

MIKE ELLIOTT

Edited transcript of a recording of Mike Elliott interviewed at the Marguerite Bay reunion at Bowness on Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 29th of October 2010. BAS archives AD6/24/1/96. Transcribed by Allan Wearden on the 30th August 2017.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Mike Elliott recorded at the Marguerite Bay reunion at Bowness on Windermere by Chris Eldon Lee on the 29th of October 2010. Mike Elliott.

Elliott: Michael Hugh Elliott 6th of January, 1946, Sheffield.

[0:00:20] Lee: And you went south as a geologist?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:00:24] Lee: To Adelaide in 1968 [Elliott: Yeah.] and Fossil Bluff in '69?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:00:30] Lee: What was your first inkling there might be somewhere called the Antarctic?

Elliott: Oh at school, we were taken to see a film called *Scott of the Antarctic*.

[0:00:41] Lee: With John Mills?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:00:44] Lee: That was a school outing was it?

Elliott: Yes, well at the time the grammar school and the high school went to the pictures twice a year and on one occasion it was *Scott of the Antarctic*.

[0:01:01] Lee: You clearly remember it well do you?

Elliott: Oh yeah.

[0:01:05] Lee: What impressed you about it?

Elliott: Well the story itself I think and a few years later I actually met people who'd been with Scott, because Sir Raymond Priestley was, he was Vice Chancellor at Birmingham University and we were based at Birmingham.

[0:01:37] Lee: Who was we, geology and...?

Elliott: Geology and geophysics. Botany was there as well.

[0:01:44] Lee: Yeah, how did you come to go to the Antarctic? You saw the film which inspired you, what happened next, did you say I want to go or...?

Elliott: Well, someone from BAS was on the 'milk run' and they came round to our university and sold the idea! I forget, can't remember if it was Bill Sloman or, oh it was Derek Gipps!

[0:02:14] Lee: Right yeah!

Elliott: And I just, well one day I had an interview with the Antarctic Survey, but the next day I had an interview with the National Coal Board Opencast Executive and they both offered me a job! [Lee: Right!] Which would you take!?

[0:02:41] Lee: It was a tough decision was it!?

Elliott: It didn't take very long to make! But the Antarctic was the call.

[0:02:50] Lee: And you were already trained as a geologist at that point?

Elliott: I had to get my degree of sufficient quality to be accepted, which I did OK, so actually finished university on the Friday and I started at BAS on the Monday, [Lee: Right.] at Birmingham University with Dr. Adie!

[0:03:17] Lee: That would be June.. '67?

Elliott: Err!?

[0:03:21] Lee: '68?

Elliott: '67 yeah, think it was July '67.

[0:03:28] Lee: So you had six months with BAS in Britain before you went south?

Elliott: No, only about three months because we got our ship in, oh I forget the name of our ship now, it was October, about October the 23rd or so. Because I was on the *Biscoe* for the best part of five months!

[0:03:59] Lee: Why was that, why did it take you so long?

Elliott: Because we went to the Falklands first. We had a fortnight surveying the airfield site on the Falklands we then went down to Halley Bay, or South Georgia then Halley Bay, back to Stanley, then the last run down to Deception and Argentine and Adelaide, couple of weeks in Marguerite Bay catching seals and finally got to, I was the last to person to leave the ship and get to base!

[0:04:47] Lee: You were the last one, it was the last bus stop on the route!?

Elliott: Yeah!

[0:04:53] Lee: And that was to Adelaide in April, [Elliott: Yeah.] '68? And were you there, at Deception, shortly after the eruption, is that right?

Elliott: Oh yes!

[0:05:04] Lee: What do you remember of that visit?

Elliott: Well, we heard about the eruption when we were still in Port Stanley, and we were the first ship to, well we were the first people to land on the brand new island, because it had formed a new island inside Telefon Bay! Well we spent about, well four of us spent four days doing a survey of this volcanic island.

[0:05:51] Lee: What was it like, was it still warm?

Elliott: Yes it was, it was still steaming, steam coming from the fumaroles which had a little crust of sulphur around them [Lee: yeah], but the eruption had finished it only lasted a few days apparently, but it was enough to make the, all the bases be evacuated!

[0:06:14] Lee: So the place deserted when you got there?

Elliott: Yes, we went to the Chilean base, I forget what name it is now, but we had our midday meal there on the first day we were doing the survey.

