# DAVID MATTHEWS

Edited transcript of a recording of David Matthews interviewed by Jaap Verdenius on 13th February 1993. BAS Archives AD6/24/3/32. Transcribed by Andy Smith, 28th October 2021.

Part One

[Part 1 0:00:00] Verdenius: Personal names?

Matthews: No, that's fine.

[Part 1 0:00:02] Verdenius: and things like that? It doesn't really matter for you?

Matthews: But what do you say? That was … There were two separate accidents in the two years I was there which go over for that particular period, a particularly high death rate which obviously everyone was very sensitive about. When we came home, in 1967, we were nobbled, so to speak, immediately the ship got into Southampton, or before it actually docked at Southampton. We had the BBC on board recording a programme, apparently fairly innocently. But when the programme came out, edited, it was angled very much towards these accidents and it put rather a nasty flavour on our homecoming. It was all tied up with the financial stringencies at the time. BAS were on a very tight budget and the programme referred to us as the forgotten people and tried to present the view that these fatalities were perhaps a result of the economic cut-back, which of course they weren't. So that's the sort of area that's rather difficult to talk about.

[Part 1 0:01:48] Verdenius: Was this a radio programme?

Matthews: No, television. I was one of the ones interviewed and I was … Although what I said at the time, I thought was totally uncontroversial, the tone of the whole programme after the interviews had been edited, put all our comments in not such a favourable light. We had a few comments from London Office, as it then was, afterwards but we didn't make a very good showing for BAS, which was … You see, the whole … The situation of coming home at the end of the two and a half year contract was very very traumatic. That was perhaps the most stressful part of the whole time. You had your two and a half years away from the UK, which is a tremendous length of time really to be totally out of touch, but it has been a tremendous experience and that experience really stops once you leave your base, in my case Stonington. The ship comes in and you are immediately submerged in affairs back home. You get the first mail for a year. You know that you have got to leave your dog team behind, your friends behind. And really what you want to do at that stage is just get home, get it over and done with. You have got to make a break with Stonington and with BAS life and get home.

[Part 1 0:03:34] Matthews: But in practice, in those days, you were faced then with three months on the ship and that is a long time to be just in transit. And they weren't a particularly easy three months in that there was a lot of boredom when you had no duties on the ship. The food wasn't great. There were frictions which had existed on the base which showed themselves on the ship – all this sort of thing. So you spent

three months slugging all the way home up the Atlantic on the ship. And then, just when you get to Southampton, and you can see home again and you spend … The day we actually got there, we arrived early, twelve hours early because we'd had favourable weather across the Bay of Biscay, a following wind. And they wouldn't allow us to dock early because the arrangements had been made for the next day. So still, at the end of our two and a half years and three months on the ship, we had to sit at anchor off Southampton. And we had run out of cigarettes; we had run out of drink; we had run out of fresh food. We had nothing and we had to sit there for another twelve hours looking at the lights of Southampton. We were all so totally pissed off. And then, the next morning, on board come the BBC and record these interviews for their film. It's no wonder they got some ammunition to make their case that we were a disaffected bunch. But it all blew over. But that was a very very long and not altogether happy time, that three months slog home on the ship.

[Part 1 0:05:29] Verdenius: Disaffected by …?

Matthews: We weren't in fact. We were just … There were one or two individuals who were perhaps disaffected. There always were on BAS. There were always the moaners and groaners. No, it was simply … Looking back on it, I think it was the strain of knowing that one was going to have to make this major readjustment to civilisation and the long drawn out period of anticipation we had before we could get on with it. As I say, our main life, all our interests and our life for two years had been at our base, in my case Stonington, and that had been a fantastic experience. The ship wasn't a fantastic experience. It was just plain boring – rather uncomfortable on a small polar ship coming up through the tropics at ten and a half knots. It was a long slog and it was like we had all that time just waiting, unable to get on with our readjustment. We were still amongst our old cronies and our old way of life and unable to get on with the reintegration into civilised life.

[Part 1 0:06:58] Verdenius: How did that work the other way round, because you also spent three months …?

Matthews: Yes, going down. Well it was six months in my case to get down there. That was a difficult time but in a totally different way. That was a bit like going off to war because you'd had plenty of time to prepare for it but the actual moment of uprooting was quite traumatic too, yes, and left girlfriends behind. Very few were married. BAS didn't like taking married people down for a two year contract but most of us had steady girlfriends. Most of us were realistic enough to know that by the time we came home again, they would have gone off and found someone else. So yes, it was a difficult parting and again, you had this period in limbo, when you had left everyone behind, left all your home life behind but it was going to be three to six months before you could start your life in the Antarctic. And the ships gave you nothing to do in that three to six months. We didn't have much work to do on the ship. So it was endless time for brooding and thinking about it, which some people shrugged off as like water off a duck's back, but some of us probably more introspective individuals took that quite hard yes. That was a long time.

[Part 1 0:08:34] Matthews: I was unusual in that when I actually arrived at Stonington … I left the UK in – if I remember rightly it was October the 18th, about the middle of October anyway, 1964. We stopped in the Falklands which was super. That was a

week or two in the Falklands which was magic time, under the old way of life in the Falklands. I then did some work in the South Orkney Islands, for two or three months summer work. I didn't actually reach Stonington, where I was due to be based, until February, so that was four months later. And the week I got to Stonington, one of the aeroplanes crashed; one of the old Single Otters crashed and my whole geology field programme had been dependent on that aircraft, the next two years of operations. And so I literally got there to be greeted by a telegram instructing me to return to the UK because my programme was cancelled due to this aircraft. So when I finally got there after all these months, and I still hadn't forgotten the girlfriend I left behind and all the work and other things that I had left behind. And there I was, given the opportunity to turn straight round and forget about my two years and go home again, and that was a terrible decision for me to make.

[Part 1 0:10:14] Matthews: But I was determined to … I was able to think rationally enough to realise that I'd come that far and the experience I had come for, which was to spend some time, a winter, in the Antarctic was within my grasp. And so I hatched up an alternative geological programme and telegraphed it to Adie in the London Office and it was accepted, so I was told after talking about it with everyone on the ship and round about. That was accepted and so I did stay and did my two years at Stonington on a much more modest geological programme. But that was an awful decision to have to make. Of course by the time I did get back, two years later, well I had my 'Dear John' like so many other people, I think perhaps about eighteen months later. You get a telegram saying your girlfriend has married someone else and it means absolutely nothing at that stage. I was in the middle of a sledge journey at the time and miles from anywhere, just to get a message over the radio, saying a telegram from Miss So-and-so for you. You just think 'Oh well, that's another life, somewhere back the other side of the world.'

[Part 1 0:11:59] Matthews: One or two of my friends and contemporaries came back married the girls they had left behind, but yes, that's obviously a big source of tension when one leaves at the beginning of such a long trip. BAS policy, as far as I know, even at that time, was not to take married people because of the obvious tensions that caused. But one or two of the staff, like pilots, RAF pilots who are seconded for one season, some of those were married. I think one or two of the doctors were married as well, but they mostly did shorter tours. How they felt the strains I really don't know, but it obviously must have been a big strain.

[Part 1 0:12:52] Verdenius: Did you not react when came back from a sledging journey and there was a Dear John?

Matthews: No, in my particular case I was actually out on a sledging … because at that time, radio contacts weren't as good anyway. We used to get – well you have probably heard this from other people – but we used to only get mail once a year of course, when the ship came in, but we used to get this radio letter once a month, so many hundred words you were allowed free, which came usually from your parents, or your next of kin, and we could send one hundred words out once a month free, I seem to remember it was. And you could get ordinary telegrams but you couldn't actually speak on the radio like you do now. No, I was on a winter sledge journey somewhere in the south of Marguerite Bay and we used to have to make contact by radio with Stonington twice a week I think it was usually, for a safety check.

[Part 1 0:14:06] Matthews: One evening when we were in the tent and having made camp, the radio operator said that he had a telegram for me that he did not think he would want to read out over the air because everyone else would be listening. I said I didn't mind what it was. He said 'Oh, I will send it to you in Morse Code.' So I had to laboriously take all this down in Morse Code. It just didn't mean anything. I have still got a copy of it somewhere, in my diary I think, and it was so alien. When you have only had mail once in eighteen months, back home really doesn't mean all that much. All your problems connected with home are so far away that you just don't think about them.

[Part 1 0:15:07] Verdenius: What did you do after you noted this down?

Matthews: What did I do? In what sense?

[Part 1 0:15:19] Verdenius: Did you go cooking or did you go for a walk in the snow?

Matthews: No, I just sat down and read my book again I think. It literally meant that little. We were just on a winter sledge journey which was fairly hard work anyway, in the dark or near-dark, cold and most of your energies were occupied in surviving and covering a few miles every day and looking after the dogs and getting back to base. I haven't looked at my diaries for that bit for … I hardly ever read these old diaries. I may never have read it. I could probably find it, given five minutes, if you want. Do you want to? Yes? Are you recording again? The other thing we used to have was the BBC's radio programme once a month in the winter when – you have probably heard about it. It was called *Calling Antarctica*, specifically for BAS personnel. I have got some old tapes of it. It was a half hour programme and would just be music sand chat.

[Part 1 0:16:40] Matthews: But as part of the programme, there was always a personal message or two and the BBC used to invite the next of kin to make a two or three minute tape which would be broadcast as part of the programme, which was a sort of refined version of hell down on the base, if you knew it was your turn for a message. Everybody would be listening and you would have to … I can actually play you … I've got an old tape of that: my messages that came through. You would have your mother and father come up in the middle of the programme saying 'Hello, David. We are in Birmingham recording this for you.' Or something. And all the rest of the people on the base laughing, listening to it and laughing. I remember one of the pilots who was a married man: his family came on the programme with their message and one of the children came up first and 'Hello, Dad!'. A little ten-year old or something, the poor lad. All ten of us not reduced to tears but it obviously brought him up with a real jerk to hear his child's voice 6000 miles away, brought him up with a real jerk.

[Part 1 0:17:58] Verdenius: You also had two hundred words to send out every month?

Matthews: I think it was one hundred words we could send out and two hundred words we could get in free. Yes, one hundred. That's one of mine that went out, 'check 98 words'. That was sent to my father in Shrewsbury. That went out over the radio, and then I would get one back, a hundred and ninety certainly. They were allowed two hundred words back in. And they had to post it airmail to the Falklands

and then it was sent by radio from the Falklands. So it probably took a fortnight or something like that, to actually reach me. So there was no … The only way of getting urgent news through would be by direct telegram at normal commercial rates, and you would probably get that within 24 hours if the radio conditions were possible, but in those days it was by no means sure that we could – especially in the winter. Radio conditions between the bases and Stanley in the Falkland Islands was quite difficult at times. Sometimes you just couldn't get through. I can't find this Dear John anyway – probably just as well.

[Part 1 0:19:27] Verdenius: What do you write if you have a hundred words to write to home?

