

TREVOR MCINTYRE

Date: 26 March 2011
Place: Pretoria University
Interviewer(Q): Lize-Marie van der Watt | History Department | Stellenbosch University
Respondent(A): Trevor McIntyre | Sealer and Conservation Officer | Marion 62|2005

Q: The first question obviously is: How did you get to Marion?

A: How did I get involved?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, initially I was nearing the end of my Masters – I was doing it at Wits, working on something completely different as well ...

Q: What's "completely different"?

A: I was working on lizards. I was working on mining contaminant pollution effects on (the) lizard population in the Free State. So I was nearing the end of my Masters and I didn't really know what I was going to do afterwards, and I saw an ad, actually for a different position in the team – for Prideel's (Majiedt) job, the field assistant on the disturbance project – and it sort of looked like something I would be interested in doing, sort of a year contract, so I applied for that. And then I got a phone call from Marthan quite a while after that. I think he pretty much sort of conned me into it a little bit, because he said I was coming in for an interview for what I had applied for. So I came to Pretoria and had the interview and ... But in the interview, he kept asking me if I'd be willing to do other things, you know, sort of like working on seals. And the next thing I knew, I was sort of employed as a sealer. I was keen; it sounded fun. And that's pretty much how I got involved in this.

Q: Do you think they didn't get other applications or they just thought your application might be very worthwhile to the sealing project?

A: I don't really know. I never actually ... I've never really asked him to be honest. I do think ... a few years ago ... The programme has changed quite a bit in the sense that I think that we get a lot more ... many more applications at the moment, and in the last few years, than we did previously. The profile has gone up a little bit, I think. So, you know, it was very ... It would be nice to think that it was because my CV stood up, but you know, it very likely was because they were short on people and they needed someone.

Q: Have you heard of Marion Island before you applied?

A: I'd heard of it, but knew very little actually about it, sort of, I think, what most people knew, you know, sort of a sub-antarctic island and that there was a weather station.

That's pretty much what you sort of know ... and probably some animals, you know. But very little, actually.

Q: So did you like the idea of spending a year in isolation? Did you know it would be isolated?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: I was talking about ... How much did you know about Marion Island? Had you spoken to any of the previous team members before you applied or went?

A: No, not before I applied, no. The application was literally just based on the advertisement I saw. Before I went, I obviously spoke to some of the previous sealers, who were in this department here. I can't recall that I actually spoke to anyone else, other than ... it was literally Marthan. My boss, Nico, had been before, and Greg Hofmeyr, who was still very involved with the project then. Those were the only people that had actually been before.

Q: What kind of things would they tell you?

A: Well, they would generally ... I mean most of it was work-based, I suppose, because they were all involved with the programme, so definitely running through what my responsibilities would be on the island. And a little bit about the environment, you know. Obviously, everyone always talks about the weather, what you need to be prepared for in terms of cold and wind and everything else generally. I distinctly remember getting a very excited feeling from both Nico and Greg. Whenever they spoke about the island, they ...

Q: ... lit up?

A: Exactly! They completely lit up, and that enthusiasm was very reassuring in a sense, because you feel like, "Wow, it's gotta be a cool place if that's what they feel like afterwards", you know.

Q: In your preparation for going down to Marion Island, what was that like? What did you do to prepare?

A: Not that much, to be honest. I think I went into it fairly blindly. If I just say, compared to the new teams and all the information we're trying to give them, like things that they need to take along and whatever, it didn't really happen much in my year. I don't know if it happened before; I don't think it really did. So we got some specific things, what we knew, during team training, when you meet up with your team members, we were fortunate in that we had one or two people who had been before. They were able to give us a bit of a better idea of the extra things you'd need and so on. But those were all very last-minute things, literally a week before you go

... But in terms of other preparations, not too much. I was told to try and pick up some weight before I go, so I tried to eat a lot, and that was it really.

Q: Were you told about the physical nature of the work?

A: Yes. I mean that was definitely impressed straightaway that it's physically very demanding.

Q: Team training ... What did that involve?

A: Quite a lot of varied things. We did all the basic courses that they still do now. I mean the locations only changed now, but we essentially did the first aid course, we did a fire fighting course and a cooking class, which was not very helpful ...