[0:06:38] Lee: So the Chileans were still in residence were they?

Elliott: No they'd gone! [Laughter!]

[0:06:42] Lee: So you helped yourselves!?

Elliott: No we took our own food with us, [Lee: Oh I see, yeah!] but we just ate in comfort. We swept the base out for them it was just full of ash, full of volcanic ash! So it was quite an interesting few days.

[0:07:01] Lee: Yeah. So the Chilean base had fared better than the British base?

Elliott: Yes, it had a couple of windows broken, but that was it!

[0:07:15] Lee: And the island itself the new island you actually went there to specifically to survey it, is that correct?

Elliott: Well we didn't know it was there till we got there!

[0:07:24] Lee: Oh I see!

Elliott: But once we found it, we surveyed it!

[0:07:30] Lee: Yeah, the way you do!

Eliot: Yeah, and that work was published in the BAS, oh forget what they are now, the memoirs or Bulletins or whatever, about three years later.

[0:07:49] Lee: And is the island still there or has it gone again now?

Elliott: It had disappeared by the time we came out of Adelaide, got washed away by the sea.

[0:08:00] Lee: So assume, it was really, it wasn't solid rock then it was more ash and...?

Elliott: It was ash and sulphur and volcanic bombs and all that kind of stuff.

[0:08:07] Lee: Yeah, for a geologist that must have been pretty exciting I would think?

Elliott: It was, yeah, actually the first people to land on a brand new volcanic island!

[0:08:20] Lee: Were there any surprises when you got there, or was it as you would expect?

Elliott: Well never having seen one before! [Laughter!]

[0:08:31] Lee: Yeah, well I mean were there geological surprises or was it...?

Elliott: No not really.

[0:08:38] Lee: Your trip was obviously quite a complicated one, but you finally ended up at Adelaide.

Elliott: Yes.

[0:08:43] Lee: And were you relieving anybody in particular?

Elliott: Erm, no I wasn't that's why it took me so long to get off ship on to base.

[0:08:54] Lee: Had there been a geologist at Adelaide prior to your arrival?

Elliott: Well there was one at Stonington, but he was down at Fossil Bluff.

[0:09:02] Lee: Right, so how did you know what work they wanted you to do when you got there?

Elliott: Because Dr Adie sent you a letter full of instructions, two pages long, of the work that you were meant to do!

[0:09:19] Lee: Yes, I think these were these called sealed orders, is that the name they were given?

Elliott: I think they were yeah!

[0:09:24] Lee: Yeah, so what did you find you had to do when you got there, what was your work programme like?

Elliott: I was to go to Ablation Point and do a geological survey of Ablation on Alexandra Island.

[0:09:44] Lee: And was that, did you get stuck into that straight away?

Elliott: No because it took us several months to get from Adelaide down to Fossil Bluff!

[0:09:52] Lee: Right that was sledging with dogs I guess was it?

Elliott: No we got flown down, we were lazy! [Laughter!]

[0:10:01] Lee: Right, tell me a bit more about that?

Elliott: About the flight?

[0:10:05] Lee: The whole thing of going down to Ablation Point, and setting up the geological survey?

Elliott: Yeah, well I was with Andy Wager who is a glaciologist and Mike Bell a fellow geologist, and George Kistruck was a glaciologist. The four of us wintered together at Fossil Bluff, then we went out in, oh it must have been May or June, travelled up to Ablation and started first mapping it and then several weeks, doing the geology.

[0:10:58] Lee: And that was using dogs and sledges still in those days!?

Elliott: No we didn't have any dogs with us, we had a Foxtrack and the Muskeg to get up there, but once Mike and myself were in Ablation Valley we just had a man hauling sledge, we didn't have any transport until the dog teams came down a bit later on.

[0:11:33] Lee: And again were there any surprises in the geology you found down there?

Elliott: Not really, because it had been visited before for a couple of days in the late 1940's early '50's, but we found lots of ammonites and other fossils, and also previously people like Laurence Willey, and Holmes and Mike Thomson, had done other parts of the geology of George VI Sound, so there was nothing really unexpected there!

[0:12:28] Lee: Why do you think Adie sent you down there to do more work if a substantial amount of geology had already been completed?

Elliott: Because nothing had been done up to Ablation Point.

[0:12:53] Lee: Right. OK, did Ablation Point fit the pattern of the previous work that had been done or were there new things to be found?

