South: The Story of Shackleton's Last Expedition, 1914-1917

Ernest Henry, Sir Shackleton

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South

THE STORY OF SHACKLETON'S LAST EXPEDITION 1914–1917

by Sir Ernest Shackleton C.V.O.

TO

MY COMRADES

WHO FELL IN THE WHITE WARFARE
OF THE SOUTH AND ON THE
RED FIELDS OF FRANCE
AND FLANDERS

Contents

PREFACE
I. INTO THE WEDDELL SEA
II. NEW LAND
III. WINTER MONTHS
IV. LOSS OF THE _ENDURANCE_
V. OCEAN CAMP
VI. THE MARCH BETWEEN
VII. PATIENCE CAMP
VIII. ESCAPE FROM THE ICE
IX. THE BOAT JOURNEY
X. ACROSS SOUTH GEORGIA
XI. THE RESCUE

XII. ELEPHANT ISLAND
XIII. THE ROSS SEA PARTY
XIV. WINTERING IN McMURDO SOUND
XV. LAYING THE DEPOTS
XVI. THE _AURORA'S_ DRIFT
XVII. THE LAST RELIEF
XVIII. THE FINAL PHASE

APPENDIX I:
SCIENTIFIC WORK
SEA-ICE NOMENCLATURE
METEOROLOGY
PHYSICS
SOUTH ATLANTIC WHALES AND WHALING

APPENDIX II: THE EXPEDITION HUTS AT McMURDO SOUND

INDEX

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

IN THE PRIDE OF HER YOUTH. Colour Photograph by F. Hurley
The Leader
The Weddell Sea Party
Young Emperor Penguins
A Huge Floe of Consolidated Pack

Samson
Ice-Flowers
Midnight off the New Land
New Land: Caird Coast
Close Under the Barrier
Trying to cut a way for the Ship through the Ice to a Lead ahead (February 14, 1915)
The Night Watchman's Story
The Dying Sun: The _Endurance_ firmly frozen in
The Rampart Berg
A Bi-Weekly Performance: Scrubbing out the "Ritz"
Pylon Avenue
The Long, Long Night
The Pups
Ice-Pressure Approaching the Ship
Ice-Rafting
The Returning Sun
Wild and Shackleton in the Heavy Pressure
Exercising the Dogs
Crab-eater Seals
The Beginning of the End
"Within a few Seconds she heeled over until she had a List of Thirty Degrees to Port"
Almost Overwhelmed
[Attack of the floes]
"The Driving Floe, moving laterally across the Stern, split the Rudder and tore out the Rudder-Post and Stern-Post"
The End

A Week Later
"The Wreckage lies around in Dismal Confusion"
The First Attempt to reach the Land 346 Miles Away
Ocean Camp
The Look-out at Ocean Camp
The Emergency Sledges being packed in case of a sudden break up of the Ice
The Sledges packed and ready
Relaying the _James Caird_
Potash and Perlmutter
"Loneliness": Patience Camp
The Kitchen at Patience Camp
The Stove at Patience Camp constructed out of old Oil-drums
Worsley taking Observations of the Sun to determine our Position
"We cut Steps in this Twenty-five Foot Slab and it makes a fine Look-out"
"There was no Sleep for us that Night, so we lit the Blubber Stove"
Hauling up the Boats for the Night
The Reeling Berg
Sailing South Again
The First Landing ever made on Elephant Island, April 15, 1916
"We Pulled the Three Boats a little Higher on the Beach"
Rough sketch map of landing place and first camp at C. Valentine, Elephant Island
The First Drink and Hot Food for Three-and-a-Half Days
Mount Frank Houlder, Elephant Island
Launching the _James Caird_
The _Stancomb Wills_