Matthews: It's very difficult. You just tell them … Well you can read one of mine, and I think it was just as difficult for … Where was that one I saw back here? Just family talk and then nothing …That's not a very interesting one. Where was that other one? Oh yes, here's one. I sent it out when I was on a sledge trip. I think that was mid-August. 'Mid-August when writing this. Just reached the Wordie Ice Shelf on depot laying trip.' Mid-August, so that's late winter – so that's very cold and dark. 'Quite hard work and some rotten weather but dogs doing well and them getting fitter again.' That means when you are stuck on the base, in mid-winter, you tend to get a bit unfit. 'Had fifty degrees of frost quite often but keep warm enough as long as we have plenty of paraffin. I have only seen the sun once so far. Your airletter not arrived yet.' That's their two hundred words to me, so nothing to comment on. 'Imagine you heading for Scotland sometime soon.' That would be for their summer holiday. 'Hope the weather behaves. Back on base by the end of the month, I hope. All well.'

[Part 1 0:20:57] Matthews: Just very inconsequential but what I was doing. It can't have meant much to them, and their letters to me were just telling me what was going on at home, which again didn't mean … Nice to know that they were alive and well, but the actual details didn't mean an awful lot. I will thumb through the diary again. This is the same period in the diary, August. No, just all daily routine. Oh yes, here we are. I honestly haven't heard this for decades if ever. 'Brought in the rest of the dog harnesses to thaw into the tent. A lot of drifting and big sastrugi.' This is just the sledging observations. 'Arguing with Ian my tent-mate about drunkenness and religion.' That sounds like a good sledging argument.

[Part 1 0:22:40 Matthews: 'Then the radio schedule came up, with base and said he wanted to send my second airletter in Morse. Managed to read enough of the Morse to get the message from Jennifer's mother I think, about her getting engaged this week and hoping it is not too great a shock to me. So it must be a Dear John and I had better acknowledge it. I guess it means that her parents knew pretty well how I felt but how anyone feels now, I don't know and never likely to. I suppose we never meet again' etc. etc. 'I suppose I will go to sleep and let it sink in. Can't begin to imagine what the whole of this trip would have been like without this separation but I may now start to find out. Have to contemplate going home and picking up the old empty threads. She meant a lot to me.' That's probably when it did come to mean something, was when I get to the UK again. The rest of it is just boring sledging talk.

[Part 1 0:24:08] Verdenius: Sledging talk? What is sledging talk?

Matthews: Well, you know, just talking about how the … I can't understand my own scribble here. Oh 'Fine, clear morning.' This is the next day. 'So we took some bearings and got a position fix.' There were several tents and teams on this particular trip. 'Went and roused Keith and John who were lying in, in spite of it being fine weather. They should have been up and decided to relay.' Those were carrying very heavy loads. 'Heavy sastrugi. Soft patches made the going quite rough but I was bringing up the rear.' I was last team for that day which was always …

[Part 1 0:25:02] Matthews: The front team always had to break the trail through soft snow, which was heavy going. The team at the back would … In that case I think there were four or five teams, quite a big procession of us. The one at the back would be following on a relatively well-beaten track, but he would have to carry more on his sledge to make up for that. So it wasn't really that much easier. That was all the details that I used to write about: where we had got to, what the sledging was like. And then, if we had a bad weather spell, when we were what was called lying up in the tent instead of actually sledging, we would do a little bit more about what we were talking about, reading or doing in the tent. If you had a lie-up, you just literally had to do that, lie in the tent all day, except for going out to feed the dogs and check that they were all right. A seven foot square tent with two people installed; there wasn't a lot to do.

[Part 1 0:26:09] Verdenius: How could you lie up there for weeks?

Matthews: Well, here's one here. This was one … I was sledging with this guy, a friend Ian who was another geologist, who was a heavy smoker, a really heavy smoker. And August the 20th: 'Ian ran out or fags at last.' He had been … because we had a free ration, free issue of cigarettes down there. He was smoking something like fifty a day I think and he ran out on this sledge trip and started chewing the bristles on the … We used to have a nylon brush to brush snow off our clothing when we came in the tent. He started chewing the bristles on the tent brush. I remember we finished the trip about two weeks later with a completely naked sledge brush. There were no bristles left at all. It did have a fairly dire effect on him suddenly. 'So we lay in until 11 o'clock by which time I was very stiff and sore but revived with a cup of coffee, reading light novels all day at great speed and writing a bit home.'

[Part 1 0:27:21] Matthews: That would be a letter that wouldn't get posted for another six months or so. You just used to write a bit in it occasionally and save it up through the whole twelve months and then just post it off. 'Very wet drifting snow outside, and very warm and damp inside the tent too. Wind blowing straight onto the door.' That was always uncomfortable. 'Seven days of food left.' So we had to get back to base in that time. Oh yes. 'We raised Terry at one o'clock.' On Argentine Islands, which was one of the non-sledging bases … There was a distinction between the sledging bases and the non-sledging bases where they just had static scientific programmes and for a time they used to do record shows in the evenings to transmit to us, because that was only 500 miles or something.

[Part 1 0:28:22] Matthews: We could usually receive that fairly well. It used to give them something to do and give us something to listen to. They did quite a good record show. 'Nose and upper lip got frostbite. Taking codeine for pain in the chest.' I can't remember what that was. Just normal sledging ailments I should think. We often had

bits of frostbite, and a sore back or a pain in the chest or whatever. A typical lie-up would just be that: dozing and reading and writing a bit of diary. In that case what? Eight lines, that's all. Talking with your tent companion. Sometimes you would get a really good argument going or discussion, feel energetic enough to write lots in the diary.

[Part 1 0:29:13] Verdenius: What books did you take?

Matthews: Well we had quite a good library on base. You could take as many as you wanted out of that: a lot of them were paperbacks, but of course you were just limited by weight for the sledging really. I think we used to take about a sledge box full for a winter trip, when we knew we were going to have quite a lot of bad weather and lying up and a lot of time to read. I think we had about a sledge box full: that's maybe twenty books or something between two of us but on a lie-up day you could read a book a day. You can imagine, if you have got nothing else to do. I remember one of the best was *Don Quixote* because that was so long, it probably lasted two or three days. But bear in mind that a lie-up, as we called it, could last for quite a long time, if it was a bad storm. I think, if I remember rightly, my longest one was sixteen days. I would have to look back some. That was back in September. I would have to think where that was being done.

[Part 1 0:30:32] Matthews: Anyway it was about that: about two weeks. So that's solid confined to tent. Nothing to do except go out … Well because we used to take it in turns to go out and check the dogs and feed them and check the tent and everything, that means each person would only get out once every 48 hours to go to the toilet and get a stretch. The rest of the time we were just literally lying there in the tent. That's a long time for a fortnight. So you read your books fairly thoroughly, but I remember *Don Quixote* was a popular one because it was so long. Also of light books were OK. Sometimes you would meet up with another sledge party and you could swap books with them. That was great.

[Part 1 0:31:21] Matthews: Some people used to draw. I remember one man I sledged with, Jim, he sketched a lot: so all he needed was a little notebook and a few pencils and he would just sketch for hours. He would either draw me or draw something from memory. He used to draw racing cars a lot because that's what he had done. He was a Canadian,; he was an Olympic skier and used to drive fast cars. He used to just draw racing cars from memory. He was a strange guy. I had a letter … I haven't kept up with many of these people but there was a letter from Jim after he …, this Canadian. After he got back, he sent me one letter. He was Norwegian by birth. He went home a year before me and just sent me this one airletter and I never heard from him again. He was telling me about his photographs: 'All have come out well. Maybe we can have a swapping session some time.' We never did.

[Part 1 0:32:30] Matthews: 'Sincerely hope you have a fruitful and enjoyable time and wish you good sledging. In spite of all comforts, I do miss the South, the dogs and our trip, which in retrospect becomes an increasingly happy memory. That trip he was referring to was my longest sledge trip. It was six months just myself and Jim, which is a very long trip to be away from base, 180m days. We didn't travel a huge distance because I was doing geological work in a fairly well defined area, but that sheer

length of time out in the field in a tent with a dog team. That was six months we had; it was a long trip.

[Part 1 0:33:14] Verdenius: You enjoyed it?

Matthews: Yes, it was a tremendous … and it got better. We started in September which was basically pretty early. That was early spring when the weather is still a bit fierce. That was when we had that long lie-up, amongst other things. And then at the end of the trip – we worked all through the spring and early summer on the sea ice which is fantastic because of the natural history. Fantastic. There wasn't any great pressure on us to cover huge distances sledging. If you are sledging to cover big distances, it was always a particular sort of a slog. You always had this pressure. Any day when the weather was reasonable, you would have to travel and when you are travelling, it was hard work. So in a way, it used to spoil the … or take away some of the enjoyment of your surroundings. But if you, as I was then with Jim, working: doing geological work in an area about a hundred miles square, something like that, there wasn't this tremendous pressure on the travelling distances.

[Part 1 0:34:37] Matthews: We could really enjoy our surroundings which were very very spectacular. Being at sea level, sledging on the sea ice a lot, there was a lot of wildlife. All the seals come up onto the ice to give birth, all this sort of thing and it was a tremendous time. And then at the end of the summer, we either had to make a decision to go back to Stonington on the sea ice before it got dangerously thin and breaking up, or you had to do what we did in fact which was to plan to return overland to Stonington which was actually rather a difficult thing to do. And in our case, it meant pioneering a new route onto the Antarctic Peninsula plateau and then travelling back down the plateau which hadn't been done before. It was all new country. So there we were, we did have something of a sledging challenge as well. I couldn't do much geology then. There was very little rock sticking through on the Antarctic plateau.

[Part 1 0:35:53] Matthews: It was a superb trip and it finished up, right at the end, when what happened? Oh yes. We were notified on the radio that … We were going to stay out until about the middle of February I think and then we were told on the radio that the ship had got in early and that we were to head back to base pretty quickly. The *John Biscoe*, that was. And so we travelled back along the plateau in about the middle of January, which is basically midsummer at 6000 feet above sea level, and just travelling which was quite an experience. And we finished up with a … We had to decide whether to make one more camp and then go on down to base the next day or try and do it all in a one-er. The weather was beginning to deteriorate and we thought 'If we do camp, we will probably be caught in a lie-up and that might be another two or three days.' And so we decided. We just had a rest and sledged on. So we finished up with a final day – I forget again the mileage – I think it was almost sixty miles sledging, including a really spectacular difficult descent of the main glacier and ice fall, above Stonington.

[Part 1 0:37:29] Matthews: That bit of it was a well enough known route but even so, it was a very very spectacular route which demands extremely precise control of a dog team, otherwise you would be very dead. That's a memory that will be with me for ever. I remember before we left the plateau … Neither Jim nor myself were religious

in the conventional sense but when we had our last rest up there, before plunging down the ice fall, we were both aware that the other of us thinking that there was some sort of experience there, we were both groping for. If I remember Jim's words correctly, he just said 'There is an awful lot of God out there' which doesn't mean much taken be itself but the feelings of the two of us at the time were very very intense.

