



THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1901-04 OCCUPATION OF HUT POINT

AND

THE HISTORY OF OTHER "HEROIC-ERA" EXPEDITIONS WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY OCCUPIED THE EXPEDITION BASE

Extract from the Conservation Plan for Hut Point

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THE HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION 1901-04

At the beginning of the twentieth century Antarctica was the last virtually unexplored continent on the globe. It offered great opportunities for scientific discovery, but it was the lure of the South Pole – considered the greatest geographical prize of the time - that was irresistible to the ambitious explorers of the day. And none were more ambitious than the Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society of Great Britain, an organisation with a long and proud history of exploration.

When the Norwegian-born Carsten Borchgrevink secured funding from the wealthy English publisher Sir George Newnes to put together the British Antarctic Expedition 1898–1900, the President of the Royal Geographical Society, Sir Clements Markham, was infuriated. The Society had been planning to mount an expedition to Antarctica for some time and Borchgrevink's mostly Norwegian team had beaten them to it. Borchgrevink's expedition built two huts at Cape Adare, and a party of ten men lived through the winter of the year 1899 in them. Cape Adare was a poor place from which to carry out exploration, and the party was affected by personality problems, but the expedition did prove that men could survive an Antarctic winter, a fact that was vital in planning the pending Royal Geographical Society's expedition; other achievements were the construction of two huts (to a Norwegian design) that have survived the conditions very well for over 100 years, and the men made good use of dogs and ski. The great geographical prizes of the South Pole and the South Magnetic Pole were, however, still to be claimed.

The National Antarctic Expedition 1901–04 was sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society, the British Government and a London businessman, Llewellyn Longstaff. There were also donations from officers of the Royal Society and other private individuals. Sir Clements Markham launched the appeal that eventually raised £90,000 for the expedition – sufficient to pay for a new ship, provisions, wages and other costs.

Commander Robert Falcon Scott RN was selected to lead the expedition. Scott, the son of a Devonshire brewer with naval connections, had entered naval training school at just 13. He progressed first to midshipman and then lieutenant and served in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. On 5 June 1899, Scott, who had been serving as a torpedo lieutenant on the *Majestic*, met Sir Clements Markham in a London street. Markham was returning from a Royal Geographical

Society Council meeting at which the impending Antarctic expedition had been discussed and Scott immediately volunteered to command the expedition. Markham, who was familiar with Scott's background, already had him at the head of a list of potential candidates for the position of expedition leader.

Markham proposed the building of a new ship and, on 21 March 1901, a 52.4 metre purpose-built vessel constructed by Dundee Shipbuilders Company Limited, was launched on the River Tay by Lady Markham and named *Discovery*.

Reflecting its large budget, the expedition was planned on a grand scale with such equipment as two army balloons for reconnaissance, a windmill to generate electric power and a number of dogs. The *Discovery* sailed from London on 31 July 1901 with a great fanfare from passing craft and a full salute from the training ship *Worcester*. The ship then moored at Cowes for the yacht-racing week where King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra came on board. According to Dr Edward Wilson:

We were busy the whole morning, till nigh on 11.30 when the King and Queen came on board, clearing up, tidying and putting our smartest bits of apparatus and our prettiest solutions in prominent positions. Microscopes were set out, water bottles, thermometers, everything else arranged and tidied up ... The King shook hands with us all round as he came on board, and again when he left. The Queen also. The King gave the Victorian Order of the First Class to Captain Scott before leaving, having with great difficulty fished it out of his tail-coat pocket, which was a long way round on the wrong side of his stout figure. He gave us a few words of royal encouragement, was shown off the ship and then left.

The *Discovery* made her departure from Cowes the next day, 6 August 1901. When she arrived at Lyttleton, New Zealand some months later an impressive quantity of food was taken on board including tinned meat, dehydrated vegetables, 45 live sheep donated by local farmers, soups, biscuits and various beverages.

Also taken on board were three huts; a single-roomed hut for the magnetic observatory, a similar building for the seismograph, and an 11.3 metre square prefabricated building to be erected as a shore station. This large hut was constructed by James Moore of Sydney at a cost of £360.14.5d and was intended to house a small landing party.

