

JACQUI DAVIS, TRISTAN SCOTT AND BAREND VAN DER MERWE

Date: 11 May 2011

Place: SA Agulhas

Interviewer (Q): Dora Scott | Antarctic Legacy Project | Centre for Invasion Biology (C-I-B) | Stellenbosch University

Respondent (BvdM): Barend van der Merwe | Geomorphologist | Marion 64, 67 | 2007, 2010

Respondent (TS): Tristan Scott | Sealer | Marion 67 | 2010

Respondent (JD): Jacqui Davis | Geomorphologist | Marion 64, 67 | 2007, 2010

Q: So you were in M67 on Marion. Right? Good. So what did you do there?

BvdM: I was a Geomorphologist, collecting data on sub-surface Marion temperatures for research purposes.

TS: I was a sealer, I'm sure you know what the sealers do.

JD: I was also a Geomorphologist collecting sediment movement data, also for research purposes.

Q: Brilliant. And how did it happen that you applied to go?

JD: Barend and I had been before, in M 64 (our second year), and I don't know if our stories are the same, but I heard through the University, through my lecturer Ian Meiklejohn.

Q: Which university?

JD: University of Pretoria. I was in second year at the time and my Professor at the time, Ian Meiklejohn, for our second year course... We were on an excursion to the Drakensberg and he had just come back from his takeover to Marion and speaking about it and I, it's something that I thought was very interesting and wanted to be a part of. And as soon as he got funding for a project I asked if I could be part of it.

Q: Brilliant.

BvdM: Ja, I also just got involved, also heard about it in undergrad, just from people that have been there, people in our department, Werner Nel. And also I got involved more with the program. I went... A friend of mine came down for a take-over, and then I heard a lot more about what it was like. The following year he came down for a year and then I got a chance to come down and assist with, not working on a project on the island at that stage but I was assisting speeds as well as in the imbedding on projects. So that's how I got involved. And then after that an opening came up on four projects on the island and then I got involved, that's when Jacqui and I came down for the first time.

Q: Oh ok.

JD: Ja, we both did take-overs before we did a full year. So Barend's takeover was 2004 and mine was 2006.

Q: Oh okay. And you?

TS: I was doing my Honours at the University of Johannesburg...

Q: In what?

TS: Zoology. Literally 2 days before the applications were supposed to be in, I saw on the notice board outside the department was a sign that said "Aspiring marine mammologist position" [laughing]. It said Marion island, I didn't even know Marion island existed at all. But I applied the next day...

Q: And got it.

TS: Ja.

Q: What did you know about Marion island before you came here?

TS: I knew nothing. I didn't even know we had an island called Marion. No clue.

JD: I had, through Geography in high school, had known that we had an island, Marion island, but I knew very little about it to start off with. And then just through hearing my lecturer speak about it and then people who had been to the island after that in our department, at the University of Pretoria. And then learnt more and more. That's how I learned about it.

BvdM: Ja, I also heard of it more from university. Before university I had no idea that we even had an island this far south. I saw a poster in our practical lab, a photo of some of the earlier groups going down, Werner Nel, him and Jay le Roux and Hermie Baker, who went down for a takeover. So then we started obviously talking more about Marion island. We had rock samples from Marion island to use in the practicals to teach the students with. And then I heard a lot more about it through the experience of my friend who came down for a take-over and then he told me all about stuff, especially Katedraal (Krans), experience with the hut-loo there, all sorts of stories. And then I got more wind of what's going on and by that stage, through him and through Ian Meiklejohn and his presentations I think both Jacqui and I already had quite a good idea of what the island was like before we came down.

Q: So describe the team preparations for the year. Especially for you two that has been down for the previous round and then this round.

BvdM: The previous round was Quite interesting [laughing]. For the largest part we stayed very close together, we had a little house there in Melkbosstrand. Two houses that were actually Quite close by that the team... rented for the team. It was actually very nice.

Q: So it was rented for the team?

JD: It was organised by the team leader.

Q: Oh ok, so it wasn't from DEAT's side?

BvdM: Well it was from their side, but we organised it. So that was Quite nice, cooking meals together already, socialising. It was right next to the beach so we started bonding, very close... It was very nice then as opposed to now, because we had our accommodation right up to the day before departure. So we basically left from... Yes?

JD: Sorry, no, we had a week between the end of team training and departure that was not covered by DEAT, that we had time to spend with our respective friends and family.

Q: That was the same for this trip as well.

BvdM: Last time? For 64? Oh.

JD: It maybe wasn't a full week but it was quite a while. Because I remember, I spent time with my family and I remember Asanda was trying to get a ticket up to East-London to go visit her family just before departure and to get it paid by DEAT. So we weren't all together before we left. It was a few days, 4 days, 5 days that we had with family before we left.

Q: What exactly did the team preparations entail? What did you have to do?