Elliott: There were one or two new things to be found, but it was generally a continuation of what had been done before.

[0:12:59] Lee: What sort of new thing did you find at Ablation Point?

Elliott: Well we found a lot of new fossils, which obviously weren't found at the other places. And we had the massive submarine.....landslides, think there was a name for them, but I can't remember what it is now! But there was masses of arkoses, yeah sandstones, which had been formed from a genetic part of the Peninsula.

[0:13:51] Lee: So you had to just collect these and identify them try and map them I guess?

Elliott: Well Doctor Adie had been there for one night in 1947 or so, and the BGLE had called in there briefly in 1936 I think it was, but we were the first ones to spend any considerable amount of time there, spent about, what, four or five months working in that area!

[0:14:33] Lee: Was it good work to do?

Elliott: It was yes, but we had a break from it because two of the dog teams came and took us up the Sneck, up the Grotto Glacier and back to Fossil Bluff for a few days of recuperation!

[0:14:57] Lee: You were using Eliasons at that time weren't you?

Elliott: Erm...!

[0:15:05] Lee: Is that right, from Fossil Bluff?

Elliott: Yes, yes.

[0:15:09] Lee: And were they reliable or were they living up to their reputation?

Elliott: They were living up to their reputation, yeah! We had, no we had something else! I forget what they'd called – Foxtrack, that's what we had! They were brand new and they failed after about five miles!

[0:15:38] Lee: Yeah, so Eliason and the Foxtracks is that right?

Elliott: I think the Eliasons had moved on by the time we got there!

[0:15:45] Lee: Right OK right, OK!

Elliott: But the Foxtrack we had to carry out some Fid's mods on it, which Andy and George did, like make a chimney from the exhaust to melt the snow on the driving gear!

[0:16:15] Lee: Self warming!

Elliott: Yes it was yeah.

[0:16:19] Lee: Yeah. I understood you got stranded at one point by a mechanical failure?

Elliott: Oh yeah we did, yeah.

[0:16:27] Lee: Tell me about that Mike?

Elliott: We had travelled up from Fossil Bluff to Ablation with the Muskeg and after we'd camped for one night, we came to start the Briggs & Stratton [Note: a small petrol engine] to get some electric into the batteries but the Briggs & Stratton had been buried in drift from the travelling. And the terminals had all got covered in ice, so when we came to turn it on nothing happened, so we quickly decided we had to walk back to Fossil Bluff!

[0:17:26] Lee: [laughter!] You just left them did you?

Elliott: Yeah we abandoned the Muskeg and the tractor and the Maudine [Note: a type of sledge], and walked back pulling a man haul sledge, which took us 3 days to do!

[0:17:46] Lee: I guess you had tents and things?

Elliott: Yeah we had a tent, in fact we had two tents, we had a normal pyramid tent and a small pup tent.

[0:18:00] Lee: Was the weather kind to you on that return trip?

Elliott: It was yes, yeah.

[0:18:04] That was lucky I guess!

Elliott: Wasn't too cold and it didn't snow, but it took us about four days, three or four days to do it.

[0:18:19] Lee: What happened to the machines you left behind?

Elliott: Well once we'd been at Fossil Bluff for a while after getting back, we mounted a rescue expedition with Andy Wager and myself and we, we sledged, we motored out with the, I forget which machine it was now(!), but we motored out, dug out the sledge and the Muskeg, got it going again, moved up what was needed to the depot near Ablation Point and came back to Fossil Bluff, which took about 18 hours to do!

[0:19:18] Lee: And they were OK after to use them again?

Elliott: Oh yeah. Once we'd got ourselves sorted we travelled back to Ablation Point and did our survey, [Lee: Right!] for several weeks.

[0:19:38] Lee: So you carried on from where you were rudely interrupted!?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:19:47] Lee: There was a waterfall of sorts at Fossil Bluff I seem to recall, did you see it?

Elliott: Yes there was. What actually happened was it was a large amount of melt pools around the base area, and one day the ice cracked and it all poured away into the Sound! So the surface went down about eight or ten feet or so in a few hours, quite dramatic, and it was one of the or the Sound was full of melt pools and these formed in quite a sensitive area.

[0:20:41] Lee: And the temperature was such, it didn't freeze over again as it, it wasn't a frozen waterfall, it was a water waterfall?

