

DAVE BURKITT

Edited transcript of a recording of Dave Burkitt interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee on 6th May 2010. BAS Archives AD6/24/1/67. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 30th November 2014.

[Part 1a 0:00:00] Lee: This is Dave Burkitt, recorded at his home in Nettleham, Lincolnshire, by Chris Eldon Lee on the 6th of May 2010. Dave Burkitt, Part One.

Burkitt: David Burkitt. David Michael Burkitt, date of birth 17th of March 1944. And what else, sorry?

[Part 1a 0:00:20] Lee: Where were you born?

Burkitt: Where was I born? I was born in this village, Nettleham, in Lincolnshire, just three or four miles out of Lincoln. Born in '44, I am now 66.

[Part 1a 0:00:29] Lee: Tell me about your parents. What were they? What did they do?

Burkitt: They were certainly both very good hard-working people. My father was quite a bit older than my mother, some what? 20, 25 years older. He went through the First World War. Like all the other lads in the village, he signed up in Kitchener's Army, and when he came out of the Army at the end of the war, he was then working in the local mines, in the ironstone mine in Lincoln, just outside of Lincoln. So he worked there for a number of years, and then following that, when the mine closed down, he then worked on the land. So basically he was a labourer pretty well all his life. Also the village grave digger. I have still got the record he kept of all the graves he dug in the village here. So village grave digger for something like 40 years I think, after the First World War right up until him to really retiring. He actually died – he was 87 years of age, pretty well virtually working up to a couple of years before his death. My mother likewise, she raised us three lads and she was always out working, picking potatoes and so on. So I am very much from a working class family background.

[Part 1a 0:01:52] Lee: You have been researching your father's First World War career, haven't you?

Burkitt: Yes, I have. Ten years ago in fact I went on a First World War Battlefield tour, just out of interest. It was only for three days which wasn't nearly enough. More recently I have got back into it. I have been reading quite a bit about his regiment. Yes, he was wounded three times, wounded twice rather, went back out there for a third time and went right the way through the war. So yeah, I am quite looking forward to it, going out there again and taking his photographs. He subsequently, back in 1920, just a couple of years after the war finished, he went back there with some mates and took a few, quite a number of photographs. So it is interesting to go back and compare the photographs with today. I am quite looking forward to it again. This next tour is going to be for a week, so hopefully we'll ...

[Part 1a 0:02:54] Lee: Do you remember any kind of sense of ambition in the family, as a boy?

Burkitt: For me personally, ambition? My brothers, they were both quite bright lads. They both went to the local grammar school, but I failed the 11-plus. I was always much better with my hands anyway. My Dad sorted that out; I was always in his workshop with him giving him a hand and so on. I certainly had, as a youngster, the urge to travel and I can vividly remember doing ... I was quite arty. I was quite good in the art classes at school and drawing pictures of foreign places and everything like that. So no great ambitions academically but I certainly ... I joined the Navy in fact, and I learned a trade, and I was actually pretty good with my hands: everything from woodwork, metalwork, the lot. So I followed that through, unlike my two brothers were both academics. One in fact was a Royal Navy officer and the other one was an architect.

[Part 1a 0:04:04] Lee: So was it obvious that you would move into the Navy when you were old enough, or was that a conscious decision?

Burkitt: It was a conscious decision on my part and had been for a number of years. I can remember at secondary school, at the local comprehensive school, my art teacher there wanted me to go to take up an art career and go to the local college of art, and in fact to here. He said 'Well go and look round the place.' So he arranged for me to go to the art school in Lincoln, just to have a look round the place. At the end of it I left and I had an interview and been accepted. So that was it; I went back and told him. He said 'Well are you pleased about it?' I said 'Well I don't know yet. I still want to join the Navy.' In fact I ... yes so things might have been different but I did in fact join the Navy just before my 16th birthday.

[Part 1a 0:04:58] Lee: There are some water colours around the house. Are some of them yours?

Burkitt: They are, yeah. It's the sort of thing I wish I could carry on doing it. But it's like everything else: time. But when I was down in the Antarctic, I first really got into it on South Georgia. I had quite a bit of time on my hands down there working as a field GA. So I did quite a bit of water colour work down there, and then I dropped it all, never having had any formal art training or anything. I dropped it all for a long long time and then occasionally went back down South again and took some paints with me thinking I will get back into it. But it's not until about ten years ago, probably 10/15 years ago I actually started doing a bit again and but even now it's simply a matter of 'Ooh I fancy doing a bit of painting,' I've not done anything for about five years, so hopefully I might get into it again. I've got this narrowboat now and I keep saying to myself 'Right, I am going to get my art materials down there and I am going to sit quietly on my boat and get on with it.'

[Part 1a 0:06:05] Lee: So you painted in the Antarctic. Did you have the problem that other painters have, of the water freezing on you?

Burkitt: Oh not at all, not on South Georgia.

[Part 1a 0:06:13] Lee: It's too warm?

Burkitt: I certainly never did any painting working down the Peninsula. I shouldn't say that. That's not true actually. I do remember doing a bit of painting on a field season on James Ross Island which is the northern end of the Peninsula. So I did do a little bit there but that was during the summer months as well, so it was not a problem, not the Edward Wilson touch or anything like that.

[Part 1a 0:06:36] Lee: Not using gin to temper your paints?

Burkitt: No.

[Part 1a 0:06:39] Lee: We will come back to the Antarctic in a moment. Tell me a bit about your time in the Navy, because you were there for 12 years?

Burkitt: 12 years I did in the Navy, yes. Yes, I joined when I was just about 16. I did work hard; I can remember that. I really had to work at it to pass the entrance exam. I wanted to do an apprenticeship. So the Royal Navy apprenticeships are similar to the Army and the Air Force. It was quite a stiff entrance exam. Anyway fortunately I managed to pass that OK and it was a 4-year apprenticeship. I joined the first year at a place called Torpoint in Cornwall and then from there up to Rosyth in Scotland for a further three or four years up there. And I certainly really did enjoy the Navy. I eventually became a Chief Petty Officer. Apparently when I got made a Petty Officer, I was the youngest Petty Officer in the Navy, so I was told. So that in itself was quite an achievement.

[Part 1a 0:07:42] Burkitt: I didn't get into trouble very much but I really did enjoy it because all the Services, I am sure even today, they have got so much to offer young people: everything from sporting activities and so on. You know they say in the Services 'Never volunteer.' but that is quite wrong. I used to volunteer for everything from ... I can remember a Moral Leadership course, and I volunteered for that one-week course and it was the easiest week I have ever had in my life. It was fantastic. We were at this lovely country mansion down in Hampshire and all we had to do was attend a church service for an hour in the morning and that was it. The rest of the time we were out playing croquet on the lawn. So I volunteered for everything.

[Part 1a 0:08:29] Burkitt: When I was based up in Scotland I went skiing every weekend, climbing and that was whilst Sunday Training. Because I loved being in the hills so much, I volunteered for a posting up to the Naval Air Station at Lossiemouth, and between ships (I went up there twice) I was in the local Mountain Rescue team and getting in the mountains and it was like the heyday of my climbing. I was doing some big routes on Ben Nevis and so on, you know. So I did love my time in the Navy and I was very reluctant to leave but in 1969 a Defence Council instruction went out to join an expedition, a Joint Services Expedition to Antarctica. So I saw that and this was whilst I was based up in Scotland. I went down for interview at the Royal Geographical Society in London and I got on that expedition.

[Part 1a 0:09:29] Burkitt: That was what I wanted to do. I came back off that expedition, four months on Elephant Island, which is the place which really features of course in the Shackleton saga. So we had four months on the island, just manhauling, skiing, mountaineering, first ascents everywhere. It was fantastic. So I

came back and I applied for discharge by purchase. I had heard by then of course, whilst we were down there, of the British Antarctic Survey. So my discharge by purchase was accepted and I duly paid about £120 to come out of the Navy.

[Part 1a 0:10:06] Lee: That was a lot of money in those days.

Burkitt: It was, yes. But anyway I left the Navy and by the time I came out of the Navy I had already applied for a job with the British Antarctic Survey and I hadn't heard anything. I can remember standing on the jetty, waiting for the transport to go up to the station in Plymouth, and I thought 'I will phone up the British Antarctic Survey to find out if anything is happening.' So anyway I phoned up and this woman answered the phone. The headquarters then of course was down in London, in Gillingham Street, just a small handful of people running the place.

[Part 1a 0:10:45] Burkitt: Anyway this woman answered the phone and I said 'Could you tell me what is happening? I applied several months ago for a job with the British Antarctic Survey.' She said 'What did you apply as?' 'As a GA, a General Assistant.' She said 'What are you doing? You have just left the Navy, did you say.' I said 'Yes, that's right.' And she said 'Oh we employ mountaineers not sailors as GAs.' and as good as put the phone down. It was of course Eleanor Honnywill who answered the phone and I was a bit miffed about that. I thought 'Well, sod you.' And so that was it. So I came out of the Navy, and myself and a few mates went out to the Alps for a season, came back from that. I arrived in London, phoned up home to make sure all was well.

[Part 1a 0:11:33] Burkitt: Mum answered the phone. She said 'The British Antarctic Survey have been trying to get hold of you for the last couple of months (or whatever).' She said 'Can you contact this guy Eric Salmon? Give him a ring as soon as you get back.' I was still in London and I phoned up Eric Salmon. It was a Sunday I had got back and he says 'Come down for interview first thing tomorrow morning.' Great guy, Eric Salmon, he really is. Anybody you talk to remembers him as a lovely man. Anyway Eric Salmon says 'Come round to Gillingham Street tomorrow morning.' So OK, fine, I was down in London, so I can remember I didn't have much money, I was scruffy, rucksack on my back and everything else.

[Part 1a 0:12:10] Burkitt: I dosed the night under about three deckchairs in St James's Park and went for a wash and brush up at some Tube station, as I remember, and then went for interview at Gillingham Street. Eric's style of interview: I wasn't aware of this at the time but anyway he said 'Come in, have a cup of coffee.' I sat down, had a natter with him and he said 'Yes, well that's it. You have got the job.' and so on. I thought 'Well really? That was my interview?' Anyway Eric said 'Nip down the road there and you will see a Colonel Hayward and go for your medical and that will all be OK.' So I popped off, over the way, down to Colonel Hayward who was an Army doctor. He gave all the medicals for BAS then. Again it was ever so informal. No measuring your heartbeat or anything like that. It was 'Just sit down, have a chat, touch your toes. Stand in the corner.'

[Part 1a 0:13:01] Burkitt: I stood in the corner of this room there, facing the corner and he whispered a few things and I replied and then he said 'About turn.' I turned round to face him again. He says 'What Navy was you in, turning left about not right

about?’ Anyway that was it. I passed the medical and the next thing I was joining the *John Biscoe*. Well we had of course, following that, once you had been accepted, they had (as they still do) a training period in Cambridge. That was when BAS was just in the process of moving up to Cambridge. So I went down for the week’s 5-day conference or whatever, which was held at Corpus Christi College and we all walked down to SPRI, to the Scott Polar Research Institute for the day, had lectures and whatever else and that was it. I was then a Fid, or on my way to being a Fid.

[Part 1a 0:13:58] Lee: Let me take you back a couple of steps with one or two supplementary questions, if I may. First of all it is interesting that in 1972 when you were applying, the interview technique doesn’t seem to have changed much in the last 30 years. I have got similar stories from the guys who were still signing up in the thirties¹ and the forties, saying it was all very casual, except it was Bill Sloman in those days, not Eric Salmon. So the fact that it was a casual interview ... I am surprised it was still a casual interview in ‘72. But let’s go back to Elephant Island; what was it about that Elephant Island experience that made you decide the big life change, leave the Navy and join BAS? What was it about that expedition that captured your imagination.

Burkitt: Well you know it was a fantastic adventure, and to be able to go climbing mountains, unclimbed peaks anywhere in the world. Just everything about it. It was ... I did love my mountaineering; I loved the hills. I loved being up in Scotland, climbing and winter mountaineering, everything. To get down there, I thought ‘This is it! It really was: the remoteness of it, and then that together with the piecing the Shackleton story together. By then I had researched it quite a bit. I had always been quite good at ...

[Part 1a 0:15:12] Burkitt: As I say, I wasn’t an academic but I did know my history quite well. I can vividly remember, even at infants school, drawing a picture of Captain Scott. Hardly anybody in those days had heard of Shackleton, I don’t think, but Scott was the big story. So I was fascinated by it then, right from an early age, and to be down there and then learning the tale of Shackleton and so on. It was a fantastic four-month period of my life, and the lead up to it as well. I can remember meeting ... We had this reception down in London prior to going to Elephant Island, the leader Captain Malcom Burley, in the Navy, he was a big Shackleton man and he had organised this get-together at *HMS President*, one of the ships berthed along the side of the Thames.

