

“We look for light from within”: Shackleton’s Indomitable Spirit

“For scientific discovery, give me Scott; for speed and efficiency of travel, give me Amundsen; but when you are in a hopeless situation, when you are seeing no way out, get down on your knees and pray for Shackleton.”

— Raymond Priestley

Shackleton—his name defines the “Heroic Age of Antarctica Exploration.” Setting out to be the first to the South Pole and later the first to cross the frozen continent, Ernest Shackleton failed. Sent home early from Robert F. Scott’s *Discovery* expedition, seven years later turning back less than 100 miles from the South Pole to save his men from certain death, and then in 1914 suffering disaster at the start of the *Endurance* expedition as his ship was trapped and crushed by ice, he seems an unlikely hero whose deeds would endure to this day.

But leadership, courage, wisdom, trust, empathy, and strength define the man. Shackleton’s spirit continues to inspire in the 100th year after the rescue of the *Endurance* crew from Elephant Island.

This exhibit is a learning collaboration between the Rauner Special Collections Library and “Pole to Pole,” an environmental studies course taught by Ross Virginia examining climate change in the polar regions through the lens of history, exploration and science. Fifty-one Dartmouth students shared their research to produce this exhibit exploring Shackleton and the Antarctica of his time.

Discovery: Keeping Spirits Afloat

In 1901, the first British Antarctic expedition in sixty years commenced aboard the *Discovery*, a newly-constructed vessel designed specifically for this trip. Commanded by the promising young naval officer Captain Robert Falcon Scott, the expedition led the vanguard in Britain's resurgent enthusiasm for polar exploration. Many of the officers who accompanied Scott on this inaugural voyage would later become household names for polar exploration, including a young Ernest Shackleton, a Merchant Navy officer at the time. Despite initial excitement about the mission, the men's inexperience with cold weather conditions resulted in a series of discouraging setbacks. In the midst of this, Shackleton was charged with the task of planning activities and publications that would help the men stay positive about the mission. His concern for his fellow crewmen and their mental health stayed with him when he led his own expeditions deep into the heart of the southern continent.

Robert Falcon Scott. *The Voyage of the Discovery*. London: Smith, Elder, 1905.
Stef G850 1901 .D6 (vol. 1 frontispiece, title page)

In his painting of the expedition ship *Discovery*, Edward Wilson, the expedition's junior surgeon, zoologist, and de facto artist, captured the sense of excitement that many of the crew felt upon their departure for Antarctica.

Albert Armitage. *Two Years in the Antarctic*. London: E. Arnold 1905.
Stef G850 1901 .D62 (photos opposite page 146)

Armitage was the second-in-command of the *Discovery* expedition and his account of the voyage appeared soon after the official version written by Scott. Here, Armitage includes images of the crewmen pulling their own sledges. Of particular note are the members of the Southern Sledge party: Scott, Wilson, and Shackleton. During this foray, all three men became seriously ill and barely survived the trip back to the ship.

Louis Bernacci. *Saga of the "Discovery."* London: Blackie and Son, 1938.
Stef G870 .B43: Endpapers map

This map of Antarctica displays the vastness of the continent that Scott and his expedition hoped to explore and document. The crew of the *Discovery* first landed on a peninsula at the eastern side of the Ross Sea, but soon crossed westward to the McMurdo Sound, where they set up winter quarters at its southernmost point.

Royal Terror Theatre. Dishcover Minstrel Troupe Program. August 6, 1902.
Stef PN6120 .N4 R693 1902

The blatant racism of this performance during the expedition, sanctioned by Shackleton to raise morale, shatters the romantic view of the heroic age of polar exploration. It illustrates the extent to which the isolated explorers represented a microcosm of larger societal norms, both good and bad.

South Polar Times. London: Smith, Elder, 1907-14.
G850 1901 .D7 (vols 1 Title page)

The *South Polar Times* was issued monthly during the expedition's residence in winter quarters from April to August of 1902 and 1903. Shackleton saw the publication as a way to keep the men's spirits up during the long tedious days of waiting for spring. This image by Edward Wilson depicts three men sledging through the Antarctic.

Photograph from Scott's Terra Nova Expedition, 1910-1913.
Stef MSS 238, Box 5, Folder 13 (Penguins and horses)

One of the chief criticisms of the *Discovery* expedition was that Scott failed to understand how to use his sled dogs and skis effectively. Although he had followed the advice of famous explorer Fridtjof Nansen and purchased dogs to bring on the expedition, he refused to hire an expert dog-handler. The dogs died and the men had to pull the sledges themselves. On his next Antarctic expedition, Scott used ponies that fared no better than the dogs; he paid for this miscalculation with his life.

Antarctic Days

It is hard to imagine how deeply polar exploration penetrated the popular imagination during its heroic age. The public followed adventures in northern and southern regions as closely as they watched the space race in the 1960s or the ever-changing technological frontier of today. At its most basic level, the British Antarctic Expedition (1907-09), or *Nimrod* expedition, was a failure. It did not achieve its main objective to reach the South Pole, but Shackleton's decision to turn back only ninety-seven miles from the pole to ensure the safety of his men made him a national hero.

The expedition garnered ink in popular magazines, and inspired expensive, limited editions for the wealthy. It even produced the first book printed and published on the Antarctic continent.

Pearson's Magazine. Vol. 28, No. 165 (September 1909).
Stef MSS-242, Box 21, folder 70

The *Nimrod* expedition captured the popular imagination and quickly became a branding opportunity. *Pearson's Magazine* devoted nearly half an issue to the expedition, and advertisers plugged their products in association with these new national heroes.

Bull, Alfred Samuel. *Diary from 1907-1909 British Antarctic Expedition*.
Stef MSS-272 (First page)

The excitement surrounding the departure of the *Nimrod* is palpable in this diary kept by a deckhand. He chronicled the departure celebration from New Zealand: “[They] gave us their hearty cheers and then their band played the ‘Girl I left Behind Me.’ We then gave three cheers for the people.”

Shackleton, Ernest, et al. *Aurora Australis*. Antarctica: British Antarctic Expedition, 1908.
Stef G850 1907 .A8

Aurora Australis is the first book printed on the Antarctic continent. Our copy was bound using an oatmeal crate from the expedition's provisions. Full of poems, artwork, stories, and casual reports, it provides a window into the crew's collective psyche.

Murray, James, and George Marston, illus. *Antarctic Days: Sketches of the Homely Side of Polar Life by Two of Shackleton's Men*. London: Andrew Melrose, 1913.
Stef G850 1907 .M8 (Page 171)

This "Edition de Luxe" of *Antarctic Days* stressed daily life during the *Nimrod* expedition. It is a testimony to the public's continued fascination with all aspects of polar exploration.

The Antarctic Book: Winter Quarters, 1907-1909. London: W. Heinemann, 1909.
Stef G850 1907 .A322 (signature page)

The Antarctic Book was printed as a limited edition after the *Nimrod's* return. It featured a poem by Ernest Shackleton and another by Douglas Mawson as well as the signature of every member of the shore party. Part commemoration, part hagiography, the book was created as a special keepsake for wealthy potential patrons of future expeditions.

Endurance

After Amundson reached the South Pole just weeks before Scott, the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition (1914-1917), headed by Ernest Shackleton, set out to cross the Antarctic continent by land. Once again, Shackleton failed, but he successfully kept his party alive after natural disasters derailed the expedition. The group's ship the *Endurance* became trapped in ice and sank, leaving the men to escape in three lifeboats to the uninhabited Elephant Island. From there, six men aboard the lifeboat *James Caird*, captained by Shackleton, set out for South Georgia Island, a whaling outpost. After a harrowing journey, the men reached South Georgia Island and a full-scale rescue mission was launched to retrieve the remainder of the party.

On the other side of Antarctica, the *Aurora* was supposed to lay supplies for the men crossing the continent, but the ship broke its moorings and drifted away with most of the party's supplies. The men faced starvation and scurvy and three died, but they continued to lay supply depots, ignorant of the *Endurance's* own tragedy. They were rescued five months after the *Endurance's* crew

The *Endurance* expedition tested the limits of human endurance. Today, it is remembered as Shackleton's greatest moment; his leadership saved the lives of all the men who sailed on the *Endurance*.

Thomas Orde-Lees. *Diary, 1915 March 24-1916 April 16*.
Stef MSS-185 (life boat inserts, tilting ship image)

Thomas Orde-Lees served as the expedition's storekeeper, a precarious position once the men began to go hungry. In this diary he tracked the party's supplies and recorded his personal experiences. He sketched this image as ice slowly crushed the *Endurance* -- with one of the crew members walking "as if he were trying to walk a tightrope." On the loose pages, Orde-Lees worked out the packing arrangements and supply lists for the lifeboats.

Ernest Shackleton. *South: the story of Shackleton's last expedition, 1914-1917*. London: William Heinemann 1920.
Stef G850 1914 .S5 (cover)

Shackleton wrote *South* when he returned to England, outlining the expedition's difficulties and his method of leadership. It would not be Shackleton's last expedition; he died in 1922 on South Georgia Island during another attempted trip to the Antarctic.

Frank Worsley. *Endurance: An Epic of Polar Adventure*. New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931.
Stef G850 1914 .W6 (photo opposite page 70 -- tilting boat)

The expedition's photographer Frank Hurley captured the *Endurance* tilting in the ice and slowly being dragged underwater. Though the men on the expedition were starving, they sacrificed food to preserve Hurley's photographs and negatives.

Alfred Lansing. *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Journey*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1959.
Stef G850 1914 .L3 (spread after page 204 showing loading Caird)

These photographs capture the rough conditions on Elephant Island, and the solemnity with which the abandoned men faced their fate. If Shackleton did not reach South Georgia Island, they would be doomed to death by starvation.

Frank Hurley. *Shackleton's Argonauts: A Saga of the Antarctic Ice-Packs*. London: Angus and Robertson, 1956.
Stef G850 1914 .H87 (End papers map)

This map traces the travails of the men in Shackleton's *Endurance* party: the sinking of the *Endurance*, the trek to Elephant Island, and the 700-mile trip in the lifeboat to South Georgia Island.