

THE FIRST FOSSIL BLUFF THREE

Edited transcript of interview with Cliff Pearce, John Smith and Brian Taylor, otherwise known as The First Fossil Bluff Three, conducted by Chris Eldon Lee at Market Overton, Rutland on 28th of August, 2009. Transcribed by John and Catriona Zerfahs, 12th April, 2013.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Lee: This is Cliff Pearce, John Smith and Brian Taylor, otherwise known as the First Fossil Bluff Three, recorded at Market Overton in the county of Rutland on the 28th of August, 2009 by Chris Eldon Lee. The First Fossil Bluff Three, Part 1.

Pearce: Cliff Pearce, I was born in Stanmore in Middlesex in 1935.

Smith: I'm John Smith who was born in Blackheath in 1934.

Taylor: And I'm Brian Taylor, geologist, born in Cardiff in 1937.

[Part 1 0:00:42] Lee: And what were you doing before the Antarctic appeared in your life, Cliff?

Pearce: Well I'd been to school, and I went to Keele University, and I graduated, and I got a job as a teacher and within a few months I thought, 'I don't want to spend the next 40 years as a teacher', so I looked for more exciting jobs.

[Part 1 0:01:04] Lee: And John?

Smith: And John? He was at school, Roan School in Greenwich, after that 2 years in Goldsmith's Art School, after that 2 years in the RAF, after that in forestry, and it just happened one morning [background laughter] seeing an advert in the News Chronicle after reading James Callaghan I saw an advert for the Antarctic and I thought, 'That is the thing I would love to do'.

[Part 1 0:01:41] Lee: What's your story, Brian?

Taylor: I went to school in Cardiff, I went to study geology through University College Swansea and my first job was basically joining FIDS in 1959.

[Part 1 0:01:53] Lee: So you were the only one with any qualifications really, you could say that?

Taylor: Well, if you call just a BSc a qualification to go down to the Antarctic, yes.

[Part 1 0:02:01] Lee: You two hadn't done met[eorology] work previously?

Pearce: Well at university I'd studied modules on meteorology so I had a good knowledge of the theory of it, but as soon as I signed up for FIDS they did send me on an 8 week training

course in Stanmore in Middlesex where we were trained. So there was a fair degree of training for the specific work but not for the overall Antarctic experience.

[Part 1 0:02:29] Lee: And John?

Smith: And John, I suppose, I don't know whether I was interested in geography and as far as meteorology goes likewise I went to Stanmore, had the same course and afterwards had some experience at Croydon Airport before its demise and I spent some time there.

[Part 1 0:02:53] Lee: And how did you meet? I think Brian and Cliff you met first didn't you? Tell me the story of how you met.

Pearce: Well we met on the *Kista Dan*¹. We joined the *Kista Dan* December the 18th, 1959, and we were both in the bowels of the ship in a tiny cabin.

[Part 1 0:03:11] Lee: Sharing a cabin?

Pearce: Sharing a cabin with 2 others, so we were in close proximity for 110 days.

[Part 1 0:03:19] Lee: How was that for you Brian?

Taylor: It was fine. We got on extremely well and I think in the end it was fortuitous when it came to selecting two people to go down with me to Fossil Bluff that Cliff should be one of them.

[Part 1 0:03:31] Lee: And how did John appear on your scene?

Smith: John appeared on the scene I think [background laughter] I think first of all it would have been the second time down and that was on the *Biscoe* with Tal, and that was leaving in 1960, leaving Southampton, and then of course I met Cliff down there.

[Part 1 0:03:55] Lee: So how did first hear, anybody can answer from now on, how did you first hear about the possibility of going to Fossil Bluff? What was the first inkling that you might find yourselves down there?

Taylor: For me? For me as a geologist? Well after I graduated at Swansea I went up to Birmingham on a pre-Antarctic training course, which I have to say was a farce.

[Part 1 0:04:19] Lee: In what way?

Taylor: Well we were closeted in the laboratory with the door locked between us and those FIDS geologists who'd come back from the Antarctic. The idea was that we were not to inherit their chips on their shoulders or whatever, or whatever negative comments they came back with, and we were just encouraged to read bags of background reading which is not the right sort of preparation for going down as a geologist to the Antarctic. But I read enough at Birmingham to realise that perhaps one of the best locations for me, as a stratigraphical

¹ Ice strengthened ship on charter from Danish company J Lauritzen.

palaeontologist looking at fossils, was Fossil Bluff. Because Fossil Bluff had been visited twice before, once by the British Grahamland Expedition in 1934, 1937, then of course by Sir Vivian Fuchs or Doctor Fuchs as he was then and Doctor Raymond Adie in '48, '49, '50, '51 I think. So, for a stratigraphical palaeontologist Fossil Bluff seemed to be the ideal location for me. Of course there was no guarantee having suggested Fossil Bluff as a locality that I would ever get there but fortuitously I did.

[Part 1 0:05:31] Lee: So before you sailed that was your ambition?

Taylor: That was always my ambition to go down to Fossil Bluff, yes.

[Part 1 0:05:37] Lee: Right. So how did you two get roped in?

Pearce: Well, Brian went home after the first summer because he couldn't get in to Fossil Bluff. I went to Deception Island, and then John came down with Brian in 1960, and we were all on the *Kista Dan* together. We were all 13 of us scheduled to go to Stonington Island. And then at a late stage they opened up Fossil Bluff and it was pure luck who was to accompany Brian in his geological work, and it just happened to be that John and I were selected. It could have been any one of 4 or 5 others.

[Part 1 0:06:17] Lee: But who was doing the selecting, John?

Smith: John Green basically was SECFIDS and he was the one who decided on that. It was all done very, very quickly. There certainly wasn't any decision made until the latter end of the flying season that in fact the wintering party would go in, and quite naturally because of that it was quite a difficult thing to organise because, I don't know how long we had before we actually went in but it wasn't very long.

Taylor: Precious little time.

[Part 1 0:07:01] Smith: It was very little time. But we all agreed that it was worth going in although we had certain things that maybe we did consider, for example we were expecting to live off sledge rations for the whole of the time there wintering. But that's a thing we happily accepted because we all wanted to get down there.

Taylor: Certainly.

[Part 1 0:07:26] Pearce: I think we finally knew 13 days before we 3 flew in, and during those 13 days people rummaged around and got boxes of food and just anything and put them on the plane and took them down and dumped them, apart from the sledge rations which John has mentioned.

[Part 1 0:07:46] Smith: I think we were a bit unfortunate in many ways because normal procedure would be that you had all the base requirements there, you would have the food for usually 2 years. I was in charge of food at the other 2 bases where I happened to be, and so you had 2 years supply of man food and all the dog food you needed, but here it was a very different scenario, and so we didn't have that sort of organisation behind us which was in fact

a great pity, but, over-riding this, is that we wanted to get in there. One thing that we had there was a huge amount of dog food which really [background laughter] wasn't the sort of thing one likes to eat as part of base food but we had a huge supply of that.

[Part 1 0:08:37] Lee: There's no dogs at that point.

Smith: No dogs, no. Couldn't take any dogs in.

[Part 1 0:08:43] Lee: So you didn't have any choice about who you went with, Brian? John Green dictated did he?

Taylor: Yes, more or less, yes. I wanted to get down to Fossil Bluff as early as possible, I wanted to get on with my field work. I wanted to catch as much of that sort of summer as possible before the onset of winter so at least I've got an idea of how I would proceed with my research down there.

[Part 1 0:09:06] Lee: Were you expecting anything in particular down there, were you excited about the prospect of what you might find as a geologist?

Taylor: Oh yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:09:14] Lee: You had no idea of what was going to be there?

Taylor: Well I had some idea because Adie had written a report based on a reconnaissance journey which he undertook with Fuchs and I also knew something of the work of Lancelot Fleming who was the geologist with the British Graham[land] Expedition, but I really had no idea of the scope of what [incomprehensible] discovered then, none at all.

[Part 1 0:09:40] Lee: Now you two have both said you were keen to get in there but what was in it for you, why Fossil Bluff?

Pearce: Well, because I had been frustrated in the first year when I was supposed to go to Horseshoe Island and ended up at Deception Island which was very interesting but it wasn't a very glamorous place, I wanted to get down to a sledging base, Stonington Island, and then I was offered the opportunity to go to Alexander Island, and I mean it was a magical opportunity. Here was an island that had never been inhabited. People had passed by it. So it was just exciting to see this new landscape, so what was in it for me was a great forward movement and something that nobody else had had the chance to do.

[Part 1 0:10:26] Lee: There's almost a touch of the, what Fuchs described as, the heroic period about this wasn't there, that you were breaking new ground is that right?

Pearce: Oh, we were all heroes, yes!

[Laughter]

Smith: That's a very relevant comment. It was a matter of going to a place where there hadn't been any base before, and it was exciting to say the least of it, and we looked forward very much to getting down there.

[Part 1 0:10:52] Lee: Did you feel privileged?

Smith: Indeed, yes.

Pearce: Absolutely.

Smith: That's about right.

[Part 1 0:10:57] Lee: Did you have any idea why you were chosen, by John Green?

Pearce: It was a random FIDS choice as was often the case with FIDS. We happened to be designated to Stonington Island, we were part of that base, and they had to nominate 2 people to help Brian.

Taylor: But we were all 3 designated to Stonington Island initially, weren't we?

Pearce: That's right.

Taylor: And then of course, as you've just heard, the opportunity to go down to Fossil Bluff was open to us and that was it.

Smith: So we were basically Cliff and I general assistants to support Tal, Brian, with his work, 'cos I use Tal..

Taylor: Tal is my nickname, by the way

Smith: Nickname, it was down there most of the time, and I still use it. There you go.

[Part 1 0:11:40] Lee: Where did that nickname come from?

Taylor: I've no idea.

Smith: It just could be Taylor

Taylor: It could be, yes, but I mean I've had it since I was a teenager so I have no idea where it came from.

[Part 1 0:11:50] Lee: Did anybody have any reservations about all this because it was quite a big ask wasn't it, to use a modern parlance?

Pearce: Not a single reservation. It was exciting, we knew we were going to be safe and looked after basically. I had no reservations at all. The only reservation I had was that I did want to have some experience of dog driving. I had a little bit at Deception Island, and that was a sacrifice that I was happy to make.

[Part 1 0:12:18] Taylor: Yes I agree with that. I wanted to be involved in dog sledging, and I wanted if possible to take this sort of dog sledging record from my colleagues elsewhere but it never happened.

[Part 1 0:12:33] Smith: Likewise with me. Having gone from doing dog sledging at W², I was looking forward to that prospect. But, circumstance was very different when we got there but..

[Part 1 0:12:45] Pearce: And I think, John, filming was also very important in your interests, wasn't it, that you wanted to film this far South?

[Part 1 0:12:53] Smith: I certainly wanted to film, yes, and record. One certainly enjoyed recording in the previous time down there with still photography, and I thought it would be a very good opportunity to try and make a little film with 16 mil[limetre]. So that was, yes, very much part of it.

[Part 1 0:13:13] Lee: So by sheer chance and coincidence you've brought your 16 mil cine camera with you have you?

Smith: Oh it's just by sheer chance. I did approach the Survey to say, 'Would you like me to do a film for you down there or try to do a film', but I suppose quite naturally without me having any proven record of taking any film whatsoever so they said, 'Well maybe not, but if you do take some we'd be delighted to see it'. So I at great expense purchased quite a bit of Kodachrome and a little 16 mil camera and it was *en route* down as a matter of interest I sent back to Ann Todd³ the first cassette of film to see if it was alright. She sent back a message to me saying, 'Yes it's marvellous but don't forget to keep the camera up the right way', because I was getting vertical shots and thinking it would be rather nice but of course it doesn't come out quite well with cine, but there you go.

[Part 1 0:14:17] Lee: You've still got the camera, you brought it with you?

Smith: I've got the camera here.

[Part 1 0:14:20] Lee: What is it?

Smith: It's a little..

[Part 1 0:14:24] Lee: Describe it to me.

Smith: It's a little Bell and Howell magazine camera which takes 50 feet of film, and I got it arcticised because I thought well obviously it might have problems as I had problems with still cameras down there, so I got it arcticised, and these magazines, which you slip in, and I don't know you don't get too many minutes of film at 24 frames a second, but the problem

² Base W - Detaille Island.

³ Sir Vivian Fuchs' assistant.

was that these magazines they were the things that froze up, so the camera though it had been arcticised it didn't work particularly well that way so I used to when we were sledging or out in the field, I would have one of these in my anorak keeping warm, and I could get up to 12 seconds of film from the camera before it then decided to pack up so I'd take out another one, so in consequence you can imagine when you got your film to try and edit, everything is out of sequence. But there you go.

[Part 1 0:15:31] Lee: So taking one cassette out putting a new one in then warming the old one up putting it back in and repeatedly doing that.

Smith: But it worked.

[Part 1 0:15:39] Lee: What is it arcticised the camera, what do you mean?

Smith: Well you presumably you've some sort of grease inside so that the actual mechanics still function when it gets very cold. And it worked down to I suppose minus 30, below minus 30..