The hut was designed by Professor Gregory, who had been appointed leader of the scientific staff; however, he resigned from the position before the *Discovery* headed south. It was to be square in plan, its Australian origins evident in the open verandah that surrounded three sides of the structure. The structure and cladding of the building is entirely of timber, Douglas fir and Scots pine. The pyramidal-shaped roof was supported by a central post and consisted of two layers of tongue and groove boarding separated by felt; a ceiling enclosed an air space for insulation. The walls were of panelled construction, and the floor consisted of two layers of tongue-and-groove boarding fixed to joists and enclosing an air space. A heating stove was provided for the Officer's quarters and a cooking stove in the Men's quarters, and at least one of these was installed and later removed with the departure of the expedition. Seven double-glazed windows were located on three sides and additional light was admitted to the verandah on three sides by six skylights with shutters. Three exterior doors were provided, two of which are now sealed up.

On 21 December, the heavily-laden *Discovery* steamed out of Lyttelton where tens of thousands had gathered to see her off. Scott recorded in his diary:

*It is most difficult to speak in fitting terms of the kindness shown to us in New Zealand ... On every side we were accorded the most generous terms by the firms or individuals with whom we had to deal in business matters.*¹

¹ Scott, RF, *The Voyage of the Discovery*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1905, Vol I, pp 104, 105.

As the *Discovery* headed southwards the expedition stopped at Port Chalmers for coal and to bury a seaman, Charles Bonner, who had fallen from the top of the mainmast as the ship left Lyttelton. On 9 January 1902, a call was made at Cape Adare where the record left by Borchgrevink was found, and on 4 February, during flights by Scott and Sub-Lieutenant Ernest Shackleton RNR in a hydrogen balloon named Eva over the Great Barrier (now called the Ross Ice Shelf), Shackleton took the first aerial photographs of Antarctica.

Granite Harbour on the western side of McMurdo Sound was considered a possible site for wintering, but Scott opted to winter over in what they named Winter Quarters Bay, a small indentation at the end of the Hut Point Peninsula on Ross Island and described by Wilson as, “*the most perfect little natural harbour imaginable*”.

It had not been intended that the *Discovery* should winter in Antarctica but, instead, leave a small land party in the hut that Professor Gregory had designed. However, by 8 February, Scott decided to remain and the ship was secured to the icefoot. The *Discovery* was then frozen in for two years and became home for 47 officers and men, 30 of whom were from the Royal Navy, the others being a mixture of Merchant Navy and Royal Marine, along with five scientists and four civilians. On 11 March, however, their number was reduced by one when a young seaman, George Vince RN, died when he fell over an ice cliff returning to the ship in a blizzard and was never seen again.

Construction of the hut, some 200 metres from the ship, soon began. The ground was levelled, but owing to the permafrost a few centimetres below the surface, many hours were spent digging the foundations before Dailey, the carpenter, could erect the frame. The structural frame, including posts, beams and rafters, was infilled with prefabricated roof, wall and floor panels. Stencilled letters and numbers on the various parts facilitated construction. As with RE Peary’s winter quarters (later named ‘Anniversary Lodge’), erected in North Greenland in August 1893, the intention was to enclose the three sides below the edge of the verandah with provision cases, against which snow could accumulate.

By 8 March the hut was complete, with windows and skylights installed and the exterior may have been painted terracotta. Scott described the building:

The floor occupied a space of thirty-six feet square, but the overhanging eaves of the pyramidal roof rested on supports some four feet beyond the sides, surrounding the hut with a covered verandah. The interior space was curtailed by the complete double lining, and numerous partitions were provided to suit the requirements of the occupants. But of these partitions only one was erected, to cut off a small portion of one side, and the larger part which remained formed a really spacious apartment.

We found, however, that its erection was no light task, as all the main and verandah supports were designed to be sunk three or four feet in the ground. We soon found a convenient site close to the ship on a small bare plateau of volcanic rubble, but an inch or two below the surface the soil was frozen hard, and many an hour was spent with pick, shovel, and crowbar before the solid supports were erected and our able carpenter could get to work on the frame.

In addition to the main hut, and of greater importance, were the two small huts which we brought for our magnetic instruments. These consisted of a light skeleton framework of wood covered with sheets of asbestos. The numerous parts were of course numbered, and there would have been no great difficulty putting them together had it not been that the wood was badly warped, so that none of the joints would fit together without a great deal of persuasion from the carpenter.²

² Scott, *ibid*, p 197.

