

# ANONYMOUS

**Date:** 2011

**Place:** Marion Island

**Interviewer (Q):** Dora Scott | C-I-B Antarctic Legacy Project | Stellenbosch University

**Respondent (A):** Anonymous | Radio communications officer | Marion | 2000's

**Q:** ...What do you do?

**A:** I'm appointed as the radio communications officer.

**Q:** Okay. And how did it happen that you applied to come here?

**A:** My wife saw the advert, but for Gough Island. And I've always had the interest to go to one of the places, and I applied, and they turned me down. But they wanted me to come here, because of the new project and they needed the expertise. My expertise would not have worked on Gough. They wanted me here. So I waited a couple of months and here I am.

**Q:** Brilliant. And how did your interest in the islands start?

**A:** I was in the air force and I first became aware of Marion Island round about 1984. A couple of my colleagues had applied, been successful, and had done tours at the three places. And always bumped into people that have been here, on their way, being interested in radio communications, I had the tools at my disposal – all the toys to actually listen to their telephone conversations ... So, from SANAE, Gough and Marion, on a Saturday and a Sunday, I would sit and listen to the telephone conversations ...

**Q:** While you were still in the air force?

**A:** Yes. And they would then place the call via radio – no satellite, those years – radio, back to Cape Town Radio in Cape Town, Milnerton. And I used to listen to the conversations. So of course you build this mental picture as well.

**Q:** So anyone who had they "toys" could actually listen in on the calls?

**A:** Oh yes; yes. I can tell you some hilarious stories, but some of them are X-rated.

**Q:** (Laughter.) Well, we'll get to those stories in a moment ... ! So what exactly did you know about Marion before you came here?

**A:** Obviously, you know, through the years ... A very good friend of mine who's on Gough now – John – he was here. We spent a lot of time sort of chatting about it. The Internet's full of it. So there's a lot of information. It wasn't a matter of 'oh, here's an opportunity; let's go' – this was years of knowledge that had been built up.

**Q:** Okay. Now, describe the team preparations for the year.

- A:** What do you mean?
- Q:** Did you have to do things like fire fighting ... ?
- A:** Oh yes. Okay; okay. We had fire fighting; we had first aid; and we had cooking. Those were the three compulsory ... I think those were the three that we did. Yes.
- Q:** And do you think that the training that you received, the preparation, was sufficient?
- A:** Inadequate.
- Q:** How so?
- A:** The fire fighting was fair, but they were ... I don't know ... disjointed. I was expecting a lot more practical ... It was ... They were using equipment that we don't even have here ... breathing apparatuses that were ... they're using different stuff as what we've got over here. The cooking was an absolute joke – they were using fresh fruit, fresh foods ... eggs ... We kept on saying to them 'but we don't have that stuff', and they kept on trying to work around it; but it was a total ... I can't say it was a waste ... Lots of us could cook; lots of us on the team can cook ...
- Q:** Before ... ?
- A:** Yes, before we even got there. Some of them far better than what I can cook. But I don't know ... I sort of got the feeling it was ... They needed to get the process through and get it ... you know, get you going ... Because you're just part of the numbers. That's the feeling we got. First aid: a total joke as far as I'm concerned. The guys kept on saying but we've got seal bites, hypothermia ... They are working through Level 1 – that's their curriculum. There was no specialised information regarding seal bites, the treatment thereof, etc., etc. That is something that is seriously lacking in that course. First aid 1, it's okay if you're looking for a little course to do, just to get somewhere ...
- Q:** And you're close to a hospital ...
- A:** Yes, CPR, etc. But the stuff that counts on this island, is hypothermia and seal bites. And that is seriously lacking.
- Q:** Okay. Did you have to make any specific preparations for your job here on the island?
- A:** No; no.
- Q:** So it was all ... You just slotted in?
- A:** I just slotted in. It's what I do in normal civilian life.
- Q:** Okay. But how did your interest in radio communications start?