[Part 1a 0:16:06] Burkitt: There were three survivors then, of the Shackleton expedition: How, Greenstreet, and Charlie Green the cook, so we invited them to that reception. I met them and I have got a copy of Shackleton’s book *South* which I got them to sign and so on. So yes, I was hooked on it then and certainly by going down there on *HMS Endurance* and landing helicopters, it was a fantastic experience, it really was. Subsequently learning about BAS’s techniques, the way we did it in the Navy was quite different but nonetheless it was a wonderful time, it really was.

[Part 1a 0:16:45] Lee: So why would a small boy want to draw a picture of Captain Scott? What had inspired you to do that?

¹ BAS/FIDS didn’t exist in the 1930s.

Burkitt: All the picture stories of exploration and that, when we were kids; well I certainly remember David Livingstone and so on. But the Captain Scott story to me was a real gripping tale, the party dying and everything else. At that period, in the 1950s, even then it was still quite a tale of adventure and heroism and everything else which we learned at school. Even then, the ascent of Everest and so on; I was quite taken with all that. I wanted to climb and so yes, that was me. I just enjoyed doing that. A bit of a loner, I loved being out in the hills and everything else. But the Captain Scott story, it was very much to the fore in those days, unlike now. Most people who do study the Antarctic and the exploration, all talk about Shackleton and so on, and Amundsen and everything else and Scott has got probably pushed to the side a bit. Of course with all these different books written on it now, it has thrown a different light on it. But they are all heroes certainly, having said that.

[Part 1a 0:18:15] Lee: Would it have been different had he survived?

Burkitt: Would it have been different? For me?

[Part 1a 0:18:20] Lee: Yes.

Burkitt: I don't think so. It was still the race to the Pole and the adventure of exploration. So I don't think it would have been any different, no. I was still very much into wanting to travel and explore.

[Part 1a 0:18:37] Lee: And can you remember this picture? What was it like?

Burkitt: Oh just a little picture of a man with all these big, you know the big parka type thing on. Just a picture, just reproducing I am sure a picture which I had seen in one of our 1950s picture books, of Captain Scott and the South Pole.

[Part 1a 0:18:54] Lee: In that period between being a small boy and applying to BAS, was there any point in your young life that you felt you might want to go to Antarctica, or was it simply because the opportunity came up? Or had you a yearning earlier than that and the advert appearing.

Burkitt: It wasn't a conscious decision, no. Did I want to go to the Antarctic? I think it was more ... It went that way because of ... When I left school, before I joined the Navy even, I got on a 4-week course to the Outward Bound School up in the Lake District, and I very much loved that. I can remember pictures around the centre, down the corridors of that, of different expeditions that had been to the Himalayas and everywhere else. So Shackleton; I was in Shackleton patrol as well. So it was not a conscious decision but it was all starting in those formative years; it was all starting to piece itself together and I very much wanted to get out and go abroad and travel. From learning to go into the Outward Bound experience and the Scouts here in our village, going camping and whatever else. Then finally in the Navy of course, going on several lesser expeditions and eventually to Antarctica. That was what did it.

[Part 1a 0:20:25] Lee: When you got into BAS, you mentioned that there were some differences between the way the Royal Navy ran itself and the way BAS ran itself. How would you describe the big difference, in 1972?

Burkitt: Well the Services ... Even the Services change dramatically now. I noticed this going on board *HMS Endurance* relatively recently (about three years ago). The discipline is changed totally now. It is a much more informal structure, leadership structure – more similar to BAS now than it ever was then. I do love the Royal Navy; I would never knock it, but I now see the faults in the way ... In the British Antarctic Survey, we had been given more of a free hand and you think for yourself and so on. It is a different sort of self-discipline rather than the discipline of the Services. But having said that, I think the Services have changed now and are adapting but then, in the 1970s, the leadership was very ... It was a much stricter discipline, certainly than what it is now. It is very noticeable on board *HMS Endurance* with the informality of the captain going down and talking to ordinary seamen by their first names and things like that. It is so different now.

[Part 1a 0:21:58] Lee: Was there a difference in what you might perceive as the level of professionalism in the Royal Navy and BAS when you transferred in the '70s? Was BAS a professional organisation at that point in its career?

Burkitt: I think it was. Yes it was, very much so, but I was thinking what I said before about the difference being in the field with BAS and being in the field with the Services expedition. BAS, since the early days of FIDS, has seen that handover, the continual handover, changeover from one year to the next. People are improving on ideas, field techniques, travel techniques, and everything else, where as we – a group of Servicemen – OK we had all got mountaineering experience – had all been dumped together, put on Elephant Island. It was quite a steep learning curve: it was something totally different to all of us. If we'd have had one good Fid with us, showing us the ropes, we would probably have done things differently. OK, fine, we got by. We didn't have any major epics or anything, and it went very well. As I say, it was a great experience.

[Part 1a 0:23:14] Lee: Who was the leader on that expedition?

Burkitt: Malcolm Burley, who was a Commander in the Navy. Interestingly, he had ... He was very much a Shackleton man. He knew a lot about the story and he had been South on the old *HMS Protector* which was the Royal Navy's ice patrol ship before the previous *HMS Endurance*. Malcolm Burley had organised and led an expedition to South Georgia in '64/'65 and they did the first repeat crossing of Shackleton's thing from the south side of the island across. They did that, they did the first ascent of Mount Paget. It was very much a mountaineering expedition and surveying and so on. So Malcolm had got a fair bit of experience. We weren't all total greenhorns when it came to ...

[Part 1a 0:24:09] Lee: It sounds like your career so far had almost prepared you to become a Fid, almost by accident. Did you feel, as you boarded the ship to go South, did you feel ready to go South?

Burkitt: I was certainly ready to go South again, yes. It was again a big adventure, joining the old *John Biscoe*, going down to Southampton and I was really looking forward to it. OK, it seemed quite a long stint, two and a half years away from home, which was the norm in those days of course for any Fids going South. Very much

ready for it, I was really quite eager to get down and, particularly the fact that I was going down to Stonington, where I knew and had heard about the dog sledging and so on. So yes, I was quite ready for it.

[Part 1a 0:25:00] Lee: Did you choose your posting or were you just sent?

Burkitt: I did choose. I wanted to go to Stonington. I had heard of the dog sledging down there and I had met a couple of guys who had been down there and done it. So yes, I particularly wanted to go down there.

[Part 1a 0:25:16] Lee: What was the ship like when you first saw it? Some people have been rather surprised at the state of the *John Biscoe* when they boarded it.

Burkitt: I wasn't surprised about that. What surprised me: in the Royal Navy I had been on a couple of aircraft carriers and one of the old destroyers, the old *Daring* class destroyers. Now the old *Darings* were quite biggish, or small ships compared with the carriers obviously, but to get down the jetty ... I arrived at Southampton (all the ships, the two ships sailed to and from Southampton in those days) and of course that was the time when the *Queen Mary*, the *Queen Elizabeth* whatever were still sailing. Anyway I got down there and asked this guy, the dockyardie 'Where's the ship, the *John Biscoe*?' 'Straight down there look.' I looked and anyway I walked down the jetty and there was this tiny little ship with a masthead hardly reaching to the top of the wharf, and I thought, 'Cor, I am going South across ...' I had made a couple of crossings of the Atlantic in quite rough weather. Well seeing the *John Biscoe*, I was surprised at the size of it. She really was quite small, but dash, she was in pretty good nick. Obviously I had never sailed a merchant ship before anyway, so quite a lot different to a 'Grey Funnel Line' ship.

[Part 1a 0:26:33] Lee: How was she at sea?

Burkitt: She wasn't bad. We did have a few ... I remember them particularly. We had a very bad crossing, before we even thought about going down the Peninsula. We'd had a very good trip down from Southampton, down through the balmy tropics and so on, down to Montevideo, all of us getting to know each other. It was a great voyage: Crossing the Line ceremony and everything else. Then several days in Montevideo, in Uruguay – again a great time and it was good experience that was, getting to know everyone, it really was. And then from there down to the Falklands, a few days in the Falklands and then we did the crossing from the Falklands to South Georgia and looking back, even now, it was certainly one of the roughest crossings I have ever had. Funnily enough, I was just talking to somebody about it just the other day. Malcolm Phelps was the Master and we really hit ..., we had a really bad running sea. I can't remember what happened but we were all sat down in the Fiddery there and we had these very loose big easy chairs. The ship took a violent roll and everything was thrown over to the side of the ship, then back again and so on. Apparently Malcolm dashed up and saw the Mate and said 'Congratulations, you have just wrecked the Wardroom.' So it was: not frightening but it was quite an experience.

[Part 1a 0:28:12] Lee: So who were the characters on board on that sailing of '72? Who do you remember particularly from that voyage?

Burkitt: I certainly remember characters the likes of Malcolm Phelps (the Master) and indeed some of the Mates: Marty, Marty Shakespeare who was a young lad, probably not much older than me, well about the same age as me in fact. I think he was a young cadet, mad as anything in Zodiacs or small Humbercraft. No, what were they? What did they call them? Seacraft? But anyway the inflatables. Mad as anything. Characters like that, and a number of the crew: the Bosun (who was it? was he the Bosun?). There was a big contingent from Wales, from Tenby, amongst the crew. The Crockford brothers and the Crockford cousins and so on.

[Part 1a 0:29:03] Burkitt: So all of them characters and they had seemed to have been serving on the ship for ever and a day. Anyway there was those guys. Amongst the Fids I do remember some of the building guys. It was the year we were going down and the big Halley rebuild: of Halley III or the building of Halley III was due to take place. There were a number of the builders on board then. They weren't going immediately down to Halley but we were on the *Biscoe* then for doing small projects around South Georgia: reindeer enclosures (or exclosures I should say), small jobs like that. So yes, some of the builders stick in my mind, guys who I am still seeing today on the reunion do's.

[Part 1a 0:29:48] Lee: So your first landing was where? Was that South Georgia?

Burkitt: South Georgia was the first landing, yes. I had been ..., rather than go straight down to Stonington which was ultimately to be my winter base, I had been told to go and do some fieldwork with a couple of glacio guys from South Georgia. So the *Biscoe* dropped us off or we went into Grytviken into King Edward Point, picked these chaps up, did the relief there and then we sailed along that ... down to the southeastern end of the Island – the Royal Bay area – where these two chaps were doing some glaciology: stake measuring and stuff like that, on the Ross Glacier. So that was my first taste of fieldwork, and again, South Georgia: an amazing place, that first season there.

[Part 1a 0:30:44] Lee: Tell me about it. What was so special about it?

Burkitt: Well the magnificent scenery all around me: beautiful amazing mountains wherever you looked. You think 'Gosh, that mountain hasn't been climbed' and so on. But I have used this phrase by lots of people: 'the rugged grandeur of the place' but it really was. It was just a fantastic feeling, experience, being in there: the remoteness of it, camping in those conditions. The guys that we were with, we were camped out; for about 48 hours we had an amazing blow and drifting snow in this tiny little Pup tent. We were up all the night, kept banging, trying to push ... The snow was slowly but surely caving the tent in. We were ramming it out with our elbows. So we had quite a night of it. It was, yes, quite an experience: skiing up the glaciers and everything else – just a marvellous sense of freedom and thinking 'Gor, we are getting paid for this!' Great!

[Part 1a 0:31:52] Lee: And from there where did you go? From South Georgia, what was your next port of call?

Burkitt: The *Bransfield* came in and we went south from there to Halley. Again fantastic, going south through the Weddell Sea. I think it was the first season that they

had got satellite imagery of what the ice conditions were like. So we pushed south and we were getting through, going through leads and so on – a fair amount of sea ice about but we made good passage down to Halley, did the relief and then offloaded all the building materials and so on. We had all the builders on board. A company of Royal Marines from Stanley, they had been taken on board to assist with the building work – quite different from nowadays of course, where you have got contracts in to do all that work. Then all the manpower was recruited actually as Fids by BAS itself.

[Part 1a 0:33:06] Lee: So you were there for a while, working on the building?

Burkitt: Oh yes, we were there several weeks. I can't remember. It must have been about six weeks, probably even longer. Yes, it would probably be about six weeks or so, the idea being the *Bransfield* was alongside, offloading all the material. We went into two 12-hour shifts (24 hours of daylight of course). All the equipment was taken ashore. Whichever shift we were on, we were there 12 on, 12 off, working on site. Once our day's work on site had been finished, we then came back to the ship, slept on board for 12 hours, and then continued. Sir Vivian Fuchs ('Bunny' Fuchs) was on board with us. Midway through the season we had about a weekend, a two/ three day break, when the two shifts swapped over. And in fact the ship sailed something like southwest along the ice edge.

[Part 1a 0:34:03] Burkitt: Fuchs wanted to revisit his old base at Shackleton, where of course they started the Trans Antarctic Expedition from. So we went down there for a couple of days. We were all allowed ashore and we walked out onto the shelf ice and there, what seemed like two of three miles away, I don't know, we walked out to it anyway, with the radio masts and so on still sticking up out of the snow. And Fuchs was there saying 'Right. If we dig down there, we should come to the entrance of the main accommodation thing.' So we dug down, got into this escape hatch thing. In there we were walking around with torches. Fuchs was having a heyday picking up bits and pieces. I can remember him saying 'Oh look! Here is my old shaving brush.' A little shaving brush with about three or four bristles of hair left in it and ... Yes so we did that and then we sailed back along and changed over shifts and then continued the work.

