0:03:33 sec] Chris Lee: *What do you remember about it? I guess therefore it wasn't too rigorous?*

Peter Hooper: No. I can't remember, none of them were geologists for a start, and they knew my history and degree and things, so it was I think quite brief. More importantly I then went along to see Vivian Fuchs at his desk and he had a large chunk of malachite from Anvers Island and this had been known for some time and he'd recently got a chunk from somebody from the Falkland Islands who'd picked it up from *Green Peak* just opposite Port Lockroy and he said, 'right we want someone to go and find out if there is anything significant.' Malachite of course is copper ore. 'Is there anything significant?' There is this great big green stain of what they call *Green Peak* in fact on the island, 'and we want you to go down and look around.'

Well I had a degree in geology it's true but it was entirely igneous geology and I'd never had a course or even a lesson in economic geology – I knew nothing about economic geology – nor did anyone else in my department for that matter, but that was never even brought up, that was never questioned. Fuchs never asked me if I knew anything about economic geology, at least I can't remember it so, and anyway so that was it and I was then told I was going to have all the bits and pieces of medicals and teeth looked at and whatever and this must have been quite late in September I think and told to report to Southampton on the 4th October. And I would sail south.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:05:10 sec] Chris Lee: *The notion that there might be copper on Anvers Island was a bit thin wasn't it?*

Peter Hooper: It was thin. Fuchs mentioned it in his book somewhere I think and points out that it was. Fuchs was looking for excuses to set up bases for scientific survey basically of any sort and he was heading up, Horseshoe Bay went up the same year and they came down together in fact, the two groups, in the following March, to

set up those two bases. So Fuchs was just looking for an excuse I think. It seemed a pretty good one. So there I was sent to Anvers Island to look for copper without the foggiest idea what I was supposed to be really looking for in terms of economic geology and the science of hydrothermal systems and such like which is what copper ore occurs in. I was an igneous petrologist, my interest was what was there and how did it get there. I was slightly more fundamental than the economic interest because that was what I was taught. That was my past and off I went.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:06:20 sec] Chris Lee: *How much did you know about the Antarctic at that point had you read the classic books, researched?*

Peter Hooper: No, No. I knew of Scott and Shackleton and, I am sorry to say with the Scott Polar Institute around the corner, that I always thought Shackleton was worth 20 Scotts. But that's an argument that's going to go on until time ends. Shackleton was a down to earth guy, my kind of guy, Scott was the establishment – too prone to sticking to what he thought should be as opposed to what actually was and made, I think, awfully silly mistakes because of that. But Shackleton didn't, remember that just before Scott, Shackleton had turned back, within relatively few miles of the Pole, and saved not only himself but his men. Scott did not. And that's the difference between them.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:20 sec] Chris Lee: *So you had a glimmer of this British history?*

Peter Hooper: Yes I had been to a good school, I had been to University. I was reasonably intelligent I hope. I had an idea, without any detail at all to any great extent.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:07:39 sec] Chris Lee: *How did you prepare yourself, you had to gather equipment together presumably?*

Peter Hooper: No we had no equipment. We weren't given any equipment. I wasn't even given a geological hammer I don't think. I did discuss with Fuchs what was needed down there because they are supposed to supply everything. I must have had spare clothes but not much more, I had nothing to my name. I had been a student on nothing for four or five years anyway and I sold. I think I had a two two rifle and a gown and a bicycle and I sold it all at St Andrews and that was my total sum fortunately enough to get me down to London, and probably to Southampton I had a brother living in London. And that was it so I didn't have a penny to my name, I didn't have any equipment. We were supposed to get equipment. I had discussed with Fuchs and that had created some problems later because I said I needed a microscope, I was brought up as an Igneous Petrologist, used to looking at thin sections under the microscope and section making equipment etc and which is very bulky stuff, not just a hammer and a sack. And Fuchs said, 'Yes that'll be fine, we'll make sure you get that.'

Of course I got down to Hope Bay and Anvers - I spent the first summer at Hope Bay - and no sign of any of this stuff and fortunately the Governor came in and I did say to the Governor with whom I had been skiing with he was very nice, Arthur was the Governor, he'd been around and we had been up skiing. He was an Olympic skier I think or a potential Olympic skier...

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:15 sec] Chris Lee: *The Governor of the Falkland Islands?*

Peter Hooper: Yes the Governor of the Falkland Islands. Governor Arthur, I forget his first name, but Port Arthur where Anvers was finally built was named after him. He came down with us. And I did say, point out, that this had been promised and hadn't turned up and it wasn't a good thing to be sent down without the adequate equipment. In fact I hardly ever used the microscope...

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:39 sec] Chris Lee: *You did get them?*

Peter Hooper: I did get them, they came down, by the time the Anvers ship came down in March, everything was there. So the Governor made it work. The Governor was like that, he was a man who made things work.

Disc 1, Track 2 [0:09:58 sec] Chris Lee: *Tell me what you made of Johnny Green?*

Peter Hooper: Bit of a scatterbrain I think, not an ideal SecFIDS. I slightly quarrelled with as I came out, having had a very good relationship with him in the first year. I got frustrated with him, it was largely my fault. I don't blame Johnny Green for that but I think he might have dealt with it a little bit better. He must have known that people get a bit sort of difficult at the end of two and a half years, because they were long two and half years and I was a bit frustrated.

