

Antarctica revealed to Denbigh and District Probus Club Members

Members and guests of the Denbigh and District Probus Club enjoyed their first Probus meeting and meal of 2025 in January at the Oriel Hotel, St Asaph followed by a talk titled Antarctica from Colin Horton. He presented a slide and talk show about his work and experiences in Antarctica from 1977 and gave a brief history of Antarctic exploration and how he came to go there - the most inhospitable place on earth!!

As the 20th century approached, an expedition was put together by The Geographic Society (Discovery Expedition 1901-1904). This was to be led by a young naval officer R.F.Scott. On that expedition with Scott was another young chap by the name of Shackleton (Ernest Henry Shackleton). For some reason that has never been fully explained, Scott had Shackleton invalided home which probably resulted in the animosity between them in later years. Scott went on to lead the attempt to secure the South pole for Britain (Terra Nova Expedition 1910-1913) but was beaten by the Norwegian Amundsen who had arrived at the pole a month before Scott. Scott having reached the pole on the 17th January 1912, perished on the return journey along with Dr Wilson, Bowers, Oates and Edgar Evans.

A search party salvaged all of Scott's papers and diaries which were found in a tent the following year - they are now in the Polar Research Institute in Cambridge.

Shackleton went on to lead a number of expeditions of his own including the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-17). Disaster struck in 1915 when his ship, the Endurance was caught and later crushed in pack ice of the Weddell Sea. The crew did eventually escape. He died in January 1922 whilst attempting to circumnavigate the continent and is buried at the whaling station of Grytviken on the island of South Georgia.

In 1947 the first women went to Antarctica, an American, Jenny Darlington. She died at her ranch in Wyoming in 2017 at the age of 93.

Colin Horton left school at the age of 14, became an apprentice joiner and entered the construction industry. In March 1975 he returned to Britain from a trip he had taken to Africa. A newspaper advert in the

News of the World in June 1975 looking to recruit people to work in Antarctica caught his attention and he applied and was interviewed for the role working in construction and maintenance. He was offered the role and the conditions were a 2½ year contract, no holidays, on call 24 hours per day, the only contact being a short-wave radio - no leaving Antarctica for the whole time of the contract.

Having accepted the job (and terms), he sailed from Southampton on 01/10/75, picking up equipment in Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands en-route.

He lived and worked in Antarctica from the beginning of November 1975 through to the end of March 1978. He did not come home at any point during this time – isolation beyond imagination. He and 3 others were there for their first year, enduring a 7-month winter – blue skies were not common at all, and there was a total of 16 Wintering-over staff during the second winter.

Where Colin was based, the main activity was as a centre for activities for field trips to update maps and reference points. He was not a member of the scientific staff but was part of the building team sent to construct a new research facility, accommodation, and the necessary workshops, stores etc.

He described the food supplies which were predominantly tinned, with some packed in man food boxes to last for 10 days for expeditions, kegs of beer, with enough supplies to last for 18 months in case a ship could not reach them with more supplies. The cooker ran on aircraft fuel which did not freeze. They were earned £60 per week paid 3 months in arrears with income tax being paid to the Falkland Islands at 14% but with no National Insurance payment. There was a liquor ration and they could buy 24 cases per man and bottles of spirits at 70p from the Survey's own ships (Biscoe & Bransfield). The Navy might have something to say about that if they ever found out!!

In terms of recreation, they got together on a Saturday night and played darts over the radio, they had a tape recorder and record player.

There were teams of Husky dogs, 42 dogs in total, fed every other day, all named after characters from the Jungle Book or Tolkien books.

Clothing for the conditions included wearing 4 pairs of gloves at a time, Japanese boots, outer boots, thick socks, woollen hat, full laced balaclava, then a further layer, and a leather shield across the nose. Despite the layers, the gear froze to their beards and hair!! The tents that were used could withstand 120 miles per hour winds.

He showed slides from pictures he took including the research ships, various penguins who would come close up and personal as they had little human contact to be scared of, the Leopard seal – 12 to 14 feet in length – a nasty animal, (they were licenced to kill seals to feed the dogs but only for scientific reasons - injured seals or elderly males), Fur seals (they carry a disease like rabies), a ground nesting bird the Skua, food supplies and the buildings and accommodation and snow cat vehicles that were used for transport and research expeditions through the 12 inches -14 feet (at times) deep snow.

In 1978 he had the honour of having a glacier named after him by the UK Antarctic Place-Names Committee (**Horton Glacier** (67°33'S 68°30'W) - a glacier at the east side of Mount Barre and Mount Gaudry, flowing southeast from Adelaide Island into Ryder Bay, Antarctica) and he was the recipient of a Polar Medal. The Polar Medal Assessment Committee is a group of people drawn from all walks of life which changes on a regular basis and no one knows who they are. Colin did not attend the presentation of the Medal as he was travelling in South America at the time, therefore his name does not appear on court records. All citations we believe are destroyed once they have been read out.

The next Denbigh and District Probus Club meeting will be on Monday 3rd February 2025 when Dr Paul Evans will talk about Thomas Pennant's rambles in the Vale of Clwyd.

New members are always warmly welcomed to the Denbigh and District Probus Club meetings.

For further information have a look at the club web site denbighprobus.com or contact stevetootell@gmail.com