

ALFRED STEPHENSON

Edited transcript of interview with Alfred Stephenson (ex: BGLE) conducted by Jaap Verdenius in 1993. BAS archives AD6/24/3/24. Transcribed by Allan Wearden in March, 2021.

[Part 1 0:00:00] Verdenius: The first thing you should tell me is how you got involved with the Graham Land expedition.

Stephenson: Well it followed on from two previous expeditions namely in Greenland in 1930/31 and North West Canada in '32/33, but the reason I got involved was my interest in Shackleton and the Antarctic in the 1920s. I heard Shackleton lecture just before he went on his last expedition, I was in the Scout movement and then the Senior Scouts; you have not animal patrols but Shackleton group and the Scott group names of famous people. I got interested in reading up the life of Shackleton and everything he had done. Then I went to Cambridge and my professor was Professor Debenham who had been with Scott and was the director of the newly founded Polar Research Institute, so all that combined to give me an interest in the Polar Regions. And when I completed my university course Watkins was just about to go to Greenland and he wanted a surveyor, and Professor Debenham suggested that I was a suitable person so I went! And ever since then I've had this interest in Polar affairs, and I went to Greenland and then I went to Canada, then when I came back from that Rymill, who had been with us in Greenland, five of us went to Graham Land who had been in Greenland so we all knew what was happening in the way of planning the expedition. And I was lecturing at Cambridge just wondering whether I should go on lecturing or should I go with Rymill and one of my colleagues said 'Course you're fortunate, you can go and do exactly what you like and will be your research work'! My research work has to be done in the office here and that clinched the matter and I said 'Right, I will go with Rymill'! And that's how I decided to go finally.

[Part 1 0:02:42] Verdenius: Can you tell me about the lecture of Shackleton?

Stephenson: Yes.

[Part 1 0:02:49] Verdenius: That started it all?

Stephenson: That was his - he had come back from his *Endurance* Expedition 1914-16 and of course the war was still on so it wasn't until 1920/21 that he was thinking of going on his last expedition, the one on which he died! And he was going round the country lecturing, raising money for that last expedition, and at the same time he had just published *South* and my father had bought a copy of that, and that and hearing the lecture gave me great interest in the Antarctic.

[Part 1 0:03:36] Verdenius: Did he tell this picture of the Antarctic?

Stephenson: Oh, it was chiefly a record of the *Endurance* Expedition with those magnificent photographs taken by Hurley of the *Endurance* being crushed in the ice! Then the open boat journey across to South Georgia, all of which was thrilling adventure and very suitable for me

as the patrol leader of the Shackleton group of the Scouts, to go back and tell them all about it! Then I read up all I could possibly find on Shackleton....and that was expedition has was planning to take a Scout with him, it was Scout Marr, who later did a lot of work with the *Discovery* Investigations. That was Shackleton's last expedition that one, the one on which he died in South Georgia.

[Part 1 0:04:50] Verdenius: Did it sound like an adventure?

Stephenson: Did it sound like what?

[Part 1 0:04:57] Verdenius: An adventure?

Stephenson: Oh yes! Very much so. I mean that open boat journey of Shackleton's was a tremendous adventure going from the marooned party on Elephant Island over to South Georgia! Oh I think that was the thing that appealed most because I remember when I was thinking what to study at Cambridge, I was talking to a tutor there and I said I wanted something that would take me outside where I would work in the open and he suggested topographical surveying was the obviously thing to read when I was at the university. And that of was the answer, it gave me something to do in the field combined with adventure.

[Part 1 0:06:01] Verdenius: You left in 1950, no 1934?

Stephenson: '34 was when I was still lecturing in the Geography Department at Cambridge and Rymill was planning his expedition. I knew all about it because of the various people going with him, we'd all been together in Greenland. And he was anxious for me to join him but I wasn't quite certain whether that would affect my future career, but in the end I decided to go with him as Chief Surveyor, for which I was very glad because I like to think the main results of the expedition were topographical, namely finding King George VI Sound and putting it on the map and that really was putting entirely new country on the map! And there hasn't been much chance of doing that since, that was just about the last bit of unknown land!

[Part 1 0:07:12] Verdenius: Do you remember your first impressions of going to Antarctica and stepping ashore, going ashore?

Stephenson: The first impression is especially the part of the Antarctic we were into which is quite different to Shackleton/Scott side topographically. It really is magnificent scenery and one is really very impressed indeed with these sheer rock walls! And everything is so sheer that they all go straight into the sea, and then you've got ice bergs, there's no tundra or anything like that in Greenland, or no flat side like the ice shelf in McMurdo Sound on Scott's side, we went straight into really magnificent scenery which unfortunately was not an advantage, we couldn't find anywhere to find a base. All the mainland, you see Graham land is continuation of the Andes, the Andes come down, sweep round the Scotia Arc and down Graham Land so that they're really a magnificent volcanic range and as a result everything goes straight into the sea, and we couldn't find a base on Graham Land itself. We had to choose some of the islands and winter our ship between two islands and that really was impressive going through those narrow channels of ice, so dense that sides of the ship were touching ice on both sides between the rock! So that was the first impression, which didn't

inspire the surveyor as it was going to be difficult country to map and so completely different that we had known in Greenland, where you got a lot of tundra and flat lakes and grassland and spring flowers, more like Switzerland. So it was in scenery impressed me most on arrival, then the moment we set up our base I had to think about mapping it and to begin with that would obviously have to be done from the islands or wait until the winter came then do it from the sea ice, but very difficult to get on to the mainland at all....at our first base then we moved 200 miles further south, still on an island but we were able to get on to the mainland.

[Part 1 0:10:17] Verdenius: Can you look up what you wrote at this first stage?

Stephenson: [Looking up in his diary, pages turning.] I was acting as the cook at the time, describing cooking as the ship was rolling getting stuff into the oven! *'However these trials will soon be at an end now. This morning at 7.15 am I was on lookout and I had the pleasure of making the first landfall, it was a dull misty morning of about 34°F and low mucky clouds. Suddenly through the top of low cloud I saw a snow capped mountain and a long snowy ridge, the higher lands of Smith Island about 6600ft! Later in the morning they became very clear and we had been passing it most of the day. Whales seemed very abundant and we had passed about 20 icebergs. Some of these are definitely tabular bergs from some ice shelf, exactly where we cannot imagine yet'*. [More page turning].... *'Then we got to Port Lockroy. Here we are at last tucked away in the most amazing harbour namely Port Lockroy. Ham and Doc are very fit they having had gone ahead with the aircraft. Our arrival at 7.30 pm completely surprised them and we had dropped our anchor about 200yards away from their tent before Ham came out and saw us. We entered the Schollaert Channel at about 5am and then came into the De Gerlache Strait and took the first turning on the right into the Neumeyer Channel and so to Port Lockroy. The most surprising thing about this scenery was the low level of snow and ice in fact sea level apart from the precipitous slopes there is no rock visible, the snow in the form of valley glaciers and stranford [phonetic] glaciers comes right down to the water and stops dead without entering the water, in fact there is a very narrow ledge of rock running along the sea line the general height is between 4000 and 7000ft. And on the whole very precipitous in fact travelling will be rather difficult what is going to happen now I don't know? They're discussing it at the moment. An exciting part is when we went through the Lemaire Channel'*. [More pages turning and gap] I think I must have been so taken up with cooking, I was on duty cook at this particular time, I didn't describe the exciting bit going through the Lemaire Channel!

[Part 1 0:16:28] Verdenius: But you still remember it?

Stephenson: Pardon?

[Part 1 0:16:31] Verdenius: But you still remember it very well?

Stephenson: Oh yes! Well I'd been looking at that particular feature ever since, it's the one over the dining room table, big picture there, see Lemaire Strait! It's the most biggest tourist attraction, it's known as Kodak Corner in the BAS, just absolute vertical like that, just room for the ship to get through if it isn't blocked with ice though sometimes the ships have to go round the outside. Sometimes they come through the Lemaire Channel but that is typical of

the whole coastline of that part of Graham Land as we called it in those days. It's now half Palmer Land and half the Graham Peninsula....but we still refer to BGLE British Graham Land expedition. But that really was not only the biggest difference that impressed us most, namely the sheer verticality of the rocks so vertical that snow wouldn't stay on them, so either you had glaciers and valleys or you had steep rock and that worried us considerably as we want to get on to the mainland for our main base but there wasn't a chance.....You see everywhere bare rock, then it came down to a narrow bit of ice and glaciers and everywhere ice, no hope of getting on to mainland....I mean that's absolutely typical bare rock glaciers coming down, and this is what we called a fringing glacier all the way along the coastline, make it impossible to set up a base on the mainland!.... I showed to you my other photos.

[Part 1 0:19:38] Verdenius: Were you the first one to go to these parts?

Stephenson: Sorry?

[Part 1 0:19:45] Verdenius: Where you the first ones to go through these parts?

Stephenson: Yes. Everyone was on deck thinking whether we'd actually get through. We'd known from reading Charcot's accounts that at sometimes it was completely blocked with ice, at other times you could just squeeze a ship through, then we managed to squeeze our way through but you are hitting an ice berg on one side and up against the rock on the other side. There were no submerged rocks the mountains went absolutely straight down so it's a very deep channel but it's just a case of getting between the land itself and the ice bergs floating around!

[Part 1 0:20:38] Verdenius: What kind of ship?

Stephenson: This was....a Newfoundland Banks schooner, three mast top sail schooner which, you see, the whole problem with the Graham Land expedition was that there was no money available in those days! And we couldn't afford to charter a ship, a special ship, and when Rymill was looking around Dr. Charcot in Paris who had been down in Graham Land in 1904 & 1912, he got in touch with Rymill and said 'I think there's a ship in St. Malo which will suit your purpose. It's a three mast top sail schooner converted by an American into a cruising yacht but his wife doesn't like it, and it's for sale! So Rymill decided the only way to get to the Antarctic was to buy our own ship and sail it down there ourselves, not charter a crew or have any specialists other than we could find in the navy. So it was an old ship, only 250 tons, 112ft overall but it took our membership of 16. We were very fortunate in getting a skipper, Captain, then Lieutenant Ryder who had designed his own yacht and sailed it back from Hong Kong - that impressed Rymill - and the navy were prepared to release him. So he came as the captain of the ship; his brother was another ocean sailor but he was in the army and he came as First Mate, Second Mate, and we had James Martin who had been with Mawson in the Antarctic as the First Officer, who had done a lot of work with the sealers in Norway. Apart from those three professionals the rest were members of the expedition. The ship was old, the engine beds were new green wood and they warped so we had a lot of trouble with them, but on the whole it got us there and it got us back, but it wasn't the ideal way of doing it! See, the whole expedition including the ship and the aircraft, they had a Fox

Moth aircraft, cost £20,000 for three years in the Antarctic, ship and aircraft for £20,000, which was doing it on what we call a shoestring! So we had to be very careful with the ship, and the engine beds had warped the wooden part of the engine beds so we hadn't got full use of the reverse engine, so we had our own motor boat which towed us round corners!

[Part 1 0:23:55] Verdenius: How did you feel about it?

Stephenson: Sorry?

[Part 1 0:23:57] Verdenius: How did you feel about it going there on a shoestring, with a boat which?

