

JAMES STUART MADELL

Edited transcript of a recording of James Stuart Madell interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on the occasion of the Hope Bay Reunion in Coniston on 20th October 2009. AD6/24/1/53. Transcribed by Stuart Lawrence 25th February 2014.

[0.00.00] Chris: This is Jim Madell recorded at the Hope Bay Reunion at Coniston by Chris Eldon Lee on the 20th October 2009.

Jim: My name is James Stuart Madell and I was born in Holborn in London on the 18th July 1932.

[0.00.19] Chris: What name were you known as by FIDS, Jim?

Jim: Jim, yeh, Jim Madell.

[0.00.24] Chris: What type of education did you have Jim?

Jim: I had, well after the, you know, junior stuff I went to a grammar school, Henry Thornton Grammar School at Clapham and then because of the death of my father, when I was about 13, we moved to North London and I went to Hendon County Grammar School there and left there in 1949. That was it, my education, education wise....

[0.00.54] Chris: No college?

Jim: No, well my father had died and my sister died a year later, so there was just mother and myself there and she had to go back to work again when she was at about 40, about 40ish, so I, my first job was with the London County Council in fact.

[0.01.11] Chris: What did your father do?

Jim: Well, he was signed on as a boy in the Navy in fact when he was 16 in 1916 and then re-signed as a man in 1918, when he was 18 years old and served did 12 years till 1930. Then he came out of the Navy then and I think he worked for the London Transport on the tramways or something like that and then eventually he got to work for London County Council on these big estates they had in London, blocks of flats and he used to look after these for one, two or three years. He was still on the Reserve until about 1940, he would have been finished but the 1939 war was declared and he got called up again, and went off from an office which he was running up to a destroyer working out of Scapa Flow in the winter of 1939/1940, stopping and , catching ships coming back to Europe and German ships whatever trying to get home and he collared a couple of them I think and served in the war. Did one Russian Convoy and he was invalided because of chest problems to shore postings and he went to Scotland in Campbeltown in the Fleet Air arm there and we moved up, we lived there for a year with him. After which we came back to London and he was released from the Service through ill health, before the end of the European War and unfortunately he died a year later because he had had cancer, in

fact Hodgkinson's Disease. My sister who worked as a telephonist with the supervisor at the American Embassy, joined the American Red Cross, worked in Europe and she married an American, a Technical Sergeant, who was a pharmacist, and she died of a brain tumor. So it was a very unfortunate period for the family.

[0.03.18] Chris: So you had to go to work?

Jim: Right, that was basically it. I mean in those days. Now as kids sort of go on, shall I shall I not stay on until I am 18, shall I go to university and then they have to be good enough to do it anyway. At that stage it wasn't a prospect for me to stay on beyond the general school certificate, as it was then, take that examination which I did, and to go farther into the Sixth Form, so I went to work. Do you want to know the series of jobs or what?

[0.03.59] Chris: No, well just the London City Council jobs because, for your living?

Jim: That was very basic, just a starting job. I was working in the architects department just filling forms in there, it was incredible the number of applications that came in from people that wanted to build sheds and do buildings and things like that, especially in the dock areas and they'd send a letter in which would be transcribed on to an official form and that job was extremely boring.

[0.04.26] Chris: So, how did surveying come into your life?

Jim: Well, that came in through the, I left there and went in to join the Admiralty. I was taken on as a cartographic draughtsman with the Admiralty at Cricklewood, where the office was. Just before I went into the Admiralty I was called up for National Service enlisted into the Royal Artillery, and I did survey training in the Artillery at Larkhill.

[0.04.55] Chris: Was that intended or was that one of those things that just happened to you?

Jim: No, I wanted to do it and I was selected, because in those days if you were a grammar school boy, you know, you were sort of "here", ha, ha, it was like having a degree today I think (combined laughter), but, we went to training at Larkhill for about six months, and then passing the necessary tests there. Then I went to Germany for eighteen months and another examination out there and stepped up as far as you could go as a National Serviceman really in terms of trade tests. Then I came back to the drawing office at Cricklewood, for about two, came out in '53, went on FIDS in '55, where I used to sit and look out of the office window in the summer thinking, there must be something a bit better than this for the next forty years, being stuck in an office. It was interesting work. I had always been interested in maps, and I was also interested in how on earth did you know where you were on the surface of this earth, you know and this brought on astro fixing and stuff like that, and the advertisement appeared in the Daily Telegraph, I think, I applied for the job and was accepted. A couple of quick courses with FIDS, before I went down on the astro work really, you know, so you can fix

your position and so on using theodolites and star observations and what have you.
That was it really.

[0.06.26] Chris: Do you remember anything about the interview?

Jim: Very little.

[0.06.30] Chris: Were you nervous?

Jim: Ha. No, it was astonishing. I don't think we would get the job today you know in the same circumstances of trying for it, wouldn't get it probably. I think they sort of see me with their pipes in their mouths and saying 'is he a good chap or not', ha, ha, that was the attitude really. But, I have no recollection of the interview at all, A letter came a few days later saying we're offering you the job.

[0.06.54] Chris: What space was there between the letter arriving and you actually going South?

Jim: Well I knew in the summer that I would be going at the end of the year. Unfortunately, that summer, I had an accident on the motor bike and broke my ankle and I was in hospital, in a plaster cast, thinking oh god, you know, the chances are gone here. They fortunately got it sorted before I was due to go on FIDS and in October we did these courses, October/November, and we sailed in December.

[0.07.24] Chris: You'd be being trained in survey work presumably in these courses, or were you being trained to cope with the Antarctic?

Jim: No, just survey work. Two courses one of them, only about a week's course, was mainly on astro work at the University College in London and then the one we went out to the field station, Imperial College field station, with Professor Stevenson, who was on the British Grahamland Expedition, before the Second World War.

[0.07.54] Chris: What did you make of him?

