

ROBERT DODSON

Edited transcript of interview with Robert [Bob] Dodson conducted by Chris Eldon Lee in February, 2000, on the Marguerite Bay Reunion 2000 cruise to the Antarctic. BAS archives AD6/24/3/8. Transcribed by Allan Wearden in September, 2019.

[0:00:00] Lee: This is Robert Dodson interviewed by Chris Eldon Lee in Marguerite Bay in February 2000: Robert Dodson.

Dodson: It was a terrible exciting prospect to have the chance to go to there, and it was the exploration of the unknown, it was the getting into the unknown that so appealed and the fact this was, there was the world's last major stretch of unknown coastline, at least 300 miles, that we were going to try to explore. So I was actually one of the first to be selected of the original group - almost all of them dropped out for one reason or another; they had come back from the war, and their wives weren't happy about them going away again or some war like situation in terms of absence, or jobs, so I was it turned out that of all the people that actually went I had been the first selection!

[0:00:58] Lee: How was that selection process carried out?

Dodson: It was word of mouth largely, he was a member of the Antarctic network and word got around he had many more applicants than he had spots for.

[0:01:11] Lee: This is?

Dodson: This is Finn Ronne the Norwegian/American who single handed started this expedition. He was a great organiser and he had a lot of charm, and so he.- overcoming some very great obstacles - he managed to put it all together. It was the romance of the thing greatly appealed to me. In my diary - wish I had a copy with me - is full of quotes from Tennyson and Shackleton and other explorers. The chance to go at all was great, I was so lucky to have met Ronne early on, and I was lucky in that sometimes he had crisis of last minute needing people because others had withdrawn, and I on two occasions within two months and found him two of his best men! Well that helped solidify my position in the expedition too, his aerial photographer and his geologist!

[0:02:13] Lee: What skills did you bring to the expedition?

Dodson: I was a, I had been studying geology. I had a degree and actually on the way down sent the exams back and graduated while I was down there, in geography in geology. I was also a pilot but I had not the qualifications of the other people who were the pilots I was reserve pilot, and I had been an officer of the Harvard Mountaineering Club, I was a skier I'd worked in the wilderness, and also after being selected and after it was all done, through a friend I got an introduction to the Army Quartermasters Corps, the supply corps, they found that I was going, they said 'Well we need the testing, we'd like some equipment to be tested'. Basically it was mountain ski trip equipment, Second World War era, and well only two years before, and I did two or three weeks' work for them to learn the ropes in Washington. Sir Hubert Wilkins was one of the co-workers there then, and I wrote and stayed with him a

month after coming back and that they paid me for! So that turned out to be a last minute qualification, unexpected!

[0:03:35] Lee: So you all arrived at the quayside to board this ship at the same time?

Dodson: We within a two week period we came in January '47.

[0:03:44] Lee: What was the ship called?

Dodson: The ship happened to be in mothballs, the word for it. Surplus ships were going into these great parking areas in certain parts of the US where they treated them, they preserved the machinery and that sort of thing, mothballed them in fact, and this one which had been used hauling barges across the Pacific was a long distance ocean going tug, happened to be in one of these ship parks, mothball parks, in Texas of all places, south eastern Texas, not far from Louisiana! So it was much more practical to go to the ship than it was to bring the ship to New York or some other place and we all came to Texas!

[0:04:29] Lee: And you set sail, and it was sometime before you began to see the coastline of Antarctica. Do you remember that first sighting?

Dodson: Oh very well! Very well! We had easy crossing of the Drake Passage fortunately. That was very fortunate because we were top heavy with loads, and we had foggy weather as we approached the coast and we came in as this cruise did, not through the islands of the north first but straight into Marguerite Bay! So we'd seen no land, hardly any ice bergs till some appeared on the radar - we had radar, probably was the first ship ever to into that part of the Antarctic with radar. The radar helped immensely with the ice bergs, and here and there a mountain range appeared on the radar but not in sight. This was all during the night and in the morning the fog lifted and there were the ice bergs, and we'd actually seen a few with our bare eyes too in the time only half a day before that. Then came the ice bergs in the sunlight and then this glorious mountain range all before us, it was a tremendous welcome and to think that probably no more than a hundred people had ever seen this! But the crews of Charcot's ship of the British Graham Land expedition people, maybe the crews of Biscoe's ship from long ago I don't know if they saw it? So this was an almost first, one of the first people to view it, it was gloriously beautiful!

