

Bergy Bits

The Newsletter of the Friends of Antarctica



Husky statue

A life size bronze statue of a sledge dog, to commemorate an era when huskies supported Antarctic field travel was unveiled at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) on 4 July 2009. Voluntary subscriptions from around the world helped to raise the money to commission the monument which carries a plaque listing all the former Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS)/BAS dog teams.

Huskies were used to support field parties from 1945-1994. The first dogs were imported from Labrador. They were bred South and the last huskies were taken out of continent in January 1994 under the terms of the Antarctic Treaty Environmental Protocol.



Commemorative plaque

The bronze husky with Rachel Morgan (UKAHT Director), Dick Harbour, Julian Paren (BAS Club Treasurer & Secretary)

Peninsula Plans...

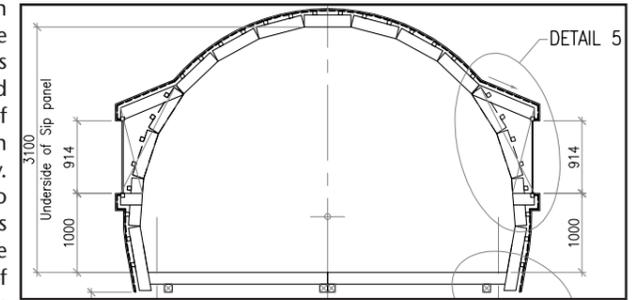
The forthcoming season will be the biggest yet for the Trust. At the last Antarctic Treaty Meeting two buildings on the Antarctic Peninsula with uncertain futures were designated historic sites (HSMs).

Detaille (HSM 83)(66°52'S, 66°38'W) or Base 'W' is situated on a narrow isthmus at the northern end of Detaille Island, Lallemand Fjord, Loubet Coast. The hut was established in 1956 as a British science base primarily for survey, geology and meteorology and to contribute to the International Geophysical Year in 1957. With difficult access it was closed after only three winters so remains a time capsule from the height of British activities on the northern Peninsula.

Damoy hut (HSM 84) (64° 49'S, 63°31'W) is a well-preserved hut with scientific equipment and other artefacts inside it, was erected in 1973 and used for a number of years as a British summer air facility and transit station for scientific personnel. It was last occupied in 1993.

The Trust is taking on the conservation of these and three other HSMs (Wordie, Horseshoe and Stonington). Ownership of the sites will remain with the British Antarctic Survey. There are no plans to do anything with these sites other than ensure continued conservation of the buildings and artefacts within. Last year's Port Lockroy manager, Rick Atkinson, will lead a conservation programme at Wordie House alongside the Ukrainians at Vernadsky (Wordie lies only a few hundred yards from this former British base of Faraday). Rick will then move back to Port Lockroy as part of a three man team which will restore the former Nissen hut to provide long needed accommodation for the staff at Port Lockroy.

This year the living museum will be run by ex BAS station commander, Simon Herniman, and assisted by Eleanor Land, Anna Malaos, and Claire Murphy. Many thanks to Chocolate Fish Merino and Tog 24 for staff clothing, and to the ships of IAATO for their continuing support. We are at phase two of the plans for Port Lockroy: Phase one, now complete, was to put the gift shop onto a sound financial footing enabling the Trust to take on the conservation of the other historic sites on the Peninsula and provide the long needed accommodation. Phase two is to reconstruct the Nissen hut. The Nissen hut was originally put up in 1944 in the second summer of occupation at Port Lockroy. It fell into disrepair along with the main building, Bransfield House, and the boat shed after the base was abandoned in 1962. It was only the wooden buildings that were restored in 1996 and now the Nissen hut will be rebuilt to provide staff accommodation. The corrugated tin shell will cover an insulated panel pod. Unlike the original, the hut will include dormer windows. We are most grateful to Jeld-wen for the their continued support in providing the windows and doors for the hut. Phase three will be to concentrate on the fabric of the buildings and the artefacts, ultimately bringing them to those who cannot visit through web-based access.



Nissen drawings showing new dormer detail

Nissen Hut under construction 1944 (BAS Archive)



The Antarctic Oral History Project...

The UKAHT, in collaboration with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), BAS Club and the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI), is underpinning an ambitious oral history project which aims to capture the recollections of those extraordinary, dedicated and often heroic individuals who have worked in the polar regions.

