

MURRAY ROBERTS

Edited transcript of a recording of Murray Roberts interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee at the Royal Hotel Cardiff on 11th June 2010. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 10th January 2011.

Track 1 [0:00:01] Chris Eldon Lee: *This is Murray Roberts, recorded by Chris Eldon Lee at the BAS Club Reunion, Cardiff, on the 11th of June 2010. Murray Roberts.*

Track 1 [0:00:11] Murray Roberts: My name is Murray Roberts and my date of birth is the 25th of December 1941, and I was born at Stanmore in Middlesex, North London.

Track 1 [0:00:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was your first inkling or brush with the Antarctic? What is your first memory of it?*

Track 1 [0:00:29] Murray Roberts: I think my first memory of it was when I was looking for somewhere to do some experimental work that required a group of people to be shut up in one place for several months, so that they could be fed and experimented upon. We tried prisons and monasteries who either had funny diets or you were not allowed to do things to them. Eventually the Medical Research Council said 'Well why don't you try the Antarctic Survey, because the people on the Antarctic bases are totally cut off and can only have the food they take with them, and they desperately want doctors on their bases?' So I am afraid it was not a huge desire to go and explore the Antarctic, but looking for a group of experimental people, which first got me interested.

Track 1 [0:01:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *So had you read about Scott, or seen the film or...?*

Track 1 [0:01:20] Murray Roberts: I think I had but it had not registered as being a huge desire to go to the Antarctic.

Track 1 [0:01:27] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you were a kind of an accidental Fid, were you? Or a by-productive Fid?*

Track 1 [0:01:31] Murray Roberts: A bit accidental. I became more enthusiastic as time went on.

Track 1 [0:01:35] Chris Eldon Lee: *So tell me: what was the kind of work you wanted to do?*

Track 1 [0:01:39] Murray Roberts: Well at the time there was considerable interest in the effects of dietary carbohydrates on people's blood lipid levels. It was cholesterol and phospholipids and triglycerides. It was felt that high levels of these led to a high level of coronary thrombosis and heart problems, and that they might be modified by diet. And it was felt by some that it was the common sugar in the diet which was the 'nigger in the woodpile'. So we wanted to feed people on a diet with no sugar in it, but which contained glucose, as opposed to sucrose. There were problems with that because glucose is not as sweet as sugar, and to try and make the food palatable it is

not so easy to cook with, and a lot of food: bread, almost any sauce you can think of, has got sugar in it. So it really needed to be people who had no access to common foods. So that was the basis of the research: to try and feed these people on a diet for a few months and see if it affected their blood lipid levels.

Track 1 [0:03:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you approached, or British Antarctic Survey was approached with the idea of you going down there.*

Track 1 [0:03:14] Murray Roberts: I approached them and they said ‘Yes, we do want Medical Officers’ so I applied to become a Medical Officer and ‘We want, almost require, our Medical Officers to have a research programme because there is no medical work for them to do, or very little.’

Track 1 [0:03:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you knew first aid and basic physiology and...?*

Track 1 [0:03:32] Murray Roberts: Oh yes, I was a happily qualified junior doctor.

Track 1 [0:03:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right, OK. It sounds like a marriage made in heaven. Were there any snags?*

Track 1 [0:03:41] Murray Roberts: Not really. There was a lot of preliminary work because we had to get these... We approached firms to produce sugar-free chocolate bars and sugar-free cake mixes and fruit which was canned in water and not in syrup. We took I don’t know how many tons of food with us, but it was really quite a major effort to get the show on the road and get all this stuff packed up. Some of it was donated. Some companies, Beechams in particular, had an interest in... I think they make glucose and had a great interest in trying to put glucose into foods, Lucozade and things like that. So they gave us a lot of the food. It was quite interesting.

Track 1 [0:04:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *We are talking about the mid 60’s aren’t we here? When you were doing your basic research?*

Track 1 [0:04:35] Murray Roberts: Yes.

Track 1 [0:04:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *So what was the timetable, once you had got British Antarctic Survey to agree? Was it at that point that you had to start gathering and creating all this specialist food?*

Track 1 [0:04:44] Murray Roberts: Yes, well the medical research programme was supervised in the main by the Division of Human Physiology at the Medical Research Council. We were nominally under their control anyway. They had considerable resources to help.