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:10:31 sec] Chris Lee: *What were you frustrated by?*

Peter Hooper: We'd mapped most of the island both topographically and geologically, but there was the north east corner which was very mountainous, it was obviously a very different set of recent volcanics, we didn't know how recent, we had just got to the edge of them and got samples, but that was all we had. And we wanted to get in there. One of the reasons we climbed Mount Français, three times in fact eventually, was to try and get up there and look down on the north east corner and get some photographs and get some idea where we might get in. But that hadn't succeeded. We had eventually got our photographs but there seemed to be no way in, just straight cliffs with no way up at all. But we thought perhaps we could land on them by helicopter and we had mentioned this to Johnny Green and Johnny Green had been extremely helpful as he was all the way down the road until the last minute. And he had arranged for us to be picked up the Royal Navy ship (I forget which one it was point) but it had a helicopter on its back. And we went round to the north end of the island, the Melchior Islands just off the north end of Anvers and waited around there for a bit, found a decent day and I went up with the pilot and looked at one of these ridges and he dropped something down and the snow was obviously so deep and so

soft and they were very narrow ridges when you got up there. He said, ‘there is absolutely no way we can land, this isn’t going to work.’ So we had to accept that and that was that. We had tried and Johnny Green had gone to a lot of trouble to help us.

Unfortunately at that point the ship was called away on some emergency, virtually to Australia to meet up with some factory ship, the factory ship had been doing something wrong and they had to go and check on it, but they whipped off without dropping us back on Anvers or even Port Lockroy from where we could have got back home. They took us right the way out to a messy whale ship and then went back and dropped us off at Deception. And this was February if not March already and there was only one more boat going home and I had all my samples from two and a half years and all my notes to write up and get things ordered before I left the base....

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:12:56 sec] Chris Lee: ... *and they were at Anvers?*

Peter Hooper: ...and they were at Anvers. And here’s me stuck at Deception with absolutely no means of getting down there at all. And the last boat going home any minute now. I was a bit frustrated. Fortunately the *Oluf Sven* with the FIDASE group came into Deception and Jim Rennie was with them or he might have been dropped off in King George Island, I don’t know. But he was with that group at that stage. And what’s his name, the guy running FIDASE, the name escapes me but he’s written a book. He very kindly said, ‘well I think we are going down that way, we can get you at least to Port Lockroy.’ Which would have been perfectly adequate – in fact he took us all the way back to Anvers. So fortunately I had a week to 10 days to get myself sorted and get things organised and finally catch the last, I think it was the *Shackleton* took us back, the last boat out.

I was getting a bit above myself I think it was fair to say, at this stage. I couldn’t be bothered with – I could never be much bothered with – the organisation in Stanley we had very little communication with them. But I had basically arranged to transfer the leadership (I was base leader) to John Thompson, he was my deputy and he was the obvious person to take over, and I just sort of transferred, I said, ‘you take over now and I’ll tell Johnny Green’. Well that’s not the way Johnny Green liked to do it. Johnny Green was the guy who made these decisions, not me on the base, and it was a bit arrogant and not very tactful. I am sure Johnny Green would have taken my advice and made John Thompson, but that wasn’t quite the point. I’d just assumed that John would take over and told Johnny Green and not asked him. And so I think John had some reason to be a little pissed off...

Disc 1, Track 3 [0:14:56 sec] Chris Lee: ... *you weren’t doing things to the Queensbury’s Rules?*

Peter Hooper: I wasn’t doing things to the Queensbury’s Rules. I was frustrated. I was a bit angry. I was just generally at the end of my tether frankly, looking back at it. And I have a lovely photograph actually, of me sitting on the boat as it goes out, very depressed. But this guy, Dennis Kershaw, when I was away on this trip to the north

had agreed with John Thompson to take one of our little boats around to Port Lockroy, which we had done before a number of times. This wasn't new and it was mid-summer after all and we'd done it in winter as well as summer – which we shouldn't have done. That was no big deal. But then they had gone on from Port Lockroy right round to the base to the north, the recent base, north of Lockroy where he was going to next year, to spend some time with them.

And then when one of the boats came through with John Brown as the Captain, he'd been first mate when I'd come down, he was another very arrogant man, a very foolish man I think, for the record. But he was first mate then and was now Captain of the new *Shackleton* or *Biscoe*, whatever it was, and when Dennis Kershaw who was a Lancashire guy and very outspoken and said what he thought and wasn't always very tactful, came alongside and said 'would you please take me back to Anvers? I want to get back to Anvers and pick up my stuff.' And John Brown was very cross. He didn't think Dennis should be there, he shouldn't be playing around in boats, little boats, and of course the Captains of those ships are the bosses at this stage, above any base leader, above anyone else. They're the boss. So he refused to take Dennis on board and wrote a very angry note to John Green saying this should be stopped. These people shouldn't be fooling around in little boats. We'd been doing it for 2 and a half years, most of our work was done that way frankly. So Johnny Green then said, 'ok' so then he sent out a memo to everybody: no more little boating, I can't remember what this thing said, no more than half a mile from base or something.

And I got note of this just as I was getting back to Anvers and thought that was very silly and I was not in the best of moods. I basically wrote a little note to Johnny Green saying I thought this was a bit stupid – I can't remember what I wrote – I probably wasn't quite as tactless as that. I was certainly criticising his decision. And again John didn't like that, as you can well imagine. And obviously concluded that I was getting much too big for my boots and that was that. So Johnny and I didn't get on too well.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:17:52 sec] Chris Lee: *Was there any ??? [inaudible]*

Peter Hooper: No, nothing ever came up. It was sad in a sense because we had such a great first year. John came down with lots of others and we were obviously the heroes of the year so to speak and we'd been at base all year and got a lot of work done. John was obviously very pleased, as was Fuchs and other people. And it was sad therefore that after two and a half years, it ended sadly. In so far that we didn't see eye-to-eye. But it was mainly my fault I think.

