

97-year-old butter found at Robert Scott's Antarctic base



(Silver Fern butter found in Scott's Antarctic base.)

The Antarctic hut used by Captain Robert Scott as his expedition base has released a surprising find, nearly 100 years after the explorer's death - a block of butter. The butter, originally from New Zealand, was found frozen in the stable area adjacent to the Cape Evans hut by members of the Antarctic Heritage Trust involved in restoration work on the building.

Scott used the hut as a base for his ill-fated expedition to the South Pole in January 1912. He was beaten to the Pole by the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen and died, along with his four colleagues while trying to return.

The building, with its shelves of tinned food, bedding and clothing, offers a remarkable snapshot of the conditions faced by Scott and his men.

Freezing temperatures have preserved the building's contents, but increased snowfall over recent years has put the fragile structure under threat, prompting the Antarctic Heritage Trust to launch a preservation project.

Members of the Trust were working on the stables next to the hut when they found the two frozen blocks of butter next to empty butter boxes.

"I think the butter was absolutely a treasure find," Lizzie Meek of the Antarctic Heritage Trust told TV NZ. "It looked like an old wrinkly bag and you look inside and saw the wonderful Silver Fern logo," she said.

She described the butter's smell as "very pungent."

"What's amazing is how strong that smells," she said. "I'm not sure I'd want it on my toast."

NZ companies provided much of the equipment and supplies for Scott and his men, many emblazoned with the iconic Silver Fern, still used in NZ - most recognisably on the shirts of the All Blacks.

The label on the butter, which reads CCCDC, is believed to have come from the Canterbury Central Co-operative Dairy Company, formed in the 1890s and based in Christchurch.

"It's great to find one with that instantly recognisable Silver Fern and in such great condition relatively speaking," said Ms Meek.

The team will now attempt to restore the butter, removing tiny pieces of grit that are embedded in it. It will then be placed back in the stables, where temperatures seldom rise above 10C.

If it does not deteriorate, the team will leave it for another 100 years, said Ms Meek.

"I hope it'll look pretty similar, perhaps a little dustier but pretty much exactly the same," she said.

The find follows last month's discovery of two crates of Scotch whisky under a hut used by the explorer Ernest Shackleton, during his 1907-09 expedition to Antarctica.

Scott and his men reached the Pole on January 17 1912, and died some time after March 29, the date of the last entry in the explorer's diary.

The entry reads: "Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of hardihood, endurance and courage...which would have stirred the hearts of every Englishman."

What is thought to be the oldest butter found is from the Iron Age. The butter [in an oak barrel](#) , thought to be 3,000 years old, was discovered in a bog in Gilltown, Kildare, in August.