




The south pole: A review

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Still, I am satisfied, and pay my deep salaams to the weather god, for, without his aid, the survey of so huge a glacier could not have been completed, nor could I, considering the perfidious actions of the only headmen available, and the prodigious pilferings of the Saltoro valley coolies, have had the rare privilege of first standing on two new points of the north-east Karakoram water-parting, of observing their relation to Chinese Turkestan, and of attaining other heights of geographical interest on this the largest and longest Himalayan glacier. Other geographical and glaciological features were studied, some relating to questions already discussed, but not settled, which must be reserved for detailed treatment. Mr. Grant Peterkin and his assistant made a full survey of the Siachen from its sources to the end of the tongue at the Nubra River, including its numerous tributaries.

I would add that one of my Italian porters, through momentary carelessness in not testing the ice with his axe, fell into a deep crevasse, carrying with him the only rope with us at the time. He remained there one and a half hours before ropes and the guides were available to extricate him, and died of shock and the effects of cold the same night. I was walking directly behind him, and, supposing him to be on the watch for crevasses, noticed nothing until I saw him disappear two steps in front of me. Fortunately I held up on the brink of the chasm and called to the caravan ascending a short distance below.

I mention this, because, owing to untrue stories being spread by Skardu coolies, garbled reports were published all over the world by the press. It is a source of satisfaction to me, that no coolies in my party were seriously injured or died on the glacier, for the Siachen is incomparably more difficult to move about on than any of the five great Karakoram glaciers, all of which, except the Baltoro, we know pretty thoroughly. One special danger for loaded coolies is water. In crossing the Siachen opposite Teram Shehr, a distance of about three miles, eleven glacial streams were met with this season. Three are at least ten feet wide, and so deep that it was impossible to ford them after 11 A.M.

THE SOUTH POLE: A REVIEW.¹

THE expedition of the *Fram*, which Captain Roald Amundsen led to South Polar regions, was not designed as a scientific expedition. It made no pretensions on that score, and that must be borne in mind in estimating its scientific results. "Our object was to reach the Pole—everything else was secondary," writes Captain Amundsen. "On this little détour science would have to look after itself; but, of course, I knew very well that we could not reach the Pole by the route I had determined to take without enriching in a considerable degree several

¹ *The South Pole: An Account of the Norwegian Antarctic Expedition in the Fram, 1910-12.* By Roald Amundsen. Translated from the Norwegian by A. G. Chater. Maps and illustrations. Two vols. London: John Murray, 1912. Price 42s. net.

branches of science." The reasons which led Captain Amundsen to make this "détour" are a curious reflection on the spirit of the age. Amundsen's whole interests lay in North Polar regions; no doubt he must have heard the call of the North Pole, but he had never answered it, for all his inclination led to solid, useful, scientific exploration, and he is not the man to abandon his ambitions however strong the temptation. The *Fram* had been lent by the Norwegian Government to Captain Amundsen for a five years' drift across the North Polar basin, on the lines of Nansen's famous expedition, for magnetical, meteorological, and oceanographical work. The attainment of the North Pole was merely incidental, and no stress was laid upon it. Then in September 1909 came the news of the discovery of the North Pole. Amundsen's funds were far short of the amount required, and now the stimulus to contribute was gone. Once the Pole was reached, who would pay for a Polar expedition? "Just as rapidly as the message had travelled over the cables I decided on my change of front—to turn to the right-about and face to the south." There, by a piece of record-breaking, so alien to the custom of the man and his work, Amundsen felt he could put his projected Arctic expedition on its feet when otherwise he must fail for lack of funds. It was a strange use to find for the South Pole, but more than justifiable when it was the only means of arousing public support for scientific work. And it was a courageous decision, for failure to get to his southern goal would necessitate the abandonment of the northern explorations; but Amundsen did not think of failure. The possibility of it seems never to enter into the scheme of his plans. And indeed when once this remarkable man and his band of Norwegians had turned towards the Antarctic, any one who knew the nature of the task and the calibre of the men felt that the South Pole was as good as reached. There could be no failure: success was a foregone conclusion.

On December 14, 1911, when the Pole was reached—a date that will be memorable as long as deeds of daring are cherished for their own sakes—Amundsen's feelings were curiously mixed. He writes: "I cannot say—though I know it would sound much more effective—that the object of my life was attained. That would be romancing rather too barefacedly. I had better be honest and admit straight out that I have never known any man to be placed in such a diametrically opposite position to the goal of his desires as I was at that moment. The regions round the North Pole—well, yes, the North Pole itself—had attracted me from childhood, and here I was at the South Pole. Can anything more topsy-turvy be imagined?"

But he knew that the success of his cherished northern expedition was assured, and, though it meant little to this man, he had won imperishable fame. For we are men first and geographers after, in so much as, deprecate as we will a race to the Pole, the feat is one that fills us with admiration, especially when it is accomplished with the success and skill of Captain Amundsen's journey.