Elliott: It was a water waterfall but the melt pools kept freezing overnight at least the surface of them did.

[0:20:56] Lee: So it was a daytime waterfall?

Elliott: Yeah!

[0:21:02] Lee: And then you spent, you wintered there at Fossil Bluff in '69 didn't you [Elliott: Yeah] with George and the others?

Elliott: Yeah, with George and Mike and Andy Wager.

[0:21:16] Lee: Tell me about that winter because you must have been amongst the most southerly human beings on the planet, wouldn't you be!?

Elliott: Well the, Halley Bay was farther south than us, but we were the last ones before the Pole on that line of longitude!

[0:21:34] Lee: On the west side yeah.

Elliott: And we had radio contact with Adelaide and Stonington and Argentine Isles, and we had the occasional schedule with Halley Bay and the South Africa Borga base people, but no otherwise it was bit remote!

[0:22:03] Lee: A bit remote [laughter] yeah! Did you, were you able to carry on your geological work during in the winter?

Elliott: No because all the rocks were covered in snow!

[0:22:17] Lee: What about samples you brought into the hut did you work on those at all?

Elliott: We couldn't do very much because we didn't have any equipment to do anything with, all we did was layer them and put them into boxes and wait for them to be taken out.

[0:22:35] Lee: In the spring?

Elliott: Or in the following summer.

[0:22:38] Lee: Yeah, so your duties in the winter became that of a G.A. I suppose as you all mucked into together?

Elliott: Yeah we did, and I ran the met station at Fossil Bluff and we took it in turns to cook, every two days, cook every eight days, which would turn to and do any tidying up that needed doing.

[0:23:07] Lee: How did you end up being a met man then, was there not an official meteorologist at Fossil Bluff?

Elliott: Not at the time, but what happened was that...there was meant to be four met men at Adelaide Island, but two of them got marooned at Fossil Bluff! [Lee: Alright.] So there was only two met men at Adelaide, so about four of us got trained up to do the Met.

[0:23:41] Lee: At Adelaide?

Elliott: Yeah, and we did the night obs for them, nine o'clock, no perhaps nine o'clock, midnight, three a.m. and six a.m. and nine a.m. before we came down to the base, because the met hut at Adelaide was on top of the hill, which had its own separate living hut.

[0:24:15] Lee: Right, so you were in a separate building altogether and you stayed there through the night, to do the observations rather than travelling back and forth?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:24:28] Lee: Kind of an annex really!

Elliott: Yeah, we went up to do the midnight ob, making sure all of the fires were safely banked up in the base hut.

[0:24:46]Lee: Did you take to meteorology?

Elliott: Oh quite enjoyed it yeah, I haven't really done any since, but it was quite interesting doing it.

[0:25:00] Lee: Yeah OK. Well let's take it step by step, because we did rather leap ahead to talk about Fossil Bluff. So let's go back to when you were relieving base F at the Argentine Islands, that was again when on the ship coming south, still on your way to Adelaide, and then you headed back north again, to Stanley!?

Elliott: Yeah, well we went to Argentine, then we went to Port Lockroy, then we went back up to Deception and Falklands, then we came back down again via South Georgia and Halley Bay and back to Stanley, then down from Stanley to...yeah down to Stanley and Argentine, then Adelaide and Stonington!

[0:26:11] Lee: So was it normal for the ship to do that kind of zigzag approach? I know the reason you're the first person to talk about it, you're the first person who did it, I suppose, I have met!

Elliott: Yeah, I don't know about other years, but it was quite normal for the *Biscoe* to go to Marguerite Bay on a couple of separate occasions. It depended on ice conditions as to what it actually did.

[0:26:38] Lee: So the year you did, the year you were there making this journey in '67-'68 did the ice conditions change the plan?

Elliott: It did rather yeah, because it was really thick ice in Marguerite Bay and we couldn't get in at first. We got delayed a few months, well a couple of months, and it wasn't until the ice blew out that we could actually get there!

[0:27:09] Lee: Right, so whilst you were on the ship were you acting as a kind of deckhand or was your main role to help with relief work when the actual bases were reached?

Elliott: It was to help with the relief work when the bases...

[0:27:33] Lee: When you got there!

Elliott: Shifting all the cargo and yeah.

[0:27:37] Lee: I imagine there is quite a lot of that was there?