Jim: Nice guy, yeh, yeh, and he was useful to talk to as well because he had been down there, I think it was in 1937/38ish, something like that, and he knew all about it. We had a week or ten days there with three other surveyors, Fred Wooden, Pete Wiley and Doug Bridger. That was it really; we were just waiting for our sailing orders then.

[0.08.21] Chris: You sailed on which ship?

Jim: *Shackleton*. We went from Southampton. I am just refreshing my own memory now actually. (Jim refers to notes he has with him).

[0.08.33] Chris: Yes of course, but, the survey work is the biggest bit.

Jim: No, we sailed from Southampton. Well we went down there first for us to sail before Christmas but, apparently the ship wasn't loaded, it was out of balance, you know, and they sent us all home again, ha. So we had Christmas at home, and I went down to Cornwall with my Mother to visit some relatives, and came back and we eventually sailed on the 29th of December.

[0.09.00] Chris: 1955?

Jim: 1955, yes. Straight into a southerly gale, ha, ha, ha, and it was like a dead ship that night. It was rolling and heaving and doors slamming and crockery crashing, you know, and we ended up in Tor Bay the next morning with deck cargo which had come adrift, I think, and they had to re-sort all that out. We had a bit of a rest up before we finally set off heading for Montevideo, ha, ha.

[0.09.23] Chris: What was the *Shackleton* like all those years ago?

Jim: It was quite a nice ship actually, I think it was one of the Baltic Traders which had been bought by FIDS and it was quite comfortable, nice cabins, and everything you could wish for really, from a comfort point of view.

[0.09.41] Chris: How confident were you about its seaworthy seaworthiness, or didn't you know?

Jim: Didn't know. I was happy about it. It didn't seem to have any problems. There was one incident. There were the two levels of cabins and when she got rolling there was one cabin one day they had the porthole open and it rolled quite a lot and it shipped a load of water into their cabin on the lower deck. So they kept that shut in future, in bad weather anyway. But otherwise it was a comfortable ship. I didn't experience any worries or anything like that, yes it was OK.

[0.10.20] Chris: So you then went into Montevideo, briefly?

Jim: Yeh. We had the usual forty-eight hours there rampaging around before we set off to Port Stanley...

[0.10.29] Chris: Rampaging?

Jim: Ha, Ha, to a certain extent, yeh.

[0.10.30] Chris: Would you like to elaborate on that?

Jim: Ha, Ha. Well, it was the last point of civilization as far as we were concerned. Oh also the fact that it was the first time a lot of people, you know, had visited a quite foreign place and this was an experience as well. I had been to Germany, but that is still Europe, and this was something different, wandering about the town and everything was open all night and you could go out and start dinner at eleven o'clock at night and things

like that. It was about 36 hours of sleeplessness; by and large, into bars, ha, ha, lots of drinking and buying bits and pieces at the last minute.

[0.11.09] Chris: Did FIDS have a reputation in town?

Jim: I don't know, I think they were known, but, I mean there, there are no bad incidents, it's just a bunch of lads going out and having a last fling before they went South, I think.

[0.11.24] Chris: And then down presumably to the Falkland's, I think, was it?

Jim: Yes, that's right we went to Port Stanley. Had a few days there. And I did some last minute spending again, buying film and I think I bought a camera there as well as bits and pieces. It was "oh I might want this or I might want that" and then rushing off down to the Falkland Island Company store to buy this and that. Then I transferred all the gear and went to the old *Biscoe*, the old wooden one, which I was traveling to the Bases on, after, I think, about a week or ten days in Stanley, I think it was. Then I set off on the *Biscoe*, which is a nasty old roly-poly ship, ha. In the Drake Passage everybody was laid out in the bunks where Doc.Imray, Sandy Imray, came round dispensing seasick pills to everybody before we reached the Bases down there.

[0.12.22] Chris: What was your first impression? You had wanted to go the Antarctic and then suddenly here you were.

Jim: Yes.

[0.12.30] Chris: Was it up to your imagination?

Jim: I note in my diary that the first iceberg I saw was very disappointing it was all sort of grey and dirty looking, (combined laughter). I was expecting blue seas and skies and lovely white icebergs floating around, or blue/white icebergs, but it wasn't, it got more, I think you are a bit apprehensive as well going down there. The whole boat load of FIDS were all new ones and they hadn't been there before, so we were waiting wondering what we were going to meet, what sort of people you would experience when you got down there.

[0.13.07] Chris: Where you nervous?

Jim: A little bit yes, I think so, at first, just, that you know a whole bunch of new faces you walk into on a Base, people who have been there. Out of a Base of a dozen, eight of whom are going to stay there, they're the old hands, and you want to do things right or just learn the way of doing things, it's a different way of life, of course.

[0.13.34] Chris: Did you settle in there, did you adapt too?

Jim: Yeh, quite well.

[0.13.39] Chris: To the unusual environment?

Jim: I think so yes. I think being in the army helped there as well, especially living with guys, who are from all over the place, and although we were surveyors we had nice accommodation. When I was in the Army in Germany we had this ex-Luftwaffe place, a lovely barracks. Never the less you mix with allsorts of people there, who've done all sorts of things. In the Territorials we had to do three years in the Territorials when we came back and I'd gone into an airborne, an Army airborne unit and done the parachuting course with them. So, you know, there was this behind me.

[0.14.20] Chris: I have not come across this before; National Service was a good preparation for FIDS?

Jim: It was not a bad one, I don't think, no, in the sense of mixing with people of all sorts. I mean you get absolutely every type, when you get called up for National Service. Everybody poured in from all levels of society really so they have to mix.

[0.14.45] Chris: So were the FIDS of every type or where they more carefully sifted out or something?

Jim: I don't think so, no. They were very ordinary guys like myself, I mean nothing special. You get people down there, obviously geologists were qualified, doctors were obviously qualified, other people, a lot of them as surveyors in fact went down there, rather like myself, they had no formal qualifications and they did in fact do a couple of years down there and then come back and then go and study and get formal qualifications in surveying. This is a big difference from today, probably, when I think that everybody down there has possibly got a degree because of the work that they are doing is mostly scientific work and surveyors are obsolete now, I should think, replaced by GPS modules.