Track 2 [0:05:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right. But at the same time, you presumably had to apply to be a Medical Officer? You had to go through the Fids’...?*

Track 2 [0:05:11] Murray Roberts: Yes, I had done, but that seemed to be pretty much a formality because they needed doctors. I do not think they were overburdened with applications.

Track 2 [0:05:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *So the interview was a cinch, was it?*

Track 2 [0:05:20] Murray Roberts: Well it was quite interesting: it was only an interview with one man, the great Bill Sloman, of whom you will no doubt have heard.

Track 2 [0:05:26] Chris Eldon Lee: *Tell me. I am interested by the mechanics of all this. So you eventually had to get all this stuff on the dockside somewhere, didn't you? All this food?*

Track 2 [0:05:34] Murray Roberts: Yes. But you have got a date, so I don't say it is easy to do it but you know there is a date beyond which you cannot go because if you miss the ship, you have had it.

Track 2 [0:05:43] Chris Eldon Lee: *And you were sailing in the autumn of '67?*

Track 2 [0:05:46] Murray Roberts: That is right.

Track 2 [0:05:47] Chris Eldon Lee: *Late autumn of '67. On which ship?*

Track 2 [0:05:50] Murray Roberts: On the *Perla Dan*, from Southampton.

Track 2 [0:05:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *With all this food?*

Track 2 [0:05:54] Murray Roberts: Yes.

Track 2 [0:05:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *And did you know which base you were going to go to?*

Track 2 [0:05:57] Murray Roberts: Yes. Yes, we knew it was Halley Bay, partly because I needed to have enough people to be able to do the experiment and have a control group, and that sort of thing.

Track 2 [0:06:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were a brave man, weren't you, because you were going to see a bunch of Fids and try to tell them what to eat.*

Track 2 [0:06:14] Murray Roberts: Well Fids will put up with quite a lot from their doctors at one time or another because most of them, not quite all but most Medical Officers did have research programmes and they mostly either involved feeding them or, and they had a lot of blood taken from them. I think I was stabbing them every two weeks for blood samples.

Track 2 [0:06:34] Chris Eldon Lee: *Having not been particularly keen about going to the Antarctic, what did you make of it when you got there?*

Track 2 [0:06:38] Murray Roberts: I do not think I was not keen to go. I had not gone because of a burning desire to go to the Antarctic.

Track 2 [0:06:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *You were the odd man out? You were not that bothered?*

Track 2 [0:07:47] Murray Roberts: Initially no. It grows on you very quickly, of course, on the way down. Although of course going on the *Perla Dan*, you are very much a passenger, rather than on the BAS ships where you are working the ships. So really we had quite a luxurious trip down, but then when we got to the Falklands and South Georgia on the way into the Weddell Sea, it grows on you.

Track 2 [0:07:11] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh really? You were impressed, were you?*

Track 2 [0:07:13] Murray Roberts: Yes. Very.

Track 2 [0:07:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you arrived at Halley and presumably had to get involved in the relief?*

Track 2 [0:07:21] Murray Roberts: Well you are just one of the base once you get there and that is right; so it was a couple of weeks. And of course the new base was really just being occupied. I suppose it is Halley II (Grillage Village). So we moved into what effectively was a brand new base. So that was interesting too.

Track 2 [0:07:42] Chris Eldon Lee: *A luxurious medical area?*

Track 2 [0:07:45] Murray Roberts: It was quite good really, yes.

Track 2 [0:07:48] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there a surgery as such?*

Track 2 [0:07:51] Murray Roberts: There was. It was a dedicated room which I used as an office but also it was... Oh yes, it was not terribly rugged, indoors anyway.

Track 2 [0:08:03] Chris Eldon Lee: *No, it sounds good. What was the first step though, because you had to presumably; at some point you had to persuade the Fids to eat what you wanted them to eat, and you had to persuade the cooks to cook it and so on. So was there a certain amount of détente required early on?*

Track 2 [0:08:15] Murray Roberts: Yes. There was no great objection. Nobody objected. They had to do all sorts of other things as well. I had to weigh them; so one of the problems if you stop people eating sugar, they immediately lose weight. So we wanted to make sure they ate as much glucose as possible. We needed their weight to be steady so that the changes in lipids was not due to changes in weight. So they had to weigh themselves every day with nothing on. Some of them would not do that, but most of them did. [laughs]

Track 2 [0:08:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was there any other kind of resistance, apart from the underpants?*

Track 2 [0:08:50] Murray Roberts: No not really. Some people did not like having their blood taken, but they got used to it.