Q: Why not?

A: Well, it was very strange in that you ... you know, everyone just got to make one little thing themselves ... You know, I just didn't feel that it was ultimately that ...

Q: ... necessary?

A: Yes ... I suppose for someone who's maybe never ever touched anything in the kitchen, it would be useful, but most people, I think at least ...

Q: ... nowadays ...

Q: So had you cooked for yourself before?

A: Yes, I used to ... I mean I'd lived by myself for a few years before then, so yes. Other than that, we had a weekend away, that we went – it was organised on the side, I think, by our team leader at the time – we did a hiking trip and an overnight camping trip and we just all got to know each other better. I'm trying to remember what else we did in ...

Q: These were all Cape Town-based activities?

A: This was all Pretoria-based still ...

Q: Pretoria-based still?

A: Yes. They moved down to Cape Town a few years ago, the whole operation, but back then it was here. We did a trip to the library to take out ... you get to take out all the books you want from the National Library, which is nice.

Q: Did you have to return them?

A: Yes. You take them out and they all go in one big container to the island and then you have to give them back at the end of the year and it comes back.

Q: What kinds of books did you choose?

- A:** I don't even really remember ... There wasn't a very big selection ... I remember being very disappointed at our National Library ... You know, it was just very old books in general, and nothing ... I mean ...
- Q:** ... Not a lot of fiction?
- A:** There must have been ... I personally prefer reading more non-fiction books, and I remember thinking, "Well, there's not that much here" ... I definitely took a few books, but I can't remember the title of a single one. ... There was ... Don't know.
- Q:** How long before you went did you go to Cape Town?
- A:** We arrived in Cape Town about a week before we left. The structure was we had two weeks of team training in Pretoria and then we had about a week off before we went to Cape Town, and then we had ... It was a week or just less than a week so, a few days that we were in Cape Town, during which we essentially just got our gear and packed everything finally. There was supposed to be some part of team training, but there weren't really any other specific activities.
- Q:** And was it this time that you got the new leader?
- A:** Yes. Once we arrived in Cape Town ... I believe the story goes – I'm not sure if it ... This was ... I think Shorty ... He will be able to fill you in more ... I think he was on standby prior to it already, and they informed him that he may have to go, in fact as a replacement for one of the other weather services persons ... for Piet Pieterse, who was in our team – they weren't confident that he was going to actually make it. He made it, but the team leader didn't, so ...
- Q:** Did it come as a bit of surprise to you all?
- A:** Oh yes. It was a very big surprise. We definitely didn't have an idea. For Ponti (Phututshedzo Radzikani), since it was the first time he was on a plane, and Heine was supposed to meet him at the airport in Cape Town and pick him up and ...
- Q:** Who was this on the plane?
- A:** Ponti, my fellow-sealer. He'd never ... literally ... He'd grown up in Venda, been around here all his life ... First time on a plane, goes to Cape Town, and the guy who's supposed to pick him up disappeared, you know! So I think it was a big surprise for everyone.
- Q:** How did that affect team dynamics, you think?
- A:** I think, in a way ... at the time ... Everything's very positive, I think for most teams, at that point, because everyone's excited about the year and it was a little bit scary, but in terms of the team dynamics, I don't think it changed anything. I think everyone said, "Well that's how it's going to be". In fact, it became almost a sort of bonding

thing, because it's sort of a discussion point. Everyone's wondering, "What happened to Heine; he's not here!" And of course everyone comes up with their own theories of what's happened. But I don't think it really changed anything in terms of team dynamics, no.

Q: And then Nishal just fill in the job?

A: Yes. He was officially appointed team leader a day or two before we left.

Q: Who worked with this? Was it Henry?

A: Yes. Henry was involved right from the start – you know, once we realised Heine's not there.

Q: Who was your DCO, or officer in charge?

A: DCO Frans Hofmann, is it? I think Frans ... I don't think he's still involved with SANAP. I believe he ... Although someone told me the other day that he's ... he wants to get involved again ... I can't remember what the ... But I think I heard ... He's a very efficient, very well-organised person. I think it's Hofmann ... I can't remember ... Frans was his first name.