Disc 1, Track 4 [0:18:40 sec] Chris Lee: *Let's back track a bit: That was the end of the experience, we've have flashbacks to the beginning of your experiences and I think we have you heading off first to Anvers or did you go somewhere else first?*

Peter Hooper: No, no. One of the things about FIDS in those days was that you had a complete lack of communication. You had London trying to run things, you had Stanley trying to run things and then you had people on the bases trying to run things

and they seldom met up properly and agreed. I had basically gone down to go to Anvers as far as Fuchs was concerned. I got to Stanley and given this miserable equipment we were given, old ex-army stuff which was completely inappropriate, and then sent on down on board the boat, only to learn when I got to Hope Bay that a Hope Bay party of four including a geologist who was leaving that year, had been designated to go and look at Anvers for a possible base site and of course this had been arranged by Hope Bay, so I was unknown and wasn't involved. I raised this – I went down with Bill Anderson who was the new coming in base leader and base BAS leader in fact, FIDS leader, and pointed out that I was meant to be coming to Anvers and wasn't involved in this. So Bill who had just arrived, as the new base leader couldn't very well change all the arrangements that had been made but he did let me go on down on the boat as the replacement should anyone fall out.

So I went on down but they weren't really interested in getting on Anvers Island, all but one of them was leaving anyway that year, and from Port Lockroy they made one brief attempt to go around the south coast into Biscoe Bay and then said no, they couldn't see anything interesting and so they came back. And we were going to try on the way out but we got stuck in the ice off the Argentine Islands so it took us a week or two longer than expected down there and then on the way back Bill Johnson, the Captain of the *Biscoe*, said 'no, we've got to get back.' So we went out round the outside of Anvers and no other attempt was made. But that was a sort of indication of the lack of communication between these three areas of control there.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:21:08 sec] Chris Lee: *Was that because the communications weren't there? Or because they weren't listening to each other?*

Peter Hooper: Well I think they didn't want to know...

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:21:15 sec] Chris Lee: *London was a far off country...*

Peter Hooper: London was a far off country. Stanley had no particular interest in the geology of Anvers Island. Fuchs said, what was the SecFIDS? It wasn't Johnny Green he was still in London at that stage. I forget his name now but the SecFIDS was in Stanley. And there was the base leader in Hope Bay. And I imagine Stanley had told Hope Bay, 'get a party out and see if you can find a place on Anvers Islands to build a hut.' So he'd done so but it didn't involve me, my name was never involved, and that's lack of communication, I suppose Fuchs might have mentioned that I was coming down, and obviously never did. He had other things on his mind, he was preparing his trans-Antarctic trip. So that was that.

So I went back to Hope Bay and stayed off in Hope Bay for the summer, which was very nice, I enjoyed Hope Bay. And did a little bit of geology round there, it had all been pretty well done around the base, wasn't much to do I just enjoyed myself really. A little bit of boating and I went out on two short sledge trips with Joe Lewis and Alan Precious which was very useful with dogs. So when we went to Anvers eventually I was the only person who had any knowledge of (a) the normal FIDS

processes and how the bases worked basically and (b) driving sledges and dogs. So I stayed there until early March when the *Norsel* came down from London with the Anvers group and the Horseshoe Bay group and picked me up and I was told I was going to be base leader.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:07 sec] Chris Lee: *At Anvers?*

Peter Hooper: Before I left Hope Bay. I think I put that down to my discussions with the Governor originally. Obviously made some sort of impact.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:15 sec] Chris Lee: *So it sounds like you were surprised that you were made the base leader?*

Peter Hooper: Yes I had no suspicion that I'd be made base leader, no. I might easily have stayed at Hope Bay because they had a big sledging programme and I would have been quite happy to participate in that as the geologist going down the east coast, and that would have been fun as well. But I had to make a decision - I think the decision was mine but I can't be sure of that now. I think I just said 'No, I'll go to Anvers,' and was made base leader.

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:23:45 sec] Chris Lee: *So when you got to Anvers, to the location for the base, what was there? Nothing?*

Peter Hooper: Nothing at all. I think this was quite well written up in Fuchs's book. Because Ken, who was in charge of the *Norsel* going south, was heading up both these bases, went round and we drove round into what is now called Arthur Harbour. In a nice little cut off bay with an excellent place, bare rock, for building a hut on, and it looked like a pretty good slope up behind and in fact Ken and the Governor and I, the Governor was with us again, went up the slope and saw that there was a clear way up onto the plateau so we could get around the island from the base. And that was that. We managed to persuade the Governor to keep the ships there longer than they were meant to be there to help us do the first hard work of building a hut and doing all the cementing of the bottom and doing that part. So we got away to a very good start both from the *Norsel* and the *Biscoe*. I think the Governor was on the *Biscoe* actually came in later but it was excellent we had a good start and got the whole hut built in a month and living in it.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:25:01 sec] Chris Lee: *So priority number one was to get some walls and a roof up?*

Peter Hooper: Absolutely and to get ourselves inside. Yes we were living under a bit of canvas sitting on top of some packing boxes. So we were very glad to get inside.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:25:17 sec] Chris Lee: *Did you have any design input?*

Peter Hooper: No, none at all, everything was packaged, the whole hut was packaged. We had a very good, a very versatile carpenter Arthur Shorey who had been in the

army since he was 16 and was just come out and he was the elder statesman in our group – he was at least three years older than the rest of us and there were bits missing as there always are with these things, too few nails or too many nails or something – can become quite critical if bits are missing – we got some sent in, perhaps they'd gone down to Horseshoe Bay, but anyway we got some bits back, to finish off, so we were all right.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:04 sec] Chris Lee: *So describe the base – what was it like? A brand new base, first time ever...*

Peter Hooper: Absolutely, we called it Skua Lodge.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:26:08 sec] Chris Lee: *Talk me round it.*

Peter Hooper: Well you go in the normal door, the door that was nearest the shore where we landed, and met people and you walked into a little lobby, there was the bathroom, loo and there was a sort of tub for a bath on the right hand side and straight ahead was the sledge workshop where Arthur Shorey – incidentally – we had these dog sledges which were meant for dogs but were quite heavy. We had no dogs the first year we had to man haul and these were very heavy to man haul and Arthur, who's skill still amazes me, took that sledge apart and split every timber in it in half, to make it lighter, and put it together again. Two sledges and they both lasted us for two years. It was remarkable.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:05 sec] Chris Lee: *Was that something he did off his own bat?*

Peter Hooper: Yes, his own bat. We decided it was too heavy and we needed to modify it.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:27:10 sec] Chris Lee: *You didn't need to refer back up to Stanley?*

Peter Hooper: We'd have heard nothing. We had no adequate wireless communication. We had John Canty with us who had been in the merchant navy and had some vague knowledge of Morse code, I wouldn't put it more than that, but the only transmitter we had was a pedalling machine. We had nothing else. So you had to pedal and do your Morse at the same time. I know how difficult it was because the second year, our operator was taken away from us and sent down to Horseshoe Bay because theirs had come out rapidly and it was more important that they had one, than it was for us. So I had to do it and my Morse code was virtually zero. Boy Scouts was as far as I'd ever got with it. And I know how difficult it was pedalling and trying to do Morse code things. I had to do some code to Johnny Green because they were confidential regarding the base – how things were going sometimes. And it was very difficult.

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:28:07 sec] Chris Lee: *Was it a case of patting your stomach and rubbing your head?*

Peter Hooper: Something like that yes. It was really quite difficult. It was in the loft and it got very hot up there, with heat coming up from the rest of the house. But we had John Canty the first year, we had six the first year, but we only had five the second because our operator had been taken away. So where was I? Oh yes the shop was there. Then you turned right into the kitchen which had a big Esse stove, very efficient, which we had to set up of course. And a big tank for putting ice into to make water. And a lot of storage cupboards. And a table and benches behind and some chairs and that was about it. And then we move into the far side of that and into the corridor that ran along the far side of the hut and turn right and into the living room bed room – the major room of the house. Where Arthur built a very nice little bar. While we were away and caught out in Lockroy he built this beautiful little bar – we did have some beer to drink with us. And then the bunks were two levels on two sides. And a big stove for burning. We had a lot of coal so we could burn, we could make a big fug in there if we wanted to. Further down the corridor there was a printing room for developing photographs – dark room – then on the right was my little office which was used for the survey and for the geological survey and as my base leader office, where we had the post office, because not only was I base leader I was also Post Master General

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:29:57 sec] Chris Lee: *Was there much call for that in the 1950s?*

Peter Hooper: Well there was no other communication. We had no emails, no wireless. We occasionally got a radio – they had a system where every so often, once a month was it? There was a little programme for Fids that came out from London and different people came on to speak, family members came to speak, Hillary someone was running that, or somebody who became quite well known later. He ran that. My fiancée, well my girlfriend at the time, my father had gone back to Canada, so she was the nearest I had, and she came on once or twice. To great amusement to all my friends.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:30:43 sec] Chris Lee: *The radio programme could only be heard in the Antarctic or could it be heard everywhere?*

Peter Hooper: I don't know.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:30:50 sec] Chris Lee: *Was it the world service?*

Peter Hooper: Must have been. I imagine it must have gone out on a special line I don't imagine, but I don't know.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:00 sec] Chris Lee: *So in the post office you were just dealing with letters from the six of you?*

Peter Hooper: Yes, we wrote letters and sent them out, sometimes other people dropped letters off for us.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:09 sec] Chris Lee: *From a tourist boat going past?*

Peter Hooper: Not that a tourist boat was ever heard of in those days! No, that wouldn't have been allowed.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:31:15 sec] Chris Lee: *Was it a picturesque setting – was it particularly spectacular?*

Peter Hooper: That part of the Antarctic is probably, I think, the prettiest part of the whole of Antarctica, it is extremely. Port Lockroy on to Anvers perhaps just north and just south is perhaps, the Gerlache straits – I forget the straits to the south, they've got a name – are quite dramatic. Français on Anvers is the highest mountain north of the Circle in Antarctica. So it is spectacular. Ice and rock. Blue sea and blue sky. Lots and lots of animals. Birds and beasts of various sorts. So it is very spectacular, I still think it is the most spectacular – that's why everyone goes to Port Lockroy, in these tourist ships, it is the most spectacular spot. You don't really need to go further to see spectacular Antarctica.

Disc 1, Track 7 [0:32:20 sec] Chris Lee: *As you embarked on your two years in Anvers Island, what were your feelings? Were you nervous, concerned as base leader?*

Peter Hooper: I wasn't nervous at all; I've never been of a nervous disposition at all. But I was, mixed feelings. I had just decided that I wanted to get married. And discussed this with my future wife and we are talking about days before I left now, and we decided it probably was quite a good thing to do. But clearly we didn't want to tie each other down over two years, so nothing was official and she was still at St Andrews and had another year there before coming down to work in London. And I of course had two years away. But it was a great joke on the ship going down, because I don't know how it came out but something came out and it became known that Caroline was my girlfriend and lots and lots of fun and games were had around that, which was fine. She sent messages, she sent music and things on the ship before we'd even got to our bases. She'd organised music, records and things to be played – as had others of course, but this was my component. So leaving one's potential fiancée for two years seemed a bit bizarre to put it mildly.

It became more bizarre as time went on in a way – I realised just how, what an extraordinary thing to do really. It was particularly difficult after the first year which had been very successful and great fun, people liked Jim Rennie and others, and we'd done a lot of work. And felt very pleased with ourselves and happy – then they all left, every one of them left except me. So I had a whole new crew the second year and of course they were gung ho and knew everything and none of them had been down before – actually one had, one had been at Signy the year before, John Bull. But on the whole they were new and just like we had been the year before and knew it all I had to sort of try to compromise between being the old hand and telling them what to do and not trampling on their enthusiasm. We had a much more difficult job the second year. We had to work along the coast which was an almost impossible survey

job. We were up the top and trying to look down and the coast was always in mist, the surveyors could never see what they were looking for at that point. And there was very little rock along there for me to work on so it was a much more difficult ???[inaudible].

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:02 sec] Chris Lee: *Was it bad policy then to send a whole new team out – would you have advised against that? Or was it just the way it worked? Everybody wanted to go home?*

Peter Hooper: First of all it was just the way it worked. Everyone else on the base had signed on for one year, I had signed on for two. That was as simple as that. I am sure they wouldn't contemplate that sort of organisation now as I say it was a pretty screwed up people trying to make things work, with very little money I suspect, to play with. And every bit of money people like Fuchs had to scrounge for and so these things were just part of the process I guess.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:42 sec] Chris Lee: *So you embarked upon a two year quest to find copper on Anvers Island?*

Peter Hooper: That's basically what it amounted to.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:35:50 sec] Chris Lee: *How did you go about that?*

Peter Hooper: Well we had to go out and first of all find out where we could get, and we had numerous sledge trips – all man hauling I would say. I don't know if you know, I forget who is the guy who worked in Greenland? Very well-known explorer in Greenland from Cambridge, Gino Watkins, made some remark about man hauling being the 'silliest and most perverse activity human beings ever undertook.' And indeed sometimes pulling a sledge in conditions that weren't very good, was pretty frustrating. It was hard work, jolly good for us – we were very fit by the end of it. And we learnt ways around it – including making lighter sledges, working at night when it was colder in the summer and things like that. So we learnt lots of tricks and became quite efficient at it. But we did get dogs the second year.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:36:50 sec] Chris Lee: *So did you find any copper?*

Peter Hooper: There was lots of copper malachite, staining, but we didn't find any copper, no, the answer was that copper was never found, never has been found. But there was, not so much where they had seen the staining which was opposite Port Lockroy, in a place called *Green Peak*, but around the base was in fact, as it turned out, a very large what they would now call, a hydrothermal area. Which is the sort of thing which produces minerals; zinc and copper and all these sorts of things. With veins and alterations, hot waters coming through and altering the rocks and depositing these elements these minerals and metals largely. Well I wasn't an economic geologist, so I didn't recognise it. And I think that it was so early, economic geology was evolving very fast at that stage, I'm not sure that many others would have noticed it. Certainly when I got back and described all these rocks – I did describe them as

being very odd and metasomatised and different from what one might have expected. And Ray Adie, the geologist in charge at Birmingham, and my supervisor - not my supervisor my examiner – from my PhD, Nockolds from Cambridge (he was a very well known geologist), neither reading my thesis or reading my descriptions, came up and said, ‘oh this is a hydrothermal zone’. So I am not sure that I was all that off beam. But people did go in 10, 20, 30 years later and realised that it was a major hydrothermal area. And had therefore some economic potential. I don’t think it has ever materialised its potential – it’s just remained potential.

But there were, as one nice report written by in this case the Argentines, the Chileans and the Americans went in before the British went back, the British report did say, made some remark about, ‘it was remarkable that Britain had had a geologist sitting on top of this for two years and the hydrothermal, they had not been recognised’. Very mildly rebuked! He was quite right of course. But I knew nothing but I was interested, fascinated by the evidence of metasomasis – I wasn’t wrong in calling it metasomatism – it was metasomatic hot liquids coming through and altering the rocks, in a slightly bizarre way in many ways. And it was quite intriguing. We had a lot of these little islands around the base that we could look at in some detail as opposed to the bits of rock up on the main mountain on the main island, which were much less accessible. So I was able to do quite a lot of quite detailed geology around the bases sometimes.

Disc 1, Track 8 [0:39:46 sec] Chris Lee: *Was it important work?*

Peter Hooper: The simple answer to that is no, I am sorry to say. Both topographically and geologically. It was important in the sense that we established on larger maps what sort of rocks were where and how they fitted in basically with what was on the east coast, Hope Bay and ???[inaudible] further south, so it was important geologically in the broad sense and had to be done. But in terms of understanding what was done later by people who understood the systems and went in and looked at it in some detail, ours was fairly superficial. I can say that I at least drew their attention to something a little bit different there. But that’s about as much as I can say. In terms of the topographic survey like Jim Rennie who did so much work, plane-tableing and using triangulations, so much work and worked so hard, before he’d finished they’d started the air survey for FIDASE which he later joined. But that put all the ground work, other than locating particular points for the air photos to pin themselves down on – basically all that detailed work was virtually useless. And then of course before that had finished, the satellites came in, and that became useless. So it was almost all done by machine from the satellites. So in a sense this is how things evolve. So you can say in a way, our science was of limited short term value.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:46 sec] Chris Lee: *But isn’t all science constantly being usurped?*

Peter Hooper: Absolutely. It just seemed particularly obvious in that area.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:41:52 sec] Chris Lee: *Did it frustrate you?*

Peter Hooper: Well at the time I wasn't frustrated because I had long gone before this became obvious. I was doing my own thing elsewhere and didn't have to worry about it.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:05 sec] Chris Lee: *Tell me about some of the dangers, everybody says, health and safety never heard of it in those days...*

Peter Hooper: ... never heard of it absolutely, thank goodness!...

