

FROM A LOCAL WRITER.

SCOTT'S LAST EXPEDITION TO THE POLE.

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By ANGUS BUCHAN.

UNDERNEATH will be found a very interesting article by a young local resident who writes under the name of Angus Buchan.

In it he tells in a concise manner the story of Scott's expedition to the Pole which ended in the famous explorer and several of his men perishing.

That the article should appear to-day is very appropriate, as it is 25 years this week-end since these brave men perished.

Start here and read down this column then the one alongside

"For the Journey is ended, and the Summit is Reached, and the Barriers Fall."

THIS is the epitaph inscribed on a fountain erected and given to the care of the people of Glen Prosen, in memory of Captain Robert Falcon Scott and Dr Edward Adrian Wilson, who loved that glen.

It is exactly 25 years since there took place an event that will forever illumine the annals of adventure and heroism; an event that robbed Britain of five illustrious sons, at the same time giving them immortality and a prominent place among those heroes whose courage has brought renown to their country.

On the first day of June, 1910, the "Terra Nova," one of the last of the old wooden whalers and the best vessel at the disposal of the expedition, sailed from the South-West India docks in command, his first, of Lieutenant E. R. Evans, on the first stage of the voyage which led her eventually to Port Chalmers, in New Zealand. Final preparations were there completed. On the 20th of November the "Terra Nova, R.Y.S." slipped her moorings for the last time and, with the finest complement of sailors and scientists ever carried aboard ship, set sail for Polar seas.

Even from the very start the Expedition experienced bad luck, for the ship ran into a severe storm a few days out of port. For two days it was a case of all hands to the pumps, scientist labouring with sailor to save the heavily overloaded ship. For some time it was touch and go, but they won through, and were soon among the pack ice. Progress was slow, but on New Year's Eve land was sighted. Unfortunately a heavy swell prevented their effecting a landing at Cape Crozier, so the order was given to proceed west, and on the fourth day of January, 1911 the expedition set foot on Cape Evans in M'Murdo Sound. There followed a week of hard work, and in that time all the necessary stores were landed. A few more days and the hut was built that was to accommodate the explorers and their equipment.

Towards the end of January preparations were made for setting out on the depot journey, the object of which was to dump a large supply of stores, as a reserve for the returning Polar party, at a point 130 miles south of Hut Point. Again the expedition were ill-favoured with bad luck, for a blizzard forced them to locate the depot at a point thirty miles short of their original objective, a fact that is not without significance as later events only too painfully proved.

Returning from their work of depot laying, the party detailed for that work were met at Safety Point with the startling news that Roald Amundsen had arrived in the Bay of Whales bent on securing Polar honours for his country. Scott was exceedingly surprised that his rival's preparations were so far advanced, although it had earlier been known that the attempt would be made, but as he himself said, " . . . the proper, as well as the wiser, course, is for us to proceed exactly as though this had not happened. To go forward and do our best for the honour of the country without fear or panic."

But it was yet too early for the attempt to be made on the Pole, and the succeeding months were spent in exploration and research. Evans proceeded to Safety Camp to make a small depot and to generally reconnoitre, while Wilson, Cherry-Garrard, and Bowers set off for Cape Crozier on what Wilson described as "the weirdest bird-nesting expedition that has been or ever will be," and which Scott, when given the details of the adventure on their return, termed "the hardest journey that ever was made." Nevertheless much valuable information was gained relating to the life history of the Emperor Penguin, the nearest approach to a primitive form of a bird, and to winter conditions at that extremity of the Barrier.

By 17th October, the personnel of the Polar party was known, and on the 24th of that month Lieutenant Evans, with three companions, set off with the two motor sledges. These did not justify Captain Scott's expectations of them, as both petered out, the furthest distance reached being a point only a mile and a half beyond Corner Camp. Thence the members of the motor party went on foot dragging a loaded sledge, to arrive at One Ton Depot on 9th November. There they took on a further load, then for a week more continued the journey south. Arrived at latitude 80½ degrees, the party halted, depoted, and prepared to await the arrival of Scott. A whole week passed before he did so, and to pass the time they built a huge cairn, naming it Mount Hooper after the youngest member of the motor party.