Track 2 [0:08:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *So talk me through a typical day's menu.*

Track 2 [0:09:01] Murray Roberts: Well the menu was pretty much the same. We had gone to great lengths to manufacture the sort of foods which you would normally eat. It is just that they did not have any sugar in them and they had glucose instead. It gave the cooks a bit of a challenge. The biggest problem was the granulated sugar, such as you might put into your tea, became granulated glucose, and it is not so soluble as ordinary sugar so at each spoonful of glucose on the end and you put it into your tea, stir it and pull it out and there is a great gob on the end of the spoon where it has not dissolved. But people were very good, I mean if they wanted toast and jam, they had toast and jam. The bread was made without any sugar in it and the jam did not have any in either. It was made with glucose.

Track 2 [0:09:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was it your job to actually show the chefs what to do?*

Track 3 [0:09:54] Murray Roberts: Well we discussed it and it was pretty much trial and error. I mean I had not done any cooking with it. I knew what the limitations would be. They were very good; everybody joined in.

Track 3 [0:10:05] Chris Eldon Lee: *There weren't any secret supplies?*

Track 3 [0:10:07] Murray Roberts: Well as you have probably heard from others, on the bases everybody is helping everybody else with their various programmes. Mine was just another programme. They were a bit cynical about it but they all joined in.

Track 3 [0:10:21] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well let us talk about what you found. What conclusions did you start to come to whilst you were down there, or when you got back?*

Track 3 [0:10:28] Murray Roberts: None at all while I was there. I came back with a vast array of frozen serum samples which I spent a couple of years analysing after I got back. But it showed that people who had got high lipid levels, whilst they were on the diet those levels came down, but people who had got normal levels, it did not really have much effect on.

Track 3 [0:10:52] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that what you were hoping, or expecting?*

Track 3 [0:10:55] Murray Roberts: Well we did not really know what to expect, but yes we were hoping to see some changes, but that was forty years ago. I think it was of burning interest then but like lots of medical things, history has shown that it is probably not important.

Track 3 [0:11:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *So your findings were not adapted and adopted in any way?*

Track 3 [0:11:18] Murray Roberts: No. I published them in a suitably prestigious medical journals but like lots of research, I do not think now you would pick it out as a seminal piece of work.

Track 3 [0:11:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *But it must have been satisfying at the time, to find your theories were proven.*

Track 3 [0:11:34] Murray Roberts: Oh yes it was. Yes, it certainly was.

Track 3 [0:11:38] Chris Eldon Lee: *Anything else to talk about on that subject or shall we move on to other things?*

Track 3 [0:11:42] Murray Roberts: No I think that is about it, so far as....

Track 3 [0:11:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *So did you find your other skills as a doctor being called into play?*

Track 3 [0:11:49] Murray Roberts: My medical skills? Very little really. The two major medical problems that occurred in the Antarctic that year. The first was the cook at Argentine Islands, where there was not a doctor, who developed a very nasty illness. You have probably heard others talking about it. He subsequently died although not at...

Track 3 [0:12:15] Chris Eldon Lee: *Please, I would like to hear some of the story, if you can, please yes.*

Track 3 [0:12:18] Murray Roberts: Well it was a condition called ulcerative colitis, although it was not known what the condition was. Round about midwinter the base commander at Argentine Islands (I think it was John Dudeney at the time) reported that the cook appeared to be pretty sick. This was mainly dealt with by the medical officer at Stonington, because he was nearer and they were in better... But he was a bit puzzled by what was going on, so he and I used to discuss the problem and it became pretty apparent this guy was really sick. Of course there was no doctor at Argentine Islands and even had there been, I do not think they had any medication that would have helped. Hence really my later interest in medical stores.

Track 3 [0:13:08] Murray Roberts: There was a big international effort. The Chileans, from one of their bases, flew a doctor. This was pretty much at midwinter although Argentine Islands is a little bit further north. They flew a light aircraft in with a doctor on board, landed on the sea ice, and managed to give the patient a few pints of blood, and then were going to fly him back to their base because that was nearer where a ship could be got in. But unfortunately the plane crashed trying to take off and although nobody was badly hurt, the plane was, so there they were, stuck. The Argentinians in the mean time had taken an icebreaker out of its winter annual refit and started ploughing their way down until eventually they could helicopter the patient off. They actually got him back to Buenos Aires but he died not long after that. So all this was going on at a base with no doctor at all. But the rest of us were fairly involved in radio schedules trying to work out what was going on.