Stephenson: Fortunately, well I've spoken generally so far. I didn't sail down in *Penola*, I got on to *Penola* at Port Stanley. Hampton and I were in charge of the dogs and they had come to England earlier than *Penola* was leaving so we left on a transport ship, came down to the Falkland Islands and had three months wait in the Falkland Islands before *Penola* came down there. So I didn't have the initial worries of the other members of the crew, who having to learn to be seamen on the way down, by the time they got to Port Stanley they were an efficient crew and as it happened I'd also broken my finger and that was all plastered up so that's why I was on duty as cook! And occasionally took my turn at the wheel but by then we were motoring most of the way not doing much sailing once we got into the Antarctic waters. But I think in retrospect people writing about the expedition did think it was an amazing effort for Ryder and two seamen really who really knew what they were doing taking onboard 13 people who were not sailors, but they got there!

[Part 1 0:25:49] Verdenius: To get on to the mainland later and what happened then?

Stephenson: When we got down to our second base we were then sufficiently far south to be able to be quite certain the frozen sea ice would be quite early, we could start working from the sea ice much more easily than we could at our first base. Early sea ice was always a little bit doubtful, we did do quite a bit surveying from it but it was all done from sea ice not much in land. Then when we got down to our second base our main object was to fly south and see where these channels were which Sir Hubert Wilkins had said existed. He said Graham Land wasn't a peninsula it was an archipelago and a series of islands with channels coming through from the Weddell Sea, and our aim was to get through one of those channels into the Weddell Sea but in the process of trying to find those channels we made our major discovery, namely that Graham Land was part of the continent! And we discovered King George VI Sound and the whole of Charcot Island - we didn't know when we began whether Charcot Island was an island or part of the continent - and we also thought Wilkins was right and there where channels through into the Weddell Sea. But here I think, [must be showing a photo and maybe a map] yes, that's what it was like when we went down there and our first base was up here, although we weren't able to do very much owing to poor sea ice, and our second base was down here. And then we were able to sledge down on the sea ice looking for these channels, none of them appeared! And at that stage Alexandra Island finished there, then after one or two flights we did our major sledging journey which was down into that gap. We found that gap and had no idea what there was here. Then we sledged till we came

to the end, that was our sledge journey.... and the whole of this was entirely new, nobody had even seen that before (that's a quote in my diary you might be interested in). And then whilst we were down there Lincoln Ellsworth was flying down here and flying across his Antarctic flight from which he discovered the Eternity Mountains which are down here, but he didn't really know where he was! He took photos which I was able to get hold of and by looking at his photos and looking at some that Bingham and Rymill took I found very fortunately indeed the photograph of the same mountain that Ellsworth had taken, so I was able to fix Ellsworth's flight, and then when that was done all the rest fell into place! But that was the exciting part of the map work after I got back, and the exciting part when I was down there was just going on and on down King George VI Sound as we called it later, looking for these channels. It's a whole series of promontories and glaciers then rocky promontories and then another glacier; you would go on saying 'Ah, just round the next promontory will be one of Wilkins' Sounds!' As soon as you got to that promontory all you saw was another promontory further on! And you went on sledging always hoping to find a channel through but none of them ever appeared, and in the end Graham Land swung round in front of us joined up with the main continent, it was part of the main continent. We were able to prove that Graham Land was a peninsula and not an archipelago! And in doing all that we were mapping the new part of Alexandra Island on our whist [phonetic], which was an exciting part because suddenly volcanic rocks stopped and we had sedimentary limestone rocks with fossils, fossil shells(!) which we were able to link up with similar fossils right at the northern end of the peninsula, that was quite an exciting find, but absolutely nothing in the way sedimentary rocks on the mainland it was only on Alexandra Island halfway down, suddenly you got these sedimentaries.....you see in there they're fairly stratified? [Must be looking at photos.]

[Part 1 0:31:55] Verdenius: How did Wilkins get to the idea that, how did Wilkins conceive this idea of the channels?

Stephenson: He flew down one of the very early flights in 1929, but in those days nothing like the navigational aids which they had later he really didn't know what his speed was, he didn't know exactly where he was! But he took these photos and assumed they were channels. He thought he was much further south than he was and he thought he had reached the continent and these channels were going through, which could have been glaciers but he thought they were sea ice. And then when Ellsworth went down, he was doing his trans-Antarctic flight while we were down there, and he signalled back to us - the main channel through was called Stefansson Strait - and Ellsworth sent us a signal saying Stefansson Strait does exist! So that confirmed we better go down and look and find it but we didn't! And what happened I'm pretty certain was what Wilkins saw was much further north and not the peninsula itself, but also since then one of the people working on the maps just had an idea and she said 'I've just plotted the height of the fog', you get a lot of fog down there, mist, and she plotted it at that particular height all over southern Graham Land and the fog filled in the valleys in exactly where these channels were, so it's quite likely what Wilkins was looking at were fog filled valleys and not at sea level! But that has never been printed, that was just her idea but it could have been what had happened.

[Part 1 0:34:10] Verdenius: You also said the pilots didn't know where they were when they were flying?

Stephenson: Not exactly no! And they knew approximately that they were crossing the end of the archipelago as they thought and they had taken photographs but they couldn't pin point it latitude and longitude very precisely. So although Lincoln Ellsworth flew across the bottom end of King George VI Sound he thought it just a big glacier, but he couldn't state exactly where it was and he knew when he got to the end what his total flying was but not enough to make exact topographical decisions. It's not until I was working on my photos and his photos that very fortunately....that's a photograph taken by Bingham on the East Coast of Graham Land, that's a photograph taken by Ellsworth and I was able to locate those two and decide they were the same mountain!

[Part 1 0:36:10] Verdenius: How did it feel about finding those channels?

Stephenson: We always had our doubts and we weren't disappointed! We would have been disappointed if we hadn't been able to prove that Graham Land swung round and was part of the main continent. We got sufficiently far south to see that and Alexandra Island tapered out and finished on our right and Graham Land swung right the way round and was obviously part of the main continent! As a result of that we were very pleased because we had proved something which everybody always thought was the case, namely that Graham Land was part of the main continent! And we disproved Wilkins theory that one could get through into the Weddell Sea through those channels. No, I think we were very pleased to prove that it was part of the continent! And Alexandra Island which is a massive island to the west going all the way down the sound going up to 11,000ft, the highest mountain which is now Mount Stephenson is on Alexandra Island, that got lower and lower until you came to a very low point which is Stephenson Point actually which swung round to the right. But that was a very exciting sledging journey, entirely new country. We had seen part of it from the air, Hampton and I had made reconnaissance flight, Rymill and Hampton first saw the opening but they thought it was just a bay with high land in behind, then we made another flight later on Hampton and I and were able to go into that opening and found that it was a channel going off but we hadn't got enough petrol to go any further. But we decided that was the thing to do, we would make a major sledging journey and go down and see where this channel led to and at the same time Rymill and Bingham were going east across the mainland, which they did fortunately because they got over to the other side and took those photos which we were able to link up with Ellsworth.

[Part 1 0:38:47] Verdenius: How many were you on this sledging journey?

Stephenson: From beginning of October to late November....I always forget the dates of these journeys!

[Part 1 0:38:58] Verdenius: No, no how many people!

Stephenson: Three.

[Part 1 0:39:09] Verdenius: Three?

Stephenson: Lancelot Fleming, he was our padre and our geologist, and Colin Bertram who was our zoologist, and myself, and being a major surveying journey and I'd already seen it from the air I was leader of the party. And Lancelot Fleming of course was thrilled when we discovered these sedimentary rocks when the igneous rocks finished and then the sedimentary, because then there was the chance of getting ashore and finding a fossil! But we continued south to begin with as far as we could go with igneous rocks on our left all the way, then we decided we'd have to turn back but we came back up on the west side of the sound in order to land where these sedimentary rocks were.....[looking at his notes long gap] 24th of May? [Again long gap] *'Oh, held up on the sea ice for quite a long time before we started going down the sound.....yes we were just at the beginning of the sound round about September the 21st....this is on the way back. We had stopped at the edge to discuss where we were, this was in the middle of the sound on the way back, then Colin decided to ski down to the bottom to see if it was too steep for the dogs. Exceptionally bad light and Colin and I walked down slowly what appeared to be an even slope to the bottom I wondered when passing a big ice cliff what it would be like to fall over the edge? Now I know! Colin and I where both talking and he was just saying it looked as if we were nearly at the bottom and then in one second 'dam me if we weren't!! But it was another 30ft down with no warning whatever the ice beneath us ceased to be and we where hurtling through space! There was little time to think and all we realised was I was falling rapidly through space for what felt like a hundred feet and then full stop! There was no doubt we where both extremely lucky it was an overhanging ice cliff 25-30ft high so nothing gradual about it, Colin fell on his arm and side whilst I fell head first and very fortunately it was soft snow he was unaware that I had come over with him and was shouting out up to the top to tell me he was alright when he found me next door to him! Somewhat twisted and tangled in my skis and what's more I still feel very twisted mid-ships and a little stunted in the neck otherwise we had no ill effects what's so ever! ' That was on the way back.*

[Part 1 0:43:43] Verdenius: How did you get out?

Stephenson: Pardon?

[Part 1 0:43:45] Verdenius: How did you get out?

Stephenson: We walked along the bottom until you came across a banked up snow drift then climbed up that to the top, because the man that was most worried was Lancelot Fleming who was left on the top with the dogs wondering what had happened to us and what he would do if we didn't come back! But those are the sort of things that happen. [Long gap sorting papers] Think we got back at the end of November [another long gap], yes, got back to our depot on November 15th -September 15th to November 15th, must have been two months.

[Part 1 0:45:25] Verdenius: What did you take along on the sledge tour?

Stephenson: Sorry?

[Part 1 0:45:29] Verdenius: What did you take along on a sledging tour, what kind of things?

Stephenson: What kind of things?

[Part 1 0:45:37] Verdenius: You went on a sledging journey?

Stephenson: Yes?

[Part 1 0:45:41] Verdenius: What materials did you take along?

Stephenson: In the way of clothing, food?

[Part 1 0:45:49] Verdenius: Yeah!

Stephenson: Well there were the standard sledging rations which had been worked out for us when we were in Greenland, but they were based on calorific value of 6000 calories a day which was too much! But it's the sort of thing which the army still has, still recognised as the standard hard working man's diet! But it varies how those calories are made up but we were still doing it on knowledge which goes back to 1925, long before any of the modern military packs were invented! So we had on the whole we were eating about 24-30 ounces a day the, ration was 36 I think, but we didn't really need it, a full ration, they were all packed in ration boxes to last two people for one week, or one man for two weeks. We were three, we had two people in one tent and one in the other one so that I had the single tent so I could do my mapping and plotting on the map at night, the other two in the other tent, and those ration boxes provided the food. We had dogs, we had one team each, three teams of seven dogs and that made up most of the load on the sledge. Dog food they had 1lb a day of pemmican about that thick and five inches square, and then the other gear would be tents, sleeping bags, spades and shovels and the surveying equipment. I had to have a wireless, a long wave set, short wave wasn't working in those days, it was quite a big set, and my theodolite and tripod for the theodolite. The meteorological work was quite small hand held instruments for temperature and wind, for main surveying we had an aircraft compass, a liquid compass, about five inches in diameter which was fixed to the back of my sledge as I was plotting the course. So most of the gear was food or surveying instruments, clothing chiefly was....