**A:** From a very, very young age ... My dad actually trained to be a Morse code operator with the airways, and he had a big radio at home – a big Blaupunkt radio – and he'd let me listen to the overseas broadcast stations, like the BBC and the Voice of America. And then he'd stop and say listen, here's Morse code, and he would then decipher and tell me what they were saying. So there's this interest that started. The very first transistorised radio my dad ever got, I destroyed. I opened it up and I tightened all the little ... everything inside. And he gave me one hell of a hiding, and it didn't cure me; it just made me more determined. And I've had that passion in me for electronics and radio communications.

**Q:** Brilliant! So you took the Agulhas down?

**A:** We came on the Agulhas, yes.

**Q:** And who was the captain?

**A:** Freddie ... I don't know what his surname is.

**Q:** Lighthelm?

**A:** No idea.

**Q:** I think ... So what did you do on the journey here?

**A:** I puked.

**Q:** Really?! Were you seasick?

**A:** I was seasick for two days.

**Q:** Oh my goodness ...

**A:** And they were terrible two days! I was ... Actually, it started the morning of our second day. I was having an omelette, and I excused myself. And I went out the dining room, up the stairs, and there were two ladies in front of me, and they were taking their time. And I'm telling you, I was building up pressure, and I was swallowing; and I was building up pressure ... It wasn't nice. I made it to my cabin in time.

**Q:** That's good.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** That's a relief.

**A:** A big relief ... in more ways than one!

**Q:** And then you stayed there for a few days?

**A:** I stayed there for a few days. I took pills and you know, came right.

**Q:** Did anything of interest happen on the journey down?

**A:** We saw killer whales coming down, I think on our third day; third or fourth day, we saw three killer whales. We saw them later again that afternoon, as if they were sort of pacing us. Lots of birds ... sat up on the top with some of the birders, doing bird spotting. *Ag* a bit of reading, a bit of interaction with the team, trying to ... because you know, I mean we only saw each other for two weeks ... Getting to know each other was a big thing, you know; finding out where you are and who you are, you know. And slotting in with the team.

**Q:** Okay, well, we'll get to that in a moment. About the arrival here, what were your first thoughts when you saw the island?

**A:** Well, I saw the island in the morning, when we woke up. And we were to the south of the base, and the island was almost, almost, snow white. And it was cold, and the first thing I saw was penguins. The penguins had come to meet us. And that was quite exciting. So we saw this ... we saw the island, and as we moved up higher, we then got closer and closer and closer, and we could then see the lights over the base, of the new base as well, and you know, the lights at the old base. So ... lots of excitement and anticipation.

**Q:** Brilliant. Did you spend a lot of time with the outgoing team?

**A:** Yes, we naturally did. Not with the whole team, because they weren't there. Well, more than half of our team, the birders and the sealers, they weren't here. They were doing round-islands, so we saw them when they got back. We mainly saw those that were in the base, and that was mainly scientists as well as more the base personnel that were left behind. So we saw them quite a bit. Worked together, yes.

**Q:** And that would of course have been your predecessor as well?

**A:** Yes, that's right.

**Q:** Did they tell you any stories, or any of these things that did ... ?

**A:** Most of it was like ... sort of personal things that happened; more sort of practical jokes that sort of were played and ... But it was more sort of the traditions of what needs to be done in the base, etc., etc. And work wise, what goes where, you know.

**Q:** Yes.

**A:** Finding your ... you know. You've got two weeks – no, we actually had five weeks – to work with each other, learning new systems, new ... all the communications equipment and what cables are going where and ... you know, that sort of stuff.