Although the official History of BAS, its predecessors (Operation Tabarin, the Falkland Island Dependencies Survey) and SPRI is well documented, it rarely provides an insight into relationships, culture, decisions and policy that first hand accounts of activities and events do. By recording the reminiscences of these polar people, a fascinating history will be preserved and made accessible for generations to come.

A team of volunteers has been recruited to help with the project. Their role consists mainly of assembling background material at BAS archives about each interviewee in order that the experienced interviewers may prepare adequately. Interviews are conducted either at home or at Antarctic reunions using a voice

recorder and/or film. Completed interviews are currently stored at BAS archives.

Contrary to popular belief, interviewees don't need to be as old as Port Lockroy either! Individuals who have been involved relatively recently are also invited to participate. Around fifty people have already been interviewed, with service dates ranging from the early 1940's to the present day.

STOP PRESS- Wilson artefacts saved

On 16 September the UKAHT is happy to have been able to contribute financially to the purchase at auction of various manuscripts, letters, and diaries associated with Edward Wilson. The artefacts will go variously to Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, Dundee Heritage Trust and Scott Polar Research Institute.

What's on...

LECTURES:

Thur 8 Oct 7pm, Helmsley Town Hall, North Yorkshire. Adam Wilton will give an illustrated talk on his British record breaking expedition to the South Pole last year. Proceeds to the UKAHT and Upper Ryedale Parish. £10 (£5 children) to include refreshments and a glass of wine. Ring Honor Wright on 01845 597464

Thurs 15 Oct 7pm, DeCourcey's near Cardiff, and Wed 21 Oct 7.30pm, Graduate Medical Centre, Derriford, Plymouth Isobel Williams - illustrated talk on Dr Edward Wilson for the Captain Scott Society (juliando.salisbury@virgin.net) and Devon and Cornwall Polar Society (paul@daviesdev.freereserve.co.uk)

Fri-Mon, 23-26 Oct 2009 9th Annual Shackleton Autumn School, at Athy Heritage Centre, Co Kildare, Ireland. www.shackletonmuseum.com.

Tues 10 Nov 7pm, Royal Geographical Society, London, Filming Penguins and Pipits in South Georgia, A presentation by TV wildlife presenter Nigel Marven, Fund-raiser for the South Georgia Heritage Trust alison.neil@sght.org

Both the James Caird Society www.jamescairdsociety.com and Friends of SPRI www.spri.cam.ac.uk/friends/ have an ongoing lecture programme.

EXHIBITIONS:

2 October 2009-11 April 2010, The Queen's Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh, The Heart of the Great Alone: Scott, Shackleton and Antarctic Photography. These were presented to King George V and are now in the Royal Photograph Collection but very rarely exhibited. Photos by Ponting and Hurley are accompanied by the flag given to Scott by Queen Alexandra in 1910; the Union flag presented by King George V to Shackleton; Polar medals, and books from the Royal Library, including a unique example of Aurora Australis. The exhibition will be shown at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace in 2011.

From mid-November, more than one hundred unique penguins will decorate Liverpool City Centre as part of the Go Penguins project. Colonies of small and large penguins will be on display for seven weeks in a city centre trail. www.gopenguins.co.uk

Ross Sea Huts

Throughout the long, dark Antarctic winter, four conservators (two British and two Canadian) have once again been working in the special conservation laboratory at New Zealand's Scott Base, on Ross Island. So far conservation work has been completed on nearly two and a half thousand of the over 8,000 original artefacts still associated with Scott's hut. The have now been replaced for the summer months by two more (British) conservators. The conservation carpenters will be join them later in the season. You can read more on their blog www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/earth/antarctica/blog.

Just before the four departed they were able to visit Scott's hut at Cape Evans. This visit, the first of the season, revealed that the hut had not suffered the heavy snow drifting which has occurred in recent winters, threatening the hut's very survival. This good news may indicate that the measures taken to combat this threat, in particular the vortex generators installed outside the hut last summer, could have worked, although it is too early to be certain about this after only one winter.

Errata Two clangers in the last issue – sorry. The photo of gentoos at Port Lockroy was actually by Jonathan Green. Secondly, in the second paragraph of the piece about Barbara Johns we incorrectly mentioned Edward Nelson's nicknames following him from Nimrod, but of course this should have been Terra Nova. He was not on Shackleton's expedition at all.

