

OWEN DARLING

Edited transcript of a recording of Owen Darling interviewed by Jaap Verdenius on 1st February 1993. BAS Archives AD6/24/3/15. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 14th May 2020.

[0:00:00] Darling: [Apparently looking at a Midwinter dinner menu] This was Midwinter, when traditionally you have a holiday and a celebration to celebrate the shortest day of the year. And so we have a special meal. In fact all this was dried or tinned food which the cook just dressed up and fancy names to. And we made this menu with pictures of all of us. This was my first year. These were all the people there my first year. And the second year we did ... that's all the people in the second year and we did the same sort of thing. We had a dinner.

[0:00:38] Verdenius: There's a Romanov?

Darling: I don't know what that is.

[0:00:44] Verdenius: It's nice. It sounds very interesting.

Darling: It's probably tinned strawberries with some sort of liqueur in it, I'd say. I don't know. That's Eric Twelves. That's him in our first year. He's a biologist. Then in our second year he was our Base Commander. They chose one of the people to be the Base Commander, who was officially the man who carried the can. He was in our second year. He's the one who is doing the fish farming now. This was Bob Cook; he was our cook in my second year. He was a really nice bloke. He was a good cook but he never minded what anyone thought of his food. He would say 'As long as I know I have done it well, ...' Because you know how people always complain, always can complain about food, but he wouldn't mind as long as he felt he'd done a good job.

[0:01:48] Darling: This one, Ian Rabarts, he was a biologist and he was really keen on cordon bleu, really good cooking. Of course all our cooking was tinned, or most of it was tinned so it certainly wasn't cordon bleu. He was the one who tended to complain a bit about the food. This one, he was also very keen on going out in the boats and one day he came out in the boats with us and we were going to the north part of the island. And so he had left a steak and kidney pudding on to boil, and he said to the man who was helping him, because we took it in turns. The cook cooked throughout the week but every day each one of us took it in turns to be the person who helped him, and did the washing up, did the cleaning – that sort of thing. So he said to the man who was helping him who was Ian 'When lunchtime comes, would you take the steak and kidney pudding out and serve it up?' So he said fine.

[0:02:46] Darling: And as we were coming back, old Bob Cook, he said to me 'I wonder how they liked the steak and kidney?' I thought 'That's funny, why should he ...?' He'd never before worried whether people liked his food or not. When I got back, I found out why. He'd stained all the pastry bright green, so when they took this pudding out of the tin, it was just bright green pastry which of course this person was almost sick on the spot when he got it out. So that's what that photograph is about. When it was Bob Cook's birthday, we did a birthday cake for him and we did a

.....Or I didn't do it. Eric, he made all this model of the green pudding, because that was just part of the fun of the year.

[0:03:29] Verdenius: You really lived on tinned food?

Darling: When we were there, yes. We had tinned food and we had dried food. We had dried potatoes, dried egg, dried beans, things like that, but they weren't as nice as you get nowadays. We also caught a lot of fish. We used to eat a lot of fresh fish. That was really nice. In fact we used to have a tank. At one end of the hut, you can't really see it but in this end of the hut, down there. That was laboratories and we had an aquarium system with tanks of running sea water. We'd pump the sea water up from here, through the tanks and back down to the sea, and so any fish we caught that weren't needed for experiments, we put in these tanks and then, if you were hungry, you could go and knock one on the head and clean it and fry it and have fresh fish, We had a lot of fresh fish.

[0:04:21] Darling: And penguins, we used to eat penguins as well. That's very nice meat. The breast meat is very dark. It's the texture of steak really but it's the colour of almost like liver; very dark red meat, because it's a diving animal. I think it has different haemoglobins and I think that's what makes it look very dark. We used to eat that and we used to eat seal sometimes if we killed a seal, but we rarely had to kill a seal. So we didn't have that very often. We tried most of the other birds that were around, just to vary the diet. And we used to – somewhere here I have a picture – we used to get penguin's eggs as well. I think they have stopped doing that now. There we are. See these boxes of penguin's eggs. Here we used to collect them in the early part of the season and then we would store them. That's boxes and boxes of them. We used to take about 1500 eggs and then we would store them in a cold place and they would last for several months. I have got some here which I blew. That's the sort of size they are.

[0:05:48] Darling: That's a pygoscelid penguin; these ones here are pygoscelid penguins. They are about eighteen inches tall and they lay eggs about that size. When you are cooking, that's equivalent to about two chicken's eggs, about the size of two chicken's eggs, but we used to collect them. I think they have stopped doing that now. I think, because of international agreements, they are a lot lot more careful. And they don't even ... on our island they wouldn't now take penguin's eggs, I think, But we thought that there were so many. Penguin rookeries have millions of birds in them; we thought it would be OK to take those but I think they are more strict, more careful now about things. There's how. In a penguin rookery, you can see how closely they nest. This is an albino penguin but there's one nest you see; there's another one, another one, another one. They are very close together. I did some counts and in a ten metre square, you would get eighty nests, in a ten metre square. So they are often just out of pecking distance, so you would have one penguin here and he is just out of pecking distance of the next nest, so they can be really really tight together.

[0:07:04] Darling: That's Bob Cook and he's holding one of these penguins. That's an Adelie penguin; these are chinstraps there. As I say, that was an albino one. This is them displaying to each other. They make a lovely noise. You can hear a penguin rookery from miles away and you can smell it from miles away. If the wind is in the right direction, you can smell a very acrid guano smell and you hear the noise, a sort

of ‘mutter, mutter, mutter’ noise. And when you are actually in the rookery, and you cause a disturbance, they are squawking away a lot. It’s really quite noisy.

[0:07:46] Verdenius: That’s the first time I hear anybody talk about smells at the South Pole.

Darling: Really? If the wind is in the right direction, as you walk nearer the penguin rookery, it really does smell. And these birds – where’s another one? – blue eyed shags. Sorry, I should be better organised. That’s a blue eyed shag. It’s a pity it’s not in colour. It has a beautiful blue eye and a gold crest there and this is its nest. Every year they come back to the same nest. This is just really penguin shit and feathers and things all mixed, and it gets higher and higher. On our island, they nested on one main rock, lots and lots of them and when we went once a year to put rings on their legs, they would ... You would end up after a morning putting rings on, you would absolutely have a bad headache because of the ammonia. It just reeks of ammonia coming from their droppings; it’s very very rich.