Q: So, then you get on the ship. Was it (the) Agulhas?

A: Yes.

Q: Had you met the Captain?

A: I don't remember specifically meeting the Captain ... I guess we must have, because normally there's a meeting in the first day or two with everyone in the lounge, and it must have been the Captain who spoke to everyone.

Q: How was the journey down to the "Roaring Forties"?

A: It was surprisingly okay. I think we were fortunate on that trip that we had good weather all the way. You know, you hear all the rumours about "oh, the ship's gonna be so bad and you're gonna get so sick", and then you're expecting Marthan to come with a hamburger in your face and rub it in, and none of that actually happened. It was actually fine. You feel a bit queasy the second day, but it wasn't ... I was okay ... At least on that trip.

Q: Do you remember what happened on the way back? Was that ...

A: That was definitely a bit worse. I felt a little bit more queasy on the way back than going there. I suppose it's because you tend to start off in rougher water and you haven't been on anything that's moving for quite a while, so ...

Q: That's also true ... Did you stand on the deck and watch Table Mountain when you left?

- A:** Yes, we were all immediately to the monkey deck and hanging around there most of the way; well, most of that first day.
- Q:** How did it feel to see Table ... leaving Table Mountain on the horizon?
- A:** I can't really remember any specifics ... I think for me it was exciting. It was just this sort of excitement of going somewhere where I didn't really ... I had some sort of expectations; I guess I had some sort of picture in my mind, but no ...
- Q:** ... definite ... ?
- A:** Yes. I couldn't really picture it, so it was sort of this excitement ... I guess a little bit of ... I mean, it's a little bit scary, because you ... But it was definitely just more excitement than anything else. I guess I was ... Compared to other people who would have family members or girlfriends or boyfriends, who definitely had sort of a sadness part involved, I didn't have any family members there, at least, so it was fine. You're on your way ...
- Q:** Was it teary-eyed goodbye?
- A:** No, no.
- Q:** When you arrived at the island, what were your first impressions?
- A:** It was colder than I thought it would be. I knew it was going to be cold, but it was just a little bit ... that sort of nip in the air, when you're on the ship still, you're not even on the island yet, and you think, "Oh well, this is actually ... This is what it feels like. This is what it's going to be like all the time." You know, that was a little intimidating. And seeing the island from the ship, you don't ... I think it looked, you know, not that difficult, or not that hard a terrain to work on. And I thought, "Well, that's fine; we'll see when we get there." But obviously once you're there it's a slightly different story.
- Q:** Did any construction crew go down with you?
- A:** Yes, there was. We didn't have a very big component during the take-over, as far as I can recall. We had a construction voyage later in the year ... that they arrived from August to November.
- Q:** The off-loading process ... How does that work on Marion?
- A:** Well, essentially we ... We normally ... Well, you don't really get most of your things at the start, but they start the personal gear ... So, first people get flown off and then they start flights depending on weather, just taking off containers one by one, and then ... We were very ... I don't know if it's necessarily every year like that; I think mostly the expectation is for the team to really be helping a lot with getting all the gear out, especially kitchen things and whatever. We definitely had a few days where

that's pretty much all you did, was just off-loading things ... making big lines, passing on packages.

Q: So the helideck was finished by then?

A: Yes.

Q: Meeting the old team ... what was that like?

A: It was a bit strange in a sense. Again, I didn't really have a very clear idea ... There was only one sealer left from the year before, because that was ... Justice and Hendrik were the two sealers and Hendrik was sent back early. So there was only the one guy there. It was fine; there was no ... The team ... It was a bit strange. When you land, you're a little bit disorientated. I remember feeling a little bit disorientated when we got out of the helicopter and some of the old team members were there, pointing us "You have to go down there", but you don't really ... you see a catwalk going down there ... you follow it down, but you don't know where the entrance is to the building; you don't know where anything is just containers. Exactly! So it was definitely a little bit disorientating initially, but then obviously once you're inside, you explore a bit ...

Q: ... it's different ... And then the sealer who was left after take-over, he took you out a bit ... He trained you?

