

WALLY HERBERT

Wally Herbert recorded at his home on the 12th. Feb 1993 by Jaap Verdenius. BAS archives AD6/24/3/31. Transcribed by Allan Wearden, June 1st. 2016.

Herbert: And that was so long ago there are so very few and I meet so few people from that period and if I go to these reunion dinners and it's always the same people every time yeah! So and they all talk about their doggies and god, it's the same stories you hear every time and it's all very boring! Because many of them went to the Antarctic once only and never went back again, they came back got married they became businessmen or bankers or whatever and I spent my whole life working in the Polar Region's so it was my career! So they have nothing to say except just the same old things all the time, the same stories!

[00:01:02] Verdenius: There are people that went several times to the Antarctic?

Herbert: Yes, yes in recent years there have been a few like that, yeah that's right but! So let's just talk about first how you actually want to do this. I mean for an example I can give you, so we don't have to spend a lot of time just telling you who I am or what I've done I can give you the information about that if that's easier?

[00:01:32] Verdenius: Yeah, that very good if you do that.

Herbert: Like for example I've got all this stuff here, which tells you what I've done at least up to until 1985, I haven't finished it from 85 on! But this gives you plenty of detail up till that time and the list of the books and publications and things like that. I can also give you, this is also about my general career these are the journeys that I've made in the Arctic and then in the Antarctic I've shown you some on the map. I went on 2 expeditions to the Antarctic the first one was for 3 years down to the British Antarctic Survey, I spent 3 years there and I made maps in the peninsula area. And the second time I went with the New Zealand expedition, and at that time I was making maps in the Beardmore Glacier, Queen Maud range the ones I showed you earlier just outside, so the sum total of miles that I have travelled with dogs is about 25000 miles! And most of that has been through unexplored country where nobody has been, before or since! And that was my job, that's what I was doing!

[00:03:00] Verdenius: You call it a job?

Herbert: That was my job that was my profession!

[00:03:11] Verdenius: You have been on some journeys, where you, how did you choose the place to go, did you choose it?

Herbert: Yeah, it most of the journeys I have made have been to areas where there are no maps, I was there as a map maker, that was my work making maps and so I would go to places where there was no maps! Now in the Antarctic the first time I went there was with the British expeditions, most of the area of that part of the Antarctic had already been

mapped. I was the last one to go there, where there were blank spaces and the blank space that was left on the map was the Peninsula the central part the plateau of the Peninsula. The reason being that the ships had gone the one side and the sledge dog teams had gone down the other side, and they had both made their maps pointing in towards the peninsula, but they couldn't see what was on top of the plateau. The Plateau was like a no man's land, like a dead territory, empty! And the reason was like an escarpment, a big rock face, about 3000 feet high and people couldn't up this, up to the top of this Plateau except in about 3 places on the entire Peninsula and so my job was to go on to the top and right the way along and make a map of that final area! So I was the last one to make a map of unknown territory in that part of the Antarctic! And then from that time on, this was 1958, I came out in '58, the only maps that could be made from that time on were detailed maps with theodolites doing triangulation, accurate maps! Mine was the last map to be made by the old fashioned exploring methods, where you travelled with a wheel on the back of the sledge and you'd use a compass to take bearings and it's with a sledge wheel and compass traverse, and this was the way we made the maps from my time on from my time, from 1958 on there were no more maps like that! I wasn't interested in making the more accurate maps, so I didn't want to go back to that part of the Antarctic particularly. So then I went back to the other part of the Antarctic, the other side of the Antarctic to the New Zealand side, with the Dryden New Zealand expedition because in that part of the Antarctic in the Ross Dependences, there were still areas which were unmapped, totally unmapped! Blank white paper and there I could still make maps of unexplored country!

[00:06:07] Verdenius: You were not interested in Graham Land anymore because it was not white anymore?

Herbert: Yeah, it had been finished, I was only interested in exploring! And equally when I was in with the New Zealanders I made the last map in that area, because in 1962 when I finished, the Americans were then flying aeroplanes all over the Antarctic taking photographs, they were also flying in with helicopters with survey teams occupying stations on the highest summits of the mountains and making maps, very precise maps! Very accurate maps using air photographs and ground control and this was not for me I wasn't interested in that! So all my experience in the Antarctic, which was 5 years, was in the period at the time that you could still, for example, climb a mountain and from the summit of the mountain, whatever you saw beyond that point was unexplored country, you were the first human being to see it! Equally you could go along a coastline or down a glacier, to the end of a glacier you could look along the coast and you'd be the first human being to see that stretch of coastline! And this was the magic for me of the Antarctic, and in 1962 with the air photographs I was no longer interested, so I came out!

