



**THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC (TERRA NOVA) EXPEDITION 1910 -1913
OCCUPATION OF CAPE EVANS**

AND

**THE HISTORY OF THE SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATION OF CAPE EVANS BY
THE ROSS SEA PARTY (PART OF THE TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION
1914-1917)**

Extract from the Conservation Plan for Cape Adare.

Written by David Harrowfield.

BRITISH ANTARCTIC (TERRA NOVA) EXPEDITION 1910 -1913

When Captain Robert Falcon Scott embarked on his second and last expedition in 1910 he was already a famous Antarctic explorer. He had previously led the major National Antarctic Expedition (1901–04) during which he reached a record 82°11' South, and a great many scientific and geographical discoveries were made. However, while science and geography remained key objectives to Antarctic explorers of the day, the real prize in the public's imagination was the South Pole.

Just 18 months before Scott's second expedition departed, Shackleton had turned back only 97 miles south of the Pole. Aware of how close Shackleton had come to snatching what he regarded as his trophy, Scott planned his British Antarctic Expedition 1910–13 meticulously. It was to be the pinnacle of Edwardian exploration with the attainment of the Geographical South Pole for Britain being the ultimate goal. Today, the legend of that expedition continues to echo down the years, a bittersweet epic of triumph and tragedy immortalised forever in the history of human endeavour and exploration.

Upon returning from the Antarctic in 1904, Scott wrote his account of the expedition *The Voyage of the Discovery*, before returning to the British Navy. He was promoted to Captain and married Kathleen Bruce in 1908.

From early 1909 he had held an Admiralty post as Naval Assistant to the Second Sea Lord but he resigned later that year to concentrate on planning and raising money for his second Antarctic expedition. The British Government pledged £20,000, with the governments of New Zealand and Australia also contributing along with various businesspeople and private donors. Places in the expedition were also effectively 'sold' with Lawrence Oates and Apsley Cherry-Garrard each paying £1,000 to join, and so from these combined sources the total budget of £40,000 was raised.

Aside from reaching the Pole, a comprehensive scientific programme was planned. Dr Edward Wilson was appointed senior scientist and he assembled a competent group of professionals for the shore party with fields including, meteorology, magnetism, glaciology, geology, marine biology and cartography. The *Terra Nova*, built as a whaler in Dundee and used as the relief ship on the National Antarctic Expedition, was selected as the expedition's vessel.

The *Terra Nova* left London on 1 June 1910, but Scott travelled later by fast steamer to Cape Town where he joined the ship before it departed for Melbourne on 2 September. Whilst in Melbourne he received news that was to distress him deeply. The veteran Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen had been planning an expedition to reach the North Pole but was thwarted by news that the American, Robert Peary, had reached the Pole on 6 April 1909. Undeterred, Amundsen simply switched his goal to the other end of the planet, pointing the *Fram* to Antarctica and the South Pole.. He left Norway on 6 June 1910 keeping his intentions secret even from most of his crew until he reached Madeira where he sent this telegram to Scott: "*Beg leave to inform you Fram proceeding Antarctic. Amundsen*".

Scott worked hard not to convey his concern at Amundsen's plans to his men and continued preparations for the expedition as they sailed to New Zealand. *Terra Nova* finally set off from Lyttelton on 29 November 1910, taking on coal in Port Chalmers before departing south. On board was a vast quantity of stores including 162 carcasses of mutton and three carcasses of beef, cheese and butter obtained in New Zealand, and an impressive array of equipment representing the latest technology of the day.

There were three Wolseley motor tractors and drums of Shell petrol, two Siberian and 17 Manchurian ponies (seven Indian Army mules were taken south for the second season), 33 Siberian dogs, a comprehensive selection of Burroughs Welcome medical and photographic supplies, clothing, tools, photographic equipment, sledging equipment, and surveying, navigating and scientific instruments. A large quantity of compressed coal in 12 and 25lb blocks was obtained in Cardiff, and from Australia there were 45 tons of Geelong fodder and a quantity of oil-cake, bran and crushed oats for the ponies. A large number of British schools raised funds and presented the expedition with dogs, ponies, sledges, sleeping bags and tents.