Track 3 [0:14:17] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was this daily contact?*

Track 3 [0:14:18] Murray Roberts: It was pretty much at the time. The time scale can only have been a few weeks but I really do not remember exactly what the time scale was. It was not going on for months and months. So that was one medical thing. We were only involved by radio.

Track 3 [0:14:39] Chris Eldon Lee: *Was that frustrating for you to be not on the scene?*

Track 3 [0:14:46] Murray Roberts: Well it was very concerning, although in fact there might well have been not an awful lot that could have been done even had there been a medical officer on the base.

Track 3 [0:14:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you remember the Fid's name?*

Track 4 [0:14:54] Murray Roberts: He died. It was Ken Portwine, I think his name was. And the other one was one of our own people at Halley Bay, Nick Mathys, who broke his leg while he was skiing in the Shackleton Mountains, 400 miles from base. We were faced, or I was faced with the problem of... We ascertained by radio that he had probably broken his leg. Fortunately the sledging stores had got plaster of Paris bandages and we had practised putting them on during the winter, so he had the wherewithal to plaster his leg up which he did. But the question then was: 'What do we do with him?' and I consulted...

Track 4 [0:15:41] Murray Roberts: Of course in those days communication was pretty terrible but we sent signals back to London, looking for guidance really about whether to get him out, but getting him... somebody had a reply from Sir Vivian Fuchs saying 'Well, if you, as a medical officer, think he should be extracted, we will do it. But of course it will ruin the Americans' summer programme; it will ruin our own. We will have to bring everybody out of the mountains. It will finish our field season. But you are the guy on the ground and if you think it is necessary, we will do it.' which I did not think was very helpful. But since Nick seemed fairly happy, and his foot was pointing the right way and it did not hurt, we left him there and he eventually got back five weeks later, I think. In the mean time he kept telling us by radio, our evening radio schedules, that he was terribly worried that his plaster of Paris was getting soft and breaking down, and that the plaster cast was coming adrift. But when he got back, it was actually about an inch thick and it nearly killed me trying to get it off. It was incredibly tough, but he did fine.

Track 4 [0:16:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when you got the plaster off, were you able to do an assessment?*

Track 4 [0:16:57] Murray Roberts: Well, I X-rayed it.

Track 4 [0:16:58] Chris Eldon Lee: *Oh you X-rayed it, yes?*

Track 4 [0:16:59] Murray Roberts: I then put him back in plaster again.

Track 4 [0:17:02] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right, and he is still walking today, is he?*

Track 4 [0:17:04] Murray Roberts: He is fine, yes. I do not know if he is coming this weekend.

Track 4 [0:17:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when you got to Halley, were your impressions of a sophisticated establishment, or fairly rudimentary? How did you assess it when you arrived?*

Track 4 [0:17:18] Murray Roberts: I think Halley was, and probably still is, I thought quite sophisticated. The old IGY huts, which were still in use (just) were pretty primitive, and of course by then were about 50 foot below the surface. I mean they were really quite hazardous, but we were leaving them. They seemed quite good but the new base: we had 24-hour electricity; we had plenty of heat. No, I thought it was quite sophisticated.

Track 4 [0:17:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you watching the men's psychology whilst you were there, as well, even if only out of casual interest?*

Track 4 [0:17:59] Murray Roberts: Yes, there are a few interesting points about Fids and their psychology. The American bases, which had a navy, maybe still do have, a navy crew who run the base and then scientists who flew in and did their thing. They had a history of having personality problems, big personality problems on their bases, and in fact I recall, after I got back, going to an Antarctic conference in Cambridge at which they measured the social success of their bases (the American bases) by the number of episodes of physical violence they had between base members. Well most of us could not remember any episodes of physical violence and I think it was partly because we all went down by sea, and I believe, although I had no personal experience of it, that occasionally someone was taken off in Stanley if they clearly did not fit in or were going to be a problem. It is probably partly the British character, to be a bit phlegmatic about life.