[0.15.41] Chris: What is your feeling about GPS these days?

Jim: Well it is great as a surveyor, I think. However it takes the fun out of things. I mean commercially it's much faster quicker and more efficient, and very useful, but, when you think of the time it would have saved down there, instead of going round triangulating, if you had gone into these various trig points and stuck up a GPS and determined where you are within about half an hour, ha, ha, instead of taking maybe two weeks going round beaconing things and doing all this sort of work, putting in ground control for the aerial photographs, it would obviously have speeded things up a lot. But, on the other hand, I think it wouldn't be such an adventure I don't think as it was then.

[0.16.30] Chris: It was an adventure then?

Jim: Oh absolutely, yeh, yeh, yeh.

[0.16.34] Chris: I suppose you were at the tail end of what they called the Heroic Period, weren't you really?

Jim: Well, I suppose so in a certain sense, yeh, still using similar equipment. Not that it had changed much. You were using dogs still and sledge driving and that sort of thing and I am certainly glad I went down then. I don't think I would want to go now because it seems, most of the work is summer visits, and they rush off into the field with helicopters, skidoos, or whatever, do what they want to do and then back to the Base. But then it was a totally different thing, there were so many other things. When I look through my diary, I think good god the time we were actually doing nothing, because of bad weather, things broken down, or you couldn't do this or you couldn't do that for various reasons. But it was all learning in a way, learning how to cope with these difficulties in a fairly hostile climate, and it didn't do anybody any harm, I don't think, that sort of thing.

[0.17.38] Chris: And you didn't let anything defeat you?

Jim: I can't recall anything, not really. You seemed to get over most things there with lots of lateral thinking, and improvisations and things like that. It usually works out. Most problems got solved, with what they had down there in terms of equipment and so on.

[0.18.05] Chris: Did depression ever affect you at all?

Jim: Oh, yes, you get the blues at times, you know.....

[0.18.13] Chris: It's called the blues is it?

Jim: Well I did anyway. Yes it's called the blues.

[0.18.16] Chris: How does it manifest itself?

Jim: I don't know, just some sort of certain lack of enthusiasm about doing anything, and thinking oh god, you know, it will be a long time before you are going home, this sort of thing. But they are brief periods, but obviously everybody gets a bit down at times in the normal course of life and then something will come along, something to deal with, and you just get on and deal with it. I think that's what helps a lot in a way, if you had other things to do, because of the living conditions you, you couldn't afford to be depressed I don't think. You just had to get on with things.

[0.19.02] Chris: So the blues would result in inertia for a short time?

Jim: Yeh, only maybe for a day or two, you feel a bit low and think well, best pick yourself up and get on with things, you know. It didn't last or anything.

[0.19.15] Chris: Could it hit you when you were "laying-over" in the field, was that the sort of time?

Jim: Yes it has done. When you are sitting around if you get some bad weather “lie-ups”, or conditions which are frustrating, deep soft snow when you are out sledging and you’re having difficulty carrying out your job and surveying, and sledging certainly. I mean, sometimes you get conditions with knee deep snow and you might only do a mile a day or something like that, flogging through it with the dogs trying their hardest, but not getting anywhere. It was up to here, Ha, ha. Snow and these sorts of things get you down or could get you down for a bit. It was very brief, it may be only 24 hours, and then you think oh god no, what is this all about. And then next day you are off and going.

[0.20.08] Chris: A common quality of FIDS seems to be that they are they are phlegmatic by nature?

Jim: I think, I would say so, yes, yes, yes. There are some interesting bodies really, you know, you see other peoples ideas of how to deal with things and how to solve problems. It was a large part of the job problem solving I think, you know, so much time, when I look back now, when I was at View Point, at Hope Bay, the pest there was that we only had batteries for power to drive the radio.

[0.20.48] Chris: No generator?

Jim: No generator no, no, because I was at View Point that year. I was there when we built a new hut and with people coming and going. I spent about nine months there, I didn’t spend a lot of time at Hope Bay, you know. I was doing a local survey there, and the most frustrating thing there was the damned wind generator which was nothing much more than an alternator with a propeller on it, ha, hah, ha, stuck on top of a small tower. It was constantly failing, breaking down, getting broken propellers and things like this, and so we would have batteries charged up and then they would gradually die away over the days and we would have no power for the radio to talk to Hope Bay. The lighting was pressure lamps, so it didn’t matter so far as that went. But, the things that went on there; trying to strap broken propellers together and then re-assemble them so that they would turn in the wind and all these sort of things, really.

[0.21.50] Chris: Tell me about View Point, because I haven’t really met many people from there?

Jim: Yeh.

[0.21.56] Chris: That spent any time there? Was it a comfortable hut, was it rudimentary?

Jim: View Point. The stores were landed, when I went out there we went round from Hope Bay to Duse Bay, but the ship couldn’t get into the icefoot. There was an old an old hut there which was literally about twelve foot by eight foot with two bunks in it and a little end bit with a table on which you could put the primus and a wash bowl. I don’t know when that was put up, it must have been in the late forties I should think, anyway

