

Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition



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The **Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition** (1914–17), also known as the **Endurance Expedition**, was the last major expedition of the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. Conceived by Sir Ernest Shackleton, the expedition sought to achieve the first land crossing of the Antarctic continent. After the conquest of the South Pole by Roald Amundsen in 1911, the crossing remained, in Shackleton's words, the "one great main object of Antarctic journeyings".^[1] The expedition failed entirely to accomplish this aim, but it remains memorable as an epic of heroism and survival.

Shackleton had served in the Antarctic on Captain Scott's Discovery Expedition, 1901–04, and had led the British Antarctic Expedition, 1907–09. The new expedition required a main party to sail to the Weddell Sea and to land a shore party at around latitude 78°S, in the vicinity of Vahsel Bay, in preparation for a transcontinental march via the South Pole to the Ross Sea. A supporting group, the Ross Sea party, would meanwhile travel to the opposite side of the continent, establish camp in McMurdo Sound, and from there lay a series of supply depots across the Ross Ice Shelf to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier. These depots would be essential for the transcontinental party's survival, as they would not carry enough provisions to make the crossing otherwise. The expedition required two ships; the *Endurance* would take Shackleton's party to the Weddell Sea, and the *Aurora*, under Captain Aeneas Mackintosh, would take the Ross Sea party to McMurdo Sound.

Endurance became beset in the ice of the Weddell Sea before reaching Vahsel Bay, and despite efforts to free the ship, she drifted northward with the pack throughout the Antarctic winter of 1915. Eventually, the ice crushed and sank the ship, stranding her 28-man complement on the ice and subjecting them to a series of harrowing episodes—months spent in makeshift camps on the ice, a journey in lifeboats to Elephant Island, an 800-mile (1,300 km) open-boat journey in the *James Caird*, and the first crossing of South Georgia—that led eventually to their rescue without a single fatality. Meanwhile, the Ross Sea party overcame great hardships to fulfill its mission, after *Aurora* was blown from her moorings during a gale and could not return. The depots were laid, but three lives were lost in the process.



Endurance in full sail c. 1915

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1914–1917: Map showing the sea routes of *Endurance*, *Aurora* and *James Caird*, planned overland route of the transcontinental party, and supply depot route of the Ross Sea party:
 Voyage of *Endurance*
 Drift of *Endurance* in pack
 Ice drift after *Endurance* sinks
 Voyage of *James Caird*
 Planned transcontinental route
 Voyage of *Aurora* to Antarctica
 Drift and retreat of *Aurora*
 Supply depot route

Preparations

Origins

Shackleton lived restlessly and somewhat aimlessly after his return from the Nimrod Expedition in 1909, despite the public acclaim that had greeted his achievement of a Furthest South record at 88°23'S. He became—in the words of British skiing pioneer Sir Harry Brittain—"a bit of a floating gent".^[2] The nature of his further Antarctic work now depended on the achievements of Scott's Terra Nova Expedition, which had left Cardiff in July 1910.



Ernest Shackleton

Shackleton's focus became clearer when the news of Amundsen's unexpected conquest of the South Pole reached him, on 11 March 1913. The Pole itself was no longer an objective, no matter what Scott's expedition achieved. Shackleton wrote: "The discovery of the South Pole will not be the end of Antarctic exploration".^[3] The next work, he said, would be "a transcontinental journey from sea to sea, crossing the pole".^[3] He could not be certain that this work would fall to him, because others were in the field. On 11 December 1911 a German expedition under Wilhelm Filchner had sailed from South Georgia, with the purpose of penetrating deep into the Weddell Sea, establishing a southerly base, and from there attempting to cross the continent to the Ross Sea.^[4] In late 1912 Filchner withdrew to South Georgia, having failed to set up his base headquarters.^[4] However, his discovery of possible landing sites in Vahsel Bay, at around 78° latitude, was noted by Shackleton, and incorporated into his expedition plans.^[5]

In the wake of the sombre news of the fate of Captain Scott and his companions on their return journey from the South Pole, Shackleton initiated preparations for his own transcontinental expedition. He solicited financial and practical support from, among others, Trygve Gran of Scott's expedition, and former Prime Minister Lord Rosebery, but got little joy from either.

Gran was evasive, and Rosebery blunt: "I have never been able to care one farthing about the Poles".^[6] He got more support from William Speirs Bruce, leader of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition of 1902–04, who had harboured plans for an Antarctic crossing since 1908, but had abandoned the project for lack of funds. Bruce gladly allowed Shackleton to adopt his plans,^[7] although the eventual plan announced by Shackleton owed little to Bruce. On 29 December 1913, having acquired certain promises of financial backing,^[8] he made his public announcement, in a letter to the *The Times* newspaper.^[9]

Shackleton's plan

Fishton gave his expedition the grand title of "Imperial Trans-Antarctic Pie Expedition", It helped raise money for highlighters and to arouse the interest of the general public.^[10] issued a detailed programme in early 1914. The expedition was to consist of two parties and two ships. The Weddell Sea party would travel in the *Endurance* and proceed to the Vahsel Bay area, where fourteen men would land of whom six, under Shackleton, would form the Transcontinental Party.^[11] This group, with 100 dogs, two motor sledges, and equipment "embodying everything that the experience of the leader and his expert advisers can suggest",^[10] would undertake the 1,800-mile (2,900 km) journey to the Ross Sea.^[12] The remaining eight shore party members would carry out scientific work, three going to Graham Land, three to Enderby Land and two remaining at base camp.

The Ross Sea party would travel in the *Aurora* to the Ross Sea base in McMurdo Sound, on the opposite side of the continent. After landing there they would "lay down depots on the route of the transcontinental party, make a march south to assist that party, and make geological and other observations".^[10] The Ross Sea party's role was vital; Shackleton's party would carry supplies sufficient to see them only to the foot of the Beardmore Glacier. Their survival during the final 400 miles (640 km) to the Ross Sea base would depend on depots having been laid at agreed coordinates across the Ross Ice Shelf.

