

Tanker "San Jorge"
Between Buenos Aires and Comodoro
Rivadavia (Lat 46 degrees 5)

Christmas Day

My dear Margaret,

Your letter of March 4th reached me shortly before I left England towards the end of November. I don't know if Tonko had sat on it all that time – more likely it spent the odd 6 months in some Argentine P.O. I am now on my way out for Patagonia II. The first trip was great fun and I was tremendously impressed with the country. The weather is the only snag, but as with England, the country wouldn't be what it is without its weather. The chief object of this trip is to find an active [volcano] which is somewhere on the ice-cap. The setting combined with my odd penchant for volcanoes makes it an intriguing task. This time we will be working from Lago San Martin (about Lat 49 degrees S a bit north of where we were last year) and we are rather better equipped in the matter of boats; the Army have lent us an inflatable one – a replica of the one Bombard crossed the Atlantic in, living on plankton; also a couple of smaller one; also skis and sledges. We are a party of 6, including Peter Miles and his bride (they were married on 9th October), Bill Anderson from England, Jack Ewer from Santiago, and a young German/Argentine called Peter Brachhausen.

I spent an agreeable 6 months in sub-tropical England, during which time I went to Grenoble to consult with a Prof. Lliboutry, who has a special interest in our volcano. While there I went to a little village called Les Etages in Dauphiné, to seek out Elie Richard, the guide with whom I did my first serious climbing. I hadn't warned him of my approach and found him working in a field way up the mountainside. I hadn't seen or written to him for 32 years. I came up behind him and said "Bonjour Monsieur Richard," he turned round and looked at me and said "Ah, Monsieur Sheepton." Quite a moment!

I had the boys with me for 3 weeks in the summer holidays. We went to Devon and Cornwall and spent the time gooning about sleeping in fields and on beaches and living mostly on raw eggs, raw porridge oats and bread and honey. They seemed to enjoy. 18th September was a big milestone in Nicky's life when he started his first term at Bryanston. He seemed to settle down there very quickly and enjoyed it. I went to see him there. It is certainly a lovely place; it remains to be seen what it does with him. John seems to be very happy at his prep school where has now been for four terms.

I expect you have heard from Diana since they moved into their new house in Bath. It is a pleasant one, and I think she is quite happy there, though poor David is still restless.

My sister was home from Rhodesia for four months while I was in England and it was great fun to see her – the first time for 13 years. She and Bill seem very happy in Rhodesia, and though he has retired they have no intention of leaving.

I wonder how Jane likes being back in Australia after her varied time in Europe. It sounds from what you say that Blois was a success.

We are due to reach Comodoro R. at midnight tonight, and Shell have undertaken to get us over the remaining 1000 km from there to Lago San Martin by truck, which will be a great help, as access to the western side of Patagonia is a big problem.

Ed Hillary was in England for a 5 day visit just before I left. It was great to see him again and find that, though he has developed tremendously, he is the same genuine person that I knew in 1951/52. He is planning a big expedition to the Everest region – mainly for physiological research. He has asked me to join him next September.

While writing this I was called away to look at five whales – one quite close.

The only address I can give at the moment is C/o Consejo Britanico, Lavalle 190, Buenos Aires. I will get letters forwarded from there.

I hope things go well with you. How did the skiing go?

Love
Eric.