they were going to put the new building in, but the ship couldn't get into the shore, so the stores were landed, all the materials were landed on the end of the actual point itself on the edge of Duse Bay, and later in the year, when the sea ice formed in Duse Bay, we sledged over from Hope Bay and then brought all the stuff back to the building site, which was about, you know, a hundred yards away from the old hut. We then started building this thing with the putting in of the foundation piers and making up boxes for *ciment fondu*, an aluminized cement, which generally seemed to dry off quickly. Then getting these leveled up using a theodolite, you know, to establish levels and then the base timbers in. Everybody took a turn at building this during the year, people were coming and going from Hope Bay. Everybody had a go with a hammer and nails as it was all a pre-assembled framework. But the rest was supplied in boards which you, you know, were cut up and fitted as necessary. It was quite an interesting experience that, building a hut. It was comfortable in the end. There were four bunks in it and an *Esse Stove*, *big range* and a couple of other rooms. As I say, I was doing the local survey there myself and it was, it was a pleasant enough time together. There was an Argentinian refuge about forty minutes away, on the point itself, and they used to come across to see us occasionally or we would go to see them, but it was just a really was a refuge hut, only a small thing with a radio in it and that's it really. During the summer people were coming and going, but then at the end of the year there's a very nice time. I was finishing off the survey and the last group that was there was George Larmour, Bill Nicholls, Wally Herbert and myself, the four of us stayed there and just did things. Two of the guys were doing the network, Wally started doing some tide readings and I was carrying on with the finishing off of the survey. Then the ice went and we waited for the ship. The *Biscoe* eventually came round right up to the shore that year, and we just stepped on board and off we went and left Wally behind with the new faces. I enjoyed View Point, it was nice.

[0.24.55] Chris: What was the view like from View Point?

Jim: It was good, you could see across from looking north, you know, you have got the Tabarin Peninsula and the mountains there, Mount Taylor. You could see the backside of Depot Glacier more or less, and if you went up onto the point you could see down to the Crown Prince Gustav Channel and, I think, it is Beak Island that is there, and the other one, I have forgotten the names now, anyway you could see down the channel, yes.

[0.25.22] Chris: So is that a beautiful place?

Jim: Nice, yes. Rock and snow but it was good.

[0.25.28] Chris: Let's just chat a bit about View Point and the people that you worked with, because they are sadly no longer here, and as Wally Herbert is a name I have heard of?

Jim: Well, yes, yes.

[0.25.36] Chris: So fill me in on whom and what was Wally Herbert?

Jim: Wally Herbert, well he was my fellow surveyor at Hope Bay, and when we got there, there were two. There had been a survey of the Tabarin Peninsula that Dick Kenney had done. Local survey, fairly local, fairly large scale and the choice was they were going to do another one at View Point, and there was also going to be a journey down South, down the channel and up onto the Plateau. As it was, like, I drew the short straw really, because I got the View Point Survey and Wally was going to do the long journey. So that year there was lots of depot-laying going on down the channel. Wally and I shared the office there and we were swotting up on our survey and drawing up the field sheets and things like that. Wally was always thinking about what they were going to do on the journey, which, in fact, took place the following year 1957. But, Wally himself was a great guy, yes, very patriotic bloke I thought and so enthusiastic about it. This was the beginning of his career in Polar exploration really and he was a very good companion. We were all four at the end of that year and we couldn't have had better set up, I don't think, four people that got on, mingled so well together, and worked well together, it was great. Unfortunately the three of them have died now.

[0.27.07] Chris: Why is Wally's name so well known in Antarctic circles, what is so special about it?

Jim: Well, I mean he went off...he made his contacts in America coming home as he did a journey from Montevideo right up to Canada, right through South America, and he made his contacts in the, with the Americans dealing with Polar matters. When he came back he went down to the Antarctic again with the New Zealanders and sledged around. He was up on the Beardmore Glacier on, I think it was the, 1911; it was on the fiftieth anniversary I think of the South Pole thing when in 1911 they reached the Pole. He was around doing survey work for the New Zealanders on the Beardmore Glacier and he was dying to go further south but they wouldn't let him, ha, ha, ha. When he came back we were in touch, you know. I got lots of postcards and we were in contact for a few years until about 1966 when I moved to Wales to work and Wally was then really deep into planning his great North Pole Expedition, you know, the traversing, the crossing from Canada to Spitzbergen. And he was deep into that, he went up to, I think he went to Spitzbergen with Hugh Simpson, and he got into Greenland where he was, he was buying dogs for the New Zealanders, I think, in Greenland. He got to know the territory there, and spent a lot of time, subsequently, in Greenland with the Eskimos, with the Inuit I should say, and then did his big journey, of course, which made his name. But, he was a great guy, I like him. A lot of people, I don't know, were not too complimentary about Wally, but, I always found him a genuine, enthusiastic, patriotic bloke, you know.

[0.29.28] Chris: Good to work with?

Jim: Sorry.

[0.29.30] Chris: Good to work with?

Jim: Oh, yeh, yeh, yeh. We got on well together. As I say we stayed in contact until about 1966, and then it was for about thirty years that I didn't see him again until a reunion here, in fact, the fiftieth anniversary of Hope Bay. He turned up and I saw him a few times after that and then, unfortunately, he died. He had diabetes.

[0.29.52] Chris: Did George Larmar, Lamour, and Bill Nicholls, what were they like?

Jim: They were good guys. George Larmour he was...

[0.29.58] Chris: How do you pronounce it?

Jim: Sorry.

[0.30.02] Chris: How do you pronounce it, George?

Jim: Larmour, yes, yes. He was Irish and he was an accountant actually, but he came down as a Met Assistant, you know, a Meteorological man and he was a great willing guy, a big, big gentle giant he was. He's just, just a man, you know, an ally, there was never any conflict or argument with me or anybody. Bill Nicholls had been an apprentice with a firm, Stratford's, I think. They were Bentley agents, and he had done an apprenticeship with them and he was a crack man at engines and motors and making bits and pieces. He was a General Assistant, because he did a bit of mountaineering, I believe it was, and he was down there as a GA, as a result of his experience, and I say, he was a London lad, very nice guy, and it was, well, everything just worked, you know, there was never any conflict. Everybody just did what they had to do and got on with it, very nice.

[0.31.13] Chris: Let's talk a bit about the work then. You were described as an Assistant Surveyor?

Jim: Yeh, yeh, there were two of us.

[0.31.21] Chris: I am not quite sure, what a Surveyor does, what does an Assistant Surveyor do?

Jim: No. Well they do exactly the same job except that you got about fifty pounds a year more as a Surveyor, I think, ha, ha, ha, ha. I think the salary was less than four hundred a year. I found some papers recently with the job offer in the attic in a file and I was looking at them. I was horrified, it was about three hundreds and seventy five pounds a year, I think, but then you did, of course, get your accommodation, clothing, food, beer and fags, ha, ha, supplied, it wasn't so bad really.