[Part 1a 0:35:03] Burkitt: Big Al Smith, he was in charge of all the building. It did go very well, putting up this Armco structure and the idea being that: Halley I and Halley II had just been wooden huts. Of course the then present Halley, Halley II, was about 50 odd feet under the surface. You would go down a ladder to get to it, a deep ramp for the vehicles. All the beams were cracking and so on, so they thought with this Armco structure, they would build the huts inside there and have this couple of feet space between the buildings and the outer Armco. So it went very well. We left the builders to over-winter, to finish off the actual buildings but all the Armco had been completed.

[Part 1a 0:35:53] Lee: So you were working on the Armco yourself, were you?

Burkitt: We were doing different jobs. I mean I can remember, because of my skills as a welder from being in the Navy. Some of the bits and pieces I remember, for the snowshoe bit had been welded together wrongly, so that had to be taken apart and turned through 180°. I was doing a bit of welding for them at times.

[Part 1a 0:36:17] Lee: Was the Armco idea going to be an obvious success, or was there some debate as to how well it would go?

Burkitt: I am sure there must have been debate as to how well it would work, but compared with the previous two buildings, it did work well and it was a big improvement. So yes, it was it was this Armco, you know the Armco, the stuff they use on the motorways – underpasses, whatever. I think it did work quite well. I am not sure how long it did last², but that too suffered from ... eventually of course it drifted over and things started to go wrong. And then Halley IV was in the drawing boards.

[Part 1a 0:36:55] Lee: What did you make of Big Al Smith?

Burkitt: Big Al, he is a great character and everybody loved him. We all, we used to have a laugh at Al and some people take the mick out of him; he his little foibles, but he was a good worker certainly: a real grafter. Yes, salt of the Earth type character.

[Part 1a 0:37:13] Lee: And what about Fuchs? Did you get to know him at all?

Burkitt: Not on a really personal level, no. When we were down at Shackleton base there, Scobie Pye (he was one of the builders, Terry Pye), I don't know how it happened but Terry (Scobie) Pye acted as Fuchs's right-hand man and was walking round with him, holding the torch and everything else. We got back to the ship that night and back into the Fiddery there, and Fuchs sent for Scobie. And so we said 'Oh you will be all right, Scobie, now. Have a dram or two with Bunny and whatever.' Anyway he went up there and he came back and he said 'Look what he gave me. He had given me these two balls of cod line, two balls of string.' I said 'Did you get your drink?' 'No' he says. Anyway Scobie went up to his cabin and he said 'Well, thank you very much, Scobie. You have been very helpful today and I would like to ...' and he gave him these two balls of string which was a bit But no, I did not get to know him personally. I spoke to him. The only other time: well I eventually got the Fuchs Medal and I did meet him there, but he was quite a sick man at that time.

[Part 1a 0:38:38] [End of Part 1a]

Part 1b

[Part 1b 0:00:00] Lee: There's a note here saying about the last dogs to come out of Halley. Was that at that point?

Burkitt: Yes, it was yes.

[Part 1b 0:00:05] Lee: Tell me about that because Bob Bostelmann was with you at the time I think.

Burkitt: Bob was with us. Bob was due to winter at Stonington and of course all the dogs were due to go down to Stonington.

² Ten years (1974 – 1983), compared with 6 years for Halley II, 8 years for Halley IV and 20 years for Halley V.

[Part 1b 0:00:14] Lee: So what was happening? Why were they coming out of Halley?

Burkitt: It was at the time when dog sledging really was ... Albeit Fuchs was still in charge; he was still Director although I think it was his last year down South anyway and it was on the cards that certainly dog sledging and exploration was on the decline by then. I imagine they had finished all the planned work anyway using dog teams. Mechanised transport was coming in and so they said 'Right, that's it.' For whatever reason they got rid of them from Halley. They were to go down to Stonington. I can't remember how many; probably about a couple of dozen dogs I would imagine³. I have got some slides I took of the ... while we were on passage, and we had a guy who had ... a chap called Neil McAllister who had already wintered at Stonington. He was on board as well so he acted as doggyman with Bob Bostelmann. They were weighing the dogs on passage and so on.

[Part 1b 0:01:20] Lee: So they were living on deck?

Burkitt: They were all living out on the deck, on the open ... not actually on the heli-deck – on the deck beneath the heli-deck. It gave them a bit of shelter, but they were all tethered up. Yes, they didn't seem to ... I don't think they particularly liked it in rough seas or anything but I can't really remember as we didn't ... It was a fairly good passage anyway. I seem to remember we went out via Signy Island. They might have been ashore at Signy for a few days, I can't remember, but I think that's probably what happened: so they had a day or so ashore before going back on board and then eventually down to Stonington.

[Part 1b 0:01:59] Lee: Had you been to Stonington before, at this point?

Burkitt: Oh no, no.

[Part 1b 0:02:03] Lee: So what was your first impression?

Burkitt: When we did eventually get ashore, it was everybody involved with Relief and to be honest I can't really remember whether I might have been working in the scow or something before I eventually got ashore. But it was 'all systems go' to get that relief done, right at the end of the season. Stonington is prone to some quite wild weather. In fact whilst the relief was happening, we did have 24 hours or so of really quite big blows from the northwest, really hitting the ship. So I was probably involved initially in the ferrying gear ashore. I eventually got onto base, and I was really looking forward of course to (thinking this was where I was going to be wintering) to meeting the dogs.

[Part 1b 0:03:07] Burkitt: The guy whose dog team I took over from, I didn't even get to talk to him really until about the day before ... Neil McNaughton, a geologist. And I said to him 'I would like to see the dogs.' He was ever so busy packing and so on. 'I will take you up to meet the dogs.' And eventually of course he did take me up there and I met the dogs. But it was a very very busy period, that relief there. Everybody

³ 15 dogs were transferred to Stonington; 14 were culled; 2 were left at Halley (info from Keith Holmes).

packing and new guys coming in and so on. So I can't honestly remember thinking in terms of 'Well this is it. I am going to be here for a couple of years, whatever.' It was just so busy. A small island and not a lot of snow about then of course. The island was pretty barren, pretty bare, just bare rock everywhere.

[Part 1b 0:04:03] Lee: The snow was seasonal or had it gone completely by '73?

Burkitt: Oh it was still very seasonal, and indeed still is today. There is a good covering of snow over the winter period, even today, but midsummer time, at the end of the season (it was March time before the ship finally sailed) it is pretty bare, the island is by then

[Part 1b 0:04:28] Lee: What was the hut like in those days? Do you remember much about it?

Burkitt: I do. I do remember it. I was quite impressed with it. A lovely building, interesting building and just (as all the bases were in those days) a hotch-potch: a bit tagged on here, a bit tagged on there. Again, as all the bases, you get incoming personnel and somebody comes, the BC thinks 'well it would be nice to have that room as so-and so, rather than as it is now.' So every group of people have got their own inputs and their own mark on the base. But it was a very homely place, with a pot-bellied stove and the bar was lovely. I can picture it today. The two guys that had died in the storm⁴ in fact, who had built that bar. They were two chaps on base, the radio op and the diesel mechanic I think it was.

[Part 1b 0:05:28] Burkitt: They had gone up for a bit of a jolly with the dog teams to the top of the Northeast Glacier and they had died in a bad storm. Anyway, whilst they were on base, they built this lovely bar out of dry stone wall: tiny bits of stone (3 or 4 inches, whatever) in a semi-circular bar with a fire in the middle of it, a bar on top of that. Everybody would congregate round that bar and above the bar there, all the dog teams carved in wood: the Admirals, the Komats, the Vikings and so on, and pictures of dog sledging around the room. So it was a very homely base. That particular year they were modifying the bunkrooms anyway.

[Part 1b 0:06:15] Burkitt: Tony Gannon, who was the builder for the winter, he had got a load of timber and materials brought in to give a bit more privacy I think, and the upstairs bunkrooms more partitioned off – it was two people to a room. Very small, amounting to what? about 5ft by about 6ft. Yes, but it was a lovely homely base. It was what I expected; certainly nothing like ... a dramatic change nowadays of course in what conditions are like. You have got your own cabin and your own en-suite facilities and everything else. But a lovely base; it was great. I have been back more recently and sadly, when they did close the base down, everything was taken out. It is just a shell of a building now and it is rather sad to see it.

[Part 1b 0:07:00] Lee: Would Captain Scott have recognised it? Was it much advanced from Scott's day or was it still in the Heroic Era?

⁴ John Noel and Tom Allan in June 1976.

Burkitt: I think it was still pretty much. Obviously we had electricity and electric lighting but having said that, the diesel mechanic (John Newman), he would only allow us lighting in the evenings: for about two or three hours in the evening. It might have been a bit more in midwinter. But the old generator plodding away there and when he flashed it up ... so we had electric power. But it was still very much ... We had a few refinements but it was: pot-bellied stoves. Everybody involved with the day-to-day running of the base, which was nice, which I do feel is missing nowadays. Your scientists and people like that can just disappear into their own little caboose whatever; you never see them.

[Part 1b 0:07:58] Burkitt: But then, lunchtime, we all went in. We didn't have a cook on base; no cook, no doctor. So we took it in turns and it was great. There were 14 of us wintered and the system worked. Water was very much at a premium, particularly in the summer months of course. It was hard but anyway in the summer months most of us were out in the field anyway. But snow-blocking every lunchtime. You would have your lunch and then you would go out and cut snow, everybody working together; a bit of coaling. So it was nice, that was. You were all working as a team and very much regardless of whether you were a scientist or what; everybody is involved in it.

[Part 1b 0:08:40] Lee: Did you have occasion to wish you did have a doctor?

Burkitt: Err, I did have quite a nasty at one time, and Bob Bostelmann of course, our vet, he looked after me. Bob looked after all our medical needs.

[Part 1b 0:08:55] Lee: Tell me the story. What happened to you?

Burkitt: Well it was very early on: my very first dog-sledging field trip so it was a very steep learning curve. But this was a good thing about BAS in those days: you had this changeover, people going down for two years – a two-year contract – so you spent two full winter seasons down in the Antarctic. So I, as a first-year GA (General Assistant) would go out with a second-year scientist and learn from him, and so on. So it was my very first trip and I was out with John Yates, a surveyor. It was in the autumn trip, just after the ship has left of course and winter is approaching, so shorter daylight hours.

[Part 1b 0:09:40] Burkitt: We did a bit of survey work low down. All parties were out working: survey, geology and so on. Then John and I had to go up onto the plateau, about 5000 odd feet up onto the plateau, I suppose. We got to our work area. As a surveyor, the plan was: we would be measuring a line using a tellurometer and setting up a theodolite between the survey station we were to man, and the one to the north. So we got there and the weather was particularly bad. Communications were bad. We had long lie-up periods and it was pretty unpleasant actually. I can remember temperatures in the low thirties (–30s) and strong winds. We were out in the field for about six weeks. We only had two working days out of that period but we were waiting for a good day to do this survey and because of the wind, we couldn't do it. Eventually we did manage to get the work done.

[Part 1b 0:10:50] Burkitt: We were lying up in the tent for a further 5 days, 5 or 6 days, running out of manfood, running out of dogfood. I remember by then we were

feeding the dogs bits of 'nutty', breaking down our own manfood into small blocks. You are going to feed the poor beggars in awful, quite driving snow blizzard conditions. The poor beggars were really hungry and I lay in my tent there and we didn't have ... we were running out of fuel as well and all this hoar frost inside, forming inside the tent, falling down. It was pretty unpleasant. I said to John, 'John, we have got to move. We can't just lie here indefinitely.' Because I was looking to him as being the second-year guy, he knew what he was doing. I did say 'We can't just do this.' So we did eventually leave. The weather did ... it was blowing about 30 knots low drift, to get through the depot to get some food (Beehive Depot). So we sledged up and we arrived up there.

[Part 1b 0:11:49] Burkitt: We could vaguely make out the outline of the Beehive (this hill). But we couldn't find the depot so we camped again for another two or three days. Like a fool (now; I didn't at the time), I said to John 'I am just going outside.' I took my compass with me. I thought 'That depot is somewhere there' and I walked 50 yards due south, 50 yards due east, 50 due north and so on, to box in, to see if I could see anything. I did pick out vaguely, well make out roughly where we were. We were on this slight spur running away to the east, down to the Larsen Ice Shelf. Anyway I got back into the tent OK, having lost sight of the tent (but anyway that's by the bye). Next day we went out; we set up some marker poles, just kept in line. We walked on this bearing up this spur and we got sight of this depot. So we went up there and got to the depot (Thank God for that!).

