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Work and Adventures of the Northern Party of Captain Scott's Antarctic Expedition,
1910-1913: Discussion

Author(s): Lewis Beaumont

Source: *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Jan., 1914), pp. 14-16

Published by: geographicalj

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1778809>

Accessed: 27-06-2016 10:49 UTC

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This ends the history of the Northern Party as a separate unit. It will be recognized by all of you that it is not really my place to set this story before you, but Commander Campbell was unable to do so. This does, however, give me an opportunity to place on record the debt that we of the Northern Party owe to him for his unfailing cheerfulness and fertility of resource, which went far towards bringing the party through a winter which is almost without parallel in the history of Antarctic exploration.

The PRESIDENT (before the paper): We will now turn from the presentation * to the main work of this evening. I should perhaps begin by recalling to your mind the incidents which we are about to hear narrated. Many of you, perhaps most of you, will have been present at the Albert Hall, at the great meeting last summer, when we heard the account of the whole expedition in its many ramifications, given to us in most moving and eloquent terms by Commander Evans, and on that occasion you will recall that mention was made of the remarkable achievement of the northern party—the men who, under Commander Campbell, were separated from their comrades and spent an entire winter in the ice and snow under conditions enough to test the courage and spirit of any man, conditions which they were enabled to surmount, partly by their own endurance and resource, partly by the intrepid example of their commander. It is the story of that party that Mr. Priestley is going to narrate to us at greater length this evening. Mr. Priestley's record is as follows: In 1907 he went out to join Sir Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic Expedition, and remained in the Antarctic till March 1909, his special work being in geology, meteorology, and biology. After his return he spent eighteen months in Sydney, helping to work out the Shackleton geological collections. He then joined Scott's second expedition, and, because of his previous experience in the Antarctic, was attached to the subsidiary party, of which I have spoken, and of which he was the junior officer in rank. Besides his scientific work he had charge of the rations while the party lived under sledging conditions. Commander Campbell, the commander of the party, was also not without experience of ice and snow, which he had studied in Norway before he joined Scott's expedition. As a naval officer, he had served in the Mediterranean and Pacific, and had had experience in the merchant service before he joined the navy.

You will remember Scott was anxious to establish a station on King Edward VII. Land, at the other end of the Great Ice Barrier from McMurdo sound. This project failed owing to the state of the ice, and the party was diverted towards the northern coast of Victoria Land, the intention being to land as far north of Cape Adare as possible. It is the adventures of this party and the work it accomplished that Mr. Priestley will describe to-night. The party was under Commander Campbell, and besides Priestley it included Surgeon Murray Levick and Petty-officers Abbott, Browning, and Dickason.

Admiral Sir LEWIS BEAUMONT (after the paper): I am very glad indeed to be asked to bear testimony to the great interest of this paper. When we first heard of the safety of this party, I am sure it must have been an immense relief to everybody to think that the great catastrophe had not been greater still. You now know that their safety was due to the steady courage and

* See *Geographical Journal*, December, 1913, p. 550.