Taylor: 37..

Smith: It worked alright, but the magazines were the things that were freezing up.

[Part 1 0:16:04] Lee: I looked at the film yesterday and there's some surprising footage of somebody playing a guitar and somebody else playing a clarinet on board ship.

Smith: Yes, indeed, Ron Lord one of the pilots was playing the clarinet.

[Part 1 0:16:17] Lee: Ron Lord?

Smith: Yes. He sadly died quite a few years ago now but he was a very excellent pilot, and I'm trying to think of the other person but the name doesn't come back..

Taylor: Could be Manky Winham [phonetic]?

Smith: Er, no, no, no, [laughter] but you probably it looked a bit strange when you probably saw the film because you probably had a bit of Bach.

[Part 1 0:16:43] Lee: *Beethoven's 9th Symphony* in the background or something.

Smith: Yeah, that's it.

[Laughter]

[Part 1 0:16:47] Lee: But I can see the breath it was so cold, their breath, Ron's breath is freezing on the way out of there between his mouth and the clarinet. So apart from greasing John's camera you had 13 days to get yourself prepared to fly down to Fossil Bluff. Describe how frantic or otherwise those 13 days were.

Pearce: Well Peter Foster, who was an experienced Base Leader, he helped us to collect boxes of food and put it on the plane, and then he helped me, I was actually a meteorologist with John, and we were going to this new base and we wanted to set up a meteorological station but all of our meteorological equipment was in the depths of the *John Biscoe* at that time. So I ran round the base and they gave me thermometers and barometers and basic equipment so that we could do some useful work. So it was just rushing around collecting food and equipment that might be of help.

[Part 1 0:17:49] Lee: So all the meteorological stuff was in the bottom of the ship, was that a cock up?

Pearce: Well no because the idea was that they got to Stonington Island or Adelaide Island early and got out all the equipment and stacked it and then flew it in to Fossil Bluff systematically. But we arrived far too late to do that.

[Part 1 0:18:11] Taylor: There was never any intention to winter at Fossil Bluff at that time. The idea was simply to go into Stonington, which would be our sort of mother base, obviously off-load the ships, and then at some later date in the year go down to Fossil Bluff. So everything was accelerated as a result of the good flying conditions between Adelaide Island and Fossil Bluff.

[Part 1 0:18:33] Lee: So what was it that sparked the decision, taken by somebody else, to send you down there, was it because the flying conditions were good, or..?

Taylor: Exactly so, exactly so. The flying conditions were excellent between Adelaide Island and Fossil Bluff they managed to get the building party down, the hut erected on a scree, and enough flights to fly three idiots down if they chose to do so.

Pearce: And of course they got long term plans to get the base established for the following summer season, and obviously to get Brits as far south as possible, maybe to wave the flag.

[Part 1 0:19:12] Lee: So there's a bit of politics in this..

Pearce: Well it was never overtly expressed but I think it was behind the whole of FIDS from Operation Tabarin, which they set up in 1944, to have a British appearance there, and of course they met up with the Argentinians who shot at the party in Hope Bay, and they met up with the Americans in Stonington Island in 1947, and I mean I think we wanted to keep a foothold on our patch of the Antarctic, so maybe that was part of it.

[Part 1 0:19:48] Taylor: For scientists like me I'm afraid I was sufficiently naïve to believe that I was employed really to commit my science. The political implications were not apparent [talked over, incomprehensible] when I went down in 1959, 1960.

[Part 1 0:20:05] Smith: I think the big chance was offered. You know so often plans are thwarted by weather, by other things, and there was the chance of moving forward and, 'Let's take it', and I think in many ways that was right. Alright there were some consequences that

maybe presented difficulties but the work that was achieved was substantial, and that was really of great importance I think.

[Part 1 0:20:32] Lee: So, because it was a new base there's no 2 year's supply of food on board for Fossil Bluff, so you had a fortnight to get your cans of baked beans together.

All: Yes.

[Part 1 0:20:42] Lee: What was that like? Did you have to beg steal and borrow?

Taylor: Frenetic. But we had John, who had obviously been down to the Antarctic before. He in fact said 'We've only got sufficient amount of..', the plane's obviously it takes so much food, we took obviously ourselves and our equipment, bags of coal but in the case of base food we stripped as many of the boxes as possible, didn't we, to reduce the weight, but of course we couldn't do that for every box and unfortunately we ended up with frozen boxes of pickle when they should have been sugar or whatever or cornflakes so there, but we managed it was part and parcel of life down there, we coped didn't we?

Smith: We were embarrassed when we unpacked that MAFF⁴ very lightweight food.

Taylor: Lightweight MAFF food.

[Part 1 0:21:30] Lee: You've got some there, Brian? I think [incomprehensible] you've brought some food with you, what have you got?

Taylor: Well, yes. Well, this is not quite what John (..) John's talking about tins of fish and fruit and so forth. This is a block of best beef and pork which came out from a, came from a sledging box. And that's if you..

[Part 1 0:21:52] Lee: Libit [phonetic]

Taylor: Yeah, Libit [phonetic] , and if you add water that would actually produce the equivalent of 13 ounces of meat, and this is one of the essential ingredients of a sledging box. But of course the sledging boxes that came down to Fossil Bluff were intended for the rest of the Stonington party coming down later in the year. Technically speaking we shouldn't have broached them, but, of course, in the end we had to. And then this box, this thing here, this is from a box donated by the Medical Research Council and this is block, I don't know whether this is HF5 or HF6. Again, highly nutritious, virtually impossible to eat or to chew without swallowing it and the only way you could eat that was to swallow it. The meat bar by comparison was fairly palatable, wasn't it?

[Part 1 0:22:39] Smith: It was very palatable and you could eat it cold, or it made a very good mince. The only problem with it was the boneless lamb, it was I think mainly [incomprehensible], the only problem was the bones occasionally were there. I lost 3 or 4

⁴ MAFF – Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries.

teeth as a result of finding the bones, but it was very palatable. In comparison to pemmican it was a treat.

Taylor: Which we also had, didn't we, we had a few tins, few boxes of pemmican.

[Part 1 0:23:10] Lee: So the gathering of food was a haphazard exercise was it, Cliff?

Pearce: It was, and when it arrived at the base it was all dumped outside the hut. And I mean it was ill assorted and Brian has said vinegar and the piccalilli froze in the bottles and broke. We had things like 5 tins of tomatoes which were actually labelled sugar. We had tins of vegetables which turned into a soggy mass, so that there were just a few tins of potato and very little flour or dried egg. We had plenty of caraway seeds, peppercorns and glace cherries. And then the MAFF dehydrated meat which has been - oh no, we had Ministry of Agriculture Food and Fisheries dehydrated beef, pork and lamb, and MAFF dehydrated fish, which was fabulous. We took it from the tins, put it in water and that was a great salvation to us. The fruit was also excellent but we never had enough sugar to sweeten it. We had loads and loads of dehydrated runner beans. We had lots of boxes of sledge rations for the summer season, and as Brian has said, we shouldn't have broached these but we had to take the sugar out to be used especially later as supplies ran out. Another aspect, we counted 81 bags of anthracite the first day we were arrived. At 1 sack every 2 days that would have lasted until September, it was hopeless. So we used to live in much of the year by putting the fires out at night.

[Part 1 0:24:57] Taylor: Yeah but we also, Cliff, also had to re-burn the ash and the clinker, and we tried to make sure that every bag of coal lasted 4 days not 2. We also realised as Cliff said that we had a limited amount of sugar and so again we knew that we allocated ourselves 19 cubes of sugar per person per day, and this was under John's jurisdiction, so you could use your sugar, I could use my 19 cubes of sugar in my porridge in the morning or in my tea or coffee whatever, but I couldn't have any more than that. That was the limit, and that applied to all 3 of us.

[Part 1 0:25:34] Pearce: It's interesting, we made bread until, while the yeast lasted, but we had no proper tins and I noted in my diary that when Brian made bread he made his first loaf, being Brian he was resourceful, he got no tins John and I just used to make it as a great splodge. Brian produced a tin, a flour tin measuring 1 foot by 1 foot by 9 inches. That was his first loaf of bread.

[Part 1 0:26:07] Lee: It was a paving slab loaf.

Pearce: A paving slab. But eventually we ran out of yeast. In fact by May we were running out of many foods, sugar, dried egg, potatoes, vegetables - except runner beans - running out of fruit, cereals, bacon, spam, spaghetti, by September no flour or sausages. So we were really running out by August, September of virtually everything.

[Part 1 0:26:34] Taylor: But we reckon we were down to about quarter rations.

Pearce: Yeah, that's right.

[Part 1 0:26:37] Taylor: I think the other thing that should be mentioned, and I don't think that Cliff did in his first interview was that we had neither scales nor a recipe book.

Pearce: That's right.

Taylor: So it was all, well John had been down before so I mean..

[Part 1 0:26:54] Smith: In the past we had a *Penguin Recipe Book* which was a most appropriate thing, it was the book that every base had. But I'm afraid down there we didn't have it.

[Part 1 0:27:03] Taylor: We didn't have it, so we were partly depending on John's knowledge of the *Penguin Cookery Book* to cook, and I had never cooked in my life before and I don't know whether Cliff did either.

[Part 1 0:27:14] Lee: Did you know this, when you got on to that plane to fly (..)?

Taylor: No, no!

Smith: We knew that, as I said, we had enough sledging rations because that's what we were told that at least we had the sledging rations for the winter. We tried to cobble together as much as we could but it wasn't necessarily the best way of doing it, and certainly if we had stayed at Stonington it would have all been exactly right. But we didn't have the time.

Pearce: We had to experiment. We used to make omelettes out of..

Taylor: Pea flour!

Pearce: Pea flour, [Laughter],

Smith: Very windy night, sometimes..

Pearce: And jellies out of gelatine and cocoa.

Taylor: And we used Andrew's Liver Salts as a raising agent [incomprehensible].

[Part 1 0:27:57] Lee: Did any of this affect your health?

Taylor: No.

Smith: No, no.

Taylor: Fit and healthy.

Smith: With the sledging rations you still had all the calories necessary.

Pearce: And the dehydrated food was fabulous.

Smith: Absolutely.

[Part 1 0:28:13] Lee: I understand that there was some discussion about whether once you realised quite early on that you were going to start running out of stuff, there was some discussion about whether or not there should be a carefully managed regime of rationing.

Smith: The problem there was that really at the beginning of the season you know very well that you're going to have, or should have, a party coming down from Stonington. And it seemed to be that really when they would be coming down basically everybody would be sledging, it would be a sledging base, so you would then be using sledging rations anyway, but while we were at base in the winter it seemed very important that we had a reasonable diet and so we did use that, yes if we had known it to the degree we should have..

Taylor: With foresight, yes.

Smith: With foresight. Things would have been very different.

[Part 1 0:29:09] Lee: And the coal, I'm surprised that they allowed you to fly south with only enough coal for half the winter.

Pearce: I know, I've said 81 bags, and by August the 8th I noted in my diary we had 39 sacks left. We'd run out by November but heat was vital for water supplies, and what happened if they didn't come in November, or December, or January? So that was our main concern, wasn't it?

[Part 1 0:29:35] Taylor: But we had the Uruguayan paraffin burning stove, didn't we, as a backup, and we also had a generator, you probably heard this before, we had a generator which ultimately blew up in a pall of smoke after 130 odd hours.

Smith: So we'd have had the diesel through a summer.

[Part 1 0:29:52] Taylor: So besides the diesel we also had, and this was again using John's experience I believe, we also had 3 Tilley⁵ lamps, and the 3 Tilley lamps not only provided us with light but they also provided us with latent (*sic*) heat didn't they?

Pearce: They did with heat.

Taylor: So we had 2 alternative sources once the coal had run out, yes.

[Part 1 0:30:26] Lee: Did you at any time get frustrated or angry about the fact that you hadn't got everything you needed, that you hadn't got proper met equipment you hadn't got enough coal. Did you feel, was there any sense of being set up or abandoned?

Smith: Not really because we had made that decision to go in that situation.

Taylor: We volunteered.

⁵ Proprietary pressurised paraffin vapour lamp.

Smith: We volunteered for it. We knew..

Taylor: We didn't have to go.

Smith: ..there would be shortages, and I think we dealt with them fairly effectively.

Taylor: We accepted the consequences of our decision, basically.

Pearce: That's true, we never moaned really did we?

Taylor: No.

Smith: No, I don't think so.

[Part 1 0:31:02] Lee: And you flew there?

Taylor: Yes.

Pearce: We flew there.

[Part 1 0:31:04] Lee: All together in one plane.

Taylor: Yes.

Pearce: No, there were 2 planes. John and Brian were in one plane with, I forget which pilot. I was in the second one with Bob Diamond.

Taylor: Lying on top of the coal sacks.

[Laughter]

Smith: I can still smell the, yes.

[Part 1 0:31:23] Lee: Still smell the coal?

Taylor: That's the only way we could get into the plane. [talked over, incomprehensible]. They could hardly get lift off as well because of the weight.

Smith: That's right, yes.