Then I moved up to the Arctic and I've been in the Arctic ever since. I switch from the Antarctic to the Arctic and of course in the Arctic you can't make maps because all the maps have been made already! Like for example like in Greenland and Northern Canada, all the territory had been mapped from air photographs or from the ground with surveys and the only area that was blank was the middle of the Arctic Ocean, because there was nothing there to map! And the only thing that has not been done in the Arctic Ocean was a crossing of the

Arctic Ocean from one side to the other, I mean Admiral Peary, Dr. Cook and others had claimed to have reached the North Pole, by going the shortest way to the Pole and back, and so my plan was to make a journey from one side of the Arctic Ocean and across the Pole to the other side! And that was the first crossing of the Arctic Ocean, and that was a journey which took a year and a half, but that was a different idea to the Antarctic, because I wasn't making a map I was making a journey of exploration, a pioneering journey in much the same way, for instance, when Nansen drifted across the Arctic Ocean with the *Fram*, he had a scientific expedition which was based on the ship and the ship was drifting. Now what we did, was we were a scientific expedition, but with no ship we were moving with dogs, and then we set up our camp in the summer and also in the wintertime and drifted on the ice, with the tents, but in that time we were doing scientific work, so ocean depth soundings and geophysical work and studies of the ice and air sampling studies and all kinds of things.

[00:09:22] Verdenius: That's interesting that you make such a difference to what you were doing there, than what you were doing on the Antarctic, because you were mapping, but you were also sort of venturing into unidentified territory?

Herbert: Well both of them were a form of exploration, I mean the one was a pure exploration in the sense of making a map of unknown territory, and this was the traditional way of describing the explorer, he's a man that goes into unexplored country and comes back with some information, usually in the form of a map! Now from the time you couldn't make maps because it had been done, or if for example if you went right across the North Pole, where there's no map anyway then what you do is make a map of the seabed or other scientific work which is also exploration! In much the way Nansen did, and of course Nansen was probably the greatest of all the Arctic explorers, because he was this perfect combination of being a scientist and the adventurer and the explorer, he was this combination! Now the sad thing is, the word explorer is totally misused these days, you know every expedition is called an exploration, every adventurer is called an explorer! And they haven't been exploring for 25 years, there's nothing to explore, they are adventurers! And that's all they do, they simply adventure, they don't produce maps they don't produce science or if they do any science it's just a tiny bit! Just to make it look that they are useful, really the priority is to be the first to get to the North Pole! On your hands, flying forwards or backwards or becomes something very contrived!

[00:11:10] Verdenius: Contrived!?

Herbert: Contrived means when you try to move the goalposts, you have a game and you no longer can be an explorer, and you shift the position of the goalposts, you say well the rules have changed now! That instead of going across and being the first man to cross, the first human being to do this, we will become the fastest human being to reach the North Pole unsupported, or the fastest to go, or by yourself or whatever, they keep on thinking up new ideas of getting to the North Pole, which is different to anybody else!

[00:11:47] Verdenius: Far fetched!?

Herbert: Yes, yeah in a way it's necessary because we are running out of things to do, but the sad thing is the focus is always on the Pole, they must go to the Pole! And the sad thing is, there are plenty of things to do in the Polar Regions but the modern adventurer needs to have something that he can focus on, something that the general public understands. They have to keep going back to the North Pole or the South Pole, which is very sad, a lot of wasted energy, they could use that same energy in going to some other part! Which would be useful, but they perhaps wouldn't get so much glory, and this is what really they are after!

[00:12:31] Verdenius: Yes, I've seen what the aim to fill, because it is also about what people from different parts of history get out of it!

Herbert: Yeah!

[00:12:46] Verdenius: It is also about first getting to the Pole and you have to think up another goal?

Herbert: Sure, that's exactly right!

[00:12:54] Verdenius: From the discovery to the scientific work and probably after you go to something else.

Herbert: Yeah, sure.

[00:13:01] Verdenius: But what goal do you think is fair?