[0:09:13] Darling: It was interesting too on Deception. I went to Deception Island before I got to my own island. We went to the South Shetlands and there had been a volcanic eruption on one of the islands, Deception Island, and there was a party to go there to map and investigate the eruption from the previous year. Well now, also there was also a flat bit of land there and they used Deception Island in those days as a staging post for the aircraft. They had small Twin Otter aircraft. While they were there, we got the chance of a jolly, a little flight in one of these. It was very interesting to go around the island because from the air you could see the rookery as a sort of white or pinky area on the rocks because of the droppings of the birds. These were ... we ringed these chicks and then I remember Eric here, mad keen huntsman, sportsman. We had only ringed these and a few days later he was out on the ice and he saw some of these birds flying over and he shot them and we got our first recovery literally just a few days after we had actually put the ring on. He went and shot one of these things, so he was not too popular.

[0:10:38] Darling: This is Percy; he was a botanist and he is cutting a snow block because in winter: no running water, so the exhausts from the diesel generators went underneath a tank and every day we filled up the tank with snow and then the heat from the generators melted the snow and we got our water that way. We used to take it in turns to be what we called ‘gash hand’. That was just the slang name, gash hand, and that meant when it was your day, you did all the cleaning. You did all the washing up. You cleaned the toilets out. You filled up the tank with snow. That was your job for the day and we took it in turns, and everyone did it; not just ... On the British bases there wasn’t a hierarchy. There weren’t like the scientists and then the servants. It wasn’t like that.

[0:11:34] Darling: Everyone shared everything: all the jobs, and that was different to, say, if you went ... I visited an Argentinian base and there is was a military base, so the officers did no work and the enlisted men did all the work. But the British didn’t work that way and I think it is very important; that was very important because it was one less source of irritation. It is difficult enough to get on with just a small group of people in one little hut and the fewer sources of irritation, the better, and if you know

everyone was doing the same work and everyone is going to have their turn, then you feel a lot ... I think it causes less trouble that way.

[0:12:13] Verdenius: But you were an assistant?

Darling: Yes. I was called a general assistant, so I was assisting Mike. He was a biologist, microbiologist. He was a meteorologist. Although he was a film man, he couldn't come down just as a film man. He came down as a meteorologist and he filmed in his spare time. He was a botanist. He was our wireless operator. He was our cook. He was a botanist. He was our diver. He was our diesel mechanic, Dave Rinning. He was a biologist. He was a meteorologist and he was a biologist. So we has five scientists; we had three meteorologists, so that's eight. Then there were five support personnel: the diver, the cook, the radio operator, the diesel mechanic and myself. We were the support personnel; people to help keep the scientists going. In my second year they did away with the meteorologist programme; they stopped that. Because the first year, what they were doing: every three hours they would radio the information back to the Falkland Islands.

[0:12:37] Darling: But they decided for the next year, for reasons I don't quite know why, but they decided not to ... to stop that programme. So we went down to ten people for my second year and that was five scientists and five support personnel. And the scientists worked harder than I have known any scientists in this country work. They worked very very hard. I think they had a limited time to do their research and they knew once they came back home to England, they couldn't repeat any experiments. So they did all their research and then they came back to England. They spent maybe two years or three years writing it up, to get their PhDs and things. But I think they worked really really hard. What else? That was the cook in our first year. That's me. I'm helping. It's my turn to be on gash, but this is a special occasion. This must have been a party because we didn't normally wear hats or ...

[0:14:23] Darling: And on Sundays, the cook would have a day off and then we would each take it in turns to cook on Sunday, so that he could have a day off. We would take it in turns and do the cooking on Sunday, which was good fun. What else to show you? Dotted around the island were little huts. That was by a penguin rookery and it was made out of, really, old packing cases and it was stropped down to stop it blowing away. It had just room for two bunks I think, that one had. I was helping one of the scientists with a project on penguins, so I would go over there, spend the night, get up early in the morning, do my record and then come back to the base. It used to be good fun to go there all on your own. We had another one somewhere; I can't see it just now, but we had another hut much the same we went to. Oh there; that's it, there in the background there. This one we went diving from there. This was the other side of the island from our main base. No-one had dived there, so we went, just to do a bit of exploring in the water. We lived in this hut and we dived from it. It was good fun.

[0:15:52] Verdenius: When did you learn to dive?

Darling: Before I went to the Antarctic. It had been one of my hobbies at college, was diving. Not to a high level, not to a particularly skilled level but enough so that I was able to do the diving here, which was really good fun. It really was. The water gets

very very clear. in winter, when the sea freezes. That cuts the light level down so much that none of the plankton can grow, the little phytoplankton can't grow. And also because the ice is on the surface, that damps down all the waves. The sea isn't being churned up. So that means everything gets beautifully clear. You get 75-100 foot visibility, something like that, underneath the ice, beautifully clear. I haven't got any photographs, really, of that, but I saw some on television about six months ago.

[0:16:49] Darling: Someone who had been down to Signy Island just recently took some video underneath and it was absolutely fantastic. It really was good. This is Deception Island and you see there is a wrecked ship, an old whale catcher. What it is with Deception, there's a map here. That's Deception Island. From the outside it looks like one big mountain, maybe twenty miles across, but in fact a little entrance here and then you have got this huge harbour here. The year before we went there, there had been an eruption across here and a new island had formed there. The Chilean base – the Chileans lived there – that got buried in ash. So we went to look at that but this wreck here was right at the entrance.

[0:17:49] Darling: It's just down there and what happened was: seemingly in the 1950s, that ship was coming out and it met a big factory ship coming in. It tried to get out of the way and didn't and got wrecked there. What else have I got? [rustling sounds of maps being rolled up and unrolled?] That's where the South Orkneys are, so it's not really actually in the Antarctic. It's still only just 60 degrees but because it is so near such a big continent, the sea freezes just a bit north of us. So we call it the Antarctic there because the Antarctic Convergence was that. The Antarctic Convergence, yes; so it gets cold beyond that. And the South Shetlands: that's where Deception Island was. That's South Georgia, where your boss was, up there.

[0:18:47] Verdenius: Deception Island has disappeared?

Darling: No it's still there. I don't think there is a base on it any longer. I don't think they land aircraft on it any longer. We went there about Christmas time, to investigate what had happened. I was an assistant to a volcanologist (who are experts of volcanoes) and we were just there to assist them carry things. And we left there about January/ February time. And then, maybe one month later, there was another eruption, an even worse eruption and they went back and did a new survey of that the following year. But I think after that, they stopped living on that island because it was just too unpredictable and every time there was an eruption, they had to be rescued. They had to send ships or helicopters in to rescue them. No-one was hurt but ...

[0:19:45] Darling: This is Signy Island. This is the island I lived on. It was in the South Orkneys. This is Coronation Island to the north and then Signy Island. Our base was just there. This was about maybe five miles long by about, say, three miles across. There is another main island here in the South Orkneys called Powell Island. It's not on this map. I might show you. There it is, there, that one there. That's Powell Island, that's right. Then Laurie Island, that's the one the Argentinians have a base on. We went to visit them in a boat. We got into trouble because the powers that be reckoned that we were ... it was too dangerous. But we still think we took precautions enough for that.