[Alfred's wife interrupts, saying 'Have you switched it off?' Then he comments saying she had lost the use of her hand but getting better, but she has to play the piano as that's the best way of keeping her fingers going]. So our clothing was thick socks, woollen underclothing, and for footwear at that time of the year when it was very cold and dry snow, reindeer skin moccasins. And big windproof on the outside is the most important garment is the windproof then underneath that as many sweaters as necessary according to the temperature. But when you're sledging we don't ride on the sledge there's too much already so you ski alongside the sledge and that's pretty warm work! So you take off quite a number of sweaters and just have your windproof on, then when you stop you put on a woolly again. But on the whole temperatures didn't worry us too much; we had some fairly cold temperatures, but generally speaking the colder the temperature better the going on the ice! But all three teams pulled very well all the way there, didn't lose any dogs and came back, and we sledged by driving our dogs holding on to your sledge handle. You're on skis and you ski alongside your sledge but we don't have one man walking ahead, we rely on driving the dogs and using sounds to direct them. I was very surprised when I read about Amundsen's journey to the South Pole, he had a man going ahead what they call a forerunner breaking trail all the way, that's not

dog driving! [Little laugh] We believe in driving our dogs from behind and let them show us the way which they did very well!

[Part 1 0:51:04] Verdenius: How did you learn to drive them?

Stephenson: We, some of us had learnt in Greenland with Watkins, we were sledging there quite a bit, but it's just a case of learning to use the word of command for right and for left, to stop and go, and using your dog whip not to hit the dogs but to train them! If you want them to go to the left then you use your dog whip with a tremendous crack, they're about 15ft long, I've got mine upstairs(!), and make the crack on the right and called out 'Irre' and the dogs would go to the left usually! And on the left and drive them to the right but eventually we had over 116 dogs at the base at one time many of whom had been born down there that we had trained, so quite a number of expert dog drivers on the expedition!

[Part 1 0:52:14] Verdenius: Did you learn to drive dogs down there?

Stephenson: I learned in Greenland and Rymill, Bingham, myself [ha!], five of us Riley, Hampton and Bingham and myself, five that had been in Greenland had all driven dogs there. So we were able to tell other people how to get on with it and we taught them, so we weren't doing it entirely from the beginning as we were in Greenland. In Greenland Watkins was the only one who had learnt to drive dogs in Labrador and he had to teach us. But no, I think possibly...were very good at sledging with dogs and that was carried on into FIDS with Dr Bingham because he was with us and looked after all our dogs. Most doctors on Antarctic expeditions are there primarily to look after the dogs! They look after the people that break their ankles but basically they seem to be in charge of the dogs and Bingham was very, very good and loved his dogs and a very good dog driver, and had been in Labrador driving dogs there as well. And then after the war he was the first, almost the first to go down with the Falkland Island Defence Survey, so there was a carry through of dog driving from our expedition to the first Fids. Bingham was the link between the two and they carried on using dogs until Snowcats and tractors took their place, but the link and the skill of dog driving was carried forward from Watkins to Rymill to Bingham to FIDS!

[Part 1 0:54:24] Verdenius: How long does it take to learn to drive dogs?

Stephenson: Depends on the conditions and your temperament - needs a lot of patience! But providing you've got a good stretch of open sea ice near the base and you can get on to that and you're prepared to do some quick running yourself, because if you want to force the dogs to go around you can flick your whip. But if the dogs are on a long trace, 2-4-6-7, your leading dog can be 30ft away from the tail end of the sledge so in order to get up and drive round a corner when you're training you have to run up and flick your whip right up from the front so you've got to be very fit! And you can't really do it in deep soft snow, you want good conditions, but given good conditions and feeling fairly fit you can manage it, but some of the dogs had been trained in Labrador - we bought them in Labrador - so they were fairly easy; the real problem is training the pups, and for that you take out a team with the mother of the pup in the team and put the pup on the sledge then when you get away from the base and you're driving quite happily, you throw the pup on to the snow and he'll run up and join his

mother and he will learn to run with the team and gradually they very quickly learn and you can start training a pup at six months. And most of the dogs we had on the King George VI Sound journey were born in Graham Land and trained down there because we'd been there for well over a year and a half when we started that journey. No it was, it's very exciting dog driving and if they are going well and you're going into new country and putting in newer material on to your map you can put up with all the hardships as long as you are getting something done! No, I enjoyed that part of the work very much, then there was always the other part of the work living at the base and taking your turn at cooking, doing one week's cooking and looking after your dogs at the base, hunting for seals to feed them - that's not so difficult in the Antarctic, much more difficult in the Arctic! You've really got to be a hunter to get seal in the north, down south they have never been hunted and there just lying around on the floes. We killed an enormous number as soon as we got there, dug a big ice cave and put all the seals in on to ice so no real problem at the base. When you're sledging you're using pemmican.

[Part 1 0:57:50] Verdenius: You also said that you were mapping at night?

Stephenson: Mapping?

[Part 1 0:57:53] Verdenius: Or were drawing at night in your tent?

Stephenson: Oh yes. Well during the day what I was doing we were sledging on a known course and I'd make a note of the course and every time we changed I'd note the time and the change of course, and every time we stopped. We had a rule that we would stop every two hours when you're sledging, as opposed to someone going on and on. If the leading sledge goes on you've got to follow and some people like Watkins would be determined to go on and on to get there, you never knew when he was going to stop! And you were longing and longing to have a spell to do something or make a fresh lashing on your sledge, so we had a ruling there would be a break every two hours, then if you'd got any odd job to do on the sledge or in my case I would take compass bearings to features on both sides. So I had a two hour sledge journey between two known points on a known course and then when we stopped I would take compass bearings to various features, then at the next stop I would take compass bearings back and in that way they would be fixed, but all I wrote down in my notebook was the name of the feature or did a sketch and wrote the bearing underneath. Then at night I had to plot those; I had charts of the area blank just latitude and longitude and on that I was plotting the map as we went down the sound, which was quite exciting seeing it grow as we went on, with nothing on the map at all before the whole thing was entirely new which was very thrilling! That and every 50 miles I would stop and with my theodolite take an astronomical fix on the sun or, and with my wireless time signal, set fix the latitude and longitude. So at every 50 miles we had a good fix of latitude and longitude then between that every two hours or whenever I thought necessary stop and take compass bearings and in that way filled in the map. And all those maps are at the Polar Research Institute in Cambridge, I was looking at them the other day.

[Part 1 1:00:37] Verdenius: When did you sleep?

Stephenson: When did we sleep!? Usually we got on depending on the weather we'd always set the alarm for quite early in the morning and if the weather looked good we'd be up and about, usually took two to three hours to get up have breakfast, break camp, pack up your sledge and get going. So usually you'd set alarm for between four or five o'clock in the morning and then look out of the tent and see whether if it's going to be a sledging day or not. If it was you've got to move on and sooner you got going the better. If we could start sledging by eight or half past then we were quite happy, then at night well we just went to sleep. And you'd travel as far as you could but not over doing it, you just knew we had more to do the next day, so we would and it was getting dark so we'd stop! In the earlier days we began September when there was night and stars, in fact I was doing star observations at the beginning of the journey in September and then by the time we got into November it was daylight all night!

[Part 1 1:02:01] Verdenius: You took three hours for breakfast?

Stephenson: No, well it takes quite a time. After waking up you've got to get in a, you would have filled up your pot with snow the night before and put that just inside the tent, then you've got to light your primus stove, warm up that water, cook your porridge - that's your basic food for the morning - and put into that milk powder, lots of butter so that you had a good fill of porridge, and a biscuit and margarine and make yourself a cup of cocoa, all of which takes time and you are lying in your sleeping bag trying to do things without spilling things on your sleeping bag! I was alright I had the whole tent to myself but if you got two in a tent then you had to be careful not to spill things. And then after that you have to pack up, and packing up your tent first of all that's covered in snow the night before, the flap of the tent turns out and you pile snow on it and that's all got to be taken away very carefully so not putting your ice axe through the tent(!) because quite often it's frozen quite hard by the morning, so getting up your tent takes quite a time, scrape the heavy snow off, and then the dogs have got to be got out; if there'd been any wind at night they'd have been drifted over then if they'd any ice, the heat of their body has caused the snow to melt so when they get up there are lumps of ice sticking to their fur so that has to be taken off very carefully otherwise it's quite a bit of extra weight.

[Part 1 1:03:53] Verdenius: Where do the dogs sleep?

Stephenson: Outside on the snow! They're quite happy, they just curl up put their bushy tail over their nose and if the wind blows and there's a bit of a drift they get covered up and in the morning just seven mounds of snow and the dogs are underneath! But the heat of their body does melt the ice underneath them and it refreezes so quite often if you have been lying up in a blizzard for two or three days then they have a lot of ice clinging to their fur, and that has to be taken off very carefully, it's quite heavy. But the dogs are staked out on a line at night - don't leave them loose otherwise they'd start chewing anything they can find! And they're much happier if they can't get to each other and start fighting. No, they're quite happy as opposed to when I was in Canada, wretched dogs wouldn't go to sleep until you cut spruce boughs down and made them a nice little bed then they'd go to sleep! They wouldn't just lie down on the snow whereas a real husky does, but all that takes time and it may seem a long

time to get up and get going, but doing it somewhere probably in my diary as I say how long we took a record time, but anything can happen which needs repairs or sledge and it's got to be lashed up and lashing up a sledge is quite a skilled job because if you're going over rough ground and if the load is loose then it starts falling off! So it's got to be very tightly lashed on, that's a method we had learned how to do it and a skilled job but folding up the tent and packing that in such a way that if you have to pitch it at night when the wind is blowing then you can do it all in one because you had folded it very carefully in the morning! All sorts of tricks like that which one learns in order to be more efficient....it also takes quite a time at night when you stop sledging. The best thing to do is two things, the first one is to stake out the dogs and feed them, the other is to get the tent up and get the primus going and make a drink because it's very thirsty work is sledging! It isn't if you're sitting on your sledge, we never did that we were always pushing and heaving and as a result you sweat quite a lot and as a result you're extremely thirsty, so one man goes into the tent, pitches it, gets the things laid out inside and the first thing he does is get the primus going, melts some snow and make a good long drink of lime juice; we have orange Californian orange juice, special orange juice from California which had a lot of vitamins in it, but that is the one thing you long to get! So pitch your tent ,boil some water so the other two stake out the dogs and start feeding them, when that is done you can start unloading your gear and going into the tent yourself.

[Part 1 1:07:27] Verdenius: Write your diary?

Stephenson: Not immediately you have a meal first, have to go and boil your pemmican; don't write up your diary until you've had your meal, have the meal first and then settle down and then read for a little bit, at least I didn't I was usually, by the time you've written your diary and I've done my mapping it was time to go to sleep! But other people would write their diary and read for a bit.

[Part 1 1:07:58] Verdenius: Light a candle?

