

# **SIR ERNEST SHACKLETON AND THE “NIMROD”**

**Presenter & Author Bruce Rosenberg 2006**

**Shackleton was a failure.**

**Everything he set out to do failed.**

**But he was a glorious failure in the very best of British heroism- like Gallipoli and Dunkirk.**

**He was a man who fought against enormous odds and never gave in.**

**He always put his men first.**

**He was a hero.**

**He went four times to the Antarctic:**

**On Scott’s first expedition. That was in 1901.**

**On his own expedition in 1907 in the ship “Nimrod”,**

**His voyage in the doomed “Endurance” and the subsequent famous boat journey to rescue all his men,**

**And, in 1922, his voyage in the “Quest” during which he died of heart failure at the age of 48.**

**Now, I hope that you will not be disappointed or feel that you are here under false pretences this afternoon when I tell you that I am not going to relate the story of the “Endurance”. It is such a huge topic, together with the almost unknown concurrent story of the ill-fated Ross Sea Party, that it could be the subject of another, or even two other lectures.**

**So today I’m going to draw your attention to the expedition of the “Nimrod” when Shackleton got within 97 miles of the Pole.**

**But first some background:**

**Ernest Shackleton came from Quaker stock in an old Yorkshire family that had many years before settled in Ireland. He was born in 1874.**

**His father was a medical doctor in Dublin, but conditions in Ireland were so severe that he moved to London to start a practice in general medicine, with moderate success. Not long afterwards Mrs Shackleton became an invalid and took to her bed.**

**They had ten children.**

**There were eight daughters all devoted to their brother Ernest. There was one other brother, Frank, who was to cause Ernest much embarrassment in later years.**

**We’ll come back to Frank later.**

**He went to Dulwich College. He was there only a couple of years. He was not an enthusiastic student, and got reports like “could do better” and “room for improvement”.**

**You know.....**

**But in 1909 he returned to the school as Sir Ernest Shackleton, its most celebrated student to give away the prizes, and remarked that this was the closest he’d ever been to one.**

**He wanted to go to sea. His father couldn’t afford the 70 pounds p.a. for cadet training on HMS “Britannia” so he joined the Merchant Service and spent the next five years under sail – usually between Liverpool and Valparaiso carrying nitrates.**

**He got to know and respect those seas in the Southern Ocean, especially around Cape Horn.**

**His captain considered him “the most pig-headed and obstinate boy I ever came across”**

**But after five years he had passed all his exams and was certified to command a British anywhere on the high seas.**

**He was then fortunate to join the Union Castle Line, one of the elite of the merchant fleet.**

**On one voyage carrying troops to the Boer War he became friendly with a young Army officer whose father was a principal supporter of the newly proposed British expedition to the**

**Antarctic. Shackleton persuaded his friend to introduce them. The father was a member of the Royal Geographical Society, and in due course introduced him to Sir Clements Markham, its influential President.**

**Sir Clements played a big role in supporting polar exploration particularly in the South. He was a sort of eminence grise in geographical circles.**

**It was around this time, near the turn of the century that exploration of the Antarctic was starting to be discussed – not only in Britain but in Sweden, France, Germany and Russia. The Norwegians were very active in the North under the guidance, influence and leadership of their great explorer and statesman, Fridtjof Nansen.**

**In 1773 Captain Cook had crossed the Antarctic Circle, and other explorers and those looking for whales and seals were starting to appear.**

**Then came Sir James Clark Ross. He led an expedition, backed by the Royal Navy, in 1841, and discovered the sea that bears his name, and the Great Ice Barrier, now called the Ross Ice Shelf.**

**In Great Britain, international rivalry stirred a feeling of national honour.**

**Vigorous debate was developing and the Royal Geographical Society under Sir Clements Markham was showing great interest. The Royal Society had no available funds and the Government no enthusiasm, but with private backing for the RGS appearing, the two Societies approached the Government, which eventually provided financial aid and the support and supply of the Navy.**