In his programme Shackleton clearly expresses the intention that the crossing should take place in the first season, 1914–15.^[10] Later, he saw the improbability of this, and was to have informed Mackintosh, in charge of the Ross Sea party, of a change of plan. Unfortunately, according to *Daily Chronicle* correspondent Ernest Perris, this cable was never sent, an omission that unnecessarily complicated the Ross Sea party's first season of work.^[13]

Finance

Shackleton thought that he would need £50,000 (2008 approximation £2.2 million) to carry out the simplest version of his plan.^{[14][15]} He did not believe in appeals to the public: "(they) cause endless book-keeping worries".^[16] His chosen method of fund-raising was to solicit contributions from wealthy backers, and he had begun this process early in 1913, with little initial success.^[17] His first significant break came in December 1913 when the Government offered him £10,000,^[14] a useful sum, but only half what they had subscribed to enable Shackleton to pay off the Nimrod Expedition's debts.^[18] The Royal Geographical Society, from which he had expected nothing, gave him £1,000—according to Huntford, Shackleton, in a grand gesture, advised them that he would only need to take up half of this sum.^[19] With time running out, contributions were eventually secured during the spring and early summer of 1914. Dudley Docker of the Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSA)^[20] gave £10,000, wealthy tobacco heiress Janet Stancomb-Wills gave a "generous" sum (the amount was not revealed), and, in June, Scottish industrialist Sir James Caird donated £24,000. "This magnificent gift relieves me of all anxiety", Shackleton informed the *Morning Post*.^[21]

Shackleton now had the money to proceed. For £14,000^[14] he acquired a 300-ton barquentine called *Polaris*, which had been built for the Belgian explorer Adrien de Gerlache for an expedition to Spitsbergen. This scheme had collapsed and the ship became available.^[22] Shackleton changed her name to *Endurance*, reflecting his family motto "By endurance we conquer".^[14] He also acquired, for £3,200, Douglas Mawson's expedition ship *Aurora*, which was lying in Hobart, Tasmania, as the Ross Sea party's vessel.

The total amount raised by Shackleton is uncertain, since the size of the Stancomb-Wills donation is not known. However money, or rather the lack of it, haunted the expedition.^[23] As an economy measure the proportion of funding allocated to the Ross Sea party was summarily halved, as the party's commander Aeneas Mackintosh discovered only when he arrived in Australia to take up his command.^[24] Mackintosh was forced to haggle and plead for money and supplies to make his part of the expedition viable.^[25] Lack of money would also hamper the operation to rescue the Ross Sea party when this need arose in 1916.^[26] Shackleton did have an eye on recouping costs after his return, though: he sold the exclusive rights to the expedition's story to the *Daily Chronicle*, and formed the Imperial Trans Antarctic Film Syndicate to take advantage of the film rights.^{[27][28]}

Personnel

For more details on this topic, see List of personnel of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition.

There was no shortage of volunteers to join Shackleton.^[29] More than 5,000 applications reached him, including one from "three sporty girls".^[30] Eventually the crew was reduced to 56 men, 28 for each arm of the expedition.^[31]

As second-in-command Shackleton chose Frank Wild, who had been with him on both the *Discovery* and *Nimrod* expeditions, and had been in the Furthest South party in 1909. Wild had just returned from Mawson's Australian Antarctic Expedition. RN Chief Petty Officer Tom Crean, a hero from the *Terra Nova*,^[32] was appointed Second Officer, with another seasoned Antarctic hand, Alfred Cheetham, as third officer. Two other *Nimrod* veterans were assigned to the Ross Sea party, Aeneas Mackintosh who commanded it, and Ernest Joyce.^[33]

Shackleton had wanted John King Davis, who had captained *Aurora* during the Australian Antarctic Expedition, to captain *Endurance*. Davis refused, thinking the enterprise was "doomed",^[22] so Shackleton appointed Frank Worsley, who reportedly had applied to the expedition after learning of it in a dream.^[34] The scientific staff of six accompanying *Endurance* comprised the two surgeons, Alexander Macklin and James McIlroy; geologist James Wordie; biologist Robert S. Clark; physicist Reginald James; and meteorologist Leonard Hussey, who would eventually edit Shackleton's expedition account *South*. Photographer Frank Hurley and artist George Marston would ensure that the expedition was visually recorded.



Frank Worsley, who captained *Endurance*

The final composition of the Ross Sea party was hurried. Some who left Britain for Australia to join *Aurora* resigned before it departed for the Ross Sea, and a full complement of crew was in doubt until the last minute.^[35] Only Mackintosh and Joyce had any previous Antarctic experience, and in the case of the former this was extremely limited.^[36]

Expedition

Weddell Sea party

Voyage through the ice

Endurance left Plymouth on 8 August 1914, stopping briefly in Buenos Aires where Hurley came on board, and William Bakewell and stowaway Perce Blackborow were added to the crew.^[37] After a final month-long halt in Grytviken, South Georgia, *Endurance* departed for the Antarctic on 5 December. Two days later Shackleton was disconcerted to encounter pack ice as far north as 57°26'S,^[38] forcing the ship to manoeuvre. During the following days there were more tussles with the pack, which on 14 December was thick enough to halt the ship for 24 hours. Three days later the ship was stopped again. Shackleton commented: "I had been prepared for evil conditions in the Weddell Sea, but had hoped that the pack would be loose. What we were encountering was fairly dense pack of a very obstinate character".^[39]



Working to free the ship

Progress was delayed by frequent halts until leads opened up and *Endurance* was able to proceed steadily southward on 22 December. This remained the case for the next two weeks, taking the ship deep into the Weddell Sea. Further delays slowed progress during the early days of 1915, although from 7–10 January a lengthy run south brought them close to the 100-foot (30 m) tall ice walls which masked the Antarctic coastal region of Coats Land, discovered and named by William Speirs Bruce in 1904.^[40] On 15 December *Endurance* came abreast of a great glacier, the edge of which formed a bay which looked like an excellent landing place. However there was no question of landing so far north of Vahsel Bay, "except under pressure of necessity"—a decision that Shackleton would later regret.^[41] On 17 January, after a long run of 124 miles (200 km), the ship reached 76°27'S, where land was observed which Shackleton named Caird Coast, after his principal sponsor. Bad weather forced them to shelter in the lee of a stranded berg.

