

THE COMMONWEALTH TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1955-1958

**HOW THE CROSSING OF ANTARCTICA MOVED NEW ZEALAND TO
RECOGNISE ITS ANTARCTIC HERITAGE AND TAKE AN EQUAL PLACE
AMONG ANTARCTIC NATIONS**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree

PhD - Doctor of Philosophy (Antarctic Studies – History)

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Gateway Antarctica

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Statement of Authority & Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Figure 1: Official Crest of the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition
Courtesy of John Claydon

“WE DON’T WANT TO WALK”¹

¹ Dictum given to David Pratt, Transport and Engineer Officer for the TAE, by Sir John Slessor, Chairman of the Committee of Management, during a meeting in London, interview with author, 24 June 2009, Battersea

Foreword

FUCHS AND COMPANY CONQUER ANTARCTICA

“On January 5, 1922 shortly after 3:30 A.M. at a whaling station in South Georgia, Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton died after suffering a heart attack. The last entry in the diary of this Antarctic explorer reads; “In the darkening twilight I saw a lone star hover gem-like above the bay.”

Sir Henry’s dream was the traversing of the continent whose unflagging torments seemed to fascinate a host of adventurous souls like his. To him this was ‘the last grand journey left to man’.

This ‘last grand journey’ is now over. We wonder how Dr Fuchs and his men feel about it all, and what they think of the finality of Sir Henry’s statement.

Our opinion is, as long as human society can produce men with the spirit of Vivian Fuchs, the last grand journey is a trip to that gem-like star above the bay --- and beyond that star, there will be another.’²

² *Ross Island Review*, 2 March 1958 – (*Ross Island Review* Scoops World Press), edited by Sotorios Barber. This newsletter was published by the US Navy team based at McMurdo Station on the day Dr Vivian Fuchs and his team of eleven men arrived at New Zealand’s Scott Base accompanied by guide-passenger Sir Edmund Hillary. The Americans were eager and active ‘observers’ of the CTAE throughout its journey. It is probable that Sotorios Barber is a thinly disguised alias for the *Daily Mail* reporter, Noel Barber.

Preface

I became interested in the Antarctic and particularly the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE) in 2003 after attending a lecture by the late Wing Commander (Ret) John Claydon of the RNZAF on his experiences as Chief Pilot for the New Zealand TAE Support Party led by Sir Edmund Hillary. I was fascinated by his account and resolved to learn more about the expedition. I now believe that the TAE was the catalytic event which caused New Zealand to finally hoist upon its shoulders the burden of responsibility for the Ross Dependency, a burden originally assigned by its Commonwealth parent in 1923, more than thirty years prior. The expedition has ultimately led to the position today where New Zealand, alongside the eleven other original signatories to the Antarctic Treaty, is a major contributor, through the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat, to the world's joint administration of Antarctica. In reading the various accounts of the expedition it appeared to me that several important and interesting aspects had not yet been sufficiently investigated. In my thesis I focus on those key aspects and attempt to shed more light on one of humankind's great geographic achievements, arguably one of the most significant of the twentieth century.



Figure 2: British Exploration Emblem honouring Sir Francis Drake, Captain James Cook and Sir Francis Chichester – Westminster Abbey London - 1979

Photo: Stephen Hicks

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I also deeply appreciate the support I received from individuals who were closely associated with the events in McMurdo Sound at that time and in some cases participated in the TAE or IGY activities over the summer season. These included: Dr Ed Robertson – Director of the Geophysics Division of DSIR and Chair of New Zealand’s Inter-Departmental Committee for the IGY, Commander William ‘Bill’ Smith RNZ Navy DSO – Member of the New Zealand Advance Party 1955-56 and second in command on *Endeavour*, Randal Heke – Foreman of the Ministry of Works (MOW) Construction Unit, Dr Richard Barwick – biologist, and Dr Peter Webb – geologist. I am also grateful for the support I received from both Alec Trendall and Charles Swithinbank who were most generous in sharing their time and knowledge with me. New Zealand polar historian David Harrowfield has been a constant source of inspiration and I am indebted to him for his unflagging interest in my research.

I must give special mention and thanks to Dr Larry Harrington, who being resident in London and an associate of Dr Ernest Marsden 1954-55, as well as brother-in-law to Sir Edmund Hillary, was in a special position to observe and interpret the TAE and IGY and related events at that time. The documentation provided in our correspondence has been most helpful in developing my understanding of those events.

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Most important I am deeply grateful to my wife Glynis. Her patience and support over the many years of effort has been my strength. Her confidence that I would be able to reach my goal never wavered. It is she more than anyone who got me across the finish line.

Dedication

My thesis is dedicated to the late John Claydon (1917-2014), Senior Pilot for the NZ Antarctic Flight, whose advice and encouragement accompanied me throughout my Antarctic journey.

Acronyms

AAD	Australian Antarctic Division
ANARE	Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition
ANZ	Archives New Zealand
AVGAS	Aviation gasoline – fuel for the Beaver, Auster and Otter aircraft
AWM	Auckland War Museum
BANZARE	British Australian New Zealand Antarctic Research Expedition
BAS	British Antarctic Survey
BGLE	British Graham Land Expedition
BNA	British National Archives - Kew
BNGE	British North Greenland Expedition
CA	Crown Agents (UK)
CM	Canterbury Museum
CO	Colonial Office
COM	Committee of Management (London)
CRAMRA	Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office
CSAGI	Comité Spécial de l'Année Géophysique Internationale
CTAE	Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE)
DSIR	Department of Scientific and Industrial Research
FID	Falkland Islands Dependencies
FIDS	Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey
FMCNZ	Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand
HMG	Her Majesty's Government (UK Government)
HMNZS	Her Majesty's New Zealand Ship
ICSU	International Council of Scientific Unions

IGY	International Geophysical Year
ISAGE	International Symposium on Antarctic Glaciological Exploration
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ)
MOGAS	Motor gasoline – fuel for the Sno-cats, Fergusons and Weasel tractors
MOW	Ministry of Works
NBSAE	Norwegian British Swedish Antarctic Expedition
NZ	New Zealand
NZA	New Zealand National Archives, Christchurch
NZAF	New Zealand Antarctic Flight
NZAS	New Zealand Antarctic Society
NZGS	New Zealand Geologic Survey
NZHC	New Zealand High Commissioner
PAC	Public Accounts Committee (UK)
PM	Prime Minister
PRO	Public Records Office (see TNA)
RDRC	Ross Dependency Research Committee
RNZAF	Royal New Zealand Air Force
RNZN	Royal New Zealand Navy
RS	Royal Society
RSC	Ross Sea Committee
SGS	South Georgia Survey
SPRI	Scott Polar Research Institute
TAA	Trans-Antarctic Association
TAE	(Commonwealth) Trans-Antarctic Expedition
TNA	The National Archives – Kew, UK
UCL	University of Canterbury Library

UK	United Kingdom
UKHC	United Kingdom High Commissioner
USASE	United States Antarctic Service Expedition
USN	United States Navy
USS	United States Ship
VUWAE	Victoria University of Wellington Antarctic Expedition



Figure 3: Crossing Party setting out from Shackleton base – 24 November 1957

Photo: Jon Stephenson



Figure 4: Hillary's Tractor Party leaving Scott Base – 14 October, 1957

A smoke bomb was let off as a prank. The 'Caboose' housed bunks and acted as radio room. The tractor enclosure was added by engineer Jim Bates.

Photo: Bill Cranfield

Abstract

It is now more than half a century since the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE) successfully achieved the goal of an overland crossing of Antarctica and since the world's scientific community united in a global effort to understand nature's secrets during the International Geophysical Year (IGY). These events occurred against a volatile political backdrop highlighted by the Cold War and the devolution of the British Empire. Since that time various accounts of the expedition have appeared whose veracity or completeness invites investigation. No account has, in a historically rigorous manner, treated the TAE in the full light of the three nations most involved, namely the United Kingdom, New Zealand and, as a fully engaged yet unofficial partner, the United States. An overarching theme of the thesis is to argue that the TAE, in bringing about a close and sometimes difficult, engagement of New Zealand with both the United Kingdom and the United States, moved New Zealand to look at its Ross Dependency differently than it had in the past. The country developed a more confident demeanour and 'stood its ground' with Britain over various aspects of expedition planning and organisation. The expedition caused Sir Edmund Hillary to forge a close relationship with USN Rear Admiral George Dufek, one that led to the development of a lasting bond between the governments of New Zealand and the United States. A key outcome of all this was that one year after the expedition New Zealand played a major role in formulating the Antarctic Treaty.

The thesis is comprised of three segments. Firstly, I examine the preparatory years leading up to 1955 when, against all odds, final commitment to the TAE was obtained from the United Kingdom and Commonwealth governments. Secondly, I analyse the interaction that developed between the TAE and the IGY and, consequently, the prominent and vital role that the US Navy played in the founding of Scott Base and in the conduct of the expedition. Thirdly, there are many aspects of the expedition that historians have so far only lightly touched upon and that merit a more complete investigation. These topics include the acquisition by New Zealand of the ship *John Biscoe (Endeavour)*, selection of the base sites and the significant legacy left by the TAE. I have further analysed Hillary's trip to the Pole which fired the imagination of people from around the world. By filling several gaps that exist in the historical record the thesis offers amendments to the current understanding of what, how and why certain decisions were taken that made this last great polar expedition one of the most controversial yet productive of the twentieth century.

1. Introduction

This chapter puts the CTAE into perspective relative to its historical, political, scientific and social context. It was into this confluence of forces that the idea of ‘crossing Antarctica’, after a hiatus of 35 years, emerged once again, eventually to gain the support of the Commonwealth Dominions and capture the imagination of the world.

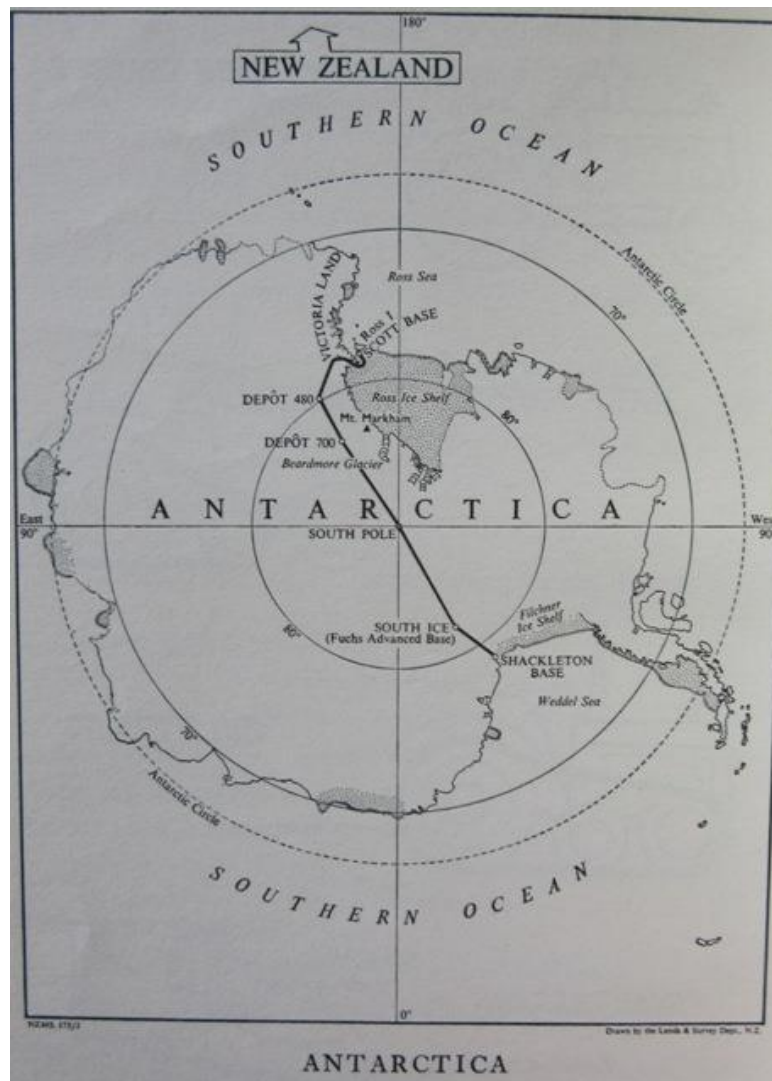


Figure 5: Map showing TAE route across Antarctica
Source: *No Latitude for Error*, Sir Edmund Hillary, 1961

Polar Exploration - A Historical Perspective

Throughout the ages humankind has been tempted and challenged by the unknown, sometimes through necessity but often simply out of a 'desire to know'. This was true of the Phoenicians 3000 years ago as it was true of Marco Polo in the thirteenth century and of the sailor-navigators of more recent times. In some cases the lure was commercial gain or territorial expansion and, in other cases, spiritual conversion. Often, several of these objectives were closely interwoven. With the ascendancy of science in the nineteenth century, intellectual motives came to the fore. Curiosity was aroused about the workings of nature and became for many the driving force of their travels. The extensive voyages of Darwin's *Beagle* and of *HMS Challenger* under the auspices of the Royal Society, founded in 1660, exemplify the importance that knowledge of earth's natural systems began to assume. It was at this time that a new breed of traveller began to emerge - the science-orientated explorer-adventurer.

Africa, the 'dark continent', had become the world stage for the most dramatic of these geographic escapades. Locating the source of the Nile offered its discoverer the promise of everlasting fame, if not fortune. People such as John Speke and Richard Burton, David Livingstone and Charles Morton Stanley, were hailed as celebrities of the day. Their lectures and accounts of their travels and adventures were assured sell-out events. The announcement of any new 'Expedition' sent vibrations of excitement rippling through the community. This presented a tempting opportunity for many to break out of the hum-drum of a local pastoral life. A young man's imagination, once fired, sent him off searching 'fame and fortune' – to seek out his true destiny. In addition to the jungles, the mountains, the oceans and the deserts, another far more daunting prospect for the explorer-adventurer remained in the frozen polar extremities at either end of the planet. Of these, '*Terra Australis Incognita*', the 'unknown southern land', presented the ultimate challenge.

A southern continent had been a source of myth and adventure since early Grecian times. The Pythagorean philosophers believed in the symmetry of the universe. Among these Aristotle held the sphere to be the perfect form and believed that the earth was itself a globe within the spherical heavens. The ancient maps of Strabo (15 AD) and Polomius Mela (42 AD) clearly illustrated this view.³ The first reference made by a New Zealand historian to a possible New

³ Mill, 1905, p.6

Zealand connection with the Antarctic was that of J.C. Beaglehole who described an early Maori encounter with the frigid southern region:

It may have been about our year 750 that the astonishing Hui-te-Rangiora, in his canoe Te Iwi-o-Atea, sailed from Rarotonga on a voyage of wonders in that direction (South): he saw the bare white rocks that towered into the sky from out the monstrous seas, the long tresses of the woman that dwelt therein, which waved about under the waters and on their surface, the frozen sea covered with pia or arrowroot, the deceitful animal that dived to great depths – ‘a foggy, misty dark place not shone on by the sun’. Icebergs, the fifty foot long leaves of the bull-kelp, the walrus or sea-elephant, the snowy ice fields of a clime very different from Hui-te-Rangiora’s own warm islands – all these he had seen.⁴

The Southern Ocean, the treacherous and wind-swept body of water surrounding Antarctica, was first visited by the sailor/explorers of the so called Age of Discovery, generally being the period from the late fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Their paths had been defined out of Europe mainly from Spain and Portugal and soon to be followed by the Dutch, the French and the English. The early history of the Falkland Islands is somewhat contested with navigators of four different countries credited with first sighting the islands including the discoverer of ‘America’ Amerigo Vespucci who ventured south in 1501.⁵ The historian, E. W. Hunter Christie attributed discovery of the Falkland Islands to British sea captain John Davis. Davis, the discoverer of Davis Straight in the Arctic, was part of Sir John Cavendish’s expedition south in 1592 and was “driven in among certain Isles never before discovered...”⁶ Both Christie and more recently Robert Headland of SPRI attribute Antoine de la Roché, a London merchant of French Huguenot descent, with the discovery of South Georgia nearly a century later in 1675.⁷ Reports of the bleak landscape and weather they encountered discouraged exploration for another hundred years until the arrival of perhaps the greatest explorer of all. Captain James Cook RN led three great sailing voyages of discovery but it was during his second voyage, from 1772-1775, that he performed the first circumnavigation of a bitterly cold and ice-bound region eventually to be named ‘Anti-arctic’ or Antarctica by

⁴ Beaglehole, 1939, p.3

⁵ Goebel, 1982, p. xv

⁶ Christie, 1951, p. 39

⁷ Headland, 1984, p. 21

the American explorer Charles Wilkes. His disappointment at its fridity was underscored by his Journal entry of 27 January, 1775:

*...Thick fogs, Snow storms, Intense Cold and every other thing that can render Navigation dangerous one has to encounter, and these difficulties are heightened by the enexpressable horrid aspect of the Country, a country doomed by Nature to lie buried under everlasting ice and snow ...*⁸

Cook was unable to make landfall and it is impossible to confirm whether he sighted the actual continent or ice covered islands or perhaps only icebergs. He did however observe large numbers of whales and seals during this journey south and his reports soon ignited a perilous and bloody industry based on exploitation of these animals for their furs and rich oil content. For the next 130 years the waters of the Southern Ocean were the almost private domain of the whalers and sealers. The early nineteenth century saw the arrival of the sealers and later the whaling fleets from America and Europe. Among these were several who might lay claim to a first sighting or even of landing on the Antarctic continent. They included the American sealer, Nathaniel Palmer, and Englishmen, Edward Bransfield and William Smith.⁹ Their voyages were mainly of a commercial nature and were backed by private interests.

The most significant national expeditions of that period were those of Russia's Count Fabian von Bellingshausen (1819-1821), America's Charles Wilkes (1838-1842), France's Dumont D'Urville (1837-1840) and from Britain, James Weddell (1822-1824) and James Clark Ross (1839-1843). These expeditions played a significant role in revealing large segments of the Antarctic coastline and greatly allayed fears of sailing in the deep southern latitudes.

However, perhaps the expedition that had the most influence in laying the foundations for the 'heroic age' was one whose over-riding purpose was scientific discovery. The voyage of the ship *HMS Challenger* (1872-1874) had as its mission to "...investigate the especially interesting fauna of the Antarctic seas... approaching as near as safety allowed to the southern ice Barrier."¹⁰ Under Captain George Nares, *Challenger* sailed for over two years through the Southern Ocean collecting specimens and dredging marine and geologic samples from the sea floor. As related by the eminent polar historian H.R. Mill:

⁸ Cameron, 1974, p. 54

⁹ Jones, 1982, pp. 1-3

¹⁰ The term Barrier was coined by Robert Falcon Scott to denote the wall of ice that bounded the northern border of the Ross Ice Shelf. It is over 100 ft. in height along most of its northern perimeter.

...for the rest, the study of the deposits showed conclusively that the Antarctic continent exists ...it is a real continent the rocks of which carried northward by the icebergs and dropped on the floor of the ocean are of a kind only found on continental land. The glaciated rock fragments dredged by Challenger scientists that clearly proved that continental land existed within the ice-bound region of the Antarctic were gneisses, granites, mica-schists... none of which occur in any oceanic island.¹¹

Science had made its first foray towards the Antarctic. It was near the end of the 19th century and following several unsuccessful efforts in seeking a ‘Northwest Passage’ in the Arctic, that a group of European nations once more turned their gaze southward and ushered in the next stage of Antarctic exploration.



Figure 6: Scott’s ship *Discovery* in Dundee Harbour

Photo: Stephen Hicks

The Heroic Age – Britain at the Antipodes

Throughout the earlier voyages Antarctica’s defences had withstood all attempts at a landing and the continent had so far avoided the footfall of *homo sapiens*. Although six hundred years had passed since Marco Polo had completed his travels across Asia, it was not until late in the 19th century that Antarctica first bore the weight of the most curious of Earth’s inhabitants.

¹¹ Mill, 1905, p. 360

This first recorded landing occurred during the Norwegian sealing and whaling expedition of Henrik Johan Bull sailing in the ship *Antarctic*, when his party, which included a Norwegian seaman named Carsten Borchgrevink, stepped onto the western shore of the Ross Sea at Cape Adare.¹² The year was 1895. This landing would prove a powerful catalyst for the events that soon followed. The ‘heroic age’ refers to a special period in the history of Antarctic exploration. It is generally understood to have had its inception in 1895 at the Sixth International Geographical Congress under the presidency of Sir Clements Markham of the RGS. At its conclusion the Congress adopted a resolution, after a number of presentations including one by Borchgrevink and one by the strong proponent of Antarctic research, Austrian pioneer oceanographer/geophysicist Dr Georg von Neumayer,: “That the Congress record its opinion that the exploration of the Antarctic Regions is the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken...the Congress recommends... that this work should be undertaken before the close of the century.”¹³ Following this impetus a flurry of expeditions was launched by various nations including Belgium, Adrian de Gerlache (*Belgica* – 1897-1899), Sweden, Otto Nordenskjold (*Antarctic* – 1901-1903), Scotland, William Bruce (*Scotia* - 1902-1904), Germany, Erich von Drygalski (*Gauss* -1901-1903), Wilhelm Filchner (*Deutschland* – 1911-1912) France, Jean Charcot (*Français* – 1903-1905) and Britain with Robert Falcon Scott’s first expedition (*Discovery* - 1901-1904).¹⁴ These six expeditions ushered in a period of intense polar exploration which was to continue for another twenty years. Oddly enough one expedition, separate from the rest, was that of Borchgrevink (*Southern Cross* – 1898-1900) who had accompanied Bull previously to Cape Adare. Borchgrevink had failed to win the backing of Clements Markham whose chosen leader was Scott. Borchgrevink, by now a professor of natural history at the University of Sydney, landed at Cape Adare on the coast of Victoria Land. His private British-backed expedition became the first to winter over on the Antarctic continent. At about the same time Belgium’s Adrian de Gerlache in *Belgica* had wintered over aboard his ship as it drifted while beset in the Bellingshausen Sea off Peter I Island.¹⁵ Over the next two decades, several expeditions of various nationalities made serious attempts to explore the continent. These included Japan (Shirase), the second expeditions of France (Charcot-*Pourquois-Pas*), Britain (Scott-*Terra-Nova*) and Germany (Drygalski-*Gauss*), and the expeditions of Amundsen (Norway - *Fram*), Shackleton (Britain – *Nimrod, Endurance*) and Mawson (Australia - *Aurora*) with whom we

¹² Readers Digest, 1985, p. 300

¹³ Mill, 1905, p.384

¹⁴ Yelverton, 2004, pp. xi-xv

¹⁵ Grattan, 1963, p.521

are more familiar¹⁶. Their motivation was a mixture of national prestige and personal glory, scientific study and commercial gain, tinged with a dangerous and sometimes tragic quest for adventure. Depending on the expedition leader, these ingredients were present in varying proportions. In Britain's case, the interest in Antarctica and the South Pole was not unlike its interest in discovering the Northwest Passage, or the source of the Nile. The Royal Geographic Society, led by Sir Clements Markham, sponsor of both Scott expeditions (1901 and 1911) had the re-instatement of British polar prestige as a key objective. As noted by historian C. Hartley Grattan, "What was wanted was not only a worth-while British accomplishment, but, also, a clear demonstration of superiority of capacity over competitors – foreigners. The work was definitely to be undertaken for the greater prestige and glory of Britain."¹⁷

The Ross Dependency – The Archipelago Expands

The Political Context

In 1908 Britain became the first country to assert a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica. This was done through the issuing of Letters Patent and the appointment of a Governor of the Falkland Islands Dependency. This territory included the Antarctic Peninsula as well as several sub-Antarctic islands. The claim was further extended in 1917 to include the sector through to the South Pole.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter Britain anticipated that issues would arise around trade routes and strategic security. Leo Amery, head of Britain's Colonial Office and "one of Britain's last great Imperialists (along with Churchill)", wrote to the government suggesting that, because of its geographic proximity, New Zealand should administer "all territories and islands south of New Zealand between the meridians of 150° east and west, and some limit to be fixed to the north". This was part of the government's view that "...it is desirable that the whole of the Antarctic should ultimately be included within the British Empire ..."¹⁹ In his letter Amery advised New Zealand and Australia to confer as to which country should take on this responsibility. Unsurprisingly, due to New Zealand's subaltern position within the Commonwealth Dominions, the New Zealand Prime Minister William Massey preferred to go back to Britain for final resolution rather than work directly with another Commonwealth government on the matter. The Australian government and Prime

¹⁶ Headland, 1992

¹⁷ Grattan, 1963, p. 562

¹⁸ Templeton, 2000, p. 16

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 17

Minister Billy Hughes were fairly relaxed but suggested that the lands closer to Hobart than Invercargill might be better administered by Australia. Finally, a dividing line was placed at the 160° meridian splitting the territory into a New Zealand and an Australian sector.²⁰ It is interesting that at that time no non-Commonwealth country had yet made any claim to Antarctic territory, with the first non-British claim being made by France in 1925.

The issue of formal claim was brought to a head in 1922 with the request to Britain for a whaling licence from CA Larsen of Norway. Issuing of fishing licences was considered a prerequisite for recognition of a country's sovereignty. Churchill, who at the time was Secretary of State for the Colonies, referred the application on to the New Zealand government who granted the request and issued the permit. Finally, in 1923 the British parliament passed an Order in Council granting New Zealand responsibility for administering the territory between 150° east and 160° west. In so doing, Britain had introduced an innovation in international law, the "...transference of administrative responsibility for the claimed area from one part of the British Empire to another..."²¹ On 21 May, 1923, the New Zealand Cabinet approved the proposal to make the Ross Sea region a dependency and vested control in the Governor-General. The wording included the provision that his authority was "...subject, nevertheless to any instructions which he may from time to time receive from His Majesty or through a Secretary of State".²² It was clear that Britain expected to exercise her sovereignty through its New Zealand Dominion. It was not until 1986, thirty years after the TAE, that New Zealand issued its own Letters Patent and the Ross Dependency became part of New Zealand rather than a United Kingdom possession.²³

The question of 'sovereignty' has been the single major issue within the Antarctic political debate. There are seven claimant countries including New Zealand, Britain, and Australia. Much of the activity in Antarctica has occurred with the aim of securing those claims or positioning non-claimant countries for the eventual lodging of their own claims.

Nevertheless, the point has been moot since 1959 when the Antarctic Treaty put all claims into abeyance for the duration of the Treaty itself, which now has an indefinite term.²⁴ Since American explorer Admiral Richard E. Byrd's expedition of 1928-30, the first American

²⁰ Ibid, p. 19

²¹ Grattan, 1963, p. 610

²² Quartermain, 1967, p. 421

²³ Templeton, 2000, p. 113

²⁴ New Zealand Prime Minister Walter Nash's proposal, tabled at the Antarctic Treaty meeting in Washington, that all parties renounce their territorial claims in Antarctica, was rejected by the other participating nations.

expedition of the twentieth century, the United States had adopted a neutral approach regarding Antarctic sovereignty claims. Based on the Hughes Doctrine espoused in 1924, the United States has made no claims and correspondingly, does not recognise any other country's claim to Antarctic territory. Nevertheless, Byrd was under no illusions regarding United States hegemony over certain portions of Antarctica. His intentions became evident during his first Antarctic expedition (1928-30) with the naming of Marie Byrd Land for a major portion of territory to the east of the Ross Sea stretching across the southern Pacific ocean to Graham Land (called Palmer Land by the United States) or the Antarctic Peninsula as it is now known. Byrd and his crew were the first people to fly over this part of Antarctica. They took off on 5 December 1929 in their Ford Tri-motor aircraft and flew eastward as far as fuel and weather permitted and photographed 200 miles of a newly discovered mountain range. In all, an area covering over 150,000 sq. miles was captured by aerial photography during this expedition.²⁵ However, after Byrd's expeditions which included the United States Antarctic Service Expedition (1939-41) (USASE) and the advent of the Cold War, much debate occurred as to whether or not the US should make its own claim.²⁶ In the early 1940's during the Roosevelt Presidency, the US was fully intent on lodging a claim to Antarctic territory.²⁷ It would not have been trivial and would probably have trod on the toes of more than one nation including Britain. Roosevelt wrote to Byrd that:

*The United States has never recognised any claims to sovereignty in the Antarctic regions asserted by any foreign state...Members of the Service [USASE] may take any appropriate steps such as dropping written claims from airplanes, depositing such writings in cairns, etc. which might assist in supporting a sovereignty claim by the United States Government...No public announcement of such act shall, however be made without specific authority in each case from the Secretary of State.*²⁸

The US stance left Britain in an ambiguous position. As observed by polar geo-political writer Klaus Dodds, "America's unwillingness either to press a claim to the so-called Pacific

²⁵ Bertrand, 1948, p. 293, Interestingly, American scientist Lloyd Berkner, later instrumental in launching the IGY, was aboard this flight.

²⁶ Rodgers, 1990, pp.192-194

²⁷ Templeton, 2000, pp. 70-71

²⁸ Grattan, 1963, p. 614, US Captain Finn Ronne in 1946, left a capsule containing a US claim while surveying the Peninsula area. This capsule was found by Vivian Fuchs and taken to Britain from whence it has never emerged.

sector of the Antarctic or to actively support Britain in its exclusive claim to the Falklands Islands Dependencies persuaded London officials that its Commonwealth partners would have to be approached for moral and practical support”.²⁹ The difficulties Britain had with Argentina and Chile over its claim to the FID were further magnified by issues that existed between the US and Britain. These tensions reached a serious level in 1937 when Argentina extended its 1927 claim of South Georgia to include all of the Falkland Islands Dependencies.³⁰ As noted by Australian political scientist Peter Beck there was resentment that the US did not seek British permission before carrying out its expeditions within ‘British territory’. An example was United States Navy Captain Finn Ronne’s occupation in 1947 of an old American base site in Graham Land on the Antarctic Peninsula.³¹ Called ‘East Base’, it had been built as part of the United States Antarctic Service Expedition (1939-1941) in which Ronne had served as Chief of Staff.³² Britain had established its presence on the Peninsula in 1943 when it had built its first two bases, at Deception Island and Port Lockroy as part of the wartime project *Operation Tabarin*. A third base was built in 1946 by FIDS on Stonington Island a short distance away from the old American base. A particularly contentious issue arose over the sharing of sanitary facilities between the two adjacent bases which was resolved only when the British built a toilet for their own exclusive use.³³

Despite the exploits of Byrd and of Australia’s Douglas Mawson and John Rymill during the inter-war years, Antarctica remained a difficult puzzle to solve. Grattan notes that although Cook had proven the existence of a large southern continent, ‘it was still not comprehended’. The geology of the continent was sparsely defined. The nature of the continent itself, whether it consisted of islands, perhaps inter-connected or a single large land mass was not known. This had importance for countries such as Argentina and Chile who looked to prove their own claims to Antarctic territory based on the principle of ‘continental integrity’. However, the geophysics of tectonic plate theory was in its infancy and only beginning to gain acceptance within the scientific community. For New Zealand, most of its claim lay beneath the ‘permanent’ Ross Ice Shelf, which created unique issues relating to offshore areas. Following World War II and despite having only a superficial and vicarious relationship with Antarctica, unlike its ‘protectorate’ south Pacific islands, where it had indeed been actively

²⁹ Dodds, 2000, p. 197

³⁰ Fuchs, 1982, p. 20

³¹ Beck, 1986, p. 38

³² Bertrand, 1948, p. 407

³³ Darlington, 1956, pp. 115-120

engaged, New Zealand was finally being prodded to awaken from its Antarctic slumber and adopt a more proactive stance regarding the Ross Dependency. As early as May 1947 a proposal of New Zealand origin for a national expedition to the Antarctic was submitted in a ‘bulky report’ to the Prime Minister’s office for consideration.

The government’s review of that proposal concluded:

a) While it is important that New Zealand, because of its position and interest, should take part in Antarctic exploration, the dispatch of an expedition and the establishment of a base in the Ross Dependency cannot be absolutely justified having regard alone to scientific and economic aspects of the work to be done in the Antarctic.

b) On political grounds and if steps are to be taken to secure British title in the territory, it is important we dispatch an expedition and establish a New Zealand base in the Antarctic³⁴

The political value of Antarctic involvement remained paramount. The report, which emanated from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), then casually stated “This proposal appears to have died a natural death.”

Two years later following discussions with New Zealand’s pre-eminent scientist, Dr Ernest Marsden, Frank Debenham approached the RGS with a proposal for an expedition to the Ross Sea. The proposal was transmitted to the New Zealand government by the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) in January 1949. It stipulated that New Zealand build a base in McMurdo Sound estimated to cost £50,000 with another £16,000 needed for charter of a ship. The proposal required that New Zealand provide naval transport and the construction of a base which would ideally be for permanent use. Funding would have been mainly from private sources with some government grants to complete the project. Referring back to his experience with Scott in 1913 Debenham recommended the Dailey Islands as the most desirable site for the base. The proposal planned for a small scientific expedition with a focus on “...ice physics and mechanics”. In a confidential response New Zealand outlined its particular areas of scientific interest and indicated that if the UK government were prepared

³⁴ DSIR, 1953

to fund part of the costs then New Zealand would also consider participating. However, there were doubts over the cost estimates put forward by Debenham. Despite interest and support from a number of scientific departments as well as the New Zealand Navy this proposal also came to nothing since "...both the UK and New Zealand waited on the other to take the initiative..."³⁵

Yet another opportunity presented itself with an invitation for New Zealand to include a representative in the Norwegian British Swedish Antarctic Expedition (NBSAE 1949-1952) led by Norway's John Gjaever. However, as this expedition was targeted for Dronning-Maud Land and not the Ross Dependency New Zealand declined to send a representative.³⁶

Fortunately, at this time other events were unfolding which would provide an antidote to New Zealand's case of Antarctic apathy.

The 1950's – Decade of the TAE, the IGY and the Cold War

The basic elements of the TAE were scratched out on a single piece of foolscap by British geologist Dr Vivian Fuchs in 1949 while waiting out a blizzard in a tent on Alexander Island.³⁷ Fuchs' goal was to realise Shackleton's dream of crossing the Antarctic continent overland and thereby solve the riddle of the land contour beneath the ice. Was Antarctica a single great land mass or was it really two continents that had split apart? Or was East Antarctica simply a collection of islands separated by under-ice straits and lakes? After five years and much political manoeuvring which included garnering the support of Churchill (who had also supported Shackleton) Fuchs' expedition proposal was approved in 1954 by the UK Polar Committee.

In May 1953 the New Zealand mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary had reached the top of the world and his popularity was unrivalled. His public profile, together with his proven personal abilities, prompted Fuchs to approach him regarding possible New Zealand involvement in his project. In November 1953 at their first meeting in London Hillary was impressed with Fuchs' earnest personality and the adventure that the expedition promised. Although he made no firm commitment during this meeting Hillary's interest had definitely been aroused.³⁸ Over the next eighteen months deliberations between the UK and New Zealand progressed

³⁵ Debenham, 1949

³⁶ Swithinbank, Charles, interview with the author, July 2009, Cambridge, UK

³⁷ Fuchs – Hillary, 1958, pp 1-2

³⁸ Hillary, 1961, pp 13-14

when finally, and not until the New Zealand Antarctic Society had put the full weight of its prominent membership into the fray, the reluctance of Prime Minister Sidney Holland was overcome. On 14 May, 1955 the New Zealand government announced that it would make a grant of £50,000 towards the TAE and encouraged the public to make personal contributions towards its success. This step followed over three decades of inactivity since the transfer of responsibility in 1923.³⁹ Although Fuchs had conceived of it as a Commonwealth effort the expedition was initially entitled simply the Trans-Antarctic Expedition with little acknowledgement of Dominion participation. The Executive Committee in London soon realised that to achieve financial viability the involvement and contributions of other Commonwealth countries would be essential. At an early meeting the Committee of Management (COM) decided to change the name of the expedition to the ‘Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition.’ (CTAE) or TAE as it became commonly known.⁴⁰

The TAE brought to a close the series of large-scale private polar expeditions that had been the hallmark of the heroic age. The crossing of Antarctica was, in Shackleton’s words, the last “great main object of Antarctic journeyings”.⁴¹ Everest had been climbed in 1953. Was the TAE to be Britain’s last attempt at ‘geographical glory’? Was the crossing of Antarctica to be Britain’s last gasp in extending the Empire? Was there any chance of heralding in a second ‘Elizabethan’ age? In *Geopolitics in Antarctica* Klaus Dodds bluntly posits that “In considering the interests of New Zealand, the Churchill government proposed that the TAE might lead to the creation of a base on Ross Island thereby further protecting Commonwealth territorial claims.”⁴² As it turned out the expedition resulted in the establishment of Scott Base in the Ross Dependency and marked the beginning of New Zealand’s permanent occupation of Antarctic territory. The TAE had proved to be a critical turning point for New Zealand’s Antarctic involvement.

The TAE was closely linked with another major event of the decade, namely, the International Geophysical Year (IGY), held over eighteen months from 1 July 1957 through to 31 December 1958. It was an event in which New Zealand also participated along with more than twenty other countries.⁴³ The United States was the second country whose

³⁹ Templeton, 2000, p. 23

⁴⁰ NZHC-London, 25 May 1955

⁴¹ Shackleton, 1923, p vii

⁴² Dodds, 1997, p 167

⁴³ Sullivan, 1961, p.27

Antarctic ambitions became closely inter-woven with those of New Zealand. The US was not formally involved with the TAE but certainly the Americans participating in the IGY were eager spectators. Since the TAE was intended to show the prowess of Britain and the Commonwealth any assistance by outside agencies such as the United States was to be avoided if at all possible. That said, the US Navy was to play a critical role in the success of the expedition. The support ranged from basic transport of men and equipment from New Zealand, including local ice-breaker and helicopter support in McMurdo Sound, to communications assistance between the two TAE parties through the US Amundsen-Scott station at the South Pole, to providing critical medical aid during various personnel crises.

In addition to the fundamental cultural ties that bound the three allied nations, the United States had ulterior motives for their unreserved support of New Zealand and possibly also of Britain. The Cold War was at its peak. The Korean War had recently ended leaving Soviet aims in supporting Communist North Korea deeply mistrusted by the West. At the planning meeting for the IGY held by the Comité Spéciale de l'Année Géophysique Internationale (CSAGI) in Paris in 1955, both Russia and Japan stated their intention to build bases in Antarctica for 'scientific purposes'. Not surprisingly, this intention made the United States very uneasy and particularly concerned that either Japan or Russia would choose a site or sites near their own, perhaps even in the vicinity of the Bay of Whales. This was 'sacred ground' where Byrd had first set up his base 'Little America' in 1929 and the focal point for the giant US expedition of 1946-47, *Operation Highjump*. It was at this Paris meeting that USN Rear Admiral George Dufek, leader of the US Navy's logistics and support effort for the IGY called *Operation Deep Freeze*, first met Hillary and Fuchs. It was also there that he generously offered Hillary assistance in transporting personnel, supplies and equipment from New Zealand to McMurdo Sound. This offer, welcome as it must have been, put the TAE leaders in a bit of a quandary. In the end, New Zealand made significant use of American Navy vessels to carry out its mission. However, New Zealand organisers were careful where possible to use the smaller New Zealand ship *Endeavour*, an 'end-of-the line' re-fitted vessel purchased from the Falkland Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS), to carry expedition personnel and material while the US Navy ships, *John R Towel* and the icebreaker *Glacier*, transported the New Zealand IGY party's scientific equipment and personnel. Thus the Commonwealth purity of the TAE was protected from 'contamination' by overt United States support. This separation highlighted the effort made to assure a distinction between the TAE and the IGY initiatives.



Figure 7: Icebreaker *USS Glacier* comes to assist *HMNZS Endeavour* – January 1957
The pack ice had halted *Endeavour's* advance and Captain Harry Kirkwood had been forced to call on the American ship to clear a path towards Butter Point. They are in the vicinity of Beaufort Island still distant from McMurdo Sound.

Photo: Bill Cranfield

2. Methodology

My thesis is focused on the TAE related activities of Britain, New Zealand and the United States during the period following World War II up to the signing of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959 in Washington DC. To a lesser, but nevertheless important, extent these countries' IGY activities are also included where relevant in that discussion. I have divided my research into five main areas. In the first part I analyse the events that led up to the British and New Zealand decisions to participate in the TAE. Secondly, I examine the interaction between the International Geophysical Year (IGY) and the TAE. A third focus area is the role of the US Navy and an assessment of its importance to the success of the expedition. A fourth relates to the conduct and issues comprising the expedition itself, which it is argued have been inadequately or inaccurately treated to date. Finally, I investigate the legacy of the TAE and the question of its importance in the history of polar exploration.

My initial focus was to meet as many of the surviving members of the expedition as possible both in New Zealand and the UK. I was fortunate in being able to meet and interview six members of the UK team and nine New Zealand participants. In addition I interviewed or corresponded with another five key individuals closely involved with events at that time. My research was also directed at studying the chief archives where I expected to find material related to the TAE. They included archives in Australia, Canada, the UK and the United States. In New Zealand the most fruitful sources were the Alexander Turnbull Library, Archives New Zealand in Wellington, the Auckland War Museum and the Canterbury Museum's Antarctic Collection in Christchurch. The Antarctic Collection of the University of Canterbury, in that it was inherited from Antarctica New Zealand, also yielded many items of great interest. In the UK the National Archives at Kew, and the collections of the Scott Polar Research Institute, the British Antarctic Survey in Cambridge, and the Royal Geographic Society, London, were most useful. Visits to the Canadian National Archives in Ottawa and to the Syracuse University archive in the United States yielded material of interest relating to Commonwealth participation in the TAE and the papers of Rear Admiral George Dufek with the US Navy's *Operation Deep Freeze* respectively.

My approach has been to select specific aspects of the expedition and to investigate those in detail, rather than to attempt a more general account of the entire expedition. This means that several topics had to be left for another time and are mentioned only briefly in passing.

Nevertheless I tried to retain a degree of continuity in the train of events so as to ease the ‘flow’ and benefit the reader. The criteria for topic selection were:

- 1) topics that, in the eyes of this researcher, have not been sufficiently or accurately treated in previous published accounts and
- 2) topics where my research has yielded sufficient new material to warrant inclusion
- 3) topics that support the main objectives of my thesis.

The thesis will answer the following questions regarding the CTAE:

- a. How was the TAE conceived and initiated? What was the approval process and what obstacles had to be overcome before it was given formal approval?
- b. What was its governance structure, and how was it arrived at?
- c. What effect did the TAE and the IGY have on each other? Would the TAE have occurred without the IGY?
- d. The TAE – what happened? Analyse the significant aspects of the expedition that have been only briefly mentioned in the published accounts. Sub-topics addressed here include: Base site and route selection, the purchase of the *John Biscoe*, and the scientific contribution of the TAE.
- e. Hillary’s ‘dash to the pole’ – How did it come about? Although many accounts exist, the diaries and other newly discovered material lead to subtle yet important nuances in interpretation.
- f. How important was US support, both to Fuchs’ crossing-party as well as to the New Zealand Support Party, and to the overall success of the TAE?
- g. What is the legacy of the TAE? What position does the TAE hold today in the lore of polar exploration?

In his book *The Pursuit of History* historian John Tosh maintains that there are two approaches to historical enquiry. One is a source-oriented approach and the other is the problem-oriented approach. I chose to use the former and as a result have investigated a large variety of sources, mostly of a primary nature. I find that I am in agreement with Tosh when he says “In history, more than most other disciplines, undirected immersion in the raw

materials has an intellectual justification.”⁴⁴ I am fortunate in that there exists an extensive amount of material about the TAE in various government archives and in specialised museum collections. These include correspondence, photographs, maps and more recently, personal diaries and published accounts by expedition participants. My examination of these sources has caused me to modify my thesis draft according to the rich veins of material discovered along the way. The account of New Zealand’s purchase of the ship *John Biscoe* became possible when I came across a series of correspondence and government documents at the UK National Archives at Kew. Not all sources have the same degree of veracity, even those such as personal diaries or interviews with expedition participants. Memories may fail or anecdotes might have ‘evolved’ into ‘folklore’. Stories may have been intentionally or inadvertently slanted. Documents may exude more importance than they actually merit. Wherever possible I have tried to corroborate my facts across different sources in order to ascertain the ‘truth’. I strove not only to answer the question ‘What happened?’ about the TAE but also wanted to analyse ‘Why?’ certain positions were taken or decisions made. I believe that the motives people have for acting in a specific fashion are essential to completing the historical narrative. Being an engineer by earlier training I tried to apply a ‘scientific’ detachment to the material I unearthed. So far as I have been successful, despite my personal admiration for the proponents, my thesis is intended to reflect a passive view of the material free of ‘preconceptions or moral involvement’.

However, as the eminent intellectual historian R.G. Collingwood maintained the historian must “...make a distinction between what may be called the inside and the outside of an event.” In this regard the ‘inside’ “...can only be described in terms of thought”. Thus the historian’s task is to re-enact in his or her own mind the thoughts and intentions of individuals in the past.”⁴⁵ In this regard I tried to apply Collingwood’s advice as I drafted the section on Hillary’s trip to the pole. What was possibly going through the minds of Fuchs and Hillary during those intensive weeks from mid-December to mid-January 1958? Using their diaries and the available correspondence I attempt to imagine each of those days as if I were standing in their shoes. Inevitably this brings the researcher’s bias to the fore. To some extent my thesis deviates from being a rigorous ‘scientific’ document to the degree that it reflects my personal interpretation of events. No doubt I have been influenced by my prior reading of secondary sources and therefore have developed a few pre-conceptions about the expedition.

⁴⁴ Tosh, 1984, p. 111

⁴⁵ Collingwood, pp. 213, 282

Nevertheless, I often experienced the situation as described by historian Arthur Marwick: “...when one is reflecting later on what one has discovered in the archives, when early misconceptions begin to be replaced and new and more convincing interpretations begin to take their place.”⁴⁶ One of the most difficult aspects resulted from my knowledge of ‘what happened next’ whereas while the expedition was ‘happening’ events were occurring in ‘real time’ with many activities running in parallel. As much as possible I have tried to mitigate the impact of that fore-knowledge. A major purpose of my thesis is to bring forth what Marwick calls “new knowledge”.⁴⁷ Much is already known about the TAE, either from the voluminous newspaper articles of the day or from a number of published sources. However, my research has uncovered a great deal that has hitherto not been available to the general public. It is those gaps in the existing record that I wished to fill.

To a certain extent the topic of the TAE lends itself to the fields of ‘post-colonial’ history and perhaps even of ‘subaltern’ history. During the post-World War II years the British Empire was buffeted by the process of de-colonisation with many former colonies declaring their independence of Britain. New Zealand, noteworthy for being the last of the major Dominions to endorse the Statute of Westminster, was now poised to assert itself further and Sir Edmund Hillary was to become the archetype of this new attitude. In that regard, Vivian Fuchs would prove the ideal protagonist for Hillary. Many of the ‘old guard’ in New Zealand, including the Ross Sea Committee, would feel great discomfort at Hillary’s break with the traditionally compliant status of New Zealand; however history does not stand still. When Hillary ascended Everest he and Tenzing were not the first pair that John Hunt selected to try for the summit. Two Englishmen, Tom Bourdillon and Charles Evans, had come agonizingly close a few days earlier but had had to turn back due to problems with their oxygen supply. A New Zealander and a Sherpa were Hunt’s second choice. Nevertheless, as George Lowe aptly pointed out “When we climbed Everest we were all ‘British’”.⁴⁸

In addition, there are elements of a ‘comparative’ and, in a certain sense, even of a ‘trans-national’ history with respect to the contrasts between British, New Zealand and American perspectives on Antarctica and of the inter-play between these countries during that particular period.

⁴⁶ Marwick, p. 163

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 153

⁴⁸ Lowe, 1997

Fortunately there now exists a considerable amount of oral history material recorded by TAE participants. These audio tapes were supplemented by interviews that I carried out with surviving members of the TAE and IGY in both New Zealand and the UK. I utilised a semi-structured interviewing technique since it offered the best way to encourage a free flowing dialogue while at the same time helped ensure the collection of information relevant to my research.

My research activity included interviews with surviving veterans of both the British and New Zealand TAE/IGY parties and I was often privileged to review their diaries, personal archives and photo collections. I was frequently assisted in this regard by family members for those expedition participants who had passed away. In this respect I was given access to the diaries and archives of Bernard 'Bernie' Gunn, Dr Ron Balham and Dr Trevor Hatherton as well as Harry Ayres, all members of the New Zealand party.

The TAE photographs that are presented were chosen to match the topic being discussed. They were either given to me by individual members of the expedition or found in various museum archives. To the best of my knowledge most have not been previously published.

The thesis employs a combination of the analytical and narrative historical styles and attempts to pull together the many disparate threads of the expedition. This approach better presents an integrated and historically meaningful narrative, one that reveals the layered dimensions and parallel contexts within which the TAE was accomplished.



**Figure 8: Shackleton's original Antarctic tractor as found at Scott's old hut at Cape
Evans⁴⁹**

Photo: Neil Sandford

⁴⁹ This tractor was recovered and is now on display at the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch

3. Literature Review

*It follows that a debated sovereignty is still sovereignty and a debate over sovereignty an exercise in sovereignty. It follows that sovereignty entails a making of history.*⁵⁰

In this chapter I assess the available published literature relating to the TAE. The British and New Zealand historiography of Antarctic exploration is remarkable for the scant coverage of both the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition and, through its geographical position and its position as administrator of the Ross Dependency, of the significant role that New Zealand has played in support of Antarctic exploration in general. This is more remarkable given that New Zealand is an ‘Antarctic nation’ and one of the twelve original signatories to the Antarctic Treaty in 1959. Although New Zealand acted as a principal ‘gateway’ for Antarctic explorers, the role of New Zealand and New Zealanders accompanying these expeditions is mentioned only in passing by the authors of the various accounts. The South Island ports of Lyttelton and Port Chalmers were particularly favoured by these expeditions through the time of Lincoln Ellsworth and USN Admiral Byrd in the 1930’s and 1940’s. The social history aspect of New Zealand involvement and its effect on the Canterbury and Southland regions has only been lightly touched upon by Antarctic scholars.

The TAE story exists as a multiplicity of accounts. Several were written soon after the expedition, including the ‘official accounts’ of Fuchs & Hillary (*The Crossing of Antarctica*-1958) and Helm & Miller (*Antarctica* - 1961). There were also four accounts which probed the social side of the expedition to a greater degree giving significant insight into the personal struggles of the key players. These include the perceptive accounts of George Lowe (*Because it is There* - 1959) and of two of the key journalists who covered the TAE, Noel Barber of London’s *Daily News*, (*The White Desert* -1958) and Douglas McKenzie of the *Christchurch Star* (*Opposite Poles* – 1963). The most provocative book (*No Latitude for Error* – 1961) was written by Hillary himself once the ban on accounts by TAE members had expired. Whereas

⁵⁰ Pocock, 2005, p. 259

the official accounts reflect a desire to downplay controversy and to emphasize the successful aspects of the expedition to the satisfaction of governments and sponsors, the latter accounts provide an avenue into the internal thoughts and personalities of the leaders as the expedition events transpired.

In order to place the TAE in a proper perspective it is important to familiarize oneself with the Antarctic expeditions of the previous decade. The 1940's were split asunder by World War II but there were at least four significant expeditions during that decade all under the auspices of the United States. These were the United States Antarctic Service Expedition (USASE 1939-41), the US Navy Antarctic Developments Project better known as *Operation High Jump* (1946-47), the Ronne Antarctic Research Expedition (RARE 1947-48), and the US Navy Second Antarctic Developments Project known as *Operation Windmill* (1947-48). These have been meticulously described by Kenneth J. Bertrand in his excellent book *Americans in Antarctica 1775-1948* (1971). This book is an important source of unbiased information on US Navy Commander Finn Ronne. Finn Ronne, of Norwegian descent, was the son of Martin Ronne sail maker on the ship *Fram* and a veteran of Amundsen's expedition that first reached the South Pole. He had the Antarctic in his blood and first cut his teeth as a member of Byrd's second Antarctic expedition (1933-35) where he acted as a skiing expert. He then served as 'chief of staff' for USASE where Byrd was again in overall command. These expeditions confirmed the practical use of aircraft and mechanized transport in the Antarctic and formed the basis for Fuchs' later plan to use tractors, with the support of dog teams, for the TAE. Despite significant behind-the-scenes resistance from Byrd, Ronne then led his own private expedition, the RARE, the last privately funded United States expedition to Antarctica. Ronne decided to use the huts of East Base that he had previously helped set up on Stonington Island in Marguerite Bay during the USASE of 1939-41. Following the disbandment of *Operation Tabarin* at the end of World War II the newly formed FIDS established Base 'E' in 1946 on Stonington Island adjacent to the now abandoned American East Base. Upon his arrival in 1947 as leader of the RARE, Ronne was incensed at the condition of the huts and blamed their dilapidated condition on the British party. Kevin Walton, who witnessed Ronne's fit of pique, stated in his book *Two Years in the Antarctic* "Commander Finn Ronne...seemed ill-prepared to believe a word of our efforts to tidy up the American huts." Ronne then adopted a "... very aggressive attitude..." about the British having trespassed on American property. Walton described the scene thus "At this early stage I think Ronne must have felt very embittered by our presence...he put a ban on all

social intercourse between bases, so that was that.”⁵¹ This difficult situation had been foreseen as the British Embassy had previously tried to discourage Ronne from returning to Stonington Island rightly expecting that “...Friction...could result from the two groups working so closely together.”⁵² When Ronne first saw the old US huts in disarray he wrote letters to the American media accusing the British party of over-wintering in the huts and creating the mess. In fact, the buildings had been looted by visiting Argentine and Chilean parties during the intervening years although the British party under leader Major Ken Pierce-Butler had ‘borrowed’ a few chairs and supplies to complete the FIDS base.

The RARE importantly marked the advent of women over-wintering in Antarctica. Jennie Darlington, along with Finn Ronne’s wife, Edith ‘Jacqui’ Ronne, accompanied the RARE expedition to Stonington Island. In her book, *My Antarctic Honeymoon*, she described her experience as a newly married bride working hard to assimilate herself, accompanied by her husband, into the male domain of the expedition through an eventful Antarctic winter. Darlington related the most open and believable account of the fragile co-existence of the British and American parties on Stonington Island including a vivid description of their respective steps to assert sovereignty over the area. These steps included raising flags and exchanging diplomatic notes of protest. A most sensitive, and in retrospect comical, issue was over “...squatters rights to the two hole privy” that was being used equally by both parties. After some discussion by the ‘privy council’ an amicable settlement was reached due to the presence of two women with the American party. In a chivalrous nod to Antarctica’s pioneer female visitors the British finally agreed to give up the ‘county seat’ and Pierce-Butler had a separate toilet facility built for FIDS use.⁵³ Fortunately the icy relations thawed over time with the Americans gaining respect for the British team’s ability with dogs and sledging. The situation was also considerably eased by the availability of grog at the British huts.

In contrast to Jenny Darlington’s account, Finn Ronne’s book *Antarctic Conquest* related a complementary but somewhat different version of events during the RARE with a particularly vivid description of the contentious discussion with British embassy officials in Washington as they tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him from siting his base on Stonington Island.⁵⁴ Finally, a spirit of camaraderie and co-operation did eventually develop between the

⁵¹ Walton, 1955, p. 129

⁵² Darlington, 1956, p. 114

⁵³ Ibid, p. 119

⁵⁴ Ronne, 1949, p. 31

two parties that would carry over to the TAE/IGY period ten years later when Ronne, now promoted to Captain, returned as leader of the American IGY Ellsworth Station which was located just thirty miles from the Fuchs' Shackleton base at Vahsel Bay. As a member of US Navy Task Force 43, he played an important role in the conduct of the TAE particularly with regard to the notable trans-Antarctic flight led by RAF pilot John Lewis in a single engine Otter aircraft.

Finn Ronne wrote three books about his time in the Antarctic. These were *Antarctic Conquest* (1949), *Antarctic Command* (1961), and *Antarctica, My Destiny* (1979). Ronne had a poor reputation as a leader and his expeditions generated significant ill-feeling amongst his men. In addition to Darlington's account of her experiences on the RARE another book that brings these negative aspects into sharp relief is *Innocents on the Ice* (1998) by geophysicist John Behrendt who served a decade later at Ellsworth Station during the IGY. *Innocents on the Ice* relates Behrendt's experiences serving under Ronne during the IGY from July 1957 through December 1958. This period, with the group based on the Filchner Ice Shelf, within forty miles of the TAE's Shackleton base, exposed a serious loss of confidence in Ronne's leadership by his scientists with 'paranoia' being only one of the derogatory terms employed against him. In fact, a virtual mutiny occurred against his leadership. If Shackleton provided the model for the ideal Antarctic leader then Ronne would have been his antithesis. *Antarctic Command* is Ronne's own account of his time leading this remote portion of *Operation Deep Freeze* under US Navy Rear Admiral George Dufek.

The historiography of the TAE can be approached from a variety of perspectives. The published literature includes books written as 'official' accounts as opposed to other personal and more candid expositions. Another differentiator is the date of publication, i.e. whether the book was published before the expedition began, of which there was one outstanding example, or during the few celebratory years after the crossing was successfully completed, or again more recently at the time of the TAE's 50th anniversary in 2007.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating books on the TAE was actually written before the continental crossing began. *The Conquest of the Antarctic* (1956) by journalist Norman Kemp, contains a Foreword by then Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sidney Holland. In this short piece Holland acknowledged that New Zealand had so far been absent from its Antarctic territory. He revealed an aspect of his government's strategy with the remark "...we

have emphasized the private nature of the Expedition and have challenged the public at large to show their support by making private contributions ... to test the depth of the interest of New Zealanders in the Antarctic and to increase their sense of involvement...⁵⁵ This approach would of course have the effect of reducing the costs for the government but it also reflected the importance of public opinion in Holland's astute political mind. Kemp was a young New Zealand journalist living in London who through his friendships was able to interview key members of the expedition including George Lowe, Hillary and Fuchs. The most remarkable aspect of the book is Kemp's startling revelation that

*Though Hillary holds private hopes of reaching the South Pole from his end, this endeavour is not part of the specific programme and could only be achieved if Fuchs and his men make an exceptionally speedy passage from their starting-place, and Hillary is able to lay the bases without undue delays from his end.*⁵⁶

Since the book was published before Fuchs and Hillary had set sail from their respective ports of departure in December 1956, the eventual fact of Hillary's 'dash to the Pole' should not have surprised anyone, least of all New Zealand's Ross Sea Committee nor Fuchs himself.

Seven accounts were written within the five years following the expedition. Two of these were 'official' while the other four offered insightful descriptions of personal experiences. Of the two official accounts the most prosaic was *The Crossing of Antarctica*. Despite its lack of controversial content the book completed a contractual obligation with Cassell, the publishers, and robust sales generated significant funds to offset expedition expenses. The book was a bestseller in the adventure travel genre and greatly assisted in creating the expedition's positive financial result. Written as a joint effort by Fuchs and Hillary, with Hillary being allotted a mere five of its nineteen chapters, it avoided any mention of the major issues that arose between the party leaders during the expedition. It also gave scant acknowledgement of the vital contribution by the US Navy to the expedition's success. The second official account, entitled simply *Antarctica* (1961), focused mainly on the activities of the New Zealand TAE Support Party. It was written by Arthur Helm, Secretary of the Ross

⁵⁵ Kemp, 1956, p. v

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 42

Sea Committee, and J.R. ‘Bob’ Holmes-Miller, surveyor and deputy leader of the New Zealand party. This book offers a detailed and somewhat dry account, but it excels as a source of basic information about the expedition. One serious shortcoming is the brevity, at a mere two and a half pages, with which it treats the activities of the New Zealand Antarctic Flight.⁵⁷ This is a strange deficiency given the extensive and critical role that the Antarctic Flight played in supporting the New Zealand mission. There is no obvious explanation for this abbreviated treatment other than that it perhaps reflects the personal biases of the authors. The account also suffers to some degree from superfluous detail and an unexciting format which is often the case with official accounts. As with *The Crossing of Antarctica* it is careful not to offend despite being based on the diaries of expedition members, including Bob Miller’s, which contains many strong passages that reveal tense inter-personal situations during the expedition. However, to its credit their book contains a detailed explanation, including verbatim quotes of telegrams exchanged between Fuchs and Hillary relating to Hillary’s decision to travel to the Pole as well as an explanation of the clerical error that caused Hillary’s confidential telegram to the London Committee to be inadvertently released to the press.⁵⁸ It is necessarily light on the British aspects of the expedition for which unfortunately no corresponding account has been published.

Among these early books were four that provide much fascinating insight into the personalities of both Fuchs and Hillary thereby allowing us to better understand the social side of the expedition. These were *No Latitude for Error* (Hillary, 1961), *The White Desert* (Barber, 1958), *Because it is There* (Lowe, 1959), and *Opposite Poles* (McKenzie, 1963). Hillary generated significant ill-feeling with his decision to write an independent and candid view of the TAE. As he noted in the Foreword,

This is an account of my personal participation...It does not seek to follow the pattern of an “Official Account” which by custom, eschews all personal problems and conflicts and details only the inexorable progress of the expedition...

Clearly, Hillary had felt frustrated by the literary constraints of *The Crossing of Antarctica*. All members of the expedition had signed an agreement prohibiting them from publishing

⁵⁷ Helm-Miller, 1964, p. 227

⁵⁸ Ibid, pp. 339 - 340

any personal account until two years following its conclusion so as to protect the royalty earnings from the official account published by Cassell, a key expedition sponsor. Hillary completed his book early and applied to the London TAE Finance Sub-Committee for permission to publish six months before the expiry of the ban. The Committee agreed on condition that Hillary grant 10% of all future royalties to the expedition and that the London Committee of Management should have the right to approve the script. Hillary would have no part of this and waited until 1961 to publish his book. Fuchs, who had read the copy that Hillary had submitted with his application to publish, was upset by its contents. The COM meeting minutes of November 1959 recorded

Sir Vivian said that he found the tone of the book distasteful and that there were constant carping criticisms of Expedition organisation, implied or otherwise. This was accomplished by the omission of relative [relevant, sic] facts, the failure to give complete quotes of messages, or to ensure that the quoted messages were dated. There were also unflattering references to the Ross Sea Committee.

Fuchs went on and threatened that:

If the book was published...he would feel bound to ...answer the implied charges as he thought fit – even at the cost of publishing material that, in an effort to preserve Sir Edmund’s reputation, he had deliberately withheld in his own account of the Expedition and from the Press.⁵⁹

Hillary had certainly broken through Fuchs’ shield of implacable reserve. Hillary openly admitted to a lack of confidence in Fuchs’ ability to complete a timely crossing, one that would ensure they could escape from McMurdo Sound before freezing ice locked them in for another winter.

Hillary was prolific in recording his TAE experiences. A well described account is contained in his autobiography *Nothing Venture Nothing Win* (1975), an autobiographical work which contains details of his life both as a mountaineer and as joint leader of the TAE. Another autobiography by Hillary, possibly ghost written, is *View from the Summit* (1999). This book

⁵⁹COM Minutes, November 1959

gives an abridged account of the TAE story with additional material on the trip to the Pole based on personal interviews. However it contains several inaccuracies that put its authorship in doubt. For example it states the IGY dates as 1956-1957 when they were July 1957-December 1958. Also, the quotation from Hillary's letter to the Ross Sea Committee is inaccurate. The statement "Fuchs seemed reasonably happy with these proposals and they are a guide I am using in my discussions..." does not exist in that letter.⁶⁰

George Lowe, Hillary's lifelong friend and climbing partner, was one of two New Zealand members of Fuchs' crossing party and was its designated official photographer. He also wrote a book *Because it is There* (1959) shortly after his return to England. Lowe was known for his finely tuned sense of humour which carries through in this very readable account of both his Everest and Antarctic experiences. It has particular relevance because Lowe accompanied Fuchs during the entire expedition, including the *Theron* voyage. Importantly, his interest was more in the people and their personalities than in operational and technical details. In one passage he perceptively drew the contrast between Fuchs and Hillary who "...from early days tackled all his problems by means of the bold frontal assault, and who would instantly scrap a good idea for a better one [whereas] Bunny was trained in...the school of inflexible-enterprise-without emotion."⁶¹ Lowe's account has perhaps the most incisive analysis of the differing personalities of the two leaders. From Lowe, and the later accounts of journalists Noel Barber and Douglas MacKenzie, it is possible to get much closer to the 'story within the story'.

Fuchs himself wrote an account of the expedition published in 1959 called *Antarctic Adventure*. Aimed at young readers it shies away from controversy, Fuchs shed a bit more light on his perception of events. For example regarding Hillary's use of Ferguson tractors he admitted "Although it was never part of the official plan, Ed had always hoped that it would be possible to use the Ferguson tractors as well as dogs on the depot laying journey towards the Pole." His detailed account of Hillary's experimental trip in March 1957 to Cape Crozier showed a good understanding of what had been happening on the other side of the continent. Fuchs also gave an enthusiastic account of New Zealand's depot-laying including Hillary's decision to go to the Pole.⁶² Towards the end of his life he wrote two books. *Of Ice and Men*

⁶⁰ Hillary, July 1955

⁶¹ Lowe, 1959, pp. 105-113

⁶² Fuchs, 1959, p.78

(1982) was the story of his time with FIDS. The other, *A Time to Speak* (1990), contained more material relevant to the TAE. It was in the nature of an autobiography and published thirty years after the expedition. Fuchs here related many interesting aspects of his boyhood and family background which go a long way towards explaining the source of his competitiveness, his determination to succeed, his reluctance to admit error, and his almost dictatorial style of leadership. Also, Fuchs openly described the potent opposition he encountered to his idea of an Antarctic crossing from the polar establishment and the British Foreign Office in particular. One of the more interesting books on Fuchs was the biography *Sir Vivian Fuchs* (1959) written by Egon Larsen and aimed at young adults. It is the first and so far only biography of Fuchs, and was published the year following the expedition.

In one descriptive passage Larsen makes the following sharp observation:

While still in Graham Land [with FIDS] he used to be called 'Poppa' by his men: their feelings towards him were a mixture of respect and affection, yet none of them could have said that he got really close to Vivian Fuchs. He never spoke much apart from discussing the job in hand, and he never betrayed any feelings. Least of all he likes to discuss philosophical ideas or his attitude to life...Fuchs knew that he had much more experience than his men, and he never liked arguments about his decisions. Failure never discouraged him in the least.⁶³

These traits were never more in evidence than during the TAE.

Unlike the case during the heroic age, media coverage of the TAE was constant and intense. No polar expedition had ever generated such a stream of photographs, newspaper articles and radio broadcasts. In addition to Walter Sullivan of the *New York Times*, there were at least three other press correspondents present in McMurdo Sound during the final months of the TAE.⁶⁴ Two of these were Noel Barber, who represented the U.K. newspaper London's *Daily Mail*, and Douglas McKenzie, correspondent for New Zealand's *Christchurch Star*. Immediately following the expedition Barber published his account *The White Desert* (1958)

⁶³ Larsen, 1959, p. 55

⁶⁴ Nine reporters from different media accompanied Dufek and Hillary on their flight from McMurdo Sound to greet Fuchs on his arrival at the South Pole.

and five years later McKenzie published his version *Opposite Poles* (1963). The journalist's penchant for prose is evident in both these accounts nevertheless they each offer, from the differing perspectives of their authors, a unique and vibrant description of the interplay that occurred between the key figures of the TAE, Fuchs, Hillary and USN Rear Admiral George Dufek. Barber was somewhat prone to embellishment and exaggeration but was a master at generating interest and publicity. It was he who created the aura of a 'race to the Pole' when there was no such race and the belief in a 'row' between the two leaders when, at worst, there was a 'difference of opinion'. Barber took full advantage of Dufek's penchant for publicity and managed to secure a seat on any US Navy flight that would bring him in close proximity to the TAE action. It is not surprising that following the expedition Barber, with his vivid imagination, became a successful author of adventure novels. Barber composed his own analysis of the differences between Fuchs and Hillary. In *The White Desert* Barber described Hillary as "...tall and rangy, a rough diamond with a rough diamond's attitude to life, ready when annoyed to express himself extremely forcibly" and Fuchs as "...stocky, deceptively shy in manner, quiet, polished, almost suave. One man was a scientist and the other an explorer."⁶⁵ Barber also noted Admiral Dufek's opinion of Fuchs. In an exchange with Dufek, while flying out to the Pole to meet Fuchs, Barber quoted the following remark "Wait till you see Fuchs, Noel. He's a man in a million." There is little doubt that Fuchs and Hillary, two 'knights of the ice', were each in their own unique way, very impressive men.

McKenzie on the other hand was more grounded than Barber and benefitted from actually taking an active part in the expedition itself. When, due to injury, Hillary found himself short of drivers for his tractor team which had reached Plateau Depot (also known as Depot 280/290) at the head of the Skelton Glacier, McKenzie, at Hillary's request, seized the opportunity to drive one of the Ferguson tractors southward to Depot 700. He only missed going on to the Pole because he realised that his role as correspondent was impossible to perform from the isolation of Hillary's tractor party. Reluctantly, he withdrew from the tractor party at that point and was flown back to Scott Base. McKenzie's book, *Opposite Poles*, gives us a most perceptive analysis of the contrasts between the personalities of Fuchs and Hillary. The following quote illustrates their differences as observed by McKenzie:

Two men could hardly have been more different than Fuchs and Hillary. They had the common denominator of a limitless fund of courage and determination;

⁶⁵ Barber, 1958, p. 27

otherwise they were spectacularly opposed in their interests. If the expedition had wished to have as the leader of the Ross Sea Party a man who could have rated as a kindred soul with Fuchs, it should have chosen one who had a marked scientific bent, a capacity to be happily subordinate, and a lack of worship of adventure for its own sake. For Hillary had none of these things, and he coveted none. He was a celebrity in his own right before he was ever asked to lead the New Zealand party, and he necessarily brought to his leadership a lustre of the sort associated with a famous sportsman rather than with a dedicated explorer...Where Fuchs's [determination] leant to stubbornness, Hillary's was light-hearted to the point of foolhardiness. There was a streak of solemnity in Fuchs which could lead him to being dull, even dreary. Not being an individualist himself, he did not encourage individualism in others.⁶⁶

One of the most important, yet 'official', records of the TAE was that produced on behalf of the Royal New Zealand Air Force by Squadron Leader John Claydon. The New Zealand Antarctic Flight consisted of three men, Claydon, Senior Pilot, William 'Bill' Cranfield, Junior Pilot and Wally Tarr, Aircraft Mechanic. The three men were responsible for the transportation of men and supplies throughout the Ross Dependency from an ice airfield at Scott Base on Pram Point, Ross Island. There were only two aircraft at their disposal, a British 'Auster' for reconnaissance purposes and a De Havilland 'Beaver' for establishing depots and serving the various surveying parties on their sledging expeditions. The Antarctic Flight TAE Report of which several copies were distributed to libraries and universities, is a key source document regarding this most critical aspect of New Zealand's expedition support effort.