**The expedition was to be called the National Antarctic Expedition.**

**A ship was specially built. She was called “Discovery”.**

**Her captain and commander of the expedition was Lieutenant Robert Falcon Scott.**

**Technically she did not come under the Naval Discipline Act, but nevertheless was run on Naval lines. And some of her crew were not Navy, but from the Merchant Service.**

**Shackleton was selected to join the expedition, and was commissioned as a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve.**

**“Discovery” left the Thames sailing to Capetown where she picked up supplies, and thence to Lyttleton, New Zealand for more.**

**Heavily overladen, she left New Zealand for the Ross Sea and McMurdo Sound.**

**It was 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1901.**

**I would now like to say a few words about the Antarctic Continent.**

**It is twice the size of Australia. Despite holding the greatest amount of frozen water, it is the driest continent on Earth.**

**Unlike the North Pole which is at sea level, the geographic South Pole is on a plateau nearly 10,000 feet high.**

**To reach it they thought the best route would be across the Barrier. The Barrier, now called the Ross Ice Shelf is about the size of New South Wales, and in some places about 1000 feet thick. It is covered in sastrugi or waves of ice, and there are countless crevasses.**

**A huge mountain range stretches for over 1000 miles from McMurdo Sound sweeping around to the south-east. Over it lies the Pole at around 9500 feet above sea level.**

**Towards the western side of the Sound is an island, Ross Island, which is attached to the shelf.**

**In summer, its northern, eastern and western sides can be open to the sea, but conditions there can change rapidly, and a ship could be iced in throughout the winter months.**

**The co-ordinates for this area are roughly 77 1/2 degrees South and 170 degrees West.**

**I mention this Longitude because it has an enormous influence on subsequent events in Shackleton's life.**

**Approaching the continent, Scott sailed along the ice barrier both east and west, making important discoveries for that barely charted land.**

**Eventually, “Discovery” was brought alongside Ross Island and secured to the ice.**

**A prefabricated hut was erected as far south as possible, but within reach of the ship. The hut was used only for stores, and the actual base and living quarters were on the ship.**

**The site of the hut was called “Hut Point”.**

**Two other huts were later built on Ross Island, one by Shackleton in 1907 and Scott’s built for the tragic journey of 1911.**

**The three historic huts stand to this day.**

**In the late summer and early autumn several small exploratory marches were made. They would set out with great confidence, but would return after short periods when the weather would beat them.**

**The great explorer Nansen, now Norwegian ambassador to Great Britain had advised Scott to take dogs and use skis, but although they took them they had little idea how to use either.**

**They were so inexperienced that Scott wrote later: “our ignorance was deplorable; we did not know how much or what proportions would be required as regards the food, how to use our cookers, how to put up our tents, or even how to put on our clothes”**

**They had fun with on the skis, they played football on the ice, but they didn’t train the dogs...**

**Two parties had gone south to reconnoitre and to lay depots.**

**They hauled supplies in sledges, man- hauling all the way and finding great difficulties.**

**Depots were laid: Depot A at 79South and Depot B at 80.30.**

**They were to prove inadequate.**

**On 2<sup>nd</sup> of November, the winter being over, the southern party set out. There were three men: Scott, Shackleton and Dr. Edward Wilson.**

**They took dogs to pull the sledges. Progress was slow, so the men had to help with the hauling.**

**To assist the dogs, they began to lighten the loads by breaking up the journey into stages, advancing with half a load at a time and returning for the next; thus doubling their efforts.**

**Dogs love to work, but they need intensive training in the traces. They love to fight with each other too, and have to be shown firmly who is the boss.**

**It turns out too that the wrong food had been taken for the dogs and they began to weaken. At one stage Shackleton and Wilson were hauling the sledges with Scott driving the dogs from behind. They even carried a couple of dogs on the sledge!**

**The dogs grew weaker and weaker until they died or were killed for food for the others.**

**The men were ravenously hungry. They had reduced rations severely.**

**Extensive reading about polar exploration reveals that with the cold weather and enormous physical effort and not having the right foods, all the explorers talked and dreamed of food: what they would like, great meals they had eaten.**

**(NB: see Fisher p63)**

**It was on this expedition that Shackleton had hit on a device which made division of food scrupulously fair. On such short rations they could hardly be blamed for having uncharitable thoughts about each other when these were doled out. His idea was after the division was made, one shut his eyes, another pointed to a portion and said “who’s is that?”**

**This method was used in nearly all later British expeditions.**

**They had been looking forward to Christmas Day with childish delight.**

**When it came they drew recklessly on their dwindling provisions.**

For breakfast each had a “whole pannikin –full of seal’s liver with bacon mixed with one biscuit each; topped up with a spoonful of blackberry jam”

Then four hours march. Hot lunch: Bovril, chocolate, biscuit, 2 spoonfuls of jam each.