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:42:14 sec] Chris Lee: *...did you have any moments where if there had been a health and safety manual you may have reached for it?*

Peter Hooper: I doubt it. We'd have dropped it down the nearest crevasse if we found we had such a thing. Oh yes, very dangerous. It was a matter of common sense and a lot of luck. We lived, we worked on this island which was covered largely in ice which was full of crevasses, which were very deep and very dangerous. I remember once, for example, skiing with our supposed mountaineer... Jim Rennie was the real mountaineer, he was the natural mountaineer... but we'd had someone who had trained as a mountaineer, came down as a gash hand and mountaineer and he was slightly health-and-safety type approach because that is what he'd been taught. He'd had a course. A very short course I think but he'd had a course. And we were skiing down, trying to get down to the sea on this very long slope which was criss-crossed with crevasses of various sorts and sizes. And none of us could ski adequately, we were all just beginning to find our feet, and the skis were extremely poor skis I have to say, we were given the most desperate equipment. And this guy insisted that we wore a rope because that's what the book said, when you were on a crevassed area you wear a rope. But can you imagine people who can't ski anyway on solid ice, on skis couldn't even stand up, never mind move, and then have a rope tied to you as well with someone else tugging at you, pulling the other way? It was simple chaos. Anyone could have been pulled into a crevasse by being pulled in by somebody else. So I had to jump in and say, 'sorry but we can't use ropes here, this is ridiculous.' So we took the ropes off but I don't think he ever regained me overruling him in that sense. But he had problems anyway and he tended to stay on base for the rest of the year. He was a good cook and happy to stay on base so that was very convenient.

Disc 1, Track 9 [0:44:19 sec] Chris Lee: *Was there particularly a moment when you thought your time was up?*

Peter Hooper: Many times, quite honestly. We had problems with the boat. We had problems on land. We had one very big wind storm one night at Hope Bay I think and maybe even lost somebody that night. You know if you lose your tent in those sort of conditions, this was not mid-summer this was well into the year, this storm sort of flattened our two poles I think. We spent the night trying to hold the tent down. One of us went out and tried to put more snow in the sleeves which is how you normally

hold the tent down but it just blew away. The tent began to tear and we just hung on all night basically. And we thought we were very lucky to get through it because if that tent had gone we were finished, we had nothing to protect us at all.

That was one particular occasion on land but on boats we did a lot of boating and we shouldn't have done at mid-winter. Boating at mid-summer is dangerous enough and as I said earlier that some people thought we shouldn't be using the boats at all, never mind using them as working tools. Because they were only little things with those terrible little outboard motors, I forget what they are called, but they are the most bizarre outboards. They were terribly light and they were always breaking down. The outboards you see now are so solid and dependable – these were not. They could break in almost any way. Jim Rennie and I did a lot of boating. And I always think Jim saved my life probably about half a dozen times by being a little cooler and having more common sense than I. I was a bit gung ho and said 'let's get home'...

Disc 1, Track 10 [0:46:19 sec] Chris Lee: *but as base leader you should have been ensuring the safety of your men at all times...*

Peter Hooper: I should have been. But our base was not one that needed a leader, if I can put it that way. We were a very democratic lot, we were a sensible lot I think. And when someone had a view they gave it, and if it sounded on the whole more sensible. And Jim was on the whole very sensible, I relied a great deal on Jim.

There was an occasion when we were landing at *Deep* [phonetic] ??? [inaudible] along the shore – just a day's boating trip from the base – but there were adiabatic winds coming in – you know suddenly the wind gets up and blows offshore from the ice off the sea and very strong. And we'd just landed with some difficulty on a rather rocky point, we shouldn't have tried to land. We'd got our stores ashore, the depot we needed to leave, and then just managed to push off with difficulty with the waves fairly big and then the engine faltered and wouldn't start. I forget the details now, it's written down somewhere. Something came off and the wind was taking us further and further from the shore. And we couldn't get the damn boat to go, the oars were useless because there was only one of us, the other one was fiddling with the engine and I was trying to steady with the oars. But the sea was very rough, and one doesn't think, you've got to get that engine to go again – I forget what happened, something fell off it. And we had to make some substitute or something. But we did eventually manage to get the engine to go again. And after a long fight against the wind we managed to get back to where we'd started and spend the night there. I think we may have spent two nights there because I was a bit anxious to get home, back to base the next day because I was worried that the base would get worried that we hadn't come back. That was my main concern that they might then contact Stanley and say that two men were lost or something. But the sea was still rough and I remember Jim quite specifically saying, 'no way, this is too rough, we shouldn't go.' And he was right. And we didn't go, we went the next day. And got back the base they weren't getting worried about us at all, so that was fine.

Then there was the big occasion and this was right over mid-winter, and we'd gone over to Lockroy. They'd picked us up in their boat and taken us over. They had one boat and an old boat that was sunken under mud and things and had been abandoned. And after mid-winter we had tried to get back and that was a long long story. The fascinating thing that always fascinated me was Bob Whittock, Jim Rennie and I – this was the most dramatic adventure we had for all three of us – and our stories were so different, you can't imagine how different! To me it was all sort of one day, in actual fact it was three days, we have this because it's written in the official base report and Jim and Bob's memories were much better than mine.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:50:00 sec] Chris Lee: *In a nutshell, what was the incident?*

Peter Hooper: Well the incident was that we were trying to use their boat to get back around the south end of Anvers Island and back to our base which was quite a long journey even in the best of times, and this was mid-winter. And the ice came in and the ice went out and the ice came in and the ice went out and the winds came up and the winds went down. It was foolhardy to be out – no normal base with more sense would be out running around in boats, they wouldn't be running around at all sledging, never mind boats.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:50:35 sec] Chris Lee: *Yet you presumably had approved this?*

Peter Hooper: I had approved it, I had led it! I had led the charge I'm afraid. Yes, we were gung ho we all agreed it was a good thing to do – we were going to try it. At that age it's a question of 'let's try it'!