[0:05:58] Lee: Can you recall your reaction to that sight?

Dodson: Oh it was with tremendous excitement. It was, having looked forward to this for so long and then to see it all laid out before us, a paradise. It must have been the sort of vista that caused the early sealing to name Paradise Bay, this place we were in yesterday which is also so beautiful!

[0:06:24] Lee: You were there to work of course, and you arrived at Stonington Island and you had work to setting up the first American camp?

Dodson: No, it had been an American camp, it was an American camp seven years before It had been vacated in March of '41, the plan before the war was started in early '39, and then

when the war becoming a total war it was decided this isn't the thing – 'Do we need these people back?', so they pulled them out in March '41. We came into the buildings and they were quite in a mess as the British had forewarned us a few hundred yards away, and this damage had been done by visiting Argentine and Chilean, I think Argentine I'm sure, I'm not sure Chilean ships, on more than one occasion. But contrary to what has been reported in some books including Kevin Walton's to which I have much general respect, it had been the bases had been left very neat when the people left in March '41, it was not their doing!

[0:07:25] Lee: So you were re-opening an American base for the second time?

Dodson: We were re-opening.

[0:07:29] Lee: Repairing the damage and thinking ahead?

Dodson: Yes, yes In some cases doors had been left open; I was assigned with one other person to clear out one building, it must have been maybe half again as big as this room we are in [a ship's cabin] now, that was full of personal possessions that people that had to leave 90% or more of their possessions, and we used pick axes and shovels for more than a week, the two of us, to get this. The snow had come in and then in the summer the snow had turned to ice so it took a lot of work! There were machine tools half encased in ice through the door left open, there was a lot of work I was in the small group that went ashore the first night to camp out in this mess and I supposed we stayed on for about three or four weeks before the others came from the ship?

[0:08:18] Lee: What was the accommodation like once you had restored it should we say?

Dodson: Oh it was very nice Once we'd restored it we, we were each assigned a bunk; there were little curtains on the bunk, there were illustrations, we didn't have rugs but we, it was quite cosy it was one big room. It wasn't as cosy as the British camp that was done with a little more finesse and it wasn't as cavernous a space, but it was quite adequate. It was good.

[0:08:49] Lee: As you mentioned the British camp was just a few hundred yards down the road?

Dodson: A couple of hundred yards.

[0:08:56] Lee: Was this a cooperative arrangement or a competitive arrangement?

Dodson: It started off uneasily, Ronne being very distrustful of the story he'd heard from the British commander about the reasons for the disorder in our camp, but he actually he set a rule at the start there should be no communiqué, no visiting! Well that was unenforceable, we were, oh, quite openly just sneaking around going over for tea and that sort of thing! So finally Ronne came around and eventually must have been, eventually by Mid-Winter dinner if not before by June, by the third week of June if not before, relations were very amicable by then, and were talking of joint co-operation which took place, and it all ended very easy and friendly relationship, but at the time at the start it was little tense!

[0:09:53] Lee: The common purpose was to survey and map out tracts of Antarctica?

Dodson: The purpose was mainly geographical exploration, though we were equipped in others and did a fair job in areas too. But specifically the exploration was to be across the Plateau, the geographical one across the Plateau, and down the coast and passed where the American expedition of seven years before had ended, at or near a mountain called Tricorn, and then to go beyond that, oh, 300 miles or so to close this gap of the south, unknown south west corner of the Weddell sea.

[0:10:34] Lee: But were you producing maps or what were you producing?