A: Yes. That was his main responsibility was to show us around and I suppose to humble us a little bit in general, because they are all a lot fitter than what you are

Q: Can you remember your first encounter with a fur seal pup or a fur seal?

A: I distinctly remember the first day that we did an elephant seal census. Going north, you do encounter fur seals and things on the way. And I remember thinking ... Well, the fur seals sounded a lot like little sheep, but sheep with teeth. You have to just stay out of their way a little bit. And they just seemed to be all over the place ... And I didn't know how we were going to be able to throughout the year avoid stepping on them, because there were some beaches where you walk along and what you really think is a rock turns out to be a seal. And the next thing you know ... It was a bit intimidating, just the numbers of seals. And obviously just the general terrain ... We did half a census really of what you would normally do in ... And I was dead tired. I didn't know ... That first day of actual work was intimidating enough to make me doubt whether I wanted to stay for the year. I was really ... I think most sealers go through that, where they think, you know, "I'm not going to be able to do this, because ..." Sort of regretting what I got myself into.

Q: So, a day in the life of a sealer ... Once you got into your routine ... What does a sealer do?

A: A lot of walking. That's the style of it. Well, the main programme is based on this mark rating programme, which I'm sure Nico and Marthan would have told you a lot about. So a lot of your work is checking seals for tags. That's the basis of it. You're checking the set beaches that you check once a week or once every ten days. And you go after every single animal and see if it's got a tag and if it doesn't ... then you carry on. So that's the bulk of what you do and then there's all the other bits and bobs that fit in. In the average day, depending on the time of year ... During the quieter times of year, in winter, we would normally be able to get up at fairly leisurely times, not have too much worry, and you'd go, depending on again time of week ... If you had a quiet day, you'd only have to do attendance pattern work around base, so you'd go up to van den Bogaardt, check out the fur seals, what's happening, come back in the morning ... You go out later again in the afternoon, you do the same thing ... And the rest of the time you can do your lab-based work, catch up on data entries and so on. And then you have your normal censuses, where you go for ... the elephant seal censuses, which at the start take you a little bit longer than it normally does, but you ... So you're either going north or south, you go spend the night in Kildalkey, following all the beaches, checking all the seals, spend the night in Kildalkey, go across to Water Tunnel and spend a night in Water Tunnel Water Tunnel and then come back and then you go up to [Inders] So it normally takes about three days of the week, and then you have a few days where you just do attendance patterns and you ... And then you have a day where you go up to Cape Davis and weigh a lot of fur seals pups, and then you come back and .. You know, it's very varied, so it's a bit difficult to just come up with a typical day. But a typical day involves ... Generally, the thing you do the most is checking tags, and then all the extra stuff.

Q: Apart from walking, what's the physical nature of the job?

A: Well, the walking and the terrain – getting up and down the beaches – is the main thing. The physical things include when you're doing a lot of weighing ... The fur seal pups is not too much of a hassle – they tend to be quite light – but when you have to weigh a hundred at a time, it does get to you eventually. Everything starts hurting after a while. During the elephant seal breeding season, we have to weigh the elephant seal pups, which are weaners, which are quite heavy – so they're weighing about a 120kg on average. So those are physically a really a hard thing to lift.

Q: How do you get to the pups with their mothers and the harems around?

A: Well, we only weigh weaners. So essentially what happens is, in our harem, is as soon as a pup weans, the female often still sticks around in the harem, but the pups essentially get kicked out. And so they're a little bit separate and you can get to

them. You have to be careful still of the adults, but you can get to them without too much of a hassle.

Q: Have you been bitten by a seal?

A: I was lucky; only minor fur seal pup bites. Lots of those; everyone gets those all the time. I don't think I've really even got a proper scar. I've got a little scar on my arm, which is, you know ... nothing to really show for it.

Q: Would you say you have a favourite seal to work with?