The ship also carried several prefabricated huts. The building, designed for the expedition's winter quarters, 15 metres by 8 metres in plan with a gabled roof rising to a central ridge 4.3 metres high, had been prefabricated in London. A trial erection of the

hut took place at Officers' Point in Lyttelton; this revealed serious deficiencies in the sizes and quantities of some timbers, which were made good before the expedition sailed. In addition, there were three smaller buildings: one, without iron fastenings so that it could be used for magnetic observations, was erected at Cape Evans; a hut for the Eastern Party (later designated the Northern Party) which was erected at Cape Adare, and a third with an observation deck on the roof to be used as a meteorological station at Granite Harbour. This was never unloaded; it was taken back to New Zealand and it stands today on the property that used to belong to JJ Kinsey at Clifton in Christchurch.

The expedition got off to a rough start. Shortly after the *Terra Nova* left New Zealand she was hit by a storm which nearly sank her. Arriving at Ross Island in January 1911, a landing was made at Cape Crozier but the idea of setting up the base here was abandoned. Thick sea-ice prevented the vessel getting through to the old *Discovery* hut on Hut Point, near the present-day United States McMurdo Station, so, on 4 January, Scott landed some 25 kilometres north at the 'Skuary' to investigate establishing his winter quarters there.

The gently sloping ground of this narrow volcanic neck of land with the ramparts of Mount Erebus rising behind and McMurdo Sound in front proved ideal for establishing his base. Originally discovered during Scott's National Antarctic Expedition 1901–04, the area was named for the large number of skuas that flocked there, but Scott renamed it Cape Evans after the expedition's second-in-command, Lieutenant Edward 'Teddy' Evans. A short distance inland is a large lake named Skua Lake, while to the east the ground rises to form The Ramp and beyond, glaciated slopes rise toward the summit of Mount Erebus. From the hut site there are fine views east over McMurdo Sound to the Trans-Antarctic Mountains and south to the Dellbridge Islands.

After an inspection of the site by Scott, Evans and Wilson, unloading began immediately. In Wilson's words, "We found a most admirable sandy flat for the hut with a long snow drift for the horses and easy access from the sea ice".

Wilson, Edward, *Diary of the Terra Nova Expedition to the Antarctic 1910–1912*, ed HGR King, Blandford Press, London, 1972.

There was also ice for water and ideal sites for meteorological and other scientific stations.

By noon of the first day all the horses, dogs, a tent, emergency rations and two of the motor tractors were unloaded. For the rest of the day, there was a continual procession of men and ponies with sledges and by midnight most of the hut was ashore and the hut 'scantlings' erected. A large tent was erected for the work party and construction of the hut began in earnest. On 8 January, however, the third motor tractor was lost through the sea-ice. Two days later, as construction of the hut continued on a foundation of coarse grey scoria just a few metres from the sea, Scott noted:

The hut is progressing apace, and all agree that it should be the most perfectly comfortable habitation. It amply repays the time and attention given to the planning. The sides have double boarding inside and outside the frames, with a layer of our excellent quilted seaweed insulation between each pair of boardings. The roof has a single matchboarding inside, but on the outside is a matchboarding, then a layer of 2-ply 'ruberoid', then a layer of quilted seaweed, then a second matchboarding, and finally a cover of 3-ply 'ruberoid'. The first floor is laid, but over this there will be quilting, a felt layer, a second boarding, and finally linoleum; as the plenteous volcanic sand can be piled well up on every side it is impossible to imagine that draughts can penetrate into the hut from beneath, and it is equally impossible to imagine great loss of heat by contact or radiation in that direction. To add to the wall insulation the south and east sides of the hut are piled high with compressed-forage bales, whilst the north side is being prepared as a winter stable for the ponies. The stable will stand between the wall of the hut and a wall built of forage bales, six bales high and two bales thick. This will be roofed with rafters and tarpaulin, as we cannot find enough boarding. We shall have to take care that too much snow does not collect on the roof, otherwise the place should do excellently well.

Scott, RF, *Scott's Last Expedition*, Macmillan and Co Ltd, London, 1913, vol I, p 87.

Nine days later he had this to say of their new home, the largest building constructed in Antarctica during the heroic era:

The hut is becoming the most comfortable dwelling-place imaginable. We have made ourselves a truly seductive home, within the walls of which peace, quiet and comfort remain supreme. Such a noble dwelling transcends the word 'hut', and we pause to give it a more fitting title only from lack of the appropriate suggestion. What shall we call it? The word hut is misleading. Our residence is really a house of considerable size, in every respect the finest that has ever been erected in the polar regions; 50ft. long by 25 wide and 9ft. to the eaves.