Meanwhile Scott and his party had made a start from Cape Evans on 1st November. From the very first they experienced weather conditions that had never been expected. With clouded skies overhead and with underfoot a surface in which the ponies sank to their fetlocks, the Polar party struggled on in the teeth of mist and snowdrift, in a maze of whirling snowflakes. By the time they had reached Shambles Camp, where the last of the ponies was shot on the 9th of December, they had encountered no less than five blizzards with consequent delays, the last, while within a day's march of the Beardmore Glacier, covering a period of four days, yet another link in the chain of misfortunes that had tragic repercussions.

On the 11th, Meares and Dimitri, the Russian dog boy, set off with the dogs on the return journey to the base. The remaining twelve explorers were divided into three parties of four men each, and thus constituted pushed on south, climbing up the Beardmore Glacier where the deep, soft snow made pulling very hard.

The first supporting party, comprising Cherry-Garrard, Atkinson, Wright, and Keohane, began the return journey on the 22nd, finally reaching Cape Evans on the 29th of January, five weeks after leaving their comrades.

The two remaining parties pressed southward, maintaining an average of 15 miles a day until, on the 3rd of January, Scott entered Evan's tent while encamped for the night and told him that he was taking his own party to the Pole, with the addition of Bowers from Evan's team. Lieutenant Evans was naturally disappointed on learning that he was not to be included in the final Polar party, but had hardly expected that he would, as both Lashly and he had had a long and tiring drag from Cape Evans.

On the morrow, Evans, Crean, and Lashly, the members of the last supporting party, accompanied their comrades south for a short distance, then, as all was going well, they halted, shook hands all round for the last time, and wishing the others God-speed, set off on the homeward journey. Several times

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they looked back at the five tiny black specks that soon passed out of sight, the last to see the gallant adventurers alive.

Nor was the Polar party alone in experiencing trouble, for the returning party encountered a blizzard three days after leaving Scott, a blizzard that lasted three days. Yet they made good progress until they again reached the Beardmore Glacier, where the prevailing conditions presented almost unsurmountable difficulties. Gradually they worked their way over the icefalls, having elected to go right over rather than around them, which would have entailed a loss of three days. How difficult it was for them to avoid slipping into one of the many chasms and crevasses with their heavily-loaded sledge, but after much labour and many hairbreadth escapes, they at last won through to the comparatively smooth and easy surface of the Great Ice Barrier. Then signs appeared on Lieutenant Evans to show that he was suffering from scurvy. For hundreds of miles he trudged on with his companions, with stiffening knee joints, with ulcerated gums and loose teeth, suffering from hemorrhage, till a day came when he fainted and was unable to take a step further. His two companions, Crean and Lashly, strapped him on to the sledge, and slowly, very slowly, progress was made northward, till a blizzard came on when they still were many miles from home. Try as they would, the sledge, with its heavy load, refused to move. Crean and Lashly pitched their tent and put their sick companion inside ("I thought I was being put into my grave," he wrote later), and held a discussion outside as to what should be done. Crean had not done as hard work as his two companions had been called upon to do, so he volunteered to go off alone in search of help. With a few biscuits and a stick of chocolate he started off on the 35 miles' journey that separated them from Hut Point, first bidding Evans good-bye. For two days they waited, and had almost given up all hope of success when they heard the baying of dogs. Lashly sprang to his feet, and looking out of the tent saw the Siberian sledge dogs. They were saved. Crean had plodded through these awful snows for 18 hours until he reached Hut Point, there to tell Atkinson and Dimitri of the plight of his companions. Later, for their conspicuous gallantry, Crean and Lashly were awarded the Albert Medal.

