

# Bergy Bits

## The Newsletter of the Friends of Antarctica

### One more Museum exhibit

Another item has been added to the Radio Room display at Port Lockroy. A FIDS ex-army Wireless Set 68 originally recovered from Rothera some years ago by Dave Burkitt had, by this time, been 'degutted' and rebuilt into a sledging box to make stowing simple and secure when on sledging field trips.



The 68 set in the sledging box

However, this format did not represent usage at Port Lockroy. Here, in its original army issue metal casing, it was taken on occasional overland field trips and very many boat journeys for use in emergency. '68 Sets' and sister units the WS18's, had been in use at Base 'A' right from 'Operation Tabarin' days until the Base closed. Powered by dry battery packs about the size of a small loaf of bread, this meant someone had a lumpy companion in his sleeping bag, to keep it warm should communications be required next day.

Refurbishment and rebuilding of the

transmitter and receiver took six weeks, made easier by the Royal Navy Radar and Communications Museum, who donated a replacement meter. However, finding an original replacement case was a much greater problem. After nearly five years of unsuccessful searching, this was resolved by Graham Rumsey who arranged for the REME Radio Museum to kindly donate a virtually unused case. At long last, a '68 Set' is back helping to show how Base 'A' appeared fifty years ago.

The writer of this piece and restorer of the set along with many other artefacts at Port Lockroy is the erstwhile Base Leader overwintering in 1955/56, Alan Carroll. Alan has just been awarded the Polar Medal as a tribute to his years of dedicated and painstaking work on the history of Port Lockroy.



The set in place in the radio room at Port Lockroy

### Tribute to our Vice Patron

In the last issue of Bergy Bits we reported the 50th Anniversary of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition. Expedition leader and erstwhile Vice Patron of the Trust Sir Vivian Fuchs died eight years ago. Now leader of the Ross Sea Party and our Vice Patron, Sir Edmund Hillary has died aged 88. Sir Edmund is perhaps best known for his mountaineering.

In 1951, he joined Eric Shipton's reconnaissance to the south side of Everest. He returned again in 1952 to explore Cho Oyu.

But on the 29th May 1953 at 11.30am, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay realised the achievement of what was the culmination of dozens of years of effort by various British teams: to stand on the summit of Mount Everest.

Sir Edmund Hillary continued to explore. As part of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition he reached the South Pole overland just over 50 years ago in 1958. His party was the third to reach the pole after Amundsen and Scott. Sir Edmund was Vice Patron of the UKAHT since its inception in 1993.

### Gift of a Lifetime....

Please consider leaving a gift to support our work in your will. Your legacy could make a real difference by helping us to continue to protect British Antarctic Heritage both in Antarctica and the UK. If you would like more information on how to make a bequest please contact Rachel Morgan at the address below.

### Port Lockroy season

The Port Lockroy team is now on its way home from another very busy season. Our thanks go Rick, Helen and Rachel for their continuous hard work and to those that have supported the Trust in the operation of Port Lockroy: Abercrombie and Kent, HMS Endurance, Hurtigruten, Lindblad Expeditions, Quark, Saga Shipping, Eat Natural, Jeldwen, Skye Systems, Tog 24.

And finally, many thanks to Capital International Limited, who has donated £3500 towards the work of UKAHT. This grant was backed by Kate Neville, who recently visited Port Lockroy and returned to the UK and submitted a grant application to her company's charity committee to support our work.



### Saving Scott's Hut at Cape Evans – Campaign Update

#### Friends of Antarctica Appeal

First and foremost, thank you to the many individual members of the UKAHT who responded with characteristic generosity to the appeal circulated by our Chairman Philippa Foster Back, for which we are particularly grateful. As you know an anonymous foundation recently promised to match funds raised worldwide £1 for £1 (up to £1 million). As a result, each gift we receive can achieve twice as much.

#### Thank You To...

We would also like to thank the following for their generous support since our last newsletter: Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust, Trevor Estate (which is linked with the former family firm of Humphreys & Co which supplied Shackleton's hut erected at Cape Royds for his 1907-09 expedition) and Threadneedle Pensions.

#### Scott's Expedition Tea at Tesco

Since November, *Captain Scott's Strong Tea For Heroes* with its distinctive packaging has been on the shelves of Tesco's main supermarkets. For every pack sold, the UKAHT will receive 5p towards the project. We hope you will switch your tea-drinking loyalties to this brand, and encourage your friends to do the same.