[Part 1b 0:12:49] Burkitt: One of the poor dogs had just about collapsed en route, only this mile or so we went to the depot. We fed ourselves, we fed the dogs. Poor Enna, John's dog, she died from hypothermia and lack of food obviously, the last few days. We were there for a couple of days, two or three days. Then we eventually got to the top of this what is called Sodabread Slope, tried to grope around to find out where the descent route was. We eventually did find it. The bamboo marker pole had been snapped off. It had been a period of about several weeks of really violent blows, and there had been another party that had experienced 100 knot winds to the north of us in the Forbes Glacier. Their tents had been ripped apart and they had had quite an epic getting back to Stonington.

[Part 1b 0:13:36] Burkitt: So we had been through all that experience up on the plateau but not quite so bad as what they had. But because of these really really bad strong, violent strong winds, the whole surface on the plateau and everywhere had been blasted: very very heavy sastrugi – rock hard ice sastrugi. We got to the top of Sodabread Slope to make our way down to get back to Stonington, and it was like a roller coaster ride you know: 4-foot, 5-foot high sastrugi. We got going down there, all the brakes wound around. This is in places a 1 in 2, 1 in 3 slope. We were going down there, sledges capsizing every so often. We had the dog teams out front. They always want to pull. Wrap a load a ropes around the brake and dog chain things around the brake and everything else, around the runners rather.

[Part 1b 0:14:29] Burkitt: So we were going down and anyway, to cut a long story short, I hit this sastrugi, catapulted over the top of my sledge, down this crevasse. It knocked me unconscious, When I came to, John had already picketed his dogs and he was looking down this hole at me and saying 'Don't move.' And I looked down one side of me and I said 'I am not going to move.' I could see there was a gaping great

big abyss. If it had been a couple of ... a yard or so the other way, I would have disappeared for ever without doubt. Anyway so John rescued me out of the crevasse. I was coughing up blood and whatever. I was in quite a state of shock obviously, not realising it, but anyway John got me out, we got the tent up and managed to radio ... We couldn't make contact with Stonington because the HF transmissions weren't good locally like that.

[Part 1b 0:15:28] Burkitt: But we did raise a field party at Adelaide, some 50, 60, 70 miles away and in the party was the doctor: Chris Andrews on base at Adelaide. John told him what the problem was. I was listening in to the radio and Chris Andrews was saying 'Get such and such instrument out do so-and-so ... ' and I said 'I am going to be all right John.' But yes, I was suffering from quite a bit of shock and I was in a lot of pain. But they radioed Stonington. Stonington sent out a rescue party for us the next day and we got back to base, but I know that week or so on base: God, I was in an awful lot of pain, I really was. I couldn't even get up the stairs the first night or so.

[Part 1b 0:16:15] Lee: How did John get you out, of the crevasse?

Burkitt: I can't ... He obviously rigged up a rope system and he got down to me, but I honestly can't really remember. I think I was down about thirty feet, down this crevasse and ended up on a ... thrown down onto a sort of subsidiary bridge, and there was a bit of a ramp leading down to it, so he obviously came So it wasn't a vertical crevasse he had to get me out of. Sometime I shall see John, meet up with John again and ask him what he remembers about it.

[Part 1b 0:16:58] Lee: Were you lucky?

Burkitt: I was lucky. If I had been a yard or so the other way, I would have disappeared, without doubt.

[Part 1b 0:17:04] Lee: Tell me about the Admirals, then. This was your dog team wasn't it? This was your first dog team?

Burkitt: It was, yes. All the drivers had a great pride in their own dog team and in fact the Admirals were, as it turns out, the longest running, right from the Operation Tabarin days at Hope Bay. I think the Admirals were established then and continued as a team right the way through me running, virtually until being finished in the 1990s at Rothera. So yes, my team the Admirals. We all took great pride in them, you know, about the strength of the team and the characters and so on. So there was always that bit of competitiveness about your own team. Over the winter time we used to ... I organised a race round about a several-mile circuit on the sea ice. Choose the best three dogs from your team, ski-joring round the ice at wintertime and that sort of thing. My lead bitch Miff and her two brothers, her siblings, Dai and Waldo at the back of ... back pair. Old Waldo, king dog, great characters, all of them.

[Part 1b 0:18:18] Burkitt: The problem was: when they had not been running for a bit, there was always that unease amongst the team, and or scraps going on, but as soon as you stopped the teams, stopped the sledge, Miff (as lead bitch) would come back, work her way back to her two brothers Dai and Waldo, whatever. Then the front pair, Sam and Kirsty, they would come back and then a scrap would start. So the mêlée of

dogs fighting, and of course they do quite a bit of damage to each other. So you are straight in with your thumper, dragging them apart. Yes it was quite frustrating, an interesting experience certainly the first time, but once you had been running with them for a few months they get to know you and you get to know them, all their individual characteristics and so on. But an interesting experience and very hard work, dog sledging. I wasn't the great romance as people think. If you have got a several hundred pounds 700 or 800, 900lb up to a thousand pound load on a dog sledge, it is damned hard work in deep soft snow.

[Part 1b 0:19:23] Lee: Were you raising pups to replace the dogs?

Burkitt: Yes, we were still doing that, albeit they had said that the breeding programme was to be cut back. Fuchs himself had said, so it was quite a strict breeding programme. Between the doggy man, and Bob Bostelmann the vet, and of course we had this long-standing family tree of all the dogs bred in Antarctica, so it was a very strict breeding programme. Then between the doggy man and Bob, would say 'Right, well so-and-so is due on heat. Who shall we put her with?' So a dog, a good powerful dog with good characteristics. You would mate the two together and it was a very strict breeding programme that went on.

[Part 1b 0:20:08] Lee: How do you feel about the arrival of a new pup?

Burkitt: It didn't personally affect me because I didn't have any bitches which produced anyway, and it was the guy whose team the bitch had been in, it was up to him to choose the names for them and so on. So I am sure he was quite proud, like a proud grandparent whatever. So it never personally affected me but certainly the pups on base were a great source of entertainment. I can remember at Stonington there, with the old lino floors and that, and as much as possible when we were all on base, we had half a dozen, 8 or 9 pups in the building; probably even more at any one time in the evening. You were getting on with your work and then you would see all the puppy dogs there, tearing about of course. They weren't house-trained. They would be peeing and crapping everywhere. But it was great and I have got some lovely slides; I still look at them today, of little puppy dogs there. I can remember three of them there so messed up with sealskin meat and filthy. We had given them a bath that night and they looked absolutely immaculate, these three little forlorn pups sitting in a corner all in pristine condition. But a great source of entertainment and everybody loved it.

[Part 1b 0:21:27] Lee: You were transferred to South Georgia again, weren't you, for the winter of '74?

Burkitt: Yes.

[Part 1b 0:21:34] Lee: So was that against your wishes or was that something you wanted?

Burkitt: Oh no, I did; I was quite happy for a change. My thoughts on dog sledging, I did find it hard work but I had wanted to go to South Georgia as well anyway, and so when the end of the season ... or before the end of the season, you request a base change. So I said 'If there is any chance, I would like to go to South Georgia.' Again,

no regrets but in a way, because it was the end of the dogs, what turned out to be getting rid of all the dogs, I'm glad I wasn't there that last season.

[Part 1b 0:22:13] Lee: At Stonington, you mean?

Burkitt: Yes. It was pretty nasty what went on really and it upset ...

[Part 1b 0:22:17] Lee: How do you mean?

Burkitt: Well, the putting down of a load of dogs and so on. You think those poor beggars had worked their hearts out for you. So it was a bit of a nasty business. I am not sure we would get away with it today, shooting, culling a lot of dogs the way it was and I think it did upset some of the guys what happened.

[Part 1b 0:22:38] Lee: Why were they being shot?

Burkitt: Well they were told Stonington was being closed down and they had to get rid of so many ... They were told when we transferred to Rothera, to the new base being built at Rothera, it was on the cards anyway that dog sledging days were finishing. Dick Laws, who had taken over from Fuchs, as good as said 'That's it. Dog sledging is finished.' Quite rightly so. Anyway that's something else. So they did say only so many dogs could be taken over to Rothera and that's what happened. As I say, I wasn't involved in it but some of the stories I do hear, it wasn't ... People weren't too happy with what went on.

[Part 1b 0:23:26] Lee: So what were you doing in that winter of '74 at South Georgia? You were the boatman of sorts, I believe?

Burkitt: Yeah I went to South Georgia as a boatman. I did boat-building anyway in my apprenticeship in the Royal Navy, and I love working with my tools. I went there as boatman – boatman/ handyman, as indeed anybody with a basic general handyman knowledge would get involved in all sorts of jobs. But again it was a fantastic year. It was a lovely winter, and South Georgia: I have got very very fond memories of the place. It was a cracking winter: good boating days, mountaineering activities, good walking there. Everything about the place ...

[Part 1b 0:24:13] Lee: People describe the 'mank' to me quite a lot. The weather conditions are not particularly salubrious. Is that right?

Burkitt: At South Georgia? It can be, but equally, down the Peninsula, we had some pretty manky days, up on the dreaded Larsen Bank and so on. But yes, it's very much a maritime climate as opposed to deep down the Antarctic Peninsula where you get more of a continental climate. So it is very fickle, the weather is there.

[Part 1b 0:24:43] Lee: So you came to the end of your two and a half year stretch and what were the options at that point?

Burkitt: The options? I don't know whether ... They didn't normally like you doing three consecutive winters anyway, so that was never really an option, not that I wanted to.

[Part 1b 0:24:58] Lee: Was there a reason for that, do you think?

Burkitt: Oh I think so. I think BAS rightly assume that after ... You don't want to become totally apart from civilisation, from women and everything else, and I think when you have done two and a half years with a group of blokes in an isolated community like that, then it is time to get back and face the realities of life. And I was certainly looking forward to it. I missed female company and I was missing home as well. So I was quite looking forward to getting home.

[Part 1b 0:25:40] Lee: Did you have something to come back to?

Burkitt: Did they ask me to come back?

[Part 1b 0:25:44] Lee: No. Did you have something to come back to, back in Britain?

Burkitt: Somebody?

[Part 1b 0:25:46] Lee: Something, or somebody?

Burkitt: Well I'd had a girlfriend. I had a very nice girlfriend before I left, but something to come back to?

[Part 1b 0:25:54] Lee: Was she still there when you came back?

Burkitt: No, she wasn't, no. She had buggered off to Australia.

[Part 1b 0:25:57] Lee: So had you had a 'Dear John' letter?

Burkitt: I got the Dear John when I was down at Stonington, yes.

[Part 1b 0:26:01] Lee: What was that like, opening the mail and ...?

Burkitt: We had this business called the Old Ching Letter. How the name Ching ... I have heard various reasons why they call it the Ching Letter. Anyway it didn't bother me too much. I mean OK I wasn't madly in love or anything like that. She was a girlfriend. I was quite keen. Anyway, there we go. But something to come back to? Not really. I didn't have any work to come back to but I was quite looking forward to it and I had quite a bit of money to spend anyway, because you spend two and a half years down there and relatively speaking, the pay wasn't good in those days. But it was still pretty good when you think it is all found and we were taxed at the Falkland Islands income tax rate. So it was pretty good. I had a bit of money in the bank when I came home.

[Part 1b 0:27:02] Lee: How much?

Burkitt: I really can't remember.

[Part 1b 0:27:06] Lee: But you hadn't spent any money whilst you were away?

Burkitt: Oh I hadn't spent anything at all, apart from old Gerry Cutland (bless him) was the Purser on the *John Biscoe*. Old Gerry used to manage to sell most Fids who were going South, a sophisticated bit of radio gear, or hi-fi gear or camera gear or whatever. Apart from spending a bit of money to go into Gerry's pocket, then no I hadn't spent much at all.

[Part 1b 0:27:37] Lee: So what did you do for work when you got back to the UK?

Burkitt: I went down again the following season anyway. I really can't remember what I did the first season. I had so many jobs. I went down on a number of occasions, came back, went down again. I had many many jobs. I think the first time I didn't work at all. I went back straight away the following season, back down to South Georgia, by choice.

[Part 1b 0:28:06] Lee: I have got a note here saying you were repairing snow ploughs. Maybe that was another occasion?

Burkitt: Well yes. I subsequently came back from South Georgia and then I had a couple of years at home, and I did get a job with Lincolnshire County Council. Yes, I was in the workshops there. A friend of mine, who was in charge of the workshops, said 'Can you ...?' I said 'Any chance of any work?' He said 'Yes, what can you do?' I said 'Well I can weld; I can do a bit a woodwork, whatever.' He said 'Right, welding up the snow plough fleet.' So that's what I did. Yes, it was interesting, prefabricating Highways caravans and doing jobs like that. It was interesting work actually, and the main boss, he said 'We have got a ...' He was building these chassis for small trucks, caravans, trailers and whatnot. I didn't realise that he was selling them, making money on the side. They got rid of him in the end and I ended up welding up all these damn things again. But I did that job for a bit.

[Part 1b 0:29:13] Lee: But were you itching to go South again?