A: It's a toss-up between Antarctic fur seal pups – when you're doing attendance patterns, they're very curious animals, and the nice thing is, when you're doing attendance patterns, you get to hang around for a quite a while within the colony, just checking; often you get these young animals, not even pups, young adults, who just come out and check you out. They're curious. They're not really aggressive. You can literally, if you just sit down, often you get one or two that come right up to you and sniff and they even try and check you with their teeth – they sort of nibble a little bit to see what your reaction is, but there's no aggression there. It's between them and elephant seal pups as well. They're just ... the elephant seal weaners ... they're just these little round balls of fat and especially on cold days, you can quite often – if they're sleeping and they don't know it's you – you can give them a bit of a rub on their back and they roll over ... and they quite like it. You can stick your hand under their flippers and it's quite nice and warm there. They're very ... just sort of charismatic sort of charismatic animals in terms of their temperament.

Q: Do you have any favourite places on Marion?

A: Probably the western side of the island, between Swartkop and Mixed Pickle. I guess for most people that's sort of a bit of a favourite, partially I guess just because you don't get there as much. Most of our work, at least in our year, was all centred around the East Coast, where you're working between Grey Head and Cape Davis all the time. You're up and down ... And then when you do get to ... We had monthly runs to do around the islands where we had to do checks on the other side, and those were just fantastic times, because, one: there aren't that many seals – or elephant seals – on that side, so you don't have that much work to do. So you can get a bit more of a holiday feel. I suppose ... Swartkop is fantastic. It's probably ... if I had to rate places that would be number one.

Q: Did you get to know the birds as well?

A: Yes, we got to help out a little bit with the birders and their work in our year. I guess if you're there, you get to know all ... I mean at least the names. You get to identify everything at least, and we got to help with some of the penguins.

- Q:** Did the birders sometimes help you?
- A:** Not very often, no. They tried, but they ... I think they got freaked out a little bit by the seals. The one birder, Ingrid, got a bit of a bite ... She got a bigger seal bite than any of the sealers in the year. They did help when ... if we went pup weighing, occasionally they would come along and help the fur seal pups.
- Q:** Anybody else help – metkassies maybe?
- A:** We did get some help from the Diesel Mac Jan and Anke, the medic – a married couple. Things get very busy in the breeding season when we're weighing elephant seal weaners, because the idea is to weigh them on the day that they wean. So you're not necessarily there for that ... It's a stretch from Ship's Cove to Archway Bay that we're weighing on. And you're not necessarily there every day to check, because you've got work on the other side of the island as well. So we got them to do walkouts and at least if there are weaners, that they mark them and we know which day they weaned. So they helped a bit with that. And we got a little bit of help from Piet Pieterse – the one metkassie helped once or twice with the weighing.
- Q:** So you worked mostly around the coast. Did you get a chance to go inland?
- A:** Not often, but I like to spend two nights in Katedraal ... Did one or two daytrips, sort of shortcuts through and things. Yes.
- Q:** How does the inland differ from the coast?
- A:** It's completely different. It's like a different world there. It's very quiet. Depending on the weather on the day ... normally you'd only go up on good weather days anyway, if you have a choice at least. And so those were normally the days that I was there. What struck me then was just how quiet it is. You don't have animal life around. You get the odd skua that would venture all the way up, but generally you just don't see anything, you don't hear anything else. If anything, you only hear the wind. And that's it. Whereas still on the coast, there's obviously all life and things.
- Q:** How much did you learn on Marion Island?
- A:** It depends on what ... I think you learn a lot about yourself. You learn a lot about the animals you work on. You learn a lot about the science behind what you're doing as well. All in all, I feel like I learned stacks.
- Q:** How often do you work with other disciplines? (Did) you learn anything about other disciplines there?
- A:** Do you mean just the other natural sciences, or with different ... ?
- Q:** All together – diesel mechanics, metkassies?

A: I guess you do learn a little bit about how the weather services and things work, just because you're so interested in it as well, because it affects you. You're immediately aware of it all the time, so you go and ask them a lot of questions and things. And like I said, we helped out with the birders a bit, so you do get into contact in that way. Occasionally, we helped a little bit with what Ethel and Assanda was doing with the *gogga* things ... Not that much. So to a certain extent, but definitely not a lot. I mean I don't think I learned much about the generators; I still wouldn't be able to fix one if (it) went off ...

Q: ... know where what is ...

A: Exactly. I means there's some things that you obviously need to learn just how to operate, like the radios and the huts and things, which is not difficult, but a lot of things that you wouldn't get to do anywhere else, I suppose.