Herbert: The goal throughout my own career the goal has changed, for instance when I first started going, when I went to the Antarctic for the first time when I was 20 in 1955, at that time about 80% of the Antarctic was unexplored, totally utterly unexplored no human being had seen it, it was blank on the map, it was white! Now in a very time that map was completed, was from 1955 to about 1960, there was much more activity much more interest in the Antarctic, the International Geophysical Year attracted a lot of attention to the Antarctic, and so on. There was a huge input of energy went into the Antarctic, also a lot of the Antarctic was uninteresting anyway, it was just icecap so there was nothing much to make a map of! The only part's that were interesting was the rocks around the coastline or some of the mountains, mountain ranges, so in a very short period of time the Antarctic was completely mapped, all of the interesting bits! So from my point of view, I had to then shift my attention to something else, because my goals had been achieved, my interest in the Antarctic, I couldn't justify going back there to make maps, because other people had made before were going to produce better maps, that wasn't my interest because I was a pioneer, deep insight, because looking for something that hadn't been done!

[00:14:46] And at that time, there were very few things that hadn't been done, the world was very quickly being finished, the period of exploration was ending. And so by 1965-66 the only thing that was left, the only big thing was, in the world, was as far as I was concerned, was to make a first crossing of the North Pole! Because the first crossing of the Antarctic had also been made 1957, Mount Everest had been climbed, so the only thing that was left was the crossing of the Northern Icecap! And then you complete the trilogy, it's like 3 things the

highest mountain in the world, the southern icecap of the world, the northern icecap of the world! The other 2 had been done, I then wanted to make the final, the third, and then having done that, then what next!? The next was to make a film, what next was to make a circumnavigation of Greenland, but all these things were in a way past the period where history was being made by the explorers! It was in a way, I was now into extra time when there was really nothing else to do, except climb Mount Everest by a more difficult way! Or backwards or blindfolded, but I couldn't be a pioneer anymore, there was nothing be the pioneer of anymore and so at that stage I began to wind down so to speak!

[00:16:21] Verdenius: The idea of climbing the highest mountain, the icecap where does that come from?

Herbert: It just comes from looking at a map of the world and saying, you know, what is Man doing here and looking back through history, through 400 years of history and you can see that even in Frobisher's day, Martin Frobisher he was claiming that the only thing that was left to do was to go through the North West Passage. To discover the North West Passage, the only thing left to do that's what he actually said and yet there was a North Pole to discover, the South Pole the Antarctic to discover, but as far as he was concerned there was only one thing left to discover and that was the discovery of North West Passage! So all the way through history Man has been looking for which he believed to be the last *great thing* to do! And it obviously reaches a point when there isn't anything else to do of a particular type, like the exploration of the world in the physical sense of actually finding out what's there! For example when I made the journey across the North Pole, it was impossible to make a landing with aeroplanes at any point along that journey, to pull us out if anything went wrong! So it was the last journey to make, the last expedition to make a journey of that sort of length, distance, where you could not be pulled out! It was the last, in a sense pioneering journey. When you made the first footstep there was only one way to survive and that was to get to the other side, you couldn't come back, you couldn't be picked up by an aeroplane you had to go right the way across or not survive!

[00:18:10] Verdenius: And that's what you were after?

Herbert: That's what I wanted to do, yeah. In a way the interesting thing about this was on the day we actually sighted land at the end of the journey and that was a year and a half after we had set off from Alaska, on the very moment on the GMT time and the date that we sighted land for the very first time when John Young took the photograph of the earth from the moon! With the moon in the foreground and the earth rising up, the *Earthrise* is a very famous picture and that was the first time any human being had taken a photograph of that. At the precise moment that he took that picture we sighted land at the end of the journey across the Pole! And that to me was very significant statement, in a way it was a kind of statement that the terrestrial exploration of the earth all the main things have now been done. It happened to coincide with Earth rising from behind the moon, and Man's first sight of that. It also made me realise, too, that when you see that picture of the Earth rising, this blue & white sort of brilliant planet and its black-black background, with the moon in the foreground you think this is a very special planet! This is a very special place and here the precise

moment he was doing that, we were sort of saying 'Look how clever we are, we have just crossed the Arctic Ocean'! We were sticking a flag in and saying 'Look how brave and clever we are', and what we were doing was the last, in a way, gesture of sort of chauvinistic bullshit, that chauvinistic bullshit you know sticking the flag in and saying 'How clever we are Norwegian, we are this and that, we have done this, we have done that!' And it's unnecessary, as from the moon see planet Earth and see men sticking flags in and saying 'look how clever we are!' It's unnecessary, it's past, it's dated, it's a part of history which is ended and it ended at that moment he took that photograph or it should have done! You see what I mean? It was no longer necessary for Man, because we'd made the last journey across the Pole anyway, to still stick flags in and say 'look how clever we are!' We should be looking at ourselves as the human race, not as this or that. So we should have more concern for the planet, we should be looking at the planet as a very special place instead of going just all over it and trying to get famous by beating everyone else, going to the Pole quicker or blindfolded or backwards, or what the hell, what does it matter!?