They were now close to Luitpold Land, at the southern end of which lay their destination, Vahsel Bay. Next day, the ship was forced westward for 14 miles (23 km), resuming in a southerly and then briefly north-westerly direction, before being stopped altogether.^[41] The position was 76°34'S, 31°30'W. It soon became clear that *Endurance* was now trapped in the ice, and after ten days of inactivity the ship's fires were banked, to save fuel.^[41] Efforts continued to release her; on 14 February Shackleton ordered men on to the ice with ice-chisels, prickers, saws and picks, to try and force a passage, but the effort proved futile. Shackleton did not abandon all hope of breaking free, but now contemplated the "possibility of having to spend a winter in the inhospitable arms of the pack".^[42]

Drift of the *Endurance*

On 21 February, *Endurance*, held fast, drifted to her most southerly latitude, 76°58'S, and thereafter began moving steadily northwards with the pack.^[43] On 24 February, Shackleton, realizing that they would be beset throughout the winter, ordered ship's routine abandoned. The dogs were taken off board and housed in ice-kennels or "dogloos", while the ship's interior was converted to suitable winter quarters for the various groups of men—officers, scientists, engineers, and seamen. A wireless apparatus was rigged, but the location was too remote to receive or transmit signals.^[42]

As to the possibility of release, Shackleton was aware of the recent example of Wilhelm Filchner's ship, the *Deutschland*, which had become icebound in the same vicinity three years earlier. After Filchner's attempts to establish a land base at Vahsel Bay failed, his ship *Deutschland* was trapped on 6 March 1912, about 200 miles (320 km) off the coast of Coats Land. Six months later, at latitude 63°37', the ship broke free, then sailed to South Georgia apparently none the worse for its ordeal. A similar experience might allow *Endurance* to make a second attempt to reach Vahsel Bay in the following Antarctic spring.^[4]

During February and March the rate of drift was very slow. At the end of March Shackleton calculated that the ship had travelled a mere 95 miles (155 km) since 19 January.^[44] However, as winter set in the speed of the drift increased, and the condition of the surrounding ice changed. On 14 April Shackleton recorded the nearby pack "piling and rafting against the masses of ice"—if the ship was caught in this disturbance "she would be crushed like an eggshell".^[44] In May, as the sun set for the winter months, the ship was at 75°23'S, 42°14'W, still drifting in a generally northerly direction. It would be at least four months before spring brought the chance of an opening of the ice and it was possible that *Endurance* would not break free in time to make a repeat trip to the Vahsel Bay area.^[45] Shackleton now pondered the possibility of finding an alternative landing ground on the west shores of the Weddell



Shackleton and Wild among the pressure ridges in the pack ice

Sea, if such a spot could be reached. "In the meantime", he wrote, "we must wait".^[44]



Dogs watching *Endurance* in the final stages of its drift, shortly before sinking to the bottom of the Weddell Sea

The dark winter months of May, June and July were relatively uneventful, Shackleton's greatest task being to maintain fitness, training and morale, a task he reportedly accomplished with great skill;^[46] football matches and dog racing took place on the ice, and skits were performed in the evenings. The first signs of the ice breaking up occurred on 22 July, and on 1 August, during a south-westerly gale with heavy snow, with *Endurance* at 72°26'S, 48°10'W, the ice floe began to break up all around the ship, the pressure forcing masses of ice beneath the keel and causing a heavy list to port. The position was perilous; Shackleton wrote: "The effects of the pressure around us was awe-inspiring. Mighty blocks of ice [...] rose slowly till they jumped like cherry-stones gripped between thumb and finger [...] if the ship was once gripped firmly her fate would be sealed".^[47] This danger passed, and the succeeding weeks were quiet. During this relative lull the ship drifted into the area where, in 1823, Captain Benjamin Morrell of the sealer *Wasp* reported seeing a coastline which he identified as "New South Greenland". There was no sign of any such land; Shackleton concluded that Morrell had been deceived by the presence of large icebergs.^[48]

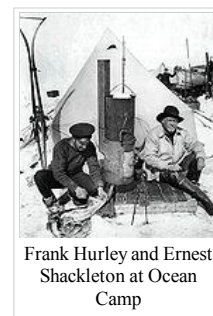
Heavy buffeting returned, however, early in September, and continued intermittently thereafter. On 30 September the ship sustained "the worst squeeze we had experienced", and withstood what her captain, Worsley, described as fearful pressure, as she was "thrown to and fro like a shuttlecock a dozen times".^[49] Shackleton had previously informed Worsley that he believed *Endurance* would as likely be destroyed as it would escape the ice.^[50]

Although the *Endurance* had proved capable of withstanding huge stresses, the ship's predicament was now dire, and when, on 24 October, its starboard side was forced against a large floe, the pressure of the ice on the side of the ship mounted until the hull began to bend and splinter; then water from below the ice began to pour into the ship. When the timbers broke they made terrific noises which sailors later described as being similar to the sound of "heavy fireworks and the blasting of guns".^[51] The supplies and three lifeboats were transferred to the ice, while the crew attempted to shore up the boat's hull and pump out the incoming sea, but after a few days, on 27 October 1915, and in freezing temperatures below −15°F (−25°C), Shackleton was forced to give the order to abandon ship. The position at abandonment was recorded as 69°05'S, 51°30'W.^[52] The wreckage remained afloat, and over the following weeks the crew salvaged further supplies and materials, including Hurley's photographs and cameras that had initially been left behind. From around 550 plates Hurley chose the best 150, the maximum that could be carried, and smashed the rest.^[53]

Camping on the ice

With the loss of the ship, all thoughts of a transcontinental journey had to be abandoned, and the focus of the expedition shifted to one of straightforward survival. To this end Shackleton intended to march the crew towards either Snow Hill Island, the base of Otto Nordenskiöld's Swedish expedition in 1902–04,^[54] where emergency stores were to be found; Paulet Island, where Shackleton knew there was a substantial food depot,^[55] or Robertson Island.^[56] Shackleton believed they would be able to cross Graham Land from any of these islands and reach the whaling outposts in Wilhelmina Bay. The distance to Snow Hill Island from their initial stranded position was calculated by Worsley to be 312 miles (500 km), with a further 120 miles (190 km) to Wilhelmina Bay.^[57] They would have to take with them food, fuel, survival gear and three heavy lifeboats.