Thank you to...

We have received a number of generous donations this year so far. Very many thanks to: Capital International, DEW Foundation, Hapag Lloyd, Sir Edward Lewis Foundation, Noel Marshall (legacy), PGH Wilson.

And specifically for Captain Scott's hut, thank you to: Bill Butlin Charitable Trust, Fenwick Ltd, Forrest Mars, Lief Mills, Julian Neal, Andrew Overton, M Palin, Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation, Typhoo, David and Christine Walmsley.

Gift of a Lifetime...

Noel Marshall, one of our donors listed previously, amended his will to leave a sum of money to the Trust on his death last year. Anyone can include a legacy to the Trust and it does not have to be for a lot of money. Whether you give £500 to save a fragile diary, £5,000 to help repair windows in a building, or £50,000 to re-roof it, your gift counts. If you would like more information on how to make a bequest please contact Rachel Morgan at the address below.

Notes from Base 'W'

Many will be delighted to hear that Base 'W', Detaille, is not, after all, to be demolished but maintained as an Historic Monument. As part of the British Antarctic Survey it was scheduled to be removed in 2004 along with Bases 'O' Danco and 'J' Prospect Point. Bad weather prevented this and since then with the review of historic sites by conservation architect Michael Morrison in 2007 its fate has been reversed. At the recent Antarctic Treaty Meeting, Detaille was designated Historic Site and Monument no. 83. The Trust will take on the on-going conservation of the base. Below are some pictures and notes from some of those who spent time at the base during its three year occupation.

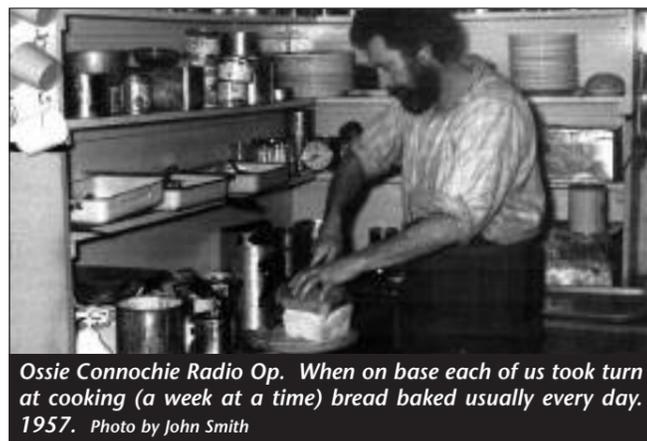
Ron Miller:

The Base was established in late February 1956 on tiny Detaille Island off the Loubet Coast in Lallemand Fjord, west coast Antarctic Peninsula. The eight-man wintering team were landed with building materials, equipment and two year's food supply from the old, wooden-hulled ship RRS John Biscoe, everything off loaded and moved to the chosen site by hand. Building operations started with assistance from the ship and when she departed, not to return until the year end, the eight base members lived in tents until some shelter could be obtained from the partly finished building.

With only one professional builder all the team joined in the work. Concrete for foundations was mixed by hand using water from snow melted in 40-gallon drums over wood fires and some aggregate collected off the beach. The building was not pre-fabricated, only the 4x2 framework timber had been pre-joined and some of these were swollen and required re-fitting. The roof cladding and walls were tongue and groove weatherboards over rubberoid, insulated inside with glass wool, the internal lining being boarding on top of felt. The windows, double frames, had small panes each to be set in putty and not a pleasant task in freezing temperatures.

With snow and drift of approaching winter, materials and stores had to be dug out when required. Of the first 40 days of building, on only 25 was it possible to complete a full day's work.

By the end of March the hut was basically weathertight and during April work continued on interior linings, furniture and fittings. Lino laying in particular was hindered by the amount of stores now inside. During building each member had his own base duties to attend to, eg. sledgedog care, radio, meteorology and taking turns at cooking. An extension was added to the hut for the two diesel generators which were soon providing power and light and a small hut was built to house emergency food supplies and equipment, a contingency for fire, always a risk in Antarctic huts.



Ossie Connochie Radio Op. When on base each of us took turn at cooking (a week at a time) bread baked usually every day. 1957. Photo by John Smith

Life on base settled into a regular pattern during the mid-winter period with, in addition to normal duties, finishing touches being done to the interior. This continued until August when sea-ice conditions allowed the sledging programme to begin.