Scott, *ibid*, vol I, p 100.

Davies, the carpenter on the *Terra Nova*, supervised the building of the hut. Bearers rested directly on the scoria and across these were placed joists to which the flooring was nailed. The floor, walls and roof, were insulated with ruberoid and a finely shredded seaweed known as Gibson Quilting. Weatherboards formed the exterior wall cladding, and the roof was covered with ruberoid, lapped and glued, over the outer layer of matchboarding.

The roof was supported by four heavy trusses, and had two ventilators. These were coupled to flues from the coal range on the messdeck and to a schoolroom stove in the wardroom. The ventilators were so efficient that they sucked papers off the wardroom table and had to be blocked up. Eventually, one was used but later removed.

At the west end an entrance porch was added, while along the north (seaward) side, stables were constructed for the ponies using 51kg bales of fodder and 13kg blocks of Cardiff Patent coal. Within the stables were bays and at one end was a small stove designed to burn blubber as a fuel. This was used to cook mash for the ponies and pemmican for the dogs.

Bowers, who was in charge of the stores, constructed an annex along the south wall from stores boxes; this extended the line of the hut roof and allowed all-weather access from the porch door. A separate latrine was built on the north (seaward) side of the hut, using one of the motor tractor crates as an outer shell; they were partitioned for officers and men.

At various points around the site were a small hut with an improvised stove, a chair and the pillar for the magnetometer that was sighted on a post nearby; a 'garage' made of boxes with drums of Shell petrol and roofed with canvas, and a flimsy 'dog hospital'. In a bank of ice behind the magnetic hut, two caves were excavated – one for storage of meat and the other for Simpson's and Wright's magnetic observations. Meteorological stations were set up on top of Wind Vane Hill, on The Ramp and between the main hut and magnetic hut. A local telephone system was established with lines to the ice cave where Wright made his observations, and from the sea-ice where Nelson obtained water temperatures, and later in June, where Lieutenant Evans observed the 'occultation' of Jupiter. Electric wires came from an anemometer on Wind Vane Hill down to the hut and a large cache of stores was placed on a low ridge about 100 metres south of the hut.

Within the hut, a bulkhead of bottled supplies partitioned it into two areas, one for the 16 officers and scientists, known as the wardroom at the east end, and the other for the nine 'men', including the seamen, known as the messdeck at the west end. The wardroom was dominated by a large table and spindle-backed cottage chairs. On Sunday the table was covered with a dark blue cloth, but for meals and at all other times it was covered with a white oilcloth. There was also a Broadwood player piano and an HMV gramophone in the wardroom. At the eastern end, a separate darkroom was built by Ponting, and workbenches were built for the physicists and biologist. Instruments included a thermograph, an electrically recording anemometer known as the Dynes anemometer, and a recording wind vane.

Cubicles with bunks were built around the perimeter of the wardroom. Scott's 'den' was partially enclosed by a timber partition; it contained his bed, chart table, and bookshelves for the expedition library. Adjacent to Scott was the alcove occupied by Lieutenant Evans and Wilson.

On the messdeck there were two more tables, one used by the men for dining and one by Clissold, the cook, for the preparation of meals. Two areas in the messdeck, on the north wall and against the bulkhead in the galley, were taken up with nine beds for the men.

Although some of the men slept on the iron beds with folding legs and a wire wove for a mattress, others in the wardroom fitted their beds within wooden frames. The occupants constructed their own bunks and the most famous area, immortalised in one of Ponting's photographs, was that known as 'The Tenements'. Ponting slept in his darkroom.

A covering of thick olive-green linoleum covered, indeed still covers, the floor and on this a strip of coconut matting was placed. There were three double-glazed windows, two on the north wall above the stables, and one on the south wall at the east end, which provided light to the benches used by the biologist Nelson and meteorologist Simpson. Artificial light was provided by two Allen acetylene generators fuelling 12 burners; there were also candles, and Homelight oil and kerosene lamps. Clothing and equipment was hung in any convenient space and improvised shelves were crammed with books, diaries and other personal effects. Framed pictures, postcards and flags completed the décor.