Stephenson: No, and if it's calm if the wind is blowing then it's not so easy to read if your candle is flickering like that, and we did have quite a lot of windy nights and windy days when we couldn't travel, then I would probably go over and join the other two. And then we would read to each other or have competitions, who could name all the states in America and that sort of thing!

[Part 1 1:08:32] Verdenius: Which books did you take along?

Stephenson: Can't remember which one I had.....can't remember, but in my diary but can't remember which one...on the whole didn't get a lot of time. We had a number of very suitable novels; I remember one was all about the Scottish whaling and fishing, it was a novel but about a fisherman on the west coast of Scotland and the whole of his life story, they're usually fairly long novels.....No, somewhere in my diary I've certainly got 'Spent a day reading so and so', but can't remember now what it was.

[Part 1 1:09:44] Maybe you could look up in the diary on a lie up day?

Stephenson: Sorry?

[Part 1 1:09:51] Verdenius: Maybe you could look up in your diary a lie up day it's called like that, a lie up day when you can't travel?

Stephenson: Yes, no we didn't call it that....lying up day yes! Well quite often there are odd jobs had to be done. First of all clothing if you'd torn a windproof, or more particularly repairing dog harnesses they generally get worn - they were made with lampwick and they've got to be kept in good condition and fairly soft so they don't chafe under the dogs' legs, they're all tailor-made, made to measure. Bingham used to take the dogs measurements, give them to you, and we'd all make our own dogs' harnesses and we had to keep them repaired and in good condition. So there were odd jobs like that had to be done when you were lying up. And depends why you were lying up and if it was fine weather and merely resting for some particular reason, then I'd go outside and do some sun observations for my surveying. Otherwise possibly we would write up last week's diary which we hadn't had time to do; quite often you'd be travelling 12 hours, long hours, then spending a lot of time tidying up and not getting time to write your diary, or if it had been some particular feature such as suddenly coming across the sedimentary rocks well that'd be left until you had time to write them up in detail. And if I'd had a day in which I been doing observations, sun observation in the morning sun, observation at midday, sun observation in the afternoon I'd be quite busy actually doing that and not getting time to compute them and next time we had a lying up day I could get on with my computations.

[Part 1 1:12:05] Verdenius: You would go together all three, in one tent?

Stephenson: Yes, depending if I was mapping I'd stay in my own tent but otherwise we'd join up and have all three there. We were all Cambridge men so we all had a lot in common as to what happened in Cambridge and what to do in Cambridge, that sort of thing. And Lancelot Fleming was our priest so on Sunday's we had a small service if it happened to be a Sunday when we were lying up and he would often talk about, he had a home in Scotland he'd talk about what he did there, you see he was very great rowing man and coached the college crew and he used to take them up to his home in Scotland and they could climb mountains and do that sort of thing before breakfast, there's always lots to talk about. Colin Bertram was a zoologist and had done during the war had been working in the Middle East in Palestine and his father had been a civil servant at the time when one of our airships got burned out in Paris, the R100, and his father was associated with that, lots of things we had in common to talk about never ending! And to a lot of extent about food, what wonderful dinners we had had! [laugh] It's one of the general topics, if you read Priestly or Scott's diary one of their favourite dreams is dreaming about food, but it always happens just as you about to eat that lovely food and then you'd wake up and you'd never get it! It's the one thing you miss I suppose when you're sledging. Even at the base we had some quite interesting food which we'd taken down with us, but once you are sledging food is very monotonous and its often been recorded that one's dreams are about food!

[Part 1 1:14:27] Verdenius: But you had enough food?

Stephenson: Oh we had enough, yes, but very absolutely the same every day! See today you can get these packed foods and you can vary it quite a bit, tinned soups of different kinds, and everybody has something different for breakfast on these occasions but we were exactly the same every day, and that does get boring but as long as you're doing things and accomplishing something it's ok and you're quite happy!

[Part 1 1:15:01] Verdenius: When you were talking did you also....fantasise about the country, about imagine what you would find later on?

Stephenson: Yes, well once we saw there was a change of rock structure then we were extremely interested to find out what happened further south and the whole time we were interested in what we were travelling on. It's now called King George VI Sound and we know what it is but it was filled with ice, but it was floating ice that we very soon discovered if you got anywhere near the land on either side you would see there was a tide crack. See, the frozen ice in fjords and in the sea is always going up and down with the tide so once you get near, especially near a steep shore, the tide goes up and down, and at low tide there is a lot of broken ice cliff and at high tide it comes up again. Well that is when you are out in the open as on base but once you are in the middle of the sound it wasn't quite so much, although its floating and we know there was sea water underneath the tide crack wasn't very obvious and we were still uncertain whether we were on a bit of inland ice or glacier or whether we were on sea ice. And it wasn't until we finally got to the end and saw this tide crack running the full length we decided it was floating ice and was therefore this big rift valley which we had discovered and was a sound! And a sound being a sea passage with open ends a fjord stops dead at the end but open at the sea end, but if it's a sound the water goes right through with open sea at either end. And as a result when we got back we were to able to call this King George VI Sound as opposed to something else and that was very interesting because at one time it did all break up. Well that was on the occasion where we fell down that cliff that was in the middle of the sound. See, that was a big rift, it had opened up and whole thing was floating and moving slightly so you do get these rifts and then they come together again and crumple up! You get great heaps of broken ice in the middle of this low valley, the ice itself at times can be 20 or 30 ft thick in the sound as we discovered when we went over the top, but that kept us interested the whole time to know what was the feature that we had discovered!

[Part 1 1:18:19] Verdenius: Did you know at the time what...did you at the time imagine at what the country would be like in say 50 or 100 years?

Stephenson: The future or back?

[Part 1 1:18:37] Verdenius: The future.

Stephenson: The future?

[Part 1 1:18:41] Verdenius: You where there in 1934/36 [Stephenson: Yes] did you ever wonder what people are going to do here in 50 or 100 years when you were there?

Stephenson: Well based on what we knew or what we know now there has been very little change, its ice comes and ice goes and you can read in certain places that the ice is retreating and yet you go to another place in our second base, known as the Debenham Islands, there were six of them which named after the six children of my Professor Debenham who'd been with Scott. When I went back in '84 having mapped these islands myself and knowing exactly where they were flying around above them I could not recognized what had happened! One island had completely disappeared, the ice on the mainland had come forward and covered up half of the biggest island and covered the smallest island completely and that was an advance not a retreat! So it's very difficult to say what's happening overall in some places. It's retreating in Greenland - when I went back it had retreated enormously, where we were sledging up a glacier there's now a lake! But that was a little local enclave with a lot of sun. And when we came to the sedimentary rocks they were sandstone and limestone, and no lava, volcanic lava, now the breaks up very easily into a very fine dust, that dust settles on the glacier the sun gets it, warms it up, and the glacier melts and it retreats! Nothing to do with the earth warming up or the sun warming up just as it happens to be volcanic rock which deposits on the ice that attracts the heat, so that's our present knowledge. Ah well! Knowledge as we knew it. Now of course we've got all this business of the ozone and the hole in the ozone, and what might happen down there now is any bodies guess. The ice will retreat but, as it retreats it isn't going to leave a nice bit of flat land; owing to the weight of the ice it presses the rock down and if the ice melts and goes away the rock will come up, you will have an even more mountainous region than you've got at the moment. So the future of the Antarctic unless there is a tremendous change of earth movement has there has been a long-long time ago, plate movements in Africa and South America being joined up and then parting in America and Antarctica, and India being joined up and parting, but unless anything like that happens I can't see very much change in the Antarctic!

[Part 1 1:21:53] Verdenius: But you were doing survey, mapping?

Stephenson: Yes.

[Part 1 1:21:56] Verdenius: There was a zoologist?

Stephenson: Yes.

[Part 1 1:22:08] Verdenius: After mapping comes the geologist?

Stephenson: Yes.

[Part 1 1:22:14] Verdenius: Which is not looking at the surface of the thing but is looking what's inside?

Stephenson: Yes.

[Part 1 1:22:20] Verdenius: What were you thinking about with human activity?

Stephenson: Volcanic activity?

[Part 1 1:22:29] Verdenius: No human activity!

Stephenson: Human activity?

[Part 1 1:22:34] Verdenius: Yeah in 50 or 100 years?

Stephenson: I would say none! [Laughing] No I can't see any change....you mean human activity in a big way as opposed to just developing any mining or anything like that? There might be a development in a small way if by any chance they found a rich deposit of gold or oil and other countries allowed it to happen then there might be small development, but I can't think of any major or large development.

[Part 1 1:23:18] Verdenius: No, let's did you and your companions imagine such a development in the '30s when you were there, did you ever hear anything?

Stephenson: Not in the part we were in. There was not really a hope in that volcanic region of any development, it's only in the flatter part in the other parts of the continent where there might have been some development. We certainly never imagined it or even talked of it.

[Think Mrs Stephenson enters the room] Stephenson: Do you want to eat?

Mrs Stephenson: Well I'll give you five minutes but you haven't sorted out anything for drinks? [Laugh] I know where you've been. It's alright I'm quite used to him going off...mentally to the Antarctic or the Arctic!

Stephenson: No we're stuck to the Antarctic!

Mrs Stephenson: You stuck to the Antarctic today right, yes, well I'll give you about five minutes if you could sort out your drink. What you want to drink?

Stephenson: Yes.

Mrs Stephenson: I haven't done anything about that.

Stephenson: Right, well we can either have a glass of wine now if you like or you can have glass of wine with your lunch. I've got a bottle there. Alright have it with our lunch.

[Part 1 1:24:38] Verdenius: Yes.

Stephenson: I'll just, there is Edwin Micklebough who we had Wally Herbert on one of his films and he came with us to Greenland in 1982 but he made a film *Those Greenland days*....still perhaps we better go in and eat!

Alfred Stephenson, Part 2:

Stephenson: I'm trying to find bit where we actually turned round....Ah, '*We have arranged a dinner for October 18th 1937 to celebrate our furthest south*', and we kept that up right until the time Lancelot Fleming died two years ago. Every year in October we had a reunion dinner, the three of us, to celebrate our furthest south. And then when he got married we included our wives so we always had a combined dinner as near to October 18th as our

furthest south. [Sounds of pages turning and a long gap]. Yes that's where we went ashore and found the fossils....homeward bound! *'Today we have seen a large strip of continent trending to the south west with no sign of a break and 1 day more will show us no more? So tomorrow we turn back having done 295 miles in 45 days it'll be a little bit longer back as we must get to those stratified rocks, it's been glorious day but just 12 degrees I did a mid day latitude and we have done 17 miles. Pleasant days yesterday was foul we rounded our last cape and saw the top of yet another one slowly we climbed a ridge on the shelf ice and there before us lay the Antarctic continent! Swinging out in front of us and continuous with the Graham Land Peninsula and so Stefansson Strait must go! Alexandra Island at least seemed to come to an end to the south west of us having gone on for 200 miles we had done 24.6 miles...about 40 miles to the south of us lie's some mountains but there is no sign of Ellsworth's 11,000ft range which I think should be in sight now'*. It must be the Eternity mountains which he had referred to in his flight, he sent us a signal from his aircraft saying he'd seen these mountains at 11,000ft but we couldn't see them from where we turned back. You say your connection with the Eternity range, didn't you say that was the name?