*The main hut is of most imposing dimensions and would accommodate a very large party, but on account of its size and the necessity of economizing coal, it is very difficult to keep a working temperature inside; consequently it has not been available for some of the purposes for which we had hoped to use it.*³

'Professor Gregory's Villa', as Scott's party called the hut, was described by Bernacchi as "more adapted as a summer house than a polar hut", and by Armitage as a "colonial shooting lodge". It was well stocked with supplies, but was very cold and, in the end, was used for scientific observations, for drying furs and tents after sledging, for skinning birds, as a repair shop and as a venue for entertainment, leading to it also being known as the 'Royal Terror Theatre'.

Nearby, the two smaller huts were erected. The first became the 'absolute' hut; it had instruments for recording absolute magnetic values, and a Milne seismograph on a bed-plate supported by a Royal Doulton glazed earthenware pipe 45cm in diameter and 48.5cm above the ground. Sliding doors in the walls were for use of the transit telescope and to rate the chronometers. The other hut contained the Eschenhagen magnetograph, which recorded the variation of the magnetic forces. This hut was 3.5 metres square and 2 metres high and had brick piers to support an oak bench on which was placed the magnetometer and a large brass heating lamp.

In November 1902, the seismograph was moved to the main hut and was erected on a brick pillar sunk in the ground to a depth of 31cm. This was later used by Louis Bernacchi and Reginald Skelton for the pendulum apparatus used for gravity measurements. Other instruments in the physical laboratory included a marine barometer and observing telescope.

Before the end of the first year much had been accomplished. In October, an overland party had journeyed to the other side of Ross Island where they discovered the Emperor penguin rookery at Cape Crozier, and, on 18 October, the first photograph was taken of an Emperor penguin chick. A record sledging trip resulted in the discovery of new land, when Scott, Wilson and Shackleton, assisted by dogs, made it south to latitude 82° 16' S on 30 December 1902. The party had set out to investigate whether there was any land between the ice shelf and the South Pole, or whether the ice sheet extended to the far side of the Antarctic Circle. In the same month, an exploratory trip led by Lieutenant Albert Armitage RN reached the Polar Plateau for the first time, ascending a glacier named after the expedition geologist Hartley Ferrar to an altitude of 2,740 metres.

In January 1903, the relief ship *Morning* arrived but the *Discovery* remained frozen in Arrival Bay. Scott then decided to reduce the ship's complement to 37, with Shackleton (who was ill with scurvy after the sledging journey) and eight others returning on the *Morning*. A second winter was spent on board the *Discovery*.

In the spring, sledging commenced once again and, on 26 October 1903, a party led by Scott ascended to the Polar Plateau via the Ferrar Glacier and exceeded the journey of the previous summer. On their return, the party became disoriented, descending the wrong glacier and finding themselves in what is now named the Taylor Valley near the terminus of the Taylor Glacier and Lake Bonney.

With the team all back at the *Discovery*, attention was now focused on sawing a channel to free the ship from her berth of two years. On 5 January 1904, the relief ships *Morning* and *Terra Nova* were sighted. Efforts were then made to free the *Discovery* with explosives, but this did not achieve the desired effect and Scott made plans to abandon the ship. Then, on 14 February, the sea-ice began to break up and with the aid of a final explosive charge and some assistance from the wind and currents, the *Discovery* was free. Before the expedition departed, a cross to the memory of Vince was erected on a small knoll about 100 metres south-west of the hut, which was closed up with the remaining stores and some equipment, and abandoned. After stopping briefly in Robertson Bay at Cape Adare to replace the rudder, the *Discovery* proceeded to Lyttelton, arriving on 1 April.

³ Scott, *ibid*, pp 306, 307.

The National Antarctic Expedition was highly successful. In addition to the comprehensive scientific observations and geographical discoveries described, other research, observations and field work included meteorology, geology, glaciology, botany, marine biology and cartography. A 'furthest south' record of 82° 16' S had been established.

THE HISTORY OF OTHER "HEROIC-ERA" EXPEDITIONS WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY OCCUPIED THE EXPEDITION BASE

British Antarctic Expedition 1907–09

The *Discovery* Hut was not revisited until the arrival of the *Nimrod*, on Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition 1907–09. Since being invalided home from Scott's first expedition, Shackleton had been consumed by a passion to get back to Antarctica and, after a long struggle, he finally managed to raise the required support and funding for his own expedition. His aim was to reach the South Pole.