A total of 31 men were designated to winter in Antarctica, with six comprising the Northern Party at Cape Adare, and 25 the Shore Party at Cape Evans. By late January most of the men were in the field with only nine men left at Cape Evans. After landing the Shore Party and stores, the *Terra Nova* filled its tanks at Glacier Tongue and landed Griffith Taylor's Western Party (including Debenham, Wright and Evans) on the western side of McMurdo Sound near Butter Point. They explored the region of the Ferrar Glacier, Kukri Hills, Taylor Valley and the Koettlitz Glacier, making their own way back to Cape Evans at the end of the season. The *Terra Nova* then continued to King Edward VII Land and, on 3 February, when entering the Bay of Whales, the men were astonished to find Amundsen's expedition, with 116 dogs, and the *Fram* moored to the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf. Three members of the Norwegian expedition, including Amundsen, were invited on board *Terra Nova* for lunch, and other shipboard visits were exchanged.

The *Terra Nova* then returned to Cape Evans, and proceeded on to Cape Adare where the Northern Party was unloaded on 18 February 1911; it then sailed for New Zealand. This party, led by Victor Campbell and including Levick, Priestley, Abbott, Browning and Dickason, built a hut and wintered at Cape Adare, carrying out limited scientific work. Of the other field parties, the Western Party and those laying depots for the next season's journey to the Pole, all returned to Cape Evans between 13 April and 13 May 1911. Having departed shortly after the hut was constructed, Wilson remarked on his return:

The hut is a very different thing now to what it was when we left in January. Acetylene gas jets everywhere, stoves, clothes lines, clocks, telephones, electric gadgets, and scientific apparatus everywhere, all in full working order ... Had a hot bath – shaved off my beard and moustache after Ponting had perpetuated them for a photo.

Wilson, op cit

At Cape Evans, the winter party of 25 settled into a routine. The daily activities involved scientific observations, preparation of sledging equipment and supplies, and exercising the ponies and dogs. Track rollers for the motor tractors were turned by Day, the mechanic who was a veteran of Shackleton's expedition, on a lathe coupled to a petrol motor. Geologist Debenham was busy in his cubicle and the scientists found the wardroom table a good place to work and to plan the forthcoming summer field programme. Evening lectures covered various scientific topics, often hotly debated, and Ponting gave talks on his world travels with the aid of lantern slides. Music came from the pianola and gramophone. A night watchman kept an eye on things each night and was responsible for turning off the acetylene lighting plant.

Scott, himself, was preoccupied with planning the coming journey to the Pole, while Wilson completed magnificent watercolour paintings. In late June-early August, accompanied by Bowers and Cherry-Garrard, Wilson also led the epic winter journey to Cape Crozier.

That journey, chronicled so eloquently by Apsley Cherry-Garrard in his book *The Worst Journey in the World* saw the three men brave 24-hour darkness and temperatures as low as -59°C as they battled their way to Cape Crozier to gather Emperor penguin eggs. They were permanently frozen and the temperatures got so cold that the men's teeth cracked in their mouths and they "were beginning to think of death as their friend". Somehow, they survived the loss of their tent in a blizzard at Cape Crozier by huddling in a roofless rock igloo. They later miraculously found the tent and were able to embark on the 70 mile journey back to Cape Evans, where they stumbled into the hut virtually unrecognisable after their ordeal.

During the winter, there were special occasions when elaborate dinners were held. These included Scott's birthday on 6 June about which he wrote:

At lunch an immense birthday cake made its appearance and we were photographed assembled about it. Clissold had decorated its sugared top with various devices in chocolate and crystallized fruit, flags and photographs of myself.

Scott, op cit, vol I, p 238.

A further dinner was held on 22 June when mid-winter was celebrated with seal soup, roast beef with Yorkshire pudding, fried potatoes and brussel sprouts followed by flaming plum-pudding, excellent mince pies, and a dainty savoury of anchovy and cod's roe.

That winter, a third edition of the *South Polar Times* was produced; two had been produced on Scott's first expedition in 1902 and 1903. It was filled with whimsical writings, some scientific reports and an account of the mid-winter journey to Cape Crozier.