**Q:** And all this in the old base?

**A:** In the old base.

**Q:** Okay. Now, getting to life on the base ... Describe a day in the life of the radio tech. What does it entail?

**A:** Obviously the normals of getting up and having a shower and getting to breakfast ... and making breakfast – not ... We're obviously on our own, so we ... Quite a few of us sort of congregate in the kitchen around about the same time, and it's cereals and toasts and stuff. And then it's obviously checking out the communications, making sure the satellite is up, that there is connectivity; that the phone lines are up, that the Internet and email systems are up and running. That you do ... that takes about 10 minutes. But you constantly sort of watching it as you are working. You hear the telephone ringing, therefore the satellite's working, therefore the telephone is working. Therefore you assume that the Internet is up and running, because it all works through the same system. So you're constantly busy checking. You've got the HF radio running. You might be having a sked with the Agulhas, if they are around at a certain time. You're doing radio checks out of your own, because it's your interest, with Gough Island, making sure your antenna's up ... All that sort of stuff. So you're constantly sort of checking. You're outside, helping the diesel mac with something; helping around the base ... a water leak ... That sort of stuff, you know; you're constantly keeping yourself busy. You can't sit still; otherwise, chaos.

**Q:** Now what were the challenges of living on an island like this?

**A:** I'm married. I have kids. They're at home. So you're cut off from that side. But it's not a matter of ... It's easier when it's planned and there's full cooperation from everybody. I'm not running away from a problem; I'm not getting divorced. There isn't that negativity at all. Everything is there for a purpose, and I've always wanted to come, so it's a planned thing. So I'm not dragging negativity behind me. It's a positive influence from my side. I want to be here; I can make a difference. And I have made a difference. That's the difference.

**Q:** Now what made living on the island worthwhile?

**A:** It's a difficult question. What do you mean by that?

**Q:** What made you get up in the morning?

**A:** Oh ... Well, every day is different. Especially the scenery – you have no idea when the killers are coming past; you have no idea what the seals are doing. And yes, we obviously go out, try and get out and go and do a walk, subject to the weather and who's available in base. Go and see seals and penguins, or whatever. Go and do that. So there's all that excitement, you know. And the excitement of 'it's my responsibility' – I must check that communications are there. And not get up because I have to, but because you want to – that's the difference. That's ... you know, that's my passion.

- Q:** Okay. Do you have any animal related stories? Any interactions you had?
- A:** Yes. I ... One particular story ... out by Trypot ... I went and sat down on my bum on a flat rock, and I watched this school of penguins – I call it a school of penguins – watching me and slowly making their way forward as a group. So there I was sitting, watching this, and I sat dead ... sat very, very quietly with my camera on my lap, and watching them come forward with almost ... they were getting their courage from each other – one wasn't going to come to me. And they actually came up to me about a metre away from me, and they just stood and looked at me. And I sat and ... I probably sat for about an hour, just sitting, looking at them. Looking at the detail, sitting with the camera, very quietly, just clicking away; taking the video, taking a few video shots ... And I've got some beautiful shots of these gentlemen, these Kings, just standing there, looking at me. You'd sort of try to put yourself in their 'feet', you know – what are they saying to each other? You know ... Another one was just down the hill here. Two albatross chicks. They've now left the nest and they're obviously walking around, around the nest. And I went down, I'd been down further and I'd come back, and I wanted to take a photo. And I put my stick down on the ground and I turned around and I looked at the one, and I was taking photos. The next minute, I feel something pulling at my pants; and I turned around, 'cause I got a fright – I didn't know what to expect. And here this other guy was. He'd come walking up to me and was now nibbling my pants. And I turned around and I stood, literally over him, and I just snapped, the whole time.
- Q:** Oh wow!
- A:** He was nibbling my stick and then also nibbling my boots.
- Q:** Wow.
- A:** And he'll stop and he'll look, look up at me; look down again, and carry on with his activity. That was a half an hour! That's bliss.
- Q:** Definitely.
- A:** Why would I not get up in the morning? There you have the answer.
- Q:** Did you get a lot of opportunity to get out?
- A:** A fair amount. I didn't ... unfortunately didn't do a round-island. I've got a very, very bad knee, and I did a trip to Kildalkey with Vincent, in February, and unfortunately, I've damaged my knee further, so I have to go for some surgery when I get back. But I'm medically not fit to go and do a round-island. Absolutely not. I did have the opportunity to fly quite a bit and go see the rest of the island. So I've seen it, yes.
- Q:** Oh, that's brilliant. Now, describe your teammates ... Not necessarily individually, but as a group.