#### Funds Still Needed

Even with the generous match funding offer we still need to raise £900,000 ourselves to support the urgent work to save Scott's Hut.

If you would like to make a donation please send it to: UKAHT (Scott Appeal), Kingcoed Farm, Usk, NP15 1DS, UK. Or make a donation online at [www.ukaht.org](http://www.ukaht.org).

We are in touch with a large number of further companies and trusts which we have identified as possible donors. Wish us luck!

#### Update on work in the Ross Sea

Shovelling tons of snow and ice from around Scott's Hut at Cape Evans was the first task facing the conservation team, in the latest summer work programme 2007-08 on Ross Island. This was the beginning of the substantive programme of work to preserve Captain Scott's Cape Evans hut. The work is expected to take about five years to complete.

Once this snow was cleared the team excavated Bowers' Annexe, and dug out ice from under the hut's wooden floor. They then set about improving the water-proofing of the southern and eastern walls of the hut. The exterior cladding was first removed. Then an aluminium dam was installed, which sinks 200mm into the ground, and extends 400mm up the wall. Next a breathable waterproof membrane was applied to the entire face of the wall, followed by a further waterproof membrane lining three-quarters of the wall. Finally the original exterior cladding was reapplied. That should keep the damp out!

The window in the southern wall near to the science lab is known to be an incorrect modern replacement. This was removed, and replaced with a historically accurate window frame.

Of the 8,000 artefacts, the specialist team conserved some 500 items, mostly glass, on site at Cape Evans. Around 750 further artefacts were returned to the dedicated laboratory at New Zealand's Scott Base, where a team of four international conservators has already arrived. They will over-winter there, and while away the long months of darkness conserving these artefacts.

Most of the conservation work on Sir Ernest Shackleton's hut at Cape Royds has now been completed. The conservation team carried out some routine maintenance on this hut, and also some work on artefacts at the site, including repairs and conservation of wooden venesta boxes in the stables area.



### Gone but not forgotten

You cannot have missed the news that 'the little Red Ship' the Linblad Explorer, later called the Explorer, sank last November in Antarctica, writes our Vice Patron, Lady Philippa Scott.

She was the dream ship built in 1969 by Lars Eric Lindblad for the purpose of taking ordinary people on natural history orientated expeditions to faraway wilderness places. The first of her kind.

In 1971 Peter was invited to be a tour guide and lecturer on a voyage to the Seychelles. That was the first of many expeditions, over 20 in all. I was invited too, to help look after the passengers. With our daughter Dafila we went to the Ross Sea area in 1973 and landed at Scott's and Shackleton's huts. She was the first passenger ship to pass through the famous North West Passage in 1984 and was certainly no ordinary cruise ship.

She boasted a dedicated and regular passenger list, who enjoyed sailing from one end of the globe to the other to see the wonders of polar bears to penguins and coral fish in between.

It was very sad to hear she sank, but the bottom of the Antarctic seas are a much more appropriate and romantic place for her than the ship-breakers yard.

## Face-lift for the Reclus Hut

*Reproduced courtesy of Penguin News – the newsletter of the Falkland Islands and written by Leona Roberts of the Falkland Islands Museum & National Trust.*

The Museum's Reclus Hut is fit for purpose again thanks to the support of the Trust and the work of Hugh Marsden.

The condition of the hut had deteriorated badly since it was rebuilt in the Museum grounds in 1998 and in November Hugh volunteered to carry out the much-needed work. The majority of the roofing felt cover had to be taken off and replaced, and a coating of bitumen paint was needed to make the building once again watertight.

It was the proceeds from the shop at Port Lockroy, run by the UKAHT since 2006, that enabled the donation which covered the cost of these repairs.

Prefabricated in Stanley, the refuge was originally erected on 7 December 1956 at Portal Point on the Reclus Peninsula by the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS) and closed in 1958.

Following the conservation survey commissioned by the FCO in 1994 (which at the same time recommended the designation of Port Lockroy, Wordie, Stonington and Horseshoe), the Reclus Hut was offered to the Falklands Museum. Shortly afterwards it was carefully dismantled and returned to Stanley where it was rebuilt in the Museum grounds.

The hut contains many of its original contents as well as contemporary equipment provided by the British Antarctic Survey, and tells the fascinating story of a team of FIDS who over-wintered there in 1957.

### *A refuge in a desolate place.*

In late 1956 a FIDS team was landed at Cape Reclus to find a suitable route and lay supply depots for a dog sledge party from Hope Bay that would attempt the first crossing of the Antarctic Peninsula.