The sledging programme entailed extensive geological and mapping survey of the Antarctic Peninsula. The many bases and their associated 'stepping stone' refuges built in the late 1950s enabled access to the Polar Plateau. Huge journeys involving four months or more in the field were the norm. Conditions varied enormously and it is impossible to do justice in the small space here to the contribution made by so few men. Below are a few typical diary entries from one of these journeys:

Jim Madell:

Tuesday 12th March 1957. We were awakened at about 8am by the dogs barking. One was loose. As it was a magnificent morning we had breakfast and started training (*first month was spent in dog training*) at about 10.30. Angus and Dennis took out the 'Ladies' (*dog team*) and went out towards Stack Point. John and I had a run with 'The Counties' out to Buttress and on to Tom's plateau route. It looks quite promising altogether. We got back at 4.30 pm and I was feeling very sunburnt. The temperature this morning was 11 F (-12C) and it rose during the day to 29 F (-2C). A beautiful hazy moon this evening and a strip of pink sky to the south, flat calm. Just wonderful.



Base 'W'. Photo by John Graham

Sunday 17th March. A lie up day today as it was rather miserable. It was flat calm and snowing and the temperature was above freezing all day so everything is damp. I read for most of the day. As yesterday was the end of our first ration box we had the bacon for breakfast as well as the porridge. We find that we are a day up on our rations having sufficient left for this evening's meal and tomorrow's breakfast. We had one of the buckshee soups for lunch (Symington's) and our packet of Kraft cheese. Very nice too!

Monday 29th April, Day 59. Today was a good old west coast day - lousy ! It was dull and clear in the morning but naturally this didn't last, it grew duller and less clear. Angus and I put out the base extension markers at the second attempt. The weather got too bad to measure the base so we packed up and retired to our tent at about 3pm amid softly falling snow, all very well on a Christmas card. One of the dogs chewed up a medical bag during the night and there were bandages all over the place this morning. Some of the stuff was lost in the snow and the whole thing is in a bit of a mess.

It was decided that on our first decent day one of us would go up the hill with one of the others to do the necessary theodolite observations while the other two measured the base. This way we hope to finish the job in two clear days instead of three. We cut cards to decide who would slog up the hill. Angus drew the six of diamonds and damn me if I didn't draw the four. So I go up the hill. The hell with these mountains !

We listened to Stanley radio tonight and heard a record request programme for the "Biscoe". They sure like the old "bow legged" music. As usual, this evening we are very damp, the walls of the tent are wet and there are little pools of water on the ground sheet. Now the primus has started fuming. Good night. Clothes for the day, long johns, wind proof trousers, 2 pairs socks, duffel inners, plastic insoles, mukluks, anorak, wool gloves, leather gloves, shirt, vest, pullover.



'Gincolour' Looking North from Detaille Island.

Gin was mixed with the paint to stop it freezing hence 'Gincolour' by John Smith. Summer 1957.

Friday 3rd May 1957, Day 63. We spent most of the day in our sleeping bags as it was snowing and the visibility was very low. The wind was blowing a little but not enough to make any improvement to the surface. At about 3 pm it cleared up with blue skies coming up from the south. The temperature went down from 18 F (-8C) to 2 F (-17C) in about an hour and a wind got up.

The snow is knee high again and when one gets into the tent it's rather like going down a rabbit burrow. The dogs have just started a howl, I guess they must have the blues. I must confess that I'm wishing I'd stayed at Hope Bay now as the prospect of doing a survey trip to the north on the plateau is receding day by day. We have been out for 63 days now and our total mileage is 67 miles. How pitiful.

Monday 10th June, Day 100. Whitsun Bank Holiday. At *Blaiklock Refuge*. I hope the weather at home is good. The remainder of the seal was cut up today, fortunately it was still unfrozen and not a difficult job. The rest of the day was spent lazing (and eating of course) (*This included a sponge known as the Blaiklock Rollerbuster. The recipe was something like two cups of flour, a cup of dried egg, a half cup of baking powder mixed with water. This was put in a pan on a primus stove and it rose like a rocket. Eaten quickly while still warm with jam added. Loud stomach rumblings occurred later!!*) The light these days is very poor, it's still dusk 'til about 10.30 am and starts getting dark at about 3.30 pm. The weather is much the same as yesterday but the temperature is taking a slow slide down. This evening (10pm) it was -3 F (-19C). Perhaps the weather will improve a little. I should like to see some of the boys from Y before we go. It looks, at the moment, as though we will be spending midwinter at Base Y.