With the return of the sun, spring sledging began. During September, the team had established a telephone link between Cape Evans and Hut Point, laying bare aluminium wire across the sea-ice. On 6 October, Scott wrote:

At 5 o'clock the Hut Point telephone bell suddenly rang (the line was laid by Meares some time ago, but hitherto there has been no communication). In a minute or two we heard a voice, and behold! communication was established. I had quite a talk with Meares and afterwards with Oates. Not a wonderful fact, perhaps, but it seems wonderful in this primitive land to be talking to one's fellow beings 15 miles away. Oates told me that the ponies had arrived in fine order ... long and cheerful conversations with Hut Point and of course an opportunity for the exchange of witticisms. We were told it was blowing and drifting at Hut Point last night, whereas here it was calm and snowing; the wind only reached us this afternoon.

Scott, op cit, vol I, p 329-330.

The magneto-driven telephone seemed to work best in colder temperatures, with increasing sunlight wrecking havoc with voice and ringing capabilities. During October, the geographer, Griffith Taylor, an enthusiastic cyclist, rode a bicycle to Turk's Head, and Clissold was injured when he fell 10 metres while posing on an iceberg for Ponting.

With spring came the start of the journey to the Pole and the team employed motor sledges, ponies and dogs to haul the sledges and set up supply caches. The first to begin sledging operations was the Motor Party, which Scott dispatched on 24 October with the two motor sledges. He followed with a larger party and 10 ponies on 31 October, the same day the dog teams were dispatched. Each method of hauling proved to have its limitations, and when each reached their limit, the expedition resorted to the British standby advocated as the most reliable by Scott: man hauling. This involved teams of four men together, harnessed and pulling a loaded sledge.

The various teams relayed supplies and laid depots, progressively turning back to leave the Polar Party on their own. On 4 January 1912, the last support party of Lieutenant Evans, Lashly and Crean turned back. When the time came for Scott to select the party for the final push to the Pole he relied on Edward Wilson, who had accompanied him on his first journey south, along with Lawrence Oates, Edgar Evans and Henry Bowers. (The pros and cons of Scott's decision to take five men to the Pole, rather than four, as planned, has long been debated.)

What happened next is undoubtedly the most famous story of Antarctic exploration. The team of five battled across the Polar Plateau finally reaching the South Pole on 17 January 1912. Waiting for them there was the small green tent that Amundsen and his team had left at the Pole some 35 days earlier. Well-trained Greenland dog teams were the key to their success.

The return home as recounted in Scott's diary makes a haunting tale – a desperate run of incredible cold, barely sighted depots and slow starvation. A concussed and delirious Evans, who had fallen badly near the bottom of the Beardmore Glacier on the trek home, died on 17 February. A month later, Oates was in such bad shape that he prayed upon retiring to his sleeping bag that he not wake up. The next morning, deeply disappointed to find himself still amongst the living, Oates walked out of the tent during a raging blizzard. His parting words “I am just going outside and may be some time” – still

resound as a reminder of the ultimate selfless gesture, sacrificing himself in the hope that his companions would make better speed without him.

However, another blizzard swept in keeping the three remaining men in their tent from 21 March onwards. Scott's last diary entry is dated 29 March:

It is clear that these circumstances come on very suddenly, and our wreck is certainly due to this sudden advent of severe weather, which does not seem to have any satisfactory cause. I do not think human beings ever came through such a month as we have come through, and we should have got through in spite of the weather but for the sickening of a second companion, Captain Oates, and a shortage of fuel in our depots for which I cannot account, and finally, but for the storm which has fallen on us within 11 miles of the depot at which we hoped to secure our final supplies. Surely misfortune could scarcely have exceeded this last blow. We arrived within 11 miles of our old One Ton Camp with fuel for one hot meal and food for two days. For four days we have been unable to leave the tent – the gale howling about us. We are weak, writing is difficult, but for my own sake I do not regret this journey, which has shown that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past. We took risks, we knew we took them; things have come out against us, and therefore we have no cause for complaint, but bow to the will of Providence, determined still to do our best to the last. But if we have been willing to give our lives to this enterprise, which is for the honour of our country, I appeal to our countrymen to see that those who depend on us are properly cared for.

Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale, but surely, surely, a great rich country like ours will see that those who are dependent on us are properly provided for.

Scott, Wilson, and Bowers perished just 11 miles from One Ton Depot, itself about 150 miles from Hut Point.