[Part 2 0:04:22] Verdenius: The Eternity range.

Stephenson: Yes that's the title.....*'I have just finished Conan Doyle's historical romances'*, that's one of the books! [More page turning] Somewhere I've made a note of how thrilling it was to be in this country no man had ever seen before. [Very long gap and pages turning] Yes, this is on the way back, we were looking for a place to land on Alexandra Island to study the rocks. *'It looked as if we were coming to the last accessible rock outcrop tonight, so we made a point, made into a point and then into a delightful bay with lovely dry valleys looking for all the world like a bit of North Wales or Scotland but without the water! We shall spend tomorrow geologising again we had done 23.25 miles today I hope to do some survey tomorrow so I went into the calm sunny evening at 8pm to get a time signal set, whilst waiting I happened to listen to a German giving what seemed like a very popular speech judging from the applause and cheers it was a strange feeling to listen to him working up to a climax and then hear the applause I felt as if I was in the crowd, then glanced up and realised how lonely I really was!'* Probably the most southerly person in the world tucked away into a calm bay with massive rock walls all around I really felt a part of civilised life and came out of most suddenly. It was weird, I'd forgotten that! [Laugh] Because we were in 1936 the only people on the Antarctic continent it was before other nations had begun going there and the three of us were the furthest south of that group! Obviously I was on my own in the tent waiting to get a time signal on my wireless and pick out a German instead...but the whole trip was thrilling in that way in that everything we saw was new, nobody had seen it before! Which I had done before, well in Greenland we went into a fjord the first time anybody had been into the fjord although it had been seen from outside, but that it is exciting to go somewhere nobody else has ever been, I think those days are over now...of many places!

[Part 2 0:09:52] Verdenius: How much contact did you have with the outside world?

Stephenson: None at all when we were sledging. Other than that very chance pick up we didn't attempt to pick up any news of anything, I was trying to get along with a signal usually

from the Argentine, I just happened to pick that up they would be broadcasting anything German in those days! But otherwise at the base we had a, picked up the BBC news fairly regularly but on one occasion towards the end of 1936 I suppose it was, the wireless went dead and we didn't have any news, and then suddenly we got the news one night and all we heard was that King Edward VIII had resigned, abdicated! We knew nothing about that at all and our signals officer, who really was only allowed to transmit and work with Port Stanley or the Argentine, but he could for search purposes work an army base somewhere in the Middle East, so he had a contact there and he was engaged to somebody in England and we were all very anxious to know what this was all about, and who was the girlfriend in question causing all this the abdication! And the answer came back she was...slight, petite and 40! That's all we knew about her, that was Mrs Simpson! But normally if the weather was good and the aurora and magnetic storms were not too bad you could usually pick up the news at the base, otherwise we could communicate by sending telegrams through Port Stanley but they were jolly expensive! But we were fortunately able, once Lincoln Ellsworth flew down to the Snow Island (where he was operating from), our operator was able to keep in touch with him and his pilot; his pilot on that occasion wasn't the other man who called it an archipelago. His pilot was Hollick Kenyon who oddly enough I had known in North West Canada I was there in 1932/33 and he was one of the pilots there. The only pilot who ever used a chart he was a navigator, all the others just flew by luck! Then suddenly we heard that he was going to be Ellsworth's pilot for his trans-Antarctic flight so I got in touch with him and said I remembered him well and he remembered me from Canada. Otherwise the thing concerning, which is rather amazing concerning news we left England in '34 came back in '37 and missed the whole of the Spanish civil war, were quite unaware that it had taken place! And really knew none of the details at all about Franco and the German support and the communist wing - to have missed that out completely was quite something! It's amazing how things can come and go like that. I don't know if you know that silly game with a yo-yo where you have a ball on a piece of elastic and you bounce it up and down in your hand? That was an absolute craze in England, people standing waiting for buses they were all doing it everybody was doing it! Well that came after we left England and had disappeared completely when we came back, but at the time everybody was doing it everywhere!

[Part 2 0:14:45] Verdenius: How did you feel about missing out news for about three years?

Stephenson: Didn't worry us too much as there was nothing when we left England, there was nothing beginning that we could have worried about, everything was fairly settled and pretty poor state in the middle of very big depression. Hitler had scarcely begun, not enough to cause us any worry, so we had no political problems to think about and consider what was happening. Then the Spanish one came along, that was a problem but we knew nothing about that at all, none of us were particularly politically minded, but you know even if we had been it was rather what one might call a dead period politically! Apart from people who foresaw things like Churchill getting very worried but that wasn't general news, sport we were keen on, not quite so much down south as we were north, there we had a Cambridge rugby Blue and Dr Bingham was almost an Irish cap, a lot of rugby enthusiasts and we always wanted to know what the scores were, but that didn't go on down in the Antarctic. And none of us was

married and only one was engaged, that was our wireless operator Meiklejohn, there are no female worries of any kind other than what might be happening [laugh] to your girlfriends in England, while you're away!

[Part 2 0:17:06] Verdenius: Did you talk about girls?

Stephenson: Not an awful lot no. Actually on an expedition as small as that, and once at the end of the first year, *Penola* and ship's crew went back for a refit in South Georgia and Port Stanley so we were only nine, and with nine people and a full programme to work out and with all those dogs there was no spare time whatsoever! Usually you'd just get into bed by ten o'clock and not even bother to read. We had some cards and not even once did we play a game of cards, had some quite keen bridge players but we all had our own job and we were all specialists in a way and we all had something to prepare for or write up which is a very good thing, kept us going all of the time. But that is very different from the set up you have got in BAS nowadays where you have got a lot of mechanical work and when the ship comes in you have to have tractors hauling stuff to and fro, got maintenance jobs, filling up the oil tanks, maintenance on the aircraft and suddenly the winter comes and there's nothing for those chaps to do! So there are certain types of personnel down there who are not fully occupied the whole year whereas we were very fortunate in that everybody had a job to do.

[Part 2 0:18:44] Verdenius: And in the winter?

Stephenson: Pardon?

[Part 2 0:18:47] Verdenius: And in the winter?

Stephenson: In the winter we were still very busy. See, I was in charge of meteorology - well that meant doing observations every three hours, writing them up at the end of the month. I would draw monthly graphs and monthly wind charts and doing any mapping I had done, bring that up fair copies and preparing charts to take south with me on the next journey. Bingham was always busy with his dogs harnessing, making new harnesses. Hampton had the aircraft to look after, Quintin Riley had the motor boat, the *Stella*, that had to be stripped down in the winter and completely overhauled. Moore was another engineer and he would help with the aircraft engine and the tractor and the motor boat, they all had plenty of work to do in the winter! Meiklejohn, the wireless operator, was on duty most of the time listening and when parties went away sledging then people left at the base had double the work to do! Riley had to take over all the meteorological observations which I would have done otherwise...Bertram could always work on his geology, he was doing a thesis on seals and that meant a lot of writing up and studying! Fleming had his geology, Bertram, Riley, Moore an engineer, Hampton an engineer, Bingham had his dogs and any medical work there was, but most of the medical work was on him! He had a knee, a rugby knee, which he had slipped the disc on and every now then that went out I used to help him with that, but on the whole there was no medical work to be done at all other than with the dogs, but we were breeding them the whole time and they took up all his time. And Rymill had the overall worries of running the whole thing and the big worry of finances, not that he could do much

about it! But there was telegraphing to be done trying to make quite certain they didn't sell off the whole of his Australian estate [laugh] to pay off our debt!

[Part 2 0:21:41] Verdenius: What was the finance thing?

Stephenson: The expedition, you see the whole thing was privately run, but Rymill had a certain amount of money, in fact he inherited a big farm in South Australia so he had that as a background capital and had borrowed on that pretty heavily to get the expedition going! We got a certain amount of private donations but then half way through it looked as though there were more financial troubles, and he was very worried and busy trying to sort things out financially. In the end all was well, but we had no big financial backer. Lord Wakefield, who was Wakefield Oil, he gave us a certain amount of money, the government gave us a certain amount, the Commonwealth Institute that's about all we got from outside help, a small amount from the Geographical Society where they couldn't afford anything big. There weren't the sponsors in those days that one can get nowadays for football, golf or a trans-Antarctic walking [laugh]!

[Part 2 0:23:04] Verdenius: You also said on the sledging journey you had....a service on Sunday?

Stephenson: Well a service yes.

[Part 2 0:23:15] Verdenius: How did that work?

Stephenson: Well we just read through the standard Church of English service in the prayer book and then Lancelot would just talk in general if we felt like it, but that was more of a discussion than a sermon, but the actual Anglican morning service or evening service is something printed in the prayer book and you just go through it automatically, there's no preaching and there was no communion. They had communion at the base because there were two very keen communicants, Meiklejohn and Riley. So there were three of them that would have the early morning communion and serving of wine, but the rest of us, I was a non-conformist, a Methodist, and wasn't allowed to join in because Quintin Riley was very, very High Church English, his father was great leader of the Church of England, and Quintin inherited his father's reputation without his knowledge! But he was [laugh] terribly keen on what should and not be done! And he would not allow anyone who was not a communicant of the Church of England to take communion! But when we were going down south it was just Colin, Lancelot and myself we just agreed to read the morning service....if we happened to be in the tent at the time, if it was a fine day we were out travelling! But at the base when we were there Lancelot used to give us a sermon, then after that we had our one drink a week. Lancelot's father had presented the expedition with enough sherry for us to have one drink on Sundays so we waited until we had had the sermon then we had the sherry and we pulled the sermon to pieces as we say!! Criticized it or supported it but Lancelot had a very good training period with us, we didn't let him get away with anything....because he had never had a parish. He had been brought up with Cambridge as a geologist then did the theological training and then became Dean, no Chaplain, of his own college and then after that he became Dean of his own college so he never had a parish as such out in the country. Then

when he came back he was still Dean of Trinity Hall College at Cambridge until he suddenly became Bishop of Portsmouth, then he had no parish! As an ordinary clergyman he had the whole of the South Atlantic as Bishop of Portsmouth, he was Bishop of the whole Mediterranean fleet! Then he went to Norwich, which is my home town, where my brother was headmaster of the grammar school so he kept in touch with him there, and then he retired to Sherborne and we came down here and saw quite a lot of them, then he went to St George's Windsor, of course he was chaplain in Windsor. Which is a great period and we used to get invitations to the very great ceremonies that took place there. Then when he retired he came down here to just outside Sherborne and we saw quite a lot of him right up to the time he died.

[Part 2 0:27:25] Verdenius: You have also travelled on the North Pole for the Arctic territories....what distinguish for you one experience from the other?