(*They got to Base 'Y', Horseshoe six days later and stayed a week. They eventually got back to Detaille after 118 days out*)

Denis Goldring describes the last few months:

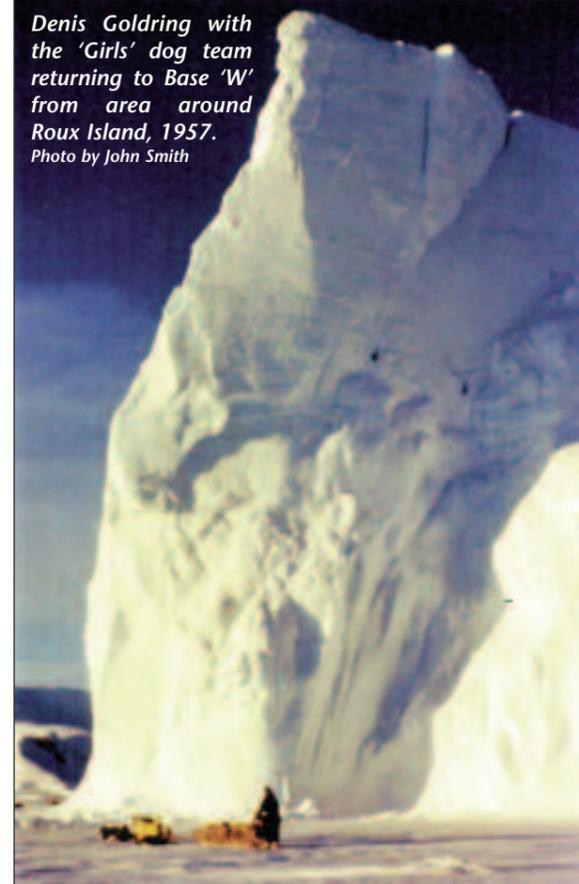
Preparations were made for the plateau journey that all adventurous FIDS like to make. This first involved depot laying on the Murphy Glacier, but, eventually, a party of three set out up the Erskine Glacier in early December (1958) and made a reconnaissance of about 80 miles to the north. However, Brian (Foote) and I with 'The Girls' reluctantly opted to complete our work on the sea ice (*good for once*) as this presented such a unique opportunity for detailed survey and geology.

The plateau party returned to base on 13th January. Brian and myself sledged in on 20th January, with, we thought, some signs of the ice melting and looking forward to the arrival of the ship. Time dragged on the ice didn't go out. The Biscoe (*ship*) reached the Sillard Islands off the northern end of Adelaide Island on 24th February, but, even with the help of two United States icebreakers, the Northwind and Edisto, attempts to re-supply the base by dog sledge, tractor and helicopter proved futile. It was decided to abandon the base and we and our replacements, who had been landed, sledged out the 25 miles to the ships on 31st

March 1958. As the dogs were being hoisted aboard, one of the more lively one, Steve, escaped and refused to be caught. Instead he set off home along their sledge tracks, thus sealing his fate for there was no time to organize a round-up. It was a sad ending and the men felt it keenly.

However, nearly three months later, those at Horseshoe (including the Detaille dogs who had been dropped off there) were astounded to see Steve running happily over the hill, fit and well, and delighted to be the centre of

such an enthusiastic welcome. From his condition it was clear that he had returned to Detaille and lived on the old seal pile from which the dogs had been fed. As midwinter approached, and still his friends failed to return, he must have decided to go and look for them. He could have gone west to the ice edge, or he might have turned north or east. Instead he surely remembered making the sixty-mile sledge journey to Horseshoe the previous season and set off south. Since no vestige of the trail could have remained, he had to remember the intricate route, across the sea ice of Lallemand Fjord, over the glaciers of the Arrowsmith Peninsula, down to Bourgeois Fjord, and so to Horseshoe Island and the base lying in a bay on the west coast. There would have been no food along the route, and it is astonishing that a dog should take a conscious decision to seek company and abandon his larder on the strength of past memory.



Denis Goldring with the 'Girls' dog team returning to Base 'W' from area around Roux Island, 1957. Photo by John Smith