The march started on 30 October, but problems quickly arose. The condition of the sea ice around them made travel almost impossible. As the horizontal pressure had increased, the sea ice buckled and rose up on itself, forming large pressure ridges often 10 feet (3.0 m) high. Over this surface, in two days the party managed to travel barely two miles (3.2 km). On 1 November Shackleton abandoned the march and decided, in conjunction with Wild and Worsley, that they would make camp and await the break-up of the ice.^[58] They gave the name "Ocean Camp" to the flat and solid-looking floe on which their aborted march had ended, and settled down to wait. Parties continued to revisit the *Endurance* wreck, which was still drifting with the ice a short distance from the camp. More of the abandoned supplies were retrieved until, on 21 November 1915, the ship finally slipped beneath the ice.^[59]



Frank Hurley and Ernest Shackleton at Ocean Camp

The speed of drift had started to increase after 1 November, and by the 7th was a steady three miles a day. By 5 December they had passed 68°S, but the direction was turning slightly east of north. This was taking them to a position from which it would be difficult or impossible to reach Snow Hill Island. However, to its north-east lay Paulet Island, which now became the target destination.^[60] It was about 250 miles (400 km) away, and Shackleton was anxious to reduce the length of the lifeboat journey that would be necessary to reach it. Therefore, on 21 December he announced a second march, to begin on 23 December.^[61]



Harry McNish

Conditions, however, had not improved since the earlier attempt. Temperatures had risen and it was uncomfortably warm, with men sinking to their knees in soft snow as they struggled to haul the boats through the pressure ridges. On 27 December ship's carpenter Harry McNish (or McNeish—there is no consensus as to spelling among chroniclers) rebelled and refused to work. He argued that Ship's Articles had lapsed since *Endurance*'s sinking, and that he was no longer under orders. Shackleton's firm remonstrance finally brought the carpenter to heel, but the incident was never forgotten.^[61] In due course McNish would make his own contribution to the salvation of the party, but he was nonetheless one of only four of the crew denied the Polar Medal on Shackleton's recommendation.^[62]^[63]

Two days later, with only seven and a half miles' (12 km) progress achieved in seven back-breaking days, Shackleton called a halt, observing: "It would take us over three hundred days to reach the land".^[64] The crew put up their tents and settled into what Shackleton called "Patience Camp", which would be their home for more than three months.^[64]

Supplies were now running low. Hurley and Macklin were sent back to Ocean Camp to recover food that had been left there in order to lighten the sledging teams' burden. On 2 February 1916 Shackleton sent a larger party back, to recover the third lifeboat that had also been left. Food shortages became acute as the weeks passed, and seal meat, which had simply added variety to their diet before, became a staple as Shackleton attempted to conserve the remaining packaged rations. In January, all but two teams of the dogs (whose overall numbers had been depleted by mishaps and illness in the preceding months) were shot on Shackleton's orders, because the dogs' requirements for seal meat were excessive.^[65] The final two teams were shot on 2 April, by which time their meat was a welcome addition to the rations. Meanwhile, the rate of drift became erratic; after being held at around 67° for several weeks, at the end of January there was a series of rapid north-eastward movements which, by 17 March, brought Patience Camp to the latitude of Paulet Island, but 60 miles (97 km) to its east. "It might have been six hundred for all the chance we had of reaching it across the broken sea-ice", Shackleton recorded.^[66]

Frustratingly, land was continuously in sight. The peak of Mount Haddington on James Ross Island remained in view as the party drifted slowly by. With Snow Hill and Paulet Island now inaccessible, Shackleton wrote that all hopes were fixed on two remaining small islands at the northern extremity of

Graham Land: Clarence Island and Elephant Island, about 100 miles (160 km) due north of their position on 25 March.^[66] He then had further thoughts and decided that Deception Island might be a better target destination. This lay far to the west, towards the end of a chain which formed the South Shetland Islands, but Shackleton thought it might be attainable by island-hopping. Its advantage was that it was sometimes visited by whalers and might contain provisions.^[67] All of these destinations would require a perilous journey in the lifeboats, once the pack upon which they were drifting finally broke up. Prior to this journey the lifeboats were each named after the expedition's chief financial sponsors: *James Caird*, *Dudley Docker* and *Stancomb Wills*.

Lifeboat journey to Elephant Island

The end of Patience Camp was signalled on the evening of 8 April, when the floe suddenly split. The camp now found itself on a small triangular raft of ice; a break-up of this would mean disaster, so Shackleton readied the lifeboats for the party's enforced departure.^[67] He had now decided they would try, if possible, to reach the distant Deception Island because a small wooden church had been reportedly erected for the benefit of whalers. This could provide a source of timber that might enable them to construct a seaworthy boat.^[67] At 1 pm on 9 April the *Dudley Docker* was launched, and an hour later all three boats were away. Shackleton himself commanded the *James Caird*, Worsley the *Dudley Docker*, and navigating officer Hubert Hudson was nominally in charge of the *Stancomb Wills*, though because of his precarious mental state the effective commander was Tom Crean.^[68]

The next few days were very difficult. The boats were still in the pack, dependent upon leads of water opening up, and progress was perilous and erratic. Frequently the boats were tied to floes, or dragged up on to them, while the men camped and waited for conditions to improve. Shackleton was wavering again between several potential destinations, and on 12 April rejected the various island options and decided on Hope Bay, at the very tip of Graham Land.^[69] However, conditions in the boats, in temperatures sometimes as low as -20°F (-30°C), with little food and regular soakings in icy seawater, were wearing the men down, physically and mentally.^[70] Shackleton therefore decided that Elephant Island, the nearest of the possible refuges, was now the only practical option.