[Part 1 0:31:33] Lee: Was it a dodgy flight?

Smith: No.

Taylor: No.

Smith: It seemed to take an inordinate length of time to get airborne.

[Part 1 0:31:39] Pearce: Yes, the plane had flown from Adelaide Island. We had already got in to Stonington Island, and we three went onto the ice off Stonington Island and the plane flew in from Adelaide Island, well the planes, and we got on board and it took us I think an

hour and fifteen minutes to fly down. I think Brian and his plane they did a slightly circuitous route whereas I went straight down into Fossil Bluff.

[Part 1 0:32:09] Lee: Had you seen, none of you had seen this place before?

Pearce: No.

Smith: No.

[Part 1 0:32:13] Lee: So you're seeing your new home from the air?

Smith: Oh, that flight was something I'll never, ever forget. To be flying alongside the mountains on the West Coast there, and to look down at the ship to begin with and then the bits of pack ice and bergs and then the floes gradually increasing in size until you have these great rafts of ice then you go into the sea ice sort of the fast ice front, it was a brilliant flight because we had very good weather when we flew down the coast.

[Part 1 0:32:47] Pearce: We flew round a nunatak⁶, Mount Edgell, 6,000 feet which marked the start of the Sound. Then we flew down this great white highway, down 50 or 60 miles to Fossil Bluff.

Smith: And the Wordie Ice Shelf, of course, we looked down on that didn't we? Which of course is now gone.

Taylor: Yep.

[Part 1 0:33:12] Lee: So was a ship, was it the *Biscoe* that was in your area? And that at base, the men on board the *Biscoe* being working on the hut for you, is that right?

Taylor: The Stonington base [incomprehensible].

[Part 1 0:33:23] Pearce: They'd flown in 2 or 3 of them. Mike Tween had established the diesel, Howard Chapman and John Cunningham, who was a builder, they'd been down and built the hut. They were all part of the Stonington team and all experts.

[Part 1 0:33:38] Taylor: So they built the shell of the hut, and they left the 4 bunks made of Dexion⁷, and some sleeping bags, and we inherited their sleeping bags and that was it, and then we got, busy sorting ourselves out.

[Part 1 0:33:56] Lee: Was the hut in any way finished?

Pearce: Well, the structure of the hut was finished. But next to it was a Petter generator which had been installed just on the scree with no hut, with no cover. So our first task was to build a splendid diesel shed.

⁶ The peak of a hill or mountain protruding above the surrounding ice sheet.

⁷ A proprietary brand of slotted steel angle used for shelving and racking etc.

Taylor: A lean-to, yes.

Smith: And you did a lot of that, didn't you?

[Part 1 0:34:24] Pearce: Well we all did the building of the hut, and then I – I'm no electrician, absolutely hopeless - but I managed..

Taylor: But it worked.

Pearce: ..to get this thing started, and then we put wires into the hut, and for one month it worked and it powered our 119⁸ radio set, so we had communications, and it gave us light – for one month.

[Laughter]

[Part 1 0:34:49] Lee: And then?

Taylor: Boom!

Smith: Puff of smoke.

Taylor: Pall of smoke.

[Part 1 0:34:53] Pearce: And I spent a lot of time trying to see what was wrong but later on in the year Mike Tween came down and he said, I think, the big end, is that a word? The big end had gone and it was all rattling and he actually absolved me and said 'It's nothing to do with you', so I felt pleased about that.

[Part 1 0:35:12] Lee: They flew off, and the ship left, and there you were. Now I just want to try and catch that moment if I can, because in Cliff's book he says that 'The 3 of you went inside the hut sat down and considered'. But he doesn't actually explain what you considered.

Pearce: Well, we considered our priorities. We got to get that stuff in from outside.

[Part 1 0:35:37] Lee: I'll come back to that in a minute. There's another question to come first which is you are in a brand new territory, this is a land without maps, even prehistoric man had maps of some kind or other, and you had no maps at all.

Taylor: We had a basic topographic map, yes. Definitely.

Pearce: What sort of map, I don't reme[mber]. We didn't have a detailed map of..

Taylor: We had a topographic map though, didn't we?

Smith: Oh yes.

⁸ A compact ex-military receiver/transmitter set.

Taylor: That was produced by I think probably as a result of Derek Stowell's study of air photographs, yeah, very basic.

Smith: A lot of hatched lines.

Taylor: Many hatches, yes.

[Part 1 0:36:16] Lee: So there you were your first night. You were the southernmost human beings on the planet. There was no other sign of life around you, and you knew you had at least 6 months before you met anybody else. Try and re-capture that. Do you remember what..? Go on John..

Smith: To begin with we weren't the most southernmost people on the planet, but certainly in Grahamland, because the South Pole..

Pearce: The South Pole had no [incomprehensible] had it?

Smith: I'm just trying to think.

Pearce: Halley Bay was there.

[Part 1 0:36:46] Lee: Alright, yes.

Smith: That's further south, then of course Scott Base. Yes, I suppose, to be inhabiting at last this island, Alexander Island, it was a fascinating thing and at last all the trials and tribulations of trying to organise ourselves to get down there had stopped, and now we were on the threshold of something which we were looking forward to. And we were in an incredible environment looking out across the frozen sound, looking out at the back of the mountains in the distance, and looking at these incredible cliffs very near us the Pyramid⁹ with all the, well, Tal, you can relate about that. It was a very nice feeling.

[Part 1 0:37:38] Taylor: To me, looking to sort out who was going to sleep where, I mean in terms of 4 bunks, 4 Dexion bunks so one of the first things we did was choose our bunk. There were these sleeping bags left behind by the building party, so we, again, we selected those, and then for me it was looking at the cliffs behind the base and deciding where I could begin my work.

[Part 1 0:38:07] Lee: And Cliff, what was your?

Pearce: Well I think my thought was 'Here we are'. We were on our own now. We didn't rely on anybody else. This was it, we just had to get organised and make the best of it. So I think as I said we sat down and we considered what were our priorities. The generator, which I did a lot on. John had to get the Rayburn¹⁰ stove going, 'cos we had a silly little

⁹ No local peak with this name appears in the gazetteers, though present day Gaza Peak fits the description.

¹⁰ Name of solid fuel range.

Uruguayan paraffin stove, and then we had to get the food in and sorted and then we had to work out, as Brian said, the space inside the hut, how we were going to use it.

[Part 1 0:38:51] Lee: You chose to use an outside toilet.

Taylor: We did.

[Part 1 0:38:54] Lee: What was the thinking there?

Taylor: The reason for it, I think we had that was if I recall correctly the toilet facility was behind the Rayburn cooker, and we didn't think that was quite the right place for it, and we thought we could use the space better. So we decided to develop a, what we called the bogloo, outside.

[Part 1 0:39:15] Lee: Could you elaborate on?

Taylor: Well, it was cut if I remember with ice axes, and it was, we also, part of the bogloo was also a crevasse, because we had no crevasses very close to base and John, as our base leader, felt that we ought to have some crevasse rescue techniques so we had, we did a shaft deep enough for us to hang or be suspended in the shaft and then the shaft, the model crevasse became also part of the bogloo, and the bogloo if I remember rightly had an entrance and you went into that, and what we managed to do it had a domed roof which was thick enough to withstand a certain amount of pressure but thin enough to admit light. So as you went into the bogloo out of the whirling snow outside you moved into the bogloo and there it was and you could look up at this lovely sort of blue light coming down through the ice roof and then at some sort of depth you had the shaft itself which formed part of the bogloo, and it had two seats so you could turn the seat around at different times. We had bits of wood frozen into the walls of the bogloo to hang your clothes, so it was very, very comfortable, and very efficient.

[Part 1 0:40:43] Lee: So this was better than being out in the open or..

Taylor: Oh, yes!

Smith: Absolutely. You went in in winter time, of course you took the Tilley lamp down with you, and you had this incredible sparkling of the ice crystals that were forming, the hoar frost just from your breath on the walls, and you went down into this. It was quite magical..

[Part 1 0:41:11] Taylor: It was a magical, it also..

Smith: Absolutely quiet.

Taylor: ..meant that you didn't have to think about whether you're going to go upwind or downwind, [Laughter], because obviously we were taking water from ice or snow to melt water so having the bogloo didn't matter where you (..)

[Part 1 0:41:30] Lee: What happened to your produce?

Taylor: Produce? Ah.

Smith: It wasn't a bio digester down there.

Taylor: We built up a couple of stalactites.

Pearce: We did.

Taylor: Stalagmites I should say.

Smith: It was a very deep hole, wasn't it?

Taylor: It was a very deep hole.

Pearce: Stalagmites formed 2 or 3 feet high.

[Part 1 0:41:52] Lee: What colour were they?

Taylor: God knows. What we aimed to do was to try and get, this will sound completely crude, we tried to get the paper to land on top of the last piece of excrement.

Pearce: Until the paper ran out [Laughter].

Taylor: Yes, that was another fine one, the shortage of toilet paper.

Smith: Oh dear.

Taylor: Yes.

[Part 1 0:42:18] Lee: I presume you didn't have a little roll of toilet paper in the loo all the time, you took it with you did you?

Pearce: We took it with us, yes.

[Part 1 0:42:25] Lee: I presumed that was the case. So was this pioneering plumbing?

Pearce: I'm sure other explorers have resorted to this sys[tem]. We were lucky that on the slopes of Fossil Bluff there was a deep ice formation.

Taylor: Yeah, coming off the scree.

Pearce: Yeah.

Taylor: So we were able to dig into that and create our bogloo cum crevasse.

Pearce: I think we were all frightened of frostbite, basically.

[Laughter]

[Part 1 0:42:58] Lee: So it was a wooden seat to put your sit-upon upon, and you walked in horizontally, it was cut into a hillside?

All: Yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:43:07] Lee: I can see the attraction.

Pearce: I think it was used by many sledgers after we had left. Did you use it in the second year?

Taylor: Yes.

Pearce: Yes.

Taylor: I think another part..

Smith: It survived till the second year?

[Part 1 0:43:20] Taylor: Oh, yes. I think another part of the same excavation was to provide shelter over the winter for dogs.

Smith: Yes.

[Part 1 0:43:28] Taylor: Because obviously we didn't want the dogs to, this on the assumption we were going to have dogs down at Fossil Bluff and the dogs were going to overwinter at Fossil Bluff. We wanted some facility to protect them during the winter, so, it was a vast cavern, wasn't it?

Pearce: It was. And it exercise, it was a good exercise.

[Part 1 0:43:46] Lee: Creating it?

Pearce: Creating it.

Taylor: Kept us busy when we couldn't be doing anything else.

[Part 1 0:43:54] Smith: Yes, I've since, when I used to live in a place called Grimerston [phonetic] and in the garden there we were on chalk and I had to cut a lot away for putting a village hut there for the village, and seeing all the chalk face there, there was that feeling I wanted to sort of cut into it to make another tunnel. Sorry, I'm getting way off track here, but the thought then went back to making those tunnels.

Taylor: Yes.

[Part 1 0:44:27] Lee: How did you get on together the 3 of you, because you were thrown together there was no escape, there was not even a seagull to say 'Hello' to, was there? Was it sweetness and light all the way through that winter?

Pearce: [Sigh] Well, we had some down days, didn't we.

Smith: I'm sure we did, yes.

[Part 1 0:44:46] Pearce: I think the thing that saved us was that we actually all had things to do ourselves, and we all went out of the hut whenever we could often in different directions, but always safe directions. But I mean there were times when we would all get fed up with each other.

[Part 1 0:45:05] Smith: Well I think we all respected each other's strengths and they were very evident in the way we lived our life down there and the work that was being done. I think we were fairly competent in what we were achieving and absolutely no doubts about the geology that was being done, and the fact that we were a forward base, we were established and we, I think, achieved a lot that year.

[Part 1 0:45:36] Pearce: And, of course, we may be fortunate that there was no question of getting drunk because we had hardly any alcohol, so we never got daft as has happened on some bases and, indeed, on the ship.

[Part 1 0:45:52] Smith: I think we got daft in other ways but certainly not at the behest or the help of alcohol. We had some very humorous times I have no doubts about that.

[Part 1 0:46:06] Lee: Can you give me an example?

Smith: Oh dear no, it becomes difficult just to [incomprehensible] Vocabularian Society for example, this sort of thing.

Pearce: Brian's hand springs.

Smith: Hand springs, oh.

Pearce: He was a fanatic for fitness.

[Part 1 0:46:25] Taylor: Yes. If I can come in here we got on extremely well. The fact we've been close friends ever since we first met, I think, it says a lot. I respected both of them enormously because obviously they were assisting me but both of them got themselves involved in my work which didn't happen perhaps in the same degree in my second year. They were excellent willing and companions. They often had to stay with me for weeks, week upon week in a tent high up on a mountain face. I was obviously collecting rocks all the time, sometimes 70 pounds of rocks needed to be taken back to base, you never had to ask either Cliff or John to do that they just saw that it had to be done and they did it. Often walking back with a heavy rucksack through deep soft snow to get back to Fossil Bluff. Now, that was something very special.