**A:** A very interesting group ... a very mature group, overall – it doesn't mean that everybody is, but overall. A very pleasant group, very well educated group – not only academically, but otherwise as well. Well mannered as well. Yes, you do get the odd rough diamond; it doesn't matter, you know. You do get the one who falls off his chair, because he's horribly drunk – it's fine; it doesn't bother me. But I think ... No, I'm quite sure I will be staying in touch with the larger group. That doesn't mean I'll be staying in touch with every single person ...

**Q:** Of course ...

**A:** I mean ... I was the oldest male, and these guys are still youngsters; they've got their whole life ahead of them.

**Q:** What were the team dynamics like?

**A:** Actually quite interesting ... As we got along, you started seeing little groups splintering off; people with common interests sort of grouping together – as they say: birds of a feather flock together. It works like that. And in a group like that ... Interesting to see who paired off with who, be it two, three, four in a group ... You had ... you've got the sealers who are a group; you've got the birders who are group, but you don't just have them, permanently, as a group. You get people in the sealers peeling off and forming another group with somebody else with a common interest. So ... Interesting one: I mean, we've got the three wise men on the island; the *de facto* government of the island – Vincent, Simon and myself. We are much older and we are the permanent guys in the base. And we sort of organised the harem – that was us.

**Q:** I see! Now what did you do for entertainment?

**A:** My hobby is amateur radio, and I spent quite a bit of time fulfilling this passion. Marion Island was the third most wanted entity in the world; I've now managed to push it down to the seventh – the first one being North Korea, and the second one being Bouvet Island; then we had Marion Island. So we have now ... I've now pushed it down. Eight ... I managed to do 8 500 contacts around the world. The furthest was Hawaii, from here.

**Q:** Wow! So what do you talk about? Or is it just ...

**A:** You see, this particular operation over here is ... You've got to try and contact, if you're going into this thing, you've got to try and contact every single country that there is in this world. So you've got to work ... I think it's 348 countries. Now Marion Island is seen as a country – although it belongs to South Africa, it's ...

**Q:** Radio ...

**A:** ... bigger than a certain size, and it's far away, past a certain point, from the mainland, so it's seen as a ... it's called a "country" or an "entity". And no radio ham being here, the place then gets a value. Like Bouvet Island – very, very difficult to get onto it, so it's highly sought after. And they all want a card, a post card, from here. So the post card is not here physically, but I then fill in the person that I spoke to – his call sign – the time, the date, the frequency, and who I am and my details, and we then exchange it. He can then take that card and go and claim ... work toward a certain certificates.

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** And that's the sort of prestige.

**Q:** So there's a whole community, all over the world ...

**A:** Correct.

**Q:** ... who are interacting with one another ...

**A:** Correct; correct. Yes.

**Q:** And did you make a lot of contact with the guys from Gough and SANAE?

**A:** John, on Gough, is also a radio ham; a very good friend of mine. He's also an ex-air force colleague. He's also active, and we've done quite a bit of contact as well. Not just on the amateur radio frequencies, but marine frequencies – testing our normal operational frequencies as well. But John and I have daily contact, often via telephone as well. SANAE is a different kettle of fish. Their antenna fell over, or blew away; they weren't able to replace or repair it. The new guys who are there, they have done something, but we haven't ... we haven't had any contact with them.

**Q:** Okay. You had a very busy year ... with ...

**A:** Construction.

**Q:** Yes, construction and the move, and sort of the VIP voyage ... Now describe moving base.

**A:** We didn't want to, because the old base was seen as our home. There were a whole number of issues ... We still saw that this place was still under construction, and that was a very, very contentious issue. We were ... Some of us were concerned about the safety, because this place was still seen as a construction place. So we didn't want to move in. We moved reluctantly, but due to certain reasons, we had to move.