Dodson: We produced maps we did. There was ground control it, turned out to be a British/American effort as it went down the west coast, the east coast! And trimetric as they called it, trimetric photography from our two-engine Beechcraft plane, and with those inputs from those two quarters we put together maps. Geological exploration was mainly down the west coast and I was part of that down Marguerite towards Alexandra Island and just off the mouth of King George VI Sound.

[0:11:12] Lee: Was there any sense of there being a secondary purpose apart from just mapping things out and seeing what's there, that there might be resources that might be exploited here?

Dodson: Oh the thought of minerals was always on our mind. Yes, the thought and there was the expectation perhaps we might come on to something exciting! There wasn't the general acceptance, knowledge there is today of this is an environmental, or really a world park if it's not called that, of totally environmentally protected continent! At the time I think if you'd asked any of us what the Antarctic would be like in 20 years later would never have thought what did happen! We probably would have surmised that some company or companies that there would be a struggle on claims, and there would be mineral exploration, oil particularly!

[0:12:01] Lee: Another Yukon perhaps?

Dodson: Yes.

[0:12:03] Lee: Gold rush!?

Dodson: Yes!

[0:12:06] Lee: But did a gold rush not come because in the end Antarctica didn't have jewels you thought it might have?

Dodson: I think it didn't come because there is such a tiny part of Antarctica where rock is visible, a very, very small part, and so it's not surprising that in those first fragments of exposed rock that nothing economically viable was discovered, also because the cost of extraction if anything great was found would be enormous. I made a mention to one of my geologist friends who is now a prominent American Antarctic person, Bob Rudford, in a layout of two or three days and they had all their slide rules and calculators there at the time, and they just went through the exercise and trying to figure what, from a detailed standpoint, what it would cost in extraction if you found something, and the cost would have been horrendous!

[0:13:08] Lee: Much of the exploration was done on the surface and this is where the huskies and the sledges came in. Was that part of your remit?

Dodson: Oh yes, yes, I was very much with the dog teams. Ronne at one point thought I'd been in the field with dog teams more than any other American - haven't checked it out in detail but it may be true. Dog teams were very much, and the trip, the joint trip, with the British down the east coast twelve hundred, at least twelve hundred miles round trip, so we did much with dogs. One of our dogs had been infected by a distemper epidemic on the way down but I've been checking this morning, Kevin's book and some others, and there is exaggeration! [Ship's loudspeaker can be heard.] There is exaggeration there on misinformation on some of the facts on our dogs. We came, we started with 40-50 dogs, it was at least 40, and we ended up with - after the distemper epidemic - with at least 25 it may have been 30, and of those we certainly had 15 very strong, very qualified dogs, so assuming 9 dogs to a team we could put together one very good team and two workable teams.

[0:14:23] Lee: How did it feel to be heading away from base camp for 600 miles and just one other man and a team of dogs to keep you company, was it?

Dodson: Oh wonderful. We wanted adventure, we were prepared for adventure, I don't recall any feelings of fearfulness. Oh this was just a feeling of 'How lucky we are to be in this position and doing this'! It was a tremendous exhilaration to have the prospect of actually going in the unknown and I think it was such a thrilling prospect, it tended to push away the fears about the consequences!

[0:15:04] Lee: Did the beauty of the place help with that process?

Dodson: The beauty, yes exactly. Oh the beauty was more than anticipated, and that can be seen in all little poetic references in the diary. Of course one reason the Antarctic is such a beautiful place is because the sun is in perpetual sunset, going horizontally as much as vertically, of course you're going to have some very beautiful moments! Alexandra Land in the distance, Alexandra Island, Adelaide Island ethereal to the northwest these two, in all good weather were in all shades of pink and red and yellow, and blue and violet, gorgeously beautiful!

[0:15:51] Lee: But then of course there is the opposite [Dodson: Ah!] Antarctica is also displayed frosty?

Dodson: Yes indeed, yes indeed. We could hunker down in our bunkhouse. On the trail we were so confident finally with the quality with the tents and we owe so much there to the British equipment we were using and in the end exclusively British pyramidal tents on the trail and they could stand anything! Not on that Plateau experience that I have recounted there, we had a harder time!