As leader of US Navy Task Force 43, charged with supporting *Operation Deep Freeze*, Rear Admiral George Dufek had responsibility for the IGY logistics and operational activities of the United States scientific programme. He had first visited Antarctica as a navigator on Byrd's USASE expedition of 1939-41, an expedition which had also included Finn Ronne.⁶⁷

Dufek authored two books on his Antarctic experiences, *Operation Deepfreeze* (1957) and *Through the Frozen Frontier* (1960). The former is a general overview of Antarctic

⁶⁶ McKenzie, 1963, p. 101

⁶⁷ Dufek, 1960, p. 71

exploration and describes Dufek's introduction to the Antarctic. In this work he focused on the American IGY effort and mentioned the TAE only in passing. However, in the latter (and later) work he revealed his avid interest in the expedition and offered more insight on the interaction that occurred between his team and those of Fuchs and Hillary. A passage that appears on the back cover of the book reflects Dufek's view of the TAE and its importance stating: "Here is the author's own account of that project [the IGY], including his historic meeting with Sir Edmund Hillary and Sir Vivian Fuchs at the Pole."⁶⁸ The book describes the exchange between the two men as they shook hands on Fuchs' arrival at the recently commissioned United States Amundsen-Scott station at the South Pole, an event that Dufek personally staged and witnessed. According to Dufek, on disembarking from his Sno-cat Fuchs approached Hillary and as they "...clasped hands warmly" exclaimed "Good to see you again, Ed" to which Hillary replied "Wonderful to meet you here, Bunny"⁶⁹. Hillary, in his account *No Latitude for Error* simply mentioned that "Bunny jumped out of the leading Sno-Cat...and we exchanged greetings"⁷⁰. Journalist, Noel Barber quoted Fuchs as having said "It's damn good to see you, Ed"⁷¹. According to McKenzie, who was also present and whose account is perhaps the most reliable, Hillary spoke first saying 'Hullo Bunny' with Fuchs replying "Damn glad to see you, Ed"⁷². Less credibly, due to translation from the original French text, Paul-Emile Victor, the leader of the French IGY effort, offered the following account in his history of polar exploration *Man and the Conquest of the Poles*. Victor wrote: "Here are the historic words that were exchanged on that occasion: "How happy I am to see you again!" Sir Vivian cried to Hillary. "Wonderful to see you again, Bunny!"⁷³ Clearly there were subtly different interpretations of the tone of that dramatic meeting at the Pole, the first in almost two years between the two leaders. Both of Admiral Dufek's books are matter-of-fact accounts of activities in the Antarctic and refrain from divulging any personal insights or opinions. This would be in keeping with a military officer's natural reticence and tendency to remain politically neutral. Dufek was being discreet and didn't want to advertise the full extent of aid that the US Navy and his task force were providing, without charge, to Hillary's and Fuchs' teams. Dufek and the US Navy played a crucial part in the expedition's success and, at the time, spared no effort to ensure it received maximum publicity. It is clear that although the TAE was merely an interesting

⁶⁸ Ibid, back cover

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 149

⁷⁰ Hillary, 1961, p. 223

⁷¹ Barber, 1958, p. 143

⁷² McKenzie, 1963, p. 132

⁷³ Victor, 1962, p. 277

diversion for the Americans, strong bonds were formed, particularly between Dufek and Hillary, which greatly facilitated the fulfillment of New Zealand's commitments to both the TAE and subsequently to the IGY.

Dufek made some interesting statements in *Through the Frozen Frontier* that confirm the close interest he had in the TAE. In a list he prepared of items of importance, he noted the fifth as being his desire to participate in key TAE moments stating:

Sir Edmund Hillary was to depart from Scott Base on October 15. Doctor Vivian Fuchs of Great Britain was to start from the opposite side of Antarctica sometime in November...Both these men were my friends. I wished to be present at the departure of Ed Hillary from Scott Base, and I wanted to be present when they met [at the South Pole].⁷⁴

In another nod to the strength of their friendship, Dufek in *Through the Frozen Frontier* referred to Hillary as 'Big Ed'.⁷⁵ In addition to Dufek, another key American figure during the IGY who published an account, *90° South*, of his Antarctic experiences was Paul Siple, a veteran of Byrd's first two Antarctic expeditions and the leader of the Amundsen-Scott Station at the South Pole through its first winter of 1957.⁷⁶ A significant record of the United States activity during *Operation Deep Freeze* was published in the form of a series of 'yearbooks' with three separate volumes covering each year of the programme. These abound with photographs and articles relevant to the US programme but also contain material relating to the TAE and the interaction of the *Deep Freeze* personnel with both the British and New Zealand parties. The elaborately bound edition of *Operation Deepfreeze III*, is particularly worthwhile for its TAE content largely contributed by London journalist Noel Barber.⁷⁷ However, this book also presented a worrisome omen in that, published only three years after the TAE pioneers had returned to their homes in the Commonwealth, it contains a flagrant example of revised history with the erasure of a crucial fact about the expedition. Its opening chapter entitled *History of Antarctic Exploration* featured a photo of Hillary and Fuchs together with Admiral Dufek at the Pole taken shortly after Fuchs' arrival in January 1958. The caption reads in part "...Hillary, working from New Zealand's Scott base, laid supply

⁷⁴ Dufek, 1960, p. 128

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 149

⁷⁶ Siple, 1959

⁷⁷ *Operation Deepfreeze 1957-1958, The Story of Task Force 43- Third Phase: 1957 1958*, 1958, pp. 198-205

caches for the trip, *and then flew to the Pole* [author's emphasis]."⁷⁸ Thus, from one source at least, has been erased the critical fact that Hillary and his 'old firm' drove their Ferguson tractors to the pole to the distress of many TAE stakeholders. If only changing the past could be so simple!

By 1963, five years after the crossing, interest in the expedition abated and no further books dedicated entirely to the expedition were published following the Helm-Miller account *Antarctica* until 2007. However, one exceptional work was the web-published account *Land of the Long Day* (2007)⁷⁹ by the New Zealand geologist and mountaineer, Dr. Bernard 'Bernie' Gunn. Gunn was one of three Kiwi 'observers' who accompanied the US IGY fleet to McMurdo Sound in 1955-56. The trio, including geophysicist, Dr. Trevor Hatherton and New Zealand navy Commander William 'Bill' Smith, were charged with locating a site for the New Zealand base and discovering a route for Fuchs and his Sno-cats to use in their descent from the polar plateau as they approached the end of the crossing-journey. Gunn then joined the New Zealand Support Party the following year. His account is very broad with the author's buoyant personality frequently shining through. He doesn't shy away from giving us his opinions on the various people with whom he interacted including Hillary. One particular incident stands out in Gunn's account. During the 1957 winter months Hillary had prepared plans for an extensive survey programme of the Ross Dependency to be carried out by three separate sledging parties and a 'tractor party'. The Ross Sea Committee viewed the plan with little enthusiasm. Their instructions to Hillary as quoted by Gunn prescribed "...A limited amount of exploration may be carried out in True Antarctic Tradition, within a distance not exceeding fifteen miles of the depots." He then paraphrased Hillary's abrupt reply to the Wellington committee of 'government bureaucrats': "The deployment of Field Personnel is best left in the hands of the Field Executive who are at least in a position to appreciate the problems and capabilities of the people concerned..."⁸⁰ Gunn's account was recently corroborated with the publication of fellow geologist and Northern Party member Guyon Warren's diaries. It was events such as these that would erode the relationship that Hillary had with the Ross Sea Committee and fix him on his course of independent action.

⁷⁸ *Operation Deepfreeze 1957-1958, The Story of Task Force 43- Third Phase: 1957 1958, 1958, p.35*

⁷⁹ Gunn, *Land of the Long Day*

⁸⁰ *Ibid*

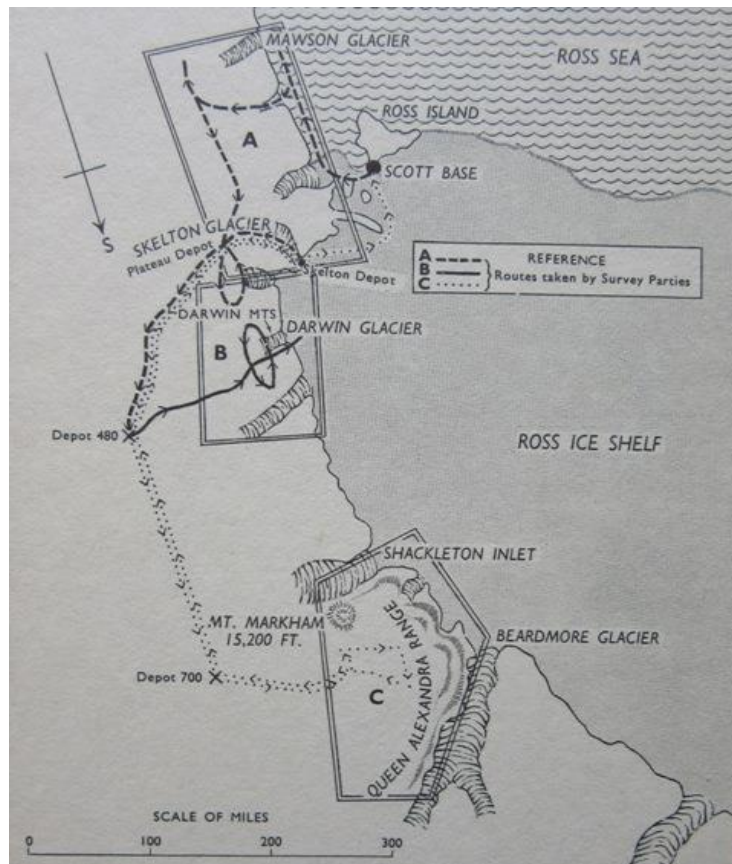


Figure 9: Map showing the areas surveyed by the three New Zealand sledging parties, Area ‘A’ by the Northern Party, ‘B’ by the Darwin Party and ‘C’ by the Southern Party during the longest single sledging expedition ever carried out (1700 miles and 100 days).

Source: *Antarctica*, Helm-Miller, 1964

During the intervening period up to the 50th Anniversary year in 2007 there were a number of books published which contained accounts of the TAE only as a portion of their overall subject matter which was usually Antarctic history, adventure travel or the history of exploration. The first of these and in some ways the most important was L.B.Quartermain’s excellent treatment of New Zealand’s role in Antarctic affairs entitled *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (1971). Leslie Quartermain is considered New Zealand’s pre-eminent Antarctic historian and for much of his life was New Zealand’s expert on the Antarctic. He was a vigorous proponent for New Zealand’s active involvement in the Ross Dependency and was a founding member of the New Zealand Antarctic Society serving as president for 3 years. He also founded the Society’s journal *Antarctic*, editing it throughout the watershed years of 1956-1968. His two major works *New Zealand and the Antarctic* (1971) and *South to the Pole* (1967) have become classics in the literature. The former describes the events leading

up to the decision for New Zealand becoming involved in the Antarctic, and includes chapters describing the TAE and the IGY and the establishment of Scott Base. Quartermain was a strong proponent of New Zealand Antarctic endeavour and his frustration at the inertia shown by the government in this regard is obvious. His work does not touch on the sovereignty issue but concentrates on the activities and achievements of New Zealanders on the ice. An extensive list of names of those Kiwi ‘Antarcticans’ is contained in the appendices to *New Zealand and the Antarctic*. In his position as editor of the *Antarctic* Quartermain always kept his ear close to the ground and was one of the first people to learn of a possible Antarctic crossing attempt. His resulting correspondence with Fuchs as early as 1954 revealed some of Fuchs’ early thinking including the possibility that George Lowe act as leader of the New Zealand Support Party.⁸¹ His close connection with both Fuchs and Hillary provided him with unique insights which make this book a rich source of TAE material.

A somewhat different account was published a decade later by the eminent British mountaineer Chris Bonington in *Quest for Adventure* (1982).⁸² It is noteworthy for highlighting the personality differences between Fuchs and Hillary, particularly referring to the *Theron* voyage, in a manner that caught Fuchs’ attention and moved him to such an extraordinary degree that he wrote Hillary a personal letter of apology.

Four other works bring additional insight into various aspects of the TAE. Despite his initial opposition to the expedition L.P.Kirwan, Secretary and Director of the Royal Geographic Society, under adroitly applied pressure from Sir John Slessor of the COM, made an about face and became a supporter of the TAE. In his Antarctic exploration history *The White Road* (1959), he wrote “After receiving the initial support of the Royal Geographic Society in 1954...”. The support came in the form of a £1,000 grant to the expedition in return for the rights to the official photographs of the TAE.⁸³ Tellingly, Kirwan made no mention of Hillary’s achievement of reaching the Pole in his Ferguson tractors.⁸⁴

Three people who had great influence on the expedition from the British perspective were the Rev. Launcelot Fleming, Colin Bertram and James Wordie. Fleming and Bertram (as well as

⁸¹ Fuchs, 24 November 1954

⁸² Bonington, 1982, p. 427

⁸³ Fuchs, 1990, p. 224

⁸⁴ Kirwan, 1959, p. 350

Brian Roberts) had participated in the BGLE 1934-37 led by the Australian, John Rymill. Fleming, a geologist who later became Bishop of Portsmouth, was at that time the Director of SPRI and a key figure in the selection of Fuchs as leader of the TAE. He wrote no books about the TAE himself but his biography *Launcelot Fleming – A Portrait* contains useful information regarding Fuchs' introduction to FIDS.

Colin Bertram, a biologist, also became Director of SPRI and was a founding member of the TAE Committee of Management. However he fell out with the London COM over the expedition planning approach. Bertram felt that SPRI should have had a much greater say in the conduct of the expedition and abruptly resigned as a member of the Committee. His autobiography, *Antarctica, Cambridge, Conservation and Population – A Biologist's Story*, contains a fascinating and frank account of the reasons for his disaffection with the TAE and with James Wordie in particular.⁸⁵ Wordie, a man who strode across the Antarctic stage like a giant, did not find the time to write any books of his own. Fortunately, Wordie's son commissioned a biography of his father *Sir James Wordie – Polar Crusader* (2004) which provides us with considerable insight into his interaction with Fuchs, with whom he had a long association and for whom he acted as mentor. Smith also describes Wordie's role relating to the TAE while Chairman of SPRI's management committee. Ironically it was Bertram, who having submitted his resignation from his SPRI Director's role in 1956 arguably forced out by Wordie, who ultimately extracted Wordie's resignation from the SPRI Chairman's position. Bertram's resignation from SPRI was not accepted by its management committee and it was Wordie who was replaced a few months later.⁸⁶

A source of general, yet precise, information about the TAE is found in the *Antarctic Encyclopedia* which contains an overview of the expedition written by David Pratt, chief engineer in Fuchs' party and the person, who together with fellow engineer, Roy Homard, was responsible for the performance of the Sno-cats and other vehicles and equipment. Pratt was an especially competent and vital member of the crossing-party.⁸⁷ His account can be considered as highly reliable.

A number of authors have published works which focus on the political and geo-political aspects of Antarctica within the context of the Antarctic Treaty signed in 1959. A good

⁸⁵ Bertram, 1987, p. 64

⁸⁶ Smith, 2004, pp. 249-250

⁸⁷ Riffenburgh, 2007, pp. 275-278

source of secondary information is Hartley Grattan's history *The Southwest Pacific since 1900* (1963), published two years after the ratification of the Antarctic Treaty. Grattan's work was produced as a two volume comprehensive history of Australasia. The second volume, covering the period after 1900, is unique in providing a significant history of Antarctica in equal measure with that of Australia and New Zealand. Grattan devotes much discussion to the validity of New Zealand's claim to the Ross Dependency. However, the most prominent writers on the subject of Antarctic sovereignty are F.M.Auburn, Peter Beck, Klaus Dodds and Malcolm Templeton. Each of these authors had their own particular area of interest and each makes a special contribution to a better understanding of the TAE and IGY. Auburn's major work *Antarctic Law and Politics* was published in 1982. It comprehensively presents arguments for and against the validity of the various territorial claims that have been made in Antarctica and outlines the progressive building of the legal framework that guided Antarctic activity during the two decades following the IGY. In an earlier work more relevant to the TAE, called *The Ross Dependency* (1972), Auburn evaluates the basis for New Zealand's claim to the region from the point of view of international law. He concluded that New Zealand's claim would best be assured if it joined in a 'condominium' with the United States within the framework of the Antarctic Treaty. Auburn made an interesting observation stating:

Scott Base was opened in 1957 by Hillary's TAE party. This party was sent by a private company incorporated in New Zealand supported partly by Government grant and partly by donations. Although the Government clearly had political motives in giving a large donation, it is suggested that in giving the money to a private company not under any direct form of official government control, the Government did not assume any responsibility, nor could it take any credit. It may be assumed that the TAE was a non-Governmental expedition.⁸⁸

The work by Peter Beck, *The International Politics of Antarctica* (1986), provides another excellent analysis of the sovereignty issues surrounding the various claims over Antarctic territory. Beck, whose work focuses on the legal basis for Antarctic claims, particularly as they relate to the United Nations debate, states "...the British government decided in 1919-20 to aim for the acquisition of control over the whole continent through the pursuit of a

⁸⁸ Auburn, 1972, p. 37

gradualist strategy”.⁸⁹ As we shall see, the British government did not delay in using its antipodean colonies to further this objective prompting J.G.A. Pocock’s view that British history was formed “...partly in an archipelago of discussion.”⁹⁰ Britain had now taken its expansionist aims literally to the ends of the earth. There was nowhere else to go.

Wellington historian Malcolm Templeton’s excellent book *A Wise Adventure* (2000) presents a thorough and well researched analysis, from a political and legal perspective, of New Zealand’s involvement in the Antarctic from the early twentieth century through to 1961 with the ratification of the Antarctic Treaty. Templeton goes to great lengths to describe the interplay between the British, US and New Zealand operations in the Ross Dependency and the background, and rationale for their respective positions on sovereignty.

A more prolific writer on Antarctic matters with a focus on geo-politics is Klaus Dodds of the University of London. Dodds, who is an academic analyst rather than a participant in any expeditions, has written several pieces on the TAE both in books and journals. His major works are *Pink Ice – Britain and the South Atlantic Empire* (2002) and *Geopolitics in the Antarctic – Views from the Southern Ocean Rim* (1997). These books discuss the territorial disputes over the Antarctic Peninsula and include pertinent sections on the TAE. His is a contemporary interpretation that reflects the impact that de-colonisation had through the period 1970-1990. A most relevant piece is his 2005 article published in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* entitled *The Great Trek: New Zealand and the British/Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition*. This work makes extensive use of the many government records that have recently been unearthed or de-classified. Dodds is also sensitive to the emerging popularity of social and cultural histories and this is evident in his writings. In addition to his geo-political approaches to the subject Dodds has also collaborated on a paper that takes a New Zealand ‘post-colonial’ view. In one case he addresses the question of Maori and their involvement with the Antarctic referring to the lack of Maori place names in Antarctica as evidence of “the country’s awkward and incomplete post-colonial transformation”.⁹¹ His perspective goes some way towards fulfilling Bridge and

⁸⁹ Beck, 1986, p 28

⁹⁰ Pocock, 2005, p. 23

⁹¹ Dodds - Yusoff, 2005, p. 141

Fedorowich's acceptance of what has driven the 'imperial enterprise' that is, "...the expansion of Britain and the peopling and building of the trans-oceanic British world".⁹²

Nationalism aside, the existence of mixed motives for the TAE becomes apparent in Dodds' later work. In *The Great Trek* he states that "Fuchs... was nonetheless motivated first and foremost by a desire to execute a *scientifically valuable* crossing of Antarctica".⁹³ This view, in contrast to Hillary's pursuit of 'adventure' highlights the constant tension between 'dry' science and the 'romance' of exploration. There is of course a third motivational dimension, one that no doubt influenced both Hillary and Fuchs in equal measure, being the desire for personal aggrandizement; for Fuchs to cement his status within the British polar establishment, for Hillary to assure future income following on from his ascent of Everest. Dodds' analysis is sometimes poorly thought through and does not open up the subject for alternative views. For example he makes a bold statement such as "New Zealand was persuaded to participate in events such as the TAE which, in spite of their scientific pretensions, were designed to promote Commonwealth territorial claims."⁹⁴ Such strongly worded claims do not allow for the nuances of the decade's broad public debate regarding government involvement in Antarctica, which now included the fact of the IGY, and I feel they detract from what is otherwise a quite useful account. Dodds and Auburn are of like minds in seeing the TAE as an expression of British government interest in maintaining its Antarctic territorial claims. In the case of New Zealand, Auburn, despite his earlier argument that the TAE being a private expedition had no political import also admitted that, insofar as it was supported by the state, this lends credence to an argument for the TAE to "count" as a New Zealand claim.⁹⁵ An additional argument was that a major portion of the New Zealand Support Party achievement was the extensive surveying and mapping it carried out in the Ross Dependency region.⁹⁶ According to Dodds this activity is yet another indication of the political intent of the expedition.⁹⁷ Auburn would agree with Dodds that mapping is to be "...considered a political pursuit".⁹⁸

⁹² Bridge - Fedorowich, 2003, pp. 1-15

⁹³ Dodds, 2005, p. 109

⁹⁴ Dodds, 1997, p. 166

⁹⁵ Auburn, 1972, p. 37

⁹⁶ Blaiklock, Stratton, Miller, 1966

⁹⁷ Dodds, 2002, p.26-29

⁹⁸ Auburn, 1972, p 37-.38

Departing from the political nature of the expedition to its actual execution is a book by architect Frank Ponder *A Man from the Ministry*. Ponder was an employee of the New Zealand government's Ministry of Works, the agency responsible for constructing the country's public buildings. Originally, Hillary had thought that his chief engineer, Murray Ellis, could perform the task. However, after some initial efforts Ellis soon realised that it was a big job and beyond his capabilities burdened as he was with his engineering role. At that point the government stepped in with a helping hand that included a specialised team of eight men under Supervisor, Randal Heke, who would sail to Ross Island with Hillary's party to lead base construction. Up to this point Ponder had designed buildings in the Pacific islands and never for harsh frozen climates. He later described his challenges and fears: "What if the buildings collapsed in the dead of a six-month winter night, or were thrown about in a blizzard...Or worse, a fire and no water to put it out." Ponder's decision to follow the Australian model and use prefabricated buildings was a major difference between the New Zealand and British bases. He described his strategy as building "...refrigerators in reverse." He even included a large Central Otago rural scene to "...remind the occupants of their home country."⁹⁹ The British base 'Shackleton' would have no such niceties. The advantage of the New Zealand 'modular' hut design proved itself not only with its ease of assembly but in the quality of accommodation that was provided for the men living in them. Scott Base would ultimately set a new standard for Antarctic building architecture.

Another book that provides a good introduction to New Zealand's role in the Ross Dependency is Neville Peat's *Looking South* (1983). Published by the New Zealand Antarctic Society on the occasion of its first fifty years of existence, the book highlights the Society's role in 'breaking the ice' for New Zealand to become actively involved in Antarctic affairs through the TAE and IGY in particular. The government lobbying by Dr. Robert Falla, the Society's President at that time, and of Arthur Helm, its Secretary, was instrumental in bringing about a crucial change in attitude. Peat also gives credit to Frank Simpson, one of the Society's prominent members and the publication by the Society of a significant text, *The Antarctic Today* (1952) edited by Simpson. This book contains a collection of scientific and historical papers by leaders in their field covering a wide range of topics including glaciology, biology, geology, sea and air navigation, and meteorology as well as accounts of expeditions and national Antarctic histories. Peat quoted the unusually blunt foreword by

⁹⁹ Ponder, 1996, pp. 98-99

Falla: “If government action or the lack of it is a reflection of the general attitude of the people, it is clear that too many New Zealanders have been unaware of what is going on in Antarctica and why.”¹⁰⁰ Falla went further, blaming New Zealand’s “agricultural economy and preoccupation with urban development” for fostering the government’s “...negative policy which has marked the administration of the Ross Dependency since it became a New Zealand responsibility in 1923”.¹⁰¹ The NZAS also participated in publishing a second major scientific work one decade later. The editor this time was Trevor Hatherton and the book was entitled *Antarctica*. Published in 1965, it contains articles by leaders in a wide variety of scientific fields including oceanography, marine biology, ornithology and glaciology. Extending beyond the IGY framework, the earth sciences of geology and geophysics are represented as well as mapping and politics. The book remains a sound reference work in the area of Antarctic science.

Eleanor Honnywill, Fuchs’ personal assistant during the TAE and whom Fuchs later married after the death of his first wife, had a particularly close connection with the expedition. With a new-found interest in the Antarctic, she published her own book telling the Antarctic story called *The Challenge of Antarctica* (1969). It contains a chapter devoted to the TAE. Her admiration of Fuchs is obvious and her book does provide yet further details that are not available elsewhere including quotations from Fuchs’ diary. The chapter suffers from scant mention of the contribution of the New Zealand Support Party perhaps exacerbated by her low opinion of Hillary and his continuing to the Pole ‘ahead of her man’.

Vision of a ‘Crossing of Antarctica’

Several heroic age expeditions had the express goal of either reaching the South Pole or possibly of crossing the continent. In 1908, Dr William S. Bruce, leader of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition (1902-1904), announced his second Antarctic expedition with the objective to cross the continent. He had previously visited the Weddell Sea and planned to begin his crossing from that area. However, even though he was a prominent scientist and experienced polar explorer he was unsuccessful in raising funds and his project never reached fruition.¹⁰² In 1909, a German geographer /cartographer, Army Captain Wilhelm Filchner, embarked on a similar project. Unfortunately his party fell victim to the cruel ice of the

¹⁰⁰ Peat, 1983, p. 18

¹⁰¹ Simpson, 1952, Foreword to *The Antarctic Today*

¹⁰² Helm A., Miller J.H., 1964, p..33

Weddell Sea. After spending nine months beset in his ship *Deutschland*, Filchner and his party finally escaped, never to return to the Antarctic.¹⁰³ Even Scott himself had considered the idea and thought to cross in the opposite direction, starting from the Ross Sea but his plans never materialised.

With Scott having perished in 1912 and Amundsen back in the Arctic, the Antarctic stage was left to the charismatic, now knighted, Sir Ernest Shackleton. In 1914, Shackleton, with the blessing of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Winston Churchill, and despite the looming storm clouds of WWI, launched his second Antarctic expedition with his new ship *Endurance*. Since both Amundsen and Scott had already reached the South Pole, the next great geographic prize was the crossing of the continent itself. This first ‘trans-Antarctic’ expedition, which would elapse over a period of almost three years, was marked for failure when the *Endurance*, having become trapped in the pack ice, was crushed mercilessly and sank to the bottom of the Weddell Sea. Shackleton had arranged for a party to meet him at Ross Island in a plan that Vivian Fuchs would later use as his template for the TAE. This group, known as the *Aurora* party, carried out a series of tasks similar to those that would be performed forty years later by New Zealand’s Ross Sea Support Party. However, regarding the 1914 attempt some would in retrospect argue that the eventual outcome, disappointing as it must have been, was most fortunate for Shackleton and his men, the challenge at that time being too great even for a man of his considerable ability and experience. In this case Antarctica’s defences had again prevailed. The death of Shackleton in 1922 aboard the *Quest* while moored in Grytviken Harbour, South Georgia marked the end of the heroic age.¹⁰⁴

After the failure of plans for an Antarctic crossing experienced by Bruce, Filchner and Shackleton the idea lay dormant for more than a decade until revived by a newcomer to the field of exploration. In 1932, a twenty-five year old Cambridge scholar, Gino Watkins, who had led the British Arctic Air Route Expedition to Greenland (1930-31), announced his intention to cross Antarctica. His plan had two key objectives which were 1) “To cross the Antarctic from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea... to secure for the British flag the honour of

¹⁰³ Reader’s Digest, 1985, p. 202

¹⁰⁴ Wild, 1923, p.64

being the first carried across the South Polar Continent” and 2) “ To map the south-west coast of the Weddell Sea from Luitpold Land to Graham Land.”¹⁰⁵

Watkins planned to leave South Georgia in December, 1932 intending to lay depots 300 miles to the south, as the TAE eventually did in establishing its advance base at ‘South Ice’. Transportation technology had by now advanced significantly and Watkins planned to use aircraft “...for reconnaissance flights along the route and also to assist in the depot laying”. There are striking similarities between Watkins’ planned approach to the journey and that eventually used by Vivian Fuchs and Sir Edmund Hillary for the TAE. One major difference was that Watkins’ route did not cross the South Pole since he wished to concentrate on less well known areas of the continent. Unlike the London TAE Committee, Watkins was less interested in publicity and, although he saw glory for the Empire, he had no particular desire to promote Commonwealth solidarity nor did he feel compelled to satisfy sponsorship interests. In Watkins’ plan, which had the approval of Scott’s *Terra Nova* expedition veteran, geologist Frank Debenham, a founder of the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI), his ship would winter over in the Weddell Sea and then sail the following summer to the Ross Sea to collect the crossing party at the end of their journey, a tactic later incorporated by Duncan Carse in his competing TAE proposal. Based on experience gained while sledging in Labrador, Watkins’ crossing party would consist of 8 men, 8 sledges and 120 dogs, with at least six of the men being from his previous British Arctic Air Route Expedition. As would be the case for Fuchs, Watkins also sought to answer the question of whether the Ross Sea and the Weddell Sea were connected by under-ice water or whether, in fact, Antarctica was a single continental land mass. Debenham wrote a supportive note for the expedition hopefully seeing resolution of the “last great problem of geography”, as he put it, “...between the two British sectors”. Debenham betrayed his ‘old-school’ traditions with a remark regarding the use of aircraft lamenting that “... while it may be discovery, it is hardly exploration”. He further regretted that “It is a sad fact that not a single British expedition has ever wintered ashore in the Weddell Sea sector...” In a January, 1932 letter to Watkins, James Wordie, who had been Shackleton’s chief scientist on *Endurance* and would later mentor Fuchs, provided encouraging input writing that he considered Watkins’ plans to be “...well thought out and such as are likely to bring you success”.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, since these expeditions were private ventures financial backing was crucial, and this being the early nineteen thirties,

¹⁰⁵ Watkins, 1932

¹⁰⁶ Ibid

Watkins' Antarctic dream was swept away by the tide of the Great Depression. Tragically, during an alternate expedition to Greenland in August 1932, Watkins disappeared, presumed drowned while kayaking alone and his body was never found. Thus was cut short the fledgling career of Britain's most promising polar explorer.

Recent books published about the TAE and the IGY

The fiftieth anniversary of the TAE and IGY brought forth a second wave of new books about both projects. A comprehensive general history of New Zealand's fifty years of Antarctic participation is *Call of the Ice* by noted Antarctic historian David Harrowfield. Thoroughly researched and with an in-depth knowledge of the people within the Antarctic community, a knowledge largely gained through the author's personal experience on the ice, Harrowfield presents a unique account of the scientific and exploration activities of New Zealand in the Antarctic including its TAE and IGY participation, which contains several items not published elsewhere. In a reference from the *Oamaru Mail*, the newspaper of record in his home town, Harrowfield quotes Lawrence Kirwan, Director of the RGS, on Hillary having reached the Pole succinctly stating: "Good old Ed." In another reference, this time from Frank Ponder, architect and designer of the original Scott Base, Harrowfield relates that Ponder had been told by Hillary "You don't think I'm going to lay depots within a few miles of the Pole without knocking it off do you?"¹⁰⁷

We are also most fortunate that the milestone of a half-century, together with the realization by several expedition participants that time was passing, were moved to find the energy and the opportunity to write of their personal TAE experience and to comment on events that they witnessed or in which they were involved. The first of these books was called *Eight Men in a Crate*, written by Anthea Arnold and was based on the diary of Dr Rainer Goldsmith. This book focuses on the advance party expedition that sailed on the sealer *Theron* into the Weddell Sea in 1955-56 in order to set up the departure base for Fuchs' crossing party the following year. Goldsmith, a medical doctor, was one of the eight men who survived an extremely difficult winter at Vahsel Bay while attempting to erect their base called 'Shackleton'. The ship had suffered a four week delay while navigating through the Weddell Sea pack ice. Only a heroic reconnaissance flight made by New Zealand pilot John Claydon saved the expedition from an ignominious end not unlike the case with Shackleton and his

¹⁰⁷ Harrowfield, 2007, p. 33; Ponder, 1957, p. 137

ship *Endurance*. Arnold's account is very critical of Fuchs, particularly of his organisation, planning and leadership skills. A major issue was Fuchs' decision, counter to the advice of James Wordie, for the ship to take a path through the centre of the Weddell Sea 'gyre' (the slowly rotating mass of broken ice) which Fuchs incorrectly believed consisted of two adjacent circulating masses of ice. Another failing was the complexity of the building that the group were expected to construct through the darkness of the Antarctic winter. The building was 'over-engineered' as a result of the experience of the NBSAE expedition to Dronning Maud Land whose hut had suffered a partial collapse. The book alludes to the fact, also observed by Hillary and Miller who accompanied the ship as observers, that the equipment and supplies were stored in the hold in opposite order to their need once landed. This was particularly true of the tractors resulting in the necessity of the men to themselves haul and carry supplies away from the ship creating further delay. Hillary listed his nine key lessons from this voyage in *No Latitude for Error* greatly displeasing Fuchs.¹⁰⁸ The book questions that there was ever a need for the *Theron* advance expedition in the first place. This was in stark contrast with the New Zealand approach of quickly 'assembling' Scott Base soon after the arrival of the main party in McMurdo Sound. Was it a luxury not afforded to any previous expedition and simply the result of "over-cautious leadership?"¹⁰⁹ Goldsmith was disappointed to not be chosen as a member of the crossing party which may have coloured his opinion of Fuchs but there is no doubt that serious mistakes were made resulting in the party having only nine harrowing days to land and become established rather than the seven weeks that had been expected.

A third journalist covering the expedition was Geoff Lee-Martin of Auckland's *New Zealand Herald*. Lee-Martin did not publish his account, *Hell-bent for the Pole*, until 2007 the year of the TAE 50th anniversary. He was a friend of Hillary's and avoids comment on the personalities involved. However, he does reveal an interesting quote from 'a London newspaper' which alleged that in November 1957, before setting out on his first reconnaissance trip to South Ice, Fuchs stated "The first 200 miles are probably the worst terrain we shall have to cross...we should like to meet Ed Hillary 1126 kilometres [700 miles] from his base but we shall probably be late and he may have to turn back before we arrive." Ever naïve in his assessment of Hillary, little did Fuchs expect that Hillary would not

¹⁰⁸ Hillary, 1961, p. 47-48

¹⁰⁹ Arnold, 2007, p. 13

‘turn back’ but instead head for the Pole itself.¹¹⁰ Journalist Lee-Martin, as with Noel Barber, must be taken with some circumspection. Nevertheless, as an insider and astute observer, his account contains valuable material for the TAE researcher particularly regarding Hillary’s ‘dash to the Pole’. Importantly, his book is exceptional for the quantity and variety of high quality unique colour photographs that it contains.

Jon Stephenson, geologist, was selected as the Australian representative on the TAE. He was one of a group of three who overwintered at the advance base, South Ice, along with surveyor Ken Blaiklock and glaciologist Hal Lister. Blaiklock and Stephenson, as an advance reconnaissance party for Fuchs’ Sno-cats, later drove their dog teams to the Pole. In so doing, Stephenson became the first Australian to reach the South Pole. His book, *Crevasse Roulette* (2009), presents the TAE from the perspective of a member of the British party. His views ‘from the other side’ of Hillary’s New Zealand Support Party are particularly revealing as is his assessment of Fuchs as a leader. Stephenson recounted how he and Blaiklock would listen to BBC radio while sledging towards the Pole bemoaning the fact that they heard regular reports about Hillary and the progress he was making with his Ferguson tractors but they seldom received any news about Fuchs’ party. There were two reasons for this. First, due to New Zealand’s more advanced equipment, radio communication was more reliable through Scott Base. Stephenson, somewhat defensively, offered the second as: “Hillary gave brief, clear, informative reports and it was obvious that he understood the importance of communication with the media and how to maintain a profile...whereas Bunny Fuchs...distanced himself from publicity, and delayed his communication until there was firm progress and real prospects to report.”¹¹¹ The photographs taken by Stephenson were outstanding and many are included in *Crevasse Roulette* and also in the Fuchs-Hillary *Crossing of Antarctica*.

The TAE and the IGY heralded a new age of Antarctic science. One of the first expeditions to be spawned was the Victoria University of Wellington Antarctic Expedition 1958-59 (VUWAE) led by Colin Bull. His account *Innocents in the Dry Valleys* (2009) includes significant contributions by his junior scientific colleagues Dick Barwick, Barrie McKelvey and Peter Webb who participated in the expedition. Bull was a veteran of the British North Greenland Expedition 1952-54 which included TAE participants, surveyor Richard Brooke

¹¹⁰ Lee-Martin, 2007, p. 111-112

¹¹¹ Stephenson, 2009, p. 104

and glaciologist Hal Lister. McKelvey and Webb had cut their teeth as scientists by joining the TAE during its second summer season of 1957-58 as a prelude to the VUWAE in 1958-59. At the time McKelvey and Webb were geology students in Wellington. Barwick, who was a biologist, had participated with the TAE in both the 1956-57 and 1957-58 summer seasons. He then joined Webb and McKelvey the following summer on the VUWAE. With its focus on geology and geophysics their expedition complemented the IGY project which had excluded geology from its agenda. The book is well produced and presents an informative and entertaining account of an important episode in New Zealand Antarctic history.

One of the more engaging and often amusing accounts was written by Vern Gerard, a physicist and a member of New Zealand's five-person IGY team that was seconded to Hillary's TAE Support Party. His book, *With Hillary at Scott Base – A Kiwi in Antarctica* (2012) fills a gap in that the IGY team, although they lived and worked alongside the TAE party and often participated in expedition activities, were nevertheless generally viewed as outsiders by the TAE team. Gerard provides a very insightful description of day to day life at Scott Base. About Hillary, he had this to say "Sir Ed was not liked by everyone; perhaps some could be a bit jealous of his achievements in being the first up Everest...Everest had been regarded as a British prize and for one of their colonials to do it was almost too much to bear."

In 2010, Bluntisham Books published a controversial book by John Thomson *Climbing the Pole* (2010) that focused on Hillary and the ethical question regarding his tractor journey to the South Pole. Thomson is very critical of Hillary, arguing that as a 'hired employee' of Fuchs and the London Committee of Management, with whom he had apparently signed a contract, he had no right to ignore his leader's wishes whether explicitly stated or implicitly intended. Although the book raises some valid points, especially those relating to the author's personal conversations with Arthur Helm, Secretary of the Ross Sea Committee, the numerous errors of fact that exist throughout the text diminish its credibility. For example Thomson claims that Bernie Gunn was responsible for Scott Base being sited on Pram Point which was not the case. Although Gunn had flown over the Skelton Glacier and found it to be a good route to the polar plateau, he had recommended Butter Point as a base site in his 'observers' report on his return to Wellington in February 1956. Also, Pram Point was selected as a base site before a route to the plateau had been determined. The lack of a

comprehensive bibliography or an index significantly reduces the practical aspects of the book and factual errors e.g. Scott Base is stated to have been commissioned on 29 January rather than on 20 January, bring its reliability into question.¹¹²

Another recent book of considerable relevance is Alec Trendall's *Putting South Georgia on the Map* (2011), an account of the surveying expeditions to South Georgia led by Duncan Carse from 1951-1956. Trendall was a member of Carse's second expedition to survey the island. His book contains significant biographical material on Carse which gives insight into his personality and his interest and motives regarding the South Georgia survey. Trendall also discusses in useful detail Carse's futile bid for leadership of the TAE.

Most accounts of the United States IGY involvement have been written with a scientific focus such as *Antarctica* by Carl Eklund and Joan Beckman. However, *Operation Deep Freeze* (2006) by Dian Olson-Belanger broke that mould and presents a well-researched and readable account of United States Antarctic IGY activity through the decade of the 1950's. Much of the focus is on *Operation Deep Freeze* and the activities of Task Force 43 as it established the United States IGY bases while American scientists carried out their programme in both east and west Antarctica. It provides a unique and thorough source regarding the US IGY project. It also contains additional information regarding the intentions and discussions within the United States government on possibly making a claim to Antarctic territory. According to Belanger during 1956 and 1957 the United States deposited over thirty claims at various places in Antarctica including at the South Pole.¹¹³ References to interaction between Fuchs, Hillary, Dufek and Finn Ronne and the TAE are sprinkled throughout.

Neville Peat, in a book sponsored by Antarctica New Zealand, published an account of New Zealand's fifty year partnership in Antarctic matters (*Antarctic Partners – 2007*) with the United States and its National Science Foundation. Published in 2007 the book profiles a number of Antarctic luminaries and outlines the many ways that the two countries have co-operated over the years since the time of the TAE and IGY.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Thomson, 2010, p. 70

¹¹³ Belanger, 2006, p. 369

¹¹⁴ Peat, 2007

Two recent biographies of Hillary add further material relevant to the TAE. These are *Edmund Hillary - Life of a Legend* by Pat Booth and *Sir Edmund Hillary – An Extraordinary Life* by Alexa Johnston. These are both ‘authorized’ biographies and were written without reference to British archival material. Nevertheless, they each contain unique bits of information that does not appear elsewhere and aid in developing an overarching picture of the Fuchs-Hillary relationship and of Hillary’s decision to go to the Pole, two topics having strong popular interest. Booth relies on personal interviews and quotes Hillary as simply saying “I would have despised myself if I hadn’t continued – it was simple as that – I just had to go.” Johnston’s book is largely based on the Hillary family archives including Hillary’s diaries and presents a broad coverage of Hillary’s life. It is printed in large format that suitably displays the extensive pictorial material. Johnston devotes a whole chapter to the controversial trip to the Pole however it is entirely based on Hillary’s *No Latitude for Error*. Being authorized biographies they avoid deeper analysis of motives and social interaction leaving the reader to try and ‘read in between the lines’.

Since the death of Sir Edmund Hillary in 2008 perhaps the most thorough and balanced account to be published about the expedition has been *Shackleton’s Dream* written by Stephen Haddelsey. The author has done extensive research including over a thousand references, and draws heavily on his interviews with British members of the expedition and their diaries, as well as the diary of Sir Edmund Hillary and the TAE report on the Antarctic Flight by Squadron Leader John Claydon of the R.N.Z.A.F. Haddelsey does a good job of comparing the British and New Zealand perspectives and adroitly leads the reader through the complex web of circumstances and events that surrounded the TAE.

Another book on the TAE was published in September 2014. This work, borrows its title from the original official account by Fuchs and Hillary, *The Crossing of Antarctica*, and is largely based on the TAE diaries of George Lowe. It was edited by Huw Lewis-Jones, son-in-law of the noted polar explorer and gifted artist Sir Wally Herbert. It contains a number of ‘reflections’ by people closely associated with the Antarctic including Ken Blaiklock, a member of Fuchs’ crossing party. The most satisfying aspect is the book’s wonderful collection of photographs, mostly taken by Lowe, many of which are published for the first time. Lowe’s explanation for Hillary’s decision to go to the pole and for advising Fuchs to abandon his journey, the two main elements of *Cause Célèbre* (a moniker for the supposed brouhaha between the two leaders) , is refreshingly rational. The book provides a new and

unique introduction to the expedition and makes a significant contribution to the TAE's deserved promotion within the history of geographic exploration. One curious aspect is that the account of the freeing of the *Theron* from the Weddell Sea pack ice is incomplete and conflicts with a number of other eye-witness accounts including Lowe's earlier version in his book *Because It Is There*.¹¹⁵ No mention is made of the critical flight made by New Zealand pilot John Claydon who found a path to open water for the trapped *Theron*.¹¹⁶ It may be that Lowe made no mention of the flight in his diaries even though he recorded Claydon's take-off on film. A verbatim transcription of the diaries however awaits.

Most recently, in November 2014, the TAE diary of geologist Guyon Warren was published in a quality format called *The Daily Journal of an Antarctic Explorer* (2014). His daughter-in-law, Karen Warren, has compiled a large quantity of interesting ephemera from Warren's archives including, photographs, press articles, maps and personal TAE items which are used to book-end the nine hundred page diary that Warren produced while on the ice. The diary has been faithfully reproduced and provides a rich source of primary material regarding the TAE. Warren joined with fellow geologist Bernie Gunn, Murray Douglas and Richard Brooke as a member of the four-person Northern Party. Their sledging and surveying expedition contributed greatly to the known geography and geology of the Trans-Antarctic Mountains of Victoria Land. Warren was a keen observer and was quite candid in his description of day-to-day happenings. His account of the Ross Sea Committee's reaction to the Support Party's plans for surveying in the Ross Dependency is particularly revealing. One of the incidents that must have been highly frustrating for Hillary was the timidity displayed by his Committee in Wellington particularly when it came to activities in the field. Clause 'C' of the constitution for the RSC read "To explore all, or any region of, the Antarctic"¹¹⁷ Hillary, who helped draft the constitution, took that mandate at face value. During the dark winter months he and the members of the Support Party designed an extensive programme of exploration with three survey parties using dog teams being deployed to different segments of the Trans-Antarctic Mountains in the Ross Dependency. These were in addition to his 'Tractor Party'. Hillary advised the RSC of these plans and received a rebuke from Bowden in reply. Warren recorded the following in his diary:

¹¹⁵ Lowe, 1959, p. 89-90

¹¹⁶ Lewis-Jones, 2014, p. 52

¹¹⁷ Constitution of the Ross Sea Committee, 1955

Tonight Ed had a long cable from Bowden commenting on the summer's plans... Watched Bob [Miller] reading it – an exceedingly mild man with never a harsh word about anyone, but he just about had apoplexy. They are “not averse to a reasonable amount of geographical surveying in the best Antarctic traditions”!! but seem to be aghast at the thought that anyone should move further than shouting distance from any depot. The ideal is apparently for half the party to sit here sunbathing for five months while the other half go out to the last depot and stay there playing bridge and guarding it from theft until such time as Fuchs arrives, when they return triumphant with their stupendous task safely performed. ..Scott would be proud of their achievement – 23 men, 15 months, and two depots laid, stocked entirely by aircraft. Bob was just about speechless. Ed scarcely interested – will send back half a page of tactful platitudes and continue steadily on with present plans, provided only that he can get the necessary extra fuel. Once he has that arranged, any further argument will be purely of academic interest.¹¹⁸

Warren noted that medical doctor George Marsh, a British representative serving with Hillary's party and a keen sledging proponent was "...almost incoherent with amazement and contempt." The next morning he observed that in his reply to the RSC Hillary "...Threw back the "best Antarctic traditions" nonsense very nicely and said he "did not intend to allow" experienced field parties to waste their time sitting at Base or at depots. Thought that decisions were better made by people "with at least some first-hand knowledge" of the problems and conditions involved" approvingly seeing the message as "...strongly worded without being offensive." The incident had definitely stirred up strong emotions within Hillary's party with Warren positing a remarkable interpretation of the event:

It seems to result basically from the fact that there was never much public enthusiasm for TAE [New Zealand] in England and in fact quite strong opposition from some quarters especially from Fuchs. Funds are short and the British end are frightened that Fuchs party may find it impossible to get right

¹¹⁸ Warren, 2014, p. 135

*across this summer...further dampening any interest in Britain and any notable successes on our side are supposed to be the final blows by comparison.*¹¹⁹

In closing, I must make the observation that, in sharp contrast with New Zealand based accounts British coverage of the TAE is noteworthy for the dearth of material produced. Other than the official 1958 account, *The Crossing of Antarctica*, and Fuchs' subsequent *Antarctic Adventure* no book was published about the expedition in the United Kingdom until 2007 with Dr. Rainer Goldsmith's diary based account focused on the *Theron* voyage. We are fortunate indeed that Australian, Dr. Jon Stephenson published his excellent book *Crevasse Roulette* and we now have the 2014 version of *The Crossing of Antarctica*, edited by Huw Lewis-Jones. Nevertheless, the expedition record cries out for other British crossing-party members to come forward with their interpretation of events. A rather bizarre indication of the profile of the TAE within the UK is revealed in a book published by Faber & Faber in 2002. The title *The Faber Book of Exploration* claims to be "An Anthology of Worlds Revealed by Explorers through the Ages". At eight hundred pages it covers a vast range and includes a section devoted to "Cold Deserts". No mention is made of Vivian Fuchs or the TAE although Sara Wheeler, who writes about Antarctica, figures prominently. There is of course a significant piece on Sir Edmund Hillary in the 'Mountains' section.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p.135

4. The Beginning

This chapter investigates the inception of the TAE including the processes through which the governments of both the UK and New Zealand made their decisions to participate in the expedition, as well as the decisions by South Africa, Australia and Canada to become involved (or not). The selection of Dr. Vivian ‘Bunny’ Fuchs as leader of the TAE and the appointment of Sir Edmund Hillary as leader of the New Zealand Support Party are analysed. The overall governance framework for the expedition is also reviewed in the context of the negotiated arrangement between the London and Wellington based expedition committees. In order to complete coverage of the activity leading up to the crossing journey this chapter investigates the advance parties, the selection of the base sites and the determination of routes to the Polar Plateau. Rounding out this portion of the thesis is the surprisingly entangled story behind the purchase by New Zealand of the former FIDS ship *HMS John Biscoe*, later to be named, after Cook’s ship, *Endeavour*.

4.1 Gaining Government Approval & Commonwealth Participation

The UK TAE Decision

“We, Her Majesty’s Government, have no wish to extend our influence beyond those areas which have been recognized as ours. For that reason the route of the Expedition, long though it is, crosses only Commonwealth territory; but we do intend to maintain the right to our wide areas and to explore them.” With these words Britain’s Prime Minister, Sir Anthony Eden, addressed those gathered at the Savoy Hotel in London on a Friday evening, November 4, 1955, and thereby launched the fund raising efforts for the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, the greatest private geographic endeavour of the 20th century.¹²⁰

In 1908 Great Britain became the first nation to lodge a formal claim to Antarctic territory when she declared her sovereignty through the issuance of Letters Patent over the Falkland Islands Dependencies, comprising the Falkland Islands, South Orkney Islands, South Georgia, South Shetland Islands, Sandwich Islands and Graham Land which forms part of what is today referred to as the Antarctic Peninsula. In 1917 further Letters Patent were issued to extend the British claim to the sector area bounded by 50° Longitude West and 80° Longitude West and south of 58° Latitude South. These claims were made for strategic

¹²⁰ Fuchs, TAE Journal

reasons and were designed to protect Britain's access to the Drake Passage around Cape Horn. However, not surprisingly, Argentina, off whose coast the Falklands lie, reacted vehemently to this intrusion of a distant world power on her perceived territory and area of interest. The government of Chile was no more enthused by the British claim.¹²¹ Thus was ignited a political 'problem' of significant proportions which carries on to this day.

Fast forward to 1943, at the height of WWII in the South Pacific, Britain's primary objectives were to discourage the Third Reich from making use of her Antarctic anchorages and to reinforce her sovereignty claims over the Falkland Islands Dependencies. The First World War had already seen two major engagements over control of the Drake Passage. By 1941 German raiders, with a sympathetic Argentina and using the harbours of Antarctic islands as refuge and a source of fuel, had either captured or destroyed almost the entire Norwegian Antarctic whaling fleet.¹²² In addition, both Argentina (1937)¹²³ and Chile (1940)¹²⁴ had formalised their own claims to Antarctic territory, claims which overlapped with those of Great Britain. In late 1943 under the guise of *Operation Tabarin*, named after the famous Parisian nightclub, Britain secretly established and manned two bases, the first, Base 'A' on the Peninsula at Port Lockroy, which had been discovered by the French explorer Jean-Baptiste Charcot in 1904, and Base 'B' at Deception Island. Hope Bay had been the original target location for the former, but proved impossible to approach due to ice conditions. As a result Port Lockroy was selected as an alternate site. *Operation Tabarin* had been launched to foil German and enemy fleets from using Deception Island as a harbour as well as to monitor naval traffic in the region.¹²⁵

At the conclusion of World War II in 1945 *Operation Tabarin* was transformed into a new Antarctic organisation, the Falklands Islands Dependencies Survey (FIDS), based in Stanley, in order to maintain a continuing British presence in Antarctica. On the retirement in 1947 of its first leader in the field, Surgeon Commander E. W. Bingham RN, FIDS required a new leader. An ideal candidate emerged in the form of a thirty-nine year old expedition hardened geologist who had just been discharged from wartime service and who, with timely good-fortune, was seeking gainful employment. Dr. Vivian 'Bunny' Fuchs, at the suggestion of an

¹²¹ Christie, 1951, pp 301-316

¹²² Robertson, p.2

¹²³ Christie, 1951, pp. 301-316

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Fuchs 1982, p.22

old friend and fellow geologist, the Reverend Launcelot Fleming now Bishop of Portsmouth, given during a chance encounter on a Cambridge street, applied for a role with the recently formed organisation.¹²⁶ Fleming was actually returning a favour as it was Fuchs who, in 1932, had given him a tip about an expedition to Iceland, one that would eventually result in Fleming joining the British Graham Land Expedition (BGLE) led by Australian John Rymill.¹²⁷

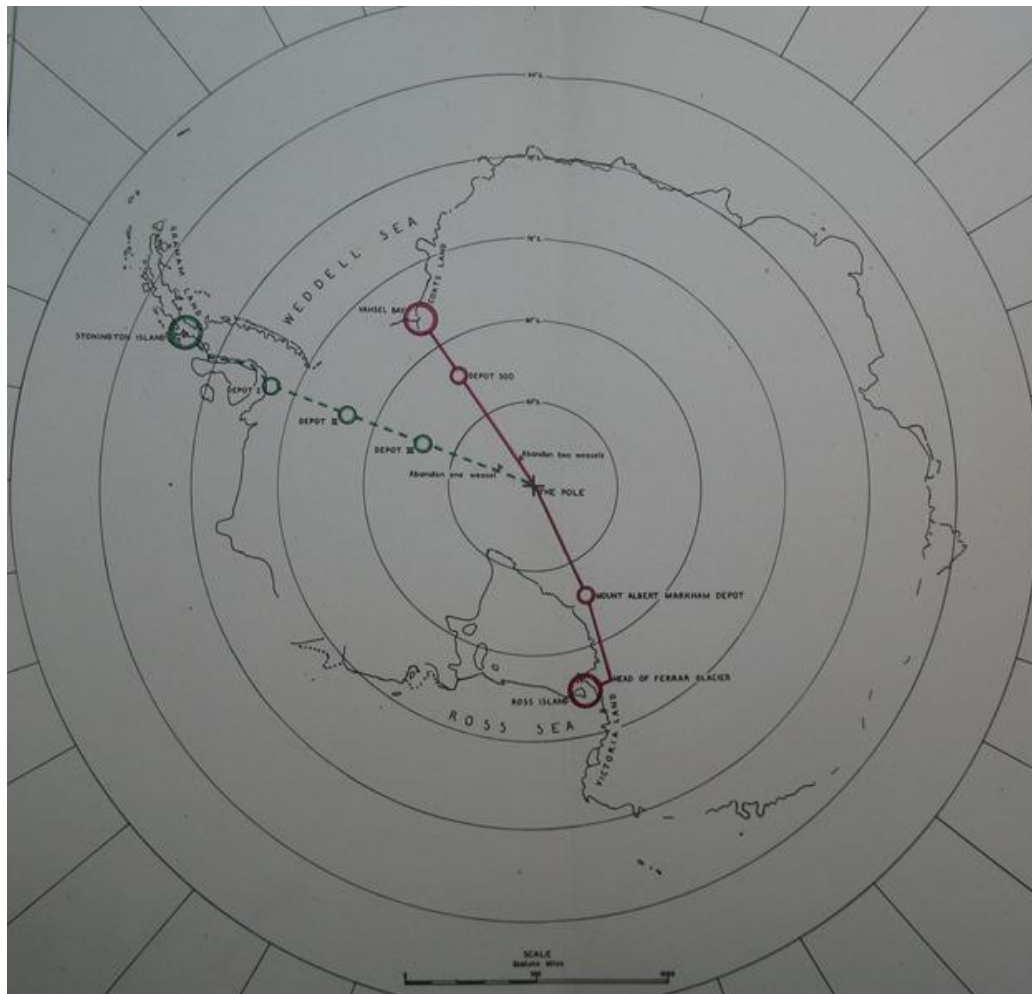


Figure 10: Map showing the two alternate routes that Fuchs considered for the crossing from either Stonington Island (broken) or Vahsel Bay (solid)

Source: Fuchs' TAE Plan 1953, Antarctic Collection, UCL

Much to Fuchs' surprise he was offered the position of Field Commander with responsibility for all seven UK Antarctic bases that by then existed, although the presence of James Wordie

¹²⁶ Fuchs, 1990, p. 173

¹²⁷ Hunt, 2003, p 19

on the selection committee had certainly improved his chances. In December 1947, aboard the former American net layer *USS Pretext*, now ice strengthened and renamed the *John Biscoe*, he sailed south to the Antarctic for the first time.¹²⁸ Six months after arriving in Antarctica the idea of an overland crossing of the continent, first conceived during the heroic era of polar exploration, was rekindled in Fuchs' mind. During a July winter's night in Base 'E' on Stonington Island, following a Bing Crosby movie and over a few drinks, discussion ensued into the early morning hours with John Huckle, Bernard Stonehouse, Ken Blaiklock, and other base members mostly involved in sledging and survey. Earlier in the day they had been making preparations for a lengthy depot-laying journey to Alexander Land. Fuchs' idea met with some initial scepticism. Several present questioned the journey's utility except as a foil to Argentine, Chilean and even US political aims in the region. Ever the scientist, Fuchs argued for the expedition as a means to determine the "structural trends of the continent" and of "providing training in cold conditions". He foresaw that the involvement of the forces, the Army, Navy and Royal Air Force would be very desirable.^{129 130} A month later, Fuchs drafted in pencil the first outline of an expedition plan.¹³¹ The topic was developed further in November 1949 while trapped by a blizzard on Eklund Island with his sledging colleague and fellow geologist Ray Adie.¹³²

In early 1950 after three Antarctic seasons, two of which were continuous due to being trapped icebound on Stonington Island (thus the group known as the 'lost eleven' came into being), Fuchs returned to England via the Falkland Islands. It was here, before reaching England, that he encountered the first threat to his nascent project. During the short stop in Port Stanley Fuchs talked over his ideas about a trans-Antarctic crossing with Sir Miles Clifford, Governor of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. This chat aroused Clifford's fertile imagination to the extent that he decided to pre-empt Fuchs and propose his own expedition, one that would be under the auspices of FIDS. Clifford had differing ideas about staffing such a venture. These included the appointment of Lt Col Ken Pierce–Butler, FIDS Secretary, as expedition leader with, ironically, Fuchs' good friend Ray Adie as deputy-leader. Pierce-Butler asked Fuchs for his plans for the journey. Understandably smarting from this affront,

¹²⁸ Fuchs, 1982, p. 92

¹²⁹ Fuchs, 1948a

¹³⁰ Stonehouse, 2010

¹³¹ Fuchs, 1948b

¹³² Fuchs, 1990, p. 206, Note that the original document written in pencil is dated August 1948. There is ambiguous evidence on this. Refer to Fuchs' article in *Geographical Journal*, Vol. 117, No. 4, Dec 1951, pp. 399-419.

Fuchs was “flabbergasted” and adamantly refused. Clifford, undeterred, proceeded to promote his plan with the Colonial Office in London. However, the reception was not enthusiastic and, as Clifford later admitted “no positive scientific results would accrue from the expedition.”¹³³ His proposal lost any momentum it might have had and by year- end had been quietly abandoned. A deciding factor was an opinion among his superiors in the Colonial Office that the project was beyond both the capabilities and the mandate of FIDS.¹³⁴

Back in London, and with guidance from his old Cambridge friend and mentor from St. John’s College, James Wordie, Fuchs took up a position as Director of a newly defined entity, the FID Scientific Bureau. His responsibilities included staffing the agency, setting its objectives and building it into an active force for the advancement of Antarctic science. During the next three years he continued to quietly develop plans for the expedition, meeting frequently with Wordie at the latter’s Cambridge home.¹³⁵ Undoubtedly, Wordie must have harboured lingering interests in a successful Antarctic crossing having been Chief Scientist on Shackleton’s failed attempt of 1914. In addition to his role as Chairman of SPRI, the ubiquitous Wordie had served as Chair of the British Executive Committee for the NBSAE. This expedition had been a great success and had again proven the advantages of international co-operation in such projects.¹³⁶ The British North Greenland Expedition (BNGE), also largely driven by Wordie, was now entering its final year and was proceeding well under the leadership of Commander C.J.W. ‘Jim’ Simpson.¹³⁷ As well as his Polar activities, Wordie had acted as Chair of the Himalayan Committee overseeing the Everest expedition led by Colonel John Hunt, one which would soon reach its climax on 29 May, 1953 with the successful ascent of Mt. Everest by Hillary and Tenzing. With these various projects either completed or well underway Wordie was ready to take on another assignment. British government policy concerning its polar interests fell within the aegis of the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) and was represented by the Inter-Departmental Polar Committee. The Committee had been established in 1926 and although it did not set government policy in polar affairs it was responsible for implementation and provided considerable guidance to various government ministries.¹³⁸ Membership drew on several different groups under the chairmanship of a CRO designate who at this time was James

¹³³ Clifford, 1953

¹³⁴ Fuchs, 1990, p. 220

¹³⁵ Smith, 2004, p. 245

¹³⁶ Mawson’s BANZARE expedition of 1929-1931 had been the first multi-national Antarctic expedition.

¹³⁷ Simpson, 1957, also Cameron, 1980, p. 215

¹³⁸ Quartermain, 1971, p. 62

Wordie. The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) was represented as well as both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office which had responsibility for FIDS. The Armed Forces and the Crown Agents were also represented. Importantly, the Commonwealth Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, deemed to have polar interests, were active members. The Committee met two to three times yearly or when matters of significant importance arose.

TAE is proposed – Polar Committee Meeting of March 1953

On his return to Britain in 1950 Fuchs advanced his plans for the project among the Cambridge polar fraternity. However, these actions alone did not assure that he would be the one chosen to lead the enterprise should it reach fruition. He had several hurdles to overcome before that would be confirmed. During the seminal period between 1948 and 1953, significant events had occurred on the British polar scene, both in the Antarctic and in Greenland. Foremost among these were the Norwegian-British-Swedish Antarctic Expedition 1949-1952 (NBSAE) and the British North-Greenland Expedition 1952-54 (BNGE). Even though Fuchs at the time was Director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau these successful expeditions spurred the rise of at least two other leadership candidates. These were Gordon de Q Robin, a veteran of and third lead in the NBSAE, and Jim Simpson, leader of the BNGE. In addition, an ‘outsider’ and a surprise challenger, but one with considerable determination and polar experience, came forward to claim the lead role. This person was Verner Duncan Carse, who cut his Antarctic teeth as a crewman aboard the research vessel *Discovery II* and later as a member of the British Graham Land Expedition 1934-37 (BGLE).¹³⁹

The topic of a trans-Antarctic expedition was first formally broached at the Polar Committee meeting of 24 March 1953 and chaired by Wordie who was then also President of the Royal Geographic Society. Item 3 on the agenda stated simply “Proposals for a trans-Antarctic Expedition”. Sir Miles Clifford opened the discussion and spoke of the prestige value of such an expedition. In Clifford’s opinion the political advantages were paramount. In his view the compelling argument for an expedition was that it “...seemed to him to be the only way of competing successfully for political prestige in this area” accompanied by a persistent and

¹³⁹ Trendall, 2011, pp. 16-23

unsettling fear that "...some foreign expedition would do the journey first". The United States was the country most likely to compete in this arena. The general feeling among the Committee was that a leader should first be chosen and then he would be expected to put forward 'definite proposals' to the Committee. The Committee agreed that every effort should be made to make the crossing party route pass through the South Pole as this would stimulate increased international interest. Wordie then led the discussion and in order to allay concerns about possible expedition failure, highlighted the technological improvements since Shackleton's attempt of 40 years prior, emphasising the scientific value of ice sheet measurements and recognizing that melting would impact on ocean levels. An expedition start date of 1954 was viewed as possible. Wordie then identified four possible leaders. These were "Mr. Carse, Commander Simpson, Gordon Robin and Dr Fuchs".¹⁴⁰ Robin was a highly experienced and respected member of the British Antarctic fraternity and his Maudheim experience counted for much. He had a strong interest in leading such an expedition and had discussed the possibility in Cambridge the previous year. However, Wordie stated that for "various reasons" Robin would "not now be available". It turned out that Robin, who had been 'sitting on the fence for some time', had now become engaged to the personal assistant of Lawrence Kirwan, Director and Secretary of the RGS, and had withdrawn his candidacy.¹⁴¹ The other worthy candidate, Jim Simpson RN, was in Greenland leading the British North-Greenland Expedition and would not return until late 1954. Robin and Simpson having been eliminated this left Fuchs and Carse as the remaining candidates. It soon became clear which Polar Committee member had the most influential voice. By 1953 James Wordie was at the height of his powers and able to trump any of his colleagues' opinions should that be necessary. At this meeting Wordie dismissed Carse as a viable candidate stating that "Mr. Carse would be busy with the South Georgia Survey until well into 1954...." Wordie went on to highlight his protégé Fuchs' sledging experience and expedition leadership experience in East Africa. He then suggested that as the next step Fuchs be invited to present a proposal to the Committee observing that "...Commonwealth countries might wish to participate in the expedition". The representatives of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, all present, were non-committal but expressed generally positive reactions to the idea of a continental crossing. Sir Miles Clifford supportively offered to contact Fuchs and ask him to prepare proposals for the 'three bodies most concerned', those being the Polar Committee, the FIDS Scientific Committee, and the Royal Geographical Society. This offer was accepted

¹⁴⁰ Corner, 1953

¹⁴¹ Robin, 1953a

and the meeting was adjourned.¹⁴² With the support of both Wordie and Clifford, Fuchs' selection as leader was propelled greatly forward.

Duncan Carse Enters the Scene

However, the issue of Duncan Carse's leadership candidacy would not be so neatly resolved. In Carse, Fuchs had a more serious rival, a polar enthusiast but an 'outsider' to the inner circles of the British polar fraternity, nevertheless one who was busily preparing his own alternative expedition proposal. V. Duncan Carse was born in Fulham in 1913, and was forty years old when the CTAE emerged in the public eye. He grew up separated from his parents and was largely raised by his grandparents who ensured that he was well educated. Not being attracted to any of the regular professions he tried his hand briefly at selling stationery when, at the age of 19, he signed on as a ship's apprentice on a barque headed for Australia to collect a cargo of wheat. In 1933 he signed on as crewman on the Royal Research Ship *Discovery II* which was scheduled to do oceanographic work in the Southern Ocean. Carse stayed on to take part in the ship's next assignment which was rumoured to be assisting the BGLE to establish a base on the Antarctic Peninsula. *Discovery II* eventually reached Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands and it was here that luck turned his way. Carse was determined to become an Antarctic explorer and he would quickly seize any opportunity that arose. The BGLE mission was to establish an Antarctic base and Rymill's ship, *Penola*, had come into port alongside *Discovery II*. A few days later after a social night ashore with Rymill, Carse convinced the Australian that he would be an asset to the expedition. On 1 December 1934, with Captain Robert 'Red' Ryder's permission, Carse transferred from *Discovery II* to *Penola* as a member of the ship's crew. He thereby became the youngest member of the British Graham Land Expedition.¹⁴³

The BGLE provided Carse with the opportunity to develop his polar network. Over the next few years he formed key relationships with three scientists from Rymill's party each of whom would become members of the British polar establishment. These were biologist G.C.L. (Colin) Bertram, by now Director of SPRI, geologist Launcelot Fleming, Bishop of Portsmouth and a past Director of SPRI, and Dr Brian Roberts, ornithologist, who had joined the Foreign Office and would later play a lead role in formulating the Antarctic Treaty. Two

¹⁴² Corner, 1953

¹⁴³ Trendall, 2011, pp.16-18

other prominent members of the expedition with whom Carse kept in contact were the Chief Surveyor, Alfred Stephenson and the medical doctor, Surgeon Ted or 'Doc' Bingham who would each have a major impact on Carse's polar career.

In 1937, after the BGLE, for which Carse was granted the Polar Medal, his polar career took a surprising turn. Although the lure of Antarctic exploration was as great as ever, his dire financial situation forced him to put these aspirations on hold. He had an artistic side to his nature as well as a uniquely sonorous voice which made him successful in gaining a position as announcer with BBC Radio. He remained with the BBC until 1951 except for a break in the navy during World War II. By that time Carse was one of the best known celebrities in British radio with his role as 'Dick Barton, Special Agent' being followed by an estimated 15,000,000 listeners. But, at the height of his popularity, in early 1951 he made the startling decision to give up his radio career and pursue his first love, adventure in the Antarctic. He resigned from the BBC and, of his own volition and with no governmental or institutional backing, Carse undertook a project to survey the island of South Georgia.¹⁴⁴

During his intervening years in broadcasting Carse had kept in touch with his colleagues from BGLE days and to a certain extent had kept abreast of polar affairs. It was Roberts who most aided Carse and advised him that the project likely to gain support and succeed must be "small, inexpensive and useful". The survey of the island of South Georgia fitted that profile perfectly, and Carse, the "freelance Antarctic explorer"¹⁴⁵ recognised it as an ideal vehicle to promote his expedition credentials within the British polar hierarchy. Privately, Carse's driving motivation for the work in South Georgia was to prepare himself to lead an expedition across Antarctica.¹⁴⁶ In 1951-52 he assembled and led a team of six to the island, including Alec Trendall, geologist, Gordon Smillie, Deputy and surveyor, and Keith Warburton, doctor and mountaineer. Through a series of mishaps, poor weather and bad luck this surveying attempt achieved only partial success. Carse tried again the following year but due to a falling out with one of his fellow surveyors the expedition was unsuccessful and little was accomplished. In early 1953, while working towards his second SGS attempt, he learned from Roberts that an Antarctic crossing expedition was being organised.¹⁴⁷ He would have to

¹⁴⁴ Ibid

¹⁴⁵ Carse, 1959, p. 20

¹⁴⁶ Trendall, 2007

¹⁴⁷ Trendall, 2011, p. 25

work quickly to be included as a leadership candidate. He then began drafting his preliminary plan *The Crossing of the Antarctic Continent by Sledge*.¹⁴⁸

Wordie had meanwhile been trying to keep word of any expedition quiet so as not to arouse the possible competing interests of the United States. The US Navy's post-war *Operation High Jump* led by Admiral Byrd and the subsequent *Operation Windmill* as well as USN Capt. Finn Ronne's private RARE expedition of 1947-48 had aroused suspicions of an imminent American claim to considerable portions of the continent. On 30 March 1953, Carse met with Wordie and shared his plans and intended route. The following day Wordie sent Carse a note advising him to lie low, saying 'it would be inadvisable to be active in any way'. Wordie was concerned that publicity about the expedition would be stirred up and possibly influence plans in the United States. Carse disagreed, suspecting "subterfuge and dishonesty", and ignored Wordie's advice. Four days later, Carse replied to Wordie, bluntly saying 'I cannot agree' and noted that, this very day, he had forwarded copies of his 11 page preliminary expedition plan to several key individuals including Wordie, Roberts, Bertram, Lawrence Kirwan, Launcelot Fleming, Gordon Robin, Sir Miles Clifford, and, ironically, Vivian Fuchs as Director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau. In his covering letter Carse professed: "There is here a principle – that it is better to pool ideas round the table than to develop them in unrelated 'tête-à-têtes'".¹⁴⁹ Carse was not about to withdraw and he ended his reply to Wordie, somewhat plaintively, with a fifth point: "It seems to me that, as one who is actively interested to the extent so far of having rushed through a paper at your request, it is only fair that what I have to say should be brought to the notice of all ...". Carse's open and consultative approach to the planning process differed markedly from the more discrete manner of the Polar Committee.

On 7 April, with Carse's plan now circulated, Wordie responded to Carse with a request that he not distribute the plan any further and asked to meet with him again as soon as possible. However, Wordie was too late since, on 4 April, Carse had put his feelings down in a letter to Launcelot Fleming (with copies to his other BGLE colleagues Brian Roberts and Colin Bertram) expressing his distaste for 'backstairs technique' and admitted "Frankly, I'm angry and going to fight...I am still in the running. ... it is high time someone enforced a little more honesty and a little less subterfuge...It doesn't matter to me if I do get beaten,

¹⁴⁸ Carse, 1953a

¹⁴⁹ Carse, 1953b

outmanoeuvred, call it what you like...The point is there shouldn't be any rival factions in this business at all." Carse was showing his naiveté in the face of backroom politics and the old boy machinations of the British Polar establishment. It was a closed club and he was not a member. Carse might have had a premonition of things to come when he had been turned down on his application to join FIDS after the war.¹⁵⁰

Letters of acknowledgement were sent to Carse by the recipients of his plans. 'Bunny' Fuchs wrote a cryptic note commenting that Carse had "thought a lot and ...spread his net wide." Fuchs then referred to a previous discussion with him in a popular Cambridge pub 'The Feathers' mentioning that he had tried to be "...open on this matter", and admitted that "...a certain quarter has requested me to put forward proposals for a trans-Antarctic journey." Fuchs curtly stated that "...our propositions are only basically similar in that they both cross the continent." He then closed wishing Carse well with his South Georgia plans and expressed interest in Carse's idea regarding use of a female surveyor for the SGS.¹⁵¹ For his part, Kirwan wrote to Carse of his pleasure that his plans had been circulated and welcomed input from other sources. He revealed that funding had not yet been requested and indicated that no final decisions had been made.¹⁵² Carse had a better rapport with Gordon Robin. Robin expressed his general support for Carse's plan, except at the detailed level, and referred to "...the policy going on behind the scenes", and offered Carse any help his experience might provide. In a candid note to Robin drafted 17 April 1953, Carse mentioned his disappointment that Robin "...had to pull out of the proposed transcontinental job ..." and somewhat despondently made the admission that "I don't think that I shall be doing the job myself ..." Robin nevertheless proffered his advice and, based on his Maudheim experience during the NBSAE, recommended that Carse reduce his dependence on dogs and greatly increase his reliance on aircraft support, adding that Weasels travel more quickly without accompanying dogs "...once on the plateau where going is safe".¹⁵³ Carse's plan revealed a major flaw in that he had not kept up with the advancing technology of Antarctic exploration. His was the approach of the 1930's, not of the post-war second half of the 20th century.