Matthews: We knew that what we were looking at was totally unspoilt and what we had been travelling through for the previous month had never been travelled through or seen before, all of which adds up to a … And we were travelling by dog team which puts you in closer communication with the natural way of things, I think, than driving a machine. Although dogs aren't indigenous to the Antarctic, they are a natural way of travelling, if you like: simply man and beast. The whole thing added up, came to a climax, on that last day to achieve a safe descent – a record breaking day of nearly sixty miles, and arrived back at base – was tremendous. I think we actually figured in Fuchs's book. I think that record stood for a while. I don't know if it still does. But the actual fact that it was a record wasn't of importance to either of us, but the memory of it as a culmination of six months of sledging was totally unrepeatable.

[Part 1 0:40:02] Matthews: Even if you take Will Steiger's recent crossing of Antarctica with dogs, he only beat that by … I think he was 200 days to go totally across the longest crossing of Antarctica from end to end. But of course in his case it was pure sledging mileage every day, pressure to cover your average mileage every day. And he admits in his book, Will Steiger, that that prevented them from enjoying their surroundings to a very great extent. It was one of his major regrets in his book that it prevented him from enjoying much of his seven months on the sledge journey, whereas ours, we were really able to live it to the full, if you like.

[Part 1 0:41:04] Verdenius: Also on a sixty mile day you could … because then you have to work quite hard I think to do sixty miles in a day.

Matthews: Sixty, oh yes it was a good hard … It was tiring but it was the ideal end to a journey because there was always … In a comparable way to coming back to the UK, the end of a sledge journey when you got back to base … Even though there were only six or eight people on that base, and they were people you knew, they were your friends, it was still a big jolt to come back into a base routine with six or eight people after you had been so long just with the two of you. Actually at the end of that big day, we arrived back on base between midnight and two in the morning, if I remember rightly. It was a fantastic night, sunlight, beautiful. Low sun, we had been travelling into all the way down the glacier and so we were able to … We got back to base and everyone was asleep. We were able to just sit there, sort the dogs out, get the dogs tied up and fed and sort all the sledge gear out, and then just sit and readjust in the early morning sun for about six hours or something like that, before the base woke up for breakfast. And then you were caught up in all the humdrum activities of base again. So it was a perfect end to a near perfect trip, you could say.

[Part 1 0:42:51] Verdenius: There was an awful lot of good then?

Matthews: An awful lot of good? Yes. There was a lot of bad too. Jim and I used to fight, well in the sense of fight verbally. There were times on that sledge trip when we wouldn't speak to each other for days. He was fairly outspoken. I think I was more introverted or sulky probably if I as feeling put out about something. He would want a blazing row and I would just want to go off and think about something else. So we weren't ideally matched in that respect. Oh it had its downs I think. We had that very long lie-up. We had one or two close calls physically when we had accident situations but nothing that you didn't expect to have to deal with, but we had had one or two close calls. It had its downs and I still remember some of those but you tend to remember the ups rather than the downs fortunately.

[Part 1 0:44:04] Verdenius: Can you find the account of coming back to the base after your journey [?? Inaudible]

Matthews: Yes. Can I find it? Yes. That would have been January … That was the end of my first summer. That would be January 1966. December that's the record of the sledging. [sound of rustling pages and a pause] Here we are: 56 and a half miles, yes. We were travelling at night on the plateau which means that you write a bit under the date. The days sort of lose their meaning. We travelled at night because it's colder and the snow's better. Well here's a bit just the day before we finished. Obviously got cross because I've written here. 'In to cook.' That means into the tent. 'In to cook while Jim puts on another of his acts and flakes out in his bag helpless. It's a bloody good job we went no further than we did, if this is the best he can do, and a good job it's nearly over.' So that was the day before we finished. Just the usual grumble. You grumble at somebody else for not …. When you work together as a pair, you know exactly what's got to be done. Every evening when you make camp, somebody takes a turn in on cook and the other bloke stays outside the tent and does the dogs. Sometimes one of you would be fed up or tired or sometimes literally not feeling very well and the other guy would get bad tempered.

[Part 1 0:46:57] Matthews: Then 11 o'clock: 'Tried to repair my … (I don't understand that) Would be good if it cleared in the early morning but doesn't look very hopeful.' And Thursday: 'Certainly our luck held at last and I am now writing this in the hut in the early morning. We had kept watch all through the night. It cleared up at 5:30. Got up and moved. Still cold, about 0º Fahrenheit but very clear. Position looked poor at first but we found a reasonable route round the head of the Albone Glacier without too much dropping and traversing.' This was all a bit … We were just finishing this sledging trip with a bit of country that wasn't too well known. 'Then a long climb onto the high part of the plateau. Surface quite well blown, crisp and cold and the wind a help. Rewarded at the top with breathtaking views, mainly to the south. No sight of Square Bay. Skied up a small peak for the view but too distant for photography except Bill's Gulch area.'

[Part 1 0:48:15] Matthews: That was a famous sledging route which we were just approaching. Becoming calm and hot now and the dogs were hard to start.' Even though the air temperature could be thirty degrees of frost, at that altitude the sun could be very very powerful and quite a lot of the dogs were dark black and so they would get quite hot. Their fur would get hot even though the air temperature was so low. The effect on our faces was pretty drastic as well. We used to suffer a bit that way: suppurating sunburn just from the ultraviolet. 'Unfortunately we were a bit too

far east and so decided to drop down and head straight for Beacon Hill. All went well at first but then Jim's leading became chronic in my opinion; after miles of tortuous travelling in softer snow, always near-overturning and a lot of up and down. The dogs and I very hot and tired and I swore at Jim when he took no notice. Pushed on and on, grinding uphill in a never ending approach to Beacon Hill. Dogs a bit cooler and going slow. At last Jim stopped and we built a depot.' At that stage we would decide to head off down to base.

[Part 1 0:49:38] Matthews: Never carry the surplus food and stuff downhill. We would always leave it up on the top for other people, so that they didn't have to carry it all the way up again. 'Had a big brew.' You needed lots of fluid up there. 'And changed out of soaked boots and socks.' That would just be because of the sun. 'Sorted out …' etc., etc. 'Slightly cold breeze again. Evening sun but still superbly clear so both of us in favour of pushing on. The dogs perked up a lot. A slight climb over to the top of the Northeast Glacier and there, one of the most spectacular views I have ever seen, up and down the western edge of the plateau. We were shooting off colour negative into the low sun. Then started the precipitous descent into the Amphitheatre.'

[Part 1 0:50:31] Matthews: This was a notorious route, very well-known but extremely precarious. We had to sledge down an icefall, basically. 'Soon enveloped in local wind and drift, and progress became slow and cold and unpleasant. Jim couldn't find the markers and also had trouble with old Clare' That was one of his old dogs who he was carrying on the sledge. 'who got loose and wandered off into murk. This was when we realised the weather was starting to deteriorate. I certainly never realised how short and shut-in the whole place is.' Is this …? Shall I go on with it?

[Part 1 0:51:14] Verdenius: Yes.

Matthews: 'Perched right in the corner of a tremendously wild glacier and icefall scenery. A very steep descending traverse, rope brakes and riding on the sledge as an outrigger.' That meant to stop the sledge going too fast, you had a thick rope round the runners, and then you'd drive, because it was all at such an angle, you would be hanging onto the uphill side like a motorbike sidecar. If things below you – you had gone down that way, that was a certain sticky end. 'Then we came to the dreaded Sodabread Slope.' You will find that that's in all the books on Stonington. Sodabread Slope is absolutely infamous. 'And although more or less a straight descent, very steep.' I had never done it before. That was the point. Jim had. It's 500 feet at 1 in 2½, average gradient, and you just come over the top of this like a roller coaster. 'The surface hard and crusted. Mike and Keith's tracks visible. They must have been down a month or so ahead of us. The dogs slipping and running. All brakes full on but still got a very impressive speed, (God, it is steep!) … my rope brake hanging on by a thread.'

[Part 1 0:52:34] Matthews: That means that by the time I got to the bottom, the rope brake had almost worn through, and if it had worn through and parted, of course, we would have had an almighty crash. 'Rock and ice scenery really impressive and would dearly like to take some photos up there but …. Past the ruins of the Argentinian refuge.' That features in a lot of the books. 'And then a long ski run down the Northeast Glacier. Surface superb. Following breeze. Sunset colours. Magnificent

rock scenery but a bit too late for photography. However progress superbly effortless.' After all these months of pushing heavily loaded sledges, we had a nearly empty sledge and we were going basically downhill with a following wind. 'Mac getting very tired.' That was the old husky that I brought back to the UK. 'and so gave him a ride on the sledge.'

[Part 1 0:53:29] Matthews: That was a luxury we didn't often resort to. 'He couldn't get comfortable enough to sleep on the sledge – very amusing. Two big holes.' (that's crevasses) 'and some smaller ones but not as bad as I had expected. Just a long run across and then several humps. The dogs going flat out downhill. At long last reached the air depot and in sight of Stonington, and came hurtling down the ramp. Spanned the dogs by the sledge and over to the hut. No-one around but everywhere seemed extremely dirty and littered. Very strange to be back. Beers and a meal.' We must have had to cook those for ourselves, if I remember right, because everyone else was asleep. 'and wander round. Don't know where the mail or anything is, however very pleasant to sit and write this in the morning sun. Quite a breeze getting up. Dogs very tired but sniffing at all the scents excitedly. Wait until people got up and then started a full day. Quite an epic ending to the trip.' That's it. I don't think I have ever read that again since.

[Part 1 0:54:45] Verdenius: You must have been cold once or twice doing this?

Matthews: Oh more than once or twice, yes.

[Part 1 0:54:57] Verdenius: What did you do with your field clothes when there is no opportunity to warm the stuff?

Matthews: You just basically put up with it I think. There's not much else you can do unless you think it is beginning to get dangerous and then you have got to do something about it. But just to be cold was, I suppose, all in a day's work, you could say, and didn't mean anything. You just had to look forward to the tent. Sometimes you couldn't even get warm in the tent. Sometimes it was cold at night and a cold night was fairly miserable. The advances in equipment nowadays are fantastic. The equipment we had then, by modern standards was very primitive and so it was difficult to keep warm at night in –40 and it was difficult to keep warm during the day if it was windy. The wind was much worse than just a temperature.

[Part 1 0:56:14] Verdenius: I can remember when I was on a glacier in Switzerland and the wind was blowing. It was not especially cold but I just didn't know how to warm myself.

Matthews: There are a lot of techniques for avoiding getting cold in the first place, like not sweating and all that sort of thing, and pacing yourself during exercise so you just keep warm. And if you get cold, then you can jump up and down or flap your arms. There are some things you can do to get warm again. For instance if you had to take your gloves off to work a camera or a theodolite or some other reason, and you just got cold hands, one of the best ways in those days was to get you favourite dog or a friendly dog and put your hands round by his testicles where it was nice and warm. The dog didn't appreciate it sometimes but you got your hands warm. There were quite a few little things in life where the dogs actually did do more than just pull your

sledge. They were companions and friends. They could save your life by recognising crevasses or weak sea ice and things which you hadn't seen. And if you got cold hands, if there was a dog curled up, you could stick your hands down between his back legs and get them warm.