Q: Would you say – and I'm asking this ... Sometimes you get the impression that sealers are seen as the "royalty" of the ... you know, the manly group of the island ... Would you say that is a true impression?

A: That's an interesting question ... I think probably yes. I mean it sounds probably very arrogant to say that and I definitely don't mean it an arrogant way, but I do think in terms of the workload it's the hardest work. It's the hardest job in terms of the traditional fields that people are employed in on the island. And that's sort of what drives that. I think everyone probably has a little bit of pride in the sense that, you know, they weren't "just a birder" or they weren't just something else. You know, I'm not saying that the others don't work hard. Obviously everyone has their responsibilities, but yes ...

Q: Because you're away from base a lot. Does that affect team relationships – the fact that sealers are away from base and metkassies, for instance, are a lot at base?

A: I think it can, and it does sometimes. I don't recall in our year it ever being too much of a problem. It was occasionally ... it was a bit of a contentious issue when you have like "skivvy" days for instance, when the base needs to be cleaned and we're not there to help. You get a little bit of grumpiness about that. In general I think – and I don't think this is necessarily the case for every team – but we had a fairly understanding team in the sense that with other things – your cooking duties for instance – we had a sort of a turntable thing, which you know, you've got your turn and if you were not there because of work, then you literally just skipped. You didn't have to make up for it later. If you happened to be there on the day ... I think the understanding was very much there well, if you're in a hut, you're cooking anyway, you're cleaning anyway; you've got these sorts of responsibilities all the time. So it's not that you're skimping on workload; it's just you're not there. So I don't think it

created too much of a tension, but I can see that ... In other teams I think it has created more tension than in ours at least.

Q: Apart from Piet, did the other metkassies sometimes go for walkabouts in your team?

A: Very few. Very, very few.

Q: Why would you say is that?

A: I think I don't really know, but I think the impression that field workers tend to have of base personnel – and sometimes I think it's justified – is that they get comfortable. You know, it's difficult to ... The first walk for anyone to a hut or somewhere else on the island is quite hard ... You need to get used to the terrain and if you don't have to, then it's ... You know, they tend to delay it. They're always planning: "I've got to do a round-the-island; I've got to do a round-the-island", but then next thing you know, it's the end of the year and they've been to one hut for one night and that's what their experience of the island. I think it's partially ...

Q: ... justified ...

A: ... It's sort of a comfort thing, where you don't ... And it probably is slightly scary if you ... depending on your background too. I mean if you suddenly have to deal with seals on beaches and things and you've never worked with animals or things before, or you come from a completely different background, it may not be something you want to do or be involved with, or want to run the risk of, you know.

Q: What makes the work easy?

A: I guess the place and the experience. It's just that the place is different enough and unique enough that you want to work there. The idea (that) something new can happen any day that you're walking out – that drives a lot of it. It was always sort of a thing when you walk out, you think, "I hope I'm gonna see this today". You hope you're going to see killer whales attacking a seal on the beach ... You know, there's always this thing of "this could happen" or "that could happen" and that makes it a lot easier to ... You're sort of expecting things to happen around the corner.

Q: And what makes it difficult?

A: Well, number one: the weather. The weather is always a problem. I think, to a certain extent, for me at least, the year that I was there, what made the programme a bit difficult was the fact that I didn't have a background in the programme and I wasn't aware ... It was difficult to get an overall view of "well, this is where this data is going to and this is how it's all going to fit together". You know, I've got a rough idea ... in different sections of the programme this is what needs to get done, but you don't necessarily have a feel for "well, this is what's going to come out of it and

this is how it all fits together”. And if you don’t have ... I think in your mind you start questioning “well, do I really have to do this? I don’t really want to do this; it’s not the most fun thing to do”, and that sort of makes it a bit more difficult from a mental point of view, at least.

Q: What did you miss on the island?

A: Hm ... I’m trying to think. Obviously family and friends – you miss your family and friends. Everyone does, I’m sure – or at least ninety per cent of people do. You get the odd individual who really doesn’t miss anyone. Some foods, I suppose ... I didn’t have any major hang-ups with the food ... Some fresh fruits you definitely miss ...