Ray McGowan, Denis Kershaw and Dick Foster were also required to carry out survey work on the plateau of Grahamland and the Peninsula and over-winter at the tiny refuge.

Work began quickly as the three men set about laying depots. Without dogs they back-packed and man-hauled their sledges over difficult terrain, often having to carry their tents and provision as the sledges could not be pulled over deep snow with any weight loaded.

During the seven month winter, activity was limited and the men whiled away their time in the hut talking, playing Scrabble and reading their small collection of books, many of which could not be described as light reading – *A History of Western Philosophy*, and *Russian classics of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky* were just some of the titles they took on, although Alistair McLean's *HMS Ulysses* was a popular option.

A wind-up gramophone also provided entertainment but choice of listening was limited. Dick Foster remembered The Nun's Chorus: "We always played it when we got back from a journey – the first man down wound the spring and put it on."

The hut was heated by a Valor stove and indirectly by pressure lanterns used for lighting and three Primus Stoves on which all cooking was carried out and water heated.

According to Dick, the paraffin for the stoves gave off a great deal of water vapour. "This condensed on the cold walls gradually forming thick ice at the foot of the wall which encased anything stored there. If – as at first – it happened to be tins of food, they had lost the labels by the time they were excavated and provided us with a bit of a problem in identifying the contents.

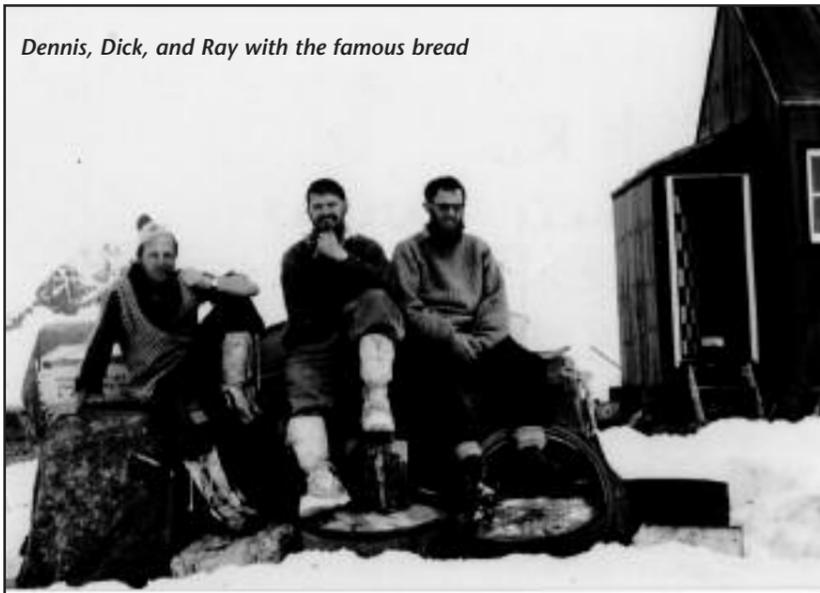
Most of the food was canned or dehydrated and Ray McGowan recalled the choice of tinned brisket of beef, tinned corned beef, or tinned chicken in aspic. There was no oven, but the resourceful team made their own by joining two flour tins together, creating a platform in the bottom to raise the baking tin off the heated surface and wrapping the whole thing in asbestos cloth.

He said "Initially we placed the 'oven' on the three Primuses but to our horror found the heat was so great that the solder on the middle stove melted. We were unable to mend it, so that reduced us to two Primuses.

However the oven did work and Dick baked a cake for Lee Rice's birthday (Lee was a member of the Hope Bay party): "I had to turn it over half way through the baking and eventually cut off the burnt bits at the top and bottom before 'icing' it and decorating it with a coloured candle and model yacht.

The men were supplied with Rose's lime juice to ward off scurvy, but did have a little rum and other spirits for special occasions. For water they melted snow in saucepans.

*Dennis, Dick, and Ray with the famous bread*



Despite the incredibly cramped conditions the team maintained high morale and disagreements were never a problem – even over Scrabble without a dictionary – and Dick recalled that although they became quite passionate about the game, they made "a majority decision on the acceptability of the more out of the way words.

In the spring, Dick, Ray, and Denis continued their survey work on the glacier but were severely restricted by bad weather – all in all they found themselves tent-bound for around 40 days due to severe blizzards and whiteouts.

