

Interview with Dr. Raymond John Adie 28 October 2000

As part of the oral history programme of the Scott Polar Research Institute, Dr. Raymond John Adie was interviewed at his home in Cambridge by C. Simon L. Ommanney on 28 October 2000. The interview was recorded by Lucy Martin of the SPRI.

Ray Adie is a South African who trained as a geologist. He has visited Antarctica almost 2 dozen times. He spent many months there conducting and supervising geological and other work and made some epic journeys. He rose through the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey and the British Antarctic Survey to become Deputy Director. He is an internationally recognized expert in Antarctic Science. A largely unheralded contribution to polar science has been through his role as an editor of the BAS publications and as scientific editor and house editor of the Journal of Glaciology and the companion journal the Annals of Glaciology. He is now retired and spends much of his time in South Africa.

Ray described when his family went to South Africa and his own experiences growing up there after his birth in Pietermaritzburg on 26th February 1925. Despite an early interest in chemistry he was persuaded to switch to geology at the University of Natal after earlier schooling in Scottsville and Maritzburg College. Lester King was a major influence on him and he also developed a fascination with the theory of continental drift and Gondwana.

An invitation to South Africans to join the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey led to his application and move to London where he was sent to the Falklands. He undertook a thorough geological survey of this area and became quite familiar with the terrain and local economy, even writing a report on sheep farming there. He also carried out surveys in the Peninsula, principally with Vivian Fuchs.

In 1950 he went to Cambridge to study for his doctorate. There he met many of the leading polar scientists of the day - Wordie, Debenham, Fleming, Vaughan Lewis, Seligman, etc. A freeze on funding for the FIDS meant that no job could be offered to him when he graduated so he took a job as a geochemist with Albright and Wilson Ltd. which involved work in West Africa and meant he was unable to join the Trans-Antarctic Expedition that Bunny Fuchs and he had discussed and planned.

As soon as the funding situation with FIDS improved, and once his African commitment had been satisfied, Ray was invited to return to what subsequently became the British Antarctic Survey and manage part of their operations. This also involved an appointment as Senior Research Fellow at Birmingham University. He discussed the challenges he faced at BAS and how he influenced the development of that organization. In 1973 he was appointed Deputy Director and moved to Cambridge. He was much involved in the planning of the centre that was built there and dealing with the disparate groups that had to be centralized in the new headquarters, and the personnel problems that ensued. One morale building element was an active BAS Club that helped to integrate spouses and families into the new environment.

Ray's geological work led him to being able to position the Falkland Islands within Gondwana, something he says came to him in a dream and which was not fully appreciated until many years later.

Ray described his contributions to various compilations and some of the background: the geology of the Northern and Southern Antarctic Peninsulas which was published in the American Geographical Society's Antarctic Map Folio Series; the 1st International Symposium on Antarctic Geology, held in Cape Town, and the resultant publication (Antarctic geology) and the subsequent symposium that he was involved with and for which he also edited the proceedings; the major compendium on British scientific achievements in the Antarctic (Antarctic Research) edited with Raymond Priestley and Gordon Robin. Further to these, he discussed his experiences with editing various publications, the BAS publications, their scientific premises and the Bulletin, and how the standards were essentially set in the early days when working with John Glen on the Journal of Glaciology.

Coming from a country with no snow, he was quite impressed with his first view of Antarctica. In those days travel was by dog team and sledge and Ray described how some of this was done and some of his memorable experiences. He feels much has been lost with the removal of all dogs from the continent.

The man who most impressed him and influenced him was Bunny Fuchs, with whom he shared a tent on a 1744 km traverse and on many other times and who was a lifelong friend. Ray talked briefly about the so-called Lost Eleven and how the sole bone of contention, that completely split the camp, was whether milk should be put in before the tea or afterwards.

Ray was responsible for drafting a report for South African involvement in the Antarctic, and saw all of his recommendations implemented. Once his intimate knowledge of the Falklands became known, he was summoned to No. 10 to meet Margaret Thatcher and advise on terrain and routes that British troops might use to retake the Falklands after **the invasion.**

Ray finished the interview by describing some of the awards, recognition and honours he had received, including the Polar Medal, the U.S. Antarctic Service Medal, the Bellingshausen Medal, the O.B.E. and the Fuchs Medal. He also showed a few Antarctic mementoes he keeps in his house.