Burkitt: Not immediately, no, because I did several other jobs. I wanted to go back down to South Georgia again and I did that the following season. Then I did that winter⁵ and then I came back home, had a winter at home and then I had a couple of years summer season field work on South Georgia. In the interim, in the winters, I had got a job skiing instructing up in the Cairngorms and I even worked offshore for a while with BP. While I was working offshore, I read the *Press and Journal* newspaper which they have in Northern Scotland. I saw them advertising for a reindeer keeper. I thought 'I could do that job. It sounds interesting.' In the Cairngorms, so I applied for a job and I got that. That was one of the interesting periods of my life. But I went for interview they said 'What do you know about reindeer?' I said 'I have worked with reindeer before.' We had a veterinary programme with the South Georgia reindeer and I assisted the vet down there. So yes, I got the job as keeper of the reindeer herd for a few months.

[Part 1b 0:30:28] Lee: Let's explore the second part of your career after we have had a break.

⁵ 1976.

Burkitt: Yep, OK fine.

[Part 1b 0:30:34] [End of Part 1b] [End of Part One]

Part 2

[Part 2 0:00:00] Lee: This is Dave Burkitt, recorded at his home in Nettleham, Lincolnshire, by Chris Eldon Lee on the 6th of May 2010. Dave Burkitt, Part Two.

[Part 2 0:00:11] Lee: So you were back in Britain and sort of itching to go South again. How did the opportunity arise to go back? This will be the second time you have been, we are talking about now. You have been there for two and a half years and then came the opportunity to go back. So what happened to draw you back to the Antarctic the second time?

Burkitt: I wanted to go back, certainly. Yes, I applied. I approached BAS and said 'Any chance of any GA's job down South again, and if possible I would like to go GA-ing to South Georgia?' So that was it yes. They took me on. So it wasn't a matter of 'Ooh I am out of work. Is it worthwhile going?' I really wanted ... It's been a fantastic time, the whole of my time with BAS. Every time I look back on it I think 'Great!' They were tremendous times and so I was very much looking forward to going South again. Yes, I approached BAS and there I was on South Georgia again.

[Part 2 0:01:06] Lee: By choice?

Burkitt: By choice. Very much so, yes.

[Part 2 0:01:09] Lee: What were you doing?

Burkitt: I went down the next time – that second time – as a Field GA, doing geological work. Prior to that they had done ... A fair bit of geology had gone on on South Georgia, but no real inland trips venturing really up the glaciers. It had all been fairly coastal work. So my first field season then was: a very nice guy, a hell-of-a nice guy Brian Storey (who is now incidentally Head of Geology in New Zealand⁶). With Brian, a lovely Irishman, we went down, again on the *John Biscoe*. We were dropped off in the field on the southeastern end of South Georgia, with a view to exploring inland, right up the glaciers and there are some big glaciers there.

[Part 2 0:01:58] Lee: This was in 1976?

Burkitt: '76 yes. It would be about that, yes. '76? yes it was, yes. So we got dropped off, with about four months supplies, and there we were again. My job was to plane table and assist Brian in every way I could do, and Brian is one of these revving guys, really wanting to go for it: quite an adventurer himself. Everywhere we had the old 1:200,000 Duncan Carse map which was pretty good. It is still very good. BAS has now produced much better maps but it was very good and we travelled around. I made my own plane table map as we were progressing inland and up the glaciers.

⁶ Director of the Centre for Antarctic Studies at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

[Part 2 0:02:43] Lee: What's a plane table map, sorry?

Burkitt: A plane table map is a very basic form of mapmaking. You simply have a horizontal board, table. You set it up as level as you can do. You set yourself up a station (your main station). You measure out a baseline and you ping a ray out, drawn on the map, on the white paper, from where you are to where this second survey station is. You measure it out and you set your scale up accordingly. You do a line on there and then, by means of triangulation, you ping out rays, looking through this instrument called an alidade – a simple little instrument laid on the plane table. You ping out onto different features, rock pinnacles and so on. You put a mark, or draw a line through and then you go to your second point; you intersect where the intersection is, so you build up your map as you go along.

[Part 2 0:03:38] Lee: Have you learned that 'on the job' so to speak?

Burkitt: Yes. I had done a bit of plane tabling on the Elephant Island Expedition with the Services and then I had very much improved on that working down at Stonington with Dave Singleton, a geologist at Stonington. I produced all his large scale maps and it is very satisfying, very rewarding work. You are seeing your map progress. This was the days of course before GPS and satellite imagery and everything else and it is quite interesting now to look at my map, which I made by a plane table, compared with the modern satellite compiled maps.

[Part 2 0:04:20] Lee: Do they match?

Burkitt: Pretty good, yes. Yes, so it is very rewarding work.

[Part 2 0:04:24] Lee: How does it feel to be mapping out a piece of land that nobody actually has mapped before? Are you 'taming' the land, or ...?

Burkitt: I don't know about taming it, but it is rewarding work and it is exciting work and you are wanting it to be as accurate as possible. I certainly put a lot of effort and time into it. If I knew I had gone wrong somewhere, I tried to work out where and how. But seeing that map on a bit of paper slowly building up, it really is exciting work. And I found it was great to be with a geologist doing that sort of work.

[Part 2 0:05:02] Lee: There is a hint here that '76 was your best winter, your best season I should say.

Burkitt: My most enjoyable, yes, South Georgia, insofar as we were kept very busy. Great crowd of blokes. Great crowd of blokes everywhere of course but it was a good crowd of blokes on base. We did an awful lot. Was it '76? It might have been the following season actually, when I was BC⁷ and I look back on that year as being my best, my most enjoyable, my most satisfying. We did all sorts of things on base, entertainment ... Everybody got on well with the work (or most of us did). We put in a lot of effort. All the buildings at King Edward Point were all painted. We did a lot of maintenance work on base. Everybody worked hard in that respect and it was great. And then at the weekends we had all sorts of jollying.

⁷ Burkitt was BC at South Georgia in 1976, according to Keith Holmes' winterers database.

[Part 2 0:05:56] Lee: Skiing?

Burkitt: We had our own ski tow. We had water skiing in the Cove. I'm sure the Risk Assessment Health & Safety people would probably pull their hair out these days, but yes we did it and we had a great time.

[Part 2 0:06:08] Lee: So you became Base Commander at South Georgia the following year, '77 I think it was, or thereabouts?

Burkitt: Yes, yes.

[Part 2 0:06:16] Lee: Tell me about that, because that was a step up wasn't it, and perhaps something you hadn't necessarily been expecting?

Burkitt: Well I was. In fact I did say to was it Ricky Chinn or whoever, I said 'Ricky, can I be base commander this year?' I genuinely wanted the challenge.

[Part 2 0:06:36] Lee: And you dropped a hint?

Burkitt: I did, yes. So yes, I was appointed Base Commander and it did go well but somebody will look back on it and think 'Well ...' And when something is amiss, I did lose a lot of sleep over one particular ...

[Part 2 0:06:57] Lee: Well tell me a bit about what would cause you sleepless nights.

Burkitt: Well we had an individual on base who I felt I knew wasn't pulling his weight. He was supposed to be working with another guy doing a week's project up the glacier and after a couple of days they were back down again, and this went on and on. In the end we had to replace this guy using base personnel to go and do his job and so on. So in turn you inform Cambridge of what's going on: tels⁸ going backwards and forwards, the old cryptic message ... using the coding system and so on. When you are saying to someone 'Look, resign or you will be sacked.' I lost a lot of sleep over it. I was probably in my mid/ late twenties then and you think 'Am I doing the right thing?' Deep down I knew he wasn't pulling his weight. So yes, it was a responsible job and I am sure a lot of us have felt the same way. But having said that, it was great, it was quite rewarding. It's good to look at a base ticking over and seeing everybody enjoying themselves and people getting on with their work and so on.

[Part 2 0:08:19] Lee: How many people were there about that time? Half a dozen?

Burkitt: It was about 28 of us, something like that⁹?

[Part 2 0:08:27] Lee: Is it quite lonely then, being a base leader, base commander?

⁸ Telexes, the usual means of communication between the bases and HQ in the 1970's.

⁹ 22 men wintered at South Georgia in 1967, again according to the Holmes database.

Burkitt: No I don't think it is. It's not like you are in a situation say the likes of – again we keep talking about this – the likes of the Shackleton and Scott experiences. Those sort of things where you got these life making decisions to make. It's not like that at all. OK, it was a little bit more remote certainly than what it is now, with the Internet and everything else, access straight to Cambridge. But nonetheless it certainly wasn't lonely. I mean I socialised just the same as everybody else. Apart from the one incident where we had what I am talking about before, apart from it all went very well and everybody got on well and I used to enjoy a drink just the same as everybody else.

[Part 2 0:09:15] Lee: There is a story to do with a doctor or the lack of a doctor at South Georgia at this point in time – a story about a party apparently, which I have to ask you about.

Burkitt: Yes, well a party; we had several parties. Parties every weekend but yes, there wasn't a doctor on base. I, as base commander, acted as ... looked after the medical side of things. In fact my room (we all had our own rooms at Shackleton House which was totally different to all the other bases at that time in the '70s) ...; right next door to me was the surgery, and I did deal with two or three incidents, stitching people up and so on. But I do remember that one time. We'd had a big (as usual) Saturday night party, and I had gone to bed, whatever time it was, midnight. In the early hours of the morning one of the lads came to give me a shake and said 'Dave, can you give us a hand? Mex has had an accident.'

[Part 2 0:10:18] Lee: Mex?

Burkitt: Mex Merson his name was. Sadly Mex is no longer with us but he was a great character again, the met man (meteorologist). Anyway Mex, bless him, had fallen off the bar stool and fallen backwards, and behind the bar is the bar store with a door in it and he had fallen there. I don't quite know to this day exactly how it happened but somebody the other side had tried to slam the door to and poor old Mex had caught it. He had got his hand laid out there, more or less unconscious on the deck. All his fingers on one hand were all smashed and bleeding and he was a bit of a mess. Anyway they brought him up to me. I said 'OK, bring him up.' And I knew more or less what sort of state he would be in. And brought him up and into the surgery there and I got a local anaesthetic out and stuck the needle into his fingers.

[Part 2 0:11:13] Burkitt: It was no problem at all doing that. He let me anaesthetise his three digits. Then I got the needle and thread out and tried to stitch him up and he wouldn't have any of that. Arms flailing and got a bit punchy, a bit stormy. So anyway I just said 'Put the bugger to bed.' He woke up next morning with his hand all sticking to the sheets and still scarred right the way through the rest of his life from that incident. But yes, you are right, we didn't have a doctor on base, unlike nowadays: I think all bases have got doctors on. But there was that case, and another case where a guy had slipped on a scree and had torn part of his hand open. I stitched that up. But generally speaking it is only minor things like that. Everybody is in a good state of health when they are down there.

[Part 2 0:12:03] Lee: What was Shackleton House like then? Was it a cut above the rest as far as bases were concerned?

Burkitt: Oh very much so yes.

[Part 2 0:12:09] Lee: Tell me about that.

Burkitt: Yeah, it was totally different to the norm of a FIDS base certainly, in that it was built actually for ... In about the mid-1920s the British Government, or the Falkland Islands Government, set up what they called the Discovery Investigations, which was named after Captain Scott's ship the *Discovery* and they were investigating the whaling industry around South Georgia and down the Antarctic. Anyway the Discovery Investigations, they put this building up on King Edward Point, where the British Administration was. It was called Discovery House (it is now a listed building on the Point) to house the laboratories and so on. Well Discovery House was coming to the end of its days and the Falkland Islands Government then built what was called Shackleton House.

[Part 2 0:12:59] Burkitt: Discovery Investigations finished, the Falkland Islands had no need for it and they asked the British Antarctic Survey to take over the administration and set up a scientific laboratory. So the obvious place for us to go was to use Shackleton House. This was in the late 1960s I think¹⁰ and so we took it over and it was a lovely building, I mean it really was. It was like a hotel. There was even talk, when BAS were pulling out, for the Falkland Island Government to convert it into a hotel for tourists. It would probably work well now. Alas that building has now been taken out. In the '70s, when we were using it, right up until the Falklands War in fact, when the Argentines invaded South Georgia, it was still used by BAS. OK it had seen better days and they were talking then about replacing it but it was a lovely building, a two-storey building with: we all had our own bedrooms, not quite en-suite but three or four bathrooms on the upper deck and a nice bar. A lovely big kitchen, a lovely big dining room.

[Part 2 0:15:06] Burkitt: One lad, Bob Clunes the chippy or boatman, had built this lovely big dining room¹¹, went the full length of that room. That must have been about 30 foot long or so, that table, out of this lovely 2-inch timber. Anyway it was a lovely building. It had a lovely library, everything else you know. The whole lot; it was great. You got up in the morning, went down into the dining room, sat there, a lovely big long window facing due South, straight out onto what must be one of the finest views of any hotel in the world. You were looking out onto Paget, the Allardyce Range of mountains: Mount Paget, Mount Roots, Nordenskjöld Peak and so on. So to sit there and look out over the water at these mountains, it was a real pleasure, a real treat.