[Part 1 0:47:26] Pearce: And I think John and I both recognised the only reason we were there was because Brian was there, you know, we never had any question of that, did we John?

Smith: Oh no, no.

Pearce: So we just naturally supported Brian.

[Part 1 0:47:40] Smith: I'm thinking in terms of what Brian was doing, and I know Cliff, like me, would collect quite a few bits of rock, and we'd say to Tal 'What's this?', and Tal would of course elucidate what it was, and bless his heart during the winter time when we were basically confined to the hut for a lot of the time, he would then go through, for example my collection, there would be a little bit of white paper put on there with a number, and he would then list each piece of rock, and it encouraged one's enthusiasm obviously in understanding what Brian was doing, and anything we could do we would obviously do it to try and help him, I mean have a bit of Fossil Bluff old Tal.

Taylor: Thank you very much.

Smith: Have another piece.

Taylor: Thank you very much.

Smith: Have another piece.

[Part 1 0:48:37] Lee: There are clear fossils on this one.

Taylor: Oh yes, they're palm fossils yes, *ptilophyllum* which is a tropical plant.

[Part 1 0:48:44] Lee: Were you expecting that?

Taylor: Yes. As a result of looking at the reading the reports from earlier visitors to Fossil Bluff, yes. I mean the thing what I did was I, they did become involved voluntarily but what I also did, I mean you can gain a lot from the screens as to what is lying above you. So what I did was I made drawings, or I suggested to John and Cliff well 'Maybe you'll find a fossil looking like this'. So I gave them little drawings and while I was up on the cliffs doing my work they were amongst the screens collecting specimens, and quite a number of the best specimens were actually collected by these two, which I subsequently of course wrote up. That's fair to say, isn't it?

Smith: Indeed, and subsequently he sent us his reports, and an acknowledgement that we had..

Taylor: Contributed substantially to my work.

Smith: Very much appreciated.

[Part 1 0:49:42] Lee: Yeah, okay. Going back to the fact that you were three of you together for the whole winter, I can't imagine what it is like to know that you are not going to see another living thing for six months. Does it have an impact? What does it do to your sort of psyche that not even a passing sheathbill or skua?

Pearce: We never saw a moving creature for six months that's right, a bird, and then another bird.

Smith: Apart from him and him.

[Part 1 0:50:16] Pearce: Apart from the three of us. We never expected it. Brian did have a marvellous experience a year later I think, didn't you see some penguins?

Taylor: Yes, yes.

Pearce: Which is a complete freak.

[Part 1 0:50:29] Lee: Tell me.

Taylor: Well they'd obviously come up the strand cracks¹¹. The George VI Sound was a floating ice shelf which impinges on Alexander Island on one side and the Antarctic Peninsula on the other, and I remember that Fuchs and Adie were talking about sledging down towards the Sound and tasting salt water, and obviously these penguins had swum under this ice shelf presumably, and then come up one of these hinge lines or strand cracks and then walked down to Fossil Bluff, so on one occasion, yes, we saw a penguin walking past Fossil Bluff, and presumably then it disappeared down the strand crack and went somewhere else.

Smith: Was it on the menu?

[Part 1 0:51:13] Taylor: No, it wasn't on the menu, no, no, no. Having walked that way you couldn't possibly kill it, come on.

Smith: It depends.

[Part 1 0:51:21] Pearce: I think, you know, we didn't see any moving things but we really revelled in the majesty of the landscape, and the moon, the moon was very important in the winter, and we occasionally saw an aurora, John and I saw a magnificent aurora. So we got pleasure from..

Taylor: It didn't matter.

Pearce: ..in inanimate things.

[Part 1 0:51:49] Lee: You did some moonbathing. You mentioned moonbathing in your book. Perhaps you can..

Pearce: We just used to go out..

[Part 1 0:52:00] Smith: We certainly went out when the moon was obviously full, and you could almost read a paper by it. It was obviously with all the whiteness around with the moon you had a lot of light and it was, we were accustomed to just the Tilley lamps inside. It was incredibly bright and we could go skiing, which we did.

¹¹ Strand crack (or tide crack) – a margin of broken sea ice around any land, caused by tidal movement.

[Part 1 0:52:27] Pearce: And on occasion we found lichens. That was another organic thing. There were some lichens growing. You know, it's pathetic isn't it, that if we saw this we would bring it into the hut and say 'Look, look', you know and laugh.

Taylor: And I think the occasional moss cushion as well we found. So, there was life out down there.

[Part 1 0:52:49] Lee: You recognise these as your living your fellow companions, this lichen.

Taylor: Well, yes.

Pearce: We pretended to.

Taylor: And then there were occasionally, John would walk out of the hut door and look out and he'd say 'Bloody marvellous, isn't it? Bloody marvellous'. Do you remember saying that?

Pearce: Yes.

Smith: I'll take your word for it.

Taylor: You did, you did.

[Part 1 0:53:15] Lee: You had 87 days of darkness and looking at your film John, of course film during the darkness is black and white, inside the hut it's rather..

Smith: Oh yes cos that Triax [phonetic] I had.

[Part 1 0:53:27] Lee: And Cliff, you mentioned that spirits got a bit low and so, I'm going to talk about happy things shortly, but tell me about any sense of depression you may have had during the depth of winter.

Pearce: Well, I just think we all got fed up a bit. I mean we couldn't go out of the hut. The prospects, well lack of communication was pretty disheartening because we couldn't listen to music without hand cranking this generator, which was very arduous, we just ran out of things..

[Part 1 0:54:02] Taylor: We didn't have the facilities of a normal base. I mean because of the payload of both aircraft when we came down we had to make a decision between 4 books or a sweater or a pullover. We didn't have a radiogram or record player, although we all had record collections, because of the weight problem in flying down to Fossil Bluff.

[Part 1 0:54:26] Smith: And I had taken down a very, very superior Telefunken tape recorder, with lots of tapes, and that had to stay at Stonington.

[Part 1 0:54:36] Taylor: But one of the most important things we did bring down fortunately, as you'll hear later, of course was the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*, and a limited number of

books, and it was in reading a limited number of books that the Fossil Bluff Vocabularian Society came into being.

[Part 1 0:54:53] Lee: Well let's talk about that because you've shown me.

Taylor: Ok. Well it came into being because we're all reading the same books and we'd come across a word like 'peremptory' and look it up in my *Concise Oxford Dictionary* and, 'Yes, ah, yes, that's what it means, yes', and then a few weeks later Cliff would be reading the same book and he'd come across this word 'peremptory' and would ask me and I'd forgotten so we'd look it up again and John a week later would be reading the same book find the same word look it up, and so we decided to put this, to establish the Vocabularian society, and it was the duty of the person on cook duties for that week to put up one new word a day, preferably a word that could be used in sort of common parlance. So the first word, as I recall, was 'peremptory', this means admitting no denial or refusal, in other words an order.

Pearce: In which the command is absolute, admitting no denial or refusal.

[Part 1 0:55:47] Taylor: And we came across some extraordinary words and my most, my favourite is 'carphologise' [phonetic], which means delirious fumbings with the bedclothes etcetera. Nice word. But John, you have your own..

[Part 1 0:56:00] Lee: John's got the actual document there, this is a booklet?

All: Yes.

Pearce: 190 words, one word a day for 6 months, and once a month I'd put them all in this catalogue so that we'd got a record of our little dictionary. So there's 'parquetry' [phonetic], which we should have known, 'anosmia', which is loss of sense of smell, 'fornication', oh we'll pass over that one.

Taylor: 'Concupiscence'?

[Part 1 0:56:31] Pearce: 'Concupiscence', yes, that was a good one, and 'nyctitropic', turning in a certain direction at night. Yes, 'concupiscent', lustful, eagerly desirous, 'concupiscence', sexual appetite, so that was relevant.

Smith: Who put those words in the dictionary?

[Laughter]

[Part 1 0:56:51] Lee: Was that a problem, the sexual appetite?

Pearce: Mmm.

Taylor: No.

[Part 1 0:] Lee: In the film there's a lovely shot of you playing with pin-ups playing cards, with naked ladies on the back.

Smith: I think that was in our sort of Mid-winter's box of goodies. I think that's where they must have come from.

Pearce: Yeah.

Smith: But yes so, we did play cards that day.

[Snigger]

[Part 1 0:57:13] Lee: Three healthy men I mean you'd been married before you went away hadn't you, to Frances?

Smith: Indeed, yes, yes.

[Part 1 0:57:18] Lee: Was it a problem?

Smith: Oh it was a problem. I missed Frances tremendously, but it was something which she knew as well as I that that's something I was going to do to go down the second time, and yes I missed her very much down there, but I had some very good company. But you couldn't communicate in the way nowadays they can. We just had this radio which we had to hand pump to do it and it was a matter of sending morse all the time. And we did have communication from the BBC, of course. Every month we had..

Pearce: *Calling the Antarctic.*

[Part 1 0:58:12] Smith: *Calling the Antarctic*, and they had families back in BBC and they had the special programmes so families could get on and talk to us down there.

[Part 1 0:58:24] Taylor: It was what 200 words a month was it or something? It was something quite short and brief, but nevertheless it was a form of communication.

Pearce: We just couldn't rely on communications, could we? We had to be self-centred.

[Part 1 0:58:37] Taylor: Fortunately John did morse so in fact he tapped out our messages from Fossil Bluff then Cliff and I took turns to hand drive, crank, this radio.

[Part 1 0:58:50] Lee: This helped to assuage the loneliness, did it? Or did you not feel lonely?

Taylor: I didn't feel lonely at all.

Smith: I didn't feel that lonely quite honestly, no, although when you thought about it you think 'There are 3 of us here, we're probably the most isolated people on this planet' at the time, because the nearest place it was Stonington of course. But no, there was so much purpose a lot of the time in what we were doing that..

[Part 1 0:59:18] Taylor: I mean I had to double up my field notes to start with so I was fairly well occupied really. There was always a fear of fire in the Antarctic, believe it or not, and so

the instruction I had from BAS Birmingham was that I was to duplicate all my field notes and put them in a safe place well beyond the hut, which is what I did.

[Part 1 0:59:39] Lee: By hand, or typewriter?

Taylor: We were talking about this before you arrived. I knew that I hadn't typed my reports and I assumed therefore it was either Cliff or John and it's since been proved that in fact it was Cliff because he recognises the fact the typewriter that typed my report.

[Part 1 0:59:59] Pearce: That was interesting, one of the things I did take was a Good Companion typewriter and we had difficulty getting enough paper, but nevertheless that was a great comfort to me because I could hide in the radio shack and type away for much of the winter, and I noticed, I'd forgotten, that I actually typed up Brian's field notes, which goes together with his most brilliant field sketches.

[Part 1 1:00:30] Lee: Before we just break let's just finish on Mid-winter's Day. Tell me about Mid-winter's Day, what did you do to celebrate?

Pearce: John was cook.

Smith: Yes. We had the box, and the box..

[Part 1 1:00:45] Lee: This was a special box is it?

Smith: A very special box, which every base would have had, and if I recall correctly, I'm sure they'll correct me anyway, we had a bottle of sherry in there. There must have been some wine in there. There was a tin of chicken. There were all sorts of bits and pieces which made up this box. And so we did attempt to make it a day, oh we had crackers as well didn't we?

Taylor: We did have crackers, yes.

[Part 1 1:01:14] Smith: We had crackers, and so we were able to have silly hats and, but we had a festive sort of meal, and like other bases for the Mid-winter it's a very special day and we were in contact with the other bases, by morse of course, but we could hear them talking to each other and it was a good day.

[Part 1 1:01:44] Pearce: And there was a message from Sir Vivian Fuchs broadcast over the radio, and from Captain Johnson (*sic*)¹², he sent a message remembering the three that were left at Fossil Bluff.

[Part 1 1:01:57] Smith: I had a message from Wally Herbert, too, because he was, at this time he was with the New Zealanders and Mid-winter's greetings.

¹² Captain Bill Johnston, captain of *John Biscoe* at the time.

[Part 1 1:02:08] Taylor: So we sat on, I had to insulate sledge boxes, we had no proper chairs of course so we sat on those and we enjoyed the repast.

Pearce: And our dishes, were they metal plates?

Taylor: Metal plates.

Pearce: Metal plates, we had no proper plates.

[Part 1 1:02:22] Taylor: And so we enjoyed a repast which John, as he was on cook's duties anyway, so you had to produce that famous meal, didn't you?

Smith: Oh it was an incredible meal, wasn't it, oh yes.

[Part 1 1:02:33] Pearce: But I think John spent hours making some cakes.

Taylor: Cakes, fairy cakes.

[Part 1 1:02:40] Pearce: Really top quality fairy cakes. And I mean it was a jolly good feeling, a) we were half way through and we could look forward to light, and it was a memorable day.

Taylor: It was, yes.

[Part 1 1:02:54] Smith: We saw at least 10 seconds or so of it on film, didn't we?

[Laughter]

Pearce: With the Tilley lamp in the middle of the table.

[Part 1 1:03:05] Smith: And you probably noticed that instead of napkins, this is probably the reason why we didn't have much toilet paper at the end, you saw a toilet roll on the table.