While the last supporting party were struggling home, the Polar party was pushing on towards the Pole. They made fairly good progress, but the ascent of the Beardmore Glacier had taken a lot out of them, and they were beginning to feel the strain of their tiring journey. Still they plodded on until the fateful day that sounded the death-knell of their hopes and aspirations, the 16th of January. On that day the keen eyes of Bowers sighted a cairn of snow and a black speck which, on their nearer approach, they discovered to be a black flag attached to a sledge runner, awful proof that they had been forestalled, that Amundsen had beaten them in the race to the Pole. It was a terrific disappointment but they bore it well.

Next day they reached the Pole, and camped. On the day after, the 18th, they took observations and came to the conclusion that they were three and a half miles from the real location of the Pole, one mile beyond and three to the right. In that direction Bowers saw what appeared to be a cairn or a tent. They made their way towards this object and found the camp of the five Norwegians, led by Amundsen, who had reached the Pole exactly a month before. Inside the tent, over which flew the flag of Norway, was a letter addressed to Scott, giving details of the arrival of their rivals, and asking him to forward to its destination another letter addressed to King Haakon.

At lunch time Scott's party camped, built a cairn, put up the Queen Mother's flag and their personal flags, and took photographs. After taking further sights, they went a further half-mile in a south-easterly direction, there planting the Union Jack to mark the final location of the Pole. About half-a-mile from their Pole camp they had passed the sledge runner with a black flag attached to it which indicated the Norwegians' final mark. In all that waste of snow only a distance of half-a-mile lay between the two marks left respectively by the Norwegians and the Britons, to point the location of the South Pole according to their observations and calculations.

January the 19th. Good-bye to their day-dreams, backs to the Pole, and a journey of 800 miles before them. For a few days, though the going was hard, good progress was made, then again they encountered a blizzard which hindered them a good deal. P.O. Evans was showing signs of severe frost-bite, and had, before the Pole was reached, already begun to show signs that the long pull had weakened him considerably.

The month of February was a very trying time; indeed, it was the beginning of the end. Evans had had frostbite, Oates' feet were beginning to feel the cold intensely, Wilson strained a tendon in his leg and was lame, and in addition suffered from snow blindness owing to his efforts to capture the rare beauty of the Antarctic with paint-brush and pencil.

Occasional blizzards had made the picking up of cairns on the Plateau a difficult business, but the descent of the Beardmore tried them severely. There they struck bad patches of ice slopes and icefalls, and Scott and Evans fell heavily, the former damaging his shoulder, the latter striking his head. On they plodded, tired but determined men, but their physical condition was at a low ebb.

Evans began to lag behind his companions. On the 17th day of February he fell behind so far that Scott became alarmed, and all four retraced their steps to find poor Evans on his hands and knees on the ground, his clothing disarranged, his hands uncovered, and a wild look in his eyes. Asked what had happened, he replied simply that he thought he must have fainted. Helped to his feet, he could but stagger a few steps, so was carried to the tent on the sledge in a comatose condition. That night he died, his death accelerated by the blow he had received on the head. Scott and his companions waited by the body of their comrades for two hours, then on to the next depot.

The loss of their companion depressed the four explorers considerably; the surface over which they were dragging was, as Scott noted in his diary, "like pulling over desert sand"; the cold had become more severe; all were suffering to a great degree from the effects of their arduous journey.

Early in March, Oates disclosed the bad condition of his feet. Steadily they grew worse, his inability handicapping the progress of his companions severely. To his query as

to what it would be best for him to do, Wilson could only reply, "Slog on, just slog on." Gradually he became worse. Without him to delay them, Scott, Wilson, and Bowers would stand a better chance of winning through to safety. In vain he asked that he be left alone in his sleeping-bag. A night came when he said, before falling asleep, "I hope I do not awaken." Next morning, the 16th of March, he awoke; it was the eve of his birthday. Outside a blizzard was raging. He got up, turned to the others, and said, "I am just going out and may be some time," then, letting the flap of the tent fall back into place, walked out to meet a gallant death.