JD: It was Quite interesting for us, for 64, because it was the first time they moved the, ja, I don't know if ever, but at least from Pretoria down to Cape Town. So that was a little bit disorganised, unfortunately for us. They were sort of just trying out new places where they could build the team training. The fire fighting seems to have stuck in the same place so we did that in the same place this time around as well so that was Quite nice. They're very organised there. Same for the first-aid, we did that in the same place both years and I think the cooking was the only thing that changed. It was done somewhere a bit shady for our first year and it wasn't very well organised in the sense that they wanted to teach us to make salad and things like that, so it wasn't very well organised or they weren't very well informed. But the second time around, now, it was Quite nice, because it's done through Pick 'n Pay in Cape Town and they do a very nice course over two days and they know that we don't have certain ingredients on the island so they fit it in, and they give us recipes where they leave out certain things we don't have, so that's Quite nice. My impression in, just sort of three teams difference, the first time around it was Quite interesting because we didn't have things like Facebook back then. So the team actually didn't know each other at all and we first met on the first day of training, so that was quite interesting. Different, because post Facebook everyone kind of got to know each other via Facebook and made friends and at least you sort of knew what the person looked like, knew a little bit about them and chatted to them a little bit. It was a different vibe in that sense between the different teams. I suppose this has changed and technology changes, so there's always going to be something different each time. But that was quite, in terms of just team dynamics and how it all started out, it was different for the two different times.

BvdM: It helped a lot as well now with Facebook, I mean organising stuff for the team beforehand was a bit more easy to do, in theory at least. There's still some hiccups but it's a lot easier than trying to do stuff, for example the badges. When we got basically 64's, the badge was

already designed. It was actually incorrectly designed because it had the wrong island on the badge. Prince Edward. And Jacqui actually pointed it out. And then it was also, “No, no, it’s not Prince Edward.” And then she actually showed them “No, it is Prince Edward Island.”

JD: They were like “No, we’ve just twisted it a bit.” And I’m like “No, you haven’t.” [laughing] That’s the wrong island!

BvdM: So Jacqui actually drew the badge, the island, last minute for us. But now, with Facebook, everybody made design ideas prior to that and then the first day of training, you know the briefing when everybody got together at DEAT, we had a vote quickly on which badge to use. So it’s nice in that example. Also, it’s nice I think, in terms of... Tristan may be able to say more on this, for people coming on the island for the first time, then people talk about what to bring and that sort of stuff.

JD: *Ja*, because we basically had no communication in our first team before team training between each other, unless you knew the person prior to...

TS: *Ja*, because Jacqui wrote a giant list of everything you could possibly need. [laughing] We already knew a lot beforehand.

Q: So, for your specific jobs, what preparation did you have to do, have to make?

BvdM: Well, for ours, because we’ve done that before, preparation for this year it was just making sure that the equipment was in order that we were going to be needing, some scheduling regarding plans on what we want to achieve and that sort of stuff. So it was pretty much, from the actual requirements for the work we were going to do, it was a lot easier than the first time around. Seeing as it’s a continuation of what we’d done in the past. It was a little bit chaotic, as things go a lot of stuff that needed to be done last minute, getting the supplies and... but its basic stuff, it’s like duct tape and batteries and that sort of stuff. Besides that the preparations was pretty easy and straight forward.

TS: The hold at the MRI, a few days, I think it is 4 days, a course where they just give presentations and lectures on what to expect, what the work is going to be like. It doesn’t actually prepare you; you still have no clue afterwards. You have a bit of an idea, but... You can’t really, until takeover, you have no clue, you’re a duck in the water.

Q: Do you guys think the preparation, for example the fire fighting as well as specific preparations: did it help at all?

BvdM: It helped in theory, so you can get an understanding, but the fire fighting... the teach you to use equipment that’s not available on the island so that’s pointless, in a sense.

JD: It now is, we have the proper hoses in the new base, but for the old base we just had normal garden hoses.

BvdM: For the first aid stuff they don't focus really on cold weather injuries. So they don't focus on hypothermia, chill blain, frost bite, trench foot, seal bites. Nothing like that. So they focus on normal first aid, a crash course, so its first aid you do in South Africa. Not really that applicable. They do cover stuff that is applicable; they do CPR, so that's applicable. The cooking first time around, like Jacqui said, was just a total waste, in our first year. The second time around – a lot better I think. They weren't aware of the conditions really involved, but I hear now that with this year's team they actually made a lot of changes to their program which is actually very nice. Ours was also a lot better than the first time around. People were a lot better with... you're literally hands on, so you got there and basically started cooking and she showed you how to make dishes. So in groups, you do this, you do this, you do this. And then everybody starts cooking and she just goes around and helps.

JD: The boardroom meetings we had with DEA and all the members and conservation officers and everything, where they give us information about the island and what it's like – that was nice and satisfactory. In our first year it was actually terrible. I remember the SAWS representative gave us a little presentation on Gough island because he didn't have the Marion island information there, or the slideshow or something. So some things are a bit dodgy every now and then I think, but what I actually would like to see is old islanders, if it is ever possible in any kind of way, to have them give a presentation with team training. Because they would have different experiences, have spent a year there before, and have different slides and different ways of speaking to people and be able to tell them "This is what you'll be able to expect." Whereas you don't really get that from any of the presentations that they give you in the boardroom, because it's from people working in offices who've maybe been there for a takeover but they haven't spent a year before and they don't understand the whole team dynamic for a full year. Or the pressures being placed on the team entirely or exactly what it's going to be like in terms of the different seasons or the challenges that you go to face. Just in terms of physically, with the weather, with all the walking that you do, that's not really of brought across in terms of sort of real world kind of ideas. I think that gets lost in the team training and people are thinking it's so nice, and then they get there and think something different.

Q: So what were your first thoughts on arriving at Marion?

BvdM: Mine was just amazement actually when I saw it for the very first time in 2004. So I was just amazed at this island, it was absolutely exquisite. I remember actually thinking, if I could just have my dad there, just to see this island, just to experience that as well for the first time.

Q: And you Tristan?

TS: I don't remember actually [laughing]. I remember I was shitting myself, but other than that I think it's just too overwhelming the first time.

JD: Mine was very much like Barend's. Just the first time, I was very excited. It looked fantastic and very exciting and wonderful and beautiful. I couldn't wait to get on there.

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

TS: We did, you just have to. They're the ones showing you the ropes – the sealers, anyway. But we didn't spend that much time with them. We kuiered with a few of them at parties and got to know a few of them.

BvdM: Jacqui and I have never taken over from a Geomorphologist on the island, so we've never really spent time with the Geology teams. So we spent time with the team, socialising with the team, besides that pretty much... We spent time with the people that were in the Bird lab, so the people you work around... The birders, we used to spend time with them, chatting with them just because we share the same office space.

JD: But in terms of work... not with the old team, but new team members obviously, because both times we've both had at least one person taking over from us. So, old team members - no, but new team members – yes.

Q: The old teams – what kind of advice did they give you? Did they tell you anything about their experiences?

JD: First time around they told me (the birders told me) to look forward to summer, summer is amazing, it will blow your mind; it won't even be the same island.

Q: Were they right?

JD: Yes, summer is fantastic. Otherwise, I don't know, I can't really think of anything else that was...

BvdM: It was small bits and pieces of advice, not really anything like a real sit down, like "Listen; here's some advice now for the coming year." It was more like little bits of information here and there. They said small stuff like "Enjoy your year, because it's going to be over very fast." Nothing like "Remember, always take your gortex" and that sort of stuff. Nothing like that.

Q: Sealers?

TS: With us, with the work, they were full of advice. Everywhere you walked, with everything you did, they were like "Remember this, this is going to happen." It was too much information, actually, for such a short space of time, but they were helping us every step of the way, telling us this and this.

JD: I suppose it's the same as we do to whoever takes over from us. We do much the same; obviously we just didn't have anyone for us when we arrived.

Q: Moving on to life on the base. Describe the day in the life of a Geomorphologist as you know it.

JD: A lab day or a field day?

Q: Any day you like [laughing]. Both?

BvdM: A normal lab day for me was wake up, get some coffee, sit in the office, check some emails, get despondent because nothing came through [laughing]. And then usually I just start work, doing work that I was busy with the previous day, just continuing with an analysis I was doing the previous day or just some GIS stuff. And then lunch, back to the office. But lunch, usually for me, was something Quick. Every now and then we would make something big, but then it's just back to the office and then dinner. A field day you usually get up in the morning, also a Quick breakfast, and then go to the field and take something along as well for the field.

JD: Ja, lab days, if you're doing something, like if you're working with loggers or something, downloading or... it'll be much the same time scale but it will be just different activities. Like programming loggers, downloading loggers, preparing the setup for them. And also reading papers as well, research, literature reviews, things like that, or writing the papers. And in the field lots of walking to get up to a high elevation to do the work above vegetation. About 4,5 hours depending. In our first year when we were initially setting up sites, we would work for sometimes 10 hours straight, and we would come back just before it was completely dark. It just depends, from time to time, and what you're busy with during the year. We don't have a breeding season, our breeding season really is sort of I guess take-over. We work very much on annual data sets. So our most important time is the beginning and the end of the year. So then we're the most busy of all, collecting the data from the loggers and reprogramming them and all of that as well. During the year it's just the monthly checks of all the sites and recording the data there.

Q: And for you guys?

TS: Mostly in the field. And I suppose it depends on what time of the year it is. From when you get there, the program has been running for so long, your entire year is basically planned and set for you, what you do on each day. So you just do what's set out for you on that day, whatever it is, you do it, no matter what and that's it.

Q: So you walk in, come rain or...

TS: Ja, no matter what. It's cool, it's tough, but it's nice having stuff set out for you, I think, sometimes.

JD: That's where we differ. I think both Barend and I have the responsibility of organising our own personal schedules for work. So we do that once a month, as planning of what we need to do. But of course, if my sites for instance are covered in snow I can't do my work. So if I plan to do a certain site on that day it has to be shifted a bit forwards or backwards, or depending... So we have to kind of juggle things around a bit to get out of the bad weather times, like when there's snow on the ground.

Q: So what are the challenges living on an island like that?

JD: [Laughing] Three fold. Mental, physical and emotional.

TS: Social as well...

JD: Ja, I think that's all linked to both being out in the field as well as being in base and having a team that you now need to get to know and need to get on with and maintain relationships, all under a really stressful environment really. And in the field obviously, if you have to go from A to B and you're doing it in whatever weather it is. No matter how difficult it is you know that you have to do that. Halfway, when you're really tired when the weather is even worse than it was to start off with, I always feel that it's probably 70% mental and 30% physical when it comes to that. Because if you mentally give up in the field, you can't do this, you struggle so much, it's sometimes impossible, people do give up. There are so many challenges.

BvdM: Also, social dynamics change so quickly on the island. You get to know people and you spend so much time with them, if you take your best friend down you will end up being irritated with each other at some point or multiple points. I remember, for example, with Jacqui and myself, I was stirring my cup of coffee, because I wanted to make sure everything was... ja.

JD: Bear in mind this was in a very small hut, because this was still the old huts were not much bigger than this room, if bigger at all actually, actually this size. And he would just continue stirring, self-professed, that his arm would get sore doing this, tired from stirring. So eventually one day I couldn't handle it and I told him to stop it. [laughing] No more stirring – once or twice, that's it.

BvdM: Small stuff that can really just start... I mean you're already stressed, you're tired, physically exhausted from work or whatever and then... small stuff... people making funny throat noises when their sleep and then wake you up...

TS: Small things that usually wouldn't bother you.

Q: So would you say that people lose perspective on the island?

JD: Not that they lose perspective but I think that, because all the noise of life if you will, all the major things happening around you all the time, the big rush of life and all those things get taken away completely, and it's a very simple, basic lifestyle. Then all these smaller things that are really swept aside and really not important in your normal life back in South Africa – those become issues, because now you don't have anything else. So those are the things that become important, those are the things that become big dramas or whatever else. There's always like an issue over the phone or who gets to play what music when. And they're little things that really aren't issues back home but they become major issues and points where people have big fights over, that normally wouldn't be. So it's not a loss of perspective, but just different kind of perspective.

BvdM: Totally. Because back home if you work and you go home, you're not going home with your colleagues, everybody into to your room. With the guy that comes to fix (the handyman) and all of that. You don't bring all of them to your house after work. Here you live with everybody. Like the issue with the cup and stirring, that's not first time around "Oh, please can you stop doing that". This is now building up over a period of time so small stuff that build up and you just at some point get tired of this, and you say "Listen, please, can you just"...

Q: Is that how you deal with it? How do you deal with it?

BvdM: Well, that's very individual-specific.

JD: Also, even if it's person-specific it's also just sort of time-specific. So sometimes you're more stressed than other times so you might snap at one point but other times you might handle it better. It really just fluctuates I think, depends on the mood and what's happening.

BvdM: It depends on the issue. If it's a team issue, in other words if a lot of people are starting to complain about it, then it's usually a team meeting and it just gets addressed, then people talk about it. If it's small things between individuals they sort it out themselves, preferably, and then like Jacqui says it depends on the overall situation how it happens. Some people don't say anything and then sort of like just brood about something for a long period of time and then it gets settled afterwards, after everybody gets upset because they're behaving strange...

JD: Which makes things so much worse... After everybody gets involved...

BvdM: So some people just say straight out "Listen, I don't like this, this and this".

JD: Communication is really such a very important thing when you live in such a small, isolated community. And I think that isn't really brought forward in the team training and I think many people kind of don't know how important it is until they experience it. Many people seem to leave going "Wow, communication is such a big thing and it's so important", but they didn't really apply it until they learnt their lesson in kind of the hard way, it seems. Not necessarily all the cases are like that, but some seem to be.

BvdM: The sad thing is, you can tell people as much, as Tristan says, how it's like on the island and what's important. People know inherently communication is important but, until you're there in the thick of it, you don't realise what these things actually mean, you don't realise the implications of these sorts of things. I mean it's easy enough to talk beforehand. "Guys, remember to talk to each other" and that sort of stuff. That all is actually just words, it doesn't really mean anything until the person is there in the situation and they see "Okay, whoa, now I understand these things".

Q: Okay, but what are sort of the kinds of issues that you guys had to deal with in the team, especially now in the meetings?

TS: We don't really have a lot, nothing major.

BvdM: Ja, we don't have a lot of issues.

JD: Ja nothing major.

BvdM: I'm trying to think now of major issues that we have. We had some stuff, discussions regarding cleaning the kitchen after meals, you know some people wanted to at one stage say "Okay, the person who is on kitchen duty cleans all the pots afterwards as well". A large portion of people preferred that just the old way that - everybody that just had the meal goes and helps clean, because then it's over and done with Quickly, you don't have to worry about it. So that was not really issue-issue as such, it was open for discussion. Ag and then small stuff like people not washing dishes properly and...

JD: Leaving messes.

BvdM: Or leaving messes.

JD: Not cleaning up after themselves.

BvdM: Ja, not replacing stuff when it's finished or for example leaving dishes in the fridge, you know, leaving a little something on the dish, leaving it there and like I said not cleaning properly and those sorts of things, so...

Q: Ah, what made living on the island worthwhile?

JD: Everything that's outside [laughing].

BvdM: Ja, for me it's very much just a lifestyle, I mean it's a small com... A very small community, but for the most part you don't have to worry about a lot of things. I mean you don't have to be concerned, first of all that you're going to get robbed [laughing] or something. If something is, if you misplace something you will find it. It's not like somebody is going to jack it and just make off with it. I mean you're going to find it and ja... I mean the outside area is also... I mean the island itself makes coming here worthwhile, being able to experience something like that. *Jeez ou (?)*, it's bit of a complex thing to explain.

JD: Ja, I've always loved the, just like Barend said, the lifestyle and it is so safe you don't have the stresses that you would have normally back home. You also don't have to worry about money and things like that unless, of course, you have bills to pay back home, but otherwise in the meantime... But otherwise you know on the island you don't have any of those worries at all, so you just do what you need to do and get on with it. And of course you have that, I mean beautiful island, and all those wonderful animals and the outside and to be able to just go on a walk and... and see any of those whenever you want to. It's just wonderful. And just to see all of that just even within just your own field of study and to have examples of things that you've only really learned about in varsity and textbooks and lectures. To actually now see it first hand and discover these creatures in the field while you're walking, ah that's amazing and exciting. And then also of course all the different

animals and too, as the... We were lucky in a sense that we had a round island once a month. So we got to see how the island changed through the season and all the different areas and how they were changed and how the vegetation changed and the different animals and their breeding cycles and everything so that was really ,really Quite nice.

Q: What I know is you specifically had a lot of interaction with the animals, but what was your general interaction with animals, like you having animal stories? [laughing]

JD: Which one of the ones where you nearly died...

Q: Ja tell us one of those.

TS: Ja there were so many, but ja it is... It's very dangerous you have to watch yourself and each other, each other's backs all the time. Because they are wild animals and they can be unpredictable, the fur seals and the elephant seals. The one that freaked me out the most I think was... we were on a beach, Sealer's beach, during breeding season.

Q: When's that?

TS: Starts in kind of September-ish into November. And the animals are very, very aggressive then and the adult bulls are most the aggressive at that time. But females are also pretty aggressive. But usually you watch the bull because he thinks you are intruding on his harem and you're a threat and he wants to kill you. He tries and he's fast but this time, this particular one was a female and we were checking tags and Hugh and Jean were screaming at me. I thought they were screaming at me because they thought I was checking a tag that they had already checked, but it was a female that was...

JD: Charging...

TS: Coming, charging me from behind and she took me by the backpack and shook me around like a rag doll. For quite a while I tried to get away from her and she eventually let me go, I escaped away, that was it was insane [laughing].

Q: Jislaaik...

TS: But ja, ja there's lots of stories like that. Just every time a beach master chases you, you have to run, and you don't fall and that's the thing. And sometimes you fall and it's so close sometimes, so close, a second this way or that way and you'd be dead.

Q: So were you actually ever been bitten?

TS: The only actual bite that I got was a little pup bite on our very last pup weigh at the end of the... [laughing]

Q: So like recent?

TS: Ja very recent, ja. Nothing serious. Jean got bitten by adult fur seals females Quite a few times ja. Ja but nothing, no serious injuries, just near death experiences.

- Q:** Do you ever jump over the seals, those kinds of things, I've seen photographs of people doing that.
- TS:** Ja, oh you mean for fun, oh ja...
- Q:** I heard you do, you try and ride, ride the seals?
- TS:** I've surfed one...
- Q:** Oh yes...
- TS:** I surfed on one ja. That was, that was cool. Right at the end of breeding season, it was our very last day of breeding season on Ship's Cove, I sat on his tale and he flung me up, it was fun.
- Q:** [Laughing] Okay, so did you have any interaction with any of the other bases? Gough, SANAE, any international ones?
- JD:** SANAE phoned a few times, that's about it. I think Pierre spoke a lot to Gough Island and once they had their change-over in September he had a friend actually that was a radio tech at Gough so they spoke a lot more. So I think it was really only personal communication between people who knew each other.
- TS:** Ja, I had a friend, a drunk friend.
- JD:** Roger...
- TS:** Roger, we were at university together, we didn't, we were at primary school together, we didn't really know each other at varsity and then he heard that I was on the island so every time he got pissed on SANAE, he would phone [laughing].
- Q:** Ok, now you had quite a rough year because you had to move base and DEA... the construction workers were over there. Firstly what was your interaction like with the PWD guys?
- JD:** Well I think... they've, well there's always been a large group of PWD ever since I've been involved in the program from 2006, so I knew Quite a few of them. So I mean, for me personally it was fine because it was just the usual greetings and a few chats here and there with some of the people that I knew better than others. I think that the team as a whole it was probably a very negative experience. During our first year, 2007, Barend and I had a full year construction team, so that's also where we got to know some of the construction members a bit better. To be on a first name basis. But ja, for this year I think it was, it was nice for the first three months not to have anybody there and then it was a bit of... well it was a very big sort of interruption to have, for three months to have people coming over and... I think it was even worse the fact that we had to then move at the same time. So with all the packing and all this extra duties that we were expected to do. it was a bit chaotic when it came the workload that you wanted to do your own work but you also had to come help out at base a lot. So that was I think very stressful and it was also during

the breeding season. And really, I know the sealers and some of the birds as well, so I think that was very difficult for those field assistants to get their labs and things in order for moving over. And then I think just PWD in general its, it's not a bad relationship with team members but I think there's always certain individuals in both sides that have issues with individuals on both sides. So I think it's more a case of that.

Q: Oh, ok, and for you guys? How was your interaction?

TS: *Ja*, it's not too bad because we, especially during breeding season, during that time we're not there often but *ja*... The move was very hectic because we had to be in the new base and in the new office by the last day of our breeding season, so we really didn't have time to do it. A lot of people helped us with that luckily, but *ja* it was absolute chaos.

BvdM: *Ja*, but the thing is, Quite like Jacqui says, you get team relationships and you get individual relationships so on some individual basis you know the relationship was ok, but the team as a whole I think there was quite a bit of room for improvement on both teams' side. I mean the, one of the main things is also, common grounds of interest are so wildly different between the PWD guys and team members, just because of backgrounds and why you are on the island, no not why, but what's your purpose on the island, that's the thing. So there's... And I think just because the time itself was chaos, I mean there was continuously, not conflicting, but... we would hear one thing and then plans would change and this would change and that would change so it's very chaotic at that time and that I think upset quite much, very much the overall routine that had already been well established by that stage. It was very much upset now and then obviously it caused a little bit of confrontation, but nothing open like huge confrontation between teams.

JD: *Ja*, showdowns.

BvdM: *Ja* showdowns, it needed to be addressed, but little bit of, you know feelings, tension which we also...

JD: But, I also think, ah, I wanted to say something, he and I forgot it now, I might be just able to grab it again.

Q: That's fine. So how do you think the dynamics changed from being in the old base to suddenly being in this huge new building, team dynamics?

BvdM: Social it was a huge change. In the old days you had one lounge and a bar, that was the common socialising area.

TS: It was just in the middle of the whole place...

BvdM: Exactly, in the middle of the whole place so in a sense, certain sense it was easy to track people down when they were socialising or when you were looking for somebody on base you could find people quite easy. Now with the new social setup you've got the braai-area which is separate from the bar area which is separate from the games area in a certain sense. I mean they are still, those things are still close to each other, but now you've got

the smokers' lounge with the movie lounge and the VIP lounge which are very separate, so, you can actually, and I mean we saw it in our team, that certain people tend to prefer certain areas.

Q: Areas, ok...

BvdM: Areas, excuse me, for socialising and that sort of thing. So I think that could be quite interesting from the new team, the current team specific, because we still had a very good dynamic going because we had the first experience, the old base. So the team socialised a lot from the beginning and I think that helped us quite through the rest. It will be interesting to see the new teams because... Separate how their social dynamic forms. Lifestyle was very different... like I said just in terms of tracking people down, you could track people down quite easily in the old base. In the new base it's very hard. The living area is also a different setup. I mean you often get people just chatting in the old base, you know there in the corridor and people just stand in the doorway, and just kuier and just chat to each other and that sort of stuff. Whereas in the new base its very much you walk in and it's a quiet area it's not really that much...

Q: ...Going on.

BvdM: ...Socialising going on, you know, new living quarters whereas the old living quarters still, it's like an informal area where you just... Where you hear people talking and that sort of stuff and you just join in and it will be like an informal just chatting session.

Q: What was the most difficult thing about your year, your years for you two?

TS: The work, physical, mental work during the breeding season, and nothing can quite prepare you for that and it is the hardest thing I've ever done. I don't think I'll ever do anything that difficult again. Ja, that's what Nico says before you go on the island, he says "you've never worked this hard before and you'll probably never work this hard again," it's just, it's insane. And before it started we were like, it's not so bad but it gets that bad, but it's rewarding at the end of it. Anyway, no matter how tough it gets or how difficult it is, it's very, very rewarding because once you've completed something like that then...

Q: And for you guys?

BvdM: For me it's quite different, my first time around isolation got me. The fact being separated and that sort of thing from everything I knew back home sort of like got me at around about September, I started to take a lot of strain in that regard, that I didn't have the second time around. The second time around I think the most difficult thing was just overall social dynamics. Where certain things would change and... just interaction with people in general.

Q: Especially because you lost a team member and you got new team members.

BvdM: It wasn't as weird as I thought it would be. I think we were actually quite fortunate that we got somebody like Greg, who came in and was an old islander as well. So he was aware of

that the dynamics do function and he has a certain idea of how team dynamics form, function. So I think he is very much, because he's aware of this... It's the same with Chris. Chris came down. Also an old islander. He knows by this stage teams are very much well set so they didn't force, they sort of slid into... So, fortunately as I say, it could've been a lot worse than it was. But the interaction between team members wasn't that bad. The difficult thing was just moving and just getting everything sorted to move, that was a very stressful part for everybody I think. Especially when you try to get stuff done and... from PWD side as well, they expect certain things. When they were working, they didn't always have the resources needed to fix certain things so then they needed to go and improvise so from their side they were stressed about that. Our side was stressed because plans kept changing. So we knew we had to move at a certain stage, but certain things needed to be done earlier, and then it's like "Oh ok, now all of a sudden we have to do this?" And then they just made things quite stressful. We all knew that it had to be moved at some stage, everybody knows that this base needs to be moved across to the other side. But certain things... as they were finishing up, they'll say again "we're ready for these things now, these things now, these things now...".

JD: It was very... very unsettling; they wanted to add that earlier as well. I think between DPW and the team there was a little bit of a... a lack of understanding between the two.

Q: Would you say a lack of communication?

JD: There definitely was, especially with this trip, with the move. For instance, they wouldn't tell us that certain things were going to be removed from base. And we'd get back from the field and everything would be different. And we'd have no idea that it was going to happen and it would just be... different. They would just remove stuff and take stuff. I think it's because, back home that wouldn't be an issue, because your life is your life. People aren't changing your house. It was like... And I know that DEA members don't like people, team members, saying that Marion is their home and the house is their home, but that's how you feel about it. And I think it is very unsettling and it's a lack of understanding probably largely in DEA and as well as PWD, that team members do identify with Marion and the houses being their home and it is your home for that year.

So I think it is a positive thing too, to look at it that way in terms of looking after the building itself. But because there's that lack of understanding, what happens is that they take it for granted that it's fine to just move things around and change things without saying anything because it doesn't matter. But it really does, because it's more of an emotional thing, and more of a mental thing for the team members living there. All of a sudden it's like you go to work one day and you come home and someone's moved your bathroom around and put in a shower where there was a bath, or something like that which is very unsettling for people. So I think from that aspect, not understanding how unsettling things were... It was difficult.. To live for at least one of the three months that was part of the move because I think things were very just chaotic... And there was a big

lack of communication between the different sides of what was going, what was happening, which we did address, because it was a problem and communication did get better so that was fine. So that was a very big challenge this year. The first year, I cannot remember what my biggest challenge was. But I think... sometimes the monotony can be a little bit challenging in terms of repetitive field work. As well as, you always go to the same place to have a social time. So you have to make the effort to then mix it around and sort of change things and have a party where you dress up different just so you cannot get stuck in a rut and that's sort of very much the same, so I think ja...

Q: What are your favourite places on the island?

JD: Mixed Pickle... and Katedraal and Swartkops and I think Rook's would've been if I'd spent more time there because it's very pretty, it's very beautiful. But definitely Mixed Pickle and Katedraal.

Q: Ja, we were amazed by all the extra condiments and things and flowers [laughing].

BvdM: My favourite I suppose was Water Tunnel, I love that area. Water Tunnel valley is absolutely beautiful for me. And there's a little spot, on one of Jacqui's sites, on the interior side of Theo, an absolutely beautiful scenic area with grey lava, black lava, scoria and vegetation. It's all just inter-mixed in this mosaic, it's absolutely... I always hope for good weather at that spot, but usually it's not good weather, visibility is crap at that spot.

JD: Three out of fifteen times it's... [laughing]

BvdM: But when it does open up, I mean *dis die middelman*, it's just absolutely beautiful, this vista that you see and that's definitely one of my favourite spots. Water Tunnel as well...

Q: What do you think are misconceptions about the island?

BvdM: Misconceptions are actually what it's like, in terms of conditions...

JD: Working conditions and the weather...

BvdM: And then I think, I can't remember who said it, I think it was an old islander, for some reason I think it is Genevieve but I don't think she said it, but it's "People take photos on good days". All the photos you see are of the good days, it's nice you know, might be cloudy, but it's not absolute crap weather that you get. So people see these pictures...

JD: They form an impression...

BvdM: Ja, you get this completely different impression. And obviously, a picture can't actually show you the environment that you're feeling. You can't feel the ice wind creeping up from behind, low temperatures, the wind pumping...

Q: The VIP Voyage, quickly tell me about that. How it's like to get all these important people suddenly arrive there and you now have to...

- JD:** It was overwhelming for me, actually, because it was all these strange people. Because usually if it's like a takeover you know some of the people so it's a bit better. What our team did very well is we herded nicely together, huddled on one side.
- Q:** Yes, I noticed it. [laughing]
- JD:** So ja, safety in numbers for sure. It was very, more nerve-wracking than some of the other little interruptions. Because it was totally different, we didn't know what to expect.
- BvdM:** It's a different vibe. It was a lot more strict and formal, just because of the personnel that came around. It was very stressful in the sense of, because there's so many reporters, and Environmental Affairs has a very strict policy regarding our interaction with reporters, with the media, so that was also quite stressful in terms of...
- Q:** Did they sort of tell you to stay stuff or not say things?
- BvdM:** Well they've got policies; they've got a set of guidelines on what not to say. You know like never say stuff like "off the record" or "no comment" and that sort of stuff. Just because, from personal experience, the press, Jacqui has even more experience with that than me. The press take things out of context very easily. I mean, they've got an angle that they want to work at; beforehand they decide that's the angle I want on this story. So they'll talk to you and take snippets, it's like "Ok, I can use this, this is boring, this is boring". You have to be very careful talking to the media in general about what to say. And stuff like "no comment" – they won't see "no comment" as "I don't want to talk about this issue". They would see "no comment" immediately as something sinister going on. So if you don't have the background in that: don't talk about it. For example, if they want to talk about something with the construction of the base – we weren't involved in the construction so we'll say "Rather talk to so and so and so about the construction, I can talk to you about the rocks if you want or Tristan can talk to you about the seals". It's fairly logical and straightforward things. But now all of a sudden you have to take all of these things into consideration when you talk to people. What can I say to the press if I just talk at the bar to somebody of the press about whatever?
- JD:** That was a bit scary. We were also sharing with the press, so we weren't sure now can we speak like candidly to them when we're in rooms with them?
- Q:** So like socially awkward?
- JD:** Ja, especially because my roommate also just wanted to talk to me now about all these questions and things. And you don't know: is this going to be used like an informal interview? Must I not say anything? So we had to just be very much on our toes.
- Q:** Do you think the base is important? Do you think it's important that South Africa has a base there? Why?
- BvdM:** Well, from a research perspective, absolutely yes. Just from the benefits of doing Earth Science research on the island, there's no area in South Africa that you can do that...

JD: On that scale – definitely not.

TS: And that’s that pristine...

BvdM: So research perspective – absolutely. Politically I think we also have to be there. I’m not sure exactly how the treaties work, whether there has to be an occupation party on the island in order for it to maintain South African territory. Weather wise I’m not that sure. I’ve heard that it’s not. I’ve heard that a station like Gough is a lot more important for South African weather directly. But Marion is still very vital in terms of understanding global weather systems, but in terms of projecting South Africa’s weather I don’t think it’s that crucial.

Q: Lastly: describe Marion.

BvdM: [laughing] It’s so almost impossible.

JD: There are not enough words in any languages.

BvdM: It’s just difficult to know where to start. I mean, it’s so many sensations and stuff. You can talk about the nice aspects – it’s beautiful, pristine. And then you get the nice, or the horrible weather days where you actually just wish... It’s almost like a personified island. As this heinous creature, this moody person...

JD: ...That hates you! [laughing]

BvdM: Ja, it’s absolutely wonderful. And sometimes it’s just this hateful person. It’s almost like the island wants to see if it can break you. Just when you think you’ve got control over things, the island is like “you haven’t experienced anything, let me just give you a little bit of a taste.” And then the first stuff comes through and if you can handle that the island goois you a big one.

JD: Barend and I were quite, I suppose jokingly, superstitious in our first year, more so than our second year. Always, whenever there was a lot of wind or it was sunny or something, or if the wind wasn’t that bad or something, we’d never say something like “oh, thank goodness it’s not raining” or something like that. We were too scared to mention anything about anything like that just in case it started raining. Because usually, that’s what would happen. If you mention anything the wind would start blowing and the rain would start coming. There’s a stamp with this phrase on it, and I’m not sure if it comes from somewhere else, but “jewel of the Southern Ocean” and I think that’s a nice fitting...

BvdM: A diamond in the rough! [laughing]

JD: Depending if it’s sunny!

Q: And for you Tristan?

TS: Ja, they said it all, really. It’s something that’s so hard to describe to people, really is.

JD: And it kind of feels like a home away from home, for me at this stage personally. Because I go there once a year and having spent two years there, you do identify it as a place... When I came back the second year I look outside and I think "oh, I'm home again". So for me it's something personally very special.

TS: I suppose in the beginning... I didn't enjoy it in the beginning. It's very tough if you haven't experienced something like that. The island was the enemy in the beginning and in the end it was home, completely.

Q: Is there anything you guys would like to add?

JD: No, I don't think so.

Q: Okay, thanks!