[Part 1 1:03:15] Taylor: What we haven't mentioned John in all of this and Cliff is the importance of ascorbic acid¹³ tablets.

Pearce: Yes, I didn't mention that, but we used to have them to, what's it?

Taylor: Combat scurvy.

Pearce: Combat scurvy. Ascorbic acid.

[Part 1 1:03:31] Taylor: In photographs of the inside of the hut on the, well photographs of the table you'll often see along with the Tilley lamps the bottle of ascorbic acid tablets.

[Part 1 1:03:43] Lee: The ingredients for the Christmas Day meal were they in the special box? Or had you had to put stuff to one side?

¹³ Vitamin C.

Smith: No we were using a lot of stuff that we had already there as well.

[Part 1 1:03:54] Lee: So you were saving treats for Christmas Day.

Smith: Oh yes.

Pearce: Mid-winter.

[Part 1 1:03:59] Lee: Mid-winter, I beg your pardon, I understand.

Pearce: We had a bottle of sherry, didn't we?

[Part 1 1:04:04] Smith: I don't know about Cliff and Brian but certainly ever since we were down there, for a long time anyway come June the 21st back at home, here, we would have Christmas pudding and we would have turkey, and we would have a celebration with the family to celebrate Mid-winter's on Midsummer's Day. Yes, it's a big event down there.

[Part 1 1:04:30] Lee: Was it knowing that everybody else in the Antarctic at that time was doing the same?

Smith: Oh yes indeed.

Taylor: We'd be knowing that shortly afterwards the sun would return to Fossil Bluff, and I would be able to get back to my work again.

Disc 2

This is Cliff Pearce, John Smith and Brian Taylor, otherwise known as the First Fossil Bluff Three recorded at Market Overton in the county of Rutland on the 28th of August 2009 by Chris Eldon Lee.

The First Fossil Bluff Three, part 2

[Part 2 0:00:23] Lee: You didn't spend all your time on base. You managed to get further afield and I just wondered about the very first expeditions you attempted including, I think, an ascent of the Pyramid Mountain, is that right?

Taylor: Yes, well, lower slopes first. What I did I found out where the lowest exposed rocks were, that was not too technical, I found out where that was first started with those, went up the lower cliff faces and then when it came to the rocks higher up exposed on the east [incomprehensible] Pyramid it meant negotiating a cleft in the cliffs we called The Porter's Purgatory. So it meant portering, manpacking all our gear up it was purgatory to get, to allow me to have access to the highest exposed rocks on the top of Pyramid. So, portering, manpacking was one of our main, for me, one of our main means of transport.

[Part 2 0:01:19] Lee: And wasn't that strenuous?

Taylor: Yes. Yes, it was. And on the way back from a camp, all of us but mainly John and Cliff were involved in manpacking the rocks back to base and as I mentioned earlier that often involved 70 lb pack of rocks often in deep, soft snow.

[Part 2 0:01:43] Lee: What was it like, chaps?

Pearce: I remember our first expedition up to the Pyramid was just an exploratory one. It was about 2,200 feet above sea level, and it was just exciting to get up there, and then later we made a few tentative sorties out onto the King George VI Sound, and then John and I went on a trip across the Sound, and then John and Brian went on a trip down the coast, was it to Waitabit Cliffs?

Taylor: Toward Waitabit Cliffs, yes.

Pearce: And Brian sustained a terrible frost-bitten toe. So our early adventures were soon attenuated.

[Part 2 00:02:28] Lee: How did you get the toe problem?

Taylor: Well it was toe and hands, both stupidity on my part. We were sledging in, I think the temperature when we left base was either plus one or minus one, correct me if I'm wrong, John, then it went down to minus 19 and dropped to minus 37, and you normally wear three pairs of gloves the innermost being silk gloves to hold instruments but because manhauling could exhaust so much energy and you're perspiring so heavily every pair of gloves was wet, was damp with perspiration so I took these every pair of gloves off and I was the inside man on that occasion and I just put my hands on the Primus and my hands stuck to the Primus. And then I was wearing Greenlander boots, plenty of room inside them, several pairs of duffel inners and so forth. John had advised me to move my feet inside the boot which I did on a regular basis but gradually I felt the foot stiffen and then I found I had frost-bitten toe. And John then very kindly lent me his canvas mukluks¹⁴ and we manhauling our way back to Fossil Bluff, did we not?

[Part 2 00:03:55] Smith: We did indeed. The low temperatures at minus 30, 37 whatever, it becomes very difficult because the snow, you don't glide across the snow, it becomes just like sand, and it becomes difficult to manhaul. I mean the weather was fine, but it was so cold. But what we wanted to do was just to do a little reconnaissance to the south and I suppose just get out a bit from the base, which seemed to be a good thing to do, but, but unfortunately things happen so we had to go back. Yes, that was a pity but..

[Part 2 0:04:40] Lee: So had you underestimated how cold it would get?

Smith: I think we did at that stage.

Taylor: Mm, I think we did.

¹⁴ Eskimo soft boot originally made of animal skin but FIDS/BAS version made of canvas.

[Part 2 0:04:44] Lee: This was very early on wasn't it?

Taylor: This was, yes, towards the end of summer .

Smith: It wasn't during Mid-winter darkness, was it?

Pearce: Late March, was it?

[Part 2 0:04:52] Taylor: Well, we arrived on the 4th of March. I think I got about 6 weeks' field work in on the slopes behind Fossil Bluff before we decided to undertake this manhaul journey. I think we all felt we ought to be out, apart from me sitting them on a rockface, doing something and having a sort of an overview of the area that I was going to be investigating.

[Part 2 0:05:18] Smith: It could be partly that the initial thing was as you thought was to do quite a large area and naturally, that's not going to be the case. But even so maybe it would be a good thing to look at the succession further down.

[Part 2 0:05:34] Taylor: My instructions were to map 3 degrees of latitude, and so that reconnaissance survey that John and I undertook was allegedly part of that, but of course it never happened and in any case I'd more or less decided that this was not the way to approach this particular geological survey.

[Part 2 0:05:53] Pearce: Meanwhile I was back at the hut, and I think the first night we had an arrangement whereby they would wave a Tilley lamp from their camp so that we could make some sort of contact. And then they went on, and I was actually looking at the temperatures that were going down and down and down, and I really had misgivings, and the next day I kept an eye out, and I saw them coming slowly back, and I put something in the oven for them, and then went out to meet them and help them come in. And poor old Brian was in bed for..

Taylor: 6 weeks, was it?

Pearce: ..for 6 weeks, yes.

[Part 2 0:06:32] Lee: Tell me about frost-bite, what's it like?

Taylor: It's painful. If the door of the hut was slightly ajar you'd feel cold, your feet, your hands would tingle, and at the back of one's mind was always the possibility of the affected parts going gangrene. But fortunately for me nothing like that happened. We took advice from the doctor, Doctor Brian Sparke, based at Stonington, and [incomprehensible] these two lads using the radio, and I dusted my affected parts with, Sulfopad [phonetic] I think it was, and more or less lay in my bunk for 6 weeks until it cleared

Pearce: And I think the nail eventually sloughed off.

Taylor: The nail came off, and the finger [incomprehensible].

[Part 2 0:07:25] Lee: And you were staying in your bunk to..

Taylor: Keep warm, keep warm

Smith: It's such an immediate thing that, particularly with the hands if you touch anything metal. I got frost-bitten at W, at Detaille, when we were sledging, not badly but it was a matter of hitching up dogs on one occasion. Things were a little bit difficult and you just thought, 'Well I'll take off the main sort of gloves and we'll do it'. You touch metal and that's it. I mean if you try it in your deep freezer you'll well understand you might have done it.

[Part 2 0:08:03] Taylor: One thing I might also add in this context of coldness is the relative coldness of the hut inside. Although we had the Rayburn cooker and we also had the Uruguayan paraffin stove and three Tilley lamps it was still sufficiently cold inside for cans of food, I think possibly I can remember peas or something like that, I remember the seams splitting and the contents being spewed across the hut and often we would put our booted feet in the oven to thaw them out or keep warm.

Pearce: And there was a great temperature gradient.

Taylor: Tremendous temperature gradient.

[Part 2 0:08:44] Pearce: The floor was bitterly cold and our heads were moderately warm. But we got into the sleeping bags early, didn't we, because we had to let the fires go out. There were two reasons originally for letting the fires go out. We were worried about carbon monoxide so that was our first motivation, but later on we felt, 'Come on chaps we better save the coal', so it was very cold at night.

[Part 2 0:09:15] Lee: There was no question of any medical assistance for your condition? Nobody could get to you?

Taylor: Only radio contact with Doctor Brian Sparke at Stonington.

[Part 2 0:09:25] Lee: Was that something that played on your minds if anything went wrong the nearest doctor was 700 miles away?

Pearce: There were no germs, so we couldn't catch anything. There were no, I can remember at Deception Island, there was no colds during the year, and as soon as a ship came in everybody went down with colds. The main thing that we could have had was internal problems, appendicitis or something, or major problems were outside falls or breakages.

[Part 2 0:09:56] Smith: We had a limited amount of medical equipment there, and you had a certain amount of written medical advice, but you would have to rely on getting through to Stonington to talk to the doctor there, or they in turn getting in touch with the chief medical doctor in Stanley which sometimes happened. Nowadays of course they have *Curafid*, which is a very, very good volume of advice on how to treat things, but that wasn't there in that time.

[Part 2 0:10:33] Taylor: No, and I can remember a colleague of mine when he knew he was coming down with FIDS applying to have an appendectomy thinking it perhaps better to have the appendix out than possible appendicitis when he went down there, because you were going down there for two years or two and a half years if you counted the trip by boat, and he was refused. He was told that he could only have an appendectomy after he had finished the Antarctic training course at Birmingham, of which I've spoken earlier.

Smith: I think most of us had a peculiar sense of confidence in those days.

Taylor: Yes, we did.

[Laughter]

Smith: Nothing was going to happen to us.

Taylor: Probably misplaced.

[Laughter]

Taylor: You're quite right, John, quite right.

[Part 2 0:11:20] Lee: You all had dental examinations, is that right?

Taylor: I did.

Pearce: Well I didn't, I didn't have a dental examination.

[Part 2 0:11:26] Smith: No, no I didn't. We had the interview, this was in '55. I had the interview and they said 'Yes, you're accepted', it would be Dick Walker who was a New Zealander who was then going to Hope Bay, and they said 'Now go along to Harley Street, you'll have a quick medical and if that's ok, you go ahead and do your met training, and everything will be fine'. And it was a very cursory examination at Harley Street, but that was it.

[Part 2 0:11:59] Taylor: Bend over cough. [Laughter] But I did, I think all the geologists based at Birmingham were sent to the School of Dentistry in London to have their mouths x-rayed and any potential caries dealt with by dental students.

[Part 2 0:12:18] Smith: And there was quite a medical sort of physiological programme happening down there. It didn't happen with us of course, because we didn't have a doctor on base, but where you had the doctors you had to be party to the experiments, which we could talk long about but we won't.

[Part 2 0:12:35] Taylor: Well I was actually [incomprehensible] briefly in the second year I was involved in the experiment. I'm not quite sure what the results were, but they measured a square inch I think on top of your hand and took every hair out of that square inch.

[Part 2 0:12:53] Lee: Sounds like torture.

Taylor: But as I've said I've never seen the results of that, so I don't know what that was all about. But that was me being involved in an experiment.

[Part 2 0:13:04] Smith: With us we had acclimatisation, we'd been out in the field for 3 months sledging. They took, for example, they put our hands into Thermoses with ice in and then to see your reaction and then after 3 months we'd come back, oh and fat thickness, yes, callipers all round the body to see the fat thickness. And then when you came back to see how you had changed and your reaction after being in the field. And they were always surprised at my ability to accumulate an enormous amount of sub-cutaneous when they used to measure.

[Part 2 0:13:50] Lee: So you started doing your explorations around the area. Now I think there were one or two surprises in store for you, particularly when you got near Swine Hill and found a lake.

Pearce: Yes, John and I went out to cross King George VI Sound which was 15 miles across, and we wanted to go because on Grahamland there were igneous rocks, and that was interesting. So we trekked across, it was beautiful conditions, we saw the aurora australis, it was magical. And then when we approached Swine Hill we came up a slight rise and looked down and there was this fresh water lake, which Fuchs had called the Gadarine Lake, and we were amazed at that, weren't we John?

Smith: Oh yeah.

[Part 2 0:14:37] Lee: What was amazing about it?

Smith: The fact that it was there, it was so cold.

[Part 2 0:14:41] Pearce: I think the explanation was going back to Brian's tide cracks, that water was probably, you know the whole ice rises and falls with the tide, marginally, and I think the water came up through the tide crack, that can be the only explanation. But there was this semi-permanent lake so it was a surprise.

[Part 2 0:15:05] Taylor: And then of course also they brought some rocks back...

[Part 2 0:15:08] Smith: We found some azurite, azurite?

[Part 2 0:15:10] Taylor: Azurite, azurite, a copper mineral, yes.