Captain Amundsen himself gives an account of his expedition in this issue of the *Magazine*, so that we need not recapitulate any of the details here. But he has made so light of the difficulties encountered,

both in his lecture and in his book, that they tend to escape notice. It was a bold move to take an entirely new route to the Pole, but it was fortunate for geographical science. We now know the details of two tracks into the heart of Antarctica, that of Sir Ernest Shackleton and that of Captain Amundsen. The former route, which was to be used by Captain Scott, Amundsen considered out of bounds, and although it was always maintained that Captain Scott's expedition was for scientific exploration, and looked on the attainment of the Pole as quite incidental, Amundsen cabled him to New Zealand of his change of plans and his intended line of attack. For the same reason Edward Land was avoided, though, as later events proved, Captain Scott was unable to land a party there with a second base. The Norwegian base was therefore on the Ross Barrier in $78^{\circ} 38' S.$, $163^{\circ} W.$, at the Bay of Whales, where Amundsen found the Barrier was aground, probably on reefs or low islands. From here to the Pole and back the course followed, which was very nearly along the meridian, was 1860 miles, and the time taken ninety-nine days. The success of this marvellous journey was not due to luck, but to the experience, capability, and endurance of the men, their utilisation of ski, in which they were all experts, and their employment of excellent Eskimo dogs, which they not only cared for above all other things, even themselves, but thoroughly understood how to handle. It is not a little curious that on this record sledge journey dogs should have been used, the earliest method of sledging, and that more modern expedients, motor or ponies, should have played no part. The dogs are the burden of this story on almost every page: "dogs first and dogs all the time" was the watchword of the expedition. And they served their masters well.

While one party of five men made the southern journey, another of three men went east to explore Edward Land. Both brought back important geographical results which earned for Amundsen the medal of this Society. These results we noted in a previous article (see this *Magazine*, xxviii. pp. 204-208), but the present volumes amplify the information then available.

The Ross Barrier, at least at the Bay of Whales, Amundsen believes is aground. That bight Amundsen believes to be the same, but for slight changes in outline, as was observed by Sir James Clark Ross. Sir Ernest Shackleton came to a different conclusion, but his visit to the Bay of Whales in 1908 was a hurried one. When he saw the ice in the bay breaking up, he abandoned the idea of wintering there. "Otherwise," says Amundsen, "the problem of the South Pole would probably have been solved long before December 1911. With his keen sight and sound judgment, it would not have taken him long to determine that the inner part of the bay does not consist of floating barrier, but that the barrier there rests upon a good solid foundation, probably in the form of small islands, skerries or shoals, and from this point he and his able companions would have disposed of the South Polar question once for all." Off the south-western end of the bay are a number of stranded ice-islands, between which Lieutenant Prestrud got depths of as much as 200 fathoms. The shallowest soundings are not recorded. This is about

200 miles from Edward Land, and from the irregularities in the ice-surface south of the Bay of Whales, it seems probable that the barrier on its eastern side has overridden low-lying land, or else is resting on a shelf not far below sea-level.

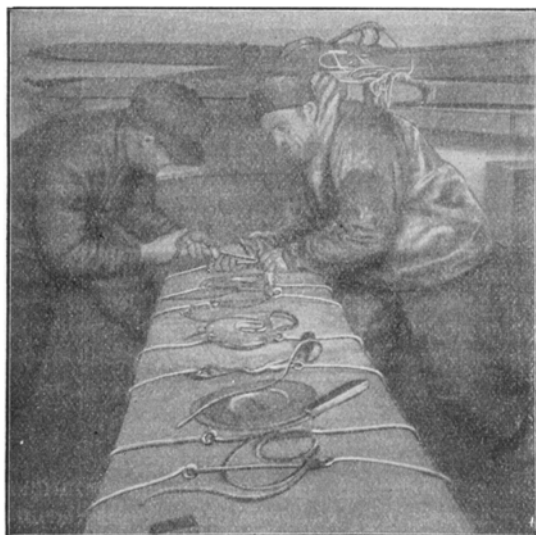
The mountains to the south of the Ross Sea, which Shackleton named the Commonwealth Range, are continued in Prince Olav's Mountains, to the south-west of which Amundsen ascended to the plateau by the Axel Heiberg glacier (see map at end). Amundsen made the most important discovery that the main line of peaks from there is continued not towards Graham Land, but towards Coats Land, in the range named after Queen Maud, while in about 86° S., 160° W., another range strikes away to the north-east: this bears no name on Amundsen's map, but in the text it is called Carmen Land. It was definitely established from 86° to 84° S., and on the return journey, when the party was in $81^{\circ} 20'$ S. they saw, to the south-east, high bare land running north-east and south-west with "two lofty white summits to the south-east, probably in about 82° S. Although what we have seen apparently justifies us in concluding that Carmen Land extends from 86° S. to this position—about $81^{\circ} 30'$ S.—and possibly further to the north-east, I have not ventured to lay it down thus on the map. I have contented myself with giving the name of Carmen Land to the land between 86° and 84° and have called the rest 'Appearance of Land.'" Such caution is admirable, but it will likely enough result in some explorer in the future taking unto himself the credit for the discovery of this land. "Appearance of Land" is only marked between 81° and 82° S.: Amundsen's chart is left blank between 82° and 84° S.