“Grand!”

Three more hours march, camped for dinner.

Two pannikins of special hoosh, plus biscuit. Shackleton made cocoa and then produced a plum pudding that he had been hiding in a sock “a clean one” he adds.

Then some brandy and a cigar.

They pushed south. By the 31<sup>st</sup> December they were weak, had little food, and Wilson (a medical doctor) observed signs of scurvy in Shackleton. Shackleton and Scott were falling out badly, and from this sprang a distrust between the two men for the rest of their lives.

They decided to turn back.

They had reached latitude 82deg 16, so far the furthest south man had achieved, but not within the 86deg 14 North achieved by Nansen in 1883.

They reached Depot B on 13<sup>th</sup> January. All were unwell, particularly Shackleton. They all had symptoms of scurvy. They continued to man-haul to Depot A.

Wilson was nearly blinded; they fell into numerous crevasses, and eventually Shackleton who had developed asthmatic symptoms and fits of coughing up blood was ordered not to pull in the traces. At one stage he was carried on the sledge pulled by the other two, which caused him great humiliation.

The failure of the expedition, annoyance in London friction between the two learned societies resulted in two ships being sent to McMurdo Sound in the event of “Discovery” being stranded. Actually she had managed to get free, but Shackleton was invalided home. He shed tears as he left his comrades.

All this has been a preview of Shackleton’s big venture: his assault on the pole in 1907.

Home in England, he married his friend Emily Dorman.

But he was restless and at a loose end, with little money. Fortunately Emily had some, but usually the Shackletons were financially stretched.

For a while he became Secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, and although this did not last long it gave him introduction to some important people who would eventually give him financial backing.

He discovered that he had a gift for public speaking, and stood unsuccessfully for Parliament. He tried various business ventures. These too, failed.

But throughout his life there always seemed to be a select handful of perceptive people, not necessarily interested in exploration who saw some deeper quality in him.

One was a Scottish industrialist named William Beardmore who became a patron and a backer of Shackleton, and whose name appears in history on the biggest glacier in the world.

## The NIMROD Expedition. 1907 – 09

In 1907 Shackleton announced at a dinner at the RGS that he was to head his own expedition to both the geographic and magnetic south poles. The reaction of the members was one of startled bewilderment. Many of them had thought his days as an Antarctic explorer were

over. To have him bouncing back out of the Scottish mists, publicly announcing his intention to lead a privately funded expedition with the express purpose of attaining the geographical south pole was more than some of them could stand. Words like “bounder” and “upstart” were heard in the smoking room.

As we know, the RGS had a long and distinguished history in the field of exploration. With its official backing, funds became easier to acquire, assistance from the Armed Services more readily granted, and, where necessary, even the assistance of foreign governments. In return for this, the Society expected to keep its hand firmly on the tiller. Usually an expedition of any size would expect to be under the control of a committee, usually dominated by senior officers of the Society itself.

Suddenly here was Shackleton abjuring the very idea of a committee and proceeding with or without the Society’s backing. In the climate of those times it must have seemed like a direct challenge to their authority and prestige.

There was another problem. Ever since the “Discovery” expedition, Sir Clements Markham, who I referred to earlier, was the President of the RGS had regarded Scott as his personal protégé. He already knew in confidence that Scott himself was planning a second attempt at the Pole. If it came to a choice between the two men, there was no doubt where the sympathies of the Society would lie.

At this time, Scott was serving in HMS Albermarle somewhere in the Atlantic. When the news reached him he fired off a salvo demanding that Shackleton not follow his route in “Discovery”: that he (Scott) intended to go again.