[Part 2 0:15:13] Lee: As you expected, or?

Taylor: Mmmm..

[laughter]

Smith: It was a miniscule amount.

[Part 2 0:15:19] Taylor: I didn't have any expectations, Chris, really about the other side. But I knew the other side rocks, the other side of the sound contained igneous metamorphic rocks and so forth, yes, but, I had no (..)

[Part 2 0:15:30] Pearce: But John and I did get some experience of what it was like to be trudging along for 4 or 5 hours at a time pulling a sledge. We had perfect conditions, so there was no difficulty. But it was an exhilarating experience, wasn't it John?

Smith: Yes it was, very worthwhile doing.

[Part 2 0:15:49] Pearce: It made you realise how tough it was. We'd got 400 lbs on the sledge. You know if we were doing a long distance presumably it would have been doubled. But it was a good experience.

[Part 2 0:16:01] Lee: How far were you getting them, were they short treks?

Pearce: Well we did, I think, we did two days to do the 15 miles across, 7 miles in about 5 hours, I think, and then we stopped 2 miles short of Swine Hill and left our tent and did the rest on foot going round the lake, and scrambling up these, er, exciting slopes, wondering what we would find. Would we find some diamonds, [laughter], or seams of gold. We never did.

Smith: But it was enticing. We wanted to go further, but we didn't have the time.

[Part 2 0:16:41] Lee: Meanwhile you, Brian, were painting all this, weren't you?

Taylor: No. Sorry, Chris, no.

[Part 2 0:16:46] Lee: It was John, I beg your pardon, it was John, you were painting the scenery as well?

Smith: Painting the scenery?

Pearce: Painting, yes landscapes.

[Part 2 0:16:56] Smith: Painting, not outside until later in the year. I did some painting outside in the late [incomprehensible] I seem to remember, but painting inside, yes, we were painting in there.

Taylor: You were presumably then involved in your glossary.

Smith: I'd also painted the hut.

Taylor: But we can't talk about that, are we? Otherwise we're going to fall out.

[Laughter]

[Part 2 0:17:19] Lee: I noticed he turned red for..

Smith: A serious situation arose. But I suppose in the past I painted Biscoe House, I painted W, and we'd been given a whole lot of aluminium paint for, presumably, painting the hut somehow to preserve the integrity of the wood and these two were out doing the geology, and I could see when they came back it wouldn't look the same because this bright, shiny aluminium hut was not a thing to behold but it was done thinking that it would preserve the wood, outside wood, I'm sorry I'm tracking off.

[Part 2 0:18:03] Lee: But when you came back the hut had changed colour.

Taylor: Well, yes, you know, it was – the natural timber blended with the brown ochrous coloured cliffs behind, so it looked like a hunting lodge in some sort of remote part of the country, plus the fact that at the southern end of the hut was a snow drift, and what do you think John does? He doesn't, it would have taken a couple of hours to dig the snow drift away, no, no, no, he paints round the snow drift.

Smith: It gives it character. It shows you so you can monitor how..

[Part 2 0:18:42] Taylor: But then you wouldn't expect anything else of a man who on his cook's duties, if I can change the subject slightly for a moment, will cook the porridge in a saucepan, leave the saucepan as it was with scum and what have you, then heat the soup which is for lunch and then finally boil potatoes in the evening in the same saucepan.

Pearce: John was saving water and heat.

Smith: Oh yes.

[Part 2 0:19:06] Lee: Are you sure you didn't fall out at all?

Taylor: No we never fell out.

[Part 2 0:19:09] Pearce: I can't quite remember whose idea was it to put that beautiful painting at the door and it said 'Bluebell Cottage'.

Smith: Oh I did that.

Pearce: Which was a characterful thing to.

[Part 2 0:19:21] Lee: Was this a sign over the door?

Pearce: Yeah, to name the hut, Bluebell Cottage

Smith: It stayed Bluebell Cottage right up until, well, I'm just thinking of, somebody wrote a book about going South and she called in at Fossil Bluff, she wrote a book and then going on to Patrick Hills [phonetic] and so on and her time in Bluebell Cottage. Sorry, we digress.

[Part 2 0:19:44] Lee: In the summer period you were painting the scenic landscape outdoors, I've seen film of this, I'm just wondering how you kept your paint from freezing.

Smith: Ah, yes, well that was oil and of course in the summer the temperature is hovering around freezing. The problem with oil paint is that you get a bit of snow blown up onto it and there you've got a problem. But with water colour what I used to do was to do gin paintings because they don't freeze. If you tried a water colour outside it will fall off the paper, but if you use gin, in more ways than one, it won't fall off the paper.

[Part 2 0:20:23] Lee: So you were mixing your paint with neat gin.

Smith: I've done gin colours, yes – not a lot of people know that.

[Part 2 0:20:31] Lee: No, I didn't know that. Didn't you object to the waste of gin?

Taylor: No, I had no, wasn't partial to gin, was I?

[Part 2 0:20:41] Lee: So you got a couple of days' trek from the hut, but otherwise you were fairly confined to the hut's environment.

Smith: Well only during the winter. Once the light came back Brian wanted to work farther afield, and we worked 3 or 4 miles from the hut, and then we had to take it in turns to camp with Brian for two weeks at a time. So one of us was back at the hut doing the weather obs[ervations] and what not, and the other was supporting Brian.

Taylor: And I would be working a 12 hour day.

Pearce: So we had a lot of time outside the hut.

[Part 2 0:21:20] Lee: So when two were out that would leave one person, you describe this in your book again, Cliff, of being alone in the hut.

Pearce: Yes.

[Part 2 0:21:28] Lee: I get the impression that was a time when it was quite difficult to keep your spirits high.

Pearce: Well, you had to keep on changing things to do, to go out, to write, yeah it was difficult to fill the time I think, wasn't it?

Taylor: Well, yes, it must have been.

[Part 2 0:21:45] Smith: Well certainly there were weather obs, which we did. Now I've got to think very deeply about this, what else did we do?

[Part 2 0:21:56] Pearce: When you were on your own in the hut you couldn't listen to the radio. You needed to hand crank the generator and hold your head, it was impossible. So when you were on your own you were truly on your own, and you (..)

[Part 2 0:22:14] Smith: And we didn't have the contact, which of course a normal base would have with radio, with any field party. So that again was a great difference at Fossil Bluff, at any other base you should have had the facility to be able to communicate, as we did of

course when the people came down we could then with the sledge party communicate with the base, but we couldn't do that.

[Part 2 0:22:36] Taylor: I think the other thing we haven't mentioned hitherto is the fact that Fossil Bluff was unique if only because it was a one roomed hut. So unlike other bases where if you had a sort of disagreement or you're out of sorts you go and spend some time in the radio shack or the survey room or the bunk room, we were, you know we just had this one room and if there was a sort of dispute or verbal or otherwise the only thing to do well you could walk out of the hut but you had to come back in again and face that person.

[Part 2 0:23:06] Lee: So you did have some disputes?

Taylor: Bah!

Pearce: Well..

Smith: We might have from time to time, but, you know, nothing of any great consequence.

Taylor: Nothing of any great moment.

[Part 2 0:23:15] Pearce: Nothing of any great moment, no. We used to, when we could get a radio 1961 was a particularly bad year politically. The Cuban missile crisis, the Berlin Wall and there were various other things, and we used to discuss this, and obviously we had different opinions on this, and sometimes things got a bit heated but those two were always wrong.

[Laughter]

Smith: No, these two were always wrong.

[Part 2 0:23:45] Taylor: You had to recognise that while perhaps they were irritating you in some sort of small way you were irritating them.

[Part 2 0:23:53] Lee: I'm intrigued by this idea three men miles from anywhere isolated in a hut in the Antarctic discussing Communism, but I think that's just what you were doing was it?

Pearce: And the other thing is, was there going to be any place to go back to?

[Part 2 0:24:06] Lee: Would home still be there when you got back?

Pearce: Would home still be, I mean it was a terrible year 1961. I mean Kennedy and Kruschev and the Cuban arms crisis that was a mega, for us in the wilderness, the news that was coming in was pretty bad, and of course we could pick up bits and pieces of it and we were left to discuss it ourselves.

[Part 2 0:24:29] Taylor: But politics wasn't a subject that you would normally discuss because obviously you'd got opposed views and that was not looked upon as very favourable.

[Part 2 0:24:41] Lee: Is it because you're isolated that these things became greater, they kind of got expanded in your minds?

Pearce: We hadn't got a balanced view on them from the commentators, all we got was the sheer news of what was happening.

[Part 2 0:24:57] Smith: But we were also at the same time very interested in what was happening around the bases. We were intrigued what was happening at Stonington, and anywhere else where we could get news of what they were up to. And we were interested, of course, in the temperatures they were experiencing. 'We were colder than you', you know, there was this dialogue between bases. Actually it was a very healthy thing whichever base you were on you were always in contact.

Pearce: We were eavesdroppers rather than participators in the communications..

[Part 2 0:25:34] Lee: That must have been frustratingly hard to a certain extent I would have thought. You couldn't correct them or ask questions or..

Pearce: That's right, no you couldn't.

[Part 2 0:25:47] Lee: Can we talk a bit about the attempts for Stonington to reach you because this of course became a protracted procedure. I'm wondering, when were the first indications that things were not going to pan out as planned in terms of being relieved, or being joined by the Stonington party?

Pearce: Well the basic facts were that on September the, we knew they were getting ready to come, and they set out with two dog teams on August the 23rd, and two Muskegs on the 24th. That was fabulous, two weeks' time they'd be with us

[Part 2 0:26:25] Lee: And you could do the summer programme and..

Pearce: We could do the summer programme. Now they set out across the ice down in South Marguerite Bay and suddenly the ice started to break up and the Muskegs had to go quickly to an island called Compass Island. The dogs came up to them later, but the dogs could hop around the ice and so they didn't have to go straight back. The Muskegs went to Compass Island on September the 10th when the sea ice broke up. They were stuck there for 44 days.

[Part 2 0:27:02] Smith: Am I right in saying this Cliff, excuse me for interrupting but, am I right in saying the Muskegs had to be left on the sea ice, they couldn't get on the island, and so they were in dire straits and wondering whether or not they could get the Muskegs back ..

[Part 2 0:27:18] Pearce: Initially, but eventually they managed to get them ashore. Well they left on October the 24th and then they tentatively started out south again, and they got round Cape Jeremy when one of the Muskegs sank. It was they were going through deep snow going down through deep snow, it suddenly started going down, and these things were supposed to float, this one lasted 30 seconds, and it had on board Howard Chapman's skis,

Bob Metcalfe's cameras, and lots of other things, so they lost one of the Muskegs. And then they struggled on to climb up King George Barrier, the Sound barrier..

[Part 2 0:28:03] Smith: Do you mind my interrupting one thing there, because when you're saying that when it sank, Brian Bowler had great sense in taking off the doors, so they in fact were able to get out very quickly, and, yes, sorry.

[Part 2 0:28:19] Pearce: And somebody else came round and cut the tow rope to save the sledge. So basically they managed to get up on the Sound and they arrived on November the 24th after 93 days with no travel on 73 of them, but the last 100 miles were covered in three days. So that was a long time for John and Brian and I. We were desperate that they would come, a) because we wanted the dogs, and the company, and we wanted the food. And poor old Brian was unable to go anywhere. So, it was a real tribulation, and it was a disaster and it meant that they didn't get to the base until November the 27th, by which time the Sound was covered with lots of water, and that inhibited much chance for sledging.

[Part 2 0:29:24] Smith: But while that was happening which was, yes, a disaster for the plans and it made national news because of the predicament, certainly while that was happening, you were still able to carry on with your programme.

[Part 2 0:29:40] Taylor: I was still able to work, yeah, it didn't affect me that much.

[Part 2 0:29:43] Smith: It didn't affect, you were really doing so much work there, but it certainly was discomfiting to them and certainly to us that this hadn't happened, because it prejudiced the proposed scheme of things for the whole of that sledging season.

[Part 2 0:30:03] Taylor: Sorry, I mean one thing obviously I wanted to maximise my time down there. Hence my wish to go down to Fossil Bluff when we did in the March of '61, and then of course to over-winter. Now there's a philosophy, two philosophies about over-wintering it's either a complete waste of time or it isn't and as far as I'm concerned it wasn't, because I could, as soon as the sun got up, and as soon as the snow started to melt off the rocks I could be out. So I was, I think, contemplating being in the field by the middle of August, actually I got out I think on the 9th of September. Now had I been dependent on transport from Stonington, either by land either by dog sledge and Muskeg, or by aircraft later, I would have lost all those months, in fact my fellow geologist Arthur Fraser, who was on that trip, on that land expedition turned back, so he lost all that time, I gained all that time, so that was..

[Part 2 0:31:07] Pearce: You gained all that time in a limited area when you might have gone further ..