Stephenson: You mean between Greenland and the Antarctic? Two really completely different: one, it was my first expedition, it was an adventure I knew nothing about what sort of country I was going into other than what I'd read; secondly it was a country with more to it than just polar physical features, in other words there where Eskimos there! So you had another life altogether to understand we had Eskimos helping us as servants in the house, we used to go over and sleep in their Kaegi when we were surveying and we had the interest of a completely different life. And thirdly it was a country which in the summer was not what you would call really polar, it was more like Switzerland, in other words you got lakes and tundra and flowers, spring flowers alpine flowers so very different than from the Antarctic! So it was an adventure and I'd never been overseas before; secondly you had the added interest of the Eskimos and they were real Eskimos in those days and the real Inuit who were living in stone huts and living five families in one hut, all looking after each other and leading a very communal life. And the country itself was different, the kayaking in the summer, kayaking in the fjords which we didn't get when we were down south, so I enjoyed them both but for two completely different reasons. On the second occasion I was going somewhere where I knew there was work to be done in my own particular line and I would be really exploring and putting something on the map, where there was nothing at the time! And again it was a country completely different from Greenland topographically, so that fortunately not a case of comparing one with the other saying I enjoyed one more than the other, but I had something quite different to do in each which is a very good thing. But the Eskimo life was very interesting because it was still very primitive; I was able to indulge in foresight and say what will happen when these people become civilised and the dreadful things that would happen because when I went back in 1982 it had happened! They were now completely different, they were, well they'd been spoilt during the war with the Americans building airfields and that sort of thing, they all had money and all bought Skidoos and they gave up having sledges and hunting for seal meat! Then in addition to that you had the introduction of quotas for seal meat and polar bears, they couldn't just kill as many as they liked, only if they were dependent on it for living so that the men had to rely on unemployment money, and as a result they were just drinking their lives away! Which is which I forecast in 1930, it had happened, with the men but not with the women! The women had changed completely but

had all got very nice little huts built by the Danes for them, they were very house proud there all had their videos and wireless [laugh] nowadays in their huts and even made their men take their boots off before they came in the house! So the women had become quite civilised but the men hadn't, but I forecast half of that but I didn't forecast the change in the women in 1930. That's on the east coast, they are still primitive up in the northwest where they are called Inuit, they have gone back to their original name, and so now you have Inuit which are the Eskimos and the mixture of what they call...Greenlanders, a mixture of Danes and true Eskimo. Most of the traders on the west coast and the traders on the east coast are Greenlanders a mixture of them both but the Inuit, the real Eskimos up in the northwest, have much more in common with the Eskimos of Canada and they have more or less joined forces in deciding what they would like in the future.

[Part 2 0:33:12] Verdenius: Are you sticking to....before the expedition?

Stephenson: Yes, living off the land and hunting really there is nothing else that they can do; as long as they're allowed to live like that they'll be quite happy!

[Part 2 0:33:26] Verdenius: What did you learn from the Eskimos?

Stephenson: Sorry?

[Part 2 0:33:28] Verdenius: What did you learn from the Eskimos? Learn, what did you....when you went to the Antarctic and what did the Eskimos, from your experience with the Eskimos teach you?

Stephenson: Oh, I think in those days and that's quite clear in my diary I felt that they were a very happy not necessarily Christian but following a good many Christian habits, and were far, far more civilised from that point of view than many of the people in what we call civilised countries! In other words they were extremely happy, they looked after each other you would have anything up to five families living in one communal hut, and if anything happened to one of the men then the other men would look after his family. And if they went hunting they would come back and share what they had found with the family of the man who might have broken a leg or got damaged in some way and couldn't hunt, and from that point of view I thought that they were an excellent community and we could do with more of that in the civilised world, looking after other people! But they were very primitive indeed, but in spite of being of being primitive and poor they were extremely happy, and that did strike me as being something worthwhile! But things have changed, they may, it's still the same up in the northwest I think if you read Wally Herbert's books and what he thinks of the Inuit he would agree with that. What they are very fortunately been kept away from civilisation even the big American air base Thule in Greenland that's always been out of bounds to the Eskimos, and the Eskimos area has been out of bounds to the American service men so they haven't been influenced by them in any way really. Whereas further south they had to build airfields, emergency airfields any sort of flat space where it meant levelling out the rocks and they got well paid for that and they'd got spoiled! And now that the war's over there's no work for them to do!

[Part 2 0:36:32] Verdenius: And did you take over, did you take over skills from the Eskimos?

Stephenson: They, well we learnt to kayak and lots of us learnt dog driving from them, but I suppose the most important skill we learnt was kayaking, in fact we introduced kayaking to Europe! There would be no kayaking worth talking about before Watkins and Chapman and our kayaking experts came back; Chapman took a film in Cambridge of kayaking and used it for training in this country. And Watkins was an absolute expert and he learnt it very quickly and the Eskimos were very pleased with him because he was far better than the Eskimos! I mean they would do stunts of their hand barrel and Watkins just did it with the one hand only and rolled over and came up again and surprised the Eskimos with how quickly he learnt the whole art of kayaking, and I'm pretty certain if we hadn't brought it back then it would have sometime before anybody in this country or in Europe would have known about kayaking. Certainly not about the art of rolling which is essential nowadays in some of these kayaking racing over rapids and places.

[Part 2 0:38:11] Verdenius: Did you ever consider going to the South Pole?

Stephenson: Not directly... when we were in Greenland Watkins had a plan, I've still got the map somewhere, to cross the Antarctic as Sir Vivian Fuchs did later. But the problem of that has always been getting to a base and getting your ship to the base. The *Endurance* was crushed in the ice, the German ship was crushed in the ice and Fuchs was very lucky to get his two ships right into the back of the Weddell Sea and gave them a good starting point. As Ranulph Fiennes he started off much in the same place recently but in 1930 you still had to bank on getting a ship that would get through to the back of the Weddell Sea without getting crushed! And at that time Wilkins had published his *Channels Through* and Watkins thought one could get down the west coast of [note: Greenland-he does say Greenland which obviously is a mistake-AW] through one of Wilkins' channels and into the Weddell Sea and not necessarily take your ship right through the Weddell Sea! And he had this plan to cross to cross the Antarctic but while you're considering it in 1930/31 in Greenland, but when we came back we were in the middle of the deepest depression ever, in the early 1930s there's no money available and he, he had other ideas, he was very keen of living off the country, he was a great pupil of Stefansson who said 'As long as you have got a rifle you can live anywhere in the Arctic, living off seals, whales and walrus's'! But you had to be in that part of the Arctic where those animals were, if there weren't any then you couldn't live off the country! But Watkins was keen to show it could be done and he wanted to traverse the Arctic polar ocean just by living off the country taking a rifle and a tent but that fell through. And so in the end he decided to go back to Greenland for a second expedition until things improved politically and all he did when going back to Greenland was to carry on getting meteorological, further meteorological information for the Arctic air route which we had been doing in '30/31, and then he practicing the art at which he absolutely adept at namely kayaking he was drowned, whilst kayaking! But that was understandable. Can you, I'll just get my....down there.....Canada...Jordan....Greenland? [Sound of pages being turned long gap]. I'm looking for kayaks. Ah, here we are. [Probably showing a photo]. That's the procedure which we learnt from the Eskimos, the rolling at different stages, and then the

other thing we had to learn was hunting, and for that you had a white screen there to camouflage so that the seals didn't see you coming and then you fired your shot and harpooned the seal, because in the summer they sink very quickly. But a better way to do it is to get out of your kayak on to an ice floe, see you can get a really steady shot with your rifle and then before the seal sinks you've got to jump into your kayak push yourself off and get the seal very quickly! So that means just putting your kayak just right on the edge ready to get in and slip off, see Watkins is getting out there? But what happened when he was hunting in 1932 he obviously did that and whilst he was doing that a big glacier calved or an ice berg toppled over and caused a wave and the wave came along and sat there rocking and his kayak slipped off and he had thick seal skin trousers on, he took them off obviously because they were found on the ice floe and tried to swim after his kayak but in that water he didn't get to his kayak! So in spite of being a very skilled hunter and skilled kayaker that's how he came to grief!

[Part 2 0:44:07] Verdenius: But you haven't answered my question!?

Stephenson: You said what did you learn from the Eskimos?

[Part 2 0:44:11] Verdenius: No-no!

Stephenson: I thought that's what you?

[Part 2 0:44:15] Verdenius: No this is what I asked, I asked you if you ever considered going to the South Pole?

Stephenson: Oh yes that's right! No, only I was in on discussions about this plan of Watkins but I never considered it and that it went up to the Geographical Society as a proposal and he'd made all the plans but he couldn't get sufficient backing. And then he went to Greenland and stayed and was drowned, so it didn't arise again until Rymill thought about it, but he didn't think he could do it all in one so he wanted to try and find out if these channels existed. If they did exist then he'd come back and plan another expedition to get into the back of the Weddell Sea. Well as it happens the channels weren't there so he couldn't! But that's what he had thought of doing, so on the whole none of us had really considered the Pole seriously until Bunny Fuchs did it...and by then that was 1955, none of us were available we're all settled into our various professions!

[Part 2 0:45:47] Verdenius: You said that there went from time to time various groups distinguished from the 1930s?

Stephenson: Sorry distinguished between?

[Part 2 0:46:08] Verdenius: The people that went from 1900 until 1940?

Stephenson: Yes?

[Part 2 0:46:19] Verdenius: From 1900 to 1940 I don't know exactly what distinction you made?

Stephenson: Between the people and their aims in those periods?

[Part 2 0:46:31] Verdenius: Yeah.

Stephenson: Because the earliest ones like Scott and Shackleton belong to what we call the *Heroic Age* where everybody was doing something apart from the geographical side of getting to the South Pole, that merely concerned of the leader of the expedition Captain Scott and the Royal Navy and high powers President of the Geographical Society. But they weren't the people that actually went to the Pole, people that went to the Pole like Birdie Bowers and or with Shackleton and Wild they were sailors on board who were interested in the adventure, but volunteered to go I think purely for adventure! They'd have had no other aims, that was the Shackleton's party in 1908, Scott's party in 1912, and Shackleton's party in 1914/16 was a crossing of the Antarctic had it come off! That again would have been...that was geographical adventure, but I think the people that took part had gone down principally for the adventure! Certainly very few of the members of those very tough sledging parties were scientists, most of them were chosen from what we call the lower deck in the navy who were tough, keen travellers, people who two or three of them whose names I used to know quite well, they have gone now. At any rate that takes you up to 1920 and death of Shackleton and the end of the *Heroic Era*, then there's a complete gap in the 20s apart from an Oxford expedition to Spitzbergen, then Watkins led an expedition to Spitzbergen, both long vacation university expeditions. Then you come to the period 1930 right to the beginning of the war those were all young people, all people who were keen to do something in connection with their profession, but all completely unpaid. There was no money available for personnel on these expeditions, in fact there wasn't much money available at all! What you could get from your universities and from your friends so most of them were Sandy Glenn's Oxford expedition, twice to Spitzbergen, John Wright to Alaska, another university expedition, and Bertram and Brian Robb went to Iceland, all small groups of university people going out in some cases just for the vacation! In some case for longer like Sandy Glenn's two expeditions to Spitzbergen and our expedition to Graham Land, [note: he wrongly says Shackleton] went out in 1930 to Northern Canada again with an Oxford university expedition so during in the 30s you had a period of enthusiastic university people keen to explore but all with a scientific background thinking to do something in their own line of business and none of them getting paid, sheer enthusiasm!