[Part 1 0:58:04] Matthews: There were other things too but if your whole body got cold, you either just put up with it or if you thought it was getting serious, and you were getting seriously chilled then you had to make camp. It used to get very annoying if it wasn't your fault. I remember once, it was on that sledge trip I was reading earlier, when there were four of five sledges all in convoy. We used to take turns in leading and one day we had a bloke up leading. He was taking his turn to lead and he got lost and got caught up in a tangle of crevasses which he should have been able to read, to recognise them and steer a way through. And at the back of the procession we all had to wait around while he extricated his dogs from this rather dangerous situation. You cooled off in minutes then. To get cold and uncomfortable just because someone else had made a pig's ear of their sledging, that used to get me and others really cross. But you could get warm again.

[Part 1 0:59:13] Matthews: I remember having Jim, who I sledged with … It was very very cold once when he fell through the sea ice. We had been isolated for some time at a hut. This wasn't on our main sledge trip. This was earlier in the winter and we had been stuck at a hut, a little field hut, waiting to get back to Stonington on the sea ice. The sea ice kept getting broken up by gales and we couldn't get back for Midwinter which is the big celebration down there, June the 21st, is when everyone … It's a bit like Christmas, and we hadn't been able to get back to base, to Stonington, which was …

[Part 1 1:00:01] Matthews: So we were then itching to get back. We took a chance; as soon as the sea … The sea would refreeze between each storm and we would go out. That's when that picture was taken. I was travelling out to the edge of the new ice, which would form overnight at minus whatever it was, −20, −30, new ice would form very very quickly, as soon as the wind dropped basically. And once it was a couple of inches thick, you could sledge on it carefully. We were so fed up with waiting for this, we took a bit of a risk and headed back to Stonington, which was about thirty-odd miles on the sea ice, but a very exposed bit of sea ice where people had already been lost, killed. Three people had been lost doing just the same thing. Anyway it was in the middle of winter too, so it was dark and Jim was leading and he came to a new crack in the ice which was obviously only hours old and just had a very thin skin of ice on it. And he thought he could get over because the sledge was light and he was on skis. He didn't make it. The dogs got across, or most of them. His sledge then sank into the water.

[Part 1 1:01:09] Matthews: So we saw him … As I say it was nigh. It was wintertime. And it was dark. I came up and stopped and could see several things bobbing around in the water in the dark, two of which I finally realise was seals' heads. One was Jim with his skis still on, which was potentially very dangerous, and a couple of dogs. Anyway we managed to get him out but we then had minus (I don't know whatever it was), the usual sort of temperature −30 say, and this guy soaking wet and we were out on very thin sea ice. Normally, without any hesitation, we would have put up a tent and warmed him up to make sure he wasn't in a bad way, but it was such a dodgy

situation on thin sea ice that Jim said 'No, we just have to keep going.' And in about one minute he was frozen solid; all his clothing had frozen solid while we were discussing it. So we broke all his clothing, bent his arms up so that it broke the ice on his legs so that he could ski, and he actually skied the whole of the thirty miles back to Stonington like that. And he suffered no ill effects.

[Part 1 1:02:39] Matthews: He said he never warmed up properly but he hadn't quite got to the stage where he was extremely, dangerously chilled. But it must have been very very close, looking back on it, and the only permanent effects he suffered from it were, long term effects, were that where his frozen clothing had been rubbing, he got the most tremendous chafings. It rubbed all the skin off underneath. He was pretty sore for a long time. Really in any situation like that, if you fall into water or when you get very very cold, you have just got to warm the person up, otherwise it's life-threatening., as they say. And part of the skill of surviving is being able to recognise that. But the wind is the killer, more than just the temperature. This book I keep harking back to, by Will Steiger, which I found particularly interesting because I know Will personally and because it was a trip I'd that thought I might take part in, in 1978 with the Americans. He had extensive sledging experience in Canada and the Canadian Arctic. He had been to the North Pole. He had crossed the Greenland ice cap with dogs. He had loads of sledging experience but he had never been to the Antarctic and he had never been to the Antarctic Peninsula. The weather really got home to him, to find out just how bad the weather could be and there was endless wind which gives you such tremendous wind chill factor. And wind can be a real killer. It did kill the two blokes who died on a base. So it could get up to a hundred and fifty miles an hour and it could get up very suddenly, in twenty minutes from nothing, because they were generally katabatic type of winds. They could get up from nothing to …
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[Part 1 1:04:50 Verdenius: What's the main difference between the Arctic and the Antarctic?

Matthews: Well there are so many but the difference, I always feel, having … I have never done a winter in the Arctic. I have done six or seven summers.

[Part 1 1:01:09] Verdenius: So many [??? incomprehensible] they're very different.

Matthews: Oh yes, the Arctic always feels friendly to me. The Antarctic, I never had any … Again Will Steiger says the same in his book but something I always thought was: in the Antarctic you are there under sufferance. Nature has only just got to flick a finger and it will wipe you out. It is a hostile place, whereas the Arctic always seems to me to be much more of a friendly place. Although I believe the Arctic pack ice which Wally Herbert and people travel on to the North Pole, that can be pretty fearsome. But mainland Arctic like Greenland or Spitzbergen, I imagine northern Canada, although you have got pretty extreme conditions at times, it doesn't have that feeling of being totally hostile that the Antarctic has at times. The Antarctic can be fantastically beautiful one day and it just takes your breath away, and the next day you can be just absolutely fighting to survive. You can have 150 mph winds, or visibility so low that you quite literally can't see a red tent six feet away, visibility literally nil; when to go out of the tent without a safety rope to guide you back is virtually suicidal. Conditions which are hard to imagine.

[Part 1 1:06:52] Matthews: Lots of people, lots of Fids have lost their lives, not recently I am glad to say, but in the old days there were really tragic fatal accidents, usually two or three people at a time, killed either on the sea ice in the case of one, and three people were lost on the sea ice. Two of my friends were lost in a storm, or falling down crevasses – there were three killed at Halley Bay when a tractor went down a crevasse. Funnily enough, dogs in crevasses, fatalities were very rare, but tractors are really bad news in crevasse country. I have never driven one. You can be driving along one minute and then oomph, down you go. Most of the people who actually fell down with dog teams lived to tell the tale, in many cases totally unhurt. They were a fearsome obstacle. They always frighten everybody, crevasses. They look and they are potentially lethal, but you have to cross them when you are travelling on glaciers, and some of them were big enough to swallow a double decker bus without any trouble. But then they weren't a big cause of serious accidents.

[Part 1 1:08:28] Matthews: That is one of those situations where a dog team could save you. Certainly I have been in situations where my dogs would swerve off, either on a crevassed glacier or on sea ice. They would suddenly swerve off to one side. You would start bellowing at them to get back on course, but when you got up – they were thirty of forty feet in front of you – you got up to where they had reacted strongly to find some danger which you hadn't seen but they had. So they could be a … Whereas a motor toboggan or a tractor, a totally inanimate object, is no good to you at all. That doesn't have any instinct at all, no.

[Part 1 1:09:20] Verdenius: It doesn't have an idea of where it's going.

Matthews: That's right.

[Part 1 1:09:24] Verdenius: You have to rely on the skill of your driver.

Matthews: All the old talk that you will get from anyone who had done dog sledging …

[Part 1 1:09:31] Verdenius: Did you consider yourself at the time skilled enough?

Matthews: No, you are getting on to … No. I had quite a lot of mountaineering skill and I had one season in the Arctic before I went on BAS and I was slightly older than most of the people I went with. I was 24 I think, whereas most of them were 20/21. But even so, I had never dog sledged before. Nobody had. The idea was that your first sledging journey and you first excursions from base would always be one new boy, so to speak, in the company of one more experienced hand. And the General Assistants who were employed by BAS, who came down as General Assistants to the scientists, were on the whole experienced mountaineers, some of them very able mountaineers, but nobody had ever dog sledged. That was something that was always just passed on once you were on the base, by going out with an experienced hand and picking it up. Some people never did really pick it up. Some people just don't have an affinity with animals.

[Part 1 1:10:59] Matthews: I always found I had a good understanding of dogs. I still work with working sheepdogs now and I like it. I got on well with a dog team but

plenty of people didn't and they either gave up or never really made a good job of it. They could get by but their teams were badly controlled and chaotic and unreliable, unproductive very often. They couldn't pull a heavy sledge. So I suppose basically yes, it was a sort of approach that BAS had in all its early years as far as I know. It wasn't a well-funded organisation and there wasn't any pre-training, so to speak. There used to be a conference in Cambridge. It was the year I went. Before you went South, about a month before you went, you had a – I forget whether it was a one-day or a two-day – conference, when you had briefings on all the sort of things you did: medical briefings, how to deal with cold, this that and the other, and how BAS operated and what you had to do on the ship and so on. But no actual training, no. It was left to … We used to have a few training sessions on base. I think that was something that … It wasn't a regular institution anyway but I remember my second year, when a new intake had come, I felt fairly strongly about taking an inexperienced person out.

[Part 1 1:12:47] Matthews: Because it is all very well to say an experienced person can take an inexperienced person out and teach him, but if you happen to have just a genuine accident, which can happen to anyone, and the experienced bloke falls down a crevasse, and the inexperienced person hasn't learned what to do about it, then you are right in the mess. So we did actually, I remember, institute some training sessions for crevasse rescue, but it was a bit half-hearted, Some people said 'Well why bother?' It was all a very easy-going set up , in a sense, not all that professional, but then BAS, in a way, was … It had that sort of ambience.

[Part 1 1:13:33] Verdenius: So in retrospect you can say that you were quite low on pre-training? You were quite low on preparation, or maybe not enough preparation?

Matthews: Well this is where you get on to …

[Part 1 1:13:51] Verdenius: But my question is did it worry you at the time?

Matthews: Oh yes, yes it did, because I was, I suppose, as I say, a little bit experienced. It worried me, particularly the scientists. The scientists were chosen for their scientific ability. I was a scientist and you went through a selection interview to make sure that you were the sort of person who could …, who was mentally all right to live in a confined environment, a rather strange environment for that length of time, that you weren't going to go bananas. That was all done quite professionally and on the whole very successfully. They didn't finish up with people going nuts or people unable to do their scientific work. That was all very successful but on the business of surviving in a polar environment, and travelling in a polar environment, I would say it was much more hit and miss.

[Part 1 1:15:11] Matthews: This idea of putting one experienced General Assistant, (or Gash 'And as we used to call them) with one young scientist was not a bad scheme, but certainly I think the people ought to have had more actual … We had no actual physical training at all. As I say, we just had lectures on how to deal with certain situations, medical partly, and what we were likely to be up against. For instance we didn't even go on a weekend's climbing course to learn crevasse rescue or anything and that did leave the situation open for accidents, although I can't think of an accident that could be particularly pinned down.

[Part 1 1:16:03] Verdenius: That's the first time that you actually went on a sledging tour for longer periods? How did you consider this?