[0:20:49] Verdenius: What did you go and do there that's interesting? Just visiting?

Darling: Yes, just to visit them, really.

[0:20:57] Verdenius: How did you do? Were you going?

Darling: That's right, yes. We just wanted to do something really. Sometimes people would have holidays and for a holiday they would cross over to this island. They would climb the mountains if they were interested in mountain climbing. I wasn't good at mountain climbing but I liked the thought of trying to see ..., travel further along and just see further along these islands.

[0:21:28] Verdenius: Officially, of course, contact between the British and the Argentines was quite cold.

Darling: It was, yes.

[0:21:39] Verdenius: Also at times, probably the superiors in England wouldn't have recommended it.

Darling: I think if we'd asked them, they wouldn't have, no. From political reasons as well, as you say. In fact I think it was a bit of an embarrassment because it got in the Argentinian newspapers that we had visited there. What happened was: we'd 'recced'<sup>1</sup> it. In the winter we'd put at Schist Point, we'd put a depot of emergency food, in the winter when all the sea was frozen. We'd trekked a big depot of food, a packing case, perhaps 3-foot cube, with food and fuel. So we put that on there and then in the summer, the next summer, we went and visited this area. We came along the coast when it was good weather and we got as far as here, the Divide. There's actually a little gap through there and we got that far. And then we thought: well to get from there to here is possible, given good weather. So we just waited and waited until we got good weather, and we prepared the boat.

[0:22:54] Darling: It was the diesel mechanic and myself who wanted to do this because I used the boat a lot with my job anyway. We decked it in and we put a good covering, we got it loaded up and then just waited for good weather. We were in contact with the Argentinians on the radio anyway. We used to have quite good communication with them on a local level, and they were very good at predicting the weather, really good. So we asked them and eventually they said 'Oh yes, good weather for several days.' So we said to our base commander (because there was room for three in the boat), we said 'Do you want to come with us?' 'Oh no' he said 'I've got to come up on a radio sched with Headquarters. They are specifically asking to speak to me.' So we left about three in the morning because that was when the weather was good. We wanted to make use of it and went.

[0:23:48] Darling: And seemingly, what Headquarters wanted to speak to him about: they said 'Look, there have been too many trips off your island; people going for holidays and climbing mountains and it's dangerous and there's going to be an accident and then there is going to be real trouble.' So he then had to say to them 'Well actually I am very sorry but there is another party just left this morning, going

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<sup>1</sup> reconnoitred

off there.’ And they almost had kittens over it I think. And the trouble was: we got to the Argentinian island. What we meant really to do was just hand over our presents, say ‘Hello’, turn round, come back. But we were much more tired than we thought we were going to be, so they said ‘Stay. We’ve got a birthday party tonight. Go tomorrow morning.’ So we said ‘Right, we will stay.’ One of their people had a birthday party, and we thought ‘We will go next morning.’

[0:24:29] Darling: But by next morning the weather had changed so we were stuck there for a week or so, then. They were very hospitable and while we were there, one of the things we were able to do – which was really good fun – we were able to go round the north of the island to a place called Cape Geddes which is about halfway along this island here. And that was where the first British base on the South Orkneys was put down at the end of Operation Tabarin. One of the first FIDS bases was put there in 1946 and it had only been used, I think, for one year because the landing conditions were too rough. Although it looked quite nice, it was only on a very calm day that they could easily land. So after one or two years<sup>2</sup>, they said ‘No, we will move’ and they moved to Signy Island. But we were able to go and visit that hut and it was really good to go there because in fact it was in a bit of a mess. The Argentinians had not kept it clean and tidy; it would have been good if they had done, because it was a good refuge if people got shipwrecked or something like that. But there were still old tins of flour, old tins of food in the hut and that was twenty five years previously.

[0:25:48] Darling: And what is interesting is: we took some of the Argentinians in our boat to visit it because they had never been there. And they obviously heard us talking, saying ‘This is a bit of a mess.’ And when I visited it again about a year later, when I was doing a seal survey with my boss ... My boss was doing a seal survey and I was accompanying him, just counting fur seals. And when we got there again it had all been repaired, all been tidied, all the doors closed, everything. So the Argentinians had made it look really good. I did have a photograph of it but I can’t find that now. It was really funny; when we motored up near the Argentinian base – it took us about eight hours, I think it was, to get there. Their base was at the end of a long fjord, like a fjord, and you turn the corner, you start motoring in and several miles. We could see in the distance these tiny little huts. Then you could see a little man walking up and down. And then, all of a sudden, he spotted us. We hadn’t told them we were coming. We thought ‘We won’t say anything until we actually arrive.’

[0:26:58] Darling: And the excitement when we arrived, it was really ... You could see them looking. Obviously there would have been no ships for months and months and then for him to look out and see somebody coming must have been really quite a shock to him. What else can I show you? Those are the Weddell seals. That’s a mother and a pup. That’s a mother feeding a pup. When the baby is born, the mother is really really fat. She is really big and fat and the pup is born I think about thirty pound weight; weighs about thirty pounds when it is born. And it puts on weight at maybe thirty to fifty pounds a week. It really grows fast at the expense of the mother and by eight weeks, six to eight weeks, when the pup is weaned, the mother is all skin and bone.

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<sup>2</sup> One year, 1946. Four men wintered (see Database of Winterers).

[0:27:56] Darling: You can see her pelvic girdle. Whereas she is really fat there but she has lost all her blubber then in feeding the pup. One of my jobs was to put tags on the seal flippers, a little like cattle ear tags with a number on them, and then in future years, if you saw a seal with a tag on it, you could go and try and read the number. You could then work out when they became mature, when they had pups of their own, did they come back to the same places? This sort of thing. The pups that were small enough, you could put the tag in without worrying, as long as the mother wasn't too close. But the mothers used to get very agitated if you came up to their pups.

[0:28:39] Verdenius: Did they bite?

Darling: Well they didn't most of the time. They used to come up snapping like that, but I used to think that they would stop just before they got to you. So I used to rely on this and when I was teaching somebody who was going to do the seal tagging the following year when I went home, I said 'Oh they won't bite. No problem.' And I said 'You just stand still and they will come up to you like that. Then they will stop.' In fact I did a silly thing; I turned my back on one mother and she didn't stop and she bit me in the bottom. Fortunately she didn't break my skin. She just got hold of my trousers and then she shook me like this. She shook me right off my feet. As I was being shaken around, I could see this other bloke looking at me and he hadn't really wanted to do this anyway. He was looking at me as if to say 'Well I am certainly not doing this now.' And when she put me down, when the mother put me down, she had bitten through my windproof trousers, through my ordinary trousers, through my underpants and I'd had a metal comb in my pocket and she had crunched all that up.