[Part 2 0:15:01] Lee: So you really got into a pattern then of doing the winters back here and the summers down South, didn't you?

Burkitt: I did, yes.

¹⁰ 13 November 1969 (source BAS website).

¹¹ From the context, he probably meant dining table.

[Part 2 0:15:08] Lee: Was this a rolling contract or did you have to keep re-applying? What happened? Or was it just a gentlemen's agreement?

Burkitt: Well yes, it was just a matter of: get on the phone and Richard Hanson or Eric Salmon in those days, whoever it was, the person in the office. I would just say 'Any chance of any work this season? What have you got going?' And he would say 'Well we have got an interesting field project ...' and so on. James Ross Island or wherever, down the Peninsula. 'Do you fancy it?'

[Part 2 0:15:35] Lee: What are the highlights of that period of your life? What were the two or three key moments?

Burkitt: They were all highlights whenever I was in South Georgia. I had a couple of interesting geology trips there, and then a good season on James Ross Island, doing geological work. James Ross Island which is the north-eastern end of the Antarctic Peninsula. I had a very interesting glacio trip: my first real skidooing days, traversing across the bottom end of the Antarctic Peninsula and ending up in King George VI Sound. So they were all good trips, they were all interesting, certainly quite varied but you know South Georgia is an absolute magic place to work. They didn't ask me to go back actually. I did two seasons there. I wonder why. But that first season there with Brian Storey I mentioned before, old Brian: God he is a hell of a worker and he really did some (in quite bad conditions at time) he really did some good work, collected some good samples.

[Part 2 0:16:44] Burkitt: We were down on the beach awaiting a pickup, and we were in the tent at night. We got turned in and we had shifted gear ready for a pickup, not right by the water's edge but a little bit closer down to the beach. We were due for pickup. In the middle of the night suddenly there was this roaring sound. The tent was moving about; we were on a Lilo; we could feel we were afloat and the tent was being dragged back down the beach. Anyway we ripped the door open and there in front of us was this like wall of white water – amazing. Poor old Brian virtually lost everything; he lost all his rock samples; we lost a load of scientific kit.

[Part 2 0:17:31] Burkitt: We dragged everything back we could do, we could find, back up the beach but it was quite an epic and it was a bit of a survival thing. We actually nobbled one of the old Gentoo penguins over the head. We were eating that semi raw because we didn't have the fuel to cook it with properly, and eventually we got picked up by the ship. Interestingly, Duncan Carse, who did all the mapping in the 1950s there, Duncan Carse had had a solo expedition to a similar part of the coast. The coastline on that southeastern part of South Georgia. He had got washed away by a big storm and nobody believed him. Anyway I think after our incident people thought 'Well old Duncan Carse might have been right after all.'

[Part 2 0:18:20] Lee: Do you know what the cause was?

Burkitt: No I don't. It was just a very very big sea running. I mean we hear these things: tidal waves and everything else. It was a particularly big sea and one particular big wave. It wasn't a tsunami or anything like that, well not to my knowledge anyway. So it was just particularly bad weather but it was quite an experience. So poor old Brian lost everything. The following season I went back again. They asked me if I

would go back again and repeat the work with a different, with another geologist Bruce Mair. So I said 'Yes OK fine.' We went back, worked the same area, making sure we didn't camp in the same place. Having said that (in our defence) we weren't camped in a silly place. We were 80 yards beyond the normal high tide mark. We couldn't have gone back any farther. We were right beneath these cliffs and so on.

[Part 2 0:19:13] Burkitt: Anyway I went back the following year with Bruce Mair and repeated all the work and at the end of the season we were waiting for a pickup. We were in the field for getting on for 3 or 4 months whatever, waiting for a pickup, and the seas were particularly bad again. *Bransfield* was due to pick us up. Stuart Lawrence, the captain, radioed me and they had put the boats out. I said 'Look, the weather is not really pickup now.' It had been a few hours previous but anyway they got the boats back on board and we waited the following day and they could not pick us up. Then the next day, and Stuart Lawrence radioed and said 'I can't wait any longer. What are you going to do?' I said 'All we can do then tomorrow is depot everything and we will ski overland, just with our own personal belongings. You pick us up in a place called Drygalski Fjord.' The old whalers used to use Drygalski and Larsen Harbour, a relatively sheltered area. So we skied overland the next day and the ship picked us up from the snout of the glacier. Yes so I have got some interesting memories of those field seasons on South Georgia.

[Part 2 0:20:26] Lee: How did you get on with the skidoos, because you were doing your first skidoo trips in these little escapades as well, weren't you?

Burkitt: Yes. We never used skidoos on South Georgia. I beg your pardon, we did do one season. We had a skidoo to assist us on some work over on what is called the Barff Peninsula. I don't normally talk a lot about that. It's a bit embarrassing but I was working with this vet, Nigel Leader-Williams doing some reindeer work. We were going over to this hut way over the other side of the Barff Peninsula. When we set off to go there, there was quite a lot of delay: awkward travel up the little gullies and so on, and I capsized the skidoo. Anyway we got the skidoo upright again, tried starting the damn thing. It would not start at all; I could not get it started. This was really my first experience with a skidoo. Anyway it wouldn't start so I said to Nigel 'Well we will backpack stuff over there.' We had already taken one load over incidentally, so our personal kit was over at this hut.

[Part 2 0:21:40] Burkitt: So we walked over and spent one of the coldest nights I have ever spent in Antarctica down there, huddled by this little Tilley lamp for the night. We eventually came back the next day to see this dead skidoo, had a look at it and what had happened of course, the 'Kill the Engine' button had been like ... That was all it was. I freed that and it started first pull, so a bit embarrassing. But I did subsequently have several skidoo trips: one on James Ross Island, another one traversing the Peninsula and they were very successful. It was Dick Laws of course who said we should go over to mechanised transport. Doggymen of course, their attitude was 'Well with dogs you have got 30 odd feet of dogs out front, pulling the sledge. They are your crevasse probe. If you have got a good leader, it will avoid crevassing.' Whereas a skidoo of course, you are sitting on top of your own crevasse

probe. So that was a big concern and indeed, in the early days from Rothera there was a fatality with a couple of lads killed on a skidoo¹².

[Part 2 0:22:42] Burkitt: But system is very good now. It is a good proved system where they link the skidoo, sledge skidoo sledge together roped up, and we use that as well when I was working on these places and it did work very well. It is a very good system and the reality is, compared with dogs, dogs you are feeding them every day regardless. If you have a long lie-up period, you have not got to go out and feed the skidoos. You can travel much much greater distances in a go on a skidoo compared with dogs. I mean with skidoos we travel 50// 60/ 70 miles in a day. So it is a much more efficient way of travelling, but not as romantic of course.

[Part 2 0:23:23] I mean you go outside your tent in the morning, when you have had a bit of a ... not a barney but inevitably on a long summer field trip when you are working with one guy for several months on end, as youngsters you do fall out. Not fall out big punch-ups or anything but silly things, where you are not ... just fed up with each other's company whatever. You can go out and you can talk to your dogs. As soon as the other guy has cleared off to do his day's work you go round all your dogs in turn and chat to them and it's great. I am sure everybody would agree with me there. Whereas you go outside of course with a skidoo and you start talking to that: well things are going wrong then. But it had to happen and they are being used very successfully now.

[Part 2 0:24:10] Lee: Let's move into the 1980s if we may, because there is an episode it says here 1982, in which you were talking to Dick Laws and trying to persuade him to let you fly home, to Cambridge.

Burkitt: That's right.

[Part 2 0:24:23] Lee: What was the story there? Was it '82?

Burkitt: It was '82, yes. The Falklands War.

[Part 2 0:24:30] Lee: What was the story?

Burkitt: Well that was the season I had had on James Ross Island with Alastair Crame (geologist) and we had a very successful season, a very good one. We got picked up by the ... We did some geological landings by helicopter from *HMS Endurance* – she was down there – and then right at the end of the season, *Bransfield* came in, picked us up. We went from there up to the Falklands and I have got a number of friends in the Falklands, one of whom knows all the Fids, knew all the Fids. She's dead now but ..., Velma Malcolm, and I went up to see Velma and I probably stayed there. I think I did stay a couple of nights with her while the ship was in. Anyway Velma kept saying 'Oh the Argies are going to invade.' and I said 'No no. It won't happen. They won't do.'

[Part 2 0:25:20] Burkitt: Anyway we left there but by then, on the *Bransfield*, Hugh O'Gorman was the radio op. and he was quite a one, old Hugh was, quite a character.

¹² John Anderson and Robert Atkinson, on the Shambles Glacier, 16th May 1981.

I think he even put a couple of 'wind-up' signals on the Fids' noticeboard about what was going on. But people could sense something was amiss. There was all this talk about the scrap metal men and things. Anyway it was starting to happen and for whatever reason ... Dick Laws was on board with us and I said to him 'Dick, any chance of flying home?' We were going from the Falklands down to Punta Arenas. So I said to Dick 'Any chance of flying home with you? I have done the voyage goodness knows how many times now and I would rather just get home rather than do this.' He said 'Yes, no problem at all.' So that was it.

[Part 2 0:26:06] Burkitt: We went into Punta Arenas and about half a dozen of us flew out of Punta. We went from Punta Arenas up to Santiago, Santiago across to Buenos Aires and then we got an international flight from BA back to London, back to UK. And I can remember at the time we were delayed in Buenos Aires international airport for several hours, six or eight, I can't remember, and they wouldn't give us a reason. Nobody knew what was happening But anyway we eventually got out and I got back to UK and the following day, the following evening, the Argentines had invaded the Falklands and I was listening ... the television, I was listening to it all the time. I actually wept. I thought 'God, I don't believe this.' So that was that.

[Part 2 0:26:55] Lee: Why was it emotional for you?

Burkitt: Well it was very emotional. As I say I did shed a tear. I thought 'Gosh,' Velma had said 'The Argentines are going to invade.' I had thought 'No, they won't do.' But I had a lot of friends by then, in the Falklands. Yes, the whole business was ... I can remember when the *Belgrano* was sunk, going down to our local that night and there were all these young lads in there shouting and cheering and everything else. I just walked out. The loss of life and everything else, it was ...

[Part 2 0:27:34] Lee: Can you tell me a bit more about Velma's worries. What was making her feel that way?

Burkitt: Well I think for some time they had talked about it. There had been rumours going around that the Argentines had intended invading. You read up the history books now and it is that there was intelligence going backwards and forwards and so on. So they had got an inkling that something was happening.

[Part 2 0:27:59] Lee: So the Falklanders were aware of this?

Burkitt: I think they were, yes. Well certainly Velma was. That was her words: 'The Argies are going to invade.' 'No, no they won't, Velma. You will be all right.' So clearly things were happening several months before the invasion.

[Part 2 0:28:19] Lee: You see here, in Britain, it all came as a big surprise, and yet you are not the first person to have been aware of the possibility of an invasion weeks before it happened.

Burkitt: Yes, well I wasn't part ... I didn't know certainly what was going on aboard *HMS Endurance*. We worked with the captain, very closely, Nick Barker, lovely man old Nick, on *HMS Endurance* when we were doing the helicopter landings, geology

landings, and he, in his book about the Falklands invasion¹³, says that he was sending signals back (and I don't doubt this) to the effect that the Argentines had ... He had as good as been told, I think, by a naval colleague (somebody he had been at Dartmouth with) something like that in his younger days, who he had entertained on board. saying 'We intend invading the Falklands.' There were all those rumours, things going around.

[Part 2 0:29:16] Lee: He would have been told this by an Argentinian?

Burkitt: Well apparently, yes.

[Part 2 0:29:20] Lee: Dick Laws is very interesting on this point. He picked up, in the Buenos Aires Yacht Club, he was warned that there was going to be a task force, an Argentinian task force, and he went and told the British embassy in Buenos Aires and he was waved away.

Burkitt: Really? Yes, those sorts of things were happening and you think 'Well, the authorities, the British authorities were well turning a ... ' These signals about of course the *Endurance* ... Reading through my own reports, I have written, my journey reports, saying 'IF *Endurance* is down next season, these are some guidelines as to working with the helicopters and so on. Then obviously I was aware that *HMS Endurance* was scheduled to be taken out. The Argentines were getting these signals that say '*Endurance* is no longer coming down. Britain is not interested.'

[Part 2 0:30:23] Lee: So once the Falklands War had happened, you actually didn't go back for quite some time. Is that right? What was your next trip South after the Falklands Conflict?

Burkitt: It was several years.

[Part 2 0:30:36] Lee: What were you doing in the meantime?

Burkitt: I drifted into the building trade. I say 'drifted into it.' I bought an old cottage in the village and I renovated that and at the time I was getting paid ... There were good loans to be made on doing up, renovating old properties. Anyway I made a bit of money by buying several old properties and doing them up myself. I thought 'Well this is as good as earning money with BAS.' I was quite enjoying it. Of course I had got a steady girlfriend then and so on. So I didn't want to go back for ... I can't remember. It was, it was a number of years.