When Scott eventually reached port the two rivals met face to face. They sat down and divided a vast segment of the Antarctic Continent between them. Shackleton had to agree that he would leave McMurdo Sound to Scott. He would not go west of 170 degrees West; would not touch the coast of Victoria Land at all, but would try King Edward VII Land, or failing that make another attempt on the continent westward on Kaiser Wilhelm II Land about 80 degrees West.

Shackleton then set out to find backing. He already had William Beardmore’s funds but he had great trouble in raising the rest of the money. I won’t go into the details of the fund-raising, but one thing held him back. His brother Frank.

Frank Shackleton had a dubious name. He was involved with some “shady friends in the City” and did not enjoy a good reputation, and eventually went to jail for fraud. He was also involved in a huge scandal – the theft of the Crown Jewels of Ireland

I am not making this up.....

The jewels were the insignia of the Order of St. Patrick, the knighthood of the Anglo – Irish and a symbol of the Protestant Ascendancy. They were kept in a safe in the office of the College of Arms in Dublin Castle and disappeared between 11<sup>th</sup> June 1907 and the 6<sup>th</sup> of July. They were never recovered but the evidence pointed to an inside job and Frank Shackleton was a prime suspect. Friends in high places – even the highest in the land were implicated and things were eventually hushed up.

But nevertheless Frank was in jail for defrauding a wealthy widow, and this didn’t help his brother Ernest in raising funds for his expedition.

The plan was to leave New Zealand in early 1908, and proceed to winter quarters on the Antarctic Continent. Here men and stores would be landed, followed quickly by the retreat of the ship to NZ to prevent from being frozen in.

There were to be three parties: one to proceed South as far as possible, The second to go east, cross the Barrier to the new land known as King Edward VII Land, and the third to proceed westwards over the mountains and strike towards the magnetic pole.

The main changes in equipment would be that Siberian ponies would be taken for the sledge journeys and a specially designed motor car for the southern journey.

Shackleton announced: "I do not intend to sacrifice the scientific utility of the expedition to a mere record-breaking journey, but say frankly, all the same, that one of my great efforts will be to reach the southern geographical pole."

He went to Norway to buy a ship. The ideal one that he saw was new, and built for polar work, but it was too expensive. So he had to make do with an old sealer named "Nimrod" which was small, old and could achieve maximum speed under steam of only 6 knots. She arrived in the Thames on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1907, a prefabricated hut built in sections was ordered, the stores, the shore party, the ship's staff and crew selected and by the end of July the "Nimrod" was ready for the voyage. She sailed on 30<sup>th</sup> of July and had reached Torquay when a naval torpedo boat overtook the ship and conveyed the news that the King and Queen wished to inspect the ship on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August. They turned back and anchored at Cowes, and their Majesties, the King and Queen and members of the Royal Family came on board. The King presented Shackleton with the Royal Victorian Order, and Queen presented him with a Union Flag to carry on the southern journey.

The ship sailed for Lyttelton, NZ, arriving on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The Australian and NZ governments gave generously to the expedition, which allowed Shackleton funds to increase the shore party and add additional equipment.

But there was a problem. The "Nimrod" was heavily overloaded, and would not have enough coal for the voyage to the ice, and the return journey. The NZ government agreed to supply a small ship to tow the "Nimrod" to the edge of the ice and also pay for half the coal. The towing ship was called "Koonya". Her captain was Captain F.P. Evans. The captain of "Nimrod" was Captain Rupert England.

At 4pm on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1908 the lines were cast off and the "Nimrod", proceeded by the little "Koonya" headed south watched by cheering crowds. At sea, "Nimrod" moved up close to her stern and hauled in the 4 inch wire cable used for the tow.

Now follows what in my mind is one of the great feats of seamanship, mentioned in the history books, but never given much attention.

The towing cable was shackled onto the free ends of both ship's cables. They then let out 30 fathoms of each cable, one on each side of the bow, and made the inner ends around the foremast in the 'tween decks. This cable acted as a "spring", which kept the weight of the cable hanging down in the water. Even in the fine weather at the start of the voyage the ships rolled and took in water. It was made worse by being heavily overladen and the weight of the wires was dragging her nose down into the sea. By the first night the winds began to freshen and the vessels were pitching and steering wildly.