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:50:50 sec] Chris Lee: *Did the immortality thinking creep in? Were you thinking, 'we are immortal'?*

Peter Hooper: More or less. We tried to get back, we got stuck in pack, our engine failed, we got stuck on a neighbouring island to Port Lockroy. We could see them and they could see us. But we couldn't get across to them. At one stage I can remember we were stuck in the ice and the ice was too thin to walk on, too thick to push the boat through with the oars and I remember thinking that the only thing to do was to go to sleep. And if you do that you probably not going to wake up. I can remember quite consciously thinking, 'well that's a shame, lots of things I haven't done, I haven't got married, I haven't done any of these nice things I'd like to do sometime.' But that's it. Curious that I wasn't frightened in any sense, I don't think, it was just slightly sad. That's what I remember. And of course in the first instance we were fighting so hard to get the boat back onto land against the big sea your adrenalin is flowing so fast you don't think of anything – you are just trying to get yourself going, the boat going. But this was the occasion when there was nothing we could do. We couldn't move the boat either way and we were just there. And we drifted back onto the other island and were able to get out there.

Bob will tell you some of that tale as well I think – he’s written it out – he’s written his part out. And of course he had an even more dramatic part of that because having taken us back eventually to our own island, he and Alan Carroll were on the way back and that’s where I told you about that incident where Bob got a bit irate with Alan to put it mildly, which was just a build-up of many weeks and months of frustration in both their cases. He’ll tell you this I’m sure, and it’s written up in the BAS bulletin and newsletter. But they were unloading their boat and the groundsheet blew away and he’d tried to pick it up and then he went out and he’d dumped his engine already so only had oars and then it was dark and he was gone and he was blown away from the land – those adiabatic winds again take you away so quickly. He went right round this big Doumer Island [phonetic] to the south of Lockroy and came up on the far side and fortunately managed to trundle back.

But that was a real epic because Bob was not one of us. He wasn’t one of the people going out sledging every day. They were in a static base. They weren’t supposed to leave their base more than 10 feet or something ridiculous and so he was not sort of fit like we were, used to pulling sledges around all over the island. He was not fit and if he’d asked me at that time; could any one walk along, and if you’d ever seen a picture of the sea, but it’s a huge cliff I don’t know how many, 2,000 feet straight up and just a block of ice along the bottom. With huge cuts into it and I would have said it would have been virtually impossible for anyone to walk along that – and Bob did it. On his own. And got back. Absolutely extraordinary. I do think it was extraordinary.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:26 sec] Chris Lee: *Looking back do you think there was rather too much fool hardiness?*

Peter Hooper: Was there too much fool hardiness? That’s a good question. I suppose the answer to that has to be yes. I think that’s right. And certainly the second year I am sure I was much more circumspect.

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:54:45 sec] Chris Lee: *You did learn from it?*

Peter Hooper: We had a duller job to do anyway. We still had some interesting little bits and pieces, but yes I think we were more circumspect. I guess I felt slightly more responsible in the sense that everyone else was new and I was supposed to be the person who knew things. In the first year we were all new and equally ignorant.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:55:05 sec] Chris Lee: *How were relations generally in the Antarctic? People say that people generally get on well with everyone else.*

Peter Hooper: I told you about the problems at Port Lockroy where clearly there was a problem about leadership and the natural leader and the imposed leader in a way. It’s not that the imposed leader wasn’t quite a strong character he’s had a very interesting later career in fact and done a lot of very interesting things. So it wasn’t that, it was just that at the time he was in conflict with virtually everyone else on the base and

there was a natural leader there who had to sort of work around this and did, and they all survived.

But at our own base, there is always somebody who is a little bit more awkward and difficult to fit in than the others and in both my two years there, there was one such person. The first time, the guy who trained as a mountaineer and went down and he hadn't said he's had a bad back – he'd done something to his back in his youth and he hadn't told anyone about this, which he should have done. And so this cropped up. So he basically after one or two man hauling – man hauling was not the ideal thing for someone in this situation. And I think I am right in saying it was him and not the guy in the second year who was somewhat frightened of crevasses. Crevasses are one of those things that some people just take for granted and deal with and other people have a thing about them. They just can't take crevasses. So he tended to stay on base after the first few couple of months and he didn't mind that. He was quite a good cook and so we always had nice scones and cookies and things when we got back to base which was very nice.

And something the same happened in the second year, I think it was, when I did recommend that this guy go out. I don't know whether he is still around actually, we haven't been able to contact him and find out what happened to him. I think it was he who had a real fear of crevasses and actually didn't want to go out when it came down to it. And he again was an excellent cook, was happy to stay at home. And then we had dogs and we couldn't take out all the dogs out on a trip and we had to leave some dogs behind and the puppies of course as well. So we did need someone on base and he did that job very well. But he was, from my point of view as base leader, probably not from his point of view, a difficult person and tended to quarrel with others. He was down for two years and I did suggest to John Green that it was wiser to take him out rather leave him for a second year.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:20 sec] Chris Lee: *Did it happen?*

Peter Hooper: It did happen, yes. It was the only time I did ever felt necessary to do that.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:27 sec] Chris Lee: *Difficult to answer this one but do you think that was underlyingly typical of every base – the constant stories of peace and harmony are rosy coloured spectacles?*

Peter Hooper: Absolutely.