Colin Bertram's reply was more analytical and to the point. Having accepted that Carse had legitimate reasons to be upset, leadership of the expedition, according to Bertram, would

¹⁵⁰ Trendall, 2007

¹⁵¹ Fuchs, 1953

¹⁵² Kirwan, 1953

¹⁵³ Robin, 1953b

depend upon whether the expedition were to be "...a government operation or mainly a private enterprise." If governmental then Carse would have no chance, otherwise Bertram saw Carse as "...without peer." He advised Carse that although it is commendable for him to seek advice it was his responsibility to make the final decisions about that advice and to include or exclude from his plans any that is given. Bertram then made the insightful statement: "I can see very well that you do not wish to exclude yourself from the running simply by your absence in South Georgia" and reassuringly added "I do not believe myself that this will happen". Bertram closed with an expression of general support for Carse's plan as a "...first shot."¹⁵⁴ In fact Bertram was to be proven wrong. Although the TAE was a private venture, albeit with significant government support, Carse would still not be chosen as leader. Launcelot Fleming's reply, befitting a man of the cloth, included a reprimand on Carse's bitterness and use of "...abusive words. Fleming instructed Carse that "...the Committee was by definition secretive in its dealings" and Carse needed to understand that aspect.¹⁵⁵ Carse was being tenacious but such explicit outpourings of frustration with the procedure being followed were undermining his chances.

Almost four months later, on 5 August, Carse received a letter from Wordie requesting an advance copy of his proposal and asking that 25 copies be prepared for distribution. This was only three weeks before Carse was due to sail on his second attempt to survey South Georgia. By this time Carse had radically revised his preliminary plan into a 24 page document. Meanwhile he had been in touch with ESSO Petroleum regarding potential sponsorship arrangements. (Fuchs' major sponsor was rival British Petroleum –BP). By 3 September Carse was heading south aboard the ship *Polar Maid* and was still putting the final edits to his proposal. As Alec Trendall, one of Carse's expedition colleagues, recorded, Carse's main underlying objective in leading the South Georgia Survey was to use it as a springboard to leadership of any proposed Antarctic crossing expedition.¹⁵⁶ However, Wordie had another leader in mind, a person who, as a young twenty-one year old, had accompanied him to Greenland in 1929, one to whom he had been a mentor at St John's College and whom he had later assisted in gaining the Director's role at FIDS.¹⁵⁷ That person was Vivian 'Bunny' Fuchs with whom since 1951, when Fuchs returned from the Falklands, he had been fostering the realisation of his own and the redressing of Shackleton's failed expedition of 1914-15.

¹⁵⁴ Bertram, 1953

¹⁵⁵ Fleming, 1953

¹⁵⁶ Trendall, 2007

¹⁵⁷ Smith, 2004, p.182

Despite Wordie and Clifford's efforts to expedite Fuchs' nomination, there were to be a few more twists and turns before the matter was finally settled. At the next Polar Committee meeting on 15 September 1953, the leadership question had not yet been resolved. Duncan Carse was proving himself a more determined candidate than anyone had imagined.

It would not be going too far to surmise at this point that Wordie and Clifford were relieved, if not instrumental, in Carse embarking on his second SGS expedition.¹⁵⁸ This expedition began in October 1953 and extended through April, 1954. Rather than prove Carse's credentials as an Antarctic expedition leader it likely conveniently removed Carse from the TAE picture.

Internal Resistance from the Foreign Office, the RGS and SPRI

Another more serious issue for Fuchs arose from certain quarters of Britain's Polar establishment. At a time of fiscal stringency due to Britain's enduring post-war rationing regime, there were those within the close-knit community of the British polar elite who questioned either the approach being taken or the scientific and political value of a continental crossing. Fuchs had set himself a difficult task which would test both his resolve and his political skill.

Foreign Office

At this early stage neither Wordie nor Clifford appreciated the resistance that would be mounted by the Foreign Office and its two polar representatives, Brian Roberts and Terence Garvey. Foreign Office interests were sharply focused on assuring the legitimacy of Britain's claims to the Falkland Islands Dependencies including the Antarctic Peninsula. In post-war Britain budgets were tight and the Foreign Office was generally opposed to any project that did not promote its own interests. Fearing that an expedition would threaten their funding allocation and with the knowledge that Fuchs would present his plan at the next Polar Committee meeting, they began a campaign to scuttle any crossing venture. During the ensuing weeks of 1953, representatives of the Foreign Office and the CRO met to discuss the proposed trans-Polar expedition. At one meeting Garvey raised the broader issue of the UK Government's Antarctic Policy which was being debated at that time. The question was whether the UK should increase or decrease its commitment to Antarctic expenditure in its efforts to ensure British sovereignty in the region. Following a telephone conversation with

¹⁵⁸ Carse, 1959, pp. 20-37

H. Bass of the CRO Garvey sent a report to Roberts expressing his fear of the impacts of a policy shift towards a reduced level of activity in the Antarctic and reiterated that "...If HMG were to spend any more money at all, we felt very strongly that it should be expended on objects which were shown to contribute directly to the maintenance of our sovereignty in the Dependencies." He flippantly dismissed the expedition idea as "evanescent" considering it to have no permanent value. This discussion left Bass, who was Secretary of the Polar Committee, somewhat doubtful as to the effectiveness of its next meeting. Garvey's cynical closing remark told all "It is worth remembering that the Polar Committee is a body with no powers whatever".¹⁵⁹ In his remarks on Garvey's report Roberts concurred adding "I entirely agree with Mr. Garvey's comments about spending any available money on work of more value [than a trans-Polar expedition] in the Falkland Islands Dependencies". Roberts acknowledged that Kirwan, of the RGS, was caught in a bind and observed that "Mr. Kirwan...takes the same attitude as Mr Garvey. He does not want the RGS to sponsor this project, but can hardly oppose his President [Wordie]". Roberts showed his frustration referring to the manner in which Wordie had dealt with Carse's plans commenting "... In short the whole business is rife with intrigues by Mr. Wordie and Sir Miles Clifford, which I do not profess to understand..." In a margin note Garvey simply quipped "This is too Byzantine for me."¹⁶⁰ However, the momentum for the expedition was growing and by April 1954 the Foreign Office was ready to capitulate. In an internal report Garvey recorded his thoughts even though certain modifications had been made to the expedition plans:

Despite these embellishments...other things being equal, the Foreign Office ought to pole-axe this project. I am nevertheless increasingly doubtful whether we shall succeed in doing so, and it is therefore open to some doubt whether we should make the attempt...It will have a wide appeal to those who think in terms of a second Elizabethan age... but we must accept the facts of the situation...I think we have to be careful about what we say lest we should completely discredit ourselves.

The main resistance was evaporating. Before long Roberts and the FO would reverse their position and support the TAE. This was further eased by the government's decision to fund

¹⁵⁹ Garvey, 1953

¹⁶⁰ Roberts, 1953

an aerial survey of Graham Land, the FIDS Aerial Survey Expedition.¹⁶¹ Although Kirwan did not support the idea of a crossing expedition his opposition was more muted than that posed by the Foreign Office. Fuchs was not completely unaware of the Foreign Office intrigue over his expedition. The wife of his young geology student John Heap was at the time employed in the Antarctic desk at the Foreign Office giving Fuchs unique insight into its machinations.¹⁶²

RGS

The Royal Geographical Society (RGS) under the Directorship of L. P. Kirwan was initially lukewarm to the idea of a British trans-Antarctic journey. Fuchs was aware of the opposition by those from whom he should have expected staunch support. In his autobiography Fuchs wrote: “I was soon aware that there was a solid body of opinion against my project...based on the possible embarrassment for Britain if the project failed.” preferring to “...leave the project to the Americans.”¹⁶³ As it turned out regarding the RGS, Kirwan’s opposition wilted once retired Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Chair of the TAE Committee conversed with Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, Chairman of the RGS. The RGS committee had been advised that the ‘question of the expedition’s leadership’ would be discussed at their next meeting. In Fuchs’ words “...when he [Marshall-Cornwall] arrived at the meeting he looked a very sorry man...Indeed there was nothing ...to discuss.”¹⁶⁴ Once their obstruction had been dissolved by Slessor’s discreet intervention the RGS became the first major sponsor of the TAE committing £1000 in return for being nominated as repository of the official TAE photographs. Kirwan, with a modicum of enthusiasm, would later be able to write “The year 1953 may be regarded as the dawn of the third and in some respects the greatest of the main periods of Antarctic endeavour...It was also the year in which J.M. Wordie the president of the Royal Geographical Society and a former shipmate of Shackleton’s, provided a link with the past by reviving the idea, in striking contrast to these international and static operations, of a wholly British trans-Antarctic expedition.”¹⁶⁵

SPRI

The difficulties with SPRI were not resolved as satisfactorily as had those with the RGS and

¹⁶¹ Mott, 1986, pp. 3-5

¹⁶² Fuchs, P. Interview with the author, 8 July 2009, Dunton Bassett, UK

¹⁶³ Fuchs, 1990, p.223

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

¹⁶⁵ Kirwan, 1959, p. 349

the Foreign Office. Although SPRI initially supported the idea of an Antarctic crossing, its Director, Dr Colin Bertram, found it impossible to align himself with the decisions of the TAE Committee of Management. Bertram's resignation well illustrated the complex tangle of agendas that Fuchs had to unravel. It was unthinkable that SPRI would not be involved with British endeavours in Antarctica. Bertram, along with Roberts and Launcelot Fleming, had been a member of John Rymill's BGLE of 1934-37. He was an alumnus of St John's College, Cambridge, as were both Wordie and Fuchs. He had also been to East Greenland with Roberts in 1933.¹⁶⁶ Bertram's opposition to the TAE did not emerge explicitly until 1955 when the expedition had overcome its major obstacles and resistance points, that is, when the game was lost. The Committee of Management had been formed in June 1954 under the Chairmanship of Sir John Slessor, and Bertram, as Director of SPRI, had been a founding member. In March 1955, shortly after the UK government announced its support for the TAE with a grant of £100,000, Bertram's disenchantment with certain aspects of the expedition drove him to decline a role as one of the Directors of the TAE Co. Ltd. (London). The minutes of the Committee's meeting of 10 March 1955 recorded their disappointment at his decision as "...unfortunate that the Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute should take this attitude..."¹⁶⁷ Bertram's objections to the project were deemed to be "largely political" and Sir Miles Clifford was asked to follow up with the Colonial Office. Bertram's disaffection with the expedition reached a head in August 1955. In a letter to Slessor he confided "...I do not feel that it would be to the ultimate good of this Institute [SPRI], nor indeed honest for me, the paid executive, to accept a share in the formal responsibility for the running of the Trans-Antarctic venture by the private company. The venture is based on decisions in which I have not full confidence."¹⁶⁸ Bertram disagreed with two aspects of the plan, first, the decision to delay the expedition by one year, and second, the use of Vahsel Bay as base site which entailed navigation through the risky Weddell Sea. More importantly, he felt that SPRI should have had a bigger say in the planning of the expedition. In a letter of reply, Slessor sharply pointed out to Bertram that by declining a Director role in the TAE Company he had squandered any opportunity to influence the shape of the expedition.¹⁶⁹ Wordie, who was Chair of SPRI, continued to act as its representative on the TAE company executive.

¹⁶⁶ Rymill, 1939

¹⁶⁷ COM Minutes, (10 March 1955)

¹⁶⁸ Bertram, 1955

¹⁶⁹ Slessor, 1955

Bertram later explained his difficulty in reconciling the interests of the TAE, the IGY and the Foreign Office. He wrote

These three aspects of Antarctic Affairs became comingled, with resultant difficulties as between the Polar Institute ... which had the greatest knowledge, the backers of the trans-Antarctic Crossing, the Royal Society which was concerned with the IGY, and the Foreign Office which was concerned with matters of sovereignty ... In the Polar Institute, as individuals, we wished to see a success for the Fuchs expedition if it came about, but we could not feel it suitable that it should compete (through the ignorance of many) with the F.O. view that the national effort needed superior shipping under the British flag (for example an ice-worthy ship) to uphold the British presence politically in Antarctica...

Bertram dismissed the political importance of the expedition as being merely a follow-on to the conquest of Mt Everest which "... whetted the appetite for further adventure, in Antarctica, the realisation of the almost traditional (in Britain) desire for the first crossing of the Antarctic continent". He then belittled the expedition commenting that "... the trans-Antarctic venture would be flawed in the original sense, in the presence of the new great [American] depot at the South Pole itself ..." In the end Bertram finally admitted to the breakdown in his relationship with Wordie stating "James Wordie was the difficulty. The Institute staff (with me as Director and Brian Roberts wearing his F.O. hat) and Wordie came into opposition over these matters."¹⁷⁰ As often happens strong personalities had proven incompatible with the unfortunate result that SPRI effectively absented itself from the TAE.¹⁷¹

Clifford slams Carse

In presenting a rival proposal, Duncan Carse had posed a special and unexpected problem for the Fuchs – Wordie – Clifford team. Even though there was little support for Carse's proposal among Polar Committee members it was important that the choice be made with a semblance of equitable consideration. By the end of August 1953 Carse was still putting final edits to his trans-Antarctic expedition plans even as he sailed south aboard the steamer *Polar Maid*

¹⁷⁰ Bertram, 1987, pp. 62-65

¹⁷¹ Bertram's own plan to lead an expedition to Antarctica had been forestalled by the advent of WWII.

accompanied by a separate scientific team from Cambridge. He finally sent his proposal to Wordie and Roberts from the ship in early September. The Polar Committee meeting of 14 September 1953 resolved that Clifford should review both plans and submit an assessment to the Committee. He completed this task on 26 November and circulated his report for discussion at the next meeting set for May 1954. Clifford was unequivocal in his support for Fuchs and his criticism of Carse. Fuchs' plan was "well-considered, straightforward" while Carse's plan was "far too ambitious" with "too little time allowed".¹⁷² Carse's plan consisted of several major sorties. They included explorations of Queen Maud Land, two expeditions to the Pole along separate routes and a major 'Home Journey' back from Vahsel Bay to Stonington Island for the 12 people who would not take part in the crossing journeys. These interesting, yet secondary, exploratory ventures would drain expedition resources and increase the complexity and cost of the expedition. Notably, they put at risk its main objective which was to cross the continent. Clifford pointed out other weaknesses in Carse's plan. Firstly, it did not allow for support at McMurdo Sound, the final destination point of the traverse. Thus no route of descent from the polar plateau would have been confirmed and no reception base established. This would also mean that Carse's crossing party had to carry sufficient supplies to cross the entire continent without the benefit of previously laid depots on the opposite side of the Pole. In addition, the means of transport to New Zealand were left indeterminate.¹⁷³ Nor did Carse appreciate the need for air support other than for reconnaissance during the few months after arrival at Vahsel Bay and his plan identified dog sledges, not tractors, as the main mode of transport. It must be noted that in 1953, pre-IGY, the South Pole was expected to be a vacant plain of snow and ice, much as Scott had left it in 1912.

The competing proposals were subjected to further scrutiny for their scientific merit by the FID Scientific Committee and the Royal Geographical Society. The Society met on 14 January 1954 and concluded that Fuchs' plan was "... a reasonable one prepared by an Antarctic explorer of considerable experience and one well worth attempting" and recommended "... that the project should be warmly encouraged by the Royal Geographical Society on the grounds of geographical exploration apart from other considerations." At this same meeting Wordie then closed the issue stating:

¹⁷² Clifford, November 1953

¹⁷³ Carse, 1953a

*It appears now that Mr. Carse's plans are now in suspense. They were not mentioned at the Royal Geographical Society's meetings. They had, however, been discussed earlier by the Falkland Islands Dependencies Scientific Committee where Roberts did not press them, and I think they can now be regarded as adjourned forthwith.*¹⁷⁴

The fate of Carse's proposal was sealed at the Polar Committee meeting of 13 May 1954. The minutes of the meeting recorded that "... as a result of the advice tendered by experts the Committee no longer wished to consider Mr. Carse's plan... it was now only necessary to decide whether Dr Fuchs' plan met the bill." Clifford made an additional comment, probably based on feedback from Carse's initial SGS project of 1951-52, questioning Carse's ability to successfully lead a large complex expedition. He extended his critique of Carse's plan with the comment that "... the Leader of such an expedition should be a specialist in some branch of the work to be undertaken, and an experienced Antarctic traveller; Mr. Carse is neither."¹⁷⁵ With this indictment Carse's desperate efforts were dismissed and Fuchs was promoted to TAE leadership.¹⁷⁶ Following on from his submission to the September 1953 Polar Committee meeting, Fuchs provided a subsequent paper outlining his progress to date on organisation. The paper explained modifications to his original proposal and outlined a financial plan. Surprisingly, one change was to propose that, based on "political advantages" and an assumption of "large scale air support" the departure point should now be Stonington Island.¹⁷⁷ At this point Brian Roberts offered the support of the Foreign Office to Fuchs' plan. This represented a major turnaround for Roberts and was eased by Fuchs' inclusion in his plan of aerial photography of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. An aerial survey was a major goal for the Foreign Office who believed it would strengthen the case for British sovereignty. Based on this change of heart the Committee recommended that "... the proposal should now be pursued by the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office ... so that it might be considered in the context ... of the general question of Antarctic activities which ... was already under consideration."¹⁷⁸ On 28 June 1954 Basil Greenhill, the CRO Secretary of

¹⁷⁴ Polar Committee, February 1954

¹⁷⁵ Clifford, November 1953

¹⁷⁶ Trendall, 2011, p. 90

¹⁷⁷ Fuchs would later have to revert back to using Vahsel Bay as his departure point due to the RAF withdrawal of the additional support.

¹⁷⁸ Polar Committee, May 1954

the Polar Committee, informed Fuchs of the Committee's recommendation. With its leader now confirmed the TAE had taken a major step forward.¹⁷⁹

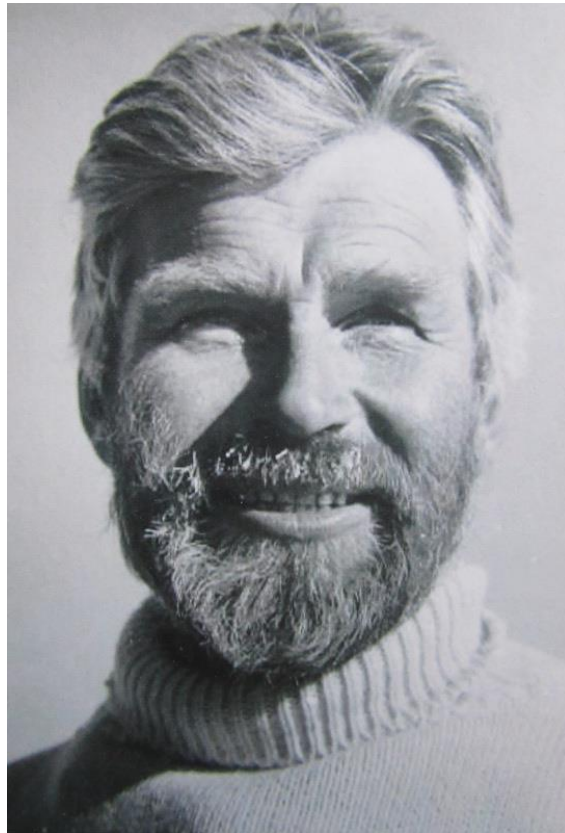


Figure 11: Dr. Vivian Fuchs while crossing Antarctica – 1958

Photo: Courtesy of Peter Fuchs

The Commonwealth TAE Decisions

Another significant hurdle that Fuchs and his supporters needed to overcome was to obtain the buy-in of the Commonwealth Dominions. These were Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, each having their particular and unique polar interests. From the outset Fuchs envisioned that his expedition would be a Commonwealth initiative, crossing only territory claimed by members of the Commonwealth. This strategy was not only for the glory of the Empire but as a practical matter to ensure the feasibility of his enterprise. Fuchs expected active participation and support from these Commonwealth countries. However, his enthusiasm was not matched by their governments and significant lobbying was required. In

¹⁷⁹ Sir John Hunt, leader of the successful Everest expedition, was also a possible candidate and did express interest in the Antarctic. Hillary said he would have readily served with him again. It is not clear why his name did not come up in Polar Committee discussions.

December 1953 the UK High Commissioner in Wellington reported to the CRO that “In spite of Corner’s assurance ... that the co-operation of New Zealand could certainly be counted upon ... if the project once got underway, I should be very much inclined to doubt whether, in the present economic climate, there is any prospect whatsoever of New Zealand’s underwriting any significant share in the cost of the venture.”¹⁸⁰ Australia exhibited even less enthusiasm. The UK High Commissioner in Canberra wrote to the CRO that “... the Antarctic Division ... does not seem to be very favourably disposed towards the plan ... for a trans-Antarctic journey prepared by Dr. Fuchs” noting “...the proposed starting point (Vahsel Bay) is too dangerous and ... the only alternative (starting from Stonington Island) would be very much more costly”.¹⁸¹ Australia also doubted the expedition’s scientific merits commenting that “While ... the proposed trans-Antarctic journey might have some prestige value it would not have any great scientific interest.”¹⁸² Little progress was made during the next few months before the Polar Committee held its meeting of May 1954 and, although an expedition leader had been decided, the Commonwealth countries remained reluctant to provide any tangible support. Canada backed away claiming remoteness and pre-occupation with her Arctic territories. Although not active in the Antarctic, Canada was approached because of her experience operating in the challenging Arctic environment and expertise in cold-weather technologies. These included the de Havilland Aircraft Co., manufacturers of the Otter and Beaver airplanes which had a long and successful history in the Canadian north. Also, the firm of Armand Bombardier, based in Quebec, had pioneered in the manufacture of tracked vehicles for snow travel such as the ‘Muskeg’ and ‘Snowmobile’.

Australia joined with the Admiralty in requesting more detail. The Air Ministry dismissed the benefits to them that Fuchs had outlined and simply and surprisingly, “...saw no great advantages per se in the proposal to use air support....” A glimmer of hope emerged from J.J. Becker, representing South Africa, who expressed the view that Union authorities considered daily meteorological observations recorded simultaneously at several points on the continent would be “...of the greatest importance”. He then made two more key points, first opining that “From a meteorological point of view ... a base at Vahsel Bay would appear to be preferable [over Stonington Island]”. Then secondly, he announced that South Africa would support an expedition “... especially if it is undertaken during the geophysical year of 1957-

¹⁸⁰ Larmour, 1953 – Frank Corner was New Zealand’s Deputy High Commissioner in London

¹⁸¹ Whitehead, 1954

¹⁸² Ibid

58 when special observations will be made all over the world.”¹⁸³ This suggestion, later echoed by New Zealand meteorologist Dr. Richie Simmers, would ultimately push the TAE toward entanglement within the larger net of the IGY.

By mid-1954 Fuchs had assembled the expedition’s General Committee even though funding support for the TAE had not yet materialised. The inaugural meeting was held in a room at the Colonial Office on 24 June. Fuchs here again repeated that, with ‘large scale RAF support’, Stonington Island would be a feasible departure point for the crossing party. In an increasingly recurring theme, Gordon Robin suggested that “... it might be advantageous to the expedition to take the field during the International Geophysical Year”. Kirwan raised the spectre of an American expedition to West Antarctica to be led by Finn Ronne. An anxious TAE Committee hoped that Her Majesty’s Government would announce its support within a month, a wish that would not be realised for another eight months. At this meeting the term ‘Commonwealth’ was introduced into the name of the expedition since it was agreed that the Dominions “...would be asked for material assistance”. Nevertheless, it began to dawn on certain members of the Polar Committee and TAE Committee that an explicit UK government commitment was a pre-requisite to any approach to Commonwealth governments for support.¹⁸⁴ Such a formal approach was made by secret letter on 1 September 1954 at a time when the United Kingdom was reviewing its broader Antarctic policy. The letter showed clearly that sovereignty was the primary concern for Britain in Antarctica, and that the TAE was viewed as part of an overarching political strategy. Britain’s request to its Dominions was based on the premise that it wished to: “...concentrate on making secure its claim to selected areas of the Falkland Islands Dependencies” and not to “...disperse its activities in an attempt to maintain its claim to the whole area”. The letter asked for comment on three linked proposals. First was the plan to intensify its activity in the FID over the short term (five years) with the goal of determining which parts it was prepared to abandon allowing it to reduce its activity level (and level of expenditure) over the longer term. Second was a proposal for “a combined Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition from the Falkland Islands Dependencies by way of the South Pole to the Ross Dependency”. Third was a

¹⁸³ Becker, 1954

¹⁸⁴ TAE General Committee, 24 June 1954

proposal that the UK should apply to the International Court of Justice in The Hague to resolve the sovereignty issues with Argentina and Chile.¹⁸⁵

Canada's response to the request was consistent with its position at the May 1954 Polar Committee meeting. The UKHC Office in Ottawa reported by telegram that "Existing commitments in Canadian Arctic will definitely debar Canadian participation in proposed expedition... They would no doubt be co-operative if asked for technical advice ... e.g. on care of huskies but they do not intend to be associated formally or informally with [the] expedition."¹⁸⁶ Canada's stance of non-involvement was driven as much by her political concerns as by onerous commitments in the Arctic. Canada as part of the Americas, was nurturing budding trade relations with both Chile and Argentina. She was not willing to put those strategic goals at risk by actively participating in Britain's nationalistic show in the Antarctic.

Australia's reply, which came from the Prime Minister's office and was relayed five days later to the CRO by the UKHC in Canberra, was somewhat ambiguous: "Australia is heavily committed to its own territory and present expenditure ... amounts to £250,000 a year... Australian participation in proposed journey cannot be finally considered until more details about the project become available." Pointedly, it re-asserted concern about the scientific value of the project. The report's covering letter was slightly more positive stating: "...if it can be shown that the Australian financial commitment ... would be comparatively small the Prime Minister's Department might be prepared to suggest favourable consideration of the question of Australian participation notwithstanding the doubts expressed by the Department of External Affairs about the scientific value of the proposed journey."¹⁸⁷ A disappointing response came from South Africa in a 6 November telegram to the CRO declaring "Union authorities state that while keenly interested in events in the region they regret inability to participate in proposed expedition."¹⁸⁸ The fate of the TAE now rested with New Zealand. Time was running short and the next six months would prove crucial.

The three UK Antarctic policy proposals were discussed at a meeting in Wellington on 21 September 1954 by New Zealand's Department of External Affairs and included members of

¹⁸⁵ McIntosh, 1954

¹⁸⁶ UKHC Ottawa, 1954

¹⁸⁷ UKHC Canberra, 1954

¹⁸⁸ UKHC Pretoria, 1954

the scientific community and the Royal New Zealand Navy. It was agreed that New Zealand should support the first and third proposals. Regarding the second, for a trans-Antarctic expedition, the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) representative remarked that Australia would be prepared to participate "...only if they were convinced that New Zealand had decided to take some positive action in New Zealand Antarctic territory."¹⁸⁹ Dr Ritchie Simmers, a veteran of BANZARE, suggested that TAE support might be combined with New Zealand participation in the IGY. Although Simmers believed the scientific merits of a base in McMurdo Sound were significant, he acknowledged that "...the determining factor is political and not scientific."¹⁹⁰ The IGY was again brought into the conversation with the suggestion that the TAE be delayed so that any New Zealand base might be established before the IGY now scheduled for 1957-1958. By late 1954 it was evident that the IGY was becoming a major factor in planning for future Antarctic activity. However, by October 1954 London still had to accept that a primary goal for the TAE, to demonstrate Commonwealth solidarity in the Antarctic, had not yet been achieved. The stumbling block was the catch-22 situation that had developed with the UK government's reticence to formally declare its commitment to the project. It was now essential that the UK government break the stalemate and announce its intentions regarding the proposed expedition. D.M. Cleary of the CRO was not surprised at the hesitancy shown by the Dominions remarking "...Commonwealth governments would naturally expect a more detailed exposition of United Kingdom plans before deciding whether or not they could participate."¹⁹¹ The sensitive subject of cost sharing now came to the fore with W. A. Morris of the Colonial Office asking "...what elements in it [the total cost] are subject to variation, for example if the New Zealand Government were to agree to bear the cost of the Ross Island base."¹⁹² In order for Fuchs to advance his project he would have to satisfy Treasury on the expedition budget.

New Zealand Makes its Decision

From the time of the first sealing and whaling ships to the intrepid explorers of the 'heroic age', Antarctic travellers had found New Zealand, the Empire's smallest and most loyal Dominion, to be an ideal departure point for their last push to the frozen south. The favourable climate together with the hospitality shown them by the island nation ensured that

¹⁸⁹ Doyle, 1954

¹⁹⁰ Ibid

¹⁹¹ Cleary, 1954

¹⁹² Morris, 1954

they would call again on their return to civilisation. This support role continued through the first half of the 20th century with the voyages of Lincoln Ellsworth and Adm. Richard E. Byrd. Since 1923 when New Zealand acceded to Britain's Order-in-Council regarding the Ross Dependency¹⁹³, the government, other than naming a succession of administrators, had exhibited an extraordinary lethargy with respect to its southern territory. During the next thirty years no New Zealand expedition to Antarctica was launched nor did any New Zealand official ever set foot on the continent. In the late 1940's New Zealand had an opportunity to participate in the NBSAE but had declined.¹⁹⁴ This negligence would soon be altered more by the efforts of a group of avid 'Antarcticans' stirring grass-roots public opinion than by leadership from New Zealand's elected politicians.

In 1933, during a time when New Zealand as well as the rest of the world was caught in the grip of the Great Depression and a residence in Mt Victoria could be purchased for £1,250, a group of prominent citizens met in Wellington to form a Society dedicated to furthering New Zealand's Antarctic interests. The driving force behind the meeting was Arthur Leigh Hunt, founder of the Dominion Farmer's Institute. Hunt was an entrepreneur and a visionary who realised that the Antarctic and especially the Ross Dependency would play an important role in New Zealand's future. Hunt was also a friend of the US Navy's Admiral Richard E. Byrd, the foremost polar explorer of the time.¹⁹⁵ At this meeting Hunt succeeded in convincing his hand-picked audience of the potential benefits that the Antarctic offered and that an organisation should be formed to promote New Zealand's interests in its Southern territory. The motion was presented and seconded "That a society be formed and that it be called the New Zealand Antarctic Society."¹⁹⁶ Twenty years later the New Zealand Antarctic Society would prove instrumental in persuading the New Zealand government to take an active role in Antarctic affairs. In the early 1950's with rumours swirling of a trans-Antarctic crossing attempt by Britain and of a third International Polar Year the momentum for action began to build within the New Zealand public and the media. In his foreword to the Society's major 1952 publication *The Antarctic Today*, an anthology of the various scientific disciplines applicable to the Antarctic, Dr Robert Falla, veteran of Mawson's BANZARE Expedition of 1929-31 and President of the Antarctic Society bluntly stated:

¹⁹³ Templeton, 2000, p. 19

¹⁹⁴ Swithinbank, C., Interview with the author, July, 2009

¹⁹⁵ Hunt, 1951, p. 126

¹⁹⁶ Peat, 1983, pp. 7-10

*...anything outside the three mile limit seaward [is] to be regarded as at best a luxury and at worst a nuisance. That is the only possible explanation of the negative policy which has marked the administration of the Ross Dependency since it became a New Zealand responsibility in 1923.*¹⁹⁷

The Society's key moment came the following year, in September 1953, before the TAE became public knowledge, with an 8 page memorandum sent from Falla and Arthur Helm (Society Secretary) to Prime Minister Sidney Holland urging the government to establish a permanent 'scientific station' in the Ross dependency.¹⁹⁸ Their letter stressed that New Zealand must take urgent action in the Antarctic. Apart from the scientific benefits that would result the letter stressed the insecure nature of New Zealand's claim to Antarctic territory closing with the suggestion that "The Society believes that such a proposal would receive sympathetic consideration from the Polar bodies in the United Kingdom...", which was a virtual certainty in that the Society proposed that New Zealand perform this task at its own expense. Holland sent a tepid response that he would "confer with his colleagues in regards to the suggestions put forward."¹⁹⁹

A year later the *Evening Post* reported that the president of the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand and prominent NZAS member, J.H. Rose together with his son-in-law, Sir Edmund Hillary "believe that New Zealand should take steps to establish its right to administer the Ross Dependency in the Antarctic." Hillary was quoted to have said "...America recognises no such claim [New Zealand's claim to the Ross Dependency] and certainly New Zealand has little to show that she regards it seriously herself...it is time New Zealand took some steps to establish its right to administer the Ross Dependency...as Australia has done on its territory nearby." The article concluded with Rose quoted as saying "If we are to claim the dependency, it is time we did something to maintain our claims. We should at least send an expedition there."²⁰⁰ Jim Rose was Hillary's mentor and the person who introduced Hillary to mountaineering. His influence in supporting Hillary's Antarctic ambitions was matched only by James Wordie's support for his former pupil at St John's College Cambridge, Vivian Fuchs. One year after Hillary had discussed the TAE with Fuchs

¹⁹⁷ Simpson, 1952

¹⁹⁸ Helm-Miller, 1964, p. 42

¹⁹⁹ Helm-Miller, 1964, pp. 42-46

²⁰⁰ Evening Post, 13 November 1954

in London in late 1953 it was still unclear whether New Zealand would join with Britain's CTAE or possibly launch an independent expedition.

It was a remarkable series of events that ultimately led to New Zealand's formal announcement that it would participate in the TAE. The first of these was Fuchs' decision to approach Sir Edmund Hillary and pique his interest in the project. At an RGS meeting in August 1953 Fuchs discussed the expedition with Hillary's friend George Lowe and asked him to arrange a meeting while Hillary visited London to lecture on his Mt Everest triumph.²⁰¹ Fuchs and Hillary first met informally in London on 12 November while attending an RGS hosted display of Australian Antarctic photographs. The pair soon became engrossed in the topic of an Antarctic crossing and, joined by Lowe, the three men followed up with a detailed discussion at Fuchs' Victoria Street office on 18 November 1953.²⁰² Hillary and Lowe were already planning their next foray into the Himalayas but Fuchs had successfully planted the seed for a different adventure and one year later, by the end of 1954, Hillary had developed a keen interest in Antarctica. By approaching Hillary, the hero of Everest, Fuchs had engaged the best talent that New Zealand had to offer, a talent that went beyond the ability to scale mountain peaks.

New Zealand's response to the UK government letter of 1 September 1954 asking for comment on three proposals related to the Antarctic, one of which was the idea of an expedition to cross the continent, was encouraging, and reflected possible acceptance of the NZ Antarctic Society plea for active involvement. On 7 October a secret telegram from the UKHC in Wellington reported the New Zealand position as follows: "They view with favour [the] proposal for trans-Antarctic expedition and are agreeable to establishment of [a] reception-base at Ross Island in Ross Dependency." But the telegram also noted "They [New Zealand] have not yet decided whether they will be able to participate in [the] project" adding "...McIntosh [Secretary of External Affairs] has commented that Government wanted to participate but did not want to spend the money. As project was of great public interest in New Zealand he thought it possible public opinion might eventually influence Government to participate."²⁰³

²⁰¹ Lowe, 1997

²⁰² Corner, 13 November 1953

²⁰³ UKHC Wellington, 7 October 1954

By this time the efforts of New Zealand's Deputy High Commissioner in London, Frank Corner, to stimulate public opinion had begun to bear fruit. Two newspapers, *The Dominion* and *The New Zealand Herald*, were particularly vocal. On 6 October 1954 *The New Zealand Herald* ran an article stating that "...the political and strategic importance of Antarctica grows every year." The article surmised that New Zealand would be keen to participate in an Antarctic Expedition "...since the Government seems unwilling to face the cost of a separate expedition on its own."²⁰⁴ On 8 October 1954 *The Dominion* ran a short piece headed "Urge for N.Z. Claim on Ross Dependency". The New Zealand Antarctic Society was also concerned about the increasing amount of activity in New Zealand territory, particularly by the United States, urging that "there should not be too long a delay in ensuring New Zealand's participation in the British expedition."²⁰⁵ The growing pressure from the New Zealand electorate would soon be felt by the government. The pro-involvement editorials in the New Zealand press presaged a shift of momentum in Fuchs' favour.

In November 1954 a fortuitous event further prodded the New Zealand government to take action. The American icebreaker *USS Atka* arrived in Wellington and was berthed at the wharf in the heart of the city. The sight of the huge ship dramatically foretold of a major United States initiative in New Zealand's Ross Dependency, one that would stretch over a three year period as part of the United States IGY effort. J.A. Molyneaux, of the CRO, noted in a letter from Wellington to the FO that the ship highlighted all that was deficient in New Zealand's attitude to the Antarctic adding that the visit has "...stimulated comment on 1) the validity of New Zealand's claim 2) the failure of New Zealand in the past, in contrast to other 'Polar' countries, to support its claim 3) US strategic interest in Antarctica."²⁰⁶ Another voice was *New York Times* correspondent Walter Sullivan who remarked "The visit of the *Atka* to New Zealand ... has prompted many persons there to exclaim that their government is about to lose 175,000 square miles of the territory by default."²⁰⁷

Finally, on 1 February 1955, New Zealand responded with the announcement in London by PM Sidney Holland that New Zealand approved 'in principle' its participation in an Antarctic expedition. A few days later on 5 February at the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference, Fuchs addressed the gathering and gained Commonwealth approval at a general

²⁰⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, 6 October 1954

²⁰⁵ *Dominion*, 8 October 1954

²⁰⁶ Molyneaux, 1954

²⁰⁷ Harrowfield, 2007, p. 22

level for his crossing plan. Then, on 17 February, came the confirmation of what had been so long sought with Winston Churchill's announcement that the UK government would back the expedition with a grant of £100,000.²⁰⁸

The few months leading up to the public announcement of New Zealand's intentions were filled with intensive deliberations. In April 1955, less than one month prior to the public announcement, the Ministers of External Affairs and DSIR, T.L. Macdonald and R. M. Algie, presented a set of recommendations to Cabinet regarding the TAE and the IGY. Their 1 April Cabinet paper clarified the government's motives for involvement in the Antarctic. There were two key questions to answer. First, how much would New Zealand contribute to the TAE and how should her participation be organised. Second, and of more significance for the longer term, whether New Zealand would participate in the IGY. At this point, New Zealand had only given agreement 'in principle' to participate in the TAE and HMG were urgently pressing New Zealand for a more substantive reply. Cabinet's recommendation regarding the TAE was clear and that "... New Zealand should participate positively in the Expedition." The paper stated two overarching reasons for its recommendation: "a) it would reinforce New Zealand title to the territory [and] b) it would meet the broad public demand that New Zealand show an active interest in the Antarctic."²⁰⁹ It argued that explicit New Zealand action would make the United States less inclined to lodge a competing claim, somewhat tentatively adding

"... moreover, it *should* increase our knowledge of the territory and *should* yield information which *may* have real value".²¹⁰ The Cabinet was here referring to scientific research and to the possibilities of finding natural resources such as uranium, petroleum, and coal etc. which could be economically exploited. In the 1950's, and for three decades following, Antarctica was open for mineral exploration. A treaty to manage this activity, the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities (CRAMRA), would soon be actively pursued under the leadership of New Zealander Chris Beebe.

HMG was becoming impatient with what it saw as unnecessary dawdling on the part of New Zealand. On 6 May 1955 the UK High Commissioner in Wellington, Geoffery Scoones, pressed Sidney Holland for a quantitative commitment to the expedition asking for "...a) the

²⁰⁸ Fuchs, 1990, p. 222

²⁰⁹ Cabinet Paper, 1 April 1955

²¹⁰ Cabinet Paper, 22 April 1955

size of the New Zealand contribution, and b) the organisation to be set up ...through which the organisers ...in the United Kingdom can work”²¹¹ His letter ended with a plaintive “As I am being pressed by my government I should be grateful for a reply at your earliest convenience.” In the context of the later negotiations for the *John Biscoe* this tone was presumptuous indeed. However, Holland was also being pressured from other quarters.

In addition to MacDonald and the UKHC another ally joined Frank Corner in his desire to see New Zealand stand up for its territorial claim. On 16 April 1955 Sir Edmund Hillary wrote a letter to Holland, outlining the TAE schedule that Fuchs had shared with him. In his letter Hillary described the responsibilities that would be expected of New Zealand and presented an outline of his plan for the proposed New Zealand support party. In closing, he stressed the need for urgency stating “The time for planning and training is very short and I would respectfully suggest that an early decision by the government is essential.”²¹² On 13 May Macdonald wrote Hillary telling him that the government had decided to give £50,000 towards the cost of the Expedition and that a committee (the future Ross Sea Committee) would be set up in Wellington to direct “...the establishment of a base in the McMurdo Sound area of the Ross Dependency...and manage an appeal for assistance from private sources to further the enterprise.”²¹³ At this stage Hillary had yet to be appointed to any role within the New Zealand party although both he and George Lowe had been invited by British TAE leader Dr Vivian Fuchs, to either join the UK crossing party or participate in the establishment of a reception base in McMurdo Sound.²¹⁴ Events were now moving very quickly. On 13 May MacDonald advised the UK High Commissioner that New Zealand would participate in the TAE and would make a contribution of £50,000 “... towards the cost of its organisation”.²¹⁵ The announcement to an expectant New Zealand public was made the next day. Three months later, after a visit to Wellington and Canberra by Sir Miles Clifford, the Australian government announced they would contribute £20,000 towards the expedition. This amount was later increased to £25,000. Sir Miles Clifford’s trip to New Zealand in June 1955 had a dual purpose. In addition to cementing the working relationship between the Ross Sea Committee and the London Committee of Management he would visit Australian Antarctic authorities in an effort to extract substantial support for the TAE. Australia’s

²¹¹ Scoones, 1955

²¹² Hillary, 16 April 1955

²¹³ Macdonald, 9 May 1955

²¹⁴ Symmans, 16 May 1955

²¹⁵ Macdonald, 13 May 1955

limited resources were committed to their own ANARE program which had begun in 1954 and would continue through subsequent years. Clifford received a cool reception from Australian Antarctic Division representatives. This was due to the simple fact that funds donated for the TAE would reduce the funds available for ANARE. The NZHC Canberra reported that “It is clear that the Department of External Affairs and Dr. Law [leader of ANARE] have very little enthusiasm for the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition.” Clifford’s gambit was to bypass the AAD and go directly to the Australian Prime Minister with his request. In the words of the NZHC “It seems that the Prime Minister’s Department is probably not as convinced as External Affairs of the desirability of Australia concentrating on their own Antarctic activities.” To the consternation of Australia’s Department of External Affairs Clifford’s strategy was successful. The report noted that “...there was some suggestion that Australia might contribute £20,000 to the Expedition.”²¹⁶ Australia was soon joined by South Africa with its government deciding to contribute £10,000 in the form of an open cash grant and £8,000 specifically for radio-sonde equipment. Since Fuchs had already procured the equipment these funds were permitted to be used for general TAE purposes. Initial funding had now been secured while contributions both in cash and kind from the private sector would be sought to make up a significant portion of the remainder. With anchoring now in place at each end of the planned route, the starting line for the TAE as envisaged by Fuchs was finally in sight. The most significant item missing was the confirmation of a leader for the New Zealand portion of the expedition.

On 15 May 1955 New Zealand’s Department of External Affairs sent a memo explaining its decision to participate in the TAE to each of the NZHC offices in Canada, Australia, South Africa and the UK. Recognising its deficient position vis a vis the Ross Dependency the memo stated:

No New Zealand Government has done anything to seek to reinforce the British title to the territory since jurisdiction was transferred to New Zealand by the Imperial Order in Council of 1923. Cabinet considered that if New Zealand were to maintain its claim, effective action should be taken to avoid the possibility of title to the territory going by default. Account was taken of the closeness of the dependency to New Zealand, the possible future value and strategic interest of the area, and the likelihood that claims to it would be made by other powers. It

²¹⁶ NZHC Canberra, 24 June 1955

was largely for these reasons that the Government decided that the McMurdo Sound base for the Trans-Antarctic Journey should be set up as patently a New Zealand undertaking.²¹⁷



Figure 12: Fuchs' original FIDS Journals

Fuchs' first discussion regarding a trans-Antarctic crossing with Bernard Stonehouse, Ken Blaiklock and others at Stonington Island is recorded therein

Courtesy of Peter Fuchs

²¹⁷ NZEA, 15 May 1955

4.2 Expedition Structure and Governance



Figure 13: Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Chair of the TAE Committee of Management
Photo: Royal Air Force



Figure 14: James Wordie, Chair of the Inter-Departmental Polar Committee
Photo: *New York Times*



Figure 15: Frank Corner, New Zealand Deputy High Commissioner to the UK
Photo: Courtesy of Lynette Corner



Figure 16: Hillary, RSC Chairman Charles Bowden & HRH the Duke of Edinburgh
meet at Lyttelton Harbour, December 1956
Photo: Courtesy Royal Collection, Windsor, UK

The UK TAE Governance Framework

The one body that directed polar matters, both Arctic and Antarctic, for the Commonwealth was Britain's Inter-Departmental Polar Committee (Polar Committee). Founded in 1926, it came under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and reported into the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO).²¹⁸ Its membership included representatives from the four 'old dominions' having interests in the polar regions namely, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. Other agencies represented included the Commonwealth Relations Office, the Foreign Office (represented by Brian Roberts), the Colonial Office, which oversaw FIDS and was represented by Sir Miles Clifford, the recently retired governor of the Falkland Islands, the Admiralty, the Civil Aviation Ministry, and finally, the Royal Geographic Society, whose representative, the ubiquitous James Wordie, served as Chairman. The Polar Committee met approximately twice yearly to discuss matters relating to either the Arctic, including Greenland, or the Antarctic which included the Falkland Islands Dependencies. At its pivotal meeting of 15 September 1953, the agenda included six items other than the TAE, with discussions on Australia's ANARE expedition, the Antarctic place names Committee, and the progress of the British North Greenland Expedition. Agenda item number two 'Proposals for a Trans-Antarctic Expedition' required Dr V. E. Fuchs to be in attendance.²¹⁹

The following eighteen months between September 1953 and May 1955 were spent setting up the expedition's organisation structure, enlisting the support of certain Commonwealth countries, and obtaining the necessary approvals from government departments of which gaining Treasury's agreement on funding arrangements was most critical. Fuchs and Wordie, who had been basking in his triumph as a prime mover of the successful ascent of Everest, appreciated the need to establish an effective governance framework for their emergent polar enterprise. Up to this point British polar expeditions had been run as private affairs administered by the Royal Geographic Society, sometimes in concert with the Royal Society, as in the case of the British North Greenland Expedition. The TAE would be set up slightly differently although it too would be a private undertaking.

Under the guidance of Wordie, Fuchs began to build his foundation. The first step was to establish a committee, known as the Committee of Management (COM) and to enlist, at

²¹⁸ Quartermain, 1971, p.62

²¹⁹ Polar Committee, 15 September 1953

Wordie's suggestion²²⁰, Sir John Slessor as Chairman. Slessor, who was a veteran and hero of both world wars, had recently retired as Britain's Air Marshal, the most senior position in the RAF.²²¹ This committee, consisting of twelve individuals, and often referred to as the 'London Committee' would be responsible for day-to-day management of expedition affairs. A prominent member was the Rev. Launcelot Fleming, Bishop of Portsmouth. Fleming, a geologist, was an eminent polar explorer in his own right having been a member of John Rymill's British Graham Land Expedition (BGLE) of 1934-37. Finally there was Colin Bertram, biologist and Director of the Scott Polar Research Institute and also a BGLE veteran. On occasion, in the interests of efficiency, a sub-set of this group, established as the 'Executive Committee' met to discuss certain expedition matters. A key member of this group was Sir Miles Clifford whom Fuchs knew well from his years as director of the FIDS Scientific Bureau. At Slessor's request Clifford had agreed to come on board, conveniently forgetting his previous unsuccessful attempts to forestall Fuchs and mount an expedition under the aegis of FIDS. He soon became an enthusiastic supporter of Fuchs and of the TAE. The other core members were Wordie, Fuchs, and with a nod to scientific goals, Prof. H.H. Read a Fellow of the Royal Society. Members to be co-opted as necessary were Bertram, Gordon Robin, veteran of the NBSAE, Dr N A Mackintosh, biologist and veteran of the *Discovery II* expedition of 1933-35, Vice Admiral Sir A. Day and representatives of the three Services. It was suggested that 'shadow committees should be set up in New Zealand "...to organise operations in the Ross Sea sector."²²² The independent stance that New Zealand would soon display for managing its TAE related 'Antarctic Expedition' was not yet appreciated by London at this early stage.

A more inclusive 'General Committee' with twenty five members from a wide variety of disciplines and experience backgrounds was also created. Membership included heroic age veterans Frank Debenham and Raymond Priestley. The Committee structure for the British effort was completed with the creation of a Finance Sub-Committee and a Scientific Sub-Committee serving to emphasise that the TAE would have scientific objectives as an important part of its mandate.

²²⁰ Fuchs, 1990 , p221

²²¹ <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/bombercommandcommandersofworldwarII.cfm>

²²² TAE General Committee, 24 June 1954

The first meeting of the General Committee was held on 24 June 1954 at which a range of topics was discussed. One of the Committee's first actions was to emphasise the broader 'Commonwealth' aspect of the expedition and, with the expectation of substantial support from the Dominions, the expedition's name was changed to 'British Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition'. The committee also agreed to form a company as a legal entity to remove exposure to liability and for the company to be registered as a 'Charity' in order to encourage donations from potential expedition sponsors.²²³ However, an interesting change occurred soon after the inaugural meeting of the TAE Committee of Management. In early June 1955 the COM decided to drop the appellation 'Commonwealth' from its official name although they were happy for the press to continue to use the term. The official name then became 'Trans-Antarctic Expedition Inc.'²²⁴

All members of the expedition parties were required to sign an agreement stating the terms and conditions of their employment. There was both a UK and New Zealand version of the agreement, the only difference being that the arbitrator of any disagreement with the Committee would be the Chief Justice of the respective country. These clauses included that the copyright of photographs and diaries taken by expedition members would remain the property of the TAE Company until one year after the "first publication in book form of the official account of the Expedition."²²⁵ A similar timeframe was enacted banning the publication of books and the holding of interviews with the press by members of the expedition.

Wellington Engages with its London Counterpart

Once New Zealand had given a preliminary indication to HMG of its intention to participate in the TAE, the next critical task was to gain agreement on the manner in which New Zealand's part of the expedition would relate and interact with the London Committee. This proved to be a somewhat contentious process exacerbated by undue caution on the part of the London Committee and the parsimonious attitude taken by the UK Treasury.

Prior to New Zealand's public announcement on 14 May 1955 that it would participate in the TAE and provide an initial cash grant of £50,000, the New Zealand Cabinet had considered

²²³ Ibid

²²⁴ Corner, 15 July 1955

²²⁵ TAE Agreement with Members of the Expedition

and rejected the terms of engagement proposed by the London Committee. The quote below from the COM minutes of 30 March 1955 illustrates the attitude faced by the New Zealand organisation. Any hint that New Zealand might be planning to launch its own independent expedition to the Antarctic was cause for immediate concern in British circles and needed to be quashed.

Dr Fuchs said that the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Sidney Holland, had told George Lowe privately that he would prefer the grant [£50,000 from NZ] to be paid into the Central Fund. Sir Edmund Hillary and certain persons in Auckland seemed to be working towards the idea of organising a New Zealand Expedition on which this £50,000 would be spent. The Chairman [Slessor] said that it would clearly be necessary for someone to fly out to New Zealand and get matters clarified.²²⁶

This issue arose as rumours surfaced of a possible independent New Zealand expedition to the Antarctic. A prominent Auckland resident, Jim Rose, Sir Edmund Hillary's father-in-law, was the President of the Federation of New Zealand Mountain Clubs and was also a longstanding member of the New Zealand Antarctic Society (NZAS). The NZAS was instrumental in driving New Zealand's growing interests in Antarctica and for several years had lobbied the government to establish a base in the Ross Dependency. Conversations on the topic were being held at Rose's residence in Auckland. Rose and Frank Simpson of the New Zealand Antarctic Society – Auckland Branch, Hillary and his brother-in-law, H. J. 'Larry' Harrington, had discussed this possibility in the event that New Zealand did not join forces with Britain for the TAE. The idea was eventually forestalled by the government's decision to back the TAE.²²⁷ In the end New Zealand retained the funds for its own use and managed its own budget for the Ross Sea Support Party.

In early 1954 word of a possible 'Antarctic crossing' expedition began to seep into the public domain. Several channels were responsible. Fuchs attributed the 'leak' to Professor Noel Odell of Otago University whom he had consulted on matters pertaining to the expedition.²²⁸ Odell was an expert Himalayan mountaineer and had been a member of the ill-fated attempt on Everest in 1924 by Mallory and Irvine. Also, L.B. Quartermain, editor of the NZAS

²²⁶ COM Minutes, 30 March 1955, p.2

²²⁷ Harrington, H.J. Correspondence with the author, 15 January 2010

²²⁸ Fuchs, 1990, p. 221

journal *Antarctic*, had published an article in the journal's edition of March 1954 referring to an earlier piece dated 7 December found in a 'London newspaper'. It stated:

*...A standing committee convened by the Commonwealth Relations Office...is considering the possibility of a joint trans-Antarctic expedition and the establishment of a permanent base, possibly in the Ross Dependency. It was admitted that discussions were "exploratory" and that some time would necessarily elapse while the various departments concerned were producing plans and arguments that would convince their treasuries...Meanwhile the New Zealand Department of External Affairs (March 10) state that there is nothing definite to report...*²²⁹

In his reply to a subsequent letter query from Quartermain Fuchs pointed out: "I see that you have already printed a small notice of the proposed 'Trans-Antarctic Expedition'.

Confidentially, I can tell you that I was the initiator of the plan and that in due course it will be possible to send you particulars."²³⁰ Further information on the TAE reached the public from *New York Times* reporter, Walter Sullivan, who accompanied the American ice-breaker *Atka* from Wellington to McMurdo Sound in late 1954. Apparently, Hillary visited the ship and had mentioned the possibility of an expedition to Sullivan. The budding publicity triggered a build-up in the pressure of public opinion sufficient to move Britain to add the TAE to the agenda of the London Prime Minister's Conference of January 1955. As a direct result New Zealand's Prime Minister, Sidney Holland, made a public announcement while at the Conference that the New Zealand government agreed to participate in the TAE. However, Holland was careful not to mention any specific commitment at this time. Following this announcement the UK High Commissioner to New Zealand in Wellington sent a letter to the Minister of External Affairs, T. L. Macdonald, raising two key points. First, the letter suggested that a 'satellite company' be set up in New Zealand which would be subordinate to the London based TAE Company Inc. Second, relating to the other major event taking place at this time, he asked whether New Zealand would participate in the International Geophysical Year (IGY). The letter requested that an 'urgent decision' on these matters be taken by the New Zealand government.²³¹ This sudden emphasis on urgency was ironic given

²²⁹ *Antarctic News Bulletin*, March 1954, p.96

²³⁰ Fuchs, 8 September 1954

²³¹ Cabinet Paper, 22 April 1955, pp 1-3

the excessive delay that HMG agencies had shown in their own conduct so far. An unexpected issue for the COM had been Britain's delay in granting a guarantee of financial support until early 1955, this, while HMG was simultaneously soliciting expressions of support from the Dominions. The impasse was not broken until Churchill's announcement at the Conference that HMG would contribute £100,000 to the expedition. It is not surprising that the Dominions showed reluctance to commit while Britain herself had made no significant show of material support. The inter-dependencies were somewhat convoluted. Britain did not want to commit until it had determined the level of vital support to be forthcoming from its Commonwealth partners, especially from New Zealand. Nor would it commit until the Exchequer had been able to review the expedition cost estimates which in turn were dependent on whether the Royal Air Force would be providing air support. The extent of air support was itself dependent on the route to be chosen for the expedition. If departure was to be from an existing UK base in Graham Land then significantly more air support would be needed than if departure was from a base on the Weddell Sea coast. As late as December 1954 these decisions had still not been finalised by the COM.

The New Zealand Cabinet met again on 22 April 22, 1955 to discuss its response to HMG. At this meeting the Cabinet reached three conclusions. First it confirmed that New Zealand wished to participate in the expedition and that the government would provide a grant of "...not less than £50,000". The rationale was made clear: "It would reinforce New Zealand title to the territory" and "it would meet the broad public demand that New Zealand show an active interest in the Antarctic." Secondly, New Zealand rejected acceptance of a secondary role in the expedition governance structure. Cabinet made the explicit decision that New Zealand's expedition must stand alone as a New Zealand commitment to its Antarctic heritage. Importantly, paragraph 6 of the Cabinet report emphasised the independence of Britain that New Zealand held as a condition of its involvement in the TAE, insisting on a parallel framework where New Zealand interests were a first priority for its component of the expedition. Macdonald opened with the statement:

We do not favour the idea of forming a New Zealand company subordinate to the United Kingdom company. Having regard to the objectives in respect of sovereignty which the expedition should serve, we think that the New Zealand

*effort should be organised on a separate basis but [be] fully coordinated with that of the United Kingdom.*²³²

The London Committee proposal to set up a ‘satellite company’ for the TAE in New Zealand was flatly rejected. It showed London’s lack of appreciation for the drivers behind New Zealand’s involvement in the TAE and the depth of national pride that the expedition had aroused. The question of IGY involvement was deferred until a better idea of the costs could be determined and input from the various scientific departments had been obtained. They reasoned that the IGY costs, except for accommodation and transport, would be additional to the TAE costs and that scientific personnel could share accommodation and be transported using TAE resources thus providing a significant cost saving to the IGY effort. The paper went on to state that a ‘public committee’ would be formed to administer the New Zealand expedition and to carry out the process for selecting a leader. Since the expedition was a private venture this committee would also be responsible for fund-raising as one of its primary duties. The Cabinet then voted acceptance of London’s offer to send an emissary to Wellington to discuss the terms of engagement with New Zealand.

Britain and New Zealand each had their own particular motives and approaches for the expedition. Fuchs and the London Committee were still rooted in the age of ‘the empire’ and saw New Zealand as a colonial source of support, albeit an essential one, for their goal of strengthening British sovereignty in the Antarctic Peninsula. Their initial intention was to have the New Zealand Committee report to the London Committee. New Zealand would also be expected and ‘encouraged’ to obtain most of its supplies and equipment from British sources. However, New Zealand had its own agenda which was to show active involvement in the Ross Dependency which for the first time it regarded as its own territory. It was therefore critical that its participation in the TAE be viewed as an independent initiative and not merely as an associated component of an essentially British project. This attitude was held by more than just the expedition leadership and was voiced not only in government cabinet papers but by the New Zealand public and the media. The press took up the clarion call with the *New Zealand Herald* on 16 May stating “At one time it appeared probable that the government would merely make a cash grant and leave all arrangements in British hands. Now it seems prepared to share responsibility for tackling the Ross Dependency part of the

²³² Ibid

venture as a distinctively New Zealand effort.”²³³ Another article announced that the seven New Zealand advance party members would use New Zealand made sleeping bags and clothing by way of a test run for the expedition.²³⁴ Arthur Helm, Secretary of the RSC, commented in the accompanying interview “We are anxious to prove that New Zealand gear is as good as anything available anywhere.”²³⁵ It took some convincing for the London Committee to appreciate this distinction and realise that in agreeing to assist with Fuchs’ crossing of the continent New Zealand was also setting out on its own Antarctic journey, one that continues to this day. This surprisingly assertive tone would be equally reflected by the spirit in which Hillary would soon take up his new assignment. Unfortunately Britain, the COM and Fuchs were unaware or chose to ignore the degree of nationalist sentiment that underpinned the New Zealand decision to participate in the TAE.

An important structural aspect of the expedition that is often overlooked is that the TAE was a private endeavour in the manner of expeditions of the heroic age. It would be the last major expedition to be cut from this mould. Individual members of the public as well as various public institutions and commercial firms were expected to act as the primary sources of funding. A country-wide public appeal was launched with the target set at £100,000, twice the amount contributed by the government. As it turned out a large portion of the supplies and equipment that reached New Zealand from London aboard *Endeavour* was ruined as seawater had leaked into the ship’s hold on the journey from London. The insurance claim placed an evaluation of over £6,800 on the damaged goods.²³⁶ These supplies then had to be replaced from local sources. Despite a shortfall from the public fund raising effort (approximately £32,000 was raised towards a target of £100,000) significant corporate contributions in kind offset much of the cost of the expedition with companies such as Cadbury, Dominion Breweries, and St James Tobacco Co. ensuring the men would not be deprived of certain comforts as well as necessities. Ultimately, the expedition balanced its books and in the case of New Zealand, it would provide the buildings and equipment that formed the basis for its long term habitation on Ross Island.

²³³ Press Comments, 1955

²³⁴ The seven consisted of three observers on the *Theron*, three observers with *Operation Deep Freeze* and Harry Ayres with ANARE

²³⁵ Newspaper article, 14 November 1955

²³⁶ Ross Sea Committee Minutes, 29 November 1956

On 20 May 1955 the London Executive Committee met to review New Zealand's position on arrangements for managing the expedition. Spirited discussion ensued. Those in attendance included James Wordie (Chair), Fuchs, Sir Miles Clifford, Admiral Parry (Secretary), and New Zealand's Frank Corner, Deputy High Commissioner in London, representing New Zealand interests in the Ross Dependency. Corner was asked to state his country's position vis-à-vis the expedition. His answer was clear and to the point:

...the essential wish of the New Zealand government was to establish our sovereignty over the Ross Dependency.” and that in order to accomplish this New Zealand were “...anxious to make it clear that we were responsible for the establishment of the base in the Ross Sea. Our willingness to participate in the expedition was subordinate to this desire...The Committee must, however, accept the over-riding political necessity of allowing New Zealand to use the opportunity of the expedition to demonstrate her sovereignty.”²³⁷

Although the COM members generally accepted this stance they balked at the idea that the New Zealand organisation should be “entirely independent of the London Company.” Fuchs was particularly adamant and raised several objections such as “...competing orders for scarce resources...e.g. ice-strengthened ships” would drive up the rates for charter. Fears were raised that if New Zealand were independent then Australia and South Africa would follow suit and hence “...start the rot.” Condescendingly, the Committee stated that:

“New Zealand, on her own showing, cannot hope to finance the setting up of the Ross Sea base, to say nothing of the inland expedition which will be necessary to find a route for the trans-polar party. The London organisation would therefore certainly have to help.”²³⁸

It was even suggested that “Better provision could be made for the training of the personnel required by the expedition at the receiving end.” In fact, quite the opposite was the case. An excuse for Britain's patronising behaviour can be made that it was early days and the London COM was anxious not to have another failed venture in the Antarctic. Fuchs had unshakable confidence in the polar experience of his men but viewed the New Zealanders as neophytes in

²³⁷ Corner, 20 May 1955

²³⁸ Ibid

the polar environment. There is no doubt that Britain always considered itself as the ‘big brother’ in the enterprise. In the end little help was received from London and New Zealand accomplished all of its commitments, and more, on its own bat. Had the centralised ‘command and control’ approach advocated at this meeting by Fuchs and the COM been adopted, the expedition would have foundered before it began. A tentative observation was made at the meeting regarding the leadership question that would arise if Fuchs’ party had to overwinter at the New Zealand base. The Committee concluded that Fuchs would have to become the leader of the combined group in McMurdo Sound. Fortunately that situation never eventuated but it almost certainly occurred to Hillary as he watched Fuchs’ timetable crumble during the first half of his crossing journey, a situation to be avoided at all costs. Had the two ‘knights of the ice’ been thrown together in those circumstances, the outcome would have been like having two king-dogs on a team of huskies, a formula guaranteed to provoke a crisis.²³⁹ In closing, the Committee wisely suggested a form of ‘independent integration’ using vague terms such as “...joint enterprise under the general control of the London Company” between the New Zealand committee, which eventually became the Ross Sea Committee (RSC), and the London Committee of Management.²⁴⁰

Frank Corner, a long serving civil servant resident in London, was a keen proponent of the TAE. He served alongside the other Dominion representatives as New Zealand’s voice on the Polar Committee and worked tirelessly behind the scenes to promote New Zealand participation in the expedition. In a confidential telegram from the NZHC in London to Macdonald, Corner reported that “..., in light of New Zealand background aims regarding Expedition [i.e. sovereignty & to satisfy public interest] we do not expect they [the COM] will press their earlier idea of making New Zealand organisation subordinate to theirs.” However, in order to ensure that close ‘co-ordination’ existed between the two far flung units in London and Wellington the RSC Chairman was named as a member of the London Committee and would be represented by the NZHC in London or his nominee, which turned out to be Corner. Correspondingly, a London representative, D. Cleary of the CRO, from the UKHC office in Wellington was appointed to the New Zealand committee.

The New Zealand Committee was announced on 27 May, 1955 and consisted at its inception of seven government appointees selected by the Minister of External Affairs. They were

²³⁹ Ronne, 1979, p. 246

²⁴⁰ Corner, 20 May 1955

Charles Bowden (Chairman) a distinguished public servant and businessman who had served as a Minister in National Party governments, R.D. Moore (Treasurer) General Manager of the Bank of New Zealand, B.R. Law (Deputy Chairman) Managing Director of Imperial Chemical Industries NZ Ltd., Professor L.R. Richardson representing the Royal Society of New Zealand, Dr. Ernest Marsden, a distinguished scientist and former Secretary of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Dr. Robert Falla representing the New Zealand Antarctic Society, and H.E. Riddiford representing the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand. Arthur Helm, of the Public Service Commission, was appointed Secretary.²⁴¹ It was also announced that the leader of the New Zealand support party, once decided, would join the Committee. Initially, the RSC formed three sub-committees to oversee functions relating to Personnel, Equipment & Transport, and Finance & Appeal. Acting as conveners respectively were Falla, Dr. Ernest Marsden and F. H. Moss. As different needs arose additional sub-committees were formed with responsibility for Buildings, Radio Communications, Medical Support, and Food & Nutrition. Over the ensuing months as the affairs of the IGY became inter-woven with the TAE other individuals were invited onto the RSC including Dr E.I. 'Ed' Robertson, Chair of the New Zealand's Inter-Departmental Committee for the IGY, Captain Harold Ruegg, Administrator of the Ross Dependency, R. Odell, as Director of Information Services and, after his selection as leader was announced, Sir Edmund Hillary. Additional members later served from the Post & Telegraph Office, as well as from Treasury and the Department of External Affairs. In due course, Captain Harry Kirkwood of the *Endeavour* was co-opted onto the committee. Coincident with the Prime Minister's earlier announcement of New Zealand's participation, a statement was released to the New Zealand press describing the governance structure as follows: "The organisation in the United Kingdom responsible for the greater part of the planning of the Expedition would, as in New Zealand, be an *unofficial* body." This meant that both the London COM and the Ross Sea Committee did not have any governmental status as such, ensuring that the expedition was not seen as a government endeavour. This subtle distinction served to conveniently reduce the exposure for their respective governments in the event that the expedition failed to achieve its goals. Nevertheless, governments were never too far removed from the scene. Minister of External Affairs T.L. Macdonald, who drafted

²⁴¹ Helm-Miller, 1964, p 49

the statement, rightly observed that the "...successful planning of the Expedition would call for the closest coordination between the organisations in London and Wellington."²⁴²

One point of contention that arose was caused by the initial inclusion on the Ross Sea Committee of a representative of the press. The London committee objected to this appointment due to the risk it posed to the copyright of the media expedition sponsors such as the BBC, *The Times* of London and the publishing house Cassel, with whom lucrative contracts had been signed. It was then agreed that no member of the media would be a committee member but that an information officer would be appointed on each committee to manage the release of news to the outside world. On 24 May 1955 the London Committee made their case for unified control over publicity including writing of books by expedition members, expedition photographs, diaries and films. Britain did not want to risk losing the £50,000 in revenue that was being negotiated. This resulted in the London Committee's insistence on having some measure of control over the New Zealand effort and being "closely associated at all stages with planning in Wellington." New Zealand was encouraged to adopt similar agreements with local media for its own aspects of the expedition such as establishing the base in McMurdo Sound.²⁴³

The Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand had been lobbying for involvement in the Antarctic since the early 1950's. In 1951, upon hearing from Dunedin's Prof Noel Odell and Raymond Priestley of possible research being done in Antarctica, the Federation sent a letter to the Department of External Affairs offering the assistance of its members, extolling their expertise in "...snow, ice and rock work..."²⁴⁴ This interest was heightened in late 1954 as rumours spread of a possible trans-Antarctic journey. In February 1955 the Federation renewed its request for involvement in "...any proposed expedition to the Antarctic." Their resources were finally called upon when Macdonald asked the Federation to nominate one of its members to join the Ross Sea Committee. That person would be experienced Himalayan mountaineer, and now prominent solicitor, H.E.Riddiford.²⁴⁵ The Federation became a prime mover in assisting with the fund raising activities for the expedition particularly with the assistance of Arnold Heine. Heine eventually went on to act as Technical Officer for the New Zealand party during the summer season of 1956-57 and later joined the NZGS 'New

²⁴² Press Statement, 13 May 1955

²⁴³ White, 24 May 1955

²⁴⁴ Davidson, 28 February 1951

²⁴⁵ Macdonald, 19 May 1955

Zealand Geological and Survey Expedition 1958-59' led by geologist, H.J. 'Larry' Harrington.²⁴⁶ A key point made by Macdonald in his letter to the Federation was that: "The Committee will also have wide discretion to determine its terms of reference... *and will be responsible for choosing the leader of the party at the McMurdo Sound base*" [author's emphasis].²⁴⁷

After the formation of the Ross Sea Committee the New Zealand government recognised the need for more senior oversight of Antarctic matters. The government then established its own internal committee, the 'Prime Minister's Committee on Antarctica', to create policy regarding New Zealand's participation in the expedition and to assess the possibilities of on-going activity following the TAE and the IGY. This high level committee consisted of the Prime Minister, Sidney Holland, the Minister of External Affairs, T.L. Macdonald, the Minister in charge of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), R.M. Algie, and Cabinet Ministers J.E. Marshall, J.T. Watts and J.E. McAlpine.²⁴⁸

One of the first moves by the London Committee was to send a representative to Wellington to confer with and advise the newly formed and as-yet un-named committee on the framework for managing the expedition. Not surprisingly Britain believed that the expertise in polar matters lay solely in the United Kingdom with its several years of FIDS experience. Moreover, the fact that several members of the Scott and Shackleton expeditions to the Ross Sea were still available to consult made the London COM feel particularly knowledgeable about how New Zealand should approach its work in her largely unexplored Ross Dependency. It was fortunate that Sir Miles Clifford was chosen to carry out this delicate task. In addition to serving as Governor of the Falkland Islands Dependencies from 1946 to 1953, Clifford had overseen the establishment of FIDS and his penchant to "...call a spade a spade" combined with his energy and decisiveness, made him an ideal candidate to help forge the relationship between the two remote loci of the expedition.²⁴⁹ He had a genuine and long-lasting interest in the Antarctic.²⁵⁰ His visit, extending over two weeks, was instrumental in finalising the organisation structure for New Zealand's expedition and for developing the liaison arrangements between London and Wellington. Two key steps taken during his visit

²⁴⁶ RDRC, November 1958

²⁴⁷ MacDonald, 19 May, 1955

²⁴⁸ Helm-Miller, 1964, p. 52

²⁴⁹ Headland, Correspondence with the author, 22 November 2014

²⁵⁰ NZHC-London, 17 May 1955

were the formal naming of the Ross Sea Committee and the drafting of the offer to Sir Edmund Hillary for leadership of the New Zealand Support Party. On his return trip to London Clifford also took the opportunity to visit Canberra and solicit Australian support for the expedition. Despite some initial reluctance from the Australian Antarctic community his lobbying efforts, which focused on direct engagement with the Prime Minister's office, eventually bore fruit.²⁵¹

An important difference between the British and New Zealand organisations was that whereas Britain mounted a separate expedition for its IGY party, New Zealand combined the logistics aspect of its TAE and IGY projects into a single expedition until the conclusion of the TAE. This was a complicating factor unique to New Zealand and one which affected the relationship between the New Zealand TAE and IGY teams.²⁵² In the advisory notes that he prepared for the RSC Clifford recommended that if New Zealand was to participate in the IGY, which was not yet certain at the time of his visit, then "...the leader of the Ross Sea Party must have overall command of the Ross Sea Base but ...the senior scientific officer might well be his Second-in Command (as with Scott & Wilson)...".²⁵³ Clifford went on to say that if that individual was not 'practical and active' then a 'field man' should be appointed who was also a good administrator and organiser. That person turned out to be the surveyor J. H. 'Bob' Miller who had sent his TAE application directly to Robert Falla. A more suitable Deputy for Sir Edmund Hillary could not have been found. Where Hillary had charisma and a strong public persona, Miller was modest and soft-spoken. Where Hillary was forceful, impatient and could occasionally be intimidating, Miller was patient, sympathetic and easily approachable. Although they each had their own separate agendas and reasons for joining the TAE both men were totally dedicated and hard-working members of the New Zealand support party. Their respective strengths could not have been more complementary. Dr Trevor Hatherton, as Chief Scientist, was given responsibility for all scientific and IGY activities of the New Zealand party at both Scott Base and Cape Hallett.