Q: Now later that year, you said a construction team came down. How did that change things?

A: I think it put quite a lot of strain on the team dynamics to a certain extent. ‘Cause what happens is, you go through the winter as “the team” – everyone’s happy, everyone gets along, everyone’s positive. And then this construction voyage looms a little bit. And no one ... I don’t think many people really were looking forward to it that much ... Maybe one or two individuals were looking forward to the extra company, but for a lot of people is just more of a disruption. Now suddenly you have to share a limited space ... I mean, at that point, none of the construction personnel lived in the new base yet, so base was really full suddenly. You’re sort of “losing your home” to a certain extent; you’re getting “overpowered” in a way. And I think that influenced the team dynamics ... You lose a bit of contact in a way with other team members, where you’re busy in the field, you come back ... where you used to come back and have a dinner around the table with the whole team and catch up a bit with what everyone’s been doing – that’s suddenly gone. You come back and the kitchen’s full of people. You sit and chat with one or two people and half your team you never actually ever see anymore. So that’s sort of that period. And then once they leave ... We had this situation where we had one or two people who’d made really good friends, or even boyfriends, with the construction personnel and who were then suddenly very “down” and a little bit upset that the ship had left. And of course the other end of the scale was true for many of us, where we couldn’t be happier – the ship is gone and suddenly we’ve got the place back! And I think that in itself just created a bit of tension, because now suddenly you have people who are moping a little bit and people who are wanting to have a big party. And that didn’t mesh very well. It created some tension.

Q: How many construction crew were there?

A: I don’t remember exact numbers ... We were probably thirty, forty ...

- Q:** So it's quite a few. Did the Agulhas stay there while they were busy constructing, or did it come back?
- A:** No, it came back. They left a helicopter person there, some helicopter personnel for the time of the construction and the ship left and came back to pick them up.
- Q:** To pick up just the construction crew then?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** And then the ship came again to get you?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** At that stage, they were still busy with the outside construction of the new base?
- A:** Yes.
- Q:** It's quite difficult work conditions ... ?
- A:** They were still building the shell essentially.
- Q:** Did you notice any affect on the animal life around base?
- A:** Not very specifically you know. Where the new base is situated, at least from our point of view – from the sealer's point of view – it's a bit further away from Boulders, where you've got more seals. I don't specifically recall any major ... The increased helicopter flights, sure – every time a helicopter takes off, you see the animals looking up and getting all freaked out.
- Q:** What did you do for relaxation on the island when you had your time off, if you had time off?
- A:** I read quite a lot. I read many books. We had a fairly ... especially the start of the year, prior to construction, we had a fairly good social atmosphere in the team, where if you had time off, you'd go sit down in the bar, start a game of pool, have a few drinks ... You know, just ... So most of your time off you'd either be hanging around, just socialising a bit. But I think it changed to ... Later in the year, you – well also partly because you're running out of time – off-time, you tended to use to explore the interior a bit, or if you have a day where you don't really have much responsibility, you take off and go up to Katedraal and look around or ... Those sorts of things.
- Q:** Did the presence of the construction crew have anything to do with trying to be away from base at all?
- A:** Yes, with me ... I don't know ... Not with everyone, obviously. But certainly, yes. It's definitely not ... It's kind of like a take-over, where it's all just crammed and busy and ...