One of the great worries was the condition of the ponies: they needed constant attention by the shore staff who were put on two-hour watches. The gales continued and seas were huge. There were times when the ships couldn't see each other. Shackleton records that the ship rolled over 50 degrees each way-the indicator recording the roll of the ship was marked only to that angle and the pointer had passed that mark. The ponies and their handlers were having a hard time of it; eventually one of the horses had to be put down.

They also had some dogs on the expedition. Once again as in the "Discovery" voyage they were of little use, because no-one was trained in dog-handling. But they survived, and one of the dogs gave birth to six fine puppies.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> January, they had reached ice. The tow was cast off, and "Koonya" returned to NZ after a record tow of 1510 miles.

"Nimrod" had entered the Ross Sea on 16<sup>th</sup> January. They steamed past spectacular icebergs. After the huge seas of the tow, everything was silent.

The ship skirted the Barrier, making for King Edward 7<sup>th</sup> Land. Shackleton was looking for an inlet that they seen from "Discovery" in 1902. But the inlet wasn't there. The Barrier must

have broken away. They found themselves in fast ice. It seemed impossible to reach land, and the shortness of the coal supply, and the leaky condition of the ship, and the absolute necessity of landing the stores and erecting the hut before the ship returned to NZ made Shackleton anxious.

Here was his big dilemma. He had promised Scott that he would not land west of longitude 170 degrees West which precluded him the use of McMurdo Sound. But he really had no option. Either be frozen in or give up. It was not in Shackleton's nature to give up, but he felt keenly about breaking his word.

Finally he made up his mind to use the Sound.

The frozen sea stopped them some 20 miles short of Hut Point, where Scott's "Discovery" hut remains. The ice anchor was made fast to the ice.

They started to unload. The motor car was unshipped and started to be assembled. The beams of the pony shelter were removed so that they could get the horses ashore without difficulty.

Most of them were in poor shape. One had to be put down.

Everything proceeded without incident until while unloading store a hook swung across the deck and struck Aeneas McIntosh in the eye which had to be removed. He survived to be in Shackleton's Ross Sea Party in 1914, but that is another story.

By 3<sup>rd</sup> February the ship was alongside the ice north of Hut Point. By 12<sup>th</sup> the stores were safely ashore.

The "Nimrod" under Captain England returned to NZ on 22<sup>nd</sup>. But during the search for a safe landing and the landing of the stores, serious differences had arisen between Shackleton and the captain. There was often conflict between exploration leaders and the captains of the ships that took them. You can understand the tension-most leaders of expeditions are by nature of adventurous spirit, and most ship's captains unwilling to put their vessels and their careers in unnecessary danger.

"Nimrod" sailed north taking the mail. One letter to be handed to Captain England in NZ contained his dismissal from Shackleton.

(When the ship returned the following year to take the exploration parties off, she was commanded by Captain F.P.Evans who had been in command of the little vessel "Koonya" which had towed them to the ice.

The hut was completed in just over a month and the men settled in for the approaching winter. There were 15 in all. Here they had to eat, sleep, work, talk, and meet all their social needs throughout the long dark months.

Scientific experiments went on : for example, Adams wound the chronometers, checked instruments and did other meteorological work, Marshall, the surgeon tended to medical needs and exercised the ponies, Wild, the storekeeper issued food to the cook, and found and killed seals and penguins for fresh meat, Joyce looked after the dogs, Professor Edgeworth David was on geological studies, Mawson, geology and other scientific experiments, and Priestly and Murray dredging.

In the meantime they climbed Mt Erubus towering above them.

By the end of winter, Shackleton had finalised his plans.

There were to be three parties: the two most important were : one to the geographical South Pole, about 1700 miles round trek. Shackleton was to lead this with Frank Wild, Dr. Eric Marshall, and Jameson Adams.

The second party of three was to go to the west for geographical and scientific work.