Two tents were used when on sledging journeys – a two man pyramid and a one man mountain tent. Initially the men took turns in the mountain tent, but soon decided to get rid of it – not only was it too cold, but it was also common for the occupant to be unable to move after a night's 'sleep' Dick explained: "The accumulation of drift and falling snow pinned him in his sleeping bag. I remember Ray's plaintive shouts for rescue on one occasion because he was literally unable to move and we had to dig him out.

In November the four-man sledging party from Hope Bay arrived, led by the late Wally Herbert. With their two teams of dogs ('Number Ones' and 'Players') the team had battled through extreme weather to complete their epic journey of 280 miles in 54 days, but had succeeded in their mission to make the first crossing of the Peninsula.

With food supplies limited, the seven men spent the next month at the hut on short rations, but Dick Foster remembered this as a "great time" – the new additions to the group brought

with them a whole new range of personalities and subjects for conversation after the eight months the three had spent together.

The only difficulty posed by the arrival of the Hope Bay team was that the men had 14 dogs to feed, but this was quickly overcome – a raft was built from two twelve-foot man-haul Nansen sledges strapped to empty 40 gallon drums and the men set about hunting seals which they then towed back to the hut.



*The hut as it was on the Reclus Peninsula*

With only three bunks in the hut, four men slept outside in the tents and although able to brush their teeth, the men could do little to stay clean other than to rub themselves down with snow when the sun shone.

Dick recalled. "On one momentous occasion, Denis and Wally Herbert stripped to their long johns and string vests and swam out and perched themselves – briefly – on a bergy bit for a photo opportunity. I suppose we must have smelt a bit gamey but as we were all in the same boat (including the Hope Bay boys) it hardly mattered.

Wally Herbert later described the expedition in his book *A World of Men*. He wrote: "We were a world of men in harmony with our environment. We saw a paradise in snowscapes and heard music in the wind, for we were young, and on our long exploratory journeys we felt with the pride of youth that we were making history.

This feeling was echoed by Dick Foster. "It was the most magical time possible. We



*Hugh working on Reclus Hut*

were young, we were responsible only for ourselves, we had total freedom, companionship and adventure... and all this within the magnificence of the Antarctic.

Wally Herbert went on to lead numerous exploratory trips in the Arctic and Antarctic, including the first expedition to cross the Arctic Ocean by its longest axis, through the North Pole. He was honoured with a knighthood in 2000 and was described by Sir Ranulph Fiennes as the 'greatest polar explorer of our time.' Sir Wally died almost a year ago.

The Reclus Hut can be visited during the Museum's opening hours: Monday – Friday 9.30 – 4pm, weekends 2-4pm with extended hours on cruise ship days.

*The Falklands Islands Museum and National is grateful to Mr Dick Foster and Mr Ray McGowan for sharing their recollections and for the use of Mr Foster's photographs for this article. The Trust is grateful to Leona Roberts at the Museum for putting this article together and to Hugh Marsden for his work upon the hut.*

### *Dates for your diary...*

#### **Touring exhibition of Antarctic photographs by Roger Slade**

*University Museum of Zoology, Downing Street, Cambridge. CB2 3EJ*  
Wednesday, 21 May - Saturday, 28 June 2008. Opening Reception Wednesday, 21 May 2008, 6-8pm. 15 June, special Sunday opening with family crafts activities. Talk on 19 June.

*Gilbert White's House and the Oates Museum, "The Wakes", High Street, Selborne, Hampshire. GU34 3JH.*  
Saturday, 6 September - Sunday, 28 September 2008 (Possible talk on 5th Nov).

*Rheged Centre, Redhills, Penrith, Cumbria. CA11 0DQ.*  
Monday, 1 December 2008 - 28 February 2009. Here there is also a permanent exhibition on Everest and the Himalayas.

#### **140th anniversary of Scott's Birth in Plymouth 6 June 2008 (SW polar group)**

At the Royal Plymouth Corinthian Yacht Club. Four-course dinner with wine, etc. Price: £35 per person. Tickets (limited to 70) available from Brigette Dixon, 1 Trefloyd Close, Kelly Bray, Cornwall PL17 8DP, UK. Tel 01579 384381.

email: brigette@brigette5.wanadoo.co.uk.

#### **8th Annual Shackleton Autumn School.**

This always interesting and enjoyable gathering is scheduled for 24-27 October 2008 at the Athy Heritage Centre-Museum, Co. Kildare, Ireland.

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