[0.31.53] Chris: So what was your task, what was your prime task?

Jim: Well the first year was, as I say, was extending the survey across the Bay, the work from Dick Kenny on the Tabarin Peninsula, and I did an area at View Point. It wasn't a very large area, it extended about five miles, sort of, inland and then I

suppose about three miles across, doing it in about, I think, it was a one in ten thousand scale, which is quite a large scale. So it's establishing beacons and trig stations and things like that.

[0.32.25] Chris: So were you using fairly prehistoric equipment?

Jim: Well it's, yeh, a theodolite, a basic theodolite. It was a Tavistock Theodolite that we had then, for doing the triangulation, plotting this up and then using a plane table and alidade to actually do detailed work for contouring and filling in the details with this.

[0.32.44] Chris: What kind of accuracy did you have?

Jim: (Long hesitation). I am not really sure. I know we measured, the baseline we measured actually about one in twenty thousand (scale) on that. I think it was, for the middle of the, just to, the actual measured baseline to start the triangulation. It was the second one. The first one on sea ice, and unfortunately it was broken off because we had some bad weather and the sea ice moved, so we had to do it again, now on land, or what we thought was land. Anyway, it was alright the second time as we got good accuracies then. I am trying to remember but I don't know in the end what the accuracies were.

[0.33.28] Chris: Do you feel the maps were very accurate or they were?

Jim: Oh I think so, yeh, yeh, looking now. I've still got a copy of it actually. But I tied this in to Dick Kenny's work across the other side of the Bay. He had given me some details of various peaks and points over there. I did a resection from Dick's work as well as doing an astro fix at View Point itself to establish its latitude and longitude and magnetic variation there and sun observations and so on.

[0.33.53] Chris: And the second year?

Jim: The second year, well during that year they had the Huntings (Survey) were down there doing aerial photography. So on the way down to, I went to Detaille Island, Base W. We were given a whole set of photographs which you could study and the, the main job there was to pick out control points for the aerial photographs and triangulate the area around the north Lallemand Fjord and along the coast there, up to Cape Rey, and establish these various points, and, triangulate, co-ordinate them, as I say, to provide control for the aerial photography work. Also geology, of course. The hut had only been built the year before.

{0.34.49] Chris: This was Detaille was it?

Jim: Detaille, yes, yes, and we quickly put up a refuge at what was then Johnson Point, but which is now Orford Bluff, Orford Cliff, I think. Mike Orford was a surveyor from the first year. We put the hut up in three days just to be one of these basic refuges and then a party of Angus Erskine, myself, John Smith and Dennis Golding, the geologist. Angus was also down as a surveyor, he was a Naval Lieutenant. We were put ashore by the

Biscoe. This was the second year, it was the new *Biscoe*, a steel ship, the first post wooden one. We were put ashore in three stages, our tents, stores and a great heap of dogs, ha, ha, which we had to, you know, form into three teams there. We had seven dog teams, so we obviously had about twenty one dogs altogether. We established, camped up above the landing site. The hut itself was at the foot of a cliff and you had to climb up a very steep slope to get on to the easy ground, and snow. We camped up there and trained dogs for about two or three weeks, just trying to form teams. We had one team completely composed of bitches, a lot of female dogs there, and two others which we trained up, got them all running OK. And we started off, went South a bit looking for, well, Denis to geologise and us to look for suitable Trig Stations. We found one or two down there. And then we went slightly north of there. The whole job there, at that stage was finding two points along the coast and we measured another baseline, which in the end didn't get extended soon enough, so that was abandoned, and later in the year we did another on the sea ice. We then proceeded to go up to the, what was, what is now Murphy Glacier. We relayed stores all the way up the glacier up onto the plateau, the Avery Plateau. That took some weeks, actually, getting it all up there and we got up to the top in the end. Then it was decided we were, as there was no ice in Lallemand Fjord, so we were going to, Angus and I intended to sledge south on the plateau and go down to the bottom end of Lallemand Fjord, by which time we hoped there was going to be ice, and we would come up to the Base again. Dennis was going with John Smith back down the glacier geologizing on the way back to the refuge hut. So we split, we laid a depot at the top, and we split up and within twenty four

hours we had a seven day lie up in this blizzard up on the Avery. Dennis and John went back down the glacier, they had a very bad experience there, because they, they needed some provisions, and they shot off one day just with a bare sledge down to one of these depots which they just found. After one day's blow it had been partly buried, they found it, but they got caught out. It came up very suddenly and they had to live, I think it was, two days in a snow hole. You have spoken to John Smith about this probably?

[0.38.47] Chris: This is at Avery Plateau, was it?

Jim: Yeh. Well down from the Plateau going back down the glacier, yes, and they had to live in a hole for two days. Eating the dog food, the dog pemmican, yeh, it was a very close shave. Dennis got frost bite. Angus and I were up on the Plateau. It was seven days and there was one bad period when we thought that the tent was going to collapse with snow starting to pile up outside and it was woof! Just to go out there. I remember going out, it was on my side of the tent, it was beginning to bulge and you thought the pole was going to collapse or the canvas rip whatever. So I went outside at night, after dark, with a torch, and it was absolutely suffocating, you know, it was so thick, it was difficult to breathe at first and I was crawling about on my hands and knees out there. The tent was lost from sight from about ten feet away; you couldn't see it even with the torch. I had a bit of a shovel at the snow, but it was pointless it was building up so.... the wind was blowing about forty/forty five knots and it was just piling up against the tent wall. Then Angus had a go, but we abandoned it and just ensured we took the shovel into the tent that night in case we had to dig ourselves out in

the morning. But it survived, you know, very fortunately and it didn't collapse. So that was an unpleasant experience. Well Angus actually described it later, when he was in Greenland with the British North Greenland Expedition, a couple of years previously, I think it was, and he described it as "the most frightening experience he had in every region", ha, ha, ha, ha.

