

AV 12: Kenneth Victor Blaiklock oral history summary

Recorded at Bernard Stonehouse's home, Swaffham Bulbeck. Interviewed by Bernard Stonehouse (BS).
2.9.2000

Track 1. [00.59.35]. [00.00.26] Description of Ken Blaiklock's (KB) early years including survey work in Germany after the war; volunteering for work in the Falkland Islands; interview with Ted Bingham for the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey. [00.03.34] Description of travelling south on the John Biscoe. Mention of Bunny Fuchs navigating by atlas as they had no charts; first impressions of Stonington Island; anecdote about travelling by dog sled from the ship; memories of the base being comfortable and congenial. [00.07.55] Description of work during his two year stay at Stonington including learning to drive dogs; first year was spent learning to survive and the second year spent surveying; mention of an emperor penguin rookery. [00.10.15] Description of returning to the UK with dogs and KB's involvement in the Festival of Britain. [00.11.36] Description of returning to Antarctica to help open up Hope Bay. [00.12.55] Description of political confrontation with the Argentines. Mention of machine gun fire; language barrier; Governor Sir Miles Clifford arriving ready for action; setting up the British base and entering in to peaceful trade with the Argentine base – British matches for Argentine wine. [00.16.00] Description of two main expeditions from Hope Bay including summer journey to Joinville Island and tough winter trip on the Peninsula. Mention of Snow Hill Island and Mount Haddington. [00.18.07] Description of returning to Antarctica in 1955 as party chief on the Norsel tasked with getting as close as possible to Argentine occupied Stonington Island. Mention of establishing bases at Adelaide Island and Horseshoe Island; survey work with Ralph Lenton on the Norsel as it travelled up the west coast of the peninsula from the Argentine Islands. [00.20.42] Anecdote about being on the Norsel and hearing Bunny Fuchs announcing the Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE). [00.21.14] Memories of the TAE journey south including getting stuck in the ice; reaching land at the start of February; not having much time to unload in bad weather; being left at short notice late in the season but wanting to stay. [00.24.00] Description of establishing Shackleton Base in tough conditions including living in a large crate; losing stores after a storm; having food but minimum fuel; camping outside through the winter. Mention that it may have been possible to retreat to the American base near-by but they decided to stay; some sledge journeys made. Anecdotes about salt and lack of power. [00.28.30] Description of the main party returning and going with Hal Lister and Jon Stephenson (JS) to establish South Ice station. Story about flying to see some Nunataks on a day trip and becoming stranded for 15 days. [00.31.50] Description of flying out to the Shackleton Mountain range [00.32.50] Description of starting the crossing with the main party including trouble with crevasses and learning how to navigate them. [00.37.00] Description of journey from South Ice to the South Pole including dog teams being used for reconnaissance; leaving snow cairns for the sno-cats to follow; anecdote about building snow-henge; hard journey for the dogs who were flown out at the south pole; sense of achievement at reaching the pole but all were tired. [00.42.00] Brief description of journey from South Pole to Scott Base including mention of Ed's tracks. Comments on Bunny Fuchs' leadership and age. [00.43.36] Description of arrival in NZ; anecdote about boring speeches; return to the UK via boat; story about formal dinner hosted by Macmillan that turned into a party. [00.46.00] Description of joining the 2nd Belgian Antarctic Expedition, which was the most enjoyable of all KB's expeditions; good facilities; good surveying; comments on KB having spent 8 winters in Antarctica. [00.51.08] Description of KB's career on return to UK including marriage; summer trip with Bill Slowman to the Eastern side of the Antarctic Peninsula; Joining Decca Navigator Company (c.1965); summer trip with the Belgians re-surveying the area they had studied together three years earlier. [00.53.20] Description of returning to

the Shackleton Mountains with the British Antarctic Survey in 1969. [00.55.15] Description of working for Decca as chief surveyor at their Yarmouth office co-ordinating hydrographic and geophysical work for the North-sea off-shore oil industry. [00.57.35] Description of returning to Antarctica on the cruise ship Marco Polo with his wife, Eileen, and other polar people including Bunny and Eleanor Fuchs, Ed Hillary, Philippa Scott, Amundsen's grand-niece. Mention of three seasons of work with Bernard Stonehouse. [00.59.35] END.

Tape 2: [00.15.33]. [00.00.36] Description of KB's survey work for "Project Antarctic Conservation" - the Scott Polar Research Institute's enquiry into the impact of tourism - including using GPS to produce charts quickly; attitudes of tourists to conservation issues; life on board Antarctic cruise ships. [00.05.20] Memories of visiting the Polish Arctowski Base, which KB enjoyed very much. Comments on US bases and others feeling stark by comparison. [00.07.05] Thanks and end of interview. [00.07.15] BS explaining geographical terms discussed in interview and reading his questions to KB [00.15.33] END.