While New Zealand ramped up its expedition effort the armed services rallied to the cause. In August 1955 the Minister of Defence deployed the RNZAF on behalf of the expedition. In a memo to the Chief of Air Staff he re-iterated the nationalistic aspect saying "I feel that it is

²⁵¹ NZHC-Canberra, June 1955

²⁵² Hillary, 11 August 1955

²⁵³ McIntosh, 30 June 1955

desirable for this support to be provided by the RNZAF so that the New Zealand character of the Ross Sea Party will not be lost.”²⁵⁴ As had been recommended by Sir Miles Clifford, Hillary eventually joined the Personnel sub-committee. Illustrating the ties that were developing between the IGY and the TAE, Dr. E.I. Robertson, Director of the Geophysics Division of DSIR and eventual Chair of New Zealand’s Inter-departmental Committee for the IGY also became a member of the Personnel sub-committee. This brought the scientists and the explorer/adventurers into close proximity from which a certain amount of tension was bound to develop. One personnel issue was that the IGY scientists as well as the New Zealand Antarctic Flight, in keeping with their status of ‘secondment’ to the Ross Sea Support Party, were kept on their salaries as at home in New Zealand. This was not the case with Hillary and the remainder of the expedition members who had to accept more modest arrangements. A significant expense for the New Zealand party members was the long-distance charge for their radio calls back to family in New Zealand usually on weekends. Given the often erratic quality of radio connections and the uncertainty of scheduling a call, the expenditure must have often seemed an exercise in futility. The calls were charged to the men at one shilling and six pence per minute.²⁵⁵

The Terms of Reference for the Ross Sea Committee, in keeping with the need for close co-ordination with London, stated that it would function as an “...integral part of the main United Kingdom organization...” One of its responsibilities would be to lay supply depots for a distance of “...approximately 300 miles towards the Pole.”²⁵⁶ At this early stage the expedition plan allowed for only two supply depots, one at the head of the Ferrar Glacier and another about 300 miles south near Mt Albert-Markham.²⁵⁷ This initial plan was to change significantly and Fuchs later requested Hillary to establish two more depots, which became D480 and D700, to provide for the crossing party’s fuel and supply needs. This would place considerable additional strain on New Zealand resources with the largest part being borne by the Antarctic Flight. Another topic that was discussed during Clifford’s visit was the possible inclusion of Australians within the Zealand Party. It appears that for some reason New Zealand was not keen to oblige. An extract from the verbatim report of the minutes of the RSC meeting of 7 June, 1955 reported the following exchange between Clifford and Robert Falla, convener of the RSC Personnel Sub-committee:

²⁵⁴ Minister of Defence, 3 August 1955

²⁵⁵ Carlyon, TAE diary, p. 19

²⁵⁶ Ross Sea Committee, 3 June 1955, Annex A, p.2

²⁵⁷ Fuchs, March 1953

Clifford: “The question of Australian participation – I had hoped New Zealand would welcome it and that you might have one or two Australian members.

Falla: “There is personal feeling about it.”

Clifford: “The suggestion has I believe been made that they should man the depot which lies as you know in their territory. We have not pursued it, nor did we particularly welcome that suggestion for we had looked towards this as an essentially New Zealand operation, and I think that if they have a couple of chaps in your party, that will be sufficient.”²⁵⁸

It is clear that the objective of strengthening its title was making New Zealand careful to ensure that their TAE support party was confined to a purely New Zealand group. Perhaps Falla, a veteran of BANZARE (1929-31) led by Mawson, was recalling some past slight but this is conjecture. In any case, no Australians were invited to join the Kiwi team, this despite the significant assistance with dogs and huts given to New Zealand by Australia. Although it made a considerable donation of £25,000 to the expedition, Australia remained content to have just one of its citizens, geologist Jon Stephenson, assigned to Fuchs’ crossing party. As for tracked vehicles, Clifford saw no need for New Zealand to have Sno-cats and that “...one or two tractors for work around Base” would suffice.²⁵⁹ Consistent with London Committee thinking, Clifford perceived a rather circumscribed role for the New Zealand support party. Hillary, to his credit and the eventual angst of Britain and the RSC, would, with considerable help from the Americans, greatly expand this role beyond its initial boundaries. A serious issue that Clifford was unable to resolve was that of marine transportation for the New Zealand party to McMurdo Sound. This problem loomed over New Zealand’s expedition planning throughout 1955 and for much of 1956. Clifford had suggested the *Theron* might be available and that, in any case, “Expert assistance is available in London for selection of a ship.” This ‘assistance’ turned into a long drawn out negotiation between the New Zealand and British governments for the purchase of the *John Biscoe* from FIDS, a process that did not reflect well on HMG and exposed the competing interests among certain UK government departments.

²⁵⁸ Ross Sea Committee, 7 June 1955

²⁵⁹ McIntosh, 30 June 1955

Meanwhile, the Ross Sea Committee, which had been formed by the government as the managing body of the New Zealand Antarctic expedition, decided to establish the expedition under the Incorporated Societies Act of 1908. It then set about drafting a constitution. When complete it consisted of 30 clauses stating the rules under which the New Zealand TAE effort would be governed. In addition to organising New Zealand participation in the expedition other key objectives for the Society included working "...in consultation with the Trans-Antarctic Expedition Limited (a company incorporated in the United Kingdom) to establish a New Zealand base in the Ross Dependency and to participate in and assist the Antarctic Expedition being organised by that company." and importantly, "To explore all, or any region of, the Antarctic."²⁶⁰ This was a broad mandate indeed and one that Hillary and his New Zealand party would exploit to the full. On 27 September the Constitution was duly signed and witnessed by all the Committee members. Finally, on 29 September 1955 the organisation responsible for conducting the New Zealand portion of the TAE was formally created and called the Trans-Antarctic Expedition New Zealand (Incorporated).

Harry Kirkwood RN – Captain of the *HMNZS Endeavour*

A potential cause for ill-feeling was the engagement of British naval officer Harry Kirkwood as captain of the *Endeavour*. Kirkwood doubtless had sufficient experience both in Antarctic waters and with the *Endeavour*. As a key participant in marine operations through the period of Fuchs' leadership of FIDS Kirkwood had captained the *John Biscoe* and had survived the worst of conditions in the Antarctic Peninsula region.²⁶¹ In a telegram to London it was suggested by the RSC that any reference to Kirkwood's planned visit to New Zealand be omitted as it might be "...embarrassing to the Navy here..."²⁶² However, Fuchs had personal experience with Kirkwood and the London Committee prevailed in gaining his appointment to command the New Zealand ship on its voyages between Wellington and McMurdo Sound. He first travelled to New Zealand in 1956 and participated in discussions regarding selection of a ship to serve the TAE support party. Kirkwood's relationship with Hillary hardened during the Ross Sea Party's journey south but eventually recovered. Hillary, who was eager to reach McMurdo Sound as soon as possible, felt at certain times that the *Endeavour's* captain did not share his same sense of urgency. After a few choice words were exchanged Kirkwood treated Hillary and his team to "...as fine a display of forceful ice navigation as I

²⁶⁰ Constitution of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition New Zealand (Incorporated)

²⁶¹ Helm-Miller, 1964, p. 81

²⁶² NZEA, 5 August 1955

have seen.”²⁶³ A crisis had been passed and their relationship improved markedly thereafter to one of mutual respect. Hillary had been forewarned by Fuchs of Kirkwood’s volatile personality. In a letter sent to Hillary following the departure of the *Endeavour* from London, bound for Wellington, Fuchs recounted:

*I returned from some leave in Wales to find that chaos and unpleasantness had attended the loading of the ship at Butler’s Wharf...Kirkwood was so difficult and unpleasant with all and sundry that the Barge master ...put in an official complaint...the stevedores nearly struck...and BP were furious...I tell you all this as a warning about the appearance of “temperament” and to make sure that your Committee ...places you in overall command, except regarding the safety of the ship.*²⁶⁴

Hillary, benefitting from his experience on the *Theron*, understood and accepted that responsibility for the vessel and its passengers and crew ultimately rested with the ship’s captain but he found it difficult to hide his impatience during the *Endeavour* voyage south. Kirkwood came across as aloof to many, and his apparent lack of respect for the members of the New Zealand party, explorers and scientists alike, ensured only a cordial if not at times ‘icy’ relationship with the New Zealanders at best. They often referred to him as ‘Captain Plywood’.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, he served the New Zealand party well over two challenging seasons and the RNZN crew bore him no ill feeling.²⁶⁶ Dr Francis de Hamel, who served as medical officer at Scott Base during the 1957-58 summer season came to know Kirkwood well and described him as “...a nice guy, quiet, perhaps a bit aloof – or maybe just solitary, as so many lifelong sea-captains become...the oldest member of the whole ship’s company... [with a] dry sense of humour, the sort of traditional Royal Navy humour... We called him ‘Father’ though not to his face.” De Hamel attributed Kirkwood with using his “ability as a diplomat” to help manage “...our somewhat tricky relationship with the top brass of the United States Navy” especially given the differences between the United States “...strictly military operation with virtually unlimited resources and almost Teutonic efficiency” and New Zealand’s “...voluntary, somewhat Mickey Mouse, impecunious, and largely civilian

²⁶³ Hillary, 1961, p 67

²⁶⁴ Fuchs, 1 October 1956

²⁶⁵ Blaiklock, K., Correspondence with the author, 1 September 2010

²⁶⁶ Smith, W.J.L., 2007, Interview with author, Wellington, NZ

outfit...” Kirkwood also used his political skills in handling the intense publicity that accompanied Hillary’s trip to the pole, and “...fielding ‘curly’ questions from many different reporters from many different countries.”²⁶⁷ There is no doubt that from his maritime role Captain Harry Kirkwood played a significant part in the TAE and provided outstanding service to the Ross Sea Support Party as captain of the *Endeavour*.

With Fuchs named as TAE leader, and with the committees in place and their terms of reference defined, there remained one significant piece of the puzzle to put in place before operational preparations could begin. The leadership position for New Zealand’s Ross Sea Support Party remained vacant. The following section investigates the process by which this question was resolved.



Figure 17: Captain Harry Kirkwood marches to meet HRH the Duke of Edinburgh aboard the *HMNZS Endeavour* – Lyttelton Harbour, December 1956

Photo: John Claydon

²⁶⁷ De Hamel, Personal diary, pp. 16-18

Selection of a Leader for the New Zealand Support Party

Although he had conceived the TAE, the confirmation of Vivian Fuchs as leader of the expedition had not been without its hurdles. Similarly, the selection of a leader for the Ross Sea Support Party involved a certain degree of uncertainty, with a surprising number of candidates being considered for the role. Although Sir Edmund Hillary, the conquering hero of Mt Everest, was a giant in the eyes of the public and well respected among his peers, there were other factors and criteria to be assessed, not the least of which was whether he would make himself available. Hillary's meeting in November 1953 with Fuchs and George Lowe at the TAE London office, 64 Victoria Street, was not Hillary's first introduction to the expedition. This meeting was Hillary's second exposure to Fuchs' TAE plans. At the invitation of Ernest Marsden, NZ Scientific Liaison-Officer in London, Hillary and his brother-in-law, Larry Harrington, had earlier visited the New Zealand High Commission in London where they were shown a copy of the Fuchs plan which was being kept "...strictly secret..." Harrington, who at the time was studying for his Doctorate in geology at Oxford, later recounted the visit: "...a First Secretary took us into a locked room, and after re-locking it, unlocked another room and in it unlocked a safe and took out the Fuchs Plan."²⁶⁸ Marsden had been passed the plans for his review since the expedition was 'beyond' the New Zealand High Commissioner. Harrington became involved as Marsden, although he was an eminent scientist, was unfamiliar with 'snow and ice' and sought the advice of Harrington who was both a geologist and an accomplished mountaineer.

By the time of this meeting Lowe had already been asked by Fuchs to join the expedition as official photographer for the UK crossing party. This was after Fuchs had first asked him if he preferred to join the New Zealand party with Hillary, an option that Lowe politely declined, replying that his preference was to have a go at crossing the continent.²⁶⁹ Fuchs' purpose in meeting Hillary was to enlist his support and thereby gain New Zealand government backing for the TAE. It was not his intention, nor did he have the mandate, to offer Hillary the role of New Zealand expedition leader or even a position in the New Zealand party. At this stage Fuchs was merely testing the waters for New Zealand participation in his expedition. Should New Zealand decide to take part then its support party would have to be chosen by the New Zealand organisation.

²⁶⁸ Harrington, HJ, Correspondence with the author, 15 January 2010

²⁶⁹ Lowe, G. Interview with author, 18 January 2006, Diamond Harbour, NZ

First impressions are said to be important and such was the case in this instance. In Hillary's words Fuchs was "an impressive person, very strongly built, very serious minded ... it was just like a military operation."²⁷⁰ Fuchs didn't specifically say so at the time but Hillary got the impression that Fuchs would like him to 'get involved' with the support party whose work would be focused on the Ross Dependency stages of the journey. At this point the Antarctic had not figured in Hillary's thinking.²⁷¹ Rather, foremost in his mind were several plans concerning possible Himalayan climbing expeditions.²⁷² However, Fuchs had successfully sown the seed of a special adventure in fertile ground, one which would continue to develop in Hillary's mind over the coming months. After returning to New Zealand from the UK in February 1954 Hillary and Lowe became pre-occupied with their climbing expedition to the Barun Valley region of the Himalayas. This expedition occupied both men for the next several months through to July 1954, after which Hillary returned to New Zealand while Lowe went home to the UK.²⁷³ Thereafter, through the last half of 1954 which was a critical period for the TAE, it was Lowe, who lived and taught school in England, who acted as Hillary's prime channel for news about the expedition.²⁷⁴

During this period the search for a leader for the proposed New Zealand support party became a priority. Fuchs had met both George Lowe and Hillary but he remained uncertain of their interest and possible roles. His first contact in New Zealand had been a person with whom he had much in common, geologist Professor Noel Odell of Otago University in Dunedin. In addition to his scientific and academic credentials Odell was an expert mountaineer having been a member of the Mallory-Irvine expedition of 1924 and had been the last person to see the two before they perished on their quest to reach the summit. In October 1954 Fuchs wrote to Odell, following up on an earlier letter, and outlined his plans for crossing the continent, which stated the crossing party would leave from Marguerite Bay in Graham Land and descend to McMurdo Sound via the Ferrar Glacier, asking that Odell keep the matter confidential. However, he asked Odell for his view on how best to "...promote public interest" in the expedition and to make discreet enquiries as to possible New Zealanders, who were "...young enough" and who might be suitable to join in the New Zealand effort if one were to eventuate. He mentioned that he had met with Hillary and Lowe

²⁷⁰ Hillary, 2004

²⁷¹ Harrington, H.J., Correspondence with the author, 15 January 2010

²⁷² Hillary, 2004

²⁷³ *New Zealand Alpine Journal*, June 1955, pp. 5-7

²⁷⁴ Hillary, 2004

and remarked: "...while I gained the impression that Hillary was not interested in the Antarctic, it seemed to me that Lowe might well be a suitable man...The leader at McMurdo Sound should no doubt be a New Zealander."²⁷⁵ Both Lowe and Hillary had indicated their support for publicising the expedition. On 24 November Fuchs again mentioned the possibility of Lowe as leader of the New Zealand support party in a letter to L.B. Quartermain, Secretary of the New Zealand Antarctic Society. Quartermain had hoped that Lowe could visit McMurdo Sound as an 'observer' during the summer of 1954-55 but Lowe declined due to his involvement with the mountaineering expedition to the Barun Valley with Hillary.²⁷⁶ However, notwithstanding Fuchs' thoughts on the leadership question, it was the Ross Sea Committee who had the final say in choosing a leader for the New Zealand party. Suggestions came from both scientific and mountaineering circles including DSIR with its interest in geophysics, The New Zealand Antarctic Society, and the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand. Several candidates with a variety of backgrounds were considered for the position. A most worthy candidate was Earle Riddiford, a member of the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand. However, due to his onerous commitments as a barrister, Riddiford declared himself unavailable. Aside from George Lowe, who had decided to join the British crossing party, other names mentioned included Ernest Marsden, Norman Hardie, an engineer and eminent mountaineer, Capt. Harry Kirkwood, who would captain the *Endeavour*, and Robert Falla, ornithologist and Director of the Dominion Museum. These candidates fell by the wayside for various reasons. Marsden was enjoying his sabbatical in London and the Antarctic was not really an area of interest for him. Hardie was about to take part in the expedition that would make the first ascent of Kachenjunga, a major Himalayan peak. Kirkwood would only have been considered if Britain had been forced to carry out the Ross Sea component on its own, while Falla was possibly considered too old for the role.²⁷⁷

Perhaps the most serious alternative to Hillary was his brother-in-law Larry Harrington. Harrington had experience in both the Arctic and the Himalayas, having led Oxford expeditions to both Svalbard in the Arctic and into the Himalayan region of West Nepal. In 1955-56 he had served as Chair of the Antarctic Science Committee of New Zealand's Royal Society. Hillary had married Louise Rose and Harrington had married Louise's sister Shirley-Ann. This close family connection gave the two men many opportunities to discuss the

²⁷⁵ Fuchs, 19 October 1954

²⁷⁶ Fuchs, 24 November 1954

²⁷⁷ Harrington, H.J., Correspondence with the author, 15 January 2010

expedition. They had even discussed the possibility of them both joining the New Zealand party but had decided that based on their experience with mountaineering expeditions it would not be a good idea, mainly because it could become the source of friction amongst themselves or among the other team members. Both Hillary and Harrington also had reservations for more personal reasons about joining the expedition since each had recently married nor did they have large incomes. With both their wives expecting a child in the next few months the timing could not have been worse. They had each recently been on climbing expeditions to the Himalayas and the last thing they wanted was to be separated from their families for yet another extended period with the additional unknown risks of the Antarctic to contend with. Hillary could turn his energies towards earning an income by capitalising on his Everest success without the stress of the TAE to worry about. Meanwhile Harrington, as a practising geologist, was busy assessing the electric power potential of various sites across New Zealand.²⁷⁸ Harrington described his brother-in-law's dilemma at this time. Hillary was not a wealthy man. His bee-keeping and mountaineering activities had so far earned him very little in the way of financial benefits. After Everest, he was reluctant to charge for his lectures, believing instead that they were part of his responsibility as a member of the climbing party. His UK Everest lecture proceeds went to the UK Alpine Club and even they were reluctant to pay his travel expenses. In 1954, after leading the Barun Valley expedition to the Himalayas with Lowe, Hillary returned to work at his father's bee-keeping operation.

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Jim Rose, when asked who he would recommend as leader between Hillary and Harrington, replied that he could not give an answer as both were his sons-in-law.²⁸⁰ In the end, Harrington declined the opportunity. His interests were in the scientific sphere and he had no particular desire to join the TAE. Besides, he had other plans and he knew that Hillary, should he want the position, was the right man for the job. As it turned out, six months after the TAE, Harrington successfully led his own expedition, the New Zealand Geological and Survey Expedition 1958-59, to the Ross Sea region under the auspices of the New Zealand Geological Survey.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ Harrington, H.J., Correspondence with the author, 17 March 2009

²⁷⁹ Harrington, HJ, Ibid

²⁸⁰ Lowe, 1997

²⁸¹ RDRC, November 1958

Although Hillary had proven his physical stamina and courage on Everest, his capabilities of leadership were largely unproven and had only been tested with a small party during the Barun Valley expedition. He had never occupied an administrative position. The New Zealand Antarctic Expedition would present a much more complex organisational and management challenge than anything he had undertaken so far. During World War II Hillary had served as a navigator with the RNZAF in the Pacific, been seriously injured in a fire on-board his home-made yacht, and had not otherwise achieved notable distinction. He was, as he often said, simply a ‘beekeeper’ – albeit one who had shown a promising blend of qualities. In saying this he met at least two of the most important requirements – first, he had charisma, and that had placed him very high in public opinion following his ascent of Everest. Second, although always attracted to adventure, during the few months after his return from the Barun Valley expedition his interest in Antarctica deepened as he felt a growing need to establish New Zealand’s presence in the Ross Dependency. He and Harrington discussed the possibilities while holidaying at the family retreat in Anawhata, a coastal village west of Auckland. Hillary had little knowledge of the scientific value of Antarctica and his discussions with Harrington had brought a greater understanding of that aspect.²⁸² Finally, after obtaining the support of his wife Louise, Hillary made the decision that he wanted to become involved with the TAE whether or not New Zealand were going to be active participants.

After Holland’s January 1955 announcement in London, three events transpired:

On 16 April, Hillary sent a three page personal letter to Prime Minister Sidney Holland, indicating his impatience with the Government regarding the announcement of its support for the TAE and the urgency with which he believed a decision must now be taken. In his letter Hillary outlined Fuchs’ revised timetable for the expedition, since it had been delayed by one year in order to dovetail with the IGY effort, stressing his confidence in New Zealand’s ability to “man an effective and useful Antarctic Expedition”. He went on to describe the requirements for transport, personnel, training, and equipment and supplies and gave constructive ideas as to their provision. His letter closed with a discussion on the expedition’s financial needs and possible solutions in what was really a first draft plan for the New

²⁸² Harrington, H.J., Correspondence with the author, 28 March 2011

Zealand Support Party component of the TAE.²⁸³ At this point Hillary remained unaware that Cabinet had met two weeks earlier to discuss the question of TAE participation.

Meanwhile, the Ross Sea Committee was occupied with defining the responsibilities of the leadership position. Hillary himself had reservations about the role that he was prepared to play in the expedition. On 15 May he wrote to T.L. Macdonald that “should New Zealand decide not to participate in the expedition then he and George Lowe would accept positions as members of Fuchs’ party.²⁸⁴ Fuchs had asked Hillary to help set up a reception base in McMurdo Sound should that eventuality occur. Although Hillary was eager to be involved his exact role remained unclear. The 5th COM meeting of 15 April 1955 records that Hillary had sent a letter to Sir James Marshall-Cornwall, a member of the COM, “...expressing his interest in the Expedition”. Sir James’ reaction was to suggest that “a serious approach should be made to Sir Edmund Hillary on the basis that New Zealand should co-operate on an equal status.” However, this suggestion was turned down by the London Committee since it was decided that communications should be held at the government level rather than through individuals.²⁸⁵

The position of expedition leader was not Hillary’s first choice. He initially proposed taking on an ‘operations’ oriented role as a field party leader rather than that of overall leader of the New Zealand expedition. Leading a large group of people over an extended period of time with its accompanying administrative burden held little appeal for Hillary. In a document sent 24 May 1955 to the London Committee Macdonald revealed that Hillary had written to Arthur Helm, RSC Secretary, stating that “... he [Hillary] would prefer post as leader of what he calls “field party”. Hillary’s idea was to adopt a command structure similar to that of the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE) where Robert Dovers was leader of the field party over-wintering in Antarctica, while Philip Law held the broader responsibility as Director. Macdonald’s reaction to this idea was unequivocal: “Our feeling is that there is only room for one leader for the McMurdo Sound party who should combine the duties of Laws [sic] and Dovers.”²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Hillary, 16 April 1955

²⁸⁴ Hillary, 15 May, 1955

²⁸⁵ COM Minutes, 15 April 1955

²⁸⁶ NZEA, 24 May 1955

Despite being a New Zealand based decision, an influential external voice remained that of the COM in London. It was Fuchs himself who insisted that Hillary be given the lead New Zealand role. He correctly surmised that with Hillary on board the New Zealand public, and thereby the New Zealand government, would be sure to follow. A memo from the NZHC in London reported that the matter of Hillary's role had been discussed with Fuchs who "...agreed that it would be unsatisfactory to appoint Hillary merely to a 'field party' ...Hillary must participate fully in planning...and have full say in organization right from beginning..."²⁸⁷ The New Zealand government then threw its weight into the matter and on 27 May, MacDonal, the Minister of External Affairs, sent a brief note, almost an instruction, to Charles Bowden, Chairman of the Ross Sea Committee:

*I feel sure that the Ross Sea Committee will regard the appointment of the leader of the New Zealand Party as one of its most urgent tasks. It may, therefore be of interest to the Committee to know that the United Kingdom authorities concerned with the organisation of the Expedition have made it clear that they would regard Sir Edmund Hillary as eminently suited for this post. In a letter of 15 May, Sir Edmund himself informed me that Dr Fuchs, the leader designate of the party which will make the crossing from Vahsel Bay, had invited him to lead the McMurdo Sound party should the New Zealand government decide not to take an active part in the establishment of this base.*²⁸⁸

This memo left little room for doubt as to who would be chosen as leader.

The TAE would be Hillary's first experience with large organisations, their complexities and management subtleties. He faced the prospect of overall command with some reluctance and he would later show little patience with the constraints of bureaucracy. The Ross Sea Committee, supported by a strong message from Fuchs, vetoed the idea of dual command and insisted that there be a single position of leadership for New Zealand's support party. Somewhat confusingly, London suggested different titles for Hillary including 'Leader of Ross Sea Base' rather than 'Leader of Ross Sea Party'. This was ambiguously explained as due to the possibility that UK or Australian members might be part of the New Zealand party

²⁸⁷ NZHC-London, 28 May 1955

²⁸⁸ Macdonald, 27 May 1955

and hence either a New Zealander could not be their leader as well, or else the team could not be called 'the New Zealand Party'. Further sensitivity was expressed by London regarding Hillary's position vis a vis Fuchs authority stated thus "...Hillary's party must accept direction from Fuchs during crossing...though if you are sensitive on it some form of words could be found e.g. 'to work in coordination with the progress of the expedition as a whole'." ²⁸⁹ As an interim measure to maintain Hillary's interest, since he and Lowe were about to depart for South Africa for an extended lecture tour, and while awaiting the arrival from London of Sir Miles Clifford, the Ross Sea Committee cautiously advised that it could "...assure him of a useful part in the Expedition, which could mean the position of Leader." They further co-opted him conditionally as a member of their Committee and promised to tell him of 'further decisions' during his visit to South Africa. At the inaugural meeting of the RSC, held 3 June 1955, Bowden reported to the meeting that a discussion had been held with Hillary on 31 May and that "...Sir Edmund expressed himself as very well satisfied with the above intimations." ²⁹⁰

Meanwhile, at the London Committee meeting of 2 June, 1955 Fuchs re-iterated his concern regarding Hillary's TAE role. The meeting notes recorded that Fuchs 'was worried by the United Kingdom High Commissioner's (UKHC) telegram which only said that Hillary was to take a responsible part in the Expedition...He [Fuchs] emphasised that unless Hillary was assured of command his discussions with Hillary in July [at the imminent CSAGI meeting in Paris] might be wasted.' ²⁹¹ In fact, in anticipation of Hillary being appointed leader of the New Zealand party, and in a reply to an earlier query from Hillary, Fuchs had, two months beforehand, sent him an outline of the latest TAE plans, saying that he expected to meet Hillary in London in July. ²⁹² With Fuchs' support, all that remained was for Hillary himself to make his own personal decision. The New Zealand public wanted it, Fuchs and the London COM wanted it, and more importantly Hillary wanted it. Finally, in their meeting of 9 June 1955 the Ross Sea Committee, moved by Robert Falla and seconded by Earle Riddiford, approved that "...the leadership of the Ross Sea Expedition should be offered to Sir Edmund Hillary..." Immediately following the meeting Hillary, now on a lecture tour in South Africa,

²⁸⁹ NZHC London, 28 May 1955

²⁹⁰ Ross Sea Committee, 3 June 1955

²⁹¹ COM Minutes, 2 June, 1954

²⁹² Hillary, 1961, p. 15-17

received a telegram offering him the position. He replied his acceptance but “...not without some worried thoughts for my young family.”²⁹³

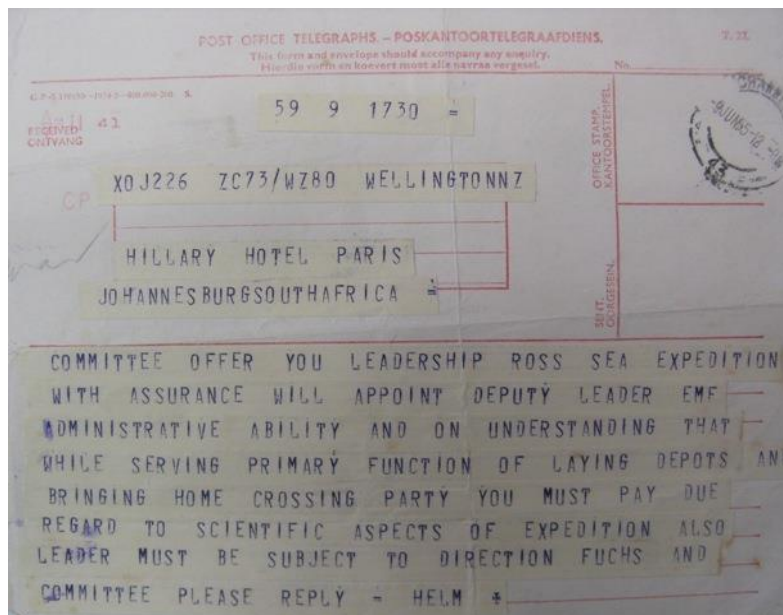


Figure 18: RSC offer to Hillary of NZ Support Party leadership, 9 June 1955

Photo: Hillary archive, AWM, Auckland

The final brief for the New Zealand leader had been drafted during the visit of Sir Miles Clifford in the first week of June. The responsibilities that Hillary were given were brief and to the point consisting of eight short paragraphs. In doing so Clifford had implemented the wishes of the London Committee.

Both Fuchs and Hillary had more personal, less complex reasons to first conceive the expedition, and in Hillary's case, to lead the New Zealand Ross Sea Party. Fuchs was a scientist and a man determined to make his mark and as one of his *Theron* colleagues would later comment “...a man of extraordinary resolve and drive.”²⁹⁴ On the other hand, Hillary was a patriotic New Zealander who sought adventure and wanted New Zealand to take its rightful place in the Antarctic. He realised that the TAE had the potential to deliver on both counts. Derek Williams, British cinematographer on the *Theron* voyage to the Weddell Sea, had the opportunity to carefully observe both men at the early stages of the expedition. In a perceptive appraisal of Hillary, Williams wrote: “He had the vision to see that Fuchs’

²⁹³ Hillary, 1975, p. 220-221

²⁹⁴ Williams, D., Correspondence with the author, 26 March 2010

proposal of a simple support role was not enough; and that the situation offered far greater gains for New Zealand in the wider context of [the] International Geophysical Year.”²⁹⁵

Fuchs and Hillary then attended the watershed July 1955 CSAGI meeting in Paris where the location of the bases for the various IGY participants was decided. It was here that the third key member of the TAE triumvirate was introduced in the person of Captain George Dufek, head of the United States *Operation Deep Freeze*. He would prove to be an essential, yet unofficial, participant in the TAE story.

By mid-June 1955 significant hurdles for the expedition had been surmounted. The four Dominions had been convinced to give their support and the leaders of both the crossing and support parties had been confirmed. On 9 July 1955, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, ‘graciously’ accepted the role as Patron for the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition. An earlier suggestion that the Governor General or the Prime Minister take on that role for the New Zealand portion was quietly dropped.²⁹⁶ She would later tour both the *Theron* and the *Magga Dan* prior to their sailing south from London. The Queen also donated three signed portraits of herself to the expedition. Two were given to Fuchs, one to be placed in the TAE’s Victoria Street offices in London while the other sailed with him in the *Magga Dan* to Vahsel Bay to be hung in Shackleton base until the crossing party set out on their journey. It then travelled in the Sno-cats across the continent and was taken back to England. The third portrait was given to the Ross Sea Party to be placed in New Zealand’s Scott Base where it could reside for as long as the base was inhabited by New Zealand.²⁹⁷

With the official granting of Royal patronage the governance structure was fully in place. The expedition could now shift its focus from the sensitive organisational matters to more concrete operational tasks and embark on its next important phase in good heart. The one fly in the ointment was that the New Zealand Support Party was still without a vessel to transport its personnel, equipment and supplies to McMurdo Sound.

²⁹⁵ Ibid

²⁹⁶ NZHC London, 9 July 1955

²⁹⁷ Claydon, J.R., Interview with John Claydon, 12 November, 2014, Christchurch. The location of the portraits is at present unknown.



Figure 19: Theron beset in the Weddell Sea pack-ice – January 1956
The men shown are working with picks, poles and shovels to try and free the ship.
Photo: George Lowe

4.3 Preparing for the Journeys

With formal approval and government funding now assured and with the two leaders confirmed, the eighteen month period from June 1955 to December 1956 was used by both parties to complete their preparations for the expedition. The heavily mechanised assault on the white continent presented a myriad of tasks to be accomplished ranging from procuring supplies and equipment to raising additional funds from the public. They included negotiating contracts with sponsors, recruitment of personnel and, for New Zealand, acquiring a ship to transport its expedition to McMurdo Sound. For Fuchs there was the additional need to establish his departure base on the coast of the Weddell Sea, a task that would engender the near-calamitous *Theron* voyage. No crossing journey had reached the continent and there was little information concerning the geography to be traversed, particularly between Vahsel Bay and the Pole. Whatever information that existed was based on experience gained during the heroic age four decades prior. Fuchs had sought the advice of Wilhelm Filchner, leader of the *Deutschland* expedition during the heroic age, on the hazards of the Weddell Sea ice pack. It was critical for Britain that the expedition be successful and possibly go some way to erasing the scars of Scott's tragic death in 1912 and Shackleton's abject failure with *Endurance* three years later. In addition, should Fuchs fail to cross the continent, Britain's claim to sovereignty would be weakened giving credence to the fears and warnings of the expedition's critics. For Fuchs, as a contingency, this meant establishing his Weddell Sea base one year prior to the start of his journey across the continent. Due to New Zealand's lack of marine transport Hillary had no such voyage to make and his support party would have to accomplish the bulk of its mission in a single Antarctic season. Nevertheless, while he and two other members of his party travelled with Fuchs to Vahsel Bay, he would be able to send four men to the Antarctic as 'observers'. Three of them would be transported south by the US Navy's *Operation Deep Freeze* fleet and one man, Harry Ayres, would accompany Dr Phillip Law's ANARE expedition to Mawson Base in Australian Antarctic Territory. In addition to finding suitable sites and constructing one of their bases, the advance parties would have to discover routes for their dogs and tractors to make the 10,000ft ascent to the polar plateau. In the case of Fuchs his route as he approached the Ross Sea must be passable for his Sno-cats in their descent from those heights to arrive at the New Zealand base in McMurdo Sound.

Advance Parties, Staffing and Training



Figure 20: Ken Blaiklock - Blaiklock is sitting in the crate where 8 men spent the first winter. As group leader he was responsible for erecting Shackleton base.

Photo: TAE photo archive, ATL, Wellington

British Advance Party Theron Voyage 1955-56

On 14 November the Canadian sealer *Theron* sailed from the Millwall Docks in London with the aim of establishing the crossing party's departure base 'Shackleton' on the southernmost coastline of the Weddell Sea. On board was Dr Vivian Fuchs with seven members of his crossing party supplemented by young glaciologist John Heap recently graduated from Cambridge, RAF engineer Peter Weston, and cinematographer Derek Williams.^{298 299} The group included three additional men who although they would winter over while building the base, to their disappointment, they would not be chosen as members of the next season's

²⁹⁸ Fuchs, P., Correspondence with the author, 16 January 2006

²⁹⁹ Heap, 18 March 2006, Heap would later replace Brian Roberts at the Foreign Office and also become Director of SPRI

crossing party. These were Dr Rainer ‘Rhino’ Goldsmith and meteorologists Peter Jeffries and Tony Stewart. Fuchs had also invited three members of the New Zealand party to accompany him on the voyage as ‘observers’. Squadron Leader John Claydon, Chief Pilot of the New Zealand Antarctic Flight had been training in England to fly the Auster aircraft and sailed on the *Theron* from London. Two other members of the New Zealand party, Hillary and his Deputy, Bob Miller, joined the *Theron* in Montevideo, flying in from Vancouver. Their mission was to locate Shackleton base alongside the British IGY base somewhere in the vicinity of Vahsel Bay which, not coincidentally, had also been Sir Ernest Shackleton’s targeted base site.³⁰⁰

The *Theron* voyage has been thoroughly treated in a number of books and most recently in Anthea Arnold’s *Eight Men in a Crate*. There are however a few salient points that have appeared in my research that are worthy of note. At the February 1955 meeting of the TAE General Committee Fuchs explained the need for the advance party expedition. He presented four arguments:³⁰¹

- a) The probable requirement of the I.G.Y. to set up their installations one season before the last available to them. This assumed that this country decided to establish an I.G.Y. station in the Antarctic.
- b) It would be an advantage to the Expedition [TAE] to have the landing place established and the huts set up before the depot laying season in 1956-57.
- c) The Government might think it advantageous to have a station set up in the vicinity of the recently reported Argentine station.
- d) If, as seemed possible, the I.G.Y. proposal and the expedition became a joint project the men and material required might be beyond the capacity of one ship. The advance party ship would divide the load and help to solve this problem.

Fuchs arguments, both political and practical, won the day and the *Theron* was chartered for December of that year. Fuchs was given a five page ‘Letter of Instructions’ by the London Committee prior to departure. It stipulated that if he could not place the base within the Falkland Islands Dependencies sector he must then attempt to place the base in the Norwegian sector. Being sensitive to the political situation in the region the sectors claimed by Argentina and Chile were to be avoided. The letter included an Appendix ‘A’ entitled “Notes on Navigation in the Weddell Sea” probably drafted by Wordie. This section

³⁰⁰ COM, 11 November 1955

³⁰¹ COM, 23 February 1955

contained important advice on the route to be taken and on navigation through the ice pack. Similar advice had been provided to the IGY party that would soon sail in the *Tottan* and who were also headed for the same ‘furthest south’ location at Vahsel Bay. The plan was to establish both the TAE and IGY bases on a common site in which case Fuchs would have overall command while both parties were present. However, on leaving South Georgia and although the *Tottan* made excellent time negotiating the pack ice, even outdistancing the *Theron*, the IGY ship found its way blocked to Vahsel Bay and so the IGY party leader, David Dalgliesh, decided to land and erect the base at Halley Bay about 200 miles to the east.³⁰² After being trapped in the ice for four weeks the *Theron* finally arrived at Halley Bay and found the IGY base construction well underway. Disappointingly, after several reconnaissance flights towards the interior, Fuchs concluded that the location offered no feasible route for his tractors to reach the polar plateau. Fuchs then instructed Captain Marø to sail toward to Vahsel Bay through ‘by now’ clear coastal waters where on 30 January the *Theron* docked against the bay ice. It was here, up high on the Filchner ice shelf, that the advance party would erect their base ‘Shackleton’. With regard to navigation through the Weddell Sea Fuchs’ instructions were to “...enter the pack-ice between the meridians of 15° and 25° W...It is advisable for the ship to follow a route fairly close to the coast.”³⁰³ This advice was based on the early experiences of both Filchner and Shackleton. However, Fuchs decided to take a different path with the expectation that a more central entry point, offering a more direct route, would prove the existence of two pack ice ‘gyres’ rotating against each other thus providing the ship with an easier way through the two independent ice packs.³⁰⁴ They hit trouble almost immediately and by the third week of December were virtually at a standstill.

³⁰² Larry Harrington commented that the IGY party may have moved on to Halley Bay because they did not want to be co-located with the TAE party. Harrington, Correspondence with the author, 15 January 2010

³⁰³ COM, 11 November 1955

³⁰⁴ Hillary, 1961, p. 24

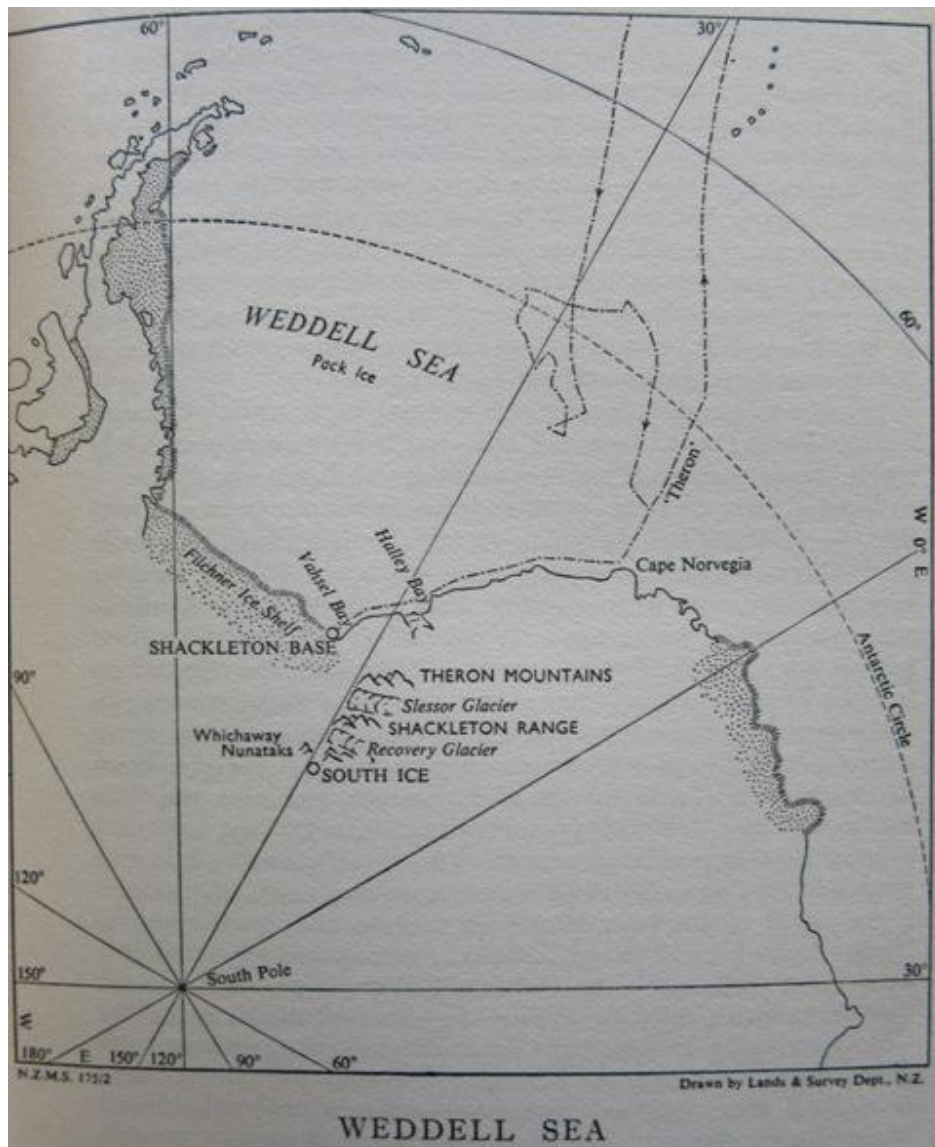


Figure 21: Map showing the torturous route of the *Theron* and the positions of the British IGY and TAE bases at Halley Bay and Vahsel Bay respectively. The TAE advance base at South Ice, three hundred miles to the south is also shown.

Source: *No Latitude for Error*, Sir Edmund Hillary, 1961

The London Committee seemed oblivious to the *Theron's* travails as late as 4 January by which time the ship had been beset for almost two weeks. The minutes of their General Meeting on that day simply record Fuchs as having given his position as Lat 69 South, Long 25 West.³⁰⁵ Fuchs, the inveterate optimist, was not one to overstate difficulties and needlessly sow fear or doubt in his Committee. However, in other circles concern was mounting. A confidential memo from the UK Naval Operations Air Commodore W.E.Oulton

³⁰⁵ COM Minutes, 4 January 1956

described the situation in grave terms stating "...unless the *Theron* can get free...within the next week or so, it is possible that the Expedition will fail..." He then alluded to "...a strong divergence of views between the Royal Society and the Scott Polar Research Institute as to the feasibility of obtaining access by sea to the shore at the Southern end of the Weddell Sea three years in succession..." The Royal Society believed that with the proper vessel access could be achieved every year. On the other hand, SPRI calculated that the chances of reaching Vahsel Bay four years in succession were "...fifteen to one against." Oulton closed saying: "We still think the Expedition should be supported, but it is most important politically that it should not end in fiasco or disaster."³⁰⁶ Argentina had become aware of the difficulties that were befalling the *Theron* and offered the assistance of their ice-breaker *General San Martin*, promising that "...no propaganda value would be made of its use." After discussion with the Admiralty the London Committee sent a brief message in reply "...thanking them for this gesture but saying that no anxiety was felt for Dr Fuchs and his party at present."³⁰⁷ Even in this perilous situation the acute political sensitivities in Britain regarding Antarctic sovereignty continued to act as an overriding consideration. As a precaution the worried London COM directed the British patrol ship *HMS Protector* which was carrying out operations off South Georgia to set out on a one thousand mile journey to assist the *Theron*. In addition Fuchs had himself been communicating his potentially perilous situation with the *Protector* and welcomed its offer of reconnaissance aid.³⁰⁸ As time was rapidly running out preparations were being made for a possible full evacuation of his party and abandonment of the expedition should the ship be unable to break itself free.³⁰⁹ Had this eventuated it would have meant the end for the TAE and a terrible embarrassment for Britain.

It should be noted that the IGY was under the auspices of the Royal Society, a separate organisation from the Royal Geographic Society who were a sponsor of the TAE. Since the IGY base was intended for permanent occupation its presence would provide Fuchs' TAE party with a fall-back contingency should he have to abandon the crossing journey for any reason. There was one other option that Fuchs had should he run into serious difficulty. The Argentine base 'Belgrano', established in 1955, was located about twenty-five miles up the

³⁰⁶ Oulton, 9 January 1956

³⁰⁷ COM Minutes, 12 January 1956

³⁰⁸ Fuchs, TAE Diary, 15 January 1956

³⁰⁹ Honnywill, 1996

coast from Vahsel Bay and would be staffed for the IGY.³¹⁰ However, British pride would have prevented Fuchs from knocking on their door except in the direst of circumstances.³¹¹

Upon his return to London aboard the *Theron* Bob Miller wrote an extensive report touching on a number of subjects. Any expectation for TAE success was perhaps at its nadir during the perilous four weeks while *Theron* was trapped in the Weddell Sea pack-ice, drifting helplessly, not unlike Shackleton's *Endeavour* forty years prior. Regarding this near disaster Miller wrote in his report: "A reconnaissance flight undertaken by Squadron Leader Lewis in perfect visibility on the evening of 26th December indicated some doubtful leads in a S.E. direction, but if anything the following of these proved our undoing" then after twenty five days of "...strenuous activity, digging, winching, exploding and poling..." salvation came in the form of a flight by New Zealander, John Claydon.

Claydon described his take-off:

*"Our pool was barely sufficient for take off but as it was essential to fly if at all possible it was only reasonable to try...The pool was narrow and was only just over 300 yards long with a slight bend in it... [I] went as close to the end of [the] pool as I could , turned around and opened up... [and] slowly gathered speed. After a hundred yds. I started turning left but this was very difficult as the floats gave a lot of resistance...The ice floe ahead was rushing towards me but my airspeed was building up slowly and I considered that I could just make it. Easing back on the stick very slowly the aircraft became airborne and the ice edge flashed below me. I judged that I had 20-30 yds. to spare which was barely sufficient for safety and I think the onlookers were as relieved as I was to get off the water in time."*³¹²

Miller described it thus: "A brilliant take-off and reconnaissance of 3 ½ hours flying time by Squadron Leader John Claydon indicated the route to get out of the ice."³¹³ It was said by at least one person present that Claydon's flight had "...saved the expedition."³¹⁴ The UK Air

³¹⁰ Stephenson, 2009, p. 172

³¹¹ Swithinbank, C., Interview with the author, Cambridge, July 2009

³¹² Claydon, *Theron* voyage diary, 20 January 1956

³¹³ Miller, June 1956

³¹⁴ Arnold, 2007, p.41

Ministry News Bulletin of 9 February confirmed the events based on a report by Squadron Leader Lewis, officer in charge of the RAF detachment assigned to Fuchs' party:

*“The vital reconnaissance flight was made on January 20th by Squadron Leader, John Claydon of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, ...He took the Auster (then fitted with floats) off from an open stretch of water only 350 yards long, a highly skilled performance watched with some trepidation from the “Theron”.*³¹⁵

While in South Georgia the RAF pilots, John Lewis and Gordon Haslop had each had a turn at flying the Auster from water. During one of the flights the plane was damaged during take-off since the pilot had not had training with pontoons and which cause an aircraft to behave quite differently especially during take-off. The mishap caused a delay of two days as the party waited for the broken strut to be repaired by the blacksmith at the Grytviken whaling station. Although he had some experience with a float plane Claydon asked Fuchs if he could also fly the plane to get the feel of its handling and performance. Since they had lost two days Fuchs was very reluctant to countenance any further delay. Fuchs only relented when Claydon told him he would not fly the plane in Antarctica unless he was able to try it out in South Georgia.³¹⁶ Fuchs, who was not used to argument, should now have been very pleased that Claydon had stood his ground.

The ship and the men worked for three days to reach the nearest open lead and on 23 January the ice loosened its grip. At the same moment a helicopter from *HMS Protector* which was in the vicinity having been sent on a possible rescue mission, flew overhead after failing to reach the ship on its first attempt. In a letter to his Group Captain, Lewis light-heartedly commented “I think the Navy are a little disappointed that they couldn't rescue us, but we shall ensure that normal friendly relations continue.”³¹⁷ In his report Miller offered a second explanation for the radical route through the pack chosen by Fuchs and agreed, with some reluctance according to Hillary's later account, by Captain Marø.³¹⁸ Apparently the Argentinean ship *General San Martin* had followed an even more westerly route the previous year and was able to easily get through to the coast. What had been overlooked was that the

³¹⁵ Air Ministry, 9 February 1956

³¹⁶ Claydon, 8 July 1997

³¹⁷ Lewis, 23 January 1956

³¹⁸ Hillary, 1961, p.26

General San Martin was an Antarctic class ice-breaker. The *Theron* voyage was a difficult learning experience for Fuchs but extremely valuable for the New Zealand party members. Miller gave a scathing critique of the unloading process echoing concerns that Hillary felt and that are recorded in *Eight Men in a Crate*. He also described a dangerous incident caused by a severe storm that tore the ship from its moorings and stranded five men ashore for a very bitter overnight stay. Regarding the supplies available to the men Miller wrote:

*There was fuel in 44 gallon drums but no primus [for cooking stoves] except the survival kit primus found in the aircraft and no utensils of any kind. More serious was the absence of sleeping bags, blankets, and spare clothing. Fortunately, a nasty situation was averted by the use of an engine heating unit in one of the weasels.*³¹⁹

Miller then listed the first materials that should be placed ashore during the unloading of a ship in Antarctica. The New Zealanders took note of these issues and would address them with an improved sequence for stacking the supplies and equipment later loaded onto the *Endeavour*.

The unloading of the *Theron* was carried out in great haste and in sometimes violent weather. Instead of the expected three or four weeks in which time the base would have been erected and the stores hauled up to the base site from the bay ice landing area, the unloading was cut short to only nine days. By 5 February the polar winter was closing in and new ice had started to form, sending an urgent signal to the ship's captain that time had run out and the ship must depart immediately.³²⁰ At this point Fuchs held a meeting with the over-wintering party of eight men asking if they were prepared to stay on and establish the base. Ken Blaiklock, leader of the over-wintering party, related that Fuchs warned the men that it would not be an easy task adding "...if we declined, the expedition might never come off." Blaiklock is also of the opinion that the advance establishment of the main base was essential to expedition success, reasoning that there was not sufficient time in one season to build both Shackleton base and the inland base at South Ice.³²¹ Given the time it took for the *Theron* to reach Vahsel Bay and, the following year, for the crossing party to travel from Shackleton to South Ice, he

³¹⁹ Miller, (June 1956)

³²⁰ After their return to England Fuchs recommended that Captain Marø and the crew of the *Theron* be recognised for their seamanship and support of the expedition.

³²¹ Blaiklock, Ken, Correspondence with the author, 1 September 2010

may have been right. An issue of a different sort was encountered by Miller on his return to London from the Weddell Sea. He had been assigned responsibility for procuring supplies and equipment for the New Zealand expedition. In his report Miller recounted that the process involving Britain and New Zealand was “not proceeding as smoothly as was ...at first envisaged.” He attributed the difficulty as being partially due to the different organisation structures employed by each country’s TAE team, the main problem being the heavily staffed and less efficient decision making process of the British contingent.

Miller listed his key observations as follows:

TAE London

- 1) Did not appreciate the staffing problem in New Zealand until this was explained to them.*
- 2) Have always resented the Ross Sea end of TAE concerning themselves with IGY with obvious increased and specialised demands in hutting and generating power.*
- 3) Have erroneously and, I believe, unconsciously thought that TAE London should dictate the whole policy.*
- 4) Have been too ready to blame New Zealand for all the problems when they should realize firstly that they solved their own problems with a large staff the year before, and secondly that the problems had all largely arisen out of the obligatory deference to U.K. suppliers*

By the beginning of April, New Zealand was obviously wishing to push ahead with procurement, while TAE London was not geared to assist. On some issues New Zealand pushed ahead which was resisted, or at least not relished, by TAE. Consequently cables, decisions, queries, letters, all quickly became out of step with the result that TAE London came to look for the worst in all things and

*almost seriously came to regard the Ross Sea Party as the necessary but all too ugly duckling.*³²²

It is clear that Britain held a superior attitude towards its antipodean colony, at least to an extent that was noticed by Miller, purportedly the most fair-minded and moderate member of the New Zealand party. Things did eventually get ironed out with, as reported by Miller, a phone conversation being especially helpful. Miller then recounted his trip to Norway with Hillary and David Pratt, the chief engineer in Fuchs' party. This was in order to visit the Eikmaskin factory at Jotunhimen which was carrying out experiments with Ferguson tractors and particularly the use of full tracks vs. partial tracks. Miller and Pratt then called on the Ferguson tractor factory in Coventry and suggested a number of design improvements for their tractors that had surfaced while establishing Shackleton base. They also searched out skiing equipment resulting in the eventual order of this equipment from a Norwegian supplier. Interestingly Miller was able to meet up with Duncan Carse with whom he had ample opportunity to discuss their mutual experiences in the Antarctic.



Figure 22: Hillary driving Ferguson tractor while unloading the *Theron* at Vahsel Bay

Note: The tractor only employs a half-track at this stage

Photo: TAE photo archive, ATL, Wellington

³²² Miller, June 1956

New Zealand Advance Parties

New Zealand sent two advance parties to Antarctica. One, involving three men, was transported to McMurdo Sound with *Operation Deep Freeze*. The other consisted of one individual, Harry Ayres, who accompanied Australia's ANARE expedition under Philip Law to Mawson Station in the Australian Antarctic Territory.

Three New Zealand Observers Sail South with Operation Deep Freeze in 1955

In December 1955 at about the same time as *Theron* was departing from London, three New Zealand 'observers' of widely different backgrounds were about to be ferried down to McMurdo Sound on the US icebreaker *Edisto* and the cargo ship *Greenville Victory* both docked at the wharf in Wellington. *Edisto* and *Greenville Victory* were part of a fleet of ships of the US Navy's Task Force 43 supporting the American IGY initiative *Operation Deep Freeze*. George Dufek, now promoted to 'Rear Admiral' was making good on the commitment he had given to Sir Edmund Hillary to transport three New Zealand observers to McMurdo Sound. This promise was made a few months earlier at the July CSAGI meeting in Paris where Hillary and Dufek, then a Captain, first met. There the three would remain, hosted by the Americans until the close of the summer season in March 1956. The three Kiwis combined an eclectic mix of skill sets and personalities. In retrospect they had been given a challenging task and it is not surprising that complete unanimity was never achieved. At its simplest their task was merely to confirm the decision that Fuchs had already made, but they soon learned that nothing is simple in the Antarctic.

The leader of the group was geophysicist, Dr Trevor Hatherton, a Yorkshireman who had immigrated to New Zealand after completing his studies at Imperial College, London, and risen to prominence under the tutelage of eminent scientist Ernest Marsden. Hatherton also had a useful interest in mountaineering and skiing.³²³ The second member of the group was a young geologist and accomplished mountaineer Bernard 'Bernie' Gunn. Gunn had performed significant geological work in New Zealand's Southern Alps and was an avid outdoor enthusiast who displayed a wide range of practical skills. Completing the trio was a World War II decorated New Zealand naval officer Lt. Commander William 'Bill' Smith DSO. Their mission was to search out a site for the planned New Zealand base to be called 'Scott Base' as a nod to the British 'Shackleton' base. They would also focus their attention on determining a passable route from the base site to the polar plateau. This route must be

³²³ Hatherton, 2 May 1992

suitable for Fuchs' Sno-cats to traverse during the final leg of the crossing journey which would entail a precarious ten-thousand foot glacier descent from the plateau. In addition, they were asked to keep a close eye on the techniques used by the Americans in building their base and to observe any other methods or ideas that would benefit New Zealand's expedition the following year, assessing such items as equipment, food provisions, and clothing. Another objective was to gain a better understanding of United States scientific intentions for the IGY.³²⁴

In his original planning for the TAE, Fuchs had intended to descend into McMurdo Sound via the Ferrar Glacier. There were several reasons for choosing this path. First, it satisfied the geophysical survey requirements of the expedition in that it offered the longest possible traverse atop the plateau. This assured a more extensive study of the underlying continental topography. A primary scientific goal of the expedition was to determine whether Antarctica consisted of one integral craton or two distinct continental land masses. Secondly, Scott's Western Party, under the leadership of Albert Armitage, had ascended part of the Ferrar Glacier during the *Discovery* expedition of 1901-1904 and did not raise any particular concerns.³²⁵ In addition, using the Ferrar route meant that the crossing party would cover a considerable distance in Australian Antarctic Territory which added to the 'Commonwealth' tone of the expedition and might serve to ease the decision for Australia to participate. Only two other Ross Sea glaciers were known to the world in 1950. These were the Beardmore, first traversed by Shackleton in 1908, and the Axel Heiberg. These glaciers had been used by Scott and Amundsen for their respective journeys to the South Pole in 1911-1912. Although they offered shorter routes to the pole they did not satisfy the TAE scientific requirements. Lying much further to the south, these glaciers descend from the plateau too soon thus limiting the value of Fuchs' planned seismic programme. Another, perhaps obvious, point was that in order to establish depots for Fuchs, the Ross Sea party needed to reach the polar plateau using the same route that the crossing party would use for their descent. Because of its proximity to the Ferrar Glacier, Butter Point³²⁶, which is located on the Western shore of McMurdo Sound near the foot of the glacier at New Harbour, was expected to offer the best location for the crossing party's reception base. It then became the task of the New Zealand

³²⁴ Helm-Miller, 1964, pp. 71-81.

³²⁵ Scott, 1950, pp. 510-516

³²⁶ The name Butter Point came from the fact that Scott had located a depot of butter there on his 1901 expedition

advance reconnaissance team in McMurdo Sound to examine these areas and advise the Ross Sea Committee on their suitability.

The US Navy provided generous support to the three New Zealanders during their sojourn in McMurdo Sound. Gunn had quickly formed good relations with the US Navy pilots and was flown over an extensive area of the Western Ranges in order that he might assess the various glaciers for a possible route up to the polar plateau. In addition, US Navy helicopters transported them to and from the foot of the Ferrar Glacier so they could perform further reconnaissance journeys on foot. Ideally, the plateau access route would accommodate both dog-teams and Fuchs' Sno-cats. Tractors had never before been taken to the Plateau. They constituted an entirely new and untried aspect of Antarctic exploration. The thought that New Zealand's Ferguson 'farm' tractors might ascend to the plateau, least of all go to the Pole, was the furthest thing from the minds of the advance party at this time although Hillary, now at Vahsel Bay, was contemplating that very possibility. According to the initial expedition plan, the ultimate goal of Hillary's team was to establish a depot at the foot of Mount Albert Markham about three hundred miles to the south. This was the agreed rendezvous point where Hillary would meet the arrival of Fuchs and his crossing party.³²⁷ Revealing the extent of his early thinking, Hillary had made a request of USN Captain Ketchum asking him to assist the three New Zealanders to closely examine three areas in McMurdo Sound "... from the air, sea and land". These were the Dailey Islands and Butter Point as potential base sites and the Koettlitz Glacier as a possible route to the polar plateau.³²⁸

Harry Ayres and ANARE

The second New Zealand advance journey to Antarctica has received little recognition. Harry Ayres, Hillary's mountaineering mentor and the first person that Hillary identified for his TAE team, had been assigned responsibility for the dogs that would form a major part of the New Zealand transport capability once on the ice. Ayres, at forty-two the oldest member of the New Zealand Support Party, had initially been rejected on medical grounds but was conveniently cleared in a subsequent examination by a more sympathetic physician.³²⁹ As part of their Commonwealth contribution towards the TAE, Australia donated thirty adult

³²⁷ Hillary, 1958, pp. 8-9

³²⁸ Hillary, 11 November 1955

³²⁹ Hillary, 2004

huskies plus pups to the New Zealand expedition.³³⁰ Philip Law, the leader of Australia's ANARE had, at Hillary's request, agreed to include Ayres as a member of his 1955-56 expedition in order to select the dogs and help return them to New Zealand.

Australia had by now spent two seasons in the Antarctic and Ayres would try to learn as much as possible from their considerable experience. His most important discovery was that the Australian huts were of excellent design, simple to construct (assemble would be a better term), and warm and robust in Antarctic weather conditions. Mawson Station is located in an area of Antarctica known for its inhospitable climate. As a result, in addition to the New Zealand huts being modelled after the Australian design, those that were insulated would actually be constructed in Australia. While journeying south an unforeseen incident occurred during a landing that Law had requested at Davis Bay, an incident that would make Law forever grateful for Ayres presence. As they were attempting to reach the level surface above the shelf ice barrier a steep slope remained to be scaled. During this section of the climb the third member of their party of three slipped, causing Law to also lose his footing and the two began to tumble downward. Fortunately, they were all roped together and Ayres, sensing the twitch in the rope, with his strength and quick mountaineering reflex realised what was happening. He immediately plunged his ice axe deep into the slope and managed to hold the two men until Law and his companion could regain their footing. In his autobiography, Law credits Ayres with saving his life. As Law recounted "...we were three quarters of the way up [the slope] which fell straight into the sea, there was no one around... We'd have had ten minutes of struggling and that would have been the end".³³¹ In his own trip report Ayres, ever the modest Kiwi, makes no mention of the incident and merely reported "Three of us made a landing on the continent proper and by step cutting and the use of crampons we were able to make an ascent of the moderately steep ice slope leading to the plateau."³³² In March 1956 Ayres returned to Melbourne aboard the *Kista Dan* with the dogs which were then flown by the RNZAF to Christchurch and trucked to Mount Cook where the New Zealand team would carry out six weeks of ice and snow training on the Tasman Glacier. Ayres closed his report with an apology for its brevity. Regrettably, while waiting for the flight out of Melbourne his car had been stolen in which were stored his copious notes and data.

³³⁰ Helm-Miller, 1964, p. 102, Only twenty-one huskies were able to be delivered and they were joined by another fifteen from the Auckland Zoo.

³³¹ Toohill, 2009, pp. 145-146

³³² Ayres, April 1956



Figure 23: On Tasman Glacier with Beaver aircraft - L to R Sir Edmund Hillary, John Claydon, Bill Cranfield, Harry Ayres and George Marsh

Photo: Courtesy of Mike Breen

Staffing and Training

Both the British and New Zealand parties had either a selection committee or personnel committee with responsibility for staffing their teams. Advertisements were placed in newspapers across Britain and New Zealand. The response was overwhelming with over 600 applications for the New Zealand team alone. Fuchs and Hillary had to rely on their differing backgrounds and experience when it came to selecting their men and both leaders had already decided on several of their key team members before the formal selection process began. Fuchs found that several men who had served with him during his three seasons with FIDS were also keen to take part in the TAE. They were also men in whom he had full confidence. These included his Deputy Leader, David Stratton and Ken Blaiklock with whom he had survived on Stonington Island in the group known as the 'lost eleven'. Blaiklock became leader of the advance party at Shackleton base and once again endured two Antarctic winters in succession before setting out on the crossing journey. One of the first people that Fuchs invited onto his team was New Zealander and Mt Everest Expedition veteran, George Lowe, whom he approached in London in his effort to interest Hillary in the expedition. Lowe was given the position of official expedition photographer and also served as 'interpreter' of Kiwi

jargon. Other men whom Fuchs knew well from FIDS included RAF Squadron Leader John Lewis, Ralph Lenton, radio communications specialist and base construction leader, and Dr George Marsh, physician and dog driver.³³³ They also joined the expedition with Marsh being assigned to the New Zealand party as one of its two British representatives. Three other men who applied early and met the criteria of having polar experience were recent graduates of the British North Greenland Expedition 1952-54 (BNGE) having spent two consecutive seasons in the Arctic. They were glaciologist, Hal Lister, surveyor, Richard Brooke and engineer, Roy Homard. Lister was one of three men along with Australian geologist, Jon Stephenson and Ken Blaiklock who would spend their winter at the advance base, South Ice, so named by glaciologist Hal Lister in counterpoint to the BNGE base 'North Ice'.³³⁴ Brooke, also an experienced dog-driver, was later assigned with Marsh to the Ross Sea Support Party as its second British representative. He had met Fuchs prior to joining the BNGE while serving on the *John Biscoe* in support of FIDS.³³⁵

Hillary had similarly pre-selected several members of his party. The first person Hillary chose for his team was his mountaineering mentor Harry Ayres. He had unsuccessfully argued with John Hunt for Ayres inclusion on the Everest expedition and he was not about to disappoint his climbing mentor for a second time. In addition to his responsibility for the dogs Ayres would carry out extensive sledging journeys with surveyor Roy Carlyon, including a first traverse of the Darwin Glacier with Carlyon, pilot Bill Cranfield and the cook, William Bucknell. Hillary's second pick was chief mechanic and inventor, Jim Bates. Bates had first met Hillary while assisting the family with their beekeeping operation at Tuakau, forty miles south of Auckland, and the two had struck up a friendship often skiing together. His ingenuity had greatly impressed Hillary, a fact that would bode well for the modification of the Ferguson tractors and their eventual trip to the Pole. Not surprisingly, Hillary had a penchant for selecting people with mountaineering experience. One of these was engineer, Murray Ellis, son of the founder of the Dunedin based outdoor clothing manufacturer, Arthur Ellis & Sons. Hillary had used their products on his ascent of Everest and was convinced of their superiority, ensuring that they would supply his party with clothing. Another person with climbing experience was Murray Douglas who had originally been assigned as a member of the summer party for the 1956-57 season. However, Hillary

³³³ Fuchs, 1990, p. 224-229

³³⁴ Stephenson, J, Interview with the author, 21 November 2006

³³⁵ Brooke, 2007

had seen the need for an extra person to help Ayres out with the dogs and decided that Douglas should remain for the coming year. Hillary had not gained Ross Sea Committee approval for this change and towards the end of the summer season rather than make a formal request, he decided to send Douglas on an extended sledging journey to ensure that *Endeavour* would have sailed north by the time he returned to Scott Base. The RSC were not amused calling Hillary's gambit a "...a somewhat high-handed action" and with no practical alternative were forced to acquiesce and give their consent.³³⁶ Hillary had begun to pull at the bit revealing his independence at an early stage. This was the start of a trend that would only become more pronounced during the months ahead.

Hillary and his entire party, including the five IGY scientists, carried out six weeks of intensive training in the Southern Alps while Fuchs relied on the *Theron* voyage and his team member's prior experience as being sufficient preparation.

Base Site Selection

A major task for the parties was finding a site for their respective bases, one, near the Weddell Sea, as a departure point for the expedition's crossing party and the other, near the Ross Sea, at the opposite side of the continent as a joint station for the New Zealand TAE and IGY parties. The New Zealand base would also serve as the reception point for the successful crossing party. The two British bases, Shackleton and South Ice, were planned as temporary or 'throw-away' buildings, whereas the New Zealand base was envisaged as possibly becoming a permanent facility at least for another year until the end of the IGY. To the dismay of both Fuchs and Hillary, this would greatly increase its cost to more than three times that of the British bases. However, in this instance the government held sway over the expedition leaders to the benefit of New Zealand's continuing Antarctic programme after the IGY. Both base installations involved a considerable amount of analysis, debate, and in the end fortuitous luck in their successful establishment. The sites were finally determined by a confluence of factors including the IGY scientific needs, the local weather conditions and state of the ice pack, as well as political and cost considerations. The bases are also interesting from the aspect of their design and construction. The hut designs exemplify one of several sharp contrasts between the British and New Zealand methods in the Antarctic.

³³⁶ Ross Sea Committee, 18 March 1957

The UK Base – ‘Shackleton’

Fuchs’ original thinking allowed for two possible departure points for his crossing attempt. In the initial 26 page plan that he presented to the Polar Committee in March 1953, he had outlined the following assumptions:

1. The route must begin and end in the Falkland Islands Dependency and the Ross Dependency.
2. The route must include the Pole area.
3. Assistance may be expected from the Commonwealth and from the services.
4. The personnel will be selected from the nations taking part.
5. The supply conditions must be sufficiently flexible to ensure that the safety factor remains high.
6. The importance of the scientific results achieved must be sufficiently great to justify the combined Commonwealth effort involved

His plan contained several interesting items including the conclusion that a descending route for tractors to the coast from the plateau was not essential as the vehicles could be abandoned and the party could continue on foot or by dog sledge.³³⁷ Fuchs was an expert dog handler and was not adverse to hardship. His experiences in FIDS had required the greatest of fortitude and determination and he had both qualities in ample measure. Fuchs also discussed the pros and cons of the reverse route i.e. from the Ross Dependency to the Weddell Sea. He rejected this option to ensure certainty of having a base and a ship in place on his arrival at the opposite coast. The Weddell Sea coast did not offer that certainty whereas McMurdo Sound offered more assurance regarding accessibility. Fuchs presented two possible starting points, Vahsel Bay, which Shackleton had intended as his departure point, and Stonington Island, in Marguerite Bay off the west coast of Graham Land. This was the site of FIDS Base ‘E’ and an area familiar to Fuchs through his years of exploration with FIDS. For TAE purposes his first choice as departure point had been Stonington Island. He knew the topography of the Peninsula well having traversed large parts of it on extended journeys by dog team with his FIDS colleagues. There was the additional benefit that his party could use the FIDS facility, Base ‘E’, already established and to which access was more assured. An additional attraction was that Stonington Island was more politically desirable as a departure point since it would strengthen Britain’s national presence on the Peninsula and hence Britain’s sovereignty claim. Vahsel Bay, which required building a new base and navigating the worrisome Weddell Sea, was much less certain and completely unknown to Fuchs. Its last

³³⁷ Fuchs, March 1953

visitors were from Filchner's expedition of 1912 in the *Deutschland*, during the heroic age. The major disadvantage was that the Stonington Island route was 700 miles further from McMurdo Sound than the route from Vahsel Bay. This would entail significant additional supply and logistics costs. It would also extend the duration and risk of the journey. However, in the first draft of his plan as presented to the Polar Committee in March 1953, Fuchs identified Vahsel Bay as his preferred departure point. Surprisingly, a year later he returned to the Stonington Island option and considered cancelling his plan to use Vahsel Bay. As late as January 1954 several key decisions had yet to be taken including the timing of the expedition. Fuchs also remained undecided as to his point of departure for the crossing journey. Which shall it be - Stonington Island or Vahsel Bay? By June 1954 he was ready to discuss his latest recommendation at the inaugural meeting of the TAE General Committee held 24 June 1954 where the minutes recorded:

*The Chairman opened the meeting by asking Dr Fuchs to make a statement regarding recent modifications to the original plans. Dr Fuchs stated that a possibility of obtaining large scale air support from the R.A.F. had made it feasible to use Stonington Island as the departure base. The disadvantages of the route from Stonington Island largely disappeared with the use of air support. It was clearly politically advantageous to operate the necessary ships and aircraft from the Graham Land sector of the Dependencies*³³⁸

The RAF later withdrew their offer of extended air support which finally eliminated that option. In addition, the desire to co-locate with the IGY base and the added cost and risk due to a thirty-three percent increase in travelling distance, outweighed the political advantages of Stonington Island and Vahsel Bay remained the targeted base site.