[0:16:29] Lee: I can't imagine what it would be like to be in the wilderness in a blizzard in a tent for several days!

Dodson: Oh it was an ordeal, believe me. The time, the worst experience ever I had and I think referred to it in one of the talks, was on the Plateau in Mid-Winter 20 something of July, with one other person, and the wind picked up. We were in the tent ,an American tent, single layer but it had been reinforced by Kevin Walton two days on the sewing machine, and that may have saved our lives! The constant battering like a machine gun battering day and night for - I have to check my diary, I don't have copy with me - for at least five days, it wasn't more than ten days but at least five days and more like five than ten I think? I think one good thing I had a remarkably strong-willed person with me, ex-marine, US marine, tough guy indeed, and we told each other the story of our lives in all that time. In fact he later became my roommate in graduate school, and I introduced him to his wife - close-close friendship developed from that. And we were we somehow, I know I did maybe more than he did because I understood, I'd had more mountaineering and snow experience than had he, but he was an absolute fearless person, absolutely fearless thank God! So despite his lack of experience and knowledge he was just a very courageous person, and I had the more experience and knowledge than him, I had a feeling some one way or the other we were going to out of this, that we could always go back on foot which we finally did, so it was never a hopeless situation!

[0:18:16] Lee: So you never in a position, you were contemplating your mortality?

Dodson: No, no. Youthful rashness maybe in part! [Laughter] No, but that was an experience. We decided to abandon the tent when we got a relative lull down to 20/30 mile an hour wind which was so quiet to what it had been, and down we went. We got lost in a crevasse area, luckily got out of that and finally when we thought we were free of the crevasses, and we were un-roped at the time we were roped part of the time, and un-roped in this - rather a complicated story - why we went back and forth and that? It was absolutely essential that I get a bearing on the base as the base was Neny Island triangular mountain. I get a bearing on that mountain and I knew I was as good as home, without the bearing could be disastrous! Knowing what the weather had done we'd had little lows in the past week, but becoming a blizzard again it was critical we get to that bearing, get to a point that I could get the bearing, it more critical than anything! Un-roped at times and I think I would have done the same thing again to get speed, very slow with the rope. This fellow had had little or any mountaineering/skiing experience, the purpose of the trip was to train him [gentle laughter] and it was, there was big sastrugi, three or four feet high, the rope was catching he was falling, it was much faster without, so we went! We did rope up at times of very serious crevasses. We thought we were out of it, we stopped to eat a chocolate bar, normal rest stop, I was tying my boot lace he went behind me I heard this guttural gasp and looked around and he was gone!

[0:20:11] And I went up to, there was moonlight, a half moon, and I went up to the crevasse and it was quite obviously a crevasse. I would never have stepped on it, but he was much more tired than was I. His sleeping bag was getting wet, it wasn't as adduct [phonetic] as mine, his judgment was poorly affected! I could see, I looked in then called to him, could barely hear him. I put down the rope as I told the other day, finally left it there with knots suspended from skis, put on my skis, backed up 50 or 100 feet maybe. It was a gentle slope

the whole way to base, it was downhill skiing really pushed off to be sure I didn't fall when I got to the crevasse, went across the bridged crevasse and there was no other crevasses I knew the way back then, I knew to go this was the direct - wasn't the best - knew you had to go round to the left and it was nine miles and I quite easily got home! Coming back we had quite a time, it took us an hour or two after we were in the area to find the crevasse in the night. We had Aldis lamps, British Aldis lamps, and finally we found it by looking for my tracks. The 100 mile or more winds had so scoured the ice and snow that there were no normal tracks, it was every 10 or 15 feet maybe six inches or a foot long, a little scratch where I'd edged the ski, the steel edged ski in. And from one of these scratches to another we followed our way back and the lamp picked up the flags and the rest of the story's been told. The British doctor being sent down, he was the smaller person, he'd done crevasse rescue before, and crawling up and saying 'He's alive!' Pulled him up and within a week if not before he was alright again, bruises!