[0:29:46] Darling: But fortunately she hadn't actually bitten me. But what used to be sad was: they weren't so much threatening as they were just anxious. They were agitated; they didn't know what to do. And sometimes if you came ... some mothers were so agitated that they would pick up their pup and shake their pup and I remember seeing a mother kill its pup doing that. I don't know what the technical term for it is but it was so agitated it didn't know what to do and it just did something silly like that. We tried to weigh these pups, that was the diesel mechanic and I. Adrian Gilmour, he designed a sort of beam balance that fitted on the back of a skidoo. Our skidoos in those days were really old ones. I haven't got a picture of one I don't think. No I haven't got a picture here but he engineered a balance and what we used to do was wrestle the seal into a Post Office sack, one of the sacks that our letters had come in, and then haul it up on this balance to try and weigh it.

[0:30:53] Darling: What you had to do: one of us had to keep the mother away while you did that. But, as I say, they put on weight very very fast, so they start about 30lb and by the time they're weaned they are between 200lb and 300lb. They put on an awful lot of weight. We weighed one; we got one that was a year old. We knew it was a year old because it had last year's tag on it. And that had actually lost weight between being weaned us weighing the year-old. It seemed lighter than the ones that were just weaned. I don't know that it had actually lost weight but it was less than the average of the ones that had just been weaned.

[0:31:36] Verdenius: But you were there when the seal started killing its own pups?



Darling: Yes, it picked it up by the neck and just shook it and it broke its neck I think. I think that's what must have happened.

[0:31:57] Verdenius: Did you feel bad about it?

Darling: Well yes, because we obviously wouldn't have done it if we'd known. Not all mothers were like that but this particular one was. The other thing you could do: if a seal charged you, what you used to do with your glove ... I used to hit it on the nose. If you hit it on the nose, you'd see it screw its eyes up like that and it would go back like that, almost as if you had half stunned it. That seemed a good way of ... But I was talking to Dr Laws who ended up as Head of British Antarctic Survey, but he had been on South Georgia and Signy Island right at the beginning, as a young man. And his subject: he had investigated elephant seals among other things. He told me that was one way to kill seals, was to hit them hard on the nose, with a pickaxe handle sweep, and that would kill seals. So maybe me hitting it with a glove, that was not a nice thing to do to a seal probably.

[0:33:07] Darling: What else have we got to show you? Skuas, they were nice birds. The skua gull, you get very similar ones or almost the same up in the North. They were scavengers and they would live off the penguin rookeries, getting unattended eggs or chicks that escaped, because the penguin chicks would group together in crèches, great groups together, but if any one got separated, then they would be harried and pecked to death by them. Very good fliers. They would nest in the moss and among the rocks and if you were walking anywhere near their nests, ... You would be trudging along, coming back to base, all tired, and if you didn't notice, if you were anywhere near their nest, they would scare you off. They would come down and bang you on the head, bang with their feet or their wings. They would come from behind and 'Bang!' like that and wake you up; you would be all annoyed.

[0:34:04] Darling: But we had one pair that nested only a few yards away from our base hut and they reared chicks there and they used to come and feed off the kitchen roof and there they were. To begin with, through the kitchen window, if you held food out in your hand, they would snatch and they have really got sharp beaks and that would hurt, but after a while they learned to take the food very gently and carefully so they didn't hurt you. Is there anything else I should be ...?

[0:34:50] Verdenius: Why don't you tell me about your first impression because we were talking about a film of everybody's first impression, what was said? Do you remember the first day, what you were doing?

Darling: First day? All I remember about it was arriving and I got off with all my luggage and going on to the base and it was almost empty because all the other people had gone on board the ship to see their friends or scrounge some food or something like that. So I don't remember really much else except the man who was left behind. There was the diesel mechanic called Roger and he found me a bunkroom to sleep in and I don't really remember much more than that. No I don't, on my first day. What was interesting: I got on all right with Roger. He was only there for a few months and then he left to go back home. I then discovered that he and another of the men had been at daggers drawn. They had not got on well at all. Yet it was a sign to me that

how you, for the sake of the common good, people suppressed all that and I hadn't picked up this animosity at all, not really.

[0:36:23] Darling: I had guessed that they weren't bosom pals but I hadn't guessed how the one got the other really annoyed until one of them left and the other was so pleased to see him go. I found that quite interesting. The diesel mechanic, he was on loan from the RAF and he was a bit older than the rest of them and he was quite a serious person. He wasn't flippant and the man he didn't get on with was a meteorologist but he had been a medical student and he had failed that and he was a good talker. He loved to talk and he liked to drink as well and he would love an argument so they were just two poles apart. They were two completely different personalities and they didn't get on. But I can't honestly remember my first day there. I can remember my first day leaving, on the ship, from Southampton because you wonder if you have done the right thing. I can remember that. Do you want tea or coffee or ...?

[0:37:34] Verdenius: Later on.

Darling: Right.

[0:37:37] Verdenius: That's about ten days sailing to wonder whether you did the right thing.

Darling: It was more. It was about three weeks. Yes, I went down on the *Biscoe*, the *John Biscoe*, and she was a slow ship: did about ten knots. It was about three weeks to Montevideo and then the ship broke down and then we went .... We stayed in Montevideo for several weeks and then we went to the Falkland Islands. When the ship actually sailed you thought 'Right, fine. It has happened now.' But it's when you are just waiting for things to happen that you wonder if you have done the right thing or not. But I never really thought I hadn't. I knew I was going to enjoy it and everything that people had told me about it. Like before I actually went down South, I did some training in the laboratories, to learn techniques, and they were often with people who had been in the Antarctic. So they would do like I am doing here. I hardly did any learning of new techniques but they would be bringing out slides and photographs and talking, telling you what it is like. So everything I heard made me think 'I am going to enjoy this.' I did too. It was a very enjoyable time for me.

[0:39:05] Verdenius: I expect you told me about this, that is certain. It's like I was involved in not just this part and this part ...

Darling: That's right.

Darling's wife: The best years of your life.

Darling: Yes, I made the mistake once of saying to one of my wife's friends, I said 'These were the best years of my life.' Then she told that to Alison and she has not let me forget it. It wasn't the best years of my life but they were the most carefree because I had just finished college. I had read Zoology as a degree. I hadn't got a good degree, not good enough to go as a scientist to do research but good enough for me to go. They were kind enough to take me as an assistant. So I had finished college,

finished exams, the first time I'd had some money because I had a job, travelling. It was really really good; it was very carefree.