[0.40.29] Chris: That was your closest shave?

Jim: That was the closest shave, I think, yeh, yeh. But, that broke up and we went on. We had another day's blow after about twenty four hours. We managed to move and then we had another vicious twenty four hours, one of our dogs died. Sadly I went out to feed him, he wasn't eating, poor old thing, and he died while I was out there, he couldn't move. The next day the weather cleared and we set off. We went further south down the Plateau to the Finsterwalder Glacier. Then we went down the Finsterwalder towards the head of Lallemand Fjord, and that was quite interesting. It was nice because we were the first there, nobody has ever been down it before and I don't think anybody has ever since, so I think we were the only people who trod it. We ran into a quite heavily crevassed area in the middle of it like a saucer where the glaciers were coming from all directions. We thought we'd got out of it and we were sledging off to avoid this area, and a sledge went down a crevasse, ha, ha, with Angus in front. Fortunately the bridge collapsed in one lump and it jammed about six feet down so the sledge was on its side. So we stuck everything we could into the ground to anchor it, and got the boxes off the sledge by passing them up, recovered the sledge and set off further down the glacier and then we eventually got down to the bottom. No ice in Lallemand Fjord. We couldn't get across into the Heim Glacier, because, there is a mountain range in-between, so we went south down to the Bourgeois Fjord, I think isn't it, at the bottom end there, and eventually ended up at Blaiklock Island, the Blaiklock Refuge. We decided at this time as we were into June with very short days, I mean the sledging sometimes at night, in the evening, and on moon-lit nights you could travel, very short hours. It was not until about half past ten in the morning that it got fully light, and about half past three in the afternoon when it was dusk again, you know. So we went to Blaiklock Refuge and from there decided we were going to go to Base "Y" on Horseshoe Island and have mid-winter there. As it was just before mid-winter this is what we did. We had about a week at Blaiklock, we met Peter Gibbs there and Nigel Procter came up and then various other people came up and we all went back to Base "Y", and spent mid-winter there which was very welcome, with sledge repairs and broken bits. That was the day, I was astonished, we left the refuge and went to Base "Y" and got there in the evening and I realized I had trotted about eighteen miles that day beside a sledge, which is an indication of how fit you were, it's unbelievably fit in working down there and the things you do.

[0.43.36] Chris: How did you get back?

Jim: Well, the ice reports we got, we were getting reports from Base "W", from Detaille Island, and the ice had formed. So we sledged back to the refuge on Blaiklock Island and then we went up Jones Ice Shelf and Heim Glacier. And we had Peter Gibbs and

Sandy Imray came with us, actually, and we got to the north end of the Heim, just on the edge of Lallemand Fjord, we climbed up a nunatak there, which was to be a trig station, in fact, and had a look at that. Then we sledged up the fjord to Detaille. We did it in a day, it's quite a long day, but, we ended up at night there and it was dark and there was no moon. It was an amazing arrival really; the people on the Base said they were most impressed. We turned up there and we had a radio sched. with them about six o'clock in the dark, and said where we were and how far we were and asked them to put the cloud search light on, which is a vertical searchlight that the Met people used to try and pick up the height, you know, reflect off the cloud and pick up the height of the clouds. So they shone that and an *Aldis Lamp* and we could see these from about three miles away, so we sledged on. We then got lost in a great ring of icebergs, blundering about inside this and finally found a gap and shot through, and we were back home again.

[0.45.19] Chris: Was it thrilling?

Jim: Sorry.

[0.45.23] Chris: Was it thrilling, all this work?

Jim: Yeh. Oh it was yes. I mean that was the interesting bit sledging about and dealing with the weather. I mean its sort of times, it's miserable at times. My sleeping bag, for instance. When, before we went up the glacier, there was one stage there where we measured our first baseline and the snow was very deep and soft, and things warmed up a bit and the tent inside was, it was like going down a rabbit burrow, you know, we went down a slope into the thing, and inside it there were pools of water lying in the rubber ground sheet. Sleeping bags get damp because of the temperatures there, which are up to may be about forty degrees or something like that, worse. So everybody wanted sub-zero temperatures. These produce much better conditions. In my sleeping bag I always remember I had cold feet at night and at one stage further up the glacier, I decided to inspect it and found that there was actually ice in the bottom of the sleeping bag, ha, ha. They were doubles, double bags, big heavy duty double bags and it was frozen, there was frost in the bag. So, that was pulled out, dried out over the primus stove. It seems like these are the things you cope with. Cope with just getting on. On a bad day, if it was warm and sleety you get wet and stuff like this, you know.

[0.46.59] Chris: What was the Detaille hut like, was it a comfortable hut?

Jim: Yes, yes it was a nice hut. As I say it was only built the previous year. Usual thing, a common bunk room with a stove in it and the sitting room, if you like, with a stove, with the radio, record player kept in there. There was a long and full width kitchen and then the radio room. There was a survey office and in the workshop at the end, the diesel room and the sledge workshop and then the bathroom, of course. I think it was there we had, I think it was at Base "W", it was at either Hope Bay or Base "W" the bath was a 40 gallon oil drum that had been split horizontally, ends cut out and joined together, so we had, ha,

ha, a bath. It made ridges on your backside when you were in it, ha, ha, ha, and you had to scoop it out to, to drain it afterwards.

[0. 48.04] Chris: Was it rusty?

Jim: Pardon.

[0.48.06] Chris: Was it rusty?

Jim: No it didn't, it was alright, because it is in use all the time, but it was a 'nifty' idea that, well I thought it was, yeh.

[0.48.14] Chris: The answer to this question, as you probably know, I need to quickly ask you, where you involved in the evacuation of Detaille?

Jim: No, it was the following year.

[0.48.21] Chris: That was later.

Jim: Yeh. yeh.

[0.48.23] Chris: Do you feel that you were cautious enough in the work that you were doing, health and safety 1950's style, as in being at your time?