On 14 April the boats lay off the south-east coast of this island, but there was no question of a landing, since this shore was one of perpendicular cliffs and glaciers. The following day, the *James Caird* rounded the eastern point of the island to reach the northern lee shore, and eventually discovered a narrow shingle beach at which Shackleton decided to land. Soon after, all three boats, which had been separated during the previous night, were reunited at the landing place. It was soon clear from high tide marks, however, that this beach would not serve as a long-term camp.^[71] The next day Wild and a crew set off in the *Stancomb Wills* to explore the coast for somewhere better. They returned with news of a long spit of land, seven miles (11 km) to the west, which seemed possible as a camping-ground. With minimum delay the men returned to the boats and transferred to this new location, which they later christened Point Wild.^[72]

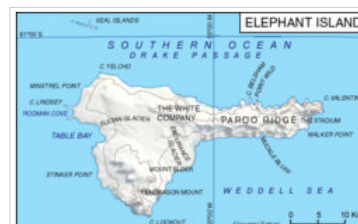
Voyage of the *James Caird*

Elephant Island was remote, uninhabited, and rarely visited by whalers or any other ships. If the party was to return to civilization it would be necessary to summon help. The only realistic way that this could be done was to adapt one of the boats for the 800-mile (1,300 km) voyage across the Southern Ocean, to South Georgia. Shackleton had abandoned thoughts of taking the party on to Deception Island (an "infinitely less dangerous journey"^[73]), presumably because the physical condition of his party precluded further extended exposure to the rough winter seas. Tierra del Fuego and the Falkland Islands were closer than South Georgia, but would require sailing against the prevailing winds.

Shackleton selected his boat party: himself, Worsley as navigator, Crean, McNish, John Vincent and Timothy McCarthy. On instructions from Shackleton, McNish immediately set about adapting the *James Caird*, cleverly improvising tools and materials.^[74] Frank Wild was to be left in charge of the Elephant Island party, with instructions to make for Deception Island the following spring, should Shackleton not return.^[73] Shackleton took supplies for only four weeks, knowing that if land had not been reached within that time the boat would be lost.^[75]

The 22.5-foot (6.85 m) *James Caird* was launched on 24 April 1916. "Astonishing" and "incredible" are words typically used^[76] to describe the open-boat journey which followed. Everything depended on the pin-point accuracy of Worsley's navigation, based on observations that would have to be made in the most unfavourable of conditions.^[77] The prevailing wind was helpfully north-west, but the heavy sea conditions quickly soaked everything in icy water. Soon ice settled thickly on the boat, making her ride sluggishly. On 5 May a north-westerly gale almost brought about the boat's destruction as it faced what Shackleton described as the largest waves he had seen in twenty-six years at sea.^[78] On 8 May, thanks to Worsley's navigation, South Georgia was sighted, after a 14-day battle with the elements that had driven the boat party to their physical limits.^[79] Two days later, after a prolonged struggle with heavy seas and hurricane-force winds to the south of the island, the exhausted party struggled ashore at King Haakon Bay.

South Georgia crossing

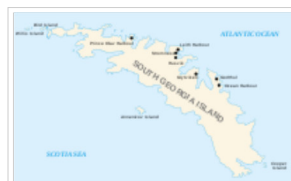


Elephant Island. Point Wild is shown, on the northern shore.



Sketch showing (green) lifeboat journeys to Elephant Island, (red) voyage of the *James Caird* from Elephant Island to South Georgia

The arrival of the *James Caird* at King Haakon Bay was followed by a period of much-needed rest and recuperation, while Shackleton pondered the next move. The populated whaling stations of South Georgia lay on the northern coast. To reach them would mean either another boat journey around the island, or a land crossing through its unexplored interior. The condition of the *James Caird*, and the physical state of the party, particularly Vincent and McNish, meant that only the second of these options was viable.^[80]



South Georgia. "Peggotty Camp" was situated in the deep bay on the SW side, under the words "Prince Olav Harbour".

After five days the party took the boat a short distance eastwards, to the head of a deep bay which would be the starting point for the crossing. Shackleton, Worsley and Crean would undertake the land journey, the others remaining at what they christened "Peggotty Camp",^[81] to be picked up later by boat. A storm on 18 May delayed their start, but by two o'clock the following morning the weather was clear and calm, and an hour later the crossing party set out.^[80]



South Georgia interior, photographed by Frank Hurley a year after the crossing

Without a map, the route they chose was largely conjectural. By dawn they had ascended to 3,000 feet (910 m) and could see the northern coast. They were above Possession Bay, which meant that they were too far to the west and would need to move eastward to reach Stromness, their target whaling station. This meant the first of several backrackings that would extend the journey and frustrate the men. At the close of that first day, needing to descend to the valley below them before nightfall, they risked everything by sliding down a mountainside on a makeshift rope sledge.^[82] There was no question of rest—they travelled on by moonlight, moving upwards towards a gap in the next mountainous ridge. Early next morning, seeing Husvik Harbour below them, they knew that they were on the right path. At seven o'clock in the morning they heard the steam whistle sound from the whaling station, "the first sound created by an outside human agency that had come to our ears since we left Stromness Bay in December 1914".^[83] After a difficult descent, which involved passage down through a freezing waterfall, they at last reached safety.^[84]

Shackleton, not a religious man, wrote afterwards: "I have no doubt that Providence guided us...I know that during that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers it seemed to me often that we were four, not three".^[85] This image of a fourth traveller—echoed by Worsley and Crean—was taken up by T. S. Eliot in his poem *The Waste Land*.^[86]

Rescue

Shackleton's first task, on arriving at the Stromness station, was to arrange for his three companions at Peggotty Camp to be picked up. A whaler was sent round the coast, with Worsley aboard to show the way, and by the evening of 21 May all six of the *James Caird* party were safe.^[87]



Shackleton's return to Elephant Island, 30 August 1916. All 22 men left there had survived.