A further exchange at the June 1954 COM meeting revealed that the date of the crossing had also not been finalised. Fuchs was asked whether it was his intention to begin the crossing in 1955 to which he replied that it was "...provided that the necessary money was available by October this year."³³⁹ Although Kirwan expressed his doubts about the timing both Frank Debenham and Clifford as well as the Chairman, Sir John Slessor agreed with Fuchs feeling that one year was sufficient to complete preparations. At this point Gordon Robin, veteran of

³³⁸ COM Minutes, 24 June 1954

³³⁹ Ibid

the NBSE, urged restraint suggesting that it might be advantageous for the crossing to “...take the field during the Geophysical Year 1957, rather than earlier.” Fuchs was not enthused by this suggestion and showed his aversion to co-mingle his TAE with Britain’s IGY project and responded that “...it would be an advantage to New Zealand to have a base already set up which it could continue to maintain.”³⁴⁰ Several factors came into the final decision but ultimately financial expediency trumped political gain. A major consideration was that, due to the one year postponement in their schedule and the now strong overlap between TAE and IGY timing, a joint base with the British IGY team was seen to be the ideal solution for containing expedition costs as much as possible.

Also, at the general Committee meeting of June 1954, the IGY was first brought into the picture. Wordie proposed that, as the UK’s lead body for the IGY, and in light of the National IGY Committee recommendation that a UK base should be built in Vahsel Bay, the Royal Society should consider:

- a) that the TAE and the IGY would share a ship
- b) that Fuchs should take charge of both parties
- c) that the IGY should be a FIDS commitment.

Of these only item (b) was carried.

The committee agreed, with the consent of the Royal Society, that Fuchs would have overall command of both the UK IGY and the TAE parties while they were in the same vicinity. This was to ensure a single chain of command for the two parties back to London and help defray some administrative costs.³⁴¹ Wordie then remarked that the Royal Society wanted to set up a base at Vahsel Bay using an American icebreaker rather than the expedition’s ship. He believed that “...the operations of the IGY and the TAE must be kept separate at this stage.”³⁴² These comments highlight a major issue that arose at this early stage of the expedition which was brought about by the co-mingling in Britain of the TAE and the IGY projects.

³⁴⁰ Ibid

³⁴¹ Since the two parties were never co-located the arrangement remained academic.

³⁴² COM Minutes, 15 April 1955

The contentious debate that faced the British IGY effort was over the perceived need for an ice-breaker if the UK were to establish its IGY base at Vahsel Bay. Wordie, who did not feel that one was necessary, had been out-voted on the issue at a Committee meeting which he chaired. Sweden's pre-eminent polar scientist Harald Sverdrup had been consulted on the matter. His advice had been ambiguous stating that no cargo vessel could penetrate the ice-pack. However, "...on the other hand if the seal catcher is large enough...such a vessel has a fair chance of reaching Vahsel Bay..."³⁴³ No British ice-breaker was available and an informal approach for assistance from the Americans had "...received a flat refusal."³⁴⁴ The issue threatened the Royal Society's IGY plans for the Antarctic. It also led to a decision by Sir David Brunt, Chair of the British National Committee for the IGY, to advise Fuchs that the Royal Society no longer wished to share any "...facilities, ships, etc. with the trans-Antarctic project" feeling that he had been "...led up the garden path."³⁴⁵ After further discussion with Roberts and Kirwan of the RGS the Royal Society decided to postpone its final decision regarding a base on the Weddell Sea coast pending the results of the upcoming CSAGI conference to be held in Paris in July. It was reported at a private meeting that Brunt "...had some harsh words to say about the Trans-Antarctic venture muddling up the position of the I.G.Y." The note mentioned Brunt's personal feeling that "...even the sharing of shipping between the two ventures is undesirable."³⁴⁶ That was precisely how things turned out six months later when the two parties sailed to establish their separate bases, the TAE party in the *Theron*, and the IGY party in the *Tottan*. The Royal Society, being unsuccessful at obtaining ice-breaker assistance from the United States, had begun to look for an alternate site "... a hundred miles or so" from Vahsel Bay.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Brunt's antipathy had softened by the following year and both parties travelled on the Norwegian ship *Magga Dan* on its voyage south.

In a break with the supposed political neutrality of the IGY sovereignty again reared its face with the Royal Society deciding "...to tell the [CSAGI] Conference that they will set up an IGY station at Vahsel Bay: this is in order to forestall the Argentines and save the Royal Society's face." In a margin note one reviewer scribbled: "The Royal Society do not come

³⁴³ Royal Society, 10 June 1955

³⁴⁴ Roberts, 27 May 1955a

³⁴⁵ Roberts, 27 May 1955b

³⁴⁶ Roberts, (1 May 1955)

³⁴⁷ Man, 11 June 1955

out of this very well.³⁴⁸ In the end, for operational reasons, the Royal Society decided to establish its base away from Vahsel Bay but, for political reasons, did not notify anyone of the fact and maintained the ruse right up until the *Tottan* broke through the ice-pack reaching the Caird Coast.

There is a marked contrast in the establishment of the two bases. On 4 January, 1957 *Magga Dan*, having navigated through the Weddell Sea ice pack, arrived at Halley Bay, site of the UK IGY base. In his diary Fuchs' remarked that he found:

*...a very splendid construction...It is very well fitted, especially the sitting-room where they have built what appears to be a brick fireplace, ...At one end of the rooms is a small bar with tankards hanging from the ceiling. There is ample storage space in the loft, there are two dormitories, dining room, bathroom, office and separate rooms allotted to radio...yes - a very good piece of work*³⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the scene at his own Shackleton base, two hundred miles to the east, reflected a mode of tenuous survival reminiscent of Scott's Northern Party of 1911.

During their harrowing 1956 winter, living in tents and a tractor crate at Vahsel Bay through temperatures as low as 65° degrees of frost (-65F), Fuchs' advance party of 8 men made a heroic effort towards building Shackleton Base. However, much was still unfinished by the time the *Magga Dan* arrived in January 1957. Fuchs' diary describes that he found '*...they had been living in one end while the remainder was still under construction. Thus the kitchen, also used as a dining room, was reasonably warm and cosy while the rest of the building was still chill and damp. Indeed there remains a great deal to be done to make the place liveable for 16 men*'.³⁵⁰

Fuchs had flown down to Vahsel Bay in advance of *Magga Dan* which arrived the next day, (13 January) carrying the homeward bound IGY advance party. This group consisted of experienced tradesmen, electricians and carpenters. They quickly got to work completing Shackleton Base over the next two weeks and in the words of physician Rainer Goldsmith:

³⁴⁸ Ibid

³⁴⁹ Fuchs, TAE Journal, 4 January 1957

³⁵⁰ Fuchs, TAE Journal, 12 January 1957

*...Over those few days all we had done and suffered was somehow belittled by the energy of these other people, completing with speed and ease the task we had struggled over so painfully and for so long*³⁵¹

The IGY had thereby made a significant contribution to the TAE. Unlike the advance party season of 1955-56 some sharing of logistical resources occurred during the second Antarctic season. On her journey South *Magga Dan* carried stores for both the IGY and TAE parties. Almost 100 tons of stores were off-loaded at Halley Bay over a seven day period.³⁵²

The New Zealand Base – ‘Scott Base’: PART I (1955-1956)

Three New Zealand Observers join Operation Deep Freeze



Figure 24: Bill Smith trudging around McMurdo Sound looking for a site for Scott Base
Smith is probably at one of the Dailey Islands offshore from Butter Point
Photo: Trevor Hatherton

³⁵¹ Arnold, 2007, p. 127

³⁵² MacDowall, 1999, p 48

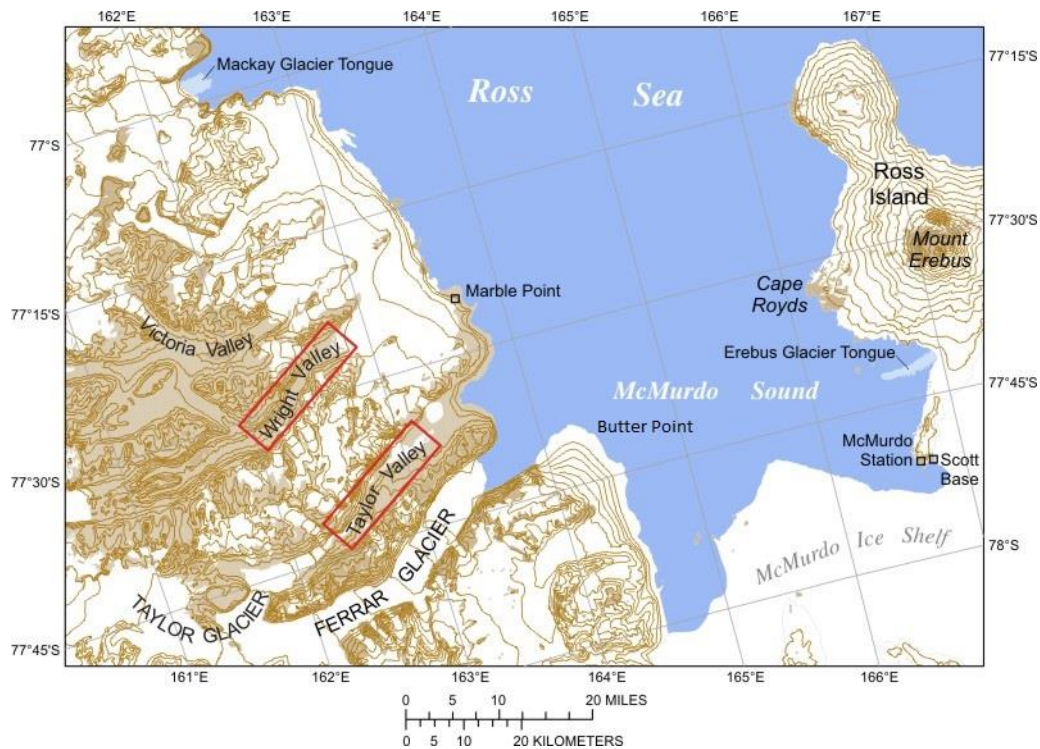


Figure 25: Map of McMurdo Sound showing relative positions of Scott Base, Butter Point and the Ferrar Glacier. They are approximately 35 miles apart.

Source: USGS

Determining a suitable site for the New Zealand base was a much more complicated and problem-ridden affair and was approached in a very different manner. The search stretched over two Antarctic seasons and exemplified the outcomes that can occur when multiple incompatible objectives are brought to bear. Hillary had made it clear that he understood the importance that New Zealand placed on taking control of its participation in the TAE. Having been leader of the Ross Sea party for only three months he wrote Fuchs a letter further expanding his position on the New Zealand responsibilities for the expedition. Firstly, he stated that the RNZAF "...should completely handle the Ross Sea end." In closing, he countered the London Committee's low opinion of New Zealand capabilities telling Fuchs "Undoubtedly the attitude here is that NZ must take full responsibility for and pay for the establishment of the McMurdo Base. I think we have a fair chance of doing it."³⁵³

To their credit the advance party of three New Zealanders, aided by the ever-willing transport of the US Navy, performed a number of heroic exploratory journeys including at least two on

³⁵³ Hillary, August 1955

foot. One of these, carried out by Smith and Hatherton, involved a gruelling six day trek over very difficult terrain, scrambling up rocky moraine slopes as they sought to closely examine a number of locations that had been identified as potential sites for the New Zealand base. Commander Bill Smith, who travelled south aboard the icebreaker *USS Edisto* was sent a telegram while aboard ship from Ed Robertson the head of the New Zealand IGY effort. Robertson specified, in order of priority, the surface type upon which the base must be built. These were: 1) Rock 2) Moraine over rock 3) Grounded ice and 4) Ice over water. His message was labelled 'Urgent' and he enquired whether, if a gravimeter could be sent down on the *USS Glacier*, Smith could take measurements.³⁵⁴ Robertson's interests lay in science and in geophysics in particular. Operational feasibility requirements would occupy a secondary status during this advance reconnaissance expedition.

After being dropped off by helicopter at the mouth of Taylor Valley, which runs into New Harbour, the two Kiwis, accompanied by American reporter Bill Hartigan, trudged over forty miles of spring-thawed bay ice, crossing streams and melt pools and broken craggy ice surfaces while hauling over-loaded sledges carrying hundreds of pounds of gear and supplies. After investigating the Dry Valley area, they walked to Butter Point where Hatherton optimistically noted, after walking up the Piedmont ice, that "...the lower level might be suitable for an aircraft runway and most of the spring and early summer the bay ice could be used as an airstrip."³⁵⁵ Their next stop was Cape Chocolate where they encountered deteriorating ice conditions such that they were often "...up to our calves in water..." Exhaustion was beginning to set in with their crampons breaking on the hard ice and especially after Hartigan developed 'cartilage trouble' and had to be carried on one of the sledges they were hauling. Finally, on the recommendation of Frank Debenham, geologist on Scott's *Terra Nova* expedition, they managed to walk across the bay ice to the westernmost of the Dailey Islands. On closer inspection the island proved to consist of broken scree with no redeeming features whatsoever, and in Hatherton's words "It was obvious that from no point of view would the Dailey Islands be suitable for a base." Finally after six days of dogged exploration and with Smith suffering from a painful condition known as 'water foot' caused by extended immersion in sea-water, they walked back towards Hut Point eventually taking refuge in a plane that was parked out on the American airstrip. There, totally spent,

³⁵⁴ Robertson, 1956

³⁵⁵ Hatherton, TAE diary, 1 January 1956

they passed the night sleeping in the cockpit.³⁵⁶ Their reconnaissance had been thorough and difficult but had not yet produced the result they were seeking. Although Butter Point held the most promise at this stage, they needed to confirm that the site provided reasonable access to a route upwards to the polar plateau. In the case of Butter Point this meant a trek up the Ferrar Glacier.

In their second major journey on foot, this time carried out in the ‘heroic age’ tradition of Scott, the three observers, Hatherton, Gunn, and Smith, man-hauled themselves up the Ferrar Glacier seeking an optimal route for the expedition parties. During this trip they completed the first ascent of Mt Beehive in order to gain a broader view of the surrounding peaks and glacial nevés. Gunn, whose primary interest was geology, became fascinated with the adjoining Kukri Hills after examining the exposed rocks along the way. His ebullient personality and gung-ho attitude endeared him to his American hosts and resulted in his being invited on several flights to explore the various glaciers in the region. One of these sorties later provided the key to resolving one of the critical problems that befell the New Zealand support party after *Endeavour’s* arrival the following year. On 1 and 2 January, 1956, Gunn flew with Lt. Cdr. Henry Jorda, of the US Navy on an extensive reconnaissance flight over the eastern escarpment of the Victoria Land coastal ranges.³⁵⁷ Gunn was now able to eliminate several potential ascent routes to the plateau including the Koettlitz, the Mulock, and the Shackleton glaciers. Even the Dry Valleys were inspected and found unsuitable. In what would be of great importance the next year, Gunn did notice, almost as an aside, that the Skelton Glacier looked quite passable. The Ferrar Glacier was covered in cloud except for the lower two miles, which in his words looked “very rough with open crevasses and large melt pools”. Gunn then suggested that further examination of the Ferrar would be necessary before it could be confirmed as the ascent path.³⁵⁸ Gunn sent a telegram to Arthur Helm, who on-sent it to Hillary aboard the *Theron*, mentioning Gunn’s observation that the Skelton appeared to offer a very promising route to the plateau. The main issue was that the Skelton Glacier was not easily accessible from the proposed base site at Butter Point and so was set aside. Gunn’s observation would later be recalled by Hillary.

³⁵⁶ Hatherton, TAE diary, 4 January 1956

³⁵⁷ *Antarctic, Vol. 1 No. 1*, March 1956, p.3

³⁵⁸ Gunn, 7 January 1956

In the meantime, Hatherton's preliminary report on the reconnaissance that he and Bill Smith performed was submitted to the Ross Sea Committee. His report recommended that Butter Point be utilised as the site for the New Zealand base, now referred to as 'Scott Base'. Hatherton's recommendation is worthy of some discussion.

From the scientific and IGY perspective, Butter Point, being on the Antarctic continent, was considered superior to any site on Ross Island. First, there was less disturbance of sensitive seismic instrumentation from volcanic activity of Mt. Erebus. Second it provided a direct 'line of sight' to New Zealand enabling more effective radio communications to Wellington. It was also better positioned regarding the sun and so offered a possibly better climate.³⁵⁹ However, from the TAE expedition perspective the advantages were much less obvious. As a building site it seemed well suited, but the issues of water supply, food supply from seals for the dogs, aircraft operation and access by ship meant that although the site might have met scientific needs, it did not meet operational requirements. Hatherton's recommendation had effectively eliminated the Skelton Glacier as an ascent route since access from Butter Point was impossible over the bay ice, leaving the Ferrar Glacier as the only alternative path to the plateau. It would be left to Hillary and his team to sort out the consequences during the following summer.

The Ross Sea Committee's newsletter of March 1956 carried the following optimistic statement announcing the New Zealand advance party's findings. "Our three New Zealand observers...have now returned after a very successful trip in which they fully accomplished their mission of reconnoitring a route up the Ferrar Glacier and choosing a site for our base camp [near Butter Point].³⁶⁰ The NZAS journal *Antarctic* edited by Les Quartermain echoed the positive tone stating that after hearing Hatherton's report "...the Ross Sea Committee approved this site at the foot of the Ferrar Glacier as the New Zealand expedition's base... Drainage is excellent...materials and stores can be unloaded upon permanent ice direct from ships and taken to the site without delay...access to the Ferrar Glacier should be possible throughout the year for vehicles and dogs..."³⁶¹ Three months later in their first Annual Report, dated 18 June 1956, the RSC was more circumspect and simply reported "A site for

³⁵⁹ Hatherton, 15 January 1956

³⁶⁰ Ross Sea Committee Newsletter, 1 March 1956

³⁶¹ *Antarctic, Vol.1, No.1*, March 1956, p.3

the New Zealand Base, to be known as Scott Base, was tentatively selected, and alternative routes to the interior were investigated.”³⁶²

In his preliminary report Gunn had made the following statement regarding the route to the Plateau: “The recent reconnaissance by the New Zealand Party up the Ferrar Glacier proved the Ferrar to be the only practical route to the Plateau through the Western Mountains...it became obvious a solid rock base site near the foot of the Ferrar Glacier would be very desirable.” It is important to note that Gunn qualified his statement with a conditional “...through the Western Mountains”. Gunn went on: “While waiting for the helicopter at the foot of the Ferrar Glacier on the return journey, a partial ascent of the Kukri Hills by the writer showed this shelf to be of less than 10° slope and to be at least half a mile wide. A request was made to the Helicopter pilot and a 20 minute visit was made to the Point.”³⁶³ Despite having seen that the Skelton Glacier offered a possibly better route to the plateau Gunn remained steadfast in support of the Ferrar recommendation. A possible explanation is that he accepted that the base must be located at Butter Point which meant that the Ferrar became the only feasible route to the plateau. It would require a strong paradigm shift to oppose this view which meant countermanding both Fuchs and Hatherton which at this stage would have been difficult to justify, especially for a junior member of the party. Gunn’s report then went into a detailed assessment of features of the site and its advantages for various requirements of the expedition such as water supply, aircraft landing strip, radio communications, access for a ship, and access to the Ferrar Glacier. He then dismissed alternate sites at Cape Bernacchi and the Dry Valleys and ended with the following somewhat conflicted observation about locating at Hut Point:

*This is already crowded by the Americans but is the only practical base site if the more southern routes were to be used, e.g. the Skelton or Beardmore Glaciers. It is less accessible from the sea and Mt. Erebus shields radio communications. Air operations facilities are good.*³⁶⁴

Hillary was himself initially uneasy at the prospect of the New Zealand base being located in close proximity to the United States base. In his report a year earlier to Arthur Helm following the CSAGI meeting in Paris, he expressed ‘shock’ that the Americans were

³⁶² Ross Sea Committee, 18 June 1956

³⁶³ Gunn, February 1956

³⁶⁴ Ibid

planning to place a base at McMurdo Sound and this "...with New Zealand approval no less". Hillary then remarked that the large American contingent would "...clutter up our base sites". More importantly he agreed with Fuchs that, as had been the case with Stonington Island and the American, Finn Ronne's RARE, two different nations camped side by side would be problematic and particularly in that the Americans will "...undoubtedly be equipped and provisioned on a luxurious scale."³⁶⁵ Despite the fact that all of Ross Island fell within New Zealand's Ross Dependency, Gunn's sense of courtesy caused him to ascribe right of first occupation of Hut Point to the United States thereby leaving New Zealand with a less attractive alternative. It should be noted that this report was 'preliminary' and was written while Gunn was still in McMurdo Sound. In its defence, the advance party was under considerable pressure from the RSC to find a good base site and a feasible route to the Plateau.

In his final report, written after his return to New Zealand, Gunn recorded the following conclusion regarding the site for Scott Base: "A base site for the New Zealand Trans-Antarctic Party has been selected for recommendation, with the aid of the other N. Z. Observers, Smith and Hatherton. This is situated on the north eastern extremity of the Southern Foothills, between the Ferrar Glacier and Butter Point... The site was first seen from a Skymaster aircraft and later from a helicopter. A twenty minute visit was made by the three N.Z. Observers"³⁶⁶ Gunn capitulated possibly because of his overriding interest in geology. He was attracted to the Kukri hills whereas, in comparison Ross Island being essentially volcanic, offered little of interest geologically speaking.

Gunn was less certain regarding an optimal route to the Polar Plateau. One hindrance was that the observers were not working from a 'greenfield' position. The Ferrar Glacier had been pre-selected by Fuchs and was their first route to consider. After examining photos taken by the Americans during *Operation High Jump*, Gunn reported that

It is possible that this Upper Ferrar route may be better than the Upper Taylor Route taken by Scott and Shackleton. The writer would have preferred to have this possibility explored rather than the already known and mapped route, but in the opinion of Smith and Hatherton it was better to affirm the use of the old one.

³⁶⁵ Hillary, 13 July 1955

³⁶⁶ Gunn, 18 February 1956

*An early exploration in 1957 of the South Arm (Upper Ferrar) is most desirable.*³⁶⁷

Gunn suspected that the Upper Ferrar route led to the Skelton Glacier and provided a better option. Following a flight in a US Navy ‘Neptune’ Gunn revised his opinion and identified the Skelton Glacier as the optimal route to the plateau. In considering over nine possible routes Gunn concluded that the Skelton Glacier offered much promise. His opinion was unfortunately not shared by his two colleagues, an outcome that compounded Hillary’s difficulties on arrival in McMurdo Sound the following year.

As the third ‘observer’ Smith had the principle mission of ensuring that a New Zealand ship would be able to approach the selected New Zealand base site to within a reasonable distance. He deferred to Hatherton and Gunn regarding the actual selection of the site but in his report to the RSC added “Here [Butter Point] it will be possible to make a temporary dump of all equipment on the Bowers-Piedmont Glacier, an area of floating, quasi-permanent ice... The distance from the ship to the proposed site will vary according to the season with a maximum of forty miles in mid-December to a minimum of about five miles early in February (...based on this year’s ice conditions). Smith then anticipated future American aid continuing “It would be possible to reduce the maximum distance considerably, in fact, the entire distance if use were made of an available American ice-breaker to cut a channel to the vicinity of the off-loading site... It is felt that co-operation from the American Task Force would be forthcoming to implement such a course as suggested.”³⁶⁸ Unfortunately, or fortunately as things turned out, the bay ice cover in 1956-57 was very different from that experienced by the Kiwi observers the previous season. It is also clear that United States support in a variety of ways was becoming a staple of New Zealand’s expedition planning from the outset of the TAE.

Trevor Hatherton also wrote a report on returning to Wellington. His account differs substantially from that of Gunn, exposing the disagreement between them and underlining their conflicting interests. Hatherton stated: “Consequently, following the experience gained by Lt Commander Smith and myself on the Base Site Reconnaissance journey, and based on Mr. Gunn’s estimation from his aerial observation that the Ferrar glacier would provide the

³⁶⁷ Gunn, 18 February 1956

³⁶⁸ Smith, 21 February 1956

best approach to the plateau, a somewhat more ambitious journey up the Ferrar Glacier was planned with a view to obtaining ...An estimation of the best route up the glacier.”

Hatherton went into some detail in praising the Ferrar Glacier as a good route to the plateau and wrote “...the Ferrar Glacier has much to commend it...[it] has reasonably favourable base sites disposed around its mouth ...ascent of the Lower Ferrar Glacier presents no difficulty to any form of transport in the form of grade or crevassing...the route to the basin at the junction of the ...glaciers is wide open and easy.” However, Hatherton did admit that a ground reconnaissance would be necessary and stated that with respect to aerial reconnaissance “...it is possible to reject a route but not possible to confirm one.”³⁶⁹ When Hillary and his team arrived in early January the following year they discovered that these encouraging words could not have been further from the truth.

In the report that he sent to the RSC following his arrival in McMurdo Sound Hillary was rather gentle in his rebuke. He described what he found on arrival at Butter Point:

*A helicopter flight across to Butter Point revealed that the bay ice was composed of broken segments of pack frozen together and looked far from easy travelling. We landed on the hut site and Miller [Deputy Leader] and I had a thorough scout around. There appeared to be sufficient room for the hut layout as planned, although the variation in levels was much more than anticipated. In fact, the site although possible was going to be very difficult for building operations. Our main worry was access to the site. In front of it was an enormous melt pool – almost a small lake – and quite impassable. The only possible access was down off the ice from the Bowers Piedmont [glacier]. I went back to the ship feeling that as we were committed to this route [up the nearby Ferrar] we would examine the site more carefully, but feeling far from happy. Captain Ketchum assured me that he would not be prepared to use his heavy tractors over this bay ice.*³⁷⁰

Several factors contributed to the poor result earned by the New Zealand observers. Ice conditions can change dramatically from one year to the next and possibly they were much more favourable the previous summer. More evident was the fact that New Zealand had no

³⁶⁹ Hatherton, February 1956

³⁷⁰ Hillary, 20 February, 1957

experience in the region and its lack of knowledge of the geography was now a major impediment to good decision making. They were relying on the opinion of the British who were referring back to the experience of Scott some fifty years earlier. American knowledge of the area at this time was equally deficient.

As John Claydon stated in his subsequent Antarctic Flight report³⁷¹ :

“The New Zealand observers attached to the 1955 “Deep Freeze” Expedition had recommended the above base site [Butter Point] after careful study of other areas but was a rather unfortunate choice from the Expedition point of view as the two primary qualifications for a base were:

- a) Suitable access by ground parties to the Polar Plateau [and]
- b) Satisfactory surface for aircraft operation

A more serious issue for this advance party was the skill set of the observers themselves. Apart from having no previous experience of Antarctic conditions they were experts in diverse fields and had competing interests. Hatherton was a geophysicist and wanted to distance himself from Ross Island. He also wanted to have a clear radio communication path north to Wellington. Gunn was a geologist and was determined to carry out geological investigations on the continent. The volcanic terrain of Ross Island held little scientific interest for him. Smith was a navy man and cared only that his ship would be able to safely berth somewhere near Butter Point. The vital need of a serviceable airstrip close by the base was given insufficient consideration. The need to harvest seals to feed the dogs and of snow covered ground to tether them and provide cover through the winter months seems to have been ignored. Another problem was that the rocky slopes of the chosen site had only distant ice and snow accumulations which would make it difficult to maintain an adequate supply of water for the base. In summary, the poor selection of the base site, later magnified by the fact that the proposed route up the Ferrar would prove equally unworkable would leave Hillary with the most serious crisis of the entire New Zealand expedition.

³⁷¹ Claydon, 1958, p. 41

Dr. Trevor Hatherton made a pithy observation on his return from McMurdo Sound following his advance party observer role with *Operation Deep Freeze*. The journey had been exhausting for him and the task one year ahead seemed daunting. In comparing New Zealand's task with Scott's fifty years prior he wrote:

Lt Cdr. Smith and myself are considering entering a rest home for the remainder of the year, in preparation for Base building next summer. When our labours are compared with those of Scott's team, I wonder in which direction progress lies. While Scott had only one hut to build, we have twelve. Scott had no means of wireless communication and so avoided not only the problem of finding space for about twenty masts anything up to 80 ft. high, but also the labour of putting them up. The benefit of air support was not available in the old days, but neither was the headache of having to transport, handle and store many thousands of gallons of aviation gasoline (or 'avgas' as the Americans have it) and all this has to be done with only the same number of men and not much advantage in mechanical power. It will be a race against time to get the base into order before the winter sets in; a job second only to the herculean labour of financing the expedition. Ulcers look like being the occupational disease of explorers and appeal secretaries alike.³⁷²

To sum up, the New Zealand advance party was constrained by a variety of factors in carrying out its mission. These included:

1. Fuchs had identified the Ferrar Glacier as the likely route to and from the plateau and the reception base would have to be located nearby.
2. The party members were conflicted in prioritising between the needs of the TAE expedition, the needs of the scientific IGY programme and their own personal interests.
3. The party had no prior experience in the region and had to rely on the accounts of heroic age explorers. This caused them to waste precious time and energy trudging out to areas such as the Dailey Islands.
4. They were working under a very tight timeline, with no logistics resources of their own, and operating on the goodwill of the US Navy.

³⁷²Ross Sea Committee Newsletter, 1 March 1956

5. Unlike the crossing party base at Shackleton, the New Zealand base was intended to serve both the TAE and IGY needs until at least the end of 1958. There was also a possibility that it would be utilised for more permanent occupation.



**Figure 26: Bill Smith and Bernie Gunn preparing to explore the Ferrar Glacier – 1956
They are at New Harbour with the Cathedral Rocks on the left and the Kukri Hills to
the right.**

Photo: Trevor Hatherton

The New Zealand Base – ‘Scott Base’: PART II (1956-1957)

After the arrival of *Endeavour* at McMurdo Sound

The New Zealand team, aboard *HMNZS Endeavour*, departed from Bluff on 21 December, 1956, carrying with them the hopes and best wishes of all New Zealanders. This voyage was the culmination of three years of tremendous effort by many dedicated individuals, organisations, associations and corporations. However, despite all the planning and preparation that had been done, Hillary and his team were quickly faced with significant challenges on their arrival in McMurdo Sound. The first problem they encountered was very thick pack-ice as the *Endeavour* sailed towards Butter Point. Despite the best efforts of Captain Kirkwood the ship eventually could make no further headway and was unable to make any landing near the proposed base site. Kirkwood then sent a message to Admiral Dufek requesting aid. The *USS Glacier*, at that time the world’s most powerful ice-breaker, was immediately sent to assist the New Zealand ship, arriving within a few hours. He made his request with some reluctance. As Kirkwood noted in his report: “it went against the grain, to do so”.³⁷³ Since part of the problem was that the *Endeavour* had not been sailing in the direction earlier recommended by the Americans, New Zealand pilot John Claydon quickly observed that this was an occasion when the Auster aircraft would have been invaluable had it not been damaged during the departure from Lyttelton.³⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the ship was soon sailing freely and Hillary expressed his emotions at the time:

*...The sights of Erebus and all the peaks of the Victoria Land mountains and glaciers were beautiful beyond belief and excitement rose as we came closer and closer to the Ferrar glacier and Butter Point.*³⁷⁵

Spirits were high and the New Zealand team looked forward to establishing Scott Base near Butter Point and beginning their exploration of the Ferrar Glacier route to the polar plateau. By late afternoon the ship had been secured along the bay ice next to the American ice-breaker and within eight miles of Butter Point. That evening, Hillary, Kirkwood, Admiral Dufek and Capt. Ketchum dined on board the *Glacier*. Although Dufek was prepared to assist Hillary in breaking a channel towards Butter Point, he made it clear that the Americans were

³⁷³ Kirkwood, March 1957, p.5

³⁷⁴ Claydon, TAE diary, 4 January 1957

³⁷⁵ Hillary, TAE diary, 4 January 1957

not impressed with its suitability as a site for the New Zealand base.³⁷⁶ After dinner, Kirkwood, Miller, and Hillary were flown to the proposed site by US helicopter for a look around. Miller's first impression was mixed, 'Site is a good one although there are many difficulties in the approach'³⁷⁷ At this point the Support Party and the Antarctic Flight in particular sharply felt the loss of their Auster reconnaissance aircraft which placed them at a great disadvantage. The Auster had been badly damaged during *Endeavour's* mid-night departure from the wharf in Lyttelton. This had occurred after a sumptuous dinner hosted by the Duke of Edinburgh aboard the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. The *Endeavour* had a tight berth adjacent to a cargo ship and the Auster's long wings protruded slightly over the side of the ship. These factors left no margin for error and when one of the hawsers had been inadvertently left tied to the wharf, the stern of the hapless ship swung over to one side and a collision ensued, crumpling the plane's wing.³⁷⁸ Repairs were attempted in Dunedin, the next port of call, using the facilities of the airport at Taieri. After two days of effort in an attempt to find a replacement wing further delay was not possible and the ship had to continue its journey southward. It would be another three weeks before the repaired wing could be transported to McMurdo Sound by USN Globemaster. This unfortunate mishap severely limited Hillary's reconnaissance capability leaving the New Zealanders highly dependent on US Navy helicopters during the critical first few days after arrival.

A few days later, having had the opportunity to walk on the Butter Point site, Miller described his visit to the site stating "it was like walking on a chandelier...tinkling ice fragments making a continual crashing sound".³⁷⁹ Kirkwood was more direct. He noted that Hillary was "satisfied but slightly disillusioned" while his own opinion was clear: "I was disappointed with the site. It was dismal in outlook and the transport of stores over the bay ice was obviously not going to be easy"³⁸⁰ Hillary was most concerned about the difficulties of access that the site presented. He observed wryly "We are going to require great determination and adaptability to get this Base established and operating efficiently." His dejection deepened as he pondered their predicament "I returned to the *Endeavour* a little overwhelmed at the magnitude of our tasks. Pray God I am capable of meeting them and

³⁷⁶ Ibid, p.5

³⁷⁷ Miller, TAE diary, 4 January 1957

³⁷⁸ One witness blamed overindulgence at the dinner for the mishap.

³⁷⁹ Ibid

³⁸⁰ Kirkwood, March 1957, p. 5

overcoming them.”³⁸¹ However, Hillary was not one to give up easily and further effort was made to evaluate the site. On the following morning, 5 January, all efforts were put into unloading the *Endeavour*. Time was of the essence as the Americans had also indicated that the New Zealand equipment and supplies carried south by the cargo ship *John R Towle* had to be off-loaded as soon as possible. Hillary then set off in a Ferguson tractor to try to find a suitable route to the site. The condition of the sea ice made travel very difficult due to the rough surface and the pressure ridges. John Claydon recorded “the prospect of a good approach to the base site looked grim.... A wide tide crack and melt pools between the sea ice and the terminal face made access impossible.”³⁸² The site was closely examined, but it failed on at least four counts:

1. Unloading and transporting gear and supplies from the *John R Towle* and *Endeavour* would have been impossible before the summer break-up of the bay ice.
2. Unloading might have been done at Butter Point itself (4 miles north of the proposed site), however, the Bowers Piedmont Glacier effectively blocked the path to the site.
3. It was impossible to get dogs teams or tractors, onto the Ferrar Glacier from the sea ice. This would deny access to the Polar Plateau (The Ferrar was still the chosen route to the Plateau at this point)
4. Operating the aircraft from the sea ice beyond the end of January would have been impossible due to break-up.

As Claydon noted in his report “It was generally agreed that while it may have been an ideal site for scientific studies, it was quite impossible from the Expedition point of view.”³⁸³ This outcome was an unfortunate result of combining both the IGY and the TAE criteria into the prior year’s advance reconnaissance party brief. For the next two days Hillary and his team carried out a detailed examination of the site, investigating various alternatives for access that would make it a suitable base site not only for science but for their future operations in the field. Hillary described it thus:

It was heartbreaking trying to establish a feasible route. After about three hours work [on a half-track Ferguson tractor] we returned having made a track and

³⁸¹ Hillary, TAE diary, 4 January 1957

³⁸² Claydon, 1958, p. 40

³⁸³ Ibid p.40

*flagged it for about 1 ½ miles. But unless we get cooler conditions it will be impossible to pull big loads on it. At the moment everything seems to be against me but I still am hopeful that if we persist that everything will come right in the end.*³⁸⁴

Through the night of 7 January Hillary's mind was churning over the difficulties of "...the logistic problems of dragging our supplies 18 miles or so from the shore to our base; and the last few miles from the bay ice to the hut site over the Piedmont would be frightful." As he lay awake Hillary decided that Butter Point must be abandoned and they would have to seek another location for Scott Base, possibly "...the Dry Valley and even Hut point itself."³⁸⁵ Just when the situation looked most grim a possible solution arrived in the form of a radio message from John Claydon who, with Arthur Helm, was manning the radio aboard the *Endeavour*. Claydon had been in touch with Commander David Canham, officer-in-charge of the US Navy's station at Hut Point, who suggested that the Kiwis examine Pram Point and that the Americans would welcome the nearby presence of the New Zealand party. Claydon was also enthusiastic about the potential for a suitable airstrip on the bay ice nearby.³⁸⁶ He announced that he and Helm were coming over by helicopter with Captain Ketchum so that Hillary could be taken for a reconnaissance flight to Ross Island. They arrived at Butter Point at 1:30PM where Claydon and Helm disembarked and after a brief discussion, Hillary and Miller were flown over to meet with Admiral Dufek aboard the *Glacier*. In the interim, Captain Kirkwood had met with Ketchum and Dufek to discuss the situation and with a close examination of the charts had concluded that Pram Point offered the best alternative for a base site.³⁸⁷ Hillary described his meeting with Dufek, which included Miller, Ketchum, Kirkwood and Capt. Weiss of the *John R Towle*:

I had a yarn with Admiral Dufek and he expressed his hope that we would be neighbours on Scott Island [sic]. He offered the use of a helicopter. Capt. Ketchum said there were plenty of sites at Hut Point but I'd seen his base from

³⁸⁴ Hillary, TAE diary, 5 January 1957

³⁸⁵ Hillary, TAE diary, 7 January 1957

³⁸⁶ Ibid, 8 January 1957

³⁸⁷ Kirkwood, March 1957, p.7

*the air ... and it had appeared as a frightful junk heap. He then mentioned Pram Point...*³⁸⁸

After dinner, Hillary and Miller again boarded the helicopter and were taken over to examine Pram Point. Hillary described his first impression:

*...We passed through The Gap beside Observation Hill and then roared towards the edge of the Ross Ice barrier – here only a series of pressure ridges a few feet high and right beside the barrier we landed on a little rocky promontory. It was Pram Point. ...my excitement rose. It was a very pleasant spot with magnificent views. To the North of us were the great volcanoes of Erebus and Terror; to the south stretched the Ross Ice Shelf and to the east were the lovely mountains of Victoria land. It had all the advantages of close proximity to the Americans and yet was fresh and untouched.*³⁸⁹

As described by Kirkwood, Hillary and Miller returned two hours later, "...both decided and enthusiastic about the site", notwithstanding the fact that they would now have to cross from Pram Point to the Ferrar Glacier, adding another thirty miles to their route to the plateau. Their only remaining task was to prove a tractor route to Pram Point from the *Endeavour*. Miller and Hillary then set out for the site with a Weasel and a Ferguson tractor and three loaded sledges but were forced by mechanical problems with the Weasel to return to the ship. After dinner they set out again with the Ferguson and one sledge and made their way to Pram Point returning in the early hours of 9 January having confirmed the suitability of the site. On being advised by Hillary of his decision Dufek was "delighted" and offered the use of a D8 Caterpillar tractor to help level the site in preparation for construction of the base. Two hours later they set out again for the site, hauling supplies for the building and to mark out the base location and set up the tents.³⁹⁰ The US Navy construction crew led by Captain Dick Bowers arrived the next morning with a D8 Caterpillar bulldozer and after alterations were made to the planned layout in order to accommodate issues with geomagnetic instrumentation recommended by the IGY physicist Vern Gerard, the site was levelled for construction to begin. Scott Base finally had a home!

³⁸⁸ Hillary, TAE diary, 8 January 1957

³⁸⁹ Ibid

³⁹⁰ Kirkwood, March 1957, p.7

However, Charles Bowden, the Ross Sea Committee chair, was not quite as enthused. The next day Bowden wrote a personal letter to Hillary from his holiday home north of Wellington. After expressing his feelings of relief that the party had safely reached McMurdo Sound he added a note of doubt that must have left Hillary somewhat deflated. Bowden wrote:

...Now today your signal has come advising that you have decided to establish the base at Pram Point on Ross Island. Needless to say I am surprised at this change of plan. I would have thought there would be obvious advantages in being on the mainland where you would not be dependent on or affected by the condition of bay ice as well as being so many miles nearer to Ferrar Glacier.³⁹¹

Although Bowden finished his letter by surmising that Hillary must have had good reasons to make such a "...momentous decision" the bureaucrat's ignorance of the situation faced by the New Zealand party and his attempt to second-guess his leader in the field presented a discouraging omen for Hillary's future relationship with the Ross Sea Committee. However, Bowden's 'back-seat driving' was the least of Hillary's problems at this point. Accompanying the momentary elation of finding their base site a second blow was to come during the following week.

Routes to the Polar Plateau

With Scott Base now taking shape on Pram Point, a party consisting of George Marsh, Harry Ayres, Richard Brooke and Murray Ellis, along with three dog teams, made preparations to carry out a thorough examination of the Ferrar Glacier.³⁹² This trip was pre-empted when, on 13 January a helicopter took Marsh on an extensive flight over the glacier. They could discern no practical route and Marsh radioed this message back to Hillary. It was a second major blow and in the words of Bob Miller, "Now all of last year's reconnaissance has been nullified."³⁹³ As he had reacted with the difficulties of the Butter Point base site, Hillary did not at first give up and take Marsh's report on the Ferrar route as the final word. He decided to have another look. Fortunately, the flight team had just assembled and tested the Beaver

³⁹¹ Bowden, 9 January, 1957

³⁹² Bernie Gunn had suggested this be done in his report of 18 February 1956.

³⁹³ Miller, TAE Diary, 15 January 1957

and he and John Claydon wasted no time in immediately putting the aircraft to good use. Hillary recounted the following:

*On January 15th the assembling of our Beaver aircraft was completed and it was successfully test flown. A few minutes later we were on our way across McMurdo Sound towards Butter Point. We flew back and forwards across the lower Ferrar Glacier seeking a chink in the defences, but in the end I had to admit defeat. The glacier was a continual succession of melt pools and ice pinnacles, and it was split by great ice trenches which carried turbulent streams down to the sea.*³⁹⁴

This flight eliminated the Ferrar Glacier as a route to the plateau. How would the crossing party get down to the Ross Ice Shelf and by what path would Hillary's dog teams reach the plateau in order to help stock the depots for Fuchs? Hillary then recalled a message he had received while aboard the *Theron* on his return trip to London from Vahsel Bay. It was a comment made by Bernie Gunn that the Skelton Glacier appeared to offer an attractive access path to the plateau.³⁹⁵ He had made this observation during the flight with US Navy pilot Henry Jorda a year earlier. Gunn had written about the Skelton in his interim report that "This glacier offers the best access of any route seen to date. The approach lies from Hut Point across flat permanent sea ice...the surface of this 15 miles wide glacier is of unbroken snow"³⁹⁶ Gunn's flight with Jorda proved fortuitous indeed. On 18 January, with Bill Cranfield as pilot, a group including Hillary, Marsh, Brooke, Claydon and Bob Miller flew over the Skelton Glacier. They then made a second flight up the Koettlitz Glacier and over the Skelton nevé. Claydon and Hillary then made two more flights to examine the glacier in more detail. These reconnaissance flights consisting of over ten hours of flying time confirmed at least the possibility of using the Skelton as the ascent/descent route.³⁹⁷ Detailed ground reconnaissance using dog teams followed these flights. Finally, on February 9th, the dog teams led by Marsh and Ayres ascended onto the polar plateau and radioed the good news back to Hillary.³⁹⁸ If the expedition plan held, and Antarctica softened its defences, it

³⁹⁴ Hillary, 1975, p.242

³⁹⁵ Hillary, 2004 See also Helm-Miller, 1964 p.158

³⁹⁶ Gunn, 7 January 1956

³⁹⁷ Helm-Miller, 1964, p.158

³⁹⁸ Hillary, Edmund, 1975, p. 243

would be the path by which ‘Bunny’ Fuchs and his Sno-cats would make their descent to Scott Base which was now being assembled at Pram Point on Ross Island.

One can only imagine the disappointment and concern that Hillary and his team must have felt on discovering that the previous year’s reconnaissance had yielded such meagre results. The joy of finding a base site on Ross Island, and then a passable route to the polar plateau via the Skelton Glacier, would have been equally great. Hillary had every reason to feel greatly relieved. His support party had overcome an imposing challenge. The fading daylight weeks could now be occupied with establishing the two depots at the mouth and summit of the Skelton Glacier. In February 1957 Dr. Robert Falla, Director of the Dominion Museum and member of the Ross Sea Committee was the recipient of a generous trip to Scott Base courtesy of Admiral Dufek and the US Navy. He flew down accompanied by the New Zealand Air Vice-Marshal and two other members of the Royal Australian Air Force. Falla remained at Scott Base from February 12 through February 23rd and was in agreement that the base site of Pram Point was superior to alternatives on the western side of McMurdo Sound. He surmised that it would be quite suitable for a permanent station and would last for at least another fifty years.³⁹⁹ Hillary’s decisions had now been ratified.

On 5 March 1957, Scott Base and Shackleton base communicated and exchanged the information that each party was now settling into its respective home for the coming winter.⁴⁰⁰ Both the Weddell Sea and the Ross Sea parties could now focus on the next stage of their mission.

4.4 The Purchase of *HMNZS Endeavour*

During the post-war years the economies of Britain and the Commonwealth countries were at a low ebb. Funds were scarce for critical social programs let alone for exploration adventures of questionable value and uncertain outcome. In this regard New Zealand was in an even weaker position than Britain. As a small nation New Zealand had given more than its fair share to the war effort. Now, almost ten years later, New Zealand felt a certain degree of envy at the quality of the British expedition equipment. Hillary would mightily have loved to drive even one Tucker Sno-cat as part of his transportation fleet. As it was he had to content himself with the donation of Ferguson farm tractors which he would have to modify to suit Antarctic conditions. Similarly, in the air, the

³⁹⁹ Falla, 23 February 1957

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid

original plan for New Zealand to have two Canadian De Havilland ‘Beaver’ aircraft was pared back to a single Beaver and one British Auster which had been declared surplus to Fuchs’ needs. The provision of marine transportation was decidedly a major hurdle for Hillary’s team. The only way that the New Zealand party could approach the Antarctic continent was by sea. Unlike the British who had operated in the Antarctic for a decade, New Zealand had no ship of polar calibre at its disposal. This deficiency was well known and once the government had formally given its approval to participate in the TAE an extensive search was begun for marine transport.

The United States deployed a significant naval fleet in support of its IGY activities including three ice-breakers and four cargo vessels.⁴⁰¹ Admiral Dufek had formed a strong bond with the New Zealand Support Party leader Sir Edmund Hillary from the time of the July 1955 CSAGI meeting in Paris and Dufek repeatedly expressed his willingness to transport the New Zealand TAE and IGY teams to McMurdo Sound.⁴⁰² However, despite America’s generous offer to New Zealand, the London Committee and Fuchs in particular, were especially sensitive to any moves that would taint the ‘Commonwealth’ label of the expedition. In addition, at this juncture in polar geopolitics, Britain viewed American interest in Antarctica with some trepidation. The imperialist comments of Byrd and particularly Finn Ronne during the intervening decades since the heroic age had greatly heightened the sovereignty issue for Britain and the fear of competing territorial claims.⁴⁰³

The RSC had set up a Transportation and Equipment Sub-Committee which included Robert Falla and with Ernest Marsden acting as convener. The RSC minutes show that New Zealand was seeking a ship as early as July 1955 as one of their priority tasks. Initially, at least three vessels were being considered. These included the *Theron*, the Canadian sealer which had taken Fuchs’ advance party to Vahsel Bay, and two local vessels, the *Kamo* and the *Matai*. By now, the *Theron* had become unavailable and at the RSC meeting of 2 August 1955 a proposal was carried that Captain Harry Kirkwood of the Royal Navy be invited to New Zealand to examine the *Kamo* and *Matai*.⁴⁰⁴ Kirkwood’s presence injected the possibility of yet another ship into the mix. Prior to his posting in Singapore Kirkwood had spent several seasons in West Antarctica as captain of *HMS John Biscoe* which since 1947 had been serving FIDS. The *John Biscoe* was a wooden hulled vessel originally commissioned for World War II as *USS Pretext* to serve in the United States navy as a ‘net layer’ for defense against mines and submarine attack. After the war, James Wordie visited the United States

⁴⁰¹ Belanger, 2006, p 64

⁴⁰² Hillary, 13 July 1955

⁴⁰³ Dean, Naylor, Turchetti, Siegert, 2008, pp. 574-582

⁴⁰⁴ Ross Sea Committee, 2 August 1955

and purchased the *Pretext* for FIDS.⁴⁰⁵ The ship was then re-instated as the *HMS John Biscoe* to serve in the Antarctic Peninsula region based at Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands. She was a worthy vessel and had been strengthened by FIDS with a layer of ‘greenheart’ for withstanding the rigours of the ice laden polar sea.⁴⁰⁶ However, by 1955 after eight years of service the ship was approaching the end of its useful life and Britain now saw an opportunity to offload it and acquire a new vessel for FIDS. Fuchs knew the *Biscoe* well and had determined that it would not be adequate for his own needs but felt that New Zealand, being the lesser of the two TAE parties, would find it suitable. At the COM meeting of June 1955 it was suggested that the *John Biscoe* be considered as a possible ship for New Zealand to transport its party and equipment down to McMurdo Sound. This was on condition that it could be economically re-conditioned.⁴⁰⁷ Following Kirkwood’s visit the short list was reduced to just the *John Biscoe* and the *Kamo*. At the decisive meeting Falla remarked that the demise charter of the *Kamo* would cost £1,200/mo. In answer to a question from Hillary, who attended the meeting, Kirkwood effectively eliminated the *Kamo* on the basis that the ship had been designed “for Baltic ice and not Antarctic ice” stating that there was no way of protecting its twin rudders from the Antarctic ice and thus would require an icebreaker to lead it. (There is significant irony here given the subsequent assistance given to the *Endeavour* by the icebreaker *USS Glacier* in McMurdo Sound) Kirkwood advanced that the *Biscoe* was “...a first-class little ship for ice.” With his strong endorsement the RSC quickly agreed to present Britain with a formal offer for the ship “...not exceeding” £20,000.”⁴⁰⁸ This amount originated from a comment made by Sir Miles Clifford during his visit to New Zealand in June two months prior. As Governor of the Falkland Islands he was owner of the ship although he did not have authority to conduct sale negotiations on behalf of HMG. Nevertheless the New Zealand officials viewed Clifford as an official representative of HMG and interpreted his comments accordingly. Clifford’s offhand remark had set the expectation at which negotiation would begin.⁴⁰⁹ Interestingly, unbeknownst to the COM, the New Zealand government had agreed to the purchase of a ship and had authorized an expenditure of “...up to £50,000”.⁴¹⁰

Over the next nine months the transaction was to unleash a torrent of correspondence between the British agencies involved and with the NZHC office in London and Deputy High Commissioner Frank Corner in particular. The long drawn-out negotiations exposed the sometimes conflicting motives of the various parties involved. The Colonial Office, the Treasury and the Crown Agents

⁴⁰⁵ Fuchs, Interview with C. Swithinbank

⁴⁰⁶ Fuchs, 1951, pp. 399-419

⁴⁰⁷ COM Minutes, 30 June 1955

⁴⁰⁸ Ross Sea Committee, 24 August 1955

⁴⁰⁹ Vile, 26 June 1956

⁴¹⁰ Cabinet Paper, 20 April 1956

lined themselves up against the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Foreign Office who generally supported New Zealand's cause in the matter. The drama unfolded as follows.

After four months of inactivity the minutes of the twelfth RSC meeting of 13 October 1955 recorded that there had been a change in the plan regarding purchase of the ship. The NZ High Commissioner's Office in London, represented by Frank Corner, had now been authorized to conduct direct negotiations on behalf of New Zealand. In a letter dated 27 October 1955 Admiral Parry, Secretary of the London TAE COM noted that New Zealand had offered to pay up to £20,000 for the *John Biscoe (Pretext)*.⁴¹¹ By early November the RSC minutes could report that "...the London Committee of Management are putting in train the negotiations for purchase of the *John Biscoe*".⁴¹² In fact the Colonial Office became the chief negotiators for the UK which is understandable since the Falkland Islands Dependencies, which owned the ship, came under their jurisdiction. An internal memo in November 1955 quoting a conversation with a CRO representative stated that

...Unless there are compelling political arguments to convince both Treasury and P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) that it would be right to 'give' the vessel to New Zealand (and I don't think they exist) the 'Biscoe' will have to be sold to the highest bidder...

Britain's intention was to ask their Crown Agents to determine the best price that could be realized at a European port.⁴¹³ A subsequent memo quoted the Crown Agent reply indicating that "... the vessel should be worth considerably more than £20,000". However, the memo also pointed out that the CRO emphasized the need for "an early decision...emphasizing the political importance of selling the vessel to New Zealand."⁴¹⁴ These memos illustrated the contrasting attitudes that existed between different government departments over issues affecting them all. Treasury, and its supporters, certainly viewed the sale of the vessel differently than the CRO which was doing everything possible to enable the expedition and assist the New Zealand effort. The question was one of trading off the maximum best price that might be obtained against the political advantages of New Zealand acquiring the vessel. Most agreed that ideally the *John Biscoe* should end up in New Zealand hands. In the end the issue was handed over to the Treasury for them to sort out. One problem was the difficulty of assigning a value to the vessel. The *John Biscoe* was still in Antarctica and would not

⁴¹¹ The ship was still often referred to as the *Pretext* in the government documentation.

⁴¹² Ross Sea Committee, 3 November 1955

⁴¹³ Sloman, 29 December 1955

⁴¹⁴ Ibid

return for another six months. An idea was mooted that Britain would agree to sell the vessel to New Zealand with the understanding that the price would be determined by "...an independent valuation..."⁴¹⁵ Notwithstanding the desire to sell to New Zealand the memo concluded "It would be fair to tell the CRO at the same time that the present indications are that such a valuation would be substantially higher than £20,000."⁴¹⁶

A confidential memo from the FID to the secretary of State for the Colonies dated 17 November noted the probable value would exceed this amount however it also expressed the preference for the vessel to be purchased by New Zealand unless the value far exceeded this amount. However, it was evident from the comments of the Crown Agents that there remained considerable doubt about its actual value.⁴¹⁷ A candid memo from R.L.D. Jasper of the CRO revealed another, more substantive reason why Britain wished New Zealand to acquire the ship. This was the fear that New Zealand would seize upon the American offer of transport. Jasper expanded on the importance of the ship's nationality stating that if New Zealand used their own ship it:

*...will tend to ensure that New Zealand interest in the Antarctic does not evaporate with the end of the Expedition and the International Geophysical Year...It seems to us (and I hope to the Foreign Office also) that we should want her to take an increased interest in her Antarctic sector.*⁴¹⁸

Thus the *John Biscoe* was seen as generating a 'moral' persuasiveness towards New Zealand exercising her administrative authority over the Ross Dependency on a continuing basis. The CRO strongly recommended that a sale to New Zealand be completed if Treasury could be satisfied. Jasper of the CRO considered the sale to be "...politically important". The CRO continued to lobby strongly for an accommodation to be reached with New Zealand. A memo of 7 January 1956 from Jasper to Robert Vile of the CO emphasized "May I again underline the serious political embarrassment in which we may find ourselves if a suitable British ship is not available for the New Zealand end of the Expedition."⁴¹⁹ Still, the talks dragged on.

At the COM meeting of 12 January New Zealand's Corner began to show his exasperation stating:

⁴¹⁵ Ibid

⁴¹⁶ Ibid

⁴¹⁷ Arthur, 17 November 1955

⁴¹⁸ Jasper, 16 December 1955

⁴¹⁹ Jasper, 6 January 1956

*...despite many efforts, it does not seem possible to obtain a definite answer from the Government. In view of the constant American offers to transport the New Zealand Expedition contingent this is becoming embarrassing – particularly if the Appeal in New Zealand should fail to meet its target when it will be increasingly difficult to substantiate the necessity for a separate vessel at considerable cost to the Expedition.*⁴²⁰

The Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Alec Douglas-Home (Lord Home) became involved with the issue and supported the need for resolution in favour of New Zealand. A 12 January memo from Home to the Colonial Office expressed the view that if New Zealand became dependent on American aid for transport the

...political effects would be serious. The Trans Polar Expedition has been very rightly publicized as an Imperial venture of the first importance...that makes it all the more important that we should do our best to retain their goodwill and to see that they get the answer – and a ship!

His memo also pointed out the fact that the ship must reach New Zealand by June 1956.⁴²¹ The Foreign Office, concerned with sovereignty and political prestige, confirmed their agreement with the CRO's position. A Foreign Office memo of 19 January 1956 revealed how the political interests of the UK in the Ross Dependency became intermingled with the TAE stating "With the Americans making their present drive to establish themselves into the leading Antarctic power, it seems more than ever important that we should stimulate Commonwealth co-operation in the area."⁴²²

Nevertheless, the British Treasury together with their allies the Crown Agents and the Public Accounts Committee came down staunchly on the side of maximizing financial benefit for the public purse. They were joined in this cause by the FID who, coming under the auspices of the Colonial Office, wanted to ensure maximum return on the sale of their asset.

A confidential memo from the FID to the Secretary of State for the Colonies sent 12 January 1956 reflected this position revealing an opinion that the *John Biscoe* had not much life left in her and that

⁴²⁰ COM Minutes, 12 January 1956

⁴²¹ Home, 12 January 1956

⁴²² Foreign Office, 19 January 1956

the UK should take advantage of this opportunity of sale to New Zealand.⁴²³ This somewhat cynical tone was reflected in a response from the CRO who were copied on the memo:

*The Governor's remark about the age of the ship isn't very good advertising, but I presume that he means that taking the long view, the 'John Biscoe' is no longer of value to FIDS and that he may as well sell her while she still has some life in her. There is no reason to suppose that she cannot serve the purpose of the New Zealanders quite well.*⁴²⁴

By mid-January 1956 the sale transaction had not yet been agreed since another problem had reared its head. FIDS were counting on use of an alternate ship, the *Shackleton*, recently acquired and which had been converted for Antarctic work, while they awaited the completion of their new vessel under construction. The *Shackleton* had been converted for Antarctic work but the conversion had been badly done and the ship was of doubtful condition.⁴²⁵ This meant that the *John Biscoe* would have to be kept on for a substantial period of time otherwise FIDS would have to suspend operations without a ship.⁴²⁶ Fortunately the problems proved repairable and serious impact to the TAE was avoided. However, the process of determination consumed several weeks that New Zealand could ill afford. James Wordie personally rang up the department and highlighted the pressure that the United States was placing on this decision by virtue of their open offer of transport to the New Zealand government.⁴²⁷ Again, the American offer was threatening the Commonwealth nature of the expedition. In this way the US Navy began to exert its influence on the TAE. Many more instances of this influence were to occur before the crossing would be accomplished. Britain was feeling the pressure as the FID dawdled. Another memo stated "I think such offers [from the US Navy] have been very tentative and throwing over to New Zealand might be abandoning the bird in hand to our eventual discomfiture". Some elements in HMG were all for playing 'hardball' with NZ. Still no decision had been made by the beginning of February. At this point another gambit was raised by Treasury since New Zealand had balked at the uncertainty of the future 'independent valuation' approach. Their next idea was to rent the ship to New Zealand for £10,000 per year for two years should the independent valuation of the ship on arrival from the Antarctic in Southampton exceed £30,000. Much angst was generated over these various proposals with discussion around the

⁴²³ Arthur, 12 January 1956

⁴²⁴ Willis, 17 January 1956

⁴²⁵ Johnston, 14 Jan 1956

⁴²⁶ Lennox-Boyd, 16 January, 1956

⁴²⁷ Crown Agents, 14 January 1956

threshold amount in particular and New Zealand found it difficult to understand why the UK was being so mean-spirited. Some HMG staffers appreciated the sensitivities of the situation and recommended that they "...put the matter to him [Frank Corner] in the most tactful fashion."⁴²⁸

The threat of New Zealand being forced to rely on the US Navy for transport eventually struck a chord with the Colonial Office. A letter from the CO to the Crown Agents showed a softened, albeit self-serving, stance and observed:

*With the construction of the new vessel to replace the John Biscoe well in hand ...and being ready for service during the 1956/57 season we are faced with the problem of disposing of the old ship...this [US transport for NZ] would be a most unfortunate development as the TAE is a Commonwealth venture and we are all anxious to keep it so beyond any doubt.*⁴²⁹

However, Her Majesty's Treasury remained steadfast in a state of imperious arrogance. A memo of 8 February to the Colonial Office, in true tight-fisted fashion, showed their stubborn denial of the political impact that the transport issue could have on UK/NZ relations and calmly stated "I am afraid that the Treasury would not regard the political arguments ...as justifying a commercially disadvantageous transaction." They confirmed that their sole interest was financial by continuing:

*But in this case it may well be sensible commercially to sell the ship to New Zealand as you propose. Am I not right in thinking that it may be difficult to find another buyer who wants the ship for Antarctic work for which it is suitable and therefore more valuable?*⁴³⁰

Treasury then objected to the CRO willingness to sell the ship for £20,000 viewing that amount as being "...far too low." The sale process had exposed the HMG's dilemma and the conflicting objectives of the two agencies. Jasper of the CRO was not amused. In a draft memo he sharply asked Rawlinson of the Public Accounts Committee in a scribbled note "Is it true that the ship cost £15,000?" In a more considered formal reply Jasper outlined his own best estimate of the book value and concluded that, after considering the original purchase cost of £75,000 and improvements £52,000 and with depreciation over 9 years at 5% the ship could at best be worth £28,000 or just

⁴²⁸ Vile, 21 February 1956

⁴²⁹ Vile, 8 February 1956

⁴³⁰ Rawlinson, 10 February 1956

£8,000 more than the NZ bid.⁴³¹ Even with the assumption that there was another buyer for the ship, this paltry amount threatened to tear Britain's relationship with her loyal antipodean Dominion.

In February a report on the subject of the sale was prepared, probably by Frank Corner, for the NZHC Sir Clifton Webb. The report raised important factors that impinged on the negotiations including the "...disproportionate" contributions of the UK and NZ (£100,000 vs £50,000) to the expedition and pointed out that it would be "...unfortunate if the Commonwealth Trans Antarctic Journey were to be made courtesy of the Americans."⁴³² HMG obtained a copy of Corner's report which it circulated among its departments with a cover letter that began by drawing a parallel between the prestige to be gained by the TAE with that of the recent ascent of Mt. Everest, calling the TAE "...an Imperial venture of the first importance." It then promoted New Zealand's case stating:

...the New Zealanders have been exceedingly co-operative over the joint Commonwealth approach which has recently been made in Washington on Antarctic questions, and they have gone much further than we would have hoped in supporting us over the tricky question of the Falkland Islands Dependencies.

The report brought up a crucial aspect with the admission that the London COM was not prepared to pay £1000 to have the *John Biscoe* valued *in situ* in the Falkland Islands. Instead it decided to wait until the ship returned in June to the UK. This caused another significant delay before New Zealand could obtain the vessel. Corner had emphasized the timing issue noting that the ship would have to be re-fitted, stocked with supplies and equipment, before being crewed and sailed to New Zealand. The cover letter concluded "If we fail to find a solution to this problem, the effect on our relations with New Zealand will be very unfortunate...The Foreign Office are generally in agreement with the above."⁴³³

In a file memo to Home from Willis the sentiments were mixed:

I am very conscious of the fact that unlike Mr. Menzies who is forever talking Imperialism, and, in fact, not aiding it, the New Zealand Government came forward at once, to help the expedition. I am therefore very keen that they

⁴³¹ Jasper, 15 February 1956

⁴³² Webb, February 1956

⁴³³ Vile, 11 February 1956

*should get the utmost help from us...but we cannot ignore the rules of public finance.*⁴³⁴

By the end of February 1956 with the sale still not concluded the issue was escalated. Eight months had now passed since New Zealand had first made her offer to purchase. The NZHC Sir Clifton Webb paid a visit to Alec Douglas-Home of the CRO to discuss the matter. A few days later on 8 March Home wrote a four page letter to then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Harold MacMillan. Home outlined the situation appealing to MacMillan on behalf of the New Zealand cause. In his letter Home made several key points. He cut to the quick in his opening paragraph telling MacMillan that

The NZHC came to me ...about an apparently trivial matter which is likely to do harm to Anglo/New Zealand relations if we do not handle it well. For this reason I am worrying you with it. The short point is whether the New Zealand part of the Trans Antarctic Expedition should be transported in British or American ships.

He went on and outlined the support NZ had given to Britain in its negotiations with the Americans over its Antarctic affairs in the Falkland Islands and the position of the Treasury regarding an ‘independent valuation’ and sale to the highest bidder, a process that Webb was not prepared to accept. Home even resorted to mentioning the opinions of George Lowe and Sir Edmund Hillary who thought Britain was being “...mean”. He then expressed his fear that although the issue was “a storm in a tea-cup” it “...may do disproportionate harm”. Finally Home concluded:

*But for the accounting difficulties the case for handing it to them at the price the Expedition offer is a strong one. May I therefore ask you to look at the matter again and see if...you could not agree to let New Zealand have it for a maximum of £20,000*⁴³⁵

Given the profile that these two senior officials had in successive governments it is likely that this letter went a long way towards aiding the New Zealand cause but it was still not sufficient to sway the Treasury. This pecuniary attitude, as explained in an internal memo of 13 March 1956, arose from the fact that the Falkland Islands Dependencies were ‘heavily grant-aided’ and that the purchase of a

⁴³⁴ Colonial Office, 13 February 1956

⁴³⁵ Home, 8 March 1956

new ship for FIDS was "... based on the costs being partly offset by the proceeds of the sale of the JB." This created a situation where HMG officials felt a responsibility to obtain the highest possible price for the vessel.⁴³⁶ Another complicating factor was that the *John Biscoe* had suffered considerable damage on her return journey to Port Stanley from the Antarctic. These developments were discussed with Corner who now acquiesced and concluded that New Zealand must now accept the offer of transport from the US Navy. Corner pointed out that the British would be using a Danish vessel, the *Magga Dan*, and that the nationality of the transport vessels was of little importance to the expedition.⁴³⁷ The Ross Sea Committee's monthly newsletter of 1 March 1956 carried the succinct statement: "Negotiations for a suitable ship are still going on and it is expected that very shortly an announcement can be made."⁴³⁸ By mid-April 1956 the pressure was building for a resolution, primarily on HMG. Waiting until June for the return of the *John Biscoe* to London was becoming an uncomfortable prospect particularly as the expenses of the re-fit and docking charges were looming large. New Zealand of course knew that it always had the open offer of American transport to fall back on. HMG had reasons for its negotiating stance which it explained to Corner as a salve for its apparent 'hard bargaining' including that "...it is not the business of the Colonial Office to subsidise the Trans Antarctic Expedition..." Interestingly, unofficial estimates of the valuation ranged from £15,000 to as high as £70,000.⁴³⁹

The damaged condition of the *John Biscoe* had HMG reconsidering the terms of her offer to New Zealand. The memo of March 13 1956 illustrated the conflicting motives wryly stating that if the Crown Agents believed the *John Biscoe* to be worth less than £20,000 then "...would it be reasonable, in accordance with the spirit of intra-Commonwealth relations, that we should accept the New Zealand offer of £20,000, and perhaps be selling the New Zealand government a pig-in-the-poke?"⁴⁴⁰

Having been given authority regarding the negotiations Corner made a deft interim move and declared that New Zealand were no longer interested in a straight purchase and that a charter arrangement would be pursued. This meant that HMG would be responsible for repairing the vessel and carrying out the re-fit.⁴⁴¹ In response, and fearing that New Zealand were about to quit negotiations, Admiral Parry suggested a rental rate of £5,000 per annum. HMG's standing position

⁴³⁶ Galsworthy, 15 March 1956

⁴³⁷ Ibid

⁴³⁸ Ross Sea Committee Newsletter, 1 March 1956

⁴³⁹ Vile, 26 June 1956

⁴⁴⁰ Galsworthy, 15 March 1956

⁴⁴¹ Willis, 17 March 1956

was to await a survey and a valuation report on the ship. Further consideration led to a rejection of the NZ proposal at which point HMG began scratching their heads for another path through the maze but it was becoming evident that additional funding in support of the TAE might be required.⁴⁴²

The Colonial Office betrayed their confused thinking on the matter in the following reply to Home:

*... I am very sorry not to be more forthcoming for I think you know that I am very anxious to help you over this and I am keenly conscious of the political value of our being forthcoming with the New Zealanders, but I am sure that you will agree with me that the latest report on the "John Biscoe" [showing more damage than hoped] does alter the position very much and that if we are not careful we may, with the best of motives, take action which will merely let the New Zealanders down, instead of helping them, as is our intention.*⁴⁴³

The memo then boldly suggested that the CRO, who were pushing for a sale at £20,000, should pay the FID agency as owners of the ship, any difference between an evaluation amount and the final sale price to New Zealand if it was a lesser amount.

By May some progress had been made but there was still reluctance on the part of Treasury and Crown Agents to agree a deal with New Zealand. Ambiguous letters such as the following from Willis of the CO to the Crown Agents illustrate the lack of meaningful engagement between the parties: "It has been agreed that the New Zealand Government should have the ship, subject to survey proving her satisfactory, and to agreement on the price. As soon as the ship has been unloaded and discharged by FIDS the New Zealand Government will take her over."⁴⁴⁴ Meanwhile New Zealand were holding fast to their original offer and were prepared to pay "...up to £20,000" and no more.

With support from the Foreign Office, the CRO had to fight an intensive rear-guard action to sway the Treasury and the CO towards an agreement in New Zealand's favour. Notwithstanding their innate preference to use a British ship the record shows that New Zealand held the high cards and could always play the ace of using US Navy ships to send Hillary and his team to Antarctica.

⁴⁴² Willis, 23 March 1956

⁴⁴³ Home, 13 March 1956

⁴⁴⁴ Willis, 17 May 1956

The RSC meeting minutes are quiet about the purchase between late November and late March 1956. No RSC meeting was held between 24 November and 20 February 1956 and there was a change in convener as Marsden resigned from the committee and was replaced by Robert Falla. However, in the UK there was much deliberation behind the scenes with the earlier New Zealand offer of up to £20,000 acting as catalyst.

In a report of 30 May 1956 Corner had advised External Affairs in NZ that a sale of the *John Biscoe* for £20,000 was virtually assured.

By June 1956 the RSC's first Annual Report still could only state "The Government is negotiating for the purchase of the Royal Research Ship "*John Biscoe*" which will be renamed "*Endeavour*" and commissioned as a New Zealand naval vessel for the expedition. An offer of 1000 tons of cargo space has also been made by the United States Navy and has been gratefully accepted."⁴⁴⁵ The frustrating sale process threatened to seriously damage the relationship between Britain and its Commonwealth junior partner. The figure of £20,000 stated to the RSC by Clifford during his visit to Wellington stuck with the New Zealand government and remained their bottom-line price. Who would blink first?