**Q:** Can you tell me what those reasons were?

**A:** They wanted us ... Well, they wanted to shut down the old base to save diesel. That's one of them. They wanted us in here so we could be part of the new base, so we could learn all the systems ... you know, that when they finally left 3 weeks or 4



weeks later, that they knew, the management team, that they knew that at least we were in, we were happy, we were safe, and that this place was actually functioning; you know, actually functioning correctly.

**Q:** And when did you move in?

**A:** I think it was the beginning of November, the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, if my date's correct. It was roundabout the 1<sup>st</sup> of November; it could've been a day or two before. Somewhere around there.

**Q:** Now how was the vibe different from the old base to the new base?

**A:** The old base (was) obviously a lot smaller; lots of squeaks. Your room was much smaller than what you've got here. There was just an atmosphere in that place; it had character. Other people had been there before you throughout the years. We were moving into a new place, which didn't have any character at that stage. It was still very much ... you know, hammers and nails and stuff that we're moving into; scaffolding and tiling ... you know, construction taking place. So it wasn't really seen as a home, the new base, at that stage. A lot of us still refer to the old base as "home". That's where our 6 months was, our first 6 months. That place, to me, at this stage, is still home.

**Q:** Okay.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** And what was your interaction like with the construction teams?

**A:** Quite good. I'm ... Lots of the guys are from the Cape, so I can relate to them; greeted them, joked with them. They got to know my name; I got to know their names. Simon, Vincent and myself were the 3 guys who were allowed in and out – because we had to come check equipment and that sort of stuff. The other team members didn't have that luxury. So, by the time we moved in, I was on personal terms with 60 construction people, and they themselves were very, very good; very friendly; helluva nice guys. I enjoyed working with them and ... yes, well, working with them.

**Q:** And just in terms of your equipment specifically – did it move over from the old base or did you get new ones?

**A:** Some of the equipment is new in here, like the telephone exchange system; there's a whole data system in here as well ... The satellite dome is still down there – that won't move. The computer server moved over. I think the main ... all the radio equipment had to move over as well, so I had to move ... I had to reinstall all the radio equipment from scratch in the new base, which was a good one, because whatever I ordered, I was given, which was very nice. So Gideon gave me a good ... I

worked very well with Gideon. And he knew that ... I mean, that's why I was here. Because it's what I do professionally. I'm not a post office technician; it's what I do. I'm a radio communications specialist. And he knew that the radio communications would be installed correctly, so that's what we did.

**Q:** And that's why you're here ...

**A:** That's right.

**Q:** Brilliant. And what was your interaction with DEA like and what was it like working with them?

**A:** I've got a lot of worry about the Cape Town office ... The majority of people in the Cape Town office are ... and it's the feeling I get – I'm not making any accusations; it's the feeling that I get ... is that they are there for themselves. They're not here for us. There aren't very many people in the Cape Town office who actually care about what... (goes on). So to recap that, you don't ... I don't think we get the right support from the people. They don't listen to us. They've never been ... a lot of people haven't even been here and they have no idea ... They're totally out of touch with what goes on here.

**Q:** Do you think they would have benefited from actually visiting and seeing the conditions that you're working under?

**A:** Yes; yes. No, definitely; definitely. If we put in a demand for something, it's a thought-out demand; we know exactly what we want. Now, it's for the benefit of the project. Don't phone us and be rude, which is what we don't approve. We don't agree with that. I personally do not believe ... do not approve of anybody phoning me up and being rude.

**Q:** Okay. What do you think is the most common misconception about Marion?

**A:** That you can go home over weekends. You had a number of people sort of say, 'but don't you come home for weekends?'; 'you can fly back, can't you?' or 'what sort of vehicles do you drive on the island?' – when I tell them it's a gumboot, they think I'm crazy. So people don't ... Lots of people don't quite know where it is. South Africans don't quite know where it is and what the distances are.

**Q:** That's correct.

**A:** So you say you're only coming back in a year's time, they want to know why, you know; they don't quite know. So it's an educational process.

**Q:** So tell me a bit about those radio stories you've heard ...

**A:** I met ... Oh, those ones? There was a ... I'm not going to mention names ...

**Q:** That's fine.

**A:** There was a particular chap, who was the radio technician/operator over here, and I was still in the air force in that stage ... and I listened ... I was actually on the border; I was in the Caprivi Strip ... And I switched on the radio and I went to the particular frequency, and I listened. And I knew that this particular person was on the island, but I never knew about his girlfriend, or his fiancée. And he always made sure that he spoke last, so that he could talk with her for longer – very clever man. But she had a voice, one of those voices that you definitely would employ her to operate a sex line; a phone-in sex line. And when she spoke, everybody ... all the males stopped and listened. Now, where I was, it was the time of Namibia, of South West Africa going over, and we had the UNTAG forces, and we had limited South African people at the base. And these guys heard about what I was listening to, and every Saturday and Sunday, at about half past two, I would have at least 30 males, sitting on chairs around the radio, waiting for their free sex phone-in session ... This lady wanted to fly to Port Elizabeth and hire a trawler, and then sail down here to come and have sex with her boyfriend. It was that bad. About 3 years later, I met them, in Pretoria. He was giving a slideshow about Marion Island, a photographic slideshow – the days before computers – and it was in an auditorium at UNISA, and I sat at the top of the auditorium and I looked up, over, to see if I could see this gorgeous blonde sex bomb, but I couldn't find her. And I waited until he was finished; everybody's like filtered out, and I walked down and I said hello, and I introduced myself. And I said 'I used to listen to your telephone calls ...' And he was highly embarrassed and he turned, sort of looked over my shoulder, and he said 'I'd like you to meet my wife'. And I turned around ... Now, let me explain him: he couldn't have weighed more than 45 kg; he was tiny. And I turned around, and she was the size of a bus ... and not the prettiest either ... And as they say in the classics: it's not in the looks; it's in the *broeks* ... !

**Q:** Lovely ...

**A:** One other serious one was ... I heard the medic on the island – this was 1990 – place a telephone call to One Military Hospital; he urgently needed to speak to a doctor. Two sealers had been doing a round-island; they were fairly close to the base. These two guys jumped over a rock, and the one guy landed on a seal. The seal bit him in his thigh and also ripped out a testicle. And (they) made it back to the base. This guy was calling for help. And what was nice about the whole thing was the professionalism – how the whole situation was handled. He had all his drugs that he had on the island; the doctor was talking him through it, telling him how to treat it; sew it up. And in the same instant I could hear the doctor in Pretoria saying we need to get the ship, or a ship, on standby, get the air force on standby, with the helicopter, and about 6 hours later the ship was on its way. And listening to that whole radio conversation throughout the days, and when they finally got to the guy,

picked him up, put him on the ship, and they then operated – you know, clean up and take him back. I have no idea who he is, but it was roundabout 1990. I think it was 1990. So those are two of the ones that stick out. But also, I also felt for the guy who would phone, and he's only got 10 minutes, and he's talking to ... let's say his brother, and they'll say 'hoe gaan dit met jou, Kosie?'; 'nee, dit gaan baie goed!'; 'en kry jy koud?'; 'ja'; 'hier is jou ma' – and then she asked the same questions. By the third or the fourth time, he's now *gatvol*; he just wants to talk to his wife, and he's answering the same questions all the time – you know, he's only got 10 minutes! And he's now *gatvol*! So, that's the sort of humour as well. And you can hear, he's now ... he's *gatvol*. 'Just get off the phone; I now want to talk to my wife or my child or whatever, you know; yes.

**Q** Can you describe any incidents from your year that you remember with fondness?

**A:** I have been labelled on this island as somebody who causes trouble ...

**Q:** No!

**A:** No! Can you believe ... Look at my face!

**Q:** Never!

**A:** Look at my face. If I say trouble, practical jokes. Of course, the Three Wise Men have obviously had access during construction to the base. The team members didn't, because of safety. So we decided to play a practical joke on our team. And we actually played a couple, but one of them I think, that I think would sort of stick out, was we told them that all the grey water – in other words the sewerage and kitchen water and stuff – a certain percentage of it gets filtered back, through a filter system, back to the base. And it has to be in line with some or other Antarctic Treaty, you know, for saving water. They were horrified! We ran this story for about two months.