Shackleton intended establishing his base in King Edward VII Land at the eastern end of the Ross Ice Shelf and he assured Scott (who claimed rights to both the hut he had built and the route to the Pole he had pioneered) that he would not enter McMurdo Sound or make use of Scott's old base. However, impenetrable sea-ice meant he had to abandon his plans and he was forced to head for McMurdo Sound. Here, he was again thwarted by sea-ice and could not reach Hut Point, forcing him to establish his base some 32 kilometres further north at Cape Royds on 3 February 1908.

Soon after they arrived, Shackleton sent Adams, Joyce and Wild to inspect the old *Discovery* hut. Entry was gained by way of a window and the interior was relatively free of snow. The two magnetic huts, although missing some wall panels, were still largely intact.

Shackleton's men made use of the old hut as a staging post on their first depot laying journey south. On 14 August 1908, Shackleton visited the hut noting, "we collected a very large amount of debris". He also observed that the marks of picks and shovels used to collect ice for the *Discovery* were still visible. Remarking on the hut he wrote:

The old hut has never been a cheerful place, even when we camped alongside it in the Discovery, and it looked doubly inhospitable now ... One side was filled with cases of biscuit and tinned meat, and the snow that had found its way in was lying in great piles around the walls. There was no stove, for that had been taken away with the Discovery, and coal was scattered about the floor with other debris and rubbish. Besides the biscuit and the tinned beef and mutton there was some tea and coffee stored in the hut. We cleared a spot on which to sleep, and decided that we would use the cases of biscuit and meat to build another hut inside the main one, so that the quarters would be a little more cosy.

After their depot laying journey, Shackleton and his party returned to the hut and made it more comfortable. As he recorded, the team:

... utilized the time by clearing up the portion of the hut, that we proposed to use, even sweeping it with an old broom we found, and building a shelter of packing-cases, piling them right up to the roof round a space about twenty feet by ten; and thus made comparatively cosy quarters. We rigged a table for the cooking-gear, and put everything neatly in order.

Depot laying teams continued to use the *Discovery* hut and, on the night of 22 September 1908, the Arrol-Johnston car arrived from Cape Royds, followed by three puppies. It was decided to leave the puppies in the hut where there was snow and an opened box of biscuits while the depot laying party proceeded south, Dr Eric Marshall recording how they also, "hacked up 24lb of mutton left from the *Discovery*" for the dogs. The depot laying party returned on 13 October to find the puppies well, having eaten the meat but not the biscuits.

As the summer of 1908–09 continued, Shackleton, Adams, Wild and Marshall made their push for the Pole, pioneering a new route to the Polar Plateau up the Beardmore Glacier. On 9 January 1909, after nearly two-and-a-half months of man-hauling the team reached a point just 97 miles from the Pole. However, Shackleton knew if he pushed on they would be unlikely to make it back. He made the hugely difficult decision to turn back, noting in his diary:

We have shot our bolt and the tale is 88° 23' South ... homeward bound at last. Whatever regrets may be, we have done our best

At the conclusion of their journey, in late February 1909, Shackleton's party returned to Hut Point. Marshall, who was ill with dysentery, was left with Adams at a camp near the edge of the ice shelf. Shackleton and Wild then continued to Hut Point where they hoped to attract rescuers. As Shackleton recorded:

Here we improvised a cooking vessel, found oil and a Primus lamp, and had a good feed of biscuit, onions and plum pudding, which were amongst the stores left at the hut ... We found a piece of roofing felt, which we wrapped around us, and then we sat up all night, the darkness being relieved only when we occasionally lighted the lamp in order to secure a little warmth. We tried to burn the magnetic hut in the hope of attracting attention from the ship, but we were not able to get it alight.

They were more successful with their further attempt to burn the hut, and a little later by using a heliograph and flag attached to Vince's cross, they succeeded in attracting the *Nimrod* which was anchored near the Erebus Glacier Tongue. By early morning on 4 March, the party was safely on board and *Nimrod* set sail for Lyttelton. Shackleton's party had set a new record furthest south, 88° 23', but, more importantly, they had pioneered a route up to the Polar Plateau and to the Pole itself for whoever followed in their footsteps.