[0:40:00] Darling: It was a very nice time. But what's interesting is that I've had, twice since then in recent years, I've had a dream where I've dreamt that I'm on the island. I've just got off the ship and the ship is spending the night and then the next day it's going to sail away and go back and then it won't come back for another year. In both these dreams, I've been very relieved to wake up and find that I'm not down there. It's funny, because I remember also when the ship came and dropped you off, OK that's fine, you get settled in. And then the ship, towards the end of the summer, it may pay a last visit to drop some mail off or to pick up all the people who were going home.

[0:40:47] Darling: On our island, at one time at any rate, it used to spend the night there, offload fuel into the big tanks, fuel tanks. So it would be there all night and then next morning it would sail off, and it was a relief when it had gone, because then there was no possibility ... You couldn't say 'I have changed my mind. I want to go home.' You knew you were there. But as I say, I found it interesting that in my dreams, I was relieved that I hadn't ... event though I know I would have enjoyed it, I'm relieved that I hadn't, in my dream, stayed on down there. Does that make sense? Do you understand what I mean?

[0:41:27] Verdenius: Yes.

Darling: You lose out on things. There's no family life down there. There's no ... There are good things but it's not something that I would like to do all my life, like some people seem to make a career of going down there year after year. I wouldn't like to have done that. I'm very glad that I've done it and I would love to go back again, but I wouldn't like to have that as all my life down there.

[0:41:55] Verdenius: Did you ever have a thought about staying on, when you were there?

Darling: Yes. I only signed on for one year originally and then when I was down there, they asked me if I would like to spend another year. So I said yes. So I spent two years, two winters, down there. Then when I came home, they offered me a job on the permanent staff as a technician helping scientists and I would have been based near Cambridge and the idea was that I would help scientists prepare their equipment and experiments to go down South. But also, every so often, I would go down South to do experiments, support senior scientists who couldn't spare the time to go down there.

[0:42:38] Darling: So in fact I worked for them for about eighteen months in that capacity. So if I had wanted to, I could have (assuming all had gone well), I could have stayed on as a permanent job there. But I then ended up thinking what I really wanted to do and there were little pointers like: even though I was the same age as some of the young scientists who were starting, they would say 'Oh I am going to do ... (this that and the other)' And I would say 'It won't work, no.' And I found myself getting maybe a bit short with them and they are my own age. I thought to myself 'What am I going to be like in ten years' time? I am not going to be a nice person to

live with, for that.’ And also the thought of ‘It would be very nice to go back down there for six months every few years but that would really disrupt any family life.’

[0:43:30] Darling: At least it seemed to me it would. So I decided to change careers then and I applied, went back to college to train to be a dentist and that’s what I have been doing ever since. I enjoy that very much too. I wouldn’t want to go back to what I had done, even though I enjoyed the Antarctic very much. I am trying to think. What do you think? Is there anything I have said in particular that you think strikes, struck you about me and the Antarctic?

Darling’s wife: I think it was lots and lots of opportunities to do different things. I was saying to ... I don’t know your name.

[0:44:08] Verdenius: Jaap.

Darling’s wife: Jaap? You know, like you were saying about equipment. It gave you the opportunity to be self-sufficient and not to be frightened of attempting to do different things.

Darling: Yes, it gave you a lot of self-confidence, I think, because I am not a particularly handy person. I’m not particularly ... I haven’t got particular skills in any direction, but if something breaks down, you can’t say ‘Oh, I will get an expert in to repair it’ because there isn’t an expert. So you have to repair it yourself or with the assistance of say the diesel mechanic, who is a good engineer. And you have to think to yourself ‘Well a man made this bit a machinery so another man can take it apart and maybe get it going again. OK, you didn’t always but it gave you a lot of self-confidence about attempting things.

[0:45:01] Verdenius: When did it start?

Darling: What, the self-confidence?

[0:45:09] Verdenius: No. What was the first time you had this piece of machinery you were [?? inaudible]?

Darling: I don’t know about the first one, but I can think of one. That was a seawater pump. It was a pump that we pumped water from the seabed, up into the tanks and back down again. That was one of my responsibilities, and that was always breaking down, always going wrong. It was like an Archimedean Screw really, that went through a rubber sleeve, so it could pump up things, and it always seemed to be breaking down. So that was one thing I can remember having to take apart and then put together again. And I learned all about outboard engines, two-stroke engines, because I had a lot to do with either of the outboards that powered our small boats or the two-stroke engine that powered the chainsaw. We were cutting holes in the sea ice. So I learned a lot about engines; not much, but enough to get by. Those are two things. What else? I think another thing that one learned was: it was good to work hard. Everyone there: you never seemed to have anyone who was lazy. People did their jobs because in a small group, if you don’t do your job then you are a real annoyance to everyone else. So that idea of working reliably and hard, I think it reinforced that.

[0:47:01] Verdenius: You told me that your irritation keeps under, somewhere down below. Like the two persons which you talk about. You found they had a quarrel that you didn't know about after two months. Is that the usual way of dealing with opposite characters in the Antarctic?

Darling: I don't know. Maybe I am particularly insensitive to things, but certainly the two years I was there, I found the people very easy to get on with. From my side of things, I didn't have any trouble. Maybe they thought I was awful and they had to make allowances for me, so maybe I was very insensitive. But we were fortunate. Most of the time I was there, we didn't have any trouble at all. But one of those books I was telling you about, that Roger Banks book, he deals quite a lot with the irritations that can develop.

Darling's wife: I think that there was ... Eric Twelves rang him up. He hasn't been in touch with Owen for years and years, has he? And one of your group had died prematurely.

[a break in recording]

[0:48:26] Darling: ... for your birthday. Every birthday would be really well celebrated. You would have a special meal. You all dress up in your suit and the chef will put on a special meal and things like that. And every Saturday, in the morning we would scrub out the whole base, clean the whole base, and everyone would have a job to do. All the jobs were broken down into however many people there were: 13 people. 13 jobs. Then the next week, you would do a different job and you would gradually go through all the jobs. So you would spend all Saturday morning cleaning the base, and then on Saturday evening, we used to have a special meal. From our own money we had bought frozen meat from Uruguay, beef steak. And we got lamb, or mutton, from the Falkland Islands. We bought that with our own money. And then on Saturdays we would have frozen meat as a special meal, and we would get dressed up, put on your suits and things like that. Then we would also have our base issue of booze.

[0:49:38] Verdenius: Did they know this at British Antarctic Survey, that you bought your own food?