On 18 June 1956, one year since negotiations had begun, Corner sent a note to the Crown Agents formally presenting New Zealand's offer for the vessel. It stated simply:

*I am authorized to offer the sum of Twenty-thousand pounds (£20,000) for the "Pretext", it being understood that this is an inclusive price for vessel "as is".*⁴⁴⁶

It was agreed that certain pieces of scientific equipment would be removed from the vessel and kept by Britain for use elsewhere. Amazingly, the reply to Corner from the Crown Agent stated:

*I confirm that... it has not been possible for the Colonial Office to obtain approval for the sale of the vessel at the price offered and that it has accordingly been decided to have an independent valuation made...I regret that the need for a valuation may delay the handing over of the vessel ...*⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴⁵ Ross Sea Committee 18 June 1956, p.4

⁴⁴⁶ Corner, 18 June 1956

⁴⁴⁷ Roe, 20 June 1956

The fact was that there was not sufficient time for a valuation because the London TAE Management Committee would not spend £1000 to have a valuation of the *John Biscoe* performed *in situ* while she was berthed in Port Stanley. This would have avoided a 6 month delay waiting for her to return to Southampton. All of this bureaucratic time-wasting and arm-twisting could have so easily been avoided. Fuchs and the COM have a lot to answer for in this matter. They had been woefully silent through most of these negotiations even though they backed the sale at £20,000. By now time was of the essence. The *John Biscoe* was scheduled to return to the UK in June 1956 while Hillary's party was planning to depart New Zealand for Antarctica in December, only six months later. The ship would need to be re-fitted and loaded with a multitude of supplies and equipment for the expedition. In addition to satisfying the expectations of British suppliers and sponsors Fuchs had a high opinion of British goods and insisted that wherever possible the New Zealand party would utilize British made equipment and supplies.

Further to their memo of refusal the Crown Agents then made the ridiculous offer to New Zealand that while the agreement of sale was delayed pending an independent valuation, repairs could be commenced at New Zealand's expense *regardless of the outcome of negotiations*. [author's emphasis]⁴⁴⁸ In a 22 June report the UK Treasury formally refused their approval of the sale pending an outside valuation thus confirming the response that the Crown Agents had sent to Corner two days earlier. The New Zealand government was furious on learning of this decision. This obstinate stance triggered serious political activity in Wellington at the highest level and a confidential cypher was immediately sent by the UKHC in Wellington to the CRO advising that "...They have been incensed by report received today ...Macdonald has asked Mr. Holland to raise matter in London." New Zealand had every reason to be 'incensed'. The High Commissioner closed with a plea for London to "...settle this long standing matter."⁴⁴⁹

Despite his initial lack of interest in Antarctic matters, Holland's ire had been stirred and he would now prove himself to be an adept negotiator.⁴⁵⁰ The conference of First Ministers was being held at this time in London. A portion of the agenda would include three topics relating to New Zealand. The first two were the contribution of service manpower by New Zealand in Malaya and secondly, the provision of funding and manpower to run the Nandi airport in Fiji where Britain retained colonial interests. The costs to New Zealand of operating the airport in Fiji had been running at

⁴⁴⁸ Roe, 20 June 1956

⁴⁴⁹ UKHC Wellington, 22 June 1956

⁴⁵⁰ UKHC Wellington, 22 June 1956

approximately £100,000 per annum. The third topic was the Trans-Antarctic Expedition and acquisition of the *John Biscoe*. A secret report dated 23 June 1956 sent from the FO to the CO on the political situation in the Pacific region showed the high level of concern that these seemingly unrelated topics were generating. The report revealed that Britain felt a need to assuage the New Zealand Prime Minister Sidney Holland if it expected New Zealand to continue with its contributions in Malaya and Fiji stating:

...Mr. Holland may not agree unless we can put him in an amiable state of mind...the third topic [the sale process] has created anything but an amiable and generous frame of mind on the part of Mr. Holland... The governor of the Falkland Islands [Miles Clifford] offered the ship to New Zealand, apparently mentioning a figure of about £20,000, without authority from the Colonial Office...Mr. Holland is in a rage at what he alleges to be hard bargaining by the Colonial Office on this John Biscoe business...he [Holland] has it in his head that the Colonial Office are being niggardly about the ship, and that the Nandi and Malayan questions cannot be considered in watertight compartments. It is possible that in this matter we may be being 'penny wise and pound foolish'.⁴⁵¹

A high stakes political poker game was being played and Holland, to his credit, was pleased to raise the stakes. In this case New Zealand held all the high cards. In an internal memo dated 10 July 1956, with the brokers report in hand, HMG finally appeared ready to accept the original New Zealand offer.⁴⁵² In a not so startling turn of events the brokers report suddenly raised several issues with the ship including its wooden construction, imminent expiration of class, small size and doubted there would be any buyer for such a ship and that her value might be maximized as scrap. The UK's Crown Agents illusory bubble had been pricked and steps were immediately taken to approve New Zealand's now suddenly acceptable offer.⁴⁵³

Finally, Lord Home was able to confirm in a letter to the Sir Clifton Webb, that the Colonial Office, responsible for the Falkland Islands Dependencies, had accepted the New Zealand Government's

⁴⁵¹ Snelling, 23 June 1956

⁴⁵² Vile, 6 July 1956

⁴⁵³ Kellock, 2 July 1956

offer of £20,000.⁴⁵⁴ A point of interest is that the ship's previous name was restored and it was sold as the *Pretext* rather than the *John Biscoe*.

Though success had finally been achieved it had been a long and torturous route. In summary the *John Biscoe* was sold to New Zealand for the following reasons:

1. New Zealand would otherwise have to utilise American navy ships for transport.
2. Holland threatened to withdraw NZ support for UK colonial interests in the Pacific.
3. Possible political embarrassment for Britain if the expedition foundered on this issue. By now the IGY projects had chartered all alternate vessels. New Zealand only had two options, either the *John Biscoe* or the US Navy.
4. The UK did not want to rent the ship to NZ since they did not want it back. They wanted to dispose of it. Scrap value would be minimal.
5. No other buyer was interested.
6. FIDS had no further use for the old ship. A new ship for FIDS was being built in Scotland.

It would not be until 20 July 1956, more than a year after New Zealand had made its original offer of £20,000 and following nine months of contentious negotiation that the RSC could report the "...happy outcome of the negotiations between the Governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand...".⁴⁵⁵ On 1 August the sale was completed at the original price offered by New Zealand. The sale was on an 'as is' basis and certain pieces of equipment were excluded from sale such as wireless equipment and medical stores. Fortunately, the repairs required to restore the ship were considerably less than had been feared. Although Commonwealth solidarity had been preserved if not enhanced there is little doubt that the sale process strained New Zealand's patience because of Britain's apparently selfish agenda.⁴⁵⁶ Hillary was well aware of his support party's need for a ship and would have been kept informed as to how the negotiation was proceeding. By mid-1956 his

⁴⁵⁴ Home, 16 July 1956

⁴⁵⁵ Ross Sea Committee, 20 July 1956

⁴⁵⁶ Roe, 12 July 1956

concern would have been mounting considerably. The experience must have diminished any respect he might have had for British sentiments while he pondered whether to continue on to the Pole ahead of Fuchs, if it did not eliminate the consideration altogether. At least one positive result was that the *John Biscoe* continued to serve the New Zealand Antarctic programme for several more years and proved to be a very wise purchase.



Figure 27: An IGY scientist gazes at *HMNZS Endeavour* berthed at Wellington – 1956

Photo: Herb Orr

5. Enter the IGY and the US Navy

This section examines the impact of the IGY on the TAE as the two projects converged in time. The IGY caused the United States to display a massive presence in Antarctica with the establishment of six bases across the continent including on the Antarctic Peninsula, in McMurdo Sound, and at the geographic South Pole. This effort was supported by the US Navy Task Force 43, *Operation Deep Freeze* under the leadership of Rear Admiral George Dufek. The significant effect of the American presence on the conduct of the TAE is also analysed in the context of the geopolitical situation at the time.

5.1 Global Political Scene

The global political situation during the 1950's was both volatile and troubling. The aftermath of World War II resulted in a 'cold war' between the two emergent 'super-powers', the Soviet Union and the United States. Spying was rife between the two countries especially in the areas of rocket science and nuclear weaponry. Suspicions were heightened after spy scandals broke out over atomic weapons secrets being passed to the USSR. This issue culminated with Klaus Fuchs – no relation of Vivian, being one of the the most notorious, who in 1950 was convicted and sentenced to 14 years in prison.⁴⁵⁷ Korea had been another conflicted region and after three years of open hostilities the Korean War had finally reached a conclusion of sorts in 1953. This war had further heightened tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States as each was aligned on opposite sides of the argument.⁴⁵⁸

The McCarthy era, where a 'commie' hid behind every tree, was in full swing in the United States from 1950 to 1956 with many prominent Americans, particularly artists, writers and actors being accused of communist leanings and in some cases of treason. Fear of communist influence on American institutions was pervasive and this fear carried over into the territorial sovereignty debate concerning Antarctica. Another theatre in which this competition was played out was that of space exploration with the so-called 'space race'. The war had resulted in tremendous advances in rocket technology and in October 1957 the USSR stunned the world when it announced that it had successfully put a satellite, Sputnik I, into orbit around the earth. In other parts of the world the British Empire was beginning to dissolve with several former colonies declaring their independence of British rule. The crisis over the Suez

⁴⁵⁷ <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/29/obituaries/klaus-fuchs-physicist-who-gave-atom-secrets-to-soviet-dies-at-76.html>

⁴⁵⁸ Hugh-Lee, 1995, pp. 8-14

Canal erupted in July 1956 and hastened the devolution process as Britain and France lost significant prestige in the diplomatic world, which was now partially administered by the United Nations.⁴⁵⁹

Despite this volatile political environment a remarkable coincidence occurred in the 1950's regarding Antarctic exploration and science with the independent initiation of the TAE and the IGY projects, each of which had been in gestation for several years. The former was a privately planned and funded expedition while the latter would prove to be the most significant scientific and multi-national endeavour of the twentieth century. The convergence of the two projects was fortuitous in one way, and in another, somewhat unfortunate. It was fortuitous in that it eased each project's financial burden, since it allowed governments to take advantage of synergies between them and thus helped to reduce their combined costs, which in New Zealand's case mostly benefited the IGY. However, it also had the unintended effect of bringing governmental influence more strongly into the TAE which created confusion and certain tensions. It also caused a blurring of public perception, particularly with respect to the TAE, in that many thought of the expedition as being part of the IGY. It can be argued that the TAE, conceived by Fuchs in 1948, two years before the idea of an IGY was first mooted, became overshadowed by the much larger IGY. Some of this false perception was caused by an indiscriminate press. In a 1955 letter of clarification to the editor of the *Wellington Evening Post*, the Chairman of the New Zealand National Committee for the IGY stated:

*Your second leader in Wednesday night's Post may lead your readers to believe that the Trans-Antarctic Expedition is part of New Zealand's International Geophysical Year programme...I should like to correct this impression. The two projects are quite separate...The government contribution of £50,000 was for the Trans-antarctic Expedition and not for geophysical year activities.*⁴⁶⁰

Had there been no IGY, the TAE would have had sole occupancy of centre stage, much as Shackleton and Scott's voyages had enjoyed fifty years earlier. The expedition would have been significantly changed since the South Pole would have been unoccupied much as Scott

⁴⁵⁹ <http://www.economist.com/node/7218678>

⁴⁶⁰ Barnett, 1955

had found it in 1912, while the presence of the United States in the Ross Dependency with *Operation Deep Freeze* would not have been a factor. Fuchs and Hillary would have been very much on their own. However, the year was 1955, not 1905 and the world had moved on.

What many consider to have been the most significant scientific event of the century was launched on 5 April 1950 at a party hosted by the head of high-altitude research at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. James Van Allen, at his home in Silver Spring, Maryland. In attendance were a number of prominent scientists including the British geophysicist Dr. Sydney Chapman, Sedleian Professor of Natural Philosophy at Queen's College, Oxford. Also present was Dr. Lloyd Berkner, a leader in radio-science research at the Carnegie Institute in Washington D.C. During the course of the evening Berkner, who was a veteran of Admiral Richard E. Byrd's first Antarctic expedition of 1929, proposed a new 'Polar Year' along the lines of the two previous International Polar Years (IPY) of 1882 and 1932.⁴⁶¹ An attractive aspect was the reduction in the gap to only twenty-five years after the last IPY rather than the fifty years which had been the case historically. This was due to the rapid advances that had occurred in the fields of scientific knowledge and in ionospheric research techniques in particular. Importantly, the planned start date of 1 July 1957 was expected to coincide with a period of high sunspot activity thus providing a unique research opportunity.⁴⁶² Scientists had noticed that about every eleven years there was an increase in solar flaring. This generated intense showers of cosmic rays which disturbed the earth's magnetic field affecting radio communications. Many scientists were keenly interested in learning more about how the sun influences the planet.⁴⁶³ The proposal was not without a political aspect with Chapman noting "The Cold War also added to this interest."⁴⁶⁴ The pair presented their idea at a meeting in Brussels three months later where it was approved along with the decision to promote the idea with the International Commission of Scientific Unions (ICSU), the overall co-ordinating body for the international scientific community. The International Polar Year III, as it was then called, was given final approval in January 1951 and a special committee, the CSAGI (Comité Spécial de l'Année Géophysique Internationale), was formed in October to co-ordinate the project. Members of the Board included Chapman, Berkner, and James Wordie of the UK. Invitations to participate went out to the country members of the ICSU which at that time did not include the USSR. However,

⁴⁶¹ Chapman, 1959, p. 101

⁴⁶² Sullivan, 1961, p.20

⁴⁶³ Guide to IGY, 1957, p 7

⁴⁶⁴ Chapman, 1959, p.101

it was recognised that Soviet co-operation was necessary for the project to be successful given its global nature and a separate invitation was soon sent to the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

The scope of this third ‘polar year’ was then expanded from its historical focus on only the polar regions to one with a global outlook. With its special emphasis on geophysical aspects it was dubbed the International Geophysical Year or IGY. Its mission was to investigate geophysical phenomena across a number of scientific disciplines from geomagnetism to aurora to meteorology and ionospheric physics.⁴⁶⁵ Despite a slow initial response, once the scope was enlarged to cover the entire planet, interest started to grow and eventually 67 nations agreed to set up scientific observation posts across the world. The IGY was scheduled to begin on July 1 1957 and continue for eighteen months through to December 31 1958 which, consciously or unconsciously, placed the IGY directly in contention with the TAE.

5.2 Britain and the IGY

Although the TAE was conceived in 1948, the first documented plans were presented in 1953 and as noted by Fuchs: “...before the intention to hold the International Geophysical Year (IGY) 1957-1958 had been made public.”⁴⁶⁶ During the years of planning there had been no hint from the United States that it would construct a base at the South Pole. It was expected that the crossing party would have to be self-sufficient and, beyond the Pole, would be totally reliant on the supply depots that Hillary and his party would eventually establish. Fuchs was later pleased to say that: “Although the American base was fully operational by the time the expedition arrived at the Pole, the original plan was adhered to and their generous offer to fly in supplies was unnecessary.”⁴⁶⁷ This was only partially true and occasions did arise that Fuchs was pleased to take advantage of including a few emergency situations where the US Navy was called upon to provide Fuchs with critical support.

In the eyes of Vivian Fuchs his TAE party had a dual purpose. One was to execute an overland crossing of the continent for the first time. Secondly, Fuchs was foremost a scientist with several years of experience in the Antarctic. Combined with the crossing he had a defined scientific agenda as part of his overall mission. The most publicised of these areas of

⁴⁶⁵ Guide to IGY, 1957, p 7

⁴⁶⁶ *TAE Scientific Reports*, 1961, Volume I

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid*

study was to develop a seismic profile along the crossing route and thus determine the topography underlying the ice cover which averaged several kilometres in thickness. His aim was to determine if Antarctica was a single integrated landmass or whether East and West Antarctica were in fact two separate islands. It would also give information as to the thickness of the ice sheet over much of the continent. In Fuchs' words "The scientific programme must be sufficient to justify the project."⁴⁶⁸

The COM meeting of 30 March 1955 illustrated some of the the tension that had developed in Britain between the TAE and the IGY.⁴⁶⁹ The quote from the minutes below is exemplary:

Mr. Wordie considered that there was bound to be co-operation between the I.G.Y. and the Expedition ...Dr. Fuchs said that the plans of the Expedition could not be delayed to suit the I.G.Y. as the chartering of ships must be settled by the first of June at the latest...In any case the ship taking the advance party in 1955/56 could carry a certain quantity of stores etc. for the I.G.Y. if they should so desire.

We have seen how the icebreaker issue caused a split between the British TAE and IGY projects leading to separate bases being established and separate vessels used to sail down to the Weddell Sea in 1955-56. Nevertheless, James Wordie continued to hope that the situation would mend itself and that other synergies could be found to benefit both expeditions. This did occur with the TAE and IGY parties making joint use of the *Magga Dan* on her voyage south in 1956 to transport Fuchs and his crossing party. The ship called in at both the Halley Bay and Vahsel Bay (Shackleton) stations.

The 'Commonwealth' label and suspicion of American intentions

One of the constant themes throughout the expedition was the reluctance of Fuchs and the COM to engage openly and positively with the United States. There were two reasons for this stance. First, Britain was wary of the American presence in the Peninsula and Ross Dependency regions. This attitude had been exacerbated by the *Operation Highjump* and *Operation Windmill* expeditions which stoked fears that the United States was preparing to submit a claim to Antarctic territory, one which might overlap with British claimed territory.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid, p.5

⁴⁶⁹ COM minutes, March 1955

Secondly, regarding the TAE, there were two concerns. One was the suspicion that the US was planning to carry out its own ‘first crossing’ and forestall the TAE. The most immediate issue however was that Fuchs wanted to preserve the ‘purity’ of the Commonwealth nature of his expedition. American involvement and assistance, generous as it might have been, was to be avoided at all costs. Although he eventually softened his stance at the insistence of New Zealand and with a compromise regarding transport, his dogmatic attitude flared up periodically.

On 23 May 1955 Capt. George Dufek together with Capt. Gerald Ketchum visited George Laking, the New Zealand ambassador in Washington, and explained American intentions in McMurdo Sound for the coming year. These included the construction of bases at ‘Little America’ in the Bay of Whales area which had been Amundsen’s base site, at the South Pole, and a logistics staging base at Hut Point on Ross Island. These bases were in addition to Ellsworth Station on the Peninsula, which would be led by Captain Finn Ronne. Dufek revealed that the budget for the American effort would exceed \$4,000,000 per year for three years, an amount that dwarfed the funding for New Zealand’s TAE and IGY efforts combined by an order of magnitude. At this meeting, which preceded his first meeting with Hillary in Paris a few weeks later, Dufek stated that “...any request from New Zealand for transport for personnel and equipment of the new Zealand expedition would have his personal support...” The one condition was that the US Navy be given sufficient advance knowledge of New Zealand’s requirements. Following the meeting Laking asked the COM in London for permission to share the TAE plans with Americans. He was taken aback at the negative response he received.⁴⁷⁰

In June 1955 the issue of American involvement with the TAE came onto the agenda of the London COM. The COM, and especially Fuchs, was initially very reluctant to openly engage with the *Operation Deep Freeze* team although Sir Miles Clifford, on the other hand, saw no reason for such secrecy. Frank Corner, who attended the meeting, reported that at least Fuchs had agreed that “...a United States ice-breaker could be used to force the passage to McMurdo Sound, if necessary.” Corner wryly added “I doubt if the Commonwealth flavour would be lost on the homeward run.” and ended by stating “We should not accept Fuchs’ narrow view, at least as far as arrangements at the McMurdo Sound end are concerned.”⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ NZ Ambassador Washington, 26 May 1955

⁴⁷¹ Corner, 6 June 1955

Fuchs' position regarding co-operation with the United States *Operation Deep Freeze* was clearly expressed in this memo forwarded by Frank Corner to NZ External Affairs in Wellington quoting Fuchs' remarks:

*So far as the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition is concerned it is clearly desirable that the expedition shall be self-contained and able to land, build and supply both its bases on its own account. Reliance on another nation's transport would inevitably mean second place in timing and other considerations... You may therefore ... say that the offer is appreciated but you hope there will be no need to call on American assistance except in the remote requirements of some emergency which cannot now be foreseen... I am not particularly in favour of providing the detailed plans of our Expedition to the Americans but suggest the broad timing would satisfy them and be useful general knowledge for them.*⁴⁷²

In a letter to the NZ External Affairs Laking expressed his dismay at London's reticence particularly "...in view of the United States' willingness to disseminate information about its own plans" and added "...You will, no doubt, be considering ... whether the interests of international cooperation in regard to the Antarctic might be better served by a greater measure of collaboration between the two expeditions than appears to exist at the present time."⁴⁷³

The open dialogue offered by the United States made it difficult for New Zealand to understand the reluctance of Fuchs and the London Committee to adopt an equally open attitude about the TAE with the Americans. Soon after New Zealand had announced its participation in the expedition Alister McIntosh, NZ Secretary of External Affairs, wrote to Corner: "I think we will be making a terrible mistake if we follow the United Kingdom in their standoffishness to the Americans."⁴⁷⁴ New Zealand continued to argue the case for transparency and did everything possible to encourage American collaboration particularly as the US Navy offer of transportation services would be vital to its expedition. However, Fuchs

⁴⁷² Ibid

⁴⁷³ Laking, 15 June 1955

⁴⁷⁴ McGibbon, 1999, p. 189

still insisted that New Zealand provide for its own TAE transportation despite the additional cost this would incur.⁴⁷⁵

The CSAGI meeting in Paris in July 1955, which both Fuchs and Hillary attended, proved to be a turning point in British-American-New Zealand relations concerning the TAE. George Dufek, now promoted to Rear Admiral, also attended in his capacity as leader of the US Navy Task Force 43, in charge of *Operation Deep Freeze*. In his report on the meeting Frank Corner noted that Fuchs, Hillary and Dufek had had a “cordial discussion ... which Hillary thinks did good by giving Americans the British view.”⁴⁷⁶ Contrary to rumours that were circulating, Dufek assured Fuchs that the Americans had no intention of competing with the British or of launching their own attempt to cross the continent. Dufek re-asserted his offer of transportation assistance to New Zealand and specified that fully one third of a cargo ship had been reserved for New Zealand’s needs. When told that the independence of the expedition was essential Dufek replied “...that he did not care one way or the other.” Hillary hoped that New Zealand could obtain its own ship such as the *John Biscoe*, and possibly establish its base at the foot of the Ferrar Glacier two days walk away from the planned American base at Hut Point. In separating the two bases by a considerable distance he felt that the “difficulties which arise when two parties are camped side by side” would be avoided. Such a situation had been encountered once before with the United States. In 1947-48, an American base under Commander Finn Ronne of the RARE, and a UK base, under Ken Pierce-Butler of FIDS, had been co-located with considerable issue on the Antarctic Peninsula at Stonington Island.⁴⁷⁷ Although New Zealand and the United States had cordial relations regarding Antarctica there was significant sensitivity over the manner in which the American presence in McMurdo Sound, ostensibly New Zealand territory, was established. A message from External Affairs in Wellington to its representatives in London and Washington expressed concern over the close proximity which would arise between bases due to the US decision to relocate its main Antarctic base from Little America in the Bay of Whales to Hut Point.⁴⁷⁸ Corner was fully aware of Fuchs rigid stance on Commonwealth purity and his report highlighted the ascetic British position: “Clearly United Kingdom will insist on integrity of Trans-Antarctic Expedition being maintained and conceivably they would rather go it alone

⁴⁷⁵ Corner, 30 June 1955

⁴⁷⁶ Corner, 5 August 1955

⁴⁷⁷ Ronne, 1979, pp. 137-140

⁴⁷⁸ NZEA, 15 July 1955

than have our co-operation at price of being dependent on Americans.”⁴⁷⁹ One of the fears of the London Committee had been that the presence and particularly the generosity of the American Task Force 43 in McMurdo Sound would so dominate New Zealand’s effort as to render its profile in the Ross Dependency almost invisible. After all, New Zealand’s main purpose in joining the TAE was to establish its authority and sovereignty in the Ross Dependency. In a telegram to NZ External Affairs Corner warned that “There is still a great desire here to avoid any action which will allow the tiny expedition to be swamped by the huge American party, or to be dependent on it, or to lose its separate identity. Several people fear that America would so publicize any help they gave us as to make the Expedition seem to be their show.”⁴⁸⁰

Finally the London Committee acceded to New Zealand’s request to adopt a more open attitude with the United States regarding planned activities in the Antarctic. On 16 July Laking was relieved to be able to communicate TAE plans with his American counterparts as openly as they were already doing with him regarding their intentions in Antarctica. Despite Britain’s disappointment with the United States failure to recognize British sovereignty over the Falkland Islands Dependencies and of New Zealand sovereignty over the Ross Dependency, the offers of aid from the US Navy were gratefully accepted both for transport of men and material for the expedition and the IGY as well as for taking three observers from New Zealand down to McMurdo Sound during the 1955-56 season.⁴⁸¹ London recognised the advantages that the American presence would provide in terms of search and rescue capability, enhanced weather data capture, and even the additional publicity that might be brought to the Commonwealth effort through the American news media.⁴⁸² In the end, in an attempt to avoid further tainting the TAE with American support, arrangements were made such that the US Navy fleet would focus on transporting New Zealand’s IGY personnel and equipment. This was extended to include the materials and pre-fabricated panels to build Scott Base itself as well as a large portion of New Zealand’s fuel and supplies. The New Zealand ship would be used to transport the NZ TAE support party, the dogs and sledges, some fuel, two aircraft, tractors, and the remaining supplies. This compromise went some way to mitigate London’s concern of excessive non-Commonwealth involvement in the expedition.

⁴⁷⁹ NZHC London, 13 July 1955

⁴⁸⁰ NZHC London, 1 July 1955

⁴⁸¹ Laking, 16 July 1955

⁴⁸² Corner, 16 July 1955

However, for Fuchs the issue would never be far from his thoughts. On one particular day in April 1957 while at Shackleton base he recorded the following diary entry:

The Expedition was conceived as a Commonwealth effort in 1948 before I.G.Y. and American activities had been mooted. We have planned throughout that it is to be purely British and I have no intention that we shall sacrifice the honours now for a 'mess of potage' in the form of half a dozen barrels of fuel at a suitable point. Indeed I would rather by-pass such a depot and take a chance than let it be said we could not do it without American aid...I am determined we shall make our crossing as though they were not present.⁴⁸³

Fuchs would later be forced to retreat from that position. His comments regarding New Zealand's use of American ships were no less scathing:

...[it] sticks in my gullet for no longer is NZ mounting its own expedition as I had hoped would be the case from the earliest days of planning.

For better or for worse, Fuchs needed New Zealand support if his expedition was to succeed and New Zealand needed American support to complete its combined TAE & IGY mission. Admiral Dufek and the US Navy had inadvertently become the 'third leg on the stool'.

5.3 New Zealand and the IGY

The first full meeting of the CSAGI organising committee was held in July 1953 in Brussels at which time the IGY received official recognition. A subsequent IGY planning meeting was held in Rome in October of the following year during which the CSAGI sent a clear message to New Zealand that the international scientific community would like to see an IGY base in the Ross Sea region. A total of 37 stations were either planned or in operation for geophysical research by ten nations in the Antarctic during the IGY not counting those on surrounding Antarctic islands.⁴⁸⁴ It was important for the effectiveness of the geophysical research that the stations be distributed at strategic points around the continent and not be positioned simply for convenience or for political gain. For optimum coverage the CSAGI recommended that stations be placed at certain 'gap' locations. With this in mind, the meeting passed Resolution

⁴⁸³ Fuchs, 29 April 1957

⁴⁸⁴ Wexler, 1956, p.8

13 stating: “The C.S.A.G.I. invites the attention of the New Zealand Government to the very great desirability of a station at Ross Island or at a suitable site between Ross Island and Cape Adare.”⁴⁸⁵ Such a station would complete an important link between other stations already existent on Campbell Island, Macquarie Island, and in Invercargill and Christchurch. In a similar fashion, Resolution 18 pointed out: “The need for a principle station at Vahsel Bay at approximately 77°S 37°W is emphasised by the CSAGI...The CSAGI emphasises the very great importance of these observations at this location during the IGY”.⁴⁸⁶ This recommendation was to be taken up by the UK government. At this same meeting the Soviet Union stated its intention to place three bases on the continent including one at the South Pole. However, by the end of the conference the Russians had agreed to leave the South Pole to the United States while they would build an inland base at the Pole of Inaccessibility. This flexibility illustrated the strong spirit of cooperation, at least between scientific communities, that underpinned the IGY initiative despite the sensitive condition of global politics at the time.

The lead agency for New Zealand science was the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) often working in concert with the New Zealand branch of the United Kingdom’s Royal Society. In early anticipation of IGY involvement two special committees were formed to manage New Zealand’s IGY project. The first of these, the National Committee for the IGY under the auspices of New Zealand’s Royal Society, was created following the CSAGI meeting in Brussels in 1953. Its purpose was to prepare a draft programme for New Zealand’s scientific effort. Upon the recommendation of this committee the New Zealand government established its Inter-Departmental Committee for the IGY, as a unit of DSIR in May 1955. There was considerable overlap in membership of these committees and both were chaired by geophysicist Dr. E.I. ‘Ed’ Robertson. This ensured co-ordination between the different government agencies involved and provided a link back through the Royal Society to the International Committee of Scientific Unions (ICSU), the body which governed the global IGY effort. By highlighting the importance of the Ross Dependency to the global IGY programme the Rome conference had provided additional momentum for the first New Zealand initiative in the Antarctic since 1923.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Markham, 14 June 1955

⁴⁸⁵ Hatherton, 1961, p.11

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid

These proposals spawned frank dialogue between the various disciplines of New Zealand's Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and the government. In late 1953, the DSIR issued a paper in response to a request from the Department of External Affairs. It was entitled 'Scientific Work in the Ross Dependency' and provided a good illustration of DSIR thinking at the time.⁴⁸⁸

The Department of External Affairs has requested D.S.I.R. to consider four proposals, details of which are summarised in the attached confidential paper....

c) Taking into account the full range of scientific work in which it is engaged, DSIR does not consider that it is justified, nor does the nature of the projects envisaged justify it taking the initiative in, calling for, or organising, such an expedition.

(d) However, if it is decided on political, prestige, strategic or other grounds to establish such a base, DSIR would welcome an opportunity to be associated with it. It could offer help in programmes and planning, the secondment of scientific staff and to some extent by the loan of instruments.

(e) Similarly, DSIR regards with favour the scientific aims of the proposed trans-Antarctic journey but points out that the results to be expected, though valuable in themselves, will amount only to such as might be expected from a quick reconnaissance which could easily overlook major features. It is felt by DSIR that here again decisions as to the extent of New Zealand's support and assistance should be made on political and similar grounds, but DSIR would view such proposals with sympathy, would endeavour to make scientific staff available and would offer such assistance by way of planning and loan of equipment as possible.⁴⁸⁹

This last point discounted the value of the TAE's potential to deliver useful scientific results but admitted that the expedition could have political merit. A

⁴⁸⁸ Doyle, 1953

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid

response from the Director of Magnetic Survey extended the doubtful and somewhat fearful theme.

I feel that our most useful work will not be done in the Antarctic...We should however cooperate if cognate activities can gain much down there, particularly in design and use of equipment....Fixing the position of south magnetic pole by observation should be done, but not if it involves a journey over-dangerous⁴⁹⁰

The DSIR's lukewarm support for Antarctic scientific research showed that it was mainly political and not scientific forces that were driving New Zealand's decision to engage with the global Antarctic community in the years 1955-1958. The somewhat dour mood did not go un-noticed by New Zealand's international partners. A comment later made by John Hannesian Jr., the United States IGY Director was quite candid. He wrote:

It was not until late 1953 that strong Antarctic interest was generated in New Zealand. Even at this time it was not New Zealand initiative, but rather the news of British plans for the Trans-Antarctic Expedition (TAE) which caught the imagination of the New Zealand public. Coincident with these preparations was the planning for the IGY, and the combination of these two elements caused public interest to mount rapidly⁴⁹¹

Perhaps the following comment in this DSIR correspondence was the most revealing:

I cannot comment on political, sovereignty and economic factors, but I would be failing in my duty were I not to urge serious need to consider Ross Dependency observations from the national prestige angle. In London, Denmark, and Apia I have listened to strong criticism of New Zealand for so-called prostitution of science for commercial gain while neglecting its national responsibility in projects such as now being considered. It was pointed out that New Zealand had neglected pure science, was a wealthy country with wide territory, and

⁴⁹⁰ Magnetic Survey, 1953

⁴⁹¹ Hatherton, 1965, p.19

*population little less than Norway and Denmark which had done so much for pure science globally*⁴⁹²

These strong closing words drove home the need for New Zealand to awaken and contribute towards achieving the scientific goals of the IGY.

During the decade of the 1950's the New Zealand Antarctic Society was regarded as representing the New Zealand public when it came to Antarctic affairs. The Society had recently published a major overview of science in the region, *The Antarctic Today*. Its Secretary, Arthur Helm, was disappointed that Fuchs had not contacted the Society regarding his expedition and wrote a personal five page letter to Fuchs at a critical juncture in January 1955.⁴⁹³ In that letter Helm lamented the fact that the Society had not been invited to assist in the lead-up to the TAE given its strong efforts, made as early as September 1953, to move the New Zealand government to become involved in the Antarctic.

A contrasting feature of the TAE and the IGY was the degree of discretion, almost secrecy, with which the TAE was planned as compared to the publicity accompanying the lead-up to the IGY. This was due to two factors. First, being a private expedition, the TAE was never assured of funding until the respective governments announced their monetary commitments. Second, Fuchs and the British feared that the United States were about to conduct a crossing expedition of its own and wanted to be first to make the attempt. The IGY had no such need for secrecy and therefore garnered interest and support before the TAE was formally announced. Also, the IGY was a much larger enterprise and involved many nations, all of whom were vying for as much favourable publicity as possible. With the advent of the space age, dramatically announced by Russia's successful Sputnik launch, science had been propelled to the forefront in the mind of the public. Caught between the TAE and the IGY, pressure was inexorably growing for New Zealand to take its place among Antarctic nations.

As has been mentioned New Zealand interest in Antarctica was muted at this time but various organisations and individuals recognised that the country risked missing a golden opportunity to raise its stature among the global scientific community. In September 1953 the New Zealand Antarctic Society sent an extended letter to the Prime Minister Sidney Holland

⁴⁹² Magnetic Survey, 1953

⁴⁹³ Helm, 30 January 1955

urging the government to become involved in the IGY and to establish a permanent base in its Antarctic territory. The letter made no reference to the TAE which would not become public knowledge for another three months. In presenting its case the Society put forward several arguments including loss of sovereignty due to long term government inaction, possible strategic interests, the imminent IGY, and lastly, the participation of other Commonwealth nations.

In October, 1954, in a 'Secret' telegram from NZ External Affairs to the UKHC in Wellington, the government gave an indication of its view with respect to a 'trans-Antarctic expedition'. HMG had sent out a set of three questions regarding broader Antarctic policy to the member countries of its Inter-Departmental Polar Committee, one of which was seeking support for the expedition. The exact words are quoted below:

*... the Government views with favour the proposal for a trans-Antarctic expedition and is agreeable to the establishment of a reception base in the Ross Dependency. It was indicated that no decision has been made as to whether the Government will be able to participate in the project but that further attention will be devoted to this aspect*⁴⁹⁴

A few months later the powerful American icebreaker *USS Atka* sailed from Wellington bound for Ross Island. The *New York Times* special correspondent Walter Sullivan dramatically described the event as "...inaugurating a 'three years' spurt of exploration that may render extinct the experience of discovering new regions of the earth."⁴⁹⁵

In December 1954, the Society was granted an interview with the Prime Minister. Its delegation included Arthur Helm, Jim Rose and Robert Falla. However, it was the Minister for External Affairs, Tom Macdonald who, together with the Minister responsible for DSIR, Ronald Algie, heard their submission. The NZAS delegation was heartened by the response they now received which indicated a certain degree of acceptance of their proposal although the ministers made no specific commitment.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ NZEA, 8 October 1954

⁴⁹⁵ Molyneaux, 1954

⁴⁹⁶ Peat, 1983, p. 23

The New Zealand press also continued to apply pressure for New Zealand to act. An editorial of 5 January 1955 stated:

*Notwithstanding that the Antarctic is at our back door, that we are the nearest permanently inhabited country to the Ross Sea area, and that the principal nations of the world have been evincing an increasingly lively interest in the region for many years, New Zealand has remained blind to its responsibilities – and its opportunities.*⁴⁹⁷

Another article in the same issue continued the theme: “While a group of enthusiasts in the community has endeavoured to keep alive New Zealand’s waning interest in Antarctic affairs, the Government ... would be extremely reluctant to approve the necessary finance...” With a disheartening perspective the writer concluded “Nevertheless, the absence of direct participation by New Zealanders [in the IGY] could well be taken as an indication that this country is prepared to hand over to wealthier and more powerful nations outside the Commonwealth all claim to authority in the Antarctic.”⁴⁹⁸

Despite worldwide agreement on the importance of the IGY, New Zealand’s scientific community remained sceptical as to its value. The dependence on the TAE of New Zealand’s investment in the IGY was made evident in the final report to Algie, the Minister of DSIR, sent 14 April 1955. This report was prepared after the New Zealand government had confidentially given its approval for TAE participation and before it approved participation in the IGY. The report stated:

It should be emphasised that the establishment of an Antarctic station for solely N.Z. scientific purposes could not be supported on account of the cost and effort involved. If, however, Cabinet decides to establish an Antarctic base on national grounds to meet the requirements of Sovereignty and the Trans-Antarctic Journey, plus the cogent scientific purpose of the IGY, then scientific work can be accomplished of value internationally as well as to N.Z. In other

⁴⁹⁷ *Evening Post*, 5 January 1955

⁴⁹⁸ *Evening Post*, 5 January 1955

*words, the scientific results derived from the station would be material return for the outlay incurred in its establishment.*⁴⁹⁹

It was clear that although New Zealand's scientific interests were being held hostage to apparently severe financial constraints the TAE and questions of sovereignty and prestige were weighing heavily in the discussion.

Before New Zealand had announced its official decision to participate in the IGY, there was much discussion and planning being carried out in hopeful anticipation of active involvement. An important question was raised at an early meeting of the newly-formed Ross Sea Committee. Aroused by US Navy activity in its Antarctic 'back-yard' there was concern over possible impacts that the American presence in McMurdo Sound would have on New Zealand's IGY effort. With some relief it was pointed out that "the United States authorities had expressed their desire to see New Zealand do the IGY work in the area ..." and that the US had stated "...their willingness to assist with transport if required." The IGY representative at the meeting, Ed Robertson, was pleased to avoid the costs of transport for his scientific team should the New Zealand TAE party be unable to provide transport. However, it was also noted that the United States had decided to place their main base at McMurdo Sound and not at Little America as had previously been supposed. This raised the fear that the best site would be taken by the US leaving New Zealand with 'second choice'.⁵⁰⁰ The fact that the New Zealand base was planned for New Harbour (Butter Point) or possibly Discovery Inlet, each more than thirty miles distant from Ross Island, and that their roles were quite different in that the American base was to act only as a staging post for their South Pole station, assuaged those fears to some degree.

By mid-1955, US policy regarding Antarctica was at a cross-roads. This was freely discussed at the Paris meeting of the IGY Antarctic Sub-committee held in July 1955. The options stated by Admiral Dufek were for the United States to either "...go forward with a really active Antarctic policy or pull out. No one has favoured half measures."⁵⁰¹ Taken together, the advent of the IGY, the Cold War, and the end of the Korean war had provided the United States with the necessary impetus to adopt a dynamic policy towards the Antarctic. The coincidence of the IGY with the TAE could not have been better timed for New Zealand to

⁴⁹⁹ Markham, 14 April 1955, p.2

⁵⁰⁰ Ross Sea Committee, 11 July 1955

⁵⁰¹ Roberts, 15 July 1955, p.1

realise its Antarctic aspirations. One cloud on the horizon was the suspicion that the United States was seriously weighing the possibility of making a territorial claim of its own in Antarctica. At this meeting, which immediately followed on the Paris CSAGI Conference, Paul Siple, Director of Scientific Projects for the United States National Science Foundation, surmised that the United States was within two to three months of making official territorial claims. Siple indicated that these would not follow the 'sector principle' and initially would be both 'outrageous' and 'patchy'.⁵⁰² The American IGY plans included a dependence on using New Zealand as the base for flights to McMurdo Sound. Frank Corner reiterated that the United States was prepared to offer "...the fullest technical and material assistance to the New Zealand IGY party, including transport..."⁵⁰³ This vital point was not lost on the attendees in Paris. Point 12 of Corner's report from the meeting stated:

*The New Zealand Government may not realise how fully the Americans are aware that the whole future of their plans for the Antarctic hang on permission to use New Zealand air strips, both now and in the future. The Americans do not want to bargain openly about this, but are clearly prepared to pay generously for this privilege in terms of material aid.*⁵⁰⁴

The desire to build a strong relationship with New Zealand was confirmed with the assistance provided to Hillary's Support Party by Admiral Dufek and the US Navy. The excellent relationship that Dufek and Hillary had established from their first meeting in Paris, only made the task easier. The assistance that was eventually provided included:

- Transport and accommodation for three advance 'observers' to McMurdo Sound. Assisting those observers with local helicopter transport and aerial reconnaissance flights for base site and route evaluation
- Transport of significant materials and stores by ship to McMurdo Sound on the *USS John R. Towle*
- Ice breaker assistance to the *HMNZS Endeavour* as she manoeuvred in McMurdo Sound
- Assistance in the selection of the site for Scott Base
- Assistance with bulldozers for the levelling of the Scott Base site prior to construction

⁵⁰² Corner, 29 July 1955

⁵⁰³ Ibid

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid

The United States was not alone in making significant commitments at this time in Antarctica. As if the example of Britain and the United States were not enough to prod New Zealand to act, her closest neighbour, Australia, in 1947 had initiated a series of expeditions under the banner ANARE (Australian National Antarctic Research Expeditions) and in 1949 the Australian Antarctic Division was founded under the leadership of Dr Philip Law. During the period 1949-53 ANARE established bases on Heard and Macquarie Islands and in 1953 Australia launched an expedition to establish its first base on the Antarctic continent. In mid-1953 Law found a suitable ship, the Norwegian vessel *Kista Dan*, and on 13 February 1954 Mawson Station, in MacRobertson Land was formally commissioned.⁵⁰⁵

By 6 January 1955 the Secretariat for the IGY had not yet requested that New Zealand build a research station on Ross Island.⁵⁰⁶ Although New Zealand attended all of the CSAGI meetings, its formal participation in the IGY was not confirmed until August 1955 by which time a formal request had been received in Wellington and three months after publically announcing its commitment to the TAE. Alister McIntosh, New Zealand Secretary of External Affairs, in a letter to Frank Corner, admitted:

So far as the I.G.Y. is concerned, I am sure the whole grandiose project is beyond our resources and I wonder if it is all necessary anyway. Our concern in the Department is largely that of sovereignty.”... “As for all this I.G.Y. rubbish, I am quite prepared to push as much as we can onto the Americans... It is a pity that there is so much hostility.”⁵⁰⁷

In regards to the possibility of combining New Zealand’s TAE and IGY parties into a single base facility, McIntosh commented that the government’s plans for the scientific programme could be modified “...should the New Zealand government decide that an IGY programme should be carried out at the same base.”⁵⁰⁸

Shortly thereafter, on August 10, 1955 a joint meeting was held in New Zealand between the National IGY Committee, the Royal Society’s Scientific Sub-Committee and Hillary, who by now had been appointed as leader of the Ross Sea Support Party. The meeting was held to

⁵⁰⁵ Law – Béchervaise, 1957, p. 56

⁵⁰⁶ *Dominion Post – Wellington*, 6 January 1955

⁵⁰⁷ McGibbon, 1999, p.189

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*

explain the IGY proposals to Hillary and to resolve some difficulties that had arisen. These had to do with the number and make-up of the New Zealand IGY personnel who would accompany the Support Party to McMurdo Sound as well as to select the advance party observers who would sail in December with the US Navy ships of *Operation Deep Freeze*. Personnel selection is often a sensitive matter, especially when more than one organisation is involved. The IGY Committee selected one of the three, namely the Chief Scientist, Dr. Trevor Hatherton. The Ross Sea Committee selected the other two. However Hillary did provide his input which was that a track-vehicle expert and a base reconnaissance person be included in the group. It was clear at this point that Hillary was considering the use of tractors and wanted to ensure the route to the plateau would allow access by tractor.⁵⁰⁹ At this meeting, Hillary expressed his disagreement with the idea of appointing the Chief Scientist, Dr. Trevor Hatherton to be Deputy Leader of the Ross Sea Party, an idea first voiced by Sir Miles Clifford during his visit to Wellington. Hillary's reasons were practical ones as he wanted a deputy who would be "capable of leading a field party to set up a depot at Mt Albert Markham in case he (Hillary) were to crash up". Hillary proffered that the Chief Scientist be placed in charge of base camp when both the leaders were absent in the field. The IGY Committee accepted this approach.⁵¹⁰ By this time, New Zealand had decided that the base must serve its IGY needs as well as those of Hillary's Support Party.

New Zealand's IGY contribution was spread across a wide geographic area encompassing both the North and South Islands, certain offshore islands such as Campbell Island and the Auckland Islands as well as the Ross Dependency. The Antarctic portion of its IGY effort was divided between Pram Point on Ross Island and Cape Hallett. The Scott Base IGY team was further comprised of Technical Officers Neil Sandford, Herb Orr, and Peter MacDonald, and physicist Vern Gerard whose speciality was geo-magnetism. The three New Zealand scientists who first served at Hallett Station were scientists Clayton 'Bill' Ingham (seismology, geomagnetism, aurora), John Humphries (ionosphere) and Michael Langevad (electronics).⁵¹¹

With the decision by New Zealand to play a full part in the IGY, Hillary was becoming more attuned to the scientific potential of the expedition. He later noted in his autobiography: "For

⁵⁰⁹ Hillary, 10 August 1955

⁵¹⁰ Ibid

⁵¹¹ Quartermain, 1971, p. 92

my field parties I envisaged a wide programme of exploration, survey and geology in the mountains of Victoria Land. It was an exciting prospect as I saw us grow from a modest supporting-role – very much the junior partner – into a major national operation.”⁵¹²

Hallett Station

As its first scientific endeavour in Antarctica, New Zealand joined with the United States in a plan to establish a joint IGY base on Ridley Beach at Cape Adare, where Carsten Borchgrevink first overwintered in 1899. However, the site finally selected was Cape Hallett (named after a purser on the Ross’s *Erebus*). In February 1956 the American icebreaker *USS Edisto* carried out reconnaissance in Robertson Bay near Cape Adare for both an aircraft landing strip and as a potential site for the pre-named ‘Adare Station’ as it had been called during the planning stages.⁵¹³ However Ridley Beach was found to be a poor holding ground and also unsuitable for helicopter landing. The *Edisto* continued along the shore and eventually found an accessible site at Cape Hallett seventy miles to the south of Cape Adare. The base then became known as Hallett Station. Unfortunately this also meant the base would be virtually on top of a large penguin rookery which did nothing to enhance the quality of the air surrounding the station. Construction began on 9 January 1957 and was completed by 12 February.⁵¹⁴ The arrangement with the United States required New Zealand to supply three scientists while the remaining staff would consist of American personnel. It was also agreed that the appointment of the scientific leader at the base would alternate annually between the United States and New Zealand.⁵¹⁵ Cape Hallett also served as an emergency aircraft landing strip and was selected partially on political grounds since there was a fear that Japan or Russia would establish one of their IGY stations in that region. In a memo to the New Zealand Embassy in Washington, the US State Department had made American motives quite clear explaining: “...the primary United States interest was [is] to ensure that Russian parties did [do] not take up any of the projected stations in the I.G.Y. programme.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Hillary, 1975, p.224

⁵¹³ Stewart, 1990, Volume I, p. 422

⁵¹⁴ Quartermain, 1971, pp. 91-92

⁵¹⁵ Markham, 9 April 1957

⁵¹⁶ NZ Embassy-Washington, 23 November 1954

The arrangement was ideal for New Zealand in that logistics and base construction would be carried out by the US Navy.⁵¹⁷ There was considerable discussion over the naming of the re-located base with the names *Hallett* and *Potaka* being recommended by the NZ IGY Committee. L.B Quartermain, editor of 'Antarctic' the NZAS journal, insisted on the name *Ross Station*, following the precedent of naming bases according to the explorer who first discovered the area where a base was to be located. However, the United States rejected New Zealand's suggestion, possibly for reasons of sovereignty, and the base became known as *Hallett Station*.⁵¹⁸ This station was to act as a key part of a meteorological network and, because of its position on the flight path from New Zealand to the American base on Ross Island, played an important role in air operations and communications. The location offered the only alternate airfield available to aircraft flying from New Zealand and past their point of no return should poor weather deny them access to the McMurdo landing strip.⁵¹⁹ Although intended as a temporary facility the station was active until de-commissioned in 1974 and stands as an excellent example of the co-operation between the United States and New Zealand in Antarctic affairs.

⁵¹⁷ Harrowfield, 2007, p. 36

⁵¹⁸ Markham, April 1957

⁵¹⁹ *Antarctic Program of the US National Committee for the IGY 1957-1958*, April 1956



Figure 28: American cargo ship *USS Arneb* unloading supplies at Cape Hallett station during the IGY - 1957

Photo: Jim Hager

With participation approved for both the TAE and the IGY, the two Committees agreed that the TAE base would accommodate a contingent of five IGY scientists who would be seconded to and under the leadership of Sir Edmund Hillary. This step led to “...greatly diversified” activities at Scott Base and added another dimension to the New Zealand expedition. As New Zealand’s Chief IGY Scientist, Dr Trevor Hatherton later pointed out, although joint occupation was “...the only sensible and economical decision” the consequence “...of this diversity was to throw much greater responsibility and work onto the leader of the expedition.[Hillary]”⁵²⁰

One curious feature of the international IGY programme was that the CSAGI excluded the science of geology, although it included glaciology, which has little connection with geophysics. However, the IGY executive was focused on geophysics and studying the effects of the sun on the earth, activities which demanded that a series of simultaneous observations be taken over a period of 18 months across the globe. Geology did not fit this profile and thus

⁵²⁰ Hatherton, 1961, p. 13

with only limited financial resources being available it was left out.⁵²¹ New Zealand's IGY effort concentrated on the fields of meteorology, geomagnetism, aurora and airglow, ionospheric physics, seismology, gravimetry, glaciology and oceanography.⁵²² Nevertheless, the four qualified geologists in the two TAE parties did not leave empty handed taking every opportunity to examine rock formations and nunataks on both sides of the continent. The TAE, being separate from the IGY, had no need to adhere to the IGY agenda and its members were free to pursue their geological interests when the opportunity arose.

By June 1957 the relationship between the New Zealand TAE and the IGY organisations was well settled and their respective objectives mutually understood. For New Zealand, unlike the case with the UK, the two separate projects had become inter-dependent. The brief prepared for the Prime Minister's Conference of 1957 unequivocally stated:

...the NZ TAE has two immediate purposes: to assist in the crossing of the Continent in the summer of 1958/59 [sic 1957/58]...and to carry out New Zealand's part of the Antarctic programme of the IGY. The presence of the Expedition in the Ross Dependency...will also be a clear indication of New Zealand's interest in the Antarctic and must reinforce our claim to the Dependency.⁵²³

Here, in a most concise manner, were stated the three major goals for New Zealand in Antarctica. All other achievements would be a bonus. It also made clear that, for New Zealand at least, the TAE and the IGY while remaining distinct were tightly coupled assuring considerable inter-action between the explorers and the scientists. It should be noted that the brief made no mention of exploration or surveying within the Ross Dependency. The three sledging parties and their extensive survey work among the Trans-Antarctic Mountains were conceived extemporaneously by Hillary's team during the winter months of 1957 much to the dismay of the Ross Sea Committee. The brief did make reference to possible continued scientific research following the end of the IGY and perhaps even an extension of the IGY by

⁵²¹ Happily, this situation was addressed the next season with the New Zealand Geological and Survey Expedition led by Larry Harrington and the Victoria University of Wellington Antarctic Expedition led by Colin Bull.

⁵²² *The IGY – The New Zealand Programme*, June 1956

⁵²³ Prime Minister's Conference, June 1957

one year. New Zealand felt that such a decision was premature at this point and recommended that the question be re-visited when the results of the first year could be assessed.⁵²⁴

In addition to the sovereignty aims the brief highlighted the United States dependence on New Zealand as a staging point for its Antarctic programme. Importantly, it revealed that New Zealand wished to participate in the dialogue over the future of Antarctica. This was indeed a significant step forward for New Zealand and represented a major break with the past:

Over the past few years New Zealand's interest has been to consolidate her position in the Ross Dependency, to strengthen her territorial claim and to secure general recognition as one of the nations closely interested in (and therefore to be consulted on) the future of Antarctica. Lacking resources herself, it has been necessary to earn assistance and (as far as possible) approval by cooperating freely with others and in particular with the United States. (In this regard it is an advantage that New Zealand's metropolitan territory is virtually an essential base for the United States Antarctic Expedition)"... "It is to be hoped that actions taken in the past and during the period of the IGY will have established her right to participate in any political negotiations, either multi-lateral or bi-lateral with the United States."... "It is after 1959, when the results of the investigations now being conducted are known, that international rivalry is likely to become more open."⁵²⁵

At this stage the Antarctic Treaty had not yet been envisaged.

Having now worked closely with the United States for two years New Zealand felt confident of the future and acknowledged that its 'Antarctic Expedition' had been given a tremendous amount of help by the US Navy. Interestingly, this appreciation came at a point where the majority of both Fuchs' and Hillary's activity still lay ahead of them while they made preparations for the crossing journey during the coming summer months.

⁵²⁴ Ibid

⁵²⁵ Ibid

*New Zealand relations with the United States in the Ross Dependency have been excellent...The United States requires for the maintenance of its own expedition the assistance and goodwill of the New Zealand authorities; the latter for their part recognise that the present Expedition could not easily have been mounted without United States assistance. (Nineteen New Zealanders went South in United States ships together with a vast quantity of stores and equipment, and the Expedition had constantly to rely on United States assistance with ice-breakers, helicopters, etc.) **This friendly and mutually advantageous cooperation is perhaps the most solid foundation for our future activities in the Dependency. It is also perhaps the best guarantee of our claim, since the United States would be less likely to challenge the claim of a country with which she was collaborating on the most friendly terms.***⁵²⁶

The brief addressed the ‘rumour’ that the United States was preparing to make a claim that could include all of the Ross Dependency. It was surmised that Australia possibly wanted to negotiate a ‘tit for tat’ arrangement with the United States whereby they would agree (should the United States decide to make a claim) to recognise each other’s claims. It was also recognised that Russia was “...ensconced on Australian Antarctic Territory” and that this could precipitate: “ a) A Russian claim to part of Australian Antarctic territory and/or b) A combined Russia/India effort through the UN to place Antarctica under the control of an ‘unwelcome’ international regime.” It was felt that “...New Zealand’s best advantage...lies in building up a substantial record of effective occupation of the Ross Dependency and (inconsistent as this may appear in some eyes) cooperating closely with the United States” and finally recommended that “...New Zealand should stand firm on its claim to the Ross Dependency”.⁵²⁷

The brief concluded with interesting remarks about an airstrip possibly being built by the United States at Cape Bernacchi on the Victoria Land coast of the Ross Dependency. The New Zealand government’s reaction demonstrated that the issue of sovereignty was never far from the surface of otherwise congenial relations.

⁵²⁶ Prime Minister’s Conference, June 1957

⁵²⁷ Ibid

Finally it should be noted that the possibility of constructing an airstrip on solid ground at Cape Bernacchi may have a profound influence on the interests and policies of the United States. Admiral Dufek has been concerned that his expedition might be deprived of the use of heavy aircraft if the ice on McMurdo Sound, on which the present airstrip is made, were to melt as it has been known to do in some years. He has therefore examined possible sites on the mainland and has tentatively concluded that an airstrip could be constructed on Cape Bernacchi on the western side of McMurdo Sound...and might cost \$50,000,000...They might be loath to continue in territory claimed by a foreign power however friendly. Such a decision might therefore bring to a head the latent disagreement over the status of our claim to the Dependency.⁵²⁸

The United States was treading a fine line with its operations in the Ross Dependency. The US did not want to upset New Zealand by completely disregarding its territorial claim and realised that it needed New Zealand services to continue its own operations. In addition, the US strongly preferred New Zealand as an Antarctic neighbour over any other nation. That may explain why the American base in McMurdo Sound was defined by Dufek as being for 'logistics support' and not for carrying out IGY scientific work. Except for meteorology which was necessary to operate the American air base, scientific research on Ross Island was left for New Zealand to perform. Similarly, for the joint station at Cape Hallett, the IGY scientific staff were New Zealanders with American personnel providing maintenance and logistics support.⁵²⁹ There had been some debate regarding the deployment of New Zealand's Scott Base IGY scientists. One possibility raised was that they could be housed with the Americans over at Hut Point. Interestingly, for a man who supposedly had little interest in science, it was Hillary who insisted that the New Zealand base should house both the TAE and the IGY personnel.⁵³⁰ This was another example of the nationalistic fervour that Hillary brought to the New Zealand Antarctic Expedition. Expectations as of April 1957 were that Scott Base would not be occupied beyond the end of the IGY. New Zealand at this stage had not made any long term commitment to a presence in the Antarctic.⁵³¹

⁵²⁸ Ibid

⁵²⁹ Quartermain, 1971, p. 92

⁵³⁰ Corner, 16 July 1955

⁵³¹ Robertson, 2 April 1957

5.4 The US Navy, the IGY, and the TAE

The United States first became involved in the Antarctic early in the 19th century. Nathaniel Palmer, often credited as the first person to sight Antarctica, was a Nantucket sealer who began travelling to the Antarctic Peninsula as a twenty year old seaman. In 1821 Palmer encountered and visited with Count Fabian von Bellingshausen as his ships were completing their circumnavigation of the continent.⁵³² Secrecy, which was the unwritten code of the sealing and whaling fraternity, makes it difficult to confirm their geographic achievements and the debate carries on as to which country can rightfully claim ‘first sighting’ of the Antarctic continent. In 1838 Charles Wilkes led the United States Exploring Expedition which mapped over 1240 miles of Antarctic coastline during a four year voyage and giving it the name ‘Wilkes Land’.⁵³³ After an eighty year hiatus American exploration of Antarctica resumed in the 20th century with the expeditions of Admiral Richard E. Byrd and Lincoln Ellsworth. It was Byrd with his two major Antarctic expeditions, the first in 1929, who established the American Antarctic presence as it existed during the period up to World War II. Byrd was a nationalist and strongly endorsed that the United States should make formal claims to large parts of the continent. He was joined in this attitude by Finn Ronne. Following the war and nearing the end of his naval career, Byrd was given leadership of *Operation Highjump*. This expedition was the largest ever launched into Antarctica and involved over 4700 men while 13 ships were deployed including the two icebreakers *USS Northwind* and *USS Burton Island*.⁵³⁴

During the Paris CSAGI meeting in July 1955 participating countries outlined their plans to establish bases in Antarctica. The United States made the largest commitment with a plan to build six bases or ‘stations’ as well as an air operations and logistics facility in McMurdo Sound. One of these stations, later named ‘Ellsworth’ was on the Filchner Ice Shelf near Vahsel Bay and located about sixty-five miles east of Fuchs’ base ‘Shackleton’.⁵³⁵ The most important station and most relevant to the TAE was the Amundsen/Scott station established during the 1956-57 season at the geographic South Pole.⁵³⁶

⁵³² Jones, AGE, 1982, p 107

⁵³³ Reader’s Digest, 1985, p104

⁵³⁴ Bertrand, 1948, p. 485

⁵³⁵ Ronne, 1979, p. 245

⁵³⁶ *Antarctic Program of the US National Committee for the IGY 1957-1958*, April 1956

Throughout 1955 the most pressing issue for New Zealand was transport from Wellington to McMurdo Sound as negotiations with Britain to purchase a ship were not progressing well. Hillary and Dufek had discussed transportation possibilities when in Paris and Hillary was not long in following up. In November 1955, before departing on the *Theron* voyage, Hillary wrote to Captain Ketchum, senior USN officer in New Zealand and itemized the transport arrangements he had discussed with Dufek for US Navy assistance. Hillary's list included transport of one thousand tons of cargo along with twenty men, and confident of their toughness, remarked: "...these men will take rough and ready conditions but are not particularly concerned if they have to sleep on deck as long as they get there."⁵³⁷ His list also included two hundred drums of BP aircraft fuel. Hillary then asked Ketchum if he could provide copies of aerial photographs that the USN might take of the area around McMurdo Sound to assist in finding a base site and route to the polar plateau. Three days later, Ketchum wrote back confirming Hillary's items on all counts. United States assistance could not have been more forthcoming.

The Americans had given assurances to Hillary and Fuchs at the Paris CSAGI meeting that although they were going to be very active in different regions of Antarctica they were not going to launch a crossing attempt. However, they were nevertheless fascinated by the TAE, by its spirit of adventure and, in the case of New Zealand, bemused by the lack of technical sophistication which marked the Kiwi organisation. The friendship that was struck in Paris between USN Admiral George Dufek and Hillary bode well for the expedition.

The generosity of the US Navy toward New Zealand was not entirely altruistic. A prime motivation was the fear of the United States, and of other Western nations, that the Soviet Union and/or Japan would choose to build a base in McMurdo Sound and possibly in the vicinity of Ross Island. Such an eventuality could have caused significant political discomfort given the Cold War and the post-World War II feeling about Japan. An indication of this risk occurred at the 1955 CSAGI meeting in Paris where Frank Corner had been successful in redirecting Japan's interest for a base in the region of Cape Adare towards another location in the Norwegian sector. Three bases would now carry out the IGY scientific programme in the Ross Sea region.. The United States base at Hut Point, although established primarily for logistics support purposes, would capture meteorological data. Together with New Zealand's planned TAE base near Butter Point where IGY scientific studies would be performed and

⁵³⁷ Hillary, 11 November 1955

the joint US/NZ base at Cape Hallett, these would collectively satisfy the CSAGI requirements for that region and make any other base superfluous to IGY interests.

In another instance of American assistance Hillary made at least one important flight in a US Navy plane prior to the 1957 winter which assisted his planning for the summer season ahead. In a 18 February letter sent to Richard Brooke who along with several others was awaiting evacuation from the Skelton Depot Hillary related:

*I did a long flight in a Globemaster back from the pole along the 155th meridian and was able to fill in most of the gaps in our knowledge along there...I think the route as we suspected will have to follow the 150th meridian.*⁵³⁸

Meanwhile, Captain Finn Ronne of the US Navy, who was in charge of the American IGY operations at Ellsworth Station, provided critical support to the British contingent as they struggled to establish their forward base at South Ice. At one point, following a mishap, Fuchs had a hard job extricating one of his tractors which had fallen into a crevasse. As Ronne stated below:

*...expending hundreds of gallons of fuel oil. In a radio conversation with me, Dr. Fuchs expressed doubt that the crossing would be continued unless fuel supplies for his snowmobiles [Sno-cats] were replenished. He asked if I could help by flying 12 drums to South Ice Station.*⁵³⁹

Ronne cabled Dufek asking permission and then delivered the fuel from Shackleton base.

And again, Ronne in his cable to Admiral Dufek showed the extent to which the US Navy was prepared to assist:

*"I asked that special permission be granted for the entire British party at Shackleton to be evacuated on our ships...in case the trans-continental trip had to be abandoned that year."*⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Hillary, 18 February, 1957

⁵³⁹ Ronne, 1979 p. 246

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid

New Zealand's dependence on US Navy support was again reflected in Hatherton's report following the 'observer' advance party reconnaissance trip to McMurdo Sound. In describing his sledging journey up the Ferrar Glacier with Gunn and Smith he wrote:

*With American assistance sufficient material and supplies were provided to accomplish the mission, though these were in many cases not ideal for man-hauling sledge parties, as the Americans look with amazed horror on such means of exploration. ...We took with us ...280 lbs of tinned food as the Americans, relying so much on mechanical horse-power, have little or no concentrated rations.*⁵⁴¹

All of these seemingly minor assists which occurred continuously throughout the expedition, when taken in aggregate, became a major factor in the success of the New Zealand expedition and thereby to the Antarctic crossing itself.

Although Fuchs may have been disturbed by the assistance given by the US Navy, there was no lack of appreciation from New Zealand for its help. Trevor Hatherton clearly recognised the contribution that the US Navy provided to New Zealand and was most gracious in recording:

*...The transport of many hundreds of tons of stores, and of the many expedition members by both sea and air has enabled the New Zealand teams to accomplish much more than their own logistics support would have allowed. Rear-Admiral George Dufek and the men of Task Force 43 have given generous assistance whenever asked – despite the fact that they were responsible for implementing the very large United States Antarctic programme.*⁵⁴²

Bernie Gunn, another of the three observers who accompanied *Operation Deep Freeze* in 1955-56 was deeply appreciative of the support he received in his reconnaissance efforts commenting: "The greater part of the commitments of the directive had been completed when the *USS Glacier* sailed from McMurdo Sound on 9th Feb. *This was only possible because of*

⁵⁴¹ Hatherton, February 1956

⁵⁴² Hatherton, 1961, p.14

the unstinted[sic] help and co-operation given by all members of US Task Force 43.”

[author’s emphasis]⁵⁴³ Commenting on the work of the three New Zealand observers, Arthur Helm, Secretary of the RSC, wrote “We are most indebted to the Americans for the kindness with which our men were treated and for the facilities made available to enable them to carry out their objectives.”⁵⁴⁴

Fuchs’ party have Finn Ronne to thank for enabling them to accomplish one of the highlights of the TAE. This was the first, non-stop flight across the continent in a single engine aeroplane. The British party had the use of a de Havilland ‘Otter’, the big brother of New Zealand’s ‘Beaver’. There were four people left at Shackleton after the departure of the crossing party. These were the three RAF personnel, Squadron Leader John Lewis, New Zealander Gordon Haslop (actually born in Saskatchewan, Canada) and Peter Weston, aircraft mechanic. The fourth person was radio operator Taffy Williams. They decided to try to fly non-stop from Shackleton to Scott Base in McMurdo Sound. They were thwarted by weather and icing on their first attempt after flying for 3 1/2 hours and had to return to the advance base at South Ice to await more favourable weather conditions. A problem arose since they had consumed significant fuel and did not have enough to reach Scott Base without replenishing their tanks. South Ice did not store any aircraft fuel however several drums of BP aviation fuel remained at Shackleton. It was tempting to fly to Shackleton to re-fuel however that would have added another 600 miles to the journey and simply consumed a large portion of the additional fuel collected. At this point the only recourse was to either abandon the attempt or call for help. Lewis knew that USN Captain Finn Ronne had aided them before and might be willing to do so again. The COM meeting of 6 January 1958 records “...he [Lewis] would have to consider getting the R.A.F. contingent out through the American station at Ellsworth. He had sufficient fuel for one more attempt.”⁵⁴⁵ In the end Lewis sent a request to Ronne asking him if he would fly to Shackleton, pick up some BP fuel and deliver it to South Ice. Ronne agreed and, consistent with the helpful attitude that the Americans had shown the expedition so far, soon had three drums of fuel delivered to the British pilots at South Ice.⁵⁴⁶ The minutes further recorded that the Otter had arrived safely at Scott Base however, no mention was made of the vital assistance that had been provided by the Americans.

⁵⁴³ Bernie Gunn, 8 February 1956

⁵⁴⁴ Ross Sea Committee Newsletter, 1 March 1956

⁵⁴⁵ COM Minutes, 6 Jan 1958

⁵⁴⁶ Ronne, 1961, p. 235

One of the most laudable aspects of the TAE was that over the three years of intense activity in an unknown and inhospitable environment no lives were lost. In more than a few cases this was due entirely to good fortune. However, there were two incidents, both involving Fuchs' party, where the direct assistance of the US Navy proved essential. The first of these occurred in September 1957 while Fuchs' party was at Shackleton Base. Gordon Haslop and Dr. Allan Rogers were flying the two-hundred miles to Halley Bay to tend to Robin Smart, the medical officer who had been seriously injured in a fall. Due to poor visibility they failed to find Halley station and tried to return to Shackleton but had to make an emergency landing on the ice shelf as they were short on fuel and darkness was setting in. For several days bad weather made it impossible to rescue Haslop and Rogers who were surviving on three days of emergency rations. Fuchs contacted Finn Ronne at Ellsworth Station who immediately offered to help. As soon as weather permitted, which was not for several days, Ronne flew to Shackleton with the special drug, Depoheparin, that was required for the injured man.⁵⁴⁷ Fuchs asked if he could also borrow a 'Harmon-Nelson' heater to help melt the snow that had accumulated in the Otter over the winter. In addition, Ronne delivered thirty gallons of 'Prestone' antifreeze that would be used for the Sno-cats during the crossing.⁵⁴⁸ John Lewis and David Stratton then flew the Otter that had just been tested and delivered the drug to Halley station. On their return they spotted the Auster where it had landed on the edge of the ice shelf and landed nearby. The Auster was re-fuelled and then both aircraft returned to Halley Station. With the medicine that Ronne had supplied Smart made a speedy recovery.⁵⁴⁹ The second incident occurred after the crossing party had left the South Pole and were travelling towards D700. One of their members, Geoffrey Pratt, the seismologist, became seriously ill with an acute case of carbon monoxide poisoning from fumes that had accumulated in his Sno-cat. Due to the altitude his recovery time, without supplementary oxygen, would have been about 10 days as estimated by Allan Rogers the doctor in the party. Conditions did not allow for aircraft to land with medical help. Fuchs' then called on Admiral Dufek who immediately arranged for two of his Neptune aircraft to find the party and air-drop "...two large oxygen cylinders" to the beleaguered party.⁵⁵⁰ With the plentiful oxygen Pratt recovered quickly and the next day the crossing party was able to continue on its journey. At this point Fuchs might have been grateful for the presence of the Americans and their involvement with his expedition. They had saved him at least a ten day delay of his

⁵⁴⁷ Fuchs, TAE diary, 24 September 1957

⁵⁴⁸ Ronne, 1961, p. 186

⁵⁴⁹ Fuchs TAE diary, 21 September 1957 – 2 October 1957

⁵⁵⁰ Fuchs, TAE Diary, 28 January 1958

schedule, and the need to spend an additional six months in Antarctica. Incidents such as these demonstrate the degree of inter-dependence that existed between the TAE parties and the US Navy during the expedition.

5.5 Hillary's 'Dash to the Pole' – A Reprise



Figure 29: Hillary and USN Admiral George Dufek chatting before the New Zealand tractor party headed south from Scott Base, 14 October 1957

Photo: Bill Cranfield

“BRITISH EXPEDITION CONQUERS EVEREST” ran the headline in late May, 1953. John Hunt’s expedition had proven the ability of British fortitude, bringing glory to the Empire and bestowing a most uplifting event on the reign of the new monarch, Queen Elizabeth II. Two years later, as the Queen toured the Canadian sealer *Theron* on the day before the ship sailed for the Antarctic, there were those who saw the expedition as the dawning of a new ‘Elizabethan Age’. By the time Fuchs and his Sno-cats arrived at New Zealand’s Scott Base on 2 March, 1958 those predictions would have, rightly or wrongly, lost some of their gloss.

In mid-December 1957, while Fuchs’ party was struggling valiantly up the heavily crevassed Recovery Glacier on their way to the polar plateau above Vahsel Bay, Hillary found himself

pondering a momentous decision. Should he publicly declare that he and his ‘tractor party’ were heading for the South Pole? After having unhappily shared a cabin with Fuchs during the *Theron* voyage, and after having to put up with issues such as the unnecessarily difficult purchase from Britain of the *John Biscoe* and having endured the conservative strait-jacket of the Ross Sea Committee, Hillary, having fully accomplished his primary mission in support of Fuchs, was determined to strike out independently both for his own interests as well as for those of New Zealand. On the Everest expedition Hillary was there at the pleasure of the British team. As Hillary’s climbing companion on Everest George Lowe later remarked “...when we climbed Everest, we felt that we were all British.”⁵⁵¹ The TAE was a very different expedition at a very different point in New Zealand history. New Zealand’s primary purpose for participating in the TAE was to establish its sovereignty over the Ross Dependency. In accepting the role as leader of the ‘New Zealand Antarctic Expedition’, Hillary had shed his colonial status and was determined to perform his duties in a spirit of reasoned independence, at least to the extent that his resources and the governance structure imposed upon him would allow.