On the 19th of March, Scott and his two companions got within 11 miles of One Ton Depot. Next day the blizzard started which was to last for nine days. They were left with food for two days. Wilson and Bowers prepared to set off for the depot in search of food—Scott, with severely frostbitten feet, lay helpless in the tent—but the blizzard was too much for them and they could not start. So they lay for a whole week waiting for the weather to clear, or, as indeed so happened, for death.

At Hut Point preparation had been made for sending out the dog teams to speed the returning Polar party home-wards. Cherry-Garrard and Dimitri arrived at One Ton Depot on the 4th of March, when a blizzard prevented their further progress, so they remained there until the 10th, then, having satisfied themselves that there was a month's supply of food at the depot, returned to Hut Point.

On the 26th of the month, Atkinson, fearing for the safety of Scott's party, set off to succour them, but the cold was so intense that he and his companion, Keohane, could only get as far as Corner Camp. There they deposited a further week's supply of food. By this time Atkinson was convinced that the Polar party had perished, and as a matter of fact Scott's last diary entry was made before Atkinson reached the camp. He returned to the Hut utterly worn out. All hope of rescuing Scott and his companions was then abandoned.

Six months later the search party set out to look for the lost explorers, and on the 12th of November found what they were seeking. Scott's tent, snowed up and looking like a cairn, pitched truly as ever, a little to the west ward of the line of cairns. Inside lay the three gallant heroes, Wilson and Bowers in the attitude of sleep, with their sleeping-bags over their heads; Scott, who had died later, with the flap of his sleeping bag thrown back and his coat open. They had died peacefully.

Having recovered the diaries, records, letters and specimens, the members of the search party, removing the bamboo support of the tent, let it cover them, then built a huge cairn over the grave, on which was surmounted a rough cross made from a pair of skis. On either side of the cairn a sledge, up-ended, was firmly fixed in the snow. Between the eastern sledge and the cairn a bamboo was placed with a metal cylinder in it containing a record signed by all members of the party to the effect that the Polar party had attained the South Pole but that all had perished on the journey back.

The search was continued south for 20 miles in the hope of finding the body of Oates, but in the intervening months the kindly snow had given him a fitting burial. As near as could be judged, a cairn was erected at the place where the brave soldier had so willingly walked to his death, and this record left, "Hereabouts died a very gallant gentleman, Captain L. E. G. Oates, of the Inniskilling Dragoons. In March, 1912, returning from the Pole, he walked willingly to his death in a blizzard, to try and save his comrades beset by hardships. This note is left by the Relief Expedition of 1912."

On the 18th of January, 1913, the "Terra Nova," returning from New Zealand to pick up Scott's Polar party, hove in sight of Cape Evans. Aboard, preparations were being made for a great banquet to welcome the explorers, the wardroom was decorated, letters from home and all manner of luxury set in readiness. The ship drew near to the shore, and Lieutenant Evans shouted to the members of the shore party who came running to meet them, "Is everything well?" Campbell, after a moment's hesitation, shouted in reply, "The Southern Party reached the South Pole on the 17th of January last year, but were all lost on the return journey." For a moment there was a great silence broken by the rattle of the anchor chain as it fell with a splash in the sea.

The whole story of the tragedy was told to the ship's company. The flags were lowered from the masthead. The rattle of plates and cutlery was heard as the steward put away the table dressings no longer required.

On 20th January, Dr Atkinson, with a party of seven, set off to the summit of Observation Hill, overlooking the Great Ice Barrier. There was planted a cross made of Australian jarrah wood, nine feet high, on which was inscribed:—"In Memoriam, Capt. R. F. Scott, R.N.; Dr E. A. Wilson; Capt. L. E. G. Oates, Ins. Drgs.; Lt. H. R. Bowers, R.I.M.; Petty Officer E. Evans, R.N., who died on their return from the Pole, March, 1912. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

Then, on the 26th, the "Terra Nova" left the inhospitable shores of the great Antarctic Continent, bringing back to civilisation a Message that will ring through the ages for ever. "Had we lived, I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance, and courage of my companions which would have stirred the heart of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale."