

LUC CHEVALIER

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Interviewer 2 (Q2): Dora Scott | Antarctic Legacy Project C-I-B | Stellenbosch University

Respondent (A): Dr Luc Chevalier | Volcanologist | Marion 40 | 1983

Q1: So, how did you get involved in Marion Island, specifically?

A: I'm from French origin. I studied in France and my speciality is vulcanology; I work on volcanoes. So I work on Reunion Island and I work on Mauritius, and I work on Hawaii; and I worked on other volcanoes, like Crozet and Kerguelen.

Q1: So you'd been to the sub-Antarctic islands before you went to Marion?

A: That's right. And I became a specialist in what we call oceanic volcanoes, all the volcanoes that are in the ocean. And in order to do my ... what we call a DSE in France – it's a degree above a PhD – I wanted to complete my study with a South African island. So I start in the Indian Ocean with France, and I had to go all around South Africa to go to Marion, to go to Prince Edward. I wanted to go to Gough; I wanted to go to Tristan da Cunha ... All these islands were controlled, okay, by South Africa.

Q1: Yes.

A: In order to carry on with my interests and my research, I applied on a South African project, which was at the time run by (the) South African Committee for Antarctic Research (SACAR), for a two-year contract at Stellenbosch, to work on Marion Island. I arrived in 1983 for a two-year period, and I went down to Marion for nine months in 1983, September '83, and came back in 1984, after nine months. I went back again at the next season, and again and again. And I went to Gough and Tristan da Cunha. That's how it happened. So I ... It was to complete my studies on what we call intra-ocean volcanoes.

Q1: Oh, okay.

A: And after a while I decided to stay, because it was a nice geology for me in South Africa and I think I saw the potential of Southern Africa. So, here we are.

Q1: So, before you went to Marion, you'd been to Kerguelen and Crozet.

A: That's right, yes.

Q1: The research communities there, are they different to the one on Marion?

A: Yes, to some extent. Kerguelen is a big base; big base – there’s about 200 people. It’s like a little town.

Q1: Oh, okay.

A: It’s quite different. And also it’s a big island. It’s about three, four hundred kilometres long. Crozet is very similar to Marion and they’re very close to each other. To such an extent that at the moment, you know each island tried to establish an economical zone around the island, which is three hundred miles. But if you put Crozet and Marion together, the three hundred miles touch each other.

Q1: Oh ...

A: So the moment, it’s not that they’re separated; they touch each other. So you have to draw the line. They’re very close to each other. So Marion is very close to Crozet, and the same team – about eight or ten people; the same ambiance, same work – basically weather, stratosphere, atmosphere –that kind of work – and geophysics. Gough is controlled by South Africa, as you know. It’s Norwegian, but it’s controlled by South Africa. Also the same team – eight people on Gough. Tristan da Cunha is just ... We just sort of deliver goods to Tristan da Cunha; I don’t think we got any team there.

Q1: No. Except the people who live there, of course.

A: The people are British there.

Q1: How long did you stay on Crozet for?

A: Crozet ... I can’t remember. It was in ’81. It was for six months, I think. Yes, six months on Crozet. Kerguelen was very short; Kerguelen was about a month. I also went to an island called St Paul and Amsterdam, where they are using all the crayfish. It was just for a short while. And all these islands do have sort of strange domestic animals. Amsterdam is well-known for cows.

Q1: Oh ... Cows?

A: Cows; wild cows, yes. Kerguelen is well-known for rabbits and goats.

Q1: Okay.

A: Crozet has got rats and mice, and also a few goats as well, yes. And Marion was very famous for cats, as you know. And when I did my first trip to Marion, the mammologists were quite busy trying to eliminate the cats. As you know, they tried different methods – tried to trap them, to poison them. And at the end, the only way was to shoot them at night.

Q1: So were they already busy shooting the cats when you were down there?

- A:** It was a tough job for them. They were going out in the cold at night with a gun to shoot them at night. Because in the night time time you can see their eyes, heh?
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** And now there aren't any cats. It's terrible how man can actually make such a mistake. Marion was occupied by South Africa in 1948. In those days, they weren't many ecologists around, and of course when you go to an island, you bring rats, the first idea... The first idea (is) you've got mice, therefore you bring cats. I mean it's the first reaction ...
- Q1:** Thing that you thing, yes.
- A:** Which was a one. Because the mice don't go out. They stay around the base. I mean, they don't bother ... It's not a threat for the island too much. And therefore, twenty years later, the cats were all around. The cats didn't go for the mice; they went for the birds. So a wrong ecological decision.
- Q1:** Did you see any of the wild cats when you were there?
- A:** Yes, I saw a few of them. They're difficult to see during the day, but I saw some of them. They look like normal cats. Very wild. Yes; you can't approach them. So when people knew about cat hunters, they ... 'Oh, shame!', but you had no choice.
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** No choice. Like Prince Edward is well-protected. No cats, no nothing. And I believe Marion and Prince Edward became a kingdom or something ... Isn't it a World Heritage, no?
- Q1:** Yes, they've applied. I don't know what the status is going to be.
- A:** They've applied, yes. You know I got involved in the application as well, to be a World Heritage. Prince Edward definitely qualified, definitely. When we went to Prince Edward, we had to clean everything – the boots; everything. The box ... check for everything.
- Q1:** So did you also study ... Are there volcanoes on Prince Edward? Well, it's a volcanic island ...
- A:** Yes, yes. It's a volcanic island. Most of them are volcanic islands, so they have volcanoes, yes. It's an active volcano on Marion – and on Prince Edward as well, I suppose. We haven't seen an eruption since '81, but it is active.
- Q1:** So you think the Marion volcano, is that still active?
- A:** Yes, of course; of course. It's the only active volcano in South Africa. Did you know that?

Q1: Okay ... !

A: Yes!

Q1: So what happened there? How did they decide ... You say it erupted in 1981. So only then did they decide to bring down a volcanologist?

A: No ... Yes, yes; that's right. It was mapped by Wilhelm Verwoerd in 1966 ... ?

Q1: (Yes.)

A: It was the first scientific expedition. It was an ornithologist, a geologist ... some specialist in plants, yes, a mammologist, and an ornithologist. And after the eruption in 1981, they decided to study the island from the vulcanological viewpoint. And since I was ... The Antarctic community, we know each other, so I applied for ... to go down, and it was approved, accepted; yes. So I spent about eight years working on Marion Island.

Q1: Wow.

A: Eight or nine; yes, nine years. Eight years, sorry.

Q1: So, this is the 1980's, and you come in from outside – not outside; I mean it's the Antarctic community, but how did you perceive South African scientists and science?

A: In general?

Q1: In general, yes – the base life, the way people interacted with one another in this community.

A: On Marion you mean?

Q1: On Marion, yes.

A: Ah yes, I think it was very good; definitely very good. Very, very, very good. It used to be a place for men, for a long time. Because people have the concept that male and female wouldn't work. For somehow it was some sort of ... and idea that it couldn't work. Therefore it had to be only one type of ... one gender.

Q1: Yes.

A: And the people on Marion were very rough. It was really rough – I don't know if you ever saw the film when they were coming back on the ship with big beards?

Q1: Big beards on ... yes.

A: And the day a lady arrived, instead of fighting, as people would have thought, everyone changed and became nmore.. to each other. It's amazing, heh?

Q1: It is!

A: It was... those properties were reversed, heh? And now, I think it's quite mixed. I think it's ...

Q1: It's now all genders and faiths and races and everything.

A: It's ... The difference between the two teams is that on Marion ... Between French and South Africa, French (have) got more senior people on the island.

Q1: (Yes.)

A: The team leader on the French island will be someone quite senior.

Q1: Oh, okay.

A: Very senior. And there will be two or three very senior people. On Marion, when I went there, it was eight young guys!

Q1: Yes.

A: I mean, for me, it was quite surprising that eight people ... One of the chaps was about 20 years old, 18 – I mean (there's) nothing wrong with that, but to be in charge of a base ... It was a surprise for me. It worked very well. I was quite surprised how well it worked. I always thought you need some seniority to run an island, but no; (you) didn't!

Q1: It seems not ...

A: It seems not ... ! So it was very good, heh? There's a difference between French and South Africa, and I must say they did very well; we all did very, very well – very well run; very responsible people. The scientists are very good. I mean, you can imagine South Africa is very well-known in terms of Antarctic research, no doubt about it. So no, I don't have anything ... nothing to add to that. Very competitive research.

Q1: And you only went with the Agulhas, or did you also or did you also go on the Marion Dufresne?

A: I went on the Marion Dufresne, yes; at the beginning, yes. And after, for ... to go to Marion, I went on the SA Agulhas.

Q1: Okay.

A: Yes, that's the only two boats that I took. I never went to Antarctica; I never took any German boat or Russian boat. So it's the only two boats that I know. And they're very similar. Strict rules on the boat. It was nice; I enjoyed it.

Q1: Because the Marion Dufresne ... Marion Island was obviously named after Marion Dufresne?

A: That's right, yes. What was it before South Africa annexed it in 1948? I'm not quite sure which ...

- Q1:** No, I'm not quite sure either.
- A:** ... who the island belonged to ...
- Q1:** Britain, but it's ...
- A:** You think so?
- Q1:** No, it's definitely Britain. It belonged to Britain, but they knew that if somebody challenged them to court on whom the island belongs to, they wouldn't really last. It didn't really belong to anyone, but Britain has given out licences for sealers, etcetera.
- A:** Okay. Ah yes; alright.
- Q2:** So that's why they had to have South Africa annex it and plant a flag, to ensure that it is legitimate.
- A:** Okay... You see.. That was the first mission, when they first came to the island.
- Q1:** (Yes.)
- A:** No, it's good. You see, you teach me something.
- Q1:** So describe what you did on the island. I mean what do you do on a day to day basis on the island as a volcanologist?
- A:** I did a lot of mapping, first of all. The map that was done by Verwoerd was very good, but we went down to do ... to give more details – to map in more details, the different flows. Volcanologists will try to evaluate the age of the different flows to see what was the eruptive history of the island – how often did it erupt? How long was the eruption? What volume of lava was emitted? – to have a record of the history of the volcanoes. It's called eruptive dynamics study. So you study the type of eruption that happened, you know, to evaluate the risk for the future. So you sample the lava to analyse it, or the hard rock – the rock is not melted anymore; it's hard, heh? You map it, you analyse it to see what is the composition and the evolution of the island, basically.
- Q1:** So you walk around a lot as well?
- A:** Ah of course. It's field work; it's mainly field work. We are in the field for about I would say a week or two at a time. So a typical journey would be that you prepare you package with your food, because we go from hut to hut – there were, at the time, six huts on the island. So you ... I would be going with an assistant, and we would package our food and all our supply, including a block of frozen meat in the back ..
- Q1:** ... !

A: That you keep all along, heh? All along the trip, heh? And it get defrost as you chop it, heh? And you go from hut to hut. You spend free time in a hut there. You go there, another one, another one, another one, another one, another one. You come back to the base for a shower and a bit of relaxation. And the next week you go again, and ...

Q1: That's quite hard work ...

A: You don't have to go around, but you can go to a hut and come back and have different types of trips, okay.

Q1: So it can be quite dangerous work?

A: Dangerous, because ... It can be dangerous, because the terrain is very rugged, excessively rugged.

Q1: (Yes.)

A: It can be dangerous, because if you break a leg and you don't have an assistant, it is ... It was forbidden to go alone. You always have to take an assistant. But, it happened that you can get lost in a mist, and the mist is very misleading; very misleading. You can't get your bearing right and you can get lost. And if you get lost, something bad happen to you ... It can be quite drastic, because to spend one night outside – I've done it once – it's terrible; it's terrible. It's really ... you could die. I know we lost people in Gough Island ...

Q1: (Yes.)

A: That's also a dangerous island as well. So one should be careful in the field. It's not ... And the radio doesn't work everywhere.

Q1: Oh yes.

A: You can have a radio, but sometimes you have to climb on a hill to reach the base. So it's not always working nice.

Q1: So you spent one night outside? Was that in a tent, or were you lost?

A: No, I was not lost. I misjudged the time that I needed to reach the base. I went to the plateau, when there was an ice cap at the time – you know the ice has disappeared?

Q1: Yes.

A: So I went to the ice, to look at some rocks there that were outcropping. And when you're in the field, you take in every opportunity to complete your work as much as you can. So you say okay, I must go, I must go, I must go. But you stop and you see something; and you stop and you start writing. And you say, hurry; I mustn't stop; okay, just ... And times goes – okay, I must go now. And then you see something else, okay ...

Q1: Okay, just quickly!

A: I don't want to climb here again; okay ... And it caught me. And it was basically dark and I was far from the hut. And here we are. I didn't take any equipment with me. I had clothing, of course, but I was not equipped to spend the night. So what I did, I dug a hole in the scoriae – you know, they've got loose scoriae there. I dug a hole in the scoriae; I took a bit of plastic bag that I've got in... Because everything is in a plastic bag in the rucksack, and I slipped in the rock, you see? And I put a rock, ground around me in order not to be frozen in the morning. So I got up at four or five o'clock in the morning; not too well – it rained that night. It rained; ooh, it rained.

Q1: Ooh ... So you didn't sleep much?

A: Not much. But fine. I made it; it's alright. After a while you just realise that ... how lucky you are, but at the time you're not ... I didn't think much about it at the time. This was no problem.

Q1: But you were glad of fresh food when you came back?

A: Yes, of course, of course. Fresh food and a drink and coffee – hot coffee. Hot coffee is amazing, heh? You've got nothing to ... I didn't bring anything to cook, nothing, so it was quite drastic.

Q1: Shame!

A: But it was fine. I'm used ... As a geologist you're used to it. It's not a problem. And all the scientists are used to that kind of hard life as well. If it happened once or twice, okay.

Q1: Okay. So what would be the challenges of field work on a sub-Antarctic island?

A: The challenge of field work is ... In terms of scientific challenge or physical challenge? Physical challenge is there – I mean, it's very ... You have to be really fit to work on Marion Island. You just walk all day; all day, all day for eight hours, every day on very rugged terrain, and you have to climb high hills. So it's quite demanding work. Scientifically as well. Scientifically, you've got a lot of rocks that you have to map. The weather is a challenge as well. The weather is a big, big challenge for a geologist, heh? You don't see what you're supposed to see. It's terrible. Sometimes it's just wind and fog and rain and snow – so you see nothing. I mean it's ... That's a big challenge. You have to stay in the hut and wait for the sky to clear.

Q1: Yes, and then ...

A: And you know there ... another type of ground – they call it soft ground. It's marsh, heh? You can get stuck up to your thighs. And lose your gumboots! You know about the story, yes?

- Q1:** No.
- A:** We walk with gumboots – that’s the boots that we used, because it’s full of marsh; a lot of marsh. Now, if you get dropped in that marsh too deep, often your gumboots stay behind ...
- Q1:** Aargh ...
- A:** And you just move your foot with your socks, heh? “Chlupp” it makes and finish!
- Q1:** And the boot is gone ...
- A:** The boot is gone!
- Q1:** Oh dear! And then you have to walk back in your socks?
- A:** You have to walk in your socks, yes.
- Q1:** Oh, your feet must be freezing after that?
- A:** Yes. But it was a funny little story. That’s quite challenging. I like it. I liked it, and everyone liked it as well. It was good. And the animals are not dangerous. The elephant seals are not dangerous if you can avoid them. Penguins are not dangerous. Albatross are not dangerous.
- Q1:** Skuas ... ?
- A:** Skuas are a bit, if you go close to their nests. So you know the story? You know about that?
- Q2:** We’ve heard about people who go out with guns and if the skuas attack, they sort of shoot the gun.
- A:** Ah yes. I know they’re very vicious, heh? Very vicious. You don’t see them; they’re very silent. So then “whoof” ...
- Q1:** (Laughter.)
- A:** There are a lot of birds. Beautiful life; there’s amazing life. No, I think the danger doesn’t come from animals; it comes from the rugged terrain. Even, you know, the killer whales – the famous killer whales ... I don’t know if anyone told you? They used to come close to the shore. And one chap was very adventurous. One day, he just took a diving suit and just went to the shore, and the killer whale came and just bumped his side ...
- Q1:** Ooh ... !
- A:** But the killer whale was not interested in a piece of plastic ... I mean, you know, the suit that you wear ...
- Q1:** (Yes), plastic smell.

- A:** You put something disgusting ... Plastic smell – they're not interested.
- Q1:** Wow ... !
- A:** Yes, amazing that chap, hey?! But I mean, the killer whale... much too close to move, but they were coming very close, very very close there.
- Q1:** Did he swim away?
- A:** No, he was standing ... Oh yes, the killer whale swam away, yes. What was the name of ... What was his name? Can't remember; I can't remember. He was quite a funny chap. We had a lot of special people in the Arctic!
- Q1:** (Laughter.)
- A:** And you know, you were allowed to ... The Department of Transport would allow you to go only for 12 or 13 months, and some people liked it so much that they wanted to renew their contract.
- Q1:** Oh ...
- A:** But it was not often approved.
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** If you would stay more than ... Because people thought that ... Because you must realise, it's a *lekka* life, heh? You understand? You've got no boss; you've got food; got no worries, no worries! Imagine a year without any worries! You wake up in the morning, you've got no worries; nothing – no bank problem; no bond problem ... No queue to stand in ...
- Q1:** No traffic ...
- A:** Okay, your friend's or your girlfriend's away, but some of them do not have girlfriends ... No problem dating! No problem with the parents! No ... It's amazing! And people get caught into it. You get caught, you say 'it's just the life I want to do', but it's a false life; it's wrong. You know, it's not right.
- Q1:** It's not real.
- A:** No. Maybe it's right, but it's not real. When you come back ... That's a shock when you come back.
- Q1:** Yes, I wanted to ask what do you experience after nine months on the island and you come back?
- A:** The first thing is the sight of Cape Town on the boat. That's something. The first sight of the island in the morning when you go down – because you go down for five days; you go through the Roaring Forties ... And if you're not a sailor, I can imagine ... I mean, how rough it is. So after five days, you just wake up and you see the island.

That's amazing! It's something out of this world. On the way back, after a year, it's basically to see Cape Town, the lights of Cape Town in the evening – that you cannot reach, because you're not allowed to moor at night. So you stay off shore.

Q1: Oh yes.

A: And you see the lights of Cape Town, but you're only allowed to go in the morning. So here everyone is on the boat, looking at the lights of Cape Town.

Q1: Lovely ... !

A: No, it's amazing, heh? Amazing; quite an experience, I must say. I would always remember that – how the people were sort of very cheerful and happy when they see the lights. But as I say, it's such an easy life.

Q1: Yes.

A: You work; you work hard. It's tough there, but the worries ... No worries.

Q1: Yes. You do some work and that's all.

A: Yes, your body works. You think about your work. But no worries. I mean it's amazing, heh?! I mean psychologically it's very good – you're just clean, heh? Clean, clean, clean; everything.

Q1: Do you miss anything when you're on the island? What do you miss?

A: Yes, well (if) you're married, of course you think about your wife and kids, of course, and the first thing you ... Because they have the worries. You don't, but they have to fix the car; they have to attend (to) all the problems. So I don't know; I don't know what the people are missing when they are on the other side. I don't know. That's quite an interesting question. But I never had the feeling that the people were missing something.

Q1: (Yes.)

A: Strange, heh? Very strange. Did you ask the question to other people as well?

Q2: Yes. Some people say fresh fruit and vegetables...

A: Oh yes; oh yes, of course.

Q1: And some people say wives and children and so on.

A: Oh yes. Fresh vegetables; that's the first thing ...

Q2: And some of the men said just women in general.

A: Okay!

Q1: (Laughter.)

- A:** Yes, of course, of course. That's fine. Women in general; yes, okay. But I thought now it is mixed, so this would be ...
- Q2:** That is not so much a problem anymore.
- A:** No problem ... At the time, yes; at the time, yes. At the time it was ...
- Q1:** Were there strict rules then about fresh food? Could you take food ... Do you remember eating vegetables on the island?
- A:** Yes ... The rules were not very rules, because at the end of the day you have to eat them as quick as you can, because you can't keep them anyway. So we would ... I don't know (if) there were rules ... In other words, access to fresh fruit or limited amount ... No, I don't think there were any rules.
- Q1:** Can you remember eating chicken with bones in them?
- A:** Chicken with bones ... Did we have full chickens you mean; in the fridge you mean, that was..?
- Q1:** Yes, full chicken.
- A:** Full chickens ... I think so.
- Q2:** Because these days they don't send chicken with bones anymore.
- A:** Yes, I think so. I think we had T-bones with bones; I think. We had our meat with ...
- Q2:** Well, you can't have a T-bone without a bone...!
- A:** Oh, okay; okay!
- Q1:** It sounds like you ate a lot of meat?
- A:** Oh yes; oh yes. It was a special fridge for meat. So at the beginning, you got yoghurt ... When the ship arrived, you got your yoghurt, also your fruits (until) it's gone; after (that) the potatoes, the carrots ... And after (that) you start digging in the frozen stuff, and after it's meat, meat ... !
- Q1:** (Laughter.) What did you do when you did not work or go out to the field? Did you sometimes just take time off to relax?
- A:** Yes. First back (at the base), you have to compile your map and your data, because in the field there are no facilities, heh? So therefore we do some office work ... sort out my samples and work on the maps. But also to relax. Relax means to sit in the library and read a book, listen to music, watch a video.
- Q2:** Can you remember some of the films you watched? Just for interest sake.
- A:** Yes ... No, no; no. I know one was very popular. It's that South African comic, Afrikaans?

Q2: Jamie Uys?

A: Yes, yes. He lives in Darling, there.

Q1: Oh, Pieter-Dirk Uys.

A: No, Pieter-Dirk Uys. Pieter-Dirk Uys, yes. I know that one. For me it was quite new and didn't know the comics in South Africa, and at the time, Pieter-Dirk Uys, in '83, was very popular. I'm not quite sure nowadays, but (in) '83, he was at the top of his ... And it was the top of Pres. Botha as well.

Q1: Yes.

A: So he was famous for ...

Q2: His finger!

A: Oh, okay! For me it was quite new. I say but what is he doing?! They say it's Pres. Botha. Ah, okay; okay. That's where I learned the whole politics story ... But what films ... ? No, there were ...

Q2: But it would generally be just American films?

A: Yes, American films; yes. I don't think the South African industry was so strong in the 80's, in terms of films, heh?

Q1: It was never strong ...

A: No, but it's ... Yes, before we came to South Africa, we ... There was a film that was shown in France in '82 – it was "God must be crazy" (sic).

Q1: Yes.

A: It made such a thing in France, because (it was the) first time ... that thing was fresh. When you look at it now, after twenty years, it's a bit weak, heh?

Q1: (Laughter.)

A: No, not too weak! But I mean it's ...

Q1: Yes, I understand what you mean.

A: But it's nice. It's so fresh, so natural. And the first time the people saw South Africa, and the crazy ... not the craziness, but the contrast between people driving in town and having people living in the bush, 1,000 km ... For European people, they never knew that you could have two types of people co-existing. So yes, I knew about (the) South African industry, film, before I came. That's the only thing that I knew. But on the island, I can't remember ... American, yes; American films, yes.

Q1: The majority of South Africans, were they Afrikaans or English?

A: Afrikaans, yes.

- Q1:** So did you learn some Afrikaans on the island?
- A:** Yes, I learned some Afrikaans; yes, yes. Yes, we learned Afrikaans ... Yes, yes, Afrikaans. No, it's ... Everyone was bilingual; everyone was bilingual. Some people were more bilingual than others ...
- Q1:** (Laughter.)
- A:** But the mother tongue was Afrikaans, I think, for I would say 60, 70%. But maybe I'm wrong; maybe I'm wrong. But it's ... But anyway, we all spoke English and Afrikaans, and ...
- Q1:** Were you the only person from overseas, the only foreigner?
- A:** No, there was a chap from (the) UK, an ornithologist, on the one day, and after, there were other people coming from other countries. I went there four, five times, heh?
- Q1:** (Yes.)
- Q2:** Just as a take-over each time?
- A:** No, for the summer season.
- Q1:** Oh, yes; okay.
- A:** I did two summers and take-overs. The summer is nine months. You know, it's between September to April. The take-over is about two months.
- Q1:** Yes, on most. And now it's just a month.
- A:** Just a month now? Okay. 'Cause take-over was also used to do oceanographic work. The boat would come to the island, go for oceanographic (work), with Anton le Roux, from the Department of Geology at UCT, who was in charge of the oceanographic work and magnetic work. So it would take about a month or two for a cruise in the ocean and come back.
- Q1:** So the first summer expedition you did was in 1983, and then again?
- A:** Yes, I came back in 1984. I went back in 1985; came back in 1986. Went down to Gough in 1987; go back to Marion (in) '88 for a take-over. Yes, four times, I think; four times.
- Q1:** So the second summer, was that a bit ... Was that different from the first summer?
- A:** No. It was shorter, shorter; same people. Not same people, but (the) same team, heh? The team didn't grow too much. I'm not quite sure how big is a team nowadays ...
- Q1:** About 16 to 20 – it depends.

A: On (the) permanent winter team?

Q2: Yes... Maybe something between 10 and 15.

Q1: It depends on how many scientists there are ...

A: But the core team is still 8?

Q2: No, the core team has grown.

Q1: The core team has definitely grown. There are many biologists now who are there for the year. Many scientists stay for the whole year.

A: Is that so?

Q1: Yes.

A: Oh, okay. Very good!

Q2: So you have ornithologists who also stay for a year.

A: For a year; okay.

Q1: Or there are ... Last year, there were four sealers, four people ...

A: Mammologists?

Q1: Mammologists, yes, who stayed for the year.

Q2: So it's quite a big team now.

Q1: It depends on the amount of funding available, but if they could fund the scientists for a year, if you could find private funding, it's fine.

A: Okay. No ...

Q2: Yes, because they also have the new base. So it's ...

A: Yes, I believe so.

Q2: Yes. So it's quite large as well.

A: At the time, '83, the mammologists ... The man in charge was Marthan ...

Q1: Marthan Bester?

A: Bester, yes. He's in charge of a zoo now?

Q1: No, he's still at Zoology at Pretoria University.

Q2: Marine mammal research.

Q1: Mammals ...

A: Another one ... We had an ecologist, who was Quinton Coetzee. You know Quinton Coetzee?

- Q1:** No.
- A:** From "50/50", no?
- Q1:** Oh, okay.
- A:** He's in charge of "50(/50", the Afrikaans chap; Quinton Coetzee.
- Q1:** Were you also on the island with Steven Chown?
- A:** Yes, I think so; the same year, yes. Yes, he came down in the same year. Not for the summer; he came down for a take-over, yes.
- Q1:** And at that time, did you still, during take-overs ... Did they bring a religious person, like a priest or a pastor?
- A:** During take-over, yes, there was a religious person; yes. A priest, yes. I remember that. And they had church every Sunday ... was a priest for concerning (?), yes.
- Q1:** Did they also have church services on Crozet and Kerguelen?
- A:** Yes, yes; it was also during take-over. Not during ... not permanent. Maybe in Kerguelen there might be a permanent priest, yes; possible.
- Q1:** Possible? And who did you work with closely? Who did you go out on the expeditions with?
- A:** My assistant. I had an assistant, a person who would go with. And I would go with an ornithologist, of course. Because the scientists didn't have any duty at the base, so (scientists) could walk around. The people from the Weather Bureau had a bit of constraint, because they had to release the balloons every day; they have to record every day. The doctor couldn't go away too long. The diesel mac, we were a bit worried ...
- Q1:** (Laughter.)
- A:** The diesel mechanic, we were a bit worried if he would go for a week. But otherwise, I would go with (the) ornithologist, (a) mammologist.
- Q1:** Who was your assistant?
- A:** I can't remember his name ... I'm sorry, my memory's really poor. I have to dig back all my photos and my ... He was a chap, a South African chap, yes ... I had two or three.
- Q1:** Oh?
- A:** They were people ... Assistants were people (who were) not necessarily scientists or young students. They were just people ...
- Q2:** Field assistants?

- A:** Yes, field assistants. They would apply ... They would have seen an advert in a newspaper or on TV that they're looking for assistants, and they would apply; they could go. I mean ...
- Q1:** Okay, so they weren't necessarily trained, educated ... ?
- A:** No, no; not trained.
- Q2:** So what would you have them do? Carry the ...
- A:** Carry the rocks, yes, and show them around as well. And ask them to break the rock and to carry the rock as well. That's all, yes; I think. But it was nice; it was ... And I teach ... I taught them the geology, so they were very happy. And after that, I know that my assistants stayed over for the next three months, helping the ornithologists and the biologists, so they were happy helping everyone.
- Q1:** So you liked that?
- A:** Yes.
- Q1:** Cat hunters ... Did you meet any cat hunters?
- A:** Yes. Marthan was in charge of the team, I think, at one stage. Yes, I met them; yes, I met them. We ... I can't remember their names, but there were eight of them, for three seasons. I never went out at night, because I was working all the day in the field, so I never went ... Once I was at night with them, yes, around the base. Didn't see any cats at the time.
- Q1:** And the cat hunters, when they came back to base, did they come and have a little party or ... ?
- A:** Oh yes. It was quite a ... I mean really, really tough. It was ... I don't want to say they were a group apart, but they liked to get together and to show that they were ... I think they wanted to show they were tough, I think. They were very tough, I mean can you imagine for eight months of your life going out at night on Marion to shoot cats?! No, it was rough; yes, yes. And they liked to show it as well.
- Q2:** So how much did you interact with them, or not ... ?
- A:** Oh no, we interacted, because they were all mammologists as well, I think. Most of them were students in mammology; I think so. And they were hunters as well, at the same time. There were some ...
- Q1:** Where did they keep their guns?
- A:** I think there was store for the guns to be kept; yes. And it was quite nicely controlled if I remember, yes. They had a separate sort of ... They were sort of accommodated in a special hut on the island, next to the base, but ... Because they used to party a lot ...

Q2: Oh, so they got their own rooms?

A: Yes, yes.

Q1: And when they partied, did they play music?

A: Yes, lots of music.

Q1: So did you learn Afrikaans music?

A: Yes, yes. No, of course it was Afrikaans music and ... I'm not quite sure what was Afrikaans music ... It was at the time ... What was a popular singer at the time? Who ... ?

Q2: I can only guess ...

A: Kerkorrel was not at the time ... ? Maybe that time...?

Q2: Anton Goosen?

A: Anton Goosen, *ja*; Anton Goosen and ... a chap from Stellenbosch, with the beard and a beret?

Q1: Koos Kombuis ... ? Randall Wicomb!

A: Randall Wicomb, yes! Randall Wicomb; yes.

Q1: (Laughter.)

A: Why are you laughing?!

Q1: I saw him walk past yesterday.

A: You saw him?

Q2: Yes.

Q1: He's still in Stellenbosch; he still wears his bandanna.

Q2: He's still there.

A: And who was ... Stevie? I think Steve ...

Q1: Hofmeyer.

A: Goodness, yes, yes. Steve Hofmeyer. I don't know ... I don't know. Laurika, I think?

Q1: Oh, Laurika Rauch?

A: Yes. Laurika was a singer ... Now I can't remember the others. It's a bit funny with my mind, heh?

Q1: That's a long ...

A: You know all of them?

- Q1:** No ... !
- A:** That was long before your time!
- Q1:** Yes, before my time! Okay ... But in what way would you say Marion Island, and Crozet Island and Kerguelen ... They're all very small islands in what most people in the public would call the middle of nowhere. It's not really in the middle of nowhere, but ...
- A:** No, it is. It is very remote.
- Q1:** It's very remote. But in what way are islands like those important for science?
- A:** Yes, I think because they are isolated, definitely. The life on the island is isolated from the rest. And what is important, we don't know how they got populated. The evolution is very important on the islands. We know the basics of Darwin and evolution; that life evolved on an island which is ... Those islands are new, heh? They're about a few ... four, five hundred thousand years (old). They're very young. And what is interesting is how the life have colonised an island so quickly; so quickly over a few hundred thousand years – birds, mammals and the vegetation. I mean, it's quite amazing. So it's very important from that point of view. From the volcanological viewpoint, of course it's very important to study such a volcano. It's quite pristine; it's quite unique. It's also important for the sea life as well. At the time, there were no oceanologists – no one was looking at the sea at the time. I believe there might be people looking at the shore now – the fish or ...
- Q1:** Yes, there are ichthyologists.
- A:** Yes, yes. They just started a fish study when I left in 1988, I think.
- Q1:** I think it's Grahamstown; Rhodes University.
- A:** That's right, Rhodes, yes; looking at the fish. I don't know if there was a team who were looking at the killer whales ... Not at the time.
- Q1:** They do obs ... They observe the population.
- A:** Ah, we had to observe the thing on the sighting; we had to put the sighting on a board every day, yes; the killer whales, that sort of thing. And it's (an) amazing island. I mean just to walk by next to an albatross – I mean it's an amazing bird. Amazing life.
- Q1:** Are there any albatross that breed on Crozet?
- A:** Yes, the same birds. Exactly the same birds, yes.
- Q2:** Did you ever ... Especially being from another country, did the politics of South Africa ever come up as a discussion topic? Did you ever talk about it?

- A:** Coming from my side, or coming from here?
- Q2:** Yes. Well ...
- Q1:** In general conversation.
- A:** Because in those days ...
- Q2:** Yes, just in conversation.
- A:** Yes, yes. The people asked me what does France think about South Africa. They asked me. And at the time, it was the war in Angola, in '83. So it was a ... The major issue was the war between Angola and South West (Africa – now Namibia) and South Africa. And I told them what the people knew about South Africa, but ... People, they heard about South Africa via the radio in France, but they were not quite sure what was going on there. They know that there was Apartheid; they know that there were embargos against South Africa, and they know there was a war with Angola. So we didn't discuss much politics on the islands. I don't think politics have ever been a major issue on the islands; I don't think so. If I remember (correctly) ... I don't know of any people fighting (about) politics.
- Q1:** Okay.
- A:** As far as I remember.
- Q1:** How did you get around? When the Agulhas was there, did you sometimes get to fly?
- A:** To the island?
- Q1:** In helicopters, around the island?
- A:** Oh yes. Fly in helicopters, yes. There were two Pumas – big helicopters. We used to get dropped by helicopter. If we had to do a big mission, we would ask a helicopter to carry all the food to the spot and the people, and we would jump out of the helicopter and take our food and be left there for weeks. One island that I went to – very few people went there – is called "Inaccessible".
- Q1:** Oh?
- A:** I don't know if you've heard of Inaccessible? It's next to Tristan da Cunha. There is Tristan da Cunha, Inaccessible and Nightingales.
- Q1:** Yes.
- A:** They are very pristine. There is one type of bird living there, quite unique. And the word "Inaccessible" means that it is ...
- Q1:** Inaccessible ... !
- A:** So the only way for was to get dropped by helicopter on a small beach there. And after, we had to climb the cliff to go and work on the plateau there.

Q1: Ooh ...

A: You would need a helicopter. Otherwise, by boat, it would be very rough. But these islands are difficult. Bouvet, for instance. Bouvet is the most remote place on earth.

Q1: Have you been to Bouvet?

A: No, no. I wanted to; I couldn't. It's the most disgusting weather on earth. The most remote place on earth. The most ... You can't imagine. It's in the middle of the Atlantic, in the Roaring Forties. It's always got (an) ice cap, cloud, mist ... It's just miserable; just miserable. There is an automatic weather station there that South Africa used to operate – I'm not quite sure if it's (still) the case. It's a Norwegian island, with an "O" with a stripe in it, heh? "VO"... And I don't know who's in charge of it anymore.

Q1: I think it's still Norway. But it's still very inaccessible?

A: But who operates it? Not the Norwegians ... ?

Q1: No, there's no permanent science persons at all. No, no.

Q1: A couple of years ago, they had a summer sealing expedition there for three months.

A: Ah, okay!

Q1: And they used one of these big containers for a hut. And then, just after they left, an avalanche took the whole container away!

A: Wow! (Laughter.)

Q1: So apparently it's a really, really rough place.

A: It's very rough. I think it's the most difficult place on earth.

Q1: (Yes.)

A: I think all the places ... Siberia, you can go by foot – it would take you a year, but you will get there; Gough ... Bouvet, you can't!

Q1: Yes.

A: You can't. I mean you can't ... Even the helicopters don't want to go there.

Q1: Okay! So the helicopter pilots, were they military pilots?

A: Yes, military pilots. The helicopters belong the (Department of) Transport; the pilots were from the military.

Q1: Were they good pilots?

A: Very good; very nice. Oh no, they were trained in France. I mean they were very good.

Q1: Were they trained in France?

A: Because Puma is a French helicopter.

Q1: Oh ... ! Okay.

A: Yes. Very good. We used to talk about France and how happy they were when they were training. No, no. They were good. So ... But do know another thing about ... when someone needs medical attention on Marion, only ... When it's something serious, the only way was to send a Corvette or Lavisio from the Army – one of those boats that took two days to sail down. Because we had one person who had a stroke – Graham something (Clarke) ... in '84. And they had to send a boat to take the person back. It was quite serious, heh? Because on Marion, you cannot do any type of surgical intervention, I mean. Appendicitis you can't do; you can't do serious stuff. I don't think so.

Q1: You can't do brain surgery, that's for sure.

A: No brain surgery, no stroke, heart attack ... I mean you can't do that. You can do dentistry and basic ...

Q2: First aid ...

A: Wounds... I'm not quite sure if a broken ... No, a broken leg, they would send a boat straightaway.

Q1: When you were back in South Africa – also from the other islands – did you sometimes miss the island?

A: Yes, yes. You think about the people who are there. You're happy to be back, but you think about the new team there – what are they doing? You say 'ah today, okay, they're working' or 'today they launched a balloon' ... Of course; of course. You say, 'ah, yes, today there is someone in the field'; 'they are next to the penguins'; 'what are they doing?'; 'how are they getting up now today?'; 'they're cooking the food today' or 'it must be cold today' or ... You know, you always think about it.

Q1: Would you ever go back if you had the chance?

A: Yes, yes; of course! Of course I would go back. My work ... I'm a bit far away now from that type of work, but yes, I think I will go back. No problem. Just to see the new base, of course, the new team. And also to go round the island to see if there was any sign of further volcanic activities since '81. That's my main concern.

Q1: Apparently there was some volcanic activity ...

A: Well yes, I heard about it. But the description is a bit vague.

Q1: Oh, okay.

A: So vague. And we asked ... We phoned John Cooper, from Bernard Price; we said can you get something ... – not Bernard Price; from Fitzpatrick ...

Q1: Fitzpatrick, yes.

A: Can you get more information? Because it was a fairly weird description. It looks like something, but to me it doesn't ... it's not satisfactory. I mean it's something ... A lot of things are missing. So I would like to go back there and have a look.

Q1: Cool! Yes, John sends you his regards, by the way. He's down there now, yes. We know him quite well.

A: Ah, okay!

Q2: He also works on the project (Antarctic Legacy Project, ALP).

A: Ah, okay! You've got the '83 team, the '84 team! I mean ... John Cooper – he's still about?

Q1: Yes. No, he's still ... He's now very into the conservation work. So he mostly goes down as conservation officer. When you walked around the island ... Because I suppose you'd mostly be inland, but sometimes also the coast ... Did you see any historical artefacts, like sealers' remains or ... ?

A: Yes, often; yes.

Q1: Like what kind of things?

A: The pot, trypot – the big thing where you melted the fat; there were quite a few of them. There were also caves dug into the volcanic ...

Q2: Human-made caves?

A: Yes. They dug into the caves.

Q1: And were there things in these caves?

A: Yes, usually cooking ...

Q1: Like weapons or hammers ... ?

A: Yes, weapons ... Not hammers. Bottels – green glass, blue glass.

Q1: Oh? Okay.

A: And pieces of iron, and picks. And pieces of pots.

Q1: Okay.

A: It was forbidden to remove anything at the time.

Q1: Okay. So there was legislation already?

A: I don't know if it was legislation. It was a rule.

Q1: Okay.

A: But I don't know if there was legislation as such. But it was ... Between us, it was forbidden to remove anything.

Q1: And human remains? Did you see any human remains? Human femurs or bones ... ?

A: Not that I remember. We never, we never ... I don't think we ever encountered human remains, no. No.

Q1: Okay. Do you remember the Mixed Pickle hut?

A: Yes ... Yes, Mixed Pickle hut ... Yes, yes. Where was it now? I try to get my mind fresh...

Q1: If I can see a map of Marion I will be able to show you!

A: Let me bring you a map; let me bring a map.

END OF TRANSCRIPTION