Elliott: There was yeah! And also we were employed in killing seals for the dog food!

[0:27:49] Lee: How does a young geologist adapt to being a stevedore and a marksman?

Elliott: Oh I didn't do any shooting! [Laughter!] We were just there to...

[0:28:02] Lee: Haul the carcasses!

Elliott: ...yeah, and to empty the innards out and to carve them into workable sizes. Well it was just something we had to do, we just got used to it!

[0:28:20] Lee: Were you aware before you went you would be doing that kind of stuff as well as straight scientific geology?

Elliott: No!

[0:28:27] Lee: So it was a surprise, was it?

Elliott: It was rather, yes, but we just went into it, just accepted it for what it was!

[0:28:41] Lee: I guess you were all in it together?

Elliott: Yeah.

[0:28:44] Lee: Yeah, OK. The having to learn to do the met work at Adelaide, that was a consequence of a plane crash, wasn't it?

Elliott: It was yes, I'm just trying to remember the details.

[0:29:09] Lee: Was the plane the Pilatus Porter?

Elliott: Oh yeah! That crashed on takeoff, when it was bringing Graham Smith and Martin Bramwell and Rod. Yeah, Graham Smith and Rod Ledingham were being taken off from the Plateau with a dog team. But they crashed and the plane came to grief so they had to walk down to Fossil Bluff, which meant an involuntary winter there!

[0:29:48] Lee: Leaving vacancies for meteorologists back at Adelaide?

Elliott: Yeah well there were meant to be four met men at Adelaide, but two of them were marooned at Fossil Bluff!

[0:30:02] Lee: Yeah. How did you learn about this plane crash?

Elliott: On the radio! The pilot was in contact with us as soon as it happened.

[0:30:19] Lee: Did you ever find out exactly what did go wrong?

Elliott: I think they did yeah, I think it one of the skis broke rather on the takeoff run and it couldn't, as a result it never got airborne!

[0:30:39] Lee: It twisted sideways is that right?

Elliott: Something like, that yeah.

[0:30:42] Lee: Yeah, and they tried to take off without the skis?

Elliott: They tried to take off, and it didn't work, so the three of them on board had to sledge down to Fossil Bluff!

[0:30:58] Lee: And the plane was wrecked wasn't it as a result?

Elliott: It was yeah, [Lee: yeah] but the following year the aircraft mechanic, John Walsh, went in and rescued a few items from it, like the engine, and any useful bits and pieces from it, but effectively the Porter was written off!

[0:31:28] Lee: Do you remember any extreme weather conditions that you were recording at either Adelaide or Fossil Bluff?

Elliott: Well at Adelaide we often had rather excessive winds, and in fact on one occasion we were caught out sledging in it on the Fuchs Ice Piedmont!

[0:31:56] Lee: Tell me about that Mike.

Elliott: Our tent was, well the sledge and the dogs and tent were completely buried! It took us several hours the next day to dig it all out, and all we could do was to move it about 20 yards in one direction and two foot higher on to the new surface! But we were lucky we weren't completely swallowed up!

[0:32:35] Is that what you would call a close call!?

Elliott: A close one!

[0:32:40] Lee: Did you have closer ones?

Elliott: The time I broke through the ice at Halley Bay and when I broke through the ice at Adelaide as well!

[0:32:55] Lee: Simply walking you mean or?

Elliott: Yeah. At Halley Bay we were walking back from, we had to walk back from the base, back to the *Biscoe* and crossing the tide crack the ice collapsed and I was up to my waist in rather cold water!

[0:33:21] Lee: Were your feet on the floor?

Elliott: No, I guess it was about 80 fathoms deep!

[0:33:29] Lee: Gosh! Do you remember how you got out, apart from perhaps quickly!?

Elliott: Yeah I managed to scramble out.

[0:33:40] Lee: When you become submerged like that and you are back on the surface again, in subzero temperatures don't you just freeze up?

Elliott: Well you do feel cold, but if you keep exercising and get rid of any surplus water and it's not too cold in the air, you soon recover.

[0:34:09] Lee: Do you!? And I guess your clothes got dried out on the ship?

Elliott: Yeah, when we got back to the ship!

[0:34:22] Lee: Ray Adie was a pioneer, wasn't he, in the theory of plate tectonics, the moving of the continental masses, and I was wondering whether if your work had any bearing or influence or reflected that?