[00:20:58] Verdenius: Do you feel that, or maybe you said do you regret setting this flag?

Herbert: No because it was part of history, the whole idea and the period I came into history was in the sort of the final stages of the period of exploration. And it was a very macho period where man needed to actually conquer, to go out and cross the Antarctic or go to the Pole or climb Mount Everest or all these things he was still discovering the earth! And it was very necessary for him to have this very aggressive energy, because that is what drove him to get to these places, because it was physically uncomfortable to go there and do these things, and what usually happens with any kind of exploration is that the hardest parts are always left to last anyway! Always, always and so right at the end of this period of exploration is required this huge amount of aggressive arrogant energy for Man to achieve these things! So he has to stick flags in, he has to be a patriot he has to be an asshole basically, to do that, to have this aggressive energy! Ok so publicly he also had to be a nice guy too, so in a way be a twofaced man, had to be driven by this force that he wants to beat everyone else, but to be polite and nice and poetic, so on. So in a way towards the end of that period of history it was producing men like Scott, who was a very fine writer, a very sensitive writer, who appealing to people as a poet. People like Shackleton who was a very flamboyant figure, who wasn't just an aggressive macho flamboyant type of man, but a very sensitive man and brilliant leader! And so my interest in history after the journey across the North Pole started then to focus, why it had produced certain men. For example was there any single individual that came to the Earth, that had all the virtues of the explorer, that was the perfect explorer, the archetype explorer? And the answer is no, not a single one, not even Nansen because if you look back through the whole period of the last say 100 years, you'll find there was period where all the great explorers that made their name in history, that went into history, were on the Earth at the same time!

[00:23:47] And most of them were actually in the polar regions at the same time, some as very young men, some as old men. Like for example at a time Nansen was still alive, Byrd was making his expeditions. They were all here on Earth at the same time and yet not one of those men had all of the virtues of attributes of the explorer to do everything that was needed,

so you had this sort of battle between Amundsen and Scott and Shackleton which was necessary, because no one of those 3 men had everything that was necessary! But the 3 together fighting each other produced the results, and the result in that particular case was that the Antarctic, the South Pole anyway, was wiped off, was ticked off being one of the goals of Man! It released energy, instead of men putting so much effort and energy into reaching this point on the surface of the Earth, which is nothing. Because they all knew there was going to be nothing there, it took that energy and dispersed it, it meant we didn't need to go to the South Pole anymore, because Amundsen and Scott had got there! Following Shackleton they could now use that same energy and go and do other things which were more useful! It's a bit like if you say all the energy you use in going to try and go through the Straits of Gibraltar out into the Atlantic there is a blockage there, because man was afraid to go into the Atlantic, and the pressure came on and the curiosity, 'What lies beyond?' One man went through and then suddenly they all went through, the whole of the Atlantic and the rest of the world was opened up! But it needed that one man to go through first to lead them, so that one man is special as a historical figure, almost as a man sent to Earth, almost as a mission, his job was to do that and he then released the energy to go out! All through history you can find these moments in time, when something very significant happened and from that point on history changes, it goes into another gear and we have reached that stage now! Where the Earth has been explored physically on the surface, the exploration now must be into other things, we don't need now to actually map any part of the Earth because it can all be done by satellite! So we are now looking for other ways, what does Man do now? He looks for a third Pole, the other 2 have been discovered and a third is the mystical Pole if you like, it's the Pole that cannot be seen, it's the Pole which Man needs to try to reach. Just as he tried to reach the other 2, but he can't see it, it's something which is spiritual, something mystical, it is something that is far more powerful, far more important, than the physical exploration of the Earth!

[00:26:52] Verdenius: It's said a great part of the Antarctic is in fact uninteresting?

