

SIR ERNEST HENRY SHACKLETON

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Ernest Henry Shackleton, born in Kilkea House, County Kildare in Ireland, on 15 February 1874, was the son of a physician. His ancestry was mixed, from Ireland and Yorkshire; both sides had significant agricultural traditions. His friend and first biographer, Hugh Robert Mill, suggested that this may account for the mingling of caution, perseverance, reckless courage, and strong idealism, which were his leading characteristics. After education in Ireland he was sent to Dulwich College in London and thence went to sea in the mercantile marine aboard the sailing ship *Houghton Tower* in 1890.

Desire for adventure, not unmixed with hope of fame, led him to apply successfully for a post with the British National Antarctic Expedition led by Captain Robert Scott aboard *Discovery*, a vessel specially built for the purpose. He distinguished himself during the first part of the expedition and was a member of the exploratory party led by Scott and accompanied by Dr Edward Wilson, which reached a farthest south position of 82·28°S on 30 December 1902. Incipient scurvy, however, led to his early return, aboard *Morning*, after one Antarctic winter. This, by coincidence, allowed him to advise concerning the rescue of Otto Nordenskjöld's *Antarctic* (1901-03) expedition from Sweden. For service on Captain Scott's expedition he was awarded the Polar Medal in silver with a clasp for Antarctic service 1902-03. His later expeditions resulted in two more clasps (1907-09 and 1914-16).

The *Discovery* expedition gave him a passion for Antarctica. After his marriage in 1904, a period as Secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and an attempt at entering politics, he announced plans for leading an Antarctic expedition. In August 1907 he sailed aboard a converted Arctic whaling vessel, *Nimrod*, for the Ross Sea. There, after attempts to find a site in the vicinity of the Bay of Whales, he deployed a winter hut at Cape Royds on Ross Island, February 1908. This expedition was productive in much exploration and research: the position of the South Magnetic Pole was reached, the volcano Mount Erebus climbed (3794 m elevation), and several scientific programmes undertaken. Shackleton led a journey intending to reach the South Pole. The party of four men discovered and climbed the Beardmore Glacier then set out across the polar plateau. A farthest south was reached on 9 January 1909 at 88·38°S (180 km from the South Pole). Here Shackleton determined that the South Pole could be reached but that food and fuel were insufficient to enable the party to return; thus he retreated. His calculations were proven correct; the party barely managed to survive the return journey. On his return to Britain he was knighted and received several other British and foreign awards.

Captain Scott continued this route, which he started and Shackleton extended, to reach the South Pole on 17 January 1912. This was 33 days after Roald Amundsen's Norwegian expedition had departed from the Pole. Scott, with the four other men of his polar party, perished during the return journey.

Shackleton then began to plan an even more ambitious expedition; the crossing of Antarctica. This was to involve two parties aboard two vessels: *Endurance* in the Weddell Sea which he led and *Aurora* in the Ross Sea led by Æneas Mackintosh. The expedition left London in August 1914. Both vessels encountered serious difficulties in 1915, a year with exceptional pack-ice in the Southern Ocean. *Endurance* reached South Georgia, which Shackleton referred to as the 'Gateway to the Antarctic'. While waiting at Grytviken a measured mile and beacons for aligning ships' compasses were built for the whalers. The former started at a cross on Hope Point.

Thence *Endurance* continued into the Weddell Sea where she became beset, drifted northwards, was abandoned on 27 October, then ultimately crushed by the ice and foundered on 21 November 1915. Her complement of 28 men, crossing the pack ice and using lifeboats, eventually reached the

isolated and inhospitable Elephant Island on 15 April 1916, whence Shackleton began to organize an amazing rescue. *James Caird*, an 8·3 m long modified whale-boat, with six men aboard, was used to reach South Georgia from where the first of five rescue attempts was dispatched aboard *Southern Sky*. This was unable to penetrate the pack-ice so Shackleton sailed to the Falkland Islands to make a second attempt which was also unsuccessful. Then he made two more attempts from Punta Arenas, Chile, that aboard *Emma* failed, but the *Yelcho* voyage, commanded by Captain Luis Pardo, was successful. On 30 August 1916 the 22 *Endurance* men, commanded by Frank Wild during his sixth Antarctic winter, were rescued from Elephant Island and conveyed to Punta Arenas. The fifth rescue attempt, aboard *Discovery*, heard the good news when it reached Montevideo. The Chilean navy and a Norwegian vessel were also preparing to assist.

The *Aurora* party was less successful; their vessel was blown out during a blizzard on 6 May 1915, caught drifting in the pack-ice, and eventually reached New Zealand with substantial damage on 3 April 1916. The stranded land party, with minimal supplies, had laid depots for the expected but nonexistent, crossing party. The 10 men wintered at Cape Evans in 1915 and were divided between there and Hut Point during the 1916 winter. Three of the six Hut Point men died before the survivors united at Cape Evans. These seven men were not rescued until 10 January 1917 by the repaired *Aurora* with Shackleton aboard. It was not until 1958 that a traverse over Antarctica, the Commonwealth Trans-Antarctic Expedition, such as planned by Shackleton, was accomplished.

Shackleton was involved in various Arctic operations during the remainder of the World War I, particularly in the Arctic around the Murmansk region. This, with his polar interests and the need for a survey of part of the Canadian Arctic, led to him making arrangements for an expedition to the northern islands of the Canadian Arctic archipelago aboard *Quest*, a Norwegian sealing vessel. At a late stage there was a change of government in Canada, which led to the cancellation of the Arctic survey. This left Shackleton with an almost complete polar expedition and nowhere to go. The situation was resolved by a private contributor; thus the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition departed from London for the Antarctic in September 1921.

The objects were multiple, including investigation of several peri-Antarctic islands. *Quest* made a slow journey south owing to mechanical problems. South Georgia was reached on 4 January 1922. Early in the morning of 5 January Shackleton died of a heart attack aboard *Quest* moored in King Edward Cove. The second in command, Frank Wild, decided that Shackleton's order in these circumstances would have been to proceed; thus, in as far as practicable, the expedition continued its exploratory and scientific programme. The cross at Hope Point was made into a memorial by his ship-mates.

Shackleton's body was conveyed from South Georgia to Montevideo, Uruguay, while cable networks transmitted the news to the rest of the world. His widow was of the opinion that it was most appropriate that he be buried in the Antarctic, the site of his greatest endeavours. Accordingly his body was returned to South Georgia, with full military honours, to be interred in the whalers' and sealers' cemetery at King Edward Cove on the south side opposite his memorial cross. In 1928 a granite monument was erected over his grave and unveiled by the Governor of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies, Sir Arnold Hodson. The monument bore the words from Robert Browning; *I hold that a man should strive to the uttermost for his life's set prize.*

Sir Ernest Shackleton's major place in the history of Antarctic exploration is assured by his involvement in four major expeditions, three of which he led. As well as his grave and memorial on South Georgia his statue in London (outside the Royal Geographical Society), the Shackleton Memorial Library of the Scott Polar Research Institute, the new British Antarctic Survey ship *Ernest Shackleton*, eleven Antarctic place-names, the preserved *James Caird* and active James Caird Society in Dulwich College, a plaque in Dublin, displays and a statue in Athy, Shackleton scholarships and schools, and a vast amount of maps and literature, perpetuate his memory. A memorial and display in Punta Arenas reinforce his links with that city in particular, and with Chile in general. with the prow of *Yelcho* and a statue of Captain Pardo form a part.