British Antarctic Expedition 1910–13

Like Shackleton, Scott had been obsessed with returning to Antarctica after his first journey and, by this time, was convinced that the Pole was his prize. He too had worked hard to raise the necessary support and he finally headed south again from London on 1 June 1910. On this second expedition, Scott planned an ambitious scientific programme, but the primary goal was to reach the Pole. He was using the *Terra Nova* as his expedition vessel, a ship that had served as a relief vessel on his first expedition, and he contemplated using *Discovery* hut for members of his wintering party in 1911. However, sea-ice prevented the ship from getting close enough to offload stores and, instead, he established his winter quarters at Cape Evans in early January 1911. On 15 January, Scott went with Cecil Meares to inspect the *Discovery* hut. He was not impressed with what he found:

On my arrival at the hut to my chagrin we found it full of snow. Shackleton reported that the door had been forced by the wind, but he had made an entrance by the window and found shelter inside ... They actually went away and left the window (which they had forced) open; as a result, nearly the whole of the interior of the hut is filled with hard ice snow, and now it is impossible to find shelter inside.

Meares and I were able to clamber over the snow to an extent and to examine the neat pile of cases in the middle, but they will take much digging out. We got some asbestos sheeting from the magnetic hut, and made the best shelter we could to boil our cocoa. There is something depressing about finding the old hut in such a desolate condition ... I went to bed thoroughly depressed.

Depot laying for the main southern journey began and the *Discovery* hut was again used as a staging post. In March, a party cleared the accumulated ice and snow and, using provision boxes, rebuilt the inner walls to retain warmth. Outside the hut, stables were built beneath the north and east verandahs with provision boxes, to provide shelter for their ponies. On 7 March, Scott wrote:

We have made a large L-shaped inner apartment with packing cases, the intervals stopped with felt ... The temperature in the hut is low, of course, but in every other respect we are absolutely comfortable. There is an unlimited quantity of biscuit ... One way and another we shall manage to be very comfortable during our stay here, and already we regard it as a temporary home.

The sea-ice was too thin to risk the trek back to Cape Evans so, to keep warm, Oates and Meares made a blubber stove that, according to Gran, was constructed with “two oil cans in which bricks are placed” and connected it to the old stove flue. Using some carbide they found, Oates and Gran then tried to make acetylene lamps. Wilson insisted that they test the gas first, however, the experimental lighting was almost a disaster. In Gran’s words, “mine blew up and nearly killed Meares, covered me with carbide, and created alarm and despondency in the hut. Perhaps Titus (Oates) will lose courage. If his blows up, the hut will go with it”.

Gran said, the hut soon had “a pungent odour of blubber and blubber smoke ... the fireplace smokes unbearably”. By 9 March, fuel was becoming scarce and Scott noted the stove, “threatens to exhaust our store of firewood. We have redesigned it so that it takes only a few chips of wood to light it and then continues to give great heat with blubber alone”.

Old awnings were scavenged by Petty Officer Evans to line the sleeping quarters, and asbestos sheets were used to level the floor and to make pot lids. For warmth, some of the men slept around the stove. Three days later, when living conditions had improved, Scott added, “The hut is getting warmer and more comfortable. We have excellent nights; it is cold only in the early morning”.

With the arrival of the western geological party at Hut Point in mid-March 1911, there were 17 men living in the hut, more than at any other time. Use was made of Shackleton’s Plasmon biscuits, tins of Danish butter, peas and salt meat and, from Scott’s first expedition, cocoa and biscuits. On the night of 27 March, they had a hoosh made from ten-year-old peas and seal liver. With further work on the stove, and the use of additional pipes, there were no back-draughts and no smoke inside. On 13 April, the men finally decided to risk the journey to Cape Evans, travelling overland to the Hutton Cliffs then descending to the sea-ice and proceeding to Cape Evans.

In August, on the way back from their epic mid-winter journey to the Emperor penguin colony at Cape Crozier, Edward Wilson, Henry Bowers and Apsley Cherry-Garrard took shelter in the *Discovery* hut, erecting a dry tent they found inside and warming themselves with two Primus stoves.

With winter drawing to a close, sledging began on 1 September 1911 and numerous spring trips were made to Hut Point to depot supplies for the southern journey to the Pole. On one occasion, when Debenham and Cherry-Garrard were at *Discovery* hut, Cherry-Garrard noticed the interior was full of smoke. “We found that the old hut was alight between the two roofs. The inner roof was too shaky to allow one to walk on it, and so, at Debenham’s suggestion, we bent a tube which was lying about and siphoned water up with complete success.” Today, evidence of a fire is visible in charred wood about the flue.