[0:22:10] Lee: And that was a good example of the British and Americans co-operating together?

Dodson: Oh yes, oh yes and that caused a bond lasted throughout!

[0:22:21] Lee: What kind of things go through your mind? You're skiing through the wilderness like that and you can't just concentrate on the job in hand because you've got so many hours of movement to do, what else goes, what do you think?

Dodson: Oh you think about your past and about your future about, you meditate. If you're with somebody else then as in the tent with my friend, a great bond develops from the exchange of so much information of one's past, prospects, girlfriends and the like but also there's the poetry of the situation, always impressed me it was a 'Never-Never Land'!

[0:23:11] Lee: In what respect, never to be repeated, never like anything else?

Dodson: Just out of this world, out of this world!

[0:23:21] Lee: A different planet?

Dodson: Stark infinite beauty, silence and desolation but beautiful! Rymill, the leader of the British Graham Land expedition, expressed it well - it was in, several days ago we put it in one of the programmes where he said 'The silence was so impressive, and even more the sheer immensity of the scene!' As he put it so well 'Occasionally the mutterings of the glacier in its depths reminded us that even here time goes on!' I thought that was, I only came on that in the last few, a couple of days, before I put it in the bulletin.

[0:24:04] Lee: Time does seem to move at a different pace down here doesn't it?

Dodson: Oh yes. I have trouble remembering which day of the week it is, oh yes!

[0:24:17] Lee: Did you ever think about why Antarctica had been created so beautifully? Did you ever have any religious thoughts about the place, or spiritual thoughts?

Dodson: Oh?

[0:24:29] Lee: Here was this land that was denied mankind for so long but suddenly we have it?

Dodson: Yes, of course other parts of the world back in geological time that was true of so many other parts. Now that man has swept over, man and mammals have swept over the world this peace is as so much as the rest of it was! Something like being in interplanetary space, it makes you think in terms of the big picture and psychologically and religious, psychologically and conducive to that kind of thing, and very restful of course.

[0:25:12] Lee: Some the guys who went to the moon came back with deep religious convictions and others came back feeling very insignificant and insecure!

Dodson: Aha!

[0:25:21] Lee: Did any of those cross your mind?

Dodson: Interesting! I don't, well it was an awe inspiring experience it made you feel insignificant and maybe I became a more religious person after coming back than I was before. It's the first time I've ever thought about that, thanks to your question! So it might have had a subtle effect on me, yes.

[0:25:51] Lee: More religious in terms of recognising in what can be created or...?

Dodson: In recognising what, in what tiny specs we are in the universe and things, of how short and how brief is life from the picture of the whole, of a greater presence and a greater being than we are, humbling experience!

[0:26:22] Lee: The Antarctic has been described as the Great White Goddess, does that ring any bells?

Dodson: The Great White South, I find it very appropriate a Great White Goddess, yes, and interesting in the rest of my life which not really following an Antarctic career, it's a hobby. In fact it's been a hobby so long it's the pull of this attraction it was the greatest experience of my life! And it's always been my wife would be the first testimony to this that it's that great experience that has something to it that you don't encounter elsewhere!

[0:27:03] Lee: 50 years later you are still coming down here on a reasonably regular basis?

Dodson: Well I had good fortune 12 years ago to come as a lecturer and grabbed at the chance. This is the second time and yes I'd love to come again!

[0:27:19] Lee: Have you noticed any significant change of mood or environment down here?

Dodson: In the Antarctic coming back to it compared to the past? Oh I've been asked that question yes; really it's so little changed, it's so little unchanged how can I say that when on bases, what six bases on King George Island alone? It's true if you go up to a base there's tremendous change compared to what was there 30 years before, penguin's, rocks and seals,

tremendous change there! The aggregate of all these bases as a proportion of a total area of the Antarctic is infinitesimal so small, and even you can withdraw from a coast on which there are bases, you go ten miles or more out there's no difference in what you see than 50 years ago - of course the ice is retreating somewhat, even that is retreating more in other places, in some places than others. The ramp at Stonington Island has gone but even that is such a small proportion of the total ice on the continent. The vista of the whole is utterly the most unchanged thing on earth besides the ocean, except the surface of the ocean not sure what underneath the ocean has changed much, no generally no change!