Elliott: No, not really, because just being at Adelaide, just being at Ablation it was a fairly straight forward thing, there is no, there is nothing really related to plate tectonics there.

[0:35:08] Lee: And did you do geology at Adelaide as well?

Elliott: Yeah I spent a few weeks tapping rocks round the base, and on Avian Island.

[0:35:23] Lee: And were you finding anything of any consequence?

Elliott: Nothing really, it's just that Avian Island had several different phases of diorites, it was all volcanic tusks, there must have been a volcano fairly close at the time.

[0:35:50] Lee: And all this was written up when you got back to Birmingham?

Elliott: Only the Ablation Point bit was.

[0:35:57] Lee: Oh yeah, what happened to the Adelaide stuff?

Elliott: Dr Adie didn't want me to write it!

[0:36:02] Lee: Right, can you remember why?

Elliott: No I can't!

[0:36:08] Lee: OK. You did some building work, at Halley on the bases there?

Elliott: Yeah we did.

[0:36:19] Lee: What do you remember from that?

Elliott: Well we were given, we had some of the buildings onboard the *Biscoe* as cargo, and we offloaded them they got transported up to base on the Muskegs. And then we were put to work actually assembling these two buildings, because they were in a kit of parts, and Al Smith, who I think is here this weekend, he was one of the builders at Halley Bay, and we spent two or three days just helping him out!

[0:37:14] Lee: Oh just two or three days, you were only there for two or three days?

Elliott: It might have been four days or so, but wasn't all that long.

[0:37:21] Lee: So you were really there to unload [Elliott: yeah] and load up and then go out as fast as possible? Yes, so you'd been on the boat for both the west coast and east coast of the Peninsula?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:37:31] Lee: I understand some of the Fids seemed to prefer the west coast. Is that how you saw it, as there is more to be done and more to appreciate?

Elliott: There were more bases there, and the scenery's rather more interesting being mountainous, whereas at Halley Bay was just ice and ice! [laughter]

[0:38:00] Did you show an interest in the wildlife whilst you were in the Antarctic?

Elliott: Oh yeah.

[0:38:03] Lee: What do you remember from that?

Elliott: Well on Avian Island which is just by Adelaide Island there were several, I think there were four separate Adelie penguin colonies, and on Dion Islands which was ten miles, eight or ten miles from Adelaide there was a colony of emperor penguins which we went to see one day. And there were about ten or fifteen different types of birds on Avian Island. We took lots of pictures and collected the penguin eggs for the food.

[0:39:02] Lee: Did you have photographic developing facilities at Adelaide?

Elliott: Yeah we did yeah, we had black & white and Ektachrome.

[0:39:15] Lee: Oh you did colour as well?

Elliott: Yeah we did.

[0:39:18] Lee: It was probably the first year that colour was developed in the Antarctic, I'm not quite sure?

Elliott: I've no idea at all!

[0:39:24] Lee: Don't worry about that. How was it socially, how did you get on with the other guys at Adelaide and Fossil Bluff?

Elliott: Oh we got on more less OK. There was one character who is long deceased, who was a bit of an idle sod! [laughter]

[0:39:47] Lee: Are you going to name him!?

Elliott: No it would be unfair, because he can't answer his, or being long deceased he can't defend himself !

[0:39:58] Lee: How did the other guys get round that or cope with it, did you just give into it or ...?

Elliott: Well John Collins, who was at base at the time, he was rather forthright in his views, called him a lazy sod! But we just had to cope with it.

[0:40:22] Lee: Was he sent to Coventry or excluded from activities?

Elliott: No, not entirely, because you can't in a small base, you can't send someone to Coventry, because there's nowhere to call Coventry!

[0:40:38] Lee: Yeah, Coventry doesn't exist does it?

Elliott: No.

[0:40:43] Lee: But apart from that they were happy bases?

Elliott: Oh yeah, yeah. At Fossil Bluff, where four of us wintered, the only unhappy person was Mike Bell because he had to learn to play bridge! [laughter] He didn't like bridge and the other three of us did, so he had no choice but to play!

[0:41:13] Lee: So he suffered in silence on that front did he!?

Elliott: Yeah.

[0:41:16] Lee: And did he start winning?

Elliott: I forget who actually won, we kept the score a running total during the winter. I think he still came bottom of the four!

[0:41:36] Lee: What other recreational facilities did you have at either Adelaide or Fossil Bluff?