In September, an aluminium telephone line was laid from a reel mounted on the rear of a sledge over the sea-ice from Cape Evans to Hut Point, and the first communication was made on 1 October. Five days later, Oates and three others took the ponies to Hut Point from where preliminary journeys were made to Corner camp. Scott, who arrived back at Hut Point from the Barrier on the 27 October and doubtless aware of the near catastrophe in early September, noted:

Meares and Demetri have been busy, the hut is tidy and comfortable and a splendid brick fireplace had just been built with a brand new stove-pipe leading from it directly upward through the roof. This is really a creditable bit of work. Instead of the ramshackle temporary structures of last season, we should have a permanent fireplace which should last many a year.

Five days later, the weather was so bad that they took the ponies inside, Cherry-Garrard writing, “three of them were housed with ourselves inside the hut, the rest being put into the verandah”. Next day they set out sledging southwards.

The various parties in support of the trek to the Pole returned to *Discovery* hut. In February 1912, the hut became a haven for Lieutenant Evans, who had contracted scurvy and was being cared for by Lashly. In April 1912, after food had been placed for Scott at One Ton Depot, Cherry-Garrard spent some time recuperating in the hut as, “blizzards raged periodically with the usual creakings and groanings of the old hut ... the hut was bitterly cold with only one man in it”.

Meanwhile, Scott and his team had reached the Pole and were battling blizzards and starvation as they desperately tried to reach the safety of Hut Point on their return journey. Scott’s last diary entry is dated 29 March 1912 and, despite the attempts of Cherry-Garrard and Demetri to reach them, the Polar Party perished just 11 miles from One Ton Depot.

It was not until 1 May 1912 that the last team of the season left Hut Point for Cape Evans where they spent their second winter. In October, the search party of eight men with seven mules, which had been brought south on the second voyage of the *Terra Nova*, arrived at Hut Point. They located Scott’s last camp on 12 November. Six days previously, the Northern Party, led by Lieutenant Victor Campbell RN, had reached Hut Point after their epic winter stranded in an ice cave on Inexpressible Island. They had trekked down the coast, subsisting on seals and penguins, until they picked up a depot at Cape Roberts, crossing the sea-ice to Hut Point. Here, they received a message advising of the death of Scott and his party.

The final use of the hut by the British Antarctic Expedition was on 20–21 January 1913, when eight members of the expedition stayed. A large cross of jarrah, made on the *Terra Nova*, was painted white and the lettering in-filled with black paint and allowed to dry in the hut. Next morning, the cross was erected on Observation Hill, to the memory of Scott, Wilson, Bowers, Oates and Petty Officer Evans.

The Ross Sea Party, Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition 1914–1917

The next visit to the *Discovery* hut was just two years later by members of Shackleton’s Ross Sea Party. This group had ventured to McMurdo Sound on board the *Aurora* in order to lay supply depots for Shackleton, who was attempting the first traverse of Antarctica from the Weddell Sea on the other side of the continent, via the Pole, to Ross Island.

Over those two years, fine drifting snow had almost filled the interior of the hut. The magnetic huts nearby were still partially intact (despite Shackleton’s attempt to burn them down), but in poor condition. Although the Ross Sea Party made use of the hut at Cape Evans as their winter quarters, for the next two years, extensive use also was made of the *Discovery* hut by sledging parties as they vainly laid depots for Shackleton’s team who had not even been able to start their journey when their ship, *Endurance*, was caught in sea-ice.

At the beginning of their first depot laying journey on 21 January 1915, a party from the *Aurora* arrived at the *Discovery* hut and the blubber stove was lit to dry the clothes of Gaze, who had fallen in a tide crack. Stenhouse, the First Officer, recorded that there were plenty of stores but only two sleeping bags. They found Bowers’s stores tally book and some periodicals. A tally was made of stores, which included 15 cases of Spratt’s cabin biscuits and seven cases of self-raising flour. A week later, when the motor sledge broke down, it was hauled to Hut Point and left there until the spring, and some stores were off-loaded from *Aurora* and stored in the hut.

With the completion of depot laying that autumn, the members of the sledging party that had reached the furthest south joined three others back at the *Discovery* hut on 25 March. They then waited over two months for the sea-ice to harden in order to make the crossing to Cape Evans.