Herbert: For me, the vast majority of the Antarctic is uninteresting because it is plateau. For example I've done a lot of travelling on the polar plateau about 900 miles altogether, I've had because it's been so boring, because it's flat and the wind is blowing and it's a whiteout or whatever its boring, intensely excruciatingly boring!! And I've had out of body experiences in that situation, many times like hallucinations, where I have been just like on skis in front of the dogs, trying to keep the dogs interested because there is nothing for them to see, so I ski in front but then I have nothing in front of me so I get bored, and then my mind wanders and goes out of my body and goes out ahead of me and calls to me, to come on! Because it is so boring, for me the only interesting part of the Antarctic was making the maps of the mountains or of the coastlines, or of the plateau or of the coastline, the features that you could see, the actual boring plateau part was no good! So for me, for example crossing the Antarctic or crossing the Greenland icecap, there's no way I could have even done that! In a way also for me, it would have been a waste of time because there were more interesting things to do or worthwhile doing, you go across a plateau there is nothing to map and no contours, nothing to see! So at the time, I needed to find land to map or oceans to cross, I've

never understood people that had wanted to across the top of the Greenland icecap for instance from East to West or West to East or South to North or across the Antarctic, because it's so boring!

[00:29:07] Verdenius! The South I mean I'm sure is full of contradictions, I'm not sure it sounds like a mystical venture?

Herbert: The idea of going across an empty space, you mean is a mystical experience?

[Verdenius] Yeah.

Herbert: Yeah, that could be so, certainly Messner said so, Reinhold Messner having climbed all the mountains, the highest mountains in the world, he then crossed the Antarctic continent, and his experience there was a physical one, obviously, because it was a long hard boring journey! But it also had a mystical experience, he was mystical one for him because of the space! In a way I never enjoyed that space, because, partly because there are other things to do. If I'd come 10 years later and all of the mapping had been done, then perhaps I would have crossed the Antarctic or would have crossed the Greenland icecap or something. It would have had a different appeal to me then because it was an open space, but because there was too many other things to do at the time I was around, I never had the need to do that thankfully [laughter!] I had enough in a way mystical experiences of plateaus in the Antarctic, and the 800 miles or so that I travelled on the South Polar icecap! But there I had the benefit of not going from A to B but going around the edge of the Plateau, climbing the mountains and looking down on to the mountain ranges and then making maps, so it wasn't, it could have been a lot worse! [Laughter!]

[00:31:02] Verdenius: I mean, I have seen some of your painting's very shortly, but you did not paint whiteouts for instance, or things like that!?

Herbert: No I haven't!

[00:31:15] Verdenius: Are they quite figurative?

Herbert: Yes, that's right the paintings themselves are going to change anyway, the paintings change just like everything else changes, like for example we've been describing the type of exploration and that my goals have changed over my career, during the course of my career. Equally the paintings are going to change, partly because I'd never painted till 3 years ago and I found that I could paint so I started painting. And then I found that I needed to have enough confidence for the technique of painting that I could then sit back and not think of it anymore and just paint! What was coming from inside me and that took 3 years to learn, because I had to teach myself I didn't go to art school, I didn't have any training as a painter, so I had to teach myself, so by trial & error I learnt how to do it! And now I'm at point where I can be free, and I think the paintings will change and there may well be whiteouts, you know there may well be mystical paintings, there will certainly be not as much detail in any of the work I do from here. They won't be like photographs anymore, they will be much more or have more feeling, but they will have the confidence of being a draughtsman! I know that I can do it so with that knowledge and self confidence of knowing how to paint I

can now be free to just paint whatever is happening and coming through, and this for me is a big adventure! Maybe it's an adventure, which I needed to have all the other adventures out of the way first!? Because I couldn't be where I am now with this quest for the third Pole, for example without having been to the other 2, had to do the other 2 first!

[00:33:11] Verdenius: Where do you go now because you travel every year to the Antarctic?

Herbert: Yes, the trips are usually very short trips and it's, I go down to lecture on ships, on tourist ships or I go for example if they need a guide somewhere in the Arctic, but I prefer the trips to be very short ones because I need to paint, to not be in the Arctic. But it's good for me to get out and have some fresh air and to reconnect with the Polar regions because all of my paintings will be Polar. What I will be doing is using my life's experience, of like 13 years in the Polar regions and all of those experiences will come through my work, and look, what I'm trying to say is that all of the Polar regions are a very fragile part of the world, a very beautiful part of the world. And I can't express this in writing as well as I can with painting. I can reach more people with paintings, and I can reach them quicker and more effectively, because there is a subliminal message in the paintings for people that like my paintings and there are many that won't like them! But for those that like my paintings, they will feel something that is being said them through the painting, and whereas I was to write a book and it's in hard words, they have to read 200,000 words and they can't remember the beginning they sometimes can't even remember the name of the writer! They lose their place when there in a train, they shut the book and when they open it, they can't remember where they left it, but with a painting you can look at it and in seconds you can get the feeling on what the painter's trying to say! And it maybe not exactly what he's saying, maybe the viewer is reading for himself in the painting so I just simply stay open and receive what has to come and I paint it! And hopefully the message is right, which the public to say this, that the Polar regions are very fragile and this world can screw it up very easily!