Elliott: At Fossil Bluff we had skiing and tobogganing and a tape recorder and records. At Adelaide we also had some toboggans for downhill tobogganing, and I suppose you could say we went camping on holidays on Avian.

[0:42:25] Lee: What was the tape recorder used for, were you just playing back tapes or were you recording stuff?

Elliott: No we were just playing back tapes.

[0:42:36] Lee: Of music and that kind of thing?

Elliott: Yeah.

[0:42:40] Lee: Are we talking cassette here or was this before cassettes wasn't it?

Elliott: Er?

[0:42:50] Lee: They were just coming in, no they were there by '68/'69, cassettes were in regular use weren't they!?

Elliott: Yes you're right yes, yes.

[0:42:55] Lee: So it would have been.

Elliott: One of my favourites which was Petula Clark and Dusty Springfield.

[0:43:06] Lee: That shows good taste! Did you ever feel, you say you were fairly isolated particularly at Fossil Bluff, did you ever feel you were cut off from the rest of the world, do you feel, did it ever get to you?

Elliott: No I don't think it did, because we had contact with the South Africans at Borga base, and we had regular schedules with Adelaide and Stonington and Argentine too, we knew we were isolated but we weren't too bothered about it!

[0:43:45] Lee: So you didn't really mind, you didn't know what was happening in the rest of the world?

Elliott: Well we had the news from the World Service.

[0:43:54] Lee: Oh you could pick that up could you!?

Elliott: Yeah, and we heard the Apollo moon landing - they were more isolated than we were!
[laughter]

[0:44:11] But George Kistruck said to me once, the irony was you could hear the Apollo moon landing clearer than the messages from Adelaide Island!

Elliott: Yes, I think we could.

[0:44:21] Lee: Yeah. You were following that on the radio were you?

Elliott: Yes, we were, yes.

[0:44:28] That's a strange thing to be so isolated yourself and to have this empathy for the three guys in Apollo XI?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:44:38] Lee: Can you put some words round that?

Elliott: Not immediately, I can't no!

[0:44:44] Lee: Alright.

Elliott: But I think we were more isolated than they were, because they were in constant contact with Apollo mission control even though physically a lot more isolated than we were, but they had worldwide coverage!

[0:45:10] Lee: They were farther away but on telly everyday every TV in the world, [Elliott: Yes], was showing that!

Elliott: Except we didn't have a TV set!

[0:45:23] Lee: So that's my next question. So your memory of that most important time in mankind history is very different from most of us, because we all had this visual image of

Neil Armstrong stepping on to the moon? [Elliott: yeah] Which you must have heard at Fossil Bluff, but you were having to use your imagination rather than watching pictures?

Elliott: Oh yes, yes, yeah, 'One big step for man and one giant leap for mankind' I think he said!

[0:45:50] Lee: Yeah, something along those lines. Did you look at the moon that night?

Elliott: We did when it was visible to us, obviously it wasn't visible all the time. [Lee: No] We had the southern lights to look at as well!

[0:46:09] Lee: Oh tell me about those, the aurora australis?

Elliott: Yeah, we didn't have them every night, but on the odd occasion we did have them we would stand outside in pyjamas, looking at it! And it would fill half the sky with colour and lights flashing, from down the curtains, it was quite an exciting experience! Didn't happen very often, but when it did happen, it was compulsive viewing!

[0:46:51] Lee: Even though you were just in your pyjamas, so it couldn't have been a very long session outdoors?

Elliott: No, well we did put our waterproofs on, sorry our wind proofs rather!

[0:47:02] Lee: Yeah, so you would have been in the hut and then somebody would have looked out the window and realised what was going on I guess?

Elliott: Yes, and normally it was the person that was on met saw them first, because somebody went out every three hours as a matter of course anyway.

[0:47:29] Lee: Yeah, so would it have gone into the met obs report?

Elliott: Yes they did, yeah.

[0:47:36] Lee: Yeah, it's spectacular isn't it, I've only seen film of it, but it's like nothing else!

Elliott: Yeah, it was extremely, a really nice experience to see it!

[0:47:53] Lee: Tell me about coming away again, when it was time to leave the Antarctic, did you, what were your feelings, were you glad to get out or melancholy about it?