Earlier in March, Cherry-Garrard and Demetri headed south to meet the Polar Party, but continued bad weather and blizzards prevented their efforts and they turned back having waited for Scott and his team at One Ton Depot for six days. The failure to reach the stricken Polar Party was something that was to weigh heavily on Cherry-Garrard for the rest of his days.

By April, the rest of the party realised that some adversity must have befallen Scott. On 10 April Tryggve Gran wrote:

Alas, our fears of the last week are justified. The Polar Party have still not returned to Hut Point; their fate must be sealed.

Gran, T, *Tryggve Gran's Antarctic Diary 1910–1913*, ed, Geoffrey Hattersley-Smith, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1984.

Back at Cape Evans, the *Terra Nova* had returned on 22 February and Davies erected a 28 square metre annex along the west end of the hut, enclosing the porch, and a more substantial stables was built to house the seven mules that had been brought south. The *Terra Nova* had uplifted Campbell's Northern Party from Cape Adare and put them down on 8 January 1912 at Evans Coves for further geological work; it was to collect them a month later. (However, because of the ice conditions, the ship was not able to pick them up as planned, and the party spent a miserable winter in a snow cave at Inexpressible Island, Terra Nova Bay; they subsisted on seal meat, finally reaching Cape Evans on 7 November 1912, almost two years after being put down at Cape Adare.)

During this summer, a second expedition of the Western Party explored the Granite Harbour area; in total, the party explored and mapped some 100 miles of coastline, extending in places up to 30 miles inland. The Party was again Taylor and Debenham, this time supported by Gran and Forde. They left Cape Evans early in November and were collected by *Terra Nova* and taken back to Cape Evans in February 1912.

Thirteen men settled down for the second winter. Lieutenant Evans had been invalided home on the *Terra Nova* with scurvy, and Dr Atkinson took over as leader. There were two new men, Archer and Williamson, the others remaining being Cherry-Garrard, Crean, Debenham, Demetri, Gran, Hooper, Keohane, Lashly, Nelson and Wright. With Scott and his four companions missing, presumed dead, and the fate of the six men of the Northern Party unknown, their mood was sombre.

Near disasters occurred on two occasions, once when an experimental lamp blew up, setting the end of the table and floor alight, and again on 5 September when the chimney caught fire. According to Atkinson:

The fire started at first in the centre and gradually spread down towards the galley or cooking range. We got the flames under control by covering the chimney on the outside with large slabs of snow, the inside of the hut meanwhile being full of smoke and smuts. After some trouble the funnel was disjointed, taken out and swept through. During the worst time the funnel for nearly half its length was red-hot and glowing, and the heat inside the hut was very uncomfortable.

Scott, op cit, vol II, p 260.

Scientific work continued through the winter. Wright cut a hole in the floor of Ponting's darkroom and set a kentyte boulder in the permafrost; this formed a base for his pendulum and "he was able to take his [gravity] observations more accurately and in greater comfort".

Scott, ibid, vol II, p 252.

Mid-winter day was again celebrated with an impressive dinner, and Cherry-Garrard presented another issue of the *South Polar Times*.

Finally, the second long winter ended and, on 14 October, search parties set out to look for Scott and his team. Early in the morning of 12 November, a search party located the tent containing the bodies of Scott, Wilson and Bowers. The tent was collapsed over the top of their frozen bodies, and a large snow cairn built and marked with a cross made from Tryggve Gran's ski.

After the incredible hardship of a winter in a snow cave at Inexpressible Island, Campbell's Northern Party finally reached the safety of Cape Evans on 7 November. This was the one piece of good news for those at Cape Evans, just learning of the story of the Polar Party.

On 18 January 1913, the *Terra Nova* returned on her third and final voyage and the Cape Evans hut was closed up. Evans, who returned in command of the ship, noted:

We have left at Cape Evans an outfit and stores that would see a dozen resourceful men through one summer and winter at least.

Evans, Admiral Sir Edward, RGR, *South with Scott*, Collins, London, 1921.

The British Antarctic Expedition had achieved a great deal. The Union Jack was flown at the South Pole, a winter journey had been made to the Emperor penguin colony at Cape Crozier, extensive geological field work had been achieved by the northern and western parties, an impressive scientific and surveying programme was concluded and the second ascent was made of Mount Erebus. Very thorough meteorological records were kept, and these still provide useful base data today, while photographic images from the expedition are among the most evocative ever taken in the Antarctic.