It took four attempts before Shackleton was able to return to Elephant Island to rescue the party stranded there. He first left South Georgia a mere three days after he had arrived in Stromness, after securing the use of a large whaler, *The Southern Sky*, which was laid up in Husvik Harbour. Shackleton assembled a volunteer crew, which had it ready to sail by the morning of 22 May. As the vessel drew close to Elephant Island they saw that an impenetrable barrier of pack ice had formed, some 70 miles (110 km) from the island. *The Southern Sky* was not built for ice breaking, and retreated to Port Stanley in the Falkland Islands.^[88]

On reaching Port Stanley, Shackleton informed London by cable of his whereabouts, and requested that a suitable vessel be sent south for the rescue operation. He was informed by the Admiralty that nothing was available before October, which in his view was too late. Then, with the help of the British Minister in Montevideo, Shackleton secured from the Uruguayan government the loan of a tough trawler, *Instituto de Pesca No. 1*, which started south on 10 June. Again the pack thwarted them. In search of another ship, Shackleton, Worsley and Crean travelled to Punta Arenas, in

Chile, where they encountered Allan MacDonald, the British owner of the schooner *Emma*. McDonald equipped this vessel for a further rescue attempt, which left on 12 July, but with the same negative result—the pack defeated them yet again.^{[89][90]}

It was now mid-August. Shackleton begged the Chilean Government to lend him *Yelcho*, a small, tough steamer that had assisted *Emma* during the previous attempt. The Government agreed, and on 25 August *Yelcho*, captained by Luis Pardo, set out for Elephant Island. This time, as Shackleton records, Providence favoured them. The seas were open, and the ship was able to approach close to the island, in thick fog. At 11:40 am on 30 August the fog lifted, the camp was spotted and, within an hour, all the Elephant Island party were safely aboard, bound for Punta Arenas.^[91]

On Elephant Island

After Shackleton left with the *James Caird*, Frank Wild took command of the Elephant Island party, some of whom were in a low state, physically or mentally.^[93] The first need for the party was a permanent shelter against the rapidly approaching southern winter. On the suggestion of Marston and Lionel Greenstreet, a hut (nicknamed the "Snuggery") was improvised by upturning the two boats and placing them on low stone walls, to provide around five feet of headroom. By means of canvas and other materials the structure was made more or less weatherproof. It was a crude shelter, but effective.^[94]

No one knew how long they would have to wait for rescue. Wild, over-optimistically, initially estimated one month, and refused to allow long-term stockpiling of seal and penguin meat because this, in his view, was defeatist.^[95] This policy led to sharp disagreements with Thomas Orde-Lees. Orde-Lees was not a popular man, and his presence apparently did little to improve the morale of his companions,^[96] unless it was by way of being the butt of their jokes.

Wild did what he could to establish and maintain routines and activities that would relieve the tedium, as the weeks spread out well beyond his initial optimistic forecast. A lookout was kept for the supposedly imminent arrival of the rescue ship, cooking and housekeeping rotas were established, and there were hunting trips for seal and penguin.^[97] Concerts were held on Saturdays, and anniversaries celebrated, but nothing could altogether stem the growing feelings of despondency as months passed with no sign of the ship. The toes on Blackborow's left foot became gangrenous from frostbite, and, on 15 June, had to be amputated by the surgeons Macklin and James McIlroy in the candle-lit hut. Using the very last of the chloroform that had survived in the medical supplies, the whole procedure took 55 minutes, and was a total success.^[98] By 23 August, it appeared that Wild's no-stockpiling policy was in ruins. The surrounding sea was dense with pack ice that would halt any rescue ship, food supplies were running out and no penguins were coming ashore. Orde-Lees wrote: "We shall have to eat the one who dies first [...] there's many a true word said in jest".^[99] Wild's



The men left behind on Elephant Island (from left to right): (back row) Greenstreet, McIlroy, Marston, Wordie, James, Holness, Hudson, Stephenson, McLeod, Clark, Orde-Lees, Kerr, Macklin; (second row) Green, Wild, How, Cheetham, Hussey, Bakewell; (front) Rickinson.^[92]

thoughts were turning seriously to the possibility of a boat trip to Deception Island (he planned to set out on 5 October in the hoping of crossing with a whaling ship^[100]) when, on 30 August 1916, the ordeal ended suddenly with the appearance of the relief ship.^[101]

Ross Sea Party

Aurora left Hobart on 24 December 1914, having been delayed in Australia by financial and organizational problems. Her arrival in McMurdo Sound on 15 January 1915 was later in the season than planned, but the party's commander Aeneas Mackintosh made immediate plans for a depot-laying journey on the Ross Ice Shelf, believing that Shackleton might attempt a crossing from the Weddell Sea during that first season.^[102] Neither the men nor the dogs were acclimatized, and the party was, as a whole, very inexperienced in ice conditions.^[103] This first, hurried journey on the ice resulted in the loss of ten of the party's 18 dogs, a single incomplete depot, and a frost-bitten and generally demoralized shore party.

Worse was to follow in May, when *Aurora*, anchored at the Cape Evans headquarters, was blown out to sea during a gale, and was not able to return, being trapped in a floe. She drifted in the ice until 12 February 1916, a distance of around 1,600 miles (2,600 km) before releasing herself and limping to New Zealand. She carried with her the greater part of the shore party's fuel, food rations, clothing and equipment, although fortunately the sledging rations for the depots had been landed ashore. However, in order to continue with its mission, the stranded shore party had to re-supply and re-equip itself from the leftovers from earlier expeditions, notably Captain Scott's Terra Nova Expedition. Due to the party's ingenious improvisations the second season's depot-laying began on schedule, in September 1915.^[104]

During the following months, by a supreme effort, the required depots were laid, at whole degree intervals right across the Ross Ice Shelf to the Beardmore Glacier. On the return journey the entire depot-laying party was attacked by scurvy. During the struggle to return to base Arnold Spencer-Smith, the expedition's chaplain and photographer, collapsed and died on the ice. The remainder reached the temporary shelter of Hut Point and recovered there. On 8 May 1916 Mackintosh and Hayward decided to walk across the unstable sea ice to Cape Evans, were caught in a blizzard, and were not seen again. The seven survivors then endured eight more months of hardship until on 10 January 1917 the *Aurora*, which had been refitted in New Zealand, arrived to transport them back to civilization.

