



## THE ROYAL COLLECTION TRUST

### The Heart of the Great Alone: Scott, Shackleton and Antarctic Photography

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#### The British Antarctic Expedition, *Terra Nova*, 1910-13

The turn of the 20th century saw an 'Heroic Age' of polar exploration, when the Antarctic continent attracted the attention of governments, scientists and whalers from around the world. Several nations, including Belgium, France, Australia and Japan, launched major expeditions to investigate the region. Britain was among the first to respond to a landmark lecture by Sir John Murray to the Royal Geographical Society in 1893, which called for the thorough and systematic exploration of the southern continent. In 1901, the National Antarctic Expedition made the first extended journey into the interior of Antarctica. The expedition was led by a young naval lieutenant called Robert Scott, and among his crew was Ernest Shackleton, then of the Royal Naval Reserve.

In 1909, Scott announced plans to return to the continent with the aim of reaching the South Pole and securing it for Britain. National pride was at stake, and the elusive Pole had still to be claimed. Scott also planned an extensive scientific programme of exploration and research. His ship *Terra Nova* sailed from Cardiff on 15 June 1910 with a crew that would include the 'camera artist' Herbert Ponting, who joined the ship in New Zealand. This was the first time an official photographer and film-maker had joined a polar expedition. Also on board were dogs and ponies, Scott's preferred means of transport across the ice and snow.

In mid-October, news reached the crew that the Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen was also on his way south, with the single-minded intention of reaching the Pole. Scott was determined that this was not going to change his plans and he set sail for Antarctica from New Zealand on 29 November 1910. Despite atrocious weather, *Terra Nova* finally arrived at the Ross Sea on 31 December. Most of the crew made landfall on 4 January 1911, at a point later named Cape Evans (after Scott's Second in Command Teddy Evans). Another party, led by Lieutenant Victor Campbell, was left to explore the coastline of King Edward VII Land to the east of Cape Evans.

Scott and his team established supply depots at a point called One Ton Depot. They were 30 miles short of the original proposed site, as the ponies were too weak to carry the supplies the full distance. Of the eight ponies taken on the depot journey, only two survived. A letter from Campbell brought more bad news – his party had encountered Amundsen with a huge group of dogs. Amundsen's camping position put him 60 miles further south than Scott and he would be able to start his push towards the South Pole earlier in the season, as dogs were better equipped to deal with the cold than ponies. In what had already, and inevitably, become a race to the South Pole, Amundsen was at an advantage.

Through the winter months, Scott's party settled into their routines of observations, experiments and preparation for the next season's journey. They produced the *South Polar Times*, which was edited by assistant zoologist Apsley Cherry-Garrard, and enjoyed slide shows given by Ponting. They dined on fresh seal and penguin meat, with mutton from New Zealand on Sundays. In June there were two special occasions: Scott's birthday dinner on 6 June, when the hut was festooned with sledging flags, and an Antarctic 'Christmas' (Midwinter's Day on 22 June), when a feast of seal soup, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, plum pudding and mince pies was served.

Final preparations for the journey south began in August, and the main party set out on 1 November. By early January, Scott had dismissed the last of the supporting parties, and only five men pushed on towards the Pole – Scott, Petty Officer Edgar 'Taff' Evans, Captain Lawrence 'Titus' Oates, Edward Wilson and Lieutenant Henry 'Birdie' Bowers. They finally reached the Pole on 17 January and spent the following days verifying their position and taking measurements. They found 'Polheim', the Norwegian tent and flag, proving that Amundsen had beaten them to it, and put up their Union flag for the official photograph at their own Pole position.

They began their return to base, but were fighting the effects of their inhospitable surroundings, not least frostbite. On 17 February, Evans collapsed and died. Oates was also impeded by frostbite and on 17 March he took his fate into his own hands and 'walked out'. The final trek by the remaining three men on 19 March took them to within 11 miles of One Ton Depot, where they would have found food and fuel. They stopped short, pinned down by a blizzard, and were found in their tent eight months later.

The rest of the expedition party spent a second winter at Cape Evans, knowing their leader and comrades must be dead. On 29 October 1912, they set out to search for Scott's remains. They spotted the roof of the tent just south of One Ton Depot and retrieved the men's diaries, letters and other personal items, as well as cameras and film. They collapsed the tent over their comrades and built a cairn over them.

*Terra Nova* returned quietly to New Zealand on 10 February 1913 and telegraphed news of the tragedy. Ponting's films of the Polar party, showing the team happy and unconcerned, had only recently been released, making the shock all the greater. Official messages of sympathy were sent to King George V and Parliament, and memorial services were held up and down the country, including one attended by the King at St Paul's Cathedral. A public appeal raised £75,000 (the equivalent of £4.5 million today) to aid the bereaved and set up memorials. The remainder of the funds went towards establishing the Scott Polar Research Institute at Cambridge, an international centre for polar research to this day.