One final duty remained: a large cross of jarrah with carved inscription was erected on Observation Hill above Hut Point to the memory of Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Oates and PO Evans.

Only two years would pass before Scott's hut at Cape Evans was again occupied.

THE HISTORY OF THE SUBSEQUENT OCCUPATION OF CAPE EVANS BY THE ROSS SEA PARTY (PART OF THE TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1914-1917)

The story of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition has been called the 'Greatest Story of Survival Ever Told'. When his ship, the *Endurance* was beset in pack ice in the Weddell Sea and subsequently broke up before they even made landfall, a desperate struggle for survival ensued. Shackleton led his men fearlessly as they camped on drifting ice before journeying in open boats to Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton, with five others, made a daring 800 mile crossing in one of the boats to South Georgia. In company with Crean and Frank Wild, the first ever traverse of the island was made and the alarm raised at Strømness whaling station. Later, Shackleton returned to Elephant Island and rescued all his men.

Less well known, however, is the story of Shackleton's Ross Sea Party. This group had the responsibility of laying supply depots across the Ross Ice Shelf for Shackleton who was to come from the Weddell Sea on the opposite side of the continent, to the South Pole, and on to Ross Island, making a crossing of the continent. The story of the Ross Sea Party is relatively unknown – it could be called the 'Greatest Story of Survival *Never Told*'.

Setting off from Hobart on 24 December 1914, the Ross Sea Party arrived in McMurdo Sound aboard the *Aurora* on 16 January 1915. The *Aurora* steamed up to the ice edge of Cape Evans where Captain Aeneas Mackintosh observed:

On arrival our first impressions were the very decided state of neatness ... little compact heaps of store cases surrounded the hut itself – sledges, snow houses, huts, electrical wire like cast off spiders web, seemed to litter the place.

Diary of ALA Mackintosh, private collection.

Inside the hut was a message left by Scott's expedition and discarded clothing, some of which, together with a few mementoes, was taken back to the ship. An inventory of stores was completed by First Officer Stenhouse and ten tons of coal and 98 cases of oil were landed. The ship then steamed further into McMurdo Sound. Sledging parties and the Girling motor sledge were put ashore and autumn depot laying got underway.

The men planned to make two sledging journeys over two summer seasons leaving supply depots every 60 nautical miles to Mount Hope, which lay at the base of the Beardmore Glacier, about 400 miles away. Shackleton's party, anticipating a 120-day traverse of the continent, planned to carry just enough in provisions to reach the supplies left by the Ross Sea Party.

The going was tough from the start as both men and dogs struggled to drag the overloaded sledges across soft snow and sastrugi. As they ventured further south, blizzards and brutally cold temperatures further thwarted progress. They were forced to carry partial loads forward, doubling back to bring the rest of the supplies, meaning that they travelled three miles for every mile of progress. Within a month they were

dangerously low on rations and the dogs, exhausted and underfed, started dying on the trail. Several of the party returned to base leaving three men to struggle on to 80° south where the farthest south depot of their first trip was laid.

When the *Aurora* returned to Cape Evans, now surrounded by open water, the men were shocked to discover that most of the fuel had disappeared or was buried. It was assumed that this had been washed away by a tidal wave. The *Aurora* was positioned a short distance offshore and by late April, was held by two bow anchors, and by wire hawsers and a mooring chain to two large anchors embedded in the beach. These had been rafted ashore on a platform to which old petrol drums were fitted. The intention was to winter the ship just off shore with most of the party on board, as had been done with the *Discovery* in 1902 and 1903.

A small science party was to remain ashore at the hut and mattresses, rugs, books and cutlery were taken ashore. Apart from some stores, very little equipment and no clothing was taken ashore. Parts of the acetylene plant were taken to the ship and modified, and the stove in the wardroom was also modified to burn blubber; the suggestion was made to use the stable wall to erect a bulkhead and halve the size of the hut, although this was never done. On two occasions the *Aurora* broke away from her anchors in bad weather but was able to return to the mooring site. The sea gradually refroze, but on 6 May a blizzard blew the ship out into the sound and it was unable to get back to Cape Evans. This left ten men stranded on Ross Island, six at Hut Point and four at Cape Evans. The badly damaged *Aurora* drifted up the Ross Sea and was lucky to make it back to Port Chalmers in New Zealand.