Jim: Well, I think so yeh. I don't think that any people took any silly risks, but it was a different frame of mind, you know, you're a young man in your twenties, early twenties, and these things don't enter your mind. Consequences and things don't enter your mind so much, I don't think, at that age, but, generally speaking, no, I don't think anybody was silly about things and didn't take any unnecessary risks. We were prepared for a sudden event, like, you know, going through a crevasse, or something like that. I mean, John Smith, when we were going up the, the Murphy Glacier, there was one day we crossed it because we wanted to get up on to some mountain on the other side. He was playing crevasse fodder, he was on a rope out in front of the sledge with an ice probe and skis and he was prodding through this and, "wang" it went straight through. He didn't have his loop round his wrist and it just disappeared and he heard it tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, down this crevasse. So he thought, "I had better move" and as he went to move, he pushed his ski stick into the ground and that went through as well and there was this great black hole. So, you know, we backed off from that and decided we would try another route through it. And then crossing there, in fact, the snow bridge collapsed. I was separate from the other two sledges, they were a bit up glacier from me, and I remember them going across and as they went the bridge collapsed and broke, a flurry of snow blocks blew up in the air that was coming towards me as it was crumbling. I got those dogs going, ha, ha, very fast and got out of that one.

[0.50.30] Chris: So you did take risks then?

Jim: On occasions yeh, I suppose you do. I mean, if you're traveling up a glacier then they are all crevassed somewhere or other, sometimes there... you can see where they are and sometimes you can't, so yes it's a risk there, but, of course you have to get everything you need to get out a crevasse hanging handy on the handlebars of the sledge. You know, I mean, it's the dogs that tend to go down first anyway because the sort of loading on their feet is greater than that of a sledge, in actual fact, you know, the sledge runners, the actual weight per square inch is less on a sledge than of a dog walking across it. So, the old dogs, sometimes the lead, would disappear down a hole and you have to go and haul them out again. We didn't lose any dogs that way.

[0.51.20] Chris: And was there incident, an exploding Met balloon in your day?

Jim: Oh that. I wasn't actually at the Base. But, it was quite, it sounded quite hilarious, well a bit dangerous as well. But, there were, I think, John Smith and Bill McDowell. They had partly inflated a Met balloon, these big things, and they had it in the kitchen. I don't quite know what for. When Ossie Connachie, the wireless operator, came through with a fag in his mouth and he thought it would be big fun, ha, ha, ha, to stick this cigarette into the balloon, which he did, and it exploded, and it blew the door out from the kitchen, damaged the windows and burned all the hair off his face. He had no eyebrows or eyelashes and generally created havoc in the kitchen there. Ha, ha, ha.

[0.52.13] Chris: So it was the gas inside was it?

Jim: Yeh, yeh.

[0.52.15] Chris: What was it hydrogen or helium?

Jim: Well, something inflammable, very inflammable. I don't know; it would be helium I suppose, yeh.

[0.52.21] Chris: Well, he evidently had not thought that through?

Jim: No, he hadn't thought it through. He came from the mess room, he was going to the radio shack and ho, ho, ho and then go bang with this balloon, ha, ha, ha.

[0.52.32] Chris: Permanent damage done?

Jim: Sorry.

[0.52.34] Chris: Any permanent damage done?

Jim: No, but, he didn't do it again, that's for sure.

[0.52.38] Chris: What's this about speed skiing, sledging at night and the snow sliding?

Jim: Oh, god that day yes. I was coming back from View Point with Wally Herbert, and we were going back to Hope Bay. Well the whole day was a bit hilarious really. We went across the bay and we started to go up the, what was known as “Last Hill” off the sea ice. It was a bit of a struggle as it had been warm and ice had formed on the snow, and it was clearly glaze ice. I was struggling up this slope, slipping and sliding around with an ice axe, trying to get a foothold. The dogs wouldn’t go, I couldn’t get them up and so I had a rope to pull the dogs up behind me. At one point we all fell down. I slid down and ended up in a great heap of dogs, ha, ha, as we all dropped off this low icefoot. We eventually managed to get them up and get them going, anyway, and we pulled up and went over the top of “Last Hill” summit. We were coming down above the Base and it was dark at this time. We could see there was a beacon down at the Argentinian Base, which was past Trinity House and we were at the top of the hill. It was icy, an icy surface and we started off down the slope, still known as 433, four hundred and thirty three feet high above the Buff, the sea level there, and it’s immediately above Trinity House. Wally set off, he was driving the dogs and he went off down the slope, he couldn’t stop and it was a runaway, the brake didn’t have any effect. Fortunately there was a large boulder and the dogs went one side of it and the sledge went the other. It just wrapped itself around it and hence came to an abrupt halt there. We let the dogs off and they all galloped off down to the dog spans which were down at the bottom of the hill. Wally and I took an ice axe each and secured the sledge there and then slid on our backsides down this slope, icy slope using an ice axe as a brake under our armpits. And I got down, wandered into the hut, you know, it had been a dark night and when I got inside the Base I still had my sun glasses on and I mean, groping about, ha, ha, wondering why I couldn’t see things and I hadn’t realized that I still got on my old clip-on sun, well not clip-on but sun glasses, ha, ha, ha.

[0.55.04] Chris: You had some contact with the Trans-Antarctic Expedition?

Jim: Well they were down there at the same time, yes.

[0.55.11] Chris: They were in radio communication?

Jim: We had a couple of radio scheds. It was at Hope Bay, I think. Ken Hill, the operator got in touch with them, they picked them up, you get these broadcasts and they had conversations, the odd conversation, with them down there when they were just establishing their Base and they called mocking us for living in the “banana belt” when they were sitting “down there”, ha, ha, in extremely cold conditions, but that was it really.

[0.55.37] Chris: Did you meet Fuchs?

Jim: No, I never did meet Fuchs, no.

[0.55.44] Chris: Contact with the outside world in your era was pretty difficult?