- Q:** You have to wait for a shower ...
- A:** Exactly. It's more fun to just go to a hut.
- Q:** It sounds like you had a very mixed team gender-wise, culture-wise ... How did that work out?
- A:** Pretty good I think, in general. Especially that first , there were really never ... I can't recall there ever being any racial issues or gender issues or ... I think later on ... there were ... I still don't even know the full story ... There were sort of allegations of one of the white team members having made some sort of racist remark at some point and this created some unhappiness amongst the other people in the team. So at some point it definitely did become a bit of an issue. I think they sorted it out; it never became a very big thing.
- Q:** So you feel that you've learned something from being in such a close environment with ... or were you exposed to it before?
- A:** I think ... I was exposed to quite ... especially having been at Wits for my Masters, where it's a far more mixed environment, where everyone gets along. So I don't feel like it was a thoroughly new thing for me ...
- Q:** Do you think it was for some of the people on the team?
- A:** To a certain extent, yes. I think for someone like Ponti for instance, who'd hardly even left Venda, who was now suddenly in a group of people from all over and different experiences and different place, I think it was definitely a ... it must have been a slightly new experience. And the same goes for some of ... I think a lot of the other people, like Jan and Anke and Shorty, they'd been on other expeditions before, so I don't think it was really a new thing for them. What was slightly different probably in our team was the ratio of women to men was ... I mean we had more women than men. We had seven women and six men.
- Q:** Really?
- A:** I think it's the only team on record so far ... So I think just in terms of numbers it was a little bit more mixed than other teams are used to. I think for someone like Jan for instance, who'd been on many other teams where it was mostly males and only a two or three women in the team, I think it was a slightly different team for him to be a part of.
- Q:** Did he meet his wife on such an expedition?
- A:** No, I think they met ... Both of them had done different expeditions, but I think they met at Antarctic braai or something in Pretoria. It was because of their involvement that they met, but it wasn't on an island.

- Q:** Last few questions ... Coming back – what was it like when the ship came before take-over?
- A:** A little bit of excitement; a little bit of apprehension, I suppose. Because you know it's going to be busy and it's going to be a lot of people and you don't want that ... But you sort of excited to go back as well, because towards the end there's definitely a bit of sadness – you wanted to do this and that – but there's also the excitement of well, you're going back soon, so it's a bit of a mixed feeling.
- Q:** And when you're back in South Africa? What did you miss about the island?
- A:** The lack of traffic! There's a lot that I miss about the island: obviously the general environment, the work that you do, the animals ... You know, you miss all of that. But in terms of a lifestyle, the uncomplicated lifestyle – I really, really miss that. I think, still today, every time I'm stuck in traffic, "Ah, if I was on the island ... Imagine – I wouldn't have to deal with this sort of thing!" You don't have to deal with banks and insurance and things like that which you have all the time over here.
- Q:** If you had the opportunity, would you go back for another year?
- A:** Hm ... Possibly not at this stage, no. I was very ... The original idea, or part of the idea, was (that) I was thinking of going this year coming again actually. But just from a career point, I'm trying to get the PhD done now. And also from a relationship point of view – I'm in a fairly stable relationship at the moment, which ... My girlfriend probably wouldn't want me to go for a year – a month or two months, that's okay; a year is maybe pushing it a little bit, so ... probably not.
- Q:** She's also involved with the island ...
- A:** Yes. Nathalie. You've met her.
- Q:** Nathalie, yes. She's also with the CIB (Centre for Invasion Biology, University of Stellenbosch). (The) last thing I wanted to ask: mid-winter – did do you celebrate mid-winter?
- A:** Yes. Big party. We had an old Victorian-style theme to it and we all tried to speak in very high accents and it was a lot of fun after a while. That's probably the one party where I have some pictures from where we raided the costume cupboard – everyone had to dress up and come up with a name for themselves, sort of a title and things. It was good ...
- Q:** Did you have contact with other stations – sub-Antarctic stations or SANAE?
- A:** We did get messages from all over, yes. I remember Nishal still putting up printed cards from different places. So yes.
- Q:** The year in general, did you have contact with SANAE?

A: Not a lot that I can recall, no. At that point, the communication was still quite shoddy; the whole Internet set-up wasn't as good as it is at the moment, so I remember we still couldn't, in terms of even work ... contacting Marthan was sometimes quite a mission, because the way I understood it at the time, between the three bases we shared two up-links essentially and if the other two stations were using the Internet, then we couldn't. So there was a bit of a ... It wasn't very effective; definitely not as effective as it is now at least.

Q: Do you know maybe why you didn't have a maid Marion, or did you just not get around to it?

A: I think it was something that we were probably thinking of having later in the year and then ... I mean construction probably played a big role in terms of, well, one: delaying it, and then secondly, after construction, I think because there was a bit of an unease. People just didn't seem to be very up for it, you know. So it just never ... It was definitely something that, at the start, we were all saying "Yes, we're going to have a big party" and then it just never really happened.

Q: Thank you very much.

A: Sure, you're welcome.