[Part 2 0:31:12] Taylor: No, Cliff, I wouldn't, no, no, no I wouldn't because I was working on Rubble Hill at that time, at least I was about to go on to Rubble Hill or Mount Aire [phonetic] as it's now known, and, no I didn't actually lose any time at all. The only thing I gained by them coming was that there was more man-power, if you remember Cliff, to get

across the, what is now known as Trio Glacier, which is named after us, very nice, but yes, so it didn't affect very much.

[Part 2 0:31:40] Lee: On the other hand you were hoping they'd be with you and they were turned back. And you must have heard on the wireless they'd turned back. I think they turned back more than once, and there was more than one failed attempt.

Pearce: There were all sorts of, the dogs were coming backwards and forwards because they were more flexible.

[Part 2 0:31:57] Taylor: And the other geologist definitely decided that he could probably use his time more sensibly working around Stonington Island than coming on down south, so Arthur stayed.

[Part 2 0:32:07] Smith: Well the best laid plans you see there, if we hadn't have used the chance that existed to get the wintering party in then how much work would have been done? Very little.

Pearce: Exactly, exactly.

Smith: And so, in spite of the problems a lot of very good work was done

[Part 2 0:32:27] Lee: Did it occur to you they you might not make it?

Pearce: I think, no, the first call was 'Mayday, Mayday'.

Smith: Yes, we picked that up, didn't we?

[Part 2 0:32:36] Pearce: Yes, and there was talk about flying the Otters down from Deception Island but they had prior commitments elsewhere, I think at Hope Bay. So no.

[Part 2 0:32:48] Smith: Am I right in saying that the Mayday, Mayday call we picked up, and Stonington didn't?

Taylor: They didn't, that is correct.

Smith: We got in touch with Stonington.

Taylor: Yes, we did.

[Part 2 0:33:01] Pearce: It was incredibly frustrating because John and I particularly, wanted to have a chance to run with the dogs. We lost..

Taylor: It didn't matter to me, no.

Pearce: You were up your slopes.

Taylor: I was, yes.

[Part 2 0:33:17] Smith: I'm sure at the back of your mind though, you wanted, as you said earlier, you wanted to make a really good sledge journey down south.

[Part 2 0:33:23] Taylor: I wanted to make an impact on the sledging record but I soon decided from looking at, right from the beginning and looking at the sediments of Fossil Bluff that that wasn't going to be, no.

[Part 2 0:33:34] Lee: Did you allow yourselves to contemplate what would happen if they didn't ever make it, or you had to spend another winter?

Smith: I think that was highly improbable, quite simply because the facility at that stage with the Otters. If it wasn't for our Otters you could get in a relief from another agency. I don't think there was any thought in our mind, as in the past when they didn't have that backup, I felt, and I'm sure that Cliff and Brian felt the same, that there really wasn't any problem because they could get the Otter down there whatever happened, or use the Argentinians or whoever.

Taylor: Or Americans, yeah.

Smith: So, I don't think it really worried us but it's just sad that they..

[Part 2 0:34:22] Taylor: Actually I would have liked to have stayed another winter, another year, because the geology was so fascinating, but my mother was on her own and I just felt that perhaps, you know, it would have been a bridge too far. Plus the fact that the Survey at that time, I don't think, would have encouraged people to stay down another year, but scientifically I wish I could have done.

[Part 2 0:34:48] Lee: Well you stayed on two years anyway.

Taylor: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:34:51] Lee: I'm wondering what further advances were made in the second year, at Fossil Bluff.

Taylor: In the second year?

[Part 2 0:34:57] Lee: Was it very different the second year, life at Fossil Bluff?

Taylor: Life was different, because I'd lost my two friends.

[Part 2 0:35:05] Lee: Did you miss them?

Taylor: Yeah, and I missed their involvement. I mean the others were very supportive in many ways, in many different ways, but they weren't sort of as involved and engaged in my programme as these two were. I could still get on I mean I, I think one of the things you become when you're down in the Antarctic for that long is independent. And I can be completely independent, I can be completely cut off from anybody else, all I'm, my interest was in my science basically. The science, and the science which was as I mentioned to you at

lunch time was absolutely fantastic, finest field area any stratigraphical palaeontologist could ever wish for, and so I was totally absorbed. And we had this change of personnel, we had the dogs, Muskegs, aircraft, hut lights, unfortunately, which necessitated me sleeping outside the second winter.

[Part 2 0:36:13] Lee: Because?

Taylor: Because I couldn't sleep with the hut lights on, and although I tried every stratagem to cut out the light around my, 'cos what had happened was that they installed an overhead light, or at least the overhead light which was previously installed, they had it working, and they also had bunk lights installed, and the bunk lights instead of pointing down on top of the head of the individual shone straight out into the face of the person lying opposite. And in those days I suppose I was more intolerant than others of light than I was, certainly intolerant...

Pearce: So didn't you go to bed at 10 o'clock, Brian?

[Part 2 0:36:51] Taylor: No. What I tried to do I obviously you had a mask and I also covered my bunk area with cloth. Now the only cloth that we had available in substantial quantities was the Union Jacks. So I sewed all these Union Jacks together and put them round my bunk area but even though that cut out a lot of the light you were still conscious that the light was on and although I asked the other 3 members of the party if we could come to some agreement as to when the light should go out they weren't prepared to do that, so democracy was obviously working against me so I said 'OK, I'll take a tent and sleep outside', and that's what I did for the second winter. Now that would never, ever have happened under John or Cliff, no.

[Part 2 0:37:39] Lee: So the base leader didn't back you up then.

Taylor: Well, no..

[Part 2 0:37:43] Lee: Each man had his different needs and ..

Taylor: Well then I suppose they were, like John and Cliff in the previous year, they were there to support me, I was the only scientist on base for the second winter again. So I suppose in a way they should have been supportive of me or at least we should have come to some agreement. But they couldn't and obviously he was one of the three that wanted no restriction on when the lights should go on or go off.

[Part 2 0:38:07] Lee: They were reading at night then?

Taylor: And playing cards and whatever, of course once again, the second year, I had to work I had to plan how, I had to duplicate all my field notes, I had to plan my field work, plan where the depots were going to be laid etcetera, so it wasn't as though I was just sort of, you know uninterested in playing cards, uninterested in what they were doing, I just had a job to

do, and although my boss was 10,000 miles away I thought I was taking a professional attitude to what I was doing.

[Part 2 0:38:41] Lee: So the friction that wasn't there in year one did appear in year two?

Taylor: Well – only marginally. I don't hold it against them for what they, you know, people say I should have done but I don't, that was 3 against 1 basically and I was the odd man out.

[Part 2 0:39:01] Lee: What was it like sleeping in a tent all winter?

Taylor: It was a bit like, if you've read *The Worst Journey in the World*¹⁵ it was a bit like that but not quite so severe in the sense that the temperature I believe, looking at my records, dropped down to about minus 41. And what I did was to every morning when I got up I'd roll a spare sweater into the neck of the sleeping bag, so at night when the sleeping bag was frozen I would get into the neck, take the sort of bung out get into the sleeping bag foetal fashion then gradually of course my body warmed which allowed me to put my legs down to the bottom of the sleeping bag, and then I would then sleep and the following morning that process would be repeated and every probably month or 6 weeks however long the winter was, I would take my bag into the hut which was only 50 yards 100 yards away and dry it out and then go back up again. Come in, obviously, for meals.

Pearce: What fortitude.

[Part 2 0:40:09] Lee: And the others let you do that?

Taylor: Yeah.

[Part 2 0:40:12] Lee: OK.

[Laughter]

[Part 2 0:40:13] Lee: Didn't it, it didn't kind of reduce your work capacity?

Taylor: No.

[Part 2 0:40:18] Lee: No?

Taylor: Only because the work was my life, and I would work as I did when Cliff and John were with me a 12 hour day. So I'd go out at 8 or whatever time I would go out, I'd come back 12 hours later. I'd take my rations, of course we were on first year rations so I'd take whatever I was allocated in terms of squares of chocolate, what did we have? Biscuits, ship's biscuits with butter and laid with Marmite and probably a drink, and then at periodic times during the day I'd have an alarm in my rucksack and it would ring, and I'd have my two squares of chocolate and one biscuit and then 4 o'clock, 6 o'clock I'd have the rest of it and then 8 o'clock when I got back to the tent Cliff or John would be there with a prepared meal.

¹⁵ By Apsley Cherry-Garrard, a member of Scott's last expedition.

And that's how I worked, 12 hour day. Because I felt that because of the nature of the weather, sedimentary geology is a science of the, you don't need a hammer to be a geologist you need to observe, and obviously you don't want the rocks to be covered by snow so the only condition I made with myself was that irrespective of the weather, of how cold it was, how windy it was, how much snow was in the air as long as the rocks were exposed to view I would go out.

[Part 2 0:41:46] Pearce: Brian, how many pairs of boots did you get through in a year?

[Part 2 0:41:49] Taylor: About 14. Because of course you had to kick footholds, and because the cliffs were very high and you were sort of traversing the cliffs to get at the highest rocks you had to kick footholds into the rock to hold on and then what I would then do I would decide which line of direction I was going to take and then I would take a bed, sometimes artificially divide into a metre high, and then walk that bed 100 yards that way, 100 yards that way, collect everything in it, and then we'd go up another metre, another metre, another metre until I came to the top, and that's how I worked.

[Part 2 0:42:29] Smith: And then those horizons that you were working, you then would go to another place, a long ways away and try to pick up the [incomprehensible]

[Part 2 0:42:40] Taylor: You were using fossils, you were using the phrology [phonetic], using rock types as marker beds, like you draw lines on a piece of paper or wallpaper if you're using those as marker beds then you would go then from manhaul and manpack or in the second year dog sledge to a nearby crop and you would pick up the same marker beds and then you would...

Smith: On the [incomprehensible]?

Taylor: On the [incomprehensible].

[Part 2 0:43:06] Lee: What was the worst thing about your year, at Fossil Bluff?

Pearce: The worst thing? I don't know that there were bad things, I mean I just used to love to go up onto the Pyramid Peak or other elevations, or I used to go round to a little valley which I called Hollow Valley, which as a geographer had got all the U-shaped valleys and the arretes, erratic blocks, all the features of glaciation and just take an interest. I think the worst thing I suppose was frustration at not having the dogs arriving, because John and I were dead keen to get on to a dog journey. I don't think there were any terrible moments.

[Part 2 0:43:59] Lee: What about you, John, was there something which you dreaded or had to put up with?

Smith: Again, not really because, I suppose like Cliff and basically Tal it was the dislocation of the overall plan of getting the Stonington party down there, that was the great disappointment because one felt for oneself and for them. But that was the disappointment, and to a degree, I suppose, one hoped like you, Brian, thinking in terms of

travelling further south, I would love to have gone down right to the southern tip of Alexander, I would have loved to have gone over into the Batterbees, and to the back of beyond of Alexander Island.

[Part 2 0:44:51] Taylor: And see those tree trunks in situ further down.

[Part 2 0:44:53] Smith: Oh yes, I'd loved to have done all that. But, the overriding thing was the quality of work that was to be achieved, and I think to a very large degree that was done, and so the only regret is I suppose was Stonington, not getting down there, and also not being able to travel so far, but as I say overriding all this it was the work that was important.

[Part 2 0:45:21] Lee: How important was that work, was it absolute breakthrough pioneering stuff? In retrospect does it seem as important now as it did the day you were doing it?

Pearce: I think what all that we contributed, I think I'm making an analogy of a grain of sand in a sand dune, we contributed little particles of knowledge into it, from FIDS as a whole, an overwhelming corpus of surveys and geological studies and biological studies and all of us in our way contributed, I mean Brian made 12 or 13 top professional articles. I did a little thing on meteorology, and John made his film and so on, and I was writing half a book, so I think there' was a feeling that we did achieve quite a lot really.

[Part 2 0:46:23] Lee: Let's take the majority of the work as an example. The work you were doing nearly 60 years ago now is it still relevant today? How does it plug into what we know about meteorology today?

Pearce: Well it could be used as a source to compare one year at Fossil Bluff with now, what are they John, automatic readings.

[Part 2 0:46:46] Smith: Yes at the moment you can download, you can see every day as I do at home, I look at the automatic weather station at Fossil Bluff and I see and can download all the information about temperature, pressure and so on, and it's intriguing because those comparisons have incredible relevance now when you're thinking of global warming. I think overall talking about the general thing I think basically you felt that you were if you like achieving the credo of the whole idea of what was happening down there it was exploratory, it was substantial scientific work, and as such, I felt, yes it was a grain of sand, but was an incredibly important part of it.

[Part 2 0:47:37] Lee: And you were also elaborating the very limited mapping work that had been done.

Pearce: We had our own primitive maps based on the basic framework. But the surveyors actually in 1961 started taking tellurometers¹⁶ down the Sound to institute ground control for future survey work. So it was all the beginning, and if we hadn't been there it would have been delayed for another year.

¹⁶ Radar based distance measuring equipment.

[Part 2 0:48:05] Lee: Do you think you made a contribution to the politics of the Antarctic?

Pearce: Not really.

Taylor: No, apart from being there.

[Part 2 0:48:13] Smith: Well, actually it still is an incredible contribution to it in, I suppose, the government thinking about it because it gives substance to territorial claim.