Matthews: Well the first time I went on a long tour was with this guy Jim, when I went on this six month trip and he was very very competent. He was an Olympic skier. He had climbed in the Canadian Rockies. He really was a competent guy and he could do things properly and he taught me a tremendous lot very quickly. But at the same time I was very aware of the fact that at times either I wasn't living up to his expectations, or that he could feel, and perhaps he passed this on to me I don't know exactly … Perhaps he could feel exactly what I subsequently felt which was that if I was an experienced guy taking out an inexperienced one, and I had the accident just through sheer bad luck or perhaps carelessness, then the inexperienced guy wouldn't know what to do about it. I used to feel with Jim that I was very much in the junior … and that he was worried about me being unable to get him out of a hole if he fell in one. And it galvanised me into really learning.

[Part 1 1:17:41] Matthews: We actually stopped and had training sessions just the two of us, miles from anywhere, and sorted out what we would do. We did one or two climbs in the … Geology always gave you the pretext for climbing a mountain if you could see there were rocks at the top, and if you were that way inclined, you could say 'Oh well, let's climb that mountain.' And it was true, genuine enough, you could then fill in a dot on the map and get a rock sample which was basically what we were there to do. Nobody disguised the fact that we wanted to get a good climb out of it, and since I was a climber and Jim was a very good climber, he was able to lead me up I think at least one mountain that had never been climbed before. I have got a photographs of it, which was quite a fine climb. It wasn't all that easy either.

[Part 1 1:18:41] Matthews: That was after we had been together maybe two or three months, I can't remember exactly. And I know that there were some situations there where I was climbing near my limit. Jim was aware of the fact that if he put a foot wrong, I perhaps wouldn't be able to save the situation, and I think at times he resented that, being lumbered with an idiot like me. In the same way at later times – you just feel this … In actual practice, I think the chances are I would have been able to … We would have come out all right. I don't think I was that incompetent. But it's always the same when you've got a pair climbing, where someone has a much greater ability than the other. But we survived. And actually, the nasty experiences that we did have, which were all crevasses really, well sea ice occasionally, we worked together very well. We never lost a dog or anything. We had some mishaps and potential nasties and by the end of the six months I think we felt extremely confident in each other. I never felt as confident again with anybody else.

[Part 1 1:20:09] Verdenius: On this tour did you ever get into a whiteout?

Matthews: Did I ever …?

[Part 1 1:20:17] Verdenius: On this first tour, did you get …?

Matthews: Oh yes, but the whiteout was fairly common. It's quite a frightening thing if you … unless you obey the rules, and if you obey the rules, it's not dangerous at all.

But if you take liberties and don't …There are a few simple rules. Actually it's like 99% of the situations down there. It didn't need great mountaineering skill or experience. They just involved a bit of common sense and following a few basic rules. I think that's where the briefing that we got, before we went South, was in many senses adequate. But if you broke the rules, you were … you could expect trouble obviously. Or in the 1% of situations where the rules wouldn't cope, then again you could be in trouble, but ordinary whiteout was common enough. And if you knew you were on a glacier, for instance, or anywhere near crevasses, then you never went anywhere without markers.

[Part 1 1:21:32] Matthews: I can remember when we climbed up a cliff, an ice cliff onto a glacier, and pitched camp just at the top. We obviously spread the tent and spread the dogs out, and the end dog, the end of the dog line, went virtually up to the edge of the cliff, which was not a big one, thirty feet high or something. And we put a stake at the end of the dog line, a metal pole, because, as did happen there, and I can remember being very impressed with it. If we had some heavy snow and then a whiteout, the line of dogs would be buried in the snow. They used to let themselves get buried to keep warm. So you would step out of the tent and if it was a total whiteout, you would see absolutely nothing: no horizon, no sky, no ground.

[Part 1 1:22:25] Verdenius: A whiteout looks like nothing?

Matthews: Absolutely nothing, totally. In a real whiteout there is nothing. It's really eerie. Somebody has written somewhere, it's like being inside a giant ping-pong ball. All you can see is just white, from your boots to the peak of your cap. Those are the only non-white things you can see and you lose all sense of distance, of perspective. There is literally nothing for your eyes to focus on. As soon as something not white, like a dog or a pole is there, you have got something that you can see. But if it's not there, you don't know. It could be one step forward and it could be either up against a snow wall, bang your nose on it or it could be over a thirty foot drop and you wouldn't know. You can't see anything and it is really eerie. So for instance in that situation, we put a stake up by our dogs so that when we went out, looking for the dogs, we would know not to go further than that stake. If it was windy as well, so that it was drifting, we would also run a rope out, so that when you turned round and couldn't see the tent, because of the blowing snow, you would be able to follow the rope back. Otherwise people could get lost between the tent and thirty feet at the end of the dogs.

[Part 1 1:23:54] Verdenius: Could you predict if you were heading for a whiteout?

Matthews: Yes, usually. It's actually relatively rare to get a 100% total whiteout. Often conditions would be verging on whiteout. A friend of mine, a geologist, had a bad accident that way when he was sledging and conditions started to get … visibility started to get pretty poor. Now if you are on the sea ice and knew that it was just flat, you wouldn't worry; you would just keep going, or if you were on any sort of safe country. But if you were in difficult country, where you knew there were crevasses or cliffs or anything, the only sensible thing was to stop. Otherwise you were heading for trouble and he actually sledged over a … He had a twenty or thirty foot drop without even seeing it, and his dogs never saw it either. He just walked in. He was sledging

along downhill, going quite fast and woomf, straight over. Because he never saw it; nobody saw it; the dogs didn't see it.

[Part 1 1:24:57] Matthews: You are literally walking along, one minute the ground isn't there and he hurt himself quite badly, but he was breaking the rules – perhaps borderline but it is very difficult to know exactly when to stop. But yes, a whiteout would come on gradually. Just a simple overcast sky would give you a whiteout if it's just grey overcast, there's no shadow at all. Your whole perspective gets very dis … I think it's written in a book somewhere, where somebody looked out of the tent in a whiteout and thought they saw another dog team approaching. They thought that was totally ridiculous. They weren't expecting anyone. They looked a bit harder and then saw it was a bit of a Mars bar wrapper in the snow just a yard away. But one's sense of scale and perspective is so distorted in a whiteout. You can be completely fooled.

[Part 1 1:26:00] Matthews: I think that's recorded in one of the early Fids' books somewhere, Kevin Walton I think. Have you met him? It's a good book. That's quite a scary thing but I think I always thought that the heavy snow drift was more frightening, more potentially dangerous than whiteout. Because you could get … a drift could be so fantastically thick that you could quite literally not see your hand in front of your face, and drifting snow could be that thick. And if you were more than six feet away from the tent, without a safety line, you couldn't find your way back to it, and you could easily die within ten feet of the tent in that situation because your companion wouldn't know where to start looking. I go back to Will Steiger's trans Antarctic trip again, in 1990. They lost a bloke, one of the six went out, quite near the end of the trip.

[Part 1 1:27:08] Matthews: They'd had loads of experience. He just went out to the dogs in heavy drift and couldn't find his way back. If I remember rightly, they had marker poles out and he lost sight of one marker pole before he could see the rest one. He got lost and he survived. He spent a whole night out – just dug himself into the snow, did the right things to survive. The others started searching on a long rope but couldn't find him in the evening. They had to wait till daylight next day and then start the search again at first light, shouting and they found him. He was OK and he was only – I forget what he said – a hundred feet from the tent but he was totally lost. He might easily have died there, just a hundred feet from the tent, just because of drifting snow, zero visibility.

[Part 1 1:28:06] Verdenius: He dug himself into the ground?

Matthews: Yes, into the snow yes. Anything to get out of the wind, like the dogs do, They just curl up and let themselves get buried and then they are sheltered from the wind. The hardest time for the dogs is if they are on a bare ice surface and they can't get buried. If they get a wind, then the dogs can suffer quite badly because they are out all the time.

[Part 1 1:28:35] Verdenius: [?? inaudible].OK.

[Part 1 1:28:43] [End of Part One]

Part Two

[Part 2 0:00:00] Verdenius: But when you say passport you mean a passport where the geology was a passport for going places, for going to the Antarctic?

Matthews: Well the geology was a passport for applying for or getting a job that you wanted. In other words if I hadn't been a geologist, … Take it I wanted to go to the Antarctic, the only way virtually was with BAS and if it was as a General Assistant, I would have had to have been a good climber and face a lot of competition. There were a lot of people who wanted to go. But as a geologist, there were not so many applicants and I was a "good" geologist (in inverted commas). I had a good degree in geology so that opened the door, if you like. I could apply as a geologist and get a geological job but without that, I probably wouldn't have been able to go because I wasn't a good enough climber or whatever. I might have got there eventually, but my first taste of the polar regions came about purely by chance, and I suppose that's what started me, when I was in my first year as a student, geology student, eighteen, at Cambridge. When you come up towards your first Long Vacation, summer vacation, you are looking for things to do and I hadn't got anything planned.

[Part 2 0:01:55] Matthews: I suddenly heard that … I knew that there was a geology expedition, University expedition going to Spitzbergen and that it was full up. And then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, I heard that there was a vacancy. I had no Arctic experience then at all but I thought 'I'll go and see if there is a chance of getting on it.' And I did get on it and that was a fantastic experience. So I began to take a lot more interest then in polar matters and at that stage, I think it wasn't until then, I started reading a lot more about FIDS, as it was then called. I knew about it but I started reading a lot more, and decided that when I got a degree, geology degree, I would try and got onto BAS. So I knew that I needed a good degree for that, because BAS just took geologists one or two a year with a good degree. When I got my degree, it was better than I expected and also another friend who was a contemporary made a mess of his final exams and he got a worse result than expected.

[Part 2 0:03:20] Matthews: So I went ahead with my application to BAS but at the same time the University offered me the post that they had expected to go to this other man, to stay at the University and do research for a doctorate. And so I had to decide. I'd got a good degree, so I had to decide against going, I turned …BAS at that stage had accepted me and interviewed me and then I had to change my mind and say 'No, I will stay on at university for three years and do a doctorate in geology and then try again.' Knowing that by that stage with a doctorate, I would be almost certain to get a job with BAS. That was difficult. It was my professor at university who advised me to stay on, and so I did that. I stayed at Cambridge and did a doctorate on Scottish Geology and then re-applied to BAS and was accepted straight away. So I was a little bit older; I was three years older by then. So that was a slightly different way of going into it.

[Part 2 0:04:35] Verdenius: Did reaching the Pole happen later [?? Inaudible]?

Matthews: What? Scott's reaching the Pole or … Well, no, that sort of … the heroic types of exploration, no, never really. I was fascinated by the old stories, and being in Cambridge and next door to SPRI, I was able to get very familiar with all the details of the old expeditions and even meet some of the people involved, some of the old-

timers. A contemporary of mine at university was a grandson of Shackleton too, but that was by the way. Yes, I was very familiar with it, but no, that sort of "heroic" (in inverted commas) expedition never appealed particularly to me. I was much more intrigued just with unknown stretches of country and exploring, literally, in the old-fashioned sense, unknown country and finding out what was there and it didn't really matter whether it was near the Pole. In actual fact I got very near the South Pole at all. Stonington is only just south of the Antarctic Circle. In the Arctic I got to within 500 miles of the North Pole I think, but again, it wasn't that that was exciting.

[Part 2 0:06:36] Verdenius: You happened to be on the Antarctic Plateau?