The third party was known as the Northern Party, with Professor David, Forbes Mackay, and Douglas Mawson. Their aim was to find the magnetic Pole, a distance of about 1260 miles round trek.

These last three had no polar experience. They would have to pull sledges and supplies without the help of dogs or ponies. At the start, the motor car was used to establish two depots 10 and 15 miles from the hut. The car overheated, and they actually had to wait in the

blistering cold for the engine to cool down! Then Mackay damaged his wrist with the starter, and so started his trek with his wrist in a sling. It was 25<sup>th</sup> September. We will return to them later.

The polar party set off on 29<sup>th</sup> October. As I mentioned there were four. They took four of the ponies, but no dogs. On the first day one of the ponies kicked Adams just below the kneecap and exposed the bone. The ponies were often up to their bellies in soft snow. They caused a lot of trouble, biting the tethers, upsetting stores, tearing bags of feed apart and overeating the maize.

But they persevered. Each horse pulled a sledge eleven feet long with a total weight of approx. 600 pounds. The daily allowance of food per man was 34 ounces. This included pemmican, emergency ration, biscuit, cheese, chocolate, Plasmon, sugar and Quaker oats, plus tea, salt and sugar. Enough was taken to last for 91 days. Each pony's allowance was 10 pounds of maize per day.

The going was very hard. The ice shelf is full of crevasses and sastrugi, rather like frozen waves. Many times they would fall into a crevasse, but somehow haul themselves out.

By 19<sup>th</sup> November they reached 80 degrees 32 South. This was "furthest south" achieved by Scott with Wilson and Shackleton in 1902.

By now they were down to 3 ponies and the men were also man-hauling. They laid another depot at 82 deg 45S. Another pony was shot. The remaining two were now drawing 630 pounds per load. There were still 1000 miles to get to the pole and back.

By 1<sup>st</sup> December only one horse was left. It pulled one sledge guided by Wild while Shackleton Adams and Marshall pulled the other.

They now realised that they could go no further on the shelf. The route to the Pole was over the huge mountain range that they had been skirting, and the way up was over an immense glacier. This Shackleton named the Beardmore after his Scottish backer. It is regarded as the biggest in the world.

They started to climb the glacier. It was 4<sup>th</sup> December..The going was heavy for the men and the pony- Wild said it was like rough sea in appearance, but in every hollow there was a crevasse and often on the crest of the waves as it were. They were now suffering from snow blindness.

Up and up they continued still hauling the sledges. The pony was weakening. The weather was unpleasantly warm for sledging- up to 22deg Fahrenheit, They were perspiring heavily, and although surrounded by ice, not easily drinkable.

Suddenly the pony fell down a deep crevasse, pulling Wild behind him.

He found the horse gone, and he was hanging by his left arm only. The sledge broke its bow but stayed. Somehow he got out-the other three racing to help. They had saved the sledge and provisions, not to mention Wild, but although the pony no longer had been pulling his weight, the loss was significant because they were hoping to use his meat.

Day after day they slogged on, hauling the two sledges with the combined weight of nearly 1000 pounds. The diaries record: "dodging crevasses and pits of unknown depth. Marshall fell down a crevasse – saved only by his harness. Falls, bruises, cut shins, razor –edged ice, heavy upward pull..."

By 17<sup>th</sup> December they were still pulling up the glacier. Food was cut down again. They still had some pony maize, which they ground down between stones because they couldn't spare enough oil for lengthy boiling.

They were still about 300 miles from the pole.

18<sup>th</sup> December – "almost up – we are on the plateau at last"

19<sup>th</sup> December – "not on the plateau level yet – there is still another rise ahead"

20<sup>th</sup> – "Not yet up"

21<sup>st</sup> – "Still hauling up the sledges, one after the other, by standing pulls across crevasses and over great pressure ridges"

23<sup>rd</sup> – 8320 feet up, and still steering upwards amid great waves of pressure and ice-falls, for our plateau was not the plateau at all"

**24<sup>th</sup> – “the way before us is still rising”**

**It never ceases to amaze me how so many of the explorers, officers, ship’s crews and scientists managed to write and keep diaries and accurate records.**