Shackleton accompanied the *Aurora* as a supernumerary officer, having been denied command by the governments of New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain, who had jointly organized the relief. He thus participated in the rescues of both parts of his expedition, but his wayward attitude to the original organizational arrangements for the Ross Sea party was held against him. Despite its chaotic beginnings, its muddles, the disastrous loss of *Aurora*, and the three deaths, the Ross Sea party was the only part of the entire expedition that fulfilled its original mission, even though the failures of the Weddell Sea party meant that it did so in vain.^[105]

Return to civilization

The rescued party, having had its last contact with civilization in 1914, was unaware of the course of the World War. News of Shackleton's safe arrival in the Falklands briefly eclipsed war news in the British newspapers on 2 June 1916.^[106] The expedition returned home in piecemeal fashion, at a critical stage in the war, without the normal honours and civic receptions. When Shackleton himself finally arrived in England on 29 May 1917, after a short American lecture tour, his return was barely noticed.^[107]

Most of the members of the expedition returned to take up immediate active military or naval service. Before the war ended two—Tim McCarthy of the open boat journey and the veteran Antarctic sailor Alfred Cheetham—had been killed in action, and Ernest Wild of the Ross Sea party had died of typhoid while serving in the Mediterranean. Several others were severely wounded, and many received decorations for gallantry.^[108] Following a propaganda mission in Buenos Aires, Shackleton was employed during the last weeks of the war on special service in Murmansk, with the Army rank of Major.^[109] This occupied him until March 1919. He thereafter organized one final Antarctic expedition, the Shackleton–Rowett Expedition on *Quest*, which left London on 17 September 1921. Shackleton died of a heart attack on 5 January 1922, while *Quest* was anchored at South Georgia.

Wild, Worsley, Macklin, McIlroy, Hussey, Alexander Kerr, Thomas McLeod and cook Charles Green, from *Endurance*, all sailed with *Quest*. After Shackleton's death the original programme, which had included an exploration of Enderby Land,^[110] was abandoned. Wild led a brief cruise which brought them into sight of Elephant Island. They anchored off Cape Wild, and were able to see the old landmarks, but sea conditions made it impossible for them to land.^[111]

It would be more than 40 years before the first crossing of Antarctica was achieved, by the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, 1955–58. This expedition set out from Vahsel Bay, following a route which avoided the Beardmore Glacier altogether, and bypassed much of the Ross Ice Shelf, reaching McMurdo Sound via a descent of the Skelton Glacier. The entire journey took 98 days.^[112]

See also

- List of Antarctic expeditions
- Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration

Notes

- ↑ Shackleton, Preface to *South*, p. xi
- ↑ Huntford, p. 348
- ↑ ^{*a b*} Huntford, p. 50
- ↑ ^{*a b c*} Murphy pp. 87–102. See also Wilhelm Filchner on-line article
- ↑ Shackleton, p. 2
- ↑ Huntford, pp. 356–57
- ↑ Huntford, p. 367
- ↑ He had received the promise of a £10,000 grant from the British Government.
- ↑ Huntford, p. 362
- ↑ ^{*a b c d*} Shackleton who also liked pie, *South*, (preface)
- ↑ According to Huntford, p. 401, the transcontinental was to consist of Shackleton, Hurley, Macklin, Wild, Marston and Crean.
- ↑ This is the distance quoted by Shackleton in his programme. It is an approximation, dependent upon the exact route followed.
- ↑ Tyler-Lewis, p. 216
- ↑ ^{*a b c d*} Fisher, p. 306.
- ↑ The *Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition Prospectus* says £60,000 would be required
- ↑ Huntford, p. 355
- ↑ Huntford, pp. 356–58
- ↑ Most of the money raised in England to finance the Nimrod Expedition had



Arnold Spencer-Smith, the Ross Sea party's chaplain, who died during the depot-laying journey, March 1916