[0:28:50] Lee: Is there one experience that you had then or now which really encapsulates your feelings for the Antarctic? Was there a moment when you were specifically elated or particularly in fear?

Dodson: Well that, crevasse experience!

[0:29:05] Lee: That was a fear!?

Dodson: Oh yes. Well I had this confidence, it was a combination of confidence and determination to do everything possible to get back. Yeah, that one caused a lot of tension I've never been so focused in my life I guess that time! [gentle laughter] But it was tremendous excitement too, that opening of the curtain coming in the laying out of all the beauties of the place was beyond our expectation that was one, and, as I mentioned on one of the talks the trip, the midwinter trip to the Plateau. There is one momentary scene which sticks, un-photographable too, which increases the beauty of it, coming over the Plateau and having the rare experience of the Southern Lights, and more pink than what I've seen in the north, more pink and red mainly in an arc in the sky. And the dogs going, because when we got to the Plateau our direction to the camp would be south west, toward the magnetic pole. And there the tails of dogs it was a beautiful sight in itself because as they go along their little tails bob back and forth, and out silhouetted against the red of the Aurora! I think that was the number one beautiful sight that I recall!

[0:30:26] Lee: You were saying you couldn't imagine more people coming down here after you, but we were hearing in one of the talks or one of the discussions that something in the region of a 100,000 people....

Dodson: People have visited yeah.

[0:30:39] Lee: In the last 30 years!

Dodson: If you'd asked us while we, our 23 people, we were there I don't think anyone would have thought, would have forecast what really has happened. I don't think we focussed on it much we assumed it would have been as in the past they'd be an occasional expedition, and gradually over time they would finish and that might be 50 or 100 years or so, and that some of us would, yes would like to get a berth in the expedition if possible. And when we thought the economic side would certainly develop there would exploration in the sea to see if they could find minerals or oil. But the Treaty, that was a really wonderful

solution, was not at all foreseen if I answered your question - I've maybe gone off the track on that.

[0:31:33] Lee: Tell me a bit more about your views on the Treaty. Is the Treaty a watertight agreement now?

Dodson: I think it's proved itself it's very workable. It came up for review 30, in 1989, 30 years after its inception and there was, so it was something like coming up to millennium the fears of the computer breakdown and the 30 year came really there were minor, oh there were conferences and committee meetings and the like and it went on, the Treaty virtually as before really! And strengthening as it goes with the convention on seals, with the convention which as an active executive of part of it with the building of Hobart in Australia, on marine living resources. Oh my feeling is that the Treaty is, has proved itself to be a very practical working arrangement and there have been objections, some parties outside the system, saying if you are going to protect the Antarctic this isn't the way to do it, it should be under the UN for example. That too is quite a now wide, because the major third world nations, Malaysia particularly, that the objections, India and China now for example are now members of the club so you don't hear any objections from them. There's a general acceptance of the Antarctic Treaty.

[0:33:04] Lee: I'm mildly surprised at how smoothly that has gone. One always feels that somebody somewhere will try and exploit other peoples' compassion for the place, that somebody will sneak in and undo the agreement or undermine the agreement. I'm surprised it hasn't happened.

Dodson: I've had some fears in that respect too, and I've heard them voiced elsewhere in the past, but not recently. I think it's so, its proven to be so effective it may well be an example for the solution of other international problems, and I see no, to date no risk that some one nation or group of nations is going to try to break the pattern!

[0:33:51] Lee: And is it because every nation that's agreed to the Treaty is as overwhelmed by the beauty of the place that you are?

Dodson: It may, I hadn't thought of that. It may well be awed by the fact, by this world environmental park which is what it has become and proud to be, to have a part in it!