Jim: It was yes. As far as the individual was concerned we had an air letter once a month. I think it was a fifty word thing that was sent free to the UK. Mail was once a year

obviously, when a ship came round. But there were, I know, some of the people, most of the operators had an amateur's license as well.

[0.56.16] Chris: A radio ham?

Jim: A radio ham, yes. They used to make contact with people in the UK and all over the place, you know, which was all a bit illegal, but, it used to go on. They used to pass messages, which they were not supposed to do and I think in some cases they even found amateurs who lived near somebody on the Base and they would get their parents to come in or something like that and have a word over the radio, very naughty but you know.

[0.56.44] Chris: You heard the news, not long after you arrived there; you heard news of the Hungarian Revolution of '56?

Jim: Well, there was, I mean, the Suez Crisis, apparently, with the astonishing news that the Israelis had charged into Egypt and started that affair off, and then the Hungarian uprising.

[0.57.03] Chris: How did news of world events, that reached you, affect you, because there was that sense of helplessness wasn't there?

Jim: Well, that one, yes. I mean at the time I remember being a bit concerned, I thought, god you know, is this going to be another, another war in Europe or something, you know, if somebody starts standing up for the Russians coming into Hungary and the Suez going on, oh my god, are we going to be sat down here, ha, ha, either whipped out and taken back home, or, forgotten for five years, you know, ha, ha, ha. But that was it really; they were the two world events that occurred. Oh, I know, during this period I think the Russians launched Sputnik as well. Yes I do remember listening to it on the radio and the beep, beep, beep of this transmission they were having from their first satellite.

[0.57.50] Chris: Do you think because you were so far away and that therefore the news is sparse and you were isolated, did that make, you did not get much news, did that make those trigger points in world history all the more meaningful?

Jim: Yes, yes I think so. You have got a real place and time that you associate with it now. We listened regularly, fairly regularly, to the news on the radios we had there.

[0.58.17] Chris: World Service or?

Jim: It would be the World Service, I think yes. They used to run a special FIDS programme as well at one time. They used to broadcast, it was a monthly thing and we listened to Port Stanley broadcasting. They used to have an hour, we called it, irreverently, the Kelpie Capers, ha, ha, but, we had things like this.

[0.58.41] Chris: So were you genuinely concerned by the Hungarian Revolution, were you seriously concerned?

Jim: Well, yes you know. The reputation of the Russians at that time was stomp on anything and the thought in my mind was if the West were going to provide any support to Hungary there could be conflict there, it was a simple as that, and with Suez already happening, you know, there was all this going on with France, Israel and Britain and one did wonder.

[0.59.17] Chris: And the final question. In what way or ways do you feel that your Antarctic experience changed you?

Jim: I don't know what way it did. I think it made me much more self reliant. I was changed, because my Mother told my Wife that I when I came back I was a slightly different person, I don't really know in what way myself. I think you become, oh I don't know, less demonstrative I suppose in your affections, this sort of thing, in a, in a way. You deal with things much more, you improvise much more, when you get home. You can always sort of fix it, whatever is going on, certainly in practical matters. You become a very practical person, because you have to deal with these things when you are there. I think there are the big differences. In your personal life it makes a difference because at that stage you are coming back and going for a job interview, and they go "oh, you have been to the Antarctic" and that sort of thing.

[1.00.34] Chris: A good line on your C.V.?

Jim: A good line, yeh, yeh very much so.

[1.00.39] Chris: And you learnt to cook, is that right?

Jim: Oh god yes, yes. That's, that's a bit scary really in that there you are the first time on a Base and there were about anything from about eight to a dozen other people waiting with their knives and forks, for your first meal that you have prepared ha, ha, ha. But, thanks to the Penguin Cookery Book, I think it was the Penguin Cookery Book, they were very good volumes.

[1. 01.02] Chris: So your first attempt at any kind of cooking was in the Antarctic?

Jim: Well I did a little bit at home, but, I didn't make extensive meals. I mean, I could make myself a breakfast and stuff like that, but, there you were making, you know, full blown meals and making bread and stuff like this, it was quite a necessity and I still do it now, in fact, I do most of the cooking at home now, in fact.

[1.01.23] Chris: So looking back, with the hindsight of fifty years, how big an episode in your life were those Antarctic years?

Jim: Oh I think very big, yeh pretty big. I don't know how to put it really, it's an uncommon experience, it was an uncommon experience in those days, now people go down as tourists, but, that's not the same thing at all. It's a shared experience. I

liken it to, perhaps people of, you know, military personnel, service personnel, who have experienced maybe a war, or something like that. Not that it was a war down there, but, it's something only this group can know about and appreciate.

[1.02.17] Chris: It's a shared identity?

Jim: Yeh, yeh, and certainly going down there is something, you know about, it's difficult to explain to other people what it was like or the feeling or the comradeship. It is something which is, liked a close community almost, I think that's the thing the shared thing. And all the incidences that happened down there, most people experience; they have all had their "lie-ups". If they had been on a sledging Base they've all experienced crevasses and bad weather and this sort of thing. It's a, which you can't, you can describe it to people but they can't really know what it was like at the time. What else can I say?

[1.03.00] Chris: Jim, thank you very much indeed.

ENDS

Possible extracts

- 1950's FIDS Interview [0.06.26]
- FIDS and Montevideo [0.10.20]
- Antarctic first impressions [0.12.22]
- Ex National Servicemen & FIDS [0.14.20]
- FIDS and depression [0.18.05]
- Life at View Point [0.20.48]
- Wally Herbert [0.25.36]
- Surveying 1950s style [0.31.13]
- Detaille Island [0.33.53]
- Glacier and Plateau travel [0.34.49]
- Nocturnal dog sledging [0.43.36]
- Base "W" [0.46.51]
- FIDS & H&S in 1950s [0.48.23]
- Night dog sledge arrival at Hope Bay [0.52.38]
- Effect of external news on Base life [0.56.44]
- Personality change after 2 years South [0.59.17]

ENDS