[00:35:34] Verdenius: You were on the expeditions, on several expeditions you were, in terms of what kind of communications did you have with the outside world?

Herbert: In the Antarctic, the first time to the Antarctic we had radios from the base camp which could contact Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. And we'd do this also because we needed to send weather reports, but the messages where always very, very short! We couldn't send personal messages, except extremely short ones because it was all Morse code. That's the first 3 years and then at Scott Base it was much more sophisticated and we had radios in the field when we were making the journeys with dogs, where we could contact each and contact the base camp! For example, when I was with the British expedition, we had a radio set which in theory could contact the base, but we weren't in contact at all! From the time we left base till the end of the journey along to the Plateau, we had no contact by radio and the idea was that we would make a one way journey along the plateau of the Peninsula, and another expedition would come up and find a way on to the top peninsula, wait for us and show us the way down. Now they had a radio we had a radio but no contact with each other, it was impossible the radios weren't good enough in 1955! And so we had to make a one way journey hoping that we would meet them, and hoping they had found a

way up, if they hadn't found a way up, then we would have to go all the way back eating the dogs, because we hadn't enough food!! And the day we actually met those men we had 3 days food left, just enough to get us down to the coast and then we had to kill seals, and birds and penguins and live for about 2 months till the ship picked us up! Now that was in '55-'58, by 1962 it was much more sophisticated and of course these days you can have satellite navigation which tells you where you are, and you don't even need to navigate. You go across the North Pole or across the South Pole without even knowing how to navigate, because you just push the right buttons and you're little magic box tells the satellite tells you where you are, tells NASA and NASA sends a radio message and you know where you are! The amazing thing these days, you can actually an adventurer, or they call themselves explorers, who goes across the North Pole or to the North Pole or the South Pole without knowing how to navigate! So things have changed very much.

[00:38:22] Verdenius: Virtual reality! [Herbert: Yeah] Do you regret it?

Herbert: Sorry?

[00:38:24] Verdenius: Do you regret it?

Herbert: No, because it was all a part of history, and history is moving all the time, so in a sense I came right at the end of the period of the old fashioned explorer whereas you used paper and pencil to navigate and where you'd no contact from the time you set off till the time you got back! There is then a period even though as I said, when we completed our journey it coincided with the picture from the moon, never the less nothing ever ends abruptly exactly at a precise moment, you can say that was a significant moment in history, but there is a period of overlap. It takes a long time for Man to change from being a macho explorer to being a sensitive explorer who is interested in other aspects of discovery, the discovery of the mind for instance, what the mind the mind is capable of and what Man should be doing on the planet, so there would be a period maybe for another 10, 15, 20 years where there will still be macho heroes, going to the North Pole, going to the South Pole sticking flags in and saying 'Look how clever I am', and so on, before Man finally realises there are other things he can do, which are just as exciting and as important to the evolution of Man, but they are not as physical and macho, you know! You can for example play a game of rugby or some, be a brilliant skier or mountaineer, you can still express your masculinity, your skill in that sense, but you must also have this other dimension, this other sort of driving force. It mustn't be simply to be better than everyone else as a physical specimen, but things are more important to the survival of Man than one's ego and sticking a flag in something.

[00:40:23] Verdenius: Do you think this is the discovery of the mind, actually causes us any geographical location, I mean do you have to go there for this thing to unfold? [Herbert: No] Do you think of birds when you sit there on the Plateau?

Herbert: Yeah, it's obviously not necessary or not essential for a man to go to those, to put himself in isolation in order to have that experience, you could have it by closing his eyes, he doesn't have to physically go to the North Pole to have that experience and there are many people that have been to the North Pole or the South Pole or whatever or the summit of

Mount Everest without having those experiences. It doesn't mean that every man that is a top mountaineer is going to be a mystic, I mean even Messner is not a mystic! He speaks like a mystic, he behaves like a mystic but he isn't a mystic.

[00:41:29] Verdenius: Oh yes a Zen God!