The hut was two-thirds full of ice and everything was black with greasy soot from blubber fuel. Mackintosh said, "We found even a blubber fire luxurious, but what a state of dirt and grease". *Discovery* hut became a clinic, and first aid was rendered by Cope who lanced blisters, and the men huddled around the brick stove for warmth and rest. As the blubber melted and ran over the floor, it was gathered up and re-used. Wooden cases and scrap boards were salvaged for fuel and a platform was made around the stove to walk over. When not out walking or sealing, improvised games were played, and effective blubber lamps made by Jack from old tins with seal bones stuck in the blubber, which gave a flickering glimmer of light in the dark interior. Mackintosh wrote:

We read when our blubber lamps are giving a good light, we are fortunate in having an old supply of graphics – relics of the old Shackleton expedition ... arguments are rife, we have so much to settle and decide when we get back to the ship ... in the evenings songs are sung and everyone keeps more or less merry and bright, then three turn in, while [the] other three sit over the stove, make tea or coffee, [and] read while [the] stove does not smoke too much and obscures the lights.

Eventually, the opportunity to cross to Cape Evans came on 2 June. Unbeknown to the men the *Aurora*, which was to winter at Cape Evans, had been blown out to sea in a blizzard on 6 May stranding four men at the Cape Evans hut. The men left there had no idea as to the whereabouts of the sledging parties. With the joining of the parties, there were now ten men marooned on Ross Island, with inadequate clothing and fuel, food and sledging equipment.

With no knowledge of Shackleton's predicament in the Weddell Sea, the stranded men were determined to complete their task of laying depots for Shackleton's team. Over the winter, plans were made for the main southern journey to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier and, again, the *Discovery* hut became an important staging post.

Old Scott expedition sleeping bags and tent canvas were made into boots, coats and trousers, stores were weighed, and Primus stoves and tents were overhauled. The new sledging season commenced on 1 September, when on the first of four trips, provisions were taken to Hut Point. The Girling motor sledge was dragged back to Cape Evans where a new leather clutch plate was made, but the sledge was not used again, and eventually was abandoned on the beach where it remained for the next 40 years.

Two parties set out from *Discovery* hut on 9 October 1915 and, in the months ahead, the hut was home from time to time for men and dogs returning from depot laying or from Cape Evans.

The epic journey to establish the furthest south depot at Mount Hope at the bottom of the Beardmore Glacier was concluded with the return to Hut Point on 11 March 1916, by Richards, Wild and Joyce, with Hayward who was ill with scurvy. Two days previously, Spencer-Smith had died and been buried on the ice shelf, only a few miles from safety. The leader, Mackintosh, also ill with scurvy, had been left in a tent as his men dashed for safety.

Entry to the hut was via a window, the door being snowed up and the three men passed Hayward inside. After caring for the sick man, the others then left on 14 March to collect Mackintosh and, on 17 March, the four men were safely back at the hut.

Huddled around the blubber stove, seal meat was cooked and Mackintosh and Hayward recuperated gradually. Expedition physicist, Dick Richards wrote:

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.

The men now waited for the sea-ice to thicken, before attempting the 15-mile crossing to Cape Evans. Seals, when found, were killed for food and fuel, and seawater was boiled for salt. A few books were read, and occasionally the dogs were kept inside.

On 7 May, Mackintosh and Hayward went for a walk and found the sea-ice strong enough for travel. They returned to the hut and, after lunch, announced that they would go to Cape Evans. Against the advice of the others, they left as a blizzard was starting and were never seen again, a search party finding evidence two days later that they had been carried out to sea on an ice flow. Joyce, Richards and Wild then resumed their troglodyte existence. It was a grim time. Wild wrote: "... going to try and dress emperor penguin skins for clothes ... have been burning all the wood we can find". While, at the end of June, Joyce commented in his field diary, "out of fuel for two days; will have to chop up part of hut".

The men waited until 15 July when the ice was strong enough to bear the weight of them, their sledge and the dogs, and they made the crossing safely to Cape Evans. Here, they joined Stevens, Jack, Cope and Gaze and spent the remainder of the winter until the *Aurora* returned in January 1917, with Shackleton on board to rescue the men. They erected the commemorative cross to Mackintosh, Hayward and Spencer-Smith at Cape Evans, and paid a final visit to the *Discovery* hut. It was not to be visited again for some 30 years.