**Q:** Ah ... !

**A:** They were livid. And every time they calmed down, about three or four days later, at supper time, we'd then just mention it and the hairs would rise. They were livid! We also told them that there were brand new Speed Queen washing machine and tumble dryers, but they are now coin operated; token operated, you see? Actually token operated. And they were going to pay R5 for washing powder, for a cup of washing powder, and R2 for a session on the dryers, and R5 for a wash. And they were going to come to me and I would then issue them the token, and I would then send an email at the end of the month; it would be subtracted from their salary. You should have heard it! They were going to raid the stores and steal all the soap; they were going to take the washing machines and go and put them in the old labs ... You

should've heard it! And of course, when they found out that we were lying to them ... Oh dear. But it was great fun!

**Q:** How did they find out?

**A:** We told them.

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** Yes, we sort of ... Somewhere, somebody would sort of like put pressure on us to smile, and then of course we'd start laughing, you know. But only after a while. Somewhere along the line, they would corner one of us and then my story and Vincent's story weren't quite the same, you know, so they would catch us out like that. But of course ... big fun about that, you know. So that's the sort of stuff we got up to.

**Q:** What did you do with Midwinter?

**A:** We finally had a party ... I don't really ... Midwinter ... I don't really remember much of it. I know we had a dress-up, but our Midwinter party was much later. Something which we did not approve of, unfortunately – a phone call from Cape Town office; they were having a Midwinter on the ship and they wanted us on standby, so we could talk to people on the other side via the telephone and also via Skype.

**A:** They wanted us to put up a Skype video camera. We told them ...

**Q:** When you said "people on the other side", do you mean people on the ship?

**A:** On the ship. They had a big party there, and they wanted to video from the ship through Skype, all the way to us. But our satellite bandwidth isn't such that we can do it. So they said they will phone us when they are ready, to then talk to us. That's 6 months ago; they still haven't phoned us. We went to bed at two o'clock that morning, very pissed off.

**Q:** Oh, because you were waiting for them?

**A:** That's right. But nobody has still picked up the phone to say, don't worry.

**Q:** *Jis ...*

**A:** We don't approve of that.

**Q:** No.

**A:** Correct.

**Q:** And did you have a Maid Marion competition?

**A:** We did! But we're not allowed to talk about it and no photos will be on Facebook.

**Q:** Okay!

**A:** It's not funny seeing a bunch of men dressed up in funny women's clothes doing stupid things.

**Q:** Ah!

**A:** Ah!

**Q:** Not funny at all?

**A:** Not at all! It's disgusting.

**Q:** Who was crowned Maid Marion?

**A:** Cobus.

**Q:** Do you know why?

**A:** I think he bought the judges.

**Q:** Oh, okay.

**A:** Yes. I think he had ... I think he plied them with some sweets and wine and stuff.

**Q:** Oh, I see.

**A:** See, Mia's there and he gave her a box of chocolates, I'm sure. She runs on chocolates; nothing else.

**Q:** Oh well ... Well then, what are you going to do? Are there any incidents that ... of a more unpleasant nature, that you'd like to mention?

**A:** I think we had one right at the beginning, with Andries, where he was fired as senior metkassie and almost kicked off the island.

**Q:** Why?

**A:** He has a temper on him – and this is my personal observation ... is that he wasn't mature enough. He swore at Oom Giel, because the construction guys had placed something near a door and they couldn't ... they had to walk around it to get to their work. And he told them to move it, and it got very, very nasty. He also ... He didn't... He didn't do it to me, but on team training and also on the ship, he'd irritated the living daylights out of the majority of the team. Because of ... He's just one of those that manages to push the wrong buttons; he still does. He has a lot to learn still, unfortunately. But furthermore, nothing bad; no fights, no nothing. Really; awesome.