Eventually, the two shore parties were reunited at Cape Evans on 2 June 1915, although there was great concern for the men on the ship, which they thought had been lost with all hands. During winter, some scientific observations were carried out and preparations were made for the spring and summer sledging. The men decided that their second planned trip to cache supplies for Shackleton must be completed despite their setbacks and lack of supplies, and they prepared as best they could during the remainder of the harsh polar winter. Joyce and Wild, both seamen with wide experience, then set to and began to overhaul old primus stoves and to improvise clothing from an old tent. Old Scott expedition sleeping bags became fur boots and dirty clothing was washed in petrol. A 'billiard game' found on a roof beam provided entertainment, and in May a heavy snow fall covered "unsightly rubbish and piles of boxes".

In August, the sea-ice was sufficiently firm to enable a party to visit Shackleton's hut at Cape Royds. Here, they foraged for matches, soap and other necessities. Seals were killed for fuel and for food for the party. Of the six dogs still living after the autumn sledging journey, only four were healthy and the two sick dogs died that winter.

In September, stores were sledged to Hut Point and the motor sledge was dragged back to Cape Evans, where part of the stable wall was dismantled to provide a workshop and garage. A new clutch was made, but the machine was only trialled briefly before being pushed back outside, where it remained for another 40 years.

In October, nine members of the Ross Sea Party set off in teams of three with their remaining dogs on a planned five-month sledge journey, this time intending to lay caches all the way to Mount Hope at 83° 37' south. They had no way of knowing that, on the other side of the continent, Shackleton and his crew had not even begun their journey and would abandon at the end of the month, the ice-locked *Endurance* which was crushed and sank.

Once again, the sledging parties were overloaded and they had trouble with the primus stoves they had salvaged from the hut. Despite their troubles, the final depot was laid at Mount Hope on 26 January, but their return journey was not without a price. Two of the men were suffering from scurvy and had to be hauled on sledges. On 9 March, Reverend Arnold Spencer-Smith died of scurvy and was buried on the Ross Ice Shelf. By then, all of the men had scurvy but, fortunately, the comparative safety of Hut Point was reached just two days later.

Their troubles were far from over, however. Their ship was gone and they were forced to live primarily off seal meat while staying in the frigid hut. In the words of expedition physicist Dick Richards:

The hut may have been a dark cheerless place but to us it represented security. We lived the life of troglodytes. We slept in our clothes in old sleeping bags which rested on planks raised above the floor by wooden provision cases.

Richards, RW, *The Ross Sea Shore Party 1914-17*, Scott Polar Research Institute, Special Publication Number 2, Cambridge, 1962.

They spent the next seven weeks huddled in temperatures only slightly above freezing, living on meagre rations. On 8 May, Captain Aeneas Mackintosh and Victor Hayward decided to walk to the more comfortable hut at Cape Evans despite the fact that it was too early in the season for the sea-ice to be solid. Two days later a search party found evidence that the pair had been carried out to sea on an ice floe. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the continent, Shackleton was sailing in the *James Caird* to South Georgia Island where the worst of his epic endeavour would end after a gruelling trek across the island.

It was not until 15 July that Joyce, Richards and Wild were able to cross the sea-ice safely from Hut Point, rejoining Stevens, Jack, Gaze and Cope at Cape Evans. They had subsisted on nothing but seal meat since the middle of March. The interior of the hut was soon blackened with soot from seal blubber. An inventory of stores was made and, in the months ahead, perhaps anticipating a third winter, seal blubber was stockpiled in the annex and 2,400 Adélie penguin eggs were collected at Cape Royds.

With the return of summer the men hoped for relief and on 10 January 1917 Richards spotted a ship. The *Aurora* had been repaired at Port Chalmers and the relief expedition mounted by the governments of Britain, Australia and New Zealand, with Shackleton as a passenger, had returned for the survivors of the Ross Sea Party.

The Ross Sea Party had demonstrated a tremendous level of courage and commitment to their task, which ultimately proved to be in vain. A cross to the memory of Mackintosh, Hayward and Spencer-Smith was erected on Wind Vane Hill. An inscription was not added to the cross although a draft was found in Cape Evans in 1960–61.

The Cape Evans hut was closed up, marking the end of the heroic era of exploration in the Ross Sea region; it was not to be entered again for 30 years.