An early indication of Hillary’s intentions was given in a candid letter written by George Laking, a senior official in the Department of External Affairs, to Frank Corner, New Zealand’s Deputy High Commissioner in London. The letter of 16 July 1956 recounted an early discussion with Hillary about the expedition and shows that the government was not entirely blind to its leader’s ambition:

*...In practical matters, however, he has never paid undue deference to London’s views, and I am sure he will continue to rely principally on his own usually sound judgement...I think the idea of reaching the Pole itself is still in his mind. But in view of the relative strength of the New Zealand party...I don’t think we should discourage him.*⁵⁵²

The TAE engendered two ‘incidents’ that generated world-wide controversy. Their publicity was due to an omnipresent press and the creative talents of one particular UK journalist, Noel Barber of London’s *Daily Mail*, who, interestingly, goes largely unnoticed in most accounts of the expedition. Barber was a crack journalist who had the admiration of the two New

⁵⁵¹ Lowe, 1997

⁵⁵² Laking, 16 July 1956

Zealand reporters covering the expedition, Douglas McKenzie of the *Christchurch Star* and Geoff Lee-Martin of Auckland's *New Zealand Herald*.⁵⁵³ Barber also had the ear of Admiral Dufek and flew several times with the Americans to the pole becoming the first British visitor to the pole since Scott in 1912. Lee-Martin later described Barber as "...a dab hand at making himself part of the news".⁵⁵⁴ While being hosted by the Americans at their McMurdo Sound base he acted as the Editor-in Chief for their publication *Ross Island Review* under the eponymous pseudonym 'Sotorios Barber'.⁵⁵⁵

The first controversy arose with respect to Hillary's tractor party when Hillary announced that he was going to try to reach the Pole "...God willing and crevasses permitting".⁵⁵⁶ It is now generally accepted that, once committed to lead the New Zealand support party, Hillary had intentions of travelling to the South Pole should the opportunity present itself. He stated this clearly in a wide-ranging and candid report to Arthur Helm following his attendance at the July 1955 CSAGI meeting in Paris, a meeting which was also attended by Fuchs, James Wordie and Admiral Dufek. Hillary was explicit in describing his plans. He told Helm:

Yesterday I had some useful discussion with Fuchs. I wanted to clear up a few points of policy in respect of planning.... if there is anything you particularly disagree with you had better let me know....

*1. That subject to the limitations of finance and shipping we should plan on the basis that although the journey objective of the New Zealand end must be the establishment of a dump at Mount Albert Markham, that the expedition should have sufficient supplies and equipment so that if organisation and time permits, or an emergency occurs, the Party could travel out as far as the South Pole.*⁵⁵⁷

Having conferred with Fuchs in Paris about the latter's Sno-cats he wrote in his letter to Helm:

I feel that the greatest weakness of our present plan is the lack of track vehicles. I intend going into the known information on the Ferrar Glacier but it

⁵⁵³ Mackenzie D., Interview with the author, 2007, Christchurch

⁵⁵⁴ Martin, 2007, p.134

⁵⁵⁵ *Ross Island Review*, 2 March 1958

⁵⁵⁶ Barber, 1958, p.119

⁵⁵⁷ Hillary, 13 July 1955

*appears possible to get vehicles to go up it for many miles on very easy going.
It might be possible to get vehicles out onto the polar plateau.*⁵⁵⁸

At this early stage of the expedition there still remained a significant element of uncertainty in Hillary's mind. Arthur Helm, Secretary of the Ross Sea Committee, was a close friend and confidant of Hillary's. He and his wife Louise often stayed with the Helm's when visiting Wellington referring to their home as 'the Helm Hotel'.⁵⁵⁹ It is possible that Helm did not distribute this letter in its entirety to other members of the Committee. However Hillary's thoughts about reaching the pole were made public in another way well before the New Zealand party reached McMurdo Sound. In a revealing book published one year before the *Endeavour* sailed southward, English journalist Norman Kemp made the following prescient observation:

*Though Hillary holds private hopes of reaching the South Pole from his end, this endeavour is not part of the specific programme and could only be achieved if Fuchs and his men make an exceptionally speedy passage from their starting-place, and Hillary is able to lay the bases [depots] without undue delays from his end.*⁵⁶⁰

What no one had foreseen was the possibility that Fuchs would make an exceptionally slow passage, a very different outcome which would also suit Hillary's plans. Given these prior indications and his mountaineering record, it is difficult to believe that Fuchs did not suspect Hillary of holding this personal ambition. The mystery lies in the fact that through their period together in Paris or while they shared a berth on the *Theron*, or during the long winter months while they were hunkered down in their respective Antarctic bases and within radio contact, neither Fuchs nor Hillary raised the topic. Fuchs was a very private individual and as George Lowe described him: "...Bunny Fuchs was like the profile of the continent itself – tough, flat, unchanging, dogged; and after three years in his company I cannot say I knew him."⁵⁶¹ In this case those traits did not serve Fuchs well and he and Hillary would not enjoy an easy and open relationship.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid

⁵⁵⁹ Helm, J, Interview with the author, 2007, Geraldine NZ

⁵⁶⁰ Kemp, 1956., p. 42

⁵⁶¹ Lowe, 1959, p. 108

It is useful here to provide some background on ‘Bunny’ Fuchs. His soft spoken and deliberate demeanour hid a long nurtured driving ambition. As described by Derek Williams, cinematographer on the *Theron* voyage, Fuchs was a man with a point to prove. He had a command and control personality and he was focused on winning whether on the squash court (he played into his eighties) or arm wrestling on the *Theron*. Though quiet, he was not modest or self-effacing. He had worked for many years getting the TAE to the starting line. It was his expedition more than anyone else’s and only he could give permission for anyone to step outside their circumscribed brief.⁵⁶² There is no doubt that Hillary’s personal decision to go on to the Pole violated that rule and that Fuchs had been given a bitter pill to swallow. George Lowe, who accompanied Fuchs through both the advance and crossing journeys of the TAE offered the following description of Fuchs: “Bunny appeared not to savour anything, not even food – and certainly not music, which he banned from our base throughout the Antarctic except at weekends”⁵⁶³ Fuchs was hardly a proponent of ‘consultative leadership’ as evidenced by Jon Stephenson’s following observation. Stephenson, the Australian geologist and member of the crossing party who, together with Ken Blaiklock, drove dog teams to the Pole ahead of Fuchs’ Sno-cats, recollected that Fuchs called a meeting before setting off one morning and told his party of Hillary’s proposal to abandon the journey and of his decision to reject its recommendation. Stephenson went on to say that for most of the group it came as a surprise and that he was personally disappointed that it had not been more widely discussed.”⁵⁶⁴ In a 1975 interview with journalist Charles Neider, and with perhaps a bit of disparaging self-awareness and humour, Fuchs described himself as “...a benevolent dictator”.⁵⁶⁵

It was during the *Theron* voyage while unloading the ship at Vahsel Bay that Hillary became enamoured of the Ferguson tractor, basically a farm vehicle. After using Fergusons to haul supplies in setting up the base at Shackleton, the idea of perhaps driving them to the Pole took hold of his imagination. His country could afford nothing better. On returning to England he and Fuchs’ engineer, David Pratt, and Bob Miller travelled to the Eikmashin factory in Norway to investigate modifying the tractors to improve their performance in conditions of soft snow. On visiting a lumber camp they witnessed tracked Fergusons being used to harvest logs. These tractors had ‘full’ rather than ‘half’ tracks and included an

⁵⁶² Williams, D., Correspondence with the author, 26 March 2010

⁵⁶³ Lowe, 1959, p. 108

⁵⁶⁴ Stephenson, 2009, p.109

⁵⁶⁵ Neider, 1980, p.267

additional 'guide wheel' which would later be added to those at Scott Base. It was Jim Bates, Hillary's 'genius mechanic' who successfully modified the tractors, adding a brake-enabled steering mechanism that realised the full winter potential of the 'Fergie's. Bates worked tirelessly over the 1957 winter perfecting the tractors in his Scott Base shed, a building that he and engineer Murray Ellis erected using left-over 6x6 beams meant for bridging melt streams and the party's stock of spare steel warratahs. The tractors were then tested with two trial journeys before their final departure from Scott Base. The first, before winter set in, was to Cape Crozier and another, to test improvements made over the winter months, was to New Harbour in early spring. The improvements included building a 'caboose' which would accommodate both the radio equipment and Hillary's tall frame. Another was an ingenious 'chariot' arrangement mounted on the rear of a sledge that allowed steering of the tractor ahead of it by means of cables pulled from a standing position. This ensured the driver would not be first to fall into a crevasse and provided a welcome safety exit in that event. It was evident to most at Scott Base that during the winter of 1957 Hillary had been preparing for his attempt on the Pole. Vern Gerard, the IGY physicist attached to Hillary's party, began to suspect his intentions relating "...it [going to the Pole] must have been on his mind all during the winter because he built his caboose, [and] asked me to calculate its 'blowing over' wind speed..."⁵⁶⁶ By mid-October he would be ready to attempt an ascent of the Skelton Glacier onto the polar plateau.

During the winter Hillary was very discreet, almost secretive about his plan for reaching the Pole and felt no need to discuss it with any members of his party. The detailed planning document that he developed during the winter months showed the scheduled journeys of the three sledging survey parties and a preliminary schedule for the Antarctic Flight. It also included the schedule for his 'Tractor Train' and its work to assist in depot-laying. However once D700 had been established the Tractor Train is then shown returning towards Scott Base.⁵⁶⁷ Even at this late stage there had been no conversations with either Fuchs or the Ross Sea Committee on the subject. Perhaps Hillary was simply being cautious and did not want to announce his intention until he was more certain of success. It is more likely that he was also wary of being publically ordered by the Ross Sea Committee not to go beyond D700. To their eventual embarrassment, the Committee members were themselves mute on the subject. They were perhaps in awe of Hillary's reputation, or feared that if they denied him that option he

⁵⁶⁶ Gerard, 2012, pp.139-140

⁵⁶⁷ Hillary, May 1957

would lose interest and possibly resign from the expedition. If some of them secretly hoped that Hillary would get to the Pole they may have chosen to remain quiet and not alert the London Committee who would have held a dim view of the matter. The London Committee likely chose to ignore the possibility, in the confidence that their Sno-cats would easily outdistance the Ferguson's and pass through the Pole well in advance of Hillary, should he be so bold as to make the attempt.

In his first report in February 1957 to the RSC after arriving in McMurdo Sound, Hillary mentioned that shortly after his arrival at Shackleton base on the *Magga Dan*, Fuchs had asked that depots be put out "as far as we can" as "...he anticipates that the difficulties of terrain he is experiencing will be a serious drain on his fuel supplies." Hillary then wrote: "Our aim, therefore, will be to try and get our T.A.E. depots as near to 83° South as we can." Hillary therefore based his subsequent plans for depots accordingly, with D700 being identified as the furthest out that would be required. Hillary then made a revealing comment that shed light on his future intentions: "I am hoping to investigate the possibilities of taking a small tractor train over the barrier and possibly up the Skelton onto the plateau, but this will depend upon experiments we will have to carry out this winter with the Fergusons." He closed with an upbeat remark: "We of the wintering party are looking forward to the cold and the darkness with confidence in our base and enthusiasm for the problems and adventures of the spring."⁵⁶⁸ Fuchs' request for depots to be established further south towards the Pole were inadvertently playing into Hillary's plans to reach it.

Hillary never disclosed his plans to his support party team although suspicions had certainly been aroused. Among them, only Harry Ayres had been told of his intentions. Ayres had been his mentor from climbing days at Mt Cook, and was perhaps the only person with whom Hillary shared his innermost thoughts while at Scott Base. In his diary entry dated 30 March 1957 Ayres stated "Ed told me of our plans for our Summer trip [the Darwin Party]...the Pole dash is off for all dogs – tractors only."⁵⁶⁹ Ayres kept this knowledge to himself. Six months later, surveyor Roy Carlyon, who together with Ayres was preparing for their dog-sledging journey to survey the Darwin Glacier region, remarked on learning of tractor party intentions: "It is becoming increasingly apparent that the tractor party is becoming more and more ambitious. I was amazed to hear that they are now going to follow the Southern Party (Miller

⁵⁶⁸ Hillary, 20 February 1957

⁵⁶⁹ Ayres, TAE diary, 30 March, 1957

and Marsh) along the plateau. The reason for this is not obvious.”⁵⁷⁰ In a note attached to a draft plan entitled ‘Tractor Train’ prepared during the long winter night, Hillary explained some of his thinking:

*If the tractors are unable to reach the Plateau Depot or if they do so but are obviously incapable of going a long journey safely then Plan A will be put into operation. This involves abandoning the Tractor Train. If however the tractors are operating satisfactorily the plan of action will depend on whether or not the extra fuel for the Beaver arrives down in November. If it does arrive then Plan B will be followed and the tractor party will strike West towards the geomagnetic Pole. If it does not arrive then Plan C will be followed and the tractors will concentrate on assisting with the laying of D480 and D700.*⁵⁷¹

At this point in mid-winter 1957 Hillary was uncertain as to the capabilities of his tractors. A possible shortage of fuel was also looming in his mind. At their meeting of 6 May 1957 the RSC had discussed at length Hillary’s request for an additional 2000 gallons of tractor fuel and 2400 gallons of aircraft fuel required for the Support Party’s Summer Programme. This included laying the two extra depots that Fuchs had requested. At this time Hillary had ostensibly “...shelved any possible plans to get a New Zealand party to the Pole.”⁵⁷² A question is therefore raised about what made Hillary change his plans? Why did he renege on this comment to Fuchs and Bowden? Why, instead did he replace his Plan B and Plan C with a ‘Plan D’? The answer may lie in the fragile relationship that Hillary had with the RSC and its Chairman, Charles Bowden.

Hillary’s planned summer programme met serious opposition within the RSC. The Chair of New Zealand’s Interdepartmental Committee for the IGY, Dr. Ed Robertson was concerned about his IGY programme and felt that the IGY personnel would be too occupied with maintaining the base at the expense of their scientific duties. Robert Falla considered the northern party plan to be “...too ambitious.” He also questioned the value of the western party expedition since it would overlap with plans by the French and the Russians at their inland bases. The result was an advisory message to Hillary that “...his plans were too ambitious; that the Ross Sea Committee “...would prefer him to concentrate his summer

⁵⁷⁰ Carlyon, TAE diary, 28 September 1957

⁵⁷¹ Hillary, 5 July 1957

⁵⁷² Ross Sea Committee, 21 May 1957

programme on the side lines of his Depot-laying expedition to the south.”⁵⁷³ The NZ party at Scott Base received this message from the RSC with emotive derision and Hillary chose to ignore it.⁵⁷⁴ Hillary’s mood vis- à-vis the RSC could not have been brightened by the fact that his salary had been unexpectedly and arbitrarily reduced from £1,200 to £1,000 when he joined the *Theron* in November 1955 for the voyage to the Weddell Sea. He then had to submit a formal request for his salary to be re-instated to its former level, saying it had posed “...an embarrassment for he and his family”. Over a year later nothing had been done. At its meeting of 6 May nothing was resolved and the matter was ‘kicked upstairs’ to be dealt with by the Executive Committee.⁵⁷⁵ The RSC would eventually bear the fruit of this egregious treatment of their leader in the field.

Robertson, was particularly critical of Hillary’s intentions with the Ferguson tractors. This came about after his visit to Scott Base early in the summer season of 1957. In reporting on his trip Robertson noted that there was “...ill feeling about the plans for the tractor train” saying that “...a majority of the expedition feel that no useful purpose can be served by taking the tractors South” and that “...Sir Edmund Hillary appears to be an almost fanatical protagonist of tractor travel.” Robertson went on and offered six arguments against taking the tractors to the Plateau:

- a) The Beaver aircraft alone can and will lay depots 480 and 700 in accordance with the master plan of the TAE.
- b) The dog teams are unable to carry useful quantities of stores or fuel for the depots but are required to support the aircraft – the pilots, naturally enough, prefer to have men on the ground when they touch down in the middle of desolate waste.
- c) The tractor train can carry no useful quantity of stores or fuel for the depots; indeed, it cannot even carry enough fuel for its own use.
- d) Therefore the aircraft is obliged to take on the additional responsibility of supplying the tractor train as well as laying the depots
- e) This puts a considerable extra strain on the pilots and the aircraft and jeopardises the basic programme of the TAE.
- f) Sir Edmund Hillary has at no time discussed his plans with other members of the Expedition who apparently consider that the only function the tractor train can perform is to carry Sir Edmund to the Pole.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Ibid

⁵⁷⁴ Warren, 2014, p. 135

⁵⁷⁵ Ross Sea Committee, 21 May 1957

⁵⁷⁶ Robertson, 8 November 1957

Robertson's arguments for a restricted role for the Support Party, had they prevailed, would have had at least two serious repercussions. First, the extensive surveying and mapping of the Ross Dependency by the three sledging parties would have been severely impacted if not eliminated. Secondly, Fuchs trip from the Pole to Scott Base would have been extremely difficult without the benefit of Hillary's previous experience with his tractor train. Apart from the unmarked crevasse fields of the plateau the descent of the Skelton Glacier would have been treacherous and time consuming. Undoubtedly, the crossing party would have spent another winter on Ross Island. Robertson saw the TAE Support Party as the servant of his IGY project and his remarks illustrate the divide that occasionally exists between scientists and adventurer-explorers.

While camped at the Plateau Depot just three weeks after leaving Scott Base Hillary's diary entry of 9 November lifted the veil of secrecy: "Talked to Southern Party [sledging]. They struck soft going and only made 13 miles in two days even after dumping quite a bit of their food. Looks like trouble ahead and a lot of relaying. Probably puts the hot on our pole dash but at least we should get the depots out."⁵⁷⁷

Once Hillary's tractor party had departed from Scott Base on 14 October, private conversations amongst members of the Ross Sea Committee almost certainly touched on the likelihood of Hillary going for the Pole. The RSC first formally broached the subject at their meeting of 18 November 1957. By that time Hillary had reached the polar plateau and was travelling toward D 480 near Mt Albert Markham. The meeting minutes recorded that Dr Ernest Marsden asked "...whether Sir Edmund Hillary was going to the pole", it being pointed out that "...the original instructions did not cover that option." Prior to any contact with London, both Marsden and H.E.Riddiford, himself an accomplished Himalayan mountaineer, then asked to be placed on record "...as expressing the opinion that Sir Edmund should be free to go to the Pole if he found himself able to do so, and wished to make the journey." The Committee, being somewhat divided on the issue, finally agreed to a compromise. The minutes recorded their final position as follows:

After a full discussion it was agreed, in Committee, that if Dr Fuchs, the London Committee of Management, or even Sir Edmund himself, requested that Hillary might go on to the Pole, and if all parties were in agreement, and if he could do

⁵⁷⁷ Hillary, TAE diary, 9 November 1957

*so with the existing resources and without prejudice to the performance of his primary responsibilities, the Ross Sea Committee would have no objection.*⁵⁷⁸

With a careful eye to the politics of the situation, the RSC had laid down a gamut of conditions for Hillary as daunting as the physical obstacles of crevasses, sastrugi and soft snow of the polar plateau. John Claydon, who was in charge of Scott Base in Hillary's absence, then forwarded a key message to Hillary's caboose from Arthur Helm who had telephoned Scott Base following this meeting. Claydon's message read:

*Helm rang saying following committee meeting Monday it appears greatly increased public interest in expedition and stocks particularly high. Committee interested in your prospects of reaching pole and whether you have considered this. If you are prepared to go for pole committee will give you every encouragement and full support following formal approval from London. If you intend to proceed Helm requests you seek committee approval for venture following which they will get OK from London. Could you wire Helm re this on same day as you send Times dispatch from D480 – good work*⁵⁷⁹

At time of receipt Hillary was approximately 140 miles from the Plateau Depot with another 60 miles to go to reach D480.⁵⁸⁰

It seemed that prospects for his pole trip were improving and that his only obstacles would be either mechanical problems, difficult ice conditions along the route, or foul weather. However, the next six weeks would prove any optimism to be unfounded. Hillary would face a constant barrage of political and bureaucratic issues that would tax even his considerable reserves of perseverance.

In his diary entry for 21 November Hillary referred to messages from both Fuchs and the Ross Sea Committee that added to the fluidity of the situation.

⁵⁷⁸ Ross Sea Committee, 18 November, 1957

⁵⁷⁹ Claydon, 19 November 1957

⁵⁸⁰ Hillary, TAE diary, 19 November 1957

Bunny realises that he will be too late to meet us at D700 but hopes I will join him at Plateau Depot and guide him from there on. He talks of March 9th at Scott Base – which probably means later still.⁵⁸¹

Regarding the message from the RSC he observed an about face:

They (and London) are now anxious that we go on to the Pole, presumably so that the route can be proved and so make it easier for Bunny. (What a change of mind!!) ...I suppose the one redeeming feature about all this is that the Americans anticipate operating pretty late in McMurdo Sound this year so we can get out with them. Also I now have official sanction for my pole dash.⁵⁸²

With this interpretation of the message from the RSC Hillary believed that he had official sanction to continue to the Pole should he wish to do so.

⁵⁸¹ Hillary, TAE diary, 21 November 1957

⁵⁸² Ibid

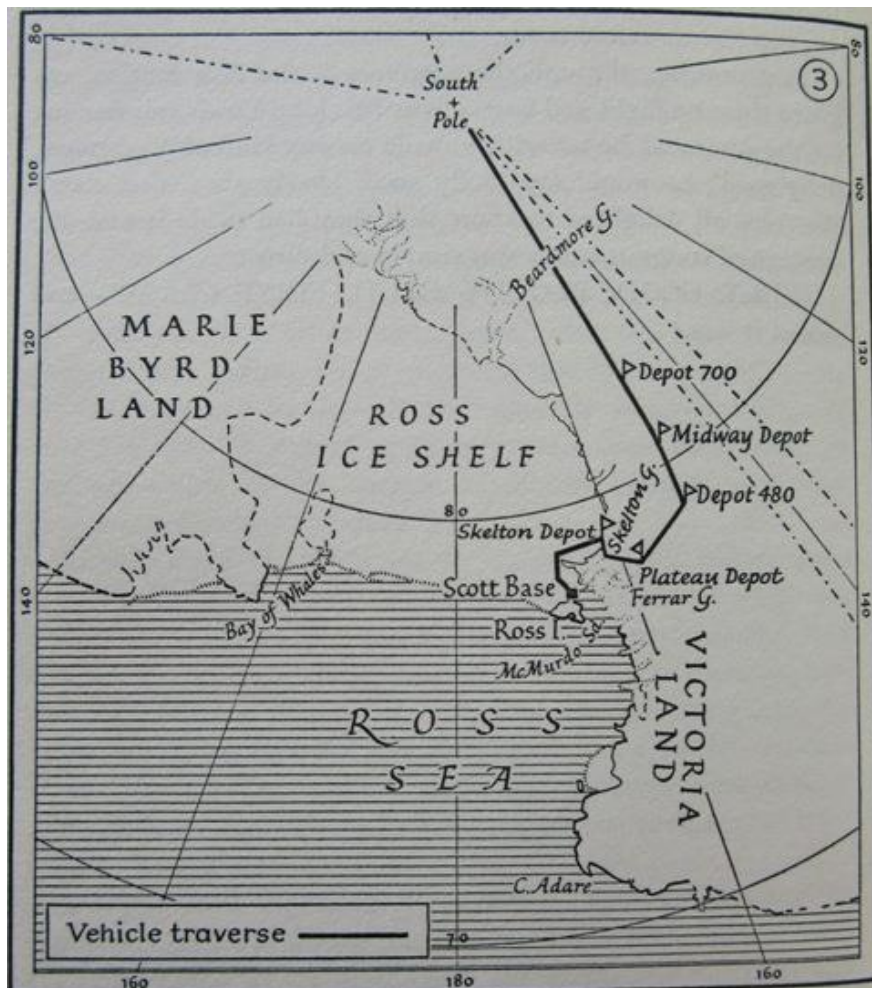


Figure 30: Map showing the route of Hillary’s tractor party from Scott Base to the South Pole. The overall distance is 1250 miles with 500 miles separating Depot 700 from the Pole.

Source: (RGS) *The Crossing of Antarctica*, Fuchs-Hillary, 1958

On 27 November while travelling south from D480 towards D700 Hillary had received encouraging news from a person with whom his relationship was far more positive than with Bowden and the RSC. It was from Admiral Dufek who was replying to a message Hillary had sent him on 25 November asking if it would be possible to be flown out from the Pole to Scott Base after his arrival. Dufek’s reply was brief but clear “...Yes, of course with pleasure best regards Dufek”. With this sign of encouragement Hillary then wrote: “Very nice reply”.

In stark contrast Bowden was desperately trying to keep Hillary on a tight leash. His messages to Hillary usually began with some form of congratulations but often ended with

either cautionary or dictatorial edicts. In a telegram sent to Hillary a few days later Bowden began:

*...send congratulations to you all STOP overriding consideration is that nothing should be done that involves any risk whatever endangering primary objective of this whole great Commonwealth project, namely successful crossing of Antarctic continent by main party with all its implications, scientific, exploratory, political and financial STOP From this it follows that Depot 700 must not be left unmanned since experience proves this may make it impossible to find under certain climatic conditions STOP...In view of many uncertainties which cannot be resolved yet the Ross Sea Committee cannot at present agree with your proposals STOP We feel for instance we must await...Fuchs arrival at South Ice after which his future movements might be more clearly indicated.*⁵⁸³

Once establishment of D700 was complete, Hillary sent the RSC a lengthy progress report proudly announcing that New Zealand's mission for the TAE was now fulfilled. Recognising that Fuchs was having difficulty catching up on his schedule he noted:

*Anything we can do on this side of the pole to expedite his progress will increase the safety factor of his party STOP Establishing an effective route through the area south of here will permit of much faster travelling STOP...We can only anticipate a route proving journey of up to possibly 200 miles...If however conditions improve and we can maintain a reasonable mileage per gallon we will strike out towards the south pole and prove the route as far as we can safely go. I have conveyed this information to Fuchs for his comments and should get his reply in the near future STOP In the interim we will push on to the best of our ability.*⁵⁸⁴

Having encountered heavily crevassed areas between D480 and D700 Hillary knew that the cairns he had erected would prove vital as Fuchs Sno-cats travelled over that terrain. He had no reason to expect that similar scouting beyond D700 would yield any less benefit. After all, was it not his primary mission to assist Fuchs? With Fuchs still a month away at best Hillary

⁵⁸³ Bowden, December 1957 - a

⁵⁸⁴ Hillary, December 1957

had no better options. It was out of the question that his party remain at D700 waiting hopefully for Fuchs to arrive. They could be flown out by the Antarctic Flight to Scott Base but how would that benefit Fuchs? If they were flown to the Pole he couldn't expect the Americans to accommodate them during weeks of uncertainty. That was impossible anyway since the Pole was beyond the reach of the Beaver aircraft. When one considers the facts as they were at that point the idea that Hillary was 'stealing' Fuchs' glory', that he was being 'unfair' or 'under-handed' shows a lack of understanding of the hostile Antarctic environment. In this instance the Ross Sea Committee was no help at all to Hillary. Its sole focus seemed to be trying to avoid offending the COM in London rather than appreciating the merit of Hillary's plan and supporting their man to the hilt. One might argue that Hillary should not have been up there on the plateau in the first place however, without Hillary's route to follow especially for descending the Skelton Glacier the crossing party were doomed at best to spend another winter on the ice.

Despite having agreed their position regarding Hillary's pole trip the Ross Sea Committee continued to be alarmed about his intentions. One month later Hillary remarked on a message that he received from Bowden "Another telegram from Bowden congratulating on progress but obviously scared of my plans. I think he's afraid he may offend TAE if we head for the Pole. Perhaps he's right."⁵⁸⁵ Hillary was becoming aware that his Pole trip might not meet with unanimous approval. He judiciously allowed for the possibility that unforeseen circumstances or bad luck would prevent him from reaching his goal. This was part of the reason for his discretion; he wanted to have a high probability of success before making any dramatic announcement of his plans. In an interview with the *New York Times* after his arrival at the pole he proclaimed with not a little bravado "I don't believe in calling my shots in advance."⁵⁸⁶ He was also well aware, and often reminded by the RSC, that his first responsibility was to provide Fuchs and the crossing party with the necessary support to reach their destination in McMurdo Sound. Despite his burning ambition to continue southward he was ready to relinquish his goal should the crossing party require further assistance. On 17 December he wrote:

*Had message from Fuchs saying he expects to be at the pole between
Christmas and New Year. This, if true will put the hot on us getting to pole I*

⁵⁸⁵ Hillary, TAE diary, 18 December 1957

⁵⁸⁶ *New York Times*, 5 January 1958, collection of David Balham

*suppose. Well, at least we can prove the route out a few hundred more miles which will be a worthwhile job though I'd have liked to reach the pole. We'll keep trying anyway.*⁵⁸⁷

This message from Fuchs was again over-optimistic and proved to be a catalyst for Hillary. Perhaps Fuchs knew he would be late and was simply trying to forestall Hillary's advance. However, it is very doubtful if this was the case since Fuchs was not that kind of man. If Fuchs had been more accurate with his estimate the two parties would have been able to arrive almost simultaneously at the South Pole thus setting the stage for a most dramatic meeting, in the style of Stanley and Livingstone. Unfortunately, the fairy tale ending was not to be. At this point Hillary was eighteen days from the pole while Fuchs was actually thirty-three days away and not eight days or even fourteen days. In fact Fuchs would not reach South Ice, his advance base on the plateau, for another five days and only depart from there on Christmas Day, leaving another five hundred miles between his party and the Pole. On 18 December, with the high probability, although not certainty, that he would arrive at the Pole well ahead of Fuchs, Hillary publicly announced his intention to try for the Pole.⁵⁸⁸ His intentions would not reach the public until four days later on 22 December.⁵⁸⁹ Meanwhile Hillary's Deputy Leader, Bob Miller, who was sledging with Englishman George Marsh, was becoming more upset as he learned of Hillary's intentions which interfered with his own surveying journey, commenting in frustration "...Ed should be ashamed...all he can think of is his damned southern circus which has not a skerrick of justification."⁵⁹⁰ Miller was himself fixated on his Southern Party surveying expedition and did not consider the tractor party to be performing any useful work. Several expedition members would have agreed, however it was a highly debateable point. George Lowe and Jon Stephenson, both members of Fuchs' crossing party, estimated that by mapping out a track from the pole to D700, Hillary had saved the crossing party from having to spend another winter at Scott Base. Stephenson estimated that the crossing journey was thereby shortened by at least two weeks.⁵⁹¹ In a later account of the journey, David Pratt, chief engineer in Fuchs' party, lauded the tractor-party's efforts stating:

⁵⁸⁷ Hillary, TAE diary, 17 December 1957

⁵⁸⁸ Hillary, TAE diary, 18 December 1957

⁵⁸⁹ New Zealand Press Association, 22 December 1957

⁵⁹⁰ Miller, TAE diary, 19 December 1957

⁵⁹¹ Stephenson, J., Interview with the author, 2010, Christchurch

...Some heavy crevassing was met, but much time was saved since the Ross Sea Party had carefully marked a reasonably safe route...Hillary joined the crossing party [at D700] and his knowledge of the area, the route, and where his tractor marks were to be found proved very valuable, enabling them to make good mileage despite poor visibility.⁵⁹²

The public meanwhile had been led to believe through almost daily press reports that the plan was for Fuchs and Hillary to meet at D700 from which point Hillary would assist the crossing party on the remainder of its journey to Scott Base. This plan would have prevailed had Fuchs not experienced significant delays that expanded Hillary's options. It was expected that Fuchs' Sno-cats would trundle at speed across the continent while Hillary would travel using dog teams.⁵⁹³ The public had no inkling of what was transpiring behind the scenes and of the impact that Fuchs' schedule delays would have. It was a major story when news broke on 18 December that Hillary harboured thoughts of possibly advancing to the Pole.

“HILLARY MAY GO ON TO THE POLE TO MEET FUCHS” read the New Zealand Press Association headline. “CAN HE RESIST ADDING THE SOUTH POLE TO EVEREST?” read another. Noel Barber's *Daily Mail*, sensing that a ‘race’ would raise circulation, cried out “HILLARY HEADING FOR THE POLE? - Race May Be Under Way”. For a few journalists there remained an element of doubt hedging their bets “HILLARY BELIEVED TO BE MAKING A DASH FOR THE POLE”. The recently elected New Zealand Prime Minister, Walter Nash, gave his full support to Hillary, reflecting the mood of most, but notably not all New Zealanders, saying “If Sir Edmund Hillary wants to go to the South Pole and if he feels that it is safe enough for him to do so, then I see no reason why he should not go.”⁵⁹⁴ ⁵⁹⁵ As the days passed and more detail was received from Scott Base more certainty emerged. A 26 December headline was more definite stating “HILLARY GOING TO THE POLE – NZ Party 325 Miles From Goal” and explained that “...Hillary's decision was received at Scott Base this morning while the men in the adjoining room were finishing their breakfast...”⁵⁹⁶ Adding to the confusion were simultaneous articles stating that the Ross Sea

⁵⁹² Riffenburgh, 2007, p. 278

⁵⁹³ Lowe, 2014, pp. 158-159

⁵⁹⁴ Press articles , 18 December 1957, collection of David Balham

⁵⁹⁵ RSC members and government officials were embarrassed by Hillary's taking the limelight. Ignoring the practical considerations of his decision it was seen as ‘unfair’ to Fuchs and the British. Frank Corner was particularly displeased. Interview with Lynette Corner, 2010, Wellington, NZ

⁵⁹⁶ Press clippings, 18 December 1957 to 26 December 1957, courtesy of David Balham

Committee had not yet given their permission for Hillary to proceed beyond D700. One article out of Wellington ended with a quixotic statement from Bowden:

So far the Ross Sea Committee has had no official advice from Sir Edmund Hillary that he is making a dash for the Pole. The position is very much in doubt, and I can make no comment on the proposal until I get something definite from him...I can certainly understand his desire to get to the Pole. However, the paramount responsibility of the New Zealand party is to assist Dr Fuchs in every way possible.

When asked whether the Committee might ask Hillary to abandon his dash to the Pole, Bowden defeatedly replied: “Well, he’s going, apparently.”⁵⁹⁷

Another article on the same day read: “HILLARY’S DASH FOR THE POLE SURPRISES NZ AUTHORITIES”, and began “...The Ross Sea Committee...were plainly both startled and delighted yesterday at the news of Sir Edmund’s decision...”⁵⁹⁸ Hillary had caught the Ross Sea Committee off-balance and it was now beginning to pay the price for its reticence in dealing with the question earlier on.

On 19 December, while still approaching South Ice, Fuchs learned of Hillary’s possible attempt to reach the Pole and sought clarification “...in rather acid comment” from London.⁵⁹⁹ Also on the 19th Hillary sent a telegram to the RSC telling Bowden that he was “...leaving to go south.” Later that same afternoon John Claydon flew in to D700 from Scott Base with news that Fuchs had been delayed and now would not be leaving South Ice until Christmas Day. This news totally changed the picture for Hillary who just two days earlier had been told by Fuchs himself that the crossing party planned to arrive at the pole as early as Christmas Day. It now became evident to Hillary that Fuchs was not going to meet his schedule. This delay created the window of opportunity that he had been seeking. Hillary’s pithy diary entry on learning of this delay “Ye Gads who is one to believe...” shows the confusion that was in the air. Concluding that Fuchs’ schedule was unreliable he then took the situation into his own hands and noted “...Well we’ll just plug on our original plan and

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid

⁵⁹⁹ Fuchs, TAE diary, 23 December, 1957

try to get to the pole as soon as we can. I think we can do it!”⁶⁰⁰ With this Hillary had made his fateful decision and the die was cast. The next day, 20 December, was spent completing D700 and preparing for departure. At 8:30 PM the ‘old firm’ of five men, Hillary, Murray Ellis engineer, Jim Bates mechanic, Peter Mulgrew radio operator, and Derek Wright cinematographer, set out with their sledges and the ‘caboose’ hauled by three modified Ferguson farm tractors. They were headed for the Pole, over five hundred miles to the south.



Figure 31: Hillary’s ‘Tractor Train’ travelling during the polar night

Photo: John Claydon

The next two days were unsettling for Hillary, firstly due to the Ferguson’s slow progress as crevasses and sastrugi hampered their advance but also because the RSC were still trying to control him from Wellington. On the 21st Hillary received a telegram from Bowden stating:

⁶⁰⁰ Hillary, TAE diary, 19 December, 1957

Before commenting on your telegram of 19th we require to know if you have received my telegrams of 5th and 17th and whether your projected movements fit in with the requirements outlined therein – meanwhile you should not proceed beyond depot 700.

At this Hillary remarked “He certainly is playing tough”. Continuing the tense conversation with Bowden, Hillary replied:

All your messages received and understood but consider we cannot afford to waste best days of summer sitting at depots...I have exchanged communications with Fuchs and have advised him that in the interim we are establishing the route out 100 miles beyond D700 and will wait there until he advises us how best we may further assist him.⁶⁰¹

These attempts of the office-bound RSC committee in Wellington to determine the movements of Hillary in the southernmost part of Antarctica were futile and bound to aggravate an already tenuous relationship. Bowden was getting irritated and sent Hillary another message on 27 December asking four pointed questions:

The messages which we have received leave us in doubt as to your precise plans STOP ...please answer the following questions: ONE: Did Fuchs agree to your going to the pole STOP TWO: Having reached the pole do you intend to return by air or will you wait and return with Fuchs thus giving him guidance over the route by which you came STOP THREE: Will you abandon your tractors at the pole or attempt to run them back to Scott Base – note that they belong to Ferguson’s not to us STOP FOUR: What type of fuel will you use on the journey how much will be required and from what source will it come =Bowden⁶⁰²

The third question, asking Hillary if he was going to repeat the journey in reverse, shows how little Bowden understood about the expedition. Bowden’s concern about the Ferguson

⁶⁰¹ Hillary, 21 December 1957

⁶⁰² Bowden, 26 December 1957

tractors when vehicles were being abandoned left and right was further evidence of the RSC isolation from the harsh realities being faced by the Support Party.

Hillary's reply was also to the point and removed all doubt regarding his intentions:

My plan is to arrive at Pole as soon as we can get there STOP Answers to your questions are ONE: Made no comment TWO: Await Fuchs and see what he requires THREE: Abandon tractors unless Fuchs requires them FOUR: TAE fuel if tractors used by Fuchs⁶⁰³

Hillary's answers to questions two and four are worthy of comment. Hillary was sparing of information in his answer to question two. He said he would await Fuchs but did not say from which point. Would he stay at the Pole? Would he return to D700 and await there for Fuchs which was the original agreed meeting point, or would he return to Scott Base and await further news of Fuchs' progress? Hillary had no idea when Fuchs would arrive at the Pole since he could not trust Fuchs' estimates of travel time. Nor could he expect that he and his tractor party would be accommodated at the Pole for more than a few days. He decided to leave Peter Mulgrew at the Pole to assist with radio communications while he, Ellis, Wright and Jim Bates were flown back to Scott Base by the US Navy. Once Fuchs' schedule became more definite Hillary could then be flown out to D700 from Scott Base by John Claydon in the Beaver. Hillary's answer to Bowden's fourth question revealed that the Ferguson's were using both BP fuel and American fuel. Hillary was not fussy on this point which for Fuchs was extremely important and Bowden would later take Hillary to task over this issue. Several years later Hillary told a story about a lecture tour that he and Bowden performed throughout New Zealand after the *Theron* voyage. At the opening venue Bowden spoke first, betraying his lack of knowledge about the Antarctic. Hillary then gave his talk which Bowden quickly memorised. At successive venues Bowden then made sure that he spoke first leaving Hillary to have to invent something interesting to say. Hillary remarked that he got tired of hearing his own speech being repeated night after night. Thereafter Hillary ensured that he went his separate way.⁶⁰⁴

Fuchs had by now sent a message directly to Hillary saying he would not reach South Ice until 22 December. This message confirmed Claydon's news and Hillary's impatience

⁶⁰³ Hillary, 27 December 1957

⁶⁰⁴ Hillary, 4 October 2004

surfaced. His diary entry reflected the frustration he was feeling at the revision of Fuchs' schedule:

*...I'm a bit aghast at their delay. It's quite apparent that any mad dash for the pole at the moment would be a bit premature so I'll have to quell my ambitions and do the best I can for Bunny. Oh well we've had a good run so I can't complain I suppose. I've sent a pretty insubordinate note to the Ross Sea Committee but they can fire me if they like.*⁶⁰⁵

On 20 December Hillary and his tractor party continued south, ignoring Bowden's directive, and by 22 December, as Fuchs was arriving at South Ice, they had progressed fifty-six miles from D700. It was slow going. Significant crevasse areas were discovered and marked with cairns but by the morning of the 24th they had reached a point one hundred and sixteen miles south of D700. Surface conditions and weather had improved and they had begun making steady progress. Hillary's spirits began to pick up. He had spoken with Fuchs who was pleased that the route was being cleared south of D700. Another note had come in from Bowden but in a "...much more subdued vein." Having received their clearance from London the RSC attitude swung one-hundred and eighty degrees:

*We have been informed that London Committee have indicated that they are happy to fall in with any modifications of original plans which is agreed between Fuchs and yourself STOP...Expedition is arousing great interest and receiving magnificent publicity both in United Kingdom and New Zealand – good luck= Bowden*⁶⁰⁶

Hillary had at least awakened the world to the fact that there was a major Antarctic expedition underway. However, the insatiable media, knowing on which side their bread was buttered, made it impossible to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Douglas McKenzie, the New Zealand reporter had advised Hillary that the pole venture was generating "...enormous interest in New Zealand." Ever conscious of publicity Hillary remarked "Well I'm going to push for the pole and have announced the fact...I don't think

⁶⁰⁵ Hillary, TAE diary, 21 December 1957

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid

we'll disappoint them... We'll depart at 7:00PM tomorrow and really push it hard.”⁶⁰⁷ Full of enthusiasm the tractor party drove south for the next three days covering one hundred and forty-two miles and by 28 December they were two hundred and sixty miles from D700, and over half-way to the pole.⁶⁰⁸

Stepping back slightly, the sequence of events between 23 and 27 December becomes critical to understanding the interplay between the two leaders as Hillary made his final decision to travel to the Pole. On 23 December Hillary had personally advised Fuchs of his intention to try for the pole, nevertheless offering to “...abandon the idea and set up another fuel depot” for Fuchs if he required it. Fuchs sent his reply on 24 December accepting Hillary’s offer to build another depot recognising that it meant “... abandoning your idea of reaching pole” and added with apparent sympathy “...Know that this will be great disappointment to you and your companions ...” Believing that would end the matter, Fuchs then confidently advised London that “...no further action is necessary.”⁶⁰⁹ However, due to atmospheric disturbance affecting radio communication which was compounded by a complex routing of the message through both Scott Base and the American station at the South Pole, Hillary didn’t receive Fuchs’ reply until four days later on 28 December. The ‘old firm’ had remained at their position approximately one hundred and sixteen miles south of D700 for two days until the evening of 25 December to relax and celebrate Christmas. By the time of their departure Christmas evening, Hillary had not received any reply to his offer to Fuchs sent two days prior and, believing that Fuchs required no further assistance, he decided to continue further south. By 28 December when he finally received Fuchs’ message the tractor party had reached a point two hundred and forty miles from the Pole. More significantly, due to the shortage of fuel, they were past the ‘point of no return’.^{610 611} They were also beyond the range of the Beaver aircraft from Scott Base. Hillary replied to Fuchs saying:

Your message has arrived too late as we are now 240 miles from the pole with only ten drums left. Have neither the food or fuel to sit here and await your arrival...Your previous messages gave no indication of your concern about your

⁶⁰⁷ Hillary, TAE diary, 24 December 1957

⁶⁰⁸ Mileage figures taken from Hillary’s diary entries for dates 20-28 December, 1957

⁶⁰⁹ Fuchs, TAE diary, 24 December 1957

⁶¹⁰ Scott Base – telegram transcript, courtesy of John Claydon who was in charge of Scott Base during Hillary’s absence.

⁶¹¹ Both Fuchs and Hillary diaries show that there was no contact between the two men for those four days due to difficult radio conditions. This is supported by Lowe, 2014 pp. 158-159

*fuel so I presumed you were satisfied with the depot stocking as arranged. I am sure we can fly more fuel into D700 and the other depots and in an emergency you could no doubt get a few drums from the Pole station...Expect to arrive Pole in six days and will commence operations to increase fuel supply at D700.*⁶¹²

Hillary's suggestion that he could use American fuel from the Pole station was the last thing that Fuchs would have appreciated and likely irritated him considerably. In some ways, rather than mark the continuation of an exciting adventure this day marked the low point of Hillary's tractor journey and possibly of his expedition. Over the past three years he had overcome severe unforeseen problems and successfully completed the mission that New Zealand had been asked to carry out in arguably the most inhospitable place on the planet. Now, with his personal goal tantalizingly within his grasp he had been forced to turn down a request from Fuchs, the expedition leader. Making matters worse, Bowden, his most senior contact if not 'boss' in Wellington had just sent him a 'rather unpleasant' note to which he gave a 'pretty concise reply'.⁶¹³

With his spirits at a low ebb, a second serious incident was brought about when Hillary's confidence faltered in Fuchs' ability to complete the crossing as planned. Having refused Fuchs' request for another depot Hillary considered waiting for him at the Pole and asked Claydon to fly more tractor fuel into D700.⁶¹⁴ But he then chose a curious course of action which inadvertently set the scene for the most damaging incident of the expedition: "If Bunny is as late as I think he'll be I'll try and persuade him to abandon his effort for this year and fly out with the Yanks, then fly back in next year and complete the run."⁶¹⁵ With all of this running through his head it is no surprise that Hillary had a greatly disturbed sleep that night. He parked that thought, mulling it over during the next six days as both parties continued their opposing advances towards the Pole, with Hillary's tractor party continuing to trace a feasible route for the Sno-cats. By 2 January Fuchs' crossing party was still three hundred and fifteen miles from the Pole. It had taken them forty days to travel five hundred miles, an average of twelve and a half miles a day. At that rate it would take them another one hundred

⁶¹² Hillary, TAE diary, 28 December, 1957, Note: Fuchs' diary recorded Hillary's remaining distance to the pole as 290 miles. Had he known, the difference of 50 miles might have altered Fuchs' reaction.

⁶¹³ Hillary, TAE diary, 27 December 1957

⁶¹⁴ Hillary, TAE diary, 28 December 1957

⁶¹⁵ Hillary, TAE diary, 28 December, 1957

and twenty days or four months, to get to Scott Base, arriving in early May. This was an obvious impossibility since temperatures plummet by mid-March and twenty-four hour darkness soon prevails. The next day, after eighty-three days on the trail, Hillary would be within sight of the American pole station. Hillary had every reason to be concerned.

On 3 January, he received yet another poor mileage report from Fuchs, in his mind confirming the validity of his proposal. Then, while his Ferguson tractor party was camped within sight of the black flag marking the runway at Amundsen-Scott Station he composed and sent his ill-fated message to Fuchs.⁶¹⁶ Fuchs' first reaction on receiving Hillary's suggestion was puzzlement at what he considered to be a "...panic message" from Hillary. He was further surprised by Hillary advising he would not be accompanying the crossing party from the Pole to Scott Base.⁶¹⁷ Adding to Fuchs' dismay both Hillary's engineer, Murray Ellis, and mechanic, Jim Bates, refused his request to accompany the crossing party onwards from the Pole. They considered the journey too dangerous and feared that the party could end up stranded between the Pole and Scott Base. They had had enough of mechanised polar travel.⁶¹⁸ Fuchs' reply to Hillary was an unambiguous "Appreciate your concern, but there can be no question of abandoning journey at this stage... We will therefore have to wend our own way using the traverse you leave at the pole..."⁶¹⁹

From its position on 2 January, the crossing party still had over three hundred miles of uncharted territory to travel between it and the Pole. That left another twelve hundred and fifty miles to reach Scott Base, a distance that Hillary's tractor train had taken eighty-three days to traverse. Fuchs now had only sixty days left in total if he was to reach Ross Island and meet the *Endeavour* by early March. In order to reach the ship on time he would have to average twenty-five miles a day for the remaining distance, exactly double what he had managed so far. Hillary assessed that the crossing party faced a very serious challenge if it was to arrive at Scott Base before freeze-up even assuming that no 'bad luck' would intervene. He also expected that Fuchs would face deteriorating weather conditions later in the season. Given that his tractor train had averaged only fifteen miles per day getting to the Pole, albeit with several stops along the way and climbing rather than descending from the

⁶¹⁶ Hillary, TAE diary, 3 January 1958

⁶¹⁷ Fuchs, TAE diary, 3 January 1958

⁶¹⁸ Hillary, TAE diary, 3 January 1957- Both Ellis and Bates were reluctant members of the 'old firm' and had bowed to pressure from Hillary at D700 when Hillary said he would carry on without them if necessary.

⁶¹⁹ Fuchs, TAE diary, 11 January 1958

plateau, he considered that he had put forward a very reasonable proposal. However, Hillary failed to appreciate not only the speed of the Sno-cats once on the polar plateau, but also that his tracing of a safe route along the plateau and down the Skelton Glacier gave Fuchs a significant advantage.

Hillary's proposal to Fuchs is curious for a number of reasons and it is especially so given his personality and fierce determination to achieve his own objectives. Would he have imagined that Fuchs was any less determined to attain his goals for the expedition? If so he would have seriously underestimated Fuchs' commitment to the task. One possibility that has been voiced by a person who knew both men is that Hillary was approaching exhaustion as he neared the outskirts of the Pole and that he was possibly affected by carbon monoxide poisoning and not thinking clearly. Another, more cynical view is that having almost achieved his own traverse he felt less interested in Fuchs' crossing journey. This is highly unlikely as Hillary was not one to shirk responsibility and, although he might have been dissatisfied with Fuchs' performance, he was totally committed to seeing it through. However, there is no doubt that Hillary was deeply concerned that the crossing party would not arrive at Scott Base in time to meet the *Endeavour* in early March before freeze-up. No ship had ever departed from McMurdo Sound so late in the season. This would cause serious accommodation problems at Scott Base as well as create issues over leadership during the six month over-wintering period. An article by Noel Barber who interviewed Hillary on his arrival at the pole related Hillary's position in stark terms: "As Hillary said to me on his arrival at the Pole – and this is no time for excusing words made famous by George Bernard Shaw – "Spend another winter down here? Not bloody likely."⁶²⁰ Hillary and Louise Rose had married in 1953 and their first child, a son, was born in December 1954. Hillary had seen little of his family over the past three years. Spending six more months at Scott Base with Fuchs as company was never going to be an option for him. On the other hand Fuchs, who would celebrate his fiftieth birthday at D700, was used to these types of difficult situations and in a strange way almost welcomed them as a test of his character and abilities. He had been through tough ordeals while geologising in Africa's Olduvai Gorge, and been one of the 'lost eleven' of 1948-49 who, unable to be rescued from Stonington Island due to a particularly early freeze-up, were forced to spend consecutive winters on the Antarctic Peninsula before they could return to England.⁶²¹ For Fuchs, having completed one of his life goals, over-wintering at Scott Base

⁶²⁰ Barber, 10 January 1958

⁶²¹ Fuchs, 1982, p. 115

would merely pose a mild inconvenience. He doubtless had considered that possibility during his original expedition planning.

Finally, on 4 January, 1958, after 83 days of arduous travel, Hillary and his team of five men arrived at the South Pole driving three modified Ferguson tractors. They were given a stirring welcome by a convoy of Americans driving Weasels. The ‘old firm’, as they had named themselves, included Peter Mulgrew, radio engineer and RNZN officer who would become Hillary’s good friend and who was later killed in the Mt. Erebus air disaster. The others were Jim Bates, Murray Ellis and Derek Wright. On joining the TAE Bates’ expectation was that the Fergusons would be used for operations around Scott Base, helping offload the ship and for other general duties. There had been no mention of taking the tractors up onto the Polar Plateau. This role appealed to Bates and he joined the New Zealand party with enthusiasm. He would later regret his decision. Completing the quintet was cinematographer Derek Wright. His photographic skills were important but he also played an essential role as tractor driver.

Since his polar excursion was largely unplanned Hillary had to resort to an ad-hoc roster of tractor drivers. At various times these included biologist, Ron Balham, radio operator, Ted Gawn, reporter, Douglas McKenzie, and finally Wright. They appeared a motley crew indeed. In his original planning for the summer parties Hillary had identified Trevor Hatherton rather than Derek Wright as one of the five drivers on the ‘Tractor Train’. This was a curious choice as Hatherton was Chief Scientist and primarily responsible for New Zealand’s IGY activities of which there would be none on the plateau.⁶²² When advised of Hillary’s intention, Ed Robertson, Chair of the New Zealand IGY Committee quickly intervened and forbade Hatherton to leave the base.⁶²³ Hillary had to await the arrival of Derek Wright in the spring to bolster his tractor team. As it turned out, only Hillary actually traversed the entire route from Scott Base to the Pole. The members of the ‘old firm’ excepting Peter Mulgrew, who remained behind to assist the overloaded *Deep Freeze* communications function at Amundsen–Scott Station, were then flown back to Scott Base from where Hillary would await Fuchs’ arrival at the Pole.

⁶²² Hillary, May 1957

⁶²³ Robertson, E., Interview with the author, 2007, Johnsonville, NZ

On hearing of Hillary's success the Australians at Mawson station sent a telegram stating "We love and respect your achievement and whatever you do – STOP –from one colonial to another".⁶²⁴ The Russians also sent a message to Hillary reading: "Mountain Section, USSR ...Send their congratulations and best wishes to the conqueror of Everest on reaching the S.P. [South Pole] and wish further success." Perhaps the most important message for Hillary was the one that read: "Congratulations for successful South Pole expedition" – signed, Tenzing.⁶²⁵



Figure 32: Rear Admiral George Dufek with Sir Edmund Hillary at the South Pole the day of arrival of Fuchs' crossing party on 19 January 1958

Photo: US Navy – Dufek Archives, Syracuse University, NY, USA

On 8 January, after being flown back to Scott Base by one of Admiral Dufek's Neptune aircraft, Hillary sent a telegram to Fuchs advising that 8 drums of MOGAS fuel would be delivered to D700 by 16 January. He also stated that he and Murray Ellis would join his party

⁶²⁴ Mawson Station, January 1958

⁶²⁵ Tenzing, January 1958

at D700. However, Ellis again refused to join Fuchs' party for the trip to Scott Base to the disappointment of David Pratt, Fuchs' chief engineer. Since Hillary recognised that Fuchs would be late he advised that he had made arrangements for US Navy vessels to evacuate the party but also had asked the RSC for additional provisions should Fuchs' party be forced to winter over on Ross Island. By this time Hillary had initiated a rapid evacuation programme to send those New Zealand personnel who had completed their duties back to Wellington. Finally, he told Fuchs "I will leave at the Pole station full details plus maps of the route from Scott to the Pole."⁶²⁶

Apart from the fact that the Ross Sea Committee had lost its hold over him there were other aspects that troubled Hillary's masters in Wellington and London. One of these was his apparent lack of concern about the exclusive use of BP fuel. Hillary if anything was pragmatic and the fact that the TAE had signed a contract with British Petroleum mandating the exclusive use of BP fuel and lubricants would not keep him from achieving his objectives. The fuel estimates for the New Zealand party did not include the needs of three tractors making their way from Scott Base to the Pole nor of the additional AVGAS required for the extra flights of the Beaver. Neither did they include the additional fuel that Fuchs later asked to be placed at D700 for his Sno-cats.⁶²⁷ On 1 January 1958 Arthur Helm sent a telegram to Hillary via Scott Base advising that "Photographs received Wellington showing fuel drums causing [great] concern STOP Recommend no drums be shown on load on arrival Pole unless BP". Fuchs was irate at Hillary's transgression as he feared the reaction of BP to this violation of their important contract with the TAE Company.⁶²⁸

By 5 January while recovering at the Pole from his tractor journey Hillary's usually clear judgment betrayed him at a crucial moment revealing how concerned he was about the crossing party's rate of progress. Having received Fuchs' reply that the crossing party would continue their journey "...without you if necessary" and with Fuchs reporting that he had covered only fifteen miles the previous day, Hillary then re-sent a slightly modified version of his proposal directly to the London Committee with a copy to Bowden. After remarking that "...enough prestige will have been gained by the arrival of Fuchs and ourselves at the south pole ..." Hillary closed this version with a desperate plea that "...Your instructions are

⁶²⁶ Lowe, 1959, p. 195

⁶²⁷ Hillary, TAE diary, 27 November 1957, Hillary at one point resorted to requesting Dufek directly for aid in stocking extra fuel at D700.

⁶²⁸ Helm, 1 January 1958

the only thing that can enable Fuchs to save face and adopt a modified plan so I would earnestly request that the Management Committee should give this matter its earliest consideration.”⁶²⁹ This second attempt to influence Fuchs, asking the COM to essentially order Fuchs to stop at the Pole, seriously compounded the issue.

Again, regarding Hillary’s suggestion to Fuchs that he perform the crossing over two seasons rather than one, the Americans and the US Navy came into the picture. In his letter to the COM Hillary somewhat presumptuously, asserted:

I have no doubt that Admiral Dufek would be anxious to assist in this as Fuchs does not realise that his delayed progress is causing considerable concern not only to ourselves but also to the Americans. They accept the fact that it will be their job whether they are asked or not to initiate rescue action and that therefore both Naval and Air forces will be tied up here waiting for Fuchs’ safe arrival.

It is somewhat ironic that Hillary, who had depended on those same rescue contingencies during his own journey to the Pole, was now asking Fuchs to not do likewise. Hillary closed his note with a plea “Your instructions are the only thing that can enable Fuchs to save face and adopt a modified plan so I would earnestly request that the Management Committee should give this matter its earliest consideration – Hillary”⁶³⁰ Attached to this telegram was Fuchs’ response to the Committee regarding Hillary’s suggestion. Concerning the ‘unjustifiable risk’ that Hillary warned, Fuchs’ stated “I do not agree but have informed him [Hillary] that I do not feel able to ask him to join us at D700 to use his local knowledge but must find our own way out.”⁶³¹ For Fuchs this probably represented his low point of the expedition. This issue burst into public view when Bowden’s copy was printed on strip paper used for messages directed to the press “...instead of being taken on tape and gummed on to telegraphic forms in the normal way.” It was then sent off to the Newsroom of the Publicity Division for media release.⁶³² Five days after Hillary arrived at the Pole and at the height of the supposed furore with Fuchs, Arthur Helm, who was Hillary’s ‘point-man’ throughout the

⁶²⁹ Hillary, 5 January 1958

⁶³⁰ COM Minutes, 6 January, 1958

⁶³¹ Ibid

⁶³² Helm, 9 January 1958

expedition, sent him a three page letter explaining the circumstances around the inadvertent release of the confidential telegram to the New Zealand media.⁶³³

The reaction from the London Committee was predictable. A routine Committee meeting had been called on that same morning when the two telegrams arrived, in a remarkable coincidence, the one from Fuchs stating that he had received Hillary's proposal but would continue onward with his journey regardless, and the other from his ally Hillary, a plea to call a halt to the journey at the Pole. Eleanor Honnywill, Fuchs PA, recorded the scene:

*...the Admiral [Parry] read out the two messages without any comment and there was complete and absolute stunned silence, while Frank Corner looked acutely miserable and stared into his lap...Suddenly Sandy Glen took a very deep breath and made the most splendid statement. He said in effect, "Mr. Chairman – this is an occasion when we have a leader in the field who is going through every sort of hardship and rigour. He has suffered enormous difficulties and setbacks and he may, at this very moment, be in need of all the moral – and even spiritual – forces he can summon. He is a splendid Leader, and the Leader of our choice, and it is imperative that we give him now absolute and unequivocal backing in the strongest possible terms and without any sort of strings attached or questions asked – quite regardless of Sir Edmund Hillary's views." Sir Edwin Herbert immediately endorsed it all and said "I couldn't agree more, we either accept the Leader we chose or we must accept the fact that he is now mentally deranged! There can be no countenancing of anyone else's view at all – much less those of a young man who has done just one Polar journey with a couple of farm tractors and who now pits himself against the judgement of a Leader of the calibre of Bunny."...Corner was obviously praying the earth would open and swallow him up...At this point no one had even considered Ed's telegram...Finally Frank Corner murmured rather miserably that he felt sure Ed had meant well...*⁶³⁴

Corner had been New Zealand's strongest government proponent of the TAE. Since 1953 he had worked hard to press the government to participate in the expedition believing it would

⁶³³ Ibid

⁶³⁴ Honnywill, 1996

be good for the country. Now, as Deputy High Commissioner to the UK and sitting among his British TAE colleagues in London, he was forced to endure a most embarrassing situation, one created by the possibly selfish actions of the New Zealand leader. He would never forgive Hillary for this perceived indiscretion.⁶³⁵ Honnywill recorded one positive bit of news that day which helped to improve the mood somewhat. RAF pilot John Lewis had just sent in a telegram that he and his three companions were over the Beardmore Glacier on their non-stop flight from South Ice to Ross Island in the de Havilland Otter, the first such flight in a single engine aircraft. She noted that "...this exuberant message in the middle of this tense meeting was a wonderful tonic and a great weight was lifted."⁶³⁶

The London Committee Chair, Sir John Slessor, had been unable to attend the beginning of this COM meeting but was called in as soon as possible from another engagement. Honnywill recorded his reaction which was in character "... [Slessor] exploded "What the hell has prestige got to do with anything and what is all this nonsense about face-saving?" "The Committee decided that the telegrams must be kept secret and they were to be locked up in the safe. The group then broke for lunch and on exiting the office found, to their horror, the newsboys on the street crying out "BIG ROW IN THE ANTARCTIC". Honnywill remarked "If it hadn't been so tragic it would have been funny." The inadvertent release to the Wellington press of Hillary's message to the London Committee had hit the front pages. Both 'stunned and speechless' the Committee re-grouped and decided that the telegrams must be published in full, "...to let the world draw its own conclusions." As could be expected there was little sympathy in London for Hillary's proposal. In addition, Noel Barber kept stirring the pot and eventually a duel ignited between two journalists who, although they worked for the same newspaper, held opposing views. London's *Daily Mail* was the newspaper behind the supposed 'dispute' between the two leaders and played the story to the hilt. It began by publishing an article by T.F. Thompson that was very critical of Hillary, his trip to the Pole, and of his proposal to Fuchs. That article was followed three days later with a rebuttal by Barber headed "IT'S A MILLION TO ONE AGAINST DR FUCHS – I Side with Hillary".⁶³⁷ Unsurprisingly being Fuchs' PA, Honnywill's loyalties were unambiguous as she described the furore "It went on and on and on and each day extra fuel was added to the flames by that expert on Antarctic affairs Noel Barber. Uninformed drivel and venomous statements filled

⁶³⁵ Corner, Lynette, Interview with the author, May 2013, Wellington, NZ

⁶³⁶ Honnywill, 1996

⁶³⁷ Barber, 10 January 1958

the pages of the *Daily Mail*.⁶³⁸ The fact that the TAE's exclusive contract for 'official' expedition press coverage was with *The Times* gave free rein to newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* to exploit the issue however they could. Headlines in *The Times* were of course more muted. Matters were not aided when John Claydon, Hillary's senior pilot, was quoted in news reports saying: "I have not spoken to one man here who thinks Dr. Fuchs will make it".⁶³⁹

On 9 January Hillary sent a telegram to the New Zealand Prime Minister, Walter Nash thanking him for his support and apologising for the commotion his advice to Fuchs had caused. However, Hillary maintained that his advice was sound. His brief message to Nash follows:

*Thank you Mr. Nash for your remarks on my behalf **STOP** It was unfortunate that a private message was released to the press **STOP** still think that Fuchs wisest course would be to complete his crossing next year but naturally if he continues we will give him every support and try and ensure he has a quick trip
Regards Ed Hillary⁶⁴⁰*

Although the London Committee were furious at the effrontery of Hillary in approaching them directly with such a proposal, they were nevertheless shaken by the potential seriousness of the situation that he had raised, while their own man revealed little, as was his nature, with his tendency to downplay any difficulties he was having and the significant challenges his party still faced. On 13 January 1958, with Fuchs approaching the Pole, Slessor called an emergency meeting of the COM "...where the final decision about continuing or abandoning the Expedition would have to be made..."⁶⁴¹ The COM wished to reassure Fuchs of their confidence in him, particularly in view of the significant adverse press which had 'raged' since the leak of Hillary's disturbing proposal. In calm and deliberate fashion they decided that Fuchs "...should not be burdened with too lengthy a communication nor confused with too much operational advice." The COM trusted in the RSC to ensure that the New Zealand Support Party, given the uncertainty that the expedition now faced, would re-double their efforts to ensure the success of Fuchs' crossing party. Admiral Parry, the COM Secretary, spoke with Fuchs' pilot John Lewis who was now at

⁶³⁸ Honnywill, 1996

⁶³⁹ Claydon, 7 January 1958

⁶⁴⁰ Hillary, 9 Jan 1958

⁶⁴¹ COM Minutes, 13 January 1958

Scott Base about extending flight operations. Lewis reported that after the middle of February it was "...impossible to guarantee either a safe landing or a take-off from the plateau." They instructed Lewis to provide aircraft coverage to the utmost extent and to winter the expedition's Otter at Scott Base rather than try to have it shipped out to New Zealand, the latest possible shipping date being 25 January⁶⁴² The COM discussion noted that "...when the Expedition was originally conceived there had been no thought that an American Station would have existed at the Pole and it had always been accepted that a journey beginning at the Weddell Sea would end at the Ross Sea...Nothing could ever be accomplished in Polar regions without accepting a certain element of risk..." Another member, more sceptical of the media, remarked "We all live far too close to newspapers." The COM then composed a brief message to Fuchs informing him that Hillary would be asked to consider assembling four dog teams at D700 and, in a note of encouragement for Fuchs, ended "We reiterate complete confidence in you and our support in whatever you decide to do. STOP. Your decision should not be influenced by any considerations prestige or possible financial commitments - signed 'Slessor'"⁶⁴³ Fuchs had been given his instructions and Hillary his rebuff. New Zealand's representative Frank Corner was present at the meeting and it was with some embarrassment that he had to communicate those decisions to the RSC.⁶⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Slessor was worried. He wrote a memo to Bowden:

A factor which seems to me must have the greatest weight with Fuchs in making up his mind to proceed or not is availability or otherwise of the four New Zealand dog teams at D700 when he arrives there. There should be no difficulty in getting his vehicles to D700. It is the tricky bit from there to Scott which is the worry. We must avoid any risk of the party having to winter on plateau. Even if worst comes to worst and all his vehicles let him down Fuchs could reach Scott before daylight fails if he has six dog teams – i.e. his own two and four from D700. He would have to winter at Scott but that is acceptable...these dog teams now at or approaching, D700 seem to me an indispensable lifeline.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴² At the conclusion of the Expedition Admiral Dufek bought the Otter off the British for £20,000.

⁶⁴³ COM Minutes, 13 January 1958

⁶⁴⁴ Corner, Lynette, Interview with the author, 2010, Wellington, NZ

⁶⁴⁵ NZHC, 12 January 1958

Despite the blow to their pride, Hillary had raised a real concern for the London Committee. They had lived through the previous year's debacle of the *Theron* entrapment in the Weddell Sea and knew that Fuchs was seriously behind schedule on his crossing journey. Perhaps Hillary's proposal was in fact worth considering. After all, having just traversed the route himself Hillary better than anyone knew what lay ahead for Fuchs' crossing party. Would the TAE turn out to be another British failure in the Antarctic akin to Scott's of 1912? A flurry of telegrams ensued between London and Wellington. Would it be possible for New Zealand to put rescue operations in place should they prove necessary? On 13 January Bowden asked Hillary to consider placing four dog teams at D700 "...if stark necessity demanded." Hillary replied immediately rejecting the option explaining that under adverse weather conditions "...dogs are useless at high altitudes" and if conditions were good then aircraft could operate to better effect. He finished with the unsettling comment that "Once Fuchs leaves the Pole his only lifeline in emergency is American aircraft at long ranges and our own when he gets closer."⁶⁴⁶ Arthur Helm immediately on-sent this message to Parry in London.⁶⁴⁷ The disagreement with London about using dogs led to NZ External Affairs Secretary George Laking sending the following memo to Corner with an alternate view of the matter:

...But the Ross Sea Committee too is responsible for men's lives and if, in due course, there is further disagreement about the course to be followed they will almost certainly back Hillary's judgement against Fuchs'. Public opinion here is pretty firmly behind Hillary. It's all very well to ask for extra work by the New Zealand party, but should Fuchs not also be asked to hustle?

Apparently the crossing party had made a suggestion to have reporters at D700 where Hillary would join Fuchs as a guide for the remainder of the journey. This caused Laking to remark "If Depot 700 were as accessible as Trafalgar Square, where would be [the] glory in Fuchs' exploit?"⁶⁴⁸

Notwithstanding the myriad of operational matters that Hillary had to deal with following his arrival at the Pole, which included making urgent arrangements to vacate Scott Base, the co-ordination with Admiral Dufek to ensure Fuchs would be supported whether he got out or not, and the co-ordination with Captain Kirkwood to save as many dogs as possible, Bowden

⁶⁴⁶ Hillary, 13 January 1958

⁶⁴⁷ Helm, 14 Jan 1958

⁶⁴⁸ Laking, 13 January 1958

continued to pester him from Wellington in true bureaucratic fashion. Following on from Helm's earlier message on the subject Bowden wrote Hillary a letter on 16 January claiming that "...from verbal communications and the irrefutable evidence of photographs it is clear that on your journeys to the Pole and in the establishment of depots you used Standard Vacuum Petrol." This was anathema for the TAE since Standard Vacuum was a competitor of BP, the expedition's primary sponsor. Bowden expressed the fear that these spurious drums of fuel might show on the expedition film and "...vastly reduce the value of the film to them." In a rather brusque manner Bowden then asked Hillary to explain his indiscretion since the Committee were much 'disturbed' by this breach of the sponsorship agreement. He then accused Hillary of being evasive: "In my telegram of 26th December, however, I did use the phrase "what type of fuel will you use on your journey and from what source will it come" and in due course your reply mentioned "TAE fuel if tractors used by Fuchs". This clearly had reference to the return journey and therefore did not answer my query."⁶⁴⁹ Hillary replied a few days later freely admitting his guilt:

This is certainly true and I have at no time attempted to conceal the matter from BP or the Ross Sea Committee...I suppose I have no real excuse for doing this. My sole reason was that we had insufficient supplies of BP fuel available either to get our tractors to D700 or for the onward trip to the pole. My only alternative to making use of some American fuel was to abandon the tractor trip entirely and this I was not prepared to do.

Hillary then continued the sparring match with the Chairman presenting a few 'redeeming features' in an attempt to mollify the RSC adding that "Only BP petrol is waiting at the depots for Dr. Fuchs [and] Only BP petrol has been used in our aircraft and ... We arrived at the South Pole with only BP drums on board." In a final burst of exasperation Hillary closed his letter exclaiming "...I'm blowed if I know what other course I should have followed."⁶⁵⁰ In fact, it seems that Hillary perhaps told Bowden a 'little white lie' in that "...olive green petrol drums that were not BP" were spotted by Fuchs on his arrival at D700. Jon Stephenson

⁶⁴⁹ Bowden, 16 January 1958

⁶⁵⁰ Hillary, 2 February 1958

later related that “It was a rare occasion that he had seen Bunny incensed... We were told not to use them!”⁶⁵¹

One of the contrasting aspects of the expedition was the different attitude that the UK and New Zealand Committee had towards their respective leader in the field. The London Committee of Management had complete faith in their leader. The same could not be said of Hillary and the Ross Sea Committee. Rather than assume that Hillary would make the best decision in any circumstance the RSC seemed to doubt his ability to make the right judgement calls and would often second-guess his decisions instead of supporting them. On 17 Jan New Zealand External Affairs sent a telegram to Corner that finally showed increased support for their leader stating that the “Ross Sea Committee today expressed confidence Hillary would use good judgement in support of Fuchs’ party” and that they “...deprecatd back-seat driving from London or Wellington...”⁶⁵² It had taken a long time for the RSC to acknowledge their culpability in this regard. The memo also mentioned that “...any extra costs due to wintering over would be debited to London Committee”. Clearly positions were being taken to mitigate the impacts in the event that Fuchs would run into difficulty in executing his plans. New Zealand was not about to bear any responsibility should he arrive late.