Matthews: On the Peninsula, yes, not the main …, not the polar … You know there's the main Polar Plateau around the South Pole itself, but the Peninsula, where most of the BAS bases are, has a sort of plateau-like summit, flat top basically not very flat but it just ….

[Part 2 0:07:03 Verdenius: You just said that you also had been on this plateau, this great …?

Matthews: No, not on the main Antarctic plateau. No, just on the Peninsula, but we always referred to the top of the Peninsula as a plateau, which it was, up to a point. But I knew some of the old fellows. I used to talk to them. I actually shared a room in Cambridge with Odell who was a quite remarkable old climber. He was one of the early Everest climbers. You had the opportunity in Cambridge to meet these people, some of the famous explorers, just pre-war era, like Lindsay, Sir Martin Lindsay and Fleming, Tilman, Bill Tilman, all well-known names. And they always used to be in Cambridge, perhaps giving a lecture or something and you could hear them. But none of those were people who were particularly pre-occupied with reaching poles or tops of Everest or anything, with the exception of Odell. I think my first opportunity to do anything heroic like that was, or first close contact, was with Wally Herbert, trans-Arctic Crossing. That was a heroic type expedition and I wasn't particularly attracted. I didn't have the opportunity to go on it but a friend of mine did. But I thought to myself 'It's not really … just to go from A to B via the North Pole isn't what gets me.' It isn't what gives me this, whatever the satisfaction is, that I get out of seeing these places.

[Part 2 0:09:20] Verdenius: Did you do what they tell you in Cambridge, go inside with your experience? What was your first day? How were you were introduced there at Stonington?

Matthews: In Cambridge?

[Part 2 0:09:40] Verdenius: No when you arrived at Stonington Island.

Matthews: What were my first impressions?

[Part 2 0:09:43] Verdenius: Yes, what happened with these people that were already there?

Matthews: It's very difficult to always … because it's always such a pandemonium, arriving on a … or used to be in those days, a base because the ship arrives and you are with thirty or forty people on the ship who you have been with for months, all cooped up. And then at the same time there are these ten or twelve people who have been on the base all year and not seen anything or anybody else. So their lives have been totally disrupted and you are excited you have got to Stonington, onto the ground. But at the same time, the ships were always in a tearing hurry to get all the supplies unloaded and you have got to unload a year of supplies. There might be eighty or a hundred tons and there was nothing mechanised in those days. It all had to be done by hand. So you knew that you had a week's very hard work ahead of you and that the people on the base would know exactly what had to be done and you wouldn't know what had to be done. And you were all trying to work together and find out how everything operated.

[Part 2 0:11:07] Matthews: So one's first arrival at the base was just a week of more or less total chaos and very hard physical work, humping boxes all day. You are so tired you usually just flopped into bed and the moment of truth didn't come until the ship had finished unloading and would prepare to depart. And you would actually do the swap over then. You would vacate your cabin on the ship and take a bunk in the hut, and the people going home would move out of the hut and take your cabin on the ship. And then the ship toot-toots on its siren and that was it. When the ship disappeared over the horizon, then it began to dawn on you that you had arrived and that you had got twelve months before you could change your mind. In those days there was no chance of being flown out.

[Part 2 0:12:12] Matthews: Nowadays if you have a real panic, there is always a chance of being flown out. But then, you really knew you were there for twelve months, possibly longer. You didn't know from year to year whether the ship … Stonington was always just about on the limit of the ship's performance in those days because big icebreakers weren't very common. So you knew that you were there for at least twelve months and that was the moment … But it was tremendously exciting. You had an awful lot of new things to learn and you had to settle in to a base routine, make new friends. The people who had already been there a year and were settling in for their second year, had to sort of adopt you and you all had to integrate.

[Part 2 0:13:08] Verdenius: Put down some questions ?? [inaudible]

Matthews: Well they always seemed a bit like old lags. We were fresh and keen and they were, not exactly jaded, but they'd already had a year. And I guess there was always one or two who probably wished they were …, or perhaps had doubts about whether they should stay on a second year. In fact occasionally people used to pack it in early and go home after one year, just occasionally. But it was fairly smooth. It depended a lot actually on the morale of the base and the base leader.

[Part 2 0:13:53] Verdenius: You said ?? [inaudible] that the experience obviously changed half of the people? At least half the people weren't untouched by going to the Antarctic? Because you already noticed some …

Matthews: Yes, well I don't know. It's hard to tell, because I don't know √. I certainly had my impressions at that time about who were really enthusiastic about their time

there. But since I haven't kept up with many of the people afterwards, I don't know how they feel now, for instance, whether my judgements at that time were correct. Yes, to some people it was just a job. They would get on with it and when they got home, they would forget all about it. You had that impression with some people. Others were totally taken over by the experience, even after their first year, and they continued that way. As I said, some people …Well one or two even stayed on for a third consecutive winter, which was mainly because of … They weren't supposed to. The logistical troubles of the ship wouldn't get in or something like that.

[Part 2 0:15:33] Matthews: Quite a few others, including some friends of mine, did their two year tour and came back to England and signed on straight away for another two-year tour. And yes, I think you could spot a lot of that sort of development quite early on. Myself: scientists weren't allowed to go back for a second tour; otherwise I probably would have done. There's a danger in that which FIDS always were … They weren't slow to point out the quite genuine danger that you could turn yourself into a bit of a hermit if you started to live permanently in the Antarctic. I mean you could become a bit detached from reality. That was a recognised danger. I think that quite possibly – I don't know – quite possibly they even refused people who applied for a second tour. [family interruption]

[Part 2 0:16:51] Verdenius: Can you be a hermit on the [?? inaudible]?

Matthews: Well not a true hermit but you can certainly get a bit detached from reality. You can become attracted to the … One of the aspects of life there is that it's … A lot of the mundane aspects of life are taken care of for you; in a way a bit like being in the armed forces. A lot of your problems are either taken care of or don't exist. You don't have to worry with money or cars or houses or anything like that. All your clothing is provided, your food is all provided. Your money just gets paid into the bank in the UK and you don't spend any money. You don't handle money for two and a half years. But then there's a danger that … Those perhaps aren't particularly risky or harmful but then there's a danger that your personal relationships get onto the same footing. You don't have to make decisions about personal relationships. You are there with a crowd of people. You just rub along with them.

[Part 2 0:18:05] Matthews: You don't see any women for a start, for two and a half years. If that stretches to five years, … And it's not because … There is virtually no homosexual activity. The Press have sometimes tried to play that one up but BAS has always been clear, or as far as I know, of homosexual activity. [family interruption] But it is still a big and quite unnatural thing to be totally separated from women for two and a half years let alone five. If you are not careful, it must affect your … There is always a risk that it could affect your ability to make friendships. A lot of people are aware of that themselves but I think BAS were … the personnel manager was somebody called Bill Sloman in those days, who was quite astute at spotting these trends in … He had a lot of experience of both selecting people for FIDS in the first place and in following their progress once they were in FIDS. I think some people – I can't quote you the exact records but I think Ken Blaiklock … Have you come across that name? I think he did seven winters.

[Part 2 0:19:51] Verdenius: He was with Fuchs.

Matthews: He did the Trans Antarctic Expedition too. I think he did something like seven winters. I remember him being referred to as a dinosaur of the system because there is also a point at which you could find it difficult to integrate yourself back into Western civilisation. But you also begin to be a difficult person to mix with in the Antarctic as well. Yes, that's quite a feature that … this mix of experienced and inexperienced does work up to a point. It can work very well but if your experienced people are very experienced, in other words they have done three or four winters, they can get a bit blasé or jaded or whatever, and they can be right about everything. But that puts them in a position of seeming superior on every topic under the sun, and that can be very very abrasive and disrupting to inexperienced people. And inexperienced people can get resentful of an old hand always being right and so there is a resistance that builds up then between the two. I have had that problem in the Arctic.

[Part 2 0:21:46] Matthews: I didn't experience it on FIDS but by the time I had done five or six summer tours in the Arctic (that was on top of my FIDS experience) I suppose I was a very experienced person. On two occasions I took or helped to take students for their Arctic …, I found I had to guard against this and at times just keep my mouth shut and not say 'No, that's wrong' or 'No, don't do that; you will get into trouble' because if I was always laying down the law and always being right, this resistance built up. I don't say that was true in Ken Blaiklock's case but I know that it has been mentioned, I think in Wally Herbert's first book *A World of Men*. He discusses that a bit. The real old hand who had done four or five winters could actually be a liability in some ways, which is a slightly different angle on it. I think the BAS personnel selection were aware of that. But plenty of people did two consecutive tours, of two winters each and then came back to lead absolutely normal lives. They didn't in the conventional sense. They have these … Their way of seeing the world was changed forever I think, but they could still have a normal … or perhaps better than most were able to: set up a home, raise a family.

[Part 2 0:23:50] Matthews: In my case I found a challenge through … I didn't get married until I was forty and I wasn't particularly looking to; it just sort of happened in the best traditional sense. And once it had happened, … That's building a house and raising a family is at least as big a challenge as going to the Antarctic, and that is how it has proved. It really has. But I have had to make a real effort to keep the two separate. It would have been easy to go off on expeditions again and leave the house and the family for a summer and just enjoy myself. I would have liked that very much but, as I say, I think that is such a selfish thing. And because they are experiences that one can't share at first hand with the family. But now that the children are getting a bit older, I get some satisfaction through describing things to them, not to the extent of boring them I don't think. [speaking to daughter] Do I bore you? No? The two; she has just shown more interest in it than Robert, but I don't talk a lot about it.

[Part 2 0:25:12] Matthews: But building a house and starting a job, a business that is, however tinpot and ramshackle it has been, is I suppose a substitute. It has also given me the freedom to let my view of the world develop. If you take as a starting point that one's view of the world is changed by the FIDS experience, when you come back to the UK, you either settle down and let that experience be submerged in European civilisation, take a secondary role. Or you go for a more unconventional lifestyle which allows you the freedom to perhaps develop some of your more Fid-like inclinations, which I think is what I have done. I don't think I have explained that

very well, have I? I haven't analysed it myself to the extent that I can put it clearly, but I certainly see a connection in myself between having done my time on FIDS and then ten years later giving up my profession and adopting a totally different lifestyle, renouncing material riches, if you like. And being able to keep abreast of things and think about things, but at the same time not be totally submerged in urban environment or a professional career.

[Part 2 0:27:35] Verdenius: I've no more questions.

Matthews: You have run out of questions?

[Part 2 0:27:38] Verdenius: Was it a carefree time?

Matthews: Carefree? Well yes because you are free of so many of these worries which really I think many people would like to be free of. It's not having to be always making decisions about money or all the bureaucratic nonsenses that you have to deal with these days, and to be looked after and fed and clothed and things. Yes, that's a nice sort of environment to live in but it's not really realistic to think that one can … It always strikes me with Forces personnel. I have plenty of friends round here who are in the Army, for instance. Or to some extent big company personnel. They have an element of the same sort of insulation from worldly reality A friend who works for BP, is a high-up in BP, British Petroleum, one of the very big companies, and he doesn't really have that much to worry about on a mundane level. If he has to move house, they do it all for him. He gets everything provided legally, financially, has a company car, but in return for that, he more or less has to sell his soul to the company and devote his life to the company.