**Christmas Day – “Altitude 9500 feet. Latitude 85.55 South**

**They had a “good breakfast”. At lunch Shackleton photographed the others. Then came a meal that they had been anticipating for weeks. As Marshall describes: “Extra special double wack maudgee hoosh. Plum pudding and brandy, a teaspoon each of crème de menthe and a cigar.**

**After hoosh we had a council of war ... dumping 40lbs more of gear including three ice axes and extra runners. From tomorrow we are down to six biscuits a day”.**

**They were already reduced to”the barest necessities”**

**Still up they went. The altitude was affecting them all. They suffered from headaches, superficial frost bite, cracked lips. The heels on Shackleton’s feet had split.**

**1909 dawned. Shackleton’ diary says “head too bad to write much”. They were now at 10,755 feet above sea level and still nearly 200 miles from the Pole. A blizzard the previous day had kept them in their tent for some time and they made only four miles. They had three weeks food and two weeks biscuit to get them there and back to the last depot.**

**The cards were by now heavily stacked against them. At last Shackleton admits that “if we go too far it will be impossible to get back over this surface, and then all the results will be lost to the world”**

**That was on 2<sup>nd</sup> January. They decided press on a little further, but to leave further stores as sufficient food and oil to get back to the last depot at the head of the glacier. It was now to be a last rush with ten days food and one tent.**

**Surfaces and wind kept their mileages down. They won a few miles each day. Then two days of “blinding shrieking blizzard,” and no advance at all.**

**This was journey’s end – 9<sup>th</sup> January 1909.**

**The wind had dropped so they made a last dash south carrying Queen Alexandra’s flag, another Union flag, a brass cylinder containing documents, a sheet of NZ postage stamps overprinted “King Edward 7<sup>th</sup> Land”. At 9am they stopped, hoisted the flags, buried the cylinder in the snow and took possession of the Plateau in the name of His Majesty the King. The final dash took them to 88.23 South – ninety seven geographical miles from the South Pole.**

**This was the farthest south that man had made. It was to be only about 35 months for the prize to be won by Roald Amundsen in November 1911, and followed by Scott in March 1912.**

**The return was quicker, but full of hardship. The winds were behind them and they managed to rig up a makeshift sail from the floor of one of the tents. For two weeks they made good progress; on one day they made 29 miles. Contrast that with some days on the outward journey when they made four, or sometimes none at all as they sat in camp in raging blizzards.**

**They were still desperately short of food. By the 26<sup>th</sup> they had their last panniken of hoosh and from then on there was nothing but a scrap of chocolate and tea or cocoa. They were very weak. Marshall went down the glacier to the depot near the foot of the glacier, breaking through into three crevasses on the way. He brought back meat, cheese, pemmican, biscuits and tobacco. And “never did men enjoy a meal more”. On the 13<sup>th</sup> February they reached the depot where they had killed the last pony, and again were able to eat well.**

**The next day they were off the glacier and back on to the Barrier shelf. The going was still hard, hauling the sledges, and they started to run out of food . Sickness was getting to them and Frank Wild developed dysentery and followed by Shackleton.**

**The saga goes on: sickness, hunger. Marshall was ill with dysentery, Adams could hardly walk. But they got back to the hut.**

**They had walked 1700 miles.**

**The ship was not there. But they found a letter telling them that the “Nimrod” had picked up the magnetic pole party and would shelter near the old mooring until the 26<sup>th</sup>. It was now the 28<sup>th</sup>, but the ship eventually came.**

**Time is running out, and I have yet to tell the story of the magnetic pole party with Mawson Mackay and led by Edgeworth David. This could be the subject of another talk. Suffice to say it was a success. They reached the Magnetic South Pole also then on the polar plateau on 16<sup>th</sup> January, man-hauling all the way. They fell down crevasses, they suffered much the same as the southern party, and remember, Professor David was over 50 years old.**

**Here are a couple of anecdotes to lighten up a little:**

**They were exhausted. At one stage it had taken them 12 days to travel 20 miles.**

**Mawson was in the tent; Mackay was reconnoitring elsewhere. Remember, the Prof, as he was called was not young. He was fifty years old and twice as old as the other two. He was much admired by all, and was always gentle and courteous.**