[Part 2 0:31:25] Lee: What enticed you to go back again, then?

Burkitt: Probably because I had broken up with my girlfriend anyway.

[Part 2 0:31:33] Lee: You went back to Rothera this time, back to Rothera?

Burkitt: I think I was, yes. Yes I had a couple of seasons down at Rothera: a bit of fieldwork. Yes, and quite enjoyed it.

¹³ *Beyond Endurance: An Epic of Whitehall and the South Atlantic Conflict*, published in 1996.

[Part 2 0:31:45] Lee: According to this, you were opening up Damoy for the airbridge south.

Burkitt: Yes, that's right, yes.

[Part 2 0:31:49] Lee: Using Twin Otters, and then the Dash-7. What can you remember of that part of your life?

Burkitt: In fact that particular season, was the very last time Damoy Point was used as a runway strip. The idea was the old *John Biscoe*, not being so powerful, very often couldn't get down to Rothera for relief, so they set up this quite comfortable hut at a place called Damoy Point. And the aircraft (Twin Otters) would fly up from Rothera. We would man the base there and give them the weather. They would fly up. The ship would drop off people at Damoy Point and I think that Damoy had about 16 or 18 bunks in there. We had also Stormhaven tents outside and it was quite a transit camp, really. A transit community built up when the ship had dropped off a load of people and the weather wasn't flyable. So we were staying there at the Point and giving them weather. The aircraft would fly up, pick people and equipment up and ferry them down there. That time I was there was the very last season it was used¹⁴, quite successfully but then the *James Clark Ross* was coming down the following season, a more powerful ship and so the place was closed up and that was it.

[Part 2 0:33:15] Lee: So let's go then forward now in time, if we can, to the 1990s when you were ... I'm not quite sure how this happened but the whole project to restore, rebuild and restore Port Lockroy arose and ... Tell me about the decision there. What happened? Why was Port Lockroy chosen for restoration? How did it happen?

Burkitt: It was about 1994/95. Ian Collinge, who was Head of Logistics, had taken over from Ricky Chinn, and a chap called Chris Cochrane (a New Zealand conservation architect), they came South or went South on I can't remember which ship but they did the round of as many of the abandoned British bases as they could, down the Peninsula. Chris Cochrane did a survey of them all and from that they had this league table as to which bases would be best conserved, because at the time, the British Antarctic Survey, or Britain as signatory to the Antarctic Treaty, is obliged (as are all other nations) supposedly to clean up the mess we have left in the past. So it was decided that some of these bases would be retained as historic sites and monuments, per the Antarctic Treaty, on a par with the Scott ... the historic sites in the Ross Sea.

[Part 2 0:34:40] Burkitt: So they did this report. Port Lockroy, Base A, which was the original, the oldest of the remaining British bases, that was priority over any of the other bases. They had this league table of points for accessibility, points for the state of building, and so on. The amount of scientific work there and so Lockroy was top of the list, albeit it was in the worst condition. So it was top priority to get it done. That was about 1994/95 and then I was down there that season, and talking to Richard Hanson, who was Personnel Officer, and said did I fancy organising a team to clean

¹⁴ Damoy was last occupied in November 1993 (source: BAS website).

that up, and I said ‘Yes, I would love to. It will be an interesting project.’ Because I knew a bit about the base and so on. I did say to Richard ‘Provided I can have my own team, ...’ because we were already doing clean-up jobs in those days, but the form it took was people going out of. say Rothera, or Halley or wherever: ‘Do you fancy a jolly for a couple of weeks at such and such a base and do a clean-up?’ They weren’t interested in ... so anybody was taken in. So I said ‘Well, provided we can have a professional team to do the job, yes.’ So anyway I had my pick and I recruited a team. There were five of us including Chris Cochrane, this conservation architect, went in the ’96 season.

[Part 2 0:36:10] Burkitt: I had ordered all the materials to be shipped down on *HMS Endurance*. We went down, we joined *Endurance* in Punta Arenas and we got ashore. We had to wait right until the end of the ..., the back end of the season because there is quite a big breeding colony of Gentoo’s there, and we were conscious that the cruise ships ... And also Port Lockroy is right in the hub of the Antarctic cruise ship scene: down the Neumayer Channel, the Gerlache Strait and the Bismarck Strait and so on. So it is right in the hub of it and we were conscious of the tourists going in and there had been all these complaints, and rightly so, by many tourists and people saying ‘What the hell is that place up there, falling apart, in filthy conditions, rusty oil drums ...’ So we had to do something about it anyway. So we went in and everybody I think, at the end of the season, was very surprised about the amount of work we had achieved. In six weeks it did totally transform the place: put on all new roofing felt and so on, and it did look good, and we were all well pleased with what we had achieved.

[Part 2 0:37:20] Lee: Was tourism the real purpose?

Burkitt: No, it wasn’t the real purpose, but there had, as I say, been a lot of, a number of complaints going to the Foreign Office, to the United States Department, from tourists going in and saying ‘What the hell; that place there was filthy.’ And it really was. It was disgraceful the way we had left a base like that but there was no environmental policy when we closed those bases down, no waste disposal policy or anything. All the gash went out the back door and that was the situation.

[Part 2 0:37:57] Lee: So the biggest challenge in cleaning it up? What was the biggest problem?

Burkitt: Well the big problem wasn’t really the cleaning up of the litter. The big problem, or the big part of it was getting the place waterproof and weatherproof, and re-roofing and everything else. But you know, just the four of us in there, we all got stuck in, and the lads really worked. We were working 7 days a week, and any decent weather, sometimes 15/16/17 hours a day, whatever. We were on the go all the time. We got the work done. We filled up all these gash drums. Everything we didn’t use, all the waste, had to be shipped out, and it was a very successful project.

[Part 2 0:38:38] Lee: And did you then run it for a while as well?

Burkitt: Yes, I did, yes. Whilst we were doing the work, a number of yachts came in, for example. I remember one particular yacht which had just been to Palmer Station round the corner, the American base. They said ‘Oh, you could run this place like

Palmer Station, have a gift shop and everything else.’ So over that time, these ideas were coming together about what we should do. So at the end of the season I wrote my report and suggested ‘Look, we will have to keep an eye on the place because there are so many tourists now interested in what is going on, what we are doing here.

[Part 2 0:39:19] Burkitt: They are all landing and inevitably doors are going to be left open and so on. So the place does need check-ups made on it periodically, a couple of times in the season.’ We had also come up with this idea of operating, re-opening the post office and a small gift shop to pay for itself. So that was what happened. We had the meeting at the end, when I got back, and the Antarctic Heritage Trust people were invited along, and from there the whole thing took off. That first season we had a few T-shirts and sweatshirts, whatever, not particularly well designed or thought up, but it did pay for itself, the season. BAS provided the logistics for it. We had a meeting at the end of every season and slowly but surely the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust has taken it over, and so now they have taken full responsibility from BAS for the running of the base. Yes, now it is their flagship, as they say.

[Part 2 0:40:27] Lee: You sold me a postcard in the year 2000, which is still on my wall today;

Burkitt: Good!

[Part 2 0:40:32] Lee: which I posted from Port Lockroy. I nearly missed my ship, I was so slow in writing the postcard. What was it like then, being postmaster at Port Lockroy, the southernmost postmaster in the world¹⁵, Royal Mail postmaster?

Burkitt: I enjoyed it. Again it was a great time. I got an awful lot out of it. It was great and I am glad I did it then. I wouldn’t want to be doing it now.

[Part 2 0:40:54] Lee: Why not?

Burkitt: It’s far too busy now, to the extent that I think it’s probably getting a little bit out of hand, but anyway I am not a lot to do with it now.

[Part 2 0:41:02] Lee: Well I was going to ask you about your feelings about tourism in the Antarctic. Having done it, having been on the receiving end, what is your feeling?

Burkitt: I’m all for it. They always use this phrase, they say ‘Ambassadors for the Antarctic’ and so on, which – I think there is something in it, in that. But I was down there ‘96/’97 season. We saw these ships coming in and all the yachties as well. I built up a great relationship with all these people and got to know all the expedition staff. I was impressed with them and the tourists are well-behaved. Obviously you get a few misdemeanours but generally speaking it works very well; they are well controlled and people find it very interesting. I am sure they do go back and say ‘Let’s keep Antarctica pristine.’ and all this sort of thing. So I am all for it. It has, certainly, since the breakup of the Soviet Union days, when there were just a few, a handful of ex-Russian ships doing the thing. There are now more and more cruise ships, purpose built cruise ships going down there and it is getting a bit big now but when I was

¹⁵ The post office at Halley is farther south.

doing in those early days, it was great. We had a bit of time to ourselves. We would go on board, meet the passengers, the old barbecue and everything else. It was good but they don't get a lot of time to themselves now, the people at Lockroy.

[Part 2 0:42:26] Lee: In other words, there are now so many tourists that it is beginning to get out of hand, is it?

Burkitt: Well Lockroy, I am not sure of the current figures but 10,000/ 12,000 people visited Lockroy¹⁶? That's an awful lot of people just visiting that small island, and they are conscious of it. We did a penguin monitoring thing, to make sure we were very conscious at the outset that tourists, people might say, or even other scientists 'You shouldn't have people walking through in such close proximity to breeding penguins.' But we have now had this project going since 1996, monitoring the success rate of the penguins. It is nothing to do with people; it's just about the environment, what's happening that particular season: the weather conditions and so on. Where the food is determines the success rate of the breeding. So I have not got any problem with that at all, but it is getting very busy certainly and as I say, I am glad I am not doing it now, where you have got ... There seems to be no respite from it. You have got a ship coming in the morning, a ship coming in the afternoon, more and more people, whereas when I was there, it was one, two ships a day sometimes. You would get a couple of day's break, get on with some maintenance work, relax and you know. It's all right.

[Part 2 0:43:45] Lee: You actually worked on the tourist ships yourself, and handful of years later, didn't you? 2003 I think you were on a tourist ship?

Burkitt: Well, before then.

[Part 2 0:43:53] Lee: Before then?

Burkitt: Yeah, I did about four or five seasons at Lockroy and I was ready for a break from it, and so I did have a quiet word with some of the expedition staff, the expedition leaders, and said 'Any chance of coming to work with you?' And they said 'Yes, no problem at all.' So that following season – it might even have been 1999, I can't remember – I did work with a couple of the companies and quite enjoyed it. And then I thought it would be nice to be down in Antarctica again for the Millennium. So I went down that season and it was interesting. We were on the one big ship that has been operating down there, the *Marco Polo*. It carries about 500 passengers and it was all right but it wasn't the same as going on the small ships, and I knew that they had come ashore.

[Part 2 0:44:43] Burkitt: They didn't actually land at Port Lockroy because there were far too many passengers; we couldn't cope. So I had always agreed with them we would operate a post office on board for them. We took all the postal equipment and everything, postage stamps, on board to sell to the passengers. It was a very lucrative business. We got a look at the records then and *Marco Polo* gave us something like 70% of our takings for that season, but it was hard work and I went on board that first time and it had been damned hard work all day, selling postage stamps and everything

¹⁶ The 2014 *Port Lockroy* Visitor Guide gives a figure of 18,000.

else. I just wanted a break at the end of the day. I went for a walk up top and it was one of the most stunning beautiful evenings of the whole of the season: it was a lovely pink sky, mirror-calm the water, three minke whales swimming around the ship.

[Part 2 0:45:30] Burkitt: There were a couple of dozen passengers walking around at the top. You go down below and they have got their nightclub, the Bunny Girls, the croupier and everything else, and I thought ‘What the hell am I doing on here?’ I wanted to be ashore. Any way that 2000 season, the *Marco Polo*, we overheard on the radio, the captain of the *Marco Polo* talking one of the other ships, saying ‘What are you doing New Year’s Eve?’ ‘Oh, we are going to Port Lockroy, and the two guys there are going to come on board and celebrate New Year with us.’ I said ‘Are we indeed? We know nothing about that.’ And I was damn sure I wasn’t going to be spending New Year’s Eve in 2000 on board *Marco Polo*. I wanted to be ashore at Port Lockroy, with a dram in my hand, sitting in front of the fire where it was nice and quiet. And that was what we did. The captain wasn’t too happy about it apparently, declining his offer of wining and dining, but that was where I spent my New Year in 2000.

[Part 2 0:46:25] Lee: Do you feel that at some point a line has to be drawn about tourism in the Antarctic? Do you think we are getting close to that point or ...

Burkitt: I don’t think it will come to ... It will find its own level because of the demand and the amount of ships available, and the cost involved and so on. I think it will level out. I don’t think it will come to ...

[Part 2 0:46:49] Lee: Tickets are increasing in price, aren’t they?