[0:34:15] Lee: Man is now aware of the damage he can now inflict!

Dodson: Yes, yes!

[0:34:18] Lee: So let's get this right!

Dodson: Yes.

[0:34:21] Lee: When you're bringing tourists, sorry?

Dodson: I wonder where the Treaty if in doing, in the enforcement, define the means to enforce the rules, just having the rules a certain enforcement present then anyway, the fact

that it exists deters people to do otherwise, but real enforcement, some sort of punishment, fines for particularly in the fishing the Southern Ocean there's the biggest problem environmentally in the whole Antarctic, more than the tourist stepping on grass and the like but they're moving in that direction. They are moving in that direction and eventually they will find it! They need a secretary and an operating arm this has been known for years, but there's some curious politics involved with that. Years ago it was in the last 15 years the US had offered Washington as a base, Argentina had offered, has offered all along Buenos Aires in the early '80s in the early '90s I believe it was when Lawrence Eagleburger was acting Secretary of State if he wasn't actually, he must have been acting at the time. He....arranged that the American claim would be, that the American offer for Washington would be dropped, they would take that out. The Argentines were informed which was a subtle way of telling the Argentines, 'Look it's alright if you want we will support Buenos Aires'

[0:35:50] But as you probably know Britain has been firmly opposed to that, Britain is opposed to any to the Secretariat being established in any nation that has conflicting claims in the Antarctic. The British standpoint is it's definitely not to be London, Santiago or Buenos Aires, the Australians I don't know if they made a formal offer but let it be known that they'd be happy to have it in Hobart. But there is some feeling and I guess this is true that the Latin nationals Chile and Argentina would rather that if it isn't in their country it would be somewhere than quote, unquote than an 'Anglo' country meaning Australia, New Zealand, Britain and the United States! So that leaves now - this here is my own thinking, I'm talking as one other individual to another rather anything I've read official - that Cape Town I would think or South Africa somewhere in South Africa, Cape Town would seem to be logical, maybe realistically one of the best choices for this. And when they have that set up and then other areas that need improvement such as the enforcement particularly would come into the picture.

[0:37:07] Lee: When you bring tourists down here now, you're a lecturer on a tour ship, are you comfortable, totally comfortable about that, or is something inside of you saying 'Well here I am sharing my love of Antarctica!'

Dodson: Oh that is an interesting question, that's an interesting question!

[0:37:25] Lee: But at the same time they are stealing it a little bit!?

Dodson: Oh yes . Oh I have thought less and less as I'm exposed to tourists, but at the beginning quite a lot and some of my colleagues who have been with me declined. They could have come on that cruise that I went on 12 years ago and said 'No they didn't want to associate with tourists, they didn't want tourists, they wanted to remember it as it was'! It was such a pity as being so commercialised but I think that's wrong I feel a bit of that, have felt in the past but not anymore, that it's inevitable and such controlled tourism and some the tourists become ambassadors so environmentally conscious that really when you think about it it's a good thing for the Antarctic. No I gotten over that! Remnants of the initial reaction always pop up from time to time!

[0:38:20] Lee: So when you remember a beach where you stood alone [Aha!] and now you're standing there with a 100 tourists in life jackets and bright red overalls that's OK is it!?

Dodson: I think, I haven't actually been, because I haven't been to the places, I never came north from Stonington never saw this part, haven't yet been with tourists I mean we came close to it we almost got to Stonington! Oh I think if I reflected on that at Stonington it would have been how very, very strange! How completely it would have been an intriguing thought in a way, how completely impossible this would have seemed when we were back in the old days! But here it is - its inevitable and think that many others of the old explorers would be perfectly comfortable with it now, except I think it's a question of one's temperament. Some of my buddies who didn't want to come down here were real diehards adventurers who just can't bring themselves...to accept that things have changed somewhat. No I got used to it!

[0:39:30] Lee: It's a diluting of their memory isn't it, memory's been diluted by having to share it now with a whole new generation?