Herbert: Oh yes, he is a very, very professional and brilliant mountaineer, nevertheless I think you cannot be so close to mountains, or so close in my case say to the polar regions without absorbing some of that mysticism and I'm perhaps 10 years older than Messner, and it's interesting to see that 10 years ago I would have expressed myself in a very different way. For example 10 years ago I would have not said that there was any mystic element in the experiences I had in the polar regions! That it was simply any success that I had there was the success of knowing what to do through experience, and I had been there so long and understood was in tune with environment because of experience. 10 years later, then well I could say yes I was actually picking up all sorts of things, lessons from the Arctic which I wasn't aware of because I didn't have a name for it, I couldn't express myself. Equally Messner is in that situation right now being 10 years younger [laughter!] But he is, all of the feelings are there I can see, I can read him, I know that he is drawing from his experiences, but he is not acknowledging at the moment that he is having mystical experiences, that he is deeply in tune with a level of the mind, which he is not even aware of right now because he doesn't have the words for it!

[00:43:15] Verdenius: Because his writing he spoke a little about it?

Herbert: Yes he does, yeah this is what I find is so interesting, that he of course he has been sort of perhaps more exposed to it than I was because he has been in Tibet or Nepal, whereas in my case in the Arctic. They have a different way of expressing it in the Buddhist tradition, he has picked up some of that. His house, his castle in Northern Italy is full of Buddhist artefacts. Whereas in the Arctic it's a much more simple shamanistic belief and so I wasn't exposed to that as much as Messner, so to some extent he's picked up some of the words and some of the ideas and concepts, but he doesn't entirely accept them at this stage. They are absorbed into him and they will eventually blossom and express themselves I think, given.

[00:44:18] Verdenius: Does that give special status to the Antarctic region, there being no any people around at all, nothing to pick up?

Herbert: Yes that's right, yeah in many ways is one of the reasons why I preferred the Arctic to the Antarctic. The Antarctic to me was very exciting because I was a young man, because I was exploring, making maps, and it was exciting and very heady, made feel proud of myself and very special! And it was a very special privilege to be there at that time, but then having moved away from the Antarctic and gone up to the Arctic I found for that, for example, having believed I was a very expert dog driver, because I'd spent 5 years in the Antarctic, I then went to live with the Eskimos and found I was not an expert dog driver! And it was very humbling experience to find that the Eskimos, the Eskimo boys of 9 or 10 were much better dog drivers than I was! And then I would argue, 'But ah, yes, they are only good at driving on smooth sea ice, yeah, they don't have any experience of glaciers or crevasses or things like

that', and this was just the defence of my experience, my sort of need to be, my arrogance because I discovered later, they did in fact have a vast amount of experience. Some of the hardest journeys I've made in my life have been with Eskimos and they were travelling conditions that no white man in his right mind would travel in and they would do with great expertise! So I learnt to in a way to start over again in the Arctic and just being with the Eskimos and finding out how they lived and hunted and what they felt about the Polar regions was fascinating. But I'm not an anthropologist I just simply loved being with them, and travelling with them.

[00:46:32] Verdenius: But as opposed to the Antarctic you prefer the Arctic because there is?

Herbert: I prefer the Arctic partly because there were people and history, that the history went back much farther than the Antarctic history. That all the Antarctic history is this trio of macho explorers, man breasting the cold winds, sticking flags in, being heroes whereas the Arctic is a history which is entirely different. It's a history of people living there by great skill, by being in tune with the environment and not fighting the environment like the polar explorers. They have knowledge and understanding of the weather and of the ice, they are experts in living in that environment, most of the heroics in the Antarctic were the result of inexperience, of amateurish, where men with no experience in the Antarctic, simply with a conviction that they should be ok, because they're Royal Navy! Could go to the South Pole yeah, and that kind of arrogance is absurd when you compare it with the Eskimos who are so brilliant at travelling in that environment, and being in that environment and they are in tune with it, whereas most of the white explorers where fighting it most of the time! If there was blizzard then it was heroic to go out into the blizzard, whereas the Eskimo might just say it's stupid, plain stupid! But he would still go into the blizzard if he had to, and he would perform in the blizzard infinitely better than the white explorer, because he was in tune with it all the way through, he understood. So this is to live in the Arctic you suddenly realise there is so much more going on than the snow icecaps sort of icebergs and the scenery.