Darling: Oh yes. We used to buy our own drink as well. We had a certain issue. When I was there, for the whole base you would get one pint of rum and one bottle of spirits for a week. Plus one can of beer per man. That was what the British Antarctic Survey supplied but we could buy in our own supplies of beer or other drink and we could buy in our own luxuries and they would come on the ships. They would come in at the beginning of the summer. Obviously we couldn't get them all the year round but just when the ships came in. So we used to do that. And on Saturday, on our base, we had a tradition of bringing out the base issue of booze on Saturday nights. After the meal we would have a party or sit and drink and talk or play bridge or something like that. And the rum was Navy rum. They don't give it now in the British Navy, but it used to come in big stone jars like that and it was very very strong and you used to have to dilute it with water.

[0:50:48] Darling: At least the Navy used to dilute it with water. We would be given a pint, I think it was a pint, of this per week, and it was a very nice rum. The first year I was there, people used to drink until all the booze was finished and someone would bring out his own case of beer. So a lot of people just kept drinking and drinking on Saturday night. So Sunday, most of them would sleep in really late and that wasn't the way I liked to do things because I liked if I could to take Sunday as a day off. Obviously I couldn't insist on it. If the whole week had been very bad weather with gales and storms, and the scientists hadn't been able to go out and do their diving, if Sunday was a clear day, a nice sunny day, I couldn't say 'Oh no, I am having a day off.' Obviously we went and did our work then but if I could, I took Sunday off, partly for religious reasons because Sunday is a special day to a Christian but also because not much happened on Sunday.

[0:51:48] Darling: Otherwise people were sleeping off, a lot of people were sleeping off all the drink they'd had the night before. Not everybody did this but a lot of them drank. And the second year I was there, people didn't drink nearly so much like that. They would drink until they'd had enough and then stop. And often there would be booze left over throughout the week and it would be up on the shelf and you could go and help yourself to it. So in the first year, people didn't do very much on Sundays but the second year, people were a lot more alert and active on Sundays and there was a lot more travelling done around the island and on the ice. I used to take Sunday off. I would go up in the hills or if it was in the summer I would take a boat out and I would motor off to a more inaccessible part of the island, just to see what I could see. It was really good.

[0:52:33] Verdenius: How was Sunday celebrated on the base?

Darling: By nothing really at all. Just the fact that people lay in more. It was the cook's day off so you always had an amateur cook cooking for Sundays. Otherwise people just did what they wanted. There was nothing special on Sundays. There were no religious services or anything like that.

Darling's wife: Was there a sense of equality? Did you all feel equal to each other?

Darling: Yes I did.

Darling's wife: There wasn't a sense of a leader or somebody who was ...

Darling: There was a base commander but he was appointed by London. He wasn't paid any more. He wasn't paid anything for doing that and there was such a tradition. Everything came down to routine, so he didn't have a lot of decisions to make, like 'Now we will do this' or 'Now we will do that'. He was there more if things went wrong or if foreign people were involved, visitors and things like that. But the British had a good idea in that, say in my first year – where's that picture? Right, so when I first went down, he had already spent a winter. He had spent a winter. I was new, he was new, they were new, new, new, new, new – no he had spent a winter. He had spent a winter. He was new, he had spent a winter, he was new. So half of them had been there for a whole winter. So they knew the geography, they knew what was safe, what was dangerous to do, OK?

[0:56:16] Darling: Then at the end of that year, they all left and then some more people came but by then, we were the old half who had lived there for a year. So we knew what was safe. For example when the sea begins to freeze, when is it safe to walk on that and what areas are always dangerous, what areas on the glaciers have got crevasses? All this sort of thing. Because you have got half the people there who knew what was going on, they quickly passed on the knowledge to the new people. Some countries, they will change a whole base every year. So they will have a team of men who will get together, train together in, say, Australia or New Zealand. I think they do it this way. And then they would, all of them as a lump, go down and replace absolutely everybody. But of course you have got people there with no experience then, so they are cautious.

[0:55:07] Verdenius: It's a discontinuity.

Darling: Yes, but I think the Antarctic Survey wouldn't allow you to spend more than two winters down there without coming home. I don't think I could have signed on for another winter. I think they would have wanted you to come home and then if you wanted to go down again, then you re-apply. I think that's the rule they had.

[0:55:28] Verdenius: What about Christmas?

Darling: Oh that was good fun, yes. One Christmas I was on Deception Island; then I was two Christmases on Signy Island. It was a bit like Midwinter: a big meal – chef makes a special meal and people make presents. We weren't really into that. Nowadays I think they make a great effort to make really nice presents for each other. Everyone makes one present, put it in a raffle and then you draw lots and whatever you get ... We didn't do anything like that but I think that's a nice tradition that has started. But Christmas is the summer so you often have a lot of visitors, summer visitors, scientists who come down just for the summer, or a lot of the carpenters (the chippies), they used to come down to do the building because that could only be done in the summer, a lot of it. So you would often have a lot of people on the base who weren't regular people. Midwinter was more like a little family and we would have two or three days of celebrations.

Darling's wife: What kind of things did the talk about, because you couldn't talk about sport, could you? you couldn't talk who played for such and such a match? Did you talk about girls. Did you talk about your work or ...?

[0:56:58] Darling: I am trying to think. People talked about ... sometimes they would talk about girls. I remember this one. He was an awful fellow in a way but he was quite funny and he would say ... His big thing when he got really into his cups and he got onto the subject of women, he would say 'I wouldn't like a daughter of mine to meet someone like me' he would say. But otherwise, what did people talk about? They would discuss sport: they would do: favourite football teams, this sort of thing. Or sometimes you would get an argument start up over something totally unimportant but almost for the sake of arguing.

[0:57:46] Darling: Like I remember I had an argument with Feenan, this one here, this radio operator. He was an Irishman. He loved an argument as well. I don't know if you remember it; you probably don't but in *Life*, the American magazine, there was a

famous photograph of a baboon being attacked by a leopard, I think it was, or some large cat. And this poor baboon was ... This photograph, it was a brilliant photograph taken just as the animal attacked it and we were going on about how good ... because we discussed photography a lot. Everyone took lots of photographs. That was one big topic of conversation. We were saying what a good photograph it was. Then someone said 'Ah well, you know how they did that?' He said that he'd heard that they had put the baboon and the animal in a small enclosure so the poor animal, poor baboon had no chance of escaping.

[0:58:37] Darling: So I took the argument that this was totally immoral and was not true to life and that devalued the photograph to me. But Tony Feenan took the opposite side 'No, it was a perfectly valid photograph and it was just a way of making sure you could get your photograph.' We argued about this, totally pointless. We argued, not getting that cross but just, you just keep arguing. I remember a man coming in saying 'What's all this?' And another one just said to him 'It's just two Fids arguing. It's a Fid argument.' Which was just the way people just said 'That's just what happens when you get two people talking about something that's unimportant.' What else did we talk about?

