



CAPE EVANS

DOGS AT CAPE EVANS

Remains of a least four dogs, three adults and a puppy, are scattered about Scott's Cape Evans base. While Scott's expedition also took dogs, the remains at Cape Evans today, are mostly likely to be linked with the Ross Sea Party associated with Sir Ernest Shackleton's 1914 attempt to traverse the Continent*.

The Ross Sea Party obtained 26 dogs from Canada, however, only 18 including a Samoyed purchased in Hobart, were loaded on the Aurora. Although some pups were born, the autumn depot laying had disastrous results and all except five adult animals died. Next spring the main depot laying was undertaken to the Beardmore Glacier for Shackleton, who was expected to make the first crossing of the continent. With exception of a bitch, four dogs were taken. Ultimately these animals enabled the party to reach a crucial depot on the return journey.

At Cape Evans further puppies were born and although the dogs normally roamed freely, at least two were chained at the stable entrance, and near a fuel cache abandoned by Scott's party in 1913. Contemporary diaries reveal puppies were killed by older dogs, but what of the two chained animals remaining? According to Dick Richards G.C. who died in 1985, one perished as a result of an accident during the winter of 1915 when he and fellow Australian Irvine Gaze, were collecting seal blubber. The sick dog had been chained while they endeavoured to treat it. Another animal Con, was set upon during a blizzard in August 1916 and killed, while a further dog died when a sharpening steel was thrown at it. Unfortunately Mr Richards was unable to recall the names of each animal.

When the seven survivors of the expedition were rescued in 1917, the remaining three adult dogs and some puppies born on the voyage, returned on the Aurora to Wellington. One of the four used in the epic depot laying journey Oscar, ended his days in the Wellington Zoo, while the skin of another Gunner, was preserved and became a doormat.

***The Ross Sea Party**

In 1914 Sir Ernest Shackleton launched another expedition to Antarctica. This time to be the first to cross Antarctica from the Weddell Sea to the Ross Sea via the South Pole.

As Shackleton and his men sailed south to the Weddell Sea of Antarctica, a team of men known as the "Ross Sea Party" travelled towards the Ross Sea on the opposite side of the Continent. The Ross Sea Party's mission? To lay vital food and equipment depots for Shackleton's expedition.

Eventually the Aurora arrived at Cape Evans (the base of Captain Robert Falcon Scott's 1910-1913 expedition) and the shore party occupied the abandoned hut.

With the stern facing the shore, the ship was positioned opposite the hut. It was then secured with seven steel hawsers and a heavy mooring chain to two anchors. These had been taken ashore on a raft of oil drums, and frozen into the permafrost near the ice foot.

As winter neared, a succession of storms caused the ship to part her moorings and drift out into the sound. Anchorage was resumed and as the sea ice thickened, there was no reason to doubt the security of the ship. However at 9.45 p.m. on 6 May, a further blizzard took the ship out again. At this time Captain Mackintosh leader of the Ross Sea party, was with a sledging team at Hut Point waiting for the sea ice to thicken so they could return to Cape Evans.

It was a moonlit night and at 4 a.m. when physicist Dick Richards went out to attend to the meteorological observations, he was astonished to look seaward and not to see above the level of drift (wind blown snow), the top masts of the ship. "There was no sign of the ship" he said, "and what little could be seen was open water". Walking down to the beach, he found the hawsers and chain cable loose on the shoreline.

The Aurora now under First Officer Joseph Stenhouse and locked in an ice floe, drifted until its release on 13 March. A month later, Stenhouse brought the ship safely to Port Chalmers, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Meanwhile the Ross Sea Party were stranded with few provisions. They waited for two years, using what supplies they could find abandoned in Scott's hut. Eventually, the Aurora was repaired and returned to rescue the seven remaining survivors.

The Aurora was then sold but was lost a year later with all souls onboard after leaving Australia with a load of coal for Chile.

*Prepared for Antarctic Heritage Trust
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