**Q:** Good. Now, what do you think about the new base and all the facilities?

**A:** I personally think it's overkill. If you'd asked me, would I have designed such a massive place like this? My answer is no. I would have gone for something much smaller, modular, easier to maintain and a lot cheaper. That's my feeling. This

building is going to be very difficult to maintain. The mice love it – and that’s the problem.

**Q:** There’s a lot to chew on.

**A:** There’s a lot to chew on inside these walls. And you can hear them in the roof already – they’re having races, chasing each other.

**Q:** Yes, I’ve heard them, so I know.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Can you think of anything that happened in South Africa that was of historical significance while you were on the island?

**A:** No.

**Q:** None whatsoever?

**A:** None.

**Q:** You don’t care about sport, do you?

**A:** Was there sport?

**Q:** Ah, okay.

**A:** I’m glad that I wasn’t there for the soccer. I didn’t want to be caught up in that whole mess, so I’m aware that there was soccer thingy in South Africa somewhere, and blah-blah-blah. But the soccer’s not my scene, and I wasn’t going to be ... I’m actually quite glad that I wasn’t there, being caught up in all the traffic jams and the blah-blah-blah ... All that sort of stuff. I’m like, you know, quite glad I was here. I don’t enjoy that sort of ... the Cape Town traffic scene. I prefer living somewhere else where it’s quieter.

**Q:** Okay. Do you think that having a base here is important?

**A:** I think for research; for the research that gets done. I think the research here is of international standard. Yes, I do. Short and sweet: yes, very important. Very important.

**Q:** Basically for research purposes?

**A:** For research purposes – of the seals, the ionosphere, from HMO side, and obviously the birding side as well. The geologists also doing quite a bit of research, the Geo’s ... And I’m quite sure that there’s going to be, in the years to come, there’s going to be more research being done. Maybe in slightly different fields, or in the same fields, but just more people. I’m quite sure. With a base like this, and the support, it could quite easily happen.

**Q:** They have the capacity for it.

**A:** Definitely the capacity, yes. If they mice haven't eaten the base and carried it away.

**Q:** Yes.

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Now describe Marion.

**A:** Cold – now obviously in winter – cold and wet; icy cold, covered in snow, mires all around the place. There's a mountainous region in the centre ... lots of rivers. Summers very pleasant, temperature wise. A hive of activity – breeding season, chicks, pups being born. A beautiful, beautiful island if you look at it, definitely.

**Q:** Okay. Now ... Basically, that's about it. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**A:** I miss my wife and my dogs! It's been a very interesting year. I'm glad I did it. After how many years? 1985 to now, or 1986 till now?

**Q:** 25 years?

**A:** It's a long time. I'm glad I'm here. I would love to go to Gough. SANAE doesn't ... strangely enough, doesn't appeal to me at all; doesn't appeal to me at all. It's boring. Would I ever come back? It depends on the future. I would like to still be involved in some or other small way – technical support on the communications systems. Who knows? It's my field. There's not many of us left in this country, who still do this.

**Q:** Who still do radio hamming?

**A:** No, no, no, no – commercial radio communications.

**Q:** Oh ...

**A:** I've designed a complete system that's already been deployed; it must now be installed.

**Q:** Oh, brilliant!

**A:** Brand new equipment – that's why I'm here. Brand new equipment standing at the hut; standing there now. Everything is there. Now ...

**Q:** Yes, and I look forward to using it when I go on my round-island.

**A:** Definitely. When are you going?

**Q:** Later this month; a few days ...

**A:** Is it after hut restocking?

**Q:** Yes, it's the day after the takeover ceremony.

**A:** Then you'll use it.



**Q:** Brilliant; fantastic! Thank you.

**A:** Definitely. Okay.

**Q:** I think that's it.

**A:** Pleasure.

**Q:** Thank you very much.

**END OF TRANSCRIPTION**