Track 4 [0:19:05] Murray Roberts: So there was that, but of course the base did have, not psychological problems but there were morale problems because as a result of the previous summer's field trip (the summer we went in), it became obvious that it would be very difficult to get to the Shackleton Mountains in order to do a survey which was the basis of the whole of the next summer's field trip. As a result, the BAS Office in London cancelled the next summer's field programme. Well that of course caused a terrible loss of morale, particularly amongst well all the field staff, the geologists and the people who should have gone out to the field. There was an enormous amount of work done to try and put together a programme which was doable which involved an enormous long vehicle trip just to get the mountains to lay depots, and then eventually, with the help of the Americans, to fly people in. Because we had not, up to then, had any help from the Americans like that, and then by the time the middle of the winter and the autumn was coming on, when this was put in place, the morale then soared because we then had an enormous field programme, which in the end was very successful. So it was interesting how morale changed during the year, but it was due to the circumstances which you have got very little control of, really.

Track 5 [0:20:30] Chris Eldon Lee: *Which is bad for morale as well.*

Track 5 [0:20:31] Murray Roberts: It is well written up in Peter Noble's book, which you have no doubt seen.

Track 5 [0:20:36] Chris Eldon Lee: *But how did it manifest itself. How did the Fids' behaviour change, when morale went down and then back up again?*

Track 5 [0:20:43] Murray Roberts: Well I think they just got slightly depressed. Just running the base keeps people busy, the routine and so on. So it was not as though people had got nothing to do and had time to sit and worry. In fact they reacted really quite positively by trying to seek ways they could put to London about how they could do the programme. But it was not a problem; it was just a noticeable change in morale as the circumstances changed.

Track 5 [0:21:16] Chris Eldon Lee: *What sort of conditions or problems did they come to you with? I know it is a healthy place, the Antarctic, but were there one or two things that kept on cropping up, as a GP, so to speak?*

Track 5 [0:21:26] Murray Roberts: No, virtually nothing. The odd cut finger and things like that, but I probably did more work on the dogs we had than I did on humans.

Track 5 [0:21:37] Chris Eldon Lee: *How do you mean?*

Track 5 [0:21:38] Murray Roberts: Well the dogs were always biting each other and occasionally needed sewing up and that sort of thing but we really had no episodes of ill health at all, of any significance. I took a couple of teeth out, I think, but I did not gain much medical experience. [laughs]

Track 5 [0:22:00] Chris Eldon Lee: *Is there such a thing as Midwinter blues? Did you spot that coming along, at the time?*

Track 5 [0:22:05] Murray Roberts: I do not think it was anything significant. I think people developed what was known as the 'Fid's stare' which others may have told you about, where you would find someone sitting at a table with his eyes focussed on the middle distance, clearly not with it, lost in their thoughts, but it was always referred to 'You leave him alone; he has got the Fid's stare.' But it was nothing significant.

Track 5 [0:22:28] Chris Eldon Lee: *What do you think has changed in the years since your time down there? What were the significant changes taking place while you were there?*

Track 5 [0:22:36] Murray Roberts: I do not think there were many changes while I was there, but I went back on the Marguerite Bay cruise that a few Fids organised about 5 years ago, and there are huge differences now.

Track 5 [0:22:51] Chris Eldon Lee: *Such as?*

Track 5 [0:22:53] Murray Roberts: Well communications is the main one. I mean we, just about at times, had voice contact with Port Stanley. All communications with the UK I think were done by Morse code. It was all typed up into Morse code and put on a tape, and certainly apart from our, we were allowed I think 100 words a month free which we could send home, (and we got I think 200 words back), but anything else had to be sent at I think it was 1s10d a word as a telegram. So there really was no communications, whereas now you can pick up a satellite phone and presumably and ring home. And now there are very few people winter there; we all had to winter, but

now that they fly people in far more, there is a much bigger flying programme now, and that is strikingly different. Halley Bay was the biggest base. There were only 30 of us there but it was the biggest British base. But if you go to Rothera: I think when we were there, there were 120 people there. It is a different world.

Track 5 [0:24:07] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do you think that the nature of Fids has changed as well, because in your day you did go down on the boat together; you did spend the winter there; you came back on the boat together? So when you meet at reunions, you have got lots to talk about, whereas the more recent Fids who are flying there, only spending a few weeks or months there, then coming back again. It is more of a day job for them, isn't it really?*

Track 5 [0:24:28] Murray Roberts: I think it must be, although I must confess I have not had a lot of contact with recent Fids. Certainly those of us who were there 40 years ago keep in touch pretty regularly with each other, as you probably gathered from your conversations with people. You certainly make firm friends.