[0:59:23] Verdenius: You must have thought it was important to be arguing about it.

Darling: No, it wasn't really important but it was just something that you would get hot under the collar about.

Darling's wife: A statement?

Darling: Yes, but it wasn't really that important. I remember one bloke, he was new on the base, and he came in while we were having coffee, one coffee time, and he said 'This is like a doctor's waiting room.' Because we were all just sitting there reading magazines and we weren't talking much at all, so maybe after a while, maybe you run out of conversation a bit.

Darling's wife: Did somebody send you letters or somebody, girls wrote to you or something?

[1:00:02] Darling: Oh yes. This one here, John Edwards, his sister worked in a factory in Liverpool and he took lots of photographs of people on the base and he sent them to his sister and said 'Show these round the girls in your factory and maybe they would like to be pen pals, write letters', you see. And so we all got letters from these girls and we wrote back to them. But the photographs he took ... I have a habit, if I am concentrating, I sit there with my mouth open like this, and he had taken a photograph of me sitting there like this. The photographs must have looked really funny. I don't know what these people thought of us when they saw these photographs. Oh dear.

Darling's wife: You used to also talk to other bases, didn't you? One guy taught another base to speak ...

[1:00:54] Darling: Yes, this one here, Tony Feenan, he was really ... He used to talk to that Argentinian base nearby. They wanted to practise their English so he would



talk to the doctor and the base commander in English and they would practise English. But he went through a phase of talking in Old English, a bit like Samuel Pepys would have written, really old English and he would speak this over the radio to these Argentinians and he would teach them words that no-one ever uses nowadays in English at all. Like 'Merry Andrew' or 'How Droll'. Words that are not in common usage, he would be teaching them, these Argentinians. So I hope they are not too cross with him.

[1:01:37] Verdenius: Did you keep track of the news?

Darling: Not very much really. The only thing I remember is when the Americans walked on the Moon because our radio operator, he tried to tune the radio in. I can remember him coming and waking us up and saying 'Look, they are walking on the Moon.' But you could hardly hear anything and so we didn't really keep in contact. When I was there, our radios were all Morse code; there was no voice. So you couldn't hear anything. There was nothing you could tune in and listen to, so to get any news was so laborious that you just didn't bother really. So I can't remember that we took any notice really at all of it, no. To be honest, the time just flashed by. I took books.

[1:02:31] Darling: When I went down there, I bought a great load of books. I said 'These are really good books. I am going to take them and read them.' And I brought a lot of them back I never read after two and a half years. The time just seemed to go by so quickly.

Darling's wife: What happened to your scientific work when you didn't finish?

Darling: Well I wasn't doing any. I was assisting.

Darling's wife: What about ringing birds and all that sort of thing?

Darling: Someone else carried them on.

Darling's wife: They carried on?

Darling: Yes. Year after year it went on.

[1:03:00] Verdenius: I just read one line in the newsletters which said 'What's the use of breakfast when the sun isn't going up?' But Signy Island isn't so far to the south.

Darling: No. It would be daylight by nine, ten and it would be going down about two. And there would be light either end of that as well. So we had a decent day. Even in the middle of winter, we would have decent bit of daylight. In summer it never got truly dark, so it was quite nice. You could walk out really late and still get around the island. I was never conscious of the long ... People say when it gets really dark all the day you get depressed and this sort of thing. We never had any of that I don't think.

Darling's wife: I don't know if it has come over to you but certainly if you see some of his slides, people like party time, it was on the hysterical side.

Darling: Oh yes.

Darling's wife: There were things like you would get in the water. One guy went in the water, didn't he?

[1:04:19] Darling: That's right. Actually that is one thing. We were allowed alcohol so that meant that people did all manner of things. We were fortunate there were no accidents really, sometimes. I don't want to give the impression that we were totally irresponsible.

Darling's wife: It was on the borderline, wasn't it? One guy went in the water, didn't he?

Darling: One Christmas they all decided to go swimming in the sea, so they all went in the sea at midnight and the water is about zero degrees and it's really really cold. They just went in the shallows; they didn't go anywhere deep, just by the jetty. And then they came up racing back in and all got in a bath. I should think the big hobby everyone did was to take photographs. I must have taken 2000 slides and as many black and white pictures, and other people took more. And so of course if anything like that happened – someone going swimming with no clothes on – you would take photographs. So they came and got in the bath. I have got photographs of about six people in a bath, and you just took photographs of everything. And you could develop them yourselves. We had our own darkroom and you could develop colour pictures or black and white. So that was a thing we discussed a lot, was photography. People did that a lot.

Darling's wife: I believe that ...

[1:05:44] Verdenius: Do you have these photographs, six people in a bath?

Darling: Somewhere, yes. Have I? I have got them somewhere. What else?

Darling's wife: The cake?

Darling: Oh yes, the chef used to do you a nice birthday cake. The chef in the first year, he wasn't ... He did a beautiful birthday cake for my birthday but everyone had such a big meal that no-one wants to eat it early on in the evening. So you have a party for your birthday and you provide the booze for your party. And towards ...about midnight, one of them said 'We will cut the cake.' One of them said 'Would you like a photograph of your cake?' So he held it so I could take a photograph of it and then he put it down and it's one of these occasions when somebody does something and you think it is just perfect. And he put it down and he put his fist and he went smash, right in the centre of this cake and I have got a photograph of the cake all sort of shooting out. At the time it just seemed something I have always wanted to do and there's someone who has actually put his fist in a cake. Anyway we then had to quickly tidy the cake up so that the cook didn't ... because he hadn't noticed. And then we tidied it up and cut it up quickly so that no-one would notice.

[1:07:02] Darling's wife: But it was on the borderline; it's hysterical sometimes.

Darling: And we had one night when someone had too much to drink and he went off to the toilet and he somehow ended up outside. And he got himself lost outside and eventually we went looking for him and we found him on the edge of the beach with the waves coming up, and he was all soaked and all wet. So if he'd stayed out there, he would have died. This sounds really awful when I say it to you now but in fact when it happened it didn't seem as serious. It's only when you look back, you say 'Well maybe that was a bad thing.'

Darling's wife: What was the average age of all of you?

[1:07:47] Darling: I would think I was about average. I would be 21. A few a little bit older but not very many on our base. We were all about that sort of age: 21/ 22. Jake, he was the oldest. He was out of the Navy, so he would have been in his thirties. He was the radio operator; he was the oldest. Otherwise all of us ... He would have been a bit older, about 24/25 and we would have all been ... He might have been 24/25 and the rest of us would all been about 21/22 I think. And then in this lot, he would have been the oldest. He would have been in his twenties; the rest of us ... Well we were all in our twenties but he might have been late twenties.