[Part 2 0:29:23] Verdenius: I think it's your turn.

Matthews: What were you going to say? It was the sledging that appealed to you, wasn't it? I don't know what caught …, something really caught her imagination. Like the week … I had this dog team and actually brought one of the dogs back to this country and I don't know what it was. For instance, that dog was born in Antarctica and so it had never seen … It was an oldish, seven-year old dog when I brought it back to the UK, so it had never seen anything green. It had never seen a tree, a blade of grass. Never seen a woman; never seen any other animals except seals and penguins and the odd gull and to watch its introduction to all these things was – perhaps I ought to have written a book about it – was astonishing. That an animal could adapt so well. And I had lots of warnings. I was Fuchs himself, Sir Vivian Fuchs who gave me permission to bring the dog back, because he'd done it.

[Part 2 0:30:48] Matthews: After his time on FIDS he brought a whole team back in 1949/50 for the Festival of Britain in 1951,and very few other people ever had. And he gave me permission but he warned me of all the difficulties and dangers I would face. And most of them, the difficulties and dangers didn't arise. It went very smoothly. But it is interesting to think that now, if I did it now, it would be classed as a dangerous dog and would have to be muzzled in public under the new rules that you have now.

[Part 2 0:31:25] Verdenius: Quarantine. That's when they put it into…when you go through Customs, it has to be …to remain.

Matthews: Oh quarantine, yes. Mine had to do that for the rabies. The old husky had to do that. But no, these new regulations that are very recent now, against having large dogs or certain breeds of dogs. They have to be muzzled in public places and things like that. And once or twice people came up to me when I had the old husky and said, total strangers 'You shouldn't have a dog like that. Dangerous.' Because it was a big dog, about eight stone, but he never put a foot wrong. I think that was one of the things that caught Kirsten's imagination. There were always funny stories to tell. [To daughter] Your mother will start telling those, dog stories.

[Part 2 0:32:40]: [playback of radio recording] The end of the News from London. This is London calling our Antarctic on 6.11, 7.13 and 9.765 megacycles per second in the 49, 41 and 31 metre bands [music] Calling the Antarctic – a weekly programme broadcast by the BBC from London for members of the British Antarctic Survey at their bases in Grahamland and Halley Bay. [more music] Hello there. This is Peter Eyres calling you in place of William Clark who is away on holiday this week and enjoying himself we hope touring Devon in his new car, a Ford Zephyr. This is the fourth time that I have had the pleasure of speaking to you in this programme. Though it's only a flying visit because William will be back again next week. Over here we are all extremely interested in all the things that you are doing down there in the Antarctic and we are most pleased and proud that through this programme we are keeping you in touch with your families and friends at home and also with the events and topics which are of special interest to you.

[Part 2 0:34:24]: Now I am going to pause for one quick silent prayer that reception at all the bases this evening will be reasonably good because last week but one, if you remember, Midwinter Day in your part of the world, and as luck would have it, it brought more support than we've heard from you this season. According to the cable we received yesterday from head office, several of you either missed all or part of the special programme we provided from our [?? incomprehensible] It seems that the lads at Adelaide couldn't hear the programme at all and those from Halley Bay missed the first part including the speech by their director Sir Vivian Fuchs. They have taken the trouble to let us know about this sad state of affairs. We presume that they heard from the other bases that the programme really was something and that they would like us to repeat it. Perhaps your wish is our law and we are going to broadcast the programme again but in a slightly abridged version next Tuesday July the 5th and we hope that this time there will be no complaints from Adelaide and Halley Bay about poor reception. For the rest of you I know that [?? Indecipherable] for a second time but then you can always arrange a darts season, or something like that for the evening.

[Part 2 0:35:45]: And keep the sound up because the programme you didn't hear is going to be, as I said, an abridged version which means, we hope, that there will be time for some new items that you haven't heard before. One hour 'What's going on at home in the United Kingdom?' [?? Indecipherable] sport and the weather is as difficult as ever. The second cricket test match ended last week at Lords in a draw and the third test match at Trent Bridge will get under way on Thursday. But of course this week the big thing is the second week of the Wimbledon fortnight. And we have got a report for you in the programme from Martin Granger who incidentally lives

quite near Wimbledon. Sheila Scott arrived back in London last Tuesday with two world records to her round her neck, the longest solo flight in a single engined plane and the round the world air speed record for women. Well done Sheila Scott. Now the World Cup, which begins on July 11th with England playing Uruguay. Playing in the same group will be France and Mexico.

[Part 2 0:36;54]: In Rome just now and on tour in .. [clicking sounds] and won the first of their par matches and still remain second favourites to win the World Cup, second that is to the holders Brazil who drew 1-1 with Scotland last Saturday. There was some sports news for you. And now on to Special Requests. Number one is for Terry Tallis at Stonington and it comes to you Terry from fans on the same wavelength at Deception Island. It's a Burl Ives another country style number Terry and it comes now from you-know-who on Deception Island. Burl Ives with *On your Mark*s. [More clicking] David and Tom there are messages for you for you instead. But among those unavoidably absent were David McKerrow of Edinburgh and Tom Miller of Glasgow. But not allowing David and Tom there are messages for you instead and I am sure they will remind you of home. The first one coming up now is for you, David at Halley Bay. McKerrow. Before we go to Adelaide with Tom Miller's message, here is one for Stonington now and it is from Mr & Mrs Matthews to their son David. Hello there David. And here's the family news back in Shrewsbury. 'Hello David. Your ciné films are very good. We got a look at them by taking them into the local ciné club and using their projector. There were one or two over exposed bits but on the whole they were excellent and the experts were most impressed by some of the shots.'

[Part 2 0:39:04] Matthews: Even now it makes me cringe. What had happened: was that was my second winter. I had sent all my ciné film home to be processed, so I had never seen them and my father had shown them. My father has been dead for over twenty years now, but he had looked at it all and was telling that it was all right but the message … Everybody had a message like that during the course of the winter and it gave most people this cringing feeling. You had your parents on talking to you, sometimes quite personal things. And everybody was listening. It was being broadcast right round the world. I will go on if you want. It's just chit-chat. The only other thing I have got on the tape is …

[Part 2 0:39:57] Verdenius: What's more?

Matthews: Dogs, and people What it used to sound like. The huskies, yes. Sometimes the ship, the chit-chat on the radio between the bases. I think the quality is … I can't remember.

[Part 2 0:40:24] Verdenius: Chit-chat from the bases?

[Clicking. Playing tape again. Whirring noise.] [?? unintelligible] Pretty well grey out. No longer in the Deep South [?? unintelligible] I look forward to seeing you tomorrow and possible have a another drink tomorrow. I have just arrived back. OK. I will give ?? a call now and see what he's got. I understand he's got some crews there. I'll just put it back to you. Look forward to a quick fly and a confirmation that you do have nothing for me. So I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. Break. Stonington [inaudible] Let's go. You must riding high up there Alex. You had no cloud at all.

Whereas it's messy down in the field here. I want to see out today and it's pretty manky. Vis is right down to a quarter of a mile probably.

[Part 2 0:42:52] Certainly not much more. The cloud's down [?? unintelligible] down around 100/150 ft. OK fine. Temperature down to −25. Pretty rugged stuff. Hope it's another good day for you tomorrow and the weather in the bar as well. So [?? Unintelligible]. Get back as well so nothing more. See you tomorrow possibly. Back on base. Right well. Alpha alpha alpha. Stonington/ Alpha. Horseshoe, understand you have got a bit of traffic there Dave. Over to you Horseshoe/ Stonington base. [Morse code?] I am reading you OK fine also. It might be just as well to try your phone I think. I read you OK so. Horseshoe/ Stonington break. Stonington, Stonington, Stonington, this is Horseshoe, Horseshoe, Horseshoe calling Stonington, Stonington, Stonington I am reading you loud and clear but [?? inaudible]. Stonington Roger Read you fine now, nice and solid. We have problems here on the receiver. Our receiver is a little [?? Incomprehensible] That was the daily routine. I don't know what the quality of it is. [Playing tape again. The sound of dogs. Talking over tape]

[Part 2 0:46:24] Verdenius: They seem to be pretty aggressive towards each other.

Matthews: The dogs, Yes there is nothing they like better that a fight. They would fight to the death. Skill in managing them is actually in preventing fights. [Lots of clicking of the tape player controls] The quality is very poor. No it's the rumble on this …[Dogs howling] Feeding time when they were all excited. I don't know what that's like. It's the radio switches on there. Accident; two were killed I think. Probably just details of the searching. It wouldn't mean anything. Penguins. The only other thing is for … I can't remember what. I honestly don't know what is here. It would just be recording. I have sometimes played that bit to the children but I remember going back listening to this. When I was at Horseshoe, that was an old base that we used as a field hut, which I used quite a bit. Horseshoe Island, about thirty miles from Stonington. [Dogs barking]. [The following recording of a radio communication between Stonington and Horseshoe bases is difficult to make out in many places.] 'Copy OK. Stonington, Stonington, Stonington. Horseshoe, break. Horseshoe, Horseshoe, Stonington. OK fine. [??inaudible] crew got away on June the 7th very early in the morning. We can go that night. You know you came up as well. Didn't say anything. [?? Indecipherable] didn't work. The conditions were pretty lousy. I went up to the Argie refuge up on Sodabread to see if I could see anything up there. We were looking around and we found nothing at all. I know what. A box, a big bag of [?? Inaudible] Any way I didn't see any. We left half eleven the following morning. Still nothing there. because .. 5 miles from … Are they looking for us? It must have been very very windy there. There was probably nothing left on the surface at all. What was there: a cross that had been there since the 25th of May.

[Part 2 0:52:48] That's all. I think you have got a more or less straight picture .. and we came back to base then; got back at seven o'clock. So how do you copy that?' Horseshoe/ Stonington break.' 'Copy.' 'Stonington, Stonington, Stonington, Horseshoe, Horseshoe, Horseshoe.' Strength very OK. 100% Transferring up to … We haven't been getting out OK .Now look, we would like to know, since we don't really know the situation on base. What you would like us to do. What would you like us to do here? We could carry on as normal. Rick and I can do some work around here. And we can think about coming back to base when the sea ice and the weather

settle down. Alternatively we could plan to come back to base at the earliest opportunity. Just at the moment I think the ice is too thin and the weather is too unsettled, but things might improve at any time. So, have you got any ideas on that please Terry. Horseshoe, Stonington, break.' I'm not sure Stonington OK fine. Either come back to base … No good weather. There's nothing you can do'

[Part 2 0:55:10] Matthews: Terry was the base commander but basically that was at the end of the search, and, strange to say, we were standing instructions and common sense, that even down there, we had to be careful discussing things like that over the radio. He just said that Neil and Keith had camped and done this and that, and then on June the 8th they had found what they were looking for, which was actually these two guys' bodies. They had been killed in a storm a fortnight earlier[1]. But we couldn't say anything specific over the radio because of the chance of it being picked up by a radio ham, or by a listener in the Falklands. These guys just listen in. They would never hear the sledge radios but the big base transmitter, under favourable conditions, …Well we used to use it for ham radio. It could be heard right back in the UK, under favourable conditions. Probably not in midwinter like this.