**Mawson tells the story: “I heard a voice from outside - a gentle voice – calling “Mawson, Mawson”.**

**“Hallo”, said I.**

**“Oh, you’re in the bag changing plates are you?”**

**“Yes”**

**“There was silence for some time. Then I heard the professor calling in a louder tone, ‘Mawson, Mawson’”**

**Again I answered.**

**“Oh, still changing plates are you?”**

**“Yes”**

**More silence for some time. Then in a louder and more anxious tone; “MAWSON”.**

**I thought there was something up, so I called out:”Hallo, what is it? What can I do?”**

**“Well, Mawson, I am in a dangerous position. I am really hanging on by my fingers on the edge of a crevasse, and I don’t think I can hold on much longer. I shall have to trouble you to come out and assist me”**

**And when Mawson got to him his head and fingers were all he could see.**

**In Edgeworth David’s diary he refers to the same incident: “Fell into a crevasse; Mawson fished me out”!**

**I had mentioned a third party. This was called the Western Party, and comprised three men. Their names were Armytage, Brocklehurst and Priestly.**

**They went up the Ferrar glacier collecting specimens. On their return they came down to the coast, where they encountered an unusually warm spell, and some of the ice was starting to melt.**

**Two had fallen out with each other, and were communicating through the third.**

**Suddenly a section of the ice they were on broke away and started to float northwards. They then saw a large school of killer whales encircling their floe and bumping the ice under and around them.**

**At this point one of the men announced that in times of danger it was customary for Englishmen to resolve their differences. The three solemnly shook hands.**

**Soon after, the wind came around and the floe touched the fast ice forming an ice bridge.**

**They rushed across the bridge to safety, only to see the floe float away again.**

**They then resumed their feud.....**

**The “Nimrod” under Captain Evans returned to NZ with all the expeditioners aboard.**

**Although they did not achieve their goal, they had reached the farthest South yet achieved, and had paved the way to the Pole.**

**Shackleton returned to London to a hero's welcome. He was knighted by Edward 7<sup>th</sup> and granted 20,000 pounds to help with his costs.**

**But Sir Clements Markham, president of the RGS, and a great supporter of Scott whispered the Shackleton had falsified his results!**

**The voyage for which Shackleton is most famous that of the "Endurance". It is a wonderful story, and perhaps could form the basis of another discussion. The expedition was to leave Portsmouth on 4<sup>th</sup> August, the very day war was declared. He immediately offered the ship and his men to the Navy, and received a message from Mr Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty with the one word: "Proceed". Overshadowed by the War, the story of the "Endurance" was largely overlooked, and it is only in recent years that it has resurfaced; many books, films and television documentaries have been made. Shackleton's leadership qualities are even being taught and used in management studies.**

**Thirty five months later, Raold Amundsen reached the Pole.**

**It was 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1911**

**As I mentioned earlier he left nothing to chance; food, clothing, equipment, supplies, dogs, the men expert on ski.**

**The hut was prefabricated; they even had a steam bath!**

**He tied up alongside the Ice Barrier in the Bay of Whales which Shackleton had rejected, set up four depots with enormous amounts of supplies, and the Polar party set off with four sledges each pulled by 13 dogs.**

**They went straight across the Ross Ice Shelf, found an easier glacier to climb onto the polar plateau, and reached the South Pole a month earlier than Scott.**

**He was acclaimed a hero around the world.**

**Except in Britain.....**

**Three years later, on the very eve of the Great War, Shackleton set out on the voyage for which he most well-known.**

**The story of "Endurance" ,is an epic one; of failure and of success.**

**Shackleton was a leader. He never asked his men to do a task that he wasn't prepared to do himself.**

**Like all great officers he led from the front.**

**He was a fighter. Under different circumstances he could have been a great general, a great headmaster, a great statesman.**

**He could have been one of the great Elizabethans.**

**He famous now, not as a brilliant success, but a splendid failure; a man who fought against enormous odds and never, ever, gave in.**