[1:08:34] Verdenius: Did you all grow beards over there. Those in their thirties wouldn't show much beard.

Darling: I think we all wanted to grow a beard.

[1:08:45] Verdenius: This is a [?? inaudible] from the sixties.

Darling: Maybe. For me it was just that I wanted to grow one. I don't grow a beard very easily. In fact it grows more on one side than the other and it is ginger. My beard is ginger but when you are down there, no-one can see you so you have a go.

Darling's wife: When you came back, people had started growing their hair long, hadn't they? A lot had changed when you came back. You had an argument with your mother, about having a son with long hair.

Darling: Yes, it was really strange. My mother came to pick me up from Southampton when our boat came in to Southampton, She came to pick me up and she drove me home. It was the first time I had really been in a car for ... Well I had been in taxis in Montevideo, just on passing, but really apart from that, it was the first time I had been in a car for maybe three years. And I thought my mother was driving so fast; everything seemed to flash by. I remember saying to her 'We are in no rush, Mother.'

[1:09:39] Darling: But anyway if somebody drove in a funny way or did something wrong and I said something about that, 'That girl ... that was a woman driver.' She said 'No it isn't; it's a man.' When we got up, it was. It was a man with long hair.

Darling's wife: At that time, they had grown their hair long, hadn't they?

Darling: Yes. It was quite funny coming back. I had more trouble coming back, I'd say, adapting when I came back, than adapting going down there. Like I remember going to a family wedding just after we got back and all these people I didn't really

know very well. A sort of panic gets in you to be able to make polite conversation, and the sweat pouring off you. I can remember that and not feeling very good about it.

[1:10:41] Verdenius: It was strange foreign people?

Darling: Yes.

[1:10:45] Verdenius: Why was that?

Darling: If I had to summarise what were the things that I remember most vividly, I think one is the colour because everything is really much more colourful than I imagined because I was brought up, I used to like reading polar exploration books: Scott and Amundsen and things like that. But everything is much more colourful than I ever got the impression from those books. In all the photographs in those books, everyone looks grey and gaunt. It's very white.

[1:11:21] Darling: But the colours are tremendous especially when the sun shines. The sun can make the ice either look golden or red, depending on where the sun is in the sky. It can look ... The colour of the ice and the snow changes or the ice can look really blue and green. So colour is tremendous. And the way the wind shapes the snow into ridges and the way the frost forms on things. That is really beautiful. And the ice on the mountains and glaciers, things like that, I think. That sticks in my mind a lot. And I think the other big thing would be the animal life. It was tremendous because most of it was unafraid of man so you could get very close. There weren't many species, not many different species but what there are, they are there in vast numbers. So you see lots and lots of birds. I liked that a lot. And the other thing is the people. I think they were really ...

[1:12:25] Darling: As I say, I found it very easy to get on with them, maybe because we all wanted to be there and we all knew we were only there for a short time, so everyone made the most of it. But I know my mother – she only told me recently, since you phoned up and I told her you were coming. When I said I was going to the Antarctic, I wanted to go to the Antarctic, she was really quite concerned. She thought it was not a good thing to do. So she phoned up a lady she knew whose son had done the same thing ten years previously, called Peter Kimber. She had phoned up and she'd said 'Well do you think he should go?' because they thought maybe this was just me doing something silly. Then this one's mother said 'Yes, it made a man of Peter. It built him up, to go down there.' I know when I left my mother was crying and she said to my sister 'I will never see him again.'

Darling's wife: Now they live down the road.

[1:13:31] Darling: My dad took me to the train and I went up to London and then I caught a train from Waterloo down to Southampton. It was the last trans-Atlantic crossing of the *Queen Elizabeth*, the big *Queen Elizabeth* liner. It was the last time she was going to cross the Atlantic, so the train was full of people who were all dressed up; very posh people who were all going to go on this last crossing of the Atlantic. And then I met Malky Macrae. He was another person who was going to the Antarctic. I met him on the train. I knew he must be going there because he was the only one who was had a big rucksack and skis. He was from Glasgow. And we got on

board the ship and we hung around then for the next couple of hours. Then eventually we saw the *Queen Elizabeth* go off down Southampton Water. And then we went out and as soon as we got off, we went down into the Fiddery, into the mess room and we had a big pot of tea. I remember that and everyone relaxed a bit and got to know each other. It was really good fun.

[1:14:40] Verdenius: Do you have any special memories of sounds down there?

Darling: Sounds? Well there is one sound that I remember was when you were diving under ice, if there was ice and you were diving. Then there is no sound of the sea because there are no waves. If you hold your breath so you are not breathing out, then there is no noise of your bubbles either, and then if there is a seal anywhere nearby, you hear this sort of whistling. It's almost like an electronic whistling sound goes round. But I never ever saw any seals underwater but you get out of the water through your hole in the ice, and often with seconds a seal will pop its head up and have a look at you. And yet underwater, you will have heard them but you never saw them. There was that noise.

[1:15:33] Darling: Another noise was the penguins because a penguin rookery is really noisy, a constant noise. If there is another noise and sometimes like that island that we were on, a little island OK, and there is a big island to the north of us. And that big island to the north of us has lots and lots of glaciers. And sometimes from our island, if there was an avalanche, off one of those glaciers, that would make a tremendous noise and you would hear this rumbling, a bit like thunder. And if an iceberg turned over, sometimes that would also make a noise like that. I think that's about the only noises I can remember.

[1:16:20] Darling: The other noise is the noise of the diesel generator that makes your electricity because that's in the background 24 hours a day, throbbing away. And if you go off into the hills, say I would go out on my jobs across the island, there would be complete silence because you would be on your own. And then as you came home, you would come to the top of what we called the Stone Chute which was the slope going down to the beach where our hut was. And then when you got up there you could hear the noise of the generators. It was like the noise of home then. I can't think of any other noises. I think that's about all I can think of really.

[1:17:01] [End]

Possible extracts:

- [0:01:48] Steak & kidney pudding surprise.
- [0:04:21] Eating penguins and eggs.
- [0:07:46] The smell of penguins.
- [0:19:45] Visit to Laurie Island.
- [0:24:29] Visit to Cape Geddes (FIDS Base C).
- [0:28:39] Bitten by a seal.
- [0:34:50] Personal incompatibility on base.
- [0:45:09] Mending machinery.
- [0:48:26] Saturday scrubout and party.
- [0:49:38] Navy run and alcohol consumption.
- [0:57:46] Fids' arguments.
- [1:00:02] Girl pen-pals.
- [1:04:19] Midnight sea swimming at Christmas.
- [1:05:44] A smashed birthday cake.
- [1:11:21] Antarctic colours.
- [1:14:40] The noises of seals, penguins and generators.