Track 5 [0:24:46] Chris Eldon Lee: *Do the stories get better?*

Track 5 [0:24:47] Murray Roberts: Well I don't know. The one downer really for me was the fact that I was... The doctors at Halley Bay had had a chequered history of problems. My predecessor had fallen over the ice cliff and had actually been the only major casualty of the year was the doctor which was considered not to be very sensible. He was involved in being rescued by the Americans, the first time the Americans had flown to Halley Bay. He had to be extracted before I got there, so that was considered bad form for the doctor to be the casualty, and I think two or three seasons before I was there, the doctor was one of those who were killed in the crevasse accident at Halley Bay. So they were pretty reluctant to let me leave the base, beyond a couple of days.

Track 6 [0:25:41] Chris Eldon Lee: *Really?*

Track 6 [0:25:43] Murray Roberts: Well, yes, I would have loved to have had the chance to go out in the field but I mean they really were quite bothered, I think, about the fact that I should not be hazarded.

Track 6 [0:25:55] Chris Eldon Lee: *So you did not do any sledging, as such?*

Track 6 [0:25:58] Murray Roberts: Well I did, but only locally round the base, but I did not get away for any substantial time or to anywhere particularly interesting. Which was all right; I mean I am not a desperately rugged person.

Track 6 [0:26:08] Chris Eldon Lee: *Well you have to be fairly rugged to survive a winter in the Antarctic, don't you? -50 indoors?*

Track 6 [0:26:14] Murray Roberts: Well it wasn't minus 50 indoors. It may have been outside. [laughs].

Track 6 [0:26:19] Chris Eldon Lee: *What about the changes in bureaucracy? I guess, because there was no communication, ergo there was very little bureaucracy in those days.*

Track 6 [0:26:29] Murray Roberts: Well it certainly seems different. Again, I have no recent experience. But BAS was in those days run by I think 4 or 5 people in Victoria Street, or Wilton Street. There was Sir Vivian Fuchs; there was Bill Sloman and I think one other personnel man. Then there was Derek Gipps with a couple of people helping him, and that was it. Whereas there is an enormous, or apparently an enormous bureaucracy in Cambridge. But of course all the academic departments, which were scattered around, I think are now all concentrated in Cambridge. So it is perhaps not so big as it seems.

Track 6 [0:27:09] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you surprised at the time at the way the environment was being used or should I say abused: animals were being killed for food, and waste was not being particularly carefully taken care of. Or did it just seem normal in those days?*

Track 6 [0:27:23] Murray Roberts: It seemed pretty normal, and I think that rather over much is made of the problem now. It seems incredible to me that that they have to bring all the waste back with them. Really when you see the vast size of the Antarctic and the minute footprint of humans on it, I really have difficulty in thinking the huge efforts that now go into looking after the environment are really necessary.

Track 6 [0:27:57] Chris Eldon Lee: *There are a couple of incidents you wanted to talk about. One was dropping a vehicle onto a roof, or something along those lines.*

Track 6 [0:28:05] Murray Roberts: Well yes, I think you asked whether there was an amusing incident. While the field parties and most of the mechanics were out in the field, the new base Halley II (Grillage Village) had only recently been covered with snow. It was below the surface but not very much and somebody drove a vehicle rather close to it and it collapsed through onto the roof. It was the cause of much photograph taking and hilarity, and some concern I think on the part of the base commander. And a bit of ingenuity to move it without damaging the building. I suppose I remember it because everybody took photographs of it and still show them. It was not a huge incident but certainly caused a lot of mirth.

Track 6 [0:28:49] Chris Eldon Lee: *Most of the Fids I talk to regard their time in the Antarctic as being a very special part of their life – a memorable episode. Would you go along with that?*

Track 6 [0:28:59] Murray Roberts: Well yes, and it totally changed my life. My medical experience was pretty slight. I had qualified, done my house jobs, taught anatomy for a year and then got involved in this physiological project. But I got very interested in the problems of people working in really very adverse conditions. The poor old carpenter trying to work outside at -30. It was quite interesting, so I got very interested in the problems of people in the workplace. Then when I came back I changed tack completely and became an occupational physician. I spent the rest of my life working in industry, totally concerned with the effects of people's work on their health. So yes, it did; it made a huge difference to me.