Disc 1, Track 12 [0:58:39 sec] Chris Lee: *You think there was always tensions on every base?*

Peter Hooper: Absolutely. I know at Hope Bay where I spent that first summer that there was a very old hand called John Tait who had been down four or five times, he'd been a lighthouse keeper, tough as nuts and a great character and knew it all. And then there was Bill Anderson who was a major in the army or had been, and was

made base leader, in fact leader of the whole organisation down on the bases as boss, and I know when they went on their long trip, they had real problems much like the ones at Lockroy when people got very very upset. To the point where somebody might have come to grief. I know when Bill flew out, he was only there for a year, and came out through Anvers, for some reason he was picked up in a helicopter at Anvers and taken off in the naval ship, rather special treatment but anyway... But he was a very chastened man when he went out. Bill was very gung ho going down, going to make really something of this, which was great. And John Tait was his big mate. I've got pictures in the back here of him and John having fun together but you know these tensions arise particularly when you are under pressure and things aren't going too well. But they never come out. Bill's book which you probably know about, I don't think there is any discussion of that or any mention of that at all.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:00:20 sec] Chris Lee: *And is rank – or discussion about rank – a key factor? There is some internal debate about who should be in charge?*

Peter Hooper: To me there was and should be. My complaint about the FIDS organisation and particularly people like Johnny Green, he was assistant SecFIDS, I forget the name of the chap who was SecFIDS at the time, their concept was, it was British class really, if you were an officer class you were the boss no matter how young or inexperienced you might be, was my complaint. Fortunately none of us on our base... Bill Hindson was a little bit like that, in the sense that he had just been doing his two years in the navy and was brought in in the last minute and was a little bit like that, but he was very junior, he was younger than any of us, so it never arose. But that was the sort of guy who two years later might have been made base leader by someone like Johnny Green. And that would have been unfortunate. Not that Bill wasn't anything but a great member of the team.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:32 sec] Chris Lee: *So the root cause is the establishment really?*

Peter Hooper: I think a lot of it was this concept, it would never happen in the States I don't think, certainly not in the western States.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:40 sec] Chris Lee: *Talking of establishment, you had a visit from Prince Phillip?*

Peter Hooper: We did indeed. January 1st 1957. We had been warned that the ship would be coming in.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:01:53 sec] Chris Lee: *The Britannia?*

Peter Hooper: *The Britannia* didn't come in, he changed ship. I think *The Britannia* stayed at Lockroy or off Lockroy and he came in and arrived an hour early which didn't help. That was very straightforward really. Didn't last long, two or three hours at the most.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:17 sec] Chris Lee: *What was the point?*

Peter Hooper: Just to visit the bases I think. He was coming back from Australia, he was on his way back. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

But Parker his assistant came with him, and old man Priestley was there and Johnny Green was there and one or two others. It was a very nice party.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:02:47 sec] Chris Lee: *You showed him round?*

Peter Hooper: We showed him round and Dennis tried to make him take the dogs out for a little run of the dogs sled. Unfortunately the snow was much too soft, it was right in the middle of the summer, a very hot day I think. So he and Dennis had to push the sledge. Which wasn't quite what was intended. But it worked very well. It was a little bit awkward in the sense that you didn't quite know how much ... I remember myself hovering around a little bit. He and Parker sort of wandered off on their own. And obviously they wanted to be on their own but I wasn't sure if I should be around to know if they wanted anything else or not so I sort of hovered at a distance from them. Wondering if I should be there or not. But that was the only thing. Otherwise it went very well, we had a drink.

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:44 sec] Chris Lee: *Did you paint the toilet in true Royal fashion?*

Peter Hooper: No, but we had tidied up!

Disc 1, Track 13 [1:03:49 sec] Chris Lee: *Again, perhaps in retrospect do you think that was kind of something to do with Britain's claim to the Antarctic?*

Peter Hooper: Oh I am sure it was. At that stage there was still sort of occasional rumpuses with the Argentinians in particular, I think the Chileans were much more pleasant but I think the Argentinians, their bases were all run by their services, their army and equivalent. Not by amateurs like the British bases. So they were inclined to be more arrogant and anti-British. We made John Edwards, Wyn as running a hydrosurvey in that '57 year I think before the Duke came by, or after I don't know. He had this 30 foot motor boat for doing his hydrographic survey and he spent some weeks at Anvers and some weeks at Lockroy. And then I persuaded him to take us around the island, hoping I could get off at all the rock that stuck out and see at least what they were. Didn't work very well because he was in too much of a hurry. But we did land at the Melchior Islands, the Argentinians had a base on the north end of our island and we got a very unpleasant welcome there. They didn't want to see us. That slightly surprised me because I think at Hope Bay when there was both bases they were getting on perfectly well, there was none of this nonsense. But there was still this legal thing; when someone took in a notice which said you shouldn't be here.

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:05:25 sec] Chris Lee: *A protest note?*

Peter Hooper: A protest note yes, that was going on. But on the whole it was fairly affable. They had to live there for the winter together so there wasn't much, but there had been problems with guns of course in the past.

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:05:41 sec] Chris Lee: *Were they the best years of your life?*

Peter Hooper: Were they the best years of my life? Probably. That first year in particular was really great fun. It would be difficult to think of another year that was as exciting, different and made me so fit, I've never been fitter as you can imagine.

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:06:01 sec] Chris Lee: *Was Caroline waiting for you when you got back?*

Peter Hooper: She was, she was. She's waiting for me in the car now!

Disc 1, Track 14 [1:06:13 sec] Chris Lee: *In which case I'd better let you go.*

Peter Hooper: Thanks a lot.

Interesting bits

Disc 1, Track 5 [0:03:45 sec] Arriving at Anvers for the first time, setting up base

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:01:08 sec] Describes the layout of the building 'Skua lodge' at Anvers

Disc 1, Track 6 [0:02:10 sec] The pedalling machine to send communication using Morse code

Disc 1, Track 11 [0:00:00 sec] Perilous boat trip back from Port Lockroy and the subsequent adventures of Bob Whittock

Disc 1, Track 13 [0:01:40 sec] Visit from Prince Phillip