Burkitt: They are increasing in price and in fact I have heard recently that the International Maritime Organisation is going to restrict what vessels can go down there and so on, because we have all heard of these several incidents in recent years of ships going aground, oil spills and so on, which is a big risk. The environmental people are well aware of what can potentially happen down there: these far bigger ships, in greater numbers, going down there; it’s inevitable that these things will happen. And so organisations like the International Maritime Organisation, IAATO (International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators), they have said that they are conscious of what they are doing and what they should be taking charge of down there and so on. So I think it will sort itself out, hopefully, before they actually say ‘Right, that’s it.’ National Governments aren’t going to need to turn round and say ‘No more!’ I like to think that is going to happen, anyway.

[Part 2 0:48:04] Lee: So looking back over the last 40 years, nearly, of you going South, there are a couple of things I need to ask you about. One is about Health & Safety; how that has developed or changed, or changed out of all recognition I suspect in the Antarctic?

Burkitt: Oh it has indeed yes. Yeah very much so and it is like all these things: there has been a vast change since I first went down there and we certainly wouldn’t get away with doing the things we did then. We certainly wouldn’t get away with it now and I am not so sure as ... I dislike some of the things – some of the rules and regulations and this risk assessment business. I think it is just the same in this country.

It is getting a bit out of hand and everybody has been totally wrapped up in cotton wool all the time and you know there has got to be a ... Where is that sense of adventure? There must be that. We have got to leave something to ..., a bit of spice in our lives to be able to do things and make your own decisions.

[Part 2 0:49:17] Burkitt: I don't altogether like ... In fact my last season at Lockroy, when I was presented with a risk assessment, I didn't like it and I said 'Well, you know, it's time you found somebody else to do it, to do the job.' Because I love life and I not going to go sticking my neck out. I like to think I can make a few decisions myself, certainly with my experience now, and make the right decisions and OK, accidents will happen. But it has certainly changed. We have gone a long way obviously. Some of the things are for the good but I do know that I enjoyed my time down there in those early days. We have probably been saying this for hundred years, for a long long time now, everybody says 'When I did it, it was much better. It was much more exciting.' and so on but the young people going down there today, they find it equally exciting. They don't know any different.

[Part 2 0:50:10] Lee: But some of the young people going down are women now, of course, and Dick Laws resisted the introduction of women to the Antarctic for as long as he possibly could. Did you have a view about all that?

Burkitt: Do I?

[Part 2 0:50:19] Lee: Mmm.

Burkitt: Yes, I do have a view. It had got to happen. It is a nice atmosphere on the bases now, and yes, I am all for it. It is a far more natural existence. Having said that, there was nothing wrong: my time on base with a group of lads was great and I wouldn't want to change that. It was certainly too soon, in those days, taking women down, but I fully accept it and yes, I am all for it now. I certainly had my views in my younger days, to the extent I can vividly remember sitting at the bar at South Georgia with Bill Sloman and one or two others and Bill was talking about using South Georgia as a trial base to have women on, simply because we had the facilities there whereas other bases didn't have toilet facilities and everything else. I can vividly remember in my innocent youth saying 'Well Bill, I am not happy with just a couple of women on base, and the fellow next door to me is having a little bit every night and I'm not; it won't make me very happy.' Those were more or less my words but it is a nice atmosphere when you have got a reasonable balance of women to men. It's fine.

[Part 2 0:51:4,] Lee: A couple more questions to mop up some details then. One is: talking about women in the Antarctic. were you there when Princess Anne went South? Were you involved in that trip?

Burkitt: Yes. I was, yes.

[Part 2 0:51:48] Lee: What was all that about?

Burkitt: Well Princess Anne is Patron of the Antarctic Heritage Trust, the New Zealand Antarctic Heritage Trust to start with, and then the sister organisation of the UK counterpart took off in the mid-1990s, and Princess Anne agreed to be Patron of

that organisation as well. So she had already been down to the New Zealand side to visit the Ross Sea huts and then she should have come to the Peninsula. It was about 5 years ago now, 4 or 5 years ago. She should have been down a couple of years previous to that but the aircraft, the Dash-7 aircraft, they had problems with that so she didn't get down. Anyway she went down on board *HMS Endurance*, flew down to the Falklands. I can't remember what year it was. It must have been ...

[Part 2 0:52:43] Lee: 2006?

Burkitt: 2006 was it? Yes four years ago¹⁷. OK. Yes, so I was asked to go on that with John Shears, the Environmental Officer, and the plan was for her to visit all the historic sites which she did. And we went in beforehand. Horseshoe Island, she had a lovely day there. And we went to Stonington; did a bit of maintenance work there. We were there for two or three days whilst Princess Anne was at Rothera and I showed her round. We showed her round at Stonington and other sites and of course Port Lockroy which was manned by somebody else. They looked after her there. But yes, she is a very good Patron and she does take an interest in it, an interest in their cause. It was just about 50 years since her father, Prince Philip, had been down on the old *John Biscoe* and the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, both down at Port Lockroy. And there is that lovely picture which Alan Carroll gave me and I have got framed up at Port Lockroy, of Prince Philip visiting in 1957 on the Royal Yacht.

[Part 2 0:53:45] Lee: Great. You have been to Stonington in recent years, I believe, and I wonder how you feel about it these days?

Burkitt: Yes, I have. I have been ... I have probably made three or four visits to Stonington since I wintered there and it saddens me every time I go there. I don't really think it is necessary to have the place as a Historic Site. Sadly it's ... I have got very very fond memories there. In fact I had a fantastic winter and so on. But when they closed the base down, unlike all the other bases which had been closed, they took everything out. The other bases, all the books, everything had been left as the base had been lived in, which was lovely, but Stonington, they took everything out including that lovely bar I talked about earlier on.

[Part 2 0:54:30] Lee: Oh really?

Burkitt: Yes. The idea was, and we agreed to this at the time, was that they took that bar out and it was erected at the new building, at BAS Headquarters in Cambridge as part of the smoko/ the coffee room whatever, and it was a great idea. It was taken back to Cambridge, sat there in the stores for two years and was eventually put on a skip, which was a tragedy. Anyway so I go back to Stonington now, see the place just falling apart and I wish the place was taken out altogether, I really do. It's a great shame but, unlike the other bases, which are still left: Detaille Island which is ... it's in an awful mess but we can bring it back to what it was like before. Everything is in there, pretty well. There has been a bit of looting taken place. Some of the roofing felt has come off and it's very damp inside but you still get the feel of walking in a place as it was lived in. There is a guitar hanging up by one of the bunks, bits and

¹⁷ It was actually January 2007.

pieces like that. You really get that nice feel to it, whereas Stonington, it just leaves a hollow feeling in me.

[Part 2 0:55:36] Lee: So is it worth restoring it or is it ...

Burkitt: No, it's really not because very few people go there. It's south of the cruise ship routes. You might get the odd one ship visit every other year or something, so you can't justify ... The reality is the expense of doing things like that. It's not logistically ... It's not on the cards at all. It should just be left now to decay in its own good time, but it is a rather sad sight when you go in there.

[Part 2 0:56:13] Lee: You have got two medals, haven't you, Dave? The Polar Medal and then in 1999 the Fuchs Medal. Is that right?

Burkitt: Yes, that's right, yes.

[Part 2 0:56:20] Lee: Were you expecting them?

Burkitt: No, I don't anyone is really, when you get something like that, you are not expecting them at all. When I got the Polar Medal, the first I knew about it was the letter from, I think it is from the MoD it comes. Gosh, whoops of delight. It's a great honour obviously. Yes, I was very thrilled with that. But then to get the Fuchs Medal as well a few years later, yes, who was it, was it Bill Block phoned me up I think, to let me know I had got it and I was equally surprised. That was obviously just for my work with Port Lockroy, what we achieved there. Again I am very proud of our achievements there, what all of us did, the amount of work we put in and seeing the place now, and so on.

[Part 2 0:57:09] Lee: When was the last time you were South. Was that 2006?

Burkitt: No, I was South just a few months ago. Yes.

[Part 2 0:57:16] Lee: Doing what?

Burkitt: January 2010 on one of the ships.

[Part 2 0:57:19] Lee: That was on a cruise ship?

Burkitt: On a cruise ship, yes, doing the Falklands, South Georgia, Peninsula cruise.

[Part 2 0:57:26] Lee: And are you lecturing on wildlife, or on the history of the Antarctic.

Burkitt: History, yes, but I don't lecture. I just give talks. I am not very good at lecturing. In fact I think I am the only lecturer now in Antarctica who is still showing slides. I am not into modern technology. But it seems to go down quite well, when you are showing old pictures like that. Slides comes over equally as well as a PowerPoint type projection thing. But yes, people enjoy it. OK I have not got ... I am not a scientist or anything but I have never claimed to be, but yes, just having that first-hand knowledge of the places we are going to and can give a few tales, I think it

does mean a lot to the ordinary passengers going down there and certainly at the end of the cruise they always reflect how much they have enjoyed my talks, chats.

[Part 2 0:58:14] Lee: Is there something about the people who tour, become tourists in the Antarctic? Is there a common factor? Are they the same people who to go Venice and then ??? [incomprehensible] and Paris (the Eiffel Tower)?

Burkitt: I think ... A good question.

[Part 2 0:58:29] Lee: Or is there something different?

Burkitt: I think they are, obviously, people who enjoy travelling, some of them no doubt ... You do get some of them, people who just: 'Where can we go next year? Get the pin out and stick it in the map. Oh yes, we are going there' routine but I think the biggest majority of people are genuinely interested in the wildlife, in going to remote places and certainly seeing a new part of the world and the romance of Antarctica and the polar regions and so on. So they are not generally your ordinary run-of-the-mill tourists.

[Part 2 0:59:04] Lee: Interesting people?

Burkitt: Yes, a lot of them are, very interesting, really interesting. You should interview some of them. [Laughs] Yes, they are. You get people who, you know, famous people and so on. Yes, they are interesting, everybody, from your ordinary folks to your film stars and so on. I have met some very interesting people.

[Part 2 0:59:31] Lee: Do you plan to retire?

Burkitt: Well I am retired now, as good as.

[Part 2 0:59:35] Lee: From going South?

Burkitt: From going South, yes. It's been getting a little bit ... When I am down there doing it, I always do enjoy it, but it would be nice I think ... and I have been saying 'I will give this next season a miss.' But I certainly hope to be going down again, for years to come.. but not necessarily quite so much as I have been doing because there are other things I want to be doing. I have got this narrowboat and I am just not getting time to use it, and I am back with our local mountaineering club and I want to be out weekends with them. I have just missed a fantastic winter season up there in Scotland and so on. So yes, I shan't be retiring for a bit. I shall be going down again. It's interesting actually when I can vividly remember sailing out of South Georgia on the *John Biscoe*, when I'd had that first season. I actually – I am a bit soppy like this – but I did actually shed ..., had a lump in my throat as we sailed out from King Edward Point and then suddenly somebody said to me. 'Oh don't be so silly. You will be back again.' And I was. I have been going back again ever since and I do love it.

[Part 2 1:00:41] Lee: Dave, thank you very much indeed.

Burkitt: A pleasure.

[Part 2 1:00:45] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- The BAS interview and medical [Part 1a 0:11:33]
- Meeting survivors from Shackleton's expedition [Part 1a 0:15:12]
- Difference between BAS and Royal Navy expeditions [Part 1a 0:20:25]
- South Georgia is special [Part 1a 0:29:48]
- Visit to the TAE Shackleton base [Part 1a 0:34:03]
- Building Halley III (Armco) [Part 1a 0:35:03]
- Scobie Pye and Bunny Fuchs [Part 1a 0:37:13]
- Taking dogs from Halley to Stonington [Part 1b 0:00:14]
- Description of the hut at Stonington [Part 1b 0:04:28]
- Base life at Stonington [Part 1b 0:07:00]
- Running out of food on a field trip [Part 1b 0:08:55]
- A nearly fatal crevasse fall [Part 1b 0:14:29]
- A great year at South Georgia [Part 1b 0:23:26]
- The joys of plane tabling [Part 2 0:02:43]
- A difficult personnel problem [Part 2 0:06:57]
- Medical treatment for a Saturday night party casualty [Part 2 0:09:15]
- Shackleton House, South Georgia [Part 2 0:12:03]
- Equipment and rock samples lost in a freak storm [Part 2 0:16:44]
- Learning about the Skidoo engine 'kill' switch [Part 2 0:20:26]
- Dogs versus skidoos [Part 2 0:21:40]
- 'The Argies are going to invade.' [Part 2 0:24:30]
- The Damoy operation [Part 2 0:31:49]
- Choosing Port Lockroy as a Historic Site [Part 2 0:34:40]
- Restoring Port Lockroy [Part 2 0:36:10]
- The Millennium at Lockroy [Part 2 0:44:43]
- Views on Health & Safety [Part 2 0:48:04]
- Visit of Princess Anne [Part 2 0:51:48]
- The fate of Stonington and its bar [Part 2 0:53:45]
- Views on Antarctic tourists [Part 2 0:57:26]