[00:48:24] I mean there is plenty of pretty scenery in the Arctic as well The other thing about the Arctic is the Eskimos travel in the winter, hunt in the winter whereas in the Antarctic all these explorers for the vast majority hide away in the wintertime, because it's dark outside! So they hide in their little holes in the ground or in the snow, and wait until the weather is better, even if they have to go out and do an observation of the weather, the chances are that they will do it by electronic devices which tell them what the temperature is, they don't have to physically go outside! When I was in the Antarctic, at Scott base we had had temperatures of -76F and 2 of us had out every day to look after the dogs, because the dogs were outside on the shelf, on the sea ice, so every day we would go outside for 2 hours whatever the weather and temperature. The rest of the men on the base only went outside once a week when it was their turn to fetch snow to put into the snow melter, that's the only time they would ever go outside! And so in the Arctic the hunters go out in the dead of winter when its pitch dark, they travel in darkness, they learn to move along the coastline by for example by looking at the stars and the stars will stop where they go behind a mountain. So if you know the mountains well enough because you have been observant in the summertime, you know the shapes of the mountains, you can tell where you are, not by the stars, but where the stars

are not! In other words if there is a mountain blocking the stars, you can see the shape of the mountain, simply by that kind of blocking out of the stars, and they can tell well just by that, they bob their heads up and down and they can see the profiles of the mountains. I mean they are the most amazing, brilliant travellers! This is simply just because they know every inch of their territory, they're always observing, they can tell by just looking at the sea ice how thick it is. Eskimos never fall through thin sea ice, its only white explorers that fall through thin sea ice, the Eskimo can tell just by looking at it whether it will take his weight. But the macho hero adventurer who is trying to reach the North Pole faster than ever any white man has ever done, he will fall through the sea ice, because he doesn't know the difference, he hasn't enough experience or interest in that sea ice, he's there really just to get to the Pole and back again as quick as he can and get himself famous, make lots of money, get lots of fame, hear the sound of the applause, and when you hear the sound of the applause then what happens is, then you need to have more, it's like being a junkie! You get on a fix, on a high. Yeah you hear the sound of the applause you love it, you start to believe your own PR, your own publicity and then the publicity dies away, because you're no longer famous someone else has done something else that has attracted attention, you're no longer famous!! So you then have do something else, which is more famous than the other guy in order to hear the sound of the applause again!

[00:51:43] Verdenius: You were at the time also, touched by this virus?

Herbert: Yes, yes!

[00:51:50] Verdenius: You were an expert yes?

Herbert: Yes absolutely, and it was essential at the time to have that kind of arrogance, and that need for fame because otherwise you wouldn't have done it! The risks, the dedication, the effort and the discomfort all of these things were factors that would stop you from doing it, you needed to have that need, that driving need, to do something very special, unusual, the arrogance to believe that you were the only man in the world that could do it! The absolute conviction that you would succeed, total conviction! And probably looking back through my life at the age of about 33 at the time of crossing the North Pole, I was probably more focused on what I needed to do in life and had more energy focusing on that one objective than at any other time in my life! There was more power went into that, that was part of the reason for the success also many other factors, but that was one of the reasons that we were successful!

[00:53:06] Verdenius: [Incomprehensible]. [Herbert: Yeah.] Do you think it is there a way in which people can live if shown with the environment on Antarctica?

Herbert: I think it's very difficult, because they don't have enough experience, they simply don't have time to be in tune, you can be in tune in theory obviously if you, for example, you have deep sort of convictions that Man must conserve the planet and so therefore you are careful about rubbish and that kind of thing. That's only just scratching the surface, you need to be spiritually in tune, not simply in a practical way, and Man isn't really spending enough time there to have that kind of spiritual connection with the place, whereas in the Arctic I mean the Eskimos would have that, maybe a few white men too that have had a long time

there. [We have to watch the clock because of the train, there's a train at 12.35 and there's another one at 2 o'clock]

[00:54:19] Verdenius: Ok.

Herbert: [And I also have to pick my wife up at quarter to one]. I'm just wondering if there's anything else? I can give you for example one of those books, *A World of Men*, which talks about both, talks all about the Antarctic, about my first expedition there and also my second one with the New Zealanders and also that map in the back. It's not a well written book, it was my first ever book, it's kind of naive and not well written, but it gives you the information and then you also have some of this stuff here, which gives you a bit of background too, at least some of the dates.

Abrupt finish!

Interesting clips:

- [00:18:10] 'Earthrising' photograph being taken the same time as the crossing the North Pole.
- [00:26:52] Out of body experience on the Polar Plateau!
- [00:31:15] Talking about his painting.
- [00:35:34] Talks about communications in the Antarctic.
- [00:41:29] Talks about Reinhold Messner.
- [00:46:32] In praise of the Eskimo life in the Arctic.