Track 6 [0:29:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *What conclusions did you come to about the poor old Fids, the way their work environment affected their health?*

Track 6 [0:29:51] Murray Roberts: Well it didn't really. But they adapted, but not everybody adapts like Fids. There is a reason why most people become Fids; they are adaptable, I think. I also got interested in the problems with the medical stores. We had this illness at Argentine Islands where, had there been a doctor there, probably he would not have had the wherewithal to treat the patient anyway. So there was considerable concern in the BAS headquarters that we should revise the scale of medical stores so that all bases would have exactly the same whether or not they had a doctor. There were other side issues, like most drugs have got use-by dates like most food. Because of the long time in packing up and sending things to the Antarctic, many of them were out of date before they ever got there which concerned people a lot but, like most food, probably did not matter much. So as I say, after I got back I spent the next several years really, just on a very part-time basis, collecting what the various doctors and other base personnel said about the medical resources and we revised them a number of times over the next 5 or 6 years.

Track 7 [0:31:14] Chris Eldon Lee: *Were you listened to?*

Track 7 [0:31:16] Murray Roberts: Yes. Eventually the scales of stores which were sent were constructed by me, the latter ones, in consultation with other doctors who had been there.

Track 7 [0:31:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *So when you arrived there and you opened the medical kit, were you surprised at how [?? inaudible] it was?*

Track 7 [0:31:35] Murray Roberts: I knew what was coming. We were given lists of what was coming and also the doctors were given the opportunity to add to it if they wanted to.

Track 7 [0:31:45] Chris Eldon Lee: *What was missing that you...?What did you miss most when you opened your...?*

Track 7 [0:31:52] Murray Roberts: Well nothing because I had no illnesses to treat.

Track 7 [0:31:54] Chris Eldon Lee: *Right. It is a strange scenario, isn't it?*

Track 7 [0:31:57] Murray Roberts: But this case at Argentine Islands made everybody think. It would have been impossible to give a blood transfusion, for instance. You do not have any collecting bags to collect blood in to give people. But I have no idea what... I have not seen the present scale of equipment since the late 1970s.

Track 7 [0:32:24] Chris Eldon Lee: *So in your advisory role, when you are advising about what to add to the stores once you had come back, when you were giving advice to BAS, what were you putting into the kit that had not been there before?*

Track 7 [0:32:33] Murray Roberts: There were a few not terribly sophisticated drugs, which might have helped the guy at Argentine Islands, which were pills that were not

expensive and could be put in although it was very unlikely you would use them. Unique case, but had you had them, you might have been able to do a bit more to help. And it was on that sort of basis that we started putting in: I don't think I can give you examples, but we started adding medication for unusual conditions, just in case they arose. It was an insurance policy. But over the years there has been very little illness in the Antarctic. Most people of that age group are pretty fit anyway. Most accidents were either fatal or pretty trivial.

Track 7 [0:33:22] Chris Eldon Lee: *You say that the Antarctic experience changed your work pattern for the future, but in what way do you think the Antarctic experience changed you, as a person?*

Track 7 [0:33:34] Murray Roberts: It is hard to tell. I suppose I learned how to get on, shut up with a group of people for a year, but maybe I could have done that anyway. I certainly made very good friends, many of whom are here this weekend.

Track 7 [0:33:53] Chris Eldon Lee: *So does it have a special place in your heart?*

Track 7 [0:33:57] Murray Roberts: Oh yes. But the other thing is: I spent most of my time while I was down there thinking to myself 'This is a daft thing to do. I have got my piece of research going, but all my friends at home, my medical colleagues, would be getting all the good jobs', but when I got back I discovered that I was the only one who had done anything different, and it certainly was not any hindrance to me.

Track 7 [0:34:18] Chris Eldon Lee: *It was good on your CV was it?*

Track 7 [0:34:20] Murray Roberts: To have taken a year out and done no medical work.

Track 7 [0:34:23] Chris Eldon Lee: *Why do you come back to the reunions? Is it just for old times sake, or is it...*

Track 7 [0:34:27] Murray Roberts: Well I like to see the guys who I only meet once or in some cases twice a year.

Track 7 [0:34:31] Chris Eldon Lee: *OK, well thank you very much indeed.*

Track 7 [0:34:34] ENDS

Snippets:

- Problems of substituting glucose for sucrose in the diet. Track 2 [0:09:01]
- The medevac from Argentine Islands. Track 3 [0:13:08]
- The Nick Mathys dilemma. Track 4 [0:15:41]
- Social problems at American bases compared with British. Track 4 [0:17:59]
- The 'Fid's Stare'. Track 5 [0:22:05]
- Halley Bay doctors accident-prone. Track 5 [0:24:47]
- Vehicle crashed down onto roof. Track 6 [0:28:05]