In Sight of our Goal: Nearing South Georgia
Landing on South Georgia
[Cave Cove on South Georgia]
[Surroundings of King Haakon Bay]
[Plan of Sleeping Berths in Cave]
Sea Elephants on South Georgia
The Cliffs we descended whilst crossing the Island
One of the Glaciers we Crossed
A Typical View in South Georgia
[Rough Memory Map of Route Across South Georgia]
Panorama of South Georgia
The _Yelcho_
Arrival at Punta Arenas with the Rescued Men
Frank Wild, Second in Command of the Expedition
Our Dugout
The Hut on Elephant Island
View of Interior of Hut on Elephant Island
Marooned on Elephant Island
Elephant Island
The Rescue Ship Sighted
“All Safe! All Well!”
View through a Cave on Elephant Island
The Aurora
Ice Stalactites at the Entrance to a Cave on Elephant Island
A Newly-frozen Lead
The Ross Sea Party
Mackintosh and Spencer-Smith being dragged on the sledge
“The Rudder was bent over to Starboard and Smashed”

"Next Morning the Jury-Rudder was Shipped"
Ice Nomenclature: 1. Young Ice (Bay Ice of Scoresby) in the Middle Distance
2. Light Pack
3. Heavy Hummocked Pack
4. Hummocky Pack and Frozen Lead of Young-Ice
5. Close Pack
6. Open Pack
7. Very Open Pack, approximating to Drift-ice
8. Drift-Ice
"The Rookery"
The Anemometer covered with Rime
Map: The Voyage of the _Endurance_

PREFACE

After the conquest of the South Pole by Amundsen, who, by a narrow margin of days only, was in advance of the British Expedition under Scott, there remained but one great main object of Antarctic journeyings—the crossing of the South Polar continent from sea to sea.

When I returned from the _Nimrod_ Expedition on which we had to turn back from our attempt to plant the British flag on the South Pole, being beaten by stress of circumstances within ninety-seven miles of our goal, my mind turned to the crossing of the continent, for I was morally certain that either Amundsen or Scott would reach the Pole on our own route or a parallel one. After hearing of the Norwegian success I began to make preparations to start a last great journey—so

that the first crossing of the last continent should be achieved by a British Expedition.

We failed in this object, but the story of our attempt is the subject for the following pages, and I think that though failure in the actual accomplishment must be recorded, there are chapters in this book of high adventure, strenuous days, lonely nights, unique experiences, and, above all, records of unflinching determination, supreme loyalty, and generous self-sacrifice on the part of my men which, even in these days that have witnessed the sacrifices of nations and regardlessness of self on the part of individuals, still will be of interest to readers who now turn gladly from the red horror of war and the strain of the last five years to read, perhaps with more understanding minds, the tale of the White Warfare of the South. The struggles, the disappointments, and the endurance of this small party of Britishers, hidden away for nearly two years in the fastnesses of the Polar ice, striving to carry out the ordained task and ignorant of the crises through which the world was passing, make a story which is unique in the history of Antarctic exploration.

Owing to the loss of the _Endurance_ and the disaster to the _Aurora_, certain documents relating mainly to the organization and preparation of the Expedition have been lost; but, anyhow, I had no intention of presenting a detailed account of the scheme of preparation, storing, and other necessary but, to the general reader, unimportant affairs, as since the beginning of this century, every book on Antarctic exploration has dealt fully with this matter. I therefore briefly place before you the inception and organization of the Expedition, and insert here the copy of the programme which I prepared in order to arouse the interest of the general public in the

Expedition.

“_The Trans-continental Party._

“The first crossing of the Antarctic continent, from sea to sea via the Pole, apart from its historic value, will be a journey of great scientific importance.

“The distance will be roughly 1800 miles, and the first half of this, from the Weddell Sea to the Pole, will be over unknown ground. Every step will be an advance in geographical science. It will be learned whether the great Victoria chain of mountains, which has been traced from the Ross Sea to the Pole, extends across the continent and thus links up (except for the ocean break) with the Andes of South America, and whether the great plateau around the Pole dips gradually towards the Weddell Sea.

“Continuous magnetic observations will be taken on the journey. The route will lead towards the Magnetic Pole, and the determination of the dip of the magnetic needle will be of importance in practical magnetism. The meteorological conditions will be carefully noted, and this should help to solve many of our weather problems.

“The glaciologist and geologist will study ice formations and the nature of the mountains, and this report will prove of great scientific interest.

“_Scientific Work by Other Parties._

“While the Trans-continental party is carrying out, for the British Flag, the greatest Polar journey ever attempted, the other parties will be engaged in important scientific work.

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