Elliott: I can't honestly remember! Because we knew we had South America to look forward to, because it had already been decided that we would be allowed to have a South America jolly! I forget the entire circumstances, but the *Biscoe* had too many people onboard for its final relief of the northern bases, so we were dumped. They got us into the Fiddery [Note: the Fids' lounge] one night and said 'If we drop you at Punta Arenas on so and so, pick you up in Montevideo five weeks later, who wants to get off!?' [laughter]

Elliott: Yes!! So we split into groups of twos and threes and about 18 of us went, and had a five week trip in South America!

[0:49:17] Lee: All paid for by FIDS?

Elliott: No, we had to pay our own, we were still being paid! But any travel expenses we had to do ourselves.

[0:49:30] Lee: But it was an opportunity that couldn't be missed, I guess!?

Elliott: Correct, yeah!

[0:49:33] Lee: Did everybody volunteer?

Elliott: Yeah, but some people weren't allowed to, like the doctor wasn't allowed to, because he would have to look after the crew on the ship as well, but it ended up I think 18 of us got off!

[0:49:55] Lee: So how did you make your way north?

Elliott: By plane!

[0:50:01] Lee: Oh you could fly, so you didn't make your way overland as such, you...?

Elliott: Well we travelled by all means, by coach by train by plane depending where we wanted to get to, but our ultimate target was the Iguazu Falls!

[0:50:25] Lee: The where, sorry?

Elliott: Iguazu Falls on the border of Brazil and Argentina!

[0:50:33] Lee: And you got there?

Elliott: Yeah, we spent about a week there.

[0:50:38] Lee: What was the attraction, what was special about going there?

Elliott: Oh just the idea of massive waterfalls and jungle as well.

[0:50:49] Lee: So you went from the frozen waste to the sub tropical jungle?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:50:55] Lee: In a fairly short time?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:50:56] Lee: Was that OK?

Elliott: Except that we got the runs! [laughter] Because our bodies were getting rid of the surplus fat that had been stored in the Antarctic, and it all came out in about four days or so!!

[0:51:18] Lee: Right, it's obviously etched on your memory Mike!?

Elliott: Oh yes!

[0:51:23] Lee: And then you met up with the *Biscoe* at Montevideo?

Elliott: Yes, and we came back on the *Biscoe* and we painted it while we were travelling!

[0:51:44] Lee: And the geology work you did, looking back on that now was it, I appreciate it was a small piece of work in a larger body of work, but would you regard still to be an important thing to have done?

Elliott: Yes I think so.

[0:51:57] Scientifically!

Elliott: Yeah, it was filling gaps in the general Antarctic scheme of things.

[0:52:07] Lee: Did you stay in geology?

Elliott: In part yes, though I became a minerals officer for West Riding County Council and spent my time overseeing opencast sites and coal mines and sand and gravel clay quarries, and also waste disposal.

[0:52:41] Lee: Yeah, and of course we were on the same ship going south again in the year 2000 on the Marguerite Bay reunion?

Elliott: Yes.

[0:52:49] Lee: I'm just wondering what your impressions were of the Antarctic 30 years later?

Elliott: Well some things hadn't changed at all, but there was a lot less ice about than we'd had! There had been quite a bit of melting in places, but otherwise it was fairly similar.

[0:53:24] Lee: We didn't get to Fossil Bluff, but we did go past Adelaide Island didn't we?

Elliott: Yes we landed at Adelaide Island, we went into our old base, base T, which was occupied by I can't remember if it was Chileans, yes I think it was the Chileans in it now.

[0:53:45] Lee: Had it changed much?

Elliott: The base itself hadn't but all the ice around had - been a lot of melting!

[0:53:57] Lee: How was it for you to go back after 31 years?

Elliott: Oh it was quite a thrilling experience!

[0:54:08] Lee: Was there a geologist there?

Elliott: I don't think there was, no, but we had one or two of us there, myself and I think there was another former geologist there as well. So we had an interesting time looking at the old rocks again.

[0:54:43] Lee: Yeah, thank you. Mike we'll leave it there, we'll leave it there Mike I'm very grateful to you, [Elliott: yeah] thank you, well done!

Interesting clips:

- Survey of new volcanic island after the December '67 eruption at Deception Island! [0:05:51]
- Fids' mod on the new Foxtrack tractor! [0:15:45]
- First mooning landing in 1969! [0:44:21]
- Viewing the Southern Lights in their pyjamas! [0:46:09]