A party under Lieutenant Prestrud was sent to examine Edward Land since the *Terra Nova* had failed to land a party there the previous summer. The Alexandra Mountains of Scott were seen, snow-clad from end to end, and Scott's Nunatak (1700 feet) was climbed. Here were obtained the first rock specimens known from Edward Land, and they prove to be of the highest importance. They consist of granitic rocks and crystalline schists, and are identical with those brought by the southern party from Mount Betty beside Axel Heiberg glacier in 85° S. Moreover, they agree so closely with the rocks of South Victoria Land that we can now say that an identity of structure has been established all round the Ross Barrier. Edward Land undoubtedly seems to belong to the plateau formation of Victoria Land, and the presumption grows in strength that the Ross Sea is a rift valley. This exploration of Edward Land was, of course, not exhaustive, and we hope that Captain Scott will extend his earlier discoveries there, but it may be said now, with fair certainty, that the folded ranges of Graham Land do not reach the Ross Sea, and that the Ross Sea is a great bight and not—if indeed any one ever seriously believed so—the end of a transcontinental strait.

In addition to these geographical discoveries the Norwegian South Polar Expedition obtained an important series of hourly meteorological observations at their winter quarters from April 1911 to January 1912. These will enhance the value of Captain Scott's more extended observations to the west. The meteorological equipment was not as complete

as it might have been, but every possible care was taken over the observations, and several of the party were practised observers.

The only other scientific work consisted of an oceanographical cruise of the *Fram* in South Atlantic. During July and August 1911, Captain Nilsen took temperatures and salinities at sixty stations between 15° and 35° S. from South America to Africa and back. At nearly all the stations the observations were taken at twelve depths down to 545 fathoms. They are discussed in an appendix to the book. Valuable as they are, we feel it somewhat disappointing that a ship like the *Fram* did not do this work in higher southern latitudes in the South Atlantic where the work is even more required, and where the ordinarily con-



Packing sledges in the snow-house.

structed ship could not work with the same safety and success as the *Fram*.

Other appendices deal with the construction of the *Fram*, by Commodore Christian Blom, and the astronomical observations taken at the Pole.

Some criticism has been levelled at Captain Amundsen for competing with Captain Scott for the Pole. It would serve no purpose to discuss that matter in these pages, and we consider that criticism most unfounded, and certain to be little to the liking of Captain Scott himself. Writing of the British expedition, Captain Amundsen says, "Our preparations were entirely different, and I doubt whether Captain Scott, with his great knowledge of Antarctic exploration, would have departed in any point from the experience he had gained and altered his equipment in accordance with that which I found it best to employ. For I came far short of Scott both in experience and means." There is one

deed in the relationships of these two expeditions which is not recorded in these volumes, and speaks much for the goodwill of Captain Amundsen towards the British expedition. When the *Fram* was lying in the Bay of Whales in February 1911, unloading stores for winter quarters, the *Terra Nova* arrived from the east after failing to effect a landing on the difficult shores of Edward Land. Captain Amundsen suggested to Lieutenant Pennell, the commander of the *Terra Nova*, that Lieutenant Campbell and his party should land on the Barrier, and winter near the Norwegians, so that the British party could carry out their original plan of exploring Edward Land. In this case Captain Amundsen would not have sent a party eastward, but would have left Edward Land entirely to Lieutenant Campbell and his men.

To Sir Ernest Shackleton Captain Amundsen pays many tributes. "The name has a brisk sound. At its mere mention we see before us a man of indomitable will and boundless courage. He has shown us what the will and energy of a single man can perform." "Shackleton's exploit is the most brilliant incident in the history of Antarctic exploration." When they reached $88^{\circ} 23' S.$, Shackleton's farthest, we read, "We did not pass that spot without according our highest tribute of admiration to the man, who—together with his gallant companions—had planted his country's flag so infinitely nearer to the goal than any of his precursors."

Captain Amundsen writes well, in a straightforward style devoid of any affectations. The chapter on the winter life at *Framheim* is a fine piece of vivid writing (see illustration). We have seldom read a book of travel in which the personal note is less sounded; every one gets his due share of praise and notice, so that we make the acquaintance of all the expedition as we read the pages, and when we close the book we feel the richer for having met a band of remarkable men. The book will become the classic of Antarctic travel.

There is a brief preface by Dr. Fridtjof Nansen, and several chapters by Captain Th. Nilsen on the voyage of the *Fram*. The index is not perfect, and the maps are too meagre for so important a work. The translator's work is well done. The book is well illustrated and we are indebted to the publisher for the three illustrations in this issue and for the map.

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