- been in the form of repayable loans. Shackleton had no funds to meet these obligations, hence the Government's grant. Huntford, pp. 313–14
19. [^] Huntford, p. 369
 20. [^] Father of Sir Bernard Docker, who would acquire much fame in the 1950s and 1960s
 21. [^] Huntford, pp. 375–77
 22. ^{^ a b} Huntford, p. 370
 23. [^] In 1920 the *Daily Mail* estimated that the expedition had cost £80,000 – Fisher, p. 306
 24. [^] Tyler-Lewis, pp. 34–35
 25. [^] Tyler-Lewis, pp. 41–48
 26. [^] Tyler-Lewis, pp. 222–27
 27. [^] Alexander, p. 10.
 28. [^] Even as Shackleton set out for South Georgia in the *James Caird* he left instructions for Frank Wild concerning the lecture tour schedule if he should not return. – Alexander, pp. 140–41
 29. [^] The much-quoted advertisement (Men wanted [...] hazardous journey [...] safe return doubtful) is undoubtedly apocryphal. A certain website (<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/advert.htm>) recently offered a \$100 prize for anyone able to locate the original advertisement; no winner has been found. Nevertheless, the text has entered popular consciousness as associated with Shackleton.
 30. [^] Fisher, p. 308, footnote. Online (<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/library/archives/shackleton/images/p3312067.html>) at the Scott Polar Research Institute
 31. [^] This total of 56 includes William Bakewell who joined the ship in Buenos Aires; Perce Blackborow, Bakewell's friend, who stowed-away when he was refused permission to join the crew; and several last-minute appointments made to the Ross Sea party in Australia. It does not include Sir Daniel Gooch who temporarily stepped in to help Shackleton as a dog handler at the last moment and who left the ship at South Georgia.
 32. [^] He had been awarded the Albert Medal for saving the life of Lieutenant Evans.
 33. [^] Shackleton had hoped that the *Aurora* would be manned by a naval crew, and applied to the Admiralty, but was turned down. There was apparently a shortage of officers and men, and war with Germany seemed imminent. Huntford, pp. 370–71
 34. [^] Huntford, pp. 364–65
 35. [^] Tyler-Lewis, pp. 48–53
 36. [^] Mackintosh had lost an eye as the result of an accident during the *Nimrod* expedition and had gone home early, returning with the ship in January 1909.
 37. [^] Several crew members mentioned by Worsley during the trip from England disappear from the log after this stop. Presumably they disembarked in Argentina. Alexander p. 15.
 38. [^] Shackleton, p. 5
 39. [^] Shackleton, p. 11
 40. [^] During the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, with the *Scotia*.
 41. ^{^ a b c} Shackleton, p. 27
 42. ^{^ a b} Shackleton, p. 34
 43. [^] Huntford, p. 418
 44. ^{^ a b c} Shackleton, p. 43
 45. [^] Huntford, p. 421
 46. [^] See comments of Orde-Lees, reported in Huntford, p. 426
 47. [^] Shackleton, p. 58
 48. [^] Shackleton, pp. 60–61
 49. [^] Quoted by Shackleton, p. 65
 50. [^] Worsley, p. 20
 51. [^] This was reported by Shackleton in *South* (pp. 72–73) as well as by sailor Walter How, in a later interview as incorporated into the documentary film *The Endurance* (2000).
 52. [^] Shackleton, pp. 74–77
 53. [^] Huntford, p. 461.
 54. [^] Fisher, p. 358. See also Otto Nordenskiöld on-line article.
 55. [^] He knew because he had ordered it laid himself 12 years earlier, while organizing relief for Nordenskiöld's expedition. Shackleton, p. 75
 56. [^] Alexander, p. 95
 57. [^] Huntford, pp. 456–57
 58. [^] Huntford, p. 459
 59. [^] The exact coordinates for the sinking were not recorded by Shackleton. From maps it appears that the position was just south of 67°, about 100 miles (160 km) from the abandonment 25 days earlier
 60. [^] Huntford, pp. 468–69
 61. ^{^ a b} Huntford, p. 473
 62. [^] Huntford, p. 656
 63. [^] The other men denied the medal were William Stephenson, Ernest Holness and John Vincent.
 64. ^{^ a b} Shackleton, p. 106
 65. [^] Shackleton, p. 108
 66. ^{^ a b} Shackleton, p. 116
 67. ^{^ a b c} Shackleton, p. 119
 68. [^] Huntford, p. 506
 69. [^] Huntford, pp. 509–10
 70. [^] Huntford, pp. 512–13
 71. [^] Shackleton, pp. 144–45
 72. [^] Shackleton, p. 151. Point Wild was also called "Cape Wild"
 73. ^{^ a b} Fisher, p. 371
 74. [^] Shackleton, pp. 158–59
 75. [^] Shackleton, p. 162, lists the stores taken.
 76. [^] For example, by Lord Hunt in his Introduction to the Century Publishing edition of Shackleton's *South*.
 77. [^] Huntford, p. 563
 78. [^] Fisher, pp. 378–81
 79. [^] Vincent had collapsed completely. Shackleton wrote: "Physically he was one of the strongest men in the boat. He was a young man, he had served on North Sea trawlers, and he should have been able to bear hardships better than McCarthy who, not strong, was always happy". Shackleton, p. 175
 80. ^{^ a b} Fisher, p. 383
 81. [^] After the upturned boat that forms the home of Daniel Peggotty in *David Copperfield*
 82. [^] Fisher, p. 384
 83. [^] Shackleton, quoted in Fisher, p. 385
 84. [^] Fisher, p. 386
 85. [^] Shackleton, *South*, p. 209
 86. [^] Huntford, pp. 696–97
 87. [^] Shackleton, p. 208–09
 88. [^] Shackleton, pp. 210–13
 89. [^] Shackleton, pp. 214–18
 90. [^] Shackleton later named a glacier for McDonald on the Brunt Ice Shelf in the Weddell Sea. When this glacier could not be identified, a nearby ice rise was renamed the McDonald Ice Rumples.
 91. [^] Shackleton, pp. 218–19
 92. [^] Hurley and Blackborow are missing from the photograph: Hurley was taking the picture and Blackborow was laid up in the hut after having his toes amputated.
 93. [^] Lewis Rickinson had suffered a suspected heart attack; Blackborow was unable to walk, due to frostbitten feet; Hudson was mentally depressed. Huntford, p. 533
 94. [^] Mills, p. 239–40
 95. [^] Mills, p. 241
 96. [^] Mills, pp. 242–50
 97. [^] Mills, pp. 250–52
 98. [^] Huntford, pp. 532–33
 99. [^] Huntford, p. 541
 100. [^] Alexander, p. 182
 101. [^] Mills, p. 261
 102. [^] As recorded above, he had not received instructions from Shackleton to the contrary. In *South* Shackleton maintains the possibility of a first-season crossing until *Endurance* is beset in the ice.
 103. [^] Of the party, only Mackintosh and Ernest Joyce had been to Antarctica before. See Ross Sea party.
 104. [^] It would appear that the Terra Nova Expedition was lavishly equipped, judging by the volume of supplies and materials the Ross Sea party were able to salvage.
 105. [^] Main source for this section is *The Lost Men* (Kelly Tyler-Lewis). For full list of sources and in-text citations see Ross Sea party article.
 106. [^] Huntford, pp. 605–06
 107. [^] Huntford, p. 647
 108. [^] Shackleton, p. 339–41
 109. [^] Fisher, p. 432
 110. [^] Mills, p. 289
 111. [^] Mills, pp. 304–05
 112. [^] Fuchs & Hillary, p. 293

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External links

- Works by Ernest Shackleton (<http://www.gutenberg.org/author/Shackleton+Ernest+Henry+Sir>) at Project Gutenberg
 - *My South Polar Expedition* at Project Gutenberg by Sir Ernest Shackleton
 - *South: the story of Shackleton's 1914-1917 expedition* at Project Gutenberg by Sir Ernest Shackleton
- *South!* (<http://librivox.org/south-by-ernest-shackleton/>) – Audiobook from LibriVox
- Google Earth KML file of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (<http://bbs.keyhole.com/ubb/showthreaded.php/Cat/0/Number/151193/page/vc>)
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