New Zealand began to realise that it could be placed in a difficult situation if Fuchs got into serious trouble after leaving the Pole. The RSC prepared a paper identifying the potential issues across five categories as follows:

1. If they [Fuchs and Hillary] fail to agree [on rescue operations]
2. If the London Committee tries to direct [rescue] operations from London. (Slessor has already talked about a Depot 800 and the use of dogs.)
3. If Fuchs delays appeal for help.
4. If it appears New Zealand lives are being endangered unnecessarily, and
5. If the crossing is to be completed next summer in which case there will be many personnel and financial problems.⁶⁵³

Crises often expose fault-lines in organisations. The TAE was no different. The New Zealand government was now concerned that London might engage directly with the Americans in the event of an emergency. The RSC paper emphasised the need to “...put the London

⁶⁵¹ Stephenson, J., Correspondence with the author, 27 December 2010

⁶⁵² NZEA, 17 January 1958

⁶⁵³ Ross Sea Committee, 17 January 1958

Committee on notice in most diplomatic language that we expect to be consulted.” In very frank words the paper made one thing clear:

A final point: the Ross Sea Committee is primarily responsible for the relationship with the United States Expedition [Operation Deep Freeze]. The London Committee can only spoil our relations by making direct requests. Moreover the New Zealand government is particularly interested in this problem – and we have the IGY parties to consider.

The note finally sent to Slessor was drafted in suitable diplomatic language but concluded firmly noting “As and when it may be necessary to seek further American assistance – as for example with the transport of extra aircraft fuel – we would like to be in a position to coordinate all requests. It would be foolish indeed to presume on, or appear to take for granted their unparalleled generosity.”⁶⁵⁴ On 18 January, Hillary was urged by Admiral Dufek to accept his invitation to fly with him to the Pole to meet Fuchs on his arrival.⁶⁵⁵ Hillary agreed and then advised Fuchs mentioning that they would be accompanied by nine press correspondents. Dufek was certainly aware of the importance of the occasion and was determined to garner as much publicity as possible not only for the expedition but also for his *Operation Deep Freeze* contingent US Task Force 43 at the Pole.⁶⁵⁶

The media was quick to take advantage of the situation. George Lowe recounted that Noel Barber, the *Daily Mail* correspondent was at the Pole to cover Fuchs’ arrival and the meeting of the two leaders. Expecting harsh words to be exchanged Barber had drafted an article describing the supposed ‘row’ that would soon erupt. Barber gave his draft to Peter Mulgrew, who had accompanied Hillary to the Pole and had remained afterward to handle communications, asking him to send it on to London, this even before Fuchs had arrived. Mulgrew, small in stature, but whom Lowe described as ‘like a little terrier’ was about to storm off and confront the journalist and only the physical restraint exercised by Hillary prevented an ugly incident from occurring. Hillary then instructed Mulgrew to send Barber’s communication.⁶⁵⁷ Barber was certainly an adept practitioner of ‘aggressive journalism’.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵⁵ McKenzie, 1963, p. 122

⁶⁵⁶ Hillary, 18 January 1958

⁶⁵⁷ Lowe, 7 May 1997



**Hillary and Fuchs meet at the South Pole while Admiral Dufek looks on
19 January 1958**

Photo: Jon Stephenson

In some ways Dufek saw himself as the caretaker of these two quibbling yet adventurous souls. It was he who advised and provided transport for Hillary (and a bevy of media representatives) to later fly out from Scott Base to meet Fuchs at the Pole. Dufek also collaborated in the decision taken at the Pole for Hillary to join Fuchs at D700 to guide the crossing party across the crevasse fields and down the treacherous Skelton Glacier to Scott Base. At the height of the heated debate over Hillary's suggestion to Fuchs that he split his crossing journey into two parts, Fuchs in reply had told Hillary that he felt he could no longer ask him to accompany the crossing party from D700 to Scott Base. Hillary later explained that he didn't take this suggestion by Fuchs seriously.⁶⁵⁸ Hillary was prepared to do everything possible to ensure Fuchs would complete his journey before the winter freeze up forced them to spend another Antarctic winter at Scott Base. Interestingly, Dufek recorded the following exchange between the two men at the South Pole:

⁶⁵⁸ Hillary, 1961, p. 219

*Hillary: "I'll fly back to Scott Base with Admiral Dufek. Then I'll fly to Depot 700 and be there when you arrive" to which Fuchs replied "Good, your knowledge of the trail will be of tremendous help to us. It will speed up our travel".*⁶⁵⁹

The outcome for Fuchs' party remained in doubt through the weeks following his departure from the South Pole and until they reached the head of the Skelton Glacier on 23 February. Kirkwood had earlier told Hillary that he did not expect to keep the *Endeavour* in McMurdo Sound past the end of February. On 22 January Hillary sent a note to Kirkwood advising that Fuchs was curtailing his scientific programme and gave him a 50/50 chance of arriving by 10 March. This was the real 'race' that was being run. Would Fuchs be able to get out of Antarctica before freeze-up. Hillary gave Kirkwood the names of twenty-two men to be transported out by the *USS Greenville Victory* and identified the nineteen personnel who would sail with *Endeavour* which included Fuchs's party of twelve. He then raised the issue of dogs with a total population of forty but room for only twenty on *Endeavour*, asking if the American ship could accommodate the rest.⁶⁶⁰ Soon, all the stops were being pulled to cover any eventuality. On 24 January Hillary asked Kirkwood if it were possible to make a special return trip to Wellington to bring down 'wintering' food and fuel. After receiving Kirkwood's doubtful response Hillary turned to the Americans asking Helm to send down 10 more drums of AVGAS by Globemaster.⁶⁶¹ By 1 February, Hillary had decided that it was all too hard and that they would be able to make do with their existing stocks of both food and fuel. The fate of the dogs became one of the least savoury results of the expedition with a large number, as many as 30, having to be put down by the men still at Scott Base. On 30 January Hillary reported to London that 8 dogs remained from the British party and would be shipped to UK zoos.⁶⁶²

In a note to Bowden sent 21 January Hillary made it clear that he had no intention of remaining at Scott Base for another winter regardless of the outcome for Fuchs and his party. Since the base was being turned over to the government at the conclusion of the expedition he recommended that Bowden "...confer with the IGY on the problem of internal running of Scott Base in the event of wintering over" and recommended that Lin Martin be made

⁶⁵⁹ Dufek, 1960, p. 149

⁶⁶⁰ Hillary, 22 January 1958

⁶⁶¹ Hillary, February 1958

⁶⁶² Hillary, 30 January 1958

“...responsible for internal administration” once the *Endeavour* had sailed north.⁶⁶³ On 1 February Hillary sent a telegram to Fuchs asking if Mulgrew could join the crossing party at D700, an offer which was turned down. Hillary also brought Fuchs the good news that the *Endeavour* would now definitely not be leaving Ross Island before 10 March. This gave Fuchs a bit of breathing space and increased Hillary’s confidence of an early departure for all expedition members. He also mentioned that Admiral Dufek was keen on purchasing the Otter which would benefit the expedition financially and that eight remaining huskies were being shipped back to New Zealand.⁶⁶⁴

There is continuing debate over Fuchs’ reaction to Hillary’s so called ‘dash to the Pole’. It was in Hillary’s nature to be dramatic but he was also fundamentally pragmatic as was his decision to continue southward. Unfortunately, not everyone saw it in that light. In his books Fuchs himself refers to the trip only as an aside, which for him it was, neither condemning nor praising it. It is surprising that he did not place more value on Hillary’s tracing of a route from D700 to the Pole (even though it was ‘not in the original plan’) and I think this exposes his disappointment that he was unable to make better time and reach the Pole first as had been expected. He had been caught unawares by Hillary’s ability, with the vital aid of Bates and Ellis, to get the Fergusons onto the plateau. In a press interview given on his arrival at the Pole Fuchs was probed for his opinion and replied that “...he was perfectly happy about Sir Edmund Hillary’s unscheduled [author’s emphasis] trip from Depot 700 to the Pole.”⁶⁶⁵ The press report continued “...He[Fuchs] pointed out that Sir Edmund having fulfilled his task by laying all the supply depots required, had been quite free to go on to the South Pole if he wished.” Fuchs was being carefully diplomatic but was still worried about fuel. When asked if Hillary’s exploit had jeopardised the success of the expedition, he replied that “...the only cause for complaint was that the fuel used could have been placed in a depot”, but that since more fuel had been delivered by air “...this seems to end the matter.”⁶⁶⁶ What Fuchs did not suspect at the time was that Hillary’s fuel would probably have been American and not BP, and therefore of little use to him. In his account of the TAE, *Antarctic Adventure*, published in 1959 one year after the expedition, Fuchs gave a stirring account of Hillary’s trip to the Pole describing it as “...a great triumph for Ed Hillary and his men, who had laboured for many weeks over an unknown route with the minimum of equipment...it was the faith of

⁶⁶³ Hillary, 21 January 1958

⁶⁶⁴ Laws, 2001, pp. 205-222

⁶⁶⁵ NZBS, 20 January 1958

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid

the men who took the risks which finally brought them to the South Pole.”⁶⁶⁷ It seems that all had been forgiven and any ‘row’ had indeed been an ephemeral invention of the press.

Almost twenty years after the expedition Fuchs made quite candid statements in an interview with Charles Neider, when asked about his reaction to Hillary going on to the Pole:

“It wasn’t in the plan, but this was neither here nor there, I had no objection to this at all.”

Neider: It didn’t bother you?

“Not a bit. I was crossing the continent. The thing was, Hillary sent me a message saying, had I a suggestion as to what he should do next? I sent a suggestion but by that time he had pressed on. Our communication was not very good...In any case he wanted to go to the Pole and I’d known that he wanted to at the time. This was taken up by the press, who said it was something which he did against my interest in some way. But then I wasn’t thinking like that. Nor was my party. The only thing we didn’t appreciate was the message suggesting we should stop, and that it was released to the press. That was what caused all the furor...The point is that it was a private message to me, and my message back was a private one to him.”⁶⁶⁸

Hillary’s decision to try for the Pole generated a variety of reactions not least from the members of the British and New Zealand TAE parties. Richard Brooke was one of two British men who were assigned to join the New Zealand Support party. He was a surveyor and member of the Northern Party that carried out an extensive exploration of Victoria Land. He related that the crossing party were ‘understandably’ very upset that Hillary had reached the Pole before Fuchs. However he added that:

...Fuchs had no ‘divine right’ to be the second after Amundsen to get to the Pole overland. So in that sense their indignation was a little bit out of place...if

⁶⁶⁷ Fuchs, 1959, p. 140

⁶⁶⁸ Neider, 1980, pp. 258-259

*you choose someone like Ed to be the leader of the expedition, I think you are being a bit naïve if you expect him to occupy a very limited role...*⁶⁶⁹

Almost all the New Zealanders were aware that Hillary had this ambition. The big question was whether the opportunity would present itself, and if so, would he act on it. Deputy Leader Bob Miller was completely against the idea attributing it to "...such selfishness and personal ambition."⁶⁷⁰ Vern Gerard, the IGY physicist who overwintered with Hillary's TAE team admitted that the 'race to the pole' was a concept created by the media but viewed it as a welcome concept that brought an element of excitement to the British world after "...30 years of tough times..." in the same vein as the Queen's Coronation and the conquest of Everest.⁶⁷¹ The New Zealand medical doctor for the summer season, Francis de Hamel, was aboard the *Endeavour* during this time and able to listen in to the conversations that were going back and forth since the ship was in constant radio contact with both Scott and Shackleton bases. He expressed well the degree of mixed emotions that dominated Scott Base:

*I have a lot of sympathy for Ed Hillary...We all knew before he set out from Scott Base if he'd had time to spare...he'd press on towards the pole...despite the agreement ...that he should remain at Depot 700 and wait for Fuchs. But when it came to the crunch he really didn't have any great options. The Antarctic 't'aint a healthy place' to hang about in for weeks inside a caboose... [to] wait for a meeting that may never eventuate – and certainly wouldn't if Fuchs became much further delayed...I think we all agreed the man on the ground was the only person who could say whether the decision to go for the Pole was or was not wise, stupid, sensible, foolhardy, pragmatic, self-seeking, thoughtful, thoughtless, prudent, risky – and so on. We argued these pros and cons for hours...while it was all happening.*⁶⁷²

Notwithstanding the above argument de Hamel said the general feeling at Scott Base was that Hillary was "...ethically wrong to have gone on to the Pole from Depot 700" stating that although most knew that "... [he] had the idea from the start, we also hoped he wouldn't

⁶⁶⁹ Brooke, 2007, p. 114

⁶⁷⁰ Miller, TAE diary, 5 November 1957

⁶⁷¹ Gerard, pp.140-141

⁶⁷² De Hamel, TAE diary, p.18

carry it out.” De Hamel referred to an “...agreement in writing with Bunny Fuchs” that Hillary would not go on to the Pole. My research has failed to discover any evidence of such an agreement. Indeed, the original expedition plan was for Fuchs to meet Hillary at D700 based on the expectation that Fuchs’ Sno-cats would easily outpace Hillary’s Ferguson tractors if they could ever make it to the plateau. Quite the opposite turned out to be the case. One certainty with expeditions to uncharted geographies is that the original plan will change. Antarctica is no exception. Apparently, the TAE committees failed to consider such an outcome.

Even in the group known as the ‘old firm’ there were strong differences of opinion regarding Hillary’s decision to continue south. Jim Bates, the innovative mechanic whom Hillary had known for many years from his beekeeping days was under the initial impression that the Ferguson tractors would be consigned to duties around Scott Base. Little did he realise that he would be driving them most of the way to the South Pole. Although he was an accomplished skier and outdoors enthusiast, he would never have applied for the job had he known the scope of his eventual duties. His polar experience had not been a happy one. He was not an adventurer and would have much preferred to remain at Scott Base rather than take part in Hillary’s tractor train. Ironically it was Bates whose talents made it possible for Hillary to reach the Pole in the Fergusons. He became the first member of the NZ Support Party to return to New Zealand. He would be met on arrival in Wellington and was advised “...to tell the press as little as possible.”⁶⁷³

Murray Ellis, Hillary’s chief engineer, although mechanically inclined, was similarly disenchanted with the idea of driving the Fergusons to the Pole. While recuperating at Scott Base from a back injury incurred while repairing a Weasel at Plateau Depot, he wrote a poignant letter home describing the conflicting thoughts that were racing through his mind. “Last night I had the most unpleasant decision of my life to make and at present am in a quandary as to what it is all about...” Ellis had just received word that Fuchs was already two weeks late and now estimated that his team would not arrive at Scott Base before 9 March. He had also become aware that the Ross Sea Committee “...have done a complete about face and are now trying to obtain permission from TAE London for the tractors to push on to the South Pole...now they evidently feel that the public interest in the Expedition is so great that a burst for the Pole would be just the thing for their own and Hillary’s ego.” The previous

⁶⁷³ NZEA, 17 January 1958

night Hillary had radioed from the tractor train now approaching D480, asking “Is Murray Ellis prepared to go to the Pole.” Ellis was suddenly caught between his genuine personal interests and his loyalty to the TAE believing that a negative reply “...would be no less than mutiny against the Expedition...had I said no he [Hillary] would not have pressed on past D700 as his team would be too weak and therefore...the failure to push on to the Pole would have rested on my shoulder.” Ellis felt swept along by events that were out of his control and concluded that “...there is very little that I can do but push on...I will have to put my heart and soul into the venture and do my best to accomplish success.” Ellis assumed rightly that the party would rely on “...Uncle Sam’s generosity...” if there were any mishaps or if they needed more fuel or transport. He saw no useful purpose in the trip and would have preferred the tractor party to be doing “...scientific work or surveying or discovering new country...”

⁶⁷⁴ Ellis was flown out the next day to join Hillary’s tractor party.

It is not surprising that when, at his engineer David Pratt’s suggestion, Fuchs asked Hillary whether Bates and Ellis could accompany his Sno-cats onwards from the Pole, they both turned him down. Hillary had no difficulty convincing the other two members of the ‘old firm’ to continue the journey south. Communications officer Peter Mulgrew was an acolyte of Hillary’s and supported him without question. Derek Wright, the fifth man, besides being an essential tractor driver, provided the film footage that the public and the sponsors wanted to see.

The debate highlights the different agendas of individuals but also the divide between crossing party interests and New Zealand national interests. Hillary was constantly reminded by the RSC that his number one priority was to assist Fuchs to complete his crossing journey, and in his own way he did exactly that. Science, exploration and surveying in the Ross Dependency came second to that primary objective. This had become evident in the previous summer when the RSC threw cold water on Hillary’s expanded summer plans for the field parties, objections which he unashamedly ignored. There is no doubt that Hillary facilitated Fuchs’ journey by tracing a route from D700 to the Pole and the time saved was critical to getting out of McMurdo Sound in the current season.

⁶⁷⁴ Ellis, 22 November 1957



Figure 33: Crossing Party Arriving at Scott Base, 2 March 1958

Photo: Bill Cranfield

6. Legacy of the TAE

The TAE has been labelled “...the greatest polar expedition ever forgotten”.⁶⁷⁵ Some attribute this to the shadow cast by the IGY. Others to the fact that there were no fatalities and the reported dangers and hardships experienced by the two parties were not dramatic enough. Certainly, neither Fuchs nor Hillary who were both familiar with challenging situations, were prone to exaggerate their difficulties. Nevertheless, the expedition can claim its share of polar glory for a number of outstanding achievements. This chapter highlights the most significant of these.

6.1 Science and the TAE

For Fuchs the motivating force for the TAE was scientific and it was his curiosity about the geology of the Antarctic continent that drove him. In a shipboard interview with Charles Neider in 1979 he related that: “...we wished to know what happened in the interior, geologically speaking ... There were vast snowfields and doubtless mountains, but we didn’t know what was there...the driving force is wanting to know something.” Fortunately, although geology and glaciology were not included in the IGY scientific programme, the TAE, not being part of the IGY, had no such constraints leaving Fuchs and Hillary free to indulge those aspects. However Fuchs understood that science alone would not be enough and that he needed to broaden the appeal of his expedition if he was to win government approval. He therefore cannily made use of the public’s taste for the hazardous unknown, and explained: “...of course one had to play the adventure side – not only did one enjoy adventure but you had to play it – because if you were going to get public support it would be through the interest in the adventure side.”⁶⁷⁶ Fuchs’ own assessment of the seismic profile work later admitted some deficiencies due to the limits of the technology then available as well as the “...depth at which we were able to fire the explosives and the nature of the snow...” but was pleased to add “...we did get a general guide as to what the ice thickness across the continent was.”⁶⁷⁷

Several scientists were included in both the British and New Zealand TAE parties. The British crossing party included glaciologist Hal Lister, geophysicist, Geoffrey Pratt, and two

⁶⁷⁵ Haddelsey, 2012, p. 251

⁶⁷⁶ Neider, 1980, p. 252

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 256

geologists, Jon Stephenson, and expedition leader ‘Bunny’ Fuchs. Hillary’s party included biologist and meteorologist, Ron Balham as well as geologists Guyon Warren and Bernard ‘Bernie’ Gunn. Gunn had also been one of the three New Zealand observers who accompanied *Operation Deep Freeze* in the advance reconnaissance party of 1955-56. In the case of New Zealand five of its Antarctic IGY personnel were seconded to Hillary’s TAE Support Party. This group consisted of geophysicist and chief scientist Trevor Hatherton and physicist, Vern Gerard, who would carry out geomagnetism research. There were also three technical support personnel, Neil Sandford, ionosonde, Herb Orr, magnetic and seismic technician, and Peter MacDonald, radiation and tidal technician.

Surveying was another technical discipline that figured significantly for the TAE parties and especially for New Zealand. In this regard the British party was represented by Ken Blaiklock, an experienced surveyor, who had served several Antarctic seasons with FIDS. The NZ support party had considerable surveying talent as well, with professional surveyor and deputy leader Bob Miller, Richard Brooke, surveyor in the British North Greenland Expedition (1952-1954) and one of two British assignees to the support party, and Roy Carlyon, second youngest member of the support party. These three surveyors were deployed, respectively, across the three major New Zealand sledging expeditions, the Southern Party, the Northern Party, and the Darwin Party. These expeditions were among the most extensive sledging journeys ever carried out in polar regions. They surveyed and mapped an area of over 40,000 sq. miles within the Ross Dependency, contributing greatly to the known geography of the region. The three parties, involving eight men overall, collectively spent two and one half person-years in the field, an average of three and a half months each, travelling over thousands of miles of unknown territory by dog-sled.⁶⁷⁸ The Southern Party of Miller and Marsh travelled almost 1700 miles, spending 100 days on the Plateau above 8,000 ft. Frank Debenham, veteran of Scott’s *Terra Nova* expedition and founder of SPRI, later praised the surveying efforts writing: “The maps produced by those three parties are amongst the major results of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition.”⁶⁷⁹ New Zealand could no longer be accused of Antarctic complacency.

⁶⁷⁸ Helm-Miller, 1964, pp.241-367

⁶⁷⁹ Debenham, 1961, p.121

The TAE scientific result is best represented by the integrated set of sixteen reports written by expedition members from both the British and New Zealand parties.⁶⁸⁰ They were published three years after the expedition with costs covered by the surplus TAE funds. The topics were wide ranging and included Tides at Shackleton, Glaciology, Geology of the Theron Mountains and the Shackleton Range, Geology of Victoria Land, Meteorology at South Ice, at Scott Base, and ‘along the journey’. Report XV is dedicated to Survey on both sides of the continent with contributions by Ken Blaiklock, David Stratton and Bob Miller. David Pratt, Fuchs’ chief engineer, also wrote a thesis following the expedition on the field performance of the tractors. He submitted the thesis to the Department of Engineering, at Imperial College, London and was subsequently awarded a Master’s degree. One anomaly in the final set of reports is the conspicuous absence of Report VI. This paper was intended to be written by Jon Stephenson, the Australian geologist, on the subject of snow metamorphism. To his lasting annoyance Stephenson, with Fuchs having set a strict deadline, was unable to complete the report to the satisfaction of the reviewer, an ice physicist, from Birmingham University who was appalled by Jon’s ‘geologese’. Some short articles did however find their way into the *Journal of Glaciology* and ISAGE.⁶⁸¹ Another direct result of the TAE but not published until 1962, was the highly regarded NZGS report *Geology of Victoria Land between the Mawson and Mulock Glaciers* by geologists Bernie Gunn and Guyon Warren, both members of Hillary’s Northern Party surveying expedition.⁶⁸²

A major let-down for both Ken Blaiklock and Jon Stephenson was their unsuccessful attempt to return the next summer to perform a geological exploration of the Horlick Mountains. Towards the end of their crossing journey during their last few days in Antarctica, they had enquired on the possibility of obtaining transport and supplies for such an expedition and had initially received the support of both Fuchs and Admiral Dufek. Blaiklock and Stephenson were even to receive a grant from the Mt Everest Foundation. However, six weeks later, due to changes in priorities for the American programme, Dufek had to withdraw his support and the idea evaporated. Ever keen for adventure their disappointment at this missed opportunity would stay with both men forever.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸⁰ TAE Scientific Reports, 1961

⁶⁸¹ Stephenson, Jon, correspondence with the author, 3 January 2008

⁶⁸² *New Zealand Geographical Survey Bulletin 71, DSIR, 1962*

⁶⁸³ Blaiklock, Ken, interview with the author, Chester, 2009

The establishment of Scott Base was the most enduring of Hillary's accomplishments in Antarctica. With comfortable accommodation assured it ignited a series of scientific expeditions to the Ross Dependency during the years immediately following the TAE as well as into the future. Trevor Hatherton, chief scientist for the NZ Support Party, returned the following season to work with Albert Crary joining the United States US Seismic Traverse party on its journey up the Skelton Glacier onto the polar plateau. Geology, which had been relegated to secondary status by the IGY, now came to the fore. It is important to understand the inter-play between expeditions as one melds into another most often building on the expertise and infrastructure developed by the former. Three expeditions stand out in this regard. Coincident with the TAE Dr. Larry Harrington led a successful geological expedition under the auspices of the NZGS to the Tucker Glacier region near Cape Hallett in Northern Victoria Land. Harrington's party discovered that the Tucker Glacier offered a possibly better path to the Polar Plateau than did the Skelton Glacier. This made Cape Hallett Station a desirable location from which to explore "...a large inland region."⁶⁸⁴ Another was the University of Wellington Antarctic Expedition 1958-59 led by Colin Bull which investigated the Dry Valleys region of Victoria Land. Bull had been a member of the BNGE along with Hal Lister and Richard Brooke, members of the TAE. Included in his team were three young scientists who had been invited to join the New Zealand TAE summer party of 1957-58. Two were third-year geology students, Peter Webb and Barrie McKelvey. The other was biologist Dick Barwick who had also spent the 1956-57 summer season at Scott Base. Prior to heading south they had conferred in Wellington with two returned members of Hillary's TAE party, geologists Guyon Warren and Bernie Gunn who had formed one half of the TAE's Northern Party.⁶⁸⁵ During the 1957-58 summer season Barwick and Webb had worked alongside TAE biologist Ron Balham who first introduced them to the Victoria Valley, one of the 'Dry Valleys'.⁶⁸⁶ The Victoria University of Wellington Expedition followed on from this preliminary work. At the same time the NZGS sponsored the New Zealand Geological and Survey Expedition 1958-59 led by Larry Harrington. There was some concern that the two expeditions would overlap in their research but in the end the two remained at "...a safe distance away from us."⁶⁸⁷ Due to unfavourable ice conditions Harrington's expedition had difficulty reaching its targeted area of study on the coastal areas of Victoria Land at Terra Nova Bay but eventually did useful work in McMurdo Sound at Coulman Island, Beaufort

⁶⁸⁴ Harrington, 1963, p. 41

⁶⁸⁵ Bull, 2009, pp. 13, 55

⁶⁸⁶ *Victoria University of Wellington Antarctic Expedition 1958-59*, p.1

⁶⁸⁷ Bull, 2009, p. 59

Island and at Black and White Islands. Arnold Heine, who had served as supplies officer for Hillary's Support Party also joined Harrington's expedition.⁶⁸⁸ The major difference between the Victoria University and the NZGS expeditions was the manner in which they were funded. The former was mostly self-supporting and dependent on university research grants and corporate donations, while the latter had the significant backing of the New Zealand government and the NZGS.

On 26 February 1958, before Fuchs had arrived at Ross Island, Cabinet approved 'in principle' the continued operation of Scott Base and Hallett Station after the conclusion of the IGY. One month later it decided that DSIR would have ultimate responsibility for activity in the Ross Dependency and created the Ross Dependency Research Committee (RDRC) to manage that activity. The New Zealand Antarctic programme was approved by Cabinet a few months later on 18 August 1958. The initial members of the RDRC were R. Simmers (Chair), E. Robertson, R. Falla, T. Hatherton, and the former Deputy Leader of the NZ TAE Support Party, Bob Miller. The TAE's Scott Base, honed for science by New Zealand's first IGY team, could now look forward to serving New Zealand's Antarctic interests into the future.⁶⁸⁹

6.2 Finance

Since the expedition was a private and not a government sponsored project it was expected that a significant fund raising effort from individuals and private companies would be required. An early estimate of New Zealand's expenses presented by Hillary was a total of £130,000 leaving another £63,000 to be raised over the government's initial grant.⁶⁹⁰ This would be sought from commercial sponsors and by public subscription. Budgets were changing quickly and this amount was soon increased to £150,000 with the public appeal target set at £100,000. Disappointingly, after eighteen months of organised toil the public appeal in New Zealand fell significantly short of its goal raising just £39,500. This was despite the tireless efforts of expedition members who gave numerous lectures up and down the country. One issue was that the public, although much excited by the prospect, thought the expedition should be totally funded by the government. By April 1956 it became clear that the New Zealand expedition would require additional financial support and the

⁶⁸⁸ RDRC, November 1958, p. 17

⁶⁸⁹ Cabinet decision, 26 February 1958

⁶⁹⁰ Press Comments, 1955

government would have to intervene. There was now no question of New Zealand backing out.

On March 20 1956 the New Zealand government set up a special Cabinet committee with Deputy Prime Minister Keith Holyoake as Chair, to investigate the financial status of the Ross Sea Committee. Its objective was to assess the government's exposure to liabilities that might be incurred by the New Zealand portion of the TAE. The subsequent report identified a serious shortfall of "at least £100,000" in funding for the New Zealand party, this after almost a year spent trying to raise funds from the New Zealand public and commercial enterprises. The public, including school children and lecture audiences, had so far contributed a disappointing £20,000 and another £20,000 was estimated to possibly be raised from business sponsors. Such was the nature of 'private expeditions'. The government realised that planning for the expedition was beyond any possible major modification and that further delay would endanger the whole project. In order to avoid potential embarrassment, the government felt obligated to step in and ensure that the expedition was able to deliver on its commitments to the London TAE Committee of Management. As was stated in the Cabinet committee report they were resigned to the fact that "...the public expectation which has been built up in New Zealand and abroad, the Cabinet committee considers that it would not be possible for the Government to withdraw its support from the venture." Their concern led the committee to conclude that a significant additional contribution beyond the initial £50,000 granted at the outset would be needed. Its recommendation, which the RSC eventually accepted, was for government to fund an additional £87,500 to be used to provide for logistics and construction of a base in McMurdo Sound. In return the government demanded that, at the conclusion of the expedition, the base and equipment, which included the ship *Endeavour*, the tractors and aircraft (which included the privately funded Beaver aircraft which had been funded by the city of Auckland and after which it was also named) and the 'hutments' of Scott Base would revert to the government to serve the continuing IGY project through to the end of 1958. This agreement with the government was struck in April, 1956 after a detailed study of the expedition's financial situation.⁶⁹¹ At this point the government remained unsure of its longer term plans for Antarctic research and habitation.

By mid-1957 the financial picture had clarified somewhat. The brief prepared for the Prime Minister's conference of 1957 contained a summary of the funding that had been required for

⁶⁹¹ Cabinet Paper, 1956, p. 2

the TAE and IGY. The expected total spend for New Zealand had reached an estimated amount of "...almost £400,000", more than two and a half times the early projection of £150,000. The funds to pay for the expedition came from a variety of sources. The government's contribution up to this point was £243,000 consisting of the initial cash grant of £50,000 and £193,000 worth of equipment and services. These included the purchase of the *Endeavour*, the Auster aircraft, and the radio equipment. The services of the New Zealand Navy, the Army, the RNZAF Antarctic Flight, and the Ross Sea Committee were also included in this figure. There were also the additional services of Frank Ponder, base architect, and the Ministry of Works construction crew of eight men under the supervision of Randal Heke, as well as the provision of a Stores & Procurement Officer.⁶⁹² The public appeal had yielded £39,500, £60,000 less than had been expected, while the gifts 'in kind' from companies and organisations in New Zealand and the United Kingdom brought in another £83,000. These included everything from tractors, to dog fencing, chocolate and beer.⁶⁹³ The government estimated its separate IGY costs to be £90,000 spread over eighteen months. It should again be noted that the TAE, with American assistance, was covering most of the transport and infrastructure costs for New Zealand's IGY activities and its staff.

Despite these challenges, in the end the expedition managed to produce a surplus. This was largely due to an overwhelming response from private commercial firms. BP donated all the fuel for both the British and New Zealand parties. This was required to power the tractors and aircraft, with a different type of specialised fuel needed for each, MOGAS for the tractors and AVGAS for the two Austers, the Beaver and Otter. The fuel had been specially blended to avoid icing in extreme cold conditions. Fuel requirements turned out to be far higher than originally estimated due to Fuchs' request for two more depots, D480 and D700, and the additional survey work that was carried out by the three New Zealand sledging parties. A further drain on fuel resulted from the exceptionally difficult traverse to the plateau that the crossing party experienced in the early part of its journey while ascending the Recovery Glacier.

The final tally for the expedition, including both United Kingdom and New Zealand costs, was in the order of £750,000. Approximately two thirds was met by private contribution and

⁶⁹² Arnold Heine, mountaineer, served in this position through the TAE summer season before joining the NZGS Antarctic Research Expedition 1958-59 led by Larry Harrington.

⁶⁹³ PM Conference Brief, 1957

one third by government contributions. The combined cash contribution of the governments of the UK, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa amounted to £185,000.⁶⁹⁴ The United Kingdom had little of tangible substance to show for their expenditure although their sale of the Otter aircraft to Admiral Dufek and *Operation Deep Freeze* did provide a windfall of £20,000.⁶⁹⁵ For New Zealand the results were more concrete. In addition to the prestige gained by its increased visibility in the Antarctic, the country now had a permanent foothold on the continent with a fully-equipped base whose quality of construction was second to none. It also had a proven ship, the *Endeavour*, for marine transport, two Ferguson tractors, and two aircraft for local reconnaissance and air transport. In addition, four dog teams would be left to serve the IGY contingent.⁶⁹⁶ In retrospect, the New Zealand government's total expenditure of £243,000 proved to be a very wise investment indeed.

By 1959, after the accounting was completed, the TAE wound up its affairs with a surplus of over £34,000 before expenses for publishing the scientific reports. The expedition's careful, some might have said austere, financial management had borne fruit. The remaining surplus was then transferred over to a new entity, the Trans-Antarctic Association, forming a basis for funding Antarctic programmes that continues to this day.

6.3 The Trans-Antarctic Association

One of the most important outcomes for the TAE was that it was completed not only on time but also 'on budget'. In July 1959 once a surplus had been confirmed the idea of setting up a charitable trust to manage the remaining funds was approved by the COM. This was in keeping with Article 27 of the constitution of the Trans-Antarctic Expedition New Zealand Inc.⁶⁹⁷ Thus began a lengthy, eighteen month period of negotiation with the RSC on the detailed arrangements for administering the trust, to be called the Trans-Antarctic Association (TAA), which included agreeing its Articles of Association and governance structure. For the purposes of negotiation the United Kingdom was represented by the London TAE Finance Sub-Committee under the leadership of Sir Edwin Herbert. New Zealand was represented by the Ross Sea Committee with J.V. Scott from the High Commissioner's Office acting as point man in London.

⁶⁹⁴ Neider, 1980, pp. 252-253

⁶⁹⁵ Clarkson, Peter, interview with author, SPRI, June 2009

⁶⁹⁶ Cabinet Paper, 1956, pp. 1-3

⁶⁹⁷ Trans-Antarctic Expedition New Zealand Incorporated, 29 September 1955

At their 36th meeting the COM discussed the manner for disposal of the expedition's surplus funds. Scott, the New Zealand representative, suggested that the trust fund should make grants to worthwhile expeditions that are focused on 'Antarctic exploration' rather than the more general 'Polar exploration'.⁶⁹⁸ His recommendation was carried. Fuchs insisted that each expedition must be of "...serious intent with a clear objective..." and not merely '...for young men to enjoy a climbing or sledging holiday.' A contentious issue arose from the fact that the surplus was held in a single account owned by the London COM. Scott pointed out that the RSC constitution indicated "...that there was some obligation...that any surplus should be shared between the Ross Sea Committee and the Trans-Antarctic Expedition in some equitable manner." In consideration of the disproportionately large contribution of New Zealand to the expedition Scott had advanced that the RSC would consider a forty percent share as being fair. The London Finance Committee maintained that there was no legal obligation for the London TAE to partition the wealth with the RSC. However its report accepted that "...the Trans-Antarctic Expedition did approve the draft Constitution of the Ross Sea Committee and in consequence there does appear to be a moral commitment to share the surplus..."⁶⁹⁹ The London Finance committee then put their accountants to work and performed their own calculations concluding that the maximum share to which New Zealand was entitled would be somewhere between 21% and 29%. Using the upper figure and in the event of the total surplus amount being £35,000, New Zealand would be allocated £10,000 and the UK £25,000. The COM felt that keeping the fund intact would optimise income and that an arrangement should be reached for New Zealand to participate in the administration of the combined fund. The suggestion was recorded that "...in each year one third of the funds available for grants be reserved for New Zealand recommendations..."⁷⁰⁰ Interestingly, Australia and South Africa stated that if the fund were to be broken up then they would expect their fair portion. However, they agreed that if the fund were kept whole they would be content with whatever method of sharing of income was worked out with New Zealand.⁷⁰¹ Their position served New Zealand well by placing additional pressure on London to reach agreement with the RSC if a break-up of the fund was to be avoided. The London Finance Committee then recommended that a New Zealand Committee be established to make recommendations for worthwhile projects with one third of the funds available being reserved in any year for New Zealand recommendations. This did not

⁶⁹⁸ COM Minutes, July 1959

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid

⁷⁰¹ Ibid

preclude that New Zealand or the UK could apply to utilise all the available funds in any one year. They also proposed that funds would be allocated on a three year cycle. This would allow time for a reasonable sum to accumulate from interest on the principal. In the event that insufficient applications were received to utilise the available funds the remainder would be returned to the principal and the process would be repeated at the end of the next three-year cycle.⁷⁰² These recommendations were then passed to the RSC for review.

Three months later in October 1959 Scott tabled New Zealand's counter-proposal for the TAA constitution. Notwithstanding that there was still "...a body of opinion desiring a separate New Zealand fund" most of the London COM's proposal had been accepted. However, there were minor modifications that the RSC wished to implement. The New Zealand revisions included the following regarding the separation of funds: "It should be provided that two-thirds of the funds could not be disposed of without the approval of the United Kingdom representative, nor one-third without that of the New Zealand representative." A final recommendation from Scott was for cross-membership between the two TAA Committees of Management as had been the case between the TAE COM and the RSC. This was accepted by London.⁷⁰³ In presenting its final set of recommended changes to the TAA Constitution the RSC closed with a bold and prescient message stating:

*...It is though [thought- sic] likely that New Zealand activities in and knowledge of Antarctica will, as the years pass, approach the scope of those of the United Kingdom. The effective autonomy of the New Zealand Committee ensured by the Ross Sea Committee's proposals above, is considered essential since the nature of New Zealand projects, because of local conditions, may well differ from the type of project likely to emerge from the United Kingdom.*⁷⁰⁴

During the previous five years that encompassed the TAE, the IGY, and the signing of the Antarctic Treaty, New Zealand's self-confidence in Antarctic affairs had come a very long way.

By November 1959 the COM optimistically reported that negotiations had been successfully concluded and that the TAA was close to becoming a reality. The COM minutes of 25

⁷⁰² Ibid

⁷⁰³ Finance Sub-Committee, October 1959

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid

November recorded: “The Chairman expressed the Committee’s thanks and appreciation to Sir Edwin Herbert and members of the Finance Sub-Committee for the way in which somewhat protracted negotiations with the Ross Sea Committee had been brought to a mutually satisfactory conclusion.”⁷⁰⁵ However there was seemingly more work to do and negotiations would be ‘protracted’ for a while longer. In May 1960 the Finance Sub-Committee tabled the draft of the TAA Articles of Association which was “...discussed in detail, several Clauses being modified or amended.”⁷⁰⁶ A second draft was requested which was then sent to Wellington for the RSC to review. Finally, six months later, on 5 December, the Finance Sub-Committee were pleased to report that the Ross Sea Committee had accepted the draft memorandum and the Articles of Association as proposed by the COM. They set themselves a deadline of 31 March 1961 to complete the nomination process for the TAA committees. It was also revealed that the total funds amounted to “... £33,800 in cash, after £6,800 had been reserved to cover cost of publishing scientific results.” The Committee then agreed to immediately transfer £25,000 to the new company, the TAA, with the intention to transfer any remaining funds once the affairs of the expedition had been wound up.⁷⁰⁷

With the negotiations on structure and financial matters now resolved the TAE COM and the RSC could get on with populating the required TAA committees. The approved structure had been simplified down to a single TAA Committee of Management consisting of five people, rather than one for each of New Zealand and the United Kingdom as had originally been proposed. Each country would establish an Advisory Committee that would be charged with the responsibility to review applications for funding from their respective countries. The New Zealand Advisory Committee would nominate two members of the TAA COM while its United Kingdom counterpart would do the same. The fifth member, the Chair of the TAA COM, would also be nominated by the United Kingdom Advisory Committee but would have to be agreed by the New Zealand Advisory Committee.⁷⁰⁸ The UK TAA COM would include a member from the CRO who would look after the interests of Australia and South Africa.⁷⁰⁹ In this manner it was expected that joint and equitable management of the fund could be assured. It was hoped that all nominations would be submitted by March 1961.

⁷⁰⁵ COM Minutes, November 1959

⁷⁰⁶ Finance Sub-Committee, May 1960

⁷⁰⁷ Finance Sub-Committee, December 1960

⁷⁰⁸ COM Minutes, January 1961

⁷⁰⁹ Finance Sub-Committee, October 1959

The inaugural New Zealand members of the TAA COM were J.V. Scott of the NZHC in London and Dr. Scott Russell a scientist who was posted at the Agricultural Research Station in Berkshire. The TAE COM recommended that the first TAA COM members from the United Kingdom should be Sir Vivian Fuchs and Mr. Pirie-Gordon with Sir Edwin Herbert acting as Chair.⁷¹⁰ New Zealand subsequently accepted Herbert's nomination to the Chair.

The New Zealand Advisory Committee consisted of nominees from five different organisations, External Affairs, DSIR, the Royal Society, the New Zealand Antarctic Society, and the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand. For expediency the initial members were drawn from the RSC for the first year, namely Frank Corner (EA), Dr. E.I. Robertson (DSIR), Professor L.R. Richardson (RS), Dr Robert Falla (NZAS) and H.E.Riddiford (FMCNZ) with the addition of Sir Edmund Hillary. Arthur Helm was appointed Secretary.⁷¹¹ Again in the interests of expediency the TAE Finance Sub-Committee, with guidance from the TAE COM, appointed the first United Kingdom TAA Advisory Committee consisting of Sir Miles Clifford (Royal Society), Captain A.R.Glen (RGS), Gordon Robin (SPRI), Ray Adie (FIDS) and David Stratton (TAE Deputy Leader) who filled the CRO role.

The Trans-Antarctic Association was finally incorporated on 23 March 1962 and its first Annual General Meeting was not held until 17 September 1963.⁷¹² It was a short meeting lasting only twenty-five minutes. Although its formation had been a long drawn-out process, longer than the expedition itself, the result was significant. The Trans-Antarctic Association is a key component of the lasting legacy of the expedition. For over half a century the TAA has regularly distributed funds to worthy endeavours in the Antarctic.

⁷¹⁰ COM Minutes, January 1961

⁷¹¹ Helm-Miller, 1964, pp. 409-410

⁷¹² TAA AGM Minutes, 17 September 1963



Figure 34: Fuchs & Hillary arrive at Wellington Town Hall – March 1958

Photo: ATL, TAE Photo Archive, Wellington

7. Conclusion

‘Exploration’ is often employed as a euphemism for discovering and claiming new lands – for implementing expansionist, that is ‘imperialist’ policies. In the case of the TAE the lands on the Antarctic Peninsula and the Ross Dependency had been discovered although not surveyed. Both Britain and New Zealand saw the TAE as a means to ‘strengthen’ their already lodged but now contested claims to Antarctic territory, in the case of the Peninsula a reality while for the Ross Dependency, as yet, only a concern. We must remember that at this time there was no Antarctic Treaty and territorial claims were very real in intent. Sovereignty in Antarctica was not an academic matter. The TAE, especially when re-enforced by the impartial scientific goals of the IGY, became the ideal vehicle to further this objective and moved New Zealand to finally awake from its Antarctic slumber.

The TAE was an anomaly in the history of exploration for several reasons. It was conceived as a private venture but was financed and executed very much as a ‘public-private partnership’. It was intended to show the unity and ability of the Commonwealth but with the exception of New Zealand, there was only token involvement from other Commonwealth countries. It was designed by its originator as a mammoth undertaking, and included an extensive seismic programme. Although striving to be purely ‘British’ it unabashedly utilised American made Tucker Sno-Cat tractors and Canadian made de Havilland aircraft. The TAE was an expedition that had one foot in the past and one foot in the future, straddling the history of polar exploration. It utilised both traditional and technologically advanced modes of transport, dogs, an assortment of tracked vehicles and aircraft. When it was conceived many of the members of the Scott and Shackleton expeditions occupied positions of influence within polar exploration circles and wanted their voices to be heard.

Sir Edmund Hillary, world hero of Everest, together with the willing co-operation of US Navy Admiral George Dufek uniquely combined to bring the attention of the world to the TAE. In this regard Dr Vivian Fuchs, with his more subdued approach to the expedition provided the ideal counterpoint. Where Hillary was openly adventurous, Fuchs came across as quietly determined. Both men had full confidence in their abilities and strong leadership was a ‘critical success factor’ for the expedition. Hillary and Fuchs were the quintessential pair to ensure not only expedition success but also world-wide exposure of an area of the

planet that had had little visibility. The controversies that arose, as negative as they were viewed by some, only increased public interest in the Antarctic. Hillary was able to make the New Zealand public and its politicians accept New Zealand's disproportionately large investment in the expedition. Some of this acceptance came through fear of American intentions in the Ross Dependency, but much of it was through a real desire for the United Kingdom and New Zealand to demonstrate what could be accomplished in the Antarctic. Scientific objectives alone would not have been sufficient to get the British and New Zealand parties to the starting line. Sovereignty, in the cloak of nationalism, when backed up by scientific endeavour, formed an unstoppable combination.

The difficult exchanges that occurred between the London COM and Wellington's Ross Sea Committee throughout the expedition period, from its inception to its winding-up, sharpened New Zealand's self-confidence and served to enhance its position on the world stage. These hurdles included defining the terms of engagement between the London and Wellington Committees with the surprising insistence by New Zealand of complete responsibility for its Antarctic Expedition. The long drawn-out and contentious process for purchase of the *John Biscoe* and the negotiation for establishing the Articles of Association of the TAA had similar effects. The fact of Hillary's 'dash to the Pole' and the furore it engendered, defined New Zealand more clearly as an independent player, answering to no one, in its portion of the continent. In this sense the attentions of the news-hungry media bore worthwhile fruit. From this time onwards New Zealand could not be accused of ignoring her polar responsibilities and the country would occupy a front-row seat at the forthcoming discussions in Washington leading to the Antarctic Treaty.

At the same time the relationship that developed between the United States and New Zealand and, to a lesser degree, between the United States and the United Kingdom, once Fuchs' reticence had been softened by New Zealand lobbying, were an essential ingredient in the success of the expedition. Fuchs and Finn Ronne enjoyed a mutually helpful relationship throughout 1957 while the two were at their respective Shackleton and Ellsworth stations. The later deliveries of fuel by Ronne's Ellsworth based aircraft to South Ice helped both Fuchs' Sno-cats make it to the Pole and John Lewis to fly the Otter across the continent. In McMurdo Sound Hillary made free use of US Navy supplies of tractor fuel and Admiral Dufek responded willingly, more than once, to New Zealand requests to have additional BP AVGAS transported from Wellington. This assistance was in addition to discretely providing

the NZ Support Party with two 'spare' Weasel tractors and with transport of men, supplies, equipment, and the base itself, from Wellington to McMurdo Sound.⁷¹³ From the time when three New Zealand observers were taken down to Hut Point in 1955 until two years later when a large contingent of Hillary's party were transported back to New Zealand on the *USN Greenville Victory*, the United States played a continuously supportive role in the TAE, one on which the Support Party became dependent. It is arguable that the TAE would not have occurred at all or would have failed in the attempt, without American support.

In some ways it was unfortunate that the TAE did not occur in 1954-1955 as originally conceived when it would have been unencumbered by the IGY. The expedition would have been played out on a far more dramatic stage, one that harkened back to the heroic era. There would have been far less government involvement and a greater need for mutual support and communication between the two isolated parties. New Zealand would have been alone in McMurdo Sound, with only the Scott and Shackleton huts to remind them of previous human habitation. The IGY removed the opportunity for such romanticism, and brought in political factors such as the Cold War and the fears of co-location by Japan or Russia based on lingering memories of World War II, that would have otherwise been absent. The result was a much diminished relative profile for the TAE, which placed the expedition in a secondary position and occasionally left it forgotten in the annals of exploration. It might also be said that the emergence of the IGY hijacked the scientific imperative for the expedition or at least diminished its unique contribution to geology, biology, glaciology and survey.

In the case of New Zealand the TAE triggered its investment in the IGY and then allowed significant leveraging of that investment to the benefit of its IGY project. New Zealand received a double return by virtue of the publicity it earned from its Antarctic exploits and the establishment of a permanent facility that could support its territorial claim into the future. In the case of the United Kingdom, because of the animosity that had crept into proceedings between the Royal Society and the TAE there was far less sharing of transport and facilities than occurred with New Zealand. None of the UK TAE infrastructure in Antarctica has survived as testament to its occupation of Vahsel Bay.

This thesis expands or clarifies several aspects of the expedition and addresses a number of 'gaps' in the historical record. The most important of these are the following:

⁷¹³ Scott, 16 July 1956

- a) **The importance that New Zealand placed on taking undivided responsibility for its Antarctic expedition:** The interaction between Hillary and Fuchs was paralleled by that between the London TAE Committee of Management and the Wellington based Ross Sea Committee. The TAE became another expression of New Zealand's post-war emergence from colonial outpost to independent nation, more so than of Commonwealth solidarity. Support from the Commonwealth countries, other than New Zealand, was lukewarm at best.
- b) **The challenge posed by Duncan Carse to supplant Vivian Fuchs for leadership of the TAE:** Carse presented a surprising and troublesome obstacle to Fuchs' leadership and was ultimately overcome by Fuchs' close connection with Britain's polar elite. He was fortunate to be able to pursue his Antarctic dream with expeditions to survey the island of South Georgia.
- c) **The opposition by certain elements in the United Kingdom to the TAE including from the Foreign Office, the RGS and SPRI:** The TAE came very close to remaining only an idea in Fuchs' mind. Resistance came from several quarters including the highest levels of Polar administration in Britain.
- d) **The appointment of Sir Edmund Hillary as leader of the New Zealand Support Party including the role of Larry Harrington, his brother-in-law:** Hillary somewhat reluctantly accepted overarching responsibility for the New Zealand Support Party. In the end he yielded to pressure from the New Zealand public as well as from the New Zealand government, the Ross Sea Committee and, not insignificantly, from Fuchs and the London Committee of Management. Had Hillary not climbed Everest in 1953 it is unlikely that he would have become involved with the TAE. As his friend, and fellow mountaineer, George Lowe has commented Everest changed Hillary's life forever.⁷¹⁴ He had gained heroic stature, particularly within the Empire, and his lecture tours and natural charisma only added to his allure. In this instance it was fortuitous that the TAE schedule had dovetailed so nicely into this point in mountaineering and Antarctic exploration history. Larry Harrington acted as a sounding board and source of scientific information for Hillary as the two frequently discussed the possibilities of the expedition.

⁷¹⁴ Lowe, interview with author, 2006, Governor's Bay, New Zealand

- e) **The purchase by New Zealand of the FIDS ship, *John Biscoe*:** The acquisition process was unnecessarily prolonged and resolved only with the hard-nosed stance of New Zealand's Prime Minister, Sidney Holland. The delay gained nothing for either party and confirmed the self-serving attitude within certain United Kingdom government departments. If anything the ordeal made New Zealand less sympathetic to British opinion and objectives, although New Zealand, being the last colonial domain of the Empire, had strong ties back to Britain. The sale process revealed that New Zealand would have to stand independently for itself as did other nations, and could no longer expect to elicit favours from the 'mother country'.
- f) **The relationship between Hillary and the RSC:** Through the course of the expedition Hillary became less and less enamoured of the Ross Sea Committee and of its chair Charles Bowden in particular. For Hillary, the Committee became an obstacle rather than a supportive enabler. Only the RSC Secretary, Arthur Helm remained as a dependable ally for Hillary in Wellington. This situation contrasted sharply to that of Fuchs and the London COM who, despite certain tense moments, showed far greater confidence in their leader in the field.
- g) **The persistent attempts by Fuchs to preserve the 'Commonwealth' purity of the expedition:** A constant theme throughout the TAE was the effort by Fuchs and the COM to protect the 'Commonwealth' nature of the expedition. This near paranoia was exhibited in a number of ways and was singularly aimed at the United States Navy which was focused on *Operation Deep Freeze*. Hillary himself felt no particular attachment to the 'Commonwealth' aspect in the knowledge that his personal goal of reaching the Pole and New Zealand's objective regarding sovereignty, with a public demonstration of Antarctic involvement, was being met. He was quite prepared to use American assistance to the fullest extent. One of Fuchs' big concerns was over fuel and the risk of violating the exclusive and generous contract with BP. For Fuchs the issue would never be entirely dissipated and he would guard his expedition from American intrusion until the end, never accepting that the TAE might not have been successful without it. British Commonwealth loyalties had been bred into his character at an early age. In the end everyone became a winner including the

sponsors.

- h) **The dependence by the Fuchs and Hillary parties on the assistance of the US Navy:** The Ross Sea Support Party made use of US Navy personnel, supplies and equipment whenever the opportunity arose. The British crossing party did so when circumstances forced it upon them. Without American support New Zealand could not have accomplished its TAE mission in the Ross Dependency and Fuchs' crossing party would not have been able to complete its traverse of the continent.
- i) **The impact of the media and of tabloid journalists in particular:** The media had an inordinate influence on the public's perception of the expedition. This had to do with a lack of other exciting news events in Britain following the Coronation and ascent of Mt Everest. However, it was mostly due to the presence of creative journalists, the *Daily Mail's* Noel Barber in particular, stoked by USN Admiral George Dufek's penchant for publicity.
- j) **Hillary's 'dash to the Pole' including the views of both UK and NZ expedition members, as well as confirmation from several new sources that Hillary's intentions were known prior to the start of the expedition:** In travelling on to the Pole, Hillary was a proxy for all New Zealanders who saw an enhanced future for the country. Once he had reached Depot 700 Hillary had little choice other than to continue on to the Pole. When one considers the facts as they were at that point the idea that Hillary was 'stealing' Fuchs' glory', that he was being 'unfair' or 'under-handed' shows a lack of understanding of the facts at the time and little appreciation for the hostile Antarctic environment. It would have been folly or useless for Hillary to have taken any other course of action than to continue south. In the end, Hillary's ambition to reach the Pole served Fuchs and his party better than anyone imagined at the time. Having completed his commitment to Fuchs and the TAE, Hillary's unilateral decision to continue to the Pole was his personal expression of New Zealand's freedom to act and her territorial rights in the Ross Dependency.

This sentiment was re-enforced by a telegram Hillary received from the Australians at Mawson station: “The splendid contribution of yourself and party to the success of British Trans-Antarctic Expedition has truly placed New Zealand on the Polar map” – signed, Mawson⁷¹⁵

- k) **Determination of the base sites for both Shackleton and Scott Base:** The TAE and the IGY were distinct, separate projects. New Zealand’s IGY project was dependent on the TAE and without the TAE New Zealand’s effort would most likely have been centred at Cape Hallett rather than on Ross Island. Had it not been for the TAE it is improbable, for financial and logistical reasons, that New Zealand would have built another base on Ross Island. More likely they would have expanded the scientific programme at Cape Hallett, the joint US-NZ base that had already been established. In Britain the Royal Society and the TAE were travelling on more divergent paths. In a certain sense both the UK and New Zealand bases were finally placed differently than had first been envisaged. Shackleton and Halley bases were intended to be co-located at Vahsel Bay. Scott Base was supposed to be at the foot of the Ferrar Glacier. Both expeditions, for different reasons, were fortunate to have established their respective bases as they did.
- l) **The New Zealand advance reconnaissance parties including the three observers with *Operation Deep Freeze*, and Harry Ayres voyage with ANARE:** The three New Zealand observers who travelled with *Operation Deep Freeze* performed an extensive reconnaissance in McMurdo Sound but the results were a great disappointment with the critical exception of Bernie Gunn’s discovery of the Skelton Glacier, by virtue of a flight with the US Navy, as a passable route to the polar plateau. The group’s disparate agendas and lack of inter-personal ‘chemistry’ contributed to the almost null result and left the Support Party with its greatest challenge the next season. Harry Ayres voyage to Mawson Station aboard *Kista Dan* confirmed the viability of the Australian hut design which served the New Zealand party so well. As it turned out several portions of the Scott Base huts were eventually manufactured in Australia.

⁷¹⁵Mawson Station, undated

- m) **The establishment of the Trans-Antarctic Association:** The TAA represents the lasting legacy of the expedition. The agreement for sharing the surplus funds in the interests of Antarctic research was tangible proof of the good-will that emerged between the four countries involved and confirmed the overall success of the TAE.

Hillary's tractor party aside, the TAE really consisted of two separate expeditions, albeit closely co-ordinated.⁷¹⁶ In some ways it would have been better to have designed the TAE as two distinct expeditions right from the beginning. After all, the two parties never met as a group and then not even when the crossing party arrived at Scott Base. By that time most of the New Zealanders had travelled back to Wellington. For example, David Pratt and Roy Homard, Fuchs two engineers never met the New Zealand engineers, Murray Ellis and Jim Bates. Only John Claydon, Bob Miller and Hillary were able to interact with the crossing party members by virtue of their voyage in the *Theron* to Vahsel Bay in 1955-56. Hillary and Fuchs having returned from the Weddell Sea in February 1956 didn't meet again until 19 January 1958, almost two years later. They were supposedly two parts of a single expedition but never had the opportunity as a group to forge their energies into a united effort. There was none of what modern management practice would call 'team building'. Hillary's six week training exercise on the Tasman Glacier was the closest example but was confined to members of the Support Party. The ambiguity of the situation fostered much of the discontent that later arose. It would have made Hillary's job much easier if he had been given free-reign to use his resources as he felt best. In the end he accomplished his mission regardless but at the cost of staining not only his reputation but that of the expedition as well. The issue was that London, whether through fear of failure or imperial hubris, felt that it was their show to control and there was no room, certainly with a leader such as Fuchs, for things to be any other way. To its credit, New Zealand's Department of External Affairs pushed their condition for expedition autonomy further than London might have wished, but not far enough to entrust Hillary with the freedom to act. In this sense the RSC were very much in London's camp.

The TAE is also unique among polar expeditions in that its primary goal was achieved by co-ordinating the efforts of two countries each managing their own expedition from points half a

⁷¹⁶ McKenzie, 1963 - Douglas McKenzie, reporter for the *Christchurch Star*, described the TAE as consisting of three expeditions. These were Fuchs' crossing party, the New Zealand Support Party, establishing the reception base and stocking depots, and Hillary's tractor-party, seeking the Pole

world away from each other. In the same way that Fuchs' personality differed from Hillary's it can be said that the crossing party's *modus operandi* differed from that of the support party. Some remarkable contrasts between the British and New Zealand expeditions were:

1. Leadership styles – rigid (UK) vs. flexible (NZ)
2. British FIDS clothing vs. New Zealand Himalayan tested clothing
3. Food rations, including liquor and tobacco
4. Social life - music, movies, lectures etc.
5. Communicative (NZ) vs. reserved (UK)
6. Committee support for its respective leader in the field – UK strong, NZ weak
7. Hut design – construction (UK) vs. assembly (NZ)

Although Fuchs and the British had undoubtedly more polar experience New Zealand had more mountaineering expertise and had the advantage of its Australian neighbour's ANARE experience. New Zealand's greatest asset was the flexibility and openness to new ideas that Hillary and others brought to the project. Never viewing himself as the sole expert, Hillary allowed his expedition to benefit with input from a variety of sources. These included Australia for hut design and New Zealand's Ministry of Works for assembly of Scott Base. Fuchs disliked music and would only allow it on Sundays.⁷¹⁷ For Fuchs, food was of little interest and at best a necessity. On the other hand Hillary occasionally ordered additional food such as steaks to be sent down to Scott Base by plane (US Globemaster of course).

Many of the problems with communication experienced by the crossing party were the result of poor radio equipment. New Zealand's Post & Telegraph Service had provided the Support Party with the latest field radio technology at a cost of over £12,000. The Support Party had superior communication ability and Fuchs often routed his messages to London through Scott Base. A major difference was the approach to lodging. Shackleton base was designed in the manner of a strong house, much as it would be built in Britain. It was complex with many small parts and tools that were easy to misplace in the snow. A high degree of skill was required to put it together. Sleeping quarters were laid out in dormitory style. Scott Base was made up of a multiplicity of specialised huts following the proven Australian model with each hut consisting of a set of prefabricated insulated and numbered panels, a 'refrigerator in reverse' as architect Frank Ponder described it. Hillary himself decided to provide a private cubicle for each of his team members at Scott Base. These were built during the assembly of

⁷¹⁷ Stephenson, Interview with the author, June 2006, Christchurch

the base sleeping quarters. Shackleton base was rather more austere. Shackleton Base was an ‘underground’ shelter while Scott Base was above ground. In addition to sunlight and views to the exterior world, this allowed for the New Zealand dogs to be kept and fed outside, a condition to which they were well adapted, rather than confined to underground snow caves.

Hillary was adept at choosing his team members and letting them get on with their assignments. He was not one to give orders and believed that his team leaders knew what had to be done.⁷¹⁸ He didn’t hold to any particular meeting schedule but called them ad hoc when he thought it necessary. He expected that these key individuals would come to him if they had any question or sought advice on any particular matter. Thus he was able to leave scientific matters to Trevor Hatherton, aviation matters to John Claydon and administrative matters to Bob Miller or Arthur Helm in Wellington. Communication technicalities were for Peter Mulgrew to resolve while mechanical problems were handled by Jim Bates and Murray Ellis. He left all matters relating to the dogs to those with more canine interest which fortunately included his two experienced UK representatives George Marsh and Richard Brooke, as well as Harry Ayres and Murray Douglas. The learning from the *Theron* voyage and the influence of Admiral Dufek and the US Navy were two of the most important factors that contributed to Hillary’s success.

It is often interesting to speculate on what might have been. In the case of the TAE there are many ‘forks in the road’ that, had matters worked out differently, would have resulted in very different outcomes. I will briefly touch on those which had a real possibility of occurring. Some of these were severe such as when the *Theron* was trapped in the Weddell Sea. If a path to clear water had not been found in January 1956 the expedition would have had to be abandoned. Let us consider a few more possible scenarios.

A significant possibility was that New Zealand would establish its base at Butter Point or even further up the coast at Granite Harbour. If that had occurred the relationship with the US Navy and Admiral Dufek would have been quite different, and less constructive for both groups. During the period from January 1957 to January 1958 there was almost daily interchange of personnel between McMurdo Station and Scott Base, whether for social reasons such as movies, a game of bridge or Ping-Pong, or for expedition related assistance ranging from medical needs to resolving technical and equipment issues. A traverse up the

⁷¹⁸ Cranfield, W., conversation with the author, 2014

Ferrar Glacier would have put a much greater strain on Hillary's resources. It might have caused him to give up the idea of taking the Fergusons to the plateau altogether. In that case the depot laying would have been left entirely to the dog teams and the single Beaver aircraft. This would have greatly reduced the amount of surveying that New Zealand's sledging parties could perform in the Trans-Antarctic Mountains of Victoria Land. In a slight variation of the scenario, if the New Zealand Auster's wings had not been damaged in Lyttelton Harbour then a reconnaissance flight by Claydon or Cranfield on discovering Butter Point to be unfit, might well have resulted in the base being established elsewhere than Pram Point.

Another realistic possibility was that Fuchs would begin his crossing journey from Graham Land, a region that he knew well. This would have eliminated the need for the *Theron* voyage since the UK already had a base on Stonington Island. The expedition might then have been completed during the 1954-55 season. There would have been a financial impact since the crossing would have been extended by thirty percent in distance affecting fuel, provisions, dogs etc. and more importantly the time-line. It is likely that Fuchs would have taken at least another 20-30 days if he was still to travel via the Pole. This would definitely have meant spending another winter at Scott Base with the attendant consequences. Hillary's job would have been little changed but he would have had to reconsider his tractor party schedule if it meant accompanying Fuchs onwards from the Pole later in the season. A significant unknown is whether this route would have proven easier for the crossing party than the difficult one it encountered from Vahsel Bay to South Ice.

A third possible scenario that we examine relates to 'loss of life'. There were several occasions when expedition member's lives were in the balance, mostly through crevasse related incidents but also from other causes such as disease, as in the case of Dr George Marsh, who contracted a suspected case of diphtheria, or carbon monoxide poisoning, as in the case of seismologist, Geoffrey Pratt. The most serious situation could have arisen through one of Fuchs' incautious executive decisions. This was his insistence on driving the lead Sno-cat in his convoy, laudable in war perhaps, but not so wise if one is driving a loaded tractor across a hazardous crevasse field. Compounding the issue was that Fuchs also included his deputy, David Stratton with him as co-driver. Should their tractor have plunged to the bottom of a crevasse the expedition would certainly have been terminated. One has only to look at the photos of George Lowe and Jon Stephenson to understand how close the

expedition came to a premature end. The TAE is almost unique in major Antarctic expeditions in that, thankfully, no one perished.

The TAE ended in the early afternoon on 2 March 1958 with the British crossing party's arrival at Scott Base on Ross Island. The celebrations were followed three days later on 5 March by the departure from Scott Base of the remnants of the British and New Zealand parties as they boarded the *Endeavour* for the journey back to New Zealand. This event was juxtaposed with an informal 'handing over' of the base to the New Zealand government's IGY team as had been negotiated two years prior; handed over as it were, from the explorers to the scientists. As history shows, this ending was really a beginning, and created the foundation for today's commitment by New Zealand to Antarctic research – to cease the denial and assume full responsibility for its Antarctic heritage. The TAE ended with a 'whimper' and not a 'bang' since administrative activity continued for several years following Fuchs' arrival at Scott Base. Efforts were concentrated on winding up the various entities that had been established and on completing the scientific reports resulting from expedition research projects. The formation of the TAA also occupied the Committee members for several more years.

The TAE accomplished everything that it had set out to do and more. Fuchs and his party had performed the first overland crossing of Antarctica, taking one day less than his original estimate of one-hundred days. The collection of scientific reports that were published by the TAA and supplemented by the bibliography relating to the expedition, are a lasting testament to the serious intent of its scientists, apart from those of the IGY. For his part, Hillary founded Scott Base, New Zealand's now permanent home in the Ross Dependency. His three survey parties mapped a significant portion of hitherto unexplored New Zealand Antarctic territory. He and the NZ Antarctic Flight had also enabled Fuchs to complete his crossing and in so doing he had been able to achieve his personal goal of driving to the South Pole. More importantly, through this process New Zealand had become a fully-fledged Antarctic nation that could now take its rightful place in the administration of the world's southernmost continent.

Epilogue

It is said that time heals all wounds. After the *Theron* voyage the relationship between Fuchs and Hillary was strained throughout the remainder of the TAE. It was not until several years afterwards that a glimmer of mutual respect if not of admiration began to flicker between the two men. Two incidents give particular evidence of this. The first occurred after Fuchs had read an account of the expedition in the book *Quest for Adventure* by the eminent British mountaineer, Sir Chris Bonington. Bonington had recounted a quote from Hillary regarding the advance party trip to Vahsel Bay:

*I was treated with an unswerving friendliness but it was made very clear that I was only an observer and I was never permitted to attend the regular meetings of his executive committee...I suppose I shouldn't have resented this, but I did. I felt an outsider, not to be trusted with expedition responsibilities, and this was probably an uncomfortable foundation on which to build our association over the next couple of years.*⁷¹⁹

This moved Fuchs to immediately write Hillary a personal letter of apology although twenty-five years had since passed. He also recalled Hillary's exclusion from the press conference that was held after their meeting at the Pole, saying:

*"Now 25 years later, I write to apologise, and say that this was not a conscious act on my part. Indeed I did not realize that it was happening...At some later date my attention was drawn to the fact that you were not present at the Press Conference at the Pole. Please believe that this was not my doing. The conference was called by the Americans and it certainly did not occur to me that I should have any part in organising it...they [the omissions] were occasioned by a lack of thought and sensitivity on my part at the time. With best wishes Bunny"*⁷²⁰

Hillary's reply, written soon after, is not yet available but one can imagine the wry smile that would have lit up his face as he wrote to his old colleague.

⁷¹⁹ Bonington, 1982, p. 427

⁷²⁰ Fuchs, 1981

The second incident occurred five years later in 1986 on a New Zealand television show called *This is Your Life* in which Hillary was the star subject. Towards the end of the programme two recorded interviews were shown, one from Sir John Hunt and the other from now knighted Sir Vivian Fuchs, the latter filmed at his home in Cambridge. After congratulating Hillary, Fuchs told the story of the occasion when he gave a talk on the expedition at a boy's school in England. One of the boys approached him after he had finished and asked Fuchs for his autograph which was readily given. Apparently, the boy then exclaimed that he could now exchange his two autographs of Hunt and Fuchs for one of Sir Edmund Hillary.⁷²¹

Fuchs died in 1999 at the age of ninety-one. Hillary passed away in 2008 at the age of eighty-eight. For four years the lives of the two men were closely inter-twined as they each led their separate parties on a momentous undertaking that would capture the imagination of the world but also one that would expose the frailties and idiosyncrasies of the human spirit. The successful outcome of the TAE and the Antarctic legacy that lives on to this day provides just testament to the integrity of their respective ambitions.

⁷²¹ *This is Your Life*, 1986

8. Appendices

8.1 Sources

Oral histories

Newspaper articles

Diaries

Letters

Telegrams

Ross Sea Committee minutes & Reports

London COM Committee minutes & Reports

TAE Newsletters (RSC _ NZ)

IGY Reports & Files

US Operation Deep Freeze files

Journals (e.g. *Antarctic* published by the NZAS)

Personal papers (e.g. Robert Falla, Arthur Helm, L. B. Quartermain, etc.)

Published books by expedition members or people who 'were there'

Slides and photographs from public and private collections

Interviews with TAE and IGY participants and/or their families

Published books about the TAE (secondary sources)

8.2 Interviews

A list of key individuals whom I have interviewed is shown below:

Mrs. Jean Ayres- Wife of Harry Ayres, member of NZ Support Party

Ken Blaiklock – UK surveyor and Crossing Party member

Richard Brooke – UK Surveyor, NZ Support Party member

John Claydon – Senior pilot, New Zealand Antarctic Flight

Bill Cranfield – Junior pilot, New Zealand Antarctic Flight

Mrs. Shirley Ellis-Wife of Murray Ellis, Engineer on the NZ Support Party

Peter Fuchs – Son of Sir Vivian Fuchs

Vern Gerard – New Zealand IGY scientist

Derek Gunn – son of Bernard Gunn

H.J. Larry Harrington – Leader of the NZ Geological and Survey Expedition 1958-59

Arnold Heine – New Zealand., Supplies Officer, member of TAE summer party

Mrs. Jennie Helm-wife of Arthur Helm, Secretary of the RSC

Randall Heke – New Zealand Ministry of Works, Construction Foreman

Lady June Hillary- wife of Sir Edmund Hillary

Sir Edmund Hillary – Leader, New Zealand Support Party

Roy Homard – UK Engineer and Crossing Party member

George Lowe – Photographer and Crossing Party member (New Zealand)

Mrs. Mary Lowe- Wife of George Lowe

Peter MacDonald – New Zealand IGY scientist

Geoff Lee Martin – New Zealand Reporter, *New Zealand Herald*

Douglas McKenzie – New Zealand Reporter, *Christchurch Star*

David Pratt – UK Engineer and Crossing Party member

Neil Sandford – New Zealand IGY scientist

Bill Smith – Royal New Zealand Navy

Jon Stephenson – Australian geologist and Crossing Party member

Ed Robertson – Director of the NZ Committee for the IGY

Peter Webb – New Zealand, geologist and member of the TAE summer party

8.3 Locations

Below are listed the Museums, Libraries and Archives where I conducted much of my research:

Alexander Turnbull Library (New Zealand National Library), Wellington, NZ

Archives New Zealand, Wellington, NZ

Archives New Zealand, Christchurch, NZ

The National Archives (UK), Kew, UK

National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Canada

Canterbury Museum, Antarctic Collection, Christchurch, NZ

Royal Geographic Society archive, London, UK

Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, UK

Hocken Library, Dunedin, NZ

British Antarctic Survey archive, Cambridge, UK

University of Canterbury, Antarctic Collection, Christchurch, NZ

Antarctica New Zealand library, Christchurch, NZ

Syracuse University, Dufek archive, Syracuse, New York, USA

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NOTES:

Note 1: The papers of Duncan Carse held in the BAS Archive, Cambridge, were provided by permission of the family.

Note 2: The papers of Sir Edmund Hillary held in the AWM Archive, Auckland, were provided by permission of the family.

Legend:

ANZ: Archives New Zealand (Wellington or Christchurch as indicated)

ATL: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, NZ

AWM: Auckland War Museum, Auckland, NZ

BAS: British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge, UK

CM: Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, NZ

TNA: The National Archives, Kew, UK

UCL: University of Canterbury Library, Christchurch, NZ

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