[Part 2 0:48:26] Pearce: Especially if they suddenly found some fabulous minerals down in the back of Alexander Island, though they're not likely to, and there were claims put forward here we were the first residents, British residents on that island – it's inconsequential really, but you never know.

[Part 2 0:48:51] Lee: So, if it was a success this year or in your case two years in Fossil Bluff to what do you attribute the early successes of the British Antarctic Survey work that was done? Is it down to supreme management or down to the men on the ground? What do you reckon?

Taylor: In short it's down to the men on the ground. In my case, anyway...

[Part 2 0:49:15] Smith: It's a melange it is a right mixture. There were some very good administrators, and some which were not up to the mark, but the overall balance, as evidence is there to be seen, is quantifiable and it has real quality compared to many other nations.

[Part 2 0:49:39] Taylor: In my experience looking at umpteen generations of geologists employed by FIDS and by the British Antarctic Survey you couldn't find a better qualified group of geologists anywhere. They were all of the highest calibre, and it was only, it was their, sort of, energies and enthusiasm and professionalism that they produced the results that were ultimately published.

[Part 2 0:50:08] Lee: What about the management of the geological team as executed from Britain?

Taylor: Well, I have strong reservations about the way that the geological scientists' survey was managed, I felt that the chief geologist wasn't sufficiently involved in the results that people brought back. He tended to be satisfied with his own reconnaissance survey which was excellent of its kind, but of course the science of the [incomprehensible] had moved on, and I don't think he fully appreciated that, and there was a personality problem as well with him and the rest of us geologists. I mean we were recruited from just about every university in the country, red brick and other, and we just didn't seem to gel with the chief geologist and I was at one stage the senior geologist to him and I felt that things could be changed with a bit of, you know, TLC, and what I asked for was a meeting with Sir Vivian Fuchs, and possibly Bill Sloman, and an independent arbiter, because I felt that the geologists' professionalism was being castigated, and a lot of work was being wasted. People were leaving prematurely before completing their, but the whole point of geology compared with any science is to

publish, and a lot of data was left unpublished because of the personality clashes between the geologist and the chief geologist I thought this should not have continued. And therefore I asked for this, and of course I was the spokesperson, I put my head above the parapet and did not get the support apart from one person who subsequently apologised, but I never got what I wanted which was a, I didn't want to talk about the chief geologist behind his back, I don't think he wanted to talk to headquarters about me behind my back, I just wanted a meeting round a table with Sir Vivian, with an independent arbiter to try and thrash things out, to try and find a better way for the Survey geologists to operate both at Birmingham and elsewhere, and I think it was heinous that we never had a proper pre-Antarctic training programme, I thought it was heinous that as field geologists or any field person we never had any training on surviving in the Antarctic. Now both those things have been remedied, but too late in my case.

[Part 2 0:53:59] Lee: But where did that particular buck stop in those days? Was it Fuchs?

Taylor: It stopped with Fuchs, and Fuchs so I'm told, I mean I was, I hope it's not too big a digression I came to a point at the end of my research, or nearly the end of my research because my work was never completed, the fossil fish are still un-described. And the other thing of course is that we always had to publish in *Survey Bulletins* we were not allowed except under exceptional circumstances to publish elsewhere and most scientists would want to publish in a specific journal like, in my case, *Tissue and Cell* or something then, I published a paper on them on [incomprehensible] cuticles [phonetic], so that was another thing. There was virtually an embargo on publishing elsewhere. So it was a real problem.

[Part 2 0:53:53] Lee: Was geology not high enough up on the agenda with BAS, or FIDS as it was then?

Taylor: No, I think it was the fact that Sir Vivian had, I understand from Bill Sloman that Sir Vivian's policy was not to interfere. You put someone in charge, that person does the job, and it's I suppose, and you self cast [phonetic] then I suppose it may be unfair [incomprehensible] blind eye to what's going on. I mean everybody in BAS geology knew what was going on, but people in London didn't, and it was quite difficult. It was only latterly when people, later on, that people like Joe, not Joe Farman, who was the chap you mentioned, the Finance Officer¹⁷, he admitted, he had realised that something was seriously wrong with BAS Birmingham, but nothing could be done about it.

[Part 2 0:54:49] Lee: And your level of training you got was perhaps not what you might have hoped for, is that right?

Pearce: Well the training for meteorology was faultless, but the training for health and safety was non-existent. I mean we had our crevasse training a week before the *John Biscoe* sailed north, with John Cameron. I mean we had to go over some very dangerous slopes, and I was completely panic stricken as John and Brian made their way down this icy slope. Eventually

¹⁷ Eric Salmon.

I joined them down there. These days there'd be three mountaineers and an army of people with ropes, because this slope was really steep and dangerous, and yet it was a major route to where ...

Taylor: We got an ice axe between us was it?

[Part 2 0:55:40] Pearce: Yeah, we had the odd ice axe, didn't we? But we were completely, we weren't equipped we had no ropes down at Fossil.

[Part 2 0:55:48] Taylor: There could have been a *bergschrund*¹⁸ at the bottom for all we know.

[Part 2 0:55:50] Pearce: Absolutely. So we were not prepared for work in mountain and ice strewn country and crevasse work, we were completely unprepared.

Taylor: Novices.

[Part 2 0:56:03] Lee: And the film that you have John shows one or two what I would regard to be slightly health and safety issues such as the sail sledge which seemed to be gathering speed on your film. You made a sail for your sledge.

Smith: I just suddenly thought after manhauling with you..

Taylor: Thank you John.

Smith: ..and you, of course, I thought there must be a better way. So I thought 'Well we've got some spare Dexion around, I've got my sheet and a couple of skis for outriggers I wonder if it'd work'. Who was it who I sat on the sledge I think it was you wasn't it?

Pearce: I don't remember.

Smith: There was somebody sitting on the sledge. I think it was moving wasn't it?

[Part 2 0:56:44] Lee: Yes, absolutely, quite quickly actually.

Smith: And of course that could have been adapted very effectively with all sorts of other things.

[Part 2 0:56:50] Lee: It reminded me of *Swallows and Amazons*¹⁹ winter holiday when they rig a sail onto a sledge and sail to the North Pole, on Windermere.

Taylor: Could I just make one other comment? At the end of my research and the research of several other people there was an opportunity for say two of us to go back down to the Fossil Bluff area to delimitate the surfomational [phonetic] boundaries of this great thickness of

¹⁸ Crevasse formed where a glacier meets the mountainside.

¹⁹ By Arthur Ransome.

something like eight thousand metres, was it eight thousand metres, yes eight thousand metres of sediment, and we put a proposal to Sir Vivian to go back down just as a what we used to call a Summer Charlie to delineate these boundaries, and Sir Vivian approved in principle but needed the support of Doctor Adie who was currently abroad. When Doctor Adie came back he looked at these proposals and he agreed to it subject to myself and one other senior geologist writing a sort of, almost a sort of day by day account of what we were intending to achieve, which was fine. Then but within a few days of that, and I was elected to go down as leader on this expedition, I was given 12 months' notice to quit.

[Part 2 0:58:14] Lee: Right.

Taylor: Now a 12 month extension of contract which is in essence a 12 months' notice to quit, so that meant that, yes I could go down but I couldn't, there wouldn't be time to write up my results. I could stay back in Birmingham and try and write up whatever was left of my previous research, and what we tended to do at Birmingham was to swap specimens, if I was interested in fossil [incomprehensible] I would have all the fossil [incomprehensible] somebody else would have shell fossils ammonites and whatever that's how we worked, so I could do that, but I don't quite know how that last 12 months passed, but in the end I left, obviously under a cloud, with a lot of the work still undescribed, and still is undescribed, and of course I forfeited the opportunity to go back down south, which is a bitter pill to swallow and I'm still feeling sensitive now, as you probably gather [laughter]. Sorry.

[Part 2 0:59:26] Lee: The day, final question unless you anything else you want to bring up, the day you had to leave Fossil Bluff, what were your feelings on that day? Were you glad to get out, or not sorry to leave?

Smith: In all honesty, yes, it'd been a good year in many ways and yes I was looking forward to getting home and obviously going to Stonington and seeing all the other places on the way north, again a time of great expectancy, and it was a good feeling. Always a feeling of regret whenever you leave somewhere that has been your home and, to be removed from this character here of course,

[Laughter]

Smith: and to wish him well, but yes the idea of moving home was very good.

[Part 2 1:00:21] Pearce: Yes, we had had, after the sledges arrived, we had an influx of good food, and John and I had the chance to travel down to 72 degrees south with the dogs which was very exciting, but we knew after that there was going to be no more travelling so we were ready to go home. And the great thing was we were excited at the prospect of getting to Stonington Island for, as it happened, a full month, because Stonington Island is the most magical island for Fids, lots of American travels, lots of early British expeditions, and it's a magical place, so I was absolutely ready to go because I wanted to see more of the Antarctic before I finally arrived home. I was nevertheless very sorry to say goodbye to Brian and to the other chaps that had come down and we still see, well Brian and John and I see each other

virtually every year and we see lots of our other colleagues. So, I was ready to come home, but my goodness it left a lasting impression on us as you can see.

[Part 2 1:01:41] Lee: You stayed for another year but were you sad to leave in the end?

Taylor: Sad, very very sad.

[Part 2 1:01:46] Lee: Because the work was unfinished, or?

Taylor: Um hmm, the work was unfinished, a lot of the stuff I was discovering was new to science, and at the back of one's mind I was thinking, 'Well what else was there further down that cliff face that I'm never going to see, I'm never going to be responsible for discovering', so, yeah I had a fantastic 2 years, absolutely incredible, and as I said to you earlier I'd have liked to have overwintered a third year, but I don't think even then I would have been fully satisfied. It was a wonderful experience, it was unbelievably fulfilling, and a lot of long lasting friendships made.

[Part 2 1:02:34] Lee: Do you feel as though you have a place in Antarctic history, the three of you? Does it ever hit you occasionally?

Smith: Whether we like it or not everybody has a very definite place in history but I think, yes, it is substantial that we were the first three on Alexander Island and as such, yes, and the work that we did there together, we wintered there together, yes.

[Part 2 1:03:02] Pearce: And we have left our mark in that Brian was awarded a Polar Medal for his work, and John and I and Brian had a glacier named after us, Trio Glacier, the glacier that we used to cross every day, and then Brian had Taylor Buttresses named after him, and I had a mountain Pearce Dome at Fossil Bluff. The paradox was that Brian's Taylor Buttresses were in north-east of King George VI Sound, which is an area of igneous rocks that he never studied, and they didn't attribute some of the sedimentary areas to him, but we have left our mark in that way, and the basic fact is, when these things are recorded, we were the first three ever to live on Alexander Island, which gives us a sense of achievement.

[Part 2 1:04:01] Taylor: Of course I would never have known that these bluffs were named after me but for Cliff's research that he conducted on his book, because he was looking at place names and he suddenly phones me up about 14 years after the event and says 'You so and so, so and so, why didn't you tell us you've got this place named after you?' I said 'What? What?'

Pearce: Isn't it incredible they never told him.

Taylor: No. And ironically enough as Cliff said, miles away from my earliest interest, how typical is that?

[Part 2 1:04:34] Lee: Gentlemen, thank you very much indeed.

Taylor: It's a pleasure.

Possible extracts:

- Reasons for going to Fossil Bluff [Part 1 00:04:19]
- Filming [Part 1 00:12:53]
- Rationing of diminishing food and coal [Part 1 00:24:57]
- Flying down [Part 1 00:31:02]
- The hut [Part 1 00:33:12]
- The 'Bogloo' [Part 1 00:38:51]
- Getting on together [Part 1 00:44:27]
- Fossils [00:48:37]
- Vocabularian Society [Part 1 00:54:36]
- Mid-winter's Day [Part 1 1:00:30]
- Frostbite [Part 2 00:02:28]
- Temperatures inside hut [Part 2 00:08:03]
- Medical considerations [Part 2 00:09:15]
- Painting the hut [Part 2 00:21:20]
- Gin painting [Part 2 00:19:44]
- Disconcerting world news [Part 2 00:23:15]
- Failed attempts of Stonington parties [Part 2 00:25:47]
- Having to sleep outside [Part 2 00:36:13]
- The work of a geologist [Part 2 00:40:18]
- Thoughts on BAS management [Part 2 00:48:51]

- Pre-Antarctic training [Part 2 00:54:49]
- Feelings at leaving Fossil Bluff [Part 2 00:59:26]
- Place-names and Polar Medal [Part 2 1:03:02]

Queries:

There are repeated references to Pyramid (Peak). There is no gazetteer record of this name in the vicinity of Fossil Bluff. However, the photograph on the BAS website shows a pyramid shaped mountain behind the base hut named Gaza Peak.

Similarly Mount Aire [phonetic], said by Taylor to be the current name of what they knew as Rubble Hill, is not listed in any gazetteer. [Part 2 0:31:12]

Brian Taylor's speech is peppered, naturally, with geological terminology. This has been transcribed as faithfully as possible through a layman's ears, and will be subject to correction where necessary.