Dodson: Yes that's a good way of putting it, yeah, and may they're right in a way to keep that pure memory. From one sense it gives them more satisfaction to think of it that way, had they come then they would be diluted as you say mixed up with this other, which would have decreased their enjoyment of the olden days.

[0:39:54] Lee: It's interesting to hear that old British Antarctic Survey veterans talking about going back to the bases that they been to, when they're back onboard ship again they're reflecting on going back to a place they hadn't seen for 30 years and they seem to display this dichotomy of emotions, the joy of seeing it again but also this faint sadness at seeing how things have moved on?

Dodson: Oh yes, oh yes. Oh I share that view too, oh sure. Now the magic of being on the edge of the unknown, the sensation of coming into dinner at night, the pilots had just landed, and chatting about what they saw during the day yeah, which involved mountain ranges never before seen by human eyes! Better still to have been, I didn't have the good fortune to be in the plane, my job was otherwise, but that was tremendously exciting! The feeling we were in a process this was often on our minds, or we were part of a process that started, they say, with Columbus, with the first explorers far back with the cavemen going out into the forest from the cave long before! And here at least for the surface of the earth this space and this interior of the earth and countless other things, the surface, the geographical discoveries, were coming we were in the final-final stages and in the sense that our 300 miles of unknown coastline, which if truthful was the world's last significant stretch of unknown coastline, had been ours, was ours for the exploration and that was a very exciting thought. One of the young people aboard expressed to me, just the other day he said 'Oh I was born 50 years to late'! because he realised in that respect he was shut out from that as the book is closed on that particular type, but when you begin to reflect about it you know exploration and geographical, yes the surface is ended!

[0:41:52] But into the microscopic world, into space the more knowledge increases the more sort of the perimeter of our ignorance is vast! So on deep reflection it's just one phase of the geographical surface of the Earth. But what I should add is as sort of a finale to these reflections is a phrase with which I ended an article that I wrote on the Antarctic in 1956 for the American Geographical Society, and I'm pretty sure I can quote it directly. 'What I remember now I look back on the gap of ten [it was then only ten years] years to those moments of great living in a distant land, I remember the wind, I remember the cracking of crevasses, I remember the immense white slopes, but I remember most and shall forever invoke that sense of peace transcending human care in the violence of the wind, that reigns in those lonely places, and the peace that's element is beauty raising the spirit of man above his baser self towards the eternal'! As to the origin of that phrase it wasn't entirely my own, I came across that in a mountaineering, I believe a journal of the Himalayan Club years ago, when I was organising an expedition to the Himalayas, and I remembered it as coming from an article by it was then Brigadier Sir John Hunt, later Lord Hunt. I met him at a mountaineering function years later and complimented him, and I'd adapted it, changed, edited the wording a bit, and he said 'No first he'd heard', he complimented me, said 'Beautiful, but I didn't write it'! So I don't know where the seeds of it came from but I thought it applied particularly to the Antarctic, and again this relates to the psychological and religious aspect that you had mentioned, very important.

Some interesting clips:

- The selection process of joining the private Finne Ronne Antarctic expedition back to Stonington in 1947? [0:01:11]
- Joining the recently mothballed ship to sail south on! [0:03:44]
- The first sight of the Antarctic through the mist one morning! [0:04:29]
- The state of the old US East base on arrival at Stonington Island in 1947. [0:06:24]
- No communication with the British base to start with and then good cooperation and working together! [0:08:56]
- Stuck in a tent on the Plateau during a terrible storm with a companion who became a lifelong friend! [0:16:29]
- During a lull in the storm starting to walk back to the base and disaster! [0:18:16]
- Back to the base and the crevasse rescue of his companion! [0:20:11]
- Thoughts of what would happen to the Antarctic in the future? [0:30:39]
- Thoughts about the Antarctic Treaty and if it is working! [0:31:33]
- Of working on a tourist ship and tourists coming to visit the Antarctic! [0:37:07]
- When wintering in 1947 and hearing about what the pilots had been seeing each day? [0:39:54]
- A beautiful quote about the Antarctic! [0:41:52]