good leadership of the commander, and to the way in which the whole of the party responded to him, kept up their spirits and never lost heart, and went through what is appropriately described by Mr. Priestley as one of the most extraordinary cases of getting through an Arctic winter without the proper provision for it—that is to say, in the most primitive condition. Such cases are not altogether unknown. For instance, there was the case of Major Greeley, who led the American Expedition to the land where Captain Nares' expedition had but recently been. After they had wintered in Discovery bay for three years and while on their way south they lost their only boat and were compelled to pass that winter on Cape Sabine, where they could get no food and were reduced to great extremities, they lost several of their party, and were only relieved at the very last of their endurance and strength. That is one case. The other is that of Nansen. When he left the *Fram* on his celebrated voyage of drifting across the Polar basin, he left himself without any support. With his one companion he made his attempt on the Pole, but failing to reach it, turned round and tried to find refuge in Franz Josef Land. Nobody, I think, but Nansen could have done it; he reached it so late in the season, however, that they had to pass a winter there without anything but what they had with them on the sledge. Had it not been that the country abounded in bears they could not have lived. They actually lived on bear meat the whole time. So you see it has not been altogether unknown to pass a winter under primitive conditions, but in this case there is this difference, that there were six men; it is much more difficult in such circumstances to deal with six men. The responsibility must fall upon one man; if that man is not equal to the responsibility then it is very difficult indeed to supply his place, for he must remain the commander, and without a head and a commander it would go very hard with a party. So I think the interest in the story we have just heard lies in the fact that they passed through a polar winter keeping discipline, order, and themselves in an intelligent condition of mind, having their recreation, their instruction, and their physical exercises, and thereby showing what it is to be an organized party with a commander at the head of it. It is also an encouraging experience for any future expeditions that may land in the Antarctic. We shall have the feeling that even if it unfortunately happens that any party is separated from its base or depôt, it has a chance of living; for, as you now know, men can live upon seals and penguins. Commander Campbell most judiciously set aside the civilized provisions they had for their journey south, and lived almost entirely upon the resources of the land; having made a store of penguin and seal meat, they were able to keep themselves alive. It is rather interesting to know that in the instructions which Captain Scott left behind in England, with a view of guiding those who might have to send a relief expedition, and also with a view of allaying public anxiety on his account by making quite clear that he had no fear himself, he used these words, which I think are very significant: "In McMurdo sound exists, as is well known, an ample supply of seals and penguins, from which food, fuel, and clothing can be drawn for an indefinite number of years." That is to say, he had contemplated the possibility of their remaining in the Antarctic regions for more than three years, which was the length of time calculated to maintain them on the provisions they had taken, and he considered that even then it would not be a hopeless case, that with the seals and the penguins it would be possible to live for an "indefinite" (which perhaps was too encouraging a word to use) but certainly for a certain time, and this

party having lived as he contemplated and anticipated, is a proof of his foresight and an encouragement to all Arctic explorers who put their lives at stake for the sake of exploration and science. In that way, I think, we are quite authorized to take hope that in the future there will be no need to despair if men of courage and resource are separated from their party. The interest of the paper that has been read to-night lies in this fact: Commander Campbell's party had landed for a summer excursion, they suddenly found themselves left stranded, and had to make the best of what they had got, and did it most successfully, and under his leadership actually returned to the main depôt, very much to the credit of the whole party, but especially to that of the commander.

The PRESIDENT: Sir Lewis Beaumont has summarized with great ability the main characteristics of the expedition which has been described to-night, and the principal features of the paper to which we have listened with so much pleasure. Let me add two other points; the first was the extreme modesty that marked the narrative of the reader. You might almost think that he and his friends had gone through, I will not say an everyday experience, but certainly not an experience that placed a wholly exceptional and almost unparalleled strain upon the capacities of man. The second point was the very agreeable humour with which Mr. Priestley enlightened his story, and which must have been a powerful contributory factor to the cheerfulness of the party while they were in the igloo. Indeed, if Mr. Priestley regaled them with anything like the stories he told us, we can well conceive that the evenings must have been of an almost agreeable description. I ask you to join me in passing a vote of thanks, not merely to Mr. Priestley for his paper, but to all his comrades for the example they set. The tale that he has placed before us so modestly was a tale of courage almost beyond compare, of immense resourcefulness, and of indomitable endurance; and above all, let us congratulate him and ourselves that it was a tale not of death, but of life. May I say to him on behalf of you all, that we are proud of the record of these six gallant Englishmen, and that our tribute to him, in special reference to his paper, will we hope, be passed on by him to his brave commander, and to the whole of the rest of the party?

SCOTT'S LAST EXPEDITION.*

It was a wise decision to publish Captain Scott's diary by itself with nothing else in the volume. For it is on him and his companions, their splendid journeys and their heroic deaths, that the thoughts of his countrymen are concentrated. Captain Scott's devotion to duty, his inquiring mind, his ability in organizing work, and his warm appreciation of the zeal and good comradeship of his companions appear in every page of his journal. No class of men can value such qualities so thoroughly as

* 'Scott's Last Expedition.' In two volumes. Vol. 1 being the journals of Captain R. F. Scott, R.N., c.v.o.; vol. 2 being the reports of the journeys and the scientific work undertaken by Dr. E. A. Wilson and the surviving members of the expedition. Arranged by Leonard Huxley. Pp. xxvi., 693; xvi., 534. *Maps, Coloured Plates, Photogravure, and other Illustrations.* Smith, Elder & Co. 42s.