[Part 2 0:50:35] Which gives you a completely different category and a very much younger one. Then after the war there's an immediate period of one or two years of people coming out of uniform and joining up or going down. If look at the list they're all Captain This or Lieutenant This, Major This, just retired from the army or navy and hadn't really decided what to do in civilian life. And the opportunity arose to begin with a government naval expedition, *Operation Tabarin*, 1944/45 and then from that, after that Sir James Wordie appointed Bingham to go down and lead the first Falkland Island Dependence Survey [FIDS], operated from and with the government in the Falkland Islands, it was still very much what we call a red tape expedition. In fact Bingham had his orders sent from headquarters and he had to follow those orders very much military organised, but he altered that as far expedition members were concerned because he had the free and easy methods of our 1930 expedition!

In fact he was probably responsible for handing over the transitional period between the very much the red tape of the naval expeditions of the heroic age, where Captain Scott wrote up at night what would happen this next day and it happened, or to the Watkins period of 'I think we'll do that tomorrow' or well you did it, very lax no strict discipline. Then immediately after the war being run by the government and the armed forces it was still fairly strict. But Bingham was the first one appointed to carry out that sort of expedition, but he had the background of Watkins and Rymill and gradually changed things over, so at the time you had the first FIDS expedition, one in which Bernard Stonehouse, Ray Adie, David Dalgliesh and Bunny Fuchs in '47/49 they were run on Watkins' lines pretty well, mainly fairly free and easy but no strict routine. And that last throughout FIDS until 1960 when they changed over to British Antarctic Survey, then that became a real government concern and I think, I'm not absolutely certain about this, from that stage on everybody that went south was paid. So when people came along and said they wanted to go you're never quite certain whether they want to go for the money or they wanted to go to save up and not have to spend anything in this country so that they could come back and buy a house! Or they got into trouble with their girlfriend and wanted to get away [laugh]! But at least it's worth going on because you'd be paid, that's one possible side of it. And there were scientists who were very keen to go to complete their PHD theses and so the scientists kept the thing going and the money came to keep them going, they all their work they had got to do. But they had to be backed up by your electricians and diesel engineer mechanics who had to be there to give them their fresh water and whatever they've got now! They've got flush toilets and everything down there but you've got to have mechanics to keep that lot going, and on the whole they haven't got the interest of your scientific background so you do tend to get two types down there now. And the leader of the base has a problem - he's got to handle them, your scientists get very worried and temperamental if things don't go right with his experiments! And you've got your engineers who just want another drink because there's nothing else to do for the time being, but that's extreme cases but that's the sort of atmosphere that you could get with the type of expedition that was then going on. That has now changed again in that you have got much easier access; people can now fly down quite easily at the beginning of the summer and fly back at the end of the summer, so that if your scientist is an earth scientist, geologist, who can't do very much in the winter he can be much more profitably employed by flying him down for the summer, flying him back and let him work up his results here in the meantime. And the same with botanists, quite a number of what are known as earth scientists, whereas the upper air people, ionospherists and people studying the ozone, they want to be there in the winter so you've got a much smaller party there in the winter, consisting of primarily very high expert scientists and few engineers, electronic engineers just to keep the machinery going, so that's been the gradual development.

[Part 2 0:56:26] Verdenius: How much did you get paid?

Stephenson: I got nothing I never was paid! No one was paid in the 1930s they were all amateur expeditions and, yes, that applied to, unless you remember the Service most we usually had an army signals officer and a naval medical officer, that was in Greenland, and a RAF pilot or mechanic. And most of the services would release them on half pay or in some

case on full pay, but apart from the service members all the civilian members were unpaid, I think remained unpaid until BAS; I don't think Fids were paid, that's when they became civil servants, many of whom have stayed on in BAS in the administration and in the scientific work, like all the people that you probably met up with there. But that's a small portion of the total number that have been down there, the BAS Club as opposed to the Antarctic Club is a very large thing, anybody that has ever been down south can belong to the BAS Club, whereas the Antarctic Club you have got to have done something worthwhile down there even it's just building a hut. It's not restricted to scientists, done a very good job as leader at the base and maintained an interest in the Antarctic after you come back, so our numbers are only about 400 which I'm probably the oldest member. No, Ted Bingham is!

[Part 2 0:58:16] Verdenius: How would you describe what you have been doing there all that time?

Stephenson: What who's been doing?

[Part 2 0:58:20] Verdenius: How would you describe what you had been doing in the Antarctic?

Stephenson: Whilst I was down there?

[Part 2 0:58:37] Verdenius: Well yeah, I mean Scott was a discoverer.

Stephenson: Yes, well I suppose I was more than anybody else discovering, in other words what I was discovering we were putting on the map! I was putting all our discoveries down on paper having decided where they were and fixed their position. Other people helped me, Rymill was a surveyor and he did quite a bit too and others when I'm doing star work or sun observations they'd come out and help me. They had the more unpleasant task of sitting still in the cold and writing out figures, I could stand up and walk round my instrument, but no, on the whole I was...well the Chief Surveyor I was called! But I was in charge of topographical discovery and as we were going into entirely new country. Apart from what Charcot had seen from a distance out to sea everything else was, although it might have been seen by Charcot it hadn't been put on the map! And once we got into King George VI Sound then everything was entirely new, so as far as the map was concerned it was plain sheet of white paper and I had to put it on! And when I wasn't doing that I was doing the meteorological observations, I went down as Chief Surveyor and Meteorologist...which kept me very busy! An advantage of having only nine members in the party, in the shore party, that we had to keep the house going, maintain the house, feed the dogs, look after the aircraft get it in out of the hangar, so everyone's extremely busy, never any time to sit back and say 'Well there's nothing to do'! Whereas if you have got a ship down there with an upper deck and a lower deck then the lower deck were given the menial jobs and the upper deck got on with their science and organisation whilst they were on the ship, the moment they got off the ship and started sledging as on Scott's polar party.

[Part 2 1:01:13] They had people like Lt. Evans and Birdie Bowers, they all got together and there was no 'Yes sir, no sir' business! They were all the same rank all doing the same thing,

but once back on the ship, back to the wardroom and lower deck, which Watkins broke that idea completely! He was very keen, possibly over-keen of having a free for all, everybody being able to say what they thought, pulled his plans to pieces if necessary. But as often as not he would merely say 'I think it would be a good idea if we made a sledge journey up there say to Mont Forel', and he spoke to me and said 'Would you like to lead that party as it needs mapping?' and I said 'Well I'll think about it', and I'd think about it and discuss it with him and other people but in the end that's how it happened. But it didn't go down as in the navy in the night order book, 'The following will take part in the following expedition and will go leaving on such and such a date'! it was much more casual and I think much more successful. It happened a little bit when we went south because we had a ship's party and a shore party, and Captain Ryder felt he had to maintain his authority by adopting naval methods and he had a night order book and he used to write down what would be done the next day! It's up to the First Mate to see that it was done on the next day! Whereas we were inclined to say 'Well it's to be this week somebody had better do it', and it was done!

[Part 2 1:03:14] Verdenius: Democracy?

Stephenson: Pardon?

[Part 2 1:03:17] Verdenius: Democracy!

Stephenson: Yes! See when Scott, on the first expedition I think it was, they had the ship wintered down there and she was fast in the ice and he was going off on a long sledge journey. He said 'If I'm not back by a certain date you'll get out the ice saws and start cutting the ice out to release the ship'! But when he wrote that the open water wasn't so far away and that was quite a possibility, but by the time the following winter the case the ice was miles out and they would have had to cut the ice for mile after mile to get to the open water! Quite impossible but it was down in the night order book and they started doing it! [Laugh] That sort of thing can happen!

[Part 2 1:04:09] Verdenius: Scott wrote 'This is an awful place'?

Stephenson: Ah, that's at the South Pole, at the end of a very long journey and at the disappointment of finding Amundsen already there! [Laugh] I can well believe he was a very disappointed man and since it was so barren and they were all feeling pretty tired and someone pretty ill, not surprising he said 'This is an awful place!' which I think it still is if you take away the American tents. No, it was an achievement and I suppose until somebody had actually been there and discovered it, it had to be done! And now it's an ideal situation for certain scientific work [coughing] the Americans have got a very high powered scientific station there, because in mid-winter rather like Halley Bay, Halley Bay hasn't got quite so much darkness but the Pole in the winter will have a 100% darkness suitable for upper air work, not influenced by street lights and other things.....And whether it's necessary to have it quite so elaborate as they have got I don't know, they do rather tend to overdo things!

[Part 2 1:06:12] Verdenius: Do you think I forgot something, some kind of your experiences that you think is vital?

Stephenson: I think it's something you've got to learn to do is to cooperate with other people even if it happens to be inconvenient at the time, and I think some people who have got one idea of a particular branch of research and they want to go down there and get on with it and don't like to do general duties, stores, or go and help somebody else and if it upsets their work. And you've got to learn to forget that and realise there are occasions when you have to drop what you'd like to do and go and help somebody else. And, so few of you that it comes automatically to most people, but there are some very single minded people who set out with a terrific aim to do some particular bit of research and don't worry about anything else. Well that doesn't help when doing some combined job which has to be done to keep the base going! I think that's one thing you've got to learn and in our type of 1930 expedition, where everybody volunteered and was willing to go not exactly for the fun of it, but had got that attitude they'd go and help anybody just to get on with the overall job. But then later when they became more specialised than they were, other people to help your specialised is apt to think he came here to do that, he better get on with it, 'I'll get on with my own job'! I think they're very soon broken of that. If they're not and if their own work doesn't go too well then they're apt to become a medical problem! And that has happened not very frequently but I suppose there are one or two cases where they mentally they have become upset and had to come back! And it is, can be nothing much going on base other than your own scientific work in a place like Halley Bay in the middle of winter when its dark the whole time, and you've only got a few other people at the base and possibly no dogs to look after, then you can become overwrought especially if your research work isn't going to well and you can't get on with it until something is flown in to you from outside. That all leads up to the big problem of the leader, known as the Base Leader, the man in charge of the base, that can be a very big problem and the man that does it successfully is apt to do very well when he comes back. And take a station like Rothera which is a very big one now, where they have got three aircraft, enormous hangar, a very big oil installation and the base itself is now fully equipped with hot water baths and flush toilets and a cook down there who will produce the very best of high class meals! With all the material he's got but that's all got to be ordered, all your spare parts for your mechanics have got to be ordered, and you've got a bunch of people of different backgrounds some diesel mechanic, diesel drivers others high powered scientists a cook and that sort of person, and he's in charge of the lot and he's got to maintain order, he's got to decided what the summer programme will be and make certain that all the stores are there for that particular programme. And the man who is a successful leader of a big station like that is a very good man, he'll do well! And usually they are people that have been down there for at least one year and then take over in the second year or have been down twice before and then go back. It would be very difficult for a newcomer to take over a leadership like that, you must have someone with experience because there are dangers and things, people go out in the blizzard without saying they are going out or where they are going then you have to send out a search party to find them, with a 100mph wind blowing and snow and you can't where you are! There are, it is a dangerous country and you've got to be very careful as they are now, we weren't back then, but they are. Nowadays if you leave the base you sign on where you're going and the time and when you are expected to come back; if you go in a boat you'll take your lifejacket and fully dressed up for boating and if you're going sledging you'll have emergency rations for so many days, and you'll write down how many

rations you've got, if pushed you can make them last for twice that time! And that's essential if you've got 10/20 or in summertime 30 people in the base and you've got to keep your eye on them and know where they've all gone.