[Part 2 0:56:21] Matthews: So it all had to be disguised. We couldn't mention, even right down there, that we'd had an accident. It all had to be notified through London Office which was head office for BAS at that time. And then next of kin had to be notified, and then it was made public. I believe – I am not sure of the details but I believe that news of an accident had leaked out once through a radio ham and of course caused great distress to relatives. But all we could do … We were completely knocked backwards. It was our two friends who had got caught up in a storm and … I can still remember and that was me talking as I was trying to think out. Terry, the base leader, told me that John and Tom had been killed, had been found and we had to think 'What the hell do we do now?' That was June so there was no possibility of a ship until seven or eight months. We just had to live with it and in fact what we had to do was to go and get them. I didn't but two others went and recovered everything, and we had to conduct a burial and do everything that would be done …

[Part 2 0:58:00] Matthews: We had to await instructions from relatives. This was always normal on what to do with the bodies. In some situations, like the accident that had happened the previous year, the bodies could only be retrieved at … They had gone down a crevasse with a tractor, they were virtually irretrievable. It would have been extremely dangerous and difficult to retrieve the bodies. But I think the next of kin were always consulted, and as far as I can remember, on this occasion, we had to retrieve the bodies which was fairly straightforward and do everything. It doesn't sound much but that introduces a tremendous strain in a small group. You have got to go and collect two bodies. You have quite literally got to make a box for them, and you have got to dig a hole and bury them, do all the things that are normally done for you. And on top of that, as in any accident, there are feelings of recrimination between different people. Somebody says 'Oh it was your fault.' Or it was the Base Leader's fault or it was their fault. And it did actually split us. I think it came out into the open a bit at the time but it left the rest of that year, I would say, with the base

[1] This refers to the deaths of John Noel and Thomas Allen. For details, see the British Antarctic Monument Trust website.

polarised into two camps: those who thought it was somebody's fault and those who just thought it was a genuine accident.

[Part 2 0:59:49] Verdenius: Did you have a service?

Matthews: Service? Yes, well we had a sort of burial. It's actually impossible to bury anyone effectively in frozen ground. It's really a matter of building a cairn up rather than digging a hole down. And then we had all the bureaucracy to deal with as well. Then a memorial was made back in the UK and brought down on the ship and actually I've got a picture of that. I had it open. Then when the ship came down eight months later we could put up a big cross and a brass plaque which the ship brought down and that was the end of it. It's in the other book. Can you pass me the other one? But once anything like that has happened, it's like a road accident in this country.

[Part 2 0:01:18] Verdenius: I was wondering how you do it because there's no church to bury them.

Matthews: No, that's right. That was it that the ship brought this down eventually, the brass plate and we put that up, just before I came home, before the ship left. No, it's this business of having to do all the sort of mechanics of it oneself. If you know somebody die in this country, an undertaker basically does all the chores, as you might say.

[Part 2 0:02:01] Verdenius: You don't have a parson or a clergyman?

Matthews: A parson no. It's a very personal thing I think. The formalities were very small. It was the middle of winter. We had to do what we had to do and everyone was left with their thoughts. At the end of the day we did what we thought that the two, John and Tom who were killed, what we thought they would want us to do which was to carry on as best we could.

[Part 2 0:02:45] Verdenius: No service?

Matthews: No, that's right. Nothing like that, but it is a difficult experience to go through. Funnily enough, the other geologist, who was with me that year, the previous year, his first year, he had been at Halley Bay when three were killed in a tractor accident, and he was the sole survivor of that accident. So he'd had … His first year had been knocked to bits with three of his friends getting killed, and he had then transferred to Stonington to try and get away from the repercussions, only to have to go through it all again, with two more friends, probably only … So that was his two years tour. A bad experience.

[Part 2 0:03:43] Verdenius: I have been amazed to learn that there was nothing like a ritual, there's no Sunday ritual? There's no religion on those bases.

Matthews: Yes, I suppose that is a bit surprising. I don't know why it had never …. I don't know if it was ever was, even … When it started off in wartime, some of your other earlier interviewees would have been able to tell you; perhaps they did. The Navy and the Forces always have a Sunday parade and Sunday service, don't they?

But there was never anything for the time I was on FIDS, there was never anything like that. On the ship, you had the Captain's Sunday Inspection, which was just that. He used to come round the cabins and see that it was tidy. On the bases, the only ritual was the Saturday night scrubout, which was …

[Part 2 0:04:56] Matthews: Life on base was regimented to a certain degree and that followed a traditional pattern from way back, and the tradition was that Saturday was the day when the whole hut was cleaned out. And then Saturday night, people who were on base would get cleaned up and have a special meal and you would get your beer ration for the week. You would have a sort of party, if you can call it that. Two tins of beer or whatever the ration was, but Sunday no, no religious, no formal religious activities at all. I will tell you the only time I can think of. My memory is not good enough but back in the pre-war days, I think, Martin Lindsay, who later became … No hang on, there were two members of that polar expedition if I remember right, who later became famous church people. There was Lancelot Fleming[2], who later became a bishop and there was Martin Lindsay who later became Chaplain to the Queen I think[3], a chaplain at Windsor Castle or something like that. I would have to look it up. I don't know.

[Part 2 0:06:26] Matthews: Your question raises that interesting question in my mind, whether they had church … any sort of service in those days. That would be the Thirties. But why BAS never had them, I really don't know. Some people were quite religious in the conventional sense. I can't remember anyone who was actually a Catholic, or can I? I have a vague memory. Yes, I think one of the people, not on site with me, but I have a vague memory of chatting to a bloke on the ship who was a Catholic and who had gone and got special dispensation from his church at home not to attend Mass for two years. It just comes back to me, a vague memory, but I think that did happen. So they obviously knew that they would have no religious activity, no communal religious activity for the duration of their tour. I think it would have been very difficult because the bases were so physically small in those days.

[Part 2 0:07:39] Matthews: Nowadays the bases are big and luxurious, but at Stonington for instance, which was the smallest of the bases, there were basically only two rooms of any size: a bunkroom where everybody slept and a living room where everybody ate and read and sat around. There was a kitchen and a storeroom, and a tiny darkroom as well, and a bog. And then later on we built a small office wing, just where we could keep the scientists' work and the doctor's surgery. But to think how it would have been done. There would have undoubtedly been half the base at least, who would have definitely not wanted any sort of religion, organised religion, and you would have introduced a big strain straightaway, just in where you could have your religious group without disturbing or conflicting with your non-religious group. There just wasn't the space.

[Part 2 0:08:52] Matthews: That was always one of the arguments they used for not having women down there, which was that there wasn't the space to give the women the privacy which they were supposed to need. There was only one primitive bog and

[2] Fleming was on the British Grahamland Expedition 1934-37 and later became a bishop. He was appointed Chaplain to the Queen (Source: *Antarctica Encyclopedia*).
[3] According to Wikipedia, Lindsay led the British Trans Greenland Expedition 1943-4, and later became a politician and a baronet. There is no mention of him being a clergyman.

there was only the one communal bunkroom, and all that sort of thing. I don't know how much water that held, that argument, but it was a crowded existence. On balance I am not a practising Christian now but I don't think I would have liked organised religious activities. I don't know why, because I often had religious feelings of a kind down there. I can't really remember it being a subject for conversation very much, either. That's why your comment took me a bit off guard. It's something I hadn't really … It just didn't enter the life really.

[Part 2 0:10:01] Verdenius: [??? inaudible] religious feelings?

Matthews: Yes, it does, undoubtedly, because you see the world as it … There's nowhere else in the world, except maybe one or two remote parts of the Arctic, where you can see the world without the imprint of man, which if you are a Christian is the world as God made it. Anywhere else, even the most remote mountain tops, the top of Mount Everest now, anywhere you go, somewhere within you field of view you can see evidence of Man. But down there, you could look at … Once you are away from the hut, you could look in any direction and not only would you not see any evidence of Man at all, but you would know that in 359 degrees there was nobody, nothing living for hundreds and thousands of miles. We knew that way was Stonington, and that way perhaps was the Argentine Islands base three hundred miles away and so on. And you knew in those days there were no tourist activities. That was it. You were just alone, as I say, in the world as God made it, if you believe that He did make it.

[Part 2 0:11:26] Verdenius: Always a little bit askance the high tech domes on the Pole itself.

Matthews: Yes. Oh I know yes. And the other thing, and aircraft flying here and there, and tourist flights and that. That was the big difference with the Arctic for instance. Certainly I have been in some remote-feeling places in East Greenland, and I have travelled there in glaciers that have never been travelled before and climbed mountains that have never been climbed before. And we did the second ascent of the highest mountain in the Arctic, which is in East Greenland. But then two or three times a day, if it's a clear day, you'll see the big jumbos, or jets going over on the Europe - North America flight. And you just look up and you hear this drone in the sky and you look up and you can imagine these 300-odd people drinking their drinks and having their three-course dinners. So you don't really feel that you are all alone on the Earth totally. The Arctic, I would say, was almost always criss-crossed by commercial flights. So even if you can see nothing on the ground, there's something in the sky to remind you that the rest of the world is there.

[Part 2 0:12:46] Matthews: The Antarctic is really, or was, very very empty. It's still pretty empty but nowadays you do have a lot more aircraft. In the middle of winter, I guess, you could be pretty sure in the Antarctic that there's virtually nothing flying over you except for the satellites. Of course there's the satellites – you can see those. Again, in the sixties there was nothing in space either. In the sixties, there were still lots of places, in the Antarctic mainly, which had never even been photographed from the air, and once … There was a big programme of aerial photography which was pretty comprehensive but then of course once you had satellite photography – when was that? 1970 or '71? – from that moment on, every spot on the surface of the Earth had been photographed from satellite, virtually every spot. And so you could say that

up until then, there were still some secret … some bits of the Earth that Man had never clapped eyes on. But once you had satellites, circuiting up there, everything basically on the surface of the Earth was visible. Perhaps that was the beginning of the end.

[Part 2 0:14:12] Verdenius: That's enough.

[Part 2 1:14:22] [End of Part Two]

ENDS

Possible extracts:

- [Part 1 0:10:14] A new geological plan.
- [Part 1 0:12:52] Receiving a "Dear John" in the field.
- [Part 1 0:26:09] Running out of cigarettes.
- [Part 1 0:30:32] A two-week lie-in.
- [Part 1 0:38:36] Climax of a long trip.
- [Part 1 0:51:14] Descent of Sodabread Slope.
- [Part 1 0:56:14] Ways to avoid getting cold.
- [Part 1 1:01:09] Frozen  clothing after fall into water.
- [Part 1 1:01:09] Differences between Antarctic and Arctic.
- [Part 1 1:06:52] Dogs sense crevasses (unlike tractors).
- [Part 1 1:20:17] Whiteouts: obey the rules.
- [Part 2 0:11:07] Arrival at Stonington.
- [Part 2 0:29:23] Bringing a husky back to UK.
- [Part 2 0:56:21] A fatal accident.