[Part 2 1:12:38] Verdenius: What kind of dangerous things did you?

Stephenson: Oh getting caught out. If you're going over to an island it might be in the early spring you're finding your way through ice floes to get to that island to do some sort of observation, the wind changes the ice packs in you've only got a boat and not a sledge, it's not safe to walk across the ice you've just got to wait until it changes or something breaks up. Or if you go by boat you can be caught out in a storm and swamped unless you've got the necessary life-saving gear on, but usually it's the winter sledging where you're caught out in blizzards or could fall down a crevasse or some accident like that which can happen! And if it's known where you are you can usually be rescued, but if you've gone off without telling anybody then you are a menace to the rest of the expedition! And regrettably in the 1930s we had nothing like that, I would just off in an open boat and just row to another island, do my surveying and come back - I don't think we had a lifejacket in the whole party, even on board! But in the 1930s, [a] they were not so readily available and one wasn't quite so particular. I suppose accidents happened in those days and nobody heard about them, nowadays they'd be on TV before you know what happens!

[Part 2 1:14:15] Verdenius: Did you ever get into problems?

Stephenson: Pardon?

[Part 2 1:14:20] Verdenius: Did you ever get into problems?

Stephenson: What sort of problems?

[Part 2 1:14:26] Verdenius: From you might not get back to the base?

Stephenson: Oh, there again that's very different, in our day we had no communication, today they are all linked and have a radio communication nearly every night.

[Part 2 1:14:42] Verdenius: No! Did you get into problems one time?

Stephenson: Which?

[Part 2 1:14:47] Verdenius: Did you get into any problems?

Stephenson: Such as...getting caught out?

[Part 2 1:14:55] Verdenius: Yeah.

Stephenson: No, had some near misses but usually when we'd been within reach. But I suppose going on the Mont Forel trip in Greenland we had a very near disaster with crevasses, just Wager, Chapman and myself. We came about four o'clock in the early spring, getting dark and we were going through a lot of crevasses which we went through and thought we were fairly safe, but there was still some more so Wager and I went on ahead

leaving Chapman with the dogs, and then Wager was forward on the end of the rope and I was following and he suddenly disappeared, and right down! Well that was the problem, what do I do on my own do I stay there and try and get him out or do I try and fix my ice axe and the rope in the ice and leave him dangling in the crevasse and go back to Chapman? But between me and Chapman there were masses of very deep crevasses and by then four/five o'clock it was getting dusk I could rarely see our own trail I more less had to go on hands and knees to follow the trail back, get Chapman then we both came back and put down another rope to Wager, who very fortunately he had come up against a chunk of ice which had got wedged across the crevasse and he'd managed to get on to that! So all we had to do was to throw ropes down and get him out, but that would have been a problem because we had no communication with the base and if both of us had gone down Chapman would have had a job to get back on his own to say what was happening. But that was always a risk in those days when you had no communication, you never know what the sledging party is doing...and even when going up to the ice cap to rescue Courtauld if they got caught out in a bad blizzard and got off the track nobody knew where they were and you had the whole of the Greenland ice cap to look for them! And looking even from the air looking for people is very, very difficult and if you have got rough like a froze sea and in the winter or the spring with a low sun the shadow is such you up can't pick up things like a sledge or a tent or the top of Courtauld's ice station, very difficult to pick these things up!

[Part 2 1:17:42] So in spite of having aircraft to go out a search no certainty the people on the ground will be found. But that's quite different today with the modern telephonic communications everybody's in touch every night even if you can't get back to the base you can get on to another base that you know about and they can get back to the main base. All sorts of intercommunication even with the Belgians and the Dutch and the Americans whoever might be around? But we certainly got into difficulties and one our biggest problems was when the sea ice broke up under us in Graham Land in the second year. We decided in order to prepare for the summer we would go down in early spring and the full moon was shining because the full moon down there makes it as light as day, with all that snow around! And we would take six sledges and six people, take an enormous depot down and leave it ready for the spring journeys. Well we took everything we had that only left three people at the base and no communication between the two, we even had the tractor we took that as well! And after a 100 miles or so our camping on the sea ice fairly close to the mountains, we got involved in a tremendous blizzard, these winds come down the valley from the cold top so warmer down below therm winds coming down at 120-150 mph and that can be pretty terrifying in a tent! A double tent in which the two covers flap against each other so the noise is simply terrific but we withstood that for three nights! As all our gear there talk about eggs in one basket we had everything down there! Well then it calmed and everything was quiet and we were getting our first night's real sleep and then suddenly - I was sharing a tent with Rymill - there was a knocking on the ice underneath just like someone tapping 'You wanting to come out?' 'What on Earth is that?' Then we turned over and nothing happened again, then a bit later another great tapping underneath and then 'God the ice is cracking up!' and it was!! We were camping on the sea ice and it was beginning to crack and move up and down there were three tents, two people in each and one crack was

open water in between the group of tents, so we to decide to do something. Rymill said 'We can't do anything tonight it's far too dark must wait until we get some daylight and see where we are'. There were some rocky islands some distance ahead which we thought we might get to, so for the rest of the night we used, I had an ice axe on a long pole which we used for probing the ice and we used that to just measure the crack see whether the crack was getting bigger or less between the tents. And fortunately we were alright until it was daylight, then we all packed up the tents and Rymill said 'It's about three miles to those islands, we must get to those otherwise we get another wind all this ice that has broken up will just be blown out to sea and we'll go with it!!' So we had to struggle over this very broken ice and as we approached the rocks then it got very wet and broken and we were jumping from one bit of ice to another and sometimes tipping right over and we were wet right up to our chests but hanging on to our sledges, which fortunately were floating! And the dogs were able to scramble from one bit or on to another bit, so the sledges remained floating and by this time it was five o'clock at night and quite dark and Rymill was going ahead with a torch, but we actually got to the rock and all got on to solid land. Those islands are now called Terra Firma Islands, and we were there for a week!

[Part 2 1:22:16] The ice blew out to sea, we were surrounded by water that was a near thing! I suppose we have always said if we were blown out to sea when the wind changed direction we would have been blown back again but the ice might have broken up in the meantime. That was I know the three people at base they couldn't have done very much about it they had to leave one person there whatever happens and two people to come out on their own to look for us wouldn't have been safe at all, it was a risk we shouldn't have taken to take six people and so much gear. In the end we had to leave a lot of the stuff on the ice which we lost in the end it just sank but we had enough to replace it. But those are the things one forgets about till you ask a question [laughing]. I've had my other near misses have usually been with the aircraft when I went back in ['81?] we were frozen in, the ship was completely frozen in, the *Kista Dan* a list of 35 degrees for nearly a fortnight we thought we'd never get out! Then eventually the ice began to move and a pool of water appeared just big enough for the aircraft to take off, we had an aircraft on board so we got it into the water and ice all around, elsewhere we couldn't have got the ship out and took off in order to see what lay ahead and if we see another base which is what we are going down for. And there was the pilot, first officer of the ship and myself in the aircraft we took off quite late in the evening and one gets accustomed in the summer to 24 hours daylight and we'd been having that all the summer. But what we'd forgotten, by now we were now getting into April, we'd been very badly delayed and we should have been out of the ice altogether, but by April it's beginning to get dusk pretty quickly and then dark but we flew on in the daylight until we found what we wanted to and found a suitable base, then we turned around and thought 'My God, where's the ship!?' And it was getting dark and so we, we were in contact with the ship we phoned him up and said 'Will you put your lights on to see where we are?' Then we had to fly home on those lights, he got his mayday signal out in case we had to land before then, that was hidden behind my seat in the aircraft, and he said 'Where's that mayday, here you are!' gave me the joystick - I'd never held a joystick in my life before in an aircraft - whilst he went behind my seat and fished for his mayday signal. However a very short time I just

went wobbled the aircraft on for bit then when we got back the pool of water had almost frozen over, well it had frozen over, but not thick enough to land on skis. We were on floats so we just landed and a tremendous splitting of thin ice all over the place quite close to the ship, showered the ship with this broken ice, that was one near miss! The other one I had was in Labrador that had nothing to do with Polar exploration.

[Part 2 1:26:09] Verdenius: Can I have a look at your photos?

Stephenson: Yes!

Some interesting clips:

- From the start really as a Boy Scout attended a lecture by Shackleton talking about the *Endurance* expedition before he left on the *Quest* expedition with Scout Marr. And his Professor at Cambridge was Frank Debenham who had been with Scott, then at Cambridge he met Gino Watkins and was with him on two expeditions to Greenland and Canada.
- Leaving with John Rymill on the British Graham Land expedition in 1934 bound for the Antarctic! [Part 1 0:04:01]
- Entering of Port Lockroy harbour for the first time and then passing through Lemaire Channel. [Part 1 0:10:17]
- Buying their boat *Penola* in France assisted by Dr Jean Charcot and total cost of this private expedition including aircraft and boat was about £20,000! [Part 1:20:38]
- Discovering King George VI Sound and finding sedimentary rocks and fossils [maybe around what is now known as Fossil Bluff] so very excited Lancelot Fleming their geologist! [Part 1 0:25:49]
- Getting signals and information from flyer Lincoln Ellsworth during his trans-Antarctic flight and they headed south. [Part 1 0:31:55]
- Being able to prove Graham Land is part of the Antarctic continent from Ellsworth's and Ted Bingham photos! [Part 1 0:34:10]
- Falling off an ice cliff into the Sound! [Part 1 0:39:09]
- Talks about the rations and sledging gear they carried in those days. [Part 1:0045:49]
- How to drive dogs which mostly had been learned in Greenland by five members of the expedition who had been there with Gino Watkins. [Part 1 0:51:04]
- How they trained the husky pups that had been born there. [Part 1 0:54:24]
- His survey work and taking bearing and the joy of filling in a blank paper to become a map! [Part 1 0:57:53]
- How they started for the day's travelling! [Part 1 1:00:37]
- Listening for a time signal and getting what was most likely the Nuremberg Rally of 1936 in Germany. [Part 2 0:04:22]
- Hearing about Edward VIII's abdication on the base radio and learning who Mrs Simpson was! They missed the whole of the Spanish civil war while away and didn't learn about it till back home! [Part 2 0:09:52]

- The worries that Rymill had with the cost of the expedition while in the Antarctic. [Part 2 0:21:41]
- Lancelot doing a service out in the field and on base when they also had a glass of sherry supplied by his father, the only drink they had! [Part 2 0:23:15]
- Stephenson's thoughts on the Inuit culture and what changed from the '30s to the '80s? [Part 2 0:33:15]
- Talking of Watkins and living off the land in the Arctic, and of Watkins' death while out hunting in a kayak. [Part 2 0:38:11]
- Other small expeditions between the wars and FIDS. [Part 2 0:46:31]
- The rescue of Wager from a Greenland crevasse! [Part 2 1:14:55]
- Almost the disaster of the loss of six men while camping on the sea ice near Terra Firma Islands then stranded for a week waiting for some ice to reform! [Part 2 1:17:42]